ECOCRITICAL NARRATIVES OF HOPE: READING SELECTED TEXTS BY MARGARET ATWOOD

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To

Acharya Gour Ganguly,

Sri Keshavi,

Ma and Baba

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It is difficult to express in words the gratitude I feel for all those who have inspired me and helped me in this journey of seven years. This thesis would have been impossible without their love, blessings, care and encouragement. Hence I will make a feeble attempt to express my eternal gratitude to everyone who has made this thesis possible and successful.

The greatest inspiration of my life is Acharya Gour Ganguly, a socio-spiritual reformer as well as a fiery leader in the Indian Independence movement. He worked for social and spiritual growth of rural people and led a massive *satyagraha* movement to empower women suffering violence and exploitation in Agartala in the 1970s, by training them to recognize the power within them to fight against all atrocities. He worked tirelessly all his life to resist profit-based values and consumerism that made man acquire more than required for life and wellbeing. His ideas inspired me to further research the root cause behind environmental problems facing our planet today and I found great resonance of Acharya Gour Ganguly's life and ideas in the deep ecology movement and its philosophy, which also understands the problem lying in a consumerist and capitalist culture and advocates a re-evaluation of what constitutes a fulfilling life, for only such a redefinition can result in long term changes instead of Band-Aid solutions to climate change and ecological imbalance. Acharya Gour Ganguly used to advise people to read the 'book of nature,' in which one would find a blueprint of the universe and one's Self. While it shall be a lifelong project and practice to experience 'nature' in the way he lived, completely in tune with it, my thesis is a first step towards such an aim and dedicated to the man whose ideas have fired up my being and propels me to live a life of purpose every day.

No work is possible without energy. I am grateful for the blessings, love and strength imparted to me by my spiritual guide, Gopa Maa, who carries on Acharya Gour Ganguly's legacy of selfless service and infinite compassion and love. At a time when I was seeking meaning in life, she came as a beacon of light, encouraging me to study further. At all the junctures when I lost faith in myself, succumbing to anxiety and fears, she held my hand, gently guiding me to see the power within myself. Over the last seven years I combated many severe health issues. Gopa Maa's blessings kept me going through thick and thin, her smile and warmth always lifting me from every darkness. I am grateful beyond words for her presence in my life.

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to teaching and service of others. I'm deeply humbled to have a father-and-mother figure in him, inspiring me to be a better version of myself, every day.

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Note

This dissertation has been written following the 17th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style guide. The 'Footnote and Bibliography' pattern has been followed to make the dissertation more convenient to read.

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Introduction

> You who have come here from some distant world, to this dry lakeshore and this cairn, and to this cylinder of brass, in which on the last day of all our recorded days I place our final words:
>
> Pray for us, who once, too, thought we could fly.[1]

Prologue

In this short flash fiction, "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet" written for *The Guardian* during the Copenhagen Climate summit in 2009, Margaret Atwood mourns the end of civilization on earth in a vision of the future—a possible future given the way we continue to ravage the planet and its resources for our short-term profit. She addresses the visitor on earth from some distant planet who has stumbled upon the time capsule. It is both hopeful and hopeless at the same moment, for it assumes a future reader, even if not human and also suggests that these words may not be comprehensible to this reader of the future, even if there is one. Speaking into the void, Atwood fashions a message of great power of the rise and fall of civilizations and their imminent end. It seals upon the reader the realization of the fact that there is only one planet available for us to inhabit well. There is no escape from the damage we wreak on our only home. It is of course written at a crucial political moment during the Copenhagen

[1] Margaret Atwood, "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet," 10:10 Review Climate Change Special, *Guardian,* Sep 26, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/sep/26/margaret-atwood-mini-science-fiction.

Climate Summit, in order to inspire urgent action towards change and transformation of the way we live and conduct ourselves on this planet.

The Copenhagen Summit, or COP 15[2] in 2009 was significant in bringing together 115 world leaders and producing the Copenhagen Accord, through which was visible a clear "political intent to constrain carbon and respond to climate change, in both the short and long term."[3] However, while there was a convergence of views regarding the long term goal of "limiting the maximum global average temperature increase to no more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels"[4] there was no concrete agreement on how the parties to the Accord would reach this goal. Over the years the UNFCCC have met annually since its opening for signatures in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, in an attempt to bring together countries and make them mutually agree to stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to a level that would halt the progressive increase in global temperatures and the attendant dangers of such anthropogenic climate change.[5] However, despite making some headway with the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, with GHG emissions reduction obligations on developed countries and Kyoto mechanisms for implementing them,[6] it has run into several roadblocks over the years. The

[2] The 15th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

[3] "Copenhagen Climate Change Conference—December 2009,"Conference, *United Nations Climate Change*, accessed March 10, 2020, https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/past-conferences/copenhagen-climate-change-conference-december-2009/copenhagen-climate-change-conference-december-2009.

[4] "Copenhagen Climate Change Conference—December 2009," Conference, *United Nations Climate Change*.

[5] "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)," Our Work, *IUCN,* accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.iucn.org/theme/global-policy/our-work/united-nations-framework-convention-climate-change-unfccc.

[6] Clean development mechanism (CDM), Joint implementation (JI) and Emissions trading (ET). See "Mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol," Topics, *United Nations Climate Change*, accessed March 5, 2020, https://unfccc.int/process/the-kyoto-protocol/mechanisms.

Doha meet tried to extend commitment period for Parties till 2020 with most developed parties not acceding to the GHG cuts,[7] and the Paris agreement in 2015 sought to push the boundary further, in encouraging Parties to set their own mitigation goals to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees centigrade given escalating climate change problems across the world. However the biggest blow to the Paris accord came in 2017, with the United States notifying the United Nations of its intention of backing out of the Agreement.[8]

The difficulty of reaching a consensus and the urgency of reaching one at the same time is depicted by Atwood in *Payback: Debt as Metaphor and the Shadow Side of Wealth.*[9] While largely a work of non-fiction, Atwood employs fiction to make a strong statement in her fifth chapter where she creates a compelling account of Ebenezer Scrooge Nouveau, referring back to Dickens' tale involving the same character,[10] but expanding on it to create a similar character relevant in the 21st century, who undergoes a change of heart after being visited by the Spirits

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[7] David Blackall however provides a counter argument to the popular narrative by suggesting that the culprit behind climate change maybe more sinister than greenhouse gas emissions, which are popularly and easily portrayed as the cause behind change in sea levels, melting of polar ice and rise in planetary temperatures. Change in land use patterns, particularly deforestation and burning of forests and the deposit of the ashes on polar ice, leading to greater absorption of heat and thereby accelerated melting of the caps might be a greater reason. He also identifies the Earth's natural variability and the 'urban heat effect' as responsible for the rise in temperature in cities (30). However, the popular scientific narrative remains the one that policy makers have taken on as the basis of protocols and conventions across the world, instead of focusing on the more alarming causes. This problematic "grand transnational narrative" in environmental discourse thus influences political decisions as well as individual responses to global warming. David Blackall, "Environmental Reporting in a Post Truth World," *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 27, no.1 (2017): 27-40, *University of Wollongong, Australia SAGE Publications*, doi: 10.1177/1326365X17703205.

[8] "US Notifies UN of Paris Climate Deal Pullout," US & Canada, *BBC News,* August 5, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40829987.

[9] Margaret Atwood, *Payback: Debt as Metaphor and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (Toronto: O.W. Toad, 2008).

[10] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*, illustr. John Leech, facsimile reproduction of the 1st edition of *A Christmas Carol* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1843), accessed August 19, 2020, Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/christmascarolin20dick.

of Earth Day Past, Present and the Future.[11] These Spirit like creatures appear to Scrooge Nouveau at the turn of midnight and take him on a journey through the past whenever Nature has exacted her dues, the present when Nature is getting ready for the next blow, and probable futures of destruction/redemption depending on the course of action taken in the present.

The Spirit of Earth Day Past traces the change in human perception over time as the Earth was soon viewed as "nothing more than an assemblage of machines, and therefore that everything in it, animal life included, existed only to be re-engineered to do Man's will and work."[12] The Spirit takes Scrooge through space and time to view the Black Death invading Europe and decimating life. As explained by the Spirit, "Nature is an expert in cost-benefit analysis," this accounting being done a little differently and the debts always collected, but "in the long run."[13] Scrooge is then taken through a whole range of crises faced by people over the ages, caused by high-mortality diseases like tuberculosis, diphtheria, smallpox, typhoid, cholera, syphilis attacking overpopulated areas of the Earth and famines such as from the potato blight in the 1840s in Ireland caused by mono-cropping, "which Nature has always disliked."[14]

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[11] These figures draw inspiration from the Ghost of Christmas Past, Ghost of Christmas Present and Ghost of Christmas Future in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, but take on a renewed significance as Atwood uses the play on timescapes to increase sensitivity to environmental concerns and the possibility of change.

[12] Atwood, *Payback,* 132.

[13] Atwood, 133.

[14] Atwood, 138.

The Spirit of Earth Day Present is a combination figure of David Suzuki[15] and Al Gore[16] and Prince Charles in his "organic farmer guise."[17] This Spirit takes a disgruntled Scrooge Nouveau through 'disaster-in the making' situations of the present—viz. overfishing, breaking the chain of marine ecology, massive deforestation of the Amazon, glacial thaw in the Antarctic and Arctic, release of methane by the tundra thawing as a result of climate change and sea levels rising with massive cyclonic disruptions.[18] The impossibility of changing the present scenario is highlighted by the Spirit who explains the deadlock between politicians across the world. One of the greatest shocks Scrooge receives is on seeing how this present had been predicted in the past, as he sees a daughter finding a news article saved by her mother many years ago predicting the nature of things to come. Scrooge is amazed that even on knowing impending disaster, humans did not take action while there was still time.[19]

The Spirit of Earth Day Future takes on different forms, depending on which future humans choose for themselves, on the basis of present actions. The first one is a cockroach, signifying the extinction of humanity. On Scrooge's insistence, the figure changes in form to one of Futures Trader carrying a briefcase, wearing a dark suit and a gold earring.[20] This Spirit

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[15] David Suzuki, a Canadian environmentalist is a geneticist and founder of the David Suzuki Foundation that empowers people to make sustainable choices in combating environmental problems in their community, by working on climate solutions, biodiversity and environmental rights among other projects.

[16] Al Gore, former President of the United States is remembered here by Atwood for his 2006 documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* which played an important role in increasing international awareness regarding climate change and the urgency of taking collective action.

[17] Atwood, *Payback*, 139.

[18] Atwood, 140.

[19] Atwood, 144.

[20] Atwood, 145.

shows him a better future, where people have changed their lifestyles to suit limited resource availability and are gentle on the earth. In fact the description seems like an environmentalist's dream come true. All power is clean and generated from solar and wind installations, people opt for natural-fibre clothing, bicycle around, eat organic fruits and vegetables and practice organic farming. Top soil has been restored by extensive mulching and composting, with carbon dioxide in the air at a new low. Bird migrations are protected, overfishing abandoned, plastic shopping bags are banned and all travel is helium or solar powered. This has of course been a result of world leaders giving up "paranoia, envy, rivalry, power-hunger, greed, and the debate over who should start cutting down the carbon footprint first"[21] and getting down to actually dealing with global warming and finding necessary solutions.

Atwood does not however stop at these two future predictions, she makes the Spirit of Earth Day Future provide Scrooge a third possibility , where he sees himself thin and emaciated, trying to buy food with wheelbarrows of cash, but unable to, as money has completely lost its value, in the face of extreme starvation and lack of food. The Spirit is preachy and gives Scrooge a long lecture on mankind's Faustian bargain with technology and lack of knowing where to stop:

> The end result of a totally efficient technological exploitation of Nature would be a lifeless desert: all natural capital would be exhausted, having been devoured by the mills of production, and the resulting debt to Nature would be infinite. But long before then, payback time will come for Mankind.[22]

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[21] Atwood, *Payback*, 145.

[22] Atwood, 147.

This frightening future is the one described in "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet" as well, to act as a warning of things to come. In *Payback*, Scrooge is terrified and realizes that if the course of action changes now, the dark future might just be averted. There is certainty of ecological degradation, yet a glimmer of hope abides. As the Spirit in the costume of the Futures Trader says, "I deal in futures….My best offer is Maybe."[23] It is this 'Maybe' that Scrooge Nouveau clutches at and decides to 'make amends,' the Spirits of the Past, Present and Future 'striving' within him, driving him towards change. It is this 'Maybe' that we too clutch at, as we read environmentalist fiction and non-fiction, looking at variant future possibilities and hoping for a not-so-dismal future.

One of the greatest difficulties of communicating the reality[24] of climate change perhaps lies in getting individuals to perceive themselves as belonging to a larger collective of human and non-human existence across the planet. Antonia Mehnart explains, "Whereas the effects of other environmental problems are often visible locally in the form of mine tailings, land erosion, or loss of biodiversity, the impact of climate change is cumulative and cannot be immediately felt."[25] However, while Paul Edwards sees hope only in the climate modelling exercises drawn from statistical analysis as the way in which changing weather patterns across the world can be linked to global warming,[26] Mehnart sees great value in the way these 'dangerous looking

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[23] Atwood, 148.

[24] See Note 7 and 16 above.

[25] Antonia Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions: Representations of Global Warming in American Literature* (Munich: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 53. Birgit Schneider identifies the difficulty of conveying something as 'elusive' as climate change as being "one of scale," as "people can only experience local weather, but not the global effects of climate change, which would require no less of them than to perceive the world as a whole." Mehnert, 54.

[26] Paul Edwards, "Representing the Global Atmosphere," *Changing the Atmosphere: Expert Knowledge and Environmental Governance,* ed. Clark Miller (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001), 33.

graphs of future climate projections'[27] are translated into reality experienced by readers through environmental fiction or 'ecofiction'[28] that make climate change more comprehensible for readers. Timothy Morton coined the term 'hyperobjects'[29] to refer to all those things that outlive and outscale a perceiver, by being "massively distributed in time and space,"[30] climate change being one of them. Thus "we are obliged to care about them, even if we didn't manufacture them."[31] In this case, aesthetic practices become "a way to materialize and articulate what would otherwise be unsayable and unthinkable"[32] and conducive for representing the 'hyperobject' called climate change.

The unique initiative of the Laboratory for Environmental Narrative Strategies (LENS): Stories for a Changing Planet, is a recent project of UCLA IoES, on environmental storytelling and explores "strategies to create narratives and images" that shall be successful in creating a drive "to build a more sustainable world."[33] It believes in tracing back the source of our present

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[27] Mehnert, *Climate Change Fictions,* 54.

[28] Jonathan Levin defines 'ecofiction' as fictional works "that address the relationship between natural settings and the human communities that dwell within them" thereby expanding the boundary for a range of writing on environmental or environmentalist themes. "Contemporary Ecofiction," *Cambridge History of the American Novel* , eds. Leonard Cassuto, Clare Virginia Eby and Benjamin Reiss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) , 1122, accessed April 10, 2022. Google Play Books. Further discussion on ecofiction can be found on pp. 22-25 of this Introduction.

[29] Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

[30] Timothy Morton, "A Quake in Being," *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 1.

[31] Timothy Morton, "Introducing the Idea of Hyperobjects," Climate Change, *High Country News,* Jan 19, 2015, https://www.hcn.org/issues/47.1/introducing-the-idea-of-hyperobjects.

[32] Jennifer Gabrys and Kathryn Yusoff, "Arts, Sciences and Climate Change: Practices and Politics at the Threshold," *Science as Culture* 21, no.1 (2012): 17.

[33] "Stories for a Changing Planet," Institute of the Environment and sustainability, *UCLA,* accessed October 15, 2016, *https://www.ioes.ucla.edu/lens/.*

crisis to "a long history of human development and our imagination of the natural world."[34] This approach is similar to that of John P. O'Grady, who sees the ecological crisis faced by us today as the result of the failure of human imagination.[35] George Lakoff calls it a failure of our eco-vocabulary, as he locates change in language as crucial to changing "frame circuits" in brains on a massive scale, which in turn can produce material changes in our shared ecosystem.[36] Thus the words used by us to refer to the world we inhabit and impacts the way we and others perceive it and our relationship to it.[37]

Therefore Shaul R. Shenhav[38] emphasizes the need for stories to be told well by activists and advocates of change so as to mobilize people effectively and guide them in the possible paths to be taken. A good story is one that "can be suspenseful, engaging, building a sense of belonging, giving meaning and order to a complex world."[39] In addition, "it can be persuasive."[40] This is echoed by Jim Dwyer who explains that "Imaginative literature is best

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[34] "Stories for a Changing Planet," *Institute of the Environment and Sustainability*, *UCLA.*

[35] John P. O'Grady, ''How Sustainable is the Idea of Sustainability?'' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 10 (2003): 1–10, doi: 10.1093/isle/10.1.1. See also Hannes Bergthaller who articulates that the "roots of the ecological crisis" lies in the "failure of the imagination." "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *English Studies,* 91.7(2010): 730, doi: 10.1080/0013838X.2010.518042.

[36] George Lakoff, "On Environmental Communication," *Huffpost*, September 28, 2010, https://www.huffpost.com /entry/on-environmental-communic_b_741306.

[37] Patrick D. Murphy agrees to the stance taken by George Lakoff that the language used to describe our experiences and perception of reality, actually shapes that reality and our perception and experience of the same. *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries, and Fields* (1951; repr. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 3.

[38] Shaul R. Shenhav, *Analyzing Social Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[39] Annika Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication* (E-book, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2, doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-69383-5.

[40] Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling,* 2.

suited to engaging people intellectually and emotionally, providing them a greater personal stake in the text itself, and making them care."[41] The pattern of hearing stories and telling them are reinforced in us since childhood,[42] thereby being such a compelling form through which the artist can "sugarcoat the bitter pill and slip it down our gullet, telling us what we didn't want to know."[43] The WBGU 2011 report by the German Advisory Council on Global Change, in its discussion of 'transformative research' and 'transformative education', which makes such research and scientific findings available to society, harps on the need for a "global sense of responsibility" to develop from such research and education.[44] However, creating such a sense of participation among people across the world is a challenge. "Suitable narratives of change," according to the WBGU 2011 report, when "fed into everyday discourse through creative forms of knowledge communication" might create scope for such transformation.[45]

Such perspectives make us hopeful and look forward to narrators whose narratives can propel change in the world we inhabit. This thesis takes up a study of the narratives spun by one such influential narrator of environmental crisis, Margaret Atwood. Her texts straddle a wide variety of environmental discourses, exploring the range and depth of genres such as ecofiction,

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[41] Jim Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are: A Field Guide to Ecofiction* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2010), 7.

[42] Annika Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling,* 1

[43] Barbara Kingsolver, *High Tide in Tucson* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 228, quoted. in Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are,* 7.

[44] *WBGU – German Advisory Council on Global Change (2011): World in Transition – A Social Contract for Sustainability*, Flagship Report (Berlin: WBGU, 2011), 23, accessed May 2, 2019. https://www.wbgu.de/en /publications /publication/world-in-transition-a-social-contract-for-sustainability.

[45] *WBGU – German Advisory Council on Global Change*, Flagship Report, 23.

speculative fiction and climate fiction[46] while critically assessing their possibilities through her unique form of genre play.[47] Writing and publishing since the 1960s amidst giants such as J.G. Ballard, James Dickey, Jim Harrison, John Brunner, Ursula Le Guin, Margaret Laurence, David Brin, Douglas Coupland, Kim Stanley Robinson, Octavia Butler, Bruce Sterling, T.C Boyle, Paolo Bacigalupi, James Powell, Barbara Kingsolver, Nathaniel Rich, David Mitchell, Jeff Vandermeer and many others,[48] Atwood's words have an impact that few can equal in the diversity of her readership.[49] Marinette Grimbeek in her 2017 thesis notes the growing

[46] The nuances of these genres are discussed in further detail on pages 16-17, 22-25 of this Introduction.

[47] Margaret Atwood sees genres as a limitation for the way in which readers can approach a text and only "useful for bookstores. And for certain kinds of readers who want to read nothing but science fiction, or nothing but fantasy." Margaret Atwood, interview by Trisha Gupta, *The Caravan,* February 4, 2016,https://caravanmagazine.in /vantage/interview-with-margaret-atwood. In her book of essays *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, Atwood describes 'genre-fiction' as referring to all popular forms of fiction writing such as "the spy thriller and the crime story and the adventure story and the supernatural tale and the science fiction," which however well written are not viewed as 'novels' in the nineteenth century definition of the term with its air of solemnity and 'truth'. Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago, 2011)*,* 57. In her own writings, as seen in the course of this thesis, she discards any adherence to specific genres, more interested in the impact her works create. In a 'Masterclass' on writing recently conducted by her online for creative writers, she insists that they focus on writing rather than genre. In fact she ascribes a value to not knowing what genre the writer's book shall belong to as then "some genre bending" becomes possible, unlike if "you lock yourself in to a preconceived box…." The Masterclass reveals a great deal about Atwood's own processes of thinking about the act of writing. She explains to budding writers that classification and categorization is the task for literary critics and publishers. The writer's task is to make his/her "book, whatever it may be, as plausible, as believable as possible." Atwood, "The Novel and the Shifting Sands of Genre," Preview, *Masterclass,* accessed June 5 2020, https://www.masterclass.com/classes/margaret-atwood-teaches-creative-writing/chapters/the-novel-and-the-shifting-sands-of-genre#.

[48] This is not an exhaustive list of writers of popular ecofiction, climate fiction, speculative fiction or science fiction. I have chosen to name those popular writers whose writings in English on ecological themes correspond to Atwood's writing timeline. Their fiction ranges from description of posthuman futures affected by pollution, inclement weather, sea-level rise, climate change, or engage with multiple possible futures on separate planets once the earth has become uninhabitable, or describe attempts to survive in the wilderness and rediscover the human and nature relationship.

[49] Atwood herself remarks on her wide readership—"Any age, any gender, any country"—as a result of the range of her writing. Atwood, interview by Trisha Gupta, *The Caravan,* February 4, 2016, https://caravanmagazine.in /vantage/interview-with-margaret-atwood.

popularity of Atwood, her 'cultural capital' slowly turning into 'environmentalist capital'[50]—thus highlighting the importance of Atwood's articulations in the public sphere, especially for environmental causes. In Atwood's writing and utterances, whether through her novels, interviews or social media posts, we find a unique awareness of this potential that words hold in shaping our realities and at the same time, hopefully in changing our realities as well.

According to Annika Arnold, one of the most important contributions that humanities and social sciences make on the debate surrounding climate change and environmentalism lies in "re-defining and re-evaluating the dialectical relationship between nature and humans."[51] Atwood is very clear in her articulation that 'science and technology' do not have a life of their own if not determined by us humans. The responsibility of present ecological problems lies squarely on our shoulders and she makes sure there is no ambiguity on that front.[52] In response to Fiona Tolan's queries at an interview she says, "There are people who practice science and invent and expand technology. But they are people first and foremost. They are not robots. And environmental damage may be wreaked in part by "technology," but people did a pretty thorough job of extinguishing some species well before they had any technology beyond stone, fire, and bone."[53] Atwood locates the crux of the problem in our "own drives and desires," which she insists we must examine.[54] In her own words, science and technology are tools that can be

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[50] Marinette Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism: Apocalypse and Satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy,* (PhD diss., Karlstad University Studies, 2017:15), 39, accessed May 21, 2017, https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1089622 /FULLTEXT02.pdf

[51] Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling,* 23.

[52] Fiona Tolan, "'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood, " *Contemporary Women's Writing* 11, no.3 (November 2017):459, *Oxford University Press,* doi:10.1093/cwwrit/vpx020.

[53] Tolan, "'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood, " 459.

[54] Tolan, "'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood, " 459.

used by humanity for bettering or worsening the condition of their habitat.[55] However, the urgency and uncertainty of the present is palpable in her words—"We are however now at a crucial point: if the oceans die, so will we. Our choice. I have no idea which way it will go."[56]

Margaret Atwood, Ecofiction and Narrative Impact

The importance of creative narratives of ecological imbalance in the larger environmentalist discourse needs attention, even as we seek to read Atwood's works as a major voice in the environmental humanities.[57] Recent research by scientists[58] are ascribing great value to the art

[55] Tolan, "'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood, " 459.

[56] Tolan, "'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood, " 459.

[57] Libby Robin defines the term 'environmental humanities' as "an interdisciplinary area that considers the moral and ethical relations between human and non-human others (at all scales up to planetary)." It tries to approach the discourse form a different angle than that pursued by the environmental sciences defining the environment by its biophysical indicators. The inherently interdisciplinary arena of study focuses on the intricate relationships between humans and environments they inhabit and impact, bringing together perspectives from disciplines such as literature, philosophy, the fine arts, history, geography and anthropology at the minimum. As Deborah Rose and Libby Robin pinpoint in 'A Manifesto for the Ecological Humanities', collaboration between disciplines can foster an ethics of collective action and serve as propellant for the future. The Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research (MISTRA) also identifies cross national and cross cultural study of different ways in which people respond to issues of ecological crisis as an important characteristic of the environmental humanities. In addition it sees the practitioners of this field as being "more than observers and critics," with an interest in wanting to be a participant to effecting change on this planet by "shaping the values and narratives that guide decision making." I see Margaret Atwood as a significant voice in the environmental humanities as her texts and conversations dissect multiple perspectives to the human and non-human relationship and the many ways in which we approach the natural world and locate ourselves in the ecosystem. Her constant engagement with issues of biodiversity loss and ecological crisis in her public persona makes reading her texts a constantly dynamic experience of turning new corners and establishes her as a practitioner of the environmental humanities as well, as I shall be explaining in the course of this thesis. David E. Nye, Linda Rug, James Fleming and Robert Emmett, "The Emergence of the Environmental Humanities," Background Paper, *MISTRA: The Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research*, May 2013, accessed June 11, 2019, https://www.mistra.org/wp-content/uploads/2018 /01 /Mistra_Environmental_Humanities_May2013.pdf ; Libby Robin and Deborah Rose, "A Manifesto for the Ecological Humanities," Fenner School of Environment and Society, *ANU,* accessed May 28 2020, https://fennerschool-associated.anu.edu.au/ecologicalhumanities/manifesto.php ; Libby Robin, "The Eco-humanities as literature: a new genre?" *Australian Literary Studies* 23 (2008): 290–304.

[58] See Ryan P Kelly, Sarah R Cooley and Terrie Klinger, "Narratives Can Motivate Environmental Action: The Whiskey Creek Ocean Acidification Story," *Ambio*, 43.5 (2014): 592-599. doi:10.1007/s13280-013-0442-2; Michael F. Dahlstrom and Shirley S. Ho. "Ethical Considerations of Using Narrative to Communicate Science." *Science Communication* 34, no. 5 (October 2012): 595. doi:10.1177/1075547012454597 , for discussions on effective scientific narratives. Discussed in further detail on p. 17-20 of this Introduction.

of narration grounded in facts in creating any form of impact, as seen vividly in Rachel Carson's[59] methodology itself. Carson's renowned work of environmental activism *Silent Spring* created such a flutter in scientific, literary and political circles,[60] because of the way she employed narrative strategy in the process of highlighting the details of the harmful effect of pesticides, especially DDT on all life forms and cycles of nature. She contrasts idyllic scenes of beauty and harmony with those after "a strange blight"[61] creeps through the land, shocking the reader into taking notice and reading more about the source of this calamity. All doubts are silenced at the point where she declares the agency behind the destruction wrought to human and non-human life—"No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves."[62] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer named the present geological epoch the 'Anthropocene'[63] in 2000, suggestive of the

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[59] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962; repr. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1964).

[60] Though inviting huge backlash from the chemical industry which tried every method to discredit her book and writing, in turn taking out a pamphlet called "The Desolate Year" (Oct 1962), that narrates an opposite picture of a world overrun by insects, threatening human life and food, Carson's hard work and stellar research stood the test of time and peoples' scrutiny so that President Kennedy had to set up a special panel of his Science Advisory Committee, to find a solution for the problem. Carson's work led to the revision of pesticide policy in the United States and a nationwide ban on DDT for agricultural purposes. The US Environmental Protection Agency press release on the ban on DDT dated 31st December 1972 clearly echoes Carson's findings and forbids its use except for emergency purposes ("DDT Ban Takes Effect"). Thus a story well told, established in its facts holds the possibility of engendering change.

[61] Carson, *Silent Spring,* 10.

[62] Carson, *Silent Spring,* 10.

[63] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer proposed the name "Anthropocene" for the current geological epoch, on observing the irreversible effects of human activity on the earth's geology and ecology since the second half of the eighteenth century. They choose this time to demarcate the onset of the 'Anthropocene' as data relating to changes in glacial ice cores, showing greater concentration of greenhouse gases and Co2 and Ch4 are traceable since then as well as coinciding with the invention of the steam engine in 1784. 'The "Anthropocene",' *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17-18. http://www.igbp.net/download/18.316f18321323470177580001401/1376383088452/NL41.pdf. While research necessary for officially demarcating the present epoch as the 'Anthropocene' is still on, there remains little doubt of the impact humans have had on the planet over the last two centuries as seen in the recent study by Colin N. Waters et al. which recognizes significant changes to the stratigraphic signature as compared to the Holocene, owing to human activity. Studying a glacial sediment core from West Greenland, they found "unprecedented combinations of plastics, fly ash, radionuclides, metals, pesticides, reactive nitrogen and consequences of increasing greenhouse gas concentrations." Colin N. Waters, Jan Zalasiewicz, Colin

massive irretrievable damage caused by humans to the planetary geology and ecosystems over the past two centuries. However Carson made the point much earlier through her dramatic, yet scientific narrative. Carson highlights the possibility for retrieval of our natural balance, as she says that the town she describes does not yet exist. No community has yet experienced all the misfortunes described by her in the span of one page, yet every one of those changes have happened somewhere or the other. Thus hope remains, if changes are brought about. All is not yet lost, as is understood from her words at the end of her first chapter titled, "A Fable for Tomorrow."[64] Perhaps it is this flicker of hope that encourages the reader to read on, or the policy makers to do something about the state of affairs in America in 1962. Just as Carson successfully utilizes an amalgamation of scientific research and fictional narrative[65] to create alarm and a possibility of hope, Atwood forty six years later uses a similar model in *Payback,* keeping hope alive in the possibility of a different future depending on our ability to act now. With futures, it's all probability, says the Spirit of Earth Day Future: "Futures are infinite in number, as many science fiction writers have told us."[66]

Summerhayes, Anthony D. Barnosky, Clément Poirier, Agnieszka Gałuszka, Alejandro Cearreta et al ,"The Anthropocene is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene," *Science* 351, no. 6269 (2016): 137. doi: 10.1126/science.aad2622. The importance of articulating the present epoch as the 'Anthropocene' is perhaps in increasing awareness of human impact on the planetary ecosystem and therefore paves the way towards greater responsibility for the present and the future created by us. As Crutzen and Stoermer clearly articulated in 2000, the greatest task for mankind now was to develop a strategy towards sustainability and reducing the human induced stress on the planet.

[64] Carson, *Silent Spring ,* 10-11.

[65] C.P. Snow, in the foreword to Carson's *Silent Spring* (9), has called it a bridging of the two cultures of science and poetry that managed to create such impact. Given the power that narratives wield over people, her work stands as an example for scientists to consider delivering their research through effective narratives that people can relate to, rather than expository ones.

[66] Atwood, *Payback*, 145.

Science fiction has had a long and intricate relationship with environmental themes.[67] In Gerry Canavan's words, SF[68] is "our culture's vast, shared, polyvocal archive of the possible; from techno-utopias to apocalypses…it is the transmedia genre of SF that has first attempted to articulate the sorts of systemic global changes that are imminent, or already happening, and begins to imagine what our transformed planet might eventually be like for those who will come to live on it."[69] Within this wide ambit, climate fiction or 'cli-fi' is often seen as a sub-genre[70] dealing more specifically with the issue of climate change. However Dan Bloom, accredited with coining the new term has explained that he never wanted to delineate a new genre, but was simply trying to attract more attention and raise awareness regarding global warming through his 'catchy buzzword'[71]—cli-fi. This 'buzzword' turned out to really catch on and gain popularity over time, with Atwood using it on her Twitter Handle[72] and Amazon marketing its

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[67] Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson, eds. *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (Wesleyan University Press, 2014).

[68] Canavan chooses the word 'SF' rather than 'science fiction' to register his protest of the assumption that science fiction has anything to do with science. He acknowledges that most writers of science fiction choose to demarcate their writing as speculative fiction or even the 'ambiguous shorthand SF"(ix) to avoid the word 'science' on which this "genre is nominally based"(ix) and which it deviates from significantly by its very nature. Canavan and Robinson, *Green Planets,* 17.

[69] Canavan and Robinson, 17.

[70] Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, "The Influence of Climate Fiction: An Empirical Survey of Readers," *Environmental Humanities* 10, no. 2 (2018): 473-500. doi: 10.1215/22011919-7156848.

[71] J. K. Ullrich, "Climate Fiction:Can Books Save the Planet?" *Culture, The Atlantic,* August 14, 2015. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/08/climate-fiction-margaret-atwood-literature/400112/ See also Dan Bloom, "Q&A with Dan Bloom, Popularizer of Cli- Fi," interview by Robin Bates, *Teleread*, January 27, 2016, https://teleread.com/qa-dan-bloom-popularizer-cli-fi-climate-fiction/index.html.

[72] Margaret Atwood (@MargaretAtwood), "Here's a new term: "Cli-Fi" = SF about climate change. Coined by Dan Bloom re: POLAR CITY RED: http://amazon.com/dp/B007UJPYWS," April 23, 2012, https://twitter.com /margaretatwood/status/194460287187959808?lang=en. This Twitter post introduced and popularized the term amongst Atwood's followers, according to Dan Bloom. See note 71 above.

'Warmer' collection of novels tagged as 'cli-fi' and subtitled "the climate changes us all."[73] Besides its sensational appeal, in Matthew Schneider-Mayerson's study, readers of cli-fi were more concerned about climate change than the non-reader of cli-fi and he concludes after his qualitative survey of American cli-fi readers that "literature can be quite effective at enabling or compelling readers to imagine potential futures and consider the fragility of human societies and vulnerable ecosystems."[74]

The balance between despair and hope in environmental narratives appears critical, for as Daniel deB. Richter highlights, multiple popular narratives of "extinction, degradation, contamination, deforestation, and climate change"[75] promote the idea of human beings as agents of destruction and creates a skewed perspective instead of triggering any real change. Instead, he promotes what he calls a "Georgic narrative," drawing its inspiration from Virgil's *Georgics* that focus on human beings working constructively with the earth, "*no matter the future prospects.*"[76] Richter's ideas are similar to Ryan P. Kelly, Sarah R. Cooley and Terrie Klinger's[77] observations on the importance of narratives in framing public policy and motivating political action. As they observe, sometimes even a lot of scientific data does not result in action that is often propelled by the right kind of storytelling based on scientific facts

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[73] "Amazon Original Stories: WARMER," *Amazon.com,* accessed March 2019, 2020, https://twitter.com/margaretatwood/status/1944602871879598 08?lang=en.

[74] Schneider-Mayerson, "The Influence of Climate Fiction," 495.

[75] Daniel deB Richter, "The Crisis of Environmental Narrative in the Anthropocene," *Whose Anthropocene? Revisiting Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Four Theses',* eds. Robert Emmett and Thomas Lekan, *RCC Perspectives:Transformations in Environment and Society* 2 (2016):97. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26241364.

[76] Richter, 98. It is significant that Richter acknowledges that most scientists in his field of soil sciences do not pay much attention to the narrative structures of their work or the way their work as scientists get communicated with a larger audience.

[77] See Note 58.

and involving real characters.[78] Kelly, Cooley and Klinger explain that "expository communication,"[79] meaning peer reviewed scientific publications in their opinion, "rarely focuses on the experiences of individuals, and generally conveys distributional and abstracted information."[80] In contrast, the narrative that communicates "specific experiences of characters [i.e. individuals] over time,"[81] which describes certain losses suffered as a result of ecological changes, "help bring scientific and statistical projections to life."[82] As I understand it, it helps people relate to the urgency of the scientific predictions.[83]

The Narrative Policy Framework (NPF)[84] discusses the importance of 'stories' in scientific communication as also the 'science of stories,' as the name of their book declares. The effectiveness of narratives, does however involve another factor—the narratives people tell themselves.[85] Stories create larger impact when they tune into the beliefs and stories

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[78] Kelly, Cooley and Klinger, "Narratives Can Motivate Environmental Action," 592.

[79] Kelly, Cooley and Klinger, 593.

[80] Kelly, Cooley and Klinger, 593.

[81] Dahlstrom and Ho, "Ethical Considerations of Using Narrative to Communicate Science," 595.

[82] Kelly, Cooley and Klinger, "Narratives Can Motivate Environmental Action," 593.

[83] According to Kelly, Cooley and Klinger, the story of a family owned aquaculture business in stress owing to ocean acidification in the Washington area, "gained critical traction because it featured identifiable and sympathetic characters--real people--with both the capacity and the willingness to share their story outside the boundaries of their community and because their story was consistent with the effects predicted by a growing body of biophysical data." Kelly, Cooley and Klinger, 595-596. Environmental crisis thus became real and accessible and credible through the Whiskey Creek story. "Psychological distance" is thus reduced, by the act of 'localizing' scientific, social and economic information, rendering it credible and leading to greater concern in the minds of readers/listeners of the narrative. A. Spence, W. Poortinga, and N. Pidgeon, "The Psychological Distance of Climate Change," *Risk Analysis* 32 (2012): 957–972, doi: 10.1111/j.1539-6924.2011.01695.x.

[84] Michael D. Jones, Ellizabeth A. Shanahan and Mark K. McBeth, eds., *The Science of Stories: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework in Public Policy Analysis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[85] Paul Cairney, "Policy in 500 Words: the Narrative Policy Framework," *Paul Cairney: Politics and Public Policy,* WordPress.com, 28 Jan 2019 , https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/2019/01/28/policy-in-500-words-the-narrative-policy-framework/.

fundamentally embedded in groups of people and can backfire where they do not share such a frequency. However then how can narratives create change, if stories only echo what the readers or the audience already feels? Perhaps the tone of narration can impact change, if it is more accessible to the reader, as per Sheldon Krimsky's[86] model of risk communication. Krimsky identifies three phases, the first being the accumulation of accurate scientific knowledge and information for educating public opinion; and the second stage in realizing that simply communicating information and facts is insufficient and recognizing the role of persuasion. The third stage of effective risk communication in this model lies in changing the relationship between the writer/communicator and the reader/audience, by shifting from a top-down approach to one that is of partnership and engagement. Climate fiction and apocalyptic climate change narratives, do not directly dictate any course of action to the reader, rather forcing the reader to consider the nature of the present that is the past of the future depicted in the novels/narratives. In my analysis, this is akin to the partnership model of Krimsky's third stage of risk communication, effective in the art of persuasion and lasting impact that can mobilize change slowly, yet surely.

The modern environmental movement heralded by Rachel Carson in 1962 was accompanied by a huge boom in both ecological non-fiction and ecofiction engaging with human perception of nature and human interaction with the planet and its ecology. The celebration of Earth Day on 22nd April 1970 was also legend in the way it brought together 20 million people across North America demonstrating for a healthy and sustainable environment

[86] Sheldon Krimsky, "Risk Communication in the Internet Age: The Rise of Disorganized Skepticism," *Environmental Hazards 7*, no. 2 (2007):157–164. doi: 10.1016/j.envhaz.2007.05.006.

and protesting ecological deterioration.[87] The mainstream environmentalist movement in the 1970s was characterized on one hand by a sense of living on a fragile but beautiful planet with images of the blue earth circulating as a popular "signifier for environmental awareness."[88] On the other hand imagining future outcomes of continuing with present socio-economic structures of living too inspired the urge for change. Schumacher thus calls this phase of environmentalism as that of "futurologists, planners, forecasters and model builders."[89] The language of environmentalism in the 1970s was therefore more often than not situated at what Dryzek calls the 'apocalyptic horizon',[90] an attempt at inspiring change in the face of imminent crisis. What also characterizes this phase is a clear idea that capitalist expansion and consumerism alongside unchecked population explosion were all contributing to this upcoming catastrophe.[91] Club of Rome's report in 1972 was instrumental in highlighting the "finite ecological carrying capacity"[92] of the Earth. At the same time, as shall be discussed in greater detail in the Chapter 1 of this thesis, such visions of collapse and destruction could lead to a general response of avoiding the truth and any attempt at changing one's perceptions or lifestyles. Thus the emergence of certain forms of environmentalism alongside these morbid visions, which Lisa

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[87] "The History of Earth Day," *earthday.org,* accessed April 2, 2020, https://www.earthday.org/history/.

[88] Wolfgang Sachs, "The Blue Planet: An Ambiguous Modern Icon," *The Ecologist* 24, no.5 (1994):170-5, quoted in Lisa Garforth, *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018), 27.

[89] Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, "Small is Beautiful: Economics as it People Matters," (1973; repr. New York: Vintage*,* 1993) 186, quoted in Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 28.

[90] John S. Dryzek, *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37.

[91] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 27.

[92] Garforth, 31.

Garforth terms as 'Green Utopias', in their hope of a better and alternative future.[93]

The key word 'sustainability' that characterizes environmentalism in the 1980s catches on since the 1987 report of UNWCED, called 'Our Common Future.' However while being more optimistic than the 1970s which saw a limitation to human capitalist growth as necessary, it also suggests that with some modifications, environmentalism should "invest in the continuation of economic growth."[94] The shift to the sustainability discourse therefore automatically renders the environmentalist vision less radical and visionary.[95] While *Limits to Growth* tried to make us perceive the interconnectedness of all parts of the ecosystem, each element having consequences for the others and thereby forcing us to consider the responsibility of our actions and choices, calling forth radical revision of lifestyle and perception, the sustainability discourse blunts the edge of this change as in the *Bruntdland Report*[96] which offers solutions that are geared towards growth, capitalist development, new technologies and reform that claims to fulfil the needs of the present without compromising the future. Therefore the sustainability paradigm greatly inhibits any attempt at changing these very 'needs' and perception of 'better'. Earth Day 1990 celebrations went 'global' involving 200 million people in 141 countries[97] and were seen as paving the way to the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Agenda 21 of this UNFCCC Summit

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[93] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 28. I shall be plumbing this idea of environmentalisms as utopias further in chapter 1 and 2 of this thesis as I delve into Atwood's negotiations and representations of different environmentalist positions in her texts.

[94] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 30.

[95] Garforth, 30.

[96] World Commission on Environment and Development, *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf Also called the Brundtland Report, as the commission was chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland.

[97] "The History of Earth Day," accessed May 11, 2019, *earthday.org.*

showcases the perceptive shift in discourse mapped by Garforth, the "transformative utopianism"[98] of the 1970s diluted by the influx of experts and institutions that now strive to 'manage' the environmental problems, ensuring minimum change to capitalist and consumerist lifestyles. This has further led to the popularization of deep ecology philosophy and the proliferation radical and revolutionary environmentalist movements across the world, which negate the sustainability approach to environmentalist problems as 'shallow and mainstream' in favour of more deep-rooted change wrought at the level of lifestyle, political action and even engage in 'ecotage.'[99]

The many trends in the way the environmental movement has progressed over the years are seen reflected in the approaches taken by ecofiction since the 1960s. While 'ecofiction' is a very wide-bracketed term and not limited to the modern environmentalist movement, I shall be referring to it in terms of the popularity the term gained since the 1960s and 1970s with increased visibility to the global environmental concern. At the same time it would also include within itself the subsets of cli-fi and SF—whether 'science fiction' or 'speculative fiction'[100] with an avid interest in human and non-human interaction and survival. Jim Dwyer's[101] criteria for delineating work as 'ecofiction,' refers to Lawrence Buell's[102] ideas on the same fifteen years

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[98] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 44.

[99] The term 'ecotage' came into circulation around the 1970s referring to acts of sabotage with an environmentalist motive. It is closely associated with revolutionary ecoterrorism and I shall be discussing aspects of ecotage and its representation in Atwood's texts in chapter 2 of this thesis.

[100] Atwood particularly identifies her work as 'speculative fiction', differentiating it from 'science fiction'. *In Other Worlds,* 6. I shall be dwelling on her reasons for the same in Chapter 1 where I seek a co-relative between her chosen 'genre' and the narrative strategy she employs for relaying her dystopias. Also see Note 100 and 320 of this chapter.

[101] Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are,* vii-viii.

[102] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 6.

back. The first criteria is that non-human environment would be present "not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history."[103] Mike Vasey's contentions on this aspect is similar as he sees ecofiction as "stories set in fictional landscapes that capture the essence of natural ecosystems."[104] Vasey however goes a step further to suggest that the human presence may be done away with altogether in such fiction. Atwood's novel *Surfacing*,[105] non-fiction *Survival*[106] and early poetry[107] show a deep consciousness of human and non-human interactions, and delicate descriptions of internal and external landscapes imprinting on each other.

The second characteristic highlighted by Dwyer as criteria for inclusion in the ambit of ecofiction, lies in the work not having human interest as the only legitimate interest[108] and the third criteria places importance on "human accountability to the environment"[109] as part of the ethical considerations of the text. Patrick D. Murphy's differentiation of 'nature oriented literature' and 'environmental literature' is close to these considerations, as it requires the text to go beyond simply describing human and non-human interactions to discussing "ways in which pollution, urbanization, and other forms of human intervention have altered the land or

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[103] Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are,* vi.

[104] Mike Vasey, E-mail discussion, *Bioregional Studies*, Feb. 20, 1996, quoted in Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are,* 3.

[105] Atwood, *Surfacing* (1972; repr. New York: Anchor Books, 1998).

[106] Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

[107] Atwood's poetry written and published between 1964-1980, particularly poems from *The Animals in That Country, The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Procedures for Underground* and *The Circle Game*, studied in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[108] Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are,* 3.

[109] Dwyer, 3.

environment."[110] Hence 'environmental literature' works with creating an awareness of human responsibility for the environment they inhabit, treating "human action in defence of, or in behalf of, wild and endangered nature."[111] Atwood embodies this aspect of ecofiction as well, in *The Handmaid's Tale*[112] and later the *MaddAddam* trilogy,[113] where the dystopias crafted by her describe disastrous future-scapes which are a result of present forms of unconsciousness in relating to nature. Dwyer extends the definition of environmental literature to define it further as "fiction that focuses on environmental action or the green movement as 'green fiction,'"[114] and states the purpose of such fiction lying in propelling people "back into the rest of nature with new perspectives and frames of reference."[115] In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood can be seen as stepping into the domain of Dwyer's "green fiction," creating new frames of reference for viewing environmentalist action. The fourth characteristic of ecofiction enumerated by Dwyer though is the most significant, as it dwells on the importance of the text having an implicit sense of the "environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given."[116] As will be seen in the second and third chapter of this thesis, Atwood explores the possibility of representing nature and the environment as a dynamic entity, through many of her texts.

Through the length of her career, and even today as she continues to write avidly, we

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[110] Patrick D. Murphy, *Further Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 1, quoted in Dwyer, 4.

[111] Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are,* 4.

[112] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985; repr. Canada: Seal Books, 1986).

[113] Including *Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam.*

[114] Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are,* 4.

[115] Dwyer, 8.

[116] Dwyer, 8.

see Atwood experimenting with multiple styles and genres, pushing the boundaries of those genres. A study of her work reveals certain themes and concerns predominating at different times of her life, as we shall see in the next section of this Introduction. Environmental concerns have been predominant through the course of her writing, but they take on different layers and forms over time. All the frameworks of ecofiction and speculative fiction and climate fiction co-exist in Atwood's works and intensify impact.[117] Therefore I have chosen to use the term 'ecocritical narratives' for referring to Atwood's writing, instead of 'nature oriented' or 'environmental' or 'green fiction,' or only using the term 'ecofiction,' as I see her writing performing a more crucial function of self-reflexively and critically evaluating the field of ecofiction and ecocriticism itself. In this coinage, I include the association of the term ecocriticism, which I see as an evolutionary entity in close alliance with ecofiction, growing in impact and possibilities since its coinage by William Rueckert in 1978 as a paradigm to explore the intricate relationship between texts as cultural products and nature as an intrinsic subject of those texts. Rueckert explained the importance of his adopting this project: "I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to literature, because ecology has the greatest relevance to the present and the future of the world we live in."[118] This thesis is an attempt to trace the way Atwood's texts redefine the possibilities of ecocritical writing, as her writings respond to urgent and critical environmental debates right from the beginning of her career as a writer.

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[117] All the three categories of ecofiction hailed by Patricia D. Netzley as significant can be seen co-existing in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy. Patricia Netzley, *Environmental Literature: An Encyclopedia of Works, Authors, and Themes* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1991), 78. I shall be discussing this aspect in more detail when essaying her literary biography in the next section of this Introduction. See Note 284.

[118] William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," *Iowa Review* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1978): 72–73, quoted in Dwyer, 3.

I have termed Atwood's writings "ecocritical narratives of hope," as through the course of this thesis, I analyse how Atwood keeps 'hope' alive through her narratives—hope for change and greater ecological awareness, in the midst of fear and uncertainty[119] regarding human survival on an increasingly inhospitable planet. Christof Mauch explains the need for "hopeful narratives that help us think creatively and act unflinchingly," combining awareness of the crisis facing all humans and animals on the planet today alongside "starting points and signposts," that can help direct our attention towards an "alternative future."[120] Atwood's narratives become such important 'signposts' on the way of navigating stories about extinction, climate change, biodiversity loss, migration and violence against animals and humans, in the battle for resources, as she showcases multiple possibilities based on choices made in the present. Mauch explains that "unadulterated optimism," and downplaying ecological changes and "potential catastrophe," was not the function of such hopeful narratives.[121] Instead he advocates for "slow hope,"[122] in this overpopulated, vulnerable and "increasingly self-destructive world,"[123] identifying the central role of arts and humanities in tilting the scale, reminding people of both past narratives of change and "positive visions for our environment."[124] Atwood's essays

[119] Ernst Bloch in *The Principle of Hope* explains that the starting point of hope actually lies in fear, crisis and uncertainty. Such hope has transformative power, as a creative force that can change the way we live and think. According to Bloch, "living in hope makes us human." Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope,* vol. 2-3 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996). See also Christof Mauch, "Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear," *RCC Perspectives Transformations in Environment and Society*, no.1 (2019): 21, doi.org/10.5282/rcc/8556.

[120] Christof Mauch, "Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear," 5.

[121] Mauch, 5.

[122] Mauch, 5.

[123] Mauch, 8.

[124] Mauch, 21.

reflecting on such achievements by environmental activists[125] and her fiction incorporating such figures of hope[126] ensure that readers are always aware of the dangers unleashed by human action in the Anthropocene and yet also jubilant about change that can still be effected by individuals choosing to embrace setbacks and challenges from a world not yet converted to the ideals of ecological hope. Harking back to the importance of Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence"[127] of toxicity unleashed on the environment by human action, that is often invisible and gradual, causing maximum damage to the poor, marginalized and disempowered populations, Mauch calls for "slow hope," that focuses on "stories, visions and actions," quietly working towards a "more hopeful future."[128] Mauch particularly emphasizes "slow," as these are counter-narratives to narratives of accelerated growth that dominate capitalist ventures, state policies and even choice of food and agricultural practices affect health and wellbeing on this planet. Mauch tells stories of individuals and institutions across the globe and in time who have chosen to adopt an alternative story, suffering multiple setbacks over time, as decades go by to restore ecosystems that they have chosen to care for.[129] My thesis therefore analyses Atwood's

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[125] Atwood collates specific articles on Rachel Carson, Barry Lopez, Bill McKibben and Ursula Le Guin among others in her latest collection of essays, *Burning Questions*.

[126] Chapter 2 of this thesis and the Conclusion to this thesis particularly dwells on the way Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* utilises the narrative framework of a green cult that deifies environmental activists as saints, with their leader spending much time sermonizing on the life stories of these ecological saints, the challenges they faced and the courage with which they held on to hope of a better tomorrow gifting the members of his present community, the 'present'. See also Note 205 in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[127] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[128] Mauch, "Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear," 22.

[129] Mauch narrates the story of Tsai Jen-Hui as an example of a man who worked tirelessly for 40 years to transform the National Taipei University of Technology into an ecological haven, with tree houses, eco-roofs and eco-balconies, with a rain-fed and recycled water moat as the University boundary and living trees forming the entrance. While it is a success story after 40 years of battle, there were multiple occasions when Tsai Jen-Hui had to face rejection of ideas, tearing down of trees and demolition of these very structures that the University boasts of now. Mauch, "Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear," 23.

storytelling strategies in detail, as she creates specific characters and situations that both raise the alarm and narrate 'hope' for transformation, however slow and impossible it may seem, shifting attention to alternative patterns of thinking about present action.[130]

When I use the term 'ecocritical narratives', I am also referring to the approach used by the newly emergent field of econarratology that sees value in pairing the ecocritical approach with "narratology's focus on the literary structures and devices by which writers compose narratives."[131] Erin James' *The Storyworld Accord*, explores the possibilities that the term 'econarratology' produces, seeing it as a crucial step towards closer understanding of the "storyworlds" created by writers and inhabited by readers, both in terms of its correlations with the extra-textual world and in its potential for fostering greater awareness in the readers' consciousness. In this thesis, I will be closely analysing Atwood's narrative strategies in the process of engaging with ecocritical and environmentalist themes. Atwood's texts serve as rich material for increasing consciousness of the possibilities held by narrative building blocks such as characterization, focalization, time and space as organized in the text, description and narration[132] in comprehending ourselves and non-human others forming our complex, intermeshed environment. Gill Ereaut and Nat Segnit in a classic diagram[133] on the climate

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[130] See Pp 444-451 of the Conclusion of this thesis that discusses 'hope' as a function of the present, to combat the critique of 'cruel optimism' regarding planetary conditions that seem intractable.

[131] Erin James, *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), xv.

[132] Erin James and Eric Morel, eds., *Environment and Narrative: New Directions in Econarratology* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2020), 1.

[133] Gill Ereaut and Nat Segnit, *Warm Words: How Are We Telling the Climate Story and Can We Tell It Better?* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2006), 10, http://www.ippr.org/images/media/files/publication /2011/05/warm_words_1529.pdf. Ereaut and Segnit comment upon the confusing nature of the climate change discourse in British mainstream media today. They observe that it consists of many contradictory positions. To represent the scenario at a glance, they have created a diagram titled, 'Opposing arguments in the climate change discourse.' At the centre of the diagram there is a jagged edged bubble enclosing the words—"A discourse in

change discourse, shows how it looks "confusing, contradictory and chaotic"[134] with every assertion being countered by an opposing voice. The net result of this "messy" battle for consensus that they depict in a diagrammatic form, is that "the overarching message for the lay public is that in fact, nobody really knows."[135] In the face of such uncertainty, selected novels, short stories, poetry and essays by Atwood bring the discourse of climate change and environmentalisms to the forefront as well as the inherent tensions that characterize these issues and make them more palpable for the reader of her texts.[136]

Research Methodology

I shall be reading Atwood's fiction and poetry alongside her non-fiction to completely view the tapestry of forms she creates through her different personas. I see her non-fiction finding animation in her fiction and poetry and simultaneously, her fiction finding critical appraisal through her non-fiction and public utterances, the two being in a constant dialogue with each

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tension," with arrows shooting out in all directions describing how different parties view climate change. The left side of the figure has all the voices supporting the existence of climate change and the possibility of change by declaring it, "the biggest issue in the world," "a bad thing," "all our fault," "reversible," etc. The right side of the diagram houses those voices that reject the existence of climate change or see it as irreversible, with declarations such as—"not happening, not real, not now," "black comedy," " a non-issue," "human agency irrelevant," etc. A big square bubble in the left lower quadrant of this diagram states, "The meta-message=Nobody knows!" The significance of the diagram lies in the way it encapsulates the lack of consensus among participants in the debate not only in British mainstream media, but across the world, specially in international forum where this leads to stasis and apathy in taking bold measures to combat climate change and environmental crisis.

[134] Ereaut and Segnit, *Warm Words: How Are We Telling the Climate Story and Can We Tell It Better?,* 10.

[135] Ereaut and Segnit, 10.

[136] There is greater understanding now that ''people are 'wired' to be especially sensitive to information in narrative format.'' Melanie C. Green and Timothy C. Brock, "In the mind's eye: Transportation-Imagery Model of Narrative Persuasion," *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations,* eds. M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, 2002), 315-341. Green and Brock in their 'Transportation-Imagery-Model' locate images in narratives as having maximum impact on changing readers' belief systems. In reference to this, I shall be analyzing the centrality of Atwood's use of striking images as part of her eco-narratological technique in the course of my thesis.

other. I present this as Atwood's particular method of narrative play, as she not only blurs the distinctions between genres in her writing, but also the association of truth with certain genres in this inter-animating dialogue within her own fiction and non-fiction.[137] Atwood in a conversation with Marilyn Berlin Snell in *Mother Jones*, expresses the way she now views 'reality' as compared to when she was young: "Reality simply consists of different points of view. When I was young, I believed that non-fiction meant 'true.'"[138] Thus in her fiction and non-fiction, we keep seeing her playing with the possibilities of the genres[139] she explores, eking out every possible point of view, to reach a more diverse presentation of events as described in both her fiction and non-fiction. In my viewpoint one cannot be read without the other.

Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson recognizes how Atwood welcomes the "challenges of genre writing but always infuses those genres with a political slant that offsets the conventions and boundaries that the genres initially suggest."[140] When plumbing ecological themes, this 'narrative play' therefore becomes the means of destabilizing the way in which characters in her texts and readers of her text perceive the planet, the ecosystem and themselves within it, at a time of grave ecological crisis faced by the planet today. In this thesis we closely examine the

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[137] For working purposes, I include all of Atwood's interviews and essays and public social media utterances in her persona as Atwood as non-fiction and all her novels , poetry , short-stories and graphic novels involving characters avowedly 'fictional' as fiction, even though as is apparent these categories clearly disintegrate in Atwood's use of them. Even the line between poetry and fiction is nebulous when reading Atwood as her impatience with the dividing lines in our imaginative and comprehensive spheres is clear as she tests the limits in her collection "True Stories".

[138] Marilyn Berlin Snell, Interview with Margaret Atwood, *Mother Jones,* July/August 1997, accessed January 16, 2019, https://www.motherjones.com/media/1997/07/margaret-atwood/.

[139] See Linda Wagner-Martin who discusses Atwood's "impatience with genres" and the way she test the "nebulous line between poem and story". "'Giving Way to Bedrock': Atwood's Later Poems," *Various Atwoods: Essays on the Later Poems, Short Fiction, and Novels*, ed. Lorraine M. York (Toronto: Anansi, 1995), 71-88.

[140] Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 25.

ecocritical praxis adopted by Atwood in many of her texts, through her unique narrative strategies. In this process, I shall also be referring to some interviews of Atwood as they create new spaces of enquiry for her texts, adding to our critical lens in reading her work. In being an "artform" in themselves, "fictional and arranged,"[141] Atwood's articulations at the interviews provide significant clues for reading her texts, even when they set out to negate certain overt readings and definitions of her creative work. She specially marks out that the feeling of the reader or the interviewer that he/she is getting to know the 'truth' straight from the writer, is 'illusory'. Interviews are fictions, in Atwood's own declaration—"Let's just state at the beginning that interviews as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth are suspect. They're fictions."[142] While all of Atwood's writing may be projected as 'play' by her, the seriousness of her environmental concerns are reflected in her interviews and non-fiction as well as her lifestyle choices.[143]

While Atwood may resist labelling at interviews, wanting to be seen as a novelist and an observer of society,[144] her writings show intense environmental awareness and self-reflexivity in presenting crucial environmental issues, with all their nuances. My thesis goes on establish Atwood as a foundational author of the environmental humanities because of the clarity of her writing, lifestyle and persona, providing readers and viewers with multiple handles

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[141] Atwood, "Tightrope Walking Over Niagara Falls," interview by Geoff Hancock, 1986, *Margaret Atwood: Conversations,* ed. Earl G. Ingersoll (NJ: Ontario Review Press, 1990), 191.

[142] Atwood, "Tightrope Walking Over Niagara Falls," 191.

[143] Margaret Atwood invented the LongPen as far back as 2006 for signing autographs on her books remotely to reduce her carbon footprint as far as possible. Margaret Atwood, "The Ballad of the LongPen," September 30, 2006, *Guardian,* https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/sep/30/margaretatwood.

[144] Sudhakar Jamkhandi, "An Interview with Margaret Atwood," *Commonwealth Novel in English* 2.1 (Jan 1983): 5.

on environmental concerns, leaving the final choice of story in readers' hands, quite like Joanna Macy and Molly Brown's *The Work that Reconnects*, discussed in detail in chapter two of this thesis,[145] that provides multiple ways of narrating ecological crisis and then leaves the final decision on the participant regarding which story he/she will inhabit. The *Angel Catbird* graphic novel series particularly brings the writer and activist in Atwood together in plain sight, as the text and images are peppered with notes on the importance of conservation of species and the dangers to birds and cats.[146] In Camille Peri's words, Atwood needs to be seen as a novelist who writes from the "ground up" and not "from some theory down,"[147] and is a master at exposing hypocrisy amongst the powerful.[148] In a similar vein, Jane Bone has observed that Atwood does not "spare any sensibilities; whether one has belief in, or gives value to, scientific rationality, nature and spirituality or technology and a pragmatic capitalism: all are flung aside and recreated in these fictions."[149]

Author, Text, Context: An Overview of Atwood's Life and Works

Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa, Canada and spent most of her early life in the Canadian 'Bush'[150] as her father was an entomologist and would take his family along on his field trips.

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[145] See pp 193-194, 276-277 of Chapter 2 of this thesis. Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2014).

[146] See Conclusion of this thesis for a detailed analysis of Atwood's narrative strategies in *Angel Catbird,* vol. 1-3.

[147] Camille Peri, "Witch Craft," *Mother Jones* (Apr 1989): 30, accessed June 10, 2020. Google Books.

[148] Peri, "Witch Craft," 30.

[149] Jane Bone, "Environmental dystopias: Margaret Atwood and the monstrous child," Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education (2015):1, doi: 10.1080/01596306.2015.1075701.

[150] As Atwood's father pursued his entomological studies, the first few years of her life were spent in 'wintry' Ottawa and Northern Quebec. David Staines, "Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood,* ed. Coral A. Howells (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 12.

Even after moving to Toronto in 1946, Atwood's parents would take Atwood and her brother Harold to the northern wilderness every summer.[151] Thus her early education was directly in the lap of wilderness which forms a major thematic backdrop to many of her works which we shall be discussing in detail in the course of this thesis. Atwood was also a voracious reader and self-taught through such reading till she joined school in cities around the age of five.[152] Her decision to be a writer and that too at a time when there was little sense of 'Canadian literature' and prejudice abounded against women writers, might have been seen as 'improbable'[153] by many. However Atwood was staunch in her decision and pursuit.

In "Travels Back", Atwood reflects on the absence of Canadian literary figures when studying at Toronto Leaside High School.[154] However at Victoria College, she discovered a new world of Canadian poetry and read extensively from Jay Macphersons's library.[155] At this time, her first small collection of poetry *Double Persephone*[156] won the E.J. Pratt Medal. While her journey as a writer began in earnest, it is only during her Masters at Radcliffe College at Harvard that she began thinking of Canadian literature and writing traditions as separate from American and British ones and exploring how she might present the same to a lay audience. This took on the shape *of Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*[157] some years later, through

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[151] Staines, "Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context,"12.

[152] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood,* 2.

[153] Macpherson, 2.

[154] Margaret Atwood, "Travels Back," *Maclean's*, January 1, 1973, 31. https://archive.macleans.ca/issue/19730101#!&pid=28.

[155] Staines, "Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context," 14.

[156] Atwood, *Double Persephone* (Toronto: Hawkshead Press, 1961).

[157] Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

which Atwood was successful in "forging an identity as a Canadian writer, something unique on the Canadian scene."[158] The reality of Canadian wilderness as perceived by her and other writers in Canada, resonate through her works throughout her career, as we will be seeing in the brief chronological study of her writings in this section of the Introduction and in selected texts through the course of this thesis. David Staines sees her as a quintessentially "Canadian" writer[159] and Atwood herself reflects on the importance of locating her Canadian roots: "refusing to acknowledge where you come from…is an act of amputation: you may become free floating, a citizen of the world…but only at the cost of arms, legs or heart. By discovering your place you discover yourself."[160] However, while acknowledging the roots of her ecological consciousness, I see Atwood as inhabiting a larger identity than Canadian, as the scope and nature of her works expand over time. This brief overview of Atwood's works from 1961-2022 attempts to sketch the way Atwood's concerns intensify and expand over the years.

Atwood began working on her doctoral studies at Harvard in 1961, but being increasingly involved in writing, with *The Circle Game*[161] winning the Governor General's Award in 1966 and rapid publication of poetry collections and novels,[162] was unable to complete

[158] Staines, "Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context," 19.

[159] Staines, 12.

[160] Atwood, "Travels Back," 48.

[161] Margaret Atwood, *The Circle Game* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1964).

[162] *The Animals in That Country* (1968), *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970) and *The Edible Woman* (1969) followed close on the heels of the Governor General's Award, with publishers taking renewed interest in Atwood.

her thesis.[163] Multiple honorary doctorates from twenty-six[164] Universities and educational institutions have since secured her fame and position as a writer of international repute. At the same time, Atwood's remarkable outreach and popularity as a writer may be measured by her wide availability and readership from airport newspaper bookshops to graduate school syllabi[165] as well as a slew of awards from Ms Magazine's Woman of the Year to The Norwegian Order of Merit.[166] While it is tempting to find connections between Atwood's writing and the events in her personal life, such a project has met with much resistance from Atwood in the past.[167] Michael Rubbo's documentary on Atwood, *Once in August*[168] shows Rubbo progressively frustrated at the attempt he makes of revealing unknown facets of the author's life. In a crucial

[163] Jerome Buckley, Atwood's supervisor has reflected on her inability to complete the thesis as a result of a "rapidly accelerating career as a poet and a novelist." quoted in A. S Adhikari, *Woman's Search for Identity in the Novels of Margaret Atwood,* PhD. Diss.(Kumaun University, 2012), 15, accessed June 12, 2019, https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/21751.

[164] The list of institutions from where Atwood has received honorary doctorates runs long and includes Oxford University, Cambridge University, Sorbonne Nouvelle and Harvard University where she had begun pursuing her academic doctoral degree. See http://margaretatwood.ca/awards-recognitions/ for a complete list of 26 honorary degrees received between 1973 and 2017.

[165] Ray Robertson, review of *The Red Shoes: Margaret Atwood Starting Out*, by Rosemary Sullivan, *Books in Canada* 27, no. 7(October 1998): 20, 31, quoted in Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood,* 4.

[166] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood,* 2. For an elaborate an long list of awards received by Atwood from around the world, see http://margaretatwood.ca/awards-recognitions/.

[167] Nathalie Cooke's *Margaret Atwood: A Biography* (1998) and Rosemary Sullivan's *The Red Shoes* (1998) both negotiated Atwood's distancing by projecting their biographies as 'not-biographies.' Lorraine York, "Biography/autobiography," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood,* ed. Coral Ann Howells (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 39. Cooke has emphasized that she was not producing a celebrity biography that idolized the subject and Sullivan explained that her work was not about Atwood's private life, but rather about the challenges faced by a writer like Atwood on the Canadian literary scene.

[168] Michael Rubbo, dir., *Once in August*, NFB, 1984, film, accessed through *YouTube*, "Margaret Atwood: Once in August," August 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wG2QMomM0Fk.

scene critically analysed by both Nathalie Cooke[169] and Lorraine York[170] later, Atwood wears a paper bag over her face with cut outs for the eyes with family members taking over the camera and offering comic answers to the question, "Who is this woman?"[171] Atwood in her interview with Tolan concedes that she was averse to biographical interpretations in her 20s, but was more accommodating and even interested in such contexts now.[172] However, at the same time, her critical awareness of reader responses to contexts, is illuminating. She says, unflinchingly, "The real difference is that when you write autobiography people think you're lying, or at least fudging. Whereas when you write fiction, people think you're concealing autobiography."[173] Macpherson notes that Atwood herself is insistent on distancing herself from her creations.[174] Atwood's website in 1995 under the name of O.W.Toad, was telling in the way she managed her public persona and celebrity status. Lorraine York's analysis of this site is useful as she notes that the desk stood in for the person of the author, maintaining a certain distance between the writer and the reader.[175] The site allowed us to 'navigate' the desk and open some of its drawers. At the same time, all drawers could not be opened by us. Thus we were given access and restricted at the same time.[176] The name of the website was 'Margaret Atwood Reference

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[169] Nathalie Cooke, "Lions, Tigers, and Pussycats: Margaret Atwood (Autobiographically)," *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact,* ed. Reingard M. Nischik (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 22.

[170] Lorraine York, "Biography/autobiography," 40.

[171] Michael Rubbo, dir., *Once in August*, 39:47-40:26. Also see York, "Biography/autobiography," 40, Cooke, Nathalie Cooke, "Lions, Tigers, and Pussycats," 18.

[172] Tolan, "'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood, " 461.

[173] Tolan, 461.

[174] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood* , 3.

[175] York, "Biography/autobiography," 32.

[176] York, 33.

Site'[177] instead of a homepage, again perhaps to keep the walls up between the readers/critics and the author's personal life and body.

Since then Atwood's website and online persona have undergone many changes. Atwood's present website, while doing away with the image of a desk, retains a certain impersonality while offering a peek into her life and thoughts. The first line that greets the viewer of her website is "I hope this site helps you to find what you are looking for. Happy Reading."[178] Therefore she is addressing a reader in 'quest' of answers, rather than a random surfer on the web. This is in keeping with the advice she doles out to young writers in a section of the website titled "Your Online Presence,"[179] where she describes possible ways of sharing one's writing and promoting the same through different online forums like Twitter, Wattpad, blogs and websites. While she expounds the importance of peppering book promotion with other articles on blogs and twitter, to retain reader interest by providing a varied palette, it is on the "writer's website" visitors actually "expect to find out about the books you've written , to read reviews and even to be shown how they can buy your books online."[180] She adds, "Pictures of the covers are not out of place here, nor is a biography."[181] True, she does include a biography on her website and lots of cover jackets of her books. However the biography is sparse and factual, placing information under subheadings—"Born", "Education", "Places of Residence",

[177] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood,* 5.

[178] Margaret Atwood's website, accessed March 30, 2020, http://margaretatwood.ca/.

[179] Atwood, "Your Online Presence," Margaret Atwood's website, accessed March 30, 2020, http://margaretatwood.ca/your-online-presence/

[180] Atwood, "Your Online Presence."

[181] Atwood, "Your Online Presence."

"Employment" and "Associations,"[182] without fleshing out the details. The 'desk' between the reader and the writer remains, even though there is a play on providing a sneak peek that is teasing and frustrating at the same time. A section of the home page shares a few lines on what Atwood is presently working upon, called "What's on my Desk"[183] to keep the Atwood fan on the line, but hardly reveals her thoughts. At the same time, there is a change in the way Atwood promotes her environmental conscious ideas through the website through the 'Green Policies' followed by her office and the 'Green Orgs' supported by her scrolling through the main page of the website as well as with the images of herself and Graeme Gibson that she shares, as an obituary for her partner of forty eight years. However in the narrative offered on this website, it is difficult to grasp a clearer picture of the author as a person, wanting to play down her life in favour of her works.[184] Atwood explains in an interview with Macpherson, the pitfalls of a biographical reading, as "how much is real, how much is not real; the fact is that, sure, you always use stuff that has gone through your head, so in that sense everything's autobiographical. On the other hand, you always alter everything that goes through your head; in that sense nothing is autobiographical…"[185] A more recent documentary by Nancy Lang and Peter Raymont called *Margaret Atwood: A Word After a Word After a Word is Power*[186] films Atwood around the

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[182] Margaret Atwood's website, "Biography," accessed April 2, 2020, http://margaretatwood.ca/biography/.

[183] See Note 178 above.

[184] Lisa Allardice notes many biographical elements in Atwood's work, specially in *Cat's Eye.* However as Allardice notes in her report on the interview with Margaret Atwood, the writer is not interested in a memoir. Atwood states, "I'm more interested in what's going on in the world than I am in myself," and adds, "I'm not much interested in my deep, dark psyche, fascinating though it may be." "Interview--Margaret Atwood: I Am Not a Prophet. Science Fiction is Really about Now," January 20, 2018, *Guardian,* https://www.theguardian.com/books /2018/jan/20/margaret-atwood-i-am-not-a-prophet-science-fiction-is-about-now .

[185] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood,* 7.

[186] Nancy Lang and Peter Raymont, dirs., *Margaret Atwood: a Word after a Word after a Word is Power,* Documentary (Canada: White Pine Pictures, November 7, 2019), 92 min, accessed through IDFA,

world on her keynote speeches and book tours, and presents an overview of Atwood's works over the years, but never probes too deep for comfort, while performing the function of augmenting and celebrating her persona in public life. Thus, my literary overview of Atwood's work in this Introduction focuses more on investigating the way her writing evolves over time, with special emphasis on texts that are ecologically conscious or environmentalist in their scope. While Atwood's personal memories and experiences necessarily form the source of her creative outpourings, I would rather like to read her in terms of the persona she crafts through her online presence, writings and conversations across the world, as an intended form of support for the environmental causes she endorses and writes about.

While Atwood's publications always devote a few pages at the beginning of the book to a list of her works divided into genres such as "Novels," "Shorter Fiction," "Non-Fiction," "Poetry," "For Children" and "Graphic Novels,"[187] within which her writings are ordered chronologically, a close reading of Atwood's repertoire makes her 'genre-bending'[188] very apparent and self-evident. The boundaries are built up by her and torn down with the same enthusiasm, as similar themes, ideas and images get repeated across texts and time but in extremely different frameworks, creating a new set of perspectives every time. In fact, the poems

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https://www.idfa.nl/en/film/9abfca35-a087-44df-839a-9664873f38ff/margaret-atwood-a-word-after-a-word-after-a-word-is-power/docs-for-sale .

[187] Atwood, "Also by Margaret Atwood," opening pages in *The Testaments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2019).

[188] See Note 47 above. Reingard M. Nischik in her book *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood* looks upon the word 'genre' in terms of forms of writing such as poetry, novels, short stories, non-fiction, children's fiction, comics, films, series, etc and analyses Atwood's treatment of gender in the genres she uses to write in. The "wide range of genres in which she has been productive," as well as the awards and accolades received for each of these productions, is a significant aspect of Atwood's popularity according to Nischik. Atwood's subversion of 'genre tradition' here refers to the way in which she plays upon conventional expectations from these forms of writing, blurring the boundaries between poetry, fiction, plays, short stories and non-fiction to create unique pieces of literature. *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood* (Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 2010).

and short stories can be seen as spaces within which Atwood can revisit characters and ideas in multiple permutations and combinations, not restricted to maintaining any form of unity or cohesion as within the space of a novel. The variety of expositions on themes relating to the environment, nature, storytelling, gender, power in relationships, the power of language and words in defining events, is staggering. This section of the introduction therefore attempts a loosely[189] chronological study of her works, instead of a generic one, focusing more on texts resonating with the theme of my thesis.

Worlds of Her Own: 1961-1980

Atwood's first small press publication *Double Persephone*,[190] was in the form of a chapbook, handset by Atwood herself[191] and the cover designed by her with a linoblock.[192] She self-published this book with a print-run of 220 books, in an attempt to make her book visible at a time when Canadian literature was almost invisible, as I have mentioned earlier. This small collection of poetry is often elided when discussing Atwood's poetry, with *The Circle Game* taking on greater importance. However, *Double Persephone* despite its small size[193] shows a poet seriously interested in retelling myth and stories from new perspectives. The "girl with the gorgon touch," searches for "a living wrist and arm" and the life of "petals that will crush and

[189] While order of publication of texts is largely considered for the analysis, at the same time, in certain cases this is overridden when texts published within a few years offer up parallels that need to be discussed together.

[190] Atwood, *Double Persephone* (Toronto: Hawkshead Press, 1961), pamphlet.

[191] Atwood, "The Publishing Pie: An Author's View," O'Reilly TOC Conference: Tools of Change for Publishing, Feb 16, 2011, New York, *O'Reilly*, YouTube, accessed April 10, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=-6iMBf6Ddjk#t=784s.

[192] Ashok K. Saini, "The Evolution of Atwood: The Role of Small-Press in Atwood's Early Works," *PUB801: History of Publishing,* accessed April 10, 2020, https://tkbr.publishing.sfu.ca/pub801/author/aashok/.

[193] Literally small, as the book was only 16 pages, each 5x6 ¾ inch in size.

fade."[194] However she is doomed to find only "marbled flesh" and "a stiffened form"[195] by the very nature of her gaze. Retelling Persephone's story introduces themes of ecological cycles, natural rhythms alongside the power of words themselves, which endow Persephone with an agency unlike conventional tales. The sensitivity to the natural world just hinted at in this collection takes on a new significance in *The Circle Game*,[196] Atwood's first major volume of poetry[197] which is a storehouse of her prescient ideas regarding the ecosystem and human interpretation of the natural world. She gives full expression to the range of emotions experienced by speakers in her poems vis-à-vis nature. From an awareness of the brutality of the natural world as a retaliation of human encroachment to sensitivity of humans being a part of this earth and eternally alive, the poems span a magnificent range of responses and experiences. "This is a Photograph of Me"[198] foreshadows themes to be developed in *Surfacing* in 1972. Through these poems, it appears that the transition from a feeling of victimhood to creative non-victimhood that Atwood theorizes later in *Survival*[199] is possible only in the crucible of nature. "After the Flood, We,"[200] is significant in showing how the access to the

[194] Atwood, *Double Persephone,* 5.

[195] Atwood, 5.

[196] *The Circle Game* was also published first (1964) as a small press publication in the form of a lithograph with Charles Pachter's illustrations.

[197] The earlier poetry collections, including *Double Persephone*, are listed by Atwood herself under "Small Press Editions" on her website. See "Full Bibliography," accessed March 30, 2020, http://margaretatwood.ca/full-bibliography-2/.

[198] Atwood, "This is a Photograph of Me," *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 2. Individual poem citations made from *Eating Fire*, which collects together the most significant poems from Atwood's different poetry collections published over the years.

[199] Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

[200] Atwood, "After the Flood, We," *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 3.

mysteries of the natural world are not available to every individual and requires a more perceptive and sensitive eye.

Atwood's next major volume of poetry, *The Animals in That Country*[201] takes a hard look at the way animals are used for human entertainment in the title poem[202] and also returns to the theme of non-human resistance to human interpretation and anthropomorphism. "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer"[203] depicts the struggle between human occupation of land and wilderness and the fear of unknown terrain. The tension between the individual and nature is presented through startling amalgamation of images that engulf the 'pioneer' as well as the reader of the poem. This theme finds further echoes in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*,[204] Atwood's next volume of poetry, describing the struggles faced by the fictionalized Susanna Moodie[205] in the wilderness that denies access and yet overwhelms the perceiver, who understands that she needs "wolf's eyes to see/the truth."[206] *Surfacing*[207] later explores the same idea in prose as the narrator of the book seeks to unravel the mysteries hidden by nature, by

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[201] Atwood, *The Animals in That Country* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968).

[202] Margaret Atwood, "The Animals in That Country," *Eating Fire*, 30.

[203] Atwood, "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," *Eating Fire*, 38-41.

[204] Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[205] Susanna Moodie is best known for her work *Roughing it In the Bush* (1852), where she details her trials and tribulations as a British emigrant trying to settle in the Canadian 'bush' in the 1830s. It was written as a kind of guide for new settlers in Canada unaware of the struggles they would have to face in the wilderness. Moodie also wrote *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush* (1853) where she compares her experience of settling in the colony of Beleville—"the clearings" with that of the farm in the backwoods of Ontario, "the bush" where she lived earlier. Atwood was greatly inspired by Moodie's writings as seen in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*(1970) and other pieces written by her over time where she dwells on the possible interactions between the human and non-human and strives at a redefinition of what is seen as the wilderness. I shall be analysing this facet in detail in chapter 3 of my thesis.

[206] Atwood, "Further Arrivals," *Eating Fire*, 55.

[207] Atwood, *Surfacing*, (1972; repr. New York: Anchor Books, 1998).

becoming one with it. The imagery used in this collection also finds a different form altogether in the short stories of *Wilderness Tips*[208] where the wilderness holds the key to all that is mysterious and unknown.

The Edible Woman,[209] Atwood's first published full length novel, explores the narrator Marian MacAlpin's growing dissatisfaction with herself and her identity as she negotiates a job as a surveyor and a marriage proposal from Peter, who seeks to define her in his own terms and a complex and disturbing relationship with Duncan who represents everything she herself desires but is unable to acknowledge. As the novel proceeds, it is interesting to note that the narration changes from the first person to the third after the marriage proposal, with Marian's increasing loss of self-identity.[210] Alongside change in narrative voice, Marian also progressively loses her appetite as she starts identifying life in all forms of food and is unable to eat. As Macpherson has noted, it is tempting to see the connections with the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s with *The Edible Woman*, in offering up a critique of social assumptions regarding women, beauty and roles ascribed for them.[211] In fact, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, forms an interesting parallel, identifying the 'problem with no name'[212] haunting women in America post 1949, as they are expected to find fulfilment in the roles of housewife and mother rather than at the workplace. Marian too faces a similar dilemma as she is expected to give up her job on marriage with Peter, which she both wants and dreads at the

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[208] Atwood, *Wilderness Tips* (1995; repr. London: Virago, 2010).

[209] Atwood, *The Edible* Woman (1969 ; repr. Canada: Seal Books, 1998).

[210] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 26.

[211] Macpherson, 26.

[212] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; repr. New York: Dell. Publishing Co., 1964), 15.

same time. At the party thrown by Peter after the marriage proposal, Marian tries to doll up with make-up into the image expected of her. However, her attempt turns into one that is comic and embarrassing, as Peter calls it a masquerade ball and she rushes off in an attempt to escape this image of herself. Marian's affair with Duncan exposes her to those sides of her that she represses, as they would be considered socially unacceptable. Unable to eat anything towards the end of the novel, feeling a sense of cannibalism by identifying with all form of food, she finally literalizes her experience of being 'consumed' by others, by baking a cake in the shape of a woman and offering it to Peter, to eat.

In *Procedures for Underground*,[213] we see the speaker of Atwood's poems negotiating memories and attempting to preserve those moments in time from slipping away and fading. "Woman Skating"[214] contrasts the imagined figure of the mother with the real one before the speaker, suggestive of the nebulous space between what we see and what we want to see. The figure of the mother recurs later in *Surfacing*, as the narrator tries to return back in time and find meaning to memories. The image of the sister, swimming in a lake in "Younger Sister, Going Swimming"[215] comes back in *Wilderness Tips*, identifiable yet different as Atwood constantly circulates images in new configurations through the range of her writing.

Gender and power inequities in relationships, while being a common theme running across her writing from the very beginning, find special focus in the poems in *Power Politics*.[216]

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[213] Atwood, *Procedures for Underground* (Oxford University Press, 1970).

[214] Atwood, "Woman Skating," *Eating Fire*, 96.

[215] Atwood, "Younger Sister, Going Swimming," *Eating Fire*, 97.

[216] Atwood, *Power Politics* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1971).

Relationships are described as a perennial battlefield alternating between intensity of desire and a need to avoid each other. The ideas and conflicts explored in this collection as well as those before find a different but analogous expression in Atwood's novel *Surfacing* that posits crucial questions regarding power in relationships between people as well as between human beings and the ecosystem that sustains them. In *Surfacing* we see the central unnamed narrator in "the process of becoming, rather than finalizing, a series of identities."[217] There are many similarities in the way the central narrator of this novel suffers a psychological breakdown, as she retreats into her past, trying to piece herself together after traumatic relationships and an abortion. When she finally allows herself to rebel against the identities forced on her by the situations and men in her life, she finds she must shun human habitation and society altogether, entering a communion with the land and nature to find meaning and self. This sense of enlargement of one's boundaries is startlingly like that envisioned by the deep ecologists discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. As in *The Edible Woman*, the narrator in *Surfacing* too undergoes a psychological breakdown when she is unable to conform to the societal expectations from her. While Marian reaches a point of identification with all food and a loss of sense of self, the narrator of *Surfacing* attempts to lose her sense of being a human separate from the natural world by the end of the novel, by attempting to unlearn all aspects of language and culture, seeing it as the only means of restoring her 'self.'

Surfacing begins with the narrator journeying to the island on which she spent her childhood summers with her family, in the quest to find her father, who had been living alone on the island since his wife's death a few years back. In this literal and metaphorical journey

[217] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 30.

into her past, the narrator, like Marian in *The Edible Woman*, comes face to face with many fractured memories repressed in her consciousness. Till now, cut off from her emotions and feelings for people around her, she experiences a need to connect with the aspect of nature totally untrammelled by human interference and inaccessible to human interpretation. At the same time, she observes Anna and David's marriage of appearances and wonders at the subterfuge and violence involved in a relationship that appeared 'happy' on the surface. The ending of *Surfacing* remains open ended like in *The Edible Woman*, as we watch the narrator of *Surfacing* deciding whether to come back to the world of humans, or not. In *The Edible Woman*, we were left with the scene of Duncan polishing off the cake baked by Marian in the figure of herself, leaving it unclear whether she is able to break the cycles of social norms, codes and consumption that she finds herself in.

Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature, published in the same year as *Surfacing*, has led to the two being read as companion pieces to each other.[218] While Atwood denies that one was written to validate the other,[219] the parallels and echoes are unmistakable. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* was Atwood's first foray into nonfiction as she set out to create a definitive space for Canadian Literature by identifying its key motifs and patterns. As per its objective, it was a bid to make "Canadian Literature, as Canadian Literature—not just literature that happened to be written in Canada,"[220] with a great effort to

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[218] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 17. Also see Jürgen Wehrmann, "Beyond the Garrison: Global Education and Teaching (Canadian) Literature in the EFL Classroom," *Challenging Boundaries in Language Education*, ed. Achilleas Kostoulas (Switzerland, AG: Springer, 2019), 116, accessed October 19, 2019, *Google Books*.

[219] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 17.

[220] Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972; repr. Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2012), 6.

set it out as a "species"[221] distinguished from all others such as American or British Literature.[222] This 'thematic' form of criticism employed by Atwood stirred the hornet's nest.[223] Atwood identified survival and victimhood to be the main thematic corners around which Canadian revolved. She suggested four basic victim positions[224] which characterized texts and saw the act of writing as the point of the author's reaching "creative non-victimhood," while for the reader such a point is reached at the "moment of insight." [225]

Atwood's unflinching exploration of power play in relationships in *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* and earlier poetry collections, continues to find expression in *You Are Happy*.[226] "Tricks with Mirrors"[227] uses verse to look at the way one individual starts mirroring the other in an act of submission and yet retains power by transmuting this mirror into a pool that can

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[221] Atwood, *Survival*, 5.

[222] Geoff Hancock, Canadian Writers at Work (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), 258, referred to by Staines, "Margaret Atwood in her Canadian Context," 19.

[223] Atwood, *Survival,* v. Atwood in her recent preface to *Survival* remembers the 'uproar' caused by the publication of the book in 1972 that transformed her "overnight from a lady poet with peculiar hair to the Wicked Witch of the North, accused of evil communism or bourgeois capitalist sycophancy." She considers the critique levelled at *Survival* as something of a "paradox," as prior to this Canadian Literature was considered almost non-existent or worthy. Also see Francesco Lorrigio, "the Question of Corpus: ethnicity and Canadian Literature," In *Future Indicative: Literary theory and Canadian Literature* ed. John Moss (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), 53-68, quoted in Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 16. Critics like Francesco Loriggio criticized the thematic framework used in *Survival* which attempts to identify common traits in texts to be demarcated as Canadian literature and what he perceives as Atwood's insistence on coherence, to establish "a unitary whole."

[224] Atwood, *Survival*, 32-36. Atwood in *Survival* identifies for basic victim positions as the grammar through which one can approach Canadian literature. These range from a denial of victimhood, to an acknowledgement of victimhood but ascribing the blame to a larger general principal such as biology, fate, divine will that prevents one from changing a situation, to refusing to accept the position of the victimhood as inevitable giving rise to a dynamic shift within to a state where these victor and victim positions become obsolete. Atwood comes up with this model on finding "a superabundance of victims in Canadian literature."

[225] Atwood, *Survival*, 35. The moment of cessation of the victor and victim positions, is called that of "creative non-victimhood."

[226] Atwood, *You Are Happy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[227] Atwood, "Tricks with Mirrors," *Eating Fire,* 140-143.

drown the other and is therefore not as innocuous as it seems to be. "Song of Worms"[228] is haunting in its resonance with earlier poems such as "The Settlers"[229] in *The Circle Game*, in projecting the sinister power of nature that shall not even be noticed at the time the underground worms attack back. The theme of payback from nature and from those dominated in relationships, while elaborated by Atwood very clearly in *Payback* later, runs as a subterranean theme through much of her poetry from the very beginning. In the third chapter of this thesis, I shall be closely analysing selected poems from *The Circle Game, The Animals in That Country, The Journals of Susanna Moodie,* and *Procedures for Underground,* alongside *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* as I delve into how Atwood represents the relationship between individuals and their natural surroundings as well as how power play in interpersonal and transnational relationships imprint onto the way humans relate to their lived environments.

Lady Oracle[230] works on the themes of identity and escape, which find resonances with the earlier two novels. It is the story of Joan Foster, who writes pulp Gothic romance novels, and whose life in the novel plays out the many upheavals characterizing the genre she writes in. The book opens with Foster in Italy, hiding, after having faked her death in Toronto to escape some blackmailers. She is perennially therefore frightened of being found out. The past unravels in the form of flashbacks, like it does for the narrator of *Surfacing*. Atwood in *Lady Oracle* also delves into the problems of unexpected celebrity as Joan publishes a book of poems entitle 'Lady Oracle' which thrusts her into fame and celebrity which she is quite unprepared for. Her relationships with men are also telling as she keeps trying to conform to their expectations from

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[228] Atwood, "Song of Worms," *Eating Fire,* 148-149.

[229] Atwood, "The Settlers," *Eating Fire,* 149.

[230] Atwood, *Lady Oracle* (1976; repr. London: Virago, 1992).

her, like Marian in *The Edible Woman*, or the narrator of *Surfacing* in her previous relationship with a married man and presently with her boyfriend Joe, or even Anna with David. There is a deep sense of perennial dissatisfaction that pervades *Lady Oracle*, as compared to *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman*. Joan is never really able to develop a sense of self and struggles with the way the reading public conflates her personal life with her writing. Atwood's constant refusal of celebrity status[231] and autobiographical reading of her works[232] can be seen mirrored in the way Joan struggles with her readers' views regarding her.

Published soon after, the short story collection *Dancing Girls*[233] also depicts women from different social strata and professional set ups, facing problems of identity that they are unable to escape from. Written a few years later, *Bodily Harm*[234] narrates the apparent impossibility of escaping from violence and victimhood in the experience of Rennie Wilford in the novel. Like the narrator in *Surfacing*, Rennie too feels numbed and mutilated by her experience of the hospital, as she recuperates from breast cancer. She tries to escape both internal and external assault on her person by going away to the island of St. Antoine and living as a tourist there. However she soon finds herself entangled with people involved in a political revolt, finally leading to her imprisonment and leaving her witness to intense brutality and

[231]Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 5. Margaret Atwood is very conscious in denouncing the celebrity label as she articulates her difference from a film star, a football icon or a pop singer—"any of those kinds of things are at a very much higher level of that phenomenon than a person who writes books ever will be." Right from the beginning of her interview with Macpherson, she keeps returning focus to her hair, suggestive of the use of her face on book jackets and covers for marketing purposes and her struggle with the way the visuals of her body are continually related to her work.

[232] See Note 167 above.

[233] Atwood, *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* (1977; repr. London: Vintage, 1996).

[234] Atwood, *Bodily Harm* (1981; repr. London: Virago, 1991).

cruelty.

The artist's infinite personas and the impossibility of pinning her down, is explored further in *Two-Headed Poems*[235] in the poem "The Paper Bag."[236] We also see Atwood exploring the terrain of prose poems like in "Marrying the Hangman,"[237] providing an imagined account of the relationship between Francoise Laurent and Jean Corolere in a prison in Quebec as Francoise convinces him to become a hangman and to marry her and therefore free both of them from the sentences they were facing. However, as with her earlier collections, Atwood turns the spotlight on such an escape and wonders at whether the relationship they enter into is not a prison as well. The impossibility of arriving at a single dominant 'truth' and the possibility of finding 'multiple truths' in narratives is a constant point of enquiry as seen in Atwood's novels and short stories as well. Almost as an analysis of her own project, the poem "True Stories"[238] from the collection *True Stories*[239] discusses the impossibility of finding any such 'true story' and such a belief in the true story becomes an act of violence against all other such stories. She goes on to narrate terrible atrocities against women in "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written"[240] but always keeps us aware of the infinite stories never told.

The novel *Life Before Man*[241] returns to themes of isolation and loneliness of characters

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[235] Atwood, *Two-Headed Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[236] Atwood, "The Paper Bag," *Eating Fire,* 198-199.

[237] Atwood, "Marrying the Hangman," *Eating Fire,* 209-211.

[238] Atwood, "True Stories," *Eating Fire,* 244.

[239] Atwood, *True Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[240] Atwood, "Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written," *Eating Fire,* 255.

[241] Atwood, *Life Before Man* (1979; repr. London: Vintage, 1996).

trapped in turbulent relationships. Despite a criss-cross of failed relationships, characters are seen constantly seeking gratification elsewhere but never feeling complete. Lesje's character bears a startling similarity to the unnamed narrator in *Surfacing*, in wanting to mother a child alone, as a step towards gaining a certain autonomy over the self. Lesje's reflections and understanding of human beings as part of a larger matrix of life emerge from studies in paleontology at the Royal Ontario Museum, where she works. She sees herself as a product of the past and existing in a continuum with the future. Lesje muses, "Everything that's gone before has left its bones for you and you'll leave yours in turn."[242] In *The Edible Woman*, Marian experiences a similar connectivity with all forms of life that we consume, to the extent of seeing herself as food and part of the chain of consumption.

Atwood's first published children's book *Up in the Tree*[243] was hand lettered in two colours to save costs. It was the "early days of children's book publishing in Canada."[244] While the picture book targets very young readers, it tells a tale of two children learning to live amidst the natural world, both valuing its pleasures and realizing the difficulties of a life devoid of cultural comforts. Of course 'Tree Sitting' has been a tactic used by Earth First protestors since 1985,[245] with Julia Butterfly Hill an environmental activist taking it to its extreme possibility by inhabiting a California redwood tree for 738 days to protest against deforestation from 1997-

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[242] Atwood, *Life Before Man,* 141.

[243] Atwood, *Up in the Tree* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978; London: Bloomsbury, 2010). Citations will be referring to the Bloomsbury edition.

[244] Foreword by Atwood , *Up in the Tree,* ii, my own numbering.

[245] United Press International, "Earth First! Begins 'Tree-sitting Protest'," *UPI*, August 14, 1989, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1989/08/14/Earth-First-begins-tree-sitting-protest/9318619070400/.

1999.[246] Atwood's tale written many years prior to these events seems very prescient and certainly suggests the importance of children understanding their relationship with the natural world. *Anna's Pet*,[247] Atwood's next children's book with Joyce Barkhouse, narrates the story of a little girl exploring the countryside and learning about animals and their natural habitats. I will be closely looking at both these books in the conclusion of this thesis, where I attempt to weave together the threads of the ways in which Atwood explores concepts and debates surrounding the nature-culture dualism and its repercussions on the way we view the ecosystem today, through different mediums and genres.

Wor(l)ds of Her Own: 1981-2001

While putting up timeline boundaries on an author as diverse and prolific as Atwood is next to impossible, certain subtle changes in the way she writes about similar issues, or returns to ideas left open-ended in initial years of writing, can be traced across time. In the next two decades of her writing, Atwood can be seen investigating further contours of the Canadian wilderness as a driving theme for Canadian writing, though changing in its nuances over time. She explores representation of women and their relationships as she attempts to break stereotypes of women in fiction. The short stories written between 1982-2001 also focus on twisting and turning generic features as she attempts to tell old tales anew. I see these two decades as extremely significant in Atwood's career as a writer, as this is also the time period when she creates the dystopian world of Gilead describing the plight of women in an authoritarian regime that would

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[246] Julia Butterfly Hill, *The Legacy of Luna: The Story of a Tree, a Woman, and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods* (HarperCollins e-books, 2000), accessed July 21, 2018. AmazonKindle.

[247] Margaret Atwood with Joyce Barkhouse, *Anna's Pet*, illustr. Ann Blades (Halifax, NS: Lorimer, 1980), accessed June 3, 2019, Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/annaspet0000atwo.

make her a writer of international acclaim.[248] At the same time, non-fiction published by Atwood in the 1980s displays a wider ambit than *Survival* a decade before. *Second Words*[249] includes reviews and essays written as introductions to other people's books as well as essays on the role of a writer in Canada, the challenges of being a woman writer and on the relationship between Canada and America at significant times in history. It also weaves together Atwood's analysis of her own writings and on the importance of critical writing.

Atwood continues to question gender assumptions in myth and folktale in *Bluebeard's Egg*.[250] "Loulou, Or, The Domestic Life of the Language"[251] in this collection literalizes the conflict of nature and culture and the way language tries to define nature and in turn women and the resistance posed to the same in the figure of Loulou, who retains a certain opacity, quite like Oryx in *Oryx and Crake*[252] many years later. *Murder in the Dark*[253] also focuses its unflinching gaze on the way language constructs and maintains the opposition between the sexes and attempts to dismantle that through a play on language and genres. In the title story, language is depicted as a maze, where meaning and interpretation is endlessly deferred. The companion volume to *Murder in the Dark* was published as *Good Bones*[254] and continues this project of

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[248] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985; repr. Canada: Seal Books, 1986).

[249] Atwood, *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982)

[250] Atwood, *Bluebeard's Egg and Other Stories*, 1983 (London: Vintage, 1996).

[251] Atwood, "Loulou, Or, The Domestic Life of the Language," *Bluebeard's Egg*, 61-82.

[252] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003; repr. London: Virago, 2013).

[253] Atwood, *Murder in the Dark* (1983; London: Virago, 2013).

[254] Atwood, *Good Bones* (1992; repr. London: Virago, 2013).

subverting genres and clichés. "Making a Man"[255] for instance overturns the myth of creation, by depicting women 'making' men and then exercising control over the bodies they have created. "The Female Body"[256] too juxtaposes different genres, attempting to subvert stereotypes by highlighting them. *Good Bones and Simple Murders*[257] brings together many short pieces from *Murder in the Dark* and *Good Bones*. This collection is especially rich for Atwood's own illustrations accompanying her re-takes on fairy tales, science fiction, parables, popular and canonical literature, sparing no one in her inimitable wry critical gaze.

Retelling mythical tales is an interest further taken up by Atwood in *Interlunar*[258] which also dwells on the power of words, poetry in particular. "Snake Woman"[259] and "Eating Snake"[260] play with symbolism and metaphors, deconstructing any perception considered holy or true. Poetry is subtly compared to the movement of a snake making its kill, like a "whiplash /across the eye."[261] While *Interlunar* retells the stories of Eurydice, Orpheus and Persephone, *Morning in the Burned House*[262] a decade later forward the interest in rewriting the stories told by mythological figures. "Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing"[263] is particularly incisive in

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[255] Atwood, "Making a Man," *Good Bones,* 47-52.

[256] Atwood, "The Female Body," *Good Bones,* 33-40.

[257] Atwood, *Good Bones and Simple Murders* (New York: Nan A. Talese, Doubleday, 1994).

[258] Atwood, *Interlunar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[259] Atwood, "Snake Woman," *Eating* Fire, 268.

[260] Atwood, "Eating Snake," *Eating* Fire, 270.

[261] Atwood, "Psalm to Snake," *Eating* Fire, 272.

[262] Atwood, *Morning in the Burned House* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1995).

[263] Atwood, "Helen of Troy Does Counter Dancing," *Eating* Fire, 311-313.

the way Helen answers back to all those shaming her for her actions and at the same time maintains an impersonality that makes it impossible for any reader to really know her intentions. "Half–hanged Mary"[264] on the other hand is a brutal look at the seventeenth century Puritan witch hunts, and the way Mary, who survives the hanging then acquires a new power, taking on the persona she never had and for which she had been falsely hanged. "Two Dreams"[265] returns to the image of the speaker's father drowning in the lake and the speaker diving to find him, creating interesting links between *Surfacin*g and other poems by Atwood written exploring the same image across time.

Returning to the 1980s, *The Handmaid's Tale*[266] remains one of her most popular works, describing the dystopian Republic of Gilead where the Sons of Jacob—an authoritarian and fundamentalist regime have taken over American administration. Here men in power attempt to control people's right to read and write as well as their reproductive rights, by ensuring that people lose trust in each other and submit to their regime of fear. Atwood depicts a planet where environmental crisis has reached a point where entire islands are full of radioactive waste, the prison where the non-conformists are sent to 'melt'. Human beings are suffering from sterility and a decimating population owing to pollution and chemical wastes. In this climate, the few who can still reproduce are confined and forced to perform the role of 'Handmaids,' acting as mechanical baby birthing machines for the elite Commanders. These Handmaids are even stripped of their names and called as per the commander they 'service'. It is a horrific reality portrayed by Atwood, however one that is not completely imagined, as she asserts that she never

[264] Atwood, "Half–hanged Mary," *Eating* Fire, 325-332.

[265] Atwood, "Two Dreams," *Eating* Fire, 349.

[266] See Note 248 above.

includes something that has not happened somewhere at some time.[267] I will be referring further to this historic novel when reading other environmental dystopias created by Atwood, in the first chapter of this thesis.

In *Cat's Eye*[268] the ravine plays an important role in Elaine Risley's life, as it is there that she breaks away from the clutches of fear and peer pressure inflicted by her three 'friends' Cordelia, Carol and Grace. Atwood also depicts Elaine's distress as she shifts location from the Canadian Bush and moves to Toronto City where she first starts attending formal school and meeting young people of her own age. Many critics[269] read autobiographical elements in this aspect of the book. We also see a toughened Elaine later in the novel who in turn taunts Cordelia when they meet again, the latter having softened and also turned into a nervous wreck. However, the episodes of her childhood keep haunting Elaine and affect her relationships in her later life. Like many of Atwood's heroines, Elaine is an artist and is proclaimed to be a feminist by the media. A common theme returning across Atwood's novels, specially *Cat's Eye* and *Lady Oracle* is the way artists' works are perceived and represented in contrast with how they view themselves.

