



**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE
CÓRDOBA**



FACULTAD DE LENGUAS

LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA Y LITERATURA INGLESA

TRABAJO FINAL

TÍTULO:

**NON-HUMAN NATURE AS A SUBJECT IN *A MERCY* (2008) BY
TONI MORRISON AND *THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD* (2009) BY
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I. Introduction

The last few decades have seen a significant rise in environmental consciousness in lay critique as well as academic reflection. In this context, Ecocriticism emerges as a space to discuss how culture elaborates its relationship with the non-human environment. Central to this discussion are ideas about whether non-human nature is considered to be a subject, and accordingly has its own purposes or meanings. The XXI century texts *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison and; *The Year of the Flood* (2009) by Margaret Atwood explore, in the past and in the future respectively, the possibility of alternative models of subjectivity that include both human and non-human nature.

Although Morrison and Atwood are both canonical authors whose texts have been widely analyzed; our research shows no articles from the perspective of the construction of the subject. However, articles like Hans Bergthaller, “Housebreaking the human animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*” (2010); and Bandyopadhyay, “An Ecocritical Commentary on the Posthuman Condition in Margaret Atwood’s Fiction” (2011) pose some interesting questions regarding the environment and the construction of the human. Valeria Mosca also reflects upon Atwood’s work in “Crossing Human Boundaries: Apocalypse and Posthumanism in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*” (2013) in connection with the rhetoric of dystopic discourse. Nonetheless, none of these articles approach the text from our perspective.

Morrison’s fiction has also been extensively studied, especially from feminist and African American standpoints. The research article “Women Who Know Things: African

Epistemologies, Ecocriticism, and Female Spiritual Authority in the Novels of Toni Morrison” (2007) by Kokahvah Zauditu-Selassie is particularly interesting because it inquires about African spirituality in Morrison’s work linked to the idea of a collective identity that includes nature, which could prove interesting for further analysis. However Zauditu-Selassie does not refer to *A Mercy*. Thus, the bibliographic review yields no evidence of any similar interrogation of subjectivity in the corpus selected, nor does it identify any work comparing the two texts.

This paper, then, interrogates the notion of “subject” resorting to the perspective of ecocriticism. In order to do so, Chapter II presents the main theoretical framework discussing the notion of subject and intersubjectivity. Particularly, we focus on those paradigms that explain the mechanisms that exclude non-human nature from the idea of “subject” (Plumwood 2003). Then, we concentrate on those paradigms that attempt to decenter “humans” from their privileged position in systems of ideas, and on those approaches which consider non-human nature as a participant in intersubjective interactions (Wolfe 2010; Murphy 2013).

Accordingly, we focus on those characters that seem to apply a particular logic of inclusion of non-human nature in the concept of “subject”. Our aim is to show: firstly, how these characters consider non-human nature as a subject ideationally; secondly, how they experience intersubjective interactions with non-human nature; and finally, how their personal self-construction is influenced by their own embodiment as well as their interactions with both social and non-human environments.

Chapter III section 2 examines how the aforementioned three aspects can be identified in two characters in *A Mercy*, Lina and Florens. Then, Chapter III section 2 proposes a similar analysis of the religious group “God’s Gardeners” in *The Year of the Flood*. Finally, Chapter IV puts them into contact for a final reflection on how these two XXI texts become an imaginative effort that envisions alternatives to the current logic of exploitation that damages both society and the environment.

II. Theoretical Framework.

Ecocriticism: The subjectivity of non-human nature

In the last few decades, environmental crises have brought the question of human/non-human relationships to the forefront of both popular and academic reflection and discussion.¹The necessity to consider matters such as the place of nature as reflected by human culture and, alternatively, the place of humanity within nature has materialized in the emergence of ecocriticism. Ecocritical studies resort to concepts belonging to both the humanities and the natural sciences to problematize the relationship between human and non-human beings as they are manifested in different cultural artifacts.

However, the aim of ecocritical analysis is not merely to denounce the hidden values that support the domination of nature. The Italian critic Serenella Iovino, for example, sees the potential in the humanities to “work out desirable scenarios if...they are supported by the project of an ‘ethical evolution’ of cultural discourse” (*Ecocriticism and a Non-Anthropocentric Humanism* 30). In the same way, Huggan and Tiffin state that an ecopostcolonial approach does not strip the literary text from its aesthetic function, but it does acknowledge its capacity to set “symbolic guidelines for the material transformation of the world” (*Postcolonial Ecocriticism* 14). Therefore, ecocriticism may be thought of as a platform from which the changes necessary for a more sustainable world may be imagined.

¹ Discussion in mainstream XXI century culture about ecological themes can be seen in the proliferation of documentaries such as *The Cove* (2009), *Home* (2009), *e-wasteland* (2012), *Baraka* (2011), *Los Nahua 20 years later* (2012) *We want clean water* (2013), *Glacial Balance* (2013), *Waste Land* (2009), *Oceans* (2009), *Ni un metro más de hormigón* (2007), *Food Inc* (2008). These deal with a variety of topics from the disruption of ecosystems and native habitats, to urban planning and the processing of food and water. Further, *An inconvenient truth* (2007) by Al Gore, and its counterargument *The Great Global Warming Swindle* (2007) by Martin Durkin are two sides of the popular debate about global warming.

Many of the theoretical and aesthetic developments within ecocriticism evidence the need to give thought to the dichotomy that separates and grades human and non-human nature. This binarism generally assumes that the human is not a part of nature but an opposite of it. At the same time, a hierarchy in which humanity has the dominant position is created. This particular modern rationalization of the world has been traditionally naturalized as a premise for the arguments which shape a worldview that results in the effective ideological domination of the other (Plumwood 1993).

Nevertheless, non-human nature is by no means the only “other” placed in the weaker side of the dichotomy by this rationale. It is in the critique of the separation and grading of beings that ecocriticism meets other critical theories that question binarisms such as subject/object, male/female, civilized/primitive. According to the ecofeminist critic Val Plumwood (1993) all these premises which underlie the justifications of diverse forms of domination and exploitation are related through what she calls “linking postulates”:

The line of fracture between reason and nature runs deeply through the key concepts of western culture. In the contrast set, virtually everything on the ‘superior’ side can be represented as forms of reason, and virtually everything on the underside can be represented as forms of nature. (44)

This process is what Plumwood identifies as the logical structure of the discursive architectures of domination. By the same reasoning, “male”, “civilized”, and “reason” have been located above “female”, “primitive” and “nature”. Connected through “linking postulates”, they create an effective model of domination while, at the same time, promote the intersections of those conceptual systems that resist this logic.

This interplay between mechanisms of domination promotes intersections between disciplines that study them. Ecocriticism and postcolonialism intersect into

ecoposcolonialism or green poscolonialism while ecofeminism connects the experience of domination and resistance of two subaltern subjects: women and non-human nature. Recently, there is an increasing interest in the ways that the human is defined by culture and within nature in accordance with the contributions of science and technology in the budding but very productive theories developed by posthumanism².

A central question pertaining to how the other is constructed is the issue of what is considered a subject participant in intersubjective relations, and, conversely, what is not a subject and as a result becomes a target of exploitation. This notion of subjectivity would respond to the modern binary pattern that underlies different forms of domination. Interrogating the idea of subjectivity is accordingly a significant aim within green critique.

Traditional ideas about a necessarily independent and dominant subject are deeply integrated into the logical structure of the binary model of human/non-human interaction of Western thought. The historically specific modern polarization locates in the superior side of the dualism the rational human inserted in a civilized culture as understood by Western societies. The non-human as well as the humans who are considered primitive, emotional, animal and bodily- in short, a part of nature as opposed to culture- are downgraded to an inferior position. While the former group is considered a subject, the latter is conceptualized as an object of legitimate exploitation.

