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Confronting Toxicity from the Beehive: Ecofeminist Alternatives to Capitalism

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Confronting Toxicity from the Beehive: Ecofeminist Alternatives to Capitalism

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of English from The College of William and Mary

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Introduction

*I believe that fiction is the moral and ethical guardian of the community...Fiction is one of the few forms left through which we may examine our society not in its particular but in its typical aspects; through which we can see ourselves and the ways in which we behave towards each other, through which we can see others and judge them and ourselves.*

- Margaret Atwood, “An End to an Audience?”, *Second Words*, p346

Every country in the world looks the same: streets, buildings, and stores are empty of people. Rather than hearing sounds of car horns, sirens, and human voices, you can hear birds, animals, rushing water and wind in the trees. A deadly virus travelled around the world faster than any sickness or plague has spread before. It seemed unstoppable, and guaranteed to spread, regardless of international borders. The virus spread even faster due to climate change, as springs come earlier, and summers are hotter and longer, causing people to go out of doors in the warmer weather. When I began writing this paper in the fall of 2019, this description would have only fit an eerie science fiction setting, like the dystopian post-apocalyptic world of Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy. By February 2020, this description fit today’s reality.

Extreme occurrences that disrupt day-to-day normality can make it easier to spot phenomena that normally slip unnoticed. This is one of the benefits of speculative fictions: their often extreme and disrupted settings provide new perspectives. In this paper, I analyze Margaret Atwood’s speculative trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* (2004), *The year of the flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013) focusing on how Atwood pays special attention to highlighting issues of physical and cultural toxicity. I will examine the ways in which Atwood highlights and confronts toxicity, and argue that Atwood suggests alternatives to capitalism through pointing out how another socio-economic structure can be less harmful. I will first discuss ecofeminism and the ecofeminist background that influences my perspective. I will then define and discuss toxicity,
and use Todd Haynes’ 1995 film *Safe* to exemplify how toxicity affects women disproportionately, in many different ways. Finally, I will engage in discourse about the toxic elements Atwood portrays in her hyper-capitalist society, and address the ways in which Atwood’s restructuring of society can be read as demonstrating socialist ecofeminist ideals, by using beekeeping and beehives as a metaphor for societal structures. In discussing the structure of bee society as a metaphor for ecofeminist ideology, I will compare the struggles of the protagonist of Kotevska and Stefanov’s 2019 documentary film *Honeyland* to Toby’s struggle against toxic capitalistic ideals and use of beekeeping ideology to form a new society in *MaddAddam*.

Many critics have discussed the ecofeminist and speculative power of Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy. Atwood is a self-proclaimed environmentalist, but she has resisted being called a “feminist” writer, as she does not consider the adjective inclusive (Changizi 74, Rowland 47). However, recent critics like Lucy Rowland, Javier Martín, Rachel Stein, and Jane Brooks Bouson assert the environmental feminist implications of Atwood’s writing, as her works connect issues of gender, environmental degradation, and toxic societal structures.

In her *MaddAddam* trilogy, Margaret Atwood brings readers into a futuristic, post-apocalyptic North America. A virus has just spread across every country, killing most of humanity in a matter of weeks. However, before the mass extinction of the human race even happens, Atwood sets up a world where almost every severe warning and prediction we hear from scientists about the natural world has come true. As contemporary science fiction and Atwood scholar Gerry Canavan puts it, “neoliberal capitalism has reached its logical culmination,” and environmental degradation is a glaringly obvious side effect of such extreme capitalism (195). In Atwood’s *MaddAddam* novels, most places around the world have no access
to oil, as it has become a rare and expensive commodity. Rather than switch to renewable energy, the money and technology-focused culture portrayed in the books prioritizes developing inventions to quickly solve problems. An example of this is “garboil” dumpsters, equipment that converts garbage and any carbon-based material into oil. Due this continuous oil burning, almost all of the polar ice has melted, and global warming has converted much of the earth into a tropical climate (MaddAddam, 59). Trees no longer change colors with the seasons, tropical afternoon rainstorms occur daily, and the sun is so hot that a few minutes in direct sunlight burns human skin through clothing (Oryx, 225).

Despite all this ecological degradation, before the apocalyptic collapse caused by the virus, there was no sign that human civilization intended on stopping or slowing down. Though fictional, this scene is familiar. Each of the severe consequences of technological development, such as climate change, invasive bio-engineered species, and oil depletion are all very real possibilities that scientists like Rachel Carson began warning about in the 1960s (Bouson, 342). In this way, in MaddAddam, Atwood displays a particular focus on the poisoning of the natural world by human society. By showing the inadequacy of the technological solutions, such as genetic splicing and garboil dumpsters, to solve the worlds’ problems, Atwood provides an unveiled critique on the consumerist, capitalist focus on technology and development. Therefore, the practices of Atwood’s extremist capitalist society have proven toxic to the natural environment, and the critique of this aspect of society is distinctly ecofeminist (Merchant 13).

Atwood also demonstrates an ecofeminist approach by writing Toby, a beekeeper and herbalist, as the series’ most important female character. Toby remains close to the natural world despite the production-oriented capitalist system that she grows up in. When she was young, Toby’s life looked more like our current real-world reality, but by the time Toby started college,
governments, police forces, intelligence agencies, and militaries had collapsed for lack of funding and were slowly replaced by powerful mega-corporations and their authoritative security force, the CorpSeCorps. Atwood depicts a society that became physically segregated by wealth, with the upper class secluded in Compounds, or walled and protected neighborhoods created exclusively for elite employees of the wealthiest Corporations. Middle class workers, like dentists, worked and lived in less secure walled neighborhoods called Modules, while the poor were relegated to the pleeblands—what used to be called cities, now slums mostly controlled by gangs, black market traders, “the addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies” (*Oryx*, 27).

Simply being a “small potato” family who found themselves to be in the way of a powerful Corporation’s development project, Toby lost her mother, father and her ability to go to college (Year, 25). She had to drop out and live in the pleeblands, working for an abusive boss at a fast food chain called Secretburgers. She was essentially on the brink of death when a radical environmental religious cult of vegetarian anti-consumerists, known as the God’s Gardeners, rescued her. After they helped Toby escape from her Secretburgers boss, Toby decided to stay with the Gardeners, who lived atop an abandoned high-rise building, where they grew organic food, wore earth-colored clothing, shunned products and food from the “exfernal world,” and sang hymns about environmental “saints” like John Muir and Rachel Carson. Children that grew up in the Gardeners were taught survival-focused classes such as Bees and Mycology, Holistic Healing and Plant Remedies, Wild and Garden Botanicals, and Predator-Prey Relationships, by each of the “Adams and Eves,” the leaders of the cult (Year, 61). The Gardeners also created and maintained Ararats, or hidden storerooms that could be blocked off and protected from the inside (Year, 47). This focus on survivalism stems from the Gardeners’ main religious teaching: that
God would send a “waterless flood” to remove all of the polluting, meat-eating humans “who have broken trust with the Animals” (Year, 91).

Though Toby never fully believed in the religious teachings of the God’s Gardeners espoused out by their leader Adam One, Toby made close female friends, Rebecca and Pilar, and her skills as an herbalist and teacher promoted her to be one of the groups’ leaders, “Eve Six.” Toby decided to stay with the Gardeners, and Pilar, an ex-Corporation scientist, became Toby’s beekeeping, mycological, and spiritual mentor. Atwood puts a noticeable emphasis on Toby and Pilar’s relationship, and maintains the theme of Toby as a beekeeper throughout *The year of the flood* and *MaddAddam*. Pilar teaches Toby a ritualistic method of beekeeping, instructing her to speak to the bees, ask their queen for permission to share their honey, and to treat them as spiritual messengers between the world of the living and the dead.

Giving Toby a spiritual connection, through a female mentor, to a female-led egalitarian community like bees, is suggestive of the spiritualistic backbone of ecofeminist ideology. Additionally, Toby’s relationship to bees and herbalism indicates Toby’s closeness to pollinators and plants shows that Toby is connected to the most foundational aspects of a healthy ecosystem. As Susan Watkins asserts, *The year of the flood*’s status as a sequel to a feminist apocalyptic work can be seen as providing an open or utopian structure for dealing with the circumstances that brought about the apocalypse (Northover, 84) Toby also exemplifies ecofeminist principles as the her leadership of the small community of survivors in the third book, *MaddAddam*, that takes place after a virus has spread across the world and killed most of humanity. Atwood includes ecofeminist ideologies as integral to the possibility of a utopian society post-apocalypse (Northover 82). When commenting on the small community of survivors in her the last novel of the trilogy, Atwood claims that the few people left by the “waterless flood” are not enough to
constitute a society (Northover 82). However, by looking at Atwood’s characterization of Toby as the beekeeper and herbalist leader of the community, there are significant underlying commentaries about societal structures, as well as utopian implications (82).

In *The year of the flood*, Atwood’s focus on the environmental and ecological narrative is closely related to Toby’s story. The toxic capitalist world brought Toby to the brink of death. The only way for Toby to survive was to escape from that societal structure with the Gardeners, therefore providing precedent for Toby’s moving from a toxic social structure to one with less toxic elements. Then, Atwood sets up Toby to lead a people into a new societal structure in the aftermath the virus. In *MaddAddam*, Gardeners from pre-virus times find each other throughout the city, and end up creating a small community of about twenty people. The new community has an egalitarian model, with each member contributing where they could help most—Toby even finding a hive of bees and continuing her status as the community’s beekeeper. Jimmy, the narrator of *Oryx and Crake* and the caretaker for a new species of genetically modified humans, the Crakers, joins their new community in order to survive, and brings the child-like Crakers to Toby, who becomes their new caretaker and teacher.

I argue that Atwood’s removal of Toby from toxic capitalistic society, and emphasis on Toby’s beekeeping, exemplifies socialist ecofeminist principles that Toby brings to the establishment of the new community in *MaddAddam*. Atwood exerts an ecofeminist critique of the capitalist and hierarchical characteristics of society by highlighting the toxicity that affects Toby in *The year of the flood*. However, by allowing Toby to escape from this toxic society, and then by characterizing Toby as a beekeeper, literally a “keeper” of a community, Atwood provides the survivors in *MaddAddam* with a leader who exhibits socialist ecofeminist principles.
Ecofeminism, Capitalism, and Socialism

In this project, I make frequent references to ecofeminism and the intricacies of different schools of ecofeminist theory, and I will analyze the texts and films I use with an ecofeminist lens. I will therefore provide some background information on ecofeminism, and social/ist ecofeminist theory specifically, insofar as it is relevant to my analysis. I specifically use social/ist ecofeminist ideas to examine Atwood’s portrayal of Toby, and therefore in this section, I will discuss some of ecofeminists’ fundamental influences on my knowledge.

