Margaret Atwood’s Environmentalism
Apocalypse and Satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy

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Abstract

This study considers the way in which Margaret Atwood’s post-apocalyptic MaddAddam Trilogy functions as an environmental project. The main focus is on how the three novels, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), simultaneously draw on and destabilise the apocalypticism inherent in so much environmental discourse, primarily through the use of satire. The trilogy is securely anchored in the concerns of contemporary readers, and transposition of the action to the near future is integral to Atwood’s environmental project: attention is focussed on the present causes of anticipated environmental catastrophe, which readers implicitly are implored to avoid. Atwood’s environmentalism is performed in the interplay between her literary stature, the equivocal content of her work, and the irreverence with which she metaleptically blurs distinctions between fact and fiction, art and commodity, and activism and aesthetics. Whereas the satiric mode serves as a way of avoiding some of the limitations of apocalyptic thinking by maintaining and even creating complexity, it also renders the entire project ambiguous. Uncertainty about the exact environmental injunction presented in the trilogy creates doubts about the degree to which Atwood’s extradiegetic environmental activism should be taken seriously, or conversely. Storytelling is foregrounded in all three novels, and through its concurrent critique of and reliance on market forces and the political potential of art, the MaddAddam Trilogy demonstrates that there is no external position from which the imagination can perform environmentalist miracles. As such, Atwood’s environmental project furthers a profoundly ecological understanding of the world.
Acknowledgements

The MaddAddam Trilogy features different types of interpersonal relationships, sometimes transcending species boundaries. Some of these are purely based on necessity or exploitation; others are constellations of allegiance, friendship or kinship. I am grateful for the fact that the years spent on this study have been characterised by the latter kind. I have first and foremost been extremely privileged in my advisors. Maria Holmgren Troy and Magnus Ullén have always been exceedingly patient, and never failed to see something worthwhile in half-formed ideas. Their insightful direction has improved this project immensely and will stay with me for years to come. Erik van Ooijen read the preliminary draft both carefully and generously, and made pertinent suggestions at my final seminar. Further, I am particularly indebted to Elisabeth Wennö and Anna Swärdh. Their perceptive comments have been valuable, but their friendship and encouragement even more so. I would like to thank Anna, Elisabeth, Magnus, and Maria, as well as Åke Bergvall, Etienne Fourie, and Johan Wijkmark for their assistance with proofreading. The flaws remaining in the end product are, of course, mine alone.

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Marinette Grimbeek
Norrbyås, April 2017
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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in parenthetical references to the MaddAddam Trilogy:

- OC  Oryx and Crake
- YF  The Year of the Flood
- MA  MaddAddam

For ease of reference, all interviews with Atwood have been cited by the name of the interviewer.
Introduction

The first half of the online description of MaddAddamites NooBroo gruit beer, produced by Beau’s, a craft brewery based in Vankleek Hill, Ontario, reads like a standard tasting note: “From its elusive, intriguing aroma to its subtle yet celebratory aftertaste, this light but substantial beer has mysterious undertones of rosehips, elderberries, and mountain herbs, with a deeper tone of roots and woody bark” (Beau’s). The second part, however, is decidedly less conventional: “Fresh and spring-like, confident and down-to-earth yet inspirational, rooted in the wild world of foraging and gathering, NooBroo is everything the MaddAddamites would wish an all natural beer to be. Saint Euell Gibbons himself would applaud it!” (Beau’s). This endorsement was not only penned by Margaret Atwood, it makes explicit reference to her MaddAddam Trilogy and asserts that her characters would approve. The description accordingly takes on an ironic tongue-in-cheekness: the MaddAddamites part—sans apostrophe—refers directly to the trilogy. This ironic effect is compounded by the name of the beer. With its internal capitalisation, doubling of consonants, and uncertainty about meaning and pronunciation, NooBroo follows the same conventions as the satiric brand names coined in Atwood’s novels. Just like most of these, NooBroo can be read in different ways, and at least two of them seem appropriate: ‘new brew’, or an emphatic ‘no brew’ (hops are essential to most beers; lacking hops, gruits are ‘not brewed’ in a conventional sense). Under the heading “History and Style,” the brewery’s webpage firmly establishes the connection between NooBroo and the MaddAddam Trilogy:

Gruits are beers brewed with herbs and other botanicals in lieu of hops. MaddAddamites NooBroo gruit includes many of the botanicals noted in Margaret Atwood’s novel MaddAddam, the third book in her trilogy of speculative fiction that includes Oryx and Crake, and The Year of the Flood. Within the context of MaddAddam there is much foraging and harvesting of plants and botanicals, and Atwood calls this collaboration “The beer Gods [sic] Gardeners would have made.” Atwood personally tasted and selected the bouquet of botanicals included in this delicate, delicious gruit. (Beau’s, my italics)

By thus inserting Atwood’s fictional universe into the marketing of a real-world product, the separation between fact and fiction is troubled. Atwood’s playful endorsement constitutes an instance of metalepsis, defined by

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1 A third possibility would be ‘no bro’—although highly inappropriate in the world of designer beers, it does replicate the dissonance between connotation and denotation of the brand names invented in the trilogy.
Gérard Genette as “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse” (Narrative Discourse 234–35). Alongside this metaleptic marketing strategy, Beau’s stresses Atwood’s involvement in the form of bodily celebrity endorsement: drinkers of their beer are enticed to replicate Atwood’s taste experience.

Moreover, consumption of the gruit beer supports a good environmental cause. The webpage includes a short description of the brewery’s collaboration with Atwood and her partner Graeme Gibson, described as “award-winning Canadian writers and longtime environmental activists” (Beau’s), and specifies that sales of the beer generate funds for research conducted at the Pelee Island Bird Observatory (PIBO), in Lake Erie. Atwood and Gibson are actively involved with bird conservation through BirdLife International and their involvement with PIBO extends beyond fundraising and promotion. The project seems to be a family enterprise: Gibson’s son founded the observatory and Gibson senior chairs the organisation’s board on which Atwood also sits (Pelee Island, “PIBO–About”).

MaddAddamites NooBroo is a high-end commodity, apparently meant for environmentally-minded consumers who can afford to buy such products. As a consumer item, the beer appears to be promoting the ideologies of sustainable development and green consumerism—it is a luxury product intended for consumption by privileged middle-class connoisseurs and, as an added bonus, sales contribute to conservation. It would seem that the target market for the beer primarily consists of Atwood enthusiasts, or at least people familiar with her name or work. As a result, the word NooBroo becomes a kind of in-joke, which of course in turn enhances the exclusivity of the product, at least for those in the know. In its metaleptic adoption of the trilogy’s intradiegetic branding strategies, Atwood’s endorsement of the beer also teasingly highlights just how untenable many of the treasured distinctions between high and low art—or art and commerce, or even art and activism—really are. While spinoffs are of course nothing new, commodification here extends to replicating a celebrity experience and involves a partly private environmental project. Yet the marketing itself is done in a mocking tone that seems to suggest that sophisticated buyers of the beer see through both its literary and commercial pretences.

The deliberate blurring of the lines between fiction and reality, between idealism and cynicism, as well as between art and commodity accomplished in the NooBroo example suggests the overall focus of this study, which falls on the manner in which Margaret Atwood’s post-
apocalyptic MaddAddam Trilogy, comprising *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), functions as an environmental project, albeit an equivocal one. The MaddAddam trilogy both draws on and destabilises the apocalypticism inherent in so much environmentalist discourse, particularly through the use of metaleptic satire (a notion to which I return below), but also through focalisation and the alternation of utopian and dystopian impulses. This should all in turn be seen against the backdrop of current environmental concerns; for the purposes of my discussion in this respect I follow Timothy Morton in simply regarding environmentalism as “a set of cultural and political responses to a crisis in humans’ relationships with their surroundings” (*Ecology* 9, my emphasis). While satiric portrayals of the self-righteousness of environmentalists and the unforeseen consequences of environmental solutions help Atwood steer clear of some of the problems inherent in apocalypticism, the sense of crisis certainly remains and the satire also serves to render her environmental project rather ambiguous.

In my reading of the trilogy as an environmental project, the three novels are, of course, of primary concern. However, Atwood’s public persona, including the manner in which her literary stature and reputation for activism influence the reception of her work, is also considered, as her environmental project in part is facilitated by her literary fame. Paul Ricoeur’s distinction between intention and injunction perhaps best explains my approach. Readers cannot rely for understanding on an “intuitive grasping of the intention underlying the text,” Ricoeur argues; injunction, on the contrary, originates from the text itself “as a new way of looking at things, as an injunction to think in a certain manner” (88). The environmental injunction of the MaddAddam Trilogy, however ambiguous it appears, can neither be wholly separated from the position Atwood occupies as an author, nor from the novels themselves as works of commodified art.

The texts and their extratextual context feed into each other: uncertainty about the exact environmental injunction presented in the trilogy creates uncertainty about the degree to which Atwood’s extradiegetic environmental activism should be taken seriously, and vice versa. Maintaining and even creating uncertainty seems, however, to be more of an advantage than a shortcoming, since satire is used to highlight the complexities of the issues involved, rather than to simplify them. This interpretation of the mechanics of satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy is more in line with Fredric Bogel’s assertion that “[r]eading satire is not so much about finding a position we can plug ourselves into as about exploring the complexity of what it means to take a position” (52) than Matthew
Hodgart’s claim that “[t]he general drift of satire is to reduce everything to simple terms” (126). In Atwood’s trilogy satire provides, in one of Donna Haraway’s useful expressions, a way of “staying with the trouble” of environmental degradation and environmentalism.²

In its metaleptic entanglement of art, commodification, wit, and celebrity culture, MaddAddamites NooBroo exemplifies the potential and limitations of Atwood’s environmental project in miniature. Its marketing mimics the branding strategies ridiculed in Oryx and Crake and apparently pays little heed to the condemnation of rampant consumerism in the novel. However ironically, it is meant to encourage a certain kind of consumerism. NooBroo also serves to illustrate why the mechanisms of Atwood’s environmentalism—like the workings of her satire—have been afforded surprisingly little critical consideration, despite the fact that her popular reputation as an environmentalist is well established, and despite the abundance of ecocritical or ecofeminist readings of her work. There are some exceptions: Lorraine York has done significant work both on Atwood’s satire and her celebrity that I draw on in this and the following chapters. Verena Bühler Roth, Ronald B. Hatch, Shannon Hengen, and Alice Ridout have all written on Atwood’s environmentalism, but with the exception of Hatch’s discussion, they focus by and large on intratextual matters and pay little attention to how Atwood’s textual themes are related to or translate into her environmental activism. Allison Dunlap presents one of few readings of Oryx and Crake as a critique of environmentalist movements, while Lee Rozelle maintains that the novel encourages “Atwood’s millennial ‘green’ readers . . . to embrace an ethos of environmental stewardship” (69). Lauren A. Rule Maxwell too sees The Year of the Flood as giving readers “a model by which we might alter our own behaviors to develop better relations with the living things around us” (9). As should become clear, however, I do not agree that the trilogy can be reduced to a set of simple environmental guidelines, particularly not when taking into account Atwood’s satire and her extratextual endeavours.³

Atwood’s environmentalism is performed in and constituted by the interplay between her stature, the ambiguous content of her work, and the irreverence with which she treats distinctions such as fact–fiction, art–commodity, and activism–aesthetics. Both her environmentalism and the

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² See, for example, Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (2016).
³ While many scholars remark on the satiric tone of Atwood’s work, discussion seldom moves beyond that. J. Brooks Bouson has for instance repeatedly discussed the novels comprising the MaddAddam Trilogy as satiric texts, but has not paid any attention to the mechanisms of Atwood’s satire, and instead relies on descriptions such as “darker satiric” (e.g. “It’s” 140, 143, 153; “Joke-Filled” 341).
position she occupies as an environmentalist are as a consequence complicated and fraught with ambiguity and tension.

The rest of this introduction provides a brief overview of the MaddAddam Trilogy as well as of the conceptual framework of this study. Next I discuss some of my key concerns, namely the Anthropocene, environmental apocalypticism, and Atwood’s metaleptic use of satire. This is followed by an outline of the following chapters.

“A third thing”: Conceptualising the MaddAddam Trilogy

In the MaddAddam Trilogy, current environmental concerns are extrapolated to the near future. Although no specific dates are given, the novels seem to be set during the middle or second half of the twenty-first century, as becomes clear through references to recent events as though they are in the distant past. In *Oryx and Crake*, for instance, the “sproat/gider” is described as “one of the first successful splices, done in Montreal at the turn of the century, goat crossed with spider to produce high-tensile spider silk filaments in the milk” (199). This is most likely a direct reference to Nexia Biotechnologies’ 2002 announcement that they plan to produce artificial spider silk, dubbed BioSteel, using their “proprietary transgenic goat technology,” a biotechnological breakthrough described in the 18 Jan. 2002 issue of *Science* (Lazaris et al. 472–76) and hailed in its news section as a process that “could produce silk proteins in plentiful qualities for applications such as high-strength composites and soft, flexible bulletproof clothing for soldiers and police—all without the chore of figuring out how to raise spiders on a farm” (Service 421). The *Science* description of BioSteel technology highlights one of the complications prominent in the novels too: biotechnology is represented as the clearest manifestation of the entanglement of ‘nature’ and venture capitalism. Biotechnological applications are seldom portrayed as innocent in the trilogy: the military-industrial complex appears ever involved, and many miracle products are primarily designed to attract more customers for other biotechnological inventions. Current cultural anxieties explored in the novels include environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, climate change, the uses and misuses of biotechnology, the privatisation of state and policing powers, and the decline of the humanities. Because the trilogy is so securely anchored in the concerns of contemporary readers, the

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4 See Chapter 3 for an extended discussion of the dating of the trilogy.
transposition of the action to the near future is, as I maintain throughout, integral to the novels’ environmental project, as it focusses attention on the present causes of impending environmental catastrophe.

Although the three novels form a trilogy, their plots are not sequential. For the most part the storylines of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* run parallel. Each of these novels features a different set of characters, and thus covers the same events from different angles. Near their ends the storylines of the first two novels converge, and *MaddAddam* is the continuation of this combined plot. One of the consequences is that while *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* are quite independent, and either may easily be read without knowledge of the other, a reading of *MaddAddam* is dependent on some knowledge about the preceding novels. Unsurprisingly, *MaddAddam* therefore starts with a brief plot summary of the preceding novels, entitled “The MaddAddam Trilogy: The Story So Far” (MA xiii–xvi). In this way, the final novel foregrounds storytelling, one of the trilogy’s central concerns, from the outset.

The first novel, *Oryx and Crake*, starts in the post-apocalyptic *medias res*. For most of the novel, Snowman, the post-apocalyptic name chosen by the protagonist and focalising character, Jimmy, presumes himself to be the only human survivor of a pandemic. Jimmy’s boyhood friend is the brilliant bioengineer Crake and Jimmy discovers too late that Crake’s environmental utopia consists of a planet rid of damaging human influence. To achieve this, Crake engineers the pandemic to make way for his environmentally-friendly humanoid splices, called Paradise Models by him but known as Crakers by everyone else. Crake spares Jimmy from the virus in order for him to release the Crakers from the laboratory, where they have been developed, after the chaos has subsided, and to introduce them to the climate-changed landscape they are designed to thrive in. Unbeknownst to Crake, however, the Crakers retain more humanity than their designer intended, and with the help of Snowman they soon construct their own elaborate mythology to explain the chaos around them. Alternating parts of the novel are dedicated to Snowman’s present-tense, post-apocalyptic experience and the approximately chronological, past-tense recollection of his past life as Jimmy, until the two narratives converge near the end of the novel. The novel ends with an armed Snowman spotting a small group of human survivors on a beach.

*The Year of the Flood* centres on a pacifist environmentalist sect, called the God’s Gardeners, who try to prepare for the Waterless Flood, the apocalypse they anticipate. All three focalising characters are members or former members of the group. Each part of the novel starts with a sermon delivered by the founder of the Gardeners, Adam One, and contains
chapters focalised through two former members: Ren, who was part of the sect as a child, but at the time of the pandemic is trapped in the Scales and Tails club where she has been working as an exotic dancer, and Toby, an older woman who has had to go into hiding and is managing a spa when disaster strikes. Ren’s chapters are narrated in the first person, while those with Toby as focalising character are narrated in the third. Immediately after the pandemic both women fear that they may be the only ones left alive (just as Snowman does in *Oryx and Crake*), and much of this novel also consists of retold memories through which the years leading up to the pandemic are sketched. Whereas the pre-apocalyptic narrative of *Oryx and Crake* is told from Jimmy’s privileged perspective as lifelong inhabitant of the secure compounds, much of Toby’s and Ren’s lives are spent in the more dangerous pleeblands. Near the end of the novel Ren and Toby meet, and set out to rescue Amanda, Ren’s friend who has been captured by other survivors. The group of people Snowman sees on the beach at the end of the earlier novel form part of the plot of the second volume, and here the two storylines merge. In many ways *The Year of the Flood*, with the spiritual environmentalism of the Gardeners, offers a positive counterpoint to the prevailing gloom of *Oryx and Crake*, but this, as will be seen in the analyses, is to simplify matters somewhat.

In *MaddAddam* Atwood ties together most of the loose strings from the first two volumes. This novel revolves around the various survivors of the pandemic. The human survivors include Snowman, a number of former Gardeners, some members of the ecoterrorist group called MaddAddam, and criminals who have escaped from the Painball arena, where they were sent to fight to the death against other convicted felons. In addition to the Crakers there are the Pigoons, genetically modified pigs that also feature in the previous novels. Most of the main characters from the earlier novels make an appearance and Toby is again one of the focalising characters. Zeb, a Gardener first introduced in *The Year of the Flood*, plays a prominent role in this novel, and much of the past-tense narrative comes in the form of focalised flashbacks to Zeb’s pre-apocalyptic life as an ecoterrorist and leader of the MaddAddam group. While many of the main characters of the trilogy die in this novel (Jimmy/Snowman, Adam One, Toby and Zeb), it is remarkable for the fact that nonhumans become fully-fledged characters.5

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5 I have in most instances opted to use the term *nonhuman* instead of more cumbersome synonyms such as *more-than-human* or *other-than-human* when it is necessary to highlight that nature refers to that which has traditionally been “both distinguished from the human and the cultural” (K. Soper 2), to those entities Val Plumwood refers to as “earth others” (137). This is, however, done at the peril of reinforcing rather than doing away with the nature–culture or human–nature binaries. As Bruno Latour has pointed out:
The last part of the novel is narrated by one of the Craker children, named Blackbeard, and the novel also includes the myths and stories of the Crakers. By the end of the novel the Crakers and surviving humans have formed a new community that lives in peace with the Pigoons and also includes human–Craker babies.

Despite their differences, the three novels by and large rely on the same narrative techniques. In each novel, distinctions between the pre-apocalyptic past and post-apocalyptic present are emphasised by the tense of narration. Knowledge about the pre-apocalyptic scenario is conveyed to the reader as past-tense narrative, usually in the form of the focalising characters’ memories or flashbacks, while the post-apocalyptic narration takes shape in a heavily-focalised present tense. The impact of these narrative strategies is two-fold. First, the post-apocalyptic world is clearly presented as the outcome of pre-pandemic events and choices. Second, the use of focalised, present-tense narration traps the reader within the points of view of a small number of characters.

Temporally the pre-apocalyptic, near-future setting is close enough to the world inhabited by us, the novels’ contemporary readers, to be recognisable, although it is in most instances worse than our world. In this sense, then, the pre-apocalyptic world may be described as a dystopia using Lyman Tower Sargent’s oft-quoted definition: “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (9). Throughout my study, I recognise the productive potential of dystopias, which are not necessarily expressions of complete despondency, but rather involve the advocacy of change through negative representations. In portraying damage to the natural environment as symptomatic of collapse in so many other spheres, Atwood’s trilogy may be deemed bleak and fatalistic, but some hope is retained. This is more than a jeremiad on the final collapse of everything. Despite their dire visions of the future, these novels remain utopian in their apocalypticism in the sense that they do envision some alternative stances toward nonhuman nature beneath all the layers of irony and satire. Moreover, because the dystopian past is cast as our near future, we, the readers, are still in a position to change this future. In this respect

“Ecological thought has suffered just as much from attempts to ‘recombine’ the two artifacts of nature and society as from the older more violent history that forced the two realms . . . to bifurcate. Even the establishment of a contract implies that there are two parties to the deal: nature and humanity” (15).

6 Following utopian theorists like Tom Moylan (e.g. 155–57), I regard anti-utopia, or the denial of hope, as the obverse of utopia.
the trilogy arguably shares the didactic ambitions ascribed to many dystopian works of art, and this trait too forms the basis for the environmental activism it performs.⁷

Apocalypse has two related meanings: etymologically it means *unveiling*, and in the Judeo-Christian tradition it denotes a vision of the end of this world and the beginning of a new that is prophetically revealed. In contemporary parlance the word is usually used in the sense of *catastrophe*. The MaddAddam Trilogy clearly plays with both senses of the word by gradually revealing a catastrophic future through the recollections of and flashbacks to the focalising characters’ pasts. The combination of focalisation and present-tense narration leaves readers to experience the post-apocalyptic narrative as both immediate and inescapable. This technique is commonly employed in what Anne Whitehead has termed “trauma fiction.” Although the three novels of the trilogy are generically very different from the literary works Whitehead investigates, the intradiegetic relationship between past and present (and its subsequent involvement of the reader in the narrative) appears to function in a similar manner.⁸ Whitehead views the ghost in trauma fiction as representative of “the disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present” (6), and in the type of temporal relationship between reader and fictional world created in the MaddAddam Trilogy, readers are living close in time to the past of the fictional future. It is our present, the time of BioSteel and new frontiers of genetic engineering, which leads up to the catastrophe depicted in Atwood’s novels. In a sense then, readers of the trilogy are both haunted

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⁷ It should also be noted that utopia has been connected to satire already from Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), and Atwood’s trilogy may be seen as a continuation of this tradition. Both satire and dystopia tend to display a didactic tendency, and dystopia is often defined in terms of its didactic qualities. David Sisk, for example, asserts that “even the bleakest dystopia offers advance warning of what could happen should present trends continue unchecked. A dystopian narrative tries to warn, didactically predicting a coming evil while there is still time to correct the situation” (6). Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan maintain that “the dystopian imagination has served as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia’s underside” (1–2). On a related note, Lawrence Buell observes that eco-apocalyptic scenarios prevail, because “the environmentalist dreams such dreams precisely in order to render the dream-scenario impotent” (*Future* 59).

⁸ It would be interesting to investigate whether the narrative conventions of trauma fiction are widely used to express the trauma of solastalgia, “the ‘lived experience’ of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation” (Albrecht 45), in works dealing with climate change and/or environmental degradation. In *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction*, E. Ann Kaplan develops the notion of “pretrauma,” the traumatic anticipation of catastrophe in the near future, without reference to Whitehead, making the tenuous claim that her focus is “on temporality, which is often lacking in trauma studies” (12).
by and haunt the narrative, and present-tense narration helps to create this sense of ghostly prescience, in turn part and parcel of the trilogy’s environmental project. Even though no omniscient third-person narrator can provide readers with answers and explanations, most of the focalising characters do have some hindsight advice to offer, and the bulk of the environmental work the trilogy seeks to perform takes the form of these oblique warnings about present developments, seen in relation to their projected outcomes.

As indicated by this overview, the MaddAddam Trilogy has considerable scope. In the present the plot unfolds over just a few months, but events span several decades if the recollections and retellings are included. The text is long (the first editions total 1206 pages in hardcover), features many characters, and addresses a number of complex issues. Although its environmental injunction seems relatively clear (simply put: save the environment to have any hope of saving yourself), its straightforwardness is obscured and undermined through the consistent use of satire. No single environmental movement is sanctioned, and all are at some point subject to ridicule.

It is further significant that Atwood here employs the trilogy, a novelistic form new to her: although she has written numerous cycles of poems, her novels have consistently been independent, unrelated works, to the extent that not even character names recur.9 In general, the trilogy as a distinct form of novel series seems surprisingly under-theorised, perhaps because of its associations with genre fiction, or maybe just because the three-part structure can be used in such a variety of ways.10 While the three novels of the MaddAddam Trilogy do not clearly fall into a beginning-middle–end or paradise–fall–redemption pattern, the overall narrative of a new post-apocalyptic beginning is to some extent cyclical, as argued below.

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10 In one of few recent studies of the formal function of the trilogy, Caroline Louise Egan notes that by the end of the twentieth century, the trilogy as form “ran counter to the formal practices of post-modern fiction and to the ideological predilections of contemporary criticism” because of “its characteristically linear plot” and “formal evocation of the ‘grand narratives’” (1–2). Egan’s study, however, focusses on the trilogy’s formal “reference to the Aristotelian mandate that narratives have a clear beginning, middle, and end” (15) in a manner that seems incompatible with the temporal structure of the MaddAddam Trilogy. Guy Andre Risko likewise concentrates on the way in which the temporal linearity of the trilogy foregrounds the “progressive structure” of narratives (iv). Lihua Gui’s study of Robertson Davies’s trilogies, on the contrary, emphasises the intertextual relationships between different novels comprising a trilogy; Davies’s novels were published independently and not all his trilogies are sequential, leading Gui to conclude that “Davies works out interconnections that are complex enough to invite readers to read his ‘linked’ novels as a group” (269).
What does seem particularly relevant in the case of the MaddAddam Trilogy, however, is the non-sequential relationship between the first two novels, which mirrors the internal oscillation between past- and present-tense narratives in each of the three novels.

To a certain extent, a dialectical interpretation of the MaddAddam Trilogy is invited through the temporal relationship between the three novels, with *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* set more or less simultaneously, and *MaddAddam* as a continuation and conclusion of the narrative.\(^\text{11}\) I have therefore opted to keep my discussion of the trilogy mainly chronological according to the order of publication, focussing on each of the three novels in turn. Since many of the themes are present throughout all three novels, and since some development takes place, I draw on examples from the other two in all three of the discussions, while keeping the main focus on the novel under consideration. These three novels form a whole, but differ significantly in emphasis and style, and these differences may well be obscured if the novels are discussed thematically. Moreover, such a discussion may give an impression of unity that the texts themselves frequently resist.

The emphases of the three analysis chapters reflect this dialectical approach: the thesis of *Oryx and Crake* (extinction is inevitable if things continue this way), is followed by its antithesis in *The Year of the Flood* (reconceptualisation of human relations to nonhuman nature is necessary for a chance at survival), and culminates in a synthesis presented in *MaddAddam*. The synthesis portrays both extinction and survival as part of the outcome of current developments; it shows that ethical changes do not necessarily guarantee survival and that the envisaged future is characterised by hybridity, in more ways than one.

Atwood’s earlier work has frequently been discussed in terms of thematic or generic hybridity or transgression of boundaries.\(^\text{12}\) In simplified terms, environmentalism as a distinctly human enterprise relies on the separation of nature (that which has to be protected) from culture (that which both necessitates and enables such protection). In the MaddAddam Trilogy, culture is portrayed as being at least in part biologically

\(^{11}\) Using the terminology of visual art, the first two novels may thus be said to form a kind of diptych. Atwood herself proposed calling *The Year of the Flood* a “simultaneous" (Coyne), as it “is not a sequel, it’s not a prequel, it’s a meanwhile” (qtd. by Gordon). In Genette’s terms, *The Year of the Flood* could be described as a paraleptic continuation of *Oryx and Crake*, “designed to bridge lateral ellipses,” while *MaddAddam* is a proleptic continuation of the storylines of the previous two novels (*Palimpsests* 177).

\(^{12}\) Examples of readings concentrating on hybridity or transgression include those by Sherrill Grace, Charlotte Sturgess, Alice M. Palumbo, Coral Ann Howells (“Transgressing”), and Reingard Nischik (*Engendering*).
determined, but biology itself cannot be understood as ‘natural’. Genetic engineering is represented as “natureculture” (e.g. Haraway, *Companion*) in action—neither the one, nor the other, but an expression of their intertwining. Biology thus emerges as a mediating third term not only between nature and culture, but also in binary categorisations such as natural–artificial, scientific–aesthetic, material–discursive, and physical–spiritual.

Biology also serves to remind of the scales and complexity of environmentalism in the trilogy: thematically, it features both on a genetic and an ecological level, and both these levels are portrayed as shaped by evolution. Ecology, “[t]he study of the interrelationships between organisms and their environment, including all biotic and abiotic components” (Park and Allaby), is derived from the Greek οἶκος (house), and the MaddAddam Trilogy clearly shows that, to some extent, our planetary habitat has become uninhabitable. Through its thematic rejection of evolutionary teleology, the trilogy also exposes the conventional environmentalist perception of ecology, described by Dana Phillips as “‘utopian’ in the pejorative sense of the term” (42). According to this view, ecology is not just holistic and harmonious, but also benevolent to the point of being endowed with moral goodness. Biology thus plays a central and troubling role in the trilogy: it is no coincidence that Crake’s apocalyptic pandemic is biological, or that the Gardeners’ faith is founded on the incorporation of evolutionary theory in Christianity. And in the final novel hybridity is biologically manifested in the form of human–Craker babies.

Biology presents a complication: it is both that which is genetically transmitted and that which may be altered through culturally-determined practices, of which biotechnology is just the most overt example. The plots of the novels themselves refute assumptions that biology is exclusively aligned with the natural; human actions and cultural practices are always shown to be part of a relational situation, which may well be termed an *ecology*. Importantly, Atwood has made much the same observation about storytelling, one of the central preoccupations of the trilogy as a whole:

> Scientists tell us that rats, if deprived of toys and fellow rats, will give themselves painful electric shocks rather than endure prolonged boredom. Even this electric shock self-torture can provide some pleasure, it seems: the anticipation of torment is exciting in itself, and then there’s the thrill that accompanies risky behaviour. But more importantly, rats will do almost anything to create events for themselves in an otherwise eventless time-space. So will people: *we not only like our plots, we need our plots, and to some extent we are our plots*. A story-of-my-life without a story is not a life. (*Payback* 83, my emphasis)
This pronouncement points to the relational, situational context—ecology, if you will—of storytelling. We are perhaps genetically predisposed to tell stories (as are rats) and use stories to order our existence, but our existence is in turn shaped by the stories we tell. Nevertheless, storytelling is thoroughly satirised in the trilogy too.

The emergence of a third term (like biology) does not, however, imply resolution, but more often than not increased complexity. I here take to heart both Linda Hutcheon’s observation that dialectical readings of Atwood’s work emphasising resolution are inadequate, since the “very real” contradictions “create a permanent unresolved tension” (Canadian 158, n6), as well as Val Plumwood’s caution against the “strong temptation, once the role of dualism in creating exaggerated separation is perceived, to conclude that the resolution of a dualism requires merger, the elimination of the problematic boundary between the one and the other” (59). “The attempt to eliminate distinction along with dualism is misconceived on both political and philosophical counts,” Plumwood continues (59). The religious and mythical symbolism of the triad seems to resonate with Atwood’s characteristic emphasis on “the mythological substructure of modern culture” (Pache 130). Seeking a way in which to highlight but not resolve such oppositions seems to be in line with Atwood’s conception of her artistic practice too; in a 1972 interview, she proposes a “third thing” as an overlooked option between two extremes: “People see two alternatives. You can be part of the machine or you can be something that gets run over by it. And I think there has to be a third thing” (Gibson 19). Atwood’s insistence on a third route also surfaces, more menacingly, in the short short story or prose poem “Third Handed” included in Good Bones (1992): “The third hand is neither left nor right, dexter nor sinister”; “[i]t’s the third hand that joins [a couple] together, the third hand that keeps them apart” (Good 124). My intention is not to blindly follow Atwood’s own ideas about how her work should be interpreted, yet her choice of the trilogy as form seems significant in the light of such pronouncements.

In order to forge a theoretical perspective that integrates this thirdness, I seek to adopt a strategy similar to what Edward Soja called “critical thirding” which “recomposes the dialectic” not through simply adding the “binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different” (61). Soja points out that the resulting “third’ term” should not be “sanctified in and of itself. The critique is not meant to construct a holy trinity, but to build further, to move on” (61). In my readings of the novels I accordingly try to draw attention to the presence of such mediating
elements that instead of undoing tensions and oppositions underscore their complexity and entanglement. Hybridity should not be reified as an environmental solution—it rather serves, like satire on a formal level, to highlight inherent complexity.

Nevertheless, a sense that the final novel presents the reader with some kind of synthesis of the previous two is strengthened by the fact that as a work of art it is the least independent of the three: the manner in which the plot unfolds in *MaddAddam* assumes that readers are familiar with the preceding novels. Temporally this novel follows on the other two, and for much of the narrative all the major characters are gathered in the same place. This synthesis does not imply resolution, however, and following Stephen O’Leary’s distinction between tragic and comic versions of apocalypticism, it seems that the trilogy leans more toward the comic side, in which evil is conceived of as error, rather than guilt, while destiny is conceived of as fortune, rather than predetermined fate (68). This is, however, a cumulative effect—*Oryx and Crake* leaves little room for hope except in its open ending. Although the final novel does seem to end on a somewhat lighter note than the trilogy begins on, its end too is open and unresolved, and makes for rather uneasy reading, at least as far as the human survivors are concerned. In fact, *MaddAddam*, the title of the last novel and the trilogy as a whole, does more than playfully bring to mind one of the best-known Anglophone examples of a sentence-length palindrome (“Madam, I’m Adam”). A palindrome is by nature cyclical or reversible, and the title therefore aptly illustrates the dialectic principle that no synthesis is final—each synthesis in turn becomes a new thesis.

**Plotting the Anthropocene**

Notions of apocalypse are clearly tied up with issues of human agency and responsibility. Additionally, apocalyptic thought tends to be totalising. It therefore seems fitting that the current vogue of apocalyptic narratives (including, of course, all those about zombies and other forms of undead) coincides with discussions surrounding the Anthropocene. Scientific consensus is emerging surrounding the use of the term *Anthropocene* to

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13 O’Leary draws in his description both on Kenneth Burke’s comic and tragic “frames of acceptance,” as well as Susanne Langer’s descriptions of the “rhythms” of comedy and tragedy (O’Leary 68).

14 Richard Alan Northover notes that the MaddAddam Trilogy could be seen as “a tripartite comedy like Dante’s Divine Comedy, rather than a catastrophist prophecy” (“Ecological” 84).
describe the current geological epoch as the “Age of Humankind,” in which humans and our technologies are accorded global agency on par with the geological forces of previous ages.\textsuperscript{15} The use of the term has especially gained momentum after its popularisation by Nobel prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen in a 2002 Nature article, in which he argues that “unless there is a global catastrophe—a meteorite impact, a world war or a pandemic—mankind will remain a major environmental force for many millennia” (23).\textsuperscript{16} Whereas a discussion of the data supporting such a claim certainly falls beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that although there is considerable consensus on the choice of term, and its approximate meaning, the exact periodisation and definition of the Anthropocene are still being debated in a number of disciplines. As yet, the term has not yet officially been adopted by the International Commission on Stratigraphy (Subcommission), although its Anthropocene Working Group presented their recommendation to formalise the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch on 29 August 2016. The Working Group also recommends that the period be dated based on a so-called golden spike of plutonium in the stratigraphic record, which would place the start of the Anthropocene around 1950 (Anthropocene Working Group), thus favouring “a signature of global, human-driven change that would wind up in the rock record, not the first traces of human influence on the local landscape” (Voosen). Other traces considered include plastic pollution, concrete, soot from coal-fired power stations, and the bones of domesticated chickens (Carrington). Basing the epoch on radioactive traces seems particularly apt, however, as it acknowledges the entanglement of ecological destruction, the nuclear arms race, imperialism, and global capitalism.

While geological epochs are not moral constructs, the very naming of the Anthropocene is closely connected to questions of human agency and intentionality, as well as to ideas about human exceptionalism. The human exceptionalism paradigm, defined by Chris Park and Michael Allaby as the belief that “humans are different from all other organisms, all human behaviour is controlled by culture and free will, and all problems can be solved by human ingenuity and technology,” is essentially an extreme anthropocentric view. Considerations of the dangers of anthropocentrism,

\textsuperscript{15} This idea is not particularly new. One of the stated aims of George Perkins Marsh’s 1864 Man and Nature; or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action was “to indicate the character and, approximately, the extent of the changes produced by human action in the physical conditions of the globe we inhabit” (iii).

\textsuperscript{16} Crutzen’s use of mankind, instead of a more gender-neutral term such as humanity or humankind, unintentionally exemplifies many of the problems posed by an essentialising concept such as the Anthropocene.
however, inescapably tend to be circular to a certain degree, as humans often have to assume that members of other species are not engaging in similar discussions of their relations to others; the double bind of human exceptionalism entails always critiquing human-centeredness from a human point of view. As philosopher Kate Soper points out, an endeavour to erase all distinctions between human and nonhuman nature could be deemed “insensitive to those ways in which the rest of nature is different” from humanity (13). Moreover, the assumption that all human–nonhuman relations are dominated by the same anthropocentric attitude risks obliterating the differences between human beings too (K. Soper 13). A rash critique of the notion of human exceptionalism may result in an attempt to erase all differences (amongst humans as well as between human and nonhuman nature), or, perhaps even more dangerously, in the anthropomorphic subsumption of all other species under human standards.

It is of course problematic to reduce past, present and future incarnations of humanity to a single agential anthropos, without taking history, class, gender, ethnicity, or consumption levels into consideration, and use of the term Anthropocene has received some criticism. Pertinent examples include Eileen Crist’s “On the Poverty of our Nomenclature” (2013) and Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg’s “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative” (2014). Crist rightfully maintains that much Anthropocene discourse “refuses to challenge human dominion, proposing instead technological and managerial approaches that would make human dominion sustainable” (129). From an environmental point of view, similar criticism may be levelled against the anthropocentrism inherent in apocalypticism. Malm and Hornborg, on the other hand, question the manner in which responsibility for climate change is laid at the door of a transhistorical humankind, thus leading to a curious paradox: “climate change is denaturalised in one moment—relocated from the sphere of natural causes to that of human activities—only to be renaturalised in the next, when derived from an innate human trait” (65). While moral responsibility for the Anthropocene is not equally distributed across all of humanity, this argument can hardly be used to deny that all humans in some way have an impact on their surroundings, and that the cumulative effect is the Anthropocene. That human impact on the

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17 In his characteristically ironic manner, Timothy Morton, on the contrary, decides to “stop worrying and love the term Anthropocene” and reaches the conclusion that it is the “first truly anti-anthropocentric concept” (“How” 257, 262).
18 Dipesh Chakrabarty notes that “[t]o call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human. Humans are biological agents, both collectively and as individuals. They have always been so. There was no point in human history when humans

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nonhuman environment is lasting and irreversible seems to be one of the guiding principles of the MaddAddam Trilogy, and the novels arguably constitute a literary version of this debate on agency and power.

According to NASA, 2016 was the warmest year on record, and it was “the third year in a row to set a new record for global average surface temperatures.” Climate change in the form of global warming has become emblematic of the Anthropocene and of anthropogenic environmental disaster. It is one of the environmental problems represented in the MaddAddam Trilogy, but the novels are as much concerned with the Capitalocene, the name Haraway (e.g. *Staying 47*) and others would prefer to give the current epoch. My use of the term Anthropocene is not in ignorance of the complications the notion obscures, but rather as shorthand for a complex of anthropogenic environmental issues. While the idea of the Anthropocene has been criticised for affording humanity too much agency, it is also possible to see it as an epoch of lost human control—so much so that humanity is now endangering its own existence, along with those of many nonhuman species. The notion of the Anthropocene is thus rich in tension which potentially adds to its usefulness as an analytical tool.

**Environmental Apocalypticism**

Environmentalism is saturated with the apocalyptic. Frequently reports of floods, fires, storms, droughts, melting ice and cold spells seem to take on biblical tones, while the predicted future effects of global climate change are almost prophetic, both in scale and in the implication that humankind will be punished for its wrongs—whether those be carbon emissions or a lack of piety. Apocalypticism has dominated environmental discourse at least since the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962. Although it falls outside of the scope of this study, the converse may also be worth considering: (Christian) millenarianism with its emphasis on establishing a new world may well be deemed an ecological tradition, intimately concerned with the relation between humans and their environment. Environmentalism is saturated with the apocalyptic. Frequently reports of floods, fires, storms, droughts, melting ice and cold spells seem to take on biblical tones, while the predicted future effects of global climate change are almost prophetic, both in scale and in the implication that humankind will be punished for its wrongs—whether those be carbon emissions or a lack of piety. Apocalypticism has dominated environmental discourse at least since the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962. Although it falls outside of the scope of this study, the converse may also be worth considering: (Christian) millenarianism with its emphasis on establishing a new world may well be deemed an ecological tradition, intimately concerned with the relation between humans and their environment. Environmentalism is saturated with the apocalyptic. Frequently reports of floods, fires, storms, droughts, melting ice and cold spells seem to take on biblical tones, while the predicted future effects of global climate change are almost prophetic, both in scale and in the implication that humankind will be punished for its wrongs—whether those be carbon emissions or a lack of piety. Apocalypticism has dominated environmental discourse at least since the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962. Although it falls outside of the scope of this study, the converse may also be worth considering: (Christian) millenarianism with its emphasis on establishing a new world may well be deemed an ecological tradition, intimately concerned with the relation between humans and their environment.

19 Although the roots of the environmentalist movement, especially in the United States, lie in the work of figures like Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and Aldo Leopold, Robert
use first affects the livestock and then people begin to die “sudden and unexplained deaths” (Carson 21). Eventually the area turns into a silent, post-apocalyptic wasteland:

There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example—where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed. The feeding stations in the backyards were deserted. The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh. (Carson 22)

Hens fail to hatch chickens, pig litters die shortly after birth, there are no bees left to pollinate fruit trees, and vegetation and fish die off. Yet, “[n]o witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves” (Carson 22), the fable concludes.

The apocalyptic tone of the first chapter of *Silent Spring* seems apt for the book’s polemic subject matter. Carson wrote her book to catalyse change, and to engage her readers she starts with a worst case scenario that is somewhat tempered in the more factual chapters that follow. And Carson’s apocalyptic tone had the desired effect: in 1972, DDT use was finally banned in the United States, largely as a result of activism inspired by *Silent Spring*. This outcome has led environmental historian Roderick Nash, for instance, to describe the volume’s influence on public opinion on pesticides as comparable to the changed view of slavery brought about by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) more than a century earlier. *Silent Spring* is “a book that exploded against traditional American assumptions” thereby becoming “a landmark in the development of an ecological perspective” (Nash, *Rights* 78). David Kinkela asserts that “*Silent Spring* shifted the debate about DDT” by “allow[ing] readers into a world that had been closed

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Gottlieb, for example, deems Carson’s book and the debate it led to “an epochal event in the history of environmentalism” (121), and in his discussion of environmentalism in Canada, Neil S. Forkey remarks that “[t]he global environmental movement might well have begun with the 1962 publication of Carson’s *Silent Spring*” (85). Carson’s book is an important point of reference for the MaddAddam Trilogy, and in *The Year of the Flood* she is named as one of the Gardener saints (e.g. *YF* 369).

21 The chapter’s tone also has much in common with science fiction, as has been noted by several scholars. M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer characterise the blend of apocalypticism and magic in the opening chapter as a variety of gothic science fiction (178), although on the whole they deem the book in its entirety to “[favor] a millennialist version of progress rather than a strictly modern apocalypse, which views the end of the world as absolute” (184).

22 David Kinkela notes that the second chapter contains “perhaps the most overlooked passage” (112) of the book: “It is not my contention that chemical insecticides must never be used” (Carson 29).
to nonscientists and making complex scientific concepts accessible to a general audience” (108). The apocalypticism of *Silent Spring* set the tone of environmentalism for decades to come.

On 1 August 2008, the New Economics Foundation launched their One Hundred Months campaign with a website and a monthly blog on the website of *The Guardian*. Predictably entitled “The Final Countdown,” the start of the first post set the apocalyptic tone: “Time is fast running out to stop irreversible climate change, a group of global warming experts warns today. We have only 100 months to avoid disaster” (Simm8). In its presentation of scientific data with apocalyptic rhetoric, the urgency of the opening line of the Foundation’s statement was likewise clear: “We calculate that 100 months from 1 August 2008, atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases will begin to exceed a point whereby it is no longer likely we will be able to avert potentially irreversible climate change” (New Economics 2). The One Hundred Months campaign clearly exemplifies an environmentalist tendency not only to cast environmental problems in an apocalyptic light, but also to present apocalyptical timetables for solutions.

In temporal and spatial terms apocalypticism indeed seems an apt vehicle for calamitous environmentalist messages: it allows for extrapolation of current action (or inaction) to a dire, yet still-avoidable future, while at the same time predicting change on a planetary scale, thus making it, as Ursula K. Heise argues, “a particular form of imagining the global” (*Sense* 141). Stefan Skrimshire describes apocalypse as “an experiment in thinking about time” (“Eternal” 221), while Lawrence Buell has termed apocalypse “the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (*Environmental* 287). Mike Hulme identifies “presaging apocalypse” as one of the four predominant narrative modes employed to frame climate change (*Why* 345–48), Greg Garrard observes that “[a]pocalyptic rhetoric seems a necessary component of environmental discourse” (*Ecocriticism* 113), and Stephen Daniels and Georgina H. Endfield note that “climate change appears millennial in a cultural as well as chronological sense, its moral imperatives assuming an evangelical urgency” (215). The all-encompassing aspects of the Anthropocene have a lot in common with apocalyptic thinking, not least because the Anthropocene is usually cast as warning about the devastating impact of humankind on the planet, rather than as a source for celebration. Apocalypticism is deemed useful in environmentalist terms partly because it imparts a “sense of danger, fear and urgency” (Hulme, “Four” 44), and a sense of urgency also underlies warnings about the effects of anthropogenic climate change, such as the influential identification of nine “planetary boundaries” demarcating a “safe operating
space for humanity” which, if overstepped, could have “consequences that are detrimental or even catastrophic for large parts of the world” (Rockström et al 472).23

The One Hundred Months campaign and Carson’s *Silent Spring* illustrate the attractions of and drawbacks to environmental apocalypticism: while impending doom certainly can inspire action, apocalyptic countdowns are not always effective. By 1 December 2016 the hundred months had passed and now the doomsday clock on the onehundredmonths.org.uk website merely shows a steady accumulation of red figures as post-tipping-point days continue to add up. In the meantime, though, environmental problems are no less urgent than at the start of the campaign. Frank Kermode has noted that “[a]pocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited” (8), yet repeated ringing of doomsday bells may engender a sense of fatalistic resignation, rather than action. It is further problematic that many of these apocalyptic visions rely on a variety of nostalgia that implicitly advocates a return to what is seen as a more benevolent past, before the widespread use of pesticides or when anthropogenic climate change still could be reversed, and by implication to a time when humans had little perceptible impact on nonhuman nature.

Much environmental apocalypticism envisions the large-scale destruction of humankind and human societies as a prerequisite for environmental regeneration, thus leaving the politics of environmental apocalypse at a rather awkward impasse. At best, apocalypse can bring about revolutionary change; at worst, however, it deprives most of humanity of agency, leaving it at the mercy of some *deus ex machina* (in the MaddAddam Trilogy taking the form of an engineered pandemic). Environmental apocalypticism therefore tends to preclude political solutions to the problems faced in favour of a dramatic reversal of the tables, in this manner stripping most humans of any real control over and individual responsibility for disastrous outcomes. Moreover, apocalypticism tends to reduce issues to simple rights and wrongs, and the wholesale destruction of much of humanity often smacks of Malthusian misanthropy, as it is seldom far removed from western-centric arguments about overpopulation and about who has the right to reproduce. In framing her environmental project apocalyptically, Atwood therefore sets out on rather murky waters.

23 The boundaries identified by the authors of the article are climate change, rate of biodiversity loss, interference with the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, stratospheric ozone depletion, ocean acidification, global freshwater use, change in land use, chemical pollution, and atmospheric aerosol loading (Rockström et al 472).
It has similarly been argued that literary dystopia has lost some of its transformative potential. In a book review that includes MaddAddam, Heise asserts that “[c]ontemporary dystopias . . . aspire to unsettle the status quo, but by failing to outline a persuasive alternative, they end up reconfirming it”:

Dystopian science fiction seems like a ready-made tool with which to engage current social and environmental crises—but only because it so often recycles worn scenarios from the apocalypses of the past. At this point, postapocalyptic wastelands have themselves become too reassuringly familiar. Perhaps Michael Crow, the president of Arizona State University, was right in accusing writers of dystopian fiction a few years ago of being complicit in pervasive social pessimism, and calling on them for new utopian visions. (“What’s”)24

Feeling overwhelmed by apocalyptic or dystopian scenarios is not conducive to taking action. “It’s hard to keep apocalypse consistently in mind, especially if you want to get out of bed in the morning,” Zadie Smith muses. Both Heise and Smith place considerable emphasis on the activist potential of environmentalist art. Underlying Heise’s condemnation of the dystopian mode and Smith’s criticism of apocalypticism is the expectation that literature about environmental crisis should move beyond mimesis to engendering action in its readers; that readers should “turn from the elegiac what have we done to the practical what can we do?” (Smith).

The ethics of environmental apocalypticism is also suspect. From an activist perspective, the reliance on apocalyptic solutions tends not just to remove human agency, but to do away with a sense of responsibility or hope. If the little agency people have cannot result in changed conditions (either through their own contributions or through forcing their elected governments to implement effective measures), there is simply no reason to feel responsible for one’s damaging actions. Besides, if one cannot hope to survive a real, apocalyptic change, there is little reason to make the small adjustments that may add up to larger environmental interventions—awaiting apocalypse could well lead to political apathy. There is, however, also something redemptive about the absoluteness of apocalypse. Humanity is held responsible collectively (although this is certainly unfair to many individuals), but may also collectively atone for its wrongs. And it is no coincidence that I phrase my discussion of apocalypse in Christian terms. Apocalypse, redemption and atonement, at least as they figure in the MaddAddam Trilogy, are founded in Christian doctrine.

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24 While I do not agree with Heise’s blanket condemnation of dystopia (or with her classification of MaddAddam as a dystopia in these terms), the issue of complicity is one to which I return in subsequent discussions.
A further disadvantage of framing environmental concerns apocalyptically is that the sense of the local or personal could be lost in the immensity of the scale of the impending or ongoing disaster. Frederick Buell has convincingly argued that the apocalyptic framing of complex environmental crises enables sceptics of all hues to dismiss such discourse as alarmist, since they can point out that the long-prophesied apocalypse has not yet taken place. Moreover, there is the danger of oversimplification, which “suppresses the complexity, diversity, and dynamism of accumulating environmental problems” into a single, apocalyptic crisis (F. Buell xii), thus leading to the creation of false universality in the representation of environmental issues. As indicated by its title, in *From Apocalypse to Way of Life*, Buell comes to the conclusion that crisis is no longer looming on the horizon, “but a feature of the present” that “has become part of the repertoire of normalities in reference to which people construct their daily lives” (76).25 Buell therefore deems the present a state of “postapocalypse” that is “closer to experiencing a very slow apocalypse” (105) than an abrupt change. This conclusion, however, seems to contradict his assertion that “environmental crisis discourse has left apocalyptic ecologism and doomsterism behind and moved beyond apocalypse into a variety of new conceptual spaces and rhetorics” (F. Buell 35), an assertion that is challenged by, for instance, the One Hundred Months campaign referenced above. It would probably be more accurate to say that apocalypse has become so commonplace as to be normal; although this would acknowledge that apocalypticism through overuse has lost some of its powers of persuasion and terror, it does not deny it its central role in environmental discourse. In the MaddAddam Trilogy both Buell’s “apocalypse as a way of life” and the sudden apocalyptic event are present, as severe climate change and corresponding species loss provide an apocalyptic background against which the pandemic plays out.

The MaddAddam Trilogy does not only address environmental issues; instead these are shown to be part of a complex of wicked problems, which include, for instance, the state of the humanities, terrorism, the power wielded by multinational corporations, widespread unequal distribution of wealth, and reproductive choices.26 At a time when global

25 Curiously, Buell’s endeavour to describe a progression from an apocalyptic moment of crisis to a perpetual state of crisis in fact seems to suffer from a propensity similar to that of always thinking of the contemporary as the end times. Kermode points out that “[a]lready in St. Paul and St. John there is a tendency to conceive of the End as happening at every moment; this is the moment when the modern concept of crisis was born—St. John puns on the Greek word, which means both ‘judgment’ and ‘separation’” (25).

26 The term wicked problem has gained prevalence since Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber defined it in 1973 to describe complex clusters of interdependent problems in
climate change and large-scale environmental collapse threaten to be overwhelming, it is hard, if not impossible, to separate other issues from environmental ones. On its own, apocalypse is perhaps too absolute to entertain such ambiguity, but in the novels satire is used to nuance the complexity of the environmental challenges faced. In the concluding chapter I therefore briefly discuss the way in which the MaddAddam Trilogy uses satire as a mode for coping with the environmental realities of the Anthropocene.

Both the utopian visions offered by Crake and Adam One depend on apocalypse, as the largescale destruction of society is a prerequisite for fostering a new relationship between transhumans (the Crakers in Crake’s return to Eden), or select humans (the Gardeners in Adam One’s version of post-apocalyptic harmony), and the nonhuman environment. As such, both these visions are rooted in death, as well as in despair about the incorrigibility of human nature. The extremity of these visions reminds readers that incremental change is probably not enough to save the habitat shared by humanity and nonhuman nature. In *Oryx and Crake*, apocalypse is mainly sketched in terms of evolution and extinction, whereas apocalypse is central to the millenarian doctrine of the Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood*. In *MaddAddam*, post-apocalyptic existence is shown to be eerily similar to pre-apocalyptic existence, as terror and idealism both have to make way for the practicalities of day-to-day life, and as the Crakers exhibit increasingly human tendencies, including a propensity for ritual and mythmaking. Although they take vastly different forms, the apocalyptic visions of Crake and Adam One evidence an inability to imagine alternatives to a completely fresh start.

Post-apocalypse is a paradoxical genre, and through its generic and formal characteristics the MaddAddam Trilogy to some degree sidesteps the inherent difficulties of apocalyptic environmentalism in a manner analogous to Atwood’s use of irony in the novels and metaleptic satire in her extradiegetic environmental activism. The cyclical structure of the trilogy jars with its apocalyptic premise: temporally apocalypse is usually linear and abrupt (Kermode 5). Traditional representations of apocalypse are satirised in the novels, and in *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman remembers that, during the pandemic, “[s]treet preachers took to self-flagellation and ranting about the Apocalypse, though they seemed disappointed: where social planning for which no simple solutions exist, as opposed to straightforward, or “tame” problems (160). In environmental contexts the term is often used as shorthand for the numerous interrelated causes and effects of climate change, as for example by Chakrabarty, who succinctly observes that “[c]limate change is not a one-event problem. Nor is it amenable to a single rational solution” (13).
were the trumpets and angels, why hadn’t the moon turned to blood?” (OC 340–41). Besides, complete apocalypse would probably not allow for any pre-apocalyptic habits, values or even problems to survive. In fact, the trilogy shares the uncanniness inherent in the premise of many post-apocalyptic narratives that involve a description of life somehow surviving the end of the current world order—such survival necessarily renders the apocalypse only partial. Yet this post-apocalyptic paradox seems necessary, as Atwood explains in a short nonfiction reflection on melting polar ice and permafrost:

> It is hard to write fiction about such scenarios. Fiction is always about people, and to some extent the form determines the outcome of the plot. We always imagine—perhaps we’re hard-wired to imagine—a survivor of any possible catastrophe, someone who lives to tell the tale, and also someone to whom the tale can be told. What kind of story would it be with the entire human race gasping to death like beached fish? What kind of story, indeed? And who wants to hear it? (“The Arctic” 226)

Kermode similarly observes that “[w]e project ourselves—a small, humble elect, perhaps—past the End, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle” (8). Likewise, Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, in connection with Alan Weisman’s popular projection of *The World Without Us* (2007), that “we have to insert ourselves into a future ‘without us’ in order to be able to visualize it” (197–98). Complete apocalypse would pose an insurmountable representational challenge: there would be no tellers of the tale, nor any listeners.

**Metaleptic Satire**

In an environmentalist context, satire, much like apocalypse, comes with some baggage that may well be deemed problematic. Activism needs to be fairly direct, and while direct attack on a specific target with the intention to provoke ridicule is an essential component of many definitions of satire, the manner in which Atwood chooses her targets leaves readers uncertain as to authorial intention. Use of the satirical mode—despite its inherent didacticism—tends to privilege the aesthetic over activism, while its extrafictional references simultaneously risk detracting from its artistic value.

Definitions and descriptions of satire are immensely varied; Ruben Quintero holds that “no literary genre has a lexicon with more nominal red herrings” (6). Depending on a critic’s point of view and whether satire is
seen as a genre or mode, some of the descriptions contradict each other. Satire is, however, frequently described or defined in terms of its intent. “What distinguishes satire from other kinds of writing . . . is the moral purpose of the satirist,” Jane Ogborn and Peter Buckroyd maintain (11). Similarly, Aaron Matz asserts that “[s]atire exists to isolate a condition or a sector of human life and hold it up for ridicule” (ix), while Zoja Pavlovskis-Petit accords satire “a burden of political and social responsibility” (523). Patricia Meyer Spacks, for instance, argues that satire always has some extratextual intentions: “This is not to say that satire does make things happen in the real world, only that its purposes are to some extent extra-literary, that its intent is to achieve on and through its readers some effect beyond immediate emotional impact, beyond insight, beyond the personal” (363, my emphasis). The subjection of everything and everyone to satirical mockery, including those characters with overt environmentalist agendas, serves to muddy the MaddAddam Trilogy’s environmental injunction, while arguably rescuing the trilogy from preachiness—or at least, it allows Atwood to preach while pretending not to.

In his discussion of Menippean satire, Carter Kaplan makes a useful distinction between dogmatic and sceptical approaches to satire that seems applicable to my discussion of Atwood’s use of satire in the trilogy.27 The dogmatist, according to Kaplan, tries to explain everything by way of a single, overarching truth, while the sceptic “approaches grand designs and fixed approaches with caution” (33). A dogmatist can see the world in stark black and white terms, while a sceptic tends to focus on the grey. Dogmatism, in Kaplan’s analysis, leads to cynicism, while sceptics are neither condemned to optimism nor to pessimism (33). Given that much of Atwood’s diegetic satire here, as in her other works, is directly aimed against different expressions of dogma (including environmentalism), her overall approach may be characterised as sceptical. Furthermore, the open endings of each of the three novels also seem to fit in with descriptions of satire that highlight urgency, and environmental destruction is throughout the trilogy presented as a clear and present danger, particularly to its readers, who still have the power to avoid such a future.28

27 Although I here focus on satire as a mode, it would be possible to argue that the trilogy belongs to the Menippean genre, not least because of its “tendency to puncture generic boundaries and fuse with other forms” (Musgrave viii–ix) and the “stressed” scene on which it is played out and on which “the world is about to pass into eternal darkness” (Kernan 15).

28 Brian Connery and Kirk Combe, for instance, identify open-endedness as a general characteristic of satire, since “[c]losure, in most cases, would turn a narrative satire into either a comedy or a tragedy and thus contradict the satirist’s representation of evil as a present and continuing danger” (5).
Satire is, in Northrop Frye’s famous definition, “militant irony” that “assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured” (223). The belligerent nature of the mode has been interpreted as a malicious intention to wound by several theorists. Arthur Pollard insists that satire “does not exalt; it deflates” (7), whilst Ronald Paulson, for example, notes that “[t]here is only one kind of laughter that per se cannot become satiric. That is the laughter of sympathy—all laughter with as opposed to at an object” (x). Valentine Cunningham goes slightly further: “If satire is a reformative art—and that will always be a matter of dispute—it works for its reformations by way of deformations. In other words, it is a catachrestical art. And catachrestical for reasons of hostility and malice” (408). Although I would not necessarily call Atwood’s satire malicious in intent, it certainly is mischievous, and the use of such a divisive—potentially antipathic—mode for environmental purposes deserves consideration.

Traditionally, satire has been the territory of male writers, and two decades ago Lorraine York conducted a study among students which identified the combination of satire and Atwood’s gender as at the core of much of the hostility she evokes in some of her readers. York summarises this resentment in no uncertain terms: “Atwood is demonic because much of her feminist writing participates in a literary mode that is inevitably gendered male” (“Satire” 43). In her conclusion, York describes satire as “the no-woman’s land of literary modes” and observes that “any woman who steps into that heavily bombarded landscape is bound to attract both medals and shell fire” (“Satire” 48). So although quite a few critics have noted that gender issues, so central in Atwood’s earlier work, are less prominent in the MaddAddam Trilogy—a claim I do not entirely agree with, as shall be seen in the rest of this study—her employment of a literary mode that remains very much a male preserve may counter that claim.

While Quintero maintains that “the satirist is not obliged to solve what is perceived as a problem or replace what is satirically disassembled or unmasked with a solution” (3), an environmentalist agenda arguably should include at least some solutions to identified problems. Satire plays an important role in destabilising some accepted binaries in the novels, including natural–artificial, nature–culture, and human–nonhuman, by highlighting the often absurd arbitrariness of such distinctions. Satire’s use as an environmentalist tool in the trilogy thus goes beyond exposing the absurdity of anti-environmentalist stances (although it is frequently employed to this effect), and includes holding various incarnations of environmentalism to account. Most importantly, perhaps, it complicates the very notion of environmentalism. A satirist also relies on sharing a “common ground of reason” (Quintero 5) with readers, which has led W. H.
Auden to proclaim that “[s]atire flourishes in a homogenous society with a
common conception of the moral law, for satirist and audience must agree
as to how normal people can be expected to behave, and in times of relative
stability and contentment, for satire cannot deal with serious evil and
suffering” (204). The use of satire for environmentalist purposes thus raises
the question of Atwood’s intended audience, a matter further complicated
by her metalectic extratextual environmental activism.

Narrative metalepsis, as defined by Genette above, is centred on
transgression between different narrative levels. Narrative metalepsis is rather different from the classical or Renaissance figure of
speech. Brian Cummings notes that in the Renaissance metalepsis was not a “precise form of rhetorical figure,” but that the term instead denoted “a way of understanding a wider
phenomenon in literature” namely “a process of transition, doubling, or ellipsis in
figuration, of replacing a figure with another figure, and of missing out the figure in
between in order to create a figure that stretches the sense or which fetches things from far off” (231, 219). Cummings suggests that the concept itself has undergone transumption, or
a metaleptic transformation, from these origins to its modern narratological use (220).

Examples include Brian McHale, who devotes a section of Postmodernist Fiction to
“Strange loops, or metalepsis” (119–21), Debra Malina, who argues that “[m]etalepsis
dramatizes the problematization of the boundary between fiction and reality endemic to
the postmodern condition” (2), and Marie-Laure Ryan, who deems metalepsis “a favorite
figure of postmodern literature” (9). While I do not here discuss the MaddAddam Trilogy
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many of the insights about the mechanisms of postmodernism seem applicable in this case too.
narrative metalepsis is thus frequently cast in terms of (a liberating) transgression of boundaries. Here too there seems to be some danger of reification, and I endeavour not to describe metalepsis as inherently positive or progressive, but rather try to show how metaleptic mechanisms facilitate the MaddAddam Trilogy’s environmentalist injunction.

In her extratextual environmental activism Atwood tends to use the MaddAddam Trilogy metaleptically as well as satirically. This is particularly evident in relation to The Year of the Flood: in the acknowledgements to the novel, Atwood encourages readers “to use any of these hymns for amateur devotional or environmental purposes” (YF 433), and performances of the hymns played an important role in the book tour events. The humour with which Atwood allows her fictional world to intrude into the world of her readers is often auto-satirical, as can also be seen in the MaddAddamites NooBroo example above. Yet, there are more serious implications too. By, for example, mimicking the very branding strategies that she satirises in Oryx and Crake in the naming of NooBroo and of the trilogy itself, Atwood satirically—and metaleptically—foregrounds the perhaps inevitable entanglement of aesthetics with commodification.

Without calling it metalepsis, David Lodge discusses transgression between narrative levels in terms of “short-circuit[ing]” the assumed “gap between the text and the world, between art and life” (239), and this seems to be precisely the function fulfilled by metaleptic satire in the MaddAddam Trilogy. The jolt from such a short circuit is only temporary, and Pier notes that “metalepsis raises the question of the porosity of levels and borders in cultural representations, but not their dissolution” (200). Keeping this in mind does seem important if the MaddAddam Trilogy is to be understood as an environmental project. Satire frequently has reformative or didactic ambitions alongside those of exposing folly to ridicule, and if readers of the trilogy are to be inspired to prevent the future depicted in the novels, distinctions between fact and fiction cannot be completely blurred. At the same time, however, the near-future world of the novel should be believable enough so that the urgency of current environmental problems is not lost on readers. As such, Atwood may well be deemed to adapt the mode of “complicitous critique” Hutcheon deems characteristic of postmodernism (e.g. Politics 2). Atwood’s complicity ought to be seen in the light of what Morton calls the inevitable “hypocrisy” that “results from the conditions of the impossibility of a metalanguage” in the face of the Anthropocene (Hyperobjects 2). When “[e]very position is ‘wrong’: every position, including and especially the know-it-all cynicism that thinks that it knows better than anything else” (Hyperobjects 136), a hypocritical position is the only one that can be taken, according to Morton. Intradiesegically, some of
the characters posing some kind of resistance to the status quo, like Jimmy and Adam One, could also be said to adopt similar hypocritical attitudes, as shown in the analysis chapters. Although satire certainly alienates some of her readers, as York discovered, Atwood’s metaleptic, self-referential satire also does the opposite: it fosters a relation of complicity between the novels and readers (and between her fictional world and consumers of NooBroo).

