



**Patriarchal Subordination of Women and Nature in Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman***

*Doris Lessing'in Türkü Söylüyor Otlar ve Margaret Atwood'un Evlenilecek Kadın Romanlarında Ataerkil Boyunduruk Altındaki Kadınlar ve Doğa*

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## ÖZ

Ekofeminizm, insanlar, insan olmayanlar ve doğal dünya arasında yeni ve daha uyumlu ilişkileri teşvik ederken, ataerkil dünya görüşlerine ve insanmerkezci ideolojiye karşı çıkarak toplumsal cinsiyet ve çevresel bozulma arasındaki ilişkiyi anlamlandırmaya çalışır. Ekofeminist teoride kadınların ve doğal çevrenin erkekler tarafından boyunduruk altına alınması öncelikle insanmerkezcilik ve ataerkilliğe atfedilir ve önerilen çözüm, biyomerkezli bir dünya görüşünün benimsenmesidir. Batı edebiyat kanonunun önde gelen yazar kadınları Doris Lessing ve Margaret Atwood, romanlarında modern ataerkil toplumlarda hem doğanın hem de kadınların marjinalleştirilmiş statüsüne ilişkin endişelerini dile getirmişlerdir. Bu çalışma, Doris Lessing'in *Türkü Söylüyor Otlar* ve Margaret Atwood'un *Evlenecek Kadın* romanlarını karşılaştırarak, bu eserlerde kadın kahramanların ve yaşadıkları çevrenin maruz kaldığı trajediyi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Her iki anlatı da kadınlar ve doğa arasındaki doğal ve içten bağı göstererek, ikisi arasındaki bağlantıya vurgu yapmaktadır. Çalışma, ekofeminist bakış açısıyla, söz konusu eserlerde ataerkil toplumsal normların kadınlar ve doğa üzerindeki zararlı etkisinin eleştirel bir değerlendirmesinin yanı sıra, her iki eserde kadınların ve doğanın karşılıklı refahının nasıl sunulduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır.

## Anahtar kelimeler

Ataerkillik, İnsanmerkezcilik, Boyunduruk, Ekofeminizm

## ABSTRACT

Ecofeminism endeavors to comprehend the correlation between gender and environmental degradation by contesting patriarchal worldviews and anthropocentric ideology, while promoting novel, more concordant relationships among humans, non-humans, and the natural world. The oppression of women and the natural world by men is primarily attributed to anthropocentrism and patriarchy, and a proposed solution is the adoption of a biocentric worldview. Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood, prominent female authors in the Western literary canon, have expressed concerns about the marginalized status of both nature and women in modern patriarchal societies. This study undertakes a comparative examination of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, with a particular emphasis on the tragic denouements that befall the female protagonists and the environment they inhabit in each respective work. Both narratives illustrate the inherent and intimate bond between women and nature, highlighting their interconnection. Upon being analyzed through an ecofeminist perspective, the two aforementioned works demonstrate a mutual preoccupation with the well-being of women and the environment, alongside a critical evaluation of the detrimental impact of patriarchal societal norms on both.

## Keywords

Patriarchy, Anthropocentrism, Subordination, Ecofeminism

## INTRODUCTION

Anthropocentrism is a philosophical perspective that serves as a standard for assessing value, asserting that human interests are the foundation of value and ethical appraisal, and that intrinsic value is exclusive to humans. Given that all other living beings are believed to exist primarily for the benefit of humans rather than for their own intrinsic value, it is both logical and justifiable for humans to exert control over the natural world for their own advantage. Anthropocentric philosophies are based on the principle of human-centeredness, which asserts that humans occupy a preeminent position in the relationship between humans and nature. This stance is strongly contested by environmental philosophies. As an environmental and feminist philosophy, ecofeminism, a term coined by Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, advocates that anthropocentrism and patriarchy are the conceptual roots of the oppression of women and nature by humans. The term “posits that the domination of ‘nature’ is linked to the domination of ‘woman’ and that both dominations must be eradicated” (Adams and Gruen, 2022, p.1). Behind this domination is the patriarchy as “manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general” (Lerner, 1986, p. 239). The concept of patriarchy can encompass not only the subjugation of women and children both within and beyond the household, but also the subordination of men, animals, and the natural world to male authority. Valeria Padilla Carroll confirms this notion as follow:

*[...] many ecofeminists, while centering women, also integrated race, class, nation, sexualities, species, ecosystems, and global location among other identities and positions within an ecofeminist matrix. This productive expansion of ecofeminist foci explicated how the unjustified domination of nature and of marginalized populations—such as women, people of color, animals, nature, and citizens of the global South—are conceptually linked in mutually reinforcing systems of oppression. (2018, p. 2)*

In Western patriarchal culture, as the “instrument[s] of oppression” (Plumwood, 2003, p. 20), the internalization of masculine constructs and values is evident in various societal institutions and is reflected in power-based social relations both locally and globally. The binary perspective, which perceives the world as a set of opposing terms with one being dominant and the other subordinate, is an inherent characteristic of patriarchal ideology. The hierarchical model posits a fundamental divide between nature and culture, men and women, reason and emotion, and the mind and body. As per the tenets of this dualistic philosophy, the male gender is perceived as the dominant entity, exercising mastery over all aspects of existence, whereas women and nature are relegated to a subordinate position. The masculine hierarchy bears responsibility for both the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature. Hence, the prevalence of dualistic thinking can be attributed to the subjugation and domination of women and the natural world by men. Ecofeminist activists strongly oppose the prioritization of human interests over those of the environment and challenge the binary system of thought that privileges masculine perspectives. Their concern for the well-being of women and the environment stems from their belief in the interconnectedness of all life and rejection of the notion that males are the apex of existence on our planet.

