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Delineating the Posthuman
Subject in the Anthropocene.
Margaret Atwood's Dystopian
Novels: The Handmaid's Tale,
MaddAddam and The Heart Goes
Last.D.

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<http://zaguan.unizar.es/collection/Tesis>

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ISSN 2254-7606



Universidad
Zaragoza

Tesis Doctoral

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UNIVERSIDAD DE ZARAGOZA
Escuela de Doctorado

2021



Tesis doctoral
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Universidad de Zaragoza.
2020

**Delineating the
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the Anthropocene.
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*The Handmaid's Tale,
MaddAddam, and The Heart
Goes Last*

Directores:
Dra. Mónica Calvo Pascual
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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people that have supported me and made possible the completion of this Ph.D thesis. Firstly, I want to thank my supervisors Prof. Francisco Collado Rodríguez and Prof. Mónica Calvo Pascual for the continuous support of my Ph.D study and related research, for their patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. Their guidance helped me throughout the process of research and the writing of this thesis. I could not have imagined having better advisors and mentors for my Ph.D study.

Besides my supervisors, I would like to thank Prof. Maite Escudero Alías, whose kindness, support, and generous advice have been a source of invaluable inspiration. My sincere thanks also go to Profs. Marita Nadal Blasco, Sonia Baelo-Allué, María Ferrández San Miguel, Carmen Laguarda, and Miriam Fernández Santiago, who have generously shared with me their insights and experiences. Without their precious support, the writing of this dissertation would not have been possible. I also want to thank the members of the research team “Contemporary Narratives in English,” my fellow PhD students, and the members of the Department of English and German Studies of the University of Zaragoza for the new perspectives, inspiring debate and help.

I am deeply grateful to Prof. Sherryl Vint who willingly accepted the request of reading the final version of this thesis and writing the preliminary reports needed to present this doctoral dissertation. I am indebted as well to Prof. Roger Luckhurst, of Birkbeck College, University of London, and to Prof. Ivan Callus, of the L-Università ta' Malta, who attentively welcomed me in their institutions and helpfully offered me their generous support during my two research stays. I am also obliged to the Spanish Ministry of

Economy and Competitiveness (Project FF2015-63506P, BES-2016-076809), and to the Aragonese Government (H03-17R and ESF-H05) for granting me financial support to accomplish the writing of this dissertation.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family and many other people for supporting me spiritually throughout writing this thesis and in my life in general. I want to express my profound gratitude to my husband, Ángel Boira Ramo and to my children, Ángel Boira, Ester Boira, Antonio Boira, Rosario Calavia, and Sergio Aniento, who have supported me from the start with their affection and patience. I also want to thank my closest friends, Luis Peciña, Mamen Gallizo, Marta Vilafañe, Montse Carrascón, and Reyes Saz, who have been deeply involved in my project and encouraged me in moments of indecision. Finally, I want to thank my sisters, Ana and Mili, my brother, Antonio, my dear granny, Emilia Maqueda, who has always inspired me, and my little grandson, Ángel, the joy of my life. From my inmost heart, I extend my gratitude to all of them.

INTRODUCTION

Female, Canadian, and writer, Margaret Atwood has had her books translated into over forty languages and has become the most well-known Canadian cultural ambassador. As a female author widely labelled as feminist, her writings have always dealt with representations of women confronted with patriarchal societies. As a Canadian writer with postcolonial worries, she has criticized the erasing force of some dominant cultures over others, and as an ecological writer, she has expressed her concerns about the destruction of nature and the consequent destruction of humanity and the planet. Her works have been analyzed and studied from different perspectives such as women's and gender studies or science fiction, in a variety of English, Canadian, Postcolonial, and American Literature courses. Nevertheless, the American influence and weight over its Canadian neighbor is very visible on the latter's literary world and, in a demonstration of "academic imperialism" (Rosenthal 48), Atwood is widely taught in US American literature courses, usually within the label of "American" without further clarification. Moreover, Margaret Atwood offers a critical view of US culture because her novels are often set and focused on US-American topics and subjects that have become universal issues beyond nationalities.

1. MARGARET ATWOOD'S LIFE AND WORKS

Atwood was born on November 18, 1939 in Ottawa, Canada, the second of three children. In her earlier childhood, she grew up in close contact with nature at the northern Quebec forests where her father developed his research as entomologist. She did not attend school before she was eleven. She graduated from high school in 1959, and studied at Victoria College, in Toronto, where one of the most influential 20th century literary critics and theorists, Northrop Frye, was her professor. She received her MA at Harvard University in 1962 where she continued her studies of Victorian literature until 1976 when she interrupted her PhD on "The English Metaphysical Romance" and went to work for a market research company in Toronto (Atwood, "Web Page" n.p.). Nevertheless, Atwood has spent part of her professional career as a university teacher in several Canadian, American, and Australian institutions, such as the University of British Columbia (1964-65), Sir George Williams University of Montreal (1967-68), University of Alberta (1969-70), and York University, Toronto (1971-72). She has also held an Honorary Chair at the University of Alabama (1985), the Berg Chair at New York University (1986), and has been Writer-in-Residence both at Macquarie University (Australia, 1987), and at Trinity University of San Antonio (1989). She has lived in many cities such as Berlin, Vancouver, London, Montreal, Provence, Boston, and Edinburgh, but her main home has always been in Toronto, with her only daughter Jess and her partner, novelist Graeme Gibson, until he passed away in 2019.

Atwood is the author of an impressive number of works and genres: more than sixty books of fiction, children fiction, an extensive body of poetry, graphic novels, several books of critical essays, television and radio scripts, and a theatre play. She is

considered as one of the world's leading women writers. From the publication of her first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969) to the most recent one, *The Testaments* (2019), Atwood has demonstrated an exquisite sensibility and the ability to capture the historical context and current people's concerns in her writings. Her huge literary opus—from the revulsive 1960s to the second decade of the 21st Century—covers the historical, sociological, scientific, and political concerns of an era, with a special focus on what it means to be human as expressed through language and fiction.

Her lengthy career, which covers more than six decades, started with the writing of poetry. In 1961, when she was twenty-one years old, she published a collection of poems, *Double Persephone*, intended for private circulation, followed by another work of poetry, *The Circle Game* (1964), which appears in her official web page as her first published work (Atwood "Web Page" n.p.). In her first published novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969), the protagonist's eschewing of meat was "equated with the exploitation of women, animals and the environment" (Ferreira 147). It was followed by *Surfacing* (1972), described as a "feminist and nature-based search for the self" (Van Spanckeren and Garden Castro xxii). Atwood's next novel was *Lady Oracle* (1976), which parodies the features of gothic romance. Extinction, evolution, and the question of human identity—if humanity can "become human at some future time" (Greene, "Can Anything" 68)—were tackled in *Life Before Man* (1979), whereas her first novel in the 1980s, *Bodily Harm* (1981), combines the topics of romance with larger political issues.

Atwood's most canonical novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) was an instant success and bestselling book that changed the academia's focus from her poetry to her fiction. *The Handmaid's Tale* is Atwood's first speculative dystopian novel and one of the narratives that marked the dystopian turn in the 1980s fiction. Atwood's novelty was the use of a genre that up to that moment was considered masculine to explore its limits

and include feminist worries on sexual politics within a wider context of national politics issues and human rights (Moynlan 150). After *The Handmaid's Tale*, her fame and critical acclaim expanded beyond Canada and Atwood began to be a globally famous writer with both popular and critical praise. Nevertheless, readers would have to wait for eighteen years for her to make a new incursion in the dystopian field. The four novels that followed *The Handmaid's Tale* did not qualify as fantasy fiction: *Cat's Eye* (1988) focuses on a woman's struggle to come to terms with her past and to reconcile her role as an artist and a woman. *The Robber Bride* (1993) explores the nature of female friendship. *Alias Grace* (1996) is the fictionalization of Grace Marks' judicial process and an exploration of the uncertainty of any narrative in direct relationship with Grace's innocence or culpability. Finally, *The Blind Assassin* (2000) is a metafictional exercise that takes up "the illusory security of discovering the truth" (Ingersoll 96). In 2003, with the publication of the *MaddAddam* trilogy's first novel, *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood revisited the dystopian genre, but in contrast to *The Handmaid's Tale*, the novel contains new expanded concerns about the effects of science and technological developments on humans and nature. *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013) completed the trilogy. *The Heart Goes Last* (2015), *Hag-Seed* (2016) and *The Testaments* (2019) are Atwood's latest fiction books. She has been awarded more than one hundred and fifty recognitions from 1961 to 2020, such as two Governor General's Literary Awards (1966/1985), two Booker Prizes (2000/2019), and a Prince of Asturias Award for Letters (2006), together with more than thirty honorary degrees.

2. CORPUS OF ANALYSIS

The Handmaid's Tale (1985), *MaddAddam* (2013), and *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) are, within Atwood's extensive fictional oeuvre, the novels that integrate the corpus of analysis of this dissertation. *The Handmaid's Tale* is Atwood's more widely read and studied novel. The book, a speculative dystopian fiction, renders the story of Offred, a handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian theocracy founded after a coup d'état, and set in the former United States. A high rate of infertility and a distorted interpretation of the Bible were the arguments used by the founders of Gilead, the Sons of Jacob, to justify the handmaids' confinement and forced pregnancies. In *MaddAddam*, the third novel and epilogue of the homonymous trilogy, a group of humans and Crakers—born from biogenetic engineering—try to survive in a postapocalyptic climate changed Earth where dehumanized criminals—Painballers—and wild biocreated animals live as well. *The Heart Goes Last* shows how a young married couple, Charmaine and Stan, after trying unsuccessfully to overcome the effects of an economic crisis, agree to sign up for an apparently utopian program, the Positron Project. They settle to be life-long residents in exchange for a nice house and job—as free citizens and as prison inmates on alternate months. However, they soon discover that the Project's profitability depends on illegal activities, and that they have forfeited their future.

The choice of these three novels as corpus for the dissertation responds to several reasons. First, among Atwood's extended oeuvre, they are almost the only examples of the dystopian genre—a genre that was scarce in her early work but has become a favorite in her later fiction. Dystopian fiction is a genre that has an enormous potential as a cultural mirror of the society and context in which it develops. *The Handmaid's Tale*, *MaddAddam*, and *The Heart Goes Last* have been published in different decades—the

1980s, the 2000s, and the 2010s—before, during and after the turn of the millennium and from the privileged position of a committed author, well informed and able to recognize contemporary problems and incorporate them in her work. Secondly, the three novels share many common features and recurrent topics that are suitable for comparison, while emphasizing the change of mainstream ideology in Western societies over the last thirty years. Thirdly, all of them are novels of recognized literary quality and worldwide impact, with strong power and interpretative potential. In the selected corpus, implications about science, humanities, politics and power in relation to human identity seem to be questioning the status quo and warning about the necessity to be critical of it. The three books present characters deprived of any control over their future amidst totalitarian societies. They feature stories in which humans have lost their value as individuals; they even lose the ownership of their own bodies. First the oppressor is a dictatorial government—*The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Later on, political power is transferred to scientific corporations and those who are in charge—*MaddAddam* (2013)—whereas power belongs to the rampant soulless capitalism in *The Heart Goes Last* (2015). Furthermore, apart from their being well-designed novels, all of them are works of fiction with engaging and complex themes and styles that make them suitable for a multiplicity of interpretations. Certainly, these novels are a fundamental source for the delineation of Atwood's craft as a writer, and her evolution from her middle literary period, when she reached long-standing fame, to her later years, once she has become the seminal representative of Canadian literature in the world.

It should be added that the last novel written by Atwood so far—*The Testaments* (2019)—, even if labelled as dystopian fiction, is not included in this dissertation. Initially, I considered *The Testaments* a logical choice to form part of the corpus of this

dissertation, for it is the book that puts an end to *The Handmaid's Tale's* story. However, although the novel could be valuable as the more recent product of the famous writer, thematically it is less complex than her previous fiction. Engaging, easy reading, and with an ending that moves it into the grounds of the fairy tale, it lacks the necessary commitment and does not contain the indispensable material to enter the gender, political, and technological debate with the other novels of the corpus.

3. ANTECEDENTS, MAIN RESEARCH AIMS, AND STRUCTURE

Atwood's oeuvre has been the constant object of extensive academic interest from the beginning of her career to the present. Earlier criticism on her work was mainly focused on her poetry, her position within the Canadian literary tradition, and her worries around environmental issues (Wisker 5–7). However, after the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood's fiction became an object of great interest for scholars around the world, who started to approach her novels from new and trendy perspectives such as postmodernism, generic hybridity, ecocriticism, and postcolonialism. Her increasing popularity brought about the publication of many collective volumes on her fiction. *Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms*, published in 1988, centers on three main thematic subjects—capitalism, ecology, and violence—, and on several theoretical approaches—feminism, Atwood's rewriting of the Gothic novel, and politics and the relationship between power and responsibility (Van Spanckeren and Garden Castro). *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity New Critical Essays* includes analyses of Atwood's earlier poetry, short stories and novels up to *The Handmaid's Tale*. Gender issues, the narratological perspective, the construction of the authorial "I", and the incorporation of a revision of Atwood's earlier poetry from a postcolonial perspective, are the scholarly approaches in this monograph (Nicholson). *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* was published in 2000 to commemorate the author's sixtieth birthday, when Atwood was already an international celebrity and public persona rather than just a Canadian writer. The book is a homage to the author's condition of literary chronicler of her time, and a compilation of scholarly discussions on Atwood's recurrent topics over the years: gender, environmentalism, postcolonialism, genre theory, and myth (Nischik). A remarkable

critic of Atwood's work from the beginning of her career, Coral Ann Howells, is the editor of the *Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, published in 2006. This compilation of essays incorporates new perspectives, especially in the analysis of Atwood's second dystopian novel to date, *Oryx and Crake*, which is interpreted as a rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and encompassed in the terrain of cyborg identities/theories within the humanities/science debate. The monograph *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, published in 2007, is a consistent attempt to trace a parallel development between Atwood's writing and the historical progress of feminist theories (Tolan). Gina Wisker published a thorough evaluation of critical approaches to Atwood's fiction in 2012. Wisker's book is an overview of Atwood's fiction and its already traditional subjects, such as language and the construction of narratives, feminism, history, myth, and the dystopian genre. Moreover, it includes a chapter on *The Year of the Flood* (2009), the second book in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, which summarizes the novel's diverse critical responses, and how critics, scrutinizing Atwood's incursions in science fiction, have focused on issues of language, feminism, and irony. Likewise, *Critical Insights: Margaret Atwood*, edited by Jane Brooks Bouson, a notable critic of Atwood's work for many years, offers a vision on her fiction's critical contexts and readings, in which there is a visible shift on the emphasis on the critical reactions to her work: from feminism to ecofeminist concerns related to environmental decline and climate change. In this preliminary approach to Atwood's scholarly criticism, a number of independent articles published in international journals need to be mentioned because they add new perspectives to the miscellaneous bibliography of scholarly studies on Atwood. Recurrent in her fiction, environmental worries have not ceased to be considered especially after the publication of the *MaddAddam* trilogy (Bouson, "We're Using"; Harland), as well as the relationship between environmentalism and dystopias (Bone),

ecocritical readings (Changizi and Ghasemi), and ecofeminist approaches (Stein, “Surviving”; Rowland). The trilogy delves into the dangers and effects of human modification through science. Consequently, the relationship between the construction of human identity and gender in the Anthropocene era (Ciobanu), and the construction of the posthuman identity (Marks de Marques, “God”, “Children”, and “Human” have been tackled in the most recent research articles on *MaddAddam*. Moreover, the interest and impact of Margaret Atwood’s writing triggered the foundation of the Margaret Atwood Society, which publishes a journal since 1984—(*Margaret Atwood Studies Journal*)—exclusively centered on analyses of her work. In tune with the times, this association of scholars has a webpage and *Facebook* and *Twitter* accounts where passionate debates, news, and publications around the world on Atwood’s work are shared in real time. Furthermore, Atwood herself is very active in social media platforms. She gives her opinion about current news, enters debates on political and social issues, and answers her fans’ questions from her *Twitter* account.

The task of approaching the analysis of the works of a novelist that is not only venerated but also has been studied from many angles and perspectives is undoubtedly daring. Finally, after an extensive review of the literature on Atwood’s work (and specifically on the novels that form the corpus of this thesis) the idea that Atwood’s life-long literary project has demonstrated a pervasive interest in the ethical implications of social, gender, and environmental issues started to take form. In addition, I also realized that such implications were formally linked to the exploration of the limits of literary genres to adapt to new times and new issues. Furthermore, Atwood’s strong engagement with new technologies and means of communication called for the suitability of a paradigm that could take into account the influence all these elements have in the construction of our [post]human identity and ethics. Atwood’s dystopian novels—*The*

Handmaid's Tale, *MaddAddam*, and *The Heart Goes Last*—have never been analyzed, together in dialogue, from the perspective provided by the combined views of the construction of the posthuman subject in its interactions with science and technology, and the Anthropocene as a cultural field of enquiry. Atwood's dystopias are bleak portrayals of potential futures that try to warn her readers about relevant issues such as pollution, genetic engineering or the attack on human rights. The posthuman, as critical framework, is brought about by the confluence of posthumanism—philosophical critique of humanism and the exceptionality of a universal model of human—, and post-anthropocentrism—a critique of an understanding of the world with the human at its center (Braidotti and Hlavajova 1). The posthuman appears in a time when humanity needs to confront environmental degradation and the visibility of the human destructive impact upon the layers of the Earth—The Anthropocene—that has launched the birth of a new genre: Climatic Fiction. Furthermore, this dissertation contends that *The Handmaid's Tale*, even if exhaustively discussed, can no longer be understood in isolation. A dialogism between the canonical novel, its audiovisual interpretations, and Atwood's later dystopian fiction can be inferred in her novels' thematic evolution and the shift on the issues tackled. I firmly believe that Atwood's dystopian novels need to be critically evaluated together. It is, then, the purpose of this dissertation to discuss and trace the evolution of the author's ideology in the three novels of the corpus¹ always in connection with the historical moment in which the books were written.

Thus, the enquiry focuses on three main features present in the novels. First, the analysis poses the question of what it means to be human in societies that deprive their citizens of any right. Then, it discusses the representation of the posthuman subject and

¹ In the analysis of *MaddAddam*, some issues and topics are traced back to the two other novels in the trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, as this is deemed necessary to fully understand the characters' evolution and the development of the story.

the implication of living in the Anthropocene era—as a literary/theoretical tool that triggers the birth of a new genre, climatic fiction. Finally, the dissertation focuses on generic considerations to illustrate the structure of the novels as dystopian fictions and the evolution of the genre to adapt to the 21st Century. This leads to the eventual assessment of other ethical issues that are present in Atwood's novels: the social and ethical value of fiction, and the meaning and power of the act of writing. This is undertaken through close reading of the novels that comprise the corpus of this thesis, following a narratological methodology. In addition, her background as a feminist writer, and formal aspects and literary theories that have influenced Atwood's novels and professional trajectory are also considered.

This dissertation will consist of five chapters. The first chapter is a review of the main theories and concepts that shape the theoretical framework of the Posthuman, the consideration of the Anthropocene as the trigger of a literary genre—Cli-fi—and the notion of dystopia in the 21st Century. The analytical section includes three chapters, each of them focused on the scrutiny of the three novels that constitute the corpus of analysis. The novels are arranged chronologically to map diachronically the evolution in Atwood's writing and ideas. The last chapter is the conclusion, which brings together this dissertation's main assumptions.

Each interpretative chapter is divided into three sections, with the exception of the first chapter on *The Handmaid's Tale*, which includes a fourth section. The first subsection considers each novel's engagement with the effects of technology for the construction of the [post]human subject and how the [post]human is conceptualized. Key elements in the inquiry are the implications of living in technologically automatized societies where surveillance technologies control the movements of individuals who have become manageable data for the establishment. Also described are the representation of

the effects of biotechnological interventions and their gendered implications. Especially, the analysis pays close attention to the novels' representations of motherhood in its imbrication with technology and social class.

In the first two novels, the second section in the analytical chapters centers on how the posthumanist critical concerns find a way to dismantle anthropocentric notions of the human and defend the need for a closer relationship between humanity and the environment. Anthropocentric environmental destruction can have deep consequences and effects on humans' bodies, and trigger human extinction. Supported by the exemplification of the generic characteristics that define the cli-fi genre (the portrayal of the emotions, experiences, and effects of living in an environment affected by climate change), this analysis discusses the effects of climate change, first at the individual level, in *The Handmaid's Tale* and, then, in *MaddAddam*, as a collective threat that can lead to a "world without us." Nevertheless, the second section in the analytical chapter dedicated to *The Heart Goes Last* necessarily varies its focus and departs from ecological worries since there is not enough presence of Atwood's environmental concerns in the novel. Consequently, the second subsection in *The Heart Goes Last* expands the assessment of Atwood's renewed controversial topics within the field of the posthuman subject. First, it addresses how the implementation of emergency measures like restrictions of movement and extreme surveillance are justified by crises such as our actual COVID19 catastrophe, which can be followed by the enactment of disciplinary societies that compromise individual freedom. Then, the analysis tackles what the book discloses about biotechnological enhancements of human bodies, behavior manipulation through science, and the possible implications these issues have for the balance between the social threat and citizens' rights.

The third section in the three interpretative chapters of the novels centers on a generic approach that considers the novels as dystopias and looks for their characteristic dystopian elements. In a genre that is politically sensitive, the target for criticism takes us to the specific society and time when the novel was published. Thus, each of these subsections traces the thematic variations in the novels. By jettisoning certain subjects that are central in *The Handmaid's Tale*—religious extremism—, or in *MaddAddam*—environmental degradation—, and emphasizing others in *The Heart Goes Last*—biotechnological developments—Atwood shows the evolution of Western society's maladies and her own position and response to the changes. Additionally, the fourth subsection in the analytical chapter dedicated to *The Handmaid's Tale* holds a survey of the two audiovisual adaptations of the novel: Volker Schlöndorff's 1990 filmic version, and the 2017 Hulu series. The analysis maps the evolution in the representation of ecological worries and its effects from the original novel to the film and the series, and relates them to the diverse social and political contexts.

To conclude this introduction, I would like to emphasize that the consideration of Atwood's dystopian fiction as part of the consistent project of a whole life, which should be understood and traced in their dialogic relationship, is an opportunity to enter and expand critical discussions of the three novels. The theoretical framework provided by the Posthuman, and the generic considerations of the novels as dystopias and cli-fi may positively call attention to the role of literature and writers and their decisive contribution to the analysis and denunciation of the problems existing in the (Western) world.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. THE POSTHUMAN TURN

1.1. INTRODUCTION: THE POSTHUMAN/POSTHUMANISM

The last decades of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st Century inaugurate a historical moment in which human beings are immersed and interrelated by economic, medical, and IT networks. These changes in the way we live and relate call for new paradigms that start to call into question the notion of human, which used to be the center and basis of previous systems of thought. In other words, posthumanism has appeared on the horizon. As a philosophical, cultural, and critical framework, posthumanism intends to redefine the principles and the idea of what it means to be human. The meaning of the term, posthumanism, is often contradictory and contested, this is why there is no generally agreed definition of such terms as ‘posthumanism,’ ‘the posthuman,’ and even ‘posthumanist.’ As Francesca Ferrando explains, posthuman “has become an umbrella term to refer to a variety of different movements and schools of thought, including philosophical, cultural, and critical posthumanism” (“Posthumanism” 26). Or as Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini rightly state, the term “posthuman” ambiguously hovers “between noun and adjective, for expressions such as the cybernetic posthuman, the posthuman subject, posthuman bodies, the posthuman condition, posthuman culture, or posthuman society” (xiii). Furthermore, the posthuman is also a state beyond the human. For some scholars we are already posthumans (see Hayles *How We Became*), if we acknowledge that we are “prosthetic beings” who have incorporated technology and bioscience to expand our capacities in our everyday life: computers, mobile phones, eyeglasses, lenses, behavior-modifying chemical treatments, aesthetic

surgery, etc. For others—transhumanists—the posthuman is a hypothetical evolutionary step for the future while for others it is the object of study for posthumanism as a discourse—critical posthumanism.

Posthumanism was born as a political project in the Seventies trying to contest Eurocentric humanism (see Hassan), and turned into theoretical debate at the end of the 1990s—“fully enacted by feminist theorists . . . within the field of literary criticism” (Ferrando, “Posthumanism” 29). Feminist scholars saw an opportunity to destabilize patriarchy arising from the figure the posthuman and its first myth: the cyborg. Posthumanism evolved to philosophy in the early 2000s “enacting a thorough critique of humanism and anthropocentrism. And still, posthumanism refers not only to an academic critical position, but also to a perception of the human which is transhistorical” (Ferrando, “The Body” 19). The “posthuman debate” was widely disseminated through the writings of N. Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, Neil Badmington, and in Francis Fukujama’s book *Our Posthuman Future* (1999).

Hayles (*How We Became*) affirms that the posthuman is born at the moment we realize that we are basically information and data processors. In a gloomier way, Hayles also associates the posthuman with the ‘disembodiment’ of humanity even if, on the other hand, she recognizes that the merging of humans and technology has become something natural. Wolfe recognizes the factual immersion of human beings in both the natural and technological environment and how the latter launches the “prosthetic coevolution,” that is, the implementation of human nature with technical mechanisms (xv). Additionally, Stefan Herbrechter underlines the relationship between the posthuman and a view of world history that is no longer anthropocentric and combines the awareness of technocultural change and the vision of humanity as ideological, historical, and social constructs in the line of previous traditions of thought that have been highly critical with humanism

and the humanist tradition (8–15). Furthermore, views differ with regard to what constitutes posthumanism and the diverse critical stances critics adopt on it, from being celebrated as “the next frontier in critical and cultural theory [to being] shunned as the latest in a series of annoying ‘post’ fads” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman 2*).

1.2. BEFORE POSTHUMANISM: HUMANISM

Posthumanism is born with the general aim of challenging the dominant philosophical theory during the last 350 years in the Western world: the humanist thinking of the Enlightenment, which in turn had its roots in the Renaissance humanism from the late Middle Ages. Humanism advocated for the notion of a model human nature shared by all human beings. That is, humanism is an anthropocentric way of understanding life and reality that focuses on the human subject, leaving aside all living and non-living entities that do not fit in its defined category of human. Moreover, as Herbrechter underlines, not all human beings are included in the ‘category’ of human; humanism has been rightly criticized due to its “merely apparent universality and the underlying specificity of its (Western, liberal, bourgeois) [and male] subject” (46). And what is a human after all? The answer to this question that seems totally constrained and delimited by humanism is what posthumanism tries to contest.

The humanist ideal, in which man was the model and center of the creation and had a superlative status among all biological species, was initially formulated by Protagoras and recuperated by Descartes during the Renaissance (Braidotti, *The Posthuman 14*). Descartes claimed that reason and rational thought were intrinsic qualities of human beings, differentiating us from any non-human entities (Badmington, *Posthumanism 5*). According to humanism, man can attain perfection through reason,

located in the human mind and thus the main constituent of human subjectivity. This identification of reason with consciousness/subjectivity as the defining characteristic of humanness lays the emphasis on reason rather than the body and as a consequence humanism implies dualism—separation of body and mind—in the conceptualization of the human being (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 13–15). Moreover, Braidotti underlines the male eurocentrism of this model of human perfection in which any notion of difference or otherness means exclusion and discrimination. In other words, humanism has been a system of thought based not only on *anthropocentrism* but also on *androcentrism*.

David Roden, in his characterization of humanism as philosophy, distinguishes between humanism—which simply states the human distinctiveness from non-human creatures—, and anthropocentric humanism—which grants human beings a superlative status in relation to non-humans. In his own words: “If a philosophy lacks a philosophical anthropology, it cannot be humanist. If it does not allocate special status to humans, it is not anthropocentric” (11). He goes on to say that not all humanisms are anthropocentric “in the same way or to the same degree” (11). According to Roden there are moderate anthropocentric humanisms such as Aristotelian ethics—which attributes reason and morals only to humans but “allows that nonhuman living beings have goods corresponding to their nature” (12)—and on the other hand more radical anthropocentric humanisms Immanuel Kant’s “transcendental humanism” (12). Transcendental humanism claimed that “humans do not merely represent the world but actively organize it, endowing it with value, form or meaning” (12). While Aristotle saw politics or legislation as the field in which humans can develop their humanness, Kant’s transcendental humanism, faithful to the Enlightenment tenets, defends education and discipline as the means for humans “to become fully autonomous beings” (13). But

humanism started to be contested long before the birth of posthumanism by some ‘antihumanist’ or critical humanist thinkers.

