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Beyond a Partnership Ethic: Evolutions of Ecofeminism in the Post-Apocalyptic Landscapes of Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy and Jean Hegland's *Into the Forest*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts / Science in Department from
William & Mary

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Introduction

> My cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities…a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.
>
> - Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"

When Donna Haraway published "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), it revolutionized the idea of what it means to be human by questioning long standing essentialist assumptions about humanity. She argued that we are beings that defy categorization – a blend of natural animal and cultural machine. In the modern age, we may not all have robot arms or microchip implants, but modern medicine nonetheless extends our lives, digital communication shapes our psyches, and genetically engineered food fuels our bodies. We exist, in essence, as human/machine hybrids – as cybernetic organisms: cyborgs. Haraway's idea of a "permanently partial identity" rejects any kind of humanist essentialism and instead acknowledges just how much humanity is affected by its relationship with other types of beings. This statement in itself may be nothing new. Humanity once lived in cooperation with nature, first in hunter gatherer societies and later small farms, where life was measured against herd migrations, animal attacks, and rainfall. As we modernized, machines became our new counterpart and nature became simply a resource to use, less and less a part of our identity. What was prescient in Haraway's analysis in the 1980s has become commonplace in the 2020s, where watches monitor our metabolism, refrigerators access the Internet, and Smart Home devices monitor our every word – which begs the question: what might the future hold? Perhaps, an ecosystem of ever more invasive machines, a world where the cyborg ultimately becomes the robot, where what we understand as humanity is completely changed by its supporting technological environment. However, many speculators of our future,

in fiction and film, instead predict the opposite – a return to nature. The question that these speculations ask is this: if human life has become irrevocably intertwined with machines, what happens when, owing to some apocalyptic event, machines fail, generators sputter and die, and computer screens wink out? What happens when human survival suddenly depends once again on "primitive" skills like foraging and gardening, when the patriarchal institutions of modern society, obsessed with power and self-advancement, suddenly collapse? In the post-apocalyptic landscapes dreamed of by speculative fiction, how does the human race evolve and change in a world no longer defined by machines, but a force completely outside our control – the wild and enormous force of nature?

This is the question I seek to explore, using two works of speculative fiction: Jean Hegland's novel *Into the Forest* and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy*,* in conversation with Eduardo Kohn's book *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Kohn uses anthropological fieldwork to describe what a non-anthropocentric ecology might look like; Hegland and Atwood write fictional narratives in which ecological disasters demand a radical rethinking of what it means to be human. *Into the Forest* follows two sisters, Eva and Nell, who struggle to survive in an isolated cabin after war, plague, and widespread technological failure have ravaged the earth. Following Eva's violent rape, the sisters begin to shift their way of looking at the world they live in – they turn to gardening and foraging, begin to live more wildly within the forest, and eventually burn their house down in a symbolic rejection of the human constructs of pre-apocalyptic society. Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, made up of *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*, is an inventive work of speculative fiction where a plague wipes out most of humanity. There are human survivors, but they live alongside a new humanoid race, the Crakers, that thrive in the post-apocalyptic

landscape because of their animal-like traits: they purr like cats to heal, and they eat leaves and their own excrement like rabbits. In these novels, both Hegland and Atwood approach selfhood and post-apocalyptic society in a radical way that parallels and informs each other. These novels challenge conceptions of selfhood, offering narratives where pregnant women carry children that aren't quite human, where animals can commune with people, and where the boundaries between human and nature begin to blur. Atwood and Hegland look at the man-made disasters of our potential future, but Kohn looks at the present – writing about his four years of anthropological fieldwork with the Runa of the Ecuadorian Amazon, a people who never left behind that human/nature collaborative existence. I also lean on Carolyn Merchant and Val Plumwood's work in the field of ecofeminism to frame my argument. Merchant's work is a keystone of the field, establishing a comprehensive parallel of abuse between women and nature, and Plumwood interprets that parallel as widely applicable to many forms of power differentials, and indicative of a necessary overhaul of the definition of what it means to be human. Atwood and Hegland's novels set up a grounded Merchant-esque ecofeminist narrative, but their more wild speculative moves echo Plumwood's arguments about the evolution of humanity and the rejection of dualistic thought.

It is difficult to write about moments of hybridity or amalgamation, as language struggles to capture the world in terms of relationships rather than individual identity. To write "rock" is to disregard the grass it pushes down, the years that have made it smooth, or the atoms that make up its form. In short, language tends to understand the world in absolutes rather than messy smears of moments, fabrications, and physicality. Donna Haraway calls these smears "permanently partial identities"; prominent philosopher Bruno Latour, in much the same vein, notes that these partialities are key to understanding the relationship between nature and society, a relationship he

nominates “nature-culture” to indicate the mutual interpenetration of each term. Kohn criticizes Latour’s term “nature-culture,” arguing that the hyphen becomes “the new pineal gland in the little Cartesian heads that this analytic unwittingly engenders on all scales [for] an anthropology beyond the human looks for a way to move beyond this analytic of mixture” (Kohn 41). Kohn finds the hyphen to be reminiscent of a Cartesian axis, which has dualistic and binary associations.

For this reason, when I approach moments of hybridity, I turn to the forward slash instead. Throughout this paper, I use the “/” symbol to bridge terms in places where I want to look at relationships, at places where dualism is challenged as two entities begin to merge and inform each other. The slash is often used to denote division or switch, but I instead invoke an echo of Roland Barthes’ structuralist account of signs in his work S/Z, by using the slash to speak in terms of blurring and blending relationships. As opposed to “nature-culture,” I would use nature/culture, a term that still allows both entities to exist while also suggesting an overlap or slippage that becomes something more. For example, I would define Haraway's cyborg as a human/machine – a similar term to cyborg, but one that honors the two distinct parts while also indicating their irreversible overlap. Indeed, the “/” becomes more than just a way for me to present overlapping ideas. If the “-” inherently brings up thoughts of a binary thinking, the “/”, which allows two entities to be distinct and one at the same time, brings up ideas of melding, and in that meld becoming even more. The “/” has movement, a push on the top, a push back on the bottom; it is a conversation. These slashed terms create coincidences of being that are exactly the vessel I want to use in order to present an understanding of the world in terms of relationships rather than categories.

In this paper, I look at three major slashed terms: women/nature, human/nonhuman, and individual/collective, with the ultimate goal of examining the overarching idea of human/nature. All of these boundaries, these ecotones of phenomena, are present and evolving in the post-apocalyptic landscapes of Hegland and Atwood's novels. In my first section "Women/Nature," I point out how the ecofeminist idea of a parallel exploitation of women and nature by the masculinized oppressor is apparent in these novels in moments where women's experience overlaps with the earth. I discuss the commodification of female bodies as resources, the lack of consent present in many areas of pre-apocalyptic life, and the ways in which the new human/nature existence in the post-apocalypse offers ways for the female protagonists to heal. In the second section "Human/Nonhuman," I question the ecofeminist idea of a partnership ethic with the earth, suggesting that Atwood and Hegland provide frameworks and evolutions that go beyond a dualistic partnership to offer a glimpse at a truly overlapping human/nonhuman existence. I look at the communication and communion with animals to argue that the divide between human and nonhuman is a relic of the dualistic thinking of the pre-apocalyptic society, something that eventually gets left behind. And finally, in "Individual/Collective" I look at conceptions of the self in these novels to argue that the human identity must evolve past the capitalist Westernized conception of the "individual." But, the narratives caution, we must not go too far, for the self is an important aspect to all life in order to maintain diversity.

I wish to use the symbol of the pregnant woman to act as a guide through these landscapes of change. The pregnant woman is essential in post-apocalyptic stories – for she signifies the survival and continuation of the human race. She herself is a slashed coincidence of being – a mother/child. The mother/child is not just a mother, but not yet a child either. It is some amalgamated third thing, a symbiote. There are not necessarily women in Hegland and Atwood's

novels that fit into this role of guide – though pregnant women do appear. Instead I want to engage with the pregnant woman as an idea – a motif. There is an urge in apocalyptic literature to use the pregnant woman as a commodified vessel carrying the future of humanity. I wish to turn that trope on its head by using the idea of a pregnant woman to push the boundaries of what it even means to be human. If the destruction of the earth came about when we started seeing the earth less as a part of us and more as a resource, its healing can come from a complete overhaul of the definition of humanity. It is the mother that can take our hands and show us how to become more than ourselves, how to lean into connections instead of distinctions and relationships instead of resources.

Women/Nature

> *He keeps me quiet, I think, because he sees creation in my eyes.*
> *Maybe a man can build, maybe a God can destroy,*
> *but someday the rain will stop and doves will come and I will make a world.*
> *That is not a power he can take from me.*
>
> - Clementine von Radics "Letter From The Wife Of Noah To The Mothers Who Follow"

There exists a preconceived perception of the earth as female and, by that same token, of woman as inherently closer to the natural world. In *The Death of Nature*, eco-philosopher Carolyn Merchant lays out the common narrative associating women with nature, a narrative that weaves through literature, media, and popular thought – from ancient civilizations through to the modern world. She points out a myriad of common portrayals of the earth, all of which demonstrate a parallel with portrayals of women. One example is the earth as a feminized nurturing force, the "Mother Nature" figure that provides and gives life. Or, popular in historic times, there is the fearful narrative of the wild and uncontrollable force of nature, a parallel to the fear inspired by the uncontrollable woman – the witch, the sexually empowered woman, the

lesbian – those who escape man's control. In both cases, the narratives surrounding both earth and women were used to relegate women to the social periphery, as only suitable for the domestic sphere or in need of masculine control. The women/nature narrative is often critiqued as reductive by linking women to a nurturing or tamed role. However, by using ecofeminism not as equating women=nature, but instead as a parallel from which to challenge the exploitation of any type of being, it can be very powerful as a lens through which to critique the effects of patriarchal instrumentalist views of both the earth and marginalized communities. As ecofeminist scholar Val Plumwood explains: "The domination of women is of course central to the ecofeminist understanding of domination, but is also a well-theorized model which can illuminate many other kinds of domination, since the oppressed are often both feminized and naturalized" (Plumwood 18). Thus, ecofeminism is an essential starting point in understanding how dominant social classes use certain narratives and lines of thought in order to keep their power.

