

## Ecological apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy

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### Abstract

Atwood comments that her *MaddAddam* trilogy is neither apocalyptic nor utopian. Nor is the Waterless Flood, the central catastrophic event around which the various narratives of the trilogy cohere, an ecological catastrophe, but, instead, is the consequence of an act of bioterrorism meant to forestall such a possibility. Nonetheless, it is argued, following Laurence Coupe's mythic schema, that Atwood's trilogy can be understood in an alternative sense of apocalypse, that of revelation, an imaginative exploration of possibilities rather than the end of all possibilities that a literalist interpretation of this key biblical myth entails. The study uses Coupe's mythic schema to analyse some of the biblical myths that Atwood employs in her trilogy and builds on Watkins's distinction between monologic, pessimistic and tragic male apocalyptic fiction and dialogic, optimistic and comic female apocalyptic fiction. It shows how the polyphonic structure of the whole trilogy transcends the apparent pessimistic content of the novels, particularly of the first installment *Oryx and Crake*, pointing imaginatively to permanent possibility and hope, even if the future may be post-human.

### Key words

Margaret Awood, *Oryx and Crake*, *The year of the flood*, *MaddAddam*, apocalypse, ecology, myth, polyphony, dialogism

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The tension between the meanings of "apocalypse" as End Time – understood as a global catastrophic event – and Revelation – understood as writing about a new age – is the focus of this study. Its title is misleading, since the catastrophe – the virtual destruction of humanity on Earth – in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, published between 2003 and 2013, is not the result of ecological collapse caused by human activity but rather the consequence of a bioengineered virus meant to forestall such a collapse by killing off all humans. Margaret Atwood does appear to give imaginative form to environmental apocalypse in her *MaddAddam* trilogy, an inherently

impossible perspective. As Karen Snyder points out, “[p]ost-apocalyptic fiction serves as a rehearsal or preview for its readers, an opportunity to witness in fantasy origins and endings that are fundamentally unwitnessable” (479). Yet at the same time, as several critics have noted (Jennings 2010; Mosca 2013), Atwood subjects the apocalyptic genre to critical scrutiny. Indeed, Atwood disputes the use of the terms “apocalyptic” and “dystopian” to describe her novels. In *In other worlds* (2006), Atwood writes about *Oryx and Crake* and *The year of the flood* that:

They have sometimes been described as “apocalyptic,” but in a true apocalypse everything on Earth is destroyed, whereas in these two books the only element that is annihilated is the human race, or most of it. What survives after the cataclysmic event is not a “dystopia,” because many more people would be required for that – enough to comprise a society. The surviving strugglers do, however, have mythic precedents: a number of myths tell of an annihilating flood survived by one man (Deucalion in Greek myth, Utnapishtim in the Gilgamesh epic) or a small group, like Noah and his family. (93)

This should caution critics who uncritically discuss the MaddAddam trilogy in terms of apocalypse or dystopia, or even as “ustopia,” a term coined by Atwood to indicate that utopia and dystopia are “two sides of the same coin” (Labudova 2013: 28).

Atwood questions Last Man narratives in *Oryx and Crake* when she has Jimmy, the narrative focaliser of this first novel in the trilogy, ask himself why he should write his experiences down if there will be no-one to read them (2003: 41). In *MaddAddam*, the third novel in the trilogy, Toby, reunited with the God’s Gardeners and MaddAddams (some of the few humans who survived the Waterless Flood), wonders whether there is any point to keeping a journal: “If there is anyone in the future, that is; and if they’ll be able to read; which, come to think of it, are two big *ifs*” (2013: 135). Atwood also puts her reservations about apocalyptic thinking into the mouths of Toby and Adam One, the leader of the eco-religious cult the God’s Gardeners, in *The year of the flood*, the second novel of the trilogy. Toby reflects skeptically about the God’s Gardeners’ beliefs and practices: “why be so picky about lifestyle details if you believed everyone would soon be wiped off the face of the planet?” (2010: 56). Referring to fears of the imminent Waterless Flood, Adam One asks rhetorically “if annihilation awaits us, why bother to strive for the Good?” (2010: 279).

The impossibility of the apocalyptic perspective is evident in Atwood's short story "Time capsule found on the dead planet" (*The Guardian*, 26 September 2009) written for the Climate Summit in Copenhagen 2009 and republished in a collection of her writing *In other worlds*. The story is written as a warning from the future, when all life on earth is extinct, to the people currently living on the planet. Equally evident in her story is the seriousness of her concern about the possibility of environmental collapse. Hengen (2006) and Maxwell (2010) have explored Atwood's environmental activism in relation to her poetry and fiction. In the final chapter of her work of non-fiction, *Payback: Debt and the shadow side of wealth* (2008), Atwood explicitly links both wealth and debt to unsustainable environmental exploitation. In *Payback* (201-02), Atwood points to technology as the machine over which humans no longer appear to have control but which initially gave them the ability to exploit the environment and reproduce beyond sustainable limits. Nonetheless, her cautious optimism can be seen in the fact that she has accepted the invitation to be the first of one hundred writers to be chosen to write books that will only be published in the twenty-second century as part of the Future Library project initiated by the Scottish artist Katie Paterson (Medley 2014).