1.3. CRITICAL HUMANISM

Humans are very mistaken in their presuming to be the motors of development and in confusing development with the progress of consciousness and civilization.
(Lyotard 99)

In the last decades of the 19th Century and contesting Kant’s radical anthropocentrism, Nietzsche ridiculed human beings’ hubris and the anthropocentric view of our world and history. Nietzsche’s nihilism questioned and was directed against “the pettiness of humanism inspired by Christian values and its self-inflicted state of godlessness” (Herbrechter 7). According to Nietzsche’s nihilism, we, humans, would be nothing more than clever animals. He advocated for the coming of an “‘overman’ humble enough to communicate with a ‘mosquito’, to learn from it . . . and powerful enough to overcome humanism’s narcissistic pathos” (2). Badmington traces back the theoretical ancestor of posthumanism to Marx’s and Engels’s materialism that triggered the “theoretical revolution, opening up a space for what would become posthumanism” (*Posthumanism* 5). Badmington explains how Marx’s and Engels’s materialism can also be contained in theoretical anti-humanism since it defends the idea that society and environment are the main factors in the formation and development of human consciousness, in contrast with Descartes’ idealism (4–7). Thus, subjectivity becomes the consequence of human beings’ circumstances, a construction instead of the origin and center of everything. Some years

later, Freud's theory of psychoanalysis also directly confronted Descartes' idealism and its fundamental notion of the centrality of human subjectivity based on reason by "proposing that human activity is governed in part by unconscious motives" (6). The concept of the unconscious shows a human mind that is not fully ruled by reason, and consequently men have unconscious desires that are out of their control. The debate against the humanist ideal was resumed and continued by other French thinkers during the second half of the 20th Century: Jacques Lacan, who developed Freud's ideas questioning human beings' central place in humanism, or Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault who affirmed that "the future will begin with the end of Man" (in Badmington, *Posthumanism* 7). Moreover, humanism has been criticized from many more anti-humanist perspectives. Feminist scholars, for instance, outlined that the model of man defended by humanism was a white European male, a universal pattern that did not leave space for women's subjectivities. Post-colonial theorists, defenders of cultural hybridity, rebelled against this white model of identity and cultural sameness that gives no voice to those who do not fit in it.

According to Pramod K. Nayar, the three major critiques against humanism or critical humanism have emerged in the late 20th Century from Foucauldian poststructuralism, feminism, and technoscience. The deconstruction of humanism would stem from two main arguments: there does not exist any human essence common to all human beings because "human nature is socially constructed" (11) and "knowledge cannot be grounded in the human subject and its cognitive processes because knowledge, like human nature, is socially constructed" (12). Nayar explains that the first major critique, poststructuralist antihumanism, traces back the construction of the human subject to the influence of social forces and power relations. Secondly, in the feminist critique of humanism, identity is "not self-contained but relational, enacted within

language and discourse, and enmeshed in power structures” (20). Nayar describes how some feminist critiques underline the effect of cultural practices and society on the creation of subjectivity, especially on the female body—the point of encounter of several cultural discourses—that force the creation of the female subject. Other feminist thinkers locate the subject and the creation of gender difference in language. Finally, technoscience and cyborg theories defend the idea that human beings have always been related to and imbricated with technology, “always cyborgs in this sense” (11–25). However, as Badmington affirms, it is in the last decades of the 20th Century when humanism is examined not only by critical theorists but by other popular cultural manifestations as well, “by literature, politics, cinema, anthropology . . . and technology. These attacks are connected, part of the circuit of posthumanism” (*Posthumanism* 9).

1.4. POSTHUMANISM

Posthumanism, as a concept, was born in the 1970s. It was Ihab Hassan, in his essay “Prometheus as Performer” who introduced the idea of posthumanism as the replacement for humanism:

We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism. The figure of Vitruvian Man, arms and legs defining the measure of things, so marvelously drawn by Leonardo, has broken through its enclosing circle and square, and spread across the cosmos. (843)

Posthumanism seems the logical development of the postmodern critiques against humanism with the aim of challenging its main postulate: that all human beings can be described in terms of an extemporal and cross-cultural shared core—a human essence or

nature present in every human being. But it was in the 1980s when posthumanism as a philosophical project started to focus more specifically on scientific and biotechnological developments and how they affect human nature, its definition and the not so clear-cut boundaries between human and machine (Heise 454–55), that is, on the ideological and physical changes in the human being: the implications of posthumanization.

Matthew Taylor defines posthumanism as a “transhistorical attempt to integrate the human into larger networks of being” (5). Taylor emphasizes the intended positive aspects of posthumanism, a goal of integration, that would mark the difference between posthumanism and antihumanism/critical humanism. Foucault’s early writings as well as Lyotard’s and Derrida’s philosophy lacked this integrationist aim with their deconstructive and negative critique (6). Moreover, as Rosi Braidotti usefully explains, posthumanism “marks the end of the opposition between humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives” (*The Posthuman* 37). Nevertheless, Taylor underlines the fact that this intended integration of the self into the world, which initially contrasts with the humanist self—defined in distinction and exclusion of the world—“sounds not ethically inclusive but disturbingly imperialist, as the world becomes only something to be colonized by our limitlessly possessive selves” (7–8). In other words, posthumanism entails the danger of being a form of hyper-humanism, a discourse of colonization and domination instead of a definite attempt of inclusion.

Hayles associates posthumanism, in a negative way, with the *disembodiment* of humanity. She is critical with the idea of human identity as informational patterns that transcend the bonds of materiality and are transferable from one container to another, implying overtones of human immortality. However, on the other hand, she recognizes that the merging of humans and technology has become something natural, and we—

humans—are already an intermediate step between human and posthuman: the cyborg. Hayles explains that a certain view of the posthuman subject, with its emphasis on cognition—movable and displaceable with the help of technology—, places the human body as something dispensable, a human possession rather than a constituent part of our selves. Consequently, some specific branches of posthumanism, by locating identity and self in cognition and giving it priority over the body, “continue the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it” (*How We Became* 5).

In this line of thought, Badmington points to the “humanist ghost” (“Theorizing” 15) inside posthumanism. He follows Jacques Derrida’s idea of deconstruction as “repetition in a certain way” (15). Then posthumanism would repeat humanism in a certain way, in its core, but with the aim to deconstruct anthropocentric thought, to question humanism and become “the working-through of humanist discourse” (22). Badmington claims that humanism has not been overcome, because “the glorious moment of Herculean victory cannot yet come, for humanism continues to raise its head” (11) inside posthumanism.

1.5. POPULAR POSTHUMANISM AND CRITICAL POSTHUMANISM

Posthumanism can be, a priori, broadly divided into two important frames: posthumanism as a “development in the nature of being itself,” (Weinstein and Colebrook 48) that is, an ontological condition in which many humans are already living and increasingly will “with chemically, surgically, technologically modified bodies and/or in close conjunction (networked) with machines and other organic forms” (Nayar 3). And, on the other hand, a new epistemology that tries to reconceptualize the human being after and against humanism (Nayar; Weinstein and Colebrook; Simon). Bart Simon classifies

these two main branches in the social and philosophical landscape surrounding the posthuman debate as “popular posthumanism”—ontology—and “critical posthumanism”—epistemology (2–4).

Popular posthumanism is usually identified with transhumanism—focused on biotechnological human enhancement and the possible trespassing of biological limits, with the result of something different from the human, first the transhuman and eventually the posthuman. This artificially driven human evolution is the main concern in the writings of Fukujama, and the opposite, a source of hope in the agenda of transhumanists like Bostrom. Fukujama sticks to the liberal humanist ideals and understands human nature as a “meaningful concept that defines our ethical dimension” (7). He gloomily reflects upon the possible negative far-reaching effects that neuropharmacy, the extension of human life expectancy avoiding aging, and the manipulation and optimization of human reproduction would bring about in our socio-political organization. He warns about the dangers of neuropharmacology as a way of controlling people’s behavior, the prolongation of human life as the source of undesired demographic and social changes that would increase the social gap, and genetic engineering as the probable cause behind the “disrupt[ion of] either the unity or the continuity of human nature, and thereby the human rights that are based on it” (172). Fukujama proposes regulation at an international level and the banning of techniques such as reproductive cloning. He also proposes restrictions towards enhancement, in clear contrast to therapy, in order to avoid a posthuman future in which society could be:

far more hierarchical and competitive than the one that currently exists, full of social conflict as a result. It could be one in which any notion of “shared humanity” is lost . . . it could be one in which the median person is living well into his or her second century, sitting in a nursing home hoping for an unattainable

death. Or it could be the kind of soft tyranny envisioned in *Brave New World*. (218).

The term transhumanism was first used in 1957 by Julian Huxley as a form of “evolutionary humanism . . . Man, remaining man, but transcending himself” (Tirosh-Samuels n.p.). Huxley advocated for the thoughtful use of eugenics, science and technology to improve the human race and create a new, more perfect transhuman future. But it was not until 1998 that the World Transhumanist Association (WTA) was founded by philosophers Nick Bostrom and David Pearce (Tirosh-Samuels n.p.). For transhumanists, our current bodily and cognitive form as humans represents only another step in the human evolutionary chain, and the direction and speed of this evolution can be implemented by the use of “psychopharmacology, antiaging therapies, neural interfaces, advanced information management tools, memory enhancing drugs, wearable computers, and cognitive techniques” (n. p.). Transhumanism is not purely a philosophy but a project that promotes the overcoming of ‘human limitations’ such as lifespan, intellectual capacity and body functionality (Bostrom 4–6). If transhumanism considers human nature as a work in process, the transhumanists would be those still human beings who do not hesitate to apply present and anticipated future technologies to defeat human limitations “imposed by our biological nature” (4), transcend them, and eventually give everybody the opportunity to become posthuman. Transhumanism includes as one of its premises “the well-being of all sentience, whether in artificial intellects, humans, and non-human animals” (12), a proposal apparently in line with the general aim of decentralizing man in the posthuman agenda. However, as Ferrando wisely underlines, transhumanism retains the Enlightenment characteristic faith on “rationality, progress and optimism” (“Posthumanism” 27) that, far from weakening the humanist ideal, enlarges it in time as a new “ultra-humanism” that still favors the primacy of certain privileged

humans over other human and non-human beings (27–28). This posthumanism as ultra-humanism that wants to generate “hyper- or super-humans” is for Colebrook nothing more than utopianism and a form of hyper-humanism because “all the features that mark the human, and that we would like to see erased in order to achieve the beyond-human or post-human, were already there in the pre-human” (“Who” 217–26). Furthermore, the “self-creating potentiality” behind transhumanism as a distinct mode of posthumanism is nothing more than “a sublimation of humanism,” the intensification of “the human quality par excellence: self-fabrication” and thus they conclude that “humanism has always been a form of posthumanism” (Weinstein and Colebrook XVII).

Critical posthumanism, or the posthuman as epistemology, would be a philosophical current that contests the humanist idea of the anthropocentrism of thinking and promotes the abandonment of the idea of human exceptionality. Gavin Rae explains that the distinction between transhumanism and (critical) posthumanism is that whereas the first “intensifies the binary oppositions of humanism by using more technology to overcome what is currently called the human” (65) the latter “entails a constant questioning of the binary oppositions upon which humanism and transhumanism depend” (65). However, the questioning of humanism does not involve its total overcoming. Rae applies Heidegger’s concept of trace, and explains that “overcoming never entails a complete liberation from that which it overcomes” (55), thus posthumanism still has traces of humanism within itself. Rae defines posthumanism using a formula: posthumanism = poststructuralist theory + the history of technology (68). Badmington coincides with Rae and recognizes the influence of Derrida’s poststructuralism on posthumanism. While acknowledging the crisis in humanism, Derrida pointed up the difficulty of a total breakdown with it because “systems are always self-contradictory, forever deconstructing themselves *from within*” (in Badmington, “Theorizing” 19). Rae

names Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1984) and Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) as the most influential texts in the birth of posthumanism (67).

A Cyborg Manifesto, originally published in 1984, is the title of Donna Haraway's most influential essay, which proposes the cyborg—the “truly creature of the post: post-gender, post-humanist, post-modern, post-familiar [and] post-natural” (in Badmington, *Posthumanism* 86)—as the living embodiment of the crisis of humanism. The cyborg is a “hybrid of machine and organism [and] . . . condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* 7). Paradoxically Haraway, whose cyborg's myth represents a seminal contribution to the theorization of posthumanism, in her most recent writings rejects the idea of being a posthumanist. Ursula K. Heise explains and contextualizes Haraway's “shift from cyborgs to ‘companion species’” (455) in the specific framework of a posthuman imaginary that initially problematized the boundaries between human and machine, and after new bioscientific discoveries—such as cloning (1996) and the mapping of the human genome (2003)—has displaced its central problematic to the boundaries between human and animal (455). Haraway outlines the artificiality of the construction of the human subject when she claims that “We Have Never Been Humans” (*Species* 1), and rejects the idea of being posthuman, the ‘next step’ after the human: “I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind. Queer messmates in mortal play, indeed” (19). Supported by the new advances in the field of biology, she underlines the fact that the human cannot be exceptional and anthropocentrism is illusory since, even at a cellular level, human genomes comprise only ten percent in the composition of the human body. We need the interpenetration and help of other “non-human” genomes like bacteria and fungi to be alive: “to be one is always to *become with many*” (3, italics in the

original). Haraway, who in her earlier writings explored the figure of the cyborg as a being “of imagined possibility and creature of fierce and ordinary reality” (4), focuses her most recent lectures and writings on the issue of humanity at the edge of extinction, not as a metaphor but as real possibility, and calls for self-critique and assumption of human responsibility in the unleashing and fueling of the Earth’s destruction.

Like Haraway, Braidotti emphasizes the importance of ecology, environmentalism and “the sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others” (*The Posthuman* 47). She departs from a posthumanist position that draws on anti-humanist philosophies of subjectivity, feminism, and anticolonialism, and moves further into her own version of critical posthumanism. In her view, the posthuman subject is not built in language, like the deconstructivist subject but “embodied and embedded” (51). Her posthuman subject, deeply post-anthropocentric, relies on the Spinozian idea of the unity of all living matter and is firmly grounded on the new scientific discoveries about the self-organizing structure of any living matter. Her post-anthropocentrism defends and understands life as the unalienable right of every creature, not only of the human being (50–60). She has adopted monism as a frame of reference to construct a posthuman subject that would imply “open-ended, interrelational, multi-sexed and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others . . . to acquire a planetary dimension” (89).

How We Became Posthuman (1999), undoubtedly a seminal work in the development of theoretical posthumanism, begins by outlining Hayles’s rejection of the radical separation between mind and body that involves the possibility of downloading any human consciousness into a machine (*How We Became* 1). This possibility illustrates a kind of posthumanism—more related to transhumanism—that for Hayles is not anti-anthropocentric at all but rather an ultra-humanism. Hayles tries to contest the separation

between body/materiality and thought/information already present in humanism and still subject in what she calls the ‘cybernetic posthuman’ (12). Hayles claims that the human being is intimately connected to and formed from language and the posthuman is “a literary phenomenon” (247). In literary representations of the posthuman, subjectivity is associated with “multiple coding levels,” suggesting “the need for different models of Signification, ones that will recognize this distinctive feature of neurolinguistic and computer language structure” (*How We Became* 279). Thus, Hayles’s strand of posthumanism would be based on language rather than on thinking as other theoreticians like Wolfe propose.

Wolfe, another central theorist in the field of posthumanism, places philosophical/critical posthumanism as exactly the opposite of transhumanism. He claims that posthumanism “isn’t posthuman at all—in the sense of being ‘after’ human embodiment has been transcended—but is only posthumanist, in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism itself” (Wolfe XV). Wolfe asserts that posthumanism, considered as something that chronologically comes “after” the human, would reinforce the humanist notion of history. Moreover, a real reconfiguration of the concept of the human should imply a new vision of history and culture no longer based on “a humanist narrative of historical change” (XIV). Wolfe insists that posthumanism should be based on thinking. Posthumanism is not only about “the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological or technological coordinates . . . [but also] about how thinking confronts that thematic, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges” (XVI). He also rejects human exceptionalism based on speciesism—the division and opposition between human and animal usually being the root and justification for other binary oppositions. Rather than a denial of the human, Wolfe claims for a more specific description of it, not based on

consciousness, reason and speciesism. Wolfe does not share the idea of “popular” posthumanism associated to “triumphant disembodiment,” but he recognizes the factual immersion of human beings in both the natural and technological environment, and how the latter launches what he calls “the prosthetic coevolution,” that is, the implementation of human nature with technical mechanisms. He proposes a recontextualization of us as human animals but also “acknowledging that [human] is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically ‘not-human’ and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is” (XXV).

Herbrechter, a great advocate of the term “critical” posthumanism, underlines the relationship between posthumanism and a view of world history that is no longer anthropocentric and combines the awareness of the undeniable nature of techno-cultural change and the vision of humanity as ideological, historical and social constructs. Herbrechter locates posthumanism—critical, philosophical—in the line of previous traditions of thought that have been deeply critical with humanism and the humanist tradition. He identifies and differentiates “the posthuman”—uncritical, popularly related to transhumanism and science fiction—as the inheritor of hybridized real and imagined new possibilities, like Haraway’s cyborg, which aims to transcend human limits (8–22). Herbrechter also signals how posthumanist awareness of the influence of technology and science would call for an interdisciplinary approach in the definition of what it means to be human in the 21st Century. Such approach would imply an alliance between sciences and humanities, that is, the birth of the “posthumanities,” that could eventually overcome the traditional separation between these “two cultures” (Snow 1). However, Herbrechter ponders about how the transition from analogic or text-based humanities to digital humanities or posthumanities, grounded on data and information, would affect and compromise the future of humanities itself (179–94).

1.6. POSTHUMAN ETHICS

Posthumanism is both about the evolution of human beings in combination with technology and science and the intended ending of humanism with its narcissistic belief in human superiority, but it is also about how we should live in this new state of things. It is about the empowerment of all those previously marginalized and weak that were outside the social discourse, and about the displacement of patriarchy. Furthermore, it is about how we exploit the environment and other human and non-human beings, it is about the future of humanity but it is also about how human behavior—right and wrong—can affect our future.

As Daryl J. Wennemann wisely affirms: “since human beings are the only beings that are capable of moral reflection, as far as we know, the traditional model of the moral community has historically been anthropocentric” (*Posthuman Personhood* 8). In other words, the human being has been the only origin and main goal for any moral or ethical reflection. The essential human nature, shared by all humans according to humanism, is, for Fukujama, one of the main conditions for the existence of a human moral dimension (7); he fears the possible end of humanism for the danger of losing any ethical drive implying responsibility towards less privileged human beings, let alone non-human beings. Moreover, Roden also relates moral thinking to human consciousness when he refers to Dominique Janicaud and affirms that the thought of some “totally inhuman” successor for the human being is ethically irrelevant for us, because “it is either contaminated by our understanding of human subjectivity or it is utterly inconceivable and, thus, ethically irrelevant” (Roden 166). As Janicaud himself states, “there is inhumanity only for man and in reference to the idea that he constructs of his own

humanity. . . even though we speak of a 'totally inhuman reality,' the adverb 'totally' does not manage to erase the reference to the human" (29). Thus, we could not talk about any posthuman ethics since our point of departure is human, and our understanding of the posthuman is always in direct relationship to our own humanity.

Wennemann also traces ethics back to humanist ideals. He defines the traditional human being not only as a specific biological creature, but as a moral creature, main and sole inhabitant of the "moral community" (*Posthuman Personhood* v). He proposes the breakdown of old frontiers of traditional ethical concepts to make possible the incorporation of new citizens into the moral community: technically and genetically altered human beings and all kinds of non-human beings such as robots, computers, animals and aliens if they exist. He argues that the "traditional concept of personhood may apply to this new situation and provide some moral orientation as we enter the posthuman age" (viii). He refers to "sentientists" and the idea that sensation, instead of rationality, should be the new element used to define a person or member of the moral community. This would open the door for sentient non-human animals first and, later on, if following more radical proposals like those defended by deep ecologists, for all the natural world (4–9). He argues that, when confronting the apparent inevitability of the posthuman age, with its biotechnological transformation of human nature, we have to make a moral choice, "what we should resist and we should respect" (12). According to Wennemann, this ethical election will be based on who or what we consider to be a person, the definition of posthuman personhood, which should be as inclusive as to incorporate new inhabitants in a new moral community in the posthuman age.

The importance of embodiment for subjectivity is also a central issue for ethics and its implications when technology starts modifying the body. Christina Bieber-Lake generically relates ethics with responsibility on the decisions that affect not only the

individual but also the other. She locates her ethical worries in the transformation of the human body, in the domain of genetic engineering and reproduction, the more current factor of human modification already in our present time. What is at stake is not genetic engineering itself but “the attitude with which the interventions are carried out” (Bieber-Lake 6). She logically worries about a posthuman future—probably more related to transhumanist ideals—in which good life is related to science and to technological solutions to everything, and the body becomes a manipulated prosthetic accessory in a consumer society. She justifiably claims that “ethics in a consumer society shifts away from responsibility to others to the realm of self-fulfillment . . . [and] clearly tends toward a utilitarian ethic, an ethic that permits other beings to be used—consumed—when it can be proven to serve the individual or the greater good” (18).

Sherryl Vint, in the line of linking ethical worries in the posthuman age with the technical manipulation of the body, defends the importance of embodiment to subjectivity in contrast to humanist and transhumanist dualisms. She argues that this dualism has triggered in the past the classification of our material world as resource in the service of the mind as agent, and has justified the exploitation both of the material world and of all those humans and non-humans coded as outside human identity. She acknowledges certain positive aspects in the humanist ideal of recognizing undeniable rights and freedom to all human beings, but underlines the negative aspects such as “false universalism, abstraction from body, and distanced relation to nature” (6–11). Vint explains that these negative humanist characteristics still survive in many versions of the posthuman and argues for a version of the posthuman in which embodiment becomes central “if we are to return ethical responsibility and collectivity to our concept of the self” (16). She maintains that “embodiment should factor in our ethics” (186). Moreover, Vint adequately links any formulation of ethics to ideology—the recognition that any

speech and social construction of value is not neutral but partial and ideological. Furthermore, her notion of “embodied ethics” (182) would imply giving the same value to all new kinds of bodies and the development of an “ethically responsible model of embodied posthuman subjectivity which enlarges rather than decreases the range of bodies and subjects that matter. . . to being more rather than less human in our next iteration” (189).

Patricia MacCormack coincides with Vint in the affirmation that body and mind are inseparable parts of the subject; thus, posthuman ethics does not make any distinction between body and thought—matter and discourse. She links her ethical formulations to Spinoza’s ethics that defined the entire world as interconnected, that there is “no body without mind, no individuality without connection . . . and no thought or theory without materiality” (*Posthuman Ethics* 4). She locates posthuman ethics, ideologically charged like in Vint’s formulation, within the space of political movements defending those voices that have been silenced by liberal humanism, such as feminism, queer theory and animal rights movements—the non-human. The human needs to be deconstructed in order to create an “ethics of the inevitable shared living with non-humans” (57). Posthuman ethics, according to MacCormack, is also ahuman in the sense that it denies any privilege to humanity and rejects the use of non-humans. It opens the path for the possibility of extinction as ethical action, that is, “an openness to the very viability of the continuation of what was formerly called the human—the cessation of the reproduction of human life” (140). Voluntary extinction would be the “most powerful activism” (142). If “human speech makes the world according to the human . . . silencing human speech opens a harmonious cacophony of polyvocalities imperceptible to human understanding” (144). MacCormack defends the seriousness of human extinction as a rightful option and as a definite act of love (148). Extinction would be the ultimate ethical election, the end of the

exploitation of non-humans and the environment, and the eventual recognition of human non-superiority over other bodies and materialities. She maintains that there will be a future even with human extinction, and the future is the real goal of posthumanism.

Even though MacCormack's ethical tenets can be endorsed by some posthuman thinkers, her proposal of voluntary self-extinction would become, in my opinion, a perpetuation of the opposition between humans/non-humans in which, this time, humans are forced to deny their natural instincts of survival. The "great chain of being" would not be enlarged and broken by a horizontal arrangement but turned upside down. The surveys carried out above would signal other possible and perhaps more reasonable paths for the formulation of a version of posthuman ethics with more integrational aims. Posthuman ethics should reject any discourse of domination and the predominance of any "critter" over the other while defending that the notion of personhood should be enlarged to give room to any 'sentience.' Ethical thinking, which should guide human behavior, is necessarily a human enterprise—as some critics such as Wennemann, Roden or Janicaud defend—that, from my point of view, cannot leave the human future aside. Even though voluntary extinction seems a priori a doubtful project to be enrolled by all the humanity, apocalypse and extinction have influenced and appear as frequent motifs in dystopian narratives written in the last decades of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st Century. The work of the scholars mentioned above within the label of critical posthumanism—and many others who cannot be referred to due to space limitations—has substantially contributed to questioning western humanism with its dualism body/mind and how this epistemological shift is also reflected in popular culture and literature

1.7. POSTHUMANISM AND LITERATURE

Badmington narrates how, in the second half of the 20th Century, science-fiction novels and Hollywood films developed stories about the confrontation between human and inhuman or non-human others. Even if geographically and presumably culturally disconnected from French antihumanist philosophers, science fiction reflected the crisis of humanism only with a very different approach: the French intellectuals celebrated the end of humanism whereas science fiction or popular culture defended it (Badmington, *Posthumanism* 7–8). The crisis of the human subject proved to have permeated western society and popular culture manifestations, specially science fiction and fantasy literature. The cyborg—both an omnipresent figure in science fiction and an emblematic figure in posthuman theorization thanks to Haraway's influential *A Cyborg Manifesto*—is particularly indicative of how the “boundary between theory and fiction has been breached” and “the crisis in humanism is happening everywhere” (*Posthumanism* 8). The cyborg appears in contemporary science fiction but also belongs to the fields of science and technology, blurring the limits between them. The future is the real goal of posthumanism, as MacCormack affirms (*Posthuman Ethics* 141), and posthuman ethics try to define how ‘we’ (still humans, cyborgs, transhumans or posthuman beings?) should behave after being knocked off the pedestal upon which humanism lifted us. Traditionally, fantasy literature has the power of placing us “within a world outside [our] current modes of knowledge ... outside of prescribed, anthropocentric construction of knowledge and into new, unfiltered modes of experience and knowledge” (Baratta 5). Fantasy literature, even though undeniably influenced by ideology, frequently mirrors contemporary social reality and projects readers into secondary worlds where they can reflect on their own time and culture. Although formerly posthuman concerns about the entanglement between humans, technology, biotechnology, and environmentalism were mainly related to the science fiction genre, nowadays ‘posthuman’ worries can be found

in the writings of many authors who a priori were not considered to be science fiction writers. Furthermore, in what Heise calls the posthuman turn in American contemporary literature and film, she distinguishes three stages in the domain of science fiction and its themes: the “Alien Moment” from the 1950s to the 1970s, “The Cyborg Moment” from the 1980s to the 1990s, and finally “The Animal Moment” from the later 1990s to the 2000s (455–56). This evolution in the subjects of the genre seems to parallel the evolution in posthumanist thinking and goes hand in hand with scientific discoveries. Therefore, it turns out that ‘The Animal Moment’ is contemporary with Haraway’s shift from the cyborg to companion species and, like Haraway, remarks the interconnection between the human self and non-human others. Moreover, the 2000s is the time of the introduction of ecology and environmentalism as “source of inspiration for contemporary re-configurations of critical posthumanism” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 47). With the introduction of environmentalism as a key feature in the theorization of critical posthumanism, Braidotti contextualizes posthuman theory in Crutzen’s biogenetic age of the Anthropocene—this period in which humans are disturbing all life and the Earth’s balance. She claims that we should question the basic beliefs of “our interaction with both human and non-human agents on a planetary scale” (5–6). Humans and non-humans are all in the same boat: “we are all compost, not posthuman. The boundary that is the Anthropocene/Capitalocene means many things, including that immense irreversible destruction is really in train” (Haraway, “Staying with the Trouble” n.p.).

