

Abstract:

This Master Dissertation aims to explore Margaret Atwood's inspirations and influences from Victorian Metaphysical Romance, via her unfinished PhD. In this study of her work, the focus is specifically on her dystopian fiction with an aim to understand how Canadian wild nature in addition to previous generations of authors informs the relationship between the natural and the unnatural in her fiction. Based on materials found in the Margaret Atwood Collection at Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto as well as a selection of other sources, this dissertation will attempt to trace the ecocritical and conceptual ideologies evident in Margaret Atwood's trilogy *Oryx and Crake* back to the works of fiction she studied as part of her PhD research. The Master Dissertation will discuss what influences and inspired Atwood to describe nature the way she does and how her view has evolved since she researched her PhD. To accomplish this, I have analysed a selection of her published work, articles and academic papers by other scholars as well as sought out unpublished material that supports my hypothesis.

There is something to be said for hunger:

at least it lets you know you're still alive.

Margaret Atwood

Oryx and Crake

Art is all that is left over. Images, words, music.

Imaginative structures. Meaning – human meaning

– is defined by them.

Margaret Atwood

Oryx and Crake

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Sincerely, Marit Brevik

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Introduction:

The relationship between humans and Nature in Margaret Atwood's eco-dystopia *Oryx and Crake* owes a legacy to Atwood's engagement with Victorian Metaphysical Romance authors, who often described the opposition between Nature's life force and the human need for progress. There appears to be an automatic assumption that Humans exist in a hierarchical higher position than the Nature we exist within. As Jacques Derrida observed, Prometheus' stealing of the fire signifies the moment humans made the first step towards developing technology, indicating that we recognise our separation from the animals by our technological advances (Derrida, p.389). However, he also argues that the separation from animals consists of self-awareness, often represented by our shameful need to cover our bodies that Nature in its variety of animal species does not possess, (Derrida, p.375-384). The human acquisition of desirable animal traits by the use of technology has from the earliest known mythologies been a recurring theme in literature. Famously, the Greek god Icarus received punishment for making his wings, the Norse god Loki repeatedly disguised himself as an animal to achieve his quests, and Dr Frankenstein created his monster, simultaneously opening the door to new levels of imaginary aspects of technology in literature. Invariably, in these literary fables, myths and fictions, Nature seems to win every battle in the face of every human attempt at domination. Similarly, end-of-the-world scenarios have been a popular element of worldwide religious mythology. Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* appears to build on these traditions, appropriating dystopian elements found in her academic study of Victorian Metaphysical Romance mixed with an eerie realism founded on plausible technological advances. She does nothing groundbreaking in describing a post-apocalyptic existence, but she does so without promising a new Jerusalem or any similar kind of utopia. According to Atwood's typed PhD notes, J.C. Garret observed that "until the end of eighteenth-century, literary utopianism is an exercise in contrast. The contrast between the world as it is and the world as it should be" (Atwood, *PhD typed notes*, n.p.). Shannon Hengen argues that "ignoring a sense of shared space in nature contributes to a dehumanization of our species" (Hengen, *Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism*, p.74). This idea of the human existence as part of a greater whole, shaped Margaret Atwood's approach to the environment she describes in her fiction.

To fully understand the implications of ecocriticism as a concept we need to understand that this is an interdisciplinary area of literary theory that encompasses the social

environment, the physical environment and the human situation within the environment described. Thomas K Dean tells us that “eco-criticism is a response to the need for humanistic understanding of our relationships with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction” (Dean, p.5). Ecocriticism examines the human perception of physical environments, and how it has changed through history. It also includes political, biological, and scientific ways that define who we are within the environment of the work we are studying. As such, the abundant physical spaces of Atwood’s fictional work can safely be said to be of an ecocritical nature. When she in the 1960s wrote her PhD draft on Victorian Metaphysical Romance, she said “One of the often-investigated features of this literature is its interest in Nature: not Nature as decorative landscape or source of emblems for moral homilies, but Nature as a mystical, even sentient source of wisdom and symbol of revelation and the regeneration of the imagination” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.1). Joseph Carroll explains that current events influenced the Nature perspective in literature when he says “British writers of the later nineteenth century lived in a long cultivated, densely populated, and heavily industrialized country, but world exploration, colonial expansion, and the still fresh scientific revelations about geological time and evolutionary transformation offered a wide field for imaginative exploration into wild places” (Carroll, p.305). What Atwood chose to focus on in her PhD, were romances that “each project a view of the moral Nature by personifying supernatural good or supernatural evil” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p2). She stated that Nature in these romances was “embodied in a series of superhuman female figures” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.6). Following the analysis of how these incarnations of nature influenced the protagonist's metaphysical quest, Atwood developed a style of fiction in which the idea of Nature as sentient appears to surround the inhabitants of her fictional environments. This ecocritical inheritance from the Victorian authors becomes especially evident in the *Oryx and Crake trilogy* where human greed and scientific ambition has altered the inhabitable environment to the point of mass extinction.

Where the Victorian writers were juxtaposing wild nature to the changes brought on by the industrial revolution, Atwood contrasts the wild with the scientific changes done to the environment. Much like the residents of William Morris’s London in *News from Nowhere*, the survival of her decimated population of humans and humanoid Crakers requires a large degree of coexistence with the increasingly wild nature to sustain the remaining human life. Margaret Atwood’s dystopian fiction tends to explore the edges of what we can consider as natural. Whether it is by selective breeding, human relations, or genetic modification, the

concept of nature in Atwood's work provides a backdrop that is equally intimidating and liberating.

Atwood herself observes in *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* that this tension between the natural and the artificial has driven fiction for as long as there has been a human imagination. She asserts that "the ability to conceive of imaginary places" is the same ability that allows children to enjoy a game of peek-a-boo. They can imagine the hidden object and therefore their attached location (Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p.23). When we expand upon this idea, the imaginary location also encompasses an inherent empathy with the inhabitants and lifeforms, including mythical gods and goddesses entrusted with the powers of regeneration and life. Endowing Nature with sentient capacities sometimes in the form of a nature entity or a character stand-in, therefore, is as logical as inventing human characters with complete inner lives. The human imagination allows Nature to be sentient along with other literary characters. One of the defining features of Margaret Atwood's fiction is how Nature appears represented in a series of spiritual entities. Even in the background of her literature, Nature exists as a living, breathing, sentient presence. Atwood describes her work as speculative fiction rather than Science Fiction in the sense that her fiction usually adheres to what is scientifically possible. Her academic interest in Victorian romance also allows for a mythical approach in which Nature in itself has inherent power, stronger than the human attempts to change it. When she positions this Nature entity in contrast with the human population of her novels, a discourse between them arises and provides the underlying tension between man and environment that Margaret Atwood so masterfully portrays.

Margaret Atwood is an award-winning novelist, poet and essayist known for her sharp wit and astute descriptions of current events set in a series of subversive alternate/fictional universes that are still recognisable in a contemporary context. She is famous for her satirical yet psychologically diverse and realistic human characters, often set in situations and stories where Nature is either abused, neglected or overrunning the character's life. The battle of control against this pantheistic Nature deity hovering in the background, saturates her fiction, even when it's buried deep in the ambience of the work and not directly observed. The conflict of the human desire for control against the divinity of Nature gives Atwood apt scope for experimentation with current society and a platform to reference her multitude of inspirational literary forbears.

The term "Nature" in this dissertation is used in the meaning of wilderness, forests and elements otherwise outside the power of human control. Human nature in this context

becomes the same groomed and cultivated nature as Frye outlines in *The Bush Garden*, where he argues that society has “tamed” humanity and removed our natural wildness. The pastoral idea of nature in literature is according to Frye “a kind of emotional photograph” showing uninhabited landscapes and harmless beauty, (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, p.34). In these terms, the wilderness of Nature in literature becomes a foreboding and unpredictable entity in contrast with the tamed and carefully cultivated garden. In *Oryx and Crake*, the main character Snowman/Jimmy is consciously longing for the cultivated, reminiscing about his ordered and controlled life before the apocalypse, while all his actions in the memories suggest that he was longing for a more unrestrained and natural life. This theme recurs in *The Year of the Flood*, where the same story, told from the perspective of Toby, who grew up outside of Jimmy’s protected gated community and therefore describes human nature at its worst.

During Margaret Atwood’s prolific career, there is a consistent link between her sombre dystopian visions and the idea of the natural and wild as an ideal state. While this ideal state is not safe, it is free and boundless, a force stronger than the human desire to conquer the natural world. What she seems to argue in her fiction is that nature will revert to its wild state regardless of how much humans try to control and alter it. The idea of Nature as a sentient force owes its legacy to Margaret Atwood’s interest in Victorian Metaphysical Romance. In her PhD, she explains how Wordsworthian nature ideals have influenced later romance writers in their description of Nature as a wilful three-part deity. The division of Nature into three parts — nurturing mother, virginal maiden and ruthless witch — was used to describe the various aspects of Nature and to provide a contrast to the more cynical Darwinian focus. Regarding Nature entities, Mother Nature provides safety, nourishments and raw materials for human use, the Nature Virgin, represents the beauty of the untouched or unexploited wilderness, and the Nature Witch encompasses the dangers of nature such as wild or dangerous animals, hurricanes, poisonous plants. While the symbolic aspects are literary representations of nature, they are also interchangeable. Presenting the aspects of Nature as sentient and autonomous characters is an idea that appears to have influenced Atwood’s later fiction. She also uses the tension between the natural and the cultivated as an illustration of how modern humans, bound by modern society crave the unrestrained chaos of nature.

David Staines argues in his essay that Atwood’s upbringing in the wilderness of northern Quebec with academically ambitious parents formed her writing style at a time when Canadian literature was unambitious (Staines, p.13). Under the guidance of Dr Northrop Frye,

Atwood developed a keen interest not only in Canadian literature but also in nature's influence on Canadian culture. The natural pantheistic view that Nature itself is evidence of a divine life force emerges clearly in Atwood's description of how the abandoned urban environment somehow lives in *Oryx and Crake*. Atwood builds a similar fictional scenario to the one Alan Wiseman described in his article *Journey through a Doomed Land*, where he observed that wildlife thrived in the area surrounding Chernobyl, eight years after the famous nuclear accident. In his article, he speculates what other consequences the removal of humans would have to nature and the environment of the planet in general (Wiseman, *Journey through a Doomed Land*, n.p.). Wiseman later developed his observations further by theorising in his book *The World without Us* what, step-by-step, would happen to the remains of our civilisations if humans, for any reason, suddenly disappeared. A similar, gradual decay is fictionalised in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, with emphasis on how the wildlife thrives without human interference. Every element belonging to nature in her trilogy grows, moves, makes a noise and are otherwise busy reclaiming every piece of human habitation. There are birds and insects in abundance, both as a threat and a comfort.

The conscious awareness of surrounding life presumably stems in part from Atwood's childhood in the Canadian wilderness of northern Quebec. Her father was an entomologist whose work demanded that most of the year was spent away from urban, human habitation. Atwood describes her background in *In Other Worlds* saying "My access to Cultural institutions and artefacts was limited: [...] there was no TV, no radio" (Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p.15). This absence of mass entertainment meant that Margaret and her older brother were left to entertain themselves. We can only assume that they spent a large amount of time outdoors, gathering impulses directly from their environment, but what Margaret Atwood herself repeatedly cites as her chief source of entertainment is the abundance of comics, novels and other reading materials that her parents brought along to their woodland home. She says "I learned to read early so I could read the comic strips because nobody else would take the time to read them to me" (Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p16), at the same time building an autonomy around learning that benefited her later fiction. Later, her brother, Harold, and Margaret would invent and create their own comics and stories, largely based on the available reading material. She refers to her father's sketches of insects, scientific notes, and preserved specimens as inspiration for the monsters she and her brother invented when drawing their cartoons. Creating and reinvention of the nature around them gave the siblings both ample opportunity to develop their minds. Harold later followed their father into science and became

a renowned Neurophysicist, while Margaret's enduring fascination with the written word inspired her to pursue literary scholarship before publishing her first novel. Atwood confesses to further developing what she sees as a natural human ability to imagine alternative worlds, based on the reading materials available to her in childhood (Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p. 39). She refers to Mesopotamian myths of rebirth as well as comic book superheroes and their disguises when trying to explain the human wish to imagine someone stronger and better. After all, the superhero's power is often part of his nature in the same way that the old gods and goddesses of myth represented elements of natural phenomena. The other worlds of Margaret Atwood's mind, in her assessment, have origins outside of her experiences. The other worlds of her novels always carry a sting of truth about contemporary society mixed with a solid inheritance from the prolific variety of books she read as a child.

In *Oryx and Crake*, she describes the world in which genetic modification has reached a level where even humans are reinvented. The two-sided character Snowman/Jimmy remains as the last man standing after a worldwide pandemic has erased human society as we know it. Atwood outlines another man's fight against nature in the third book of the series, *MaddAddam*, where the character Zeb kills bears and survives the extreme wilderness of northern Canada through his natural instincts more than skill or adaptation. His adventures is added to the new cultural canon related to the genetically engineered Crakers, a designed species of humans. This mythology becomes part of the post-apocalyptic society the survivors are trying to build (Atwood, *MaddAddam*, p.39). Juxtaposed with the surrounding gene-spliced animals, the wild bears come across as not only realistic but also resonant for the rebuilding of the new society. Atwood's environmental interests are well documented in her writing and encompass the wilderness of nature and how much nature can be changed by scientific alterations while remaining natural. Interestingly, in *MaddAddam*, the pre-apocalypse species of (natural) humans interbreed with the genetically engineered Crakers, effectively creating a third type of human. The novel is left open-ended concerning what breed of humans will be the best fit to survive the chaos and potentially rebuild society.

