

Eco-awareness as an Antithesis of Apocalyptic Eco-Phobia in

Margaret Atwood's (The Year of the Flood)

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Abstract

This paper argues that eco-awareness is presented in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* as a remedy for apocalyptic eco-phobia. The study focuses on apocalypse and eco-phobia as a motivation of the characters' eco-awareness. Accordingly, the novel depicts several scenes of natural apocalyptic regarding the decline of the environment. There is an obvious relationship between apocalyptic eco-phobia and eco-awareness because they are environmental elements. Therefore, the study examines Atwood's perception of apocalypse that threatens the ideal nature; she offers alternatives to avoid it via elevating the characters' eco-awareness. Consequently, eco-awareness exemplifies the ideal natural state needed by the characters because imminent apocalypse endangers its safety and significance to their lives. Here, the study scrutinizes eco-awareness as a remedy for possible destructive environmental disaster. Hence, it applies Scott Slovic's concept of eco-awareness as a remedy for apocalyptic eco-phobia to unravel Atwood's obsession with contemporary negative exploitation of nature. By interpreting the contradiction between eco-awareness and apocalyptic eco-phobia, it tries to contend that environmental perfection would exacerbate the characters' eco-awareness. The novel encourages readers to deduce the vitality of eco-awareness and its capacity to promote the characters' need for ideal environment. This finding accentuates the characters engagement with nature since it exalts their eco-awareness as a therapeutic antithesis to apocalyptic eco-phobia; whereby they become convened to cease exploiting nature in negative way. Thus, the study explores how Atwood's descriptive portrayal of natural apocalypse prompts the characters' eco-phobic feelings; and how it could be mitigated by dint of their eco-awareness.

Keywords: Apocalypse; Atwood; eco-awareness; eco-criticism; eco-phobia; environmental nature.

الوعي البيئي كوسيلة مضادة للرهاب البيئي المروع في رواية عام الطوفان لمارغريت اتود

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ملخص

ترمي هذه الدراسة الى اكتشاف الوعي البيئي كوسيلة مضادة للرهاب البيئي المروع في رواية عام الطوفان لمارغريت اتود على ضوء نظرية النقد البيئي. تتمحور الدراسة حولة تصور نهاية العالم و الرهاب البيئي كدافع اساسي للوعي البيئي لدى شخصيات الرواية. تستعرض الرواية مشاهد متعددة للرؤية البيئية المروعة فيما يتعلق بموت الطبيعة. هناك علاقة وطيدة بين الرهاب البيئي المروع وانماط الوعي البيئي في خضم احداث الرواية. ولذلك تعتمد الدراسة الى اماطة اللثام عن تصورات اتود المستقبلية لسيناريو نهاية العالم الذي يترص بديمومة الطبيعة المثالية وامكانية تجاوزه عن طريق ابراز اهمية الوعي البيئي. وبذلك هذا على ان الوعي البيئي يجسد الرغبة في الحفاظ على البيئة وهيئتها المثالية كما يتصورها الشخصيات في الوقت الذي يشكل فيه تصور نهاية العالم تهديدا لديمومتها. تحاول الدراسة اكتشاف الوعي البيئي كعلاج ناجع للكآبة البيئية التي تلوح بالافق. تقوم الدراسة بتطبيق مفهوم الوعي البيئي للمنظر سكوت سلوفك لتحليل الوعي البيئي كوسيلة مضادة للرهاب البيئي المروع والذي يعكس عدم رضى اتود عن الممارسات السلبية المعاصرة ازاء الطبيعة. وتحليلها للتناقض بين الوعي البيئي والرهاب البيئي المروع، تؤكد الدراسة على امكانية رفع مستوى الوعي البيئي للمحافظة على البيئة عن طريق تحفيز القراء لتكوين انطباعات منطقية حول اهلية الرواية وقدرتها على الترويج للوعي البيئي لتصويرها اماكن طبيعية عرضة لتهديد محقق بها. وبهذه النتيجة، تدعو الدراسة للتماهي مع قضية الوعي البيئي كوسيلة اصلاحية للممارسات المدمرة ضد الطبيعة البيئية. ولذلك، تمحصر الدراسة اسلوب اتود الوصفي والمتعمد لشعور الشخصيات بالرهاب البيئي الناجم عن الشعور بدنو نهاية العالم الكارثية وكيفية كبحها عن طريق رفع مستوى وعيهم البيئي.

الكلمات الدالة: نهاية العالم، اتود، الوعي البيئي، النقد البيئي، الرهاب البيئي، الطبيعة البيئية.

Introduction

Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* hinges on the fictional episodes of Oryx and Crake. These characters are perceived from a lower class position, pleeblands. The pleeblands are often referred to as "God's gardeners" in the plot. They hold the responsibility of protecting all God's animals and natural environment, including, plants, trees and so forth. They expect and predict a natural catastrophe. This catastrophe is described as "waterless flood" in the course of the events. This is the apocalyptic peculiarity of the novel, whereby future events are predicted by these lower class creatures since they are so devout to save God's environment and animals. As the plot goes on, pleeblands are introduced as Gardeners for the readers. Accordingly, they expect that the "waterless flood" will be a massive catastrophe that might change the Earth.