2. THE ANTHROPOCENE

The detrimental effects and changes that human activities have had upon the Earth since the late 18th Century were forthwith noticed by Vladimir Verdnadsky and included in his book *The Biosphere*, published in 1926. He relied on both Darwinist and ecological approaches to define life in general as a geological force that can change the Earth's climate and form landscapes. *The Biosphere* was one of the founding texts that introduced the concept of what is currently known as the Gaia theory² (in Dukes 2). More recently, in the year 2000, Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen, in this line of taking into consideration the (negative) human influence upon the Earth, claimed that our contemporary biogenetic age should be named the Anthropocene because "human activity has so altered the history of the Earth that it has become necessary to declare a new epoch to signify this impact" (Trexler 2). With the change of millennium, the Anthropocene era is starting to be recognized in all cultural fields. This irreversible degeneration of the Earth system generates "an undeniable sense of tragedy, urgency, or perhaps more often: panic . . . [and] anthropobia" (Robbins and Moore 8), that is, fear of people or more specifically fear of human actions in relation to the environment. Moreover, the Anthropocene is, from the very beginning, intrinsically intertwined with the threat of the Apocalypse, since the impact made on nature by human actions could cause the end of life as we have known it. Technically, the Anthropocene is not accepted

² Gaia theory proposes "that the biosphere and the physical components of the Earth (atmosphere, cryosphere, hydrosphere and lithosphere) are closely integrated to form a complex interacting system that maintains the climatic and biogeochemical conditions on Earth in a preferred homeostasis. Originally proposed by James Lovelock as the earth feedback hypothesis, it was named the Gaia Hypothesis after the Greek supreme goddess of Earth. The hypothesis is frequently described as viewing the Earth as a single organism. Lovelock and other supporters of the idea now call it Gaia theory, regarding it as a scientific theory and not mere hypothesis, since they believe it has passed predictive tests" (Lovelock n.p.).

as a geological period's name by the earth sciences and it entered the Oxford English Dictionary only in the year 2014—almost 15 years after its first use by Paul J. Crutzen (Macfarlane n.p.). Even if it is still an “unofficial” term, the Anthropocene is the source of an extraordinary cultural activity engaging not only the humanities but also many other disciplines. As Diletta Cristofaro and Daniel Cordle explain, the Anthropocene

involves physical processes, geological change, the history of our species upon the planet, how we organize ourselves in the light of our growing consciousness of the role we play in shaping the planet, and—crucially—how we construct narratives to make sense of all this, the Anthropocene is a fertile site for projects in both the Humanities and the Sciences. (n.p.)

But even if there is a general agreement about the fact that human activity has indeed deteriorated the biosphere, the Anthropocene is not the only candidate name suggested to designate this period. There is a certain controversy about the term itself—Anthropocene—and about whether it should be considered a new geological era—maybe the last one in an Earth inhabited by humans—or simply a border stage, that is, a frontier marking the change between the Holocene and the following unnamed epoch (Haraway, “Anthropocene” 160; Dillon 16. A great deal of criticism against the use of the term Anthropocene comes from the central role that the word *Anthropos*, that is, human being, still plays in its root. The Anthropocene, in a certain way, would pay homage to the principal agent of the possible destruction of the Earth. By means of naming this period after *Anthropos*, human beings would still remain in a higher position than nature and non-humans and, for better or worse, signaled as the unique origin and cause of the Anthropocene. However, humanity is not the only factor/agent and not all human beings are involved to the same degree in the destruction of nature (Haraway, “Anthropocene” 160). Haraway acknowledges the need for more than one name to encapsulate the

ingredients that have contributed to and determined the Anthropocene. She defends the use of two other names: Plantationocene—collectively coined by a group of anthropologists in the year 2014—and Capitalocene—according to Haraway, coined by Andreas Malm and Jason Moore (160). The Plantationocene is named after the plantation/farming extractive system that originated the massive exploitation of farmlands, and Capitalocene points to the capitalist system, both of them key triggers and catalysts behind human modification of nature. Bruno Latour coincides with Haraway in that not all human beings bear the same amount of responsibility in the origin of the Anthropocene and affirms that if any historical period or region has to be blamed, the most accurate name for this new geohistorical period would be “Capitalocene” (“Anthropocene and the Destruction” 10).

Clive Hamilton explains that the use of the term Anthropocene should be private for describing the changes and effects in the Earth as a system, that is: “the Earth taken as a whole in constant state of movement driven by interconnected cycles and forces ... a single, dynamic, integrated system, and not a collection of ecosystems” (“Anthropocene as Rupture” 94). In this wider context, the Anthropocene would not begin when human actions start to affect the earth’s ecosystems but when humans “play a significant role in shaping the Earth ... [and] the functioning of the Earth System” (Hamilton, “Getting the Anthropocene so Wrong” 97–98). Hamilton claims that the general use of the term Anthropocene in the social sciences and humanities to describe the impact of human actions on the Earth—where the ‘Earth’ concept and connotations are not clearly delimited—is the origin of some confusion. This is why he proposes the use of a different term: “the Technocene” (“Anthropocene as Rupture” 103), which refers to the effect that human technology has had upon organic and non-organic life.

There seems to be a general agreement in the scientific community that the world after the Anthropocene will not be the same. In Haraway's words, "Anthropocene is about the destruction of places and times of refuge for people and other critters" ("Anthropocene" 160). Yet, for her, it is not a new geological period but a transition, a border dividing an Earth unspoiled by human beings and that which comes after, still unknown but surely not the same. Haraway proposes a new name, "The Chthulucene" for "this era". The Chthulucene would summarize "past, present, and to come" (161). The Chthulucene would be:

a figure for sympoiesis, symbiogenesis, to develop through time we need each other in symbiosis . . . we are all lichens now. Infection is necessary to complexity. We have never been individuals from anatomical, physiological, evolutionary, philosophical, economic, developmental . . . I don't care what perspective: we are all lichens. (Haraway, "Staying with the Trouble" n.p.)

Haraway retakes the scientific argument of biological interdependence in the Gaia hypothesis to deconstruct the central role of humanity in previous systems of thought based on the premise of human narcissism and self-centeredness. The argument of human exceptionalism would have always been a fantasy. The human kingdom was already scientifically challenged in the past through Copernicus and his removal of the Earth, "man's home world, from the center of the cosmos" (Haraway, *Species* 11). Later on, it was contested through Darwin and his evolutionary theory that put human beings "firmly in the world of other critters" (11), and through Sigmund Freud who "posited an unconscious that undid the primacy of conscious processes, including the reason that comforted Man with his unique excellence" (12). Eventually and more recently, through the cyborg which "unfolds organic and technological flesh" (12). The Chthulucene then would put men at the same level as all other non-human 'critters,' all of them included in

a sympoietic system, evolving and changing, part of the process but never in isolation. Haraway calls for action, to “collect up the trash of Anthropocene” and collaboratively all work together to build a future, “something that might possibly have a chance of ongoing” (“Staying with the Trouble” n.p.). Moreover, Haraway outlines the necessity to abandon the human privileged position as Earth’s tyrannical “owners” and make room for other creatures’ needs (“Anthropocene” 161).

2.1. THE ANTHROPOCENE AND TIME/HISTORY

Temporality and temporal scope are inextricably entangled with the concept of the Anthropocene. Whether a transitional period or a new epoch, the Anthropocene is born as the visible consequence of our past and evolution: our technological, biological and social development. Therefore, human history should be inseparably linked to the very existence of the Anthropocene and would be a critical approach also necessarily involved in its understanding and analysis. Nowadays, we are affected by worrisome factual events which show fleeting glimpses of the reality of its existence: changes in the climate, so-called “natural disasters,” and the extinction of some species confirm that the world is no longer the same. However, the outcome of the Anthropocene is generally displaced into the very distant future. Furthermore, while the past of the Anthropocene and its present have human and comprehensible temporal scales, its future almost escapes from our human—and so limited—understanding of time when we are confronted with the vastness of geological time. Trying to get across and promote understanding of the threat that human actions involve for their own survival, in 1947 some atomic scientists created the Doomsday Clock to represent the age of the Earth and “the perils facing humanity from nuclear weapons” (Dukes 1). They reduced millions of years to a more

comprehensible scale for human beings: a clock dial. In this clock, the final bell—twelve o'clock—symbolizes the end of the world, the apocalypse. In 2007, after incorporating new and novel ingredients to the equation such as “new developments in the life sciences and nanotechnology, and the threat of climate change” (1), the clock was advanced to five minutes before the end. At the moment of writing this section of my thesis—2018—it is two minutes to midnight (Mecklin n.p.). The threat of global warming—the most visible manifestation of the changes brought about by the Anthropocene—is considered at the same level as the nuclear threat in the years immediately following WWII, marked by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki explosions. Dukes claims that the Anthropocene, as caused by humans, has its origins in human history, and signals the historical period going from the beginning of the industrial revolution onwards as the setting for the “fundamental narrative concerning the Anthropocene” (X). He proposes the change from a history centered on and around humans, that is, an “anthropocentric history,” to an “anthropocenic approach . . . which would place the study of the past together with the human, social and natural sciences in a pandisciplinary amalgam” (XI). All human scientific and cultural expressions are and should be necessarily involved in defining the Anthropocene.

Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty also calls for a conversation between disciplines to approach the historical understanding of the Anthropocene. Moreover, in his essay “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” he argues that “anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history” (201). He explains that the transformation of human beings, who have always been ‘biological agents’—interacting with and affecting the environment and geography—, into ‘geological agents’—with an impact on planet Earth on a geological scale—makes impossible the separation between human history and natural history (204–

11). He claims that even the history of “the anthropogenic factors contributing to global warming” (216) is not only the history of western capitalism and the rise of industrialization, but also the history of humans as a species, a combination that “stretches, in quite fundamental ways, the very idea of historical understanding” (220). Consequently, human history would only be a brief period in comparison to natural history and always inseparably linked to the latter and to the history of non-humans. This fusion implies the union of nature and culture and a rupture with “the dominant way in which we have conceptualized ourselves since the Enlightenment” (Emmett and Lekan 7).

Beyond history, narratives trying to make sense of and represent the world have always mediated the relationship between human beings and their environment. Formerly, primitive human beings worshipped natural elements and situated themselves at a lower level than nature. Later on, the emergence of religious grand narratives changed the ‘power relationship’ between men and nature by introducing the idea that man “could, or even should, dominate nature” (Dukes 1). In other words, according to Thacker, Western culture has always relied on ‘interpretive frameworks’ that still survive in our contemporary age under different forms. Thus, classical Greek Myth appears now transformed into “computer generated films and merchandise,” religion is “diffused into political ideology and the fanaticism of religious consumerism,” and existentialism has been “repurposed into self-help and the therapeutics of consumerism” (11–12). However, the frightening possibility brought about by the Anthropocene, of a “world-without-us” makes these classical anthropocentric approaches no longer adequate.

Another historian, Timothy J. LeCain, expands and discovers the challenging message—a New Humanism—that Chakrabarty launches by means of joining human history and natural history in his understanding of the Anthropocene: that is, the union of

nature and culture. LeCain sees Chakrabarty's thesis as a "Great Ontological Collapse", and a new argument against the modern division between human beings and the material world, in which humans were always subjects, never objects (17). Global warming and the Anthropocene would produce a new understanding of human ontology in which humans are totally bound to the Earth: human and nature ontologies are the same. LeCain notices that this inseparability of materiality and culture also plays a key role in the new ways of thinking and cultural approaches such as "environmental history, Posthuman thinkers and Neo Materialism" (18).

2.2. BEFORE THE ANTHROPOCENE: ENVIRONMENTALISM AND ECOCRITICISM

The undermining of anthropocentric philosophical approaches and the concerns for the responsibility of human actions upon the Earth were already at the core of environmentalism, which emerged long before the general consciousness of living in the Anthropocene era. Environmental concerns started to be widely disseminated already in the 1960s with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), an environmental science book that is generally considered the origin of modern environmentalism (Garrard 1). Greg Garrard emphasizes the inherent relationship between the birth of environmentalism and literature since "A Fable for Tomorrow"—the first chapter in Carson's book—is written as a fairy tale and "relies on the literary genres of pastoral and apocalypse" (2). These first environmental worries trigger the birth of ecocriticism as an "avowedly political mode of analysis" (3) that studies "the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (5). Ecocriticism is not an immovable approach but a "transformative

discourse” (7) in relation to the social context, with common and characteristic thematic concerns.

In his theoretical proposal, Garrard distinguishes between “Environmentalism”—a political-pragmatic position—and “Deep Ecology”—a philosophical-spiritual position. Whereas Environmentalists are concerned about environmental issues but their priority is still the maintenance and improvement of Western standards of living, deep ecologists defend more ‘Arcadian’—as more simple, rural and preindustrial—views that involve de-urbanization, long-term population reduction and low-technology solutions. Deep ecologists do not give more value to human life than to non-human entities and this is why they blame anthropocentric philosophies as the origin of anti-ecological behavior and methods that have altered our environment (18–23). This deep ecological rhetoric is the most widely adopted one, both explicitly and implicitly, by ecocriticism, which aims to overcome anthropocentrism and thus favors narratives on “wilderness experiences, or apocalyptic threats, or Native American ways of life, . . . supposed to provide the impetus or the example by which individuals come to an authentic selfhood orientated toward right environmental action” (176). In contrast, Garrard proposes that the future of ecocriticism should be:

attuned to environmental justice, but not dismissive of the claims of commerce and technology; shaped by knowledge of long-term environmental problems, but wary of apocalypticism; informed by artistic as well as scientific ecological insight; and committed to the preservation of the biological diversity of the planet for all its inhabitants. (182)

Garrard’s vision of ecocriticism is very suspicious of Apocalypse narratives. Dramatic Apocalypse stories pretend to stimulate, influence and convince people but sometimes entail the danger of arising polarization, dismissal and even the risk to provoke

the same apocalyptic denouement they are trying to avoid (105). The ecocriticism for the future proposed by Garrard should consider both human and non-human inhabitants of the Earth and would try to rebuild the link between human thought and cultural manifestations—seen through the prism of ecocriticism—and human biology and nature. In other words, it would be an ecocriticism that could be used as a form of textual analysis without reinforcing nature/culture and human/non-human dualisms.

Furthermore, according to Glenn Love, ecology's most important message should be that "everything is connected to everything else" (164). He also defends and focuses on the inseparable relationship between human biology and human consciousness while aiming to deconstruct the poststructuralist idea of "human thought and behavior as formed by culture independent of biology" (163). Love relies on evolutionary Darwinian Theory to affirm that ecology and biology are inextricably linked to all our cultural and social manifestations: history, literature, economics, art, and even to our aesthetic preferences. Focusing on literary criticism, he argues for the necessity of ecocriticism as the unavoidable approach to understand literary works made on the Earth, i.e., in our context. Whether our environment may be or may be not an explicit part of any literary subject, it will always be part of "the interpretative context" (16). Love claims for a "redirection" on the study of literature, so far mainly focused on human consciousness, towards a "full consideration of our place" (163) by incorporating the environment into the analysis. He does not understand the literary criticism that after the 1960s moved from New Criticism, archetypal and mythical interpretations to structuralism, post-structuralism, new historicism, reader-response theory, and race-class-gender studies without taking into account the "scenario", that is, "the natural systems within which these cultural conflicts were playing themselves out" (3). In other words, he claims for the decentering of human consciousness and social conflicts as the only subjects of literary criticism and the need

to reexamine and reinterpret canonical works of the past through the lens of ecocriticism, to “reinterpret the depictions of nature” (34). In order to achieve this ‘biological and evolutionary’ understanding of human nature and behavior, it would be necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach and the incorporation of “biology, ecology, the neurosciences, psychology, anthropology, biogeography, linguistics, and related fields” (166).

According to Martin Middeke, even poststructuralist Derrida, in his later writings, showed an increasing interest towards the ecological perspective implied by the deconstruction of binary oppositions such as mind/body and culture/nature:

This turn towards ecology in later postmodernism represents a significant move beyond its earlier positions, supplementing concepts of difference and heterogeneity with concepts of connectivity, feedback loops, networks and webs of relationships, which underlie the complex phenomena of life and which are fundamental to any ecology of knowledge. (255)

It is in this context of the later poststructuralism and in the desire to “bridge the gap between ecology and postmodernism” (255) that the project of a “material ecocriticism” appears (Iovino and Oppermann). Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann propose that the new materialisms provide a new theoretical framework in which ecocriticism can become material ecocriticism through the incorporation of the agency of matter. Thus, “if matter is agentic, and capable of producing its own meanings, every material configuration, from bodies to their context of living, is ‘telling’, and therefore can be the object of a critical analysis aimed at discovering its stories” (79). In other words, if originally ecocriticism focused on narrative portrayals of nature, now the new materialisms provide a frame for a material ecocriticism that could give voice to the non-human and move on to a form of textual analysis that avoids the old binary divisions and

dualisms. In Iovino and Oppermann's words: "The text, for material ecocriticism, encompasses both human material-discursive constructions and nonhuman things . . . material ecocriticism attends to the stories and the narrative potentialities that develop from matter's process of becoming" (83).

In the second decade of the 21st Century, ecocritical analyses of literature have increasingly focused on the issue of climate change—the most visible manifestation of the Anthropocene—to the point that some critics view "climate change criticism . . . as a separate development to ecocriticism" (Johns-Putra 274). According to Johns-Putra, climate change criticism analyzes climate change from two main different perspectives: either using conventional literary theory, for instance deconstruction, analyses of power and discourse, and actor-network-theory, to study climate change as a cultural phenomenon or by using climate change and literary theory to study "contemporary life, culture, and thought" (275). This second perspective of climate change criticism would focus more specifically on the contemporary existential crisis fueled by the transformation and destruction of our environment and civilization by humans turned into geological agents in the Anthropocene. In addition, it is in the latter specific context in which Adam Trexler's book *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015) can be contextualized. Trexler lists climate change novels from the 1970s to the first decade of the 21st Century. He focuses not on how literature represents climate change but on "how climate change and all its things have changed the capacities of recent literature" (13). In his opinion, climate change is a common topic that confers new meanings to preexisting genres.

2.3. ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

If environmentalism was born in the 1960s trying to preserve nature, now that we are living in the Anthropocene, it seems that there is no way back and the initial environmentalist premises have become unreachable, that “pristine nature is no more—which in turn means that we need a new environmentalism for a new age” (Walsh n.p.). Furthermore, as Shellenberger and Nordhaus state, 20th century environmentalism—understood as a political-pragmatic position—has, in a certain way, failed because of its incapacity to evolve and tackle conservation challenges. Its goal of reducing both human population and its impact upon nature frequently goes against a densely populated world that demands “to live energy-rich modern lives” (17). Shellenberger and Nordhaus call this type of ecologism—which fears ecological apocalypse and defends antimodernity while its theoreticians are comfortably living in western modern countries—“nihilistic ecotheology” (33). Shellenberger and Nordhaus claim for human responsibility over the planet, as the Earth’s “stewards” who cannot relinquish their intervention. Instead of the erasing of human footprints in nature, their solution is “machinery, and more machinery, civilization and more civilization” (20), and a new worldview “that sees technology as humane and sacred, rather than inhumane and profane . . . ‘modernization theology’” (35–36). Modernization theology would not reject technology and progress; on the contrary:

It should celebrate, not desecrate, the technologies that lead our prehuman ancestors to evolve. Our experience of transcendence in the outdoors should translate into the desire for all humans to benefit from the fruits of modernization and be able to experience similar transcendence. Our valorization or creativity should lead us to care for our cocreation of the planet. (Shellenberger and Nordhaus 40)

In the same line, Peter Kareiva *et al* notice that the idyllic concept of nature as fragile and connected to the feminine and women has always been “a human construction,

shaped and designed for human ends” (76). Instead of fragile, nature is resilient and dynamic. They go on to say that the actions intended to preserve this idealized nature without men’s presence have very often involved the relocation of human populations, and inevitably the loss of their lands and homes. However, we human beings are also part of nature, this is why conservationist movements that have based their policies on the opposition between good/fragile nature and pernicious human actions need to evolve. For environmentalism to work, it should adopt measures ensuring both human and non-human welfare, even if this turn involves the adherence to “economic development for all” (Kareiva *et al.* 71–78). All the authors included in *Love your Monsters* agree on the need for a new environmentalist paradigm for the Anthropocene: ‘postenvironmentalism’. They do not foresee the Anthropocene as the threshold of the Apocalypse. If the Apocalypse were the only possible future, there would not be any point in trying to act or change anything. The Anthropocene for them is a call for change, an important warning in a world where human needs, both material and cultural, can be achieved through responsible progress.

Furthermore, it seems that environmentalism as a label to name any movement advocating the preservation and protection of nature has become outdated. “Millennials”—the new generation of young adults born between 1980 and 2000—generally refuse to be labelled as environmentalists (Benderev, Chris; Massello; Katsnelson . The paradox is that millennials belong to a generation that cares and adopts “ecological” measures to actively work for the sustainability of the planet to a larger extent than previous generations. This rejection of the environmentalist label can be explained by several factors. As Katsnelson points out, historically, the beginning of environmentalism was marked by “white, elite, mostly male recreation . . . it had racist, classists, and gender biases” (n.p.). Moreover, environmentalism has been strongly

politicized and environmental activists negatively stereotyped as fanatics that embrace an essential and austere way of life. Millennials are eco-conscious and seek the development of new renewable energy sources, but they do not share the old deep ecology precepts.

Deep ecologists claimed for the reduction of human population and for low technological solutions as the only way to heal the Earth. The intention of bringing the Earth back to its pure, idealized and mystical natural state involves a biosphere without men's intervention, even without humans at all. However, and paradoxically, human-made technology may seem to be precisely the hypothetical solution and the way to make real this long cherished deep-ecologist dream for the conservation of the remaining wilderness and the development of more free-of-human-intervention spaces. In the line of the full responsibility acceptance or stewardship of the planet supported by post-environmentalism, high technological devices could be used to improve not only human welfare, but also non-human lives. Several high technological prototypes are being designed "to save ecosystems by taking us [humans] out of the picture entirely" (Yong n.p.). At Harvard University, a team is developing prototypes "for intelligently controlling river systems," other groups are building "drones that can plant trees, artificial pollinators, swarms of oceanic vehicles for cleaning up oil spills, or autonomous, weed-punching farm-bot" (n.p.). All these high technological devices would be self-updatable, with the capacity of learning and decision-making. If we consider the idea of the Earth as Gaia—the interconnected result of symbiosis—then the proposal would be to incorporate high technology to the better working of the common organism and help us to exert our responsibility. As Yong states: "The idea of fully removing ourselves from nature is unachievable. It's the Anthropocene and humans are here to stay" (n.p.). In the period of the Anthropocene there is no way back, as Latour says: "gone are all the dreams entertained by deep ecologists that humans can be cured of their political strivings if only

they could be convinced to turn their attention to Nature. We have permanently entered a postnatural epoch” (“Anthropocene and the Destruction” 81).

Furthermore, some scholars defend the idea of a ‘good Anthropocene’ in which technology and global solidarity would still be able to make room for a future Earth inhabited by humans. In “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” a group of eighteen scholars self-denominated “ecopragmatics” and “ecomodernists” declare:

[W]e write with the conviction that knowledge and technology, applied with wisdom, might allow for a good, or even great, Anthropocene. A good Anthropocene demands that humans use their growing social, economic, and technological powers to make life better for people, stabilize the climate, and protect the natural world. (Asafu-Adjaye, John *et al.* 6)

This technological and certainly optimistic view of the future after or within the Anthropocene contrasts with other much more pessimistic predictions. James E. Lovelock, the scientist who launched the Gaia hypothesis, affirmed in 2008 that no matter what we do now, the apocalypse in the form of floods, drought and famine will diminish human population even bringing us close to extinction. He predicted that “by 2020 extreme weather will be the norm, causing global devastation; that by 2040 much of Europe will be Saharan; and parts of London will be underwater” (Aitkenhead, “Enjoy” n.p.). However, as stated in a more recent interview in 2016, Lovelock has changed his mind and reconsidered his views on climate change: “I’m not sure the whole thing isn’t crazy, this climate change” (Aitkenhead, “Before” n.p.). Now for him the biggest and more immediate threat is no longer global warming but artificial intelligence. In his own words: “Before the end of this century, robots will have taken over” (in Aitkenhead, “Before” n.p.). Regardless of whether the problem is global warming, ecological disasters or robots, this scientist’s message does not give the human race much hope for survival:

the apocalypse is the only possible outcome and there is nothing that we can do. Lovelock gives scientific support to the same future as it was envisioned in some science fiction narratives, such as *Neuromancer* (1984), which presented robotic rebellion and human submission/extermination as the consequence of the development of artificial intelligence. Therefore, the Anthropocene still presents an apocalyptic future without humans that poses a challenge for humans to make sense of it. If the Anthropocene is the unintended result of human biological, technological, social and economic evolution, cultural evolution cannot be separated from the equation. As Love claims, “humans affect and interpret—“construct”—our earthly environment, inevitably mediating to some degree—culturally and textually—between ourselves and the world” (26). The Anthropocene is born in the sciences, as a geological era, but it is also culturally constructed and affects in turn all cultural constructions.

2.4. LITERATURE ADDRESSING THE ANTHROPOCENE

If the stories we've told ourselves, about dominion over nature, manifest destiny, liberty and advancement and ease, are the things that brought us to this state [Anthropocene]—what kind of story-telling can usher in a new way of life? (Robbins and Moore 7)

The Anthropocene outlines the mutual dependence of nature and culture/ history and makes evident their indivisibility. Moreover, as Latour claims: “Anthropocene does not overcome this Divide [the Great Divide of the social and of the natural]: it bypasses it entirely” (“Anthropocene and the Destruction” 78). The moment human agency has become a collective geological force affecting the Earth system, the literature of the Anthropocene should overcome traditional spatial and temporal limitations to be able to

incorporate the new dimensions into its meanings, and “such scaling up has always been the business of speculative modes of literature and films” (Weik von Mossner 83). Alexa Weik Von Mossner remarks the potential of storytelling—and more specifically speculative fiction—for making readers/spectators “imaginatively experience” a future exposed to harsh geophysical forces. She goes on to say that narratives trying to portray the Anthropocene very often mix fiction and non-fictional elements, even if fiction seems to be more effective than non-fiction in raising readers’ empathy and emotional response, even more so when speculative fiction narratives are commonly claimed to be based on real scientific and technological developments (85–88). As De Cristofaro and Cordel state: “With deep time comes a problem of perception and representation” (n.p.). While the Anthropocene is measured by geological, “deep” time, and calls for the expansion of human imagination, human beings are mainly able to find meaning and empathy when “narrative events . . . are experienced by someone—ideally someone we know well enough to care about” (Weik von Mossner 88). In other words, our human imagination, perception, and sympathy seem too much limited to understand and find empathy in narratives that should cover a span of time so vast as to be incomprehensible to the human mind. Weik Von Mossner also admits that fictions concerning the Anthropocene are usually focused on individual protagonists and their limited life-spans, that is, they are, in general, conventional apocalyptic narratives with very basic story lines (84–88), still far away from the exercise of imagination that the Anthropocene poses as an enormous existential threat.

The difficulty to imagine a world-without-us in the future is central in Eugene Thacker’s *In the Dust of this Planet* (2011). He suggests trying and escaping old interpretative frameworks such as myth, theology or existentialism in favor of a cosmological or Planetary view (18). As he ironically emphasizes, human beings are the

cause of the problem but “at the planetary level of the Earth’s deep time, nothing could be more insignificant than the human” (158). Thacker tries to reconcile the philosophical void of thinking a world without humans with the inconsistency of having a human mind as the only tool for thinking and imagining this world. It is the same problematic paradox that Latour recalls once applied to social sciences, “the researchers were too much involved with their subject matter” (“Anthropology” 11). Living in the Anthropocene concerns the whole human race, even if not all humans are equally responsible for its origin. Thacker, acknowledging the scientific argument that even our human cells are made of ninety percent non-human organisms, wonders whether human thought would be composed in a similar non-human way, interpenetrated by non-human thoughts. The question is: “what if thought were *non-human*?” (20). He proposes the use of horror as a frame to develop the anxieties generated by the Anthropocene. In his approach, horror would not be only a genre or simply fear, but a concept “about the enigmatic thought of the unknown” (22). He takes the horror genre as a kind of “non-philosophical attempt to think about the world-without-us philosophically” (24) and a primary response to a future without humans—our extinction—foreseen after the Anthropocene.

