



## REIMAGINING THE POST-APOCALYPTIC WORLD THROUGH AN ECOFEMINIST LENS IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S MADDADDAM

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### Abstract:

This article deals with the post-apocalyptic world depicted in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy through an ecofeminist lens. By analyzing the complex interplay between gender, ecology, and power, this study aims to shed light on the ecofeminist themes present in Atwood's dystopian vision. The article examines the representation of women's agency, the exploitation of nature, and the intersectionality of oppression within the context of the narrative. Through a comprehensive analysis of the trilogy, this research contributes to the understanding of ecofeminism in contemporary literature and offers insights into the potential for reimagining a sustainable and equitable future.

**Key words:** MaddAddam trilogy, post-apocalyptic, ecofeminism, gender, ecology, power, women's agency, exploitation of nature, intersectionality, oppression, sustainable future

### Introduction

#### The relevance of ecofeminism in analyzing MaddAddam

Ecofeminism shows women's interconnectedness with nature, their knowledge to solve environmental issues. In the characters like, Oryx, Toby, Ren, readers can understand oppression of women and destruction of nature are interconnected with each other. Both express implications of controlling nature and human in patriarchal society. Especially, Crake, with his brilliant knowledge, manipulates women and environment for his experiences. Oppositely, God's Gardeners, A religious group, value nature and all living creatures of God, try to keep them safe to the New World after the flood. In the trilogy, all forms of destructions, such as commodification of nature and ecosystems, oppression of women's bodies are all issues that patriarchal society has caused. The Maddaddam trilogy argues that true solutions to environmental issues must be intersectional, addressing the systemic injustices that plague both women and the environment. The trilogy serves as a tool to understand marginalization of nature and women and warns us about implications of injustice to the nature and women.

### Main part

#### Women's Agency and Empowerment

The essential figures, female characters of the Maddaddam trilogy are not simple, weak and timid female characters, but multifaceted characters who fought for their place in a dystopian society, suffered from sexual violence and overcame it. Toby goes through various difficulties from the beginning until he comes to the cult group of God's Gardeners. "Toby couldn't remember being hugged by a child. For the children it must have been a formality, like hugging a distant aunt, but for her it was something she couldn't define: fuzzy, softly intimate. Like being nuzzled by rabbits." [Atwood, 2009, 32] Here we can see that Toby didn't feel parental love that every child needs and wants. Because her parents died when she was

young, so she could not find care and attention after being orphan. When she starts working for a man named Blanco, she experiences sexual abuse. After joining the ranks of gardeners, she learns a lot from Adam and Pilar, including medicine, plant and animal care, gardening. And Oryx does various jobs like Toby until she is hired by Crake for his science experiments. "This village was a place where everyone was poor and there were many children, said Oryx. She herself was quite little when she was sold." [Atwood, 2003, 81] This passage shows that child trade is in a high rank in the village where Oryx was born. "Oryx said it must have been too bad for a child not to be chosen. Things would be worse for it in the village then, it would lose value, it would be given less to eat. She herself had been chosen first of all." [Atwood, 2003,85] Not to be bought means the worst for the child, because he/she is not given enough food. First, Oryx sells flowers on the streets after having been bought, and later becomes a professional extortionist, accusing men of violence. Then she works in the hands of a porn video recipient and acts in various porn videos. "Every child should have love, every person should have it. She herself would rather have had her mother's love – the love she still continued to believe in, the love that had followed her through the jungle in the form of a bird so she would went, so it was good to have a money value.." [Atwood, 2003, 90] These are Oryx's thoughts about parental love that she lacked. She feels the necessity of it but at the same time, considers the value of money is more preferable. Because: "...there were many who had neither love nor a money value, and having one of these things was better than having nothing." [Atwood, 2003, 90] Both Ren and Amanda are sexually abused characters who find redemption in the third novel of the trilogy, in a new post-apocalyptic world. Ren did not feel love and care by her parents, so she searched kindness and love from others around her. In this passage, we can feel her inner thoughts about her fate: "The stretch of time after that was very dark. I wondered what I was doing on the Earth: no one would care much if I wasn't on it any more. Maybe I should cast away what Adam One called my husk and transform into a vulture or a worm. But then I remembered how the Gardeners used to say, Ren, your life is a precious gift, and where there is a gift there is a Giver, and when you've been given a gift you should always say thank you. So that was some help." [Atwood,2009,149] The similarity of these characters is that all of them were deprived of parental love, spent their childhood only in hardship and oppression, despite being victims of sexual violence, they found the strength to stand on their own feet (except Oryx), they are characters who fought against oppression and felt happiness only at the end of the novel. The female characters in the MaddAddam trilogy are not simply passive victims of a dystopian world. They are complex, resilient, and essential figures who drive the narrative, challenge traditional gender roles, and offer a vision of a more equitable and sustainable future

