

No Homes, Only the Wilderness: The Eco-Dystopian Vision in Margaret Atwood's Trilogy

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Abstract—Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy (Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood, MaddAddam) presents a harrowing vision of a post-apocalyptic world where humanity's exploitation of nature culminates in environmental collapse. This article examines how Atwood constructs an eco-dystopia where wilderness reclaims the ruins of civilization, interrogating the consequences of unchecked capitalism, genetic engineering, and anthropocentrism. Drawing on eco-critical theory and dystopian studies, the analysis highlights Atwood's critique of humanity's destructive relationship with the natural world and her ambiguous portrayal of a future where non-human entities—genetically modified creatures and rewilded landscapes—dominate. The trilogy serves as both a warning and a speculative exploration of ecological hubris, urging a re-evaluation of humanity's role within the Anthropocene.

Index Terms—Eco-dystopia, Anthropocene, environmental collapse, genetic engineering, Margaret Atwood, MaddAddam trilogy

Cli-fi's patron saint, the man who transformed climatic fiction to the genre called CLI-FI, a self-proclaimed "cli-fi missionary, a cheer-leader for novelists and screen-writers, a P.R. guy with media contacts, a literary theorist, and an advisor to novelists seeking publication advice and direction is none other than Dan Bloom. Bloom maintains the web presence and research tool called "The Cli-Fi" on which he meticulously follows and documents, news coverage of the genre. Bloom claims that the term "cli-fi" came to him after reading the 2006 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and began thinking of ways to raise awareness of novels and movies about climate change issues. National Public Radio used Bloom's moniker during a 2013 segment with authors Nathaniel Rich and Barbara Kingsolver, and from that point on, "cli-fi"

very much entered academic and journalistic lexicons.

Born as the unfortunate love child of global environmental crisis and narrative imagination, climate fiction is a timely cultural reaction to the growing societal awareness of human impact upon the planet and its climate system. During the last ten years, global anthropogenic climate change has become a stable theme in new narrative fiction, and climate fiction has been recognized both academically and popularly as a legitimate narrative genre. The increasing concern over climate change still has not led to any adequate change in the global consumption of fossil fuels; a cultural interest in the worsening environmental situation can only be expected to grow in the near future. The emergence of global warming and other global-scale environmental issues as themes of fiction highlight the common need for a narrative experience of the changing world.

Since the Publication of *The Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, the hue and cry to protect nature against all atrocities has been in the air. The devastation of nature has become the major themes of many present-day writers. In Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behaviour*, the miraculous appearance of monarch butterflies is recognized by scientists as a consequence of climate change. N. K. Jemisin's in his *Broken Earth* trilogy, presents an earthlike planet that hates humanity because of its over exploitation of its deepest resources. These novels, respond to the idea of the Anthropocene: a new geological era marked by the planetary impact of human activity. This new era was first proposed in 2000 by chemist Paul J. Crutzen and marine science specialist Eugene F. Stoermer, who concluded that we have left behind the Holocene, the relatively warm and stable geological era that began at the conclusion of the Ice Age: "considering ... [the] major and still growing

impacts of human activities on earth and the atmosphere ... it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing the term anthropocene for the current geological epoch. As such, the defining feature of the Anthropocene is that humans “wield geological force” at a planetary scale. While there is no consensus as to when our species’ impact on the global environment grew large enough to mark the beginning of the Anthropocene, it is most commonly tied to the emergence of the fossil fuel economy: “humans began to acquire this [geological] agency only since the Industrial Revolution, but the process really picked up in the second half of the twentieth century, alarming manifestations of the Anthropocene. Our species burning of fossil fuels has devastating effects on Earth’s environment, and there can now be a little debate that the ever-accelerating pace of climate change presents one of the greatest threats to the future. Therefore, put simply, the new geological era we are living in is one defined by the ways in which our species is gradually destroying its planet.

Alarmed by the present over exploitation of nature and everything sine qua for a comfortable life on this planet, Margret Atwood, envisions the collapse of the very rubrics of nature in an apocalyptic way. Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–2013) comprising *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam* reimagines dystopian fiction through an ecological lens, depicting a world ravaged by climate disaster, corporate greed, and biotechnological excess. Unlike traditional dystopias centred on totalitarian regimes, Atwood’s narrative foregrounds environmental collapse as the catalyst for societal disintegration. The trilogy’s setting—a near-future earth scarred by rising oceans, pandemics, and genetically engineered species—reflects contemporary anxieties about climate change and bioengineering. Atwood’s eco-dystopia critiques anthropocentric ideologies, illustrating how humanity’s alienation from nature precipitates its own obsolescence. By situating the trilogy within eco-critical discourse, the novels explore the tension between dystopian despair and the ambiguous potential for ecological renewal. Eco-dystopia, as a literary mode, highlights the destructive impact of unchecked capitalism, ecological neglect, and