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[267] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 88. Atwood explains, "My rules for *The Handmaid's Tale* were simple: I would not put into this book anything that humankind had not already done, somewhere, sometime or for which it did not already have the tools." I will be discussing this aspect of narrative strategy adopted by Atwood in further detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis. See particularly pp 108-109 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, which discusses Atwood's later reflections on this 'rule' followed by her and the Hulu series on *The Handmaid's Tale.*

[268] Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (1988; repr. New York: Anchor Books, 1998).

[269] Molly Hite, "Optics and Autobiography in Margaret Atwood's *Cat's* Eye," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no.2 (Summer, 1995), 135-159.Hite analyses the way *Cat's Eye* plays on our expectations of "autobiographical fiction," forwarding the possibility and withdrawing it simultaneously, asking us to believe and then questioning what truth at all is. Macpherson chooses to use the term "semi-autobiographical," when referring to *Cat's Eye.* Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 59.

Wilderness Tips[270] is a collection that I will be analysing in greater detail in the course of my thesis, as it includes different perspectives on the human encounter with nature and specifically the Canadian 'wilderness.' Carol Ann Howells sees a definitive change in the way Atwood encounters the wild over the course of years from *Surfacing* and *Survival* in the 1970s to *Wilderness Tips* in the 1990s.[271] Characters seek to find 'something' in the wilderness or in depictions of the wilderness, just as before, but a crucial change is noted as well as this myth of mystery and meaning attached to the myth of the Canadian wild appears now increasingly insubstantial and vague. Essays in the volume *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Fiction*[272] explore what the Canadian North has meant for the country's authors, specially women writers over time. One of the chapters also discusses Sir John Franklin's failed navigation of the far Canadian North. She cites the "Grey Owl Syndrome" to describe Euro-Aboriginal relations[273] and traces a change from early exploration of the North in the 1800s to the twentieth century from "living like the Natives in order to survive in the wilderness" to "living like the Natives in the wilderness in order to survive."[274] Questions of survival emerge again, but here it is survival from the "advancing decadence, greed, and rapacious cruelty of white civilization."[275] I shall be closely reading selected short stories from *Wilderness Tips* for its descriptions of the wilderness and its impact on human relationships in the third chapter of

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[270] Atwood, *Wilderness Tips* (1991; repr. London, Bloomsbury, 2013).

[271] Coral Ann Howells, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 2-3.

[272] Atwood, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1995).

[273] Shannon Hengen, "Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism," *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood,* ed. Coral Ann Howells (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 75.

[274] Atwood, *Strange Things*, 44.

[275] Atwood, *Strange Things*, 44.

this thesis.

The 1990s also saw Atwood returning to children's books with *For the Birds*[276] and *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut.*[277] The former being written as part of the Earth Care Books project, tries to acquaint and involve children in environmental concerns. This is done by blending facts and fiction, such that the storytelling is accompanied by illustrations, fact boxes on the side and activities to engage the child's mind. Samantha, a young girl undergoes a journey through the course of the tale whereby she acquires greater sensitivity to the problems faced by birds and their migration patterns owing to human interference and pollution. Atwood's environmental activism and support for bird conservation projects are very apparent in this book and find a new method of representation in the *Angel Catbird* series[278] of graphic novels almost three decades later. *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut* on the other hand is a very different book focusing on the growth of little princess Prunella who learns to be less self-obsessed and more inclusive of other people's needs over the course of the book. While not directly concerning itself with ecological concerns the way *For the Birds* does, it carries on the theme of children learning to appreciate life beyond themselves, an essential step towards greater environmental awareness as seen in *Anna's Pet* a decade earlier.

Atwood's portrait of women in her novels always attempts to break stereotypes of good and bad, as the characters portray a range of selves, complicating our perception of them. In *The*

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[276] Margaret Atwood and Shelly Tanaka, *For the Birds* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990).

[277] Atwood, *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut*, illustr. Maryann Kowalski (New York: Workman Publishing, 1995), Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/princessprunella00atwo.

[278] See Note 331 below.

Robber Bride[279] and *Alias Grace*,[280] she presents villainesses, exploring the nature of trust and friendship between women. *The Robber Bride* also explores the relationship between three women—Tony, Charis and Rox , who connect with each other on the basis of their experience of betrayal by Zenia, who has interfered in each of their romantic lives, stealing their respective partners for herself. Food plays an important role in this novel, similar to *The Edible Woman*, often demarcating the relationship that the women have with their own desires. *Alias Grace* on the other hand recreates a fictionalized account of the famous Kinnear and Montgomery murders in 1843 in Canada. In the novel, Dr. Simon Jordan researches the story of Grace Marks, finding it difficult to reconcile the figure of a murderer with the mild mannered Grace whom he interrogates.

The Blind Assassin[281] which won Atwood the coveted Booker prize in 2000,[282] continues Atwood's exploration of the complex relationship between perception and reality and the way characters exert themselves to confuse and obfuscate any attempt at reaching any one narrative of truth. In *The Blind Assassin*, the author again explores the nature of celebrity by the way Iris manufactures a sensation around a novel that she writes in her sister Laura's name. Iris is seen manipulating the truth, writing letters to academics and fans to accentuate the image of a suicidal writer of the novel. At the same time, it is ironic that Iris' control over the novel is lost when the copyright runs out as Laura is dead and she reflects on the way a text behaves once it is out in

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[279] Atwood, *The Robber Bride* (London: Bloomsbury, 1993).

[280] Atwood, *Alias Grace* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

[281] Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

[282] Rebecca Allison, "Atwood Wins Booker Prize," November 8, 2000, *Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com /uk /2000/nov/08/bookerprize2000.awardsandprizes1.

the world, beyond authorial intervention—"The thing is out there in the world, replicating itself in God knows how many forms, without the say so from me."[283]

Writing in Times of Precarity: 2002-2022

From the turn of the century, we see Atwood's writing gathering new pace, as her critical analysis of her own writing continues with greater incisiveness. While Atwood's poetry collections and fiction in the form of *Surfacing, The Handmaid's Tale, Wilderness Tips* and non-fiction in *Survival* and *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Fiction* delved into environmental themes in the previous decades, the *MaddAddam* trilogy written between 2003-2013 establishes her firmly as an environmental fiction writer.[284] At the same time many essays into the nature of writing continue through the medium of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and short stories written across this phase of time. We also see Atwood at her most playful in the graphic

[283] Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*, 283. Also quoted by Macpherson, 73 ; Ellen McWilliams, *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

[284] Patricia D. Netzley sees ecofiction as belonging to three categories, depending on the position taken by the author or the focus of the text. These are identified as works which depict "the environmental movement and/or environmental activism," or those that describe conflicts relate to environmental issues and reveal the author's stance on the conflict, as well as those works "that feature environmental apocalypse." Atwood's writings interestingly utilize all these focal points, specially in her *MaddAddam trilogy*, as we shall be seeing in the course of this thesis. Environmental movement and activism is portrayed in the form of the green cults described, the conflict over environmental issues is seen in the conflict between the mega Corporations and the activists in her novel; at the same time, environmental apocalypse forms the framework within which she situates the entire narrative. Each of these aspects are however developed over the course of the three books of her trilogy and strengthened in the multiple perspectives she brings to these aspects. Patricia D. Netzley contends that one element is common in all forms of "environmental fiction", viz. "the author's desire to promote environmentalism among the general public." Atwood, though resistant to categorization, is an avid environmental activist, as seen in her Twitter persona, which I shall be discussing further in the conclusion of this thesis. Patricia Netzley, *Environmental Literature: An Encyclopedia of Works, Authors, and Themes* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1991), 78-79, quoted in Dwyer, *Where the Wild Books Are,* 5-6.

novels she scripts and note her increased online presence on Twitter[285] and Wattpad.[286] With increasing popularity and over six decades of writing and earning innumerable awards and accolades, she can be seen exploring every kind of medium, and returning to stories that need to be told again and again in present times.

Atwood's Empson Lectures at Cambridge in 2000 became the source of the essays compiled as *Negotiating with the Dead*.[287] This was later renamed *On Writers and Writing*.[288] This collection is significant when reading her fictional texts as she probes what writing means for authors, including herself. She dwells greatly on the 'doubleness of the writer'[289] as she question the connection between the self of the author that "exists when no writing is going forward" and the "other, more shadowy and altogether more equivocal personage" who sharing the same body, "takes it over to commit the actual writing" and that too "when no one is looking."[290] Looking back at Atwood's fictional heroines, we find this being a recurring theme, whether it is Lady Oracle's automatic writing, Elaine Risley's art in *Cat's Eye* or Iris' writing for Laura in *The Blind Assassin*,[291] or even the artwork of the narrator in *Surfacing*. I will be referring to Atwood's articulations in this collection when analysing texts throughout the course

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[285] Margaret E. Atwood@MargaretAtwood, twitter handle,https://twitter.com/MargaretAtwood?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor. Also see Atwood's interview on her insatiable interest in different forms of writing, including the format provided by Twitter. Xandra Bingley, "Life is tweet: Margaret Atwood on Her Passion for New Technology," Fiction, *The Royal Society of Literature,* accessed April 30,2020, https://rsliterature.org/library-article/life-is-tweet-margaret-atwood-on-her-passion-for-new-technology/.

[286] Margaret Atwood@MargaretAtwood, *wattpad* , https://www.wattpad.com/user/MargaretAtwood.

[287] Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (2002*;* repr. London: Virago, 2015).

[288] Atwood, *On Writers and Writing* (2002*;* repr. London: Virago, 2015).

[289] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*, 19.

[290]Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead*, 35.

[291] Macpherson, *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood,* 19.

of this thesis, as the critical frameworks elucidated by her in this collection forms a lens through which we can view her texts.

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, the first book of the trilogy, returns to speculative fiction, describing a dystopia where humans have been wiped out by a virus engineered by a scientist determined to save the planet and his created race of genetically modified humans called Crakers from humans including himself. The lone survivor of this catastrophe appears to be Jimmy, who struggles to protect the childlike and innocent Crakers from all possible dangers. He weaves a complex mythology for the Crakers, overriding his late friend Crake's desire for the Crakers to be free from religion or myth, depicting Crake himself, ironically as a God. The novel returns to Jimmy and Crake's childhood and growing years in the form of flashbacks as Jimmy seeks to remember how he missed the sign of things to come. It depicts a world where scientists do not flinch to create genetically 'spliced'[292] organisms as needed by the Corporations that hire them, irrespective of future consequences. Those who question are 'melted' chemically or killed in staged accidents. The novel ends with Jimmy looking at three surviving humans in the distance and deciding if he should reveal himself and the Crakers to them. I shall be engaging in detailed textual readings of this novel in my first chapter, as I look upon Atwood's use of the narrative technique of the dystopia for elaborating on critical ecological themes.

The Year of the Flood,[293] the second book of the trilogy, is really a 'simultaneul',[294]

[292] The term 'spliced' is used in the *MaddAddam* trilogy to refer to organisms created by amalgamating genetic codes from different species. See pp 179 and Note 163 of Chapter 1 for more details on splices in the *MaddAddam* world.

[293] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (2009; repr. London: Virago, 2013).

[294] The word 'simultaneul' combines the aspect of a sequel but one that occurs simultaneously with the previous book's timeline, allowing for more perspectives to emerge of spaces and events mentioned in the first book of the trilogy.

presenting the events leading up to the point little after Jimmy's discovery of the three humans, but from the focalizing narratives of two women characters, Ren and Toby. Both the women are connected to the God's Gardeners[295] green cult, but very different in their personalities. Ren joins the God's Gardeners as her mother escapes the Compounds and her life as a scientist's wife to be with Zeb, one of the significant Adams of the green theological cult. Toby on the other hand joins the group after being rescued from the sexual assault of her boss Blanco at the meat barista Secret Burgers where she used to work. Both find much to dislike in the code of life they are expected to follow as a God's Gardener, yet unconsciously adopt many of the practices which actually help them survive once the BlyssPluss epidemic[296] strikes the planet. I shall be delving into this novel in greater detail in the course of my second chapter where I analyse Atwood's depiction of and utilization of ecotheological models in her representation of ecological crises. In the third novel in the series, *MaddAddam*,[297] many of the loose ends of the earlier two novels are tied up, as Zeb the MaddAddamite's[298] history is revealed through Toby's narration of his life. We see the few straggling and leftover humans set up camp with the Crakers

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[295] The God's Gardeners in the *MaddAddam* trilogy are one of the 'green' groups depicted by Atwood, who adopt lifestyle choices and interpret religion to propagate an ecologically conscious mode of living. I shall be analysing this eco-theological cult in detail in Chapter 2 of my thesis where I explore Atwood's representation of certain forms of environmentalism.

[296] In O*ryx and Crake, t*he BlyssPluss epidemic is designed by Crake by inserting a decimating virus in libido enhancing pills. This virus is biotechnologically designed with a specific incubation period, such that the outbreaks happen across the world in quick succession, not giving people time to understand or combat the disease, effectively wiping out most of the human population as intended by Crake.

[297] Atwood, *MaddAddam* (2013; repr. London: Virago, 2014).

[298] The MaddAddamites are scientists and other individuals who oppose the unsustainable and profiteering activities of the Bio-tech corporations and secretly communicate with each other through pseudonyms referring to extinct species, as they contact each other through the digital game 'Extinctathon'. They also collaborate in many underground activities to counter the establishment, reminiscent of revolutionary ecoterrorism, which I shall be discussing in detail in Chapter 2.

close by, even as the remaining Painballers[299] from the earlier novel threaten their existence. With Jimmy being severely ill, Toby takes over the duty of narrating stories to the Craker children, further influencing their ideas and desires. The history of the MaddAddamites becomes clearer in this novel, as a group that set out to rebel against the capitalist exploitation of the CorpSeCorps.[300] Adam One and Zeb, both foundational members of God's Gardeners turn out to be brothers escaping the ideals of their profit seeking exploitative father, a preacher espousing the benefits of petroleum over the environment. I shall be analysing *MaddAddam* for its exploration of the different kinds of environmentalism in the figures of Adam One and Zeb and the MaddAddamites in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing[301] includes essays written in earlier collations like *Moving Targets: Writing with Intent 1982-2004*[302] and *Writing with Intent: 1983-2005.*[303] This collection was remarkable for its variety and range, from reviews, to newspaper and magazine articles, politics and analyses of her own writing. The essay "Nine Beginnings" is memorable for the nine different ambiguous answers she provides for the question 'Why do you write?'[304] I shall be returning to this collection especially for her essay "Writing *Oryx and Crake,*" to chart

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[299] Violent convicts in the *MaddAddam* world, instead of being executed, are sentenced to play to death in the Painball arena, where they hunt each other down and virtual reality viewers derive entertainment from this grotesque play. Those prisoners surviving the game are the most hardened criminals and are referred to as 'Painballers'.

[300] The CorpSeCorps (Corporate Security Corps) are the police forces guarding compound walls of gated communities populated by scientists hired by the large corporations like HelthWyzer, OrganInc and other pharmaceutical biotech companies in the *MaddAddam trilogy*.

[301] Atwood, *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing* (2005; repr. London: Virago, 2014).

[302] Atwood, *Moving Targets: Writing with Intent 1982-2004* (Toronto: Anansi, 2004).

[303] Atwood, *Writing with Intent: Essays, Reviews, Personal Prose 1983-2005* (NY: Carroll & Graff, 2005).

[304] Atwood, "Nine Beginnings," *Curious Pursuits*, 143-149.

how her non-fiction plays on the responses evoked by her fiction, in Chapter 1 of the thesis. In the format of a play, *The Penelopiad*[305] too dwells on the nature of storytelling, comparing it to the weaving and unweaving of Laertes' shroud by Penelope as she waits for Ulysses to return. In the retelling of Penelope and her maids' stories, Atwood probes our assumptions regarding the tale that is usually told, attempting to find a voice for the twelve maids who were mercilessly hanged by Ulysses when he returned. The indispensable link between the writer and the reader is a matter of constant reflection for Atwood as seen in her other works as well.

In her collection *Moral Disorder*,[306] Atwood steps into territory that she usually avoids describing directly—her memories of childhood and growing up with pages devoted to parents of the narratorial voice, bearing a striking resemblance with her own, especially in the last story "The Boys at the Lab."[307] The tone of this collection is very different from her other short story compilations, finding more similarity with some of her poetry, appearing very personal in its detailing and recollection. Many of her descriptions of her mother's slow transformation echoes with sections of *Surfacing* as well. Of course, as with any of her books, all stories cannot be clubbed under this bracket of what may be seen as 'autobiographical,' the title story diverging from the model discussed above. The characters Nell and Tig recur through the course of multiple stories along with the title story, revealing different facets of their relationship, even as they discover themselves, over time.

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[305] Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (NY: Canongate, 2005).

[306] Atwood, *Moral Disorder* (2006; repr. London: Virago, 2013).

[307] Atwood, "The Boys at the Lab," *Moral Disorder*, 233-257.

Atwood in another collection, *The Tent*[308] published the same year speaks in a totally different style that dismantles every attempt at categorizing or defining the writer's voice. Her short single or double page essays on the nature of creation are funny, witty and sharp in her attack on pretensions of any kind, very different from the gentle lens she uses in *Moral Disorder*. In the title story, writing itself is pictured as a tent with which the inhabitant of the tent—the artist or creator—tries to protect herself and her dear ones from the 'howling' outside. However, her loved ones are unable to comprehend this obsessive need to write all over the inside of the tent! The artistic faculties taking on a life of their own is more vividly portrayed in her story "Voice"[309] and the illustration by her accompanying it, where the 'voice' of the artist literally feeds off her life energies, even as it grants her great acclaim in the world. Accompanying that is a sense of dread of this faculty shrivelling up and taking away all that it has given her, at great cost. In the course of this thesis, I shall be delving into more stories from this collection, like "The Animals Reject Their Names and Things Return to Their Origins,"[310] and "No More Photos"[311] in the third chapter of this thesis, as I locate resonances between her novels, poems and short stories that form a conjuncture between animals, the wilderness, humans and the act of writing /creation.

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[308] Atwood, *The Tent*, 2006 (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

[309] Atwood, "Voice," *The Tent*, 21.

[310] Atwood, "The Animals Reject Their Names and Things Return to Their Origins," *The Tent*, 77-84.

[311] Atwood, "No More Photos," *The Tent*, 25.

Returning to publishing poetry more than two decades later[312] in *The Door*,[313] "Resurrecting the Doll's House"[314] finds that memories are nearly not so neatly arranged as a doll's house can be. Reading this poem, one finds certain continuities with "Morning in the Burned House"[315] in the earlier collection by the same name. The act of returning to the past and viewing memories is full of possibilities, as the characters in those memories can be changed and rearranged like figurines in a doll's house. At the same time there is a realization of irretrievable change over time. In *The Door*, Atwood returns to examine our relationship with animals around us. "Mourning of Cats" startles us by its unwavering look at grief and how we mourn the deaths of only certain animals "only those who look like us, /at least a little."[316] Atwood's father's figure returns to the pages of the book, as she tries to recreate the moment which changed the course of his life forever.[317] The mother's portrait in "My Mother Dwindles" makes us remember the mother's flitting presence in *Surfacing* and changing persona in *Procedures for Underground.* Though it has dwindled, it never lets go—it "lives and lives"[318] like all metaphors and images in Atwood's repertoire, returning in myriad and unforeseen forms through all genres of writing.

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[312] In between the standalone poetry collections being detailed since the 1960s, *Selected Poems* (1976), *Selected Poems, 1965-75*(1976), *Selected Poems II: Poems Selected and New, 1976-1986*(1987), *Selected Poems 1966-1984*(1990), *Margaret Atwood Poems 1976-1986*(1991)and *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995*(1998) have collated her best poems from these standalone editions, over the years.

[313] Atwood, *The Door* (London: Virago, 2007; Hachette Digital, 2007), accessed through Amazon Kindle. All subsequent references are from the Kindle edition on Amazon.

[314] Atwood, "Resurrecting the Doll's House," *The Door,* 7-8.

[315] Atwood, "Morning in the Burned House, " *Eating Fire,* 367-368.

[316] Atwood, "Mourning of Cats," *The Door*, 10.

[317] Atwood, "Butterfly," *The Door*, 13-14.

[318] Atwood, "My Mother Dwindles," *The Door*, 16.

In *Payback: Debt as Metaphor and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, Atwood takes on the nature of debt and its repayment in different spheres of life, from trade between monkeys and humans and an innate sense of payback/justice, to the connection between debt and sin for both the lender and the indebted. She also compares Doctor Faustus with Dickens' Scrooge and finally presents her theorization regarding ecological payback as the greatest cost to be borne by humans. The beginning of this thesis therefore utilizes the powerful framework established by her in this remarkable prophecy of the future. Atwood's lifelong literary interest and engagement with the forms of the utopia and the dystopia, as a researcher at university[319] and later as a reader and writer is seen for its use in *Payback* as well as a major point of enquiry in the collection of essays, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. It is here that she clearly identifies her work as 'speculation fiction' rather than 'science fiction.'[320] I shall be engaging with the ideas expounded in this work of non-fiction in Chapter 1 of this thesis, as I explore Atwood's use of this narrative technique in the *MaddAddam* trilogy and *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*.[321] The 'other world' referred to in the title is a pointer towards our own earth irreparably turned into another world in the future, alerting us to the special significance of speculative fiction in promoting ecocritical thought.

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[319] See Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago, 2011), 78-79. Atwood explains that in the course of pursuing her thesis, "The English Metaphysical Romance" analysing fantasy fiction and books about "other-than-human-beings," she became increasingly interested in utopias and dystopias from the nineteenth century onwards.

[320] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 6. See also Atwood, "Margaret Atwood Shares Some Of Her Favourite Speculative Fiction," *Audible*, April 6, 2017, https://www.audible.com/blog/playlisted/margaret-atwood-shares-some-of-her-favorite-speculative-fiction. To make light of these distinctions and the heated debates surrounding the terms 'science fiction ' and 'speculative fiction', she calls them 'zucchinis' and 'beets'! See Note 100.

[321] Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2019).

In *The Heart Goes Last*,[322] Atwood again utilizes the form of the dystopia to explore the extent to which the human heart can go to survive. The narrative follows the story of Charmaine and Stan who live in a cramped car, in the scrapheap that the north-eastern United States has turned into in this envisioned future, having lost their jobs and homes in the financial collapse. On seeing an advertisement for the 'Positron Project' they sign up for a chance at living in a gated community—that of Consilience and in exchange hand over their liberty as they are bound to leave their homes and live in a prison every alternate month while another couple exchange places with them-their Alternates. The novel goes on to describe the effects of such a nightmarish life as Stan and Charmaine start getting irresistibly attracted to their unseen Alternates.

The recurrence of characters across stories, revealing different aspects of their personalities was explored as a stylistic device by Atwood in *Moral Disorder* and is again utilized by her in *Stone Mattress*.[323] Constance, Marjorie and Gavin specially return in different spaces, revealing facets that force us to piece them together, like a jigsaw puzzle. This device is also seen used in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, as with varying narratorial perspectives, more facets of Jimmy, or Crake or Ren or Toby appear before us. Using the hermeneutic of a simultaneul also helps in detailing the characters further. In *Stone Mattress*, she returns to an exploration of the writer's mind and motivations in "Alphinland,"[324] through Constance's reflections on her creation 'Alphinland'—the way she sees it and the way her fans and interviewers see her and her books. The short story, "Dark Lady" focuses more on Marjorie and her twin brother's

[322] Atwood, *The Heart Goes Last* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[323] Atwood, *Stone Mattress* (2014; repr. London: Virago, 2015).

[324] Atwood, "Alphinland," *Stone Mattress,* 1-40.

experiences, while "Revenant" is more about Gavin. This collection also shows Atwood's foray into deeper discussions on age and ageing and what it means for the characters involved, in "Alphinland" and specially in "Torching the Dusties,"[325] where an elite old age home, Ambrosia Manor is torched down by a group called 'Our Turn', burning the old and the infirm with extreme cruelty. Narrated through Wilma's eyes, who has weak eyesight and is dependent on Tobias, another old age home inmate, Atwood produces an arresting account of Charles Bonnet syndrome, bringing together the shocking and the mundane in her narrative. At the same time, it remains uncertain whether Tobias' description of events to Wilma are fabricated or real, returning to questions of experience and fantasy that begin the short story collection with Constance's fantasy series called *Alphinland*.

Retelling canonical and popular tales in new formats, seen in much of Atwood's poetry and short stories in earlier decades, as well as in *The Penelopiad* in 2005, takes on a new form in *Hag –Seed* [326] which was written by Atwood as part of a Hogarth Shakespeare series, where she had to re-tell a Shakespearean play. Atwood re-tells *The Tempest* in this novel, by recasting Prospero in the role of theatre director, whose position as Artistic Director of the Makeshiweg theatre festival is usurped by his most trusted aide Tony. The novel follows his imaginary conversations with the ghost of his daughter Miranda and his plans for taking revenge on those who have ousted him. He ultimately manages to take revenge by staging *The Tempest* in a Correctional Centre with the inmates as actors, trapping the audience, including Tony and ensuring that he is restored to his original position.

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[325] Atwood, "Torching the Dusties," *Stone Mattress,* 259-308.

[326] Atwood, *Hag–Seed* (London: Hogarth Shakespeare, 2016).

A Trio of Tolerable Tales[327] collates together three of Atwood's children's books with Dusan Petricic's illustrations, including within itself *Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes*,[328] *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda*[329] and *Wandering Wenda and Widow Wallop's Wunderground Washery*.[330] While telling very different tales, the three books explore the resourcefulness of children when left to their own devices. In the challenges and adventures experienced and overcome by the children, animals are the most trustworthy and dependable. In *Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes,* it is Ralph the rat that leads Ramsay to the other side of the Rampart to a world of beauty in contrast with his present ramshackle existence. Similarly in *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda,* a group of dogs--a boxer, beagle and a borzoi turn out to be the only ones looking after Bob as he is abandoned by his mother. Wenda and the children imprisoned by Widow Wallop in a washery are also helped in their escape by a woodchuck called Wesley in *Wandering Wenda and Widow Wallop's Wunderground Washery.* All the stories show children faced with extremely difficult life situations unlike the children's books written in earlier segments of Atwood's writing. Ramsay has to eat reptiles and rotten repast and is treated very badly by his relatives, while Rillah, a little girl lives all alone as her relatives have run off to avoid paying rent. Bob grows up amidst dogs and even thinks he is one, as no humans pick up the abandoned baby. Dorinda is dealt a bad deal in life as her parents have apparently met with an accident and her relatives are worse than strangers. Wenda's parents

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[327] Atwood, *A Trio of Tolerable Tales*, illustr. Dusan Petricic (Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2017).

[328] Atwood, *Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes*, illustr. Dusan Petricic (2003; repr. London: Bloomsbury, 2005).

[329] Atwood, *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda,* illustr. Dusan Petricic (Toronto: Key Porter Kids, 2004).

[330] Atwood, *Wandering Wenda and Widow Wallop's Wunderground Washery*, illustr. Dusan Petricic (Toronto: McArthur & Co, 2011).

disappear in a mysterious storm and she sets out searching for them, when she lands up at the wizard's washery. In all of these dire events, the children face the storms and come out with flying colours, but with an enhanced self-esteem and regard for animals who help them in this journey.

In the years between 2016-2018, Atwood dedicates herself to the graphic novel interface with the *Angel Catbird series*[331] and *War Bears, Vol 1-3*.[332] Atwood's foray into the world of graphic novels is not new, as she drew a comic strip for *This Magazine*, called Kanadian Kultur Komix in the 1970s in Canada,[333] under the pseudonym Bart Gerrard, about a Canadian superhero—'Survivalwoman' who couldn't fly. She created strips on her political and cultural experience of Canada, with one of the central tropes being 'survival' as exemplified in her work of non-fiction around the same time, and plays upon the expectations surrounding that word in her comic strip.[334] In the three volumes of the *Angel Catbird* series, Atwood works with Johnnie Christmas (illustrator) and Tamra Bonvillain (colouring) to create a series about scientist Strig Feleedus who gets involved in a clichéd[335] accident with a DNA altering chemical and ends up as a cat-bird-human hybrid. This gives him multiple powers as well as a confusion regarding his

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[331] Atwood, *Angel Catbird Vol.1-3*, illustr. Johnnie Christmas, colors Tamra Bonvillain (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Books, 2016-17).

[332] Margaret Atwood and Ken Steacy, *War Bears, Vol. 1-3* (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Books, 2018).

[333] Reingard M. Nischik, *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2009), 277-279. Nischik lists the 'Survivalwoman' comic strips published by Atwood, with the name *Kanadian Kultur Komix* in *This Magazine*, under the pseudonym Bart Gerrard between 1975-80.

[334] Atwood, "Margaret Atwood Reflects on the Significance of her This Magazine Comic Strip," *This,* November 8, 2017, https://this.org/2017/11/08/margaret-atwood-reflects-on-the-significance-of-her-this-magazine-comic-strip/.

[335] See Note 29 of the Conclusion to this thesis, which discusses this as a popular trope of Superhero Comics, that Atwood plays upon.

role—does he save a bird, or eat it—being one of them.[336] Additionally he is introduced to a thriving subculture of such hybrid entities, including a rat-man hybrid called Dr. Muriel bent upon destroying all other forms of hybridity existent in his world. On the other hand, *War Bears, Vol 1-3*, Atwood's latest contribution to genre play, is more a paean to the golden age of Canadian comics as she traces the story of a comic book creator named Alain Zurakowski, who creates the figure of Oursonette, a bear-themed, Nazi-smashing superwoman at the time when American comics were unavailable in Canada during the war. I will be referring to both *War Bears* and the *Angel Catbird* series in the conclusion of my thesis, as I look upon human and non-human interactions in Atwood's texts as crucial inter-species dialogue and reflections on the posthuman in ecocritical terms. In case of the latter, the figure of the artist/illustrator will also be an important template of enquiry, as it remains one of Atwood's lifelong concerns, throughout the oeuvre of her texts.

With *The Handmaid's Tale* written in 1985 returning to the limelight after three decades with protests and marches following Donald Trump's anti-abortion legislation[337] and the Hulu

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[336] See Note 51 of the Conclusion to this thesis, for Atwood's introductory comments on Angel Catbird's multispecies identity.

[337] See *BBC News*, "Trump executive order reverses foreign abortion policy," US & Canada, Jan 23, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38724063; Chris Bell, "How the handmaid became an international protest symbol,"BBC Trending, July 27 2018, *BBC*, https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-44965210; Amy Grief, "Margaret Atwood Signs Make a Statement at the Women's March," *blogTo*, January 24, 2017, https://www.blogto.com/city/2017/01/margaret-atwood-signs-womens-march-toronto/; Jessica Campisi, "Margaret Atwood: Anti-abortion states should pay women who give birth," *The Hill,* Sept 20, 2019, https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/in-the-know/462375-margaret-atwood-anti-abortion-states-should-pay-women-forced-to .US President Donald Trump signed the "Mexico City Policy" which places a ban on funding NGOs performing or providing information on abortions. This applies to international NGOs as well. Protests against Washington erupted across US and Canada with activists dressing up as 'handmaids' inspired by Atwood's dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* and holding Atwood inspired placards saying , "Make Margaret Atwood Fiction Again." Pro-choice protests and marches in many parts of the world fighting for women's reproductive rights, such as in Buenos Aires, Croatia, Dublin among others, adopting the handmaid's garb to draw attention to the possibility of the present turning into the Gilead of the future. Atwood also participated in the Toronto Women's March in 2017 and have spoken out for women's right to decide what happens to their bodies. See Note 66 in chapter 1 of this thesis as well.

series[338] on the book creating massive visual impact, Atwood returns to narrating the future of Gilead, the theocracy created by the Sons of Jacob, in *The Testaments*.[339] Just as with the earlier novel, reflecting on the power of words and narration of events, this Booker Prize winning novel[340] too is structured as a series of 'testaments' by three characters—Agnes Jemima, the Handmaid Offred's child from her pre-Gilead days, Nicole—Offred's child born and brought up in Canada post her escape from the Gilead regime and Aunt Lydia, one of the doctrine enforcers in the previous book, who is now presented as the hidden powerful source of the anti-establishment Mayday operations. Atwood in her Acknowledgements at the end of the novel states that *The Testaments* was written as a response to a question—"How did Gilead fall?"[341] She continues to state, "Totalitarianisms may crumble from within, as they fail to keep the promises that brought them to power; or they may be attacked from without; or both."[342] As with *The Handmaid's Tale*, this novel too ends with Professor Pieixoto in the Thirteenth Symposium on Gileadian Studies, 2197 discussing the testaments by the three women, excavated by archaeologists and historians. True to his character he is often insensitive towards the narratives, yet unable to resist storytelling—"You can take the historian out of the storyteller, but you can't take the storyteller out of the historian!"[343] Aunt Lydia in her holographs also

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[338] Bruce Miller, dir., *The Handmaid's Tale,* Seasons 1-3, April 2017-, *Hulu*. Can also be viewed on Amazon Prime, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0P0X72Z35JR1UB78BC872SOLG8/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r.

[339] Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2019).

[340] See Roisin O'Connor and Clémence Michallon, "Booker Prize 2019: Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo win joint award as jury break the rules," *Independent,* Oct 14 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/booker-prize-2019-winner-margaret-atwood-bernardine-evaristo-a9155236.html. Atwood won the 2019 Booker prize for *The Testaments* along with Bernardine Evaristo for *Girl, Woman, Other*.

[341] Atwood, *The Testaments*, 417.

[342] Atwood, 417.

[343] Atwood, 414.

keeps pointing out the power of the reader over her words, and on the flip side the power of her written words that she can destroy at any moment. The relationship between the reader and the writer and the words on the page have been a constant refrain with Atwood, as specially seen in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Murder in The Dark*. The environmental crisis is not directly mentioned in the text except in its effects on human lives—the 'Unbabies' born, or the oranges in short supply, the increasing incidence of juvenile cancer and the frequent death of the Wives.[344] As in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, she uses the method of parallel and separate narrative voices, telling their experience of the same moment and then threading all of it together in the form of the novel we read. I shall be analysing her technique of representing this dystopia in the first chapter of my thesis. The possibility of societies turning into Gileads, to entrench power through indoctrination and subordination of women by reducing them to their bodies, is mapped out by Atwood in a chilling way through multiple perspectives past and present, making the autocracy appear more real than ever.

With *Dearly: Poems*,[345] published first in 2020, Atwood returns to poetry after thirteen years since *The Door* in 2007. This collection contains poetry written by her between 2008 and 2019, covering years of great upheaval, ageing and loss in Atwood's own life, including the loss of her partner Graeme Gibson, to whom this collection is dedicated. Many echoes of past poems return in new forms in this collection such as in "Blizzard,"[346] where the figure of her mother

[344] There is a suggestion that the death of the wives could be both from illnesses contracted from the contamination everywhere or even induced by their husbands, to replace them with a new one with better chances of bearing children. A healthy child is the rarest commodity on Gilead given the high rate of infertility and miscarriages, still births and birth of deformed babies referred to as 'Unbabies'.

[345] Atwood, *Dearly*: *Poems (*United Kingdom: Penguin Random House, 2020).

[346] Atwood, *Dearly*: *Poems*, 7.

reappears, blurred in her experience of stroking her cat's head and the confluence or the memory of stroking her mother's head in her last days of transition into death. In the conclusion of my thesis, I shall be analysing selected poems from this collection such as "Short Takes on Wolves,"[347] and "Fear of birds,"[348] which return to a description of human and non-human encounter, while "Walking in the Madman's Wood,"[349] has echoes of her early novel *Surfacing* and encounters with the wilderness that transforms. Many poems of this collection deal with ageing, loss and emptiness, the void becoming a space for filling in with song and poetry. She writes of the need to find the lost dear ones, both birds and humans, somewhere. The figures in her poems blur between human and animal and bird, showing a continuum of abuse faced by all such forms and deep suppressed rage against such atrocities. Atwood, in her Introduction to the *Dearly* poems collection, states that it populated by birds, along with "the core of human existence: life, death, renewal change…The world in all its variety."[350] I shall be concluding my thesis with an analysis of many of the poems on cats and birds in this collection, alongside *Angel Catbird*, as I see Atwood exploring similar themes through multiple forms and genres.

Atwood compiles essays and short non-fictional pieces from 2004 to 2021 in *Burning Questions*,[351] published in 2022, delving into themes as various as the strain of writing alongside her passion for writing and the way the characters come alive in "Five Visits to the Word Hoard," to comparing her propensity towards giving unsolicited advice to youngsters with

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[347] Atwood, 76-77.

[348] Atwood, 75.

[349] Atwood, 71.

[350] Atwood, "Dear Readers," *Dearly*: *Poems*, i-ii.

[351] Atwood, *Burning Questions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2022).

Polonius in Hamlet, in the humorous piece "Polonia," to the dangers invited by indiscriminate cutting of trees in "Trees of Life, Trees of Death," and reviews of work by Alice Munro, Kafka, Gabrielle Roy, and Barry Lopez, among others. Multiple essays cover her own analysis of books written by her and the motivation behind her choice of theme and genre, such as in "Oryx and Crake," or "Why I Wrote MaddAddam," "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*," and "The Writing of *The Testaments*." I shall be referring to Atwood's self-examination of her works while reading them in the course of the thesis. The largest chunk of this collection is however devoted to essays concerning themes relating to climate change, literature and the environment and her concern for writing about such themes that she sees as urgent and necessary on the planet today. I shall be particularly delving into the essays "Scientific Romancing," that acts as a corollary of "Burning Bushes: Why Heaven and Hell went to Planet X," in her earlier collection *In Other Worlds*, on the value of using speculative fiction in narrating environmental crisis; "How to Change the World?" which discusses how our concepts regarding change and the world both need re-evaluation; "Rachel Carson Anniversary," and "The Sea Trilogy," discussing Carson's research trajectory among many others through the course of this thesis to conceptualize Atwood's immense contribution as a writer of ecocritical fiction, non-fiction and poetry.

Compos(t)ing Ideas

The arena of existing research on Atwood's ecologically conscious writing is vast, as environmental concerns inform much of Atwood's writing over the decades as seen in the literary overview of Atwood's works, in the last section of this thesis. In this section of the Introduction to the thesis, I will be analysing select existing research work on ecocritical aspects of Atwood's writing, both to locate my thesis in its midst as well as to identify springboards into

my actual thesis chapters. Instead of a chronological approach to these texts on Atwood, I will be performing a thematic overview in consonance with the way in which parallel and contesting arguments are presented in the topics approached in different chapters of this thesis. I have chosen to include in this literature review research and writing on Atwood that centre around the ideas that I am interrogating in the course of this thesis, as otherwise it would be too large to contain in a book. There is also a vast field of research and writing on ecocriticism, ecofeminism, environmental activist writing, ecotheology, deep ecology and radical environmentalism that I will be detailing and reviewing in the chapters ahead, as I use those theoretical frameworks for analysing Atwood's texts.

In the section following the Literature Review, I have included a brief overview of the chapters in this thesis, highlighting their central themes and the theoretical frameworks used for reading Atwood's ecocritical narratives in every chapter. Each chapter focuses the spotlight on a certain group of ecocritical texts by Atwood, even while referring to others discussed through the course of the thesis. The themes explored in the chapters are interlaced and provide pathways into investigating the many ways in which storytelling and ecological hope are indelibly intertwined in Atwood's texts.

Literature Review

Gerry Canavan in **"Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*,"** argues for the 'science fictional imagination of the apocalypse' as the only avenue for shaking the foundations

of the existing capitalist system and "jump starting" a new history.[352] He also notes that 'eco-apocalypse' thus becomes the frame of choice for most novelists seeking to depict the end of capitalism, as the end of the world and the end of capitalism seems to be the same thing as the latter creates the former, as per the warnings given by scientists and ecologists across the world. Despite there being many supporters of the efficacy of the eco-apocalyptic imagination, which I shall be exploring in detail in the **first chapter** of my thesis, there still remains what Canavan calls a "fatal internal contradiction of the politics of apocalypse," [353] which is clearly identified by Greg Garrard—who wonders why humans will take responsibility for a world that is doomed to end in the near future.[354] Hence, imagining the end might be counter-productive, in Garrard's words, ''Only if we imagine the planet *has* a future, after all, are we likely to take responsibility for it.''[355] Canavan iterates that Atwood's fiction manages the super-feat of imagining a future that is 'frightening', but not 'final', creating space for hope and the 'reopening of possibility.'[356] However Canavan does not develop this important strain of thought further. While Canavan thinks there is no hope left for us, in his reading of the first two books of the trilogy, I investigate Atwood's engagement with ecological hope further in my thesis.

The meaning and contexts of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives in contemporary times is further analysed by Moon Hyong-jun in his thesis **"The Post-**

[352] Gerry Canavan, "Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 23, no.2 (2012): 139, doi: 10.1080/10436928.2012.676914.

[353] Canavan, "Hope, But Not for Us," 155.

[354] Greg Garrard, "Apocalypse," *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2012), 93-116.

[355] Garrard, 116.

[356] Canavan, "Hope, But Not for Us," 156.

Apocalyptic Turn: A Study of Contemporary Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Narrative,"[357] with Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy being part of his textual study. Hyong-jun goes back to the originary meaning of the word apocalypse, being 'revelation' and discusses the relevance of this meaning when approaching contemporary apocalyptic narratives. He tries to identify the way the 'apocalypse' is visualized and comprehended by the texts selected for his study. Frank Kermode's concept of the apocalypse being 'immanent', rather than 'imminent' today[358] forms an important crux of Hyong-jun's argument and is further explored by me in **chapter one** of this thesis, in the section exploring how children like Jimmy and Crake in the *Oryx and Crake* world created by Atwood have reached a state of complete desensitization to imminent doom and narratives of extinction and death on television and the internet, seeing the apocalypse as part of the everyday and the present inhabited by them.

Ng Soo Nee takes on Crake and Jimmy's relationship as embodying predominance of scientific rationality over creative imagination, seen as a significant propeller of the apocalypse narrated by Atwood, in the fifth chapter of her doctoral thesis, **"Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: Interrogating Nature, Bodies and Genre."**[359] As observed by Soo Nee, Atwood locates the text firmly in the present concerns of our times, even though the setting is futuristic.[360] Soo Nee cites Atwood: "my writing is closer to caricature than satire—distortion

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[357] Moon Hyong-jun, "The Post-Apocalyptic Turn: a Study of Contemporary Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Narrative," 2014, *Theses and Dissertations,* 615, accessed June 20, 2022, https://dc.uwm.edu/etd/615.

[358] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 25.

[359] Ng Soo Nee, "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: Interrogating Nature, Bodies and Genre," *(Re)Configurations of Power and Identities in Twenty –First Century Fiction*, (PhD diss., University of London, Goldsmiths College, 2010).

[360] Ng Soo Nee, "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*,"154.

rather than scathing attack—and I say, it's largely realism,"[361] and goes on to analyse that the stereotypical personas Atwood creates is not to censure them, but rather to interrogate them and their motives and the result of their decisions. When attempting a close reading of *Oryx and Crake,* in the **first chapter** of this thesis, I shall look into how Atwood complicates any easy affiliations of the two characters—Crake and Jimmy with either head of the "two cultures" of science and humanities, contesting Soo Nee's analysis of them as stereotypical characters.

Sophia David, when exploring *Oryx and Crake* among novels depicting climate change for their ability to imagine the scale and complexity of the event in her doctoral dissertation ***Eco-Fiction: Bringing Climate Change into the Imagination****,* also engages with how climate change influences and changes the language and words we use.[362] I find a parallel between David's analysis of the loss of words examined in *Oryx and Crake* and Jimmy's anguish over the loss of meaning to the loss of ecology and multiplicity and ecological imagination and shall be dwelling on this aspect in greater detail in **chapter one** of this thesis. David, when extending her analysis to other novels dealing with climate change and apocalyptic visions of our planet, reflects on how the loss of words descriptive of aspects of nature actually creates greater distance between us and those natural spaces and invisibly prevents any possibility for their protection or revival. Therefore an ecological consciousness seems irretrievably associated with our ability to imagine the dead-ends we are creating for ourselves and ways to get out of them. My **first**

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[361] Linda Sandler, "Interview with Margaret Atwood," *The Malahat Review*: *Margaret Atwood : A Symposium*, 41 (1977):7-27, quoted in Soo Nee, "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*," 156. See also Marc Christensen, "The 50 Issues Project: Issue #41," *The Malahat Review*, accessed May 30, 2020, http://www.malahatreview.ca/issues/featured/issue41.html.

[362] Sophia David, *Eco-Fiction: Bringing Climate Change into the Imagination* (PhD Diss., University of Exeter, June 2016), accessed July 22, 2022, https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871 /24331/DavidS.pdf?sequence= 1&isAllowed=y.

chapter therefore engages with the importance of Atwood's speculative fiction creating the possibilities for the revival of such an ecological consciousness.

Allison Dunlap's 2013 essay **"Eco-Dystopia: Reproduction and Destruction in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake,*"**[363] is a significant contribution to studies on Atwood's take on 'environmentalism.' Dunlap closely looks at *Oryx and Crake* as a critique of not just capitalist science but also of ecotopianism.[364] Studies on *Oryx and Crake* by Giuseppina Botta, Stephen Dunning and Grayson Cooke[365] see the novel as a sharp indictment of capitalist science, but unlike Dunlap, do not read into Atwood's critique of Crake's ecotopian dreams. Hannes Bergthaller's study of the novel, **"Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the***

[363] Allison Dunlap "Eco-Dystopia: Reproduction and Destruction in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake,*" *Journal of Ecocriticism* 5, no.1 (January 2013):1-15, https://ojs.unbc.ca/index.php/joe/article/view/389.

[364] The word 'ecotopia' refers to an ecological utopia, describing a society or community practicing ecologically sustainable modes of living, derived from Ernest Callenbach's novel *Ecotopia*, where he discusses possibilities for addressing existing environmental issues by depicting a society which while not perfect, strives to reach an ideal of ecologically conscious living. In Callenbach's 'ecotopia' there is a turn towards anti-consumerism and decline in population growth with greater preference for quality of life than economic growth. I shall be engaging more closely with the concept of the ecotopia in chapter two of this thesis, when I look at the impact of this concept on the forms of environmentalism represented by Atwood in her texts. See Roman Meinhold, "Ecotopia," in *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, ed. David M. Kaplan (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 683-684; Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (1975; repr. Berkeley, California: Banyan Tree Books, 2004).

[365] See Giuseppina Botta, "Faustian Dreams and Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and* Crake," *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities: Ecocritical Perspectives on the New English Literatures,* ed. Laurenz Volkmann, Nancy Grimm, Ines Detmers and Katrin Thomson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 243-255, doi: 10.1163/9789042028135_018; Stephen Dunning, "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: The Terror of the Therapeutic," *Canadian Literature* 186 (2005):86-101, https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/canlit/article/view /193014 ; and Grayson Cooke, "Technics and the Human at Zero-Hour: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 31, no. 2 (2006):105-125, http://epubs.scu.edu.au/cgi /viewcontent.cgi?article =1537&context=sass_pubs. Dunlap also engages with these three significant essays, but focuses more on reading Crake's environmentalism differently.

***Flood*,"** [366] does well to locate it in the environmentalist movement, but does not engage as much with the figure of Crake, the problematic environmentalist, the way that Dunlap does. Dunlap floats an interesting link between Crake's biological determinism and the complicated nature of knowledge production and 'biovalue,' referring to Catherine Waldby and Kaushik Sunder Rajan.[367] However, her paper in this regard is hastily concluded. I shall be exploring this dimension further to better understand Atwood's representations of the possibilities and disabilities produced through the use of biotechnology in my thesis. In the **second chapter** of my thesis, I shall be extending Dunlap's analysis of Crake as an environmentalist, to view its impact on all other forms of environmentalism depicted in the trilogy. I disagree with Dunlap's reading of Atwood as absolutely condemning Crake's choices and shall attempt to scrutinize the frissions within the texts for the way they complicate easy indictments of any form of ecotopia.

Katie Prilutski's 2012 thesis ***Disciplining Gender: Margaret Atwood's Dystopic Novels,***[368] compares Atwood's depiction of power relations in society, specially as experienced by women with respect to Foucault's concept of power that is ubiquitous and shifting, produced from one moment to another, "at every point"[369] and in relation to other points. Prilutski reads Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* for its explicit reference to Foucault's 'panopticon' and then

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[366] Hannes Bergthaller. "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." *English Studies,* 91, no.7 (2010): 728-743, doi: 10.1080/0013838X.2010.518042

[367] See Catherine Waldby, "Stem Cells, Tissue cultures and the Production of Biovalue," *Health: An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social study of Health, Illness and Medicine* 6, no.3 (2002): 305-323, doi: 10.1177 /136345930200600304; and Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006).

[368] Katie Prilutski, *Disciplining Gender: Margaret Atwood's Dystopic Novels* (Master's Thesis, Villanova University, December 2012).

[369] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 93, quoted in Prilutski, *Disciplining Gender,* 3.

Oryx and Crake and *The Year of the Flood* to see how gender and power intersect in the drama that unfolds. In this she refers to both Foucault's theories as well as those of Judith Butler, identifying performativity as the site of resistance taken up by both Ren and Toby in *The Year of the Flood*. Prilutski highlights that Foucault theorized—"no matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groups."[370] In my **second chapter**, I shall take the cue from Prilutski's analysis to further analyse how resistance is pictured in the different resistance groups depicted by Atwood in her trilogy. Even within the Gardener group that resists the Capitalist and consumerist society within which they live, there are pockets of resistance to Gardener ideology as well, which I shall be analysing in close detail in **chapter two**. I shall also consider the glimmerings of such resistance in the Crakers as well, as they begin to question the mythology fed to them by Oryx and then Jimmy, to control their thoughts and actions.

Sara Catarina Melo dos Santos' 2016 thesis ***(Un)Making the (Post)Human: Biopolitics and the Corporatization of the Body in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake***,[371] sees these positions of resistance occupied by the figures of Oryx and the Crakers as offering alternative, liminal forms of subjectivity, in Atwood's post-apocalyptic vision. Her analysis of these characters as occupying significant positions at the "borders of corporate power,"[372] moving across biopolitical boundaries is important if we seek to identify the possibilities of resistance in the biopolitical space engineered by Atwood. Santos argues that these alternative subject

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[370] Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, and Power," *Power Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984,* trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1994) , 355, quoted in Prilutski, 6.

[371] Sara Catarina Melo dos Santos, *(Un)Making the (Post)Human: Biopolitics and the Corporatization of the Body in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake*. (M.A. diss.,University of Lisbon, 2016).

[372] Santos, *(Un)Making the (Post)Human,* ix.

positions open up a space for thinking about non-human or posthuman subjectivity. However, I wish to critically view this position taken by Santos in the course of my **second chapter** as the forms of resistance are also seen to be co-opted by strategies of power, in the dystopias crafted by Atwood.

Marcy Lynn's 2010 thesis ***(Un)natural Bodies, Endangered Species, and Embodied Others in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake,***[373] explores the paradox in the *Oryx and Crake* world, where gene-splicing and biotechnology views all species, including humans as malleable substances, thereby revealing the interconnected nature of this ecosystem and yet enacts the alienation of these humans from the natural world, by the use of this very technology. Thus a re-imagining of the world and the human being's role within that as an "integrated organism"[374] seems essential. Another significant study in this area, Megan Kathleen Telligman's 2013 thesis ***Imagining Boundaries: (Post) Humanist Understandings and Ecological Ethics in the Fiction of Margaret Atwood*** reads Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* and *Surfacing* in terms of how Atwood depicts ecological ruin as stemming from the human-nature divide, "fortified by capitalism and consumerism in contemporary societies."[375] Telligman asks whether it is necessary to actually create and respect certain boundaries that 'nature' has drawn for us, rejecting the possibilities of tweaking these borders using technology. However she does not develop or analyse this idea further. I seek to investigate this concept of redrawing

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[373] *Marcy Lynn Galbreath, (Un)natural Bodies, Endangered Species, and Embodied Others in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake* (M.A. diss., University of Central Florida, 2010), accessed May 15, 2019, http://purl.fcla.edu/fcla/etd/CFE0003227.

[374] Galbreath, *(Un)natural Bodies, Endangered Species, and Embodied Others in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake,* iii.

[375] Megan Kathleen Telligman, *Imagining Boundaries: (Post) Humanist Understandings and Ecological Ethics in the Fiction of Margaret Atwood*, Paper 543 (M.A diss., University of Montana, 2013), accessed May 29, 2019, https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/543.

boundaries in greater detail in the course of my thesis.

Dana Percec in **"Margaret Atwood and the Politics of Ecofeminism,"** explores the ecofeminist aspects of Atwood's novels, with special emphasis on *Surfacing*.[376] She observes that Atwood does not want to be called a feminist or see her works as feminist, rather as social realism. However Percec does not dwell on this statement by Atwood or re-interpret the texts in light of this statement. She rather chooses to focus on the symbols used by Atwood in her novels, and comments on the impact Atwood's childhood in the wilderness of Quebec has had on her writings and perspectives from the age of five. In her reading, Percec finds much matter in Atwood's texts that serve well for an easy analogy between the domination of women and nature, but also recognizes Atwood's complication of this easy analogy. However Percec is more intent on comprehending the title of the story vis-à-vis the theme of ecofeminism, than critically viewing the theoretical axes being used by Atwood or analysing her critical engagement with it. My thesis however goes on to explore the ways in which Atwood's works pre-empt many ecofeminist theoretical perspectives, and showcases Atwood's critical and creative engagement with patriarchal dualisms, through her ecocritical narratives.

Grimbeek in her thesis, ***Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism: Apocalypse and Satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy*,**[377] strives to describe how Atwood keeps her activism separate from her fiction and poetry. According to Grimbeek, Atwood is at "pains to avoid the

[376] Dana Percec, "Margaret Atwood and the Politics of Ecofeminism," *Colloquium Politicum* 3, no. 1.5 (Jan-June 2012): 45-56. https://www.academia.edu/72984284/Margaret_Atwood_and_the_Politics_of_Ecofeminism.

[377] See Note 50 above.

environmentalist label,"[378] and works at 'maintaining complexity'[379] through the ironic stance she takes towards her own creations, never becoming too serious about them, but always remaining serious about the causes she espouses.[380] However, my thesis observes the way Atwood consciously participates in environmentalist debates, through her fiction, non-fiction, poetry and online posts,[381] creating awareness regarding multiple approaches to common concerns regarding the ecosystem, particularly with the passage of time and acquired celebrity and fame.

Chapter Summaries

In the **first chapter** of my thesis, I begin with exploring how Atwood locates herself in the science fiction and speculative fiction matrix and how that impacts the way she fashions her ecocritical narratives. In tracing this out, I shall be referring to Frederick Jameson, Ursula Heise, Ursula Le Guin and Atwood's own premises in her book of essays, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* as well as *Burning Questions.* Nazry Bahrawi's essay **"Hope of a Hopeless World: Eco-teleology in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the***

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[378] Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism: Apocalypse and Satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy,* 37.

[379] Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism*, 38. Also see Fiona Tolan, "'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 11, no.3 (November 2017): 460. doi:10.1093/cwwrit/vpx020. In this interview we see Atwood trying to complicate any notions of authorial intention when questioned about her work. Atwood says that "purpose and value are not conferred upon a book by the writer…They are conferred by the reader. The reader, singular. The reader is the violinist of the score that is the book." According to Gregory Fitzgerald and Kathryn Crabbe, she has long since wanted to evade the critics who would categorize and pigeonhole her and resists clarifying her intentions behind her writing. Gregory Fitzgerald and Kathryn Crabbe, ""Evading the Pigeonholers." *Margaret Atwood: Conversations*, edited by Earl G. Ingersoll (Princeton: Ontario Review P, 1990), 139. Grimbeek also notes in her thesis that in taking a public stand on any environmental issue, Atwood the person was often more straightforward than in her literary productions, where she is often nebulous and ambiguous. Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism*, 41.

[380] Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism*, 41.

[381] See Note 285 above.

***Flood*"** suggests that the first two books of the *MaddAddam* trilogy are 'critical dystopias.'[382] My **first chapter** will also be analysing this narrative structure as an essential method by which Atwood introduces hope in a world where the characters need emotional and physical enclaves to survive. In addition to extending Bahrawi's brief articulation of the idea, by a detailed analysis of this hermeneutic used by Atwood in her *MaddAddam* trilogy, my chapter will go on to investigate this as an essential structure of the 'ustopias'[383] crafted by Atwood in other speculative ecofiction written by her, such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments,* with reference to multiple perspectives on the form of the utopia/dystopia by Ruth Levitas, Lisa Garforth, Lyman Sargent, Fatima Viera, Tom Moylan and Raffaela Baccolini. In reference to Canavan, Buell, Garrard and Hyong-jun's arguments, I shall be closely investigating how Atwood walks the tightrope of the apocalypse and the contradictions inherent in its use as a framework for stimulating change. As part of this analysis, I will be referring to Lisa Garforth, Richard Hamblyn, Kari Norgaard, Stefan Skrimshire's works on the problematic of using the apocalypse as a shock tactic in ecofictions.

Chapter two continues the discussion on dystopias created by Atwood, but turns the lens on specific forms of environmentalism highlighted by Atwood in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, with particular focus on *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*. This chapter looks at the evolution of deep ecology and radical environmentalism as a response to global environmental politics and closely reads the representation and critique of these philosophies through the characters in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. I shall be referring to Arne Naess, Bill Devall, George

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[382] Nazry Bahrawi, "Hope of a Hopeless World: Eco-teleology in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *Green Letters* 17, no.3 (2013): 256, doi: 10.1080/14688417.2013.862156.

[383] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 66. See Note 1 of Chapter 1 of this thesis for more details.

Sessions and David Abram in reading deep ecology principles and their impact on Atwood's narrative, specially seeing how they closely align with ecotheological ideas expressed by the Gardeners in this trilogy, particularly *The Year of the Flood*. In pursuit of green theological concepts explored by Atwood, I shall be engaging with Lynn White Jr., Van Dyke, Also Leopold, Nicola H. Creegan, Gene M. Tucker, David Jobling and Nathan Loewen, Matthew Fox, Arnold Toynbee and the Earth Bible Project amongst others, to understand the wide range of perspectives grappling with injunctions in the Bible as is seen in the figure of Adam One and the Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, itself. I shall also be engaging with how extinction of species is viewed by the children and later scientists in the trilogy and comparing it with the approach taken by the Gardeners and Adam One in particular through his sermons, to analyse Atwood's representation of the possibilities offered by ecotheology, steeped in deep ecology principles. Llewellyn Vaughan Lee identifies that the 'deepest part' of the separateness we feel from the world lies in the "forgetfulness of its sacred nature, which is concomitant with our own sacred nature."[384] The Gardeners work hard at rendering the world sacred and worth saving and living for. However community support remains crucial for transforming lifestyle and holding on to hope for change in the long term. Deep ecology considers new forms of ecological consciousness best grown in small self-reliant and autonomous communities. My second chapter therefore shall also delve into the lived practices of the Gardeners and observes similarities with existent 'green' religious communities like the

[384] Llewellyn Vaughan Lee, "Introduction," *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), 13.

Green Sisters,[385] sustaining hope through ecologically guided spiritual practices of conservation and meditation on the earth's rhythms and natural cycles.

Facing environmental grief [386] also leads to asking significant questions regarding our 'selves' in the larger ecological self and facilitating self-discovery or self-realization,[387] in Naess's terms. Thus 'positive disintegration' or "the loss of previously valid norms," while "painful and confusing," is essential for "more adaptive understandings of self and world to arise." [388] In **chapter two** of this thesis, I shall be examining the way Adam One in his sermons and meditations strives to create such a transformative redefinition of the self, by constantly drawing his listeners' attention to the pain of loss of ecological balance and species diversity. My chapter also refers to Gaia[389] philosophy and planetary consciousness that functions through feedback loops[390] maintaining homoeostasis in Gaia, which the Gardeners attempt to revive through their ideology. In many ways, Atwood's fiction and poetry shock us back into

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[385] Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[386] Kriss Kevorkian and Jordan Rosenfield, "Facing Down 'Environmental Grief'," *Scientific American*, July 21, 2016, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/facing-down-environmental-grief/. Kriss Kevorkian coined the term "environmental grief" to describe the profound grief she felt after studying the decline of killer whale populations. Kevorkian explains this as the "grief reaction stemming from the environmental loss of ecosystems by natural and man-made events."

[387] Arne Naess,''Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World,'' *The Trumpeter* 4, no. 3(1987): 36.

[388] Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Positive Disintegration* (np: Little Brown, 1964), quoted in Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2014), 77. Also see Bill Tillier, *The Theory of Positive Disintegration by Kazimierz Dąbrowski*, https://positivedisintegration.com/

[389] James E Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look on Life on Earth*, 1979 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[390] Jules Cashford, "Gaia and the Anima Mundi," *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), 131.

participating in the feedback loops of the Earth by beginning to experience and process ecological grief [391] as the only means towards working for change.

Ecological grief is a consistent feature of all ecocritical texts created by Atwood, in the face of irreparable loss and transformation to the idea of nature in our present lives and dystopic futures envisioned**. Chapter three** of my thesis, instead of mourning[392] such loss, engages with the possibilities of representing and reconceptualizing 'nature' and human engagement with the non-human universe. The chapter interrogates the dualisms of 'culture' and 'nature' and the way they reinforce other hierarchized patriarchal dualisms[393] translating into exploitative structures affecting the way gender, race and class are imagined, lived and represented as well. **Chapter three** of this thesis analyses the ways in which Atwood's *Surfacing, The Edible Woman,* and early poetry, particularly *The Animals in That Country, The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Procedures for Underground* and *The Circle Game* explore the possibilities of dismantling dualisms and borders separating the human and non-human, nature and culture as well as the problematics of the same.

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[391] Gaia Vince, "How scientists are coping with 'ecological grief'," the Observer, *Guardian,* Jan 12, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/jan/12/how-scientists-are-coping-with-environmental-grief. Increasingly, scientists and researchers of the environmental humanities describe the effect of watching ecosystems degrade or die before their eyes on their psyche as they look for ways of articulating this loss and feeling of anxiety and helplessness.

[392] See Steven Vogel, "Why 'nature' has no place in environmental philosophy," *The Ideal of Nature: Debates About Biotechnology and the Environment,* ed. Gregory E. Kaebnick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 2011). Vogels's criticism of mourning the end of nature, which he sees as an anthropocentric perspective that limits 'nature' to that excluding humanity and therefore in peril from human activity, always.

[393] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 42. Plumwood explains that dualisms are not free of hierarchies, one being construed as higher than the other. She provides a list of such dualisms such as reason/nature, male/female, mind/body, master/slave, reason/emotion, human/nature , etc that re-inforce patterns of domination and form the basis of ecofeminist articulations. See pp 372-374 and Notes 354 and 357 of Chapter 3 for more details.

As I read Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing* and poetry in particular in this chapter, concerns regarding the limitations of language in describing the experience of characters desirous of seeing themselves as a part of one organic but heterogeneous whole become central to my study of these texts. Karen E. Macfarlane, in her 2006 essay **"Messing with Atwood: Power, Reception and Writing Politics,"** written as an Introduction to three essays on Atwood by Elizabeth Meese, Lynne Dickson Bruckner and Jennifer Hoofard, calls Atwood "messy", analysing this 'mess' to be an integral part of the subjects she chooses to write about in the medium of words.[394] As observed by Macfarlane, Atwood describes language as slippery and recognizes ambiguity as an intrinsic feature of attempting to grapple with the human condition.[395] For Atwood, the complex workings of power in the world are communicated by the complex workings of language in her texts, as the text and the world in which it is embedded are inextricable from each other. I shall be referring to Jonathan Bate, Terry Gifford, Bruno Latour and Leonard M. Scigaj, to comprehend the nature of Atwood's ecocritical narratives which represent power inequities characterizing relationships between humans and the non-human world.

Ecofeminism as an ecocritical praxis has undergone much self-critique over the years to reach a point where it enacts a unique balancing act between the biological essentialism of the 1970s that uncritically aligned women and the environment and the extreme opposite tendency of disavowing any continuity between the experience of women and nature as victims of exploitation by a patriarchal anthropocentric society. The **third chapter of my thesis** engages

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[394] Karen E. Macfarlane, "Messing with Atwood: Power, Reception and Writing Politics," *Atlantis* 30, no. 3 (2006): 63-64.

[395] Atwood, "Spotty-Handed Villainesses: Problems of Female Bad Behaviour in the Creation of Literature," in *Moving Targets*, 161, quoted in Macfarlane, "Messing with Atwood," 63.

with the way the theoretical discourse of ecofeminism has changed over time, to evaluate its possibilities in ecocritical writing. Much of Atwood's texts predate the upheavals within the domain of ecofeminism, but astutely reflect the ways in which the concerns of ecofeminism would play out over the decades, which I have closely examined in this chapter of my thesis. I have referred to Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard, Susan Griffin, Karla Armbuster, Judith Plant, Ynestra King, Helene Cixous, Charlene Spretnak, Carolyn Merchant and Dorothy Nielson to comprehend Atwood's representation and critique of the variant shades of ecofeminist thought in *The Edible Woman, Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and selected poetry written by Atwood over the decades.

The chapter also explores the way Atwood's writing highlights the importance of an alternative epistemology that is polyvalent in perception, and comfortable with acknowledging the limitations of 'knowing' and 'defining' the non-human universe. Along with a transformative shift into experiencing and narrating one's embeddedness in an interconnected and dynamic, agentic 'nature' encompassing the self, a heightened awareness of inseparability and entanglement with the non-human universe both informing our perception of ourselves and all others, is also a realization of the infinite nature of the unknown dimensions of 'nature.' The **third chapter** therefore also explores an alternative ethics of care for a world peopled by multiple other selves, reading Atwood's writing alongside Deane Curtin, Lori Gruen, Gretchen T. Legler and Bruno Latour, considering how far literary narratives can work as emancipatory vehicles, reconceptualising the human and non-human relationship as a relational ontology, based on 'attentive listening,'[396] compassion and intuitive response, enabling a shift from

[396] See pp 410-411 and Note 527 of Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion on 'Attentive Listening' as praxis.

'bios'[397] to 'zoe.'[398]

The **conclusion** of my thesis will be reflecting on Atwood's prominent environmentalist stance, particularly with the publication of *Burning Questions* in 2022, where she collates essays and reflections between 2004-2021, returning to critically analyse her own texts as well as other environmental activist writing that has impacted the way we see the planet and ourselves in this ecosystem. [399] While earlier documentaries on Atwood discussed earlier in this Introduction to the thesis, showcased her resistance to autobiographical readings of her texts, Ronn Mann's *In the Wake of the Flood*,[400] chooses to portray Atwood's public persona and as much of her home and memories of childhood as Atwood decides to include as part of her environmentalist stance. In the **conclusion** of my thesis, I will be analysing Atwood's book tour promoting *The Year of the Flood*, both for its portrayal of Atwood's fame and her continued investment in the environmental impact of her work and public appearances. The documentary by Mann shows some of Atwood's pictures as a child, living in the wilderness, learning from nature and her parents, suggesting the importance of a childhood connected to the natural world in imbibing sensitivity to the non-human universe and its role in our continued existence on this planet. Hence, I will also be analysing Atwood's picture books for children, *Up in the Tree* and *Anna's Pet,* for the way images and text are used to create new ways of relating to the natural world and understanding the interconnected web of life, inclusive of human, animal, insect and plant life,

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[397] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 92. This term is used by Braidotti as referring to an anthropocentric approach to life focused on human interest.

[398] Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 41. 'Zoe' is a term used by Braidotti to refer to the concept of endless "becoming" that characterizes life, which is an "endless vitality."

[399] See pp 76-77 of this Introduction, for a brief summary of salient essays in *Burning Questions*.

[400] Ron Mann, dir., *In the Wake of the Flood* (Canada: Sphinx Productions, 2010), 47 min, Vimeo.

so crucial for developing an ecological consciousness. I will also be critically viewing the *Angel Catbird* series of graphic novels by Atwood, alongside selected poems from her *Dearly* collection, analysing the way she visually assembles these multiple natures, confusing easy boundaries between the human and non-human, tying together a massive range of perspectives regarding nature, language, the human and non-human, constantly holding on to hope for transforming our capacity to imagine change.

Epilogue

At the San Miguel International Writers' Conference, Laurie Gough turns to Atwood in her despondency, seeking answers regarding the future that Atwood envisions and writes about. Gough asks if there was any hope for the world, to which the writer reiterates, "We have to have hope…because without it, nothing can get better." [401] While such hope seems elusive, my thesis explores how Atwood through her ecocritical narratives holds on to this tenuous thread, as the only means of sustaining the possibility of a future. According to Atwood, "In literature, every landscape is a state of mind, but every state of mind can also be portrayed by a landscape." While this line takes on an eerie significance, as human 'state(s) of mind' viewing the earth as a 'resource,' has resulted in the transformation of the planet's geology and environment to the extent that the epoch has been named the Anthropocene,[402] at the same time, it holds out hope that with change in 'states of mind,' or transformation of perception and consciousness, the landscape may change as well.

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[401] See Laurie Gough, "Meeting Margaret Atwood with Spinach in my Teeth," san Miguel Writers' conference and Literary Festival, June 16, 2016, https://sanmiguelwritersconference.org/meeting-margaret-atwood-spinach-teeth-laurie-gough/

[402] See Note 63 above.

Chapter 1

Extinction, Speculative Fiction and Margaret Atwood's 'Ustopias'[1]: Examining *Oryx and Crake*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

> Understanding the imagination is no longer a pastime or even a duty, but a necessity; because increasingly, if we can imagine it, we'll be able to do it.[2]

Imaginative projections of the future are powerful indicators of the way in which we humans comprehend the nature of our present as well as future possibilities. Such narratives hold within them the potential for affecting our perception of ecological degradation resulting from human choices and actions, by creating a space where changed planetary circumstances may be experienced—either better or worse than the present. It is significant that hope for a future where human beings still exist on the planet without harming their own habitat, requires an amalgamation of faith in its "possible fulfilment," as well as "anxiety over the chance," that such hope might never materialize.[3] Thus such hope becomes a crucial "existential response to the contingency" marking all our actions and the future of the world we inhabit.[4] To completely envision hope, it becomes important to also plumb the depths of

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[1] Atwood's coinage, coalescing the forms of the utopia and dystopia which she sees as inherent in each other. This term shall be discussed in detail in the course of this chapter as significant in formulating Atwood's ecocritical narrative strategies. See Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago, 2011), 66.

[2] Margaret Atwood, "Scientific Romancing," *Burning Questions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2022), 13.

[3] Stan van Hooft, *Hope* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 32, quoted by Briohny Doyle, "Hope Out of Stock: Critical and Melancholic Hope in Climate Fiction," *Dystopian Emotions: Emotional Landscapes and Dark Futures*, eds. Jordan McKenzie and Roger Patulny (United Kingdom: Bristol University Press, 2021), 159. doi:10.46692/9781529214567.010.

[4] Stan van Hooft, *Hope*, 32.

its affective opposite, despair. Margaret Atwood's ecocritical speculative fiction studied in this chapter, opens the doorway to discussions on the power of both utopian and dystopian imagination rendered in narrative, each interlaced in the other. Hope becomes the centre point of such narratives, as we shall see in the course of this chapter, as the very hermeneutic of the 'ustopia' discussed here, is sustained by hope that the dystopian future may be averted and the utopian one achieved, even if fragmentary and incomplete.

This very hope for change also drives Atwood in her essay on "How to Change the World,"[5] to express great consternation and surprise that most other participants in a conference[6] by the same name in 2012, seemed to be focusing on ideological and philosophical questions of "change," not wanting to address the biggest question sitting unarticulated in the room—the problem of surviving on a planet that was melting down![7] No one was asking how we might supply ourselves with the necessities of life without harming the biosphere and the ecosystem. Despite the fact that large corporations benefiting from present practices of exploiting the environment would try to discredit all who spoke for necessary and urgent change, Atwood steps into the role of the messenger who decides to raise the alarm, at the risk of being called a fanatic or a lunatic.[8] While human beings want to avoid bad news, Atwood shows the urgency of facing reality and implementing change. She also highlights the 2012 report of the World Bank,[9] which clearly demarcates the

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[5] Margaret Atwood, "How to Change the World?" *Burning Questions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2022), 202-213.

[6] 2012 Nexus Conference on "How to Change the World?" accessed January 22, 2021, http://opentranscripts.org/sources/nexus-institute/nexus-conference-2012/.

[7] Atwood, "How to Change the World?" 204.

[8] Atwood, 204. She also highlights the lost years since the *Limits to Growth Report* and since Rachel Carson's whistleblowing, both discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. See pp 13-15, 19-20 of the Introduction to the thesis.

[9] World Bank, *The World Bank Annual Report 2012 : Volume 1. Main Report*. (World Bank Annual Report;. Washington, DC., 2012), accessed February 14, 2020, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/11844 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

dangers of rising sea levels, desertification and extreme weather conditions on human life. Thus in her lecture at the conference, Atwood steers clear of abstract and philosophical musing on better forms of governance, choosing to focus the spotlight on changing the conception of the 'world' to include the entire planet with its biosphere and all its beings and the imperative of both "positive physical intervention, as well as negative physical action," required from human beings, involving change in lifestyle in order to continue living on the planet.[10]

In *The Sixth Extinction*, Leakey and Levin describe *homo sapiens* as potential agents of mass extinction, no less than the giant asteroid that wiped out more than half the world's species in "a geological instant," on colliding with the earth.[11] Franz J. Broswimmer's book *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species,* calls attention to the way habitat destruction and extinction of species has accelerated, with more than a hundred species disappearing every day.[12] In addition to the loss of critical species in the web of life in the ecosystem inhabited by us, there is also a widening chasm of lost knowledge of Earth's biodiversity, as only a fraction has been identified and the relationships between many species remains a mystery.[13] Broswimmer pins habitat destruction as one of the major causes of biodiversity loss and extinction of species, as forest cover in the remaining biological hotspots on earth has been "reduced to as little as 10% of their pre-human levels."[14] This is of course aggravated by climate change, pollution and invasive species decimating others,

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[10] Atwood, "How to Change the World?" 204.

[11] Richard Leakey and Roger Levin, *The Sixth Extinction: Patterns of Life and the Future of Humankind* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 41. See Franz J. Broswimmer, *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species* (Pluto Press: London UK and Sterling VA, 2002), 1.

[12] Franz J. Broswimmer, *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species,* 12.

[13] Broswimmer, 12.

[14] Broswimmer, 14.

introduced into habitats owing to human interference and activities.[15] In "Wetlands," Atwood describes her efforts at adopting a conscious lifestyle, out of her belief in small choices making a difference to the planet.[16] As mentioned in the Introduction to the thesis,[17] she follows a set of green protocols in the office and at home and portrays how changing one's lifestyle can be difficult, but possible. As a social media influencer through her twitter channel[18] and as an internationally recognised writer, Atwood uses her public persona and fame to set an example regarding how changes can be brought about in everyday life—from eliminating air conditioning, installing solar panels, choosing low energy, low water washing machine options, recycling and reusing.[19] Her essay acts as a warning, alerting us to the immediacy of climate crisis, as real and dangerous as "if an asteroid were sweeping towards Earth, threatening massive impact."[20] Atwood is aware that she would be called an "alarmist" but chooses to embrace the tag, given the urgency of the situation—the building we are living in is on fire![21] Human induced changes on the biosphere are at an unprecedented scale, changing the face of our planet as we know it. Disruption of natural biochemical cycles, release of synthetic toxins and pollutants, slaughter of animals for human use, introduction of genetically modified organisms, extensive desertification and

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[15] Broswimmer, *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species,* 14.

[16] Margaret Atwood, "Wetlands," *Burning Questions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2022), 63.

[17] See pp. 38 of the Introduction to the thesis.

[18] Margaret Atwood's Twitter Handle, accessed June 12, 2019, https://twitter.com/MargaretAtwood?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor.

[19] For those choosing lifestyle changes, it is a solitary and lonely journey, as noted by Atwood in her essay "Wetlands." She feels that those people not opting for green choices are penalizing those who are, as the air, water, earth are "common goods" needing common protection. Atwood, "Wetlands," *Burning Questions,* 60.

[20] Atwood, "Wetlands," *Burning Questions,* 64. Atwood compares the climate and environmental crisis to the Black Death that no one could have avoided. However, she also highlights the difference as we now have the technological tools and science to combat impending doom, unlike in the middle ages. In an incisive comment, she remarks, "It is not lack of knowledge on our part. It's lack of political will." See Atwood, "Wetlands," *Burning Questions,* 66.

[21] Atwood, "Wetlands," *Burning Questions,* 60.

destruction of soil cover along with global warming are realities created by human choices, with an uncertain future looming before us, as we destroy the very home that sustains us. The title of Broswimmer's book—*Ecocide*—is apt in describing human impact on their habitat. While not a science fiction thriller, it simply states facts that make it appear like one, and shows the close connection between the alarming present and the future imagined by science fiction/speculative fiction[22] that extends the present and extrapolates on multiple possible futures.

Frederick Jameson describes "the function of science fictional futures," as that of making "readers see the present anew as the past of societies yet to come."[23] Therefore science fiction creates multiple futures for readers, alerting them regarding the powerful present which becomes the "determinate past of something yet to come."[24] By their very structure they therefore become suggestive of how the utopias of the future may be achieved or their disasters and dystopias prevented. Atwood, in "How to Change the World?" suggests that the origin of all twentieth century "catastrophes," including Hitler, Stalin and

[22] These terms will be discussed in detail in the course of this chapter. Atwood identifies her fiction as speculative fiction rather than science fiction. However she also acknowledges that most people see the matter differently. See pp 100-103 of this chapter. See also Atwood, "Scientific Romancing," *Burning Questions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2022), 8. For Atwood, SF denotes narratives that deal with things that "we can't yet do or begin to do, like going through a wormhole in space to another universe," in contrast with speculative fiction which utilizes techniques and tools and processes that are already in use and recognizable on "Planet Earth,", just not so readily accessible yet. In this lecture, she makes place for other points of view. She recognizes that for some writers and readers the term speculative fiction acts as an "umbrella" term referring to "science fiction and all its hybrid forms." She keeps highlighting the value of the form she uses, as speculative fiction becomes a tool through which "proposed changes in social organization," can be explored, by showing what the changes "might be like for those living within them." This exploration takes the form of utopias and dystopias in speculative fiction. The consequences of utilization of "new and proposed technologies," are also explored by speculative fiction and in vivid, graphic ways, therefore acting as both inspiration and warning of what might occur when these technologies still being invented and conceived of in the present become fully operational. This is important and urgent as Atwood explains in the opening quote of this chapter, making us realise how potent human imagination is in formulating the future.

[23] Frederick Jameson in *Archaeologies* (2005) explains that the function of science fiction was not to portray the future but rather the present as an imaginary past and this finds ample demonstration in Atwood's speculative ecofiction. See Frederick Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), 288.

[24] Frederick Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (1982):152. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4239476.

Mao lay in their visions of "betterment of the world."[25] The problem lay in the enabling of such utopian ideas of betterment, which automatically required the elimination of people not fitting into the idea of utopian future floated by these individuals and their followers.[26] Atwood astutely remarks, "When sweeping utopian changes are proposed: What do you do about those who don't agree with you?"[27] Atwood's 'ustopias'[28] therefore trace the "shadow side of any plans for positive change,"[29] as seen in the course of this chapter's analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale,*[30] *The Testaments*[31] *and Oryx and Crake*.[32]

Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction and 'Ustopias'

Bill McKibben utilizes the science fiction model for narrating the urgency of climate change. Thus in *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*,[33] he describes a planet that can hardly be recognized as earth, climate change having altered its basic features. Renaming the planet "Eaarth" McKibben adopts dystopian science fiction to jolt readers into realizing that their present way of inhabiting this planet was transforming the planet in unrecognizable ways. When analysing McKibben, Ursula K. Heise also contends that the "adoption of

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[25] Atwood, "How to Change the World?" *Burning Questions*, 202.

[26] As seen throughout history and such envisioning of progress, "better for some always means worse for others." Atwood, "How to Change the World?" *Burning Questions*, 202. See also Note 256 and pp 147 of this Chapter, where this idea is taken up again when discussing Atwood's interview by Daniel Zelawski.

[27] Atwood, "How to Change the World?" 202.

[28] Atwood, *In Other Worlds, 66.* See Note 1 above.

[29] Atwood, "How to Change the World?" 202.

[30] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985; repr. Canada: Seal Books, 1986).

[31] Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2019).

[32] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 2003 (London: Virago, 2013). This chapter particularly focuses on the first book of the MaddAddam trilogy. The other two books (*The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*) are mentioned in the course of analysis here, but are analysed in greater detail in chapter 2 of this thesis.

[33] Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* (2010; repr. Canada: Vintage, 2011).

science fiction as a way of thinking by the foremost spokesperson of the environmentalist movement in the US is significant for an understanding of current developments in the genre."[34] In the last two decades, science fiction can be seen presenting a world that is not so "readily identifiable as a future to the reader," but is more like the present itself that "has undergone some momentous but not quite identifiable change."[35] Atwood in her essay "Wetlands" written for *Granta* in 2005, writes about the melting of Arctic ice to which she has been an eyewitness. In her usual wry humour she notes that one "could write a science fiction novel about it," only sadly, "it wouldn't be science fiction," being as it is a rendering of one's present, and not a fantastical future. [36] Even as she considers framing the narration, she realises that the average "condo-dweller" would not be bothered much by the sudden disappearance of fish, small organisms and seals. The disappearance of Long Island, Florida and Bangladesh with rising water levels would invite the same cynical response—"people could just migrate, couldn't they?"[37]—only concerning those inhabiting coastal areas or owning property there. Even as she narrates the challenges of narrating *Icemelt*, the possible science fiction novel on melting Arctic ice, she highlights how human beings stave off responsibility and care for their planet and ecosystem unless personally affected.[38] In "Wetlands," Atwood alerts us to the urgency of permafrost melting and peat formed on the tundra breaking down to release large quantities of methane gas that could soon choke us all

[34] Ursula K. Heise, "The Invention of Eco-Futures," *Ecozon@* 3, no. 2 (2012) : 2, doi: 10.37536/ECOZONA.2012.3.2.468.

[35] Ursula K. Heise, "The Invention of Eco-Futures," 3.

[36] Atwood, "Wetlands," *Burning Questions,* 61.

[37] Atwood, "Wetlands," 61.

[38] Her surmises on the nonchalant responses of people participating in their own extinction is reminiscent of the teenage boys and girls in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, some in the Compounds like Jimmy and Glenn and those outside in the pleeblands, scavenging the roads responding to the narratives of extinction on television or told by elders in communes. See pp 152-153 of this chapter where this episode in *Oryx and Crake* is discussed in greater detail.

to death. She anticipates being called "harsh" in this direct and unabashed econarrative, which she names *Icemelt*, for she thinks it imperative to "wake sleepwalkers from their trance."[39]

Reflecting upon the history of science fiction over the last fifty years, Heise calls it a history of "expansion and infiltration" as it has included within itself a variety of concerns ranging from "gender roles and social structures in feminist science fiction," to that of cyberpunk and its virtual spaces, to explorations of identity in "futuristic Japanese films."[40] She observes that science fiction has also transgressed its apparently cordoned off arena and become palpable in the mainstream, especially in the hands of writers like Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Arno Schmidt, Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Atwood, who Heise says, "have for decades written science fiction that was considered part of the high literary canon," while so many other works continue to be considered "as part of a separate domain with inferior cultural credentials."[41] In the Introduction to this thesis, we have seen how Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson have opted for the term 'SF' as a more plausible alternative to 'science fiction' for writing that seeks to imagine the changes happening to our planet, without necessarily having any scientific basis to it.[42] This widening of ambit for

[39] Atwood, "Wetlands," *Burning Questions,* 61.

[40] Ursula K. Heise, "The Invention of Eco-Futures," 1.

[41] Ursula K. Heise, "The Invention of Eco-Futures," 1. See also Brian Wilson Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree* (United Kingdom: Doubleday, 1973). Aldiss argues that science fiction has been undervalued by literary critics because of its association with pulp fiction and because it often deals with themes that are difficult to classify. He traces the history of science fiction literature from early works of writers like Jules Verne and H.G. Wells and then the genre's development the pulp magazines of the 1920s and 30s, the "Golden Age" of science fiction in the 1940s and 50s, and the "New Wave" movement of the 1960s and 70s. Aldiss critiques the view that science fiction is merely escapist entertainment, arguing that it explores important philosophical and social issues. Aldiss particularly emphasizes the link between science fiction and science, citing examples of books that have had an impact on science, by its visionary quality, as Arthur C. Clarke's idea of using geostationary satellites for communication, which later became a reality.

[42] See Note 68 in the Introduction to this thesis.

ecofiction,[43] as a genre is also seen in Atwood's engagement with 'other worlds' both fantastical and real at the same time. In her book *In Other Worlds*, Atwood calls herself an inventor of 'other worlds' since her childhood, the worlds created then being more akin to 'SF.'[44] However, she terms her later work—*The Handmaid's Tale, Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* –"speculative fiction."[45] Ursula Le Guin in a review of Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* in the *Guardian* in 2009, attacks Atwood for not wanting her writings to be labelled 'science-fiction.'[46] Atwood emphatically disagrees with Ursula Le Guin's classification of the depiction of 'other worlds' in these later works.[47] To emphasize the importance of breaking such labels, Atwood quotes Le Guin verbatim in her book of essays, where Le Guin states that *The Handmaid's Tale, Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* all appear to "exemplify one of the things science fiction does, which is to extrapolate imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that's half prediction, half satire." [48] According to Le Guin, Atwood resists categorization of her novels as science fiction as she wants to, "protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers and prize-awarders. She doesn't want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto."[49] Atwood however strongly contends with this categorization, locating a clear difference between speculative fiction and science fiction, as that between *The Martian Chronicles* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, identifying her writing as

[43] See Note 28 in the Introduction to this thesis.

[44] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 1.

[45] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 6.

[46] Ursula K. Le Guin "The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood," *The Guardian,* 29 Aug 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood.

[47] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 5-6.

[48] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 5-6, quoting Le Guin "The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood," *The Guardian,* 29 Aug 2009.

[49] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 5-6, quoting Le Guin "The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood. "

being closer to the latter. By the term science fiction, Atwood understands books descended from H.G Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, describing invasions by "tentacled, blood-sucking Martians shot to the Earth in metal canisters," thereby talking about events that "could not possibly happen."[50] She compares such narratives with those that are descended from Jules Verne's style of writing, depicting journeys by submarines and balloons—which were events that hadn't happened yet, but could possibly happen, extrapolated from present day situations and circumstances.[51] Atwood wishes to locate her texts in the second format of 'other worlds,' where there are no 'Martians.'[52] She explains that it is not because of any grouse against Martians, but because they just weren't compatible with her "skill set."[53]

In a later public discussion with Le Guin in 2010, Atwood comes to the conclusion that she and Le Guin just understand the categories themselves very differently—"In short, what Le Guin means by "science fiction" is what I mean by "speculative fiction," and what she means by fantasy would include some of what I mean by "science fiction."[54] Atwood acknowledges the slipperiness of all these boundaries.[55] However, Atwood's avoidance of

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[50] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 6.

[51] Atwood, 6.

[52] Atwood, 6.

[53] Atwood, 6.

[54] Atwood, 6-7.

[55] Bruce Sterling in his 1989 essay "Slipstream" criticizes the state of SF as deplorable, having turned into a "category" alone, perpetuating a commercial power structure which it probably set off to critique. He therefore sets out to depict a new genre called 'slipstream' which he describes as "a contemporary kind of writing which has set its face against consensus reality. It's fantastic, surreal sometimes, speculative on occasion….this is a kind of writing which makes you feel very strange; the way that living in the late twentieth century makes you feel, if you are a person of a certain sensibility." See Bruce Sterling, "Slipstream," *SF Eye #5* (1989), retrieved and reprinted by *Electronic Frontier Foundation,* https://www.journalscape.com/jlundberg/page2. It is interesting that Atwood sees her writing as different from Slipstream as well. She sees the narratives by the authors cited by Bruce Sterling in his essay as "travellers' yarn(s)"—recounting events that are unlikely to have taken place. See Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 8. Thus the likelihood of the events in her narratives is what she wishes them to be set apart for, at the same time conceding the shared root of all these forms—"Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction, Swords and Sorcery Fantasy and Slipstream Fiction" as the "wonder tale", depicting worlds located apart from the everyday one we inhabit and are desensitized to. Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 8. Thus the function of these narratives more often than not serves to estrange us from our everyday deadened reality, seeking to change our perception and thereby effect a change in world affairs.

the label of science-fiction for her works seems more than just a populist measure, or an effort to avoid being stacked with other science-fiction labels, or to be seen as 'more' than science-fiction. In rooting her stories in the real recognizable world, the narratives become more urgent and immediate to her readers and reach a wider audience of readers, who can access her writing without the prejudice of labels. When she highlights her form of writing as speculative fiction instead of as science fiction,[56] it is an effort towards fulfilling the intended impact of her writing. As she says, there is nothing in her works that has not already happened somewhere or the other on this planet, and her narrations take those existing events to their logical conclusions. Atwood cites her role as a speculative fiction writer as one who studies the present "facts and trends," and extrapolates from them to "postulate their consequences."[57] As a writer of such fiction, her narratives are about change, pondering over "changes for the better, changes for the worse."[58] She cites with wonder how some changes once thought improbable have occurred while others that seemed imminent have never taken place. She hopes that through writing, "possible catastrophic changes," like atomic warfare might perhaps be avoided.[59]

On the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood expresses her amazement at the popularity it has gained since.[60] She remembers how it was

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[56] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 6.

[57] Atwood, "How to Change the World?" *Burning Questions*, 207. Atwood also distinguishes speculative fiction written by her from the 18th and 19th century definition of the "novel" that lays "claim to a certain kind of truth," as opposed to genre fiction that strives to entertain. Atwood, "Scientific Romancing," *Burning Questions,* 5. Her narratives seem to be located in a space between the two, as her characters have psychological depth, unlike those in genre fiction and at the same time participate in creating fictional extensions of present reality.

[58] Atwood, "How to Change the World?" 208.

[59] Atwood, 208.

[60] Atwood, "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*," 245. See Footnote 66 below on the Hulu series on *The Handmaid's Tale*.

at first "dissed" by the New York Times reviewer Mary McCarthy. The response to *The Handmaid's Tale* changed slowly, as readers started to wonder whether such a dystopia was imminent in their countries. Atwood specifically calls *The Handmaid's Tale* "a literary dystopia—a world worse than ours."[61] One of the staple features of science fiction/speculative fiction[62] is in characters who look back at their past, i.e. our present.[63] *The Handmaid's Tale* is entirely narrated by a speaker who keeps looking back at her past, in the form of flashbacks that interrupt her present, a utopia compared to the present inhabited by her, where the environment has turned toxic and women's bodies become slaves to the requirements of rich and influential men, seen only in terms of their fertility or sexual appeal. It is interesting that in the flashbacks of interactions between the speaker and her friend Moira or her husband, the world is seen as equally fraught with problems and inequality, the dystopia embedded as a seed in the past that grows into the horror of the future present.[64] In Gilead, literal interpretation of biblical sources is used to control women

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[61] Atwood, "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*," 256.

[62] See Note 22 above. While writers differ widely on what constitutes SF or science fiction or speculative fiction, as seen in discussions on pp 15-16, 22-24 of the Introduction to the thesis as well as pp 103-106 of this chapter, I have used these two terms with an oblique where the discussion covers both fiction involving the apparently impossible, like Martians on Earth, or the probable, based on extrapolating on what has already happened, as demarcated by Atwood and discussed in Note 22 above.

[63] This is also seen in *Oryx and Crake,* which begins with Jimmy/Snowman looking back at his past, which is our near future, closely bordering on our present. See pp 138-145 of this chapter. Contemporary science fiction, according to Ursula Heise, is defined by the tension between two approaches to the present. In one, the present is seen as the past of imagined futures. In the other, the present is "an already if incompletely materialized future that makes palpable the obsolescence of the present." Heise, "The Invention of Eco-Futures,"5.

[64] This aspect of perspectival utopias and dystopias is developed further on pp 120-122 of this chapter. Moira and the speaker, whose name is possibly June (later Offred) have misgivings about the state of things before the totalitarian regime of Gilead takes over. Rebellious and outspoken Moira s critical of the restrictive gender roles and expectations placed on women in their society, and chafes at the idea of settling down into a traditional role as a wife and mother. She is also sceptical of the political and economic systems that underpin their society, and sees them as corrupt and unjust. June, on the other hand, is more cautious and reserved. She has a husband and child, and is initially more willing to accept the status quo of their society, despite her own misgivings. However, as she begins to experience the full extent of the restrictions placed on women in their society – including the loss of her job, the erosion of her autonomy, she becomes more and more disillusioned. When all her bank accounts are frozen and the money transferred to her husband, she feels like her feet are cut off. Even as her husband Luke says, "You know I'll always take care of you,"(225) she feels that he has already started to patronize her. There is a constant sense of unease in Moira and June, even if they cannot quite understand which way their society was heading. "Look out, said Moira to me, over the phone. Here it comes."(218) In response, June can only stutter, "Here what comes?" (218) Their misgivings ultimately prove prescient, as the

for political reasons and also to support the powerful elite commanders' interests.[65] Readers saw such a dystopia becoming a reality with the US President's elections when women's reproductive rights and control over them became an agenda.[66] Atwood explains how "absolutist governments have always taken an inordinate interest in the reproductive capabilities of women."[67] As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis,[68] Atwood explains that she had decided to follow certain rules when writing *The Handmaid's Tale*, the primary one being that she "would not include any detail that people had not already done, sometime, somewhere," or something that was technologically possible once resources were invested.[69] By setting up this rule she ensures that she does not conjure up fantastical realms that are improbable. In the acknowledgements at the end of *The Testaments*, the sequel to *The*

society they live in is gradually taken over by a totalitarian regime that enforces gender roles with brutal violence and repression. Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 214-229.

[65] Atwood, "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*," 255.

[66] This has also been discussed briefly in the Introduction to the thesis where an overview of Atwood's works have been attempted. See in particular footnote 337 of the Introduction to this thesis. In addition, see Daný van Dam and Sara Polak, "Owning Gilead: Franchising Feminism through Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments," European Journal of English Studies*, 25:2 (2021):172-189, DOI: 0.1080/13825577.2021.1950362. Dany van Dam and Sara Polak discuss how *The Handmaid's Tale*, with its multi media presence has become a "media franchise" that provides a visual shorthand as a protest symbol in feminist marches and other events protesting the curbing of women's reproductive rights. Trump's Presidential elections in November 2016, and measures taken by the government limiting/forbidding legal abortion in as many as nineteen US states and the #metoo movement gaining traction in media made the "patriarchy-as-terror-regime," portrayed in THT appear hyper real and relevant. While *The Handmaid's Tale* has been converted into a film, an opera, a computer game and recently also a graphic novel, it is the Hulu series on *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-19) that made Atwood's narrative more popular than ever, the red cloaks of the Handmaid's becoming a recognizable symbol of "feminist protest culture."(172) According to Julia Kuznetski, *The Testaments* winning the 2019 Booker prize further testifies "to the urgency of the issues raised in these works."(287) See Julia Kuznetski, "Disempowerment and Bodily Agency in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale* TV Series," *The European Legacy* 26.3-4, (2021):287-302, DOI: 10.1080/10848770.2021.1898108. See also "Margaret Atwood on Booker Prize Win, Handmaid's Tale as a Protest Symbol," *CBC News*, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riVh9YWXPTQ&t=20s, where Atwood talks about scenes from the recent past with men in suits taking decisions about women's bodies. She also explains how women in red handmaid's suits have become a symbol of protest, recognised across borders, like a visual signature that cannot be erased. Not creating any disruption, and fully covered up, they cannot be removed from places they choose to be in.

[67] Atwood, "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*," 254.

[68] See Note 267 and pp 55-56 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[69] Atwood, "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*," 252.

Handmaid's Tale, Atwood thanks MGM and the Hulu series for bringing *The Handmaid's Tale* to life and for respecting "one of the axioms of the novel: no event is allowed into it, that does not have a precedent in human history."[70] Atwood explains in her interview with Lisa Allardice,[71] that she did not return to writing the sequel earlier as she felt that recent events propelled its relevance more than before. In Atwood's words, "For a long time we were going away from Gilead and then we turned around and started going back towards Gilead, so it did seem pertinent."[72] For *The Handmaid's Tale* as well as for *The Testaments*, she draws on multiple historical sources, like Hitler's regime, Argentina with its military rule and the Ceaușescu dictatorship in Romania.[73] Alongside, she also drew upon the history of "denial of literacy to American slaves," as well as that of group hangings in the medieval times.[74] In the 'particicution'[75] scene in *The Handmaid's Tale*, we see the handmaids tearing

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[70] Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2019), 418.

[71] Lisa Allardice, "Margaret Atwood: 'For a Long Time We Were Moving Away from Gilead. Then We Started Going Back Towards It'," *The Guardian*, 20 September 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/20/margaret-atwood-moving-away-from-gilead-testaments.

[72] Allardice, "Margaret Atwood: 'For a Long Time We Were Moving Away from Gilead. Then We Started Going Back Towards It'." See also Atwood, "Margaret Atwood on What 'The Handmaid's Tale' Means in the Age of Trump," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2017, https://nyti.ms/2mtyjSC.

[73] Atwood in her essay, "The Writing of *The Testaments,*" explains that *The Handmaid's Tale* was a rumination based on actual events in Napoleon's regime including the criminalizing of abortion, legalization of slavery and the atrocities committed in Guadaloupe and Haiti. The French colonial forces in Haiti had responded to the Haitian Revolution in 1791, with mass execution, torture, rape and burning of villages. In 1802, when Napoleon sent a large force to Haiti, he also sent troops to Guadeloupe to suppress a rebellion there. The French forces committed numerous atrocities during this campaign as well. See Atwood, "The Writing of *The Testaments,*" *Burning Questions,* 416.Atwood also drew upon actual events in Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime in Romania, who made it mandatory for fertile women to bear four children! Those who could not or did not follow this decree had to answer the state that demanded such utilization of their bodies. Mandatory pregnancy tests and penalties every month added to the surveillance regime which ultimately led to many suicides, orphans and hungry children. Atwood also cites the rise of the religious right wing in the United States in the 80s who were pushing "to outlaw any form of birth control,"(418) as another existing world event that led her to reflect on what "would happen if these people gained power, and what would they do."(418) She traces world history and shows how time and again regimes have sought to silence women's voices and tried to deprive them of jobs and money, telling women that their place place was at home, serving the needs of men. (418) See Atwood, "The Writing of *The Testaments,*" *Burning Questions*, 414-423.

[74] Atwood, "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*," 253.

[75] "Particicution," is a ritualistic execution carried out by a group of Handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale.* Usually those convicted of crimes against Handmaids are executed by the Handmaids themselves in this ritual which is also called "Salvaging" in the text. The Handmaids are not given any weapons, so they use their bare hands to beat and tear the man to death, in a state of frenzy, Gilead using this ritual as a means by which the

a man apart with their hands, reminiscent of sacrificial victims being torn apart by Dionysian cults.[76] In her lecture "Tell. The Truth," written in 2019, Atwood reflects on the importance of research behind words on the page, ensuring the sanctity of their power.[77] She describes words/language as one of first human "technologies,"[78] as they become tools through which we think and rethink our ideas regarding the past, present and future. She instructs other writers, "Use these languages truthfully, use them fairly, and if you do that, you will also be using them powerfully, in the best sense."[79]

Through the course of multiple essays, Atwood hammers in a constant refrain that the present is all we have to go on—hence, when we talk of the future, it is really the present that we are extending.[80] Much after writing *The Handmaid's Tale*, she stumbled upon Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, which she realized was a direct influence on Orwell's *1984*, which in turn was a source of inspiration for Atwood's dystopian writing in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In her essay "We" in 2020, she notes with surprise that *We* was written in 1920-21 when Hitler's camps and Stalin's purges and the Berlin wall were yet to materialize. The novel seems "prophetic," by the timeline, almost like a blueprint for all "later dictatorships and surveillance capitalisms."[81] In *We*, the One State attempts to "abolish the individual," and

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Handmaids can release their suppressed rage at complete loss of autonomy effected by the state as well as a means to re-establish control and order over the citizens of Gilead who are expected to follow the rules laid out by the state, dissuading aberrations through this violent public ceremony.

[76] Atwood, "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*," 253.

[77] Atwood in "Wetlands" describes how she preserves newspaper clippings when working on her speculative fiction "set in the not so distant future," a world severely affected by global warming, extinction of species and bizarre use of technological interventions in the genetic code of all living beings. She stores the clippings to prove that the seeds of the future lie in choices in the present. See "Wetlands," *Burning Questions,* 62.

[78] Atwood, "Tell. The. Truth," *Burning Questions* , 389.

[79] Atwood, "Tell. The. Truth," 389.

[80] Atwood, "The Futures Market," *Burning Questions*, 170.

[81] Atwood, "We," *Burning Questions*, 409.

create a collective where every thought and act is monitored and all dissent squashed. *We* seems startlingly like *The Handmaid's Tale* as discovered by Atwood in the 1990s, but much after writing and publishing *The Handmaid's Tale*![82] Gilead too erases individual rights and freedom except for the highest ranking male commanders and works on a similar model of surveillance, quite like *1984*, a template for Atwood, as she herself declares.[83] In her 2020 essay Atwood remarks on how Gilead too is projected as a utopia, by its creators, where rights are seen as frivolous and unnecessary.[84] In an uncanny resemblance, in *We*, the One State declares that since one cannot be both happy and free, "freedom has to go,"[85] while in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aunt Lydia schools the handmaids to be, trying to reprogram their thinking telling them that there was a "freedom to," and there is a "freedom from," and the latter was no less than the first, suggesting that Gilead would protect them from unnecessary dangers that were common in the era of "anarchy," which provided "freedom to."[86] The similarities between the narratives seem to stem from the impulses fashioning dictatorships and the way speculative fiction writers craft their narratives. When Zamyatin wrote *We*, the "utopia promised by Communism was fading into dystopia."[87] Atwood wonders how Zamyatin could have "seen the future so clearly?" answering her own question by understanding how she wrote her speculative dystopias—not needing to see the future, but

[82] Atwood, "We," 408.

[83] Atwood, 408.

[84] Atwood, "We," *Burning Questions*, 409. This is further elaborated and discussed on pp 122-123 of this chapter where the conversation between Aunt Lydia and Cdr. Judd showcases the way he conceives the authoritarian state as a utopia, which in effect creates the dystopia for all others. See also Atwood, "Dire Cartographies: The Roads to Ustopia," *In Other Worlds* (London: Virago, 2011), 83, where she discusses this as a leitmotif of most utopias and dystopias.

