

Speculative Solutions

The Development of Environmental and Ecofeminist Discourse in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*

Lucy Rowland

Volume 40, Number 2, 2015

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/scl40_2art03

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)

1718-7850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Rowland, L. (2015). Speculative Solutions: The Development of Environmental and Ecofeminist Discourse in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, 40(2), 46–68.

Speculative Solutions: The Development of Environmental and Ecofeminist Discourse in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*

LUCY ROWLAND

The *MaddAddam* Trilogy and the Canadian Environmental Context

UTILIZING HER FAME AND POPULARITY as a platform for her views and philanthropic social activism, Margaret Atwood has always been vocal about her stand on contemporary environmental problems and social equality (Whisker 3). These issues are increasingly relevant to a Canadian readers, many of whom face the growing prevalence of oil drilling, fracking, and deforestation and bear witness to the immediate effects of climate change, particularly in the Far North (Boyd 82-83). Atwood's involvement in the Green Party of Canada, contributions to environmental charities, and outward support of Canadian grassroots movements such as Idle No More (Atwood, "Tell Harper") all interact productively with the subtexts of her recent fiction.

The wealth of extant criticism on *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) occupies a broad range of critical approaches: from post-apocalypticism, to posthumanism, to ecocriticism, to ecofeminism. Critics such as Hannes Bergthaller and Rachel Stein have evaluated the two novels in relation to their immediate environmental and social implications, and others, such as Jane Brooks Bouson, have concentrated on the post-apocalyptic nature and bioengineering narrative strand of each novel.

However, though Stein and Bergthaller address — to an extent — the ecofeminist undertones present in the first two novels, there has been no sustained work evaluating the ecofeminist implications of the texts over the whole trajectory of the trilogy. Furthermore, due to its recent publication, Atwood's latest novel, *MaddAddam* (2013), has yet to gain a fraction of the critical attention that the other two novels have

received.¹ Therefore, in this article I aim to extend critical ecofeminist considerations of the first two novels to the latest text and to open up critical analysis to promote a consideration of the trilogy's implications as a set of closely interwoven ecofeminist experiments. Essentially, I propose that this novel offers the most effective and directed use of ecofeminist principles in presenting potential solutions to the societal, cultural, and environmental issues depicted in the first two texts. In engaging productively with previous and current ecofeminist epistemologies, *MaddAddam* is an effective practical exposition of the material concerns of developing ecofeminist literary theory.

MaddAddam offers a multifaceted ecofeminist approach to resolving the problems explored thoroughly in the first two texts of the trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. In her extended satire of contemporary Western society, Atwood offers clear warnings about the dangerous consequences of consumer-driven cultures. However, *MaddAddam* also seems to propose its own solutions that speculate on how we might go about addressing environmental and social problems. This speculation invites the question of what, exactly, literary authors can hope to achieve in promoting environmentalism through their work. Can literary contributions to environmental ethics ever be significantly productive?

In response to this question, I will demonstrate in this article that Atwood uses *MaddAddam* to aid the “democratic political vision” (Sandilands xvii) of ecofeminism (and thereby environmentalism in a broader sense) by entrenching its flexible and inclusionary practices within the narratives of the novel. Rejecting the label of a “feminist” writer — having stated that she does not “consider [the adjective] inclusive” (Ingersoll 139) — Atwood uses her literature to create space for a new type of inclusive ecofeminist praxis that corrects the failings of other branches of feminism.

To illustrate Atwood's development of ecofeminist ideas, in the first section of this article I will outline the emergence of ecofeminism as a critical theory, its origins, and its divergence from earlier branches of second-wave feminism that have proven problematic. I will then address how the characters in the novel implement ecofeminist practice. Finally, I will analyze how Atwood invites the reader to take part in a dialogue that we might read as a developing strand of ecofeminism by using ecofeminist principles — along with new theories on humanity's rela-

tionship with nature — as solutions to the social and environmental issues in the text.

In the second part of the article, I will look more closely at specific strands of narrative in the novel and how the setting in Atwood's imagined "ustopia" (*In Other Worlds* 66) allows for speculative experiments in democracy and ethical action. I will also examine the implications of the "elsewhere," near-future setting of the novel (*In Other Worlds* 71), demonstrating its efficacy in providing a location in which new moralities and methods of implementing democracy can be tested.

In the final parts of the article, I will address Atwood's literary experimentation with solutions to problems of social inequality, assessing how these solutions contribute to, or diverge from, recent ecofeminist literary theories. In synthesizing the subtexts of *MaddAddam* with new ecofeminist critical trends, I will demonstrate that Atwood creates myriad potential pathways for a new, and increasingly inclusive, ecofeminist practice.

New Movements: The Emergence and Continuation of Ecofeminist Literary Theory

Over the past few decades, the turn toward deep ecology and environmental concern in philosophy, ethics, and social studies in Canada and the United States — a transition that Atwood herself has influenced — has generated some productive modes of literary and social criticism. Emerging movements such as ecofeminism have addressed the exclusivity and flawed aspects of earlier feminisms (e.g., cultural feminism) and promoted recognition of the shared subjugation of women and the non-human environment. Although there are several distinct branches of ecofeminism, their overarching goal is to liberate contemporary epistemologies from the patriarchal hierarchy systems that govern how we consider humanity in relation to the non-human environment (Warren 5496). Ecofeminism also aims to challenge inequalities in gender, class, and race, with an emphasis on giving voice to a "multiplicity of subject positions" (MacGregor 53). With these types of methodologies, "imaginative writers" such as Atwood can go some way toward developing "a vocabulary that promotes broad environmentalism," which biology and other scientific discourses have failed to do (Hengen 73). If "the arts express the emotions that guide scientific research" (75), then *MaddAddam* is an artwork in which we can perceive a persuasive

discourse on the need for an epistemological revision of how humanity interacts with the non-human world. The text could therefore be seen as a radical new literary experiment in style, form, and subtext, utilizing setting, narration, language, and new theories in ecofeminism and ecocriticism to drive forward new ways of considering our relationship with the environment and its non-human inhabitants.