technological experimentation on the environment. In Atwood’s trilogy, these themes are explored through vivid world-building, characters who survive in this collapsed future, and the complex relationships between humans, nature, and technology. Atwood’s eco-dystopia is not a simple projection of environmental catastrophe but a warning about the possible effects of current global trends—biotechnology, resource depletion, climate change, and the commodification of nature. Atwood uses her trilogy to present an eco-dystopian world in which ecological collapse is intimately tied to the breakdown of social systems and human relationships. . Atwood’s exploration of ecological collapse and the role of human agency in the devastation offer a poignant meditation on the fragility of both the planet and the human condition. The trilogy presents a world where traditional forms of home and civilization are no longer viable due to the ravages of climate change, pollution, and unchecked biotechnology. Atwood’s eco-dystopian world challenges the reader to reconsider humanity’s relationship with nature and to question the sustainability of contemporary practices. Central to this vision is the absence of “homes” in the conventional sense, replaced instead by a desolate wilderness that both isolates and defines the survivors’ new reality.

In a world with highly advanced biotechnology, filled with environmental disasters, Atwood portrays a future that leads to the annihilation of the human race. The novels place the readers in a post-apocalyptic landscape, and the books’ narrators present stories of how life was before the end of humans. Atwood’s descriptions of life before and after this apocalyptic event offer contemplations on the issues of bioethics and anthropocentrism, as well as how corporate greed and human consumerism contribute to humanity’s downfall. In the trilogy, self-centeredness and overpopulation, together with the misuse of technology, have led to environmental disasters. These issues are primarily the motivation behind the characters’ plan of human extinction. The various discussion points in Atwood’s trilogy reflect on concerns in the modern world. Atwood’s novels are good examples of science fiction in the apocalyptic tone: they extrapolate from our present

moment and present us with a vision of the future that is frightening to behold.

In the MaddAddam trilogy, home is not merely a physical space but an emotional and cultural construct. As Atwood's characters struggle to survive in a post-apocalyptic world, they are forced to confront a fundamental disconnection from the world that once provided them with shelter, safety, and a sense of identity. The ecosystem in Atwood's narrative has been irreparably damaged by corporate experiments, climate change, and the genetic manipulation of species. The collapse of home thus symbolizes the larger collapse of environmental systems, with the wilderness representing both a literal and metaphorical void. Atwood's critique of industrialized capitalism is underscored by the formation of the Corporations in the trilogy—entities that prioritize profit over the well-being of the environment and humanity. These corporations, such as the fictional Helth Wyzer and Organ Inc Farms, spearhead the exploitation of natural resources and the manipulation of life itself. This exploitation is vividly depicted in the genetic engineering of animals and the creation of the Crakers, a genetically modified race of humans designed to be free of the corruptions of modern civilization. The collapse of ecosystems and the eradication of traditional homes are, thus, consequences of unchecked corporate greed and ecological negligence.

The MaddAddam trilogy describes the biggest fear of every environmentalist: that the plundering of the natural resources and use of fossil fuels will lead to a dystopian future. Humans in her books have to live with the horrors of environmental catastrophes, the collapse of society, and its economy (Bouson joke-filled romp 345). In the MaddAddam trilogy, the planet has become inhabitable for many animals, and eventually, for the human species. The novels are all set in a dystopian future, in which climate change has decisively altered the world as we know it. To deal with the problems of overpopulation, a mad scientist, Crake, released a deadly virus in the world that killed almost every human being. The first novel introduces the character Jimmy, who was once friends with Crake before the pandemic. Jimmy lives on a beach with the Crakers, genetically engineered humanlike creatures. At the end of the first novel, Jimmy meets Toby and Ren. Before the pandemic, the two girls

were part of a sect called God's Gardener's. The second novel is about their lives before and after the pandemic. In the third novel, the three characters meet other survivors, like Zeb, another former God's Gardener member. Together, they try to navigate their lives in a world where humankind has almost become extinct. The dystopian trilogy could also be classified as climate fiction. While sexuality, gender issues, or the supremacy of corporate culture are crucial themes in these novels, this thesis concentrates on the use of satire in the trilogy as cli-fi novels (DIAL)