Located at the crossroads of science fiction, post-apocalyptic narratives, and dystopias there emerges what for some critics is a new genre in its own right (Tuhus-Dubrow) and for others a common theme in other genres (Johns-Putra; Trexler): the climate change novel or Cli-fi. In an attempt to make sense of the collective anxiety and to force us to react and to disturb, if only a little, a presumable state of “solastalgia”³ produced by the Anthropocene, there is an increasing number of novels dealing with a

³ *Solastalgia* is a term coined by the Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht to define “a form of psychic or existential distress caused by environmental change” (in Macfarlane n.p.). Solastalgia is related to the “modern uncanny” or unheimlich in which the familiar place is no longer recognizable because of the transformation made by climate change.

world, more or less overtly, suffering the consequences of climate change. Johns-Putra and Trexler agree on their identification of *Heat* (1977) as the first ‘climate change novel’ and include in this category novels written by well-established and popular authors such as Michael Crichton, Maggie Gee, Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson, Ian McEwan or Cormac McCarthy, among many others (Johns-Putra 268). The core narrative is common in all these stories and the key concept is the Anthropocene: human behavior has affected the Earth, and consequently its climate, to a point of no return. Tuhus-Dubrow points out how this pattern of human responsibility in cli-fi narratives may be certainly a “rewriting” of ancient flood myths warning about human hubris and sins (60). These mythical resonances could make cli-fi hard to believe and, even when believed, the reactions can be contradictory: from total negation to “stuplimity.”⁴ Interestingly, Tuhus-Dubrow remarks the irony in the fact that many cli-fi novels are the materialization of the conservationist and environmentalist goals: a world in which human ubiquity and the loss of wilderness gives way to the few survivors’ fight for survival in a returned primitive world (59). This ironic detachment of some cli-fi novels from “eco-parables” (Tuhus-Dubrow 58) sometimes entails satiric elements or even critiques of certain ecological principles that will be found, for instance, in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy.

Johns-Putra defines climate change fiction not necessarily as a genre but as “fiction concerning with anthropogenic climate change or global warming” (267). The subject of climate change is to be found, above all, in science fiction, dystopian, and postapocalyptic novels. In the large majority of cases, these novels are set in the future, but some of them locate their narrative times closer to the contemporary period. Johns-

⁴ *Stuplimity* is a new word coined by the literary critic Sianne Ngai. In a derivation of the concept of the ‘sublime,’ stuplimity would be “the aesthetic experience in which astonishment is paradoxically united with boredom ... to the point of outrage-outage” (in MacFarland n.p.). Stuplimity, in relation to the climate change threat, is produced due to a general tendency to forget or directly deny the risk: “we know the [ecological] catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not believe it will really happen” (Zizek 328)

Putra signals how in the novels located closer to our contemporary time, climate change “is a phenomenon that requires individuals’ engagement as a political, ethical, or even psychological problem” (269). Meanwhile, those novels set in the most distant future and/or postapocalyptic scenarios depict climate change “as part of an overall collapse including technological over-reliance, economic instability, and increased social division” (269), that is, the focus and emphasis in the present moves from the most personal and internal to the physical consequences, the collective, and the global in the future.

3. UTOPIAS/DYSTOPIAS

It's a sad commentary on our age that we find Dystopias a lot easier to believe in than Utopias; Utopias we can only imagine Dystopias we've already had. (Atwood, *Writing* 95)

The word utopia appeared for the first time in Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in Latin in 1516. The definition provided by the Oxford dictionary sets the origin of the word as based on Greek noun *topós* denoting "place" and the Greek prefix for negation *ou* meaning "not" ("Utopia Definition" n.p.). However, the term has also been provided with an alternative philological interpretation. There is an almost identical prefix *eu* that with *topós* means "good place" (*British Library* n.p.). Thomas More emphasized, in the title of his book, the idea that this "good" place was located in a non-existent place. Three centuries later, the term dystopia was used to denote a "bad place," its concoction traditionally attributed to the English philosopher John Stuart Mill in 1868, as he was denouncing the government's Irish land policy (Ashley n.p.).

3.1. UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

The a priori clear distinction between utopia and dystopia as the opposite and differentiated sides of the same coin, positive vs negative, has proved to be problematic: an ideal society does not mean the same for everyone. Moreover, "one person's utopia is another's dystopia" (Claeys, "Five Languages" 15). Darko Suvin defines dystopia, in literary terms, as the representation of "a community where socio-political institutions, norms, and relationships between its individuals are organized in a *significantly less*

perfect way than in the author's community" (Suvin 170; emphasis in the original). This critic also acknowledges that the definition of perfection is problematic because it is subjective and subsequently adds to this first definition the premise that the notion of perfection would be "as seen by a representative of a discontented social class or fraction, whose value system defines 'perfection'" (170). Subjectivity—both the narrator's and the focalizer's through whom this society is presented—becomes a substantial element for the labelling of a cultural work as dystopia. He also adds the notion of "Anti-dystopia" as "pretended utopia" because it presents a community ruled under principles that are theoretically better than "any thinkable alternative while our representative, 'camera eye' and value-monger finds out it is significantly less perfect than an alternative" (170–71). Thus, by relying upon the notion of perfection to differentiate utopia and dystopia, Suvin outlines the slippery moral nature of both genres since it is precisely their subjective character that which defines them as either one thing or the opposite.

Lyman Tower Sargent, another leading scholar in the field of utopian criticism,⁵ subscribes to Suvin's definition. Moreover, he specifically appreciates it in the sense that it takes into account an "alternative historical hypothesis" ("Three Faces" 7) in the representation of the ideal or bad society. In other words, there are some hints on how these societies can be created. But, on the other hand, Sargent misses in Suvin's vision a consistent description of all the aspects of this imaginary society (7). Sargent on his part also agrees with Suvin's definition of anti-utopia not as the opposite of utopia or a synonym for dystopia but as "works that use the utopian form to attack either utopias in general or a specific utopia" (8). Sargent includes the terms dystopia and anti-utopia in the broader field of "Utopianism," which would not be exclusively restricted to literature.

⁵ Utopian criticism refers to both to positive and negative versions of the future (dystopias).

Utopianism would be “the imaginative projection, positive or negative, of a society that is substantially different from the one in which the author lives” (Sargent, “Introduction” 1). Then, utopias would be a literary genre in which the following categories should be listed:

Utopia⁶: a non-existent society described in detail and normally located in time and space.

Eutopia or positive utopia: a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the reader lived.

Dystopia or negative utopia: a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived.

Utopian satire: a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of the existing society.

Anti-utopia: a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia.

Critical utopia: a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve, and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre. (“Introduction” 1–2)

Sargent consciously avoids the notion of perfection in his definition of the categories within utopia, in an attempt to make these classifications more objective.

Gregory Claeys, co-editor of *The Utopia Reader* (1999) together with Sargent, considers Utopia in a much broader sense than just a literary term. In his more recent work “The Five Languages of Utopia” (2013), he tries to state what for him is a realistic

⁶ In contrast with the classical definition, Sargent-Tower’s Utopia encapsulates positive and negative (dystopia) meanings.

definition of utopia by means of articulating it by negation, that is, he expresses which four things utopia would not be. According to this scholar, first, utopia “is not an exclusively literary tradition” even though there is a wide range of utopian literary projections in which plausibility is the primary condition and establishes a “barrier between utopia and other forms of imaginative discourse” (“Five Languages” 27). Utopia is neither “a branch of theology” nor “a state of mind . . . or pathological form of extreme fantasy . . . [and] fourthly utopia is not simply a synonym for social improvement” (28–29). Claeys firmly defends the validity of “the concept as a mode of conceiving a realisable future. It functions as a map for avoiding less desirable outcomes, and achieving the more optimal” (30). In spite of the fact that Claeys invests the term with a wide spectrum of possibilities that go well beyond the literary work, this is not contradictory with the latent intention behind literary utopias—to show what the world “should” look like—and its negative mirror-image dystopias that show what the world “could” look like, always, of course, according to each author’s ideological bias and ethical stance.

Utopian novels such as H.G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* (1905), B.F. Skinner’s *Walden Two* (1948) or Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End* (1954) suggest possibilities of an ideal future. However, G. Orwell’s *1984* (1948), Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931), R. Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) or, more recently, S. Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2008) and C. McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), are classified as dystopian novels. They are narratives that warn against futures in which our present time becomes a past/lost utopia and where the potentials for a better future have been wasted. Utopia lives within dystopia and vice versa. Moreover, the frontiers between both genres would only be delimited and based on the subjective depiction of the writer. The subjective perspective offered in each occasion either by the narrator or any focalizer can make the difference between utopia and dystopia, depending on how they live their role in the given society. Moreover, the

distinction between a model and a nightmarish society also relies on the unpredictable reception/interpretation of readers, that is, how they perceive the rightness or wrongness of this particular depiction of the future.

3.2. DYSTOPIA: SOCIAL CRITICISM AND HISTORY

The dystopian novel appears as a consequence and logical response to optimistic utopian novels in which planned societies, technology, and science offer a model future. The development of dystopian novels is closely related to the 20th Century—called the dystopian century, even if the twenty-first century “does not look much better” (Sargent, “Do Dystopias” 10). Dystopian fiction provides a negative but plausible representation of a concrete future society; that is, the intended warning is addressed to a specific geographical, historical and cultural moment. Thus, it is directed to specific societies and issues, and consequently, it is not relevant for every society. According to Jill Lepore, contemporary dystopian novels are:

[P]essimistic about technology, about the economy, about politics, and about the planet, making it a more abundant harvest of unhappiness than most other heydays of downheartedness. The internet did not stitch us all together. Economic growth has led to widening economic inequality and a looming environmental crisis. Democracy appears to be yielding to authoritarianism. (n.p.)

The proliferation of dystopian novels from the 20th Century onwards is very significant inasmuch as utopias and dystopias represent the valuation of the collective idea of the future based on contemporary political systems, social reality, scientific and technological advances, and the possibilities those imply. Lepore goes on arguing that dystopias produced in the second half of the twentieth century are in general ideologically liberal

novels that try to warn against “pollution and climate change, nuclear weapons and corporate monopolies, technological totalitarianism and the fragility of rights secured from the state” (n.p.).

Consequently, dystopias have an inherent message of social criticism. By means of presenting what the author perceives as their society’s maladies, dystopia has an undeniable didactic intention directed towards the author’s contemporary society. As M. Keith Booker asserts, dystopia “is always highly relevant more or less directly to specific ‘real world’ societies and issues” (19). Thus, if dystopias are intrinsically related to a specific society in a specific historical place, they cannot be understood without taking into account which society and which place they are intended to represent and warn. The notion of temporality, then, is also a key element to define and understand dystopias since, as Ross states: “utopianism is based on a critique of the deficiencies of the present, while dystopian thinking relies on a critique or perceived ‘deficiencies in the future’” (in Booker 19). Then, the author’s contemporary society and history becomes the dystopia’s past whereas the dystopia’s temporal setting is located in the author’s more or less distant future.

Shortly after the publication of her most famous novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), Atwood writes an essay in which she claims that her book is a “negative form of Utopian fiction that has come to be known as the Dystopia” (*Writing* 92). She explains that while utopia is related to the design of good societies, dystopias are concerned with bad ones. The goal behind the creation of the worst possible version of a given society is that “the readers are supposed to deduce what a good society is by seeing, in detail, what it isn’t” (93). That is, dystopias have the function of warning us about the possible outcomes of our present circumstances. Atwood interestingly remarks the relationship between western monotheist religions and their linear vision of time, with the type of

stories that try to warn present day readers in order to improve their societies' future. In the case of polytheistic religions with a circular understanding of time, this intended improvement reveals as an impossible task since everything is doomed to return to the same point. Atwood goes on to say that there have been several real attempts to create utopias in real life, for instance “the venture of the Pilgrim Fathers” who wanted to create “a city upon a hill, a light to all nations” (93), and Marxism, with its communist utopia. According to the writer, among the most frequent target issues for dystopias are:

Distribution of wealth; labor relations; power structure; the protection of the powerless, if any; relations between the sexes; population control; urban planning . . . the rearing of children; illness and its ethics; insanity ditto, the censorship of artists and suchlike riffraff and antisocial elements; individual privacy and its invasion; the redefinition of language; and the administration of justice. (Atwood, *Writing* 94)

She also outlines the fact that neither in utopias nor in dystopias lawyers are included: “In Utopia, then, no lawyers are needed; in Dystopia, no lawyers are allowed” (95). In sum, dystopias, in their implicit warning and social criticism, have the undeniable didactic intention of moving the reader to resist and question the conditions that led to the creation of these nightmarish societies. Furthermore, both place—usually western society— and time—dystopias' present time—become key ingredients to understand and interpret their implicit message.

3.3. SCIENCE FICTION AND DYSTOPIAS

Whereas Atwood willingly accepts the label of dystopian for those of her novels dealing with a nightmarish future—to which the corpus of this thesis belongs: *The Handmaid's*

Tale, *MaddAddam*, and *The Heart Goes Last*—, in contrast with some critics' opinions, she does not acknowledge being a writer of science fiction. She claims that her dystopian novels are speculative fiction because all the things she has included in them are reality bound. In a certainly dismissive way, the writer relates science fiction to "talking squids in outer space" (in Mancuso n.p.). In other words, Atwood uses things that have already happened in history, certain aspects of the social thread of present day societies, scientific achievements that can be the logical developments of existent ones and, in sum, things that "can happen" even if they have not *yet* occurred (Atwood, *In Other* 6). But this attempt to establish a clear-cut limit between science fiction and speculative fiction is seen by certain critics as a snobbish effort to classify the latter as "belonging to a superior genre in literary terms and leave the term 'science fiction' to describe only much-derided 50s pulp novels" (Mancuso n.p.). In spite of Atwood's claim, the frontier between her dystopian novels and the literary genre of science fiction is not so easy to draw.

In her book *Writing History as a Prophet* (1991), Elisabeth Wesseling takes a diachronic approach to define the characteristics of literary science fiction. She claims that science fiction's political significance "emerges when we pay some attention to its affinity with utopian/dystopian fantasy" (95). In other words, Wesseling, in contrast to Atwood's apparent dismissal of the genre, explains that science fiction has a tremendous potential that goes beyond its "fascination with technological gadgetry [and] the need for escapism" (Wesseling 94). She maintains that these possibilities are better developed when the utopia/dystopia inhabiting most science fiction stories is uncovered. According to Wesseling, there are more similarities than differences between science fiction and utopias (or dystopias). Both science fiction and utopias project "alternate worlds," either significantly better or significantly worse than existent reality, in which this empirical reality is defamiliarized. She adds that both are "political sensitive genres" with a strong

component of social criticism because they are concerned with “empirical historical reality.” Moreover, both have in common an “eschatological dimension, in that they ultimately deal with the problem of how mankind can attain harmony within itself, with the natural environment and, indeed, with the universe; that is, both genres are tentative responses of how mankind may survive into the future” (95–96). Wesseling differentiates science fiction and utopias in that, for her, the first has to be validated “with reference to extent scientific laws ... derived from existing ones” (95) whereas the same is not necessarily true in the case of utopias. On the other hand, utopias are more concerned with “sociopolitical organization” (96). The intimate relationship, when not total identification, between science fiction and utopias is clearly stated. In general terms, for Wesseling, science fiction is a “more comprehensive category than utopian fiction . . . [although] the bulk of science fiction partakes of the utopian mode” (96).⁷

3.4. SPECULATIVE FICTION AND DYSTOPIAS

The term “Speculative Fiction” was coined in 1941 by Robert A. Heinlein. In this first definition of the term, speculative fiction was a subgenre within science fiction in which “accepted science and established fiefs are extrapolated to produce a new situation . . . new human problems are created . . . [and it] is about how human beings cope with those new problems” (Heinlein 4). Heinlein claimed that “science fiction is not about human beings and their problems, consisting instead of fictionalized framework, peopled by

⁷ Wesseling draws on the concepts of ‘genre’ and ‘mode’: “a genre or a ‘kind’ is a repertoire of thematic elements and formal features. A mode is an abstraction from a kind, which discards the distinctive external features of the latter while retaining the core of its characteristics *topoi*” (96). She also borrows from Fowler the idea of the “temporal relationships between genres and modes, in that genres tend to turn into modes in the course of their development through time” (96). In this line of argumentation, she claims that “science fiction has become the modern avatar of utopian thought” (96).

cardboard figures, on which is hung an essay about the Glorious Future of Technology” (3). Moreover, his speculative story is an “honest-to-goodness science fiction story” (4), a human story with human interest in contrast with a ‘gadget story’. His differentiation emphasizes speculative fiction’s alleged superior quality in contrast with science fiction but both as belonging to the same genre.

Marek Oziewicz claims that there are three possible approaches to define speculative fiction. He acknowledges Heinlein’s formulation of speculative fiction as the first, and still not totally abandoned view, which defines it as a subcategory within science fiction. Nevertheless, he sees this categorization as “restrictive, if not elitist” because “it excluded not just pulp science fiction ... but also fantasy, horror, and other non-mimetic genres” (“Speculative” n.p.). The second approach in the theorization of speculative fiction is precisely that which sees it as an opposite category with regard to science fiction. For some, Margaret Atwood has become a leading advocate of the distinction between speculative fiction and science fiction as opposite literary genres (n.p.). Atwood bases her division on probability, because from her point of view speculative fiction includes “things that really could happen but just hadn’t completely happened when the authors wrote the books” (Atwood, *In Other* 6). On the other hand, science fiction deals with things that cannot possibly happen: “What I mean by ‘science fiction’ is those books that descend from HG Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*, which treats of an invasion by tentacled Martians shot to Earth in metal canisters—things that could not possibly happen” (Atwood, “The Road to” n.p.). In other words, Atwood understands as science fiction things that really could not happen and reserves the designation ‘speculative fiction’ for things, in her opinion, more grounded in reality (n.p.). Nevertheless, Atwood claims that she has always followed the rule of including in her works things that have happened “somewhere in the world” (Allardice n.p.). While Asimov already claimed in the 1960s

that science fiction narratives had a predictive value (in Oziewicz, “Speculative” n.p.), in 2018 Atwood denies to be a prophet:

I’m not a prophet, let’s get rid of that idea right now. Prophecies are really about now. In science fiction it’s always about now. What else could it be about? There is no future. There are many possibilities, but we do not know which one we are going to have. (in Allardice n.p.)

The third attempt in delimiting speculative fiction in the 2010s, following Oziewicz, would define it rather as a ‘supercategory’, a ‘cultural field’ that would include:

A great number of non-mimetic genres such as the gothic, dystopia, zombie, vampire, and post-apocalyptic fiction, ghost stories, superheroes, alternative histories, steampunk, magic realism, retold or fractured fairy tales and so forth ... either derivatives of fantasy and science fiction or hybrids that elude easy classification. (Oziewicz, *Justice* 3)

Nevertheless, Oziewicz affirms that this broader understanding of speculative fiction, although increasingly adopted among younger readers, authors and scholars, “has not yet won much support among seasoned researchers” (“Speculative” n.p.).

Summing up, dystopias, speculative fiction and science fiction have so many connections and are so entangled that it seems almost impossible to draw clear lines delimiting them. However, they all share one common element: they do not refer to the factual, to events and people that we might experience and see in our normal lives. Such characteristic puts all these types of narrative under the common umbrella of fantasy fiction and separates them from many other genres such as the realist novel, the modernist novel, the historical novel, minimalist fiction, blank fiction or the novel of manners. Throughout this thesis, I will stick to Suvin’s definition of dystopia as a negative representation of a present society, which is set in the future, that emphasizes politics,

economy, social aspects and the limitation of individual freedom. A common motif in the late 20th century and 21st century dystopias is the introduction of the degradation of planet Earth as background setting, both motivation and trigger in the birth of the dystopian society. Dystopia would always be the subjective depiction of the authors, guided by their ideology, and can therefore be received as a Utopia—positive depiction—by any reader politically and ideologically opposed to the writers. All dystopias are speculative fiction and, thus, fantasy fiction works—sometimes even science fiction narratives if science and technology play an important part in the story—but not the other way around. Moreover, not all science fiction and speculative fiction writings include the dystopic specific negative expansion of any real society with its emphasis on the critique of social power relations and the questioning of individual freedom. Even though the frontier between speculative fiction and science fiction is very slippery—being both under the umbrella of fantasy or non-factuality—it seems that there is a general agreement on the fact that the fascination with technology and its role in the future is much more predominant in the latter. Speculative fiction would only include the development of already existent technology (Atwood) and its main focus would be the human interest (Heinlein), the construction of the social dimension and the distribution of power, the political, and the survival of mankind with or without the presence of impressive new technologies. Moreover, the treatment of speculative fiction as new “supercategory” (Oziewicz) would open the door for the inclusion of many hybrids and other genres considered as minor ones in the past.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The scrutiny accomplished above underlines the particularities and distinct focus of interrogation of posthumanism and its entanglement with the Anthropocene era. Both theoretical frameworks reveal elemental similarities of approach with many possible connections in the questions they ask of literary texts. Departing from the idea of literature as the site of ethical concerns that mirror real societies and situations, ethical and political assessments are made evident in the revival and proliferation of new dystopian narratives reflecting and giving voice to the new ontology represented by posthumanism and the idea of living in the limit era of the Anthropocene. The discourse of posthumanism, as discussed above, is born as an attempt to resist and repair the discriminatory exclusion of the other who did not fit into the ideal human model—white, western and male—enacted by humanist thinking and later on by the hubristic ultra-humanism represented by certain models of the posthuman. Being the posthuman the object of study for Posthumanism, critical posthumanism as philosophy searches for the development of posthuman ethics—still a “human” enterprise—that would seek for morally right and wrong elections in the process of being or becoming posthumans. In Braidotti’s words, “the posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming” (12). Culture, in general, is the site where different historical values and societies are reflected. It is more specifically in the field of the creative arts, among them literature, where “the rise of posthuman bodies . . . that reconceptualize the ‘nature’ of the human, and their ethic-political implications in terms of the human-non-human relation, are addressed” (Nayar 33). Posthumanist concerns also underline the human species’ intimate relationship with the environment, sadly enough, mainly with its destruction in the Anthropocene era. The Anthropocene opens the real and imaginative

possibility of a world-without-us. It seems undeniable that the cultural manifestations originated by the awareness of living in the Anthropocene era are as immensely varied and heterogeneous as the disciplines involved in its definition. However, even if the analyses and the implications may differ from one discipline to the other, many scientific, social and 'natural' fields' scholars generally agree that something has changed our Earth system forever. The question that remains to be asked and this dissertation seeks to discuss is how this change is significantly affecting the writing of the Anthropocene's contemporary fiction in their generic characteristics, for some scholars to the point of giving birth to a new kind of literature: cli-fi.

Finally, in this dissertation and throughout the analysis of the corpus, I wish to underscore the role of dystopian fiction as narrative of warning, with an ethical purpose that focuses on social and political decisions of the present and aims to a desired better future. Its social criticism always targets a specific society, history and time—in this case the last decades of the 20th Century and the first ones of the 21st Century in the USA. I am totally convinced and aware of the difficulty of establishing frontiers between what Atwood understands to be “science fiction” and her own novels. For coherence reasons and when necessary, I will draw on the definition of science fiction and speculative fiction as both subgenres within fantasy fiction with only different degrees of probability. Whereas science fiction is more fascinated with technology and its role in the future, speculative fiction would only include the development of already existent scientific advances and would have a stronger focus on social, political and ethical issues—regardless the presence or absence of massive technological changes.

CHAPTER 2: *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

1. INTRODUCTION

Atwood's writing won critical acknowledgment both from general publications and from academia since her early literary career. Hundreds of newspaper reviews, interviews, and blogs' entries have appeared in the last thirty-five years. At the time of its publication, *The Handmaid's Tale* garnered uneven reviews in newspapers and magazines such as *Booklist Reviews* (Hooper, December 1985), *The New York Times* (Lehmann-Haupt, January 1986), *The Washington Post* (Johnson, February 1986), *Newsweek* (Prescott, February 1986), *New Republic* (Ehrenreich, March 1986), and *Mademoiselle* (Maynard, March 1986) to name only a few. Those first critiques mainly measured the validity of *The Handmaid's Tale* for the novel's reinvention of dystopian fiction, a genre that had been the sole domain of male writers, but was here written by a woman, and where gender issues were central. Brad Hooper, even if he praised Atwood as a writer, harshly criticized the author's incursion into the dystopian genre: "the didacticism of the novel wears thin; the book is simply too obvious to support its fictional context" (n.p.). In contrast, Christopher Lehmann-Haupt admired the book as "more than a taut thriller, a psychological study, a play on words" ("Books of the Times" 24), and for Atwood's success with her first attempt at writing an "anti-utopian novel" (24). On the openly positive side, Joyce Maynard defined *The Handmaid's Tale* as an "incredible and moving story" (114), Joyce Johnson applauded "Margaret Atwood's *Brave New World*" (n.p.) while Peter Prescott outlined how a "talented novelist" had created the horrifying Gilead "without recourse to special effects" (70). But not all the newspapers' reviewers joined in the praise of the novel. On the more critical side, Barbara Ehrenreich did not find *The Handmaid's Tale* as good as other works in the utopian field, and underscored the "narrator's vagueness and inappropriateness to tell us the tale" (33). However, and in spite

of its flaws, Ehrenreich remarked that *The Handmaid's Tale* was worth reading. Linkous's review, on the negative side as well, agreed with Ehrenreich and openly demonstrated certain hostility against the main character, Offred, and defined the protagonist's speech as monotonous and even boring: "[it] just drones and drones" (6). Nevertheless, novelist Mary McCarthy wrote the harshest and probably the most famous review for a novel that in her opinion lacked imagination, and was "a poet's novel," very far away from the conventions and needs for a dystopian novel, especially in terms of language:

The writing of *The Handmaid's Tale* is undistinguished in a double sense, ordinary if not glaringly so, but also indistinguishable from what one supposes would be Margaret Atwood's normal way of expressing herself in the circumstances. This is a serious defect, unpardonable maybe for the genre: a future that has no language invented for it lacks a personality. That must be why, collectively, it is powerless to scare. (n.p.)

In spite of McCarthy's dismissive critique, the novel has never been out of print from the moment of its publication, because, like Atwood herself, many people have been "haunted by *The Handmaid's Tale*" (Atwood, "Haunted" n.p.). After the release of the *Hulu* series in 2017, many new reviews have appeared in the newspapers revisiting Offred's story. The controversy around the story's social critique, its targets, and its pertinence in present-day Western society is more alive than ever, as can be seen in reviews published in *National Review* (Geraghty, April 2017), *Los Angeles Times* (Morrison, April 2017), *The Guardian* (Cain, May 2017), or *The National Post* (Kay, May 2017). Jim Geraghty rejects any present day link between US society and Gilead and suggests that Atwood should have set Gilead's theocracy in other places such as Afghanistan, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, or Iran, countries where, according to him, are the ones where women

really suffer from gender discrimination. In this same line, Barbara Kay coincides with McCarthy's critique in the 1980s. She affirms that *The Handmaid's Tale* is not, and never has been a believable dystopia either in the 1980s or in the 2010s: "Were the relations between men and women in 1985, or are they now, in such a precarious state that women have any reason whatsoever to entertain fear for the complete erosion of their legal personhood?" (n.p.). In contrast, Morrison defends the currency of Offred's story under the perceived threat that Trump's presidency can represent for women's rights. Moreover, Cain claims that there has "never been a moment since Atwood's book arrived on shelves that this story hasn't been timely We are blessed, in a strange way, that it has the capacity to shock us still" (n.p.). The controversy around the currency of the handmaid's figure with respect to the 21st century American society was intensified by the author herself in dozens of interviews and meetings which were arranged for the premiere of the TV series. In her interviews for *The Guardian* (Havana, February 2017; Allardice, September 2019), Atwood affirmed, after president Trump's election, that "[f]or a long time we were moving away from Gilead. Then we started going back towards it" (Atwood in Allardice n.p.). Moreover, renewed worries about women's issues have soared the sale of a thirty-five year old novel.

Besides, *The Handmaid's Tale's* worldwide popular success and its high critical attention provoked the birth of a new academic trend/industry: the publication of uncountable scholarly works on *The Handmaid's Tale*, and by extension on any of Atwood's publications from the date. The abundance of Atwood criticism on *The Handmaid's Tale* makes it impossible even to type an up-to date list of all publications; thus, in the following literary review, a selection is compulsory. In the thirty-five years that have gone by since *The Handmaid's Tale* publication, several book-length critical

analyses, papers on academic journals, conference papers, anthologies and doctoral dissertations have been published in a constant flood that is still growing by the day.