[85] Atwood, "We," *Burning Questions*, 409.

[86] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 31.

[87] Atwood, "We," 412.

only "the present, and what was lurking in its shadows."[88] Jameson says that the "most characteristic SF does not seriously attempt to imagine the 'real' future of our social system.[89] As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the multiple mock futures, both "possible and probable,"[90] created by science fiction/speculative fiction[91] changes the way we view our present choices. In Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, the present we readers inhabit is long past, and what is depicted as the past for the characters, via their memories, is the time before the apocalyptic 'waterless flood,'[92] which is also a projected dystopian future for the reader. Thus the trilogy plays with multiple futures situated on the timeline of our imagination and conceptions. The present we inhabit is depicted as the past in the novels, while the present of the characters, while having echoes of our present, is still in our future. It is as Gibson mentions, "[t]he future is already here—it's just not evenly distributed yet."[93] This is very true for *Oryx and Crake*, as the technologies and social organization seen in the trilogy are all present today in some way, but perhaps not as popular and mainstream as in the present depicted by the novel.

As Atwood's writing seeks to depict important present trends in the way technology,

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[88] Atwood, 412.

[89] Frederick Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?" 152. See Note 62 above. Also see pp 15-16 and Note 68 of the Introduction to the thesis for Canavan's discussion on "SF."

[90] Atwood, "Margaret Atwood on Fiction, the Future, and the Environment," 2012 Nexus Conference on "How to Change the World?" http://opentranscripts.org/sources/nexus-institute/nexus-conference-2012/

[91] See Note 22 and 62 above.

[92] The impending apocalypse is referred to as the "Waterless Flood," by the God's Gardeners, an environmentalist and resistant cult described in great detail in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. The Gardeners are certain of doom in the near future, triggered by human interference with the environment and basic genetic code. However they visualise the apocalypse as similar to the Flood experienced by Noah in the Bible, but without the flooding. When Crake's pandemic starts destroying the human populace, they see it as the fulfilment of their prophecy of such a "Waterless Flood." See Chapter 2 of this thesis of further discussion on the "Waterless Flood."

[93] Atwood, "Scientific Romancing," *Burning Questions,* 7. See William Gibson, *The Economist*, December 4, 2003, doi: 10.1080/23748834.2020.1807704.

science, the humanities and the environment is seen—she wishes readers to take her warnings and critique of the present very seriously. This is in keeping with her assertion that art was not just for self-expression,[94] but had to perform an important social function—to make visible and apparent, to narrate the invisible power dynamics informing society, exploitation and present ecological destruction. Coral Ann Howells discusses how Atwood's novels make a conscious effort of making things visible—"for Atwood the artist's major human duty is to bear witness."[95] In her essay "Burning Bushes", Atwood satirizes the way literature defines novels and "genre fiction" and marginalizes the latter as it "want(s) to entertain, as opposed to rubbing our noses in the daily grit produced by the daily grind."[96] In this essay she also plays defender of all kinds of fantastic tales—whether science fiction or speculative, as serving certain important functions. Atwood discusses the possibilities of these fantastic tales—"They can explore the consequences of new and proposed technologies in graphic ways by showing them as fully operational."[97] This is particularly seen in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, where genetic engineering and biotechnology assisted modifications are taken to their extreme possibilities in the hybrid animals, plants and humans created by

[94] In an interview with Adele Freeman in 1980, she exclaims that that one of things she would like to "squash underfoot like a cockroach is the idea of art as self-expression." She feels that artists as inescapably connected to the reality of their worlds and "must say something about the world at large." See Adele Freeman, "Happy Heroine and 'Freak' of CanLit," *Globe and Mail*, October 25, 1980, 1, accessed May 5, 2019, https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/. See also Coral Ann Howells, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 15. See also Atwood, *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), 148, where she further defines what she sees as the writer's role in society. She elaborates that the connection between the writer and society may reflect in different ways initially, being unconsciously represented. However, this connection can only "increase in intensity as the society….becomes the "subject" of the writer."

[95] Coral Ann Howells, *Private and Fictional Worlds: Canadian Women Novelists of the 1970s and 80s* (London: Methuen, 1987) 56.

[96] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 57-58.

[97] Atwood, 62.

the Compound[98] scientists. As discussed a little while earlier,[99] if Atwood's work is seen as science fiction, then by her definition of the genre,[100] it would be describing events that could not possibly take place; whereas, if her writing is seen as speculative fiction about a future that is dangerously close to our present, then there is hope that such a future may be averted. This chapter therefore sees Atwood's choice of narrative style and genre as critical to her environmentalist stance of 'hope'—that change, while difficult, is still possible.[101]

In the Introduction to this thesis, we have seen that popular environmentalist accounts of climate change and extinction are often permeated by a sense of doom and a seemingly impossible planetary situation that cannot hope to be altered, encouraging thereby a sense of hopelessness and gradual desensitization to the 'crisis' facing our planet today.[102] Lack of positive vocabulary on action that resuscitates the human-nature relationship or images of such action that can reverse and stall the damage done to the earth, creates pessimism and paralyses action. While it becomes difficult to imagine sustainability in the face of such gloom,[103] ecological fictional narratives like that of Atwood become significant crucibles of hope and the possibility of a new future.[104] There is also a certain time gap experienced by individuals between the present and the direct experience of the effects of climate change as

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[98] The Compounds in *Oryx and Crake* are the gated communities created by the Corporations, where the scientists and their families live and work on the projects of genetic engineering designated by these Corporations, without questioning the ethics of such operations.

[99] See Note 22 and pp 105 of this Chapter.

[100] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 6.

[101] Atwood sees writing itself as an act of hope. See pp 116 and 176 of this Chapter and Note 111 below.

[102] See Note 75 of the Introduction to the thesis.

[103] Jonathan Porrit, "Must utopia be sustainable?" Talk at the Institute of Advanced Studies, Durham University, 8 February 2011. https://www.iasdurham.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/201011-Annual-Report-final.pdf

[104] See the pp 16-27 of Introduction to the thesis for a detailed introduction to this concept.

debilitating. This "time-spatio distance of climate change's consequences,"[105] makes it a little difficult for individuals to ordinarily hold on to the anxiety of a process unfolding gradually every day and therefore acts as an obstruction towards altering human behaviour significantly in terms of cultural lifestyle.[106] The phenomenon is termed the "value action gap."[107] It is also called the Giddens' Paradox.[108] Anthony Giddens explains that in spite of being "told about the threats" to our lives with the continuation of our present lifestyles, "it is hard to face up to them, because they feel somehow unreal – and, in the meantime, there is a life to be lived, with all its pleasures and pressures."[109] The paradox lies in the fact that while most people will stay inactive owing to the lack of immediate or visible danger, waiting for the signs of climate change to becoming "visible and acute before being stirred to serious action….will be…..too late."[110] However, Atwood is not hopeless regarding the state of ecology and the environment. As she says in a lecture at Dalhousie University in 1980, she views her act of writing itself as an act of hope—"the hope that things can be better

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[105] Annika Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication* (E-book, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) , 10, PDF, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69383-510).

[106] Timothy Morton's idea of climate change as a 'hyperobject' discussed on page 7-8 of the Introduction to this thesis, also refers to this difficulty faced by individuals in comprehending and confronting an issue that is so vastly distributed in time and space. Ereaut and Signit's (2006) survey on the treatment of climate change by the UK popular media , also identifies 'alarmism' as a popular shock tactic used by media, but argue that it renders the climate problematic 'too big and intractable, undermining the resources of hope and agency that would enable people to make changes in their own lives'(Garforth 109). Also see Note 133 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[107] Susan Owens and Louise Driffil, "How to change attitudes and behaviours in the context of energy," *Energy Policy, Elsevier*, 36.12 (Dec 2008):4412-4418. https://ideas.repec.org/a/eee/enepol/v36y2008i12p4412-4418.html.

[108] Anthony Giddens, *The Politics of Climate Change, Cambridge* (Malden: Polity Press, 2009), 2.

[109] Giddens , *The Politics of Climate* Change,2. Also see pp 18-19 of the Introduction of this thesis, discussing Krimsky's model of risk communication. Sheldon Krimsky, "Risk Communication in the Internet Age: The Rise of Disorganized Skepticism," *Environmental Hazards* 7.2 (2007):157–164. doi: 10.1016/j.envhaz.2007.05.006.

[110] Giddens, *The Politics of Climate* Change,2.

that they are."[111]

In her essay "Dire Cartographies: The Roads to Ustopia," Atwood explains her coinage of the term 'ustopia' which I shall be interrogating in my reading of her texts in this chapter—"Ustopia is a word I made up by combining utopia and dystopia—the imagined perfect society and its opposite—because in my view, each contains a latent version of the other."[112] Lisa Garforth recognizes that "speculative fictions envisage post-apocalyptic wastelands, but also moments of joy and hope, and even descriptions of life in sustainable society."[113] She therefore places much importance on these dystopias containing utopias in their midst, as significant contributors in the larger narrative of climate change and environmental problems existing in popular and political imaginations today. Atwood in my analysis introduces hope, through the utopian enclaves in the dystopia depicted by her. Tom Moylan's concept of the "critical dystopia,"[114] is in many ways similar to the term "ustopia" coined by Atwood. In contrast to traditional dystopian fiction, which often presents a bleak and hopeless future as an inevitable consequence of human folly, critical dystopian fiction seeks to highlight the ways in which dystopian societies are constructed and maintained by power structures and institutions, and to suggest possibilities for resistance and change. In being firmly rooted in critiquing contemporary society and its power structures, presenting the vision of an oppressive and often totalitarian dystopian society as well as in exploring possibilities of resistance and alternative futures, the critical dystopia also holds within it the

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[111] Atwood, "An End to Audience?" *The Dalhousie Review* 60, no. 3 (1980): 426. https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/60268/dalrev_vol60_iss3_pp415_433.pdf?sequence=1.

[112] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 66.

[113] Lisa Garforth, *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018), 2.

[114] See Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986 and Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction,Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000).

enclave of hope and change. Similar to the 'ustopia,' described by Atwood, it seeks to inspire readers to take action in the present to prevent the realization of dystopian futures. In Lyman Sargent's words, a critical dystopia is:

> A non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but that normally includes only one eutopian enclave or holds out the hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with eutopia.[115]

The form of the critical dystopia, or the 'ustopia' therefore becomes significant as the narratorial method whereby Atwood maintains the possibility of change and transformation that we all seek through ecological fiction. Ruth Levitas describes utopia's distinctive core as being 'the expression of desire for a better way of living and being.'[116] Garforth acknowledges that the forms taken by utopias, the values espoused by them and work done by them in our culture are multifarious.[117] The utopia, therefore can function as a method,[118] or a hermeneutic.[119] Garforth sees green utopianism in the "creative space of speculative fiction" as both "estranging and engaging,"[120] as it both brings us affectively close to alternative possibilities as well as creates a certain distance—critical and cognitive—from the unsustainable world we inhabit at present. While science-fiction or 'SF' and then its

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[115] Lyman Tower Sargent, "In Defence of Utopia," *Diogenes* 53, no.1(2006): 15. https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192106062432. Also quoted in Gerald Farca and Charlotte Ladeveze, "The Journey to Nature: *The Last of Us* as Critical Dystopia," (Proceedings of the 1st International Joint Conference of DiGRA and FDG, 2016), 3, accessed March 12, 2022, http://www.digra.org/digital-library/forums/13-digra-fdg2106/.

[116] Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 1990 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 9.

[117] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 156.

[118] Levitas, "Some Varieties of Utopian Method." *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 21, no.2 (Nov. 2013): 41–50.

[119] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 156.

[120] Garforth, 157.

similar sounding cousin 'Cli-Fi'[121] is pitched as useful for its function of disorienting and defamiliarising the conditions of everyday life and opening the mind to previously unimagined possibilities while retaining a foot in reality, by its use of 'cognitive estrangement,'[122] Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction performs a similar feat, straddling fantasy and reality, so that cognition is kept alive, "the reality principle that keeps our imagination honest."[123]

However, whether a narrative moment is perceived as a dystopia or a utopia depends also on the reader and his or her present context.[124] Likewise Atwood in her critical analysis of her own book *The Handmaid's Tale*, says that there are two utopias concealed in the text[125]—one which is the past, that is our present and the other is the future depicted in "The Historical Notes,"[126] where the horrors of Gilead have ended. However, the past which is like a utopia for the women in Gilead,[127] is our present and might appear to be a dystopia to the reader inhabiting the present. Again, the future when the conference on Gilead is taking place, on closer inspection appears to be a problematic space,[128] hardly a utopia, though it

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[121] "Climate-fiction." See pp 16 and Notes 70-73, 100 of the Introduction to this thesis, for an introduction to the term cli-fi and its association with speculative fiction.

[122] Darko Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," *College English* 34, no.3 (1972):372. doi: /10.2307/375141.

[123] Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson, eds. *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), xi.

[124] Lyman Tower Sargent remarks, "…a book could be both an eutopia and a dystopia depending on the reader." See "Do Dystopias Matter?" *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on screen, on Stage*, ed. Fatima Vieira. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013),11.

[125] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 90.

[126] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 371.

[127] It appears so in comparison, to the speaker of *The Handmaid's Tale*. However, as shown by Atwood, and as discussed earlier in this chapter, the utopia of the past had its own problems. See Note 64 above and pp. 108-110 of this chapter.

[128] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 371. The conference depicted in *The Testaments,* located further in the future, is equally problematic. See Note 153 below for details.

might appear as one to the people suffering Gilead, like June/Offred.[129] Thus, 'ustopias' appear to be ubiquitous and perspectival at the same time. Atwood explains that she wanted to try narrating a dystopia from a "female point of view,"[130] in *The Handmaid's Tale*. However in the same breath she disavows the label of *The Handmaid's Tale* being a "feminist dystopia," as she does not agree that giving women voice and an "inner life," is akin to calling it feminist.[131] *The Handmaid's Tale* was written much before the feminist movement became popular and gained momentum in the West. However, as noted by Atwood, its publication coincided with the movement's gaining ground and hence led to people connecting it to the women's movement which she denies.[132] *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*,[133] published in 2019, more than three decades after the original novel's publication, brings alive the horror of Gilead and yet leaves space for our imagination as many questions remain unanswered in the gutters[134] between the panels. Graphic novels, according to Clint Jones[135] require active reader participation because of the way in which

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[129] The name of the narrator in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, is probably June, as surmised from her narration of exchanging names with fellow inmates at the Red Centre, where Gilead trains fertile women to become Handmaids. See Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 4. Gilead erases these women's names, naming them after the Commander whom they serve to produce children for Gilead. As the narrator is posted in Commander Fred's service, she is called Offred, on a temporary basis. I shall be using the name Offred through the rest of the thesis, as the novel itself does away with her name, except as a whisper of the past. I have referred to her as June only when discussing her conversations with her friend Moira in the past in Note 64 above.

[130] Atwood, "Scientific Romancing," *Burning Questions,* 10.

[131] Atwood, "Scientific Romancing," 10.

[132] Atwood, 10.

[133] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*, art and adaptation Renee Nault (London: Jonathan Cape, 2019).

[134] The space between two panels in a comic strip or a comic book or graphic novel, is the 'gutter.' This blank space enables a "transition from one moment to the next within a story." Althea Delwiche, "Gutter," *Comic Book Glossary*, accessed January 21, 2020, https://comicbookglossary.wordpress.com/gutter/. The gutter plays an important role as readers mentally fill in action between the panels, creating the narrative flow. It is a very crucial element in graphic novel storytelling as Scott McCloud explains, it takes "wo separate images and transform them into a single idea." Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Harper Collins Publishers Inc: New York, 1993), 66. The gutter can be used by the graphic novel or comic book artist to create surprise or even suspense, building anticipation or tension, by the strategic placing of panels and spaces.

[135] Clint Jones, *Apocalyptic Ecology in the Graphic Novel: Life and the Environment After Societal Collapse* (Jefferon, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2020).

the images are put together. Unlike a film, with its steady stream of images, graphic novels rely on the reader to "fill in certain blanks," giving it meaning and perspective by virtue of such dynamic engagement with the text.[136] The panels in the graphic novel on *The Handmaid's Tale*, move back and forth between Offred's present that she can hardly make sense of, the dangers looming at the corners of the pages and the past that appears in the form of warm and colourful flashbacks. The visual difference between the present Gilead in shades of grey and dull green and a lot of red of the Handmaid's outfits, stand out in contrast with the past which is suffused with a glow and a variety of colour and emotions. The dystopia in the present and the past as a utopia become visually rendered and demarcated. Aunt Lydia's words keep returning to Offred to haunt her reveries of the past, intruding even on the spaces and panels where she rests, or takes a break from the narrative of her present. The Aunt's voice guides the Handmaids' perception of their present altered lives, suggesting that the quicker they adapt to changed environmental and political circumstances, the better it was for them. Aunt Lydia's words, "Where you are is not a prison, but a privilege,"[137] runs through the narrative creating painful contrast with the reality of the Handmaids' lives, as also the Angels, the Martha's and the Wives, all trapped in roles and colours defined by Gilead.[138] It is interesting that in *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*, the Handmaids look mostly alike, their features almost indistinguishable, quite like their uniforms, creating a visual layered commentary on the way Gilead had reduced its women to their functions and their bodies, with no space for individuality or expression. The co-existence of perspectival utopias and dystopias, one stemming from the other is brought alive by the panel

[136] Jones, *Apocalyptic Ecology in the Graphic Novel*, 5.

[137] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*, 8.

[138] See Kuznetski, "Disempowerment and Bodily Agency in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale* TV Series," 289-90, for a detailed discussion on "Gilead and its Classified Bodies.

art and colour schemes depicting the past and the present of the narrator of the novel.

Having a utopia within a dystopia seems baffling at first. However the form has much to offer for ecocritical speculative fiction as in Atwood's own analysis, it is like a yin and yang pattern, 'within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia a hidden utopia, if only in the form of the world as it existed before the bad guys took over."[139] Sargent in his essay in *Dystopian Matters*,[140] while not using the term 'ustopia', similarly asserts the existence of utopias within dystopias. The importance of the dystopia lies in its depiction of a gloomy future that must be avoided by us. At the same time, Sargent says that the dystopia 'really only works" when combined with its 'counterpart'—the 'eutopia' acting as a reminder for us that the "better, while difficult, is possible."[141] This is especially significant as we set out to analyse the effect and impact of 'ustopias' on our interpretation and imagination of the global ecological and climate change problems, through Margaret Atwood's narratives. As Fatima Viera says, "dystopias that leave no room for hope do in fact fail their mission."[142] According to Sargent, dystopias function as jeremiads,[143] describing the result of people's behaviour and actions, a result of "people messing up,"[144] without the necessity of a religious sermon accompanying this vision.[145] Atwood takes the existing vocabulary regarding utopias and dystopias and turns them into elements of her own

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[139] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 85.

[140] Lyman Tower Sargent, *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, ed. Fatima Vieira. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013).

[141] Sargent, *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, 4.

[142] Fatima Viera, "The Concept of Utopia," *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature,* ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge UP, Cambridge, 2010), 17.

[143] Sargent, *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, 12.

[144] Viera, "The Concept of Utopia," 3.

[145] Atwood however incorporates the sermon as well in *The Year of the Flood*, compared to a Green Bible by many and discussed in detail in the second chapter of this thesis.

narrative to create a multi-layered reality with utopias and dystopias interlaced with each other, depending on each character's personality and perception.

In *The Testaments*, written by Atwood more than three decades later as a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, to satisfy the curiosity of readers asking her how Gilead toppled,[146] we see another play on the co-constitutive reality of utopias and dystopias. In the initial conversations between Commander Judd and Aunt Lydia, we see how he positions the creation of Gilead with him and other Commanders at the helm in the rhetoric of crafting a utopia, which necessitated the extermination of the present "decadent and corrupt society."[147] Full of bombast, he speaks of changing the social order, so that only men like him are in power, subjugating all women and all other men to his codes and rules, to enforce and sustain the hierarchical regime. Judd's study holds the biographies and histories of Ceaușescu, Stalin and other autocrats and "controllers of men,"[148] each of whose regimes are in some way reflected in the creation and sustenance of Gilead. This intention is covered up by declaring it as a means of "building a society congruent with the Divine order."[149] One of the most salient features of achieving this is through segregation and making women feel

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[146] Atwood explains that of the many ways that "totalitarianisms may crumble," one was from within the regime by virtue of its own excesses, and the other when it was attacked from outside. In *The Testaments*, we see her using both the narrative strategies to satisfy her readers' curiosity regarding how Gilead fell. See Acknowledgement, *The Testaments*. See also Lisa Allardice's interview with Atwood, where she explains how *The Testaments* was all about how the regime collapses. Atwood explains that she "needed an insider," who would have access to all the information and power to move the regime, yet "without absolute authority." For this purpose, she chose Aunt Lydia and told Bruce Miller, in charge of the Hulu series that she needed the characters of the Aunt, Agnes and Nicole alive to craft her sequel, even as he had leeway to fill in the blank years between *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, in his show. While Aunt Lydia is seen as a unidimensional cruel figure in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the sequel showcases her perspective as hers too is a struggle for survival in a regime where it is a stark choice between a 'Yes' or 'Death.' In her perspective, it makes no good to "throw yourself in front of a steamroller out of moral principles and then be crushed flat like a sock emptied of its foot?" She would rather hurl the rocks than have them hurled at her. Lisa Allardice, "Margaret Atwood: 'For a Long Time We Were Moving Away from Gilead. Then We Started Going Back Towards It'," *The Guardian*, 20 September 2019. See also Note 66 above.

[147] Atwood, *The Testaments,* 175.

[148] Atwood, 316.

[149] Atwood, 174.

inferior. This is in keeping with Judd's notion that the concept of women's equality to men was a lie in itself. The dystopia takes shape before our eyes, as Aunt Lydia details its formation from the time she was arrested and rounded up like an animal at the stadium with all other women and forced to undergo mental and physical torture, dehumanising their sense of self till they succumbed and agreed to what was expected of them or killed. Only the framing of new set of laws and dogmas can sustain the "utopia" demanded by Judd and his fellow Commanders. The Aunts—Lydia, Vidala, Helena and Elizabeth, all previously professionally successful women who had chosen to subscribe to the Gileadian vision to save their lives, frame these new rules week by week, with approval from Commander Judd. These dogmas betray all that these women had achieved in their previous lives for the sake of survival and retention of a degree of power in the 'ustopia'[150] that they are forced to participate in. It is all the more frightening as it takes away all the years of effort by the woman's movement in one swoop, destroying what they had believed as permanent progress. It is unsettling for the reader, as intended to be, compelling us to become aware of such fundamentalist autocracies re-usurping power if we weren't careful. It is also up to us to prevent environmental degradation from reaching a point that makes a Gilead possible, playing on people's fears and insecurities regarding continuation of life on the planet. Lisa Allardice, notes that *The Handmaid's Tale*, more visibly recognised as "a feminist classic," overshadows the fact that it is environmentalist as well, as "the catalyst for Gilead was environmental catastrophe."[151] Her dystopia shows that the hardest hit would be the women and children in such a situation. Chapter 3 of this thesis analyses *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* further from an ecofeminist lens, highlighting the close connection between

[150] See Note 1 and pp 116-117 of this chapter where this term is analysed in detail. Also Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 66.

[151] Lisa Allardice, "Margaret Atwood: 'For a Long Time We Were Moving Away from Gilead. Then We Started Going Back Towards It'."

exploitation of the environment, animals and women and considers the necessity of such readings amidst multiple objections to such an amalgamation of interests.[152] Aunt Lydia's testimonial, found later as the Ardua Hall holograph by Professor Pieixoto,[153] also records the climatic changes—the fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes and droughts ravaging the country as well as the earthquakes and water shortages creating competition for resources amongst people.[154] The parallel economic meltdown, unemployment and infertility were also responsible for making people frightened and angry.[155] In Gilead, most babies are 'Unbabies,'[156] born without complete body parts, or born dead, owing to the toxicity of the environment. In addition, juvenile cancer is also seen on the rise.[157] Gilead becomes possible, because such dangers were left unheeded. Aunt Lydia wonders why the atomic reactors were not decommissioned before it was too late. In later Gilead we see how women who are infertile, intractable and condemned as "Unwomen" are sent to the colonies where

[152] See pp 376-381 of Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[153] The Thirteenth Symposium on Gileadian Studies in 2197 inspects and interrogates the 'Ardua Hall holograph' or Aunt Lydia's testimonial and records as well as the testimonials titled Witness 369 A and B unearthed from a library in Sheshatshiu, Labrador. Professor Pieixoto famous for his research on Gilead and for speaking on the tapes called *The Handmaid's Tale* in the Twelfth symposium on Gileadian Studies, now attempts to deconstruct the testimonials of Agnes and Daisy as well as Aunt Lydia's holograph, based on the information gathered by him as well as his own perceptions which are clearly problematic starting with misogynist humour that the conference seems to ally with. He begins by addressing the Chair as Professor Crescent Moon and then Madam President, making her gender apparent and showcasing his discomfort with women in power. Even in the projected future 2197, Pieixoto makes a cringeworthy statement like "Now that women are usurping leadership positions to such a terrifying extent, I hope you will not be too severe with me." Atwood, *The Testaments,* 408. It is alarming to see the same tendencies that bred a Gilead reflected in the words of a man in the future, though camouflaged by misogynist jokes and laughter. There is much debate regarding the veracity of the accounts as well as great academic pleasure in piecing them together and crafting a story that satisfies curiosity regarding Gilead. Pieixoto remarks with wry humour, "You can take the historian out of storytelling but you can't take the storyteller out of the historian,"which meets with great laughter and applause from the audience. Atwood, *The Testaments*, 414. We become aware that the Ardua Hall holograph and the Witness Testimonials that we have been reading are those that have been pieced together by Pieixoto and his team in the form of a linear narrative, which makes us consider how that too might have been manipulated to suit his academic ends!

[154] Atwood, *The Testaments,* 66.

[155] Atwood, *The Testaments* ,66.

[156] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 139.

[157] Atwood, *The Testaments,* 222.

the toxicity melts down their bodies. Aunt Lydia's wistfulness for not acting on time, becomes a warning for present readers believing in the reverie-like state that "it would nonetheless be business as usual."[158]

Envisioning the Frightening Future

In the dystopia painted by Atwood in the *MaddAddam* trilogy,[159] we see a future where the planet has become uninhabitable for humans, after the pandemic designed by the bio-scientist Glenn/Crake[160] decimates most of humanity. It is comfortable for the genetically modified humans called 'Crakers' who have been designed by Crake to suit the present climatic conditions. However it is very difficult for Jimmy/Snowman[161] who thinks that he is the last human on the planet and on his way towards becoming extinct. The heat of the day is unbearable,[162] food is scarce and most water is toxic. He sleeps up in a tree, in fear of rakunks, snats, wolvogs and pigoons.[163] *Oryx and Crake* begins with a focus on Jimmy

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[158] Atwood, *The Testaments,* 66. In contrast we see Ada and other members of the Mayday operative, who were able to escape Gilead on time, or after who keep working towards helping people escape or toppling the regime which exploits the climatic changes and environmental disaster for its own benefit and power, at the cost of individual freedom and rights.

[159] Including *Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam.* See Note 32 above.

[160] The character Glenn takes on the name Crake, referring to an extinct bird while playing the game Extinctathon. The name sticks on, as Jimmy narrates the tale, the adopted name taking on more prominence in the story, as the character Glenn changes over time. I shall be referring to the character as Crake henceforth, in this thesis. The politics of adopting names of extinct animals and birds is further discussed pp 147-148 and Note 276 of this chapter.

[161] Jimmy, Glenn's friend and the primary narrative voice of *Oryx and Crake* adopts the name Snowman in the post-apocalyptic world, where he struggles to survive amongst the genetically modified quasi human Crakers created by Crake. The two names are also emblematic of the two phases of his life, before and after the pandemic unleashed by Crake. I shall be using the name Jimmy when referring to the character in his childhood, and the two names with an oblique—'Jimmy/Snowman' when analysing his travails post pandemic as it show his struggle between the past and present selves he inhabits. See also pp 151-152 and Note 276 of this chapter, for further discussion on the symbolism of taking on the names of extinct species.

[162] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 41.

[163] In the world of the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy, the Compound scientists under the control of the CorpSeCorps create 'splices' involving the genetic codes of different species to create new amalgamations, sometimes for serving a purpose and sometimes just as part of a game. The product of such experimentation are the 'rakunks'- a combination of rat and skunk genome, the 'snats'—a splice of rat and snake genome, 'wolvogs'—a combination of wolf and dog genetic codes and 'pigoons'—pigs with human neocortex tissue.

aka Snowman and his loneliness. From the start, his solitude and the recurrence of words echoing in his head from conversations and books read by him in the past, intensifies the sheer frustration he experiences when he repeatedly realizes the absence of a listener. "Everything is so empty. Water, sand, sky, trees, fragments of past time. Nobody to hear him."[164] While the Craker[165] children do visit him to ask questions regarding the objects they find floating in the sea, and stare at him as he ruminates on their safety as playthings, they don't seem to count as 'somebody' for Jimmy, as they do not share the same memories of the past that he has. Unable to find suitable explanation for all the objects they fish out of the sea, he creates his own narrative regarding himself and the Crakers' existence, to suit his moods. Jimmy represents himself as 'Snowman.'[166] This renaming of himself for the Crakers is interesting as the reference he alludes to is lost on them. We, the readers and people of the past can understand his reference to the 'Abominable Snowman,'[167] and the naming being a cynical take on Crake's idea of taking on extinct animal or bird names. However, for the Crakers, who have never seen snow, the word 'Snowman' is just that—a word without the signifiers usually attached to its meaning. When they ask Jimmy regarding the outgrowth of "moss" on his face, probably looking at his beard as the Crakers themselves have been designed as clean shaven by Crake, he says they are 'feathers' in a wild

[164] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 13.

[165] Genetically modified quasi-humans designed by Glenn/Crake in his 'Paradice' Project. See pp 62 of the Introduction to this thesis for a short summary of the novel.

[166] Jimmy naming himself as Snowman might be interpreted therefore as an act of separating his present horrors from his past. Similarly, Snowman has trouble thinking of Crake as Glenn, the boy he had first met, "so thoroughly has Crake's later persona blotted out his earlier one." Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 81.

[167] The name 'Abominable Snowman' itself was a result of an error in translation, when referring to the Yeti, or the "wild man of the snows," seen by the Sherpas in the Himalayas. Henry Newman mistranslated the Tibetan "metoh kangmi" meaning "man-like wild creature" to wild/filthy/dirty creature, mistaking "metoh" as "metch."The name coined by Newman unfortunately stuck as it captured the imagination of Westerners. See Colin Dickey, "Why Bigfoot and the 'Abominable Snowman' Loom Large in the Human Imagination," *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 20, 2020, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-bigfoot-and-abominable-snowman-loom-large-human-imagination-180975365/#:~:text=Newman%2C%20hearing%20these%20reports%2C%20garbled,speaking%20readers%2C%20the%20name%20stuck.

imaginative gesture, knowing that his listeners are completely unaware that he is fooling them.[168] The children then want 'feathers' too, seeing it as something exotic. Jimmy/Snowman picks up his hand and listens to the defunct watch he is wearing as a 'talisman,'[169] as though gathering Crake's directives, having established Oryx and Crake as mythical figures for the Crakers and says, "No… Crake says you can't. No feathers for you."[170] Therefore right from the beginning of the novel, Atwood establishes the constructed nature of narratives through Jimmy's self-representation and the stories he weaves for the Crakers. At the same time, she also shows the inescapable impulse of storytelling, that Jimmy/Snowman cannot escape, or the Craker children stop wanting. Melissa Cristina Silva Desa in her thesis *Storytelling as Survival in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood*[171] reflects that storytelling becomes the "basis of human survival" in the face of an apocalypse, keeping alive the hope of a new beginning. This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter as a significant trait of Atwood's 'ustopias.'[172] The Crakers' desire for storytelling is what creates a similarity or continuity with human experience and prevents us from viewing them as robots or non-humans.

The third chapter of the first section is called "Voice", highlighting Jimmy's need to hear a human voice, "a fully human voice, like his own."[173] In parallel he also keeps hearing voices in his head—sometimes that of Oryx, or his other girlfriends, or people he had met in the past. These voices float in his head quite like the flotsam collected by the children from

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[168] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 9.

[169] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 3.

[170] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 10.

[171] Melissa Cristina Silva Desa, *Storytelling as Survival in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood*, MA thesis, (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2014) 139.

[172] See pp 161-177 of this chapter, for the section entitled 'Storytellers in Ustopias.'

[173] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 11.

the sea, assorted, without coherence or meaning. Atwood makes meaning scarce in the situation that Jimmy inhabits in the present of the novel. Even the words he remembers are references to past eras whose creatures are now extinct:

> *Mesozoic*. He can see the word, he can hear the word. He can't attach anything to it. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlists drifting off into space.[174]

Jimmy, in the past had striven to protect old, archaic words without referents as part of his studies at Martha Graham, which might be seen as his bid to unconsciously save a certain reality that is fading or has faded, a kind of rebellion against the discourses of the society on what is considered important and valuable, and what is described as of little use—the Martha Graham Centre as a whole, when compared to the scientists of Watson Crick where Crake studies and lives luxuriously.[175] When the words return to him, randomly washing up in his memory, after the pandemic or the 'Waterless Flood' caused by Crake, they cause greater pain as there is no one left to understand these words, and all referents to reality have been lost. What is interesting is how Jimmy turns things over by re-signifying the words according to present realities, when speaking to the wide-eyed Craker children who gulp down his narratives. Jimmy as Snowman, momentarily experiences the power of fashioning their perception and realities, through his use of language, but is morose the next moment at the sheer absurdity of his actions.

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[174] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 43.

[175] *Oryx and Crake* depicts the clash between the humanities and sciences taking on a visible turn, in the race over utilitarianism. In *Oryx and Crake, w*hile the students pursuing science at the Watson and Crick Academy live luxuriously, the students of Martha Graham, studying arts and advertising, are seen as their shabby counterparts and afforded equally shabby living and study quarters. Atwood, through Jimmy's mad scramble for saving words perhaps indicates the importance of critical thinking and preservation of the arts and humanities in saving human and non-human life on the planet by enabling narratives of change, before it is too late.

In an attempt at stopping the Crakers from asking too many questions, Jimmy/Snowman utters that Crake has said that if they kept asking so many questions, they would all "be toast."[176] After uttering this new expression, he is in a bind as he does not know how to explain the expression to the Craker children, having no idea what a toast was. He tries hard to figure out a possible explanation for an object that is no longer available and completely beyond their comprehension. Thus he concocts a completely new meaning for the word toast, calling it "a pointless invention from the Dark Ages. Toast was an implement of torture that caused all those subjected to it to regurgitate in verbal form the sins and crimes of their past lives….Toast cannot be explained by any rational means."[177] Of course, this dialogue is in Jimmy/Snowman's head, as he doesn't allow the Crakers to question him further. However it points to their gullibility and the power that he as storyteller wields over them and their imagination and perceptions. As Jimmy/Snowman re-signifies the word "toast", it displays the power he holds in the absence of any memory or reference point to tally whatever he has said. At the same time, he says "Toast is me. I am toast,"[178] referring to his own tortuous condition.

A few pages into *Oryx and Crake*,[179] we see that Jimmy/Snowman has constructed a mythology for the Crakers, in a bid to answer their questions regarding their origin as also to satiate their desire for stories. He calls the Crakers 'Children of Crake' and all the animals, birds and fish are called 'Children of Oryx.' He compares himself to a criminal on the dock, making up a story. "Get your story straight, keep it simple, don't falter…. *Crake made the bones of the Children of Crake out of the coral on the beach, and then he made their flesh*

[176] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 113.

[177] Atwood, 113.

[178] Atwood, 113.

[179] Atwood, 110.

out of a mango. But the Children of Oryx hatched out of an egg, a giant egg laid by Oryx herself."[180] Jimmy/Snowman relies upon the Crakers' trust in him and sticks to the internal consistency of the story narrated by him. He creates 'chaos'[181] by filling a pail with water and then mixing a handful of earth in it and stirring it with a stick, while the Crakers watch in great delight! He narrates, "The people in the chaos were full of chaos themselves and the chaos made them do bad things. They were killing other people all the time. And they were eating up all the Children of Oryx, against the wishes of Oryx and Crake."[182] The gentle Crakers are aghast at this every time they hear this story. Jimmy/Snowman continues his narration, describing how "the people couldn't be happy, because of the chaos. And then Oryx said to Crake, *Let us get rid of the chaos.* And so Crake took the chaos and he poured it away."[183] At this point in the story, Jimmy/Snowman overturns the pail, and pours away the 'chaos.' This emptiness is what creates the possibility of a new arrangement according to Jimmy/Snowman—"There. Empty. And this is how Crake did the Great Rearrangement and made the Great Emptiness. He cleared away the dirt, he cleared room…"[184] When he is at a loss for words, the Crakers fill in the blanks and complete the story, seeing Crake as the Almighty who through the pandemic 'cleared' room for his children—the Crakers and the Children of Oryx—the animals and birds. While Jimmy/Snowman feels angry at himself for creating this liturgy for the Crakers, under a "banner of Crakedom, of Crakiness, of Crakehood, hallowing all he does,"[185] he had created this narrative out of spite for Crake

[180] Atwood, 110.

[181] Atwood, 119.

[182] Atwood, 119.

[183] Atwood, 119.

[184] Atwood, 119.

[185] Atwood, 111.

who had been "against the notion of God, or gods of any kind". By turning Crake and Oryx into Gods, Jimmy/Snowman had thought it was revenge against Crake for the disaster he had engineered and left Jimmy alone to deal with. However, now when the Crakers worship Crake, he feels irritated at his own narrative strategy that has made him into a priest of sorts for this new theology, forcing him to participate in the false worship of Crake and Oryx. The way Jimmy/Snowman arbitrarily makes up the story and the way the Crakers believe every word he says, points towards the artifice of all narratives.[186] Of course, Atwood is poking fun at all theologies and their narratives through Jimmy/Snowman's impulse. On the other hand, she is also suggesting the importance of narratives and the way the tales can shape the listener's perspectives regarding themselves and their roles and place on this planet. Therefore, narratives can alter the way we think.

As seen in *Oryx and Crake*, arts and humanities are pushed aside as unnecessary and frivolous subjects leading to a state of emotional and psychological emptiness, as scientists create 'splices'[187] and animals without any concern for the consequences. With no self-reflexive questions raised as usually done by the humanities as to the purpose of human endeavours and their flipside of uncontrolled experimentation, we see the *Oryx and Crake* world hurtling towards disaster. Atwood emphasizes the function of the Arts, as a "society without the arts would have broken its mirror and cut out its heart. It would no longer be what we recognise as 'human.'"[188] As seen in *The Handmaid's Tale*, reading and the arts are both absent. The Sons of Jacob realise the power of the arts to motivate people to rebel against an authoritarian regime and ban all literature except that available to the elite male

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[186] Silva De Sa, *Storytelling as Survival in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood*, 139. Silva De Sa also comments on the way in which Jimmy 'creates' narratives for the Crakers, exploring "the artifice of telling stories".

[187] See Note 163 above and pp 179 below as well as Note 292 of Introduction to this thesis.

[188] Atwood, "Scientific Romancing," *Burning Questions,* 12.

Commanders. Literature, as the utterance of human imagination and by concretizing the "shadow forms of thought and feeling,"[189] makes it possible for us to inspect human desires and its darkest corners, ideas of Heaven and Hell that create utopias and their attendant dystopias as well as the limits of human action and its consequences.[190]

Sargent, while discussing the advantages of using the dystopian format in his essay says it is more interesting to write a dystopia as it provides an automatic entry into the conflict that drives the narrative impulse of the tale.[191] Both Atwood and Sargent refer to Thomas More's pun on the Greek word 'ou-topos' meaning 'no place' and 'nowhere', with the Greek word 'eu-topos' meaning a good place, in his coinage of the term 'utopia.' "Some are of the opinion that More's book was a sort of joke : utopia can't exist because fallen human nature doesn't permit it."[192] Sargent concludes that therefore the 'no place' becomes the 'non-existent good place.'[193] He explains that we need dystopias to remind us that "our dystopia could get worse," but there is greater need for the eutopias to help us remember that the "better, while difficult, is possible."[194] Margaret Atwood in her analysis of the Crakers and the 'ustopia' she creates points out that she places the "utopia facilitating element" in *Oryx and Crake* in the human body itself.[195] The Crakers behave the way they do—almost perfectly—as they have been designed in that way. By this Atwood makes us think about

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[189] Atwood, "Scientific Romancing," *Burning Questions,* 13.

[190] According to Atwood, stories and myths we tell, give us a closer look at what human beings desire as well as the darker side of such wants. This also forms the basis of utopias narrated as well as their flip side, the dystopia, originating often, from this very utopia of what humans desire or consider ideal. *In Other Worlds,* 12.

[191] Sargent, *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on screen, on Stage*, 10.

[192] Atwood, *In Other Worlds* 85.

[193] Sargent, *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on screen, on Stage*, 11.

[194] Sargent, 12.

[195] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 94.

where 'ustopias' are headed in our own lives as well—"through genetic engineering, we will be able to rid ourselves of inherited diseases and ugliness, and mental illness, and aging, and…who knows? The sky's the limit. Or so we are being told."[196] Herein she asks an important question regarding what might be the "little dystopia" hidden within such utopian ideas regarding the human body—perfected, in our vision. Ideas of perfection too can lead to disasters, as Atwood explains the need to cultivate balance between improving our lot and deciding the fate of the planet, "we should try to make things better, insofar as it lies in our power. But we should probably not try to make things perfect, especially not ourselves, for that path leads to mass graves."[197] Jimmy through his recollections attempts to piece together Crake's intentions behind the pandemic and creation of Crakers. From the glimpses of Glenn/Crake's interaction with the Gardeners or with Ren in *The Year of the Flood,* or seemingly casual conversations with Jimmy, we understand that he had been planning the pandemic for a long time. Jimmy/Snowman in his storytelling sessions with the Crakers refers to the decimation of the human race as the 'Great Emptiness' and the creation of appropriate conditions for the new race of people he had created in his laboratory 'Paradice,' as the 'Great Rearrangement.'[198] As Jimmy/Snowman looks back, he analyses that Crake possibly thought that humans with all their exploitative and violent tendencies would have been a threat to the non-violent and peace loving Crakers. Thus Crake envisions a utopia where the 'humans' he creates with all 'negative' human traits ironed out, a perfect species living on this earth, cleared of the humans who were wreaking such damage on the planet and its creatures. It is interesting that Crake sees himself and Oryx as part of the problem, as he kills Oryx and is predictably killed by Jimmy in reaction. Crake had obviously planned

[196] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 95.

[197] Atwood, 95. See earlier discussion on utopias leading to dystopias, on pp 101 at the beginning of this chapter.

[198] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 354.

for Jimmy to be alone on this earth with the Crakers, as his last words to Jimmy were, "I'm counting on you."[199] Crake possibly envisioned that Jimmy would die soon, in loneliness and with lack of food, after taking care of the Crakers and relocating them and settling them to live peacefully, grazing by a sea shore thereby fulfilling Crake's utopia. Atwood explains that "Oryx and Crake is dystopic in that almost the entire human race is annihilated, before which it has split into two parts: a technocracy and an anarchy."[200] However this dystopia is Crake's utopia, as he sees it as the only solution for the ills affecting humanity and the planet.[201] It is interesting that the Crake who appears to be simply another profit seeking Compound Scientist turns out to be a MaddAddamite[202] with close links to the God's Gardeners[203] and finally a dreamer who creates a new species of humans, which Atwood defines as the little attempt at utopia within the dystopia—"a group of quasi-humans who have been genetically engineered so that they will never suffer from the ills that plague Homo sapiens sapiens."[204] In a way Crake's engineered pandemic is an act of extreme ecotage,[205] or radical environmentalist sabotage going beyond the ethics of radical environmentalists who would never harm humans, only damaging corporate and state funded equipment and property, to damage profits. Zeb, a central character of *The Year of the Flood*

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[199] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 386.

[200] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 91.

[201] See Chapter 2 of this thesis for a detailed discussion on reading Crake as a radical environmentalist.

[202] See Note 298 in Introduction to the thesis.

[203] See Note 295 in Introduction to the thesis.

[204] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 91.

[205] See Note 99 in Introduction to the thesis. Chapter 2 of this thesis discusses the praxis of radical environmentalists and their representation in Atwood's texts. See also Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2015), who discusses that often authoritarian solutions to the deep social upheavals of climate change are presented in these eco-fictions. Crake's act of wiping out humanity to make way for his special race of Crakers, may be seen as such an authoritarian act.

and *MaddAddam* and one of the important Gardeners, would fit into the character of an ELF (Earth Liberation Front)[206] leader, as discussed in chapter 2. Crake is even more radical, assuming the impossibility of the present human species improving or changing the way they live. This is of course also depicted by the fact that Crake, who is initially close to the Gardeners, acting as their source of information on Compound activities, slowly cuts himself off from them and pursues his own ends and ideas. This is also observed by Jimmy in retrospect by the change in his fridge magnets over time.[207]

Jimmy's experience of the *Oryx and Crake* world is completely opposite to that of Crake. Creating these two characters enables Atwood to craft her 'ustopia,' with its contending utopias and dystopias depending on the refractive lens of characters' perceptions. For Jimmy/Snowman, memories of time spent with his best friend Crake, the life he knew with his innumerable girlfriends and then Oryx, his work of fashioning meaningless advertisements for Compound projects--all still appear as a utopia for him. This utopia is now lost. As discussed a little earlier,[208] he struggles with loneliness, scarcity of food, extreme heat and no shelter from the wolvogs[209] and snats[210] roaming around. The present,

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[206] A radical environmental group that originated in the United States in the 1990s, known for its direct action tactics, like sabotage and arson, used against government organizations and businesses seen as contributing to environmental degradation. The ELF, have over time targeted logging, animal testing industries and corporate buildings constructed on natural habitats. See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on radical environmentalism and its representation in Atwood's texts.

[207] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 245, 354. Initially Crake's fridge magnets are quirky and humourous, with phrases like, "'I'm not lazy, I'm energy-efficient," or "'I'm not arguing, I'm just explaining why I'm right." However, over time, as Crake's disillusionment with society increases, his fridge magnets become more critical and cynical, with phrases like "Make Your Own Reality," or "Question Authority." When Crake becomes more deeply involved with creating the genetically engineered race of Crakers, his fridge magnets become more philosophical, with quotes from Nietzsche and Descartes, reflecting his own questions regarding reality, life and human existence. While this detailing is subtle, it shows how Atwood charts the journey of her characters. Jimmy/Snowman realises the change in Crake too late, wishing he had paid more attention, earlier.

[208] See page 125-131 of this chapter.

[209] A 'splice' between a wolf and a dog, created by genetic engineering by the Compound scientists in *Oryx and Crake.* See Note 163 above and Note 292 of Introduction to the thesis on 'splices'.

[210] A snat is a 'splice' between a snake and a rat, created by the Compound scientists, in *Oryx and Crake*, by fusing the genetic code of the two organisms.

Crake's utopia of a world free of greedy and exploitative humans, is a dystopia for Jimmy. He also vaguely registers that the presence of other humans might be harmful for the Crakers who do not comprehend money, violence, or power. Neither do they perceive sex the way humans do, as they mate only in season, like baboons. Jimmy worries for them, as Oryx had made him promise that he would look after them, but he feels frustrated as there is no one like him left, at least in his experience and perception. Thus when he sees three humans, he hesitates to reveal himself to them as the future of the Crakers worries him. The future, post the "Waterless Flood," remains uncertain. Jimmy/Snowman himself remains confused about his perception regarding the past, present and future—"He doesn't know which is worse, a past he can't regain or a present that will destroy him if he looks at it too clearly. Then there's the future. Sheer vertigo."[211] Atwood exacerbates this uncertainty as she wonders in her self-analysis of the trilogy:

> Do the surviving human beings in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* represent a dystopian threat to the tiny utopia of genetically modified, peaceful and sexually harmonious New Humans that is set to replace them? And as it is always the reader rather than the writer who has he last word about any book, I leave that to you.[212]

The critical dystopia or 'ustopia' therefore becomes an important vehicle for showcasing the possible effects of such colliding utopian and dystopian visions each embroiled in the other.

Silva De Sa, in "Retelling Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," argues that *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* "retell

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[211] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 173.

[212] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 93.

apocalypse in a revisionary and ironic way."[213] In her analysis, the first novel of the trilogy represent the "reluctant elect," while the second novel of the trilogy describe the "story of the non-elects."[214] Silva De Sa reads the texts with respect to James Berger's *After the End: Representations of Post Apocalypse*,[215] seeing in these two texts an assimilation of Berger's enunciation of the three ways in which the post-apocalypse can be represented. One of the central facets of Berger's theory of the apocalypse, is the division of the world "into a before and an after,"[216] and the feeling of a rupture caused by the trauma of the apocalypse. While Silva De Sa goes on to show how all the features of the apocalypse including the image of the post-apocalyptic world, the sense of catastrophe and rupture mentioned above and the "revelation," that illuminates "what has been brought to an end,"[217] has been showcased in the first two books of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, I would like to extend analysis of the sense of rupture and division of experience into a 'before' and an 'after' as critical to the way Atwood's 'ustopia' or critical dystopia is narrated and maintained.

Rewinding to the Beginning of Things

Patrick D. Murphy when looking for ways in which literature can "affect the minds of its readers," discusses the concept of 'referentiality,' stating that such an effect is possible only when it is able to draw their attention not only to the world of the text but also to the world in which the text exists, "materially and ideationally," at the moment of reading.[218] The

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[213] Silva De Sa, "Retelling Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *LiNQ* 41(2014): 54. https://journals.jcu.edu.au/linq/article/view/3191/3144.

[214] Silva De Sa, "Retelling Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," 54.

[215] James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (United Kingdom: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

[216] Silva De Sa, "Retelling Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," 54.

[217] Silva De Sa, 55. Also see James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse,* 6.

[218] Patrick D Murphy, *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries, and Fields*, 1951. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 4.

element of 'referentiality'[219] that is embedded in the critical dystopia thus draws readers' attention to the reality of the speculative tale, increasing the sense of urgency for necessary change in the world we inhabit now, the world in which the text exists. Jimmy/Snowman, through the course of the novel *Oryx and Crake*, keeps remembering moments from his childhood. This apocalyptic present he inhabits can be seen as a culmination of the past events that return to haunt him, in the form of disjointed memories. He had been a very sensitive child and very considerate of the wellbeing and feeling of animals and remembers a bonfire made with the carcasses of cows, sheep and pigs that he witnessed as a child. Adults around him assured him that animals were not getting hurt, even when they were being burnt! This was a result of competition between Compounds[220] in creating hybrid animal variants, which went to the point of biological warfare as rival Compounds would create viruses that decimated the animals created by other scientists to flood the market with their variants. The conversation between Jimmy's father and another Compound scientist overheard by Jimmy as a child creates a window into understanding how economics drive these Compounds and their research.[221] At the same time it is like a premonition for the future, when Crake would take this instinct of scientists to create bioforms that infect just to push sales, to its logical extreme by manufacturing the BlyssPluss Pill that would spread the virus he created worldwide and decimate the human population that he saw as the creator of all problems.

We are given our first glimpse of the OrganInc farms early in the novel as Jimmy's father is one of the scientists involved in the pigoon project. We learn that the objective of this project was to grow multiple human-tissue organs in a pig host, for transplantation in

[219] Murphy, *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries, and Fields*, 4.

[220] See Note 98 above.

[221] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 21.

humans. The organs growing in the pig hosts—the 'pigoons,' were designed in a way that would ensure the acceptance of the organs by the human body as well as enhance the ability of the body to combat the influx of newer strains of viruses and microbes attacking the human system every passing year. These organs in the pigoons were designed to grow faster than normal, as a "rapid maturity gene" was spliced in.[222] Jimmy's father is seen perfecting the pigoon such that it could grow five-six kidneys at a time. In addition, the pigoon would continue living and producing more and more organs for humans. Atwood deliberately chooses to relate this information in an unemotional tone, to suggest the deadening of emotions in the Compound scientists as well shock us into realizing the way such genetic engineering and use of animals for human purposes have been normalized in the speculative future, which is also the past for Jimmy/Snowman. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Atwood presents us with multiple futures, each becoming a stepping stone for the next.

Jimmy travels between Martha Graham, the academy for the artists and the rejects, to Watson-Crick where Crake studies, through the pleeblands.[223] The Watson Crick Academy for scientists stands in sharp contrast with his experience at Martha Graham. Hannes Bergthaller emphasizes that the dystopia narrated by Atwood is very much a part of our lived experience of today, with the arts finding it difficult to get funding for research, most grants being absorbed by the natural science departments. [224] *Oryx and Crake* offers us

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[222] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 25.

[223] The 'pleeblands' are the large areas of human habitation that lie outside the Compound walls. These are depicted by the CorpSeCorps as outside their realm of control and therefore sites of potential harm. This narrative cobstructed by the Compounds strive to keep the scientists and their families within the close scrutiny and control of the CorpSeCorps, by instilling a deep fear of disease and chaos present in the 'pleeblands'.

[224] Hannes Bergthaller, "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *English Studies,* 91.7(2010): 728-743, doi: 10.1080/0013838X.2010.518042

a "biting satire on this state of affairs"[225] through its depiction of the institutions Crake and Jimmy attend for their higher studies. The Watson-Crick Institute, for which Crake qualifies is the more sought after and prestigious institute, with incredible funding and resources for its scientists, while the Martha Graham Academy for arts and humanities that Jimmy attends is old and decaying, severely strapped for funds. As we see the work of the budding scientists at the Watson-Crick Institute, we get a flavour of the dystopian future pictured by Atwood, which is very much a part of the present, only perhaps not yet popular or available en masse.[226] Here Jimmy gets his first glimpse of what is later popularised as 'Chickie-Nobs,' when he visits the Department of Neoagriculturals[227] and is shocked and startled by the grotesqueness of chicken parts growing on tubers, without heads. There is just an orifice through which nutrients are dumped—the chicken have no eyes or beak or feelings according to the woman showing the boys around. "The thing was a nightmare. It was like an animal-protein tuber," observes Jimmy to himself.[228] All brain functions except those relating to digestion, assimilation and growth had been removed to protect the 'chicken' from the "animal-welfare freaks."[229] The readers would feel shocked at the way everyone except Jimmy seems to think that it was normal and necessary to manipulate chicken genetic code in that way, to suit human requirements. Atwood in her dystopia stretches present day advances in genetic engineering and biotechnology to their extreme conclusion, making us wonder what human beings are capable of, once they learn the codes to arrange and rearrange

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[225] Bergthaller, "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," 728.

[226] See pp 112-113 of this chapter.

[227] This is one of the many departments that performs research in the field of genetically modified food and produces new variants of food for humans, in *Oryx and Crake,* both in the form of GMO plants and animals, the Chickie-Nobs being an example of such research.

[228] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 238.

[229] Atwood, 238.

every available species and the havoc they can create by this knowledge, unchecked by any sense of ethics or limits. While initially the OrganInc brochures insisted that no defunct pigoon would end up as meat to be eaten by humans, the scenario changed rapidly. Jimmy recounts changing planetary conditions, "as time went on and the coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the mid-continental plains went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes,"[230] which lead to meat becoming difficult to come by and people doubting the source of meat on their plates. People like Jimmy are squeamish of eating pigoons, thinking them to be creatures like himself, while others are deadened by the rhetoric of advertisements choosing to desensitize themselves from their own reality. As Atwood highlights in her book of essays on fantastic tales *In Other Worlds,*[231] none of this is very alien to us as we already have ongoing scientific projects for cloning animals and growing organs for human use.[232] Dystopias work only if they appear to have a tinge of reality, else they would be too fantastical for critically evaluating our present. Thomas Disch discusses dystopian fictions thus—"The author continues to pile horror on horror to preposterous and appalling heights. Yet they should never be so preposterous and merely phantasmagoric as to escape the quotidian, accepted awfulness of the here and now."[233] In the declaration at the end of

[230] Atwood, 27.

[231] Atwood*, In Other Worlds,* 91-95.

[232] See Margaret Atwood's Flipboard page, https://flipboard.com/@MargaretAtwood, for a collation of articles from science and climate justice websites that Atwood keeps flipboarding into "MaddAddam's world," on her Flipboard page, thereby continuously extending the relevance of her book. MaddAddam also therefore becomes part of the present, instead of being in the future, bringing the dystopia closer to us.

[233] Thomas M. Disch, "The Hot Zone," Review of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* in *The Washington Post*, April 27, 2003, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/2003/04/27/the-hot-zone/8a32f949-b392-43dc-bcd0-fd4b8c36ef56/. Also quoted in Sarah A. Appleton, "Myths of distinction; myths of extinction in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake*," Once Upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings*, ed. S. A. Appleton (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 10.

MaddAddam, Atwood consciously situates her texts firmly in the here and now.[234] Jane Bone also analyses that the attraction of dystopia lies in its roots being in the everyday.[235] Utopia on the other hand, "seems to be forever out of reach," according to Bone.[236] However, the utopia is always also suggestive of our dissatisfaction with our everyday reality.

We are given many indicators of the way living conditions have changed on the planet, in the near future depicted by Atwood. Jimmy remembers his mother rambling on about the way life had changed irreversibly.[237] The beach house owned by her family had been washed away by huge tidal waves that had inundated the coastal cities. With the rains becoming scarce, her grandfather's grapefruit orchard in Florida had dried up totally. Jimmy recollects that in "…the same year Lake Okeechobee had shrunk to a reeking mud puddle and the everglades had burnt for three weeks straight."[238] However in this dystopia, the children seem deadened to these massive changes taking place on the earth's surface, having no sense of what is lost or where their planet's fragile health is headed. As a child, Jimmy sees these memories as part of his mother's snivelling and mood swings, not understanding the implications of her lament. As he says, "everyone's parents moaned on about stuff like that. *Remember when everyone lived in the pleeblands? Remember when you could fly anywhere in the world, without fear?....Oh it was all so great once*."[239] Therefore, it is a

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[234] Atwood, *MaddAddam* (2013; repr. London: Virago, 2014), 475. Atwood reiterates in the Acknowledgements section at the end of her trilogy, that even though *MaddAddam* is "a work of fiction, it does not include any technologes or biobeings that do not already exist, are not under construction, or are not possible in theory." In the course of this chapter I keep highlighting Atwood's multiple attempts to impress upon readers the urgency of her message and the probability of events mentioned in her fictional dystopia.

[235] Jane Bone, "Environmental dystopias: Margaret Atwood and the Monstrous Child," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* (2015):2 , doi: 10.1080/01596306.2015.1075701.

[236] Jane Bone, "Environmental dystopias: Margaret Atwood and the Monstrous Child," 2.

[237] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 72.

[238] Atwood, *72.*

[239] Atwood, 72.

dystopia for those who remember the past or long for it like Jimmy's mother, while not so for those who have happily become a part of the world created by CorpSeCorps,[240] like Jimmy's father or Ramona, his girlfriend.

The 'present' in *Oryx and Crake* is viewed differently by different characters, thereby prodding their actions or responses to the events demarcating their present. The Compounds project their own version of reality, representing parts of the city outside their walls as the 'pleeblands'[241] which are seen as the ghetto of all disturbance, chaos and insecurity. This reality is accepted by many like Jimmy's father, Ramona and other scientists living in the Compounds, afraid of challenging this narrative woven by the Corporations running the Compounds. Many characters like Sharon, Crake, the Gardeners and MaddAddamites emerging in the course of the trilogy do not accept this version of reality. The CorpSeCorps particularly discourage such questioning of its policies and metanarrative of 'security' within the Compound walls. Individuals seeking to enter the Compounds are carefully screened. After Sharon escapes the imprisoning atmosphere of the Compounds, Jimmy and his father are constantly interrogated by the CorpSeCorps to understand whether they are similarly disengaged from the version of reality framed by the Corporations for effective economic turnover at their Compounds. We also see how dissenters like Crake's father and Jimmy's mother are erased in cold blood by the CorpSeCorps, thereby maintaining their economic empire by silencing critique or counter narratives.

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[240] See Note 300 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[241] See Note 223 above. The pleeblands, portrayed by the Compounds as the hotbed of all that was dangerous and chaotic, was attractive to Jimmy. "Everything in the pleeblands seemed so boundless, so porous, so penetrable, so wide-open. So subject to chance." Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 231. The dingy houses, factories, gravel pits, smoke billowing from chimneys, garbage and trailer parks look mysterious and exciting to Jimmy as it is everything that the Compounds are not. However he is well aware that he would be unable to survive in the pleeblands, knowing nothing about them. In the later books of the trilogy, specially *The Year of the Flood*, we get a closer look at the pleeblands through the eyes of Ren, a dancer at 'Scales and Tails' and Toby, who used to work at a Secret Burgers outlet, as well as Amanda who lived as a 'pleebrat' till Ren made friends with her and brought her to the Gardeners. Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, 2009 (London: Virago, 2013), 80.

Jimmy as a little boy doesn't question this 'reality,' but we see him reflecting on it again later, when he visits Crake, studying at the Watson Crick Institute and questions him regarding some shocking pink butterflies with huge wings the size of pancakes[242] that he sees on a tour of the Compound. While Jimmy wonders if they were recent genetically modified species, Crake debates what is 'fake' and what is 'real.' He compares it to people dying their hair or getting body enhancement surgeries, saying all that mattered was the final product, the process being unimportant. Crake asserts, "These butterflies fly, they mate, they lay eggs, caterpillars come out."[243] Atwood's trilogy keeps us aware of the conflicting nature of perception and reality inhabited by its characters to destabilise our own notions of the same. In *Oryx and* Crake, Jimmy and Crake play chess with each other on their computers, their backs to each other, and discuss ideas of reality and falsehood, in light-hearted banter. When Jimmy asks why they do not use a real set, Crake points out "The real set is in your head."[244] He further questions reality as in case of the physical chess set, the plastic figures were not 'real' men either, thereby alerting us to the way we participate in creating stories we believe and inhabit. Similarly, when discussing the websites that showcase live executions as entertainment for viewers, Jimmy wonders if the people there are really executed or if these were just simulations, to which Crake replies, "You never know," and goes on to question what was real and whether we could ever fathom reality.[245] This confuses Jimmy further, who decides to end the seriousness of this philosophical discussion, by calling it "Bogus!" [246]

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[242] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 235.

[243] Atwood, 236.

[244] Atwood, 88

[245] Atwood, 95

[246] Atwood, 88.

It was decided between Jimmy and Glenn, that whenever Glenn's logic would become too philosophical and abstract, Jimmy would shout 'Bogus' to counter him. While many of Crake's statements are heavily loaded with hard-hitting perspectives which we often try to avoid, Jimmy's 'Bogus' response acts in two ways. On one hand it lightens the mood of their conversation; on the other hand it also shows the extent of desensitization and denial in the world inhabited by Jimmy and Crake. Later, these very comments by Crake return to haunt Jimmy/Snowman, who realizes that the seeds of the present crisis were sowed right in front of his eyes. Crake's views on the genetically modified butterflies closely reflect his conviction in creating the Crakers later, where he alters many human genetic features to create these quasi-human creatures who are in his perception perfect utopian alternatives to flawed humans responsible for planetary destruction. When other characters in the trilogy meet these Crakers, they wonder how to categorize them—as human or non-human. Visually and behaviourally they are a mixture of different species. At the same time, they also look like perfect human models with airbrushed pictures, flawless in their physical contouring. The existence of the Crakers, created in the laboratory with human and non-human genetic code further destabilises our notions regarding reality and humanity, both. According to Heise, one of the techniques by which science fiction challenges our notions of human exceptionality, is by showing human-alien confrontation, or "species with whom humans have not coevolved."[247] These are termed "species fiction" by Heise, plunging readers into "questions of multispecies assemblies and multispecies justice."[248] Human behaviour and practices often become a danger for other species as explored by science fiction texts from the sixties, even as they seek "the emergence of new forms of human identity."[249] Heise

[247] Ursula K Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 227.

[248] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 227.

[249] Heise, 227.

returns to Philip K. Dick's *Do Android's Dream of Electric Sheep*[250] and Kurt Vonnegut's *Galapagos*[251] as examples of such texts. Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl*[252] also describes a future planet that struggles with epidemics, climate change, capitalist exploitation of the masses and environmental toxicity, mutating pests and agricultural diseases. In this future world, the bio-engineered plants and animals seem to stand a better chance at surviving than humans responsible for the collapse of the ecosystem. Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, beginning with *Oryx and Crake* predates Bacigalupi,[253] having entered the fray of narrating environmentalist dystopias much earlier, and engages with multi-species encounters and questions of human identity. Between the humans left over after a bio-engineered pandemic, genetically modified quasi-humans and pigs with neo-human cortex, the future described by the trilogy, is uncertain. Atwood also complicates our reading of the dystopia with its utopian elements, forcing us to critique both frames of perception.

Heise identifies certain disturbing aspects to the trilogy, particularly the "reliance on violent exclusion,"[254] in forming the multispecies society. However, I feel that Atwood deliberately showcases such a convenient manner of doing away with state machinery and the "troublemakers" to re-imagine a new kind of society, post-apocalypse as a mock re-enactment of the trope of apocalyptic fiction that would kill off the opposition to make place for the new. While Heise critiques the way the peace treaty is brokered with the pigoons, granting them "a kind of honorary citizenship in the new humanity,"[255] because of the human

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[250] Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968; repr. London, England: Gateway, 2010).

[251] Kurt Vonnegut, *Galapagos* (United Kingdom: Dell, 1986).

[252] Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Windup Girl* (Belarus: Night Shade, 2009).

[253] *Oryx and Crake* was first published in 2003.

[254] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 228.

[255] Heise, 228. In contrast, Bruno Latour's idea of the 'Collective' envisages inclusion of all non-humans, machines, artificial intelligence and robots, as the only means of dismantling modernity's dualisms, and distributing agency throughout such an interconnected network. See pp 298-300 of Chapter 3 of this thesis for

neo-frontal cortex tissues in their brain, other non-human species whether bio-engineered or natural, are not included in this envisioned collective of Crakers, humans and pigoons. She also points out that the humans seen as subhuman or criminals are killed by the other surviving humans for their own security. I think that Atwood intentionally participates in the popular speculative fiction/science fiction narrative framework, duplicating and highlighting them in order to make the readers consider the way utopias or multi-species futures are envisioned and therefore crafted by human agency, creating dystopias alongside for those excluded from the same. In an interview with Daniel Zalewski she talks about the "catch" in every utopian imagination of a better society—where those who do not fit in to the vision need to be eliminated.[256] Zelawski also comments that Atwood never vilifies the person or people crafting these 'utopias' "even if they go seriously awry,"[257] to which Atwood astutely answers that always behind utopian thinking there is always an imagination that "we can do better"[258] that drives all actions, which she clearly maps in her speculative fiction texts. She also explains that "behind literary dystopias is the feeling it could get a lot worse."[259]

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a more detailed analysis of Latour's ideas and their significance in re-visioning representation of humans, non-humans and machines, necessary for a new political ecology. See Kerry Whiteside, "A Representative Politics of Nature? Pursuing Bruno Latour's 'Collective'," *Western Political Science Association 2011 Annual Meeting Paper*, 1, accessed January 15, 2019, http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1800767. Crake's utopia however is very different from Latour, as he tries to wipe out humans from such a 'Collective,' to make room for a new race of quasi humans-the Crakers. Heise's observation regarding the post-apocalyptic world in *Oryx and Crake* and its new hierarchies, showcases a tendency amongst the survivors to repeat the patterns of the past, by valuing creatures with human genome more than other species or genetically modified creatures.

[256] The New Yorker, "Margaret Atwood on Creating Worlds - The New Yorker Festival - The New Yorker," *Youtube*, July 23, 2014., 6.36. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77Zb_xCB1r4.) See also pp 101 above and Note 22-23 above, which discusses Atwood's awareness of this aspect of utopian visions, requiring the elimination of those that do not fit in, in her essay on "How to Change the World."

[257] The New Yorker, "Margaret Atwood on Creating Worlds," *Youtube*, 7.22.

[258] The New Yorker, 7.50.

[259] The New Yorker, 7.55.

Narrating Apocalypse

Bergthaller's exploration of the role played by "language, literature and…the human propensity for symbol-making,"[260] in dealing with the ecological crisis, with respect to the first two novels of the *MaddAddam* trilogy series is important as we try to understand the importance of imagination and narratives in comprehending the Anthropocene[261] and any attempt at changing the same. Bergthaller interrogates whether Atwood wishes to suggest that flaws in the human biological make-up are primarily responsible for ecological problems and the possible solutions for such deeply embedded flaws.[262] In Crake's imagination and subsequent actions, the solution for these inherent flaws lay in destroying the human race as we know it now with bio-technologically modified humans. Thus "aggressive posthumanism that ruthlessly remodels human nature according to ecological criteria,"[263] is the way adopted by Crake. Bergthaller wonders how else the human animal can be suitably inspired to modify his lifestyle to reverse his impact upon the planet. This is where narratives step in with their power to enchant and at the same time change the way humans think about themselves and the earth.[264] "It is through the imagination alone," says John P. O'Grady that we "recognize what 'truly sustains us'—our 'kinship' with the non-human world. [265] As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, there has been much debate

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[260] Bergthaller, "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," 729.

[261] See Note 63 in the Introduction to this thesis, for a detailed discussion on the nomenclature of the term 'Anthropocene.'

[262] Bergthaller,729.

[263] Bergthaller, 729.

[264] See Lucy Sargisson, "Green Utopias of self and other," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 3:2-3(2000): 140-156.

[265] John P. O'Grady, ''How Sustainable is the Idea of Sustainability?'' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 10 (2003): 8. doi: 10.1093/isle/10.1.1. O'Grady has critiqued the way the word 'sustainability' has "fallen...under the sway of reductionism and rational materialism," qualities informing our "academic, corporate and bureaucratic culture," and excluding what might have been its saving grace--the

regarding the effect of apocalyptic narratives on the climate change discourse.[266] While ecofiction using the hermeneutic of an apocalyptic dystopian narrative might strive to trigger change, it can also have the opposite effect of paralyzing action altogether in a state of fear. Annika Arnold observes the problematics of working with fear—"it is difficult to sustain fear in the long term because the audience might become desensitized to fear appeals."[267] While apocalyptic images of the end of the world, or massive destruction wrought by climate change might cause a certain degree of shock and draw the viewer's attention, it can lead to feelings of helplessness and fear, if guidelines regarding possible action are not signified, as pointed out by The Canada Institute of the Woodrow, Susanne C. Moser and Maggie L. Walser.[268] Arnold emphasizes that "recommendations for taking action have to be effective, concrete, and doable."[269] The worst effect is when the reader/viewer sees it as irresolvable and retreats completely, avoiding the topic.[270] In a state of desensitization, the readers or

realm of imagination that finds its full expression in the arts and literature in particular according to O'Grady.(7).

[266] See pp 78-79 of the Introduction to the thesis for a discussion on Gerry Canavan's concept of the contradiction inherent in apocalyptic narratives and the politics framing them. Gerry Canavan, "Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 23, no. 2 (2012): 155, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10436928.2012.676914.

[267] Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication*, 8.

[268] The Canada Institute of the Woodrow, Susanne C. Moser, and Maggie L. Walser, "Communicating Climate Change Motivating Citizen Action," *Encyclopedia of Earth*, ed. Cutler J. Cleveland (Washington, DC: Environmental Information Coalition, National Council for Science and the Environment, 2008), accessed February 14, 2020, https://climateaccess.org/system/files/Moser_Communicating%20Climate%20Change_1.pdf; also quoted in Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication*, 121.

[269] Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication*, 9.

[270] See Richard Hamblyn, "The Whistleblower and the Canary: Rhetorical Construction of Climate Change," *Journal of Historical Geography* 35 (2009): 235, doi: 10.1016/j.jhg.2008.09.006. Also see Elliot Aronson, "Fear, Denial, and Sensible Action in the Face of Disasters," *Social Research 75*, no. 3 (2008): 855–872, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972094. Aronson describes an experiment conducted upon University of California, Los Angeles students in 1986, where college freshmen were alerted about the possibility of an earthquake and then allocated random dormitories. It was noticed that soon half moved to newer and seismically better houses, while others continued to live in older and unsafe buildings. When researchers asked the students, regarding their knowledge regarding earthquakes, they found out that the half that continued living

viewers of media or literature on climate change, often view the alarming issue as one that cannot be changed like the other problems of the world. It may be compared with the way people think about 'violence on television', or economic problems faced by markets,[271] shifting the worry to the margins of their consciousness, when unable to deal with it.

Often lists or catalogues are used by writers to "convey a more panoramic view of mass extinction,"[272] than that expressed through mourning individual species lost in time.[273] According to Heise, cataloguing species is a way of valuing biodiversity.[274] As the commemoration of so many species becomes overwhelming, these lists achieve the effect of evoking "a numerical sublime of sorts, numbers too large to be contained by conventional storytelling procedures that focuses on a discrete set of events, scenes and characters."[275] In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood also refers to such databases and catalogues indirectly, to convey the alarming rate of extinction of species through the games played by Jimmy and Crake, particularly Extinctathon and later MaddAddam.[276] Heise observes how Atwood

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in the older houses, had less access to knowledge regarding earthquakes and suitable action to be taken during such an event. According to Aronson, these students, not being provided with strategies, were overcome by their fear to lead to a state of denial, where they chose to ignore the problem to continue with their daily existence. Arnold, when discussing this experiment, comes to the conclusion, therefore that "knowledge and information alone will not lead to behavioural change; on the contrary, it might even become counterproductive if no guidance is provided." Arnold, *Climate Change and Storytelling: Narratives and Cultural Meaning in Environmental Communication*, 9.

[271] Hamblyn, "The Whistleblower and the Canary: Rhetorical Construction of Climate Change," 234.

[272] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 55.

[273] Lev Manovich sees databases as a "new way to structure our experience of ourselves and of this world." *The Language of New Media* (United Kingdom: MIT Press, 2001), 219. Also see Heise *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 66. Heise also observes certain cases where narratives alternate between lists and focused accounts of individual species, using both the styles to create maximum impact, conveying the range of extinction as well as triggering a sense of irrevocable loss. See also Diane Ackerman, *The Rarest of the Rare: Vanishing Animals, Timeless Worlds* (New York: Random House, 1995).

[274] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 56.

[275] Heise, 56.

[276] The IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species forms the basis for identifying species at risk and promulgating laws at national and international levels. As conservation itself is seen as a "product of the cultural imagination,"(15) reflected in the ways in which biodiversity laws are framed, databases become important in the face of the difficulty of arriving at an agreed sense of "we" when engaging with non-human species. (18)

deliberately uses 'vulgar' and 'casual' teen lingo for showcasing extinction through the conversation between two teenage boys,[277] both evoking loss as well as representing the deadening towards such loss that has come to be seen as inevitable on the planet, by the time of Oryx and Crake. The Grandmaster of the Extinctathon Game required participants to know well the names of bioforms "that had kakked out within the past fifty years."[278] Extinction is thus reduced to a game, as participants try to identify the causes of species' loss, without any personal investment in the narrative, amplifying the crisis of the future where mass extinctions have become sidelined as ubiquitous, irretrievable and ongoing phenomena. Jimmy and Glenn do not think much of it, identifying the reasons behind extinction as "pollution, habitat destruction, credulous morons who thought eating its horn would give them a boner."[279] The players of Extinctathon take on names of extinct species like Glenn assumes the name of "Crake," an extinct red-necked Australian bird, and also nicknames his girlfriend "Oryx," another extinct East African antelope, the Oryx Beisa.[280] Jimmy takes on the name "Snowman" standing in for the 'Abominable Snowman'[281] whose existence is uncertain, after the pandemic is unleashed and he is left as a lone survivor among the Crakers. The names taken on by the central characters are representative of the crisis of

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In all lists, and narratives of extinction and endangered species, certain species are highlighted and showcased as "a shorthand for all other species,"(23) For example plants which are equally endangered are almost forgotten by extinction narratives. Heise notices a certain hierarchy prevalent in these lists and databases narrating extinction, as larger mammals, like tigers, gorillas, pandas, bears , whales and white rhinos are more frequently referred to or remembered , than less visually appealing ones. (23) Even among birds, the more colourful ones are highlighted to attract greater attention and sympathy. She notes that the most neglected taxa are those of crabs, worms, bacteria and fungi that remain invisible in cultural narratives of extinction. In a way, Extinctathon and MaddAddam encourage the remembrance of such lost taxa, the database functioning as an "ark" or as an extinction epic. Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 15-23.

[277] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 57.

[278] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 92.

[279] Atwood, 92.

[280] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species, 57.*

[281] See Note 167 above.

narrating extinction, where the taking on of nicknames trivializes loss and yet serves as a constant reminder of such loss, when the only memory of lost species is preserved through a virtual reality game. The taking on of such names functions in a manner similar to Joel Sartore's photographs of extinct species which act as "a visual Red List, documenting the extent of the mass extinction crisis through the juxtaposition of dozens and hundreds of photographs," of extinct species, using the visual to trigger mourning and to narrate mass extinctions.[282] Heise observes Sartore's method of defamiliarising nature, creating the critical distance enabling "new forms of awareness."[283] Sartore's photographs are startling in the way they render both beauty and strangeness, involving and disengaging at the same time. The "imaginative webs"[284] around endangered species is important in conceiving ways in which humans relate to other species and narrate their loss or impending extinction and is also linked with the way they see their future as a community or as a species. This is also essential for formulating "multispecies justice" and "multispecies cosmopolitanism."[285]

In Garforth's analysis, earlier ecofictions identified catastrophe in the middle of the 21st century, or a re-establishment of a better world, towards the latter half of the 21st century.[286] However now the "environmental predicament has now been absorbed into the present."[287] The most extreme projection of ecological problems are no longer a projection and instead a living reality. It is a greater problem that these realities are accepted as ordinary

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[282] *Heise, Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 83.

[283] Heise ,84.

[284] Heise, 6.

[285] Heise, 6.

[286] See Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars* (United Kingdom: HarperCollins, 1992); *Green Mars* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), which Garforth mentions visualized "catastrophe in 2027…and a better future in 2065." Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 97.

[287] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 97.

and normal—no longer an emergency to be acted upon with utmost haste.[288] As mentioned briefly in the Introduction to this thesis,[289] Garforth astutely connects this with the rise of the sustainability discourse and the Brundtland Report in 1987, that focuses on 'managing' the environmental crisis, rather than complete transformation or overhauling of the very concept of 'good life'[290] that is required by deep ecology[291] practitioners. The sustainability narrative instead encourages change in everyday practices and consumer choices—steering the spotlight on how we travel or dispose our waste,[292] leading to the rise of green capitalist practices, businesses adopting 'green technologies' and coming up with 'innovative green products.'[293]

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[288] Lawrence Buell discusses this further in his work, arguing that the environmental crisis is no longer an event of the future, but happening every day in our own homes and experience, thereby becoming a part of the ordinary, losing its threat to our present. *The Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995). The crisis is seen as more of something we are living through, or a catastrophe that is unavoidable. Thus the figure of hope in this discourse suffers the worst hit. If crisis is ordinary and banal, a part of the everyday, then the sense of fear regarding impending doom ceases to work and the drive to change is always pushed off as the present is more or less getting by. On the other hand, if all is doomed to end anyway, then why change anything at all? In the second book of the trilogy *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood represents this sense of depression and frustration through the children of the God's Gardeners a utopian green cult that narrates the impending apocalypse as the "Waterless Flood" requiring lifestyle changes and training in methods of surviving doom. The children being educated by the Gardeners, poke fun at the philosophies and wonder at the point of all lifestyle changes adopted by their parent(s), and which they have been forced to adopt, when the "Waterless Flood" was imminent anyway! This response to banality of the apocalyptic narrative is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 of this thesis.

[289] See pp 21 and Note 96 of the Introduction to the thesis.

[290] See Note 13 in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[291] See Chapter 2 of this thesis for a detailed analysis of deep ecology philosophy and its representation in the *MaddAddam* trilogy by Atwood.

[292] Garforth, *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature,* 97.

[293] "Green technologies" refer to those that are designed to mitigate the impact of climate change and which promote sustainability, such as renewable energy technologies, energy efficient buildings, electric vehicles, recycling, waste management and carbon capture and storage technologies, etc. "Green products" are those manufactured using green technologies and designed to have minimal impact on the environment through their life cycle. Some examples of green products include organic food and beverage, energy efficient lighting and appliances, non-toxic and biodegradable personal care and cleaning products, clothing from recycled materials, and "green electronics," like solar-powered chargers. However all these do not encourage change in lifestyle, rather supporting a new form of capitalism and "greenwashing." Chapter 2 discusses such "green capitalism" and dark green environmentalism that responds to such superficial mainstream environmentalism, based on the rhetoric of sustainability. See Note 1 of Chapter 2 of this thesis for a discussion on Light Green, Bright Green and Dark Green environmentalisms.

While certain events, like an international climate summit,[294] or the publication of a report[295] may bring climate change to the forefront,[296] it is only for a brief period and leads to much coverage on news media. Garforth identifies 'mitigation' and 'adaptation'[297] as the two most important discourses framing climate governance in the present day. We understand through her analysis that mitigation would mean the attempts taken to curb the excesses of human activity that causes rise in carbon emissions, while adaptation refers to methods of support to help the humans causing the emissions to live comfortably within altered climatic conditions.[298] While on one hand there is greater visibility of environmental concerns, becoming more mainstream and institutionalized, at the same time the concerns become abstracted and less radical, reducing the possibility of concrete ideas regarding transformation of human-nature relationships.[299] However given the wide variety of discourses surrounding the planet today, viewers are left desensitized after such bombardment of information, unable to understand how they can create any change at all.

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[294] See pp 1-3 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[295] See Note 44 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[296] Reiner Grundmann, "Climate Change and Knowledge Politics." *Environmental Politics* 16, no.3 (2007): 416–434, doi: 10.1080/09644010701251656.

[297] Garforth traces the rise of the 'language of mitigation and adaptation,' to the UNFCCC policy framework 1992, that sought to make climate change a 'common concern for humankind' with the principle objective of 'stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.' See United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, (United Nations, 1992), 4. See also pp 6, 4-8, of the Convention, for the repetition of the words "mitigation" and "adaptation," to see the way they become the rhetoric of the climate change discourse. As Garforth goes on to re-iterate, the adaptation discourse, discourages any form of radical break with the present system, seeing no hope for ultimate change. Garforth, *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature*, 103, 99.

[298] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 98.

[299] Mike Hulme on the other hand has a totally different take on the development of the discourse. He identifies four moments that were definitive in transforming the discourse around climate change in the 21st century from denial, equivocation, delay—to—certainty, acceptance and solutions. He dwells on the IPCC 4TH assessment report in 2007, the Bali Climate Change Conference in 2007, the Stern Review in 2006 and Al Gore's landmark film *An Inconvenient Truth* as these four critical junctures. Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity* (United States: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 330-332.

Sometimes, the high costs involved in creating lasting change or impact can also lead to people denying the reality of the crisis. Kari Marie Norgaard's study of "living in denial" suggests that a lot of effort is put into the act of denial by a community of individuals.[300] In her analysis, this collective denial ignoring the threat of climate change and ecological crisis, is not passive, but actively conducted, through the use of cultural narratives.[301] Atwood represents different forms of such denial and desensitization in her *MaddAddam* trilogy, to highlight the problem of the apocalypse becoming a norm.[302] When Jimmy and Crake watch television, they incessantly flip channels, consuming the news of irretrievable ecosystem changes happening across the planet[303] with reports of environmentalist uprisings and their violent suppression alongside watching live executions and pornography, all at the same time and with similar forms of flippant responses.[304] The proliferation of electronic devices

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[300] Kari Marie Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life* (United Kingdom: MIT Press, 2011).

[301] See Norgaard, *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life,* 140. She takes the example of a fictional Norwegian town called Bygdaby to establish her point.

[302] Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 28.

[303] Garforth, when discussing how climate events are represented in media, analyses how such "stories and images of horrifying climate events rehearsing the end of civilization have become common, even mundane." The proliferation of "apocalyptic images of melting ice caps, dried-up lakes and violent hurricane(s)," in news-media, "end-of-the-world narratives in films, young-adult fiction and newspapers," lead to viewers or readers becoming either overwhelmed or desensitized to the reality of climate change. Garforth, *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature,* 98. See also Christopher Palmer who describes this as the 'habit of apocalypse,' becoming routine over time and therefore losing its teeth. "Ordinary Catastrophes: Paradoxes and Problems in Some Recent Post-apocalypse Fiction," *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction*, eds. Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 159. See also Note 7 of the Introduction to this thesis, for further details on how the metanarrative regarding climate change is framed. See Chapter 2 of this thesis for further explorations on how such desensitization may be overcome as well.

[304] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 93-97. Jimmy and Crake would flip through multiple kinds of violent, gruesome shows, from ones showing cats being torn apart by human hands, or stomping of live frogs like 'Felicia's Frog Squash,' to watching live executions allegedly taking place in remote pockets of Asia on a site called 'hedsoff.com,' to detailed electrocutions being conducted on humans and lethal injections administered on other websites with the persons being executed dramatizing their last moments for the audience. The two young boys consume these shuttling images of violence and death without really being affected by it. Jimmy is still portrayed as mildly emotional regarding watching women being executed and prefers to watch the men, who run about a bit before being killed! Atwood startles by making these shows commonplace for the teenagers, who consume assisted suicide on 'nitee.nitee.com' and the 'Queek Geek show' with its eating of live animals and birds, with equal desensitization, and disaffect. Jimmy and Crake smoke pot and watch executions and pornography on parallel screens, finding little difference between them—as Jimmy says, "If you switched back and forth fast, it all came to look like the same event." Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 99. In their discussions, Crake

that hijack attention spans of characters in *Oryx and Crake*, also contribute to deadening of sensitivity to the planet, affecting their ability to analyse events deeply or sustain meaningful conversations.[305] Jimmy and Glenn watch television and play video games endlessly as children, unaffected by the violence depicted on screen, in fact feeling entertained by it. David Orr explains the "muddle headed feeling" as arising from excessive bombardment with information, that remains largely unassimilated and fails to provide any coherent image of the world we inhabit.[306] The dulling of response to news and information broadcast over television or the internet and games played by the Compound children is perhaps intentional, as Joanna Macy identifies "corporate controlled media" serving entertainment as "soporific and as a good to consume," as one of the many reasons behind sustaining desensitization to ecological damage. The monoculture of a consumerist lifestyle propagated by the mass media in *Oryx and Crake*, constantly works at maintaining desire for a lavish and irresponsible lifestyle, that keeps the corporate houses in profitable business and helps maintain the narrative of 'Business as Usual.'[307] The God's Gardeners[308] and rebels in the *MaddAddam* trilogy are seen as attempting to break away from this deadly cycle of consumerism to the extent possible, as they attempt to redefine the foundational conceptions

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suggests that most of these executions were all simulations and one never really knew whether they were actually happening, adding to the nonchalance of their responses to the visuals on the screen. Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 95.

[305] Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 31. Buell discusses how mainstream media narratives of the apocalypse simply offer a spectacle of destruction for entertainment—environmental degradation therefore becoming an object for passive consumption.

[306] David Orr, "Speed," *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Intuition* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2004), 45. Also see Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2014), 56.

[307] See pp 193-195 of Chapter 2 of this thesis for further discussion on Joanna Macy's concept of "Business as Usual," that helps corporates continue their exploitation of the environment and resources, feeding on people's need to continue their lavish lifestyles.

[308] See Note 295 of the Introduction to this thesis.

of what constitutes a good life.[309]

Many factors feed this disconnection from the reality of decimation of our ecosystem. Not least of these is a sense of guilt for not being able to act decisively in time or prevent escalation of crisis. One of the significant fallouts of the act of denial, "conscious or unconscious," leading to an "abdication of the power to respond," is that it leads to an intensified feeling of powerlessness and "relegates us to the role of victim, before we even see what we can and want to do."[310] Jimmy's mother Sharon is particularly consumed by this emotion as she witnesses the Compound scientists including Jimmy's father involved in dismantling and recombining genetic codes to suit the needs of their Corporate employers disregarding the larger implications of playing with genetic codes on the ecology and on the wellbeing of all species on the planet. Sharon was herself a scientist and leaves working when she feels uncomfortable with the work required of her and also keeps rebuking her husband for continuing his 'unethical' work with the Compound for the sake of financial and social security. This creates an atmosphere of constant negativity and turmoil in Jimmy's household since his childhood, which he keeps remembering throughout the span of *Oryx and Crake*. Jimmy as Snowman perhaps understands the seriousness of his mother's protest only later as he lives the horror of a post-apocalyptic world. Peter Marin, quoted by Macy, explains this frustration felt by Sharon best, "Many of us suffer a vague, inchoate sense of betrayal, of having somehow taken the wrong turning, of having somehow said yes or no at

[309] See pp 181 and 285 of Chapter 2 of this thesis for further discussions on how the God's Gardeners redefine what constitutes the "good life," in contrast to what is narrated by the corporate houses seeking profit, as a necessary condition for convincing people to change their lifestyles.

[310] Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects,* 62. Interestingly this is similar to the discussion on victimhood by Atwood in *Survival* discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. In her novels, the personal, social, ecological and political spheres are never disconnected in the characters' lives and their choice of positioning themselves as victims or non-victims in their self-narratives.

the wrong time and to the wrong things…"[311]

Other reasons of denying sensitivity to climate change and its effects include fear of not fitting into the popular and mainstream attitudes towards impending apocalypse. This is depicted in the attitude and actions of the Gardeners' children in *The Year of the Flood*, reared in the environmental activist schooling practices of the Gardeners but espousing pessimism and desensitization as performance, when seeking to blend in with other children in the pleeblands.[312] On the other hand, there are characters like Crake who adopt a false attitude of denial to survive the present and work towards their own solutions to the crisis, however problematic they may be for the rest of the world. Crake's mother dies with a bioform invasion eating through her body. It is horrific but Crake describes his mother's death in a very nonchalent manner—as he watches her dissolve, he seems to focus on the froth coming out of her, betraying no emotion. Jimmy is puzzled when Crake relates the incident to Jimmy, "…it was horrible, the thought of Crake watching his own mother dissolve like that."[313] However Jimmy also realizes that this was possibly Crake's act, put on to preserve himself, as the "alternative would have been losing it."[314] As the trilogy progresses, we understand that Crake's parents had come close to the truth of HelthWyzer, where they worked, as his father had also been in a so-called 'accident,' apparently falling

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[311] Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects,* 25. Also see Peter Marin, *Freedom & Its Discontents: Reflections on Four Decades of American Moral Experience.* (United States: Steerforth Press, 1995) 131. In a certain way, Marian in *The Edible Woman* feels a similar sense of guilt and restlessness, as she reclaims her sensitivity to all beings around her, including the food she eats—leading her to a state where she cannot eat anything anymore, having identified herself with everything around her. Only after she visually comprehends herself being consumed, can she return to consuming anything else. The circle, only then is complete. See pp 43-44 of the Introduction to this thesis, for a brief synopsis on *The Edible Woman*. Also see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion on ecofeminist readings of the text.

[312] The environmental activism practiced and propagated by the God's Garderners is discussed in great detail in chapter 2 of this thesis.

[313] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 208.

[314] Atwood, 208.

off a pleebland overpass. HelthWyzer had been for a long time introducing diseases through their vitamin pills, making people sick so that they came back to Helthwyzer for treatment and more pills.

The apocalyptic narrative need not however propel us to a state of stasis and despair. Rather, in Garforth's analysis, the apocalyptic imagination should encourage us towards radical change.[315] The loss of power of imagination is perhaps the most dangerous effects of denial and desensitization along with a sense of separation from the natural world that is actively encouraged by the consumerist monoculture propagated by the corporate houses funding the gated communities of the Compounds in *Oryx and Crake*. For imagination, as explained by Macy, opens up our minds to alternatives and takes us "beyond our perceptions of what is to what might be". This is especially important in creating new and alternative patterns of resistance to dominant narratives of the present. Sometimes actual personal experiences of disasters influence the way the readers/viewers perceive the projected risks of climate change.[316] In this respect climate fiction narrates actual experiences of disasters and loss, which readers inhabit in the course of reading. Ecological dystopias work to create the experience of absolute loss, to mobilize action for change. By concretizing actual instances of harm,[317] such dystopias reduce the uncertainty and ambivalence regarding the

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[315] Garforth, *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature*, 99. See also Gerry Canavan and Kim Stanley Robinson, eds. *Green planets: Ecology and science fiction* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014),13. Also see Stefan Skrimshire, "Eternal Return of Apocalypse,"*Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. S.Skrimshire (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), 237. Skrimshire sees the apocalypse as an "eternal return" or part of a "continuing, unfolding and transformed reality of which our current actions are unavoidably a part," rather than a single disastrous or climatic event in the future. He also argues that the logic of the apocalyptic narrative derives from its roots in the Bible, where it is not just the end, but also a new beginning. See also Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 123.

[316] See Karen Bickerstaff and Gordon Walker "Clearing the smog? Public responses to air-quality information," *Local Environment* 4, no.3 (1999): 279-294. doi: 10.1080/13549839908725600.

[317] Charles Perrings, "Reserved rationality and the precautionary principle: Technological change, time and uncertainty in environmental decision making," *Ecological Economics: The Science and Management of Sustainability,* ed. R. Costanza. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

effects of environmental harm wrought by news and media articles. Atwood's ecofiction is especially significant in this regard, as it triggers this faculty of imagination within us, heightening our involvement with and awareness of the ecological harm caused by our lifestyles. Her form of the 'ustopia,' discussed in this chapter thus acts as a wake-up call for our deadened energies, forcing us to see the world for what it is, for what it is becoming and what it could be with our imaginative and creative interventions rooted in foundations of biocentrism. Thus her chosen narrative form helps establish the urgency of the problem and renders clear the necessity of taking action. As Maxwell T. Boykoff, David Frame and Samuel Randalls analyse, the obverse of governable climate change, managed through policies is an "insecure, unsafe, unstable" future that is for sure chaotic and catastrophic for the climate and our habitation in this ecosystem.[318] According to Garforth, the idea of the catastrophe is essential for the policy package, "setting out the thresholds for manageable emissions also invokes the prospect of what lies beyond them."[319] She asserts that the catastrophe or the apocalypse is an important and unavoidable necessity for the 'climate change imaginary.'[320]

Storytellers in 'Ustopias'

As seen earlier in this chapter, Jimmy's loneliness is exacerbated by the absence of a palpable listener: "…even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who'll come along later and find his bones and his ledger, and learn his fate. Jimmy/Snowman can make no such assumptions: he'll have no future reader, because the Crakers can't read. Any reader he can

[318] Maxwell T. Boykoff, David Frame and Samuel Randalls, "Discursive stability meets climate instability: A critical exploration of the concept of 'climate stabilization'in contemporary climate policy," *Global Environmental Change* 20, no.1 (2010): 61.

[319] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 107.

[320] Garforth, 107.

possibly imagine is in the past."[321] While reflecting the anxiety of a narrator unsure of readership in an apocalyptic future,[322] these lines by Atwood in *Oryx and Crake* also address her present readers, situated in the past of the future represented in this tale. After an outburst at the situation in which he feels trapped, Jimmy weeps and then even as he feels the pointlessness of his repining, he feels "he has a listener: someone unseen, hidden behind the screen of leaves, watching him slyly."[323] It alerts us to our own active participation in the text and also in the circumstances that could well be our own in a few years to come.[324] It is significant that Atwood's future-scape is not located on another planet, or unexplored hinterland or somewhere underground. Instead the apocalyptic dystopian future is located recognizably on the earth we inhabit at present, just altered by our own anthropogenic interference in nature and its processes. In "Dire Cartographies," Atwood analyses the mechanisms by which such 'ustopias' are usually created or established. For us to know about the future or the past, we need messengers and means of transmission of these messages.[325] While Jimmy wonders about who shall listen to his tale at the beginning of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, we see the Crakers continuing the tradition of storytelling, imbibed from Jimmy/Snowman. Jimmy/Snowman himself feels the need to tell stories to the Crakers having seen Oryx doing the same, before the pandemic. He feels responsible for fulfilling the Crakers' need for stories. Later Toby, a Gardener and survivor of the pandemic, who starts caring for the Crakers continues this tradition of storytelling when prompted by the

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[321] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 45-46.

[322] See pp 176 of this Chapter, which discusses Atwood's anxiety regarding the absence of a reader in the future, and her participation in the Future Library Project.

[323] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 51

[324] Coral Ann Howells, "Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*." *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood.* Ed. C. A. Howells (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006)101) similarly suggests that the 'primary function of a dystopia is to send out danger signals to its readers'.

[325] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 73.

Crakers. While Crake had genetically removed many human traits from these quasi-human creatures created by him, the impulse of storytelling seems too deeply ingrained in both humans and the "not-quite-human"[326] depicted by this 'ustopia' as Crakers like Blackbeard[327] fill in for Toby to satiate their need for a narrative. Atwood in her essay "Burning Bushes," wonders about the impulse behind the narration of "wonder tales," or "other worlds."[328] Atwood asks, "What purpose do they serve in our lives? Are they the result of nurture—we learn our stories as children, from the adults around us—or are they built in, hard-wired into the brain in "template" form…"[329] Atwood wonders if telling tales is "part of the matrix of our shared humanity," and if they are an essential aspect of being human, forming the foundation of various societies and nations.[330] At the same time in her own inimitable way, she counters such a serious description of narratives, asking if they are not just "pastimes—old wives tales to be spun around a cottage fireplace," comparing them to "sentimental and sensationalist novels" and "TV-series spinoffs", considered 'frivolous.'[331] At the same time she is aware that such a distinction between the serious and the frivolous may be unrealistic, as she questions whether "slabs of foundational bedrock and frivolous, entertaining pastimes," are really exclusive as we would think them to be. [332] Through this question she also focuses our attention on the way her ecocritical narratives

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[326] Atwood, *62.*

[327] The Crakers are named after historical figures like Abraham Lincoln or notorious ones like Blackbeard the pirate. The Crakers themselves have no referents regarding these names given to them, one being as good as the other. Jimmy/Snowman wonders at such naming as well, being a product of Crake's dark humour as he names the Crakers, knowing that their might be no human survivors left to give them the referents of such names, after the pandemic is unleashed.

[328] Atwood, *In Other Worlds,* 41.

[329] Atwood, 41.

[330] Atwood, 41.

[331] Atwood, 42.

[332] Atwood, 42.

operate, utilizing and playing upon genres considered frivolous to critique our own sense of displaced prioritization that have led to the ecological crisis of the present. By specifically using the form of storytelling by characters within the novels, she highlights the power of these narratives as well as the constructed nature of her own novels and of the reality we inhabit.[333]

Amanda's bio-art installations[334] in the *MaddAddam* trilogy uses visual storytelling as a "strategic weapon"[335] to create a spectacle that disturbs. Amanda is seen working on a project called 'Vulture Sculptures.'[336] It involved taking parts of dead animals to open plots, vacant fields and parking lots of abandoned factories and arranging them in the shape of certain words such as 'Pain,' 'Guts,' 'Consume', 'Obey', 'Be Silent' and 'Die,' selected by Amanda with care.[337] Then she would wait for the vultures to descend, eating away at parts of the 'words' and photograph the entire transition from a helicopter. Thus these animal carcasses resulting from climate change and ecosystem degradation caused by human actions are ironically consumed by ravens and other birds of prey. Amanda's bio-art therefore startles by critiquing the monoculture of consumption propagated by the Corporate Houses in *Oryx and Crake*, as well as by representing the power of nature over human artefacts—for nature here consumes and erases, instead of humans. According to Amanda, this 'vulturization' of words, "brought them to life" and then killed them.[338] "It was a powerful

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[333] See pp 7-10 of the Introduction to the thesis for a detailed analysis on the importance of effective storytelling in conveying urgency of environmental degradation, human culpability in climate change and in involving readers' emotions to propel change.

[334] Atwood, *The Year of The Flood*, 67.

[335] Bron Taylor observes that radical environmentalists have thus often seen the arts as a "strategic weapon" in the struggle for reviving a connection to nature. *Dark Green Religion: Nature, Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2010).

[336] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 287.

[337] Atwood, 287.

[338] Atwood, 287.

process--"Like watching God thinking."'[339] The animal carcasses and the vultures who come and eat up the carcasses thereby effacing the words laid out by Amanda through the carcasses, participate in the narration of a meaning that Amanda wishes to make, of which the vultures themselves are unaware. Heise wonders why "we produce and consume replicas and images of endangered and extinct species as commodities?"[340] She wonders if such replicas and images trivialize the environmental crisis or draw attention to the cause.[341] At the same time, she asks pertinent questions regarding "How, when and why" we choose to invest in the fate of endangered species, as many of the organisations and corporations contributing to conservationist causes are actually also those whose practices result in habitat destruction and extinction of species.[342] Heise astutely observes that narratives regarding endangered species "gain socio-cultural traction to the extent that they become part of the stories that human communities tell about themselves--stories about origins, their development, their identity, and their future horizons."[343] In *The Year of the Flood*, we see a younger Amanda practicing this by writing out words in syrup and watching the ants take on those forms as they came for the syrup and then eat away at the words till the words disappear. This appearance and disappearance intrigues her, as she explains to her Gardener friend Ren, "It's neat…You write things, then they eat your writing. So you appear, then you disappear. That way no one can find you."[344] Erasure is important for Amanda, as in environmental refugee from Texas, whose entire life and identity had been wiped out by

[339] Atwood, 287.

[340] Heise, *Imagining Extinction*, 2.

[341] Heise, 2.

[342] Heise, 4.

[343] Heise, 5.

[344] Atwood, *The Year of The Flood,* 92.

droughts and hurricanes. The moment she gets a chance, she lodges with the Gardeners to secure her life, adapting to their environmentalist narrative without question, choosing to change her name to Amanda from Barb Jones,[345] perhaps in a bid to rewrite her future narrative. Later in *The Year of the Flood,* we see an older Amanda through Ren's eyes, covering cow bones arranged in the shape of selected words with pancake syrup in the Wisconsin desert. Amanda would then make a video of the insect life all over the syrup—"She liked to watch things move and grow and then disappear."[346] While not all characters within the novel understand what Amanda is trying to say and feel that it is strange, disturbing and even quirky,[347] it is a silent but powerful visual commentary on the rapid extinction of species in Amanda's time. The narrative reflects on the "big drought" that occurred ten years ago, leading to cattle death and slaughter, such that Wisconsin was now covered with cow bones**.**[348] This thesis would like to read Amanda's bio-art installations as more than just sensationalism, drawing attention to and reminding people watching her videos of the loss of species, in an indirect way. Hence she brings to the forefront what would otherwise be forgotten. As in the case of Amanda's roommate artists, there's no active solution proposed by Amanda to the massive impact of climate change across the world. However critical representation still remains valuable. It is also a complex visual description of human utilization of the non-human—in creating words from carcasses and the subsequent decimation of these words by non-humans—whether vultures or insects, thereby completing the cycle, in a way. She called the Wisconsin installation series *The Living Word*, a reference to her Gardener days.[349] The God's Gardeners would discourage writing things

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[345] Atwood, *The Year of The Flood,* 101.

