

T.C.
ATILIM UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
ENGLISH CULTURE AND LITERATURE MASTERS PROGRAMME

ECOFEMINIST CONCERNS AS REFLECTED IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S
ORYX AND CRAKE* AND DORIS LESSING'S *THE CLEFT

Master's Thesis

Betül KESKİN

Ankara-2025

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Ankara-2025

ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This is to certify that this thesis titled “Ecofeminist Concerns as Reflected in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and Doris Lessing’s *The Cleft*” and prepared by Betül KESKİN meets with the committee’s approval unanimously as Master’s Thesis in the field of English Culture and Literature following the successful defense conducted on 20/01/2025.

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I accept and acknowledge that I have prepared this thesis study, prepared in line with the Thesis Writing Guidelines of Atılım University Graduate School of Social Sciences;

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Betül KESKİN

ÖZ

KESKİN, Betül. Margaret Atwood'un *Oryx ve Crake* ve Doris Lessing'in *The Cleft* Adlı Eserlerindeki Ekofeminist Kuramının Yansımalarının İncelenmesi, Yüksek Lisan Tezi, Ankara, 2025.

Bu tez, Margaret Atwood'un *Oryx ve Crake* ve Doris Lessing'in *The Cleft* adlı eserlerindeki ekofeminist kuramının yansımalarını incelemektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, ekofeminizmin tarihsel arka planını öne çıkartarak ve eko-eleştiri ile feminizm arasında bağlantılar kurarak ekofeminist edebiyat teorisini araştırmaktır. Ekofeminist teoriye genel bakışın büyük kısmı, Greta Gaard, Patrick Murphy ve Ynestra King gibi alandaki akademisyenlerin eserleri aracılığıyla incelenmiştir. Bu çalışmada araştırılan ekofeminist kaygılar arasında antroposentrizm, fallosentrizm, kadınların ve doğanın metalaştırılması, cinsiyet dinamikleri, çevresel bozulma, kurumsal açgözlülük ve pervasız genetik mühendisliği yer almaktadır. Distopik romanlar *Oryx ve Crake* ve *The Cleft* bağlamında, çalışma bu kaygıların nasıl yansıtıldığını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ekofeminizm, cinsiyet, doğa, *Oryx ve Crake*, *The Cleft*

ABSTRACT

KESKİN, Betül. Ecofeminist Concerns as Reflected in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2025.

This thesis examines the ecofeminist concerns as reflected in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*. The aim of this study is to investigate ecofeminist literary theory by focusing on the historical background of ecofeminism and making linkages between ecocriticism and feminism. The majority of the overview of ecofeminist theory is examined through the works of reputable scholars in the field, such as Greta Gaard, Patrick Murphy, and Ynestra King. Among the ecofeminist concerns that are investigated in this work are anthropocentrism, phallogentrism, commodification of women and nature, gender dynamics, environmental degradation, corporate greed and reckless genetic engineering. Within the context of the dystopian novels *Oryx and Crake* and *The Cleft*, the study examines the ways in which these concerns are reflected.

Keywords: ecofeminism, gender, nature, *Oryx and Crake*, *The Cleft*

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INTRODUCTION

As humans have been evolving throughout centuries, the inequality between races, sexes and species still continues to this day. The atrocities committed by the ‘white men’ of the world against all ‘others’ are played in front of our eyes through different means of media outlets, as if we are all watching a horror movie. The year 2025 holds examples of ethnic violence and crimes being committed against people of apartheid regimes in places like Palestine, Congo, East Turkistan and India while mass sexual violence against women is being committed in Sudan right this minute. Women are being psychologically, physically or sexually assaulted and even killed by their husbands, boyfriends or family members all over the world while their male perpetrators get away with their crimes. In a report published by *UNICEF* in October, 2024; more than 370 million girls and women alive today have been raped or sexually assaulted worldwide before the age of 18. *United Nations* estimates that approximately 51,100 women and girls were killed by their intimate partners or other family members during 2023. Within the context of this real-life horror movie, nature and animals are the “others” that are most likely to be the least protected and rarely seen. Every year, it is estimated by the *World Resources Institute* that humans are responsible for the destruction of millions of acres of forest land due to corporate greed. The organization *Peta* reports that more than 110 million animals are killed annually in the United States alone for the purpose of animal testing, and that every twenty-four hours, 6.5 billion animals are slaughtered for food. These numbers unfortunately increase drastically every year.

Ecofeminism is deeply concerned with all these issues and takes a stand against oppression of any living creature. These issues ecofeminism is concerned with are more relevant and significant today than any other time in history. Greta Gaard who is a prominent ecofeminist scholar asserts that ecofeminism seeks “sustainable ways of life for all inhabitants on earth” (10), while challenging existing power structure. Ecofeminism is concerned with the commodification of women and nature, anthropocentrism, interconnectedness of gender and ecology, environmental ethics, phallocentrism and gender dynamics. Greta Gaard, Patrick Murphy and Ynestra King can be considered as the most influential ecofeminist theorists whose

works have significantly contributed to the understanding of ecofeminism. Their distinct points of view on ecofeminism have contributed to a richer discussion.

Gaard, Murphy, and King offer a broad and dynamic approach to ecofeminism. Gaards' emphasis on rejecting essentialism and incorporating queer theory, Murphy's emphasis on animal rights and environmental ethics, and King's exploration of spirituality and empowerment of women weave a rich mosaic of ideas into ecofeminist discourse. Their combined work questions past narratives and promotes a more comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness of gender, ecology, and social justice.

Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing are both renowned authors whose writings have contributed significantly to ecofeminism, albeit in different ways. Their narratives frequently investigate the intersections of gender, ecology, and societal structures, revealing a profound concern for women's rights, animal rights and environmental concerns.

Atwood and Lessing use their stories to criticize patriarchal norms and argue for a more equitable interaction between genders and the environment. While Lessing typically focuses on the historical and cultural circumstances of women's subjugation in relation to nature, Atwood's works frequently address the consequence of modern societal challenges such as genetic engineering and environmental degradation.

Their ecofeminist reflections in their writings encourage readers to reconsider the relations between gender and nature, advocating for a more harmonious coexistence that recognizes the intrinsic value of women, animals and the environment. Through their respective literary contributions, Atwood and Lessing have significantly shaped the discourse surrounding ecofeminism, making them pivotal figures in this field.

Oryx and Crake (2003) written by Margaret Atwood and *The Cleft* (2007) written by Doris Lessing were published in the same decade and both novels are significant representations of these ecofeminist concerns. Both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Cleft* criticize patriarchal hierarchies while emphasizing the repercussions of environmental neglect. While Atwood's narrative stresses the threats of technological utopianism and the commodification of both women and the

environment, Lessing's work examines the historical foundations of gender discrimination and the possibility of a harmonious relationship with nature. Both authors call for a re-evaluation of social norms that prioritize environmental health and gender equality. This thesis aims to explore ecofeminist concerns as reflected in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* through an analysis of gender dynamics, corporate greed, environmental degradation, commodification of women and nature, anthropocentrism, and phallocentrism and how these issues shed light on the interconnectedness of social and environmental issues, ultimately challenging dominant power structures and advocating for a more sustainable and equitable world.

Both works serve as warning stories about the dangers of unfettered exploitation and the necessity for a rethinking of societal norms. Atwood and Lessing encourage readers to participate in critical self-examination and advocate for behaviours that recognize life's interdependence. Both authors have used their narratives and story lines to present the concerns of ecofeminism. *The Edible Woman*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* are examples of Atwood's novels in which ecofeminist concerns are reflected. *Mara and Dann: An Adventure*, *The Fifth Child*, *The Grass is Singing* and *The Cleft* are examples of Lessing's novels in which ecofeminist concerns are reflected. Through these stories, Atwood and Lessing encourage readers to reconsider their values and habits, aiming for a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the environment around them.

This thesis is organized in three chapters. Chapter one discusses the theoretical background in five headings. The first chapter focuses on ecocriticism, feminism, ecofeminism, the relationship between these three theories, and ecofeminist literary criticism. The views of Greta Gaard, Ynestra King and Patrick D. Murphey are reflected on while discussing these theories. Chapters two and three are the analytical chapters in which a brief biography of the authors and a short summary of the novels are included. The novels are analysed in terms of the reflections of ecofeminist concerns reflected in them. The study is finalized with the conclusion part.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter discusses the evolution of ecofeminist theory and its relationship with ecocriticism and feminism. The term ecofeminism was first used by the French writer Francoise d'Eauborne in her book *Feminism or Death* in 1974. In her book, d'Eauborne makes a connection between the oppression and patriarchal domination of marginalized groups including women, people of color, and people in poverty with the oppression and domination of nature. She asks women to show concern towards the environment and lead an ecological revolution (1981). In order to understand the concerns of ecofeminist theory, it is important to understand the concerns of ecocriticism and feminism.

1.1. Ecocriticism

The term 'ecology' was coined by Ernst Haeckel, a German biologist, in 1866. It is an interdisciplinary field which is defined by Britannica as follows;

The study of the relationship between organisms and their environment. Some of the most pressing problems in human affairs; expanding populations, food scarcities, environmental pollution including global warming, extinctions of plant and animal species, and all the attendant sociological and political problems are to a great degree ecological.

The National Geographic Society examines ecology in multiple subfields, such as ecosystem ecology, which examines entire ecosystems and interactions among living and non-living elements, population ecology which focuses on species population dynamics, and landscape ecology which studies larger spatial patterns, including human impacts on environments. These branches collectively emphasize understanding environmental balance and species survival, which aligns with ecocriticism's focus on the impacts of human activity on nature. According to the *Environmental Protection Agency*, ecology investigates how human actions influence ecosystems, addressing critical issues like pollution, invasive species, and climate change.

In "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology" Ynestra King defines ecology as "an integrative science in an age of fragmentation and specialization. It is also a critical science which grounds and necessitates critique of our existing society. It is a reconstructive science in that it suggests directions for restructuring human society in harmony with the natural environment" (150). In the

same article, she explains that nature became something to be dominated, overcome, and made to service the needs of men in Western industrial civilization. She was stripped of her magical abilities and properties and reduced to 'natural resources' to be exploited by men in order to accomplish human needs and desires that were defined in opposition to nature (151). In this way, nature has become the 'other', something to be exploited and dominated.

The term 'ecocriticism' was made popular by Cheryll Glotfelty, who defined it as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (2019). Ecocriticism is a critical literary and cultural theory that arose in reaction to increased awareness of environmental challenges and the need to investigate the relationship between literature, humans, and nature. Ecocriticism aims to investigate how nature, the environment, and the human relationships with the natural world are portrayed in literature and other cultural texts (Marland 2013). This method promotes a deeper comprehension of how environmental contexts impact and are impacted by narratives by highlighting the interdependence of literary studies and ecological studies and it shows the way the issues of ecocriticism are portrayed within literature.

