

Faithfulness and Hopelessness in Nature : An Analysis of Margaret Atwood's *Nature as Monster* [From 'The Survival']

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Abstract

This paper tries to present the faithfulness, hopelessness and the dual face of nature bound in Atwood's *Nature as Monster*. It presents the faithfulness in nature because nature enriches the life of a person in many ways and at the same time nature even takes the life through catastrophic calamities and thereby installing hopelessness in the mind of a person. *Nature as monster* is also enriched with several concepts such as death by drowning and death by bushing to support the dual role played by nature. Margaret Atwood's extraction of ideas from other writers acts as a proof for why nature is considered as a monster. More than faithfulness, hopelessness is discussed and thereby proving the monstrous face of nature. The reason for the nature's fury is discussed at the end. Man destroys nature and nature reacts to it through disaster. So we cannot and should not hope that nature will be kind towards us if we are not kind towards nature.

KEYWORDS: Nature, Faithfulness, Hopelessness, Monster.

Literature is the reflection of life. By life we mean man as well as nature in which man lives. Some writers deal with nature alone in their settings. Hence they are so-called nature poets who celebrate the elements of nature like the sky, sun, moon and stars, creatures of nature etc. the different geographical regions of nature like the mountains, valleys, deserts and the coastal land have their own distinctive features. These in turn affect the life style, character, occupation, economy and destiny of the people in that particular geographical area. The eco-critical approach aims to study a work of art from the eco point of view, to study the role played by nature, to probe into the interaction between man and nature.

Margaret Atwood's *Nature the Monster* includes various views about Nature given by various Canadian writers. Preston Manning quotes 'An optimist in Canada is someone who thinks things could be worse'. This quotation would be apt for the context of this paper if taking 'nature' as the context. Margaret Atwood a Canadian can also be considered as an optimist with pessimistic attitude in terms of her writing in the work *Nature as Monster* even though the later part of *The Survival* has an optimistic conclusion in it. In reality she is an environmentalist who is on the side of nature. The reason for her being considered as a pessimistic person here is that her selection of sources is something that proves the monstrous and thus the pessimistic side of nature than the optimistic side. This eventually proves the hopelessness that Canadians have towards nature. All the concepts portrayed by Atwood are not her own concepts but it is a collaboration of concepts that literary writers wrote in their works.

This work includes various views about nature given by various Canadian writers. She states from Alice Munroe's *Lives of Men and Women* that 'Nature is a lot of waste

and cruelty may not be from Nature's point of view but from a human point of view. Cruelty is the law of nature'. After quoting about the cruelty of nature Atwood describes more about the monstrous side of nature with reference to literature that Landscapes in the poems of Canadian literature are interior landscapes and are traps on a state of mind. It is the poet's attitude towards the external natural universe. This can be seen not only in poetry but also in novels with natural settings.

Canada is a land of a high ratio of trees and rocks so that images from nature are present everywhere. They describe nature as either dead or indifferent or actively hostile to man. Canadian writers do not trust nature. Lack of trust in nature again reveals the hopelessness.

Canadian literature reflects the condition of the geographical Canada as well as the Canadians. Canadian geographical nature is known for its scenic beauty. The lost trust in nature was not reflected in literature during the earlier centuries because the supremacy of nature is the idea that prevailed among the people in previous century. Before eighteenth century the people considered nature as supreme and the beauty of the landscape is important. Even in the first half of nineteenth century the belief shifted to Wordsworthian concept of Romanticism of Nature that considered nature as a kind mother or nurse and a spiritual guide to man. This resulted in the consideration of nature as 'good' and cities as 'evil'. It was in the middle of nineteenth century that nature became redder in tooth and claw.

Now this clearly shows when the faithfulness in nature got converted into hopelessness. But 'when' not the problem here is 'how' has to be the problem. To answer this, the geographical condition of the real Canadian landscape should be analysed. According to the Canadian disaster database only about ten reported disasters occurred before nineteenth century. But after nineteenth century more than fifty disasters happened in just one century and the number is quite huge. The data base showed both manmade as well as natural disasters. But the disasters such as the great lakes storm of 1913, great banks earthquake and tsunami, Vancouver island earthquake, Red River flood of 1950, Pine Lake Tornado, Hurricane Juan, and the 1985 Barrie Tornado outbreak that took the life of so many were natural disasters. Now it is evident why the Canadian writers reflected the monstrous Canadian nature in their works. This continuous and recurrent natural disaster is the main cause. When comparing the natural disasters of pre and post nineteenth century the former had less reported natural disasters than the later. The nature based literary works bloomed in Canada during the post nineteenth century and what they witnessed from nature during this point was nature's fury. The pre nineteenth century was a period in Canada with less disaster as per the database and that could be the reason why nature was considered as a female deity.

There also occurred a tension between expectation of the faith in the divine Mother Nature and the actuality of hostility of nature in Susanna Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* as portrayed by Atwood. Susanna Moodie is an England born Canadian writer who writes about her problems in Canada. *Roughing it in the Bush* is her account of her journey to Canada and the first seven years of settlement and life in the Canadian bush. For her coping up with the Canadian landscape was hard at first even though she had belief in the landscape. Atwood speaks about two emotions, faith in the divine mother and a feeling of hopeless imprisonment. If the divine Mother Nature is faithful then why she is imprisoned in the landscape without an identity?

Another extraction discussed here is Douglas LePan's *A country without a Mythology*. Here an element of split can be seen. In it a stranger is travelling towards a land without a landmark among savage people who are silent and moody. The landscape is violent cold in winter and burning hot in summer. The stranger tried and expected to get spiritual fulfilment from the place rather than adapting himself into it. Atwood claims here that the Wordsworthian concept of nature prevents him from making contact with the real environment and that is why he remains a stranger. This clearly points something else. The refugees and immigrants in Canada should adapt themselves to the Canadian landscape rather than expecting something from it.

The other major concepts coined by Margaret Atwood that again shows the hopelessness in nature are the concepts like *Death by Nature* *Death by freezing* *Death by drowning* and *Death by Bushing*. As explained earlier hurricane earthquake etc. comes under the concept of death by nature where nature is the culprit and human is the victim. Blaming nature for death is not a good choice. But the recurrent natural disasters made humans to blame nature. Atwood even points how a man is killed by falling of a rock as in Earley Birney's poem David and how another victim is squashed under a tree as in Isabella Crawford's poem *Malcolm's Katie*. Death by bushing is another concept where a person gets deserted in an island and finally gets mad.

The name David is suggestive wherever there is a David in Canadian literature, there is also Goliath the evil giant which is nature itself. In the Canadian literature David and Goliath stories Goliath always wins. So far nature has been blamed. Nature is often considered as a gift from man to God and nature is considered as a Female God by Atwood here. Nature as a God would never punish her children just like that through disasters. There has to be a valid reason. Man might have provoked nature and so that nature reacted. Atwood completes this work with one such thought extracted from the work of Peter Such.

Man seen as an aggressor of nature is revealed in Peter Such's novel *Fall Outin* in which a land is attacked by a machine technology making nature retaliate in the form of a hurricane. The author definitely sides with nature. This paper has shown the belief that people have towards nature during various eras that commenced with faithfulness and ended with hopelessness in nature. Whatever may be the situation Atwood finally point out that man's failure to treat nature properly for our life is based on nature. Man destroys nature and nature reacts to it through disaster. So we cannot and should not hope that nature will be kind towards us if we are not kind towards nature.

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