Far from fading into the background as a vague sideline of mainstream ecocriticism, as many critics predicted at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Sandilands xvi), ecofeminism has gained momentum, generating a wealth of new critical material over the past two decades (Gaard and Murphy 5). Consequently, in harnessing the democratic power of ecofeminism and intertwining its principles with the study of contemporary literatures, many critics — such as Patrick D. Murphy, Greta Gaard, and Catriona Sandilands — have produced and developed original, insightful, and powerful ecofeminist literary interpretations and theoretical frameworks.

Recent critical efforts, such as *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy* by Sandilands, have concentrated on strengthening the democratic intentions of ecofeminism. This is a reaction against the more identitarian discourse that often overshadows the political issues of inequality that it seeks to alleviate. As Sandilands asserts, “an ecofeminism that is both feminist and ecological must . . . place at the center of its existence a commitment to good theory and good politics, in concert” (xvii). Similarly, collections such as *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* (Gaard, Estok, and Oppermann) and *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (Campbell) have synthesized current social and political theory with literary practices, facilitating the emergence of a persuasive and varied ecofeminist discourse.

These works realign the ideals of ecocriticism more closely with feminist theories (Campbell ix), and this realignment encourages an increasingly multifaceted ecofeminist agenda. There have also been attempts to traverse the problems of Euro-American bias in feminist discourse by refuting the second-wave feminist idea that there exists an innate, universal female “nature” (Zerbe Enns 154) and recognizing the variation in and heterogeneity of women’s experiences. However, it is in *MaddAddam* that we can see these theories being put into literary practice. Atwood characteristically refrains from didacticism, utilizing

the multifaceted and experimental emphases of ecofeminism to illuminate parts of the novel that a reader might find ethically complicated.

Atwood uses the first two novels, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, to address the material concerns of earlier branches of cultural feminism and to highlight the dangers of certain aspects of postfeminist thought. *Oryx and Crake* delineates the failures of cultural feminism and its concentration on women's "positive connections" with the non-human natural world (Zerbe Enns 161). The protagonist, Jimmy, is a representative of the psychological effects of cultural feminism — and its connections with environmental eugenics (Stein 186-88) — on the male mentality. Atwood also implicitly links certain cultural feminist ideologies and the neo-conservative ideas of "motherhood environmentalism" (Sandilands xiii), using the character of Jimmy's mother, Sharon, to enact the cultural damage that these ideas can inflict on women. Sharon is seen as "insufficient" (*Oryx* 77), and it is evident that her sense of "deficien[cy]" is "culturally induced" (Banerjee 239) by the governing New Right ideology and its use of cultural feminist agendas as tools of oppression. Although ecofeminism finds its roots in some cultural feminist ideologies, Atwood's interrogation of the fundamentally flawed aspects of cultural feminism can direct new strands of ecofeminism toward more productive ends.

In *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood explores the postfeminist world of the pre-plague society at its tyrannical extreme, from the viewpoints of two women (Toby and Ren), though, as Paula Anca Farca has observed, "a female perspective does not presuppose female power" (18). In this novel, Atwood makes an extensive critique of society's apparent abandonment of feminism, linking it with the privatization of science, technocratic totalitarianism, and domination of the non-human natural environment. In this novel, dubbed by Brooks Bouson an "admonitory satire on our contemporary postfeminist society" (13), there is a direct focus on the consequences of postfeminism as a cultural movement. Here these ideologies are hijacked by patriarchal modes of governance in order to oppress the population and exploit women. In the pre-plague society, women are encouraged to believe that their personal consumer choices are acts of empowerment, and this inevitably leads to the demise of supporting political action. The idea that personal choice is enough to retain autonomy — a notion perpetuated by certain strands of postfeminism (Brabon and Genz 9) — leaves women vulnerable to physical,

political, and psychological exploitation. Bouson has made the rather problematic criticism that one of the young characters, Ren, “chooses, or at least accepts, her own sexual commodification and humiliation” (14), but a less damning interpretation might infer that her choices are so extremely limited by her personal circumstances that she is forced to commodify her body by a culturally enforced postfeminist ideology.

“Postfeminism” is an extremely contradictory term in itself (Brabon and Genz 2); however, there is a particularly insidious strand of postfeminist thought that carries the “implicit assumption” that “feminism no longer needs to be enforced politically as it is now up to individual women and their personal choices to reinforce . . . fundamental societal changes” (9). Building on this notion, in *The Year of the Flood* this strand of postfeminism is exposed as an oppressive practice. Subsequently, ample space remains for Atwood’s ecofeminist experiments in social and environmental equality. In this novel, we see the surviving characters begin to reform after the plague and move away from the previous society’s ills of cannibalistic consumerism: they begin to express the “democratic desire” central to ecofeminist principles (Sandilands xviii) by creating a non-invasive space for humanity within the environment.

An Ecofeminist Hierarchy? Manifestations in *MaddAddam*

Tracing the ecofeminist discourse in *MaddAddam* is possible through a close consideration of the use of space in the novel. However, confrontation of the ills of the pre-plague society is dramatized in more complex ways. The survivors execute their democratic impulses in opposition to the epistemologies of the pre-apocalyptic, hierarchical world controlled by the governing totalitarian corporations, and this different mode of resistance also requires close examination.

For example, though present in the first two novels as a subtle undercurrent, an important discourse on figurative and literal cannibalism is addressed in *MaddAddam*. It is explicit in this novel that the Corps-ruled society before the plague encourages the symbolic (and often literal) consumption of other humans, specifically women. Oliver Lindner has addressed this pervasive commentary in *The Year of the Flood*, stating that the pre-plague flashbacks “highlight consumption as the primary value” of the earlier flawed society (83). Characterized here as an inevitable “consequence of capitalism’s celebration of unlimited desire,”

cannibalism is defined as “the most radical way of incorporating what is outside the self” (84). In this case, the binary of the “self” and the “other” is at the core of the capitalist cannibal impulse.