One of the main ideas behind ecocriticism is that it uses ideas from different fields, like biology, philosophy, sociology, and ecology to help us understand literature. This multidisciplinary approach enables a more sophisticated understanding of how literature reflects and influences human attitudes toward the environment. For example, ecocriticism investigates how cultural beliefs about nature and human behaviour toward the environment are interrelated, highlighting the intricacies of ecological interactions (Khokhar 2024). Ecocriticism also critiques anthropocentrism, which is the belief that humans are the central and most significant beings in the world. Ecocriticism does this by pushing for a more inclusive perspective that recognizes the intrinsic value of nonhuman existence (Ledesma 2023).

Furthermore, as stated in *Social, Psychological and Environmental Effects of Pollution in London from the Eyes of British Poets*, ecocriticism has played an important role in highlighting the socio-political aspects of environmental issues, emphasizing how literature can be used to promote environmental activism and raise awareness (Gökçek 2019). Ecocritics analyse literary representations of nature and the environment to enhance awareness of ecological degradation and promote

sustainable practices. This analysis of literature enhances comprehension of the texts and prompts readers to consider their own connections to the natural environment (Fawareh et al., 2023).

1.2. Feminism

Feminism also derives from the concept of ‘other’ where women are treated as the ‘other’. Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. It has many concerns such as the right to vote, run for public office, work, earn an equal pay, own property, receive education, have equals rights in marriage. There are four waves of feminism and although written on an earlier date, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) marks the beginning of the first wave.

The first wave of feminism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with an emphasis on legal issues and inequalities, particularly women’s suffrage and property rights. This wave was marked by the efforts of early feminists who fought to gain basic rights for women, such as the right to vote, which was a critical issue in many countries (Song 2024; Mohajan 2022). *The Declaration of Sentiments*, written in 1848, was a pivotal text in the history of women’s rights in the United States, introduced during the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. It was principally created by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and designed to mirror the Declaration of Independence, highlighting the similarities between the American quest for freedom and the women’s right for equality. In the declaration, Stanton states,

The strongest reason why we ask for woman a voice in the government under which she lives; in the religion she is asked to believe; equality in social life, where she is the chief factor... is because of her birth-right to self-sovereignty (Stanton 2002).

The first wave paved the way for succeeding feminist movements by emphasizing the importance of women’s voices in politics and society.

The second wave feminism emerged in the 1960s and 1970s due to the perceived limitations of first wave feminism. Second wave feminism expanded the focus beyond legal rights to encompass a broader range of issues which include workplace equality, reproductive rights and sexuality. This wave questioned traditional gender roles and societal conventions, calling for women’s independence from patriarchal hierarchies (Aune & Holyoak 2017; Kark 2024). Second wave

feminists, such as Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem, highlighted the need of consciousness-raising and collective action, which were essential in organizing women from different social classes (Reicher 2023). Friedan helped establish the National Organization for Women in 1966, which became a leading force for advocating gender equality in the workplace. Second wave feminists contested societal norms that primarily defined women as wives and mothers. They examined the over-sexualization of women and the prevailing double standards in societal behaviours. De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, written in 1949, emerged as a significant reference point during second wave feminism due to its examination of women's oppression and the concept of 'othering' in patriarchal societies.

The third wave of feminism, initiated in the 1990s, arose as a reaction to the constraints of the second wave. The initiative aimed to incorporate diversity and intersectionality, acknowledging that women's experiences are influenced by multiple factors, such as race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class (Snyder-Hall 2010). Third wave feminists adopted an individualistic approach, emphasizing personal choice and sexual empowerment, while challenging the strict definitions of femininity set by previous movements (Fahs 2015). This wave critiques the second wave's emphasis on the experiences of middle-class, heterosexual white women, as noted in *Feminism without Borders* (Mohanty 2005). Third wave feminists aimed to elevate the perspectives of women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized communities. The initiative was focused on persistently challenging gender norms. Third wave feminism adopted fluid and non-binary conceptions of gender. It dismissed essentialist conceptions of womanhood and acknowledged the diversity of women's experiences (Wang 2023, Li 2023; Evans 2015; Zimmerman et al., 2009). The emergence of post-feminism during this period complicated the narrative by arguing that feminism had fulfilled its objectives, thereby enabling women to prioritize personal empowerment over collective struggle (Braithwaite 2002).

The fourth wave feminism, which started in 2012 signifies a notable advancement in feminist discourse and activism, was predominantly marked by the use of digital platforms for mobilization, advocacy, and building of community. This wave is differentiated from its predecessors by its significant dependence on social media and online communication platforms, which have revolutionized the discourse

and activism surrounding feminist problems worldwide. The #MeToo movement and several online campaigns illustrate this transformation, demonstrating the ability of digital platforms to elevate voices and cultivate solidarity among women from varied backgrounds (Gnedash 2022). Emphasizing intersectionality, which recognizes the complexity of women's experiences and the range of oppression they encounter, is one of the hallmarks of fourth wave feminism. Intersectionality advances a more complex view of gender issues that takes into account racial, class, sexual, and other identity factors, building on the third wave's emphasis on diversity and inclusivity (Perez, 2023). The internet world has enabled this intersectional discourse, permitting a wider array of narratives and experiences to be disseminated and affirmed (Li 2023; Turley & Fisher 2018). And so, fourth wave feminism is also characterized by its technological proficiency and nuanced understanding of gender, as activists utilize online platforms to form a responsive movement addressing current social injustices (Christi-Lee 2023; Chairil 2023). The wave's adaptability and response to contemporary socio-political contexts highlight its significance in current dialogues regarding gender equality and women's rights. The amalgamation of digital activism with conventional methods of protest and lobbying exemplifies a progressive approach to feminist practice that continues to evolve (Gnedash 2022).

Each wave of feminism emerges as a result of the limitations of the previous wave and the necessity for ecofeminism stems from traditional feminism's shortcomings, especially in addressing the interconnectivity of gender oppression and environmental degradation. While feminism has made considerable progress in pushing for women's rights and challenging patriarchal structures, it frequently fails to address the ecological implications of these efforts. This oversight can result in a restricted focus that ignores how environmental challenges disproportionately affect women, particularly those in marginalized communities.

1.3. Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a framework that integrates ecological issues with feminist viewpoints, positing that the exploitation of women and environmental degradation are interrelated phenomena stemming from patriarchal and capitalist structures. King states that:

The ecology movement, in theory and practice, attempts to speak for nature – the 'other' that has no voice and is not conceived of subjectively in our

civilization. Feminism represents the refusal of the original 'other' in patriarchal human society to remain silent or to be the 'other' any longer. Its challenge of social domination extends beyond sex to social domination of all kinds, because the domination of sex, race, and class and the domination of nature are mutually reinforcing (153).

The interdisciplinary approach highlights the necessity of concurrently addressing gender inequality and environmental issues, suggesting that the empowerment of women and environmental protection are interdependent objectives. It is a fusion of environmentalism and feminism that holds the patriarchy accountable for environmental disasters and women's discrimination. Feminism alone falls short as it can be viewed as anthropocentric. As Gaard (2011) explains:

It is this human-centered (anthropocentric) feminism that has come to dominate feminist thinking in the new millennium, effectively marginalizing feminism's relevance. The global crises of climate justice, food security, energy justice, vanishing wildlife, maldevelopment, habitat loss, industrial animal food production, and more have simultaneously social and ecological dimensions that require both ecological and feminist analyses (32).

Ecofeminism fundamentally critiques anthropocentrism, which places human interests above those of the natural environment. Ecofeminists contend that this perspective has resulted in the exploitation of women and nature, as both are frequently perceived as resources subject to control and domination. Because of the same worldview that sees men as the only representation of humanity, male aggression is directed not only against women, but also at nature. Ynestra King states that ecofeminism connects feminism and ecology critiques and argues that they are inseparable. She argues that the dominance of the male sex over women serves as a model for other forms of oppression, whether social or ecological (155). According to Catherina Halkes, the goal of ecofeminism is to demonstrate that males want to govern not only the environment, but also the "nature of women and nature" as women (12). Ecofeminism emphasizes the significance of intersectionality, recognizing that women's experiences of oppression are influenced by gender, race, class, and additional social categories. This perspective is essential for comprehending the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on marginalized communities, especially women of color and indigenous populations (Putra 2023).

Gaard states that ecofeminists have articulated various linkages between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature, which are crucial for comprehending why environmental issues are feminist in nature, and inversely, how

feminist issues can be framed within the context of environmental concerns. For example, “the way in which women and nature have been conceptualized historically in the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind.” (Gaard 1993). This attitude can be described as chauvinistic and as Birkeland states, human chauvinism cannot be transcended without confronting male-centeredness and sexism (16).

Gaard also points to how societal structures privilege certain groups while marginalizing others when talking about oppression:

In their analyses of oppression, socialists, animal liberationists, ecologists, and feminists each distinguish between privileged and oppressed groups, where the privileged are upper or middle class, human, technologically and industrially “developed,” male, and the oppressed are poor or working-class, nonhuman animal, “undeveloped” nature, and female, respectively. Ecofeminism describes the framework that authorizes these forms of oppression as patriarchy, an ideology whose fundamental self/other distinction is based on a sense of self that is separate, atomistic (1993:1).

Gaard’s claim that socialists, animal liberationists, ecologists, and feminists distinguish between privileged and oppressed groups emphasizes the significance of intersectionality in comprehending oppression. The privileged groups are defined by their socioeconomic standing, technical advancement, and gender, whereas the oppressed groups are the impoverished, nonhuman animals, and women. This concept demonstrates how societal hierarchies are created and maintained, frequently at the expense of marginalized communities. Gaard defines patriarchy as the ideological structure that permits many forms of oppression. This claim emphasizes the need to oppose patriarchal mechanisms that not only oppress women but also abuse nonhuman nature. The self/other difference inherent in patriarchal ideology promotes a sense of isolation, which justifies dominance and exploitation.

According to King, the ecofeminist principles are based on the following beliefs:

1. Because women are thought to be closer to nature, the construction of Western industrial society in opposition to nature interacts dialectically with and reinforces women's subjugation. As a result, ecofeminists adopt all of nature's living struggles as their own.

2. Life on Earth is an interconnected network, not a hierarchical structure. Natural hierarchy does not exist; human hierarchy is projected onto nature and then used to excuse social dominance. As a result, ecofeminist theory attempts to demonstrate the connections between all forms of control, including nonhuman nature domination, and ecofeminist practice is inherently antihierarchical.