Atwood’s use of metaleptic satire thus simultaneously serves to highlight the aesthetic nature of her project, while leaving readers slightly uncertain as to how seriously its environmentalist intentions are to be taken. In keeping with the theme of this study, it could be said that Atwood’s environmentalism operates in a complex ecology that involves art and activism in a way that makes the commodification of her novels clearly visible. Atwood does not only tell a tale with an environmentalist injunction, she sells it too (albeit with considerable self-deprecating humour), and her readers and intended audience play important roles in this ecology of environmentalism.

**Organisation**

Following this introduction, the MaddAddam Trilogy and Atwood’s environmentalism are contextualised in the first two chapters. In Chapter 1, I pay attention to Atwood’s public persona, her canonical position in Canadian and contemporary Anglophone literature, her celebrity status, and the way in which she exploits her fame to further various causes. The manner in which Atwood’s stature and public activism feed into each other is highlighted throughout—in Bourdieusian terms, I show that with the publication of the MaddAddam Trilogy Atwood’s considerable cultural capital has also been translated into environmentalist capital. This transaction is particularly evident in classifications of the MaddAddam Trilogy as climate change fiction, as well as by the fact that Atwood increasingly features in the public eye as an environmentalist, much as she earlier was presented as a feminist. Atwood’s canny metaleptic use of her celebrity for activist means has played an important role in the promotion of the MaddAddam Trilogy, and therefore to some degree facilitates the novels’ environmentalism. This chapter concludes with a consideration of the critical reception of the MaddAddam Trilogy, focussing on the contradictory ways in which it has been interpreted, as well as Atwood’s interventions into its reception.
Chapter 2 concentrates on another factor in the trilogy’s reception, namely the manner in which the novels are packaged and marketed as books written by Atwood. Relying on Genette’s classification of different paratexts, Chapter 1 may be said to focus on *epitexts* (paratextual elements external to the published volumes) and other extratextual aspects, and Chapter 2 on *peritexts* (paratexts included in the printed books themselves) (*Paratexts* xviii). In this chapter these frequently overlooked elements are examined in relation to the articulation of an overall environmentalist agenda. This chapter therefore prefigures the discussion of the intradiegetic portrayal of branding in *Oryx and Crake* and Atwood’s elaborate *Year of the Flood* book tour, discussed in the following chapters. I also show how ambiguity arises due to the ways in which covers, epigraphs and acknowledgements sometimes contradict each other. These discrepancies seem to mirror the uncertainties sustained by metaleptic satire in the texts themselves and in Atwood’s extratextual activism.

Each of the three analysis chapters centres on a different aspect of environmentalism examined in the trilogy. These main focal areas are the presumed teleology of evolution, the evangelical expressions environmentalist activism takes, and the way in which hybridisation complicates perceptions that the nonhuman environment is homeostatic. In addition, these chapters address the significance of storytelling and the imagination in each of the novels.

Chapter 3 accordingly focusses on the role played by notions of extinction and evolution in the representation of apocalyptic environmental crisis in *Oryx and Crake*. The novel may be read as a satire of intelligent design, here not founded in religious belief, but in Crake’s incorrect teleological understanding of evolutionary development. In misunderstanding both evolution and the Christian apocalypticism he unwittingly re-enacts, Crake’s project appears simultaneously tragic and farcical. Jimmy’s feeble resistance to the prevailing pre-apocalyptic commercialism is seen as emblematic for the complicity of the arts in capitalist exploitation, and some attention is paid to the role played by satiric coinage in the novel. Finally I discuss the inscrutable figure of Oryx, and highlight the importance of storytelling in the novel.

Chapter 4 centres on environmental evangelism—on the apocalyptic variety practiced by the Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood*, but also in relation to the elaborate metaleptic book tour Atwood embarked on to launch this novel. Whereas the chapter on *Oryx and Crake* highlights the destructive elements of apocalypse, this chapter concentrates on its redemptive and religious aspects, which nonetheless are frequently satirically portrayed. Special attention is also paid to the forms of
environmentalism advocated both by Adam One's sermons and through Atwood's book tour. By placing an emphasis on responsible consumption, Atwood's extratextual environmentalism appears far less radical than that portrayed in the novel itself. The reciprocity between aesthetics and activism is highlighted in the discussion of the metaleptic book tour events.

*MaddAddam* is discussed in Chapter 5. Here the spotlight falls on the novel's depiction of post-apocalyptic hybridity. With its picaresque blend of oral storytelling and written chronicle, as well as its depiction of the meeting of oral and literate cultures, *MaddAddam* is generically and stylistically the most hybrid of the three novels. Whilst trying to avoid a reading that valorises hybridity, this chapter examines the ways in which the novel foregrounds storytelling and uses hybridity to complicate current environmentalist thinking by exposing the erroneous view that nature is inherently balanced and good.

The brief concluding chapter challenges the commonly-held ecocritical notion that environmental crises can be countered through the imagination, and I consider the extent to which metaleptic satire really allows the MaddAddam Trilogy to move beyond apocalyptic environmentalism. Instead of presenting solutions to environmental problems, Atwood’s satirical complications ought to be seen as a way of coming to terms with the realities of the Anthropocene.
1 | The MaddAddam Trilogy in Context

Stating that Margaret Atwood creates her own context is no exaggeration, yet the manner in which she does this is all but straightforward. Complications are ironically highlighted rather than resolved in her work, and she adopts a similarly ironic stance to her literary production, its reception and her renown. In this chapter, the MaddAddam Trilogy is on the one hand considered in the light of a long career of political engagement, and on the other as part of an extensive and varied oeuvre. In Bourdieusian terms, the focus is on the way in which Atwood’s considerable cultural capital upon the publication of the MaddAddam Trilogy increasingly has been translated into what I here call environmentalist capital.

In this chapter, I first discuss Atwood’s canonical stature and a few examples of her public activism to show that, contrary to her protestations, her actions undertaken as a citizen cannot readily be separated from the political aspects of her literary work. Her activism often appears to resonate with her art, and at the very least influences the way in which her work is received. I then briefly contextualise the MaddAddam Trilogy in terms of Atwood’s oeuvre, particularly focussing on issues of power, agency and dogma in her novels. Lastly I briefly discuss the reception of the MaddAddam Trilogy by way of some examples. Here the main focus falls on generic issues, as well as the way in which scholars have drawn on similar arguments to present very different interpretations of Oryx and Crake.

Atwood’s Cultural and Environmentalist Capital

The relation between the private and the public is fraught with tension and the two spheres overlap abstrusely, especially in the case of such a well-known author. Undoubtedly, much of the activism Atwood undertakes privately has impact because of who she is publically, and the MaddAddam Trilogy does not exist in a vacuum. In fact, Atwood’s public persona may well be regarded as a work itself, albeit not of literature. In addition to the writer, a number of people play important roles in creating and maintaining her public profile, including her office staff, agent, editors, translators, and researchers. As illustrated by Lorraine York, Atwood’s celebrity forms “a pattern of interdependencies within the circle of cultural agents: between, that is, Atwood and those to whom she has entrusted the labour of managing her literary career” (Labour 14). Although this is a tenuous
distinction at best, I therefore endeavour to read the novels as a distinct part of Atwood’s activism (done, as it were, under the Margaret Atwood brand), without attempting to see these as fitting seamlessly into a whole.

**Canonical Atwood**

In 1951, the Canadian Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, chaired by Vincent Massey, famously reported that “neither in French nor in English have we yet a truly national literature” (Sec. 4 Ch. 15 § 5). The Massey Report eventually led both to substantial government investment in the arts through the establishment of the Canada Council and considerable Canadian cultural protectionism. Two decades later, Atwood’s *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) was one of the first—and arguably one of the most influential—studies of Canadian literature to be published. It was pioneering in identifying the specificity of Canadian writing (as distinct from the literatures of the United States or Britain that it had most often been conflated with). As Atwood is fond of pointing out in interviews, when she started writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, “new Canadian novels published in a year could usually be counted on the fingers of one hand” (e.g. Oates, “Dancing” 84). *Survival* highlighted Atwood’s part in an oft-neglected Canadian context, while also showing that Canadian literature is worthy of critical consideration.¹

Significantly, *Survival* may be deemed proto-ecocritical, and Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley note that it, together with the work of Northrop Frye, “helped establish a context for later ecological criticism” (xvi) in Canada. However, in typical self-disparaging mode, Atwood describes the volume in the preface to the 2012 edition as little more than a potboiler, “a grownup version of selling Girl Guide cookies” (*Survival* x), written in the hope of saving her publishers, House of Anansi, from bankruptcy. The book became a controversial bestseller in Canada and has never been out of print,

¹ The widely-held view that Canadian literature was completely absent from school and university curricula until the 1960s is challenged by Margery Fee, who notes that “just as English literary studies were a less prestigious alternative to classics in Britain, so Canadian literature became a less prestigious variant of English studies, taught in primary and secondary schools to develop patriotism and to assist in conforming immigrants to a nationalistic norm” (22). In Fee’s view, it was not so much that Canadian literature was never taught, but rather that it was seen as inferior. Atwood contributed substantially to raising the profile of Canadian literature—through her criticism and through her own literary production.
thus not just ensuring the survival of the press, but also giving Atwood the financial security needed to embark on a full-time writing career. Additionally, *Survival* gave her fame, if not notoriety, and placed Atwood full in the public spotlight, making her “an instant sacred monster” in Canada, as she recalls (*Survival* xv).

“Singlehandedly,” Coral Ann Howells claims, “Atwood has established a high profile for Canadian writing in general and for Canadian women’s writing in particular” (“Writing” 201). Atwood has been doubly involved in the shaping of the Canadian canon: both in describing its contours and in dominating it during the second half of the twentieth century. In Canada this has led to some tension—Atwood tends to overshadow Canadian letters to such an extent that literary critic Brian Fawcett already in 1991 detected a “let’s-bash-Atwood’ rancour” among his compatriots (8). According to surveys conducted by Caroline Rosenthal, Canadian academics seldom praised Atwood’s work but rather felt that they had to put her achievements and success into perspective. Most of them seemed to be annoyed that Canadian literature is often identified with Atwood internationally, and that in most countries her fame has not promoted the study of other Canadian authors. (49–50)

Rosenthal comes to the conclusion that Atwood is “haunting’ the canon today because she has become a literary monument, and as questioning cultural icons seems to be part of the understanding of Canadian culture, Atwood is praised as well as challenged” (50).²

Atwood’s seems to constitute a textbook case of the accumulation of “embodied” cultural capital (Bourdieu 48), as also evidenced by the numerous honorary degrees bestowed upon her. The first of these was already awarded in 1973 by Trent University in Ontario and she has received twenty-five to date.³ Atwood was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada as early as 1973 and was made a Companion of the same order in 1981; she has acted as editor for *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*

² Atwood’s supremacy has also shaped the manner in which Canadian literature has been taught outside the country. According to Rosenthal, Atwood was by far the most-taught Canadian author in Germany in the period 1981–99, while her work was frequently taught without being identified as Canadian in the United States (43, 45).

³ In fact, a look at the list of the honorary degrees provided on her website reflects the geographical spread of her fame (“Awards”). Thirteen of the degrees were awarded by Canadian institutions, all except two located in Ontario (the other two were awarded by institutions in Quebec); four each were awarded by institutions in the United States and Britain; and two by Irish institutions. A further two were awarded by non-Anglophone institutions: the Sorbonne Nouvelle in France (2005), and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens in Greece (2013), showing that Atwood has gained substantial acclaim and status even in translation.
in English (1982) and The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English (with Robert Weaver, 1st ed. 1986), and thus played a considerable role in shaping the canon she is often seen as epitomising.

The three volumes of the MaddAddam Trilogy are not just products of early twenty-first-century culture—they are published with Atwood’s name prominently on their covers, and as novels written by Margaret Atwood they form part of a very specific situation, one in which the identity of the author and her public persona cannot be ignored. To complicate matters even further, Atwood tends to make pronouncements about her own work that necessarily colour subsequent reception and interpretation, delivering what York refers to as “critical pre-emptive strikes of a particularly clever sort” (Literary 100).4 The eagerness with which critics still read Atwood’s new work in the light of her theories of Canadian literature proposed in Survival is an interesting case in point: in doing so, they unify her disparate literary and critical production as well as reinforce her centrality in the canon, in a manner which Atwood certainly seems to encourage.5 This is not to say that such readings are automatically inadequate, but they do seem exemplary of a trend in Atwood scholarship to produce readings that are, as it were, pre-approved by Atwood herself.

Atwood’s propensity for shaping her reception is not new. In 1980, for instance, she delivered a lecture entitled “An End to Audience?” that traverses a range of topics and gives a brief account of the state of the Canadian publishing industry.6 The lecture presents what appears to be her raison d’être for literature itself: “writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community”; “it’s also an act of hope, the hope that things can be better than they are” (“An End” 346, 349). These weighty pronouncements are however presented with Atwood’s characteristic wit, and upon closer reading, the piece abounds in contradictions. The assertion that a “writer has about the same relation to the thing written, once that thing is finished, as fossilized dinosaur footprints have to the beast who made them” (“An End” 344) is for instance made in a lecture that not only

4 Although Atwood’s pronouncements about her own work are influential, they can of course not be taken at face value, as she herself is careful to point out. In an interview with Geoff Hancock, for example, Atwood notes that “[i]nterviews are an art form in themselves. As such, they’re fictional and arranged. The illusion that what you’re getting is the straight truth from the writer and accurate in every detail is false. . . . Let’s just state at the beginning that interviews as the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth are suspect. They’re fictions” (191).

5 A recent example of a reading of the MaddAddam Trilogy that heavily relies on Survival is Miles Weaver’s “Writing from the Margin: Victim Positions in Atwood’s The Year of the Flood” (2015).

6 Delivered on 8 Oct. 1980, as part of the Dorothy J. Killam lecture series at Dalhousie University, and reprinted in Second Words (1982).
provides biographical information, but also deplores biographical readings of women’s writing. And Atwood’s tracks are everywhere: as both Atwood and her audience are aware, she is invited to make pronouncements on writing precisely because of her reputation as a writer, and her artistic and critical practices are afforded prominence by her canonical and celebrity status.

**Atwood’s Celebrity Activism**

The way in which writings feed into the public image of the writer, in turn influencing the reception and interpretation of her writing, is of course not unique in Atwood’s case, but here the process is highly visible. Atwood has for decades been making active use of her literary stature to further various causes, although she has consistently tried to separate her activism from her literary work, perhaps to avoid the biographical readings she cautions against in “An End to Audience?” When asked in 2003 whether she is an activist, for instance, she answers: “I separate my life as a citizen from my life as a writer,” while at the same time conceding that as a writer, she often has to become a spokesperson for various causes (Halliwell 263). On being announced the recipient of the 2016 PEN Pinter Prize, Atwood points out that she is “a stand-in for the thousands of people around the world who speak and act against [human rights] abuses” (qtd. by Flood, “Wins”). In fact, Atwood is at pains to avoid the ‘environmentalist’ label, much as she in earlier decades protested against being labelled a feminist. This can for example be seen in an interview with Merilyn Simonds during the Year of the Flood book tour, in which Atwood tries to avoid aligning the novel with an overt environmentalist message:

Simonds: This book has an environmental message, of sorts, too. One could say that it’s preaching a certain . . . a certain view of how things are or could be. You’re an environmentalist. Is that safe to say?
Atwood: Well, what does that mean?
Simonds: What does that mean?
Atwood: Well, we’ve now got one of these great big words that people sort of kick around. What does it mean? I think it means, in my case, somebody who did the math. And the math is: when it’s all gone there isn’t any more. (In the Wake)

Yet, she is fond of explaining her interest in biology or environmental matters by pointing out that she grew up “among the biologists” (e.g. Payback 3; “When” 202).

Although Atwood has commonly been read as a feminist writer, she has consistently rejected “embodying somebody’s party line” (interview with Brans 140).
Already in a 1986 interview with Geoff Hancock, she points out that “if something is only [message], then we feel we’re being preached to and we resent it” (204). In the interview with Simonds, she likewise avoids association with preaching an environmentalist message (despite the fact that this seems precisely the point of the *Year of the Flood* book tour events discussed in detail in Chapter 4):

Simonds: Well people do, you know sort of... art with an environmental message. I’m not saying that’s all there is here, but that’s part of it....
Atwood: What is that message? It’s a little bit more complex than that.
Simonds: Well, it is complex. Do you think that... writing books is going to be part of the solution? Or are you preaching to the converted? How do you reach out to the infidels?
Atwood: No, I’m a novelist.
Simonds: Oh, you’re preaching a little bit.
Atwood: No no no. (*In the Wake*)

Quite simply, Atwood does not want her art to be reduced to environmentalist or feminist propaganda, and in this regard her ironic stance plays an important role in maintaining complexity.

In a detailed analysis, Graham Huggan identifies Atwood’s “celebrity glamour” as a version of the exotic and notes how she plays an active role in maintaining her own celebrity status (*Postcolonial* 209, 214). Huggan identifies eight factors contributing to Atwood’s celebrity. In brief, they are: her skilled public performances; the “multiplication of her... media image”; Atwood’s willingness to speak out on national issues; her international status as a representative and interpreter of Canadian culture; the view, both inside and outside Canada, that Atwood is one of few truly important Canadian writers; Atwood’s status as a feminist icon; her quotability; and the way in which she mediates between scholarly and popular views of her work (Huggan, *Postcolonial* 214–15). Huggan ascribes so much power to Atwood in determining her own public image that it would seem to entail much cynicism on her part, although this impression is somewhat moderated by his observation that “she is highly aware of herself, and of her writing, as a commodity; and she is conscious, too, of the role she plays in the image-making industry that surrounds her work” (*Postcolonial* 215). Moreover, he touches upon what may be the most important aspect of her fame, namely her middle-class appeal (Huggan, *Postcolonial* 217). It is perhaps this, more than any other aspect of her

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9 He notes that “Atwood’s celebrity status owes to the careful management of multiple images that ensures that she and her work will generate maximum public appeal, both in Canada and elsewhere in the world” (Huggan, *Postcolonial* 215), and generally seems to conflate the writerly persona with the private individual—a distinction Atwood on the
work, which has turned her into a global literary figure, and the question of the intended audience for her environmental activism is one to which I return in subsequent chapters.

Atwood’s international and commercial success further complicates her relationship with the Canadian canon, and York identifies a “self-conscious awareness of the terms of her own celebrity” as “what sets Atwood apart” from other Canadian literary stars, such as Michael Ondaatje and the now-deceased Carol Shields (Literary 100). The cultural capital attached to Atwood also results in economic capital and she has displayed a remarkably keen business sense from an early stage in her career, becoming probably “the first Canadian author to incorporate herself as a company, O. W. Toad” in 1976 (York, Labour 7). There is some tension between the aesthetic and the financial in Atwood’s activism, although she seems to adopt a pragmatic attitude in these matters and has for many years been channelling her revenue-generating potential towards the benefit of various charitable causes. These include literary causes: for instance the effort to rescue House of Anansi through the publication of Survival, intended to be used as a textbook in Canadian literature; Atwood’s editing of Barbed Lyres: Canadian Venomous Verse (1990) to benefit This Magazine; compiling and illustrating The CanLit Foodbook: From Pen to Palate—A Collection of Tasty Literary Fare (1987), with profits going to PEN International and the Writers’ Development Trust; and the auctioning off of a character name in The Year of the Flood for the benefit of the Canadian Walrus magazine. Atwood has also consistently drawn on her literary renown in other spheres: her opposition to the 1988 North American Free Trade Agreement included testifying in the Canadian parliament and co-organising a public protest, and she has been a longstanding public supporter of Amnesty International and member of PEN Canada’s Writers in Prison committee.

Significantly, her cultural capital has increasingly been translated into environmentalist capital, and York notes that Atwood “is now regularly associated in the public eye as much with environmental causes as with the cause of writers” (Labour 138). Her work for the protection of birds is particularly well known. Since 2006 Atwood and her partner, the writer Graeme Gibson, have been the honorary co-presidents of the Rare Bird Club within BirdLife International, and in 2013 they received the organisation’s President’s Medal for their fundraising and campaigning (BirdLife). In this capacity, she wrote an article entitled “Act Now to Save contrary has always been careful to uphold, not least through publishing as the more formal Margaret Atwood, rather than as Peggy.
our Birds” for The Guardian in 2010, and the “Green Policies” section of her official website also includes a section on birds. Sales of the MaddAddamites NooBroo beer discussed in the introduction also benefit avian conservation. Specific attention was drawn to her environmental activism when she was awarded the PEN Pinter Prize: she is described as “novelist, poet and environmental campaigner” (Sharp, my emphasis).

Atwood has been savvy in her use of social media too, and in 2011 a call on her Twitter followers to sign a petition against the proposed withdrawal of funds from Toronto’s public library system not only crashed the server hosting the petition, but also resulted in public humiliation for Toronto mayor Rob Ford and his brother, city councillor Doug Ford, who first denied knowing who Atwood was, and then had to hastily backpedal amidst the ensuing public outcry. York discusses the incident in some detail, and notes that in January 2012, when library funding was much less drastically cut than initially proposed, Atwood was still connected to this issue in news reporting on the matter (Labour 199). York’s conclusion about the library controversy is telling:

Although this is a limited case, it suggests several implications for the question of literary celebrity’s influence in the civic realm. Atwood has lent her name to many a cause in the several decades of her high-profile career, but this one has provided the most convincing instance of her influence on actual public policy making because, I would suggest, the issue at hand is so directly related to her perceived area of expertise: reading, books, literacy. The other factor, I suggest, is that a public official—Doug Ford—tried to deny her very visibility as well as her right to comment publicly on an issue, and this served, ironically, to cement her legitimacy. (Labour 199)

Particularly significant for my study, however, is the fact that Atwood frequently is assumed to have expertise in non-literary matters too, based on the themes of her writing. This is particularly the case with the subject-matter of the MaddAddam Trilogy. Oryx and Crake was, for example, reviewed in Science (by Susan M. Squier), and in 2016 Atwood not only delivered the keynote address at a conference hosted by the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Nursing on “Compassion Under Contemporary Conditions,” she was also a keynote speaker at the Pandoland technology conference, and participated in a Science Friday conversation that was promoted as a talk on Oryx and Crake and CRISPR technology.\footnote{The Pandoland organisers describe Atwood in the Chicago Tribune as one of their “curveballs,” but also laud her as “someone who’s having a great impact in the creative world, yet she’s also someone who’s been a huge early adopter of different technology platforms” (Elahi). The Science Friday website headlines a page with an audio recording and photographs of the event as “Margaret Atwood on Dystopia, CRISPR, and Oryx and Crake.” CRISPR}
More than a decade earlier, Susanne Becker already pointed out that irrespective of whether Atwood “takes on Canadian politics, for example the current question of a Torontonian mega-city, or the larger ecological and human rights issues that she has made her cause, her voice has an impact” (29–30). Of course, Atwood’s voice has this impact because it is broadcast and heeded, and Atwood herself appears acutely aware of the fact that she speaks from a position of relative power, even though she tends to downplay this somewhat.11 Making metaleptic reference to her own literary production in connection with the promotion of the MaddAddam Trilogy certainly seems to be a new activist strategy, but it serves a canny dual purpose: it legitimises her opinions on environmental matters, while simultaneously satirically deflating the seriousness of her ‘message’. As seen from the examples above, Atwood’s message often seems circular: it is that her art carries no message, but that Margaret Atwood the writer does have an important message. And this she gets to deliver precisely because of her art.

One of Atwood’s main themes, across genres, concerns who is given a voice and what is said. Her work implicitly and explicitly deals with questions of power, which suggests that she is well aware of her own public influence. Atwood is “by far Canada’s best-known living writer” internationally (Huggan, *Postcolonial* xv), and, as Ashley Thomson points out, she is “so well known in fact that she is sometimes mistaken for an American” (ix). Her prominence is supported by scholarly attention, and references to a nebulous “Atwood industry” abound.12 Atwood has indeed attracted scholarly attention on an industrial scale, but while the reciprocity between her literary merit and celebrity seems obvious, one can only speculate about the extent to which her literary renown and canonicity in

11 Atwood is English-Canadian, and in addition to that, a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant—i.e. a member of the culturally dominant group in Canada. She has for decades been living in Toronto, the hub of the Canadian publishing industry, and could therefore, even before her work became more or less synonymous with Canadian literature, hardly be described as a marginal figure.

12 Nischik, for example, remarks that “the Atwood industry is booming” (“Flagpoles” 1); Huggan observes "a thriving literary/critical industry in North America, Europe and elsewhere in the world" which he also dubs "Margaret Atwood, Inc." (*Postcolonial* 209, 210); York refers to Atwood’s web of agents, editors, etc. as the “small literary industry surrounding Atwood” (*Labour* 19); Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra reflect on the fact that Atwood “supports a critical industry” (189); while Howells notes that “there is a thriving academic Atwood critical industry” (“Writing” 201). My own study, of course, has to be regarded as part of this critical industry centred on Atwood.
turn afford her the freedom to adopt less-than-conventional, metaleptic strategies to market her work and its environmental content. The MaddAddam Trilogy, with its intertwined themes of environmental degradation and the decline of the humanities, thus acts as a literary parallel to Atwood’s public activism, although the environmental work done in the novels seems on the whole much more ambiguous—in taking public stands on most matters (except perhaps on her own literary production and celebrity), Margaret Atwood the writerly persona tends to be much more straightforward than she is in her literary work.

The MaddAddam Trilogy and Atwood’s Novels

One of the first things to be noted about Atwood’s body of work, in addition to its unusually large scope, is the variety of genres it encompasses. Atwood is now in her sixth decade of literary production and although she is internationally primarily known for her fiction, she made her debut as a poet with the collection *Double Persephone* (1961), and won the Canadian Governor General’s Award (her first major literary award) for her second volume of poetry, *The Circle Game* (1966), long before she received her first nomination in the fiction category of the same award (for the 1979 novel *Life Before Man*). To date she has published sixteen novels, eleven major volumes of poetry, eight collections of short fiction and ten volumes of nonfiction. Atwood has also produced a few screenplays, some libretti, and comic strips, and the first volume of her first graphic novel series, *Angel Catbird*, was published in September 2016. A number of Atwood’s novels have been adapted for radio, the stage, television or film, most notably the 1990 film adaptation of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, directed by Volker Schlöndorff and with a screenplay penned by Harold Pinter.

Atwood’s work has for decades been straddling high and low culture; her ‘middlebrow’ appeal comes to the fore when Victoria Singer of Virago’s marketing department asserts that “Atwood is probably our only author to

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13 For ease of reference, an updated bibliography of her major written work has been included as Appendix A.
14 This work too has an environmentalist element: the December 2015 announcement of the series, illustrated by Johnnie Christmas, specified that proceeds are going to Nature Canada (Flood, “Writes”).
15 Darren Aronofsky is currently directing a mini-series adaptation of the MaddAddam Trilogy for HBO (release date still to be announced). CBC and Netflix recently started filming a new adaptation of her 1996 novel *Alias Grace*, due to air in 2017, and Hulu and MGM’s new serial adaptation of *The Handmaid’s Tale* premiered on 26 Apr. 2017. Atwood is making cameo appearances in the latter two series.
achieve enough recognition to be considered by supermarkets” (qtd. by Royle et al 10). Linda Hutcheon has repeatedly considered Atwood a prime example of postmodernism (e.g. in The Canadian Postmodern). At the same time, Stephen Scobie, for example, has identified a tendency “to enshrine modernism (or, more precisely, the late modernism of the 1960s and 1970s) as the canonical mainstream of contemporary Canadian literature,” particularly as “seen in the canonization (one might even say deification) of Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies” (57–58). Atwood is thus seen as a writer with supermarket appeal, as one of the pinnacles of canonical Canadian modernism, or as one of prime examples of Canadian postmodernism, depending on one’s perspective.

Given the scope of Atwood’s body of work, any contextualisation of the MaddAddam Trilogy will necessarily be incomplete; the trilogy may be considered in various ways, some of which partially overlap, complement, or even contradict each other. The three novels could, for example, be seen as recent products of a long and prolific authorship and may therefore be contextualised thematically or otherwise as part of a large body of work. It does, however, seem impossible to condense Atwood’s vast oeuvre to a few coherent themes, and the three novels comprising the trilogy do not sit entirely comfortably in the canon of feminist (or women’s) fiction to which most of Atwood’s work has been assigned. The trilogy could be characterised either as Canadian literature, or, due to Atwood’s prominence, it could be contextualised in terms of contemporary, globalised Anglophone literary production. In Rewriting Apocalypse in Canadian Fiction (2005), Marlene Goldman identifies a strong apocalyptic tradition in Canadian literature, which has undergone radical changes after the Second World War, leading Canadian writers to use apocalyptic tropes in envisioning “alternatives to the exclusionary and apocalyptic conceptions of home and the nation-state” (168). Atwood’s trilogy may well be said to form part of this tradition, as it overtly demonstrates the violence inherent in apocalyptic thinking.16

As far as scope is concerned, the three novels are unparalleled in Atwood’s oeuvre. While they do share the dystopic and apocalyptic tone of much contemporary ‘environmental’ writing, they do so with humour mostly absent from comparable works.17 Although the MaddAddam Trilogy

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16 Goldman devotes a chapter to Atwood’s short story “Hairball” (from Wilderness Tips, 1991).
17 There are few environmentalist satires, although there are some satires with environmental themes, such as Ian McEwan’s Solar (2010), and Ben Elton’s This Other Eden (2003) and Stark (2006); in Last Chance to See (1990), Douglas Adams and Mark Carwardine present a humorous nonfiction view of species extinction.
seems far removed from some of the other dominant strands of contemporary environmental writing, such as nonfiction, creative nonfiction, and ‘new nature writing’, it is commonly regarded as exemplary climate change fiction, as discussed below. Finally, the trilogy could be considered part of the current, *début de siècle* vogue of apocalyptic narratives, or as recent instances of a tradition of catastrophic narrative as old as myth itself. The novels of the MaddAddam Trilogy, accordingly, like much of Atwood’s work, may be seen as prime examples of playful postmodernism, or instead as the products of a celebrated literary author ‘slumming it’ in genre fiction, but any one such contextualisation would necessarily entail simplification.

Many intertextual traces (comprising both fiction and nonfiction) may also be examined in relation to the MaddAddam Trilogy. For example, *Oryx and Crake* could profitable be (and in some cases, has been) discussed in relation to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) by H.G. Wells, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell. There are fascinating parallels between Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998) and *The Year of the Flood*, and the novel may also be examined in the light of Donna Haraway’s work on companion species, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962), Val Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), Edward Abbey’s *The Monkeywrench Gang* (1975) and Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984). Findley’s *The Wars* (1977) makes for interesting comparison with *MaddAddam*, as does a cluster of works making use of pig imagery, including Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* (1906), William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), *Pig Tales* (1996) by Marie Darrieussecq, and Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945). Marian Engel’s *Bear* (1976) and Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles* (1990) could be read intertextually with the polar bear narrative in *MaddAddam*. More specific intertextual references to Atwood’s own work may be found in the overview of important themes in her novels below, as well as in the analysis chapters, where the portrayal of prophecy in *The Year of the Flood* is specifically considered in relation to Atwood’s most recent volume of poetry, *The Door* (2007), and the representation of hybridity in *MaddAddam* is related to three texts from the short fiction collection *Good Bones* (1992).

Particularly interesting in the light of my metaleptic focus, however, is the way in which the novels of the trilogy in effect become each other’s intertexts. The dialectic construction of the trilogy allows Atwood to basically tell the same story twice in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the
Flood, but from the points of view of different focalising characters. Storytelling is at the heart of MaddAddam, and in this novel several stories relayed by Zeb to Toby are retold to and by the Crakers in rather different forms. Tellers of stories thus metaleptically become characters in the stories told by others, and throughout Atwood’s emphasis seems to be on the fact that a story is dependent on relation and participation: no real tale can be said to exist without both a teller and a listener.

The dissimilarities between the three novels of the trilogy further compound the problem of their contextualisation—separately each may be contextualised slightly differently. In what follows, however, I choose to refer to the trilogy as a whole, by and large, while detailed distinctions and work-specific points are raised in each of the three analysis chapters. This contextualisation concentrates on the way in which the MaddAddam Trilogy makes use of narrative techniques which Atwood has been using in most of her novels, and further focusses on the way in which it continues themes prominent in the rest of Atwood’s novels. Of particular interest is that environmentalism is treated in the trilogy much as feminism has been in her earlier work.

**Narration and Agency**

Atwood’s novels abound in playful experimentation; she makes frequent use of literary games, humour and acerbic satire, and her narration is always permeated by irony. This playful side is however nearly always accompanied by a much darker streak. Quotidian existence in Atwood’s fictional worlds tends towards the bleak and despondent, and characters are often trapped in their circumstances. While some of the novels are overtly dystopian, such as The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), the MaddAddam Trilogy, and The Heart Goes Last (2015), many of the others are also pervaded with a sense of the dystopic. This is perhaps most evident in the alienation experienced by the protagonists, but also in the sense that they more often than not are powerless to change their circumstances for the better. In Atwood’s novels children are regularly left devoid of parental care, or are subject to abuse by adults and bullying by their peers, commercialism saturates life in various negative ways, language is unstable or unreliable, and characters often predict or fear the end of human existence.

As discussed in the introduction to this study, Atwood’s satire tends to be sceptical rather than dogmatic. In fact, anti-dogmatism could be seen as one of the chief characteristics of her work. According to Linda
Hutcheon, “postmodernism works to ‘de-doxify’ our cultural representations and their undeniable political import” (*Politics* 4), by showing that representation is neither neutral nor exempt from ideology. Much of Atwood’s literary output seems to work in the same way, and intradiegetically dogmatists are frequently exposed to ridicule, while power relations are usually subject to ironic scrutiny. Yet, examination of power relations alone does not result in palpable change. More often than not, Atwood’s protagonists only possess a modicum of agency, and they frequently occupy much the same position at the end of the novels as at the beginning. Theodore Sheckels, for example, has therefore concluded that “[u]nfortunately, one of the consistencies in Atwood’s vision is that these noble goals of dignity and respect are rarely achieved. Her vision of the world is often bleak; her ‘politics’ pessimistic” (*Political* 1). This assessment certainly holds true for most of the novels. Largely, the bleakness of her characters’ political prospects results from their own emphasis on the individual; in their frequently less-than-optimistic outcomes, Atwood’s novels thus seem to suggest that individual liberation depends on community. Ronald Hatch connects this to Atwood’s environmentalism, noting that she “break[s] down the too easy assumption that the individual is a being entirely separate from his or her environment. Thus the environment—whether it be the land or the urbanscape—plays a crucial role in revealing the problems associated with individualism” (181). Individual agency is depicted as always contingent on a larger context, and Atwood’s activism involves relationality and negotiation between extremes. This conclusion is, however, complicated by her frequent satire of feminist and environmentalist communities, discussed in more detail below.

If the family is to be seen as a microcosm which reflects the state of society at large, it is perhaps not all that surprising that the present appears bleak in most of Atwood’s novels. Women not only feel trapped in their bodies, but are in very real ways limited by societal expectations. Men are often described, on the contrary, as suffering identity crises due to the encroachment of women on their territory. Whereas most romantic relationships are characterised by betrayal and misery, family relationships are primarily organised around the notions of duty and decency (and the suppression of everything which may be deemed untoward). Many of the artists and humanists populating these novels are forced to choose between their artistic integrity and their economic survival, and organised religion and education have lost nearly all credibility. Accordingly, little solace is to be found in less conventional forms of belief (with the exception, perhaps, of *Surfacing* (1972), where the unnamed female protagonist appears to achieve some kind of unity with nature that is not questioned in the first-
person narrative). Furthermore, most of the protagonists are haunted by their pasts and pessimistic about their futures. Although they do possess some agency, many of Atwood’s characters are confined or paralysed by their circumstances and the choices they have made in the past.

As in the MaddAddam Trilogy, this sense of entrapment and powerlessness is often reinforced through highly-focalised narration—either in the third person and focalised through one or more of the protagonists (typically women), or through a first-person narrator. More often than not Atwood’s narrators may be described as unreliable, especially when they as adults retell memories from their childhoods. Atwood’s narrative techniques are however not as simple as they may seem from the above description. Her first published novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969), for example, is first narrated in the first person by Marian. This is followed by a number of chapters in the third person that are focalised by her, but much more distanced than the first-person parts. The last part of the novel is again narrated by Marian in the first person. In this manner form mirrors content—while Marian experiences a severe personal crisis she is portrayed from the outside, but she then regains control of her life and is able to resume the telling of her own story by the end of the novel. Simultaneously, this return to first-person narration also echoes the hopelessness experienced by the protagonist. Although she manages to assert herself and end a relationship she is not really committed to, she is still trapped by the limited choices available to a woman in 1960s Canada.

Other novels make use of two or more focalising characters in turn, thus giving the reader different perspectives on the same story. Atwood uses this strategy in *Life Before Man* (1979), for instance, where each short chapter is told from the perspective of one of the main characters, Nate, Elizabeth, or Lesje. In this way the reader gets brief glimpses of the experiences of each character, without ever being afforded a more objective overview of the relationship between the separated couple Nate and Elizabeth or of the unhappy affair between Lesje and Nate. Although the reader is therefore less confined to a single point of view in this novel, the focalising characters appear as trapped as ever within their own perspectives. The sense of the everyday dystopic also derives from the characters’ inability to empathise and see beyond their own confined points of view. In *The Robber Bride* (1993), the narrative is similarly shared between Tony, Charis and Roz, the three focalising characters. Although this novel is certainly not as bleak as *Life Before Man*, the reader sees how the three focalising characters make precisely the same mistakes in their assessments of Zenia; in this way a despondent sense of repetition is created. Arguably Atwood uses a similar strategy in the MaddAddam
Triology, although she here moves beyond the confines of a single novel and instead tells an elaborate story from different perspectives in the three novels, using various focalising characters. Through focalisation and multiple viewpoints the anti-dogmatism permeating Atwood’s work is reinforced—even intradiegetically, readers are constantly reminded of the subjectivity and situatedness of characters’ experiences.

A further significant aspect of Atwood’s narrative style is the way in which the present and past are interwoven. Memories, dreams and flashbacks are often used to create a type of psychological realism, and the way in which the protagonist has arrived at her present, both psychologically and physically, is explored in minute detail. Whilst past events are usually narrated in the past tense, Atwood regularly—but not always—makes use of the present tense to narrate events that occur in the character’s present. Most of Atwood’s protagonists are in some sense held captive by their pasts, and are obsessed with identity, or self-realisation. They frequently appear to believe that the present is primarily to be understood in terms of the past. As a case in point, the first sentence of Bodily Harm (1981), printed as a single stand-alone paragraph, reads “This is how I got here, says Rennie” (11). The first-person narrator then proceeds with retelling the first bit of her history, before returning to the present. The narratives of Lady Oracle (1976), Cat’s Eye (1988) and The Robber Bride follow similar trajectories, in that past and present are interwoven, and the protagonists compulsively return to memories as a way of making sense of their presents. In The Blind Assassin (2000), the influence of the past takes on a generational dimension: Iris’s unhappy childhood and marriage seemingly lead to her daughter Aimee’s drug addiction and Aimee’s subsequent neglect of her own child. On a larger, global scale, the post-apocalyptic present of the MaddAddam Trilogy is understood in terms of the excesses and mistakes of the past. The combination of characters that are somehow limited by their pasts and restricted narrative perspectives lends Atwood’s novels a sense of confinement, which in turn reflects on the degree of agency characters possess.

One reason for characters’ frequent return to childhood memories seems to be an implicit (and sometimes explicitly stated) belief in the importance of childhood in shaping one’s personality, which in turn largely determines one’s adult circumstances and relationships. Unsurprisingly therefore, many of Atwood’s protagonists have either had unhappy or at the very least unconventional childhoods, and if parents are not entirely absent they are usually incompetent. Elizabeth in Life Before Man is raised by her strict aunt after her mother’s mental and addiction problems have rendered her unfit to take care of her children; Joan Foster, the protagonist of Lady
Oracle, grows up in an ostensibly happy nuclear family, but suffers under a body-obsessed mother and a father who, though present, is almost entirely stifled by his wife; in The Penelopiad (2005), Penelope obsesses over her father Icarius’ attempt to drown her as a child. Iris in The Blind Assassin and Tony in The Robber Bride both lose their mothers in their preteens and their fathers later to suicides as they make important symbolic entries into adulthood—Tony’s father shoots himself on the day of her graduation from high school and Iris’s father literally drinks himself to death within a week of her wedding which he has arranged as a type of business transaction. Karen/Charis, another focalising character in The Robber Bride, is abused as a child by her uncle, seemingly with her aunt’s silent consent or wilful ignorance. In the same novel, Zenia swindles acquaintances by concocting various narratives of a deprived childhood. In The Blind Assassin, Laura is not just as a girl abused by a teacher, but also later by her brother-in-law. The mother of the protagonist of Alias Grace (1996) dies at sea during the family’s voyage to Canada, leaving Grace to fend for herself and her younger siblings in the face of an alcoholic and abusive father. At the age of twelve Grace leaves home to work and soon she loses all contact with her family. In the MaddAddam Trilogy, Jimmy, Crake, Ren, Adam and Zeb all come from dysfunctional family backgrounds, and as a toddler Oryx is to all intents and purposes sold into sex slavery by her own mother. In Atwood’s novels families tend to be deeply flawed, and more often than not fail to provide a communal context for individual agency.

Names and Naming

In Atwood’s novels, names and naming are frequently connected to agency, or a lack thereof. A surprising number of her characters subscribe to a kind of onomancy: Elaine wonders, for example, whether Cordelia’s life would have turned out otherwise if she had not been saddled with an ominous Shakespearian name (Cat’s 263); Iris names her baby daughter Aimee because it “meant one who was loved, and I certainly hoped she would be loved, by someone” (Blind 526); and after Felix’s wife dies of an infection contracted during childbirth, he names his daughter “Miranda: what else could he have named a motherless baby girl with a middle-aged, doting father?” (Hag-Seed 14). Other characters change their names in an attempt to (re)assert control over their lives. Voluntary or forced character name changes occur in Lady Oracle, Life Before Man, Bodily Harm, Cat’s Eye, The Robber Bride, Alias Grace, and The Blind Assassin. Yet, despite their
name changes most of these characters do not really manage to change their circumstances, except perhaps for Karen/Charis in *The Robber Bride*, who is only able to survive by suppressing her past life as Karen. The protagonist of *Surfacing*, arguably the woman in Atwood’s novels who comes closest to forging a new self during the course of a narrative, remains anonymous throughout the novel. Atwood’s characters appear more often than not trapped by their circumstances, unable to change them by simply adopting different names.

The significance of charactonyms in Atwood’s oeuvre has most often been noted in connection with *The Handmaid’s Tale*, in which name changes are testament to being deprived of agency, rather than to asserting agency.\(^\text{18}\) In this novel, the suppressive religious patriarchy is reinforced by assigning a patronym derived from the name of the man heading the household to each Handmaid. In this manner, personal names inscribe unequal power relations. Accordingly, the protagonist is known as Offred (the genitive of combined with the Commander’s name Fred). The excising of women’s names is part of the Republic of Gilead’s concerted effort to render women powerless and replaceable, and instead of conferring identity, these generic names tend to obscure any distinctiveness, as Offred realises when Ofglen has been replaced:

> “Has Ofglen been transferred, so soon?” I ask, but I know she hasn’t. I saw her only this morning. She would have said.
> “I am Ofglen,” the woman says. Word perfect. And of course she is, the new one, and Ofglen, wherever she is, is no longer Ofglen. I never did know her real name. That is how you can get lost, in a sea of names. It wouldn’t be easy to find her, now. (*Handmaid’s* 294–95)

Robbing women of their names is related to a more extensive effort to deprive them of the written word. Handmaids “aren’t supposed to be reading,” and even the names of shops have been replaced by pictograms: one store “has a huge wooden sign outside it, in the shape of a golden lily; Lilies of the Field, it’s called. You can see the place, under the lily, where the lettering was painted out . . . . Now places are known by their signs alone” (*Handmaid’s* 129, 34–35). The connection between literacy and freedom—posited as so self-evident in *The Handmaid’s Tale*—is troubled in the Maddaddam trilogy, for example through the satiric portrayal of Jimmy, proponent of the humanities in *Oryx and Crake*, through the Gardeners’ fear of being persecuted if they write anything down in *The Year of the Flood*, and through Toby’s fear that teaching the Crakers to read and write

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\(^\text{18}\) Naming in *The Handmaid’s Tale* has attracted quite a bit of critical discussion, for example by Jessie Givner, Charlotte Templin, Tom Henthorne, and David Sisk.
has planted the seed of their destruction: “What comes next? Rules, dogmas, laws? The Testament of Crake? How soon before there are ancient texts they feel they have to obey but have forgotten how to interpret? Have I ruined them?” she wonders (MA 204).

In the trilogy, naming is frequently foregrounded. There are Jimmy’s explicit discussions of branding, as well as the clear connection between naming and extinction. The word MaddAddam itself is an endonym used by a group of anti-corporation bioterrorists. In Oryx and Crake readers encounter the word as the slogan of the Extinctathon game through which members of the group stay in touch. The motto of the game refers to naming too: “Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones” (OC 80). The objective of players is to correctly guess the name of a species “that had kakked out within the past fifty years—no T-Rex, no roc, no dodo,” based on clues provided by an opponent through analysing its “Phylum Class Order Family Genus Species” and then finally determining “the habitat and when last seen, and what had snuffed it” (OC 80). The spelling of the palindromic name MaddAddam, with its doubled letters and internal capitalisation, follows the same pattern as many of the coined brand names satirised in the novel, thus suggesting that Atwood metaleptically satirises the commodification of her own work through its title.

Outrage at recent species extinction is part of the reason for Zeb’s formation of the breakaway MaddAddam terrorist group from the pacifist God’s Gardeners, and Crake forcibly recruits the bioengineers for his Paradice Project from the ranks of the MaddAddamites. Most of the MaddAddamites readers meet in Oryx and Crake bear the names of ‘charismatic megafauna’ extinct in the world of the novel, such as Black Rhino, Indian Tiger and Polar Bear (OC 298). Using these names seems to create a sense of exclusivity, group cohesion and trust, while also emphasising the similarities between Crake and a sect leader. When Toby meets the surviving MaddAddamites near the end of The Year of the Flood, she is accepted as soon as she tells them her MaddAddam nickname, Inaccessible Rail. As Ren immediately notices, “[t]hey’re a lot friendlier now that Toby’s told them she was really someone else” (YF 388). Importantly, these names serve as a reminder of the temporal relationship

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19 According to Dale Goble, the term charismatic megafauna was first used in the 17 May 1985 issue of Science in a review of The Giant Pandas of Wolong (by George B. Schaller et al, 1985), written by Devra G. Kleiman and John Seidensticker: “Most people, if ever exposed, remember and are able to name elephants, tigers, bears, rhinoceroses, and gorillas. The giant panda probably tops this list of charismatic megafauna in terms of attractiveness and mass appeal” (Kleiman and Seidensticker 875).
between the novels and their readers, as they alert readers to the rate of species extinction in the near future.\textsuperscript{20}

While readers never learn Oryx’s real name, Crake names his Crakers after important historical figures like Abraham Lincoln, Madame Curie, and Sojourner Truth. This could either be seen as an attempt to prove historic human achievements inconsequential or as a way of establishing some kind of continuity between the Crakers and their human predecessors. Sven Wagner notes that it is perhaps significant that the Craker called Abraham Lincoln seems to be developing into a leader in the novel (175).\textsuperscript{21} Above all the Crakers’ names seem to reflect Crake’s endeavour to rid them of the capacity for symbolic thinking, but they also serve to hyperbolically differentiate them from their historic predecessors, while taking no account of chronology: now Abraham Lincoln and Marie Antoinette are eating grass together. Another aspect of Atwood’s metaleptic activism, discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, involves naming the saints of the God’s Gardeners’ in The Year of the Flood. In doing so, she in effect engages in environmental canonisation, establishing a pantheon for environmental education.

\textbf{Feminism and Environmentalism}

The MaddAddam Trilogy tends to frame questions of environmentalism primarily as questions of power relations and the exercise of power, and in that respect, attitudes toward nonhuman nature seem to occupy much the same position as gender issues do in Atwood’s previous work. There are indeed many obvious parallels: in her novels examining the intricacies of gender relations, Atwood satirises feminists, much as she satirises

\textsuperscript{20} The other names Jimmy spots are White Sedge, Ivory-Billed Woodpecker, Lotis Blue and Swift Fox (OC 298); all these MaddAdamites appear as minor characters in the third novel. As far as the temporal distance from the novel’s readers is concerned, the North-American ivory-billed woodpecker (\textit{Campephilus principalis}) presents the most interesting case, as there had been almost no confirmed sightings during the second half of the twentieth century, until the Pearl River Expedition reported hearing the bird and recorded its distinctive knocking pattern in 2002. On 20 Feb. 2002 the National Geographic reported on this on its website, using the upbeat headline “‘Extinct’ Woodpecker Still Elusive, But Signs Are Good” (Mayell).

\textsuperscript{21} Wagner further develops this line of reasoning by wondering whether this is a hint that the offspring of Madame Curie “will develop into scientists” or the children of Napoleon “will turn into warlords and leaders of large Craker armies” (175). While both of these outcomes appear remote by the end of the trilogy, the Craker names certainly invite this kind of speculation; they can both suggest that history is doomed to repeat itself, or that the meanings of names are changeable.
environmentalists in the trilogy. In fact, issues of environment and gender are often portrayed as overlapping in Atwood’s poetry and prose.

Already in her first published novel, Atwood presents feminist rhetoric satirically through the figure of Joe, an academic who at first appears to be, if not a feminist, at least concerned with women’s rights. Yet when he describes his wife’s situation after their marriage and the birth of their children, it is clear that he is completely unable to detect the irony inherent in his reasoning. Using then-current feminist parlance, he diagnoses his wife as having had “her core . . . invaded” through marriage; “she wakes up one morning and discovers she doesn’t have anything left inside, she’s hollow, she doesn’t know who she is any more; her core has been destroyed” (Edible 235, 236). While Joe’s ideas about the destruction of a woman’s personality through marriage certainly resonate with some notions held by second-wave feminists, he is unable to move beyond rhetoric and improve his wife’s existence in practical ways. In Bodily Harm, Rennie interviews an artist who creates sculptures from store mannequins and remarks that if he had been a woman, his works would be labelled “strident feminism” (208). As he is a man, however, his work receives very little attention from feminist quarters. In Cat’s Eye, Elaine too realises that she is not completely accepted by the group of feminist artists she joins because she lives with a man: “Women like me, with a husband, a child, have been referred to with some scorn as ‘nukes,’ for nuclear family” (344). Although the group includes other nukes, “they are not in the majority and say nothing in their own defence. It seems to be worthier to be a woman with a child but no man. That way you’ve paid your dues. If you stay with the man, whatever problems you are having are your own fault” (Cat’s 344). Elaine’s recollections of the feminist movement and the feminist artists she has worked with are damning. To them “[p]ain is important, but only certain kinds of it: the pain of women, but not the pain of men” (Cat’s 378).

In the worlds of Atwood’s novels, feminism is routinely portrayed as dangerously dogmatic and limiting; the practical impact of feminism is often minimal, and only certain women and particular lifestyles benefit from feminism or are condoned by feminists. Moreover, women are in general shown to suffer much more at the hands of other women than of men.

Feminism takes on new dystopian proportions in The Handmaid’s Tale. In an imaginary conversation with her feminist mother, Offred describes the Republic of Gilead as “a women’s culture” (Handmaid’s 137), and throughout the novel the reader is confronted with the fact that many women are indeed complicit in the running of this androcentric state and are thus responsible for the oppression of other women (and certain classes
of men). In the retrospective 1979 introduction to *The Edible Women*, Atwood notes that the novel is “protofeminist rather than feminist,” since “there was no women’s movement in sight when [she] was composing the book in 1965.” She also gloomily points out that “[t]he goals of the feminist movement have not been achieved, and those who claim we’re living in a post-feminist era are either sadly mistaken or tired of thinking about the whole subject” (*Edible* n. pag.). The picture painted in this introduction is fairly pessimistic, and Atwood seems to indicate that in the decade since the publication of her novel, the feminist movement has made but few advances, thus extratextually reinforcing the sense of entrapment which dominates her novels.

Women in Atwood’s novels are often depicted as at risk of being reduced to their bodies only: in the suffocating 1940s atmosphere of *The Blind Assassin*, pregnant society wife Iris becomes “the bearer of a very expensive package, pure and simple” (520). In the full-blown dystopia of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, women are completely reduced to their bodies’ reproductive functions and are valued as vessels only. The advent of advanced biotechnologies enables people in the pre-apocalyptic world of the MaddAdam Trilogy to attempt to defy ageing (and therefore the passage of time itself), and the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries fuel this futile quest for immortality by the marketing of various miracle products, and designer babies have become commonplace. The birth of hybrid babies in the final novel draws renewed attention to the materiality of reproduction, and seems to suggest that women, by way of their biology, may play a more active role in the creation of a new community. Swift Fox, one of the characters in *MaddAdam*, has sex with both humans and Crakers, thus using her reproductive agency to conduct what she refers to as “an experiment in genetic evolution. Reproduction of the fittest” (*MA* 273). Significantly, though, two of the hybrid babies are the products of rape (albeit that the rape is the result of a misunderstanding between the Crakers and the human survivors). Ren and Amanda thus have no choice in the matter: they are forced to become bearers of new hybrid humans by virtue of being women.

In Atwood’s portrayal of gender relations, the spotlight tends to fall on practicalities: the focus is more often on who gets to wear what, and who does the dishes and why, than on abstract considerations of power or agency. As an act of defiance, numerous women characters decide not to do the dishes, and even leave a pile of dirty dishes in the sink until they are overgrown with mould (this is, for example, done by Marian in *The Edible Woman*, Rennie in *Bodily Harm*, and Elaine in *Cat’s Eye*). In *Life Before Man*, Nate habitually does the dishes and Elizabeth cooks, but as a way of
resisting his estranged wife and her moodiness Nate starts to fry liver—which Elizabeth cannot stand—late at night whilst listening to loud music; he also

leaves his dishes in the sink, or if he’s feeling especially daring, on the kitchen table itself, defying Elizabeth’s hand-printed sign:

CLEAN UP YOUR OWN MESS! (Life 192)

In Lady Oracle, Joan loses the respect of her male friends as soon as she succumbs and does the dishes for them. “One could not, apparently, be both a respected female savant and a scullery maid,” she realises wryly (Lady 169). Literally bringing the implications of power relations home seems characteristic of Atwood’s sceptical treatment of dogmatism: the feminist movement is frequently derided or misunderstood in Atwood’s novels, by women as well as by men, and is often shown as unable to move beyond the discursive to the practical. There is a clear parallel in the MaddAddam Trilogy: the Gardeners’ environmentalist teachings consistently prioritise deeds over abstracted beliefs.

Many of Atwood’s characters express a concern for the environment and the future of humanity. The everyday bleakness of her novels is also frequently related to an awareness of pollution, environmental degradation and the possible extinction of humans. The attitudes adopted by different characters to environmentalism range from the nameless protagonist’s assimilation into nature in Surfacing and Charis’s esoteric ideas in The Robber Bride, to the delight Elaine’s father takes in predicting the end of the world over the dinner table in Cat’s Eye. The sentiments expressed by Fish, one of the graduate students Marian befriends in The Edible Woman, who longs for a disastrous event to destroy much of humanity so that one can start anew, are not that different from the premises of Crake’s ecological utopia: “What we need is a cataclysm. . . . A cataclysm. Another Black Death, a vast explosion, millions wiped from the face of the earth, civilization as we know it all but obliterated” (Edible 200). Likewise, Lesje, a palaeontologist, wonders parenthetically:

(The real question is: Does she care whether the human race survives or not? She doesn’t know. The dinosaurs didn’t survive and it wasn’t the end of the world. In her bleaker moments, of which, she realizes, this is one, she feels the human race has it coming. Nature will think up something else. Or not, as the case may be.) (Life 19)

While concerns about the environment contribute to despondency in many of Atwood’s novels, environmental degradation is the catalyst for the dystopias sketched in The Handmaid’s Tale and the MaddAddam Trilogy. As Alice Ridout has pointed out, “Atwood crosses the Canada–US border in
her dystopian fiction” in a manner that “draws attention to issues of scale” (31, 34). Environmental issues are simply too large to be contained within national borders. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, set in the near future, many species have already become extinct, and the human reproductive problems that lead religious fundamentalists to set up the Republic of Gilead are caused by various kinds of pollution. In the world of the MaddAddam Trilogy full-scale environmental destruction has taken place due to climate change and rampant capitalism, thus opening the way for increasingly outrageous experimentation with biotechnologies. Action taken in the face of environmental concerns in the dystopian novels vary from the peaceful eco-religious approach taken by the God’s Gardeners, to the religious fanaticism of *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the ecoterrorism of the MaddAddam group. Feminists tend to be overbearing, judgemental and obnoxious in Atwood’s novels, while most characters who display a concern for the environment are fairly despondent and feel that the only hope for the planet lies in a drastic reduction of the human population. Due to the persistent use of satire and irony, environmentalists and feminists are seldom represented unequivocally positively; even sceptics are presented in a satiric light. This strategy is also used in the portrayal of the God’s Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood*, where the reader is never quite sure whether the sect is intended to appear as a ridiculous mishmash of religious beliefs and popular science, or if they represent a serious environmental alternative.

Ecocentrics like Crake share some ideas with radical proponents of deep ecology, as expressed in the now infamous 1969 remark made by the American ecologist Garrett Hardin that “in view of their relative numbers he would, if forced to choose, support the existence of one redwood tree over one baby” (as qtd. by Nash, *Wilderness* 240). Crake’s creation of the environmentally-friendly Paradice Models, intended to replace human beings, may not only be read as a Frankensteinian domination or corruption of the natural, but also as an extreme form of biocentrism: in the Crakers, he creates beings that are completely in tune with their environment. The Crakers are engineered to regard all animal life as precious and to treat nature with respect, their selfhood is supposed to be communal rather than individual, and they are not intended to indulge in religion or philosophy—they are not supposed to see themselves as different kinds of beings than other animals. The destructive aspects of Crake’s ecotopia are just the other side of dogmatic, ecocentric radicalism and it is therefore unsurprising that his utopian vision has catastrophic results.

Atwood clearly spells out the connection between gender relations and the environment in a nonfiction piece, entitled “When the Lights Go
Here the dogmatism of environmentalism is pitched against the issue of gender equality. After pointing out that fossil fuel use has led to more gender equality on the labour market, Atwood suggests that after a real environmental apocalypse such gains may well be eroded (“When” 206). The reasoning here provides a clear example of Atwood’s inclination to complicate matters: instead of simply asserting that fossil fuels are bad for the environment (which she also does in this text), she points out that their use has led to some positive results, and also speculates about the possibility of advancing environmental and feminist concerns simultaneously.

Art, Education, and the Humanities

Given Atwood’s characterisation of writing as “an act of hope,” noted earlier in this chapter, it may seem surprising that education and art seldom are depicted as ways of escaping entrapment in her novels. Many of Atwood’s protagonists are artists or other “word people,” as Jimmy is described in Oryx and Crake, but the notion that education has intrinsic value is often questioned. The graduate students in The Edible Woman are locked in an endless spiral of writing papers on increasingly obscure topics, and when the conference speaker describes Offred at the end of The Handmaid’s Tale, she remarks that Offred “appears to have been an educated woman, insofar as a graduate of any North American college of the time [presumably the late twentieth century] may be said to have been educated” (318). In Surfacing a teacher working at an Adult Education programme habitually refers to it as “Adult Vegetation” (28), thus reiterating the impression that education seldom facilitates escape from the everyday dystopic in Atwood’s novels.

Some of the characters, such as the privileged Iris and Laura in The Blind Assassin, try their best to avoid schooling, while those who do make it to university are frequently forced to study subjects they are not particularly interested in. Elaine in Cat’s Eye wins a scholarship and when she decides that she wants to become an artist, she studies “Art and Archaeology at the University of Toronto, which is the only sanctioned pathway that leads anywhere close to art,” but she “discovers that there’s nothing much [she] 22 Incidentally, this piece is another testament to the way in which Atwood’s cultural capital has spilled over into other areas: “When the Lights Go Out” is printed as a commentary piece on Ian Morris’s Tanner Lectures, entitled Foragers, Farmers, and Fossil Fuels: How Human Values Evolve (2015).
can do with [her] degree” (275, 329). More often than not, protagonists are forced to accept jobs because they have no other alternatives. In *Life Before Man*, Nate is forced to give up his toymaking business, and his unwilling return to the bland world of a law firm is symptomatic of the sacrifices artists have to make in order to survive economically; Elaine ends up “doing mock-ups” (*Cat’s* 329). Another typical example of this is in *The Edible Woman*, where Marian MacAlpin is employed at a market survey company, as a “manipulator of words” (110). When asked about her job she remarks “we all have to eat. Besides, what else can you do with a B.A. these days?” (*Edible* 55). Her work involves “revising the questionnaires, turning the convoluted and overly-subtle prose of the psychologists who write them into simple questions which can be understood by the people who ask them as well as the people who answer them” (*Edible* 19). Rennie, the protagonist of *Bodily Harm*, is a journalist specialising in fashion and travel. She does not abide by any code of integrity—she even reports on non-existent fashions to see if she can create trends. When offered an assignment to report on the post-independence elections of a small Caribbean island nation, she turns down this opportunity to become a serious journalist, even if that is what she initially wanted as a career.

There is a place for language and art in the lives of Atwood’s protagonists, but generally only when they are reduced to mere tools—like Jimmy, in *Oryx and Crake*, who works in advertising, Marian and Rennie use their education in the service of commercialism. Although she also puts her education to a less-than-noble purpose, Jocelyn, the surveillance chief in the dystopian prison society of *The Heart Goes Last* deems her degree in English extremely useful for her job: “It’s where all the plots are. That’s where you learn the twists and turns. I did my senior thesis on *Paradise Lost*,” she remarks (149). Tony in *The Robber Bride* is one of few successful academics in Atwood’s novels, but “female historians, of whom there are not many” tend to dismiss her work; “[t]hey think she should be studying birth; not death, and certainly not battle plans. Not routs and débâcles, not carnages, not slaughters. They think she is letting women down” (*Robber* 25). Atwood’s sustained critique of formal education contrasts starkly with the fact that her own work is a fixture on curricula, both in Canada and many other countries. This critique ought to be seen as yet another instance of her anti-dogmatism: schooling is only a few steps away from indoctrination.

In a manner similar to the dystopic view of education, many of Atwood’s protagonists habitually disparage the provinciality of Canada. Its citizens are frequently depicted as narrow-minded and xenophobic, and the First Nations, Inuit and Métis groups as well as Francophone Canadians are
for the most part absent from these novels. The notion of a national Canadian identity is often satirised, as for example by Iris’s description of the singing of the national anthem: “The school orchestra struck up with squeaks and flats, and we sang ‘O Canada!,’ the words to which I can never remember because they keep changing them. Nowadays they do some of it in French, which once would have been unheard of. We sat down, having affirmed our collective pride in something we can’t pronounce” (Blind 46–47). Canadian literature (and art) is routinely ironically depicted as inferior. When The Robber Bride’s Roz grows tired of the art decorating her offices, she thinks “it looks like a tablecloth, though the thing cost a mint. A corporate tax write-off, fortunately. Canadian Art” (104). And in a comical scene in Life Before Man partygoers play a game “that substitutes the word ‘moose’ for any other word in the title of a Canadian novel” (144). Some of the titles the guests devise include “As for Me and My Moose” (alluding to the canonised 1941 novel by Sinclair Ross, As for Me and My House), and “A Jest of Moose” and “A Moose of God” (both playing on Margaret Laurence’s 1966 A Jest of God). The fact that Atwood enjoys international acclaim despite being a Canadian author of course takes the sting out of many of these allegations, but also lends more irony to the narratives. While her disparaging of Canadian culture certainly appears self-deprecating and deflating, it also serves as a reminder that she is one of its most prominent products.

In the MaddAddam Trilogy, the nation state has been replaced by corporations, so accepted democratic means of effecting political change are largely precluded. Thus, issues of entrapment, as well as of individual and communal agency, again take centre stage. What is different, however, is that nonhuman nature appears to be accorded much more agency than in her earlier work. In the following part of this chapter, on the reception of the MaddAddam Trilogy, interconnection is discussed as one of the central tenets of Atwood’s environmentalism.

**Critical Reception of the MaddAddam Trilogy**

Atwood’s prominence as an author—including her celebrity status and canonicity, and the tensions between these aspects—clearly influences the range of reactions to her literary work from scholars, in the media, and from non-academic readers. ‘Atwood bashing’ is not just a Canadian phenomenon; attacking her work is popular among critics, but Atwood is also regularly invoked to legitimise various critical approaches. The array of
responses to her work is in part due to the manner in which it often resists reductive interpretations. Instead of inviting either/or-readings, Atwood’s novels tend to evoke not only . . . but also-responses, which means that a variety of critical perspectives can be accommodated, albeit with varying success.

Charting the critical reception of the MaddAddam Trilogy is not entirely straightforward: the first and last volumes were published roughly a decade apart, and as yet MaddAddam (2013) has not generated nearly the same amount of criticism as The Year of the Flood (2009), which in turn has led to far fewer analyses than Oryx and Crake (2003). One reason for this is the delayed reaction of scholarly publishing, another perhaps that both The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam are slightly more difficult to come to terms with than Oryx and Crake. Because the novels form a trilogy, there is also a cumulative effect—Oryx and Crake could be considered as a standalone text, while readings of The Year of the Flood may need to take into account (however cursory) Oryx and Crake too. This is compounded with the publication of the third volume, particularly because MaddAddam relies on knowledge of the previous two novels to such an extent.23 Moreover, perhaps due to the pressure to publish and Atwood’s prominence, scholarly material on the trilogy abounds in basic errors, ranging from incorrect character names to misrepresentations of the plots.24 Scholars also seldom engage more than superficially with previous

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23 In March 2017, a simple subject search in the MLA International Bibliography yields the following results:

- 'oryx and crake' AND atwood: 141 hits
- 'the year of the flood' AND atwood: 49 hits
- maddaddam AND atwood: 16 hits

Although the figures are not definitive (resulting as they do from indexing choices made in compiling the database), they do give a good indication of the focus of available scholarly analyses. Many, but not all of these results overlap—ten of the sixteen items retrieved in the MaddAddam search also turn up in the Oryx and Crake results, and 34 of The Year of the Flood results overlap with those of Oryx and Crake—confirming that the later novels tend to be discussed in relation to the earlier ones.