As we learn throughout the course of the trilogy, the pre-plague society was consumed by a desire to exert control and power over non-human nature, at a time when the environment was becoming more and more of a threat to the continued survival of humanity through flooding and extreme weather (in short, through the effects of climate change). Genetic engineering in the pre-diseased world is rife, with scientists creating hundreds of animal hybrids and, most importantly, the humanoid creatures (called “Crakers”) that possess some typically human and some typically animal traits. The out-of-control consumption of and desire for meat — exhibited by both the luxury restaurant “Rarity” and the cheap (and suspect) “SecretBurgers” (*Year 27*, 40) — is a direct manifestation of this desire to consume the other. It therefore follows that in the trilogy the self, or the human, is driven to consume what is outside it. Non-human nature, then, is hereby defined as the other. However, Atwood uses *MaddAddam* to rewrite this dichotomy. In the aftermath of Crake’s plague, both genetically modified and “natural” animals and plants remain as well as genetically modified humans and “natural” humans. In this environment, the construct of the other in opposition to the self becomes more and more difficult to sustain.

As Steven Vogel states, “the concept of nature has been a problematic one for critical theory from the start” (1), and it is clear, especially in Western Marxist ideas of nature and the natural, that critical responses to these ideas have often resulted in the formation of uneasy and unstable dualisms between ideas of nature and society (3). Some theorists and critics, such as Herbert Marcuse, claim that studies of nature and natural science are primarily a type of domination (Vogel 4), in fact simply rhetorical and reflective of a “desired power,” a view endorsed by many social constructivists (Haraway 577). More recently, theorists such as Marcuse have encouraged the problematic notion that a “New Science” should be applied to nature, one that “eschew[s] domination,” somehow leaving nature “as it is” (Vogel 4).

However, if we do as Vogel suggests and adopt a more Hegelian view of nature and humanity, and consider nature to be a “*socially constructed*” concept (5) in the context of the trilogy, then we can avoid the problems created by thinking of the social and natural as binaries

of the dominator and the dominated. Assuming that nature can exist in some way “as it is” (4) in a world inhabited by humans is unproductive, as Atwood demonstrates. It assumes, as ecofeminist critic Karen J. Warren has suggested, that there is a “clear separation of culture from nature,” an idea often used to justify the patriarchal “logic of domination” (5496). Similarly, only by incorporating ideas of the natural into the individual self, and recognizing “the relationship of humanity *within* nature” (Murphy 7; emphasis added), can the survivors hope to create a successful and egalitarian heterarchy (as opposed to the patriarchal value hierarchy) within their demarcated space. This particular ecofeminist principle “offers ecological notions of the self which challenge dominant Western models of rationality, knowledge, and ethics” (Warren 5496). Furthermore, ecofeminism’s revision of the humanity/nature binary challenges the cultural feminist assertion that women have an innate biological or psychological “tie” with nature (5495). If the “social ecofeminist” route is taken here, and we subscribe to the notion that there is “no essential (biological, natural, innate) nature of ‘women’” (5495), then the already unstable constructions of man/woman and social/natural encounter further disruption.

This blending of the supposed socio-cultural and the natural occurs tangibly within *MaddAddam* in many different ways. Atwood uses the initial conflict between animals (if we use the term loosely to refer to non-*Homo sapiens* species) and humans to document an eventual ecological synthesis. The “pigeons” that originally threaten the survivors’ camp are pigs that have been implanted with human neocortex brain tissue — perhaps the most explicit hybridization of human and animal that we encounter in the novel. Left to flourish in a world no longer dominated by humans, genetically modified animals prompt questions about what (if anything) can be called “natural.” At the beginning of the novel, the survivors attempt to fight off the pigeons in order to protect their garden, and they eat the pigeons killed in the struggle. Eventually, however, the pigeons confront the surviving humans — communicating telepathically through a young Craker boy — and request that the survivors do “not kill and then eat” them (271).

As the young Craker boy in *MaddAddam* tells Toby, the pigs are “Children of Oryx and Children of Crake, both” (268). It is explicit in the first novel of the trilogy that the Children of Oryx are animals and that the Children of Crake are semi-human (*Oryx* 110). Therefore,

the surviving humans refuse to partake in the cannibalism of the pre-apocalyptic world when they agree not to kill and then eat the pigeons, rejecting the capitalist-consumerist mentality of their previous lives. Although the pigeons advocate eating what “is dead already” (*MaddAddam* 271), this appears to be simply an extension of the ecological equilibrium. It is a clear rejection of cannibalism as a manifestation of desire and excess and an acceptance of the need to maintain balanced, resourceful, and non-wasteful consumption. Atwood here effectively defuses the impulse to cannibalize or to “incorporat[e] what is outside of the self” (Lindner 84). By dissolving the boundaries between the self and the other (in this case the self being “human” and the other being a construct of “nature”), the need for hierarchy, domination, or self-perpetuating violent desires is negated in the new world order.

This literal hybridization also occurs more conceptually in *MaddAddam*: the theme of artificiality woven through its environment incorporates a vein of Timothy Morton’s theory that frames his work *Ecology without Nature* and intertwines it with ecofeminist refutations of the nature/culture dualism. As Morton identifies, in order to work toward a new set of environmental aesthetics that rejects earlier Romantic tendencies toward ecomimesis, a new and productive “dark ecology” (143) should celebrate the artificiality of the other.

In *MaddAddam*, this threatening, manmade environment that the survivors have no choice but to inhabit becomes their home. Filled with spliced animals, stitched together by humans (like Mary Shelley’s monster, which Morton hails as a paradigm of dark ecological literary production), the survivors must “identify with the monstrous thing” in order to become truly “ethical” (Morton 195). By having the survivors connect with the pigeons and acknowledge their worth as conscious, artificial beings, Atwood intertwines ecofeminist-derived ideas that advocate transcending patriarchal dualisms with the vein of Morton’s dark ecological theory that advocates the “‘goth’ assertion of the contingent and necessarily queer idea that we want to stay with a dying world” (184-85). This strand of the narrative, truly experimental in its conflation of theoretical influences, drives forward a new style of prose undoubtedly ecological, but it refuses to romanticize its constructed environment and its inhabitants in the ecomimetic style that Morton critiques.