The Future Library project seems more hopeful than the Dark Mountain Project, a group of deep ecologist artists and writers who believe it is too late to reverse global warming and the sixth extinction event that the biosphere is arguably undergoing currently, and that it is the job of artists and writers to try to imagine a post-catastrophist future through works of the imagination. In their Dark Mountain Manifesto (2009) they call for "uncivilized writing" as a response to the crisis of ecocide that civilization has created. In a sense, this is what Atwood does in her *MaddAddam* trilogy, although, as noted above, she also critiques catastrophist and apocalyptic rhetoric. Canavan (2012) discusses the "primitivists" who influenced Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, including Jared Diamond, Marshall Sahlins and Daniel Quinn (147), and mentions the Dark Mountain Manifesto in relation to catastrophic thinking, deep ecology and the anthropocene (150-51). For Canavan, the apocalypse in Atwood's fiction is the revelation that there is no future for consumer and global capitalism (154).

Critics have engaged with various biblical myths in their analyses of the first two novels in the *MaddAddam* trilogy: the creation, flood (Bahrawi), Moses (Appleton) and end of times (Bousson, Snyder, Canavan). It may seem strange that most of the myths in the ecologically

aligned trilogy are biblical, since the Bible is often blamed as one of the texts justifying human dominion and the current destruction of biodiversity on the planet. Although biblical myths appear to dominate the trilogy, and will therefore be the main focus of this study, the figure of Gaia can be understood to be a hidden myth underlying the entire work. Following Atwood's comment about her work being informed by myths, this study applies Laurence Coupe's (2009) complex theory of myth to her trilogy, including his alternative understandings of the term "apocalypse", not as final end but as permanent possibility (Coupe 2009: 77-80, 103). The literalist idea of apocalypse as catastrophic event – applied allegorically by believers to current events, looking for signs of a final end – will be complemented with what Coupe calls radical typology, which contrasts the closed and hierarchical allegorical approach with one of the endless – open and horizontal – imaginative exploration of possibilities. The closed monologism of biblical mythos turned into Logos (the authoritative Word of the scriptures, or doctrine) is opposed by the open-endedness of mythos (narratives or words).

Coupe identifies four main myths: creation, fertility, hero and deliverance (3-4). While each of these find various forms in the stories of the Bible, the entire Bible is structured by the creation and deliverance myths, the apocalypse offering both salvation from the fall and a renewed creation, the New Testament thereby rewriting the Old (181). Coupe also discusses the greater pattern of Northrop Frye's mythic system, the myth of deliverance, with heaven above, hell below and earth in between, with its "two kinds of symbolism: 'apocalyptic' and 'demonic'" (156). It seems clear that Atwood does, in fact, employ the two master myths of the Bible in her trilogy, creation and deliverance, both of which are implicit in the myth of apocalypse, which redeems the fall and re-creates the world. However, instead of a prophecy of a final, catastrophic end, the apocalypse is understood in its original sense of revelation (of a new age), a liberation or salvation from current difficult times. Apocalypse is then the permanent possibility of (imaginative) liberation. This "revisionist" kind of reading (itself a radical revision of the work of Erich Auerbach) involves original myths as types prefiguring and being fulfilled by anti-types, which also, however, modify them, as the New Testament, as a whole, is interpreted as fulfilling and modifying the Old Testament. Coupe writes, in relation to Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

If orthodox typology involves a thorough rewriting of scripture, radical typology involves a shift of emphasis from the sacred to the profane. While it may appear to be arrogant

appropriation, similar to that by which one set of scriptures becomes a foil to another, its effect is to liberate the imagination. Its business not dogmatic assertion, but narrative exploration. (105)

This radical typology applies both to Atwood's trilogy as a whole and to the ecologically rewritten biblical myths of the God's Gardeners in *The year of the flood*, particularly as enounced by Adam One, the leader of the sect, who, often comically, reinterprets biblical myths in ecological terms (the humour being lost on the God's Gardeners, however, who tend to take themselves quite seriously). In keeping with the insight that Atwood's trilogy can be characterized as polyphonic, Adam One appears to fit very well Bakhtin's description of a Socratic figure, that is, "the combination of the image of Socrates, the central hero of the genre, wearing the popular mask of a bewildered fool . . . with the image of a wise man of the most elevated sort" (1981: 24) and also "this combination produces the ambivalent image of wise ignorance" (24).

This study supplements Coupe's complex myth schema with Bakhtin's ideas on monologism, dialogism and polyphony. Watkins (2012) argues that male apocalyptic fantasies are tragic, linear and monologic, as opposed to those of feminist writers', which are comic, cyclical and polyphonic (2012: 133). She notes that utopian and apocalyptic works cannot be equated but argues that feminist writers' apocalyptic works have sequels and thus can be seen as utopian or open. She also notes the impossibility of the post-apocalyptic perspective. Watkins's work can be seen as an extension of that of Jennings who, citing Garrard, writes that:

The tragic plot accepts that evil is fundamentally rooted in guilt whereas the comic plot remains focused on 'the exposure of fallibility' so that evil is seen in terms of human error; thus redemption is contingent upon the recognition (and rectification) of mistakes rather than sacrifice and death; in other words, tragedy demands victimhood and comedy permits agency" (12-13).

She argues further that as "we see in *The year of the flood*, the God's Gardeners espouse the tragic view while the narrative framework and the tone of the text itself present a comic vision" (13). Although Watkins has applied Bakhtin's ideas to *Oryx and Crake* and *The year of the flood*,

no one has yet done so to the entire trilogy. This study corroborates Watkins's insights, extending them to the final book in the trilogy.