However, contemporary ecocritics and philosophers have reflected upon the notion of subjectivity and subject formation from a more inclusive point of view. One such

²We follow the strand of posthumanism supported by Cary Wolfe (2010), which claims the decentering of the human by the assumption of its own embodiment, and its interconnection with technological, ecological and biological networks.

proposal is Patrick Murphy's analysis of the relationship between human and the world (2013). He asserts that the notion of "subject" should be thought of not only as "*subject of*", that is, a subject that acts on the world but also as a "*subject to*", influenced by external constraints. Murphy contends that being a subject implies necessarily being subjected to external factors with which semiotic exchanges- not necessarily linguistic- are established (41- 42).

Murphy briefly outlines different theoretical proposals about the concept of subjectivity which show that although "Althusser, Butler, Cavell or Wolfe all recognize the primacy of intersubjectivity in the human constitution of the subject" (42), the environment seems to function only as background rather than as an actor in intersubjective relations. The displacement on non-human nature to the position of background, according to Murphy, underestimates the key role played in personal human construction by intersubjective interactions:

Personal human construction is always and invariably proceeding by means of intersubjectivity that is not only ideational and linguistic but also corporeal and ecological (43).

Humans, in other words, enter into basic experiential intersubjective relationships with the environment: whether they are ideational, linguistic, corporeal and ecological, these connections greatly condition the human self-constructed movement from *being subjected to* towards *being the subject of*.

Consequently, Murphy's claims point to a more inclusive idea of subjectivity that includes the environment as a subject with which semiotic connection can be established.

³ Italics are used in the original text.

This evidently assumes a displacement of the male civilized human from the center of the notion of subjectivity. Although somehow criticized by Murphy, posthumanism is perhaps one of the most useful approaches to reflect upon the emergence and evolution of the idea of the human as a historical specific phenomenon, as well as the appearance of a more inclusive view on the subject that includes the non-human.

Our research follows the stance of Cary Wolfe, who understands posthumanism as a historical moment that must assume the decentering of the human by its involvement in technical, social and biological networks. This implies returning to a vision of the human as embedded and integrated into a biological and technological world. In other words, it discredits the idea that humanity can be independent from its biological, social and technological environment, while implying humans do not master this environment, rather, they co-evolve with it. Furthermore, since this assertion understands man in its co-evolution together with forms of technology as language and culture, it eliminates the dichotomy mind/body that regards the body as animal nature and puts it in a lower position compared to the mind that represents human culture.

Our sense of the posthuman must not be mistaken for the widely acknowledged branch of posthumanism that Wolfe calls “transhumanism”. In Wolfe’s view, the invention of the “human” as a historically specific phenomenon implied the will to transcend the bonds of materiality from the body and the environment:

“the human” is achieved by escaping or repressing not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether. (XV)

Far from presuming that the humanist ideal of emancipation is to be achieved by overcoming the embeddedness of humans in their bodies as well as their environment,

posthumanism takes materiality as inevitable and necessary. That means, returning to the concept of intersubjectivity by Patrick Murphy (2013), human cultural and bodily experience of the world shapes the process of human self-construction. An analysis of such construction requires an understanding of the environment as a subject in intersubjective semiotic exchanges since there can be no human without environment.

III. The Non-human as Subject in *A Mercy*(2008) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009)

1- Preliminary considerations

A reading of *A Mercy* and *The Year of the Flood* guided by the aforementioned philosophical quests may provide a discursive construction of alternative ideational systems, experiences of intersubjectivity, and processes of human self-construction. As both texts present a reality dominated by the type of modern Western rationality that creates hierarchies of masters and dominated subjects, the characters who present a wider notion of subjectivity are part of the subaltern.

Thus, special attention is directed to uncover all the phases of intersubjectivity that Patrick Murphy: ideational, linguistic and corporeal. The ecological relations are here assumed as inherent to every interaction because “ecology” is in fact the study of interactions between organisms with their environment. In this context, it is necessary to acknowledge not only the possibility of non-human nature as subjects, but also the human in all its embodiment and embeddedness in their social and non-human environments. In Wolfe’s words, this would imply the “the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks” (XV).

While *A Mercy* explores, in the past, the interplay between the modes of being of European colonizers, native and African slaves, or white indentured servants in a land in the process of being colonized at a time when modern ideas had not taken complete hold yet; *The Year of the Flood* is a speculation about the future of a society where profit is the ruling value in the name of which all manners of exploitation are legitimate leading to an apocalyptic scenario and beyond.

In light of the emerging concepts of a more inclusive view of subjectivity, studying the imaginative creation of human and non-human subjects in our corpus entails three important processes. Firstly, identifying what ideational systems and conceptualizations of non-human nature as a subject are present in the text. Secondly, determining what practices in the textual universe reveal that characters experience intersubjective connections with their non-human counterparts. Finally, analyzing whether the text illustrates a process of personal human self-construction forged through interactions with both social and non-human environments as well as through the assumption of one's own embodiment.

For these reasons, we will refer to those characters in the text that think about, and behave towards non-human nature as a subject. These characters enter into intersubjective relationships with both other social actors and the non-human environment. These relationships indicate that they have a more inclusive view of subjectivity, an outlook which has a concrete experiential effect in their self-construction.

2- *A Mercy*: Reworking Past Ideas and Experiences.

2.1- Story and Context

A Mercy presents an imaginative reconstruction of the life of a colonial household in XVII century America. The story is told from multiple points of view of different characters whose narrations are interwoven by their connection to the Vaark household. The inhabitants of this community differ greatly: Jacob Vaark, an orphan from the Netherlands who inherited a property in America is the owner of the farm who left Europe to claim his lands and work on them. He lives with Rebekka, his English wife sent to America to marry him as the lesser evil within her choices.

They are the owners of the lands and they share their house with three servants of different origin and status. Lina is a native American slave who has resisted being socialized into the European ways and thinking; Florens, a young African American girl given to Jacob as payment for a debt from a Portuguese landlord is raised by Lina; and Sorrow, a young castaway schizophrenic woman who ends up living in the Vaark house by sheer luck is also part of the permanent help. They are slaves by their bond to Jacob but, in the majority of the narrative, they are not treated as such. Unofficial members of the household are Scully and Willard, indentured servants to a neighboring house who work for Vaark in their free time.

The narration opens with the tale by Florens who is writing her story in the wooden floors of a house. The voices of different characters interweave the story of how the Vaark farm is built, and how it declines. Through the narrative, there is an evolution from a heterogeneous but harmonic society to a hierarchical organization with Rebekka at the top

and the rest of the household underneath. Nonetheless, Florens's and Sorrow's acts of defiance still manifest the possibility of resistance.

2.2- Lina and Florens: Past Ideas and Experiences of Non-human Nature as a Subject.

The focus of analysis is on two characters Lina and Florens, since they are the clearest representatives of system of ideas that regard nature as more than a resource to be exploited against the backdrop of Jacob's colonial effort to dominate it. It is important to consider that Lina and Florens are characters that also represent the dominated "other" on different levels: they are "female" in a patriarchal society, and "primitive" in a colonial setting. It is important to remember Plumwood's claim that:

"racism, colonialism and sexism have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture."⁽⁴⁾

On the one hand, Lina and Florens could then be thought of as linked to nature not only by their ideas but also by their experiences of subjection. This is particularly important since both Lina and Florens establish empathy with non-human elements. On the other hand, Plumwood highlights the idea of the animal body construed as inferior, while in the narrative the assumption of Florens's embodiment is essential to her independence as we will develop in the next section.