Ecofeminists advocate for the convergence of the ecology and feminism movements to eradicate anthropocentrism and patriarchy, which are the underlying causes of male domination over nature and women. This is because ecofeminists recognize that these two ideologies are interrelated and contribute to the imbalance in ecological harmony and sustainability, as well as gender equality. Ecofeminism posits that there exists a fundamental correlation between the subjugation of women and the subjugation of the natural world. It contends that any attempt to isolate the protection of women and the environment would prove to be deleterious. The term implies that the entire universe is interconnected and interdependent, thus "juxtaposing the goals of" feminism and environmentalism "can suggest new values and social structure [...] on the maintenance of environmental integrity" (Merchant, 1980, p. xix). In this sense, "recognizing and utilizing the convergence of gender and environmental issues" (Murphy, 2023, p. 1), the aim of ecofeminism is to establish a state of concordant coexistence between humanity and the natural world, encompassing individuals of all genders and all living organisms, thereby facilitating the perpetuation and progression of the natural environment.

Doris Lessing and Margaret Atwood, notable female writers within the Western literary tradition, have been vocal about their apprehension regarding the subjugated state of nature and women in contemporary patriarchal societies. From the onset of her writing career, Lessing has demonstrated a preoccupation with issues pertaining to women, race, and environmental circumstances. The primary focus of the debut novel, *The Grass is Singing*, centers around the character of Mary, who is portrayed as a vulnerable Caucasian female. The narrative delves into the challenges faced by her family, including her father's alcoholism and her mother's bitterness, as they strive to maintain financial stability. The protagonist's search for a suitable spouse proves to be unsuccessful, leading her to reluctantly enter into matrimony with Dick, an agriculturist lacking in proficiency. Dick's decision to wed the protagonist stems from his belief that she possesses the ability to create a domestic environment for him. The marriage commenced without affection as it was established solely on the basis of their individual requirements. Furthermore, both parties exhibit an unwillingness to engage in any form of intimate behavior. Following their marriage, Mary gradually becomes aware of Dick's lack of farming expertise, which has resulted in a series of financial difficulties due to his poor management skills. Mary exhibits a strong aversion towards being associated with a lack of success, yet she appears to possess an unconscious inclination towards relinquishing control to a more dominant male figure. At this juncture of Mary's cognitive maturation, the African American domestic worker Moses becomes a significant presence in her life. Mary exhibits a sense of superiority towards individuals of African descent, however, her influence over Moses diminishes. Moreover, a sexual liaison ensues between the two individuals. Mary refutes the claim and endeavors to eject Moses. Finally, he commits the act of homicide against her. Consequently, her spouse becomes mentally unstable. Mary aspires to achieve happiness throughout her lifetime. As a result of her limited capacity to embrace the inevitability of events, she finds herself incapable of rescuing herself.

Atwood's inaugural novel, *The Edible Woman*, centers around Marian, a solitary Canadian female who secures a role as a market researcher at a research organization subsequent to completing her studies. Peter, the significant other of the subject, is perceived as possessing exceptional physical attractiveness, yet displaying a demeanor of conceit and possessing

substantial financial resources. From the standpoint of other individuals, they are deemed to be a flawless match. Nevertheless, Marian experiences dissatisfaction and gradually develops eating disorders. This is due to her persistent perception of Peter's oppressive behavior. As the date of their engagement ceremony draws near, she experiences growing restlessness and a decreased ability to consume substantial amounts of food. Subsequent to that juncture, her resistance towards matrimony is concomitant with resistance towards sustenance. Ultimately, Marian manages to rescue herself by crafting a cake in the likeness of a female figure, which she presents to Peter as a replacement for the genuine Marian. Peter, nonetheless, declines to partake of the cake and departs, leaving Marian in a state of fury. The aforementioned outcome suggests that Marian is severing all ties with her betrothed, Peter, who serves as a representative of the male demographic in society. In the end, Marian ingests the cake resembling a female figure, which subsequently results in the restoration of her appetite. Through this process, Marian emancipates her previous identity and establishes a novel self-perception. The protagonist achieves a state of internal equilibrium and rejuvenation by the conclusion of the narrative.

Although there exist a limited number of articles that address the ecofeminist motifs present in both *The Grass is Singing* and *The Edible Woman*, the majority of these publications fail to establish significant connections between the two literary works. From an ecofeminist standpoint, both pieces of work demonstrate a shared concern for the welfare of women and the environment, and a condemnation of the harmful consequences of patriarchal systems on both. The objective of this study is to perform comparative analyses pertaining to the symbols of climate and weather, the correlation between patriarchy and the destruction of nature, and the fate of women in order to discern the ecofeminist viewpoints that are apparent in the literary works under consideration. Additionally, this study seeks to analyze the tragic outcomes that befall the female protagonists and the natural environment within the novels.

## THE SYMBOLS OF CLIMATE AND WEATHER

The novels in consideration showcase an allegorical correlation between the female gender and the environment. In summary, women are inherently inclined to act as vigilant guardians of their surroundings, and they derive a sense of security from their interactions with the natural environment. Individuals provide mutual support and solace to each other during periods of distress. The main characters of both novels derive comfort and motivation from the natural environment that surrounds them. The climatic conditions function as a figurative gauge for Mary's religious condition and a signal of Marian's emotional disposition. In *The Grass is Singing*, the description of nature is pervasive from beginning to end; the changing weather and "brutality hot climate [...] function as active agents of" (Fishburn, 1994, p. 3) Mary's emotions and even her destiny. When Mary was young, "she remembered an exposed dusty village that was backed by a file of bunchy gum trees, with a square of dust always swirling and settling because of passing ox-wagons; with hot sluggish air that sounded several times a day with the screaming and coughing of trains" (Lessing, 1973, p. 27). Mary's childhood was characterized by parental conflicts and extreme financial hardship. She has been habituated to the climate characterized by "hot sluggish air," which has become an integral part of her childhood recollections. The adverse circumstances of Mary's life are compounded by the presence of a warm climate.