### **Examination of women's agency in the post-apocalyptic society**

After the disaster, a dystopian society, a patriarchal capitalist society, has been destroyed and a new society based on the equality of men and women will emerge. In this society, only a few members of the religious group of God's gardeners, the cloned people created by Crake- the Crakers, survived, and these two small societies are united by a fair attitude towards nature and living creatures. After surviving the Waterless Flood, Toby finds the other survivors, Ren and Amanda. She heals their injuries, prepares food from nature's blessings and feeds them. This small community, led by Toby, occupies a habitable area and builds a space there, and gradually other survivors begin to be found. Toby treats every injured person by helping them. In this new world, no one aspires to control, does not try to

oppress, but prefers living in harmony. Toby and his female friend Ren begin to play a central role in this community. Toby manages to help every injured person, cooking, and even taking care of Crackers: "Brewing herbs, gathering mushrooms, applying maggots, tending bees, removing warts-beldam's roles. Those are her proper vocations." [Atwood, 2013, 87]

The portrayal of resistance and empowerment in the face of environmental challenges

The Maddaddam trilogy offers a powerful exploration of resistance and empowerment in the face of environmental challenges. The characters demonstrate the power of individual action, the importance of community, and the enduring strength of the human spirit. They remind us that even in the most challenging circumstances, hope, resilience, and a commitment to build a more sustainable future can provide the force for positive change. Resistance to environmental issues is evident in the activities of the God's Gardeners in the trilogy. They make every action on the basis of the Bible and adjust the rules for the group accordingly. Their main belief is to survive in the upcoming flood as well as to protect animals and nature as God's creatures: "We God's Gardeners are a

plural Noah: we too have been called, we too forewarned. We can feel the symptoms of coming disaster as a doctor feels a sick man's pulse. We must be ready for the time when those who have broken trust with the Animals — yes, wiped them from the face of the Earth where God placed them — will be swept away by the Waterless Flood, which will 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." [Atwood, 2009, 62] Therefore, this religious group expresses their resistance to the environmental problems that may occur by emphasizing the conservation of nature and natural resources through their sermons.

In a post-apocalyptic world, the survivors of God's Gardeners and Crake's invention- the Crackers, continue having environmentally-friendly relationships, while the ex-gardeners rebuilt their way of life by following the old sermons and instructions of Adam. The Crackers express their friendship to nature involuntarily by innate instinct. They consider that the animals to be the children of Oryx and they are the children of the Crake, and consider themselves related to animals, and do not engage attack animals, kill, hunt and eat their meat.

- Depiction of the natural world and its relation to gender.

In the pre-apocalyptic world, the environment becomes a victim of human lust and desire, which is illustrated by the genetic research of Crake and several scientists. "At the bonfire Jimmy was anxious about the animals, because they were being burnt and surely that would hurt them. No, his father told him. The animals

were dead. They were like steaks and sausages, only they still had their skins on." [Atwood, 2003, 11] This passage shows how the burning of animals caused Jimmy to be anxious. Because he was a child and he blamed himself for the death of animals: "...suffering animals-was his fault, because he'd done nothing to rescue them." [Atwood, 2003, 11] Destruction of nature and its living creatures for one's own purpose is inextricably linked with the humiliation, sexual violence and discrimination of women in a masculine society. In the dystopian male-dominated society of the trilogy, the treatment of nature is similar to the treatment of women, both representing the ills of patriarchy and the importance of gender roles in the society. The rampant consumerism, the unchecked pursuit of technological advancement, and the commodification of natural resources contribute to the destruction of the planet and the subjugation of women.



