

Regaining Harmony with Nature: An Ecofeminist Study of Margaret Atwood's *the Animals in That Country*

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Abstract:

This paper deals with Atwood's perspective of regaining the lost harmony between human beings and nature, adopting an ecofeminist approach to see how far woman and nature are related to each other, and how they are treated in a male-oriented society. The paper aims at shedding intensive light on the relationship between humans and nature, and how it can be promoted. Some questions about this relationship are raised in the introduction to be answered through analyzing a number of significant poems from Atwood's *The Animals in That Country* (1968), and the

conclusion comes with the replies to these questions: Firstly, nature is a living whole of which we are an indivisible part. In modern society, nature is excessively exploited and terrifyingly endangered because of the use of destructive technology and harmful pollutants. Secondly, animals are part and parcel of nature and, consequently, they are negatively affected by man's irresponsible behaviour towards it. They are so massively killed and driven out of their habitat that many species have died out and others are on their way to extinction. Thirdly, a woman's relationship with nature is so close and organic that each of them affects and is affected by the

other. In a patriarchal society, women, like nature and animals, are oppressed and devalued. Fourthly, Atwood asserts that in order to regain harmony with nature, human beings must make a return to it to reconnect with their roots because alienation from nature is crippling. Atwood believes that the cause of all kinds of oppression is the colonial patriarchal ideology of treating woman as innately inferior to man, and nature to culture. Therefore, the whole patriarchal system should be demolished to have a fairer society to women and nature, and to regain that lost harmony with nature.

Key words:

Atwood – *The Animals in That Country* – Ecofeminism – Patriarchy - Colonization

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث منظور مارجريت أتود لاستعادة الوئام المفقود بين البشر والطبيعة، متخذاً الاتجاه النسوي البيئي منهجاً له؛ وذلك لمعرفة إلى أي مدى ترتبط المرأة بالطبيعة، وكيف يعامل كل منهما في مجتمع وجهته وجهة ذكورية. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على العلاقة بين البشر والطبيعة، وكيف يمكن تطويرها. وتثير مقدمة البحث عدداً من التساؤلات ستتم مناقشتها من خلال تحليل بعض القصائد الهامة من ديوان أتود "الحيوانات في ذلك البلد" (1968)، لتأتي الخاتمة فتوجز الرد على تلك التساؤلات بما يلي: أولاً: إن الطبيعة كلٌ حيٌّ ونحن جزء لا ينفصل عنها، ولقد تعرضت الطبيعة في المجتمع الحديث لاستغلال مفرط وخطر محقق بسبب استخدام التكنولوجيا المدمرة والملوثات الضارة. ثانياً: إن الحيوانات جزء لا يتجزأ من الطبيعة؛ لذلك فهي تتأثر سلباً بسلوك الإنسان غير المسؤول تجاه الطبيعة؛ فلقد قتل الإنسان منها الكثير وهجر عدداً أكبر من بيئتها الطبيعية لدرجة أن بعض السلالات قد انقرضت، والبعض الآخر في طريقه للفناء. ثالثاً: إن علاقة المرأة بالطبيعة علاقة حميمة جداً لدرجة أن كل منهما يؤثر ويتأثر بالآخر؛ فالمرأة، مثل الحيوانات والطبيعة، مضطهدة وينظر إليها نظرة دونية في هذا المجتمع الذكوري. رابعاً: لقد أكدت أتود على أنه لكي يستعيد البشر ذلك الوئام المفقود مع الطبيعة فعليهم الرجوع إلى جذورهم؛ لأن في الغربة عن الطبيعة ضياعاً. وتعتقد أتود أن سبب كل أنواع الإضطهاد ذلك المذهب الذكوري الاستعماري والمتمثل في معاملة المرأة على أنها بالفطرة أقل قدراً من الرجل، مثلها في ذلك مثل الطبيعة بالنسبة

لثقافة؛ لذلك يجب التخلص من هذا المذهب الذكوري إن كنا حقاً نريد أن نستعيد ذلك الوئام المفقود مع الطبيعة.

الكلمات الدالة:

آتود - الحيوانات في ذلك البلد - الاتجاه النسوي البيئي - المذهب الذكوري - الاستعمار

Introduction:

Nature has always been the focus of man's interest, the source of his fear and power and the object of his gratification. It is the terrifying monster which threatens his life, and the benign mother who nurtures and secures him. He is always trying fervently to subject her to his will and to avoid its wrath; to regain harmony with her. Recently, man's irresponsible behaviour towards nature has pushed the world into an environmental crisis and, consequently, threatened our survival. Chaia Heller explains: *"Awareness of the ecological crisis peaked in 1972, when the astronauts first photographed the*

planet, showing thick furrows of smog scattered over the beautiful blue and green ball"(219). The realization of this ecological crisis has prompted many scholars, in various fields, to look for solutions for saving the planet. These scholars are later called "Ecofeminists". The term "ecofeminism" was first coined by the French Francois d'Eaubonne in 1974. She intended to describe the oppression and violence inflicted upon women and nature as a result of male domination. There is no single definition of the word "ecofeminism" because it is an umbrella term and a multilayered perspective. However, it can be roughly defined as a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degeneration of nature and the subordination and oppression of women in a patriarchal society. It is an organic

mixture of environmentalism and feminism. Stressing this fact, Janis Birkeland writes: "*To separate ecology from feminism is to try to separate the heart from the head*"(18).

Margaret Atwood (1939-), an internationally-acclaimed contemporary Canadian author, is an ecofeminist before ecofeminism. She is publicly recognized as an ecological and feminist activist and a spokeswoman of the rights of both humans and animals. Bhakti Viashnav asserts that "*Margaret Atwood has been a committed environmentalist and feminist from the beginning of her career as a writer*". Elaborating on this point, Dana Percec writes: "*Margaret Atwood's preoccupation for environmental issues and deep interest in gender discourses have made her one of the best known*

ambassadors of ecofeminism in North America"(45). Growing up in 1950s, Atwood had to face a society full of prejudices against women since Canada was still staggering under the yoke of a long colonization, making very little or no effort to assert its literary identity or define its specific culture. It was difficult for a woman, at that time, to get a job because of the domination of the male-oriented culture which proclaimed that women were innately inferior to men and, consequently, they should be led and controlled by them. Commenting on the status of women at that time, Vijay Singh Mehta writes: "*Woman is a victim of patriarchal forces that suppress and enslave her, hence cause a frequent threat to her identity*"(39).

Atwood's ecofeminism is a protest against the oppression of woman and nature in a patriarchal society. Woman is oppressed, not because of any fault in her character but because of her gender. This oppression emerged with the appearance of the Western ideology, "patriarchy", about five thousand years ago. This patriarchal way of thinking is based on dualism which divides the world into opposed pairs of concepts: mind and body, spirit and matter, male and female, culture and nature...etc. The first concept of each pair is deemed superior to the other. This "Other" is oppressed and looked down upon. Women are placed with animals and nature at the bottom of the hierarchal scale. Both women and nature are exploited and oppressed at the hands of colonization and patriarchy.