Mary is compelled to wed Dick, a destitute farmer, due to the influence of patriarchal norms, and subsequently departs from the locality where she was employed. Mary experiences a positive emotional state subsequent to her initial overnight stay at Dick's agricultural property: "When she woke she found she was alone in the bed, and there was the clanging of a gong somewhere at the back of the house. She could see a tender gold light on the trees through the window, and faint rosy patches of sun lay on the white walls, showing up the rough grain of the whitewash" (Lessing, 1973, p. 48). The presence of "tender gold light" and "faint rosy patches of sun" may suggest a positive emotional state. The climate undergoes fluctuations similar to the changes in Mary's emotions, ultimately resulting in her eventual distress: a "complete nervous breakdown" (Lessing, 1973, p. 160). The novel takes place in South Africa during the mid-twentieth century, characterized by a tropical climate that was persistently hot, except for the winter season spanning three months. Mary's optimistic perspective on life initially mitigates her discomfort with the hot air: "In the first flush of energy and determination she really enjoyed the life, putting things to rights and making a little go a long way. She liked, particularly, the early mornings before the heat numbed and tired her; liked the new leisure; liked Dick's approval" (Lessing, 1973, p. 53). The narrative would be more captivating if the female protagonist had a specific role or task to fulfill. Mary derives satisfaction from the autonomy and accountability that accompany returning to an unoccupied dwelling: "Because it was new, she really enjoyed it. But when everything was clean and polished, and the pantry was full of food, she used to sit on the old greasy sofa in the front room, suddenly collapsing on it as if her legs had been drained of strength. It was so hot! She had never imagined it could be so hot" (Lessing, 1973, p. 57). She exhibits a persistent tendency to sweat profusely, resulting in the accumulation of moisture on her thighs and ribcage beneath her garments. She remains in a state of immobility with closed eyes, experiencing the sensation of high temperature emanating from the impact of the iron on her cranium.

Following her nuptials, Mary's existence is replete with sweltering climatic conditions. The fluctuating climatic conditions serve as an apt analogy for the wretched existence of Mary while being subjected to the dominance of Dick. As the temperature rises, Mary experiences a progressive depletion of her spiritual well-being. Mary may experience a transient sensation of pleasure when the temperature decreases: "As time passed, the heat became an obsession. She could not bear the sapping, undermining waves that beat down from the iron roof" (Lessing, 1973, p. 59). The expectation of Mary is that precipitation will replenish her energy levels, implying that rain could potentially serve as a beneficial and rescuing force for females. Nevertheless, the level of humidity does not have any impact on Dick. He consistently refuses to modify the roof as per her request. As long as Mary remains deceased, the iron roof will continue to subject her remains to high temperatures.

Margaret Atwood is recognized as a proficient writer who possesses both feminist and ecological awareness, akin to the ecofeminist consciousness espoused by Doris Lessing. The author's debut novel, *The Edible Woman*, delves deeply into the predicaments faced by women in a patriarchal society and the ecological distress. The protagonist of the literary work is Marian, an unmarried female who is employed as a market researcher for a commercial enterprise. In contrast to the character of Mary in *The Grass is Singing*, the individual in question does not submit to the societal constraints imposed by tradition.



Rather than depending on external factors, the protagonist draws upon her personal fortitude to overcome the subjugation imposed upon her and successfully liberates herself from the dominance of her betrothed, Peter. During the entirety of the process, there are alterations in the natural environment and atmospheric conditions, which are accompanied by fluctuations in Marian's emotional state. At the outset of the novel, Marian frequently alludes to the heat, which can be attributed to her unfulfilling occupation at Seymour Surveys and her despondent state during her visit to Clara, a former college peer who is currently expecting her third child: "The day was going to be hot and humid; already I could feel a private atmosphere condensing around me like a plastic bag [...] She could work in a shiny new air-conditioned office building, whereas mine was dingy brick with small windows" (Atwood, 2010, pp. 16-20). Marian perceives her current work environment as being constricting and stifling due to the elevated temperature and lack of ventilation. Additionally, she feels that there are no opportunities for career advancement within her current position. While on her way to Clara's home, she walks "down towards the subway station along the late-afternoon sidewalk through a thick golden haze of heat and dust. It was almost like moving underwater" (Atwood, 2010, p. 35). The lexical items "heat" and "moving underwater" convey the notion that Marian's encounter with Clara may not be entirely pleasurable. Once Marian achieves her objective, this statement holds true. It is incumbent upon her to convey empathy and sorrow in light of Clara's circumstances. The individual expresses concern regarding the possibility of encountering a similar destiny in the interim period. She thus feels as though she "was enclosed in a layer of moist dough" (Atwood, 2010, p. 44) on the trip back.

The two novels under consideration demonstrate a consistent correlation between hot weather and melancholic feelings experienced by female characters such as Marian and Mary. Conversely, the arrival of cold weather serves as an emotional signal of comfort for the heroines. Marian exhibits inherent qualities of purity, kindness, decency, and submissiveness. However, as she develops a relationship with her arrogant partner Peter, she gradually realizes that she is merely a subject of his authority and will consistently occupy a subservient position. Consequently, she experiences a strong urge to break free from the limitations imposed by Peter: "On the street the air was cooler; there was a slight breeze. I let go of Peter's arm and began to run" (Atwood, 2010, p. 82). Peter obstructs her from fleeing during her first endeavor. Upon their arrival at Len's apartment, Marian, accompanied by another one of her high school classmates, endeavors once again to relinquish their patriarchal societal norms: "I began to find something very attractive about the dark cool space between the bed and the wall. It would be quiet down there, I thought; and less humid" (Atwood, 2010, p. 86). Marian exhibits a heightened cognitive state during cooler temperatures and is actively striving to attain a state of equilibrium between her internal and external environments. As meteorological conditions deteriorate, women are increasingly subjected to the oppressive forces of patriarchal societal structures. Concurrently, tumultuous weather patterns and associated natural phenomena, such as lightning and thunder, often mirror the discord and misfortune that befalls these marginalized individuals. Marian's personal encounters or observations:

*the wind was now stronger and colder and the lightning seemed to be moving closer by the minute. In the distance the thunder was beginning [...] "Why the hell you had to*

*ruin a perfectly good evening I'll never know," he said, ignoring my remark. There was a crack of thunder [...] We sat silently, listening to the storm. It must have been right overhead; the lightning was dazzling and continuous, and each probing jagged fork was followed almost at once by a rending crash, like the trees of a whole forest splitting and falling. In the intervals of darkness we heard the rain pounding against the car; water was coming through in a fine spray around the edges of the closed windows [...] He stroked my hair, forgiving, understanding, a little patronizing. "Marian." I could feel his neck swallow. I couldn't tell now whether it was his body or my own that was shuddering; he tightened his arms around me. "How do you think we'd get on as ... how do you think we'd be, married?" I drew back from him. A tremendous electric blue flash, very near, illuminated the inside of the car. As we stared at each other in that brief light I could see myself, small and oval, mirrored in his eyes. (Atwood, 2010, pp. 90-93)*

The severe weather brings Marian Peter's proposal, which appears as "a tremendous electric blue flash," upsetting Marian's tranquil existence. She has a perception that Peter will exert control over them in the future, whereas Peter himself holds the belief that he is acting in a patronizing manner. Based on the preceding information, it is apparent that although lightning and thunder may not have a substantial effect on males, their occurrence is intimately connected to the distress experienced by females. Women are often subjected to male indifference and exhibit more similarities than differences.

#### **PATRIARCHY AND DEVASTATED NATURE**

The concept of patriarchy posits that women and the natural environment are primarily intended to fulfill the material needs of men. According to Marti Kheel's argument, there has been a longstanding association between nature and femininity and nature "has been depicted as "the other", the raw material out of which culture and masculine self-identity are formed" (1993, p. 244). Val Plumwood explains that "in terms of the assumptions of nature/culture dualism, women's 'uncontrollable' bodies make them part of the sphere of nature" (2003, p. 37). The influence of patriarchal ideology has resulted in an inherent and unbridled inclination among individuals to exert dominance over the environment. Consequently, it is feasible to establish similarities between women who have been subjugated and the environment that has been harmed, both of which have been caused by patriarchal devastation. .

In *The Grass is Singing*, Charlie Slatter is an unscrupulous farmer "who survives on the [...] material level by exploiting the labour of the blacks on his farm for more than twenty years" (Divya, nd., p. 33). Prior to the onset of World War I, Charlie's standard of living was modest. However, subsequent to the conclusion of the war, he was able to amass a substantial fortune by cultivating tobacco. In general, he "appreciates the non-human aspects of the environment for their instrumental value and being symbolic of forms of human exploitation as well as the commodification of nature" (Mondal and Dey, 2022, p. 45). While he over-exploits his farm with planting tobacco for money, his "farm had hardly any trees left on it. It was a monument to farming malpractice, with great gullies cutting through it, and acres of good dark earth gone dead from misuse. But he made the money, that was the thing" (Lessing, 1973, p. 70). Charlie is proud of his unconventional approach to making a living and "his consciousness is mediated and informed by a teleology of domination" (Mutekwa and Musanga, 2013, p. 243). The discourse during his visits with his neighbor



Dick consistently revolves around agricultural topics. Upon learning about Dick's agricultural difficulties, he promptly proposes an option that is financially lucrative but not environmentally sustainable, which involves transitioning from maize cultivation to tobacco production. He spends "three hours trying to persuade Dick to plant tobacco, instead of mealies and little crops" (Lessing, 1973, p. 70). His only motivation for farming is financial as his "capitalist bent restricts his views to profit making in the short term" (Iheka, 2018, p. 670). Dick's persistent efforts in agricultural cultivation and tree-planting do not yield any financial gains, which exacerbates his frustration. Charlie holds the belief that Dick's investment in tree-planting is not a financially sound decision. Conversely, his sole concern appears to be generating revenue, with no regard for any other matters. But Charlie, "as an ecoambiguous character" (Iheka, 2018, p. 667), is aware that his abuse of the planet is negative. The sentiment in question is revealed through Dick's remarks regarding his personal property: "This was a hundred acres of some of the best ground on his farm, which he had planted with young gums a couple of years before. It was this plantation that had so annoyed Charlie Slatter – perhaps because of an unacknowledged feeling of guilt that he himself never put back in his soil what he took from it" (Lessing, 1973, p. 74). Charlie Slatter, in actuality, exhibits egocentric tendencies as a white farmer, and his expressed concern for Dick is characterized by hypocrisy, driven by a fervent aspiration for occupation: "The real reason why the Slatters, particularly Charlie, maintained their interest in the Turners, was that they wanted Dick's farm still: more even than they had" (Lessing, 1973, p. 147). Charlie's utilitarian outlook is what fuels his growing excitement for Dick's land. Charlie's dark soil farm becomes lifeless because of his "capitalist orientation" which "engenders environmental degradation" (Iheka, 2018, p. 669). The individual in question operates in a specific geographic region before transitioning to the subsequent area, propelled by the incentive to generate revenue. The individual is in dire need of acquiring Dick's farm, which boasts 100 acres of exceptionally fertile soil, due to this particular reason. Consequently, he is motivated by an incessant and escalating urge to surpass and capitalize on the nation and its inherent resources. As Mutekwa and Musenga state, "his ecological philosophy is in tandem with the dominant Western world view and so it is quintessentially anthropocentric and instrumentalist" (2013, p. 243). Charlie exhibits a lack of understanding regarding the interrelationship between the human species and the natural environment. Mary's eventual downfall can be attributed to Charlie's excessive utilization of his property, which subsequently fuels his fervent ambition to acquire Dick's property.

