

The Wave of the Future: Cognizance of the Environmental Insubstantiality in the Face of Human Intrusion in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Year of The Flood*

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A fragile environment is prone to dangers caused by mankind, it is undeniably perplexing to know the upsurge in population that leads to the dearth and privation of resources. Under supplied resources intensify the need in man and incite him to discover alternatives to sustain his livelihood. Sustainability aims to bring steadiness in both anthropoids and nature. Barry Commoner in *Closing Circle* states the interdependency of lives with the ecosystem. All the networks in the web of life are vital, when one of the connections is disturbed the entire web of life is prone to threat leading to catastrophe which leads to annihilation and death. Harmony could be anticipated when both coexist together and are limited in their terrains without bewildering the existence of the other. Unfortunately, that is not the possibility in today's world, the whole ecosystem is becoming unusual by the deeds of men who strive to support their survival. Human's interventions have altered the whole functionality of nature and have created a faux inhabitation, forcing humans to believe that the sceptre has passed from nature to mechanization.

One of the most disquieting assaults of man towards the environment is definitely the contamination of the resources of the earth. The existence of the earth did not come into being at once, eons of time made it possible. Amitav Ghosh, a contemporary Indian English writer has voiced out the issues concerning society and the environment impudently in many of his works, among his work *The Great Derangement: Climate change and the Unthinkable*, has brought out the need to incorporate the changes in the climate into the works of fiction, he also insists on the need for the writers

to know that there is a connection between the nature and the human behavior. Donald Hughes in his book *An Environmental History of the World* (2009), illuminates the implications of the relationship between the natural environment and the indigenous human beings. Donald Worster has introduced three phases of environmental inquiry in his work *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (1989). First is the study of material environment history, which details human involvement with the forest and animals. Secondly, political and policy-related environmental movements, include various efforts to protect the natural species. Thirdly, the portrayal of the cultural and intellectual history. This highlights the relationship between society and nature. In short, environmental history is a detailed inquiry into human mistreatment of the natural world.

Margaret Atwood's concern towards the functionality of Earth is evident in her works *Maddaddam Trilogy*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Heart Goes Last*. All the dystopian domains that she created hold an indestructible association with advanced technology. Her penchant for entomology is drawn from her father's profession, Dr. Carl Atwood a forest research entomologist, in the Department of Lands and Forests, he spent all the seasons with his family in the woods of northern Quebec. The Silvicultural research in Quebec's hardwood forest by Zoran Majcen, Steve Bedard, and Christian Godbout states that, Quebec's hardwood zone is very valuable, as much from the point of view of biodiversity and its natural attractions as for the quality of its timber. Located populated region of Quebec. It has been subjected to human disturbances more than any other forest zone.

Atwood belongs to the environment as such and one who has spent most of her days in the woods should have been introduced to frequent anthropological activities and her reflections regarding the vulnerability of the environment are recorded in her trilogy the *Maddaddam*. In one of her interviews with *TIME*, she said, The climate is not a person. It's a background, just as the weather and landscapes are backgrounds. They're also always metaphors, but they aren't people in themselves. And Fictions are always about people – even if those people are rabbits or hobbits. So what you're really talking about in so-called climate fiction is people, in a plot, having events, having emotions, having interactions with other characters, in the context of a changed climate.

In *Burning Questions*, Atwood claims that "Science as such is not a person, and does not have a system of morality built into it, any more than a toaster does" (11), she indeed claims it to be a mere tool, a fundamental tool that helps one to pursue what he desired in his or her whole lifetime. She justifies her intention by quoting the hammer as an example, the hammer that is used for both creation and destruction of the houses. She gives her own vivid reasons for introducing *Maddaddam* to the world, she talks about three hands in work, the first hand is the way one is engaged with all sorts of technologies It is quite hard to resist the probable livelihood fashioned by them. The inventions, robotics, and mechanism have perfected the world and has also thrown the compulsory notion of abiding by them to survive in the future. On the other hand, the biological home is destroyed by the appraisal of the techno world. "On the third hand (for there is always a hidden hand)", where she comes down heavily on the "Democratic form of government" which has grown with power and technologies. She also adds that "*Maddaddam* tells us what next", the phrase is caustic, she not just meant to explain the final sequel through that phrase but foretells that, the imaginative forged happenings in the trilogy could become the reality in no time.

Technology seems reliable but a constant threat to humankind, its repercussions lead to the unnatural subsistence instincts in man, which proliferates the self-centeredness in himself leading to the ultimate destruction. The quest for power ignites the minds of individuals to go against Nature. The advent of globalization and industrial infrastructures has posed menaces on the indigenous people. This eventually resulted in both internal and external migrations. Mamang Dai in her poem

reminiscences the lost natural beauty in her poem *This Summer*, the inward cry of lost nature is revealed in her careful choice of words.