Colonizers destroy Mother Nature for material benefits, and patriarchy marginalizes women for men's gains. Supporting this idea, Reshmi K. S. observes that "*the identity of both feminine and nature is constructed and re-constructed by the determined realm of patriarchy. Man becomes a law giver to both women and nature, victimizing both*"(452). Ecofeminists believe that there is a destructive opposition between masculine culture and feminine nature, and to extricate this opposition is to reject any form of primacy of one party over the other, and to dismantle the whole patriarchal system. Throughout her work, Atwood has tried to raise the public awareness of the position of woman in society, and to restore her dignity in a commercialized, technological age. This is strikingly evident in

her poetry, especially in her collection, *The Animals in That Country*.

The Animals in That Country (1968) resonates with Atwood's ecofeminist concerns and reflects her arduous endeavours to regain the harmony between man and nature. The volume illustrates that alienation from the natural world can be crippling because it is often connected with the emotional side of the human nature. It is specifically here that Atwood illustrates that nature is a living whole of which we are inseparable parts. She concretizes the close relationship between human beings and nature, in general, and animals, in particular, and asserts that no harmony can be attained between them without reconsidering our relationship with

animals and changing our aggressive attitude towards nature.

This paper aims at presenting an ecofeminist perspective of Atwood's *The Animals in That Country*. It aspires to illustrate the relationship between women and nature to see how far each of them is affected by the harm done to the other, and how far both of them are dominated and oppressed by man in a male-oriented society. Atwood's suggestions for regaining a healthy relationship between man and nature will be illustrated through a number of poems from this collection. The study intends to answer the following questions:

- 1- How is nature presented in Atwood's *The Animals in That Country*?
- 2- How does this volume present the relationship between woman and

nature, and how are they treated in a patriarchal society?

- 3- How are animals treated by man? Does this treatment have anything to do with the loss of harmony between humans and nature?
- 4- In Atwood's opinion, what should be done to regain that lost harmony between man and nature?

Nature, represented by the vast stretches of untamed wilderness, forests, water, animals, birds and planets, has played a role so prominent in Atwood's poetry that there is almost none of her poems that is devoid of its influence. Atwood's profound love of nature and its wilderness is deeply rooted in her childhood. Her father raised her ecological awareness since he

was a forest entomologist whose work – studying insects – kept the family in the forests of Ontario for much of Atwood's childhood. She was carried into the woods in a packsack when she was six months. The landscape became her hometown until she was eleven. In an interview with Mary Morris, Atwood said: "*I grew up in the woods outside of any social structures apart from those of my family*". She uses wilderness as a sign of a distinctive national heritage, a marker of the Canadian cultural identity, "*a symbol for the world of the unexplored, the unconscious, the romantic, the mysterious and the magical*" (Margaret Atwood, *Second Words*, 232).

Atwood believes that different people look at nature from different angles, even writers are different in their handling of

nature: some present it as awful, tough and sinister, while others present it as a paradise on the Earth. The general inclination of most of the Canadian writers is that nature is evil and usually betrays expectations. Stressing this point, Atwood writes: "*Canadian writers as a whole do not trust Nature; they are always suspecting some dirty trick. An often-encountered sentiment is that Nature has betrayed expectation, it was supposed to be different*" (*Survival*, 49). Being colonized for a very long time, the Canadians have always had a feeling of menace from everything around them. For them, the familiar peril lurks behind every bush. Atwood is against those romantic people who think that nature is completely innocent. Atwood goes on to assert: "*Pretending that Nature is the all-*

good Divine Mother when you're being eaten by mosquitoes and falling into bogs is Position One. It can't really stand up very long against the Canadian climate and the Canadian terrain..." (61). Position one, as Atwood believes, indicates that you deny the fact that you are a victim.

This ambivalent attitude towards nature is best articulated in Atwood's "**Attitudes Towards the Mainland**" which looks like a dialogue between a woman and a man, presenting two different views of nature. The female speaker believes in the solidity of the landscape, whereas her male partner can not trust nature. She is trying hard to convince him of her point of view, but in vain:

*I can't persuade you
the sun
is tangible, the trees
can be folded in the
hand, the earth will
not melt*

if you stand on it,

*that anything can be
possible, be built
or float.*

(8-9)*

These lines show that the woman's attitude to nature is positive; she believes that she is part of it. Therefore, she trusts nature and is not afraid of it. Unlike her, the male partner can not believe in the solidity of the landscape because, for him, nature is still destructive and can not be trusted; it is a place where one can be drowned:

*you think there is
nothing but the lake*

*and various drowners,
letting slip
their numbed grasp on
the gunwhale,*

*their eyes' quick
pictures*

.....

*...
in the water, the white
suffocation, the snow*

(9)

It is a fearful picture of drowning in the freezing water of the lake; a white suffocation because of the numbness caused by the snow. This fear from a destructive hostile nature prevents the male partner from feeling that harmony the female perceives with nature.

Atwood does not create a romantic-escapist image of nature. She believes that nature is neither purely evil nor completely innocent; it is a mixture of both. Sometimes it is evil, destructive and unpredictable, and at other times, it is benign, nurturing and threatened. Summing up Atwood's double role of nature, Dana Percec writes:

*This Canada, for
Atwood, is a two-faced
nature: Nature the
Monster, the evil
North, reminding of*

*the wilderness the
pioneers confronted
putting their lives in
danger, and Nature
the Threatened, the
landscape which has
remained, here,
remarkably
unchanged, despite the
common threats of the
modern world-
pollution,
overpopulation, and
tourism (49).*

"Provisions" presents a Canadian vision of the natural world as monstrous. The explorers do not expect to confront this disastrous nature:

*So here we are, in thin
raincoats and rubber
boots
on the disastrous ice,
the wind rising....*

(1)

They are not well-qualified for such a dangerous expedition in the wilderness; their raincoats and rubber boots are not protective

from the bitter cold of the North because they are thin. Nature here is destructive because the ice is disastrous and the wind is rising. Blaming man, not nature, in such a situation, Atwood writes: "*Nature is a monster, perhaps, only if you come to it with unreal expectations or fight its conditions rather than accepting them and learning to live with them. Snow isn't necessarily something you die in or hate. You can also make houses in it*"(Survival, 66).

The explorers come to nature with unrealistic expectations because they do not bring things that can protect them from the disastrous ice, assuming that they can manage it. They come almost with nothing suitable for such a terrible journey except for some trivial things that can avail them nothing:

nothing in our pockets

*but a pencil stub, two
oranges
four toronto streetcar
tickets*

*and an elastic band,
holding a bundle
of small white filing-
cards
printed with important
facts.*

This disharmony between man and nature is not the fault of nature but it is man's. Harping on this idea, Lothar Honninghausen writes: "*'Provisions' makes fun of city dwellers, whose list of 'provisions' for survival in a harsh natural environment culminates in 'four toronto streetcar tickets// and ... a bundle// of ... filing cards// printed with important facts'*"(100).