On the other hand, Ren and Toby are the plot's two main characters. Each of them tells a story, yet their stories intertwine at several narrative points. Their stories also intersect with some characters like Oryx and Crake. The bulk of the plot is told in a narrative flashback that depends on events from Atwood's previous novel *Oryx and Crake*. This is because the two characters survive a destructive disaster described in that novel. They talk about the horrible sequences and scenes of the disaster which they truly experienced. After that, they spend the rest of their lives in "God's gardeners"; which is a theological indication to their current characterization in the novel.

Toby is presented as a young woman. She loses her family. She blames the official corporations for losing her family. By time, she is obliged to work at a burger shop. She becomes a victim of the notorious Blanco, but she is saved by the good Adam One. He takes her to a rooftop sanctuary garden where she meets Ren as a member of the gardeners. Ren becomes a trapeze dancer. When a disease breaks out, he is locked in bio-containment unit in order not to be infectious. Toby, likely, is blocked in a luxury spa which had been her safe work place of Blanco and his gangs who used to raid and terrorize people. As such, the current paper will explore eco-awareness as an antithesis of apocalyptic eco-phobia in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. Therefore, the study's theoretical framework will draw upon eco-criticism. The main focus is going to be on eco-critical apocalypse and eco-awareness. However, they will be specifically applied in the light of Greg Garrard's concept of apocalypse and Scot Slovic's concept of eco-awareness in the wide scope of eco-criticism. The textual interpretation of the novel is going to be followed in accordance with these three interrelated concepts with some further critical elaborations and arguments polarized from other eco-critical resources.

2. Literature Review

Valeria Mosca (2013) follows a discursive methodology to infer the significance of depicting environmental scenes in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. Mosca (2013) focuses primarily on an ecological approach to examine the pastoral environmental elements in the novel. In this respect, the ecological elements of the novel are the distinct feature of Mosca's (2013) qualitative interpretation of the creatures that appear on the recurring episodes of the plot. Mosca (2013) connects the novel's pastoral dimension with the hybrid creatures that are genetically improved by scientists for achieving humanity needs of biodiversity; Mosca (2013) writes: "the novel is populated by ambiguous hybrid creatures, all of them developed by prestigious scientists in order to fulfill various kinds of human needs" (p.41). Consequently, the improvement of hybrid creatures will inevitably lead to apocalyptic demise of the environment; and Atwood, argues Mosca (2013), perceives such demise through the novel's erudite narrative clues. To explain, the novel is deemed as a supreme fictional composition on the end of the world; and Atwood could avidly insert her implied apocalyptic vision concerning the world by dint of the novel's narrative facets. Being so, the novel's apocalyptic vision is "the only possible referents for end-of-the-world narratives are other narratives; and apocalypse is an entirely discursive phenomenon" (p.43). Mosca (2013) views Atwood's perception of the end-of-the-world is the basic principle of apocalypse. Mosca's (2013) study, however, lacks some critical decisive points which make the study less attractive as a literary interpretation of Atwood's view of nature projected in the novel.

This study will differ from Mosca's (2013) analysis in several ways. My study applies eco-criticism to analyze the literary forms embodied in the fictional environmental elements. Unlike Mosca's (2013) analysis, this study will not consider ecology in the theoretical discussion of the environmental nature described in the novel. Instead, it conducts eco-critical concepts to examine the characters' lugubrious feeling of eco-phobia and how it relieved through eco-awareness. Though

there are several eco-critical elements in the study Mosca's (2013), like the fictional anthropomorphic fauna, yet, it does not address the issue of eco-phobia from a proper ecological anthropomorphism perspective. Nor does it shed light on the imaginative post-human world created by Atwood's literary dexterity. Moreover, the study does not concentrate on the eco-phobia as a serious environmental problem threatening the whole existence of humanity. Therefore, this study will analyze eco-phobia from an eco-critical perspective by pursuing the characters' turbulent feelings caused by the predicted apocalypse. Eco-phobia, hence, will be elucidated under the aegis of perfect fictional pastoral scenes as necessary literary phase resulting in the characters' eco-awareness. Contrary to Mosca's (2013) study, the study will not look into eco-phobia in relation to post humanism. As such, it will pinpoint the application of eco-criticism in order to unravel the negative sequences of eco-phobia on the environment; and how it is obliterated by the characters' development of positive eco-awareness.

Moreover, the implications of the concept of apocalypse are also studied in terms of dystopian allusions in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. Belo Horizonte (2014) argues that *The Year of the Flood* reveals "dystopian tradition and plays with it. One of the many traditions played with and parodied in both novels is the notion of utopia and dystopia and their literary manifestations. By way of referring, rewriting and reworking clichés and common motifs of these two distinct literary traditions, the novels present their hybrid and genre blurring nature" (p.53). Hence, Horizonte (2014) uses the concept of dystopia to study "the major difference between the elements of literary utopia and dystopia which is the focus on the individual. Whereas in utopia the conversations between the traveler and the guide expose how society works, in dystopias society is described through the eyes of a discontent citizen" (p.55). In this manner, dystopia is used as a literary tradition within utopian or dystopian literary expressions since they occur in actual realistic communities or as a fictional expression.

