

**Negentropy, Entropy and Environmental Justice in Atwood's
Surfacing and *Oryx and Crake***

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ABSTRACT

Literature is a candle to spread the light in the room of darkness. It helps to remove the darkness from the room. The darkness may compare to ignorance, selfishness, exploitation, money minded, un-sympathy towards fellow beings not only a human being, including animals too. The light from the candle is slowly changing the psyche and atmosphere from negative into positive. A versatile writer Margaret Atwood is promptly pictures the contemporary life style in Canada. It is not only applicable for Canada but throughout the world. Her novels *Surfacing* and *Oryx and Crake* are perfect examples to show how people are exploit the natural resources in the name of Modernization and Technologization. This paper is critically analysis the value of nature and how it was exploited in the hands of human beings.

Key Words:

Positive energy, Negative energy, Justice, Self Identity, Modernization, Technologization and Scientific development

A prolific, controversial and innovative writer, Margaret Atwood has emerged as one of the most eminent contemporary figures in Canadian Literature. After the recent passing of Canadian greats like Robertson Davies and Timothy Findley, Atwood along with Alice Munro was the first to elevate Canadian Literature to the world stage and through her profuse writings, critiques and activism, has ultimately contributed to the growth of women's writing and to the established legitimacy of Canadian literature.

Although she mostly writes about women, from a female perspective and with a noticeable feminist slant, her writing transcends the boundaries of what is often described as 'female fiction'. In all her works, she focuses on Canadian national identity on Canadian relationship with United States and Europe, human rights issues, the Canadian wilderness and women's exploitation as well as her relation to the world and individuals around them. Atwood's novels are filled with characters who are all seeking something; whether for answers, equilibrium, freedom, revenge, understanding, or fulfilment. The plots are complex, at times very dark, but always filled with passion and drive and the stories range from childhood cruelty to grownup inhumanity of people towards each other; from the search of a father to the search for answers in a post-apocalyptic wasteland. The locales stretch from nineteenth-century Toronto to the Caribbean islands, to dystopian future landscapes.

Surfacing (1972), demonstrates the complex question of identity for an English-speaking Canadian female. Identity, for the protagonist, has become problematic because of her role as a victim of colonial forces. She has been colonial by men in the patriarchal society in which she grew up, by Americans and their cultural imperialism, or neo-colonialism as it has come to be known as, and the Euro-centric legacy that remains in her country although the physical presence of English and French rulers have gone. The novel begins as a detective story. The unnamed narrator/protagonist comes back from Toronto after nine years absence to Northern Quebec where she had lived as a child. She has been told that her father, an eccentric botanist, living alone on a lake island has vanished without trace. She has no touch with him for many years and attempts to find what has happened to him. The anonymous narrator and her lover Joe, another married couple David and Anna set out to find out her missing father.

In *Oryx and Crake* 2003, Atwood's pilgrim in the hell is snowman, the only human to have survived a biological viral cataclysm. The story opens with Snowman (who was formerly known as Jimmy) having been forced to become arboreal by circumstances. He lives in trees and in shelters of junk roaming the beaches and picnic grounds of Former Park where fungi sprout from rooting picnic tables scavenging for food. His only companions are some humanoids, the crackers. These are the gentle creations of Jimmy's old half mad scientist friend crake (who was earlier known as Glenn) "each one naked, each one perfect, each one different skin colour, chocolate, rose, tea, butter, cream, honey, but each with green eyes, Crake aesthetic". Free from their experimental lab the crackers also live near the beach.

They eat nothing but grass, leaves and roots. Their emotions have been efficiently programmed. Anything deemed inessential, from facial hair to sexual lust has been done away

with. To them the man they know as a snowman is a demi-god or prophet. Unable to bear the harsh sunlight covers himself in a ghostly bed sheet and a grotesque one-eyed broken sunglass. For the crakers, the real gods are crake, who they have never seen, and his girlfriend Oryx, whom they have. The crakers listen to Snowman telling his stories about Oryx and Crake and along with the readers, await their return.

The massy landscape, bushes, wilderness, small species, insects, cliffs, mountains, and forest are the critical tools in the novels *Oryx and Crake* and *Surfacing*. These insignificant and inanimate things are giving priority in the author's perception. This paper attempts to discuss the clear idea of Negentropy, Entropy, and Environmental Justice in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *Surfacing*. The paper also aims to show how the positive and negative energy of nature has an impact on the lives of the human beings.