In "**What Happened**", nature is catastrophic in being an agent of disconnection between people; it prevents them from

communicating their feelings instantly:

*Where the houses here
surround
this moment, the
leaves are yellow and
going
out; while in your part
of the country
it is snowing or maybe
there is a spring flood,
it can
be expected on the
prairie
five blocks away.*

(26)

Nature, here, is completely indifferent to man's suffering. Atwood sheds light on the use of nature in Canadian literature:

*Nature seen as dead,
or alive but indifferent,
or alive and actively
hostile towards man is
a common image in
Canadian literature.
The result of a dead or
indifferent Nature is
an isolated or
"alienated" man; the
result of an actively
hostile Nature is
usually a dead man,
and certainly a*

threatened one
(*Survival*, 54).

If we apply these words to the poem we will find that nature here is dead or indifferent: the leaves are yellow, the snow is falling and the spring flood is rising. That is why man is isolated or alienated:

*The mail
delivery is slow
again, I won't know till
much later.*

.....
.....
*No wires tender even
as nerves
can transmit the
impact of
our seasons, our
catastrophes
while we are closed
inside them.*

(26 - 27)

In his comment on the last four lines, Manijeh Mannani observes that the subject of the poem is "*the alienation of mankind in a non-feeling environment*". The poem

shows no harmony between man and nature which looks indifferent to man's suffering and agony:

*Meanwhile on several
areas of my skin,
strange bruises glow
and fade, and I can't
remember
what accidents I had,
whether I was
badly hurt, how long
ago*

(27)

These bruises and accidents tell the story of man's suffering in the wilderness, questing for his own identity and that of his own country.

In "**Speeches for Dr. Frankenstein**", Atwood reflects the Canadian attitude of deep terror towards nature; "*not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even mysteries of nature*", says Northrop Frye, "*but a terror of a*

*soul at something that these things
manifest"*(342):

*The sparkling monster
gambols there ahead
his mane electric:
This is his true place.*

*He dances in spirals
on the ice,
his clawed feet
kindling shaggy fires.*
(46)

The gamboling and the spiral dancing of the monster on the ice add more fuel to the shaggy fires kindled by the monster's clawed feet. Colin Nicholson observes that the poem "*gives iconic form to feral existence in the Canadian wilderness*"(32).

The created monster may stand for nature. To some people, nature looks like a monster; it is a source of terror and fear:

*Blood of my brain,
it is you who have
killed these people.*

.....
.....

*Over this vacant
winter
plain, the sky is a
black shell;*

*I move within it, a cold
kernel of pain.*

(45-46)

The image of nature, here, is negative; it is "*a vacant winter// plain*", "*a black shell*" and "*a cold// kernel of pain*". It has killed a lot of people. The monster may also stand for woman, the other facet of nature. She was created from man's ribs but, like the monster, she rebels against his orders: "*I will not come when you call*"(47).

It is also likely that the monster represents the other side of the speaker's personality, the grotesque and the unconscious side. Atwood herself writes: "*The monster is the narrator's other self, and the process of writing that poem involved separating them*"(Conversations, 46).

Giving the rein to the suppressed unconscious negative emotions is sometimes destructive. Illuminating this aspect of the poem, Barbara Blakely writes: "*Man's own violence is cut loose, incarnated and reified, and turns to destroy its creator, its twin*"(41). This separation between the two selves, the mind and the body, is a duality that permeates Atwood's poetry. Such a duality is negatively reflected on the relationship between man and nature. There is a loss of harmony and a sense of violence and rebellion:

*The thing
refuses to be shaped, it
moves
like yeast. I thrust,*

*the thing fights back.
It dissolves, growls,
grows crude claws;*

*The air is dusty with
blood.*

(43)

The created monster is now swelling with pride like yeast which swells as time passes. "*The air is dusty with blood*" because of the mutual violence between the creator and his creation, the monster; between man and nature.

In "**Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer**", nature is hostile to man because he can not decipher its messages or understand the language of the trees, animals and birds. Had he listened to the ground's "aphorisms", he could have been saved:

*He dug the soil in
rows,
imposed himself with
shovels.*

*He asserted
into the furrows, I
am not random.*

*The ground
replied with aphorisms:*

*a tree-sprout, a nameless
weed, words*

he couldn't understand.
(36)

The pioneer uses technology as a source of power to subjugate the land to his will. This male violence against the female landscape results in ecological violations. Tom Marshal asserts that, in these lines, "*Atwood attacks again the masculine desire to control and contain everything within straight lines*"(156). The pioneer has decided to win the war against nature through moving from Position Two, in Atwood's scale of victim positions, (where he accepts the fact that he is a doomed victim) to Position Three (in which he refuses to be a doomed victim). That is why he tries to subject nature to his will, digging the soil in rows and imposing his own order with shovels. Referring to this movement from Position Two to Position Three, Atwood writes:

"Instead of giant Nature beating up weak helpless man, we get giant man beating up weak helpless Nature ..."(*Survival*, 63). It is here that the masculine culture, which is rationalistic and dangerously aggressive, is rejected in favour of the nature-identified femininity.

It is through his use of force and refusal to accept the natural order that the pioneer has lost harmony with nature which refuses to be a passive female victim to an aggressive male or to submit to his forced order which changes into an absence of order:

*He was wrong, the
unanswering
forest implied:
It was
an ordered absence*

(37)

The pioneer was wrong in his expectations and in his harsh treatment of nature. He thinks of

himself as the centre of the universe and everything else must revolve around him:

*He stood, a point
on a sheet of green
paper
proclaiming himself
the centre....*

(36)

Although he is no more than a mere "point// on a sheet of green paper" (the natural world), the pioneer uses force to impose his order on this world. He fails to realize the fact that the wilderness resists patterns of imposed order because it is an "unstructured// space" or "a deluge":

*If he had known
unstructured
space is a deluge
and stocked his log
house-
boat with all the
animals
even the wolves,
he might have floated.*

(38)

Here, there is a reference to Noah's Ark which was loaded with

humans, animals, birds and other creatures; all together in one company during the Great Flood.

That is why they floated and were saved from drowning. The pioneer fails to do that; he thinks of himself as the pivot of this world, not a part of it. He can not assimilate the elements of the natural world into himself. Tom Marshall points out:

*The pioneer must ... assimilate
the wilderness ... into his psychic
garrison, his ark, and not attempt
to deny it or fence it out. Then he
may survive and be at home,
having accepted the "flood," the
dark, predatory and mysterious
flux of life: it is a familiar
Canadian moral (156- He should
learn from animals how to adapt
himself to the harsh realities of the
environment so as to regain that
lost harmony with nature. Susan
Gingell explains why the pioneer*

fails: "*The mistake of the would be settler in 'Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer' ... is that he fails to identify with the totemic animals that represent the spirit of the land he seeks to occupy*" (131).

