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MARGARET ATWOOD'S "MADDADDAM TRILOGY" AS A WORK OF "ECO-FICTION"

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines *Margaret Atwood's* dystopian fiction, the "*MaddAddam trilogy*" as a work of eco-fiction. *Atwood* is a Canadian novelist and her novels are well known for their thought-provoking content and she also expresses her strong views on environmental issues in most of her novels. The funny, cruel and profound "*MaddAddam trilogy*" is *Atwood's* most prominent work, which focusses on the current trends, and extrapolates them to explore the future. The paper further examines the themes and aspects of eco-fiction that are present in the novels : ecological crisis, out-of-control scientific innovations and environmental degradation. I consider the theme of ecological catastrophe and environmental degradation in the trilogy to be inspired by current real-life situations. *Atwood* ingeniously narrates the after-effects of environmental deterioration in a post-apocalyptic world, and the ecological holocaust that run amuck in the novels and effectively portrays them as a reflection of the contemporary society.

Key words: Dystopian Trilogy; Eco-Fiction; Ecological Catastrophe; Environmental Deterioration; Margaret Atwood

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Margaret Atwood, a Canadian novelist, who brilliantly narrates the apocalyptic end of the world, to which we humans are dedicating ourselves in her "*MaddAddam trilogy*". She is a renowned feminist and her works are largely based on environmentalism. The "*MaddAddam trilogy*" is *Atwood's* one such work which lays stress on the significance of the ecosystem and the role of human beings in deteriorating the environment.

The term "*eco-fiction*" is used to refer any branch of literature that covers nature-oriented or environment-oriented works of fiction. Eco-fiction did not become popular until the 1970s, when various environmental movements came into action, giving way to the rise of environmental literature, nature literature, and ecocriticism. It deals with environmental issues or the relationship between

humanity and the physical environment. And further it is divided into three categories : "Works that portray the environmental movement or environmental activism, works that depict a conflict over an environmental issue and express the author's beliefs, and works that feature environmental apocalypse". The "*MaddAddam trilogy*" is a work that features environmental apocalypse.

Much of *Atwood's* works deals with environmental issues. The "*MaddAddam trilogy*" is one such work, which is a post-apocalyptic fiction, a subgenre of eco-fiction. The novels involve attempts to prevent an apocalypse event, and it deals with the impact and consequences of the event itself. She won the Orion Book Award for her speculative series "*MaddAddam trilogy*". She is also known as a

climate change author, as he calls climate change the “everything change”. Global warming occurs prominently in her trilogy. She hopes through her writings to create awareness on the impending environmental apocalypse.

Atwood's trilogy is all about ecological holocaust, and it is not only the result of ecological collapse caused by human activities but rather the consequence of the out-of-control scientific innovations. One obvious thing about the trilogy is, it portrays the current environmental situations of the world. The trilogy clearly implies that environment is in a terrible condition, and although an environmental apocalypse is not imminent, we are definitely headed down that road. All the three novels in the trilogy deals with the significance of the ecosystem and the scrupulously precise way of handling the same.

Though *Atwood* appears to give imaginative form to environmental apocalypse, in her trilogy, she writes on issues that largely do exist in today's society. She has expanded and modified such already existing environmental issues. Although it is true that her novels largely hinge on the existence of certain technological advances, leading to environmental destruction, the trilogy has elements of love and is also funny, cruel, and profound. It portrays environmental crisis caused by advanced science, overpopulation, overconsumption of resources, consumerism and totalitarianism. With our current population increase rates, it will be double within the next century. And it is only a matter of time before there are shortage of life supporting resources on the planet. Overpopulation is a serious threat, because even though if we reduce our impacts on the environment, when the population doubles, the impact on the earth will be doubled. Many of the resources, that we rely on are non-renewable. Consumerism is another threat to our planet, people care much about their image in the society, neglecting the results of their actions. *Atwood* skillfully narrates in the trilogy, how we are rapidly depleting these resources and would have nothing to use when they are gone in the future, and she has specified clearly that mankind and their advanced technology are the major cause of the impending apocalypse.

“Oryx and Crake” is the first novel of the dystopian trilogy. Published in 2003, it is a post-apocalyptic eco-fiction set in an unspecified future. *Atwood* has used a great deal of technology in *“Oryx and Crake”*, it portrays the role of gene modification and transplant science or transgenic biotechnology in deteriorating humankind and the environment. The novel shows that, technology can actually be a curse to environment, society, and mankind. We get to see many genetically modified organisms, such as “Pigoons, Rakunks, Bobkittens, Wolvogs, Chickie Nobs, Kanga-Lambs, Happicuppa, Blysspluss pills” and many other gen-modified substances in the novel. Most of them are those, that we get to see very often in today's society. All of these GMOs and gen-modified substances came to create a sophisticated lifestyle and to give a lending hand to the human beings, but the same had become the reason for the imminent ecological crisis.