Margaret Atwood: Vision and Forms, published in 1988, already included two essays on *The Handmaid's Tale*: Roberta Rubenstein's "Nature and Nurture in Dystopia"—focused on female anxieties around motherhood/nurture "projected as feminist nightmare and cultural catastrophe" (102)—, and Arnold E. Davidson's "Future Tense Making History in *The Handmaid's Tale*,"—where he discusses the subjective value of history and its influence on the construction of the future (120–21). In *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity* (1994), Mark Evans traces Atwood's view and use of history. Supported by Atwood's choice of dedicatees in the novel—Mary Webster, accused of witchcraft, and Perry Miller, a great historian of puritanism—he moves the historical focus from fictional Gilead to its actual "historical ancestors," the puritans. Within the same volume but from a generic perspective, Sherril Grace examines the limits of the genre of autobiography in relation to Offred's story. *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impacts* (2000) is a collection of essays with an obvious diversity of perspectives such as genre theory and politics, myth, and cultural theory. The book sums up what had been, up to then, the dominant approaches of Atwood's criticism on *The Handmaid's Tale*. Namely, power relationships and the power of storytelling (Palumbo, "On the Border"), the expansion of the limits of genre (Howells, "Transgressing Genre"), the moral ambiguity of Atwood's heroines (Rigney, "Narrative Games and Gender Politics"⁸), worlds constructed and controlled following Baudrillard's idea of the end of nature (Irvine, "Recycling Culture"), and myth intertextuality in Atwood's novels (Wilson, "Mythological Intertexts"). Coral A. Howells, a scholar specialized in Atwood's works,

⁸ Palumbo's and Rigney's essays appear reprinted in *Modern Critical Views: Margaret Atwood* (2009), edited by Harold Bloom.

edited *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (2006), where a variety of scholarly essays are collected around the writer's recurrent worries, such as autobiography, power politics and the female body, history, and the generic conventions of dystopias (Howells, "Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*"). In *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* (2007), Fiona Tolan approaches *The Handmaid's Tale* from a dominant model of interpretation: a historical perspective of feminism. She defines the novel as "a metafictional examination of metahistory, and the history in question is, to a significant extent, that of the feminist movement" (*Feminism and Fiction* 144). Two years later, in 2009, Jane Brooks Bouson edited a monography, *Critical Insights: The Handmaid's Tale*, with fourteen essays exclusively dedicated to the novel. It includes reassessments and innovative perspectives from different critical contexts and readings: history, feminism, survival and resistance, resistance through narration, and the relationship between dystopia, utopia and human rights. Gina Wisker's *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views in her Fiction* (2012), revisits the early reviews of the novel as a feminist text and discusses the links between religion and fundamentalism, and language and storytelling. In the collection of essays *Critical Insights: Margaret Atwood* (2013), edited by Bouson, Michael P. Murphy, revisiting the importance of language in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, connects her special understanding of spirituality, "the living spirit . . . with [her] unrestrained logophilia, her religious love for words—what they mean, and what they can and cannot do" (230).

Studies on *The Handmaid's Tale* have never ceased to appear in academia. In addition to the selection of book-length recompilations of essays, a huge amount of independent academic articles focused on analyses of the novel have been published in international journals and must be added to this literary review. A high number of critics

are consistent with three main approaches only with subtle nuances: feminism, the novel's manifold coincidences and variations within the dystopian genre, and a multi-faceted valuation of language as narration and its use. Early articles already tackled Atwood's problematization of feminism (Stillman and Johnson), a perspective that is incessantly revisited retrospectively and contextualized (Tolan, "Feminist"), and concentrated on the author's view on the power politics of gender (Neuman). Moreover, the relationship between feminist theories, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and laws regulating surrogate motherhood have recently been the new subject of inquiry in articles outside the literary field (Busby and Van). The generic approach has been an inexhaustible resource for decades. It has been employed to map Atwood's use of recurrent issues such as the blurring of generic limits (Stein "Modest" 1994), survival and dystopia (Ketterer 1989), romance and dystopia (Miner 1991), surveillance and dystopia (Cooper 1995) or dystopia as female satire (Hammer 1990). Atwood herself joins the generic debate in her article "*The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* in Context" where she consistently rejects the label of science fiction for her first dystopian novel (Atwood, "Context"). Furthermore, early papers already tackled the novel's metafictional character as a text that comments itself (Bergman); the power of language to build reality and specifically gender roles (Klarer); or the power of words like "liberty and justice" to construct the myth of a utopian America and how Atwood shattered this same self-deceived American society, based on a paradigm of denial (Dodson). Besides, this forcibly selective literary review cannot be concluded without including at least a brief reference to the publication of recent papers that discuss the intertextual conversation between the novel and the highly acclaimed TV adaptation. As Atwood herself explains, "over the years, *The Handmaid's Tale* has taken many forms. It has been translated into forty or more languages. It was made into a film in 1990. It has been an opera, and it has also been a

ballet. It is being turned into a graphic novel. And in April 2017 . . . an MGM/Hulu television series” (“What” n.p.). The enormous success of the series has involved an unavoidable and permanent connection between the written and most widely known audiovisual version of the story, for “we will never read the novel again without connecting it to the series” (Somacarrera 92).

In spite of the fact that criticism of the novel is absolutely massive, a revision of the literature indicates that the novel has never been approached from the perspective of the posthuman in the age of the Anthropocene. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the connections of *The Handmaid's Tale* and the birth of the posthuman subject and the consciousness—or not—of living in the Anthropocene era while approaching the novel as a proto-cli-fi product that thematically, at least partially, anticipates Atwood's subsequent dystopian novels. *The Handmaid's Tale* unearths the effects of the degradation of nature at a personal or individual level. Offred gives us her subjective point of view as a woman, a member of one of the minorities that are not inside the Gilead regime. Consequently, issues such as the historical context and its political consequences will be explored in the first section to find contemporary meanings in a work that is thematically still highly relevant. Moreover, this first section will analyze the implications that technology, biotechnology and data/information have in the construction of the [post]human subject and how they affect their social rights, in sum, the dangers of technology and biotechnology that were predicted by the novel more than thirty years ago. The second section, by examining references to climate change concerns in *The Handmaid's Tale*, will consider the presence in the novel of ecological issues, and how the effects of environmental modification condition the social tissue. Finally, the last section will consist of a deeper discussion on the speculative and dystopian character of the novel, that is, from the generic perspective, and contextualized in the 21st Century.

Thus, the displacement of present-day worries onto a desolate future to criticize them and its implications will be considered, and how fiction defamiliarizes reality to enable the reader to reach less context-biased interpretations; as Atwood says in Offred's voice, "context is all" (*Handmaid* 150).

Published in 1985, *The Handmaid's Tale* is Atwood's most famous work and her first dystopian novel, since all her previous fiction had stemmed from the conventions of realism. The novel is Offred's first person account of her own story. She is a "handmaid" in the Republic of Gilead,⁹ a totalitarian and theocratic regime that has replaced US democracy. Gilead has a very low birth rate and many children are born with severe deformities and defects due to chemical experimentation and environmental changes. In this state of affairs, the few women still fertile and not married under the regime's rules are forced to serve as "handmaids." Robbed of their own small children, they have to bear Gilead commanders' babies and give them up immediately after giving birth to them, only to be relocated in another commander's house and start the process all over again. But before being called Offred—the name consists of the possessive "of" followed by the name of the handmaid's commander, indicating the handmaid's commodification and transformation into her commander's mere possession—the unnamed protagonist was an American citizen with a very different life that is recollected and narrated in a discontinuous way through autodiegetic, fragmented, and apparently simultaneous narration,¹⁰ digressions, and analepses (in Genette's terminology 244–45).

⁹ The name 'Gilead', which refers to a town upon a hill or a hill of testimony, has a biblical origin (Gen. 31:21) and points to the religious character of the regime, which aspires to be a 'model of perfection'.

¹⁰ When readers reach the final chapter of *The Handmaid's Tale*, "Historical Notes," they learn that Offred's story is the result of the transcription of thirty cassette tapes found in the future. Since Offred does not have any possibility of recording a cassette during her life as a handmaid, the simultaneity of her narration is obviously questioned and with it Offred's reliability both as narrator and as focalizer.

1.2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The election of the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, as President of the USA (2016) brought Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* to the forefront of the media and of public attention. The dystopian/cautionary tale, set in an undated future in which women are considered mere vessels to accommodate babies and procreation becomes a national duty, seems to be now, in the 21st Century, still a live issue. Merely five months after Trump's election, on April 26, 2017, a Hulu TV series based on *The Handmaid's Tale* had its world premiere.

One of the main reasons that triggers the birth of the fictional Republic of Gilead relates to the control that modern Western governments have over their citizens through the manipulation of information media, and the possibility of cutting any social right with the help of the computers and the "digital identity" they keep of any citizen. Thus, Howells understands *The Handmaid's Tale* as a warning against "the policies and assumptions of late twentieth-century Western technological society told from the woman's point of view" (Howells, *Notes* 47), and of 1980s issues such as "the anti-feminism backlash, surrogate mothers, abortion, pornography and social violence, issues concerning ecology and pollution, issues of nationalism, extreme right-wing political movements and religious fanaticism" (77). It seems then imperative to revise the social and political context in which *The Handmaid's Tale* was published.

In the Women's march on Washington, January 21, 2017, some protesters made allusions to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* carrying signs that read "made Margaret Atwood Fiction again." Nowadays, *The Handmaid's Tale* not only seems to maintain its original appeal. It has also increased in the face of the Trump's administration. Atwood herself claims, even if ironically, that there is a clear relationship

between the revival of her story and Trump's presidency when she affirms: "If the election of Donald Trump were fiction . . . it would be too implausible to satisfy [the audience] . . . fiction has to be something that people would actually believe" (in Mead n.p.). But some others read Atwood's declarations as a way to exploit a good marketing opportunity when—in an interview for *Los Angeles Times* about the Hulu Series—she hyperbolically affirms that "we're no longer making fiction, we're making a documentary" (in Geraghty n.p.).

The 1980s, the historical context in which *The Handmaid's Tale* was written, was a very conservative period in the USA, unlike the two previous decades. The 1960s shows the coming of a historical period marked by the development of social movements advocating for minority rights in America: the counterculture, the hippy movement, the Civil Rights movement, Women's rights, the Gay movement, the Hispano and Chicano movements, among others. As a reaction to such an intense period of social demands, in the late 1970s and more intensively all along the 1980s, conservatism reacted in America to stem the tide of change. The Republican candidate Ronald Reagan had two clear victories in the 1980 and 1984 presidential elections with an overwhelming majority of votes. He assembled economic conservatives, members of the Christian Right, working-class whites and supporters of a more aggressive US foreign policy. Reagan's followers were called the "New Right" and the resulting "Reagan Era" became a backlash theoretically aimed at bringing back the Founding Fathers' National spirit, that is, conservative moral, social, and religious values. According to Doug Banwart, a group of evangelical Christians, the so-called Moral Majority, which reached its maximum influence and expansion during Reagan's presidency, was one of the President's strongest supporters. The Moral Majority was led by an evangelical Christian—Falwell, the main leader—, a Catholic—Paul Werych—, and a Jew—Howard Phillips. Jerry Banwart

affirms that the legalization of abortion was the fact that triggered the mobilization and activism of the MM group. The MM saw a direct relationship between the development of civil rights movements and the moral decline of the US as “a modern-day Gomorrah” (133–35). Moreover, as Michael Sean Winters explains, even if it is not clearly demonstrated “whether Reagan could have won without the votes of the millions of evangelical voters Falwell energized and organized, there is no doubt that the moral concerns that mattered to Falwell and his voters became an integral part of the Reagan Revolution” (1). In spite of the fact that the Moral Majority dissolved in 1989 and their main goals were not achieved, Reagan was accused of becoming a radical (Wicker n.p.). He proposed, for instance, very controversial and backward measures such as the restoration of organized prayer in the schools—forbidden since 1962 in favor of the separation of church and state. Reagan’s extremely conservative and religious views were clearly stated when he said that the nation’s liberty stemmed from “an abiding faith in God,” and that “of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports” (AP n.p.).

Even though Margaret Atwood affirms that “nowhere in the book is the [Gilead] regime identified as Christian” (*In Other* 244), she imagined the Republic of Gilead’s ideology from the Bible and the same source offers many points in common with the ideology defended by the American Moral Majority, Reagan’s supporters. They—Gilead’s rulers, the Sons of Jacob—had their particular interpretation of the Bible in which a woman’s primary responsibility was rearing children. According to the Moral Majority, it was in the Bible that God had designed different roles for men and women (Banwart 144). They maintained that abortion, feminism, and gay rights were a “tripartite assault on the family” (141) and saw an identification between “patriotism and serving one’s country with being pro-family and supportive of morality in politics” (144). Since his vice-presidential nomination in 1980,

George H.W. Bush—Reagan's successor in the USA presidency—defended Reagan's conservative stance, more rigid than Bush's own initial moral positions. Accused of acting ideologically in a chameleonic way and of being more conservative than he really was, during his presidency (1989-1993) and the posterior election campaign, Bush "put aside conviction for political opportunity...[and] recanted his long-standing pro-choice politics in order to be chosen as Reagan's running mate" (Greenberg n.p.).

2. THE POSTHUMAN: TECHNOLOGY AND BIOTECHNOLOGY

2.1. TECHNOLOGY: SURVEILLANCE AND INFORMATION

The Handmaid's Tale has been praised for its seemingly prophetic virtues in its anticipatory vision of Western society's maladies (see Mead). Published sixteen years before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the novel seems to foresee the tremendous vulnerability American citizens can feel when confronting a—real or invented in the case of the novel—external threat and the subsequent dangers for democracy the effects of such threat may have. As Margaret Atwood herself affirms, after 9/11, democratic governments have legitimized “the methods of the darker human past, upgraded technologically and sanctified to our own uses . . . For the sake of freedom, freedom must be renounced” (*In Other* 148–49). Gilead's regime is born from the same type of argument. With the excuse that they *protect* and *defend* Gilead's inhabitants—former Americans—from an invented terrorist attack, “they blamed it on the Islamic fanatics” (*Handmaid* 183), their freedom and rights are gradually suppressed with barely any resistance: “Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd boiled to death before you knew it” (66).

One of the main concerns about the birth of the posthuman subject is how our technological society may affect “the status of the body and the self” (Toffoletti 1). In the *Handmaid*, technology becomes also an essential tool, a weapon with which a totalitarian regime can be enacted. As Roger Clarke states, *The Handmaid's Tale*, as a dystopia and in common with cyberpunk, belongs to a genre that anticipates negative derivations of the novel's contemporary society and helps to assess developments in the attitude of

authors of fiction to what they perceive as dangers already present in their contemporary society, for instance “data surveillance matters” (n.p.). In the novel, the coup leaders initially install control and surveillance networks under the excuse of protecting citizens from terrorism. Theoretically, these measures are provisional, for the sake of security; this is why they easily and rapidly achieve citizens’ consent. American people in *The Handmaid’s Tale* accept total state control without any resistance. Lisa Jadwin, in her analysis of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, remarks that Atwood expresses in her works serious concerns about how “surveillance and propaganda allow the state to control their citizens” (34). After the creation of a subdued and restrained society, Gilead’s leaders applied similar restriction procedures to those described by Michel Foucault and adopted in the 17th Century in an exceptional situation, when a leprosy plague reached a town. “The plague-stricken town traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies—this is the utopia of the perfect governed city” (*Discipline* 198). The reaction against an external menace is that the state—the only entity responsible for national security at a national level—endows itself with total authority.

According to George Lakoff, who parallels the workings of the nation and the family, the state is this “caring” but domineering “father figure” which is legitimized to police its metaphorical children to prevent dangerous and clandestine activities and secure citizens’ welfare (50). However, the increasing number of surveillance systems can pose a threat to the population’s freedom and privacy. Once this first step of cutting civil liberties is taken, the possibility of collective control measures is available and open. The Gilead regime is born because the coup leaders own the mechanisms of surveillance and control provided by technology. In this regard, there seem to be many gaps in the plot that remain unexplained, like the presence of a private army more efficiently equipped

than the American armed forces that appear out of the blue. Yet, they can be ascribed to the fact that Offred, as autodiegetic narrator and exclusive focalizer, has and offers a partial and self-conscious “reconstruction” of the events limited to her own particular and individual experience (*Handmaid* 144; 275; 279). Moreover, Atwood with her witty irony, uses Pieixoto’s analysis of Offred’s narration to underline that it is very problematic to “authenticate” the narrator and her story. He explains that Offred’s narration is his—more or less arbitrary—transcription of thirty cassette tapes that should “be regarded as approximate” because they “were arranged in no particular order” (314).

Intense and extreme surveillance is the resource used by Gilead’s elite to control the remaining population after eliminating “otherness,” that is, those opposed to the regime. Gilead becomes a massive prison built after Bentham’s Panopticon model, described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, first published in 1975. In the panopticon a single watchman was able to control the entire prison’s population. The design allowed the prison guard to see all cells and inmates at once, and even if it was physically impossible to observe each prisoner at the same time, the mere prospect to being policed allowed for the seamless functioning of the penitentiary system. As Foucault explains: “A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation. So, it is not necessary to use the force to constrain the convict to good behaviour” (*Discipline* 202). In Gilead the single watchman is omniscient and ubiquitous because “The Republic of Gilead ... knows no bounds. Gilead is within you” (*Handmaid* 33), each Gileadean citizen’s fear efficiently fosters the regime, fear is the best tool for control.

Offred’s first person account oscillates between the present tense of an *apparently* simultaneous narration—because, as explained above, her narration is the arbitrary written transcription of 30 cassettes—and analepses in a combination of interpolated narration (in Genette’s terminology 244–45). The narrative is divided into chapters

related to sleeping time—seven *Night* and *Nap* chapters—and other chapters whose titles refer to routines and day-light activities: “Shopping,” “Waiting Room,” “Household”. In the former, she voluntarily shifts to the past tense to recall her memories from her most personal and cherished past. She does so to fill the empty hours of doing nothing that are only “hers.” As she says, “the night is mine, my own time, to do with as I will ... my time out. Where should I go? Somewhere good” (*Handmaid* 47). In the chapters set in her life as a handmaid, when some memory of her past as a free woman comes to her mind, the often-involuntary memories appear in the form of digressions provoked by associations of ideas: “dishtowels are the same as they always were, sometimes these flashes of normality come at me ... the ordinary, the usual, a reminder, like a kick” (58). These “diurnal” chapters are centered on her scheduled and controlled life as a prisoner in Gilead. It is in the chapters devoted to Offred’s life as a handmaid that her narration becomes more detached and impersonal in her description, at the same time as the use of the present tense gives the reader a feeling of immediacy. She acts like a faithful witness and describes what she sees while her words, actions and thoughts are integrated into the narration:

A chair, a table, a lamp. Above, on the white ceiling, a relief ornament in the shape of a wreath, and in the centre of it a blank space, plastered over . . . Sunlight comes in through the window too, and falls on the floor, which is made of wood, in narrow strips, highly polished. I can smell the polish. There’s a rug on the floor, oval, of braided rags. This is the kind of touch they like, from things that have no further use. A return to traditional values. Waste not want not . . . Like other things now, thought must be rationed. There’s a lot that doesn’t bear thinking about. Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last. (17)

She presents herself as an obedient prisoner without rebelling against her situation. Her main goal is her own survival: “I intend to last” (17), while she also transpires the conscious acknowledgment of being continually “under a vigilant eye”, not only that unknown eye of the authority but also everyone else’s gaze: “If either of us slips through the net . . . the other will be accountable” (29).

In a society in which fear of being monitored, blamed, and then punished is the main source of social control, nobody trusts anybody, anyone can turn out to be the “finger of blame.” Offred suffers the loneliness attached to her role of “institutionalized mistress” and the rejection this produces in other women. The wives resent these younger women having sex with their husbands in their own houses,¹¹ econowives—poor married women—“do not like [them]” (*Handmaid* 54) and neither do the “marthas” or servant women. Compassion and fraternal bonds among women have also been erased from Gilead and with them the spirit of the women’s liberation movement. The other women do not see the handmaids as victims, they emphasize that they have a different option. As Rita—the martha/servant—says, they could “Go to the Colonies . . . They have the choice” (20). The strategy of division and control creates extreme alienation, which prevents any attempt at rebellion. To borrow from Foucault again: “The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities . . . by a sequestered and observed solitude” (201).

Offred is perfectly aware of her isolation. Even among the handmaids, her peers, everyone is monitored and can be reported and punished if she does not play her part in

¹¹ If *The Handmaid's Tale* is, according to Lepore, “among other things, an updating of Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)” (n.p.), the Wives’ attitude in the novel faithfully reflects slave owners’ mistresses’ behavior when they “had no compassion for the poor victim . . . [and were] incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which [their] unfortunate, helpless slave[s] [were] placed” (Jacobs 53).

the surveillance system: “The truth is that she [Ofglen] is my spy, as I am hers” (29). The repression/control and surveillance system’s working does not allow for the development of personal relationships. The constant pressure of the panopticon model implies not only the acceptance, but also the collaboration of the prisoners in monitoring their own behavior. The government is insidiously able to modify all Gilead’s citizens’ will and behavior—no matter whether they are male or female—“even before the offences, mistakes and crimes have been committed” (Foucault, *Discipline* 206). In day light and under the possible scrutiny of the “Eyes,” Offred “can’t take the risk” (*Handmaid* 29) and when she confronts the dissenters’ corpses hanging on the wall, “What [she] feels is that [she] must not feel” (43). As the perfect and obedient prisoner under surveillance, she gets used to the brutality of the regime because “ordinary . . . is what you are used to” (43), and she “can’t afford to know” (43), to acknowledge and share the suffering of the condemned. She wants to survive, to behave as Gileadean authorities expect from her and if they demand from her ‘to be a tree’, “[she] stand[s] on the corner, pretending [she is] a tree” (28).

Even though a wide majority of critics have always emphasized women’s oppression as the main characteristic in the novel, therefore labelling it as a feminist dystopia, the power-sharing structure would be pyramidal, as Atwood herself claims:

In a feminist dystopia pure and simple, all of the men would have greater rights than all of the women. It would be two-layered in structure: top layer men, bottom layer women. But Gilead is the usual kind of dictatorship: shaped like a pyramid, with the powerful of both sexes at the apex, the men generally outranking the women at the same level; then descending levels of power and status with men and women in each, all the way down to the bottom, where the unmarried men

must serve in the ranks before being awarded an Econowife. (Atwood, "Haunted" n.p.)

The color of people's clothes makes visible the assigned role and its relative—though always limited—power in the case of women, whereas the panopticon model defines power relations for both, women and men, in Gilead's strongly hierarchical society. Each member of society is allowed a different degree of independence. Not only handmaids and male suspected dissenters are under surveillance, but also the most important commanders of the Gilead government and their wives can be monitored by a structure that provides the means to "supervise its own mechanisms" (Foucault, *Discipline* 204): nobody knows who the "Eyes"—the secret surveillance force in the Gilead republic—are. The unknown identity of the "Eyes" is presented as the best strategy to maintain the fear attached to the invisible thread of the surveillance net. Even the Guardians, the regime's military force, do not dare to question the Eyes' power and authority when a black van with their symbol—a winged eye on the side—arrives at a control post: The Guardians "waved through without a pause. [They] would not want to take the risk of looking inside, searching, doubting their authority. Whatever they think" (*Handmaid* 32).

Back in the 1980s and still now in the 21st Century, technology and information are the sites of power. A terrorized nation is easier to handle; as Zygmunt Bauman affirms, "displays of threats to personal safety have been promoted to the rank of a major, perhaps the major asset, in the mass media ratings war, adding yet more to the success of both the commercial and the political uses of fear" (29). This strategic use of fear was employed by Gileadean coup perpetrators. After attacking the Congress and shooting the President,

they suspended the Constitution. They said it would be temporary. There wasn't even any rioting in the streets. . . . Newspapers were censored . . . for security

reasons they said. The roadblocks began to appear, and Identipasses. Everyone approved of that, since it was obvious you couldn't be too careful. (182–83)

Any use of technology is then denied to women in Gilead, but the ultraconservative leaders still use the media and censored information as a way to manipulate and control the citizens. First, they are able to deprive women simultaneously from their jobs and their money—physical money did not exist and virtual money was a “Compucount” number in their “Compubank” (*Handmaid* 182)—only by pushing “a few buttons” and changing the information stored in their “Compucards” (187). Then, money is replaced by tokens that also have a number in the “Compubite” (36). Recalling well-known Nazi practices, each handmaid's identity also becomes a numeric code written on her ankle, a kind of “passport in reverse” (75). Her status and with it her identity are defined by the government and checked in the “Compucheck” (31) each time she walks on the street. All these “compu-names” emphasize and warn against the weight that computers and technology already had in the 1980s, affecting the definition of human identity. Identity was dangerously more and more determined by stored information. If individual identity was menaced by its dependence on computerized folders, the citizens' capacity of reaction as a collective becomes numbed through the control of the media.

The media reveal as their best propaganda and one of the Gilead government peace makers' tools: “They show us only victories, never defeats” (*Handmaid* 93). Offred understands the subliminal message behind the news program, in which all the information is governmentally controlled: “What he's telling us, his level smile implies, is for our own good. Everything will be all right soon . . . There will be peace. You must trust. You must go to sleep, like good children” (93). Gilead citizens' blind gullibility leads to total acceptance and passivity in the novel, the means by which the totalitarian regime can be maintained. But this strategy of control over the population would not be

only restricted to fictional Gilead, according to Ray Surette: “The world as seen on TV resembles ‘citizen-sheep’ being protected from ‘wolves-criminals’ by ‘sheepdogs-police’” (in Bauman 29). The passivity and regression to an infant state of the population as an unthinking mass who must be protected and directed by “the guardianship of law and order” would also be daily promoted by the way the world is portrayed on real contemporary television.

In the novel, former American citizens’ empathy is easily silenced or mollified by means of generating fear and hatred toward the menace posed by otherness, or simply by the feeling of living in safety while bad things happen only to “others.” Offred recalls her family as “people who were not in the papers” (*Handmaid* 66). She did not fight for anyone, she did not speak out as her feminist mother did when she was still an American citizen living in a democracy: “We lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn’t the same as ignorance, you have to work at it . . . the newspapers stories were like dreams to us, bad dreams dreamt by others” (66). Atwood creates a dystopia in which the protagonist “does not grow into the role of a heroine. Rather, she adapts to the daily humiliations, learns to protect herself by betraying others, and seldom hesitates to sacrifice her dignity for fleeting comfort” (Hoffmann 17). Offred’s acceptance and passivity in the novel anticipates a similar scenario with some of the characteristics that 21st-century dystopian narratives have, according to Lepore. She affirms that, while dystopian fiction was born as a warning against the future in which resistance played an essential role in the plot, now “it’s become a fiction of submission, the fiction of an untrusting, lonely, and sullen twenty-first century, the fiction of fake news and infowars, the fiction of helplessness and hopelessness . . . it doesn’t call for courage; it finds that cowardice suffices” (n.p.).

Technology in the form of surveillance systems and manipulation of the information media proves to be an extremely effective control measure to achieve easily

the citizenship's acceptance of any action aimed at reducing civil liberties and rights. We live in a society in which identity is increasingly conformed by technology since a large part of our identity is formed by information. Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) affirmed that the paradigmatic shift, the posthuman age, opened the moment we humans recognized that we are essentially information. Our [post]human identity was formed by data kept in our brain and the consideration of our body as something replaceable. Increasingly, identity is not only formed by our brain's data but also by the data kept in governmental computers and in the web. Our posthuman identity seems to be defined by a sum of data stored in different folders. In Gilead, once the leaders of the new regime are in power, they hunt and eliminate dissenters and enemies with the help provided by the information—dataveillance—kept about people's political ideologies, sexual orientation, and loyalties. Nowadays, all movements, acts and even personal decisions are stored in databases and circulating on the Internet. Atwood's dystopia is a warning against a general passivity and blind obedience that finds its best example in the attitude and the almost numbed consciousness of her protagonist, Offred, who chooses this passive strategy as her way to try and survive, with an uncertain result. Offred in the novel describes how she is disempowered and made dependent first on her husband and later on her subsequent commanders. She becomes a commodity long before being a handmaid and this gradual process of dispossession is accepted as part of the establishment's "urgent measures." She can rid herself from the red clothes but she is branded by fire¹² as her identity has become mere data saved in "the Compucheck" (*Handmaid* 31).