- Exploration of the exploitation and commodification of nature

Commodification of nature can be seen in various forms in the trilogy. In the second novel of the trilogy, «The year of the Flood» skin and leather of some animals are used as costumes and Toby worked as a furzooter wearing such costumes and advertising different places. The last place where Toby worked commodified nature as well. It was called 'Secretburgers» where burgers with unknown animals' meat were made and sold. "The secret of SecretBurgers was that no one knew what sort of animal protein was actually in them... The meat grinders weren't 100 per cent efficient; you might find a swatch of cat fur in your burger or a fragment of mouse tail. Was there a human fingernail, once?" [Atwood, 2009,22]. Besides that, animals are killed, hunted or used for genetic experiments which are one of examples of commodification. «On the way back to the building, she finds the tail of a dog beside the path- an Irish settler, it looks like- its long fur matted with burrs and twigs. ....they are always dropping things... fingers were the most.»[Atwood, 2009,13] Another example for the commodification of Nature has been seen in the first novel «Oryx and Crake»: "The pigeon organs could be customized, using cells from individual human donors, and the organs were frozen until needed. It was much cheaper than getting yourself cloned for spare parts..." [Atwood, 2003, 16] There is a restaurant called «Rarity» where meat of endangered animals is used for making meals. "The skinned carcasses were sold on to a chain of gourmet restaurants called Rarity. The public dining rooms served steak and lamb and venison and buffalo, certified disease-free so it could be cooked rare — that was what "Rarity" pretended to mean. But in the private banquet rooms — keyclub entry, bouncer-enforced — you could eat endangered species. The profits were immense; one bottle of tiger-bone wine alone was worth a neckful of diamonds." [Atwood, 2009, 25]

- Symbolic representation of femininity in relation to the environment

The God's Gardeners often refer to the earth as a "mother," signifying a deep reverence for nature's life-giving capacity. Their respect for the earth reflects the importance of nurturing and caring for the planet, often associated with feminine qualities. The trilogy challenges the traditional binary opposition between masculine and feminine, and the association of femininity with weakness or passivity. Toby demonstrates strength, resilience, and leadership, oppositely Ren and Amanda show the weakness, lack of self-confidence and fragility. For instance, Amanda is called "A hothouse flower" by Zeb because "She never learned about picking up stones and hitting back and yelling. It was because her earlier life." [Atwood, 2009, 68]

- Intersectional analysis of oppression and environmental degradation.

As the Trilogy should be analyzed as speculative fiction, Atwood intended to portray various types of oppression related to gender, race, religion and social background of the characters. In the first novel, "Oryx and Crake", Jimmy, the male narrator of the novel, grew up in the family in which parents have arguments every time. As the result, Jimmy, the only child of the family could not find care and attention in his family. This fragile relationship caused Jimmy's mother to leave her husband and even, Jimmy. His teenage years passed by witnessing his father's and his new wife's happiness. Another male protagonist of the novel, Crake had the same situation in his family. His father died or killed, his mother married to another person who had become colleague of his father. He also grew up without care and love by parents. Adam and Zeb, protagonists of "The Year Of The Flood" had been oppressed by family members, like Jimmy and Crake. They grow up witnessing their father, who is a priest,