Bakhtin opposes the closed monologic, pessimistic and tragic form of the epic to the open, dialogic, optimistic and comic form of the novel, which he traces back to the Socratic dialogue. Whereas the epic is aristocratic and retrospective, the novel is democratic and prospective, as well as scientific and irreverent, unafraid to experiment with ideas and willing to laugh at anything. Bakhtin writes:

It is, finally, profoundly characteristic ... that we have laughter, Socratic irony, the entire system of Socratic degradations combined with a serious, lofty and for the first time truly free investigation of the world, of man and human thought. Socratic laughter (reduced to irony) and Socratic degradations ... bring the world closer and familiarize it in order to investigate it fearlessly and freely. (1981: 24-25)

While biblical myths can be seen as part of a closed and linear divine monologue, at least from a literalist or fundamentalist perspective, they can also be seen dialogically, especially in their intertextuality and their later refiguration and reinterpretation in various works of literature. Atwood's trilogy can be seen as a polyphonic novel, a tripartite comedy like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, rather than a catastrophist prophecy. A sense of humour, often taking the form of dark irony, pervades Atwood's trilogy despite the often horrifying details of the narrative. The comic and polyphonic structure of the trilogy as a whole absorbs the apparent tragic pessimism and monologism of the male voices that dominate *Oryx and Crake*, both that of the narrative focaliser, Jimmy, and his friend, the megalomaniac Crake, who engineers the virus that kills off most of humanity and who engineers the peaceful, vegetarian post-human Crakers to replace them. The polyphony finds further expression in the three narrators of *The year of the flood*: the females Ren and Toby, and the leader of the God's Gardeners eco-religious cult, Adam One, despite the pessimism of some of his beliefs. The polyphony is continued in *MaddAddam*, where Toby is the main focus of the narrative, although the MaddAddam eco-activist, Zeb, and the Craker boy, Blackbeard, are also important voices. This study traces how control of the Word shifts from male domination through female mediation to the non-human Crakers, and how the narrative is opened up to further imaginative possibilities in its retelling by different voices. This is paralleled by the task of story-telling (for the benefit of the Crakers) being passed on by

Jimmy to Toby. The words of Crake, as narrated by Jimmy and Toby, threaten to become the basis of a new religion (Word or Logos), except that the comical mode of the story-telling keeps it profane. The very fact that the Crakers enjoy listening to stories (mythos) subverts Crake's monological plans (to eliminate symbolic thinking in his creatures). Jimmy takes malicious pleasure in ironically deifying of the atheist scientist in his mythical narratives to the Crakers.

The apocalypse, then, is first and foremost not an event but a book, the final one of the Bible, meaning the revelation of a new age. According to Coupe (68-69), *The Book of Revelation* was written in order to give hope to the seven Christian churches amidst intense persecution by the Roman Empire. This is echoed in the *MaddAddam* trilogy where the God's Gardeners are eventually subjected to by the CorpSeCorp (Corporation Security Corps), the sinister security corporation that protects the economic interests of the various corporations and eventually takes over the security functions of governments, establishing a corporate police state. So oppressive is the CorpSeCorp that the God's Gardeners avoid writing anything down lest it be used against them. Thus oppressive power permits only the dominant corporate discourse to be expressed and tries to silence all other voices. This study applies the idea of apocalypse as the imaginative exploration of possibilities rather than as mere catastrophic event that ends all possibilities. This approach is applied both to the narrative of the trilogy as a whole and the story-telling that is thematised within the novels.

### *Oryx and Crake*

In *Oryx and Crake*, Glenn's (Crake's) voice threatens to dominate monologically, even though Jimmy is the narrative focaliser. In addition, Crake represents the monologic voice of Science (or, rather, Scientism), which has suppressed the voice of the humanities, represented by the ineffectual Jimmy. Crake himself is intolerant toward views that differ from his, and his conversations with Jimmy tend to be monologues rather than dialogues. He often belittles Jimmy's views, including the one time that Jimmy tries to stand up for the humanities:

When any civilization is dust and ashes ... art is all that's left over. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures. Meaning – human meaning, that is – defined by them. (2003: 167)

Crake's malicious answer is that "[t]he archeologists are just as interested in gnawed bones and old bricks and ossified shit these days" (203: 167). It should be kept in mind that just as Jimmy's despair is largely a result of abandonment by his mother when he was still a child, Crake's loss of faith in humanity is largely conditioned by the murder of his scientist father by the corporation whose dark secrets he wanted to expose. Isolated and alone in the post-apocalyptic world, Jimmy reflects on Crake's dismissal of art, a capacity that he tried to eliminate from the creatures that he designed to replace humanity:

*Watch out for art, Crake used to say. As soon as they [the Crakers] 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. (2003: 361)*

Crake expressed to Jimmy before the Waterless Flood his aims to eliminate symbolic thought and the concept of god in his creatures: "They would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money" (2003: 305). Thus, while Crake's goals seem very egalitarian, his means are authoritarian, as is the monological way in which he expresses his ideas.