Atwood's fascination with Science Fiction and Victorian Metaphysical Romance, as outlined in her non-fiction book *In Other Worlds*, has greatly influenced the descriptions of scientific feats, especially in the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy, where human interference with nature has created new species of animals. Mo'hairs, sheep that grow human hair for transplantation, and pigoons, pigs with human DNA and tissue, as well as crossbred wolvogs (wolves and dogs), rakunks (racoons and skunks), luminescent rabbits, and glow-in-the-dark

roses. Shannon Hengen describes Atwood's dystopian society as confined, regulated, and bound. She tells us that in Atwood's works, "'human' does not imply 'superior' or 'alone', [...]what is fabricated or artificial is less satisfying than what has originally occurred" (Hengen, *Margaret Atwood and environmentalism*, p.74). Especially so in *The Handmaid's Tale* where Gilead represents the ultimate in oppressive states, but also in *Oryx and Crake* where society is clearly divided by education and socioeconomic factors, not unlike contemporary Western society. The natural wild, outside of these controlled and cultivated areas, appear alluring and free despite the terrors of injury, crime and wild animals.

Mixed with her academic background this detailed approach aids her in continuing to build on the genre legacy from Victorian fiction. In her PhD thesis, she analyses Victorian writers' ideas of the natural as an independent entity, and she reuses the same ideas in her fiction intermixed with the scientific advances she sees developing. Atwood herself credits her father with the initial exposure to "nineteenth-century yarns" (Atwood, *H. Rider Haggard's She*, p.106), on account of the collection of books in her childhood home. When she in the 1960ies was granted access to the Widener Library as a graduate student specialising in nineteenth-century literature, Atwood immersed herself in "Victorian Quasi-goddesses" (Atwood, *H. Rider Haggard's She*, p.109) which lay the foundation for the supernatural nature deities that later emerged in her fiction. She acknowledges the long line of female supernatural goddesses in a direct matrilineal line from Wordsworth's benevolent Mother Nature and Henry Rider Haggard's *She* via pulp fiction and cartoon heroines, illustrating the permanence of the mythological female, (Atwood, *H. Rider Haggard's She*, p.114). With this evolution in mind, we can assume that every version of Nature as a strong female entity leads up to Atwood's version of the quasi-goddess in the form of Oryx.

Chapter1: The Mother. The Role of the Surrounding Nature in *Oryx and Crake*.

Atwood describes her work as speculative fiction rather than Science Fiction in the sense that her fiction usually adheres to what is scientifically possible. Her academic interest in Victorian romance also allows for a mythical approach in which Nature itself has inherent power, stronger than the human attempts to change it. A question to ask is therefore whether there is an opposition between human culture and nature itself in Atwood's fiction. To fully understand Margaret Atwood's pastoral, there is a need to view her work from an ecocritical perspective about her interest in Metaphysical Romance, as described in her unfinished PhD, *Nature and Power in the English Metaphysical Romance of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century*. Atwood's nonfiction books *Strange Things*, and *In Other Worlds* document her awareness of her work and motivation. Her childhood, in the Canadian wilderness, awakened an appreciation of nature in its variation that, when mixed with her later academic interest in the Victorian Romance genre, coloured her brand of metaphysical ecocritical fiction. She researches her themes and anchors any scientific and technological advancements in the environments she describes to realistic future visions. Mixed with her academic background this detailed approach aids her in continuing to build on the genre legacy from Victorian fiction. In her hand notes, Atwood observes that Metaphysical Romance often builds on a subversive Persephone myth of life, death and rebirth. The other interesting thing is that she also notes that "in Romance, as well as Science Fiction, Hell is always urban" (Atwood, *PhD notes*. n.p.). She later noted that "Scientific Romances [of the kind H.G. Wells wrote], are urban fairy tales, appropriate for the city" (Atwood, *PhD, hand notes*, n.p.). The separation between the urban and the natural appears to become a source of conflict that the author has to solve. The methods Atwood appears to have inherited from her forebears is, therefore, a sense of a subversive pastoral. She reuses the same urban ideas in her later fiction intermixed with the scientific advances she sees developing by setting her *Oryx and Crake* firmly in a city perspective rather than the wild natural one. As Glover argues, there is a transitional sense of darkness colouring Atwood's description of the world, "the setting of the novel highlights the darker side of Utopia and the ambiguous nature of Dystopia" (Glover, p.53), which lends realism to the otherwise bleak post-apocalyptic world she describes.

David Staines argues that "Whereas *the Handmaids Tale* is a classic dystopia, *Oryx and Crake* is an adventure romance that depicts intellectual obsession leading to personal destruction" (Staines, p.24). The heritage of Victorian romantic tradition dictates that pride

leads to downfall, which is what happens to the already unstable human society in *Oryx and Crake* in general, but also more poignantly, both the male main characters suffer because of their overindulgence. Crake dies, indirectly because of his ambition, whereas Jimmy/Snowman struggles in his lone-survival existence after a lifetime of avoiding any form of close relation to any other human. As Dunlap observes, “At the heart of *Oryx and Crake* is a tension between capitalist science’s tendency to minimise human/animal differences and its simultaneous insistence upon maintaining human exceptionalism” (Dunlap, p.3). Crake’s technological superiority allows him and his colleagues to redesign nature and incorporate new features in existing species, thereby creating new designer species while simultaneously distancing themselves and their activities from Nature. Hengen argues that Atwood “concludes [her PhD] that not only is nature threatened by power unchecked, but also nature without the conscious exercise of power remains inhuman” (Hengen, *Metaphysical Romance* p.155). Crake and his fellow scientists, therefore, create a barrier between Nature and Humanity in a world where mass extinction of a wide range of species is such a common occurrence that even Extinctathon, the computer game Jimmy and Crake play, focuses on recently extinct species. Jane Glover writes that within the prospect of environmental destruction “as a type of eco-Science Fiction, Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* demonstrates how the tensions between idealistic and apocalyptic trends within the genre can question the assumptions of current ecological thinking by alerting us to the subterranean complexities of such philosophies” (Glover, p.51). Where the Victorian writers were juxtaposing wild nature to the changes brought on by the industrial revolution, Atwood contrasts the wild with the scientific changes applied directly to each species, consequently changing the surrounding environment. In both cases, by altering nature for profit, the environment is changed, usually at the cost of some basic humanity.

There is an undercurrent of brotherhood with other species evident, especially in *MaddAddam*, where the Crakers communicate with the other “Children of Oryx”. Dunlap reasons that “This levelling of hierarchical order between animals and humans is even more evident within the scientific world, where all lifeforms are objects for study and experimentation” (Dunlap, p.5). In addition to the fact that the Crakers are genetically designed for the purpose of repopulating Crake’s imagined utopia, ordinary humans living in the pleeblands, were before the pandemonium, regularly used as test subjects for medicines and viruses, often without their consent or knowledge. There is, therefore, a division of the human species as well into the privileged compound dwellers, and the “wild” pleebland

population. Dunlap tells us that “Crake embraces instead a biological determinism that categorises all animals, humans included, as similar lifeforms – life forms which can be manipulated and perfected” (Dunlap p.7). Also, the fact that some of the new species, notably the Pigoons, pigs with human brain tissue, were created by Jimmy’s father, makes them his spiritual brothers. This idea of brotherhood with other species resembles the nature-religious beliefs of several cultures around the world, but possibly most notably the Canadian indigenous tribes. The idea of placing man in a situation where he comes face to face with his place in nature is not a new literary motif. Derrida wrote that “Crossing borders to the ends of man I come to surrender to the animal – to the animal in itself, to the animal in me and the animal at unease with itself” (Derrida, p.372). This consciousness of the human species and its place in nature is in this sense key to understanding Jimmy’s position in the new world described in *Oryx and Crake*. His position as a western man “gone native”, hints back to Grey Owl, who Margaret Atwood takes great pleasure in analysing in *Strange Things*. Grey Owl’s origins as an Englishman disguised as a native were undiscovered until his death, in a striking resemblance to how Toby and the rest of the survivors see Snowman after the apocalypse. He has gone from being one of the privileged few to what the survivors describe as “crazy as a bag of snakes” on account of his hermit lifestyle among the Crakers (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, p.396). As Atwood points out in *Strange Things*, “the first Europeans in Canada literally could not have survived without the help of the Native peoples” (Atwood, *Strange Things*, p.48), and “going native” therefore became a mark of honour for some Canadian settlers. By acquiring the lifestyle of the people who knew the land, they gained an almost supernatural strength in contrast to the more conservative Europeans, who were unprepared for encounters with nature in the wild as it were. Snowman gets his divinity among the Crakers on account of his abilities to build their mythology, but as the original natives helped the settlers, the Crakers keep him alive both by feeding him and giving him a purpose. Margaret Atwood has on several occasions defended Canadian native tribes’ traditional way of life in public and argued for ways to allow these people their culture in combination with Western interests rather than allowing financial concerns take precedence. In 1984, Margaret Atwood was an active debater against the expansion of a logging road through an area populated by the Teme-Augama Anishnabai native tribe. The area was a popular area for camping, kayaking and tourism as well as a traditional dwelling area for these indigenous tribes. In a letter published in the *Toronto Daily Star*, Atwood argued the case of tourism. She wrote that “People won’t go to an area if you make it ugly, smelly and

noisy” (Atwood, *Toronto Daily Star*, May 2. 1987) in a forerunner of typical Craker phrasings she later used in *Oryx and Crake*.

Margaret Atwood brings up a point, in her PhD research, which later becomes key in her own later *Oryx and Crake* about how the human imagination fails to plan long term, but often expect instant results. J.C. Garret is quoted in Atwood’s typed notes, “The utopian imagination cannot remain content with far off bliss and perfection. It’s characterized by an insatiable desire to pull heaven down to earth by a violent effort. It not only wants to effect a radical change, but it also wants it now, if possible” (Atwood, *typed notes*, n.p. (Garret, p.45)). In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood’s titular Crake is instrumental for this violent shift. Crake, however, isn’t solely focused on creating a utopia. His motivation is a desire to “reset” earth, defining according to Glover “the kind of world hoped for by the majority of ecocritical philosophers is generally one characterising harmony between humans and the non-human world” (Glover, p.51) placing Crake firmly in the ecocritical segment. The decimation of the human population happens through his secretly designed virus, and his master plan is that the genetically designed Crakers will eventually repopulate the earth in a more harmonic, non-selfish and environmentally less taxing existence than the naturally evolved humans.

We should understand Margaret Atwood’s description of utopia and dystopia from an ecological and partially historical context. When Aristotle described paradise, he did so with a utopic idea of paradise being a place where one was exempt from work (DiMarco, p.173). By the time William Morris wrote his socialist Utopia, *News from Nowhere*, he described a classless society of individual freedom. Morris’ world is, according to Norman Talbot, a “world precisely analogous to our own, which is still the world of our liberty” (Talbot, p.341) in which the paradisiacal elements are all focused on the individual’s freedom to choose without harm to others. What Morris reached for in his romances, was not to complicate, but rather to fulfil an ornamental purpose. His romances were invented worlds that used “folktale elements such as fortunate heroes, beautiful maidens, and happy endings” (Talbot, p.341) following a “grail quest” of self-discovery (ibid, p. 342). Should Morris’ hero fail his quest, it would not be because of external influences but because of an inner hamartia of self-interest and possessive ego that ruins the hero from within (Talbot, p.342). This impetus is a motif we recognise from Victorian romances where the quest for self-discovery leads the hero to an improved life. Atwood repeatedly mentions this in her PhD draft on *Metaphysical Romance*, where she points out the repeated hero quest through magic lands, aided or hindered by nature maidens or dangerous nature, depending on what the goal of the quest is. Atwood points out

how Haggard, Macdonald and Morris shared a common negative emotion, “ranging from distrust to disgust which they felt for the society surrounding them [...] Coupled with this conviction, not altogether unrealistic, that Industrialisation was ruining the countryside” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.9). Crake’s motivation is to create a Utopia free from jealousy, greed, and psychological suffering lead him to “entirely alter the way human beings live and act” (Dunlap, p.8). The leap from pre-virus dystopia, where human expansion has overreached earth’s capacity to sustain life, into a post-apocalyptic chaos, and a promise of a more harmonic future in *Oryx and Crake*, we see how Atwood’s paradise is not related to the individual’s freedom from work or freedom to choose. It is instead a freedom from destruction and life in relative harmony with surrounding nature – including a formal peace treaty with the genetically altered pigeons. Glover tells us that in the proposed, fictional future of *Oryx and Crake*, “it is becoming obvious that human practices are not sustainable” (Glover, p.51). The heroic journey that Jimmy embarks on is not a metaphysical journey through a magical land, but rather a slow, painful wandering through the memories of a lost world combined with the physical trek through the ruins of the world he remembers. The fact that the world he knew, is not the world he walks through, further distances him from the memories, embedding them in a disjointed jigsaw puzzle that gradually becomes clearer as he physically gets closer to the Paradise dome where the apocalypse had its origin. Atwood’s prose utilises Victorian metaphysical devices to illustrate the complete destruction of the former world, and to showcase Nature’s reclamation of what humans once built and maintained. Glover claims that “aggressive capitalism, globalisation, and the self-seeking interests of multinational corporations are seen by social and Marxist ecologists as the major contributing factors to the abuse of the environment” (Glover, p.54). The described capitalism sets up the premises for the exact society Atwood portrays as the pre-apocalyptic dystopian society Crake wishes to change. There seems to be an element of ecopoetic in the underlying promise of how he envisions the world will improve in the hands of the Crakers.