Extending the premise that Atwood uses the hybridization of species as a tool for complicating the patriarchal culture/nature binary system, and as a method for examining the possibility of a heterarchy, the reader is able to learn throughout the trilogy that the Craker creatures are more genetically complex than the pigeons. The implications for the new society of survivors, and for the scope of *MaddAddam*, are significant. If the pigeons are an equal blend of animal and human consciousness, then the Crakers are a collaboration of different genetic sources, but arguably they do not have the same kind of human self-consciousness that the pigeons possess. The process of creating the Crakers, and the manner of their peaceful existence in the post-plague world, render the dubious concept of an originary “nature” even more redundant. Since there is no identifiable point at which the Crakers cease to be human during their creation, and indeed no established criteria at all for being human in the new world, their categorization as a species is impossible and in any case unhelpful.

Toward the end of *MaddAddam*, three of the surviving human women give birth to babies with Craker fathers. Two of them are results of Craker men performing their instinctive mating ritual on two women characters, oblivious of the concept of sexual consent. However, the resulting children are evidence of the physical breach of boundaries between what could be seen as “natural” and “human.” This added dimension complicates a simplistic self/other perception to the point of elimination, rendering value hierarchies redundant in the setting of the novel. Here heterarchies are the only possible way forward, for “rank and status have peeled away” (141), and the categorization required for the creation of a destructive value hierarchy is unattainable.

As the conclusion to the trilogy, *MaddAddam* can be interpreted as an experiment in the hypothetical implementation of ecofeminist praxis in a posthumanist setting — a location that allows, even promotes, the effective decentring of “the human” (Wolfe xv). Through the use of a narrative that circles from the past back to the present, from the pre-plague world to the new commune of survivors, it is easy to delineate myriad potential solutions to the issues explored in the first two novels. One possible solution is Atwood’s use of space and her hybrid blending of utopian and dystopian traits.

Utopia: Creating Space for Democracy

If Atwood's own term "ustopia" (*In Other Worlds* 66) is used as a signifier for the communal space inhabited by the survivors in *MaddAddam*, then it invites the recognition of a designated space for a possible utopia within the wider dystopian setting of the novel. This is beneficial in enacting a broader socio-political interpretation of the text; put more simply, the term allows us to demarcate the boundaries and limitations of the democratic impulse exhibited by the characters. It also gestures toward how an ecofeminist democracy might be extended outward to neutralize and level dangers that might threaten the carefully balanced environmental equilibrium in the novel.

The commune itself is significant in terms of space. The MaddAddamites and ex-Gardeners live together in a cobb house, built by "ancient greenies," and its name, the "Tree of Life Exchange" (*Year* 169), could be read symbolically as a reference to a kind of environmental haven. Here the survivors live among "nature," not elevated above it or isolated from it. This directly opposes the traditions of the pre-plague world, in which humanity appeared to be locked in a constant battle with the rebellious planet, killing and consuming animals in a violent and obsessive manner (of which the prevalence of the meat-oriented eateries *Rarity* and *SecretBurger* are perfect examples) in order to retain power. The survivors are forced to work *with* the non-human environment: as plants and animals begin to reclaim the biosphere (*MaddAddam* 209), humans are relegated to a small area in which to exercise their impulse to psychologically reorder and restructure the world. As the moral details of the survivors' new life are debated within the cobb house, the dystopian outer world threatens to invade it. Remnants of the pre-apocalyptic society — the violent patriarchal forces and consumerism — still govern the space surrounding the ecohouse. When the inhabitants have to leave their safe house to search for the threatening and murderous Painballer men, they acknowledge that the move is "an exodus, a move away from civilisation" (278).

The threat of the Painballers in *MaddAddam* is apparent from the beginning of the novel. Paradigms of the destructive pre-plague world, the Painballers are criminals sent by the Corps-controlled modes of government into an arena in order to fight to the death for glory and public entertainment. Toby outlines the danger of these misogynist, violent men: "Sex until you were worn to a fingernail was their mode;

after that, you were dinner” (9). Within the novel, the survivors recognize that, to achieve heterarchy throughout their world, remnants of the cannibalistic patriarchal world must be eradicated, and the urge to perpetually consume and kill must be stopped. As we see throughout the novel, the MaddAddamites join forces with the non-human species in order to re-establish this democracy throughout their accessible space, and to eradicate the Painballer men, extending their democratic ideologies outward as far as they can.

In order to find Zeb’s brother — the ex-Gardener leader, Adam One — the group works with the part-human pigeons, executing a carefully planned mission to recover him from the Painballer men who hold him captive. This alliance between humans and non-humans facilitates ecofeminist praxis, establishing a level playing field and fostering a community. However, the threat of the outside world ensures that the newly created society does not become the dominating force over the space that it inhabits, which maintains the carefully balanced heterarchical structure.

An idea pertinent to this discussion is that “ustopia is by definition elsewhere” (Atwood, *In Other Worlds* 71). In her essay “Dire Cartographies: The Roads to Ustopia,” Atwood recounts classic utopian literary settings based in unknown or unexplored lands, or at the borders or peripheries of maps, to illustrate this (*In Other Worlds* 68-69). Similarly, in *The Year of the Flood*, God’s Gardeners live on the “Edencliff Garden” rooftop (6), technically locatable but removed from the Corps surveillance and chaos of the quasi-anarchic Pleebland world below, as in classic utopias. As Lindner has pointed out, the Gardeners’ roof “can be regarded as the utopian space that offers hope to the reader” (83). However, as Atwood states, a utopia depends on perspective: it can be a dystopia to the people relegated to its margins. As we can see in *The Year of the Flood*, the supposed utopia of the Edencliff Rooftop is actually deeply flawed: inequality is rife (54), women’s appearances are policed (56), women are expected to ignore the attempted rapes by one of the male Gardeners (124), and Toby is forced to become a Gardener leader (224). Although the Gardeners promote strict vegetarianism, and sanctify animals almost as much as they sanctify God, for women the Gardener collective is far from utopian.