Merchant focuses her argument on the Scientific Revolution, the moment when attitudes towards nature turned from one of cautious awe to a secular scientific approach – which at its best was an earnest desire to understand, and at its worst an arrogant bid for human sovereignty over the natural world. Merchant calls this era the moment of "transition from the organism to the machine as the dominant metaphor binding together the cosmos, society, and the self into a singular cultural reality" (*Death of Nature* xxi). She seems to be identifying the moment we moved towards Haraway's cyborg human/machine and left human/nature behind. She explains how the intellectual pursuits of the Scientific Revolution attempted to add order to the wild natural world, contributing to a culture where that which could not be scientifically categorized and controlled was not only distasteful, it was a threat. In the same way, the body of the woman

was thought to be a threat if it could not be controlled, and as the world became increasingly viewed as a mechanistic resource, so did women and other marginalized bodies that did not fit into the masculinized world of self advancement and normative categorization. The “death of nature” as Merchant calls it, was the shift in understanding of the natural world from a place with which we coexisted, into an economic resource – one that we could control and exploit. Is it this shift that led humanity to today, to the point where the world has been so abused and exploited that that natural equilibrium of days past seems impossible to return to, and when we look ahead, we can’t help but see overconsumption, climate change, and death.

The conception of nature as something orderly, regular, and above all exploitable, is the focus of Eduardo Kohn’s critique. He leans on Max Weber's notion of "disenchantment," which describes the secularization and the loss of cautious awe towards nature that started with the Scientific Revolution and contributed to the rise of rationalism. Kohn argues that “as we come to increasingly see the world in mechanistic terms we lose sight of the telos, the significance, the means-ends relationships…that were once recognized in the world” (Kohn 89-90). When we view the world as a machine, and a machine’s *raison d’être* is to service the humans who made it, the earth becomes a mechanism to fulfill our needs. To view the earth as an orderly machine is to discredit the miracle that is the disordered interconnectivity and delicate balance of the natural world. Kohn urges us to remember that the means and the meanings in the natural world are a “constitutive feature…not just something we humans impose upon it” (Kohn 16). It is in this way that we can appreciate the earth as something that exists for itself, not for our pleasure and convenience. Both Kohn and Merchant’s criticism of a mechanistic worldview fall away in the landscape of the post-apocalypse, where the human/nature collaboration returns, and where survivors are once again at the mercy of the disordered splendor of the natural world. Thus, post-

apocalyptic narratives offer a unique opportunity to explore how our relationship with nature could evolve past a mechanistic attitude towards the earth, and in turn, offer a world characterized both by human and environmental equity.

The apocalypse of the modern era is no longer a judgment day Revelation where an all-knowing deity descends from the clouds to purge the world of sinners in holy fire. Instead when we think of, write about, or conceptualize the apocalypse, it is generally man-made – an inherent assumption that one day, our greed and corruption will lead to us consuming ourselves. The apocalyptic event, resulting from the exploitation enabled by this mechanistic view of nature, is often figured as a kind of rape: a violent, traumatic, and non-consensual – often even penetrative (e.g. in the case of oil extraction or mining) – assault on Mother Earth. By the same token, sexual assault becomes a commonplace, all-too-human feature of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives. Each is an index of the other: the literal rape of women pointing to the metaphorical rape of Mother Earth and vice-versa, indicating that the same (or similar) logic is at work in both instances. It is significant then, that both Atwood and Hegland center their stories around figures of raped women in the post-apocalypse, understanding that these figures offer a way to comment both on what humanity has done to the earth and what humanity has done to women. The women in these novels represent an axis of abuse, and thus their role in survival driven novels offer alternatives to both the treatment of women and earth. In these narratives, the raped women find solace and survival in gardening and living in equilibrium with the earth, suggesting that this consensual relationship with the earth is the path to survival.

Worlds rushing headlong into their apocalyptic moment are almost invariably characterized by the opposite: wanton acquisition and despoliation of resources, human and otherwise. Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* series introduces a dystopian world characterized by

overconsumption, unchecked corporations, environmental abuse and a sexualized commodification of women. Anna Bedford explains that although there are many threats to pre-apocalyptic life in Atwood's narrative, "the most systemic and pervasive is capitalism and its value system predicated on individualism and profit" (Bedford 75). By valuing individual achievement and praising profit as the highest form of human success, a capitalist system encourages an instrumentalist view of the world and of other people. Val Plumwood agrees, arguing that:

> The same basic structures of self which appear in the treatment of nature as lifeless instrument also underlie the rational egoism and instrumentalism of the market, the treatment of those supposedly less possessed of reason as inferior, and as instruments for their far more civilized western neighbors (as in slavery, colonialism, and racism), and the treatment of women as inferior others whose norms of virtue embody a thinly disguised instrumentalism. (Feminism 143)

In the pre-apocalypse of *MaddAddam*, women are treated as instruments, used only for their value as sexual objects, especially in a capitalist context. Every prominent female character in the trilogy uses their own sexuality to gain agency in the economy in order to survive and some of the characters accept this as their only way to have power in the world. The titular character of Oryx was sold into child sex slavery at a young age, and remarks matter of factly: "Love was undependable, it came and then it went, so it was better to have a monetary value" (O&C 126). She saw the world in terms of "price," using her sexuality to "trade" to get things. To Oryx, there was no such thing as consent, "'Against my will…what is my will?'" (O&C 141), only a beneficial transaction or a non-beneficial one. Similarly, characters in *The Year of the Flood*, Amanda and Ren, two children who grow up together as a part of a vegetarian animal-rights

activist cult called the God's Gardeners, refer to offering sexual favors to men in exchange for something they want as "trading." Ren is taught this by Amanda, who has more real world experience outside the peaceful cult, and when the safety of the Gardeners collapses, she chooses to become a sex worker (despite having other job offers). In this way, the experience of women in the late stage capitalistic society is demonstrated by the commodification of their bodies as resources, a situation they themselves willingly accept because of the absence of the freedom of consent. In a world in which women's best chance for survival is using their own body to satisfy patriarchal structures, consent cannot exist. Oryx does not resist her position in her childhood and Ren may choose to become a sex worker, but they don't *consent* to their situation. In this way, they draw a parallel to the exploited earth – not able to offer resistance to its commodification – but not a consenting party.

On the other hand, the protagonist of *The Year of the Flood*, Toby, is a female character who manages to escape capitalist and patriarchal exploitation, through her transcendence of gender binaries and her closeness to the natural world. Toby was orphaned after her mother got poisoned by expensive health supplements that were supposed to keep her healthy, and then her father killed himself when he found himself in unescapable poverty due to pouring his money into his wife's health care. Thus, she is the product of two people who were gobbled up by an exploitative capitalist society, she notes that before his death there was "almost nothing left" of her father (YF 26). Just like female bodies, the lower class too is an instrument to be exploited by the dominant patriarchal elite. Toby is forced to use her body to try and keep herself alive. First, she takes a job as a "furzooter," which requires her to put on an animal suit and hold an advertising sign. At that position, she is routinely sexually assaulted – though safe within her suit – she still finds the "strange noises, of which the meows were the most recognizable" extremely

"creepy" (YF 31). Here, Toby is likened to an animal, used only for the pleasure of others, as she herself is dehumanized within the furzooter suit. She sells her hair, then tries selling her eggs, which works twice before she is accidentally sterilized by an infected needle. Forced to sell her femininity and fertility to stay alive, that too is consumed by her capitalist society. She then finds a job working at SecretBurgers, a chain notorious for not caring what meat goes into their burgers, offering their customers the occasional cannibalistic experience: "the meat grinders weren't 100 percent efficient; you might find a swatch of cat fur in your burger or a fragment of mouse tail. Was there a human fingernail once?" (YF 33). J. Brooks Bouson argues that this cannibalistic reduction of humans into meat is a symptom of a larger theme in Atwood's world – that Americanism, or "the American culture of violence and corporatization and commodification and unbridled consumption" (15) has reached global proportions. The cannibalistic corporations spread beyond the literal consumption of meat to a commodification of human bodies, in particular female or marginalized bodies, as fuel for their consumption.

Toby finds herself being consumed, not only by the cannibalistic capitalist society she lives in, but also by her repulsive manager Blanco, who makes her perform sexual acts in exchange for protecting her job and her life. With no where else to go, Toby has no choice but to submit to this rape. Anna Lindhe points out how Toby here "becomes someone's meat" (Lindhé 46), in essence serving as a consumable resource for men to exploit. Toby recounts that after Blanco's rapes he "demanded a thank you" since "his 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" (YF 38). Suffering under this abuse, Toby feels she will be "used up soon" (YF 38). Toby here serves as a metaphor for the Americanistic society she lives in – a patriarchal capitalist force is consuming her, but because she needs its protection to survive, she is forced to say thank you.