Through Lina's account of events in the fourth part of the book, the text depicts glimpses of the native consideration of nature from her now extinct tribe. According to Lina, a sachem's of her tribe had predicted Europeans arrival describing them as follows: "Cut loose from the earth soul, they insisted on the purchase of the soil, and like all orphans they were insatiable" (54). This European belief that the land is a commodity that can be

purchased is shown by their insistence to fence it, whereas Lina's native clan believes the land belongs to everyone and probably everything: to the "earth soul". This is also illustrated by Lina's yearning for the home she once knew "where everyone had anything and no one had everything" (60). This construction of a native worldview may be illustrative of an ideological assessment of non-human nature as a part of an intersubjective community.

Jacob, an orphan turned land owner arrives at the colonies with his mind set on working hard to achieve a comfortable living. Lina describes Jacob upon his arrival in the world as a "hurricane of activity laboring to bring nature under his control" and his frustration at "land's refusal to obey his will" (49). That is to say, nature as seen through Lina's eyes has a resolve of its own and might resist domination. This is echoed by her own resistance to be colonized since Lina, although taken by Presbyterians who turned her into a slave and unsuccessfully attempted to Christianize her, holds on to her beliefs. Thus, if we follow Plumwood, even if Lina and non-human nature have been "construed in the sphere of inferiority", they share the willingness to resist exploitation.

The interconnection between all natural elements is reflected in Lina's thoughts on the construction of the third and most luxurious mansion that Jacob builds. According to her, the unnecessary house is "a profane monument for himself" (46). The devastation brought about by the destruction of the environment to build the house causes, in Lina's interpretation, the tragedies that strike the Vaark household: "Killing trees in that number without asking their permission, of course his efforts would stir up malfortune" (44). For the native, there seems to be a connection between the cutting of trees and the emergence of illness. This could easily be explained if we think of the existence of communication

between all that is living- all that lives in the earth's soul- which causes hardship when it fails to occur. In this case, making a decision about the trees' future without contemplating the trees' permission may trigger adversity. Lina's mistrust of the house shows in her refusal to enter it, and her attempts to prevent other people from trying.

All these instances of Lina's mindful consideration of the non-human world are mirrored by Florens's thoughts about the wilderness. At the beginning of her tale, Florens is sent to look for a blacksmith with medical knowledge to help a pox stricken Rebekka Vaark. The blacksmith had been working for Jacob and Florens fell in love and lust with him. On her way to find him, she wonders about the wilderness: "Who lives in the wilderness between this farm and you and will they help me or harm me?"(5). She seems less afraid of the wilderness than of the people she might encounter. This may be further evidence of the identification with non-human nature derived from the experience of domination at the hand of Europeans.

In the same passage, she acknowledges that people are also animals when she claims that bears know us "from when we are beasts also" (5) and if humans look at them in the eyes "They will approach, run to us and play which we misread and give back fear and anger" (5). Florens assumes that people were also beasts, and other animal can be reminiscent of them. Nonetheless, humans seem to misunderstand animals' attempts at communicating and answer with violence. Hence, Florens's ideas oppose what Wolfe describes as the humanist repression of the animal origin of humans.

This scene is replicated later in the narrative when some religious women examine Florens for marks of the devil. Once the women finish their examination, they avoid her eyes, the way humans are supposed to avoid bears' eyes to prevent them to come to play

and love. In this scenario, she has established another layer of connection with nature by empathizing with the bear: like the bear, Florens is looked at without recognition and her glance is avoided by the women hindering closeness. This experience of giving love and receiving violence also marks the unfolding of Florens's inner violence: she describes it as "the withering inside...that opens the door for what is wild" (160). We analyze this in depth in the next section.

Lina and Florens show a heedful esteem for the non-human participants in their lives. Their ideas point to a different outlook on the relationships that can be established between human beings and their non-human environment. In the text, they represent a pre-modern worldview in that most of their ideas come from a fictional native tribe. Thus, their ideas and practices may represent the inclusion of non-human nature as a subject by those who may be conceptualized as less than human themselves (see Plumwood's quote above).

Nevertheless, it is not only the characters' ideas that manifest an intersubjective connection to the non-human world. In different moments in the narrative, Lina and Florens communicate with non-human animals, in a way that shows their actions follow their worldview. "Communication" in this context means any kind of semiotic exchanges that may be established between human or non-human participants. The importance of this resides in the fact that viewing communication as only linguistic "limits the possibility of becoming a subject to humans and other animals that can demonstrate linguistic self-reflexivity." (Murphy 41) Thus, although the human characters under scrutiny interact linguistically with non-human animals, other exchanges are corporeal.

Two instances have already been described above: the trees in Lina's opinion should have been consulted before being cut down, and this massacre had the very physical

effect of illness. The other one is the attempt of bears at play and love when people look at them in the eyes (body language), which is answered with human violence. Furthermore, this communication can also be exemplified by Lina when she milks the cow while talking to her, humming, and then milking it (55). She is also portrayed as talking to birds on more than one occasion. In addition, Florens recalls a time when, after wondering into the woods, she saw a wall of sweet perfumed flowers and a stag. At the moment, she felt free yet-frightened by the unfamiliar feeling- she interrupts the moment, greets the stag with a “good morning”, and the stag goes away (70). These examples can be seen as instances in which humans attempt to establish communication with non-human animals, allowing the possibility of intersubjective interaction.

Moreover, Florens compares the unrecognizing way in which a group of religious women saw her body when searching for marks of the devil with the eyes of a swine which looked at her “with more connection” than them (113). In this comparison, the text addresses the issue that an animal can have more connection through the eyes, than people when they believe a fellow human being does not share their status as subjects: “they are looking at me my body across distances without recognition.”(113). In this case, a very corporeal connection is established with a pig unlike with humans that give her a vacant look.

It can be then partially concluded that far from constructing themselves against nature, they seem to move among nature, and relate to non-humans as equals. This is also helped by the fact that they are women slaves in a world where men, in Florens’s mother’s words “thrive on insults over cattle, women, water, crops” (165). That is, their experiences of being dominated might also help this connection as they allow for empathy on a more

basic level. In stark contrast with the humanist repression of the animal origins of humans, this system of beliefs also acknowledges the animal in humans. In addition, their actions establish a line of communication with non-human nature that connects their ideological beliefs with their linguistic and corporeal experiences.

2.3- Lina and Florens: the Role of Social and Natural Environments in Personal Self-Construction

As we stated before following Murphy's perspective, subject formation is a complex process in which intersubjective relationships- either being subjected to external factors or being the subject of something- play a central role. In *A Mercy*, the evolution of Lina and Florens as characters can be interpreted in terms of their self-construction. Their environment and imbrication in a social structure are both essential to understanding their development. Echoing Florens recollection of Lina's wisdom "We never shape the world (...) The world shapes us" (70), the characters enter into intersubjective relationships with their social and natural environment in corporeal and ecological experiences that shape them. Furthermore, the narrative traces a progression towards a sense of self in both characters. This to a great extent conditions the movement from *being subjected* towards *being the subject of*.

Lina's self-construction is overtly present in her account of her personal life story. After her village was destroyed by the plague and set on fire by Europeans, Lina is sent to be Christianized by Presbyterians. Afraid of being left alone in the world, she took their shelter and teachings. Under the Presbyterians' guard, Lina learns that ordinary activities for her are considered sins by Christians: bathing in the river, plucking berries from trees, eating with her hands. She lets them cut her hair and burn her clothes, yet all her efforts do

not stop Prebysterians from turning against Lina when a violent episode with a European man leaves her with a “swollen eye”, and “lash cuts on her face, arms and legs”.