Therefore, Atwood develops and manipulates the simple utopian trope by locating the hybrid “ustopian” world of the *MaddAddam* tril-

ogy in a place both familiar and unfamiliar to a contemporary reader. In slightly distancing the *MaddAddam* world from the reader in this way, she invites a consideration of the idea that a democratic heterarchy is an idealistic — perhaps even unrealistic — goal. Yet, by positioning the struggle for these ideals in an ecological haven surrounded by a chaotic and dangerous dystopia, she also allows room for the notion that heterarchy might one day be achievable, given the right environment and set of governing practices, even in flawed surroundings. The near-futuristic setting and similarities to our own contemporary world only add to the potential power of the ecofeminist discourse here. As Atwood herself states, “unless we readers can believe in the ustopia as a potentially mappable place, we will not suspend our disbelief willingly” (*In Other Worlds* 73), and her blend of the possible, probable, and unfamiliar in this ustopian setting weaves a narrative tapestry that renders ecofeminist theory accessible and productive.

Ecofeminism in Construction: The Development of Ecofeminist Theory in *MaddAddam*

The dissolution of boundaries — in terms of utopia/dystopia and self/other — is a movement away from earlier modes of ecofeminist practice. For example, Murphy stated in 1995 that “only by recognizing the existence of the ‘other’ as a self-existent entity can we begin to comprehend a gender heterarchical continuum in which difference exists without binary opposition and hierarchical valorisation” (4-5). Although Murphy advocates the recognition of difference, his assertion that it is necessary to recognize “the ‘other’ as a self-existent entity” in order to achieve a heterarchical democratic system seems to be contrary to his purpose. Later he states that “the struggles to end both patriarchy and capitalism need to be placed in an even larger context: the relationship of humanity within nature” (7). However, this is unachievable if we accept his externalization of nature. For the progression of a new ecofeminist discourse, we must sympathize with the Hegelian idea endorsed by Vogel that “pure” nature and the natural are primarily human constructs.

By accommodating and internalizing the concept of nature, and recognizing that it is instead a construction applied to certain aspects of the external world (instead of being self-existent, as Murphy attests), it is possible to achieve a heterarchical worldview. Instead of categorizing

the non-human world — a process that lends itself to a hierarchical ranking system — in *MaddAddam* it becomes clear that categories cannot be defined in the new world in the same way as in the patriarchal pre-plague world. The characters themselves cannot decide whether the Crakers should be called human. We learn through an indirect and fluid narrative that “you could never teach them about shooting and killing people. They just aren’t capable, not being human as such. Not so fast: that case has not yet been proven, says Ivory Bill” (206). As the survivors come to realize here, there are no longer any established criteria to define how the categories of “human” and “natural” exist independently: the existence of the Crakers negates these divisions.

Another facet of Murphy’s argument complicated by the narrative of *MaddAddam* is his Derridean assertion (Noonan 75) that nature should be rendered a “speaking subject” in order to achieve a heterarchy (Murphy 14). Although this is a justifiable request that advocates a “multivocality” (19), which recognizes the voices of all subjugated beings, Murphy fails to address the practical issues raised by this point. One of them is primarily the inescapable paradox of living beings that cannot speak for themselves — an interpreter is required. This can easily become a type of domination that aims for emancipation, since human interpreters for non-human subjects cannot fully renounce their humanity, and listening to or speaking for the non-human subjugated other will always be transmitted through a human voice. However, in *MaddAddam*, Atwood appears to address this issue hypothetically by giving the non-human beings — or not-fully-human beings, to be more precise — a mode of communication translated to the human survivors through a Craker voice (269). The pigeons communicate their wishes — in an almost telepathic fashion — to the human group through the necessarily impartial Craker boy Blackbeard. As the closest possible thing to an independent entity, devoid of an agenda or emotional bias, the Craker is the ideal non-human-to-human interpreter and mediator.

With this idealistic and speculative solution to the material problem of interpretation, however, I would argue that Atwood emphasizes the importance of striving for such a solution rather than highlighting its inaccessibility. The point here seems to be that only by destroying patriarchal modes of perception, and actively dissolving the deeply rooted and socially constructed boundaries that divide “nature” and “humanity” (as the existence of the Crakers encourages), is it truly pos-

sible to achieve a heterarchical system. In the *MaddAddam* world, the non-human, non-vocal being can only be truly accepted as a speaking subject, independent of its attributed resources or consumable value, when the boundaries separating the supposed domain of humanity and the supposed domain of nature are thoroughly breached in this way.

Evidently, a new ecofeminist theory begins to emerge here as the novel redirects Murphy's call for an independent nature to focus on more tangible concerns as opposed to abstract concepts. Atwood uses this strand of narrative to expose the need for an ecofeminist praxis applicable to real-world situations.

As we have also seen through consideration of the breakdown of nature/culture dualisms, *MaddAddam* also incorporates new theories on environmental writing into its development of ecofeminist ideas. Far from idealizing the location and settings of the novel, Atwood uses a series of narrative voices to link observations about the environment and its inhabitants to Morton's ideas on dark ecology.

One pivotal example is Toby's internal thought process when she ingests hallucinogenic mushrooms to convene with the dead Pilar. Her comments on the environment as she walks to the park — “the earth swallows the pieces. Everything digests, and is digested” (221) — indicate that she is confronting, if not yet exactly celebrating, the gothic decay of her surroundings that Morton advocates. When a pigoon sow — an “artificial” representation of what is supposedly “natural” — appears with her piglets while Toby tries to communicate with Pilar, she is struck by the thought of killing the pigoon, yet she recognizes how it could easily kill the group of humans. This paradox of imminent death on both sides of this hypothetical battle calms Toby and forces her to address the chaos and ever-present threat of death in her environment, but it allows her to make the “ethical” (Morton 195) choice of preventing her companions from killing the sow.