King's claim that women are perceived to be closer to nature, and that this view promotes their enslavement in Western industrial civilization, emphasizes the dual connection between gender and ecological exploitation. The theory implies that the patriarchal conception of nature as something to be subjugated is parallel to the subjection of women, as both are regarded as inferior or subservient. King's second principle opposes the anthropocentric worldview, which imposes human hierarchies on nature to legitimize dominance.

3. Diversity is essential for a healthy, balanced environment that includes both human and nonhuman inhabitants. Environmental simplification is as serious an issue as environmental contamination. Biological simplification, or the extinction of entire species, corresponds to the reduction of human variety into faceless workers, or to the homogenization of taste and culture via mass consumer markets. For the convenience of market society, social and natural existence are literally reduced to the inorganic. As a result, we require a decentralized global organization that is founded on shared interests while celebrating diversity and opposing all forms of dominance and violence. Ecofeminism has the potential to be such a movement.

4. The survival of the species requires a new understanding of our relationship to nature, of the nature of our body, and of the nonhuman nature around us; it requires a challenge to the nature-culture dualism and a corresponding radical restructuring of human society based on feminist and ecological principles.

King asserts that the link between biological simplicity and the standardization of human culture raises serious concerns about consumerism's impact on the environment and social norms. In a market-driven society, the commercialization of nature frequently prioritizes profit over ecological health, resulting in practices that destroy biodiversity and reduce cultural richness. King's approach attempts to dissolve the binary oppositions that separate people from environment and men from women. Recognizing the interconnection of all life

forms, ecofeminism pushes for a holistic perspective of existence that transcends hierarchical thought. Hence, promoting a more compassionate and ethical relationship with the environment, emphasizing the innate value of all beings.

According to King's principles ecofeminism demonstrates how civilizations based on male values harm both women and the environment. This understanding is critical for devising methods to remove oppressive structures and foster a more fair society. Ecofeminism supports a paradigm change by pushing for equitable relations and caring for both women and the environment. Ecofeminism explains how incorporating ecofeminist ideals into personal relationships can result in more peaceful and responsible interactions with nature. Ecofeminism encourages sustainable behaviours that benefit both humans and other animals by instilling a feeling of cosmic solidarity and environmental responsibility. This strategy is critical for solving today's serious environmental concerns because it encourages individuals and communities to embrace actions that promote ecological balance.

1.4. The Relationship between Ecocriticism, Feminism and Ecofeminism

The interplay among ecocriticism, feminism, and ecofeminism constitutes a complex discourse that explores the intersections of literature, cultural narratives, environmental concerns, and gender dynamics. Ecocriticism examines the portrayal of nature and the environment in literature, analysing how these representations reflect and shape human interactions with the natural world (Neupane 2023). Ecocriticism aims to analyse the ecological implications of literary texts and their contributions to environmental awareness and activism.

Feminism analyses the social, political, and economic disparities experienced by women, promoting gender equality and the deconstruction of patriarchal systems. Feminist ecocriticism emerges from the convergence of feminism and ecocriticism, focusing on the influence of gender biases on environmental narratives and the marginalization of women's experiences and voices in ecological discourse (Bergthaller et al., 2014). This viewpoint highlights the importance of integrating feminist perspectives into ecocritical studies, thus enhancing the comprehension of gender and environmental justice.

The interaction among these three fields is essential for tackling current environmental issues. Feminist ecocriticism reveals the disproportionate impact of

environmental policies on women and marginalized communities, advocating for equitable solutions (Bergthaller et al.2014). Ecofeminism emphasizes interconnectedness issues, thereby fostering a comprehensive approach to activism (Heidari 2016).

The relationship between ecocriticism, feminism, and ecofeminism is defined by a common dedication to social justice and environmental sustainability. The integration of feminist perspectives into ecocritical analyses highlights the connections between gender and environmental issues, thereby enhancing the understanding of complexities inherent in human-nature relationships and the necessity for equitable solutions.

Equitable solutions that arise can be multifaceted, addressing both gender inequality and environmental sustainability. Policies that consider gender in environmental decision-making can result in more fair outcomes. Providing education and resources to women, especially in poor nations, can considerably improve their ability to manage environmental resources responsibly. Feminist environmentalism can help countries create a more holistic vision of sustainability that prioritizes both gender equality and ecological health. Using intersectional frameworks in environmental policy can address the numerous levels of prejudice experienced by vulnerable groups, especially women. Societies can achieve sustainable and equitable outcomes that benefit both people and the environment by encouraging gender-inclusive policies, empowering women via education, and implementing intersectional frameworks.

1.5. Ecofeminist Literary Criticism

In the field of literature, the term “ecocriticism” was first used by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” (107). Lawrence Buell defines the term as “the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyse the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation” (qtd. in Dobie 239). A feminist perspective to environmental literature came about naturally as the concerns are very similar and the connection between women and nature is quite obvious. A new genre of literary criticism called ecofeminist literary criticism emerged and *ISLE (Interdisciplinary*

Studies in Literature) published an issue on *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (Vol.3, Issue 1) in 1996. It was edited by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy. In literature and academic discourse, ecofeminist literary criticism seeks to reveal suppressed women's voices and ecological issues, much like feminist criticism. It arose as a continuation of activist movements. Murphy explains this evolution of activism in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* by explaining that initially, feminist critics reread literature and criticized their gender bias. Second, by broadening their criticism to include the entire canon, they began to rediscover suppressed, overlooked, and forgotten works by female writers. Third, they began to criticize women's depictions and to find feminist themes in female-authored works. Ecofeminism, then, has entered literary criticism as the influence and continuance of an activist movement (45). And as a result Murphy states that: "the recovery of works by women demonstrating ecological sensibilities and proto-ecofeminist themes has been, and continues to be, given high priority, particularly in women's studies and women's literature courses"(45).

Patrick D. Murphy had outlined ecofeminist viewpoints in his book *Literature, Nature, Other: Ecofeminist Critiques* (1995). In his book Murphy states that:

Literary criticism uses ecofeminism as a ground for critiquing all the literature that one reads. For literary in particular this would mean re-evaluating the canon that constitutes the list of major works and texts, and calling for a dialogue between critical evaluations based on humanistic criteria and those based on de-homocentric criteria. This would require, for instance, re-evaluating the poetic tradition of the "pastoral," which tends to be based on an idealization of nature rather than a genuine encounter with it (25).

Murphy (1998) also suggests bringing "nonhuman actors and characters into prominence alongside the human ones from every ethnicity and nationality" (46) and he further states that this can be achieved through an ecofeminist literary perspective. It can be said that in ecofeminist literary criticism, the reader looks for representations of the concerns of the "other". Gaard and Murphy (1998) point out the significance of the concept of the "other" in ecofeminist literary criticism:

We can relate ecofeminist principles and interpretation to existing literary study by building on feminist attention to the concept of the "other." This concept is prevalent in literary study as a result of the influence of psychoanalytic theory and feminist critique. But the "other" must be rethought through grounding it in physical being (5).

In the above quotation, Gaard's assertion regarding the necessity to rethink the concept of "other" within the context of ecofeminism emphasizes a key intersection between feminist theory and ecological consciousness. Traditional feminist literature, highly influenced by psychoanalytic theory, frequently characterizes the "other" in terms of gendered identities, emphasizing the social and psychological aspects of women's oppression. However, Gaard advocates for a more nuanced perspective that bases the "other" in the physical facts of existence, particularly in relation to nature and the environment.

When a more nuanced perspective is formed, both feminism and ecocriticism fall short as they can both be regarded as "single-issue" movements. Regarding this, Greta Gaard states that;

By documenting the poor quality of life for women, children, people in the Third World, animals, and the environment, ecofeminists are able to demonstrate that sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism (the oppression of nature) are mutually reinforcing systems of oppression. Instead of being a "single-issue" movement, ecofeminism rests on the notion that the liberation of all oppressed groups must be addressed simultaneously (5).

Gaard's claim that ecofeminists document the low quality of life for many disadvantaged groups such as women, children, people of the Third World, animals, and the environment demonstrates the interconnectivity of multiple oppressive systems. This viewpoint is critical in realizing that sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism are not separate issues, but rather mutually reinforcing systems that lead to the degradation of both human and non-human life. Gaard's emphasis on the simultaneous liberation of all oppressed groups highlights the importance of an intersectional approach within ecofeminism, which is critical for addressing the complexity of social justice holistically.

Ecofeminism enables the concerns of the "other" to be seen and to be heard. The concept of "other" is not specified to a single oppressed group. Ecofeminist Literary Criticism is concerned with gender, race, ethnicity, animals, nature and the treatment of all beings.

CHAPTER 2: MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE*

2.1. Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is a notable Canadian author recognized for her extensive works, which include poetry, essays, critical writings and novels. Margaret Atwood was born on November 18, 1939, in Ottawa, Ontario. She is recognized as one of the most influential literary figures of her generation, noted for her exploration of themes including gender, identity, power, and environmental issues (Howells 2006).

Atwood's literary career started in the late 1950s, achieving notable recognition with the release of her debut novel, *The Edible Woman*, in 1969. This novel is considered a precursor to her subsequent works, highlighting her engagement with feminist themes and the intricacies of female identity (Davies 2017). During the 1970s and 1980s, Atwood advanced her unique voice, creating significant works like *Surfacing* (1972) and *Lady Oracle* (1976), which reinforced her status as a prominent feminist author (Arrabal 2019).

One of the most notable works of Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985. This dystopian novel examines themes of totalitarianism, gender oppression, and the regulation of women's bodies, reflecting current debates regarding women's rights and societal frameworks (Arbaoui 2018). The novel has had a significant impact, resulting in adaptations across various media, including a successful television series that has renewed interest in Atwood's work and its relevance in the contemporary socio-political context (Macpherson, 2010). Along with her fiction, Atwood has authored various essays and critical works that explore the intersections of literature, gender, and ecology, solidifying her status as a prominent figure in ecofeminism (Mohar et al., 2020).

2.2. Margaret Atwood as an Ecofeminist Writer

Margaret Atwood is a significant figure in the realm of ecofeminism. Her works frequently demonstrate a significant engagement with ecological themes and feminist critiques, establishing her as a crucial voice in contemporary literature that explores the interconnected issues of women's exploitation and environmental degradation.

Atwood's significant contribution to ecofeminism is evident in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which explores the simultaneous oppression of women and the environment in a dystopian context. Kumbet explains this:

Margaret Atwood, in her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, focuses on the interrelatedness of women and environment, their dual subjugation, abuse, and exploitation in the not-too-distant speculative world. She depicts that in the case of environmental disasters and/or ecological instability, women, becoming the most disadvantaged group, get subjected to docility, exploitation, and various horrendous practices, thus they suffer and pay the consequence of ecological devastation gravely (7).