Lina describes the attack she suffers at the hand of a European man as follows:

The Presbyterians(...), never asked what had happened to her and there was no point in telling them. She had no standing in law, no surname and no one would take her word against a Europe.” (52)

The violence she suffers is then double: she experiences physical violence in the hands of the man, and then she undergoes the injustice of being blamed and sold in order to hide the episode. But this violence is legitimized by the location of Lina in the underside of the dichotomy described by Plumwood because she is “primitive”. This traumatic moment remains with her throughout her life and triggers a rejection of men and lustful cravings. This influences her energetic mistrust of the blacksmith and Florens’s reactions to him (60).

After being sold to Jacob Vaark, she decides to piece herself together by arranging all her experiences into a sense of self:

Relying on memory and her own resources, she cobbled together neglected rites, merged Europe medicine with native, scripture with lore, and recalled or invented the hidden meaning of things. Found, in other words, a way to be in the world. (48)

In this process of inventing herself, the role of the non-human environment becomes the key to overcome loneliness, regret and anger. Indeed, she became “one more thing that moved in the natural world. She cawed with birds, chatted with plants, spoke to squirrels, sang to the cow and opened her mouth to the rain” (49). In other words, Lina was able to construct herself by selecting her memories and experiences, while establishing intersubjective relationships with the environment who becomes the substitute for her nonexistent family and clan.

Lina's self-invention is to a great extent successful, since she is shown to be a powerful character in the narrative: She is Jacob's advisor on farming, Rebekka's friend and confidante, albeit her slave. Furthermore, she seems to have the power to make decisions in the house. Sorrow, for example, believes that "Lina ruled and decided everything Sir and Mistress did not. Her eye was everywhere even when she was nowhere" (122). Rebekka also reflects upon Lina's strength: "Only Lina was steady, unmoved by any catastrophe as though she has seen and survived everything" (100). Despite her status as a slave, Lina is in the majority of the text a strong character often making decisions about the lives of others or trying to influence them.

Lina's self-invented wisdom and strength are partially forged by, on the one hand, the social circumstances that landed her in Jacob's farm, by the flexibility of Jacob and Rebekka's views as well as the power granted for her abilities to work the lands and handle the house; and partially by her contact with non-human nature that provided company and a link to her tribes past. To put it in Murphy's terms, we could argue that having been *subjected to* the whims of nature (plague) and humanity (her experience with Presbyterians), she successfully becomes *the subject of* her own self. The exercise of constructing herself is in fact part of her shaping: "She resorted and stored what she dared to recall and eliminated the rest, an activity which shaped her inside and out" (50). Nevertheless, by the end of the narrative Lina loses her willfulness by reason of the loss of her personal connections.

On the one hand, Rebekka already cured from pox develops a new religious fervor that makes her behave more like the towns fellow: she takes down Lina's hammock, and makes her sleep outside with the animals. This would not have affected her so much. After

all, before Jacob built a cowshed for her and Florens, she slept with the chicken. But it represents indeed the loss of a friend: Rebekka would not go back to work the garden with her and they would not enjoy the companionship of shared tasks any longer.

The most important factor, nonetheless, in her decline is the loss of Florens to her love for the blacksmith. We learn that Lina considers Florens to be “her own” (61) from the very beginning as Sorrow recollects:

Lina, having taken off her shawl and wrapped it around the child’s shoulders, picked her up and carried her into the cowshed. Thereafter, the girl belonged to Lina. They slept together, bathed together, ate together. Lina made clothes for her and tiny shoes from rabbit skin (124)

Furthermore, she struggles to keep Florens away from Sorrow or any other person or circumstance that might come between them: “Lina was simply weary of anyone who came between herself and Florens” (131). The arrival of the blacksmith marks the beginning of Lina’s weakening. Despite all her efforts to keep Florens sheltered, the girl falls in love and lust with the free man sharing a passionate affair and harboring a borderline obsession with him: “He takes her when and where he wants and she hunts him like a she-wolf if he’s not in her eye” (151).

Evidently, when she is sent to fetch him and bring him to the farm again, she is quick to accept his request to stay while he goes back to the Vaarks alone. Her staying there deeply affected Lina who “between tending Mistress’ new requirements and scanning the path for Florens, (...) had little time or inclination for anything else” (131). Scully even describes her as a being “simmering” about to burst (145). Florens eventually returns a completely different person from what she was, but Lina never goes back to her solid self. Having lost her only friend and her perceived daughter, Lina crawls into herself and

become aloof, letting neglect take over the farm (133). Lina's process of self-invention and later depression is good evidence of the importance of intersubjectivity in the life long process of subject formation.

The process Florens undergoes is the opposite of Lina's. Marked by her unexplained mother's dismissal of her as a child, Florens grows to be a submissive child with a great willingness to please others (61, 96). She inadvertently becomes a pray to others. Scully describes her as a "combination of defenselessness, eagerness to please and, most of all, a willingness to blame herself for the meanness of others" (152). This subservient attitude and tendency to take the blame for other people's malice comes to its climax when she meets the blacksmith.

The blacksmith is hired by the Vaarks to build the fence for Jacob's third and most luxurious house. Florens becomes smitten with him and lets her body take over:

Since his coming, there was an appetite in the girl that Lina recognized as once her own. A bleating desire beyond sense, without conscience. The young body speaking in its only language its sole reason for life on earth. (60)

The quote shows the importance of the corporeal in Florens's awakening and development. Having survived her mother's rejection and living her whole life trying to please others, this is the first time that Florens stands up for herself while experiencing her body's needs with great intensity. Her lust and eagerness to see him is perceived by all the members of the household but only rejected by Lina. This contact with her body is a key experience in her life, so much so that she emotionally enslaves herself to the blacksmith.

Florens refers to the blacksmith as "her shaper", "her world" (71) and she constantly asserts he is the reason she is alive. As Florens puts it: "I don't want to be free of you

because I am live only with you” (70) and “You alone own me” (141). Hence, it is Florens who chooses to subject herself to domination as her whole self-perception is tied to the blacksmith’s approval. It is predictable then, that given the smith’s choice of his adoptive son over Florens, her sense of self is either shattered or it evolves. Finally, the latter happens.

In all truthfulness, Florens does perceive something dark hidden in even before her startling realization that the blacksmith will not keep her. This darkness inside is described in terms that remind of an animal: “the inside dark is small, feathered and toothy” (115). Florens’s perceives her inner animality as “*her*”, and “*her home*”- that it defines her subjectivity and the place where she feels comfortable.

After Florens is rejected by the blacksmith- the second rejection in her life after her own mother’s, her inner darkness surfaces. So, Florens embraces her own nature as darkness and her own embodiment. Florens’s unfolding reflects Plumwood’s idea that systems of exclusion construe sexual, racial and ethnic difference as an inferior sphere by mapping them as animal and bodily as opposed to the superior reason and culture (4). However, in Plumwood’s theory this construction of difference is the legitimizing force for the domination of the other whereas in Florens’s case it is the cause of her emancipation.

In this sense, the text subverts the traditional western mapping of reason as superior. For instance, the blacksmith rejects Florens telling her she is wilderness, she has no mind, no constraint: “You shout the word—mind, mind, mind—over and over and then you laugh, saying as I live and breathe, a slave by choice” (141). Far from making Florens feel self-conscious or inferior, it causes the remnants of her repression disappear allowing her inner

wilderness to unfold: “From all those who believe they have claim and rule over me. I am nothing to you. You say I am wilderness. I am” (160). It is in the wilderness of the woods of the farm that shelter her love affair with the blacksmith when her body starts speaking, and it is her own status as wilderness that releases Florens from her self-imposed enslavement. She finds a hammer and attacks the man to destroy him in the same way he did her.

By Florens’s own assessment, she withers inside and that “opens the door for what is wild” (160). Her unfolding and embracing of her embodiment is her freedom and the definite mastering of her own self: “I am become wilderness but I am also Florens. In full. Unforgiven. Unforgiving. No ruth, my love. None. Hear me? Slave. Free. I last” (161). In a very posthumanist way, the emancipation of Florens does not come from “transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether” (Wolfe XV) but from the embracing of her basic embodiment and emotion.