Here Atwood uses Toby's voice both to establish a heterarchical worldview, one that recognizes the “enormous power” of the non-human being (*MaddAddam* 223), and to drive forward an anti-Romantic consideration of the surrounding non-human “natural” environment. Toby's internal monologue here resists the tendency of environmental mimetic writing to recreate the “ethereal” (Morton 34) external surroundings, instead internalizing her observations and using them to shape her thought processes. These ideas can be incorporated product-

ively into new ecofeminist discourse, for they aid the breaking down of patriarchal epistemologies in both eschewing dualism between nature and humanity and idealizing a true nature that needs objective, rather than subjective, aesthetic representation.

Blackbeard, the young Craker boy, also makes some interesting formal contributions to this blend of ecofeminist and anti-nature theory in the novel by offering his own narrative. Adopting the storytelling monologue form, usually a voice used by Toby or Jimmy to rationalize events to the Crakers in a way that they can understand, Blackbeard tells the “Story of the Battle” (*MaddAddam* 358). This narrative style uses explicitly stripped-back language: Blackbeard comments on his surroundings, things “left over from the chaos” (359), in a deliberately unpoetic style; for example, “I saw empty skins, many. I saw metal and glass things, many” (359).

Explaining the concept of the battle to his fellow Crakers (360), Blackbeard takes on the role of an observer, detached from the chaotic world and commenting on, but not analyzing, the events of the battle. In this way, he is a satirized personification of Hegel’s “beautiful soul syndrome” (Morton 117). He maintains a paradoxical distance from his surroundings and his human companions’ endeavours — “We do not have battles. . . . Crake made us that way” (360) — and balks at the sight of Oryx and Crake’s decayed bodies (356), the remnants of their murder-suicide. Yet it is impossible to ignore Blackbeard’s origins: scientists in a laboratory created Blackbeard, and the other Crakers, by experimentally splicing genes. Despite his ability to communicate ethereally with his surroundings and other non-human beings, he could be termed completely “artificial,” something that Morton encourages us to celebrate.

Here, Atwood uses Blackbeard’s narration to point toward the impossibility of trying to observe the environment at a distance and of trying to remove oneself from the constructed trope of nature. Blackbeard is as much a part of the interwoven environment and human world as the pigeons, and his apparent ability to learn aspects of human culture and emotion — for example, when Toby explains the concept of marriage to him and he concedes “now I understand it better” (379) — further demonstrates the futility of trying to divide and categorize species. Blackbeard, like humans and pigeons, learns how to adapt. Similar to how the Crakers eventually understand to “ask first . . . to see

if a woman is really blue or just smelling blue” (386), this acquisition of knowledge promotes flexible ecofeminist epistemologies, which recognize the redundancy of species categorization. Working with Morton’s theory to disseminate idealistic conceptions of nature, an ecofeminist understanding of constant mutability, and species’ capacity for change and adaptation, pushes forward the possibility of an ecofeminist heterarchy among the survivors.

More Speculative Solutions: The Benefits of Ecoreligion

From the previous analysis, we can see that Atwood offers potential solutions to patriarchy by disseminating deep-seated socially constructed boundaries and through her characters’ refutation of the cannibalistic consumerism of the pre-apocalyptic society. However, *MaddAddam* also revisits and confronts the problems of inequality and hierarchy in the God’s Gardeners’ fundamentalism that were originally introduced in *The Year of the Flood*. Rather than rejecting religion outright as a potential solution to the inequalities of the pre-plague world, she explores its successes, offering another pathway for ecofeminist experimentation.

In Zeb’s narrative segments of the novel, it is true that the dangerous aspects of religion are dealt with explicitly, through his connection to the “Church of PetrOleum,” a Christian “cult” (111) created by his supposed father, “the Rev” (110). The Church of PetrOleum, we learn, became popular during an oil shortage by holding oil and petrol sacred. This mirror image of the God’s Gardeners cult demonstrates how religion can be hijacked for personal, financial, and political gain and how it can be used as a tool of oppression. Tellingly, the PetrOleum cult clearly shares values with the neo-conservative religious movement of late-twentieth-century America. We learn that Adam and Zeb’s father killed Adam’s mother, but the Rev manages to circulate the story that she had abandoned the family. As Adam says, “bad mothers are always a good story for them” (124). Here the Rev gains popularity by playing the victim. He encourages the idea that his runaway wife was undermining his masculinity, like other women dissenters from the patriarchal authorities, a neo-conservative religious idea upheld in many contemporary religious frameworks in America (Snyder 150). By subverting his power as the authority in his nuclear family, the Rev’s ex-wife is condemned for “rejecting the rightful, God-given authority of the husband/father as the head of the household” (Snyder 150).

However, as well as addressing these clearly misogynistic ideas, Atwood uses *MaddAddam* to highlight the benefits of an ecoreligion like that of the God's Gardeners. She emphasizes the importance of maintaining a sense of considered morality in the face of evil, a trait actively encouraged by the Gardeners. For example, in the first few pages of *MaddAddam*, when Toby and Ren rescue Amanda from her captors, Toby insists on upholding a Gardener festival, the feast of "St Julian and All Souls," that celebrates "God's tenderness and compassion for all creatures" (10). She cooks soup and shares it with the group, including the murderer Painballer men, upholding the tradition that "forgiveness must be offered, loving kindness must be practised, circles must be unbroken" (10). Not only does this particular phrasing emphasize a moral need for a heterarchy between humans and non-human animals in the context of the God's Gardeners' pro-animal creed, but also Toby's continuation of these moral practices demonstrates an ecofeminist approach to a morally grey situation. Ecofeminism negates the right/wrong or black/white moral mentality that a patriarchal society might have applied to the men's actions, encouraging (with the help of the religion-based creed of the Gardeners) a balanced and sensitive response to the violence perpetrated by the men.

