

Dissonance and Harmony: An Ecocritical Reading of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*

Abstract

The article explores the positive and negative facets of nature and harmonious coexistence of human being with nature. The article depicts the struggle and submission of the protagonist in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to analyze comparatively how dissonance and harmony can be figured out in two novels, namely "*Oryx and Crake*" by Margaret Atwood (2003) and "*Hatchet*" (1987) by Gary Paulsen in figure 2, in order to establish the relationship of human beings with environment. To do this, an Ecocritical theory has been used from an ecological perspective. In recent times, people are living in a chaotic world pursuing materialistic things that overburdened their state of mind. Their relationship with nature and the environment is cut off. Therefore, an attempt has

been made to justify the main title of this research using Ecocriticism.

A Brief Overview of Ecocriticism

'Ecocriticism' is a term coined by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay on 'Literature and Ecology: an experiment in ecocriticism' (Glotfelty xxviii). Ecocriticism is a concept first discussed in the meetings of the Western Literature Association in 1970. Ecocriticism that started in America has taken its literary bearings from three major nineteenth-century American writers – Ralph Waldo Emerson (Nature and Selected Essays), Margaret Fuller (Summer on the Lakes), and Henry David Thoreau (Walden). Now, it is necessary to understand what ecocritics do while analyzing a literary text from an ecological perspective.

"*Oryx and Crake*"

Margaret Atwood (born in 1939, Ontario, Ottawa) is regarded as one of Canada's finest living authors. She is an evangelist, novelist,

literary critic, and environmentalist. She has won the Booker Prize award, Franz Kafka, and many more. Her renowned work "*Oryx and Crake*" (2003) illustrated in figure 1 is Science fiction, Adventure romance, and Dystopian novel. In this novel, Snowman is the protagonist who is the only survivor of the Global pandemic that occurred in his past. The novel opens in the post-apocalyptic world in which Snowman recounts his life in the past and present memories along together. He is the only one who has compassion towards nature and the environment yet with some deformity with his morals.

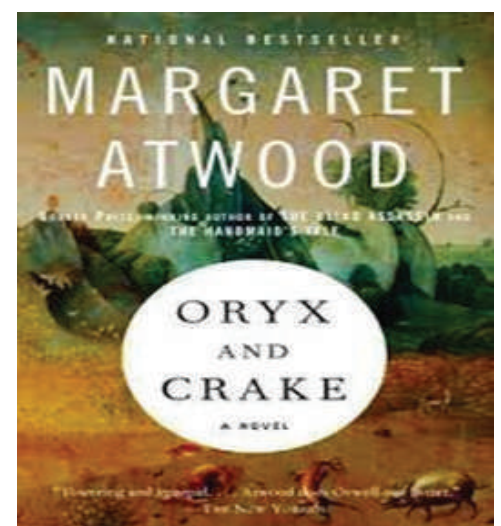


Figure 1 (Atwood, 2013)

“Hatchet”

Gary Paulsen (born in 1939, Minnesota, United States), a leading American writer of Young Adult literature and the Wilderness. His notable work “Hatchet” illustrated in figure 2 depicts the story of 13 years old Brian Robeson and his journey to the north woods of Canada in order to meet his father. During his journey, he comes across the harsh challenges in life. But he made successful attempts to survive alone in the wilderness. This research will try to find out the harmonious relationship which Brian framed with wild animals and the environment in the wilderness.

Literature Review

Katherine V. Snyder in her major article deliberates on Atwood’s imaginative world. *Oryx and Crake* and highlights the traumatic experiences of Snowman who feels disturbed because of the extreme scientific progress and rationality of Crake and his father. In her article, she tries to ask an individual if one can think of the world where complete isolation overrules the human race. In the end, she discusses in her article the post-apocalyptic vision that Atwood framed in her realistic fiction *Oryx and Crake*.