In addition, Horizonte (2014) uses the concept of apocalypse to discuss the dystopian qualities of *The Year of the Flood* as "the relationship between the individual and the system is highlighted, because the focus on character rather than on setting stresses the manner a system operates oppressing individual experience" (p.58). The study of dystopian element in the novel would create "powerful counter-narratives of the system that may contain within themselves utopian impulses" (p.59). Accordingly, this dystopian implication is exemplified in the depiction of gardens in the novel: "*The Year of the Flood* portrays a different version. The Garden is described as a place of beauty, and the narrator focuses on how Toby's expectations of finding a disorganized place" (p.65). Horizonte's (2014) study suggests that Atwood approaches the environmental retardation in terms of the dystopian peculiarities of the novel. This is in itself a genuine discussion of the novel. But there is no ample textual codes resulting in the discovery of the real impetus of dystopian societies portrayed in the plot.

This study, however, will not focus on the theological insights of the novel. Horizonte's (2014) study is interested in these insights to a great extent. Accordingly, this study will only concentrate on the ideal nature, which is partially tackled in Horizonte's study. Being so, the study will focus on Atwood's perception of the ideal environment in the light of the perfect natural elements, not on the theological representations of the environment. The analysis of such image of nature relies on eco-criticism to approach Atwood's meticulous depiction of the ideal environment by depending on the novels' textual portrayals of nature, which is almost missed in Horizonte's (2014) appropriation of environmental nature in terms of religious matters. Accordingly, this study will interpret the ideal environment through pursuing Atwood's narrative description of the environment that has a necessary significance for the lives of human beings. As such, the analysis – in this study – asserts the primal natural elements threatened by humanity; and they must be preserved from any dangerous destruction. Unlike Horizonte's (2014) narrative study, I will apply eco-criticism in this study to explore the danger lurking behind the ideal environment and how it could be preserved. Consequently, preserving nature will be pinpointed through applying Slovic's (1992) concept of eco-awareness, which is not entirely applied in Horizonte's study.

C. Austin Sims (2012) applies psychoanalysis to pursue the psychic disorders in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. Sims, like Horizonte, analyzes the dystopian aspects of the novel, but the emphasis is given more credit on the psychological nuances because he finds "an accidental dystopian variation on the guided dystopia" (p.113). Notwithstanding, Sims does not tackle dystopia from eco-critical perspectives and the whole study does not refer to the natural calamitous incidents that

might create any dystopian society. Instead, he only focuses on it through the human disastrous practices, like genocide that inevitably lead to the destruction of human existence, while the environmental side is entirely neglected in the textual analysis. Correspondingly, dystopia is not sufficiently studied in the light of eco-criticism. Therefore, my study will focus on apocalypse and how it could be mitigated in the light of ideal pastoral scenery which is almost bypassed in Sim's Study.

Though Sim's (2012) study approaches some environmental issues, yet, it does not wholly discuss the eco-critical matters that concern the lives of humanity. This is because the environment is a comprehensive ideal place of human living; and it must be preserved by people in order to prevent any possible threat resulting in mass destruction for people of different races in the world. For this reason, my study will concentrate on the natural environment; and not from a social view like Sim's (2012) study. Interpreting the natural environment from this angle would sustain this study's originality and critical departure from Sim's (2012) exploration of social matters in the light of the novel.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Eco-phobia

Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* approaches eco-phobia from distinctive narrative perspectives. Yet, I will briefly introduce eco-phobia and its relation to the literary narrative components. Eco-phobic feeling denote the imminent approach of natural catastrophe that threatens people's lives because it is a "serious environmental problem" (Shellenberger, 2020, p.53). The fictional characters embody the lives of these people. Atwood creates her characters as literary simulacra of real people who seem to suffer from natural crises. They also develop negative feelings concerning the natural environment around them because they do not have the proper equipment to confront the devastating environmental destruction. Being so, the novel serves as a literary indictment of human negligence of natural environment, which, in turn, affects the lives of the characters. In this sense, presumably, eco-phobia would be perceived as the pre-existing phase of any apocalyptic destruction.

In the first place, eco-phobia is stimulated by dystopian practices. That is, the characters' negative over-utilization of the environmental nature around them could worsen their health or any other forms of their living conditions (Estok, 2020). As a response, the fictional characters feel that they are threatened; and they must take crucial procedures to hamper this threat as possible as they can. Consequently, eco-phobia functions as a warning against the destruction of nature as a vital and necessary circumference for the characters' development. Their feeling enlarges as they witness new tremendous changes in the environment. For this reason, they pay strenuous effort to hinder the spread of nature's apocalyptic end. This reaction is an ostensible manifestation of eco-phobia as a responsive feeling to the destruction of nature (Oppermann and Akilli, 2021). Therefore, the characters' initial response to hinder the deterioration of the natural environment is motivated by dystopian oblivion regarding the importance of the environment to their prosperity. In *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood portrays such eco-phobia in terms of Adam One who describe other character's fear of the flood: "it's because they're afraid. You must listen for the sound of their fear" (p.10). In this case, Adam One exemplifies the imminent occurrence of the waterless flood that would destroy the characters' lives. Being so, Atwood offers and erudite conceptualization of the influence of eco-phobia upon the characters' attitude toward nature.