doing various evil deeds under the guise of religion for the benefit of government officials. The male protagonists of the trilogy, Jimmy Crake, Zeb, and Adam, grew up under the oppression of their parents, far from love and attention, while the representatives of the opposite sex, the female protagonists of the trilogy, experienced a different kind of oppression. Oryx, sold by her mother, is forced to engage in various forms of labor. First she sold flowers at the streets, and then she was made to cheat rich men by accusing them of violence and stealing their money, and then, when the boss becomes ill, he sells them to another merchant. After passing through the hands of several businessmen, Oryx is bought by a businessman who creates pornographic films. Then, she started starring in porn videos featured on porn sites. Along with participation in pornographic films, she herself becomes a victim of sexual violence. Toby, the main female character of the second novel of the trilogy, faced unique challenges in the narrative due to her marginalized racial identity. Orphaned by her parents, after burning all her documents, Toby had to do daily jobs which did not check identity. But she had to leave the job when she saw discrimination against her gender in each of them: "In the first week she suffered three attacks by fetishists who knocked her over, twisted the big head around so she was blinded, and rubbed their pelvises against her fur, making strange noises, of which the meows were the most recognizable." [Atwood, 2009, 25] As a result of doing such low-paying jobs, Toby lost her female organs and became infertile: "When she tried a third time, they told her there were complications, so she could never donate any more eggs, or — incidentally — have any children herself." [Atwood, 2009, 26] Finally she got a job at "Secretburgers", which sells burgers from the meat of an unknown animal, and fell into the trap of her boss, Blanco. Toby was regularly raped until she was rescued by a religious group of God's gardeners. But any woman caught in Blanco's trap would have a fate ranging from violence to death. Ren and Amanda, another female characters of the trilogy had been oppressed and humiliated regardless of their gender. The different attitude of religious and social groups to the environment creates environmental problems. For example, Crake and his team of scientists researching in the field of genetic engineering caused the extinction of some animal species. Adam and the members of his religious group took their motto as «not to eat animal meat in order to protect the environment». They consider that human caused to the destruction of environment: "...any further cursing of the ground would be done not by God but by Man himself. Consider the southern shores of the Mediterranean — once fruitful farmland, now a desert. Consider the ruinations wrought in the Amazon River basin; consider the wholesale slaughter of ecosystems, each one a living reflection of God's infinite care for detail ... but these are subjects for another day." [Atwood, 2009, 62] The different attitudes of different groups to the environment, the lack of cooperation of the human race in protecting nature, helped in the implementation of Crake's despicable plan.

- Examination of the intersectionality of gender, race, and class in the narrative.

In all three novels of Maddaddam trilogy, Atwood creates intersectional identity of characters in the narrative. Intersectionality of gender can be seen in the analysis of the characters due to their gender. For instance, in the first novel of the trilogy, male is dominated and narration is told by male narrator. In the second novel, «The year of the flood», narration moves to the female narrator. In the last novel, humanoids whom Crake created became characters and even a narrator of the novel, so their importance has become essential in the

trilogy: "Why not send a couple of human beings with the Crakers? That way the humans will be protected from wild animals via the Crakers, and the Crakers will be protected from the

Painballers via the sprayguns toted by the MaddAddamites" [Atwood, 2013, 197] Throughout whole trilogy, male and female characters intersect with each other in making scientific experiences and solving environmental problems. Intersectionality of the class can be viewed in the narration of different groups. Corpscorps which was owned by Crake aimed to employ brilliant scientists and exploit them to use natural resources, as well as, make researches on animals. Another group, The God's Gardeners had opposite aim: they try to live in a simple way and fight together against environmental degradation.

### **The importance of environmental justice in ecofeminist discourse**

Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy places great emphasis on environmental justice, highlighting its crucial role within ecofeminist discourse. It offers an ecofeminist approach, advocating environmental justice. In the trilogy, the idea of protecting animals and nature, preserving natural resources through such fair treatment is proposed. For example, the religious group of God's gardeners establishes several rules for its members to maintain environmental justice and insists on obeying them. We can see them in these contexts: «it was especially bad about the butcher and the sausage , because meat of any kind was obscene as far as the Gardeners were concerned.»[Atwood, 2009, 41]OR «No daily showers» was one of the Gardener rules...» [Atwood, 2009, 42], «The Gardeners didn't believe in wasting water and soap on too much washing»[Atwood, 2009, 42]. These were the rules of God's Gardeners which insisted members to be more environmentally-friendly to the Nature. In the post-Apocalyptic World, human-made creatures also represent environmental justice: "They ate nothing but leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two; thus their foods were plentiful and always available. Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones: they came into heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than man." [Atwood, 2003, 225]