However, Crake's monologue should be understood not simply in the domineering and inflexible way he expresses and adheres to his ideas, but in the execution of his homicidal plan. He discusses this side of his plan with no one, not even Jimmy, his closest confidant, choosing unilaterally to silence all other human voices for good. (In *MaddAddam* (2013: 139-140) his former employees reveal that he ran the Paradise Project in an authoritarian manner.) Although he is a genetic engineer he holds a pessimistic view of human nature, believing that humanity cannot be redeemed but must be destroyed in order to make way for a better designed post-human. Despite the facts that his voice dominates the novel in the *MaddAddam* trilogy and that his megalomaniac plan largely does come to pass, Crake's control is not total, since he entrusts his legacy to Jimmy, who subtly subverts Crake's grand design, once he has worked out how he had been unwittingly manipulated by him. It is through mythos (narratives) that Jimmy most deeply subverts Crake's plans, turning the atheist scientist into a deity in a series of narratives he tells to the post-human Crakers. Although the voices of Jimmy and of Oryx, the men's common



girlfriend, may appear to be weak, these two voices nonetheless act as critical counter-voices to Crake's monologue.

Jimmy is unable to form lasting relationships with his girlfriends, most probably because he himself was abandoned as a child by his mother. The concept of trauma has been applied by critics to the *MaddAddam* trilogy. Brooks Bouson, in relation to *The year of the flood*, quotes Berger: "post-apocalyptic representations are simultaneously symptoms of historical traumas and attempts to work through them" (2011: 10). Karen Snyder relates the pre- and post-apocalyptic periods of Atwood's fictional world to the pre- and post-traumatic temporal experiences of sufferers of trauma (2011: 472). She shows how the global trauma of the novels parallel and reinforce the traumas of Jimmy, the narrative focaliser of the first novel (472). As a result of his past trauma and present loneliness, while working in a low paid job for a marketing company and before Crake involves him in the Paradise Project, Jimmy experiences despair:

He was drinking alone now, at night, a bad sign. He shouldn't be doing that, it only depressed him, but he had to dull the pain. The pain of what? The pain of the raw torn places, the damaged membranes where he'd whanged up against the Great Indifference of the Universe. One big shark's mouth, the universe. Row after row of razor-sharp teeth. (2003: 260)

Coupe (161) discusses "hurt" and "hope" in relation to Ricoer's work on myth. Jimmy's despair and hurt are expressed in the image of the universal shark, an image that seems perfectly Schopenhauerian in its pessimism, where driven blindly by the will to life, individual life forms feed endlessly off of each other.

The other main source of his hurt is revealed in the unfolding of the narrative which alternates between Jimmy's present suffering and the past pain of his life, as he makes his way from the beach where he has taken the Crakers to safety, after the Waterless Flood, to the Paradise Dome in which the Crakers were created and kept safely while the waterless Flood ravaged the world. As he reaches the airlock of the Dome, the past and present narratives converge to reveal how Jimmy shot Crake for cutting Oryx's throat in the same airlock soon after the Waterless Flood had begun. When Jimmy returns to the beach, injured and limping, the

Crakers inform him that they had seen three humans, two men and a woman. So Jimmy goes to confront them, full of hope and fear, the novel ending on that note and open-endedly.

Despite the bleak and tragic nature of Jimmy's narrative, is somewhat relived by the polyphonic and open-ended nature of the novel – especially the voices of Oryx and the Crakers – and by Atwood's ironic tone. The Crakers themselves are not mere puppets of Crake, but unwittingly subvert his monologic plans by constructing an effigy of Jimmy in his absence. Even Jimmy, as ineffectual as he seems, presents an alternative voice to Crake's domineering one.

*The year of the flood*

The year of the flood has three main voices: that of Adam One the leader of the God's Gardeners, a vegetarian eco-religious cult, and two women who were members, for a time, of that cult: Ren (short for Brenda), a young woman initially from a privileged background, and Toby an older woman from the Pleebland rescued by Adam One from her psychopathic boss, Blanco. Critics (Hoogheem 2012: 65-66) have pointed out how Jimmy suffers partly as a result of his incoherent individualism, in contrast to the community of God's Gardeners in *The year of the flood*, whose myths and rituals help to sustain them and give meaning to their lives. Whereas hurt dominates the narrative in *Oryx and Crake* and hope seems absent, the narrative alternating between Jimmy's painful past and tortured present, hope manifests itself throughout *The year of the flood* in Ren and Toby's alternating narratives despite the presence of almost overwhelming hurt, and in the sermons of Adam One, the leader of the God's Gardeners, despite the deep pessimism that infuses his eco-theology.

While the God's Gardeners' pacifism (they bear witness to the destruction of God's creation) and fatalism (they believe in the inevitability of the Flood) may appear pessimistic, the polyphonic whole of the novel provides a comic framework to redeem or, at least, relieve this pessimism. Adam One's ecological revision of the biblical myth of the fall may seem pessimistic – although perhaps it can be redeemed as a fortunate fall – but its pessimism is offset, at a higher level, by its comic humour (which may well escape the God's Gardeners though):

According to Adam One, the fall of man was multi-dimensional. The ancestral primates fell out of the trees; then they fell from vegetarianism into meat-eating. Then they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology; from simple signals into complex

grammar, and thus into humanity; from firelessness into fire, and thence into weaponry; and from seasonal mating into an incessant sexual twitching. Then they fell from a joyous life in the moment into the anxious contemplation of a vanished past and the distant future.