The ecological study is basically an experiment in nature, in contrast to literary theory. Negentropy, entropy and environmental justice are the sub genres under the main head of ecocriticism which express both positive and negative energy of nature which characterize the study of ecocritical learning. According to Barry Commoner's the first Law of Nature states that "everything is connected to everything else". Environmental justice further argues how negentropy and entropy the energies are fundamental spirits in the human life and how human society treats towards nature. An environmental justice is basically an animate and inanimate thing also have a rights to live as like human beings. It is based on fundamental rights, race, social, political, economical, and cultural forces are reasons for the destruction of nature in terms of scientific advancement. It clarifies and argues the value future environmental interdependencies between human, non-human and within human society.

The principles of nature study and its significance is a major study in the field of literature in postmodern era. In Canadian literature, Margaret Atwood's works are field with nature and its importance is revealed through her works especially *Surfacing* and *Oryx and Crake*. The very first chapter of the novel *Surfacing* discusses the travelling of the narrator or protagonist of the novel along with her friends David, Anna, and Joe. The first person narrative mode highlights the author's perceptions through this protagonist. The anonymous protagonist is a special feature of the novel shedding light one. Atwood's personal thoughts are related to the Canadian mind set. The first paragraph itself is a natural scene and the description of nature which reflects the author's past experience.

The first few passages of the novel signify some important season of the nature and that particular season is associated with in the life of the protagonist within positive and negative ways. Eastern or Western philosophy, nature plays an important role in the human life. The first few pages of opening chapter give a general description of Canada particularly the Northern part well centred like 'cow sprinkled hills', 'Leaf trees', 'dead elmskelton' 'need trees' and 'cutting dynamited' which describe through the letters GATE WAY TO THE NORTH, here north is nothing in it except wilderness. The protagonist acknowledges the truth and reality of the direction and recollects her father's voice when she heard, there was nothing in the North, but only dead or alive nobody knows which he has no longer making epigrams.

The novel itself is a journey pointing out the protagonist's search for her father along with her friends. The narrator herself is unaware of the landscape except for a few places her psychological will to search her father made her continue the journey in spite of the difficulties. Her friend David, basically a mean minded and morally a weak person has a good and tender

wife Anna. The protagonist is courted by Joe who is innocent and child-like. This child like nature of Joe attracted the narrator. She herself acknowledges, “ he would like them to set up a kind of park for him like a bird sanctuary, Beautiful Joe” (Sur 5).

As the name negentropy points out Atwood projects hazards of the environment pollution in a positive light. She criticizes the over production of bottles, she further adds that these over produced bottles are used to build a roof, sheltering animals. “The bottle house is built of pop bottles cemented together with the bottoms facing out; green ones and brown ones is Zigzag like ones they taught us in the school to chew on tepees: there is a wall around it made of bottles too; arranged in letters so the brown ones spell BOTTLE VILLA” (Sur 8).

The novel highlights the conflicts that the narrator undergoes, throughout the process of the novel. The protagonist is fully loaded with positive energy, which guides her into the forest to find out her father. The forest parts into two different roads with a sign board standing ‘Welcome’ and ‘BIENVENUE’ respectively. The sign board has bullet holds, signifying the danger that awaits the narrator. The narrator points out the difficulties faced by aboriginals under the foreign rule. The narrator feels that individual are physically challenged (deaf) and (dumb) can lead the normal life when compare to an aboriginal under the foreign rule. Atwood criticizes the city life as that which is full of dust and trees are cut down for paper mills.

The protagonist feels that even nature is being colonised by colonial powers, who exploited both human and natural resources. Atwood points out that the heights of colonization when she describes the seen at gas station, where a little boy is typically dressed in American mannerism- baseball cap and American flag. Nature is projected as a hurdle in this novel, as it is described as wilderness, pointing out the uncertainty of the protagonist, about her father.

The second novel of Margaret Atwood is *Oryx and Crake* narrated by three important characters such as Snowman, Crake and Oryx. Snowman is a narrator of the novel and he is a representation of nature. Atwood is basically a female writer but she uses male narrator to convey her thought process through Snowman. The natural scene of the sea shore and the physical description of Snowman are compared to the broken bones, they symbolize the condition of environment in the seaside (entropic), because Snowman is also in a decayed condition. All the boys and girls criticize the appearance of Snowman who looks like a barbarian. Snowman longs for communal living because he lives a lonely life in the seashore. Wilderness is only a source nothing more than that. He collects few used things from the seashore where a ship was wrecked. He collects can opener, empty bottles, piano, keyboard, pale green pep bottle, a plastic BlyssPless container, computer mouse, these useless and un functioned things makes him happy. He lives in the world of absurd.