¹² In the novel Offred's identification as a Handmaid is tattooed on her ankle whereas, in the 1990 film, she is given an identification bracelet that can be read by a scanner. In the 2017 *Handmaid* Hulu show she is implanted with an identification chip that defines and keeps her identity information. If there is a significant social and structural difference between the 1980s context of the novel and that of the 2017 Hulu series is that the 2017's Offred is a *pure cyborg* who has technology inserted *within her*: she has become totally

2.2. BIOTECHNOLOGY: SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD

Kay strongly claimed that the plot of any dystopia “should be grounded in some kind of reality whether of historical fact or of human psychology” (n.p.). She argued that “neither genders’ relationship in the 1980s, nor the influence of evangelical Christians were controversial enough to justify, even hypothetically, the creation of such a regime as Gilead” (n.p.). Kay reduces the plot of the novel to a mere example of the binary thinking of the war of the sexes and affirms that *The Handmaid's Tale* has “zero degree of probability” (n.p.). She argues that “in an era of falling fertility rates . . . the spectre of mass eugenics is a compelling topic for a futurist. Yet 32 years on, there are no signs of a handmaids’ program in democratic countries” (n.p.). Furthermore, she concludes that “the plots of dystopic novels based in ideology rather than observed reality can be just plain silly, with *The Handmaid's Tale* [as] a perfect case in point” (n.p.). In contrast, other critics such as Laura Moss and Howells label *The Handmaid's Tale* as a “political fable for our time, as if the present is rushing in to confirm Atwood’s dire warnings about birth technologies, environmental pollution, human rights abuses, religious fanaticism, and extreme right-wing political movements” (in Bouson, *Critical Insights: Handmaid* 3–4). Timely, as Atwood herself defends after Trump’s election (in Geraghty n.p.), or timeless because the novel tackles many issues that are still unsolved problems in Western societies, it seems undeniable that the novel still keeps its controversial character. The

posthuman. The means of control changes from the 1980s literary version to that of 2017. Technology advances with the passing of time, but the important fact is that her identity, what she is allowed to be and do, is still determined by the information that others keep of her.

following pages reexamine *The Handmaid's Tale* from a 21st-century perspective, since we have presumably reached the historical time in which Atwood placed her dystopian novel.

As Robert Pepperell explains, the “posthuman condition” and “the end of humanism,” among other things, deal with “how we live, how we conduct our exploitation of the environment, animals and each other. It is about what things we investigate, what questions we ask and what assumptions underlie them” (171). If Gilead is a society in which extended infertility is the consequence of the environmental mistreatment and degradation that has also caused the extinction of many animal species, and the handmaids’ slavery is a perfect demonstration of exploitation of the—gendered—other, the assumption seems to be that Gilead reached the terrain and condition of the posthuman long before the term was widely known. The next pages will also assess the thin line that divides what is ethically justified and accepted by a given society—Gilead vs 21st century Western society—and what is not.

2.2.1. Surrogate Motherhood and Handmaids

The role played by creative writers is, according to Susan Squier, crucial in the understanding and treatment of artificial reproduction issues and their gender and social implications. Squier acknowledges the diverse representations and approaches of this field in the works of Margaret Atwood, Octavia Butler and Angela Carter, among others. There is a certain “disjunction” in the feminist responses to reproductive technologies (RT). Some of them give “emancipatory interpretations of reproductive technologies” (19) whereas other feminist theorists classify these technologies as “unsuccessful, unsafe, unkind, unnecessary, unwanted, unsisterly, and unwise” (19). Toffoletti explains that

some feminist critics such as Wajcman see technology associated to maleness and as a means of perpetuating power inequalities between genders. Moreover, as Cockburn affirms, “technological tools are used by men to maintain power over women” (in Toffoletti 22). The handmaids’ role is accepted in the novel’s universe, as happens in some countries of our present-day Western society with surrogate motherhood or substitute wombs. Atwood herself acknowledges in the novel the intended relationship between surrogate mothers and handmaids. In the ‘Historical Notes’ section of the book Pieixoto explains that already in the pre-Gilead period, that is the 1980s US, “the need for birth services was already recognized . . . inadequately met by ‘artificial insemination’, ‘fertility clinics’, and the use of ‘surrogate mothers,’ who were hired for the purpose” (*Handmaid* 317). However, many people who are shocked by “the ceremony” and Offred’s duty to conceive a child for her commander and his wife, deny any parallel between her and a contemporary surrogate mother but, as Aunt Lydia says in the novel, “ordinary . . . is what you are used to . . . [what] may not seem ordinary to you now . . . after a time it will. It will become ordinary” (43). In other words, as Fukuyama says: “there are no transcendent standards for determining right and wrong beyond whatever a culture declares to be a right” (113) and, in a significant number of countries, our contemporary Western society approves of any biotechnological development that allows people to have gene-related offspring.

When *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985, Louise Joy Brown—the first baby born as a result of an in vitro fertilization (IVF)—was seven years old. The enormous possibilities that her birth brought about for infertile people raised almost immediately the first ethical objections and the problematization of possible future developments in the field of human reproduction. At that time, Gena Corea published her book *The Mother Machine*, in which she entered the ethical debate surrounding

scientifically mediated motherhood and the probable implications for women in general. The issue, she said, “is not fertility. The issue is exploitation of women” (7). In other words, what for feminists opposing RT poses a problem is the “exploitative and unequal” relationship between women and technological advances that situate women’s body and nature in a position increasingly dominated by technology (Toffoletti 23). As Ayesha Chatterjee points out: “While Atwood’s handmaids are not called surrogates, some disturbing parallels exist between their experiences and the realities of modern-day surrogacy” (n.p.). At the time of *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s publication, gestational surrogacy without embryos’ transference was a fact. In 1983 a figure of about one hundred children had been born through this method in the USA (Corea 214). In her book, Corea reflected on the ethical, social, legal and economic consequences of the new possibilities opened up by the biomedical advances in RT. She considered the main arguments put forward in the defense of surrogate motherhood: it was an attainable resource for all these women who suffered “the empty arms” syndrome, a cure for the infertility “disease” which was a “free” decision for all the parts involved. What is more, the surrogate mother who rents her womb has certain psychological “reward”: she helps other human beings to have their own children and obtains financial gain, that is, everybody gains something. In this allegedly beneficial exchange, on the one side there is a woman’s body, on the other technology and money, as Offred thinks: “There’s always something that can be exchanged” (*Handmaid* 24). The objections Corea raised are related to probable racism, the medicalization or treatment of infertility as a disease, the lack of a real possibility of choosing on the part of the women renting their wombs, the economic factor that would transform mothers and babies into commodities, and the search for the reduction of production costs in the process that would be the trigger of another kind of colonialism.

Sterility is the main problem regarding Gilead's society, although it is something that officially affects only women, since any problem related to procreation by law is a woman's fault, never a man's (*Handmaid* 72). It is the most genuine patriarchal thought that leads Gilead's commanders to desire the preservation of their own genes, whereas the wives, who know that none of their own genetic information is going to be preserved, only want to be mothers. They have "empty arms," they consent to their husbands' having sex with other women in the hope of obtaining a baby in exchange. Why does a woman accept her husband having sex—even if as allegedly "impersonal" as the one had in the ceremony—with another woman? Extrapolating this to real life, Corea explains that the reasons behind women's acceptance of first surrogacy experiences—without embryos' transference—include, among others, trying to get attention and love from the future child, fear of being exchanged for another fertile woman and certain fear of "social ostracism and economic abandonment" (220). Corea goes on saying that in surrogate motherhood "the woman is again seen as the vessel for a man's seed, just as she was under Aristotelian/Thomistic biology" (221). Moreover, she also affirms that it is the Judeo-Christian tradition which gives a woman value in relation with her fertility as illustrated in the story of Abraham's wife, Sarai, and her "handmaid" Hagar; and now biomedicine and technology make possible the renewal of the "same old story" (223–24). This is the same narrative as Gilead's regime uses to justify the "rightfulness" of the handmaids' status. Offred is looked after for the sake of her commander and his wife, the prospective parents: "washed, brushed, fed, like a prize pig" (79) and taken to the doctor "once a month, for tests" (69). Chaterjee contends that present-day gestational mothers "are akin to Atwood's handmaids—outsourced, outside, and out of sight . . . separated from their own families, including their children, during the pregnancy and required to stay in dormitories, constantly monitored and unable to leave at will" (n.p). But the bad

living conditions suffered by these modern surrogate mothers are often, whether voluntarily or not, ignored, as happened with Offred's commander in the novel, who several times "gave evidence of being truly ignorant of the real conditions under which [she] lived" (*Handmaid* 167).

Serena Joy—Offred's commander's wife—has an overwhelming desire for a baby who would raise her social value. Even if socially powerful, the wives are "defeated women. They have been unable . . ." (*Handmaid* 56) to have their own babies. In the birthday ceremonies, Gilead's wives whose handmaids are having a baby, perform childbirth as if they were themselves really in labor. They appropriate the laboring woman's role in the childbirth and get the other wives' attention. In this "ceremony," which belongs only to women, wives achieve the highest level in social ranking among their peers. The "successful" handmaid who gives birth to a commander's healthy baby only gains her immunity, her right to continue living, whereas the wife gains the status of mother and a baby that she will not have to share with a handmaid. It will be only "hers." As Aunt Lydia says: "a thing is valued . . . only if it is rare and hard to get" (124). In the novel's universe, the wives want to "fill their empty arms" with the most valuable possession in Gilead: a baby. As Arnold E. Davidson says, it is remarkable that "there is no necessary relationship between one's importance to the perpetuation of society and one's privilege within that society" (120). The handmaids are the only fertile women in Gilead but they live subjugated to the powerful wives, as their slaves. In terms of biology, commanders and wives have surpassed the age signaled by nature to be fertile, as happens with some contemporary parents through surrogacy.¹³ However, both, the wives in the novel and the parents in 21st-century reality, have the power, the means and the money to

¹³ Only as an example, in the U.S District of Columbia, the April 2017 new surrogacy law, sets among other things the verification of "medical and mental health evaluations and approvals of the surrogate (but not the intended parents)" (Crockin n.p.).

obtain their reward, the most valued commodity: a perfect baby—because both in the novel and in real life ‘defective products’ are rejected¹⁴ or “put somewhere, quickly, away” (*Handmaid* 123).

2.2.2. Surrogacy: Elitist “Cure” or Business

As Corea explains, before the irruption of biotechnological advances in reproduction “a woman could at some point, however painfully, come to terms with her infertility, go on with her life” (6). Moreover, according to the World Health Organization, infertility—a “state” which all women and men reach at some point in their lives—is defined as a “disease of the reproduction system defined by the failure to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse” (n.p.). It is in this context of infertility/disease that RT entered as something therapeutic, something designed to “heal” someone who is “ill.” It was formerly intended only for heterosexual couples. Viewed in these terms, infertility would be a sickness needing a cure: genetically-related parenthood. Moreover, as has been alleged recently, genetic parenthood is the prospective parents’ right.¹⁵ Consequently, the desire for gene-related offspring also implies the elimination of multiracial families. At the beginning, mostly Western white heterosexual couples resorted to surrogacy, an image that Gilead faithfully

¹⁴ In 2016, surrogacy was in the front page of newspapers when “baby Gammy,” a Down Syndrome child “was rejected by an Australian couple who kept Gammy’s twin Pipah. The case was further complicated by the fact that the father paying for the children was discovered by the birth mom to be a sex offender” (Lahl n.p.).

¹⁵ At the beginning of 2017, Ciudadanos—the fourth political force in Spain, where surrogacy is illegal—drafted a proposal for a surrogacy law. This generated a national debate about whether surrogacy is an exploitative practice or an “undeniable” right for those who want to be parents (Blanco n.p.).

represents. Gilead was a racist white society,¹⁶ and so seems to be the process of surrogacy, which was suspected from the beginning of undeniable racist nuances, as Corea argued:

Since we live in a society where white people are valued more highly than those of color, these technologies will not affect all women equally. There will be no great demand for the eggs of a black woman. But there may well be a demand for her womb—a womb which could gestate the embryo of a white woman and man.

(2)

One of the main arguments against surrogacy agreements is not only the commodification of the woman's body, very often equated to prostitution, but also the issue of the baby turned into a trendy and luxury product. Nowadays surrogacy is regulated by contract, a business concerning millions of dollars in the USA states where commercial surrogacy is legal. It has turned India and other third world countries into "womb providers" (see Pardies). This view of surrogacy as mere business is also, according to Offred, shared by the commander and his wife in the novel. For him, even "The Ceremony" in which he has to inseminate his handmaid "has nothing to do with sexual desire . . . is not recreation . . . is serious business" (*Handmaid* 105), whereas Serena Joy affirms that "as far as [she is] concerned, this is like a business transaction" (25). It seems that it is not a democratic way to reach motherhood/parenthood, either in the novel, or in present day society, because not all infertile people can afford to pay for the process. It is frequently argued that it is precisely its character of profitable business that makes the agreement beneficial for all the parties involved: surrogate mother, intended parents and intermediaries. Surrogacy involves a significant economic investment on the part of the prospective

¹⁶ The TV series based on *The Handmaid's Tale* has incorporated the figure of non-white handmaids, lowering this way the clear racist component present in the original work.

parents who want to “choose” the child they want, above all a baby with their own genetic information. This is why surrogacy has been suspected of having in its roots not only the shadow of racism but also of eugenics.¹⁷ In the novel there are not but white handmaids, since Gilead is a racist white theocracy. In our society, when the egg comes from donors, the intended parents want to have the “best” possible baby, and those donors “who are graduates and those with high IQs are in particular demand” (“The Iona Institute” 6), although most of the couples prefer, when possible, to be genetically related to the baby. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, a handmaid pregnant by a man other than her commander, if discovered, is sentenced to death (*Handmaid* 71). In that sense, the survival of Gilead's society as a whole becomes only an excuse: the rulers' offspring is the real issue at stake. The commanders only want their babies, not “any” Gileadean baby. In the 21st Century, this desire for the “genetically right” baby leads some surrogate parents—suspecting that their child does not have the desired genetic code—to feel outraged. In some cases, after raising a healthy baby, they sue the surrogate mother and the agency involved in the contract, thereby gaining a large economic compensation. They have won lawsuits for damages because of “loss of genetic affinity” (Crockin n.p.).¹⁸ As Pikee Saxena *et al* wrote in 2012: “It seems ironic that people are engaging in the practice of surrogacy when nearly 12 million Indian children are orphans” and claimed for “the need to modify and make the adoption procedure simple for all” (6). But it seems at least dubious that intended parents—having the economic means to obtain a genetically related baby

¹⁷ Eugenics, as defined by its founder Sir Francis Galton, is “the science which deals with all influences which improve the inborn qualities of race; also with those which develop them to the utmost advantage” (Squier 57).

¹⁸ Furthermore, recently a woman who accepted a commercial surrogacy in California delivered two children she supposed were twins, but because of a medical incident called superfetation, one of the babies was her biological son. She has been asked for compensation by the intended parents, who did not want to keep the ‘unrelated’ baby (Farand n.p.).

through surrogacy—would prefer an already born, probably from another race, and non-genetically related baby.

2.2.3. Separating Genetic Information from the Body/Flesh in Motherhood

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles is critical with the identification of human identity with informational patterns that would be transferable from one container—the body—to another. In this conception of the posthuman subject, the body would be deprived of any substantial weight in the construction of human identity. This idea of being only a dehumanized container for a baby—genetic information—is perfectly expressed by Offred when she says: “We are containers, it’s only the inside of our bodies that are important” (*Handmaid* 107). In 1990, Hayles had already argued that biogenetics and reproduction techniques stand as a good example of the denaturalization of the human body: “When the genetic text of the unborn child can be embedded in a biological site far removed from its origin, the intimate connection between child and womb which once provided a natural context for gestation has been denatured” (*Chaos* 27). Both Gileadeans and contemporary want-to-be parents foster genetic information as the imperative condition to define the baby belonging to its family, its identity and, in consequence, familiar relationships. The surrogate mother, the “two-legged-womb” is, like the handmaids, ejected from a process of motherhood in which the body has lost any right and is not considered an intrinsic part of a woman’s identity. After years of women’s struggle affirming the ownership of their bodies, the surrogate mother’s dispossession goes as far as losing any legal power of decision over her own body. A triplet’s pregnant surrogate under a signed contract cannot even refuse to have a selective abortion when the intended father does not want to keep all three babies: a “75-pages agreement ...

includes a provision agreeing to selective reduction” (Crockin n.p.). As Jennifer Block wonders: “if gestational surrogacy eliminates maternity rights . . . If the thinking is, ‘This is not my baby; this is not my seed; I am not the mother,’ can the thinking slip into ‘This is not my body?’” (n.p.). This rejection and woman’s detachment from her own body is also a defense mechanism, used by Offred in the novel: “one detaches oneself” (*Handmaid* 106). During the “Ceremony”, she says that the commander is “fucking . . . the lower part of [her] body” (104), as if her body—split in two halves—and her bodily sensation could be separated from her mind. Moreover, Offred avoids “looking down at [her] body” because she does not want “to look at something that determines [her] so completely” (72–73). Block explains that some surrogate mothers ‘linguistically’ dissociate from their pregnancies by means of using the language of “babysitting, foster parenting or nannying” (n.p.). Moreover, Nadya, a Russian several-times surrogate, considers herself a worker rather than a mother and denies any importance to the fact that the baby is fed inside her body and with her blood: “The only thing I did was giving the babies blood. The foetuses were attached to my placenta. That was the only link to my organism, the only thing that was mine!” (Weis n.p.). They try and avoid creating emotional bonds with the fetus, but as medical sociologist Barbara Katz Rothman argues: “If you are pregnant with a baby, you are the mother of the baby.... the nutrients, the blood supply, the sounds, the sweep of the body . . . That’s the only mother that baby has” (in Block n.p.). But this is not the case either in the novel or in present day society. In both sites “there will be family albums . . . with all the children in them; no Handmaids [no surrogate mothers] though . . . this kind . . . we’ll be invisible” (*Handmaid* 240).

Some popular posthuman theories see the body as something disposable. They defend the idea that what makes us humans is the information stored in our mind, which can be transported from one container to another. This controversy could be extrapolated

to the issue of what makes us parents: the genetic information of an embryo—which cannot survive by itself—, or the body that grows this embryo into a human being? Or both? And, what about nurturing the child in the case of foster parents? It seems that those who are parents through rented wombs make it clear that genetic codes/information is the most important issue here, what gives them the right to use a woman's body to satisfy their desire. They are prospective parents that see the woman's body only as a container. If genetic information is what makes someone a baby's mother or father and the womb is considered only as a "hatchery," the baby's identity and belonging would also be associated to the 'right' genetic information. This notion becomes questioned when one learns about the ROPA—Reception of Oocytes from Partner—technique as the best way for lesbian couples to really *share* their motherhood. The technique explains that both are "biological mothers" since one is "who provides the eggs and the other who carries the embryo in her womb" (Marina *et al.* 939). This technique implicitly recognizes the importance of the "egg mommy" and the "womb mommy" in order to share motherhood between two women, and implicitly it invalidates the argument of "disembodied" motherhood detached from the womb.

Francis Fukuyama, one of the pioneers of the Posthuman theoretical debate, is particularly worried about the implications for human identity of technological enhancements and modifications. He claims that human nature is a meaningful concept that defines our ethical dimension or "basic values" (7), and remarks that once our nature is modified by technology, our values and acceptance of political regimes will be modified as well and "will have possibly malign consequences for liberal democracy and the nature of politics itself" (7). In Gilead, most of the population is infertile, its nature has been altered as a secondary effect of the abuse of technologies and biological experimentations that have altered both human bodies and their environment. This change

in Gileadeans' bodies is the trigger of a radical shift in the social thread. Furthermore, what lies behind creating the figure of the handmaid is not the need of the Gileadean society, as a whole, to avoid the danger of extinction, but the need of the powerful *men* to have their own biological descendants. It is the powerful commanders' genetic material that they want to preserve and this is why the young guardians dream of gaining "enough power and live to be old enough, of being allotted a Handmaid of their own" (*Handmaid* 32). Genetic inheritance is as important for the commanders as for people signing a surrogacy contract. In spite of Kay's strong defense of *The Handmaid's Tale's* fantastic and non-factual character and even though it is true that there is no sign of "pure" handmaids in democratic countries, at the time of writing this dissertation there seems to be a growing number of women in third world countries who have become "two legged wombs" (*Handmaid* 146) or surrogate mothers—as Offred was "forced" to be in the novel because finally "the expectations of others . . . have become [her] own" (83). As Glosswitch affirms: "*The Handmaid's Tale* has already come true just not for white Western women" (n.p.). The modern "handmaids" in the 21st-century world are economically weak women, particularly third-world women, whereas "the commanders" and "wives"¹⁹—financially powerful enough to pay for renting a womb—mainly belong and remain in the first world. 21st-century society shows generalized tolerance and certain lack of debate on the ethics of a woman risking her body's integrity²⁰ when serving another man/woman to be a parent. However, perhaps in a not too distant future, the poor

¹⁹ I use the names "commanders and wives" indistinctly for men and women since nowadays some of the want-to-be parents that recur to a surrogate womb are also homosexual couples.

²⁰ In surrogacy with embryos transference—the preferred, in which the embryo carries at least half of its intended parents' genetic information—the surrogate mother has a hormone treatment to suppress her own ovulation, takes estrogen and progesterone for weeks. Moreover, she endures sexual abstinence with her partner, in sum, "her uterus resumes an amplified, robotic version of its normal cycle" (Block n.p.). To maximize the probabilities, the woman is implanted with more than one embryo, so the result is frequently a multiple gestation which "increases maternal morbidity and both fetal and neonatal morbidity and mortality" ("Multiple Gestation Associated with Infertility Therapy" n.p.).

and third world women's wombs will become outdated commodities and be replaced by artificial wombs.

Human gestation outside the womb has been the unsuccessful goal of several researchers during, at least, the past 30 years, but 2017 became the highlight that marked a new path. In 2017, researchers succeeded in keeping alive a lamb fetus in an artificial womb for the second time (Zoellner n.p.). In addition to this, researchers at Cambridge University kept alive a human embryo in artificial conditions imitating the womb, this time for 13 days, because there is a 14-day legal limit for keeping an embryo alive in a laboratory (Sedgwick n.p.). The possibility of a human being grown outside a woman's body seems a probable next step in the future. While the debate of whether rented wombs should be universally accepted and legalized is still unresolved, scientific developments will confront us with a new ethical dilemma, "ectogenesis," which Sedwick links to the total deprivation of women's power over pregnancy. The future of human reproduction could be totally governed and controlled by technology. An option that looked like science-fiction some years ago, is now a real possibility. As happened to the introduction of RT, there is not a unanimous response to ectogenesis. Some optimistically see it as the breaking up of the most important barrier separating gender roles, that is, the actual women's liberation (Prasad n.p.). In contrast, others problematize the negative possibilities: the phantom of eugenics, who controls and decides when and how to use ectogenesis, the widening of the gulf between rich and poor in reproduction, as well as the ultimate deprivation of women's right to choose (Sedgwick n.p.). Others question whether an infant "nurtured in an artificial womb would not be comparable to the 'healthy, happy fetus in the womb'" (Yuko n.p.). When the controversy of women's bodies modified and controlled by technology in favor of other more powerful men and women is still unresolved, scientific research, faster in its development than society's

response, goes one step further and seeks for the disposability of women's bodies in reproduction issues.

3. THE ANTHROPOCENE. IMAGINING A DESOLATE FUTURE IN THE 1980/1990s

3.1. THE BACKGROUND OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Much has been written about the role of women, anti-feminist backlash, political conservatism and religious extremism in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel presents a future in which all the social movements born in the 20th Century are annihilated in a near and nightmarish future. The social fighters and activists of minority rights are the “structural others of modernity,” according to Braidotti, because their activism “inevitably mark[s] the crisis of the former humanist ‘centre’ or dominant subject-position and are not merely anti-humanist, but move beyond it to an altogether novel, posthuman project” (*The Posthuman* 37). That is, in her view, social movements advocating for the rights of the marginalized others marked the initial transition between humanism and anti-humanism towards the new alternative represented by the Posthuman paradigm. Braidotti positions the Posthuman project against the social and religious conservatism that still today contends that the human should be included “within a paradigm of natural law” (2), in opposition to the growing post-anthropocentric turn heralded by culture theory. Braidotti also claims that ecology and environmentalism are important ingredients for “contemporary re-configurations of critical posthumanism” (47) because both of them emphasize the “inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others” (48). Notwithstanding, this interaction between humanity and the environment has also proved harmful. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter of this dissertation, according to Nobel laureate atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen, we are living in a bio-genetic age named the Anthropocene because “human activity has so altered the history of the Earth that it has become

necessary to declare a new epoch to signify this impact” (Trexler 2). Human intervention in the form of carbon emissions is pointed out as the main cause for climate change. I think it is worth considering to what extent the 1980s novel raises awareness of something that is not a mere possibility in the future but an actual threat and tangible problem: climate change and environmental degeneration caused by human beings.

In 2007, Dan Bloom coined the term “cli-fi” to refer to fiction related to climate change (Brady n.p.). This term refers to a “growing corpus of novels setting out to warn readers of possible environmental nightmares to come” (Glass n.p.). Whether a new class of fiction in its own right (D. Bloom; Glass; P. Clark; Tuhus-Dubrow; Ullrich) or rather a topic spread across many genres (Johns-Putra; Trexler), it is undoubtedly related to negative visions of the future, i.e., to dystopias. Climate change fiction depicts “nightmarish societies triggered by sometimes catastrophic climate events” (Johns-Putra). If Rebeca Mead in her article calls Margaret Atwood “the Prophet of Dystopia” (2017), it would be equally suitable to call her “the prophet of cli-fi,” since she tackles in her novel the issues of changes in nature and climate as forces powerful enough to bring about the end of Western society as we know it. Trexler affirms that in the 1980s “climate change novels began to be written in significant numbers . . . [although] climate fiction is not the result of a literary ‘school’ of related authors” (n.p.). In the sense that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a novel that explores possible public, natural, behavioral, emotional, physiological, and political responses to a new environment transformed by human actions, I consider the term proto-cli-fiction to be adequate for *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel can also be seen as a precursor of Atwood’s subsequent dystopias more openly centered on the climate change issue, such as *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013). Atwood herself acknowledges the existence of the term *cli-fiction* in her twitter account (“Margaret E. Atwood (@MargaretAtwood) /

Twitter” 2012). According to Johns-Putra, some novels use the topic of climate change to depict an “overall collapse” in which an increased social division and the physical drama are emphasized over the emotional (269) whereas “other studies also consider climate change fiction as a reflection of the contemporary response to climate change . . . a complex and peculiarly modern world-view” (Johns-Putra 273). Furthermore, the high rate of infertility in Gilead is caused mainly by environmental changes, which are themselves mostly the consequence of the increasing human involvement with science and technology. If *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a highly marked social division and is considered as, at least, a partial reflection of the 1980s response to climate change, it seems pertinent to consider what the state of affairs was regarding climate change awareness in the 1980s.

3.2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN THE NOVEL

When *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985, “acid rain was corroding the forests and rivers” (Morrison n.p.) but the American population in general was not especially attentive to the situation. As Michael Bastasch affirms, Americans’ concern for the environment is secondary to their economic welfare (n.p.) and in the 1980s American people were too deeply worried by their economic situation to devote much attention to ecological issues. Sablik explains that “the 1981-82 recession was the worst economic downturn in the United States since the Great Depression” (n.p.) and the American people “expressed their dissatisfaction with the federal government’s policies through Reagan’s election” (Sablik n.p.). This is why Americans’ concern for the environment did not start to become more widespread until the 1990s, with the economic recovery (Bastasch n.p.). Nevertheless, the comparison of past (1989) and recent (2015) opinion polls data shows

that Americans were and still are more concerned over short term and domestic threats such as pollution or drinking water than about global warming or climate change and, what is more, these worries have not increased but diminished over the years (Jones n.p.).

The high rates of infertility in the former US population is one of the main reasons why the Republic of Gilead is a theocratic society led by religious extremists. The origin of this extended epidemic of infertility is not explained at the beginning of the novel. In a story in which the information is provided in fragments, the explanation is deferred to the second half of the book, when Offred recalls the indoctrination undergone in the Red Centre:

The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells. Who knows, your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies. Maybe a vulture would die of eating you. Maybe you light up in the dark, like an old-fashioned watch . . . Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers. Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas fault, nobody's fault, during the earthquakes, and the mutant strain of syphilis no mold could touch.