Her new attitude even elicits the following reaction from Scully when Willard and him saw her stomp back to the farm: “Surely a sudden burst of sweating men out of roadside trees would have startled a human, any human, especially a female. But this one neither glanced their way nor altered her pace”(146). Florens new self is perceived by others as lacking human qualities, which puts her by their judgment on par with non-humanity. Again, this takes us back to Plumwood’s claims that the emotional, bodily, female and non-human are constructed as separate from the human realm thought of in terms of reason, culture, male and civilized.

In the end, Florens writes her story on the floor of the house that doomed their family of orphans, disobeying a direct order from Rebekka and also Lina’s advice. She

invites Sorrow to escape and plans to burn the house. Her recent emancipation from her self-imposed enslavement triggers a resistant attitude in her. Symbolically, she stops wearing shoes- which distinguished her from other slaves when she was a slave on her own accord, but instead of lowering her to a lesser status; her hardened feet are a crucial evidence of her newfound independence.

In a converse progression, both characters construct their sense of self through their intersubjective interactions. Lina's solitude and mistrust of people lead her to invent a system to fit her various experiences and strengthen her. The non-human environment serves her at this point, so that when Rebekka arrives at the household her self-invention is almost finished. In her social interactions with Rebekka and Florens, she finds the solace of companionship akin to a family. When her social ties disappear, her strength does too and she finally withdraws, not bathing in the river anymore, and doing her tasks in silence.

Florens, on the other hand, is greatly conditioned by her relation to all the people she constantly tries to please. She enslaves herself to her lover only to be shunned again. She embraces the wilderness in her and her emotions unfold, freeing her and turning her into her own master. In a last act of resistance, she writes her story in the house she is prohibited to enter and plans to burn it down. She finally lets go of her lust and love, owns herself and learns the hard way, the lesson her mother tried to tell her: "to be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing" (167). Only the decision to resist dominion, can truly make somebody free, in the case of Florens, this comes when she acknowledges her inner wilderness.

3-- The Year of the Flood: Projecting Future Ideas and Experiences

3.1- Story and Context

The Year of the Flood constructs a post-apocalyptic world where a genetically engineered virus has eliminated the greatest part of humanity. Toby and Ren, two survivors of this “Waterless Flood” are the main points of view in the narrative, which alternates with sermons by Adam One (the preacher of a religious environmentalist cult called “God’s Gardeners”) and Song from “The God’s Gardeners Oral Hymnbook”. The narration revolves around the lives of the main characters before, during and after the plague.

The central storyline alternates with a series of flashbacks that provide background about the lives of the main characters before and after the flood. Before the virus, a process of social degradation has taken human societies to extremes of exploitation, consumerism and ecological disaster. This downward spiral of corruption departs from a situation similar to that of present day America towards the consolidation of Security Corporations⁴ that replace the States inheriting the monopoly on legitimate violence since they are the only ones who can legally have weapons. They are supported by other monopolistic pharmaceutical, beauty and food Corporations among others.

In this context, there are resistance groups that challenge the domination of Corporations and subvert, peacefully or violently, the values that legitimize Corporate power. Many of these groups, are cults which seem to pose the only valid alternative to the passive consumerist attitude that legitimizes Corporate power in a world where ecosystems have been disrupted -for example there are mentions of the Wisconsin desert (67) the

⁴ We keep the capitalization of “Corporations” as present in *The Year of the Flood*.

desertified shores of the Mediterranean (109) - and the exploitation of human and non-human nature is taken to an extreme –such as the use of disposable smuggled girls as sex workers (43), the eating of endangered species as a luxury (37). The text focuses on one in particular, the God’s Gardeners, who develop an ascetic lifestyle and engage in pacific resistance of the CorpseCorps while preparing for a Waterless Flood that comes in the form of a lethal genetically engineered virus.

In this dystopic universe, there is a clear cut division between people who live in “Compounds”, enclosed neighborhood protected by the Corporations, where people with “identities” live- and the “plebs” urban spaces where people with identities and legitimate jobs mingle with those excluded from the system. Some plebs are richer than others but none of them is exempt from violence and danger. The people and institutions inside the Compounds live a privileged life marked by consumerism with a blatant disregard for the fate of the disadvantaged part of humanity let alone the non-human world. This utmost consumerism is shown for instance in the brand names and slogans of different products that mock the consumer: for example, breast implants are “bimplants” (implants for bimbos) and the SecretBurger slogan “Because Everyone Loves a Secret!” actually points to the fact that, in their meat grinders, everything from cats to corpse disposals became burgers (40).

On the other hand, although the inhabitants of the “plebs” might also be commercial locus for some products like Secret Burgers and SeksMart (sex Corporation), in general they are unprotected and many of them virtually invisible. Different mobs live in the plebs: the Tex-Mexes, the Linheads, The Asian Fusions, and the Blackened Redfish; each mob controlling a territory. These mobs are dangerous since their business is

harvesting organs for transplant, disposing of corpses, kidnapping and assassination (40). The pleebs also provide shelter for “greenies”, ecological groups that range from violent bioterrorists to peaceful eco-cults, often made up of Compound runaways and pleeb refugees. The God’s Gardeners is formed by former compound and pleeb inhabitants who enjoy physical isolation in Gardens built in rooftops.

Nonetheless, the areas of the pleebs taken over by religious cults are not attacked by mobs. According Adam One the leader of Gardeners, they “don’t trespass unless they’re having a mob war. In any case, the CorpSeCorps run the mobs, and according to our information they’ve declared us off-limits” (58). The CorpseCorpse (name of the most powerful Corp) have chosen to leave the religions alone since it would be badly seen by many Compound inhabitants. Therefore, being a religious group grants a relative safety that might explain the number of religions tied with activism (the Wolf Isaiahists, Lion Isaiahists and the Gardeners.) If the groups gather too much support, the CorpseCorps find ways of making them out to be responsible for crimes and persecute them (325).

Against a Corporate system that considers profitable people inside the Compounds as subjects while the rest of society as well as non-human nature are something to be exploited and disposed of, the God’s Gardeners show an inclusive view of the subject where all of God’s creation is thought of as a community of equals. Our analysis focuses on The God’s Gardeners beliefs and experiences, particularly on Toby.

3.2- The Gardeners: Non- Human Nature as a Subject, a Dogma and a Practice

Energetically opposing the Corporate logic of exploitation and uncritical consumerism, the Gardeners promote an ascetic life and a community of the natural and

non-natural world. Their religious beliefs combine Biblical studies, scientific knowledge and environmental activism. In their early years the Corporations underestimate the Gardeners: “They view us as twisted fanatics who combine food extremism with bad fashion sense and a puritanical attitude towards shopping. But we own nothing they want, so we don’t qualify as terrorists” (58). Then, the Gardeners are not under their immediate scrutiny since they are not a threat to Corporations, which allows them to develop safely. Later in the narrative, they grow stronger, triggering Corps persecution. Their Edencliff Rooftop Garden is destroyed, but they remain strong in spirit and influence through their “Truffles” formed of underground Compound Gardener groups (327).

The Gardeners’ ideas about the connection between all nature are systematic and often discussed. To that end, the cult has a council that discusses matters of dogma in order to create a consistent account of Biblical interpretations in synchrony with science and environmentalism. For example, one of their debates revolves around a passage of the Old Testament in which God makes coats of skin for the man and the woman (Genesis 3:21), which contradicts the Gardeners’ teaching that animals are not to be harmed to eat or clothe humans unless it is a last resort. In long secret meetings, they discuss what explanations they should give children regarding these contradictions in dogma (287).