The society is filled with greediness, the negentropic energy slowly disappears and entropic energy dominates the whole society. Their mind is filled with how to make money, through genetically improve the creature like pigs (pigoon). “The pigoons were much bigger and rather than ordinary pigs, to leave room for the entire extra organ. They were kept in special buildings, heavily secured; they kidnapping of a pigoon and its finely honed genetic material by a rival outfit could have been disaster” (OC 29).

Negentropic energy in Jimmy is revealed in this novel. He always looks at the creatures as his fellow beings. The kindness of Jimmy reveals many way in this novel. “Dot fall in said his father. They will eat you up in a minute. No they won’t, said jimmy. Because I am their friend he

thought. Because I sing to them. He wished he had a long stick, so he would poke them not hurt them, just to make them sum as sound” (OC 30).

Jimmy’s mother works as a microbiologist. Her job is to study the proteins of the bio forms and find out it is an unhealthy to pigeons. To modify the calls that not affects the pigeons. Jim is the pen name given by his mother. The negentropic energy leads Jimmy’s psyche. His real interest is to keep pet animals but his family does not allow. He asks his mother, but she criticizes him, saying he will get his cell damaged. Jimmy keeps on asking “Can I have a Cat. He would begin, Can I have a dog than, can I have a parrot...” (OC 37).

The negentropic energy could be transformed (pet animal) into negative energy (entropic). The disease is entropic in nature, it would bring pain, decay, none other than. She (Jimmy’s mother) says “No Jimmy you cannot have a cat. We have been over this before. Cats might carry disease that would be bad for the pigeons?” (OC 36). Jimmy has a friendship with Crake. Crake is more intelligent than Jimmy. Jimmy’s father always gives something to Jimmy. His father wants his son to be more practical rather than theoretical.

Thunder and lightning are the negative connotation of human psyche. Jimmy is totally disturbed because the deity landscape filled with worn bottles, dead trees, and decay animals, wired up lab animals are representation of Jimmy’s condition. Human life is also decaying because of lack of love, care, affection, kindness and sympathy. Little things make him happy but it is only a short time. Jimmy mourns and laments when he looks at the laboratory. The valuable species are kept for research purpose but they forget to value the life of species. “If he were some caged, wired-up lab animals, trapped...” (OC 50).

Oryx and Crake is basically considered as a historical novel, but it has a rich ecocentric value in it. When Jimmy looks at the wired – lab animals in laboratory, he feels sorry for them. The non-human beings also have a right to live, but the society is unjust to them. The natural resources like air, water, trees and animal must be equally shared. It is the duty of each citizen, to carry this treasure to their future generation. Snowman (Jimmy) abhors and criticizes the action of the society. Jimmy's father gave a birthday gift to him. The gift is not a thing like doll, toy, or playing instruments, but a small pet animal "Rakunk". This makes Jimmy happier. Jimmy's father works as a scientist and always looks at the animals as a commodity.

The theme of ecocentric study of the land, attitudes of human beings, way of life and technology is well developed in this work. The real identity of human nature is revealed through Crake's speech. He informs that lot of money involved and invested in research and development of the project. There are two projects undertaken by the scientist. The first is the creation of pill; BlyssPluss which will eliminate the non-biological causes of death. In other words it will replace sexual energy. Crake hides the truth that this is the cause of the death. Crake insist that he working on immortality. The transformation of genes is a major problem the future generation. The pill used to control the level of disease and infection, becomes a standard level of birth rate. Jimmy was appointed as an in charge of advertising. Crake's work in Paradise at Rejooven Essence made a research on species to change the nature of the species.

In *Surfacing*, *Oryx and Crake* and "Journey to the Interior" are visible evidences of ecocentric value handled in an apt way. In the first novel *Surfacing*, the anonymous protagonist is the representation of nature which gives a message to the society to preserve nature. The duty and responsibilities of human society should be shared equally the natural wealth to the future

generation. In *Oryx and Crake* this is highlighted through the character of the narrator Snowman. In both the novels Environmental Justice is also given emphasis to create awareness in human society.

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