The devastated natural environment is also portrayed by Atwood in *The Edible Woman* through her depiction of Duncan's place of origin and the issue of pollution:

*The thing I like about the place I came from, it's a mining town, there isn't much of anything in it but at least it has no vegetation. A lot of people wouldn't like it. It's the smelting plants that do it, tall smokestacks reaching up into the sky and the smoke glows red at night, and the chemical fumes have burnt the trees for miles around, it's barren, nothing but the barren rock, even grass won't grow on most of it, and there are the slag-heaps too; where the water collects on the rock it's a yellowish-brown from the chemicals. Nothing would grow there even if you planted it, I used to go out of the town and sit on the rocks, about this time of year, waiting for the snow. (Atwood, 2010, p. 157)*

Duncan's conversation with Marian "exposes the pathetic condition of Nature in the hand of man" (Lakshmi, 2022, p. 257) and clearly demonstrates that the environmental problem caused by industrial development had become very serious at the time. The environmental degradation resulting from industrial civilization may elicit strong negative emotions from a significant portion of the population. However, Duncan does not appear to be among this group. He frequently exhibits apathy towards the ravaged environment and even holds contempt for the principles of organic development. Duncan exhibits a lack of affection or affinity towards the natural world and appears to be oblivious to the ways in which human beings engage with the environment beyond the realm of humanity. The individual exhibits an aversion towards encountering natural phenomena. When discussing the guest towels, he says, "I can't stand things with flowers embroidered on them" (Atwood, 2010, p. 153). The village of Duncan, which has been contaminated, provides a compelling example of how the contemporary industry has not only polluted the physical environment but also had a negative impact on the mental well-being of individuals. The narrative exhibits a discernible decline in the climate. Commonly, the atmosphere exhibits a gray hue and terrestrial objects manifest a smoky haze: "The sky was cloudless but not clear: the air hung heavily, like invisible steam, so that the colours and outlines of objects in the distance were blurred" (Atwood, 2010, p. 52). In the event of air contamination, a catastrophic outcome is likely to occur as all living organisms rely on it for sustenance.

## THE FATE OF WOMEN

Within a patriarchal societal structure, the father figure conventionally assumes a pivotal position in both familial and communal spheres. The existing patriarchal order subjugates and marginalizes both women and the natural world. According to ecofeminist ideology, there exists a pattern of male domination over the natural environment, which is accompanied by the marginalization of women within society. The detrimental effects of patriarchy extend to both women and the environment. Ecofeminist theory posits that the environmental degradation and oppression of women can be attributed to the dualistic worldview and androcentric values of patriarchal societies. Evidently, there exists a perception that women and the natural environment are regarded as mutually supportive entities. The female protagonists in the novels, Mary and Marian, encounter significant obstacles due to the prevalence of male dominance within their culture. However, their distinct viewpoints regarding this issue ultimately shape their disparate fates. The protagonist's antagonistic disposition towards the natural world constitutes a significant contributing element to her ultimate demise in *The Grass is Singing*. Mary's demise can be attributed to her hostility towards the natural surroundings and the ecosystem. Despite having lived in South Africa her entire life, Mary has never regarded it as her home. The individual envisions a distant and picturesque England that has yet to be visited. The root cause of her unfortunate circumstances and ultimate demise can be attributed to her antagonistic attitude towards the indigenous population and the plant life present on the agricultural property. It is an undeniable truth that attempting to combat natural forces invariably leads to unfavorable outcomes. Mary perceives her engagements with the environment as an ongoing conflict, and furthermore, derives pleasure from the confrontation. Mary exhibits an unidentified and disconcerting phobia of the topography, resulting in her avoidance of the foliage encompassing the farm. The tragic decline of Mary

can be attributed to her persistent conflict with the natural world and her incapacity to derive satisfaction or pleasure from it throughout her life. Mary's full appreciation of her error and her subsequent affinity towards nature only manifests itself shortly before her demise. Ultimately, the protagonist attains an unyielding state of equilibrium through the act of passing away. She has resided in a small and uninviting rural settlement since her childhood. She recollects her place of origin as featuring a square covered in dust, a dusty village, the presence of dust and domestic fowl, the coexistence of dust and children, and the existence of a store amidst the dusty surroundings. Therefore, Mary does not place significance on her upbringing, which inevitably influences her later years. The first interaction she had with Dick in proximity to a nearby cinema provides substantiation for this claim. Dick halts his agricultural vehicle, laden with a pair of harrows and sacks of grain. Mary displays a facial expression of contentment while analyzing these unfamiliar objects. She possesses a valid rationale for engaging in this behavior, as they harbor a fondness for the community and perceive it as a secure environment. She always "associated the country with her childhood, because of those little dorps she had lived in, and the way they were all surrounded by miles and miles of nothingness – miles and miles of veld" (Lessing, 1973, p. 36). Nonetheless, the affectionate society coerces her to enter into matrimony with Dick, an impoverished agriculturist. To clarify, the individual's idyllic existence in the urban setting has forsaken her due to her unmarried status. Due to her inability to alter others' perceptions of her, she relocates to a rural area alongside Dick. Despite her inner reluctance, she acquiesces to life on the farm as it represents her only viable alternative. As she sets off for Dick's property, she tells herself that she is going there so that "she would get close to nature" (Lessing, 1973, 42). Upon her arrival, she displays an inability to conceal her anxious state from the residents of the farm. "She looked round her, shivering a little, for a cold breath blew out of the trees and down in the vlei beyond them hung a cold white vapour" (Lessing, 1973, p. 43). Given her lack of familiarity with agricultural life, it is reasonable for her to experience feelings of apprehension. In actuality, she is a female individual who fulfills the reproductive role inherent in nature, yet she does not inherently hold contempt for the natural realm. Consequently, she ambles towards the trees in a thoughtless manner, observing their enlargement and softening as she approaches. But "then a strange bird called, a wild nocturnal sound, and she turned and ran back, suddenly terrified, as if a hostile breath had blown upon her, from another world, from the trees" (Lessing, 1973, p. 43). Following that experience, she develops a phobia of trees and refrained from interacting with them until the final day of her existence. Undoubtedly, the animosity towards agriculture and forestry involves factors beyond mere fear. The tumultuous period she spends with Dick is the primary factor responsible for this outcome. The gradual development of aversion towards all things associated with Dick can be attributed to the lack of affection from her spouse and the frequent encounters with his apathy. Given that Dick's primary source of income is derived from farming, Mary exhibits hesitancy towards engaging in physical intimacy with him and his preferred activities. However, as a conventional spouse, she acquiesces to her husband's desires.