The trilogy, tells the story of a world changed by global warming where a scientist named Crake releases a deadly virus to deal with overpopulation. In the first novel, *Oryx and Crake*, the reader meets Snowman, also known as Jimmy. He survived the deadly pandemic and now lives on a beach with the Crakers, humanoids created by Crake. The scientist, Crake wistfully desires to erase humans and replace them with the Crakers, who are more sustainable and less violent. Throughout the novel, Jimmy speaks about his past and the world before the pandemic that destroyed humankind. It was a violent world, ruled by consumerism and divided between scientists, who are in control of everything, and the average population. The rich scientists live comfortably in Compounds, isolated from the other humans who live in the run-down areas called Pleeblands. Jimmy lives in the Compounds, where he meets Crake. The two of them become friends, and Crake makes Jimmy immune to the virus, about which Jimmy knows nothing. After the pandemic breaks out, Jimmy kills Crake and marches down to the beach with the Crakers. At the end of the first novel, he meets Ren and Toby, the protagonists of *The Year of The Flood*. In the second book of the trilogy, the reader learns more about the world before the pandemic. While the first book is told from Jimmy's perspective, which was rich and well-protected from the already-destroyed world by climate change, the second novel follows the point of view of the other part of the population who is poor and lived in the Pleeblands. The protagonists are Ren and Toby. They had before the pandemic been a part of the group called God's Gardeners. The God's Gardeners form a religious sect that combines biblical and scientific practices to honor the Earth. Though, they had predicted the end

of humanity some of them, like Ren and Toby, survived the virus. A girl, named Amanda, in Ren's age group and his best friend, survived the virus. When the pandemic had been out leashed, Amanda, Ren, and Toby escaped to a spa and hid there. However, in the flow of time, "the Painballers", the worst kind of criminals who participated in a television game to kill each other, find them. Unfortunately, these criminals survived the virus too, and they kidnap Amanda. In search of her, Ren and Toby meet Jimmy on the beach. Here, the story of the first book and second meet. Together they capture the Painballers and save Amanda. The last novel, MaddAddam, continues with Jimmy's, Ren's, and Toby's story. They reunite with other survivors. Some had been a part of Crake's project who had been working reluctantly for him. They had been kept in total oblivion on what they were working on when they collaborated with Crake to develop the virus and the Crakers. Others Like Zeb were already a part of the God's Gardeners. Zeb who once dated Ren's mother now falls in love with Toby, the brother of Adam One, the former leader of the God's Gardeners. The survivors live in harmony with the Crakers and try to protect each other from the Painballers, who managed to escape again, and the Pigoons, a highly intelligent animal hybrid. The Painballers become dangerous for the Pigoons too, and so the survivors, the Crakers and the Pigoons, form an alliance. Together they fight the Painballers. During the battle, Adam One as well as Jimmy meets with death. Throughout the last novel, the survivors try to rebuild their old lives. They teach the Crakers to write and start growing vegetables for surviving the hard times. Meanwhile, some women are impregnated, throwing the beacon of hope toward the beginning of a new generation where Crakers, humans, and even hybrid animals can live together in accord. However, Zeb dies, and Toby kills herself that leave the ending on a sad note.

Atwood unsettles the narrative in MaddAddam through her 'Utopia' denomination. Utopia as a narrative trope collapses familiarity and implodes fixed categories; thus, combining the two genres dystopia/utopia releases them from their binary status and makes possible a continuous and inclusive reading of the trilogy. Subversion of genre convention in this way is a method that contemporary

feminist writers use in order to reveal hidden structures and to destabilize hegemonic discourse. It produces a critical distance from a standard text, and its concomitant conventions. Not only does it provide an opportunity for present social criticism, but it also introduces a narrative space for future potential. Constructing MaddAddam as an Utopia releases Toby's character to a post-feminist reading. Initiating this reading is an analysis of how a Utopian narrative generates, and welcomes, alternative figurations, followed by an investigation of Toby's subjective becoming, realized through the nomadic mode and the critical cyborg figuration. But first, here follows a brief summary of the trilogy. Oryx and Crake open with Jimmy-Snowman waking at dawn from his elevated position in a tree, on a beach. It soon becomes clear that he is the sole human survivor of a flesh-eating virus that has wiped out all humankind. Pre-pandemic time Jimmy-Snowman worked together with bio-scientific mastermind Crake and his female partner Oryx in a gated corporate compound and was responsible for engineering some of the strange animal hybrids that now populate the wreckage-laden landscape surrounding Jimmy-Snowman. Crake not only masterminded the creation of a colourful trans human species named eponymously, who now provide Jimmy Snowman with quasi-human companionship, but it turns out Crake was also responsible for releasing the viral pandemic. In the erupting chaos Crake and Oryx perish, and Jimmy-Snowman negotiates the post-apocalyptic chaos guided by the disembodied voice of Oryx, until one day he discovers a band of rag-tag survivors on the beach. One of them is Toby. The second installment of the trilogy, *The Year of the Flood*, introduces Toby surveying her surroundings from the roof of an abandoned beauty spa, where she has been ensconced since the pandemic. Toby's story is mediated in flashbacks, just like Jimmy-Snowman's, and covers the same timeline from a different perspective. Toby's story is one of loss and survival in the violent pleebland slums, until one day she is rescued by an eco-religious group called the God's Gardeners, lead by the sanctimonious Adam One. Zeb, Adam One's brother, and an assortment of other 'Adams' and 'Eves' live together on a verdant rooftop elevated above the slums. After some time, Toby gets