Other than the dystopian aspects of eco-phobia, the unmeasured exploitation of the environmental nature would be a significant factor stimulating eco-phobia (Parker, 2020). In this respect, I tend to refer to some destructive practices that deprive nature of its original purity and inherent importance to the characters. Literary characters exploit the environmental nature in a way that degrades its significance, for example, cutting down of trees and dense woods is a blatant practice engendering the future of the eco-system as a whole. They do not measure their exploitation of the environment because they only focus on their needs and life's infrastructure. By time, they find themselves trapped in environmental dilemma, which they cannot escape. The accumulation of the exploitive practice against nature limits the positive continuity of perfect environment proper for healthy and sufficient living requirements (Rivera-Barnes, 2020). This unmeasured practice would be deduced from literary works as an exemplification of eco-phobia, especially when the characters begin to recognize the negative sequences of their exploitation of nature. In a striking way, eco-phobia precisely prefigures the danger engulfing the environment. The fictional societies are depicted as eco-phobic entities that are afraid of the environmental retardation

that comes after their feelings of natural crises (Smith, 2016). Hence, eco-phobia is closely related to the available indicators of the natural problems developing in front of their eyes, yet, they do not have instant solutions to them. Nevertheless, they seriously start looking for viable solutions to these problems by all means.

The characters' serious search for solutions for environmental problems is an indication of eco-phobia. In other words, when the characters ultimately recognize the environmental retardation, they come to find successful remedies for them (Ralph, 2021). The first implication of their understanding of natural problems is their natural destruction. They initiate steps to deal with any problem endangering their environment. Accordingly, the characters' intention to confront their environmental problems is the authorial implicit expression of eco-phobia feelings projected in the context of the narrative events and the characters' pertinent responses (Bladow and Ladino, 2018).

As explained, the issue of eco-phobia represents the overwhelming human fear of natural disaster that might destroy the ideal elements of the environment; and this case, "we confront the greatest environmental threat of our time" (Ray, 2020, p.97). The result is that people begin to feel the genuine danger lurking behind the destruction of nature at certain apocalyptic natural disasters. Presumably, this is due to the fact that people are concerned with the environment and how it is very vital for their living conditions. In this context, to cite Serpil Oppermann's (2011) argument, the issue eco-phobia "is shaped by fear" that reflects humanity anticipation of dangerous practices against nature (p.165). Accordingly, eco-phobia creates, or "begets" as Oppermann (2011) describes it, a dominant sense of environmental crisis endangering the whole human existence on Earth. As a result, the fear produced by eco-phobia "begets the present ecological crisis"; which leads to the enviable destruction of the environment (p.165). In a striking way, Oppermann (2011) strictly attributes eco-phobia to the human adverse excessive utilization of the environmental elements, such as animals; and this utilization threatens the ecological equilibrium that results in the extinction of natural species. In this regard, he sheds light on the exploitation of animals as an obtrusive example because "animal exploitation implies speciesism" that must be protected in nature to control the environmental equilibrium between human and non-human elements (p.165).

Such eco-phobia is evident in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. I prefer to shed light on the novel's narrative aspects as a premise for inferring eco-phobia. The novel similarly exemplifies the typical fictional eco-phobia through the narrative description of the over-exploitation of nature elements, like animals. In the course of the plot's environmental descriptions, the ideal nature is threatened by human negative utilization of animals that represent the primary components of optimal environment. An obvious aspect of utilizing animals is hunting, which clearly appears in the novel's narrative episodes. The characters hunt animals in an illegal way ignoring the possible negative sequences of the exploiting animals. An example of this relates to Toby's hunting experience. She accompanies her father to Ruger 44/99 Deerfield where she is taught by him to shoot animals, like deer. Consequently, she goes with him and they arranged their time to hunt animals for entertainment: "The rifle is a primitive weapon - a Ruger 44/99 Deerfield. It had been her [Toby] father's. He was the one who'd taught her to shoot, when she was twelve, back in those days that seem now like some mushroom-induced Technicolor brain vacation. Aim for the center of the body, he'd said. Don't waste your time with heads. He said he just meant animals" (p.6). In the light of this quotation, the over-hunting is an indication of eco-phobia since it inherently endangers natural components, like animals. Toby, here, is not satisfied with her father's negative practice against nature. Being so, her frightful felling incarnates the sense of eco-phobia due to the possible destruction of nature that might happen after hunting. For example, hunting might lead to the extinction deer which are integral elements of nature. Furthermore, they are God's blessing since they represent environmental wonder. In this sense, eco-phobia is brought by human negative practices against the ideal nature.

Here, my view of such hunting is mere embodiment of Toby's and her father's utilization of environmental elements, like animals, for the sake of entertainment ignoring its significance. Their over-hunting of animals corresponds to Oppermann's (2011) assertion that the exploitive utilization of environmental components is the essence of creating eco-phobia because these characters will recognize the sequence of their adverse exploitation of the environment. This is due to the fact that environmental components are integral parts of nature; and the extinction of one of these components implies the extinction of the others. As such, the extinction of animals, like deer depicted in the narrative description in the above-quoted lines. The deer incarnates the part or "speciesism" endangered by human beings in the novel. Consequently, Atwood

highlights this over-utilization of environmental components to provoke the reader's perception of the characters' forthcoming eco-phobia and the way it should be stopped before they really get caught in its impasse. In this sense, eco-phobia is the core of natural apocalypse that is going to be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Apocalypse