The Fall was ongoing, but its trajectory led ever downward. Sucked into the well of knowledge, you could only plummet, learning more and more, but not getting any happier. (2010: 224)

Adam One's revising of the myth of the fall is an anti-type to the biblical myth of the fall, and although it may seem comical, it also contains profound truths. It at once reaffirms and radically reinterprets the biblical myth of the fall in terms of modern science. The God's gardeners are not anti-science but fuse science and religion in their eco-theology, even though the results are often ludicrous, for instance, their debate on why God gave humans canine teeth if He meant them to be vegetarian (2010: 286-87). Despite their comical elements, the revised biblical myths remain deeply pessimistic, however, which is effectively expressed in the term "Exfernal World" that the God's Gardeners apply to the world outside of their communities. Using Frye's terms, the Exfernal world represents the demonic city and the God's Gardeners rooftop gardens represent not simply the lost Garden of Eden, but an apocalyptic possible vision of what might be. The God's Gardeners interpret the virus that destroys most of humanity as the Waterless Flood, thus treating it as an anti-type to the original Flood myth, retaining the original's pessimistic view of human nature: "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done" (Genesis 8: 21). However, they also revise God's covenant with His Creation to include not just humans but all other animals too (2010: 109). Besides reinterpreting various biblical myths, Adam One and the God's Gardeners celebrate the lives of ecological scientists. A discussion of all of Adam One's revision of biblical myths is beyond the scope of this study. However, his approach can be summed up as follows: biblical myths are ecologised; ecological scientists are sanctified. Despite the pessimism of some of the God's Gardeners' beliefs, their inconsistency and comical aspects prevent them from becoming Word or dogma, and they open the biblical myths up to ecological revision.

Adam One also mentions sharks in a way that functions as an anti-type to Jimmy's image of the universal shark while, at the same time, demythologizing the demonic image of sharks. On April Fish Day, Adam One prays for the marine creatures: "... and bring help especially to the Sharks, that misunderstood and much-persecuted breed" (2010: 235). After the CorpseCorp has destroyed the Edencliff garden and forced the surviving God's Gardeners into hiding, Adam One reflects on Predator Day on the ferocity of God: "As Creator, God has put a little of Himself into each of His Creatures – how could it be otherwise? – and therefore the Tiger, the Lion, the Wolf, the Bear, the Boar, and the Shark ... are in their way reflections of the Divine (2010: 414). This myth helps the surviving God's Gardeners to cope with their persecution, much as St John the Divine wrote the Revelation to help the Christians cope with their Roman persecution.

Optimism and polyphony are expressed in *The year of the flood* not simply in its having multiple narrators but also in the fact that both female narrators decide to write down their experiences despite believing that they may be the only survivors of the Waterless Flood. In a sense their diaries can be considered to be apocalyptic in that they imply hope for the future, in that they are premised on the belief that someone may read them one day, despite the moments when the women think that they may be the sole survivors of the Waterless Flood. They also function as anti-types to Jimmy's narrative, since they reveal alternative imaginative possibilities (or perspectives) to his bleak narrative, including Ren's enduring love for Jimmy. In fact, as parallelquel to *Oryx and Crake*, the narratives of *The year of the flood* provide a revision of Jimmy's narrative as a whole. Whereas Jimmy's narrative is dominated by pessimism and despair, compassion and hope characterize theirs, although Toby's is tempered by healthy skepticism and pragmatism.

In *The year of the flood* (2010), Ren considers keeping a diary while confined in the disease isolation unit of the club Tails 'n Scales that employs her as a striptease artist (since she may have been infected by a client). As a former God's Gardener, Ren was taught some years previously, not to write anything down but to commit everything to memory, since written words could be used against one, and the spoken word was superior to the written (2010: 7). However, her isolation has saved her from the Waterless Flood, the virus that has destroyed most humans, and so she decides it will be safe to keep a written diary to help pass the time – she is locked in the chamber with a dwindling food supply. Holding apparently irrationally on to a form of

deliverance myth, Ren expects to be rescued by her childhood friend and former fellow Gardener, Amanda Payne. Improbably, this does, in fact, occur, and the two young women are later found, equally improbably, by three young men, childhood friends and fellow Gardeners: Crozier, Shackleton and Oates. These men escaped the Waterless Flood because they had been incarcerated in the Painball Arena as environmental activists (MaddAddams) to fight against a team of hardened painballers (including Blanco, a particularly unpleasant villain), all repeat offender murderers. In fact, the veteran painballers also make their way to Scales and Tails, and the five young people decide to flee and look for other surviving God's Gardeners and MaddAddams. However, on the way they are ambushed by the three painballers, and Ren and Amanda are captured by them. This thread of the story joins up with Toby's story, which is explored later after a brief excursion into events that occur before the Flood, necessitated by the cyclical and dialogical way in which the novels relate to each other.