According to Lee Rozelle, The Crakers embody a millennial “green” idea of vegetarian lifestyle, recycling, and environmentally friendly existences that a large amount of millennial population might aspire to, (Rozelle, p.67). This idea of a nature-friendly life serves to place the human back in the role as a slightly more natural animal. Derrida argues that animals in general “Not being naked, therefore, not having knowledge of their nudity, in short without consciousness of good and evil” (Derrida, p.373). He goes on to say that in these terms an animal would never “in truth be naked”, which is essentially what the Crakers

are. Despite being engineered, they serve as a reminder of the human place in the surrounding ecosphere. Dunlap explains this contradiction by saying that “The Crakers are designed, in short, to solve the inconsistent approaches to the hierarchy that are deeply embedded in the capitalist-scientific world that surrounds Crake” (Dunlap, p.10). With the ensuing genetic interbreeding between the original humans and the engineered Crakers that happens in *MaddAddam*, we can interpret the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy in some ways as a prequel to William Morris’ *News from Nowhere*. In Morris’ socialist utopia, London is a formerly prosperous city, now in ruins and overgrown or rebuilt by the notably peace loving, aesthetically pleasing inhabitants, who see no harm in doing things for pleasure rather than profit. In Atwood’s notes for her PhD, she has noted that C.S. Lewis in his observations on William Morris in *Rehabilitations* said: “Everything is always beginning over again: it is a dance, not a diagram” (Atwood, *PhD typed notes*, n.p.). It is a statement which seems to ring true for both *News from Nowhere* and Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* where both societies are new beginnings, founded on the ruins of a former, more destructive society. While Morris never gives any real details about what happened to the surplus population, the remaining futuristic neo-Londoners and their harmonic personalities ring out like plausible descendants of the Crakers. Again this is also foreshadowed by Atwood in her notes concerning Morris: “Advocating as they did work in fields or simple handicrafts, they were, in many cases, a romantic protest against the machine age” (Atwood, *PhD hand notes*, n.p.). Morris describes a fully functional non-violent society built on the ruins of a greedy and profit-based society, not too different from the society Atwood leaves us in at the end of *MaddAddam*. The neo-Londoners view childrearing as a communal responsibility, the traditional family structure is open to personal interpretation, personal choice and interest shape their occupation. The neo-Londoners education is largely motivated by interest and not commerce, much like the Crakers enjoy being told stories as part of their education, but their main source of knowledge appears to be somehow inherited and intuitive. The interesting aspect of Morris’ neo-Londoners is their apparent mix of old values, unlimited curiosity and how they have maintained some of the symbolic buildings from the earlier civilisation but utilise them for different purposes. There is not much of an imaginary leap between them and their origins as the hybrid descendants of humans and Crakers in *MaddAddam*. Hence, despite the reversed generation gap, the Crakers seem to be the ideological progenitors of the inhabitants of Morris’s socialist utopia. Where humans before the apocalypse exploited every natural resource for financial gain, it appears that once the artificially engineered Crakers reveal their

supernatural talents for communicating with animals, the world is heading towards a much eco-friendlier path that Atwood inherited from her Victorian forbears.

The human position in the surrounding Natural world is essential to *Oryx and Crake*. “In its representation of liminal life from a biocentric perspective, *Oryx and Crake* reminds us that place is always being born” (Rozelle, p 62). Humans in this context are not the anthropological focus of the story, their place in the larger scale, in the biological web around them, is more important than the human-made culture. Before the removal of humans, the world Atwood describes is overpopulated yet lacks a sense of community. It’s each man for himself unless you’re a member of God’s Gardeners, who on the surface at least, appear to be a close-knit society. This paradox of being alone in the crowd is part of Crake’s motivation behind the annihilation of the dominant species. Rozelle says that “Crake splices modified bodies to reveal, paradoxically, a yearning for *comunitas* in a world that will little resemble its past or present state” (Rozelle, p.65). Crake’s rejection of God and his conscious distance to the slow evolution of nature to favour science gives him the opportunity to “reset” nature and remove modern humans from circulation, giving Nature a chance to reclaim what humanity has destroyed and abused. Cheryl Glotfelty says that “Most ecocritical work shares a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems” (Glotfelty, p.7). Science, or specifically, the science of the possible, becomes through Crake’s hands a force of Nature. This idea of science as a menace and a saviour was another point Atwood made in her notes for her PhD. She noted that “Dystopias, cacotopias, anti-utopias describe ‘nightmare’ states where men are conditioned to obedience, freedom is eliminated, men are isolated from nature where science and technology are employed, not to enrich human life, but to maintain the state’s surveillance and control of its slave citizens” (Atwood, *PhD hand notes*, n.p.). The world of *Oryx and Crake* before the virus, is, therefore, Atwood’s true dystopia, whereas the postapocalyptic society holds a promise of a budding utopia, just how Crake had imagined.

Rozelle mentions how critics often dismiss the “complex viability of remaining flora and fauna that still thrive in the novel” in favour of “anthropocentric theoretical paradigms to wrangle with environmental issues in her [M.A’s] work” (Rozelle, p.64) which leaves the area of biocentric exploration of the described ecosystems uncharted. Atwood’s use of a subversive pastoral, juxtaposing the beauty with decay, often within the same sentence, sets her in a somewhat cynical ecocritical situation. The beauty and purity of untamed nature and

reclaimed wilderness, jars in contrast with the description of crumbling buildings, abandoned as well as burned out cars and derelict cityscapes. With every piece of chaotic rubble, Atwood describes in *Oryx and Crake* there is a representation of nature to balance it out. In the very first paragraph, she juxtaposes the rising tide of the ocean, eroding skyscrapers and other urban, submerged sprawl with the shrieking seabirds who have made their nests in the derelict buildings (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.3). When Snowman/Jimmy embarks on his journey back to where the apocalypse originated, he makes his way through the obstacle course of an empty city. Atwood almost poetically describes the side streets “choked with vines” and “through the clefts in the overhead greenery he can see vultures, circling idly in the sky” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.223). Jimmy/Snowman’s incessant awareness of his environment, whether it is flicking spiders out of his baseball hat, peeing on grasshoppers, observing birds, or casually noticing where potentially edible plants grow, is characteristic of Atwood’s ecocentric prose. This is the world where even the genetically engineered species have carved a niche for themselves in the new world of a reduced human population. Insects especially appear to have an important role in Atwood’s fiction. Bees are a crucial species, spiritually, medicinally and nutritionally in *Year of the Flood*, flies are the reliable companions and confidants of Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The mosquitoes, spiders and grasshoppers, generally seen as pests, plague Snowman/Jimmy before butterflies and other more attractive insects gradually become dominant in keeping with Snowman’s mental healing. Even in Snowman/Jimmy’s perspective, it is obvious that the nature surrounding him will manage just perfectly without human presence, including his own.

A key concept in *Oryx and Crake* is the notion of “real”. Jimmy and Crake repeatedly debate whether the gene-spliced new additions to the biological multitude in a world where the natural multitude is rapidly decimated. Where Jimmy views the new species with a dark suspicion at the beginning of *Oryx and Crake*, he accepts them as part of his new surroundings towards the end of *MaddAddam*, making peace with the world Crake has devised. Crake argues that the new species ability to breed, thrive, and live makes them real. In a similar debate between Jimmy and Oryx about human sexuality, Oryx explains that “All sex is real” when Jimmy argues that prostitution and pornography are illusions and therefore not real. Rozelle explains this debate by saying that “biological effects of cosmetic surgery, cloning, predation by GM animals, and urban starvation are also real – regardless of where they originated. If they can hurt you, the novel suggests, they are real” (Rozelle, p 67). Glover also points out that a similar debate was taking place around the time of publishing *Oryx and*

Crake. At the time, scientists were developing methods, making it possible to grow human transplant organs in pigs. The recent creation of a goat producing milk that included spider silk proteins was innovated in 2002 by a company called Nexia Biotechnologies, (Glover, p.52). In Margaret Atwood's fiction, this genetically altered goat is named a spoot/gider, and the silk is utilised in bulletproof vests, showing how "Science can have Utopian applications" (Glover, p.52) but becomes dystopian when used as a tool to exert control. In this case, the spoot/gider silk is used exclusively in CorpSeCorps armour, unavailable for anyone else, as a means to assert the superior force of the private police. When the fictional scientists working alongside Jimmy's father use their scientific abilities to create crossbreeds for no apparent practical reason, is the moment when Atwood separates the utopian science with the intention of bettering the world, from the dystopian science that will later lead to Crake's instrumentalist approach of seeing the laboratory creations as natural.

Where ecocritical literature meets Victorian Metaphysical Romance, we find Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. Atwood appears to break down the human superiority over Nature and allows Nature in its sentient form to take control. Based on her academic research, her interest in current technological advancements and the accompanying destruction of Nature for profit places her prose in a position where the dystopia appears possible. The human position as superior is a prevailing inheritance that Atwood appears to disagree with in her relegation of humans into a position of watchers, survivors, and struggling for survival on an equal footing with the wildlife around them, restoring humans to their natural place in nature.

Chapter 2: The Virgin. Oryx and Crake as Metaphysical Romance.

Margaret Atwood spent a large portion of her childhood in the “wild north” of Canada with her parents and elder brother. Her parents’ priority was to ensure their children’s education by primarily providing a rich variety of reading materials and not restricting their children’s choices. Their upbringing in the wild, far from urban environments left the two siblings free to invent their own entertainment, usually based on the selection of reading materials available in combination with the expanse of nature surrounding them. Her entomologist father was also the source of her early knowledge of nature in its scientific detail, while her mother was a nutritionist, able to provide Atwood with a solid knowledge of edible plants. Through their father’s work, the siblings had “ample access to scientific drawings of, for instance, pond life under the microscope, which may have contributed to what Martians and Venusians and Neptunians and Saturnians should look like” (Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p.19). She also tells us in *Strange Things* that white settlers and inhabitants often perceived the Canadian wilderness as a place to go to “renew life” (Atwood, *Strange Things*, p.11), alluding to her life as an author getting its first growth spurt in the northern wilderness. This acknowledgement of her influences also becomes evident in her 1982 lecture held in Finland, entitled *Improvisation of Eden*, where she identified authorial creativity regarding the continuous exchange with other authors and writers. She said: “Let us also suppose, with Northrop Frye, that literature is made structurally at least, from other literature, and with Professor Steiner that writers do not invent myths, they only recycle them” (Atwood, *Improvisation of Eden*, p.2). There is, therefore, a safe assumption to make that Margaret Atwood is not only aware of how her work is the progeny of the material she encountered in childhood, she also has a meta-awareness of how previous generations of authors, and their ideas, have shaped her intellectual inheritance.

In the Margaret Laurence Lecture on June 1st, 2003, Margaret Atwood identified her brother as one of her earliest influences. Atwood’s elder brother, inspired by post-WW2 Science Fiction and space adventure comic books, was in childhood a prolific writer of his space-fantasy fiction. Atwood makes her own assessment clear when she told the attending audience: “It’s not very far from my brother’s 1946 version of Neptune to my own 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake*, except that, in my admittedly longer work, Earth takes the place of Neptune, and the bacteria and unpleasant scavengers have been created, not by nature but by us” (Atwood, *Margaret Laurence Lecture*, p.14). In her non-fiction book, *In Other Worlds*,

Atwood explains the genealogy of her creations, telling the reader from the start that her fictional stories were from a very young age inventions of a different world, not entirely unlike her later, more earthbound stories. Her attraction to Science Fiction rather than the everyday adventures of *Dick and Jane* shaped her characteristic removal from sociological realism, later evidenced in works like *Oryx and Crake* (Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p.1-2). It appears that the closeness to nature she experienced in her formative years, made her emotionally and intellectually prepared to invent fictional environments, coloured by her childhood experiences and reading materials, with the necessary verisimilitude to engage the reader on an emotional level. With this perspective in mind – writers do after all invent new fiction based on input inherited from earlier writers, artists and scientists – Atwood set about an academically ambitious PhD project in 1965. According to a recent profile interview with Rebecca Mead in *The New Yorker* magazine “Atwood had embarked on an academic career, not for the love of teaching or scholarship but because making a living as a writer seemed an implausible aspiration” (Mead, n.p.). She never completed her dissertation, but the notes and collected drafts do provide a valuable insight into how her later fiction developed and where her seeds of imagination may have found fertile soil.

The PhD draft available, entitled *Nature and Power in the English Metaphysical Romance of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, focuses on Victorian literature and “its interest in nature: not nature as decorative or source of emblems for moral homilies, but Nature as a mystical, even sentient source of wisdom and symbol of revelation and the regeneration of the imagination” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.3). Atwood’s thesis explores how authors of the romance genre all appear to have in common the simple idea of nature as a sentient, thinking, planning, and calculating, but nonetheless divine, being. Shannon Hengen, also, argues that “Atwood’s interest in nature and power, good and evil, vis-à-vis the particular kind of novel she describes as ‘Metaphysical Romance’ persists in [*The Handmaid’s Tale*]” (Hengen, *Metaphysical Romance*, p.154). This interplay between nature and power that, according to Hengen, is evident in *The Handmaid’s Tale* reappears as an underlying theme in Atwood’s more recent *Oryx and Crake* trilogy. Human interaction with nature, whether it is uncontrollably growing, or in the shape of a supernatural Nature entity, generates the tension that Atwood so cleverly borrows from the Victorian Metaphysical Romance authors to create her dystopia.

It is logical to assume that all creativity feeds off other creative input whether us technological vision, scientific ambition, or invention of fiction, it stems from somewhere.

“The characters which an author creates may bear a striking resemblance to other characters in earlier books, but ‘meaning’ connected to it may have changed” she writes (Atwood. *M.L. Lecture*. p.5). Input begets output, and by reading or discussing other authors’ work, new ideas and new fictional realities emerge. In her PhD draft, Atwood discusses Metaphysical Romance writers from the Victorian William Morris through J.R.R. Tolkien, trying to find the similarities that allow for the pedigree of this literary evolution. In her handwritten notes, Margaret Atwood makes several observations on the connection between various Victorian and earlier authors’ imaginative work (Atwood, *PhD Hand notes*, n.p.). When discussing Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* she notes that “Lothlórien is the locus of the nostalgic imagination: to enter it is to become part of Wordsworthian art, an art of memory, of the past recovered as paradise” (Atwood *PhD draft*, ch.2. p.19). By this, she refers to how authors look back to other authors gone before them to try a recreation of the emotions already invoked by the words on the page. In this case, emotions connected to untouched, or at least unmanipulated Nature, in Tolkien’s version symbolised by elves and their ethereal existence, in Wordsworth as a three-part female deity that simultaneously entices, nurtures and threatens.