We made flowers and sunlight And bracelets of rain Disturbing songs,
Now I can sing the bright, crackling words
In the memory of songs
Begging forgiveness of butterflies,
And beauty that we destroyed in our hunt for life (13-20).

Technology's role in altering climate change has been palpable throughout history. This could be traced to the beginning of the 1880s, this period is known as the Second Industrial Revolution or Technological Revolution with the advent of electricity through coals (www.arcadia.com). Climate change is the most stimulating topic today detailing the weather events that have a great impact on the world. When the temperature, and precipitation, are altered by the engagements of humans, the complete form of life structure and the functionality of nature itself is modified. When anthropological activities are closely scrutinized, their consequences are lethal, they result in Global warming, Environmental depredation, ocean acidification, mass extinction, and a rise in sea level.

Global warming alters the climate, when there are vagaries and fluctuations in the temperature then the life forms have to adapt to the prevailing mutable condition of the environment. The changes in the environment will lead to a menacing lifestyle. The surrounding which was once considered as innocuous and breathable becomes treacherous. Ordinary and natural way of living could not be anticipated rather enduring instincts induced by mechanization is certainly welcomed and worshipped. Technological investments have made lives miserable, the prominence was given to automation and modernization. The 2012 report by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, *Turn Down the heat: Why a 4 ° Centigrade Warmer world Must be Avoided*, stated by Margaret Atwood in *Burning Questions* concludes that, With pressures increasing as warming progresses towards 4 °C and combining with nonclimate-related social, economic, and population stresses, the risk of crossing critical social system thresholds will grow...One example is a risk that sea-level rise in atoll countries exceeds the capabilities of controlled, adaptive migration, resulting in the need for complete abandonment of an island or region. Similarly, stresses on human health, such as heat waves, malnutrition, and decreasing quality of drinking water due to sea water intrusion....

Thomas Robert Malthus, British economist, and philosopher, in his book *An Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798 familiarised the Malthusian growth model to evaluate populace growth. The theory states that the requisite for food will mount with the surge in population, this eventually results in the birth of ailments, deprivation, confrontation, and calamity. Atwood says “Lowering the death rate without increasing the food supply will get you famines, social upheavals, and wars, every time” (*Burning Questions* 367)

Oryx and Crake, according to Atwood, was a creation after a high discussion on extinct animals with her birding group. She questions the steadiness of the earth due to the new biotech world created with the help of AI, and solar energy. This technically holds a crucial position in altering the climate itself. Atwood created the ‘Crakers’ uniquely, probably this would be the dream of voluminous bio-technicians around the world. Crakers also known as the designer people, are immune to insects, their bodies can easily block the sun's rays, and their digestive system were designed like that of rabbits with this capability they can digest even the leaves. There would be no territorial wars as there would be no need for agriculture or territories to grow food. In a social context, there will be no public nuisance on rape as their mating is programmed in certain seasons alone. They also purr to heal themselves. These Crakers cannot prevail among humans because humans could either kill them or exploit them to a great extent. In order to accomplish this

wonderment, Crake decided to wipe out the whole human race. The Year of the Flood is a sequel that follows the survivors of the “Waterless Flood”. The multiple notions of the forbidden world. There are numerous entailments of the human findings that led to this catastrophe.

Initially the OrganInc Farms, the unusual presaging is unlike organic farms. Jimmy’s father is the prime chief architect of the ‘Pigoon Project’. He was working with a team of transplant experts and microbiologists to succeed in the creation of *susmultiorganifer*, the official name for Pigoon. The aim of the project “was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host” (OC 25). The innovation does not end there, as they began working on a new variation with upgraded characteristics, to perfect pigoon to grow five or six kidneys at a time. They were used for organ transplanting, this became a popular deed and not unusual anymore. The organs created in the host of pigs could be customized, and executed through the cells offered by the individual human donors. The flesh of the pigoon is turned into Pigoon pancakes, pigoon popcorns and pigoon pies. Unless the cute pigoonlets, pigoons were large sized and “frightening, with their runny noses and tiny, white-lashed pink eyes” (30). There were other hybrid creatures found, the rakunks, a breed between racoons and skunks; the wolvogs, a deadly combination of dog and wolves; the Liobams, the cross between lions and lambs; Crakers, the genetically modified life forms.