Some years previously, both Ren and Amanda had been girlfriends of Jimmy, Ren at the HelthWyzer compound high school and Amanda while studying at the Martha Graham Academy, an impoverished school of arts, as opposed the well-funded science schools which Crake attends. It is while spending time with Amanda that he meets her friends who express Jared Diamond's ideas of agriculture being the big mistake made by humanity: "According to them it had been game over once agriculture had been invented, six or seven thousand years ago" (2003: 242). They also express views similar to those held by the Dark Mountain artists and poets: "Human society, they claimed, was a sort of monster, its main by-products being corpses and rubble" (2003: 243). Jimmy's sarcastically critical, but uninformed, comments are ignored by Amanda's friends. Jimmy and Amanda soon break up and Amanda goes on to become a landscape eco-artist arranging huge letters spelling out words in the desert – the letters being made of body parts that wild animals eat – and photographing them from helicopters. Her art enacts the impermanence even of written words while at the same time relating their disappearance to natural food cycles – ants eat the letters of her name and vultures eat the bones that form the giant letters in the desert. Thus, in Amanda's art, nature is accorded a certain primacy over culture, ecology over literacy, biology over the book. Besides showing the impermanence of written words before the forces of nature, her art also reveals the violence behind these words, the violence with which human civilization imposes itself on nature. The

fact that animas eat the humans' words could be interpreted, too, in apocalyptic terms, as looking towards the end of the human oppression of animals.

Earlier in *The year of the flood*, Toby, the parallel narrative focaliser to Ren, is rescued by the God's Gardeners from Blanco, the psychopathic owner of a SecretBrugers takeout, who uses his female employees as his sex slaves, killing them once they start to bore him. He wants his revenge on her for escaping and especially after her bees sting him when he and two henchmen fail in an attempt to take her by force from the Edencliff rooftop garden. Adam One sends her to the AnooYoo Spa both to protect her life and to safeguard the God's Gardeners community, since he fears the CorpseCorps may use the incident to destroy the God's Gardeners, as they are becoming increasingly influential. Toby adopts a new identity at the AnooYoo Spa – her new name "Tobiatha" may be an allusion to the woman Tabitha mentioned in the New Testament who was restored to life by Saint Peter – and is installed as its manager. As Tabitha's resurrection can be seen as an anti-type to Jesus' resurrection, so too can Toby's going underground and re-emerging after the Flood.

During her exile, some years later, while isolated in the AnooYoo Spa and while the Waterless Flood is ravaging the planet, Toby thinks she may be losing her sanity and reflects on language. She considers the loss of language (words) and her potential descent into madness as a result of her isolation – but considers "Or is it all one Word?" (2010: 418). Indeed, she keeps writing in order to preserve her sanity as much as to preserve what she has learned from the God's Gardeners, particularly the holy days and rituals. Although a skeptical member of the eco-religious cult, initially finding their theology "scrambled" (2010: 56), she finds herself unable to set their rituals, myths and practices aside. Indeed, their teachings and the skills she learned help her to survive on her own after the flood, although, like Ren, she also clings onto a deliverance myth, since she hopes to be saved by the eco-activist Zeb. Hoogheem (2012: 57) argues that the truth of the God's Gardeners' faith is not as important as is the fact that their religion confers an evolutionary advantage on them, as most of the survivors of the Flood are God's Gardeners, especially their splinter group, the MaddAddams. To use Coupe's terms, this gives priority to mythos (narratives) over logos (words or truth).

Thus Atwood shows in *The year of the flood* that sanity requires not mere words but meaningful narratives (myths) to make sense of individual lives and forge group identities. Coral

Ann Howells notes that “the Crakers love [Jimmy’s] stories, which makes me wonder if the primitive human brain is hard-wired not just for dreaming and singing as Crake had discovered, but for narrative as well” (2006: 232). Her comment applies to the *MaddAddam* trilogy too, both as a meaningful story in itself and in terms of the lives of its fictional characters. It is the biblical narratives and myths, with an ecological slant, that give meaning to the lives of the God’s Gardeners and to the narrative structure of the trilogy too, just as the myth of apocalypse helps to give meaning to people in times of extreme crisis and oppression, and hope for deliverance in the future.

Toby rescues Ren from the painballers, after wounding Blanco fatally with a bullet from her rifle. After restoring Ren to health, Toby sets out with her to rescue Amanda. On the way Toby manages to hasten Blanco’s death using a poisonous mushroom concoction. When she and Ren meet the surviving MaddAddams, the first sight she has of them is of one of the young men, Crozier, dressed like a biblical shepherd herding some mo-hairs (a genetically modified type of sheep) (2010: 462-63), an anti-type to the original biblical type. Toby and Ren join the MaddAddam community but soon go on to rescue Amanda, where they, lying in ambush, see the half-crazed Jimmy confronting the painballers. It is exactly at this point that the parallel narratives of *Oryx and Crake* and *The year of the flood* meet. Toby, Ren and Jimmy take the painballers prisoner and free Amanda. However, the painballers escape when the Crakers arrive and, not realizing the danger the painballers pose, free them. The Crakers carry the seriously ill Jimmy, whom they follow and adore as Crake’s “prophet,” back to the MaddAddam community. The narrative structure of the first two novels in the trilogy, although parallel, can also be considered cyclical, the narrative circling back to the beginning and working forward to the same moment in the present, at the same time allowing the second novel to revise the first in an ongoing dialogue. The entire second novel can, therefore, be seen as an anti-type to the first.

Thus the pessimism and fatalism of some of the God’s Gardeners’ beliefs and the extreme darkness with which Atwood describes the apparently irredeemable and demonic Exfernal World, are relieved somewhat by Atwood’s irony, by the comic aspects of the God’s Garderners’ theology, by the hope implicit in the diaries that Ren and Toby keep, and in the dialogic structure of the novel, including the way it revises the first novel in the trilogy.