Climate change is prominently evident in *“Oryx and Crake”*. The novel shows global warming, rise in the sea level, rise in the temperature, everyday noon storms (the twisters), and rain. “Harvard had been, back before it got drowned”(p:203), this statement shows the climatic condition present in the novel. The novel states that human society is a sort of monsters, it never learned that it made the same vacuous mistakes over and over. “Trading short-term gain for long-term pain”(p:285). Soon the air and light would be artificial, and the ozone and oxygen would be destroyed, thereby leaving the planet unfit for survival.

“Blysspluss” were those pills which contained hidden deadly viruses which is airborne once it has started to spread, creating a global pandemic wiping off almost all the human population. There were very few survivors and the gen-modified “Crakers”. Jimmy the protagonist of the novel who acts as a connection between the world before the pandemic and post pandemic, was one among the survivors. The Crakers called him the “Abominable Snowman”. After the pandemic, we get to see the degraded environmental conditions and the shortage of resources. Snowman, in the novel portrays the ruined buildings in the seashore,

the changed climatic conditions, and the life with genetically modified organisms and "Crakers".

"The Year of the Flood" is the second in the trilogy. Published in 2009 is set in a fallen future, and it was a notable fiction at the time of its release. The novel is mostly in the form of flashbacks of certain characters. But the book predominantly focuses on a religious sect called the "God's Gardeners". Through the lifestyle of these "God's Gardeners" Atwood brilliantly states the precise way of handling the environment, in order to procrastinate the impending environmental catastrophe. They are portrayed as a small community of survivors of the same biological catastrophe depicted in "Oryx and Crake". They are vegetarians who took "Vegivows" and they are devoted to honoring and preserving all plant and animal life. They predict a human species ending disaster and eventually make arrangements to survive the same. A handful of these God's Gardeners cult survive the pandemic with the help of their training as a Gardener member. They were strange, freakish and followed an eccentric lifestyle.

The novel also portrays the post-apocalyptic scenario. After the pandemic, the air itself is not fresh and clear, instead it smells of caramel, tar, rancid barbecues, and garbage dump. Since it rains every noon, the survivors are getting used to the foul smell oozing out of the damp garbage. The sound of the birds, sparrows, and other animals, and even their small voices are clearly audible, as there are no longer any sounds of traffic and the honking vehicles. The novel states that human beings are the major cause of the ruinations in the Amazon river and the wholesale slaughter of the ecosystem. "Beware of man, and his evil heart"(p:91). In this novel, among all the other characters and incidents causing ecological damage, Atwood has shown keen interest in bringing out the importance of leading such simple and righteous life through "God's Gardeners" sect.

"MaddAddam" is the final book in Atwood's speculative trilogy. Published in 2013, this thrilling conclusion to Atwood's dystopian trilogy points towards the ultimate endurance of community and love, bringing together "Oryx and Crake" and "The Year of the Flood". Combining adventure, humour,

romance, superb storytelling, and imagination, "MaddAddam" is Atwood's dramatic conclusion to her internationally celebrated dystopian trilogy. The novel actually creates a source of hope towards the end. It is about how the survivors of the pandemic, along with the GMOs and Crakers hold hand in hand and rebuild a civilization. The novel is sure to kindle questions in the reader's mind whether the humans and humanoids would make a good company in preserving the leftover resources, as the Crakers are created to save the environment and the human beings are made to destroy the same. Atwood leaves us with this dilemma towards the end and almost she left the conclusion to the readers.

Margaret Atwood, being a forward-thinking writer, writes a lot about her strong feelings on futuristic contents, and one among them is the environmental crisis. On the whole the "MaddAddam trilogy" is a work that depicts a conflict over an environmental issue and also a work that features environmental apocalypse. In this trilogy Atwood shows how technology has been misled and mishandled and ultimately paved the way for the impending apocalypse. She has also portrayed the ecological threats caused by overpopulation, totalitarianism, overconsumption of resources, and consumerism, bringing out the "eco-fictional" elements prevalent in the trilogy. And ultimately towards the end Atwood creates a sense of hope with few of her characters that the civilization could be rebuilt and brought back on track, and the deteriorated environment could be rejuvenated and revitalized.

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