In his attempt to establish himself as the centre of the universe, repudiating the randomness of its order and repressing its force, the pioneer seems to be suffering from narcissism. Elaborating on this idea, Frank Davey writes:

Like Narcissus, he wants nature to mirror back his own image. His struggle becomes a parable not only for the unnecessary conflict between man and nature but for the Freudian struggle between superego and id, and the Christian one between

dogma and natural energy (101).

To justify his stubborn attitude towards nature, the pioneer believes that nature is no more than chaos, a monster to be repressed. He projects

the 'monster' image of malevolence onto nature, casting it as 'victor' to their 'victim.' His initial assumption that a hostile nature must be repressed by straight-line human creations results ... in his head being 'invaded by the Nature which he has identified as chaos' (Frank Davey, 157).

The pioneer, like many others, is defeated by nature. He stamps his foot in the surf and sinks. The unnamed whale, which

is barely visible, is ready to swallow those who do not attend to its hidden energies:

*and in the end
through eyes
made ragged by his
effort, the tension
between subject and
object,
the green
vision, the unnamed
whale invaded.*

(39)

The pioneer's head is invaded by the unnamed whale, which stands for nature, because – as Barbara Blakely asserts – he is "*willfully blind to the flux and namelessness beneath and around him*"(42):

*Things
refused to name
themselves; refused
to let him name them.*

(39)

Nature, here, is metaphorically both feminine and primitive. She refuses to submit to the pioneer's patriarchal orders of naming things. There is an allusion here to Adam, the oldest Patriarch of all, who was asked to name the things in the universe and he did, but here things refuse to name themselves or to let the pioneer name them. Explaining these lines, Frank Davey observes that the pioneer "*attempts the Adamic act of naming the objects in his environment*" but he fails because "*nature refuses to receive, refuses, we might say, the traditional female role*"(23).

For Atwood, nature is neither an evil monster nor a divine mother; it is a mixture of both. She firmly believes that by destroying nature, man destroys himself, asserting that nature is more sinned against than sinning.

She is against the view of looking at man as a victim in the hands of a purely hostile nature. She writes:

Man wills his role as victim because this completes for him a Universe-as-hostile pattern, and at this point the pattern becomes self-perpetuating.

Wherever it comes from, this attitude sees mainly the obstacles to our survival, and it can itself become an obstacle to survival"(Survival, 62-63).

man is now more destructive towards Nature than Nature can be towards man; and, furthermore, that the destruction of Nature is equivalent to self-

destruction on the part of man"(60).

In his feverish endeavours to control nature, man uses modern technology to clear forests, cutting down trees in large numbers with bulldozers and trucks, and leaving behind him a wreck of dead and easily flammable branches, which causes forest fires. Huey-li Li sheds more light on this point: "*Technology appears to be the most powerful instrument in gaining mastery over nature, and destructive technology (e.g., escalating pesticide use, nuclear weaponry) exacerbates ecological problems*"(286). In his infatuation with technological and economic progress, modern man is intentionally blind to the harms he has done to nature. Hitting this point, David Suzuki points out that

the natural world is disappearing at a frightening rate scientists documented a terrifying rate of extinction and loss of habitat around the world, thereby upsetting the ecological diversity and balance that have enabled life to be so resilient for millions of years (3).

In the name of scientific progress, experimenters have used the bodies of women and animals as the objects of medical research. Connecting between the female body and nature as targets of aggressive, technological attacks, M. L. Eileen Brisha writes:

Like nature, female body is seen as a resource to be

colonized and commercialized. The new developments in biotechnology, genetic engineering and reproductive technologies have affected the rhythms and regenerative capacities of women and nature. The patriarchal capitalist production technology, using power and violence, alienates woman from her body and living forms from their basic environment (1-2).

Such structures of patriarchal consciousness destroy the harmony between humans and nature through subordinating and oppressing both women and nature. It is ecofeminism that

glorifies this harmony and asserts that all forms of oppression must be uprooted. To do this, we should think of nature neither as a goddess nor as an enemy but as a partner so as to heal the damage we have done to the environment.

Atwood underscores that at the border between Canada and America, the latter has spoilt the environment, causing widespread damage to nature. Canada is presented as an oppressed woman in front of the destructive power of the aggressive male America, a power that deforms the beauty of the Canadian wilderness. The Americans use technology and mechanization to subdue Canada's lively, free spirit to their will. Describing their negative intrusion on Canada, as presented in Atwood's works, Ering Ozdemir remarks that the Americans are

representatives of a national spirit characterized by egoism and exploitation, and a country contaminated by urban pollution and decay, soul-killing machinery, and artificiality. They intrude on nature, leaving behind nothing but garbageThey are 'mental killers', who come to the Canadian wilderness for hunting and fishing. They kill for fun, to satisfy their greedy and narcissistic urge for exploitation and violence (60).

In "**The Surveyors**", the surveyors are those American or European incomers who are doing

exorbitant harm to the Canadian nature through cutting the trees and using technology to clear the forests:

*By the felled trees,
their stems
snipped neatly as
though by scissors
we could tell where
they had been,
the surveyors,
clearing
their trail of single
reason
(with a chainsaw it
was easy
as ruling a line with a
pencil)
through a land where
geometrics are
multiple.*

(4)

The place where those surveyors have been at can be detected through the neat clearing

of the trees with a chainsaw. They have changed the beauty of the landscape into desolation and ugliness. Atwood is against the destructive use of modern technology that ruins nature. The stumps of the newly cut trees are red as if they were bleeding. This act of clearing the forests and driving away their native inhabitants of people and animals is an evil action which results in the extinction of the Red Indian tribes, besides many species of animals:

*red vestiges of an
erased
people, a broken
line*

The reference here is to the displacement of the Indian culture by the European or American one. Commenting on these lines, Colin Nicholson writes: "*By their numbers and brash letters*"

European incomers impose their signifying systems upon a territory that none the less outlasts them"(36). The poem reflects some sort of disharmony between man and nature; the European and the American surveyors are trying hard to impose their order on a land that refuses to be subdued to their orders.

Atwood is against the exploitation and destruction of the Canadian wilderness, especially by those who claim to be sensible and enlightened. She is shocked to see the natural surroundings polluted mostly by the Americans. Coral Ann Howells sheds more light on this idea:

*Atwood speaks out
against exploitation
and destruction of the
forests, urging the
need to pay attention
to ecological*

*principles in a way
that the highly
developed American
technological society
was not doing, in
order to preserve the
environment for future
generations* (24).

Man has also polluted the earth, water and air by using destructive chemicals. Listing the sweeping harmful effects modern man has inflicted on the natural world, Atwood writes:

*Pollution, vanishing
ozone layer,
genetically engineered
organisms go on the
rampage, the icebergs
melt, the sea floods all
coastal plains, plagues
wipe out
civilization...Only a
few survive, reduced to
roaming bands of*

*brutal scavengers ...
all large land
mammals having gone
extinct, they eat rats,
cockroaches, roots,
and one another*
("Cryogenics: A
Symposium, 146-47).