This hard work successfully creates a well-organized system of belief that translates into rituals and practices. The Gardeners’ conceptualization about who should be considered a subject is a crucial part of their religious discourse. The content of Adam One’s sermons, the Gardeners’ Hymnbook and their rituals are a clear illustration of this. Each chapter in the book starts with a sermon by Adam One and a song from the “The God’s Gardeners Oral Hymnbook” in which The Gardeners creed is shared and taught to

children. Therefore, the Gardeners views on the community between human and non-human nature is, in Murphy's words, a good example of an ideational system that considers non-human nature as subjects, and humans as having intersubjective connection with their environment.

The fact that the text proposes an ideational system in the form of a nature worshipping creed is very telling since, in Plumwood's words:

Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the nonhuman world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness.(19)

Therefore, the same ideological system that devalues the non-human world, also underrates emotions, animality, embodiment and faith, all of which are associated to nature. In fact, they are also considered crazy by many people, even Toby who at some point describes them as: "this clutch of sweet but delusional eccentrics" (123). In a subversive twist, the Gardener's embrace all the aspects that would make them inferior by that ideological system, as precisely the reasons for their existence. Therefore, the Gardeners are constructed as the exact opposite of the Corporations that represent in the fictional universe the instrumental reason of the logic of domination.

The concept of decentered human integrated into nature is present by their idea of the Fall of humanity, attributed to failing to live "Animal life in all its simplicity" (63). The original sins are consequently greed and pride:

Why do we think that everything on Earth belongs to us, while in reality we belong to Everything? We have betrayed the trust of the Animals, and defiled our sacred task of stewardship. (63)

Humans, by this account, are embedded in the world interconnected not only by creation but also by the holy duty to protect animals. In this sense, there is not also an equal dignity to human and non-human animals but also a responsibility of people towards other forms of life. This responsibility does not entail a sense of ownership of other species: lands, vegetables and animals-human and non-human- belong to Earth in an interconnected integration not a hierarchy of domination.

Their concept of the Fall of humanity, also reinforces human decentering by considering:

The ancestral primates fell out of the trees; then they fell from vegetarianism into meat eating. Then they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology; from simple signals into complex grammar, and thus into humanity; from firelessness into fire, and thence into weaponry; and from seasonal mating into an incessant sexual twitching. (224)

Therefore, the Gardeners' embracing of their animal origins subverts the logic by which "To be defined as 'nature' (...) is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the 'environment' or invisible background" (Plumwood 4). All the aspects that in traditional binary models would define humans as subjects, and would place them above other humans and species are seen as stages of degradation: the right over other forms of life, the use of reason and technology over instinct, linguistic communication over other forms of semiosis.

In addition, the Gardeners' view on evolution is combined with the Biblical myth of the Fall in "The Feast of Adam and All Primates" (61). The dust that made up Men in this account of the Biblical myth is atoms and molecules, while natural selection was also planned by God. They also assert that humans are primates: "Our appetites, our desires, our more uncontrollable emotions- are all Primate" (62). All of these passions are traditionally

associated with the body; thus, in what we could call a posthumanist embracing of our animal origin in nature (Wolfe XV), the Gardeners affirm the embodiment of the human animal.

This is confirmed by their acceptance of death as a way of sacrificing your body to become part of the earth or of another animal like a vulture (70). The Gardeners creed embraces mortality not only as inevitable but necessary: “Imagine how terrible it would be if there were no death!”(4). Consequently, their burial rites include planting a bush or tree on the earth above the buried corpse (219), so that they return to the matrix of Life (214), which should be celebrated rather than mourned. According to Wolfe quoting Derrida mortality is key to deconstructing the human:

It concerns us directly, in fact, for ‘mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion’ (46)

Hence, considering mortality is one of the levels in which humans and non-human animals are undeniably equals, this celebration of death as gift for the Earth is coherent with their inclusive dogma. It is also good ground for instilling a feeling of compassion to non-human animals.

This creed becomes practices in the form of ritualized and later ingrained behaviors. On the issue of language for example, Adam One claims that during creation God “called the Animals in their own languages. To the Reindeer He spoke Reindeer, to the Spider, Spider; ...”(15) That is to say, animals are capable of semiosis even if humans tend to think of themselves as privy to communication just because they develop complex grammars. This

agrees with the previously idea of communication as not necessarily linguistic semiotic exchanges. (Based on Murphy, 41)

The *Year of the Flood* presents very good examples of intersubjective communication between humans and animals. Toby, one of the main characters, who is rather skeptical of the Gardeners' ideas on several occasion (4, 55, 204) establishes communication with bees. As part of her learning with Pilar, one of the oldest members of the Gardeners, she learns that bees should be talked to. Although she feels self-conscious about talking to insects, she does so repeatedly and notices it is effective: she asks for permission to work with the hives which they allow (119), she informs them of Pilar's demise (216), she asks them for protection from her violent revenge seeking stalker which they grant (302), she informs them of her departure and tell them she will miss them, to which one they buzz and walk on her face as a farewell (307). Thus the text opens the possibility for communication and an understanding between human and non-human species.

The text also offers a post-apocalyptic rendering of this communication with non-human nature, this time in the form of instinctive interpretation of animal sounds. Toby has been isolated and fighting for survival for some time and she starts interpreting the crow sounds: "Not alarm calls, so not an owl. More like astonishment: Aw Aw! Look! Look! Look at that!"(418). Listening to the crows and watching them fly, she realizes there are people in the forest who she later sees: dangerous Painballers carrying two girls on leashes. She does not recognize them, but she sees them as evil and shoots, effectively repealing them from her territory. At this moment, Toby having dropped her self-consciousness about talking to animals, can connect with crows and understand them. This does not mean she

can decode crow's caws; it shows she starts to interpret their behavior, their corporeal non-linguistic signs.

Another basic belief of the Gardeners is that humans are not naturally carnivore from the moment of the naming of the animals:

Let us imagine Adam calling out the Names of the Animals in fondness and joy, as if to say, There you are, my dearest! Welcome! Adam's first act towards the Animals was thus one of loving-kindness and kinship, for Man in his unfallen state was not yet a carnivore. The Animals knew this, and did not run away. (15)

By reason of the love and kinship that link human experience to animals translates into practice in the form of the protection of animals from slaughter. Wolfe also establishes this responsibility over animals, one that, far from not entitling ownership, joins humans and non-human animals by reason of their shared vulnerability: "our shared embodiment, mortality, and finitude make us, as Diamond puts it, "fellow creatures" in ways that subsume the more traditional markers of ethical consideration". Accordingly, Gardeners do not believe in the use of non-human animals for clothes or food.

The text puts a lot of emphasis in the importance of veganism in the characters' lives. They cannot be carnivore since they have a responsibility towards their non-human kin. This account for the practice of taking Vegivows to be accepted as part of the community- a ritual by which they promise not to eat animal protein and if possible avoid food that is achieved by unethical practices like slave-labor (169). In fact, they worship "Saint Euell of Wild Foods" (149) in reference to Euell Gibbons, a famous naturalist of the 1960s since he studied naturalistic outdoor sources of food. The Gardeners are well versed in picking food from what nature offers, and try to keep their diet as natural as possible.

Another example of the force of vegetarianism includes considering insulting to call a person “meat breath” (85) because they consider it degrading.

After the pandemic kills most people and triggers riots, the survivors lock themselves up in buildings making food last as much as they can. Even in this life or death situation, the enforcement of the Vegivows is so strong that Toby still refrains from eating pigs claiming “animal protein should be the last resort” (22). She is in fact taken aback by the fact that other survivors from the Gardeners were openly eating bacon (470), even when she had already eaten lamb from abandoned Mo’Hair corpses (453). The Gardeners’ teaching have become a part of Toby so much that she holds on to them even after the apocalyptic flood has changed everything.