24 In a chapter on the gothic in Atwood, Shoshannah Ganz for instance not only consistently refers to Toby as “Tobi” (98–99), she also calls the God’s Gardeners “the earth’s gardeners” (88), the CorpSeCorps security corporation becomes variously “Corpsecore” (96) or “Corpsecorp” (98), while the spelling of a coinage like BlyssPluss is regularised, thus rendering it “bliss plus” (98–99), and so doing away with much of the impact of the orthography of such coined brand names. In her eagerness to uphold a vegan–cannibal dichotomy in her reading, Laura Wright erroneously bases her discussion on the Gardeners’ “veganism” (521), while they are depicted in The Year of the Flood as ovo-vegetarians (they consume pigeon eggs, e.g. YF 133) who also keep bees.

My aim here is not to detract from Ganz’s and Wright’s efforts (I could supply many similar examples from other scholars), but rather to show that the scholarship produced on the MaddAddam Trilogy shows the strain of the pressures currently faced by the
scholarship on the novels (perhaps because it can more accurately be termed simultaneous rather than earlier scholarship). The scholarly reception of the novels frequently ignores differences between them in an effort to present a coherent interpretation of the trilogy, while aspects of some readings that only take into account *Oryx and Crake* are often contradicted by details from the later novels. In a curious, slightly disconcerting manner, the scholarly reception of the MaddAddam Trilogy therefore to some extent seems to reflect the crisis of the underfunded humanities depicted in the novels themselves.

There has been a tendency to classify the MaddAddam Trilogy as a subset of dystopian works (usually including *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and presumably *The Heart Goes Last*, when criticism on this novel starts to appear). This is understandable, given the generic similarities between the novels and Atwood’s encouragement of this connection, but tends to obscure the fact that many of the environmental concerns present in the trilogy may be detected in Atwood’s earliest work, and in very different genres and forms (including poetry, short stories and nonfiction). Environmental and apocalyptic themes have mainly been discussed in relation to *Surfacing* and *Life Before Man*. Yet, as mentioned in my introduction, comprehensive discussions of Atwood’s satire and environmentalism are few and far between, particularly as far as the tension between her literary production and writerly persona is concerned. This is remarkable, given the size of the ‘Atwood industry’, as is the fact that so little attention has been paid to the role played by her extratextual environmentalism in relation to her recent work, or the parallel between her reception as an environmentalist and her earlier reception as a feminist.

While many scholars have discussed the novels of the trilogy as utopian texts, other critics have adopted the opposite approach: rather than seeing the MaddAddam Trilogy as somewhat discontinuous with Atwood’s humanities—hastiness is surely a factor here, but so is inadequate peer review and copy-editing.

25 One of the most extreme examples of this unifying tendency can be seen in Richard Alan Northover’s pronouncement that “Atwood’s trilogy can be seen as a polyphonic novel” (“Ecological” 84, my emphasis). He goes on to detail that this “novel” is “tripartite” (Northover, “Ecological” 84), but it is difficult to see what is gained by viewing all three texts as a single novel, particularly when one wants to make the salient point that the trilogy is polyphonic. Ashley Dawson’s reading of *The Year of the Flood*, on the other hand, is at the complete opposite end of the spectrum; Dawson is seemingly unaware of the existence of *Oryx and Crake*, asking rhetorically: “Are the Gardeners then the creators of the pandemic that obliterates humanity?” (66).

26 For example, Greg Garrard (“Reading”) and Shannon Hengen (“Environmentalism”) discuss *Oryx and Crake* in the light of both these novels, Sylvia Mayer considers *Surfacing* and *Oryx and Crake* in an ecofeminist light (“Literary”), and Rosario Arias’s discussion focusses on *Oryx and Crake* and *Life Before Man*. 
body of work as a whole, they have endeavoured to reinterpret much of Atwood’s earlier work in terms of its apocalyptic environmentalism. This has been done through focussing on environmental themes, but also, perhaps less successfully, through reassessing earlier works in the light of the apocalyptic setting of the trilogy. The most overt example is the slim volume *Margaret Atwood’s Apocalypses* (2015), edited by Karma Waltonen, in which various scholars discuss Atwood in apocalyptic terms. In her introduction, Waltonen deems some of the earliest poems, such as “This Is a Photograph of Me” (from *The Circle Game*, 1966), apocalyptic (x), without explaining what would be gained from viewing an individual speaking after death by drowning as apocalyptic rather than gothic, for instance. Although such reconsiderations are interesting for the way in which they trace concerns present in much of Atwood’s oeuvre, they tend to be reductive in their quest for unification, while they dilute the critical potential of apocalypse considerably. The trilogy, in conjunction with *The Handmaid’s Tale*, has also frequently been described in prophetic terms, a point to which I return in the chapter on *The Year of the Flood*.

*Oryx and Crake* is Atwood’s first novel that only features a male focaliser.27 The combination of a male protagonist, the curious lack of depth to the character of Oryx, and the pornographic assault on the senses characterising the pre-apocalyptic world of the novel, has probably led some critics to conclude that environmental issues have eclipsed concerns about gender in the trilogy. Reingard Nischik, for example, notes that *Oryx and Crake* is “not particularly focussed on issues of gender” (*Engendering* 122), while Sheckels argues that the novel cannot easily be deemed political, since “[p]ower relations are as they are” (*Political* 144). Fiona Tolan goes even further, relating Atwood’s use of a male protagonist to “a much more negative scenario for feminism, signalled by the loss of the female voice, in which Atwood’s protagonists inhabit a future that is not only postfeminist, but posthuman”; she asserts that the novel’s “postfeminism is consistent with what has effectively become a post-political state” (273, 282). Such conclusions seem curious, particularly in the light of the subsequent volumes of the trilogy, in which issues of reproduction and gender relations gain importance, and in which power relations are apocalyptically (and genetically) rearranged.28 Atwood has on occasion defined the political as

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27 As noted above, one of the three focalising characters in *Life Before Man* is male, while the two novels published after the MaddAddam Trilogy also feature male protagonists: in *The Heart Goes Last* the focalising characters are husband and wife Stan and Charmaine; *Hag-Seed* (2016) centres on theatre director Felix’s staging of *The Tempest* in a prison.

28 All these studies were published before the completion of the trilogy, and could therefore not take into account subsequent developments: both Nischik’s discussion of Atwood’s
“having to do with power: who’s got it, who wants it, how it operates; in a word, who’s allowed to do what to whom, who gets what from whom, who gets away with it and how” (“An End” 353), and this pragmatic definition certainly encompasses both gender and power in the trilogy, although relations with the nonhuman environment are more prominent here than in much of her earlier work.29

In the following sections, the critical reception of the MaddAddam Trilogy is discussed by way of a few examples, rather than through an exhaustive overview.30 First, I describe the way in which two astute critics, Atwood scholar Shannon Hengen and ecocritic Greg Garrard, use similar examples and arguments to arrive at two very different analyses of the notion of human nature in Atwood’s work. Their disparate readings highlight the manner in which biology becomes an ambiguous mediating term between nature and culture in *Oryx and Crake* and the rest of the trilogy, and also leads to larger related issues, namely understandings of nature, human nature, and wilderness, as well as the conceptualisation of gender. Second, I return to the matter of Atwood’s propensity for dictating the terms of the reception of her own work, which was notably manifested in her controversial rejection of the *science fiction* label for *Oryx and Crake*. The novels comprising the MaddAddam Trilogy have frequently been regarded as epitomising cli-fi (climate [change] fiction), despite the fact that various scholars (sometimes the very same ones) have decried them for not dealing with the theme of climate change in an appropriate manner. Through her promotion of the works of other authors, Atwood has also intervened in the cli-fi discussion, without directly identifying her own novels as such.

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29 Atwood makes a very similar pronouncement in a 1981 Amnesty International address: “By ‘politics’ I do not mean how you voted in the last election, although that is included. I mean who is entitled to do what to whom, with impunity; who profits by it; and who therefore eats what” (“Amnesty” 394). The emphasis on who gets to consume what certainly resonates with the concerns of the MaddAddam Trilogy.

30 In the subsequent chapters, relevant secondary material is referenced as appropriate.
(Human) Nature in Oryx and Crake

One of the reasons for the varied critical reactions to the MaddAddam Trilogy is that critics approach the nature–culture dualism described in the introduction from various angles.31 This is particularly clear from the readings of Oryx and Crake presented by Hengen and Garrard. Whereas Hengen largely works to produce a consistent reading of Atwood’s environmentalism through drawing on both her literary and non-literary work, Garrard focusses on what he sees as a Darwinian streak in works by Atwood and Ian McEwan. Central to both their readings is the notion of human nature—Garrard in the main forwards a genetic explanation of human nature, while Hengen highlights social biology and genetic engineering.

Hengen begins her chapter on “Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism” by pointing out that Atwood’s environmentalism revolves around a central question: “What is a human being?” (72). She connects this question to Atwood’s view of human nature, stating that Atwood, in Oryx and Crake, “begins to consider what a genetically engineered human might be in the form of the Crakers, and there she dares to look beyond her own repeated belief that human nature cannot change” (Hengen, “Environmentalism” 74). Hengen’s reading of Oryx and Crake thus appears to take seriously Crake’s undertaking to use genetic engineering as a way of ridding human nature of its flaws, yet, in asking rhetorically “[s]hould only the Crakers survive, what remains of being human?” (“Environmentalism” 83), Hengen fails to account for the satirical presentation of genetic engineering in the novel, as well as for the Crakers’ capacity to mythologise their existence.

Slightly disturbingly, Hengen moves from her reading of the novel to making a more general claim about the place of humanity in the nonhuman environment: “As biologists argue, the natural environment in its profound resourcefulness will outlast human abuse of it and continue to be beautiful” (“Environmentalism” 82). In doing so, she (presumably unwittingly) appears to share Crake’s Malthusian misanthropy, without paying much

31 I here follow Val Plumwood in seeing dualism as a specific variety of dichotomy: “an intense, established and developed cultural expression of such a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable. Dualism is a relation of separation and domination inscribed and naturalised in culture and characterised by radical exclusion, distancing and opposition between orders constructed as systematically higher and lower, as inferior and superior, as ruler and ruled, which treats the division as part of the natures of beings construed not merely as different but as belonging to radically different orders or kinds, and hence as not open to change” (47–48).
attention to the way in which his scheme plays itself out in the novel, while also promoting an idealised view of nature as balanced and good. Skirting the issue of human nature, which she rightly characterises as vital in Atwood’s work, leads Hengen inevitably to a rather pious-sounding conclusion about the author’s overall environmentalism:

> Human nature is made as much of reverence, compassion, and the capacity to forgive, as of lust, greed, arrogance, and cruelty. To deny any part is to lessen the whole. As whole creatures we both affect and are affected by the larger environment in which we evolve, and her work asks us to bear that interconnection firmly in mind. (“Environmentalism” 84)

While the notion of interconnection without doubt is central to Atwood’s environmentalism, Hengen’s reading of *Oryx and Crake* clearly illustrates the difficulties faced by an Atwood scholar trying to interpret such a multivalent text while she also has a vested interest in Atwood’s infallibility. Hengen fails to consider the fact that human nature (whether exemplified by Crake, the Crakers or Jimmy/Snowman) is represented as deeply flawed and the cause of many environmental ills in the novel. Unqualified acceptance of all aspects of human nature seems to leave no room for any environmentalism, as activism depends on the conviction that change is possible, thus in effect negating her reading of the novel.

Garrard, on the contrary, identifies a trajectory in the work of both Atwood and McEwan that leads from ecofeminism (exemplified by Atwood’s *Surfacing* and McEwan’s *The Child in Time* in his analysis) to a “Darwinian viewpoint” (“Reading” 224) that he also sees at work in *Life Before Man* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. In Garrard’s view, this leads to an understanding of “global ecological concerns” as the product of interaction between ideology and “transhistorical human nature” (“Reading” 224). Both critics implicitly rely on a definition of human nature as (partly) biologically determined, but while Hengen’s reading remains rather utopian in its celebration of the wholeness of humanity, Garrard deliberately situates his argument polemically as he sets out to upset three constituencies (of increasing size): Atwood scholars, who have typically appropriated her work for their routine assertions of anti-essentialism, cultural constructionism, and creaking post-Freudian models of the mind; ecocritics, who have typically allied themselves with ecophilosophers in identifying anthropocentrism as the core conceptual problem with Western civilization in its relations with more-than-human nature; and literary critics and theorists quite generally, who typically valorize ‘difference’ and associate Darwinism with biological determinism and right-wing ideologies. (“Reading” 224)

Garrard appeals for the recognition of human nature as something that encompasses more than the discursive; he describes “evolutionary psychology” as a means of “begin[ning] the immense and complex process
of working out how best to achieve environmentalist objectives in the light of both our various cultures and our shared human nature” (“Reading” 225). In his conclusion, Garrard advocates the use of “Darwinian literary theory” to “undermine the prevalent assumption that ideology has a determining role in environmental crisis,” while he also emphasises that the humanities can no longer afford to ignore “the evidence that evolution shaped our shared human nature” (“Reading” 240, 241).

Significantly, Garrard does pay some attention to the satire of Oryx and Crake, coming to the conclusion that in an “unremittingly despairing” representation of the “intersection of evolved human nature and contingent modern culture . . . the only possible redemption lies in Atwood’s consistent use of satirical irony” (“Reading” 237, 239). Perhaps predictably, given his line of argument, Garrard continues to describe the possible function of this literary representation in evolutionary terms, arguing that “irony, like other literary techniques, might conceivably have an adaptive function” and that “identifying human folly in imaginary scenarios and mobilizing shame—a universal morally corrective emotion—so as to draw upon and reinforce the intricate social hierarchies characteristic of our species” could serve environmental purposes (“Reading” 240). This suggestion seems particularly interesting in the view of my argument in the concluding chapter that satire becomes a way of coping with the Anthropocene in the MaddAddam novels. Although I do not share Garrard’s optimistic view that reinforcing human social hierarchies through irony and shame necessary will benefit the nonhuman environment, it is difficult to fault his assertion that “our susceptibility to shame, desire, status-seeking, and fun” could be “manipulated more consistently towards environmental ends” (“Reading” 240).

Whereas Hengen presents an ultimately humanist reading of Atwood’s environmentalism, Garrard veers to the opposite end in his evolutionary reading, in effect denying that ideology and power imbalances among humans play a role in human behaviour to nonhumans. Hengen’s reading is by and large focussed on the discursive (although she makes some allowance for role played by biology in human nature), while Garrard’s reading is rooted in the materiality of genetics. These two critics have very different critical (and political) agendas, and Oryx and Crake lends itself to such conflicting readings precisely because of its internal ambiguity and satire. If human nature is central to Atwood’s environmentalism—as it indeed seems to be—the trilogy offers no certain pronouncements on its origins or forms of expression, thus presenting an ambiguous environmentalist injunction.
Nature, Wilderness, Gender

The differences between the readings offered by Hengen and Garrard may in part be ascribed to different understandings of nature, famously described by Raymond Williams as “perhaps the most complex word in the language” (219). Carefully examining the way in which biology (as genes and as ecology) mediates between material and discursive extremes may therefore make for a slightly more complex view of Atwood’s environmentalism. In her extensive overview of conceptualisations of nature, Kate Soper points out that in common parlance, nature is fundamentally opposed “to culture, to convention, to what is artificially worked or produced, in short, to everything which is defining of the order of humanity” (15). This problematic opposition underlies much environmental thinking too: nature is that which is not human, but which should be protected by humans from humans.

The notion of wilderness, for example, is one such environmentalist paradox. The influential United States Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as “an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (Sec. 2c). In a world in which different anthropogenic influences can be detected everywhere (in space, the atmosphere, in water, in our bodies), the idea that there are true wilderness areas left seems contentious in itself. In an influential 1995 article entitled “The Trouble with Wilderness,” environmental historian William Cronon deconstructs what could perhaps be called an ‘ideology of wilderness’ and the ways in which that ideology is used, rather than the existence of wilder places per se. By pointing out that wilderness is “quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history” (7), Cronon highlights wilderness as a conceptual product of a certain culture. Wilderness denotes a place devoid of permanent human presence, yet this absence has to be witnessed and experienced by humans for such a place to be recognised as wilderness. Thus the idea that humans are completely separate from nonhuman nature is reinforced in the very}

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32 Williams’s oft-quoted pronouncement, although probably not inaccurate, should be taken with a pinch of salt. His Keywords abound in descriptions of the difficulty (alienation; bourgeois; class; criticism; literature; realism; violence; subjective; tradition) or complexity (democracy; determine; mass; mediation; private; romantic) of the terms under discussion. Culture is likewise described as “one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (87).
33 Many of his subsequent critics, like Kenneth Brower and Dave Foreman, founder of Earth First!, have failed to consider this distinction.
notion of wilderness (as in many other environmentalist conceptions of nature).

The history of the idea of wilderness largely overlaps with that of the ideas of western imperialism; through seeing “wilderness as the polar opposite of civilization, wilderness in its ideal form could be viewed as free of people” (Merchant 152), which in turn could be used as justification for colonisation. Further, by often excluding traces of prehistoric or pre-Western human presences, the concept promotes a very specific view of ‘the human’ as someone who does not inhabit nature, but enjoys sublime experiences of nature; a human in possession of ‘unnatural technology’, i.e. usually someone who is western, middle-class, and white (and typically male). The ideology of wilderness is thus not just used for the spurious separation of humanity and nonhuman nature, but also to reinforce various degrees of humanity, usually on a racial basis. The assumed correlations between nature and native are troubled in the MaddAddam Trilogy through the representation of the Crakers who live in a manner that seems completely ‘natural’ despite their own ‘artificiality’.

Recent and ongoing scientific discoveries about the largely unchartered ecosystems of our bodies suggest that they perhaps constitute wildernesses in themselves, which leaves one with the interestingly double image of wildernesses in human shape exploring ‘the wilderness’. The MaddAddam Trilogy further implies that human nature constitutes a type of wilderness, and that there is no clear line between civilisation and the wild, particularly not in the post-apocalypse. This image of an all-encompassing wilderness corresponds to Levi R. Bryant’s notion of “wilderness ontology” (19), which essentially entails seeing both nature and culture as ecological, on equal terms. When no distinction is made between nature and culture, “wilderness is not a place to which we can go, for wherever we are we already are in the wilderness” (20), Bryant argues. Bryant still admits that colloquial use of wilderness “contains a kernel of ontological truth worth preserving,” since it acknowledges the existence of an area not entirely subject to humanity (21). Bryant thus turns the idea of wilderness on its head—instead of maintaining that there are no wild places left, he equates wilderness with a comprehensive ecology that includes all culture and social interactions.

The tensions between the material and the discursive evident in conceptualisations of (human) nature and wilderness are of course also prevalent in the area of gender. As Stacy Alaimo so succinctly points out, “feminist theory’s most revolutionary concept, the concept of ‘gender’—as distinct from biological sex—is predicated on a sharp distinction between nature and culture” (5). Until fairly recently, most feminist theorists could
be divided into two distinct camps: those who stress the discursive nature of gender as performance and those ecofeminists who emphasise a material connection between women and nature which may easily be deemed essentialist. Not surprisingly, the tension between the material and the discursive in feminism has in recent years been explored through biology, and the work of thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Myra Hird and Karen Barad have laid the foundation for what is often called new materialism, which may by and large be seen as a response to the emphasis placed on the discursive in poststructuralist thought. The manner in which the biological emerges as a third term between the natural/material and the cultural/discursive in the MaddAddam Trilogy certainly parallels the emphasis on embodiment and situated knowledge in this field.

Atwood’s environmentalist capital has grown considerably with the publication of the MaddAddam Trilogy, but she has also seen a recent resurgence as acclaimed feminist. Shortly after Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th US president in January 2017, *The Handmaid’s Tale* topped Amazon’s bestsellers’ list—probably boosted by a primetime Super Bowl trailer for its new serial adaptation, as well as by the Trump administration’s signing of the ‘Global Gag Rule’—and remained in the top ten for a number of weeks (Andrews). As noted above, some critics have seen an emphasis on environmental issues as replacing Atwood’s earlier focus on gender relations. The emphasis on biology, reproduction and sex throughout the trilogy seems to counter this claim to some extent. Accordingly, others, like Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, have identified environmentalism and feminism as coterminous in *Oryx and Crake* (211), while Elaine Showalter notes that the novel’s “politics . . . are consistent with Atwood’s pacifism, feminism, environmentalism and anti-globalism” (35). Indeed, feminism and environmentalism are more than just parallels in Atwood’s literary production and in her public reputation: investigating unequal power relations is at the core of her novels, as is the degree to which movements intending to counter such imbalances are prone to dogmatism and instituting new inequalities.

**Defining Genres: Science Fiction, Climate Change, and Cli-Fi**

Despite her popular appeal, Atwood has not been averse to alienating fans and critics alike through pronouncements about her own work, which Amanda Cole has described as Atwood’s “claiming the responsibility and the right to frame her tale”; similarly Lee Rozelle has noted that “Atwood’s
own numerous writings, website suggestions, and interviews appear to suggest prescribed approaches to *Oryx and Crake*” (61). Her interventions in the reception of her work belie her repeated assertions that it has no message, and rather suggest that she wants to guide readers towards certain interpretations.

Infamously, Atwood asserted that *Oryx and Crake* is not science fiction, by claiming that “[l]ike *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Oryx and Crake* is a speculative fiction, not a science fiction proper,” because the novel “contains no intergalactic space travel, no teleportation, no Martians” (Atwood, “Writing” 330). This claim has riled science fiction pundits, because, as Greg Bechtel notes, “Atwood’s unilateral redefinition . . . seemed not only dismissive of SF [science fiction] as a whole but ignorant of how SF had been defining (and re-defining) itself . . . for several decades” (117). In a particularly venomous review of the novel, influential Canadian science fiction critic John Clute describes “Atwood’s attempt to ringfence her novel from the long conversation of works it takes it substance from” as amounting to “a palpable and conscious slur on honest discourse.” Gary K. Wolfe, on the other hand, explains Atwood’s classification as “not demeaning the SF market so much as protecting the Atwood market” (qtd. in Clute). Clute goes so far as to describe Atwood’s denial of the label as an instance of “intellectual treachery on the part of that class—the ‘clerics’ or clerisy, the guardians and disseminators of higher culture—one of whose obligations is to *tell the truth*.” While Clute’s reaction could simply be read as yet another instance of Canadian ‘Atwood bashing’, it does speak volumes about her perceived cultural capital and position in Canada.

Six years later, Ursula le Guin started her *Guardian* review of *The Year of the Flood* with a reference to Atwood’s statements about genre, and she too implicitly refers to Atwood’s perceived cultural capital, rather acerbically ascribing Atwood’s “arbitrarily restrictive definition” to the fact that she “doesn’t want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto.” Atwood responded to this attack in grand fashion: she dedicated *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (2011) to Le Guin in a reconciliatory gesture, while using much of the introduction to the volume to explain the overlap between *speculative fiction* and Le Guin’s preferred term *science fiction*. Atwood’s proposal is that both of these (and a number of other genres) really are “wonder tales” (*In Other Worlds* 8)—in short, she maintains that she was right all along.34 Tellingly, NooBroo is marketed as

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34 Being unsure as to the generic classification of Atwood’s work is not a problem unique to the MaddAddam Trilogy; the difficulty of classifying her work has been noted before, and has led Reingard Nischik to propose, for instance, that Atwood’s short fiction published in
based on “Atwood’s trilogy of speculative fiction” (Beau’s, my emphasis). Whereas many reviewers and some scholars have pandered to Atwood’s views in this regard, science fiction scholar Adam Roberts goes to the other extreme, proclaiming that “in spite of her denials, Atwood’s three best novels are all SF” (316). The three novels he has in mind are The Handmaid’s Tale, Oryx and Crake, and, rather improbably, The Blind Assassin—while the novel-within-the-novel here undoubtedly is science fiction, one would be hard pressed to explain why the novel as a whole should be labelled as such.

Although less controversial than her rejection of the science fiction label, Atwood has also launched the neologism uestoia to discuss the genre of the MaddAddam Trilogy. She describes her coinage as “a world I made up by combining utopia and dystopia—the imagined perfect society and its opposite—because, in my view, each contains a latent version of the other” (“Dire” 66). As mentioned in the introduction, there is an existing tradition of utopian theory that regards dystopia as a form of utopia, rather than its diametric opposite, so adding to the proliferation of terms in the field seems unnecessary. Still, various scholars have seized upon the notion of uestoia in readings of the MaddAddam Trilogy. In addition to showcasing Atwood’s proclivity for coinage—which takes central stage in the trilogy itself—it is difficult not to regard uestoia, like her speculative fiction intervention, as attempts to guide the reception of her work.

In ecocriticism, much discussion has centred on classifying the ‘new’ genre of climate (change) fiction, and on literary representations of climate change. A comprehensive overview of this ongoing project falls outside the scope of my study. What is significant, however, is the prominence of the MaddAddam Trilogy in this debate despite the fact that it is less directly concerned with climate change than, for example, Kim Stanley Robinson’s Science in the Capital trilogy. Atwood is perhaps the most frequently referenced of a group of ‘literary’ writers who have recently written what

Murder in the Dark (1983), Good Bones (1992) and Bottle (2004) introduced a new “genre into Anglo-Canadian literature, the Baudelerian prose poem” (“Short” 153). Even seemingly realist novels, such as Bodily Harm, are, on closer inspection, amalgams of elements from many different genres (in this case the novel combines the basic plot of a political thriller with the gothic, amongst other things).

Moreover, pronouncing the word as “us-topia” adds to the confusion: who is this us, and what would an us-place be more than just another word for here?

These include Shelly Boyd, Gerry Canavan (“Hope”), Anna Lindhé, Eduardo Marks de Marques, and J. Paul Narkunas, while Sharon Wilson has applied the notion to Doris Lessing’s Mara and Dann (“Storytelling”).

The three novels, Forty Signs of Rain (2004), Fifty Degrees Below (2005) and Sixty Days and Counting (2007), are set in Washington DC and detail policy wrangling necessitated by global warming; the trilogy has subsequently been abridged and published as a single novel, Green Earth (2015).
could in broad terms be described as climate change fictions. Other novels and novelists often mentioned in this regard include Maggie Gee (*The Ice People*, 1998; *The Flood*, 2004); Doris Lessing (*Mara and Dann*, 1999; *The Story of General Dann and Mara’s Daughter, Griot and the Snow Dog*, 2005); T.C. Boyle (*A Friend of the Earth*, 2000); Will Self (*The Book of Dave*, 2006); Cormac McCarthy (*The Road*, 2006); Sarah Hall (*The Carhullan Army*, 2007); Jeanette Winterson (*The Stone Gods*, 2007); Ian McEwan (*Solar*, 2010); Jonathan Franzen (*Freedom*, 2010); and Barbara Kingsolver (*Flight Behavior*, 2012). A list including genre fiction and not focussing on recent works would be much longer, as convincingly shown by Johns-Putra and Trexler in their overviews of climate fiction. That is, however, beside my point. What is pertinent is that the MaddAddam Trilogy has become a type of touchstone in any discussion of climate fiction, and this is magnified when recent environmental fiction is discussed. Moreover, inclusion of *Oryx and Crake* in the growing canon of climate change fiction seems to have been facilitated, at least in part, by Atwood’s linking of the genesis of the novel to an awareness of climate change, and her description of writing part of the novel while “on a boat in the Arctic”; “I could see for myself how fast the glaciers were receding,” she notes (“Writing” 329).

In their 2011 overview of climate change in literature and literary criticism, Trexler and Johns-Putra note that “Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* has likely received the most attention as a single novel dealing with climate change” (189). Given their focus, however, they appear to be disappointed with the critical response and identify a “trend, in which Atwood’s concerns about climate change are recognized but not explored at length” that they also observe in the critical response to *The Year of the Flood* (Trexler and Johns-Putra 190). Yet whether one gives an overview of the genre (e.g. Sylvia Mayer, “Klimawandelroman” 237; “Explorations” 23), or decries the fact that “feminist fiction confronting climate change has yet to be written,” as ecofeminist Greta Gaard does in a recent chapter (170), or argues that

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38 This list is an amalgam of ‘literary’ novels mentioned by Adam Trexler and Adeline Johns-Putra (188) and Johns-Putra (“Climate Change” 268–70) in their overviews of climate change literature, as well as those discussed by Trexler as “Anthropocene fictions” (7).

The frequent inclusion of *The Road* is curious: although it is probably almost as often invoked to establish the pedigree of climate change or environmental fiction as the MaddAddam Trilogy, the novel does not specify an anthropogenic cause for environmental disaster. Here too it seems to be the case of proponents of climate change fiction eagerly appropriating work by an acclaimed author. See Johns-Putra’s “My Job” for an analysis of readings of *The Road* in the light of climate change.

39 Readings of the novel as a climate change novel may also have been encouraged by the cover used for its first Canadian edition (Fig. 1, discussed in the next chapter).
climate change fiction “is changing the curricula of English departments across the country” (Fernandes A18), the MaddAddam Trilogy is included as a prominent example of the genre. Atwood’s work is, for example, mentioned by Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow to show that “major novelists . . . have published books that touch on climate change” (59), by Terry Gifford in his discussion of pastoralism as examples of “recent apocalyptic novels of survival” (28), by Louise Westling as an example of increased attention afforded by authors to environmental issues (“Introduction” 6), and by Adeline Johns-Putra as examples of “the recent spate of novels about future climate-changed worlds by authors who are not usually identified with SF” (“Care” 127–28). Even those who lambast Atwood for her representation of climate change feel compelled to discuss her novels. Trexler provides an excellent example: he starts out his book on Anthropocene Fictions by referring to Oryx and Crake as the prime example of “unfocused novels by literary giants” (6), and despite his assessment that “climate change is little more than a footnote to the novel’s concerns” (195), both Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood are included in his discussion of climate change fiction. Atwood is simply too prominent an author to leave out of considerations of recent Anglophone fiction with environmental themes and the MaddAddam Trilogy has almost instantly been assimilated into the growing canon of climate change fiction, not least due to Atwood’s existing cultural capital.

In recent years, the term cli-fi—analogous to sci-fi—has increasingly been used to denote climate (change) fiction. Johns-Putra observes that the term and the increased attention paid to climate change in literary and critical theory constitutes “more than just a matter of perception and of naming” (“Climate Change” 266). She holds that in the period 2011–2016, since she and Trexler authored the first comprehensive overview of the representation of climate change in literature, “there has been an actual increase in literary engagements with climate change, and literary scholars have been busy exploring both these texts and the concept of climate change as a cultural phenomenon” (“Climate Change” 266). Given Atwood’s propensity for coinage and for influencing the debate around her own literary production, it should therefore come as no surprise that she has played an important part in assuring that cli-fi is recognised as a genre. The term itself was coined by blogger Dan Bloom in 2008 and Bloom in turn credits Atwood with helping “to bring [cli-fi], and the genre, to much wider
public attention.” As Bloom is quick to point out, an article in the *Irish Times* by Sara Keating erroneously attributes the coinage to Atwood.40

Atwood’s promotion of the term includes a 2012 tweet about the novel *Polar City Red* by Jim Laughter, and media attention to cli-fi only took off after this tweet (23 Apr. 2012).41 In a short piece that first appeared in the October 2013 issue of the *Canadian Living* magazine (later republished on *Huffington Post*), Atwood describes cli-fi as fiction “in which an altered climate is part of the plot” (“We Must”). Yet, in a manner reminiscent of the debate about speculative fiction briefly recounted above, she has also managed to create some distance between her own work and run-of-the-mill cli-fi, as evidenced, for example, in Bloom’s pronouncement that “Margaret Atwood does not write cli-fi per se, and prefers to call her novels ‘speculative fiction’” (qtd. by David Holmes). Atwood has continued to promote the use of cli-fi and her association with the term has become commonplace; the promotional material of the short story collection *Loosed Upon the World* (2015, ed. by John Joseph Adams), for example, describes it as “the first, definitive anthology of climate fiction—a cutting-edge genre *made popular by Margaret Atwood*” (amazon.com, my emphasis).42 Bechtel has noted that “[t]hanks to the whole Atwood/SF kerfuffle, ‘speculative fiction’—although this isn’t how Atwood defines it—is now often thought of as a more respectable, more literary cousin of science fiction” (123), and Atwood’s cultural capital similarly appears to have lent cli-fi some respectability.

This chapter has focussed on the MaddAddam Trilogy as novels by Margaret Atwood, an author who has and continues to shape the context of the reception of her work in a number of ways. Her dominance of Canadian letters appears to be as much the result of her reputation for eccentricity and irreverence as of the literary quality and wide appeal of her work. In

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40 Given Atwood’s proclivity for coinage, Keating’s assumption was perhaps not unjustified.
41 Bloom directly attributes the proliferation of the term to this tweet, as well as to Scott Thill’s inclusion of the term in the keywords to his *Wired* 2009 review of the climate change film *The Age of Stupid* (dir. Fanny Armstrong). It should be noted that Atwood’s influence in this regard may well be significant. She currently has more than a million followers on Twitter; when she started tweeting about cli-fi in April 2012, she had about 400,000 followers, according to Bloom.

Trexler notes that there was “rather suddenly” (8) a discussion in the media about the emergence of a new literary genre focussed on climate change, and although he mentions Bloom’s 2008 coinage of the term, he does not account for the fact that all of the examples he cites date from 2013, i.e. after Atwood’s tweet and the subsequent article in the *Irish Times* mentioned above. Trexler’s examples includes online articles on the websites of the *NPR, the Christian Science Monitor, The Guardian*, the *Financial Times, Vice*, and *The New Yorker* (n. 12, 239–40).

42 The volume contains a reprint of Atwood’s “Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet” that first appeared in *The Guardian* in 2009.
addition, she seldom shies away from putting her renown to activist use. In the next chapter, on the peritexts of the novels, I look at how the design and marketing of the novels as books contribute to creating the context of their reception, as Atwood’s “celebrity-commodity” (Turner 15) is transformed into real commodities. The novels are of course mainly presented as commodified books for financial reasons on the part of the publishers, yet it also encourages devoted fans to enter into a relationship with a carefully designed object—and as detailed above, relationality and interconnection form the basis of much of Atwood’s environmentalist activism.
2 | Marketing Environmentalism: Peritexts of the MaddAddam Trilogy

The point of departure of this chapter is simple: for the trilogy to engage in environmental work, it needs to be read, and to garner readers, it needs to be marketed. Marketing may take the benign form of word-of-mouth recommendations, may rely on displays in physical or virtual bookstores or libraries, or may be a result of the ‘author events’ publishing houses invest in. Simply seeing the name of an established author (like Atwood’s) on a new cover may be enough to attract readers. Following Gérard Genette’s distinctions between different types of paratexts (Paratexts xviii), the previous chapter has focussed on the epitexts of the trilogy, such as interviews with the author, and the interplay between epitextual elements and other extratextual aspects such as Atwood’s canonical and celebrity status, the rest of her oeuvre, reviews of her work, and the reception of her writing. The current chapter deals with the peritexts included in the printed volumes themselves. More specifically, the peritextual material in focus here includes the covers and titles of the printed novels, in addition to their dedications, epigraphs and acknowledgements. Peritexts occur in such close proximity to the texts of the novels themselves that categorisation is difficult at times, particularly in the case of epigraphs that both precede and form part of the novel proper. And the metaleptic tendencies of Atwood’s extratextual environmental activism are also evident in the acknowledgements to the novels. Although peritexts play a vital role not just in the marketing and dissemination of literary works, but also in subtly guiding reception and shaping subsequent epitexts, they are frequently ignored in literary discussions. In regarding the peritexts as essential parts of the environmental project the trilogy engages in, this chapter concentrates on the three novels as material, commodified objects: it is first and foremost a discussion of the novels as concrete books, rather than as more abstract texts.

Together peritexts and epitexts determine the context and reception of Atwood’s work, but they are rather different. Arguably an author exerts more control over peritexts than over some epitexts such as interviews (although, as seen in the previous chapter, Atwood tends to intervene in these contexts too). The extent to which the final products coincide with the author’s original intentions differs from case to case and is subject to all kinds of considerations, not least the publishers’ financial concerns. Atwood has, for example, commented on the fact that the working title of The Year of the Flood was “God’s Gardeners,” but that it was deemed to attract an inappropriate audience (e.g. in interview with Emma Brockes). Moreover,
the scheduled 2008 publication of the novel was postponed by a year so as not to coincide with the United States presidential elections (James Adams). However, this chapter is not so much about the manifestation of authorial or publishers’ intent in packaging, but rather concentrates on the sometimes conflicting roles the various packaging elements play in the reception of the trilogy. Here too Ricoeur’s notions of intention and injunction are useful. In the case of the cover designs used for a novel, the exact intention remains unspecified (beyond the most obvious intention of selling more copies), but when different images are used on the covers of different editions, readers may form rather different perceptions of the injunction of the same novel, for instance as far as genre expectations are concerned.

“Being immutable,” Genette points out, “the text in itself is incapable of adapting to changes in its public in space and over time. The paratext—more flexible, more versatile, always transitory because transitive—is, as it were, an instrument of adaptation” (Paratexts 408). Since the three volumes comprising the trilogy are still relatively recent publications, they have yet to acquire the kind of peritexts Genette has in mind here, such as additional introductions or forewords. Still, the increased emphasis on marketing and packaging the three novels as a unified series is particularly noticeable in the various cover designs used for the different editions of Oryx and Crake. While the novel at first was treated as an independent volume (this is to a lesser extent evident in the cover designs used for The Year of the Flood too), MaddAddam is consistently cast as the conclusion to a trilogy. With the publication of the second and third volumes of the MaddAddam Trilogy there has been a clear tendency to brand the three novels as a series: their covers have become increasingly uniform in design, thus tending to obscure the stylistic and other differences between the novels. The tendency to give subsequent editions of the novels a more uniform design, which may otherwise be dismissed as mere branding, is paralleled by increased self-referentiality in the prefatory elements included in the volumes. Whereas Oryx and Crake opens with epigraphs from Swift and Woolf, the subsequent novels draw on the fictional world of the trilogy for such elements: The Year of the Flood includes a Gardener hymn in lieu of an epigraph, appropriately titled “The Garden,” while MaddAddam starts with four pages summarising the two previous novels. As a synthesis and continuation of the previous novels, the third novel is the least independent volume, but it is nevertheless striking how its peritexts serve to retroactively rebrand the earlier volumes. Both of these tendencies (towards a more unified design and self-referentiality) seem significant, given Atwood’s involvement in designing the covers of her work, and her explicit
association of cover designs with “deep motifs” present in a text (Nischik, “The Writer” 524).

David Ayers rightly points out that discussions of the materiality of the book easily slide into critiques of the material relations of book production and distribution, without acknowledging this subtle shift and its ideological basis (762), thus resulting in “an inquiry into materialism and materiality in general” (763). Given, however, the MaddAddam Trilogy’s sustained critique of commodification, both these lines of inquiry seem valid in this case. Indeed, particularly significant in the following discussion is the extent to which the trilogy inevitably is implicated in the economic system it criticises much of Oryx and Crake centres on satirising the practice of branding, yet this critique is delivered in a branded package. Multinational corporations are consistently portrayed as evil in the trilogy, yet, during the decade of the MaddAddam Trilogy’s publication, Atwood’s smaller American and Canadian publishers have been subsumed by the Random House conglomerate. My argument is not that Atwood is cynical, but rather that she practises a kind of complicitous critique or inevitable hypocrisy, as detailed in the introduction: the commercial mechanisms condemned in the novels are remarkably similar to those involved in the publication of the books themselves.¹ This seems to indicate that Atwood is very well aware of her involvement in a profit-driven system, and that she stresses her awareness by playing on the commodification of her own work. Of course this state of affairs does not refute the environmental work done by the novels, but does serve to highlight more generally the constraints faced by ‘serious’ novelists engaging in literary activism, as well as the entanglement of cultural and environmentalist capital with economic capital in Atwood’s case, more specifically.

By giving an overview of these frequently disregarded elements, this chapter aims to highlight how the peritexts of the three novels both produce and adapt to a context that has changed over the decade or so of the trilogy’s publication. This context is multi-faceted, and its terms are in part dictated by an increasingly globalised literary marketplace, but the chosen cover designs, epigraphs, dedications and acknowledgements also gesture towards increased emphasis on the environmental project of the trilogy (perhaps partially due to the rise of cli-fi as a genre), as is evident, for

¹ Atwood’s use of online platforms (such as wattpad.com) for publication seems to indicate that she has been considering alternatives to traditional publication venues and processes. According to Atwood, this has in at least one case led to the exasperation of her publishers, who wanted her to also publish the work traditionally (e.g. S. Paulson), and the four short stories forming the Positron series, first published on the now defunct Byliner site, were rewritten to form part of her 2015 novel, The Heart Goes Last.
example, in the more consistent use of animal imagery on the covers. Although it is impossible to quantify the impact of this increased uniformity, a similar trend may also be discerned in the critical discussion of the trilogy, as seen in the previous chapter. The peritexts discussed in this chapter can be related to Atwood’s considerable cultural and increasing environmentalist capital, but are also evidence of her economic capital as an established author. Most importantly, the MaddAddam Trilogy’s peritexts again highlight how tenuous Atwood’s distinction between her activism and literary production is—much like her literary stature and the reception of her work, they exist in a complex web of feedback and reinforcement.

Cover Designs and Dust Jackets

Any environmental work done by the trilogy is framed and in part initiated by the covers of the books: potential readers of the novels first need to be enticed to open the books. As Nicole Matthews notes, “[b]ook jackets are a key conduit through which negotiations take place between authors, the book trade and readers”; “the material form of texts is key to understanding the way they work as part of cultural practices of reading” (xi). This first part of the chapter, on the covers used for the MaddAddam Trilogy, follows a similar line of reasoning to that offered by Tore Rye Andersen in his detailed discussion of the dust jacket of David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*. Andersen proposes that “the jacket and its information” may be considered

a literary text in its own right; a text that to a certain extent is separate from the larger text enclosed by it, but which at the same time constitutes a sort of authorized gateway into this larger text, and which through its selections and omissions lays down certain guidelines for our approach, interpretation, and contextualization. (254)

Seen as an environmental project, the covers of the novels are significant in positioning the trilogy in the literary marketplace, and to a certain, unquantifiable extent, shape the reception of the works themselves.⁴ This part concentrates on the manner in which the cover designs contribute to the branding and contextualisation of the novels—generically, as novels authored by Margaret Atwood, and, by the publication of the last volume,

⁴ The focus of this chapter and the rest of the study is on the printed books. Arguably packaging is less pertinent to the consumption of ebooks or audiobooks, but while some of the factors remain the same in these formats too (including the ‘author brand’), some other issues come into play in these media, such as the choice of audiobook narrator.
as novels forming a cohesive trilogy. While a sociological examination of the readership (intended or actual) falls beyond the scope of this discussion, regarding the covers and dust jackets as texts in their own right sheds some light on the functions they fulfill in Atwood’s overall project.

Atwood is actively involved in the visual design of her books. She is primarily known as a writer, and her visual art has received relatively little attention. In interviews, Atwood has related her interest in cover design to her student business printing silk screen posters (e.g. M. Morris 250). In addition to designing and illustrating the cover of her debut volume of poetry, *Double Persephone* (1961), the first edition of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), for example, includes Atwood’s collages and appeared with her cover design. She has also collaborated with visual artists such as Charles Pachter, who both illustrated her poem cycle *Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein* in 1966 and a limited edition of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* in 1980. Other volumes have featured Atwood’s own illustrations, including the rather idiosyncratic *CanLit Foodbook* (1987), an anthology of literary excerpts and recipes provided by Canadian authors, collected and illustrated by Atwood and sold in aid of PEN International and the Writers’ Development Trust. Atwood illustrated the children’s book *Up in the Tree* (1978) herself, while her artwork in the form of dough Christmas decorations adorns the cover of *Two-Headed Poems* (1978). In a recent interview with Reingard Nischik, Atwood remarks that she would generally assume that a cover design “was proposed by the author,” as is the case with her own books (“The Writer” 524). This statement does more than clarify Atwood’s involvement in the matter—it speaks to her standing as an author, as publishers surely are not as likely to defer to the wishes of less prominent writers. Her interest in cover design extends beyond her own publications, and she has, for example, written an essay on pulp magazine covers, called “Weird Tales Covers of the 1930s.” Significantly, Atwood points out that she takes book covers into consideration when writing reviews: “if you consider the book as an entity, the cover is part of that

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3 In the following discussion of the covers, I concentrate for the sake of brevity on the front covers of the novels in their first Canadian, British, and American editions, referring to the proliferation of covers used for other editions only when pertinent. To avoid unnecessary repetition, the British first editions, used as primary sources for this study, are discussed in more detail.

4 Her watercolours have been discussed by Sharon Wilson in “Sexual Politics in Margaret Atwood's Visual Art.” More recently, Reingard Nischik devoted a chapter to Atwood’s cartoons in *Engendering Genre*.

5 In the same interview with Mary Morris, Atwood remarks that one of her “parallel lives” is that of a painter (250), while she tells Nischik that she “began as a cartoonist” rather than as a writer (*Engendering* 254).
entity” (Nischik, “The Writer” 524). The book as a commodified “entity” is precisely the subject of this discussion.

Book covers are aimed at promotion and increased sales of a volume and publishers’ choices give an inkling of the immediate cultural and commercial contexts of the book in question. Matthews notes that “since at least the 1950s, covers have played a privileged role in the wider strategies for marketing books” (xiii), while Angus Phillips remarks that a “cover plays a vital part in positioning a book or author in the market” (29). One of the features of most of the covers used for the MaddAddam Trilogy is that they tend to display the name of the author at least as prominently as the title of the novel. This is of course not exceptional for Atwood, nor particularly remarkable given that the marketing of new novels by established authors is usually based on their reputations, but it is striking. While this feature may be taken as part of Atwood’s tendency to straddle high and low (her name appears as prominently as that of a genre writer would), it may also be seen as evidence of the strength of the Atwood brand.

The first major English-language hardcover editions of *Oryx and Crake*, published in Canada, Britain, and the United States, display the greatest variation in design, with each of the three seemingly placing the novel in a different tradition or context (Figs. 1, 2 and 4). In fact, they show so much variety in their chosen imagery that a generic classification based on these covers alone would produce rather different results, depending on the cover in question. However, as the subsequent novels appeared, the American and Canadian editions used virtually identical covers (due to the consolidation of the publishing industry, if nothing else), while the earlier volumes have been repackaged in ways that emphasise their relationship to the later ones, and to Atwood’s oeuvre as a whole. The variety of designs testifies in part to the thematic and generic complexity of the novel, but also hints at the cultural context in which the publishers hope the novel to be successful. Of the first editions, the dust jacket design used by Canadian publishers McClelland & Stewart most clearly associates the novel with an environmentalist agenda (Fig. 1).

The image of desiccation cracks left in mud, here reproduced in a photo-realistic style, is a universal symbol of drought. In addition to a few dried plants, there is the shadow of a single human figure shading its eyes and presumably looking towards the horizon (but here also in the direction of the title of the novel). The name of the author is printed using larger

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6 Commenting on the increased importance of author branding in the publishing trade, Angus Phillips notes that “[c]ustomers . . . choose a book based on the author’s name and style, rather than the specific title” (25).
letters than the title of her work, and the cover also includes the phrase “A Novel”—perhaps an understandable addition, given Atwood’s varied literary production. The lone shadow and pose of the figure seem to fit in with the plot and theme of the novel, since Snowman’s post-apocalyptic existence largely follows the conventions of a last man narrative, a point to which I return in Chapter 3.

Figure 1. Front panel of the dust jacket for the first Canadian edition of *Oryx and Crake* (McClelland & Stewart, 2003). Used by permission of McClelland & Stewart, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited.

The McClelland & Stewart cover is strikingly similar to the photographs used for the paperback edition of Doris Lessing’s *Mara and Dann* (published by HarperCollins’s Flamingo imprint in 1999). The Lessing cover shows the shadows of two humans, appearing to be running with joined hands, against a similar backdrop of dried mud. Although *Mara and Dann* differs a lot from *Oryx and Crake* in tone and setting, the two novels do share important features: both have titles comprising the names of two characters, both are post-apocalyptic narratives, in both environmental destruction is implicated in the apocalypse, and both are written by acclaimed literary authors who in these novels (again) turn their hands to speculative fiction. By pointing out the similarity in cover design I do not imply that the McClelland & Stewart cover directly refers to that of Lessing’s novel, but rather that both these novels draw on shared imagery of drought and its relationship to humanity. On both covers human figures are
only present as shadows, but past human actions cast a long shadow over the post-apocalyptic presents of these novels. Through these images the novels are thus associated with the catastrophic effects of drought, and, more particularly, they are brought into the context of the debates on global warming that dominated environmental policymaking around the turn of the millennium, as they still continue to do. This cover particularly resonates with the apocalyptic framing that so often dominates discussions of climate change. The covers used for both Atwood’s and Lessing’s books do substantial work in casting these novels as environmental, without needing as much as a reference to environmental concerns in their rather obscure titles.

By contrast, the first American edition of *Oryx and Crake*, published by Nan A. Talese, displays the title of the novel more prominently than the name of its author, and it too includes the genre label “A Novel” (Fig. 2). The front of the dust jacket, designed by John Gall, is based on detail from *The Fall of Man* (dated to after 1537) by Lucas Cranach the Elder, one of a number of studies of Adam and Eve produced by the painter (Fig. 3). On the cover, the bodies of Adam and Eve are mirrored around a central axis, with most of Adam’s body remaining outside the frame. As in the painting, a stylised leafy twig is strategically placed over the genitals of the figures, and it is only when the cover design is compared to the original painting that both the hand offering the fruit and the hand around Eve’s waist are seen to belong to Adam. Even without reference to the painting, this cover evokes the myth of the Garden of Eden, and thus reflects some of the prominent details of the plot of *Oryx and Crake*, including the Paradise Dome where the Crakers are designed, and the sense that the apocalyptic pandemic facilitates a new start for the Crakers and the environment. The mirrored bodies on the cover appear rather strange at first glance, and therefore tie in with the themes of bioengineering, as well as the obsession with bodily perfection so prevalent in the novel’s pre-apocalyptic society.

The Nan A. Talese cover further includes the words “Author of Booker Prize-Winner *The Blind Assassin*.” In a discussion of the role played by the Booker Prize in book promotion, Claire Squires notes that “[t]he strapline ‘Booker Prize Winner’—and its associated promotional activity—has a marked impact on book sales and production” (72).7 On the whole,

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7 As an example, Squires notes that the sales of *The Blind Assassin* “jumped, from fewer than 200 a week to more than 3,000” after the announcement of Atwood’s Booker Prize win in 2000 (72). Since then, the influence of the Booker Prize on sales seems to have escalated. In 2013, Jamie Byng, managing director of Canongate, estimated that at least 10,000 additional copies will be sold of books on that year’s Booker longlist (Rankin).
Figure 2. Front panel of the dust jacket for the first American edition of *Oryx and Crake* (Nan A. Talese, 2003). Used by permission of Nan A. Talese, a division of Random House LLC.

Figure 3. *The Fall of Man* (after 1537) by Lucas Cranach the Elder, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Oil on wood. In the public domain; obtained from the Cranach Digital Archive.
Atwood’s Booker Prize is often mentioned on covers of the MaddAddam Trilogy, but the much earlier *Handmaid’s Tale* is more frequently referenced than *The Blind Assassin*, while the novels published between these two landmarks (*Cat’s Eye, The Robber Bride*, and *Alias Grace*) are completely ignored. Reference to the Booker Prize establishes Atwood’s reputation and reconfirms her considerable cultural capital, which publishers of course seek to convert into economic capital. These straplines, combined with publishers’ frequent explicit association to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, also create an expectation about the genre and contents of the MaddAddam Trilogy.

Another American cover, likewise designed by John Gall and used for the paperback edition published by Anchor (2004), is also based on a classical painting. This design is a reproduction of part of the left panel of Hieronymous Bosch’s triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490–1510). The painting uses fantastical imagery, and the section reproduced on the cover clearly shows a boar (creating a thematic connection to the Pigoons of the novel), but also a predator devouring prey, which could here be associated with the violence in the novel, as well as with the themes of consumption and power relations. Generically, the two covers designed by Gall—presumably with Atwood’s approval—seem to align *Oryx and Crake* more closely with the mythical or fantastic than with debates around environmental damage and climate change, while also connecting Atwood’s work to the canons of Western visual art.8

Through the depiction of Adam and Eve on the Nan A. Talese cover, and the paradisical Bosch imagery used for the Anchor paperback cover, Gall’s two designs highlight the Edenic or utopian aspects of Crake’s project. The Canadian first edition, on the contrary, employs more conventional environmentalist imagery. This difference seems at least in part to be related to the prevailing politics, thus exemplifying the complex interplay between marketing and branding, the cultural and political climate, and the text itself. The United States withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, whereas the treaty was ratified in December 2002 by Canadian prime minister Jean Chrétien, but without a detailed implementation plan (Harrison 180). So while Riley E. Dunlap and Aaron M. McCright observe that “the inauguration of the George W. Bush Administration . . . institutionalized climate change denial in the federal

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8 Neither is this purely a matter of John Gall’s personal style—although he has incorporated existing artwork in some of his covers, the two designs for *Oryx and Crake* do not appear particularly typical of his work. Ned Drew and Paul Sternberger note that “Gall strives for a conceptual complexity . . . though he tempers it with wry humour” (151).
government” of the United States (148), climate change denial had at the
time not yet become so entrenched in Canada.9 When these editions of *Oryx
and Crake* were published, not aligning the novel too closely with
environmentalism or the climate change debate—so as not to alienate
potential readers—may have been a marketing strategy in the United States.
The cover of the Canadian edition, on the contrary, deliberately seems to
invite associations with environmental issues. In this manner astute
packaging may be used to exploit or circumvent political and market forces,
and unsuspecting readers picking up the American edition would probably
do so with rather different expectations from those who first saw the
Canadian cover.

The dust jacket style of the first British edition differs markedly from
that of both the Canadian and American first editions. Its pixelated image of
the face of a woman, with prominent green eyes, in reference to a
distinguishing feature of the Crakers (Fig. 4), seems to place the novel
squarely in the tradition of science fiction. This is particularly interesting,
given Atwood’s subsequent refusal of the science fiction label. The futuristic
quality of the image does fit the future setting of the novel, but arguably
contradicts Atwood’s insistence that everything in *Oryx and Crake* is based
on scientific fact, or that the novel “invents nothing we haven’t already
invented or started to invent” (“Writing” 330). Moreover, it clearly is a
reminder of the technological context at the time of publication. These
pixelated images not only recall a prominent theme of the novel, but also
reflect the way in which many of the technologies used in the novel had
almost became outdated by the time of its publication.

In the case of the Bloomsbury first edition, the name of the author
and the title of the novel are the same size, and no additional information
about the author or genre of the work is provided, although the back flap of
the dustjacket includes a short biographical description and photograph of
Atwood. The two faces on the dust jacket (Figs. 4 and 5) conceivably
represent the two title characters; staring green Craker eyes also appear on
some of the paperback covers used for the novels (see for example Fig. 16).10

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9 The initial will to reduce emissions shown by the Canadian government was not followed
up adequately in practice; the conservative government of Stephen Harper (elected in
2006) cancelled many governmental climate programmes (Harrison 184), and in
December 2011 the country became the first signatory to withdraw from the Kyoto
Protocol.

10 Intradiegetically a printout of a picture of a prepubescent Oryx from a child pornography
site plays an important role, but the face on the cover does not seem to be that of a child,
but rather of the adult Oryx, wearing her her “luminous-green gel contact lenses” (*OC* 310)
so as not to scare the Crakers with her brown eyes.
Figure 4. Front panel of the dust jacket for the first British edition of *Oryx and Crake* (Bloomsbury, 2003). Reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Figure 5. Back panel of the dust jacket for the first British edition of *Oryx and Crake* (Bloomsbury, 2003). Reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Although a human face is in focus here, the style is completely different from the mythical quality of the human figures on the first American
edition, and also creates a different generic impression from that of the image used on the Canadian first edition. One could hardly blame readers for classifying the novel as science fiction based on its cover before even opening the book.

Figure 6. Front cover of the first British edition of *Oryx and Crake* (Bloomsbury, 2003). Own photo; reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

However, under the dust jacket the covers of the Bloomsbury first edition are decorated in a very different, much more colourful pattern (Fig. 6). The pattern consists of repeating images of rabbits with bright pink eyes, washed in translucent green. The image continues over the spine (left denuded of lettering) and back cover. The rabbit imagery is however hidden from the reader, only to be revealed when the dust jacket is removed. Building such a ‘hidden feature’ into the design, presumably at extra production costs as opposed to a conventional cloth binding, seems to be a reward to the reader for buying the ‘right’ edition of the novel. The cover design seems to suggest that aesthetics trump instrumentality, or at the very least that it is so unusual that there is no need to include the name of the author or title of the novel on the spine. This design choice focusses attention on the book as (rare) material object, while at the same time seemingly differentiating it from run-of-the-mill commodities: buyers of
this edition are consumers, but discerning ones.\textsuperscript{11} Except for the artificial quality of the rabbit depiction—the colours are too bright and unusual to be appropriate for ‘conventional’ animals—the cover pattern has little in common with the pixelated human faces on the dust jacket. References to the luminous green rabbits that populate the world of \textit{Oryx and Crake} have subsequently been included on paperback covers of the novel (e.g. Figs. 11 and 15), with another green rabbit on the dust jacket of the first British edition of \textit{The Year of the Flood} (Fig. 8), but the overtly science fictional style of this dust jacket has not been replicated in any of the later Bloomsbury designs for the MaddAddam Trilogy, despite the fact that the volumes are all set in the same fictional world. Atwood’s polemical pronouncements on science fiction as a genre presumably played their role in these changed marketing tactics.

In the case of \textit{The Year of the Flood}, the fronts of the Canadian and American first edition dust jackets are virtually identical. What presents itself as a design choice is in actual fact a reflection of the complex corporate relations governing the publishing industry. By the time of the publication of this novel, both McClelland & Stewart and Nan A. Talese had become part of the huge Random House conglomerate. In 2000, Random House of Canada acquired a 25\% share in Atwood’s Canadian publishers, McClelland & Stewart, and bought the remaining 75\% from the University of Toronto in 2012, thus becoming the sole owners. Nan A. Talese has been a Doubleday imprint since 1990; Doubleday became part of Random House in 1998 and merged with Knopf in 2009 to form Knopf Doubleday. Bertelsmann, a multinational media conglomerate, has owned Random House since 1998. In July 2013, Random House merged with Penguin to form Penguin Random House (jointly owned by Bertelsmann and Pearson), consequently establishing the largest publishing house in the world, controlling 25\% of the global publishing trade and comprising nearly 250 different imprints (Rankin). Over the last two decades, the publishing industry has become increasingly globalised and multinational, and the relatively small number of actors involved remains largely obscure through the use of a variety of imprints. And in the MaddAddam Trilogy, the aspects of capitalism most under attack are precisely insidious globalisation and murky corporate ties, of which the CorpSeCorps becomes emblematic.

\textsuperscript{11} Jo Royle, Louise Cooper, and Rosemary Stockdale pay considerable attention to the apparent differences between books and other commodities: when marketing books, repeat purchases are rarely an objective and brand recognition centres on the names of authors, not on those of publishers (3–4).
Figure 7. Front panel of the dust jacket for the first Canadian edition of *The Year of the Flood* (McClelland & Stewart, 2009). Used by permission of McClelland & Stewart, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited.

The words printed on the right edge of the covers, and almost fading into obscurity on both, differ slightly: on the Nan A. Talese cover it says “Author of Booker Prize Winning *The Blind Assassin*” while the endorsement reads “By the Booker Prize Winning Author of *The Handmaid’s Tale*” on the McClelland & Stewart cover reproduced here (Fig. 7). Both covers include the generic indication “A Novel,” and although the name of the author is displayed in much larger lettering than that used for the title of the novel, the title is prominent, given the contrast between the bright letters and the muted background. The background to the top half consists of fragmented glass, while the lower right corner appears to represent fire, but the design is dominated by a red poppy, evocative of First World War imagery. Poppy extract is important in the narrative: it is used as a sedative by the Gardeners in the novel, and also forms part of the concoction Toby uses to kill her erstwhile rapist Blanco.

The front of the dust jacket of the first British edition of *The Year of the Flood* displays both the title of the novel and the name of its author prominently (Fig. 8). A design of thorny creepers twines around the letters comprising the title, and in addition to supporting colourful leaves, fruit and butterflies against a black background, the creeper also serves as a prop for trapeze artists and pole dancers. Two snakes curl around the Y, and some of the other figurines include a luminous green rabbit, dismembered female manikins, a shotgun, a handgun, a lamb, and a lion. The creeper and
other figurines are embossed over the letters of the title, so there is a tactile aspect to the design too.

Figure 8. Front panel of the dust jacket for the first British edition of *The Year of the Flood* (Bloomsbury, 2009). Reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Figure 9. Back panel of the dust jacket for the first British edition of *The Year of the Flood* (Bloomsbury, 2009). Photograph by George Whiteside. Reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
This imagery reflects some of the details of the plot, but also plays upon the theme of the biblical fall so prevalent in the God’s Gardeners’ mythology. As with Oryx and Crake, Bloomsbury markets their product simply as a new volume by Margaret Atwood, and the front of the dust jacket neither includes a generic reference, nor references to Atwood’s reputation (those are again saved for the back flap). The entire back of the Bloomsbury edition is taken up with a colour photograph of the author (Fig. 9). As with their first edition of Oryx and Crake, Bloomsbury does not include any of the volume blurbs on the outside, and rather seems to work according to the principle that Atwood’s name and picture suffice as marketing tools. And Atwood’s picture is nothing if not recognisable; Lorraine York observes that “[m]any Canadians, in particular, seem conscious of Atwood as a visual spectacle, not least among them Atwood herself,” who “has proved herself to be adept at ridiculing such representations” (“Biography” 33). Inside the dust jacket, the cover of this Bloomsbury edition is a simple, dark cloth binding, with the title of the novel and name of author in shiny green letters on the spine. When the volume is opened, however, the coloured flysheets are bright green, referred to as “glow-in-the-dark green” by Atwood in an interview conducted by Leslie Hills (In the Wake). Hills notes that the green paper contains a green message inside, and the relationship between the colour green and green politics is indeed spelled out in the packaging of this edition of the novel.

Coinciding with the publication of The Year of the Flood in 2009, Bloomsbury also released special hardcover editions of some of Atwood’s novels, including Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood. These covers are designed in much the same style as that shown in Figure 8. Each features the name of the author in pride of place with the title of the novel in much smaller print. The remainder of these covers consists of winding designs and small pictures in white above the title (and repeated as a mirror image below), against single-colour backgrounds. On the cover of Oryx and Crake (Fig. 10), for example, double helices of DNA wind between images of laboratory instruments and animals; flower stalks and nooses twist around images of flowers, clocks, and gloves for The Handmaid’s Tale; sewing thread winds around needles, buttons and flowers on the cover of The Blind Assassin; while yarn and bonnet straps twist around images of birds and flowers on the cover of Alias Grace. Here branding takes both the form of the author brand and repeated design elements. “Refreshing the backlist of

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12 As Rebecca Braun and Emily Spiers note, literary celebrity inevitably entails commodification, as it “throws literature into doubt about itself, as it becomes a quantifiable good: a marketable book, a photographic authorial body...” (453).
an author is a regular part of successful publishing” (26), Angus Phillips notes, and in the case of Bloomsbury’s new series of Atwood hardbacks, branding is used to imply continuity between the novels. More banally, the publishers surely hoped to attract customers that desire a complete set of similarly designed Atwood novels. There is the added implication that novels by Atwood are instant classics that may be issued in expensive new editions fairly soon after their initial publication. Again, aesthetics cannot easily be disentangled from the financial impetus at work.

Figure 10. Front cover of the 2009 Bloomsbury hardcover edition of *Oryx and Crake*. Reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

In their paperback editions, the covers of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* have also been redesigned to fit an established Atwood line. The covers used for the first Virago paperback editions follow the style adopted by this publisher (now a Little, Brown imprint) for Atwood’s backlist in the 2000s, characteristically combining photographs and line drawings against monochrome backgrounds. These two paperback editions are immediately recognisable as belonging to the Virago Margaret Atwood brand (Fig. 11). As with Bloomsbury’s reissue of *Oryx and Crake*, much more focus is here placed on the animals in the novel than with previous cover designs, which tended to focus on human figures, at least in its first editions. Both Virago covers show animals perched on furniture: a green
rabbit for *Oryx and Crake* and a shorn purple Mo’Hair for *The Year of the Flood*. Mo’Hairs are bioengineered sheep used to grow hair transplanted to humans in the novel, and beneath the stool on which the animal balances, snakelike plaits of hair can be seen. The quirkiness of these designs fits well with the style Virago uses for their Atwood backlist, and seems to suggest that the novels themselves are rather surreal.

![Figure 11](image-url) Front covers of the Virago paperback editions of *Oryx and Crake* (2009) and *The Year of the Flood* (2010). Reproduced by permission of the Little, Brown Book Group Ltd.