Ecofeminist literary theory prioritizes the exploration of the underlying factors that fuel the dual dominance of women and the natural world through an analysis of their dynamics. Ecofeminist scholars refute the notion of a clear-cut dichotomy between distinct categories

such as male and female, nature and culture, and mind and body, as they maintain that these categories are fundamentally interconnected. During the period subsequent to their nuptials, Dick inflicts severe harm upon Mary, while the environment experiences a decline as a result of both natural factors and excessive human exploitation. Mary is subjected to the dominance of the male-dominated society, leading to a state of emotional detachment and hopelessness. She displays apathy towards the suffering of nature:

*The week before a fire had swept over part of their farm, destroying two cowsheds and acres of grazing. Where it had burnt, lay black expanses of desolation, and still, here and there, fallen logs smoked in the blackness, faint tendrils of smoke showing grey against the charred landscape. She turned her eyes away, because she did not want to think of the money that had been lost (Lessing, 1973, p. 64).*

Her pessimistic perspective on nature and the world is likely to lead her towards a path of misery and suffering. Whenever she engages in a disagreement with Dick, she departs from the enclosed dwelling to seek solace in the refreshing outdoor atmosphere, albeit with a resentful disposition towards the surrounding locality. Mary's fallacy lies in her refusal to acknowledge the inherent correlation between women and the natural world, and instead attributes her misfortunes to the dichotomy between urban and rural environments. The protagonist remains unaware of the root cause of her misfortune until her untimely demise. On the final day of her journey, she ultimately acknowledges that nature is an enduring presence in her life, notwithstanding her antipathy towards it over the course of numerous years: "She ran away from the house, across the hard, baked earth where the grains of sand glittered, towards the trees. The trees hated her, but she could not stay in the house. She entered them, feeling the shade fall on her flesh, hearing the cicadas all about, shrilling endlessly, insistently" (Lessing, 1973, p. 171). Even in her final moments under Moses' knife, her only thought is that "the bush avenged itself: that was her last thought. The trees advanced in a rush, like beasts, and the thunder was the noise of their coming" (Lessing, 1973, p. 178). The demise of Mary can be attributed to the restrictive circumstances imposed by a patriarchal society, coupled with her own limited capacity to come to terms with her unjust circumstances and the misguided rejection of solace from nature. The individual in question has undergone a process of socialization that has instilled within her a strict adherence to both anthropocentrism and patriarchy. Consequently, she has become subject to the negative effects of these dominant ideologies. The deficiency lies in her inability to perceive the interdependence of all living organisms and the imperative for them to coexist in a state of symbiosis. The notion that all life is inherently equal within the biosphere, coupled with the protagonist's transgression against the natural order through her exploitation of the environment and the indigenous population, leads to the inference that her ultimate demise at the hands of Moses is predestined from the outset of the narrative.

In comparison to *The Grass is Singing*, wherein the protagonist's demise and the devastation of the natural world and surroundings are portrayed as a complete tragedy caused by men, Atwood emphasizes the significance of preserving tranquility and concord among all living beings, irrespective of the historical dominance of men over women and the environment. Atwood's ultimate objective does not involve the resolution of oppositional dualism. The main objective of the individual is to determine effective strategies for cultivating harmony

in various types of relationships, encompassing those with oneself, fellow women, and the environment. The portrayal of Mary's submission to authority and disdain for nature in *The Grass is Singing* is a source of great suffering for her, whereas Marian's resistance against the oppression of a patriarchal society in *The Edible Woman* serves as a positive example. Yawer Ahmad Mir states that states that "the title 'edible' itself shouts of the heartbreaking status of woman as an object for entertainment and consumption" (2019, p. 1). Despite the pressure exerted by her fiance Peter, she remains steadfast in her refusal to acquiesce to his demands. Assisted by her companions, she acquires the self-assurance to challenge established societal conventions and attain genuine serenity.

Carol Ann Howells writes that "as a woman writer Atwood has always been intensely aware of the significance of representations of female body, but in terms of a woman's self-definition and as a fantasy object" (1996, p. 43). The novel portrays women solely in terms of their physical attributes and marital status. Madeleine Davies writes that

*Atwood's female bodies are inevitably coded bodies that tell the story of the subject's experience within a political economy that seeks to consume them, convert them into consumers in turn, shrink them, neutralize them, silence them, and contain them physically or metaphorically.* (2006, p. 60)

Within the novel, Clara and Ainsley are portrayed as being among Marian's most intimate companions. Marian rediscovers her personal identity by assimilating insights from the life experiences of her closest companions, thereby determining the optimal trajectory for women. As Pelin Acar states, "Atwood criticises the value that patriarchal traditions put on the female body as fertility objects through Marian's college friend Clara" (2019, p. 57). At the end of her second year of college, Clara marries Joe Bates, who is seven years older than she is and "legitimizes man's natural superiority over woman" (Uğurel Özdemir, 2019, p. 84). Clara, at the outset of her narrative, has already given birth to two offspring and is currently anticipating the arrival of her third child. In this sense, Clara is a character who celebrates "women's biological destiny" (Howells, 1996, p. 44) and it would appear that she is the archetypal subordinate middle-class woman who "lets her personality be captured, ruled and tyrannized by her husband" (Uğurel Özdemir, 2019, 88). It is anticipated that she will fulfill her calling as an affectionate mother and committed spouse, thereby progressing towards the status of a domestic angel. According to Julia Zimmer, "Clara is being swallowed by the role of motherhood and has lost her sense of self, she is a passive body and no longer has any control over what happens to her" (2021, p. 34). In contrast to Clara, Marian does not associate herself with the cohort of insurgent young women, although she does express similar dissent towards the conventional societal expectations imposed on married women. In her eyes, "Clara's body is so thin that her pregnancies are always bulgingly obvious, and now in her seventh month she looked like a boa constrictor that has swallowed a watermelon" (Atwood, 2010, p. 36). Marian realizes that Clara has lost her identity as a result of exhaustion at "her reproductive function" (Tolan, 2007, p. 13). Marian is significantly troubled by the frequency of her pregnancies. Upon gaining knowledge of Clara's third childbirth, the individual made a spontaneous choice to procure a bouquet of roses as a gesture of gratitude for her recuperation and return to her own ailing physique. Marian holds a negative perception of pregnancy, as she perceives it as evidence of the lack