Ecofeminism, a term that began circulating in the 1970s, brings feminism and ecology together by linking women’s subordination to ecological degradation (Mellor, vii). Ecofeminism proposes that women must play a key role in the “transition from an unsustainable to a sustainable world.” (Mellor, 45) For ecofeminists, the main link between women’s oppression and ecological degradation is the domination-based nature of our society. For example, the majority of societies around the world follow a capitalist structure that uses natural resources in unsustainable ways. Simultaneously, most societies have a historically patriarchal structure and culture that continuously enforces gender and racial hierarchies. Ecofeminists see both of these structures as forms of domination that overlap and build on each other. Margaret Atwood’s reality in her trilogy is constructed using an even more extreme version of capitalist structure, and a patriarchal culture is visible throughout her novels until the collapse of society and reformation of a small community of survivors. This creates a perfect setting for reconstructing society, and I argue that Atwood’s community in MaddAddam demonstrates specifically social/ist ecofeminist principles, as “ecofeminism recognizes that ecological problems are social and cultural problems, [therefore ecofeminists] call for social changes that foster egalitarian
social relations and believe that such changes are a prerequisite for an ecologically healthy society” (Carlassare 90, emphasis mine).

Ynestra King, one of the first leaders of the ecofeminist movement in the 1980’s, described the general goal of ecofeminism to be “national and planetary security which includes societies free of violence, with nature-friendly technologies and sustainable economies that are respectful of place and culture.” (King, 15) However, since ecofeminism’s beginnings, many different schools of thought have emerged and diverged on how to address the connections between the oppression of women and nature. In searching for a background with which to discuss and analyze Atwood’s portrayal of the toxic aspects of extreme capitalism and her restructuration of society in MaddAddam, I looked to more specific forms of ecofeminism. Both Carolyn Merchant and Mary Mellor provide histories and descriptions of the divisions between more specific, differing forms of ecofeminism, which have been key in the conceptualization of my project. Mary Mellor, in her book Feminism & Ecology, separates ecofeminists into three general categories—spiritual feminists, affinity feminists, and social/ist feminists—while Carolyn Merchant gives a slightly more complex profile of the ecofeminist movement, separating the different groups of ecofeminists into “Liberal, cultural, social, and socialist” ecofeminists. (5) Merchant describes liberal ecofeminists as evolving from liberal feminism, inspired by Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (1949) and Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963), focused on women’s equity in the workplace, and environmental problems as a result of “overly rapid development of natural resources and the failure to regulate pesticides and other environmental pollutants” (9). She describes liberal ecofeminist’s methodology as focusing on “better science, conservation, and laws” as the best approach to environmental resource problems (Merchant, 9). This form of ecofeminism, while lending itself well to practical application,
works within the system that subordinates women and nature. In this way, I found that liberal ecofeminism did not align with Atwood’s use of the breakdown of society to create a framework for change, as liberal ecofeminism preferences change within the system, rather than a restructuring of the system.

Since many of the movement’s first leaders had strong backgrounds in theology, many early ecofeminists connected women’s issues with environmental issues through a nature-focused spiritual alternative to patriarchal Christianity. Spiritual and affinity ecofeminists as Mellor terms them, or cultural ecofeminists according to Merchant, harken back to historical (eg. Greek) female-centered spirituality in order to focus on the connection between women and nature (Mellor 54). They are often associated with earth, nature, or moon goddess worship (Mellor 54). Spiritual/affinity ecofeminism usually combines “a celebration of women-centered values (mothering, nurturing, caring) with a celebration of women’s bodies,” creating a space where women can reclaim their bodies and sexualities as an alternative to patriarchal Christian practices (Mellor 54). Like Mellor, Merchant details the history of “Mother Earth” or “Gaia” as an important spiritual metaphor for the beginnings of ecofeminism, used to reclaim female power in the 1980s and 90s, and defines this as the groundwork for “cultural ecofeminism” (4).

One of the most powerful aspects of cultural/spiritual ecofeminism is its alignment with political activism as a response to the devaluation of women and women’s bodies (Merchant, 10). Pointing out the historical value of cultural ecofeminist political struggles, Merchant mentions activists such as Lois Gibbs of the Love Canal Homeowner’s Association, Cathy Hinds of Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY), and the Native American women of Women of All Red Nations (WARN) (13). The powerful connecting factor between these movements is the leadership of women who were responding to the toxification of their environments and
communities with the motivation of protecting their children, their bodies, and their lands (Merchant 12-13). While the leaders of these movements were not explicitly ecofeminist, they demonstrate the cultural ecofeminist connection between “women’s reproductive biology (nature) and male-designed technology (culture).” (Merchant, 11) However, both Mellor and Merchant point out such fundamentalism and biological determinism is problematic in implying “what men do to the planet is bad” and “what women do is good” bars the possibility for men to develop “an ethic of caring for nature.” (Merchant, 13).

Another issue with using spirituality and women-centered goddesses as a starting point for a guiding philosophy is that it generates a wide variety of beliefs and methodologies within ecofeminism, as no two people conceptualize spirituality in the same way. Mellor questions the cohesiveness of spiritualistic ecofeminism as an applicable ideology, as it generates such ambiguity between religion and symbolism. She also points out the problematic nature of the use of traditionally native and tribal religious beliefs by those with European colonizer backgrounds (55). Importantly, ecofeminist theorists who privilege a focus on the spiritual and biological connections between women and nature “fail to provide an analysis of capitalism that explains why it dominates nature,” and “does not deal with the problems of poverty and racism experienced by millions of women around the world.” (Merchant, 13) This lack of explanation for the reasons that society dominates nature, as well as a lack of attention to social inequality experienced by poor and minority women around the world, allows for much criticism about cultural ecofeminism (Merchant, 13). In searching for an ideology that removes inherently toxic aspects of society that are harmful to women, spirituality-based ecofeminism did not seem like the most applicable framework for a feminist ecologically minded society, if certain groups are separated, or seen as unable to participate, in its empowering aspects.
Elizabeth Carlassare, in comparing different schools of ecofeminism, advocates for a more comprehensive movement of ecofeminists:

Even where ecofeminists rhetorically claim a strong affinity between women and nature, and deep divisions between men and women, often the actual analysis leans towards social constructionism, as differences and divisions in human history are given a causal significance such as the patriarchal invasions of ancient matriarchal societies. (Mellor, 57)

This gravitation towards social constructionism in analysis and methodology connect ecofeminism by focusing on the fact that, overall, all ecofeminists make a material connection between women and the natural world (Mellor, 58). Social/ist ecofeminists, sometimes called materialist ecofeminists, evolved from Marxist feminist ideas. They considering nature as the material basis of life (food, clothing, shelter, energy) and critique capitalist control of such resources (Merchant, 6). Carlassare points out that materialist ecofeminists further developed the Marxist “idea that both “nature” and “human nature” are socially produced” (Carlassare 90-91).

By discussing the palpable, material connections between the oppression of women and the degradation of ecosystems, it is easier to pinpoint strategies and examples of what a non-oppressive system might look like.

Social/ist ecofeminism is “based on a socioeconomic analysis that treats nature and human nature as socially constructed, rooted in an analysis of race, class, and gender.” (Merchant, 13)

The reality-focused analysis that social/ist ecofeminism provides attracts scholars like as Merchant and Mellor because it lends itself to an action and ideology-based framework for the liberation of women, and all oppressed peoples, through reconstructing social systems. Social ecofeminism, from which socialist ecofeminism grows according to Merchant,

[…] advocates the liberation of women through overturning economic and social hierarchies that turn all aspects of life into a market society that today even invades the womb. It envisions a society of decentralized communities that transcend the public-private dichotomy necessary to capitalist production and the bureaucratic state. (Merchant, 14)
This ideal of decentralization is key to the social/ist ecofeminist critique of capitalism. Because the connection between women and nature points to “structure” and not “coincidence,” this structure causes the domination of women and nature to reside in “the forms of knowledge and belief that justify and sustain western patriarchy,” which is itself the system of capitalism (Mellor, 180). In “English feudalism and the origins of capitalism,” George Comniel points out that “in every society prior to capitalism, human economic relationships were normally bounded by rules of reciprocity and redistribution, in what might be described as a form of ‘moral economy’.” (6) Social/ist ecofeminism advocates for such reciprocity and moral economy, and scholars of capitalism like Comniel show that this construction of a social system is not unfounded historically. Capitalist systems, rather than emphasizing the importance of goods and services themselves, attribute power to those with the most “capital” – the assets or stock someone possesses that allows them to perform work, or access goods and services (Kenneth et al.). As Ellen Wood in *The Origin of Capitalism* puts it, “the production of goods and services is subordinate to the production of capital and capitalist profit. The basic objective of the capitalist system, in other words, is the production and self-expansion of capital.” (3) She goes on to explain further that in capitalism,

the requirements of competition and profit-maximization are the fundamental rules of life. Because of those / rules, capitalism is a system uniquely driven to improve the productivity of labour by technical means. Above all, it is a system in which the bulk of society’s work is done by propertyless labourers who are obliged to sell their labour-power in exchange for a wage in order to gain access to the means of life[…]

(Wood, 3-4)

This inherent focus on production, as well as the power imbalance ingrained into capitalist systems by pitting every person against one another in an endless competition, is what social/ist ecofeminism addresses.
Women are specifically affected by the capitalist power imbalance and the focus on production due to their “disproportionate responsibility for human embodiment” and “their availability for biological needs,” and they are valued as the material source of human reproduction (Merchant, 184). Since human social existence is bounded by our bodies, as well as the ecosystem or natural setting in which we live, the valuation of productive capacity specifically affects both women and nature when viewed as reproductive machines. Merchant describes how women’s “traditional roles as producers of food and clothing, as gardeners and poultry tenders, as healers and midwives, were largely appropriated by men” in the shift to capitalist societies (16).