At the time of the publication of *MaddAddam* in 2013, the three novels comprising the trilogy were being rebranded as part of a series and not just as Atwood novels, as is evident from the cover designs used. The dust jackets of the first Canadian and American editions are again identical in design, and, in addition to the name of the author and the title of the novel, both include the promotional phrase “Booker Prize Winning Author of *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” as well as the genre label “A Novel” (Fig. 12). The background of broken glass echoes that used by the same publishers for *The Year of the Flood*. The image of the nest and egg chimes thematically with the novel, recalling the Crakers’ myth about their own origin. In fact, the first sentences of the novel proper read: “In the beginning, you lived inside the Egg. That is where Crake made you” (*MA* 3). The handprint inside the egg may refer to this origin myth, but it could also been interpreted as a stop signal, and a very similar image is used on the cover of the Vintage
paperback edition of the novel (Fig. 16). Mythical eggs recur in Atwood’s work, as do images of human–bird hybrids. In the trilogy, this is perhaps most evident in Jimmy/Snowman’s picturing of his mother as “a mythical being, something that transcended the human, with dark wings and eyes that burned like Justice” (OC 191), as well as his flights of fantasy, during which he imagines the deceased Oryx “drifting towards him on her soft feathery wings” (OC 238), but on a more concrete level, Ren and Amanda wear bird costumes when they are captured in The Year of the Flood.

The dust jacket of the first British edition published by Bloomsbury, designed by the same team credited with their edition of The Year of the Flood (Fig. 8), sets the tone for one of the ways in which the books have been rebranded as a trilogy (Fig. 13). Featuring an overlapping pig and crow in bright pink and green, respectively, the image seems to be of a winged pig, thus recalling the idiom “pigs might fly,” as well as the winged Pigoons featured on the OrganInc birthday cards Jimmy used to get from his father (OC 50). The association with the idiom and the colourful, playful design lend the book a fantastical air. The design repeats the colours used for the rabbit pattern on the cover of Oryx and Crake by the same publishers (Fig. 6), thus establishing some continuity with the earlier novels. Underneath the dust jacket, the cloth binding is dark green, and the name of the author
and title of the novel are in shiny pink letters on the spine. The colour scheme is carried over to the book’s flypapers: the front is bright pink and with the same illustration of the pig in the lower left corner, while the back is bright green and shows the crow flying at the top (this time in the opposite direction, towards the text). These details again serve to render the book itself an aesthetic object, and are doubly interesting in the light of the fact that much of the plot of MaddAddam revolves around storytelling and the Crakers’ tentative adoption of the written word.

Figure 13. Front panel of the dust jacket for the first British edition of MaddAddam (Bloomsbury, 2013). Reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

MaddAddam is the first of the Bloomsbury first editions to display the name of the author significantly larger than the title of the novel, the first to include additional wording on the front (the name of the publisher), and also the first to include text on the back (Fig. 14). These are general endorsements of Atwood—by John Updike, Alice Munro, Michael Ondaatje and Germaine Greer—rather than blurbs that specifically refer to MaddAddam. (The second sentence of praise from Updike was printed on the back flap of the dust jacket of Bloomsbury’s edition of The Year of the Flood too.) The personages chosen to endorse Atwood’s work are arguably more significant than their words: John Updike’s name creates an association between Atwood’s work and canonical twentieth-century American writing; Alice Munro and Michael Ondaatje are the only other
Canadian writers who have international reputations comparable to that enjoyed by Atwood herself; and Germaine Greer’s name stresses the connection between Atwood’s work and second-wave feminism. In addition, the novel is proclaimed to be “the stunning conclusion to the trilogy that began with *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*” in the publisher’s description, thus ensuring that the reader is aware of the novel’s position in the series. Bloomsbury’s change of tack with the jacket design for this novel seems evident of a slight anxiety about *MaddAddam*, but also of an increased emphasis on the playful aspects of the novel.

Figure 14. Back panel of the dust jacket for the first British edition of *MaddAddam* (Bloomsbury, 2013). Reproduced by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

With the publication of *MaddAddam*, the first two novels were again repackaged. Virago produced new paperbacks that stylistically correspond to the Bloomsbury edition, rather than to their existing Atwood series (shown in Fig. 11). Virago’s *MaddAddam* cover uses the exact same design as that of Bloomsbury, but, appropriately for a paperback, includes an excerpt from the *Guardian* review of the novel between the title and the image. The covers of the new Virago editions of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* similarly use bold colours against a white backdrop, and each features animals (Fig. 15). The two rabbits on the cover of *Oryx and Crake* recall the earlier Virago paperback design (Fig. 11), while the Mo’Hair featured on their earlier paperback edition of *The Year of the Flood* has now
been replaced by a liobam, a lion–lamb animal splice described in the novel. The inclusion of animals on all three covers is markedly different from the first edition covers used for *Oryx and Crake* (Figs. 1, 2 and 4) and *The Year of the Flood* (Figs. 7 and 8), but follow on from the earlier Virago covers reproduced in Figure 11. The development from human figures to stylised animal figures is particularly striking in the case of *Oryx and Crake*, and seems to indicate that more emphasis is placed on the animals featured in the novel in the marketing of later editions, while its fantastical aspects also take precedence. Moreover, the Virago paperback editions tend to emphasise light-heartedness rather than weighty themes such as apocalypse, climate change, or global corporate capitalism.

![Figure 15. Front covers of the 2013 Virago paperback editions of the MaddAddam Trilogy. Reproduced by permission of the Little, Brown Book Group, Ltd.](image)

A completed series affords publishers different marketing opportunities, and the three novels have, for example, also appeared as a paperback boxset published by Vintage. Just as the Virago covers connect the three novels visually, the covers used for the Vintage boxset are designed in the same style, but they also linked through other cross-references. All three covers include the promotional tagline “National Bestseller” printed at the top, and *The Year of the Flood* bears the endorsement “Booker Prize-Winning Author of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” while the *MaddAddam* cover bears the legend “Booker Prize-Winning Author of *The Year of the Flood* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*” (Fig. 16).

The increased use of the same styles for all three volumes tends to highlight the similarities of the novels and obscure the differences between them. While MaddAddam is a continuation of the storylines of the first two novels, little critical attention has yet been paid to its vast stylistic differences from Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood (two novels that are already very different from each other), which is perhaps in part attributable to the context created through its marketing. Despite the thematic importance of bioengineering in Oryx and Crake, animals do not feature on any of dust jackets of the first editions of that novel, but there is increased emphasis on animals on the covers of subsequent editions and on the covers of the other two novels. Nevertheless, human faces take pride of place on the covers of the boxset, and none of the later covers have the overt environmental thrust of the first Canadian edition of Oryx and Crake (Fig. 1). This is in part related to the content of the novels. The shock of extinction and environmental destruction is perhaps greatest in the first novel, where the protagonist seems to be the lone human survivor of the pandemic through much of the text. In the second and third volumes, environmental issues are still prevalent in the flashbacks to the pre-apocalyptic conditions, but much more emphasis is placed on the possible forms ethical communities may take, as well as on who could become part of such communities. It seems no coincidence that the Vintage cover of MaddAddam shows a face with closed eyes (Fig. 16)—events in the novel spell the end for the survival of humanity in conventional biological forms, and its tone is much more dreamlike than that of its predecessors.
An increased emphasis on certain thematic and stylistic details of *Oryx and Crake* (especially on animals and the fantastic) is evident in the way the cover designs have changed in the decade between its publication and that of *MaddAddam*. Rebranding is of course a marketing ploy, with the object of attracting new readers for the ‘old’ novels each time a new volume appears. However, the extensive redesign of *Oryx and Crake* indicates that some effort has been put into presenting the three novels as a unified work. The same kind of movement towards increased unity can also be seen in the prefaces and epigraphs used in the three novels, discussed in the next part.

**Front Matter and Epigraphs**

All three Bloomsbury first editions of the MaddAddam Trilogy list Atwood’s previous publications between the half-title and title pages, thereby establishing a lineage for the work in question. They also all bear dedications. That of *Oryx and Crake* reads “[f]or my family,” while the dedication in *The Year of the Flood* is more specific, but carry the same meaning: “For Graeme and Jess” (Atwood’s partner and daughter). The dedication in *MaddAddam* moves beyond immediate family: “For my family / and for Larry Gaynor (1939–2010).” Larry Gaynor was a scriptwriter and friend of Atwood and Gibson’s, and according to Atwood the character of Zeb was partly based on him. The focus on family and friendship in the dedications is of course not particularly remarkable—dedications are usually the most personal of all peritexts, and each of these could be described as a private dedicatee, described by Genette as “a person, known to the public or not, to whom a work is dedicated in the name of a personal relationship: friendship, kinship, or other” (*Paratexts* 131). Dedications printed for all readers to see are of course never private in the ordinary sense of the word: they curiously display the private in public.

Genette calls dedication a “typically performative act” involving “demonstration, ostentation, exhibition: it proclaims a relationship, whether intellectual or personal, actual or symbolic, and this proclamation is always at the service of the work” (*Paratexts* 134–35, my emphasis). This formulation highlights the functions dedications could fulfil, and

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13 Upon his death Atwood tweeted a picture of him with the words: “Old friend Larry Gaynor, who just died.. part model for Zeb in YOTF. Where was he in this pic? Dunno..” (19 May 2010).
following this line of reasoning, it seems significant that the volumes of the MaddAddam Trilogy are all dedicated to close family members and a deceased friend. In one way or another, each of the three novels involves the rethinking of family and other interpersonal relationships in the face of environmental change and an apocalyptic pandemic. Traditional nuclear families are shown to be either dysfunctional or inadequate, while new communities are founded upon other than biological ties. One of the key themes of the trilogy is the redefinition of kinship, an aspect I return to in the following chapters.

*Oryx and Crake* includes two epigraphs, placed between the dedication and the table of contents.¹⁴ The first is from Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and has been modernised to read “I could perhaps like others have astonished you with strange improbable tales; but I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner and style; because my principal design was to inform you, and not to amuse you.” The second is from Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and reads: “Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?” These two epigraphs fulfil a variety of functions. First, they serve to contextualise *Oryx and Crake* (and, by implication, the rest of the trilogy) on Atwood’s own terms. This is important, given Atwood’s propensity for dictating the reception of her work, noted in the previous chapter. Second, the Swift epigraph serves to insert *Oryx and Crake* into a venerable tradition of literary satire. The epigraph from Woolf, on the other hand, speaks to a rather different, albeit no less canonical tradition in English, namely that of the internal monologue.

Taken together, the two epigraphs may seem to give rather contradictory information about *Oryx and Crake*—except for the fact that this novel is cast as the continuation of the canon from which it takes its epigraphs. In one of few remarks on the epigraphs used in this novel, Coral Ann Howells convincingly shows that the narrative sets out to erode the female–male, aesthetic–scientific binary highlighted by the pointed, gendered difference between Gulliver’s emphasis on fact, and Lily Briscoe’s “more speculative view of the world” (“Dystopian” 170).¹⁵ According to

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¹⁴ Only two of her ten novels published before *Oryx and Crake* do not bear epigraphs—*Surfacing* (1972) and *Lady Oracle* (1976). With a few exceptions, such as Andy Jones’s commentary on the epigraphs to *Alias Grace*, Atwood’s choice of epigraphs has in general received little sustained critical attention.

¹⁵ Greg Garrard’s characterisation of the thematic relevance of the epigraph is typical of most comments: “the world of *Oryx and Crake* splices together the grotesque humanity of Brobdingnag, the mad scientists of the Laputan Academy, the contest of reason and the
Howells, this is done by casting both the main artist (Jimmy) and the main scientist (Crake) as men, and by affirming that “the creative imagination is not confined to artists, but is shared by scientists, for it is one of the qualities that distinguish human beings” (“Dystopian” 170). In what follows, I do not focus on further comparison of the epigraphs, but instead discuss them separately to stress the different, yet related, generic and thematic contexts they help create.

The epigraph from *Gulliver's Travels* comes from the start of the very last chapter of Swift’s satire. The first part of the chapter’s title is “The Author’s veracity” and in it, the reader is directly addressed:

> Thus, gentle reader, I have given thee a faithful history of my travels for sixteen years and above seven months: wherein I have not been so studious of ornament as of truth. I could, perhaps, like others, have astonished thee with strange improbable tales; but I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact, in the simplest manner and style; because my principal design was to inform, and not to amuse thee. (Swift, *Gulliver’s* 322–23)

By aligning her work with Swift’s satire, Atwood’s epigraph evokes the ironic implications exploited by Swift. On the face of it, the famously unreliable narrator of *Gulliver’s Travels* hereby contradicts most of his preceding narrative by metaleptically stepping outside of the diegesis to address his readers. Flying islands, tiny Lilliputians, giant Brobdingnagians and lands where the human population is subject to the rule of benevolent talking horses can hardly be deemed “truth” or “plain matter of fact”: Gulliver’s fantastic voyages are precisely “strange improbable tales.” Furthermore, while the narrator’s primary object may not have been to amuse his audience, comedy certainly plays an important role in Swift’s satire. By thus drawing attention to the incongruity of Gulliver’s tales, Swift forces readers to see through the narrator’s protestations. On another level, the second sentence, used as an epigraph for *Oryx and Crake*, would be interpreted as a claim to truth—it is precisely because Gulliver is an unreliable everyman that Swift uses him to reveal deeper truths about human nature—truths that remain true, irrespective of the diegetic context of their presentation.

Howells comments on the fact that both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* include Swiftian epigraphs. *The Handmaid’s Tale* includes an epigraph from *A Modest Proposal* that reads “But as to myself, having body in the Land of the Houynhmns [sic], and, of course, Swift’s all-encompassing satirical irony” (“Reading” 237); Gerry Canavan provides a similar interpretation (“Hope” 152).

16 Howells fails to remark on the fact that her assertion about the distinctiveness of human imagination is itself steeped in the human exceptionalism satirically dismantled in the trilogy.
been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal . . . ." Swift’s sentence continues “which, as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expense and little trouble, full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging England” (Modest 2638). Atwood thus left out the “solid and real” part of the sentence used as the epigraph to The Handmaid’s Tale, while she included the “plain matter of fact” statement in the epigraph to Oryx and Crake. In Atwood’s choice of epigraphs for The Handmaid’s Tale and Oryx and Crake, Howells detects a progressively darker trajectory, paralleled by a similar development in the works by Swift from which Atwood quotes. Accordingly, Howells identifies a move on Atwood’s part away from the “political and social satire” of The Handmaid’s Tale, to “a satire against mankind” in Oryx and Crake ("Dystopian” 169). Although I do not fully agree with her assessment of Atwood’s satirical target, as ought to become clear through the rest of this study, Howells’s short discussion highlights some of the obvious intersections between mode and the chosen epigraphs in both of these novels.18

Whereas Gulliver’s exhortation comes at the very end of his story, Atwood’s trilogy starts in this way. Of course Swift is never to be taken at face value, and Gulliver cannot be trusted. Nevertheless this direct address to the reader, despite its obvious ironic tone, also serves to create a kind of pact or conspiracy between the reader and narrator. Naturally all reading relies on some kind of similar contract between text and reader, with meaning only being created in reading, but Swift in effect here urges the reader to assent to his claim of veracity, literal or otherwise. Just as Gulliver knows that he is telling a tall tale, Swift purposefully crafted his fantastical satire so the reader knows that this is both untrue and true at the same time, albeit on different levels. Readers are therefore forewarned of the satirical mode employed in Oryx and Crake, but are simultaneously exhorted to view the content as “plain matter of fact.” Atwood’s novel, like Swift’s, simultaneously includes strange, improbable tales and plain facts. Seeing the novel as only the one or the other would be reductive.

Atwood has repeatedly commented on the mimetic correspondence between scientific reality and technology depicted in Oryx and Crake in epitexts, as for example in the passage from “Writing Oryx and Crake” cited

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17 Howells’s use of “mankind” is telling, as this is the first of Atwood’s novels to focus exclusively on male protagonists.

18 The epigraphical connection between The Handmaid’s Tale and Oryx and Crake is paralleled by the frequent references to the earlier novel on the covers of the trilogy.
above. Despite this insistence, the copyright page of *Oryx and Crake* bears, in addition to publication information, the following disclaimer: “This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously.” At the same time, however, by so obviously denying the satiric mode of her tale using Gulliver’s words, *Oryx and Crake* risks being viewed as *nothing but* satire. As Atwood remarks in an interview with Martin Halliwell, a possible reaction from readers could include thinking that “nobody can predict the future because there are so many variables” (260). Such a reaction would be contrary to the environmental agenda of the novels, as it would promote inertia rather than action. Accordingly, using the satirical mode is a balancing act, as it could be used to deny or underplay the environmentalist exhortations of the novel. Using satire allows the author to mock her own society (and her readers), while she at the same time avoids offering workable environmental alternatives, as would be expected from a factual account. Satire can indeed be seen as a mode of coping with the Anthropocene, in that it emphasises the complexity of environmental problems, without offering simplified solutions.

The epigraph from Woolf, taken from the final part of *To the Lighthouse*, is completely different in tone from that from Swift: Gulliver claims veracity whereas Lily Briscoe utters a series of rhetorical questions. Although Woolf’s novel differs substantially from *Oryx and Crake*, the two texts do share some characteristics. As mentioned above, the epigraph from Woolf is one of the numerous instances of interior monologue in the novel. It could therefore be related to Atwood’s characteristic use of focalisation. Woolf’s novel shares another trait with Atwood’s, in that its narrative clearly falls into *before* and *after* parts. Here the watershed stretches over a period of ten years, spanning the First World War in which Andrew Ramsay is killed, the death of Prue Ramsay, and the death of their mother, Mrs Ramsay. Upon Lily Briscoe’s return to the island after these events

> the house, the place, the morning, all seemed strangers to her. She had no attachment here, she felt, no relations with it, anything might happen, and whatever did happen, a step outside, a voice calling (‘It’s not in the cupboard; it’s on the landing,’ someone cried), was a question, as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow. How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was, she thought, looking at her empty coffee cup. Mrs Ramsay

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19 The wording differs slightly between the different editions of the novel. Although its inclusion in a work of fiction is curious, it is by no means exceptional, but the Bloomsbury editions of *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam* do not bear similar disclaimers.

20 Guiseppina Botta sees the Woolf epigraph as foundational for a novel in which “the protagonist moves in quest of safety, searching for a guide, a shelter” (244).
dead; Andrew killed; Prue dead too—repeat it as she might, it roused no
feeling in her. (Woolf 227)

The epigraph captures the same sense of being adrift, both physically and
emotionally; there is “no guide, no shelter” for Lily or anyone else. After the
pandemic, Jimmy/Snowman is literally alone, as perhaps the last surviving
human. Quoting Coleridge, he is “All, all alone. Alone on a wide, wide sea”
(OC 10); he too is adrift in a world he thought he knew, which has changed
beyond recognition. There is thus an almost post-apocalyptic quality to the
final part of To the Lighthouse that is echoed in the much more visceral
post-pandemic setting of Oryx and Crake.21

While the two epigraphs to Oryx and Crake associate the novel with
giants of the literary canon, The Year of the Flood includes a Gardener
hymn, entitled “The Garden,” rather than an epigraph taken from another
work.22 Compared to the epigraphs chosen for Oryx and Crake, the
implication seems to be that the fictional world has become its own context,
and to some extent this is of course true of a second volume in a trilogy,
however independent it may be of the first. The same tendency to complete
immersion in the fictional world may also be detected in the metaleptic
book tour events held in support of The Year of the Flood detailed in
Chapter 4. Like the other hymns included in each of the parts of the novel,
this one is attributed to The God’s Gardeners Oral Hymnbook, a work
which only exists as excerpts in the novel.23 The epigraphs to Oryx and
Crake point both outwards and backwards, providing generic and thematic
context to the novel while anchoring it in tradition. By contrast, this
epigraph is decidedly inward-looking. Yet the hymn does important work in
setting the scene and tone for the novel. It establishes the foundations of the
Gardeners’ creed and the characteristics of their faith: their religion is
largely based on Christianity, exhibits a tendency to view the world both
allegorically and elegiacally (and often nostalgically), and the purpose of the
Gardeners is to restore the environment.

There are no epigraphs to MaddAddam, although the palindromic
title of the novel fulfils a function similar to the role played by “The Garden”
in The Year of the Flood, in that it is rooted firmly in the intradiegetic

21 Woolf’s novel reappears in Oryx and Crake; Jimmy remembers it as one of the animated
parodies he put together at university: “a naked Pride and Prejudice and a naked To the
Lighthouse, just for laughs” (OC 187).
22 Louise Squire seems to regard the first two numbered chapters of the novel (focalised by
Toby and narrated by Ren, respectively) as epigraphs. While these chapters are certainly
introductory, I do not agree that they are epigraphical.
23 The hymns of the Gardeners are completely different from Atwood’s poetry in style and
tone, but they do share some of the same imagery, as well as a penchant for surprising
juxtapositions.
world. The name MaddAddam first occurs in Oryx and Crake and recurs in
The Year of the Flood, so this title connects the different novels to each
other. The different versions of the cover do not all immediately establish
how the word is to be spelled (e.g. Fig. 13), but this is clarified by the use of
both upper- and lowercase letters on the half title pages. From a marketing
point of view, using a neologism as a title could either be positive (it is
distinctive) or negative (it may alienate potential readers before they have
even bought the product). Of particular interest is the manner in which the
coinage uses the same principles as those employed to create the satirised
brand names within the novels. It therefore seems to be at least in part a
metaleptical, auto-satirical gesture. MaddAddam does, however, include a
prefatory piece entitled “The MaddAddam Trilogy: The Story So Far” (xii–
 XVI). This is divided into two sections, each providing a two-page summary
of one of the earlier novels. The content of these summaries is less
interesting than the fact of their inclusion: they confirm that MaddAddam
is the least independent of the three novels, and least understandable if
read independently, as it continues the united plot lines of the earlier
volumes.

Acknowledgements and Back Matter

Each of the three novels concludes with fairly detailed acknowledgements,
and it is in these peritexts that the metaleptic activist impetus of the
MaddAddam Trilogy is most explicitly articulated. Both the
acknowledgements in The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam start with
claims of veracity, similar to the claims Atwood makes in “Writing Oryx
and Crake”:

The Year of the Flood is fiction, but the general tendencies and many of
the details in it are alarmingly close to fact. (YF 433)

Although MaddAddam is a work of fiction, it does not include any
technologies or biobeings that do not already exist, are not under
construction, or are not possible in theory. (MA 393)

In the case of The Year of the Flood, this is in short order followed by a
curious claim to fictionality, reminiscent of the disclaimer on the copyright

24 This is not to say that the title of Oryx and Crake is not centred on the fictional world,
consisting as it does of two species names used as the nicknames of two characters, but the
point is that these names are not invented, although the use of such an obscure title is
anomalous in Atwood’s body of novels (with the obvious later exception of MaddAddam).
page of *Oryx and Crake*: “The Gardeners themselves are not modelled on any extant religion, though some of their theology and practices are not without precedent” (*YF* 433). The basic doctrine of the Gardeners is clearly modelled on Christianity, if not on a specific religious group, so this statement appears analogous to Gulliver’s protestation that his tales are “plain matter of fact” in the epigraph to *Oryx and Crake*. Moreover, the next sentence appears to grant the Gardeners some extratextual existence: “Their saints have been chosen for their contributions to those areas of life dear to the hearts of the Gardeners; they have many more saints, as well, but they are not in this book” (*YF* 433). The irony seems intended and is also present in the discussion of the recording of the Gardener hymns by Orville Stoeber, called *Hymns of the God’s Gardeners*. Here Atwood metaleptically condones using the hymns, as long as it is not for profit: “Anyone who wishes to use any of these hymns for amateur devotional or environmental purposes is more than welcome to do so” (*YF* 433). The statement is ambiguous in tone and intent, and it is hard to know whether this should be interpreted as making fun of devoted readers who consume all things Atwood and therefore may want to engage in Gardener-like activities, or whether it should be seen as an earnest offer. In all likelihood it is a bit of both. During Atwood’s elaborate book tour promoting *The Year of the Flood*, the Gardener hymns and amateur performances *did* play a substantial part, as can be seen from the documentary film *In the Wake of the Flood* (2010), which director Rob Mann created of the tour. In Chapter 4, both the book tour and the hymns are discussed as important paratexts and significant parts of Atwood’s environmental project in the trilogy.

The acknowledgements in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* are also used to alert readers to further paratexts. After thanking various publishers and literary estates for permission to quote excerpts in *Oryx and Crake*, it is noted that “[a] full list of the other quotations used or paraphrased on the fridge magnets in this book may be found at oryxandcrake.com” (377). According to the acknowledgements, “[d]eep background was inadvertently supplied by many magazines and newspapers and non-fiction science writers encountered over the years” (*OC* 378), and this now defunct website apparently included a reading list of sorts. Three accompanying websites are mentioned for *The Year of the Flood* (separate Canadian, American, and British ones, *YF* 433). The yearoftheflood.com site includes, for example, sections linking to various online vendors of the novels and Stoeber’s CD, as well as to merchandise related to the novels (t-shirts and tote bags), a reading list of “some of the books it is thought may have influenced the founders of the God’s Gardeners in their youth, before they discarded electronic modes of
communication and severely limited their use of paper products,” and more information about the 2009 book tour and related events, including a section entitled “Greening the Tour” on how the environmental impact of the book tour was managed. Recommending additional reading to readers of the trilogy seems an overt instantiation of its environmental project, here taking the form of raising awareness and promoting self-education. While they provide evidence of the environmental education project that underlies the MaddAddam Trilogy at least in part, the titles in the reading list are also directly connected to the intradiegetic content of the novels, with many of the authors appearing as Gardener saints. The acknowledgements therefore facilitate another metaleptic transgression that connects the fictional saints to their real-world environmentalist precedents.

In addition to more personal notes of thanks, the acknowledgements of all three novels also note the fact that Atwood auctioned off some of the character names in the trilogy. *Oryx and Crake* includes a note that “[t]he name ‘Amanda Payne’ was graciously supplied by its auction-winning owner, thereby raising much-needed funds for the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (U.K.)” (377). A similar note about Amanda's name appears in the acknowledgements to *The Year of the Flood* (433–34). Amanda is a minor character in the first novel, but she plays a more prominent role subsequently. In *Oryx and Crake* her name is described as “an invention, like much about her” (*OC* 241). Her reinvention of herself hinges on the rejection of her original name, *Barb Jones*, and her past: “She’d had to reinvent herself, she told Jimmy, the original Barb having been so bulldozed by her abusive, white-trash, sugar-overdosed family that she’d been nothing but a yard-sale reject, like a wind chime made of bent forks or a three-legged chair” (*OC* 241). In *The Year of the Flood* Amanda describes her given name as “a white-trash name” and points out: “That was my identity. But I don’t have an identity now. So I’m invisible” (*YF* 85). In this way, Amanda seems to follow the long line of Atwood characters that change their names to assert their agency. By thus intradiegetically insisting on the fictionality of a name that clearly was not just “an invention,” Atwood subtly, and metaleptically, draws attention to her extratextual activism.

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25 The recommended titles on the *Year of the Flood* reading list have been reproduced as Appendix B.
26 Other authors have since followed suit. In Oct. 2014 *The Guardian* reported that “[s]eventeen authors, including Atwood, McEwan, Julian Barnes, Sadie Smith and Will Self, are selling naming rights to characters in upcoming works next month, in a charity auction in London. Money raised from the sale, suitably dubbed the Immortality Auction, will go to Freedom from Torture, a charity that provides therapies and support to torture survivors” (Cain).
Two more names in *The Year of the Flood* were auctioned off for good causes: “Saint Allan Sparrow of Clean Air was sponsored by an auction run by CAIR (CommunityAIR, Toronto),” while the character name Rebecca Eckler is noted to appear “thanks to a benefit auction for *The Walrus* magazine (Canada)” (*YF* 434). This paragraph of the acknowledgements is concluded with typically dry humour: “My thanks to all name donors” (*YF* 434). Throughout the novel, the Gardeners use euphemisms to describe events, and variations on gifting and donation are some of the most common. Suicide is for example glossed as a character’s belief that “she was *donating* herself to the matrix of Life through her own volition” (*YF* 179, my emphasis), while Adam One describes the surviving Gardeners’ resorting to meat-eating after the pandemic in similar terms: “But we are blessed that so many of our Rat relatives have *donated* their protein to us, thus enabling us to remain on this Earthly plane” (*YF* 346, my emphasis). In thus echoing intradiegetic euphemism, Atwood seems to simultaneously create a connection with the rather sinister donations in the novel and to make fun of such a connection.

The acknowledgements in *MaddAddam* again mention the auctions for the character names of Amanda Payne and Rebecca Eckler, before stating: “Joining them in *MaddAddam* are ‘Allan Slaight,’ courtesy of his daughter, Maria (his biography is called *Sleight [sic] of Hand*); ‘Katrina Wu,’ courtesy of Yung Wu; and ‘March,’ courtesy of a blind draw on Wattpad.com that was won by Lucas Fernandes” (*MA* 393). It continues to specify that the name “Saint Nikolai Vavilov came from Sona Grovenstein” (*MA* 393). Not all of these auctions have been for the benefit of environmental causes, but the fact that Atwood does create these kinds of links between her fictional world and various other interests seems significant in itself. It blurs the line between what she does “as a writer” and what she does “as a citizen,” a boundary she has tried to uphold in interviews (e.g. Meyer and O’Riordan 163), while also blurring the boundaries between high and low art—some of these character names have not sprung from the artist’s imagination, but were suggested by others and then *bought*.

Aesthetic and financial aspects are inextricably connected in the publishing world (as also seen in the cover designs of the books themselves) and the acknowledgements repeatedly draw attention to this tie. Significantly, Amanda Payne and Rebecca Eckler are the only of the major characters in the novel whose surnames we learn, which seems to indicate that the auctions had at least some, if minor, impact on the style of the trilogy. These auctions also fit in with Atwood’s reputation for eccentricity and irreverence; a reputation which gained some momentum with the
introduction of her remote signing device, the LongPen, at the 2006 London Book Fair and which was underscored by the *Year of the Flood* book tour.\textsuperscript{27} Atwood’s status, age, and pedigree probably help her ‘get away’ with what may uncharitably be described as gimmicks, and simultaneously garner more attention for the causes she chooses to champion. Auctions like these succeed *because* of her literary stature and considerable cultural capital, and her literary merit seems to remain undamaged by her public exploits. Stature and celebrity feed into each other (here financially benefitting certain causes), which shows that Atwood is not entirely averse to using her work and stature to promote messages, despite her understandable reluctance to reduce her work to messages.

While the acknowledgements provide evidence of the environmentalist project Atwood pursues in the trilogy, and to some extent reinforces the sense that Atwood does possess environmentalist capital, all three British first editions of the novels follow these by “A Note on the Author” that emphasises Atwood’s cultural capital by highlighting the prizes for which Atwood has either been nominated or that she received. In *MaddAddam* there is additional focus on the author’s “experimentation with both narrative forms and new digital publishing platforms.”\textsuperscript{28} In the first Bloomsbury editions of *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam* this is followed by a colophon, headed “A Note on the Type” and “A Note about the Type,” respectively:

> The text of this book is set in Epic Thin, one of six weights in a contemporary and versatile font family, with many subtleties in its construction. Epic is a true workhorse and is effective both as a readable text face and one that is visually interesting when used in display. (*YF*)

> This book was set in a typeface called Walbaum. The original cutting of this face was made by Justus Erich Walbaum (1768–1839) in Weimar in 1810. The type was revived by the Monotype Corporation in 1934. Young Walbaum began his artistic career as an apprentice to a maker of cookie moulds. How he managed to leave this field and become a successful punch cutter remains a mystery. Although the type that bears his name

\textsuperscript{27} The LongPen could in effect render book tours—or at least this aspect of them—obsolete, but at its launch Atwood described it as a “democratising tool,” since it would enable authors to interact with audiences who cannot usually attend book tours (Burkeman). In a detailed analysis of the LongPen, Phoebe Ann Wolframe considers the device “part of Atwood’s oeuvre” and “one in a series of texts, both written and non-written, which deal with the theme of self-extension and celebrity control” (15). In a 2015 interview, Atwood remarks that the primary application of the LongPen currently is “remote signatures for things like banking” (Venkataraman). As such, the LongPen may well be deemed another site of unresolved tension between invention and commerce in Atwood’s production.

\textsuperscript{28} Here followed by a list of online contact details: her website address, Facebook, Twitter, Wattpad and Byliner accounts, as well as to the website address of the Margaret Atwood Society.
may be classified as modern, numerous slight irregularities in its cut give this face its humane manner. (MA)

Presumably, authors exert little or no control over the wording of such texts. While it is tempting to identify an Atwoodian ring to the note included in MaddAddam, for example, a quick Internet search reveals that a colophon with the exact same wording already appeared in the 2005 paperback edition of Mary Kinzie’s poetry collection Drift.29 And while the colophons have little bearing on the contents of the MaddAddam Trilogy or on Atwood’s environmental project, they actively showcase that a book is a commodity as much as a work of art. Megan L. Benton unequivocally connects the revival of the colophon to the booming sales of expensive, limited editions in the United States after the First World War. “[U]nder the pretext of informational service,” she notes, the colophon “enabled publishers to point out the craft-based aspects of production that distinguished fine bookmaking from ordinary” (64, 199).30 This use of the colophon is particularly apparent in the signed and numbered limited small-press editions of Atwood’s poetry and short stories. These books are clearly marked (usually by Atwood herself) as collector’s items, and profits from their sales have frequently benefitted various good causes. Colophons are thus both marks of distinction, frequently used to justify the higher prices of special editions, and reminders of the materiality of the books they appear in: the final forms of books are the result of authorial intent, design, marketing, the publishers’ bottom line, and a bit of happenstance that all add to the reading experience (and the shelf price).

The peritexts discussed in this chapter all highlight different aspects of the novels. Covers, dust jackets and colophons reveal something about the buyers the various publishers hope to entice and also testify to the increasingly globalised publishing environment. The epigraphs help create generic and canonical contexts, and like the packaging of the novels show a tendency towards unification and resolution absent in the open endings of the texts themselves. Both intradiegetically and in its peritexts, there is an increased focus on various aspects of storytelling in the trilogy, a point

29 This type of information is frequently left out when texts are rendered digitally searchable, so it is hard to say whether Kinzie’s volume is the first to use this exact description of Walbaum. Authorship of colophons is seldom acknowledged, and neither of these is attributed to anyone.

30 At the urging of type designer William Addison Dwiggins (1880–1956), notes on type became a distinguishing feature of books published by Knopf, and other publishers have since followed suit. According to Paul Shaw, Dwiggins intended his colophons to draw “the reading public’s attention to a book’s design and manufacturing background” (30), but Benton quotes Dwiggins also complaining about the fact that Knopf’s colophons were merely included to “give the books tone” (199).
discussed extensively in Chapter 5. Cover designs of subsequent editions have more and more focussed on the whimsical aspects of the novels, and appear to underplay the seriousness of their themes. This is particularly evident in the case of the composite image resembling a flying pig on the *MaddAddam* cover (Fig. 13), which highlights the fabulous or yarn-like qualities of that novel. With the publication of *MaddAddam*, the earlier novels were repackaged using the same style (Fig. 15), and as a result some of the peritexts contradict others, as far as the overall environmental project of the trilogy is concerned: while Atwood repeatedly stresses the factual basis of her fictional enterprise in the various acknowledgements to the novels, the emphasis on the fantastic in the packaging of the novels seems to undermine these claims to veracity. Moreover, it is clear that the covers of the novels play a role in conveying a message, as can be seen with the overt use of the imagery of climate change on the cover of the first Canadian edition of *Oryx and Crake* (Fig. 1).

As with the use of satire in the texts, the creation of such tensions between packaging and content is a way of entertaining ambiguity and avoiding the preachiness Atwood is always quick to disavow. Furthermore, it appears as playful insistence on the hybridity inherent in the trilogy. The books are commodified artefacts that contain criticism of the commercial system they are themselves implicated in. The three novels are simultaneously works of art, activist projects, and commodities. Relegating them to any one category would be to simplify the complexity of Atwood’s overall environmental project. Dedications and acknowledgements show just how entangled the public and the private, the political and the artistic, and the pecuniary and the aesthetic are. Peritexts thus play a role in setting the scene for readers’ encounter with the texts proper—the subject of the following chapters.
As argued in the introduction, biology emerges as a mediating third term between various binaries in the MaddAddam Trilogy, although it does not resolve the tension between these opposites. In *Oryx and Crake*, environmental and other concerns are consistently portrayed in relation to various forms of extinction. Extinction, biologically speaking the "permanent disappearance of a species throughout its entire range, caused by the failure to reproduce and the death of all remaining members" (Park and Allaby), is integral to Crake’s apocalyptic environmental utopianism: the pandemic Crake spreads is intended to cause the extinction of humanity, thereby putting a stop to the environmental destruction wrought by rampant consumerism and global capitalist exploitation. The notion of extinction clearly illustrates the contradictory views of human exceptionalism inherent in environmentalism: in regarding anthropogenic extinction as *unnatural*, humanity is somehow placed beyond the natural. Yet, extinction is also part and parcel of the *natural* process of evolution. Here too, though, it is a question of scope and scale, and the current unprecedented rate of mass extinction cannot be simply dismissed as inherent to the natural order of things, since humanity has the power to prevent at least some of these extinctions. Discussions of extinction thus lay bare the tension between notions of the natural and the artificial, both in *Oryx and Crake* and in environmentalism more generally.

The pre-apocalyptic world of the MaddAddam Trilogy is in part already apocalyptic, in the sense in which Frederick Buell describes apocalypse becoming “a way of life.” Climate change and pollution have produced irrevocable change, and these changes form the backdrop to the novel. Accordingly, Heather Sullivan, for instance, deems the pre-apocalyptic world of the trilogy exemplary of “slow violence” (55), defined by Rob Nixon as “a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). While this holds true for at least some of the environmental damage alluded to in *Oryx and Crake*, much violence is explicitly foregrounded, and does not take place “gradually and out of sight” (Nixon 2). Violence is at the heart of the pre-apocalyptic society, and both the corporations and the pleeblands are portrayed as governed by the logic of social Darwinism, in which the strongest survive because of their exploitation of others.

In the pre-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake* numerous species extinctions are paralleled with what may be termed cultural extinctions, which include the general demise of the humanities and highbrow culture,
but also moral decline. On a political level, democracy and nation states appear to be things of the past. Almost all entertainment is based on violence and exploitation, and the arts are shown to serve the interests of commerce. Accordingly, extinction does not only relate to genes, but also to memes, defined by Richard Dawkins as those “unit[s] of cultural transmission” which “propagate themselves in the meme pool by jumping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation” (249). The entanglement of nature and culture is represented as a vicious circle of extinctions: biodiversity loss appears directly related to a society that has abandoned its moral compass in order to consume more, which in turn fuels environmental degradation.

This chapter first describes the role played by extinction in situating the near-future, pre-pandemic past of the narrative in relation to readers of the novel. Next the relationship between extinction and evolution is detailed in brief. Crake’s Paradice Project testifies to his fundamental misunderstanding of Darwinian evolution: evolution is not ordered, predictable or teleological, but random and contextual. Crake’s misunderstanding is shown to be as detrimental as that of social Darwinists in the corporate pre-pandemic world. By aligning Crake’s vision of saving the planet from destructive human influence with the equivocal name Paradice, readers are reminded that this is just one of many possible outcomes; all results of Crake’s endeavours are uncertain, and this is at best an ambiguous paradise. Crake’s misconception of evolution is also akin to environmentalist views of nature as homeostatic, and his teleological conception is the main reason why his attempt to rid the Paradice Models (called Crakers by everyone else) of all undesired traits through bioengineering fails. The novel should therefore not only be read as a satire of techno-optimism, as has often been the case, but also as a satire of intelligent design (albeit science-based). Although Crake’s misunderstanding may be deemed tragic, his unwitting re-enactment of the narrative patterns of Christian apocalypticism adds an element of farce, and appears to bear out Atwood’s assertion that “we are our plots,” discussed in the introduction.

I then turn to Jimmy’s complicitous role in pre-pandemic commercialism. Crake’s project clearly shows that the imagination is not only put to good uses, and this is paralleled by the inability of the arts to counter commercialism in the novel. Late capitalism is intimately

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1 J. Brooks Bouson’s “It’s Game Over Forever: Atwood’s Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*” (2004), is a good example of a reading concentrating on the detrimental aspects of technology.
connected to death and extinction in *Oryx and Crake*, and through branding the arts are shown to facilitate commercial exploitation, to a degree. Finally, I briefly consider the character of Oryx. Her inscrutability may either be interpreted in a feminist or postfeminist light, and serves to highlight the important role played by storytelling in this novel and the trilogy as a whole.

### Timing the Apocalypse

To mark the difference between his pre- and post-apocalyptic existence, Jimmy takes the name *Snowman* after the catastrophe, and refers throughout to his previous self in the third person. In this way, he becomes a character in his own post-apocalyptic narrative, and this is the most overt form intradiegetic metalepsis takes in the novel. Crake’s apocalyptic pandemic thus forms a chasm in the narrative of *Oryx and Crake*, a break that is underscored both onomastically and through the tense of narration: passages narrated in the present tense, and set in Snowman’s post-apocalyptic present, are alternated with much longer recollections of Snowman’s past, pre-apocalyptic life as Jimmy.\(^2\) This emphasis on the past serves to bring the narrative closer in time to the readers of the novel, while also underscoring the pre-apocalyptic causes of environmental degradation.

Crake’s rules stipulated that those working on the Paradice Project could not have names “for which a physical equivalent—even stuffed, even skeletal—could not be demonstrated. No unicorns, no griffins, no manticores or basilisks” (*OC* 7). Snowman derives “bitter pleasure” as much from breaking Crake’s rules as from the adoption of this “dubious label” at a time when climate change has rendered snow obsolete in North America (*OC* 7). His decision to introduce himself as *Snowman* to the Crakers springs from his desire to “forget the past—the distant past, the immediate past, the past in any form” (*OC* 348). More pertinently, by choosing a fictional name, Snowman is right from the outset of the novel poised as an alternative to the scientism advocated by Crake.

At first he describes the name as a shortened form of *the Abominable Snowman*, a figure “existing and not existing” (*OC* 7), and therefore an

\(^2\) In my discussion I follow the novel when referring to the protagonist, calling his past self *Jimmy* and his post-apocalyptic present self *Snowman*, while using *Jimmy/Snowman* to refer to the character as a whole. In *MaddAddam*, the Crakers combine these names into “Snowman-the-Jimmy” (*MA* 15).
appropriate name for what could be the last remaining human being. Much later in the novel, Snowman considers:

Maybe he’s not the Abominable Snowman after all. Maybe he’s the other kind of snowman, the grinning dope set up as a joke and pushed down as an entertainment, his pebble smile and carrot nose an invitation to mockery and abuse. Maybe that’s the real him, the last *Homo sapiens*—a white illusion of a man, here today, gone tomorrow, so easily shoved over, left to melt in the sun, getting thinner and thinner until he liquefies and trickles away altogether. As Snowman is doing now. (*OC* 224)

Although he deliberately chooses a name with a (to him) clear denotation, Snowman thus comes to realise that the more conventional sense of his name is more apt in his situation, especially with the added connotation of a snowman as a type of fool. Roger Davis notes that “Snowman’s formative moment of naming occurs with a denial of history and an avoidance of guilt. True to his name, he desires a whitewash of history, to bury history’s wrongs and his wrongs under the pure, driven snow” (247). Although this certainly seems to be his intention, Snowman’s flashbacks reveal his culpability and tend to undermine this attempt at escaping the past. The dissonance between denotation and possible connotations is characteristic of the naming practices in the novel, and is especially prominent in relation to its treatment of brand names, discussed below.

Importantly, Jimmy/Snowman is the only focalising character in the novel: all events are told from his point of view, and readers therefore (however unwillingly) have to accept his version of events. In believing himself to be the sole survivor of the pandemic for most of the narrative, Snowman becomes a type of Everyman. His singularity invests him with some power, as he alone determines how pre-pandemic events are remembered and retold; all descriptions of the other characters and events are mediated by Snowman.

At the start of *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman is confronted with an apocalyptic loss of control, symbolised by the “blank face” of his watch, which he nonetheless continues to wear “as his only talisman” (*OC* 3). The extinction of independent measurement, or the “absence of official time,” leaves him without a point of reference and “causes a jolt of terror to run through him” as it brings home the vulnerability of his position as perhaps the last remaining human being after the pandemic (*OC* 3). Gerry Canavan describes the stopped watch “as an index of the radical dissolution of the

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3 Reading the novel as primarily concerned with, or set in, Canada, Davis further observes that “Snowman becomes a representative of a particular brand of Canadian identity, namely one that represses the colonial oppression of Canadian history and absolves itself of the responsibilities for such wrongdoings” (247).
capitalist system” (“Hope” 140), and it serves as a reminder that Snowman has now entered a time after time—none of the pre-apocalyptic standards hold true in the post-apocalyptic world he now inhabits. This absence of humanly measured time also brings about a return to the cyclical rhythms of day and night that now dictate Snowman’s existence. Although this may be connected to environmentalist nostalgia for a pristine pre-human existence, the novel makes it clear from the outset that it is impossible to return to such a time:

On the eastern horizon there’s a greyish haze, lit now with a rosy, deadly glow. Strange how that colour still seems tender. The offshore towers stand out in dark silhouette against it, rising improbably out of the pink and pale blue of the lagoon. The shrieks of the birds that nest out there and the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble sound almost like holiday traffic. (OC 3)

The world inhabited by Snowman and all the remaining nonhuman species has been irrevocably changed through human action. Some critics have read the depiction of the regeneration of nonhuman nature in the novel positively; Lee Rozelle, for instance, sees it as proof that nonhuman nature in “liminal zones . . . continue to adapt and grow” (62). Yet the inclusion of “deadly” in this opening passage cannot simply be ignored—the conditions bringing about apocalyptic rejuvenation for some species are lethal for others. Gradually the narration reveals that measurability only provided a modicum of control: life before the pandemic was characterised by indulgence in wild, almost fatalistic, experimentation, especially with various forms of biotechnology. From the very outset of the novel, readers are therefore shown that the anchorless existence now led by Snowman is only the exacerbation of his pre-apocalyptic life. Following Snowman’s gradual revelation of the past, readers can wonder, as Lily Briscoe does in the novel’s epigraph from To the Lighthouse: “Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?”

Oryx and Crake is structured so as to invite intradiegetic comparisons between the “twin figures” (Huggan and Tiffin 210) of Crake the bioscientist and Jimmy/Snowman, representative of the “word people” (OC 25). Its environmentalist potential, however, relies on the metaleptic transgression of the boundary between fact and fiction; it repeatedly encourages comparison between the world of its readers and the world it depicts. Already in its rather unusual title attention is drawn to some of the novel’s main concerns, namely extinction, biodiversity, and naming. Although this only becomes apparent later in Oryx and Crake, the names of the two title characters are taken from the red-necked crake (Rallina
tricolor), an Australian water bird, and the East African oryx (Oryx beisa). These names were chosen according to Crake’s naming rules, in turn based on the rules of the Extinctathon game (briefly described in Chapter 1) and thus refer to species that have become extinct in the previous fifty years of the near-future world of the novel (OC 80). In the world of its readers, however, these species are not yet listed as endangered. By presenting these species as extinct in the future depicted in the novel, its environmentalist injunction has to be that its readers still have the time to prevent these and other extinctions. In yet another play on the notion of extinction, the title characters are already dead by the start of the novel.

Part of the environmental impetus of the novel may, as discussed in the introduction, be related to the latent (and sometimes blatant) didacticism inherent in the utopian and satiric modes. This didactic impulse relies for its effectiveness on readers’ comparing the world of the text to their own reality. Snowman’s recollections of his life as Jimmy start with Jimmy at the age of about five and a half, and continue with the description of subsequent episodes, right up to the pandemic. Indications of the exact date of its future setting are carefully avoided, although the novel seems to be set in the middle or second half of the twenty-first century. Prominent Atwood scholar Coral Ann Howells calculates that Oryx and Crake is set “around 2025” based on her unsubstantiated assertion that “Snowman is 28 and was born around 1996” (“Dystopian” 163). Although Howells’s claim has since been repeated by others, her dating seems to me highly unlikely, and at least a quarter of a century too early. Howells made her suggestion in 2006, based on Oryx and Crake alone, and with the parenthetical caveat that “Atwood is deliberately unspecific about precise dates for her dystopias” (“Dystopian” 163). It is of course unfair to judge Howells’s calculation in the light of more details about the setting from the subsequent novels, yet it does seem implausibly early based on details from the novel. Jimmy’s parents’ generation, for example, is constantly reminiscing about the past:

Remember when you could drive anywhere? Remember when everyone lived in the pleeblands? Remember when you could fly anywhere in the world, without fear? Remember hamburger chains, always real beef.

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4 In April 2017; the conservation status of Rallina tricolor is ‘least concern’ and that of Oryx beisa ‘near threatened’, according to the seven-point classification of the Red List of Threatened Species (International Union). The classifications used are: least concern; near threatened; vulnerable; endangered; critically endangered; extinct in the wild; and extinct.

5 Howells’s claim is cited by, for example, Nischik (Engendering 129, fn. 12) and Sibylle Machat (81). Ingrid-Charlotte Wolter also determines that the novel is set “around 2025,” without specifically crediting Howells with the dating (265); Howells is cited later in her reading, so presumably this is the origin of the claim.
remember hot-dog stands? Remember before New York was New New York? Remember when voting mattered? (OC 63)

Animal species, such as the Komodo dragon, rhino and manatee (OC 80), are extinct by the time Jimmy is a teenager, but are today still extant, if endangered. Moreover, the twentieth century is repeatedly described in rather distant terms in the novel; Martha Graham is for instance referred to as “some gory old dance goddess of the twentieth century” (OC 186). Even the time during which Howells assumes the novel is set, is described in a manner that seems to imply that it has long passed. The decline of performance art is ascribed to “the sabotage panics of the early twenty-first century,” for example, while “[t]here hadn’t been anything like [the Happicuppa riots] since the first decade of the century” (OC 187, 179; my emphasis).

What is important here is not so much the fact that Howells seems to be incorrect, but rather that Oryx and Crake—and the rest of the trilogy—constantly invites these kinds of comparisons with the present through its mixture of the familiar and the strange. The pre-apocalyptic past of the novel is superimposed on our present, and the oscillating structure of the narrative (between Snowman’s post-apocalyptic present and his dystopian, pre-apocalyptic existence as Jimmy), as well as the subtle connections between the past of the narrative and the readers’ present, emphasise that past actions have present consequences. Readers are allowed to see the clues Jimmy had missed, thus compelling us to learn from his recollections about our near future. Pointing towards foreseen and unforeseen causality is one of the fundamental ways in which Atwood’s environmental project functions in the MaddAddam trilogy, and the narrative structures of all three novels are important in this. Complex webs of causality are emphasised through these flashbacks, and there are frequent reminders that this imagined future is the outcome of the readers’ present, in which remedial action still is possible. Part of the point of the vaguely recognisable setting seems to be that although readers can never exactly map their own experiences unto the fictional events, there is always some nagging doubt about just how closely fiction resembles fact.

Apocalyptic Dreaming: Engineering Extinction

Through extinction the dystopian pre-apocalyptic setting of the text is differentiated from the world of its readers, and the (partial) extinction of humans is the precondition for the realisation of Crake’s apocalyptic
environmental utopia. In *Oryx and Crake*, the imagination is repeatedly connected to the capacity to dream, and one of the sustained metaphors used to describe the post-apocalyptic chaos is that of dreaming. Yet Crake’s apocalypticism only superficially corresponds to Lyman Tower Sargent’s influential definition of utopianism as “social dreaming” (9): Crake’s utopian project is individual at its core—his ecocentrism is deeply egocentric—and involves the destruction of existing society. Crake’s project is flawed in part because of its insistence on solving problems genetically only, while ignoring the context of genetics, so it is no coincidence that his dreaming turns into the nightmare in which Snowman is “immersed” (*OC* 218).6 Snowman describes himself as “wading through” Crake’s dreams; he is permanently “stuck in them” (*OC* 218). In describing how “[e]very moment he’s lived in the past few months was dreamed first by Crake. No wonder Crake screamed so much” (*OC* 218), Snowman draws attention to the world-shaping capacity of the imagination. The present first took shape in the mind of Crake, but readers only have Snowman’s word for it, as he is the sole focaliser of this novel.

Crake’s efforts to eradicate dreaming through bioengineering were unsuccessful: “We’re hard-wired for dreams, he’d said. He couldn’t get rid of the singing either. We’re hard-wired for singing. Singing and dreams were entwined” (*OC* 352). When Snowman tries to explain the post-apocalyptic world to the Crakers in a manner they can comprehend, he makes use of the same metaphor, describing someone who dies in the pandemic as “a piece of a bad dream Crake is dreaming” (*OC* 352). Through this metaphor, Snowman and the Crakers venture into mythological territory obviously resembling Christianity:

“Why does Crake dream a bad dream like that?”
“He dreams it,” said Snowman, “so you won’t have to.”
“It is sad that he suffers on our behalf.”
“We are very sorry. We thank him.”
“Will the bad dream be over soon?”
“Yes,” said Snowman. “Very soon.”

... “It will be over when Crake wakes up?”
“Yes. When he wakes up.”
“We hope he will wake up very soon.” (*OC* 352–53)

6 Grayson Cooke notes that Crake’s understanding of evolution ignores epigenetic elements, that is, the fact that “the human is not reducible to a genetic program,” but “the genetic is informed by” such “extra-genetic” conditions (121). “Epigenetic memories exist before us, we acquire them on top of our genetic make-up, and yet we live with them and according to them, at the same time as we build upon them,” Cooke notes (121). Epigenetics troubles the nature–nurture distinction, and illustrates just how reductive Crake’s project is.
Ironically, Crake, who wanted to do away with “symbolic thinking” (OC 360), is thus cast as an ultimately benign Christ-like figure who assumes the lot of the scapegoat. The sustained image of Crake’s dreaming the end of the world is connected to the novel’s consideration of art and aesthetic expression too—the annihilation of most humans is an act of creation as much as it as an act of destruction.

**Extinction and Evolution**

Extinction tends to refer to the collective (a species), rather than to the individual (a specimen), and extinction is closely connected to evolution. Charles Darwin deemed extinction a process that goes “hand in hand” with natural selection (130), since “the extinction of old forms and the production of new and improved forms are intimately connected together” (234). According to the theory of natural selection, then, extinction is the inevitable outcome of imperfect adaptation to the environment, and it is celebrated by Darwin as part of a process that “works solely by and for the good of each being,” since “all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection” (360). In *Oryx and Crake*, however, as in the rest of the MaddAddam Trilogy, extinction is usually connected to human agency. Although Darwin does account for the fact that some “animals . . . have been exterminated, either locally or wholly, through man’s agency” (235), extinction is generally described in *On the Origin of Species* as a natural part of evolution, as “the almost inevitable consequence of the production of new forms” (252); in short, as something that happens irrespective of human interference with the nonhuman world. In the pre-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake* this is often no longer the case. The ubiquitous mention of extinct species in the novel and the scope of pre-apocalyptic extinction in the MaddAddam trilogy clearly resonate with the much-discussed ongoing sixth extinction event, and provide an example of how Atwood extrapolates current environmental concerns in her fiction.8

Extinction, like evolution, also has an important generational dimension, which in turn links it to issues of (failed) reproduction. Echoing

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7 The OED lists extinct in the sense of an individual death as obsolete.
8 The ongoing sixth extinction event is intimately connected to the Anthropocene, as many of the extinctions are the result of biodiversity loss due to human action. According to Ceballos et al, “the average rate of vertebrate species loss over the last century is up to 100 times higher than the background rate” of extinction—i.e. the estimated ‘normal’ Holocene rate of species extinction.
Darwin’s assertion that “[w]hen a group has once wholly disappeared, it does not reappear; for the link of generation has been broken” (253), Crake explains to Jimmy that “[a]ll it takes . . . is the elimination of one generation. One generation of anything. Beetles, trees, microbes, scientists, speakers of French, whatever. Break the link in time between one generation and the next, and it’s game over forever” (OC 223). While extinction is destructive (and of course utterly disastrous for the species becoming extinct), it is also creative. The disappearance of one, inadequately adapted, lifeform should make room for another to continue its specialisation and adaptation. Accordingly Darwin views extinction as a process for the greater good and this seems to be how Crake views his engineered pandemic too—it is for the greater good of the planet, though to the detriment of humanity. Yet Crake’s fixation on extinction is thoroughly satirised in the novel, and his apocalyptic solution to environmental damage is never completely endorsed.

In Crake’s Malthusian view, human overpopulation and the resultant overexploitation of natural resources are the greatest dangers faced by humanity and the nonhuman inhabitants of the planet alike. Humanity is, according to Crake’s deep-ecology argument, “one of the few species that doesn’t limit reproduction in the face of dwindling resources” (OC 120). Crake’s apocalypse is therefore merely a more extreme version of the arguments of radical environmental groups like the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement, who under the slogan “may we live long and die out” proclaims that “[w]hen every human chooses to stop breeding, Earth’s biosphere will be allowed to return to its former glory” (vhemt.org). In keeping with his biological determinism, Crake regards the only function of sex as reproduction, and his ironically-named BlyssPluss pills exploit the human proclivity to have sex for pleasure. As Crake is careful to point out, the pills have three publicised effects: users are protected against sexually transmitted diseases, experience increased libido and improved moods, and youth is prolonged (OC 294). Their secret fourth function is only known to investors: users are rendered sterile, “thus automatically lowering the population level” (OC 294). Crake’s Paradice Project is “inextricably linked” to BlyssPluss: “The Pill would put a stop to haphazard reproduction, the Project would replace it with a superior method. They were two stages of a single plan, you might say” (OC 304).

9 By including “speakers of French,” Crake’s example subsumes memes under genes.

10 Crake’s use of “the Pill” cannot but be seen as a reference to the utopian expectations connected to extradiegetic birth control pills—his pills, however, does not give women reproductive choice, but instead denies all users such freedom.
ensures the success of his plan by using BlyssPluss as the vector for his engineered pandemic. In this way humanity faces the poetic justice of being destroyed by what Crake perceives as its flaws—promiscuity and vanity. Even without the breakout of the airborne pandemic, widespread use of BlyssPluss may have led to a significant decrease in the human population within a generation, but Crake’s apocalyptic vision does not allow for anything less drastic than the immediate destruction of humanity.

Upon first hearing some of Crake’s plans, Jimmy, as a marketing specialist, reflects on the chosen brand name: “Good name, too—BlyssPluss. A whispering, seductive sound. He liked it” (OC 296). What follows is an apocalypse by branding, in which Jimmy plays an important role. The popularity of the pills is a direct result of the way in which they are marketed, so the success of Crake’s apocalypse is due to the pre-apocalyptic complicity of art and consumerism. Snowman is racked by guilt over deceiving himself about the role he played in spreading the pandemic. He realises that his former self Jimmy “had clues”; he “ought to have seen but didn’t” (OC 276). The virus is extremely contagious and rapidly spreads to those who have not used the pills themselves. Crake has made sure that Jimmy would be vaccinated so that he could take care of the Crakers, but other people would only survive if they were able to avoid both being contaminated and falling prey to the ensuing chaos. Authorities name the virus JUVE, an acronym for Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary (OC 341). Its pronunciation echoes RejoovenEsense, the name of the corporation housing the Paradice Project, thus leading Jimmy to wonder whether “they now knew something, such as what Crake had really been up to, hidden safely in the deepest core of the RejoovenEsense Compound” (OC 341). As if to prevent readers from missing the connection, Atwood plainly shows how the “rejuvenation” promised by RejoovenEsense instead morphs into the deadly JUVE; the “essence” of Crake’s project, emphasised in the spelling of the corporation’s name, is revealed to have been the destruction of humanity.11

In the pre-apocalyptic world of the novel, technology pervades all spheres of life. Residents of the compounds are subject to strict surveillance, and their only escape from a dreary existence can be found in online gaming, pornography and macabre reality shows, including snuff and live executions. Compounds are mainly centred on biotechnological enterprises, which include everything from genetic manipulation to

11 Jayne Glover points out that Crake’s project is doomed to fail, as “it is impossible to impose an ecological ethic through unethical means” (59). Nevertheless, the project is by and large an environmental success.
cosmetic enhancements, and the curing and spreading of diseases. More benign technological solutions to environmental problems are rarely foregrounded in *Oryx and Crake*, although it is clear that renewable energy is commonly used, and that access to transportation has been severely curtailed, because of both terrorism and energy scarcity (there are few private vehicles, for instance, and air transport is almost unheard of). It seems, however, that these technological changes came too late to slow down climate change: the pre-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake* is one in which all technological mitigation of environmental problems fails spectacularly. Crake’s assertion that gradual change would be insufficient to save nonhuman nature from human excesses not only echoes the apocalyptic tone of much environmental campaigning, but is deeply misanthropic. It partially denies humanity’s agency in rejecting the idea that humans can alter their behaviour, and is based on profound biological determinism:

> Monkey brains, had been Crake’s opinion. Monkey paws, monkey curiosity, the desire to take apart, turn inside out, smell, fiddle, measure, improve, trash, discard—all hooked up to monkey brains, an advanced model of monkey brains but monkey brains all the same. Crake had no very high opinion of human ingenuity, despite the large amount of it he himself possessed. (*OC* 99)

Crake’s assessment not only denies some of humanity’s agency, it may also be interpreted as a type of absolutism: humans are unable to change, because of their evolutionary biology.

Accordingly, Crake decides to eliminate civilisation for a generation; once those with the required technical knowledge are dead, he reasons, “that would be it. They’d have no apprentices, they’d have no successors” (*OC* 223). Crake’s assessment of the origin of environmental ills therefore echoes that of the artists Jimmy encounters, who believe that

> it had been game over once agriculture was invented, six or seven thousand years ago. After that, the human experiment was doomed, first to gigantism due to a maxed-out food supply, and then to extinction, once all the available nutrients had been hoovered up. (*OC* 242–43)

Unlike these artists, however, who maintain that “correct analysis was one thing but correct solutions were another” (*OC* 243), Crake’s solution entails the apocalyptic destruction of most of humanity and their replacement with his Paradice Models. Despite his dogmatic valorisation of logic, Crake therefore seems blind to the inherent contradictions of his project. *Humans* are responsible for the conditions leading him to set his plan into action, and the apocalyptic event itself is very much *man*made. While supposedly valuing nonhuman nature over humanity, Crake simultaneously reinforces
his own superiority, thus emphasising the distinctions between humans and nonhumans and also sharpening the distinctions among humans. It is only because he is human and has access to advanced biotechnology that Crake can try to destroy humans altogether.

**Intelligent Designs**

Biology, in the shape of notions of extinction and evolution, is used to trouble traditional binary categories in various ways in *Oryx and Crake*. While the humanities and arts are depicted as being on the brink of extinction, for example, bioengineering is shown to be a type of art in itself. Yet, paradoxically, Crake repeatedly (and unsuccessfully) tries to rid nature of culture when designing the Crakers:

> Watch out for art, Crake used to say. As soon as they start doing art, we’re in trouble. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war. *(OC 360)*

Crake appears unable to escape the double bind of human exceptionalism: the pandemic meant to save ‘nature’ is a process facilitated by culture, directed by a single person’s vision and convictions. Crake is further unable to see that his apocalyptic solution to environmental problems repeats well-established patterns of thought. This lack of insight indicates that Crake is as much ruled by cultural determination as he despises humanity for being governed by biological determination; put differently, memes are as important as genes, and both of these are contextual.

Crake’s environmental utopia essentially entails the apocalyptic speeding up of evolutionary change, but appears founded on a false (and dogmatic) belief that evolution is teleological.12 “Evolution itself is a gigantic comic drama,” Joseph Meeker observes, for “the evolutionary process is one of adaptation and accommodation, with the various species exploring opportunistically their environments in search of a means to maintain their existence. Like comedy, evolution is a matter of muddling through” (33). By aiming to eliminate the necessary and unpredictable stages of “muddling through,” Crake appears to reinforce human exceptionalism, rather than to counter it. In short, Crake’s project is doomed through his teleological (and

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12 In her reading of the novel, Veronica Hollinger contrasts the “new and ‘unnatural’ evolutionary process” of the novel with the “‘natural’ evolutionary process that so fascinated Wells’s late-nineteenth-century imagination” (457).
tragic) understanding of the world. Moreover, despite his profession for science, Crake appears to conflate morality with evolution, which again is to misunderstand its contextuality and unpredictability. As Meeker points out, “[e]volution is just a shameful, unscrupulous, opportunistic comedy, the object of which appears to be the proliferation of as many life forms as possible without regard for anyone’s moral ideas” (35). Yet Crake’s apocalypse, just like the biblical Revelations, is precipitated by human vices that necessitate the remaking of the world.

The environmentalism Crake espouses is apocalyptic through and through: he does not hesitate to wipe out most humans to make space for the Crakers. Yet, his insistence on replacing humans with a new version of humanity is curious in itself, and appears indicative of residual faith in some version of humanity. In an evolutionary sense, humanity has shown itself to be disastrously adaptable, capable of surviving at the cost of most nonhumans. Their replacements, however, cannot be said to fulfil an existing ecological niche, since no organisms like the Crakers had existed before. In spite of Crake’s professed denial of human exceptionalism—regarding most human faults and accomplishments as the by-products of flawed genetics—he still retains some hope for an improved form of humanity. Crake’s decision to create replacement humans seems in part due to his own insatiable curiosity (he too has a monkey brain), but it also speaks to the fact that he does not believe that a return to pristine wilderness is possible. Crake views ideal, unsullied nature as a cultural construct, not as a prior materiality. “Nature is to zoos as God is to churches,” he tells Jimmy. “Meaning what?” says Jimmy.