Atwood's early work, exemplified by *The Edible Woman*, engages with ecofeminist concepts by examining the metaphorical relationships between food consumption and gender dynamics. The novel critiques societal expectations of women regarding food, emphasizing issues of agency and autonomy within the frameworks of gender and environmental concerns (Meklash 2024). Atwood's writing exemplifies an intersectional approach, consistently challenging conventional narratives that disconnect human experiences from ecological realities.

Furthermore, Atwood's involvement with ecofeminism transcends her literary works. She has actively advocated for environmental issues and engaged in numerous initiatives focused on promoting sustainability and social justice (Salas 2015). Margaret Atwood's contributions to ecofeminism are significant and complex. Her novels and essays examine the intricate relationship between power, gender, and the environment, promoting a more equitable and sustainable world. Her work stimulates awareness regarding the pressing necessity to confront the interconnected crises of gender inequality and environmental degradation.

2.3. Ecofeminist Reflections in *Oryx and Crake* (2003)

In a CBC interview, Margaret Atwood herself refers to *Oryx and Crake* as speculative fiction. She states that speculative fiction narrates stories that are possible to come true and therefore serve as warnings. Speculative fiction is an important literary genre that pushes standard narrative bounds, allowing writers and readers to explore alternate universes, futures, and social structures. One of the key strengths of speculative fiction is its capacity to deal with difficult issues like technology, identity, and the environment. Speculative fiction encourages readers to rethink their current realities through the lens of cognitive estrangement. This cognitive estrangement helps readers to reassess their existing circumstances, encouraging

critical thinking on the direction of societal development and the potential ramifications of current decisions. *Oryx and Crake* is a perfect example of speculative fiction in this way.

In the dystopian future depicted in *Oryx and Crake*, the majority of humanity has perished due to a genetically modified disease. One of the few surviving humans, Snowman, tells the story from his point of view as he considers the circumstances that brought civilization to an end.

Jimmy/Snowman, a former advertising executive, and his childhood friend Crake, a gifted but psychopathic scientist, are the main characters. After creating a virus that exterminates all people, Crake creates his own genetically modified species, the Crakers, which are intended to be a more ecologically friendly alternative to humanity. Oryx, the woman character who experienced childhood sexual abuse is an important figure in both Jimmy's and Crake's lives.

The story follows the events leading up to the end of the world through Snowman's eyes. These events include an increase in environmental degradation, the expansion of corporate power, and the creation of technology like genetic engineering that is used to control and rule both nature and people. In Atwood's society, the working class fights for survival in the destitute 'Pleeblands' while the privileged 'Compounds' are home to the top scientists and technicians.

The commodification of women and nature, the ethical implications of genetic engineering, corporate greed, anthropocentrism, phallocentrism and gender dynamics as well as environmental degradation are among the themes covered in the novel.

In terms of the theme of the commodification of women and nature, the dynamic is exemplified through the character of Oryx. She was born in a small village in south or southeast Asia. She was sold into slavery at a young age and spent much of her childhood working in the sex trade. Oryx is commodified and sexually exploited starting from a young age until her death at the end.

In the village where she lived, everyone was poor and there were many children who were all burdens on the families as they were extra mouths to feed.

In the village it was not called 'selling,' this transaction. The talk about it implied apprenticeship. The children were being trained to earn their living in the wide world: this was the gloss put on it. Besides, if they stayed where

they were, what was there for them to do? Especially the girls, said Oryx. They would only get married and make more children, who would then have to be sold in their turn. Sold, or thrown into the river, to float away to the sea; because there was only so much food to go around (91).

The idea that selling children is considered “apprenticeship” reveals a problematic normalizing of exploitation, particularly in terms of gender roles. Oryx’s comment that girls are largely destined for marriage and giving birth emphasizes women’s limited autonomy within this hierarchical structure, in which their value is linked to reproduction rather than individual potential or independence.

Every now and then a rich man whom Oryx refers to as ‘the wristwatch man’ would come and select children to buy as if selecting livestock from a farm. In this sense Oryx is no different than a non-human animal or a crop which reflects King’s comment stating that the ecofeminist thought is the assertion that the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature are ‘intimately connected and mutually reinforcing’ (154).

In the morning he would look over the children on offer and ask questions about them – had they been sick, were they obedient? And he’d check their teeth. They had to have good teeth, he said, because they would need to smile a lot....He would take three or four children with him, never more; that was the number he could manage. This meant he could pick the best of the crop (91).

This quote exemplifies the horrifying commodification of human life in a dystopian future in which children are considered as products to be examined and chosen based on their marketable features. This transactional view of children exemplifies a broader critique of capitalist systems that prioritize profit and efficiency over human dignity and ethical concerns. The painstaking attention to the children’s physical characteristics, such as their health and dental condition, highlights a disturbing reduction of human beings to their economic value and utility.

Furthermore, in Atwood’s dystopian future, the connection with the historical objectification and commodification of women’s bodies, particularly black women’s bodies is very significant. Just as in Oryx’s case, as stated in “Ecology is a Sistah’s Issue Too: The Politics of Emergent Afrocentric Ecowomanism”, black women were “displayed at elite Parisian parties” or forced to “stand on auction blocks as masters described their productive body parts as humans do cattle” (Riley 216) in the same way Oryx was lined up along with other children to be examined and sold.

Oryx was sold by her mother along with her brother when she was a child but girls were preferred as they were easily controlled and dominated.

The man said he was doing Oryx's mother a special favour, as boys were more trouble and did not obey, and ran away more often, and who would pay him for his trouble then? (93).

The quotation raises important considerations concerning agency and autonomy. The man's decision to favour Oryx's mother for economic reasons deprives the children of their identities and turns them to simple commodities in a transactional system. This reflects broader cultural concerns about the agency of underprivileged groups, especially women and children, who are frequently subjected to the decisions of those in authority. This quote can be further examined via the lens of how patriarchal structures exploit both humans and non-humans. The commodification of women and children is frequently rationalized by economic rationales that favour profit over ethical issues. In this case, the man's reasoning for selecting female children reflects a transactional perspective of human life, in which girls are more desirable in a market-driven society due to their perceived compliance.

As McDaniel states in "Six Characteristics of a Postpatriarchal Christianity", when men have been influenced by the ideal of the autonomous self, they have approached women as objects to be controlled by that self" (314). The oppressive conceptual framework explains the dominance and subordination of species in a biotic community, while the patriarchal type explains the subordination of women by men due to gender bias (Warren 1990). Oryx's value was solely based on her appearance, with village women ensuring she seemed "pretty and healthy"(89) in order to get a higher price. After she was sold off, she was coerced into child exploitation and was forced to appear in pornographic material.

Objectification of Oryx can be clearly seen in the quote below which refers to the first time Jimmy and Crake see her:

This was how the two of them (Jimmy and Crake) first saw Oryx. She was only about eight, or she looked eight. They could never find out for certain how old she'd been then. Her name wasn't Oryx, she didn't have a name. she was just another little girl on a porno site. None of those little girls had ever seemed real to Jimmy---they'd always struck him as digital clones---but for some reason Oryx was three-dimensional from the start. She was small-boned and exquisite, and naked like the rest of them, with nothing on her but a garland of flowers and a pink hair ribbon.... The guy's distinguishing features were concealed---bag with eyeholes over the head, surgical tape over the tattoos and scars (70).

The quotation depicts a complex interplay of themes about commodification, objectification, and loss of agency, particularly in terms of gender. Oryx is introduced as a young girl on a pornographic site, immediately situating her within a system of exploitation. The characterization of Oryx as “just another girl on a porno site” emphasizes the commodification of her identity. In this setting, she is not regarded as an autonomous individual, but rather as a desire object devoid of humanity. This reflects a larger societal trend, in which women’s bodies are frequently objectified and commodified, especially in patriarchal and capitalist systems. The statement “she was small-boned and exquisite and naked like the rest of them” underscores Oryx’s objectification by reducing her to physical characteristics that may be commodified in the marketplace of desire. This also reflects the ways in which nature is frequently depicted, emphasizing beauty and function while neglecting the intrinsic value of both women and the environment.

Ynestra King discusses how “women have had to grapple with the historical projection of human concepts onto the natural, which were later used to fortify masculinist notions about females’ nature” (216). This relates to Jimmy’s assessment of the females as “digital clones”, they have been stripped of their particular identities and turned to objects. According to Karen J. Warren, women are frequently perceived through an “objectification” lens, where they become “others to be appropriated and dominated”. She concludes that objectification “is based on a profound forgetting by men” of women’s humanity (154). The dehumanization process is most visible when women are reduced to their bodies and physical characteristics, as in the previous passage, which characterizes the girls as naked objects while the male perpetrator preserves his privacy and identity through concealment. This process further reinforces what Warren calls “making of women and nature into ‘others’ to be appropriated and dominated” (154).

Oryx was also manipulated by different men who would pay for sexual services.

Next day the man appeared and asked Oryx if she would like some money, a lot more money than she could make selling roses. He was a long white hairy man with a thick accent, but she could make out the words. This time Oryx went with him (101).

The quotation emphasizes the transactional character of Oryx’s connection with the man, mirroring the economic value of women in a patriarchal society.

Ecofeminism opposes such commodification, claiming that women and nature are frequently considered resources to be exploited for profit. The reference to Oryx's ability to earn more money than she could selling roses emphasizes the economic constraints that force people, particularly women, into difficult situations (Naz 2024). Oryx's willingness to accompany the man could be regarded as a survival strategy rather than a genuine decision. In a world where economic survival frequently means sacrificing one's beliefs or safety, Oryx's decision shows the unfortunate reality of people forced to navigate exploitative systems. This is consistent with ecofeminist views, which emphasize the need to respect all beings' intrinsic value and the significance of creating equitable systems that do not rely on exploitation.

The narrator continues to explain Oryx's interaction with the man:

Oryx was obedient and did as she was told. She had a general idea of what else the man might want---the other children already knew about such things and discussed them freely, and laughed about them. People paid a lot of money for the kinds of things this man wanted (101).

Oryx's compliance and awareness of the man's intentions demonstrate the normalcy of exploitation in a patriarchal framework. Her compliance can be interpreted as a survival strategy in a society that commodifies women, turning them into mere objects of desire and commerce. The fact that Oryx has a "general idea" of what the man might desire indicates that she has been conditioned to view such transactions as normal, indicating a broader cultural acceptance of exploitation as a method of survival. The mention of "the other children" discussing these matters freely further indicates a societal acceptance of such exploitation, normalizing the commodification of women's bodies.