[346] Atwood, 68.

[347] Particularly Jimmy, her boyfriend is unable to completely comprehend her intentions.

[348] Atwood, *The Year of The Flood,* 67.

[349] Atwood, 68.

down as they could be used as evidence against them by the Corporate Compounds.[350] Hence the children would have to memorize everything and erase everything written on slates. This prohibition obviously alerts all Gardeners to the power of the written word and Amanda uses this power, to make a statement by using fish guts, toxic-spill-killed birds besides carcasses of cows to form these words. Once she creates the word 'kaputt' and tells Ren that she was sending a message.[351] When Ren enquires who the message is for, Amanda indicates euphemistically that it was for Mr. Rich, Mrs. Rich and the Bigs, referring to the Corporate Houses whose indiscriminate profit based activities result in such huge collateral damage. Ren warns her that she might land up in trouble. Interestingly Amanda is confident that "they won't understand it."[352] Atwood thus also makes us wonder at the utility of a message or a critique that the intended receiver(s) will not be able to comprehend. If there are no listeners do stories cease to have meaning? Amanda's visual art stems from an indomitable urge to narrate, to express her sense of frustration with the world around her. Rachel Thorpe discusses how Atwood's characters feel 'compelled to narrate their stories, their perceptions of the truth.'[353] Thorpe draws on the example of Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* for making this point.[354] However this compulsive urge to narrate is also true with respect to Jimmy, or Toby and later the Crakers, as discussed a little earlier. Quite like the Ancient Mariner in

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[350] Atwood, 68.

[351] Atwood, 68.

[352] Atwood, 68.

[353] Rachel Helen Smith (nee Thorpe), "Life Without Certainty? Margaret Atwood's Ambiguous Worlds*" bethinking,* accessed March 12, 2021, https://www.bethinking.org/culture/margaret-atwood-life-without-certainty. First published Rachel Thorpe, "Life Without Certainty? Margaret Atwood's Ambiguous Worlds*," Cambridge Papers* (United Kingdom: Jubilee Centre, 2012).

[354] Offred feels compelled to tell her tale, even though there is uncertainty regarding whether it shall ever reach any listeners in the future. She is constantly aware that her narration is a reconstruction. "All of it is a reconstruction…" Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 168. By constantly describing her narration as such, she also steers clear of any avowal to truth. Even when she remembers fragments of her past, she seems to conjure multiple versions of them, blurring the lines between experience and imagination and narration.

Coleridge's poem,[355] they cannot but help tell the stories that propel the narrative and slowly present fragments before our eyes.

Thorpe describes how Atwood's fictions reflect the move away from metanarrative towards 'fragmented notions of truth.'[356] In the course of this thesis we see how she problematizes any unifying metanarrative regarding climate change or ecological problems or their solutions, employing multiple voices and parallel narratives to complicate our perception regarding the truth. In *The Handmaid's Tale,* the entire story is available to us only through the tapes recorded by the narrator recounting her experiences in Gilead.[357] The tapes act as the messenger of the future to the readers in the past as well as the scholars situated in the future, for whom Gilead is the past. Atwood's analysis of the power of stories can be seen depicted in the world of Gilead where the narrative spun by the Sons of Jacob make themselves celebrated heroes. In her essay, "Burning Bushes: Why Heaven and Hell went to Planet X," Atwood explains, "Yesterday's righteously condemned miscreant can become today's martyr, and vice versa. It all depends on the story. But stories themselves, of one sort or another, are always with us, and are always moving and changing through time."[358] The narrative of using women's bodies for producing babies by the powerful Commanders is established at the Red Centres, by citing the story of Rachel and Bilhah from the Genesis. In parallel, the tale that we hear from the Handmaid Offred, depicts the world of past freedom which is lost and compared to the present horrors of Gilead. The "Historical

[355] See Atwood, "An End to Audience?" *The Dalhousie Review* 60, no.3 (1980): 426. https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/60268/dalrev_vol60_iss3_pp415_433.pdf?sequence=1, where Atwood talks about the compulsiveness of storytelling, arguing that "all writers play Ancient mariner at times to the reader's Wedding Guest."

[356] Smith (nee Thorpe), "Life Without Certainty? Margaret Atwood's Ambiguous Worlds."

[357] See pp 55-56 of the Introduction to this thesis for a brief synopsis of *The Handmaid's Tale.*

[358] Atwood, "Burning Bushes: Why Heaven and Hell went to Planet X," *In Other Worlds*,43.

Notes" at the end of the novel, creates another story about this narrative by Offred, as the Professors of the Symposium on Gileadean Studies doubt the veracity of this story found in tapes, looking rather for facts and figures to describe and understand Gilead. While on one hand, it is great relief to know that Gilead has ended, it remains another matter whether this projected utopia of the future—2195—is better or worse than the one narrated by the Handmaid Offred.[359] As Professor Pieixoto says, we must not 'censure' Gilead, but try to understand it.[360] Hence, what we view as horrible and unfathomable is viewed very objectively by the future world. In fact, what we dread to imagine while reading the novel is brought to life pictorially in the graphic novel on *The Handmaid's Tale*, particularly the Ceremony Scene when the Handmaid is forced to be a passive participant in the Commander's act of sexual penetration,[361] or that of the lascivious and sexually frustrated doctor checking Offred and treating her like a torso, her head and emotions screened off from his view[362]—the women rendered bodies without faces.[363] The erasure of the written word in Gilead is also pictorially depicted in the form of signboards and the names of shops shown as images rather than as written text. Even the boards hanging from the necks of those hung on the wall for their treachery are in the form of these image boards without writing on them. A strange unsettling feeling arises as we readers, can access both these images and the written words populating the panels when people are speaking or as introducing events in the text. The privilege of reading strikes us more forcefully in this graphic narrative and lead

[359]Libby Falk Jones, "Breaking Silences in Feminist Dystopias." *Utopian Studies*, 3 (1991):11, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20718920

[360] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 376.

[361] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*, 72-75.

[362] Atwood, 37-39.

[363] Chapter 3 will be further addressing the close link between exploitation of the earth and women's bodies in *The Handmaid's Tale.* See pp 376-381 of Chapter 3 of this thesis for a detailed analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* from an ecofeminist perspective.

us to consider the possibilities heralded by the power of written words that are so rare in Gilead. Even the telling of one's tale becomes a radical act in such an environment and we follow Offred's tale, with its lacunae and lapses and realise how much it takes her to just narrate her story.

In *The Testaments*, Aunt Lydia writes her experiences in Gilead in the 'private sanctum' in the library, which in itself is a rare and privileged space, given the large scale book burnings across Gilead, to restrict access to the written word to the elite Commanders and a few chosen women, labelled 'Aunts' who would indoctrinate all other women into the codes decided by the white, male Commanders who engineer the coup and restructure Gilead to enjoy maximum power over women and resources. Aunt Lydia, known as one of the Founders of Gilead, having accepted its dictums to survive is seen planning the destruction of Gilead from within. She feels a need to reminisce the past trajectory of events that have made her who she is and write about them for the reader of her testimonial in the future. However even though this becomes her vehicle for explaining her actions, some quite cruel in order to fit into the regime, she is uncertain if there would be a reader at all in the future. She writes and wonders aloud, "Who are you, my reader? And where are you? Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps fifty years from now, perhaps never."[364] At the same time, she seems compelled to record and narrate, "though to no end, I often fear."[365] On close reading, we also see that her narrative assumes a reader who would be anti-Gilead and therefore sympathetic to her cause. Hence, despite her misgivings regarding her plan at toppling the regime, she holds out hope of a future where Gilead is no more, by the very act of narrating her tale and recording it secretly within the pages of Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita*

[364] Atwood, *The Testaments,* 61.

[365] Atwood, 115.

Sua. When we read *The Testaments*, we are constantly made aware of our privileged position as readers of secrets hitherto not revealed. Our reading of Aunt Lydia's account also presupposes therefore that the "manuscript" has survived and Gilead and its autocratic regime is no more. Hence the dystopia crafted by Atwood is at a distance, enabling critical consumption. At the same time, it is too familiar, reflecting events that have happened in the past as well as existent as possibilities in the present, keeping the narrative relevant, engaging and acting as a warning all at the same time. By creating a distance between events and their reception, in *The Testaments* as well as in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood constantly interrogates the way tales are told as well as the motivations behind such narration by individual characters. Julia Kuznetski[366] analyses that the woman characters of the *The Testaments* keep their body and mind together through narrative, overcoming the dualistic split between mind and body that the state wishes to effect. Kuznetski calls such agency "polyphonic,"[367] in the form of Aunt Lydia's storytelling in her confessional narrative, Agnes' reading in the library revealing Gilead's lies and her testimonial, recorded later as well as Nicole's carrying the microdot holding all information regarding Gilead's corrupt regime in her body and her testimonial on her experiences outside and within Gilead. Kuznetski suggests that Nicole with the microdot embedded in her tattoo becomes a "cyborg,"[368] blurring the boundaries between human and machine, "blending corporeality

[366] See Julia Kuznetski "Disempowerment and Bodily Agency in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale* TV Series," *The European Legacy* 26, no.3-4 (2021): 287-302, doi: 10.1080/10848770.2021.1898108. Kuznetski's essay analyses the sequel *The Testaments* and Seasons 2 and 3 of the Hulu Television series, in the way the female body functions both as the site of vulnerability, control and social construction as well as the site of resistance and resumption of agency.

[367] Kuznetski, "Disempowerment and Bodily Agency in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale* TV Series," 297.

[368] Kuznetski, "Disempowerment and Bodily Agency in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale* TV Series," 297. Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg comes from her 1985 essay "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." The term "cyborg" stands for "cybernetic organism," which refers to a being that is part human, part machine, and part animal. According to Haraway, the cyborg is a figure that challenges traditional notions of identity and boundaries. She argues that the cyborg blurs the boundaries between human and machine, nature and culture, and self and other. The cyborg is a hybrid entity that exists at the intersection of biology, technology, and social

and technology."[369] Kuznetski's essay showcases how the three voices come together and employ the "resources of the body," to counter the totalitarian regime and bring it down.[370]

Agnes' (Witness 369A's) testimony reveals the narrative strategies used by the Aunts to create horror and establish control over women's bodies.[371] As she dwells on Aunt Vidala's tales regarding women's bodies as snares for lustful men, and Aunt Estee's slightly less melodramatic ones, she understands how these impact her perception of herself and her future.[372] Women in Gilead are reduced to their reproductive functions. As Aunt Estee teaches, "Every woman who wasn't an Aunt or a Martha…would want a baby."[373] It was drilled into the girls' heads, that if they didn't have babies or want them, there was no "earthly" use for them."[374] Ideas of female inferiority and that of a woman's body being a

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relations. Haraway also sees the cyborg as a powerful symbol of resistance against patriarchal oppression, as it represents a new form of subjectivity that breaks free from the constraints of traditional gender roles and identities. In *The Testaments*, this is literally enacted in the way Nicole's cyborg body becomes the means for resisting the patriarchal oppression that Gilead symbolises. Just as Haraway sees the cyborg as an empowering means of redefining our relationship with the natural world and rethinking our sense of self and boundaries, Atwood's text showcases the use of technology embedded in the human body for enacting change. See Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *The Transgender Studies Reader,* eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (2006; repr. London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 103-118.

[369] Kuznetski, "Disempowerment and Bodily Agency in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale* TV Series," 297.

[370] Kuznetski, 297.

[371] It is similar to Gramscian ISA, the schooling and indoctrination becoming a powerful tool for changing women's self-narratives vis-à-vis the state. While the Rachel and Leah Red Centres use both the RSA and the ISA to frighten fertile women into subjugating their bodies for the demands of the state, the schools for the younger girls without past memories of freedom rely entirely on the Aunts' narrative skills creating unquestioning obedience in future citizens of Gilead, by changing Biblical stories as that of the concubine cut into 12 pieces. This is projected as a sacrifice by the concubine, to the young impressionable girls. However many years later, when Agnes as Aunt Victoria reads the Bible, she is shocked by the manipulation of the state, as it is really a story of merciless rape and murder of a woman. The fear ingrained in Agnes can be seen as she plans an escape from the marriage being forced on her, but is deterred by thoughts of "men who were certain to be tempted by girls who'd strayed out of bounds: such girls would be viewed as loose in their morals."(224) Fear and lack of access to the external world and opportunities keep the girls bound to the stories told to them by the Aunts at school.

[372] Atwood, *The Testaments,* 10-11

[373] Atwood, 81.

[374] Atwood, 81.

dangerous "booby trap" for all men, is so deeply ingrained into Agnes that she starts loathing herself.[375] She even tries to eat less, so as to shrink her growth as puberty approaches. It is apparent that even women at the top of the chain in Gilead are subject to the whims and fancies of the men commanding this world, as the Wives, Marthas, Econowives, Handmaids and would-be-wives are all confined to their roles and the colours fixed for them by the state. The colours of garments worn by the women become a visual reminder of their fixed duties and functions in the state, within which they have to confine themselves. Agnes can be seen rebelling against the state delineated behaviour, particularly as the Handmaid in her household dies while giving birth, because she is cut open to save the baby. While the larger narrative spun by the state glorifies Ofkyle/Crystal as the paragon of "ultimate sacrifice,"[376] Agnes understands that it is murder, early in her testimonial. Her sensitivity however is triggered by her learning the truth about her own birth as she gets to know that Tabitha was not her actual mother. This truth is compounded by the fact that her birth mother was possibly a Handmaid now, owing to her proved fertility. This dystopia too has a utopia welded into it, as Agnes recollects her memories of her adoptive mother Tabitha who loves and cares for her and creates a bubble of comfort for Agnes.[377] However it is only when the utopia of Agnes' childhood gets ruptured that the nature of the dystopia that Gilead actually is, filters into her consciousness. This rupture becomes more extensive with Agnes acquiring literacy as an Aunt in Gilead, as she discovers the truth behind each of the lies narrated to her and other young girls in the schools in Gilead as well as that passed around by the Marthas in her home, albeit to protect her from disciplinary measures. Reading does not

[375] Atwood, 80- 81.

[376] Atwood, 104.

[377] When, towards the end of *The Testaments*, Agnes and Nicole are fleeing Gilead, delivering information regarding the corruption of the Commanders to the outside world, Agnes feels nostalgic and worried as she leaves the cocoon that she has been used to all her life, despite its many faults.

answer all her queries though, as she discovers that it just leads her "to other questions; and then to others."[378] She describes her experience of losing faith to that of losing a best friend—"everything that defined you is being burned away…You feel exiled as if you are lost in a dark wood."[379] In addition to this, Aunt Lydia plants messages and records of corruption in Gilead on Agnes' desk, including her Bloodlines File with her genealogical information. As Agnes' perception of Gilead changes, she also feels the world emptying itself of meaning, "Everything was hollow. Everything was withering."[380] Atwood's narrative keeps us constantly aware of the power of stories as well as the effect of such stories turning false, suddenly. Agnes reflects that once a story that she had believed in was proved false, she began suspecting all other such narratives masquerading as the truth.[381] As seen in this chapter, Atwood's 'ustopias' also function in a similar manner, disintegrating belief in the metanarratives spun by the state that informs ecological and economic decisions taken by us. This is facilitated by characters in the 'ustopia' breaking through existent state narratives to reposition their own.

Atwood does not reveal the names of the speakers of the testimonials that we begin reading. As their voices become more definite and emerge as different, she grants us access to their names and roles. As with the *MaddAddam* trilogy, *The Testaments* written after uses a similar narrative strategy of presenting parallel time frames through different points of view, thereby intensifying the narrative. By collating accounts by two women within Gilead—one in power, one powerless in comparison and another woman outside Gilead and nonchalant about it, creates a triad of perspectives and also comments on the fractured nature

[378] Atwood, 299.

[379] Atwood, 303.

[380] Atwood, 303.

[381] Atwood, 303.

of the way atrocities continue in pockets of the world that are 'study modules' for other parts of the world. The way the accounts are interweaved, each reaching a tipping point and switching to the other, never completing, sustains momentum in the narrative and showcases contrasting experiences within the same time frame. Daisy/Nicole[382] narrates how she views Gilead through the lessons in school in Canada, that teach, "it was a terrible, terrible place, where women couldn't have jobs or drive cars, and where the Handmaids were forced to get pregnant like cows…"[383] What is a living reality and nightmare for the women in Gilead, is a school lesson elsewhere, such as the protest march about Gilead for which schools give time off for the oldest graders, to be part of "World Social Awareness."[384] The co-existence of Daisy/Nicole and Hannah/Agnes become an ironical comment on the way in which we readers too perhaps read about horrors in newspapers and on television, but consider them as separate from our own life narratives. When Daisy suddenly learns that she is Baby Nicole, the poster baby in Gilead and representative of a Handmaid's escape and journey to freedom from Gilead, the story that had been a study module suddenly becomes her own life story. This is a rude shock as Daisy/Nicole is suddenly thrown into dystopia, the borders between Canada and Gilead becoming porous without warning. The 'ustopia' crafted by Atwood, intentionally focuses on how the worlds coalesce into each other, suggestive also of how thin the borders are between our present imaginary utopias of existence and the possible future dystopias, building through choices made in the present. Aunt Lydia records how "things had been on a downward spiral for years,"[385] but people had ignored the signs

[382] As with most characters in the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy having two alternative names, Daisy does not know that she is Baby Nicole, the child of the Handmaid who escaped Gilead. She later takes on her name Nicole to infiltrate Gilead as part of the underground Mayday Resistance Operation.

[383] Atwood, *The Testaments,* 146.

[384] Atwood, 146.

[385] Atwood, 60.

till it led to the formation of a fundamentalist state like Gilead. In *The Handmaid's Tale,* the speaker Offred remembers how they had "lived, as usual, by ignoring,"[386] the signs of violence and patriarchy growing around them. She also concedes that such ignoring was different from ignorance. Despite knowing what was happening, they chose to ignore it, always seeing the news as about "other women," and "other men," awful and terrible, but never quite believable. By such denial, people lived at the margins of stories, in the "blank white spaces at the edges of print,"[387] giving them the solace of not being connected to the news, apparently. However, as Offred reflects, "Nothing happens instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it,"[388] just as it happened for her family and herself and all the women who ignored the signs and lived as "usual." Now that Gilead was in full sway, this too was the present "usual,"[389] with people surviving in it without questioning, always shifting worry to the margins of their existence. While Offred and those like her in pre-Gileadian days, "lived in the gaps between the stories"[390] read in newspapers and seen on television about the violent murders, rape and mutilated corpses found in ditches, Atwood's 'ustopias' engage readers by involving them in those very gaps, by filling in vivid detail and forcing us to see what we would avoid.

The power of the written word and imagination are themes that recur through the entire oeuvre of Atwood's writing.[391] In "The Writer as a Political Agent? Really?" Atwood calls writing itself "an act of hope, since writing implies a future, in which the freedom to

[386] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 70.

[387] Atwood, 70.

[388] Atwood, 70.

[389] Atwood, 70.

[390] Atwood, 70.

[391] See literary overview in the Introduction to this thesis as well as through the course of the three subsequent chapters taking up certain selected works by her, concurrent with certain ecocritical concerns.

read will exist."[392] In the Future Library Project[393] that Atwood participates in, the story written by her in the present would be printed on paper from a forest in Norway, 100 years later. While there is great uncertainty regarding whether there would be any human beings left to read the writings stored for The Future Library, Atwood's participation in the project is an act of hope as well. The project in many ways rearticulates what we know about writing being always "a time capsule, since the author who marks the words down and the receiver of those words—the reader—are always separated by time."[394] The Future Library Project just makes the situation more apparent than it usually is.[395] Aunt Lydia in *The Testaments* teeters between destroying her records and testimonial and submitting to the regime and living comfortably as an Aunt versus keeping the document hidden in the library and transporting evidence against Gilead and its Commanders overseas through Mayday operatives and its attendant dangers. At this point the power of the writer emerges most dramatically as the reader's existence is dependent on the writer's choice to tell the tale or to snuff it out with "flame of the match."[396] However on choosing to keep alive her testimonial, even as she readies to take her own life before the Guardians appear at her door, she keeps alive the reader in the future, who she imagines will be one fascinated by her account as well as judgemental regarding her choices, "You yourself would never have done

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[392] Atwood, "The Writer as Political Agent? Really? ," *Burning Questions, 132.* Also see pp 115-116 and Note 111 of this Chapter.

[393] Atwood, "Future Library," *Burning Questions,* 243.

[394] Atwood, "Future Library," 243.

[395] In *Oryx and Crake* we see Jimmy/Snowman wondering if there is a listener left for his tale, just as Atwood in her essay on the Future Library wonders if the future would have any readers, or a forest and whether meaning s of words would have changed. In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy/Snowman collects words that have become obsolete, in nostalgia and perhaps in preparation for his own state a few years in the future, when his memories and his existence itself is like those obsolete words in the face of a world where he appears to be a last remnant human, at the beginning of *Oryx and Crake*, trying to find relevance and meaning to his existence. Ref back to part of chapter discussing this.

[396] Atwood, *The Testaments, 318.*

such things? And you yourself will never have had to."[397]

Posthuman Possibilities: An Uncertain Future

Patrick D. Murphy in his essay "Environmentalism" emphasizes that some of the most fundamental themes informing science fiction like life on other planets, aliens, new technologies, all by their very nature refer to questions pertaining to the human body and humans' co-existence with other beings as well as "appropriate and inappropriate manipulations of natural systems."[398] Atwood in her *MaddAddam trilogy* constantly questions the definitions of what it means to be human, as Jimmy grapples with a world where he may be the last 'human' left. Atwood in her essay *In Other Worlds*, states that the fantastic tales genre "… can explore the nature and the limits of what it means to be human in very explicit ways, by pushing the human envelope as far as it will go in the direction of the not-quite-human."[399] The Crakers, in the *MaddAddam trilogy* become a means of testing the boundaries of what we consider essential human traits as they are created from human genome but significantly altered according to Crake's definition of necessity and emancipation of the human race.[400] Jimmy's need to hear what he calls "a fully human voice, like his own,"[401] mentioned earlier, suggests that he doesn't quite accept the Crakers as human. He feels quite imperfect in front of them, almost deformed in comparison to their

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[397] Atwood, *The Testaments,* 318.

[398] Murphy, *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries, and Fields,* 379-80.

[399] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 62.

[400] See also Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 11. In her essay "Scientific Romancing," Atwood explains that creation of the Crakers in *Oryx and Crake*, designed as "an improvement on the current model: ourselves,"(11) requires the writer, or "designer" to ask very crucial questions regarding what features lie at the core of being human. "What a piece of work is man, and now that we ourselves can be workmen, what bits shall we chop off?"(11)

[401] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,*11.

perfect naked bodies and always covers himself with a white sheet, to hide his bug-bitten, dirty body and body hair. Atwood, citing the replicants in *Blade Runner* and the beast folk of *The Island of Doctor Moreau,* suggests that "the quasi–humans can take more positive forms that help us to understand and navigate differences,"[402] and help us reflect on what we consider essentially 'human.' She wonders how far humans can go, "in the alteration department before those altered cease to be human? Which of our features are at the core of our being?"[403] Rosi Braidotti elaborates that "There is a posthuman agreement that contemporary science and biotechnologies affect the very fibre and structure of the living and have altered dramatically our understanding of what counts as the basic frame of reference for the human today."[404] Andy Miah in her essay "The Biopolitics of Posthumanism," discusses how our imagination regarding how humanity may be transformed by technology are ultimately "historically contingent manifestations of posthuman ideas." Therefore contemporary events are closely linked with the imagination of the posthuman future,[405] similar to Atwood's avowal of the relevance and significance of speculative fiction, discussed earlier.[406] Braidotti identifies the humanist project as having been instrumental behind "practices of exclusion and discrimination,"[407] that define the human and non-human relationship. The posthuman vision attempts to destabilize these

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[402] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 62.

[403] Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 91. Such speculative fiction makes us consider both the advantages offered by technology as well as its possible "misuse" and disasters ensuing from such experimentation or malevolent intentions. Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 11.

[404] Rosi Braidotti, The Posthuman (Germany: Polity Press, 2013), 40.

[405] Kevin La Grandeur describes the posthuman as the condition in which humans and intelligent technology are increasingly becoming intertwined. Kevin La Grandeur, "Androids and the Posthuman in Television and Film," *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television* (2015): 111-119.doi: 10.1057/97811374.

[406] See pp 101-114 of this Chapter, which discusses Atwood's reasoning behind her choice of narrative style and genre.

[407] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 26.

hierarchies and exclusionary practices that see the human at the top of the evolutionary ladder.[408] The value of the posthumanist perspective lies therefore in the "movement from the binary of humanism/anti-humanism and proposes that the turn to posthumanism gives rise to affirmative and alternative discourses."[409] The genetically modified spliced organisms seen throughout the *MaddAddam trilogy*—the pigoons with human neo-cortex tissue, the wolvogs, snats, rakunks, liobams and of course the Crakers, signify a world where scientists don't flinch at creating any combination organism—"biolab hotshots" as they are called.[410] Most of these genetically modified animals/humans are created from scientific experiments in the laboratory, the result of "fooling around."[411] As Atwood's novel describes the events that led to the point of Jimmy/Snowman being left alone as the only survivor post the viral epidemic created by Crake, Jimmy/Snowman recounts that "create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God."[412] Atwood's presentation of the posthuman complicates its description as a field of 'positive' alternative possibilities by Braidotti and Miah, making us reflect on the fallout of such experimentation and "fooling around" with genetic code. Including the posthuman voice is a challenge as well,[413] necessary for interrogating the possibilities offered by such imagination. While the Craker

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[408] Bone, "Environmental dystopias: Margaret Atwood and the Monstrous Child," 3.

[409] Bone, 3.

[410] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 57. The rakunks had begun as an after-hours hobby on the part of one of the OrganInc biolab hotshots.

[411] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 57.

[412] Atwood, 57.

[413] Jane Bone also discusses the problem of including the post-human voice. "Environmental dystopias: Margaret Atwood and the Monstrous Child,"3. One of the key problems of such representation lies in the fact that posthuman characters might have different sensory perceptions and modes of communication than humans in the text. Jane Bone notes that often posthuman characters in texts challenge conventional notions of morality, agency and identity, making it difficult for readers to empathize with their choices and actions. In Bone's analysis Atwood resists anthropomorphizing and sentimentalizing the Crakers and is successful in her representation thereby. However, I think that Atwood includes many features that are close to human ones in the Crakers, like their fascination for stories and music as well as their deep compassion and sadness, that make it easier for readers to empathize with them.

child Blackbeard clamours to learn to read and write and tell stories, we see that Toby[414] is constantly worried about disrupting his innocence.[415] Crake had attempted to keep reading and writing outside the Crakers' pool of skills, perhaps seeing in these skills the possibility of recreating human-like creatures, who could repeat the destruction of the planet and other species by their anthropocentric vision. Even as Toby teaches the Craker children to read and write, she wonders if she was doing the right thing, "Now what have I done? She thinks. What can of worms have I opened?...What comes next? Rules, dogmas, laws? The Testament of Crake? How soon before there are ancient texts they feel they have to obey but have forgotten to interpret?"[416]

As identified by Miah, the premise of posthumanism lies in "its critical stance towards the prominence afforded to humanity in the natural order."[417] Therefore, posthumanism automatically de-centres the human as the exceptional and supreme creature, strongly undermining theories of human exceptionalism. While that may be a step forward, when considering that anthropocentric thinking has led to such modifications of the planet's ecology as to the era being named the Anthropocene,[418] at the same time we need to interrogate the posthuman imagination for its contribution to ecocritical thinking and the possibilities it provides in creating and contemplating 'critical dystopias' or 'ustopias.'[419]

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[414] Toby, one of the survivors of the pandemic, and once a Gardener as well, takes on the task of looking after the Crakers as Jimmy/Snowman is ill. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 2013 (London: Virago, 2014).

[415] Bone, "Environmental dystopias: Margaret Atwood and the Monstrous Child,"9.

[416] Atwood, *MaddAddam,* 250.

[417] Andy Miah, "A Critical History of Posthumanism," *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity* eds. B. Gordijn and R. Chadwick (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009): 71-94, doi: 10.1007/978-1-4020-8852-0_6.

[418] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene"' *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17-18. http://www.igbp.net /download/18.316f18321323470177580001401/1376383088452/NL41.pdf. See Note 63 in the Introduction to this thesis.

[419] See pp 116-117 above for a detailed discussion on the similarity between Atwood's "ustopias" and the term "critical dystopia" used by Moylan. Also See Note 1 above.

Atwood's depiction of the transgression of boundaries between the human and non-human in *Oryx and Crake* does not showcase the growth of a biocentric perspective. Besides the spliced[420] organisms created, the cosmetic engineering devices created by the Compound scientists in the form of the NooSkins BeauToxique Treatment[421] where wrinkles were paralyzed forever, or the Fountain of Yooth Total Plunge[422] that rasped off the entire epidermis to create an illusion of youth, show the extremely anthropocentric vision of scientists pursuing such amalgamation of human genome and technology for personal economic gains, wholly centred on the needs of Corporate Houses funding such research. If we look at the conversation between Manatee and Tamaraw in Crake's laboratory in *MaddAddam*, we see them discussing Crake's possible motivations behind the pandemic virus and the destruction it wished to effect. Manatee thinks that Crake was probably "very, very messed up," but Tamaraw suggests that perhaps Crake felt that the rest of the world 'messed up' and saw this as a solution, "what with the biosphere being depleted and the temperature sky-rocketing."[423] Ivory Bill, another MaddAddamite[424] also sees the Crakers as Crake's imagined antidote to the destruction wrought by the humans on this planet.[425] Through the MaddAddamites and their conversations, Atwood depicts differing perceptions regarding ecological problems faced by the planet today, as well as the different ways in which action taken to combat this degradation is then viewed, quite like the many

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[420] See Note 292 of the Introduction to this thesis. See also Note 163 above.

[421] The Anoo Yoo Spa is a high-end spa in *Oryx and Crake* trilogy that caters to wealthy clients, offering a range of services, including cosmetic treatments, anti-aging procedures, and genetic modifications., like NooSkins BeauToxique Treatment, where Wrinkles are Paralyzed Forever.

[422] Fountain of Yooth Total Plunge, is an anti-ageing procedure offered by the Anoo Yoo Spa. The spa and the people who frequent it are shown as disconnected from the natural world and the consequences of their actions, highlighting the novel's critique of the dangers of unchecked technological progress and unbridled capitalism.

[423] *Atwood, MaddAddam,* 171.

[424] See Note 292 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[425] Atwood, *MaddAddam,* 171.

environmentalisms discussed in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Depending on how reality is viewed, different environmentalist positions are adopted by the dissenters in this trilogy. At the same time, the dystopia presented to us is also a function of how present reality is perceived by us readers reading the book. All environmentalist positions require a construction of their own version of reality, coherent and strong in its references for it to be able to sustain hope in effecting change, inspire others and inspire change. However Atwood in her *MaddAddam* trilogy provides a fragmented vision of multiple realities, as shall be further discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis, positioning us in a way that we are able to critically view the problems of our present utilization of technology, the destruction we are wreaking on the environment and ecology everyday as also the methods taken up by many to combat all of these.

Chapter 2

The Many Shades of Green[1] in *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*

In *The Sand County Almanac,* Aldo Leopold describes the transformation that comes upon him as he sees the "fierce green fire" in the eyes of the wolf dying from his gunshot.[2] He feels the presence of a knowledge only available to the wolf and the mountain, which he seems to have no access to. Leopold accepts at this moment that his anthropocentric logic, "that…fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise," was not one shared by the wolf and the mountain.[3] Watching "the green fire die" in the eyes of the wolf, he senses "that neither

[1] Alex Steffen coins the terms 'bright green,' 'light green' and 'dark green' environmentalism to describe the variant approaches taken by green groups themselves. He himself advocates the 'bright green' approach that has increasingly caught the imagination of mainstream environmentalists for its focus on sustainable innovation and its belief in "design, urban revitalization and entrepreneurial zeal to transform the system." This belief in technological reform is in contrast with the light greens, who believe in changes in individual lifestyles and behavioural patterns, such as shopping differently or eating differently as important for making a difference in the aggregate. The dark greens in contrast to both the light greens and the bright greens however espouse more radical choices such as "the need to pull back from consumerism," even industrialization and reconnect with the land. In Alex Steffen's definition, these dark greens are prone to apocalyptic discourses as well. Steffen also recognizes that environmentalists are often a combination of these shades of green, choosing pathways towards focused efforts. All these 3 strains are contrasted with the 'grays' who represent the naysayers denying the need for any action at all, whether at the individual or collective levels and represent the Corporates and consumerist enterprises that thrive on such denial. In the second book of Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, all these approaches to environmentalism can be seen represented in close detail, as shall be seen in the course of this chapter. See Alex Steffen, "Bright Green, Light Green, Dark Green, Gray: The New Environmental Spectrum," *Worldchanging*, February 27, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20160112194947/http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/009499.html.

[2] Aldo Leopold, *The Sand County Almanac: Outdoor Essays and Reflections*, 1949 (New York: Ballantine, 2001), 129.

[3] Leopold, *The Sand County Almanac,* 129.

the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view."[4] This moment of inner transformation[5] that grants Leopold access to a more expansive vision of human and non-human interdependence and shifts his perception towards biocentric thought is prized as most valuable by those environmentalists seeking lasting transformation, where according to Thomas Berry, "a change must occur deep in our souls."[6] Berry is not resistant to technology, acknowledging our need for it, but insists that the transformation required is more than improving existing technology.

Some of the most crucial debates between environmentalist approaches lie in the way this transformation is perceived, with mainstream environmentalists pitching for ameliorating the present ecological crisis with technological fixes and radical environmentalists[7] seeking greater and more long-lasting transformation in the way human life itself is perceived. Leopold, often seen as one of the forefathers of radical environmentalism,[8] is astute in his observation that the crux of the resolution lies in a reappraisal of what human beings consider valuable in life—"our bigger-and-better society is now like a hypochondriac, so obsessed with its own

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[4] Leopold, *The Sand County Almanac,* 129.

[5] Gavin Lamb, "How a Wolf Transformed Aldo Leopold's Environmental Worldview," *Wild Ones,* June 5, 2020. https://medium.com/thewildones/how-a-wolf-transformed-aldo-leopolds-environmental-worldview-4ec7bcd5eaad#:~:text=In%20Aldo%20Leopold's%201949%20classic,hunting%20companions%20just%20shot%20her.

[6] Thomas Berry, "The World of Wonder," *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), 26.

[7] Including within its ambit the deep ecologists and the revolutionary environmentalists, which can be seen as variant shades of green, with different choices in the realm of actions undertaken, as will be analysed in detail in the course of this chapter.

[8] Bron Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2, no.1 (Spring 2008): 31. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41887590. See also Daniel Cryer, *A Model Citizen: Ethos, Conservation, and the Rhetorical Construction of Aldo Leopold* (PhD diss., The University of New Mexico, 2014), accessed May 2, 2019, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1030&context=engl_etds.

economic health as to have lost the capacity to remain healthy."[9] The way out would be what Leopold calls "a little healthy contempt for a plethora of material blessings."[10] This is a change that deep ecologists and ecotheologians as well as revolutionary environmentalists call for–a revision in the way human fulfillment is perceived. The God's Gardeners[11] and the MaddAddamites[12] in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* attempt to live the ideal of a redefined notion of 'eudaimonia,'[13] facing many obstacles and challenges in this attempt, their utopian enclave always suffering the barrage of the dystopia that constantly seems to seep in from the edges around their 'Edencliff Rooftop.'[14] *The Year of the Flood* is prefaced with a Hymn from the *God's Gardeners Oral Hymnbook.* The title of the Hymn called 'Garden' focuses our attention on the biblical resonances brought forth by the use of the term, and its connection with the green cult--the God's Gardeners--represented in detail in this second book of the *MaddAddam* trilogy. The Hymn describes the changes wrought in the garden of joy and plenty

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[9] Aldo Leopold, "Foreword," *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (1949; repr. New York: Oxford UP, 1989), viii-ix.

[10] Leopold, "Foreword," viii-ix.

[11] See Note 295 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[12] See Note 298 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[13] Aristotle in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, discusses the concept of 'eudaimonia', or human wellbeing and the kind of life that would be seen as constitutive of such a 'blessed' state of wellbeing, involving the complete development of a person's faculties based on reason and actions.Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* trans. W.D. Ross, 1.10-11, accessed June 15, 2020, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.1.i.html. I particularly use this Greek word as I begin my discussion, as the concept of what constitutes human wellbeing has been such a consistent realm of enquiry for the field of ethics, and which finds renewed relevance in the ecological realm as environmentalist struggle to redefine capitalist and consumerist notions of human wellbeing and popularize a different valuation of life. In this chapter, I shall be closely studying Atwood's eco-fictional God's Gardeners in terms of their attempts at such redefinition and re-evaluation of eudaimonia in ecological terms.

[14] The Gardeners grow their food organically on the rooftops of the dilapidated and abandoned buildings that they re-inhabit. Reminiscent of the plenty that the Garden of Eden represents in the *Genesis*, the Gardeners name their rooftop gardens 'Edencliff Rooftop'. The name also automatically alerts us to their awareness of the possibility of the loss of this Eden at any point in time. Chapter one provides a detailed study of the co-existence of utopias and dystopias in Atwood's fiction.

by the "Spoilers" who decimate and bury the fruit giving trees and transform the life nourishing water "to slime and mire."[15] In a line reminiscent of *Silent Spring*,[16] the silence of the birds and the loss of their "joyful choir" turns the Garden into a scene of mourning, "Until the Gardeners arise"[17] and restore life to this physical and metaphorical 'Garden'.

The utopian attributes of environmentalist visions,[18] represented through the Gardeners and the MaddAddamites in *The Year of the Flood,* while heavily criticized by mainstream environmentalists as ineffective and impractical, are rather seen as increasingly valuable in imagining change. Felix Guattari[19] sees utopian dreams as a possibility for transforming the planet, which he describes as a living hell for more than three quarters of its population. Sargisson too explains that in the space called utopia, it becomes possible to "play with alternatives" and "explore ideas to their limits."[20] In the previous chapter I considered the importance of eco-fictions and specifically 'ustopias'[21] in representing ecological collapse. In this chapter I shall be looking at Atwood's representation of radical environmentalism, deep

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[15] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (2009; repr. London: Virago, 2013), opening hymn, ix.

[16] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962; repr. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1964). Also see pp 13-15 and Note 60 of Introduction, where Carson's seminal work is discussed in more detail.

[17] Atwood, "The Garden," *The Year of the Flood*, ix.

[18] See Lisa Garforth for detailed discussion on the value of utopian visions in environmentalist discourses-like that of Deep Ecology and Radical Ecology. *Green Utopias: Environmental Hope Before and After Nature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018).

[19] Pierre Felix Guattari, "Regimes, Pathways, Subjects," *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Oxford and Cambridge, Massachussets: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 104.

[20] Lucy Sargisson, "Green Utopias of Self and Other," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 3.2-3(2000): 140. doi: 10.1080/13698230008403317.

[21] The hermeneutic of the critical dystopia or 'ustopia' used by Atwood as an econarratological technique has been discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis. See Chapter 1, pp 116-117, for a detailed discussion on the "critical dystopia."

ecology and ecotheology in her trilogy, with special focus on *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*. As seen earlier, Atwood's texts never adhere to any single discourse or ideology, choosing to critique the assumptions of each. My chapter shall try to see how these approaches to ecology and the environment fare through her critical lens.

The 'Industrial Growth Society,'[22] Ecological Grief and 'The Great Turning'[23]

In Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, she showcases the use of the dramatic, urgent and *Limits to Growth*[24] based approach through the figure of the Gardeners and Crake, who keep iterating the imminent end of all things at the rate humans were proceeding in siphoning off the planet. This is voiced in the form of the 'Flood' by the Gardeners, reminiscent of the biblical apocalypse[25] and created in a real form by Crake himself by the pandemic he spreads through the BlyssPluss

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[22] This term is borrowed by Joanna Macy and Molly Brown from Norwegian eco-philosopher Sigmund Kwaloy. They explain that they choose this term as it is more inclusive than 'capitalism' because it applies to state controlled industrial economics as well. Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2014), 38. I shall be utilizing Macy and Brown's theorization to analyse Atwood's depiction of a capitalist and consumerist society in her *MaddAddam* trilogy, as well as possibilities of transformation, in this section of the chapter.

[23] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life,* 37. This term will be analysed in more detail in the course of this section and refers to the narratives of positive transformation that may still be effected by human will and action for the sake of planet Earth.

[24] Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth* (Washington, DC: Potomac Associates, 1972). Presently available in Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth—the 30 Year Update* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing Co., 2004). See Page 20-21 of the Introduction to the thesis, for a discussion on the *Limits to Growth* report in 1972. See also Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 31.

[25] See *Genesis 6:9–9:17* for the biblical narrative of 'Noah and the Flood,' *BibleGateWay,* accessed July 12, 2020, https://www.biblegateway.com/ passage /?search=Genesis%206:9-9:17&version=NIV. Adam One compares the Gardeners to plural Noahs, who are responsible for preserving species, at least in their memories. His use of the metaphor of the Ark and the biblical Flood are further discussed on page 207, 235-236 of this chapter. See also Note 416 below and Note 92 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Pill[26]—his aim being to clear the earth of existing humans to make way for his bio-engineered race called the Crakers[27]—the 'better' beings who are designed to live in harmony with the planet. Certain tracts of the 1970s, such as Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* echoed *Limits to Growth,* designating the desire for unfettered growth as the root cause of chronic ecological problems of the planet.[28] Schumacher saw this as a crisis caused by the emptiness and "fundamental unsatisfactoriness caused by a life devoted to the pursuit of material ends."[29] Margaret Atwood depicts such a hollow and unsatisfactory life in the Compounds of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, where the scientists and the CorpSeCorps[30] single-mindedly pursue profit at all costs. Within the Compounds themselves we see some individuals questioning the worth of this lifestyle that utterly neglects all thought of consequences for human and planetary wellbeing. Jimmy's mother Sharon is seen suffering from severe depression, when she is unable to change the system within which her husband and Jimmy are both active participants. This ultimately leads to her rebelling and finally escaping the Compounds. In her flight from the 'cage' of the Compound she also sets free Jimmy's pet 'rakunk'—a Compound created biotechnological amalgamation or 'splice' of a rat and a skunk. As Jimmy was really fond of the rakunk, he remains disturbed by his mother's actions for a long time. It haunts Jimmy that she would do something like this in addition to taking on the status of a rebel who is always on the run, hunted by the CorpSeCorps. However, as we continue reading *Oryx and Crake*, we

[26] See Note 296 of Introduction to the thesis, explaining the BlyssPluss pandemic in O*ryx and Crake.*

[27] The specific characteristics of these biotechnologically created beings with certain human characteristics has been discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[28] See Note 24 above. Also see pp 19 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[29] Ernst Friedrich Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as If People Mattered* (United Kingdom: Random House, 2011), 24.

[30] See Note 300 of Introduction to the thesis for an explanation of CorpSeCorps.

realize that her act of setting the rakunk free is also her physical expression of protest against the research and development Jimmy's dad was engaged in—'splicing' animals for profit based purposes, without considering the dangers of such a scientific enterprise, to the extent of embedding human neo-cortex tissue in pig brains and creating creatures called 'pigoons'!

Joanna Macy and Molly Brown see the 'Industrial Growth Society' as the cause of worldwide suffering, fostering the poisons of 'greed', 'aggression' and 'delusion' in the form of 'consumerism', 'military-industrial complex' and 'state and corporate controlled media'.[31] Macy and Brown refer to Lester Brown's apt analysis of the state of the global economy to that of a "continually growing cancer," that "eventually destroys its life support systems by destroying its host,"[32] the Earth. In *Oryx and Crake,* Atwood describes a similar response through Amanda's roommates, who are vocal about their dislike of Compounds and the culture propagated by them. They are also fatalists believing in the end of the human race once the food supply ran out.[33] Jimmy would ask them if they had the answers to the problem, but they would be unperturbed, explaining that the lack of correct solutions did not invalidate correct analysis of situations. Quite apocalyptic in their analysis and imagination, they would even suggest the absence of any solution at all: "Human society, they claimed was a sort of monster, its main by-products being corpses and rubble. It never learned, it made the same cretinous mistakes over and over, trading short-term gain for long-term pain."[34] Amanda's roommates compare human

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[31] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects.*

[32] Lester Brown, *State of the World 1998: A Worldwatch Institute Report on Progress Toward a Sustainable Society* (Norton: 1998) in Macy, *Coming Back to Life,* 35. See also Lester Brown, *Full Planet, Empty Plates: The New Geopolitics of Food Scarcity* (NY and London: Norton, 2012).

[33] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 2003 (London: Virago, 2013), 285.

[34] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 285.

actions on earth to that of a giant slug eating its way through all other beings on this planet and defecating plastic and other junk. While it is a startling image, it is very striking in terms of its accuracy in describing the Anthropocene and resource-guzzling humans!

The utopian nostalgia for a world less or not at all transformed by humans is seen in the Gardener's hymns and Adam One's sermons on Feast Days. It is interesting to note how Adam One in *The Year of the Flood* sees an analogy between the Fall of Man and his loss of the garden of Eden and Man's growing distance from nature, which is akin to a 'fall' from grace. As Toby recollects, Adam One portrays this Fall as "multidimensional."[35] He elaborates, "The ancestral primates fell out of the trees; then they fell from vegetarianism into meat-eating. Then they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology…"[36] Therefore in his discourse the Fall was an ongoing process as humans are increasingly distanced from their natural selves and also their basic sense of what is good for the planet and therefore their own race, in the long run. This loss of sensitivity also directly translates into the loss of simple joys and fulfillment. While technological knowledge has increased rapidly, "…sucked into the well of knowledge, you could only plummet, learning more and more, but not getting any happier."[37] This is specially seen reflected in Compound life in the first book of the trilogy in Jimmy and Crake's childhood experiences, as they are flooded with gizmos, but also a constant sense of aching emptiness. While Jimmy is more articulate about it compared to Crake, the latter is seen haunted by the spectre of this lost happiness, when he is seen seeking the source of happiness while designing the 'Crakers'. He tries to genetically design them as satisfied beings who shall not need to

[35] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 224.

[36] *Atwood,* 224.

[37] *Atwood,* 224.

acquire anything to find 'happiness'. They are satisfied with very little and cannot comprehend the need to own or hoard at all. Jimmy as Snowman recognizes the difference between himself and the Crakers, observing "…what he's got they'll never catch. They're immune from him,"[38] signifying the human tendency towards incessant acquisition as a trait that has been apparently eliminated from this new race of genetically engineered beings. This is an extreme example of radical change taken to its absolute limit where the species itself requires to be changed to save the planet![39] Through the Crakers and the pandemic, Atwood depicts romantic, utopian visions taken to their extreme possibilities which make us question whether the fault lies in humans as a species who need to be thus housebroken"[40] and revamped to save their own habitat.

The over consumption of the present described in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, can be seen in the urgency of Adam One's sermon on Fish Day in *The Year of the Flood*. He stretches the Fisherman analogy[41] in the Bible to describe the decimation of marine ecology. He calls the

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[38] *Atwood,* 181.

[39] An element of Radical Environmentalism that Bron Taylor points out is a sentiment that the "preagricultural, foraging societies were superior, ecologically appropriate and socially egalitarian."In search of this ideal, we see Crake designing his new race of beings as similarly ecologically appropriate and preagricultural. The Earth First! slogan "Back to the Pleistocene!" is taken to its extreme limit by Crake, showcasing possible variants of Radical Environmentalism. Bron Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 41. See also Jeremiah Gorsline and Freeman House for their coinage of the term "future primitive" in 1974. "Future Primitive," *Home! A Bioregional Reader*, ed. Van Andruss, Christopher Plant, Judith Plant and Eleanor Wright (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1990), 39-41. First published in *North Pacific Rim Alive!* (San Francisco: Planet Drum Foundation, 1974).

[40] The paradox that man though being a part of 'nature' must be changed/modified/altered, even 'housebroken' according to Hannes Bergthaller, so that he does not further cause harm to the ecology that sustains him! The figure of the Crakers demarcates this, as Crake has in a sense bred "the wildness out of man, creating a species of human beings that will be congenitally unable to soil the planetary oikos." "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." *English Studies* 91, no.7 (2010): 735, doi: 10.1080/0013838X.2010.518042.

[41] See Luke 5:1-11, *KJV, BibleGateWay*, accessed May 11, 2020, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+5&version=KJV, where Jesus startles the fisherman Simon Peter and others with a huge catch of fish, and tells them that "from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

'fish' "an apt symbol, for Jesus first called as his apostles two fishermen, surely chosen by him to help conserve the Fish population. They were told to be fishers of men instead of being fishers of Fish…"[42] Adam One is led to reflect on human folly that has brought the climate and the ecosystem supporting humans and numerous other beings to such a crisis, where they can only remember with grief "the Great Dead Zone in the Gulf of Mexico; and the Great Dead Zone in Lake Erie; and the Great Dead Zone in the Black Sea; and the desolate Grand Banks of Newfoundland, where the Cod once abounded; and the Great Barrier Reef, now dying and bleaching white and breaking apart."[43] At the same time, there is hope that no more "may vanish from the Earth by Human Agency."[44]

The most important message from Macy and Brown therefore is the possibility of still altering the state of life on the planet by virtue of the choices we can still make. In a way this is similar to the way the 'ustopia' as a form functions in Atwood's writing, as discussed in the first chapter, by alerting us of possible horrific futures and yet suggesting the possibility of averting that by change in the present. Macy and Brown's words are optimistic as they proclaim that "we have the scientific knowledge and technical means" by which we can "meet our needs without destroying our life-support system."[45] They also recognize the phenomenal effort being put in by people from across the planet, who are "choosing" life of the ecosystem and therein of themselves and future generations by creating community gardens, restoring rivers and streams, obstructing oil and gas pipelines that threaten ecosystems, introducing solar power, their efforts

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[42] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 234.

[43] *Atwood,* 235.

[44] *Atwood,* 235.

[45] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 36.

characterized by a constant process of "organizing, learning and taking action."[46] While the doomsayers would perhaps see all these individual and community efforts as 'ineffectual' in the face of grave ecological crisis today, according to Macy and Brown, the actions of these committed people would rather be seen as "epochal" by future generations, as the bedrock of what is called the 'The Great Turning'. A similar sense of hope is seen expressed by the Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood*, who see the inevitable 'Waterless Flood'[47] as such a 'great turning' point in the history of humanity that shall usher in a new world order.

In their workshops called 'The Work that Reconnects,' Macy and Brown explore the commonly accepted narratives or 'stories' regarding the world inhabited by us today. The story of 'Business as Usual' is the one narrated *by* and *for* the 'Industrial Growth Society.'[48] The central trait of this storyline is to insist that no change is required in our present lifestyles, instead economic growth and profit is suggested as the panacea for troubles plaguing the planet today! The second story is the one of 'The Great Unravelling' that is the central narrative expounded by most environmental scientists and researchers, activists and journalists who focus intensely on disasters caused by the 'Business as Usual' storyline on "biological, ecological, economic and social systems."[49] The third narrative is told by those who acknowledge 'The Great Unravelling', but do not want it to be the final truth of this planet. This storyline named as "The Great Turning" seeks and articulates "new and creative human responses that enable this

[46] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 36.

[47] See Note 92 of Chapter 1 of this thesis that discusses the term 'Waterless Flood' used by the Gardeners to refer to the impending apocalypse and the biblical resonances of the term adopted by them.

[48] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 38.

[49] Macy and Brown, 37.

transition," from an 'Industrial Growth Society' to a 'Life-Sustaining Society.'[50] As explained by Macy and Brown, this brave and optimistic outlook requires collective will and action, "for the sake of life on Earth."[51] All who work towards this goal which is larger than personal gain, are termed 'activists' by them.

It is interesting to note the parallel co-existence of these narrative strains in Atwood's writings as well, thereby reinforcing the significance of these commonly held assumptions and their impact on the way we perceive our ecosystem and our present planetary crisis. The capitalist and profit centric enterprises are seen at their acme in the corporate controlled pharmaceutical and technological industries in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. The CorpSeCorps and the scientists inhabiting the different Compounds propagate the first storyline identified by Macy and Brown--'Business as Usual.' The individuals believing in this narrative are seen as indiscriminately playing with the 'toy box'[52] of technology through genetic engineering and working for pharmaceutical and corporate profit, without caring for the effects on people, agriculture patterns and planetary ecology in the long term. As seen in the first chapter, individuals within the Industrial Growth Society depicted in the story-world of *Oryx and Crake* who protest against 'Business as Usual' are killed or forced to flee, such as Crake's father and mother and Jimmy's mother Sharon respectively. Characters representing the second form of belief--'The Great Unravelling'—are also often tied to the third, 'The Great Turning', as they

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[50] Macy and Brown, 37.

[51] Macy and Brown, 37.

[52] Atwood is seen to be describing biotechnology as "the biggest toy box in the world." Atwood also clarifies that biotechnology in itself was not 'dangerous', itself being "neutral". Rather it was "people's fears and desires," that could make its uses "evil" according to Atwood, once business interests started influencing biotechnological goals. Sabine Louet, "Profile: Margaret Atwood." *Nature Biotechnology* 23, no.2 (2005): 163. doi: 10.1038/nbt0205-163.

both grasp the disasters wrought by state and capitalist enterprise as well as attempt to formulate innovative methods of overcoming those anthropogenic disasters. They represent different forms of environmental activism, as Atwood takes us through the many shades of green in her trilogy, specially in *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*. The God's Gardeners form a central conduit of environmentalist thought, as they provide a space of refuge to all those challenging the ideology of the Compounds, with Adam One continually alerting his followers about the damage wrought by humans and possible ways of changing lifestyles and thought patterns, based on reinterpretations of biblical teachings to combat the root causes of such ecological degradation. The scientists calling themselves MaddAddamites and operating across the world, are seen involved in technological acts of sabotage against the corporate controlled industries. Amanda, once a part of the Gardeners, becomes a bio-installation artist, whose installations attempt to create awareness regarding extinction of species.[53] At the extreme end of this spectrum, lies Crake's ambiguous figure who acts as though he believes in 'Business as Usual,' but works towards 'The Great Turning,' though the methods he employs are radical and shocking. Hence, "anguish for the world," "scientific breakthroughs" and "ancestral teachings"[54] form the parallel 'rivers' that run together in the figures of these different characters or groups, describing the different stories told and enacted upon in the world today, which shall

[53] Amanda and her bio-installations has been analysed in more detail in the section examining the representation of Species Extinction by Atwood, in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[54] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 45. Three possible ways in which our perception of the planet we inhabit can 'shift' are identified by Macy and Brown as "anguish for the world," "scientific breakthroughs" and "ancestral teachings," which they refer to as three rivers. To elaborate a little, the first refers to the grief felt by us on viewing the destruction of the ecosystem of which we are an intrinsic part, the second refers to the scientific theories such as systems theory and quantum physics that create greater awareness of a larger indivisible universe and the third remembers the mystical and ancestral wisdom that have always experienced the world as a sacred whole. These are seen as the rivers inspiring 'The Great Turning' towards ecological wisdom and aware living, some aspects of which have been taken up in greater detail in the course of this chapter.

be discussed further in this chapter, delineating Atwood's representation of the possibilities and loopholes of every approach to environmental crisis.

Activist action to break with a capitalist world order is also classified in the form of three movements by Macy and Brown, which are also seen in uncanny alignment with events and actions in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. 'Holding Actions in Defence of Life'[55] refer to the vigils, marches, legal action against corporate and government agencies, whistle blowing, creative articulations like books and films and public talks on raising awareness, creating study groups and even blockading environmentally harmful construction work. These actions, in Macy and Brown's definition, "attempt to hold the line, to buy time for systemic changes to take place,"[56] thereby referring to the short-term action taken by environmentalist groups, as they hope to pave the way for long-term systemic change. This is reflected in the Gardeners' marches, or the green activists' protest against the GMO Happicuppa coffee bean developed and marketed by the CorpSeCorps, the bio art installations by Amanda as well as the acts of ecotage by the MaddAddamites across the world.[57] Sharon's act of collecting sensitive information regarding the Compounds and passing it on to the Gardeners, can also be seen as such a form of 'Holding Action in Defence of Life'. While the information is outdated and the Gardeners are not able to make much use of it, her intent and actions add to the movement.

The Second Movement in activist action according to Macy and Brown, "Transforming

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[55]Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 38.

[56] Macy and Brown, 38.

[57] The acts of ecotage (eco-terrorist sabotage) by the MaddAddamites represented by Atwood in *The Year of the Flood* will be discussed in greater detail in the latter half of this chapter, when discussing the different strains of Radical Environmentalism and compared to actual historical instances of similar ecotage across the world by revolutionary environmentalist groups.

the Foundations of our Common Life"[58] is significant as it attempts to analyse and understand the mechanics of corporate capitalism and the structures of state and law apparatus supporting its existence and at the same time attempts to generate new structures on the basis of the inherent rights of people to govern the foundations of their 'common life' bound with the planet, their home. This is a more philosophical approach to the challenges facing our ecosystem, however it is extremely important as it is necessary to understand "what indentures us to an insatiable economy that uses our larger body—the earth—as supply house and sewer?"[59] Without addressing the root cause behind such enslavement it is impossible to move towards larger freedom. In their analysis of corporate capitalism and creation of intentional sustainable communities that attempt to dismantle pre-existing ideologies regarding life on earth, the Gardeners in the *MaddAddam* trilogy specially describe such emergent activist action. It is important to note the similarities that emerge with the deep ecology movement and its ecosophy in the way the Gardeners attempt the third movement, which is a "Shift in Perception and Values," intrinsic to the success and long term sustainability of the second.

'The Ecological Self' and the God's Gardeners

Deep ecology as a philosophy and as a movement tries to describe what it means to be interdependent with all earthly life. Arne Naess introduced the term "deep ecology" in 1973, in contrast with 'reform environmentalism'[60] which remains superficial in treating the 'symptoms' of ecological degradation, while not addressing the 'fundamental premises of the Industrial

[58] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 40.

[59] Macy and Brown, 41.

[60] Macy and Brown, 69.

Growth Society.'[61] In the abstract to his essay, based on his lecture delivered at an International conference on Florence in 1987 Physis*/To Inhabit the Earth*, Naess identifies the requirement of the hour to be ecosophy or 'Eco-wisdom' as he terms it, citing that ecology or 'Eco-science' is not enough.[62] He states this as a response to the 'narrowly utilitarian outlook' towards the natural world that mechanistic science derived from 'Descartes, Bacon, and Galilei to Newton'[63] While such a utilitarian approach may be seen as advantageous by modernity, it has obviously also resulted in "alienation" from the "rich, spontaneous experience of nature."[64]

Macy and Brown also consider it necessary that we understand deep ecology not as a dogma or ideology but rather as a process that 'motivates' people to ask 'deeper questions' about their life in 'relation to life on earth.'[65] Thus the "questions act as a solvent"[66] in Macy and Brown's terminology, propelling individuals to make informed 'choices' that can impact the wellbeing of the ecosystem significantly.[67] The distinction between 'dogma' and 'solvent' is specially necessary as we see a close overlap between many deep ecology and ecotheological ideas in the course of this chapter and attempt to analyse Adam One's sermons in light of these philosophical approaches. When analysed as a method, deep ecology, both as "a movement and

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[61] Macy and Brown, 69.

[62] Arne Naess, "From Ecology to Ecosophy," 185.

[63] Naess, 185.

[64] Naess, 185.

[65] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 71.

[66] Macy and Brown, 71.

[67] Arne Naess insists on the importance of an 'ecosophy' that would rather "outline how to inhabit the Earth" while "conserving her long range, full richness and diversity of life as a value in itself." Therefore deep ecology is posited as an ecosophy of theory and praxis in response to the "man/nature alienation" created by modern science. Naess, "From Ecology to Ecosophy," 186.

a way of thinking,"[68] seeks to find the means for alleviating the root cause of our ecological problems. Usually defined in contrast to conventional environmentalism[69] which is viewed as "shallow," offering only superficial and "band-aid" solutions to the planet's environmental crises, deep ecology is characterized by asking 'deeper' questions" and aiming at "more long-range solutions."[70]

By adopting an ecocentric vision instead of an anthropocentric one,[71] deep ecologists value non-human entities as ends in themselves and not in terms of their 'use' to humans. Naess specially highlights the right of every organic being to 'Self-realization'[72] or blossoming in their

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[68] David Abram, "Depth Ecology," *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, eds. Bron R. Taylor and Jeffrey Kaplan (London and NY: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 469.

[69] Environmentalisms that seek to 'manage' environmental resources through institutional reform and regulation and development of new technologies are seen as 'shallow' by deep ecologists like Arne Naess , versus those that call for an intrinsic greening of consciousness and culture. A similar differentiation can be seen in Ricky Lawton and Murray Rudd, as they discuss two approaches that narratives about the environment and for the environment can take—the EBM and ES narratives. The former refers to 'ecosystem-based management' and the latter stands for Ecosystem services. EBM approach of course looks t at the ecosystem as an interconnected organism, while ES seeks to quantify the returns from this ecosystem. The two automatically lead to very different perceptions and impact in terms of policy framing or action generation. Arne Naess,"The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement. A Summary," *Inquiry* 16, no. 1-4 (1973): 95-100, doi: 10.1080/00201747308601682; Ricky N. Lawton and Murray A. Rudd. "A Narrative Policy Approach to Environmental Conservation," *AMBIO* 43, no.7 (2014):850. doi: 10.1007/s13280-014-0497-8.

[70] David Abram, "Depth Ecology," *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, 469.

[71] In Naess' writings, "the deep ecological movement with its ecosophies is said to be biocentric or ecocentric rather than anthropocentric." Naess, "From Ecology to Ecosophy," 189.

[72] As David Rothenberg points out in his "Introduction: Ecosophy T-from intuition to system," *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy,* the Norwegian word used by Naess is '*Selv-realisering'*, which would translate as 'self-realising'(9)and is therefore an "active condition , not a place one can reach,"(9) for in Naess' conception, "complete Self-realization would require the realization of all." Naess describes this widening of 'self' with a capital 'S', signifying a greater whole which is seen as the self, discovering "parts of nature," as "parts of ourselves."(10) This becomes possible, through 'identification' or *'identifisering'* as he terms it in Norwegian, which is seen in its "widest interpretation" as "love."(11) However Naess is also careful to explain that such 'love' does not mean a subsuming of nature within our own self-definition and also not a complete loss of self-identity. This apparent paradox is solved by Naess through the articulation of the concept of '*naturens egenverdi'* or the 'intrinsic value of nature.' This realization of our individual selves as part of a larger self and yet retaining the diversity of selves is what Naess describes as 'Self-realization' that makes all altruism unnecessary as the ecosystem and its interests become our own interests and no external ethics is then necessary. This realization is also central towards moving to a conception of the 'Ecological Self' that we shall be discussing in the course of this chapter. See Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans.

own way to their highest potential. Thus the change demanded by deep ecology as a solution to the environmental crisis, is one of transformation of consciousness and in turn that of socio-economic systems and evaluation of what is worthwhile in life—"*a substantial reorientation of our whole civilization*."[73] According to Lisa Garforth, deep ecology philosophy is completely utopian in its vision and desire.[74] While appearing impractical and too imaginative for many critics, its value perhaps lies in its approach to the crisis, and the call for transformative and radical change, that the sustainability or shallow environmentalist models severely compromise by aligning with institutional capitalist structures.

However this movement has been often criticized and marginalized over the years as a certain arrogance is seen in its categorization of certain approaches as 'shallow' and others as 'deep'. David Abram's analysis of the idea behind 'deep ecology' makes us approach this hermeneutic in a completely novel manner though. As he explains, Naess' ideas were little more "mysterious"[75] than they are generally described. The inherent humility of this movement where humans were unafraid to look upon themselves as just another "earthly animal,"[76] is what attracted so many talented activists to deep ecology. This humility, in Abram's analysis, is

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David Rothenberg (1989; repr. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001). Also see Arne Naess, "Self-realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," Keith Memorial Lecture, Murdoch University, Western Australia, 1986, *The Trumpeter* 4, no.3 (1987): 35-41.

[73] Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: Outline of an Ecosophy*, trans. David Rothenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

[74] Garforth, *Green Utopias*, 55.

[75] Abram, "Depth Ecology," *Alliance for Wild Ethics*, 2020, accessed February 15, 2020, https://wildethics.org/essay/depth-ecology/. This version of the essay by Abram draws upon the one written by him in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, but is slightly different as he adds some astute reflections on the subject in this online version of "Depth Ecology."

[76] Abram, "Depth Ecology," *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature,* 469.

coupled with a sense of responsibility as a member of this biota and also a constant sense of awe, "in the face of a world that exceeds all our designs, the delicious and sometimes terrifying awareness of being human in a much more-than-human world."[77] This immersive experience of wonder is highlighted by Abram as he seeks to redefine deep ecology as truly 'depth ecology', the meaning of deep having larger connotations than immediately meets the eye. He suggests that 'deep' here is in contrast with 'flat' rather than 'shallow', suggesting that an objective perception of the world we inhabit is deeply inadequate and at the root of all ecological problems as it snuffs out the experience of belonging to and being part of a community and creates a sense of hierarchy.[78] On the other hand, when viewed with depth, only possible when we are a part of something, rather than apart from it, this same ecology takes on a new significance and experience. This "embedded" manner of "seeing (and feeling) that gazes into the depths of a nature that encompasses and permeates us,"[79] is what deep ecology really implies according to Abram.

Naess' 1989 exposition on the idea of embeddedness, years before Abram, aims at humans reaching a point of maturity to the extent where they experience "a high-level of positive identification with life forms and a resulting deep seated need to protect them and enjoy their presence,"[80] therefore valuing oneself as much as every other self. Thus in this state of experience, or realization, anthropocentrism and biocentrism collapse into each other, owing to the selves becoming non-different in value/worth. Naess describes this as the 'most ambitious

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[77] Abram, "Depth Ecology," *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature,* 470.

[78] Abram, "Depth Ecology, *Alliance for Wild Ethics.*

[79] Abram, "Depth Ecology," *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature,* 470.

[80] Naess, "From Ecology to Ecosophy," 189.

goal' of ecosophy which would eliminate the "thought and feeling of a fundamental cleavage between man/environment and spiritual/physical."[81] The experience of the "Ecological Self"[82] that crosses the limitation of the skin, is necessarily the acme of deep ecological thought and praxis**.** This shift in sense of identity created at this moment is 'lifesaving' according to Macy and Brown, specially for activists and individuals having to face the many 'socio-political and ecological traumas lying ahead.'[83] The two common reflexes of 'panic' or 'paralysis', discussed in the form of denial and desensitization in the first chapter, are overcome more easily with this expanded sense of identity and alternative approach to staying afloat in an event of crisis. Macy and Brown make a very significant point in this regard, recognizing how natural it is to give in to these responses: "No one is immune to doubt, denial or distraction in relation to the severity of our situation, nor to doubt about our power to change it."[84] However, the real danger identified by them, which is greater than the severity of climate change or ecosystem degradation, is "the deadening of response."[85] By addressing the importance of spirit, hope and resolve in their theorization, Macy and Brown create a new dimension to the way in which we view deep ecology practices, radical environmentalist action as well as ecotheological approaches to the present crisis. Spirit and hope become the most important factors that can sustain the 'Great Turn' envisaged by ecosophical thinkers like Macy, Brown and Naess.

Bill Devall and George Sessions highlight this aspect of deep ecology as well, suggesting

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[81] Naess, "From Ecology to Ecosophy," 189.

[82] Naess, 189.

[83] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 44.

[84] Macy and Brown, 48.

[85] Macy and Brown, 48.

the source of all transformation would lie in human experiential realization of the 'self-in-self' –ourselves as rooted in and part of the ecosystem, the feeling that "no one is saved unless we all are saved."[86] John Seed describes the shift, where the internal dialogue changes from "I am protecting the rainforest" to "I am part of the rainforest protecting myself. I am that part of the rainforest recently emerged into thinking."[87] He identifies this transition as a 'spiritual one', connecting it to deep ecological ideas of expansion of sense of self and loss of feeling of separation or isolation from the natural world. Thus the ethical imperative manifests automatically when the shift in perception to an 'Ecological Self' occurs. However, as seen in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, this ideal is not seen as possible by all environmentalists. While Crake does not repose much hope on the improvement of the human species, and takes the idea of humans as a biological species like any other to its extreme logic by attempting to eradicate humans including himself, Adam One in his sermons holds on to the hope of humans reaching such a state of expanded awareness.[88] An ecotheological expression of such expanded awareness is also seen in St. Francis of Assisi's[89] attempt at "enfraternization" of "the entire

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[86] Bill Devall and George Sessions*, Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (Salt Lake City, UT: Peregrine Smith, 1985), 7.

[87] John Seed and Dailan Pugh, *Thinking Like a Mountain: Towards a Council of all Beings* (New Society Publ., 1988), 36. Also quoted in Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered,* 199; David R. Keller, "Deep Ecology," *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy,* eds. J. Baird Callicott and Robert Frodeman (USA: Macmillan, 2009), 207.

[88] Naess speaks of contemporary ecosophy as an evolving paradigm, acknowledging multiplicity of views regarding how to inhabit the Earth. He also recognizes that the premises of this ecosophy may derive both from philosophers like "Aristotle, Spinoza, Hegel, Bergson, Whitehead, Heidegger" as also from different religions, as seen in the inspiring "Assisi Declarations" of 1986 on man and nature. This is an important observation as ecotheology and deep ecology practices are often seen as enriched by each other, their close association remarkably represented in Adam One's classic sermons. Naess, "From Ecology to Ecosophy," 186.

[89] St Francis of Assisi is recognized as the medieval patron saint of animals and ecology. St. Francis' conception of the interconnectedness of Creation, was however deeply rooted in his own salvific experiences, seeing Creation "as a catalyst for mystical experience." Paul Lachance, "St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Toward the Environment by Roger D. Sorrell," Review, *Church History* 59, no. 3 (1990): 395, doi: 10.2307/3167753. Pope John Paul II enacted the beatification of Francis of Assisi in 1979, on Lynn White's proposal. See Pope John Paul II, "The Ecological Crisis: A Common

created order."[90] Adam One's ideas are strongly reminiscent of St. Francis of Assisi's, especially in the way in which he tries to combine tradition and innovation, even providing a re-interpretation of St. Francis of Assisi's recollection of St. Anthony's act of preaching to the fish in Rimini.[91] He acknowledges that the Saint was according due respect to God's garden under water, but the Saint did not seem to have realized that they needed no sermon like humans, as the fish were communing "directly with God."[92] Here Adam One is seen trying to de-throne humans from their assumed hierarchy in the Order of Creation, by explaining how every other creature and being was actually superior, being in harmony with the natural order, unlike humans.[93] On the occasion of April Fish, celebrated by the Gardeners to remind themselves of human foolishness in destruction of nature and its reserves as well as to remember their "kinship with the Fishes, who appear to us mute and foolish,"[94] whereas, in truth "we are all mute and foolish"[95] in the eyes of God, according to Adam One. The instinctive knowledge and wisdom possessed by the non-human creatures of the universe is a subject that Adam One returns to on

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Responsibility," *"And God Saw That It Was Good": Catholic Theology and the Environment*, eds. Drew Christiansen, SJ, and Walter Grazer (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996).

[90] Lachance, "St. Francis of Assisi and Nature," 395.

[91] Brother Ugolino, "Of the Miracle which God Performed when St. Anthony Being at Rimini, Preached to the Fishes of the Sea," Chapter XL, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis of Assisi,* trans. Arthur Livingston, accessed June 20, 2020, https://ccel.org/ccel/ugolino/flowers/flowers.iii.xl.html

[92] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 234.

[93] Adam One repeatedly harps on the foolishness of assumed human superiority as "what in us is belief and faith, in the other Creatures is inborn knowledge." *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 279.

[94] *Atwood,* 235.

[95] *Atwood,* 235.

the Feast of Serpent Wisdom.[96] He highlights the superiority of such instinctive knowledge in serpents, who feel and know what humans strive to comprehend through "elaborate intellectual frameworks."[97] In the face of the "Divine vastness that encircles us," Adam One points out the ineffectiveness of human reasoning that is compared to a "pin dancing on the head of an angel."[98] Faith and belief in God too is presented as 'labour' that humans strive to possess, which is naturally present in the sparrow, rakunk,[99] nematode, mollusc, mo'hair,[100] and liobam[101] as "all are held in the Palm of His Hand."[102] It is significant that Adam One includes the biotechnologically created splices[103] like rakunks, mo'hairs and liobams in his list of species being held in the "palm" of God, even though they have been created in human engineered laboratories.

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[96] *Atwood, 277.* The Feast of Serpent Wisdom refers to *Matthew 10:16, " Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. " KJV, BibleGateway*, accessed May 15, 2020, *https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2010%3A16&version=KJV.*

[97] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 279.

[98] *Atwood,* 279.

[99] See Note 161 and pp 179 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[100] While Mohair is the fabric derived from hair of Angora goats that is known for its sheen , luster and durability, in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, sheep are specifically biotechnologically designed to supply lustrous fibres for implanting human hair. These specially 'spliced' sheep called Mo'hairs come in various colours, to cater to different hair colour demands. It is Atwood's way of depicting the extremes to which an anthropocentric and consumerist society can go, to provide for its incessant demand for youth and beauty.

[101] The 'liobams' are also biotechnologically 'spliced' creatures, combining the genetic traits of the lion and the lamb, created by the Lion and Wolf Isaiahists in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. These fanatical environmentalists use the scientific knowledge generated in the compounds to fashion their own projected creature of the future, who shall bring alive the biblical dream of the co-existence of the lamb and the lion. Note that the God's Gardeners strive to be seen as different from these 'extreme' cults, the politics of which shall be discussed in the 'Radical Environmentalism' section of this chapter. See also *Isaiah 11:6, KJV*, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them," that inspires the Lion and Wolf Isaiahists in Atwood's trilogy.

[102] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 279.

[103] See Note 161 and pp 179 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

The longing for a "wholeness of Being" [104] that is possessed by the serpent is in some ways similar to the deep ecology concept of the Ecological Self that apprehends the ecosystem as the self, and not apart from the individual self. The Hymn "God Gave Unto the Animals" accompanying this sermon is instructive in this longing voiced by Adam One: "Oh, would I were like Serpents, wise--/To sense the wholeness of the Whole."[105] This 'wisdom' is characterized by the ability to apprehend the 'whole' but "with a swift and ardent Soul," unmediated by the "thinking Brain." [106] Hence through his sermon and the Hymn from the *God's Gardeners Oral Hymnbook*, Adam One presents an ecotheological and biocentric vision of the world where anthropocentric reasoning becomes the greatest barrier to the experience of divine grace, and in parallel invokes respect for all those creatures like the fish, serpents and even the human engineered non-humans who exist in the lap of grace, according to him.

A significant aspect of Macy and Brown's workshop 'The Work that Reconnects', is that the participants are given a 'choice' to decide which story regarding their planetary ecosystem they would like to believe. This highlights the responsibility that humans have because they have the faculty of choosing their beliefs and their path of action. In that sense the naming of the 'Anthropocene' takes on a new significance as humans have the ability to both damage and revive the ecosystem they inhabit. In a similar way, Atwood's writing also implicates the reader in making those significant choices regarding their present when faced with the possibilities of horrific futures. Wendell Berry identifies the "great work of our time"

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[104] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 279.

[105] *Atwood,* 281.

[106] *Atwood,* 281.

as the required shift from the 'Technozoic' era to the 'Ecozoic' era.[107] This is very similar to Macy and Brown's idea of the urgency to shift from the 'Industrial Growth Society' to a 'Life Sustaining Society', which she identifies as 'The Great Turning'. The God's Gardeners in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* really survive on their belief of such a great turnaround and shift, which they name as the 'Waterless Flood', the only way in which the envisaged transformation can come to the Earth—in the form of an apocalypse.[108] This seems to be the only way out, given the human propensity for violence. Adam One in one of his last recorded sermons, whispering to the remaining[109] Gardeners, wonders —"Why are we so addicted to the shedding of blood? Whenever we are tempted to become puffed up, and to see ourselves as superior to all other Animals, we should reflect on our own brutal history."[110] The Gardeners, at this juncture of persecution by the CorpSeCorps, look forward to a new dawn post the Waterless Flood that is such a central part of their discourse. Adam One asserts, "Take comfort in the thought that this history will soon be swept away by the Waterless Flood. Nothing will remain of the exfernal world but decaying wood and rusting metal implements; and over these the kudzu and other vines will climb; and birds and animals will nest in…"[111] The reality of this vision is seen post the 'Waterless Flood' by the surviving Gardeners as non-humans multiply in the absence of humans.

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[107] Wendell Berry, "Life is a Miracle," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 27, no.1 (2000): 83-97. https://www.communio-icr.com/articles/view/life-is-a-miracle.

[108] The first chapter of this thesis discusses the use of the hermeneutic of the apocalypse by Atwood as an essential part of her econarratological framework.

[109] The rest of the Gardeners having spilt up in the face of persecution or died at the hands of the CorpSeCorps after the eco-terrorist attack on the Rarity Restaurant chain by the Wolf Isaiahists.

[110] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 372.

[111] Atwood, 372.

Wendell Berry's 'Ecozoic' era may however be understood as a 'life-affirming' one. It is important to note that Crake's vision of the 'Ecozoic' is very different. He creates the Crakers as a response to the urgency of the shift required. However, this aspect of Crake's environmentalism is radically different from the Gardeners who do not preclude humans from the 'Ecozoic' era that they wish for unlike Crake who sees the 'Ecozoic' as impossible in the presence of humans with their inherent traits of limitless greed and exploitative tendencies. Thus the Crakers are created as peace loving beings requiring limited earth resources to survive, almost blending in with their natural environment. It is Crake's vision of the 'Ecozoic' and his perception of true happiness that has personally eluded him through his own life.

Therefore, an essential and undeniable part of choosing 'the Great Turning' is in letting oneself experience the pain of the planet and our own loss, in this planetary time. Many try to cut themselves off from this foreboding and grief, as seen in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, in Snowman's reminiscences of times past and opportunities lost where he might have intervened, Toby's memories of desensitization in the face of imminent danger, and Crake's apparent nonchalance and deep-seated seething anger against the socio-economic structure he inhabits and participates in.[112] As Macy and Brown explain, "No one is exempt from that pain, anymore than one could exist alone and self-sufficient in empty space."[113] The pain is so acute because we are part of a larger whole, like the cells of a larger body: "When the body is traumatized, we sense that trauma too."[114] Inseparably connected to the world, through the air we breathe, the

[112]The particulars of such experiences of desensitization and reminiscence of opportunities lost by characters in *Oryx and Crake* has been discussed in detail in Chapter 1. In particular see pp 145, 155-159 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[113] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 50.

[114] Macy and Brown, 50.

food we consume, water we drink, the "currents of matter, energy and information…flow through us and sustain us as interconnected open systems."[115] This "greening of the self"[116] that is thus 'co-extensive with other beings and the life of our planet,"[117] that renders "moral exhortation irrelevant,"[118] is possible only with an opening of the self to experiencing collective ecological grief that in turn breaks down the "delusion" of the separate self.[119] The grief and pain experienced has a purpose, similar to pain in any part of our human bodies which give warning signals and alert us to some part of the system requiring our attention and healing. Thus the problem aggravates when this pain is repressed and the feedback loop that would propel necessary remedial response at individual and collective levels is blocked.

Facing ecological grief also leads to asking these significant questions regarding our 'selves' in the larger Ecological Self and facilitating self-discovery or self-realization, in Naess's terms. Thus 'positive disintegration'[120] or "the loss of previously valid norms," while "painful

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[115] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 50.

[116] Macy's terminology for Naess' concept of the 'Ecological Self'. Joanna Macy, "Greening of the Self", *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, ed. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee (California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), 108.

[117] Macy, "Greening of the Self," 108.

[118] Macy, "Greening of the Self," 114. This is akin to the 'moral ecology' that Robert Bellah insists we must acquire, for its unique transformative potential for ourselves and the planet and also similar to John Seed's idea of the expanded sense of self. See Note 88 and pp 203 above. See Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 284. For a more detailed discussion on 'moral ecology', see Allen D. Hertzke, "The Theory of Moral Ecology," *The Review of Politics* 60, no.4 (1998):629-660, doi:10.1017/S003467050005083X.

[119] Macy, "Greening of the Self," 110.

[120] Kazimierz Dabrowski, *Positive Disintegration* (np: Little Brown, 1964), referred to by Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 77. Also see Bill Tillier, *The Theory of Positive Disintegration by Kazimierz Dąbrowski*, accessed September 18, 2020, https://positivedisintegration.com/.

and confusing," is essential for "more adaptive understandings of self and world to arise."[121] Adam One in his sermons and reflections is seen striving to create such a transformative redefinition of the self, by constantly drawing his listeners' attention to the pain of loss of ecological balance and species diversity. He is also seen attempting to create an awareness of the interconnected matrix of life in the Gardener children and adults, to foster respect for all beings who co-exist to make human life possible on this planet. Adam One's sermon on Mole Day, attempts to make his listeners aware of the role of underground life in sustaining human life. While talking about earthworms and nematodes and dung beetles, his words veer towards a reflection on the countless micro-organisms that form a part of the human body, making our bodies function well, when in balance. He compares each person to a "Garden of sub-visual life forms."[122] Of course along with the friendly microorganisms, there are also those "nanobioforms we would prefer to be without, such as the Eyebrow Mite, the Hookworm….the Tick, not to mention the hostile bacteria and viruses."[123] Here Adam One tries to conjure faith in the inscrutable workings of God, as these unwanted creatures too "reside in the Eternal Mind,"[124] and are part of the web of Creation. There is increased awareness of the way life in the soil supports the Gardeners in their activities and life, the earthworms, nematodes and ants enriching the soil with their endless tilling. The medicinal properties of maggots, honey and spider's web are all remembered with gratitude in this sermon as is the natural process of decay and destruction post death, which too is hastened by these bacterial agents. Thus the Gardener

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[121] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 77.

[122] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 192.

[123] Atwood, 192.

[124] Atwood, 193.

ideology of 'returning Life to Life'[125] through the process of death is repeated at different times in the sermons and seen in the children's ironic discussions. In Pilar's[126] death the philosophy is actually played out by her desired burial in the park with a tree planted over her, returning element to element without sorrow.

Hence, Adam One's sermon tries to inculcate the consciousness of the Ecological Self that Naess describes or the extended sense of identity and interconnectedness that Macy and Brown strive to explain in their works. In feeling a part of all Life, the human being is seen as a 'Garden' of organisms, thereby upturning any hierarchy in the order of beings. The nomenclature of the cult---'God's Gardeners' takes on renewed significance for symbolizing the matrix of life that forms a garden. When we view the ecosystem using the lens of systems theory, it changes the way we see ourselves within the world we inhabit.[127] The most interesting feature of a system or a 'holon'[128] is its connection to other holons within which it is nested and its simultaneous ability to retain its particular nature through its self-regulating homoeostatic function. In Macy and Brown's analysis, the "holons form nested hierarchies, systems within

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[125] Adam One's sermon on Predator Day specially dwells on the conundrum, "which is more blessed, to eat or to be eaten? To flee or to chase? To give or to receive?" He concludes by suggesting that "Should your life be required of you, rest assured that it is required by life." Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 414-415.

[126] Pilar was one of the leading Eves, a mycologist and specialized in bee-keeping at the Edencliff Rooftop. She trains Toby in the art of beekeeping as well as the use of fungi and other herbs for medicinal use. When Pilar is dying of cancer, Toby notes that "Pilar believed that she was donating herself to the matrix of Life through her own volition," and is not sad. Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 214.

[127] Attracting our attention to General Systems Theory, Macy describes each system "from atom to galaxy" as a 'whole'. Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 65.

[128] A 'holon' describes something that is simultaneously a 'whole' and a 'part'. Arthur Koestler introduced the present use of the term in his book *The Ghost in the Machine*. See Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, 1967 (London: Penguin, 1990), 45, accessed November 24, 2020, Archive.org, *https://archive.org/details/ghostinmachine00koes/page/44/mode/2up?q=holon*

systems, circuits within circuits."[129] The way each holonic system maintains such a unique balance remaining open, processing matter and information passing through it and then transmuting the information to evolve itself yet always retaining its homoeostatic balance, which while dynamic, is yet stable and is relevant to my study of deep ecology premises and Gaia theory[130] which both rely intensely on foundational systems theory, and inform the philosophy espoused by Adam One in his sermons in *The Year of the Flood*. I particularly see the understanding of the holon as crucial to both comprehending and critically analyzing the 'Ecological Self' as well as for locating important indicators with which to view the Gardeners and their organization that attempts to create such a self-contained yet open system, in this chapter.

One central aspect of the holon is therefore its ability to constantly reproduce and maintain itself, even as it faces a barrage of information, matter and energy that threatens to

[129] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 65.

[130] Lovelock explains his use of the term 'Gaia' further in his Preface to *Gaia: A New Look on Life on Earth*, explaining that he was referring to the "entire surface of the Earth including life" as "a self-regulating entity"(ix). On reviewing the backlash faced from the scientific community for his poetic introduction to the subject in 1974, he concedes the importance of his second book on the subject *The Ages of Gaia* (1988), where he provides a more scientific exposition on the subject. However, as rightly noted by Jonathan Porrit, the concept of Gaia is too important for environmentalist thought, philosophy and action to be "conscripted by science"(Preface xiii). The poetic nature of the 1974 book helped capture people's imagination and emotions towards the world they inhabit, which too was necessary in world events, as it was not sufficient to only think of human wellbeing, separate from the planet. Jules Cashford in *Spiritual Ecology* suggests that the use of the term 'Gaia' "to describe a scientific hypothesis" which would have otherwise been called "systems theory"(131) might be indicative of a deeper layer of consciousness operating as the planet, of which human consciousness forms a part. Cashford analyses the Gaia hypothesis itself as a response or feedback produced by the larger ecosystem, "compensate for the present imbalance in human consciousness"(131). I see it as significant in the suggestive power that images have in changing the way we perceive the universe and our place within it and even the potency of our actions in the face of vast uncertainty. James E Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look on Life on Earth* (1979; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); James E. Lovelock, *The Ages of Gaia: A Biography of Our Living Earth* (1988; repr. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995); Jules Cashford, *"*Gaia and the Anima Mundi," *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (California, The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), 129; See also David Abram, "The Mechanical and the Organic: On the Impact of Metaphor in Science," *Scientists On Gaia*, eds. Stephen Schneider and Penelope Boston (United States: M.I.T. Press, 1991). https://web.archive.org/web/20120223165936/http://www.wildethics.org/essays/the_mechanical_and_the_organic.html.

destabilize it. This is possible, however only because of efficient feedback loops, which also help it to constantly evolve, for as Macy and Brown explain, "A system both transforms and is transformed by that on which it feeds."[131] However, this automatically leads us to consider the damage that can be wrought if these feedback loops stop functioning. James Lovelock, when formulating the 'Gaia Theory' of the earth as a self-regulating organism, highlights the importance of considering the intrinsic interconnectedness between human consciousness and the planet we inhabit, with a growing sense of the formulation and popularity of the Gaia theory, itself being the desire of Gaia, which consists of us! Hence when we, as a part of the feedback loop that maintains homoeostasis in Gaia, start disregarding the signals of pain and disruption caused by our own species on the planet, we intensify the grief and pain in the ecosystem and bring it to the verge of collapse and rupture, both for our own individual holonic selves and the larger holon we inhabit--the ecosystem Gaia. Atwood's fiction and poetry shock us back into participating in the feedback loops and begin to experience and process ecological grief as the only means towards working for change. Adam One's sermons in *The Year of the Flood* and the God's Gardeners in their public outreach programs similarly try to re-kindle the lost awareness towards the planet before the planet in its natural process of self-regulation wipes out humans from the ecosystem in its own methods of bringing back dynamic balance. This envisaged reprisal from the planet is what the Gardeners term the Waterless Flood, signifying a complete re-ordering of the planet as we know it.

[131] Macy and Brown, *Coming Back to Life*, 65.

Reconnecting with the Sacred

Llewellyn Vaughan Lee's analysis of the root cause of all problems facing our future on the planet is in the separateness we feel from the world around us. Similar to Macy and Brown, he demands the need of a perspectival shift –"The world is not a problem to be solved; it is a living being to which we belong."[132] He also identifies that the 'deepest part' of the separateness we feel from the world lies in the "forgetfulness of its sacred nature, which is concomitant with our own sacred nature."[133] Lee also astutely pinpoints the spiritual loss that is a result of such a feeling of separateness, manifesting in the larger sphere as loss of habitat, species and finally ecological balance. Bron Taylor in his book *Dark Green Religion* contemplates the definition of the word religion in context of locating the need for a dark green religion.[134] Going back to the Latin roots of the word-*religare,* Taylor explains that it could be rendered as "to reconnect," and thus religion may be seen as "that which connects and binds people to that which they most value, depend on and consider sacred." [135] In *The Year of the Flood*, we see the Adams and Eves actually formulating the tenets of the dark green religion they all ascribe to, such that it can hold the Gardeners together and bind them at the level of either need or belief or both.

Impersonal science, while leading to great advances in science and technology can help us to know certain bits and pieces of things, but in Wendell Berry's analysis, it can never take

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[132] Llewellyn Vaughan Lee, "Introduction," *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth (*California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013)*,* 13.

[133] Lee, "Introduction," *Spiritual Ecology,* 13.

[134] Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature, Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2010), 2.

[135] Taylor, *Dark Green Religion* 2.

the place of "the language of familiarity, reverence and affection" which determine the value of things to us and by which they are ultimately protected.[136] According to Vaughan Lee, only from a position of "sacred wholeness and reverence can we begin the work of healing, of bringing the world back into balance."[137] Berry and Lee both call for a re-enchantment of the world for the sake of healing the ecosystem and ourselves. Their voices are echoed in Adam One's consistent efforts at creating a meaningful universe in the midst of apparent hopelessness in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. In the Gardener Hymn called "Oh Lord, You Know Our Foolishness," the danger of despondency in the face of a meaningless universe is highlighted. In seeing the Sky as "an empty void" and "the Universe a blank," human beings lose their sense of gratitude and fall into a "vacant mood."[138] This is foolish, as acknowledged by the Hymn that forms a companion piece to Adam One's sermon on April Fish day. However, it is also a reality that the Gardeners must constantly contend with and recreate magic to believe in and live by, in the face of constant fear of apocalypse and irretrievable damage wrought by humans to the planetary ecosystem. Adam One's plea of hope and faith in his sermon,[139] praying for the revival of oceanic reefs and lakes, makes his sermon appeal more urgent in changing his listeners' ecological consciousness, even if they cannot individually change the fate of the dying fish and oceans.

As seen in the writings of Arne Naess, Joanna Macy, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry,

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[136] Wendell Berry, "Life is a Miracle," 86.

[137] Lee, "Introduction," *Spiritual Ecology,* 14.

[138] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 236.

[139] Adam One prays, "Let them come to life again; let Love shine upon them and restore them; and let us be forgiven for our oceanic murders; and for our foolishness….arrogant and destructive." *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 235.

Thomas Berry, Vaughan Lee, Matthew Fox and others in the course of this chapter, the idea of spirituality as separate from the world is actively countered by ecotheologians and ecosophians alike. Adam One in his sermons in *The Year of the* Flood, is also forced to counter the idea that enlightenment can be achieved by isolating oneself from people and planetary crisis. While certifying the importance of silence and contemplation for short periods, the Gardeners suggest an active involvement with the world, with heightened awareness, as does Macy in her writing. Desensitization to the ecosystem and grief caused by its degradation impedes 'access to the Unconscious' according to Macy, which is seen as the source of intuition and creativity and also that precious part of us that brings the necessary awareness of ourselves as embedded in the universe.[140] The Gardeners therefore try to reconnect to the source of their experience of interconnectedness, both by facing ecological grief as well as through their rituals and practices of contemplative gardening and all-night vigils and meditations. By consciously breaking the patterns of existing consumerist and capitalist lifestyle all around them, they force a rupture into the experience of the Ecological Self.

Wendell Berry explains the necessity of a "functional cosmology" that shall return a "meaningful sense of the nature of the universe,"[141] that illuminates the source of our existence and our relationship with creation. As a part of this shift in cosmology, the "telling and the re-

[140] This is similar to Vaughan Lee's description of the "wholeness that is calling to us now, that needs our response," and which requires "us to our own root and rootedness," which is "our relationship to the sacred within creation," enabling healing and awakening of ecological consciousness, as discussed earlier. Lee, "Introduction," *Spiritual Ecology,* 14.

[141] Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988),66 and 87–88, quoted in Sarah McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.

telling of the creation story through performance and ritual,"[142] is central towards creating a collective cosmology that holds together a community of disparate individuals in alternative life-supportive practices. In the Gardener fold this is established repeatedly by Adam One's sermons and the schooling received by the Gardener children, where the telling and re-telling of the creation and apocalypse myth in accordance with newly devised ecological trappings becomes an essential ritual granting the community a sense of self separate from the world outside that may not conform to life-affirming practices and beliefs and also strengthens the sense of community. While the feasts and celebrations with the sermons and hymns sung by the Gardeners can be seen as a performance, it also becomes a defining practice for their community and affirmed practices.

Adam One also tries to interpret the Creation story in a novel way by suggesting that we see the narration in the Bible as metaphorical for a larger ongoing process of creation. He also hints at the fact that time described in the Creation story ought to be seen differently, with God's days representing aeons in human time.[143] We see him struggling with breaking the limitations imposed by a literal understanding of the Creation story in the *Genesis*. The sequence in which the creatures were brought forth also implies the evolution story according to Adam One in his sermon. Thus in these monologues, he presupposes the questions that may arise and answers them, trying to create a theology that shall be believable and worth living by at the same time. In his efforts, Adam One quite resembles David Ray Griffin[144] combining science and theism

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[142] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or Cosmos and History,* trans. Willard Trask (1949; repr. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3-6, quoted in McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 6.

[143] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 14.

[144] David Ray Griffin, ed. *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), accessed May 10, 2020, Google Books. Griffin's ideas showcase a postmodern development of Alfred North Whitehead's ideas, as an alternative to Darwinian naturalism. See also Alfred North Whitehead,

and proposing the concept of 'saltationism'[145] wherein a new and ideal form is "called forth" by the cosmic soul or divine reality, to which certain organisms respond by "producing novel forms" or "internal, incremental adjustments"[146] which are seen as evolutionary leaps from outside. The importance of this perspective to evolution, may be regarded in the way in which Griffin places emphasis on organisms as "responsive subjects"[147] rather than helpless objects in a larger flow of information and energy. This is again similar to the idea of the holon that has a self-organising, dynamic function of processing information and energy influx and evolving accordingly yet maintaining an intrinsic self.

Re-interpreting the biblical word "dust" to mean "atoms and molecules, the building blocks of all material entities,"[148] Adam One also gives a renewed theological interpretation of evolutionary process, suggesting that it was a means of "instilling humility in Man."[149] He explains that the rage against God, for making us one of the creatures, instead of "Spirit, like Himself"[150] is what constitutes the anger of those against such a scientific understanding of our connection with Primates. Therefore, in his sermon on "The Feast of Adam and All Primates,"[151]

Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (1929; repr. NY: The Free Press, 1978), accessed May 10, 2020, Google Books.

[145] Griffin, ed. *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflicts*), 257. See also Lisa Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism: The Role of Ecotheology in Creation/Evolution Controversies," *Worldviews 11* (2007): 69, for a discussion on Griffin's idea of 'saltationism'.

[146] Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism," 69.

[147] Sideris, 70.

[148] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 62.

[149] Atwood, 62.

[150] While asserting the existence of God as "No Thing," at the same time Adam One describes God as "spirit." *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 62-63. Also see Note 156 below.

[151] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 61.

Adam One attempts to recreate the Creation story, blending Darwinian ideas with biblical terminology and scientific understanding of genetic code with philosophical concepts of the oneness of all beings. This is a very significant sermon by Adam One, as it becomes a direct representative of ecotheological debates concerning perceptions regarding creation, the 'fall' of man and human possibility in a world that appears predetermined. Adam One instead affirms primate ancestry for humans, locating his arguments and Gardener theosophy in a domain different from theosophists who would deny evolutionary science.[152] The "knots of DNA and RNA"[153] tying us to our fellow creatures, thus make us more responsible humans in the argument forwarded by Adam One in his sermon which finds further expression in the Hymn "Oh Let me Not BE PROUD." The worse traits of man—"Aggression, anger, greed", even "vanity and pride" are seen as the remnants of the "Australopithecus" or "Animal inside."[154] Blending the scientific and the religious understanding of the crucial nature of space,[155] through which existence is perceived, Adam One tries to engage the attention and belief of different members of his cult. Interestingly, the ritual and performance that Jimmy/Snowman[156] creates

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[152] In this Adam One mirrors Lisa Sideris, who recognizes that while many turn to evolutionary science as a basis for demonstration of such interconnectedness, many environmental ethicists see evolutionary science as propagating the same patterns as the "despotic" and "mechanical" Baconian model for its tendency towards implicit hierarchy and control. However Sideris continues to see the Darwinian model itself as indicative of our connection to the "primordial past and with all other life forms, past and present." Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism,"64.

[153] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 65.

[154] Atwood, 65.

[155] Adam One describes 'God' as the 'No-thingness, that through which and by which all material things exist; for if there were not such a No-thingness, existence would be so crammed full of materiality that no one thing could be distinguished from another." *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 62. Also see Note 151 above.

[156] See Note 160-161 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, for a discussion on Jimmy and Glenn's adoption of names based on extinct creatures, and the significance and politics of retaining these names in the trilogy. As noted in chapter 1, I have used the name Jimmy, when referring to Jimmy's experiences before the BlyssPlus pandemic, and the names Jimmy/Snowman with an oblique when referring to his experiences after the pandemic, as in the latter scenario, he feels impelled to use the name of an extinct animal as a counterpart to Glenn's adopted name "Crake," when he lives in a world created by Crake's extremist vision of human annihilation.

for the Crakers, when retelling their Creation myth to them, places him on a pedestal similar to Adam One's. The parallel created by Atwood is subtle yet striking. On one hand it re-affirms the need for the 'functional cosmology' that Berry talks about, to satiate the need to know one's origin and continuity, at the same time Jimmy/Snowman's act of concocting the tale to suit his needs also places every such preacher and cosmology in the eye of critique.

The feeling of being adrift, without direction or hope is beautifully described by Thomas Berry who compares it to children losing their way, "we've become lost, adrift in a society that has lost its guidelines, its rudder," leading to "dire consequences for the planet."[157] The opening pages of *Oryx and Crake* focus on this feeling of loss and hopelessness, aptly titled 'Flotsam'—a metaphor for Jimmy/Snowman's own feeling of being lost in a world without references and meaning. He feels extinct, which is concretized in his adopting the name 'Snowman' as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis. It is also perhaps because of his acute feeling of loss that he tries to comfort the Crakers, who he feels responsible for owing to the promise he had made to Oryx, the girl he loved and desired. He tries to play the role of shepherd, caring for his flock in the way envisaged by Oryx, trying to grant them a comprehensive sense of identity and meaning that he himself lacks. In a similar manner Adam One and the older members of the God's Gardeners cult called Adams and Eves also try to comfort and look after the new entrants to their fold—their naming suggestive of their function as 'parents' of the group. It appears a necessary rite of passage towards accepting an alternative identity reinforced by a re-narrated cosmology and life practices in the form of changed dress codes, food and habits.

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[157] Nancy Ryley, "Interview with Thomas Berry," *The Forsaken Garden: Four Conversations on the Deep Meaning of Environmental Illness* (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest,1998), 239, quoted in McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters,* 6.

However, according to Wendell Berry, the existing creation narrative in the Bible fails to "provide modern humanity a sense of communion and kinship with a universe that is alive, sacred, intelligent, and still being created."[158] Van Dyk reflects on the journey charted by Christian theology and worship, observing the absence of environmental and ecological issues within the clergy and the church till about the 1980s.[159] Prior to this, discussions were largely critical of Christian theology as in Lynn White Jr's historical critique[160] of the foundational perspective of Judeo-Christian traditions as forming the root cause behind present environmental crisis by informing our worldview. Aldo Leopold's *The Sand County Almanac* similarly blames the ecological crisis and the difficulties of conservation on the "Abrahamic concept of land."[161] Seeing land as a 'commodity' causes us to abuse it, rather than as a 'a community to which we belong," which would inspire us to love and respect it. Michael Paul Nelson and Thomas J. Sauer highlight how precarious our fight for the planet becomes, when it

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[158] Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 176–180, quoted in McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters,* 6.

[159] Peet J. Van Dyk, "Eco-theology and Losing the Sacred," *OTE* 23, no.3 (2010): 822-833, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234074109_Eco-theology_and_losing_the_sacred. See also Van Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," *Old Testament Essays* 22, no.1 (2009): 187, http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/ote/v22n1/10.pdf

[160] Lynn White Jr's 'classic' address "The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis"(1967), traced the source of our environmental crisis to our ideological and philosophical perceptions of ourselves vis-à-vis the world we inhabit, influenced strongly by a Western, post-Enlightenment worldview. Societal structures themselves are therefore seen as built out of a primarily skewed worldview, thus the challenge lies in re-inscribing these root structures in our thought processes that draw "a hard and fast boundary between humans and nature" (Nelson "The Long Reach") and prioritizes human needs over all others, before we attempt any change in technology or set up institutions for combating ecological change. According to Nelson and Sauer, White's address, though analyzing the Judeo-Christian tradition for its contribution towards fostering such a worldview, is more foundational at its core. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1203-1207, https://www.cmu.ca/faculty/gmatties/lynnwhiterootsofcrisis.pdf ; Michael Paul Nelson and Thomas J. Sauer, "The Long Reach of Lynn White Jr.'s 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis'," *Ecology and Evolution,* Dec 13, 2016, https://natureecoevocommunity.nature.com/posts/14041-the-long-reach-of-lynn-white-jr-s-the-historical-roots-of-our-ecologic-crisis.