### **- Discussion of alternative visions of sustainability and equity**

The idea of sustainability and equity appears in various forms in the Trilogy. In the pre-apocalyptic world, environmental justice became a rule of God's gardeners. The insistence of God's gardeners that all animals and humans are equally responsible for nature, their beliefs that they are equal before God, made them ensure friendship and harmony between man and animal, man and nature. but the fact that non-religious scientists are conducting absurd experiments such as crossbreeding human organs with animals shows that their ideas of equality are completely opposite. While a group of scientists led by Crake tried to implement sustainability through various genetic studies. For example, "The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year. Such a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then, rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs, much as a lobster could grow another claw to replace a missing one." [Atwood, 2003, 17] Although such scientists sacrificed nature and animals for their research, Crake's sustainability plan did not only ensure equity in the post-apocalyptic world, but also ends the destruction of the environment with human ego. Humanoids created by Crake-Crakers represent another view of sustainability and equity. The

characteristics that distinguish Crakers from real people are that they ensure the equality of women and men in sexual relationships and end the lust, greed and sexual oppression against women that destroy humanity. Therefore, man's violence to nature also ended with the destruction of humanity through the capsule invented by Crake. Hence, in the trilogy, sustainability and equity in the post-apocalyptic world is represented by the example of the Crakers. "In fact, as there would never be anything for these people to inherit, there would be no family trees, no marriages, and no divorces. They were perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses or tools or weapons, or, for that matter, clothing. They would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money. Best of all, they recycled their own excrement." [Atwood, 2003, 225] Amicable treatment of pre-apocalyptic cult members and Crakers showed best action to preserve the environment and natural resources. The MaddAddam trilogy ultimately suggests that a truly sustainable and equitable future requires a fundamental shift in values and priorities. It envisions a world where human ingenuity and compassion are directed towards creating a society that respects both the environment and the diversity of human life.

#### **- Analysis of ecofeminist strategies for reimagining the future**

Having based his beliefs on biblical stories, Adam advocates the preservation of living creatures through the following words and STRESSES that through this, he will be instrumental in the creation of the NEW WORLD that will be established in the future. God's Gardeners, a religious group, values living in harmony with nature and practice farming, gardening and caring about nature. This is because they believe in Noah's story about flood and prepare themselves to the upcoming danger. Their strategies to keep the nature help to rebuild new society after the apocalyptic. We can see Gardeners' imagination after the flood by reading this passage from the novel: «According to the Human Words of God, the task of saving the chosen Species was given to Noah, symbolizing the aware ones among Mankind. he 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 and his Ark was beached upon Ararat. Then The rescued Creatures were set loose upon the Earth, as if at a second Creation.»(p57) Ecofeminism emphasizes the importance of nurturing relationships between humans and the environment, as well as among humans themselves. So Toby, ex-Gardeners showed her care to the nature and all living creatures in the Post-Apocalyptic World and used her knowledge learnt from Pilar and Adam to make medical treatment for Jimmy, Ren, Amanda. The Relationship between Crakers and humans shows that people also have chosen environmentally-friendly way of living and respect Crakers' need too. In this way the trilogy highlights the power of community, mutual aid, and empathy in building a better future.

#### **- Implications for real-world environmental activism and policy-making**

The strong and decisive female characters in the trilogy demonstrate the importance of empowering women and girls in environmental activism and decision-making.

#### **Conclusion**

This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy through an ecofeminist lens. By examining themes of women's agency, the exploitation of nature, and intersectionality of oppression, it contributes to the understanding of ecofeminism in literature and explores the potential for reimagining a sustainable and equitable post-apocalyptic world.

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