Even in her adult life at Paradise, Oryx's body remained commodified, yet in a different way: she was compelled to appear naked to teach the Crakers, which Crake justified by arguing that "clothes would only confuse them" (235). Her entire existence is characterized and defined by others exploiting her body for their own ends, illustrating the novel's underlying condemnation of female exploitation.

As Janes Birkeland states: Ecofeminism addresses corporate greed and exploitation through its fundamental rejection of "power-over" relationships and domination systems (19). Several significant parts in the narrative serve as a harsh condemnation of corporate greed and reckless genetic engineering. While Atwood

uses the voice of Jimmy's mother and Jimmy to address this ecofeminist concern, Jimmy's father and Crake are the voices of corporate greed. Jimmy's mother explicitly rejects the "moral cesspool" of genetic engineering, calling it "sacrilegious":

Jimmy's mother must've been mulling that over. "Be that as it may," she said---a sign that she wasn't going to give in. "Be that as it may, there is research and there's research. What you're doing---this pig brain thing. You're interfering with the building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's...sacrilegious."

The expression "you're interfering with the building blocks of life" captures the core ethical dilemma surrounding genetic engineering. Scientists are not only conducting study when they manipulate live beings' genetic makeup but they are changing the core essence of existence. This involvement raises serious moral concerns about the extent to which people should have control over nature. Within ecofeminism, such manipulation is frequently criticized for having the ability to commodify life, reducing sentient beings to mere resources for experimentation and profit. The mother's claim that this method is "immoral" and "sacrilegious" reflects a deep concern about the ramifications of playing God and the possibility of unintended consequences for both individual organisms and ecosystems.

In today's technologically developed world, not all women are allowed to have the same reproductive rights due to the high costs of these treatments. Lori Gruen points out that reproductive technologies and experimentation have not been available for all women of all classes and races. While some middle-class women have benefited from procedures like artificial insemination and embryo transfer, "the overall costs have not been adequately assessed" (67). Atwood addresses this ecofeminist issue of health treatments not being available to all through Jimmy's mother as she claims that corporations like NooSkins abuse people's hopes while making treatments unaffordable:

"Can't you be positive, just for once? All this negative stuff, *this is no good, that's no good*, nothing's ever good enough, according to you!"

"Positive about what? That you've thought up yet another way to rip off a bunch of desperate people?" said Jimmy's mother in that slow, anger-free voice.

Jimmy's mother's remark about "ripping off a bunch of desperate people" emphasizes the exploitative aspect of their culture, in which the vulnerable are

frequently preyed upon by those in power. This discussion lays the groundwork for a more in-depth examination of the moral quandaries confronting individuals in a capitalist system that values profit over ethical considerations. The term “anger-free voice” suggests her acceptance of the situation, implying that she has become accustomed to the moral decay around her.

“God, you’re cynical!” “No, you are. You and your smart phones. Your colleagues. It’s wrong, the whole organization is wrong, it’s a moral cesspool and you know it.”

“We can give people hope. Hope isn’t ripping off!”

“At NooSkins’ prices it is. You hype your wares and take all their money and then they run out of cash, and it’s no more treatments for them. They can rot as far as you and your pals are concerned. Don’t you remember the way we used to talk, everything we wanted to do? Making life better for people---not just people with money” (45).

Her claim that the corporation “hypes your wares” while leaving desperate individuals without resources exemplifies the predatory nature of the capitalist system in which they operate. The expression “they can rot as far as you and your pals are concerned” exemplifies the dehumanization inherent in such practices, in which human well-being comes second to financial gain. The reference to their previous discussions about “making life better for people-not just people with money” is a heart-breaking reminder of their former ideals. This nostalgia for a time when their goals were based on true concern for others highlights the moral deterioration they have endured. It raises important considerations concerning the trade-offs people make in the face of systemic pressures, as well as the ethical duties of those who work in exploitative systems.

It is not a surprise that Jimmy’s mother is appalled by the corporate greed as a woman. In the article “Ecofeminism and the Politics of Reality”, Linda Vance states:

The answer lies in both our experience and our perspective. We know, because we lived it, that men and women have been disparately treated within patriarchy and capitalism, with women receiving the worst treatment. We know what it means to be exploited, to be forced to yield and produce against our will. We know what it means to be made invisible, to have our reality denied. Because we know all this from our experience, and know from a study of history that the domination of women and the domination of nature have long been politically, philosophically, and economically linked, our perspective differs from that of the men (139).

Vance’s comment emphasizes how women have historically been oppressed and exploited by the combined systems of patriarchy and capitalism. The statement

that “men and women have been disparately treated within patriarchy and capitalism, with women receiving the worst treatment” emphasizes the systemic nature of gender inequality, in which women’s exploitation is a collective reality shaped by socioeconomic and political forces. By acknowledging the links between gender and environmental exploitation, Vance’s comment encourages a more comprehensive concept of social justice that includes both feminist and ecological issues.

In the novel, the corporate compounds function as medieval castles, emphasizing the divide between privileged scientists and the general population.

Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies, said Jimmy’s father, and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside (25).

The comparison of the Compounds to castles with “high walls and drawbridges” represents the protective barriers that companies create to secure their interests while excluding others. This exemplifies a key characteristic of corporate greed: the quest of profit frequently results in the marginalization of those outside the corporate system. Ecofeminist theory views this exclusion as part of a larger pattern of domination that prioritizes the interests of the privileged, often wealthy, masculine, and technologically advanced over the needs of marginalized groups including women and the environment. As Gaard explains in “Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature”:

As the human species approaches the capacity to annihilate all life on this planet, it becomes imperative that we challenge both the ideological assumptions and the hierarchical structures of power and domination that together serve to hold the majority of earth’s inhabitants in thrall to the privileged minority (10).

The phrase “slots on the ramparts” for pouring “hot pitch on your enemies” emphasizes the brutal nature of corporate greed. This image conveys a sense of anger and hostility toward people labelled as “other,” whether they be marginalized communities or the natural world. As Mao-de-Ferro and Ramelli (2022) suggest, such violence stems from a worldview that values dominance and control over compassion and cooperation. Corporate greed promotes a cycle of violence that hurts both women and the environment by establishing a competitive and aggressive mentality (1).

The man-created dangerous hybrid creatures such as ‘wolvogs’ and ‘ChickieNobs’ exemplify a reckless pursuit of profit without regard to ethical consequences.

“Why make a dog like that?” said Jimmy, taking a step back. “Who’d want one?”

“It’s a CorpSeCorps thing.” Said Crake. “Commission work. A lot of funding. They want to put them in moats, or something.”

“Moats?”

“Yeah. Better than an alarm system---no way of disarming these guys. And no way of making pals with them, not like real dogs.”

Jimmy’s initial reaction to the genetically altered dog reveals a visceral uneasiness with the concept of producing life forms that depart from natural norms. His query, “Who’d want one?” raises an important ethical dilemma about the purpose and desirability of such inventions. Crake’s reaction presents the development of these dogs as a realistic security solution, underscoring the utilitarian ethos that underpins much of the genetic engineering in Atwood’s dystopian society. Crake’s claim that these altered dogs are “better than an alarm system” displays a disturbing attitude on the value of life; the dogs are reduced to simple security instruments rather than beings with intrinsic worth. The mention of “moats” demonstrates how far humans would go to regulate and contain nature. Crake’s creation of a creature incapable of befriending people demonstrates a desire to eradicate the unpredictable nature of natural connections. This raises serious concerns regarding the ethical implications of such interventions, as well as the potential consequences of breaking the relationship between humans and nature.

“What if they get out? Go on the rampage? Start breeding, then the population spirals out of control---like those big green rabbits?”

“That would be a problem,” said Crake. “But they won’t get out. Nature is to zoos as God is to churches.”

“Meaning what?” said Jimmy. He wasn’t paying close attention, he was worrying about the ChickieNobs and wolvogs. Why is it he feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed? How much is too much, how far is too far? (159).

Jimmy’s anxieties about the potential ramifications of Crake’s creations stem from a deeper fear of genetic engineering and nature’s unpredictability. His reference to the “big green rabbits” serves as a warning about the perils of unregulated

breeding and the environmental effects of human interference. This worry is related to the larger topics of ecological balance and the potential for humans to disturb the natural systems. Crake's dismissive response, "But they won't get out," indicates a deep belief in his capacity to manipulate nature using scientific methods. His analogy, "Nature is to zoos as God is to churches," implies that human constructs may contain and govern natural forces, much as religious organizations try to define and control the supernatural. This viewpoint raises important ethical concerns regarding the boundaries of human intervention and the moral responsibility that comes with the ability to influence life. Jimmy's internal conflict, as he dwells on the notion that "some line has been crossed," exemplifies the existential dread that comes with realizing humanity's ability to modify nature. This moment of reflection urges readers to contemplate the moral boundaries of scientific discovery and the consequences of crossing them.

Atwood's presentation of genetic engineering as a boundary transgression serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of pushing ethical and ecological boundaries. The unrestrained pursuit of scientific advancement without regard for the larger ramifications can have disastrous consequences for the environment and society. Ecofeminism asks for a reconsideration of these practices, pushing for a more sustainable and ethical approach to scientific inquiry that recognizes the interconnection of all living things.

This also reflects today's unethical genetic engineering practised on animals to serve the needs of corporate greed. The genetic manipulation on cows is similar to the genetic manipulation done on dogs and chickens in the novel. Lorie Gruen argues that the dairy industry uses genetic manipulation to increase milk production through artificial insemination and embryo transplantation. Cows are continuously experimented on to produce more milk than their bodies should naturally handle. She states that with the emergence of the Bovine Growth Hormone, "the already shortened and painful life of the dairy cow may become even shorter and more painful" (74).

Crake goes on to reveal that corporations purposely develop diseases to maximize profit, making sure patients "die just before all of his or her money runs out":

“The best diseases, from a business point of view;” said Crake, “would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally---that is, for maximum profit---the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out. It’s a fine calculation” (164).

The quote above raises serious ethical concerns regarding the consequences of genetic modification and the creation of diseases for profit. The notion that “the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out” demonstrates the moral bankruptcy of such procedures. By emphasizing the implications of corporate greed and reckless genetic engineering, Atwood’s narrative challenges readers to reconsider the principles that drive our relationship with science and technology.