The constant recession of the wilderness, caused by deforestation, pollution and the expanding of cities into farmlands, forests and wetlands, has alienated man from nature. We begin to regard nature, as David Suzuki observes, "*as a frill, something removed from us to enjoy on a hike or camping trip*"(2).

In "**Backdrop Addresses Cowboy**", Atwood points out the way in which the American Cowboy has violated the Canadian landscape he ought to have held sacred. The poem looks like a dialogue between Canada (I) and

America (you). Canada is presented as a dominated and desecrated female whose landscape has been violated by the American male: "*I am the space you desecrate// as you pass through*"(51). Ronald Hatch remarks that these lines signify that "*the reader now views the land as a sentient, existing being, and Atwood here comes close to creating an ecocentric or ecological view of the land*"(187). The "space", here, may refer to a female or to a landscape. Atwood stresses the two possibilities: "*That poem is about Canada. What is being desecrated may in fact be female, but it's also a particular place*"(*Conversations*, 102).

America, which lies to the South of Canada, is a source of pollution. Its invasions have left

Canada with "tincans", "bones",
"empty shells" and "litter":

*I am also what
surrounds you:
my brain
scattered with your
tincans, bones, empty
shells,
the litter of your
invasions.*

(51)

These lines show that America leaves Canada with nothing more than pollution and havoc. They come only to exploit Canada's natural resources and leave their rubbish behind them. Stressing this point, Atwood says: "*We are dominated by the Americans. They use Canada as a branch-line economy. Our workers are laid off before yours. We are dominated by American unions. I didn't invent these facts; they are part of the*

society in which I live"(*Conversations*, 138).

Atwood believes that the Americans are killers, hunters and surveyors, and that Canada is a collective victim, an oppressed and exploited minority. It is a colony exploited economically and culturally by a bigger country, America. However, in spite of its inferiority and the threat of pollution coming from the South, Canada resists the American colonization:

*Then what about me
what about the I
confronting you on
that border
you are always trying
to cross?
I am the horizon
you ride towards, the
thing you can never
lasso*

(51)

In these lines, we feel a tone of challenge on the part of the female Canada. In spite of America's perpetual attempts to overcome Canada through frequent invasions, the latter can not be subjugated to the former's will.

For the native Canadians, colonization means alienation from their land, their history, their identity and their rights. It is through this colonization that the harmony between them and their nature is disrupted. Stressing this point, Dana Percec writes: "*In the encounter between humans and wilderness, nature is at the same time victimized by the colonizers and a victimizer, refusing people its nurturing potential*"(53). Canada has always been subject to invasion and oppression by stronger enemies because of its virgin wilderness and pristine innocence. Therefore, it has

become a symbol of feminine victimization, as Atwood presents it in her works. Until 1982, Canada had been a colony; first to the French, then to the British. Even after its technical independence, Canada is still economically and culturally colonized by the United States of America. When the European Colonizers first came to Canada, thousands of years ago, they dispossessed most of the native Canadians (Paleo-Indians) of their land and settled in Canada, establishing an unequal relationship with the native people, which privileged the colonizer at the expense of the colonized. To rationalize their oppression of the native Canadians, the colonizers turned to racism. They assumed that they were genetically superior to those natives. The colonizers

categorized themselves as "civilized", while stigmatizing the native people as "savage".

Canada has plenty of forests, jungles, lakes, rocks and unpopulated wilderness, which makes it one of the fewest countries that still has room for wildlife. Animals are part and parcel of such a physical environment. Studies are often geared towards understanding animal behaviour and their relationship to human beings. The use of animals as victims is a persistent image in Canadian literature, and Atwood's poetry is no exception in this respect. Susan Gingell asserts that "*animal victims abound in Atwood's poetry, and they frequently represent or turn into human victims*"(129). *The Animals in That Country* presents a multitude of animals of various types; some are

studied in their natural habitat, while others are found in metropolitan zoos and museums.

This volume is mainly concerned with the gross manipulation and destruction of animals and ecosystem by humans. This theme of victimization is concerned not only with animals and nature but with women and the colonized Canada as well; it is part of a larger concern with identity.

Janice Flamengo remarks that "*animal figures sometimes symbolize harmony between humanity and nature, an ideal spiritual order to which human beings seek to return*"(6). Atwood willingly shoulders the responsibility of regaining that lost harmony between man and nature, especially animals. She believes that there should be an interconnectedness and integrity between human beings and

animals and that any violation of this relationship will result in disharmony between man and nature. Spotting the integrity between human beings and animals in Atwood's poetry, Kathlen Vogt observes: "*The best animal images remind us of the integrity of both animals and humans and the necessary interdependence of the two*"(164).

"The Animals in That Country" exemplifies how different animals hold distinct positions in different cultures. The poem announces its ecological bent through its title which links between humans and animals. The word "that" of the title suggests that Atwood is not happy about "this" country. The poem is divided into two parts: the first one deals with animals in "that" country as having the faces of the human beings, while the second

presents the animals in "this" country as having the faces of no one:

*In that country the
animals
have the faces of
people:
the ceremonial
cats possessing the
streets
the fox run
politely to earth, the
huntsmen
standing around him,
fixed
in their tapestry of
manners*

(2)

The word "that" before country may refer to the old world civilization which is different in time and quality from the present one, or to the wild environment of the past when animals were treated as if they had been human beings,

or to the European civilization which glorifies animals and gives them elegant deaths.

The "ceremonial cats" are "possessing the streets" since they roam the streets freely as if they were only theirs; they wander without being disturbed by anyone. The reference to the fox that runs politely to the earth recalls to the mind the importance of the fox to the British because of its fur. This image of fox hunting shows how far the fox is respected in Britain, and highlights the ties Canada has with Britain and France as a former colony of both. It is these European settlers who are the people in power in Canada, even after its technical independence. Shedding some light on the use of animals in British literature, Rupal Bhandari writes:

In British literature, animals are pretty close to being "gentlemen in furry zippered suits, with a layer of human clothing on top", to use Atwood's words ... they speak fluent English and are assigned places in a hierarchal social order which is essentially British, or British-colonial.

In the following lines, we have a reference to the bull in the Spanish sport of bull fighting:

with blood and given an elegant death, trumpets, his name stamped on him, heraldic brand because (when he rolled

*on the sand, sword in
his heart, the teeth
in his blue mouth were
human)
he is really a man*

(2)

The death of the bull is very painful because he is covered with blood, rolling on the sand with the sword in his heart, and his mouth is blue because of the fatal injuries. However, his death is heroic and elegant since his name is ceremonially stamped on him as a heroic brand. Even after his death, he looks like a human being. Susan Gingell highlights the death of an animal in the European culture: "*The death of the animal in the European experience is described as polite, mannerly, and elegant; it is viewed as ceremonial and glorious, and is granted significance precisely*

because such an animal 'is really a man'"(125).