As previously argued, the critical insights of fictional apocalypse imply the imminent decline of the human world at a natural catastrophic disaster as a "way of imagining a post-*apocalyptic environment*" (Watkins, 2020, p.1). It includes the deterioration of the natural elements, like animals, birds, forests, biosphere and so forth. In this regard, apocalypse is the inevitable way by which the Earth begins to reach the final critical turning point where it could be destructed. This apocalyptic end comprises the human lives that represent an integral part of the environment itself. In this respect, Garrard (2004) argues that the concept of apocalypse entails the final episodic end of the natural environment threatened by catastrophic occurrences; and logically apocalyptic incidents "always careering towards some final, catastrophic conclusion"; and this conclusion "is open-ended and episodic" (p.87). At this point, the concept of apocalypse is inherently about the possible anticipated environmental devastation that begins gradually till it reaches a turning point where the whole life on Earth could be endangered and life comes to its final end.

To reveals these apocalyptic incidents, the threatening destructive end of the world appears in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* when birds – together with animals – begin to be affected by catastrophic apocalyptic changes. My focus, here, is on these changes that include extinction of birds and animals that lose their ideal habitat in the environment. For example, the formation of the poles, depicted in the plot, inevitably leads to a crucial deterioration of the environment which embodies the ideal natural habitat for animals and birds. The essence of natural apocalypse is represented in the disordered natural elements; such as the extinction of birds and animals and the destruction of hydro poles. Atwood portrays vultures that lose their habitat due to the environmental deterioration of the poles. She describes the thermal emission or "spirals" as the real cause of the hydro poles. By utilizing the omniscient narrative perspective, she portrays the ideal ecosystem including animals, birds and the poles as God's blessing that should be protected from any kind of danger. Yet, the problem of hydro poles threatens the lives of animals that will ultimately lose their perfect habitat and, consequently, they would die afterwards. The quotation below illustrates this predicted apocalyptic scene:

The vultures roosting on hydro poles fan out their wings to dry them, opening themselves like black umbrellas. One and then another lifts off on the thermals and spirals upwards. If they plummet suddenly, it means they've spotted carrion. Vultures are our friends, the Gardeners used to teach. They purify the earth. They are God's necessary dark Angels of bodily dissolution. Imagine how terrible it would be if there were no death! (p.1)

In this scene, by analyzing Atwood's narrator, the narrative voice describes the poor state of the hydro poles. They are losing their true sense of environmental perfection which is very necessary for birds and animals. Consequently, the narrator is worried about the terrible deterioration of the poles where there is no sufficient food or suitable living conditions for birds and animals. Accordingly, they are deprived of their basic needs. This fact leads Toby to wonder this unbelievably terrible state of nature because everything in the poles negatively changed: "Do I still believe this? Toby wonders. Everything is different up close" (p.1). Such fictional scene paves the way for a more terrible environmental situation. As such, the accumulation of similar situations would lead to the anticipated apocalyptic fatal catastrophe threatening the environmental nature. That is, the decline of hydro poles is the cause of the extinction of birds and animals; and this extinction results in an unavoidable defect in the ecosystem which culminates in apocalyptic end. For this reason, the gradual deterioration of nature, portrayed in the plot, necessitates the proper protection of natural environment from any kind of apocalyptic destruction in order to guarantee good living conditions for humanity as a whole. People should preserve the natural environment for the sake of restoring the ecological equilibrium that could be endangered by apocalyptic scenes. Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* presents some pure natural elements which must be protected by people to reinforce the continuity of good ecological conditions needed for people everywhere. The sense of apocalypse emerges when the characters are overwhelmed with the fright of natural destruction. Toby, for example, is excessively afraid of apocalypse since it will lead to the destruction of their properties: "they have an aversion to the destruction of private property" (p.35). In this way, Atwood utilizes Toby's

interrogation of the viable solutions to be safe of such destructive apocalypse. Consequently, Toby and other characters respond to apocalypse through adopting more aware perception nature and its significance to their lives. As such, the novel concentrates on pastoral scenery that exemplifies the ideal environmental components needed for the characters. This scenery will be elaborated as the core of the character's eco-awareness and its vital importance to avoid the apocalyptic flood.

3.3 Eco-awareness

The concept of eco-awareness includes the authorial implied attempt to spread conscious appreciation of nature in literary works. To use Scott Slovic's (1992) claims, the concept of eco-awareness corresponds to the representation of the authorial implied message in the text to elevate the public consciousness about the importance of the environment. Consequently, the ecological problems could be mitigated to a great extent. Additionally, Slovic (1992) says that eco-awareness requires a serious action towards nature. To explain, when the public consciousness becomes awareness of the environmental importance, people must begin suitable action to exert their abstract awareness in practical action; Slovic (1992) writes: "the commonplace and frequently unexamined assumption that awareness will lead directly to corresponding action" (p.169). Furthermore, eco-awareness involves the all people of the same spatial "region" (Abu Jweid, 2020, p.212); and it reinforces their consciousness concerning the environmental positive influence on their lives: "the particular type of awareness known as 'public awareness,' the collective elevation of consciousness" (p.169). In this regard, he emphasizes the literary works' ability to convey this collective consciousness by the narrative scenes presenting eco-awareness matters. As a sequence, eco-awareness is a primary reaction to the positive value of natural environment for all people; and the way they should protect it.

Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, likewise, spreads eco-awareness about the occurrence of natural apocalypse and the possibility of avoiding it via the end of the plot. This is because the fictional are prone to annihilation due to an imminent destructive environmental calamity. Here, Atwood depicts the disasters as a form of apocalypse. It would occur and destroy people's lives since they do not have sufficient eco-awareness about it. As a reaction to this disaster, people sought refuges in guardhouses to be safe of the calamity. The novel ends in this apocalyptic scene due to people's lack of eco-awareness to hinder the occurrence of such disaster from the beginning. Croze, who is a central character in the novel, describes this apocalyptic experience. At this situation, people got frenzy of the disaster and they resorted to guardhouse to protect them: "So we went online," said Croze, "The news was still working. Big disaster coverage, so we figured we shouldn't go out and mingle. We locked ourselves into one of the guardhouses - they had some food in there" (p.62). By portraying this terrible apocalyptic scene, Atwood inserts implicit cautionary insights about exploiting nature because this negative exploitation inevitably leads to its destruction as depicted in the above quotation. The narrator finds the solution for this apocalyptic dilemma. He says that conciseness and awareness is highly needed for protecting nature that is ideally created by god for the benefit of humanity. However, when people ignored its bliss, they fell into depressing sadness and anxiety: "the innocent acting-out of such patterns and impulses to a conscious and shamed awareness of them; and from thence comes our sadness, our anxiety, our doubt, our rage against God" (p.13).

Furthermore, the narrator's reference to the apocalyptic contravening influence upon the lives of the characters is the culmination of eco-awareness which is badly needed for saving them from destruction. For this reason, he asserts the necessity of "replenishing" Earth; and this natural replenish is the suitable reaction to restore the Earth to its God-created and ordered state: "true, we - like the other Animals - were blessed, and ordered to increase and multiply, and to replenish the Earth" (p.13). By virtue of this narrative perspective, Atwood conveys her abstract conceptualization of eco-awareness in the narrative events. The projection of eco-awareness in this way underscores her attitudes regarding curbing the possibility apocalyptic end of the Earth at the hands of human negative practices. Moreover, she advocates the very notion that the Earth is the home for all humanity; and she appreciates its axiomatic fact by expressing her profound interest in nature and what protects it. In this sense, the novel's narrative perspective functions as a medium between the reader and the narrative text to convey her authorial somber emphasis of eco-awareness to raise the readers' consciousness about idyllic environmental nature. Thus, eco-awareness is the decisive remedy for environmental apocalypse.

The concept of eco-awareness primarily denotes the characters' conscious perception of the vitality of the environmental

nature. Once the characters become able to take care of their natural surroundings, they exert the meticulous indication of eco-awareness. Being a nature writer, Atwood polarizes this awareness through the characters' intentional actions to preserve nature. To use Slovic's (1992) words, nature writers implicitly project their view of eco-awareness in order to express their attitude towards nature. They have specific aims to improve the current position of nature. Therefore, they gradually become less explicit in dealing with the intricate natural issues. For this reason, they convey their aims through the literary text; Slovic (1992) comments: "nature writers have often become less explicit in their espousal of one particular attitude towards nature" (p.137). Therefore, the authorial implicit conceptualization of safe natural environment comes into terms with the concept of eco-awareness. In this sense, the concept of eco-awareness does not only involve the entire perfect environment, but also the proper recognition of its parts. As a result, the protection of the entire natural environment begins with protecting its parts; Slovic (1992) argues that the characters' protection of nature represents the "awareness of its parts for attending to its whole" (p.113). Atwood implicitly tackles this awareness by means of the characters' conscious awareness. The novel depicts the characters' happy celebration of the producing of remedial antidote extracted from elderberries and honey. They are greatly blessed with nature's gift for them since it provides them with the elements necessary for making remedies to dangerous diseases. In this way, they are presented as being aware of the natural environment, especially when they underwent the apocalyptic experience. In *The Year of the Flood*, this awareness manifest in the way by which Atwood appropriates the characters' awareness with their anxiety or sadness created by the apocalyptic flood. When they, truly become aware of the authentic danger of the apocalyptic flood, they feel that they develop shameful awareness regarding their responsibility to protect nature. Adam One insists on protecting nature through developing environmental awareness after being engulfed by destructive apocalypse. Here, he says that he and the other characters feel shameful because they previously neglected such awareness which is not very decisive to their nature; therefore, he calls other characters for "acting-out of such patterns and impulses to a conscious and shamed awareness of them; and from thence comes our sadness, our anxiety, our doubt" (p.33). In this manner, Atwood implicitly projects her own environmental insights concerning the safe state of nature. In other words, the character could preserve their environment by adopting such aware environmental reaction.

For example, when Toby extracts purple remedial items and puts them in jars, her fellow characters become very pleased with her experiment. She could be able to offer them natural substance items which might save their lives. Out of happy astonishment, they compare her achievement to the Holy Grail: "A great fuss was made over the opening of a jar of preserved purple items - those were her first elderberries - and a pot of honey was produced as if it was the Holy Grail" (p.32). Toby's happy responses to Toby's achievement incarnate their awareness of nature as an ideal place for their salvation. Atwood deals with this awareness by unraveling the characters' serious care of nature in order to ensure the continuing of their health and welfare. As a matter of fact, their awareness strengthens the protection of the environmental nature in a distinctive way. Therefore, the novel's perception of eco-awareness is the essential antithesis of natural apocalypse that motivated the characters' eco-phobia.