Though the society clearly suffers from ecological crises too, that aspect is relegated to the periphery of the trilogy, brief mentions of climate activism riots, hints that endangered species were dying out and sea levels were rising. Toby muses on the state of the world before humanity was wiped out: "Everybody knew. Nobody admitted to knowing…*We're using up the Earth. It's almost gone*" (YF 239). The language similarity between Toby's father: "almost nothing left," her own experience of being "used up" and that of the earth establishes an idea of consumption that draws a parallel between marginalized groups and the treatment of the earth. Toby is emblematic of the commodification of female bodies in the dystopian future – she is rendered infertile, deemed sexless by her androgynous, used up body – almost gone. Blanco's parting words to Toby when she escapes are: "I'll slice off your tits!" (YF 51). His last threat is a reminder of the violence and sense of ownership that is sanctioned in a world where women are viewed as resources. Even when she is free, Toby lives in fear of Blanco, certain he will find her and kill her, unable to free her body even in his absence.

When Toby is offered salvation from her consumption by Blanco, it comes in the form of the God's Gardeners cult, a group of militant vegetarians who believe that every life is sacred, and live sustainably off the earth in their rooftop sanctuary. Lindhé argues the Gardeners are a model for restoring a healthy relationship with the earth: "humanity, Atwood suggests, needs to restore the divine within, or those ethical aspects of human life which have somehow been lost: the caring other-oriented emotions of gratitude, charity, forgiveness, and love" (42). Thus, it is significant that Toby, who within the women/nature paradigm is symbolic of both mistreatment of women and nature, finds her freedom in a cult that lives in harmony with the earth. When she is safe with the Gardeners, Toby starts crying with relief and admiring the plants all around her: "each petal and leaf were fully alive, shining with awareness of her" (YF 43). Toby recognizes

life, even awareness, within the plants – after surviving her horrible ordeal she finds herself more appreciative of all life, and just like the shining plants, Toby comes back to life. As the years with the Gardeners pass, Toby celebrates a "new self," one that smells "like honey and salt…and earth" (YF 101). She is reborn from rape through gardening, and caring for the earth while she cares for herself. But it isn't until the post-apocalypse that she is able to reclaim her body entirely. After the plague wipes out most of humanity, both Blanco and Toby are among the survivors. Toby encounters him again, but this time, she holds all the power. Blanco lies dying, his leg rotting, "he's decaying" Toby realizes (YF 381). Toby offers him a drink, but has laced the liquid with powdered poisonous mushroom, a herb she learned of in the Gardeners from her mentor Pilar. Toby eventually took Pilar's place in the Gardeners as the teacher of holistic healing, so she knows what plants to eat, which ones could heal, and which could kill. In the landscape of the post-apocalypse, masculine strength and fear ceases to be the dominant power. It is the feminized attention to nature that allows Toby to kill Blanco, reclaiming her bodily autonomy.

In this way, Toby's character achieves something like Haraway's cyborg existence, as Susanna Rokka compellingly argues, she falls outside the gender binary and, furthermore, beyond the commodification of women's bodies. Having lost her fertility, Toby cannot have kids, and she exemplifies many traditionally masculine traits. Toby is described as a tree trunk, or a plank, "thin and hard" (YF 74), and her extremities "stiff and brown, like roots" (YF 19). She essentially lacks all of the ways her exploitative society conceptualizes women and resources. The Gardener children nicknamed her the "Dry Witch," "Witch because she was always mixing things up and pouring them into bottles and Dry because she was so thin and hard" (YF 61). They see her as "a hardass," "a rock." Rokka argues that Toby's characteristics make her "half

women, half something else," in essence a cyborg existence (Rokka 17). But I push back on Rokka's argument in one particular area – does Toby's evolution help her reach cyborg existence – or is that term outdated in the landscape of a post-apocalypse, perhaps even in poor taste? It was machines, and a masculinized obsession with advancement and genetic engineering, that led Toby's world to its ruin, that commodified her, raped her, and used her up. It is the natural world that brought her back to life. Toby exists as no cyborg, no human/machine. She is a woman/nature – a stubbornly surviving root, withered but determined and gentle. Toby's character acts as a bridge between the abuse of the earth and the consumption of women. Her character suggests that the cure for an abused and exploited world *is* one that transcends gender exploitation, but it isn't through the machine that this transcension takes place. It is instead the restorative practices of gardening, and Lindhé's "caring other-oriented emotions of gratitude, charity, forgiveness, and love" that save Toby's life and continue to guide her in the post-apocalypse. When she finds another survivor, Ren, a child in the Gardeners cult that Toby taught, she only briefly considers how Ren could bring illness and danger, choosing almost instinctively to heal her wounds instead. Ren has been captured by other surviving men and repeatedly raped and abused, and she is sick and injured. It is only the training of the Gardeners, and the memory of their pious leader Adam One that stays Toby's hand from slipping poison into Ren's medicinal soup and letting the girl peacefully slip away:

> Adam One would say that Ren is a precious gift that has been given to Toby so that Toby may demonstrate unselfishness and sharing and all those higher qualities the Gardener had been so eager to bring out in her. Toby can't see it that way, not at the moment. But she'll have to keep trying. (YF 358)

After this one moment of doubt, Toby finds herself wanting to "cure her, cherish her," for Ren is the end of a "ghost"-like existence that Toby feels she has been living in the post-apocalypse thus far; Ren brings her back to life. Toby treats Ren using mushrooms and maggots and medicinal plants – paying forward the holistic healing she received from the Gardeners when she was recovering from her own rape by Blanco. In fact, one of the men who abused Ren was Blanco himself, representing a cycle of abuse that is broken by Toby. She uses her knowledge of plants and healing to care for Ren, while turning the same power against Blanco to kill him. Toby is able to transcend the traditionally masculine definition of women – fertile, supple, delicate – while still maintaining her role of caregiver. In this way, she offers insight into a new model of ecofeminism – women/nature as powerful but sympathetic, strong but not selfish.

This concept of caregiving is given an especial intensity in Jean Hegland's *Into the Forest*, whose two main characters, Eva and Nell, live in a remote cabin, unsure if other humans even exist. What care means in these austere conditions is put to the test, as the sisters face a series of trials that irrevocably change them, and test their commitment to caring for each other and for themselves. Their first major struggle comes when their father dies after he mortally wounds himself with a chainsaw while cutting down trees for wood. His death, like Blanco's in *MaddAddam* (though he is a very different man from Blanco), is an indication the masculinized view of the earth as a resource is no longer the way to survive. The chainsaw machine and the act of deforestation bring only death and pain. After his death, the sisters live in both fear and in hope that they will find others, but it is their fear that turns out to be justified when Eva is brutally raped by a wandering man looking for gas. Heidi Hutner points out the deeper meaning of this moment: "A male invader searching for 'gas' rapes Eva because she refuses to give up their small remaining supply" (76). This event symbolically replicates much ecofeminist theory

that links the rape of the feminized earth (for oil in this case) with the rape of the female body" (Hutner 76). In this way, Eva's body is linked with the earthly natural resources that man has abused, in effect, this rape is a miniature version of the man-made apocalypse that the sisters live in. If we follow that metaphor, her recovery then serves as a symbolic message for how the earth may recover from its male led destruction, similarly to Toby's recovery in *MaddAddam*. And Eva, she finds her recovery in her sister, and in gardening, in living off the earth not as a resource, but as a part of herself.

Following her traumatic rape, Eva is terrified that every noise is danger; Nell sees every shape as "the figure I know is waiting for us" (IF 146). Eva cannot even be tempted to dance, though dancing was the sole passion of her pre-apocalyptic life and used to keep her occupied and happy after societal collapse. She sits, silent and broken, refusing to eat while her sister, also traumatized, contemplates killing herself. The sisters' recovery begins in the garden, on a sunny day where Nell feels the sun "like a hand on [her] shoulders" and she gently tills the earth with a renewed vigor to plant a few seeds their father left them. She persuades her sister out of the house to help, and slowly Eva seems to regain some strength and appetite. The therapeutic regimen proposed by Nell is actually confirmed by real-world science. Recent studies like that conducted by Hui Chen (2021) advocate for horticultural therapy as effective for depression recovery. Depression has physical effects on the human body – in particular this study focuses on the shrinking of the hippocampus. Gardening requires significant physical effort, which helps reduce the apoptosis rate of hippocampal cells. The exercise that comes from the physical act of gardening also causes fatigue – which leads to better sleep and increased appetite. The day she goes out into the garden, Eva eats a large meal for the first time in weeks, and is already showing

signs of improvement. Nell's prescription not only makes sense in novelistic terms, but in scientific ones as well.