of ownership women have over their bodies. When Clara discusses her forthcoming third offspring, Marian appears to be less enthusiastic than her: "'Of course it hurts like hell,' Clara said smugly, 'and they won't give you anything till quite far along, because of the baby; but that's the funny thing about pain. You can never remember it afterwards. I feel just marvelous now'" (Atwood, 2010, p. 141).

Clara, nevertheless, fails to effectively and joyfully manage her responsibilities as a spouse and parent. In actuality, Clara experiences a degree of astonishment regarding her post-nuptial existence. The loss of her ability to lead a liberated and unburdened existence akin to that of an angel is accompanied by a concomitant loss of her feminine allure. The domicile, akin to the individual's existence, is in a state of utter chaos; both the exterior and interior areas are persistently disheveled and congested. Regrettably, Clara exhibits a lack of maternal dedication, resulting in her child being confronted with a complex array of decisions pertaining to nourishment, attire, and overall way of life. The children's attire often appears unkempt. Furthermore, the subject exhibits a lack of spousal consideration and declines to contribute to domestic duties. The individual's inability to confront actuality and exhibit autonomous discernment and decision-making is evidently demonstrated by her inadequate management of her enterprise. The subject undergoes a gradual metamorphosis into a woman who exclusively embraces a lifestyle that is in harmony with nature. She experiences exhaustion subsequent to childbirth and nearly severs all ties with modern society. Despite the predicament, Clara exhibits minimal inclination to depart from the inactive circle. The woman in question appears to exhibit a sense of complacency towards her husband's protective measures, and displays a nonchalant attitude towards the various unfavorable and restrictive situations that arise. Marian periodically endeavors to provide solace to Clara due to her empathetic disposition towards her. The protagonist gains insight into the potential trajectory of her life should she opt to adhere to conventional norms of matrimony and procreation in the interim. She has created a psychological distance from the aforementioned circumstance: "Whatever was going to happen to Clara had already happened: she had turned into what she was going to be. It wasn't that she wanted to change places with Clara; she only wanted to know what she was becoming, what direction she was taking, so she could be prepared" (Atwood, 2010, p. 224). The prevalence of submissive female characters is a recurring theme throughout the novel. The characters portrayed in the work are depicted as two-dimensional, representing the patriarchal social and cultural milieu that serves as a backdrop against which the non-conformist characters are juxtaposed.

Ainsley and Marian are the two female characters in the novel who exhibit rebellious behavior. In contrast to Clara, "Ainsey is a juxtaposition to [...] anxious portrayal of motherhood in which the woman loses control over her body" (Zimmer, 2021, p. 34). She has somewhat more radical views on life and marriage because she "is not among the favorable stereotype woman that could be easily manipulated by patriarchal norms and ideals" (Uğurel Özdemir, 2019, p. 102). She derives pleasure from engaging in smoking and alcohol consumption, and exhibits a tendency to frequently change romantic partners. Ainsley's decision to embark on single motherhood and have a child has left Marian in a state of surprise. She explains,

*No, I'm not going to get married. That's what's wrong with most children, they have too*

*many parents. You can't say the sort of household Clara and Joe are running is an ideal situation for a child. Think of how confused their mother-image and their father-image will be; they're riddled with complexes already. And it's mostly because of the father.* (Atwood, 2010, p. 46)

Marian does not endorse Ainsley's attempt to seduce her friend Len, as she is unable to comprehend her unconventional thought process. However, Ainsley exhibits a high level of determination in executing her preconceived plan. After multiple encounters, she effectively entices Len and "she manipulates [him] to impregnate her" (Zimmer, 2021, p. 34). However, she is compelled to beseech Len to enter into matrimony with her and assume the role of father to her offspring upon discovering that a child lacking a paternal figure may experience cognitive abnormalities and health issues. Ainsley successfully secures a marital partner in Fischer Symthe, who happens to be one of Duncan's cohabitants, subsequent to experiencing rejection from Len due to her impractical expectations, which had a detrimental impact on his mental well-being. Broadly speaking, Ainsley exhibits a radical disposition in both ideology and action. The subject in question attributes the act of assuming the role of a conventional marriage archetype to Clara, with the intention of undermining said archetype. Although her comments regarding Clara may be laudatory, she nevertheless aligns herself with Clara's opposite. Upon implementation of her defiant strategy, she solely encounters animosity and descends into the marshland she has consistently opposed. The outcome pertaining to Ainsley indicates a potential compromise of the convention. Ainsley, a proponent of radical feminism and an advocate for those dissatisfied with established societal and moral norms, endeavors to effectuate a transformation of the existing reality, albeit with limited success. While her choices may be deemed socially acceptable, they are also comprehensible.