*MaddAddam*

In the third novel, the narrative continues from where the previous two novels ended. However, its trajectory cannot be seen as merely linear, since in the novel the various narratives keep returning to past events, revising and expanding on them. As such, the third novel can be considered an anti-type to the first two, rewriting them and opening up more imaginative possibilities. At the same time, it reveals life in the (post-apocalyptic) new age. Michael Spiegel (2010) has characterized the pre-apocalyptic world of Atwood's imaginative world "neo-medieval," taking the term from international relations. In the neomedieval world scientific elites (aristocrats) inhabit fortified compounds (castles) while the rest of the population (peasants) live in the dangerous and polluted pleeblands, and central authority has been replaced by the power of competing corporations. In contrast, the new age that follows the catastrophic Waterless Flood can perhaps be characterized as palaeolithic, or Neolithic in the sense of a new Stone Age, where the surviving people have been forced to return to hunter-gathering (and scavenging) and limited cultivation, with limited technology, sharing the world with other animals (including genetic engineered species), no longer from a position of human dominance, but as equals. Thus *MaddAddam* can be seen as apocalyptic, not in the sense of the end of human history, but in the way it envisions a new age where oppression has ended.

One of the major voices to emerge in this third novel of the trilogy is that of Zeb, the brother of Adam One, and the leader of the MaddAddam eco-activists. He and Toby become lovers. In several conversations following their nocturnal love-making, Zeb recounts his and Adam One's history as the sons of a sadistic preacher, leader of the Church of PetrOleum, including how they eventually escape him after stealing his ill-gotten money. Fearing revenge, they go their separate ways into hiding, but remain in communication via stealthy Internet channels, using a series of false identities. Perhaps the climax of Zeb's narratives is the one concerning how he ate a bear while working for Bearlift, an NGO that provides food for starving bears in Alaska, depositing donated food waste from (orni)thopters (2013: 58). On one such mission, the person assigned to accompany him turns out to be an agent (possibly sent by his father) who tries to inject a drug into Zeb using a needle. Zeb evades the needle, but in the ensuing tussle they lose control of the 'thopter, which crashes, killing the agent. Zeb has to survive on his own while making his way out of the dangerous wilderness, managing to kill a bear and using its hide, meat and fat. Later he confides to Toby that, much later, during one of



his Vigils while he was amongst the God's Gardeners, he experienced a vision of the bear and that it showed him no ill will.

Toby's reflections in *The year of the flood* and Jimmy's in *Oryx and Crake* thoughts about insanity and the loss of words are echoed by Zeb's in *MaddAddam* when he feels he is losing his sanity and humanity while walking through the wilderness in Bearlift Country:

He could sense words rising from him, burning away into the sun. Soon he'd be wordless, and then would he still be able to think? No and yes, yes and no. He'd be up against it, up against everything that filled the space he was moving through, with no glass pane of language between him and not-him. (2013: 80)

In telling his story to Toby, Zeb gives narrative form to an otherwise chaotic experience, once again demonstrating the importance of mythos. The telling of these stories is often interrupted by questions and comments and playful banter between Toby and Zeb. This, and the often comical (profane) tone in which Zeb narrates his stories, helps to prevent the narratives from becoming monologues. They also revise Toby's own stories, revealing other stories behind the ones she believed were closed. For instance, they reveal the relationship between Zeb and Adam One that she never managed to fathom while she was a God's Gardener. They also reveal more about Pilar, one of the Eves whom Toby respected and befriended, and whose position as bee keeper and mushroom expert she inherited when Pilar died. The cyclical nature of the narratives accords with Watkins's ideas on female apocalyptic fantasies, revealing the openness and endless imaginative possibilities of events.

Precisely because she fears that the story of Crake may become doctrine if written down, Toby wonders if she has made a huge mistake teaching the Craker boy Blackbeard to write:

Now what have I done? What comes next? Rules, dogmas, laws? The Testament of Crake? How soon before ancient texts they feel they have to obey but have forgotten how to interpret? Have I ruined them? (2013: 204)

The Crakers have come to expect Jimmy and then Toby to tell them stories. They especially enjoy the story of how Crake and Oryx created the world. They never seem to tire of it, which means that the words of that narrative threaten to become the Word, a myth frozen into

doctrine. They also are eager to hear the story of Zeb, particularly the story of how he ate a bear. He has become a hero in their eyes. However, Toby censors the stories about Zeb that she relays to the Crakers, not simply to preserve their innocence, but also to prevent them from asking too many questions and thus interrupting the flow of the narrative. Nonetheless, their questions introduce a new voice into the polyphony of the narratives, extending their imaginative exploration and preventing them from becoming monologues.

After Jimmy hands to Toby the responsibility of telling stories to the Crakers, she tells the Crakers about the two eggs (2013: 289-90), one filled with animals and the other with words, explaining in mythical terms why animals have different degrees of rationality and language. She then explains to the Crakers why Crake made the Great Rearrangement (2013: 291) and cleared away the Chaos created by humans, namely, because humans would not learn and change their ways. Toby thus provides both *logos* (reason) and *mythos* (narrative) to explain the shattered world that the Crakers have been brought into. She explains how Crake saw only two possibilities: first, that human activity will end all life on Earth (including their own); second, that humans must be eliminated so that life on Earth can continue. However, Toby's taking control of the narrative (on various levels) and teaching the Crakers to write show how Crake's masculine and megalomaniac plans have been redirected by female agents. Extending Watkins's insights, 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*. Not only are their narrative focalisers women, but they undermine Crake's plans in various ways. Three of the surviving human women fall pregnant with human-Craker hybrids. Toby takes over the story-telling function from Jimmy and eventually passes it on to the Craker Blackbeard. She also teaches the Crakers to read and write.