Hegland's novel, however, departs radically (and controversially) from science in at least one important way. The turning point in Eva's recovery appears in perhaps the most criticized and controversial elements of the novel – an incestuous love scene between the two sisters. The taboo sexual relations between sisters is not presented as something shameful and dirty, but rather a moment where Nell provides physical comfort and salvation to her sister. It is only in the post-apocalypse, where all of the patriarchal social norms have broken down that this scene could have beauty and peace. The girls are not commodified by their bodies, sexuality is not something to be governed by rules, there are no disturbing power plays at hand, no sense of wrong. As Nell touches her sister she think that "for the first time since the rape, her flesh was not afraid, and I felt a joy rise within me, through my hands, up my arms, swelling in my heart because it seemed it was in my power to help my sister heal" (IF 159). Nell sees her touch as healing, as love. She thinks:

> *I love you*, my hands said. *Remember this body is yours,* they told her. *This body is yours. No one can ever take it from you if only you will accept it yourself, claim it again – your arms, your spine, your ribs, the small of your back. It's all yours. All this bounty, all this beauty, all this strength and grace is yours. This garden is yours. Take it back. Take it back.* (IF 160)

The parallel of beauty and bounty, of body and garden, work within the ecofeminist framework to urge Eva to find her own power through the reclaiming of the earth. This scene is about togetherness and yet simultaneously it is all about the self – sex not for pleasure or ownership but given, with love. Women, like the earth, have for so long been owned, used, thought to exist

because they have a purpose for men. This act between sisters is for no one but themselves, and as Nell compares her sister's "beauty" to "bounty" and parallels "this body is yours" with "this garden is yours," the reader understands that Nell is showing the path forward – for the traumatized women and the irrevocably damaged earth. It is through healing and gardening and blending the body and the earth that these girls have a future.

Following this scene, the sisters continue to garden, and slowly recover from the "fugue state" they had been living in (IF 228). Gardening can have physiological benefits to those who suffer from depression, as Chen suggests, but there are also psychological benefits to the practice of gardening as well. In fact many studies have proven that horticultural therapy is particularly effective to treat the trauma of sexual abuse survivors, as it encourages the victim to reconnect with the world around them, and focus on how plants can be used to fuel and support their own body (Watkins et al). In *MaddAddam*, Toby finds recovery from her sexual abuse in this way, by tending to plants, mushrooms, and bees. In studying how to heal the body using plants, she inadvertently heals herself. In *Into the Forest*, Eva and Nell were terrified by the threat of a male intruder, to the point that both of them had decided to give up, and in doing so surrendered control of their bodies to the unnamed man who raped Eva. When Nell tries to talk to Eva about gardening Eva says "it doesn't matter," and Nell agrees "You're right. It doesn't matter. We'll probably get killed before these seeds even sprout" (IF 154). But after that conversation, by tacit agreement, they both walk out of the house and get to work. In a world where they have nothing to lose, they make the choice to care for themselves, care for their bodies, and care for the earth around them. Chen explains that "For depression patients who are indifferent about the future, they become concerned with when to germinate, when to bloom, and even what kinds of plants to grow next season…these issues arouse concern for the future" (Chen 15). Months later, Nell

realizes instead of her worries that they were going to be killed, now: “I worry about when to plant and how to fertilize, and whether or not we’ll have enough water. I worry about diseases and insects and accidents. But I haven't wanted to be dead since the day I entered the garden” (IF 162). Horticultural therapist Mitchell Hewson, who studies the effect of the practice on PTSD explains:

> There is something magical and curative about the powers of nature as seen in the growth of a plant. Flowers perpetuate themselves with their seeds, constantly repeating the cycle. Nature is forgiving if a plant dies, another can be grown in its place… the life cycle of plants provides us with hope of life renewed and a chance to begin again. (Hewson 45)

In this way, the practice of gardening is a parallel to the second chance these female protagonists are given in the post-apocalypse, and the practice of gardening is significant when paralleled with Eva’s eventual birth of a child.

As Eva begins her recovery in the garden and the carefully planted seeds begin to stir in their warm beds of earth, so too does a child begin to form within Eva’s womb. Though the birth is difficult, Eva does carry the child to term, but the newborn boy does not serve as an emblematic symbol of humanity’s ability to procreate and repopulate the earth. Instead, it is after his birth that Nell and Eva feel compelled to burn down their old house and venture into the forest. Eva initially struggles to give birth, and Nell, desperate to help her sister, thinks “We must leave this house. If Eva is to survive, we must leave this place where she is stuck. If Eva is to be a mother, we must find some other way for her to give birth” (IF 213). Indeed, it is deep within the forest, huddled within a tree stump, where Nell feels they “finally matter” to the forest, that Eva pushes the boy into the world (IF 216). The boy is supposedly named Robert, but they nickname him Burl, like a growth on a tree, and he breastfeeds from both sisters. Mothered by

two sisters and birthed within a tree, Burl is not emblematic of the previous human race, but the future one. He is evolution in a single generation, as if the aftershocks of the trauma Eva had endured affected her womb – turning it from a place of reproductive procreation to a place of simple creation– Eva doesn't even think of Burl as her own but as his "own person" (IF 165). In this way, the women/nature ecofeminist parallel is pushed beyond just the power and recovery of nature, it becomes a launching point for a complete evolution of the human species.

The connection between women and nature is more than an age-old parallel used to relegate women to the role of docile mother and tamed nurturer. The women/nature coincidence can be used to point out the problem with our masculine conception of what it means to be human. Narratives where the apocalypse is brought about by man offer us ways to expose the failings of our society, our failings as a species. The crisis of *MaddAddam* and *Into the Forest* come about as a result of a masculine capitalist society that viewed the earth in instrumentalist terms. Val Plumwood explains that "the characteristics traditionally associated with dominant masculinism are also those used to define what is distinctively human" (Plumwood 25). For example it is seen as human nature to achieve "transcendence and intervention in and domination and control of nature, as opposed to passive immersion in it" (Plumwood 25). She explains how the "savage" stereotype is linked to a more passive immersion in nature, and thus thought of as less human. Therefore, the perception that the women/nature paradigm, or any comparison to nature, is harmful actually betrays an inherent assumption that the natural world is beneath human beings. Plumwood also stresses that by "dominant masculinism," she really means a certain type of masculinism that operates as the oppressor in not only the sphere of gender, but also race, class, and ecology. Thus, Plumwood argues that ecofeminism has the power to challenge Western rationalist ideals of humanity, working to dismantle masculinized oppression.

Both *MaddAddam* and *Into the Forest* offer ecofeminist narratives that demonstrate the dangers of masculinized exploitation to women and the earth alike. It is only in the post-apocalypse that these exploited women begin to heal, to thrive and recover from their trauma. In *MaddAddam*, women are treated as consumable resources, and it is only among the peaceful Gardeners, or in the tumultuous landscape of the post-apocalypse that they embrace their own worth and find the power to live on their own terms. Toby, especially, is a character able to transcend masculinized exploitation and commodification of her body – and in the post-apocalypse is finally given the space to choose her own path – and she chooses to care for others. In *Into the Forest*, Eva is able to heal from her traumatic rape through gardening, making the choice to keep living, to keep caring for herself. In both cases, the Westernized, masculine conception of what it means to be human is challenged – and ecofeminist alternatives are provided. They seem to suggest that an ecofeminist future is characterized not by commodification of women or the commodification of earth, but by a consensual choice to *care* for all beings, and for your own self. But that focus on self is intrinsically tied with caring for the earth, and for each other, a reversal of the self-centered capitalist views in the pre-apocalypse societies. As the protagonists of these novels move closer and closer to the natural world, the boundary between that which is human and that which is nature begins to blur, suggesting that in order to end the cycle of violence against women and the earth, we need to question what it means to be human entirely.

Human/Nonhuman

> "*Looking at animals, who look back at us, and who look with us, and who are also, ultimately, part of us, even though their lives extend well beyond us, can tell us something. It can tell us how that which lies 'beyond' the human also sustains us and makes us the beings we are and those we might become.*"
>
> - Eduardo Kohn

What makes us so separate from other animals, what makes us think we are better than trees, or machines? In this section I wish to explore the conclusion developed from the last – the idea that the conception of "humanness" must be challenged in order to take ecofeminist ideologies to further conclusions. Indeed, Atwood and Hegland offer glimpses into what this conception would look like, using the speculative nature of their novels to craft stories in which humanity evolves and changes in radical circumstances. As my ultimate goal of examining human/nature existence, I turn to a popularly discussed boundary: that between the human and the nonhuman. The "nonhuman" is a definition used to denote beings or things by what they are not; it is an inverse, a footprint left in the wake of humanity's large boots. Most commonly, "nonhuman" is used to describe animals, as if some inherent recognition of our similarities leads us to defensively call them something certainly *non*human. And by relegating something as nonhuman, it is implied that that being is not civilized, not individualistic, not the masculinized definition of human that was discussed in the last section. Thus, Atwood and Hegland suggest that evolutions towards the traditionally nonhuman may be essential for our survival, and the path to rejecting a masculinized oppressive definition of humanity. There are moments in their two narratives where the lines between human and nonhuman blur, in particular the relationships of humans and animals. The blur of the human/nonhuman contends with a long-held ecofeminist narrative, that of the partnership ethic, by suggesting that we must move beyond partnership into spaces of communion.