[161] Aldo Leopold, "Foreword," *A Sand County Almanac,* viii.

is anthropocentric in nature, evaluating the ecosystem in terms of its services to humans.[162] White had warned that our ecological crisis would only worsen if we were unable to redefine the way we see the human-nature relationship[163] and reject the notion that nature exists only to serve human needs. He articulates the need for a philosophy that affirms the "intrinsic value of nature."[164] The deep ecology principles[165] perhaps fulfilled this gaping lacuna in our worldview and thus attracted such a wide following amongst the sensitive and creative individuals of the environmentalist movement. However, Christian theologians have also striven since then to re-interpret the Bible and present its doctrine as an eco-friendly one. Growing popularity of green sentiment is specially noted amongst Christian theologians since the 1980s.[166] The Earth Bible project started in 2000 by Norman Habel brings together writings on the Bible from around the world "from the perspective of justice for the Earth"[167] and asks pertinent questions of the text—

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[162] Nelson and Sauer, "The Long Reach."

[163] White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," 1.

[164] Nelson and Sauer, "The Long Reach."

[165] 'The Basic Principles of Deep Ecology,' articulated by Arne Naess and George Sessions in 1984, 'give priority to the 'Inherent value' of all human and non-human Life on Earth, irrespective of their 'usefulness' to each other; comprehends the importance of diversity of life forms in reaching a deeper understanding of 'inherent value' and exhorts human beings to restrict themselves to the use of other life forms only for the satisfaction of their 'vital needs' and nothing beyond that. In this, they suggest the importance of controlling human population to allow other beings to flourish. The principles also recognize the worsening of 'the situation' as a result of excessive 'human interference' in the non-human world. The last two principles exhort the importance of 'ideological change' towards 'appreciating *life quality'* instead of desiring a 'higher standard of living' and the obligation of every individual who subscribes to the principles to 'implement' required change either 'directly or indirectly'. Thus Naess and Sessions place great hope on the transformative nature of ideological change in personal and collective lives. The 'obligation of action' suggested by the 8th principle, shows their faith on the way the principles, when understood and appreciated are bound to affect individual choices and practices. See Arne Naess and George Sessions, "The Basic Principles of Deep Ecology," *The Trumpeter* 3, no.4 (1986):14.

[166] Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," 186-204.

[167] Earth Bible, "Reading the Bible from the Perspective of the Earth," *Web of Creation,* accessed January 15, 2020, *http://www.webofcreation.org/earth-bible. The Earth Bible* project has taken the shape of five volumes of 'geocentric' readings of the Bible. These five volumes are, *Volume One: Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); *Volume Two: The Earth Story in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); *Volume Three: The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); *Volume Four: The Earth Story in Psalms and Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic

"Does a given text value or de-value Earth? Is the voice of Earth heard or suppressed? Are humans portrayed as 'rulers' over Earth or kin with Earth? Does Earth suffer unjustly?"[168] It aims to create a forum from where the Earth's voice may be heard and restorative and healing impulses may be generated amongst the readers towards the Earth. Environmental issues have also become part of regular church services in some cases, as in the liturgy of the New Zealand Holy Communion prayer book, where a prayer is included calling for a sense of wonder and awe towards nature as opposed to one of subjugation and control—"Renew in us a sense of wonder for the earth and all that is in it."[169] It is significant that within a decade, the Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth, adopted at the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth at Cochabamba, Bolivia, April 22, 2010, voices similar concerns, acknowledging the Earth as the "source of life, nourishment and learning," and understands that "we are all part of Mother Earth, an indivisible, living community of interrelated and interdependent beings with a common destiny."[170] The Declaration calls for a recognition of the Earth as a "living being" with inalienable and inherent rights such as the "right to regenerate its bio-capacity and to continue its vital cycles and processes free from human disruptions," as also the obligation of humans towards Mother Earth.[171] This Declaration urges

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Press, 2001); *Volume Five: The Earth Story in The New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). The project attempts to retrieve the voice of the Earth and reinstate ecoteleological principles in their reinterpretation and re-presentation of the Bible as a text that can still be read in concomitance with eco-justice principles.

[168] Earth Bible, "Reading the Bible from the Perspective of the Earth," *Web of Creation.*

[169] Nicola H. Creegan, "Theological Foundations of the Ecological Crisis," *Stimulus* 12, no. 4 (2004):30, quoted in Van Dyk, "Challenges for Ecotheology," 187.

[170] "Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth," *Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature,* accessed January 20, 2021, *https://therightsofnature.org/universal-declaration/.*

[171] "Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth," *Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature.*

the United Nations to adopt its basic tenets and prompt its observation by people across the world. The *Earth Bible Project* attempts a similar awakening of responsibility towards the Earth, in theological terms. Adam One and the Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* appear to be an assimilation of both these discourses, in a bid to create maximum impact, continuously revisiting scripture to find new liturgies to complement their environmental consciousness and widening awareness of themselves as part of a larger whole, as will be seen in the next section of this chapter. Berry also understands that "we are between stories," and in the process of finding stories that will simultaneously "educate, heal, guide and discipline us, just as the Genesis story once did."[172]

Ecotheological Hurdles

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, one of the dangers of the 'apocalyptic imagination' lies in fostering the thought that since all would come to an end, one might as well live irresponsibly, destroying the delicate ecology of a planet that is moving towards doom anyway. Mary Evelyn Tucker[173] and Nicola H. Creegan[174] both highlight the negative impact of the apocalyptic images in the Bible. Atwood astutely represents this by Adam One's preemption of this unsaid contention, by raising it himself—"if annihilation awaits us, why bother to strive for the Good?"[175] He tries to answer this with an appeal for faith and belief in

[172] Thomas Berry, "The Sacred Universe," *The Forsaken Garden* ed. Nancy Ryley (Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books, 1998), 239, accessed July 7, 2019, Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/forsakengardenfo00ryle. See also McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters,* 7.

[173] Mary Evelyn Tucker, "The Emerging Alliance of Religion and Ecology," *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 1, no. 1 (1997): 11, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43809623

[174] Creegan, "Theological Foundations of the Ecological Crisis," 33.

[175] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 279.

Divine Providence, as well as providing a reminder of the free will granted to Adam[176] that allows him to choose action that is not necessarily pre-ordained, trying to answer the critics amongst his listeners who would view the environmental crisis as predestined and thus irreparable. He tries to alert the audience that their actions may not be entirely pre-determined, thereby giving them room to change their behavior and hope for a change in the ecosystem in response to these changes made by humans as well. Human will has been the force behind the Anthropocene, and therefore human will shall alone "restore"[177] by changing attitudes towards the world we inhabit.[178]

In the Council meetings of the Adams and Eves of the Gardener organization, many debates are held to solve disputes regarding biblical doctrine that appear to clash with the ecological vision promoted by the Gardeners. Specially when the Gardener children ask questions that disturb the ecotheological concepts taught at the Gardener school, the Adams and Eves are forced to reconsider and recreate narratives to hold their doctrine together. One of the issues raised is regarding human teeth having both herbivore and carnivore characteristics that clashes with the Gardener propagated ideology of Adam being created a 'vegetarian,' to encourage Gardener children to adhere to the 'Vegivows.' The conundrum is not easily solved though and Adam One leaves the discussion for another day.

Two of the most problematic verses of the Bible that comes up for scrutiny by ecocritics and ecotheologians attempting to provide a new interpretation, are *Genesis 1:28* and *Psalm 8.*

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[176] *Atwood,* 14.

[177] *Atwood,* 15.

[178] Adam One's ideas regarding positive possibilities of human will is quite similar to Macy and Brown's idea of 'The Great Turning' discussed earlier in the chapter.

In *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, we find the Gardeners too grappling with their attempts at redefining the inherent meanings of these lines in the Bible through Adam One's Sermons. *Genesis 1:28* declares, "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and *subdue* it: and *have dominion over* the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."[179] This perspective of 'ruling over' the earth and its inhabitants is also strengthened by *Genesis 2:19* that states, "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof."[180] Through the act of naming, Adam is given control over all creatures and this has often been read as the source of an anthropocentric teleology governing human choices over centuries. Dyk in his analysis[181] adds that the way the narrative is framed in the *Old Testament*, with humans being the last creatures created by God in *Genesis 1* as the acme of Creation, tends to portray humans as superior, which is often interpreted as the right to dominate over the rest of the earth and see it as a resource for the supreme creation—man.[182] Adam One in this sermon on Creation Day in *The Year of the Flood*, tries to address the common criticism regarding the event of his namesake Adam naming the animals in the Bible. Adam One criticizes this human impulse to own everything on earth, "while in reality we belong to Everything."[183] He insists that it is our misinterpretation of God's

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[179] Genesis 1:28*, KJV,* italics mine. *BibleGateWay,* accessed March 19, 2020, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201%3A28&version=KJV.

[180] Genesis 2:19*, KJV.*

[181] Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," 191.

[182] See note 180 above and 218 below.

[183] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 63.

commandment that has led to population explosion of humans and other species' extinction resulting in ecological disharmony. "God's commandment to "replenish the Earth" did not mean we should fill it to overflowing with ourselves, thus wiping out everything else," says Adam One.[184] He reminds his listeners that the slightest acts of violence against God's creatures are akin to acts against God.[185]

Adam One's address itself tries to break with this assumed hierarchy: "Dear Friends, dear Fellow Creatures, dear Fellow Mammals."[186] He also takes a leap of faith for himself and the audience he is addressing—the other Gardeners—by suggesting that the act of naming is the moment where Adam claims his own "Human soul"[187] as naming the creatures is seen as an act of "loving –kindness and kinship," [188] a means of drawing other creatures towards oneself. I find this explanation rendered by Adam One a little strained, however it also shows his desperation to overthrow the kind of criticism that Lynn White Jr. levels against the Bible. In Adam One's words, humans have violated the trust placed on them by the animals responding to the names given by Adam, [189] "For man has broke the Fellowship/ With murder, lust and greed." [190] The hymn "When Adam First" following Adam One's Creation Day Sermon, traces this shift from trust and love to gluttony and betrayal and seeks for a way to return to that state of 'Love' as

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[184] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 63.

[185] Adam One's sermons have a deeper impact than apparent, as we see Toby struggling to kill a kudzu moth or a pigoon even in self-defence. Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 18-19.

[186] *Atwood,* 13.

[187] Atwood, 15.

[188] Atwood, 15.

[189] Atwood, 15.

[190] Atwood, 16.

Adam One wants the Gardeners to view Adam's act of naming the creatures.

Another dimension of the distancing of man from other beings is introduced in *Genesis 9:2-3*,[191] when fear is instilled in all creatures for humans and they are presented as food for humans. In Gardener ecotheology, this is the reason why the Bible warns non-humans regarding human beings and instills fear in their heart regarding man.[192] This biblical verse is often misinterpreted according to Adam One to mean that "Man has the right to destroy all the Animals."[193] However, it should be read instead as a warning to all animals regarding the propensities of evil in the human heart, according to him. At the same time, in the book of *Amos*, nature is seen as unpredictable, the source of dangers and perils.[194] To break this cycle of predator and victim, Crake designs the new race of Crakers to be herbivores requiring little for sustenance. The Crakers also cannot clearly be identified as humans or non-humans being a strange mixture of many genetic strains. Therefore in his own way Crake topples the hierarchical assumptions of the biblical narrative of Creation, by trying to manifest his own narrative of Creation and destruction through the pandemic and the race of beings 'created' by him.

David Jobling and Nathan Loewen also identify the metaphor of 'plenty' used in the Bible, specially in the book of *Amos* as inherently damaging as it creates a picture of never

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[191] Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," 194.

[192] "And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered." Genesis 9:2*, KJV, BibleGateWay,* accessed March 18, 2020, *https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+9.2&version=KJV*.

[193] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 16.

[194] David Jobling and Nathan Loewen , "Sketches for Earth Readings of the Book of Amos," *Readings from the Perspective of Earth, ed.* N. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 72-85. Also see Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," 194.

ending supply of 'resources' for humans, eclipsing the reality of limits to growth and exploitation of the earth.[195] Ecotheologians often return to the few verses in the Bible that place some restrictions on the human exploitation of natural resources, as a window of reprieve, as noted by Dyk.[196] These verses include *Deut 22:6* that restricts taking the life of both the mother and fledgling birds, or clearing forests during war-times.[197] However, it remains debatable whether such restrictions are in the interest of the creatures themselves or to serve human needs,[198] returning us to the quest of Deep Ecologists who urge us to value nature for its own sake rather than as a resource for humans. Arnold Toynbee identifies the problem to be stemming from the monotheism of the *Old Testament* that has blanketed the awe of the animistic, by the pronouncement in *Genesis 1:28*.[199] In his analysis it is difficult now even for people who are not monotheistic to return to a perspective that sees nature as having rights and responses of her own. Quite like Lynn White Jr., he suggests that, "We have been taking unlimited liberties with nature because we have been thinking of her, in monotheistic terms, as unsacrosanct 'raw material.'"[200] The way out of this crisis, lies in re-prioritizing conservation of whatever "we have left of our natural environment, whatever the cost of this may be in

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[195] David Jobling and Nathan Loewen, "Sketches for Earth Readings of the Book of Amos," *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman C. Habel (Malawi: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), 81.

[196] Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," 196.

[197] "When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege." Deuteronomy 20:19*, KJV* .

[198] Dyk, "Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology," 196.

[199] Arnold Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 3.1-4 (1972): 145, doi: 10.1080/00207237208709505

[200] Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," 145.

limiting, and probably reducing, the World's gross global product."[201] However, lasting remedy according to Toynbee would come from reverting to the "*Weltanschauung* of pantheism," from that of monotheism.[202] The call to remember the "Buddha…Bodhisattvas and Christ" who stand for "self-abnegation and self-sacrifice", perceiving divinity as "love, benevolence and humanity"[203] rather than power, is the tune taken by Adam One and the Gardeners as they celebrate Feast Days in the names of Saints—individuals who have stood for such qualities and worked to preserve the balance and sanctity of the environment or given up their lives in the attempt at maintaining ecological balance of this planet in some way or the or the other.[204]

Berry's interpretation of the Bible is instructive in that he views it very differently from White Jr. or Wilson's arguments that see the Bible as instrumental in ecological crisis. By turning to specific verses in the Bible, he attempts to establish its reverence for multiplicity and diversity in the universe and its recognition of the 'holiness' of beings and their "absolute intimacy" with God. He cites *Job 34:14-15*, "All flesh lives by the spirit and breath of God." He further adds from his reading of *Acts 17:28,* that we "live, and move and have our being" in God. He focuses on biblical descriptions of God's immeasurable love and compassion for every

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[201] Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," 144. In this Toynbee's idea mirrors the *Limits to Growth* approach to ecological conservation. See Note 24 above.

[202] Toynbee, "The Religious Background of the Present Environmental Crisis," 145.

[203] Toynbee, 145.

[204] The individuals memorialized as Saints by the God's Gardeners are of great variety and belonging to many nations and time periods, ranging from environmentalists like Farley McGill Mowat, Allan Sparrow, Jane Jacobs, Icelandic Sigríður Tómasdóttir, Anil Agarwal, Wen Bo, Chico Mendes conservationists like Jacques Costeau, Suryamani Bhagat, Stephen King, Odigha, scientists like Rachel Carson, James Lovelock, Francis Crick , Carl Linnaeus, Stephen Jay Gould naturalists like Maria Sibylla Merian, E.O. Wilson, Alexander Zawadski, Tim Flannery, writers like Robert Burns, Christopher Smart, Peter Matthiessen, Wayne Grady, David Suzuki, theologians and religious figures such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Jerome of Stridon, Jesus of Nazareth and Gautama Buddha, to name a few of those mentioned in the course of *The Year of the Flood.* It is interesting to note how Atwood creates a commentary on the importance of these multiple voices in the environmentalist narrative, through the demarcation of such a wide variety of individuals as ecological 'Saints'.

creature, not limited to any particular race or species. He cites the 104th *Psalm*[205] as vibrant proof of divine delight in multiplicity that can help build an ecotheological claim for conservation purposes.[206] Adam One similarly highlights the importance given by the Biblical Word to the spirit in all beings, by virtue of the Covenant that God makes with "every living creature."[207] He reasons that the Covenant signifies respect for the souls of these living beings. He quotes the book of *Job 12* further to establish how non-humans become important in comprehending the actions of God.[208] The constant repetition of the importance of 'reverence' towards all creatures as the basis of ecological conservation highlights its significance in following the principle of biocentric egalitarianism, according to my analysis. The emphasis on diversity and plurality in the approach is also central towards avoiding 'synthesis' as an opposite to scientific reductionism.[209] As Berry explains, he wishes to highlight "God's love for all things, for each thing for its own sake and not for its category." [210] Many confluences can be noted between deep ecology and ecotheological approach to eco-teleology[211] in this regard. The

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[205] *Psalm 104* praises the Lord for his manifold Creation and its beauty. Specially verses 24-25, *KJV*:

> **24** O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.
> **25** So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts.

[206] Wendell Berry, "Life is a Miracle," 95.

[207] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 109; See also Wendell Berry, 94.

[208] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 110. See also Job 12:7-9*, NIV* :

"But ask the animals, and they will teach you,
or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you;
or speak to the earth, and it will teach you,
or let the fish in the sea inform you.
Which of all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?

[209] Wendell Berry, "Life is a Miracle," 95.

[210] Wendell Berry, 95.

[211] Nazry Bahrawi elaborates on how the discourse used by the Gardeners unsettles the anthropocentric notion of 'nature' in service of humanity, by re-iterating the reality of humans being "one among many earthly species of

first principle of the deep ecology platform[212] itself can be seen as a call for 'biocentric egalitarianism' as it enjoins us to affirm the equal value of all beings to flourish, rather than seeing humans at the top of the chain. Devall and Sessions, continuing to elaborate on these deep ecology principles alert the reader to not judge the value or hierarchy of beings based on their 'degree of sentience.'[213] However, to enable such a perception, what Arne Naess described as 'Self-Realization' of humans as one part of a larger whole[214] appears essential. Warwick Fox's ecotheology finds it suitable to explain this extension of self through the power of love, which he describes as the 'Christ principle' that finds expression in the creation of the world. [215] In this version of ecotheology, seeing all forms of life as emanating from a single force becomes the driving factor towards dissolving hierarchies and boundaries, similar to the deep ecological concept of realization of the Ecological Self, which lies in recognizing the intrinsic worth of all beings and in identifying with all other beings and their experiences—leading to a sense of interconnectedness with the lifeworld one inhabits.[216]

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equal standing." This is termed "eco-teleology" by Bahrawi, suggestive of an alternative ecological ethic that sees all non-human species as ends in themselves. Nazry Bahrawi, "Hope of a Hopeless World: Eco-teleology in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *Green Letters*, 17.3(2013): 253, doi: 10.1080/14688417.2013.862156. The idea of eco-teleology is closely related to deep ecology philosophy articulated by Arne Naess and discussed in detail in this chapter. Naess explains that even the term "carrying capacity of the Earth" focuses the lens on the anthropocentric concern of how many humans can live on the surface of the Earth, maintaining a high standard of living, while "exploiting every resource available," instead of focusing on rejuvenation of the Earth's ecology for its own sake, as deep ecology and biocentric egalitarianism urges us to do. See Arne Naess, "From Ecology to Ecosophy, From Science to Wisdom," 185.

[212] Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered,* 70.

[213] Devall and Sessions*,* 67-69.

[214] Devall and Sessions, 67-69.

[215] Warwick Fox, ''Deep Ecology: A New Philosophy of Our Time?'' *The Ecologist* 14, no.5-6 (1984): 196, https://philpapers.org/rec/FOXDEA-2.

[216] Arne Naess,''Self-Realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World,'' *The Trumpeter* 4, no. 3 (1987): 36, doi: 10.1007/978-1-4020-4519-6_128 See also Alan Drengson, "Ecophilosophy, Ecosophy and the

Another path adopted by ecotheologians re-interpreting the Bible to present it as an ecologically conscious text post White Jr.'s dissection of Judeo Christian tradition,[217] has been to perceive *Genesis 1:28* as an injunction to stewardship and steer the argument towards sensitizing people regarding their responsibility towards all beings created by the Lord. Hence the paradigm of 'Creation Care' or 'Christian Environmental Stewardship'[218] became increasingly influential in rethinking a devout response to environmental crisis. This approach urges Christians to think of themselves as caretakers of non-human creation, with a consciousness that this creation belongs to someone else—in this case, God.[219] Note that this is however different from seeing ourselves as just another species amongst many, as it implies a certain hierarchy in the fact that we can consciously 'care' for God's creation. However, this form of environmentalism utilizes this hierarchy to propel action and ecological consciousness.

Deep Ecology Movement: An Overview," *Ecocentrism Homepage,* 1999, accessed December 12, 2021, http://www.ecospherics.net/pages/DrengEcophil.html. A different dimension of the extension of the self and the desire for the dissolution of boundaries between the human and the non-human world is studied in detail in Chapter 3 where we closely analyse Atwood's poetry and selected novels such as *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman* on their representation of the experiences of such an extended self.

[217] See Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," where he critiques the Judeo-Christian tradition for its emphasis on human dominion over creation as the primary cause of human destruction. See Note 151 for details. Also see Richard Randolf and Jeremy Yunt, "Introduction: Beyond Lynn White Jr.," *counterbalance,* accessed June 20, 2020, https://counterbalance.org/enviro/intro-frame.html; Emily Warde, "Christianity and the Environment: The Lynn White Controversy," *Ex Post Facto* XX (Spring 2011):46-62, https://history.sfsu.edu /sites/default/files/EPF/2015/2011_Emily%20Warde.pdf

[218] The ecotheological discourse of 'Christian Environmental Stewardship' or 'Creation Care' connects love and devotion for God with care for His Creation by implying that exploiting God's Creation cannot co-exist with worshipping God, for He is known through His works as explained by Wayland Baptist University. See "Biblical foundations for Christian Environmental Stewardship," *Green Initiatives, Wayland Baptist* University, accessed August 24, 2018, https://www.wbu.edu/about/green-initiative/biblical-foundations.htm. See also Jennifer Welchman, "A Defence of Environmental Stewardship,"*Environmental Values* 21, no.3 (Aug 2012):297-316, doi: 10.3197/096327112X13400390125975, for a defence of this ecotheological perspective against accusations of the stewardship principle being speciesist and anthropocentric. She sees Christian Environmental Stewardship as a valuable possibility for redirecting environmental consciousness, engaging people's devotion towards necessary action on behalf of the planet.

[219] David Paul Warners and Matthew Kuperus Heun, *Beyond Stewardship: New Approaches to Creation Care*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Press, 2019).

Loren Wilkinson and the Fellows of the Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship have elaborated on the philosophy and practices of stewardship in Christian life in their influential book on the topic, *Earthkeeping*. They clearly mention a need for experiencing 'embeddedness in nature and nature's embeddedness in us."[220] To add a theological dimension to this experience, Wilkinson et al. also add that the Christian must re-conceive the idea of salvation to "include the rest of creation in his or her own salvation."[221] This is once again similar to the widening of the self described by deep ecology practitioners, but with a theological bent as redemption is redefined from its focus on the individual self. Wilkinson et al. explain that redemption can only be "in nature" and not "apart from it."[222] How the Earth is seen by its inhabitants therefore plays an important role in formulating how we relate to her.[223] *Earthkeeping* particularly sees the metaphor of 'spaceship earth' circulating in the 1980s as detrimental to environmental consciousness, calling it "ecologically terrifying" and a striking example of anthropocentrism as a spaceship is after all "a human artifact, designed to sustain human life and for no other purpose."[224] In *The Year of the Flood,* Adam One is seen carefully

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[220] Loren Wilkinson, Peter De Vos, Vernon Ehlers, Calvin De Witt, Derk Pereboom, Eugene Dykema and Aileen Van Beilen, "Humanity and the Planet Earth: Two Futures," *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* ed. Loren Wilkinson (Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans, 1980), 3, accessed August 6, 2021, *Archive.org*, https://archive.org/details/earthkeepingchri0000unse/page/n9/mode/2up.

[221] Wilkinson et al., "Humanity and the Planet Earth," 4.

[222] Wilkinson et al., "Humanity and the Planet Earth," 4. This conceptualization of ourselves as part of nature rather than 'apart' from it, shall be discussed in a separate context in Chapter 3 of this thesis, where I shall be analyzing Atwood's texts for their consideration of human and non-human boundaries, the definitions of 'nature' and the 'self' and poetic revisions of these definitions.

[223] The Gaia metaphor is a case in fact as it helps people relate to the Earth as a conscious being. However Lovelock presents it as a scientific fact, rather than only a poetic metaphor. Both ways, it inspires human beings towards ecologically conscious choices. See Note 131 above and pp 212-213 of this chapter for more details on Gaia theory.

[224] Wilkinson et al., "Humanity and the Planet Earth," 4.

choosing his metaphors to maximize the impact of his sermons and move his listeners to feel that they are indeed stewards of the Earth.

Adam One in his sermon on the occasion of the Festival of Arks celebrated by the Gardeners, describes the continued relevance of humans as stewards of God, to whom the animals and other survivors of the floods of the past are 'bequeathed' for care. He returns to the story of Noah's Ark, analyzing that Noah represented the "aware ones among Mankind"[225] indirectly suggesting a similarity with the Gardeners, who project themselves as ecologically aware and conscious in their choices. He explains that Noah "alone was forewarned; he alone took upon himself Adam's original stewardship, keeping God's beloved species safe until the waters of the Flood had receded…"[226] The period post biblical Flood is referred to by Adam One as the 'Second Creation.' He continues to describe the degradation of the ecosystem wrought by the hand of man since this second chance at creation and existence—the desertified southern Mediterranean, the destroyed Amazon river basin and the "wholesale slaughter of ecosystems, each one a living reflection of God's infinite care for detail…"[227] Adam One describes the Gardeners as "a plural Noah," as they have been forewarned about the Waterless Flood and have the responsibility of cherishing within themselves "the knowledge of the Species, and of their preciousness to God."[228] The Hymn that closely follows the Sermon is revealing in comparing the human body to an Ark, by its storage of genetic information: "It's builded(sic) firm of genes and cells/And neurons without number/My Ark enfolds the million

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[225] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 108.

[226] *Atwood,* 108.

[227] *Atwood,* 109.

[228] Atwood, 109.

years/That Adam spent in slumber."[229] Thus Adam One tries to interpret the story of Noah's Ark in a new way, so that the Gardeners and the children may find it relevant to their time and also perhaps follow in the principle of stewardship highlighted in this tale, according to his interpretation and carry on the legacy of Adam and Noah.

In Wilkinson et al.'s view, the Bible abounds in examples of both humans causing disaster and degradation on earth as well as those caring for the earth. While Eve's eating of the fruit[230] and Cain's murder of Abel[231] are seen as examples of the former, the *Psalms* are seen as a repository of images of humanity in harmony with their habitat. In this reading therefore the images of greed, voraciousness and evil serve to contrast with the goodness and compassion of others. The choices of a few are also seen to result in 'punishment' for the human race, in form of floods and fires.[232] Adam One is also seen taking this discursive route in his sermons where he sees the apocalypse as inevitable, given the extreme degradation of the earth by human beings. With the co-existence of both possibilities, the important choice is that of the story that one believes and lives, comparable to the alternatives provided by Macy in her workshop. How would Christian theology respond to the same choices? Wilkinson et al. see two major pathways emerging from this question—one of those who seek a separation of church and spiritual life from the earth and its environmental concerns, seeing no possibility of building a future on

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[229] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 111.

[230] Genesis 3.6

[231] Genesis 4.8

[232] See Genesis 6.11-21, where the figure of God declares His intention to " bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it," as the earth "was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence." *NIV,* accessed February 15, 2020, https://www.biblegateway.com /passage/?search=Genesis+6&version=NIV

human foundations, the other are those who believe in the possibility of human institutions and humans, both as gifts of God and redeemable for a better future. This is therefore similar to those who in Macy's terminology espouse the 'Business as Usual' or 'The Great Unravelling' as different from those participating in 'The Great Turning'. Hence, there are different ways of perceiving the same present, as seen in the *MaddAddam* trilogy itself.

Therefore the same technological prowess that humans wield today that also leads to its 'misuse' in "exploitative trade relationships, destructive mining, devastation of the habitat of nonhuman creatures," can also be viewed by the devout Christian as the potential of humans to successfully "care for, to steward, the earth."[233] Thus the stewardship approach to environmental ethics is similar to bright green environmentalism[234] that sees a possibility in technology addressing ecological issues, modeled on recycling resources and sustainable patterns of living. There is a recognition of the value of imitating the rhythm of the natural world in finding solutions to our crisis. Wilkinson et al. suggest the need to model our technology "after the way in which creation itself cycles matter and energy through its intricate web of life."[235]

However, while the concept of stewardship introduces an element of responsibility towards the Earth in the devout, David Paul Warners and Matthew Kuperus Heun identify certain drawbacks to this template adopted. The first among these is the absence of specific verses in the Bible instructing human beings directly in this regard. It is more a roundabout

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[233] Wilkinson et al., "Humanity and the Planet Earth," 6.

[234] See Note 1 above.

[235] Loren Wilkinson, Peter De Vos, Vernon Ehlers, Calvin De Witt, Derk Pereboom, Eugene Dykema and Aileen Van Beilen , "The Earth and Its Fullness," *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* ed. Loren Wilkinson (Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans, 1980), 71.

interpretation by people to suit present requirements. Warners and Heun go back to specific biblical references of the word 'steward' used in the bible, and point out the difference in attitude that a servant of the household would have as compared to that of a steward(or manager). According to their reading of the Bible, the text provides clues on "ways we are to serve and to protect the non-human creation," as opposed to being the steward of the household.[236] This is an interesting take on the stewardship argument that we find detailed in *Earthkeeping*. In Warner and Heun's analysis, the paradigm of stewardship assumes that the Creator is distant from his Creation, as seen in the role of the steward in Jesus' parable,[237] when the master of the household is away. However, this concept is "inconsistent with the teachings of God's pervasive immanence within Creation."[238] They also identify the distance created between humans and this 'Creation' that they are supposed to steward as per this argument as an obstacle towards comprehending the interconnectedness of life in the ecosystem.[239] Hence, in this reading the concept of stewardship opposes the transformational shift that is envisaged by the experience of the Ecological Self in deep ecology. Somewhere, the concept of stewardship also implies a certain 'hierarchy' between the household and its caretaker. This is a very astute observation by Warners and Heun as they analyse ecotheology closely and seek a different theology that will understand the co-dependence of humans and non-humans and de-objectify non-human

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[236] David Paul Warners and Matthew Kuperus Heun, "If Not Stewards of Creation, What Are We?" *BioLogos*, October 28, 2019, https://biologos.org/articles/if-not-stewards-of-creation-what-are-we/.

[237] Luke 16.

[238] Warners and Heun, "If Not Stewards of Creation, What Are We?"

[239] Interestingly, the conundrum can be seen in the name taken on by the green cult depicted by Atwood—"God's Gardeners" that immediately draws attention to this ecotheosophical approach to environmentalism, by stressing on the word 'gardener' and the associations of stewardship that it derives by reference to the Bible, kept alive by the word 'God' . Yes, nature is seen as the repository of all good things, yet there is a need to 'garden' it or cultivate it to suit human requirements.

creation. While not providing an alternative theology, they touch upon the idea of gratitude for non-human creation as a gift, as a possible entry point into a different worldview. A paradigm shift in perception of biblical myths, necessary for this transition is also reflected by Matthew Fox in *Original Blessing* as he contrasts the traditions of the religion focused on Fall/Redemption with that of 'Creation Spirituality.'[240] Fox explains that the Fall/Redemption tradition with its excessive focus on the 'Original Sin' and suffering has served the needs of the "successful and the established,"[241] however, Creation Spirituality alters the viewpoint of history as it focuses on "memories of beauty, of pleasure, of original blessing."[242] It is a crucial shift as the former keeps people in a state of hopelessness, dominated by the "comfort of consumerism and the violence of militarism,"[243] whereas the latter, by focusing on the 'Original Blessing,' fills people with hope and makes them "cosmically passionate about the blessing that life is."[244] It is important to note the similarity in patterns of thinking between Matthew Fox's ecotheological argument and Macy and Brown's deep ecology philosophy discussed earlier in

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[240] In fact, Matthew Fox sees the shift towards a "Creation-centred spiritual tradition," as "truly ecumenical," as 'creation' is something common to people across the world, and sees a close connection between "spiritual awakening …of global dimensions," with a movement from an 'egological consciousness' to an 'ecological consciousness.' With growing comprehension of interconnectedness of all life, derived from a 'global awakening', a natural byproduct according to Fox would be cessation of violence and wars and redirection of resources towards sustainable growth instead of building nuclear armaments. In a way he echoes Teilhard de Chardin's concept of the growth of consciousness beyond limited circles of the family and kin to finally encompass the earth. 'Creation Spirituality' therefore places a premium on earth consciousness as the earth becomes the largest unifying factor, with all humans being nurtured by the earth and returning to the earth. Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1983), 15-16, accessed June 12, 2021, Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/originalblessing0000foxm. See also Piere Teilhard de Chardin, *Human Energy* (New York:Hen and Kurt Wolff Book Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), 32, accessed May 12, 2021, Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/HumanEnergy. I will be discussing ecofeminist interpretations of Creation Spirituality in Chapter 3 of this thesis, while analyzing Atwood's poetry and *Surfacing* in particular.

[241] Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*, 16.

[242] Matthew Fox, 17.

[243] Matthew Fox, 18.

[244] Matthew Fox, 19.

the chapter. The cynicism and pessimism created by the 'Fall/Redemption' paradigm is very similar to Macy and Brown's conception of denial and desensitization that leads to the narrative of 'Business as Usual' and helps in keeping the 'Industrial Growth Society' alive. Hence, the urgency of an ecotheological doctrine that recognizes the need for dismantling the hegemony of the doctrine of 'salvation as deliverance' over the doctrine of 'salvation as blessing'.[245] As Matthew Fox explains, "attention to divine grace,"[246] also shifts attention from the anthropocentric preoccupation with human sinfulness, to moving beyond the human centric view. By seeing the Earth here and now as the space of blessing and salvation, the devout are freed of the conflict of deliverance from earthly life, which discourse might propel many to ignore and disregard their responsibilities towards this magnificent Creation. Adam One's sermons are seen to reflect a similar viewpoint as he tries to sensitize his listeners to the unfathomable beauty of Creation that cannot be assessed by our limited human understanding. In his sermon on Creation Day, Adam one exhorts, "God cannot be held to the narrowness of literal and materialistic interpretations, nor measured by Human measurements, for His days are eons…"[247] He also tries to make the Gardeners appreciate that Creation was an ongoing activity, "for are not new stars being formed at every moment?"[248] Then again in his sermon on Mole Day, Adam One celebrates the "polyphonic symphony of Creation," within which all creatures from the worms and micro-organisms to human beings, "shine in Eternal Light."[249] Through the

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[245] Matthew Fox, 22.

[246] Matthew Fox, 26.

[247] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 14.

[248] Atwood, 14.

[249] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 193. In this Adam one also echoes St. Francis of Assisi, who saw Creation as "an expression of divine love," using familial analogies to express his feeling of love for this Creation. While his love for all creatures, specially birds, bees, lambs, crickets and fish is well known, his expression of "warm love"

course of the text and our analysis in this chapter, we see Adam One trying to walk the bridge between the discourses of gratitude and guilt, between remembering the Fall, and choosing gratitude for the many blessings of life, from reflecting on the human condition to expanding the scope of his sermon to consider other life forms and their condition given human interference in natural ecosystems.

Toby in *The Year of the Flood* can be seen asking Adam One if it was necessary to 'split such theological hairs'[250] as the Adams and Eves did at their confidential meetings, wherein Adam One had explained the importance of constructing an affirmative and plausible doctrine. To combine "the findings of Science with the sacramental view of life" [251] seems essential for developing long-lasting doctrine that will stand the test of questions and hold the Gardeners together in faith and belief at the same time. Atwood's depiction of this frank conversation between Adam One and Toby is startling in the way it addresses the significance and practicality of all ecotheological narratives. Adam One is very practical in his use of theology for influencing popular opinion. He explains the need for envisioning a 'God', as the "strictly materialist view—that we're an experiment animal protein has been doing on itself—is far too harsh and lonely for most, and leads to nihilism." [252] In its place, Adam One sees utility in pushing "popular sentiment in a biosphere-friendly direction by pointing out the hazards of annoying God by a

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even for worms is seen in his act of picking them up from the road and placing them in safer zones. This is read as an example of Creation care enacted by St. Francis by Keith Warner. "Franciscan Environmental Ethics: Imagining Creation as a Community," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 31, no.1 (Spring / Summer 2011): 144, 148. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23562646

[250] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 287.

[251] *Atwood,* 287.

[252] Atwood, 287.

violation of His trust in our stewardship."[253] He acknowledges that "there's a penalty without God in the story too…"[254] but also understands that people like a narrative that has a penalizer when there is a penalty, as "they dislike senseless catastrophe."[255] The way that the Gardeners wield their ideology and live out their doctrine in actual everyday life, therefore presents ecotheology as a significant form of environmentalist philosophy with the power to affect and redirect human actions towards a biocentric manner of living. At the same time, just as Matthew Fox calls his reflections "unfinished meditations" that are in his own words, "briefly sketched out,"[256] Adam One also calls his sermons 'meditations' on themes that the Gardeners consider necessary in their trying times. Thus they are left open ended, often calling for answers that are not completely comprehended in the course of the sermon. The hymns at the end of each sermon by Adam One, emphasizes the importance of personal reflection and deduction on each of the themes explored by Adam One, perhaps as a means of preventing rigidity and finality in the alternative ecosophy created by the Gardeners. The upcoming section discusses the particular ways in which this ecosophy is practised by the God's Gardeners in Atwood's trilogy as well as in 'real' life by ecotheologically oriented deep ecology practitioners.

[253] Atwood, 288.

[254] Atwood, 288.

[255] Atwood, 288.

[256] Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing*, 28.

Community Support in Transforming Lifestyles

According to deep ecology practitioners, new forms of ecological consciousness are best grown in small self-reliant and autonomous communities.[257] The Gardeners try to create these small units that are self-sufficient as far as possible, growing much of their own food and trading some handcrafted products for what is not available in their small rooftop gardens. The small size of their community also helps Adam One to hold it together in ideology and belief, despite many apparent cracks and critiques. An important requirement in the journey from the 'soulless materialistic wasteland to a land rich in meaning and sacred purpose'[258] is the need for a supportive and nourishing community that assists this transformative journey. The anxious and isolated lives we live are part of the crisis to be addressed, rather than being 'solved' as though it were separate from our own experience. A world and a life bereft of meaning is not worth saving, hence the world has to appear "full of sacred meaning and purpose."[259] Our lives also have to appear intrinsically connected with this 'meaningful' world, to motivate sustainable living practices. Adam One and the Gardeners in the *MaddAddam* trilogy attempt to provide this support of a community invested in creating change.

Sarah McFarland Taylor uses the term 'Green Sisters' to denote the "environmentally activist Roman Catholic vowed religious women" in North America who form the subject of her study as she attempts to understand lived practices of the ecologically conscious and the

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[257] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 55.

[258] Lee, "Introduction," *Spiritual Ecology,* 14.

[259] Lee, 15.

way the "faithful organize their daily lives and actively put beliefs into practice."[260] McFarland Taylor interacts with Green Sisters across America who are working on a daily basis at developing "greener ways to inhabit their communal lands."[261] Many of these methods find representation in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* in the Gardener practices. In this section, I will be comparing and analyzing the commonalities found in Atwood's representation, as the correlatives with the present intensifies the impact of her work in delineating the future as discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis. By recognizing ecotheological beliefs and practices as a significant environmentalist force at the centre of her trilogy, Atwood forces us to reconsider the philosophical premises behind Gardener ideas and explore the confluences between deep ecology, ecotheology and radical environmentalist practices.

The Green Sisters use the metaphor of 'rhizomes' to describe the functioning of their community, which is intentionally decentralized "to embody both multiplicity and unity."[262] The strength of this structure lies in the flexibility it accords to the multiple shoots to develop and adapt according to their local and environmental conditions. Thus the different groups of vowed religious women engaged in raising ecological consciousness operate differently even

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[260] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, xi-xii.

[261] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 1.

[262] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 17. McFarland Taylor here draws on the 'rhizome' analogy used by Sister Mary Louise Dolan in the 1998 Sisters of Earth Conference to refer to "the growing network of environmentally active sisters."(302) McFarland Taylor traces the use of the term to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'rhizome' that they use for theorizing "postmodern, non-hierarchical epistemologies,"(275) and its further adaptation by environmentalists like Dolores La Chapelle for referring to ecological social movements. The rhizome metaphor is specially apt for describing the movement's tenaciousness, with every attack on the rhizome structure simply stimulating new growth and expansion of the rhizome, as with the radical environmentalist movement, as analysed by McFarland Taylor.(275) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* vol. 2, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), quoted in McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters,* 17; Derrick Jensen's interview with Dolores LaChapelle and Julien Puzey in Derrick Jensen, *Listening to the Land: Conversations about Nature, Culture, and Eros* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 244–247.

though they are united in their larger aim of life. This is also in contrast to the hierarchical model of organization of the institutional church and the hierarchical manner in which the church relates to the vowed women.[263] The way the God's Gardeners rally behind each other is also a significant aspect of the 'rhizomic' nature of organization. When Pilar trains Toby in beekeeping, she compares the Gardeners to a hive of bees, who are one in spirit and willing to die for the hive, as are the bees.[264] Toby, in her early days with the Gardeners, finds this difficult to believe and wonders if Pilar is joking. However, the truth of the statement is seen in the aftermath of the Waterless Flood.

Adam One in the 'Creation Day' sermon traces the changes brought about by the Gardeners to the Edencliff Rooftop inhabited by them, transforming it from a "sizzling wasteland" to a garden which "has blossomed as the rose."[265] He identifies the important mission of the Gardeners in covering the initially "barren rooftops" with abundant greenery, as a means of both supplying themselves with uncontaminated food as well as performing their little part "in the redemption of God's Creation from the decay and sterility" lying all around. He also notes that "some would term our efforts futile,"[266] referring to the naysayers who see no hope for the world. Bioregionalists place much importance on learning how to restore and re-inhabit spaces rather than discarding them for new ones. Stephanie Mills explains the significance of this act, in that it sustains hope of "developing communities integrated in their

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[263] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 18.

[264] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 119.

[265] *Atwood,* 13.

[266] *Atwood,* 13.

local ecosystems,"[267] thereby treading 'lightly' on the planet. It also enhances consciousness regarding sound ecological living as the space inhabited is seen as a constant source of nourishment rather than a resource to be used and then discarded. Thus re-inhabiting space also requires a shift in perspective as it demands a long-term change in lifestyle and attitudes.

An aspect of rhizomes are the way they transform the space where they grow, whether they are "train tracks, vacant lots" or "stripped land," loosening the soil usually considered inhospitable and aerating it "with their system of offshoots making room for diverse species."[268] However, while making room for the new, the rhizome also helps in soil conservation by virtue of their "lateral network of roots that prevent erosion."[269] In the *MaddAddam* trilogy we find a parallel in the way the Gardeners take up discarded building and spaces and revive them, creating gardens on rooftops, devising methods of self-sustenance and ways of making the place "more ecologically sound."[270] Like the rhizomes, the Gardeners change the spaces they inhabit and at same time, play an active role in conservation of existing resources through their acts of conscious living. Thus like the Green Sisters in McFarland Taylor's study, Atwood's Gardeners also see 'sustainable ways of life' [271] as spiritual practice and discipline.

A common trait in the Green Sisters across the continent is in their act of 'sacred agriculture,'[272] as they see the act of community gardening as a deeply meditative process that

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[267] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 10.

[268] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 18.

[269] Atwood, 18.

[270] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 10.

[271] McFarland Taylor, 12.

[272] McFarland Taylor, 1.

connects them to the land and makes them conscious about food and their relationship with the earth. The use of the term 'God's Gardeners' is obviously suggestive of many layers of references, not least of which would be the 'Quiet Garden Movement' in England, initiated by Rev. Philip Roderick in 1992, which cultivates and maintains gardens across England, where people can "experience silence, restfulness and contemplative practices."[273] Whether the Green Sisters or the Gardeners or the participants of the Quiet Garden movement, a common methodology appears in the way the background setting and activities within which spiritual practices appear to find renewal and strength are seen as closely connected to being in touch with the earth, in whichever way it is possible. There is also a biblical connection that is often cited in this regard, referring to Jesus' act of withdrawing to a quiet place for reflection and practices in solitude.[274] The God's Gardeners are seen performing silent all-night vigils or meditations in their gardens at times as they seek access to a larger intelligence than their own. The importance of visions received in contact with the elements can also be seen in St. Francis of Assisi's *The Canticle of the Creatures*,[275] celebrating the sun, stars and the elements of fire, earth, water and air. Particularly significant as he wrote this hymn of praise when blind and on

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[273] "Quiet Garden Movement: Sharing Outdoor Space for Wellbeing and Inner Journey," *Quiet Garden Movement,* accessed March 19, 2021, https://quietgarden.org/

[274] While there are multiple references to Jesus' practice of withdrawing into solitude for prayer and rest from his spiritual ministry, some verses such as Luke 5:15-16, Luke 6:12, Luke 4.42, and Mark 6.31-32, Matthew 14.23 stand out amongst numerous others, highlighting the importance of solitary meditation. The Gardeners adopt this practice in the form of their overnight vigils through which they seek answers at their moment of crisis. Some of Adam One's sermons also grant us glimpses into his thoughts where he admits to glimpses of larger collective consciousness only during such solitary meditations or vigils. Thus the silent vigils are also seen as essential towards the transformative shift in ecological consciousness, sought by the Gardeners embodying deep ecology philosophy. See also Bill Gaultiere "Jesus' Solitude and Silence," *Soulshepherding,* accessed April 19, 2022, https://www.soulshepherding.org/jesus-solitude-and-silence/

[275] Saint Francis, "The Canticle of the Creatures," *Webster University*, accessed February 14, 2018, http://www2.webster.edu/~barrettb/canticle.htm. Also called "The Canticle of the Sun." For further details, see Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), accessed October 9, 2019, Google Books, https://www.google.co.in/books/edition/St_Francis_of_Assisi_and_Nature/Uq7mCwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=St.+Francis+of+Assisi+and+Nature&printsec=frontcover.

his deathbed, it can be understood as the result of long periods of contemplation in the wilderness and natural spaces and celebrates Francis' understanding of God's love in the Creation of the cosmos. As noted by Keith Warner, St. Francis spent a third of every year in spiritual meditation in the wilderness hermitages with some of his brothers,[276] and the solitary garden vigils performed by the Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood*, keep alive the importance of revering nature for progress on the spiritual path as experienced and embodied by a Franciscan environmental ethic,[277] and also restates the usefulness of the approach towards promoting sensitivity towards the environment.

Adam One's sermons on Feast Days connected to solstices and equinoxes, celebrates ecological stalwarts across the globe, drawing attention to the rhythm of the planet as well as the importance of activism, acts as meditations on the connection between spiritual and ecological consciousness. The celebration and Feast Days as well as rituals performed collectively by the Gardeners also provide a common and crucial sense of identity and community to the Gardeners. The Green Sisters are also seen practicing certain diurnal cosmic liturgies at dawn and dusk, their spoken prayers and bodily rituals and celebration of certain days and events attempting to "embody" or "mimic" the patterns of renewal and growth seen

[276] Keith Warner, "Franciscan Environmental Ethics," 149.

[277] Keith Warner proposes a Franciscan environmental ethics, drawing upon the inspiration of St Francis of Assisi as well as Bonaventure of Bagnoregio and John Duns Scotus, to complement contemporary environmental Ethics of Care. St Francis viewed his encounters with Creation as a means of drawing closer to God. According to Keith Warner, St Francis was able to "perceive Christ in all of material reality." This faculty of perception is extended by Bonaventure in the role of the senses in appreciating Creation and thus experiencing Christ. Bonaventure explains that through the study of creation, therefore one could learn more about the Creator. The image of the circle that Bonaventure uses—"we come from God, we exist in relation to God, and we will return to God," thus becomes another discursive ecotheological arguments to sustain the importance of the stewardship approach towards the environment. Keith Warner, "Franciscan Environmental Ethics," 148-149, 152.

naturally in the Earth's ecosystem.[278] Harmonizing the "spiritual and biophysical landscapes" seems a crucial step towards rekindling awareness of a 'sacred' earth. Activist action is also seen as essential by the Green Sisters studied by McFarland Taylor. Similar to the God's Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood,* the religious vowed women studies by McFarland Taylor are seen actively participating in protest movements—disrupting meetings of corporate polluters, obstructing construction work responsible for ecological degradation, attempting to stop the 'suburban sprawl,' protesting against GMOs and irradiated food, promoting organic farming and agriculture. In addition to this, the Green Sisters are seen developing "green liturgies that honour the whole life community,"[279] seeing it essential to unite spiritual practice with ecological awareness as inseparably linked with each other. Thus they espouse a daily spiritually conscious ecological practice as a model for others to follow.

In the hope of restructuring lifestyle practices, many of the Green Sisters pay attention to building 'alternative housing structures'--retreats or hermitages with renewable and natural substances like 'straw bale, rammed earth and cob material'[280] consciously avoiding forest products to reduce their ecological footprint. They adopt many more ecologically prudent practices like using composting toilets, heating when necessary using solar power, cooking on solar ovens and using electric vehicles instead of gas powered ones. While these may be small-scale practices for the naysayers, who might see them as more in tune with 'light green environmentalism,'[281] according to me they describe a shift in consciousness that seeks to be in

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[278] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 20.

[279] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 2.

[280] McFarland Taylor, 1.

[281] See Note 1 above.

tune with existence, finding divinity in the world inhabited by us and a need for finding praxis that reflects belief systems. The Green Sisters also conscientiously use water for bathing and washing dishes and use non-toxic compounds for these purposes.[282] Hence, I would like to see these lifestyle changes as expression of dark green environmentalism[283] that seeks to change belief systems rather than providing superficial and temporary solutions to environmental crisis.

The Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* are also seen using biodegradable toilets called 'biolets' and limit their water usage to a minimum, teaching the children to be ever mindful of wastage and to constantly seek ways of recycling whatever is available. The Gardener children are trained to actively contribute to community life through their "Young Bioneer" work,[284] which involves collecting thrown away wine from garbage vats of winos, bars and nightclubs for making vinegar used by the Gardeners for household cleaning. The children collect soap-ends from hotels and restaurants for making new soap for use in the house as well as for re-sale at the 'Gardeners' Tree of Life Natural Materials Exchange' where tourists and other rich Compounders come to buy the vegetables and soap produced by the Gardeners for their assured organic methods of production. The lesson drilled into the Gardeners' minds is articulated by Ren in her reminiscences: "Nothing should be carelessly thrown away, not even wine from sinful places."[285] Garbage, trash and dirt are redefined according to their recyclable value by the Gardeners in their everyday practice.

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[282] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 17.

[283] See Note 1 above.

[284] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 83.

[285] Atwood, 83.

The food choices of the Gardeners also form an intrinsic part of their philosophy and practice. They all take the 'Vegivows' when joining the fold, attempting to stick to vegetarian options to practice their philosophy of seeing every creature's life as valuable. They celebrate the Feast Days connected with different environmentalist heroes, who are beatified as Saints in the Gardener philosophy, with specially prepared food[286] that attempts to tease the taste buds within the limited fare available to the Gardeners from their own rooftop gardening as the food available outside is heavily contaminated. At the same time, they are also practical regarding food choices at times of crisis. While advocating love for all creatures, Adam One also warns that when the apocalypse strikes, individuals need to protect themselves, or they shall end up drowning with those clutching at them.[287] Zeb, one of the leading Adams in the group teaches self-defence in his Urban Bloodshed Limitation classes, asserting the importance of limiting one's own bloodshed before all others.[288] The older Gardener children are also trained by Zeb to trap small animals for food, to survive challenging times when other sources of nourishment may be absent.[289] The rhetoric used in these lessons which appear to clearly contradict the Vegivows taken and practiced by the Gardeners is that "nothing is unclean to us if gratitude is

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[286] Some examples of specially prepared food on Feast Days by Gardeners include turnip pie prepared from those stored from the last year's harvest, Pickled Mushroom Medley on the Feast of Adam and All Primates; or Fish Cakes, i.e. cakes shaped like Fish to celebrate April Fish Day.

[287] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 26.

[288] Atwood, 26.

[289] The way the Gardeners adapt their practices to suit their circumstances, can be seen as a parallel to Naess' concept of Ecosophy T, his own personal version of ecosophy that adapts and derives practices according to local requirements but on the basis of larger philosophical ideas. Therefore every individual is encouraged to develop their own version of ecosophy combining theory and practice in the way that Naess has done in his life. The Gardeners too keep training their members to be innovative in adapting their ideas, specially in preparation for the apocalypse they foresee, where many might find themselves in unforeseen situations requiring the application of their training in new, individual ways. Zeb is the epitome of such an individualized and practised ecosophy, according to me, for moulding his behaviour rapidly in different spaces for the larger cause that he believes in, without the hesitations that characterize Adam One's reflections. Adam One and Zeb's differing approaches to environmentalist action are explored in detail a little later in this chapter. See page 265-268 of this chapter.

felt and pardon asked, and if we ourselves are willing to offer ourselves to the great chain of nourishment in our turn."[290]

On 'Predator Day,' Adam One tries to redefine God in terms of his more ferocious creations, asking his listeners to see God, not in his gentle and loving form, but rather as "God the Tiger. Or God the Lion. Or God the Bear….Or even God the Shark."[291] As Adam One explains, terrifying and overwhelming strength of these creatures must also be worshipped as they are desired by humans too sometimes. He reasons that as "God has put a little of Himself into each of His Creatures," the creatures must be viewed as "reflections of the Divine." [292] Here Adam One strives to solve the apparent contradiction between choosing Vegivows and a peaceful way of life with the ferocity seen in the predator-prey relationship in the natural world. This sermon is also given at a time when the Gardeners are struggling to survive post the Waterless Flood and death seems imminent. Adam One reflects on whether it is "more blessed, to eat or to be eaten" [293] as human engineered biotechnological spliced predators threaten the survival of the handful of Gardeners left with Adam One along with lack of food and the fear of infection. It is in answer to the inner struggle he himself undergoes, as the vows taken by the Gardeners break and they are forced to consume meat. They also mentally prepare themselves to offer up their lives to the cycle of life, in the process of struggle for survival and lack of food, confronted with reality of the words that they had been preaching all these years theoretically.

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[290] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 149.

[291] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 414.

[292] Atwood, 414.

[293] Atwood, 415.

Atwood during her book tour for the promotion of *The Year of the Flood* also adopts the Vegivows[294] and declares her food choices as well as lifestyle choices on her website, therefore extending the importance of the Gardeners' lifestyle and food choices in the larger journey of shift in ecological consciousness. Amongst the Green Sisters as well, food remains an important part of daily ritual and "central" to "harmonizing of internal and external landscapes."[295] In accepting the importance of food, the processes of preparation and consumption of the food in maintaining one's body and in the awareness of the earth's bounty in providing for us, the vowed sisters of different congregations, while varied in their choices and practices, are similar in their comprehension of the importance of 'healing' the "divisions between both matter and spirit, and body and earth." [296]

Naess' vision of a more contemplative life, averse to the materialistic has often led to deep ecologists being portrayed as 'self-denying, austere and joyless.'[297] Atwood's representation of the Gardeners in her series, caricatures this aspect, through the Gardener children's angst regarding the ecologically friendly but misshapen clothes they are forced to wear**.** Ren and Amanda are seen particularly disliking the Gardener overalls that they as

[294] Atwood, "Greening the Tour," *The Year of the Flood*, accessed April 15, 2020, http://yearoftheflood.com /greening-the-tour/. Atwood in this section of her website on *The Year of the Flood,* declares methods by which the Book Tour in 2009 tried to be as "green as possible," which included the author's taking the "VegiVows" during the trip," with the exception of non-avian and non-mammalian bioforms once a week." At the same time she, "like the Garderners," permits "eggs, viewed as a sort of a nut." The 'VegiVows' are one of the vows taken by individuals choosing to conform to the Gardener way of life in *The Year of the Flood*, where they take a decision to eat mostly vegetarian food as far as possible.

[295] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 12.

[296] McFarland Taylor, 12.

[297] Garforth, *Green Utopias,* 55.

Gardener children must wear. Compared to the pleebrats,[298] whose clothes are sparkly and colourful, the Gardeners' clothes look like "parking lots" according to Ren, as they wear dyed plain, natural scrubs that are shapeless and unattractive. The Gardener children envy the pleebrats "their gaudy freedom" and view their "forbidden worldly life" as a charmed one.[299] It is by these clothes that the Gardeners stand out even in the pleebs and are teased and mocked by the pleeb children. Amanda observes Ren carefully first time they meet on a pleeb street and asks if she is "one of *them*… the…Goddies. The Godawfuls."[300] Ren tries to disidentify herself with these "Goddies" saying that she only lives with them and is "not really like them at all."[301] The Gardeners however adopt these dresses as part of their spiritual discipline and practice. While the 'Greenies' are made fun of because of their chosen attire that marks them out as different from the rest of the people, we can also see it as part of activist action by the Gardeners, to intentionally demarcate their lifestyle and choices as different from the larger populace and thereby signal a different possibility of life to those willing to make the 'shift'. An extreme expression of austerity is seen through the figure of Bernice, one of the Gardeners, who later turns towards radical ecotage[302] and is shown as a fiery self-denying environmentalist when she burns Jimmy's leather sandals and other articles in protest against his lifestyle in college. Many of the Green Sisters in McFarland Taylor's study wear clothes recycled from others,[303]

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[298] Children living in the pleeblands, in utter poverty and surviving on theft and cunning are called 'pleebrats' by the Gardeners.

[299] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 81.

[300] Atwood, 89.

[301] Atwood, 81.

[302] See Note 99 in the Introduction of this thesis for an explanation of the coinage of the word 'ecotage.'

[303] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 100.

preferring those made of natural fibres[304] as recounted by Sister of Charity Maureen Wild, or devise practical, comfortable yet distinctive community wear such as the nuns of the Green Mountain Monastery in Vermont who have chosen a "modest brushed cotton blue denim dress"[305] that serves them well for all light physical work, gardening, cooking and other jobs. This tea length dress adopted by the Green Mountain Monastery is also low maintenance and economical and makes them easily identifiable, but was specially chosen by the nuns as a form of resistance to "the dominant culture of advertising and its large-scale manipulation of women."[306] Thus clothes become an intrinsic part of politics and environmentalist action and even a form of distinguishing a community of individuals from another.

The method of schooling adopted by the Gardeners involve writing on slates and erasing words written at the end of each day as it is considered dangerous to retain written documents that could be used by "enemies" against them, referring to the CorpSeCorps. The children are in addition taught that "paper was sinful because it was made from the flesh of trees."[307] Ren recollects a lot of time spent memorizing Gardener history and their peculiar manner of naming the years according to the entry of significant members to their fold. While on one hand it shows the need of the cult to have their own personal history that they wish to save for posterity through training the children, the effects of the same are also shown in Ren's craving to be a part of the

[304] Sister Maureen Wild however acknowledges that she finds it difficult to afford organic cotton, and therefore relies on thrift shops and other recycle stores and hand-me-downs for clothing. See McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 103.

[305]McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 103.

[306] McFarland Taylor, 103.

[307] McFarland Taylor, 73.

nomenclature of years: "I wanted Year Ten to have Ren in it, but I didn't think it would."[308] The children are also made to memorize the names of saints connected to every day of the year, commemorating the souls who lived their lives for the cause of the ecosystem and the environment in times past and present. The students find it difficult to remember all of it and cannot understand why they are being forced to do so. The alternative cosmology promulgated and propagated by the Adams and Eves of the organization obviously require the development of a different kind of worldview in its members for the movement and its ideals to be sustained. The schooling provided by the Gardeners attempts to inculcate such a different perspective in the young children redefining the way they view religion and Feast days, to always be connected to the earth and its wellbeing. Raising awareness seems pivotal in the efforts made by the Gardeners both within their fold and outside when they are campaigning for a 'greener' way of life. Gardener children are also trained in fabric recycling, cooking, sewing, mental arithmetic, beekeeping and mycology, holistic healing with plants, wild and garden botanicals, meditation as well as survival techniques in the worst circumstances—namely predator-prey relationships and camouflage skills. Different Adams and Eves are appointed for each of these subjects depending on their expertise. We see in the second and third book of this trilogy how many of these skills stand the Gardeners and the children in good stead, helping them adapt to hostile conditions and survive. Though they face great difficulty at breaking the Vegivows, they return to their training of predator-prey relationships taught by Zeb and change their eating habits to match their changed circumstances. At the same time, Atwood keeps the depiction of the

[308] The Gardener years were named after important Adams and Eves of the organization, like "Year three, Pilar starts bees; year Four, Burt came in the door; …Year Nine, Philo began to shine." Keeping the rhythm in mind, and Ren and Lucerne's entry in Year Ten makes Ren covet such a position in the annals of Gardener history. However she doubts the same, even though she's so young at that time, understanding the working of hierarchy in the organization. *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 73.

children real, by portraying their acts of meanness to each other and their nicknaming the teachers and creation of remixes of the chants and hymns taught to them. This keeps critique alive within the fold[309] and caricatures the Gardeners, disrupting the seriousness of Adam One's sermons occurring periodically in the course of the book. Atwood blends humour and emergency in a unique way in this book. Thus Pilar, the serious beekeeper and teacher of Mycology is called 'Fungus' by the children and Burt the teacher of Wild Botanicals is called the 'Knob' as he is almost bald. Toby is called the 'Dry Witch' who mixes concoctions in bottles but is a tough teacher, while Nuala is called the 'Wet Witch' for crying at the drop of a hat. The children also use a Code word for identifying their own kind, with the word 'Gang' requiring a reply 'Grene' with pun intended!

In the Gardeners' training school for their children, they are taught to respect all species and learn the specific qualities of different plants, to protect themselves when the Waterless Flood came. In his sermon on the first day of 'Saint Euell's Week,' Adam One calls upon the spirit of Euell Gibbons, well known for his books on natural diets and wild foods in the 1960s.[310] He is eulogized as a saint by the Gardeners to amplify their teachings regarding the consumption of natural food rather than the artificially produced Compound food, for health and ecological wellbeing. Knowing how to identify edible varieties of plants and selecting food and herbs to suit physical conditions would help the listeners tide over the Waterless Flood that "is coming", when "all buying and selling will cease, and we will find ourselves thrown back upon our own resources, in the midst of God's bounteous Garden."[311] The hymn following this sermon, called

[309] Find further discussions on this aspect of inbuilt critique within the cult, on page 276, 286-288 of this chapter.

[310] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 150.

[311] *Atwood,* 151.

"Oh Sing We Now The Holy Weeds"[312] stores certain information regarding weeds and plants that can be used, thereby placing greater faith in the recall value of songs as compared to sermons, in times of need. Thus the hymns of the God's Gardeners can also be seen as their way of codifying and storing their ideology in a form that would easily be retained and travel through singers to those needing it most.

A dominant characteristic of the Green Sisters' communities also lies in their becoming a sanctuary or refuge for those "who fundamentally disagree with the dominant capitalist consumer culture…or are disenchanted with the 'American Dream' of unchecked wealth accumulation and unlimited progress."[313] In the *MaddAddam* trilogy as well, the Gardeners become a refuge for all those breaking away from the Compounds and their culture of wealth accumulation and exploitation, or even characters in the pleeblands[314] suffering exploitation and violence in any form. Thus their lifestyle choices take the form of a movement against capitalist and consumerist ideology. Toby experiences overwhelming relief on reaching the rooftop garden. She feels immense gratitude after the harrowing experiences with Blanco at Secretburgers. The plants and flowers on the Edencliff Rooftop, the bees and butterflies and air of the Garden refresh her and she feels "as if a large, benevolent hand had reached down and picked her up, and was holding her safe."[315] Toby observes new people arriving and leaving the Gardeners, some converting to the way of life, and others not staying for long, like " shadow

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[312] Atwood, 152.

[313] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters*, 15-16.

[314] See Note 223 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, that discusses the term 'pleeblands' used by Atwood in the *MaddAddam* trilogy to describe the large areas of human habitation outside the Compound Walls.

[315] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 52.

people, and Adam One was moving them around in the shadows."[316] She slowly begins to understand the reason why the Gardeners prefer not to ask personal questions, as many of their fold are with them to protect themselves from the eye of the CorpSeCorps and other such organizations. When Toby formally becomes an Eve, and therefore part of the decision making body of the Gardeners, she begins to understand how the Gardeners were actually taking a strong and measured stance against commercial activities propagated by the CorpSeCorps. Her perspective regarding the cult now changes and she understands that it was not simply an "otherworldly sheepfold-like cocoon."[317] The Gardeners were slowly gaining momentum in public life and providing a space of refuge and relief to many individuals wanting to break away from unhealthy and exploitative Compound life.

The detailed analysis of the God's Gardeners returns us to the crucial question of how important a sense of community is towards adopting a new lifestyle that is markedly different from the majority of the population. How essential is companionship in effecting 'The Great Turning' identified by Macy? Atwood presents us with the impact of community in several ways. While the Gardeners live in a commune like existence and feel a bond through their common set of beliefs and practices even if located far away from each other, Crake lives an isolated life, which impacts his choices and actions, which further affect all individuals on the planet through his engineered BlyssPluss pandemic to decimate the human race. Though communicating with the Gardeners initially, he slowly cuts off all contact. Crake is seen throughout as a loner, only finding some companionship in Jimmy and later in Oryx. The

[316] Atwood, 122.

[317] Atwood, 226.

MaddAddamites also experience a sense of community through their virtual interactions and plans of ecotage,[318] though they are spread out across the globe and not in physical proximity. It is interesting to note how these different groups or individuals tread the path of their version of environmentalism and how the existence of and in certain cases lack of community affects the way they practice and the effects of their practice and beliefs on the larger world depicted in the novels. Crake, choosing to be isolated and lonely, walks the most extreme path of misanthropy, seeing humans as the greatest curse on the planet. In fact he designs the Crakers in a way that they do not feel lonely or lost, at least in his estimation. He also designs them such that they never cause damage to the ecosystem they inhabit like humans have done for millennia. On the other hand the Gardeners, while expecting a 'Flood' that shall create necessary changes also see themselves as possible survivors and creators of the new world order. The MaddAddamites find inspiration to continue their acts of sabotage on capitalist enterprise by their communication with each other, hiding their identities but cherishing their impact on the Corporates and other entities engaged in ecological and human exploitation.

After the BlyssPluss pandemic or the 'Flood' in Gardener terminology, when all characters are scattered and alone, their solitude tests their lifestyle choices and brings back memories of times spent with their Gardener community peers. Those memories then become their mainstay through the challenging silence and scarcity they face. Toby confined to the AnooYoo spa after the pandemic, reflects on whether she still believes in the dictums of the Gardeners, as she watches the vultures looking for prey. The Gardeners would teach that the Vultures were "friends…They purify the earth. They are God's necessary dark Angels of bodily

[318] See Note 99 of Introduction to the thesis. 'Ecotage' has been analysed in detail in the next section of this chapter titled 'Radical Environmentalism.'

dissolution. Imagine how terrible it would be if there were no death!"[319] However, in the face of extreme death and destruction, Toby finds her beliefs challenged and tested. Surviving on the rooftop garden created by her in Anoo Yoo, Toby is seen picking some spinach and then flicking off the iridescent beetles eating the leaves, and then stepping on the beetles. In the next moment, she remembers to make a little "thumbprint grave" for the beetles and prays to free their souls and asks for pardon, in a rite learnt in her Gardener days. Thus she finds Gardener teachings deeply ingrained in her, even without her active realization.[320] While in the Gardener fold, Toby was quite uncomfortable with the practices of the Gardeners and never quite fit in. Yet the habits ingrained in her keep returning to challenge her decisions when she is alone. Atwood's depiction of the effect of community and isolated action in the course of the trilogy, also raises pertinent questions regarding extremist action by environmentalists who completely separate themselves from community, seen specially in the figure of Crake. While not voiced directly, the presence of a community certainly keeps a check on excesses and helps individuals out through their internal crisis at moments of struggle.

Radical Environmentalism

Atwood confronts the debates around ecoterrorism and revolutionary environmentalism and its connection with deep ecology philosophy, through her nuanced depiction of the MaddAddamites and their relationship with the God's Gardeners. This section of the chapter shall attempt to analyse Atwood's representation of radical environmentalist politics and problematics at the same time, particularly in the second and third books of the *MaddAddam*

[319] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 4.

[320] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 18.

trilogy. Radical environmentalism often adopts arson, vandalism and theft of property belonging to persons or organizations causing harm to the environment and human, animal and non-human life forms. Reed Noss in an early article defending ecotage as an act of self-defence, calls direct action[321] "regrettable but necessary,"[322] if we see the earth as a part of our own selves. He also directly connects the contribution of radical environmentalism with deep ecology—calling Earth First! the "resistance embodiment" of deep ecology.[323] The methodology adopted is seen as terrorism by the FBI, even when their objective may be defence of the earth and its denizens from capitalist, consumerist enterprise. An important warning included by the call for action by the radical environmentalist organizations is to avoid risking human life in the operations. This is what the Earth Liberation Front (ELF)[324] website calls "non-violent activism."[325] The injunction that ecoteurs should ascertain "that no animals, human or otherwise, will be inadvertently injured or killed,"[326] is what sets radical environmentalism apart from the other

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[321] Radical environmentalists used direct action tactics that may range from peaceful civil disobedience, tree-sitting, blockading, tree-spiking, to more controversial ones like sabotaging facilities causing harm to animals or forests, disrupting infrastructure and damaging properties involved in animal exploitation or environmental harm.

[322] Reed Noss, "A Taoist Reply (on Violence)," *Earth First!* 3, no.7 (1983): 13, quoted in Bron Taylor, "Conservation Biology," *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, eds. Bron R. Taylor and Jeffrey Kaplan (London and NY: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 416.

[323] Noss, "A Taoist Reply (on Violence)," 13.

[324] The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) was formed as an overt revolutionary alternative to the radical Earth First! group, as Earth first! sought to keep itself dissociated from blatant law breaking to keep up its popularity specially during the anti-road protest at Twyford Down in Britain in 1992. It has since become a collective name for all the scattered individuals and groups that espouse guerilla warfare and ecotage techniques to stop environmental destruction by states and corporate institutions and is often compared to the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) formed in 1976, whose name was used as an inspiration for naming the ELF, to instantly convey "how the ELF operated and what its goals were." See Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella, "Introduction: A Fire in the Belly of the Beast: The Emergence of Revolutionary Environmentalism," *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth* (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), 49-50.

[325]Horacio R. Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement,"*Aptitude for Destruction,* Volume 2 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005), 146. See also ELF website, accessed April 17, 2017, http://www.earthliberationfront.com/

[326] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ,"146.

forms of terrorism seen in the world today. It is important to note that radical environmentalists more often than not reject the 'eco-terrorist' label as they see the government or corporate as the real terrorists, in exploiting the environment.[327] The use of the word 'terrorist' to define revolutionary action, itself is an act of judgment according to Richard E. Rubenstein.[328] Hence, as I reflect on the journey traversed by radical and revolutionary environmentalism in the following pages, in order to better understand how the trajectory is mapped by Atwood in her fiction, I shall not be using the term 'eco-terrorist,' rather opting for the term 'radical environmentalist' as I choose to focus more on their ideological and philosophical roots.

The 1970s saw an explosion of ecological philosophizing in North America, boosted by the academic conferences and collectives that helped in creating a biocentric conservation movement, inspiring many students on college campuses towards radical environmental activism.[329] Horacio R. Trujillo cites the different forms that direct action takes in the 1970s close on the heels of the Earth Day celebrations.[330] A group called the Arizona Phantom attempted to stop construction of a coal mine by dismantling railroad tracks and disabling equipment, while college students naming themselves 'Eco-Raiders' burnt billboards, disabled

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[327] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ,"146.

[328] Richard E. Rubenstein explains, "To call an act of political violence terrorist is not merely to describe it but to judge it. . . . Descriptively, "terrorism" suggests violent action, by individuals or small groups. Judgementally, it implies illegitimacy..." He also astutely analyses that for the people defending any particular regime, "any politically motivated disobedience," or even mass resistance would be viewed as terrorist action, while on the other hand, for those rebelling against the existent social order, the regime in power is 'terrorist'. Thus Rubenstein carefully analyses, "Nobody wants to be called a terrorist; terrorism is what the *other* side is up to." *Alchemists of Revolution: Terrorism in the Modern World* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 17-18, quoted in Sean P. Eagen, "From Spikes to Bombs: The Rise of Eco-terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19 (1996):2-3, doi: 10.1080/10576109608435993.

[329] Dave Foreman, Confessions of an Eco-Warrior (New York: Harmony Books, 1991), 8. See also Bron Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2, no.1 (Spring 2008): 45. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41887590

[330] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement,"152.

bulldozers and vandalized development projects in the Tucson area. In a similar manner, the 'Billboard Bandits' operated in Michigan. A group calling themselves 'The Fox' worked by plugging drainage pipes and dumping industrial waste from a steel plant in the US into the office of the CEO of the company running the plant. A Minnesota farmers' campaign of sabotage between 1977-79 were called the 'Bolt Weevils' for their method of toppling electricity towers by loosening the bolts, when they were unable to prevent high voltage power lines being erected on their land.[331] Sometimes, radical environmentalists are seen even staking their own lives for preserving what they consider sacred. Mark Dubois chained himself to an area of the Stanilaus river in California that would be flooded by the construction of a dam, as an act of resistance, risking his life in 1979. His cited his motivation as deep love for the river, that he called his "spiritual teacher, guru" and comparable to a "lover."[332]

While certain organizations were formed in the following decade for furthering the cause of RE, they were soon seen to be co-opted by institutions and bureaucracy by dedicated radical environmentalists and splinter groups soon formed. A classic example of this is seen in the history of Greenpeace that formed in 1971 as a direct action group protecting whales and protesting nuclear testing, but was seen to degenerate into a Gang of Ten bureaucracy.[333] As a

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[331] Trujillo, 143. More details of direct action by Radical Environmentalist groups in the 1970s can be found in Daniel J. Philippon, "Eco-Terrorism," *Gale/St. James Encyclopedia of Popular Culture* (Farmington Hill, MI: Gale Group, 2002).

[332] Roderick Frazier Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 191-92, quoted in Bron Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 47.

[333] Larger environmental groups like Sierra Club, Environmental Defense Fund, National Resources Defense Council, among others are called the 'Gang of Ten' which acquired great influence, wealth and power as they sought to fight the environmental battle from within corridors of power such as Washington, DC. However, these organizations were quickly co-opted and turned into parallel institutions quite like the very corporations they had begun criticizing, adopting the route of compromise and focusing on profit from 'greenwashing' campaigns. The Radical Environmentalist movement was also a response towards such degeneration into bureaucracy and compromise with the state and corporate enterprises seen in such large environmental organizations in the 1970s. Steven Best and Anthony J. Nocella, "Introduction: A Fire in the Belly of the Beast: The Emergence of

result a more radical splinter group soon formed as a breakaway with evicted Paul Watson forming the Sea Shepherds/Orcaforce in 1977.[334] The ALF was formed soon in 1976, an underground transnational movement for freeing animals from captivity, using direct action when necessary.[335] Earth First! too was formed soon by David Foreman as one of the founders in 1980. The motivating factor was a need to "say what needs to be said, and do what needs to be done, and take strong actions to dramatize it."[336] Again this was stated as a contrast to Sierra Club and its manner of working.[337] Earth First! modelled itself after Edward Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang*, as they were formed in response to the US Forest Service's policies that opened up many million acres of the wilderness to commercial exploitation.[338]

However, the nature of activism characterizing Earth First! also changed over time, as Foreman and other founders felt that their group had been invaded by those preferring civil disobedience over direct action. It resulted in many militant breakaway factions, following Foreman's departure from the group[339] that continued with violent direct action. Judi Bari's role in the movement needs special consideration as she advocated the split in the group as strategic and necessary. Hence even while protesting the violence of direct action rhetoric used

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Revolutionary Environmentalism ," *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth* (Oakland and Edinburgh: AK Press, 2006), 15-16.

[334] Best and Nocella, "Introduction: A Fire in the Belly of the Beast," 17; Also see Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 149.

[335] Best and Nocella, "Introduction: A Fire in the Belly of the Beast," 17.

[336] Eagen, "From Spikes to Bombs: The Rise of Eco-terrorism," 6.

[337] Eagen, 6.

[338] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 149.

[339] See Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 152, and Martha F. Lee, "Violence and the Environment: The Case of 'Earth First!'" *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7, no.3 (Autumn 1995): 122, doi: 10.1080/09546559508427308, for more details about this split.

in the Earth First! journal, she sees the importance of the split, so that direct action can continue without official connection with Earth First![340] The ELF can thus be seen as a fallout of this split between shades of radical environmentalism favouring different degrees of direct action and requiring a certain official distance from each other.

A defence adopted by the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and Animal Liberation Front (ALF), is the 'choice-of-evils' defence, asking which the greater evil is, "to destroy this property of this corporation or to choose to allow this corporation to continue to destroy the environment,"[341] and choosing to act on behalf of the environment even if that is considered an evil. The multiple forms of direct action, whether common acts of vandalism, use of graffiti, breaking of windows, disabling equipment, gluing locks or even direct intimidation of individuals involved in environmental and animal rights abuse[342] can be seen represented in the activities of MaddAddamites[343] in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy and may be compared to the ecotage performed by ELFs. Similar to the acts of eco-terrorists, unidentified MaddAddamites operate across the world, communicating via a series of impersonated digital gateways to a common platform, to share their attacks on the Compounds and other organizations with similar ethics of maximising profits at the cost of all animals and humans. This "decentralized yet

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[340] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 152; Also Bron Taylor, "Religion, Violence and Radical Environmentalism: From Earth First! to the Unabomber to the Earth Liberation Front," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 10, no. 4 (Winter 1998):11, doi: 10.1080/09546559808427480.

[341] Craig Rosebraugh in Robert Sullivan, "The Face of Eco-terrorism," *New York Times*, December 20, 1998, quoted in Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 147.

[342] Daphne Bilouri, "Eco-Protest Develops More Militant Edge," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 1, 2001, referred to in Trujillo,"The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 156.

[343] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 253.

networked"[344] nature of communicating via layered and encrypted internet pathways, is similar to ELF and ALF communication via chatrooms and electronic mail[345] which has had the advantage of quickly disseminating ideas of the groups, fulfilling their agenda of educating public opinion and mobilizing action.[346] The internet allows for planning larger scale of direct action at multiple locations, as observed by Bilouri[347] and can be seen in the way the MaddAddamites work in the *MaddAddam* trilogy.

Reacting to the Compounds' use of scientific knowledge to spread epidemics and then controlling them with expensive vaccinations[348] with their own methods, the MaddAddamites use their knowledge of splices to wreak havoc on selected business units of the CorpSeCorps. We find news of a biotechnologically created wasp that invades the ChickieNobs[349] installations and infects all the Nobs, such that the whole ChickieNobs unit has to be incinerated to control the epidemic unleashed. Another such attack is made on the GMO Happicuppa Coffee Bean

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[344] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 154.

[345] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 154.

[346] See Peter Chalk, "Leaderless Resistance," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 1, 2001, https://www.rand.org/blog/2001/07/u_s_-environmental-groups-and-leaderless-resistance.html., for a detailed discussion of the "autonomous leaderless units ALUs" used by Radical Environmentalists, that while operating independently from each other, can through their networking effect a "chain reaction" that can lead to a "national revolution."

[347] Bilouri, "Eco-Protest Develops More Militant Edge."

[348] In the course of *The Year of the Flood*, Toby learns that the mysterious illness that took her mother's life was a HelthWyzer conspiracy that inserted microbes into her mother's blood stream via the vitamins and health supplements that her mother would take from the HelthWyzer brand and then siphoned off all the family's money in the treatment of this inserted disease, using further drugs manufactured by HelthWyzer.

[349] At the Watson Crick Academy, chicken parts are grown on tubers without heads, with nutrients injected through an orifice. These animal-protein tubers, which are chicken without heads are called ChickieNobs. These biotechnological variants are created to supply the growing demand for chicken meat as well as to assuage people that the organisms did not feel pain when killed as they did not have 'heads'. See pp 140-141 of Chapter 1 for a discussion on Jimmy's response to these grotesque creations.

crop that is attacked by a new bean weevil, resistant to all kinds of pesticides. Atwood includes more news reporting on the *MaddAddam* web portal[350] of the microbe that eats through interstate highways and the splice of porcupine and beaver in the form of a rodent destroying the fan belts and transmission systems of parked vehicles, etc.[351] In his younger days, Crake is seen discussing the news of ecotage reported on the *MaddAddam* site, which he is able to hack into with his extraordinary hacking abilities, suspecting these MaddAddamites to be Compounders or Compound trained as the 'bioforms'[352] they were putting together were too advanced for the pleeblands. He reflects, "I thought at first they were just another crazy Animal Liberation org. But there is more to it than that. I think they're after the machinery. They're after the whole system, they want to shut it down. So far they haven't done any people numbers, but it's obvious they could."[353]

An important characteristic of the radical environmentalist direct action observed by Trujillo, is the need to educate public opinion regarding capitalist and state enterprise that is harmful for the environment. Mike Roselle[354] also highlights how this often determines the agenda of radical environmentalists.[355] The visual spectacle of environmental destruction chosen and manner of ecotage chosen in response is planned according to the dramatic impact

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[350] This web portal was designed specifically so that it could be accessed only by advanced hackers like the MaddAddamites, to keep their planning and execution of ecotage safe from CorpSeCorps radar. Crake was able to break in through the multiple gateways and firewalls owing to his expertise in hacking.

[351] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 253.

[352] Biotechnologically engineered forms are called 'bioforms' in the *MaddAddam* trilogy.

[353] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 254.

[354] Mike Roselle was an Earth First! founder.

[355] Trujillo,"The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 148.

it would create. Drawing people's attention to the cause and change required is a primary requirement for radical environmentalists and as analysed by Brian Denson and James Long, "if they don't feel like they're getting that attention, they try something else."[356] Drawing media attention and sensationalizing issues are tactics used by radical environmentalists, specially tree spiking and mobilizing support for the cause of protection of forests. The NAELFPO[357] statement in their pamphlet also notes the importance of targeting the state and its capitalist ideology as well as its 'symbols of propaganda' as the ELF battle is not just against individual environmental issues, but also against the mindset of people and the state that creates these issues.[358] Much of MaddAddamite action can be seen as utilizing the spectacle created for creating greater awareness of CorpSeCorpse atrocities. The success of ecotage is often seen as inspiration for similar direct action in different locations, not necessarily linked to each other.[359]

The three characteristics identified by Eagan as common to radical environmentalist organizations highlight its "grass-roots" and "non-hierarchical structure," the fact that it always supports direct action versus lobbying and most significantly adopts an "uncompromising position" in defense of "Mother Earth!" [360] In these characteristics, we do find a difference with deep ecology practitioners who would veer away from direct action and instead choose

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[356] Bryan Denson and James Long, "Eco-terrorism Sweeps the American West," *The Orego-nian*, September 26, 1999, quoted in Trujillo,"The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 148.

[357] The North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office.

[358] Gary A. Ackerman, "My Reply to Perlstein and Taylor," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 15, no.4 (Winter 2003):189; Trujillo,"The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 160.

[359] An example cited by Bron Taylor is of the Abbey fan John Walker who developed his own band of "Tucson Eco-Raiders" to engage in 'nightwork' against the growth of urban sprawl. "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 47.

[360] Eagen, "From Spikes to Bombs: The Rise of Eco-terrorism," 2.

lobbying, or even a hierarchical structure as in the Gardeners where the Adams and Eves control the rhetoric and make compromises where necessary. In a way the difference in approach held by Adam One and Zeb, in the Gardener group may be seen as a depiction of the shades of difference between non-revolutionary deep ecology practitioners and radical environmentalist actions. While Adam One keeps wanting a peaceable solution to problems with the CorpSeCorps, or peaceful picketing outside establishments that cause the extinction of species, Zeb keeps expressing the need for direct action. According to him "Peace goes only so far…"[361] He observes the extinction of a hundred species in a month's time and the need to begin attacking establishments that cause such murder of non-human creatures, instead of simply watching as more animals getting slaughtered by the endless greed of Corporate institutions. Zeb speaks in reference to the attack on SecretBurgers[362] carried out by him and his Urban Bloodshed Limitation students and speaks of his plan to attack the gourmet restaurant Rarity next. Adam One however rejects this argument, believing that the Gardeners' role "in respect of Creatures is to bear witness"[363] and also to hold on to the memories of the departed species.[364] He insists that one cannot "fight blood with blood."[365] The argument between the two leading

[361] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 300.

[362] SecretBurgers is a chain of restaurants run by the CorpSeCorps that utilizes meat from animals and even human carcasses indiscriminately for producing fast food.

[363] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 300.

[364] Adam One particularly emphasizes that repeating the names of species keeps them alive in the inner world and sees this as the sacred duty of the Gardeners. Ren, when isolated in the Sticky Zone of Scales and Tails keeps repeating the names of the extinct species out of habit, even if she is not sure what use such recollection holds. In a certain way this act is similar to the way Jimmy/Snowman holds on to obsolete words, keeping them alive in his memory. Adam One in one of last sermons, opines that "Human beings may well have killed the Tiger and the Last Lion, but their Names are cherished by us; and as we say those Names, we hear behind them the tremendous voice of God at the moment of their Creation." *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 376, 415.

[365] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 300. Adam One's argument is very similar to Gary Snyder's who refers to industrial culture as a cancer on the earth and endorses ecological resistance movements, at the same time, he does not actively support monkeywrenching and even cautions about the dangers inherent in this pathway. Snyder locates his roots in Zen Buddhism as well as Animism, calling himself a "Buddhist-Animist." See Bron

Adams are an interesting depiction of the schism and split in the radical environmentalist groups in the 1980s, that led to the formation of the ELF and the ALF as separate from the EF.

It is also worth noting that the Gardeners are keen to be seen as different from the Wolf Isaiahists, who are projected as fanatical eco-terrorists.[366] *The Year of the Flood* makes sure to mention these multiple fanatical groups as well, to locate the Gardeners as a separate entity with their own specific ideology. The MaddAddamites, who form a breakaway group with Zeb later, are also seen as slightly different from these "fanatical greenies."[367] The Boston Coffee Party[368] described in *Oryx and Crake*[369] as well as in *The Year of the Flood,* shows people wearing 'g is g' or 'God is Green' T shirts. However, Toby while watching the newsreel suspects that they may not be Gardeners, as the Gardeners had never worn such T shirts themselves. She thinks she spots familiar faces in the newsreel, but is unsure of it. We know from *Oryx and Crake* that Sharon, Jimmy's mother and Bernice, one of the ex-Gardeners were probably in this campaign. The number of sub-groups formed over time, show both the increase in momentum of groups protesting against Corporations as well as the multiplicity of ideological approaches to Radical

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Taylor, Interview with Gary Snyder, Davis, California, June 1, 1993, quoted in Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 39-40.

[366] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 305.

[367] *Atwood,* 317.

[368] Toby follows the news which shows the protesters dumping Happicuppa coffee beans in the harbour, protesting against genetically modified food products. *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 317.

[369] Prior to HelthWyzer launching the Happicuppa coffee bean, coffee beans on bushes ripened naturally at different times and were handpicked and processed. However with the launch of the Happicuppa coffee bush, designed for all coffee bushes to ripen simultaneously, production increased and machine driven harvesting and processing completely bypassed labourers and small coffee growers so they lost their business and were unable to compete with the low pricing offered by Happicuppa. In *Oryx and Crake* we see Jimmy and Crake watching the worldwide resistance to Happicuppa. The resistance movement involved the looting of Happicuppa cafes, kidnapping of Happicuppa personnel, dumping of Happicuppa packages into the harbour at Boston. At the same time, armies clamped down on the rebels and as Jimmy notices, there were dead peasants everywhere. Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 210-211.

Ecology ideas, which cannot be confined to the Gardeners, though it is the only group that we are able to view in detail in the course of the trilogy.

According to Zeb, one of the reasons why the CorpSeCorps tolerated the presence of the Gardeners instead of shooting them directly or obliterating them despite having the firepower and army to do so, was so that the Corporations that employed the CorpSeCorps could maintain their image of tolerance before the consumers of their products. The Gardeners are viewed as ineffective and tolerable as opposed to revolutionary environmentalist groups like the Wolf Isaiahists or other 'fanatical greenies' or urban 'green-guerillas',[370] who could be attacked and eliminated for their direct action. The attack on the Rarity restaurant chain is finally carried out by the Wolf Isaihaists, but is pinned on the Gardeners, as feared by Zeb, forcing them to go underground. However, Adam One in his sermon on Pollination Day blames the MaddAddamites, "the schismatic and heretical group" for other bio-attacks on establishments that are then linked to the Gardeners who do not wish to be seen as 'violent'. At the same time, not wanting to be seen as ineffective, Adam One also interprets the attack on the Gardeners as proof of the impact actually being created by the Gardeners in changing mindsets and lifestyles, "as prophets of the age to come" and therefore threatening the Corporations' profit margins. [371]

Atwood thus provides a very close and detailed study of the schism within green groups that is usually overlooked in homogenizing the radical environmentalist movement by presenting the difference of opinion regarding modes of action even amongst the Gardeners as well as the silent threat of one group's actions being pinned onto another, for the sake of

[370] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 319.

[371] Atwood, 327.

appearances by the institutions against whom the eco-terrorist attacks are carried out. Adam One's sermon spoken on the Feast day of 'Saint Rachel and all the Birds' particularly shows him grappling with the difference of opinion and mode of action opted for by individuals within his group as well as the breakaways. Referring to the protests against the Hapicuppa Corp, he acknowledges the presence of many ex-gardeners in the militant campaign. He stresses that "Although we could not condone the violent methods, we did endorse the intention."[372] In a lot of ways it is similar to the narrative adopted by Earth First! towards ELF actions. A certain distance is maintained between the Earth First! journal and its Ned Ludd column that gives advice on monkeywrenching and radical direct action. The disclaimer states that Earth First! "…does not formally endorse the practices explained therein."[373] However, Earth First! on its website clearly states that "there is broad diversity within Earth First!" including within itself "animal rights vegans to wilderness hunting guides, from shrill voices to careful followers of Gandhi, from whiskey-drinking backwoods riffraff to thoughtful philosophers, from misanthropes to humanists…"[374] The strange co-existence of dissociation from violence and at the same time a sub-current of unsaid support for any form of action with correct intent, can be seen in different aspects of the website and journal.

Trujillo refers to the "unique organizational structure" of the radical environmentalist movement, referring to the polycentric and integrated structure of the ELF and ALF.[375]

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[372] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 444.

[373] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 154.

[374] Earth First! website, *Earth First! Worldwide,* accessed May 23, 2019, http://www.earthfirst.org/

[375] Trujillo,"The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 145. See also Luther Gerlach's work on seeing environmental activism as a network that is segmentary, polycentric and integrated at the same time--calling it SPIN. Luther P. Gerlach, "The Structure of Social Movements: Environmental Activism and Its Opponents,"

According to Trujillo, the radical environmentalist movement must be seen as a social movement, a formal organization but without conventional organizational structures and boundaries. An important aspect identified by Trujillo in his studies is the way activists of radical environmentalism reject structured 'membership', with the example of Earth First! which in its organization guidelines itself notes that "there are no members of Earth First!, only 'Earth First!ers' who live in accord with the principles of the movement"[376] This has the simultaneous effect of dismantling hierarchies that can creep into an organization as in the Gang of Ten[377] that the radical environmentalists react against, as well as expand the impact of the movement by including in its fold anyone across the world who aligns with its ideas and principles. The many breakaway groups formed from Earth First! actually showcases the impact of Earth First! As the organizations continue to cross fertilize and co-exist[378] after splintering owing to increasingly intense radical activist visions that may not be compatible with the mother group.

The resilience of the rhizomic structure is also perhaps a reason for choosing it as an image of organization that cannot easily be erased. Deleuze and Guattari have emphasized the nature of the rhizome that "may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines."[379] In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, the *MaddAddam* Network

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Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy, eds. J. Arquilla and D. Ronfeldt (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001).

[376] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement," 144.

[377] See Note 334.

[378] Trujillo,"The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 145.

[379] Gille Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1988; repr. London and New York: continuum, 2004),10. Also quoted in McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters,* 17. See Note 263 and pp 244-245 of this Chapter for details on the use of the 'rhizome' metaphor by environmental activists.

is decentralized and 'rhizomic' and its members work from separate locations so that all attempts to repress them may only be temporary with an undercover MaddAddamite springing into action from another part of the globe, even when the common platforms 'shatter.'[380] As discussed earlier, the Gardener organization is also rhizomic in nature, as they are not limited to the Edencliff Rooftop, though that is their visible location. Toby in the course of *The Year of the Flood* understands that they operated through branches in different pleebs and cities and derived information and warnings from their sympathizers or members hidden at every level in the Corporations themselves. These different branches of the Gardeners were called 'Truffles'[381] to designate their rare and valuable occurrences as they operated silently and suddenly. In this case, the Truffles operation reminds us of ELF and ALF[382] actions, undercover and spread out to avoid detection, operating with Earth First! and yet apart from it. Each of the Truffles and Rooftop Edens run their administration independently and sends delegates for every half-year convention held at different locations to avoid detection.

However, Atwood in her inimitable manner critiques the forms that the rhizomic

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[380] Utilising and extending the terminology used regarding the rhizome, with which the Gardener organization has been compared earlier in this chapter. Refer also to Note 349.

[381] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 226.

[382] The ELF and the ALF have created quite a mark, as they are recognized as the nation's "top domestic terrorism threat" by the FBI. , John E. Lewis, "Testimony Before the United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary Hearings on Animal Rights: Activism vs. Criminality," May 18, 2004, quoted in Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement," 141. It is important to note that the radical environmentalist movement is of course not a homogenous movement, the ELF and ALF being critically different—however the underlying motivation is similar and in that, for the purposes of this chapter, I group them under this banner, in keeping with Bron Taylor's methodology. Steven Best points out the significance of animal liberation activists and environmental activists collaborating in their efforts as he explains "the struggle for animal rights is intimately connected to the struggle for human rights…The animal rights community can no longer afford to be a single-issue movement…." Best also adds that the animal rights movement has also thus become a fight for democracy. Identifying commonalities, and forming alliances against "capitalism, militarism, patriarchy, state repression.." that affects "everyone, whatever their gender, sexual preference, class, race or species," might be beneficial for the sake of the movement according to him. Steven Best in Trujillo,"The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 142, 160.

structure of organization actually takes in the course of the narrative, as certain individuals within this seemingly egalitarian manner of working take on the role of leaders and then try to determine how the others shall enact their environmental consciousness. After achieving the position of a top research scientist in the HealthWyzer Compound, Crake starts gathering the MaddAddamite scientists together under one roof, seemingly to protect them from the CorpSeCorps, but also utilizes them for his own Paradise Project involving the creation of the Crakers and in parallel the BlyssPluss Pill that would result in a worldwide pandemic erasing most of human population. However the scientists are left in the dark regarding the entirety of his plan. In a slightly different way we also see Adam One among the Gardeners assuming a position of relative power and authority by his very nomenclature. While theoretically there was no head of the Gardener fellowship, yet for practical purposes, Adam One the founder was considered one.[383] Toby observes, "Adam One insisted that all Gardeners were equal on the spiritual level, but the same did not hold true for the material one… the Adams and the Eves ranked higher…"[384] She compares the Gardener organization to be like that of a monastery with the "inner chapter" and the "lay brothers " and "lay sisters."[385] Thus hierarchies seem to remain even within the attempted rhizomic structure of organization of alternative movements, in Atwood's fictional representation of these shades of green. The inbuilt critique of the system however enriches the description and analysis of the possibilities of different forms of environmentalism, which would otherwise have been 'only' a utopia as seen by Sargisson or Garforth at the beginning of this chapter. Thus, Atwood's writing in the ambit of

[383] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 289.

[384] Atwood, 54-55.

[385] Atwood, 55.

environmentalist fiction stands out in the way it describes and presents all nuances of environmentalist movements and their philosophies, leaving the reader to choose her/his 'story' like the participants of Macy's workshop, 'The Work That Reconnects,' discussed earlier in this chapter.[386]

Regarding fears of the radical environmentalist movement turning more violent with time, Bron Taylor contends the unlikelihood of such an event as the rhetoric of the movement remains violent, but continues to remain more rhetoric than reality. However, the movement's opponents often take this rhetoric as reality, taking it out of context and disseminating fear.[387] This use of extreme rhetoric can be seen as one of the methodologies adopted by the movement to draw attention to itself and its causes. An example of this can be seen in John Davis' statement in the Earth First! journal, "I suspect that eradicating smallpox was wrong. It played an important part in balancing ecosystems."[388] In Bron Taylor's reading, most radical environmentalists would actually shirk action that harms human beings. Peter Chalk and David Helvarg also agree with this vision of radical environmentalists in the future moving towards civil disobedience rather than violent monkeywrenching.[389] However, the threat of violent action actually remains from those isolated from the movement, or the "lone wolf assassin"[390] rather than those engaging in writing and discussion of ideas.

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[386] See pp. 193-194 of this chapter for details of Macy and Brown's workshop 'The Work That Reconnects.'

[387] Trujillo,"The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 168.

[388] Betsy Carpenter, "Redwood Radicals," *U.S. News and World Report*, September 17, 1990, 50, quoted in Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 168.

[389] Trujillo, "The Radical Environmentalist Movement ," 169.

[390] Taylor, "Religion, Violence and Radical Environmentalism: From Earth First! to the Unabomber to the Earth Liberation Front," 11.

In Crake, we see a depiction extreme ecotage caused by such a "lone wolf assassin" who believes in the righteousness of his attempted action of wiping out most of the human race. While initially seen interacting with the Gardeners, he slowly cuts himself off and pursues his own course of action of saving the planet by decimating humans, thereby breaking with one of the central codes of the revolutionary ecoterrorism that tries to limit loss of lives.[391] When Jimmy/Snowman recollects his conversations with Crake in the course of the first book of the trilogy, we get glimpses of his thought patterns that later lead to the plan of unleashing the global pandemic. During one of these conversations, Crake discusses the ramifications of the end of civilization as we know it.[392] According to Crake, as all available surface metals had been mined, none of the ages--the Iron Age, Bronze Age, age of Steel and the rest of inventions connected tto these ages could happen again. The advanced technology for mining the metals present further deep into the earth would not be there anymore, so it would be an effective end. As Crake explains, "All it takes...is the elimination of one generation. One generation of anything. Beetles, trees, microbes, scientists, speakers of French, whatever. Break the link in time between one generation and the next, and it's game over forever."[393] It is apparent in retrospect that Crake is contemplating the destruction of humanity and technology and seeing these as necessary for the benefit of the planet in his eyes.[394]

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[391] See Note 326 and pp 262 above in this Chapter.

[392] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 261.

[393] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 262.

[394] Nazry Bahrawi returns to Ernst Bloch's concept of the "Not-Yet" being the driving force in Crake, who seeks to erase the problems in the human race, to fashion the future as an utopia free of human species, and therefore all problems created by humans on the planet. Crake also operates from hope, as do all environmentalist action, only difference being in the extremity of that vision and in including all of life in the imagination of a better future.

Much later, when Jimmy is brought into the ByssPluss Pill campaign he learns that it would act as a one-time final birth control pill without the users' knowledge, as it would be sold promising to maximise libido and sexual prowess, prolong youth and protect the user from sexually transmitted diseases. Crake explains to Jimmy that this pill would therefore benefit society as a whole, and the planet at large.[395] Jimmy is of course little taken aback at Crake's plan, but Crake continues to explain why he thinks this essential--saying it was "More like sink or swim" for the species:

> As a species we're in deep trouble, worse than anyone's saying. They're afraid to release the stats because people might just give up, but take it from me, we're running out of space-time. Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famine and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply for everyone.[396]

Crake's girlfriend Oryx appears to support him in his objectives, though remaining in the dark regarding his actual plan of annihilating all existing humans, through the virus embedded in the BlyssPluss Pill. In a separate conversation with Jimmy, Oryx asserts—"I believe in Crake, I believe in his….his vision. He wants to make the world a better place. That is what he is always telling me. I think that is so fine, don't you, Jimmy?"[397] She continues in this vein, "There are

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See Bahrawi, "Hope of a Hopeless World: Eco-teleology in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," 256.

[395] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 347.

[396] Atwood, 347.

[397] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 377. See pp 101 of Chapter 1, where Atwood discusses how all real-life dystopian scenarios are created from this impulse of making the world "a better place."

too many people and that makes the people bad. I know this from my own life, Jimmy. Crake is a very smart man!"[398] In this she echoes many environmentalist positions that call for population control as a means of saving the planet from further harm.[399] Crake is nonchalant about the cost of creating a 'new earth,' to the extent of taking his own life and that of the girl he loved, to ensure ultimate erasure of human beings on the planet. Jimmy/Snowman later reflects that Crake had adopted the stance of the "the whole world," being "one vast uncontrolled experiment," with "the doctrine of unintended consequences…in full spate."[400] However the question remains, is sterilisation of the human race an answer? Or is the erasure of the human race, as attempted by Crake, the only way to save the planet? Atwood does not take a direct stand on this, rather presenting it as a stance taken by an extremist position such as Crake's, defining through her fiction the many gradations and kinds of radical environmentalism present or those possible in the future given the short sightedness of government and corporate politics. In an

[398] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 377.