Why is it he feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed? How much is too much, how far is too far?
“Those walls and bars are there for a reason,” said Crake. “Not to keep us out, but to keep them in. Mankind needs barriers in both cases.”
“Them?”
“Nature and God.”
“I thought you didn’t believe in God,” said Jimmy.
“I don’t believe in Nature either,” said Crake. “Or not with a capital N.” (OC 206)

Crake’s environmental apocalypticism thus differs slightly from popular environmental uses of apocalyptic tropes: although Crake believes that change on a global, apocalyptic scale is needed to curb humanity’s greed, he does not try to bring about a prelapsarian Eden, but an engineered Paradice of his own invention, into which the Crakers will fit as well as any other organisms.

His seemingly unwitting repetition of these mythical patterns provides a clue as to why Crake chooses to give humanity a second chance,
albeit in the much altered form of the Crakers, instead of just eradicating all humans with the pandemic. Forgiveness and second chances for select groups are integral to Christian mythology, as evidenced, for example, by God’s warning Noah of the impending deluge, saving the faithful from the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah, sparing the Israelites from the death of the firstborn in Egypt, the death and resurrection of Christ, as well as the sparing of the elect in Revelations. However, the select intended to survive Crake’s apocalypse do not fit as seamlessly into the Christian patterns: the Crakers never had the opportunity to be corrupted in the first place, and therefore do not need to be saved, while Jimmy has numerous unappealing character flaws, and seems an unlikely initiator of a fresh start.

Crake identifies symbolic thinking as the root of all human problems, and therefore undertakes to edit it out of the genetic makeup of his Paradice Models. Yet, in casting himself as superhuman, not subject to the same biological determiners as the rest of humanity, Crake succumbs to the very symbolic thinking he rejects. The almost godly aspects of Crake are emphasised by the fact that all other characters call the Paradice Models Crakers, something Crake never does himself. More literally, the Crakers are made in his image: they all sport luminescent green eyes, reminiscent of Crake’s own, and they refer to themselves as the “Children of Crake.” Accordingly the novel suggests that despite Crake’s aversion to religion and systems of belief he himself is completely caught in the narrative patterns of Christianity. The very notion of apocalyptic redemption is taken from Judeo-Christian belief, and his project quite deliberately plays out the creation myth. Jimmy thinks of the pandemic as Crake’s “[s]itting in judgment on the world,” and he resents the fact that Crake has assumed the right to do so (OC 341). When Snowman later deliberately introduces Crake as a type of god in the Crakers’ developing mythology, he is well aware of the irony: “the Crake they’re praising is his fabrication, a fabrication not unmixed with spite: Crake was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification” (OC 103–04). The manner in which Snowman describes the chaos of the pandemic clearly draws on the biblical creation myth: “In the beginning, there was chaos,” Snowman begins the story of the “deeds of

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13 Stephen Dunning identifies the three main characters as suggestive of “the Christian Trinity whose authority science has effectively displaced. Crake assumes the role of Father, creator of all, triumphant over chaos; Snowman, that of sacrificial Son and immanent Logos (and perhaps also of Gnostic Logos marooned in matter); and Oryx, that of Spirit, omnipresent, ‘feminine Paraclete,’” and points out that “Crake’s secular Eden has proven decidedly sacred” (95).

14 As discussed in the next chapter, the tendency to embrace the trappings of Christian evangelism is also present in secular environmentalist movements such as Earth First!.
Crake” (OC 102). Snowman’s formulations clearly echo the biblical account of creation:

“Oryx said to Crake, *Let us get rid of the chaos*. And so Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away.” Snowman demonstrates, sloshing the water off to the side, then turns the pail upside down. “There. Empty. And this is how Crake did the Great Rearrangement and made the Great Emptiness. He cleared away the dirt, he cleared room . . .”

“For his children! For the Children of Crake!” (OC 103)

By introducing the metaphor of dreaming, and by positing Crake’s destruction as a form of creation, one of the central conceptual flaws of Crake’s project is satirically exposed, namely his belief that a clear distinction can be drawn between science and art, or between intellect and emotion. The Crakers themselves, who, despite all the precautions Crake has taken, obviously are capable of advanced symbolic thinking, are testament to the falsehood of such compartmentalisation.

In keeping with his general indictment of the imagination, Crake ascribes human overpopulation and resultant environmental degradation to an awareness of our own mortality:

Men can imagine their own deaths, they can see them coming, and the mere thought of impending death acts like an aphrodisiac. A dog or a rabbit doesn’t behave like that. Take birds—in a lean season they cut down on the eggs, or they won’t mate at all. They put their energy into staying alive themselves until times get better. But human beings hope they can stick their souls into someone else, some new version of themselves, and live on forever. (OC 120)

It should therefore not come as a surprise that Crake introduces his Paradice Project as “working on . . . immortality” (OC 292). According to Crake, *mortality* entails “being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it,” so immortality is simply “the absence of such fear. Babies are immortal” (OC 303). And by setting himself up as being able to take away the fear of death, Crake is implicitly casting himself as a type of deity. His godlike attributes are already confirmed when the other characters name the Crakers after him. However, Crake’s attempt to erase human influence was only possible because of human intellect and technologies, and is thus inherently ambiguous. The name *Crakers* monumentalises Crake, and his Paradice Project is thus exposed as being neither completely selfless, nor successful in its quest to eradicate symbolic thinking. Although he is cast as the god-like creator of the Crakers and their Christ-like saviour from humanity, he attempts to destroy much that was valuable in humanity at the same time, including the ability to make jokes (OC 306). In the end, though, the Crakers’ unanticipated proclivity for symbolism means that the joke is largely on him.
Being Native: Preternaturality and Monstrosity

In designing his Paradice Models, Crake seeks to do away with those features which allow humans to behave inhumanely or to exploit nonhuman nature on the scale his own civilisation does. The Crakers cannot be racist, for example, because they “simply [do] not register skin colour” and lack the capacity to create hierarchies (OC 305). It does not seem incidental that Crakers is reminiscent of Quakers: the Crakers’ engineered placidity certainly seems in line with Quaker ideals. Although this only becomes obvious when reading the rest of the MaddAddam Trilogy, the Crakers are in many respects perfected versions of the God’s Gardeners. The Gardeners’ vegetarianism is central to their religious environmentalism; the Crakers are herbivores with the digestive systems of rabbits, who redigest their food repeatedly to “break down the cellulose” and make “maximum use of the nutrients at hand” (OC 159). The Gardeners condemn unnecessary use of energy and other resources; the Crakers’ use of resources is minimal, as they do not wear any clothing, do not cook their food, and have no need or desire to collect material possessions. However, the Crakers are equipped for a degree of self-sufficiency the Gardeners cannot begin to imagine. There are “chemicals programmed into the men’s urine” that scare off predators, and they can purr like cats, based on Crake’s discovery that “the cat family purred at the same frequency as the ultrasound used on bone fractures and skin lesions and were thus equipped with their own self-healing mechanism” (OC 154, 156).

While the Gardeners emphasise the continuities and similarities between human and nonhuman nature, the Crakers embody many of the characteristics of nonhuman animals. Not content with equipping his Paradice Models with the digestive systems of other species, Crake incorporates the attributes of various nonhuman species into their reproduction rituals. As noted above, Crake diagnoses unchecked human population growth as at the root of environmental degradation, and his reimagination of reproduction has to be seen in this light. The Crakers copulate in fives—one woman and four men—and fertile women turn a

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15 In The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam it becomes clear that Glenn (Crake’s given name) knew some of the Gardeners, in particular Pilar and Zeb, so the connection is not just incidental—Crake’s apocalypticism has much in common with Adam One’s theology, predicated as it is upon an entire new relation between humanity and nonhuman nature.

16 Rozelle argues that the “Crakers embody genetically what Atwood’s millennial ‘green’ readers might aspire to behaviorally, and thus part of Atwood’s novel’s ecological optimism might be found in the capacity of culture to embrace an ethos of environmental stewardship” (69), but this optimistic reading of the environmentalist intention of the novel fails to take into account its pervading satire.
“bright-blue colour” on their buttocks and stomachs, described as “a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the baboons, with a contribution from the expandable chromospheres of the octopus” (OC 164). As soon as the men notice a blue woman, “they indulge in musical outbursts, like songbirds. Their penises turn bright blue to match the blue abdomens of the females, and they do a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs” (OC 165). On the one hand, the details of Crake’s reimagined courtship rituals represent the farcical results of immoderate genetic engineering and biomedical interventions (surely Viagra is the satirical target here!). On the other hand, though, these details again expose the human exceptionalism underlying his project. Crake rejects symbolic thinking on the premise that symbolism is exclusively human, but the nonhuman animals from which he adapts these characteristics are patently capable of symbolic thinking, albeit perhaps rudimentary, as they can interpret these courtship signs.

Crake, Jimmy and Oryx all come from dysfunctional family backgrounds (as is so often the case for Atwood’s protagonists). Crake’s father is killed after finding out that HelthWyzer, the corporation he worked for, engaged in practices he regarded as “not only unethical but dangerous to public health, and therefore immoral” (MA 246). Crake ends up living with his mother and stepfather, who both die of mysterious illnesses, leading Jimmy later to wonder if they were “trial runs” for the real pandemic (OC 343). Jimmy’s mother defected from HelthWyzer to join radical environmentalists. In The Year of the Flood she spends some time in hiding with the God’s Gardeners (YF 248–54), and she is eventually shot for treason by the CorpSeCorps (OC 258). Oryx’s father dies when she is young, and to feed the family Oryx and one of her brothers are in effect sold into slavery by their mother (OC 116–19). Katherine V. Snyder observes that through “juxtaposing the horror of human extinction with more mundane, private losses . . . Oryx and Crake challenges its characters’ and readers’ attempts to draw a cordon sanitaire between what happens at home and what happens in (and to) the world” (“Time” 473). Given these family

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17 In Lars Schmeink’s reading, Snowman’s description “ridicules the mating ritual and thus marks the Crakers as other” (101). That the Crakers are marked as other seems indisputable, but to me it seems that Crake’s project is the main subject of ridicule, not the Crakers themselves.

18 This has led Françoise and Jeff Storey to observe that “[t]he irony in the fact that these three characters emerge as a tripartite parental group for mankind’s final brood can not [sic] be overstated.”
histories, it should come as no surprise that the elaborate mating ritual of the Crakers is designed to reimagine family constellations:

It no longer matters who the father of the inevitable child may be, since there’s no more property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war. Sex is no longer a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing, conducted in the dark and inspiring suicides and murders. Now it's more like an athletic demonstration, a free-spirited romp. (OC 165)

Prospective partners present flowers to the woman in question; she selects four “and the sexual ardour of the unsuccessful candidates dissipates immediately, with no hard feelings left” (OC 165). Crake’s intention is to do away with jealousy and sexual competition, while at the same time limiting population growth, as women are only fertile once every three years. In trying to undo the pre-apocalyptic fixation with sex and the body, Crake designs the Crakers so that there is “[n]o more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape” (OC 165).19 Snowman asserts that the post-apocalyptic “world is now one vast uncontrolled experiment—the way it always was, Crake would have said—and the doctrine of unintended consequences is in full spate” (OC 228), yet, as shown in his careful genetic engineering, Crake has precisely tried to eliminate unintended consequences. Nevertheless his design could not take all eventualities into account, and it tragically backfires when the Craker men first meet fertile human women in MaddAddam—Amanda and Ren are raped by the Crakers in what Toby understatedly describes as “a major cultural misunderstanding” (MA 13), eventually leading to the birth of human–Craker babies.

The representation of the Crakers, who at first glance appear human, draws on anxieties surrounding bioengineering, cyborgs and artificial intelligence. Ostensibly they are the ultimate designer babies, and the advanced “floor models” on display at the Paradise Dome “represent the art of the possible” (OC 305).20 In addition, the Crakers are, to quote Lee Frew, “post-human indigenes” (214), designed to be completely adjusted to the precarious climate-changed environment they will inhabit: they boast “UV-

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19 Sven Schmalfuss describes the Crakers’ sexual behaviour as “gang-rape rather than the mating behavior of animals” (102) and argues that Crake has genetically engineered them to uphold gender inequality. While Crake has designed Craker men and women to function very differently biologically, there is little indication in the farcical descriptions of their mating that it is violent.

20 Later in the novel, when Jimmy is interviewed for his first marketing job, the interviewers tell him their promotions likewise concern “the art of the possible” (OC 246). By thus echoing the same formulation, the complicity of the arts in biotechnological capitalism is underlined, as discussed in more detail below.
resistant skin,” as well as “built-in insect repellent” (OC 304). Importantly, however, Snowman does not perceive the Crakers to be monstrous hybrids. This is noteworthy, given their numerous potentially alienating nonhuman attributes, which include “green eyes luminescent in the semi-darkness, just like the rabbit: same jellyfish gene” (OC 102) and their unusual singing, which is “beyond the human level, or below it. As if crystals are singing; but not that, either. More like ferns unscrolling—something old, carboniferous, but at the same time newborn, fragrant, verdant” (OC 105). The Crakers’ always-naked bodies are uncannily perfect:

They’re every known colour from deepest black to whitest white, they’re various heights, but each one of them is admirably proportioned. Each is sound of tooth, smooth of skin. No ripples of fat around their waists, no bulges, no dimpled orange-skin cellulite on their thighs. No body hair, no bushiness. They look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program. (OC 100)

Yet their perfection fails to arouse in Snowman “even the faintest stirrings of lust”; the Craker women “leave him chilled” (OC 100). Snowman nostalgically remembers “the thumbprints of human imperfection that used to move him, the flaws in the design: the lopsided smile, the wart next to the navel, the mole, the bruise” (OC 100). His nostalgia about imperfection resonates with the Gardeners’ valorisation of amateurism in The Year of the Flood, but, more importantly, separates him from Crake’s mechanistic view of evolution.

Despite their oddities and humans’ nostalgia for the past, Toby regards the Crakers as “preternaturally beautiful” (MA 36), which is of course a valid description—they are designed outside natural evolutionary processes. “We must seem subhuman to them, with our flapping extra skins, our aging faces, our warped bodies, too thin, too fat, too hairy, too knobbly. Perfection exacts a price, but it’s the imperfect who pay it,” Toby thinks (MA 36). Snowman in particular experiences himself as monstrous by comparison.²¹ He reflects that the Craker children must think of him as “a creature of dimness, of the dusk,” and he wonders whether they keep their distance from him out of “respect, as he’d like to think, or because he stinks?” (OC 6). Frequent reference to the Crakers as the “Children of Crake” underlines their child-like innocence, while their connection with nonhuman animals is emphasised through calling the animals the “Children of Oryx.” These epithets are partially the result of the haphazard mythology Snowman feeds them, but also trouble various binaries, such as art–science

²¹ Florian Mussgnug ascribes this to the fact that “the disruption of social bonds and the traumatic experience of catastrophe have affected the ‘last man’, bringing him into uncanny proximity with the animal” (338–39).
and natural–artificial, while showing the utopian potential for forging new kinds of relationships inherent in Crake’s project—the Crakers clearly think of themselves as related to nonhuman nature.

Descriptions of colonial encounters are echoed in accounts of the Crakers’ gradual development of a cosmogony, as well as the numerous anthropological descriptions appearing in the novel. Right at the start of *Oryx and Crake*, a passage from a “directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations of one kind or another” appears in Snowman’s mind: “It is the strict adherence to daily routine that tends towards the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity,” he quotes (*OC* 4). Hannes Bergthaller notes that “Snowman’s invocation of colonialism” is appropriate in three ways: it highlights “sexual violence against women and children” as symbolic of “the general breakdown of cultural restraints”; Atwood presents “European colonialism” as “the direct historical predecessor of the exploitative transnational capitalism [she] excoriates”; and colonialism historically “cast itself as a force of civilized order” while it “disinhibit[ed] its functionaries” (733).²² I agree with Bergthaller on all three counts, but it is also important to note that generic colonial tropes are troubled in *Oryx and Crake* because of the unprecedentedness of the situation Snowman finds himself in. These evocations frequently serve to underline the extent to which Snowman and the Crakers are strangers in the post-apocalyptic world and show that indigeneity has become a thing of the past in a world where distinctions between natural and artificial have become meaningless.

The indications that Snowman is ‘going native’ in the post-apocalyptic wilderness therefore serve to underline his otherness; he is not shown as the bearer of any civilisation worth preserving. Snowman instead adopts the trappings of preindustrial human cultures: he takes to sleeping in a tree because of predators, and wears a bedsheets instead of clothes—a biblical getup which befits him as the “improbable shepherd” (*OC* 353) of the Crakers. In comparison with the perfect Crakers, Snowman “is just too weird; they make him feel deformed” (*OC* 42). As if to acknowledge his abnormality, Snowman aligns himself with Frankenstein’s monster, rather than with Dr Frankenstein, bemoaning the fact that there is no “Bride of Frankenstein” (*OC* 169) reserved for him in the post-apocalyptic world. By calling himself Snowman, he associates himself with the monstrous yeti; in his loneliness he “laughs like a hyena or roars like a lion—his idea of a

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²² Davis reads “Snowman’s repression of history” in terms of historical racism pervaded by colonialism, finding that it “enables the continuation of the unspoken power dynamics of whiteness” (253).
hyena, his idea of a lion” (OC 10). He also “grunts and squeals like a pigoon, or howls like a wolvog: Aroo! Aroo! Sometimes in the dusk he runs up and down on the sand, flinging stones at the ocean and screaming, Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit! He feels better afterwards” (OC 10). Snowman thinks of himself in the third person as “humanoid, he’s hominid, he’s an aberration, he’s abominable; he’d be legendary, if there were anyone left to relate legends” (OC 307). And when he whistles to warn the Crakers of his approach, it “is like a leper’s bell: all those bothered by cripples can get out of his way. Not that he’s infectious: what he’s got they’ll never catch. They’re immune from him” (OC 153). However, in MaddAddam the Crakers learn to read and write, so at least some of the trappings of our civilisation are transferrable to them.

Snowman’s monstrosity becomes particularly obvious when he receives the sacramental fish caught by the vegan Crakers in exchange for a story. The Crakers

> keep their distance and avert their eyes while he crams handfuls of fishiness into his mouth and sucks out the eyes and cheeks, groaning with pleasure. Perhaps it’s like hearing a lion gorge itself, at the zoo, back when there were zoos, back when there were lions—a rending and crunching, a horrible gobbling and gulping—and, like those long-gone zoo visitors, the Crakers can’t help peeking. The spectacle of depravity is of interest even to them, it seems, purified by chlorophyll though they are. (OC 101)

Although Snowman may be expected to be the civilised partner in this encounter, this is shown not to be the case. The final scene of the novel again troubles notions of indigeneity in its play on colonial imagery. Robinson Crusoe is evoked when Snowman sees “a human footprint, in the sand. Then another one. They aren’t sharp-edged, because the sand here is dry, but there’s no mistaking them. And now here’s a whole trail of them, leading down to the sea” (OC 372). Yet Snowman decides to approach the group of human survivors in the nude, carrying only his stick and spraygun. As he “peers out through the screen of leaves” at them he realises that “he has nothing to trade with them, nor they with him. Nothing except themselves” (OC 373). The open ending of the novel is a moment of indecision; Snowman is poised between the monstrous pre-apocalyptic civilisation and his post-apocalyptic, back-to-‘nature’ monstrosity as he has to decide between trading stories with the group of survivors, or killing them before they kill him.

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23 The novel is, for example, deemed a “Robinsoniad” by Karin Höpker (165).
A Vocabulary of Extinction

As seen in the above discussion, Crake’s apocalyptic vision depends on the elimination or extinction of human traits he deems harmful. In *Oryx and Crake*, biological extinctions are always shown to be related to cultural practices, as well as to exploitation of the nonhuman environment and other humans. These in turn are depicted as related to general cultural decline, and to the commercial saturation of culture. As possibly the only human survivor of the pandemic through most of the novel, Snowman becomes not only the sole representative of humanity, but also a flawed representative of the *humanities*. The rest of this part explores Snowman as last man, the complicit role played by the arts in pre-apocalyptic commercialism, as well as the limited opportunities for resistance art provides in the novel. The figure of Oryx is finally considered in the light of the novel’s sustained critique of the imagination.

**Snowman, Last Man, Everyman**

Jimmy/Snowman is the sole focaliser of *Oryx and Crake*, and he is acutely aware of himself as an *endling*, the last of his species. As the pandemic unfolds he witnesses the ongoing extinction of humanity as if it were part of the Extinctathon game:

> Meanwhile, the end of a species was taking place before his very eyes. Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species. How many legs does it have? *Homo sapiens sapiens*, joining the polar bear, the beluga whale, the onager, the burrowing owl, the long, long list. *Oh, big points, Grandmaster.* (OC 344)

As such, the novel could be read as a post-apocalyptic narrative in the tradition of Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826). More pertinent to my discussion, however, is the manner in which Snowman portrays himself as the last bearer of culture in the novel. He repeatedly self-identifies as a “word person” (e.g. *OC* 67, 244), as opposed to the “numbers people” (*OC* 25) of the bioscientific corporations—but also as opposed to his girlfriend Amanda, who describes herself as an “image person” (*OC* 244). When

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24 Although the word has yet to be included in major dictionaries, Dolly Jørgensen notes that *endling* was first proposed in 1996 in *Nature* as a descriptor for the last person of a family lineage, but that it has since come to denote the last individual of a species.

25 Critics who have drawn on the parallels between *Oryx and Crake* and Shelley’s novel include Florian Mussgnug, Earl Ingersoll (“Survival”), and Anna Bedford.
Snowman enters a house to find “[a] desk with a dead computer, a fax, a printer; also a container with plastic pens, a shelf with reference books—a dictionary, a thesaurus, a Bartlett’s, the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry,*” he realises that its deceased occupant “must have been a word person” (*OC* 233). Readers of the novel, who presumably also are word people, at least to some degree, thus first recognise themselves in the description before they are confronted with Snowman’s interpretation of the dead house owner’s occupation: “a RejoovenEsense speechwriter, an ideological plumber, a spin doctor, a hairsplitter for hire” (*OC* 233). In the world of the biotechnological corporations, art is always at the service of commerce.

The sense that readers are cajoled into complicity with Jimmy/Snowman is strengthened because his version of events is the only one available, and because of the clear sense that he is also a victim of Crake’s apocalypticism. Schmeink observes that Jimmy “becomes a pawn in Crake’s god game” who is saved “to witness the extinction of his world” (74). More specifically, Snowman is the only link between the pre- and post-apocalyptic worlds, between the readers’ world and this disastrous future. The sense that readers are meant to identify with the focalising character is reinforced by Snowman’s casting of Jimmy as the sceptical commentator on pre-apocalyptic societal ills and bioengineering. Snowman remembers, for instance, that Crake “kept saying ‘Wave of the future,’ which got irritating after the third time” (*OC* 201). Any sympathy generated for Jimmy/Snowman is precisely because of his flaws: he is all too human, but nonetheless both human and humane. And this is precisely the reason why Crake vaccinates him against the virus: Jimmy would be able to handle the Crakers, as opposed to the bioscientists, who “wouldn’t have the empathy to deal with the Paradice models” (*OC* 321).

As noted above, Snowman paradoxically sees the Crakers as preternatural natives, and the post-apocalyptic situation draws on colonial

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26 Helen Mundler, for instance, has criticised *Oryx and Crake* for a tendency “to universalise” which she sees as “threaten[ing] to undermine the strength of this novel, pushing it towards a totalising, generalising, and thus sometimes didactic and hectoring, discourse” (98). Although this point is not entirely unfounded, it pays very little attention to the pervading satire of the novel, or to the fact that its readers also are subtly mocked.

27 Höpker argues that Snowman’s dislocation “from the anthropocentric paradigm of human exceptionalism” enables him “to reclaim his humanity, once he realizes that his otherness has already always been an integral part of his own humanity” (163), but this reading seems to ignore the fact that Jimmy/Snowman is portrayed as both human and humane throughout the novel, particularly if contrasted with the coldness of Crake and the insubstantiality of Oryx.

28 Somewhat curiously, Karen F. Stein compares Crake’s lack of empathy to that of Victor Frankenstein, and identifies this flaw as what makes him human “like us” (152).
tropes. Coupled with its beach setting, the novel therefore invites readings as a castaway narrative in the tradition of *The Tempest* or *Robinson Crusoe*. Snowman makes this explicit when he considers keeping a diary to record his post-pandemic experiences. But the futility of the idea soon dawns on him:

> He could make lists. It could give his life some structure.
> But even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who'll come along later and find his bones and his ledger, and learn his fate. Snowman can make no such assumptions: he'll have no future reader, because the Crakers can't read. Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past. (*OC* 41)

In *MaddAddam* some of the Crakers indeed learn to read and write, so Snowman’s fears about the extinction of reading are unfounded. More problematically, Snowman’s view of the Crakers seems to be at least partially founded on his view of them as “innocent creatures” (*OC* 169), uncontaminated by the trappings of civilisation and the written word.

Since he failed to get into one of the prestige science universities, Jimmy studies “Problematics,” which, as “everything at Martha Graham . . . had utilitarian aims. Our Students Graduate With Employable Skills, ran the motto underneath the original Latin motto, which was *Ars Longa Vita Brevis*” (*OC* 188). At university Jimmy cultivates an image of himself as an old-fashioned scholar—in comparison with his classmates, at least. He takes “to spending hours in the more obscure regions of the library stacks, ferreting out arcane lore” (*OC* 195), and “write[s] his own papers, eccentric though it seem[s],” not because he is averse to cheating, but because it was “a line that played well with the Martha Graham type of woman. They liked a dash of originality and risk-taking and intellectual rigour” (*OC* 194–95). Jimmy’s actions are driven by “stubbornness; resentment, even,” because “what he was studying was considered—at the decision-making levels, the levels of real power—an archaic waste of time” (*OC* 195). In then deciding to “pursue the superfluous as an end in itself” (*OC* 195), Jimmy distances art from politics and curtails its political potential. At the same time, his rather nostalgic *l’art pour l’art*-view allows him to cast himself as the sole sceptic who sees through the trappings of society (but this ability is not used politically).\(^{29}\) This position of course resembles that taken by Crake, who much more forcefully resists the corporations through his pandemic.

Jimmy compiles lists of “words of a precision and suggestiveness that no longer had a meaningful application in today’s world” (*OC* 195).

\(^{29}\) As the Crakers’ main mythmaker. Snowman becomes “the lone survivor as poet and master-magician,” according to Ralph Pordzik (154).
J. Paul Narkunas notes that Jimmy “hold[s] onto disused words as an art form and basis for giving life,” and that these words “provide stability in a world of dramatic change” (11). Through reciting his lists, Jimmy/Snowman also constantly reinforces the notion that he is a last repository of humanist knowledge. After the pandemic, however, he increasingly experiences difficulties in relating words to meaning: “From nowhere, a word appears: Mesozoic. He can see the word, he can hear the word, but he can’t reach the word. He can’t attach anything to it. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlists drifting off into space” (OC 39). His words gradually disappear at least in part because Snowman is no longer part of a community. Cultural extinctions, like evolution, are thus shown to be contextual, and Snowman emerges as a type of symbolic Everyman by virtue of his isolation.

**Complicit Branding**

Questioning the value of human achievements is the point of the Blood and Roses online game Jimmy and Crake play as boys. The game involves trading “[m]assacres, genocides, that sort of thing” against “[a]rtworks, scientific breakthroughs, stellar works of architecture, helpful inventions” with suggested exchange rates: “one *Mona Lisa* equalled Bergen-Belsen, one Armenian genocide equalled the Ninth Symphony plus three Great Pyramids” (OC 79). In the pre-pandemic world, culture is pastiche and Jimmy’s description of the way in which “[a]nyone with a computer could *splice* together whatever they wanted” (OC 187, my emphasis) clearly echoes the descriptions of genetic engineering in the novel. Jimmy is shown to be complicit in the pre-apocalyptic decline of high culture, albeit benignly so, in his “put[ting] together a naked *Pride and Prejudice* and a naked *To the Lighthouse*, just for laughs”; he has also “done *The Maltese Falcon*, with costumes by Kate Greenaway and depth-and-shadow styling by Rembrandt” (OC 187). Art has been replaced by entertainment: during the “early twenty-first century” theatre “had dwindled into versions of the singalong or the tomato bombardment or the wet T-shirt contest” (OC 187). And entertainment is in turn routinely based on violence and exploitation, centring on child pornography, snuff, live executions and live suicides.

It is not only culture that is at stake in the pre-pandemic world: with the corporatisation of the public sphere and education, citizenship seems to be a thing of the past. Rampant globalisation leads to large-scale environmental destruction and food shortages, and society is divided
between the dangerous pleebland slums and the biotechnological compounds. Multinational corporations have become de facto governments, in what Sarah Appleton has described as a “Corpocracy” (“Corp(Se)Ocracy” 64). Intellectual endeavour tends to be concentrated on profitable fields of inquiry, and in particularly on bioengineering. The only place afforded “word people” like Jimmy is in the marketing of pharmaceutical miracle products to gullible or desperate customers—and in this society people are customers first, not citizens. His “employable skills” land Jimmy a copywriting job at a minor biotechnological corporation, called AnooYoo. As indicated by this name, Jimmy’s job involves promoting “pills to make you fatter, thinner, hairier, balder, whiter, browner, blacker, yellower, sexier, and happier. It was his task to describe and extol, to present the vision of what—oh, so easily!—could come to be” (OC 248). Chris Vials rightly points out that Atwood not only takes corporate capitalism to task here, but also neoliberalism, and particularly “the tyranny inherent in its very utopian idea of freedom” (237). And the dogma of individualism and self-realisation is not restricted to the privileged world of the corporations: most of the products on offer on the pleebland “Street of Dreams” (OC 288) are intended for corporeal enhancement and for the furthering of individualist ideals.

As a “wordserf” (OC 253), Jimmy, much like his literary predecessor Winston Smith in Nineteen Eighty-Four, works with the language of the apparatus he eventually comes to distrust. While Winston openly rebels against Big Brother and the Party, Jimmy never has the courage (or conviction) to completely reject the world of the compounds. He invents words like “tensicity, fibracionous, pheromonimal—but he never once got caught out. His proprietors liked those kinds of words in the small print on packages because they sounded scientific and had a convincing effect” (OC 248–49). This slight subversive action is thus taken at little risk to himself. Jimmy’s useless resistance ought perhaps to be seen as an attempt to cope with the situation he finds himself in. This again evokes Timothy Morton’s notion of inevitable hypocrisy, but it should be kept in mind that Jimmy has an alternative, although not a very attractive one: like his mother he can leave the compounds and try to survive in the pleeblands, but he realises that “he certainly had no marketable skills, nothing he could use in the pleeblands, not if they went underground” (OC 321). While he holds out this possibility to his various lovers and to Oryx, none of them ever takes his offer seriously.

Jimmy comes to see coinage as a “challenge” and remembers wondering “how outrageous could he get, in the realm of fatuous neologism, and still achieve praise?” (OC 250). Arguably, Atwood is walking the same
tightrope as her character in coining her brand names, but in Orwellian
terms these “outrageous” coinages may perhaps be seen as examples of a
kind of Newspeak. Characteristic of Orwell’s Newspeak is “doublethink,”
which entails “holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind
simultaneously, and accepting both of them” (Nineteen 244). Casting her
protagonist as a marketer affords Atwood the opportunity of foregrounding
the mechanisms of branding through the coinages pervading the pre-
apocalyptic world. In this way, readers are not only intradiegetically
confronted with jarring neologisms and brands: a coinage from the first
novel which displays all the characteristics of the coined brands in Oryx
and Crake is used as the title of MaddAdam and the trilogy as a whole.
The metalepsis here is retrospective, but nonetheless powerful, as it serves
to highlight the fact that the commodification of literature in the readers’
world at least shares some characteristics with the commodification of
“[h]ope and fear, desire and revulsion” (OC 248) in the novel itself.

The satirical brand names of the novel are blunt and seem to
purposefully invite mockery through their “outright silly spellings”
(Canavan, “Hope” 156n3). Such corporation names include CorpSeCorps,
the brutal security agency that services other corporations, as well as
OrganInc, HelthWyzer, and RejoovenEsense, the names of malevolent
biotechnological corporations. Ostensibly referring to ‘corporation security
corps’, CorpSeCorps of course includes the word corpse. The name could
either be pronounced ‘corps-se[c]-corps’ or ‘corpse-corps’, although the
latter seems more fitting. The brutal methods employed by its guards result
in corpses, a fact emphasised by their nickname: Corpsmen. The hegemonic
power of the CorpSeCorps does not just include providing security, but also
encompasses controlling the financial system used in the compounds
through the Corpsbank. The neologistic compound Corpsbank exemplifies
one of the central premises of the novel—corporatisation is directly related
to death and extinction—and this point is made all the clearer when the first
syllable of these compounds is pronounced as ‘corpse’.

The possibility that readers may pause to consider the pronunciation
of coinages adds to their disruptiveness. One of the HelthWyzer
subsidiaries, for example, is called NooSkins, bringing to mind both ‘new
skins’ in pronunciation and an emphatic ‘no skins’ (and perhaps ‘noose’) in
writing. This ambiguity is strengthened by the name of one of their
products: the NooSkins BeauToxique Treatment. Through the use of
internal capitalisation, the word BeauToxique does not just recall “beauty”
and “beau,” but also “Botox” and “toxic.” Botox itself is a registered
trademark now often used generically; it was registered in 1992 and
according to the United States Patent and Trademark Office the mark is
currently owned by Allergan Inc.—a real-life corporation name that might well have come from Atwood’s novel.

Although the coinage practices used in the novel are familiar, there are often jarring disparities between the connotations and denotations of the resulting brand names. Kirk Combe writes that “[n]o matter how intricate the ironic strategy employed by a satirist, in the end the writer wants the reader to know—quite plainly—that satire is the convention at hand. At some level satire always draws attention to itself as a form” (75). The brand names in *Oryx and Crake* seem to be a case in point. Greg Garrard observes that the pre-apocalyptic world of the novel is “overrun” by brand names (“Reading” 238), while Christopher Palmer describes the coinages in the novel variously as “banal-cheery,” “silly,” and “nasty” (166). Brand names also play an important role in rendering the near-future setting of the novel simultaneously familiar and strange. In addition to coinages, registered trade names readers presumably are familiar with are included in the narrative, as for example, Red Sox, Pachinko, Coke, Velcro, and Spam. Although these names link the world of the readers with the intradiegetic world, they are often used ironically. In the first scene of the novel, for example, Snowman wears an “authentic replica Red Sox baseball cap” (*OC* 4); later he manages to find an unopened can of “imitation Spam” (*OC* 152). The casualness with which the oxymoron “authentic replica” is employed, as well as the formulation “imitation Spam” (considering that Spam itself is a substitute for fresh meat), highlight the apparent futility of a quest for authenticity in a world largely shaped by commercial interests. Additionally, these adjectives draw attention to the pervasiveness of brands—they even survive the apocalypse.

While most of the coinages in *Oryx and Crake* may be classified as “descriptor” or “suggestive” names according to Marcel Danesi’s categorisation of brand names (179–80), the descriptive and suggestive functions frequently contradict each other through deliberate dissonance between spelling and pronunciation. Because they are coinages, there is no orthoepic tradition to appeal to and inherent ambiguity cannot readily be resolved by the reader. Confusingly, therefore, a single name can have euphemistic and dysphemistic connotations. The name of a fertility agency such as Foetility is a good example. In writing its –ity suffix seems to describe an abstract state or condition related to foetus, ostensibly meaning “being pregnant.” In pronunciation, however, the name recalls both fertility and futility—antonyms in the context of fertility agencies. These types of dissonant corporation names are presumably the ones Elaine Showalter rallies against in her review of *Oryx and Crake*, remarking that “Atwood’s satire and her playfulness don’t always sort well with probability. She does
not have Amis or DeLillo’s gift for satiric coinage” (35). Given, however, the importance of words, names and naming in the novel, these seemingly ridiculous brand names and their very obvious contrary connotations ought rather to be seen as commentary on the cynical exploitation of human fears of ageing, illness and death which lurks behind their development. Further, the brand names are orthographically presented in such a way that they, for better or worse, cannot be ignored; they are “obviously cynical, over the top” and “exhibit their dreamed-up-ness almost as a badge of authenticity” (Cooke 117). Their very banality therefore forms an essential component of the satirical critique of consumerism presented in the novel.

New technologies of course necessitate new names, and quite a few of the coinages in Oryx and Crake name new animal splices which originate from the heady time when “create-an-animal was so much fun” because “it made you feel like God” (OC 51). Unlike the capitalised brand names, animal names commonly take the form of lowercase portmanteau words or morphophonological combinations that indicate the ancestors of the new species. Names of animal splices include snats, hissing combinations of snake and rat; rakunks, raccoon–skunk splices; vicious wolvogs, a cross between wolves and dogs developed for the CorpSeCorps; kanga-lambs, “a new Australian splice that combined the placid character and high-protein yield of the sheep with the kangaroo’s resistance to disease and absence of methane-producing, ozone-destroying flatulence” (OC 292); and bobkittens, smaller versions of the bobcat, designed to control the feral cat population. The names of these creatures mimic their spliced natures in that both components can be distinguished.30 Cooke notes that Atwood through such coinages “foregrounds this recombinative nature of language, and implicitly relates it to the highly recombinant technoscience of the novel” (118). The name Pigoon is an exception to this general rule, as it is not compiled of two species names, but is a nickname for these transgenic pigs that resemble “pig balloons” (YF 221). As if to accord them more-than-animal status, the word Pigoon is consistently capitalised from the middle of the third novel (from MA 276), after the surviving humans have entered into a truce with these transgenic pigs. Capitalisation, or the lack thereof, is therefore potentially significant in the trilogy. The choice not to treat the names of spliced animals in the same way as those of all other biotechnological products appears to make a larger ethical point: although genetic manipulation is possible, life itself cannot be branded.

30 They also hark back to the early days of envisaged bioengineering, such as the applorange (apple–orange) and zucchana (zucchini–banana) advertised in Science in 1993 and discussed by Donna Haraway in Modest_Witness (64–65).
Coinages and branding are thus stylistically prominent and thematically important. Structurally, coinage also plays a significant role. Brand names with their ubiquitous capitalisation are conspicuous on the page, and sometimes disrupt the reading experience. Coinages are even more noticeable when used as the titles of chapters. More than a third of the 53 chapter titles in *Oryx and Crake* consist of coined names. In this manner form mirrors content: branding is pervasive in the near-future world of *Oryx and Crake*, and readers are already confronted with coinages in the table of contents. Just as Orwell’s Newspeak fits the totalitarian society he describes, Atwood’s coinages seem appropriate for a society on the verge of extinction and in the last throes of commercial over-exploitation. The neologisms and brand names of *Oryx and Crake* demand readers’ attention through their ostentatiousness, and they all force a type of doublethink that highlights rather than obliterates their internal contradictions, as well as the discrepancies between the purported intentions of products and their realisable effects. Satire of commercialism thus serves to maintain, rather than to resolve complexity.

**Art and Resistance**

The satirical portrayal of branding in *Oryx and Crake* functions as a way of exposing the crass commercialism pervading the pre-apocalyptic world, but this condemnation extends to those who, like Jimmy, are responsible for facilitating consumerism. Throughout the novel, humanists and artists are shown to be complicit with, or at least not in direct opposition to, the corporations. Jimmy manages the BlyssPluss marketing campaign and is therefore at least partially responsible for the spread of Crake’s pandemic. Jimmy’s lists of disused words form an obvious parallel to the names of extinct species guessed at by the players of the Extinctathon game. This parallel serves to underline the fact that the pre-pandemic world is an age of extinction in all areas. Despite the sympathy one may have for Jimmy and his lists of unused words, there is a streak of nostalgia and cultural conservativism—as well as more than just a measure of self-pity—in his obsessive collecting.

If one discounts the various biotechnological projects mentioned in the novel, which may well be deemed art in their own right, the only art project discussed in any detail in *Oryx and Crake* is Amanda’s Vulture.

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31 See “Wholesale Apocalypse” (Grimbeek 96) for a categorisation of coined chapter titles.
Sculptures. This involves “tak[ing] a truckload of large dead-animal parts to vacant fields or the parking lots of abandoned factories and arrang[ing] them in the shapes of words” before photographing the feasting vultures from a helicopter (OC 244). According to Amanda, “vulturizing” the words “brought them to life . . . and then it killed them” (OC 245).32 The words she builds in Oryx and Crake are pain, whom, guts, and finally, after breaking up with Jimmy, love (OC 245–47). As a child in The Year of the Flood she writes her name in syrup and watches the ants converging on it: “You write things, then they eat your writing. So you appear, then you disappear. That way no one can find you,” she explains to Ren (YF 76). In The Year of the Flood her art project is entitled The Living Word, which involves writing words “using bioforms to make the words appear and then disappear” (YF 304). Words are built using “different materials, including fish guts and toxic-spill-killed birds and toilets from building demolition sites filled with used cooking oil and set on fire,” and the next word she is working on is kaputt, which is supposed to be a “message” (YF 57). In doing so, Lauren A. Rule Maxwell argues, “Amanda makes others read the writing on the wall” (9).

Nazry Bahrawi notes that Amanda’s art could be interpreted as “a satirical take on modern art as hyperbolic and pretentious” (252).33 While this is not unlikely, given the satirical tone of the novel, Amanda’s art also stages extinction and death, and to some extent aestheticises it. Basing her project on the disappearance of words belies her insistence that she is not a word person, referenced above, and also aligns it with Jimmy’s word lists. This focus on words echoes the orthographically marked brand names in the novel—art is portrayed at best as a coping mechanism, not as a political solution to underlying problems. In so doing, the novel appears to further the point of view of the artists referenced above, who believe that art can play a role in identifying problems, but perhaps not in offering “correct solutions” (OC 243).

While it is certainly significant that a Jimmy/Snowman fulfils the role of main sceptic in the novel, this cannot be read as a reflexive

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32 Miles Weafer points out that there is a parallel between Amanda’s artistic practice and the mythology Snowman presents to the Crakers, according to which people ate up all the words, leaving none for the animals, and therefore “animals can’t talk” (OC 96): Amanda “literally gives words to hungry animals” (Weafer 67).

33 Bahrawi regards another possible interpretation as a complication of “the idea that the pleeblands are undesirable” in comparison with the compounds (252). Throughout the trilogy, however, and already in Oryx and Crake, the pleeblands are depicted as possible sites for resistance, as evidenced in Jimmy’s repeated thoughts about fleeing there, and his (romanticised) view of the pleeblands as “mysterious and exciting, over there on the other side of the safety barriers. Also dangerous” (OC 196).
endorsement of the power of the arts and imagination. The political potential of the arts is questioned throughout *Oryx and Crake* by first inviting readers to identify with Snowman and showing how feebly he offers resistance to the pervading commercialism; to some extent he is “paralyzed with self-pity and resentment, seeking solace in manufactured nostalgia or fantasy” (Narkunas 12). Although Amanda’s project is meant to send a message and arguably has more political potential, the way in which it is supported by those it criticises reflects the manner in which art is assumed to be devoid of political potential in the world of the trilogy. In *The Year of the Flood* it becomes clear that Amanda has corporate funding; she “always got the money to do her art capers. She was kind of famous in the circles that went in for culture. They weren’t big circles, but they were rich circles. This time she had a deal with a top CorpSeCorps guy—he’d get her up in the helicopter, to take the videos” (*YF* 56). Adam Stock notes that her work potentially is “ethically and socially controversial,” but “[p]atronising the arts . . . clearly does something for the executives’ liberal consciences.” Amanda’s art visualises extinction and disappearance through connecting nature to culture (and the material to the discursive), but it also provides a type of absolution to its supporters.

Both Jimmy and Amanda are thus to some degree complicit with the system they critique. Nevertheless, it seems important that they present readers of *Oryx and Crake* with a more moderate (if slightly passive) critical point of view than the radical apocalypticism Crake subscribes to. However ineffective their resistance is, it shows that corporate capitalism is not entirely hegemonic in the novel, and thus perhaps gives a tiny glimpse of hope.

**Imagining Oryx**

As noted in Chapter 1, Atwood’s work has almost routinely been read as feminist, but several critics have noted that *Oryx and Crake* is, to some extent, postfeminist. Connecting different kinds of exploitation seems to be at least part of Oryx’s function. Accordingly, others, like Sylvia Mayer (“Literary”) and Rachel Stein, have read the figure of Oryx in an ecofeminist light, identifying a continuation between the exploitation of women and the

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34 Dunja Mohr holds that language is “restorative as well as creative” (18) in the novel, but this optimistic reading appears to overlook the complicity of language in the ills of the pre-apocalyptic world.
exploitation of nonhuman nature in the novel. Oryx is a particularly inscrutable character, and critics have seen her variously as “one of Atwood’s most ambiguous characters to date,” “an enigma” (Tolan 286), “elusive” (Showalter 35; Dunning 96), a “highly fetishised capitalist incarnation” (Tolan 295), “the embodiment of globalization” (Spiegel 127), “a narrative cipher” (Narkunas 15), and a “chilling reminder of the reader’s world” (Ingersoll, “Survival” 168). Several critics have proposed psychoanalytical readings of the novel, and in perhaps the most extreme of these, Sarah Appleton asserts that both Oryx and Crake “may . . . be mere ‘shadows,’ figments of [Snowman’s] tortured mind. . . . [They] may represent portions of his own psyche: superego and id, shadow and anima, mind and soul, thanatos, and eros” (“Myths” 10). Rachel Stein, on the other hand, emphasises that “Oryx is an object of desire for Jimmy and Crake precisely because she is a commodity and they may take advantage of her abjectness” (191).

However one prefers to read Oryx, it is difficult to disagree with Susan Hall’s assertion that she “is largely denied agency; that is, she is treated as an object rather than recognized as a subject” (181). This is primarily due to the fact that her story is only pieced together retrospectively by Jimmy. Further, Oryx appears to do very little to assert herself, leading Mundler to assert that she “allows Jimmy to compose her, to write her” (97), while Marc Bosco on the contrary asserts that “Oryx thwarts his desire to rewrite her past as the story of lost innocence and colonial victimization” (167), and Narkunas holds that Oryx’s entire “background story may in fact be choreographed by Crake” (15). Accordingly, many readings of Oryx tend to reduce her to a plot device that either highlights the role played by globalisation and the violence of the pornography and trafficking industries, or that exposes the pervading orientalism and neocolonialism of the corporations. Allison Dunlap sees the murder of Oryx as Crake’s way of “eliminat[ing] the possibility that Oryx and Jimmy would produce human offspring,” as well as a way of “ensur[ing] that the reader recognizes his utopianism as utterly twisted” (10). The figure of Oryx is thus frequently read to give a face to the adverse

35 As so often in ecofeminist readings, this is done at the peril of aligning woman with nature and thus reinforcing binaries which facilitate patriarchal oppression in the first place (a danger acknowledged by Mayer, “Literary” 119).
36 Other readings with psychoanalytical elements include those of Bahrawi, who speaks of “the split personality of Jimmy/Snowman” (254), and Stephen Dunning, who discusses Crake’s engineered apocalypse as a “therapeutic approach to the pathologies of his world” that “proves to be tellingly Freudian” (94). Gerry Canavan (“Hope” 142) and Carol Osborne (“Mythmaking” 25) both describe Snowman’s telling of his story in therapeutic terms, while Shannon Hengen deems it redemptive (“Moral” 137).
effects of globalisation, or seen as evidence for Jimmy/Snowman’s psychological breakdown.

Readers first encounter Oryx when Jimmy and Crake see her on a child pornography site when “she looked eight” (OC 90). About ten years later Jimmy sees trafficked girls on the news being released from a garage in San Francisco, and he identifies one of them as Oryx, despite the fact that she should have been older by now, because “the look was the same: the same blend of innocence and contempt and understanding” (OC 255). As it turns out, both Jimmy and Crake were entranced by the child Oryx’s look “over her shoulder and right into the eyes of the viewer—right into Jimmy’s eyes, into the secret person inside him. I see you, that look said. I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want” (OC 91). So when Jimmy next encounters Oryx, she has been recruited by Crake to teach the Crakers in the Paradice Dome, and is explicitly said to personify the service economy. “Where’d you find her?” Jimmy asks Crake:

“I’ve known her for a while. Ever since post-grad at Watson-Crick.”
“She was studying there?” If so, thought Jimmy, what?
“Not exactly,” said Crake. “I encountered her through Student Services.”
“You were the student, she was the service?” said Jimmy, trying to keep it light. (OC 309–10)

Oryx is, as numerous critics have pointed out, a profoundly mediated character: she is at first only encountered on screen, and much of what we know of her is Jimmy’s story, not her own. Theodore Sheckels notes that Jimmy’s “willingness to have sex with Oryx allies him with those who had sexually exploited her earlier in her life” and in doing so he “perhaps betray[s] his friendship with Crake, since it is unclear whether Crakes [sic] has assented to their liaisons or not” (“No” 119). Oryx herself seems to indicate that Jimmy is not so different from her earlier abusers; when Jimmy becomes indignant about one of them, she points out that “[h]e never did anything with me that you don’t do. Not nearly so many things!” (OC 141). Jimmy’s defence (“I don’t do them against your will”) is met by Oryx’s laughter: “What is my will?” she said. Then she must have seen his pained look, so she stopped laughing” (OC 141).37

Jimmy/Snowman and readers are uncertain as to how much of her history is real, and how much Jimmy has imagined, and near the end of the novel, there is the rhetorical question “Was there only one Oryx, or was she legion?” (OC 308). Snowman wonders:

37 Susan Hall notes that despite the fact that Oryx’s repeated “laughter makes no impact on the material conditions of her life, it does significantly disrupt narratives and fantasies that attempt to confine her to the role of object” (194).
How long had it taken him to piece her together from the slivers of her
he’d gathered and hoarded so carefully? There was Crake’s story about
her, and Jimmy’s story about her as well, a more romantic version; and
then there was her own story about herself, which was different from
both, and not very romantic at all. (OC 114)

Oryx herself seems to merely humour Jimmy in his quest to discover her
background; she teases him about his need to possess her through
possessing her history. According to Danette DiMarco, “Oryx is so
transformed in the process of production or making (i.e., what Jimmy or
Crake make of her) that her essence—as raw material—can never be known”
(“Paradice” 184–85). While most critics have viewed Oryx’s malleability
negatively, Stephen Dunning sees her as “incarnating possibilities of
communion and love that neither Snowman nor Crake can fully grasp” (89).
In this manner too Oryx is reduced to her body, and accorded little agency
of her own. Larissa Lai, however, notes that the figure of Oryx is “for all
intents and purposes, a white man’s fantasy of the racialized, sexualized
Other,” but she also possesses “a kind of subaltern power that is open-
ended and ambivalent” (192). In a similar manner, Hall observes that
“Atwood invokes the stereotype of the exotic Asian woman in order to
criticize it” (180). Both Lai’s and Hall’s readings therefore see some utopian
potential in the character of Oryx—she is seen as more than the
embodiment of commodification and exploitation.

What is most provocative about Oryx is her refusal to be a victim.38
She does not appear bitter about her past; she refuses to condemn her
mother for selling her, the child smuggler Uncle En for using her to bait
paedophiles, the pornographer who also taught her English as a child, or
even her traffickers in San Francisco (assuming that the trafficked girl had
been Oryx). Her seemingly naïve view of the world and lack of righteous
anger have certainly played a part in critics’ deeming the novel post-
feminist. Yet, whatever (limited) agency Oryx may have, she is above all an
ambiguous testament to the power of the imagination. Even her refusal to
be a victim may well be misrepresented by Jimmy/Snowman, since readers
cannot tell how much of Oryx is purely his imagination.39 The figure of Oryx

38 I find it difficult to agree with Weafer, who asserts that Oryx is “likely afraid to recognise
victimhood for fear of losing her acquired privilege” (63). Neither do I completely agree
with Anna Bedford’s assertion that Oryx is “resigned to her interpolation in the capitalist
system” (80), as she appears to mock it from time to time, not least when answering
Jimmy’s exasperated exclamation that he does not buy her story: “‘If you don’t want to buy
that, Jimmy,’ said Oryx, looking at him tenderly, ‘what is it that you would like to buy
instead?’” (OC 142).
39 Mundler argues that “[the extent to which Jimmy imagines, rather than knows, Oryx is
underlined when she in his memory, quotes Paradise Lost: ‘Paradise is lost, but you have
thus serves as yet another instance in the novel where notions about the imagination are troubled: the imagination may well be all we are left with, but Jimmy’s taking control over Oryx’s story cannot be deemed positive by default—at worst it is another violation of Oryx. The novel condemns dogmatic beliefs in the transcendental power of humanism and the arts as much as it denounces scientism.

“Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past”

In its satiric appropriation of post-apocalyptic generic conventions, Oryx and Crake simultaneously draws on and mocks the apocalypticism inherent in much environmentalist thought. Notions of extinction are at the heart of novel and, broadly speaking, they play a double role. On the one hand, they are used to further the environmentalist agenda of the novel, and on the other to trouble the very ideas underlying environmental apocalypticism. In Oryx and Crake, biodiversity loss is directly connected to the exploitation and commodification of humans as well as art, to growing divides in society, and to a diminished public sphere. Global capitalist exploitation is thus depicted as at the core of the environmental and societal problems faced in the novel, and nature and culture are portrayed as inseparable. Not only multinational corporations are targeted here: the insidious neoliberal dogma of individual freedom and self-realisation is shown to be as much at fault, and in the novel extinction serves to trouble ideas about the valorisation of the imagination.

Crake’s apocalyptic imagination is revealed to be flawed because of a mistaken teleological view of evolution, based as it is on the reductive idea that life is modular and mechanistic, rather than haphazard and circumstantial. The cutthroat competition of social Darwinism has its roots precisely in this view of nature as “red in tooth and claw.” Yet in Oryx and Crake evolutionary development is shown to be above all contextual, while contextuality is depicted as necessarily too complex for full comprehension. Likewise, Jimmy’s belief in the power of the word is satirically exposed for its nostalgia, its complicity in upholding the status quo, and the way in which it seeks to deprive Oryx of agency.

Snowman’s fear of the extinction of reading is unfounded—if nothing else, we are his readers. Moreover, by the last volume of the trilogy the

Paradice within you, happier far’, an occurrence which given her background, her lack of education, goes beyond the unlikely” (97).
Crakers have also become literate, as they are clearly capable of the symbolic thinking Crake so desperately wanted to eradicate. It is no coincidence that the larger part of the *Oryx and Crake* is set in the past, closest in time to its readers: part of what the novel does is precisely to imagine its readers as agents with the injunction of preventing the future depicted in the novel. Through its open ending the novel places the onus on its readers: we are left to fill in the blanks. We are invited to enter into an imaginative relation with the novel, and it is in this that the environmental potential of an otherwise rather bleak *Oryx and Crake* lies.
4 | Evangelical Environmentalism and *The Year of the Flood*

Whereas readers have to look to its inconclusiveness to find much hope in *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* is on the whole more positive, partially because it focusses on resistance to the oppressive corporations that dominate the first volume of the trilogy. Already from its title, *The Year of the Flood* is firmly rooted in the world of the God’s Gardener’s sect. As noted earlier, the novel includes a Gardener hymn entitled “The Garden” as an epigraph or type of prologue, and all three protagonists are connected to the Gardeners. Coined brand names are frequently used as chapter titles in *Oryx and Crake*, but *The Year of the Flood* is literally organised according to the beliefs of the sect, as it is structured according to the Gardener calendar. Each part of the novel is named after one of the annual Gardener feasts and follows the same pattern—it opens with a sermon preached by Adam One on that particular feast day, followed by a Gardener hymn. Adam One’s sermons are presented in chronological order, stretching over a period of twenty years. The sermons and hymns are followed by short chapters set in the post-apocalyptic present, narrated by Ren in the first person or focalised through Toby, and all narrative switches are labelled (“Toby,” “Ren,” or “Spoken by Adam One”). As in *Oryx and Crake*, flashbacks and memories intersperse Ren’s and Toby’s experiences of the post-apocalyptic present, and all narrative strands progress more or less chronologically, and the last sermons by Adam are also from the “Year of the Flood.” The repetitive pattern of each part creates a liturgical, cyclical feel that complements its religious content.

The inclusion of three very different protagonists means that the sect’s teachings and inner workings are illuminated from different vantage points: their official doctrine is presented in the form of Adam One’s revisions of Christianity and the Gardener hymns that open each part of the novel, while Toby’s sceptical memories of her time as a Gardener are counterbalanced with Ren’s sometimes naïve first-person recollections of her involvement with the sect as a child. Katherine V. Snyder notes that through this structure, “Atwood braids a multi-stranded narrative that is simultaneously singular and collective, telling the stories of individual characters, of a utopian community in a dystopian world, and of the collective fate of humankind” (“Screen” 201). Numerous critics have

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1 The earliest sermon included is from Year Five, i.e. five years after the establishment of the first Garden, while the pandemic (called the “Waterless Flood”) occurs in Year Twenty-Five.
juxtaposed the single male focaliser of *Oryx and Crake* with the female focalisation of Toby and Ren. Richard Alan Northover, for instance, describes how “the monologic aspects of *Oryx and Crake*, masculine, pessimistic and tragic, are supplanted by the feminist, comic and optimistic polyphony of *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*” (“Ecological” 93). Susan Watkins likewise sees *The Year of the Flood* as a “comic reworking of the tragic masculine perspective or narrative of Jimmy in the first novel” (132), while Lars Schmeink describes the novel as “interject[ing] . . . the female, precarious perspective of the pleeblands” (74) and Annette Lapointe identifies the Gardeners as representative of “[a] parallel culture organized on feminine [sic]/environmentalist lines” (141). Yet, as Paula Farca rightly points out, the novel’s “female perspective does not presuppose female power” (18). Women lead precarious lives in the pleeblands: Toby is rescued from violent abuse and almost certain death at the hands of Blanco by the Gardeners; Ren works as a “postfeminist” (Bouson, “We’re” 13) exotic dancer in a manner as unapologetic about her commodification as Oryx is in the first novel; and after the pandemic Ren and Amanda are subject to the rape and abuse of the Painballers, led by Blanco. In striving to uphold this male–female distinction between the first two novels, however, critics tend to circumvent the central role played by Adam One. Adam One is certainly a protagonist and the entire text is structured according to his theology. In this chapter my focus falls on the evangelical aspects of environmentalism, and Adam One is therefore central to the discussion. Moreover, as shown below, Atwood herself metaleptically preaches environmentalism in a manner resembling that of Adam One in the novel, so he seems pivotal in the shaping of her environmental project as a whole.

Environmentalism, as argued throughout, is steeped in apocalypticism. The first part of this chapter looks at the way in which Adam One can be said to hypocritically appropriate Christianity for his own environmental means. Radical environmentalism exhibits many parallels to evangelical Christianity and Adam One follows an established environmentalist pattern, albeit hypocritically. He seems highly aware of his own hypocrisy and frequently adopts the character of the fool in an auto-satirical manner. The focus of the Gardeners’ doctrine is on practice, rather than faith, and the following part centres on the ethical practices they

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2 He is not mentioned at all by Watkins or Schmeink; Anna Bedford notes that the novel is “told from the perspective of two women” (72), without referring to Adam One, while Andrei Simuț observes that “the narrative point of view changes, shifting between two feminine characters, Toby and Ren,” without paying attention to the fact that portions are spoken by Adam One. Likewise, Miles Weaver pays no attention to Adam One’s role, referring only to him as a “mysterious priest” (60).
advocate, and particularly on witnessing, which bears many similarities to the impotent resistance offered through art in *Oryx and Crake*. Witnessing is related to storytelling, and as in the previous novel, storytelling is shown to have real, potentially disastrous, consequences in *The Year of the Flood*. This novel can thus also be said to problematise the role played by the imagination in environmentalism and more generally. In Chapter 2 I have already indicated how the peritexts of the MaddAddam Trilogy highlight its status as a work of art that is aware of its commodification. In the final part of this chapter I pay specific attention to the *Year of the Flood* book tour, which exemplifies how Atwood provides opportunity for rethinking the role of the imagination in environmentalism by problematising the relationship between aesthetics and commercialism. I also pay some attention to the ways in which readers are included in the Gardeners’ congregation through hymns and sermons, and to prophetic elements in the Gardeners’ creed, as well as to the way in which Atwood in turn has been deemed a ‘prophetical’ author. Throughout the novel, however, the Gardeners are satirised, and there is little indication that this is a serious attempt on Atwood’s part to found an ecoreligion (as some critics have argued).³

Whereas metalepsis in *Oryx and Crake* is mainly intradiegetic, Atwood ironically and metaleptically bases the promotional *Year of the Flood* book tour on her fictional world, so as to perform a type of evangelical environmentalist activism herself. The last part of this chapter focusses on the book tour, and shows how metalepsis allows Atwood to simultaneously preach environmentalism and distance herself ironically from her environmentalist message. Atwood’s advocacy of green consumerism is highlighted, as it again shows just how entangled financial aspects are with aesthetics and activism in relation to the MaddAddam Trilogy. I finally briefly turn to Atwood’s environmental education project. The novel’s promotional website included a “reading list” of environmentalist books, by and large authored by the same people canonised by the Gardeners in the novel. This educational aspect of Atwood’s extratextual

³ Ashley Dawson, for example, holds that “Atwood seems to intend her readers to take the Gardeners seriously as a vehicle for redemption” (75), while Andrew Hoogheem takes seriously (64) Atwood’s metaleptical invitation to her readers to use the hymns “for amateur devotional or environmental purposes” in the acknowledgements to the novel (YF 433). J. Brooks Bouson remarks that Atwood “in an unexpected manoeuvre for readers long familiar with her work, looks to religion—specifically eco-religion—as she seeks evidence of our ethical capacity to find a remedy to humanity’s ills” (“We’re” 17). According to a note included by Gerry Canavan, Greg Garrard has “suggest[ed] that the book may, in fact, be a serious attempt to create a Darwinist ecological religion—making the novel quite literally a Bible for the world to come after all” (Canavan, “Hope” 157–58n24). Like Canavan I do not believe this to be the case, as should become clear from my discussion of Atwood’s book tour, on which Garrard bases his assumption.
activism is highly metaleptical, and much less satiric than the book tour performances. It is therefore perhaps here where the MaddAddam Trilogy best reveals itself as an environmental project. Atwood deliberate stages her environmental activism as a hybrid of art and commodity. In doing so, she arguably adopts a hypocritical attitude to her work (and to her evangelical environmentalism), which is not all that different from the attitude Adam One adopts in relation to the Gardeners’ creed in the novel itself, discussed below. Atwood partially self-satirises this hypocritical attitude, yet it is still used to present readers with an environmentalist message. Her very adoption of such an attitude is telling—it shows how her metaleptical satire enables her to cannily preach an environmentalist message without having to admit to doing so, while also highlighting the question of her intended audience.

**Gleaning a Doctrine**

Adam One and the Gardeners have a penchant for creative euphemism. One of their recurring expressions is “gleaning,” which can be used to refer to acquiring “salvaged” objects (YF 63), but sometimes appears to border on stealing. In a similar manner, Adam One’s doctrine is a gleaned amalgam of Christian millenarianism and science, which also draws on some of the established practices of radical environmentalism. In reconciling Christianity and evolutionary theory, for instance, Adam One mobilises hypocrisy for environmental ends. This theological hodgepodge is not all that different from Crake’s incorporation of so many different species in the Crakers’ genetic makeup. In fact, Adam One does not really try to present an entirely consistent doctrine, and his teachings are humorously shown to be developed as needed.4

Just as Jimmy serves as sceptical commentator on Crake’s apocalyptic utopianism, Toby functions as the main sceptic in this novel. Ren’s point of view provides another counterpoint to Adam One’s sanctimoniousness, while Zeb, who forms the radical ecoterrorist MaddAddam group after a schism about the Gardeners’ pacifism, provides a further critical point of view.5 Incorporating these critical voices plays an

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4 Andrew Hoogheem remarks that “all manner of exceptions and inconsistencies are permitted in the service of living the sustainable, reverent lifestyle the Gardeners advocate” (62).
5 Dawson notes that Toby, Ren, and Zeb present “internal critique” to the Gardeners’ theology (75).
important role in Atwood’s ambiguous project, which both involves “demythologizin[g]” apocalypse and “contributing to its tradition of prophetic warning,” as Hope Jennings points out (11). In the following sections I first briefly look at the relationship between Christianity and environmentalism, before turning to the manner in which Adam One hypocritically appropriates evangelical Christianity to further his brand of pacifist environmentalism. At the same time, Adam One’s self-deprecating adoption of the persona of the holy fool serves to both undermine and strengthen his position as messenger, as is shown below.

**New Edens: Christianity and Environmentalism**

Environmentalism often adopts the vocabulary of the kind of apocalypticism rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It seems significant that the religion of the God’s Gardeners is primarily based on Christianity, particularly in the light of the widely-held notion that Christendom, through its anthropocentric endorsement of the dominion of humans over nature, has played a large part in triggering and perpetuating ecological crises in the west. The most well-known version of this thesis appeared in Lynn White’s now seminal essay “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (1967). In his essay, White traces the connection between Christianity and imperialism and establishes that most ecological woes are due to “an implicit faith in perpetual progress” that is “rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology” (1205). Much like Adam One, White warns of the dangers of reliance on scientific and technological solutions to ecological problems: “More science and more technology are not going to get us out of our present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one” (1206). In White’s subsequent consideration of St Francis of Assisi as “the greatest radical in Christian history since Christ,” he seems to come very close to the notions espoused by Adam One and the Gardeners: “Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious,” White holds, “the remedy must also essentially be religious, whether we call it that or not” (1207). Although mainstream Christianity has been slow to respond to ongoing environmental crisis, some change has taken place since White published his essay. On 29 November 1979, St Francis of Assisi was declared patron saint of ecology by Pope John Paul II, and on 18 June 2015 Pope Francis published his second encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, which bears the subtitle “On Care for Our Common Home.” The encyclical is essentially a Catholic environmentalist manifesto
and addresses anthropogenic climate change, fossil fuel use, and the disproportionate impact of environmental damage on poor communities, while also speaking out against conspicuous consumption and a “throwaway culture” (Francis Sec. 22). *Laudato Si’* could be seen as an attempt to rethink Christian values by converting them into more environmentally-friendly ones, thus in effect redeeming Christianity from its complicity with ecological destruction. Adam One’s ecoreligion likewise constitutes an attempt to reconcile Christian values with environmental ethics and scientific fact.⁶

Mainstream protestant Christianity has also paid increased attention to environmental issues in recent decades. Roderick Nash has identified a “‘greening’ of recent American religion—the development of what is called ecotheology” (*Rights* 92).⁷ Since religion gives meaning to “the unintended and unforeseen” thereby stressing “the necessity and the reality of the transcendent,” Peter Beyer argues that “[t]he nature of environmental crisis is therefore just the sort of problem religion addresses: it is virtually religious” (208). Roger Gottlieb observes that “theoreticians of religion and the environment alike question whether and in what ways religious energies can be connected to secular environmental philosophy and ecological activism” (“Introduction” 10). To some extent, however, this association has already taken place—the existing resemblance between the practices of secular environmental activists and evangelical Christians is striking. Both movements demand personal commitment, expect adherents to keep to certain ethical codes, and seek to convert nonbelievers through various means (often including threats about what the future may hold should they fail to see the errors of their ways).

