

Ecofeminism Vs Darwinism: An Analysis on Margaret Atwood's Novels

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Abstract- Ecological concern is increasing in today's world because the nameless diseases and helpless natural calamities. There are several ecocritical writers in various countries however, Margaret Atwood is one of the most popular and respected serious novelists writing today. In addition to a Booker Prize she has received numerous awards and honorary degrees, and in particular she is the centre of a great academic industry inspired by her work. She is significant for ecocriticism because she has addressed environmental issues in her writing and their public lives consistently over more than past twenty five years in building fictional scenarios around climate change at least a decade before the subject came to public attention in the early 1990s. Atwood is a patron of friends of the Earth, and is honorary president of the conservation charity. Atwood had tried to integrate scientific ideas in her work, in theme and as structural elements of narrative. Her novels appear to be highly ecofeministic. But when given a deeper read it shows its deviation from an ecocritical view to Darwinism. The paper is a study on Atwood's novels and her gradual movement from ecofeminism to Darwinism.

Keywords: -- Ecocriticism, ecofeminism, Darwinism, environment, dystopia, etiology, ecology, survival, ecophilosophers, anthropocentrism, and constructionism.

Ecological concern is increasing in today's world because of the nameless diseases and helpless natural calamities. There are several ecocritical writers in various countries however, Margaret Atwood is one of the most popular and respected serious novelists writing today. In addition to a Booker Prize she has received numerous awards and honorary degrees, and in particular she is the centre of a great academic industry inspired by her work. She is significant for ecocriticism because she has addressed environmental issues in her writing and their public lives consistently over more than past twenty five years in building fictional scenarios around climate change at least a decade before the subject came to public attention in the early 1990s. Atwood is a patron of friends of the Earth, and is honorary president of the conservation charity. Atwood had tried to integrate scientific ideas in her work, in theme and as structural elements of narrative.

Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on November 18, 1939. She is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, inventor, and environmental activist. She is a winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias Award for Literature. She has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize five times, winning once, and has been a finalist for the Governor General's Award several times, winning twice. In 2001, she was inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame. She is also a founder of the Writers' Trust of Canada, a non-profit literary organization that seeks to encourage Canada's writing

community. Among innumerable contributions to Canadian literature, she was a founding trustee of the Griffin Poetry Prize.

Atwood is also the inventor, and developer, of the LongPen and associated technologies that facilitate the remote robotic writing of documents. She is the Co-Founder and a Director of Syngrafii Inc. (formerly Unotcht Inc.), a company that she started in 2004 to develop, produce and distribute the LongPen technology. She holds various patents related to the LongPen technologies. While she is best known for her work as a novelist, she has also published fifteen books of poetry. Many of her poems have been inspired by myths and fairy tales, which have been interests of hers from an early age. Atwood has published short stories in Tamarack Review, Alphabet, Harper's, CBC Anthology, Ms., Saturday Night, and many other magazines. She has also published four collections of stories and three collections of unclassifiable short prose works.

Atwood was born in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, as the second of three children of Carl Edmund Atwood, an entomologist and Margaret Dorothy (née Killam), a former dietitian and nutritionist from Woodville, Nova Scotia. Because of her father's ongoing research in forest entomology, Atwood spent much of her childhood in the backwoods of northern Quebec and travelling back and forth between Ottawa, Sault Ste.

Marie, and Toronto. She did not attend school full-time until she was eight years old. She became a voracious reader of literature, Dell pocketbook mysteries, Grimm's Fairy Tales, Canadian animal stories, and comic books. She attended Leaside High School in Leaside, Toronto, and graduated in 1957. Atwood began writing plays and poems at the age of six. Atwood realized she wanted to write professionally when she was 16. In 1957, she began studying at Victoria College in the University of Toronto, where she published poems and articles in *Acta Victoriana*, the college literary journal. Her professors included Jay Macpherson and Northrop Frye. She graduated in 1961 with a Bachelor of Arts in English (honours) and minors in philosophy and French.

In late 1961, after winning the E. J. Pratt Medal for her privately printed book of poems, *Double Persephone*, she began graduate studies at Harvard's Radcliffe College with a Woodrow Wilson fellowship. She obtained a master's degree (MA) from Radcliffe in 1962 and pursued doctoral studies at Harvard University for two years, but did not finish her dissertation, "The English Metaphysical Romance". She taught at the University of British Columbia in 1965, the Sir George Williams University in Montreal from 1967 to 1968, the University of Alberta from 1969 to 1970, York University in Toronto from 1971 to 1972, the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in 1985, where she was visiting M.F.A. Chair, and New York University, where she was Berg Professor of English. Atwood, who was surrounded by the intellectual dialogue of the female faculty members at Victoria College, often portrays female characters dominated by patriarchy in her novels. She also sheds light on women's social oppression as a result from patriarchal ideology.

Atwood's father was an entomologist, her brother is a neurophysiologist, and she has claimed that if she were not a novelist she would probably be a botanist busily engaged in the genetic modification of plants. Her novel *Cat's Eye* uses ideas from Quantum physics and *Oryx and Crake* reflects her knowledge in bioengineering. Atwood have followed a path: from something a lot like ecocriticism, which identifies environmental crisis as a specifically modern and western problem with ideological origins in patriarchy and consumerism to a Darwinian viewpoint that identifies the interaction of these contingent and local factors with trans-historical human nature as key elements in the complete etiology of global ecological concerns.

The term *ecofeminism* links feminism with ecology. It stresses how paternalistic/capitalistic society has led to a harmful split between nature & culture. *Ecofeminists* view in that the split can be headed by the feminine instinct for nurture and holistic knowledge of nature's processes. Modern

ecofeminism, or *feminist ecocriticism*, as chews such essentialism and instead focuses on inter sectional questions, such as how the nature-culture split enables the oppression of female & non human bodies. It is an academic activist movement that see critical connection between the exploitation of nature and the nature and the domination over women both caused by men.