entrusted with a role in the Gardener's secret network, which perform acts of terrorism to undermine the hegemony of corporate power. Toby's role as an undercover operator takes her to the AnooYoo Spa where she ends up barricading herself as the pandemic hits. Flood closes on Toby breaking her isolation to save a couple of younger women, Amanda and Ren, from the hands of a band of evil men, the Painballers. As they set up camp on a beach, Jimmy Snowman comes bounding out of the brushes. MaddAddam, the final instalment to the trilogy, brings together the storylines of the two preceding novels and advances them forward. The Painballers have been chased off temporarily, more survivors have joined in and a community has developed consisting of humans and Crakers. Threatening the group are genetically modified feral Pigoons, a cunning human/pig hybrid, as well as culture clashes between the humans and the Crakers, and finally the still-at-large Painballers. The novel tells of Toby and Zeb getting together as a couple and Zeb recounting his pre-pandemic story to her in nightly installments. In the daytime Toby tends to the comatose Jimmy-Snowman, as well as the three human women who've fallen pregnant. At night Toby is responsible for telling the Crakers a story, before she is free to spend time with Zeb. The culmination of the trilogy is a mighty clash between the humans and the Painballers and the novel closes with a Craker child writing a creation narrative of sorts featuring all the aforementioned humans. The novel, and indeed the trilogy, is open-ended, which is a characteristic of critical dystopias, lending it a horizon of hope. As mentioned above, the co-mingling of genres is a way of confronting power inequalities latent in traditional discourse. Not all critics approach the trilogy from this perspective, but most undertake the task of attempting to find a label.

The Trilogy laments the loss of home and the favourable ambience for a cosy existence on this planet. In lieu of the homes that once symbolized security and stability, wilderness becomes a space of both survival and alienation. The trilogy's survivors, primarily the protagonists Toby, Ren, and Snowman, navigate a dangerous and unforgiving landscape filled with genetically altered creatures, toxic environments, and violent human factions. The wilderness, which once had symbolized natural

beauty, now reminds one of human destruction and the extinction of once-ordinary species. For instance, the Crakers, created to live in harmony with nature, are juxtaposed against the fractured humanity of the survivors, who have been corrupted by their own technology.

Atwood's wilderness is a complex and ambiguous setting—at once it is a site of trauma, rebirth, and dislocation. While the survivors are physically displaced from their homes, they must also confront the psychological dislocation of being removed from the world they once knew. The wilderness represents both a literal absence of shelter and a metaphorical absence of belonging, where humanity is alienated not only from nature but from its own history and identity.

Atwood's trilogy is a critique of the role of technology and bioengineering in shaping the ecological and social landscape. The bioengineering of new species, such as the Crakers and genetically modified animals like the pigoons, mirrors humanity's vaulting desire to gain control and dominance over nature. This technological manipulation, driven by corporate interests, ultimately leads to the environmental collapse and the breakdown of traditional systems of life, including the very concept of home.

In the MaddAddam trilogy, technology is both a tool of destruction and a potential source of salvation. The Crakers, for example, are designed as a biologically perfected human species, but their innocence and lack of social complexity highlight the limitations of technological interventions in human nature. The survivors, who have been shaped by their own destructive practices, are forced to reconcile with the consequences of their technological excesses. The wilderness that replaces their homes, thus, becomes both a reminder of their failures and an opportunity for re-imagining what it means to survive and belong. The absence of homes in the MaddAddam trilogy is a moral and ethical critique of the contemporary society's irreverence to environmental sustainability and social responsibility. By depicting a world where civilization has crumbled and homes have been lost, Atwood forces readers to confront the realities of ecological degradation and the ethical dilemmas of genetic manipulation. The wilderness, in this context, becomes both a consequence of human

irresponsibility and a potential site for renewal and transformation. Atwood's trilogy urges the readers to consider the long-term consequences of human actions, particularly in terms of environmental stewardship and the ethical implications of technological advancement. In a world where homes are no longer secure or even possible, the idea of "home" is redefined—becoming not a fixed place, but a constantly shifting, fluid space shaped by ecological, social, and ethical forces. Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy is a chilling eco-dystopian vision of a world where homes are no longer viable because of environmental collapse and technological overreach. By presenting a wilderness where survival becomes the only means of existence, Atwood challenges the readers to rethink their relationship to nature and the very notion of home. The trilogy is a powerful reminder of the consequences of the unchecked ecological destruction and the ways in which humanity's failure to respect the environment that leads to the loss of security, identity, and belonging. In the absence of homes, the wilderness stands as both a symbol of human failure and a space for potential redemption. Atwood's eco-dystopian world prompts readers to consider what home means in an age of environmental crisis and how humanity might find new ways of relating to both the Earth and each other.

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