In short, environmentalism, like most religions, tends to be both prescriptive and dogmatic. This is evident in the case of real-life radical environmentalist groups such as Earth First!.⁸ Bron Taylor argues, for instance, that although few members of Earth First! “identify exclusively with any particular religious tradition,” the organisation should be considered a religion since “[c]lose observation of Earth First! and of the wider deep ecology movement shows an emerging corpus of myth, symbol,  

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⁶ It is important to note that Pope Francis’s encyclical is not technophobic, but instead calls for the judicious use of technology.

⁷ Nash attributes this development to a combination of three factors: incorporation of elements of non-anthropocentric (eastern) faiths; inclusion of “the strong animist traditions of American Indians”; and the reinterpretation of basic Judeo-Christian beliefs “to accommodate demands for an ethical system that did not exclude nature” (*Rights* 92).

⁸ Earth First! was founded in 1980, with the stated aim of “introduc[ing] and promot[ing] sabotage as well as civil disobedience as a means of environmental struggle” (Taylor “Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front” 518).
and rite that reveals the emergence of a dynamic, new religious movement” (“From Primal” 547, 548). Taylor continues to show that Earth First!’s mythological foundation includes an explanation of “how the world came to be (a cosmogony), what it is like (a cosmology), what people are capable or incapable of achieving (a moral anthropology), and what the future holds (an eschatology)” (“From Primal” 547). Moreover, Taylor stresses the apocalyptic nature of Earth First!’s beliefs (an apocalypticism which clearly resonates with the worldview of the Gardeners in the novel): “Earth First! is radical largely due to this apocalyptic worldview: There will be a collapse of society, because this society is ecologically unsustainable” (“From Primal” 552). Although I briefly return to Earth First! below, my point here is not so much that there are real-life parallels to the Gardeners, but rather that religion, and specifically evangelical forms of Protestantism, seems to have provided a model for much radical environmentalism.

Despite the fact that apocalyptic thought is a common denominator in evangelical Christianity and environmentalism, Henry Maier points out that there is also a strong Christian tradition of distrust of environmentalism based on readings of the biblical apocalypse: whether ecological destruction is seen as the result of human sin, or as heralding the second coming of Christ, it is deemed god-ordained (253). On the other hand, Maier notes that Christian environmentalists tend to base their arguments on competing readings of Revelation (255). Moreover, as Greg Garrard notes, “[e]nvironmental crisis serves modern American conservative evangelists just as natural disasters served mediaeval millenarians; as a sign of the coming End, but not as a warning to avert it” (Ecocriticism 97). If apocalyptic beliefs are to be self-fulfilling prophecies, they do not encourage action, but rather inaction, and this may be reflected in the passive approach adopted by the Gardeners in The Year of the Flood.

The Gardeners’ theology takes its bearings from the Christian tradition it tries to transform in a manner rather different from ostensibly secular environmental groups like Earth First!. The millenarianism finds an apt metaphor in the garden: they call themselves God’s Gardeners and refer to their elders as Adams and Eves. Contained in the Edenic is also the notion of a fall from grace, which in Gardener doctrine becomes “a fall into greed” (YF 52). Adam One glosses original sin as human disobedience to “[t]he commandment to live the Animal life in all simplicity—without clothing, so to speak” (YF 52). Moreover, he explicitly equates human exceptionalism with the sin of pride: “We pray that we may not fall into the
error of pride by considering ourselves as exceptional, alone in all Creation in having Souls; and that we will not vainly imagine that we are set above all other Life, and may destroy it at our pleasure, and with impunity” (YF 53). According to Adam One, the postdiluvian covenant between God, Noah, and the animals has been broken by humanity through its pride, leading to ecological collapse.

The Gardeners’ reverence for all life may therefore perhaps best be described in terms of what biologist E. O. Wilson has called biophilia, defined as “the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes” (1). Wilson describes biophilia as a defining human trait: “we are human in good part because of the particular way we affiliate with other organisms” (139). Similarly, Adam One reminds his congregation that “[w]henever we are tempted to become puffed up, and to see ourselves as superior to all other Animals, we should reflect on our own brutal history” (YF 312). Although the notion of biophilia is not devoid of ideas of human exceptionalism, it nevertheless emphasises continuity between human and nonhuman nature. Adam One extends this continuity to the divine in his meditation on “the Alpha Predator aspects of God”: “God walks in the tender dawn Gardens of the mind, but He also prowls in its night Forests. He is not a tame Being, my Friends: he is a wild Being, and cannot be summoned and controlled like a Dog” (YF 346). Adam One’s reflection on the predatory nature of God clearly brings to mind the “immortal hand or eye” which could give William Blake’s Tyger its “fearful symmetry” (3, 4). Just as Blake considers the dual nature of a creator both responsible for the Tyger and the Lamb, Adam One’s emphasis on the complexity of the wild nature of God serves to establish continuity between nature and the divine, which is analogous to the biophilic continuity between human and nonhuman nature. In the Gardener hymn “When God Shall His Bright Wings Unfold” (YF 373), God appears in the shapes of various birds—as a dove, but also as a vulture. In some ways the veneration for life exhibited by the Gardeners borders on pantheism, but it is, as shown above, frequently tempered by their incorporation of scientific findings. Wilson writes that the “role of science, like that of art, is to blend exact imagery with more

10 E. O. Wilson is named as one of the Gardener saints (YF 246), so the connection is more than incidental.

Like Adam One, Wilson struggles to reconcile a view of humanity as part of nature with an approach that still marks the human as a separate observer and exploiter of nonhuman nature. “Humanity is exalted not because we are so far above other living creatures, but because knowing them well elevates the very concept of life” (22). Wilson remarks rather circularly. More disturbingly, Wilson speaks of human curiosity about nonhuman nature in terms of mastery and progress: “Nature is to be mastered, but (we hope) never completely. A quiet passion burns, not for total control but for the sensation of constant advance” (10).
distant meaning, the parts we already understand with those given as new into larger patterns that are coherent enough to be acceptable as truth” (51), and the Gardeners similarly accept religious and scientific narratives as versions of the same truth.

As shown by the opening hymn of the novel, the fall and ultimate restoration of the Garden of Eden is at the core of Gardener doctrine:

Oh Garden, oh my Garden,  
I'll mourn forevermore  

Until the Gardeners arise,  
And you to Life restore. (YF n. pag.)

Any recreated Garden will, however, always be a worldly, fallen paradise, but a type of paradise or utopia nonetheless. Their anticipated “new Eden” is not so much an apocalyptic New Jerusalem, but rather a second postdiluvian state of grace, thus connecting the myth of the garden to that of Noah’s Ark. As such the Gardener creed works according to the Christian trajectory of sin and redemption, although it does not end in eternal salvation, but in re-established harmony between humanity and nonhuman nature.

**Hypocrisy and Foolishness**

Adam One’s simultaneous adoption and subversion of Christian traditions, vocabulary, and doctrine could be described as a strategy of hypocrisy. This, however, involves more than the inevitable hypocrisy Timothy Morton sees as the result of all-encompassing environmental crisis. In his leadership of the Gardener sect, Adam One is actively hypocritical, albeit for the greater environmental good, and sometimes to ensure the safety of his followers. In part, Adam One’s hypocrisy is the result of his reappropriation of Christianity. In adopting some of the trappings of religion (such as the persona of a messianic sect leader) to found his own, revised version of the same religion, Adam One occupies a hypocritical position which asks his followers to distrust the dominant pre-pandemic forms of Christianity, but

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11 Laura Wright observes that “the novel is careful to engage with . . . hypocrisy in a way that can perhaps foster a new mythology upon which to rebuild society after the apocalypse” (521). Her observation is, however, made in the light of their eating habits, which Wright mischaracterises as “vegan” (516).
to believe in his version. In doing so, Adam One also takes a position against his father, the Rev, who in his “Church of PetrOleum, affiliated with the somewhat more mainstream Petrobaptists” (MA 111) preaches consumerism and fossil fuel consumption. This is however only revealed through Zeb’s flashbacks in MaddAddam. Nevertheless, in The Year of the Flood the Gardeners are clearly set apart from “[t]he Known Fruits and the Petrobaptists and the other rich-people religions” (YF 39) which seem to operate according to a kind of hypernormative paradigm, in which consumerism reigns supreme. Although many of the details about the Gardeners’ background are only relayed in MaddAddam, it is important to note that Adam One was trained to be a theologian in the fossil fuel churches. His university education is subject to even blunter satire than that of Jimmy in Oryx and Crake: Adam One studied at “Spindletop U. and had majored in PetrTheology, Homiletics, and PetrBiology; this last, as far as Zeb could see, required you to learn biology in order to disprove it” (MA 120). Adam is a trained hypocrite, and many of the Gardener elders are bioscientists who defected from the corporations to stage their resistance under the cover of religion. Adam One’s resistance to the dominant forms of Christianity is thus initially launched from inside the system. It is partly by virtue of his position and background that Adam One can simultaneously adopt and subvert the dominant religions, much as Crake can overthrow the corporate system precisely because he is part of it.

Much like Crake, Adam One focusses on Darwinian evolution. In trying to reconcile evolutionary theory with traditional Christianity, he sometimes faces theological challenges and has to take illogical turns of thought (which may be deemed hypocritical), thus showing that such a synthesis remains a utopian ideal. Biology acts as a mediating third term between the physical and the metaphysical in Adam One’s theology. Accordingly, Adam One preaches on humanity’s “Primate ancestry—an affirmation that has brought down wrath upon us from those who arrogantly persist in evolutionary denial” (YF 51). His emphasis on evolution clearly recalls Crake’s description from the previous novel of how humanity is ruled by “monkey brains” (OC 99). Adam One holds, for example, that “[o]ur appetites, our desires, our more uncontrollable emotions—all are Primate!” (YF 52). Original sin, in Adam One’s theology, can be traced back to humans taking the shape of “perishable matter, and a

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12 Nazry Bahrawi (257) and Anna Lindhé (47) both remark on the Christ-like portrayal of Adam One, without accounting for the fact that it is largely the result of his self-portrayal.

13 Some of these elders, like Pilar, appear to be truly spiritual, although it is impossible to say whether they all believe in Adam One’s doctrines.
matter so unfortunately Monkey-like” (YF 52), not to human rebellion against the divine.

“Adam One used to say that people can believe two opposite things at the same time,” Ren remarks (YF 229), and much of the Gardeners’ doctrine is based on accepting contradictions. Toby’s recollection of their teachings on the nature of love is likewise typical of Adam One’s attempts to reconcile Christianity and science: “Some will tell you Love is merely chemical, my Friends, said Adam One. Of course it is chemical: where would any of us be without chemistry?” (YF 359). Adam One then goes on to determine that “Science is merely one way of describing the world. Another way of describing it would be to say: where would any of us be without Love?” (YF 359). In a similar attempt to reconcile the biblical account of creation with the Big Bang theory, Adam One first highlights the similarities in these two competing narratives: “both accounts concur in their essence: Darkness; then, in an instant, Light” (YF 12). Yet, by the end of a lengthy exposition of the biblical creation story, Adam One comically qualifies his argument by pointing out that the biblical and scientific accounts place events in “more or less the same order. Or close enough” (YF 12). In both these sermons Adam One brings together scientific explanations with an esoteric appeal to faith, in a fairly nebulous, if inoffensive manner, which in effect compels his congregation to believe two contradictory things simultaneously.

There is never doubt in the novel that the Gardeners are benign, on the whole, and the corporations (particularly the CorpSeCorps) malign. Still, the contradictions inherent in Gardener theology and practice are frequently satirically exposed. After being appointed an Eve, for example, Toby finds that the Gardener leadership, despite prohibiting the use of electronics, owns a computer that is kept hidden from the other members of the sect:

Toby had been shocked to discover this—wasn’t such a device in direct contravention of Gardener principles?—but Adam One had reassured her: they never went online with it except with extreme precaution, they used it mostly for the storage of crucial data pertaining to the Exfernal World, and they took care to conceal such a dangerous object from the Gardener membership at large—especially the children. Nevertheless, they had one. “It’s like the Vatican’s porn collection,” Zeb told her. “Safe in our hands.” (YF 188–89)

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14 This appears to be an overt allusion to Orwellian doublethink, although Adam One’s intentions are more benign than that of the totalitarian Ingsoc government in Nineteen Eight-Four.
Toby’s sceptical observations provide a counterpoint to the blind faith shown by some of the Gardeners, and Zeb’s lack of reverence for Adam One fulfils a similar purpose in the novel. Adam One’s leadership involves negotiating contradictions hypocritically. He tries to present the general Gardener membership and children with simple truths that serve a higher, environmental purpose, but he is open with his deception to those in the know. “[S]incerity consists of a performance,” Ernst van Alphen and Mieke Bal write (3), and Adam One’s self-reflective hypocrisy is, paradoxically, nothing if not sincere. This in turn renders him a sympathetic character, who, although set in his own ways, appears slightly more pragmatic and less dogmatic than extremists like Crake.

Part of Adam One’s performance of sincerity involves avoiding the accusation of hypocrisy by drawing attention to his own hypocritical position through his emphasis on the “the foolishness within all religions” (YF 195). In this manner, Adam One casts himself as both prophet and fool. As David Runciman has pointed out in a rather different context, this kind of self-awareness seems to “[forestall] the charge of hypocrisy before it can be made” as “self-knowledge provides the bona fides of . . . good intentions” (28). Building the notion of foolishness into Gardener theology seems at least in part to be a pre-emptive recognition of the fact that the Gardeners and their practices are regarded as fools by the rest of society. More pertinently, it links Adam One’s teachings with the tradition of the divine fool, and therefore underlines rather than undermines the value of what he preaches. In so affirming his teachings by appearing to invalidate them, Adam One demonstrates how powerfully hypocrisy can function as a strategy. As seen in the discussion of the Year of the Flood book tour below, Atwood adopts a very similar ironic distance to her own metaleptic environmental activism, in which she positions herself both as the conveyor of an environmental message, and as somehow removed from the message being conveyed.

Adam One’s “April Fish” sermon is based on the premise that since “God contains all things good, He must also contain a sense of playfulness” (YF 195). After taking a rather absurd theological detour to explain that “Jesus first called as his Apostles two fishermen, surely chosen by him to help conserve the Fish population. They were told to be fishers of men instead of being fishers of Fish, thus neutralizing two destroyers of Fish!” (YF 195–96), Adam One explains that “the life of the Spirit always seems foolish to those who do not share it” (YF 196). Accordingly he urges his

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15 Runciman’s comments pertains to Tony Blair’s handling of post-9/11 terrorism, which he sees as involving “embrac[ing] the double standards of contemporary politics” (27).
congregation to “accept and wear the label of God’s Fools gladly, for in
relation to God we are all fools, no matter how wise we may think we are”
(YF 196).

Although his message appears sincere, it is never quite possible to
say just how serious Adam One is. Throughout his sermons, Adam One’s
curious mixture of high and low seems to underscore the foolish persona he
adopts. He has a penchant for using euphemism and for creating lists that
tend to veer off into the absurd, giving his sermons a slightly surreal feel.
The first sermon that appears in the novel, preached by Adam One on
Creation Day in Year Five, sets out the foundation of the Gardeners’
teachings and the main environmental practices advocated by the sect. In
this, as in all the other sermons contained in The Year of the Flood, readers
become in effect Gardeners by proxy: Adam One starts each sermon with a
direct salutation, addressing, for example, “Dear Friends, dear Fellow
Creatures, dear Fellow Mammals” (YF 11). Although this is not precisely a
metaleptic “Dear Reader,” the direct address includes readers in the
congregation. By making the sermons such a prominent part of the novel,
Atwood can also preach environmentalism by proxy, without appearing to
do so. Like the other sermons, it opens with a few general observations
related to the specific feast. In this case Adam One points out that through
their Edendcliff Rooftop Garden the Gardeners are playing a “small part in
the redemption of God’s Creation from the decay and sterility that lies all
around” (YF 11). In the next passage of the sermon, Adam One first holds
out hope, then delivers an almost Churchillian appeal to hard work, before
suddenly changing register and returning to the mundane:

Some would term our efforts futile, but if all were to follow our example,
what a change would be wrought on our beloved Planet! Much hard work
still lies before us, but fear not, my Friends: for we shall move forward
undaunted.
I am glad we have all remembered our sunhats. (YF 11)

Such abrupt switches from the idealistic to the commonplace punctuate his
sermons, often to comic effect. Whereas much of the satire in Oryx and
Crake derives from dissonance between the connotations and denotations
of punning brand names, the dissonance in The Year of the Flood is usually
between the tone and register of Adam One’s sermons, and their actual
content. In addition to incorporating mock-cheerful rhyming slogans like
“It is better to hope than to mope!” (YF 89), Adam One tends to switch
registers suddenly. The ubiquitous capitalisation of important nouns (the
names of species, religious concepts) invites the reader to give them more
emphasis. Coupled with the rhythm of his sermons, his preaching definitely
imitates the familiar intonations of Anglophone Protestants, much as the
hymns follow familiar hymnal patterns. In his “Saint Euell of Wild Foods” sermon, for example, Adam adopts his preacher-like tone to deliver something resembling a recipe:

[Saint Euell] taught us not to waste; for even the lowly Nettle, so often wrenched up and thrown away, is a source of many vitamins. He taught us to improvise; for if there is no Sorrel, there may be Cattails; and if there are no Blueberries, the wild Cranberry may perhaps abound.

Saint Euell, may we sit with you in Spirit at your table, that lowly tarpaulin spread upon the ground; and dine with you upon wild Strawberries, and upon spring Fiddleheads, and upon young Milkweed pods, lightly simmered, with a little butter substitute if it can be obtained.

(YF 126)

In this example the satiric deflation, as usually in The Year of the Flood, comes at the end of a paragraph. Adam One’s adaption of the formulae of traditional Christianity to somewhat incongruous content sometimes shades over into a surreal caricature of evangelical preaching, as for example when he punctuates his consideration of the human body as a garden with “[w]e teem with multitudes, my Friends—[w]ith the myriad forms of Life that creep about under our feet, and—I may add—under our toenails” (YF 160).

There are often practical problems when the God’s Gardeners try to live ethically in a fallen world, leading to some hypocritical discrepancy between their beliefs and actions. For instance, although they neither support nor advocate industrial-scale production, they “glean” and repurpose discarded manufactured goods for their own use; they teach that writing is dangerous and avoid the use of written texts, yet most of their religion is based on the bible; they sell handmade products to a niche market for a substantial part of their income, and in this limited way they participate in the market system they deplore. Frequently the potential problems with the Gardeners’ teachings are humorously exposed, in which the children play an important role. A minor theological crisis arises when some of the Gardeners learn about “the differences between the biting, rending teeth of carnivores and the grinding, munching teeth of herbivores,” and “wanted to know why—if Adam was created as a vegetarian, as he surely was—human teeth should show such mixed characteristics” (YF 240). Importantly, Adam One demands that the elders present a communally-devised answer that makes sense in scientific terms too, since “they could not achieve their goal of reconciling the findings of Science with their sacramental view of Life simply by overriding the rules of the former” (YF 240). A similar crisis ensues when the children become worried about “the animal-skin clothing provided by God for Adam and Eve at the end of Genesis 3” (YF 241). The Adams and Eves suggest they be
taught that these are the skins of very small animals that died natural
deaths, and Adam One decrees that this argument should “stand for now,
until a more plausible explanation presents itself” (YT 241). The Gardeners’
theology is depicted as something under active negotiation, yet nevertheless
prone to orthodoxy.

In spite of all the humorous ways in which Adam One and the
Gardeners’ hypocrisy is depicted, it does seem important that the satire is
not nearly as caustic as that with which Zeb remembers the Rev and his
Church of PetrOleum in MaddAddam. The contrast between Adam One’s
advocacy of passive resistance and the Rev’s capitalisation on exploitation
(including abusing Zeb as a child) could hardly be greater.\footnote{Readers learn later in MaddAddam that the Rev was not Zeb’s father and that Adam and Zeb are not blood relations, although they grew up as brothers.} In MaddAddam, the Rev becomes a caricature of an evil preacher, while Adam
One for all his righteous indignation always appears to be good at heart. By
including both these preachers in the trilogy, Atwood draws attention to the
misappropriation of dogma; in MaddAddam it becomes clear that the Rev
and Adam One make use of the same means for very different ends. The
suggestion is therefore that the end justifies the means, and this attitude
appears to govern Atwood’s extratextual environmental activism and her
advocacy of green consumerism too. In all, the satirical representation of
the Gardeners does not preclude utopian sensibility to the same extent as in
the representation of the Crakers in Oryx and Crake. Although their
utopian reimagining of the place of humans in a more equitable system is
thoroughly satirised, the sincerity of the creed of the Gardeners (if not of
individual members), appears never completely in doubt, perhaps because
of their refusal to take themselves completely seriously.

\section*{Crafting Utopia}

Whereas dreaming is one of the sustained metaphors used in connection
with utopia in Oryx and Crake, the God’s Gardeners tend to set more store
by practice. When Toby, some years after being rescued by the sect, is asked
to become an Eve, she answers that she cannot accept the title, because
doing so “would be hypocritical”:

\begin{quote}
She’d never managed to repeat the moment of illumination she’d felt on
her first day with the Gardeners, though she’d tried often enough. She’d
gone on the Retreats, she’d done an Isolation Week, she’d performed the
\end{quote}
Vigils, she’d taken the required mushrooms and elixirs, but no special revelations had come to her. Visions, yes, but none with meaning. Or none with any meaning she could decipher. (YF 168)

Although she says herself to have “believed in very little” of their doctrine, Toby is reassured by Adam One, who explains that unlike some other religions, where faith heralds action, in theirs “action precedes faith” (YF 168). “You’ve been acting as if you believe, dear Toby,” Adam One explains. “As if—those two words are very important to us. Continue to live according to them, and belief will follow in time” (YF 168). As Lauren A. Rule Maxwell argues, “[t]he phrase ‘as if,’ in addition to being important to this scene and the Gardeners’ ecocritical theology, is also important for reading the novel as a whole” (4). As the novel unfolds, it appears that Adam One’s prediction was correct: on one level Toby’s story is a tale of conversion. In taking over as Eve Six from Pilar, Toby’s duties include beekeeping as well as being in charge of medicines and potions, and both these practical duties are attended by Gardener lore and superstition. Toby’s religious conviction seems to deepen during the course of The Year of the Flood, and the novel’s “almost fairytale-like ending” (Bergthaller 741) shows her serving soup to a group of survivors on the night of the Gardener feast of Saint Julian and All Souls. Toby now sounds curiously like Adam One: “This is not the time,” says Toby in her old Eve voice, “for dwelling on ultimate purposes. I would like us all to forget the past, the worst parts of it. Let us be grateful for this food that has been given to us” (YF 430–31). In MaddAddam, Toby seems by far the most pious of the former Gardeners and emerges as the spiritual leader and healer of the surviving humans, as well as the main storyteller to the Crakers. In religious terms, Ren’s storyline, on the other hand, describes her faith as a child, her drifting away from the Gardeners and her gradual return to a community by virtue of being rescued by Toby, although it is never quite clear if she is a believer as an adult.

At the start of the novel, both Toby and Ren are physically isolated. Toby has locked herself in the AnooYoo spa and Ren has been in the “Sticky Zone” quarantine area of the Scales and Tails, the sex club where she works, as she has suffered possible exposure to disease shortly before the outbreak of the pandemic. It is by virtue of their isolation that they survive the pandemic, and the post-apocalyptic storyline of the novel progresses from

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17 Maxwell’s argument is that “[r]ead the novel leads us to consider if we, too, have been acting as if we believe that our everyday behaviors affect the world around us in a meaningful way” (4).

18 In this novel she insists on doing an “Enhanced Meditation” to commune with her “inner Pilar” (MA 219) at Pilar’s grave, and ends up communicating with a Pigoon sow, thus laying the foundation for the eventual truce between the Pigoons and the humans.
the two isolated women to the communal meal served by Toby. The redemption trajectory is therefore paralleled by a movement from isolation to the possibility of community, which is much more definite than in *Oryx and Crake* (the previous novel ends before readers know what Snowman will do about the other survivors). The end of *The Year of the Flood* is likewise inconclusive. Yet the emphasis throughout the novel falls on the importance of community—Toby and Ren’s memories are mostly about interpersonal relations, however flawed they may be, while Adam One’s sermons are addressed to a congregation, and the hymns are meant to be sung together. It is in this definite progression from isolation to community (however precarious and temporary) that some hope lies. While the previous part of this chapter mainly concentrates on the doctrine of the Gardeners, the following sections centre on their communal practices, and focus particularly on the importance of the garden, the practice of witnessing, and their hymns. Atwood’s work has often been received as prophetic, and the final section of this part shows how Atwood, much like Adam One, humorously cultivates an oracular persona.

**The Garden**

In keeping with the down-to-earthness of the Gardeners and their general pragmatism, going through the motions is as good as, or indistinguishable from, true faith. Or, put differently, faith *is* action. Adam One therefore preaches experiential or situated knowledge in the form of what he calls “Serpent Wisdom,” or “the wisdom of *feeling directly*, as the Serpent feels vibrations in the Earth” (*YF* 234). This kind of knowledge is cast as the opposite of “the elaborate intellectual frameworks Humankind is endlessly constructing for itself” and is equated by Adam One with a “wholeness of Being” (*YF* 235, 236). The material basis of the Gardeners’ spirituality is also evident in Adam One’s insistence that utopia should be crafted, rather than just dreamt. The garden is therefore an apt image, implying, if not an enclosed space, at least a space otherwise limited and distinguished from its surroundings. A garden suggests some degree of planning, order, and nurture, and implies much manual labour. As an image of rest and respite a garden also suggests at least a certain degree of harmony.

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19 In keeping with the Gardeners’ reverence for all living creatures, Adam One thus rehabilitates the serpent that spoke such foolish words of wisdom in the biblical Garden of Eden.
Gardening aligns the sect with various other (utopian) traditions and modes, such as pastoral and idyll. For the Gardeners, their Edencliff Rooftop Garden, on the roof of an abandoned block of flats, is also a lifeline: it provides much of their food, it sustains the bees from which they get honey (traded as one of their few outside sources of income), and it keeps members continually usefully occupied. Quite a bit of Gardener lore therefore takes on a georgic character, such as advice relating to the phases of the moon: “Old moon is a pruning week, said the Gardeners. Plant by the new, slash by the old. A good time to apply sharp tools to yourself, hack off any extraneous parts that might need trimming” (YF 237). Following their non-violent creed rather dogmatically, their gardening practices, such as “relocating” slugs and snails “by heaving them over the railing into the traffic, where they were supposed to crawl off and find new homes” (YF 83), are also frequently satirised in the novel.20

Adam One’s sermons frequently make use of imagery where the garden is used to indicate scale or interconnectedness. The planet itself is a “shared garden” (YF 423); imagination is glossed as “the inner Gardens of our Minds” (YF 345); and on a different scale each individual Gardener “is a Garden of sub-visual life forms” (YF 160). Notions of cultivation are central to the teachings of the group, but are more often than not connected to physical, rather than intellectual pursuits. The Gardeners do not, however, valorise able-bodiedness. Although each member is expected to contribute according to interest and ability, they also acknowledge, employing yet another gardening metaphor, a “Fallow state” of being (e.g. YF 80, 107, 430), which covers most psychiatric incapacities. If anything, the sect valorises amateurism, and the physical appearance of members (determined by their once-weekly showers and changes of clothes) is seen as outward proof of their faith. Their self-righteousness—and false humility—in this regard is often satirised in the novel. “Gardener produce” is, for example, described as “the real thing. It stank of authenticity: the Gardeners might be fanatical and amusingly bizarre, but at least they were ethical” (YF 141). The Gardeners’ resistance to the status quo is thus seen to morph in its turn into a form of orthodoxy, which is frequently satirised.

The garden is portrayed as a space of relative equality, and Adam One interprets the biblical myth of the temptation of Eve by fruit to mean that “our Ancestors were fruitivores, without a doubt, and only a Fruit

20 Atwood makes use of the same euphemism in The Heart Goes Last to describe human executions. In this novel, enemies of the dystopian prison system are purported to be “sadists and psychopaths who needed to be—not euthanized, not erased, those words are too blunt. Relocated to a different sphere” (Heart 201).
would have tempted them” (YF 276). The myth of the Garden of Eden is, in addition to being a creation myth, also the biblical myth of the fall, and one of the outward signs of a fallen state is the consumption of meat, according to the Gardeners. One of the foundations of their faith is thus their vegetarianism, known as the “Vegivows,” based on the teaching that “Man in his unfallen state was not yet a carnivore” (YF 19, 15). The Gardeners are expected to keep to wholly vegetarian diets, unless they are in real danger of starvation, in which case care should be taken to eat animals from as close to the bottom of the food chain as possible, in order to limit the ecological impact of animal consumption.

Eating, and the eating of meat, is central to a number of Atwood’s earlier novels too, in which concerns about their present circumstances are often expressed in terms of the characters’ anxieties about their bodies. The Gardeners appear to take the idea that one is what one eats slightly further: they avoid meat due to an awareness of the close affinity between humans and animals—consuming meat becomes tantamount to cannibalism. In a very literal sense, human consumption patterns are shown to be devouring planetary resources in Oryx and Crake, and in the budding mythology of the Crakers, the insatiable appetite of their human predecessors is deemed to have played the decisive role in their own creation. As Snowman explains to them:

> The people in the chaos were full of chaos themselves, and the chaos made them do bad things. They were killing other people all the time. And they were eating up all the Children of Oryx [animals], against the wishes of Oryx and Crake. Every day they were eating them up. They were killing them and killing them, and eating them and eating them. They ate them even when they weren’t hungry. (OC 119, my emphasis)

The scarcity of food sources in an overpopulated world also has other, more sinister results, such as the consumption of endangered animals at the gourmet Rarity restaurants (YF 39), which may perhaps be seen as a quest for an authenticity otherwise absent from eating, as well as the Quick Geek Show on the internet, in which contestants compete in the eating of live birds and animals (OC 97). A prominent example in The Year of the Flood is the SecretBurgers fast-food franchise: the secret is that “no one knew what sort of animal protein was actually in them” and it is even rumoured that

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21 Examples include Joan who struggles with obesity in Lady Oracle, Marian who develops an eating disorder in Edible Woman that is only conquered through a symbolic act of self-cannibalism when she bakes and eats a cake in the shape of a woman, and Charis who follows a strict vegetarian diet as part of her project of recreating herself in The Robber Bride. Marlene Goldman has for instance noted that “[t]he link between consumption and women is evident throughout Atwood’s corpus, beginning with her first novel” (“Wilderness Tips” 179).
human bodies end up in the meat grinders after their organs have been harvested (YF 42–43). The pre-pandemic society of the trilogy is thus one in which consumption is paramount, and in choosing to limit their consumption, the Gardeners radically distance their lifestyle from other religions and the rest of society.

The Gardeners’ ideas about eating are connected with an ecological worldview of human existence as part of a natural process. Adam One describes the death of one of his followers euphemistically in terms of the food chain: “Via the conduit of a wild dog pack, she has now made the ultimate Gift to her fellow Creatures, and has become part of God’s great dance of proteins” (YF 404). Likewise, burial is euphemised as “composting” (e.g. YF 184). Ren remembers the Gardeners’ view of death as contradictory: they “were strict about not killing Life, but on the other hand they said Death was a natural process” (YF 59). Their insistence on the materiality of the body (called a “husk” by members) distances the Gardeners from the traditional religious emphasis on the metaphysical and may also be seen as a way of erasing the boundaries between human and nonhuman nature to some extent. Composting again emphasises the centrality of the garden in their mythology, and incidentally also resonates with Donna Haraway’s recent emphasis on death and composting as necessary components of ecological thinking.22

One of the key ways in which the Gardeners try to atone for human excesses is through their emphasis on self-reliance. The particular forms that their practices take may be seen as efforts to ensure a measure of resilience for when the Waterless Flood arrives. Resilire, the Latin root of resilience, encompasses both “to bounce back” and “to recoil,” and these senses are equally relevant in this context. The term resilience originates from ecology, where it was defined by systems ecologist Crawford S. Holling as “a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters, and still persist” (17). Resilience is thus intimately connected to risk and survival, but the term has become absorbed in neoliberal discourse; “when it has been applied from ecology to society,” Stephanie LeMenager and Stephanie Foote note, the notion of resilience “promises that unforeseeable systemic disruptions are natural and survivable, if not by everyone then by some ones—some who will perhaps even thrive, opportunistically, on the tail end of the others’ disaster.” In their exploration of the use of the term, Jeremy Walker

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22 Death, dying, and compost as the basis for new “collaborations” with nonhumans is one of the recurrent themes of Staying with the Trouble, in which Haraway urges her readers to “make kin not babies” (e.g. 4–6).
and Melinda Cooper argue that “the success of this ecological concept in colonizing multiple arenas of governance is due to its intuitive ideological fit with a neoliberal philosophy of complex adaptive systems,” noting that “resilience has become a byword among agencies charged with coordinating security responses to climate change, critical infrastructure protection, natural disasters, pandemics and terrorism” (144). While the righteous indignation about environmental degradation exhibited by Adam One and the Gardeners could thus be seen as a form of resilience in itself, their dogmatic emphasis on self-reliance and resilience partially undermine the continuity and kinship with nonhuman nature and other humans fundamental to their creed, as it highlights independence rather than interdependence.

A garden presupposes a gardener, and there seems to be an implicit hierarchical assumption related to agency in the image of the garden too. Some facets of Gardener doctrine retain conventional Christian customs, and they refer to and address a male, capital-G God in the Christian manner. Their doctrine is by and large based on a ‘green’ reinterpretation of the bible (what they call the “Human Words of God”), but incorporates what Adam One frequently terms “Science,” as well as a smattering of mystical beliefs and practices such as meditation, martial arts, and ample use of psychoactive substances. Adam One tends to use the terms Man or Mankind when referring to humanity in general and not opting for a gender-neutral equivalent seems in keeping with the rather normative views of gender roles in the community—women members of the sect tend to help more in the kitchen than their male counterparts, who are more likely to be in charge of martial arts or construction—and is also in line with the biblical tone of the sermons.

Annette Lapointe notes that the “[p]atriarchal-Christian tradition persists” in the language use of the Gardeners, as well as “in the primacy of ‘Adam’ figures over Eves in the Gardener hierarchy” (143–44). Although Atwood is never shy to use or coin new words, she has in her nonfiction sometimes continued to use man or mankind as a general substitute for human or humanity in a way that does not necessarily square with her reception as a feminist author. Her reason for doing so has been humorously articulated in her Survivalwoman comic strip. One episode, entitled “Survivalwoman Renamed Survivalcreature” (published under the pseudonym Bart Gerrard in This Magazine in 1975), ends with the reflection that such a name change is “about as significant as anything else” the Canadian Federal Government has done on behalf of women (reproduced in Nischik, Engendering 208). If Adam One’s slightly archaic usage is read in the light of Atwood’s implication that vocabulary changes
do not constitute actual change, it would seem that substituting man or mankind for humanity or humankind would only be a way of smoothing over historic and present inequalities between humans. When read against the grain, however, it could also be interpreted as a sign of inherent, normalised sexism in the Gardeners’ doctrine. As so often in Atwood’s work, in *The Year of the Flood* it is particularly Gardener women who try to force gendered norms on each other. Toby recalls first joining the sect, for example, and being told to grow her hair: “When Toby asked why, she was given to understand that the aesthetic preference was God’s. This kind of smiling, bossy sanctimoniousness was a little too pervasive for Toby, especially among the female members of the sect” (*YF* 46). Here, as through much of the novel, Toby’s sceptical recollections shed a slightly different light on the practices of the Gardeners, and frequently ridicule their dogmatism.

**Naming and Witnessing**

Much as Crake is caught in the double-bind of human exceptionalism in the first novel (he can only engineer the end of humanity because he is human with access to the necessary technology), the Gardeners’ creed simultaneously denies and reaffirms notions of human exceptionalism. Giorgio Agamben notes that until the eighteenth century language was assumed to be a trait shared by humans and animals, but only later became “man’s identifying characteristic par excellence” (24) and Adam One’s insistence on the existence of animal languages may be seen as part of this attempt to undo the differences between the metaphysical and the scientific. Accordingly, Adam One does not define language in human terms:

> God must have caused the Animals to assemble by speaking to them directly, but what language did He use? It was not Hebrew, my Friends. It was not Latin or Greek, or English, or French, or Spanish, or Arabic, or Chinese. No: He called the Animals in their own languages. To the Reindeer He spoke Reindeer, to the Spider, Spider; to the Elephant He spoke Elephant, to the Flea He spoke Flea, to the Centipede He spoke Centipede, and to the Ant, Ant. So must it have been. (*YF* 12)

In doing so, however, Adam One humorously recalls Dr Dolittle, thus undermining the seriousness of his own sermon somewhat. According to Adam One’s interpretation of the biblical creation myth, naming is an essential part of being human: “And for Adam himself, the Names of the Animals were the first words he spoke—the first moment of Human
language. In this cosmic instant, Adam claims his Human soul” (YF 12). Yet, naming, in Adam One’s view, is not an act of superiority, but of kinship, because “[t]o Name is—we hope—to greet; to draw another towards one’s self” (YF 12). Humanity is thus portrayed both as kin to all other species, but also as tasked with the “sacred task of stewardship” (YF 53). Naming is central to the Gardeners’ pacifism. They cannot actively prevent the extinction of species if that would entail violence, so instead they set out to witness the ongoing ecological damage. Adam One’s insistence on following “the way of peace” (YF 252) eventually leads to schism, with Zeb and the MaddAddamite ecoterrorist group breaking away from the pacifists. In an altercation with Zeb, Adam One insists that the Gardeners’ “role in respect to the Creatures is to bear witness. . . . And to guard the memories and the genomes of the departed. You can’t fight blood with blood. I thought we’d agreed on that” (YF 253).23 Witnessing thus becomes a peculiarly passive element in their action-based faith.

The schismatic MaddAddamites also incorporate the practice of witnessing extinction in the Extinctathon game though which they keep in touch. The Gardeners see the naming of the animals as a way of re-establishing an interspecies covenant, and Adam One urges the congregation:

\[
\text{Stretch out your hand towards those gentle eyes that regard you with such trust—a trust that has not yet been violated by bloodshed and gluttony and pride and disdain.}
\]

\[
\text{Say their Names. (YF 13)}
\]

When Toby wonders why she has survived the pandemic, and not someone younger, she too thinks in terms of witnessing: “she ought to trust that she’s here for a reason—to bear witness, to transmit a message, to salvage at least something from the general wreck. She ought to trust, but she can’t” (YF 95). Ren recalls the practice of witnessing as taught to the Gardener children:

\[
\text{Say the Names, Adam One would tell us. And we’d chant these lists of Creatures: Diplodocus, Pterosaurus, Octopus, and Brontosaurus; Trilobite, Nautilus, Ichthyosaurus, Platypus. Mastodon, Dodo, Great Auk, Komodo. I could see all the names, as clear as pages. Adam One said that saying the names was a way of keeping those animals alive. So I said them. (YF 315)}
\]

23 As, for example, Dawson has noted, “MaddAddam recalls direct action groups such as Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front” (76). Dave Foreman, the founder of Earth First! “finds nonviolence unnatural and has often pointed out that all beings will resort to violence if they perceive a serious enough threat to themselves” (Kinsley 202).
In her isolation, she tries to draw on the almost magical power the Gardeners have accorded to naming to try to ensure that she is not the only survivor of the pandemic:

I said other names too. Adam One, Nuala, Zeb. Shackie, Croze, and Oates. And Glenn—I just couldn’t picture anyone so smart being dead. And Jimmy, despite what he’d done. And Amanda. I said those names over and over, in order to keep them alive. (YF 315)

For Ren the invocation of the names of those she knows seems to have much more real power than Jimmy/Snowman’s word lists have in Oryx and Crake, although those lists too are a way of keeping something alive.

By the end of the novel, Adam One has lost most of his companions to the pandemic or other causes and the few remaining Gardeners are facing death by starvation. As he wryly remarks in one of his last sermons: “there is a certain—let us not say disappointment. The debris left by the Waterless Flood, like that left by any receding flood, is not attractive. It will take time for our longed-for Eden to appear, my Friends” (YF 371).

Fittingly, the remaining Gardeners return to the site of their former garden. They are anticipating their own deaths rather than a new Eden now, and are seemingly convinced that they are witnessing the end of humanity. In the last post-pandemic sermon in the novel, Adam One ritually recites a list of extinct species, directly asking the “[d]ear Diplodocus, dear Pterosaur, dear Trilobite; dear Mastodon, dear Dodo, dear Great Auk, dear Passenger Pigeon; dear Panda, dear Whooping Crane; and all you countless others who have played in this our shared Garden in your day” to support the few remaining Gardeners in the face of impending human extinction:

be with us at this time of trial, and strengthen our resolve. Like you, we have enjoyed the air and the sunlight and the moonlight on the water; like you, we have heard the call of the seasons and have answered them. Like you, we have replenished the Earth. And like you, we must now witness the end of our Species, and pass from Earthly view. (YF 423)

This sermon ends with an appeal for forgiveness, likewise linked to species extinction, as Adam One exhorts his audience to “forgive the killers of the Elephant, and the exterminators of the Tiger; and those who slaughtered the Bear for its gall bladder, and the Shark for its cartilage, and the Rhinoceros for its horn” (YF 425). Adam One remarks that “[t]his Forgiveness is the hardest task we shall ever be called upon to perform” (YF 425). Despite the fact that the world has suddenly become dangerous and

24 In an ecofeminist reading of the novel, Tomoko Kuribayashi wonders how the women characters’ forgiveness of their abusers “may benefit women—and Earth or Mother Nature—
even more precarious than before, the open ending of the novel allows for a utopian reimagining of the world and the relations between humans, if not yet between humanity and nonhuman nature.

**Destructive Storytelling**

As shown by the examples above, the inner contradictions of the sect are sometimes exposed humorously. Yet in *The Year of the Flood*, as in *Oryx and Crake*, the imagination is also sometimes shown to have detrimental effects, particularly in the children’s bullying of each other. Ren’s recollections of the power relations between the children provide a much more serious indictment of this utopian community. Despite the fact that Toby thinks the children “think we don’t know what they’re up to. Their snobberies, their cruelties, their schemes” (*YF* 177), adults seem oblivious of the extent of the abuse the children heap on each other, much as in Atwood’s earlier novel *Cat’s Eye*.

When Ren and her mother first join the Gardeners, Ren is befriended by Bernice, who habitually bullies her. Later, after the homeless Amanda has joined them at Ren’s insistence, Ren follows Amanda’s lead and the two of them exclude Bernice, in increasingly malicious ways. This culminates when they lie to Bernice, telling her “in a virtuous, Eve sort of voice” (*YF* 143) that her father Burt has been having an affair with Nuala, one of the Eves. The incident takes a turn for the worse when Bernice’s mother the next day turns over her husband to the CorpSeCorps for his illegal marijuana growing. After their raid, the Gardeners lose one of their buildings and are placed under sharpened surveillance, Bernice’s father ends up dead, and Bernice and her mother leave the sect. Ren is plagued with guilt, and when she runs into Bernice at university many years later she apologises, only to find out that Bernice has been abused by her own father, and that was why his wife betrayed him (*YF* 289). None of the adults in this close-knit community noticed his illegal marijuana cultivation or the incestuous paedophilia; it seems that Bernice’s mother also fails to notice or intervene. In fact, the Gardeners seem to systematically ignore any incidents involving sexual harassment, and after Toby is attacked by a male Gardener, the only advice she receives from her mentor Pilar is that “[t]here’s no harm in Mugi really. He’s tried that on more than one of us—

—when the Judeo-Christian tradition has often justified the exploitation of women and Nature on the basis that the female/feminine was inferior to the male/masculine” (26).
even me, some years ago” (YF 104). She is even given an evolutionary explanation: “The ancient Australopithecus can come out in all of us. You must forgive him in your heart. He won’t do it again, you’ll see,” Pilar assures her (YF 104).

The incident with Burt, however, has serious implications for the utopian ideals of the sect, and is a far cry from the light-hearted celebration of foolishness preached by Adam One. In the face of child abuse, satire becomes inadequate, and although the Gardeners’ blind faith in their own superiority is sometimes humorously exposed through the events surrounding Burt’s arrest, his arrest becomes the first step in the eventual disintegration of the Gardener community. As noted in Chapter 1, the failure of nuclear families is a theme than runs through many of Atwood’s novels. Yet it would seem that despite attempts to rearrange the family structure somewhat (by making a multitude of adults responsible, in various ways, for raising the Gardener children), the children concerned are still failed. They still bully each other, and they are still subjected to the violence of adults. In some ways, the Gardeners are betrayed by their own piety and self-righteousness—they are so convinced that they occupy the moral high ground that they are blind to their own shortcomings. In a manner analogous to the power relations between the girls in the novel, the Gardeners are powerless against the corporations and in society at large. More disconcertingly, they are shown to maintain internal hierarchies and as unable to guarantee the protection of members from other members. It would seem that the Gardeners are just all too human to create their biophilic utopia.

**Hymns and Prophecy**

One of the more eccentric Gardener prohibitions is of the written word. The very first chapter narrated by Ren begins with this prescript: “Beware of words. Be careful what you write. Leave no trails” (YF 6). Ren continues to recount that the Gardeners “told us to depend on memory, because nothing written down could be relied on. The Spirit travels from mouth to mouth, not from thing to thing: books could be burnt, paper crumble away, computers could be destroyed. Only the Spirit lives forever, and the Spirit isn’t a thing. (YF 6). The Gardeners regard writing as “dangerous,” since “your enemies could trace you through it, and hunt you down, and use your words to condemn you” (YF 6). Words come to be nigh on meaningless in the branded, pre-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake*, and the Gardeners
in their almost superstitious view of the power of writing and words seem to be exerting some resistance to this. Their proscription against writing stands in stark contrast to Jimmy’s almost obsessive collection of words and rescuing of books in *Oryx and Crake*.

To abide by this injunction, all fourteen hymns printed in the novel are attributed to *The God’s Gardeners Oral Hymnbook*—a conceit that seems rather incongruous, given the use of capitalisation in the hymns. In the acknowledgements to *The Year of the Flood*, the hymns are related to traditional church music and in an interview Atwood describes devising them “to standard hymn tunes” (Browning). Quite a number of the hymns, such as “When Adam First,” “My Body Is My Earthly Ark,” “Oh Sing We Now the Holy Weeds” and “When God Shall His Bright Wings Unfold,” are written in common metre, while others are written in long metre (“God Gave Unto the Animals,” “The Peach or Plum,” and “The Earth Forgives”).

There are different traditional tunes for the different hymnal metres. The epigraphic hymn “The Garden,” for example, is in 7.6 metre. One of the best-known hymns in this metre is George J. Webb’s “Stand Up! Stand Up for Jesus,” and if sung to this tune, the hymn appears much more militant in intent than apparent from the words only. Most of the remaining hymns are variations on either common or long metre, or follow other recognisable hymnal patterns. Some of the hymns, like “The Garden,” appear to set out the main beliefs of the sect. Others serve to reconcile faith and science, much as Adam does in his sermons. “My Body Is My Earthly Ark” thus combines Gardener doctrine with biblical mythology and biological information:

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My body is my earthly Ark,
It's proof against the Flood;
It holds all Creatures in its heart,
And knows that they are good.

It's builded firm of genes and cells,
And neurons without number;
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25 Common metre (8.6.8.6), as indicated by its name, is one of the most frequently used hymnal metres. It consists of alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, rhyming *abab* (ballad metre, also used in some of the hymns, rhymes *abc*). “Amazing Grace,” “Advance Australia Fair” and “House of the Rising Sun” are all examples of common metre melodies. Long metre (8.8.8.8) consists entirely of iambic tetrameter (rhyming *abcd* or *abab*).

26 Most of the verses of “Oh Let Me Not Be Proud” and “Oh Lord, You Know Our Foolishness” are in common metre, with few following a variant pattern (8.7.8.7); “Today We Praise Our Saint Dian” and “The Water Shrew That Rends Its Prey” are both in 8.8.8.6; “The Longest Mile” is in 8.5.8.5.

27 Dawson remarks on the “nursery rhyme simplicity of this hymn” (66), which stands in stark contrast to Webb’s melody.
My Ark enfolds the million years
That Adam spent in slumber. (YF 93)

This hymn also shows how rhyme and metre force certain oddities: “builded” is used here to provide the required number of unstressed syllables, while the last syllables of “number” and “slumber” are probably partially elided so as to fit the 8.6.8.6 pattern of common metre. The slight awkwardness introduced by their metrical patterns seems to indicate that a measure of faith is needed to make sense of what Laura Wright refers to as these “horrible hymns” (521). Several of the hymns dwell on the fallen state of humanity. “When Adam First” explicitly condemns human exploitation of nonhumans, while also emphasising the Gardeners’ roles as witnesses of this destruction (YF 14). In “The Earth Forgives” the destructiveness of humanity is likewise emphasised: “But Man alone seeks Vengefulness // He tortures limb and crushes bone” (YF 426), the hymn proclaims. However, this hymn ends more positively:

Give up your anger and your spite,
And imitate the Deer, the Tree;
In sweet Forgiveness find your joy,
For it alone can set you free. (YF 427)

Most of the hymns tend to end on a promise or exhortation, thus expressing a communal purpose of the Gardeners. Again it seems relevant to compare the practices of the Gardeners to those of Earth First! activists. Taylor argues that even secular environmentalists have their hymns, as it were: “Earth First!ers symbolically express their identification with other creatures through a variety of songs, such as Dana Lyons’s sensual affirmation in ‘I Am an Animal’ (sung to primal chant-rhythms)” (“From Primal” 550).28 While the traditional metres of the Gardeners’ hymns seem to suggest musical renditions rather different from those of Lyons, they are likewise communal. Each of Adam One’s sermons ends with an invocation to sing, and song seems to be one of the ways through which the Gardener community is united. Similarly, song is also significant in the Crakers’ community rituals in MaddAddam; singing was one of the traits Crake was unable to eliminate from their genetic makeup (OC 352). In the MaddAddam Trilogy, singing is thus posed as a defining and essential part of being human. The hymns serve to structure the novel through the

28 In fact, the refrain of Lyons’s song seems to echo some of Adam One’s teachings, most specifically his habit of addressing his congregation as “Dear Friends, dear Fellow Creatures; dear Fellow Mammals” (e.g. YF 11): “I am an animal, you are an animal / We both are animals, we both eat animals / We dance like animals, we love like animals / We all are animals, we all are animals” (Lyons).
regularity of their forms, and were also central in Atwood’s metaleptical Year of the Flood book tour, the focus of the next part of this chapter.

In casting himself as a holy fool, Adam One projects the persona of a prophet. Both senses of the word apocalypse are relevant in this novel too, although in more literal adherence to the religious origins of the term than in Oryx and Crake. Adam One and his teachings about the impending catastrophe take on a prophetic character, not just in his apocalyptic warnings about the impending Waterless Flood to the Gardener community, but also in the persona and appearance he cultivates. Yet, after being with the sect for some time, Toby comes to realise that it “would be a mistake to underestimate him” (YF 97). Adam One’s appearance is saintly, but although “his beard had now turned an innocent feathery white and his blue eyes were round and guileless as a baby’s, though he seemed so trusting and vulnerable, Toby felt she would never encounter anyone as strong in purpose” (YF 97). In MaddAddam, when more of Adam’s background is revealed, it becomes clear that he is much more calculating and aware of his surroundings than it may appear at first glance. In fact, it is perhaps possible to speak of his hypocritical appropriation of Christianity and his rather vague references to fellowship and love as largely pragmatic—he is packaging his personal environmentalist convictions so that potential followers could easily identify it as religious, and therefore as involving a change of lifestyle.

Based on Andrew Bennett’s work on authorship, Sandra Mayer observes that “[t]he writer’s position in the cultural imagination draws on the Romantic conception of the author as an enlightened poeta vates, a prophetic moral authority, who possesses superior insight and strives to appeal to the political and social conscience of his/her readership” (153). Prophetic abilities appear to accompany cultural capital, and this is particularly evident in the case of Margaret Atwood. Since at least the publication of The Handmaid’s Tale there has been a popular (and sometimes scholarly) tendency to view Atwood’s work as prophetic or as containing an element of forecasting. Coral Ann Howells notes, for example, that Atwood “has always shown a genius for codifying and indeed for predicting popular cultural trends” (“Writing” 201). As Rebecca Mead notes in an April 2017 profile of Atwood in The New Yorker (tellingly entitled “Margaret Atwood, the Prophet of Dystopia”), “current events have polished the oracular sheen of her reputation.” Posters photographed at the international Women’s March held on 21 January 2017 following the inauguration of Donald Trump as US president included signs saying “THE HANDMAID’S TALE WASN’T MEANT TO BE A HOW-TO MANUAL” and “MAKE MARGARET ATWOOD FICTION AGAIN” (Diegelman).
The MaddAddam Trilogy, despite Atwood’s repeated insistence that it is based on scientific fact, has attracted similar observations. Shoshannah Ganz, for example, notes that “[t]he scholarly articles that repeatedly parrot Atwood’s descriptions of her works as ‘speculative’ seem weak reassurance in the light of her uncanny predictions of market failures in her 2008 *Payback: Debt as Metaphor and the Shadow Side of Wealth*” (91). It is fair to say that reviews of *Payback* almost without fail mention the foresight shown by its arguments. Louis Bayard’s review of *Payback* begins by stating, “[i]f nothing else, Margaret Atwood has a gift for timing.”

Due to the close proximity between the publication of *Payback* and *The Year of the Flood*, this emphasis on foresight and timing has often spilled over to the reception of the trilogy too. In his *Maclean*s review of the *Year of the Flood* book tour event in Ottawa, Jonathon Gatehouse calls Atwood “positively Delphic” and wonders:

> Is this the future of the book tour? Another case of Atwood surfing the zeitgeist—releasing *Payback*, a book about debt during the height of last fall’s financial meltdown, turning her hand to environmental themes in *Oryx and Crake* just as the green movement gathered steam?

Atwood, however, has been predictably quick to point out that her work is not prophetic: “‘I do not predict the future,’ she says. ‘I just have a creepy way of appearing to’” (qtd. by Gatehouse). In March 2017 she commented on *The Handmaid’s Tale*:

> No, it isn’t a prediction, because predicting the future isn’t really possible: There are too many variables and unforeseen possibilities. Let’s say it’s an antiprediction: If this future can be described in detail, maybe it won’t happen. But such wishful thinking cannot be depended on either. (Atwood, “What *The Handmaid’s Tale* Means”)

Nevertheless, as Mead rightly observes, “Atwood is a buoyant doomsayer. Like a skilled doctor, she takes evident satisfaction in providing an accurate diagnosis, even when the cultural prognosis is bleak.”

Understandably, Atwood disavows forecasting the future through her writing, yet she also cultivates her reputation for uncanny foresight. In January 2009, the Canadian *National Post* placed a sarcastic report on a planned fundraising event for *The Walrus* magazine. Its humour at the

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29 The financial press reacted in a similar way. In an unattributed review in *The Economist, Payback* is described as “a collection of radio talks, conceived and delivered long before the current crisis, but its publication is remarkably timely” ("Payback: A Cultural History"), while Lewis Jones opens his review of the volume in the *Financial Times* similarly: “Margaret Atwood’s latest book could hardly be more timely.” Critics like Susan Hall have also referred to her “uncanny sense of timing” (179) in relation to *Payback*, while Sarah Appleton has noted that *Oryx and Crake*, like *The Handmaid’s Tale*, offers prophecy in the form of ‘speculative fiction’” (“Corp(Se)ocracy” 66).
expense of Atwood and those who believe in her prophecies is acerbic: “Margaret Atwood’s latest, greatest new act—Life with Psychic Maggie—is set to take her crystal-ball-ing to a whole new level next week,” Shinan Govani writes. After making reference to “her frighteningly prescient book about debt, Payback (published just in time for the credit crunch!” the article goes on to detail that Atwood is the source of the single live auction happening at The Walrus magazine’s first annual gala funder. “In a crystal decanter,” I’m told, “Atwood has donated her best new predictions for the future! The lucky bidder will have the choice of keeping the predictions secret or sharing them by publishing them online at—where else?—walrus-magazine.com.” Her clairvoyance, you might say, has no bounds. (Govani)

The predictions were bought by Rebecca Eckler—the same Rebecca Eckler who bought a character name in The Year of the Flood at auction—who recounts that the predictions span “five pages, typed single-spaced” on the themes of “energy, laundry, clothing, connections and communications, and health and religion.” Here too, there is tension between seriousness and plain fun, the aesthetic and the financial. Atwood’s last prediction deftly makes fun of the entire notion, while at the same time asserting that she has been right before: “I will be wrong about something, sometime. But what? And when?” (qtd. by Eckler). That Atwood humorously draws on her reputation for prediction to support a good cause seems entirely in character, and it should not come as a surprise that Adam One in one of his sermons puns on prophet and profit: the corporations “feared us, as prophets of the age to come,” Adam determines. “In short, we threatened their profit margins” (YF 275).

Central to the Gardener creed is their prophetic anticipation of an apocalyptic event, which they call the “Waterless Flood.” Adam One clearly articulates their millenarian beliefs in his sermon preached during the Festival of Arks in which they “remember Noah, the chosen caregiver of the Species” (YF 91). Adam One’s prophetic prediction of the end clearly posits the Gardeners as the elect: “We can feel the symptoms of coming disaster as a doctor feels a sick man’s pulse” (YF 91), Adam One preaches. In presenting prophetic awareness as collective knowledge, Adam One in effect endows all the listening Gardeners with prophetic knowledge. In Adam One’s vision, the Waterless Flood is to be followed by the establishment of a “new Eden.” The envisioned Eden is not merely spiritual, but entails the ecological restoration of the planet: “It is not this Earth that is to be demolished: it is the Human Species. Perhaps God will create another, more compassionate race to take our place” (YF 424), Adam One teaches. This also summarises the most fundamental difference between the creed of the Gardeners and the beliefs of mainstream Christian denominations. The
Gardeners do not believe that any spiritual rewards of their actions will follow in an afterlife: their insistence upon including humans as part of, yet different from, the rest of nature, securely anchors them in the material.

In her 2007 volume of poetry, *The Door*, quite a few of Atwood’s poems touch on themes such as prophecy and prediction, as well as the oracular nature often ascribed to poetry. After mocking the pretentiousness of poets who “have the irritating look / of those who know more than we do” (11–12), “The Poets Hang On” describes poets who are “having trouble with their wings” (27): “If they fly, it’s downwards / into the damp grey earth” (36–37). Yet the final stanza seems to reaffirm that poetry may be prophetic:

They do know something, though.  
They do know something.  
Something they’re whispering, 
something we can’t quite hear.  
Is it about sex?  
Is it about dust?  
Is it about fear? (58–64)

Thus echoing Eliot’s ominously prophetic “I will show you fear in a handful of dust” from *The Waste Land* (30), Atwood’s poem seems to anticipate “Enough of These Discouragements” and the longer “Another Visit to the Oracle” which both appear later in *The Door*. These poems place the onus on the recipients of prophecies, by making the age-old point that prophetic contents are largely determined by what the one receiving the prophecy wants to hear.

The poems in *The Door* emphasise that prophecy, like poetry, is imaginative and participatory. Recipients of prophecy have to engage with it to make it relevant. In “Enough of These Discouragements,” the speaker is one of the angels of the apocalypse, who first gave positive prophecies, but “You didn’t want them, / these pastel flavours. You were bored by them” (20–22). Instead, “You wanted the hard news,” culminating in “the cities toppled, the dust ascending, / the leaden thud of judgment. You wanted fire” (23, 28–30). Finally, the speaker points out that apocalypse is largely of our own making:

Despite my singed feathers  
and this tattered scroll I haul around,  
I’m not an angel.  
I’m only a shadow,  
the shadow of your desires.  
I’m only a granter of wishes.  
Now you have yours. (31–37)

Adam One’s reflections in the final sermon of the novel recall these poems on prophecy and the biblical Revelations:
Do we deserve this Love by which God maintains our Cosmos? Do we deserve it as a Species? We have taken the World given to us and carelessly destroyed its fabric and its Creatures. Other religions have taught that this World is to be rolled up like a scroll and burnt to nothingness, and that a new Heaven and a new Earth will then appear. But why would God give us another Earth when we have mistreated this one so badly? (YF 424)

Moreover, the resemblance between Adam One’s vision and Crake’s misanthropic utopia is striking in this passage: the Gardeners’ reliance on the Waterless Flood is indicative of the fact that they too espouse a “eugenic environmentalism,” as Rachel Stein rightly points out (197). In this final sermon, Adam One appears not quite ready to see his own prophecies realised. Adam One’s interpretation of the apocalyptic pandemic anchors the Gardeners securely in the present and the material—for them paradise is always worldly, rather than spiritual. The difference between the solemnity of Adam One and the wryness with which Snowman realises that “[h]e is Crake’s prophet now, whether he likes it or not; and the prophet of Oryx as well” (OC 104) is also striking. The oracular nature of Snowman’s storytelling to the Crakers—like any oracle, he needs an offering to speak—serves to underline the link between the imagination, prophecy and storytelling in the trilogy.

Atwood’s Metaleptic Activism: The Year of the Flood Book Tour

In late 2009, Atwood embarked on an elaborate seven-country Year of the Flood book tour that illustrates how important the link between the imagination, storytelling and prophecy is in her real-life environmental activism. During the tour the connections between Atwood’s cultural and environmentalist capital are purposefully highlighted, and the book tour provides obvious examples of how Atwood metaleptically draws on her writing to promote environmental causes. The book tour events illustrate how cannily Atwood uses her literary acclaim to political effect, without outright admitting to doing so. In preaching her environmental message, Atwood deliberately adopts a hypocritical strategy for environmentalist purposes not all that dissimilar to the position of Adam One in the novel: she insists on the factual basis for urgently countering environmental crisis, while simultaneously undercutting her own message through auto-satirical pronouncements. She is careful to dissociate the novels from any specific environmental message, thus upholding the Ricœurian distinction between intention and injunction, as it were. At the same time, as she tries to convert readers and fans to sustainable coffee drinking, an example discussed in
detail below, the intentions of at least some of Atwood’s actions during the book tour appear crystal clear.

Aesthetics and commodification are intertwined during the book tour, which accordingly constitutes yet another complication in Atwood’s environmental project. Her activism draws metaleptically on her literary production, but is interwoven with public performance and presented as light entertainment. At the same time there is an economic component—much of her activism appears to encourage ‘green’ consumerism. This leads to insistent questions about her environmental project as whole, including about the degree to which the tour events ought to be regarded as serious environmental activism, who the target audience is, and whether activist efforts are strengthened or undermined through self-deprecation, satire, and amateurish performances.

Book tours and author events are usually aimed at increasing the sales of the book in question. Although this was probably part of the purpose of Atwood’s book tour too, the elaborate tour events were also used to promote other, mainly environmental causes. Local actors, singers and musicians volunteered, ticket proceeds went to conservation (different events benefitted various charities), and Atwood used this platform to educate her audience, particularly about the environmental impact of coffee drinking. While the tour events clearly had environmentalist intentions, they also served to promote Atwood as an environmentalist, rather than as a writer of fiction with environmental themes. In this way, whether inadvertently or by design, they simultaneously increased Atwood’s environmentalist capital as much as her cultural capital, while they also raised funds for conservation (and presumably generated profits for her publishers through increased sales).

The Year of the Flood was promoted rather differently from the two other novels in the trilogy, and there is a proliferation of additional material connected to the novel. The acknowledgements mention two of these: the CD with recordings of all fourteen hymns that appear in the novel, set to music by Orville Stoeber and entitled Hymns of the God’s Gardeners, and the novel’s accompanying Canadian, British and American websites (YF 433). The book tour itself was recorded through Atwood’s tour blog (hosted by WordPress and simply titled Margaret Atwood: Year of the Flood), and documentary filmmaker Ron Mann produced a film based on tour footage. Most of my discussion below is related to the tour events as they appear in the documentary, entitled In the Wake of the Flood (2010).

In her opening voiceover of In the Wake of the Flood, Atwood makes the activist aims of the book tour explicit: “I decided to change the way I’ve been doing things. . . . Instead of doing a standard book tour, I wanted to
add a new wrinkle: a fundraiser and attention-raiser—my attempt to support the continued life of the birds of the skies.” *In the Wake of the Flood* includes repeated reference to Atwood’s age: the opening voiceover starts with such a reference (“In the final days of my seventieth year” are the first words she speaks), and the DVD includes scenes from a tour event held close to her 71st birthday, during which she is toasted by the mayor of Sudbury, Ontario. This is doubly effective: environmental problems are represented as so dire that someone who should be retired is travelling the world to create awareness about them, while Atwood is also presented as an elder with important knowledge to impart to a younger generation.