Under capitalism[…] men bear the responsibility for and dominate the production of exchange commodities, while women bear the responsibility for reproducing the workforce and social relations[…] Under industrial capitalism, reproduction is subordinate to production. (Merchant, 16)

Therefore women, especially minority and non “first-world” women, are disproportionately affected by capitalism, due to their reproductive expectations for contributing to the economic gains of production (Merchant, 18-26). Additionally, because of being valued for their reproductive capacity, when women’s bodies age, are poisoned, or affected by toxic substances, their value is “lowered” within the capitalist system. It is often elements of the capitalist system itself that that causes the poisoning of women’s bodies and nature, from toxic substances used for production (pesticides, radiation) to toxic substances that are used to control women’s bodies (beauty products, plastic surgery). For example, the patriarchal valuation of women’s reproductive ability emphasizes the importance of women’s beauty and attraction for men, therefore creating an expectation and industry for women’s beauty products. In turn, many of these beauty products contain chemicals or substances that often cause long-term health issues. Valuing both women and nature by their ability to reproduce, and then subsequently lessening
their value through poisoning or toxic substances, the capitalist system maintains subordination and control of women. The patriarchal hegemony embedded in society therefore works in tandem with capitalism to subordinate women.

Socialist ecofeminists propose that disavowing capitalism and the subordination of reproduction also addresses many layers of social inequality. Capitalistic colonialism has subordinated women, and men, all over the world by placing them in positions of labor, while those in control of production reap the benefits. This capitalistic colonialism is exemplified by the society that Atwood sets up in *Oryx and Crake*. Atwood positions the character Crake as the ultimate product of a culture that prioritizes technological advancements, and one which uses technology to solve environmental problems. Crake’s colonialist mindset is visible in his choice to solve environmental problems by wiping out the human population on earth and recolonizing earth with a new species that he genetically engineers. Wiping out human civilization by incorporating a deadly virus into BlyssPluss, a birth control and sexual pleasure pill, Crake essentially colonizes the earth with a species he created, deeming them to be a “better chance” at humanity (Oryx 295). Crake’s new humans, called the Crakers, have insect-repellent skin, their body temperatures are set for tropical conditions, and their diet consists only of wild plants and vegetation. Before his intentions of exterminating humanity with the “waterless flood” are revealed, Crake cunningly tells his best friend Jimmy that “demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply for everyone. With the BlyssPluss Pill the human race will have a better chance of swimming” (Oryx 295).

Crake brought about the waterless flood due to his own personal belief that human beings are destructive to the natural world, and Atwood demonstrates that he develops these ideologies
in the toxic capitalist context in which he grew up. Jimmy narrates the story in *Oryx and Crake* of how he and Crake grew up together as sons of high-ranking scientists at the HelthWyzer Corporation. They lived in a Compound, one of the neighborhoods for important Corps employees. After college, Crake, renowned for his genius in genetic engineering, was hired by the powerful RejoovEsense Corporation. Backed by RejoovEsense, Crake developed and spread the virus spread across the world unbeknownst to all who sold, bought, and used it. After the virus in the BlyssPluss pill has been distributed around the world, Crake commits suicide, revealing his true intentions to use the virus to free the earth from humanity, and forces Jimmy to watch over the Crakers as the lone human in a post-apocalyptic world. As Stein points out, a “feminist ecocritical lens foregrounds Atwood’s critique of the dangerous repercussions of enacting anti-human environmentalisms with the aid of transgenic science” (185).

Warning signs throughout *Oryx and Crake* foreground such anti-human environmentalism. Most of Crake’s story is told by Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake*, through flashbacks to all of the memories that Jimmy has of them playing video games together throughout their childhood. The consistent inclusion of such violent video games in Crake’s childhood offers a criticism of the psychological effects the violent, capitalistic world on Crake’s colonialist, non-ecofeminist mindset. The games that Jimmy and Crake play, such as Barbarian Stomp, Blood and Roses, and Extinctathon all “turn mass destruction into an enjoyable spectacle” (Bouson 2004, 143).

Crake would get fixated on a game, and would want to play it and play it and perfect his attack until he was sure he could win, nine times out of ten anyway. For a whole month they’d had to play Barbarian Stomp (See If You Can Change History!). One side had the cities and the riches and the other side had the hordes, and – usually but not always – the most viciousness. Either the barbarians stomped the cities or else they got stomped, but you had to start out with the historical disposition of energies and go on from there. Rome versus the Visigoths, Ancient Egypt versus the Hyksos, Aztecs versus the Spaniards.
These games give a bleak outlook of human society, and Atwood highlights Crake’s fixation and mastery of each game. As Bouson describes, Atwood “presents Crake as a scientist-imperialist but also a trickster-jokester figure who, not unlike the author-jokester, creates a grand game-like illusion that becomes the horrifying and bizarre post-catastrophe reality” inhabited by all those who survive the virus (141). Showcasing Crake’s mindset as too influenced by the toxic elements of capitalist and colonialist culture, Atwood sets up the problematic nature of Crake’s method and ideologies behind his decision to wipe out human civilization. This focus on the problematic aspects of the society, and the games that extract and glorify the competitive nature of society that pits culture against culture, gender against gender, and people against nature demonstrates Atwood’s socialist ecofeminist critique of Crake.

Many ecofeminists, especially social/ist ecofeminists, call for a restructure of society, and look to socialist (small, community-based) systems to counter the subordination of all peoples and seek to address the lays of social inequality that are rooted in gender. In a paper where she summarizes and compares differing divisions within ecofeminism, Elizabeth Carlassare says that most ecofeminists, in looking for to make societal changes,

- seek a social and cultural transformation through new spiritualities and personal change, as well as through material changes, such as:
  - the end of capitalism and commodity culture
  - the beginning of nonstatist forms of socialism
  - the preferential consumption of local goods
  - reduced consumption by late-industrial countries
  - the end of normative hetero-sexuality and patriarchal nuclear family arrangements
  - and the use of renewable energy instead of fossil fuels.

(Carlassare, 90, bullets mine)

Therefore, in analyzing Margaret Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy, I consider the destruction of toxic society seen in Oryx and Crake and The year of the flood, followed by reconstructive concerns shown in Atwood’s MaddAddam, demonstrating socialist ecofeminist values.
By highlighting socialist societies as the alternative to capitalism, and removing the focus on competition, economic growth, and profit maximization, socialist ecofeminists prioritize both the sustainability of the human race as well as environmental sustainability. Atwood also focuses on the aspect of sustainability, and connects issues of societal sustainability to gender, setting up a contrast between patriarchy/capitalism and women/beekeeping. Beekeeping and beekeepers represent a socialist, community-based ideology that prioritizes sustainable production and communitarian relationships. Using a socialist ecofeminist lens, I will discuss the non-toxic community values that Toby advocates for as a beekeeper, and the anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal ideology Toby represents as a character.

**Not Safe from capitalist patriarchy**

One of the ways in which the capitalist patriarchy instigates toxicity towards women is through its maintenance of the consumerist culture that prioritizes production (Merchant 16). Preventing poisoning by avoiding potentially toxic substances is subordinate to the existence of production, and therefore the selling of products. This is easily exemplified in the millions of products that are available today to the public. Anyone walking through a drugstore is confronted by a myriad of products, all of which contain hundreds of ingredients with unpronounceable names. “Personal care products” are advertised to and used by women more often, due to a “cultural emphasis on women’s appearance,” and are a significant source of chemical exposure (Helm et al., 448) (Hosey, 81). Frequent use of chemical products is ingrained in our everyday routines, from soaps, lotions, and hair products to cleaning products, paints, or pesticides. This toxic exposure to chemicals, potentially harmful substances, and practices that may harm the human body all demonstrate the ‘physical toxicity’ that can result from products of the capitalist system. While physical poisoning from chemicals or other toxic substances might be more
obvious, an example of a “practice” that causes also contributes to physical toxicity can be as simple as “habituation.” As toxicity scholar Sara Hosey cites from an anonymous source in “Life after Love Canal,” who reflects on the implications of plastics and chemicals in our everyday lives: “Habituation, the acceptance of the abnormal as normal, is an ever-present threat” (Hosey, 78).

Many well-known films that came out in the years leading up to the twenty first century began dealing with issues of physical toxicity, as stories of poisoning and toxicity began appearing with more frequency throughout the world. Mike Nichols’s *Silkwood* (1983), Steven Soderbergh’s *Erin Brockovich* (2000), and Todd Haynes’ film *Safe* (1995), all with star-studded casts and famous directors, demonstrate a growing consciousness for the ways in which certain products of the capitalist patriarchy affect women’s bodies. *Silkwood*, starring Cher, Kurt Russell, and Meryl Streep, tells the true story of Karen Silkwood’s fight against her employer for exposing their workers to nuclear radiation. When Silkwood (played by Streep) decides to take incriminating evidence of the company’s malpractice to a journalist, she is killed in a car crash and the documents disappear. *Erin Brockovich* also told the story of a woman who discovers a powerful company’s malpractices. The Pacific Gas & Electric Company had been contaminating groundwater with carcinogenic chromium, which had been causing cancer and sickness in many inhabitants of the area. Brockovich, played by Julia Roberts, pursues legal action against the company and rallies the inhabitants of the area to fight against the illegal and immoral consequences of knowingly poisoning the residents. Both films were well received, receiving nominations and winning prestigious film awards. The attention given to issues of toxicity in such mainstream films further opened the conversation about women’s relationship to environmental toxicity.
Like *Erin Brockovich* and *Silkwood*, Todd Haynes’s *Safe* depicts how a woman deals with toxicity, but his protagonist, Carol, played by Julianne Moore, is very different than the outspoken, protestor examples of Karen Silkwood and Erin Brockovich. *Safe* is a useful entry point into better understanding the intricacies of toxicity that I will talk about in this paper. For *Safe*’s much more passive protagonist, Carole White, her body itself protests all of the toxic forces acting upon her. While illuminating the physical sickness that affects Carol, Haynes’ film also portrays the consequences of patriarchal dismissive attitudes towards her illness.