Depending on nature for remedial purposes is the core of the characters' eco-awareness. In the course of the novel, the utilization of the environmental nature for offering rescue alternatives for people is the basis of eco-awareness. The fruitful consequence of the characters' protection of nature brings their lives "to higher levels of awareness" (Slovic, 1992, p.113). Atwood portrays this awareness via Toby's earnest interest in extracting remedial substances from the environment. She spends log hours among the trees in order to collect honey from beehives. Furthermore, she carefully collects crops of lavender and buckwheat. All these natural elements are collected from the natural environment for the sake of creating remedial products for other characters: "now Toby spent all her spare hours with Pilar - tending the Eden cliff beehives and the crops of buckwheat and lavender grown for the bees on adjacent rooftops, extracting the honey and storing it in jars" (p.66). Here, Toby's perseveration of nature is more serious than before. This is because she did not understand the importance of nature to people. On that account, she dedicates her time to extract remedial medicine which could be obtained but from nature. Accordingly, she strongly preserves nature for the sake of saving people from death. In this sense, taking care of nature is an indication of her eco-awareness. Such awareness is plainly expressed by the omniscient narrator's

recognition of depending on environmental products, like fruit and harvest, as potential sources for their health and lives: “the fruit remains a deeply meaningful symbol for us, embodying the notions of healthful harvest, of rich culmination, and of new beginning, for within every Fruit is a seed - a potential new life” (p.161).

The concept of eco-awareness, furthermore, represents the fictional characters’ realization of the environmental nature around them. That is, they become passionately engaged with nature as a source of their happiness and self-autonomy by keeping nature from any destruction. Lucy Weir (2020) tends to describe this passionate relationship between nature and the fictional characters as “compassion;” whereby the characters becomes overwhelmed by the love of nature since it is the cause of their euphoria and good life. The characters’ compassionate realization of nature is the core of their awareness of nature; and the narrative story reflects this awareness in the course of the plot; Weir (2020), therefore, says that the eco-awareness is the “development of conscious awareness, a story that requires reflection” (p.88). Weir (2020) adds that realization is the most influential keyword in developing the characters’ awareness. Their proper perception of nature as a mother would make them lead a perfect environmental experience by interacting with its natural physical places; Weir (2020) writes: “realization as agency implies that the act of realization creates a new narrative, an experience that then becomes a part of, and therefore interacts with, what is going on throughout the mesh” (p.88). In this way, the concept of eco-awareness exemplifies the characters’ realization of the environmental nature through love and compassionate relationship. Once the characters love nature, they truly become dedicated dwellers. This is achieved through their direct relationship with is “mesh,” or materials components, such as places, wilderness, fauna, flora and so forth. Hence, the concept of eco-awareness is the mutual compassionate relationship between the characters as human being and the environment.

The compassionate relationship between the characters and the environment are evident in Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*. Lucerne, for example, is very fond on nature. She loves the physical elements of nature to a great extent. She wants to protect them from any harm. The omniscient narrator tells us how she strongly loves the animals and other natural places. They become parts of her life. By time, she feels that she is responsible for preserving nature from nay threat. She holds this responsibility since she believes in God’s will on Earth. That is, it will be preserved by people who love nature, just like her. When she loves nature in this way, she gets spiritually elevated. Consequently, she embodies the concept of eco-awareness as an advocate of the environmental nature:

She wanted to be a responsible person. She really did believe that Adam One was right about so many things, and nobody loved animals more than she did. But really there was a limit and she did not believe for one instant that slugs had any central nervous system, and to say they had souls was to make a mockery of the whole idea of souls. And she resented that, because nobody had more respect for souls than she did. She’d always been a very spiritual person. As for saving the world, nobody wanted to save the world as much as she did, but no matter how much the Gardeners deprived themselves of proper food and clothing and even proper showers, for heaven’s sake, and felt more high and mighty and virtuous than everyone else, it wouldn’t really change anything. (p.22)

Lucerne, accordingly, embodies the paradigmatic case of eco-awareness because she loves nature and dedicates her whole time for saving it from danger. Atwood portrays her as a way of unraveling the goodness of persevering nature. In doing so, she expands eco-awareness through the narrative depiction of Lucerne’s experience. By the same way, the concept of eco-awareness includes the authorial ability to spread the significance of nature by virtue of the fictional characters’ experience. In this respect, Mitchell Thomashow claims that authors rely on their narrative expertise and fictional appropriation of the environmental nature for the sake of “expanding ecological awareness” (p.207). Accordingly, the authorial depiction of the characters’ eco-awareness embodies the profound spiritual fusion with nature. Hence, eco-awareness is an emotional confrontation with the environment. For this reason, Thomashow argues that the concept of eco-awareness of the environmental tangible places and species; and it incarnates “a deeper emotional or even spiritual encounter with the landscape along with the expanded community of species and the biosphere” (p.207). This spiritual encounter requires “a deeper awareness or organisms, landscapes, and habitats” (p.207); and the concept of eco-awareness involves all of them. Thomashow says that the result is very promising as eco-awareness sustains the characters’ spiritualism and existence, yet, they should “build respect, gratitude, and appreciation for the conditions of our human existence on a

magnificent planet” (p.207). When the character respect nature, they greatly appreciate it. Then, they will lead a magnificent life on the planet Earth. In a striking way, eco-awareness enables the characters to be fully conscious of the environmental grandeur as they are spiritually exalted by such ecological awareness.