The first part of the poem ends with the hungry, wild wolves which definitely belong to the wild Canadian environment, 'holding resonant// conversations in their// forests':

*even the wolves,
holding resonant
conversations in their
forests thickened with
legend.*

(3)

The wolves, "*thickened with legend,*" are symbols of the Indians who were the original settlers of the Canadian forests. Stressing this point, Rupal Bhandari writes: "*These wolves then undoubtedly are the Indian tribes living in the forests of Canada, who now have been reduced to legends*".

In the second part of the poem, the word "that" before country is changed to "this", which suggests that this part is talking about the new world civilization or the modern urban environment, or the present Canadian civilization:

*In this country the
animals
have the faces of
animals.*

(3)

These animals no longer have the faces of people because, in modern Canada, animals are not respected or glorified. That is why they still have the faces of animals.

The Canadian animals, which stand for the Canadian native people in this urban society, are doomed victims; they are completely helpless in front of a destructive technology which has alienated human beings from their

natural environment and from the animals that are part of it:

*Their eyes
flash once in car
headlights
and are gone
Their deaths are not
elegant.
They have the faces of
no-one.*

(3)

The urban settlers invade the wild habitat of these animals which usually die in car accidents when settlers intrude on them. For them, these animals are not worthy of stopping their cars. After being run over by such cars, the dying animal's eyes flash for once in the car headlights and it dies. It is a gaze of pity and suffering which reflects Atwood's sympathy with these innocent creatures. They undergo deaths which are far from being elegant or victorious.

Comparing such inelegant deaths of the Canadian animals with the elegant ones of the European animals of the first part, Lothar Honninghausen writes: "*In contrast to the sophisticated ritual patterning of fox hunting in British or bull-fighting in Spanish culture, the deaths of animals in Canada are not culturally or aesthetically integrated, occurring as banal road accidents*"(100). The dead animals are so deformed that they have become faceless: "They have the faces of// no-one". Their facelessness is a symbol of the lack of Canadian identity. The human abuse of animals is reflected negatively not only on nature but on man as well. Kathleen Vogt explains that "*the abuse of animals, or the loss of contact with them, represents the denial of the significance of*

anything outside the isolated individual will or mind"(169).

Atwood's sympathy with these oppressed animals sheds some light on the connection between women and animals in a patriarchal society; it is, as Lori Gruen observes, "*a constructed connection that has been created by the patriarchy as a means of oppression*"(61). Both women and animals are oppressed because they play subservient roles in a male-dominated society of meat eating; women prepare and cook the meat, and animals are prepared and cooked. Both of them are forced to provide food in a different sense. Therefore, such a connection between women and animals is constructed by a patriarchal society to justify the oppression of both. It is through the ecofeminist revolt against this patriarchal ideology that Atwood

hopes to end this oppression. Lori Gruen goes on to assert: "*Both feminist theory and animal liberation theory address ways in which the continuing oppression of women and animals, respectively, can be curtailed and eliminated*"(75).

For Americans, hunting an animal is a valorous act of overcoming a monstrous nature. Atwood writes:

The Americans have been performing their ritual act of 'taming' Nature by killing one of its animals, but somehow the thing is no longer real; the dark wood is now just ornamental, the dead animal a decoration, not something that can be seen as itself (Survival, 78).

The American hunters indulge in this ritual act of killing an animal as a sign of coming of age. Comparing the act of killing an animal in both the American and Canadian literatures, Atwood writes:

In American literature you killed the animal and achieved something by doing it; in the Canadian one, you killed the animal and it was a negative achievement. You didn't get good things from doing it. You got the horrible realization that you had killed your brother, your relative (Conversations, 36).

In "**The Festival**", these American hunters are eager to slay an animal ritualistically:

*They must be waiting
for the god to appear,
crossed in the sight of
their rifles
(it is the ceremony
they say, that gives a
sacramental
meaning to butchered
meat)*

(17)

Waiting for the god to appear, during this sacramental ceremony of butchering a hunted animal, changes the act of hunting into a ritual to be performed. Calling the dead animal "butchered meat" ironically suggests a loss of sympathy on the part of those American hunters who are no more than butchers. That is why the opening rhetorical question resents such celebrations which are performed after killing the animal:

*What festival do they
celebrate, these
hunters
in their orange and
red coats,
their caps with ears?*

(17)

Colin Nicholson, in her comment on these lines, observes that "*male hunters with their ritual self-justifications are held up to a peculiarly withering contempt. A human ecology forgetful of its wider responsibilities is guilty of a wanton self-diminishing*"(30).

This contempt is clearly reflected in the last stanza which satirizes those American hunters' ignorance of the fact that things have changed:

*Nobody has told them
they are in the wrong
century,
the wrong
country.*

(17)

Atwood wants to say that the twentieth century is the century of the urgent need to regain that lost harmony with nature, rather than killing animals ritualistically, and that Canada is no longer that submissive colony where they come to hunt for pleasure or material benefits.

"**The Trappers**" stresses the relationship between humans and animals, with both of them treated as doomed victims:

*The trappers, trapped
between the steel jaws
of their answerless
dilemma, their
location,
follow, stop, stare
down
at dead eyes
caught in fur*

(34)

Commenting on the poem, in general, and the above lines, in

particular, Susan Gingell explains: "*Perhaps no poem more explicitly recognizes the symbolic identification of Canadians with victimized animals than 'The Trappers'.* From the very first line, *the men participate in the fate of the animals*"(126). Like animals, the trappers are trapped between their sense of guilt for killing such innocent creatures and their compulsion to kill animals because of their need either for meat or for fur. It is, as Atwood clarifies, a "*national guilt: Canada after all was founded on the fur trade, and an animal cannot painlessly be separated from its skin. From the animal point of view, Canadians are as bad as the slave trade or the Inquisition*"(Survival, 78).

The hunter is torn between his obligation to kill the animal and his sympathy for that animal. It is an internal conflict

which is best exemplified in another poem called "Dream 2: Brian the Still Hunter":

*I kill because I have to
but every time I aim, I feel
my skin grow fur
my head heavy with
antlers
and during the
stretched instant
the bullet glides on its
thread of speed
my soul runs innocent
as hooves.
Is God just to his
creatures?
I die more often than
many.
(The Journals of
Susanna Moodie, 36)*

This sense of internal conflict between unity and disunity with the natural world, represented by the dying animal, is also manifested in exchanging looks between the hunter and the dying

animal in "The Trappers": "*stare down// at dead eyes// caught in fur*". Highlighting this pathetic moment, Atwood explains that it is "*a recurring moment in Canadian literature; in it the hunter identifies with his prey as suffering victim*" (Survival, 80).

This internal division between sympathy and violence is ironically exposed in the concluding lines of the poem:

*I can understand
the guilt they feel
because
they are not animals
the guilt they feel
because they are*

(35)

Atwood, here, expands the ironic image presented in the first line of the poem. The trappers feel guilty because they are humans who can see and feel how much

animals suffer when they are trapped or killed. They also feel guilty because they are not humane enough in their behaviour towards animals. The trappers' outwardly exhibited violence is a projection of their inwardly perceived guilt. Jerome Rosenberg remarks that "*we often act cruelly and (out of guilt or fear) conduct ritual slaughter as a means of redemption and a means of control*". It is from the violent expression of their duality that their trapped condition comes.