Carol is a wealthy white “homemaker” who grew up in a nuclear family in Texas, and lives in the San Fernando valley with her husband. She attends Jazzercise classes and lunch parties with her socialite friends (*Safe*, 37:58). Carol lives a privileged lifestyle as a wealthy woman in 1987 California, where Sara Hosey argues, she is “ensconced in the ostensible safety of white suburbia” (87). Despite the geographical and temporal closeness of the film’s setting to 1985 protests against toxic hazards in a LA-area African American community, Carol is unaware of how her “personal experience may be related to larger issues like corporate greed, class and race privilege, and systemic sexism” (Hosey, 87) I refer to larger issues such as these as “cultural toxicity.” *Safe* displays the cultural toxicity that affects Carol through the obstacles she faces in trying to get treatment, since the audience is witness to Carol’s “environmental illness.”

Haynes simultaneously portrays the physical toxicity that affects Carol with the cultural toxicity of the patriarchal attitudes and product-centered consumerist society. This physical toxicity refers to the effective poisoning of Carol’s body, causing her to have physical symptoms. As the film goes on, her symptoms worsen. Though she has complained of fatigue since the beginning of the film, the first scene where Carol’s sickness really starts to become visible is when car fumes cause her an extreme coughing fit (16:04). Haynes emphasizes the scene,
overwhelming the viewer’s senses by overlaying grating sounds of car tires screeching, the radio, and breathing, that start quietly in the background and rise to a harshly loud level. He also utilizes shaky camera to build the sense of unease and fear that is mirrors Carol’s adverse reactions to her environment.

As in the car fumes scene, Haynes uses non-traditional filming techniques and sound to emphasize scenes toxicity in the scene where Carol decides to get a permanent hair treatment. Contrasted against the traditional stable-image technique and wide lens used throughout the majority of the film, Haynes zooms in extremely close on the chemicals that the hairdresser pours into Carol’s hair, while overlaying ominous dripping sounds (27:30). Carol expresses extreme alarm at getting a nosebleed immediately after her hair treatment is completed (28:36). Haynes purposefully draws the attention to the toxicity to clue in the audience that the toxicity affecting Carol is indeed real, and rather frightening.

Haynes must establish the validity of Carols physical toxicity, for at the same time, many of the male characters work to deny its existence. Though Carol goes to see her doctor for fatigue, he tells her “I really don’t see anything wrong with you” and she at first agrees, embarrassed, and attributes her symptoms to stress (23:39). However, in the latter half of the film, Carol begins to have memory loss (47:26), seizures (1:02:40), and a persistent severe rash (1:50:00). Despite the obvious worsening of her condition, Carol’s husband displays skepticism and hesitation throughout the film, not noticing that anything was wrong with Carol until she was unable to perform her wifely duties at his client dinner. He only acknowledged that something was wrong her sickness actually affected him personally (23:16). Initially, he even reacts with anger at her for the abnormality of her symptoms (29:35).
Carol’s doctor recommended her see a psychiatrist, as he is “more suited for stress-related conditions” (25:20). In the scene where Carol sees a psychiatrist, he implies through his silence and seeming indifference that the low-level of stress in Carol’s life as a housewife is not enough to warrant her physical reactions (38:05). Even after being rushed to the ER from a seizure-like episode brought on by fumigation at her dry cleaners, Carol’s doctor consistently tells her that “from a medical standpoint” there is no “proof” that she had immune system response to chemicals (Safe 1:03:32). This issue with her doctor points to a larger systematic problem that Rachel Carson points out (thirty years before Safe was filmed):

We are accustomed to look for the gross and immediate effect and to ignore all else. Unless this appears promptly and in such obvious form that it cannot be ignored, we deny the existence of hazard. Even research men suffer from the handicap of inadequate methods of detecting the beginnings of injury. The lack of sufficiently delicate methods to detect injury before symptoms appear is one of the great unsolved problems of medicine.

(Carson, 190)

Carson describes an ingrained cultural fault: the inability to see past what is immediately present. Therefore, the dismissal of Carol’s symptoms was not simply the fault of the doctor, but a greater fault in the normal way that entire medical system looks for symptoms of illness. This demonstration of a larger, systematic “toxicity” – a problematic method of thinking, can be spotted in Safe’s portrayal of how Carol’s world deals with her sickness.

However, since Carol is unable to recognize the cultural toxicity of the patriarchal attitudes that contribute to her physical sickness, rather than joining the activist community, (implied in the film by a women’s group discussion at an environmental illness information session) Carol opts to try living at a retreat in New Mexico, called Wrenwood (Safe 58:04). After Carol has been at Wrenwood for some time without improving, the film shows Carol electing to live in an airtight, enclosed ceramic igloo in order to close out the physical toxicity that is still reaching her in this “natural” setting. However, though the exact reasons that the physically toxic
environment are affecting her are not clear, Haynes showcases that Wrenwood’s leader also
denies and diminishes Carol’s experience, as he promotes self-blame and psychological
explanations for her physical symptoms. In this way, now that the physical toxicities are
supposedly removed and no longer specifically visible, what is mostly visible to the audience as
affecting Carol is the toxic attitude that the men in Carol’s life have towards her. The film works
in this connection between physical toxicity and societal toxicity by bringing special attention to
Carol’s silencing and unawareness that these men’s attitudes are part of the problem.

At the film’s end, although Carol has gained an awareness of the physical toxicities
against which she struggles, Carol’s final scene, telling herself “I love you” in the mirror of a
ceramic safe room “exists in a literal and metaphorical vacuum” (Hosey, 88). Though Carol is
now aware that she is affected by physical toxicity, she does not see the interconnected forces of
societal oppression that prevent her recovery, and instead implement strategies, given to her by
men in power, that cause her condition to worsen (Hosey, 88) Safe exemplifies one of the many
ways in which physical toxicity and societal toxicity work simultaneously against women,
connecting the gender and toxicity. Applying a socialist ecofeminist reading of Safe, Carol’s
struggles with her environmental illness demonstrate that the toxins and other environmental
factors affect women disproportionately precisely because of the societal toxicity at play within
the established capitalistic patriarchal system. As Rachel Carson pointed out, the patriarchal
hegemony and capitalist structure of established patriarchal systems, label sick women as
“hysterical” and physically allocate poor and minority communities near more physically toxic
areas, maintaining the oppression of women and people of color through physical and mental
control. In this way, Safe offers an ecofeminist critique of consumerism, where its toxicity
disproportionately affects women due to their subordinate status as reproducers of the workforce
and of social relations as compared to the higher value of production (Merchant 16). The unknown effects of chemicals and products does not matter, as it is the system of production that maintains such consumerism. This ecofeminist critique can be compared to Atwood’s portrayal of the dangers of her highly capitalistic, Corporation controlled society and its physical effect on her female characters.

**Toby vs. capitalism and patriarchal toxicity**

Atwood’s capitalist society was extremely toxic to Toby and her family, just as chemicals and patriarchal attitudes were to Carol’s health. Starting from Toby’s childhood, the conversion to Corporation control negatively affected her middle-class family. Though her parents owned a home and had stable jobs, with her father selling air conditioning and her mother running a HelthWyzer supplements franchise, Toby’s father refused to sell his house and ten acres of land when developers tried to buy it (Year, 25). Looking back to the beginnings of her struggle with the Corporation-controlled world, Toby reminisces that her father thought the world was still the way it had been fifty years before[…] Already, back then, the CorpSeCorps were consolidating their power. They’d started as a private security firm for the Corporations, but then they’d taken over when the local police forces collapsed for lack of funding, and people liked that at first because the Corporations paid, but now CorpSeCorps were sending their tentacles everywhere. He should have caved. *(The year of the flood, 25)*

By stating that “he should have caved,” Toby implies that her family had suffered worse hardship because her father tried to fight against the all-powerful will of money-fueled Corporations. The collapse of the police forces for “lack of funding” shows that with capitalism reigning, public (socialistic) systems become obsolete when those with the most money gain the most power. With the CorpSeCorps consolidating power, Atwood demonstrates that a “small potato” like Toby’s father was an easy target if he remained in the way of the Corporation’s wishes. After he refuses to sell his property to developers, he “lost his job with the air
conditioning corp,” then “got another one selling thermal windows, but it paid less” (Year, 25). Because wealth is power, low-paid citizens in this society are at great risk. This empowerment of wealth over public goods becomes a toxic force to anyone that is not able to compete monetarily, disadvantaging people like Toby’s middle-class family or anyone else who is born at a disadvantage.

The toxic effects of the extreme capitalistic societal structure on her family intensified, and took a physical form, with Toby’s mother. She had been a HelthWyzer franchise operator, which meant she had gotten a deal on a “customized package” of daily HelthWyzer Hi-Potency VitalVite supplements, supposedly just like the “higher-ups as HelthWyzer” (Year, 25). However, her mother “came down with a strange illness” that caused her to become “weak and confused” and “lose weight rapidly,” despite her always having been careful about her health (Year, 25). Atwood hints that this “strange illness” might have not been an accident, including that the

HelthWyzer Corp clinics[…] took an interest because she’d been such a faithful user of their products. They arranged for special care, with their own doctors. They charged for it, though, and even with the discount for members of the HelthWyzer Franchise Family it was a lot of money; and because the condition had no name, her parents’ modest health insurance plan refused to cover the costs. Nobody could get public wellness coverage unless they had no money of their own whatsoever. (The year of the flood, 25-26)

The cost of care for Toby’s mother caused Toby’s father to take out a second mortgage, but all the doctors, drugs, hired nurses, and hospitals did nothing to prevent her from “withering away” (Year, 26). Eventually, this caused Toby’s father to end up having to sell the house, that he had originally refused to sell, for a much lower price. He lost his job at the thermal window company due to taking off too much time to help is wife, and then had to sell his car and much of their furniture (Year, 26). Therefore Atwood depicts how the HelthWyzer Corporation, by using their monetary power and monopoly to literally feed toxic substances to and poison Toby’s mother.
This in turn forced Toby’s family in to ever worsening financial circumstances, exhibiting the physical effects of a toxic capitalist system that prioritizes competition for capital, thus allowing harmful actions to come to anyone that cannot compete.

The saga of Toby’s parents is Atwood’s most obvious example of the crueler aspects of her Corporation-controlled society. This extreme form of capitalism parallels medieval feudalism, demonstrating how a figure (in this case the Corporations and CorpSeCorps) that has power from wealth can harm those with less power if it is beneficial to them, and there is no law or protection for civilians. As Michael Spiegel points out in “Character in a post-national world: neomedievalism in Atwood's Oryx and Crake,”

whether by assassinating a whistle-blower, commodifying art, disempowering the masses, or exacerbating class division, the transnational corporations that drive global integration bear significant responsibility for the social, cultural, political, and economic fragmentation in the world of Oryx and Crake. This degree of responsibility suggests a significant imbalance between the economic realm and that of the social, cultural, and political.