As we have seen, the Gardeners arguably attempt to reject the "anthropocentrism" central to Western "religious and secular humanism" (Murphy 3), but in doing so they became callous, misanthropic, and neglectful of human individuality, as evidenced by their misogynistic traits exhibited in *The Year of the Flood*. However, in *MaddAddam*, their use of ecoreligion as an antidote to obsessive consumerism has its benefits in the newly forged post-apocalyptic society. Atwood emphasizes, as we have seen above, the survivors' need to constantly examine, consider, and justify the ethics of their actions, a trait that the Gardeners encourage in their constant sermonizing. When the two Painballer men are recaptured toward the end of the novel, the survivors organize a vote to decide whether they should live or die. They discuss the moral implications of killing the men: one character even states that "taking life under any circumstances is reprehensible. . . . We shouldn't let our own moral standards slip" (368). The survivors weigh the men's crimes, which include killing and eating parts of a young boy, kidnapping and repeatedly raping Amanda and Ren, and torturing and killing a pigeon piglet.

The group decide to kill the men as a result of the vote. It is a direct outcome of discussion, consideration, and democracy: even the pigeons vote on whether the men should die (369-70). Although God's Gardeners might not have advocated execution, the decision is reached through democratic means in the name of safety and preservation of all other life. To maintain their functioning heterarchy, the survivors again must eradicate all threats to the well-being of their ecosystem. However, these executions do present some problems for an ecofeminism in development. Are the survivors simply eliminating difference rather than attempting to find a peaceful solution? Are the killings justified by the text? In response to these questions, it appears that — though the executions are problematic — Atwood uses them to demonstrate the impossibility of a complete utopia and to highlight the inevitable difficulties that arise during attempts to establish a heterarchy. She believes that utopian perfection is a dangerous thing to aim for; as she herself has stated, “of course we should try to make things better, insofar as it lies within our power. But we should probably not try to make things perfect, especially not ourselves, for that path leads to mass graves” (*In Other Worlds* 84).

Another complication of the “Trial” of the Painballers that the survivors initiate is the fact that the Crakers observe, but do not participate in, the vote. Is this true heterarchy? In Blackbeard's own recounting of the trial, he states, “We do not have to have a Trial, among us. Only the two-skinned ones and the Pig Ones have to have a Trial” (*MaddAddam* 371). In removing the Crakers from the moral dilemma here, by refusing to allow them the rationality to consider the consequences, it could be argued that Atwood again outlines a moral perfection that humanity can strive toward but never achieve.

However, considering this idea in conjunction with Morton's anti-nature theory, it could also be argued that, if the Crakers were left to make the decision, the men would be left alive and cause untold pain and suffering for the group as a consequence. I suggest that Atwood instead points out that a humanity aiming for survival, sustainability, and heterarchy cannot ignore morally questionable problems and must confront Morton's “dark ecology”: the idea that we survive in a world ruled by death. Only by recognizing death as a necessary companion to life can the survivors integrate and continue to live in the post-apocalyptic world.

It could also be suggested that the Crakers' absence from the trial is by their own volition; as Blackbeard states, "I did not like the Trial" (371). By not forcing the Crakers to participate in something that they do not understand, the survivors engage with and celebrate a cultural (or genetic) difference without ignoring or suppressing that difference. In this part of the novel, a heterarchy is clearly in conceptual construction.

Ultimately, the emphasis on the survivors' collaborative moral growth, as opposed to a blind subscription to an extremist doctrine, allows Atwood to add to the growing diversity and breadth of ecofeminist principles. By testing possible solutions to the problem of anti-feminist and anti-environmentalist patriarchal capitalism and consumerism across the trilogy, it becomes evident that one of the most appropriate ways of confronting issues of misogyny, anti-environmentalism, and consumerism is by experimenting hypothetically with potential antidotes. By demonstrating that ecoreligion could be beneficial if its harmful dogmas are discarded, this novel contributes to the already varied, multiple, and inclusive ecofeminist agenda.

New Ecofeminist Directions: Atwood's Ethical Polemic

The latter sections of this article have demonstrated that *MaddAddam* does not present a neatly packaged, conclusive set of solutions to the problems presented in the first two novels of the trilogy. However, *MaddAddam* can be seen as a web of intertwined and overlapping potential ways forward for new ecofeminist praxis. By assessing the progression of ecofeminist ideologies in the novel, using the narrative to interrogate previous ecofeminist critical works, and analyzing Atwood's use of a speculative setting and experimental narrative strategies, one can map the trajectory of her implicitly ecofeminist subtext.

In summary, by demonstrating the impracticability of the "othering" of nature encouraged by some theorists, Atwood diverts ecofeminism toward a more social constructivist stance. Her novels explicitly condone a refusal to recognize the existence of a nature in opposition to a culture and instead encourage the idea of a heterarchical web that includes humanity; therefore, the characters of *MaddAddam* can refrain from viewing the environment as an exploitable resource. As Warren has observed, many ecofeminists find the "promise of ecofeminism in disrupting the nature/culture dualism by seeing nature as both an active, unpredictable, unstable, ungendered subject with agency . . . and also

as constructed artifact” (5498). However, in *MaddAddam*, Atwood harnesses the latter mode of disruption by demonstrating the dangerous effects of viewing nature as a self-existent entity.

However, as Bergthaller has stated, “the fact of our naturalness does not answer the question of how we ought to live” (732). This statement resonates powerfully in *MaddAddam* as Atwood both attempts a reversal of conceptual anthropocentric thought and actively develops heterarchical modes of governance and a democratic method that could hypothetically function in a posthuman world. As we have seen, the nuanced and complex experiments and solutions executed in *MaddAddam* do go some way toward indicating how we ought to — and ought not to — live.