What Atwood defines as Metaphysical Romance, she admits it is a hypothetical category, encompassing works such as Herbert Reed’s *The Green Child*, Henry Rider Haggard’s *She* as well as J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and C. S. Lewis’ *Narnia* series, to mention some. When asking what specifically belongs in this category and “who can be identified as writing in this tradition” she also points out the difficulty of defining a “genre the existence of which has not been admitted” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.2). What separates this category from other categories is, according to Atwood, that they are “romances” rather than “novels” due to how they “portray an imaginary world situated either in a different dimension, on another planet, or in a part of the earth previously unknown” (ibid. p.2). Also, these romances “project a view of the moral nature of the universe by personifying supernatural good and supernatural evil” (ibid. p.2) and a conflict between these. Atwood then goes on to justify the creation of this new category by identifying “romance” as the genre and “metaphysical” to denote species. This genre of books, also often referred to as “fantasy”, can be applied to a variety of supernatural fiction. However, if we keep Atwood’s somewhat loose categorization, Victorian Metaphysical Romance can be interpreted as a precursor to what later developed into Science Fiction. Science Fiction, as a genre, borrows heavily from the late Victorian authors who described their contemporary

social changes through utopias and the associated dystopias, in the same way, that Science Fiction is often used allegorically to criticise societal, ideological or technological advancements that may or may not be beneficial.

Victorian-era literary Nature often embodied what Atwood identifies as “superhuman female figures” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.6). Especially Wordsworth “envisions Nature as an apocalyptic landscape, certain features of which seem both to conceal and proclaim eternal truths, could man decipher them” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.12). The Wordsworthian representation of Female Nature is divided into three parts – nurturing mother, virginal maiden, and ruthless witch –, presenting females in his poetry as minor aspects of nature rather than as a whole. Atwood argues that this “complex of images – mother, death, Nature and underground otherworld – is a remarkably persistent one, and appears throughout Victorian non-realistic literature” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.15). This combination of nature elements reappears in *Oryx and Crake*, with the underground otherworld being the underground of criminal greed that saturates the entire trilogy, including death on a grand, all-encompassing scale. Jimmy/Snowman becomes the imagined sole survivor of his species in a furious battle against the incarnation of Nature he finds surrounding him as well as within himself.

What Margaret Atwood seems to argue in her fiction is that nature will revert to its wild state regardless of how much humans try to control and alter it. She dedicates several paragraphs throughout *Oryx and Crake* to the description of vegetation winding up the sides of buildings or breaking through roads in what Snowman/Jimmy in his pessimistic state sees as a hindrance on his journey. Nature in Snowman’s view is a menace, something that has always been controlled and carefully tended in gardens and parks, but now gone wild and become a means for dangerous creatures to hide in or sneak up on him through. Jimmy’s perception of the menacing Nature, keeps in with how Atwood, in her PhD draft, explains how in nineteenth-century fiction, Nature was either described from a rose-tinted Wordsworthian perspective or a bleak Darwinian one. “The joy and delight of a Wordsworthian version of Nature and the grimmer pleasures of a Darwinian one are alike regarded as evil: pleasures of any form is a delusion” she argues (Atwood, *PhD draft ch.2*, p.31). She craftily recycles this duality of good and evil in the same vein in *Oryx and Crake* where Jimmy repeatedly opts for self-gratification and self-preservation in a world on the brink of destruction. She mentions the horror writers Algernon Blackwood and Arthur Machen as examples of authors of other metaphysical genres, who utilise “uncanny natural

forces” in their fiction. These authors also present Nature in the form of various female supernatural maidens, Machen’s invention even representing death through a reverse evolution (Atwood, *PhD draft. ch.2.* p.6). This symbolic use of Nature as a dominating force in horror fiction acknowledges “the natural evil but not the natural good” (Ibid, p.6). Civilisation, therefore, becomes a protection against nature in stark contrast to the benevolent romantic Nature Goddess, a recognisable theme in romance fiction in general but especially prominent in the metaphysical subgenres. It seems, that if you asked the Victorian authors of romantic fiction, “Is she thy God”, like how God confronted Adam in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the answer appears to be a resounding “Yes”. It seems the protagonists, in general, were less concerned about the fact that this mythical “she” could be a malevolent force rather than the untouched virgin they appeared to seek. Atwood briefly theorises that the cause of this romantic female deity may have a connection to extra-literary influences such as the growing suffragette movement and the fact that Queen Victoria was on the throne of England at the time, (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.15). Placing another female in a venerated position to represent not only humanity and civilisation, made her able to morally protect her citizens from external savagery and perceived wilderness found outside the safe confines of the British Isles. Atwood muses that there was a real fear in the nineteenth century of if women “ever came to wield political power” they would “drink men’s blood, sap their vitality, and reduce them to grovelling serfs” (Atwood, *H. Rider Haggard’s She*, p.111). The technological advances constructed in the reign of Queen Victoria served to control the wilderness and exploit the natural, giving the Queen’s reign a symbolic value in addition to her governing one.

Atwood counts George MacDonald’s *Phantastes* (1858) as the first Metaphysical Romance, complete with the Wordsworthian mother goddess, in where the protagonist faces a symbolic female death goddess that challenges his perception of the true Mother-goddess as opposed to society’s expectation of what nature should be. The imagery of death as a transitional state before the protagonist meets the Mother-goddess also seems to be a recurring theme with a lot of authors. Some even went as far as reverting to an embryonic life before re-growing into manhood with new wisdom acquired from the goddess (Atwood, *hand notes*, n.p.), making the goddess of life and the goddess of death identical. This is a dualistic pattern we see repeated in *Oryx and Crake* where Oryx herself serves as a mother figure to the Crakers while travelling the world to promote the BlyssPluss pill that contains Crake’s pandemic virus, designed to wipe out humanity.

The concept of the Wordsworthian nature Goddess is an idea that appears to have influenced Atwood's fiction with her recurring theme of a symbolic trinity of female figures. Most notably perhaps as the trio of Aunts, Handmaids, and Wives in *The Handmaid's Tale* with their colour coded dress to denote social status. But also Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake* encounters several of these incarnations in his story. Oryx perhaps at times filling all three roles, but the female Crakers and Jimmy's various love interests (one of whom is tellingly named Morgana, complete with behaviour hailing directly back to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*) certainly function as placeholders until Oryx can regain her throne as the almighty Mother Nature. Oryx is an omnipotent mother with roots back Henry Rider Haggard's *She* where the protagonist enters into direct communication with a Nature goddess who recognises his superior intellect and protects him from death, represented by the destructive Armahagger people in exchange for his information about the modern world. Oryx repeatedly protects Jimmy from the unknown world outside of the very symbolic cocoon he lives in, not telling him of Crake's plans and withholding crucial information that certainly would have helped prepare him for the post-apocalyptic existence had she given it.

Nineteenth-century male supernatural figures, on the other hand, appear to project power and control (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.6), recognisable in Fred/The Commander in *The Handmaid's Tale* and Crake in *Oryx and Crake*. In the years approaching the first world war, literary Nature Gods dominated in a surrounding society in turmoil, only to be replaced with Mother Nature once the authors had seen destruction at the hands of male rulers and again longed for the maternal stability as opposed to male ambition (Atwood, *PhD Ch.2*. p.7). Atwood herself appears to use this inherited tension between female and male, freedom and power as an illustration of how present-day humans, bound by modern society crave the unrestrained chaos of nature. Similarly, Atwood mentions H.G. Wells' short story *The Door in the Wall* where a young, motherless boy enters a "world of mothers as opposed to fathers" (Atwood, *PhD draft ch.2*, p.2-3). In this novel "the world of mothers is one of nature, emotion, imagination", whereas discipline and obedience dominate the father world outside the door. The tension between male, forced control and feminine, controlled chaos, is, according to Atwood, something that appears when the "Wordsworthian Nature-goddess fails to incorporate the Darwinian concept of the state of Nature as a savage struggle" (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.28). The mother versus the father, in this case, replaces the traditional Judaeo-Christian division of "good" versus "evil". Atwood argues that "in Metaphysical Romance, the logical result would be two female figures" (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.28) when the battle

between the good and evil happens. However, the control and antagonism in a male Nature God, perhaps most famous in western Biblical mythology, is an apt representation of the technological advancements and control over natural resources that we encounter in pre-apocalyptic *Oryx and Crake*. Capitalism, power and force are represented by the most male of all males, the ominous, CorpsSeCorps mercenary police and the Painballers, criminals who have served time in a survivalist prison where the aim is for the prisoner to kill his fellow inmates, psychologically reducing him to what Atwood describes as no longer human.

Victorian literature and “its interest in nature: not nature as decorative or source of emblems for moral homilies, but Nature as a mystical, even sentient source of wisdom and symbol of revelation and the regeneration of the imagination” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.1) establishes the view that would later be passed down to Atwood’s fiction. Her ideas of nature as tamed is inherited from her interpretation of Wordsworth’s nature maidens where nature is a pure and virginal (albeit slightly unpredictable and wild) until the mythical nature maiden either becomes “mad mothers” or marries and becomes tamed and domesticated. (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.12). Atwood’s maidens, invariably tend to go for the “mad mother” option, with Offred silently rebelling in writing and Oryx actively distributing Crake’s pandemic. Toby in *The Year of the Flood* may be the strongest example of the tamed version, focusing on her beehives and healing properties, partly to compensate for her lack of children, complete with her unrestrained male chaos-god/wendigo in the form of Zeb.

Metaphysical Romance writers also often cast their female nature in a role of menacing seductress. The nature maiden in her seductive mode becomes a witch and therefore a threat to the male protagonist. As Atwood points out, “These figures have a sexuality and menace denied the Nature-maiden” (Atwood, *PhD draft*. p.13), not entirely unlike the sirens of Homer’s *Odyssey*, who though their beauty steals the male life force. Strong females are in this way closely related to nature, they get their strength from nature, just like Oryx controls both Jimmy and Crake through seduction. Victorian nature values were “formed at a time when the confident assumption of Nature’s goodness was being undermined” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.13). By the time Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859, the concept of nature had changed beyond recognition. As Atwood points out, “his [Darwin’s] Nature became, not the sadistic and wasteful witch but a benevolent mother” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.14). Nature was suddenly controlled for profit; the industrial expansion had greatly changed the landscape in most of Europe and the accompanying social and political changes impacted how artists portrayed their surroundings. In fiction, authors such as Richard Jefferies

imagined the landscape itself changing, forcing human society to revert to a medieval, feudal structure in *After London*.

H.G. Wells imagined a devastating social schism in *The Time Machine* based on the social divide between the workers and the wealthy, combining the idea of evolution with the Christian virtues. The question arises here of if the Morlocks devolved back into ape-like, cave dwelling cannibals as a result of working class bad morals, or were the Eloi, the victims because of their inherent, upper-class laziness (Atwood. *PhD hand notes*, n.p.). As such, H.G. Wells projects an alternative future of humanity where he took Atwood's pre-apocalyptic schism between the compound dwellers and the pleeblanders to an extreme that she only hints at in *Oryx and Crake*. H.G. Wells showcased a similar play with the science of the possible in both *The Food of the Gods* and *The Island of Dr Moreau* where an experimental alteration of nature results in unforeseen chaos. These forerunners of Crake's ambitions were only limited by what H.G. Wells saw as possible in his contemporary world. With the developments of farming, soil improvements and a better understanding of hereditary traits that came to light in the pre-victorian and Victorian era, H.G. Wells utilised the science of the possible in the same way that Atwood did a century later in creating *Oryx and Crake*. Crake has in this sense a long line of ancestors, building up towards his attempts at improving nature and the ensuing catastrophic results similar to the chaos his forebears created. From gigantic humans and oversized wasps in *The Food of the Gods* to shocking pink butterflies equipped "with wings the size of pancakes" in *Oryx and Crake* (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.200), the fictional alterations create a clear divergence from what the respective protagonists account for as reality.

Atwood brings up this duality of the natural state of the world juxtaposed with the altered again when discussing the peaceful vegetarian society described in Herbert Reed's *The Green Child*. Here, the archetypical male hero, Olivero, is led by a nature maiden into an apparent underground utopia, peopled by green, peaceful, vegetarians (Atwood, *PhD draft*, ch.2. p.27-29). In this alternate world, the ultimate goal is to become one with the earth itself, which Olivero eventually achieves in death by being buried entwined with the green nature maiden. The antithesis to this principle does not seem to exist in other forms than the consumerist and industrialised human world on the surface. This societal divide between the supposedly rich and the poor, the beautiful, and the ugly, the clean and the dirty, re-emerges as a theme in *Oryx and Crake* where the privileged compound dwellers employ CorpsSeCorps private police to protect them from the symbolic cannibalism of crime that

happens in the pleeblands outside. Natural disasters, floods, and droughts have forced pleeblanders together in urban close quarters in a society built on trade and personal needs more than a societal unity, not unlike the Morlocks, whereas the compound dwellers have a seemingly vast expanse of greenery and an abundance of fresh foods available, not unlike the Eloi. Repeatedly the Compound dwellers are warned about life outside, and the pleeblanders are feared much like the Morlocks are feared by the Eloi. Until the apocalypse, Jimmy's only interaction with the divergent "other" is occasional forays to strip clubs with Crake and the distanced view through the window of a train. The only alternative to this divided society appears to be the God's Gardeners who somehow appear to exist outside the privileged and the plebs without actually depending on either. In *The Time Machine*, the Morlocks hypnotise the Eloi and lure them into the cave to be food for the Morlocks. Similarly, in *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood plays with this idea of being consumed, both physically, as the protein component in the somewhat disconcerting SecretBurger chain of fast food outlets, and mentally, regarding the pleeblands being an ideal place for anyone to disappear. There are new identities to be bought; operations can change a person's iris and fingerprints as well as hair and skin tone. In *MaddAddam*, Zeb even recalls having his ears altered to avoid computer recognition. This idea of physically altering not only nature around but also the individual becomes the means of metaphorically going underground, by immersing oneself into the society of the Other, the cave of Morlocks or the culture of the pleeblands, away from the apparently utopian society of the compounds. The underground world of Victorian literature repeatedly served as the site for the hero's quest, giving him a new, unknown reality. Atwood remarks in her notes that this allowed the author to point a critical finger to current affairs, the destruction of land for profit while disguising as an adventure story (Atwood, *PhD hand notes*, n.p.). By grounding her work in realism, describing the emerging slums and gated societies in current society, Atwood gives her dual world an economy based on scientific progress and alterations made to order.