The novel depicts how corporate interests corrupt scientific innovation by emphasizing profit over human welfare, resulting in terrible implications for humanity and nature. Although Crake is one of the master minds of this catastrophe, the novel harshly condemns human anthropocentrism, particularly through Crake’s philosophical standpoint and the negative influence of human activity and behaviour on the environment. Crake sees human society as a “sort of monster” that ruthlessly consumes other life forms. He compares humanity to “a giant slug eating its way through all the other bioforms on the planet” and destroying everything in its path (187). The post-apocalyptic landscape demonstrates humanity’s destructive self-centeredness, with rusty automobile parts and rubble forming artificial reefs in the beginning of the novel.

On the eastern horizon there’s a greyish haze, lit now with a rosy, deadly glow. Strange how that colour still seems tender. The offshore towers stand out in dark silhouette against it, rising improbably out of the pink and pale blue of the lagoon. The shrieks of the birds that nest out there and the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble sound almost like holiday traffic (7).

The description of the “greyish haze” and “rosy, deadly glow” paints a harsh picture of a landscape that has been irreversibly transformed by human intervention. This imagery conveys a sense of gloom and decay, implying that the environment has not only been harmed but has also evolved into something strange and unfriendly. The juxtaposition of “tender” color with “deadly glow” emphasizes the irony of beauty mixed with danger, illustrating the intricacies of a post-apocalyptic world where remnants of civilization coexist with the repercussions of environmental negligence.

Crake created the Crakers as an attempt to erase human anthropocentric tendencies, removing “destructive features” including racism, hierarchy, and territorial behaviour.

It was amazing---said Crake--- what once-unimaginable things had been accomplished by the team here. What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world’s current illnesses. For instance, racism---or, as they referred to it in Paradise, pseudospeciation---had been eliminated in the model group, merely by switching the bonding mechanism; the Paradise people simply did not register skin colour (232).

The removal of racism in the Paradise model represents the ability to transcend socially imposed divisions. It implies that a fairer society is feasible if the root causes of injustice are addressed. This approach advocates for the breakdown of repressive structures and the realization of interconnectivity among all beings regardless of race or gender. Crake continues to explain:

Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it. Since they were neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land, there was no territoriality: the king-of-the-castle hard-wiring that they had plagued humanity had, in them, been unwired. They ate nothing but leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two; thus their foods were plentiful and always available. Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones: they came into heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than man (232).

The Paradise people’s lack of territoriality represents a concept of a community that coexists with nature, in stark contrast to the competitive and exploitative inclinations of modern human societies. This approach is consistent with ecofeminist beliefs that promote sustainable living practices and a strong regard for the natural environment. By showing a society that thrives on plant-based diets and communal living, Atwood highlights the possibility of alternate ways of being that promote ecological balance and social equality (Kareem 2015).

In this quote it can be seen that though it is an attempt by Crake to end anthropocentric behaviour in humans, his own intention behind this new creation of beings can be seen as arrogance as he feels he has the right to manipulate genes to create as he sees fit. The narrative depicts how human arrogance and “monkey brains” caused environmental catastrophe (76), with the changed landscape of “unrooted trees” and “torn fronds” serving as a witness to humanity’s negative impact (203).

As stated in *Ecofeminism*, the male-centered perspective results in “the domination of man over nature and women”, both are perceived as the ‘other’, the passive none-self. Women and environment are transformed into “passive objects, to be used and exploited for the uncontrolled and uncontrollable desires of alienated man” (Shiva 165). The attitudes and power dynamics of male characters in the novel serve as primary examples of phallogentrism. Crake displays this through his mocking view of women, declaring “Female artists are biologically confused” (131), meanwhile treating women as scientific objects rather than autonomous beings. His conception of the Crakers represents male-centered design, creating women with “ultra-strong vulvas” exclusively for male sexual desires. Even in the post-apocalyptic world, this power dynamic is perpetuated through ritualized mating customs in which men stand guard while another “copulates,” reinforcing male dominance in sexual relationships. The woman body is designed specifically to sexually please without any physical or psychological consequence to men:

No more *No means yes*, anyway, thinks Snowman. No more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape. The five of them will roister for hours, three of the men standing guard and doing the singing and shouting while the fourth one copulates, turn and turn about. Crake has equipped these women with ultra-strong vulvas---extra skin layers, extra muscles---so they can sustain these marathons (129).

With Crake calculating and decreeing that mating “once every three years per female was more than enough” (128), even their reproductive rights are restricted. Warren states that according to a dominant radical feminist viewpoint, “patriarchy oppresses women in sex-specific ways by defining women as beings whose primary functions are either to bear and raise children or to satisfy male sexual desires” (114). The gender dynamics are strikingly evident in the women’s roles as well. Their roles are restricted to traditionally feminine activities such as tending fires and preparing Snowman’s food:

As far as Snowman can tell, fire-tending is about the only thing the women do that might be classified as work. Apart from helping to catch his weekly fish, that is. And cooking it for him. On their own behalf they do no cooking (123).

The novel depicts how corporate patriarchy commodifies both nature and women, with women’s bodies serving as products for genetic manipulation, mirroring the profit-driven exploitation of natural resources. In the article “Ecology is a Sistah’s Issue Too”, Riley states that “The global environment crisis is related to

the socio-political systems of fear and hatred of all that is natural, non-white, and female that has pervaded dominant Western thought for centuries” (189).

Environmental degradation is also one of the themes Atwood reflects in her narrative. The post-apocalyptic scene vividly depicts the devastating results of environmental degradation, with the earth becoming “one vast uncontrolled experiment” with invasive species pushing out native vegetation. The novel envisions a future in which air quality has deteriorated so drastically that humans use special “nose cones” to filter out microorganisms and pollutants, particularly in the areas called ‘pleeblands’, which refers to the urban areas outside the privileged compounds where the wealthy elite and the scientists live.

The corporate world’s approach to the environmental catastrophe is profit-driven and superficial, depicted by lavish malls with artificial elements like “Roman-look fountains” and “self-energizing gyms” (222). The environment has changed so much that vines choke city streets and scavenging animals adjust to new hunting habits:

The walking has become an obstacle course for Snowman: in several places he’s needed to make detours. Now he’s in a narrow sidestreet, choked with vines; they’ve festooned themselves across the street, from roof to roof. Through the clefts in the overhead greenery he can see a handful of vultures, circling idly in the sky. They can see him too, they have eyesight like ten magnifying glasses, those things can count the change in your pocket (172).

The depiction of Snowman navigating an “obstacle course” stresses the environment’s chaotic and overgrown state after the collapse of human civilization. The image of “narrow sidestreet, choked with vines” depicts a once-structured urban landscape that has been reclaimed by nature, highlighting the repercussions of environmental neglect and human leadership failures. The metamorphosis serves as a striking reminder of the vulnerability of human structures in the face of environmental change.

The novel effectively incorporates ecofeminist concerns into its condemnation of corporate exploitation of both women and nature. Oryx’s character represents the commodification of women, from child trafficking to adult objectification, which parallels the exploitation of natural resources. The ethical issues of genetic engineering are examined through corporate greed, as businesses such as RejoovenEsense put profit over ethical concerns. Human anthropocentrism is

challenged by Crake's portrayal of humans as "a giant slug eating its way through all the bioforms" (187). Phallogocentric views and gender dynamics are visible in how women are engineered and controlled, particularly in the Crakers' design, which creates females specifically for male sexual demands. Environmental degradation plays as the backdrop, with a post-apocalyptic environment representing humanity's devastating impact. Together, these themes demonstrate how patriarchal capitalism's dominance over both women and environment has fatal effects.

CHAPTER 3: DORIS LESSING'S *THE CLEFT*

3.1. Doris Lessing

Doris Lessing, a prominent British novelist, poet and playwright, received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2007 (Bilgis 2023). She was known for her vast body of work, which covered a wide range of genres and themes, including politics, social issues, feminism and ecofeminism (Mul 2009).

Lessing's most renowned works include the novel *The Golden Notebook* (1962), regarded as a landmark of feminist literature, and the science fiction series *Conopus in Argos* (Bilgis 2023). Her writing frequently delves into the intricacies of human connections and the effects of societal and political pressures on individual lives (Clark 2011).

In addition to her literary accomplishments, Lessing was noted for her political activism and involvement in social and political issues. She was an outspoken opponent of apartheid and supporter of numerous left wing initiatives (Bilgis 2023). Her writing frequently showed her political views and dedication to social justice (Szczygiel et al., 2021).

Lessing's writing and activism were also influenced by her own experiences as a woman and a writer. She was born in Kermanshah, Iran, in 1919 and grew up in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Her father, a World War I veteran, worked for the Imperial Bank of Persia, and the family later relocated to a farm, where Lessing received her early education at a convent and later at Girls' High School. She dropped out of school at thirteen to work as a nursemaid and secretary. Lessing had three children from two marriages but eventually realized that marriage was not her strength. In 1949, she moved to England, joined the Communist Party, and became a professional writer. Her experiences in life shaped her ideas on colonialism and the social injustices of the world around her and she expressed these concerns as an ecofeminist writer.

3.2. Doris Lessing as an Ecofeminist Writer

Doris Lessing made substantial contributions to ecofeminism by weaving themes of gender inequality and environmental exploitation throughout her literary works. Lessing's ecofeminist approach is obvious in her exploration of the

interconnectivity between the treatment of women and the degradation of nature (Zhu & Huang 2021).

Lessing portrays female characters as environmental protectors in *Mara and Dann: An Adventure*, in contrast to masculine characters who represent violence and ecological ruin (Aldeeb 2017). This representation not only emphasizes women's duties as environmental stewards, but it also challenges the typical male-centric narratives that frequently dominate literature. The novel's apocalyptic themes highlight the repercussions of environmental negligence and the necessity for a more equal connection with nature (Aldeeb 2017).

Lessing's work focused on the depiction of women and the issues they faced in patriarchal society. Lessing's novel *The Fifth Child*, for example delves into the problems of motherhood and the social constraints that women confront when carrying out their parental duties (Khalaf 2022).

Lessing's earlier work, *The Grass is Singing*, can also be evaluated from an ecofeminist perspective. The protagonist, Mary Turner, feels tremendous estrangement from her surroundings, which eventually leads to her terrible demise. This alienation mirrors larger societal issues of colonialism and gender oppression, demonstrating how land exploitation mimics women's subjugation (Zhu & Huang 2021).

3.3. Ecofeminist Reflections in *The Cleft*

The novel represents a dystopian past which is an ancient historical text being studied by a Roman historian. It depicts the origin story of human gender division, beginning with an all-female culture who breed independently, believing kids come from "the moon, or a big fish".