(Handmaid 122)

In the novel, human behavior is blamed for the poisoning and physical deterioration of the people. The above quotation, told in the past tense, resembles a kind of ironic creation myth, the mythical tale of the birth of the Republic of Gilead, born because of human folly. As Tuhus-Dubrow reminds us, the tale in which the human race is annihilated for their sins has a long-term tradition within human narratives (60–61). However, there are differences between ancient myths of total destruction—Noah's represents a biblical

example—and the story told in *The Handmaid's Tale*: in Atwood's book the deity is absent. God or the gods do not intervene in the destruction. In cli-fi contemporary versions of the myth, in the Anthropocene period humans do not need God's hand to destroy the world, we do it by ourselves. But even though infertility and human degeneration in the novel are presented as a direct result of human folly—the extended use of diverse technologies—the Sons of Jacob, the creators of the Republic of Gilead, still see God's hand punishing humanity. They take God's place to build their ideal society according to their distorted interpretation of natural rules. As the Commander explains to Offred: “Those years were just an anomaly, historically speaking . . . All we've done is return things to Nature's norm” (*Handmaid* 232). He refers to the shift of values American society had achieved in the 1960s-70s with the process of acceptance and inclusion of all marginalized minorities. In his brief enumeration of the sources of humans' bodily degeneration and corruption—“may be a vulture would die of eating you”—there is a great dose of irony and bitter humor pointing to humans' unconscious and insensible agency: “nobody's fault.” This ironic explanation of how environmental degeneration has affected humanity is full of tentative possibilities: “maybe . . . who knows. . . .” Even former Americans, Gilead's citizens, unable to procreate, seem not to be fully aware of how and why they have reached such situation. This ironic wondering also brings to the fore one of the main problems caused by environmental deterioration and climate change, which is the risk of denying or minimizing the threat:

Global warming is precisely the kind of threat humans are awful at dealing with: a problem with enormous consequences over the long term, but little that is sharply visible on a personal level in the short term. Humans are hard-wired for quick fight-or-flight reactions in the face of an imminent threat, but not highly

motivated to act against slow-moving and somewhat abstract problems, even if the challenges that they pose are ultimately direct. (Popovich *et al.* n.p.)

The Handmaid's Tale faithfully reproduces climate change consequences in a personal, physical, and social level, that is, it translates “graphs and scientific jargon into experience and emotion” (Tuhus-Dubrow n.p.); the warning is evident even if somehow subtle. As if the issue were not generally accepted when the novel was published or not popular enough to call the reader’s attention, its presence throughout the text turns to be permanently at a background position instead of becoming one of the main and explicit subjects in the story. Even in the novel’s universe, when environmental problems and the damage in the human race are visible and undeniable facts, Offred still does not quite believe that many natural species have disappeared: “I remember haddock, swordfish, scallops, tuna, lobsters . . . salmon, pink and fat, grilled in steaks. Could they all be extinct, like the whales? I’ve heard that *rumour*” (*Handmaid* 173, emphasis added). In spite of being aware of the consequences that pollution and environmental deterioration had for human beings, Offred seems to represent the actual average citizen’s reaction in the face of environmental degradation, climate change and animals’ extinction. The reaction consists of either incredulity or acceptance and passivity, even if her personal situation is a direct consequence of such degradation: Gilead needs handmaids’ healthy bodies. Neither politics nor even religion are the main sources of her imprisonment but the degradation of nature that has infected most people in the former United States of America. She has been reduced to being a mere body, commodified and deprived of any right, affect, identity, and power of decision because of the fact that her fertility shows that she remains untouched and unaffected by pollution and environmental degradation. Climate change has transformed her into a valuable good.

But even the handmaids are not in a secure position in Gilead, “any real illness, anything lingering, weakening, a loss of flesh or appetite, a fall of hair, a failure of the glands, would be terminal” (*Handmaid* 163), the physical consequences of environmental destruction are not over. Janine, a handmaid, is able to conceive, but her new-born is an “unbaby,” “a shredder after all” (226). In the novel, many “unbabies” are born and made to disappear by a regime that maintains its purity by means of destroying not only genetic malformations but also any kind of otherness. Political and ideological dissenters are executed, people from races other than white and sexual options other than heterosexual are banished as well as any person listed as an anomaly. Difference is forbidden in Gilead. Surprisingly enough, Gilead in the novel seems to be a healthy safe place that has managed to keep contamination away from its borders. Atwood still keeps the environmental threat as a national issue that has not reached the category of global, but it is present in the life of the territories they call “the Colonies”. Moira, Offred’s best friend, is caught after trying to escape from the handmaids’ training center and she is offered two options: to become a prostitute for Gilead government dignitaries or to be sent to the Colonies. In order to help her decision, she is shown footage about life in the Colonies, and she explains to Offred and to the readers what life is like there:

In the Colonies, they spend their time cleaning up. They’re very clean-minded these days. Sometimes it’s just bodies, after a battle. The ones in city ghettos are the worst, they’re left around longer, they get rottener. This bunch doesn’t like dead bodies lying around, they’re afraid of a plague or something. So the women in the Colonies there do the burning. The other Colonies are worse, though, the toxic dumps and the radiation spills. They figure you’ve got three years maximum, at those before your nose falls off and your skin pulls away like rubber gloves. (*Handmaid* 260)

Moira's account is bitterly ironic and critical with Gilead's cleansing policy but at the same time shows nature's brutal deterioration in all its harshness and, as a result, the loss of humanity. The territories that surround Gilead are the visible demonstration of a self-centered individualism that has abused technology and science without taking into account what Braidotti refers to as Monism or the unity of all living matter (*The Posthuman* 57). That is, a "posthuman theory of subjectivity" that moves beyond humanism and other anthropocentric notions, defends the interconnection among the environment, human beings, animals, and plants and "condemns the abuses of science and technology . . . and the domination and exploitation of nature" (48). Atwood's dystopic vision displays in the novel the Post-anthropocentric ideas that underlie the Posthuman turn that, among other things, "is usually coated in anxiety about the excesses of technological intervention and the threat of climate change" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 57). Furthermore, as Shannon Hengen explains, environmental concerns in Atwood's works are related to keeping the balance in the preservation of humans' place "in a natural world in which the term 'human' does not imply 'superior', or 'alone'" (74). Atwood's strong awareness of the dangers of human intervention in nature remains visible until the last pages of the novel. In the "Historical Notes" that close the book, the group of scholars analyzing Gilead's society from a future perspective give the most comprehensive and detailed account of the 1980s environmental threats:

The age of the R-strain syphilis and also the infamous AIDS epidemic . . . Stillbirths, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase, and this trend has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage . . . leakages from chemical and biological-warfare stockpiles and toxic waste disposal sites . . . uncontrolled used of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays. (*Handmaid* 316—17)

This eventual reminder of the direct relation existing between the creation of the totalitarian Gilead regime, and human self-destruction and destruction of the planet clearly demonstrates Atwood's intention of getting the message across. Religious extremism, extreme political conservatism, and the backlash against the rights of women and other marginal groups are triggered by and rapidly spread across an environment that is ruined. Atwood, as a cli-fiction prophet, anticipated and presented to the reader the dangers of climatic and environmental degradation that were already becoming structural for the planet and for the survival of life. Climatic issues are thus a pervading background in the novel. The book has the undeniable intention of attracting attention to environmental worries but without putting on them an excessive weight that would have transformed it into propaganda. In my opinion, the novel succeeds in its intention of raising awareness without overwhelming the reader. Furthermore, the ironic and humorous writing prevents the imagined catastrophic future from being utterly hopeless because it leaves the door open to other—humoristic and ironic—futures in which the environment has recovered to the point that the academics in the epilogue can arrange fishing excursions within the social program of their conference (311).

4. THE HANDMAID'S TALE'S DYSTOPIAN CHARACTER

Kay affirms that *The Handmaid's Tale* is “not a believable dystopia. It's science fiction” (n.p.). While acknowledging that generally the novel is classified as a dystopia, she sees Atwood's analysis and vision of the 1980s US society as extremely far-fetched and very far away from the real 1980s American society. However, as seen in Chapter 1 and according to Suvin's definition of dystopia—a negative representation of a present society, which is set in the future, that emphasizes politics, economy, social aspects and the limitation of individual freedom (170)—factuality is not an essential requirement in order to define a work that belongs to the realm of fantasy fiction. Dystopian strategies are a “subjective” way to come to terms with the changing social reality, the economic, the political and cultural conditions of a specific geographical and historical society imaginatively projected into the future to criticize it. For many others like Mead, their opinion is the opposite: not only is *The Handmaid's Tale* a believable dystopia but also a sign that social maladies that were already part of the 1980s cultural context have become almost endemic in 21st-century Western society. Recalling the genesis of the novel and the reasons that led her to write it, Atwood explains that she began the book in the claustrophobic atmosphere of 1984 Berlin, a city surrounded by a wall, and finished it in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, a city in a democratic country (the USA), “but one with quite a few constraining social customs and attitudes” (*In Other* 87). When writing her novel in the 1980s, Atwood tried to build the kind of totalitarian coup and subsequent government that could seem more believable in Reagan's United States. She imposed herself a strict rule: she “would not put into [the] book anything that humankind had not already done, somewhere, sometime, or for which it did not already have the tools” (88). In the “Historical Notes” chapter, Atwood ironically outlines—in the titles of the lectures given

in the Gileadean Studies Symposium—the parallels between her invented Gilead and other real states: “Iran and Gilead: Two Late-Twentieth-Century Monotheocracies,” “The Warsaw Tactic: Policies of Urban Core Encirclement in the Gileadean Civil Wars,” “Krishna and Kali Elements in the State Religion of the Early Gilead Period” (*Handmaid* 312). Furthermore, as the character Professor Pieixoto affirms: “There was little that was truly original with or indigenous to Gilead: its genius was synthesis” (319).

Atwood herself claims that *The Handmaid's Tale* is speculative fiction²¹ and a “negative form of utopian fiction” that is called dystopia (*Writing* 92). The classification of her work as dystopia implies an expected reaction from the reader, to some extent a guided reading because authorial intention matters. As Sargent affirms, an author’s claim that a work is a dystopia requests at least an initial reading from a positioned perspective (“Introduction” 2). There is a general agreement about the fact that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopia, but, what kind of dystopia? Who or what are the targets for the critique? Initially, *The Handmaid's Tale* was widely labelled and understood as a “feminist dystopia” (Malik 11), a “global feminist fable” (Bouson, *Critical Insights: Handmaid* 3), “a political tract deploring . . . antifeminist attitudes” (Lehmann-Haupt n.p.), or even a “feminist 1984” (J. Johnson n.p.). In this line, Wisker claims that Atwood’s novelty is that the novel is “a feminist challenge to the forms of dystopian fictions” (95). Howells agrees with the term feminist dystopia because Offred is not only a female narrator but also in her view it is precisely her sex that is the origin of her marginalization and disempowerment: “This is a herstory, a deconstructive view of patriarchal authority,

²¹ As discussed in Chapter 1, Atwood favors probability as the main factor in her understanding of speculative fiction in contrast to science fiction (*Other* 6). According to Judith Merrill, speculative fiction would refer to “stories whose objective is to explore, to discover, to learn, by means of projection, extrapolation, analogue, hypothesis-and-paper-experimentation, something about the nature of the universe, of man, or reality” (in Latham 27). All dystopias, by definition, are speculative fiction and, thus, fantasy fiction works. If science and technology play an important part in the story, dystopias can be also science fiction narratives, but not all speculative fiction and science fiction narratives are dystopias.

which in turn is challenged at an academic conference two hundred years later” (“Transgressing” 142). But it was shortly after its first publication that the novel spurred great controversy in its portrayal of feminism. McCarthy, for instance, probably in the harshest critical review ever received by *The Handmaid's Tale*, claimed that the novel partially blamed an “excessive feminism” for the creation of Gilead (n.p.). Greene, in the same line, not only problematizes the novel’s feminism, but also emphasizes that feminism “is too a target of Atwood’s satire” (“Choice of Evils” 14). Furthermore, Ehrenreich outlines that in *The Handmaid's Tale* “we are being warned . . . not only about the theocratic ambitions of the religious right, but about a repressive tendency in feminism itself” (“Feminism’s Phantoms” 78). Nevertheless, Atwood stated that in 1984 she wanted, and still maintained in 2017, to “try a dystopia from the female point of view . . . this does not make *The Handmaid's Tale* a ‘feminist dystopia’ except insofar as giving a woman a voice and an inner life will always be considered ‘feminist’ by those who think women ought not to have these things” (*In Other* 146).

Since dystopias are a political sensitive genre valid for a particular historical and geographical society, Bolton summarizes the 1980s American society issues criticized in the novel: “the backlash against feminism, the blurring of lines between church and state, the exploitation of women in pornography and in advertising, and the bombing clinics in the name of saving lives” (64). However, he points to the religious component as the most distinctive element of dystopian literature that characterizes the novel (59). However, Antonis Balasopoulus emphasizes the political element and inscribes *The Handmaid's Tale* into the subcategory of “Dystopias of authoritarian repression . . . that, in identifying the State as the primary culprit for the perversion of Utopian impulses or principles, betray their reaction to the earlier twentieth century’s hopes in the prospects of State revolution” (n.p.).

Even if Atwood does not agree with *The Handmaid's Tale's* label of “feminist dystopia,” there are legitimate reasons that supported, at first sight, this gendered and genre classification. Dystopias, as Howells states, have a warning function of sending out “danger signals to its readers” (“Dystopian” 161) and, as such, *The Handmaid's Tale* has undeniable feminist warning messages. Some feminists read the novel as a warning against their most feared threats for women. As Ehrenreich explains, there is a branch of feminism—cultural feminism—that sees “all of history as male assault on women and, by proxy, on nature itself” (“Feminism’s Phantoms” 78) and consequently they predict and fear a future in which women are deprived of all their rights as citizens. In this frightening future, women would be forced to fulfil a limited role only as “breeders and scullery maids” to be discarded and annihilated when technology makes enough progress to substitute their wombs and make them unnecessary for human reproduction (78—79). *The Handmaid's Tale* puts in practice this feminist nightmare of women’s subjugation. In the strongly patriarchal Gilead, women have “freedom from” instead of “freedom to” (*Handmaid* 37). Those who are not classified as unwomen are protected from sexual assaults and kept safe in their imposed role of breeders, wives and housekeepers. In the first steps in the creation of the regime, women are deprived from their jobs and strictly forbidden to hold property (187). Later on, they are denied access to any education and reading (98). Handmaids are taught their duties in the “Domestic Science Room” (127) and are indoctrinated through documentaries and old porn films—presented as real footage—to learn how badly they were treated by men in the time before Gilead (128). As Offred recognizes, after the brainwashing in the Red Centre, they were “losing the taste for freedom, already [they] were finding these walls secure” (143). Even worse, the Historical Notes chapter mentions the existence of “escaped Handmaids who had difficulty adjusting to life in the outside world . . . after the *protected existence* they had

led” (323, emphasis added). This vision of women as infantilized and totally subjugated to men’s whim and compulsory protection functions as the materialization of cultural feminism’s worst fears, and consequently it is easy to understand that the term “feminist” became quickly attached to Atwood’s dystopian novel.

Totalitarian societies in dystopic fictions repress their citizens’ thoughts and speech. Without freedom of speech, storytelling comes as an act of resistance because for Offred “to tell her tale is to risk her life” (Stein, “Scheherazade” 261). Stein emphasizes the importance of language in dystopias and sees Offred as a “Scheherazade in Dystopia” linking “the feminist project to ‘steal the language’ of/from patriarchy—and the postmodern critique of language” (261). However, it is precisely in language and the way the story is narrated—narrative time, reconstruction of the story—that some ambiguity or even contradictory readings can be found in the text. *The Handmaid's Tale* offers two different projected futures. One is Offred’s story, and the other one is the conference that takes place at the “University of Denay, Nunavit, on June 25, 2195” (*Handmaid* 311). Professor Pieixoto introduces Offred’s story as the result of writing down ‘his’ random organization of some 30 cassette tapes found in the former US state of Maine—which was part of the republic of Gilead. The Historical Notes chapter serves to confirm Offred’s survival after the ending of her first-person narration as well as the end of the nightmarish society of the republic of Gilead. However, it also introduces some doubts about Offred’s reliability as narrator—the veracity of her story, because it “might be a forgery” (314)—and shows how the society after Gilead is too similar to the society that allowed Gilead to be born. As Davidson remarks: “Even with the lesson of Gilead readily at hand, the intellectuals of 2195 seem to be preparing the way for Gilead again” (120). Borrowing again from Davidson, he points to the ideological construction of history when he says: “how we choose to construct history partly determines the history we are likely to get”

(115). At the end of the novel, a male narrator, Pieixoto, tries to be “cautious about passing moral judgements upon the Gileadeans” (314). Atwood, through Pieixoto, ironically questions, deconstructs, and reinterprets Offred’s story, engaging in metafictional commentary of the storytelling process, disclosing this way the fictional character of her story and by extension of any narrative:

Supposing, then, the tapes to be genuine, what of the nature of the account itself? Obviously, it could not have been recorded during the period of time it recounts, since, if the author is telling the truth, no machine or tapes would have been available to her, nor would she have had a place of concealment for them. Also, there is a certain reflective quality about the narrative that would to my mind rule out synchronicity. It has a whiff of emotion recollected, if not in tranquility, at least post facto. (315)

Pieixoto’s commentary makes perfectly clear that Offred’s apparently interpolated narration—composed by present impressions during her life as handmaid and her subsequent narration from the time she was a free US citizen—can be only subsequent narration rendered from any unknown moment in the future in which she is no longer Offred. Thus, the total veracity of her narrative of resistance is suddenly under suspicion of distorting the truth. The questioning of Offred’s narrative reaches a new level when the importance of language and narration as act of resistance in dystopian narratives is considered. As Ildney Cavalcanti argues, “Futuristic dystopias are stories about language . . . feminist dystopias overtly thematize the linguistic construction of gender domination by telling stories about language as instrument of both (men’s) domination and (women’s) liberation” (152). However, in Howells’s opinion “Offred has the author’s support . . . and she also has the reader’s sympathy, so that [the Historical Notes chapter] does not succeed in undermining herstory after all” (“Transgressing” 142).

Besides, Offred's story is not only questioned and reconstructed in the Historical Notes but also "from within" her own narration. Offred's narrative voice comments on and outlines the fictional character of her own memories: "this is a reconstruction . . . It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was" (*Handmaid* 144), or "I made that up. It didn't happen that way" (275). Thus, the story and the act of narrating become entangled with a clear metafictional intention, a self-conscious reflection on the act of narrating. In spite of Stein's affirmation that for Offred "to tell her tale is to risk her life" ("Scheherazade" 263), she did not take any dangerous or risky action either as a US citizen or as a handmaid: "I've crossed no boundaries. I've given no trust, taken no risk, all is safe. It's choice that terrifies me" (*Handmaid* 71). As Bolton argues: "Atwood's narrators thought much, but acted little . . . speak in lamentation rather than in protest" (72). Moreover, we do not have any clue about whether her story ever reached her contemporaries or not, and even less about its political impact, because the Gileadean state still prevails after her disappearance. However, and although the others' experience is not available through an unmediated rendering in *The Handmaid's Tale*, as Moylan wittily outlines, "Gilead is a society in which the contradictions are more pervasive and closer to the surface than in many of the dystopian accounts of authoritarian states" (164). There are other sources of resistance to the regime that come directly from within: its unhappy ruling class that, according to him, make *The Handmaid's Tale* a "weak dystopia" (164). Even in the climactic moment of the "Ceremony" (*Handmaid* 105), Offred underlines the discomfort and suffering of the other participants: The Ceremony "is not recreation, even for the Commander... [he], too, is doing his duty" (105). Offred wonders "which of us is it worse for, her [the Commander's wife] or me?" (106). Those

wives forced to accept a handmaid²² also subvert the regime law by enforcing their handmaids to illegally achieve their pregnancies. The wives may have known that their husbands were sterile—“many of the Commanders had come in contact with a sterility causing virus” (321)—and sought the help of younger men, such as the doctors or Nick himself (70; 214-15), even though all of them know that if discovered the penalty would be death. The Commanders, paradoxically trapped in their own prohibitions, resist their own enacted laws with private and forbidden sexual intercourse with their handmaids and attending Jezebel, the bar and brothel (207). Finally, in the novel there are many other dissident female presences who resist and “act” against the regime: the unwomen, former feminists, nuns that reject to be assimilated by the regime, lesbian Moira, activists like Ofglen, and women working as prostitutes at Jezebel, among others. The fact that Offred’s narrative has been recorded after her time serving as handmaid would diminish its effect as counter narrative at the same time as it increases the self-justifying and passive mood of her account. It becomes a submissive victim narrative, even more so when her main aim is only to adapt and survive.

According to Tolan, the metafictional elements of the novel represent a self-conscious strategy to scrutinize “the role of narrative in creating the historical record” and thus Offred’s story focuses on the examination of the history of the feminist movement (*Feminism* 144). Atwood ironically underlines how the feminist movement and the Gilead republic have common goals achieved very often through censorship. She shows how Gilead adopted some of the feminist movement’s ideas in line with those of Gilead: “some of their ideas were sound enough” (*Handmaid* 128). In spite of being considered from the very beginning a feminist novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* questions “the validity of any

²² “Not every Commander has a Handmaid: some of their wives have children” (*Handmaid* 127).

political or philosophical system that is prepared to limit basic freedoms in the pursuit of its goal” (Tolan, *Feminism* 152). As Haraway, the theorist of the cyborg and “cyborg politics,” very suspicious of totalizing and universal theories, affirms:

The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one. Perhaps, ironically, we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos. (*Cyborg Manifesto* 173)

In her dystopian fiction *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood cautions against totalitarian systems of thought that compromise individual freedom, not only religion and politics but also that early dogmatic feminism. She encourages the idea of freedom and personal liberty before any ideology and it is in that sense that *The Handmaid's Tale* encourages the “cyborg writing about the power to survive . . . on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (Haraway, *Cyborg Manifesto* 175).

5. THE HANDMAID'S TALE: VISUAL ADAPTATIONS

Since the Republican Party candidate Donald Trump won the elections in November 2016 under the motto “we will make America great again,” many parallels and comparisons have been drawn between him and Ronald Reagan. In his current agenda, increasing deportations of undocumented immigrants, the firm intention of suspending immigration from what Trump calls “terror-prone regions” and the plan of building a border wall and get Mexico to pay for it are certainly important and controversial issues. Religious conservatives have put their hope in Trump as happened before in Reagan’s 1980s but it is not clear yet whether his partial assimilation of these groups’ ideology is going to be sufficient for them. On the one hand, Trump is not a defender of traditional family values since he is a serial divorcee. On the other, he has been very stark and clear, for instance, about his stance on abortion, to the extent of affirming that “women who have abortions should face some sort of legal punishment” and now “he’s making it happen” (Graves n.p.). Trump is a president who has overtly shown contempt for women’s rights during his campaign and signed “an executive order withdrawing federal funds from overseas women’s-health organizations that offer abortion services” (Mead n.p.). On his first day in office he reestablished an order from Reagan’s times, “the global gag rule” that forbids public funding to any international NGO providing abortion services for women and girls without resources. Moreover, Trump’s Vice-President Mike Pence describes himself as a “Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order” (Cook and Schneider n.p.). The second in command in the US Government is a firm opponent of abortion and showed in his 2016 State of the Nation address much more interest in protecting religious rights than LGBT’s. Moreover, in 2013 he said: “I believe marriage is the union between a man and a woman and is a unique institution worth defending in our state and nation. For

thousands of years, marriage has served as the glue that holds families and societies together and so it should ever be” (Cook and Schneider n.p.). Perhaps it is due to Falwell’s long shadow but it seems that the moral essence of the 1980s US Government ideology has been partly restored in the 21st Century.

As already mentioned, Atwood has always claimed that her work in general and *The Handmaid's Tale* in particular are not science fiction but speculative fiction because the former has fewer reality-bound possibilities while the latter stems from “things that really could happen but just hadn’t completely happened when the authors wrote the books” (*In Other* 6). Whether *The Handmaid's Tale* has endured the passing of time—transformed into its TV version—without losing its dystopian character or has become simply entertainment, a drama depicting a fantastic or inconceivable society to the 2017 audiences’ understanding is what the following section intends to analyze.

Now, in the 21st Century, Mead still sees parallels and coincidences between Gilead and the USA under Trump’s presidency and she calls Atwood “the prophet of Dystopia” (n.p.). Atwood herself reinforces this vision of her novel as a prophecy with total current validity when she affirms that “never has American democracy felt so challenged” (in Mead n.p.). But, if the novel could be seen as a liberal reaction against the rise of the 1980s conservatism represented by the Moral Majority, where Atwood “chose the evangelical Christians as her villains” (Kay n.p.), *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series’ plot is rewritten—with the actual collaboration of Margaret Atwood—to cope better with the American 21st-century background. The enormous success and positive reception of *The Handmaid's Tale* series’ first season, with its partially renewed dystopian vision and assumptions about a possible terrible future, may be pointing to a tremendous collective pessimism. Or maybe the society and circumstances *The Handmaid's Tale* novel presented are so far from present day audiences’ worries and

reality that the TV series loses the original character of dystopian cautionary tale. If Atwood's novel was—as she strongly claims—a dystopia based on social, political and ideological trends existing in the mid-1980s, which had become a potential threat against liberal thought and minority rights, then the implicit question would be whether the 2017 series is still a plausible dystopian product—commenting on and criticizing the present—or simply fantasy fiction in a different historical context and concocted for a different generation.

Claiming for a new paradigm to measure the success of any cultural adaptation other than fidelity to the source text/original, Bortolotti and Hutcheon interestingly propose a similarity between the biological evolution of living organisms and cultural products. They explain that biological organisms evolve, change and become *adaptations* driven by the need of success in the shape of survival, while stories as cultural products similarly change from the original influenced by their social, political or historical context and the different media used in their communication (443–44). They go on to say that traditionally the assessment of the quality of narrative adaptations has depended on the degree of faithfulness to the original. This evaluative criterion has proved limiting and this is why they argue for the biological homology related to a descriptive approach to analyze and understand “*why* and *how* certain stories are told and retold in our culture” (445). Certain parallels between the 1980s and 2017 US political context, social worries, and environmental threats seem to be the underlying reason *why The Handmaid's Tale* is appealing and retold nowadays. The *how* should be the evolutive answer to understand the contemporary relevance and success of the Hulu adaptation and “its efficacy in propagating the narrative for which it is a vehicle” (452).

5.1. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN THE 1990 FILM ADAPTATION

The first audio-visual adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* was released in 1990. The film, directed by Volker Schlöndorff, was a flop at the box office and did not receive rave reviews either. It was labelled as feminist, even before being filmed, and “many actresses feared the stigma of being associated with such an explicitly feminist work” (S. Gilbert n.p.). Moreover, it was classified as a “preposterous cautionary tale” (Maslin n.p.) or “rehash . . . with delusions of grandeur” (Travers n.p.). The film passed almost unnoticed until being rescued from oblivion by the 2017 *The Handmaid's Tale* series release. In comparison to a novel or a TV series, a film has more time constraints that condition and force a careful selection of the subjects that can be treated. Furthermore, the range of subjects is also strongly biased by the film’s political and ideological context. In the 1990s, the political situation was slightly different from the 1980s. As Jason Bailey argues, the 1990s was a period in which political cinema was not very successful and, under the presidency of George H. W. Bush, the influence of the Moral Majority’s ideas was significantly weaker than in Reagan’s period (n.p.). The 1990 film, strongly centered on the effect of a theocracy on women’s rights, still gives prominence to the environmental origin of the infertility plague. The film takes almost full aesthetic freedom and changes many symbolic details that are “actually quite important” (Garbato n.p.). Kelly Garbato judges the film harshly attending to its fidelity to the novel. She strongly criticizes how key and symbolic details are changed in the film such as the handmaids’ concealing clothing or even more important, the ending, which is transformed from the novel’s inconclusiveness into an ending “not completely wrapped up. . . but . . . downright rosy” (n.p) or, even more, “a mistake” (Maslin n.p.). Nevertheless, according to Peter

Travers, the main weakness the film has is its narrowing of the focus from “misogyny, racism, fascism, fundamentalism, censorship, pollution and sexually transmitted diseases . . . to MCPs [Male Chauvinistic Pigs] who like to put women in their place” (n.p.). In other words, from a complex and perhaps rather excessively thematically rich novel which treats a wide scope of ideologically liberal concerns, what is born is a simpler and more focused film that loses not only complexity but also interest in the process. Without any access to the protagonist’s thoughts, so significant in the novel, what the audience sees is an almost passive woman, numb and remote that “often has little more to do than stand by and watch blankly as others impose their will on her” (Maslin n.p.). In spite of the general agreement about the film’s flaws, the warning about the perils of environmental degeneration appears almost unaltered. In the first minutes of the film, Offred (Natasha Richardson), caught after trying to escape by crossing the country border with her husband and daughter, is transported to a center in which fertile women are trained as handmaids. Before getting on the bus that transports her and the other future handmaids, the film shows the effects of war and pollution.