When Atwood discusses the female figures of Victorian fiction, she mentions Morris as a divergent author from the norm of the divine, (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.46-47). Despite Morris' "rambling plots" and "arbitrary symbolism", his "superhuman" females are symbolic of his view of nature as a process of change (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.46-47). Morris' personal atheistic belief greatly coloured his fictions. Atwood observed that "He does project a metaphysic, but it is the metaphysic of innocence. The only being that transcends human life in Morris is Nature" (Atwood, *hand notes*, n.p.). Although this removes Nature from a divine

position, it is still in Morris' fiction a pantheistic force of life, a force of destruction and a force of rebirth and regeneration. William Morris' Nature does not preside over death, as there is in Morris' view no afterlife, and she is tangible (Atwood, *PhD draft*. p.49). Unlike Wordsworth and Mac Donald's more elusive embodiments of Nature, Morris' Nature females are active and intelligent, human characters and Nature itself is an unstoppable force that will reclaim what humans leave behind. His heroes have their female counterpart who is "neither too powerful nor too ambiguous for him" (Talbot, p.347). However, Nature is never straight forward, not even in Morris' fiction. Where the Mother Nature provides life, the Nature Witch, staying within genre norm, provides chaos. According to Atwood, this is why "The Darwinian mother is a mother death too" (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.15), especially regarding Victorian romance fiction where the Nature Virgin, untouched and innocent, often is the ideal, but equally often fails to materialise. Northrop Frye points out that Morris's late romances "fell stillborn from his press" (Frye, *The Meeting of Past and Future in William Morris*, p.3), and were largely undiscovered until a new generation developed Science Fiction when Morris gained popularity as a source of inspiration. Some of the bestselling works within the Science Fiction genre were trilogies. Frye points to how the sensational success of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* presumably inspired the popularity of the trilogy format. Similarly, Margaret Atwood built her Metaphysical Romance series, *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam* in the form of a trilogy, and with the overarching theme of man vs. nature saturating the three novels in a subtle nod back to the Metaphysical Romance ancestry. Northrop Frye makes the observation that "the genre (Science Fiction) itself seems clear to have begun with Morris, apart from the fact that Morris was at least one significant influence on Tolkien." (Frye, *Past and Present in William Morris*, p.3). Tolkien, in his turn, was an inspiration for Margaret Atwood, mentioned several times in her PhD handwritten research notes, along with C.S. Lewis. Lewis on his hand was unimpressed by Morris, claiming he had a "passion for immorality" (Atwood, *PhD hand notes*, n.p.), presumably referring to Morris' somewhat liberal views on marriage and childrearing expressed in *News from Nowhere*. Atwood observes that most scholarly study of J.R.R Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy had by the 1960s focused on the ring itself and the hero's struggle, but as she points out, Tolkien – in good Metaphysical Romance style, – also prefers his goddesses to gods. In middle earth, good is connected to Nature; evil is represented by "cold intellect" (Atwood, *PhD draft*, Ch.2. p.15). Not immediately visible, Tolkien's nature is represented in passive elementals such as the female water goddess Goldberry and her spouse, the enigmatic Tom Bombadil

who are both above the ring's power but unable to destroy it, as well as the often invoked but never seen elven goddess Elbereth. Tolkien was according to Atwood in these terms, the last author of Victorian Metaphysical Romance before more action-based Science Fiction made imaginative romance old fashioned, (Atwood. *PhD hand notes*, n.p.). The blossom of Science Fiction was of course also motivated by the advances in technology and inspired by the innovations in space travel, so tellingly resonant of the metaphysical Father God with his control over nature.

In addition to the idea of Victorian romance fiction, Margaret Atwood is in her research also aware of her position as a Canadian studying essentially British literature from a former colonial perspective. This desire for Canadian identity to release itself from both European colonial ideas and the powerful brother to the south, she inherited from Northrop Frye. It appears that Northrop Frye saw the Canadian identity as a midpoint, drawn between the consumerist, bound USA and the archaic, traditional Europe. This duality of identity has according to Linda Hutcheon, limited the growth of Canadian self-awareness and identity in literature (Hutcheon, xvi, xvii). While this may be so, Margaret Atwood, in her PhD thesis shows her connection to British Victorian heritage, this only functions as a base for further development and creativity within the Canadian culture. Atwood may play with the conventions of American culture and British heritage in her fiction, but her idea of Canadian identity is distinctly Canadian. As Frye points out, "The Wordsworth who saw nature as an exquisitely fitted to the human mind would be lost in Canada" (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, p.166). In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the neo-puritan society of Gilead is set in the fictional former USA (specifically, Cambridge, Massachusetts,) but Offred and her husband Luke try to escape with their daughter North, to Canada when they seek freedom. Despite Offred hearing gunshots and knowing that Luke was shot, she never gives up the hope that he is alive somewhere and will somehow reunite their family. There is an expectation that he will descend from Canada "above", like a divine being, to rescue her from her demeaning and forced social position somewhere between a necessary vessel for childbirth and a prostitute. Symbolically, Canada, in this setting equates to the natural where personal freedom is allowed, and USA/Gilead represents confinement and limitation of a politically and religiously male dominated state. Canada, once again, through Atwood's prose, becomes the goal of the underground railroad, in the novel called the underground femaleroad, the symbol of freedom for the oppressed and restricted. As David Staines also points out, "The brilliance of this international bestseller rests in the creation of a future that is a too logical extension of

many dimensions of the present” (Staines, p.21). This statement can also be said to encompass *Oryx and Crake* and the scientific fiddling with genetics that Atwood describes there. Whatever Atwood describes, has a predecessor in either Victorian fiction or a contemporary equivalent in reality.

Influenced by Northrop Frye’s ideas of Canadian mentality as coloured by the idea of the frontier as a phenomenon (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, p.223), Atwood wrote *Survival, A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. In this work, she argues that Canadian literature centres on the theme of a victim’s survival in the meeting with a victorious opponent in the form of nature. This idea of survival against odds appears in the Metaphysical Romance as a moral choice rather than skill, separating the English Victorian identity from Atwood’s Canadian identity. This “Violent Duality” (Staines, p.17), between fearing the wilderness and craving it while inhabiting an urban and innovative nation, sets up the Canadian mentality, somewhere between European and American. Northrop Frye asserts that “The colonial position of Canada is, therefore, a frostbite at the root of Canadian Imagination” (Frye, *Bush Garden* p.136), implying that the magnitude of the European heritage has stumped Canadian imaginative life by restricting the expectations of what Canadian authors should be able to produce. Canada is in this sense placed in a virginal position. The untouched wilderness, ruled by nature is according to Frye so vast and overwhelmingly untameable that it appears invincible. Creativity, caught between the colonial, European identity and the overwhelming expanse of wilderness, struggled to gain a chance at life. He says “Canada developed with the bewilderment of a neglected child, preoccupied with trying to find its own identity” (Frye, *The Bush Garden*. p.223). He states that because of the lack of direct guidance in the Canadian formative years, “adolescent dreams of glory haunt the Canadian consciousness” (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, p.223), which in turn acts as a restraint on the potential of what authors especially think they can achieve. Frye names this colonial view of Canadian identity, “prudery” (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, p.136) and connects it to the Canadian desire to seek conventional and commonplace expressions where personal ideas and overreaching innovation should flourish, often stumped by a paradoxical imperial loyalty to either French or English heritage. Setting Canada in a wider perspective of a modern state, it is not young or underdeveloped in an industrial capitalist context but simply suffers from a minority complex that Frye seems to scoff at (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, p.137). This unwillingness to acknowledge Canada’s position as a modern culture, combined with the fallacy that Canadian writers should write about nature, on account of Canada’s vast expanse of wilderness, has

according to Frye severely limited Canadian creativity. The frontier was not, as in the United States, something to be conquered and you could abandon if it got too much, “In Canada, the frontier was all around one, a part and condition of one’s whole imaginative being” (Frye, *The Bush Garden*, p.222). It appears that Northrop Frye in this sees the Canadian identity as a midpoint, drawn between the capitalist USA and the archaic, traditional Europe. This duality of identity has in this context limited the growth of Canadian self-awareness and identity in literature. To some degree, Frye has a point, but although Margaret Atwood, in her PhD thesis shows her connection to British Victorian heritage, this only functions as a base for her further development and creativity within the Canadian culture. Atwood may play with the conventions of American culture and European heritage in her fiction, but her idea of Canadian identity is distinctly Canadian. Her native relationship with wilderness in all its variations is defined through her literary use of Nature as a conscious, life-strong and evolving being, existing alongside the human characters, much like the Canadian wilderness exists in parallel with the modern Canadian society. Margaret Atwood, therefore, appears to represent the first generation of Canadian writers who manage to combine the urban aspect of modern life with the idea of Nature, not just as a backdrop or enemy but as a defining part of the landscape.

For all Margaret Atwood’s contemporary values and her razor sharp ability to describe current events with a chilling edge, her sentiments owe their genealogy to Victorian Metaphysical Romance writers who described Nature as a conscious and calculating force in shape an idea of a sentient Nature goddess. Combined with the Canadian inherent awareness of Nature as not just a symbol, but a full on, real and alive phenomenon, this is where Margaret Atwood’s imagination comes into play.

Chapter 3: The Witch. The Supernatural context of *Oryx and Crake*.

The concept of the natural as a sentient entity appears in Margaret Atwood's fiction as an overreaching life force. Recently, she interacted on this subject with a reader on Twitter. The reader had noticed a full stop missing at the end of chapter 24 of *The Handmaid's Tale*: "All I can hear now is the sound of my own heart, opening and closing, opening and closing, opening" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, p.156). He asked if this was intentional. Margaret Atwood responded that this omission of punctuation had been fully intentional from her side, saying: "Not cheating. The passage describes a heart, beating. A period is a full stop. The heart does not stop" (Atwood, Twitter). However, in all three of my editions, a full stop has been added. Where Margaret Atwood had ended the chapter on a metaphor for life and nature's will to live, a proof-reader unintentionally (we hope) managed to end the symbolic life with a single keystroke. This editorial correction is a suitable representation for Atwood's metaphysical fiction in which forces out of their control dictate the main characters' lives. Her fiction is rife with subtle portrayals of life and nature. In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood opens the first and the last chapter with a description of waves lapping at the shore in a rhythm akin to a heartbeat, showing the reader from the start that Snowman/Jimmy is still alive and able to tell his story. When Snowman, at the beginning of his tale, feels trapped and imprisoned, he compares his position as the last living man with that of a caged-up lab animal. Atwood reminds him "What could be more out than here?" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.45), reminding both Snowman and the reader that he is in fact outdoors, facing the menacing side of nature, the victorious witch who may not allow him to survive too much longer on his own.

The Handmaid herself, Offred, is put under a misogynistic dictatorship and forced into a dubious, religiously defended, concubinage while Snowman/Jimmy in the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy, is left to fend for himself after his presumed best friend wiped out the rest of the earth's human population. Survival and a new form of nature where human courage prevails is, therefore, a key to Atwood's dystopic novels. Offred finds her liberty in nature. In her solitude, nature symbolises freedom to the degree where she envies even flies (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, p.7) whereas Snowman finds himself on the opposite end of the spectrum, surrounded by more nature and chaos than he knows what to do with. So, what role does nature itself play in these novels? Returning to the notion of the Wordsworthian nature trio, Snowman is faced with the witch, seemingly out to take his life, whereas Offred is looking at the Mother Nature, able to grant freedom and liberty through small windows of hope in an

unnatural life. In her desolation, Offred reclaims her own body as a natural sanctuary casting herself in the role of the fertile Mother Nature when she says “I sink into my body as into a swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, p.83). Tellingly, the Wife in *The Handmaids Tale* spends a lot of time in the garden, attempting to control nature, symbolically renewing herself and postponing death by weeding, removing dead plants and replacing them with new ones. In this sense, she is not unlike the God’s Gardeners, especially in *The Year of the Flood*, who constantly recycle both organic and inorganic materials, reusing them for their purposes in their quest for eternal life.

In a subtle nod to the Victorian Metaphysical Romance genre, described in Margaret Atwood’s unfinished Ph.D., Snowman embarks on a symbolic underworld journey, both physical and mental. He journeys through the abandoned wasteland of the old civilisation, back to Crake’s Paradise dome where Crake created the disastrous virus and where Jimmy had his physical encounters with the real Oryx – who may or may not be the person he remembers so fondly. On this journey, Snowman recounts the fall of humanity, the descent into egotistical possessive savagery, and a society barren of any form of reverence for Nature. Several times, Jimmy and Crake have discussions around what is “real” and if the genetically spliced and modified creatures and lifeforms are “real”. Crake, ever practical, argues that their ability to reproduce does make them real, whereas Jimmy, even in his existence as Snowman remains sceptical. The bioluminescent rabbits and pigs with human neocortex tissue are not of Jimmy’s idea of Nature. Snowman is in this story very much the primal man, his castaway narrative highlights on several occasions how he seeks physical gratification, but it’s not the pleasure or the intoxication he seeks, it’s the absence of human contact. It appears he seeks Nature in a basic form by removing himself from society.

The main idea of ecocritical literature in a metaphysical setting comes through in the interaction between man and Nature, epitomised by the imagery of destruction and disorder at the hands of humans and the will to survive shown in the creatures surviving in the ensuing chaos. Cheryll Glotfelty tells us that “all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (Glotfelty, p.6). The power humans exert over nature affects us and alters how we perceive Nature. Hengen links this to Atwood’s unfinished PhD by suggesting that the power struggle between the female representation of nature and male representation of power is evident in Atwood’s later fiction. Hengen asserts that there are “Unmistakeable echoes between her thesis topic and her dystopic novel” (Hengen, *Metaphysical Romance*, p. 155). While

Hengen's paper discusses *The Handmaid's Tale*, the echoes are still recognisable when we get to the question of genetic manipulations and how far we can stretch the idea of evolution in *Oryx and Crake*. The effort to control and coerce Nature has in Atwood's fantasy reached the point where pharmaceutical companies manufacture new illnesses as well as their respective cures to maintain a steady financial flow of supply and demand. In Crake's expressed opinion, this is still within the realms of nature, simply because it is possible. With the expanding population of wolvogs, rakunks and bioluminescent green rabbits, Nature has lost its autonomy. Humans have altered Nature for profit, reducing the natural evolution to a series of random events in contrast to the controlled development of genetically altered, more profitable species. Thus, in Crake's opinion, the cure to all earth's underlying problems is to get rid of humanity. Or are least to delete a full generation and in his words "reset" humanity to a less advanced, less numerous and no longer dominating life form (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.223). This paradox is especially obvious when Snowman at the end of the novel encounters three individuals of his own kind, which leaves him with the seemingly impossible decision of which population has the best chance of survival in the new world, the genetically modified but innocent Crakers, or the "natural", selfish humans.