The women, referred to as Clefts enjoy an environmentally sustainable lifestyle on an island. They maintain a cycle of life that results in the continual births of female offspring. However, the pattern is broken when one of the Clefts gives birth to a boy. The Clefts are astonished and apprehensive at the sight of the infant boy with "all bumps and lumps and the thing like a pipe which is sometimes like a sea squirt" (12). Initially, this male new-born and the ones that follow are abandoned to die, but eagles rescue them and with the help of other animals like does, they miraculously mature into adulthood. Eventually, two distinct communities emerge:

the shore dwelling Clefts and the valley dwelling Males (called “Monsters” or “Squirts”).

As these two communities interact, complex power structures emerge from both conflict and cooperation. The Males become more daring and mobile, while the Clefts stick to their traditional ways. The Males follow their masculine instincts, ultimately resulting in the killing of one of the Clefts during an act of rape.

Two of the Clefts; Maire and Astre decide to visit the men and end up getting pregnant. They persist in their meetings with the Squirts, to the delight of both parties, resulting in the birth of real “human” babies.

The new infants and their remarkable alertness arouse mistrust among both the elder Clefts and the younger generation. The elder Clefts devise a merciless scheme against the Squirts but through the scheme is averted, and the elders are wiped out of existence by the combined efforts of the Squirts and some young Clefts. The two societies merge after years of isolation and division resulting in the evolution of gender roles, with power changing from female to male supremacy.

A power struggle between the Clefts and the Squirts continue until the Males accept defeat and responsibility for their actions without protest. They end up establishing a peaceful civilization characterized by mutual empathy, harmony, and ecological awareness.

The narrative weaves together with the Roman historian’s commentary, resulting in a multifaceted examination of ecofeminist concerns like gender dynamics, commodification of women and nature, anthropocentrism, phallocentrism, and environmental degradation.

“The Cleft” offers a critique of patriarchal norms by describing a society in which women initially thrive in peace with nature, symbolizing an idealized relationship between femininity and nature. They were so in sync with nature and with each other that they felt whole with everything around them: “We didn’t think like that, no, we didn’t, that every person had to have a name separate from all the others” (11). Looking back, they felt they lived in a dream, “a sleep, everything slow and easy and nothing ever happening but the moon being bright and big, and the red flowers washing down The Cleft” (11). The entrance of men upsets this balance, symbolizing the harmful effects of patriarchal rule on both women and the

environment. The narrative is consistent with ecofeminist theory, which claims that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are both based in patriarchal ideology and that women's commodification relates to natural resource exploitation.

The text reflects the commodification of women and nature through several key aspects. Women are largely valued for their reproductive potential, and are viewed as useless containers for childbearing rather than individuals who could contribute in their society in many different ways. Some of the young Clefts go to the valley of the Males out of curiosity and decide to stay there:

Yet there were some girls who refused to leave the men's valley, and said they liked the life there. Then, first one and then another, they returned, angry and fearful, because they were pregnant, and as their bellies swelled were told they are not wanted, even though they were useful, cutting up carcasses, making fire, clearing away rubbish and the remains of feasts. 'Back to your own place,' they had been told, though some did not want to go (162).

The rejection of the pregnant girls, despite their usefulness, emphasizes the conditionality of their acceptance within the patriarchal paradigm. The phrase "Back to your own place" denotes a definite marking of borders, reinforcing the notion that women are not fully integrated into male culture but instead restricted to a secondary role. This exclusion mirrors the broader ecofeminist critique of how patriarchal societies often marginalize women and deny them agency, paralleling the ways in which nature is often exploited and disregarded.

Greta Gaard (1993) states that in Western culture, mothers are expected to be "selfless, generous, and nurturing" with their existence deriving "sole meaning from tending to the needs of their children" (302). Similarly in the narrative, women are limited to utilitarian roles, expected to care for injured boys: "The boys, from seven or so, did spend most of their time up in the trees. What boy can resist the trees of a real forest? It was a good life. They came down to the ground to join in the meals, the feasting, and the trips" (179). And when the women expressed their concern for safety, their concerns were dismissed as "positively irrelevant" by men:

There were of course accidents, and that was another reason the women's complaints were so irritating. They said that when the boys fell and broke a leg or an arm, the men sent them back to the women's shore to be put right. Couldn't men at least watch over the little boys enough to stop so many falls – and even some deaths? This struck the men as positively irrelevant. Of course boys will venture into danger, and there must be accidents. What was this extraordinary concern by the females for safety? (180).

The men's dismissive attitude toward women's concerns exemplifies power dynamics. The men's reaction to the women's complaints, "this struck the men as positively irrelevant", demonstrates patriarchal disregard of women's voices and experiences. This reflects a broader social trend to downplay women's viewpoints, supporting the impression that their problems come second to those of men. The men's lack of accountability for the boys' safety reinforces their position of power, as they are not held responsible for the repercussions of their conduct.

The women's complaints about the safety of the boys and subsequent rejection after becoming pregnant highlight how their value is frequently linked to their reproductive skills and utility in the community. The statement "they were useful, cutting up carcass, making fire, clearing away rubbish" stresses how labor and reproduction define women's duties, reducing their identities to simple usefulness. As stated by Eren (2016), this commodification is consistent with a larger pattern in patriarchal society, in which women are frequently valued for their services to men's survival and comfort rather than as individuals with agency and autonomy (415).

Nature itself is treated as a resource to be exploited. It is portrayed as something to be conquered and controlled, and the emergence of the fire changes the natural landscape considerably. The fires grow so big that they disrupt the natural order:

Now the fires at night were sometimes so tall that fish and sea animals rose to the sea's surface goggling, because the light of the flames were gilding the waters, and they wondered if the moon or the sun had risen out of turn. The light of the fires running in the hollow of the waves told the Old Ones that nothing they knew was the same, and that the new held dangers for them they had learned already (108).

The visual of "fires at night" that draw fish and sea animals to the surface exemplifies how human activity disrupts the natural world. Fires represent a destructive force that changes the environment, producing uncertainty and suffering among the organisms who live there. Furthermore, the reference to the "Old Ones" realizing that "nothing they knew was the same" emphasizes the devastating impact of environmental deterioration on traditional knowledge and ways of life. Ecofeminism emphasizes the need of preserving indigenous and local knowledge systems, which have historically maintained a peaceful relationship with the environment. In *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Animals* Margaret

Robinson states that indigenous ecofeminism recognizes traditional leadership roles of women in maintaining harmonious relationships with land and nature, giving women significant roles in governance and decision-making about land and resources (604).

As the male population increased, the exploitation of nature continued to the point of no return:

By now it had become clear to them all that this land was as riddled as an old piece of wood that the borers had got at. Caves and tunnels and great worlds of underground rivers and lakes. Who would ever have suspected this if the little boys had not made a home for themselves high on the cliff above the beach? (232-233).

The image of landscape “riddled” with caves, tunnels, and underground rivers conveys degradation and devastation, implying that human activity has had a significant impact on the natural environment. This metaphor might be understood as a critique of how patriarchal civilizations abuse the environment for personal benefit, frequently without consideration for the long-term implications.

The novel asserts that the introduction of male dominance causes societal homogenization and a loss of diversity, both in human interactions and in the natural environment. Lessing’s narrative, which calls for a more inclusive and compassionate response to gender and environmental challenges, emphasizes the need for a decentralized global organization that embraces diversity and opposes all forms of dominance (Jabbar 2024)

In *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology* Michael E. Zimmerman states that:

Deep ecology or radical environmentalism claims that environmental pollution, extinction of countless species of plants and animals, clear-cutting of rain forests, overpopulation, genetic engineering, and similar modern practices and problems are symptoms of the real disease: anthropocentrism. By regarding themselves as radically separate from and superior to the rest of nature, modern human beings have increasingly exploited nonhuman reality (135).

Zimmerman’s assertion that anthropocentrism leads to the exploitation of nonhuman reality is a basic critique of how modern civilizations view their relationship with nature. Humans justify behaviours that cause severe environmental harm, such as pollution, deforestation, and genetic engineering, by perceiving themselves as separate from and superior to the natural world. The idea that

anthropocentrism is a “disease” implies that it is more than just a philosophical position, but a widespread worldview that influences behaviours and policies. Zimmerman’s claim that anthropocentrism is at the foundation of many environmental problems is a striking critique of modern human attitudes toward nature. Recognizing the connection of human actions and ecological repercussions allows us to begin to address the fundamental philosophical and ethical challenges that contribute to environmental deterioration. This viewpoint is critical for building a more sustainable and equitable interaction with the natural world, highlighting the need for a paradigm shift away from anthropocentrism and toward a more eco-centric worldview.

Lessing reflects anthropocentrism in several different ways within the novel. The narrative portrays humans as superior to other species, as evidenced by how they regard animals solely for their utility. Even the relationship with deer is basically exploitative; they are seen as “milk donors” rather than as autonomous beings (42). This exploitation extends beyond physical use and includes the emotional and psychological aspects of how animals are seen and handled. Reducing animals to simple resources demonstrates a lack of empathy and knowledge of their perspectives, perpetuating the hierarchical systems that support anthropocentric ideas.

Human characters increasingly distance themselves from nature, asserting supremacy through fire and considering the natural world as something to conquer. “Apart from the dangerous river, great fires were kept burning always, day and night, because of these animals, who were afraid of fire, and the fires too had guards” (157). They not only used fire to control the animals, but also had guards to control the fire, demonstrating how people elevate themselves above other species and the natural world.

The disconnection from the environment is reflected in Horsa’s (the leader of the Squirts) inability to return to the island after leaving it to discover new land. His disorientation in the forest symbolizes a greater masculine disconnect from natural instincts, as the narrator observes “boys were clumsy, seemed to lack a feeling for their surroundings” (107). Horsa’s use of artificial aids (his stick) and incapacity to read natural signs reveal his estrangement from nature. He can simply see “a glitter

and shine from a waterfall” (236) and he is unable to appropriately interpret natural signs.

The novel further illustrates anthropocentric thinking in how humans begin to see themselves as unique and distinct from other creatures, building what they call “civilization” while viewing the natural world solely as a resource to be exploited:

Suppose the climate of that long ago has changed so that we have no means of knowing what it once was? Balmy and beneficent shores where lived people through long ages, slowly evolving from – but we do not know – to ... We do know they called themselves the people as if there could be no others in the world. But that is the common tale of the beginnings of a people (171).

The quotation begins with a reflection on the climate and the uncertainty surrounding its history, implying a disconnect between humans and the natural world. The phrase “we have no means of knowing what it once was” emphasizes an important component of anthropocentrism: the preference for human experiences and knowledge over the intrinsic value of the natural environment. This attitude generates a sense of human exceptionalism, where people see themselves as apart from and superior to the natural environment, resulting in a lack of understanding and respect for ecological processes. The notion that “they called themselves the people as if there could be no others in the world” exemplifies the insular nature of anthropocentric thought. This self-identification reveals a limited worldview that ignores the existence and importance of other beings, both human and nonhuman.