(Spiegel, 3)
The repercussions of such imbalance brought about by the Corporations in control of Atwood’s society is seen in Toby’s father’s trajectory, with the loss of both his dignity and property. Despite all that Toby’s father sacrificed for her care, Toby’s mother still died of the mysterious incurable illness. After losing his property, his job, and his wife, Toby’s father killed himself, as “humiliation, pain, and failure had eaten away at him until there was almost nothing left” (Year, 26). This implies that his life was not worth living without economic success, property, or his wife. However, Atwood describes Toby’s father as a “sentimental” man, for if “he’d been nothing but practical he’d have marched into the hospital with the divorce papers, the way a lot of men did when something too debilitating and expensive struck their wives. Left her mother to be tossed out onto the street. Stayed solvent. Instead, he’d spent all their money” (Year, 27).
Here, Atwood makes a clear connection between the toxicity of the capitalist system that poisoned Toby’s mother, and the extreme patriarchal “practicality” that most men adhered to. Once their wives were too “debilitating and expensive,” or no longer valuable, they would be “tossed out onto the street,” showcasing the capitalistic commodification of the female body. If a woman gets old, sick, or infertile, she no longer serves a biological purpose. Atwood also cynically categorizes a man as “sentimental” for not making the “practical” decision of ditching his wife, and shows how he was punished for such sentimentality in a capitalist culture by losing everything. This passage demonstrates a feminist perspective with its obvious sardonic tone, but I argue that it goes further than a feminist critique to an ecofeminist critique, by connecting the normalized subordination and devaluation of wives to the experience of Toby’s family being broken apart by the toxic capitalist system.

Toby had had a college scholarship to Martha Graham Academy, but after her mother and father’s deaths, Toby is forced into hiding for fear of being held responsible for her father’s debts, or his crimes of suicide and illegal possession of a firearm.

Most likely the CorpSeCorps wouldn’t bother tracing her. There was nothing in it for them: one of the Corporation banks would get the house anyway. If her disappearance was of interest to anyone, such as maybe her college[…] the CorpSeCorps would spread it about that she’d been last seen with a cruising pimp on the lookout for fresh recruits, which is what you’d expect in the case of a young woman like her — a young woman in desperate financial straits, with no visible relations and no nest egg or trust fund or fallback.

*(The year of the flood, 28)*

This passage shows that money is prioritized over human life, and particularly female life, by the Corporation-controlled society. Toby was of no worth to the people in power as they would obtain her father’s property, and the most likely outcome for her was that she would become “what you’d expect” of “a young woman in desperate financial straits” – only valued monetarily for her body. Though there was a probable lack of interest of the CorpSeCorps in her
whereabouts, “there was still a chance the CorpSeCorps might come after her for her father’s debts. She didn’t have any money they could seize, but there were stories about female debtors being farmed out for sex. If she had to make her living on her back, she at least wanted to keep the proceeds” (Year, 30). Therefore, not only was the most common practice for the CorpSeCorps to spread rumors involving sex trafficking when explaining a woman’s disappearance, but it was also common for those in power to “farm” women out for sex. This establishes Atwood’s socialist ecofeminist critique that the CorpSeCorps, as representative of an entity that gained power purely due monetary advantages, mainly values women for their body, subordinating women as representative of their reproductive purposes.

Without any money, Toby had to resort to various ways of feeding and sheltering herself, one of which was selling her eggs on the black market, as “young women could get top dollar for donating their eggs to couples who hadn’t been able pay the required bribe or else were so truly unsuitable that no official would sell them a parenthood licence” (Year 32). However, the third time she tried to sell her eggs,

the extraction needle had been infected. At that time the egg traders were still paying for treatment if anything went wrong; still, it took her a month to recover. When she tried a third time, they told her there were complications, so she could never donate any more eggs, or — incidentally — have any children herself. (The year of the flood, 32)

Her desperate situation, caused by Corporation exploitation of her family in the first place, had only allowed her a few options to support herself. Atwood describing selling her eggs as one of the only ways Toby could get “top dollar,” demonstrates how women’s reproductive abilities are their most highly valued qualities. However, Toby is also essentially poisoned, forever affected by this procedure. This displays Atwood’s dark irony, and an ecofeminist critique on capitalistic reduction of women’s value to reproduction. Toby loses her reproductive abilities, which
eco-feminists claim to be women’s main value under capitalism, through an infection caused by trying to sell her reproductive eggs (Merchant, 16).

Toby’s life is the best example of Atwood’s socialist eco-feminist critique of society. Toby’s family is torn apart by the toxic, wealth-based patriarchal system controlled by the CorpSeCorps. This Corporate, capitalist system also caused the physical toxicity that Toby and her mother experience. Like Carol in Safe, the patriarchal culture works simultaneously with the physical toxicity created by the capitalist structure. Her and her mother were affected physically by the pollutive practices of capitalist society due to Atwood’s Corporation-controlled use of these women as guinea pigs and egg-carrying reproductive machines. This example also follows the eco-feminist claim that physical toxicity more often affects women, as Toby and her mother are both poisoned and devalued, while the entire capitalist system disadvantages middle- and working-class men and women, like Toby’s father, through a structural competitive disadvantage.

I read Atwood showing how the capitalist Corporation system destroyed Toby’s family, poisoning Toby’s mother, and removing Toby’s valuable reproductive capabilities as a subversive eco-feminist strategy. For example, by removing Toby’s reproductive value to capitalism, Atwood forces Toby’s value to be separated from the toxic capitalist parameters for women’s value as reproductive machines (Merchant, 16). In this way, by placing Toby at the center of a narrative that highlights such toxicities within the capitalist Corporation system, Atwood converts Toby into the ideal candidate to subvert such toxic systems, by removing her value within such toxic capitalism. Toby, though a woman, cannot be valued as a “tool” of reproduction. Therefore, Atwood establishes Toby’s integral position in negotiating the structure of the post-apocalyptic community of survivors as completely separate from someone who
would contribute to human society as a female reproducer. Instead of positioning her as the woman who affects the next generation through reproduction, by aligning Toby with the theme of bees and beekeeping throughout the novels, Atwood positions Toby instead as the “keeper” of the community that strives towards ecological values established by the Gardeners and the egalitarian socialist structure exemplified by the bees.

**Capitalism, God’s Gardeners, and the Bees**

Like the patriarchal toxicity that worsens the effects of the physical toxicity on Carol’s health in *Safe*, Atwood shows that the problematic patriarchal attitudes of her Corporation society worsens the physical toxic effects on Toby. After her interactions with mainstream Corporation society costs her Toby her mother, father, and her reproductive capabilities, Toby moves to the slum-like pleeblands and begins working at a fast food chain, Secretburgers. At Secretburgers Toby catches the eye of the physically and sexually violent, tattooed manager, Blanco, whose female employees often end up dead with their necks broken in vacant lots (36). Atwood uses crude, extreme language to characterize the abuse Toby suffers in the few weeks before she joined the Gardeners, describing Blanco’s view was that

> a woman with an ass as skinny as Toby’s should consider herself in luck if any man wanted to stick his hole-hammer into her. She’d be even luckier if he didn’t sell her to Scales as a temporary, which meant temporarily alive. She should thank her lucky stars. Better, she should thank him: he demanded a thank you after every degrading act. He didn’t want her to feel pleasure, though: only submission. Nor did he give her any time off from her SecretBurgers duties. He demanded her services during her lunch break — the whole half — hour-which meant she got no lunch.

*(The year of the flood, 38)*

This overtly misogynistic language shows the abusive patriarchal control that men have over women in the capitalist society that prioritizes power and subordination. Once Toby had been “Blanco’s one-and-only” for less than two weeks, “despair was taking her over,” and she was each day becoming “hungrier and more exhausted” (Year, 38). She had bruises on her arms, and
knew “she’d be used up soon” (Year, 38). This bleak picture of Blanco’s treatment of Toby serves to highlight the extreme abuse of women that goes unchecked in the working-class pleeblands.

Blanco’s abuse made the strange cult-like God’s Gardeners look really good in comparison. Rebecca, Toby’s old Secretburgers coworker, had asked Adam One and Gardener children to retrieve Toby from her bleak circumstances. The Gardeners caused a commotion that started a fight between pleeblang gangs, providing the perfect escape opportunity for Toby to be led up to the “Edencliff Rooftop Garden,” atop an old red-brick factory building (Year, 42).

Compared to her previous circumstances, Atwood describes the rooftop garden as truly Eden-like to Toby:

> it was so beautiful, with plants and flowers of many kinds she’d never seen before. There were vivid butterflies; from nearby came the vibration of bees. Each petal and leaf was fully alive, shining with awareness of her. Even the air of the Garden was different. She found herself crying with relief and gratitude. […] “I’m so glad you have made this decision, my dear,” said Adam One. But Toby didn’t think she’d made any decision at all. Something else had made it for her. Despite everything that happened afterwards, this was a moment she never forgot. (The year of the flood, 43)

Through this description natural setting and beauty and of the Garden, Atwood verifies that the Gardeners were certainly a much safer, healthier community for Toby than the capitalist “exfern” world. The Gardeners also exhibit some socialist ecofeminist values. Each of the Gardeners had a communal system of labor, with each Gardener contributing their skills to the community in whatever areas they could. Toby began making “herbal lotions and creams,” as well as teaching the skills she learned in her Martha Graham Holistic Healing courses with the Gardener children (Year, 46). However, the longer she was with the Gardeners, the better she understood the intricacies of the eco-religious cult, and couldn’t see herself “sticking it out among these fugitives from reality for long” (Year, 47) Though she had no issues with the
vegetarianism, the communal labors, the “dark, sack-like garments the women wore,” or sleeping on dried husk mattresses, Toby did find issue with some of the social aspects of the Gardeners. After Nuala, Eve Nine, told Toby that she should “grow her hair long” as it was an “aesthetic preference of God’s,” she noted that the “smiling, bossy sanctimoniousness was a little too pervasive for Toby, especially among the female members of the sect” (Year, 46). Toby works out the “Gardener hierarchy:”

Adam One insisted that all Gardeners were equal on the spiritual level, but the same did not hold true for the material one: the Adams and the Eves ranked higher, though their numbers indicated their areas of expertise rather than their order of importance. In many ways it was like a monastery, she thought. The inner chapter, then the lay brothers. And the lay sisters, of course. Except that chastity was not expected. (The year of the flood, 45)

This sarcastic description of the “spiritual” versus the “material” world echoes the hypocritical aspects that Merchant and Mellor point out about spiritual ecofeminism. I would not consider the Gardeners’ society to be ecofeminist, specifically due to the hierarchy that came with the religious aspects of the cult. Through Toby’s fresh perspective, Atwood criticizes the hierarchical, patriarchal toxicity visible in the leadership structure, while pointing out that the “bossy sanctimoniousness” about God’s preferences for women’s’ appearance is a toxic factor affecting the female gardeners. While Toby easily adapts to and even appreciates the environmentalist elements of the Gardeners, she notes and remains skeptical of the hierarchical structure of the sect as well as the contradictions within the religion. Toby eventually becomes one of the Eves, and although does not fully disbelieve, she notices that “the prayers were tedious, the theology scrambled – why be so picky about lifestyle details if you believed everyone would soon be wiped off the face of the planet?” (Year, 47).