In the previous section, Merchant's *Death of Nature* explained how the perception of nature shifted during the Scientific Revolution into viewing the earth as an exploitable resource over which man had dominion. In her work *Reinventing Eden*, she offers a remedy to the previous exploitative attitude – what she coined as the "partnership ethic." Merchant's partnership ethic outlines a relationship with the earth that is predicated on several conditions:

- Equity between the human and nonhuman communities.
- Moral consideration for both humans and other species.
- Respect for both cultural diversity and biodiversity.
- Inclusion of women, minorities, and nonhuman nature in the code of ethical accountability.
- An ecologically sound management that is consistent with the continued health of both the human and the nonhuman communities. (*Reinventing* 68)

Let's look at the first condition, upon which her whole argument is based: "Equity between the human and nonhuman communities." In order to achieve this equity, humans must first shed the impression that we are a superior race, accepting not only animals, but every form of life and indeed non-living forms as equally significant. In *Into the Forest* and *MaddAddam*, we see moments where the human role gets decentered, and the nonhuman gains equity. The post-apocalyptic landscape allows nature to significantly gain back its power over humans, just as the human survivors evolve in ways that make them better equipped to survive. Equity begins to be rebalanced, but even more important than that, there are moments when human and nonhuman entities blend together, becoming for brief moments a blended human/nonhuman phenomenon. These human/nonhuman coincidences suggest that in order to succeed, Merchant's ideas of equity must be pushed even further. After all, to call for "equity" or "partnership" conveys that

on some level, the two groups are still distinct. In a truly evolved world, the "partnership ethic" between nature and humans would no longer be a necessity, as humans would have become as inherent to nature as leaves, rocks, or squirrels. In achieving this, the individualism created by masculine and capitalist societies that characterized modern conceptions of the human would be challenged, and "humanness" could move towards a definition more defined by relationality and interdependence – a piece in a larger ecosystem. Thus, I argue that the human/nonhuman conception is a necessary evolution of the partnership ethic – from an unsteady truce to an ecosystem of interdependent beings.

This level of integration is called by Kohn as "an anthropology beyond the human," a viewpoint that stresses the agency and importance of all beings. He explains a primary difficulty in ending the perception of dissimilar beings as a subordinate "other" arises from our inability to communicate with that "other." Donna Haraway agrees, as she points out that communication, to some extent, always involves communion, a sort of "becoming with" others, a communion that, if we could achieve, would allow us to see the world from a perspective that was not our own, challenge our inherent assumptions of anthropocentrism. Kohn explains that in order to achieve this becoming, communication must transcend language, using instead semiosis – a representational form of thought that all living things take part in. Semiosis is a way of seeing the world through signs, and all living things understand signs. For example, a sign of the sensation of cold could mean to trees it was time to drop leaves, to birds it was time to migrate, and to humans it was time to buy a Christmas tree. Even though it means a different thing to all creatures, each one understands the significance of "cold." Understanding through signs thus is a way of intuitive understanding that both the human and nonhuman use. But how can we communicate using semiosis? Kohn offers several "trans-species pidgins" – or ways to tap into

the collective semiotic thought of living things. One way, he suggests, is dreams, which he argues “are a kind of real” (Kohn 13), especially when understood not literally, but intuitively.

During his time with the Runa, Kohn came to realize that “sleeping in Ávila is not the consolidated, solitary, sensory deprived endeavor it has so often become for us” (Kohn 13). Instead sleeping is done surrounded by other people, in thatch roofed houses mostly exposed to the outdoors, where the noises of nature should be monitored, where continuous interruptions leave sleepers half-awake, where dreams become real and reality becomes dreams. To the Runa, dreams are shared, and indeed Kohn found that he shared dreams often with the others he slept near. Dreams are a space where things are understood primarily through semiosis rather than language, and promote a method of understanding the world that is more instinctual, and thus closer to the way the nonhuman would understand the world. Therefore, dreams can be used as a bridge between species, a phenomenon used in *Into the Forest* and *MaddAddam* to create a space where the human/nonhuman can exist.

In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, a Merchant partnership ethic can be seen even before the apocalyptic events that wipe out humans and their exploitative societies. The God’s Gardeners cult that Toby ends up joining has a religious system that values every life, even those of slugs and snails. Eating any kind of animal is seen as an affront to God, and the Gardeners live completely sustainably, recycling and reusing things that other humans throw away. Toby struggles a bit to accept all of the Gardener ideas, and the Gardeners cult falls apart even before the plague comes, suggesting perhaps that a partnership existence wasn't enough, especially when faced with the corrupt and eroding world around them. Nonetheless their relationship with the earth ensures that a good deal of the survivors were those previously exposed to Gardener teachings in some way. Indeed, it is Toby’s ability to garden that saves her when society

collapses. However, there are limitations to the Gardeners' way of thinking. Rokka argues that Toby's mentor Pilar was emblematic of the old "Earth Mother" rhetoric of essentialist ecofeminism that promoted a passive goddess worship and the nurturing role of the women. When Pilar dies, and passes the role of healer to Toby – a more nonbinary figure – she represents a move beyond essentialist ecofeminism into a relationship with the earth less focussed on binary thinking, especially as the post-apocalypse "catapults [Toby] into transformation" (Rokka 20). In this way, the *MaddAddam* trilogy suggests the partnership ethics perhaps enables too much of the dualistic thinking that separates humans and nonhumans.

In contrast to the Gardeners' partnership ethic, the outside society is completely indifferent to the treatment of animals, ruled by the scientific elite that take genetic engineering to its extremes. Naturally, given humanity's mechanistic view of the natural world, most of the genetic modifications changed animals to better suit humans – the ChickieNobs that reduced chickens to their edible meat so much that they became "thick fleshy tubes" (O&C 203) with a mouth at the top and no pain receptors, or the MoHair sheep that grew long colored hair for scalp grafts, or the pigs spliced with more and more human DNA so they would serve as better hosts for transplantable organs. The Pigoons, as these human/pigs were called, eventually became so advanced that they contained parts of human brain tissue. Like much of Atwood's dystopian designs, the Pigoons are based on real human efforts, as a movement to use pigs as organ donors for humans already exists. In fact, in January of 2022, the first successful pig heart organ transplant sustained a terminally ill man's life for more than two months. Monkeys and other primates may seem the obvious first choice in animal organ transplantation, but primates tend to be carriers of diseases deadly to humans, and there is a reluctance to kill the monkey, which does not fit so easily into the nonhuman category. Better it be pigs, who after all, we already mass

produce for meat. In *Into the Forest,* Nell seems to agree, deciding to kill a pig for meat because "there's not much to love about a pig – they're ugly and tough…it wouldn't be like killing a deer, with its soft eyes and dancer's legs" (IF 196). In Judeo-Christian literature, and in Muslim faith, pork is considered taboo because the meat is thought to be impure, prone to bacteria from dirty living conditions or from the pig's tendency to eat whatever it finds. And general opinion about pigs follows a similar line – they are thought of as dirty, almost vermin-like animals. To call someone a "pig" insinuates grotesque eating habits or general distastefulness. However, pigs share a remarkable genetic similarity to humans, and though they are not as close a relative as the monkey, it is the pig that has the ability to offer us organs to save human lives. It isn't until the pig is moments from being shot that Nell sees it suddenly as "startlingly beautiful" (IF 202). And it is the meat from the pig that saved her sister's life, and thus the future child within her.

The pigs in *MaddAddam* also become more than meat, as their human DNA makes them capable of complex thought, and eventually, cross-species communication. With the Pigoons, Atwood pokes fun at humanity, simultaneously likening us to no better than pigs, while also suggesting that pigs are just as worthy as us. When Toby shoots a Pigoon, she expects the other Pigoons to eat the remains. Instead, she finds fern fronds and flowers, some old and some fresh. Finding this image "truly frightening," she wonders: "Could the pigs have been having a funeral?" (YF 328). By the end of the novel the Pigoons have become characters in their own right, working together with the humans, establishing peace treaties, and getting revenge when one of their children is killed. The first moment of communication with the Pigoons comes when Toby is doing an Enhanced Meditation, a Gardener practice where one takes hallucinogens and meditates while seeking guidance. The drug induced mediation toes a similar line between reality and mind as dreams do, similarly acting as a trans-species pidgin. During her Meditation, Toby

speaks to a shrub that was placed on top of the grave of her old mentor Pilar. Believing Pilar's soul to be alive within the shrub, she begs her to send a sign about what to do with the women who have become pregnant from interbreeding with the Crakers, the new humanoid race genetically engineered to survive the apocalyptic plague. Just as she begins to doubt that Gardener meditations were nothing more than "child's play" (MA 222), a large pigoon sow appears, five of its children with it. When her male companions go to shoot it, Toby bids them to stop, in her drug-addled head thinking:

> Such enormous power. A bullet would never stop the sow, a spray gun burst would hardly make a dent. She could run them down like a tank. Life, life, life, life, life. Full to bursting, this minute. Second. Millisecond. Millennium. Eon.
>
> The sow does not move, Her head remains up, her ears pricked forward. Huge ears, calla lilies. She gives no sign of charging. The piglets freeze in place, their eyes red-purple berries. Elderberry eyes. (MA 223)

The sow is a mother, a matriarch, and a power beyond that of guns and men. To Toby she exists forever, but also in one single moment. The pigs' ears are flowers, their eyes are berries. The Craker boy that is with them can communicate with the sow, and sings to her. When the sow vanishes, he turns to Toby and says "'She was here'" (MA 223), speaking of Pilar. Toby also communicated with the pig, though "she couldn't put it into words…it was more like a current of water, a current of electricity. A long subsonic wavelength. A brain chemistry mashup" (MA 262). So through her drug induced vision, much like the Kohn's observations of the Runa people who take hallucinogenic drugs with their dogs to communicate with them, Toby reached the blended "mashup" form of human/nonhuman. A joining "current " ran through her and the pig, blurring their distinction. It is kneeling asking a bush to give her advice, seeing pigs made of

plants, and watching a humanoid Craker communicate through song to the pig, that Toby understands the future of humanity. It does not lie in the past, when wild pigs were shot, and humans only bred with other humans. Instead it belongs in an evolved form of Merchant's partnership world where that which is human, and that which is not, merge together. With this revelation, Toby embraces the Craker hybrid babies, understanding that they are the first step in evolving towards that partnership.