Atwood's sympathy lies not only with the victim but also with the victors who are similarly "*trapped between the steel jaws of their answerless// dilemma*":

*The snow snaps in
their faces;
the forest closes
behind them like a
throat.*

*The branches have
cold blood*

(34)

They hunt animals in the forest under severe and uncongenial conditions: "*The snow snaps in their faces*", and "*the forest closes// behind them like a throat*", which means that the forest is very dark and bitterly cold. However, they have to put up with these severe conditions so as to "trap and smash" these innocent creatures. It is here, as everywhere in the collection, that Atwood's ecofeminism is manifested clearly. Being a female, she sympathizes more with the victim than with the victimizer. She takes the side of the victimized animal in order to mend the unbalanced scales and to regain that lost harmony between man and nature.

**"Arctic Syndrome:
Dream Fox"** reverses the hunter/

hunted duality to a hunted/ hunter one. In other words, the fox, which appears as a victim at the beginning of the poem, becomes the victor at its end. When the fox feels the presence of the hunter, he becomes so terrified that his fur turns into terror:

*I crawl
pulled by hypnotic
snowcall
and on my skin a thick
white fur of terror.*

(48)

It is an image of fear and terror. The speaker in this poem is the fox who feels terrified and humiliated by his human pursuer:

*My citizen, I hear you
deducing me from my
footprints: hunting the
fox
reek of me:
reducing*

*me to diagram, your
accurate
paper aiming
and must answer
with glare of moon on
glacier, an
arctic madness.*

(48-49)

The fox calls the hunter his citizen, which suggests that both the victim and the victimizer are Canadians, and highlights the feeling of intimacy animals have for human beings. However, the hunter is busy tracing the footprints and the bad smell of the fox, reducing him to a mere diagram. The fox threatens or wishes that this hunter may be plagued with an arctic madness, a disease which takes us back to the title of the poem. Shedding some light on this title, Atwood (in an interview with Karla Hammond) explains that "'arctic syndrome' is

the name of a specific kind of madness that occurs only north of the Arctic Circle, in which the person becomes a fox or a wolf"(*Conversations*, 113).

Out of mad fear, the fox warns the human pursuer that the only reply is to kill him:

*Shed blood, only reply
to cold; to rid
the flesh of logic.*

(49)

The fox runs through "*the nomad houses*" and kills the hunter while he is sleeping:

*I drop
and ran on all four feet
through the nomad
houses.
In the neck
of the sleeping hunter
my teeth meet.*

(49)

The way the fox kills the hunter reflects the great fear of the fox,

which changes him from a victim to a fierce killer, and sheds light on that hostility between Canadian citizens for the sake of material benefits. Atwood's sympathy still lies with nature, represented by the victorious fox, even though the victim is a human being. She wants to warn human beings of violating nature and killing animals who are our citizens and the sharers of our planet. This conflict between the citizens of the same country should be stopped if we want to regain that lost harmony with nature.

"Elegy for Giant Tortoises" claims that, in his attempt to conquer nature, man destroys animals and, consequently, himself and others. Being an environmentalist, Atwood is worried about the misty future of the giant tortoises which are on their way to extinction:

*I will confine myself to
a meditation
upon the giant
tortoises
withering finally on a
remote island.*

(23)

The giant tortoises are dying
out on a remote island, far away
from people's concern. They seem
to be on their last day, marching
towards their final destination:

*on the road where I
stand they will
materialize,
plodding past me in a
straggling line
awkward without
water*

*their small heads
pondering
from side to side, their
useless armour
sadder than tanks and
history*

(23)

The giant tortoises are
heading to some unknown
destination which unfortunately,
turns out to be a museum where
they will be treated as relics of the
past:

*lumbering on the
steps, under the
archways
toward the square
glass altars
where the brittle gods
are kept,
the relics of what we
have destroyed,
our holy and obsolete
symbols.*

(23)

Wilson Foster remarks that, in
these lines, "Atwood imagines the
huge reptiles, outdated in their ill-
fitting and useless armour,
ascending the steps of a museum
towards 'the square glass

altars"(15). The poem first gives us the impression that these magnificent animals are going to be honoured – as they should be – but we quickly realize that the "altars" are no more than the museum displays. The giant tortoises have become "obsolete symbols" because they are dead not alive. They are only relics of a past that we have destroyed. That is why the poem is an "elegy", lamenting the death of these animals before they die. Atwood is warning us against destroying animals in an attempt to control nature because, in this case, we are destroying ourselves and losing that harmony with nature.

Both women and nature are passive, which makes them vulnerable to male domination. Mostly-male activities, such as: deforestation, pollution, industrialization and dangerous

nuclear testing have negative effects on nature and women. Women are most affected by these ecological transgressions because of their innate features of caring, non-violence and earth sensitivity. Under the influence of technology, both women and nature are exploited and violated. Vijay Santram Gavhane stresses the harmful influence of technology on both of them:

Everyday thousands of trees are cut and many animals are killed and died. Every now and then many living creatures are getting the victims of this advance technology ... women too, in such so called modern and advance world are tortured and spoiled ... ecology and women

*are subject to the
domination of
patriarchal society
(134).*

In "**The Green Giant Murder**", Atwood raises the possibility that nature has already been murdered:

*Over the victim, the
squad
of detectives are
swarming;
their magnifying
glasses
twitter with excitement
in the clear light
(32)*

The green giant nature is swarmed over by a great number of hypothesizing detectives, expressing their "*cool dissections*" of the green giant murder. There seems to be a crime: the criminal is man, and the victim is nature.

Humans' fierce attacks on nature have made a victim out of her:

*a vegetable
corpse on ice,
essential
fact for the practice of
their
art, these cool
dissections.*

(33)

It is clear that there is no harmony between man and nature; man is the victimizer and nature is the victim. He is the killer of that "*vegetable// corpse on ice*", which is nature.

However, nature and women are not always weak and passive. Sometimes Atwood turns the scales upside down and presents them as the real source of power. In "**The Landlady**", there is an ecofeminist relationship between the woman and the

land. Here, woman and nature are not powerless or oppressed, as usual, but they are fierce, domineering and aggressive. The landlady is the owner of the land and of all the available space. She presides over all the details of the tenant's daily life, giving him no chance to escape from her strict grasp: "*She everywhere, intrusive as the smells// that bulge in under my doorsill*"(14). She oppresses the male tenant who escapes in dreams to find himself walking over the vast face of the landlady:

*... when I dream
images
of daring escapes
through the snow
I find myself walking
always over a vast
face
which is the land-*

*lady's, and wake up
shouting.*

(15)

soul but he is astonished to find himself walking in snow over her large face, which frightens him awake. This image of a male oppressed by a fierce woman and a hostile nature is not recurrent in Atwood's poetry. However, she wants to stress the fact that all forms of oppression are rejected, whether they are carried out by men or by women, and that woman is not always a passive victim.