Snowman explains at one point that the entire planet has turned out to be "one vast uncontrolled experiment" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.267) following Crake's release of the deadly virus that killed most of the earth's population. Crake's underlying lack of respect for the natural mechanics of evolution, his arrogant attitude to what is possible and what is ethical problematizes modern science. Crake's nature is a static and mechanical nature designed for profit, showing the natural, spiritual Nature through the genetically engineered "children of Crake", or Crakers, who appear more at ease with the surrounding environment than any of their ancestors. A variety of nature is in this setting expanded to encompass the genetically altered varieties. Bioluminescent rabbits, fluorescent flowers and pigs with human brain tissue roam the fictional remains of the American east coast while the "natural" and unaltered Snowman remains weirdly unsuited to the new environment around him. Atwood describes in her trilogy the metamorphosis from overpopulation, via destruction and into rebuilding with eerie resonance to the science of the possible. At an especially desperate point in the story, Snowman wonders "What the fuck did he need me for? [...] Why didn't he leave me alone" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.283). If Snowman's story, about the time his name was Jimmy, is to be seen as reliable, Crake needed him to do what he is doing; to look after the Crakers, guide them and protect them. Crake meant for him to be the last man on earth and to ensure

the Crakers survival after the apocalypse. In this way, Crake becomes a creator God, and Snowman his prophet.

Atwood's relationship with Nature is according to her assessment founded on the legacy of the Victorian romance writers who all had the opinion that "Industrialism was ruining the countryside" (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p. 9). The idea that Nature would prevail became evident in the literary symbolism of the genre, as exemplified in *News from Nowhere* by William Morris. In Morris' version of utopia, human building works, and evidence of engineering is overgrown, and even urban London itself turned into a lush green forest, where very few of the landmark buildings are recognisable, and those that remain are used for different purposes than intended. This idea of nature reclaiming what humans have changed is an inheritance Margaret Atwood brings into her fiction, despite the very recent apocalypse, and what we must assume is a still urban environment. The environment of the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy focuses on the beasts, plants and wildlife that has turned the previously human-dominated, urban landscape into something wild and menacing. The buildings themselves, cars, and detritus of human habitation is reduced to merely landscape. The wall surrounding the now defunct compound, much like a medieval castle wall with turrets and parapets, provides Snowman with some distance to the murderous pigeons that haunt him below, but the electric gates and fences are useless as barriers. Their medieval appearance does nothing but enhances the fact that they are ruins, uninhabited and ready for nature to break apart what humans have built.

Atwood separates from her Victorian forebears when discussing Nature's intention. Where Metaphysical Romance writers described nature as a reliable and safe state, even the menacing Witch could be trusted to be just that, Atwood's nature becomes an unpredictable threat when mixed with the results of the genetic engineering experiments culminating in Crake's pandemic. When Atwood wrote her PhD, she consulted the scholar Anne McWhir. In her letter to Atwood entitled *Notes on Utopia* she observed that the distinction Atwood defines in her PhD as mother-worlds and father-worlds, "suggests to me Frye's distinction between two possible myths of creation", the sexual fertile earth mother (womb and tomb of everything) and purposeful creator, sky father (McWhir, p.1). This letter is possibly an indication of when the first seed of imagination for *Oryx and Crake* germinated in Margaret Atwood's mind. It also provides a direct line back to Northrop Frye, religious mythology and the Wordsworthian/Victorian nature goddess. However, the opposition between female Nature and Male power is not necessarily as clear-cut as it may seem. Shannon Hengen

contextualises this idea when discussing Atwood's PhD. Hengen tells us that Margaret Atwood's "distinction between nature as female and power as male does not correspond neatly to the other broad categorical opposition she outlines in her statement of aim, that good vs. evil, for nature is not wholly good, and power is not essentially evil" (Hengen, *Metaphysical Romance*, p.155). Atwood did bring this distinction into her creation of Oryx and Crake in as much as she had Jimmy, the storyteller, build a mythos for the Crakers in where Oryx was the nurturing caregiver and mother of all animals and Crake was the distant yet almighty, powerful father. McWhir points out that "in a world where the sky-god runs his universe like a clock, or plays with people like flies, or disappears altogether, the artificial myth of creation suggests the most evil of all possible myths" (McWhir, p.3). While this refers clearly to Victorian authors such as H.G. Wells and Henry Rider Haggard who described altered nature at the hands of man, it also suggests that Crake's brand of ecocriticism appeared in Atwood's mind several decades before she wrote *Oryx and Crake*.

In Jimmy's memories, both Oryx and Crake have become distant, ghostlike and through his stories, even Jimmy himself seems to have elevated them from the normal mortal realm. Once we get to *MaddAddam*, Zeb becomes the physically present, yet mysterious object of the mythology, with Toby as a prophet. Jimmy expresses several times that he regrets making Crake into a deity, but he regrets no such thing about Oryx. Oryx is still someone he venerates despite her never becoming more than a figment of his imagination. Even in the conversations he recalls having with her, she never gives an impression of being emotionally invested. Oryx, in Snowman's memories is unreachable, like a wisp of smoke, best illustrated by the way Snowman envisions her with wings as he falls asleep.

When analysing Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Northrop Frye observes that "As soon as Adam falls, he loses his sense of humour" (Frye, *Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, p.84). Not only does Jimmy go through a similar transformation, but he is also evicted from Paradise. We also have MaddAddam, – the leader of the digital game Extinctathon that Crake becomes obsessed with – with the tagline: "Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.80), placing MaddAddam in a position of an anti-Adam, a malevolent destructor out of Jimmy/Snowman's control. Growing up as the clown at school in a family situation far from ideal, but in a sheltered environment, Jimmy is a symbolic, naïve and innocent Adam of his kind, with Crake, mysterious and slightly manipulative from the start, a trickster in place of the snake. Oryx comes from a gritty background of human smuggling and child prostitution to become a pure, natural Eve in the

world of the Crakers. Tellingly Jimmy becomes serious, fearful and sceptical only after Oryx appears. The Eve to his Adam opens his eyes to the real world and removes his spiritual innocence. Again; she is the active part in spreading the BlyssPlus pill. She spreads the disease, the sin, the cause of human mortality and becomes through her actions the agent of the engineered fall from modern grace. Her actions place her in the position of a modern Eve, offering the BlyssPlus pill as a constructed Apple promising eternal youth and health while hiding destruction and chaos.

In her commentary, Anne McWhir makes several observations about the divine hierarchy Atwood describes in her PhD that predates *Oryx and Crake* by several decades. McWhir observes that: “The Orthodox Christian myth sees the sky-father as a positive one” (McWhir, p.1), similar to how Jimmy presents the myth of Crake to the Crakers. Another similarity appears where the “Pastoral world of the Bible is also a positive model, though it’s different from classical pastoral because it’s permeated & inseparable from the Father world” (McWhir, p.1). The world Snowman finds himself stranded in is very much the work of Crake. Considering McWhir’s observation, it places Crake in an image of a chaotic creator God. A distant father to the Crakers, Crake still exists in their mythology as a divine and all-powerful provider of life. McWhir explains that “Because the power at the top isn’t perfect, they are the tower of Babel and Pandemoniums, not civitates dei” (McWhir, p.2). Crake is not perfect in any way, but his work with genetics makes him able to make not just new species, but a new species of humans who he intends to exist as a separate culture, with separate values from the original humans who he views as flawed. Snowman even embellishes the myth by placing Crake’s domain in the sky, whereas Oryx’s domain is firmly anchored on earth. This connection hints that *Oryx and Crake* may have been brewing in Margaret Atwood’s imagination for a long time before she got around to writing it. According to Anne McWhir “part of the descent into the self is the return to the mother – lost childhood & the past – so the mother-world is often identified with the positive inner or Underworld” (McWhir, p.2). There is a definite relation between this observation and how Snowman’s journey, physically back to Paradise, mentally back to his childhood, makes him encounter the two women so deeply entwined with his identity, Oryx and his estranged mother. If Oryx then is a mix of the maternal and virginal, Jimmy’s mother remains the witch. In protest against the genetic manipulations she was witnessing, she abruptly abandoned the compound, relocating to the “wild” pleeblands, leaving an emotional gap in Jimmy’s life.

When choosing aliases for the game Extinctathon, Crake chooses the rare Australian bird the Red Necked Crake for himself, a relatively rare and mysterious bird. Jimmy, however, is given the name Thickney, after another Australian bird “that used to hang around in cemeteries” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake*, p.81). Jimmy in his later life as Snowman ends up in a very literal cemetery of the society left after the apocalypse. Again looking at what may have formed Snowman’s introspective journey, there are hints in Atwood’s PhD. Anne McWhir pointed out that in literary father-worlds, once chaos is a fact, “The formerly demonic underworld becomes the only source of true power - the inner self, world of memory & vision, poetic imagination, or whatever: imagery of valleys, forests and caves” (McWhir p.2). This is exemplified in Snowman and how he spends his journey mentally picking over dead memories, symbolically becoming the Thickney of his new world.

There appears to be a direct line of descent from Henry Rider Haggard’s *She* to Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. Henry Rider Haggard was fascinated by vanished civilisations, as was the fashion of the Victorian gentleman. His decision to send Leo Vincey and Horace Holly on a quest to avenge Leo’s ancient family secret is therefore not such a radical notion. As expected, the journey to Ayesha brings Leo and Holly through a hostile variation of Nature, where according to Atwood “everything either eats or is eaten” (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.31). Just like Snowman, Holly in *She* declares war on oversized mosquitoes and has to endure the threatening wilderness. Once Leo and Holly encounter the Armahagger, it even becomes obvious that these have some genealogy in common with the Crakers. Where the Armahagger people are sombre and sullen, the Crakers are bright and cheerful, but both sing in an unnerving and unsettling manner while walking. The Armahagger, unlike Morris’ neo-Londoners in *News from Nowhere*, appear to be a negative result of Craker descent. They are cannibals, farmers and most importantly they reject education. Haggard allows his scholar Holly to philosophise that “Too much wisdom would perchance blind our imperfect sight, and too much strength would make us drunk, and over-weight our feeble reason till it fell and we were drowned in the depths of our own vanity.” (Haggard, *She*, p.110), eerily foreshadowing the hunger for knowledge and scientific development evidenced in the pre-virus society of *Oryx and Crake*. Evidence of a former, technologically advanced civilisation is prevalent much like the abandoned pleeblands of *Oryx and Crake*. In *She*, this is first hinted to by the discovery of an overgrown ancient wharf at the mouth of the river and later by the ruins of the vast city Kôr, complete with remains of advanced engineering feats. Similarly to Atwood’s fictional world, a more advanced civilisation is decimated by a plague, in *The Year*

of the Flood referred to as the waterless flood, making way for the advancement of a new, more primitive, eco-friendly culture. In *She*, the area is repopulated by the Armahagger, people carefully selected by the titular *She* who also regulates the population by ordering wars and allowing regular decimations of the female population. Where Crake utilises the latest technology in DNA design to create his ideal humans, Ayesha/She-who-must-be-obeyed admits to having carefully and selectively bred a race of deaf/mute servants through many centuries of trial and error, reflecting the recent developments in selective breeding that Haggard found in his contemporary time. Also, Haggard supplied a matrilinear practice that may well have been a response to the Victorian rise of “woman” and her connected “rights” (Atwood, *H. Rider Haggard’s She*, p.110). Like the later Crakers “Descent is traced only through the line of the mother, and while individuals are as proud of a long and superior female ancestry as we are of our families in Europe, they never pay attention to, or even acknowledge, any man as their father, even when their male parentage is perfectly well known.” (Henry Rider Haggard, *She*, p.79). If we compare this to the mating practices of the Crakers and the subsequent maternal lineage, there is not much of an imaginary leap between the Armahagger and the Crakers. They are tall and dressed in a minimal amount of clothing and the Armahagger even have their own “Snowman” in the form of Bilial, who in a similar fashion to Jimmy/Snowman, dressed in “old linen”. In an apt symbolism, Bilial’s linen clothing is later revealed to be recovered grave clothes from the preserved corpses of the earlier civilisation. Considering Snowman’s linen consists of bedsheets recovered from a “dead” society, it seems reasonable to claim a relationship between the two characters. When, also, Bilial is the only Armahagger allowed to speak directly with the titular *She*, it does resemble the way Snowman in his careful creation of Craker mythology is the only person capable of communication with Oryx. Similarly, Ayesha is tied to her mountain dwelling, unable to leave it even to visit her worshippers much like Oryx in death can not visit the Crakers. Interestingly, *Oryx and Crake* takes place in a world already ruined by global warming. Jimmy recasts himself as Snowman when he believes he is the last of his species and thereby acknowledges that he is effectively extinct. He is, in comparison, the last remainder of the people who built Kôr. This mysterious group of people, already extinct before Ayesha gained her longevity, died in a virus plague and left behind a ruined city and a series of writings on cave walls in a language that oddly enough only Ayesha can read. Horace Holly is therefore forced to trust her account of who the people of Kôr were.