In *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* Josephine Donovan explains that: “Beyond the ontogenetic theory is the phylogenetic thesis developed by Rosemary Radford Ruether that patriarchal civilization is built upon the historical emergence of a masculine ego consciousness that arose in opposition to nature, which was seen as feminine” (180). The novel offers a critical framework for comprehending the ramifications of phallocentrism in patriarchal societies. Ruether’s claim that masculine ego awareness arose in contrast to nature, which was viewed as feminine, exemplifies the profoundly ingrained gender dynamics that define society structures and environmental interactions.

Phallocentrism is another ecofeminist concern reflected in the novel. The narrative itself is controlled by male perspectives, as clearly admitted by the male historian narrator:

So, I shall end the explanations and come to my attempt at a history; one that both Clefts and Monsters, males and females, would agree to. Immediately I confront a problem. I wrote there ‘males and females’. Males are always put first, in our practice. They are first in our society, despite the influence of certain great ladies of the noble Houses. Yet I suspect this priority was a later invention (28-29).

From the beginning of the novel, this demonstrates the inherent male-centered power structure. The phrase “males are always put first, in our practice” emphasizes the universality of phallocentrism, which prioritizes male experiences and identities over those of females. This prioritizing is not solely due to biological differences but it also has its roots in cultural narratives that favour male dominance and authority. The speaker’s acknowledgement that “this priority was a later invention” suggests that the hierarchical structures governing gender interactions are socially produced rather than inherent.

The female body is described through a male gaze, which considers women’s anatomy inferior or “ugly,” whereas male anatomy is positioned as the standard. This is evident when females are depicted as “fat, slow” beings who must become “lithe and flexible” in order to meet masculine norms (153-154). Physical strength also becomes increasingly male-centered, with boys being removed from their mothers around the age of seven to join the males, where they are taught to “dare the dangers” as an initiation ritual. The novel emphasizes that even when boys died in these rituals, “the males seemed to think this a reasonable risk” (146), demonstrating how male-centric norms override maternal concerns.

Gradually the male perspective and language dominate and replace the original female-centered society:

Though the murdered girl had not been able to say much that was coherent, from the words she did say they knew that the language they used was poor compared with hers and, forced to worry over the question, find a reason, they at last understood that all they said had developed from the speech of small children who had made that first brave quest over the eagles! Mountain. The language was a child’s, and it was even pitched high, like children’s talk. Yes, they had new words, for the tools and utensils they had invented, but they talked together like children (49).

The text presents complex gender dynamics primarily through power relations and social roles. Males and females are depicted in an evolving power struggle, with women first possessing control but eventually losing it. Women are portrayed as “talking down to the men, chiding and scolding,” (177) but men react with “derision” and “jeers” (167) when women come.

There is an apparent divide in behavioural expectations, with males engaged in competitive behaviours such as “stone-throwing” while females look on, perplexed, asking “What’s the point?” (159). This emphasizes basic distinctions in how each gender perceives purpose and meaning.

Sexual relationships are portrayed as intricate power struggles in which women are both wanted and resented. It can be observed from the narrative that “nagging changes, without much warning, into a plea for” intimacy (167), while males remain divided about their reliance on females for reproduction: “‘The girls can’t have babies without us,’ they concluded, and then were observed inspecting that part of their anatomy which had once, so very long ago now, made them Monsters” (241).

The narrative depicts how gender roles become more strict and hierarchical, with males finally establishing supremacy through their physical strength and violent actions, while females become increasingly defined by their reproductive potential.

Environmental degradation is also reflected in the novel in different ways. The landscape undergoes dramatic deterioration as once “thickly forested” areas become “bare rocky hillsides” (171) which represents the significant environmental decline through human activity. Natural disasters follow the deterioration caused by humans: “Large parts of the forest were swamp, marsh, and that was because the Noise, that great storm, had felled trees as easily as one of our breaths may blow seeds off a stalk” (171).

The river, which they had known as nurturing now became hostile as the ecosystem changed:

It ran very fast, it was deep, it was cold, and to bathe in it they all, except for the strongest of the young men, had to confine themselves to a bay or inlet where water idled and lazed, and it was shallow. These people who had been born on the edge of the sea, had always been in and out of the water, who had felt about water almost as they did about air, benign, safe, their element, now knew water as an enemy (155).

The depiction of water as “deep” and “cold,” when contrasted with the people’s past familiarity with the sea, demonstrates a dramatic shift in their connection with nature. Water, once seen as “benign” and “safe,” has now been dubbed an “enemy.” This change represents the impact of environmental changes on human experiences and emphasizes the vulnerability of human existence in the face

of nature's unpredictability. The transition from viewing water as a nurturing element to a source of danger parallels the larger subject of environmental degradation, in which human actions can result in a hostile relationship with the natural world.

Throughout *The Cleft*, Lessing emphasizes the anthropocentric worldview that regards humans, particularly males, as superior to other living beings. The narrative demonstrates how the viewpoint leads to the exploitation of both women and nature, as seen by the commodification of women, animals and nature, reducing them to mere resources. This mirrors a broader critique of phallocentrism, in which men's needs and desires are prioritized, often at the expense of women's autonomy and the integrity of the environment. The realization that "males are always put first" highlights the persistent biases that perpetuate gender inequality and environmental harm.

CONCLUSION

Ecofeminism is the interdisciplinary approach that emphasizes the importance of addressing the concerns of feminism and the concerns of environmental challenges simultaneously. Both the empowerment of women and environmental protection are mutually reinforcing goals as one's concerns should not be dealt with alone without dealing with the concerns of the other. Both women and nature have been treated as the "other" and both have been subjected to commodification and neglect by the patriarchy of the "white men" of the world.

Francoise d'Eauborne encourages women to voice their concern for the environment and take the initiative to lead an ecological revolution which would subsequently provide the foundation for ecofeminism when it was implemented. D'Eauborne asks women to stand up for nature because only women understand what it means to be exploited, to be compelled to yield and produce despite their will. They understand the experience of being marginalized and denied their reality because they know all of this from personal experience.

Lessing used the title of Robert Graves' book "Man does, women is," as an epigraph which resonates deeply within ecofeminist concerns. The phrase implies a fundamental contrast between action and existence, portraying males as active actors shaping the world while reducing women to a passive condition of being. The concept of "women is" implies an unchanging existence, which can be read as a reflection of how women have traditionally been perceived in relation to men: as objects or resources rather than active participants in shaping their own lives or the environment. This viewpoint emphasizes the ecofeminist claim that women's oppression and environmental degradation are inseparable.

The ecofeminist thought owes its recognition to its most prominent theorists; Greta Gaard, Patrick Murphy and Ynestra King. Without their invaluable work, awareness on issues like commodification of women and nature, anthropocentrism, phallogentrism, gender dynamics, unethical applications of genetic engineering could not be raised. Their work combined challenges previous narratives in many fields including literature, and encourages a more comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness of gender, ecology and social justice for all.

Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing are both prominent writers who have used their narratives to draw attention to the concerns of ecofeminism. Through examining the ecofeminist reflections in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft*, it is evident that both authors are highly concerned with themes of anthropocentrism, phallogentrism, and the commodification of women and nature. Their narratives criticize patriarchal structures that not only marginalize women but also plunder the environment, resulting in ecological degradation and societal collapse.

While Atwood creates a dystopic future which has a post-apocalyptic ending due to corporate greed and unethical genetic engineering, Lessing creates a dystopic beginning of life on earth caused by the entrance of men into the picture. Both works depict an anthropocentric worldview, emphasizing the consequences of phallogentrism, in which male experiences and identities are prioritized over those of women and nature.

Both Atwood and Lessing emphasize the relationship between gender dynamics and environmental challenges. The commodification of women and the exploitation of nature are depicted as intertwined battles, reflecting the ecofeminist notion that women's subjugation and environmental degradation stem from similar patriarchal ideologies.

In *Oryx and Crake*, reckless genetic engineering procedures motivated by corporate greed demonstrate how human activities can have disastrous implications for the environment. The commodification of life, in which animals and even humans are exploited for profit, symbolizes a broader critique of a society that sees nature as a resource to be mined. Similarly in *The Cleft*, the depiction of women as child bearing vessels emphasizes the commodification of female bodies, reducing their identities to simple usefulness within a patriarchal framework.

Both works serve as warning stories about the dangers of unfettered exploitation and the necessity for a rethinking of societal norms. Atwood and Lessing encourage readers to participate in critical self-examination and advocate for behaviours that recognize life's interdependence. Through these stories, Atwood and Lessing encourage readers to reconsider their values and habits, aiming for a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the environment around them.

Ecofeminism paves the way for a more fair and compassionate future by acknowledging the interconnection of all life forms and the value of varied perspectives in influencing our understanding of the natural world.

The principles of ecofeminism are significant because they can challenge patriarchal hierarchies, promote environmental justice, advocate for interconnection, and develop ethical interactions. Ecofeminism provides a comprehensive framework for solving today's complex challenges by acknowledging the interconnectedness of gender and environmental issues. Its contributions go beyond academic debate, providing practical ideas for action and policymaking to create a more just and sustainable future.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* both explore ecofeminist concerns, revealing a strong critique of the interrelated oppressions suffered by women and environment within patriarchal and anthropocentric paradigms. Both authors use their stories to emphasize the negative consequences of a society that prioritizes the needs of privileged humans over ecological balance and gender equality.

Atwood's dystopian vision in *Oryx and Crake* serves as a cautionary tale on the consequences of genetic engineering and environmental degradation, demonstrating how these issues disproportionately affect women and marginalised people. Similarly, Lessing's *The Cleft* delves into the historical and cultural narratives that continue to oppress women and the environment. Lessing uses her ecofeminist viewpoint to challenge patriarchal assumptions that drive cultural ideas of gender roles and environmental stewardship. The novel's examination of female solidarity and the possibility of a more peaceful relationship with nature emphasizes the importance of removing repressive structures that hurt both women and the environment.

The synthesis of these works highlights the critical need for an ecofeminist approach that acknowledges the intrinsic value of both women and nature, advocating for a biocentric worldview that values interdependence above dominance. As current society grapples with rising environmental catastrophes and gender inequality, Atwood and Lessing's observations remain critical, pushing readers to rethink the ethical implications of their acts and the societal institutions that guide

them. Both writers advocate for a new understanding of our relationship with the natural world, one that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life and defends the rights of those who have historically been and are still being disadvantaged.



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