Next the Nooskins, here the pigoons were reduced in size compared to those in the OrganInc Farm, they are safeguarded exclusively “to develop skin related biotechnologies” (62). The ulterior motive behind this framework is to ensure wrinkle and blemish-free skin, this is achieved by replacing fresh epidermis in place of the older ones. Jimmy’s father was working simultaneously on his new project ‘neuro-regeneration project’, and he succeeded in growing human neocortex tissue in a pigoon. Watson-Crick, the institute where Crake got himself admitted proved his intellectual capability. The Rockulators; pseudo rocks that had the capability of absorbing water in times of humidity and generating water in the time of drought, immensely large winged butterflies, and purple shrubs amazed Jimmy. Crake answered “After it happens, that’s what they look like in real-time. The process is no longer important” (235). He was shocked to know about the ‘ChickieNobs’ formed in the Neo Agriculture lab, that even the parts of chicken could be grown separately without proper body form, even without a head. The wallpaper made out of “Kirilian-energy-sensing algae” in décor Botanicals and ‘Wolvogs’ developed in Biofence lab, “they’re bred to deceive”(241) are the exploits of nature. Crake clearly states that he does not believe in ‘Nature’ especially “not in a capital N”.

HelthWyzer, the parent company of Nooskins, here the diseases are created and not invented. When a solution to a biological problem nullifies their need for further medication, it affects the production of newer innovations. To avoid this chaos, the diseases are spread initially through vitamin pills and later companies come up with formulas (created beforehand) to treat people. One of its inventions is ‘Happicuppa’ the unusual coffee beans. These beans need not be handpicked and one need not wait for a longer time till they ripen, it was designed in such a way that it could be harvested concurrently without much hustle, and this unique quality of the bean heightened its utility value in the market.

Rejooven Esense, bigger than OrganInc farms and Helthwyzer, crake worked in a unit ‘Paradise’, introduced ‘BlyssPluss Pill’, that helps in immortality. The aim of the pill is to achieve four traits, protection against sexually transmitted diseases, elimination of feelings of low worth, prolonged youth, and enhancement of birth control, which will not be advertised publically. They planned to begin their trial in the “poor countries”, “whorehouses”, “sex clinics” and “prisons”. The ‘Crakers’ are considered as the fearless, seven-year-old looking children of crake, who are genetically made in the lab. There would be no much difficulty in proliferation as they procreate themselves. Every single characteristic was carefully planned and fed into the life form of Crakers. They were automatically crafted to expire when they turned thirty. When evolvment takes control

over the birth and death of an individual, the law of nature is collapsed and it becomes impossible to retain it. If you take 'mortality' as being, not death, both the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then 'immortality' is the absence of such fear. Babies are immortal. Edit out the fear, and you'll be....(356)

The inkling behind the creation of Blyss Pluss pills and Crakers was to eradicate the instinct of fear. The ulterior motive was to reduce the population and replace it with the "Paradise Project". The project promised zero illness and a safer environment. Later it is revealed that pills caused bioterrorism, which was intentional and accomplished by the mastermind Crake. Jimmy's father being the technician and mastermind behind the whole creation of OrganInc farm, lost his reputation as a good father and a husband. His inventions were welcomed by the people who were financially stable leaving the other side of the world to suffer.

As the first heat hits, mist rises from among the swath of trees between her and the derelict city. The air smells faintly of burning, a smell of caramel and tar and rancid barbecues, and the ashy but greasy smell of a garbage dump fire after it's been raining. The abandoned towers in the distance are like the coral of an ancient reef-bleached and colorless, devoid of life. (TYTF 3)

The bioterrorism was termed as the 'waterless flood' that pilfered the livelihood of the human population. The pandemonium was not the natural outcome rather it was through the spread of pills. The 'God's Gardeners' indicate nature, and their sustenance in guarding the life forms and not to prey on them. Numerous sayings in the novel regarding the big annihilation that is yet to commence in years highlight the temperance reality. They anticipated the destruction of the world in the form of a 'waterless flood' and also believed that "all buying and selling will cease" (126). According to Adam One, the founder of Gardeners, believed in the multidimensional aspect of the fall of man. It began long back when the man turned from a naturally ordained life to a technology-based life. The Earth remains unchanged until it is not distressed constantly with the nuances of technology, the contented lifetime happiness cannot be certain. The machinery transformation divulges its true nature in times of expiration, of course, it seems to be the liberator in times of the woe but the truth unveils in the end. There is indeed no life after the phase of technology, it could be the different stages of obliteration, say, destruction phase one, destruction phase two, destruction phase three, and so on. Each phase might bring destruction according to its own intensity. The end could not be altered "We're using up the earth. It's almost gone" (239).