In *MaddAddam*, the pregnant women carry to term evolutions of the human race. Toby never becomes pregnant, having lost her fertility. However, she mentors over those who do, other raped women who find themselves beside her in the post-apocalypse. Amanda, a resourceful artist in the pre-apocalypse, and a determined survivor in the post-apocalypse, is raped by many men, but becomes pregant from the Crakers. The Crakers have a unique mating ritual in which four men mate with one willing woman – free of love, jealousy, or concern about who the father is. However, the Crakers misinterpret human women as always willing, and end up raping several human survivors. When children begin to be born they have inhuman green eyes and the humans wonder "what other features might these children have inherited? Will they have built-in insect repellent, or the unique vocal structures that enable purring and Craker singing?" (MA 380). The way that the Crakers mate render the identity of a single father impossible and thus create a baby that must be raised by a community. In this way, Amanda's baby is free from patriarchal ownership, born into a community of gardeners, and is symbolic of a generation evolving closer to the nonhuman and thus more equipped to survive with a human/nature identity.

In *Into the Forest*, Eva's baby similarly has aspects about it that situate it closer to nature and the natural world. The pregnancy also results from violent rape, a rape that symbolically acts

as a miniature representation of the whole apocalypse. Thus, as Eva chooses to keep the child and raise it as she recovers from her trauma through gardening, the child is symbolic of rebirth, a new generation raised upon care, and living in harmony with the earth. Just as the earth recovers from the metaphorical rape mankind has wrought upon it, so too does Eva recover as a child grows in her womb. The child is marked by the transformation that Eva and Nell are undergoing, and when he is born, he is closer to nature in many ways. It isn't until Eva is in the middle of the woods that she is able to give birth to him, and his human name "Robert" falls away to his more nature inspired nickname "Burl." Burl is a representation of the human/nonhuman in that he is characterized by human aspects but also by nonhuman ones. Though he is celebrated as his "own person," he is also portrayed as having elements of the nonhuman. As she advances in her pregnancy, Eva becomes weak as the child drains the life from her body – the sister's sparse vegetarian diet is not enough to satiate it. The nonhuman hungry fetus inside her makes her body a space of human/nonhuman – both a human woman but also irrevocably affected by another thing inside of her. When he is born, Nell must nurse him because Eva is too sick. She remarks that he is "like a little vacuum cleaner" (IF 221), reducing the child from a complex human to an automated machine. The image evoked is a Deleuzian "desiring-machine," a different take on the cyborg. Gilles Deleuze argued that humans are just mechanisms to "eat…shit…and fuck," and that "the breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth a machine coupled to it" (Deleuze 58). Deleuze was an anti-individualist, and used this argument against the Freudian concepts of the unconscious to argue that at its core, human desire renders the world machinic. The child is a key example of this idea of a desiring-machine, it cannot help any of its actions anymore than a vacuum cleaner can help the sucking force when it is turned on. In this way, the child is closer to the nonhuman than the traditional conception of the human. It has no free will,

no agency, and can only respond instinctively to stimuli. A child is generally valued above all else in human societies – but they are, in effect, human/nonhumans. In *Into the Forest*, this concept of the child as a nonhuman entity is presented side by side with the overall insistence that Burl is his own self. That is the human/nonhuman, caught within this contradiction – an existence that humbles the human while never removing their agency as selves entirely. The contradiction presented by Burl suggests that perhaps there should be no boundary or distinction between humans and nonhumans, that in general, humans are closer to animals or inanimate machines than we tend to acknowledge.

Nell's character offers another lens through which to see the blurring of the human and the nonhuman. As Nell evolves – shedding the comforts of society and living more wildly in the forest – she has a sequence of dreams about a black bear. In her first dream, the bear bites her head off, which should be a violent nightmare. Instead, Nell finds that she is not at all afraid, and when her head is gone, she can still see with "a lucidity I had never before imagined," even thanking the bear, thinking: "what an effort it was to have to lug my head around with me for so long" (IF 189). The bear taking off her head is symbolic of the evolution Nell is undergoing. Nell's pre-apocalypse character was a familiar silhouette of many youths of today – obsessed with studying for her exams, sights set on Harvard and a lifetime of academic achievement. For a character so concerned about grades, tests, and knowledge, to lose her head is to lose her previous understanding of humanity and what value as a person is. But when it is gone, she feels lighter, as if sophisticated academic thought were only a yolk around her true animal existence.

The power of dreams to transcend rationality and connect the human with the nonhuman is shown rather literally when Nell dreams that she is buried in the earth, her "arm and legs like taproots," while her skull "expands as though I were absorbing the above ground world and the

sky through my eye sockets" (IF 206). She becomes the earth, not only an embodiment of the woman/nature coincidence but also the human/nonhuman. She is larger than the sum of her parts, allowed, in her dream state, to reach connection, and indeed communion, with the earth around her. Later in the book, and deeper into her character development, Nell dreams again of the black bear:

> *I dreamed she bore me from the hot mystery of her womb, squeezing me down the tunnel of herself, until I dropped, helpless and unresisting, to the earth. Blind and mewling, I scaled her huge body, rooting until the nipple filled my throat. Later, her tongue sought me out. Lick by insistent lick, she shaped the naked lump of me, molded my body and senses to fit the rough tug of her intention. Lick by lick, she birthed me yet again, and when she was finished, she shambled on and left me – alone and Nell shaped – in Her forest*. (IF 230)

If the bear biting off Nell's head was symbolic of the beginnings of her evolution, this dream is her rebirth – out of the womb of an animal. She is birthed naturally from the womb, but also through the bear's "intention," as not "Nell" but something "Nell-shaped"– becoming not a human being, but only another creature among the thousands within the forest. Kohn writes that dreams "grow out of and work on the world, and learning to be attuned to their special logics and their fragile forms of efficacy helps reveal something about the world beyond the human" (Kohn 13). The dream works as a trans-species pidgin to reveal the deeper connection between all life. In the dream world, Nell can become the child of bears, with arms like taproots, and eyes filled with sky – to emphasize her final conclusion – she is also just another mewling creature in a vast ecosystem. When she returns from this dream to the cabin in the clearing she sees the house "with the eyes of a forest creature" as "a lair, reeking of chemicals and stale flesh, harsh and

cramped, leaking and crumbling" (IF 233). It is symbolic of her transformation that Nell returns to her childhood home, a place she thought of fondly, and finds it wholly repulsive; she is in this moment half Nell, half forest creature: the human/nonhuman. The house which for so long had been a place of refuge and safety is now unwelcome in the otherwise undisturbed forest. When Nell notices that the house is filled with "chemicals," that are "leaking and crumbling," it evokes images of pollution and poisoning of the earth. It is apparent the house has become more than just the building. It represents the legacy of humanity on this earth and is a blight and an affront to the human/nonhuman being Nell has become. Nell, Eva, and Burl eventually burn down their house, when they realize it has nothing left for them. Their journey from traditional modern teenagers to wild forest creatures is necessary for them to survive in their new world, but it also offers a suggestion about how to avoid their earth's fate - the key to a world free from exploitation and destruction of the natural world is the destruction of the human and nonhuman boundary.

Plumwood explains that the human and nonhuman divide arises from an idealized Western definition of human that "maximizes the difference and distance from the animal, the primitive and the natural; the traits thought distinctively human, and valued as a result, are not only those associated with certain kinds of masculinity but also those unshared with animals" (Plumwood 25). By focusing instead on the similarities between humans and nonhumans, Atwood and Helgand's narratives offer a glimpse into how to contest this idealized Western definition by creating characters that commune with animals. Speculative fiction holds the power for us to imagine that which is outside of our current existence. Of course that imagination is always limited by a human perspective – the author, though capable of pure creation, is still limited to see the world through the eyes of a human. However they can imagine a character

where this is not the case. When Toby speaks to pigs, when Nell is reborn from a black bear, they imagine the experience of seeing beyond the human. In these moments, the self is challenged, smeared across existences. If communication always involves communion, then these post-apocalyptic narratives do not just involve moments when the human and nonhuman boundary begin to blur and meld, they offer an insight into what the transformation of the self entirely could look like. So then, if it is in these moments of communion that true evolution can be found, what is the role of the self? Is the self lost, or does it become something more in its communion?

Individual/Collective

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)
- Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

We tend to think of the self in one of two ways: a fixed (and sometimes predetermined) indication of individual identity or an evolving relational phenomenon inextricable from outside influences. As with women/nature, and human/nonhuman, I am arguing that the boundary between individual and collective self is not a boundary at all, but instead a moment where the two can exist, and create something bigger. In Atwood and Hegland's narratives, ideas of self are challenged as the definition of humanity is called into question. As previously established, these two post-apocalyptic tales create worlds in which humanity is questioned and encouraged to reach out beyond itself and commune with nature, in effect moving towards a more collectivist relationship with nature and the nonhuman. However, elements of naming and celebration of selfhood are present as well, which ground the more collectivist ideas by establishing the power of knowing and owning your own selfhood. Thus, the individual/collective is present within

these novels as an encouragement to reach beyond individualized existences, but never lose sight of the diversity and uniqueness a variety of selves can bring.