Accordingly, Atwood, in *The Year of the Flood*, fictionalizes the characters’ awareness. Saint Euell believes that they will be safe of the destruction of the apocalyptic waterless flood. The narrator recounts Saint Euell’s anxious response to the other characters’ fear of the waterless flood. They think that they will not be able to survive due to its massive destruction. Therefore, when Saint Euell realizes the grandeur of “God’s bounteous Garden,” he embodies the notion of the spiritual recognition the environmental nature’s bliss. The other characters, notwithstanding, are busy buying and selling their stuff because they are afraid of the coming apocalyptic flood. However, Saint Euell urges the other characters to stop be sure that they will be safe of the flood and due to God’s merciful providence and assistance:

And in the time of our greatest need, help us to accept whatever Fate may bring us; and whisper into our inner and Spiritual ears the names of the Plants, and their seasons, and the locations in which they may be found. For the Waterless Flood is coming, in which all buying and selling will cease, and we will find ourselves thrown back upon our own resources, in the midst of God’s bounteous Garden. (p.27)

Saint Euell’s insistence on keeping the other characters comfortable and quite is the manifestation of his belief that the environmental nature will not be affected by the flood. This is because he is ecologically aware of its grandeur created by God. As such, Atwood uses his literary disposition through the narrator’s words that depict Saint Euell in a blessed fictional consideration. He is no longer afraid of any natural destruction or deterioration. This is because he developed a strong capacity of eco-awareness and respect of the environmental nature around him. Therefore, he leads the other characters to the way they could be safe of any natural threat. His personality is the proper exemplification of the environmental symbiosis since he could live together with natural species without in fear, which previously overwhelmed him and other characters when they had undergone eco-phobic experience. Furthermore, he feels that he is relieved. He is satisfied with living in a perfect pastoral environmental scenic sublimates which seem to be a far from apocalyptic disaster if the whole characters keep and develop it. As a result, his eco-awareness incarnates Atwood deliberate utilization of narrative events that fictionally reveal eco-awareness as a remedy for the devastating environmental apocalypse.

Conclusion

This study has focused on the issue of eco-phobia in Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*. The critical and textual discussion of this issue has been implemented by applying three concepts, namely, eco-phobia, apocalypse, and eco-awareness. By using the concept of apocalypse, the study has examined the threatening meanings inherent in the novel’s context, which is rarely tackled in previous studies. There are a number of textual descriptions of natural phenomenon which hold a warning against the death of nature which, indirectly, indicates the death of human beings. On the other hand, the concept of eco-phobia has been used to demonstrate the characters’ frightful feelings developed out of the imminent natural disasters. These feelings are the essence of the third concept i.e., eco-awareness which has been applied to explore eco-awareness as a remedy for environmental destructive apocalyptic eco-phobia.

The study has discussed the eco-phobia and its remedy in the novel in order to shed light on three related findings. First, eco-phobia originally springs from the characters’ feelings of the accumulation of the environmental problems apparent in their natural surroundings. The discussion has found that Atwood uses her characters as realistic simulation of real people suffering from eco-phobia. She depicts the characters’ eco-phobic feelings as functions of their gradual recognition of the ideal eco-awareness reactions. The pastoral environment is the second finding of the analysis. To explain, the discussion of the perfect eco-awareness has found that Atwood is greatly concerned with the conscious perfection in order to direct the characters to the viable solutions to their natural crises. Consequently, they find, through eco-awareness, that nature is a supreme escape from any danger. The result is that they could ensure good and healthy lives away from eco-phobic feelings or devastating natural ruin. The analysis’s finding of perfect eco-awareness orient the characters to avoid natural apocalypse which must be hindered. The hindrance of natural apocalypse is the core of the third finding. As such, the characters become more conscious of the possible apocalypse. Thus, the discussion of their eco-awareness has been found as the essence of

their recognition of apocalypse and the possibility of thwarting its menace and negative impact on their ideal environment.

Therefore, the study significant results are attributed to the inextricable relationship between eco-phobia, apocalypse, and eco-phobia. The interpretation of the connection among these natural issues has unlevelled Atwood's profound obsession with finding serious solutions to one the most dangerous environmental phenomena, namely, natural apocalypse. In this case, she utilizes her narrative descriptions to expose such danger. She also accentuates the significant of hindering natural deterioration that might occur in reality; whereby readers and critics would figure out her implied narrative nuances regarding the ability of humanity to confront apocalypse by whatever available means. Another major result deduced by the study is eco-awareness per se. That is, the core conceptual notion of apocalyptic eco-phobia lies in the characters' oblivion and lack of conscious care of nature. Hence, they relentlessly develop eco-awareness when they really experience apocalypse. They become more aware of nature's blessing and significance to living conditions. Thus, the study has explored this awareness as a crucial remedy for apocalyptic eco-phobia.

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