The intent of the tour is further underlined by emphasising efforts made to keep the tour an environmentally friendly one. The “Greening the Tour” section of the yearoftheflood.com website provides a list of environmental measures taken, presented with Atwood’s characteristic self-deprecating humour. Some of the measures include:

- The author took the VegiVows for the duration of the trip, with the exception of non-avian and non-mammalian bioforms once a week. Like the Gardeners, however, she will permit eggs, viewed as a sort of nut.
- To request the event venues to serve only shade-grown, organic, fair trade coffee, which is bird-friendly—unlike sun-grown and pesticide-sprayed, a huge destroyer of songbirds.
- To avoid bottled water.
- The biggest challenge for the author was keeping the luggage to a minimum. She did manage mostly wheel-it-yourself. The rules for the wardrobe will be ONE OR MORE OF: Had it for years; organic cotton; hemp. And remember: Think pink, pack black. It dirts less.

Atwood’s list metaleptically draws upon details from the novel: the upbeat admonishment to “Think pink, pack black” clearly recalls the Gardeners’ rhyming slogans, while her assertion that she has taken “the VegiVows” seems to suggest that the “Vegivows” taken by the Gardeners have crossed the border between the world of the writer and the world of her writings. Incidentally, no internal capitalisation is used in the novel (e.g. *YF* 19); Atwood’s orthography on the website seems to metaleptically amend her literary work. The list also sets the tone for the promotion of green consumerism by mentioning the “organic cotton” merchandise related to the novel and shade-grown coffee.
**Preaching Environmentalism**

Judging from the excerpts forming *In the Wake of the Flood*, the tour events sometimes took on evangelical qualities. In part this may be due to ‘getting into character’: much of *The Year of the Flood* is religious in tone, and the scenes chosen for the performances include excerpts from Adam One’s sermons. Many of the events were also held in churches, compounding this effect. Yet the seriousness of Atwood’s environmental ‘preaching’ (and Adam One’s pontificating) is tempered by the amateurishness of the performances, Atwood’s self-deprecating humour and the inclusion of the rather farcical hymns. At the event in Vancouver, for instance, Atwood remarks to audience laughter that she follows a strict vegetarian diet for the duration of the tour, “unless I get really, really hungry” (*In the Wake*). The tour events also exhibit some of the characteristics Graham Huggan has identified as contributing to Atwood’s celebrity listed in Chapter 1, including her knack for delivering quotable quips, her skilled public performances, and her middle-class appeal. When the existing tendency to view Atwood’s near-future fiction and some of her nonfiction as prophetic is taken into account, the tour events clearly belong to the variety of evangelical environmentalism espoused by Adam One in the novel, despite the pervading irony.

Tour events themselves took the form of amateur dramatic and musical performances rather than traditional readings. Atwood describes an event as “a unique hybrid,” specifying that “it’s not a play, it’s not a musical, it’s a dramatic reading from the novel stitched together with music” (*In the Wake*). Lorraine York notes that

> the public performances that Atwood and others held as part of the tour for *Year of the Flood* marked a departure in her promotional practice. There are, in fact, compelling arguments for considering them extensions of Atwood’s growing interactivity and multimedia celebrity. (*Labour* 142–43)

York is, however, also careful to point out that the tour events “are not quite as revolutionary as was claimed in the press and by Atwood’s representatives” (*Labour* 143). York observes that “Atwood’s coup was to bring performance promotion into the realm of literary fiction,” yet this was done at the peril of “suffering a loss of critical esteem,” something she avoided by “adopt[ing] a more socially conscious, not-for-profit activist approach” (*Labour* 144). York does point out that she does not “question Atwood’s commitment to her causes, which is both long-standing and deeply genuine,” while pointing out that “this form of promotion, however, would simply be less viable for most writers of her cultural standing and
would open them up to charges of crass commercialism” (Labour 144). Without labelling it as such, York thus identifies tension between cultural, environmentalist, and economic capital in connection with the book tour: there is the slight suspicion that its environmentalist approach in part was motivated by a desire to leave Atwood’s cultural capital untainted, while her cultural capital and celebrity status conversely enabled her to take such an unconventional approach. York views Atwood’s ability to successfully negotiate between the commercial and the aesthetic as a function of the particularities of her literary celebrity. This is a two-way process: her literary celebrity is also maintained and in part generated by this negotiation, and that in turn gives her voice legitimacy on issues ranging far beyond the literary—something cannily exploited on this tour.

The tour events all followed the same script, but they relied on the interpretations of local volunteer participants and as a result no two were exactly the same. In an interview with Maria Browning, Atwood remarks that

we got everything from twenty-five-person, shout-out choirs to three professional woman singers doing a kind of Andrews Sisters act. We got everything from professional actors to—in Ely, England, at the Ely cathedral—we had two bookstore employees and one customer, and they were pretty good.

At each event, some Gardener hymns were sung in Stoeber’s arrangement, Atwood read linking passages and (often amateur) actors playing Adam One, Toby and Ren acted out some scenes from the novel. In the Wake of the Flood includes footage from seven different events, with a complete recording of one of them.30

The events filmed for In the Wake of the Flood all show a similar spatial arrangement, with Atwood standing off to the side and the actors occupying centre stage. Although this is perhaps the most pragmatic way of staging the script, it also affords Atwood the opportunity of delivering her linking passages as ironic comments on the staged action. Her drily humorous tone seems to distance her from the scenes played out on stage, and there is a stark contrast between her tone and Ren’s naïve speeches on the one hand, and Adam One’s sermons on the other. In his review of the event held in Ottawa (revealingly titled “Sister Atwood’s Traveling Salvation Show”), Gatehouse notes that “the 70-minute performance casts the author as guide.”

30 The full event recorded was held as part of the Kingston WritersFest in the Grand Theatre in Kingston, Ontario on 23 Sep. 2009. This was the tenth of twenty events held during the tour.
In literally maintaining such an ironic distance to the performed action Atwood takes the position of a relatively objective bystander—sometimes evidently unable to keep herself from chuckling as she reads—rather than that of the invested creator of the scene. The audience is of course aware of her being the originator of the staged scenes, so she occupies multiple roles at once. Atwood is the creative genius who satirises her own work, the highly visible celebrity author, a prominent activist preaching an environmental message, as well as a cultural icon; in short, Atwood is an actor in a play of her own making. By staging the events in this manner, Atwood can simultaneously act as the sceptical ally of those audience members who are not completely captivated by the spectacle on stage, without necessarily alienating those who are. As narrator she mediates and provides context; her deadpan delivery forms a kind of counterpoint to the drama on stage. These once-off, amateur productions do not seem to have been extremely well rehearsed, and this in turn adds to the sense of immediacy and urgency in the events portrayed: because the various incarnations of Adam One sometimes stumble over the words in the sermons, for example, they may well appear more sincere and authentic, and less like a publicity stunt.

The hymns are crucial in rendering the performances ambiguous: they can be viewed as sincere, but misguided attempts at religious devotion, as self-deprecating farce, or, as with so much connected to *The Year of the Flood*, as a curious mixture of the two. As discussed above, most of the hymns are written to standard hymnal metres, with at least some being textbook examples of common metre. In the acknowledgements to the novel, Stoeber’s compositions are described as a “fortunate coincidence,” followed by a more detailed account of how he began composing the music to several of these hymns to see what might happen, and then got swept away. The extraordinary results can be heard on the CD, *Hymns of the God’s Gardeners*. Anyone who wishes to use any of these hymns for amateur devotional or environmental purposes is more than welcome to do so. (YF 433)

The phrase “extraordinary results” has an ironic ring to it, as does “swept away” and this appears to be yet another instance of Atwoodian self-deprecation. The following sentence, however, condoning their use “for amateur devotional or environmental purposes,” seems no longer to be auto-satirical: here the author appears to poke fun at those readers who would actually wish to take her up on the offer. In the same interview with Browning, Atwood recounts that she “wasn’t anticipating” setting the hymns to other than traditional hymnal music, but “Orville Stoeber, who’s the partner of my agent, started reading the manuscript when she was

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reading it, and began channeling the music. So we just said, ‘Go Orville.’ He wrote them all.” Stoeber’s own account of the process is rather different: “I came in contact with the manuscript of *The Year of the Flood* through Phoebe Larmore, Margaret Atwood’s literary agent. There were fourteen hymns in the book, and Margaret, Phoebe and I wondered if they could be set to music” (“How”). Stoeber’s version of events creates the impression that he is a true believer—if not in the God’s Gardeners’ creed, at least in Atwood’s vision—and is worth quoting at length:

The idea was to write the kind of devotional music that the Gardeners themselves would write: singable by all, as hymns should be; drawn from many different backgrounds, and thus with many musical influences, from C&W to gospel to folk to older hymn music; and appropriate both to the Gardeners as a group and to the Feast Day or Saint’s Day each individual hymn is honoring.

I became fully caught up in the process, and very attuned to structure and mood. As I drew on my own memories and faiths, the songs came in a rush: fourteen tunes in three weeks, with one rewrite. It was that rare time in an artist’s life when something else seems present in the creation. Margaret Atwood’s inspired reading of the perilous times we live in, and of the fragile nature of our earth, have [sic] directed me. I have used as my signposts the various styles of deity-based songs that I have come in contact with through my cultural inheritance, my musical education and my love of spiritually motivated art.

I wrote these songs for the reasons the Gardeners themselves would have written them: for the purpose of praise, adoration, and prayer to our planet, in thanks for its animals and plants and the “primate seeds” that led to our human experience. (“How”)

It would therefore seem that the music to the hymns used in the book tour events had been composed by a fan who takes his own contribution slightly more seriously than Atwood does her entire project.

Read as lyrics only, the hymns, as Atwood remarks in the acknowledgements to the novel “have moments that may not be fully comprehensible to non-believers” (*YF* 433). They are fairly bland, although amusing at times. In Stoeber’s arrangement, however, most of the hymns become syrupy and sanctimonious. His compositions clearly move the hymns away from more traditional, organ-accompanied church music to the guitar-based music often used in evangelical or Pentecostal churches. The hymns played a significant role in the book tour performances and the filmed excerpts show rather different renderings with varying choir sizes, at times performed a capella and other times accompanied by various instruments or a band. If understood as part of the fictional world of the Gardeners, their slightly misguided, but sincere piety makes perfect sense. However, when they metaleptically cross over into the extradiegetic world, the hymns as recorded on the CD (and performed during the book tour), seem at best absurd. Unless Stoeber’s account is in itself an elaborate satire
of his creative process (this seems unlikely), the farcical effect of his compositions is completely unintentional, yet perhaps fortuitous. In performance these hymns serve to undermine the seriousness of the environmental ‘messages’ conveyed by the book tour events, and may be related both to Atwood’s general ironic, anti-dogmatic stance and her droll delivery of the connective narrative sections. Based on Atwood’s invitation in the acknowledgements to the novel, Andrew Hoogheem maintains: “And if we doubt whether Atwood intends them to function as hymns rather than as artful parodies, we need only consult the novel’s afterword. Here, Atwood in effect invites her readers to join the God’s Gardeners” (64). It is, however, rather difficult to take Atwood’s invitation seriously, as it is based on the hymns in Stoeber’s arrangement. Stoeber’s music therefore, probably unwittingly, plays an important part in rendering the book tour events, as one reviewer puts it “part serious issues, part fun” (Simpson). The very absurdity of the hymns undercuts the seriousness of the subject matter and therefore humorously enables Atwood to sidestep the pitfalls of the preachiness she courts.

Nevertheless, many of the aspects of the book tour shown in In the Wake of the Flood exhibit not just a proselytising tendency, but make active use of the conventions of evangelical Christianity. When the actors playing Adam One deliver his sermons, audience members are in effect equated with the fictional Gardeners listening to their leader, much as the readers of the novel become the Gardeners by proxy when directly addressed as “dear Friends.” A number of the events were held in churches, thus adding to this congregational effect. In some cases, the audiences joined in the musical events; Peter Simpson remarks that the book tour event held in a deconsecrated church in Ottawa was brought “to a very un-Catholic, clap-along close.” In the Wake of the Flood also shows some audience members who seem rather puzzled by the staged scenes and hymns.

More pertinently, a recording from an event held at the First Parish Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts shows Atwood exhorting the audience to promise to drink organic shade-grown coffee in a manner reminiscent of

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31 The apparent sincerity of Stoeber’s compositions may well be contrasted with the ostentatious, self-aware satire of the songs used by the real-life environmentalist and anti-consumerist activist group calling themselves Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir. On their website the group describe themselves as “wild anti-consumerist gospel shouters and Earth loving urban activists who have worked with communities on four continents defending community, life and imagination. Our Devils over the 15 years of our ‘church’ have remained the same: Consumerism and Militarism. In this time of the Earth’s crisis—we are especially mindful of the extractive imperatives of global capital” (Reverend Billy). Stoeber’s compositions also contain little of the playfulness inherent in, for example, Dana Lyons’s “I Am an Animal,” discussed above.
the ‘alter calls’ of evangelical preachers. According to Atwood’s blog entry, this event did not include a theatrical performance:

I began the evening by signing another 200 books for the Harvard Book Store’s First Edition Club, then continued with a solo performance during which I played three of the Gardener Hymns from the CD, and “sang” a fourth. Always a risk, that—there’s a high note I have to reach for, and the Queen of the Night I’m not. ("Boston and Cambridge")

While Atwood has always been careful to avoid accusations of preaching, she seems to actively engage in evangelical environmentalism in this case. First, speaking from the pulpit, with one hand raised, she leads a pledge, to some giggles from the audience: “I hope you will all now take the following pledge: I promise never to drink anything but shade-grown organic coffee, because the other kind is a big killer of migratory songbirds.” Then, the evangelism is tuned up a notch as Atwood says “hands in the air” and start recognising the raised hands, counting them off by saying “yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . thank you . . . thank you . . . thank you . . . thank you” (In the Wake). The whole episode is finally deflated by the author’s laughter to enthusiastic audience applause.

As discussed earlier, the similarities between environmental activism and evangelical Christianity are many—participants in both movements have been converted to the ‘truth’, are generally convinced that they occupy the moral high ground and tend to engage in active propaganda (or missionary work) to convince others of this fact. Given the religious tone and content of The Year of the Flood, as well as the church venues frequently chosen for the book tour events, it is hard not to see Atwood’s coffee crusade as captured in Mann’s documentary as environmentalist proselytising. Yet, in an interview with Merilyn Simonds held at one of the book tour events included in the documentary, Atwood emphatically denies that she is preaching (while also admitting to evading the interviewer’s questions about this aspect):

Atwood: No no no. What novelists do is write about the world that they see before them. . . . So I’m looking at what is already here in the present time and just taking it a bit further to see how it might play out. And I can say, however, that unless people feel an emotional attachment to saving the planet, they’re not gonna do it. Because we don’t do things out of pure reason. We never have. We do things out of emotional attachment. . . . If it’s true, as Mr Dutton says in a book called The Art Instinct, that art is an evolved adaptation that we got through spending 80,000 generations in the Pleistocene. If that’s true, and if religion is one of those too, it’s not a question of whether you got one or not. It’s a question of what kind of one you’ve got. So, this is one kind.

Simonds: And we saw it today.
Atwood: You might not like the clothing styles, but you cannot question the inner conviction. And that inner conviction that they have, that this group has in the book, has been created by the conditions they find themselves in. Which will shortly be our conditions. Like it or not.
Simonds: Well wait for it. You heard it here first.
Atwood: Well, probably not. I mean you probably heard it in other places as well. . . . What did you want me to say? Did you want me to say something more theoretical? . . . More theological? . . . I thought it was kind of a sucky answer. I thought I kind of dodged the question. (In the Wake)

Earlier in the same conversation (excerpted in Chapter 1), Atwood resists having The Year of the Flood reduced to an environmental message. As the interview progresses, it shows Atwood performing what may well be deemed a characteristic manoeuvre in response to questions about the MaddAddam Trilogy. She first ascertains that her narrative is art (and therefore does not function in the same way as a political contribution to the debate). Next, she insists on the factual basis of her speculative fiction. Here she points out that there already are environmentalist versions of Christianity; in connection with Oryx and Crake and MaddAddam she usually refers to biotechnological advances. In this conversation with Simonds she continues by establishing that art and religion result from an evolutionary imperative, thus further cementing the fact that this is not just a flight of fantasy, or, at the very least, that humans are genetically inclined to the metaphysical. Finally she comically undermines all these moves by referring to them as a “kind of sucky answer,” so taking the prescriptive sting out of the tail of her pronouncements on her own work.

**Selling Environmentalism**

Atwood’s extratextual environmental project has two main components: raising awareness about environmental concerns, and raising funds to address those concerns. To these ends she commodifies her own celebrity performance during the book tour and in the subsequent documentary. In the Wake of the Flood bears the tagline “Book Tours Are for the Birds!” which illustrates the attitude Atwood takes beautifully: profits from DVD sales benefitted BirdLife International, but conventional book tours are worthless. Despite the fact that profits from the events were donated to conservation charities, the tour naturally fulfilled the role of a usual book tour too, as it generated publicity for her new novel (and perhaps even more so, precisely because of its unconventionality).
In endeavouring to disentangle her art from commerce, while trying to generate funds through activism, Atwood ends up underplaying the economic aspect of the book tour entirely, instead casting herself as an aging writer with environmental concerns, setting out to raise awareness despite the difficulties it may entail. Atwood’s resulting promotion of green consumerism should be seen in the light of these unresolved tensions between the aesthetic and the commercial surrounding her work and critical reception. On the one hand, green consumption seems to be a pragmatic focus (if one is going to consume anyway, it is better to do so in an environmentally-conscious way), but it also testifies to her awareness of her public. Atwood’s readership tends to be middle class, and her activism seems to be addressed to this public. Green consumerism is nevertheless problematic, since it does not stress the need to reduce consumption, but concentrates on consuming ethically.

Merchandise connected to the MaddAddam Trilogy, including clothing, bags, posters and ringtones, have periodically appeared for sale on Atwood’s homepage, as well as on the various websites dedicated to the novels. York notes that yearoftheflood.com “deals more heavily and blatantly in commodities other than books than does margaretatwood.ca,” but that “all profits generated from these commodities are painstakingly identified as going to specific causes in Canada, Britain, and the United States” (Labour 140). Significantly, however, “the commodities for sale are identified as environmentally friendly in themselves” (Labour 140). York points out that “Atwood attempts to manage this challenge to her cultural capital by reminding website visitors at every turn that funds raised by these commodities benefit not-for-profit environmental organizations” (Labour 140). York concludes that “the economic and the idealistic” are intertwined “in Atwood’s practice of publicity, the better to play them off against each other” (Labour 141). In short, Atwood’s stance towards commerce comes close to Adam One’s hypocrisy in the novel.

As described in the introduction to this study, the MaddAddam Trilogy has not just spawned merchandise sold by Atwood for charitable purposes, but has also inspired some other products, like the NooBroo beer. This in itself may be regarded as an indication that at least some of the activism is having real effects. Yet, these products are also endorsed by Atwood, and may therefore simply be seen as successful marketing strategies on the part of their producers. In what follows I discuss another such example, namely Atwood’s promotion and endorsement of bird-friendly coffee. This endeavour cunningly combines education and fundraising, the two main components of Atwood’s activism, while also
shedding some light on her target audience and the metaleptic turn her activism took during the book tour.

Serving bird-friendly coffee was one of the prioritised environmental goals of the Year of the Flood book tour. Already in Oryx and Crake one of the malevolent corporations is the satirically named Happicuppa franchise. Traditional coffee growing involves handpicking, but the new, genetically modified Happicuppa variety “was designed so that all of its beans would ripen simultaneously, and coffee could be grown on huge plantations and harvested with machines” (OC 179). In Oryx and Crake this is not just seen to have adverse environmental consequences; it also “threw the small growers out of business and reduced both them and their labourers to starvation-level poverty” (OC 179). As a result there were “gen-mod coffee wars” (OC 178), a global resistance movement developed and “[r]iots broke out, crops were burned, Happicuppa cafés were looted” (OC 179).

Consumption of Happicuppa is regarded as sinful by the Gardeners; Adam One preaches against it in one of his sermons, noting that “[i]ts sun-grown, pesticide-sprayed, rainforest-habitat-destroying coffee products [are] the biggest threat to God’s feathered Creatures in our times, just as DDT was the biggest threat to them in the times of Saint Rachel Carson” (YF 372). In MaddAddam the human survivors make their own coffee substitute “from a blend of toasted roots: dandelion, chickory, something else. It has an undertaste of ashes” (MA 205). Coffee seems the ideal middle-class consumable to target, and Atwood’s search for and consumption of responsibly-sourced coffee while on the book tour is a recurring theme of In the Wake of the Flood. As seen in the coffee pledge described above, Atwood tackled coffee drinking habits with evangelical fervour during her tour.

It should therefore come as no surprise that there is an Atwood-endorsed coffee on the market. Balzac’s Coffee Roasters, a microroastery running a small café chain from their headquarters in Ancaster, Ontario, produces something they call the Atwood Blend, which according to their website is a “Smithsonian Institute certified BIRD FRIENDLY® blend” which like NooBroo helps to raise funds and awareness for the Pelee Island Bird Observatory (PIBO). In promoting their brand Balzac’s appeal both to Atwood’s cultural and environmentalist capital. Their website includes a description of Atwood: “One of the world’s most prolific and award-winning authors, Margaret Atwood is truly a Canadian treasure. Her deep commitment to the environment and concern for avian ecosystems make us

33 Both Beau’s and Balzac’s are listed as “Funding Partners” on PIBO’s website (“Partners”).
honoured to work with her in creating this special blend.” In addition, a video promotion of the Atwood Blend shows the coffee displayed flanked by copies of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. As with the marketing and packaging of the novels themselves, there is thus a curious tension between the critique of consumerism presented in the novels and the encouragement of certain kinds of consumption.

As in the case of NooBroo, the Atwood Blend is a high-end commodity, meant for environmentally-minded consumers who can afford to buy these kinds of products. The products themselves seem to be promoting the ideologies of sustainable development and green consumerism: they are luxury items intended for the consumption of a privileged middle class, produced by small companies. Although small-scale production to some extent seems to fit in with the God’s Gardeners’ ideas presented in *The Year of the Flood*, the products remain commodities for repeat consumption, a far cry from the frugality preached by the Gardeners. In fact, the scale of production only serves to increase their exclusivity. Nevertheless, Atwood’s promotion of green middle-class consumerism ought perhaps to be seen in the light of her 1988 comment that “despite all the nasty things people say about the middle class, that’s where a lot of the initial movement happens, in any society” (B. Langer). Atwood’s endorsement of these products speaks of pragmatism often unavailable to strict dogmatists, as the Gardeners doubtless are: the end (raising funds for conservation) seems to justify the means (encouraging a superior, more responsible kind of consumerism). She certainly understands that wishful thinking and idealism alone will not lead to tangible results.

Atwood appeals to the purses of her fans, but with the book tour events, and to some extent the Atwood Blend and NooBroo beer too, it is uncertain exactly who the intended audience or target market is. Most attendants of the book tour events were probably already committed Atwood enthusiasts, or at least people familiar with her literary reputation. The target market for the coffee and the beer also highlights class: prospective buyers would most likely be a combination of middle-class readers or environmentalists, drinkers of exclusive coffee, or the consumers of craft beer; they are certainly conscientious consumers who have the luxury of being able to afford these products and to figure environmental considerations into their purchasing choices.

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34 Atwood has never been averse to coupling environmental concerns with financial interest. On the subject of a 1978 article on the Temagami region in North Ontario (published in the Sunday magazine of the *Toronto Star*), Ronald Hatch observes that “Atwood’s main argument is that preservation makes good economic sense” (198).
While I have paid much attention to the financial side of Atwood’s activism in the previous sections, there is a substantial educational component too. The yearoftheflood.com website contains an extensive “reading list,” metaleptically introduced as “some of the books it is thought may have influenced the founders of the God’s Gardeners in their youth, before they discarded electronic modes of communication and severely limited their use of paper products.” Many of the titles are followed by short, single-sentence descriptions, and publishers are alerted to the fact that they can donate to certain conservancy charities if they want to advertise a book on the page. This list of works by more than fifty authors includes books on gardening and composting, religion, evolution, urban survival techniques, foraging, and historical pandemics, as well as major environmentalist works, ranging from classics to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, and works by James Lovelock, to recent volumes by Bill McKibben, George Monbiot and E. O. Wilson. Works authored by a number of Gardener saints are included, and the list also includes two volumes by Atwood’s partner Graeme Gibson, as well as a book by Bridget Stutchbury on the dangers posed to birds by pesticides used in the coffee industry.35

In another instance of metalepsis, many of the works on the list are authored by Gardener saints. In his review of *The Year of the Flood*, Fredric Jameson maintains that “[t]he mark of the amateur [science fiction author] here is topicality,” and specifically relates this to “the list of saints’ names” (“Then” 8). Laura Wright sees the saints as evidence of “the light hand that Atwood takes in rendering the Gardeners and their beliefs” (521), while Maxwell notes that through “canonizing leading conservationists and scientists in the novel, Atwood, too, bears witness to those who have committed their lives to bettering the planet for others, including other species” (8). Hoogheem instead sees the Gardeners’ “pantheon of (mostly) secular saints” which “omits evolutionary giants like Darwin but makes room for a host of arguably lesser lights, many of whom were active in the late twentieth century” as “entirely of a piece with [Atwood’s] emphasis on the Gardeners’ willingness to improvise” (62). The now-defunct oryxandcrake.com website contained a similar reading list, now unavailable.36 However, none of these descriptions of Atwood’s environ-

35 The complete list, including the short descriptions presumably penned by Atwood, has been reproduced as Appendix B. The appendix also includes details on how the reading list authors feature in *The Year of the Flood*.
36 Amanda Cole has interpreted “Atwood’s use of extra-textual material” in the case of *Oryx and Crake* as “demonstra[ting] an abstruse desire to manipulate the novel past what is
mentalist canonisation takes into account her extratextual activism. Intradiegetic canonisation and the reading list ought to be seen as forming an educational counterpart to the scenes from the novel acted out during the tour events. The reading list confirms the factual basis of the fictional narrative Atwood insists on, while also encouraging readers to do some of their own research. By intradiegetically canonising some of these activists and drawing attention to their work in an extratextual environmental education project, Atwood again seems to trouble the boundaries between fact and fiction, art and activism.

Hope Jennings has saliently observed that “Atwood’s metafictional and comic approach [in *The Year of the Flood*] resists the grand tradition or myth of apocalypse, yet she is not aimed at exposing the futility of revelation and/or meaning but focused on demythologizing in order to show the limits or ends of the myth itself” (12). This is perhaps how the book tour should be seen as well. While Atwood, according to Jennings, “does not expect us to take seriously, or even accept, [the Gardeners’] version of environmental apocalypticism” (13), she does invite us to take seriously the idea that art could be used for environmentalist purposes, despite the satirical coating in which environmental messages are presented.

In an interview with Karla Hammond (first published in 1979), Atwood categorically states: “If you want to change the world, you do not choose poetry” (119). She continues to observe that while poetry can “change a possibility in the imagination,” it cannot “effect change the way a law can effect change” (Hammond 120). Nevertheless, Atwood’s metaleptic reliance on the evangelical apocalypticism of *The Year of the Flood* in her extratextual activism seems to indicate that she has indeed chosen art to effect environmental change. If “we are our plots,” as Atwood has suggested, her intervention may be seen as an attempt to provide an alternative plot. She uses her celebrity, established fan base, and, I would argue, her age and already established reputation for irreverence, to embark on something few other authors could succeed at with their cultural capital intact. She delivers environmentalist propaganda, but framed in such a way that she is able to hold up her own fictional creation as a warning, while also using it to deny her environmental impetus. Thirty years after this interview her activism is precisely aimed at citizens-as-consumers.

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generally accepted as the perceived limitations, or boundaries, of authorial influence.” Cole’s understanding of reading lists and supplemental material as authorial safeguards against “unauthorised versions” of the novel’s narrative seems, however, somewhat misplaced.
The *Year of the Flood* book tour is a hybrid of commodification, activism, evangelism, art, and celebrity culture. As discussed in the next chapter, hybridity also appears to be the governing principle of *MaddAddam*. The final novel of the trilogy is generically, stylistically and thematically hybrid, and hybridity plays an important role in troubling notions of environmentalism and apocalypse, as well as of the power of the imagination.
5 | Telling Hybrid Stories in *MaddAddam*

As set out in the introduction, the temporal relation between the three novels of the MaddAddam Trilogy invites a reading of *MaddAddam* as the synthetic continuation of the thesis of *Oryx and Crake* and the antithesis of *The Year of the Flood*. Synthesis is also suggested on a formal level: the single male perspective of Jimmy/Snowman in *Oryx and Crake* is followed by the more communal perspective of the Gardeners, as represented by Toby, Ren, Adam One, and their hymns. In *MaddAddam*, much of the narrative is focalised by Toby or reminisced by Zeb, but the novel also includes the oral stories of the Crakers and Toby’s written chronicle of events. By the end of the novel, most of the earlier focalisers of the trilogy are dead (Jimmy/Snowman, Adam One, Zeb, and Toby all die), and the Craker boy Blackbeard takes over as focaliser, as well as main chronicler and storyteller of the new community. This synthesis seems to promise resolution. Yet the style and open ending of *MaddAddam* leave readers with as many questions as answers, particularly if the trilogy is read as an environmentalist project.

Thematic, generic and stylistic hybridity is paramount in *MaddAddam*, but rather than providing a panacean third way, hybridity serves to highlight the complications faced in environmentalism and in imaginative responses to crises. A reading concentrating on hybridity risks assuming that it necessarily works for the good (in a manner similar to the notion that nature is inherently balanced), but I want to heed Homi K. Bhabha’s warning that hybridity in itself has no “truth to provide: it is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures, or the two scenes of the book, in a dialectical play of ‘recognition’” (113). Hybrid forms cannot be entirely reduced to their constituent parts, but form new combinations that retain the tensions between these parts, and this is particularly evident in *MaddAddam*. Whereas biology plays a mediating role between nature and culture in the previous two novels, it is concretised in *MaddAddam* through the birth of the first human–Craker babies and the establishment of a hybrid community of sorts, comprising human survivors, the Crakers, and their Pigoon allies. The tensions inherent in Atwood’s environmental project are underscored by the apparent ease with which biological hybridity defines the post-apocalyptic world, coupled with the novel’s self-reflexive insistence on its own fictionality.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White describe hybridisation as capable “of shifting the very terms of the system itself, by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it” (58). Throughout this chapter I address the underlying question of whether manifestations of hybridity can
lead to changed relations of power in the new post-apocalyptic order, and whether the realisation of inherent capacity for hybridisation necessarily challenges entrenched notions of human exceptionalism. In the novel a community of survivors comprising both humans and nonhumans is formed. The relationships between the different species comprising this community are important, as are gender roles in the new community, and the degree to which the post-apocalyptic quotidian may be seen as a satiric reenactment of pre-apocalyptic dilemmas. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss notions of hybridity more generally and in relation to some of Atwood’s earlier work, before considering the formation of a hybrid community in MaddAddam. Developing empathy for Others seems to be one of the key environmental practices encouraged by the novel and the trilogy as a whole. Empathy between humans and nonhumans is furthered by a realisation of the inherent potential for hybridisation, but hybridity conversely also highlights the limitations of empathy and the pervasiveness of human exceptionalism.

However precarious an existence human survivors lead after the pandemic, Atwood definitely courts the notion of an apocalyptic new beginning for nonhuman nature in the MaddAddam Trilogy. After the disappearance of most humans, birds and plants are shown to be thriving in a post-apocalyptic landscape roam by numerous spliced animal species. The next part of this chapter therefore focusses on the apocalyptic ends of environmentalism envisaged in the novel. The dilemma hybridity poses for environmentalism is discussed by way of two portrayals of ‘new natures’ in MaddAddam: the last-ditch pre-pandemic efforts to save the polar bear population in a climate-changed world, and the post-apocalyptic proliferation of the invasive kudzu vine.

Storytelling is a central concern throughout the trilogy, but is foregrounded to an even greater extent in this novel. Like the previous two novels, MaddAddam includes a number of interconnected storylines. In the post-apocalyptic present, there is the search for Adam One and any surviving Gardeners, the hunt for the Painballers, and the establishment of a tentative new community. Although MaddAddam contains memories of the pre-pandemic era—mainly taking the form of the stories Zeb tells to Toby who then retells them to the Crakers—a large part of this novel is set in the post-apocalyptic present. Toby keeps a diary in which she chronicles community events, and she also teaches Blackbeard to read and write. The covers of some editions of MaddAddam show a composite image of a flying pig—the suggestion that the entire novel is merely a flight of fancy is thus present even before readers open the book (see Figs. 13 and 15). This notion is reinforced by the summary of “the story so far,” included in lieu of an
epigraph. The fairy-tale-like style of these summaries is markedly different from the styles of the previous two novels, and the table of contents already shows that the titles of several of the short chapters start with “The Story of.” *MaddAddam* is as much a novel about storytelling as about anything else, and in this respect, it has a lot in common with Atwood’s earlier metafictional novels, such as *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*, although it differs much in tone and subject-matter. The final part of this chapter centres on the role played by storytelling and the imagination in *MaddAddam*. Here I return to Atwood’s assertion that “we are our plots.” In its simultaneous reliance on and undermining of environmental apocalypticism, the trilogy illustrates that the apocalyptic imagination is not an unambiguous environmental tool. By the end of the novel, choices seem largely to come down to what kinds of stories are told and how they are told. This sustained focus on narrative and narration in *MaddAddam* has a two-pronged result: while the open ending of the novel retains some utopian environmentalist potential, there is also a sense of impending repetition that suggests how difficult it is to imagine new plots.

### Hybrid Communities and the Violence of Empathy

The novel starts in the post-apocalyptic present, shortly after the end of *The Year of the Flood*. The Crakers, readers learn, have approached the group eating Toby’s soup and released the two Painballers, who manage to escape with arms. As discussed earlier, in what Toby euphemistically deems “a major cultural misunderstanding” (MA 13) both Ren and Amanda are raped by the Crakers. The surviving Gardeners and MaddAddamites have started to make a home in the ironically named Heritage Park, and this is where Toby and Ren return with the ill and apathetic Amanda, as well as with Jimmy, who is delirious from an infection, and the Crakers, who refuse to leave Jimmy’s side. The Crakers settle close to the humans, but for most of the novel they remain two distinct groups—the humans live inside the buildings, and construct more, while the Crakers want to be outdoors. The main threats to the survival of this loose grouping are the violent Painballers and the Pigoons that uproot their garden and threaten their food supply. Using the Crakers as intermediaries, a truce is entered into with the Pigoons, and with the help of the Pigoons the Painballers are eventually recaptured in the Paradise Dome. Adam One, who has been taken hostage by the Painballers, is killed in the fight, and Jimmy gives his life to save Toby’s. Together the Pigoons and humans vote to execute the
Painballers—their new community is thus founded on capital punishment and violence. Throughout the novel there is the suggestion that the post-apocalyptic world and its problems are uncannily similar to that of the pre-apocalyptic world. The transformative potential of post-apocalyptic thought is curtailed through presenting post-apocalyptic existence as a weird continuation or repeat of what precipitated the apocalypse in the first place. Moreover, it is suggested that some aspects of post-apocalyptic life are decidedly regressive, and this includes a partial return to normative gender roles, with women primarily being concerned with childrearing.¹

The novel therefore continues the themes of sexuality, reproduction and families from the previous volumes. In *Oryx and Crake* the global sex trade preys on children like Oryx, but Oryx appears, as described earlier, neither resentful nor regretful about this. Much of *The Year of the Flood* is of course set in Scales and Tails, and Ren too does not seem to view her occupation with regret. In the second novel both Toby and Ren are raped by Blanco (and by the other Painballers and Crakers, in Ren’s case), while Burt is guilty of abusing his own daughter. Most families in the first two novels are dysfunctional, and if they are relatively happy, such as Toby’s, they tend to be destroyed by outside forces. Although the Gardeners do form an alternative family of sorts, it remains flawed. In *MaddAddam*, however, fertility and reproduction take centre stage. By the end of the novel, Ren, Amanda, and one of the MaddAddamites, Swift Fox, have given birth to hybrid human–Craker babies. Thus the plot of the novel seems to suggest that the future, very literally, is hybrid, although it remains uncertain exactly what this hybridity would entail.

As if to underscore the incongruity of their hybridity, as well as the fact that they link past and future, two of the babies are given composite names made up from the names of other characters: Amanda calls her daughter Pilaren, and Ren her son Jimadam (MA 380). In this way they join a long line of Atwood characters who connect naming with possibility: very literally, Amanda and Ren contextualise and historicise their hybrid children by giving them the name of their human predecessors (in doing so, probably privileging their human heritage over their Crakerness). Swift Fox, on the other hand, names her twins Medulla and Oblongata (MA 381). This could be read as another instance of playful obfuscation, but naming these hybrid babies after the brainstem places their hybrid, bridging function in full focus. Since Swift Fox highlights the Crakers’ intellectual inferiority throughout the novel, for example by pointing out that “[t]hey’re walking

¹ This echoes Atwood’s nonfiction discussion of the possible erosion of gender equality in the event of cataclysmic change in “When the Lights Go Out,” mentioned in Chapter 1.
potatoes” (MA 19), there is little doubt that she sees humans as representative of the brain and Crakers as representatives of the body, with the hybrid babies occupying the in-between. Conversely, it could also be read as an oblique comment on mind–body and attendant dualisms: through its sustained focus on ecology as situated biology the MaddAddam Trilogy continually blurs such distinctions. The strangely peaceful (yet open) end of the novel seems to support apocalypticism as a viable form of environmentalism. Nevertheless, the novel ends with Blackbeard’s account of the hybrid babies and expected babies, thus reinforcing the suspicion that the story of overpopulation and environmental degradation may repeat itself—the potential for another apocalypse is already present.

Hybridity features in various ways in all three novels of the trilogy, perhaps most obviously in the genetically engineered creatures populating the fictional world. The outfits donned by the dancers at the Scales and Tails sex club seem to confuse their customers in blurring the figures of women and animals: “Are you a fish?” Jimmy asks Ren in The Year of the Flood; later Toby mistakes Ren in her bird outfit for “a bird with blue-green iridescent plumes like a peagret” with “the head of a woman,” leading her at first to believe that the “bird-woman” is only a hallucination (YF 308, 350–51). In associating the exotic dancers with animals, the patriarchal relegation of woman to the realm of nature is underscored rather than undermined. As shown in Chapter 3, the Crakers are portrayed as being between human and animal, native and preternatural, and they occupy a hybrid position in the narrative.

This part of the chapter first briefly introduces hybridity more generally, before the use of the term in the MaddAddam Trilogy is discussed. Atwood has employed hybridity to trouble notions of human exceptionalism in her earlier work, as is shown through some examples from Good Bones (1992). While an awareness of the hypocrisy of human exceptionalism to some extent facilitates empathy, empathy is shown to involve the violent reduction of the Other to the self. The Pigoons and Crakers are accorded the status of honorary humans in MaddAddam, which enables the human characters to empathise with them, while the Painballers through their actions more or less renounce their humanity. The foundation of the new hybrid community is laid in the real violence of the Painballers’ execution, but also in the anthropomorphic recognition of the Crakers’ and Pigoons’ latent humanity.

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* Most of these creatures are splices, rather than biological hybrids, as discussed in more detail below.
Hybrids and Splices

The term *hybridity* comes with quite a bit of baggage. It is derived from the Latin *(h)ibrida*, which originally referred to the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar, but which was by extension used to refer to people too. These origins of the word draw attention to the fact that hybridity is, or at least should be, a contested notion. The idea that biological hybrids are somehow impure and consequently inferior is also present in terms like *mongrel*, *half-caste*, and *half-breed*. Although cultural hybridity has been celebrated as, for example, a postcolonial means of reversing the process of domination, the modern roots of the idea of hybridity lie in part in Victorian natural science, and, more disturbingly, in systems of racial classification. Aside from these dubious origins, the term also implies prior, completely pure states from which hybridity can arise. My argument is neither that hybridity in *MaddAddam* presupposes the existence of earlier states of purity, nor that all things are always already hybrid. Instead, I try to show how ideas of the continuity between human and nonhuman nature are expressed in terms of hybridity in the novel, and how such notions of hybridity in turn are important in exposing the advantages and limitations of empathy as an environmental ethic and the founding principle for this new kind of community.

Hybridity appears to be one of the keys to understanding the entire *MaddAddam* Trilogy, but the word *hybrid* itself is not used very frequently in the novels. It does not appear at all in *Oryx and Crake*, and only once in *The Year of the Flood*, in relation to a new type of cyborg insect. Adam One concludes his Pollination Day sermon by relating that the corporations have developed a “hybrid bee”:

> It is not a genetic splice, my Friends. No: it is a greater abomination! Bees are seized while still in larval form, and micro-mechanical systems are inserted into them. Tissue grows around the insert, and when the full adult or “imago” emerges, it is a bee cyborg spy controllable by a CorpSeCorps operator, equipped to transmit, and thus to betray. (*YF* 277)

Particularly noteworthy about this section of Adam One’s sermon is the distinction he makes between hybrids and splices. In the world of the trilogy, all kinds of genetically spliced animals and plants have become commonplace, and some, like the liobam, are even the objects of religious cults. Many of these ‘artificial’ organisms have become feral, if not completely wild, and they thrive in the post-pandemic world. The hybrid, however, is here presented as something much more frightful, and somehow more terrifying than such spliced species. This is probably partly due to the nature of its hybridity: the bee is a hybrid of animal and
electronics, developed purely with the goal to spy for the corporations. The fear caused by such a “bee cyborg” could also be related to the importance of bees for the Gardener community—as pollinators, and as a source of honey, which the Gardeners consume, use as medicine and also barter for other goods. Nevertheless, Adam One’s fear of the hybrid seems to stem primarily from his inability to decide on the exact nature of such a creature. Whereas splices can fairly easily be divided into their constituent parts—as also indicated by their portmanteau names—the nature of hybrids is altogether harder to define. Adam One continues by detailing some “ethical problems raised” by the development of this bee: “Should we have recourse to insecticides? Is such a mechanized slave bee alive? If so, is it a true Creature of God or something else entirely?” he asks rhetorically (YF 277).

In the light of the complications posed by hybridity in MaddAddam, Adam’s questions could be summarised as asking whether it is possible to feel any empathy for the cyborg bee, whether it is possible, on the most basic level, to recognise it as a fellow living being.

In MaddAddam, Toby refers to the human–Craker babies as hybrid on several occasions. More problematically, perhaps, the two times Zeb uses the word hybrid it seems to be in relation to the racist concept of miscegenation. First he describes Katrina Wu as “a lynx-eyed Asian-Fusion hybrid from Palo Alto” (MA 177).3 Zeb further remarks that the assumed name Horatio suited his appearance, because people “thought I looked kind of Tex-Mex, or maybe like a hybrid that contained some of that DNA. Which I do, as was discovered not long after that” (MA 320). Although hybrid is not used as racial slur by Zeb, it is indicative of mixed race and clearly harks back to the racist roots of the word—what is referred to here is biological hybridity, with the implication that humans can be divided into different species.

Much of the representation of hybridity in the trilogy indicates that boundaries between species are porous at best, and Atwood’s roundabout alignment of a fear of hybridity with miscegenation and thereby with the imperialist history of the notion, should perhaps be seen in the light of the eugenic creation of the Crakers, as well as the way in which they are gradually ‘civilised’ in the trilogy, in a manner reminiscent of colonial encounters with the Other.4 And although hybrids and splices are treated

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3 Fusion is fairly consistently used in the trilogy as a racial description: Oryx is for instance referred to as having an “Asian Fusion body type with a foreign accent” (YF 306), but it also seems to be used as an autodescriptor, as in the name of the Asian Fusion gang, so it is perhaps less racially loaded than Zeb’s use of hybrid potentially could be.

4 Robert Young, for example, traces the connection between ideas of hybridity and nineteenth-century justifications of colonial subjugation (e.g. 10).
somewhat differently, both these types of combinations simultaneously highlight and erase difference.

The novels do not present hybridity as a utopian solution, but rather as a complication. Some critics, like Richard Alan Northover, have argued that the “eerily hybrid animals” populating the trilogy “are the fictional embodiment of our current disrespect for nonhuman animals taken to logical extremes” (“Strangers” 125–25), while others, like Veronica Hollinger, hold that hybridity is solely associated with the monstrous and unnatural in the MaddAddam trilogy. Hollinger remarks that *Oryx and Crake* is anything but celebratory in its constructions of hybridity . . . . Hybridity here represents the unnatural, the transgressive, the grotesque and monstrous results of technoscientific stupidity and greed. It is the hybridity of the gene-splice, of the transgressions of an absolutely commodified technoscience, of the ultimate collapse of nature into culture. (456)

What Hollinger does not remark on here is that culture too is shown to be hybrid in the novel; rather than showing that nature is completely subsumed under culture, *Oryx and Crake* and the rest of the trilogy illustrate that such distinctions are impossible to uphold. While I do not completely agree with this wholly negative reading of the hybrid in *Oryx and Crake*, I also do not share Lars Schmeink’s optimistic assertion that “Atwood remains hopeful that human and non-human will merge into a hybrid, interconnected, and protean form of society” (243). In the MaddAddam Trilogy, hybridity is instead a source of constant tension.

**Hybridity and Human Exceptionalism**

Atwood’s work has often been lauded for its generic hybridity, and thematically too hybridity surfaces time and again in her writing. In *MaddAddam*, notions of hybridity are used to trouble ideas of human exceptionalism, and three of Atwood’s short short stories, “Cold-Blooded,” “My Life as a Bat” and “Homelanding,” all first published in the collection *Good Bones*, provide a suitable entrance point to a discussion of the novel.6

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5 It ought to be noted that her reading only considers *Oryx and Crake*; arguably hybridity is more positively portrayed in *MaddAddam*.

6 The genre of the texts included in *Good Bones* has baffled the few critics who have afforded the collection any attention. Sharon Wilson describes it as “perhaps Margaret Atwood’s most neglected volume” (“Fiction” 18), while Reingard Nischik argues that this neglect is due to “the challenging originality of [the texts’] form and modes of
“Cold-Blooded” and “Homelanding” have both been republished in *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (2011) and they clearly resonate with the subtitle of the later collection, as they concern the manner in which the human is or could be imagined, while also showing that ‘the human’ is to a disturbing degree an imaginary construct.

In the first of these stories, “Cold-Blooded,” humanity is described from the point of view of moth-like aliens, who at first “supposed [humans] incapable of speech” since “[t]hey had no wing-casings with which to stribulate—indeed they had no wings; they had no mandibles to click; and the chemical method was unknown to them, since they were devoid of antennae” (*Good* 59–60). In comparison to their own experiences, the human sense of smell is but “a perfunctory affair, confined to a flattened and numbed appendage on the front of the head” (*Good* 60). However, later the insects “discovered that the incoherent squeakings and gruntings that emerged from them, especially when pinched, were in fact a form of language, and after that [they] made rapid progress” (*Good* 60). Human customs, such as the wearing of clothes and the burial of the dead in coffins, are viewed as failed attempts to mimic insect appearances and lifecycles—in short, through its comic insectile point of view this story shows just how (unavoidably) anthropocentric our perspective usually is, and seeks to present the familiar as strange, and even arbitrary. Moreover, it draws parallels between humanity and insects which suggest that humans are not as exceptional as we may want to believe, thus perhaps working towards undermining the distinction between human and nonhuman. There is, perhaps inevitably, inherent duplicity in Atwood’s mockery of human sensory capabilities: a human author can of course only indulge in the insectile point of view to a limited extent. However much Atwood makes fun of humanity’s sense of itself as superior to other species, she is still writing as a human, imagining what insects may think about us. Whether insects are capable of a similar thought process is doubtful, and if they are, humans would in all likelihood be unable to access it. So, while taking a stab at human exceptionalism Atwood may instead just be confirming it through the act of writing.

Atwood similarly exploits the dilemma engendered by a critique of anthropocentric thought to humorous effect in the short short story “My representation” (“Short” 152). Wilson observes that these short texts “can be described either as prose poems or short-short, sudden, or flash fiction” (“Fiction” 19), but Nischik argues that it would be inaccurate to simply refer to them as *short short stories* or *prose poems*, since “commentators have yet to discover an appropriate collective critical term for these highly varied short texts” (“Short”153). I have here opted for *short short story* for the three texts under discussion, as it seems accurate enough for the purposes of my argument.
Life as a Bat,” which may be read as a playful response to the philosopher Thomas Nagel’s famous essay “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (1974). In his essay, Nagel discusses the nature of consciousness by way of exactly this problem, namely the impossibility for humans “to know what it is like for a bat to be a bat” (439). According to Nagel, this knowledge cannot be acquired, since the human observer is inevitably restricted to his/her own imagination of a bat’s subjective experience, and the “resources of [one’s] own mind” remain “inadequate to the task” (439) of imagining the subjective experience of a completely different order of being. Atwood’s “My Life as a Bat” imagines the life of a bat in a tongue-in-cheek manner: the bat-narrator of the story derides the anthropomorphic depictions of bats by humans, for example as vampires (Good 94–96), whilst itself being just such a depiction.

A slightly different technique is used in “Homelanding.” Here the speaker is not nonhuman, but a woman who visits another world and tries to explain human bodies, behaviour, and particularly the relationship between sexual differences and gender constructs to an unidentified, alien presence. By casting herself in the role of the alien, the speaker tries to describe humanity from the outside, as it were. She uses a style similar to that used by naturalists to describe other species, thus undermining anthropocentrism to some degree:

Let me propose myself as typical. I walk upright on two legs, and have in addition two arms, with ten appendages, that is to say, five at the end of each. On the top of my head, but not on the front, there is an odd growth, like a species of seaweed. Some think this is a kind of fur, others consider it modified feathers, evolved perhaps from scales like those of lizards. It serves no functional purpose and is probably decorative. (Good 116)

Use of the first person further disturbs the conventions of this kind of description: the object of description is describing itself, and a disturbing subjectivity is introduced in an ostensibly objective genre. Next human appearance is related to survival:

My eyes are situated in my head, which also possesses two small holes for the entrance and exit of air, the invisible fluid we swim in, and one larger hole, equipped with bony protuberances called teeth, by means of which I destroy and assimilate certain parts of my surroundings and change them into my self. This is called eating. The things I eat include roots, berries, nuts, fruits, leaves, and the muscle tissues of various animals and fish. Sometimes I eat their brains and glands as well. I do not as a rule eat insects, grubs, eyeballs or the snouts of pigs, though these are eaten with relish in other countries. (Good 116)

While the speaker also makes an us–them or self–other distinction in her references to local eating habits, this distinction is presented as immaterial and coincidental—as unrelated to humanity on a larger scale. Her
homogenising representation of humans would at first seem to indicate that a belief of human exceptionalism does underlie her description, but this is to some degree refuted by the last two sections of the short story, where the speaker instead concentrates on the values and experiences she shares with the addressed alien presence. In these last sections, the speaker dwells on human mortality, and proposes that an awareness of death could constitute common ground for understanding between humans and other beings. This consideration of human exceptionalism thus culminates in a degree of interspecies empathy, which emerges as one path to environmental redemption in the MaddAddam Trilogy too.

Atwood’s identification of death as the common denominator in the experiences of living beings is echoed by another literary response to Nagel’s essay. In J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, the character Elizabeth Costello argues that Nagel “is wrong; or at least he is sending us down a false trail” by suggesting that “we need to be able to experience bat-life through the sense-modalities of a bat” (33). Costello stresses that “there is no limit to the extent to which we can think ourselves into the being of another. There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination” (Coetzee 35). The attribution of such a capacity for sympathy to humans may be seen as indicative of an expression of human exceptionalism, however benign its expression in this case. Similarly, the human faculty of imagination could well be identified as the principle around which *Good Bones* is organised: most of the texts included in Atwood’s volume are from usually mute or inaccessible perspectives (those of silent or silenced figures in myth, literature and folk tales; animals, aliens, and women). Yet the notions that empathy or the imagination necessarily lead to changed power relations are subtly critiqued in *MaddAddam*.

Empathy (feeling like the Other), seems a more appropriate term for the hybrid community formed in *MaddAddam* than sympathy (feeling with another). By putting humans and nonhumans in the same post-apocalyptic boat, their interdependence is highlighted in the novel. Through including hybrid organisms—the Pigoons and Crakers—in the community of survivors formed in *MaddAddam*, Atwood suggests that humans share much with nonhuman creatures; in the case of the Crakers, so much that interbreeding is possible. Nevertheless, the generation of empathy for the Pigoons and Crakers depends on their assimilation as almost humans, or at least recognition as more-than-animal or almost human, and as such it does not involve a real departure from human exceptionalism. In part, this recognition is based on acknowledging that these creatures share some of their genetic makeup with the surviving humans. Both the Pigoons and Crakers are the products of bioengineering, so human ingenuity is
portrayed as directly linked to questioning the concept of the human, but there is no indication in the novel that the Crakers or Pigoons are fully regarded as human. Empathy is instead the result of forceful inscription of the self onto the otherwise unknowable Other, and through hyperbolically drawing attention to the ways in which empathy fails, the novel also exposes the limitations of an environmental ethic based on empathy alone.

**Human Pigs and Piggish Humans**

When the Pigoons are first introduced in *Oryx and Crake*, they appear to be nothing more than dangerous, oversized pigs, like their domesticated ancestors solely bred for human use. No longer intended to be consumed as meat, however, each Pigoon is genetically engineered to act as a host for multiple human organs for transplant. In the aftermath of the pandemic, the Pigoons are either let loose or somehow escape from the laboratories where they have been developed and kept, and they prove to be surprisingly adaptable to their new circumstances, partly due to their human brain matter. Mature Pigoons now have a considerable advantage over humans in most situations: they are much bigger and stronger, they apparently revert to type when feral and grow vicious tusks, and they have the ability to plan and execute group attacks and ambushes. Since they retain their porcine instincts to dig and wallow, they pose a substantial threat to human vegetable gardens. As a child Jimmy thinks of the Pigoons as “creatures much like himself” (*OC* 24), but he is pursued and ambushed by these lethal pigs after the pandemic, and only barely escapes with his life. When Toby shoots a Pigoon boar to protect her garden in *The Year of the Flood*, she later sees that there are flowers and fern fronds scattered around the carcass, and wonders: “Could the pigs have been having a funeral? Could they be bringing memorial bouquets?” (*YF* 328). The sight of Pigoons uncannily mimicking human funerary behaviour undermines any human sense of uniqueness.

The representation of the Pigoons gives rise to an uncomfortable recognition of the human in the nonhuman. In part this is due to the fact that relations between humans and pigs are fraught with ambiguity. Pigs can be seen as liminal animals: they are the only domesticated animals bred

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7 In keeping with many of the banal commercialised brand names in the trilogy, *Pigoons* are so nicknamed because their enormous, blown-up bodies resemble “pig balloons” (*YF* 221). This is conceivably an allusion to the inflatable pigs which have appeared at Pink Floyd concerts since the 1970s and which too are used in a critique of consumption.
solely to be eaten, and have traditionally lived in close proximity to humans. Historically pigs simultaneously provided a cheap source of protein and played an essential role in human hygiene. The banning of pigs from the streets of New York in the middle of the nineteenth century led to squalor (Mizelle 54–57), and according to the 1851 census there were three pigs per human inhabitant in the Potteries slum adjacent to North Kensington (Stallybrass and White 147). Pigs have historically played a mediating and transformative role: they have thrived on rubbish not fit for human consumption, and been in turn consumed by humans as an affordable source of meat. It has even been argued that the pig has played such an important role in the establishment of some human civilisations, that the two species could be said to have coevolved.8 The pig’s ambivalence as both a mechanism of waste disposal and a source of protein is mirrored in its ambiguous cultural significance: sometimes pigs symbolise luck or happiness, but more often they are seen as the embodiment of everything unclean.9

Furthermore, pigs and humans are physiologically uncannily similar: both species are naked, furless, mammals; there is such a degree of genetic similarity that porcine heart valves have been used in transplants since the 1960s. It is an evocative coincidence that the boiled skins of slaughtered pigs resemble those of white humans, historically perhaps the most damaging and insatiable consumers in human history, and Atwood’s Pigoons make obvious reference to this complex nexus of humans, consumerism, and pigs. These associations are important in a number of the trilogy’s intertexts too, including Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle (1906), which shows a vicious circle of violent exploitation related to the meat industry at the turn of the twentieth century: “What they wanted from a hog was all the profits that could be got out of him; and that was what they wanted from the working man, and also that was what they wanted from the public” (354). In William Golding’s The Lord of the Flies (1954), Piggy becomes legitimate prey in part because of this nickname; in Pig Tales (published in 1996 in French as Truismes), Marie Darrieussecq connects the exploitation of humans with the position of pigs in a first-person account of the protagonist’s transformation into a sow; and the

8 Brett Mizelle compares the domestication of wild boars to that of wolves, and in a formulation that highlights the intelligence of pigs argues that “it is possible that both wolves and pigs in some sense ‘chose’ domestication” (15) because of the benefits it presented.

9 Hence The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang lists the use of the verb to pig out to describe overindulgence, as well as the use of pig to denote an obstinate or greedy person; it notes that the first documented use of pig to pejoratively denote a police officer was recorded in 1811 (Ayto and Simpson).
representation of the Pigoons alludes to the pigs of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), although Pigoons do not seem particularly interested in taking power away from other animals.

Throughout the first two novels and for the first part of the final one the Pigoons are depicted as a potential threat to humans, and Pigoons are therefore killed as a precautionary measure, with the added advantage of being a ready source of protein. Pigoon is not consumed without a considerable degree of uneasiness, however. Due to their shared genetic material, some of the human characters feel that eating Pigoon meat comes perilously close to cannibalism.\(^\text{10}\) The anxiety around the consumption of Pigoon flesh is already present in *Oryx and Crake*, when the public is reassured that Pigoon meat does not end up in their food, since “no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own” (*OC* 23–24). Yet the consumption of pork products is noticeably high at OrganInc, which used to upset Jimmy, because as a child “he was confused about who should be allowed to eat what” (24).\(^\text{11}\) In MaddAddam, Manatee remarks that he feels “kind of weird about eating them. They’ve got human neocortex tissue” (*MA* 19). This kind of taboo—that eating the Pigoons could verge on anthropophagy—appears to indicate that although they are clearly not human as far as appearance is concerned, the Pigoons become a site where the boundaries of humanity are tested and perhaps to some extent reconfigured. Significantly, it is the Pigoons who approach the humans to come to an accord, on the conditions that Pigoon meat becomes taboo for the MaddAddamites and that the Pigoons are not to enter the humans’ kitchen garden. For a sense of community to be established, the surviving humans have to accept that the Pigoons make more suitable allies than some humans do. Most importantly, the notion of community itself needs to be revised in order to include Pigoons and Crakers. Yet this is done not so much by accepting the fundamental difference of these creatures, but rather by inscribing them with humanity.

As an unintended result of genetic engineering, the Crakers and Pigoons are able to communicate with each other, using a kind of telepathy combined with the Crakers’ “high, clear” (*MA* 348) singing and the Pigoons’ grunts. The Craker boy Blackbeard becomes the main interpreter between the Pigoons and the humans. Atwood makes his role as messenger and

\(^{10}\) Helen Tiffin observes that the eating of pork is “possible only because our symbolic construction of [pigs] as categorically ‘other’ enables their literal rendition into our ‘same’” (251).

\(^{11}\) Susan McHugh discusses meat sourced as a by-product of the medical industry as one of three kinds of fake meat which feature in *Oryx and Crake*, the other two being “victimless meat” and animals specifically engineered to have a reduced environmental impact (183).
magician explicit by having Toby shoe him in “a pair of Hermes Trismegistus cross-trainers” to protect his otherwise bare feet from glass and sharp objects littering the city streets; “[t]he shoes have appliquéd green wings on them and lights that flash with every step he takes” (MA 347). As soon as the MaddAddamites realise that they are able to communicate with the Pigoons using the Crakers as intermediaries, the Pigoons are elevated to near-human status in (some of) their minds. As already noted, this recognition is manifested typographically in the last novel: after the alliance between the MaddAddamites and the Pigoons is cemented, the word Pigoon is regularly capitalised, as if to affirm that they are not mere genetically-modified animals (from MA 276). Up until this point, and in the previous two novels, the word is consistently written in lowercase. This could however be read as a reinforcement of human exceptionalism too: the MaddAddamites tacitly accord the Pigoons the status of semi-humans and therefore bestow the capitalisation on them, through this action cementing their own authoritative position as humans, rather than broadening the scope for what could be considered human. This action could also be construed as a not too subtle reference to Adam’s naming of the animals, so important both in the Extinctathon game and in Gardener doctrine. Although the MaddAddamites find the names of the Pigoons unpronounceable, the Crakers experience no such difficulties—the Crakers and Pigoons are able to communicate effortlessly.

The Crakers consider the Pigoons proper subjects from the outset, as emphasised by their name for them, “Pig Ones” (e.g. MA 37). It takes longer for the human characters to recognise their individuality, though. When using the neutral pronoun for a Pigoon, Toby chastises herself for objectifying the creature and reminds herself: “Her back. The Pigoons were not objects. She had to get that right. It was only respectful” (MA 351). Toby’s reconsideration of the use of pronouns echoes Carol J. Adams’s discussion of the use of it when referring to animals: “just as the generic ‘he’ erases female presence, the generic ‘it’ erases the living, breathing nature of the animals and reifies their object status” (93). In her realisation that Pigoons are subjects in their own right, Toby is therefore forced to re-examine her own belief in human exceptionalism somewhat. The unpronounceable quality of Pigoon names appears to somehow add to their authenticity and individual identity—conversely, it also adds to their otherness. When telling a story to the Crakers, Toby is unable to pronounce the “Pigoon’s name in any way that resembled the grunt-heavy original. But nobody in the Craker audience seemed to mind, though they laughed at her a little” (MA 350). Accepting the Pigoons and Crakers as creatures with individual as well as collective agency, and as being closer to the traditional
idea of the human than anticipated, does not necessarily undermine the characters’ (or readers’) notion of human exceptionalism. Instead, it highlights the violence inherent in an understanding of empathy based on likeness: there is no definite move away from the human as standard.

The humans and Pigoons join forces to apprehend the Painballers, who not only slaughtered a small Pigoon, but have also killed Oates, one of the former Gardeners, and eaten his kidneys, in addition to raping Amanda and Ren and kidnapping Adam One. The eating of flesh therefore again appears significant, and through their deliberate cannibalism the Painballers are in effect rendered inhuman. As Maggie Kilgour pithily observes, cannibalism “presents a disturbing fiction of otherness because it both constructs and consumes the very possibility of radical difference” (viii). Accordingly, several characters make observations that deny the Painballers’ humanity:

“Who cares what we call them,” says Rhino. “So long as it’s not people.”

Hard to choose a label, thinks Toby: three sessions in the once notorious Painball Arena have scraped all modifying labels away from them, bleached them of language. Triple Painball survivors have long been known to be not quite human. (MA 367–68)

The idealistic MaddAddamite White Sedge insists on calling them “[f]ellow human beings” although “this in itself is not a defence,” and Toby “feels impelled to advocate for them in some way, but why?” (MA 367). Although there is a brief discussion about needing their DNA to increase the shrinking human gene pool, this only serves to highlight the fact that humanity is not only a factor of genetics. The way in which the survivors distance themselves from the Painballers and render them inhuman reverses the process through which the Pigoons are recognised as honorary humans. “Cannibalism is constitutive of community . . . because it is the limit that humanity requires in order to know itself as itself,” Geoffrey Sanborn notes (194), and the same kind of violent logic underlying empathy is at work in stripping the Painballers of their humanity: the survivors reconfirm their own humanity through rendering the Painballers Other and inhuman.

Eventually, the prisoners are tried in their absence, since “[t]he trial is about the verdict only” (MA 367) and the truce between the humans and Pigoons is cemented through their joint decision to execute the two Painballers. The “Pigoons vote collectively, through their leader, with Blackbeard as their interpreter”: “‘They all say dead,’ he tells Toby. ‘But they will not eat those ones. They do not want those ones to be part of them’” (MA 369–70). The voting process involves using “pebbles: black for death, white for mercy” (MA 369). Only one of the humans, presumably
White Sedge, votes against executing the Painballers. Calina Ciobanu sees “the ethical potential of Atwood’s new world order” as lying in this single “white stone, which defies the logic of self- and species-interest” (159). Voting to keep them alive transcends self-preservation, and is not based on empathy-as-likeness, but simply on the conviction that “[t]aking life under any circumstances is reprehensible” (MA 368). It does seem significant that the Crakers do not participate in making the decision. They also do not attend the execution; according to Blackbeard, “Toby said it would be hurtful” to them (MA 370). In fact, the Crakers’ capacity for empathy is much greater than that of the surviving humans, and they would possibly not willingly condemn anyone to death.

The new community is brought together by death: the Pigoons take part in the funeral for Jimmy, Adam One and Oates, by carrying their bodies “to the site for us, as a sign of friendship and inter-species co-operation. They collected more flowers and ferns, which they piled on top of the bodies. Then we walked to the site in procession. The Crakers sang all the way” (MA 373). The body of the Pigoon sow killed in the battle is also treated ritually: “The Pigoons had their own funeral rites. They did not bury the dead Pigoon, but set her down in a clearing near one of the park picnic tables. They heaped her with flowers and branches, and stood silently, tails drooping. Then the Crakers sang” (MA 374). This seems to confirm the fact that the Painballers somehow forfeited their right to be treated as humans through their behaviour, while the Pigoons earned the right to be treated as more-than-animals. So this new community is founded on a communal decision to end the lives of others, in which the Crakers do not participate. Toby observes that the entire process “has an archeological feel. The old symbol systems follow us around” (MA 369), thus emphasising the material roots of culture, and heightening the sense of impending repetition.