Margaret Atwood's strong notions of the ongoing confrontation between religion and mechanization are evident in the novel. Religious principles of creation, and the ways Adam, the first man on earth named the life forms around are infused in the ideologies of the Gardeners. Overconsumption and overuse of resources escalate the quest for more and the need for it never ceases in time, the change in the conviction of the people made them embrace a new order of life. The whole construction of human-hood is put to test, more replacements, treatments, alterations, and proxies in place of nature ruined the actuality and the functionality of nature. Atwood says "Then they fell from the joyous life at the moment into the anxious contemplation of the vanished past and the distant future" (188), with the advent of fire and weaponry the evolution of modernism began, and precisely the fruition of devastation began. The comfy life is definitely a treat to mankind.

One part of the world still believes and considers the creation of 'Cyborgs', where they are seen with a greater utility value than experiencing physical, mental, and social prejudices. Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' exposes capitalist technocratic politics, and eventually stresses individualization. The quest for Individual liberty and Individual consumption could have been the possible reasons for the creation of cyborgs. Her insist on "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (2016) seems a strong aversion towards inequity. When the earth is concerned the paradigm shifts, the focus is on nature.

Peter Barry exposes the shift from ‘Holocene’, the Greek meaning would be ‘entirely recent’, to ‘Anthropocene’ known as ‘the human age’(263-264). The difference is opaque and not hidden anymore any damage on Earth is clearly visible. Re-inhabitation is all about thriving in the dystopian world, in *The Year of The Flood* Toby and Ren adapt themselves to the way of living. The opening of this novel is rustic in nature, and the elements of darkness and hopelessness is highlighted. The technocratic world can still make one feel burdened, Atwood through the voice of gardeners places a powerful argument stating, “Imagine how terrible it would be if there were no death!” (TYTF 3). The role of religion takes a high stand in this novel. Two great phenomena, the phenomena of sustenance of life through religion and the phenomena of the evolution of life, change the perspective of living. Here, in the fiction, the Gardeners formed a group that abides by the regulations of environmental ethics. Gardeners believed in the saints who lived a saintly life before the waterless flood and who stood against the destruction of natural life forms through the threatening forms of technology.

...Its sun-grown, pesticide sprayed, rainforest-habitat-destroying coffee products were the biggest threat to God’s featured Creatures in our times, just as DDT was the biggest threat to them in the times of saint Rachel that some of our more radical former members joined the militant campaign against Happicuppa. Other groups were protesting its treatment of indigenous workers, but those ex-Gardeners were protesting its anti-Bird policies. Although we could not condone the violent methods, we did endorse the intention. (TYTF 372)

Margret Atwood has pronounced the possible remedies in *Burning Questions*, she states that though technology has managed to help life forms like solar power gathers, Lily pad devices, water-purification machines, etc, installing them in sufficient qualities remains an unanswered question. It is important to be aware that “We are part of Nature: we are not apart from it” (212). Funding new scientific discoveries and transportation seems a reckless job. This in turn triggers the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere resulting in climate change. Even when private companies volunteer to fund new discoveries, there is a high chance that they opt for the ones that double their pockets and would least care to be ecologically conscious. Moreover, resources are always in demand due to the increase in the rate of consumption by the richest in the world. Lastly, the population has to be made stable to make it fit enough for mankind to thrive in the future. The role of an individual becomes significant, their intrusion in a greater level will shut the whole earth down in no time. On one hand, the release of methane into the atmosphere acts as the most powerful global warmer than Carbon dioxide, on the other hand, the advent of several life-draining technologies limits the life span of the earth.

Hence, Margaret Atwood has stalwartly unveiled the awful truth that the contemporary age is indeed a paradigm shift from eco-consciousness to techno-consciousness in her *Maddaddam Trilogy*. Through the voice of Crake she disclosed the thoughts of every individual who at least once in a lifetime thought about immortality and eventually projected the predicted dystopian environment that the very thought could bring through the trilogy. Crake anticipated an environment that is free from all corporeal and societal ailments, one facet that he failed to diagnose and accomplish is, the cognizance of the effect that his attempts would bring on Earth. He kept hissing ‘the wave of the future’ in the presence of Jimmy to make him apprehend that crudely a great hazard, maybe in the form of flood on its way to exterminate and wipe out the whole race, his intention to sustain the survivors in the future was achieved through the distribution of pills. Atwood managed to build hope in the minds of readers in her last sequel, that the civilization could be revived and rejuvenated. The irony that is put forth by Atwood is that the Crakers help in building up the civilization and humans bring havoc by destroying the same. If you’re writing anything about the “future,” you’re going to have to deal with climate. In the *Madd Addam* series, that had to be taken

into account: where are the people in the story located? And what, therefore, are their resource? Because climate is going to affect everything. (www.time.com)

A Note on Documentation

In order to avoid lengthy documentation and repetition while referring, the works of Margaret Atwood are quoted in abbreviations and indicated in the text of the thesis within parenthesis along with the page number concerned.

OC – Oryx and Crake

TYTF – The Year of the Flood

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