Atwood's early association with nature raises her consciousness of the organic relationship between women and nature, and of the fact that nature is a living whole of which we are an indivisible part. Human beings must make a return to nature in order to reunite with their roots. In

revolting against male domination of women and nature, Atwood is trying to restore a kind of balance and harmony between human beings and nature. In "**A Fortification**", there is a harmony between the female protagonist and nature; nature is no longer a source of menace and danger for her because she is well-armed:

*I have armed myself,
yes I am safe: safe:
the grass can't hurt
me.
My senses swivel like
guns in their fixes
sockets:
I am barriered from
leaves and blood.*

(16)

The woman is not afraid of nature because she is enclosed within her body which looks like a spacesuit, and also because she is well-defended by her love of

nature. However, other creatures, like animals, are in danger of dying out because of man's irresponsible use of technology in destroying their habitat through deforestation:

*I
caught sight of the
other creatures,
the one that has real
skin, real hair,
vanishing down the
line of cells
back to the lost forest
of being vulnerable*

(16)

This extract shows that the female speaker has much sympathy for these endangered animals which are our partners on this earth; they have real hair and real skin like us. This stanza warns us against killing animals since many species of them are on their way to extinction. It is the

irresponsible use of technology that alienates man from nature and creates various enclosures.

In "**More and More**", there is a close connection between the female speaker and nature; she wishes very much to assimilate the whole natural world, including her male partner (the addressee), into herself:

*More and more
frequently the edges
of me dissolve and I
become
a wish to assimilate
the world, including
you, if possible
through the skin
like a cool plant's
tricks with oxygen
and live by a harmless
green burning.*

(53)

The reference to "oxygen" and to the "harmless green burning" reflects Atwood's keen wish to get rid of that pollution which has

defaced nature and spoilt its natural resources. The woman is looking forward to a full harmony with nature:

*Unfortunately I don't
have leaves.
Instead I have eyes
and teeth and other
non-green
things which rule out
osmosis.*

(53)

She wishes to have leaves instead of her eyes and teeth to help nature breathe healthier and to get rid of those ecological transgressions which hinder its process of osmosis.

In "**Sundew**", there is a full harmony between the female speaker and nature; she is submerged in the beauty and tranquility of this harmonious natural scene as if she were an organic part of it:

Where I was
in the land-
locked bay
was quiet
The trees
doubled themselves
in the water
On half-submerged
branches and
floating
trunks, the weeds
were growing
 (62)

This harmonious natural scene invites the woman's organs to be parts of it:

My tangled head
rested water-
logged among the
roots
the brown stones
its hair
green as algae
stirred with the gentle
current

(63)

Her organs have become parts of nature: her head rests among the roots, reflected on the water, and her hair becomes as green as algae, stirred by the gentle current. It is a complete harmony between human beings and nature, which Atwood wishes to achieve.

Conclusion:

Atwood's *The Animals in That Country* resonates with ecofeminist concerns and reflects her fervent efforts to regain that lost harmony between human beings and nature. The poems in this collection illustrate how alienation from the natural world can be crippling because nature is life-giving and resource-providing. It is modern man's irresponsible behaviour towards nature that has caused a lot of ecological crises which threaten man's existence on

this planet. Consequently, a wave after wave of ecofeminism has appeared to defend the rights of both women and animals and to protect nature from man's fierce attacks and ecological transgressions. In spite of the fact that Atwood does not have an ecofeminist agenda to fulfill, she is keen on regaining that lost harmony with the natural world and uprooting all forms of oppression and exploitation. Using the ecofeminist approach in analyzing a number of significant poems in this collection, the study has reached the following conclusions:

First: Nature is a living whole of which we, as human beings, are an indivisible part. It is through out contact with nature that our existence on the Earth continues. Therefore, destroying nature simply means destroying

ourselves. The constant recession of the wilderness, caused by deforestation, pollution and the expansion of the cities into farmlands, has alienated man from nature and drained the emotional springs of his life. For Atwood, nature is neither an evil monster nor a benign mother. Sometimes it is threatening, destructive and unpredictable, and at other times, it is innocent, nurturing and threatened. Atwood's sympathy usually goes with nature which looks like an oppressed woman in a patriarchal society. In a country which is still culturally and economically colonized by the Americans, nature is excessively exploited and harmfully contaminated.

Second: Being part and parcel of the natural environment, animals have been negatively affected by man's

irresponsible behaviour towards nature. They have lost their habitat because of deforestation and pollution which have smitten their natural environment. Many of these animals have been killed either for their meat or fur or just for fun. Using technology, modern man has invaded their habitat, killing a large number of these animals without any sympathy or remorse. Consequently, many species have died out and others are on their way to extinction. Such a cruelty towards animals widens the gap of disharmony between man and nature. In a patriarchal society, animals – like women and nature – are placed at the bottom of a hierarchal scale to be exploited for man's gains. Atwood's sympathy with these animals links their oppression with that of women since both of them play subservient roles in a male-

dominated society. Such a connection is constructed to justify the oppression of both.

Third: Atwood's early association with nature raises her consciousness of the organic relationship between woman and nature. They are closely related because they are caring, nurturing and life-giving. Each of them affects and is affected by the other. No harm can be done to any of them without harming the other, and the oppression of one of them means the oppression of the other. Therefore, solving the ecological problems necessitates solving the feminist ones, and no freedom for any of them will be effective without freeing the other. In a male-oriented society, a woman is too weak and vulnerable to protect herself; she is often an object of a male's invasion, colonization and sexual attacks. Moreover, the

exploitation of nature and animals is justified whenever they are given female characteristics. Women are oppressed, not because of any fault in their characters but because of their gender. They are usually connected with housework, service and caring, which reflects their inability to perform any valuable work. A woman is no more than a man's private property. Her body is a battlefield of violence and a theatre on which a male's brutal rituals are enacted.

Fourth: Atwood shoulders the responsibility of regaining such lost harmony between human beings and nature. She asserts that human beings must make a return to nature to reunite with their roots, that ideal spiritual order which enriches their lives. Animals are our partners on this planet. They should be preserved and treated

properly since any violation of this relationship will result in disharmony between man and nature. The integrity of the relationship of both animals and humans is necessary for their interdependence. Atwood believes that oppression, whether of nature, animals or women, originates from the colonial patriarchal ideology which places males at the top of a hierarchal scale, leaving women, with nature and animals, at the bottom, on the assumption that they are innately inferior.

Therefore, these patriarchal ideologies must be uprooted if we want to have a healthy society based on equality, and to regain that lost harmony between human beings and nature. Atwood has also shown women how to struggle for establishing their individuality, and taught them how to say "No" to the male domination and oppression.

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End Notes:

Except otherwise indicated, all quotations from Atwood's poetry are from: Margaret Atwood, *The Animals in That Country* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968).

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