The next significant work on *Oryx and Crake* is by

Lars Schmeink. His chapter postulates the concept of Anthropocene and Post-humanism. This chapter includes the debate on posthuman theory and for comparison, the author has used works of Paolo Bacigalupi. In both works, the world has undergone social, political, and ecological changes. The author says that the world of Atwood’s novel is uninhabitable. The rational mindset of people and their desire to create ideal state has drastically affected the natural environment. Crake’s project on developing genetically modified humans is something unnatural.

Research Methodology

As discussed earlier in an introductory section about Ecocriticism, it embodies a number of literary approaches in the literature. Ecocriticism is like a vast ocean; it has no single thread having a kind of dominance because it is in itself diverse and eclectic. Also, Ecologists and Ecofeminists can blend concerns like social injustice, gender; and race using an ecocritical standpoint.

Comparative Literature as a Methodology

In this work, using comparative study not only distinctions can be drawn out how Snowman and Brian’s life changed when they adapted to nature but also their relations towards the natural world including animals can be figured out with a deep observation.

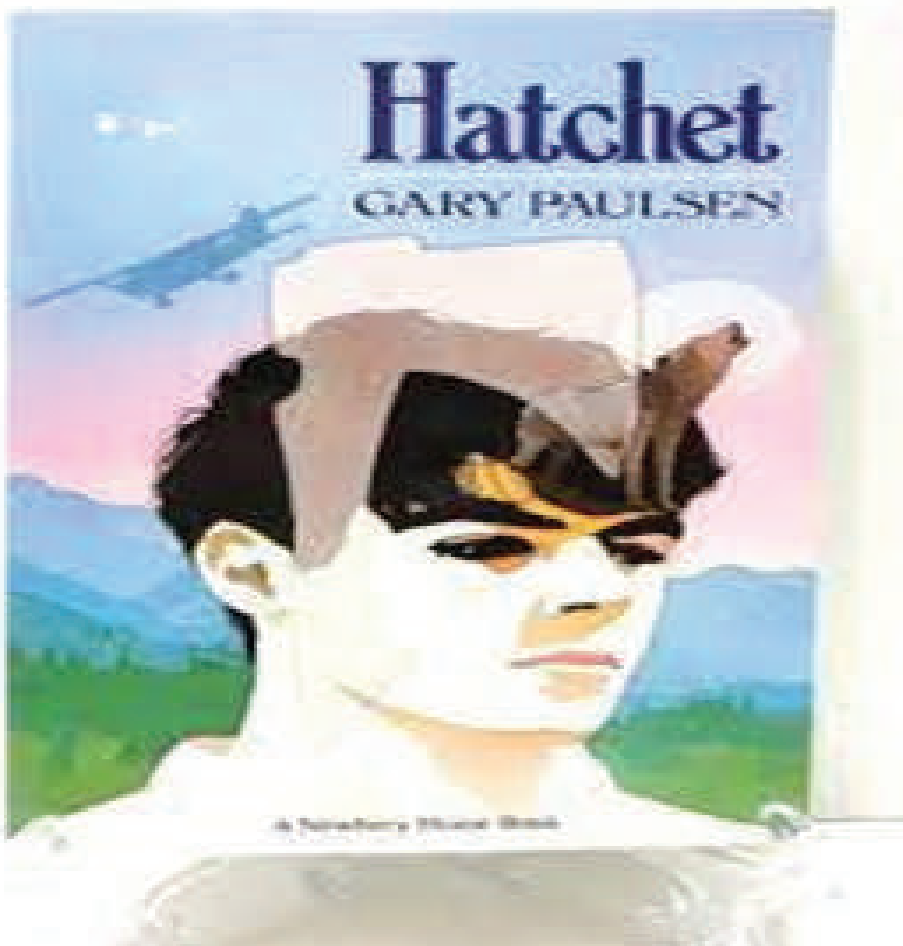


Figure 2 (Paulsen, 1987)

Furthermore, this research is qualitative. A qualitative study is relatively better than a quantitative study because it helps to gain some insight into a particular aspect. For an in-depth analysis of these two novels, a qualitative study has been used.