[399] Through Crake and Oryx's opinions regarding population explosion having a direct impact on consumption of resources of the earth and therefore quality of life, Atwood represents a neo-Malthusian version on environmentalist thought, that views unchecked human fertility as a prime reason for ecological catastrophe. For Thomas Malthus' famous hypothesis regarding population explosion being exponential versus food production being linear, see Thomas R Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society* (London: Johnson; 1798). The issue was further taken up by George Perkins Marsh in *Man and Nature*(1864), and more recently Paul Ehlrich's *The Population Bomb* (1968) focuses attention on the interrelationships between population growth, environment and food production. George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature: or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (New York: Scribner, 1864); Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968). Note that this position is also echoed by the *Limits to Growth* thesis proposed by the Club of Rome Project. See Note 21, Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth.* As Gerard Maarek analyses, population explosion and its effects on the ecosystem of the planet remains one of the most urgent issues that no one wants to talk about, with the COP21 in Paris completely ignoring this sensitive topic. See Gerard Maarek, "Population Control, The Environmental Fix No One Wants To Talk About," *Les Echos, Worldcrunch,* May 16, 2018, https://worldcrunch.com/opinion-analysis/population-control-the-environmental-fix-no-one-wants-to-talk-about. Also see Alex de Sherbinin, David Carr, Susan Cassels and Leiwen Jiang, "Population and Environment," *Annu Rev Environ Resour* 32 (2007): 345–373. doi:10.1146/annurev.energy.32.041306.100243

[400] Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 267.

interview Atwood asks an important question---"how much is too much, how far is too far?" [401] The question is addressed to both those meddling with the codes of ecological balance as well as those trying to solve those problems. It is necessary therefore to see Crake as more than a representation of science wreaking havoc on the planet or Jimmy/Snowman as the sole representative of the humanities and the last hope for the future.[402] Reading Crake as an environmentalist complicates the depiction of environmentalisms by Atwood and perhaps serves better purpose as Atwood forces us to compare Adam One, Zeb and Crake's visions and ideas through the course of the trilogy, presenting the dense relationship between deep ecological ideas and lived realities and their uneasy alliance with extremist actions, whether radical or revolutionary.

Adam One compares the anti-Happicuppa campaign[403] by green environmentalist groups like Gardeners who picket institutions peacefully encouraging alternative choices to that by the more radical wings who choose 'direct action' to continue Rachel Carson's campaign against pesticides in the 1960s, and acknowledges that the present struggles have not met with the same success as Carson's did. However he celebrates the fact that "a greater power" had solved the problem by decimating Happicuppa crops through the Waterless Flood.[404] Even as he foresees his own death in the coming days, Adam One tries to hold on to Gardener ideals by

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[401] Louet, "Profile: Margaret Atwood," 163. See Note 52.

[402] Hannes Bergthaller also contends with such easy analogies. "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," 735. See also Danette DiMarco, ''Paradice Lost, Paradise Regained: Homo Faber and the Makings of a New Beginning in Oryx and Crake,'' *Papers on Language and Literature* 41, no.2 (2005): 170–95. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A133280082/AONE?u=anon~ab719937&sid=googleScholar&xid=9edb29e3.

[403] See Note 369-370 above for more details on the anti-Happicuppa protests.

[404] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 445.

the hope that "even now… the rainforests must be regenerating!"[405] There is a sense of loss, yet a celebration of spirit. In his sermon on the day of Saint Terry and All Wayfarers,[406] he asserts the value of their worthy aims and intentions and their "methods without malice"[407] as well as their certainty of prevailing against all odds. For this they "raised their voice in song" and "believed" that their way would succeed.[408] His sermon on the day of 'Saint Julian[409] and All Souls' accepts the demolition of the human species which have "murdered God's Creatures and extinguished His Species" and "worshipped nothing but riches; and who to gain wealth and worldly power, have inflicted pain and death."[410] Adam One points out that the Earth is not destroyed, as the plague unleashed infects humans alone and "leaves all other Creatures untouched."[411] He sees this as proof of the Waterless Flood being a kind of punishment for man's reckless, greedy and exploitative behaviour, which could not treasure the world full of bounty given to him and therefore did not deserve the "Love by which God maintains the

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[405] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 445.

[406] The Feast Day celebrating Terry Fox, memorializes his act of extreme courage and hope as he embarked on a cross-Canada run on his prosthetic leg, braving pain and obstacles, to raise funds for cancer research and laid down his life in this attempt at creating a more sensitive world. See Leslie Scrivener, *Terry Fox: His Story*, 1981 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2000). It is interesting to note how the Gardeners select their Saints, including not only environmental activists but also those who inspire empathy and courage in the face of extreme odds, giving them hope in the darkest days of their own battle against the corporate capitalists.

[407] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 485.

[408] Atwood, 485.

[409] Mother Julian of Norwich, an anchoress known for her mystical book, *Revelations of Divine Love*, written between the 14th and 15th centuries, is commemorated by the Gardeners on this Feast Day. While Mother Julian and her book is known for its description of the Passion of the Christ and the Revelations she receives on her deathbed, Adam One utilizes the occasion to focus on the principle of divine Love and describe the way humans have veered from the path, propelling their own destruction. See Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 553.

[410] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 509.

[411] Atwood, 509.

Cosmos."[412] He re-iterates that this was warned by the Gardeners. Thus he hopes that "Perhaps God will create another more compassionate race to take our place."[413] Adam One speaks these lines, unaware of the survival of a few humans. It is also uncanny, the way in which his words seem echoed by Crake's extremist act and creation of Crakers. The words spoken by Adam One describing the imminent apocalypse is strangely prescient as though he was abreast of Crake's plans. He says that the Waterless Flood would be "carried on the wings of God's dark angels that fly by night, and in airplanes and helicopters and bullet trains, and on transport trucks and other such conveyances."[414] In the first book of the trilogy, we have seen how the BlyssPluss Pill was marketed and reached across continents through different transportation means, to infect people around the world with the virus, simultaneously. It was a 'Flood' in its causing mass extinction of humans, but 'Waterless' in its method of destruction. It is never clarified, how much Adam One actually knew. However, in the sermon he presents the information as though arrived at by a general conclusion drawn from observing the 'sick pulse' of humanity. The secret knowledge is used to guide Gardeners to always keep their 'Ararats'[415] full of food, in case of the sudden calamity striking. Adam One also reminds his listeners of the protection guaranteed by *Psalm 91* to the followers of God, who need not fear any pestilence, when under his wings.[416] Through this image, he tries to end on a note of positivity and faith. However he

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[412] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 504.

[413] Atwood, 509.

[414] Atwood, 110.

[415] The Gardeners stored food in these little chambers which they called the Ararats, camouflaged well to sustain them in the event of the apocalypse that is widely forecasted by the Adams and the Eves. The word also refers to the place where Noah's Ark finally rests, at the end of the Flood. Hence it is a symbol of hope and renewed life.

[416] Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,

is quick to remind listeners to wash hands frequently and avoid "anyone who is sneezing"[417] therefore blending faith with practicality. At the same time, his awareness of the Waterless flood being a 'pestilence' that shall 'walketh in darkness' and 'wasteth at noonday'[418] again points towards his possible knowledge of Crake's plans, but perhaps not the extent of them. When relating the story to Toby, Zeb says that Crake had gone dark after initially helping the Gardeners,[419] hence it might be far-fetched to assume a point of communication between Crake and Adam One in Crake's later days. However the unmistakable similarities between Adam One and Crake's ideas showcases a similarity in thought processes but marked difference in mode of action.

In a different sermon, Adam One specially remembers Dian Fossey, who is given the position of a Saint by the Gardeners for her conservationist work and subsequent martyrdom for the sake of the gorillas she was studying and trying to protect in Rwanda. Saint Dian embodies "loving care for all other Creatures"[420] —an ideal held dear by the Gardeners. Adam one refers to Fossey's belief in showing the same tenderness and love to all creatures as we would show our own kinfolk and friends, as he tries to rouse the spirits of the Gardeners even after their fold has had to break up following the ambush of the Corps men. The Hymn "Today We Praise Our

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and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday. (Psalm 91*, NIV*)

[417] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 110.

[418] See Note 417 above. Psalm 91*, NIV.*

[419] *Atwood, MaddAddam,* 283-291.

[420] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 372.

Saint Dian"[421] tries to inculcate the importance of all species on earth, "For when a Species dies from Earth, /We die a little too."[422] As he bewails the violence of humans against other humans and creatures, for their own ends, wondering what in the human species makes them so "vulnerable to the impulse of violence?"[423]— Adam One's celebration of the Waterless Flood that shall arrive and wipe away the brutal history of mankind and his false sense of superiority to all creatures[424] seems oddly similar to Crake's plan. He prophesies, "nothing will remain of the Exfernal World but decaying wood and rusting metal implements; and over these the kudzu and other vines will climb; and Birds and Animals will nest in them, as we are told in the Human Words of God….For all the works of Man will be as words written on water."[425] This is seen as reality by Toby and other Gardeners who outlive the pandemic created by Crake.

However Adam One's final sermon ends on a note of compassion, as he seeks to forgive the extortionist and cruel humans who have killed the elephants, tiger, bear, shark, rhino and countless species to feed their greed for wealth. He seeks to forgive these humans who have rendered his own existence precarious. He acknowledges that this "forgiveness is the hardest task we shall ever be called upon to perform,"[426] and asks for strength from the divine to be able

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[421] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 374.

[422] Atwood, 374.

[423] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 372. Adam One is here referring to the widely known brutal murder of primatologist Dian Fossey in her cabin at her research site in Rwanda in 1985. It is believed that she was possibly murdered as a retaliation to her lifelong crusade against poachers and attempt at protecting the gorillas in the region. See "World-renowned Primatologist Dian Fossey is Found Murdered in Rwanda," *History,* December 26, 1985, https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/primatologist-dian-fossey-found-murdered-in-rwanda.

[424] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 372-373.

[425] *Atwood,* 373.

[426] Atwood, 509.

to close his life on a note of hope to forgive and be forgiven by "God, who holds our frail Cosmos in His hand, and keeps it safe through His endless Love."[427] The complementary hymn to the sermon "The Earth Forgives" at the end of the second book of the trilogy ends with this note of forgiveness and freedom in knowing that the Earth forgives and survives.[428]

Sustaining Ecological Consciousness

Atwood's depiction of a green theological cult in the God's Gardeners is significant because of the econarratological technique adopted by her, by including an inbuilt critique of the cult through members of its own community, as seen at various junctures in the course of this chapter. She fashions *The Year of the Flood* through Ren and Toby's individual and separate recollections of similar and disparate events that had occurred simultaneous to the narrative in *Oryx and Crake*. We see that all is not perfect in the Gardeners' world, though Adam One tries hard to bind together the community on Edencliff Rooftop and other hideouts. Toby's first experience of the God's Gardeners is instructive of the way the pleebland mobs look at the 'Greenies' and the difficulties faced by the Gardeners as they try to convert others to their line of thinking. She joins the Gardeners in a bid to escape Blanco's rape and torture at SecretBurgers. The way Toby is rescued from Secretburgers by Adam One and the Gardener children showcases the possibility of many individuals joining their group because of their helpless situations rather than because of their ecological belief systems. Isolated in the Anoo Yoo Spa post pandemic, Toby has to shoot a pigoon to save herself and for a moment she contemplates the Gardener induced philosophical restrictions regarding eating its meat. At this

[427] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 509.

[428] Atwood, 510-511.

juncture, the 'Vegivows' taken by her when joining the Gardeners, return to haunt her and she resists. While whispering the prayer of apology learnt from the Gardeners, she notes that "…she doesn't feel apologetic. Or not apologetic enough."[429] Hence we see a transference of ritual but not a complete transformation of consciousness at this juncture in Toby's life. However it also makes us ponder whether the other Gardeners feel like Toby but simply cover up their lack of conviction with a show of complete inner transformation or they actually believe in the words they speak.

Thus while projected as a utopia, it is not necessarily so for all its members. Within the Gardener fold, Lucerne, Toby and Ren's impressions regarding the Gardeners remain its strongest critique. Ren observes the Gardeners' constant refrain of "doom, enemies and God"[430] and sees a contradiction in their forbidding killing and yet demarcating death as a natural process. Her discomfort with their philosophy can be seen in her reflection, "They had the idea that turning into compost would be just fine. Not everyone might think that having your body become part of a vulture was a terrific future to look forward to, but the Gardeners did."[431] Zeb's partner Lucerne, is seen as one of the most reluctant Gardeners, battling the new set of lifestyle changes that she is forced to live with, after running away with Zeb from the Compounds. She felt that the Gardener doctrine was slightly stretched and sometimes meaningless, for she rues, "nobody wanted to save the world as much as she did, but no matter how much the Gardeners deprived themselves of proper food and clothing and even proper

[429] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 22.

[430] Atwood, 71.

[431] Atwood, 71.

showers….it wouldn't really change anything."[432] She refuses to believe that slugs had a central nervous system as taught by the Gardeners and felt that such a theory made "mockery of the whole idea of souls" and disturbs her concept of herself as a "spiritual person."[433]

The children's nicknames for their Gardener teachers[434] and their mock-rhymes ridiculing the hymns they are supposed to sing automatically critique the utopian impulses of the Gardeners, making the narrative structure of a 'critical dystopia'[435] an intrinsic part of the story. Shackie and Croze, named after two Saints Shackleton and Crozier, are the naughtiest of the bunch who make fun of every Gardener dictum they are forced to follow. While Ren finds it a little difficult to adjust to the way the Gardeners viewed death and the Waterless Flood that was going to kill all others on the planet, only perhaps leaving them alive; the other Gardener kids who were used to this idea of impending death, would make fun of it—"We're all gonna diiiiie,"[436] making dead man faces. Then they would tease Ren, "Hey, Ren. Want to do your bit for the Cycle of Life? Lie down in that dumpster, you can be the compost."[437] Shackleton and Crozier, who inspire the names 'Shackie' and 'Croze' in *The Year of the Flood,* were actually Irish explorers who mapped the Antarctic, almost forgotten by history. The Gardener attempt to deify and name as Saints all those who respected the ecology of our planet and are often forgotten, is a method of remembering these ecosystem heroes. At the same time Shackie and

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[432] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 136.

[433] Atwood, 136.

[434] See pp 256 of this chapter for a discussion of the nicknames of Gardener teachers, kept by the Gardener children to make fun of them.

[435] See Note 21 above.

[436] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 71.

[437] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 71.

Croze's flippant, abrasive and arrogant behavior sharply contrast with the possibility their naming evokes, acting as a metaphor for the way the Gardeners' ideals and lived realities clash with each other. However, Atwood's narration is not dismissive or negative towards the Gardeners at any time. The importance of their approach to life and alternative lifestyle is highlighted for a means towards practising deep ecology and sustaining ecological consciousness.

In *The Year of the Flood,* many people join the Gardeners, but do not stay on. Similarly there are breakaways from the Compounds—people who cannot subscribe to their indiscriminate methods of increasing profit margins—like Jimmy's mother Sharon, or Crake's father, both of whom are hunted down and killed by the CorpSeCorps. While the Compounds create the discourse of the 'good life' as a selling point for Compound life, projecting the pleeblands as the hub of all that is dangerous and life-threatening, the Gardeners too project their lifestyle as the best, situated in aversion to that in the Compounds and pleeblands.[438] The pleeblanders on the other hand view the Gardeners as strange 'Goddies'[439] and envy the Compounds their affluence and lifestyle. However at the same time, for Compounders like Jimmy and other Corps men, the pleeblands also offer much entertainment that is unthinkable in the Compounds.[440] What is common therefore, is the necessity of a well-defined discourse and keeping up belief in the discourse for maintaining the boundaries of these self-projected utopias and dystopias. Adam One's sermons and subsequent hymns that begin every section in

[438] Atwood, *The Year of the Flood,* 76-77.

[439] See pp 254 of this Chapter.

[440] Pockets of the *Oryx and Crake* geography view each other as potential utopias as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, serving an important function of contrast and critique.

the book are essentially his attempts at rationalizing what the Gardeners believe in and an effort at convincing them. On the other hand, Zeb, another leading Adam of the God's Gardeners group keeps humming songs that appear senseless at first and just like limericks, but they are also a commentary on the present state of affairs:

> Nobody gives a hoot,
> Nobody gives a hoot,
> That's why we're down the chute,
> Cause nobody gives a hoot![441]

Adam One's methods of articulation are more poetic than Zeb's, but they all hover around the same conclusions. Analysing Atwood's specific narrative style, it becomes apparent that she creates a series of echoes, apparently disparate, being so markedly different in tone—the hymns sung at the end of each sermon on Feast Days, the songs sung by Zeb in the shower, Crake's stoic and nonchalant observations on the human race and Jimmy's vague reflections on life. However, on closer analysis, they all accentuate each other to create a crescendo of the urgency of action required in the present inhabited by the readers, in the shadow of the looming apocalypse that is preponed by Crake's intervention, in the novels created by Atwood.

In all this detailing, Atwood is never judgemental regarding the Gardeners' environmentalist methodologies. She leaves it to the reader to figure out the pros and cons of each approach, building in critique regarding their philosophy and practices through the Gardeners' own opinions, as discussed earlier. I feel that Atwood's writing shows great sensitivity to the need for every kind of environmentalism and the awareness that no system is

[441] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 77. Zeb is heard singing many variations of this song through the course of the book, articulating his rage at a world that simply has not cared to change itself in time.

perfect. Analyzing *The Year of the Flood* within the framework of the critical dystopia[442] or 'ustopia'[443] we notice that in the dystopia depicted in *Oryx and Crake*, prior to Crake's engineered worldwide pandemic, the Gardeners form the little utopian enclave of hope and possible change. Again within this utopia of the Gardeners' enclave, there are dystopian elements such as Burt's illegal weed production and sale,[444] or Lucerne's forced acceptance of membership and the Gardener children's many attempts at breaking the rules binding them. Alongside, many other Green Groups are mentioned such as the Fernside Collectives, the Big Box Backyarders, Golfgreens Greenies.[445] While their inner workings are not explored, many groups like the Zachariahs and Wolf Isaiahists are described as more radical than the Gardeners. Thus Atwood portrays the Gardeners as one among many other Green cults, always leaving many unexplored regions in her narrative design. In *Oryx and Crake*, the Gardeners were marginal figures, mentioned in passing by Jimmy who watches the Boston Happicuppa campaign with rebels wearing 'God is Green' T-shirts on television; and in the figure of Jimmy's first roommate at Martha Graham, Bernice who burns his underwear and sandals to protest against his lifestyle. Bernice reappears in *The Year of the Flood,* in a more central role as a Gardener, who later breaks away towards more radical ecotage. Atwood is sensitive to the many shades of green within the Green groups themselves, and attempts a partial portrayal and assessment of these radical environmentalist stances through her narrative.

Critiques of radical environmentalism and deep ecology in particular abound amongst

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[442] See Note 21 above.

[443] See Note 1 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[444] *Atwood, The Year of the Flood,* 206.

[445] Atwood, 169.

the ecological modernization theorists[446] in particular, who look for a better, more secure and sustainable society that will develop via continuities with the present, rather than seeking absolute transformation of consciousness. Ecological modernization theorists welcome the end of the language of environmental crisis. They argue that environmentalism has moved on from an early preoccupation with *Limits to Growth*[447] and radical critique of capitalist modernity to adopt a more mature and pragmatic focus.[448] Being a new form of the 'sustainability discourse,'[449] it sees deep ecological models as ineffective and utopian. This seems to be a fashion, as in Giddens'[450] argument supporting this viewpoint and emphasis on the anti-utopian approach of this vision. He argues that radical environmentalist visions were inefficient and calls for a more 'hard-headed' approach, as stressed by the ecological modernization theorists. However, the bright green environmentalist model[451] of ecological modernization theorists neglects the importance of re-visioning human interdependence with the ecosystem that is facilitated by dark green environmentalism[452] or radical environmentalist thought and

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[446] See Arthur P.J. Mol & David A. Sonnenfeld, "Ecological Modernisation Around the World: An Introduction," 9, no.1(2000): 1-14, doi: 10.1080/09644010008414510; Huber, Joseph Huber, *New Technologies and Environmental Innovation* (Cheltenham, UK and Massachussets, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2004), Google Books.

[447] See Note 24 above.

[448] Arthur PJ Mol and Martin Janicke, "The origins and theoretical foundations of ecological modernisation theory," *The Ecological Modernisation Reader: Environmental Reform in Theory and Practice* (London, NY: Routledge, 2009), 17.

[449] See pp 20-21 of the Introduction to this thesis for a discussion on the problematics of the 'sustainability' discourse.

[450] Anthony Giddens, *The Politics of Climate Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 11.

[451] See Note 1 above.

[452] See Note 1 above.

practices.[453]

Atwood appears to recognize the importance of the emergence of an Ethics of Care[454] that is only possible with a deepened knowledge of the fact that we are inseparable from the ecosystem we inhabit and "that we are linked to nature and interdependent with it,"[455] as she devotes an entire book of her trilogy to the representation of deep ecology, ecotheology and revolutionary environmentalist ideas and practices. Thomas Berry's description of the consciousness of the human being "in whom the universe has become conscious of itself"[456] describes the requirement for a narrative of creation where the human in addition to being "an intimate part of a sacred, evolving universe," [457] also recognizes himself/herself as a force of this sacred universe, capable of bringing about positive, life-affirmative change. Adam One's continued efforts at increasing consciousness in the Gardeners and their children, appears to follow a similar trajectory, for it would translate into a sense of responsibility for this expanded

[453] It is important to note that this very adjective 'utopian' that is used as a criticism for deep ecology ideas by ecological modernization theorists, is instead seen as a positive attribute in Sargisson's studies of deep ecology philosophy, seeing it as an ecotopia that is important for its transgression of boundaries between the self and the other and hence the re-visioning of the human and non-human relationship. Lucy Sargisson, "Green Utopias of Self and Other,"144-45.

[454] See Mary Phillips, "Daring to Care'': Challenging Corporate Environmentalism," *J Bus Ethics* 156 (2019): 1151–1164, doi: 10.1007/s10551-017-3589-0; Kyle Powys Whyte and Chris Cuomo, "Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies," *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, eds. Stephen M Gardiner and Allen Thompson (NY: Oxford University press, 2017), 234-247, for a brief discussion on the ethics of caring for human and non-human selves and its foundation in deep ecosophy and ecofeminist ideas. I will be taking up the concept of Environmental Ethics of Care in greater detail in Chapter 3, when analysing ecofeminism as another form of Radical Environmentalism represented by Margaret Atwood in selected works and the alternative politics offered by such a re-evaluation of environmental ethics.

[455] John Cobb, "Ecology, Science, and Religion: Toward a Postmodern Worldview," *Religion and Scientific Naturalism: Overcoming the Conflict,* ed. David Ray Griffin (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 108. Also quoted in Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism: The Role of Ecotheology in Creation/Evolution Controversies," 64.

[456] McFarland Taylor, *Green Sisters,* 6.

[457] McFarland Taylor, 6.

awareness of self.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Naess's ecosophy indicates that the objective behind such empathy and experience of the ecosystem as one's self, is in reaching a state where ethics would be superfluous, not requiring any policing or dictums, but a natural response to protecting the world as an extension of one's own body/consciousness. What is sought therefore is not "environmental ethics", rather an "ecological consciousness"[458] that impels one to act responsibly. This is hinted at in the eighth principle of the deep ecology platform, formulated by Naess and Sessions in 1984, "Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the necessary changes."[459] At first this dicta might appear to be pressurizing the reader or subtly challenging his/her active participation in creating change. However, this principle emanates from the other seven[460] principles of the deep ecology Platform having become established experiential reality for the writer/reader, when there is no choice left, but to act!

Lisa Sideris analyses the perceived subversive potential of the field of studies called ecology,[461] with respect to its possibilities of promoting interdependence and interrelationality,

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[458] Warwick Fox, *Towards a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing new Foundations for Environmentalism* (NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 225.

[459] Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature* Mattered, 70.

[460] See Note 166 above for a description of the other 7 deep ecology principles as well.

[461] Carolyn Merchant also describes the Cartesian, Baconian, Newtonian perspectives as atomistic and mechanistic perceptions of the world, that conceive of nature as dead and inert matter, to be manipulated by humans at will. Disenchantment of nature, stripping it of all "vitalism and animism" stands at the root of present day crisis, according to Merchant. In this respect ecology is seen as a "subversive" science as it propagates the idea of interconnectedness instead of reductionism. Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1980); Also discussed in Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism: The Role of Ecotheology in Creation/Evolution Controversies," 60.

wondering if it can at all "suggest an ethic of mutuality, care, even love and liberation for all beings."[462] She observes the positive implications of a postmodern ecological model that "embraces community" and "common good" but stresses the importance of avoiding any form of homogenization and a need to respect diversity in this community.[463] This is posited in contrast to traditional western thinking that Sallie McFague identifies as "atomistic and reductionist" separating "human beings from other beings," and reducing "all that is not human to objects for human use."[464] However, while the ecological model promoting community and interrelation is a "liberated and liberating alternative,"[465] and highlights the qualities of cooperation, solidarity and symbiosis in the ecosystem, it underplays the reality of competition, strife, predation and hostility existent in the ecosystem as well. The *MaddAddam* trilogy pays careful attention to describing the opposite facets of the ecosystem and shows Adam One striving to reconcile them in his sermons. Non-humans created in biotechnology labs, who run amok specially after the pandemic are seen as specially violent and competitive and hostile as they bring together predatory traits of humans and non-humans. Alongside human irresponsibility and lack of awareness in creating such creatures as the liobams, pigoons and snakunks,[466] it also makes the reader continuously aware of an altered ecology that is not

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[462] Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism: The Role of Ecotheology in Creation/Evolution Controversies," 60-61.

[463] Sideris, 61.

[464] Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 8, in Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism: The Role of Ecotheology in Creation/Evolution Controversies," 60.

[465] Charles Birch and John Cobb, *The Liberation of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 68, quoted in Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism: The Role of Ecotheology in Creation/Evolution Controversies," 60.

[466] See Note 292 of Introduction to this thesis and Note 163 and pp 179 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, for discussion on 'splices' like the 'pigoon,' 'snakunk,' 'liobam' and others in created by the Compound scientists, in *Oryx and Crake*, by fusing the genetic code of the two organisms. Also see Note 102 above.

necessarily supportive of human existence post pandemic in the trilogy created by Atwood. Thus the ecosystem is a constantly evolving whole, with human intervention often creating havoc in its natural systems of repair and interdependency.

Charles Birch and John Cobb, in a significant study emphasize the need to see even atoms as ecosystems.[467] By re-stating the purpose of ecological studies in its application to the study of atoms, ecology becomes a propellant of change to such an Ethics of Care by recognizing all beings as constituted by their relationship to other beings. While a mechanistic view of the universe sees human and non-human beings as "communities of bacteria, modular manifestations of the nucleated cell,"[468] process thinkers specially think of the world as enchanted and organismic, rather than an aggregation of vacuous self-contained units. This aspect can also be seen in quantum and relativity theories in science that understand how even the process of observation creates changes in the phenomenon/object being viewed. Thus subject/object dualities begin to dissolve in this perception of the world. In the next chapter of this thesis, we therefore explore Atwood's novels *Surfacing, The Edible Woman,* select short stories and poetry for their exploration of the inter-animation of the human and non-human, the categories of nature and culture, the dissolution of boundaries between the perceiver and the perceived as well as the re-institution of those very boundaries for the sake of a defined politics and emergence of self-consciousness. The re-enchantment of the natural world takes on a renewed significance in these works by Atwood, plumbing the contours of human embeddedness in the ecosystem, and outlining the nature of hope in the face of precarity.

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[467] Birch and Cobb, *The Liberation of Life*, 108.

[468] Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *Microcosmos: four Billion Years of Microbial Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 191.

Chapter 3

An Ecofeminist Ethics of Care: Exploring Interbeing[1] in *Surfacing, The Edible Woman, Wilderness Tips, The Tent* and Margaret Atwood's Early Poetry[2]

The eco-activist scholar is redefined by Greta Gaard as one writing in the hope of a world which is "more intimately attuned to life: to our interbeing with humans of diverse races, genders, nations and with all species and elements of this one precious earth."[3] Such attunement becomes one of the salient means of reconceptualising 'nature,' as well as a means of awakening hope in revitalizing human consciousness of embeddedness in 'nature,'

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[1] Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (United States: Lexington Books, 2017), x. Gaard uses the term "interbeing" to refer to the webbed matrix of life of human and non-human. This is similar to Donna Haraway's concept of "entities in assemblages," including all kinds of combinations of entities such as the "more-than human, other –than-human, inhuman, and human as humus," which is an important framework for reading the polyvalence of Atwood's texts, in this chapter. See Donna Haraway, "Making kin in the chthulucene," *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), 101. https://law.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3119681/12-Haraway,-Donna-J,-Ch-4,-Making-Kin,-Anthropocene,-Capitalocene,-Plantationocene,-Chthulucene.pdf. The term however also goes back to Thich Nhat hahn's coinage of "interbeing" to refer to the interdependence of all phenomenon. See Thich Nhat Hahn, *Interbeing: The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of Engaged Buddhism* (1987; repr. California: Parallax Press, 2020). Also see Thich Nhat Hahn, *All in One, One in All : the Nature of Interbeing* (Singapore: Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery, 2001), where he discusses ways of enhancing our perception of such interbeing. Barbara O'Brien explains that the term helps discuss existing ideas in Buddhist philosophy, particularly that of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination, or *pratitya-samutpada* in the *Sutta Pitaka*. See "Interbeing: The Inter-existence of All Things," *Learn Religions*, March 06, 2017, https:// www.learnreligions.com/interbeing-3866931. In a lot of ways, this philosophy has also been seen in our discussion of Deep Ecology in chapter 2 of this thesis, and the concept of the 'Ecological Self' highlighted by Arne Naess. The God's Gardeners in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* are seen practising a radical environmentalist lifestyle emanating from an ecological consciousness of such 'interbeing'. See Note 73 of chapter 2 of this thesis.

[2] Referring to Atwood's poetry written between 1964-1980, particularly poems from *The Animals in That Country, The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Procedures for Underground* and *The Circle Game*.

[3] Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, x.

through effective writing. Through this chapter, I would like to see Margaret Atwood as such an eco-activist writer, whose texts embody this deep understanding of connections between social, trans-species and ecological justice. I find Atwood's ecocritical narratives describing the possibilities of representing "experience in ways that honour the agency and creativity of the more-than-human world,"[4] years before Val Plumwood articulated a need for such representation. Atwood's writings therefore become significant crucibles of hope at a time when fears and anxieties regarding ecological degradation threaten to overwhelm human imagination. According to Kerry Whiteside, the 'environmental crisis' is not as much "a crisis about the condition of 'nature'" as it is a "crisis of representation."[5] This stems from the modernist tendency of presupposing two distinct forms of representation--that of representing "things" and that of representing "citizens" thereby automatically presupposing a dualism in the process of representation, one through the means of the laboratory and the other through a social contract.[6] However Bruno Latour proposes that we seek a non-modern approach to representation which understands that "social groups, technologies and things" are all "inextricably intertwined" and can have similar means of representation.[7] As Whiteside reflects in his discussion on Latour, such new forms of representation seek "to protect future generations and non-human species," by systematically bringing non-human claims and interests "into representative political processes."[8] Representation is thus seen

[4] Val Plumwood, "Journey to the Heart of Stone," *Culture, Creativity and Environment: New Environmentalist Criticism,* eds. Fiona Beckett and Terry Gifford (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 19. Also see Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* , xiii.

[5] Kerry Whiteside, "A Representative Politics of Nature? Pursuing Bruno Latour's 'Collective'," *Western Political Science Association 2011 Annual Meeting Paper*, 1, accessed November 17, 2019, doi:10.2139/ssrn.1800767. See also Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences Into Democracy* (United States: Harvard University Press, 2009), 22, for Latour's detailed discussion on political ecology being a crisis of objectivity rather than a crisis of nature.

[6] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1991), 27.

[7] Whiteside, "A Representative Politics of Nature?" 1.

[8] Whiteside, 2.

for both its possibilities as a "positive and actualizing power," as well as "a negative power"[9] in the control it can exercise on the subjects of representation and recreate dualistic structures with embedded patterns of power and hierarchy. The key towards newer models of representation and a new "political ecology" thus lies in breaking with "modernity's constitutive dualisms--nature and humanity, science and politics, fact and value."[10]

Jhan Hochman also reminds us of the impact that representation of nature can have on cultural consciousness leading to further actions having an impact on 'nature'. He defines the project of green cultural studies as being "the examination of nature through words, image, and model for the purpose of foregrounding potential effects representation might have on cultural attitudes and social practices which, in turn, affect nature itself."[11] Hochman reflects that the "confusion about cultural construction of nature is the word construction."[12] The word 'construct' usually means 'to cause to exist' or 'to fashion'. With respect to the entity demarcated or represented as 'nature', only the latter can have any application. Thus it also shows that "culture fashions and manipulates worldnature."[13] He acknowledges that culture has invented the word 'nature' with its multiple meanings. Hochman also reflects on the nomenclature of the word—'environment' that has a dangerously anthropocentric tone—as 'environment' is not inclusive of all plants, animals, and elements, and furthermore the term has increasingly come to mean a nature tangibly important only to human health or livelihood."[14] However we need to understand nature "as important in itself, for itself,

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[9] Whiteside, 2.

[10] Whiteside, "A Representative Politics of Nature?" 4.

[11] Jhan Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2000), 187.

[12] Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 188.

[13] Hochman, 188.

[14] Hochman, 188.

outside human considerations."[15] In this chapter, I will be analyzing Atwood's early writings, in particular *Surfacing*, *The Edible Woman*, selected short stories from *The Tent* and *Wilderness Tips*, and multiple poems from her poetry collections, *The Animals in That Country, The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Procedures for Underground* and *The Circle Game,* which grapple with the power-inflected dualisms characterizing the way we perceive 'nature' and ourselves as products of culture and seek to represent an extra-linguistic reality of interbeing[16] and redefine the way we see the human and non-human relationship. Latour's analysis of humans forging their own identities by their "relations with things,"[17] sees human subjects as dependent on non-humans for the validation of their existence. However, Whiteside is quick to clarify that such a conception does not therefore view humans as "active intending agents manipulating passive things in the world."[18] Rather it is Latour's way of bringing to the fore agency emerging out of the interconnection between things and people, through the "Actor-Network-Theory," proposed by Latour, which "pictures humans and non-human things bound together in networks, with agency distributed throughout."[19]

In this chapter I will be interrogating the multiple means by which Atwood negotiates emerging ecocritical debates surrounding the question of representation of nature, as well as pre-empting many theoretical models by her ecocritical narratives[20] in prose and verse. Alongside a close examination of texts, I will be tracing the way ecocritical thought has considered the possibilities of language describing nature and the problematic of collapsing

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[15] Hochman, 188. See also Notes 68-76 of chapter 2 of this thesis for an extended analysis of deep ecology ideas based on such a biocentric perspective.

[16] See Note 1 above.

[17] Whiteside, "A Representative Politics of Nature?" 4.

[18] Whiteside, 4.

[19] Whiteside, 4.

[20] See pp 24-28 of the Introduction to this thesis.

all boundaries between the human and non-human. As Atwood is often labelled an ecofeminist,[21] I will be also closely delving into the progression of ecofeminist thought in academia and the challenges faced and countered by ecofeminists over time, seeing Atwood's writing as proto-ecofeminist and highlighting her contribution to the questions of perceived affinity between women and nature.[22] This chapter shall attempt to see Atwood redefining ecofeminist politics, much before the debates emerged and were countered by theorists in the field, particularly by Atwood's acute awareness and representation of stories embedded in all material entities within which the human perceiving self is located.[23] I shall be bringing together a wide variety of apparently disparate theoretical tools, to read Atwood's ecocritical narratives, ranging from ecofeminist spirituality and cognition of unitive dimensions of being, closely allied to deep ecology discussed in the last chapter, to

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[21] See Carol P. Christ, "Margaret Atwood: The Surfacing of Women's Spiritual Quest and Vision," *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2, no.2 (1976): 316-330, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173450 ; Judith Plaskow, "On Carol Christ on Margaret Atwood: Some Theological Reflections," *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2.2(1976): 331-339, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173451. See also the section on "Reading Margaret Atwood," in the Introduction to the thesis where seminal existing works analysing ecofeminist aspects of Margaret Atwood's works are discussed. Christ and Plaskow kick-start an important debate in academia regarding seeing Atwood's texts as ecofeminist while the author herself in the same journal refuses such a tag. See Atwood, "A Reply," *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2, no.2 (1976): 340-341, doi: 10.1086/493361. Atwood strives to establish that she is only a writer exploring human nature and not writing a treatise that is a social commentary. See also Katie Struckel, "The Human Nature of Margaret Atwood," *Reader's Digest* 80, no.10 (2005): 35, https://www.writersdigest.com /writing-articles/the-human-nature-of-margaret-atwood. However Struckel presents Atwood somewhat differently, as someone who understands that simply by writing and having an opinion, writers do become spokespersons for certain causes.

[22]See H. Louise Davis, "Natural Resistance: Margaret Atwood as Ecofeminist or Apocalyptic Visionary," *Women Writing Nature: A Feminist View* (United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2008), 81-94, for her take on critical writing viewing Atwood's works as ecofeminist. Davis attempts a close reading of Atwood's oeuvre to suggest that most of the woman characters in Atwood's texts also extend the domination and invasion of nature, as nature remains just a backdrop to their self-examination, metamorphoses and revelations. Davis also extends her ecofeminist reading of Atwood's oeuvre to *Oryx and Crake*, seeing all of Atwood's writing to be "ecofeminist friendly."

[23] Serpil Opperman and Serenella Iovino describe all non-human entities as "agencies" that produce meaning and demarcate all "matter as text" and as dynamic self-articulating "storied matter." While the academic discourse of Material Ecocriticism that is based on recognising all material entities as agential storytellers is a more recent articulation, I see Atwood's writings describing a similar awareness of "meshwork" in nature. See Serpil Opperman, "Ecological Postmodernism to Material Ecocriticism," *Material Ecocriticism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana university Press, 2014), 29.

an analysis of Latour's concept of the collective, that becomes a forum of 'propositions', giving voice to both humans and non-humans, forming the 'raw material' of this collective,[24] characterised by a "condition of continual process sustained by the exchange of properties,"[25] between the participants—the humans and non-humans.

The 'Notion' of Nature

The way the term "nature" is perceived and constructed has a direct impact on the way we respond to the entity called 'nature' by us, either in opposition to everything we consider as ourselves or as a greater subset of Creation, of which we are a part. Thus narratives defining 'nature' become significant in influencing our actions and experience of the "more than human world."[26] In Terry Gifford's words, "notions of nature, are of course socially constructed and determine our perception of our direct experiences, which, in turn, determine our communications about them."[27] Pugh takes this a step forward, saying that the 'natural' is the "cultural meaning read into nature, meaning determined by those with the power and the money to use nature instrumentally…."[28] Nature itself is defined as two kinds by Raymond Williams, when capitalised referring to the larger concept of an "inherent force

[24] Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern,* 61. Latour proposes that the new collective be envisaged not as "a thing in the world, a being with fixed and definitive borders, but a movement of establishing provisional cohesion that will have to be started all over again every single day." Latour, 147. See also Tony Fry, "The Cultural Politics of Politics of Nature: Review of Bruno Latour Politics of Nature," *Design Philosophy Papers*, 2, no.1 (2004):78, doi: 10.2752/144871304X13966215067796. Latour conceives of this collective as superseding the concepts of nature, society, culture, politics and ecology as separate from each other. A new constitution is called for that will not mirror the existing fixed dualistic structures such as the objective and the subjective or the common and the private. Latour, 93. This is his way of enacting change, which he sees as a continual process of expanding the new collective thus perceived.

[25] Fry, "The Cultural Politics of Politics of Nature," 79.

[26] Plumwood, "Journey to the Heart of Stone," 19.

[27] Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1995), 13.

[28] Simon Pugh, *Garden-nature-language* (United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 1988), 2, quoted in Gifford, *Green Voices,* 14.

that directs either the world or human beings or both" and when not capitalized, signifying "the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings."[29] However, while Alan Liu rejects the existence of nature altogether calling it a construct used to validate the human, "to interpose a mediation to make humanity more easy with itself,"[30] this mediation does not thereby imply the absence of an extra textual reality, according to Gifford as well as Patrick Murphy.[31] Gifford in fact asserts the role played by texts in mediating human experience of this physical reality—personal and collective, immediate and historical. He argues that Liu is not correct in completely denying the existence of a material reality that is called 'nature,' as "there has to be a nature to be called 'nature.'"[32] Laurence Coupe, in his 'General Introduction' to *The Green Studies Reader*, affirms Gifford's thoughts as he says that green studies do "not challenge the notion that human beings make sense of the world through language, but rather the self-serving inference that nature is nothing more than a linguistic construct."[33]

In analysing the scope of ecocritical narratives used by Atwood, it becomes important to interrogate the debates surrounding the signifiers used in the course of analysis. In this Jonathan Bate's suggestion when discussing Liu's proposition is significant. He says that 'nature' as a term be contested, not rejected.[34] Contesting the notions regarding nature shall

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[29] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2014), 164.

[30] Alan Liu, Wordsworth: the Sense of History (California: Stanford University Press, 1989), 38. Also quoted in Gifford, *Green Voices*, 15.

[31] See Patrick D. Murphy, *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries, and Fields* (Ukraine: Lexington Books, 2009).

[32] Gifford, *Green Voices,* 15.

[33] Laurence Coupe, *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2000), 3.

[34] Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), 56.

help in selecting those most 'useful to our survival and that of the planet,' as observed by Gifford.[35] This is a practical observation as the ultimate impact aimed for by the environmental humanities is in conserving and resuscitating our planetary ecosystem through influencing people's thoughts. Gifford asserts, "the problem with those poststructuralists who contest everything at once and are therefore only able to answer a question with another question, is the pretence that they are not using "provisional assumptions in order to communicate."[36] Gifford accepts that there cannot be any 'innocent' reference to nature in a poem, as any such reference will hold within itself "culturally developed assumptions about metaphysics, aesthetics, politics…."[37] Thus Gifford points towards the importance of "choosing provisional notions of nature" as "crucial to considered action," as "whether we like it or not we act upon the environment everyday."[38] Thus personal notions of nature would always "be in dialectical relation to socially constructed notions of nature."[39] The poem or literary work then becomes the "site where writer and reader negotiate that dialectic of personal and social meanings."[40]

While language is seen by some critics as an obstruction in representing or communicating experiences of 'nature,' some see it as a possibility, as all writers and critics are ultimately stuck with language as a means of expression and communication. William Howarth therefore feels that although cast as opposites, nature and culture really keep

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[35] Gifford, *Green Voices,* 15.

[36] Gifford, 15-16.

[37] Gifford, 16.

[38] Gifford, 16.

[39] Gifford, 16.

[40] Gifford, 16.

mingling "like water and soil in a flowing stream."[41] However, in Helene Cixous' view, 'language distracts us,' becoming an obstacle between ourselves and the objects of perception—"we let ourselves be led aside by grammar, we let ourselves be distanced from objects by sentences, we let language double us, let it throw itself surreptitiously in front of objects, just before we can attain them."[42] On the other hand, Gary Snyder sees great potential in language in the way in which we approach the universe and its "Unsayable Truths."[43] Snyder urges us to "see *with* language," such that it becomes a "vehicle of self-transcending insight,"[44] into ourselves and our relation to the world we inhabit. Snyder predicts that such language can yield "surprises and angles that amaze us and that can lead back to unmediated direct experience."[45] This is specially so as he sees the role of creativity lying in seeing what is already present with new eyes. As the "world is constantly in flux and totally mixed up and compounded," the role of art and language increases in becoming the medium through which we can actually participate more fully in the flux. In this respect, Snyder sees the process of creating as emerging from complete immersion in "what is" and displaying all the "overlooked connections, tensions, resonances, shadows, reversals, retellings."[46]

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[41] William Howarth, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism.," *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology,* eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Greece: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 69.

[42] Helene Cixous, *Illa* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1980), 135-7, in Verena Andermatt Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism,* ed. Laurence Coupe. (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2000), 150.

[43] Gary Snyder describes the way language has always been conceptualised as the flowering of human intelligence and the means by which humans impose "a net of categories on an untidy universe." However, as Snyder rightly points out, the complex universe with its inscrutable methods of operating remains hard to predict and categorize. He particularly stresses on the importance of acknowledging that "we live in a realm in which many patterns remain mysterious or inaccessible to us." See Gary Snyder, "Language Goes Two Ways," *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2000), 127-28.

[44] Snyder, "Language Goes Two Ways," 128.

[45] Snyder, 128.

[46] Snyder, 128.

In Atwood's short story, "The Tent," the speaker of the story tries to defend, protect, heal and keep her sanity through writing in the face of the "howling wilderness,"[47] just outside her tent. The speaker describes the experience within the tent as "frightening"[48] as the howling of creatures outside approaching the tent increases in intensity. She struggles to keep herself and her loved ones safe, by writing on the walls of the tent, which is "made of paper"[49] as though fashioning a talisman against the invasion by the wilderness. She descends into frantic writing, "upside down and backwards,"[50] and feels the need to describe the howling outside, the death, agony and nature of the wilderness she can see outside the tent. At the same time she feels that she must also write about her loved ones within the tent, though hiding their real identities, who she is trying to protect through her writing. She recognizes the difficulty of protecting loved ones who do not recognize the world outside the tent as dangerous as she perceives it, instead thinking it is a "picnic out there in the wilderness."[51] In *Surfacing* as well we see the speaker of the novel experiencing the power inherent in the wilderness unlike her friends who are oblivious to real transformative nature of the wild and the way it can invade your life and consciousness. David, Anna, Joe and Bill see it as a holiday spot. Writing thus becomes an act of retaining identity, or a human sense of self, in face of the wilderness breaching every human made boundary and swamping all sense of self. "You write as if your life depended on it, your life and theirs."[52] Knowledge of nature in its elemental form provides the writer with the power to protect and create greater

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[47] Margaret Atwood, "The Tent," *The Tent* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 143.

[48] Atwood, "The Tent," 144.

[49] Atwood, 144.

[50] Atwood, 144.

[51] Atwood, 145.

[52] Atwood, 145.

awareness regarding a life lived to the tune of the wilderness instead of at odds with it. The speaker of "The Tent" identifies the loved ones she protects as not just people but "cities and landscapes, towns and lakes and clothing you used to wear and neighbourhood cafes and long-lost dogs."[53] In the initial stages of the novel *Surfacing*, the speaker tries to retain a separate identity, by holding onto memories as a way of demarcating the self. However in the latter half, once she decides to merge her consciousness with the wilderness, breaching all self-created boundaries, she also attempts to erase memories in the form of photographs that limit her in a certain way.

As the writer in "The Tent" writes in the light of the candle, the animals outside are drawn to the light and her creative energy. Thus writing makes her conspicuous and she even questions her illusion thinking that her writing is important or powerful, "the belief that you doodling is a kind of armour, a kind of charm."[54] The tent starts to disintegrate at this point, catching fire from the candle that she was writing by, the eyes of the howlers peeping in through the gaps created.[55] Even at this point of annihilation of her writing self, she keeps writing, "because what else can she do?"[56] This creates a striking image for Atwood's production of eco-narratives as the only thing she can do—write, hoping that it acts as a talisman propelling change. Snyder describes the best kind of writing as that which produces more than what is aimed for, explaining that "really good writing is both inside and outside the garden fence."[57] The unpredictability of such writing makes it possible to engage with a

[53] Atwood, "The Tent," 145.

[54] Atwood, 146.

[55] Atwood, 146.

[56] Atwood, 146.

[57] Snyder, "Language Goes Two Ways," 129.

"broader, deeper kind of intelligence,"[58] as seen in Atwood's poetry that continually borders the edge of the unknown and incomprehensible world of non-human reality. Snyder projects a view of language that is different from the "familiar", to suggest that language be seen as biological rather than only cultural.[59] He also posits "good writing" as "wild language," rather than 'civilized language', referring back to his garden metaphor.[60] Thus he calls for a different kind of language altogether, a form of "playful writing," where the "mind's eye is roaming, seeing sights and scenes, reliving events, hearing and dreaming at the same time."[61] This form of language becomes a possibility of seeing our place in the interconnected matrix we call nature. However this is possible only when "the world is allowed to come forward and instruct us, without the interference of the ego and opinion" [62] that is reified by the earlier and familiar conception of language as something that tames "the unruly world of nature and feeling."[63] Such dualistic oppositions are seen underlying most of Western thought as identified by Cixous and later detailed by Plumwood and other ecofeminists.

Woman, always seen on the side of 'nature' and separated from the realm of 'culture' is relegated to passivity, according to Cixous. Verena Andermatt Conley elaborates on Cxous' idea and explains that a 'vertical order' therefore becomes law—and everything that is intelligible slotted into oppositions which are dual and irreconcilable.[64] Conley explicates

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[58] Snyder, 129.

[59] Snyder, "Language Goes Two Ways," 129-130.

[60] Snyder, 130.

[61] Snyder, 130.

[62] Snyder, 130.

[63] Snyder, 129.

[64] Conley, "Language Goes Two Ways," 148.

that, "These oppositions extend into Nature/History, Nature/Art, Nature/Mind, Passion/Action."[65] Culture, society, art, religion, symbolic systems, the family and language all conform to the same schemata of oppositions.[66] Conley also analyses that the constitution of an opposition is also concomitant with the destruction of the couple.[67] Cixous in her writing is seen exposing the logic of the death of one term for the life of another as the basis of the exclusion of women from the symbolic system. This is the deadly logic of Freudian psychoanalysis, where the "masculine subject asserts himself through negation of the Other."[68] In Conley's words, "Masculine culture spells the death of women and nature."[69] In this viewpoint, the masculine subject "spirals toward the spirit and leaves the body (that is, nature) behind."[70] At the same time, Conley exposes the dichotomy in the 'body' and the 'woman' also being always 'cultural' and 'always already written.'[71] As seen in the course of this chapter, Atwood's *Surfacing*, *The Edible Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments,* explore this dichotomy of experience, where the woman's body is always already 'written' by culture and at the same time repressed and excluded by that very signification, by associating it with the realm of subordinated nature. Therefore in a step that is crucial towards rethinking the categories of women and nature, and for creating "a mental ecology," Cixous outlines modes of exchange that would be different from the transactional masculine tradition and closer to 'gifting,' where subjects give themselves to each other,

[65] Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," 148.

[66] Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," 148.

[67] Conley, 148.

[68] Conley, 149.

[69] Conley, 199.

[70] Conley, 199.

[71] Conley, 199.

freely, without seeking obligatory returns on their investments."[72] As the world of 'natural' language, closer to body and affect, is lost and replaced by a phallocentric, martial culture, Cixous searches for a relational and "harmonious" language that embodies this "poetic idiom of proximity" and tries to bridge the gap that culture and language create between the experiencing self and nature.[73] This is particularly seen in *Surfacing* and selected poems from *Eating Fire*, that shall be analysed in detail in the course of this chapter, where Atwood experiments with narrative techniques to seek a language that predates the divisions introduced by a "masculine language that divides the subject from the mother's body, and teaches him or her through grammar and rules to speak of things from a distance."[74]

In *Surfacing*, the wilderness is described as an endlessly expanding space. The unnamed speaker in the novel remembers her father playing 'hide and seek' with her and her brother, recalling the sheer impossibility of locating him in the bush as "the space to hide in was endless."[75] This quality of the wilderness is similarly described in Atwood's poetry as an entity that invades and dismantles any steady sense of self. This quality of transfiguration is pointed out early in *Surfacing*, as the narrator recollects, "…even when we knew which tree he had gone behind, there was the fear that what would come out when you called would be someone else."[76] This is a recurrent motif in Atwood's poetry, particularly competing narratives about the wilderness, swinging between the fear of being hunted and erased to a longing for the obliteration of boundaries between the self and the wilderness that threatens

[72] Conley, 150.

[73] Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," 150.

[74] Conley, 150.

[75] Atwood, *Surfacing*, (1972; repr. New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 47.

[76] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 47.

and appeals at the same time.

In Atwood's poem "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," in the collection *The Animals in That Country*, the pioneer who wishes to make a mark on the land and make it subservient to his interests, faces great resistance within and without. The vastness of the sky, "totally un-/enclosed," engulfs him in response, till he feels swamped, shouting—"Let me out!"[77] He battles the wilderness, trying to plant seeds, digging the soil into furrows, trying to impose a sense of order and retain his self-identity and uniqueness in face of this incomprehensible extended sense of self that starts invading him. "He asserted/into the furrows, I/am not random."[78] The plants growing, the weeds and tree-sprouts are compared to aphorisms emerging from the earth as a response to his assertion of identity. However, owing to his initial lack of sensitivity, he is unable to understand what the earth seems to be telling him. There is a continuous feeling of being unsettled and lost, as even in the house, he feels pitched "in the middle of nowhere,"[79] frantic and clutching for co-ordinates in the darkness, as the pioneer's boundaries start collapsing with night approaching. The sounds at night are magnified by imagination and creates forms of animals, from the auditory impressions, "The idea of an animal/patters across the roof."[80]

The unknown overwhelms the pioneer and he is completely swamped by the deluge that is the wilderness, the fences he builds around the fields sown by him struggling to keep their separateness. He continues trying to resist, even as "everything/is getting in."[81]

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[77] Atwood, "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," *The Animals in That Country, in Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 38.

[78] Atwood, "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," 38.

[79] Atwood, 39.

[80] Atwood, 39.

[81] Atwood, 39.

However, the silent presence of the "unanswering forest," challenges his notion of "the absence/of order"[82] implying a different order of perception. In Atwood's words, "It was/an ordered absence,"[83] deeply similar to the experience of the speaker in *Surfacing*, who learns the language of nature at great cost, submerging herself in this "ordered absence"[84] to learn its mysteries, embracing what the pioneer experiences as "unstructured / space"[85] to feel empowered and reconnected to herself again, without the mediation of language and culture that had created such a distance from nature and therefore herself. The pioneer still doesn't understand the key to surviving the wilderness as the speaker of *Surfacing* learns through the course of the novel. Resistance only worsens the pioneer's battle. As he turns obstinate, stomping on the land, trying to assert its solidity, the more fluid it becomes, eating him up, his foot sinking "down through stone/up to the knee."[86] His constant tussle "between subject and object"[87] through the course of the poem, is also a condensed version of a similar tension that the speaker in *Surfacing* undergoes. The dualisms of subject and object keep the narrative dynamic, but is also tiring, as "his eyes become(s) ragged by his effort,"[88] of keeping alive the distinction between himself and nature. The wilderness is seen throbbing with presence, refusing to be contained or named by him, no matter how hard he tries, he fails. Instead "the green/vision"[89] invades his perception and the boundaries are blurred, as

[82] Atwood, 39.

[83] Atwood, "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,"39.

[84] Atwood, 39.

[85] Atwood, 40.

[86] Atwood, 40.

[87] Atwood, 40.

[88] Atwood, 40.

[89] Atwood, "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer,"41.

with the speaker of *Surfacing*, or Lucy's unseen presence in "Death by Landscape."[90] The speaker of *Surfacing* willingly surrendered herself to this "green/vision" understanding its power of transforming her. The pioneer reaches the same conclusion through a journey of resistance.

Snyder redefines the essence of what 'wildness' means—seeing it as "the essential nature of nature,"[91] which when "reflected in consciousness," can be seen as "a kind of open awareness--full of imagination but also the source of alert survival intelligence."[92] Snyder sees language differently, analysing that language "does not impose order on a chaotic universe," rather reflects its own wildness back to it. Thus he sees language as a product of nature that "enables us to have a small window onto an independently existing world," at the same time playing the crucial role of shaping how we see the world through its structures and vocabularies.[93] This is also articulated by Scigaj's theory of 'referance'[94] where we see language used in ecopoetry really pointing towards its limitations, "the reader's gaze is thrust beyond language back into the less limited natural world that the language refers to, the inhabited place where humans must live in harmony with ecological cycles."[95] Atwood's poetry and the novel *Surfacing* can be seen in light of Scigaj's theory of *reference*, which "turns the reader's gaze toward an apprehension of the cyclic processes of wild nature after

[90] After Lucy's strange disappearance during a camping trip in Lois' adolescence, she is eternally haunted by her friend's presence in every aspect of the natural landscape depicted in paintings on her walls, through which Lois keeps searching for Lucy. This short story by Atwood from *Wilderness Tips* is analysed in detail on pp 365-368 of this chapter.

[91] Snyder, "Language Goes Two Ways," 127.

[92] Snyder, 128.

[93] Snyder, 129. Snyder also refers back to Thoreau's concept of 'Tawny Grammar' describing the grammar of language, but also of culture, derived from "this vast mother of ours, nature."

[94] Leonard M. Scigaj, "Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets," *Literature in English, North America*, 2 (1999): 38, https://uknowledge.uky.edu/upk_english_language_and_literature_north_america/2/.

[95] Scigaj, "Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets," 37-38.

a self-reflexive recognition of the limits (the *sous rature*) of language."[96] A third movement in our response to nature following the earlier two, is that of 'atonement' according to Scigaj, where "we confide our trust in (*sen référer*) nature's rhythms and cycles."[97] At this point, 'nature' itself, becomes our text, as pointed out by Scigaj.

Atwood's early poetry showcases the transition from the first to the third stage of responses identified by Scigaj. In "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," we have seen how difficult nights in the wilderness have been for those resisting the wild, as the mind feels displaced. In Atwood's poem "The Journals of Susanna Moodie" from the 1970 collection by the same name, the terror and fear of the unknown is felt most at night, as "My brain gropes nervous /tentacles in the night, sends out/fears hairy as bears, /demands lamps."[98] The possibility of erasure of self-identity is almost irreversible, even as the speaker's way of relating to the night itself is 'tentacular,'[99] and therefore part animal. The transfiguration has already begun, even as she gropes for an understanding of the creatures of the night. The feeling of powerlessness seen in "Progressive Insanities," is also seen here, as she waits for her husband to return from the forest. As in "The Wereman," the speaker is delicately aware of the way her husband shall be altered by the forest he walks into. When "unheld" by her vision or any form of human interaction, the other can blend into the undergrowth into a form that is translucent and a part of the wild, shifting forms, quite like the speaker's

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[96] Scigaj, 38.

[97] Scigaj, "Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets," 38.

[98] Atwood, "The Journals of Susanna Moodie," *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 55.

[99] Borrowing Donna Haraway's definition of tentacularity, as well as playing on the 'spidery' suggestions of Atwood's poem that is replete with tentacular non-human presences entwined with the human. See Donna Haraway,"Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene*," Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016). Also available on https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/

perception of her father's shape-shifting in *Surfacing*.[100] In "The Wereman," she wonders "what does he change into/what other shape/blends with the under-/growth."[101] She visualises the form wavering across pools, camouflaging itself from "the listening/swamp animals,"[102] taking on the nature of the wild, needing to camouflage itself from human interference. The speaker is also keenly aware that this transfiguration might well be internal and unseen in physical appearance of the living like in her husband. When he returns, it might only be her "idea of him" returning, his altered self hiding behind this appearance of normalcy. The sense of stealth and the terror of the unknown returns with the understanding that this change within would be so intense and fierce as to change the speaker as well—"He may change me also/with the fox eye, the owl/eye, the eightfold/eye of the spider"[103]—the animals already having become a part of him, such that the human and animal distinctions have become blurred. At the same time, there is also a suggestion that she might already have changed into a form that would not be recognised by him, for she doesn't know, "what he will see/when he opens the door."[104] Thus the process of writing the poem itself becomes a kind of metamorphosis for her, increasing awareness and sensitivity towards changes brought about by the blurring of boundaries which is inevitable for inhabiting the wilderness and would otherwise invade, through every fence built—physical and mental. The neatness of boundaries have to be discarded as realized by the narrator of *Surfacing*, the pioneer in "Progressive Insanities," as well as the speaker of the poems in *The Journals of Susanna*

[100] The speaker describes her anxiety of seeing her father reappear in a form that is unknown to her, changed by his time spent in the wilderness. See pp 318-319 of this chapter where the scene is analysed in detail.

[101] Atwood, "The Wereman," *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 58.

[102] Atwood, "The Wereman," 58.

[103] Atwood, 58.

[104] Atwood, 59.

Moodie. It is "an ordered absence."[105]

However, the wilderness cannot be easily embraced either. There is always an underlying tension in the lines. The trees around the speaker of the "Journals of Susanna Moodie" seem to take on a malicious air. In "First Neighbours" as well, the forest remains a place that cannot be trusted, that threatens with the power of the unknown. She fears being tricked by the forest in this poem, and senses the presence of the forest hovering around her, with intentions that she cannot fathom, "..one afternoon, while I was drawing/birds, a malignant force/flickered over my shoulder."[106] In the poem "Paths and Thingscape," the speaker of the poem still feels like an invader in the wilderness and longs for "that union" with nature, when "each thing (bits/ of surface broken by my foot/step) will without moving move/around me/into its place."[107] The words on the page that break the boundaries between the speaker and the non-human world, by being replete with suggestions and possibilities, can also be seen as these footsteps that 'break' the surface. It is almost like a jigsaw puzzle that she hopes will fit one day, once the boundary breaks, and the wilderness accepts her as one of its own. This desire is seen woven through *Surfacing* as well, propelling all of the speaker's actions.

However, blurring the nature/culture dualism also results in certain complexities. While Ronald Hatch rightly remarks that Atwood "break[s] down the too easy assumption that the individual is a being entirely separate from his or her environment,"[108] neither can

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[105] Atwood, "Progressive Insanities," 39.

[106] Atwood, "First Neighbours," *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 57.

[107] Atwood, "Paths and Thingscape," *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, 60.

[108] Ronald B. Hatch, "Margaret Atwood, the Land, and Ecology," *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*, ed. Reingard M. Nischik, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 181, quoted in Marinette Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism: Apocalypse and Satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy* (PhD diss., Karlstad

one remark that she suggests that nature/culture dualism doesn't exist. Atwood appears to be very aware of the dangers of completely collapsing all boundaries, yet she represents how these boundaries keep falling into each other as well. Hochman asserts that "nature and culture cannot be willed together by glibly naturalizing culture," or by "culture simplistically proclaiming itself part of nature."[109] According to Hochman, Green Cultural studies would fare better without a forced blurring of boundaries--ensuring that plants and animals are granted separateness, independence and liberation which is better than "forced fusions and coalescences."[110] He suggests this as a way out of the difficulty of "becoming" nature, or of assuming a merger with the real and imagined subjectivity of non-human nature. For Green Cultural Studies to be an "effective politico-cultural tool in the service of nature and culture," Hochman emphasizes the need for all entities and beings to be granted, "unromanticized difference, an autonomy apart from humans, a kind of privacy and regard heretofore granted almost exclusively only to those considered human."[111] Hochman turns to Deleuze and Guattari's take on the culture/nature, animal/human boundary—as a distinctly different take, as it is "dialectically careful not to abandon the advantages accruing to borders and boundaries."[112] According to Hochman, Deleuze and Guattari's "view of 'becoming-in-the-world'...incorporates structuralism with poststructuralism," bringing together the qualities of "boundaries, limits, identities," with "transgressions, joyous confusions, protean

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University Studies, 2017:15), 46, accessed May 21, 2017, https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get /diva2:1089622 /FULLTEXT02.pdf

[109] Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 192.

[110] Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 192. See also Lucy Sargisson, "Green Utopias of Self and Other," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 3, no. 2-3 (2000): 140-156, doi: 10.1080/13698230008403317. The conception of the self and other in symbiosis or even in an inverted dualism helps us view the world differently. However, at the same time the danger of subsuming the other in the self, in a bid to erase boundaries also calls for a warning as discussed in detail by Sargisson in this essay.

[111] Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 192.

[112] Hochman, 191.

fluctuations," turning into what Hochman calls "a shape-shifting multiplicitous postmodernism."[113] I see Atwood's ecocritical writing analysed in this chapter as embodying such a Guattarian 'becoming-in-the-world.'[114]

In *Surfacing*, Atwood restructures the relation between human and non-human, attempting a blurring of boundaries and a resumption of them, in the face of the terror of erasure of self. Even though the speaker of *Surfacing* is disturbed by the absence of her parents, she is also afraid of her father suddenly returning from the wilderness, "unrecognizable, his former shape transfigured by age and madness and the forest, rag bundle of decaying clothes, the skin of his face woolly with dead leaves."[115] In her imagination of her father, he is part of the forest, the lines between human and non-human blurred by his long absence. She even recollects an experience of her childhood where she saw her mother waving her hands and driving a bear away, as they lived for a long time in tents in the forest. The speaker envisions herself doing the same to her father, if he returns transfigured, an animal-like creature whom she may not be able to recognise. This both frightens her and increases her curiosity regarding such an existence, as she tries to inhabit a similar space through the course of the narrative, where the hierarchical lines between nature and culture are blurred. The anxiety of her father returning in a non-human form haunts the speaker—"I felt stretched, pulled tight like a drying rope, the fact that he had not yet appeared only increased the possibility that he would."[116] While expressing her desire to get off the island in the internal narrative presented to us, she uses the word "protect" to refer to the reason for her choice—she feels the need to "protect them from him, to protect him

[113] Hochman, 191.

[114] Hochman, 191.

[115] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 77.

[116] Atwood, 83.

from them," therefore projecting a certain boundary between the group of people who had come with her and her father who she imagines as someone who has transgressed the human and nature boundary. She does not want him to be judged or for him to unsettle them. We see her trying to avoid a confrontation or disturbance of the status-quo. However on closer analysis, we also realise that she wishes to at first avoid the dismantling of her own tenuous experience of the boundary between her ideas of the human and non-human on the island. She also appears afraid to disturb her imagination regarding her father's present existence on the island in a form that might be unrecognizable to human eyes and unfathomable for city dwellers like David, Joe and Anna.

The Wildlife Protection Association of America wishes to buy the speaker's house and convert it to a retreat, "where the members could meditate and observe…the beauties of nature, coupled with a bit of hunting and fishing,"[117] and is no different from David and Joe's film-in-the-making *Random Samples* in their exoticization of the wilderness, so different from the speaker's own experience of the Canadian Bush. At a point in the narrative, David even imagines setting up a "community" here, remarking that "This is life," and a need to break away from city life.[118] However this is said casually without any real understanding of the rigours of life in the wilderness or the impact of living in such close proximity with nature, as seen in Atwood's *Susanna Moodie's Journals*. The narrative also contrasts the way different characters see the house on the lake. For the speaker, it is peopled with memories of her childhood that catch her unawares and leaves her with mixed feelings, while for Bill it is prime estate that can attract tourists. In the speaker's experience, the wilderness cannot be 'framed' or contained in the form of a 'retreat' as visualized by the

[117] Atwood, 94.

[118] Atwood, 89.

developers who wish to buy out her house and her wilderness of leeches, bears, impenetrable trails, lakes and the constant threat of losing one's boundaries of self and identity in the wild. In the poem, "At the Tourist Centre in Boston," we can see the speaker's irritation at the way Canada is viewed as a tourist destination, sold as an idea, a "dream" which she calls "a manufactured/hallucination."[119] The snapshots displayed at the Tourist Centre in Boston showcase a picture perfect family in Saskatchewan—a flat lake with rocks conveniently placed around it, where children pose with the father while the mother is shown cooking over a 'smokeless fire'. The advertisement does not even begin to capture the reality of the wilderness that Atwood has portrayed in *Surfacing*, or *Susanna Moodie's Journals*, or "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer." This sanitized version of her homeland disturbs her, particularly the way Americans reduce her experience to a map with red dots at this centre. She recollects the reality of people living in cities in Canada as well as the slush and garbage that is not showcased for the tourists. Seeing this representation of her country, she even questions her own perception, wondering if hers was a "private mirage," alongside a sense of rage against Americans seen as distorting her sense of national identity. The dangers of the wilderness not depicted in the installation at the Tourist Centre, haunt the fringes of the poem. There is a presence underwater that she can only sense, similar to that seen in *Surfacing*, or "The Tent" or "Death by Landscape," where the wilderness carries secrets and knowledge only accessible to the writer/speaker which she feels responsible for.

The honesty with which Atwood narrates the conflicting narratives of relating to the wilderness, through the speaker's changing perspectives and memories, is significant for alerting us to the co-existence of both romanticization of the wilderness and the harsh reality of actually living in the wild. For a moment the speaker feels, "How have I been able to live

[119] Atwood, "At the Tourist Centre in Boston," *The Animals in That Country*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 32-33.

so long in the city, it isn't safe. I have felt safe here, even at night."[120] At the next moment, her inner voice has contradicts, "That's a lie, my own voice says out loud."[121] She remembers now that at times she was terrified, shining the flashlight ahead of her in the pathway in the woods surrounding the cabin, afraid of the rustling in the forest, knowing that it could be "a bear, a wolf or some indefinite thing with no name," hunting her down.[122] The fear of being hunted, changed and transformed runs as a subterranean sensation through most of the first part of the novel, until the speaker decides to embrace all of these possibilities, by actually stepping into the wild and attempting to learn its language.

There are multiple opinions[123] regarding who has the right to speak for 'nature' or the wilderness and we see Atwood's writing wrestling with these contentions even as she tests the limits and possibilities of ecocritical writing and ecopoetry to describe the relationships between the human and the non-human world. In the prose poem "The Animals Reject their Names and Things Return to their Origins," the animals start speaking out against the definitions imposed on them by other humans, including their names.[124] The bear refuses participation in fairy tales, or the way humans use its fur to make coats, rugs or its face to make trophy heads or depict the ensnaring and capture of bears as a glorified act in chateau tapestries. This poem unabashedly looks at the way humans exert their power and hierarchy over animals and tries to undo the damage, by granting the bear a voice.[125] The

[120] Atwood, "At the Tourist Centre in Boston," 70.

[121] Atwood, 70.

[122] Atwood, 70.

[123] Particularly Val Plumwood, Donna Haraway and Jhan Hochman, as discussed in pp 324-326 of this chapter.

[124] See pp 226 and Note 180 of chapter 2 of this thesis where Adam's naming of all creatures in the Old Testament is discussed as well as the implicit control exerted over all non-humans through this act. Atwood attempts a reversal of this cycle of utterance and power through her poem.

[125] Atwood's poem shows the discomfort and tensions surrounding such anthropomorphization and assumption that humans can speak as non-humans. However the flip side of not representing non-humans at all, is problematic as discussed in this section of the chapter.

bear renounces metaphors as well and states clearly, "I am not like a man,"[126] rejecting our usual methods of anthropomorphizing non-humans for our own comfort. Atwood's poem draws attention to the way narratives are woven around animals, thereby determining how they are seen by other humans and conceived in afterthought. Rejecting its name, the bear announces, "I am now nameless. /My true name is a growl."[127] The use of language is a barrier at this moment, but the nameless bear clarifies that he is using human language to communicate, but it is not his own—"In your languages I announce."[128] Thus the poem also dwells on its limitation as a form used for communication of the significant moment of withdrawal from human narratives. What follows is a complete exodus of animals from all objects of human use, leading to disintegration of these objects. This exodus is then extended to all creation returning back to its source, including stories spun by storytellers, finally leading back to the original word spoken, being unspoken and God biting "his own tongue."[129] The first word, thus hovering, unspoken creates the possibility of a new Creation where the power hierarchies may be dismantled and the power inflected dualisms created by humans undone, where animals can retain their autonomy as well as humans. Such Creation remains potent and possible, but at the same time unknown. The question remains whether the power of words can be used to redress the violence inflicted on animals, reversing time, Creation and the world created anew from such a void.

Atwood's poem, "The Animals in that Country" also analyses the differences between how animals and humans relate and are perceived in "this country" and "that

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[126] Atwood, "The Animals Reject their Names and Things Return to their Origins," *The Animals in That Country*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 78.

[127] Atwood, 78.

[128] Atwood, 78.

[129] Atwood, 84.

country" ostensibly referring to Canada and America, as seen in *Surfacing*, where national identity as a concern becomes closely intertwined with the way the human, non-human interface is fashioned.[130] In this poem, the speaker declares that in "that country," the animals appear to have "the faces of people," suggesting greater anthropomorphism in practice as compared to "this country" where, "the animals/have the faces of/animals."[131] However in both countries, the animals die. In "that country" they may be perceived as human-like and given "elegant death(s),"[132] but the hierarchy between the hunter and the hunted, humans and non-humans are retained. The appearance of greater equality and blurring of boundaries are found to be superficial, as humans continue hunting animals for sport, decorating tapestries with the story of such victories, executing bulls in the rings and foxes in the forest. As contrast, in "this country," the animals die inelegant deaths, crashing into cars that cross their paths, describing human–animal conflict. Yet, they are not romanticised or anthropomorphized, having "the faces of no-one."[133] Thus the animals remain mysterious and incomprehensible, like the wolf that the speaker sees in *Surfacing*, offering no clear answers, resisting human attempts at comprehension and codification. At the same time, it is important for ecocritical writing, as that attempted by Atwood, to engage with such issues of representation and voice, as Hochman says, "speaking for the survival and continued wellbeing," of an animal or species, with or without its sanction, "is less problematic than

[130] See "Texts and Contexts" section of the Introduction for a discussion of Atwood's Canadian roots and her struggle to carve a niche for herself and find a Canadian literary tradition that she could be a part of. See pp 46-47 of the Introduction for a brief discussion of Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, where she analyses the victim positions taken up by Canadian texts in articulating their identity in opposition to an American one. See Note 217-219 of the Introduction for further details.

[131] Atwood, "The Animals in That Country," 30.

[132] Atwood, 30.

[133] Atwood, 31.

not representing them at all."[134] Raising counter arguments to Donna Haraway's complaint against the notion of environmentalist as ventriloquist,[135] Hochman wonders that if there is "no longer any convincing boundary between human and animals."[136] Referring back to Haraway's thesis 'of reinvention of nature,'[137] he wonders "why should animals not be represented by people, just as people are represented by people."[138] He also extends this argument to say that 'animals, like people who cannot or do not represent themselves, are the ones most in need of representation."[139]

Plumwood observes the difference between Green activism and other liberation movements, as in the former, the activists have to speak for nature, "nature does not speak for its own liberation,"[140] as compared to the latter, where to be spoken for by another is itself seen as an 'indignity.'[141] However, Susan Griffin has responded to this contention raised by commentators in the past by reminding readers of the shared roots of oppression and denied identity as materiality and animality, suggesting that women *can* therefore speak

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[134] Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 190. Also see Jhan Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies: An Introductory Critique of an Emerging Discipline," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 30, no. 1 (March 1997): 92, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44029559.

[135] Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 189. See also Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," *Cultural Studies* (1992): 295-337, https://pages.mtu.edu/~jdslack/readings/CSReadings/Haraway_Promises_of_Monsters.pdf; Donna Haraway, ed. *The Haraway Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 63-129.

[136] Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 190.

[137] Hochman contends that Haraway would have done well to situate 'nature' within quotation marks, therefore making it clearer that she is talking about the "reinvention of cultural concepts of nature," as otherwise, her statement becomes the subject of indignation for many. Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 189. Also see Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991). Haraway's suggestion that technology is a "particular production of nature," as a subset of the argument that everything, including culture and technology is n/Nature." See Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," 66.

[138] Hochman, "Green Cultural Studies," 190.

[139] Hochman, 190.

[140] Val Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism," *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, eds. Karen J. Warren and Nisvan Erkal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 349.

[141] Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism," 349.

as nature.[142] While Griffin's contention may be unacceptable for many detractors of ecofeminism, yet the point draws our attention towards the "inclusive and exclusive senses of nature," and also raises questions regarding the seeming obliteration of boundaries in the nature/culture divide by this act of speaking *as* nature suggested by Griffin and even attempted by her in her well known work *The Roaring inside Her*.[143] The theoretical position seen repeating itself through Plumwood's writing and other ecofeminist writers[144] is the possibility of empowering nature through empowerment of women, one being so closely linked to the other in time and history.[145] Plumwood herself takes issue with the stance of speaking *as* nature. She also critiques the deep ecology assumption of the right to speak as the other on performing "the requisite self-enlargement,"[146] which Plumwood sees as an expression of arrogance that erases the need to acknowledge our role as oppressors.[147] However, the way out of this conundrum posed to ecophilosophers, ecofeminists and ecological activists, doesn't seem to be easily available. Plumwood herself poses an open ended question, asking plainly, "Can it ever be acceptable to speak for the other?"[148] While postmodernist theoretical perspectives would largely suggest the unacceptability of such speech, Plumwood acknowledges the necessity of "speaking in defense of the other," in certain situations, where the other is not heard, through speaking--referring to the case of

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[142] Plumwood, 349. See particularly Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (United States: Open Road Media, 2015).

[143] Other critics with similar discursive approaches include Carolyn Merchant (1981), Vandana Shiva (1988) and Patsy Hallen (1994) amongst others. See Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism," 349.

[144] Like Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. See Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (United Kingdom: Zed Books, 2014).

[145] Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism," 349.

[146] See Note 73 of chapter 2 of this thesis that discusses the concept of extended self proposed by Deep Ecologist Arne Naess.

[147] Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism," 350.

[148] Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism," 350.

nature.[149] We have already seen that the term nature itself is heavily contested[150] and when Plumwood is referring to nature as speaking, we must consider that she is bringing into the ambit other kinds of speech than human, and an interface that is not easily defined in the usual human/nature relationship. Atwood's poetry and *Surfacing* particularly spend great lengths of narrative time in trying to articulate this complex interface of a redefined nature whose boundaries permeate into the self that is perceived as human and yet resists any form of appropriation or categorization.

Adopting an Ecofeminist Lens for Reading Margaret Atwood

Ecofeminism is often critiqued as 'concerned with too many issues,' and also considered 'utopian.'[151] However Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen highlight the importance of identifying these intersections of oppression and forms of domination that ecofeminist theory exposes and opposes. They explain, "ecofeminist theory helps us imagine healthier relationships; stresses the need to attend to context over universal judgments; and argues for the importance of care as well as justice, emotion as well as rationality, in working to undo the logic of domination and its material and practical implications."[152] Ynestra King tries to establish the logic behind collating feminist and ecological politics, seeing each as incomplete without the other. King also explains the additional perspectives offered by ecofeminism to social ecology as the former goes beyond challenging the dualistic assumptions of the separation of nature and culture to seeing "misogyny at the root of that

[149] Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism," 350.

[150] See pages 302-304 of this chapter that explores the various "notions" of 'nature' and the impact such perception has on the way we relate to nature and therefore narrate the same.

[151] Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, eds. *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with other Animals and the Earth* (United States: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 15.

[152] Adams and Gruen, *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with other Animals and the Earth*, 15.

opposition."[153] As King establishes through the course of her essay, the domination of nature and the non-human is re-inforced by the domination of women and the feminine and vice-versa, leading to her emphasizing the need for the two praxis to work with each other for better effect. The importance of maintaining biological diversity in the ecosystem is also highlighted by King[154] as both an ecological requirement as well as a political requirement for a global movement against hierarchical models of simplification. She posits ecofeminism as a movement that can work towards common goals while celebrating diversity and opposing domination and violence.[155]

The close link between ecofeminism and anti-militarism appears through King's writing as she expounds the life-affirming basis of ecofeminism. War takes its greatest toll on the lives of women and the health of the ecosystem that is left ravaged and polluted. King describes the Women's Pentagon Action against nuclear arms as an ecofeminist action as the politics and rhetoric used by women in this demonstration and others surrounding it were life-affirming and emotional, such as weaving in scarves, poems, baby clothes and personal-life symbols on the fence of a military installation in England, in 1982.[156] King asserts that, "ecofeminism holds that a personalized, decentralized life-affirming culture and politics of direct action are needed to stop the arms race and transform the world's priorities."[157] This returns us to the need for transformation of priorities that radical environmentalism strives

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[153] Ynestra King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. Judith Plant (Santa Cruz, New Society Publishers, 1989), 19, accessed January 24, 2021, Archive.org, https://archive.org/details/healingwoundspro0000unse_x7v0.

[154] King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," 24. King explains that ecofeminism celebrates diversity—as opposed to "environmental simplification" effected by "industrial technology, capitalist or socialist."(24) She further analyses this to be a result of consumerist capitalism that wishes to homogenize the global market and the needs of people across the planet.

[155] King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," 20.

[156] King, 26-27.

[157] King, 27.

for in different ways. In this chapter, I shall be trying to explore the ecofeminist dimension of radical environmentalism for its attempt at re-configuring 'care,' 'intuition' and interconnectedness as those weapons of transformation strikingly at odds with the weapons of mass destruction that they fight against. In this section of my chapter, I will be exploring how Atwood through her creative expressions, works in a manner parallel to this definition of ecofeminism, reflecting on the importance of an ethics of care[158] and an awareness of interconnectedness of all life. While *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* written in the early 1970s predates the academic popularity of ecofeminist theory and its discourse,[159] even later works written by Atwood while ecofeminism was gaining popularity and later losing ground in academia, show an inherent sensitivity to the concerns of this discourse. While Atwood may refuse to tag her works within the limiting confines of a discourse,[160] the concerns keep returning in her creative outpourings across the length of her oeuvre,[161] particularly in her novel *Surfacing*, *The Edible Woman* and her early poetry that we have been analysing in this chapter.

In *Surfacing*, the speaker journeys back to the cabin in the Canadian bush where her childhood had passed, after news of her father's disappearance and observes the changes in ecology over time, with the dying white birches, the disease spreading from the Southern

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[158] The basis of an ethics of care in ecofeminism rests on "'loving perception' of the non-human world," instead of an "arrogant perception," that imposes definitions and obliterates differences. Karen J. Warren, "A Feminist Philosophical Perspective on Ecofeminist Spiritualities," *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 137.

[159] See Peter Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 75-84, for a brief and condensed discussion of the popularity and then upheavals faced by ecofeminism in academia.

[160] See Note 21 above.

[161] As also noted by H. Louise Davis. See Note 22 above for more details.

part of the country.[162] Later in the novel, she observes men cutting down trees and plotting a new shoreline and she foresees the future, where in the absence of the trees, the hill would become "an eroding sand island surrounded by dead trees."[163] She also notes that the lake that means so much to her was simply seen as a reservoir by the "surveyors, paper company or the government."[164] While losing the lake and the trees feels like losing a part of herself, she also declares her feeling of helplessness, "I would be able to do nothing, I didn't live there."[165] Canoeing down the lake, the speaker and her friends come across a dead heron strung up like a lynch victim for all to view.[166] The speaker observes that the heron must have been killed before it had time to surface from the lake where it must have come for fishing. The tone of narration is very unemotional and taught, but her anger beneath the surface is apparent too. Atwood creates a strange parallel between the speaker's sense of violation and the way the wilderness is being felled, trampled, marked, shaped and controlled by the government, the surveyors and also the speaker's own friends on this trip. David and Joe respond to the heron as an artefact to be displayed in their film *Random Samples*, their insensitivity creating a sharp commentary alongside the speaker's numbness. She reflects on who may have done this deed, "It must have been the Americans; they were in there now, we would meet them."[167] However, she also knows that if she asked them why they committed such a violent act, "it would mean nothing."[168] In a very subtle way, her friends'

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[162] Atwood, *Surfacing,* 3. See also the conclusion of this thesis, which discusses Atwood's childhood experience of the insect infestation of trees and their diseases, learnt by observing her father who was an entomologist.

[163] Atwood, *Surfacing,*114.

[164] Atwood, *Surfacing,* 114.

[165] Atwood, 114.

[166] Atwood, 117-18.

[167] Atwood, 118.

[168] Atwood, 118.

response to the heron is seen to be very similar to the way the 'Americans' have viewed the bird—killed for a show of power—"Why had they strung it up like a lynch victim, why didn't they just throw it away like the trash? To prove they could do it, they had the power to kill."[169] In addition, Atwood also creates an additional layer to the narrative of '*Surfacing*', as the narrator's experience of anaesthesia during her medical procedure, which left her numb and unable to 'surface' to sensation and awareness, is similar to the way she views the heron who too is subjected to the fancies of men trying to show their power over it. The entire narrative of the novel thus becomes her journey of 'surfacing' from the experiences of the past which have left her deadened. It also becomes a narrative of experiencing and transcending the boundaries of nature and culture that have left the speaker so numbed. In this respect, the novel becomes an important signifier in the ecofeminist method of enquiry, even while it predates the ecofeminist movement in academia.

In *The Edible Woman*, the central narrator Marian and her friend Ainsley are seen trying to regain control over their own bodies rather than being defined by men, in their own ways. Ainsley plans to have a baby as a single mother and seduces a common friend Len to fulfil her objective in a comic reversal of gender roles. On the other hand, Marian rebels against the paper doll image that her fiancé Peter seems to crave of her, by running away to Duncan, a literature student who refuses to play the role of a hero or see her as a love interest. The first time that Marian suddenly runs away physically from Peter, he pursues her and wonders what was wrong with her and puts it down to hysteria. However, she repeatedly refuses to conform to expectations of social etiquette and behaviour as she crawls under the bed and then refuses to come out. At the same time, she keeps submitting to Peter's expectations as well. In a way, the narrative is a see-saw of changes within her as she tries

[169] Atwood, 118.

to define an identity outside the lines drawn by Peter and the office co-workers, and expectations of marriage and child rearing seen through the lives of her friends Clara and Joe. However, we also note that she is not like Ainsley, whose initial enthusiasm to be a single mother changes to a desperate need for a husband to provide a father-image to her unborn child. When Marian looks into Peter's eyes and sees herself, "small and oval, mirrored in his eyes,"[170] she starts losing the ability to eat, even as she accepts his marriage proposal and starts playing the role of Peter's fiancé. On one hand it demarcates her increasing sensitivity to the life forms consumed by humans and her inability to eat them, finding herself in some way connected to the food on the table. On the other hand, it also shows her body taking decisions on its own, not taking commands from her, rejecting food that it would have otherwise accepted without question. A distance crops up between her body and sense of self that continues right till the end of the novel, when we see Marian re-assuming her identity, having rejected the false pretentious version of herself that she had adopted to fit into social codes and norms.

King observes that the "process of objectification, of the making of women and nature into 'others' to be appropriated and dominated, is based on a profound forgetting by men."[171] She explains that this involves forgetting their birth and dependence on women in their early years and dependence on non-human nature for survival itself. This forgetting is crucial to the process of objectification and domination.[172] *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman* details the nature of this 'forgetting' and its effects, thereby performing the crucial function of 'remembering' through narration. The first chapter of this thesis dealt with the way such forgetting is often a device for denial and desensitization in dealing with environmental

[170] Atwood, *The Edible* Woman (1969 ; repr. Canada: Seal Books, 1998), 99.

[171] King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," 22.

[172] King, 22.

crises, which might at times overwhelm and be too large to comprehend and address, as well as the importance of ecological narratives in remembering such crises. However this chapter focuses on reading texts by Atwood that consciously remember the connections between human and non-human, as well as between women, men and nature that have suffered disintegration and distortion over aeons, from an ecofeminist perspective. In the second chapter of the thesis, we have seen different eco-philosophers articulating the importance of seeing ourselves as part of the earth. Ecofeminist articulations add another dimension to this sense of identification with the planet as our own selves—attempting to visualize an "ecological-feminist transformation of societal structures."[173] The writers strive to be agents of transformation, seeing ecofeminist thought as praxis and a way of life, rather than simply theory, as presented by Judith Plant.[174] I would like to see Atwood's early writings in terms of its enduring impact on what later develops into ecofeminism, instead of always viewing literature in terms of existing theoretical paradigms. Karla Armbruster articulates a similar stance as she argues that, "creative, complex ecofeminist interpretations of literary texts should be able to enhance the growth of ecofeminist theory rather than wait for its

[173] Judith Plant, *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, x.

[174] Plant, *Healing the Wounds,* x. See also Petra Kelly, "Foreword," *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. Judith Plant (Santa Cruz, New Society Publishers, 1989). Petra Kelly describes Judith Plant's effort at collating different ecofeminist voices as an act of hope and belief in the possibility of transformation that can be brought by a "global ecological sisterhood"(ix). Kelly dreams of a world that is "free of mass destructive weapons, free of sexism and racism, free of violence and repression."(ix) She brings together in one breath, the protests by women across the world against deforestation, militarization, nuclear testing and other forms of corporatization, to suggest the power of these movements.(ix) While Plant's concepts of women and compassion in her Introduction are heartwarming, yet they are problematic because of their essentialism and homogenization of women's relationship with the environment. According to Kelly, this transformation is closely related to "transforming power"(x) that is connected to discovery of women's "own strength" rather than passively receiving "power exercised by others,..in our name."(x) The changes sought are "immediate and personal as well as long-term and structural." King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," 25. A similar viewpoint is also seen in the practices of the Green Sisters discussed in Chapter 2, pp 243-257. See Note 263 of Chapter 2 of this thesis for more details.

development."[175]

Ursula Le Guin in her essay refuses the definition of 'Nature', as it is seen as a "construct made by Man, not a real thing," similar to the constructs regarding women by Men.[176] At the same time the narrator in Le Guin's text, a woman identified with the wilderness, explains that "the experience of women as women, their experience unshared with men, that experience is the wilderness or the wildness that is utterly other—that is in fact, to Man, unnatural." She also points out that this is "what civilization has left out, what culture excludes, what the Dominants call animal, bestial, primitive, undeveloped, unauthentic…what has not been spoken, and when spoken, has not been heard…."[177] Le Guin seeks a language for this experience that has been categorized as wildness/wilderness by the dominance-identified men and women, who fear it for its unknown and indefinable nature. In a similar trajectory, Cixous calls for a feminine subjectivity that is "attuned to the language of things, to feeling, or pathos," by emphasizing "communication along vibrations, in language of the flesh without words."[178] According to Cixous, women have access to a form of communication whose source is the body, the "vibrations" travelling from "blood to blood, through musical vibrations, and cosmic harmony."[179] Thus Cixous suggests we experience a different kind of "knowing" that is in contrast with the 'model of knowledge and power'—born of the "fall and separation" from nature and all natural bodily processes and connections.

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[175] Karla Armbruster, "Blurring Boundaries in Ursula Le Guin's 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Poststructuralist Approach to Ecofeminist Criticism," *The Green Studies Reader*, ed. Laurence Coupe (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2000), 198.

[176] Ursula K. Le Guin, "Women/Wilderness," *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, 46.

[177] Le Guin, "Women/Wilderness," 46.

[178] Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," 151.

[179] Conley, 151.

Cixous' model of 'knowing' is an 'active condition' where the "divisions between body and intellect (language) and between nature and culture are not clearly drawn."[180] We see the narrator in *Surfacing* trying to access this 'knowing' that predates the separation induced by language, by discarding language altogether and human company. In *The Edible Woman*, Marian's heightened sensitivity to non-human life forms are triggered by her fraught human relationships. As she loses agency in social and interpersonal relationships and her sense of independence, she also loses her self-definition and this leads to a rupture in her experience of her body and its boundaries. Thus the food on her plate becomes an extension of her life and she is unable to consume herself. Marian's inner resistance to consumerism is seen in her visits to the supermarket as well as she feels it is "dangerous to stay in the supermarket too long."[181] The supermarket becomes an infection of sorts that she fears would affect her. She feels afraid of being trapped on the shelves as an item to be purchased and bought, "propped against one of the shelves in an unbreakable coma, surrounded by all the pushcarts in the place heaped to overflowing with merchandise."[182] An extension of this consumerist culture is seen in interpersonal relationships, where partners see each other as objects to be consumed and used, as well as the way humans relate to non-humans in this book, as meat to be consumed. Marian unconsciously tries to break this paradigm of power and consumption through her body, by rejecting food and expanding her sense of self. As noted earlier, this is in some ways mirrored in *Surfacing* by the narrator's act of rejecting clothes and cooked food, in an attempt to break the bindings of culture and consumption practised by humans to regain an identity connected with the larger

[180] Conley, 151.

[181] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 222.

[182] Atwood, 222-223.

ecosystem and environment inhabited by these characters.

Conley explains that, "Cixous writes a path into nature."[183] For things to be "felt in their essence, Cixous frames a 'techne' which paradoxically, remains as 'natural' as possible. She makes full use of her poetic licence so that she can slip and slide between techne and poetic plenitude."[184] Cixous goes back to a Heideggarian philosophy of language and "naturalness" that is "anti-technological" and "anti-scientific."[185] This 'naturalness' calls for a different kind of 'techne' in the body than the usual one of instrumental technology. This alternative 'techne' presents women's connection with their natural bodies in a "friendly, forever revalorized nature."[186] In Conley's analysis, 'nature' in Cixous' discussion needs to be reconceptualized to understand "movement" which "flows, as opposed to being cut off, congealed, retained, dammed up."[187] As a result such nature also resists any kind of "framing, arresting; or neat delimiting of a subject and an object at the level of language."[188] Atwood's writings keep describing nature as engulfing and dynamic in the way her human characters experience and relate to the non-human life forms around them. While *Surfacing* and Atwood's early poetry[189] engages with the wilderness as an extension of the self in heightened moments of transformation and experience by the narrators, in *The Edible Woman* Atwood focuses more on the network of human and non-human bodies in patterns

[183] Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," 151.

[184] Conley, 151.

[185] Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," 151-152.

[186] Conley, 152.

[187] Conley, 152.

[188] Conley, 152.

[189] Particularly poems from the collections *The Circle Game*, *The Animals in That Country* , *The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Procedures for Underground,* discussed through the course of this chapter.

of consumption. As her relationship to food becomes "ambiguous,"[190] Marian starts deriving pleasure watching other people eat. She also starts seeing others as non-human after a while—seeing her co-workers as corn plants, "some rapidly becoming overripe, some already beginning to shrivel; she thought of them attached by stems at the tops of their heads to an invisible vine, hanging there in various stages of growth and decay…."[191] As Marian keeps examining these women's bodies and the ingestion of food, beverages and the "giving…out" of burps, words, milk, sweat, etc, she becomes transfixed by this "continual flux between the outside and the inside,"[192] and suddenly feels a part of this mass of bodies and their fluxes. Atwood creates a moment of great intensity in the text, where Marian suddenly loses her self-identity and feels "their substance, pass over her head like a wave."[193] She feels she is "one of them, her body the same, identical, merged with the other flesh…."[194] This expanded awareness of self and body chokes her and she struggles to draw her mind and body into herself again, comparing herself to "some tactile sea-creature withdrawing its tentacles,"[195] again seeing herself as a non-human life form.

Cixous describes a "poetics of being in the world," meant as a route towards empowerment of women by deconstructing "the moral of separation of nature and culture," and to "rehabilitate the mother-daughter rapport."[196] Atwood keeps exploring the nature of memories and the way we construct them, often changing them to suit our requirements and

[190] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 196.

[191] Atwood, 211.

[192] Atwood, 212.

[193] Atwood, 212.

[194] Atwood, 212.

[195] Atwood, 213.

[196] Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," 152.

imagination. However reconnecting with the memories of her mother seem essential towards a recovery of a sense of self prior to the distance and separation introduced by culture. In "Woman Skating," the speaker remembers her mother skating with the backdrop of "a lake sunken among/cedar and black spruce hills; /late afternoon" while in reality her mother had been really skating at a rink near the cemetery with brown brick houses on three sides and cars whizzing by.[197] While her mother was actually wearing "faded maroon earmuffs," she imagines her wearing a "jacket sudden/red against the white."[198] The contrast between mundane reality and the way imagination colours memories is sharply brought to the fore by Atwood's poem. To add to the visual, she also sees her mother focused "on moving/in perfect circles."[199] In *Surfacing*, we see the speaker of the novel also seeking to remember her mother in a way that suits her present needs, as a figure in transition between the human and non-human world. She keeps searching for a message from her mother to navigate the wilderness and her life better, in contrast to the reality of her having had very little contact, communication or understanding with her mother while she was alive. In "Woman Skating," she places a glass bell over the entire scene, trying to capture it and preserve it in its perfection in her mind. However, as in *Surfacing* and other poems, the objects start morphing back into their mundane realities, no matter how hard she tries to contain them.

The novel *Surfacing* starts on a note of reminiscence and returning to a space described as home, and also "foreign territory,"[200] marked by the speaker's absence over so many years. Thus her experience of the place is layered, combining her memories, with her

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[197] Atwood, "Woman Skating," *Procedures for Underground,* in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 96.

[198] Atwood, "Woman Skating," 96.

[199] Atwood, 96.

[200] Atwood, *Surfacing,* 7.

imagination of the past and her present discordant experiences. From the beginning we observe her feeling out of place amongst her travelling companions--her partner Joe and friends David and Anna—"either the three of them are in the wrong place or I am."[201] While she has returned 'home', it is more an 'absence' that she is afraid to face. She enters the cabin by the lake, "warily" and finds "nothing...out of place."[202] The speaker of *Surfacing* seems to have imagined that she could come back whenever she was ready and her parents would remain where they were.[203] However returning to an empty house, she feels betrayed by time and she is left only with the ghosts of memories and her own imagination that she pieces together in the form of a narrative that gives her a new lease of life, outside the constraints of social expectations. She also catches herself calling her father, mother and her younger self "they" and corrects her perspective realising that she was trying to distance her memories as though "they were somebody else's family."[204] The narrator realises that she has to keep herself "from telling that story,"[205] returning our attention to the power of narratives in reconstructing the past as well as in redefining our present sense of self.

When the speaker of *Surfacing* feels her memories slipping away from her, she feels afraid of losing a stable sense of identity, the two being so inextricably linked to each other. She iterates, "I have to be more careful about my memories."[206] At the same time she wonders if those memories are her own or whether of other people telling her their own versions of how she acted, thought or felt at times, realizing suddenly that "if the events are

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[201] Atwood, 4.

[202] Atwood, 31.

[203] Atwood, 5.

[204] Atwood, 10.

[205] Atwood, 10.

[206] Atwood, 70.

wrong, the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too."[207] While this leaves us wondering about the reality or validity of any of her memories, it also creates a nebulous space where imagination and reality can coalesce to help describe other kinds of emergence and realities. She realizes that she might start "inventing" her memories as those who could correct them are all gone.[208] Thus, it is both terrifying and vacant at the same time—replete with the possibilities of creating her life anew in her mind in the absence of any reference frame and thereby creating a new identity for herself—"I run quickly over my version of it, my life, checking it like an alibi; it fits, it's all there till the time I left."[209] However the part of her life post leaving home suddenly goes blank—"static, like a jumped track, for a moment I've lost it."[210] It is like losing a piece of her story and her sense of self collated together in the form of memories past and present, feeling she is going senile. When David enters the house and she can identify him, all her coordinates suddenly return to her.[211]

The speaker's brother keeps returning to the narrative in the form of memories that interweave and lead to epiphanies for the speaker, who rediscovers herself with respect to the landscape that she attempts to become a part of. She attempts to heal herself and gather her sense of self, at a distance from the city and its mechanical nature of life and logic. When she sees the dock on the lake she remembers the incident of her brother drowning, as though it is her own memory, though she must've still been an unborn child in her mother's womb. She feels she watched the event from inside her mother's womb, the way she imagines her unborn child to be participating in the events and experiences she has as a part of the

[207] Atwood, 70.

[208] Atwood, 70.

[209] Atwood, 70.

[210] Atwood, 70.

[211] Atwood, 70-71.

wild. There also appears no apparent difference between lived and imagined realities for the mental landscape. At a point in the novel, the speaker also reflects that if it had been her drowning instead of her brother, it would have given her access to a different epistemology—"I would have returned with scents, I would have known things most people didn't."[212] In fact that is what she attempts in the later part of the novel, as she jumps into the lake, attracted by the possibilities and mysteries inherent in the narratives of the lake within which she imagines her own. The lake enables her transitional experience and comprehension of a different language—that of the wilderness, that she names the 'power' granting her comprehension of the continuum of human and non-human existence.

The way the speaker of *Surfacing* perceives her parents changes over the course of the narrative. She remembers thinking her mother as undefeatable and her illness and passing seems incomprehensible to her. She keeps looking for some kind of secret note or message left for her by her parents as a recognition of her existence to them.[213] The absence of such communication haunts her and she fears the silence, preferring the goofy comments of her insensitive friends and partner to the "loss, vacancy" that threatens to overtake her at any moment.[214] She reasons that no one can accuse her of not trying, as she has tried everything to find her father. Finally she feels she is "absolved from knowing."[215] However this reasoning is purely superficial as she soon becomes engrossed in the struggle to "know" what really happened and access the knowledge that she thinks her parents possessed regarding the natural landscape of the swamp. There is also great change in the external appearance of things, as the narrator acknowledges. The roads to her home have changed so

[212] Atwood, 71.

[213] Atwood, 32.

[214] Atwood, 35-36.

[215] Atwood, 48.

significantly that she needs to ask the way—"Nothing is the same, I didn't know the way anymore."[216] In fact the entire novel ultimately becomes an articulation of her finding the roads to her own self, combining the memories of the past with those created by her in the present. The old road crossing the new one they travel by also becomes a metaphor for the cascade of memories inundating her consciousness. The memories keep intruding upon her present, indistinguishable from the present flow of events after a while, as real as the present. The entire novel moves imperceptibly between the layers of narratives, past, present and imagined till there is no reality except the one experienced by the narrator and no logic seems appropriate to analyse an experience as multi-dimensional and transformative as the one narrated by the speaker of *Surfacing.* Alongside dismantling dualisms informing our perceptual frameworks, it works to unsettle our expectations from the narrative itself and becomes a significant text in the annals of ecofiction for describing the possibilities inherent in the space between poetry and prose to reconceptualise nature and our self within the matrix.

It is only towards the end of the novel that the narrator is seen realizing the hardships faced by her parents and the difficult choices made by them in raising their children. She understands now that her father wanted to live an isolated life, finding the most remote lake in the bush. She reflects now, "…he needed an island, a place where he could recreate not the settled farm life of his own father but that of the earliest ones who had arrived when there was nothing but forest and no ideologies but the ones they brought with them."[217] However all remains in the space of assumption, as the speaker has no access to them anymore, except in her experience of a trance like state that she assumes in the second half of the novel, when

[216] Atwood, 8.

[217] Atwood, 56.

she is able to perceive her parents alive and present in the natural landscape of the swamp and animals and birds in the Canadian outback. However, initially, she can only sense her father's absent presence—"My father had simply disappeared then, vanished into nothing."[218] The speaker in a way recreates her father and mother through the course of the text, as she cannot accept that they left no message for her. The dolls connected to the barometer in Paul's house appeared to her to be determining the weather rather than the other way round. While this is the memory of her imagination as a child, it also creates a parallel frame of analysis for the text, as we wonder if her actions can have a reverse impact on the world she inhabits, rather than only receiving impressions from the world outside or being controlled by others' actions. She attempts to assume agency by her act of destroying the film tape and rendering David and Joe's film making endeavour meaningless as well as refusing to join the social mourning and burial arranged for her father. While her actions appear nonsensical to those moored in conventional patterns of thinking as represented by the three friends who travel to the cabin in the swamp with her, the narrative grants us the advantage of having access to her thoughts and thereby participate in an alternative reality. She considers that it may be better for her father to remain in the forest and wilderness in case he had gone insane as that was better than institutionalisation. The end of the novel sees her teetering between similar choices, of remaining in isolation in the wilderness with her new found knowledge and 'power' or returning to the world of humans, culture and superficiality.

Going through the albums, the speaker of *Surfacing* sees herself "shut in behind the paper; or not me but the missing part of me."[219] She feels as though that part of her was

[218] Atwood, 20.