Therefore, though the Gardeners’ ecological lifestyle is non-toxic to Toby, the patriarchal and hierarchical structure is problematic. While demonstrating ecofeminist ideals of anti-
consumerism, local consumption, and use of renewable resources and recycling, the Gardeners’ social structure causes many internal conflicts, and the leadership structure is more corrupt than communitarian. Because of this patriarchal hierarchy, with Adam One as the semi-dictatorial cult leader, the Gardeners’ society does not align with all of the necessary values for a non-toxic ecofeminist society structure. Despite these imperfections, Toby eventually “stopped thinking she should leave the Gardeners” (Year, 97). One of the reasons she became more comfortable with the Gardeners was the close friendships that she developed with two strong female characters, Rebecca and Pilar.

Pilar exposed Toby to what would become her strengths as a leader: beekeeping, herbalism, and mycological skills. Pilar teaches Toby a very ritualistic, folk-lore based method of beekeeping (Year, 99). While teaching Toby the actual methods of caring for the bees and extracting honey, Pilar insists that the ritual practices are equally important. Because Pilar was an older, “walnut-faced” role model to Toby who “seemed kind, and who had a serenity she envied,” Toby listened to and followed all of Pilar’s instructions. Atwood shows the relationship that Pilar instructs Toby to build with the bees:

Pilar took her to visit the beehives, and introduced her to the bees by name. “They need to know you’re a friend,” she said. “They can smell you. Just move slowly,” she cautioned as the bees coated Toby’s bare arm like golden fur. “They’ll know you next time. Oh — if they do sting, don’t slap them. Just brush the sting off. But they won’t sting unless they’re frightened, because stinging kills them.”[…]The bees were agitated by her at first, but after a while they accepted her. They allowed her to extract the honey by herself, and she got stung only twice. “The bees made a mistake,” Pilar told her. “You must ask / permission of their Queen, and explain to them that you mean them no harm.” She said you had to speak out loud because the bees couldn’t read your mind precisely, any more than a person could. *(The year of the flood, 99)*

By introducing Toby to the bees by name, communicating aloud with them, and teaching her to respect their structure and society, Pilar introduces Toby to an egalitarian, community-minded way of thinking. Pilar also tells Toby that the bees are “the messengers to the dead,” and
provided her with a fund of “bee lore,” foretelling meanings for any chance interaction one might have with the bees. “A bee in the house means a visit from a stranger, and if you kill the bee, the visit will not be a good one. If the beekeeper dies, the bees must be told, or they will swarm and fly away. Honey helps an open wound. A swarm of bees in May, worth a cool day. A swarm of bees in June, worth a new moon. A swarm of bees in July, not worth a squashed fly” (Year, 99).

By demonstrating such respect for the natural world of the bees, and taking care to explain all of the physical and spiritual importance of maintaining a relationship of reciprocity with the bees, Atwood develops the concept of a different kind of social structure that influences Toby. Pilar even directly suggests that a human social structure can be like that of the bees, telling Toby that “all the bees of a hive are one bee: that’s why they’ll die for the hive. ‘Like the Gardeners,’” (Year, 99). Considering all of the members of a society as one demonstrates the egalitarian socialist ecofeminist ideal that is lacking in the Gardeners’ hierarchical structure. Atwood therefore contrasts the Capitalist society, the Gardener’s society, and the society of the bees, implying that the combined non-toxic elements of the Gardener’s ecological lifestyle and the bees’ social structure serve as an instructive example for Toby when she leads the community of survivors in the last novel of the trilogy, *MaddAddam*.

**Bees and Beekeeping as Ecofeminist**

*Humankind is deeply ill. The species won’t last long. It was an aberrant experiment. Soon the world will be returned to the healthy intelligences, the collective ones. Colonies and hives.*
– Richard Powers, *The Overstory*, page 56

Honeybees play a very prominent role in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy and in Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov’s 2019 film *Honeyland*. As I read both the film and the novels as exemplifying ecofeminist principles, I argue that the recurring theme of bees and beekeeping
exhibits specifically socialist ecofeminist ideals. Toby, maintaining her identity as a beekeeper throughout The year of the flood and MaddAddam, has a strong spiritual and physical relationship to bees. In Honeyland, Hatidze has a similarly strong relationship with her bees, and relies on selling some of the honey from her beekeeping to support her and her mother. Both Toby and Hatidze employ ritualistic methodologies to their beekeeping, and directly communicate with their bees. Toby talks to them, gives them the news, and asks permission of their queen to work with them. Hatidze sings, chants, and dances with the hive during her beekeeping ritual. Because of the community dependent social structure of a honeybee society, a beehive is a useful metaphor for discussing human societal structures. As social insects, honeybees live together in large, complex family groups, and are considered “highly evolved insects” that “depend on continual social interactions to survive” (Mortensen et al.) Some of the communal tasks of a colony include communication, complex nest construction, food collection, brood rearing, defense, and division of labor, all of which are divided amongst three kinds of adult bees: workers, drones, and a queen (Mortensen et al.). Bees demonstrate the a certain socialist ideal of community dependency and interconnectedness, as just like the characters in Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy, an individual bee cannot survive by itself (Mortensen et al.).

**Hatidze and Bees**

Honeyland opens up on a wide, grassy Macedonian landscape, the lone figure of the protagonist, a woman named Hatidze, walking across it. Ethereal, wordless voices add to the sounds of birds and wind as the camera pans over the rocky, mountainous landscape (1:26). The scene cuts to Hatidze scaling a rocky, windy ledge with ease, and coming upon a small cave filled with a wild beehive (2:17). Hatidze slowly, methodically removes the honeycombs, places them in a homemade dried dung beehive structure, wraps it in a bedsheet, and transports it back
to her tiny village home (2:50). These opening scenes help to establish Hatidze’s natural, reciprocal method of beekeeping. It is obvious that she is well practiced with handling bees, as she chants to them while they buzz around her and her new home. Singing and dancing with the bees, she showcases through her ritual for becoming a hive’s beekeeper that her method is to form a relationship with the bees, and is more than just a means to collect honey (Honeyland, 3:28, see below). The scene feels beautiful and nostalgic.

![Hatidze performing her beekeeping ritual](image)

**Fig. 1.** Hatidze performs her beekeeping ritual with a new hive; *Honeyland*; Trice Films, Apolo Media, 2019.

Hatidze, age 52 at the time that the documentary was filmed, is the caregiver for her 85-year-old blind, and almost deaf, mother. Her mother has been unable to leave her bed for four years, and is very ill, coughing often, sleeping for most of the day, and waking to eat. Her mother’s dependency on her makes Hatidze and her mother’s relationship very close, establishing the value of Hatidze’s mother to her despite her inability to contribute to their survival (11:58). This non-measurable, non-productive value of Hatidze’s also hints at Hatidze’s non-capitalist mindset. In order to support her and her mother, Hatidze takes a long bus journey into the nearest city, Skopje, where she sells jars of honey to vendors at a market for slightly
higher prices than other honey. She explains that her honey contains raw, pure honeycomb that can be used as a remedy or cure (10:45). Continuing the characterization of Hatidze as avoiding a capitalist, production-focused mindset, the film shows that Hatidze has developed a good, reciprocal working relationship with the vendors at the market: she lowers prices without a thought when asked, and is given gifts by the vendors for her mother (12:01).

When a new family drives a mobile home into the village, the filmmakers immediately introduce a contrast between Hatidze’s way of life and theirs using sound. While the first fifteen minutes have been a mostly quiet serene setting, with natural sounds of birds, wind, and bees buzzing, the truck that brings the large Sam family to the village also brings a cacophony of noise pollution. As soon as they step out of the truck, there is shouting, laughing, banging on metal surfaces, hammering, crinkling of tarp, chirping of chicks, a baby crying, dogs barking, and cows mooing (16:53). This contrast foreshadows the Sam family’s pollutive practices, which end up deeply hurting Hatidze throughout the film.

The filmmakers also spotlight the Sam family’s many moments of verbally and physically violent reactions to any problems that arise. The boys in the family are shown throwing rocks at their cows and tugging fiercely on their ropes, playing rough with both their siblings and animals (19:31). Their parents are shown threatening physical punishment often. The father, Hussein, offers beatings and the mother uses threats like “I’ll make you black and blue all over” (24:20). This continuous familial toxic violence demonstrates an overarching toxicity that pervades all of the family’s actions towards others and their environment.

For the majority of the film, Hatidze welcomes and assists the family, and even shares her beekeeping knowledge with the patriarch, Hussein Sam, when he becomes interested in
beekeeping. However, he starts to cause issues for Hatidze through his beekeeping, as he begins beekeeping with a mindset of producing honey to make profit.

Fig. 2. Hatidze hangs out with the Sam children; *Honeyland*; Trice Films, Apolo Media, 2019.

Fig. 3. Muza hangs out with Hatidze and tries her honey; *Honeyland*; Trice Films, Apolo Media, 2019.