The similarities between Oryx and Henry Rider Haggard's Ayesha are noticeable. Ayesha lives in a series of tombs and caverns dug out as catacombs by the now extinct citizens of Kôr. Similarly, Oryx inhabits the figurative tomb of Jimmy's memories. Also, Oryx is said to be a previous victim of human trafficking, which is another form of underground activity. This idea of the underground as a space for women also appears in *The Handmaids Tale* where enslaved women are liberated through the underground femaleroad. The title is reminiscent of the underground railroad, famous for liberating slaves, but also as a subtle nod back in history to Ayesha, who resided, literally underground. Where Oryx's innocence in Jimmy's mind makes her into an angelic sorceress, Ayesha is in Holly's descriptions both a harbinger of evil and death, while still being an angelic, virgin goddess. Atwood argues that "If she is a fallen angel, she is still an angel, and is in fact identified as one" (Atwood, *PhD draft*, p.34). Oryx has, according to Jimmy, eyes that can see his soul even through photographs and computer screens. Jimmy says that her blend of innocence, contempt, and understanding "made him feel light headed, precariously balanced, as if he was standing on a cliff edge above a rock filled gorge and it would be dangerous for him to look down" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.255). When Ayesha looks into his eyes, Holly is "drawn by some magnetic force" (Haggard, *She*, p.144). Both heroes are blinded by the apparently sinister quality of the woman's gaze and are instantly addicted, or enchanted by the woman and her supernatural beauty. However, none of these two women allows their respective heroes to look back. Oryx's personality is as veiled as Ayesha's face. Through Jimmy's memories, Oryx never once appears as a whole person. Her whole persona is so fragmented that the reader is left unsure if Jimmy is describing one person or a multitude of different fantasy aspects of her that in his mind has become an ideal woman. Similarly, Ayesha does not allow Holly, or Leo, her reincarnated soulmate, to know who she is beyond her looks and the magical powers granted her by longevity. Based on her looks alone, they are expected to follow her lead and obey her every command. Unlike Ayesha, bound to her somewhat gothic caves, Oryx has the ability to travel between the different realms of the novel. She effortlessly moves between the plebs and compounds. She, like Ayesha, also holds power to destroy, not just Jimmy, but also the whole world's population through distributing the lethal virus that Crake has created from a multitude of micro bioforms.

Ayesha's ambitions are however not focused on world domination. At least not on her own. She is patiently focused on waiting for the reincarnation of her lost love before she will fulfil her potential for world dominion. She killed him two thousand years previous because

he chose another woman and every night she mourns his preserved body, much like Snowman mourns the fading memory of Oryx, keeping her fresh in the mythology he invents for the Crakers. There is, however, no indication that Kalikrates would voluntarily return to Ayesha. In fact, his descendant Leo seems quite attached to the Armahagger woman Ustane until Ayesha kills her. Nor does Leo seem to want to be with Ayesha until she reveals her face, casting her (very Victorian) spell of beauty on him. In a similar love-triangle Crake kills Oryx once he realises that she has a love affair with Jimmy. Crake also knows Jimmy will kill him and therefore the ultimate revenge is knowing Jimmy would see Crake and Oryx eternally united in death. Jimmy is throughout the novel mourning both his best friend and his lover, knowing they are both dead at the entrance of the Paradise dome, symbolically blocking the entrance to the place of birth with their death.

Especially in death, the similarity between Oryx and Ayesha becomes clear. When Jimmy, in *MaddAddam*, returns to the site of Crake and Oryx's death, he finds a pile of what the young Craker Blackbird call smelly bones. Beside her remains, lies Oryx's long black hair tied in a faded pink bow. Much like Ayesha's hair falls from her head in one single stroke and lands beside her shrivelled body, so Oryx's hair lies intact next to her dead bones. Atwood also follows the Victorian trend of abrupt ends. Once the quest is over, that is it. Once Oryx and Crake are dead, Atwood gradually drops off. Haggard, similarly ends the story of *She* quite quickly once Ayesha is dead. The goddess is gone so why bother continuing the story. Haggard wrote a series of sequels and prequels, most famously, *Ayesha; the revenge of She*, where he does wrap the story up a bit more neatly than what he did in the original. Atwood follows up with *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, where Jimmy/Snowman last-man-standing narrative is disproven and where the remaining loose ends are, if not tied up, at least bundled together.

Before the pandemonium, the hierarchical order dominated the *Oryx and Crake* world. Money was the source of power, and the pleeblands were a mix of crime and trade. By the time we get to *The Year of the Flood*, we encounter the pseudo-Christian cult God's Gardeners, who through recycling, vegan lifestyle, and a conscious opposition to corporations' genetic engineering provides an extreme alternative everything in the pre-apocalyptic world Jimmy has described. A few decades earlier, Anne McWhir pointed out a similar power structure, divided between power and Nature when discussing symbolism in fiction. She wrote, "regarding Christian imagery, the city and the garden are both types of the ideal, the city modelled on heaven, the garden of Eden." (Anne McWhir, p.1). In an

illustration of how the power of the urban is utilised in benefit of nature, The God's Gardeners even have a connection with a juvenile Crake who provides scientific information, medical diagnostic technology, and who appears to function as a ghost, going between the pleeblands, compounds, and God's Gardeners without apparently belonging to either. It is, however, interesting when Crake in a conversation with previous God's Gardener, turned compound dweller, Ren, he asks questions about the Gardener's lifestyle that later appears as preferred modes of behaviour in the design of the Crakers (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, p.228). While trying to do away with the notion of religion, Crake, in his God-incarnation, appears to have modelled his Crakers on the vegetarian, religious gardeners. Their devout debates go as far as to discuss diet of the original Adam considering the evolution of human omnivorous teeth, (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, p.241). Crake's motivation for creating the BlyssPlus pill is similarly idealistic. There is an increasing problem with overpopulation and a resulting lack of resources, habitable living space that he seems to want to change. The BlyssPlus, therefore, seems a logical solution, providing birth control and sexual gratification in one pill. The virus hidden in these pills, therefore, seems to have a function expanding on the idea of population control by simply reducing the number of people available. At one point Crake explains to Jimmy that once the pharmaceutical companies have found cures for all disease, they will be out of business. Therefore the pharmaceuticals have started creating a new disease that needs curing, creating a need for new cures based on a purely capitalistic greed (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.248). Crake's disdain for humanity is by this point fairly obvious; he knows humans are underachieving their capabilities. He wants to unlock the untapped potential inherent in the human species. He has in a sense turned to deep ecology, as defined by Joseph Carrol when he says that "Deep ecology defines itself primarily through its opposition to "anthropocentrism," or human-centred systems of value and meaning. Ecocritics who wade into deep ecology are wont to say things like "there exists not one scrap of evidence that humans are superior to or even more interesting than, say, lichen." (Carrol, p.299). In Crake's worldview, humans are nothing more than a biological species among many others. And to prove his point he creates the Crakers, a flawless model of humans, made possible by the market for "designer babies" with pre-set genetic features. Crake's intention to make floor models, examples of perfect people, develops into a survival strategy in combination with the virus he had implanted in the BlyssPlus pill.

In a series of sermons in *The Year of the Flood*, Adam One preaches a mixture of Christian and Pantheistic Nature messages in a cycle of allegorical cautionary tales pre-

warning of the “waterless flood” that will wipe out humanity. Adam One repeatedly calls on the Gardeners to create a new Eden and refers to Nature itself as female. Their sanctuary is a set of gardens on rooftops, “Edencliffe” in the middle of a destructive, greedy and nearly demonic urban sprawl very symbolically placed beneath them. There is a definite relationship between the God’s Gardener’s ideology and Atwood’s PhD. Anne McWhir observed that “If the Christian mother-world is Eden or the earthly paradise, it’s lower than the father world of heaven but on the right track” (McWhir, p.2). The constructed Eden of the God’s Gardeners is under constant threat from police, criminal gangs, and internal struggles, held together by a thin reliance on consumerism and manipulation in a world that is going to hell in a handcart. Their city as a heaven has failed. The symbol of this occurs when Toby chooses to use a set of beehives as a weapon against the thugs attacking their rooftop sanctuary (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, p.255). What is interesting is that even though the God’s Gardeners see Adam One as their leader, it becomes increasingly obvious through reading *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, that it is, in fact, Zeb who is the Mad Adam. He is given the name by the children of the Gardeners, who nickname their adults for personality traits. Tellingly, Toby is “the dry witch”, and Nuala is “the wet witch” to denote sentimentality or emotional engagement. Zeb as a character is, however, an interesting example of a chaos deity, a force of Nature within a confined society. He wanders in and out of both the narrative and the world described, being a practically autonomous character in his refusal to adapt to the world around him. He seems impervious to violence, viruses, illness, as well as wildlife. In *The Year of the Flood*, he is a benevolent hippie with the agency to change the world, in *MaddAddam* he’s largely absent, like a deity or prophet, leaving his followers a bit scattered and rootless. Atwood tells us, via Toby, that Zeb is responsible for the communication between the various cells of God’s Gardeners, scattered around in other cities and settlements as well as with Crake (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, p.243). Zeb has ample opportunity to run the underground terrorist part of God’s Gardeners, making Zeb the truly powerful bringer of chaos in a juxtaposition with his more peaceful brother Adam One. Zeb also appears to acknowledge the female divinity of Nature When Toby questions him about the idea of women as birds or snakes, he tells her “We like to think you’re [women] wild animals, says Zeb. Underneath the decorations” in a subtle nod to earlier fictional Nature Goddesses in animal guises (Atwood, *MaddAddam*, p.171). As prophets go, Toby is amazingly alert when the incarnation of chaos, Zeb, forewarns bad news. She tells us Zeb sings upbeat tunes “whenever the news was bad” (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, p.243), foreshadowing his

role as the mastermind behind the waterless flood of the pandemic. There are even several references to cooperation between Zeb and Crake, placing the two of them in a position to represent the opposing powers of chaos and control to become one symbolic force of change.

In *MaddAddam*, Zeb becomes part of the Crakers' nature mythos through the stories Toby tells about him, not unlike the stories Snowman has already told them about Crake. But this time there are no stories about creation, but about destruction and survival against all the odds. They are stories that are not unlike stories about the Wendigo, of a man turning into a monster of malicious Nature through isolation and suffering. According to Atwood, the Wendigo is a cannibalistic creature with a "compulsive desire to eat human flesh" (Atwood, *Strange Things*, p.83). To survive, alone in the wilderness, Zeb has no choice but to eat human flesh to survive. When he, a few days later, eats a bear and wears the skin to keep warm, he is said to become part of the bear, or bearlike. It's a way of survival, but in the narrative, it gives Zeb a power, usually reserved for the bear. In the original Wendigo myth, one becomes Wendigo by eating human flesh. Zeb becomes a bear by eating bear flesh in addition to the flesh of another human which gives him his unexplained strength. In *The Year of the Flood*, Ren refers to him as singing "in his big Russian bear voice" telling the reader he was still bearlike for years after his Wendigo experience (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, p.64). The other way to become Wendigo is by extreme isolation. Atwood says that the "Wendigo is a human being who has been claimed by the sinister wilderness and has become an expression of it" (Atwood, *Strange Things*, p.93) and this is quite interesting because it hints at Snowman being the original Wendigo of the *Oryx and Crake* story. Snowman is a primitive monster among the flawless Crakers. Much like the indigenous monster of the Canadian North, "He is a manifestation of the environment" (Atwood, *Strange Things*, p.90). Snowman descended into the uncivilised version of himself to match the loss of civilisation around him. It is perhaps most clearly expressed in the way he describes the loss of vocabulary and his fear of losing his language skills. As a word-person (as opposed to Crake's number-person) Jimmy's strength has always been his ability to express himself and tell stories. His talent with words is presumably why he is such a compelling protagonist. With only the Crakers as an audience and their lack of extended context, Jimmy takes the name Snowman, both as a nod to another wild, mythological being, the Abominable Snowman, but also to signal his position as a dying breed, a snowman melting when his season is over. Atwood explains that the myth of the Wendigo appeared as a result of an environment in which food was hard to come by, and survival came at the cost of some humanity (Atwood,

Strange Things, p.84). Even those who avoided cannibalism might have suffered mentally as a result of isolation during long winters. Just like Jimmy/Snowman, survival for the original Canadian settlers depended on their ability to adapt to their new environment. Snowman seems a bit too attached to his past for a full adjustment, leaving him stranded in a no-mans-land, a Wendigo in a new world. When he is offered a clean slate he chooses to remain in the world he has left behind.

In Jimmy's mind, Oryx is divine even before he meets her. On first seeing her in real life, he sees her through a monitor as she looks into the camera. Atwood describes their first meeting by saying "and there it was again, that look, that stare, the stare that went right into him and saw who he truly was" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p.308). This scene places Oryx in a position to observe and symbolically save Jimmy from the oncoming destruction, simply by her existence. His two closest divine beings protect Jimmy from the dangers of the outside world, the dangers of his future, and the hazards of nature. The father God of creation, Crake, repeatedly injects him with what we understand is a vaccine against the upcoming pandemic, whereas Oryx in her conversations, mothers him, mollycoddles him and protects him from the truth about the world outside his protected life. The fact that Jimmy has grown up in a compound very rarely visits the world outside makes him a very ill prepared hero of the story. He lives in a literal bubble, a dome constructed to protect the Crakers. Even after the apocalypse, he has no idea of how to deal with nature slowly taking over the surrounding landscape. Having grown up with carefully controlled parks and manicured lawns, he faces a Nature that no longer keeps its distance but becomes a part of his life. To Jimmy, nature is a threat, something to be scared of and careful not to offend. Combined with the genetically modified creatures and experiments hovering around, Jimmy's nature is no longer a nurturing mother or an enticing virgin, ready for exploration, but a vicious and deadly witch. The Crakers, however, accept nature and the motherhood that goes with it. To them, Nature provides food, shelter and Jimmy/Snowman is their father god of chaos, even if he doesn't realise his status himself. Existing entirely inside of the Paradise complex before being released by Jimmy/Snowman, they lack an understanding of the outside world. Ironically, this is the world which Jimmy is as unprepared for as any of the Crakers, and you do get an impression that they would do just fine without his guidance. This becomes evident in *MaddAddam* where Jimmy is fatally injured, and the Crakers still pray to him as well as Oryx and Crake themselves.