The conception of the self as collective seems immediately more relevant to the discussion within this paper. This type of selfhood can perhaps be summarized by Walt Whitman's infamous line "I contain multitudes" from his poem "Song of Myself," a poem that was criticized for being overly self-centered when it was first received. This poem was later celebrated by many influential authors and several queer figures (Whitman himself was also believed to be queer) as a statement of anti-individualism. It rejected labels, binaries, and the idea that human existence is an individual act. For this reason Whitman became a kind of lodestone for influential philosophers like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who referenced Whitman's milieu in their work arguing that there is in fact no such thing as the individual, as conceptions of identity are only a deception summoned to obscure the true nature of reality. They declared that beings don't exist as individuals, but in relation to one another, and the true interest of a being is their "becoming," which is defined as an amorphous quality that exists in contrast to permanent being. In the previous section, the becoming of characters was examined through the lens of a blur of women/nature and human/nonhuman. Toby's becoming was towards a genderless figure, Nell's becoming was towards a forest creature. Here, "becoming" is a sense of motion with no direction; it is evolution with no final form. It is the idea that selfhood and identity are not bound within the framework of the individual, but spread like the air we breathe to all beings who we shape and in return, who shape us.

However, this line of thinking can go too far. Within the sphere of environmentalism, there is a holistic philosophy called deep ecology, which, like ecofeminism, strives to reconcile the "hyperseparation" between human and nature. Environmental philosopher Val Plumwood

coined the phrase “hyperseparation” to elucidate the structures of dominance that pervade Western binaries in order to relegate one as subordinate. For example binaries like nature and culture, female and male, or savage and civilized, award one side of the binary with value, which forces the other side to assume a position of relative subordination. While Plumwood disagrees with the dualistic thinking such hyperseparations encourage, she criticizes the methodologies of deep ecology. Deep ecology argues for increased ability to “identify with” nature through the development of the “the expanded self,” “the transcended self,” and eventually “the indistinguishable self,” (Plumwood 12). These shifting and vague selfhoods offer a way for the human to shed their individualism, accepting that they, and all organisms are equal parts of a much larger whole. In the context of this paper, the expanded, transcended, or indistinguishable self could be argued to appear in moments where women and earth, or human and nonhuman overlap. However, the problem with deep ecology, Plumwood argues, is:

> The origins of the particular opposition involved in the human/nature dualism [are] unaddressed and unanalyzed. Deep ecology is so eager to encourage understanding that it blows past diversity and distinction, homogenizing as a way to promote unity. It’s a patriarchal, colonialist method to achieve harmony (which starts to look a lot like order) (Plumwood 12).

Thus, some element of the self is needed in order to prevent the erasure of diversity. Val Plumwood, as well as many other environmentalists turn to the idea of a “self-in-relation” or the relational self, as the alternative. This definition focuses on the importance of the “self” rather than the “individual,” an important distinction. In the Oxford English Dictionary, an individual is defined as a “single” or “distinct” entity. A “self,” on the other hand, is defined as:

> A person's or thing's individuality or essence at a particular time or in a particular aspect or relation; a person's nature, character, or (occasionally) physical constitution or appearance, considered as different at different times…Any of various (typically conflicting) personalities conceived of as coexisting within a single person. (OED)

Self is defined as both inherent ("individuality or essence") and changeable (in "relation…different at different times"), as opposed to individuality, a rational concept falsely born from the notion that a being can exist wholly "distinct" from everything around it. Adding the idea of relationality into the concept of self emphasizes the idea that self is evershifting based on aspects, relations, and times – existing in multitudes. However, the relational self still has some measure of our unique "essence," preventing a homogenisation like the order suggested by deep ecology. Keeping in the themes of my work, I call the phenomenon of the relational self the individual/collective.

To begin, I turn back once again to the idea of the pregnant figure. There exists so much debate and argument over whether a pregnant person is one human or two, while really they are both one and two beings at the same time– a mother/child, an individual/collective. It is this quality that allows pregnant women to drive stories of the apocalypse, as they are creatures of both the past and the future. In moments when the Earth is undergoing radical change – caught between the destruction of the past and the rebirth of the future, the pregnant woman (especially the raped pregnant mother) is undergoing a parallel radical change. The womb is a place of evolution and potential, just like the natural landscape of the post-apocalyptic world. And the babies, born of the post-apocalyptic mother/child amalgamation, are born in Atwood and Hegland's narratives as humans that reject binary existence and individualism. In fact, both narratives outline arguments for selfhood that fall into the individual/collective experience. They

offer elements of both deep ecology ideas and individualistic notions, but land on the middle ground, suggesting that neither collectivism nor individualism work as a mode for mending human and nature relations, it must be a blend of the two.

In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood crafts a narrative where individual/collective existence is key to the survival of the human race. The *MaddAddam* apocalypse is brought about by one man named Crake, who embodies the mindset of deep ecologists, thus hinting at a warning of the dangers of that mindset. Crake genetically engineered a plague to wipe out all of humanity because he saw them as a ruined species, destroyed by their own selfishness. When his friend declares that humans are "'doomed without hope,'" he answers cheerfully 'Only as individuals'" (O&C 120). Thus, Crake designed his Craker humanoid beings to be removed of all the elements that make humans individualistic, successfully making a working model of a fully collectivist society. The Crakers have no sexual desire, no jealousy, sense of ownership, or greed. They are vegetarian, eating their own excrement like rabbits or munching on invasive species of plants. They mate in groups of four, so even the children are not distinct in any way, with no specific ties or potential for traditional family units. With the Crakers, Crake achieves the theoretical deep ecology being: transcended, expanded and indistinguishable selves – living as one with nature and with each other. But many critics point out that for all their supposed perfection, the Crakers fade into "voiceless allegories for the potential of genetic engineering…They are present without ever really featuring as characters – rather they seem to be living props" (Schmeink 102). Even the names of the Crakers: Abraham Lincoln, Blackbeard, Marie Curie, evoke hollow images of more dynamic humans – ghosts of real selves. In some ways, the Crakers are emblematic of a man's view of what the perfect humans would look like too, echoing Plumwood's sentiments that deep ecology is a patriarchal way of viewing the world.

The Crakers all have perfect bodies, the women have "no ripples of fat around their waists, no bulges, no dimpled orange cellulite on their thighs…no body hair, no bushiness" (OC 100). But when the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy, sees the female Crakers, they arouse no lust in him. He finds them "placid, like animated statues. They leave him chilled." (OC 100). As Jovian Parry explains: "the Children of Crake, for all their innocence and peaceful ways, are fundamentally nonhuman – are fundamentally subhuman" (Parry 252).

It is only when the Crakers begin to significantly interact with the surviving humans that they become characters in their own right. Blackbeard, only a boy at the beginning of the trilogy, takes a liking to Toby, who finds herself in charge of explaining the world to the naive Crakers through tales of the pre-apocalypse that harken to our ancient myths or folktales. Toby teaches Blackbeard to write, and he begins to conceptualize his existence as a self. The first thing she teaches him is how to write his name, "it means you, your name" and he is confused: "That is not me…it is only some marks," but after another human reads his word aloud he exclaims "It said my name…it told my name!" (MA 203). Naming is linked to relationality early on at the beginning of *The Year of the Flood* when Toby, wearing clothes with the wrong name tags, muses "there's no need to label [my]self now that there is no one left to read the labels" (YF 17). Names are indicated then to be necessary for other people to conceptualize the one who is named. Toby is thinking of names in the pre-apocalyptic sense – as labels. It is Blackbeard, the being of the post-apocalypse, that sees naming in a different way. He takes over Toby's storytelling, so that the reader hears the end of the *MaddAddam* trilogy through Blackbeard's own words. He writes again and again "I am Blackbeard… I (Blackbeard)...He (I, Blackbeard)" explaining to the reader "If you look at this writing I have made, you can hear me (I am Blackbord) talking to you, inside your head" (MA 376-79). Writing and names (as self

conception, not as labels) offer a way of understanding that the self is more than just an individual. Blackbeard is a collectivist Craker, but given an individualistic label, and thus he is able to use his name as something that allows himself to smear into the minds of other people. As Blackbeard points out writing, like dreams, like visions, is here a trans-species pidgin – a way to communicate "inside your head" to another. His insistence over and over again "I am Blackbeard" is not just a confirmation of his own individual identity, it is a recognition that his being, through language, exists in the conceptions of others, thus he has an effect on them; in essence his selfhood extends into other minds.

The idea of naming as a phenomenon of the individual/collective appears in *Into the Forest* as well. Near the end of the novel, Nell muses: "Before I was Nell and the forest was trees and flowers and bushes. Now the forest is *toyon, manzanita, wax myrtle… red thistle*, and I am just a human, another creature in its midst" (IF 176). Here too there is a distinction drawn between the pre-apocalypse labels and the post-apocalyptic names. Nell describes herself as a human, rather than as Nell to emphasize her greater connection with the ecology of selves that makes up the forest. However, over and over again the reader is reminded of Nell's mother's words to Nell as a child, a line the sisters pass on to their son Burl: "you are your own self." Nell may be a small piece in a large forest of selves, but that does not mean she is lost among them. Burl's name too represents the individual/collective– he is referred to as his own self but his name Burl means the growth on a tree, a name symbolizing his reliance on Nell and Eva. The two coexist in *Into the Forest* in a radical way – rejecting both entire collectivism and entire individualism.