Hussein speaks with Hatidze about her beekeeping knowledge using production terms, asking how many kilos the bees produce in a year, and how much she sells the honey for (31:01). His questions, being more about the production value of the bees rather than the method, exemplify Hussein as seeing the bees from a capitalist producer’s perspective of exploitation. Contrastingly,
although Hatidze tells Hussein that the bees produce about 10 kilograms, waving her hands, she exclaims “No matter how much there is! There’s enough for all of us” (30:30). Hatidze emphasizes and warns Hussein that he must always leave half of the honey for the bees (30:39). The filmmakers contrast Hatidze’s sharing attitude with Hussein’s, demonstrating his as a production mindset and hers as a more communitarian relationship with the bees.

Through her beekeeping methodology, Hatidze embodies the socialist ecofeminist mentality of anti-consumerism. Her priority of sharing the honey between herself and the bees demonstrates the ecofeminist ideals of reduced consumption and anti-consumerism. Her respect for the bees also demonstrates a familiarity and respect for the socialist, community-based values that bee colonies represent. Hussein’s use of the bees for production and money, though based on the need to support his children, causes physical pain to his own family (from bee stings, 52:26, pictured below) and emotional pain to Hatidze by costing her her beehives. Hussein’s maltreatment of his beehives is laid out as a result of him being under pressure of an enterprising friend Safet, who wants to buy 200 kilos of honey in a short amount of time to maximize profit (1:07:48). Muza, who Hatidze has trained in her ritualistic art of beekeeping, points out to his father that he should not take all the honey out, otherwise the bees will not produce honey (43:34). Hussein responds in anger and prideful embarrassment, banning his son from going to see Hatidze and telling Muza, “I’m doing this for you. I don’t need this. I already know how to breed bees” (43:42).

Hussein’s harvesting of all his bees’ honey causes his bees to go over and kill Hatidze’s hive. When she accuses him of this, he denies it and shrugs her off, telling her “it’s not my problem,” and asserts that his bees are the priority, since he has children to take care of (56:39).
Going even further to exploit Hatidze’s bees, Hussein and Safet find the wild hive in a tree that Hatidze tends, and physically cut it down, harvest the honey, and take the queen (1:08:46).

Fig. 4. Hatidze confronts Hussein about his destructive beekeeping method, cupping a handful of her dead bees; *Honeyland*; Trice Films, Apolo Media, 2019.

Hussein’s nonchalant attitude towards the conflict between himself and Hatidze demonstrates that he sees the death of Hatidze’s bees as a normalized product of capitalistic competition. He dismissively claims that Hatidze’s problems, though indeed caused by his actions, are “not his problem.” The effect of this conflict on Hatidze is shown in her emotional plea to Hussein’s wife, and half-hearted threat to take the Sams to court. She relays her fear that she will not be able to support herself and her ailing mother, since the honey was her only source of income. However, the film also displays that Hatidze is more affected by Hussein’s actions as a matter of principle. Though she considers Hussein’s actions unforgivable, and decides she has to cut herself off from their family, Hatidze tells her mother that “I can make it without them” (1:10:50). Hatidze’s reaction, therefore, is not solely rooted in fear for her survival, it is more rooted in their clash of values, as Hussein prioritizes a mindset of competition and production,
seeing the bees and Hatidze as a means to an end. Contrastingly, Hatidze’s relationship with the bees is reciprocal and renewable, and while she is hurt that her relationship with the Sams did not end up being reciprocal as well, she has confidence that she will be able to survive despite Hussein’s actions. This is proven to be true, as although Hatidze’s mother passes away, the Sam family leaves to pursue their economic interests elsewhere, and the film closes on Hatidze returning to the mountain and finding another beehive.

_Honeyland_, as a documentary film, portrays two very different beekeeping methodologies side by side. Hatidze’s beekeeping is collaborative, respectful, and egalitarian, and her neighbors’ beekeeping is exploitive and destructive. Correspondingly, Hatidze’s egalitarian, ritualistic beekeeping methodology, “half for me, half for them,” is ecofeminist, as it fosters sustainability. By prioritizing reduced consumption, Hatidze keeps the bees alive and happy, and therefore the honey becomes a renewable source (Carlassare, 90). Hatidze’s neighbors, the Sams, remove all the honey in order to maximize production, which angers the bees, causing them to destroy Hatidze’s hives. Hatidze’s socialist egalitarian collaboration is an ecofeminist beekeeping structure, while Hussein’s is a capitalist exploitation of the bees’ society. By depicting bees as a metaphor for society, and beekeeping as a metaphor for the social structures that govern society, _Honeyland_ creates a gendered contrast between Hatidze’s beekeeping as sustainable and Hussein’s as destructive.

**Toby and Bees**

Like Hatidze, Toby’s main occupation is beekeeping throughout _The year of the flood_. Whenever not completing her assigned Gardener duties, Toby “spent all her spare hours with Pilar — tending the Edencliff beehives and the crops of buckwheat and lavender grown for the bees on adjacent rooftops, extracting the honey and storing it in jars” (Year, 101). Despite the
toil involved in beekeeping and extracting honey, as Toby must speak to the bees aloud, gas them to calm them, and sometimes get stung, Toby’s memory “of the whole experience is one of unblemished happiness” (Year 96). The presence of bees is one of Toby’s only constants in a novel where the Toby fluctuates from the brink of death in a toxic hyper-capitalist environment, to becoming one of the leaders of an eco-religious cult, to being stuck in isolation while the rest of humanity dies off from a virus. In *The year of the flood*, Atwood shies away from a chronological framework, instead choosing to flit between past and present: Toby reminisces about the time before the waterless flood began while isolating herself until it is over. This flitting between past and present, as Toby thinks about the people and society that have died, mirrors Atwood’s description of the bees as “messengers” between the living world and the unseen world of the dead (Year, 100). Toby’s bee-like mental travels to the dead capitalist world allow Toby to learn lessons from the previous society, just as the bees bring “messages” from beyond.

This is one example of Atwood’s many indications that the bees serve an important role in the way Toby interacts with her environment. Atwood includes many oddly specific instructions and detailed idiosyncrasies that Pilar tells Toby about the bees. Toby follows her instructions, despite never being quite sure how serious Pilar was about them (Year, 99). However, Atwood signals a certain level of credibility in Pilar’s words, as she mixes in factual information about the worldwide decline in bee health around with Pilar’s lore. Pilar tells Toby that

> the bees all over the world had been in trouble for decades. It was the pesticides, or the hot weather, or a disease, or maybe all of these — nobody knew exactly. But the bees on the Rooftop Garden were all right. In fact, they were thriving. “They know they’re loved,” said Pilar.

*(The year of the flood, 100)*
Here, Atwood places significance on the beekeepers’ relationship with bees, emphasizing the importance of an ethic of love, communication, and respect between beekeeper and bees. “If you didn’t tell the bees everything that was going on, Pilar said, their feelings would be hurt and they’d swarm and go elsewhere. Or they’d die” (The year of the flood, 181). Pilar warns that not communicating directly with the bees, or keeping them aware of the news, could cause them to die. In the Corporation-controlled societal structure that Atwood portrays, the citizens of the society are kept in the dark about the Corporation’s plans and ideas, and assume that the only motivations behind the Corporations actions are money and power, rather than the public good. This fosters a relationship of fear and mistrust. With Pilar’s method of beekeeping, the beekeeper as the maintainer of the hive must also maintain a relationship of trust with the hive that she keeps. By emphasizing that the beekeeper must speak the news, aloud, Pilar advocates for a social structure of communication, openness, and respect. If there is not such a culture of openness, the bees die or leave. In this way, socialist ecofeminist ideology is present in Atwood’s portrayal of Toby and Pilar’s beekeeping methodology, as socialist ecofeminists assert that a non-toxic social structure creates for a more successful environment for all members of a society (Carlassare, 90).

When Pilar dies in The year of the flood, Toby becomes the Gardener beehives’ sole caretaker.

“Bees,” she said. “I bring news. You must tell your Queen.” Were they listening? Perhaps. They were nibbling gently at the edges of her dried tears. For the salt, a scientist would say. “Pilar is dead,” she said. “She sends you her greetings, and her thanks for your friendship over many years. When the time comes for you to follow her to where she has gone, she will meet you there.” (The year of the flood, 181)

Toby continues Pilar’s method of beekeeping in her memory, giving them the daily news and following Pilar’s respectful rituals. At first, as their sole beekeeper, Toby expresses that she feels
“like such a dolt” speaking to the bees out loud (181). However, Toby realizes that when she spoke to the bees, “Nobody was listening, though if they had been they wouldn’t have found anything odd, not up here on the Rooftop. Whereas down below at ground level they’d have labelled her as a crazy woman, wandering the streets, talking out loud to nothing” (Year, 181).

Here, Atwood again contrasts the mainstream capitalist society against Toby and Pilar’s method of beekeeping, pointing out that to many, such a methodology make her seem crazy for going against the norm. However, when Toby has to leave the Gardeners for her own safety, as her previous boss Blanco had discovered her location and was coming to kill her, Toby shows the emotional connection that she has built with the bees.

Blanco had come up to the rooftop Garden in search of her, and Toby protected herself by tipping over a beehive, which chased him away. Though many Gardeners also got stung, and Toby apologized to these victims, “she apologized much more profusely to the bees, once she’d smoked them enough to make them drowsy: they’d sacrificed many of their own in the battle” (Year, 255). Toby deeply appreciated that the bees had saved her, but her location at the Gardeners’ rooftop was no longer a secret to Blanco, and she had to be moved away from the Gardeners for her own safety. This was devastating for Toby, but it resulted in her being placed with a new undercover identity, working at the AnooYoo spa, which ended up as the perfect place to isolate herself during the pandemic. When she had to leave the Gardener’s rooftop she went to tell the bees:

“Bees,” she said out loud. “I have news.” Did the bees pause in mid-air, were they listening? Several came to investigate her; they lit on her face, exploring her emotions through the chemicals on her skin. She hoped they’d forgiven her for tipping their hives. “You must tell your Queen I’ve had to leave,” she said. “Nothing to do with you, you’ve performed your duties well. My enemy is forcing me to go. I’m sorry. I hope that when we meet again it will be under happier circumstances.” She always found herself using a formal style with the bees. The bees buzzed and fizzed; they appeared to be discussing her. She wished she could take them with her like a large, golden, furry collective pet.
“I’ll miss you, bees,” she said. As if in answer, one of them started crawling up her nostril.  
*The year of the flood*, 257-258)

Toby’s emotional and spiritual relationship with the bees solidifies the impact that being a beekeeper has on Toby’s relationship with the world, and she brings this experience with her to the post-pandemic community in *MaddAddam*.