In terms of inheritance, Atwood, in addition to the genre specifics of the Metaphysical Romance, appears to have drawn a few parallels to Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Crake's creation of the Crakers is even called "the Paradise Project", located in an artificial glass dome called the Paradise dome. Rhona Trauvitch, argues in her text that Crake in creating the Crakers is attempting to rewind "history to a point analogous to Paradise before the fall" (Trauvitch, p.166). Hence, Crake's Paradise is an advanced paradise of upgraded, superior inhabitants, not shaped by evolution into primal savages, but designed to undo humanity's wrongdoings. According to Northrop Frye, Milton never described Adam and Eve as savages, but instead as "suburbanites in the nude" who even invite their neighbouring Angels for a meal (Frye, *Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, p.69). This image of the domestic bliss, sexual innocence, sensory naturalism, is repeated in the society of the Crakers. Milton's Paradise-dwellers were sophisticated yet simple inhabitants of their world. Frye explains the apparent sophistication by saying that "Primitivism and savagery came later and was never intended by God to be part of man's life" (Frye, *Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, p.70). Atwood cleverly reinvents Milton's Paradise for the Crakers, placing them in an Adam and Eve-like state of innocence where even sexuality has a naturally obvious element to it. In the Bible, Adam names the animals, in *Oryx and Crake* MaddAddam names the extinct ones in the computer game Extinctathon where Crake is a grandmaster, paraphrasing the Bible, (*Genesis*, 2:19). By the time of Atwood's reinvention of Paradise, the descendants of the original Adam and Eve have failed their task to "guard Paradise" (*Genesis*, 2:15), leaving Crake with the decision to reset the planet and give humanity a second chance with improved, prerequisite abilities. The Crakers' innocence appears to be the innocence of selflessness and altruism, replacing the evils of greed and individual ambition that has up until Crake's plague destroyed Nature. In addition to the original biblical pair of paradisiacal inhabitants, Atwood has expanded their little society to encompass an entire tribe, children, rudimentary hierarchy and even a prophet in the form of Snowman preaching the gospel of the dual deities of Crake and Oryx. Milton equipped his Adam and Eve with appetites not mentioned in the Bible, appetites for food as well as sexual appetites. According to Frye, this interplay is all natural and part of creation (Frye, *Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, p.72). However, when Adam and Eve fall from grace, their appetites are perverted into lust and greed, which leads to the downfall of man and by extension the pre-apocalyptic world described in *Oryx and Crake*. As Trauvitch tells us, "The sin changes the very nature of the relationship between man and his environment" (Trauvitch, p.172). Sexual relations are no longer an expression of love, but a mechanical expression of

individual gratification, driven to its extreme in *Oryx and Crake* with the repeated descriptions of online pornography with no apparent moral boundaries. In *The Year of the Flood* Ren works as an exotic dancer/prostitute, only protected from disease by a thin biofilm suit. Sex, originally a natural act, exemplified (albeit slightly altered) by the Crakers group habits, in these terms become emblematic for the unnatural self-gratification of the society of Jimmy and Crake's childhood. Trauvitch points out, "since the sin, [...] everything man does is geared towards reaccessing Paradise and this harmonious co-existence with his environment" (Trauvitch, p.171). Crake's attempt at recreating a race of humans to inhabit his post-apocalyptic paradise is, therefore, an attempt to redeem the damage done to Nature at the hands of humans. This naturalistic idea returns in *The Year of the Flood* where the God's Gardeners in their religious convictions do not believe in marriage. According to their gospel, "There was no record of the first Adam and the first Eve going through a wedding, so in their eyes, neither the clergymen nor any secular official had the power to marry people" (Atwood, *Year of the Flood*, p.115). Once Adam of *Paradise Lost* has fallen, he tries to explain his feelings for Eve, but subtly using words describing the paradise, he was just evicted from (Frye, *Five Essays on Milton's Epics*, p.68). Interestingly is also the phrasing "children of Crake" and "children of Oryx" to denote the Crakers and the animals. This denotation of origins is reminiscent of *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, where girls are "children of Eve", and boys are "children of Adam". The children of Eve are no longer the female human population but the animals, placing divine Oryx in a position above the Lewisian/Biblical Eve. Oryx is no longer simply a creator and a mother, she is a protector, and from the way the Crakers are venerating her, she is a very emotional deity. To Snowman, however, the animals, the children of Oryx, aren't the venerated creatures of the Crakers minds, they are threatening and dangerous, a representation of Oryx's destructive abilities.

The wide array of religious and ecocritical aspects of the fictional *Oryx and Crake* world, adds to the general verisimilitude of the narrative. There are no promises of a paradise at the end of *MaddAddam*, only a hopeful wish for a new start for humans in harmony with nature instead of in a fight against it. We simply do not know what the future would hold for the Craker descendants. It would be folly to speculate on the possibility of their extinction. They do after all appear to be the more adaptable branch of the human family tree. And interbred with the old species of humans, there is a hope that they form a society resembling the one in Morris' *News from Nowhere* rather than the Armahagger society Haggard described in *She*. Through Atwood's words, they represent an alternative to the current

destructive path humans appears to be on, an ideal alternative to the original human greed that is threatening to decimate the planet's resources.

Conclusion.

Following Margaret Atwood's writings and tracing her influences makes it obvious that her fiction owes their heritage from not only her childhood experiences but also from a wide array of scholars and authors. By her admission, she was from childhood a prolific reader, making no discrimination between good and bad literature. She has since published a great many novels; collections of poetry and non-fiction works in which she very often refers to the reading materials of her parent's basement as a great source of inspiration. When she assesses her inspiration for writing *Oryx and Crake* she does mention scientific research and climate change (Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p.94) that she built her world around, but she also describes a feeling of hope for an improved future. She also acknowledges the shortfalls of humanity and names *Oryx and Crake* a "Ustopia" to encompass both the utopian aspirations and the dystopian reality of the trilogy. She places her fictional world outside reality when she says "ustopia is by definition elsewhere" (Atwood *In Other Worlds*, p.71). In this case a fictional future where Nature Goddesses, powerful Sky-fathers and Wendigos share the environment with the designed and engineered Crakers.

Margaret Atwood's awareness of Nature as a living entity and animals as a source of nutrition allows her to debate the human superiority in current society. The *Oryx and Crake* trilogy is in its entirety packed with nature related hints juxtaposed with the problematic aspects of human expansion into Nature for profit. The greed and financial crime of the overpopulated pleeblands where everything is for sale at the right profit ring out as a stark contrast to the affluent, but emotionally devoid compounds where brainpower and scientific development feeds the increasing wealth of the corporations. This socially aware approach combined with as scholarly awareness of the surrounding ecosphere, allows Atwood to twist and play with conventional approaches to nature in literature. Her locations are fictional descendants of the Victorian Metaphysical Romance sites where incarnations of Nature in all her glory resided and ruled. The Wordsworthian Nature is brought back to life both through the character of Oryx, untouchable and divine, and through Crake's allegedly altruistic decision to reduce the human population to a bare minimum. The spirit of Nature buzzes and thrives in the urban environment devoid of humans. Around Snowman, everything grows and moves in a fictional world paradoxically very much alive in the wake of a grand scale mass extinction. It is a source of comfort, unexplored and dangerous all at the same time.

The story told in the *Oryx and Crake* trilogy serves as a representation for human vanity. Crake and his fellow scientists, as a stand-in for scientific ambition in general, creates new variations of species by incorporating genetic material from another species. He does not do this because it is right or because it aids the ecological surroundings. He chooses to alter these genetic markers simply because he can. The resulting gene splices provide the novels with their sinister undertones of the unnatural. The rebranding of Jimmy, when he names himself Snowman, reads like an ominous nod to the Abominable Snowman, a figure of terror from folktales, closely related to the Canadian Wendigo. Snowman/Jimmy becomes emblematic of all the damage humans have done to the surrounding Nature. At the same time, he feels threatened by the same nature now that he is on his own as the sole survivor. He is the ghost of humanity past with the Crakers representing the hopeful future.

Atwood draws parallels back to the findings she did in her scholarly research. Her abandoned PhD focused on the Nineteenth-Century Victorian Metaphysical Romance serves as the basis upon which she builds her fictional dystopia. The multitudes of similarities to Victorian Metaphysical Romance places *Oryx and Crake* as a clear descendant of the authors Atwood studied when researching her PhD. Especially the Victorian penchant of equipping beautiful women with mythical properties reappears as a motif in several of Atwood's novels. The creation of Oryx as a mythical being in Snowman/Jimmy's mind places her in a position of the divine mother goddess. She is set in a literary position established in Wordsworth's poetry, but repeated through Victorian Romance fiction as a symbolic entity, comprising mystical, sinister, magical and supernatural female entities, capable of bewitching and enchanting the hero of the novel. Oryx is the intellectual child of Henry Rider Haggard's *She* who through a series of incarnations in popular culture emerged in Atwood's novel as not just a spiritual Mother, but also as an abused child, a spiritual virgin and through her distribution of Crake's virus, a malevolent witch.

Oryx and Crake also borrow heavily from biblical ideas. Genetically designed Crakers inhabit a chaotic replacement of the garden of Eden after the waterless flood of the deadly virus has eradicated the rest of the known human population. We can only speculate that this Eden is loosely modelled on a Miltonian idea of paradise, mixed with a general utopian ideal of a new species of humans uncorrupted by greed, jealousy and general selfishness. The Nature focused religious aspects of Atwood's dystopia are also present in the form of God's Gardeners preaching a new, pantheistic and eco-friendly gospel that asserts both the human need to believe in something as well as how easy it is to subvert this need for

gain. Placing this faith within an ecocritical frame of storytelling also places the fictional world within a pantheistic ideology where nature itself has sentient qualities, made obvious by the removal of humanity. The way Atwood incorporates Nature into her novels places her within an ecocritical framework. The known Nature undergoes a metamorphosis following the disappearance of the human population in a warning tale describing the science of the possible. Once Nature is without the restraints and control of human manipulations, it winds up buildings, Breaks the urban sprawl apart, shrieks overhead, crawls into shoes and hats, and it most certainly lives.

Victorian authors sent their heroes on a quest through other, fantastical worlds. Snowman journeys through his childhood, his memories and emerges. Snowman is reborn, rescued from virus-induced death, as a Craker prophet. The dark underground world favoured by the Victorian authors is in Snowman's world replaced by a perilous journey through the darkness of his mind while his physical journey through the ruins of civilisation bears witness to the potentially malicious future. While Snowman's life as Jimmy certainly wasn't ideal, it was at least predictable. From wrestling with his inner hamartia, Jimmy is through his quest forced to accept the new world around him and his insignificant role in it as the prophet, the monster and in the end the creator of the Crakers' mythology.

The creation myth surrounding Crake's design of a new, improved race of humans, positions the Crakes as ideological forebears to several other tribes of apparently perfect societies. In their otherworldly artificiality, they contain abilities that Nature has not equipped humans with. Like his ancestor, Dr Moreau, Crake reinvents the traditional notions of what is Natural and what is real. His creation of the Paradise dome places Crake in the position of a Judeo-Christian God tradition where he is the almighty creator. Despite the scientists before him creating pigoons, with human neocortex and human organs, Crake still takes it one step further. He is unapologetic in his conviction that the world can be improved on by removing traditional humans.

Despite Atwood's description of nature as symbolic of freedom, she never idealises nature as peaceful or safe. Atwood is aware of her relationship with nature and relates her fascination with the mystery and danger connected to nature. Through Snowman's point of view, the wilderness presents an unpredictable nature with a multitude of variables that Snowman is very unprepared to endure. The Crakers, on the other hand, seem to enjoy the freedom, and abundance of this new reality that Margaret Atwood has created for them. In many ways, her idea of nature is as dangerous as the civilised society. The question posed in

Oryx and Crake is not whether we can improve on nature, but rather how nature is better off without humans.

With the exchange of ideas across generations and genres, Atwood has distilled a multitude of ecocritical, supernatural, weird and wonderful literary concepts into the fictional world of *Oryx and Crake*. The dystopian first impression hides a multitude of genre specific traits typical for the Metaphysical Romance genre Atwood studied in the 1960s. The symbolic hero's quest through dangerous and frightening territory is intermixed with the science of the possible in the new millennium and merged into a tale that resonates as a believable futuristic vision. All human literature is based on a simple premise of interaction. Interaction with other literature, previous author's works, early mythology or even the tales your older brother invented out of sheer boredom. But this interaction must happen within a context. There has to be a physical space. *Oryx and Crake* would not be a very interesting story if all Snowman did, was sit on the beach as he does in the first paragraph, mulling over his mortality. The environment shapes his experiences. The interaction with the Crakers and the insects provide a grounded backdrop to his remembered interactions with Oryx, Crake and the rest of the pre-apocalyptic population. Similarly, *She* would have been a boring tale if Haggard had let Leo and Holly dismiss the mystical potsherd and stayed at home rather than embark on the journey through the wilderness that led them to Ayesha. The human experience within the environment is, therefore, an integral part of the fiction. And it is the deep understanding of this phenomenon that makes Margaret Atwood such a compelling author.

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The master's thesis' relevance for the teaching profession.

In the Norwegian National Core Curriculum, LK06, reading is established as one of five basic skills. Through the reading of literature, students will meet the curriculum requirements for language and communication, culture and history, as well as literary knowledge. This dissertation has attempted to illustrate Margaret Atwood's influences and chart the origins of her ideas. I can use his method of analysis with great success in an educational situation using other authors and literary works to demonstrate how writers and thinkers across generations and trends, exchange ideas, ideologies and fictional scenarios. Literature often highlights topics about life, society, historical events or events that somehow affect the author's contemporary society or the individual's perception of society. By studying how a literary theme has changed from one generation to the next, the student will be able to fulfil the requirements that are described in the general section of the Core Curriculum as “the social human being”.

In secondary education, literature is a valuable supplement to learning the facts through the way fiction describes an imagined reality. An author has through his fiction the opportunity to describe a reality that the students may know from the point of view they have previously been aware of. Literature can also twist historical events and describe a different reality than the students know. Realistic contemporary literature can contribute perspectives from other cultures, other subcultures, socioeconomic conditions or purely hypothetical future scenarios that otherwise seem inaccessible to the students.

Use of literature in foreign language education can also be a useful tool in the acquisition of vocabulary and automation of grammatical rules. By repeated exposure to English grammar through literature, students will acquire an understanding of the correct use of grammar and sentence structure that may otherwise be difficult to understand if only explained and demonstrated theoretically. Regular exposure to a foreign language, written as well as verbally contributes to the overall acquisition of the language as a whole. A living language is also acquired through exposure to authors varied wording and associated dynamics.