Thomas Henry Huxley, an English biologist, coined the term *Darwinism* in 1860. It was used to describe evolutionary concepts in general. An English philosopher Herbert Spencer published the concepts earlier. *Darwinism* is a theory of biological evolution developed by the English naturalist Charles Darwin. The theory states that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* refers to biological evolution but creationists have appropriated it to refer to the origin of life, and it has even been applied to concepts of cosmic evolution, both of which have no connection to Darwin's work.

Concepts of Darwinism:

- More individuals are produced each generation that can survive.
- Phenotypic variation exists among individuals and the variation is heritable.
- Those individuals with heritable traits better suited to the environment will survive.
- When reproductive isolation occurs new species will form.

In arguing thus there are three constituencies of increasing size and Atwood scholars, who have typically appropriated her work for their routine assertions of anti-essentialism, cultural constructionism and creaking post-freudian models of the mind of ecocritics, who have typically allied themselves with ecophilosophers in identifying anthropocentrism as the core conceptual problem with western civilization in its relations with more than human nature and literary critics and theorists quite generally, who typically valorise differences and associate Darwinism with biological determinism and right wing ideologies. For most of the people in the humanities, nature is best kept sealed off safely in hermetic scare quotes, and human nature is best not mentioned at all. However, for ecocritics in particular, to focus on nature-orientated literature and ignore the reading, thinking, feeling naked ape at the centre of humanistic enquiry is to narrow fatally the scope of our critique. The importance of Atwood lie not only the public activism, nor her representation of nature and its vicissitudes under specific cultural dispensations, but like most great novelists in their

representation of the dilemmas and disasters attendant on human nature.

Atwood has said, in that what we want has not changed for thousands of years, because, as far as we can tell, human nature hasn't changed either. Speaking or writing *Oryx and Crake*, she says, A caterpillar is letting itself down on a thread, twirling slowly like a rope artist, spiraling towards his chest. It's a luscious, unreal green, like a gumdrop, and covered with tiny bright hairs. Watching it, he feels a sudden, inexplicable surge of tenderness and joy. Unique, he thinks. There will never be another such moment of time, another such conjunction. (O&C46)

These assumptions are fundamentally opposed to those held by most literary critics and theorists, who the supposedly infinite mobility, malleability and ductility of desire and deride the notion of human nature as a reactionary fiction. Ecocriticism is meant to be a political criticism, akin to feminism and Marxism, but it has rarely if ever engaged with the embodied, evolved moral and reading subjects to whom it ought to appeal. The proposal is that, like Atwood, people come to terms with Darwinism in the forms most useful to us specifically evolutionary psychology and thereby begin the immense and complete process of working out how best to achieve environmentalist objectives in the light of both our various cultures and our shared human nature.

In writing *ecofeminism: Surfacing, The Handmaid's Tale, The Child in Time* the advent of modern environmental politics coincided with that of feminism and from the outset, a certain commonality of purpose as well as some defining tensions were evident. Feminists and environmentalists shared a critique of Enlightenment rationality, with its anthropocentrism, its scientific philosophy of reductivism rather than holism, and its tendency to value nature instrumentally rather than intrinsically. Feminine qualities of nurturance and peace were clearly preferable to masculine aggression and mastery. At the same time, though, feminist theory sought to liberate women from restrictive essentialist stereotypes by distinguishing biological sex from enculturated gender, and prioritising the latter as a potential field of struggle and change. Biology was equated with determinism and oppressively reactionary politics, ensuring that the role of the body remained vexed within feminist theory: valorized, denied, mystified, subjected to cultural inscription and eventually in performativity theory credited with as much of the hoped for fluidity of gender as seemed remotely plausible. Quite early on in this argument, Margaret Atwood published *Surfacing*, her second novel and by far the most popular of all of both writers' output amongst ecocritics.

From this seemingly unambiguous ecofeminist manifesto, she moved eventually to the dystopian *The Handmaid's Tale* in which feminism and a kind of environmental politics are brought into open conflict while Darwinian thinking is represented as complicit with the violently oppressive theocracy. Ironically, perhaps, shortly after one of the foremost women writers in English published this magnificent exploration of the problematic relationship of nature and gender.

The dreadfully over-analysed novel is *Surfacing* a substantial majority of responses to the novel find strong support in the internal monologue of the unnamed Surfacer. The landscape of the Canada is powerfully presented in the novel, sutting between the mythicised wilderness of Canadian nationalism. The Surfacer's home ground, "oreign territory is scarred by new roads and long ago transformed by dams and forestry, while the white birches are dying, the disease spreading up from the south literally a reference to fire blight, but of course also symbolising a little too bluntly American cultural and environmental imperialism. Stuck to a cliff are the entreaties, adverts and graffiti of local and global commerce, politicians, priests and lovers, a melange of demands and languages, an x-ray of it would be the district's entire history. However, her return to her childhood haunts in search of her father develops into a struggle with her sexist companions and the other anthropocentric dimensions of the region, and a gruelling process of self-discovery. For example, some fishermen she has taken to be American have killed a heron, an act of seemingly pointless if typical, cruelty.

The study analyses how the writer has made eco concern to over-power everything but still in western sense. Thus the paper shows the writers gradual movement from Ecofeminism towards Darwinism. The author's own life has become the source of her literature and her sound knowledge in bioengineering, is reflected in her works. The novelist tries to replace God with nature, which too is one of the creations. So it seems that Atwood has gradually moved from ecofeminism to Darwinism.

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