The consequences of these modes of thought, then, are important for ecocritical social and cultural theory as well as for literary ecocriticism. If authors can harness and develop emerging social theory through literature, advancing the type of dialogical conversation that Murphy advocates (3), then Atwood’s contribution to ecofeminist discourse is invaluable for reaffirming the core principles of ecofeminism — namely, variation, inclusion, and equality — and establishing new productive avenues of examination. Similarly, the epistemology encouraged by the narratives and discourses present in the texts enacts ideas that could influence the field of biocentric ethics. Although Atwood makes clear — through Crake’s plague and the Gardeners’ creed — that the prioritization of non-human nature above humanity could be detrimental, the heterarchical system implemented in *MaddAddam* invites consideration of a new kind of biocentrism that includes humanity. This text, along with its two prequels, appears to endorse the idea that an ecological balance needs to be found and implemented but that it is not necessary for humans to be excluded from this balance.

As Murphy has stated, “it is time that literary critics more systematically begin to search for the ‘emancipatory strategies’ that have been giving voice to ecological narratives, and to recover those works that have realized such strategies” (20). These strategies are clearly at work in this novel and innovative textual experiment. In *MaddAddam*, indeed across the trilogy, Atwood radically repurposes the often male-dominated dystopian genre as a location in which the ethics of our society’s future can be interrogated and shaped, and she opens up the sphere of dystopias to include new “speculative” fictions (Lucas 843) concerned with inclusivity (840).

Not only does *MaddAddam* give a multivocal and multifaceted expression to a narrative of environmental catastrophe, but it also outlines many emancipatory ecofeminist strategies, as we have seen through the discussions in this article. Most importantly, however, Atwood demonstrates that ecofeminist praxis has not become inflexible and unchanging but remains responsive and multiple. By extending and diversifying how ecofeminist ideologies can be applied to certain situations, and adding new potential solutions to ever-pervasive patriarchal and totalitarian worldviews, Atwood shows that the ecofeminist principles of inclusivity, equality, and democracy are the ultimate objectives in *MaddAddam*.

NOTES

¹ The themes of ecofeminism in *MaddAddam* have been considered recently by Anna Bedford in her chapter entitled “Survival in the Post-Apocalypse: Ecofeminism in *MaddAddam*.” While Bedford devotes most of her discussion to examining the inherent ecofeminist and anti-capitalist themes in *MaddAddam* (and indeed in the previous two novels in the trilogy), this article considers more closely how Atwood uses *MaddAddam* in particular to develop and redirect current ecofeminist (and other) theoretical frameworks.

WORKS CITED

- Anca Farca, Paula. “Margaret Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* and the Garden of Limited Choices.” *Margaret Atwood Studies* 3.4 (2010): 18-21. Print.
- Atwood, Margaret. *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*. London: Virago, 2011. Print.
- . *MaddAddam*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Print.
- . *Oryx and Crake*. London: Virago, 2003. Print.
- . “Tell Harper You Support Idle No More and Chief Theresa Spence shar.es/hZsrA via @sharethis.” 24 Dec. 2012, 3:41 a.m. Tweet.
- . *The Year of the Flood*. London: Virago, 2010. Print.
- Banerjee, Suparna. “Towards ‘Feminist Mothering’: Oppositional Maternal Practice in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 14.1 (2013): 236-47. Print.
- Bedford, Anna. “Survival in the Post-Apocalypse: Ecofeminism in *MaddAddam*.” *Margaret Atwood’s Apocalypses*. Ed. Karma Waltonen. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2015. 71-92. Print.
- Bergthaller, Hannes. “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 (2010): 728-43. Print.

- Boyd, David R. *Unnatural Law: Rethinking Canadian Environmental Law and Policy*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 2003. Print.
- Brabon, Benjamin A., and Stéphanie Genz, eds. *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009. Print.
- Brooks Bouson, Jane. "We're Using Up the Earth, It's Almost Gone': A Return to the Post-Apocalyptic Future in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46.1 (2011): 9-26. Print.
- Campbell, Andrea. *New Directions in Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008. Print.
- Gaard, Greta, Simon C. Estok, and Serpil Oppermann, eds. *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.
- Gaard, Greta, and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1998. Print.
- Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14.3 (1988): 575-99. Print.
- Hengen, Shannon. "Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism." *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Ed. Coral Ann Howells. Cambridge, UK: U of Cambridge P, 2006. 72-85. Print.
- Ingersoll, Earl G., ed. *Margaret Atwood: Conversations*. London: Virago, 1992. Print.
- Lindner, Oliver. "The End of the West in Contemporary Anglophone Fiction." *From Popular Goethe to Global Pop: The Idea of the West between Memory and (Dis) Empowerment*. Ed. Ines Detmers and Birte Heidemann. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013. 71-90. Print.
- Lucas, Gerald R. "Speculative Fiction." *Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century British and Irish Fiction*. Ed. Brian W. Shaffer. Vol. 1. Oxford: Blackwell, 2011. Print.
- MacGregor, Sherilyn. *Beyond Mothering Earth: Ecological Citizenship and the Politics of Care*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 2003. Print.
- Morton, Timothy. *Ecology without Nature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007. Print.
- Murphy, Patrick D. *Literature, Nature, and Other: Feminist Ecocritiques*. Albany: SUNY P, 1995. Print.
- Noonan, Jeff. *Critical Humanism and the Politics of Difference*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003. Print.
- Sandilands, Catriona. *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and the Quest for Democracy*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999. Print.
- Snyder, R. Claire. "Paradox or Contradiction: The Marriage Mythos in Neoconservative Ideology." *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America*. Ed. Michael J. Thompson. New York: New York UP, 2007. 144-63. Print.
- Stein, Rachel. "Sex, Population, and Environmental Eugenics in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." Gaard, Estok, and Oppermann 184-202.
- Vogel, Steven. *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory*. Albany: SUNY P, 1996. Print.
- Warren, Karen J. "Feminist Theory: Ecofeminist and Cultural Feminist." *The International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Ed. Paul B. Baltes and Neil J. Smelser. Vol. 8. Oxford: Elsevier Science, 2001. 5495-99. Print.
- Whisker, Gina. *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Print.
- Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010. Print.
- Zerbe Enns, Carolyn. *Feminist Theories and Feminist Psychotherapies: Origins, Themes, and Diversity*. 2nd ed. Binghamton: Haworth, 2004. Print.