The idea of selves rather than individuals also aids in the ecofeminist reading of women overcoming their commodification as resources. For individuals can be owned by others, but selves can only be owned by yourself. Nell idly reading an encyclopedia comes across this quote:

> *The oldest use of the word 'virgin' meant not the physiological condition of chastity, but the psychological state of belonging to no man, of belonging to oneself. To be virginal did not mean to be inviolate, but rather to be true to nature and instinct, just as the virgin forest is not barren or unfertilized, but instead is unexploited by man. Children born out of wedlock were at one time referred to as 'virgin-born.'* (IF 109-110)

Here Hegland establishes a distinction between individual and self. Virgin used to be a characteristic of owning your own self, a trait only lost when a woman was relegated to an individual – when she belonged to a man. The sisters in the novel become this definition of virgins, owned only by themselves, able to copulate and procreate without ever losing their divine selfhood. And the earth they exist upon can also keep that virginity, as they live in harmony with it, not exploiting it.

When Nell leaves their old cabin to live solely in the forest she muses: "My life fills this place, no longer meager, no longer lost or stolen or waiting to begin. I drink rain and it quenches an ancient thirst. This is no interlude, no fugue state" (IF 228). "Meager," "lost," "stolen," "waiting to begin," all descriptions that could apply to female existence in a patriarchal world where women are sold into marriage or slavery, owned by husbands, and raped by men. It is deep within the forest, as Nell sheds her humanity that she finds her selfhood, and is able to transcend those patriarchal bindings. Nell eventually returns to the house and finds Eva and Burl ready to leave with her. They burn down the house, a symbolic rejection of the last vestiges of societal humanity. Nell leaves behind the books she so dearly loved, her calculator, her letter

from Harvard. She no longer wishes to use her knowledge to gain the approval of patriarchal institutions like Harvard, instead she uses her knowledge to identify plants, to hunt pigs, and to live off the earth. Eva leaves behind her prized dance toe shoes, and as the house burns, Eva reclaims her selfhood too. Nell watches as Eva "danced a dance that sloughed off ballet like an outgrown skin and left the dancer fresh and joyous and courageous…she danced the dance of herself" (IF 240). She no longer worried about the eyes of viewers, the beauty and grace of her dance was only for herself. The girls leave behind everything that society once told them they needed to succeed as individuals, and go to live in the forest as their own selves.

Plumwood argues that dualism is a sort of binary thinking that does not work when trying to move towards a new conception of the self in non-masculinized terms. Dualism inevitably results in a side with more power and a side with less; it allows the dominant side to oppress the other. Thus, in order to strive for a world without oppression, the very notion of selfhood entirely needs to be restructured to focus on relationships rather than categories. By defining selfhood as something both inherent and relational, it becomes a concept that defies dualism entirely. Atwood and Hegland's narratives link both singular individualism and singular collectivism with the failed pre-apocalyptic worlds, and offer moments in the post-apocalypse that are individual/collective– both and neither and something new all at once. In doing so, these narratives offer glimpses at a potential new existence – a perpetual becoming – that would break the legacies of exploitation and abuse so ingrained into humanity.

Conclusion: Human/Nature

> *In our efforts to rise above ourselves, we have indeed fallen far, and are falling still...Ours is a fall into greed: why do we think that everything on the Earth belongs to us, while in reality we belong to Everything?*
>
> - Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*

*Into the Fores*t and *MaddAddam* are works that look to humanity's future, following our flaws to their most disastrous conclusions, but also enhancing our strengths to draw out our most unlikely capabilities. Our greatest flaw, they caution, is our perception of the earth as a resource, something that exists for our pleasure. This line of thinking is dangerous because it parallels the way in which humans tend to view the subordinate other as something to exploit for an advantage. In these narratives, marginalized groups become commodified bodies for consumption, animal DNA is rewritten for human's advantage, and women are used as objects for male sexual pleasure. But the remedy for these dangers lies within us too, in the capacity we have for care, connection, and evolution. Our greatest strengths, these narratives advise, lie in the love and compassion we can show to others, in the communication we can achieve, and in the reclaiming of our own selfhood and internal power. It is within the natural world that we can learn to show care again by investing in the future of a planted seed, trying to speak the language of pigs, or giving birth within the trunk of a tree. Partnership with the earth is not enough, we must also achieve communion.

It is significant that both Atwood and Hegland's narratives take place in the upper areas of North America, as notions of partially collective selfhood and a human and nonhuman relationship that goes beyond partnership are ideas that already exist today in non-Western cultures. In general, non-Western cultures emphasize a collectivist relationship with nature, whereas Western cultures promote a more individualistic and dominating relationship. Western ideas of nature, as Carolyn Merchant points out, are based on ideas of control and an expectation

of mechanized subservience. Non-Western conceptions of nature, however, focus on harmony, connection, and a sense that nature has power that equals or exceeds that of mankind. In the Shinto religion, for example, there are animals that possess human speech, or toads with knowledge even gods do not know. And Buddhist thought promotes the harmony of human and nature as idealized existence. The idea of individualized self is also already contested by marginalized groups. Fred Moten in his book *Black and Blur* (part of a trilogy titled "consent not to be a single being") writes about how the Black experience is one made of a multiplicity of identities smearing across cultures, borders, and conventions. He writes using *me* and *we* as interchangeable, unsettling the reader by convincing them that he is not one person – but an amalgamation of experiences, influences, and identities. Thus Moten coins a sort of me/we conception of identity; as Whitman would say, "me" contains multitudes. Kohn, too, uses this sort of terminology about the Runa people when he explains that they have much to teach us about "how we might become new kinds of *we*, in relation" (Kohn 23). As Fred Moten puts it:

> You can't count how much we owe one another. It's not countable. It doesn't even work that way. Matter of fact, it's so radical that it probably destabilizes the very social form or idea of 'one another.' But, that's what Édouard Glissant is leading us towards when he talks about what it is 'to consent not to be a single being. (Fred Moten and Harney, 154)

The idea of "another," which in history and politics usually becomes the inferior "other," has been the keystone on which Western cultures rationalized colonialism for centuries. Indeed the idea of the "other" has been the basis for exploiting and abusing since the beginning of humanity. In some ways, Atwood and Hegland's narratives are moments where Westernized culture is forced, through the events of the post-apocalypse, to view life in a new, non-Western way. In fact, in *Into the Forest*, Nell uses the recorded knowledge of indigenous tribes to guide

her as she learns to live off the earth, and it is only with their guidance that she and her sister survive. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, it is the capitalist "Americanism" of the world that is leading to earth's destruction, and it is holistic practices and living in harmony with the earth that enables survival. In both novels, the pre-apocalypse takes place in a society with a hyperseparation between human and nature, a characteristic shattered in the post-apocalyptic world where nature and humanity are intertwined once again.

As Plumwood argues, the idea of a dualized relationship between human and nature (with human on top) is a "logic of colonialism" (40), an echo of the subordination that colonial powers demanded from those they colonized. In order to remedy these conceptions, Plumwood urges that the best anti-dualism strategy is not a reversal of hierarchies, but a redefining of the categories altogether. For instance, the way to break free of the men and women dualism (with men on top), is not to push for women's equality or superiority, but to question the notion of gender itself. Atwood and Hegland create narratives that do flip the human and nature hierarchy, giving nature an edge over humans – but they don't stop there. They use this fictional environment of the inverted hierarchy to imagine a world in which the definition of "human," "nature," and ultimately "self" can be contested. It is in their unlimited world of creative fiction that these books, though not laws or reforms themselves, have an impact. As Lawrence Buell points out:

> For technological breakthroughs, legislative reforms, and paper covenants about environmental welfare to take effect, or even to be generated in the first place, requires a climate of transformed environmental values, perception, and will. To that end, the power of story, image, and artistic performance and the resources of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural theory are crucial. (Buell vi)

Humanity loves post-apocalyptic narratives because they give us a chance to start over – to redefine ourselves in the absence of societal structures, gendered expectations, and institutionalized corruption and oppression. Atwood and Hegland take this second chance and write narratives where humanity learns from its mistakes and sheds an instrumentalist view of the earth in favor of a new way of living – what I have defined as the human/nature. The human/nature contains coincidences of women/nature, human/nonhuman, and individual/collective, to evolve beyond the popular ecofeminist paradigm of the partnership ethic. Though the term partnership ethic was coined in the 1980s, it is an idea that most ecofeminists base some semblance of their argument upon, and is a popularly referenced line of thinking amongst critics of *MaddAddam* and *Into the Forest*. The other field of thought when it comes to human and nature relations is deep ecology, which argues that humanity must achieve a transcended self that becomes indistinguishable from nature. The idea of the human/nature situates itself along the line between the two, offering a frame of reference for something that isn't just human, or nature, but the two working together to create something bigger. It challenges the dualistic thinking that divides in reductive ways while preventing homogenisation that erases diversity.

Atwood and Hegland create narratives led by strong female protagonists that have been abused and exploited by men, which immediately establishes their post-apocalyptic stories with an ecofeminist theme, a paradigm of thought that has received criticism for being anti-feminist in its connection of women as the nurturing, delicate earth. But these characters – Oryx, Amanda, Ren, Toby, Nell, and Eva – are anything but delicate. They are not peaceful earth mothers, arguing for a deep spiritual female connection with nature. They are fighters, women who transcend gender binaries, who wrestle for the reclamation of their bodies and in doing so, break

the idea of what it is to be human entirely. But they are not Haraway's cyborgs either, for the landscape around them is not machinic, but natural. They reveal that the pre-apocalyptic definition of "human" was actually a Westernized, masculinized definition: humans should be civilized, dominant, technologically advanced, better than animals, and stronger than plants. The women in these novels are wild, they are caring, they talk to animals as equals, and respect plants as having the power to heal or kill. In these narratives, we see Buell's "transformed environmental values, perception, and will" taking shape, and they tell us that a future where we heal, where we can come together; it is not cyborg, it is human/nature.

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