In the end, Marian, who "does not wish to turn into any of the models of adult women offered by society" (Howells, 1996, p. 46), also rejects the traditional marriage. The monotonous daily regimen that Clara adheres to post-marriage, coupled with Ainsley's unsuccessful strategy as a single mother, impart significant insights to her. She possesses an understanding that women possess capabilities beyond that of domestic labor and procreation, and recognizes that completely disassociating from the male gender is not necessarily conducive to achieving personal contentment. Marian endeavors to overcome the limitations imposed upon her by the predominantly patriarchal society in her milieu, ultimately achieving a state of inner tranquility and harmonious cohabitation with the natural world. Marian's profound spiritual depression is attributed to her association with Peter and the environmental factors surrounding her. Despite acknowledging the limitations imposed by societal norms and economic activities on contemporary individuals, she deems it unacceptable to perceive herself solely as an extension of Peter. This proves that "male body is made rational by being made the instrument of a rationality which transforms nature, the female body is made part of culture by being subject to the control of others taken to represent rationality" (Plumwood, 2003, p. 38). In this sense, "Marian is actually being symbolically consumed, oppressed and by people surrounding her" (Bornancin, 2019, p. 30). At first, Marian makes an effort to act normally and "gradually distances from her real self and lets herself to be consumed and subjugated at the helm of her husband" (Mir, 2019, p.2 Although she may attempt to appear conventional, she has surpassed the majority of individuals in society. She is unable to refute

her true identity, in other words. The act of abstaining from food can be interpreted as an attempt to distance oneself from their inherent femininity or authentic identity as "the only escape from this consumption of her self proves to be non-eating" (Zimmer, 2021, p. 38). Marian strives to create a "masculine" shell around her "feminine" self because she is terrified of being disintegrated and "with the fear of being consumed, she begins to refuse to consume, as well" (Acar, 2019, p. 60). The subject endeavors to remove the bandage, exhibiting a dualistic behavior. On one hand, she repudiates her feminine identity by abstaining from nourishment, while on the other hand, she is subjected to torment and necessitates a support system to facilitate her escape to a secure environment.

Marian is rescued from her predicament by Duncan who is "a sort of alter ego for Marian" (Macpherson, 2010, p. 28). Duncan serves as an intermediary between Marian's tangible reality and the unfamiliar realm in which she resides. Marian maintains her social connections with Peter and Duncan, all the while exhibiting signs of inner turmoil. Duncan, an individual with distinct characteristics, exhibits remarkable resilience within his imaginative realm. This data instills in Marian a sense of assurance to disclose her genuine identity; his idiosyncrasy motivates Marian to reacquaint herself with her true self. The individual gains insight from Duncan regarding the extent to which they have been socialized into gender stereotypes, and the potential fragility and insignificance of such societal constructs. Marian creates a cake that is shaped like a female figure and presents it to Peter as a surrogate for her own persona, subsequent to her realization of her true identity and her decision to depart from Peter. The cake is "a metaphor for power" (Parker, 1995, p. 349) and has a wide variety of symbolic connotations. Initially, the replacement of Marian's identity as a commodity within a consumerist society is substituted by the cake. Peter's decision to refuse the cake and depart stems from his failure to recognize the detrimental impact of his conduct within his association with Marian. The protagonist comes to the realization that the encompassing group is attempting to harm her instead of Peter. The solitary act of Marian baking and consuming the cake serves as evidence of her transformation from her previous identity. "You look delicious [...] that's what you get for being food" (Atwood, 2010, p. 290) she says to the cake. The cake serves as a representation of Marian's previous character, which ought to be ingested. She eats the cake-lady, a stand-in for herself, "her body returns to normal metabolism" (Pundir, 2012, p. 3) and reveals her true personality.. The resurgence of Marian's appetite serves as evidence of her reinstated human condition. Food is linked to frailty as "an indicator of the state of female subjectivity" (McWilliams, 2016, p. 76) while eating is linked to strength as "eating the cake is an act of celebration which marks the decisive moment of Marian's recovery from an hysterical illness and her return to social order" (Howells, 1996, p. 43). Now that her confidence has returned, she consumes what others can "which means that she alludes no longer woman is to be treated as a base object in the society in the consumer-ridden world" (Gautam and Sinha, 2012, p. 708). Consequently, she regains her freedom and identity as a typical person and "reconstructs that new persona or concept of self through a renewed relationship to food" (Royanian and Yazdani, 2011, p. 1). Primarily, Marian has acquired self-assurance through the act of producing and consuming the "cake lady," thereby exhibiting boldness in challenging the societal norms that dictate gender roles. Marian's act of rebellion encompasses more than mere separation from an unsatisfying marital union, despite its

apparent singularity. Through the utilization of her cognitive abilities and creative faculties, she devises a figurative representation of herself in the form of a "cake lady". This statement suggests that Marian successfully challenges the dominance of the patriarchal system and ultimately reclaims her sense of self.

## CONCLUSION

This study conducts a comparative analysis of *The Grass is Singing* and *The Edible Woman* through the lens of ecofeminism. Both narratives depict the interconnection between women and nature as an inherent and intimate bond. The correlation between the fluctuating weather patterns and the characters' dispositions serves as a symbolic connection between the two narratives. However, there exist experiential connections between women and the environment. Lessing and Atwood utilize a clear ecofeminist perspective to depict the lives of two educated women and the changes in their respective environments, based on their fleeting connections. Both works effectively depict the multifaceted manners in which women are subjected to oppressive patriarchal norms. Mary's life is significantly impacted by the dominant influence of her spouse, next-door neighbor, native houseboy, father, employer, and first boyfriend. Moreover, Marian's romantic relationships and employment opportunities are bleak due to the influence of men. The works of Lessing and Atwood establish a correlation between the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment, as well as the improper utilization of natural resources. However, the responses of the two main characters towards persecution and coercion exhibit stark contrasts. Mary's submission to men and expression of hostility towards those around her have resulted in catastrophic outcomes. However, Marian is determined to resist the advances of the male hunters and not be consumed like prey. Despite differences in their perspectives, both novels arrive at a shared conclusion that opposing injustice and advocating for liberty is the sole means of attaining genuine harmony between humanity and the natural world.

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