Scientific Advancement and Dissonance

The novel's very first chapter shows the post-apocalyptic world where the Sun poses a hazard, and the ocean is filled with piles of rusting junk. The pre-apocalyptic world of this novel is full of Science and Technology. Research labs and companies are focusing on Transgenic research. In order to get progress, these companies drove out human civilization over the edge. Jimmy's father has worked on the Pigeon project. He created a hybrid pig creature to grow human kidneys and cells. Jimmy's friend Crake has a keen interest in Genetic engineering. He is discovering his projects like the BlyssPlus pill and a new race of genetically mutated humans. There is a conflict between science and nature in the novel. Except, Jimmy all other characters are fully involved in scientific experiments due to which their relationship with nature is not harmonious. The other dangerous consequences of such advancement are discussed below-

The Dominance of Corporate Power

The society which has been shown in the pre-apocalyptic world is scientifically developed. High class and educated people live in Compounds and those who are not meant for elitism live in Pleeblands. Only disease-free people are allowed to live in Compounds with high-tech securities. Jimmy is grown up in an organized society having an unprecedented and dangerous amount of power. Society in this novel follows its own rules and regulations that stand totally against to environment. The dangerous effects of corporate power could be seen in the later sections of the novel when it becomes crystal clear that any catastrophic event had occurred which killed most of the world's civilization at Rejooven Esense. Likewise, one can understand what people went through in the year 2020. The world has been suffering from the Global pandemic- Covid 19. The situation, in this case, is similar to that of Atwood's novel. Such disastrous events have been designed in powerful societies which ultimately lead to the downfall of human civilization. In order to achieve scientific progression, one tries to manipulate the Environment for one's sake.

The Depreciation of Art

One of the most out-breaking factors of scientific achievement is the deflation of art. In *Oryx and Crake*, symbolism is used from the very outset demonstrated through the battle between the sciences and the arts. Science is represented through the Crake, in contrast the Snowman represents art. In the novel, the pre-apocalyptic world is dominated by Science and Rationality to a greater extent. The result of which can be easily understood in the later chapters of the novel- end of human civilization and destruction of the natural environment. The gap between the ability of the two boys depicts that Crake enjoyed victory due to his logical sense and scientific skills whereas Snowman experiences failure due to his lack of skills in the field of science. But this does not mean that Snowman is truly a naturalist. The earlier chapters show he had a sympathetic attitude towards the natural world but he too involved in scientific projects governed by Crake. It was after the pandemic, that forced Jimmy to seek resilience in nature. Crake's indifferent attitude towards the environment leads to the theme of the devaluation of art.

In the novel, the most amusing blend of human and animal is Crake's genetically engineered,

The Crakers. They possess color-changing sex organs like a baboon, a digestive system like a rabbit, and the smell of a citrus plant. They are known as humanoids. In contrast Crake believes that human ingenuity and scientific curiosity is an inferior, animal trait. Wolvogs- genetically designed innocent dogs but are very dangerous have been designed for safety reasons. Rakunk- genetically designed from two species, raccoon and skunk has been gifted to Jimmy on his tenth birthday by his father. He developed an emotional bond with Rakunk and was his only best friend. Also, the distinction between humans and animals has been challenged and explicitly stated that humans do not exist all alone on this planet and they are mistaken to consider themselves as supreme. One can easily analyze that the relationship between humans and animals in this novel is deformed. There does not exist a symbiosis between them. Therefore, an attempt has been made using this aspect of the novel *Oryx and Crake* to reveal dissonance.

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Figure 3 (Vandysteph, 2010)

The Wilderness in the Hatchet

The novel is primarily set up in the wilderness. This novel typically the structure of a classic story which contrasts civilization to the wilderness. Brian falls into the wilderness, so according to him, his journey leading him into the wild has been forced onto him, opposed to being a quest for self-freedom or discovery. This shapes his attitude towards nature, which at the beginning was seen as the enemy and a dangerous place. When he comes to his senses after the crash, he considers himself lucky not to have collided with rocks that would have smashed him to pieces. But he recalls, "he knew that was wrong. If he had had good luck he would not have been flying with a pilot who had a heart attack and he would not be here where he had to have good luck to keep from being destroyed" (Paulsen 37). He feels despondent as he does not understand where he should go, nor how he should live. Finding food, making fire, and building up a shelter was complicated for him. He comes up with ways to survive by acquiring things he needed but soon as he overcomes one trouble, something else befalls him.