While little Blackbeard learns to write, he initially does not appear to understand its significance fully, since he compares it to the way pigeons and Crakers communicate (2013: 376), which is more like speech, since it is temporal and immediate, rather than spatial and enduring like written words. Nonetheless, humans are excluded from the communication between Crakers and pigeons which also indicates a loss of power for humans and the beginning of a more just dispensation. Humans are no longer supreme and totally dominant – they no longer dominate the word – but have to negotiate and share power with other animals.

Blackbeard matures quickly and eventually takes over the narration of the story from Toby (2013: 357). He even goes through the ritual of pretending to eat a fish (though the very idea disgusts him). Thus, through him, the Crakers begin to appear more human than Crake anticipated. This is the case for several reasons, because, while Crake wanted to eliminate symbolic thought, singing and religion amongst the Crakers, they have developed all three. Blackbeard's behavior is particularly telling. He has learned to read and write (symbolic thought). He engages in rituals: he wears the story cap when telling the stories and pretends to eat a fish. He narrates stories and imaginative fiction (mythos). He starts to reason (logos): "Toby told this reason to me. It is a good reason" (2013: 358). Thus while literacy survives the catastrophe in the trilogy, this does not necessarily represent the reemergence of human dominance, but rather the transference of power to the Crakers, representing a more peaceful and optimistic post-human future. This is so even though the new age is founded on violence, since, besides Crake's global genocide, the painballers are captured and later, after a "trial," executed.

Besides the beginning myth of the Bible – the Creation in Genesis – and the culminating one – the catastrophe of the Apocalypse – there is the crucial one of the Crucifixion, which is part of the Deliverance myth. It is difficult to see a clear Christ figure in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, despite its extensive use of Biblical myths. However, a possible candidate could be Adam One (Bahrawi 2013: 257) who lives like a saint and who sacrifices his life in the final confrontation with the painballers, although Jimmy and the pigoon sow who carries him to the final battle in the Paradise Dome also sacrifice their lives. Toby, however, is identified with the liobamb (a lion and sheep genetic splice), as a result of a drug-induced vision she has during a Vigil she performs while still one of the God's Gardeners (2010: 204). Coupe observes that "the story of Revelation tells us is that the Messiah, figured simultaneously as 'Lamb' and as 'Lion of the tribe of Judah', defeats the dragon that is Satan, and establishes his thousand-year reign or millennium" (69). This suggests that, through her identification with the liobamb, Toby can be considered a Christ-figure. The demonic figure that she has to defeat is Blanco who represents the very worst of the Exfernal, pre-apocalyptic world. At the same time, in keeping with the palaeolithic ethos of the new age, Toby is a shamanic figure, her spirit animal being the liobamb (just as Zeb's is the bear), since she attempts to communicate (2013: 222-223), during a drug-induced altered state of consciousness, with the spirit of Pilar.

The last chapter of *MaddAddam* is entitled “Book” (384-5) and it is written and narrated by the grown-up Blackbeard. The chapter is set after Toby’s death and shows how her life (story) has endured through Blackbeard’s writing and narrating. The word, in the sense of narrative, has moved from men, through women, to the post-human Crakers. So while the Crakers literally have the last word, the words and story of Toby are preserved for posterity and since they include the feasts, myths and rituals of the Gardeners, and so, too, are the words (or voice or spirit) of Adam One. Indeed, they not only endure, but promise to continue to inspire the Crakers and human-Craker hybrid descendants and to give a sense of identity to their community and meaning to their lives. The words that the Gardeners avoided writing down in the pre-catastrophe period – the Fallen and corrupt period – can now be safely recorded and passed down.

### *Conclusion*

Thus the Crakers preserve (and extend) the word, and they are the embodiment of the Gardeners’ vegetarian, ecological and pacifist ideals. Their rise represents not a new domination but the melding of book and biology in a more peaceful harmony. In this respect, it is worth reiterating that apocalypse does not strictly mean catastrophe but, rather, revelation, that is, a book foretelling the end of times and revealing hope for a new age, albeit it a post-human age. While literature is one of the conditions of civilization that has made an environmental apocalypse possible, through imagining the apocalypse, literature may help to end the threat and, hopefully, forestall its unimaginable trauma. In a comical twist, Atwood has made her post-human Crakers, in their learning to write and tell stories, more human than Crake had imagined, departing from his monologic and megalomaniac text, thus qualifying the idea of a post-human, post-apocalyptic future. In the last chapter of his book on myth, Coupe (185) criticizes St John’s apocalyptic vision for the ecological catastrophe it imagines and for its anti-ecological and artificial picture of the New Jerusalem. Atwood’s new age, being a new Stone Age where animal and plant life multiply and overwhelm the cities, affirms a deeply ecological vision, a radical anti-type to the Bible’s anti-ecological vision of the New Age.

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