[219] Atwood, 108.

completely lost, "locked away," while the part of her that continued was the "wrong half, detached, terminal."[220] Her feeling of being incomplete, like a severed part of a body, runs through the course of her narrative till her surreal experience in the wilderness in the second part of the novel, where she experiences a power that finally gives her a sense of completeness that was missing in her life till that point. Through this novel, Atwood thus also explores the transformative power of life in the wilderness that causes a complete shift in perspective which is also seen in parallel through her poetry collated in *Eating Fire,* particularly "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," "The Journals of Susanna Moodie," "the Wereman," and others discussed earlier in this chapter. Also in "No More Photos," a prose poem in *The Tent,* we see a continuation of the speaker's aversion towards photographs that limits the speaker to an image or a series of images: "No more photos—surely there are enough. No more shadows of myself thrown by light onto pieces of paper."[221] She rejects any definitive firm idea of self—"*This is she*."[222] Instead she chooses a fluid, watery idea of self, "I'm watery, I ripple, from moment to moment I dissolve into my other selves."[223] This is also seen as we move between stories and poems—every narration, short story or poem, we see the speaker shifting selves, not wanting to be bound to any fixed contour or identity.

In the poem "This is a Photograph of Me," from *The Circle Game*, the speaker's unease with photographs resurfaces. At first it seems to be a blurred image, but slowly it takes on a certain clarity, as the elements start emerging—the 'part of a tree', a 'small frame house' halfway up the slope as well as those 'under the surface' of the lake, unseen but

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[220] Atwood, 109.

[221] Atwood, "No More Photos," *The Tent*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 25.

[222] Atwood, 25.

[223] Atwood, 25.

present in the photograph.[224] The speaker's drowning in this poem, can also be seen as an extended expression of her act of immersion in the lake in *Surfacing*, bringing together associations of her brother's drowning as a child which she imagines having watched from her mother's womb, her father's death by drowning in the lake that she discovers in *Surfacing,* as well as the death of her unborn foetus in her womb during the abortion she had to undertake. These images of drowning in *Surfacing* coalesce in her act of walking into the lake, drowning her sense of earlier selves and *Surfacing* with an altered perspective. The poem furthers this act, by capturing the moment in a photograph that cannot do justice to the layers of drowning involved in the moment depicted. She asserts her invisible presence in the poem, "I am in the lake, in the center / of the picture, just under the surface."[225] This presence is central to the narrative of the poem, even though she cannot be seen, quite like the author's presence through the course of her narratives, so palpable and crucial, yet invisible. The poem describes "the effect of water /on light is a distortion,"[226] twisting the usual expression, to suggest the impact of every element on the other as well as the way photographs were developed in the dark room. If her writing is seen as a way of framing photographs before our eyes, then the writing is also a way of creating distortion, blurring clarity in perception, leaving it to our keenness of sight to find the focal point beneath the surface of the images painted on the page in the form of words. The invisible presence emerges slowly, "If you look long enough, /eventually /you will be able to see me."[227] At the same time, in the short story "No More Photos," she also indicates that knowing her too much is actually an obstacle in knowing her—"You know me too well to know me. Or not

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[224] Atwood, "This is a Photograph of Me," *Circle Game* in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998)*,* 2.

[225] Atwood, "This is a Photograph of Me," 2.

[226] Atwood, 2.

[227] Atwood, 2.

too well: too much."[228] The creation of multiple selves through writing gives us the impression that we are getting to know the speaker or the author better. However, the many speakers of different texts created by Atwood, therefore become calculated distractions from her own person, an evasion of fixed identity. However in a lot of ways, her voice finds clarity through the act of writing or "drowning" as even she cannot say how "large or small" she is precisely.[229] The blurred image of photographs are also her blurred memories that she has difficulty remembering and therefore of perceiving herself. By drowning/writing she is able to reconnect with her fractured selves aided by the wilderness, the forest and the lake.

One of the major criticisms levelled against ecofeminism is that of biological essentialism--the line of argument most popular amongst ecofeminists in 1970s and 1980s—that "women and nature do exist in a special relationship," and that this special connection, instead of being "an axis of inferiority," can be seen instead as an axis of power, rendering "women uniquely capable of ecological insight."[230] This at the same time, as noted by Peter Hay, places "responsibility for devising strategies of planetary healing," on women.[231] A connection is thus seen between women's physiological cycles and their biological 'closeness' to the planetary ecosystem. In *Surfacing* and in Atwood's poetry analysed closely in this chapter from *The Journals of Susanna Moodie, The Animals in that Country* and *Procedures for Underground,* we have seen the narrators exploring the possibilities of this bodily connection with her natural landscape, seeking to become a part of it and learn its language in a way impossible through the tools of culture. As pointed out by Peter Hay,

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[228] Atwood, "No More Photos," *The Tent*, 25.

[229] Atwood, "This is a Photograph of Me," *Circle Game*, 2.

[230] Peter Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 76.

[231] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 76.

patriarchal[232] dualism has been central to ecofeminist analysis since Rosemary Radford Ruether's pioneering work, *New Woman, New Earth.*[233] While Plumwood has been one of the most influential writers analyzing the impact of dualisms on Western philosophy and thought, Ruether's work is often forgotten for articulating the same as early as 1975. Of course Plumwood's exposition is powerful in its listing of the power inflected dualisms through which perceptions are shaped and hierarchies are created. Dualism is explained as, "a logic of hierarchy in which women are reduced to "inferior, impoverished or imperfect human beings, lacking or possessing in a reduced form the characteristics of courage, control, rationality and freedom which make humans what they are."[234] Plumwood describes patriarchal dualism as a "mechanism of social domination," and points out the mutually re-inforcing nature of these dualisms.[235] One of the main factors of contention between ecofeminism and deep ecology lies in ecofeminist critique of deep ecology's identification of anthropocentrism as the central factor responsible for the destruction of nature,[236] which the former would like to pin onto androcentrism instead. Ecofeminism[237] requires that we become aware that the destruction of the ecosystem is a consequence of "structures of

[232] Patriarchy is defined by Peter Hay as a gender privileging system of power relations that is subtly embedded within dominant social structures, at all social levels, across almost all cultures, and sustained throughout most of history." *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 73.

[233] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (United Kingdom: Seabury Press, 1975).

[234] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, 74. See also Val Plumwood, "Feminism and Ecofeminism," *Society and Nature* 1, no. 2 (1993): 36.

[235] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 42. See also Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 74.

[236] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, 73.

[237] Prior to Plumwood, Karen J. Warren when discussing ecofeminism also talked about "a patriarchal conceptual framework," characterized by "value hierarchical thinking." See Karen J. Warren, "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections," *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1987):6, https://philpapers.org/rec/WARFAE. Thus male identified beliefs, values, attitudes are seen as superior to ones identified as female. Also see Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 73.

exploitation embedded within human society."[238] Patriarchal dualism therefore becomes the bedrock of these "structures of exploitation" that prevent the "fulfillment of human potential."[239]

Re-prioritizing the Intuitive—Transitioning to an Ethics of Care

Among opponents of biological essentialism in ecofeminism, King and John Griscom's positions gained wide acceptance within feminist circles in the 1980s. King is seen opposing these extreme positions of severing all connections with nature or believing women to be more natural than men.[240] According to King, both these positions are "complicit with the nature/culture dualism."[241] King calls biological essentialism "critical otherness"[242] and is critical of this notion of women being biologically more attuned to nature. She explains that "Since all life is interconnected...one group of persons cannot be closer to nature."[243] Griscom reminds us that men are equally 'natural' as they eat, breathe, excrete, sleep and die, all "experiences of bodily limits."[244] In addition he points out that men, while not menstruating, have their own bodily cycle and biological clocks. They also play an important

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[238] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, 73.

[239] Hay, 73.

[240] Ynestra King, "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature," *Heresies* 13, no. 4 (1981): 14-15., https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315698724-27/feminism-revolt-nature-ynestra-king. Also Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 77.

[241] King, "Feminism and the Revolt of Nature," 14-15.

[242] King, 14.

[243] Janis Birkeland, "Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice," *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. Greta Gaard (Philadelphia, Temple University Press: 1993), 22.

[244] Joan L. Griscom, "On Healing the Nature/History Split in Feminist Thought," *Heresies,* 13, no. 4 (1981): 8, http://heresiesfilmproject.org/wp-content /uploads/2011/10/heresies13.pdf. Victoria Davion also discusses that "Some men feel more connected to nature than some women; many women, indeed feel no connection at all." Davion, "Is Ecofeminism Feminist?," *Ecological Feminism*, ed. Karen J. Warren (London, Routledge: 1994) 25-26. Also see Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 78.

role in childbearing and it is important that we do not de-recognize this.[245] However, Plumwood in 1993 re-iterates and re-inforces the importance of a feminist standpoint within ecofeminism. She calls it an "ecological feminist position," that "could and should privilege some of the experiences and practices of women, over those of men as a source of change, without being committed to any form of naturalism."[246] Of course this applies to those experiences of women's lives that have been "less directly oppositional to nature than those of men."[247] Hay also bats for a certain importance to be given to women's experiences as women historically have been "assigned roles that have permitted the development of insights and empathies denied to men,"[248] thereby also suggesting that we think more deeply about the reasons behind skewed power hierarchies and gendered notions of 'closeness' to nature. While Plumwood refers to women as the "custodians" of a different culture,"[249] Hay forces us to think of the separation thus effected by this continued emphasis on differential relations to the entity being demarcated as 'nature.'

However, it seems important to retain the terms 'woman'[250] and 'nature' despite the associations built into these words and the dualisms they signify as seen till now. Susan

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[245] Griscom, "On Healing the Nature/History Split in Feminist Thought," 8.

[246] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* 134.

[247] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 78.

[248] Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 78.

[249] Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* 201.

[250] Griffin approaches the internal crisis affecting feminist studies in the last decade--that of language and the debates surrounding the use of the word "woman" (213). As observed by Griffin, "on close examination, the word begins to dissolve,"(213) and also opens up a series of chasms."(213) The word woman is itself seen as "a social construct: the fantasy of cultural and political structures of power."(213) However, as astutely noted by Griffin, it is difficult to sustain a feminist movement without words and specially the word 'woman'. She cites poststructuralist (specially Derridean) thought where along with the word 'woman', all language is doomed to failure by virtue of meaning being endlessly deferred.(213) Susan Griffin, "Ecofeminism and Meaning," *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, eds. Karen Warren and Nisvan Erkal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

Griffin explains that "to reveal the limitations of category one must have the category."[251] The seizure of a term and re-using it to "make oppression visible,"[252] is also an important phase of a movement as recognized by Griffin. The nature of oppression may vary in every individual's experience, but the reality of oppression itself can form the "common ground"[253] according to Griffin, thereby addressing the charge that the word 'woman' did not do justice to the varied nature of women's experience of hegemonic oppression across the world and in time. Griffin sees a historical convergence of the attitude of racism, misogyny and fear of nature, as they 'share' a pattern and a psychology. In her view identifying the patterns is a crucial aspect of the feminist and environmentalist movements and does not imply the wiping out of all differences between women.[254] Poststructuralist feminism questions the word 'woman' and its associations, however Griffin alerts us to be careful that one set of phrases not be replaced by another. She emphasizes the importance and intent of deconstruction, "to liberate consciousness from social constructions which favour dominant political structures of power."[255] Griffin argues against the essentialist critique, saying that "we still need the word,"[256] even though it appears to limit or confine what it refers to. According to her, too much is lost if the word dies a premature death. The only way out of the impasse created by the essentialist critique lies in "the recognition of many varieties of women within the word 'woman' and at the same time the acceptance of various approaches, viewpoints, starting points, perspectives in discourse."[257] Thus Griffin

[251] Griffin, "Ecofeminism and Meaning," 223.

[252] Griffin, 223.

[253] Griffin, 223.

[254] Griffin, "Ecofeminism and Meaning," 225.

[255] Griffin, 225.

[256] Griffin, 214.

[257] Griffin, 215.

identifies the intersectionality of ecofeminism with other discourses as the answer to the poststructuralist questioning of the word 'woman.' She explains that whenever ecofeminist analysis or discourse suggests that a traditional woman's culture is "closer to nature," this closeness has to be comprehended "as a result of the social construction of gender and the socialization and division of labour which proceed from those constructions."[258] Therefore in Griffin's reading, when ecofeminism highlights that 'women' are 'closer to nature' by virtue of their biology--the discourse is really pointing towards 'the fiction' generated by existing forms of socialization. For in Griffin's analysis, the holding together of the approaches of both post-structuralism and ecofeminism can actually prove valuable, as a shift in thinking can occur.

Griffin explains that "nature" is in fact 'a hidden partner' in the socially constructed dualism of man and woman and used to "justify the social construction of gender."[259] At the same time, it is important to note that the concept of 'nature' used for this purpose is itself "a social construction of nature, an idea of nature."[260] Therefore Griffin thinks it essential to reveal the 'social construction of nature' to reveal at the same time 'social construction of gender as a fiction.'[261] I think Griffin's take on the essentialist critique of ecofeminism is significant for alerting us to the possibilities offered by the parallel seen in exploitation of 'women' and 'nature' by providing us a forum for revealing the discursive efforts of the 'Master Model'[262] that constructs both the terms---'women' and 'nature' that are

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[258] Griffin, 215.

[259] Griffin, "Ecofeminism and Meaning," 219.

[260] Griffin, 219.

[261] Griffin, 219.

[262] See Notes 354 and 357 below.

interrogated in Griffin and Plumwood's efforts. The project of ecofeminism thus lies in understanding how these discursive efforts work in tandem, resulting in hegemonic patterns of thought and action-- as "the many fictions of women, of gender, of nature, of race, support and explain each other."[263]

Stacy Alaimo in *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*[264] has observed that most feminists[265] have striven to disidentify 'woman' from 'nature'—to counter critiques of essentialism and reductionism. However Alaimo and Susan Hekman also feel the difficulty with such a "flight from nature" lies in "that very 'nature'," becoming implicitly or explicitly reconfirmed as the treacherous quicksand of misogyny.[266] The other route taken by theorists and writers as a response to the backlash against ecofeminism has been that of reinforcing the 'woman' and 'nature' connection and positing the 'spiritual' and 'intuitive' versus 'culture' and 'patriarchal rationality.'[267] Neither route challenges dualisms and King takes up cudgels against such a simplistic reinforcement, for it does not challenge dualisms and also does not "recognize that women's ecological sensitivity and life orientation is a socialized perspective that could be socialized right out of us depending on our day-to-day lives."[268] An uncanny similarity is found in *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman*, where the central heroines of Atwood's texts have to strive to revive this intuitive

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[263] Griffin, "Ecofeminism and Meaning," 220.

[264] Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2019).

[265] Beauvoir and Ortner take this route of severing the woman and nature connection, thereby not challenging the dualistic model. See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (NY: Random house, 1968). Also see Ortner, Sherry B. "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" *Feminist studies* 1, no. 2 (1972): 5-31, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3177638.

[266] Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," *Material Feminisms,* ed. Alaimo and Hekman (United States: Indiana University Press, 2008), 4-9.

[267] King , "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," 23.

[268] King, 23.

connection with the non-human and the natural, as their daily lives and work spheres disconnect them from this sensitivity.

In *Surfacing*, the speaker keeps contrasting her inability to "feel much of anything," in connection to the movements and choices of people around her as compared to her sensitivity to the "absence" in the house.[269] She feels embarrassed by the "vulnerability" demonstrated by her partner Joe. She recognizes that "he could still feel."[270] She even envies his "pain," as he asks for a confirmation of whether she loves him. However, the speaker feels deadened to any such emotion and language associated with it. The matter of language and feeling is crucial in this text, as she begins to locate herself within a different space of signification by the end of the novel. With respect to Joe's plea, she reflects, "It was the language again, I couldn't use it because it wasn't mine."[271] The speaker feels as though there is something odd about her and her inability to feel. It is only later when she starts to live as a part of the forest that she experiences her ability to feel seeping back into her. However she is not completely bereft of feelings as seen when she approaches her home, and finds she cannot recollect the way. She nearly breaks down and attempts to stifle her emotions by biting into ice cream and diverting her sense of pain. On the other hand when she finally views the lake, she observes that she doesn't really feel the way she had expected to feel and the vacancy of feeling disturbs her—"I feel deprived of something, as though I can't really get here unless I've suffered, as though the first view of the lake, which we can see now, blue and cool as redemption, should be through tears and a haze of vomit."[272] Atwood makes it apparent that the narrator's friends are completely unaware of the internal

[269] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 106.

[270] Atwood, 106.

[271] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 107.

[272] Atwood, 11.

narrative that we are able to hear and also therefore points towards the others' inner narratives that we do not have any access to. The imagination of returning home and its clash with the reality she experiences guides the initial narrative of the novel. However the lake that is described as "redemption" does become the site of her transformation later in the novel.

Atwood therefore disrupts the assumption of a deep connection between women and nature, describing it more as something acquired by her woman characters experiencing the dualisms inherent in culture. When creating bait for fishing, the speaker assumes a cool-headed approach, then catching fish and killing the fish thus caught with a stone. She practises indifference, but is also troubled by her act, describing feeling squeamish—"one of its eyes is bulging out and I feel a little sick, it's because I've killed something."[273] She then interrupts this thought process, reasoning that killing certain things were all right, "food and enemies, fish and mosquitoes; and wasps, when there are too many of them…."[274] In contrast David and Joe are presented by Atwood as male unidimensional characters who appear to have no sensitivity towards nature, besides filming whatever catches their eye for their film project *Random Samples*. David and Joe treat a log of wood as though it is an animal they had caught, taking pictures of it for their film.[275] They also try to film David's wife Anna naked without her consent, with David actually forcibly stripping her while Joe looks on, apparently unperturbed. The speaker's initial numbness and subsequent return of acute sensitivity towards all non-human presence around her is in contrast to the violence inherent in David and Joe's way of objectifying all things they come across, whether the logs

[273] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 62.

[274] Atwood, 62.

[275] Atwood, 80.

of wood axed by them, or the heron strung on a tree. Thus, Atwood creates an implicit parallel between the objectification of women and non-human others, which is the basis of ecofeminist thought. In *Surfacing,* the speaker's act of destroying David and Joe's film reel becomes a powerful act of refusing such a narrative based on violence and insensitivity. In Marian's narrative in *The Edible Woman*, a subtle connection emerges between Peter's act of carving his food with his knife and fork and the way he tries to measure her up and define her. "She watched the capable hands holding the knife and fork, slicing precisely with an exact adjustment of pressures. How skilfully he did it: no tearing, no ragged edges. And yet it was a violent action, cutting…."[276] As Marian starts rejecting violence in her relationship with food, she also starts rejecting subtle violence in Peter's manner of relating to her and framing her in his own terms. With increased sensitivity, she watches Peter carving beef and then finds herself unable to eat the meat on her plate, as she views it as "flesh and blood, rare, and she had been devouring it. Gorging herself on it."[277] She tries to convince herself that "Everyone eats cows, it's natural; you have to eat to stay alive, meat is good for you, it has lots of proteins and minerals."[278] However, her body refuses to listen to this reasoning, identifying in the life of the food on her plate and not letting her consume it. Marian slowly loses the ability to consume other life forms, which suddenly become part of the "forbidden"[279] list--"Whatever it was that had been making these decisions, not her mind certainly, rejected anything that had an indication of bone or tendon or fibre."[280] After a while, she feels afraid of this separate autonomy of her body that "the circle now dividing

[276] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 189.

[277] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 191.

[278] Atwood, 191.

[279] Atwood, 192.

[280] Atwood, 193.

the non-devourable from the devourable would become smaller and smaller," and she would lose the ability to eat anything at all.[281]

Other characters' narratives regarding food add to Marian's sensitivity towards food and consumption. When Len speaks about her vision of a chick inside an egg and shudders thinking about it, it leads to Marian's body rejecting the egg as well next morning. The memory of Len's narration makes her visualise the yolk as an "accusing yellow eye," and she finds her mouth tightly closing "like a frightened sea anemone."[282] She feels that the egg is alive and pushes the dish away. Her perception of her own mouth as that of a sea anemone shows her increased identification with non-human life forms by this point in the novel. She also loses the ability to eat hamburgers after one of Peter's friends narrates a story of mouse hairs in the burger as a joke. Atwood also elaborates on Marian's inability to eat mutton and lamb as arising from Peter's stories regarding large white worms in sheep brains and her rejection of pork stems from her co-worker Emmy's narration of a lady getting trichinosis from eating a pig with worms inside it. This aspect of *The Edible Woman* also highlights the importance and power of narratives in framing our perception regarding the world we inhabit and the food we eat as well as how we perceive our own bodies and life forms with respect to others. As in Marian's case, other character's stories about food and eating affect her perception. While she is "irritated by her body's decision to reject certain foods,"[283] and fails in her attempts to coax and tempt it to eat, she also recognises its adamant decision and ethical stand, "it simply refused to eat anything that had once been, or (like oysters on the half-shell) might be still living."[284] This awareness of life in all forms of food and non-

[281] Atwood, 193.

[282] Atwood, 204.

[283] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 226.

[284] Atwood, 227.

human entities grows to include plants and vegetables as soon as she becomes aware of the pulsating life of a carrot that she is peeling and visualises how the carrot has been dug up, where it must've screamed, "a scream too low for us to hear, but it doesn't die right away, it keeps on living, right now it's still alive."[285] However, this becomes the tipping edge for her as she loses the ability to eat vegetables thereby also signifying a completion of her expanded sense of awareness of herself as a part of all life around her. However, as shown through Atwood's narrative, it is an awareness and identification that emerges through painful experiences, and is not inherent in Marian at the beginning of the novel.

In the process of seeking an alternative to the routes of biological essentialism versus disidentification of 'women' and 'nature' taken by ecofeminism, King suggests a pathway that recognizes the nature-culture dualism as a 'product of culture' and at the same time consciously chooses "not to sever the woman–nature connection by joining male culture,"[286] using this consciousness and choice to create an alternative culture and politics that "would integrate intuitive, spiritual, and rational forms of knowledge, embracing both science and magic…" helping in the creation of a "free, ecological society."[287] I am particularly focusing on the way King chooses to demarcate her version of ecofeminism, for its attempt at redefining the importance of choice and consciousness in the ecofeminist battle against dualistic modes of thinking. In *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman* we see the narrators similarly struggling with culture enforced dualisms and their slow movement towards such a point of choice and awareness, where consciousness of the dualism is used as a vantage point, even if not erased in the course of reality in the characters' lives. Preparing for the

[285] Atwood, 227.

[286] King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," 23.

[287] King, 23.

engagement party, Marian in *The Edible Woman* goes to the hairdresser, conforming to Peter's expectations of her being dressed up for the occasion. However she feels a disjunction between herself and her body, feeling that the nail polish, makeup and hair arrangements were stuck to her surface like patches or posters. As the shampoo girl and hairdressers start dressing her up, she feels uncomfortable, "like a slab of flesh, an object," reminiscent of a hospital where she feels "strapped in" with the doctor operating on her in a depersonalised way. [288] In a manner similar to *Surfacing*, where the narrator feels divested of control over her body during her abortion, Marian too feels that her body and agency have been taken over by others and their opinions regarding beauty and desire. Marian reflects that she has become "Inert; totally inert. Was this what she was being pushed towards, this compound of the simply vegetable and the simply mechanical?"[289] Throughout the course of the novel, Atwood shows Marian reading advertisements on the bus during travel, that use women's bodies and innerwear as the means to titillate the buyer. As a commentary on consumerism, Marian also picks up a woman's magazine that accentuates women's need to adhere to certain standards of physical beauty.[290] Being with Duncan on the other hand is a relief for Marian, as she does not have to play any role to satisfy him or make him desire her. He too sees her as an object and as someone to turn to for comfort, however he makes no bones about covering it up with the veneer of sociability.[291]

As Marian gets ready for the party and has a bath, she feels frightened at the disjunction between herself and her body, which she now sees almost like a third person.

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[288] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 269.

[289] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 270.

[290] Atwood, 270.

[291] Of course, Duncan's treatment of Marian is equally problematic as he treats her as a replacement for the distraction offered by the laudromat! See Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 182.

Aware of the water and the soap particles, she sees the body sitting in the tub, apparently her own, feeling that "she was dissolving, coming apart layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter puddle."[292] At the party , she feels "afraid of losing her shape, spreading out, not being able to contain herself any longer…."[293] She also feels afraid that she would talk a lot and even cry during the party, dismantling Peter's expectations regarding her behaviour. When dressed up in her sequinned red dress with the elaborate hairdo, she looks in the mirror and cannot recognise the figure as herself, the disjunction grows. Calling Duncan to the party becomes her means of re-establishing connection with her authentic self, which she feels slipping away with Peter and his friends and their artificial social norms. While others praise her appearance and the red dress treating her like a doll, Duncan's point blank question is real, "You didn't tell me it was a masquerade…Who the hell are you supposed to be?"[294] The question destabilises Marian and makes her uneasy and finally leads her to run away from the party, even as Peter tries to click a photograph of her. As in Atwood's poetry,[295] photographs become powerful entities trying to frame characters created by Atwood within the viewer's gaze and perception. For Marian, Peter's framing and defining her through the photograph with its implicit assumptions of social construction and the hierarchy of gaze, is similar to being shot by a gun and she escapes by running away from the party.

When considering the importance of analyzing models of social construction, Alaimo and Hekman observe the close interconnection between language, subjectivity, knowledge and power--for such deconstruction exposes the "pernicious logic" that has cast

[292] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 281.

[293] Atwood, 282.

[294] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 309.

[295] See pp 343-345 of this chapter where "This is a Photograph of me" is discussed in detail.

"woman as subordinated, inferior...invisible."[296] They also trace this to the impact of postmodern thought on feminist theory, that results in the revelation of gendered dichotomies that have framed Western thought, such as culture/nature, subject/object, mind/body, rational/emotional.[297] However Alaimo and Hekman also emphasize the significance of not moving from 'one side of the dichotomy to the other' or reversing the dichotomy. This has also been highlighted by postmodern feminism as it is important to remember that the dichotomy itself needs to be deconstructed, to move to an understanding that does not rest on oppositions.[298] The way out therefore seems to be a reconceptualization of nature as "agentic"—whose "actions have consequences for both the human and non-human world," rather than perpetuating the nature/culture dualism or rejecting it altogether.[299] In this perspective, the materiality of the body as an "active and sometimes recalcitrant force, foregrounds lived experience, corporeal practice and biological substance" which are excluded by hyper-focus on "representations, ideology and discourse."[300] 'Nature,' as material feminism refers to the word—does not signify "a blank, silent resource for the exploits of culture"—rather it is seen as "an active, signifying force; an agent in its own terms; a realm of multiple, inter- and intra-active cultures."[301]

The narrator of *Surfacing* is able to regain her autonomy over her body and memories

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[296] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 2.

[297] Alaimo and Hekman, 2.

[298] In this project, Alaimo and Hekman note that despite contesting all other dichotomies, postmodernism still embraces the dichotomy of language/reality without contesting it (here they are referring to the argument proposed by postmodern thought that sees the real/material entirely constituted by language and not having any extra linguistic reality). However material ecocriticism diverges from this postmodern construction and proposes the experience of reality outside the confines of linguistic structures. "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 2.

[299] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 5.

[300] Alaimo and Hekman, 4.

[301] Alaimo and Hekman, "12.

as well as her connection with the wilderness by discarding all symbols of culture and social conventions in favour of life in the wilderness, as a part of nature. Marian in *The Edible Woman*, regains control over her body and self, by baking a cake that she moulds in the figure of a woman and consuming that by herself. At first she placed this decorated cake with its doll like face and green eyes before Peter, directly accusing him of wanting to destroy her and assimilate her according to his whims. Giving him a fork and knife, she states she has made a direct substitute for his consumption. Peter, alarmed at her behaviour flees and then Marian hungrily starts eating the woman she herself had moulded from cake. After a long time, she is able to eat, plunging "her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the body from the head."[302] Only after this act that is portrayed as akin to self-cannibalism, does Marian's narrative return to the first–person perspective. She reassumes her subjectivity and reasserts herself through redefining her relationship with food. In case of both the central characters created by Atwood in the two novels *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman*, we see them emerging as powerful and agentic, only through the process of identification with life forms beyond the limited human body and gaining access to perspectives beyond the scope of logic and reason. However, it becomes impossible to avoid culture and consumerism as Duncan states, reflecting on the mutually destructive nature of relationships always inflected by power hierarchies. By reclaiming the body, Marian decides who shall consume it, the cake finally being eaten by Duncan, who exclaims that "It was delicious."[303] In comparison, the narrator of *Surfacing* is seen veering between choices as her fiancé calls out to her, searching for her in the wilderness.

While the women in *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman* are seen making certain

[302] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 354.

[303] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 363.

choices regarding the future course of their lives that are not necessarily immersed in the larger sense of Self experienced in the course of the narrative, having discarded the same for survival in a world that fragments rather than unites, it is important that they regain their ability to choose and define themselves. In this process, the non-human world acts as aide and the crucible for transformation. Hence, such a conception of nature is not a "mirror image of culture,"[304] and breaks through the simplistic dichotomies within which nature has been conceptualized so far. Donna Haraway's work offers such "compelling transformations of the category of nature."[305] Haraway's "conceptual universe" is also "replete with material-semiotic actors," best exemplified by Atwood's writing that actually brings to life the co-constitutive nature of material reality, or what Karen Barad calls "intra-actions" between "material, discursive, human, more-than-human, corporeal and technological"[306] phenomena. Nature thus becomes all encompassing, including in its ambit the human, non-human, organic, inorganic offering "possibilities for transforming environmentalism itself."[307]The idea of "dynamic objectivity" which, when applied would change our perception of the natural world as an agent or actor, "not as a screen or ground or resource,"[308] also therefore conceives of nature as a dynamic entity and not just an affixed

[304] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 12.

[305] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 12. See Donna Haraway, "Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms," *The Haraway Reader*, ed. Donna Haraway (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 125-150.

[306] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 5. See Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana university Press, 2008), 140.

[307] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 9.

[308] Gretchen T. Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, eds. Karen J. Warren and Nisvan Erkal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 232. See also Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no.3 (1988): 592, doi: 10.2307/3178066.

backdrop for human activities.[309]

In Atwood's ecological narratives, the external landscape seems inextricably woven into the way the characters experience upheaval in their lives, the lines between the self and nature blurring and resituating themselves and constantly shifting our focus. In *Surfacing*, the ambience of the cabin home and lake suffuses the novel with its mysterious air, "warm, cool and fluid, the trees behind us moving their leaves, the sound ripples; the water gives off icy light, zinc moon breaking on small waves."[310] Riding the tugboat on the lake, the speaker hears, "loon voice, each hair on my body lifting with the shiver, the echoes deflect from all sides, surrounding us, here everything echoes."[311] It is in a way similar to her memories echoing off the landscape and returning to her, with only her friends' presence preventing her from caving in and facing her past. Portia in "Wilderness Tips" wades into a lake towards the end of the short story, feeling her known universe slipping away as the coordinates of her life and belief suddenly change. She experiences the lake as layers of a mirror, "the glass layer, the silver layer,"[312] through which she can find her earlier self, going back in time six years.[313] Curling up and floating, there is a sense of comfort in the lake, the landscape and its familiarity soothing her in comparison to her life circumstances that threaten to come apart. "The cold hush of the lake is like a long breathing out of relief."[314] Wanting to avoid

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[309] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 232. As suggested by Diana Fuss, this reconceptualization of nature can also become one of the ways out of the essentialism debate plaguing ecofeminist scholarship, as nature too is then seen as a constructed subject, though fluid. See Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (London: Routledge, 2013). In addition to this, Legler also analyses the work of multiple writers projecting nature as not just a "speaking subject but also as a desiring subject."(232)

[310] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 36-37.

[311] Atwood, 37.

[312] Atwood, "Wilderness Tips," *Wilderness Tips* (1995; repr. London: Virago, 2010), 249.

[313] Analysis of mirrors in Atwood's poetry, if you want Ref back to the introduction reg the way images keep circulating in Atwood. We find them returning again and again across genres, in different configurations, as though reflected by multiple mirrors of different consistencies as seen in *The Circle Game*. In this labyrinth of words and memories, the self is never quite located, which is Atwood's technique or narrative play.

[314] Atwood, "Wilderness Tips," 250.

the reality of her life, Portia even contemplates swimming further out into the lake and sinking.[315] Portia had believed that her husband George would never desecrate the memories of her childhood home Wacousta Lodge, by dishonouring their marriage in her presence. However his act of sleeping with Portia's sister Pamela, in the outhouse of the Lodge leads to Portia's world crumbling, the landscape mirroring her sense of loss—"She looked at the shore, the water line, where the lake ends. It's no longer horizontal: it seems to be on a slant…."[316] Portia had even accepted her husband's flings with her other sister, Prue. However she had never imagines Pamela and George together. The thin tenuous lines of acceptance that she had drawn around her fragile marriage suddenly break. She feels as though the trees, the granite outcrops, the Lodge, peninsula and "the whole mainland were sliding down, submerging."[317]

While people around Portia would hardly sense the change within her, her entire world was sinking, quite like the Titanic. This experience of inner transformation of a character, submerging herself in the landscape is a recurrent theme through much of Atwood's early writings. As seen most remarkably in *Surfacing*, the transformation experienced by Atwood's heroines are not easily perceived by those around them not possessing the finer sensibilities acquired by them in the course of sudden events in their lives, or sudden discoveries and choices made by them. Even in *The Edible Woman*, the characters around Marian do not really understand the tumultuous changes going on within her. Peter's patronizing and patriarchal assumptions seem to echo what everyone else around her seem to think except Ainsley, who does not really support Marian's decision to get

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[315] Atwood, 250.

[316] Atwood, 250.

[317] Atwood, "Wilderness Tips," 250.

married. It is expected that she will stop working after getting married, as Peter considers it "unfair to marry, he said, if you couldn't afford to support your wife…."[318] Marian accepts this decision without challenging it, apparently essaying the role of the perfect fiancée. Since her engagement with Peter, she begins leaving all the decisions to him, having "fallen into the habit in the last month or so of letting him choose for her."[319] Even till the middle of the novel, Marian is seen as uncertain regarding her choices, "she never knew what she wanted to have."[320] Only later, we see her re-assuming agency and choice in her life, after finally breaking away from Peter.

Early in *Surfacing*, we see a longing in the speaker to know the "secrets" of nature, as she contemplates that if it had been her drowning, instead of her brother she would've access to knowledge that other people didn't. It would be as though she were raised from the dead. In an interesting parallel, the speaker's journey of living in the wilderness, the 'surfacing' of an understanding beyond the codes of human culture and a possible return to human settlement at the end of the novel, mimics such an act of drowning and then of resurrection. The lake thus becomes a symbolic storehouse of secrets and an access point to a liminal experience of blurring boundaries between the self and nature. The absence of answers sometimes triggers more curiosity and the intense desire to know, as with the speaker's questions regarding death in her childhood, which remained unsatisfied by her mother's silence. Similarly, the silence of the wilderness as she seeks a message from her parents, a message that can help her reconstruct her own sense of self, leads her to the state of awareness of a power that permeates the swamp around her, which refuses to speak to her

[318] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 133.

[319] Atwood, 185.

[320] Atwood, 185.

in the usual codes of communication that we as humans are familiar with.

Vicki Kirby suggests that that what 'we have been calling 'culture'--- "was really nature all along," therefore reconceptualising nature--via "articulation, reinvention, and the cacophony of multiple signifying agents."[321] Kirby also sees human bodies as situated within "specific environmental contexts," and human processes and events as inseparable from specific biophysical relations and interconnections. [322] Kirby refers back to Alaimo's idea of co-constitutive materiality and draws our attention towards exploring "the extent to which the corporeal substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment.'"[323] Kirby also sees human bodies as situated within "specific environmental contexts," and human processes and events as inseparable from specific biophysical relations and interconnections.[324] At the same time Kirby observes 'the space-time' of transcorporeality" as a site of pleasure and danger, as it brings together desire and lively emergence and death, toxicity and pain at the same time. Such a co-existence of pleasure and danger in the experience and awareness of transcorporeality has been seen in "The Journals of Susanna Moodie," "The Wereman," "Paths and Thingscape," discussed earlier in this chapter as well as in *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman*. The blurring of boundaries is both desirable and fearsome at the same time. Alaimo thus calls for such a trans-corporeal feminism that encourages us to "imagine ourselves in constant interchange with the environment,"[325] and also makes us imagine "an epistemological space that allows for both the unpredictable

[321] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 13. See Vicki Kirby, "Natural Convers(at)ions: Or What If Culture Was Really Nature All Along?" *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), 214-236.

[322] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 14.

[323] Alaimo and Hekman, 14.

[324] Alaimo and Hekman, 14.

[325] Alaimo and Hekman, 14.

becomings of other creatures and the limits of human knowledge."[326]

In "Death by Landscape," Lois collects landscape paintings by artists who have grown to fame over time, arranging them on the walls of her apartment such that they are a prominent part of her room and existence. In these landscape paintings, the background extends beyond the known, islands behind islands, trees behind trees, suggestive of all that is unexplored, yet actively present in the wilderness. The convoluted tree trunks represent more than can be perceived easily to Lois, who spends hours watching the paintings, searching for answers, unconsciously. The "ice-blue gleam of a pond half-seen through the interlaced branches,"[327] seems to hold the key to events that have happened in her past, particularly since a camping trip at thirteen that led to the disappearance of her best friend Lucy under mysterious circumstances. The paintings unsettle her, no matter how peaceful they apparently appear. A "wordless unease"[328] fills her every time she looks at them—but she is irresistibly drawn to them as well.

Lucy and Lois go trekking to the "lookout" which is the edge of a cliff overlooking the lake and only Lois returns. The story is full of suggestions regarding what might have happened, with no concrete answers. Lucy's interest in diving off the cliff makes it appear like it may have been her adventurous spirit that causes her disappearance. At the same time Lois' ruminations make us suspect that she might have had something to do with it. She keeps remembering the shout she had heard, which was like a cry of surprise after which Lucy could not be found anymore. As would happen, people pin the blame on Lois, as she is the easiest target in this situation. This blame haunts Lois forever and she keeps trying to

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[326] Alaimo and Hekman, 14.

[327] Atwood, "Death by Landscape," *Wilderness Tips* (1995; repr. London: Virago, 2010), 120.

[328] Atwood, "Death by Landscape," 120.

go back in time to the point where she lost Lucy through the landscape paintings, remembering the moments spent with Lucy, canoeing through these landscapes. The fact that Lucy's body could not be found haunts Lois endlessly as she cannot accept the fact that a dead person would not have a body or occupy space. The fact that "Lucy is not in a box, or in the ground, "adds to the mystery. In Lois' perception, "Because she is nowhere definite, she could be anywhere."[329] Like her Wordsworthian namesake, Lucy becomes a part of the "rocks, and stones, and trees,"[330] an indelible presence in the landscape where anyone can get lost. The trees in these paintings therefore cease to be simply trees drawn on canvas for Lois, as they are seen by her as "currents of energy, charged with violent colour."[331] She sees the trees as somehow responsible for what happened to Lucy, the use of the word 'violent' particularly ascribing an agency and intent to the forest with its "twists and turns."[332] Perhaps, she is also searching for a suppressed memory of an action propelled by the trees charged with such 'violent colour'[333] thereby also suggesting that people can act differently in such a space, that the ordinary self might find difficult to comprehend or remember. The paintings therefore become for her, "a picture of Lucy,"[334] hidden behind the stones or trees, "or crouching beneath the overturned canoe."[335] Lois also imagines walking into the paintings and resuming her search for Lucy, behind the trees and what can be seen. The fact that the search would never end is as important a part of her imagination

[329] Atwood, "Death by Landscape," 142.

[330] William Wordsworth, "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R.L Brett and A.R. Jones (1798; repr. London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 150.

[331] Atwood, "Death by Landscape," 142.

[332] Atwood, "Death by Landscape," 142.

[333] Atwood, 142.

[334] Atwood, 143.

[335] Atwood, 143.

as the right tree would always be further on. In this story the forest is seen as becoming a part of Lois' consciousness, even through their representation on canvas. The duality or boundary between the self and the wilderness is lost, by the experience of a forest that engulfs and transforms the intent and actions of those who inhabit it mentally or physically. Lucy or Lois felt impelled to act in ways unfathomable to themselves, making them feel empowered but also perhaps act dangerously. As seen in the poem, "The Wereman," the speaker isn't sure what she or her husband can turn into after entering the wilderness.[336]

The trees in the poem "Paths and Thingscape" are seen as sentient and powerful beings, themselves being the trail, instead of just points on the trail that the poet visualises. This trail or passageway becomes a path to the innerscape as in "Death by Landscape," where artistic recreation of landscape and trees are seen as equally potent in creating the doorway to the blurred interface with nature that lies submerged within. Trees as a symbol take on greater significance as in "The Two Fires," the burning trees trap her and prevent her from escaping the house, where the children sleep and "could not be wakened."[337] The children sleep to their death, dreaming of trees that are "straight and still," green and blooming, instead of the actual raging fire outside where the trees are "melting, returning/to their first red elements/on all sides."[338] In contrast the fire within shrivels up the protective roof overhead. The flaming trees can be seen as a metaphor for the dismantling of stereotypes and dualisms. With the roof shrivelling, a cocooned perception of the wilderness, held by the children, representing the speaker's deepest concepts are burnt down and all order dismantled—as the rafters are "incandescent" and "the corners/and straight lines

[336] See pp 314-315 of this chapter for a detailed analysis of "The Wereman." See note 99 and 101 above.

[337] Atwood, "Two Fires," *The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Journal I*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 61.

[338] Atwood, "Two Fires," 60.

flaming."[339] The structures imprisoning the speaker of the poem are all in flames, "a cage of blazing/bars,"[340] as in the fire within, the children awaken, their dreams of a calm forest shaken up by the reality of the wilderness, that we have seen invading and breaching straightened notions of the self and non-human other. These two fires have "in-/formed" the speaker, crafting her consciousness in a certain way. One of the deepest realizations lie in that "each refuge fails/us; each danger/becomes a haven."[341] What was thought to be a refuge therefore is seen as a cage imprisoning the speaker's perceptions, limiting her, in the form of the house and the idea of straight and calm trees. On the other hand, danger disrupts existing notions and liberates the consciousness, becoming a haven for freedom from dualities and boundaries constructed by the idea of the refuge. The fire therefore becomes a starting point for the speaker to grow around, and is not a destination or finality of perceptual sensitivity. Each poem by Atwood can be seen as such a fire, burning down comfortable notions of dualisms and distinctions of human and non-human experience. Therefore each poem needs to be seen as a starting point, as through the course of Atwood's writing we see a self in the making, a constant effort at shape shifting, refusing fixed contours. I see her narrative technique as crucial towards relating to the non-human world meaningfully, as with previous structures of perception in place, one cannot perceive anew. The fluidity of her verse and prose, that portrays human and non-human boundaries struggling, collapsing and recreating themselves are a significant means of re-formulating our own perceptions regarding the universe we inhabit, questioning the way we see separateness or similarity.

In "Departure from the Bush," we see that the erasure by fire creates the necessary

[339] Atwood, 61.

[340] Atwood, 61.

[341] Atwood, 61.

space for the "green" to invade and brings such lucidity in her experience, as she had yearned for in "Paths and Thingscape."[342] The animals too now see her as a part of the forest, and she feels no resistance as they come to inhabit her being. At first the animals are wary of stepping into her and move in one by one, "stealthily."[343] Slowly they gain confidence, "having marked new boundaries."[344] The constant tussle between "subject and object" is also seen from the other side, as the wilderness too needs an expanded sense of boundaries to inhabit the willing human, unencumbered by culture. However, this transition is seen as difficult, "I was not ready/altogether to be moved into."[345] This co-existence of surrender and fear is seen in the speaker of *Surfacing* as well, as it takes her time to give up all the appendages of culture, to learn the language of nature. In "Departure from the Bush," the animals sense her uncertainty and fear as she sees the animals' eyes "glowing out from inside me."[346] The transformation both thrills, fulfils and frightens her, both exhilarated by the power she feels and afraid of capsizing with such a takeover. She senses a possible erasure of her pre-existing identity as the culmination of such an invasion. At the same time, the biological limitations haunt her and she still feels a sense of incompleteness, for she still needs lanterns to see at night.

The speaker's partner in *Surfacing* suggests that it is time to depart from the bush. However, being in the process of transformation, she finds it difficult to wear "clothes," or the appearance of culture. The partner's unawareness of her transformation is very similar

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[342] Atwood, "Paths and Thingscape," *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 59.

[343] Atwood, "Departure from the Bush," *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 63.

[344] Atwood, "Departure from the Bush," 63.

[345] Atwood, 64.

[346] Atwood, "Departure from the Bush," 64.

to Joe's complete inability to comprehend the speaker's inner transitions in *Surfacing*. Unlike the latter, where the future is uncertain and the speaker's choices hang in the air whether she will return to society and culture, the speaker of the poem "Departure from the Bush," is pushed towards the city by a "sleigh" and is suddenly freed from the invasion by the wild animals. Instantaneously, she is "unlived in"[347] and the animals are all gone. Interestingly, she sighs with relief at this vacancy created within her, signalling the still existent ambiguity within her between the desire to be inhabited by the wild and the fear of erasure by the same. She both resists her participation in culture as well as feels relieved to be back. Atwood's poetry is significant for detailing the dilemmas characterizing the human-nature relationship. A sense of loss clouds the poem, "There was something they almost taught me/I came away not having learned."[348] This is in contrast to *Surfacing*, where the speaker has a sense of fulfilment of having had access to the other side, however temporary and having learnt from it.

Negotiating Dualisms—Writing as Transformation

The only way out of experience demarcated by dualisms appears to lie in unlearning the codes that characterize our socio-political matrix of life to reconnect with the earth and our own bodies. Griffin describes the split created within our own selves on being educated and socialized to see ourselves as separated from the earth we inhabit. [349] She traces the beginning to an Augustinian view of the universe which is extended into the philosophy guiding scientific enquiry. Griffin observes a parallel between a religious view of the

[347] Atwood, 64.

[348] Atwood, 64.

[349] Susan Griffin, "Split Culture," *Healing the Wounds: the Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. Judith Plant, (Santa Cruz, New Society Publishers, 1989), 9.

universe that suggests that our senses cannot be trusted and science that explains how our perception regarding the world of matter is limited and deceptive. Griffin notes that while the former placed authority in the hands of the priest and scripture, the latter places authority in the hands of scientists and the "truth of objective experimental data."[350] According to Griffin both these powerful approaches alienate us from believing in our affective and sensitive experience of our own bodies in contact with the world we inhabit. She also places the blame for the development of nuclear armaments, the holocaust and other man-made destructive efforts like deforestation and mining to this patriarchal worldview that discounts the importance of what we know and experience at a deeper level of the self.

Griffin's comparison of cruelty inflicted during slave trade to a similar need to control nature and suppress the finer feelings of love and compassion that would obstruct such an act of violence, in fact startles us into realizing the need for rethinking the importance of ecofeminist thought as an individual, social and political praxis. Griffin deliberately speaks emotionally, "Suffering grief in my own life, I have felt all the impulses that are part of my culture in my own soul."[351] She confesses her resistance to the pain felt and her "will toward self-annihilation."[352] However, she is pulled towards life by the "singing" in her body that returns her "to a love of the earth." She also understands that to survive, she has to "learn to listen to this song."[353] Atwood's ecocritical narratives therefore become crucial to this act of unlearning and reviving contact with the intuitive self and the body, disassociated from

[350] Griffin, "Split Culture," 9. When the speaker of Atwood's *Surfacing,* recollecting her experience of an abortion at the clinic, remembers her baby as an "it" feeling in some way robbed by the way it was taken away from her, "exported, deported," as though a slice of her life was taken away from her, "like a Siamese twin." Atwood, *Surfacing,* 45.

[351] Griffin, "Split Culture," 17.

[352] Griffin, 17.

[353] Griffin, 17.

personal experience by a socio-political matrix favouring the continuation of power inflected dualisms.[354]

It is worth noting how interpersonal relationships narrated by Atwood in her texts reflect these dualisms and create a parallel with the way humans then interact with non-humans in her ecocritical texts. In the 'Master Model,' Plumwood explains how dualistic thinking underlies Western culture and also constructs a colonialist identity. Plumwood iterates that the dominant half of the dualistic construct cannot simply be posited as "masculine identity pure and simple," rather needed to be seen as the "complex, cultural identity of the Master formed in the context of class, race, species and gender domination."[355] She describes the process of objectification rendered through dualisms that are "gendered, raced and classed,"[356] in the form of five essential steps taken by the figure of the Master.[357] *Surfacing, The Edible Woman* and Atwood's early poetry discussed in this chapter showcase the nature of these hierarchized dualisms and describe characters struggling against the Master Model, and trying to redefine themselves and their

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[354] Gaard goes back to a study of Val Plumwood's Master Model introduced in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993). In *Environmental Culture: the Ecological Crisis of Reason* (2002), Plumwood is seen augmenting her theory. See Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (United States: Lexington Books, 2017).

[355] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* 5. Also quoted by Karla Armbruster, "Blurring Boundaries in Ursula Le Guin's 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Poststructuralist Approach to Ecofeminist Criticism," 199.

[356] Gaard, "Introduction: Critical Ecofeminism," *Critical Ecofeminism* (United States: Lexington Books, 2017), xxiv.

[357] One of the first techniques employed by the Master to establish a power hierarchy between selves, is that of 'backgrounding', where the Master employs the services of the other that is utilized, but the Master does not reveal his dependence on the other. Then the Master intentionally "magnifies differences between self and other," which is called 'radical exclusion' by Plumwood. The third technique used by the Master is that of 'incorporation' where the Master defines his own traits as the superior one against which standard the other has to measure his own, which will always fall short in the face of the insurmountable dualism of Master/Slave or self/other created and sustained by the Master. 'Instrumentalism' is the fourth technique that describes the other as "having no purpose other than to serve the Master." The final blow in keeping alive the hierarchised and power inflected dualisms of Master and Slave, or Mind over Matter, or Culture over Nature and all that is associated with the 'inferior' side of the dualism-viz. Slave/Matter/Nature/Other, is 'homogenized' where the entire "dominated class of others is seen as uniform and undifferentiated." See Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* 42-56.

relationships with the non-human world around them. In Atwood's poem, "The Circle Game," the little children who move arm in arm, oblivious to their external surroundings, ignoring the grass, trees and the lake, only focusing on going round and round, moving as though in a trance, become a metaphor for the speaker's relationship with her partner, who like the children pinned together, keep moving in circles, with mirrors all around them, multiplying their motion.[358] This moving is not joyous by any stretch of imagination as clarified by the speaker and is almost painful—as she and her partner are unable to leave each other and yet resist being together. She watches her partner trying to map and memorize her, transfixed by his eyes like "cold blue thumbtacks."[359] By the end of the poem, we see the speaker wanting to break this spell that binds them together and these constant repetitive motions and erase all the maps drawn as well as all the singing and moving children. In *Surfacing* too, we have seen the speaker having a similarly tensed relationship with Joe, resisting him and yet being unable to leave him, till she is able to embrace all the layers constituting herself.

Then again, in "Axiom," interpersonal human relationships are also seen in terms of this struggle between "subject and object" that is seen in human and nature relationships through Atwood's writings. The power exerted by humans in claiming, knowing and comprehending land or controlling it, is compared to the way individuals seek to know each other. There is intimacy, but also the sharpness of control, of creating "inhabited islands," wherever the fingers touch each other. Atwood focuses her lens on the violence of intimacy that desires to mark the other as territory, so similar to the way the pioneer in "Progressive Insanities" discussed earlier, wants to stake his claim on the land. In "Axiom," the other is

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[358] Atwood, "The Circle Game," *The Circle Game*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 5-15.

[359] Atwood, "The Circle Game," 10.

pictured as a "sea" that is totally unknown and unfathomable, quite like the wilderness seen as unstructured space by the pioneer. The creation of small islands in this sea, through the act of staking claim, to the point where all of the sea, becomes "all earth: a known/land, a country."[360] In *The Edible Woman* as well, Peter's constant attempt to know and define Marian becomes the basis of his attempt to control and define the object of his gaze—"These days however he would focus his eyes on her face, concentrating on her as though if he looked hard enough he would be able to see through her flesh and her skull and the workings of her brain."[361] Peter's searching gaze makes Marian uneasy, as he runs his hand over her skin, "without passion almost clinically, as if he could learn by touch whatever it was that had escaped the probing of his eyes."[362]

The theme of circles keeps returning through Atwood's poems, as she even wonders aloud if she is repeating herself, in her expressions. Writing takes on the form of the wilderness, where one is liable to get lost. This writing is also a space of transformation, as seen in *Surfacing*, *The Tent*, and other poems highlighted through this chapter—"many have been here, but only /some have returned safely."[363] The circles being woven by the writer are equally dangerous for the reader who might get trapped in them as much as the speaker of the poem. In this wilderness of the mind, "a compass is /useless."[364] No directions can be found using gadgets, which are "as pointless /as calling in a vacant wilderness."[365] She also

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[360] Atwood, "Axiom," *The Animals in that Country,* in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 52. Also see pp 44-45 of the Introduction to the thesis where this parallel between power politics in human relationships and that between human and non-human, is also discussed with respect to S*urfacing, The Edible Woman* and Atwood's poetry collection *Power Politics.*

[361] Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, 188.

[362] Atwood, 188.

[363] Atwood, "A Journey to the Interior," *The Circle Game*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 16.

[364] Atwood, "A Journey to the Interior," 16.

[365] Atwood, 16.

creates a distinction between this landscape and others, seeing it as easier for her to lose her way "forever here, than in other landscapes."[366] In this wilderness, she is aware that she needs to keep her head. Writing then also becomes the way of breaking down the tapestry of circles, of blending with the wilderness and also of extricating oneself, when needed. Thus Atwood's writing itself becomes a significant means of engaging with the wilderness within and without, negotiating boundaries, breaching them, questioning them and re-instating them if necessary. The methods employed by the speakers in Atwood's texts detailed here, in combating the 'Master Model'[367] and its techniques of domination are worthy of scrutiny and provide important contours to the possibilities of econarratology. As articulated by both Gaard and Plumwood before and showcased by Atwood through her ecocritical narratives, "the struggles for environmental justice and social health are conceptually intertwined."[368]

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* studied in detail in the first chapter of this thesis,[369] particularly showcase the interconnected nature of this exploitation, where women's bodies and their reproductive rights become subservient to patriarchal interests of power and domination. This is seen in parallel with an ecosystem that has been rendered unsupportive by years of exploitation and abuse by humans. The world in Gilead is a direct result of human intervention in the environment and its degradation to the extent that the toxicity has penetrated human systems when fertility and natural healthy babies are

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[366] Atwood, 16.

[367] See Notes 354 and 357 above.

[368] Gaard, "Introduction: Critical Ecofeminism," *Critical Ecofeminism,* xxiv.

[369] These two novels are discussed in greater detail in chapter 1 of this thesis, which discusses the form of the critical dystopia that Atwood adopts for her narratives, as well as the ways in which power politics determine such exploitation of both the environment as well as women's bodies. Along with land becoming barren, human beings become infertile, leading to women being viewed as reproductive objects, rather than individuals. .

rare. The Colonies mentioned in the novels and pictorially represented in the graphic novel[370] are places where chemical toxicity and desertification have rendered the air inhospitable for human life. Women whose bodies are not considered useful or those whose minds are not malleable to the cause of the elite male Commanders and their vision of Gilead are deported to the Colonies, made to work in the chemical spills, till their bodies decimate and they die. The way the women's bodies are treated is in many ways shown in parallel to the way the planet is treated by its inhabitants. Asmae Ourkiya[371] emphasizes the link between the environmental degradation seen in Gilead, from nuclear weapons' radioactive waste, pollution and irresponsible human behaviour and the way women are forced to bear the brunt of this loss by a regime that is modelled on New Puritan male supremacist ethics. In this horrific dystopian narrative, men are seen taking over women's lives and bodies and determining all choices. Thus without dismantling the basis of these oppressive structures, lasting change cannot occur, as observed by Gaard. She says that we must work on "(re)situating humans in ecological terms and non-humans in ethical terms."[372]

Nicole Cooke in her thesis *Feminist Dystopias and Ecofeminist Representation: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and Naomi Alderman's The Power*,[373] critiques

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[370] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*, art and adaptation Renee Nault (London: Jonathan Cape, 2019).

[371] See Asmae Ourkiya, "Bodies and Sexuality in Gilead: A Queer Ecofeminist Reading of The Handmaid's Tale," *Environmental History Now*, Sept 24, 2020, https://envhistnow.com/2020/09/24/bodies-and-sexuality-in-gilead/. Also see M.L. Eileen Brisha, "Ecofeminism and politics of 'Triple Marginalization' in Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* (2004): 1-4, https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/NCSCRCL/Volume-2/1.pdf. Also see Indu B.C., "Flowers of Survival: An Ecofeminist Reading of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 2, no. 4 (2013): 7-9, http://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v2(4)/version-2/B240709.pdf. Oana Celia Gheorghiu and Michaela Praisler also discuss Atwood's latest novel *The Testaments* for its feminist narrative structure and comments on the politics employed in continuing the story narrated in The Handmaid's Tale, that had overtaken everyone's imagination. "Rewriting Politics, or the Emerging Fourth Wave of Feminism in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*," *Dunarea de Jos* 17, no.1 (2020), 87-96, doi: 10.4312/elope.17.1.87-96.

[372] Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xxv.

[373] Nicole Cooke, *Feminist Dystopias and Ecofeminist Representation: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and Naomi Alderman's The Power* (United States: University of Toledo, 2018).

Atwood's dystopian classic as reinforcing the woman-nature connection and therefore being detrimental to the feminist cause. Cooke groups together a body of texts by women writers[374] along with Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* where control over women's reproductive systems becomes a corollary to environmental degradation placing humanity at risk.[375] She also identifies the two common discourses adopted by such speculative fiction—one in which women are reduced to livestock, forced to reproduce as often as possible and in a way the state deems fit, as seen in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* or the other extreme where women are forced to undergo sterilization as the earth and its resources remain insufficient to support further life as depicted in Sarah Hall's *Daughters of the North*.[376] Cooke insists that Atwood's text reemphasizes the dualistic patterns of women being closer to nature, particularly in the scenes where Offred[377] responds to Serena Joy's garden and its flowers, delighting in their sensory perception, in a world where all pleasures have been denounced as unnecessary for the Handmaids.[378] The Wives' role of trimming the garden and keeping it under control is almost a parallel to their work of keeping the Handmaids under their

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[374] Cooke particularly mentions Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937), Margaret Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1985), Sarah Hall's *Daughters of the North* (2007), Jennie Melamed's *Gather the Daughters* (2017) alongside Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.* See Cooke, *Feminist Dystopias and Ecofeminist Representation,* 1.

[375] Cooke, *Feminist Dystopias and Ecofeminist Representation,* 2.

[376] Cooke, 3.

[377] See Note 129 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, for a discussion on the naming of the Handmaids in Gilead.

[378] In Chapter 25 of *The Handmaid's Tale*, we see Offred describing the flowers in Serena Joy's garden, with great sensuousness. She describes the beauty of the irises, their glass like tall stalks, dwelling on their pastel shades, and also "the bleeding hearts, so female in shape," that Offred is surprised that they have been allowed to exist in a regime that tries to suppress all forms of desire. She revels in the heavy scent of flowers, as sunlight falls on the flowers and heat rises from them, which can almost be felt. "like holding your hand an inch above an arm…" Hungry for such sensory perception, she feels herself swooning in the fragrance, the flowers breathing—"To walk through it in these days, of peonies, of pinks and carnations, makes my head swim." Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 1985 (Canada: Seal Books, 1986), 190. While the garden provides a space for the Wives to control and direct according to their wishes, becoming a domain where the Wives of the Commanders take decisions, it also becomes a visual treat for the Handmaid's who are denied all other sensory pleasures.

supervision and control, as also depicted in the Ceremony scene where the Handmaid has to lie on the Wife's lap as the Commander has sex with her, with the sole purpose of inseminating her. While their red garments symbolise their fertility, they are also seen as dangerous competitors for the Commanders' sexual interests.

Offred sees the garden as silently subversive, the plants bursting forth like "buried things burst upwards, wordlessly, into the light,"[379] quite like her own narrative that lies buried in her, bursting forth in the form of the tapes that make up *The Handmaid's Tale*, later. Gilead forces the Handmaids to think of themselves as "two-legged wombs,"[380] or like a "cloud, congealed around a central object,"[381] that is, her womb. The regime forces her to see herself only in terms of her reproductive capability and nothing more. The 'Wives' and the 'Daughters' of the Commanders, and wives of Guardians and Econom*e*n, ranking below the Commanders, called 'Econowives' are also all trained and schooled to see themselves in this vein, reducing self-worth to the womb alone. The 'Marthas' or the women assigned to Commanders as household help and the 'Aunts' who are the instructors and law enforcers for all these women in Gilead, are seen as effective only when supporting these women in their reproductive roles. In *The Testaments*, Agnes at an early age becomes aware of the way her stepmother Paula and other Wives and Marthas were only interested the Handmaid Ofkyle's womb, treating her almost like an object that breeds for them, named as belonging to Commander Kyle. As highlighted by Julia Kuznetski, Agnes notes that "none of them were interested in what was going on in her head, they were only interested in her belly."[382]

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[379] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 190.

[380] Atwood, 171.

[381] Atwood, 91.

[382] Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2019), 100. See also Julia Kuznetski, "Disempowerment and Bodily Agency in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale* TV Series," *The European Legacy* 26, no.3-4, (2021):291, doi: 10.1080/10848770.2021.1898108.

Agnes later takes the trouble to find out Ofkyle's name, which is Crystal, in a bid to give an identity and recognition beyond her breeding functions. It is significant that in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the speaker's name is never directly mentioned. We surmise that her name might be June, from her fragmented and scattered narrative. This erasure of names for Handmaids in Gilead reinforces the power of the state and its control over the women's bodies. As explained to Agnes in *The Testaments*, it is not a good idea to form attachments with the Handmaids as they would be circulated to other Commanders once they had succeeded in delivering a baby. The Angels, or military guards and a surveillance system enforced by the Eyes, keep people in Gilead fearing public execution and severe punishment if they fail to follow the strict code of conduct. As noted by Kuznetski, Foucault's concept of panoptic power is literally translated into the spies or 'Eyes' in Gilead that are everywhere, including in the form of a physical symbol on Commander Judd's office to re-emphasize his power over all entering this office.[383]

While Cooke criticises Atwood's narrative for re-aligning patriarchal exploitation of natural resources and women's bodies, this thesis sees Atwood's conscious interrogation of the discourse through her text and highlights the politics of remembering the possibilities engendered by such a discourse. *The Testaments* written much after Cooke's thesis, further elaborate the nexus between state power, environmental degradation and patriarchal control over women's perception of themselves. The regime's system of dehumanising women, is most vividly described by Aunt Lydia's reminiscences of the way infertile women, or those past childbearing age were rounded up in a stadium like animals, placed in compartments according to profession and then subjected to the 'Thank Tank,' if they were considered useful to the regime later. The 'Thank Tank,' involving solitary confinement in the dark,

[383] Kuznetski, "Disempowerment and Bodily Agency in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale* TV Series," 291.

electrocution and dehumanisation left women like Aunt Lydia with little choice, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis.[384] Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, both delineate the way in which patriarchal rhetoric strives to limit women to biological essentialism and how women participate in this deconstruction of self and identity and at the same time also showcase means by which characters in her texts reclaim agency and control over their bodies. Offred's relationship with Nick, creates an impact on revitalising her emotional self that expands her sensory perception of her own body and pleasure. While she recognises her inadequate resistance to the state, and settles into the temporary pleasure of being with Nick, the turn of events that lead to her being led off by the Guardians, and the survival of her testimonial in the form of the tapes that make up *The Handmaid's Tale*, showcase a different kind of survival of the self through the act of narration, as elaborated in chapter 1 of this thesis.[385]

In *The Testaments*, we see Aunt Lydia testing her limits of control over the women's sphere as she limits male interference within Ardua Hall and the rules and codes framed by her. By retaining access to the written word for the Aunts, she keeps alive her access to identity and self beyond being seen as a body that cannot reproduce. Agnes and her friend Becka also escape their roles as would-be-wombs, with Aunt Lydia's help and become Aunts Victoria and Immortelle, respectively. As part of the Mayday Resistance movement, Daisy/Nicole[386] is forced to return to Gilead to help in toppling the regime. As Baby Nicole was Offred's child with Nick, lost to Gilead when Offred escapes through the 'Underground Femaleroad,'[387] the return of Nicole's body to Gilead, becomes a symbol of victory for

[384] See pp 123 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[385] See pp 167-176 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[386] See Note 382 of chapter 1.

[387] The 'Underground Femaleroad' refers to the underground rescue and resistance organization that helps smuggle people out from Gilead, through a network of 'safe' houses that give them shelter on the escape route.

Gilead, as she is an icon of sorts. It is to be noted that this narrative is one that has been crafted and created by Aunt Lydia over the years, in her final plan of smuggling out information regarding the regime in Nicole's body, through the microdot she plants in Nicole's tattoo. Hence, the woman's body with its cycles connected to the moon, in Offred's narrative of self, becomes the site through which the body of resistance too is effected through her child Nicole. Becka gives up her life to protect Agnes and Nicole, by disappearing from view, immersing her body in the tank. Aunt Lydia, after conveying the explosive microdot carrying information through Nicole's body to the outer world, also commits suicide, refusing control over her body by the Guardians approaching her door. Hence Atwood's texts showcase characters who overturn the hierarchical and power inflected dualism of mind/body and culture/nature by choosing to narrate their bodily experiences within Gilead, through testimonials and writing that we stumble upon later through Professor Pieixoto's research on Gilead.[388]

Critical ecofeminism,[389] as defined by Plumwood, sees the "culture/nature" and the "human/nature" dualism to be the basis of "ecological failings" of the West.[390] In a similar vein, Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale, The Testaments* and poetry

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[388] See Note 153 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, for the problematics of Professor Pieixoto's analysis and approach to the tapes and testimonials found on Gilead.

[389] Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xxv. While Gaard uses and redefines the term 'critical ecofeminism' in her 2017 tract, it was originally coined by Val Plumwood, in 2004. See Plumwood, "Gender, Eco-Feminism and the Environment," *Controversies in Environmental Sociology*, ed. Robert White (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 43–60. Critical ecofeminism, as a theoretical and political framework, examines the intersections between gender, class, race and ecological issues, seeing the ways in which systems of oppression are mutually reinforcing and interconnected. Gaard argues that environmental problems cannot be adequately addressed without also addressing social injustices, particularly those related to gender. See Greta Gaard, *Ecological Politics* (United States: Temple University Press, 1998).

[390] Thus critical ecofeminism appears very closely allied with deep ecosophy and radical environmentalist thought in its approach towards environmentalism. Gaard emphasizes the importance of dismantling an anthropocentric view of human superiority and separation from nature and urges the necessity of redefining our relationship with the natural world, shifting to an ethics of care and responsibility towards the environment and a recognition of the interdependence of all beings. Greta Gaard, *Ecological Politics* (United States: Temple University Press, 1998). Also see Greta Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* (United States: Lexington Books, 2017).

discussed in this chapter, significantly draw attention to the matrix of hierarchies and power structures operating in her fictional and poetic world, to realize the importance of addressing multiple issues in tandem for any real transformation of mental planes of consciousness and then of the material universe inhabited by us. Patrick Murphy, an important voice in the field of ecofeminist dialogics discusses the necessity of shift in perspective from seeing nature and other non-human beings as "things-in-themselves" or "things-for-us" to "us-as-things-for-others,"[391] as the possible outcome of a dialogical critical method[392] bringing together ecology and feminism. He goes on to explain his use of the Bakhtinian concept in reading the inter-relationships between the power inflected dualisms described by Plumwood, calling them dyads which need to be seen in a dialogical relationship, as complementary instead of dichotomies as interpreted by ecofeminist theory. He asserts, "...dialogics lets us recognise the mutually constitutive character of these dyads, with each aspect at specific times constituting a centre of mental activity and requiring the other to act as centrifugal force to prevent the solidification of that centre into dogma."[393] Such a reading of the dualisms of human/nature or intellect/emotion completely changes the politics of the domain of ecofeminism and makes us aware of the possibilities of this discourse.

Murphy has pointed out the need to apply Bakhtinian dialogics to the study of ecology as the original theory formulated by Bakhtin is largely anthropocentric.[394] In

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[391] Patrick Murphy, "Ecofeminist Dialogics," *The Green Studies Reader*, ed. Laurence Coupe (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2000), 194.

[392] Dialogics, according to Murphy enables the "differential unification of ecology and feminisms." By the word 'differential unification,' he is referring to a conjoining "that does not conflate particularities or subordinate one to the other." While this sounds theoretical, such a differential unification would certainly alter the perception of human and non-human relationships. Such dialogics, according to Murphy "encompasses Marxist dialectics by emphasizing the unity of opposites and their inter-animating dynamic tension." Murphy, "Ecofeminist Dialogics," 193.

[393] Murphy, "Ecofeminist Dialogics," 196.

[394] Murphy, 196.

Atwood's texts I see a unique realization of the possibilities of ecofeminist dialogics,[395] in the way her narrative methodology attempts to de-centre either side of the dualisms imprinting our cultural consciousness. The scope of "human interaction and interanimation within the biosphere and beyond,"[396] can be fathomed as an ever expanding circle through her poetry and creative visualizations in novels and short stories, studied in the course of this chapter. I would like to read Atwood's narratives as a play of such centripetal and centrifugal forces,[397] as she attempts to counter all forms of totalization, while aware of the opposition itself assuming the form of a totalizing discourse,[398] particularly as ecofeminism struggles with the pitfall of overturning the dualism and creating a new power inflected one.[399] By drawing together and pulling apart the experiences of the dualisms informing cultural

[395] Murphy also refers to "Bakhtin's conception of centripetal/centrifugal tension," as a means of "countering totalization," so that any totality "is continuously recognized as already a relativized, temporal centripetal entity in need of centrifugal destabilizing." This tension is felt in Atwood's poetry and *Surfacing*, as the power dynamics and perspectives of subject/object keep changing in the matrix of inter-animating tension between the human and non-human. The play of subject positions is enabled by dialogics, according to Murphy. "The dialogical relationships of intellect/emotion and humanity/nature," which Murphy asks to be seen as 'complementary dyads,' instead of dichotomies--requires 'both sides of the slash' to come into 'verbal being.' According to Murphy, 'ecology must be brought to bear, to break dialogics out of the anthropocentrism in which Bakhtin performs it." Murphy, "Ecofeminist Dialogics," 194-196.

[396] Murphy, "Ecofeminist Dialogics," 197.

[397] See note 395 above.

[398] Plumwood traces certain contributions of ecofeminist thought, in the development of what she calls "centrism" that detects a common underlying centric structure to different forms of oppression. According to Plumwood, this helps us understand the entrenched nature of anthropocentrism even in environmentalist discourse and find strategic alternatives. Plumwood, "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism," 327.

[399] Karla Armbruster, in a line of approach similar to Murphy, argues for finding an ecofeminist discourse that dismantles the assumptions of the two usual discursive strategies that ecofeminist theory tends to embrace--that of the "ocean of continuity" and the "desert of difference." Armbruster, "Blurring Boundaries in Ursula Le Guin's 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Poststructuralist Approach to Ecofeminist Criticism," 198. While the former cements the connections between women and nature, and is therefore critiqued for its essentializing tendency as well as the risk of "holism" that it posits, by incorporating the other within the self and therefore losing sight of the importance of "respecting the other as other." Jim Cheney, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics* 9(1897): 124. The latter approach of "desert of difference" is also problematic as it tends to concretize the differences between species and human beings and can lead to isolation as well as reduce the comprehension of the entangled nature of human and non-human subjectivity and experience of the ecosystem. Therefore Armbruster seeks a poststructuralist approach to the principles animating ecofeminism that would encourage "neither erasure of difference by representing women and nature as a homogenous, continuous whole," nor over-emphasize "difference" that can lead to alienation as well as continued domination and exploitation of human and non-human others. Armbruster, 198.

assumptions, Atwood constantly tests compartments and definitions of environmentalist responses. However, she also carefully avoids complete nihilism of meaning, keeping alive the possibility of transformation through awareness, particularly seen in the characters she weaves in her earlier novels and poems.

As noted earlier, memories and identity seem to be inescapably linked to the landscape. Therefore as perceptions regarding nature changes in the course of *Surfacing*, the narrative regarding the self also changes thereby pointing to the close interdependency between language and the way the self is visualized with respect to nature. In "Younger Sister, Going Swimming" the speaker of the poem watches her sister diving into the lake and describes it in startling terms--"The lake heals itself quietly/of the wound left by the diver."[400] It almost mirrors the actions of the speaker in *Surfacing* and is later repeated in *Wilderness Tips*, where Portia wades into the lake and almost chooses to drown in it. Throughout her oeuvre, the lake and submergence in the lake remain powerful signifiers for inner transformation and self-analysis. In this poem, Atwood creates another layer of signification by comparing the act of diving into the lake to words formed on the page. The paper closing over the words written on the page, is seen as an act of diving in. She enunciates, "The words ripple, subside, / move outwards towards the shore,"[401] thereby suggesting their afterlife that carries on in the readers' minds where further ripples are created. This poem seems to answer the question she asks in "The Small Cabin," regarding the fate of words spoken, "Where do the words go/when we have said them?"[402] Reading Atwood's works across genres helps us understand the layering of images constructed across

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[400] Atwood, "Younger Sister, Going Swimming," *Procedures for Underground*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 98.

[401] Atwood, "Younger Sister, Going Swimming," 98.

[402] Atwood, "The Small Cabin," *Procedures for Underground*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998), 88-89.

time. She sets up a sensitive parallel between the relationship that humans have with nature and the writer and her craft.

The image of drowning and submergence returns in "After the Flood, We," as the speaker of the poem, walks "across the bridge" to the safety of higher ground, which are the tops of trees, as the flood had submerged the forest. She imagines fish swimming from tree to tree, like birds and the city lost, "far undersea."[403] However despite the scale of such flooding, her partner walking beside her, talks about "the beauty of the morning/not even knowing/that there has been a flood."[404] This is very similar to the experience of the speaker in *Surfacing*, where her experience of the wilderness and nature is not shared by those around her, or the speaker in "The Tent" who struggles to protect her loved ones from the unknown dangers of the wilderness, that they seem happily unaware of.[405] In "After the Flood, We," the difference in sensitivity is acute and dangerous between the knowing writer/speaker and those around her, as her partner tosses pebbles over his/her shoulder, not hearing the "footsteps /of the almost born"[406] approaching from behind, forming out of stone itself. For the speaker, the non-human world is sentient and alive, communicating in its own terms, resonant with presence, which at times is even cruel, sinister or dangerous and not necessarily soothing or caring. Atwood's poetry showcases all faces of nature and the wilderness. The faces forming "out of stone" are 'brutal' in the speaker's perception as well as "almost human."[407] She feels that the dead and the drowned are re-incarnating through

[403] Atwood, "After the Flood, We," *The Circle Game,* in *Eating Fire,* 3.

[404] Atwood, "After the Flood, We," 3.

[405] See pp 305-307 of this chapter, for a detailed discussion of Atwood's short story "The Tent."

[406] Atwood, "After the Flood, We," 3-4.

[407] Atwood, 4.

these stones and pebbles tossed so carelessly by the survivors of the flood.

The poet's acute awareness of these transfigurations and blurring of boundaries between the human and non-human become a central trope of most of her early poetry. In the poem, "Some Objects of Wood and Stone," the pebbles on the beach are "sea-smoothed," enclosing messages that they "intended/to mean in shapes/as random and necessary / as the shapes of words."[408] Every object in Atwood's poetry tells a story, through its very form and shape, similar to the shape of words on a page. The carved animals being passed from hand to hand, in section three of the poem "Some Objects of Wood and Stone," after a point become so much a part of the hands passing them around that, "the skin wonders/if stone is human,"[409] The hands are seen as taking on the elements of the animals carved in stone, even after the game is over. The inner shapes of the people participating in the game are thus changed by this contact with the non-human world, in ways unknown to them.

In "The City Planners" the speaker of the poem sees the planned city trying hard to impose a sense of order, suppressing the chaotic within—"the driveways neatly /sidestep hysteria /by being even."[410] However, the cracks in the plaster give a glimpse of "the landscape behind or under,"[411] quite like the suppressed self of the speaker in *Surfacing*, or Portia in "Wilderness Tips," the feelings pushed away, sanitized, locked up by social order and expectations of propriety. At the same time, the impending disaster is also clear to the speaker, as she visualizes these houses capsizing and sliding, "obliquely into the ….seas/

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[408] Atwood, "Some Objects of Wood and Stone," *The Circle Game*, in *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* (London: Virago, 1998),18.

[409] Atwood, "Some Objects of Wood and Stone," 19.

[410] Atwood, "The City Planners," *The Circle Game*, 4.

[411] Atwood, 4.

gradual as glaciers,"[412] unnoticed until all is lost. The imposition of order by the City Planners appears foolish as they draw "transitory lines rigid as wooden borders /on a wall in the white vanishing air."[413] This can also be seen as a commentary on the dualisms that culture tries to retain, for fear of disorder and invasion by nature, or the 'surfacing' of the "landscape behind or under."[414] However Atwood's poetry remains acutely aware of all invisible presences, as in "The Settlers," where we see a deep understanding of how the native human and non-human inhabitants of a place are an indelible part of the land and are forever present, though invisible, their skeletons growing as "trees/and grass," and "the salt/seas that uphold the land."[415] The settlers on the island can only survive because in some way, the invisible presence of the natives supports them. The last stanza of this poem describes children running through the fields, under which the bones of the natives are buried, overpowered by the settlers in ages past, not knowing the price paid for their lives and laughter on this island.

Murphy has pointed out many writers or artists who have tried to "render nature as a speaking subject....as a character within texts with its own existence."[416] In this collation of literary writers, he has not mentioned Atwood. I think this exclusion is significant as in my own reading of Atwood's writing, she doesn't try to render nature as speaking subject, seeming very aware of the problematic of such appropriation. She is also seen as extremely conscious of the limitations of human perception and keeps touching on the boundaries of this perception—making us aware of the world of non-human subjectivity that remains

[412] Atwood, 4.

[413] Atwood, 5.

[414] Atwood, 4.

[415] Atwood, 28.

[416] Murphy, "Ecofeminist Dialogics," 196.

inaccessible to the human intellect. While the longing to know and experience sears through her characters, the limitations of accessing such knowledge through the usual routes of knowing are also described in her texts, particularly in *Surfacing*, *Procedures for the Underground* and *Susanna Moodie's Journals*, analysed earlier in this chapter. In *Surfacing*, the speaker feels the need to mimic her father's experience of isolation in the wilderness, as an entry point into an alternative universe. She considers how other humans without similar perception would see her father and herself as insane, "Bushed, the trappers call it when you stay in the forest by yourself too long."[417] The speaker's act of actually staying in the forest, discarding all trappings of human settlement for a while, perhaps tries to embody this experience of being 'bushed', but describes the same as an empowering experience rather than one that would be seen as "crazy" or "loony" by others who do not share the experience of blurring of boundaries of nature and culture. The speaker actually embraces this isolation as a precondition for access to the language of nature and attempts to inhabit her father's absent self.

Murphy strives to explain—"an ecofeminist dialogics requires this effort to render the other, primarily constituted by androcentrism as women and nature….as speaking subjects within patriarchy in order to subvert that patriarchy not only by decentring it but also by proposing other centres…."[418] Murphy sees this as a method to breakdown the dualistic thinking of patriarchy that perpetuates the exploitation and oppression of nature in general and women in particular. The aspect of proposing other centres can be seen in Atwood's proto-feminist work, yet she keeps a fine line of distinction alive between making us aware of other centres and speaking for those centres. I rather see her suggesting the

[417] Atwood, *Surfacing*, 57.

[418] Murphy, "Ecofeminist Dialogics," 196.

importance of not knowing as a possible route towards experiencing the non-human or for writing effective ecocritical narratives. In this therefore, I see Atwood's writing through the lens of ecofeminist dialogics, as a space "for dancing" and fluidity, instead of "a static theory of approach,"[419] and Atwood's awareness of the pitfalls of proposing such other centres to counter the existing forms of centrism. Similar to Hochman discussed earlier in the chapter,[420] Armbruster also warns against over reliance on finding connections between humans and non-human nature and locating the "potential for communion," between them, as while it is "an important step towards overcoming the dualisms that structure our culture's thinking," however it runs the risk of collapsing the "self/other dualism into an undifferentiated whole."[421] Jim Cheney also speaks about the risk of incorporating the other into the self, that leaves no room for the other's existence as the other.[422]

Gretchen T. Legler worries about how 'nature' can really be represented in a way that avoids the "Walt Disney syndrome"[423] of anthropomorphizing nature to suit our need for comprehension. She is also critical of the Romantic model of thought that assumes that human perception of non-human nature was perfectly in sync till the advent of Baconian and Descartian thought that 'separated' us from the idyll of harmony of perception and experience. Thus, both these models of thought are seen as anthropocentric by Legler and perhaps rightly so, as both assume human understanding of nature as one of the means towards a better environmental ethic. However, in the course of this chapter we explore the

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[419] Murphy, 196.

[420] See pp 316-317 of this chapter, for an analysis of Hochman's stance.

[421] Karla Armbruster, "Blurring Boundaries in Ursula Le Guin's 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Poststructuralist Approach to Ecofeminist Criticism," 198.

[422] Jim Cheney, "Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics* 9 (1897): 124, doi: 10.5840/enviroethics19879229. See Note 399 above for details.

[423] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 228.

possibility of a degree of non-comprehension as one of the means of evolving an environmental ethic that accepts the human and non-human relationship to be utterly complex and a space of limitless "interactionism"[424] that always leaves much unknown, this unknowability itself demarcating an ethic of care, respect and co-existence as the impulse to fully 'know' or comprehend can often become the basis of exploitative and oppressive practices.[425] This is borne out by Atwood's poetry, *Surfacing* and selected short stories discussed previously in this chapter, where inconclusivity and unknowability becomes the basis of richer experience.

Also, an unchallenged focus on women's connection with nature, "can actually reinforce dualism and hierarchy by constructing yet another dualism,"--this time of men's supposed alienation from nature versus women's supposed connection with nature.[426] Constructing a new dualism to combat an old one, may not be the best way forward. Armbruster suggests that "the work of poststructuralist feminists can complement and

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[424] Nancy Tuana proposes 'Interactionism' as a way to dissolve the divisions between the two poles of nature/culture, acknowledging both agency of materiality and porosity of entities . Such a theorization sees the basic units of existence as phenomena emergent from interactions, instead of emerging from physical objects. Note that Haraway's ideas of the material-semiotic are also derived from Whiteheadean process metaphysics, as also the theory of Interactionism. Interactionism "removes any hard and fast divide between nature and culture," at the same time troubles the distinction between realism and social constructionism. Nancy Tuana, "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina," *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Bloomington University Press, 2008). Also see Tuana, "Re-fusing Nature/Nurture," *Hypatia*, special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* 6, no. 6 (1983): 45–56, doi: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.1988.tb00060.x

[425] The Foucauldian analysis of the reciprocity of power and knowledge, which serve each other is countered by such an approach towards the ecosystem that sees the importance of 'unknowability' of the non-human as an essential means of relating and transforming through Interactionism discussed in Note 424 above. See also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1977), 27. See also Martin A. Hewett, "Michel Foucault : Power/Knowledge and Epistemological Prescriptions," (Virginia: University of Richmond, 2004), Honors Theses, Paper 534, accessed May 19, 2021, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232758021.pdf

[426] Armbruster, "Blurring Boundaries in Ursula Le Guin's 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Poststructuralist Approach to Ecofeminist Criticism," 198-199. The trends adopted by ecofeminist theory are the ones articulated by Val Plumwood in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* that Armbruster refers to, which warns that the "ecofeminist theorist 'pilgrim' can easily fall into the Ocean of Continuity on the one side or stray into the waterless and alien Desert of Difference on the other, there to perish." Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* 3.

complicate the ideas most commonly associated with ecofeminism, providing an approach to identity that encourages neither the erasure of difference by representing women and nature as homogenous, continuous whole nor its over emphasis, which can lead to alienation and domination of humans and nature."[427] Thus a poststructuralist take on ecofeminism destabilises and refuses "static definite boundaries between nature and culture, myth and reality," and other 'constructed dualisms."[428] This transformed and flexible view of identity offered by a poststructuralist view of ecofeminism offers a different possibility for "more sustainable relationships both within human culture and between culture and nonhuman nature."[429] Such a view does not view the differences between humans and non-humans as a source of conflict, rather offering the scope for new kinds of relationships that break the mould of dualisms embedded with hierarchies.[430] Such a "transformed vision of identity," signals the possibility of differences between humans and between human and non-humans becoming the "potential source of new and more sustainable relationships," rather than the "roots of conflict."[431]

Fiona Tolan in her thesis on Atwood has observed that what preoccupies Atwood in her recent novels is "the debate between an essentialist belief in a knowable and unified self and a more postmodern concept of an inessential self comprised entirely of influences and experiences."[432] Through the course of her writing, we see Atwood never interested in the

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[427] Armbruster, "Blurring Boundaries in Ursula Le Guin's 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight': A Poststructuralist Approach to Ecofeminist Criticism," 202.

[428] Armbruster, 202.

[429] Armbruster, 202.

[430] See discussion on Hochman and Guattari on pp 317 of this chapter.

[431] Armbruster, "Blurring Boundaries in Ursula Le Guin's 'Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight'," 202.

[432] Fiona Tolan, *Margaret Atwood : Feminism and Fiction* (Netherlands: Rodopi, 2007), 223.

finished product, rather focusing on all that is blurred and unclear in our perception of ourselves and the world we inhabit, like the photographs beings processed in a studio. Atwood's art lies in keeping us engaged in the blurred images, seeking clarity, to reach a deeper understanding of the elusive writer, absent and yet present in every frame.[433] It is almost as though identity is perceived as fixity by Atwood, "a condition deprived of becoming," interrupting "harmonious flows of giving and receiving."[434] In Conley's view, identity as imposed by society from the outside is related to "arrestation and death."[435] In my reading Atwood's presentation of human characters teetering between the boundaries of human and non-human experience attempts to embody a position that strives to acknowledge dualisms and yet dismantle them, retaining at the same time the sense of danger and terror of doing so. As a way out of all these conundrums and theoretical puzzles, Atwood embraces a very different form of ecofeminist spirituality[436] in her ecocritical writings, which require an attitudinal shift in the reader, making room for the unexplained and the unknown as an important pathway towards experiencing nature and the non-human.

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[433] See pp 35-36 of Introduction to the thesis. Michael Rubbo, dir., *Once in August*, NFB, 1984, film, accessed through *YouTube*, "Margaret Atwood: Once in August," August 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wG2QMomM0Fk

[434] Conley, "Helene Cixous: The Language of Flowers," 150.

[435] Conley, 150.

[436] Ecofeminist spirituality cannot be separated really from its politics. See Greta Gaard, "Ecofeminism and Native American Cultures: Pushing the Limits of Cultural Imperialism," *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 309. Karen Warren argues for ecofeminist spiritualities to be given importance, "because such spiritualities can be 'life-affirming' and 'personally empowering'." Karen J. Warren, "A Feminist Philosophical Perspective on Ecofeminist Spiritualities," *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 130. See also Peter Hay, *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought,* 89. In Anne Cameron's narrative of Creation as well as the role of Mother Earth in nourishing and creating the Rainbow Children or the children of the Earth, ecology and feminism are inseparably linked in their interests. She also asserts that "the spiritual is an integral part of both personal and political."(58) Anne Cameron, "First Mother and the Rainbow Children," *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism*, ed. Judith Plant (Santa Cruz, New Society Publishers, 1989). See also Charlene Spretnak, ed., *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1982).

Ecofeminist Spirituality and 'Unitive Dimensions of Being'[437]

Charlene Spretnak in "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality," sees a possibility for change on Earth only possible by embracing "a postpatriarchal, holistic attitude toward life on Earth,"[438] with feminist spirituality as a means for evolving such an attitude and encouraging practices that would lead to lasting transformation. She highlights an "ethics of mutual respect,"[439] that would prevent us from hurting our fellow beings once we have experientially experienced all other beings as part of our selves through meditations and other practices of holistic ritual. While being very similar to Arne Naess,[440] Joanna Macy[441] and other deep ecologists in her articulation, Spretnak extends her argument to embrace a new definition of ecofeminism. She describes females to be more "predisposed from a very early age to perceive connectedness in life;" being more empathetic and "aware of subtle, contextual 'data' in interpersonal contacts throughout adulthood."[442] Of course, this approach treads the path of essentialising women's experiences or reinforcing notions of the

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[437] See Charlene Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature,* ed. Karen J. Warren and Nisvan Erkal (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 425, for a detailed explication of such 'unitive dimensions of being.' This section discusses Atwood's texts as creating possible spaces for experiencing such a dimension of being.

[438] Charlene Spretnak, "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality," 129.

[439] Spretnak, "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality," 129. This approach is in contrast to one derived from Judeo-Christian traditions and their rhetoric revolving around sin, "fallenness, fear and trembling,"(127) , following on the heels of an Augustinian and Pauline approach that enforces moral conduct through "the whiplash of guilt" and "self-denial" following out of that. (128) Spretnak instead focuses on the Judeo-Christian traditions and their revolving around sin, "fallenness, fear and trembling,"(127) , following on the heels of an Augustinian and Pauline approach that enforces moral conduct through "the whiplash of guilt" and "self-denial" following out of that. (128)

[440] Arne Naess, "Self-realization: An Ecological Approach to Being in the World," Keith Memorial Lecture, Murdoch University, Western Australia, 1986, *The Trumpeter* 4, no. 3 (1987): 35-41, doi: 10.1007/978-1-4020-4519-6_128.. See note 73 of chapter 2, for a detailed discussion of Naess' ideas.

[441] Joanna Macy and Molly Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* (Canada: New Society Publishers, 2014), 38. See chapter 2, for a detailed discussion of Macy and Brown's ideas.

[442] Spretnak, "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality," 129.

feminine that the second wave of the feminist movement sought to overturn. Spretnak reclaims women's bodily experiences like menstruation and orgasm to specifically provide access to the "consciousness of oneness" that is sought for through spiritual practices.[443] She conceded that women "have an elemental advantage" over men in this regard, but also suggests that "all minds contain all possibilities,"[444] and men can find access to this larger consciousness by opening up to the feminine within themselves. Spretnak also highlights the role of rituals centred on women's spirituality that are qualitatively different from "empty, hierarchically imposed, patriarchal observances," in tapping into the source of power within and manifesting in the form of "healing, strengthening, creative energy that expands with spontaneity from a meaningful core of values."[445]

Atwood in *Surfacing* attempts such an attitudinal shift through the main character and her acceptance of her body and its interconnectedness with the natural world. The experiences of the narrator are deeply spiritual in their apprehension of a larger consciousness and 'Self,'[446] expressing itself through her bodily awareness. However *Surfacing* also leaves a lot of questions unanswered as the narrator is seen at crossroads between living in a state of expanded 'being'[447] and returning to her life of limited consciousness and patriarchal structures. It might be more pertinent therefore to see *Surfacing* as an expression of evolving consciousness rather than a world that has changed completely. It is a world that is still fragmented by patriarchal dualisms. The narrator also

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[443] Spretnak, 129.

[444] Spretnak, 130.

[445] Spretnak, 130.

[446] Similar to the concept of the 'Ecological Self' discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. See Note 73 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[447] See Note 1 of this chapter.

espouses different bodily rituals that she feels essential towards this process of reconnecting with herself and the land she grew up in. As a part of "self-regeneration," *Surfacing*'s narrator also understands the importance of "time alone for thought and meditation."[448] It is almost as if Spretnak articulates the experiences described in *Surfacing* seventeen years ago as she urges her readers to "Feel your wholeness. Feel our oneness. Feel the elemental source of our power. Discard the patriarchal patterns of alienation, fear, enmity, aggression, and destruction."[449] This is the very journey towards the 'Self' described in *Surfacing*—towards empathy and care and gentleness, towards embracing all those values of interconnectedness that are demarcated as inferior by a patriarchal society, to deny their power in healing and regeneration of a society that lives in harmony with its ecosystem as these values contradict those of capitalism, power and consumerism. Spretnak provides a meditative process for dealing with the negative, masculinist thoughts that can arise and haunt us by virtue of habit, opting not to feed them with our psychic energy. She posits the "wisdom of the body/mind" as sufficient for washing over the "artificial habits of thought as waves riding from our centre."[450]

In "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," we see Spretnak trying to focus attention on "ecofeminist alternatives to a dualistic interpretation of the world."[451] She attempts to "encourage ecofeminist philosophical consideration of radical nonduality."[452] Radical nonduality, as described by Spretnak, "asserts the existence of unitive dimensions

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[448] Spretnak, "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality," 131.

[449] Spretnak, "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality," 132.

[450] Spretnak, "Toward an Ecofeminist Spirituality," 132. See also Carol P. Christ, *Diving Deep & Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (United States: Beacon Press, 1980), for her analysis of the speaker of Surfacing being on a spiritual quest, haunted by her alienation from her own feelings and ability to respond.

[451] Spretnak, 425.

[452] Spretnak, 425.

of being, a gestalt of a subtle, unitary field of form, motion, space and time."[453] However, there are significant challenges to the acceptance of such radical nonduality in Western philosophical thought, which Spretnak then discusses. One of the primary objections stems from the predominance of deconstructive postmodernism that considers every perception as socially constructed, specially any ideas of nonduality. However, as observed by Spretnak—for deconstructive postmodernists, "perceptions of difference are accepted as obvious truth" as opposed to "perceptions of an inherent continuity," which are seen as fictive.[454] The second objection to the theory of nonduality also derives from "the modern Western enthronement of the individual."[455] In this, 'a radical discontinuity' between the self and the world around, 'is of permanent importance."[456] Therefore, unitive experience of being threatens to obliterate the self whose autonomy the individual is used to protecting. In this worldview therefore, "nonduality is misconstrued as an annihilating monism." [457] This struggle between preserving the individual self and the fear of obliteration by the "unitive dimensions of being," is a common theme running through Atwood's early works, particularly *Surfacing*, poetry about the wilderness and interpersonal relationships seen earlier in this chapter as well as in *The Edible Woman*.[458] At the same time, these texts also explore the radical possibilities offered by an apprehension of this non-dual experience of the Self—when the protagonists actually "surrender" to the larger 'whole'—signified by the wilderness/nature/the world of non-human others—leading to a permanent transformation

[453] Spretnak, 425.

[454] Spretnak, 427.

[455] Spretnak, 426.

[456] Spretnak, 426.

[457] Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 426.

[458] Particularly see pp 354-355 of this chapter where Marian's experience of losing her self-identity and feeling a part of all other flesh is analysed in detail.

of the self. Thus Spretnak proposes nonduality as a "dynamic system of relations wherein any particular manifestation functions simultaneously as a distinct part and an unbroken whole."[459]

Spretnak acknowledges that ecophilosophers still grudgingly accept a concept of nonduality that is limited to mean "'interdependence' or 'interrelatedness' of autonomous entities."[460] However, she urges us to consider the evidence for a more radical nonduality as such experience is recounted and located mostly in marginalized epistemologies, which is "devalued by the modern objectivist orientation," leading us ultimately "to reconsider the dominant conceptualization of acceptable epistemology."[461] Therefore theoretical paradigms such as material ecocriticism and ecofictional and ecopoetic narrative techniques adopted by eco-activist writers like Atwood also challenge such hegemonic paradigms of accepted epistemology, by reminding us of the polyvalence of human perception. Ecophilosophy can be enriched by recognizing such polyvalence of perception, much of which might also be non-linguistic, therefore again asking us to break the stronghold of accepted and dominant paradigms of epistemology and phallocentric forms of "knowing."[462]

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[459]Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 427. Interestingly, Spretnak's idea is very similar to that of the holon discussed in chapter 2, for its ability to hold in itself wholeness, diversity, nonduality and particularity. See pp 211-213 and Note 129 of chapter 2 of this thesis for a detailed discussion on 'holons.'

[460] Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 429.

[461] Spretnak, 429.

[462] The need to know and define has been seen to occupy scientific and cultural attempts to delineate 'woman' and 'nature' in anthropocentric, phallocentric and stereotypical terms. Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature* in an attempt to 'liberate' both the concepts has traced the evolution of the associations with these terms from antiquity to the eighteenth century. She has shown the way the metaphors used for describing 'nature' shift from the 'organic' to the 'mechanistic' in scientific, business and legal texts, leading to denigration of both the environment as well as women. While the organic metaphors helped retain respect for the environment, the mechanistic reduced nature and women's bodies into objects to be controlled and utilised. The language used to describe both therefore helped in authorizing exploitation of the environment and reinforced the perception of women as sexual objects, both exemplifying the mysterious and unknown 'other' to be penetrated, possessed, defined. However while Merchant traces the method employed by science and culture to justify destruction of the environment, as Nielsen observes, Merchant does not suggest resuscitation of organic metaphors as a solution. Carolyn Marchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). See also Dorothy Nielsen, "Timothy Findley's Not Wanted

According to Spretnak's conception of ecological postmodernism,[463] the human being and his/her experiences are much more than these limitations imposed by discursive boundaries.[464] While the reality of power play and language games are not denied by Spretnak,[465] she explains that "in addition to exposing the power dynamics inherent in the 'metanarratives' of the modern worldview," it is necessary "to break out of the conceptual box that keeps modern society self-identified apart from nature and to reconnect with a fuller, richer awareness of the human as an integral and dynamic manifestation of the subjectivity of the universe." [466] I see Atwood's ecocritical narratives studied in this chapter as embodying such an attitudinal shift and transformative approach. As with the narrator of *Surfacing*, the concept of autonomy of an individual is found to be constituted by the dynamic web of relationships within which the individual is existent at the given moment.[467] Spretnak's ideas echo Lisa Sideris' who observes that "the observer is interwoven with, inseparable from, the fabric of that which is observed."[468] This is also similar to John Muir's reflections[469] on the interconnected nature of life, which is best experienced while reading

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on the Voyage: An Exemplary Ecofeminist Text," *Canadian Poetry* 42 (1998): 100-22, https://canadianpoetry.org/volumes/vol42/nielsen.htm.

[463] Ecological postmodernism as described by Spretnak, "acknowledges *both* the enormous role of social construction in human experience and our constitutive embeddedness in subtle, biological, ecological, cosmological, and quantum processes about which contemporary Western society has only an extremely rudimentary level of understanding." Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 433.

[464] Can be linked to Behe's idea of "irreducible complexity" of how cells work, connected to each other. This is taken a step forward in Wendell Berry's conception of the irreducible complexity of human experience that reductionist science tries to define and delimit but which can never be mapped completely in language, but only experienced. This is specially seen in Atwood's poetry, in *Surfacing* and in Oryx's figure, who resists any defined identity and Jimmy's attempts to decipher her in *Oryx and Crake*.

[465] Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 433.

[466] Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 433.

[467] Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 433.

[468] Lisa Sideris, "Evolving Environmentalism: The Role of Ecotheology in Creation/Evolution Controversies," *Worldviews* 11 (2007): 63, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43809343.

[469] "When we try to pick out anything by itself we find that it is bound fast by a thousand invisible cords that cannot be broken to everything else in the universe." John Muir's Journal, 27 July 1869, quoted in Bron Taylor,

Surfacing, *The Edible Woman* and Atwood's ecocritical poetry, where every aspect of the internal and external universe seem to intermingle in a state of heightened awareness. Hence this is the renewed meaning/perception of autonomy or uniqueness of an individual that is nevertheless "coupled with intersubjectivity and interbeing."[470]

The feminist concern/fear[471] regarding "loosely defined boundaries of the self," which have often led to exploitation of women in the past, along with the fear of the annihilation of the individual by radical nonduality, are both addressed by Spretnak in the honouring of polyvalent perception that is basic to ecological postmodernism, thereby suggesting that "the subjectivity of every manifestation in the universe is as real and precious as its far-reaching participation in systems of vast proportion."[472] Atwood's ecocritical poetry, *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* are seen celebrating this polyvalence in utterance and experience of interbeing. It is the denial of the intuitive and bodily perceptions and the interconnectedness with nature that leads to the speaker in *Surfacing* experiencing a disconnection from her own self, suggesting as well the deeper forms of disconnection and insensitivity thus bred in other humans around her who do not have the slightest glimpse of unitive dimensions of being or interbeing with the non-human universe that they are embedded in. The denial of this interconnectedness also eases the way for ecological

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"The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism." *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 2, no.1 (2008):29. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41887590. Also see Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Boston: Little Brown, 1981), 291.

[470] Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 434.

[471] Spretnak also answers the feminist concern regarding deep ecology's articulation of an 'ecological self,' which could take on the form of an expanded masculine ego. While she acknowledges that some might engage in such projections of the self, at the same time, the very appreciation "for the astounding diversity and profound difference in the universe" in ecological postmodernism was what would automatically contradict any form of "ego aggrandizement". Thus Spretnak proposes ecological postmodernism as an extension and development of deep ecology ideas, with the ability to counteract the critiques that have emerged against deep ecology. Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 434.

[472] Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 434.

degradation as noted by Dorothy Nielsen.[473] Thus metaphors and the way we see the world around us impacts our actions with respect to it. While Spretnak calls for a 'relational ontology'[474] that helps us partially comprehend the unitive dimensions of being, she also explains that human knowledge of the unitive field and its "countless modes of dynamic relation will always be decidedly incomplete."[475] The acceptance of this knowledge always remaining incomplete and partial is an important aspect of recognizing polyvalent experiential epistemologies. In *Surfacing*, as in Atwood's early poetry, we see the narrators coming to terms with such 'unknowing' despite touching the shores of such 'unitive dimensions of being' apprehended through their close encounter with the wilderness.

Nielsen argues that simplistic critique of ecofeminism's 'doubleness' misses out on seeing that ecofeminism "does not eschew rationality--but rather rejects a hyper-rationality that excludes all other forms of knowing, such as those based on intuition, experience and valuing."[476]Atwood celebrates this alternative form of knowing without necessarily limiting it to the confines of women's bodies but rather to all those sensitive to patriarchal forms of domination in the sphere of metaphor and its connected realities. Such an apprehension of the unknown seems crucial also for retaining a sense of wonder and awe, as Thomas Berry insists on the importance of realizing that our knowledge of the world is partial and the significance of the ever expanding realm of the mysterious. Hence an aspect of the sacred appears to be the unknowable dimensions of life in this universe, including our own selves.

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[473] Nielsen, "Timothy Findley's Not Wanted on the Voyage: An Exemplary Ecofeminist Text," 100-22.