Nonetheless, faced with the chaos after the virus, the Gardeners have to betray some of their principles, mainly due to the need for food. By the end of the book, the Gardeners seceding group MaddAdam unapologetically eat bacon (470), Toby gathers Mo’Hair legs to eat and makes rakunk soup (513). Even Adam One survivor group needs to resort to animal protein: they eat the rats they had placed in the Buenavista Condos (413). The latter group, while sheltering in a Happicuppa store building, eats their products which were considered evil before the Flood; but as Adam One acknowledges “there are time when the rules must bend”(444). Despair and hunger may have led them to carry out practices they contempt, but this does not mean their views on the non-human change.

Actually, the Gardeners take measures to atone for their sin: they say prayers of “apology and release” to the animals-human or not- they eat or kill for survival (458), they thank them for giving their body’s so that humans can stay alive (413), and Toby goes as

far as leaving Blanco's body and knife as a peace offering to the relatives of the boar she hunted down (461). Thereupon, the Gardeners true to their faith, do not forget to thank their fellow creatures and atone to their violence towards them even in extreme situations which is coherent if we consider their regard for non-human nature as a subject.

The dogmatic construction of non-human nature as a subject has a counterpart in action as we stated before. Sometimes, this action is more truthful than the actual creeds the Gardeners preach. The fact that Gardeners do create a conscious account of religion in order to achieve their ends of a better behavior towards non-human animals and environments is, in the context of a decaying futuristic society, less important than the effect it has on their members. The Gardeners ideas and experiences illustrate a connection with nature on an ideational, linguistic, and corporeal sense. They seem to care for non-human nature, and treat non-human nature as an equal that enters intersubjective relations with them.

3.3- Toby's Case: the Role of Social and Natural Environments in Personal Self-Construction

If we briefly consider Toby's evolution as a character from Murphy's notion of the process of subject formation, we can also view at her intersubjective relations to the non-human environment and society as shaping her personal self-construction. Toby might be the most experienced of the two narrators since she lives through many of the social and ecological changes that resulted in a degraded state of culture.

Her life is marked by her quick fall into disgrace due to her mother dying of an illness which she later learns to be medical Corporation induced (126). As a result, her father who had been a moral man lost all of their money paying for her treatments, and

finally killed himself (33). Toby's father ethics led him to resist the pressure of the Corporations by burying his rifle when Corps outlawed weapons; later refusing to sell her house as "a matter of principle" (30); and finally not divorcing Toby's mother and putting all his money on her treatments (33). Toby was then orphaned and, contrary to her father's sentimental actions, she does the practical thing and disappears from the Corporations radar into the plebs.

In the plebs, Toby lives through two physical experiences of deprivation and loss. First, she loses her fertility after donating her eggs due to a medical malpractice. Since this takes away one of the basic female bodily capacities of reproduction, she is deeply scarred: "when she was told she'd been accidentally sterilized she could feel all the light leaking out of her" (39). Losing fertility cannot be thought of as just another loss. It is the loss of a corporeal function in females of different species since birth that is taken for granted. The strength of this experience is such that Toby ponders over death (39).

Moreover, she has to go through another sexually related marring experience because of the rapes and degradation in the hands of her violent SecretBurger boss Blanco. This experience marks her for life by, according to her, blocking her "neural connections for sex", which she does not mind. At this point she loses a part of her embodiment, since sexuality in her life is not useful as it cannot lead to reproduction, and it has not been enjoyable, so it is logical she might not feel sexual drive.

The difficult experiences she lived through harden her, to the point when she is referred to as a "tough and hard", "solid" (10, 467), a "rock", a "hard ass" (75). The children call her the Dry Witch: "Witch because she was always mixing things up and

pouring them into bottles and Dry because she was so thin and hard” (75). Therefore her hardness is not only self-perceived but it is a trait that other people identify in Toby. Her strength is also seen by MaddAdam leader Zeb who insists that she survived the Flood even if he does not have any proof (467).

Nevertheless, her contact with the Gardeners helps her heal and imprints a new self on her. Her first contact with the Gardeners was her rescue from SecretBurger’s manager Blanco when they take her to the Edencliff Garden and she feels mesmerized by the human love and the contact with nature. The love of the children is a kindness she did not know existed:

Toby couldn’t remember being hugged by a child. (...) for her it was something she couldn’t define: fuzzy, softly intimate. Like being nuzzled by rabbits (...) Nevertheless she found it touching: she’d been touched, in an impersonal but kindly way that was not sexual. (51)

This experience is not an intellectual experience, it is a corporeal one. It is a moment in which Toby also undergoes a process of renewed awareness of her own body. The sense of touch and the smell of the children return Toby to a positive connection with her own embodiment. She falls into a routine with the Gardeners in which she finds the solace of her friendship with Pilar and the familiarity of shared tasks. It is also through smell that she finds her new self: “Toby breathed herself in. Her new self. Her skin smelled like honey and salt. And earth” (121).

Within Toby’s process of self-construction, the experience of the body is central. But the body is also a part of the process: in fact, Murphy views it as a permanently incomplete process. He defines the body as a “semiotic material dialogue of change and response to stimuli, natural and cultural simultaneously” (50) So in this case, it is not only

the assumption of her embodiment that influences her subjectivity, it is the actual changes in her body and the effects it has on her personality: her loss of fertility and sexual trauma that harden her; the gaining of awareness of her sense of touch and smell that change her.

The persuasion of staying coming from the Gardeners' kindness is completed by the feeling of a moment of connection with nature in the rooftop Garden.

it was so beautiful, with plants and flowers of many kinds she'd never seen before. There were vivid butterflies; from nearby came the vibration of bees. Each petal and leaf was fully alive, shining with awareness of her. Even the air of the Garden was different. She found herself crying with relief and gratitude. It was as if a large, benevolent hand had reached down and picked her up, and was holding her safe. (52)

Her connection with nature is a moment of peace for Toby. She instinctively feels protected and cared for. Unlike the "plebs" which turned her invisible and put her in danger, the Garden welcomes her, notices her and protects her. This shaping experience will be one of the reasons why, despite her criticism of the Gardeners and her constant doubt in their beliefs, she remains with them and embraces their rites until the end.

Toby expresses critical and skeptical opinions (4, 55, 123, 204) on many occasions, her attitudes and actions point otherwise. The Gardeners' dogmatic views cannot be questioned. Doubt is poorly regarded by the Gardeners so "she kept her doubts to herself, because doubt wasn't a word the Gardeners used much." (120). Toby feels hypocritical (201) and a pretender (55). However, above we discussed her talking to and being protected by bees, solemnly apologizing to pigs, understanding birds, and keeping her Gardener vows to the fully extent possible. Furthermore, in the text's universe the Gardeners' teachings prove present and necessary in Toby's life: particularly, her time with the Gardeners provides the knowledge for survival after the Flood.

Indeed, the Gardeners had predicted a catastrophic event that leads to the death and rebirth of the human race. For that reason, they urged member to build secret *Ararats* storage rooms containing necessary supplies. Toby builds an Ararat in the AnooYoo Spa where she is hiding under a false identity (316). In addition, Toby constantly resorts to the Gardener teachings in moments of distress. For example, Toby makes use of what she learns in *Urban Bloodshed Limitation* and *Predator-Pray* relations several times after the flood to defend herself from human or non-human foes (26, 167, 461, 137, 433, 457). She also feeds from larvae collected from a decaying pig as a source of lipids and uses maggots and honey to cure Ren's infection. (393, 430) The Gardeners teachings on making use of available material (418) and growing Gardens with plants and mushrooms also proves useful. This illustrates the fact that in the context of the text, respect towards and cooperation with non-human nature is not only a matter of principle but also a question of survival.