After spending some time in the wilderness, he cultivates the ability to value its magnificence. Eventually, He makes a harmonious

relationship with nature. He learned to survive somehow in harsh and tragic situations. He starts finding solace in the company of the environment and animals. , he becomes aware of his surroundings during his stay in the wilderness.

Brian and the Animals

This chapter is dealing with Brian's encounter with different kinds of animals in the wilderness. He is subject to a variety of different animals that he can eat like fishes, birds and rabbits. However, Brian also encounters animals and insects that may cause him harm like bears or wolves, moose, or mosquitoes.

He first comes into contact with mosquitoes. They function as natives of the wilderness. His reaction towards them clearly shows his knowledge and nature. Insects attack him when he wakes up, "thick, swarming hordes of mosquitoes that flocked to his body, made a living coat on his exposed skin, clogged his nostrils when he inhaled, poured into his mouth when he opened it to take a breath. It was not possibly believable" (Paulsen 34). His passive knowledge helps him to protect himself from these animals but there are times when he fails, "they ever showed on the naturalist shows was beautiful scenery or animals jumping around having a good time" (Paulsen 35). There are some encounters that Brian faced with dangerous animals. His views and reactions are very different in each case, which makes them noteworthy. One day when he was indulging in sweet berries, he hears a noise, turns, and sees- a huge bear. He is

paralyzed with fear "He could do nothing, think nothing" (Paulsen 69). He finally recognizes that he is a part of nature and nature is not a counterpart in nature/human dichotomy.

On an intellectual level, he does not understand the chaos of nature completely but realizes that sometimes things are out of control and no one can master it rather surrenders to it. Now, he comes into contact with animals in his search for food and learns "the true vital knowledge that drives all creatures in the forest-food is all. Food was simply everything. All things in the woods, from insects to fish to bears, were always, always, looking for food- it was the great, single driving influence in nature" (Paulsen 122). So, this section describes the mutual coexistence of Brian and animals together in the wilderness.

Conclusion

This article has analyzed 'Dissonance and Harmony' in *Oryx and Crake*, and *Hatchet* from an ecocritical perspective to point out the basic attitudes towards the non-human world conveyed by these two books through their protagonists. In *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman lived his whole life in a world where nature has been considered as secondary. Atwood's use of the natural world in this novel is a threat to human civilization if people are not going to show collective ethical responsibility to preserve nature. Scientific progress can only lead to development

whereas nature can act as a healing balm to the chaotic and disturbed minds. In *Hatchet*, the protagonist of the novel encountered nature in the mediated form in the beginning. But later, Brian could be seen as a spiritual and positive man at the end of the novel.

The analysis has focused on protagonists' attitude to nature as the implicit reader of the fiction is generally identify with the main character. Gary Paulsen in his novel was able to write about a man's struggle against nature and his ability to live in harmony with it. He faced numerous struggles as a man that animals experienced. He made himself ready to acknowledge nature's beauty and danger. One can see nature as a guide. Sometimes nature tests one's strength, belief, and patience. This research also observes that Brian learns the power of positive thinking during his stay in the Canadian woods in association with nature. And this realization offers Brian the first step towards mental resolve.

Furthermore, this research work observes the positive and negative representations of nature. The positive one refers to a deep ecological idea of portraying nature, while negative representations show nature in an extractive view. Therefore, ecocriticism is diverse and there is a scope for future researchers to observe another aspect of the novels using an ecocritical standpoint.



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Research Objective:

To conduct and collaborate in research areas like Diasporic Studies, Post-Independence Indian Writing in English, Feminism Writing.

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Key Words:

Eco-Criticism, Scientific Advancement, Depreciation of Art, Human -Animal Interaction.

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