**Atwood’s Post-Virus Community in MaddAddam**

At the end of *The year of the flood*, Ren, another former Gardener woman, finds Toby where she had stayed isolated from the pandemic at AnooYoo spa. Ren is injured from a confrontation with some men who had survived the flood, and Toby nurses her back to health. After Ren improves, Toby and Ren set out from AnooYoo to find Amanda, another former Gardener and Ren’s best friend. She has been kidnapped by the three violent and dangerous men, known as Painballers. The Painballers had survived due to their isolation in “Painball,” a “facility for condemned criminals” who

“had a choice of being spraygunned to death or doing time in the Painball Arena, which wasn’t an arena at all, but more like an enclosed forest. You got enough food for two weeks, plus the Painball gun — it shot paint, like a regular paintball gun, but a hit in the eyes would blind you, and if you got the paint on your skin you’d start to corrode, and then you’d be an easy target for the throat-slitters on the other team.  
*The year of the flood*, 98)

Therefore, after the flood, Atwood establishes that the humans left on earth are a group of ex-environmental cultists, and a group of violent criminals who had spent months in a Hunger Games-like scenario, trying to kill other human beings for the entertainment of Corporation officials. Additionally, one of the Painballers was, of course, Toby’s former sexually and physically abusive Secretburgers boss, Blanco. This pitted Blanco’s survival and Toby’s survival against each other yet again, representing the two ways that the surviving human community could go: back to kind of societal structure that promoted violence and subordination and had
created Blanco, or change to an egalitarian, environmentally aware society represented by Toby. In order to rescue Amanda from the Painballers, Toby would have to interact with Blanco again, confronting her abuser.

While searching for Amanda, Toby and Ren discover Blanco, who is alone, having been shot in the leg, and is dying from gangrene. Fittingly and symbolically, Atwood portrays Toby defeating the pain and abuse she had suffered from the Blanco and the capitalist world. Toby gives Blanco “a painless exit, and better than he deserved” using Poppy and Amanita, a deadly poisonous mushroom (Year, 279). Even after all that Blanco represented in Toby’s previous life, and all the pain and fear he had caused her, Toby gives him a painless exit, rather than letting him die a painful death from his gangrenous leg. She then “dragged him onto the ornamental planting ringed with whitewashed stones, as a gift for the wildlife. Was the dose of Amanita strong enough to poison anything that ate him? She hopes not: she wishes the vultures well” (Year, 279). Even in defeating her enemy, Toby exemplifies a constant ecofeminist awareness for the interconnectedness and effect that human actions have on the natural world, and how poison can dangerously trickle down from one entity to another. Despite the difficulty of facing her abuser, Atwood exhibits Toby’s survival capability, showing her overcoming these obstacles while protecting Ren. This indicates that Toby’s way of life and beekeeper mentality provides a better chance for human survival.

After this interaction with Blanco, Toby and Ren run into Croze, another former Gardener, who leads them to a previous Gardener building, the “cobb house” (387). There, Toby and Ren find more God’s Gardeners, including Toby’s friend Rebecca, and remnants of MaddAddam: a group of ecoterrorist scientists who had been captured by the CorpSeCorps and then forced to work for Crake, helping him to design the Crakers and the BlyssPluss pill. Toby
was older than, and somewhat of a legend to, most of the MaddAddamites. They knew her as the mysterious Gardener who had access to their private online chatroom under a codename. As the community is made up of young former Gardeners and former MaddAddam scientists, Atwood quickly establishes that the members of the community trust and respect Toby as an elder leader.

Throughout *MaddAddam*, Toby becomes one of the go-to leaders for the community of survivors along with Zeb, another former Gardener who becomes Toby’s significant other at the end of the novel. As the two eldest, ecologically minded adults, they shape the future of the community. In her article “Speculative Solutions: The Development of Environmental and Ecofeminist Discourse in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam,*” Lucy Rowland, an Atwood scholar, argues the ecofeminist implications of the community’s physical space, as well as the community’s non-hierarchical structure. In the Cobb house,

> the survivors live among “nature,” not elevated above it or isolated from it. This directly opposes the traditions of the pre-plague world, in which humanity appeared to be locked in a constant battle with the rebellious planet, killing and consuming animals in a violent and obsessive manner[...] in order to retain power. The survivors are forced to work with the non-human environment: as plants and animals begin to reclaim the biosphere (MaddAddam 209), humans are relegated to a small area in which to exercise their impulse to psychologically reorder and restructure the world.

(Rowland, 56)

Rowland also points out the significance of the small community of survivors’ interactions with non-human sentient species. The Crakers, Crake’s genetically modified humanoid creatures, have begun to live adjacent to the cobb house community. Since they still have little knowledge of the history of their world, and desire explanations for their own existence, Toby steps into the role of prophet and teacher for the Crakers, even passing on the tradition of writing so that they may create a history for themselves (MaddAddam, 385).

Richard Allen Northover, another Atwood scholar, argues that “Toby’s taking control of the narrative (on various levels) and teaching the Crakers to write show how Crake’s masculine
and megalomaniac plans have been redirected by female agents” (Northover, 93) Crake’s colonialist mindset, toxic due to the influences of the patriarchal, capitalist structure in which he lived, tried to eliminate art from the Crakers, as he blamed symbolic thinking for the problems of society.

Watch out for art, Crake used to say. As soon as they start doing art, we’re in trouble. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war. (Oryx and Crake, 361)

However, Atwood denies the validity of his argument by disrupting Crake’s plans, and showing through Toby and the community of survivors the socialist ecofeminist implication that the social structure of a human society is what makes the difference, rather than the existence of art.

_MaddAddam_’s final conflict and resolution is enacted by the community’s cooperation with a group of Pigoons: pigs with human brain tissue that had been developed in order to use their organs for human organ transplants (MaddAddam xiv). An unintended side effect of the toxic culture of genetic engineering, the Pigoons are highly intelligent, and could communicate complex ideas and plans with each other and to the Crakers. Through the Crakers, the Pigoons asked for the human community’s help in ridding the world of the remaining Painballers, for they kept killing the Pigoons’ young. The survivors, agreeing that the Painballers must be stopped so that their community does not live in fear of their potential attacks, create a pact with the Pigoons to work together to eliminate the Painballers. Rowland points out that decision to remove the Painballers is significant, as it indicates that “the survivors recognize that, to achieve heterarchy throughout their world, remnants of the cannibalistic patriarchal world must be eradicated, and the urge to perpetually consume and kill must be stopped” (Rowland, 57) The survivors also enact a treaty that the Pigoons would not eat from the survivors’ garden, and the survivors would not hunt the Pigoons. This interspecies cooperation deconstructs the socially
created divisions between humans and nature, demonstrating the socialist ecofeminist ethic of
caring for nature by respecting other species (Merchant, 13).

Like the Gardeners did, the new community of survivors maintains harmony through a
socialist communal work structure. However, they also avoid hierarchy within the community by
maintaining a system of voting on important decisions, such as whether or not they should
execute the Painballers. Their new community, while perhaps too small to designate a “society,”
exemplifies a restructured social system that maintains socialist ecofeminist values. Though
Atwood uses an apocalyptic virus to bring about the end of capitalism and commodity culture,
which does not exactly lend itself to practical applications, it also demonstrates a preference for
socialist ecofeminist ideology. Atwood also spotlights Toby’s beekeeping and the community of
survivors’ de-constructed divisions between humans and nature, as they are non-toxic ideals to
incorporate into the structure of a community. Characterizing Toby as a beekeeper, a protector of
an egalitarian community social structure, supports the socialist ecofeminist ideal of ending the
subordination of gender and nature within society.

Atwood brings *MaddAddam* to an end through Toby’s journal entries. The journal entries
become shorter and shorter, as the removal of the threat of the Painballers brought peace and
mundanity to the small community. Toby obtains and continues to work with beehives, and three
of the surviving human women end up having Craker babies, pushing the socialist ecofeminist
notion of the socially constructed divisions between nature even further. Though Atwood’s
portrait of the pre-apocalyptic hyper-capitalist society seem like a dire warning for what we have
coming for us, Atwood’s focus on the ability of humanity to survive and restructure expresses an
optimistic light within all the dark.
Atwood refers to her version of a post-apocalyptic utopia as an “ustopia” to indicate “that utopia and dystopia are two sides of the same coin,” (Northover, 82).

See Elaine Showalter’s 1997 “Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media,” detailing the history of hysteria and the effects it has had in creating a precedent of “skepticism concerning women’s complaints” (Hosey 81). See also, Jessica S. Helm et al. “Measurement of endocrine disrupting and asthma-associated chemicals in hair products used by Black women,” a scientific study that demonstrates the disproportionately higher amount of carcinogenic chemicals in Black women’s hair products, correlating with the higher number of Black women with diseases such as cancer as compared to white women. Also, in Robert D. Bullard’s Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color, he outlines the countless historical examples that show how “people of color are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces” (p. 4).

The Hunger Games, by Suzanne Collins, another a dystopian series that highlights a problematic social structure, portrays a country divided into districts based on economic function, forces each district to send yearly “tributes” of its citizens to the capitol. In punishment for the uprising against the dictatorial government, “each of the twelve districts must provide one girl and one boy, called tributes, to participate. The twenty-four tributes will be imprisoned in a vast outdoor arena that could hold anything from a burning desert to a frozen wasteland. Over a period of several weeks, the competitors must fight to the death. The last tribute standing wins. Taking the kids from districts, forcing them to kill one another while [citizens] watch [on television] is the Capitol’s way of reminding [the districts how they are totally] at their mercy. How little chance [they] would stand of surviving another rebellion” (Collins, 18-19). Collins also describes the severe traumatic consequences of human beings hunting and killing each other, which Atwood echoes in her description of the psychologically messed-up Painballers.

“Cob, cobb or clom (in Wales) is a natural building material made from subsoil, water, fibrous organic material (typically straw), and sometimes lime. The contents of subsoil naturally vary, and if it does not contain the right mixture it can be modified with sand or clay. Cob is fireproof, resistant to seismic activity, and uses low-cost materials, although it is very labour intensive.” (Wikipedia, “Cob (material)”)
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