[474] Spretnak, "Radical Nonduality in Ecofeminist Philosophy," 434.

[475] Spretnak, 435.

[476] Nielsen, "Timothy Findley's Not Wanted on the Voyage: An Exemplary Ecofeminist Text," 101.

Thus it is "the sacred…that evokes the depths of wonder" within us.[477]

Of the many ways of connecting with the utter unknowability of the universe, the wilderness is seen as the first stop destination.[478] Muir[479] compares the wilderness and its mountains, rivers and groves as 'temples' or 'cathedrals.'[480] In *Surfacing*, the narrator's journey towards an expansive experience of the universe that she is a part of is only possible through an uninhibited submergence in the wilderness. While Edward Abbey's[481] perception of the wilderness is different from Muir's in that Abbey is "content with surfaces, with appearances," not knowing "about underlying reality, having never encountered any,"[482] his descriptions of the landscape as the best spaces for introspection and development of a biocentric vision are no less evocative in describing the sense of limitlessness and awe

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[477] Thomas Berry, "The World of Wonder," *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (California: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), 26.

[478] Muir also notes that the "clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness." Muir's Journal entry quoted in Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 20. Also see John Muir, "John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir," *John of the Mountains*, ed. Linnie Marsh Wolfe (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1938), 31.

[479] Muir just one among many other followers of such pantheistic and animistic spirituality in the 20th century including Aldo Leopold, Bob Marshall, Charles Lindbergh, David Brower and even Rachel Carson and others. However as with Muir, their beliefs were expressed in the garb of Christian terminology in the "overwhelmingly Christian culture of the United States." In the 1980s, Edward Abbey and Gary Snyder come forth with a more aggressive form of "pagan environmentalism," shaping the religious and philosophical subcultures that would lead to the formation of Earth First! and its militant form of environmentalism.(30) Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 30-31. See chapter 2 of this thesis for more details on deep ecology and radical environmentalism and its representation in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam*.

[480] Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 30. Also see Michael P. Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 198), 330.

[481] Edward Abbey is best known for his novel about ecological saboteurs, *The Monkeywrench Gang* (1975), as one of the first novels celebrating 'direct action' and inspiring the Earth First ! movement in so many ways. Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 32. *Desert Solitaire* is also remarkable for its description of Abbey's experiences as a ranger in Utah Arches National Park. Conservationists immediately responded to the novel. . He compares the wilderness to "an Eden" and the construction of a dam as a desecration of holy place, for example the Glen Canyon dam in Arizona. Therefore monkeywrenching to undo such desecration would be seen as a necessary act and similar to a consecration. Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 33.

[482] Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988), xii, in Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 34.

described by Muir, and expressed in fiction and poetry by Atwood, later. One of Abbey's descriptions of living in the wilderness is striking in his loss of distinct self hood and the blurring of boundaries between himself and the natural world. Dave Foreman, one of Earth First!'s co-founders called for a non-theistic sacred view of the universe, similar to Abbey. Abbey sees great value in primal spirituality that locates divinity in everything rather than select spaces or figures, seeing it as an essential aspect of living in reverence of the world that sustains us.[483] Abbey vehemently impresses, "Either everything is divine, or nothing is."[484] According to Taylor, the processes of reconnecting with the natural world and experiencing a deep affinity with all non-human species are many—such as art, performance, dancing, music, drumming and other rituals—but most importantly "spending time in nature with a receptive heart."[485] In *Surfacing*, as well as Atwood's early poetry, we have seen how spending time alone in the wilderness facilitates the erosion of the anthropocentric in favour of the biocentric and the intuitive.

Legler critiques the way many canonical writers like Emerson, Thoreau and Muir among others whose works often define how Nature writing in American literature is seen, present nature as something that is "out there" and which one visits as a 'sacred' place.[486] I see Atwood's *Surfacing* as also an answer to these treatises on the journey of solitary men into the wilderness, constituted as sacred and separate from the self, as the narrator of *Surfacing* travels with a group of people and is yet alone and solitary in her perceptions and

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[483] Edward Abbey, "Interview with Edward Abbey," *Headed Upstream: Interviews with Iconoclasts*, ed. Jack Loeffler (Tucson, AZ: Harbinger, 1989), 14-15. Also see Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 36.

[484] Abbey, "Interview with Edward Abbey," 15-16, quoted in Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 36.

[485] Taylor, "The Tributaries of Radical Environmentalism," 27.

[486] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 229.

finally in her effort at transcending the spatial boundaries "between the me and not me, between the I and the other."[487] Legler mentions a host of women writers[488] creating a separate narrative regarding human-nature interactions, which Legler calls a "postmodern pastoral" informed by ecological and feminist ideas and imaging the human/nature dualism as "conversations between knowing subjects."[489] The way in which we "act towards the material world"[490] is itself seen as influenced by our language practices and in turn influences the way in which we narrate these relationships. Donna Haraway in "Situated Knowledges" also pays attention to the importance of these new texts in reconceptualising nature as an "actor or agent" and not just "an object of study" or "passive matter."[491] This process of "embodying nature"[492] as an active subject can be seen as a salient feature of Atwood's writing as well as that of other ecofeminist writers of fiction and poetry. The necessity of an ecofeminist perspective to such writing lies in the identification of patterns of oppression effected through discourse and in reconceptualising those metaphors and concepts that have led to the impulse of continuous resource extraction, mapping and appropriation.[493] The strategies that may be uncovered by this effort are what Patrick D Murphy calls "emancipatory strategies in ecological writing."[494] In this respect, the

[487] Legler, 229.

[488] Alice Walker, Joy Harjo, Mary Oliver, Ursula Le Guin, Diane Ackerman, Leslie Silko amongst others. See Legler, 229.

[489] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 229.

[490] Legler, 229.

[491] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 229. See also Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

[492] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 229.

[493] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 230.

[494] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 230. Of these emancipatory strategies that literary writers could employ "to reimagine nature and human relationships with the natural world," some have already been discussed in this chapter including the "Re-mything nature as a speaking, 'bodied' subject," and the erasure of boundaries between inner (emotional, psychological, personal) and outer (geographic) landscapes, or the

possibilities offered by an ecocritical work is judged by the way it "challenges previous constructions of nature and human relationships with nature."[495] However as analysed by Legler, this ambitious project is only possible by a radical shifting away from patriarchal philosophy and would do well to combine its forces with parallel movements in other disciplines.[496]

The importance of reconceptualising nature for the feminist cause lies in the very way in which women's bodies as well as nature has usually been "inscribed in patriarchal discourse, as passive, interceptive, docile, as mirror and complement."[497] Thus rewriting one becomes part of rewriting the other conceptualisation as well, therefore highlighting the significance of an ecofeminist perspective. Literary expressions can further offer "an idea of nature as a non-fixed, bodied subject that humans may "know" in multiple ways."[498] Atwood's early poetry and *Surfacing*, as seen through the close readings performed in the course of this chapter, exemplifies this aspect of nature and re-inscribes the idea of 'knowing' itself. The expression of "an ethic of caring friendship, or "a loving eye"' in relating to nature[499] finds a different kind of expression in Atwood's writing as this 'loving

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erasing or blurring of self/other(human/nonhuman, I/thou) distinctions' that is a constant source of pleasure and terror throughout the oeuvre of Atwood's ecocritical poetry and novels. The third strategy that Legler discusses as unseating "vision or 'mind' knowledge", from the privilege it occupies as a means of knowing towards "positing the notion that 'bodies' know," can be seen as another important articulation of an alternative epistemology that privileges forms of embodied experience over and above that which is linguistically articulated. See also Catriona Mortimer Sandilands, "Landscape, Memory, and Forgetting: Thinking Through (My Mother's) Body and Place," *Material Feminisms,* ed. Alaimo and Hekman (United States: Indiana University Press, 2008), 265-287, for her discussion on embodied forms of knowing.

[495] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 230.

[496] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 230. Legler mentions in particular French Feminism and its efforts at revising representations of female desire, subjectivity and sexuality and the efforts of ecofeminist philosophers attempting to highlight the close connection between environmental ethics and ecofeminism.

[497] Legler, "Ecofeminist Literary Criticism," 233.

[498] Legler, 234.

[499] Legler, 230.

eye' becomes rather the ability to perceive the wilderness in all its difference and its power to consume any predetermined notions of nature carried by the perceiver. As we delve into an ethics of care, we are forced to re-examine the notion of care with respect to the non-human world. Sometimes care might mean leaving the other alone and sometimes, it might mean an active participation in its growth. Atwood's poetry negotiates the terrain of separateness and submergence in equal measure, providing us with new lens for examining environmental ethics of care and reconceptualization of 'nature'.

Deane Curtin highlights the importance given by ecofeminism to an ethics guided by "care/empathy/compassion" rather than "an abstract ethics of rights."[500] This is because an 'ethic of care' is seen as less anthropocentric and more inclusive than an ethic based on the human quality of 'reason'.[501] As seen by us earlier, in Plumwood's theorization 'reason' is also identified as one of the dominating halves of a power inflected dualism that sees emotions and feelings as inferior. However, in Curtin's detailed analysis of the ethic of care, he goes on to show how such an ethic is based on compassion which he describes as more resilient than 'empathy', making "an ethical practice possible."[502] This definition of compassion, makes it a unique amalgamation of reason and feeling, dismantling the hierarchical dualism that ecofeminism strives to challenge. Curtin explains the difference in approach between a liberalist ethic that derives from the notion of "a strongly individuated, autonomous self as the rights holder," and an ethic of compassion that derives from the concept of "a relational self."[503] This is of course very similar in its principles to deep

[500] Deane Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," *Ecofeminism, Feminist Intersections with other Animals and the Earth*, eds. Carol J Adams and Lori Gruen (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 57.

[501] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 58.

[502] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 58.

[503] Curtin, 58.

ecology discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis. However radical ecofeminism changes the politics of radical environmentalist philosophy by extending its ambit to realm of gender as an indelible part of environmentalist ethics. Judith Plant insists that ecofeminism wishes to convey that "we *all* must cultivate the human characteristics of gentleness and caring," thereby re-instating the value of these qualities which have been traditionally devalued by a patriarchal structure of society.[504] Valuing diversity of thought is thus also seen as a central characteristic that fosters gentleness and caring.

Expanding the realm of environmental ethics to bring in the fulcrum of compassion is essential as it is not premised on reciprocity,[505] unlike that of rights and duties, thereby easily embracing the collective of non-human others. At the same time, one of the earliest critiques that would emerge against this ethic would be that a hierarchy yet again emerges between the 'subject' and 'object' of compassion.[506] However, according to Curtin, this would be a misapprehension of the quality of compassion itself, which in his interpretation is ultimate compassion for one's own self as undivided from other selves. In this he hearkens to Buddhist philosophy, and a reading of the Dalai Lama's recent articulation on 'compassion.'[507] However, this also bears an uncanny similarity with Naess' concept of the

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[504] Plant, *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism,* 3. Plant suggests that women are socialized in a way that makes it easier for them to feel compassion, unlike men, who have to struggle against their upbringing to experience compassion for all life around them. However, she particularly draws attention to the fact that this ability to feel compassion has not been accompanied with the power to make decisions, and thus caring has become "entangled with personal frustrations over feelings of powerlessness, leading to an inability to take responsibility."(3)

[505] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 58.

[506] Immanuel Kant sees compassion as "an insulting kind of beneficence," equating it with "pity" for one who is "unworthy." See "The Doctrine of Virtue," *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. and trans. Mary Gregor (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205. Curtin however rejects this definition of compassion and opts for a larger one that includes the self in other selves and can therefore be seen as an important lens through which we can view the importance of ecofeminist spirituality as represented in literary texts or as practised by the Green Sisters discussed in Chapter 2, when analysing Adam One in *The Year of the Flood.*

[507] See Note 518 below.

Ecological Self discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis,[508] as it dismantles the usual divide between egoism and altruism, between choosing to benefit the individual self versus choosing to help others even at the cost of the individual self.[509]

Curtin also points out a basic characteristic within us to experience the world in a relational manner, analysing that "we would not be social (and therefore moral) beings at all, without the basic genetic capacity to share meaningful experience empathetically with others."[510] It is in fact this comprehension of a world populated by other selves, "others, who, like ourselves, need to be treated with understanding and care,"[511] that makes possible the dimension of compassion and care. Thus an ethic of compassion is also based on the recognition of the value of other beings in the ecosystem. To take this argument a step further, Curtin proposes empathy to be the defining trait of a human being rather than rationality or capacity to think and in this he challenges Aristotelian and Descartian ideas regarding the primary nature of a human being.[512] This change in perspective automatically grants primacy to human understanding of "interconnectedness to other beings," as well.[513] Curtin analyses Gruen's idea of 'entangled empathy'[514] as the possibility of shift in

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[508] See Note 73 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[509] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 58.

[510] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 60.

[511] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 60.

[512] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 60. Curtin is also quick in differentiating between empathy and compassion, the former being a basic trait, the latter being a more developed form of moral commitment, rather than just a feeling, involving what he calls, "moral skilfulness,"(62) bringing within itself an integration of emotion and reason, becoming a moral practice in itself, rather than an impulsive bodily or social reaction. Curtin calls compassion therefore "a deep, ongoing pattern of engagement,"(64) which can look spontaneous after a while, but which demands wisdom and incessant cultivation. (65) This definition of compassion is also very similar to Lori Gruens' idea of 'entangled empathy' that involves both "affect and cognition."(65) See Lori Gruen, *Entangled empathy: An Alternative Ethic for our Relationships with Animals* (New York: Lantern Books, 2015).

[513] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 60. See Note 23 above for a discussion on Material Ecocriticism as a discourse that engages with such interconnections and 'meshwork' in human and non-human relationships.

[514] See note 512 above.

perspective from the first to the third person and this ability to move back and forth between perspectives is what distinguishes the "precognitive empathic response from fully entangled empathy."[515] Thus the ethics of compassion also become an alternative to the "intellectual gymnastics performed by liberal animal rights philosophers in extending human moral standing to non-human others,"[516] which revolves around an anthropocentric need to find human analogies to grant 'rights' to other being. On the other hand, a compassionate response to the world of non-human others, enables us to recognize "the ability of non-humans to experience empathy," often expressed even more than in humans.[517] Thus the perspective shift is crucial and is only possible with "the insight into the connectedness of self and others," not requiring the privileging of "human rational personhood," and expressive of a "commitment to all sentient beings," who are "co-inhabitants of the earth."[518]

Part of this recognition and experience of interconnectedness and empathy for all sentient beings including non-humans also involves the possibility of 'conversation' with non-humans and ecocritical narratives like Atwood's, attempt multiple narrative strategies to represent such 'interbeing.'[519] However, as discussed earlier, "lots of well-intentioned, but finally imperialist ecological discourse,"[520] take on the project of representing nature, as

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[515] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 67.

[516] Curtin, 73.

[517] Curtin takes the example of the shape of flocks of birds in flight, or murmuration as an example of non-human empathy, referring to Thomas Metzinger's study in *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

[518] Curtin, "Compassion and Being Human," 73. He specially refers to the Dalai Lama's lecture on compassion as illuminating this principle. See Dalai Lama, *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011). Also in "Compassion and the Individual." http://www.dalailama.com/messages /compassion

[519] See Note 1.

[520] Haraway, "Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms," *Material Feminisms,* ed. Alaimo and Hekman (United States: Indiana University Press, 2008),176.

that which is considered inert and unable to represent itself. Through the course of this chapter, we have seen how an 'agentic' view of nature in ecocritical narratives like those by Atwood could change this assumption. In Latour's re-conceptualization, "Nature is not to be conquered, controlled, or even protected. Rather, our conception of natural fact and reality must be re-examined in order to make room for other members of the political-ecological collective."[521] Haraway acknowledges that "in the context of our law systems, animals are bound to appear as human underlings."[522] However Haraway suggests that we see animals as "other worlds, whose other worldliness must not be disenchanted and cut to our size, but must be respected for what it is."[523]

The recognition of the 'otherworldly' subject status of animals and non-humans can become the basis of coherent conversations between us and them.[524] Contact with the 'otherworld' however is quite impossible without 'interference' as otherwise one cannot be "a social subject webbed with others."[525] This communication is however fraught with questions of power, which cannot be evaded. Also this contact with 'otherworlds' has an indelible impact on the self. Particularly in Atwood's early poetry and *Surfacing* as well as selected short stories discussed in this chapter such as "Death by Landscape," "Wilderness Tips," we have seen the speakers' personalities changed by their contact with non-humans and submergence in the landscape. As part of the process of transformation, the act of 'listening' to the wilderness becomes an essential route towards reconstructing the self and nature relationship. This overturns Plumwood's Master Model where "to speak is the human

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[521] Matthew G. Gerber, "Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 42, no.2 (2005): 118, 10.1080/00028533.2005.11821645.

[522] Haraway, "Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms," 177.

[523] Haraway, 177.

[524] Haraway, 178.

[525] Haraway, 178.

prerogative (because we have language), it is the active mode of being; listening (or being spoken to) is the passive or recipient position."[526] Listening then becomes an act of ecological care and empathy that is a natural result of perceiving nature as agentic and desiring. Gaard also identifies "Attentive Listening" as the fourth phase[527] of ecofeminism, which goes beyond the dualisms and essentialism backlash, to focus on 'listening' to all human and non-humans 'othered' by the dominant discourses of patriarchal perspectives. Gaard quotes Josephine Donovan, "We should not kill, eat, torture, and exploit animals because they do not want to be so treated, and we know that. If we listen, we can hear them."[528]

Highlighting the importance of listening to one's research subjects, Gaard asserts that the advancement of knowledge can only be possible by scholars listening to each other, therefore pointing at the importance of revising and rethinking existing theoretical formulations. In *The Edible Woman*, Marianne exemplifies such acute sensitivity toward animals and plants and all non-human entities that become food for humans, reaching a point where she cannot even consume vegetables, having experienced unitive dimensions of being where the boundaries between the self and the other have collapsed completely, leading to

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[526] Deborah Bird Rose, "Val Plumwood's Philosophical Animism: Attentive Inter Actions in the Sentient World," *Environmental Humanities* 3 (2013): 102, doi:10.1215/22011919-3611248. Also quoted in Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xviii.

[527] Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism*, xv-xvi. Richard Watts identifies three stages in the development of any academic discourse, which Greta Gaard applies in her study of ecofeminism. The first stage sees a few master thinkers emerging with the problematics to be approached in the discourse. The second stage sees the publication of many foundational texts and anthologies that "circumscribe the intellectual area in question," and the third stage describes the point where internal and external critical interrogation of the assumptions made become most important. According to Gaard, ecofeminism has survived these three stages and entered a fourth stage, which she terms the stage of "Attentive Listening." Although some of Atwood's works predate even the first stage of discourse development described here, with respect to ecofeminism in academia, her writing certainly displays the traits of what Gaard calls the fourth stage. See Richard Watts, "Towards an Ecocritical Postcolonialism: Val Plumwoood's Environmental Culture in dialogue with Patrick Chamoiseau," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 44, no. 3 (2008): 251, doi:10.1080/17449850802230285.

[528] Josephine Donovan, "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory," *Signs* 15, no. 2 (1990):375, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174490. Also quoted in Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism,* xvii.

all eating being experienced by her as a form of self-consumption and self-annihilation. In *Surfacing* as well, we see the speaker's growing sensitivity to the forest and the lake that she resides in and then merges with, temporarily, in her desire to listen to and comprehend the messages from the other side of the culturally constructed dualism of self and nature. The settlers in Atwood's early poetry also struggle with the land and the wilderness, until they surrender to it and become ready to listen to the 'other' in its own terms and its own language that is extra-linguistic, experiential and embodied. Writing then becomes just a means to point to its own limitations, as we have discussed earlier in the chapter with reference to Scigaj's theory of 'referance'.[529]

Griffin compares the interconnected and dependent nature of an ecosystem to the Derridean notion of différance. In the way that the meaning of a word really depends on other words, never existing in one word alone,[530] a tree too is really also the soil, air and light on which it is dependent and which forms a part of it. Thus the tree is affected by and affects the elements around it, sustained by and sustaining the ecosystem of which it is a part, similar to the ecosystem of words and language and signification, according to Griffin.[531] In Atwood's writing we see a steady awareness of the "co-constitutive materiality of human corporeality,"[532] that is always suggestive of interbeing with the non-human universe beyond the scope of econarratology. This is also emblematic of what Judith Plant sees as "coming home,"[533] representing a deeper association with the land and community

[529] See Note 94 above and pp 313 of this chapter for a discussion of Scigaj's theory of 'reference.'

[530] Griffin, "Ecofeminism and Meaning," 216.

[531] Griffin, "Ecofeminism and Meaning," 216.

[532] Alaimo and Hekman, "Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," 9.

[533] Plant, *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism,* 132. Plant redefines the importance of bioregionalism in this journey towards empowerment of women. She is careful in the use of the word "home" whose idealization has for long been the basis of limitations placed upon women. However, at the same time, she recognizes the value of 'home' that empowers women, by reconnecting them with their land and communities, vital towards the formation of an eco-community.(121) Plant's concept of a sustainable and

that can co-exist with differences and the possibility of 'unknowing' and the importance of accepting that nature cannot be 'known' by the limited 'mind' centric nature of epistemology. The expansion of experience offered by such an alternate ecofeminist ethics of care and re-prioritization of the intuitive, also helps in enriching the scope of imagination regarding possible futures, where such epistemologies of interbeing can influence and affect the choices made by people and in turn state policies impacting the environment within which we are embedded. As explained by Briohny Doyle, "hope is an emotion tethered to the future," and is nurtured by imagination and also affected by "our engagement with present and future realities."[534] Atwood's novels and poetry explored in this chapter provide the contours of such imaginative experiences of the present that can inform "visions of the future…that focus on shifting paradigms," rather than finding concrete solutions, dismantling notions of human exceptionalism or hierarchy, rather foregrounding "human and non-human alliances," and thereby also locating ways of inhabiting "environments in crisis."[535] Such ecocritical narratives are important for formulating what Briogny calls "critical hope," which instead of offering empty solace, imagines ways to "grieve and transform."[536]

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vibrant community that reflects "a way of being in the world that reflects a respect and love for all of life,"(121) as its fundamental ethic. That is a central aspect to Plant's vision for the future of ecofeminism. (132-33) However, we need to understand Plant's redefinition of the concept of 'home' to mean a space where we learn to "live with the infinite differences that make life possible."(139) I

[534] Briohny Doyle, "Hope Out of Stock: Critical and Melancholic Hope in Climate Fiction," *Dystopian Emotions: Emotional Landscapes and Dark Futures*, eds. Jordan McKenzie and Roger Patulny (United Kingdom: Bristol University Press, 2021), 162. doi:10.46692/9781529214567.010.

[535] Briohny Doyle, "Hope Out of Stock: Critical and Melancholic Hope in Climate Fiction," 162.

[536] Briohny Doyle, 162.

Conclusion

Margaret Atwood, in an interview with CBC News in 2019,[1] right after winning the Booker Prize the same year alongside Bernardine Evaristo,[2] says that she would have been embarrassed to win the Booker prize alone, lauding the jury for the joint win. When questioned further by her interviewer, she explains the function of such prizes in creating popularity for writers as well as readers of that genre, which she explains she doesn't need, as her book was doing quite well as it is. Atwood's candid statement regarding her popularity and celebrity status also showcases growing confidence in the impact of her work and the possibility of effecting a shift in consciousness through her writing and public utterances. Atwood declares that that she would be donating her prize money to *Indspire*,[3] which funds scholarships for indigenous students. She emphasizes that she wants to fund students from indigenous communities who would be working in the realm of the environmental humanities as she feels that such students, connected to the land, would know most about it and needed to be placed in positions where their perspective could alter environmental research and decisions. In *Burning Questions,*[4] published in 2022, she continues pursuing questions regarding the way we see ourselves with respect to our planet, wondering aloud at our unawareness, even as danger looms in the near distance, asking "How long do we go on this way before we destroy our enormous natural carbon sink, reduce the fragile North with

[1] "Margaret Atwood on Booker Prize Win, Handmaid's Tale as a Protest Symbol," *CBC News*, 2019, accessed 14 May 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riVh9YWXPTQ&t=20s.

[2] Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* won the Booker in 2019 alongside Atwood's *The Testaments.*

[3] Indspire is a Canadian Indigenous charity organization, investing in the education and careers of "First Nations, Inuit and Métis people," to benefit their families and communities and Canada as a whole. See "About Indspire," *Indspire*, accessed January 22, 2021, https://indspire.ca/.

[4] Atwood, *Burning Questions* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2022).

its thin soil cover to a rocky waste land and in the process wipe out a large number of species, before we scorch ourselves to death."[5] As discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis, visualization of the future in speculative fiction, as an extension of the reality of the present, provides a means of triggering awareness regarding environmental degradation in readers.[6] In "The Futures Market," Atwood notices a change in the way people have begun visualising the future, with growing awareness of climate change, diseases from mutated bacteria and viruses, "biosphere depletion, rising sea levels, and levels of methane in the atmosphere."[7] This has led to visualisation of the future in the form of dystopias, which look more "like a slog in the swamp," than "a stroll in the park."[8] The Hulu series on Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* does a remarkable job in presenting visuals of parts of the earth that have become uninhabitable, called the Colonies, where women deemed 'criminals' are sent as punishment and made to work unceasingly, extracting minerals from the earth and dying from exposure to toxicity and radiation. [9] Atwood's powerful narrative of a future that seems frighteningly familiar and probable, is extended by the Hulu production into 5 Seasons and 56 episodes, describing June's struggle to free as many individuals as possible from the stranglehold of an oppressive state. The web series follows Atwood's intentions more than her storyline, as Gilead takes on a life of its own, expanding beyond the pages of Atwood's

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[5] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 76.

[6] See pp 106 of Chapter 1 of this thesis in particular. Fiona Tolan also notes that Atwood's dystopias are "always determinedly rooted in the real" and "cautionary amalgamations of things that have already happened or are in the process of happening." Fiona Tolan, " 'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood," *Contemporary Women's Writing* 11, no. 3 (November 2017):455, *Oxford University Press,* doi:10.1093/cwwrit/vpx020.

[7] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 169.

[8] Atwood, 169.

[9] Bruce Miller, dir., *The Handmaid's Tale,* Seasons 1-5, April 2017-, *Hulu*. Can also be viewed on Amazon Prime, https://www.primevideo.com/detail/0P0X72Z35JR1UB78BC872SOLG8/ref=atv_dp_share_cu_r. Particularly see Season 2, Episode 2. Also see pp 124-125 of Chapter 1 of this thesis and pp 375 of Chapter 3 of this thesis where the novel's depiction of the Colonies are discussed.

novel, becoming symbolic of the horrors that we can create for ourselves, by damaging the planet that sustains us.

In "Greetings, Earthlings! What Are These Human Rights of Which You Speak?" in Atwood's recent collation of essays and reflections, *Burning Questions,* Atwood takes on the persona of an alien from "Mashupzyx," from a fictional galaxy far away from planet earth.[10] She declares that she has transformed into "the form of a short, elderly frazzle-headed female human person," from the country of Canada,"[11] to avoid creating alarm amongst the listeners who would feel fear on seeing her real, giant, slug and octopus form on Mashupzyx. Of course this "frazzle-headed" physical form is clearly recognisable as Atwood herself, thereby creating for herself the position of an 'alien' observer of planet Earth and its inhabitants as she attempts to understand what 'human rights' mean. Atwood's presentation of herself as a persona, might also be suggestive of how she might feel like an 'alien' amongst earthlings not sharing her perspective![12] Positioning the speaker's voice as an alien, allows her to speak about human behaviour from an objective standpoint and showcase human follies that lead to environmental disasters, creating optimum conditions for readers to be startled out of any sense of complacency or denial[13] regarding the urgency

[10] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 368.

[11] Atwood, 368.

[12] In addition, her position as a Canadian, is specially mentioned as part of the identity the alien assumes, suggestive of feelings of alienation that Atwood has engaged with in critical detail through her earlier writings—*Surfacing* and *Survival*. See pp 32-35, 46-47 and Notes 223-225 of the Introduction to this thesis. Also in the documentary *In the Wake of the Flood*, discussed in more detail towards the end of this conclusion, she describes how people espousing thoughts regarding climate change and ecological crisis like her father were seen as the "lunatic fringe." Ron Mann, dir., *In the Wake of the Flood* (Canada: Sphinx Productions, 2010) 5.50, Vimeo, https://vimeo.com/ondemand/331757. Also see pp 97-98 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, which discusses the "How to Change the World" Nexus conference, where Atwood decides to take on the role of the 'lunatic' alarmist, warning that the house was on fire.

[13] See Pp 151-153 and Note 301 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, for a detailed discussion on the problem of denial and desensitization in addressing climate change and other environmental issues.

of addressing climate change concerns.

Atwood, in *Burning Questions* indicates that we have the technological tools necessary for saving the environment that is fast degrading.[14] However, the challenge lies in raising funds for conservation of birds, animals, wildlife and the environment, and to find ways of applying these techniques and tools as most people living in artificial environments cannot see the connection "between human beings and the rest of the world."[15] Warwick Fox in his Book on *A Theory of General Ethics: Human Relationships, Nature, and the Built Environment*, draws our attention to the importance of individual and contextual cohesiveness in the formulation of ethics, or the values that we live by. He recognizes the criticisms[16] levelled against deep ecology philosophy for being impractical and romantic and develops his concept of transpersonal cohesiveness to provide a more concretized description of Arne Naess' 'Self-Realization!'[17] that seems impossible for the larger world to experience and realize.[18] Fox now raises the question of the relationship between individual forms of cohesion with contextual forms of cohesion, drawing us towards the realization that the "largest responsively cohesive context that bears on our lives," is the planet earth which should be accorded priority when compared to our own individual

[14] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 62.

[15] Atwood, 62.

[16] See pp 291-288 and Note 454 of Chapter 2 of this thesis for details on the criticism levelled against deep ecology philosophy.

[17] See Note 73 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[18] Warwick Fox describes three ways in which things can be organized or structured—i) where the things or beings are held together by a "mutual responsiveness of their elements" which Fox calls "responsive cohesion", ii) things or beings held together but in a constrained manner, not reflecting much mutual responsiveness except as required by the hierarchical structure they are bound in, which Fox calls "fixed cohesion"(16-17) and iii) things or beings in a state of what Fox terms "discohesion"(15), failing to hold together at all. The most valuable or desired for system is of course the one with responsive cohesion between its elements. Warwick Fox, *A Theory of General Ethics: Human Relationships, Nature, and the Built Environment* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 2006).

responsive cohesiveness, for maintenance of larger responsive cohesiveness of life on earth.[19] Hence according to Fox, "we should seek to support and create responsively cohesive forms of organization within the human social realm," which includes "democratic forms of politics that are responsively cohesive with the healthy functioning of the ecological realm and that promote responsively cohesive societies."[20] While this is another way of describing the Ecological Self [21] conceptualized by Arne Naess or the 'Greening of the Self'[22] described by Joanna Macy and discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Fox's representation does not base such a transformation of ethics and politics on individual transformation of consciousness, instead calling upon the natural human tendency towards desiring mutual responsiveness and cohesion in his/her interpersonal relations at a micro level and a transference of such cohesion at all levels of social and political life at a macro level—which would lead to the same result of awareness of fashioning systems that are in congruence with the ecological realm, for the sake of experiencing this responsive cohesion.

Atwood's light hearted graphic novel series, *Angel Catbird, vol. 1-3,*[23] actually creates a story where the "mutual dependencies of humanity and animals,"[24] are showcased. Karlijn Herforth expounds on how Atwood's narratives continually bring forth new perspectives on human and non-human interconnectedness and how humans, "both affect

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[19] Fox, *A Theory of General Ethics: Human Relationships, Nature, and the Built Environment*, 19.

[20] Fox, 19.

[21] See Note 73 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[22] See pp. 209 and Note 117 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[23] Atwood, *Angel Catbird Vol.1-3*, illustr. Johnnie Christmas, colors Tamra Bonvillain (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Books, 2016-17).

[24] Karlijn Herforth, *Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives: Ecological Responsibility in Margaret Atwood's Angel Catbird* (Bachelor's thesis, Utrecht University, 2018), 5. Also see Maria Moss, "'Their Deaths Are Not Elegant'– Portrayals of Animals in Margaret Atwood's Writings," *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* 35 (2015): 122, http://www.kanada-studien.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/zks_2015_6_Moss.pdf.

and are affected by the larger environment."[25] *Angel Catbird* is peopled by hybrid animal and human personas. Strig Feleedus[26] is part cat, part bird, part human. Cate Leone is half-cat, half-human and Atheen-owl is half-owl and half-human. Count Catula is a hybrid between cat, bat and human. While the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy[27] was marked as speculative fiction by Atwood, *Angel Catbird* treads the realm of fantasy, as it goes beyond the probable and possible.[28] It is to be noted that Strig becomes a quasi-animal from an accident collision with his pet cat, a bird, the mysterious scientific formula designed by him in a petri dish and a car running him down, all at the same time.[29] However the other characters populating the graphic novel are quasi-animals without such encounters with scientifically developed formula. It showcases an alternative world where multispecies ethics[30] is visually

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[25] Shannon Hengen, "Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood,* ed. Coral Ann Howells (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 84. Also quoted in Herforth, *Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives: Ecological Responsibility in Margaret Atwood's Angel Catbird,* 5.

[26] 'Feleedus' is an amalgam of the Latin name for cats and owls. Laura Hudson, "The Story Behind Margaret Atwood's Bonkers New Comic About a Flying Cat-Bird Superhero," *Slate,* Sept 6, 2016, https://slate.com/culture/2016/09/the-story-behind-margaret-atwood-s-graphic-novel-angel-catbird.html

[27] The trilogy by Atwood consisting of—*Oryx and Crake*, 2003 (London: Virago, 2013); *The Year of the Flood*, 2009 (London: Virago, 2013); *MaddAddam*, 2013 (London: Virago, 2014).

[28] In keeping with Atwood's own definition of these categories in her book of essays, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago, 2011), discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[29] Strig's transformation into Angel Catbird is deliberately reminiscent of the Marvel superheroes like Spider Man, the Fantastic Foour and Incredible Hulk, born out of a "scientific mishap." Esther Susan Csorba, "Unlikely Superhero: Margaret Atwood's Angel Catbird," *Women Write About Comics,* October 18, 2019, https://womenwriteaboutcomics.com/2019/10/unlikely-superhero-margaret-atwoods-angel-catbird/

[30] The arena of multispecies studies attempts to shift from an anthropocentric perspective to a biocentric one, that recognises the way different species are all entangled with each other in webs of "becoming," (2) the processes of living and dying connected to each other. Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey, and Ursula Münster discuss the importance of "cultivation of skills,"(6) needed for responding meaningfully to the non-human world, and attentive to other species as an intrinsic part of formulating concepts regarding multispecies ethics, that might teach us "how we might come to know others,"(6) as well as "re(craft)," the way we perceive our emergence from and survival in "multispecies communities."(2) Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey and Ursula Münster, "Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness," *Environmental Humanities* 1.8.1 (May 2016): 1–23. doi: https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3527695. See also Francisco J. Santiago-Avila, "Multispecies Ethics are Messy: Five Questions for William Lynn," *EdgeEffects*, Oct 9, 2021, https://edgeeffects.net/william-lynn/. William Lynn describes his efforts at finding ways in which humans and nonhuman others can sustainably flourish on the earth and calls this practice of "deep sustainability" central to the development of multispecies ethics, that helps us know "how we ought to live," ensuring that we do right by other species.

showcased, with different species having a pronounced impact on each other's survival.

The multimodal form of the graphic novel offers new connections, as the reader is an active participant in filling in the gutters between panels,[31] with both existing imagination regarding the interface of species as well as the new possibilities of envisioning offered by such a colourful and visually fantastic tale. According to Herforth, *Angel Catbird* decentralizes the human.[32] However, in my reading of the graphic novel series, the quasi human-animal figures have distinctly anthropocentric traits, in their dressing and expressive faculties. While this makes for cognitively engaging content, powerful as a tool for education or persuasion,[33] it is not an easy journey from the anthropocentric to the biocentric, though it attempts to unsettle the usual manner of thinking about biodiversity and interspecies ethics. By reimagining inter-relationships between species in this fantastic tale, Atwood performs the important function of making the reader reconsider climate change and extinction from the point of view of other species, however problematic that may be in actuality,[34] refocusing the lens from human need for biodiversity to the valuation of multiple species as ends unto themselves. The narrative in *Angel Catbird* imbues the quasi animals with agency and subjectivity, as they take on the responsibility of fighting Dr. Muroid who wants to destroy all other species, creating a world where only rats and half-rat and half-human creatures like him hold all powerful positions. While anthropocentric traits in animal representations may be problematic, suppression of animal subjectivity and agency are also identified as dangerous, leading to increased aggression against non-humans who might be imagined as

[31] See Note 134 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, discussing the importance of the gutter in graphic novel narratives.

[32] Herforth, *Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives,* 6.

[33] Kelly Sue DeConnick, "Foreword," *Angel Catbird: The Catbird Roars*, vol. 3 (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Books, 2017), 6.

[34] See pp 321-324, 388 of Chapter 3 of this thesis, where the problematics of anthropomorphizing are discussed.

"devoid of experiences worthy of human consideration."[35] This is seen in *Oryx and Crake*, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, where Jimmy/Snowman[36] remembers his childhood experience of Neoagriculturals[37] where animals are reared for human experimentation and consumption. Atwood's *Angel Catbird* and *War Bears*,[38] both function as a nostalgic remembrance of both pre-World War Golden Age[39] superhero comics as well as post World

[35] Marion Scholtmeijer, *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction: From Sanctity to Sacrifice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 229, quoted in Herforth, *Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives,* 6. Also see Josephine Donovan, *The Aesthetics of Care: On the Literary Treatment of Animals* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 111.

[36] See Note 161 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, for a discussion on why the names Jimmy/Snowman are mentioned with an oblique.

[37] See Note 227 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[38] Atwood's graphic novel *War Bears*, with Illustrator Ken Steacy, follows on the heels of *Angel Catbird*, with its superhero embodying animal characteristics as well. Margaret Atwood and Ken Steacy, *War Bears, Vol. 1-3* (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Books, 2018). This novel too has a meta fictive style, as the graphic novel series Oursenette, is set within the framework of the struggles faced by comic artist Alain Zurakowski in creating the black and white comic strip during World War II as Canada joined the fight alongside the Allied forces. It remains a landmark effort by Atwood dabbling in new media for telling her tales, as it showcases an important juncture in Canadian history, a time of transition and uncertainty, remembering the comic book industry sprouting in Canada during the War years, as importing American comics at that time was forbidden. However as the Allied forces defeat the Axis powers, it is a day for celebration and at the same time marks the end of the newly emerging black and white comic book industry in Canada as with the end of War, the markets would be flooded by the American ones. Oursenette is a Nazi bashing superhero woman with bear like attributes and two polar bear sidekicks who appear magically when required. At other times, she is the demure Sophie, playing by the superhero trope. When Alain's boss Gloriana asks why it is a bear-woman, he feels offended that he even has to explain that the bear represented Russia, an important ally in the war against the Nazis. Oursenette is visibly modelled on Gloriana, Alain's boss exerting power over her male employees, a commentary on women's access to positions of power and financial independence, enabled by the men going to war. See Christian Holub, "Margaret Atwood explains the genesis of her new comic *War Bears," EW,* Sept 10, 2018, https://ew.com/books/2018/09/10/margaret-atwood-war-bears-interview/. See also Atwood, "Oursonette," *The Globe and Mail*, July 1, 2017, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/canada-150/fiction-story-of-canada-margaret-atwood-oursonette/article35479584/

[39] The 1930s to the 1950s is usually considered the Golden Age of comics in America, with the emergence of iconic superheroes like Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, etc. Peter Coogan identifies 4 key features of the superhero genre, as it begins developing at this time—a mission, certain special powers , an identity that is different from the one espoused by the hero when not fighting villains threatening peace on earth, enabled by a special costume. See Peter Coogan, *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre* (Austin, TX: Monkey Brain Books, 2006), 30-33. Also see Joseph J. Darowski, "The Superhero Narrative and the Graphic Novel," *Critical Insights: The Graphic Novel* (2014): 5. The major publishers at this time were DC Comics and Timely Comics, later to become Marvel Comics amongst others. In Canada as well, comics were greatly influenced by the American counterparts, leading to the emergence of Nelvana of the Northern Lights, Johnny Canuck and Captain Cannuck. See Michael Hirsh and Patrick Loubert, *The Great Canadian Comic Books* (Canada: P. Martin Associates, 1971), which also formed a source book for comic aficionado Margaret Atwood.

The Silver Age of comics in America, from the 1950s to the 1970s, led to the popularity of slightly more complex characters like Spiderman, the Fantastic Four and the X-Man, characterised by more internal flaws and fears which became impediments in the struggle of espousing a superhero identity, rather than an external agent like Kryptonite in case of Superman, the icon of the Golden Age of comics in America. See . Darowski, "The Superhero Narrative and the Graphic Novel," 10. Canadian comics also followed suit,

War II animal comics, utilising the familiarity of the trope to create awareness regarding extinction narratives and human responsibility for the welfare of other species.

In an interview with Laura Hudson, Atwood explains her fascination with the form of the comic book since her childhood and making her own comics since then.[40] She even experimented with the Book Tour Comix autobiographical strip intermittently in the 1970s.[41] As noted by Hudson, *Angel Catbird* is different from all the other works by Atwood which are known for their layers and subtlety. Carrying on the "pulpy traditions of Golden Age superhero comics,"[42] the adventures of her eponymous hero Angel Catbird play on our expectations from the superhero genre, as in this series, Strig is seen groping his way to elusive stardom, as the women around him take firmer decisions. Abounding in puns, like "purrfect,"[43] there is even a discotheque for the half-cat and half-human characters, called "Catastrophe."[44] Cate Leone, the love interest of most of the quasi animals and humans in the book, joins the band here called "Pussies in Boots,"[45] singing songs with lyrics that pun on 'cat' desires. Atwood is deliberately blunt and unabashed in her puns. *Angel Catbird* also becomes a fulfilment for Atwood's fantastic imagination and her interest in transformational mythological beings. As she explains to Hudson, she had "been drawing flying cats with

addressing more complex themes and socio-political issues. See Michael Hirsh and Patrick Loubert, *The Great Canadian Comic Books*. The 1980s onwards, are called the Iron Age of comics in America, with Watchman and The Dark Knight Returns describing antiheroes and stories that deconstructed the genre. This also led to much controversy regarding violence and censorship of comic books owing to their darker themes and violent tone. Darowski, "The Superhero Narrative and the Graphic Novel," 10.

[40] Hudson, "The Story Behind Margaret Atwood's Bonkers New Comic About a Flying Cat-Bird Superhero."

[41] Hudson, "The Story Behind Margaret Atwood's Bonkers New Comic About a Flying Cat-Bird Superhero."

[42] Hudson, "The Story Behind Margaret Atwood's Bonkers New Comic About a Flying Cat-Bird Superhero."

[43] Atwood, *Angel Catbird Vol.1,* 32.

[44] Atwood, 43.

[45] Atwood, 55.

wings since about the age of six."[46] In the graphic novel series, Atwood includes pages on how the characters come to life in the hands of illustrator Johnnie Christmas and colouring artist Tamra Bonvillain, taking into account her own imagination regarding how Angel Catbird and other characters should look. Thus the process of creating the visual-scape is as important for Atwood as scriptwriting. We can see her active engagement with the text and the storytelling, by this inclusion. While many may wonder at her experimentation with genre and form, after winning so many accolades, she consciously embraces the new, owning the freedom that has accompanied age and celebrity. Replying to Hudson, she says, "I'm so old…Why do anything that isn't fun?"[47] I see Atwood using this flexibility to write and talk more directly about ecological and environmental concerns.[48]

Esther Susan Csorba analyses Atwood's use of the superhero figure, as an unconventional one.[49] She thinks that Atwood does not conform to the usual tropes of the superhero fighting for justice and truth, having a sidekick or a best friend that complements his characteristics, or a love interest who does not know the real identity of the caped superhero.[50] Angel Catbird here fights for survival, and actually has two quasi human love interests—Cate Leone and Atheen Owl. Cate knows his Strig Feleedus identity as well, and helps him in his transition, as he assumes the identity Angel Catbird with its confusing natural tendencies of bird, cat and man.[51] According to Csorba, Atwood has written this

[46] Hudson, "The Story Behind Margaret Atwood's Bonkers New Comic About a Flying Cat-Bird Superhero."

[47] Hudson, "The Story Behind Margaret Atwood's Bonkers New Comic About a Flying Cat-Bird Superhero."

[48] See Note 49 and pp 11 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[49] Esther Susan Csorba, "Unlikely Superhero: Margaret Atwood's Angel Catbird."

[50] Esther Susan Csorba, "Unlikely Superhero: Margaret Atwood's Angel Catbird."

[51] See pp 72 of the Introduction to this thesis, where the struggle within Strig is discussed, as he assumes his new multispecies identity. See also Atwood's introduction to Volume 1 of the *Angel Catbird* series where she reflects on her creation--"[h]e would be a combination of cat, owl, and human being, and he would thus have an identity conflict – do I save this baby robin, or do I eat it? But he would be able to understand both sides of

witty graphic novel series for "superreaders," as it is a "metacomic," playing on the conventions of superhero comic books like Superman, Batman, Captain Marvel, Wonder Woman, Plastic Man, The Green Lantern, The Human Torch, among many others.[52] Douglas Wolk explains metacomics as those "aimed at an audience steeped in the lore of the medium."[53] As an example, Strig's pet cat Ding creates an echo of Batman's Ace, or Superman's Krypto. Joseph J. Darowski explains that Superman Comics, created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, tapped into the existing traditions of superhero comics and included all the recognisable elements in the form of a single character and a narrative that codified the genre and its elements, establishing the generic conventions that would then be imitated or changed in further superhero comic book creations.[54] Joseph Campbell identifies the pattern of classical myths that are incorporated in the superhero's journey—from a call to adventure, the initial refusal of such a call, the involvement of fantastical beings,

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the question. He would be a walking, flying carnivore's dilemma." Through his confusion, we also become aware of conflicting species interests. Atwood, "Introduction," *Angel Catbird, Vol.1,* 8.

[52] Esther Susan Csorba, "Unlikely Superhero: Margaret Atwood's Angel Catbird." While Csorba does not explicitly refer to Captain planet, it becomes crucial to remember this enduring animated figure, when considering the multiple sources from which Angel Catbird is created as a spoof on superhero comics and their expected tropes. The American animated television series Captain Planet and the Planeteers by Barbara Pyle and Ted Turner had an overt environmentalist message, sensitizing viewers to the idea of Gaia, "the spirit of the Earth," who invokes the power of the five elements in the form of five rings sent to 5 young people from the different continents, their power combining to invoke Captain Planet. The superhero fights the eco-villains and departs with the message, "The power is yours," shifting attention to the fact that long-lasting change lay in the hands of the viewers and young people across the planet. Angel Catbird is very different from Captain Planet as while intends to solve problems, he is unable to do so on his own, requiring help from other quasi animals, more skilled than him. He does not have superpowers like Captain Planet, except that he can fly and has the spirit of a superhero, inspired by his knowledge of how superheroes must behave! The episodes of Captain Planet would be followed by a clip called "Planeteer Alert" that would discuss different social-political-environmental issues, connecting the animated series with real-world problems, motivating young viewers to be part of the solution, rather than exist in despair or feed the problems facing the planet in its day. This aspect can be seen mirrored by Atwood through the factoids placed strategically at the bottom of pages of Angel Catbird, using readers' engagement with Strig to create awareness regarding extinction.
See George Bass, "How we made Captain Planet and the Planeteers," Interview with Barbara Pyle, *The Guardian*, Jan 20, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/jan/20/how-we-made-captain-planet-and-the-planeteers

[53] Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (United States: Hachette Books, 2008).

[54] Joseph J. Darowski, "The Superhero Narrative and the Graphic Novel," *Critical Insights: The Graphic Novel* (2014): 3-16.

superpowers, secret disguises and death defying battles finally fought by the superhero.[55] In the American prototype of the heroic journey, we see a community living in harmony, till it is suddenly threatened by an evil power or a villain, when "a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out this redemptive task," of restoring harmony to the people.[56] After the battle between the hero and the villain, the community returns to its "paradisiacal condition," and the superhero also "recedes into obscurity."[57] *Angel Catbird*, being a 'metacomic' or a spoof on the traditions of Golden Age superhero comic, functions differently as the community threatened by the "evil" Dr. Muroid, is that of quasi non-human beings, whose happy nights at the 'Catastrophe' are destroyed by Muroid's attack. Human beings that are not half-animal, are not focused upon by the narrative,[58] as they are not yet affected by Muroid's plans. Also Angel Catbird has no special powers or technology at his disposal, except that he can fly, like many other half-birds in this graphic novel, and therefore help carry other participants in this battle to and fro. Atwood ruptures any sense of uniqueness that Angel Catbird might harbour within himself, as there are so many other half-human and half non-human characters populating 'Catastrophe' as well as the book, with better skills and prowess. Angel Catbird does not impact the world the way Superman does in his narratives. He just happens to be at the site of action. Characters around him turn out to be cleverer and more effective, creating humour and subverting expectations, yet gathering enough attention to further Atwood's aim in creating this book, appealing for the

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[55] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (NY: Princeton UP, 1949), mentioned in Darowski, "The Superhero Narrative and the Graphic Novel," 4.

[56] Darowski, "The Superhero Narrative and the Graphic Novel," 4. Also see John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett, *The Myth of the American Superhero* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eardmans Publishing Company, 2002), 6.

[57] Darowski, "The Superhero Narrative and the Graphic Novel," 6.

[58] Humans who do not transform into non-humans, form the blurred backdrop in some panels, suggesting a larger universe that remains at the fringes, but not central to the present narrative, in a reversal of the way in which non-human characters are usually at the fringes of an anthropocentric text.

safety of cats and birds.

Atwood and her partner, late Graeme Gibson's love for birdwatching as well as conservation is well known.[59] They both helped found the Pelee Island Bird Observatory (PIBO) in 2003 which functions as an important node among a chain of other observation stations within the Canada Migration Monitoring Network on avifauna. Atwood explains that PIBO's "chief mission," was the counting of birds,[60] as without those accurate statistics, it was not possible to convey the losses over the distances travelled by birds in the face of inhospitable climatic regions that birds would earlier migrate to. She sees such gathering and dissemination of data as crucial towards the use of scientists working on environmental change. This also therefore explains the enormous amount of data built into Angel Catbird, a confluence of humour and serious statistics. Atwood is aware of her celebrity status and uses it to maximum impact to create awareness regarding environmental and ecological issues.[61] As noted by Grant Munroe, in his article in *The Walrus* in 2020, "interest in

[59] Atwood and late Graeme Gibson were recently awarded the *Douglas H. Pimlott Award,* "for their outstanding contributions to Canadian birds and nature conservation." Sabine Dietz, Nature Canada, March 30, 2022, https://naturecanada.ca/news/press-releases/douglas-h-pimlott-award-recipients-margaret-atwood-and-them-late-graeme-gibson/. Atwood also wrote a foreword for a later edition of Gibson's book, *The Bedside Book of Birds: An Avian Miscellany*, which compiles poems, non-fiction, fiction and folktales on birds collated by Gibson himself. Atwood poem, "Vultures," is also included in this book by Gibson. See Hillel Italie, "Birds as revelations: Atwood writes foreword for Gibson book," *AP*, March 30, 2021, https://apnews.com/article/wildlife-birds-graeme-gibson-margaret-atwood-canada-b94d195ea8ba23e5c2011ecba0fb4577. Atwood's poetry in the *Dearly* collection also reflects her growing concern for birds and cats in equal measure, discussed in more detail on pp 424-426 of this Conclusion.

[60] Grant Munroe, "How Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson Built a Bird Sanctuary," *The Walrus,* Sept 2017, https://thewalrus.ca/how-margaret-atwood-and-graeme-gibson-built-a-bird-sanctuary/

[61] See page 11 of the Introduction to this thesis. Marinette Grimbeek observes in her thesis (2017) that Atwood uses her status as a renowned writer to further various environmental causes (37). Marinette Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism: Apocalypse and Satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy,* (PhD diss., Karlstad University Studies, 2017:15), 39. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1089622/FULLTEXT02.pdf In a 2003 interview with Halliwell, responding to a question asking her whether she was an activist, Atwood answers that she separates her life as a citizen from that of a writer. However, we see in the same interview she concedes that despite this separation that she feels she enacts, she has to often act as a spokesperson on various concerns in her role as a writer. See Atwood, "Awaiting the Perfect Storm," Interview by Martin Halliwell, *Waltzing Again: New and Selected Conversations with Margaret Atwood*, ed. Earl G. Ingersoll (Princeton, NJ: Ontario Review Press, 2006), 263.

birdwatching has grown since the couple took it up."[62]

In February 2016, National Conservation Charity of Nature Canada launched an initiative, "Keep Cats Safe and Save Bird Lives,"[63] raising awareness regarding mortality of birds and cats, with the aim of curtailing "the number of unsupervised house cats roaming outside,"[64] as house cats wandering outside are often unable to navigate roads, meeting with car accidents and also causing bird deaths. *Angel Catbird* was written by Atwood and co-crafted with the illustrators, supporting this initiative and providing a quirky but popular way of attracting attention to the cause by involving readers' imagination as well as providing them with crucial facts and information, as every page of the graphic novel series is peppered with factoids regarding bird and cat extinction.[65] With the extinction of bird species in Canada rising from 47 in 2001 to 86 in 2014, it has become an alarming situation threatening to fulfil Rachel Carson's description of the still landscape bereft of birdsong in *Silent Spring*.[66] Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose plead for awareness of a "multispecies city," that moves beyond the anthropocentric assumption that cities are only living spaces for humans."[67] *Angel Catbird* makes us visually aware of a multispecies city, by depicting characters espousing both human and non-human selves as well as many non-humans participating in the larger narrative of the text. The graphic novel series also provides directions on ways in which other species can be cared for, by expanding our awareness of

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[62] Munroe, "How Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson Built a Bird Sanctuary."

[63] Nature Canada, "Taking Care of Cats and Birds," *Cats and Birds,* https://catsandbirds.ca/

[64] Nature Canada, "Taking Care of Cats and Birds."

[65] Most of the factoids focus on how cats can inadvertently cause bird deaths, if unsupervised and the extinction rate of birds.

[66] See pp 13-15 and Notes 59-60, 64 of the Introduction to this thesis, for more details on Carson's seminal work and its impact on environmental activist writing.

[67] Thom van Dooren and Deborah Bird Rose, "Storied-Places in a Multispecies City," *Humanimalia* 3.2 (2012):1-27. https://doi.org/10.52537/humanimalia.10046.

the world we inhabit. It is important to note that in the pages of the graphic novels, fantasy and reality co-exist, both feeding each other and yet remaining separate. For the tale remains in the space of imagination as the part animal and part human creatures are not all technologically crafted, being rather a mixture of myth and fantasy. However the statistics regarding extinction at the bottom of the pages and the directions for care of non-humans remain rooted in the reality we inhabit today. The confluence of the two both suspends disbelief and reconstructs what we believe by altering perception.

According to Ursula K. Heise, "biodiversity itself becomes a measure for what we value about nature as well as, more indirectly about ourselves, so that biodiversity loss comes to be felt and understood as a sign of something that we lost in the course of modernization and/or colonization."[68] In *Angel Catbird*, the narrative woven around species extinction is highlighted in a different vein, as it becomes a space for considering multispecies ethics as well as biodiversity loss, from a biocentric perspective. The idea of multispecies justice is given visual representation as part human and part animal characters fight for their survival, all coming together to battle extinction at the hands of Dr. Muroid. In a twist to the tale of humans causing species extinction, the half-rat and half-human Muroid plans his project of annihilating the human race and all other species except rats. When the other quasi-humans become aware of Muroid's plan, they rally their forces to conserve biodiversity, as for these multispecies characters to survive, all species need to survive, as they are an amalgamation of multiple interests. At the same time, appropriating Heise's analysis, it is true that the graphic novel series gains traction as human interests are woven into the narrative as well, by blurring the lines between human and non-human. As the prominent human characters in

[68] Ursula K Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 23. This perspective sees the disappearance of species as a loss to human experience of other non-humans. While this is an anthropocentric perspective, this often becomes the only means of motivating conservation efforts. The "we" is of course too varied, as different regions, nations and indigenous communities would see nature and themselves in relation to all non-humans differently.

the text are themselves part animal, they experience biodiversity loss both as victim and perpetrator, and changes the way readers would relate to the non-human universe and perceive biodiversity loss, by giving humans a stake in the matter as well. In Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* trilogy, decimation of the human species along with many others creates the narrative frame within which other environmentalist concerns are raised, as has been discussed in Chapter 1 and 2 of this thesis. According to Heise, this explains "why we care" for the fate of other species, "not just as individuals but as communities and cultures."[69] These narratives of extinction also become important in involving larger groups of individuals in conservation efforts by connecting the survival of the human species with all the rest. Thus Heise places great value on these "broader structures of imagination," or extinction narratives. The stories we tell are also an indicator of what we value and wish to mourn, hence such narratives become significant in including and highlighting biodiversity loss and extinction as "cultural issues," rather than "issues of science."[70] For without a cultural valuation of species, data remains too remote and unfathomable for communities and individuals to process or include as part of their life stories. Amanda's bio-art installations, discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, therefore seek to disrupt the personal narratives of individuals viewing her art, by creating a tremor of shock, as extinction is brought alive by her project of 'Vulterization.'[71] Language fails to convey what her visuals do, as the vultures eat away at the words created with the carcasses of animals.[72]

Most narratives of extinction rely on the elegiac or tragic template to portray loss of

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[69] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 5.

[70] Heise, *Imagining Extinction,* 5.

[71] See pp 163-167 of Chapter 1 of this thesis for details on Amanda's bio-art installations and their role in narrating extinction.

[72] See pp 163-167 of Chapter 1 of this thesis. See also Atwood, *Oryx and Crake,* 287.

species, who have vanished for no fault of their own, and thereby victims of human exploitation of nature. Mourning and melancholia regarding extinction, both mobilizes emotions as well as functions as a political act sometimes, as the narrative chooses to evoke mourning, "where society sees nothing worthy of grief."[73] Fear of extinction and mourning is used to great effect by Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale*,[74] and *The Testaments*,[75] both analysed in detail in Chapter 1 and 3 of this thesis, as humans can be seen on the verge of extinction, fertility becoming a prized commodity, with toxicity of the environment and massive climatic changes.[76] Most babies are born "shredders" without limbs or features and have to be killed when born.[77] As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, the speaker's act of holding onto memories of her past and present and recording them in the form of tapes in *The Handmaid's Tale*, becomes a political act of resistance as well in a culture that tries to erase her experiences and memories. While she is never much of a radical by her own admission[78] and largely overwhelmed by fear and concern for keeping her daughter safe, wherever she is, it is in mourning the loss of past freedom and an earth supportive to life, that the narrative in *The Handmaid's Tale* registers itself as an elegy for a present that we are fast losing. The Hulu series on *The Handmaid's Tale*,[79] extends this mourning in the visuals, as the speaker

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[73] Catriona Mortimer Sandilands explains the elegiac mode of narrating extinction as a "potentially politicized way of preserving that object in the midst of a culture that fails to recognize its significance." "Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies," *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, eds. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 333. Also see Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 34.

[74] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985; repr. Canada: Seal Books, 1986).

[75] Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2019).

[76] See pp 374-380 of Chapter 3 of this thesis, for details.

[77] See pp 124 of Chapter 1 of this thesis for details.

[78] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 338-339.

[79] See Note 9 above. Atwood served as the consulting producer for the web series directed by Bruce Miller, which adapted and extended Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, even as the author was writing *The Testaments.* In an interview with Laura Bradley, she explained that while she had influence over the way the web series panned out, she did not have power to finalize changes. Thus the series takes on a life of its own,

is seen conceiving and carrying her daughter to full term, unlike most other women, suffering miscarriages or crib deaths. The scene where the speaker, identified clearly as June[80] in the web series, stares at an empty nursery full of empty cribs in the hospital where her daughter is born,[81] becomes a poignant scene of mourning, as she feels the pain of all the mothers who have lost their children overnight.

Atwood's poetic narratives in the *Dearly* [82] collection also employ the tragic to create awareness regarding human impact on non-human life, through violence, insensitivity, callousness and lack of understanding regarding the interconnected web of life. Many poems in *Dearly* dwell on the fate of birds at the hands of humans, drawing from Rachel Carson's preoccupation with the loss of birdsong[83] as a central metaphor for ecological imbalance and the precursor to further extinction. In the poem "Feather,"[84] Atwood describes a slaughtered bird, with its torn skin and "calligraphy of wrecked wings,"[85] seeing in its demise and interrupted flight, our own failures and loss. She imagines picking up a "plume from the slaughter,"[86] which she sharpens and prepares as a quill to 'draw' this poem. Atwood's poetry in her latest collection takes on a solemn and mournful air, as she takes the reader

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extending and expanding Gilead beyond Atwood's text. See Laura Bradley, "Margaret Atwood Has "Done Some Yelling" Over the Handmaid's Tale TV Series," *Vanity Fair*, Sept 5, 2019, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/09/margaret-atwood-the-testaments-handmaids-tale.

[80] See Note 129 of Chapter 1 of this thesis, for a brief discussion on the ambiguity in the name of the speaker of *The Handmaid's Tale* and Gilead's practice of erasing the Handmaid's names. The web series showcases Offred consciously remembering her name 'June' and encouraging other Handmaids to do the same as part of her resistance to Gilead.

[81] Bruce Miller, dir., *The Handmaid's Tale,* Season 1, Episode 2.

[82] Atwood, *Dearly*: *Poems (*United Kingdom: Penguin Random House, 2020).

[83] See Note 66 above.

[84] Atwood, *Dearly*: *Poems,* 73.

[85] Atwood, 73.

[86] Atwood, 73.

through the bird's panic, its "eye spiralling down," as it dies.[87] The unawareness of the birds is contrasted with human awareness and lack of action in the poem "Fatal Light Awareness,"[88] where she describes birds dying owing to human laziness. The speaker of the poem laments that she didn't hang the lattice that would've prevented the illusion of trees by the mirror-like façade of her window, which the thrush crashes into and is killed by impact. While many birds' songs are thus lost by crashing into high-rises, their feathers falling everywhere, still warm, unlike snow and yet like snow, as they melt into nothing,[89] such deaths are seen as of no consequence by those fashioning the buildings with mirror-like façades. The poem particularly highlights the close link between the loss of non-human life with human ones, in the near future. "We are a dying symphony,"[90] reflects the speaker, the foreknowledge of our impending extinction, linked to the loss of other species, being a startling contrast to our lack of urgent action. Some of the poems in the *Dearly* collection also return to themes explored in earlier poetry collections, analysed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.[91] "Short Takes on Wolves," tries to reflect the impenetrability of non-human experience as the "wolf doesn't want to see" the human wanting to 'see' or investigate the wolf.[92] The speaker imagines how "wolf nightmares," would include humans, muzzles,

[87] Atwood, *Dearly*: *Poems,* 73.

[88] Atwood, 74.

[89] Atwood, 74.

[90] Atwood, 74.

[91] Chapter 3 focuses on detailed reading of poems written by Atwood between 1964-1980, particularly from *The Animals in That Country, The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Procedures for Underground* and *The Circle Game*. The poem "Blizzard," in the *Dearly* collection for example is reminiscent of Atwood's poem "Woman Skating" from *Procedures for Underground*, as well as sections of the novel Surfacing, evoking the memory of the speaker's mother, that keeps returning to haunt her. In "Blizzard," she wonders at the recurrence of the narratives in her imagination surrounding her late mother, asking why she cannot let go. The poem "Short Takes on Wolves" from the *Dearly* collection, discussed in the next section, also extends the reflections in "Dreams of the Animals," from the collection *Procedures for Underground.*

[92] Atwood, *Dearly*: *Poems,* 76. Also see pp 183-184 of Chapter 2 of this thesis that describes Also Leopold's experience of the non-human gaze.

needles, cages and cars that try to restrict and control the wolf's movements, while "wolf happy dreams," would be of the "endless taiga" stone dens and the flesh of caribou, its food.[93] By contrasting human perception of the wolf with that of the wolf's regarding human "creatures,"[94] Atwood breaks down any assumptions of human perception regarding the wilderness and its creatures. On the other hand, "Plasticene Suite" holds together multiple poems on plastic pollution of the oceans, rendering our geological age "the Plasticene,"[95] coined to extend and exaggerate the nomenclature of the Anthropocene.[96] "It sprouts everywhere, this foliage," of plastic, in trees, "like mistletoe," in marshes and ponds, "like waterlilies," on beaches, like "neo-seaweed/of torn bags, cast wrappers, tangled rope."[97] The poems describe the spread of plastic, killing whales[98] and yielding nothing, like a "useless crop" that cannot be stopped. Extending the pain of extinction from whale babies to human babies, Atwood's poem "Oh Children" in the *Dearly* collection wonders whether there will be a future generation of children who will know the warblings of birdsong, crickets, mice and lichens.[99] The speaker imagines a future where there are stones, waves and sunsets, but no pines or mosses, where children grow up in caves with artificial oxygen, till there is a power failure and they die as well. The plaintive cry, "Oh children, will you grow up?"[100]

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[93] Atwood, *Dearly*: *Poems,* 77.

[94] Atwood, 77.

[95] Atwood, 83.

[96] The naming of the Anthropocene highlights the negative impact that humans have had on planetary geology, with no single species ever reducing "planetary level biological diversity until now," as we have. Philip Cafaro, ""Three ways to think about the sixth mass extinction," *Biological Conservation* 192 (2015): 387, 10.1016/j.biocon.2015.10.017 See Note 63 in the Introduction to this thesis, for earlier discussions on the Anthropocene.

[97] Atwood, *Dearly*: *Poems,* 85.

[98] Atwood, 89.

[99] Atwood, 97.

[100] Atwood, 97.

sounds the note of urgency and the need for immediate action, as Atwood takes on multiple speaking voices through the course of her collection, attempting to startle, engage and unsettle the reader of her poems.

Heise observes that very few conservationists use "comedy" and suggests its importance, as it can provide a different model for perceiving biodiversity loss. Comedy can actually emphasize "contingency"[101] and highlight the improbable and unpredictable, in imagining extinction and survival, both. While Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* cannot be described solely as a comedy, it does use farce and comedy in sections of the text, to keep rupturing a narrative of despair. While for Jimmy/Snowman[102] it is a tragedy, for the Crakers he is a funny entity they both care for and are amused by.[103] Instead of the 'end of nature', the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy points towards "its continually changing futures."[104] Comedy facilitates a different way of approaching extinction, by involving both emotions and cognitive clarity in making readers aware of the way they relate to themselves as a species and to other non-humans involved in the process of extinction. Atwood also utilises comedy in *Angel Catbird* to generate sympathy for the cause, without sounding preachy, involving us in tales, where humour and crisis create the necessary tension and relief needed in taking the narrative forward. Joseph Meeker in *The Comedy of Survival* describes how literary comedy bases itself on the disruption of equilibrium and the recovery of the same. [105] While the tragic and the elegiac creates a sense of irreversibility of loss, the comic mode changes

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[101] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 14.

[102] See Note 161 of Chapter 1 of this thesis for details on the significance of Jimmy adopting the pseudonym 'Snowman.'

[103] See pp 126-127 of Chapter 1.

[104] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 51.

[105] Joseph Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic* (1974; repr. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 16. Also see Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 50.

the approach and keeps hope alive. In Douglas Adams and Mark Carwardine's *Last Chance to See*, comic parallels are drawn between human and non-human behaviour and shortfall in adaptation. Instead of questioning how species became extinct, Adams and Carwardine's narrative wonders at how any survive, thereby flipping the perspective and keeping the readers engaged alongside creating awareness regarding startling similarities and differences between humans and non-humans both struggling to survive on an increasingly inhospitable planet.[106] *Angel Catbird* also utilises comedy to create this sense of solidarity as the half-human and non-human characters all unite despite all differences[107] in the face of their impending extinction. The narrative includes difference of opinion among characters, scuffles between them and tempers raging in discontent, making the characters real and relatable.[108] At the same time it remains light hearted and mock-heroic, successful in drawing attention to certain species[109] on the verge of extinction, calling on other species such as human readers to change their ways to conserve what is left. According to Heise,

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[106] Douglas Adams and Mark Carwardine, *Last Chance to See* (New York: Ballantine, 1990). Also see Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 53.

[107] In a dramatic scene where Cate finds Strig romancing Atheen Owl, the animosity between cats and birds erupts to great comic effect, as the two fight over Strig, calling out names like "Beak Nose!" "Mouse Stealer!" "Kitten Killer!" and "Egg Sucker!"(21) Strig, realizing that he possibly loves them both, tries to make them see a shared sense of urgency in Muroid's plan, as "Rats eat birds' eggs…So a world of rats would mean no birds.."(22) the possibility of personal loss affects Atheen Owl and she becomes ready to join the battle against Muroid and shakes hands with her species rival Cate, stating "We can settle our dispute over the feathered fur guy later,"(23) as they agree to overlook differences, for the sake of present survival. See Atwood, *Angel Catbird*, Vol 2.

[108] When Cate invites Strig to Catastrophe, the night club for all the half-cats, Strig finds it difficult to gain entry in human form and also because he is half-bird, which is food for many of these half-cats, who recognise him as the half-cat-bird who saved the bird they were chasing, instead of eating it.(44-45) Cate explains that "they don't like full humans here." (48) When Strig finally transforms into his Angel Catbird form, after Cate hits him on the head with a bottle to accelerate his transformation in half catbird and human, the other half-cats vying for Cate's attention, protest, calling him a "freak."(51) At this juncture Cate intervenes and highlights their shared quasi animal features, "Face it, half-cats –we're all freaks,"(51) and that he was "cat enough" for her! (52) See Atwood, *Angel Catbird,* Vol 1.

[109] Cats, mice, birds, act as "flagship species" standing in for all the taxa not discussed in this graphic novel narrative. Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 24. Species selected for campaigns by scientists are termed "charismatic megafauna" by Heise. (24) While some are "keystone species" occupying critical positions in the ecological food web, there also appears to be a 'taxonomic bias' (24), in the inclusion and exclusion of species from extinction narratives.

Adams and Carwardine's book shows that conservation of biodiversity can result from "human commitment to value biological otherness," as well as "shared vulnerability to contingency."[110] I think that *Angel Catbird* works in a similar fashion, as the half-human characters all work together to defeat Muroid and save each other. The sense of shared vulnerability enables this course of action. Hence through Atwood's text as well as Adams and Carwardine's account, extinction narratives become a possibility towards change rather than an endpoint without a solution.

Atwood's recent participation in the Future Library Project,[111] conceived by Katie Paterson, where a hundred artists each contribute an unseen piece of their writing to be locked for one hundred years, is seen by Fiona Tolan as an act of faith—both in the possibilities of the future and in "the value of her art."[112] The project holds on to the hope that a hundred years from now, there will still be humans reading the anthology printed from the paper produced from the trees planted in Nordmarka, north of Oslo, for this purpose. Such hope is also sustained by the telling of stories that can create "neural pathways," that "inscribe" the need for change within readers, quicker than facts ever can.[113] In her essay "Literature and the Environment," in *Burning Questions*, Atwood highlights the importance of breaking through the walls of silence regarding human culpability in environmental degradation. She explains that "the inability to speak encourages the unspeakable, and secrecy is an important tool not only of power but of atrocity."[114] Stefanie Walter, Michael

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[110] Heise, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species,* 54.

[111] Atwood, "Scribbler Moon," *Future Library, https://www.futurelibrary.no/#/years/2014.* Katie Paterson imagines Atwood's "words growing through the trees," as an "unseen energy," finding realization a hundred years from now, "the tree rings becoming chapters in a book." Atwood sees Paterson's project as a "tribute to the written word," as a means of transmission "through time."

[112] Tolan, " 'I could say that, too': An Interview with Margaret Atwood, " *Contemporary Women's Writing,* 457.

[113] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 143.

[114] Atwood, 139.

Brüggemann and Sven Engesser discuss the dangers that the 'spiral of silence' and "echo chambers" posit for discussions on anthropogenic climate change.[115] While there is widespread acceptance of the reality of climate change among scientists, there are pockets of people still in denial, who might avoid expressing their opinion publicly for fear of isolation, given the majority opinion on climate change and environmental problems. The internet further facilitates existing in such a 'spiral of silence' as it is possible to remain unidentified, silent and anonymous on critical issues as well as inhabit online forums that voice only opinions favourable to one's existing perceptions. This is further amplified by the way the algorithms of these online forums match people's preferences and opinions with the pages that show up for them,[116] locking people into what Walter, Bruggemann and Engesser call the "echo chambers,"[117] that bring together people sharing similar ideas and beliefs, preventing any form of critical reasoning and dialogue to cultivate difference of opinion. This might not portend well for the Anthropocene, as it creates pockets of extreme opinion that remain unaddressed or unrecognized by any form of critical dialogue. According to Cass R. Sunstein,[118] it can lead to polarization in society. Individuals reading content in the "echo chamber" can mistake the exchange of opinion there as the majority opinion and refrain from voicing any dissonant opinion, thereby magnifying the 'spiral of silence' processes.[119] I feel

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[115] Stefanie Walter, Michael Brüggemann and Sven Engesser, "Echo Chambers of Denial: Explaining User Comments on Climate Change," *Environmental Communication* 12.2 (2018): 204-217, doi: 10.1080/17524032.2017.1394893.

[116] Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding From You* (London: Penguin Group, 2011).

[117] Walter, Michael Brüggemann and Sven Engesser, "Echo Chambers of Denial: Explaining User Comments on Climate Change," 2.

[118] Cass R. Sunstein, "The Law of Group Polarization," in *Debating Deliberative Democracy*, eds. J. S. Fishkin and P. Laslett (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 80-101.

[119] Walter, Michael Brüggemann and Sven Engesser, "Echo Chambers of Denial: Explaining User Comments on Climate Change," 2. Also see Pablo Porten-Cheé, and Christiane Eilders, "Spiral of silence online: How online communication affects opinion climate perception and opinion expression regarding the climate change debate," *Studies in Communication Sciences* 15, no.1 (2015): 143-150, doi: 10.1016/j.scoms.2015.03.002.

that this issue is important in my investigation, as through this thesis I have tried to comprehend the nature of Atwood's ecocritical narratives and her attempt to represent diverse voices and opinions regarding the environment through multiple characters and voices that create a polyphony of approaches to impending ecological disaster, as discussed through the three chapters of this thesis. While the apocalyptic narrative may be seen as ineffective by many theorists, Chapter 1 has engaged with the way in which Atwood has utilised the form of the 'ustopia'[120] and the 'immanent apocalypse'[121] to startle readers and awaken sensitivity to the multiple possible futures, depending on action in the present. Chapter 2 has engaged with the many forms of radical and revolutionary environmentalism emerging as a response to climate change and ecological imbalance and the possibilities as well as challenges of all such activist action, as explored through Atwood's narratives. Chapter 3 has further engaged with how Atwood narrates the challenges and possibilities offered by representation of 'nature' in literature as well as the academic and activist response of ecofeminism and its perceived alliance of exploitation of women and nature as the root cause of environmental crisis seen today. In all the chapters, approaching the many facets of Atwood's ecocritical writing, I have found her unsettling any "echo chamber" of opinions and breaking through the "spiral of silence" that can undo the processes of critical thinking about environmental issues.

Atwood in the essay "The Writer as Political Agent? Really?" in *Burning Questions*, disagrees with the notion that all writers are political agents, rather seeing the functioning of writers to politics as a child that calls out the Emperor being naked, because that is the child's

[120] See Note 1 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[121] Stefan Skrimshire, "Eternal Return of Apocalypse,"*Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. S.Skrimshire (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010). See Note 315 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

naiveté.[122] She fights for writers' freedom to tell the stories that they wish to, emphasizing the importance of the "space allowed for the far-ranging human imagination and to the unfettered human voice," as the true mark of a society moving towards freedom.[123] Atwood insists that writing might involve itself with issues such as world peace and women's position in society and suppression of their rights, however, "to say that it must," is "sinister."[124] At the same time in "Literature and the Environment," Atwood insists that speaking about the environment is among the "good and worthy things," that a writer is expected to write about, as without the environment—the air, water and food that sustains humans, "there wouldn't be any literature at all because we ourselves would not exist."[125] Being extremely practical as well as imaginative, Atwood wonders about the kind of stories that can be told, as we can neither go back in time, nor completely discard technology that forms such an intrinsic part of our daily lives. She keeps reflecting on the impact that she can have as a writer and the possibilities of her art.[126] Her frankness is startling as she expresses her helplessness about the "increasingly desperate situation," as well as her inability to find an answer—as she states, "I can't tell you because I don't know."[127] However her vision is not hopeless, as she explains that as long there is hope, there will be stories, and the desire to "listen to them, transmit them, and derive meaning from them…."[128]

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[122] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 133.

[123] Atwood, 135.

[124]. Atwood, 135.

[125] Atwood, 139.

[126] Grimbeek in her thesis reflects on the value of Atwood's writing skills, enunciating that "…Margaret Atwood the writer does have an important message. And this she gets to deliver precisely because of her art." *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism: Apocalypse and Satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy,* 41.

[127] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 146.

[128] Atwood, 146.

Atwood analyses the basic framework of stories told about the environment, and the forms they usually take, from being about survival in extreme conditions to being the backdrop for stories about love or ageing, holding onto hope that such writing about the environment may be a way to access another dimension from where the storyteller could "bring back something from the otherworld,"[129] like a talisman, that could perhaps "protect us, even a little."[130] I see Atwood's writing as performing this crucial function, protecting the readers from giving in to absolute dejection. In her novel *Surfacing,* studied in detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis, we have seen the narrator of the text seeking such a talisman by trying to cross over to a state of consciousness and a dimension where she can be participant in the mysteries of nature, through alteration of perception. Atwood in the later essay on "Literature and the Environment," hopes that through writing, and storytelling, "perhaps we will once more talk with animals, and be instructed by plants."[131] Hope remains alive in the possibilities of what writers may achieve and what readers may perceive. As particularly seen through Atwood's poetry analysed in Chapter 3 of this thesis, the lines between human and non-human perception blur as she creates narratives of mystical encounters with the wilderness. The possibilities are still endless, as she wonders, "Who knows what forms our metaphors will take?"[132] as her writing journeys unknown pathways into alternative forms of perceiving the interconnected web of the human and non-human universe. In the essay "Trees of life. Trees of Death,"[133] Atwood discusses her childhood experience with trees and infestation of insects on trees, as her father was an entomologist. She recognizes human

[129] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 147.

[130] Atwood, 147.

[131] Atwood, 147.

[132] Atwood, 147.

[133] Atwood, 67.

ambivalence towards forests combining fear and awe at the same time. Towards the end of the essay, she turns to the present problem of deforestation stemming from such ambivalence, taking us towards our self-destruction. Direct and urgent, her voice cries out to the readers, "If we cut down all the trees in the world, we'll be doomed."[134] Atwood traces fear of forests in humans arising from unfamiliarity with them and stores much faith in childhood association with forests, to change our response to the natural world. In *Surfacing*, the narrator is able to reconnect with the wilderness in a way that her companions are not able to, as she grew up near the forest. Atwood's own childhood, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis,[135] gave her such an opportunity to experience a close communion with forests and be part of the wilderness that her later city life did not. Atwood's children's fiction therefore dwells on children's connection to the natural world and its impact on their consciousness. In the children's picture book *Up in the Tree,*[136] written and illustrated by Atwood herself, two children are seen enjoying their time up in a tree, in the sun and the rain, swinging from the branches, crawling among the leaves, with birds for company. However this enjoyment lasts till they have the ladder with which they can climb up the tree and also return to their home, if they so wish to. When the ladder is suddenly taken away by some hedgehogs, the children panic and the beautiful tree, becomes a "horrible" one in their experience.[137] As they run out of pancakes and tea and hot water, amenities from the world of 'culture,' this journey into 'nature' becomes a source of terror for these children as they wonder if they shall be forever trapped in the tree. Hence the utopia of the child's imagination very soon turns into a dystopia when the connecting pathway between the

[134] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 75.

[135] See pp 32-35 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[136] Atwood, *Up in the Tree* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978; London: Bloomsbury, 2010). Citations will be referring to the Bloomsbury edition.

[137] Atwood, *Up in the Tree,* 21.

child's existing world and the utopia imagined is suddenly closed. Chapter 1 of this thesis has studied Atwood's fascination with the form of the 'ustopia,' through which she is able to hold on to enclaves of hope even within frightening dystopian scenarios. In this children's tale as well, hope is renewed as the children's "friend," a great big bird arrives to help them get down from the tree, when they can finally declare, "We are Free!! We Are Free!!"[138] It is interesting to note that right after, they want to "climb back" to their "home in the tree,"[139] signalling their need to inhabit their utopia with the safeguard of a permanent ladder through which they can climb up and down from the tree. The final image in the book depicts the children sleeping soundly on the tree, with a ladder embedded on the tree trunk and the owl for company. The illustrations by Atwood show the children enjoying their interaction with the natural world as well as the fear in their eyes when they feel trapped in the very world they thought of as paradise. In the space of a short tale, Atwood showcases the importance of the children spending time in nature as well as the way in which cultural artefacts become an undeniable part of such experiences as well, as the children want to have the best of both worlds. Chapter 3 of this thesis has delved into characters in Atwood's novels teetering between the realms of culture and nature and describing the narrators' desire as well as fear to be in a space that is boundless and unknown.[140] The children's book reflects a similar pattern, though represented as a simple innocuous child's tale, describing the pleasures and thrills of living in nature and the associated fear of losing cultural contours and identity. The picture book therefore becomes a means of kick-starting a conversation between children and adults, possibly reading out the story to the child, on spaces and experiences beyond the realm of the home. It is to be noted that the children reiterate that the tree is their "home" as

[138] Atwood, 24.

[139] Atwood, 26.

[140] See pp 391 of Chapter 3 of this thesis, in particular.

they try to redefine the concept of "home" and belonging, attempting to hold together the pleasure of being in the wild and the comfort of being at home. At the same time, for the critical reader, Atwood through this picture book also problematizes the notion of domesticating the wild that can be seen through the children's attempt at configuring the tree according to their own requirements. In Atwood's children's picture book *Anna's Pet*,[141] published two years later, we see Anna, a city girl visiting her grandparents on their farm and learning about the natural habitat of animals. Anna wants a pet that she can hold on to and in the attempt brings home a toad, worm and snake, and every time her grandparents urge her to see that the animal is unhappy in the artificial environment and encourage her to return the animal to its natural habitat. While it saddens Anna, she understands and reiterates that she wants the toad, the worm and the snake to be "happy,"[142] and places them back in the garden, from where she found them. Being from the city, she has no previous knowledge regarding the life of these animals, and her grandparents gently educate her on co-existing with non-humans and respecting their space. However Anna still wants a pet that she can domesticate and carry back to the city. Her grandmother gets her a tadpole and creates a bowl for the tadpole to grow in.[143] Not knowing about the life cycle of a tadpole, Anna frets that it does not fit into her perception of a pet she can hold in her hand.[144] Atwood's children's book shows how human perception regarding the non-human world is formed in our early years and the importance of inculcating awareness regarding the natural world and its life cycles that need to be left undisturbed for smooth functioning of the ecosystem. Anna's grandfather explains that the tadpole would grow into a frog that Anna would have

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[141] Margaret Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, *Anna's Pet*, illustr. Ann Blades (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Publishers, 1980).

[142] Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, *Anna's Pet*, 8, 18, 28.

[143] Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, 31-32.

[144] Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, 30.

to return to the pond soon, which makes the little girl wistfully exclaim, "I wish I could keep it forever."[145] The grandma's sage advice to Anna both comforts her sense of longing as well as alerts her to the transience of all life, as she says, "it's hard to keep anything forever."[146] The illustrations in the book by Ann Blades show young Anna gazing at the natural world, learning through her sense of wonder and grandparents handholding her to a richer understanding of the living universe she inhabits. They never scold her for disturbing the animals from their natural habitat, rather evoking her emotional response, by suggesting that the worm, snake and toad were not "happy,"[147] leaving Anna to decide on the best course of action and thereby sensitizing her to the importance of becoming aware of the needs and requirements of non-humans, over and above her own need from them. Atwood's children's picture books therefore also become vehicles for starting conversations regarding the need for a biocentric and deep ecological perspective of seeing the non-human universe as valuable for its own sake[148] rather than in terms of its utility to human beings, as well as human embeddedness in this web of life.

Christof Mauch in his essay on "Slow Hope," discussed in detail in the Introduction to this thesis,[149] keeps returning to the story of Prometheus and of Pandora's Box and its similarity with environmental crises faced by us today.[150] While Prometheus stealing fire is likened to man's overreach that has led to ecological disruption and consequent suffering,

[145] Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, 34.

[146] Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, 34.

[147] Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, 8, 18, 28.

[148] See pp 231-232 and Note 212 of Chapter 2 of this thesis for detailed discussions on eco-teleology and biocentric egalitarianism, closely linked with deep ecology philosophy and practice.

[149] See pp 25-27 of the Introduction to this thesis.

[150] Christof Mauch, "Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear," RCC Perspectives Transformations in Environment and Society, no.1 (2019): 40, doi.org/10.5282/rcc/8556.

Pandora's opening of the box, is compared to the release of "ecological curses."[151] Mauch however notes that one thing remained in Pandora's box, "elpis" or the spirit of hope.[152] When I began writing this thesis, I started by asking whether creative narratives could have any impact at all on climate change, biodiversity loss and other environmental disasters in the making.[153] Coming across endless articles on impending doom, I searched for hope in Atwood's stories and interviews, finding a pathway through the darkness in her faith in the resurgence of both human spirit and non-human natures, as well as her faith in the power of writing.[154] While this thesis analyses selected writings by Atwood between 1964 and 2022, that are ecocritical in scope, there remains many possibilities of further work in this domain, particularly exploring Atwood's engagement with alternative media, such as graphic novels, web series and children's books, as well as her Twitter posts and YouTube presence, in greater detail, as she keeps rummaging "Pandora's forgotten box of hope,"[155] drawing into her conversation thinkers, writers, activists and research scholars seeking to be inspired by 'hope.'

Given the reality of climate change and its impact on the globe today, fostering hope regarding the future might seem like "cruel optimism," the condition of "attachment to compromised conditions of possibility," which are unlikely to come true, or are fantastic or

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[151] Mauch, "Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear," 40.

[152] Mauch, 40.

[153] See pp 7-10, 11-15 of the Introduction to this thesis that reflects some of my research and findings regarding the importance of creative writing impacting people's emotions and therefore engaging them in environmental questions. See also pp 454 below, where Atwood and Bill McKibben articulate the same in the documentary *In the Wake of the Flood.*

[154] Atwood's reflection on the power of words, in her poem "Spelling": "A word after a word/after a word is power." Atwood, *True Stories* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1981), 63-64, quoted in Reingard M. Nischik, ed., *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* (United States: Camden House, 2000), 253.

[155] Mauch, "Slow Hope: Rethinking Ecologies of Crisis and Fear," 43.

utopian in their conception.[156] Lauren Berlant further explains the cruelty of the situation lying in the content of this attachment providing a sense of continuity to the subject's desire to continue living and desiring an object, situation or event and the cluster of promises associated with that.[157] Mainstream environmentalists' attachment to the idea of environmental sustainability through technological fixes can also therefore become an obstruction towards addressing the need for deep rooted transformation required in economic systems, consumption patterns and political structures. Cruel optimism can also be seen manifest in narratives that describe the environment as a stable entity that might be restored to its 'pristine' state, thereby encouraging utopian ideations and affects regarding such a reversal to an Edenic state of the environment. Berlant also makes a significant point when he analyses that the investments made by individuals in "objects or scenes of desire," are less about these projections and more about the affects and desires that individuals can keep "magnetized," to them.[158] Therefore such forms of environmentalism require the repetition of affective discourses that can keep alive the idea of such transformation in the world we inhabit. At the same time, unrealistic projections and affective attachment to capitalist and consumerist definitions of "the good life"[159] can hinder actual efforts to address the complexities of ecological degradation and adaptation required to see the world as an assemblage of human and non-human entities, in a state of dynamic transition.[160] This can be particularly seen addressed by Atwood through her representation of the Green cult of the

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[156] Lauren Berlant, "Cruel Optimism," *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 94.

[157] Berlant, "Cruel Optimism," 93-94.

[158] Berlant, "Cruel Optimism," 94.

[159] See Note 13 in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[160] See pp 298, 300 and Note 24 of Chapter 3 of this thesis, discussing Bruno Latour's idea of "The Collective."

God's Gardeners[161] whose discourse requires them to recreate the idea of a lost Eden, and at the same time be aware that the world has changed and can never be the way it was. Thus the Edencliff rooftops,[162] are just that—refurbished portions of terraces and balconies, trying to keep alive the affect connected to restoration of nature and the environment. In Chapter 2 of this thesis, we have seen how the Adams and Eves[163] of the cult struggle to maintain this discourse of optimism, in the face of overwhelming odds. The Waterless Flood[164] they envisage, is both a threshold of destruction and reconstruction for them and they hold on to the dream of a better world, post this apocalyptic scenario. At the same time, Atwood steers clear of making the Gardener discourse completely utopian, by constantly introducing a note of uncertainty in their narrative regarding the future, the Cult followers moving between moments of belief and disbelief, choosing to opt for membership often for reasons of survival rather than optimism regarding the future of the planet or environmentalist goals of transforming existing notions of "the good life" that dark green[165] environmentalism sees as the basis of real change.

The optimism fostered by bright green[166] and light green[167] environmentalists discussing green technologies and lifestyle changes as the road to reversal of climate change, is 'cruel' in this sense, as it nurtures the idea of a future where environmental crises have been resolved. Brian Massumi discusses how intractable the global situation actually is, with

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[161] See Note 295 in the Introduction to this thesis as well as Chapter 2 for a detailed analysis of the God's Gardeners and their environmentalism.

[162] See Note 14 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[163] See pp 220-225 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[164] See Note 92 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[165] See Note 1 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[166] See Note 1 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[167] See Note 1 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

increase in economic inequality, decreasing sanitation and health, "mass displacements of workers and refugees," and increasing conflict between nations, alongside climate change taking a toll on people's lives.[168] On the other hand, a completely pessimistic outlook, that sees no future at all, dooms us all to despair, paralysis and lack of action, as discussed at length in the Introduction to this thesis. I feel that Atwood, through her writing chooses 'hope' rather than optimism, to solve this conundrum in environmentalist writing. In a conversation with Mary Zournazi, Massumi places 'hope' in the present, separate from futuristic projections or predictions based on "rational calculation of outcomes."[169] He explains the power of uncertainty in the present as that leaves room for "manoeuvrability,"[170] opening up the possibility of experimenting and trying alternative avenues instead of projecting success or failure. Atwood's ecocritical narratives woven through her writing over the decades, all clutch on to this precarious present, which in its uncertainty also becomes a threshold of possibilities. In Chapter 1 of this thesis, we have seen how Atwood's speculative fiction really extends what the present portends and explores multiple projected futures depending on our course of action today. Chapter 2 has further expanded on Atwood's use of green utopian imagination located in the midst of a dystopia and engaged with the problematics and possibilities of different forms of environmentalisms, all in different ways holding onto and motivated by hope in the present, differing in the path of action taken on the basis of such hope. Massumi reflects, "You are only ever in the present in passing,"[171] this being the means to liberation from paralysis of action. Hope in the present provides that window that prevents one from feeling "boxed in," even if there are "horrors," that one

[168] Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 2.

[169] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 2.

[170] Massumi, 2.

[171] Massumi, 3.

rationally expects to combat or envisages in the future.[172] In Atwood's writings, analysed through the course of this thesis, we have seen multiple characters surviving on 'hope' that can just visualize the next step to be taken, rather than the "end of the trail," [173] as it is "less intimidating than how to reach a far-off goal in a distant future where all our problems will finally be solved." [174] Not knowing the end of the narratives created by Atwood within which they exist, the characters' actions are impelled by the tension created between uncertainty and hope. The speaker in *The Handmaid's Tale* walks into the black van of the Eyes[175] that may signal her death or her freedom. Jimmy/Snowman in *Oryx and Crake* looks after the Crakers,[176] not knowing what his chances of survival are in this inhospitable world. Aunt Lydia in *the Testaments*, writes her testimonials and stores them[177] without ever knowing the final fate of the plan she hatches against Gilead. The narrator of *Surfacing* chooses to dismantle all appearances of 'culture' in a bid to live as a part of 'nature,' without any certainty of experience of the communion with the wilderness that she yearns for.[178] Atwood's poetry is peopled with speaking voices that try to navigate the unknown, inhabiting the wild, and being inhabited by the wild as well.[179] Atwood's writing rests on the threshold that Massumi describes as 'affect' that exists at the borderline between affecting something and in turn therefore opening up oneself "to being affected in turn."[180]

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[172] Massumi, 3.

[173] Massumi, 3.

[174] Massumi, 3.

[175] The 'Eyes' form the surveillance system in Gilead, through which the state maintains power and control over its citizens. See pp 378 of Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[176] See pp 136 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[177] See Pp 124-125 and Note 153 of Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[178] See pp 400-401 of Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[179] See particularly pp 369 of Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[180] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 4.

This transition has been explored by Atwood through the range of her poetry, as well fiction, where such affect becomes the medium of shift in perspective and therefore hope, in changing the way the reader perceives and experiences the environment and human and non-human interactions. Instead of escaping the realities of global climate change and environmental degradation, Atwood makes readers face them through her fiction, non-fiction and poetry, engaging through affect, to "interrupt the flow of meaning," and disrupt the "normalized interrelations and interactions," ordinarily characterizing the readers' lives.[181] Just as the act of walking requires a person to constantly combat gravity that would pull us down,[182] teaching us early in life to strive against obstacles to make any kind of headway, Atwood's narratives remain vehicles of hope, in the very act of telling them despite all odds, believing in the power of reconfiguring perception by creating affective experiences through literature and storytelling.

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* showcased a man-made pandemic ravaging the planet and decimating the human population, eerily similar to the Covid-19[183] pandemic occurring sixteen years after the publication of the novel. The prescience of her speculative fiction startles, by its accuracy and roots in the present[184] and therefore makes the concerns of her work more immediate and urgent.[185] When the world was still wondering if the future would mimic Atwood's representation in her trilogy, with most humans wiped off the face of the Earth, Atwood chose to sound a message of hope in her essay, "Growing Up in

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[181] Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 8.

[182] Laurie Anderson describes 'walking' as "Controlled Falling," always combating "the constraint of gravity." Massumi, *Politics of Affect*, 8.

[183] "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic," *World Health Organization,* accessed March 14, 2022, https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

[184] See Note 22 of chapter 1.

[185] See pp 106 of Chapter 1 discussing her use of the 'speculative fiction' label to further her intended impact.

Quarantineland," remembering the way many infectious diseases have ravaged the earth, and the way human beings have made it through. She reiterates, "There will be an other side, eventually. We just need to make it through this part, between Before and After."[186]

In an interview with Merilyn Simonds, on *The Year of the Flood*, when the interviewer tries to label her an environmentalist, she retorts, asking what the word really means anymore.[187] Then she defines the term, when applying the label to herself, as someone who has simply done the math—"the math is : when it's all gone there isn't anymore."[188] This is similar to the story of the Amoeba in a test tube that she relates in her interview with Gene Grant,[189] reflecting on the blinkered view of humanity that doesn't realise that the clock is ticking. Atwood worries that we are heading towards that "one minute to midnight,"[190] when it will be too late to make changes. However, Atwood is not one to lose hope in the possibilities of her writing and acquired celebrity status, using the same to further environmental causes.[191] The documentary *In the Wake of the Flood*,[192] by Ron Mann follows Atwood through her book tour for *The Year of the Flood*,[193] as she decides to chart

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[186] Atwood, *Burning Questions*, 397.

[187] Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism: Apocalypse and Satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy,* 37.

[188] Grimbeek, *Margaret Atwood's Environmentalism,* 37.

[189] "IN FOCUS: Margaret Atwood Interview (2009-12-04)," *New Mexico in Focus, a Production of NMPBS,* YouTube, 4 Dec 2009, https://youtu.be/EgcP-xBqHK0

[190] "IN FOCUS: Margaret Atwood Interview (2009-12-04)," *New Mexico in Focus, a Production of NMPBS,* 17.15. Margaret Atwood in this interview cites an experiment that demonstrates the blindness of humans with respect to their planetary resources and ecosystem dying out. An amoeba is placed in a test tube filled with amoeba food, and every minute the amoeba(s) duplicate themselves, at 12 midnight the test tube is full of amoebas and all food runs out. However, just the minute before that, at 1 minute to midnight, the test tube was half full of amoeba food and the amoebas thought it was all good for them! Atwood's speculative fiction discussed in this chapter elaborate this very foolishness of human beings and showcase how close we are to the brink of our own extinction, as well as a glimmer of hope retained by the fact that 1 minute still remains to effect change.

[191] See Note 48 above.

[192] Ron Mann, dir., *In the Wake of the Flood* (Canada: Sphinx Productions, 2010), 47 mins, https://vimeo.com/ondemand/331757

[193] See Note 12 above.

an unusual journey,[194] raising funds for *Bird Life International* and creating greater awareness regarding environmental concerns, rather than only focusing on selling more books.[195] Atwood calls it her "attempt to support the continued life of birds in the skies."[196] As she visits 30 cities spread across Europe, Canada and the United States of America, Mann's camera showcases her ecological awareness as Atwood chooses to travel by the most eco-friendly options available—by train and by ship—at least for the length of the book tour, to minimise the carbon footprint of this environmental activist journey, that Atwood sees as an "attention raiser."[197] At each of the stops, local volunteers perform sections from Atwood's novel and sing selected hymns from *The Year of the Flood*, with Atwood joining them onstage, reading and performing sections, bringing the book and its concerns to life and creating the kind of emotional impact that Atwood sees as essential for inspiring any kind of change.[198] The God's Gardeners, discussed in detail in chapter 2 of this thesis, use an alternative hagiography, venerating environmental activists and individuals contributing to ecological and human wellbeing as Saints.[199] Some of these, like Saint Rachel Carson,[200] Saint Euell Gibbons[201] and Saint Terry Fox[202] feature through video clips in this documentary even as the theatrical performances by local volunteers celebrate them as Saints

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[194] Constance Droganes, "Margaret Atwood a 'leader in a leaderless age'," *CTV News*, Oct 12, 2010, https://www.ctvnews.ca/margaret-atwood-a-leader-in-a-leaderless-age-1.562274

[195] John Semley, "Margaret Atwood's Got Issues, and Ron Mann's Got 'Em on Tape," *Torontoist*, Oct 13, 2010, https://torontoist.com/2010/10/margaret_atwoods_got_issues_and_ron_manns_got_em_on_tape/.

[196] Ron Mann, dir., *In the Wake of the Flood* , 2.09.

[197] Mann, dir., *In the Wake of the Flood,* 2.01.

[198] Mann, 31.28.

[199] See Note 205 of Chapter 2 of this thesis.

[200] See Note 66 above.

[201] See pp 257 of Chapter 2 of this thesis for a discussion on Euell Gibbons and the Gardeners' celebration of Saint Euell's Week in *The Year of the Flood.*

[202] See Note 407 on Terry Fox in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

who are remembered at the Gardener feasts.

Atwood is constantly seen engaging with environmental concerns of conservation, discussing the migratory paths of birds being obstructed by wind power projects, participating in the restoration of community gardens and drinking organic shade grown coffee that saves birds from being harmed by pesticides and advocating and advertising such coffee, to raise awareness. Atwood is introduced as a national treasure and a hero[203] in Vancouver and later as the 'Grand dame'[204] of Canadian Literature in Sudbury, Ontario at a dinner hosted by the Mayor. In one of the most moving scenes in the documentary, the changes in the landscape of Sudbury is depicted from the time it was completely barren, and covered by the fumes from smelting nickel ore to a restored landscape after forty years, with a growing forest, wildlife, birds and lakes with aquatic life.[205] As Atwood transitions to writing her next novel, Sudbury stands out as a symbol of hope that human intention can create change, however difficult the road may be. At one of the book signing events, an audience member asks her if the human condition would get any better,[206] to which Atwood in her own inimitable way replies, that "The interesting thing about hope…if you don't have any hope, there is less hope."[207] Atwood calls 'hope' a "self-generating thing,"[208] and asks the young girl to "have some," as she explains that 'having' hope, "it's more likely to be

[203] Mann, dir., *In the Wake of the Flood,* 23.14.

[204] Mann, 38.10.

[205] Mann, 35.28-36.52.

[206] Mann, 24. 10. It appears that this is one of the most oft-repeated questions that Atwood gets asked at public gatherings and in individual conversations, as also seen in the conversation between Atwood and Laurie Gough discussed on pp 95 of the Introduction to this thesis. It is significant that readers turn to her repeatedly seeking hope for the future.

[207] Mann, *In the Wake of the Flood,* 24.35.

[208] Mann, 24.41.

more,"[209] therefore pointing towards its domino effect in multiplying the possibility of affirmative change, like the town of Sudbury, which now has "some of the cleanest air in all of Ontario."[210] A conversation between Atwood and Bill McKibben filmed by Mann in his documentary, highlights the importance of using music, theatre and literature to appeal to human imagination, to propel change. McKibben reflects on the large amount of money invested by Exxon Mobil and other multinational companies to keep people uninformed about climate change and to prevent legislation for the environment.[211] As Atwood listens carefully and assents, McKibben suggests that the only currency available to the environmental movements were "bodies and spirit,"[212] and powerful, beautiful literature that 'moves' us emotionally and therefore propels action. The documentary ends with Atwood beginning to write her next novel, *MaddaAddam*. As the words are typed on the page, and a new ecocritical narrative emerges, her voiceover inspires hope for change and hope for survival of both human and non-human species—"The sound of songbirds isn't only beautiful. It is a reminder to us…We can't live without other life….it is also the sound of hope."[213]

[209] Mann, *In the Wake of the Flood,* 24.46.

[210] Nadia Mykytczuk, "Sudbury went from a major polluter to a clean city — here's what extractive industries can learn," *The Narwhal,* Sept 3, 2021, https://thenarwhal.ca/opinion-sudbury-ontario-extractive-industries-transition/#:~:text=For%20almost%20100%20years%2C%20Sudbury's,rolling%20hills%20of%20blackened%20rock.

[211] Mann, dir., *In the Wake of the Flood,* 30.20.

[212] Mann, 30.40.

[213] Mann, 44.25.

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