The humans and Crakers live together in Heritage Park, albeit in distinct groups, while the Pigoons come and go. The human–Craker babies embody the hybridity of this new community. When Toby tells the Crakers “The Story of the Birth of Zeb,” she needs to explain the concept of marriage to them: “with marriage there was supposed to be one male for each female and one female for each male. Although sometimes there were more. But there were not supposed to be,” Toby says (MA 108). She continues to explain that marriage “was a thing of the chaos. That is why you can’t understand it” (MA 108). And the apocalypse seems to have brought about somewhat changed family constellations: the Crakers are genetically engineered to live communally in much larger groups than nuclear families, and the remaining humans seem to share childrearing duties irrespective of genetic relations. At the same time, there is a
disturbing intimation that hybridity and the acceptance of hybridity are gendered in the novel—it is, after all, the human women who bear the hybrid babies. The new community shows clear signs of reverting to traditional gender roles, as the men hunt and protect the community, while the women rear children and stay closer to home.

Embracing hybridity seems key to forging a sense of community in MaddAddam. By accepting that the Crakers are different by degree rather than kind from humans, the conception of what it means to be human is stretched and perhaps expanded, although, as discussed below, this is also satirically undermined by the Crakers’ farcical storytelling. The recognition of the Crakers as human or almost-human (or the realisation that what is meant by human is at best fluid) appears to hinge on the fact that they possess agency, and do more than just react to their surroundings. And here, as in several of Atwood’s other works, agency is intimately connected to the purposeful use of language. It is therefore significant that the final part of the novel is focalised by Blackbeard, and that storytelling and singing play such important roles in the Craker community. The case of the “ontologically ambiguous” Pigoons (Mosca 41) is much less clear-cut: after reaching an agreement with the human survivors, the Pigoons offer them the piglet killed by the Painballers as food, leading Toby to reflect on their “[c]urious funeral rites. . . . You strew the beloved with flowers, you mourn, and then you eat the corpse. No-holds-barred recycling. Even Adam and the Gardeners never went that far” (MA 271). In some ways the Pigoons remain just too Other to become completely accepted into the community—the implication certainly seems to be that the old Gardeners who used to celebrate “interspecies empathy” on the saint day of Dian Fossey (YF 311) are not quite able to put this into practice.

It is therefore noteworthy that one of the few explicit considerations of empathy in the trilogy is directly related to violence. One of Zeb’s recollections of the pre-pandemic world concerns the “haptic wanksites” through which users with “feedback terminals” (MA 117–18) could experience sensations related to the onscreen action. His father favoured the “historical re-enactment beheading sites” that “gave you the sensation, right in your own hands, of what it felt like to decapitate a woman with an axe” (MA 118).12 Zeb considers

12 The pre-apocalyptic backstories of the three novels of the MaddAddam Trilogy are not always entirely consistent: Zeb recalls more advanced technology used to enjoy violence-as-entertainment than that remembered by the much younger Snowman. This seems to indicate that Atwood uses the three novels to revise and amend her own fiction, a fact which suggests that the power of storytelling itself is more important than the stories told in the trilogy.
hacking in and recoding the program so that when the axe came down you got the sensation not in your hands but in your own neck. What would it feel like to have your head chopped off? Would it hurt, or would the shock cancel that out? Or would you get a rush of empathy? But too much empathy could be dangerous. Your heart might stop. (MA 118)

Although less overtly violent than in this example, the novel consistently draws attention to the fact that identifying the Other as similar to the self is likewise a process fraught with violence and determined by existing power relations.

For the surviving humans, humanity is something that can be bestowed on or taken away at will from others, and perceived humanity is the determining factor in generating empathy. As an environmental ethic, empathy accordingly appears deeply flawed. If environmentalism is to rely mainly on empathy, and if empathy is nigh impossible to engender for other humans and for living organisms unless they can be shown to approximate the self, relying on empathic relations to other kinds of nonhuman nature appears inadequate.

**Hybridity and the Ends of Environmentalism**

Environmentalism that relies on empathy as assimilation is shown to be insufficient in *MaddAddam*, as is environmentalism that fails to take into account hybridity. The pandemic has brought about the end of environmentalism in the trilogy. Genetically engineered organisms such as the Pigoons and the Crakers embody ‘new nature’, and, in the case of the Crakers, are specifically designed to thrive in the new natural environment they inhabit. The remaining Gardeners quickly abandon their vegetarianism in a quest to survive a little longer, and humanity is in a sense deprived of the kind of technological agency that hailed the Anthropocene in the first place. This seems at least to be the reasoning behind Toby’s consideration that “[t]here would be no point in being a Gardener now: the enemies of God’s Natural Creation no longer exist, and the animals and birds—those that did not become extinct under the human domination of the planet—are thriving unchecked. Not to mention the plant life” (MA 209). In so returning to nature (however far from pristine it is), the distinction between humans and nonhumans which made environmentalism possible has become more questionable.

In Chapter 1, I briefly described the way in which the idea of primeval wilderness, a foundational concept of environmentalism, is based on a separation of nature and culture that is in itself an untenable cultural
construction. In recent years, attention has increasingly been paid to so-called new natures, i.e. nonhuman nature that coexists with humanity, and which cannot be classified as wilderness. In his notion of “emergent ecologies,” Eben Kirksey for example includes non-native species and anthropogenic disturbances which result in “multispecies communities that have been formed and transformed by chance encounters, historical accidents, and parasitic invasions” (1). The notion of new natures is therefore closely connected to the concept of the Anthropocene. In one influential call for the recognition and management of various types of new nature, Emma Marris presents a convincing opening gambit: “In 2011 there is no pristine wilderness on planet Earth . . . . Inhale. That breath has 36 percent more molecules of carbon dioxide than it would have had in 1750” (2). Marris’s vision depends on human intervention in nonhuman nature, and, in the light of the MaddAddam Trilogy, it is interesting that she frames her entire argument in terms of gardening:

In different places, in different chunks, we can manage nature for different ends—for historical restoration, for species preservation, for self-willed wilderness, for ecosystem services, for food and fiber and fish and flame trees and frogs. We’ve forever altered the Earth, and so now we cannot abandon it to a random fate. It is our duty to manage it. Luckily, it can be a pleasant, even joyful task if we embrace it in the right spirit. Let the rambunctious gardening begin. (171)

Marris’s notion of “rambunctious gardening,” like so many more traditional forms of environmentalism, relies on viewing humanity as part of, but different to the rest of nonhuman nature. Humanity is to “manage nature,” but little attention is paid to the degree to which humans in turn are part of nature.

Hybridity may be deemed characteristic of new natures or emergent ecologies. On the largest scale, anthropogenic influence has rendered ecosystems hybrid: as seen in Marris’s example, even the atmosphere is no longer ‘natural’. But hybridity also features on many other scales in the meeting and merging of otherwise separate ecosystems, for example through domestication, species introduction, migration, or simple chance. At a genetic level hybridity poses a further conundrum for environmentalism, as for instance illustrated by the recent discovery that the grey wolf is the only wolf species on the North American continent; the “[t]wo other purported species, the Eastern wolf and the red wolf, are mixes of gray wolf and coyote DNA” (Zimmer). This finding has exposed a flaw in the United States Endangered Species Act: there is no specific provision for the protection of endangered hybrid species, since the legislation is based on a view of nature and the natural which simply leaves no room for this kind of hybridisation. Although the current legislation protects endangered grey
wolves, coyotes are not classified as endangered. One of the interviewees in this article argues that “[r]ed and Eastern wolves still deserve protection” not because of their intrinsic value as predators in the ecosystems they form part of, but “because they still carry the DNA of an endangered species” (Zimmer, my emphasis). Hybridity per se is of course nothing new—we are all genetic hybrids to some extent. In *MaddAddam*, hybridisation is used to question ideas of the natural, and by extension, notions of what environmentalism should and could entail, as traditional environmentalist views about the inherent balance of nature become untenable and the unruly proliferation brought about by hybridity cannot be accounted for. In the next sections, I discuss two such examples from the novel: the pre-apocalyptic efforts to conserve the polar bear population in the face of global warming, and the post-apocalyptic spread of the invasive kudzu vine.

**Polar Bears and the Arctic**

Climate change has become a metonym for the environmental problems of the Anthropocene, and the polar bear on its rapidly diminishing ice float has in turn become emblematic of the consequences of climate change. The polar bear’s prominence as “the ‘poster child’ for climate change” (Owen and Swaisgood 143) is in part due to the fact that the species is an example of the charismatic megafauna which environmentalists tend to highlight. According to Mike Hulme, surveys have shown that “the power of the polar bear icon to represent climate change in the minds of the public rests on its emotional appeal” (*Why* 242). The polar bear is, as Graham Huggan contends, “one the world’s most affective animals” (“Never-Ending” 13). According to Huggan,

> [t]he polar bear’s affectivity (the measure of its affective state) thus owes not just to its readily exploitable emotional appeal, but to the multi-functionality of its status as an icon: as a physical and visual embodiment of ‘the Arctic’, ‘the wilderness’, ‘wild nature’ and—inssofar as it is co-opted as an ecological or anthropomorphic cipher for general imperilment—of ‘the planet’ or ‘humanity’ itself. (“Never-Ending” 14)

Conversely, such focus on the polar bear population also serves to distance climate change from its causes—it becomes something that affects wildlife elsewhere, in the Arctic ‘wilderness’.

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13 Shannon Petersen notes, for example, that the U.S. Endangered Species Act already from its inception in 1973 has “displayed a profound bias toward charismatic megafauna” (479).
The only large-scale conservation project described in detail in the MaddAddam Trilogy is Bearlift, a pre-pandemic scheme to save the polar bear population. In the pre-apocalyptic world of MaddAddam, Arctic “ice had mostly melted” and parts of the polar bear population had subsequently “starved, but the rest of them were drifting southwards, mating up with the grizzlies, from which they’d separated themselves a mere two hundred thousand years ago” (MA 59). As the maritime polar bears and continental grizzlies mix, there are bears with mixed white and brown coats, as well as single-coloured bears, but because of the hybridisation, “whatever was on the outside was no predictor of temperament: the pizzlies would avoid you most of the time, like grizzlies; the grolars would attack you most of the time, like polar bears. You never knew which kind any given bear might be” (MA 59). The polar bears have thus found a way to survive climate change, irrespective of human intervention, and anthropogenic climate change results in a new hybrid bear species in North America. Zeb’s description of the hybridisation of the polar bears and grizzlies highlights that notions of genetic purity are tenuous. If polar bears and grizzlies can mate, they may never have been separate species at all. Moreover, “The Story of Zeb and the Bear” (MA 53) also complicates some other categorisations, such as the distinctions between human and nonhuman animals, and the boundary between fact and myth.

The story of Zeb and the bear begins with the following observation: “There’s the story, then there’s the real story, then there’s the story of how the story came to be told. Then there’s what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too” (MA 56). In its focus on agency and the power of storytelling, Zeb’s tale does more than just examine the constraints of environmental efforts in the Anthropocene: it demonstrates the extent to which environmentalism relies on narrative construction. And as briefly shown above, the demise of the polar bear in the face of global warming is one of the dominant environmentalist narratives at present.

Heidi Hansson identifies two literary traditions in the portrayal of the Arctic. Ideas of the region’s “nothingness, pristine nature and harsh natural conditions” have been expressed in the form of “adventure stories and thrillers, as a kind of fictional development of the narratives of discovery published by Arctic explorers” (70). However, “there is also another strand of thought where the Arctic emerges as a transitional space between the familiar and the truly alien” (Hansson 70). Both of these strands are present in the story of Zeb and the bear.14 Zeb tells the story of

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14 This is not incidental. Atwood has been concerned with the Arctic in both her nonfiction and fiction, and particularly with the lost Franklin expedition of 1845. One of her 1991
his involvement with the organisation to Toby, who then retells a sanitised version of the tale to the Crakers. Through the picaresque form of *MaddAddam* Atwood draws on and slightly subverts the conventions of Arctic adventure stories through Zeb’s tale, while the ironic distance Zeb maintains to his own account allows for a critique of this large-scale interventionist conservation project.

The story of Zeb’s encounter with the bear has various threads. First, there is the basic story of Bearlift, the how and why of their conservation efforts and the reasons for Zeb’s involvement with the project. Second, there is the story of how Zeb comes to crash on the tundra of the Mackenzie Mountain Barrens, and how he manages to survive the trek back to civilisation. Although Zeb resorts to cannibalism to survive, this does not seem to jeopardise his humanity at all. This narrative therefore throws that of the Painballers in sharp relief, and again demonstrates just how inadequate empathy based on identification is. When Zeb kills a bear, eats its flesh and fat, and uses its skin, he crosses a threshold and enters the realm of myth. Finally, there is the suggestion, already hinted at in *The Year of the Flood*, that Zeb somehow assimilates bear-like characteristics through this ordeal. I here discuss each of these narrative strands in turn, to show how the story of Zeb and the bear functions to destabilise notions of humanity in the novel, and how it is used to highlight human attitudes to nonhuman nature.

Bearlift’s conservation project involves, as Zeb tells it, flying in with “thopters” and dropping “numerous dumpsterloads of rancid biotrash around the far north so a bunch of mangy Ursidae could gobble it free of charge” (*MA* 58). This project is something humans engage in as much, or even more, for their own sakes than for the sake of the nonhumans involved. Zeb points out that “Bearlift was a scam, or partly a scam. Unlike many scams it was well meaning, but it was a scam nonetheless” (*MA* 59). Bearlift is described as a type of environmentalist penance; according to Zeb the project “lived off the good intentions of city types with disposable emotions who liked to think they were saving something—some rag from their primordial authentic ancestral past, a tiny shred of their collective soul dressed up in a cute bear suit” (*MA* 59). Moreover, the corporations use Bearlift to distract people “from the real action, which was bulldozing the planet flat and grabbing anything of value” (*MA* 69). Environmentalist efforts consequently become a type of alibi for other destruction. Again

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Clarendon lectures is entitled “Concerning Franklin and His Gallant Crew” (collected as *Strange Things*), and the short story “The Age of Lead” (in *Wilderness Tips*) also deals with the expedition.
there seems to be a traditional Christian principle at work: through donating money to a good conservationist cause, some absolution can be bought. Additionally, because Bearlift operates in the Yukon, environmentalist efforts are framed as concerned with far-off wilderness areas, and the rest of nature is in effect denied its rights to protection and existence by virtue of proximity, accessibility, and visible human contamination.

The polar bear’s status as “hackneyed icon of climate change” (Hulme, *Why* 344), makes it a particularly apt subject for illustrating the conundrums faced by environmentalists in the novel and in the real world. Zeb recalls that the Bearlift “concept was simple: the polar bears are starving because the ice is almost gone and they can’t catch seals any more, so let’s feed them our leftovers until they learn to adapt,” and goes on to describe *adapt* as “the buzzword of those days” (*MA* 59). The dialogue between the two characters takes on a decidedly didactic tone with Toby’s rejoinder that “[i]t was another way of saying tough luck. To people you weren’t going to help out” (*MA* 59). In Toby’s reply the connection between environmentalism and environmental justice is made explicit, although this is not followed up by Zeb. In his turn Zeb points out that that “feeding trash to the bears didn’t help them adapt, it just taught them that food falls out of the sky. They’d start slavering every time they heard the sound of a ’thopter, they had their very own cargo cult” (*MA* 59). Zeb’s logic is patently flawed, as is that of the conservationists who devised Bearlift: the bears clearly do adapt, but to being fed, not to hunting on their own. Shelley Boyd remarks that the “polar bears’ predicament is not unlike that of the cobb-house residents, who scavenge until their dependency on finite food supplies leads to other methods of species continuation” (172), and it is certainly notable that the future of both species is shown to be literally hybrid. The polar bear is accordingly shown to be worthy of its reputation as a harbinger of climate change—in *MaddAddam*, humanity appears to be on the same path to extinction through hybridity as the polar bears.15

Throughout his tale, Zeb manages to create some retrospective distance between himself and the true believers in this conservation effort. He becomes involved with Bearlift not so much to save the bears, but to save himself. He is only “taking a breather at Bearlift: it was ultra far from Brazil” where he gets into trouble for illegal hacking; he is one of those

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15 Extinction through hybridity is of course just a paraphrase for evolution. In *Oryx and Crake* the polar bear is twice listed as an extinct species (*OC* 298, 344), so Bearlift apparently fails to save any ‘pure’ polar bears in the world of the trilogy.

In May 2016 *The Washington Post* reported the hybridisation of grizzlies and polar bears in Alaska, and according to the interviewed experts the polar bears were “not gaining any genetic diversity” from this contact (qtd. by Popescu).
Bearlift employees who “claimed to be along for the challenge” rather than out of any real environmentalist conviction (MA 59, 58). On the whole, Bearlift is sketched as very different from the altruistic environmentalist effort it is advertised to be. The entire operation is only viable in an age of relatively cheap oil, and as soon as the large-scale conversion of food waste into biofuel starts through the “carbon garboil business,” there is no longer any reason to “waste such valuable primary material on bears” (MA 58). Environmentalism is predicated on convenience and cost-effectiveness in the pre-pandemic world of the novel. This consideration also highlights that environmentalism is seldom wholly benign. Decisions to save certain species are almost always taken at the expense of others, and if humans need to choose they usually choose themselves first.

The second thread of the narrative concerns the reasons for Zeb’s crashing in the tundra. Zeb flees to the Arctic from Brazil, but eventually someone called Chuck also joins Bearlift, and Zeb becomes convinced that Chuck is following him. As if in a fairy-tale, it is on their third flight together that things take a turn for the worse as Chuck tries to inject Zeb with something and they have a mid-air struggle, resulting in their ‘thopter crashing. Chuck dies in the accident, and Zeb flees the scene, his suspicions confirmed that Chuck has been sent to kidnap or kill him. A few hours after the crash an “ornodrone” arrives, inspects the crash site from the air and finally blows up the remains (MA 75). By then, Zeb is already hiding at some distance away. Zeb’s description of the surrounding environment time and again highlights that although it is remote, it is far from being the pristine wilderness envisaged by conservationists. The landscape includes “the remains of the Old Canol Trail, still marked by the occasional World War Two telephone pole,” and once Zeb starts walking away from the crash scene he passes “parts of old airplanes sticking out of the peat—a strut here, a blade there, detritus from rash twentieth-century bush pilots caught by fog or sudden winds, long ago” (MA 66, 72). As Zeb hikes he passes “a leaning telegraph pole, an archaic wooden one. There was a tangle of wire beside it, and a caribou skeleton, the antlers snarled; farther on, an oil drum, then two oil drums, then a red truck, in almost pristine condition but no tires” (MA 74). In reality, the Arctic is thus all but pristine wilderness: it is instead a site that testifies to historical human presence and influence.

Nevertheless the far north emerges as a place of exception in the novel. It is a place in a rapidly warming world that is still cold, and to some extent its inhabitants escape the corporate constraints faced by the rest of the civilian population in North America. ‘Thopter pilots are for instance allowed bear-guns, in case of emergencies, despite the fact that “it was around that time that the CorpSeCorps was confiscating those, having raised the
spurious banner of civic safety and thus effectively securing a monopoly for
themselves on killing at a distance” (MA 62). Zeb thus escapes the crash
armed, and also in possession of some of Chuck’s clothing and boots. Most
significantly, however, he tells Toby: “I took some of Chuck. Hacked it off
with the pocketknife, kind of sawed it. Chuck had a fold-up waterproof
jacket, so I wrapped it in that. Not much to eat up there in the Barrens, we
all knew that, we’d had the Bearlift course” (MA 70). In his reigning state of
exception, Zeb has to resort to cannibalism to stand any chance of survival.

The accident reverses roles: Zeb is no longer taking part in environ-
mentalist efforts to save the polar bear, but has been rendered an
endangered (human) animal, fleeing for his life and willing to do whatever
it takes to survive. Typical for Atwood’s work in general, this transgression
takes a gothic expression, but is also rendered somewhat comical by Zeb’s
“patting [Toby’s] bum” (MA 70) while telling this story to her. Zeb’s action
could also be seen as a reminder of what they now both know he is capable
of doing. Motivation is seen to play a determining role in the view
characters take of cannibalism. Zeb’s cannibalism is forced, and he does not
have to kill Chuck to take a chunk of his thigh, whereas the Painballers kill
Oates with the sole purpose of eating his kidneys and thereby renounce
their claim to humanity, in the eyes of the others. The sense that the north
exists on an almost mythical plane is reinforced as Zeb’s tale progresses. He
consumes his co-pilot’s flesh with some difficulty, and eventually shoots
and eats part of a bear: “What did this taste like? Who cared? Having eaten
the heart, could he now speak the language of bears?” (MA 81). In some
ways, Zeb’s eating of the bear gives a practical demonstration of the
violence of empathy through assimilation: that which was Other literally
becomes part of the self.

As seen in the previous chapters, consumption is central to the
environmental problems sketched in the MaddAddam Trilogy, and changed
eating habits are seen as one of the best ways to halt environmental
destruction. This is why the Crakers are designed to be herbivores, and why
the Gardeners’ Vegivows are central to their practice. So the fact that Zeb
breaches two eating taboos during his journey through this altered
wilderness seems noteworthy. Most obviously, it shows that one’s own
survival always takes priority over the survival of others or any idealism.
While Zeb does not kill Chuck, he does not hesitate to kill an endangered
bear to survive. More interestingly, however, the eating of the bear plays a
significant role in Zeb’s future portrayal of himself, and in how he is
perceived by others. He may not be able to speak the language of bears, but
he does incorporate a nebulous measure of the ursine by consuming the
bear. This in turn links the episode with Adam One’s teachings on the continuity between human and nonhuman nature.

Already in *The Year of the Flood* there are a few instances when Zeb is subtly associated with bears: Ren remembers “his big Russian-bear voice” (*YF* 6), and sometimes dreams about Zeb “wearing a bear suit, and the fur would unzip down the middle like a pyjama bag, and Zeb would step out” (*YF* 214), while Toby remembers how Zeb taught the Gardeners about the nutritional value of maggots: “Rich in lipids, a good source of protein. How do you think bears get so fat?” (*YF* 349). The Gardener boys appear to have heard some version of the story of Zeb and the bear and revere him for his exploits (*YF* 109), and in the Extinctathon game Zeb’s nickname is *Spirit Bear* (*YF* 269).16 Yet in *MaddAddam* Zeb’s partial transformation into a bear is not depicted as a spiritual journey or as part of a process of self-realisation. It is instead portrayed as a farcical quest for survival. Zeb makes “new footgear—wraps of hide, fur side in, tied with crisscross strips like a fashion item in a cave-man comic. He’s got a fur cape, he’s got a fur hat, and all of it doubles as sleeping gear, heavy and stinky. He’s porting a meat cargo and a big wad of fat” (*MA* 81). In his guise as a bear, Zeb surprises a cyclist, takes his bicycle and gear, and eventually cycles out of the area. This leads to a rumour that “Sasquatches are real after all,” and soon “Bigfoot-believers from around the world” flock to the area in the hope of collecting “definitive DNA” (*MA* 83).17 The news of a possible Sasquatch sighting seems to galvanise more public interest than the inland migration and hybridisation of polar bears.

Atwood devotes two of her four 1991 Clarendon lectures, later published as *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995), to the monstrous figure of the Wendigo, a cannibalistic figure from First Nations mythology. Atwood notes that “[f]ear of the Wendigo is twofold: fear of being eaten by one, and fear of becoming one” (*Strange* 82). Of the two, “[b]ecoming one is the real horror” (*Strange* 83). Despite his consumption of human flesh, Zeb does not turn into a Wendigo. Instead, through later killing and eating a bear, and then dressing in its furs, he is mistaken for Bigfoot. This seems to be an important distinction, at least in the light of Atwood’s analysis of the Wendigo. Becoming a

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16 The *spirit bear* (*Ursus americanus kermodei*) is a subspecies of the North American black bear that in some cases have light coats (similar to those of polar bears). Perhaps this should be seen as a proleptic hint to the thematic importance of genetic variation and bears in *MaddAddam*.

17 The *Bigfoot* (also known by the Salish name *Sasquatch*), is a large mythical ape-like creature purportedly found in the north-western parts of North America that resembles the Himalayan yeti.
Wendigo is indicative of insanity: if he had turned Wendigo, Zeb would in a sense have become part of the wilderness, never to return. A Sasquatch, on the other hand, not only resembles the yeti, it inhabits the same kind of borderland Jimmy associates with the Abominable Snowman in Oryx and Crake. It too can be said to be both “existing and not existing” (OC 7). In this case, the hybrid figure of the Sasquatch blurs the boundaries between fact and myth: there is, after all, photographic evidence of its appearance taken by the mountain bikers, but the story of how Zeb came to be dressed in a bearskin is as improbable as the notion of the Sasquatch itself. Putting on a bearskin may be seen as the literal embodiment of empathy, but here it ends in bathos.

The image of inhabiting or entering a bear recurs in Atwood’s work. “Bear Lament,” one of the poems included in The Door (2007), dwells on the ongoing demise of polar bears. “You once believed if you could only / crawl inside a bear, its fat and fur” the speaker says, “this would / save you, in a crisis” (1–2, 7–8). But the speaker realises that this is no longer the case; “last year” the speaker saw a bear that “was thin as ribs / and growing thinner” and so can provide “scant // comfort” (17, 20–21, 24–25). The poem ends with a series of mournful questions:

Oh bear, what now?
And will the ground
still hold? And how
much longer? (26–29)

“Bear Lament” appears wistful and nostalgic, and much more closely aligned with prevailing climate change iconography than with the strange new natures of MaddAddam. Together, however, the two texts articulate a very real and potentially insoluble problem for environmentalists, particularly for those who cling to some notion of pristine wilderness. The story of Zeb and the bear thus serves to highlight the complexity of new natures and the entanglement of human and nonhuman survival, while also showcasing the power of myth and storytelling.

Post-Pandemic Kudzu

Whereas the post-apocalyptic world does not bode well for human survival, some critics have interpreted the regeneration of nonhuman nature in the trilogy in a positive light. Lee Rozelle, for example, rightly points out that criticism of Oryx and Crake has been overwhelmingly anthropocentric in its focus on the demise of humanity depicted in the novel, while what he
terms “liminal zones” (62) of the nonhuman are shown to thrive in the novel. Anna Lindhé asserts that MaddAddam “portrays a utopian world” in which the “[p]re-apocalyptic landscape of human corruption, perversion and exploitation has been radically transformed to harbour a peaceful posthuman race who lives in harmony with the natural world” (41). As is so often the case in the MaddAddam Trilogy, however, Atwood entices with the promise of environmental apocalypticism, while simultaneously showing its disadvantages.

In The Year of the Flood, kudzu features in Adam One’s vision of the post-apocalyptic resurgence of nonhuman nature:

Take comfort in the thought that this history will soon be swept away by the Waterless Flood. Nothing will remain of the Exfernal World but decaying wood and rusting metal implements; and over these the Kudzu and other vines will climb; and Birds and Animals will nest in them. . . . For all works of Man will be as words written on water. (YF 312)

Soon after the pandemic, Toby notes that “the vines are growing almost audibly, shutting out sight” (YF 367). Even the well-adapted Crakers, who do without many of the trappings of humanity, such as clothes, continue to have an impact on the environment they inhabit. In Oryx and Crake they have to leave the Paradise Dome because they “were munching up the leaves and grasses faster than they could regenerate” (OC 345), and in MaddAddam the Crakers and surviving humans are struggling to outpace the growth of the invasive kudzu vine. Despite kudzu being one of the Crakers’ “favourite plants” (MA 96), and most of the MaddAddamites’ meals including kudzu, Toby thinks that some environmental management may be called for, since kudzu “gets in everywhere. It’s tireless, it can grow a foot in twelve hours, it surges up and over anything in its way like a green tsunami” (MA 209). By focussing attention on kudzu, Atwood exposes another favourite fallacy of environmentalism, namely that green is good.

Kudzu is not a hybrid, but the post-pandemic kudzu invasion is one characteristic of a hybrid ecology and clearly illustrates that the apocalyptic erasure of humanity will not necessarily restore balance to nature. Mainstream environmentalists continue to promote notions of nature as homeostatic, yet the idea that there is a natural balance that is always upset by human intervention has, for example, been refuted by Daniel Botkin in Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-First Century (1990). Through numerous examples of seemingly spontaneous (or natural) population explosions and their disastrous consequences, Botkin shows that natural equilibrium is, and has always been, an illusion. The assumption that nature is always homeostatic seemingly derives from a human desire to
impose order on the nonhuman world—it is the environmental equivalent of Adam Smith’s invisible hand.

The focus on kudzu in the trilogy is both effective and pertinent. A perennial native to Southeast Asia, kudzu (*Peraria spp.*) was introduced to the United States as an ornamental plant at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia; during the first decades of the twentieth century it was cultivated as fodder in the American South, and during the 1930s kudzu use was aggressively promoted by the federal government to combat soil erosion (Blaustein 56–57). As an introduced species, kudzu is emblematic of new Anthropocenic natures, and the invasive proliferation of the plant is the direct result of an environmentalist project. Invasive species trouble categories such as natural and artificial, and attendant notions such as distinctions between the indigenous and the exotic. In determining what is native to an area, environmentalists usually resort to rather arbitrary temporal cut-off points. These are frequently implicitly tied up with western imperialism, and can thus be related to the sustained colonial project of distinguishing between nature and culture in terms that would tend to categorise all native inhabitants (human and nonhuman) on the side of nature, and all newcomers on the side of culture. Further, as a choking vine, kudzu is an extremely apt symbol for the insidious unforeseen and unintended consequences of environmental management projects.

According to Richard Blaustein, by the middle of the 1990s, kudzu covered an “estimated 2.8 million ha” and was estimated to be “spreading by 50,000 ha a year” (57). Kudzu tends to follow in the wake of human disturbances; Blaustein describes the plant as a “classic invader” that tends to colonise “disturbed or degraded habitats where sunlight is abundant, such as forest edges, clearcut patches, abandoned fields and roadsides” (56). “Once established in an area,” Blaustein observes, “Kudzu begins to reshape the entire landscape, enshrouding and slowly killing surrounding fields and forests, and destroying habitat for associated wildlife” (56). Kudzu is thus deemed to have agential power of its own, and Blaustein’s discussion of the plant centres on the ways in which it “has infiltrated the South, pervaded the culture, altered lifestyles, caused great distress, and hindered the enjoyment of national parks” (62). In the post-pandemic world, kudzu appears poised to dethrone humanity as the species that has most impact on other organisms and the nonorganic environment.

Environmental discourse is permeated by nostalgia and environmentalists often appear unwilling or unable to accept any change, unless such changes hark back to an earlier era that is seen to be more pristine—usually because it bears fewer visible traces of human influence. Paradoxically, most discussions of nature and nature conservation tend to
be framed anthropocentrically. By framing nature as hybrid, changeable and instable, and by inscribing humanity in nature, MaddAddam demonstrates that conventional forms of environmentalism are no longer imperative or viable. Hybridity has permeated everything and there is no longer any means to regain any prior purity: the very notion of underlying naturalness is shown to be untenable not only in this post-apocalyptic world, but to have been flawed long before the pandemic. Yet some forms of humanity, particularly in the shape of storytelling, thrive in this post-apocalyptic world, as seen in the following part of this chapter.

**Hybrid Storytelling**

There can be little doubt that Atwood regards current environmental crises as real and urgent, and that she deems her MaddAddam Trilogy more than just light entertainment and a valid response to such crises. Nevertheless she has for decades remained consistent in questioning the political role of art and artists, particularly in relation to feminism and environmentalism, as highlighted in the preceding chapters. In an article from January 2017, entitled “What Art Under Trump?,” Atwood again states that

> [t]here will, of course, be protest movements, and artists and writers will be urged to join them. It will be their moral duty—or so they will be told—to lend their voices to the cause. (Artists are always being lectured on their moral duty, a fate other professionals—dentists, for example—generally avoid.) But it’s tricky telling creative people what to create or demanding that their art serve a high-minded agenda crafted by others. Those among them who follow such hortatory instructions are likely to produce mere propaganda or two-dimensional allegory—tedious sermonizing either way. The art galleries of the mediocre are wallpapered with good intentions.

Atwood clearly does protest too much; her repeated disavowal of art with a message is belied by her own artistic production, and the metafictional focus of MaddAddam makes the tensions in her project manifest. Significantly, she does concede that “social satire” may be a feasible “genuine artistic response,” although this observation is also qualified: “satire, alas, tends to falls flat when reality exceeds even the wildest exaggerations of the imagination—as it is increasingly doing today” (Atwood, “What Art?”). In keeping with the complicitous critique that dominates her entire oeuvre, the MaddAddam Trilogy ought perhaps to be seen as an attempt at justifying the importance of storytelling in the face of crisis, although it at the same time satirically pokes fun at the potential of narrative.
All three novels of the trilogy metaleptically dramatise some aspects of their own conditions as commodified aesthetic objects. The mechanisms of branding and marketing made explicit in *Oryx and Crake* are to some extent replicated in the titling and promotion of the novels themselves, for example, and during the *Year of the Flood* book tour Atwood satirically performed evangelical environmentalism in a manner similar to that used by Adam One in that novel. Storytelling and narrative construction are thematically important in all three novels, but are absolutely central to the final novel. In its focus on the mechanics of storytelling, *MaddAddam* draws attention to its own fictionality, but also to issues of audience and agency. The novel underlines the degree to which stories depend on context and participation: narratives are constantly negotiated and stagnation is shown to lead to dogma. In the next sections I first discuss the manner in which storytelling is foregrounded in *MaddAddam* through the Crakers’ budding literacy, before turning to the possible implications of the metafictionality of this novel and the trilogy as a whole.

**Hybrid Literacy**

Atwood’s declaration that “to some extent we are our plots” indicates both that humanity is malleable, and that we inevitably seek to create order out of chaos by telling stories. So while we have agency, there is also some risk of succumbing to established narrative patterns. In the trilogy, this risk is repeatedly brought to the fore in the satirical deflation of the apocalyptic environmentalism espoused by Crake and Adam One, but also in other narrative strands, such as Jimmy’s casting himself in the role of the Romantic artist, or Zeb’s assertion that “[h]e’d been told since a child that he had the morals of a sowbug, and he hated to defeat expectations” (*MA* 62). The post-apocalyptic world of *MaddAddam* is one of impending repetition, as has been shown above, but also one of farcical misunderstandings, particularly between the Crakers and the humans.

Snowman’s eclectic mythmaking in *Oryx and Crake* “is appropriative and adaptive” (DiMarco, “Going” 141), and through this mishmash of religion, mythology, falsehoods, and on-the-spot explanations the Crakers construct their own cosmogony. In *MaddAddam*, the Crakers’ mythology seems to function as comic relief; their interpretations of human behaviour frequently become bathetic, leaving readers in little doubt that the developing hybrid culture is going to make for some tedious confusions. On hearing Jimmy swearing, for example, the Crakers add *Fuck* to their expanding pantheon:
“Who is this Fuck?” says Abraham Lincoln. “Why is he talking to this Fuck? That is not the name of anyone here.”

“You can’t see him,” says Toby a little desperately. “Only Jimmy, only Snowman-the-Jimmy can see him. He’s—”

“Fuck is a friend of Crake’s?” asks Abraham Lincoln.

“Yes,” says Toby. “And a friend of Snowman-the-Jimmy.”

“This Fuck is helping him?” says one of the women.

“Yes,” says Toby. “When something goes wrong, Snowman-the-Jimmy calls on him for help.” Which is true, in a way.

“Fuck is in the sky!” says Blackbeard triumphantly. “With Crake!”

“We would like to hear the story of Fuck,” says Abraham Lincoln politely. “And of how he has helped Snowman-the-Jimmy.” (MA 146–47)

The Crakers’ almost compulsive need to make sense of the world in mythological terms often leads to such farcical results, but could also be seen as a more general commentary on the overzealous interpretation of narrative. This is what happens, Atwood seems to suggest, when every little detail has to be imbued with meaning.

MaddAddam also abounds with descriptions of the difficulty of telling stories to a demanding audience, which may well be read as wry commentary on the roles ascribed to fiction in overcoming various crises. When Toby tells stories to the Crakers, she is constantly interrupted by their curious questions, as well as by their emotional responses to the tales they hear. Toby repeatedly has to ask them to stop interrupting her by either crying or singing (e.g. MA 55, 228, 291), and when Blackbeard takes over as storyteller, he has to do the same:

Please don’t sing.

Because when you sing I can’t hear the words that Crake is telling me to say, and also when we sing about him he can’t tell me any words of the story, because he has to listen to the singing. (MA 371)

The Crakers’ comical interruptions lead to some frustration for the storytellers, but do illustrate the communality of storytelling. The story is not the version of the tale the teller intends to relate, but is created in the interplay between the audience and the teller—participation is paramount.

Whereas oral storytelling is performed in a collective, “[w]riting and print isolate,” as Walter Ong observes (74). If environmentalism is seen as relational in Atwood’s oeuvre at large, the Crakers’ return to a measure of individualism as they become literate surely does not bode well for the future. Toby’s fear that writing may lead to orthodoxy in the form of a “Testament of Crake” (MA 204) is not without substance, but seems also based on a view of the Crakers’ as somehow unspoiled by civilisation that echoes that of Snowman in Oryx and Crake. This is, however, an oversimplification: Snowman’s ritual consumption of a fish before telling a story, first instituted on the pretext that “Crake has decreed it” (OC 101),
has become a ceremony Toby and Blackbeard are expected to follow. The first time Blackbeard has to consume fish he naturally becomes sick, but maintains

    if I did not do the hard thing with the bad taste, I would not be able to hear the story Crake is telling me, and then tell it to you. That is the way it was with Snowman-the-Jimmy, and that is the way it is with Toby. The hard thing of eating the fish, the smelly bone taste—that is what needs to be done. First the bad things, then the story. (MA 357–58)

The Crakers’ hybrid cultural and genetic makeup does not prevent them from becoming dogmatic, and orality carries no less potential for orthodoxy than the written word.

    One of the main developments in MaddAddam is the Craker boy Blackbeard’s learning how to read and write. “Blackbeard is,” as Jane Bone argues, “a strange mixture of innocent and wise; he embodies the child as saviour of the world, a role that seems to be indispensable to human imaginings” (634). Blackbeard’s name is perhaps significant, as he could be interpreted as ‘appropriating’ a culture that does not belong to him through becoming literate. There is, however, no indication that this is done maliciously; on the contrary, Blackbeard is the paragon of child-like innocence and delight as he learns how to read and write his own name:

    He’s carrying the sheet of paper, holding it in front of him like a hot shield. His face is radiant.
    “It did, Oh Toby,” he says. “It said my name! It told my name to Ren!”
    “There,” she says. “That is writing.”
    Blackbeard nods: now he’s grasping the possibilities. (MA 203)

In short, Blackbeard realises that “[a] word after a word / after a word is power,” as Atwood writes in “Spelling” (24–25), from the 1981 collection True Stories. In the poem, the speaker describes her daughter’s first encounter with letters and writing, and playing on the different meanings of the word spell, the poem explores the magic of writing: “learning how to spell, / spelling, / how to make spells” (3–5). In the last stanza the speaker answers the question “How do you learn to spell?” (37) with “your own name first, / your first naming, your first name, / your first word” (39–41). Blackbeard’s first forays into writing clearly echo Adam One’s injunction to “say the names”:

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18 By misspelling his own name as “Blackbord” (MA 376), there is also the suggestion that Blackbeard is a teacher (he does go on to teach some other Crakers to read), or, more troubling, a tabula rasa ready to be inscribed with content.
“What are you writing?” Toby says.
“I am writing the names, Oh Toby,” says Blackbeard. And, sure enough, that’s what he’s been doing. TOBY. ZEB. CRAK. REBECA. ORIX. SNOWMAN THE JIMY.
“He’s collecting them,” says Rebecca. “Names. Who’s next?” she says to Blackbeard.
“Next I will write Amanda,” says Blackbeard solemnly. “And Ren. So they can talk to me.” (MA 262)

Significantly, after Blackbeard learns how to write down stories, he no longer tells stories to the other Crakers, but instead chooses to read from “the Book that Toby made when she lived among us” (MA 385). He begins “The Story of Toby” by telling the other Crakers: “Now it is time to listen, while I read to you from the Story of Toby that I have written down at the end of this Book” (MA 388). Thus some of the fluidity of oral storytelling is lost and the Crakers now have an authorised version of events to turn to. In showing the other Crakers how writing works, Blackbeard himself becomes the repository of such an official version:

This is the Book, these are the Pages, here is the Writing.
And she showed me, Blackbeard, how to make such words, on a page, with a pen, when I was little. And she showed me how to turn the marks back into a voice, so that when I look at the page and read the words, it is Toby’s voice that I hear. And when I speak these words out loud, you too are hearing Toby’s voice. (MA 386)

The use of capitalisation here echoes Adam One’s sermons, and Blackbeard’s description of writing is likewise rather pedantic and slightly absurd in its self-assurance. The Crakers may not be the “future readers” Snowman had in mind when he lamented the demise of the written word, but they are certainly capable of learning. And the capacity to learn, like the expected hybrid babies, could be deemed “a thing of hope” (MA 390), not only for the Crakers, but also for the readers of the trilogy, who are implicitly implored to avoid the future it depicts.

“A thing of hope”

In passing on literacy instead of her genes, the childless Toby embodies “a mode of reproducing the world beyond reproduction,” she “gives birth not to a baby but to a book,” as Calina Ciobanu argues (161). Toby’s diary is an act of faith: “Maybe acting as if she believes in such a future will help to create it, which is the kind of thing the Gardeners used to say” (MA 136). Both in The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam Toby is at the centre of alternative kinship constellations that could well be said to illustrate Donna Haraway’s charge to “make kin not babies” (e.g. Staying 4–6). In The Year
of the Flood Toby remembers how she was rendered infertile by a botched egg donation (YF 32), but she becomes like a daughter to Pilar at the Gardeners, and later protects Ren as a mother would. In MaddAddam she is the main elder of the community, and Swift Fox plans on naming her unborn hybrid baby after her (MA 390). When she, as Pilar in the previous novel, decides to end her own life, Toby’s stance goes against the apocalyptic emphasis on survival at all costs.

To some extent the focus on storytelling and the discursive in MaddAddam would seem to undermine the novel’s environmental thrust—although environmental problems have frequently been associated with crises of the imagination, that does not mean that they are merely imaginary. Yet by emphasising storytelling intradiegetically, while insisting that art has little political potential extradiegetically, Atwood leaves her readers to make up their own minds about the matter. J. Brooks Bouson notes that the open ending of The Year of the Flood is “a gesture meant to compel, as many Atwoodian novelistic closures do, reader participation in the text” (“We’re” 12); likewise the open ending of MaddAddam, and Atwood’s concurrent assertion and denial of the power of narrative oblige readers to reconsider both the apocalyptic imagination, and the power of art more generally. It is this constant uncertainty and negotiation which can potentially prevent narratives from becoming dogmatic.

The MaddAddam Trilogy questions many grand narratives of environmentalism. In MaddAddam, representations of hybridity are used to expose the spurious separation of nature and culture and implicit reliance on human exceptionalism underlying much environmentalism, as well as beliefs in the inherent stability and goodness of nature. Overreliance on empathy is shown to be inadequate as an environmental ethic, as this in itself obscures difference and instead reaffirms the self. Post-pandemic new natures could perhaps best be described using Anna Tsing’s phrase “contamination as collaboration” (27). Hybridity does not guarantee the dismantling of hierarchies: Blackbeard clearly takes pleasure in wielding the power of the word and being lauded for his skills. However, Atwood’s challenging the notion that art possesses redemptive power is perhaps the most disturbing for readers and critics alike. In the brief conclusion that follows, I show how the imagination is routinely assumed to work for the good, particularly by ecocritics. Rather than seeing the imagination as a panacea for environmental ills, the MaddAddam Trilogy shows that it can, perhaps at best, help us to cope with them.
In *Science and Poetry* (1926), I.A. Richards concludes his Arnoldian account of the inadequacy of scientific knowledge by asserting that poetry “is capable of saving us; it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos” (82–83). This New Critical sentiment is not as musty as it may seem—ecocritic Jonathan Bate makes a very similar assertion in *The Song of the Earth* (2000), when he maintains that “poetry is the place where we save the earth” (283). While Richards’s claim mainly pertains to humanity, Bate’s faith in the power of the imagination swells to encompass the entire planet in a manner appearing simultaneously totalising and naïve. Disconcertingly enough, pronouncements of this kind have surfaced so frequently in ecocriticism that Hannes Bergthaller has dubbed them expressions of “ecocritical orthodoxy” (730).

In the main, ecocriticism’s project has been diagnostic: texts studied are generally chosen for thematic or generic reasons. Such texts usually deal with the environment in a way that goes beyond setting, and they tend to belong to certain genres or make use of particular modes, including Romantic poetry (the preserve of first-wave ecocriticism), pastoral, nature writing, and environmental utopias and dystopias. Ecocritical diagnostics are often intended to result in therapeutic activism, despite the fact that “pragmatic action is seldom driven by humanist prose, and only in the rarest of cases are humanities professors placed so as to have much impact on climate policy,” as Gary Tomlinson wryly notes (19). “Most of all,” Richard Kerridge asserts, “ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (5, my emphasis). During the last two decades, ecocriticism has rapidly become institutionalised and in general its foregrounding of the imagination is based on a standard assumption that “the roots of the ecological crisis are to be found in a failure of the imagination, and that literary studies—the human imagination being their home turf—therefore have an important role to play in understanding and overcoming this crisis” (Bergthaller 730). Ecocriticism’s focus on the imagination is thus twofold: it both involves analysing environmental representation and envisioning a future in an activist sense.

In one of very few direct responses to Bergthaller’s observation, Timothy Clark sets out to investigate the extent to which “much environmental criticism [is] vulnerable to delusions that the sphere of cultural representations has more centrality and power than in fact it has” (21). My aim here is related: in taking seriously Terry Eagleton’s pertinent reminder that “the imagination is by no means simply a creative power”
I briefly show how the MaddAddam Trilogy challenges normative conception of the imagination. This is not only done intradiegetically, but also through Atwood’s metaleptic satire and the trilogy’s ambiguous reliance on and critique of apocalypticism and commodification. As already described, Atwood’s strategies may well be labelled a form of what Linda Hutcheon has designated “complicitous critique.” This acknowledgement of ideological embroilment arguably has some political potential per se, in that it furthers an ecological view of art in which art is shown to always be embedded in a context. Satiric complication has a therapeutic dimension which may help us cope with the realities of the Anthropocene, even if it does not directly alter them.

The MaddAddam Trilogy portrays environmental destruction and capitalism as inextricably connected: the apocalyptic pandemic brings about the end of late capitalism, and conversely, capitalist consumption patterns lead up to the pandemic. Intradiegetically, the trilogy therefore at first glance seems to exemplify Fredric Jameson’s sentiment that “[i]t seems easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imaginations” (Seeds xii).1 Similarly, the imagination is routinely equated with the progressive and good in ecocriticism, and environmental crisis has repeatedly—and apocalyptically—been cast as the result of an imagination in crisis. Kerridge asserts for instance that “[t]he real, material ecological crisis, then, is also a cultural crisis, a crisis of representation. The inability of political cultures to address environmentalism is in part a failure of narrative” (4), while Greg Garrard notes that the “global environmental crisis is also a crisis of representation” (“Ian McEwan’s” 709). Amitav Ghosh’s polemical The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable (2016), in which he bemoans the inability of literature to come to terms with the scope of climate change, is tellingly to be subtitled The Crisis of Imagination in the Era of Climate Change in its forthcoming British edition (Hodder & Stoughton). And in the introduction to his seminal The Environmental Imagination (1995), Lawrence Buell argues for example that “environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination” (2). In fact, this assumption that the imagination acts for the good shows many parallels to the fallacy that nature inherently is holistic and equilibrious (and, by extension, benevolent).

1 An observation usually quoted as the apparently self-referential “[s]omeone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (Jameson, “Future” 76).
Although demonstrably erroneous, the ferocity with which we cling to these beliefs is completely understandable. As Eugene Thacker pithily notes, the realisation “not only that the world remains indifferent to us, but that the world is and has always been mostly an inhuman world” is “[n]ot a comforting thought” (20). According to Thacker, horror stems from this realisation of the world’s indifference, and naturally enough, humanists shirk such existential dread whenever possible. Instead, we tend to adhere to Romantic ideas of the power of the imagination to justify the place of the humanities in an ever more competitive academic environment. In doing so, however, there is a tendency to re-enact the double-bind of human exceptionalism: humanity is posed as the greatest danger to its own survival, and the humanities as presenting an overlooked solution. In an influential early appeal for the importance of the environmental humanities, Sverker Sörlin notes for instance that “[i]f humanity is the chief cause of the ominous change, it must surely be inevitable that research and policy will be focused on human societies and their basic functions” (788). He argues that the inclusion of the humanities on environmental matters will mean deeper reflexivity and an increased competition of ideas and perspectives. It will also bring a sense of realism back to our work for the environment and sustainability. When even humanists have come to the point at which they consider the environment (almost) as important as people, there may—malgré tout—be reason for hope. (Sörlin 789)

It is hard to take issue with this argument, in part because of the intangible contribution the humanities are to make.

Completely rejecting the power of the imagination is not my objective, however. The very structure of the MaddAddam Trilogy is testament to the power of the imagination: the setting and focalisation of the first two volumes effectively allow Atwood to tell the same story twice, but in completely different ways and to very different effects, and its near-future setting holds the utopian promise that readers do not have to face this future. Yet, throughout the trilogy, the imagination is posed as powerful, but not inherently positive; it is neither presented as the cure-all for environmental problems, nor as the sole reason for their existence in the first place. Instead, the MaddAddam trilogy shows that the imagination has a more nuanced role to play in coming to terms with the Anthropocene and humanity’s place in it. Both the deadly pandemic and the Crakers’ design spring from Crake’s imagination, for example, while art in Oryx and Crake

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2 Eagleton, perhaps facetiously, points out that the imagination “is capable of dreaming up noxious scenarios as well as positive ones. Serial-killing requires a fair amount of imagination” (61).
is seen to serve marketing and Amanda’s bioart projects appear to exert little political force. The apocalyptic imagination espoused by the Gardeners fails to help most of them to survive the pandemic, and instead survivors have to contend with the fact that nature is chaotic and unbalanced as kudzu vines threaten to overrun cleared areas.

Through satirically highlighting the mechanisms of marketing in the novels, and then metaleptically relying on commodification and fame in her extratextual environmental activism, Atwood clearly shows that aesthetics are complicit with capitalist production and distribution, and that this complicity is not automatically detrimental to either art or activism. In fact, vilification of all kinds of capitalism and the mechanisms of the market carries the added implication that capitalism is *unnatural*, and thus reinforces the nature–culture dichotomy which ecocritics are so eager to dismantle. Atwood’s environmentalism, relying as heavily as it does on satire and metalepsis, takes the form of complicitous critique and mobilises hypocrisy for environmental ends.

The ceaseless complication which attends the MaddAddam Trilogy’s environmentalist injunction, and its satirical refusal to adopt any clear environmentalist stance, could also perhaps be seen to exemplify Donna Haraway’s “situated knowledge” which “makes room for surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production” (“Situated” 594). While Hutcheon is careful to point out that awareness of complicity is not necessarily politically productive and warns of its “potential quietism” (*Politics* 22), Haraway has consistently taken a more utopian view of complexity. Entanglement is central to her alternative envisioning of the Anthropocene as the Chthulucene, an existence that “is neither sacred nor secular; this worlding is thoroughly terran, muddled, and mortal—and at stake now” (*Staying* 55). Most importantly, however, Atwood’s reliance on strategies of hypocritical complicity emphasises the futility of believing that “art (or criticism) can ever be outside ideology” in a manner comparable to that ascribed to postmodernist practice by Hutcheon (*Politics* 136).

There seems to be a very real risk of reifying metalepsis, satire, hypocritical situatedness, etc.—much like hybridity or the imagination—as by definition constituting successful environmental practices on Atwood’s part, irrespective of whether they lead to any tangible environmentalist outcomes. “Acknowledging the agency of the world . . . makes room for some unsettling possibilities, including a sense of the world’s independent sense of humor,” Haraway observes (“Situated” 593). And the MaddAddam Trilogy seems to echo this sentiment. Indeed, if some guarded hope is to be maintained about the power of the imagination, and about Atwood’s environmentalist project as a whole, it lies in the fact that the trilogy may
well be deemed a “comedy of survival,” in Joseph Meeker’s useful phrase, if a troubling one. It is in its humorous appraisal of the urgency of the environmental status quo that Atwood’s environmental project appears to provide readers with “equipment for living” (Burke 293) in the Anthropocene.

We are, as Frank Kermode stressed, always “in the middest” (8), and precariously so. Through sustained focus on storytelling and the power—and failure—of the imagination, as well as through its mischievous complicitous critique of market forces and of the political potential of art, the MaddAddam Trilogy recognises that there is no external position from which the imagination can perform benevolent miracles. As such, Atwood’s environmental project seems to be furthering a profoundly ecological understanding of the world.
Appendix A | Margaret Atwood’s Publications

Poetry
The Circle Game (1964)
The Animals in That Country (1968)
The Journals of Susanna Moodie (1970)
Procedures for Underground (1970)
Power Politics (1971)
You Are Happy (1974)
Two-Headed Poems (1978)
True Stories (1981)
Interlunar (1984)
Morning in the Burned House (1995)
The Door (2007)

Poetry: Small Press Editions
Double Persephone (1961)
Kaleidoscopes Baroque: A Poem (1965)
Talismans for Children (1965)
Speeches for Doctor Frankenstein (illus. Charles Pachter) (1966)
Marsh, Hawk (1977)
Notes Towards a Poem that Can Never Be Written (1981)
Snake Poems (1983)

Novels
The Edible Woman (1969)
Surfacing (1972)
Lady Oracle (1976)
Life Before Man (1979)
Bodily Harm (1981)
The Handmaid’s Tale (1985)
Cat’s Eye (1988)
The Robber Bride (1993)
Alias Grace (1996)
The Blind Assassin (2000)
Oryx and Crake (2003)

1 Excluding non-collected and/or manuscript pieces, volumes of collected poetry and interviews, as well as visual art (comics, paintings, and other illustrations), films and recordings.
The Penelopiad (2005)
The Year of the Flood (2009)
MaddAddam (2013)
The Heart Goes Last (2015)
Hag-Seed (2016)

**Short Fiction**
Dancing Girls (1977)
Murder in the Dark (1983)
Bluebeard’s Egg (1983)
Wilderness Tips (1991)
Good Bones (1992)
The Tent (2006)
Moral Disorder (2006)
Stone Mattress: Nine Tales (2014)

**Short Fiction: Small Press Editions**
Encounters with the Element Man (1982)
Unearthing Suite (1983)
Bottle (2004)
I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth (2012)

**Non-Fiction**
Days of the Rebels 1815–1840 (1977)
Second Words: Selected Critical Prose (1982)
Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing (2002)
Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing (2005)
In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination (2011)

**Children’s Books**
Up in the Tree (1978)
Anna’s Pet (with Joyce Barkhouse; illus. Ann Blades) (1980)
For the Birds (with Shelley Tanaka; illus. John Bianchi) (1990)
Wandering Wenda and Widow Wallop’s Wunderground Washery (illus. Dušan Petričić) (2011)

Theatre
The Penelopiad—The Play (2007)

Television Screenplays
The Servant Girl (1974)
Snowbird (1981)
Heaven on Earth (with Peter Pearson) (1986)

Libretti
The Trumpets of Summer (with composer John Beckwith) (1964)
Pauline (with composer Tobin Stokes) (2014)

Online Publications
The Happy Zombie Sunrise Home (with Naomi Alderman) (wattpad.com) (2012)
The Positron series (wattpad.com): I’m Starved For You (2012); Choke Collar (2012); Erase Me (2013); The Heart Goes Last (2013)

Graphic Novels
Angel Catbird series (illus. Johnnie Christmas) (first part publ. 2016)

Collections Edited
The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English (with Robert Weaver) (1986)
The CanLit Foodbook: From Pen to Palate—A Collection of Tasty Literary Fare (1987)
The Best American Short Stories (with Shannon Ravenel) (1989)
Barbed Lyres: Canadian Venomous Verse (1990)

² The Positron series was incorporated in The Heart Goes Last (2015).
Appendix B | The Year of the Flood “Reading List”

The Case for God by Karen Armstrong. Examines how the changing world has altered religion through the ages, and why it has not disappeared.

Square Foot Gardening by Mel Bartholomew. All the how-to information you need to successfully square-foot garden—for all those with postage-sized city backyards.


The Secret Life of Compost: A “How-To” & “Why” Guide to Composting—Lawn, Garden, Feedlot or Farm by Malcolm Beck. Gives us the understanding and direction to initiate the regeneration of the most precious life form known—soil.


The Last of the Curlews by Fred Bodsworth. Classic novel about the last of a species.

Trauma Farm: A Rebel History of Rural by Brian Brett. Witty barnyard tales with deep insights into the symbiosis among animals, plants, and human beings.


Silent Spring by Rachel Carson. Landmark work with the first shattering look at the ecological degradation caused by pesticides and weed killers. The grandmother of today’s environmental awareness.

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1 The reading list is reproduced as it appears on yearoftheflood.com, including the commentary provided on the titles.
2 One of Adam One’s sermons is entitled “Of the Gifts of Saint Rachel; and of the Freedom of the Spirit” (VF 371–72). The Gardeners also celebrate a feast devoted to “Saint Rachel and All Birds” (VF 369).
Acquainted With The Night: Excursions Through the World After Dark by Christopher Dewdney. The science, religion, and art of night. Charts the nocturnal phases of life—planetary, human, and animal.

The Art Instinct by Denis Dutton. Dutton argues that humankind’s universal art-making is not simply socially constructed—art and religion are both evolutionary adaptations.

The Unexpected Universe by Loren Eiseley. Granddaddy of whole-universe thinking.

Locavore by Sarah Elton. Elton, the food columnist for CBC Radio’s Here&Now, looks at the local food movement in Canada, pros and cons.


Stalking the Wild Asparagus by Euell Gibbons. The classic of wild foods.

The Bedside Book of Beasts: A Wildlife Miscellany by Graeme Gibson. Gathered from all eras and cultures, works of art and literature that capture the power, grace, and inventiveness of predators and their natural prey.

The Bedside Book of Birds by Graeme Gibson. Writings and images that celebrate the many ways people have engaged with birds over the centuries.

The Lost and Left Behind: Stories from the Age of Extinctions by Terry Glavin. We’re losing not only animal and plant species, but the vast legacy of languages, and with it ways of living and knowing. Endangered species, but hope in unlikely places.

Vulture: Nature’s Ghastly Gourmet by Wayne Grady. A fascinating and authoritative look at the important but gunky role vultures play in the ecosystems they inhabit.

The Green Bible: Understanding the Bible’s Powerful Message for the Earth. The first bible of its kind includes inspirational essays from key world leaders; essential for anyone interested in a biblical basis for humane and sustainable living.

Healing the Landscape—Celebrating Sudbury’s Reclamation Story. A photographic history of re-vegetation and restoration in the once

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3 The Gardeners celebrate a feast devoted to “Saint Euell of Wild Foods” (YF 123) during “Saint Euell’s Week” (e.g. YF 132, 332). One of Adam One’s sermons is entitled “Of the Gifts of Saint Euell” (YF 125–26), and Atwood’s endorsement of NooBroo with which I started this study also mentions Euell Gibbons.

4 Toby remembers “Saint Wayne Grady of Vultures” as one of the Gardener saints (YF 163).
devastated Sudbury area, and of the community members that worked to achieve it.

*Grass, Sky, Song* by Trevor Herriot. Herriot draws on twenty years of experience as an observer of nature to reveal the spirit of the grassland world and the uniqueness of its birds, discovering why birds are disappearing and what can be done to save them.

*Ravens in Winter* by Bernd Heinrich. A charming in-depth study of these very smart and sociable birds.

*Balcony and Roof Gardens: Creative Ideas for Small-Scale Gardening* by Jenny Hendy. This insightful work guides you through the process of establishing, maintaining, and enjoying small-plot up-in-the-air gardens.

*A Diet of Souls*. Film. Directed by John Houston. Explores the profound spirituality of the ancient covenant between the Inuit and the animals they hunt— and the difficulty of preserving this way of life today.

*Mean and Lowly Things: Snakes, Science, and Survival in the Congo* by Kate Jackson. An intriguing blend of science and human interest detailing the author’s Republic of Congo experiences collecting snakes, frogs and toads.


*The Flu Pandemic and You: A Canadian Guide* by Dr. Vincent Lam and Dr. Colin Lee. A frank and clear book about how to prepare for the next influenza pandemic, and how to understand the broader context in which the threat exists—an essential survival guide.

*The John Livingston Reader* by John A. Livingston. Several of the prophetic ecologist’s most important texts, which decry man’s impact on the natural environment and predict a worsening of the situation.

*Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv. Describes Nature Deficit Disorder, the effect it has on children deprived of nature, and how to counteract this effect.
Revenge of Gaia: Earth’s Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity by James Lovelock. Expounding on his theory that Earth functions as a single living super-organism, Lovelock argues that global warming presents a threat to humanity.

The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning by James Lovelock. Lovelock warns that the environmental problems we will face in the twenty-first century are even more terrifying than previously realized, and that only the Gaia theory can help us understand the crisis fully.

Greek Fire, Poison Arrows, and Scorpion Bombs: Biological & Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World by Adrienne Mayor. The origins of biological warfare, drawing extraordinary connections between ancient and modern worlds.

Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age by Bill McKibben. Shines a revealing spotlight on humanity’s headlong rush into technology and the ethical slippery slope on which we will find ourselves.

Plagues and Peoples by William H. McNeill. Considers the influence of infectious diseases on the course of history, paying special attention to the Black Death of the 13th and 14th centuries, which killed millions across Europe and Asia.

God, A Biography by Jack Miles. Combining literary criticism and religious inquiry, Miles examines God as a literary character and the Bible as one of the greatest but most complex books of all time.

Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning by George Monbiot. Explores our current reliance on fossil fuels, the burning of which, he suggests, is about to pass a point of no return. An urgent call for drastic action.

People of the Deer by Farley Mowat. Mowat recalls his time spent with the Ihalmiut people in Northern Canada, whose population over a forty-year span during the late nineteenth century nearly became extinct.


The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions by David Quammen. Applies the lessons of biogeography to modern ecosystem decay, offering insight into the origin and extinction of species, our relationship to nature, and the future of our world.

Rodale Organic Gardening Basics—Vol. 8: Compost. How to make compost and how to use compost to produce healthy soil and plants, without using chemicals.

A World for Butterflies: Their Lives, Habitats and Future by Phillip J. Schappert. Examines the most highly visible and endangered

5 “Saint James Lovelock” is one of the Gardener saints on Toby’s list (YF 163).
members of the insect world. A plea for the continued existence of these beautiful creatures.

The Return of the Black Death: The World’s Greatest Serial Killer by Susan Scott and Duncan Christopher. Contrary to popular belief, the disease may not have been bubonic plague, and may have been spread by human contact. Perhaps the plague (or a variant) is lying dormant, waiting to strike again in the very near future.

Silence of the Songbirds by Bridget Stutchbury. Follows the migratory paths of a number of endangered songbirds, identifying as she does so the most virulent threats to their continued existence, especially pesticide-sprayed sun-grown coffee.

Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants by Douglas W. Tallamy. A guide for gardeners and planters, urging them to revert to and support an area’s native plants in order to help sustain local wildlife, and in turn, our own human existence.

The World Without Us by Alan Weisman. Using New York as a template, Weisman speculates how long our presence will take to vanish should we become extinct.

The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth by E. O. Wilson. Wilson argues that both secular humanists and believers in God acknowledge the glory of nature and can work together to save it.

The Future of Life by E. O. Wilson. Combines lyrical descriptions with dire warnings and remarkable stories of plant and animal life on the edge of extinction. How many species are we really losing? Is environmentalism truly contrary to economic development? How can we save the planet?

The Evolution of God by Robert Wright. Wright provides a history of the shifting perspectives of monotheistic faiths, arguing that, despite undeniable differences, there is a common pattern.

Rats, Lice, and History by Hans Zinsser. A darkly humorous [sic] classic that examines disease transmission, the transmitters, and the scientists who sought to understand and halt the spread of pandemics.

On Guerrilla Gardening by Richard Reynolds.

The Confessions of Edward Day by Valerie Martin

Brodeck by Phillipe Claudel

Gifts of War by Mackenzie Ford

What On Earth Evolved? by Christopher Lloyd

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6 “Saint Bridget Stutchbury of Shade Coffee” is another name on Toby’s list (YF 163).

7 A painting of “Saint E. O. Wilson of Hymenoptera” adorns the meeting room used by the Gardener elders (YF 246).
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1 For ease of reference, all interviews with Atwood have been cited under the name of the interviewer in the next section.
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Margaret Atwood’s Environmentalism

Margaret Atwood routinely eludes her readers, and the MaddAddam Trilogy is no exception. These three novels, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), are ostensibly written in the tradition of environmental apocalypse, yet they constantly undermine its conventions through satire. This study considers the trilogy as an environmental project, performed in the interplay between Atwood’s literary stature, the ambiguous content of her work, and the irreverence with which she blurs distinctions between fact and fiction, art and commodity, and activism and aesthetics. Atwood’s use of the MaddAddam Trilogy in her real-world environmental activism creates uncertainty about how seriously both her art and her activism should be taken. Her opinions on environmental matters are legitimised, but at the same time an urgent environmental ‘message’ is presented as entertainment. Atwood’s message often appears circular: her art carries no message, but Margaret Atwood the writer does have an important message, which she gets to deliver precisely because of her art. Storytelling is a central theme in all three novels, and through both critiquing and relying on commercialism, the MaddAddam Trilogy demonstrates that there is no external position from which the imagination can perform environmentalist miracles. As such, Atwood’s environmental project furthers a profoundly ecological understanding of the world.