Her connection with nature deepens once the plague hit and the riots settle. Toby spends a long time in loneliness defending herself from the threats of animal attacks and starvation by hiding away on the rooftop of a spa. She then starts to experience her surroundings in a more encompassing way. She feels the trees of the forest "drawing her, luring her in, as the depths of the ocean and the mountain heights are said to lure people, higher and higher or deeper and deeper, until they vanish into a state of rapture that is not human."(392). By this time. her understanding of animal signals and birds actions has increased. She doubts that her language will survive but she is sure the bird's languages will: "Soon her own language will be gone out of her head and this will be all that's left in

there. Ooodle-oodle-oo, hoom hoom” (418). Therefore, her confinement leads her to acknowledge more strongly non-human subjectivity.

Thus, Toby’s experience of her own embodiment, and her emotional connections with non-human nature which are stronger than her beliefs account for a subjectivity loaded with the intersubjective experience of the environment –both social and natural. As the text finishes, Toby’s connectedness with God, her body, non-human nature and her Gardener subjectivity assert as she walks to rescue Amanda. Firstly, she talks to God and questions his choices of survivors. Then, she feels her own body, her blood flowing, and finally she feels the energy of nature radiating through flowers, twigs and pebbles (497, 498).

In the end, as Gardeners somewhere die of the plague, she celebrates her favorite Gardener festivity Saint Julian and All Souls with soup made of leftover animals and vegetables. She shares the soup with Ren, Amanda, and Jimmy and includes the two violent Painballers in a gesture of temporary forgiveness since it is a feast to thank and honor the fallen. (518) Toby, who somehow admired her father- as impractical and sentimental as he was- indeed evolves as a character to impractically postpone the Painballers death and share a Feast with them, thus, honoring the Gardeners’ teachings she has often doubted.

IV. Conclusions.

Imagining the Possibility of Non-Human Nature as a Subject in the Past and the Future.

The search for new models of subjectivity in the XXI century that legitimize a new approach to non-human nature can be read in the analysis of the imaginative efforts in contemporary literature. *A Mercy* and *The Year of the Flood* can be interpreted in terms of the ideas that underlie the construction of its characters and the values that emerge from them. Following Murphy, our analysis has illustrated how both texts construct alternative ideational systems, intersubjective experiences involving non-human nature, and environmentally oriented processes of human self-construction: on resorting to a reconstruction of past ideas and experiences, and the other one constructing a possible dystopic future. In both texts, the supporters of this view of subjectivity are subaltern subjects, to some extent linked to nature through their own experience of subjection by the logic of domination explained by Plumwood.

Firstly, both text show systems of ideas that point to the inclusion of non-human nature as a subject; thus discursively constructing a conceptual decentering of the human. *A Mercy* does so in the form of an imagined pre-modern worldview from a fictional native tribe. *The Year of the Flood*, on the other hand, devises a well-built religious dogma in a future where profit making has done away with any form of empathy. The texts point to an idea of community between all nature- human and non-human- and reject the idea that

humans master non-human nature: while for Lina land is not property to be seized and the Earth belongs to everyone, including its non-human inhabitants, for the Gardeners humans' erroneous belief that their sacred stewardship over other species entitles ownership is countered by their idea of empathetic relationship with non-human beings. By the same token, the necessity to consider non-human nature's opinion: the same logic that leads Lina to believe that trees should be asked for permission before being used as wood underlies the Gardeners prayers of apology after they have killed an animal for food or on self-defense.

Furthermore, both texts present, in what we could call a posthuman turn, an acknowledgement of the animal origins of the human being, and the importance of embodiment. While the misunderstanding between people and bears in *A Mercy* shows they used to know each other, Adam One overtly preaches that humans are primates even if they will not accept it. In this respect, corporeality becomes of utmost importance. Lina recognizes the body has its own language and the disregard for the connections between all of nature lead to bodily illness. Meanwhile, for the Gardeners all humans base desires, appetites and drives are undeniably animal. Instead of repressing this animality, the characters of both texts embrace it and let it define them.

Secondly, on the experiential level *A Mercy* and *The Year of the Flood* portray instances of intersubjective communication between humans and non-humans; thus, they discursively establish an experiential decentering of the human. Both Lina and Florens talk to animals on several occasion eliciting bodily responses from them. In Florens's case there is even an endorsement of the idea that sometimes animals can be more empathetic to people than other humans. Likewise, a reluctant Toby- despite her self-consciousness about talking to bees- is able to communicate with bees, and understand crows. This

communication exceeds the use of languages since- as we understand it following Murphy- it includes other forms of semiotic exchanges.

In addition, other practices connect the ideas about an inherent equality in nature with the characters' experiences of it. Lina and Florens's perceptions of space for instance show that a house which is traditionally associated with a refuge makes Lina uncomfortable; she refuses to enter the house built by Jacob because of its evil origin in the assassination of trees. Wilderness, on the contrary, does not seem to be threatening to Florens, who in the end becomes wilderness herself. On the other hand, the Gardeners believe that their kinship to animals should translate in their choice of food and clothing. Accordingly, they are vegan until some pressing situation forces them to feed on animals, to whom they apologize before eating, and thank after doing so.

A third and final aspect that should be considered is the role that intersubjectivity has in the self-construction of the selected characters. In Murphy words, the environment here does not function only as background but it has an impact on the lives of the characters that shapes their self-construction.

On the one hand, their social environment, their contact with other humans, has a role. In Lina's case, the loss of her tribe and her traumatic involvement with a man harden her and make her strong and determined. Her subsequent friendship with Rebekka and her self-appointed guardianship of Florens influence her self-construction greatly. As the text progresses, her involvement with them conditions her final demise as she loses her willfulness. In a strikingly similar process, Toby also suffers the loss of her family, and experiences abuse at the hands of a Blanco. Like Lina, this struggle also hardens her and detaches her from sexual contact. Similarly, Toby also finds friends in the Gardeners that

help her recover. But, unlike Lina, her strength never wields, her friends do not leave her behind, and she survives.

In addition, both characters similarly find solace in nature as a source of companionship and connectedness: when Lina's decides for her own self-invention, her first contact is non-human as she talks to animals and plants. Toby goes through two moments of deep connection with nature at her most hopeless moments: once, running away from Blanco in the rooftop Garden, and twice, after a very long period of loneliness at the AnooYoo Spa when her sense of the natural non-human world around her is heightened.

There is also a marked importance in the acknowledgement of human embodiment in self-construction. For Florens, embracing the basic emotional and corporeal wilderness in her is what frees her from her self-imposed inner enslavement. After she can stop repressing her inner self, Florens finds her independence and resists domination. Toby, on her part, is able to start anew after her hard youth thanks to a very corporeal and emotional experience of contact with her own body in the Garden. She finally comes to terms with her belonging with the Gardeners when she can breathe her own honey-smelling, salty, earthy odor.

Therefore, if we consider these two texts in their contextual connections we can conclude that, on the one hand, they point to values that circulate in society. The important academic and popular debates about the place and dignity of non-human nature are present in *A Mercy* and *The Year of the Flood*. On the other hand, they are imaginative portrayals alternative worldviews and lifestyles that subvert much more powerful paradigms. Either resorting to a recreated past, or a projected future, this samples of XXI century literature fictionalize possibilities of different ideas and experiences of non-human nature.

We consider that this topic can be further explored in the future by analyzing the complementary systems of exclusion of non-human nature from the notion of “subject” as presented in the corpus. Therefore, this analysis will therefore be part of a wider research as part of my final thesis for the Maestría de Culturas y Literaturas Comparadas, to be carried out during 2015.

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