Figure 1. Screenshot: Aunt Lydia’s first meeting with the future handmaids

The audience can identify some women dressed in grey showed in the background of the shot. Aunt Lydia (Victoria Tennant), representing their destiny as handmaids, is the only obstacle that separates fertile women from forced labor, from a life exposed to contamination under Gilead forces’ surveillance. A visual and physical element, a metal

fence, separates the frontline from the background of the shot. In the novel, these women, dressed in grey and wearing masks are unwomen who are relegated to the Colonies, the strongly contaminated areas that surround the Republic of Gilead, but in the film, they appear several times in different places of the city. Unwomen's forced work and grey clothes contrast with those of the handmaids, and function as a reminder of the dangers and origin of the infertility plague. In the film, Aunt Lydia's voice-over narration explains to the audience the artificial origin of infertility, as soon as the fertile women reach the training center: "The air got once too full of chemicals and radioactivity. The rain water swarmed with toxic molecules. These poisons flowed into the rivers, crept into people. The result, sterility" (Schlöndorff). This condensed version of the book directly points to the origin of the destruction of US society and maintains its warning message. Moreover, probably in its most faithful aspect to the original novel's worries, the film takes up and reaffirms the ecological reminder/warning in the ceremony of consecration in which fertile trained women are appointed as handmaids. During the ceremony, the priest recalls without any doubt what the reason behind the handmaids' destiny is: "On this day of consecration, you would do well to remember by what deadly steps you were brought here. The folly of mankind, and of womankind as well . . . God, in his profound compassion, has seen fit to punish us. To send a plague of barrenness, a desert of infertility" (Schlöndorff). Furthermore, when the protagonist handmaid (named Kate in the film) reunites with her friend Moira (Elizabeth McGovern) at the Club Jezebel's, Moira's words are also a reminder of the still existent environmental devastation: "they showed me a movie about the colonies. You know, those fucking toxic dumps, with all the dead bodies and shit? They say you have one-year maximum there before your goddam nose falls off" (Schlöndorff). If the film is an evolutive adaptation of the book, according to Borlotti and Hutcheon's proposal (2007), it seems that the five years that

separate the publication of the book and the film release have affected the core message of the novel in narrowing its focus. In that sense, it proves to be an adaptation that fails because it transmits only a minimal part of the novel's worries. If the film represents the evaluative idea of the future in 1990, it has lost force in its character of dystopian speculative fiction on issues such as right-wing political movements. Furthermore, it passes almost tiptoeing over racism, and other minority rights issues, but I believe that it openly maintains its proto-cli-fictional character in a historical context in which ecological awareness was taking its first important steps.

5.2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN THE 2017 SERIES

In contrast with the failed 1990 filmic version of the novel, the series—distributed through a pay-online TV subscription platform—has become a big audience success and has contributed to the revival and topical relevance of a novel written 32 years earlier. Even though the novel has been periodically reprinted and it is Atwood's bestseller, it is in 2017, when the mini-series was released, that her fiction made a real worldwide impact. However, the story, characters and circumstances narrated in the novel are not identical in the series. When a film or TV series based on a book is released, the critics frequently establish a comparison between the original—the novel—and the “copy”—the audiovisual product. Critics and novels' fans usually look for the divergences from the initial plot and characterization in an attempt to assess the quality of the copy on the basis of its faithfulness to the original. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, this analysis—following the biological model proposed by Borlotti and Hutcheon—attempts to approach each version of *The Handmaid's Tale* as temporal adaptations that have evolved due to cultural, political, and sociological reactions to the changes produced in the environment.

Atwood herself measures a text's aliveness for its capacity to "grow and change" (Bouson, *Critical Insights: Handmaid* vii). The many and significant differences between the novel and the TV series—the most outstanding among them being related to characterization—may be pointing to the fact that US society has undergone very substantial changes over the last thirty years. But this assumption seems contradictory to *The Handmaid's Tale's* claimed timelessness. On the one hand, both Atwood herself and the series producers defend *The Handmaid's Tale's* relevance nowadays, and, on the other, the changes introduced indicate that 2017 American society is far away from that of the 1980s. Atwood, interviewed by Dockterman, says that "we're taking off from now rather than 1984 . . . so just as we have cell phones in the plot now, we have to update other things" (n.p).²³

All the groups traditionally marginalized—women, homosexuals and non-whites—that struggled in the 1960s to attain some visibility, were again at risk of exclusion in the conservative 1980s USA under Reagan's presidency. Environmental crises, marches for women's rights and protests against racism were, in the 1980s, hot topics at the forefront of American social unrest that are reflected in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel's extremely conservative republic of Gilead—misogynistic, racist and homophobic—does not tolerate difference; thus, any political dissenter, any non-white or non-straight citizen is expelled or eliminated. The republic of Gilead exerts violence, repression and aggressive power over the others, excluded from the 1980s conservative ideal model. However, *The Handmaid's Tale* conscious commitment to social minorities

²³ Even though the series makes a great effort to update the setting with the introduction of more LGBT characters, interracial marriages and mobile phones, there are very limited allusions to the role of the internet and globalization in present-day society, a presence that becomes central and ineludible in contemporary dystopias such as *The Power* (2016), a kind of reversed vision of *The Handmaid's Tale*—backed by Atwood herself—in which the totalitarian regime is now a matriarchal one.

had diminished in the 2017 TV series. Offred's memories of her mother—a radical feminist activist during second-wave feminism—have been totally erased from the series script even though the categorization as an explicitly feminist product has accompanied it even before its release: “since the show started being promoted in America women have been attending marches and protests dressed in the [Handmaid's] red robe and white bonnet” (Cain n.p.). In the show, Offred (Elizabeth Moss) is married to a black man, in this way normalizing the proliferation of multiracial couples in the 2000s. Moreover, a black actress (Samira Wiley) plays lesbian Moira's role—another new lesbian character, Ofglen (Alexis Bledel), plays a leading role—because in the show “fertility trumped everything, even racism” (Bradley n.p.). Moving away from racism, colored babies are as desired as white ones in this new Gilead. If the introduction of these changes is the evolutive response to current American society, it might be inferred that racism has ceased to be an important problem nowadays.²⁴

The age of Offred's commander Waterford (Joseph Fiennes) and his wife Serena Joy (Yvonne Strahovski) is a priori another less significant change introduced in the show. Whereas in the novel they are a couple around their sixties, in the series both Commander and wife are at full reproductive age; moreover, Serena is Offred's age. Elisabeth Moss herself, Offred in the series, interviewed by Grant, shows a certain misinterpretation of the original core story when she declares: “The fact that Serena is my age is really great, because we're not saying that she can't have a baby because of her age. The fact that she can't have a baby for *another* reason is way worse” (Grant n.p, emphasis added). The actress overlooks “one of the underlying premises of *The*

²⁴ The analysis of the treatment of feminism and homophobia together with the question of whether racism is no longer an acute problem in American society or whether the series is simply trying to reach a greater target audience are outside the scope of this thesis.

Handmaid's Tale too, the environmental depredation that's affected human fertility" (Morrison n.p.). Age was never the source of infertility in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The fact that even the protagonist of the TV show—documented and informed about the plot—misses such an important element, points to the probability that many people in the audience will never get the environmentalist warning. Nevertheless, while problematic issues, such as racism or second-wave feminism, are not central in the TV show's script, environmentalism still remains a subtle presence even if weaker and weaker as the series shows an evolution that may be related to contextual changes and factors.



Figure 2. Screenshot: Aunt Lydia instructing the handmaids.

As happened in the 1990 film, a shortened version of Aunt Lydia's explanation of the causes of infertility to the future handmaids is maintained in the show. In a dark long shot, the uniformed handmaids are represented as students in a classroom. The intense sunlight streaming through the windows adds a sharp contrast between the oppressive atmosphere of the class and the sunny outside, a visual reminder of what they are leaving behind: their past freedom. Aunts dressed in brown surround the handmaids to impede any attempt to escape. The position of the camera eye is slightly elevated, the audience can diagonally attend the class from above, detached and from the position of a surveillance camera. The scene reinforces the feeling of passivity; the defenseless handmaids transmuted almost into children are imposed a doctrine while someone is

monitoring all of them: the watchers and the watched. In spite of the fact that there is a chain of power in which the handmaids occupy an inferior position, all of the figures in this shot are pawns in the game, as the high-angle shot suggests. Re-education is an important part of their obligatory transformation. They are imposed not only a certain type of life but also Gilead's ideology. They are enforced to be true believers. Aunt Lydia, like a teacher in a history class, is showing real footage of factories and nuclear power plants, and a graph—that ends in 2015—showing the decline in the birth rate. She introduces not only the source for the infertility plague but also Gilead's foundational master narrative of infertility as God's punishment: "They made a mess of everything. They filled the air with chemicals and radiation and poison! So, God whipped up a special plague. The plague of infertility" (*Handmaid Miller*: episode 1). In the TV series, pollution is still present, which is why Waterford's driver Nick (Max Minguella) asks Offred not to buy chicken because he has read "they've got crazy levels of dioxin" (episode 1). In episode 2, Offred thinks about the possibility of a pregnant handmaid, Janine (Madeline Brewer), giving birth to a seriously unviable newborn: "What will she give birth to? An unbaby, with a pinehead or a snout like a dog and no heart. The chances for a healthy birth are one in five, if you can get pregnant at all." But the series has 10 episodes in its first season, several narrative threads and very dramatic moments, so that these few instances of recalling environmental degeneration pass almost unnoticed. No shot shows life in the colonies or unwomen cleaning radioactive waste. Furthermore, Janine's baby, a seriously ill baby/unbaby who is discarded in the book, is transformed into a healthy girl for the sake of the narrative in the series. This type of changes does not seem to correspond to any intention of softening the plot in the TV series. On the contrary, the show is much more brutal, presenting many instances of violence and mutilation that

were inexistent in the novel—for instance, Janine/OfWarren's eye is put out in Episode 1, and a commander's hand amputated in the Episode 10.

If the TV series, as Atwood affirmed, takes off “from now” (in Dockterman n.p.), the almost complete disappearance of the environmentalist message should be pointing to the fact that what was a problem in the 1980s is no longer recognized as such in 2017. However, climate change and environmental degradation are still present nowadays as very real and contrasted risks. Atwood, interviewed by Morrison on the occasion of the series release, still emphasizes the importance and danger of human actions in nature: “There's a couple of studies about declining male fertility and it is due to human stuff, plastic in the water. You can deny those studies all you like but it will have consequences” (n.p.). Denial and inaccurate risk perception are probably the main problems regarding environmentalism because people are not interested in texts in which climate issues play a central role. Americans in 2017 “know climate change is happening, and a majority agrees it is harming people in the United States. But most don't believe it will harm them” (Popovich *et al.* n.p.). In 2017, the USA seemed to live an “environmental backlash.” If general unconcern seems to be the American people's reaction, American lawmakers are unlikely to change pollution policies soon. Vice-President Pence's stance on climate change is that there is no risk at all: “Global warming is a myth . . . Just like the ‘new ice age’ scare of the 1970s, the environmental movement has found a new chant . . . The chant is ‘the sky is warming! The sky is warming!’” (“Mike Pence for Congress” n.p.). Moreover, in a movement that reverses Obama's policies aimed at reducing pollution, President Trump announced in June 2018 that the USA “would withdraw from the Paris climate accord, weakening efforts to combat global warming and embracing isolationist voices in his White House who argued that the agreement was a pernicious threat to the

economy and American sovereignty” (Shear n.p.).²⁵ President Trump uses patriotism as an argument and defends that the Paris accord is “an attack on the sovereignty of the United States and a threat to the ability of his administration to reshape the nation’s environmental laws” (Shear n.p.). If denial and lack of commitment appear to be the American Government’s official position on global warming, it only mirrors and makes evident many American citizens’ perception of the problem, as the surveys show (see Popovich *et al* 2017).

The Hulu show is too imprecise and vague about the origin of the crisis that has made totalitarianism possible. When the novel was published, some critics found the story implausible, because:

We’re not clear what we’re being warned against. Is it the danger of a fanatical religious group taking control of the United States and imposing a tyranny similar to that in Iran? Or the possibility of our poisoning the atmosphere with chemical and nuclear pollutants to the point at which a normal birth is a rarity, and infertility threatens the survival of the race? Or the danger of the feminist cause overreaching itself, resulting in a repressive male backlash? (in Grace 44)

These are precisely the same objections one can cavil at the TV series. The series is ideologically reductivist, with the disappearance of issues that were central in the novel such as racism and an inherent questioning of the prescriptive nature of 1960s feminism. The remaining original warnings have lost strength in the attempt to contextualize the story in the 21st Century, a different scenario from 1985, despite the show’s promotion campaign claiming its documentary character. In spite of the ideological parallels between the Reagan era and Trump’s government, social circumstances have changed. Thus, the series introduces black people in the script and more LGBT characters, targeting

²⁵ The Paris Agreement was intended to develop world strategies to fight global warming.

a wider audience than the novel, while also becoming less committed to social and environmental causes but more politically correct, which, in my opinion, makes it less understandable and believable. The series combines an attractive aesthetics—tidy arranged green spaces, impressive commanders' houses and modern and well-lit hospitals—with an increasing repressive violence even harder than that in the novel. Nevertheless, there is not any sign of decline, environmental deterioration, nuclear waste or even contamination that, on the other hand, the novel does make present by showing, for instance, documentaries about the life in the colonies. There is no reminder or sign on how or why people's bodies have been affected and changed by the environment. Furthermore, if the series—losing much of the proto cli-fictional character that the novel and the feature film have—is considered as an evolved product adapted to the present-day social concerns, even in a defamiliarized setting, it faithfully “extrapolates” the state of the question in ecology. By 2017 the average Western citizen had become used to living with the knowledge that the environment is certainly damaged and deteriorating. Global warming is something that everybody is familiar with but almost nobody cares about, and the series does not seem to try to raise critical awareness. Atwood's novel was, by far, much more committed and convincing in its environmentalism whereas the TV series, even though it still keeps vague nuances of it, reflects contemporary public opinion and “reinforce[s] what people already believe rather than change anyone's minds” (Ullrich n.p.). Maybe this reduction of the importance of the topic can be positive, as argued by those critics who are not convinced of the cli-fi's potential. They think that seeing the consequences of climate change “in a fictional context might reduce the urgency readers [or the audience] feel about the issue in reality, or simply reduce it to a vague concern with no practical remedy” (Ulrich n.p.). Whether conscious diminishment pursuing a more powerful subliminal message or simply an attempt not to fall into the

category of environmentalist propaganda, the TV series results in neither dystopia nor cli-fi.

If a dystopian vision of the future should complete a “detailed and plausible extrapolation from the world of the ‘now’ to the future world” (Bolton 48) and warn about the future, the series cannot be classified as dystopia since we have already lived the series’ time period. That is to say, the authorial future guessing or “what if...?” question is applied to our past. Temporarily, *The Handmaid’s Tale* is set in the recent past, from the 21st century audience’s point of view. Moreover, according to Margaret Atwood, speculative fiction must rely on things that can potentially take place, but they have not happened *yet*; then, following her own differentiation between plausibility/possibility and fantasy, the TV series falls in the category of fantasy. Furthermore, even if the novel clearly fitted in the category of dystopian novel as defined by Wesseling, the series would also respond to the characteristics that, borrowing from Wesseling again, define another “stage in this entanglement of the historical novel and science fiction” (100): uchronian fiction or utopia in history. Uchronian fiction develops “an apocryphal course of events, which clearly did not really take place, but which might have taken place” (Wesseling 102). It tries alternate histories, other possibilities that could have happened, and “speculates about the future by way of a detour through the past” (102). The series does not speculate with the future but with the most recent past and becomes a “mode of historical speculation” that Gallagher names “counterfactual history” (1), a mode that closely recalls Wesseling’s uchronian fiction in its reflections on “the role of human agency and responsibility in history” (Gallaguer 2). Since its temporal setting, where the causes that triggered the establishment of Gilead happened, belongs to the 21st century’s actual past, the series would be an alternative version of the recent past and the present-day, not of the future, in this way losing the temporal value of didactic warning about the

future, intrinsic to dystopian fictions. The TV series then proves to be an entertaining fantasy show, losing most of the complexity and depth that characterizes the novel. It is a biological adaptation to the times, suitable for the 21st Century although unsuccessful in keeping the book's complete core message—maybe the only way to reach certain impact over a posthuman audience already far away from that of the 1980s.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a society in which the merging of the human and technology is already a fact, in which, according to Hayles (1999), we “became” posthuman the moment we realized that our identity is basically information, who or what controls our data/information has become a key issue. *The Handmaid's Tale* narrates how a totalitarian regime is born thanks to the gradual acceptance of governmental control measures, among them extreme surveillance and control/censorship of information. In a technological society, information is a tool, a weapon in the hands of the powerful. Gilead's government initially presents itself as a paternalistic state that wants to protect its citizens from external menaces. They eliminate any dissenter, any other who does not fit in their ideal model of citizenship. When they start depriving women from their most elemental rights, first as citizens and later on as mothers, they do it with the passive consent of their fellow citizens, because “it's the law” (*Handmaid* 185). Governmental control of media pacified good citizens, convinced that all this unrest had to do only with the other: “there wasn't even any rioting in the streets. People stayed at home at night, watching television looking for some direction” (183). After the elimination of dissenters and the transformation of the citizens into fearful isolated individuals under the panopticon system of surveillance, oppression and lack of liberty reach all the elements of the pyramidal society in Gilead. Not only women have to obey the dictates of the totalitarian state, but everyone, even the Commanders and their wives can be accused of breaking the law. The invisible and technological eye is vigilant for everyone; no one is safe in a dehumanized state. When one's freedom and identity are stored in a Compucheck, they only have to press a few buttons and one's identity changes, and maybe life is over forever.

The handmaids in the novel play a key role in a society that needs them to survive. But egotistically, particular interests and desires are imposed on these women, forcing them to be mere receptacles for the seed of the powerful. The handmaids' commodification and subjugation are without any doubt issues of gender politics in a patriarchal society, but in my reading, the prioritization of the commanders and wives' reproductive needs corresponds to the imposition of the powerful individual's will over the powerless. As Offred remarks, "maybe none of this is about control ... Maybe it's about who can do what to whom and be forgiven for it" (*Handmaid* 144–45). Once women's bonding is broken, "wives," "marthas" and "econowives" support, accept and collaborate with the dispossession of women. As a result, a great part of Gileadean women also cooperate with the regime and justify handmaids' role because "they have the choice" (20). Gilead society could have survived with the handmaids having their own babies with their own partners, but the resulting babies would not have been the "right" ones. Moreover, these babies' genetic codes would have been "wrong" and they would shift from valuable "objects" of desire to disposable things. If genetically related babies in *The Handmaid's Tale* are the powerful commanders' privilege, a parallel could be established with the situation of contemporary babies bred through artificial insemination and grown in a rented womb to satisfy the wish of financially powerful contemporary surrogate parents. In a 21st-century society in which human fertility does not involve any primary risk of extinction, contemporary surrogate mothers "voluntarily" take health risks, being as dispossessed of their bodies as the handmaids, and detached from their feelings to give another man/woman the ultimate possession they can pay for: their own genetically related baby. If 21st-century society is extremely shocked because of the handmaids' destiny, it should also be shocked because of its contemporary surrogate mothers, mostly economically powerless women, equated to the handmaids under the mission of giving

the more powerful what they desire. Both handmaids and surrogate mothers “voluntarily”²⁶ do it. Both “are very happy . . . What else can [they] say?” (39).

The novel prophetically embraces the posthuman agenda and echoes the effects of human action in the destruction of the planet, a type of destruction that affects our bodies and, consequently, our political structures, society, and identities. In the Anthropocene, our human actions have disastrous consequences. They destroy nature and change us into something different: the posthuman being. Social and cultural changes go hand in hand with changes in nature and the other way around, environmental degradation directly affects our survival also by means of affecting our social structures, as happens in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Atwood's novel has turned out to be, in my opinion, an accurate prediction and warning for some of the social maladies foreseen for the future in the 1980s, especially those related to its proto-cli-fictional character and its precursor embracement of some of the worries that characterize dystopian narratives in the 21st Century.

The Handmaid's Tale belongs to the speculative fiction realm and it is a dystopian novel, written from a female point of view. It has many targets in its agenda of social criticism: religious extremism, environmental degradation, right-wing extremism, governmental authoritarian repression and dogmatic feminism, among others. In a totalitarian society repression of thought and speech makes any dissident story a narrative of resistance, and Offred's in particular is a narrative of passivity and “interrogation.” The passive strategy of resistance the narrator employs to survive under Gilead's regime painfully reminds the reader of former American citizens' behavior that allowed for the birth of the totalitarian state. Moreover, the Historical Notes section not only challenges

²⁶ Offred herself affirms that she is not forced to be a handmaid: “nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this was what I chose” (*Handmaid* 105).

the verisimilitude of her account, but also displays a future too similar to that preceding Gilead. If this is the utopian future within the dystopia, it could end up being the beginning of another dystopia. On the other hand, Offred's tale comments on its own internal mechanisms in a metafictional enterprise that invites reflection about the role of narrative in the linguistic creation of reality and history. Moreover, the novel also questions the early feminist dream of a female language that in Haraway's words would be "totalizing and imperialist" (*Cyborg Manifesto* 323). Atwood's novel sends the message that individual freedom is more important than "any" ideology and I would add that liberation should include any sentient being, not only humans, an idea that Margaret Atwood herself develops in her following "posthuman" dystopian novels.

The review of *The Handmaid's Tale* audiovisual versions conducted in the final section of this chapter provides a deeper interpretation of the cultural impact of Atwood's original story. The 1990 feature film takes over from the novel and continues the work of spreading the ecological message in a historical moment in which environmentalist awareness reached the highest percentage in the American polls, a percentage that has not since been overcome. Moreover, in the 21st Century global warming and nature's degradation have become something generally known by the American population but something that an important part of them do not accept as a real risk. This has been the American government's position since the conservative Republican Party and Donald Trump are in power. It is not surprising that the TV-series *The Handmaid's Tale*, then, in an attempt to reflect the present social context, diminishes the issue of environmentalism to the point that it passes almost unnoticed. Trying to understand in the series what the origin of the infertility epidemic is, becomes more difficult and the resulting theocratic regime more implausible—in the light of our present circumstances, as the series places total birth rate declining in 2015, in our very recent past. This is why the series loses the

novel's dystopian proto cli-fictional impulse to become instead a very attractive TV product that better falls into the category of fantastic tale attending to Atwood's criterion based on probability, or uchronian fiction. Maybe the series' reduction of plausibility can be related to Atwood's words in the 1980s when she wrote: "It's a sad commentary on our age that we find Dystopias a lot easier to believe in than Utopias; Utopias we can only imagine; Dystopias we've already had" (*Writing* 95). The question is that in spite of political similarities, we are no longer in the 1980s but in a different period in which this tale can be seen as appealing, terrifying, impressive but not sufficiently linked with our social and political present.

CHAPTER 3: *MADDADDAM*

1. INTRODUCTION

The *MaddAddam* trilogy is born under the long shadow of Atwood's first dystopia and without any doubt her most famous work, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The parallels and comparisons between them have been unavoidable since none of Atwood's novels published in the eighteen years that separate the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* (2003) has been a dystopia. *MaddAddam* (2013), the novel, has garnered highly favorable reviews in journals and newspapers as varied as *NPR* (Newitz, September 2013), *The Globe and the Mail* (Lennon August 2013), *The Economist* (Wagner, September 2013), *The Independent* (Roberts, August 2013), *The Boston Globe* (V. Miner, August 2013), *The New York Times* (Greer, August 2013), *Nature* (McEuen, August 2013), and *The Times* (Burnside, August 2014). *MaddAddam* is a "marvel of sustained artistic control," according to Michael Dirda (n.p.). Most of its reviews remark two main aspects of the novel: hope for the future of a posthuman race, as well as the novel's self-conscious promotion of the crucial role of language and writing in the construction of human identity. This final message of hope is evident for Annalee Newitz, who concludes in her analysis that "there is no nostalgic invitation to mourn the loss of humanity here . . . [because] our greatest hope comes from the new species that were born in labs" (n.p.). In the same line, Joshua Chaplinsky comments on how Atwood imagines "the auspicious beginning of an entirely new world" (n.p.). Michele Roberts affirms that "this dystopian journey through a wasteland of high science and low deeds ends in hope," while she also outlines how writing and storytelling are the tools used in the novel to renew "the damaged world" (n.p.). Placing even more emphasis on the importance of language and stories in the novel, Lennon claims that the whole trilogy is "a love letter to literature" (n.p.), while Valerie Miner qualifies literacy as the gift that humans have left

to the new generation, the Crakers, “to whom the future—and the last words of the story—belong” (n.p.). Andrew Greer on his part emphasizes the novel’s acknowledgment of the relationship between oral history and origin stories, and discovers in *MaddAddam* “an exposition of how oral storytelling traditions led to written ones and ultimately to our sense of origin” (n.p.). Finally, Paul McEuen observes the inextricable relationship between technology and language, because the latter “was humankind’s first technology,” and the only way to start a new world is “a process of weaving different languages and understandings of the world into a unified tapestry” (n.p.). John Burnside comments on *MaddAddam*’s generic hybridity: “neither straightforward sci-fi nor fantasy; Atwood’s is a baroque, yet scientifically credible satire” (n.p.). Finally, Erika Wagner, focusing on the novel’s ideological message, highlights its philosophical depth but laments that the book “is too closely tied to its predecessors to stand on its own. No reader should begin the trilogy with *MaddAddam*” (n.p.).

However, not all critics have been unanimously positive in their commentaries. Theo Tait, in his review for *The Guardian* (August 2013), mentions some positive values in the novel such as “its complexity, its tough-minded satire, and its strangeness,” but he still qualifies the novel as “unoriginal” and contends that “Atwood’s attempts to write in youthful and hardboiled registers are not always successful” (n.p.). In another review published by *The Guardian* the following month (Cartwright, September 2013), Tait explains that “there are some wonderful, lyrical passages . . . some very good jokes. . . but at the same time there is a nagging sense that what is supposed to be a richly imagined dystopia is, in fact, a rather overburdened and undisciplined indulgence” (n.p.). Moreover, he ironically concludes by saying that “I will continue eagerly to read anything Atwood writes except tales of bioengineered people with blue genitals” (n.p.).

Nevertheless, Atwood is undoubtedly a successful and venerated author, and her publications generate many and varied critical reactions from academia. *MaddAddam*, the last volume in the trilogy, has been generally related to its predecessors, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* (2009), which have received a higher level of attention on the part of the critics. In contrast with *The Handmaid's Tale*, which has produced several book length monographs exclusively centered on its analysis, critical works on the *MaddAddam* trilogy's analyses appear so far within volumes that compile scholarly articles on Atwood's oeuvre in general. A review of the literature reveals that some recurrent issues have captured critics' attention. Scholars such as Fiona Tolan, J. Brooks Bouson, and Karen Stein have focused on the subject of feminism and ecology (see Tolan; Bouson; Stein). Tolan reproaches the loss of a female voice in *Oryx*, and the depiction of a future "that is not only postfeminist, but posthuman" (273). Bouson establishes a parallel between several instances of literal cannibalism in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* and the male commodification and consumption of female lives and bodies. From an ecofeminist point of view, Stein links misogyny, scientific imperialism and the consumption and manipulation of women with the destruction of nature and the environment. Together with gender issues, many analyses of the whole trilogy begin with attempts at generic classification, in spite of Atwood's restrictive affirmation after writing the first book of the cycle:

[It] is a speculative fiction, not a science fiction proper . . . every novel begins with a *what if* and then sets forth its axioms . . . *What if we continue down the road we're already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who's got the will to stop us?* (*Writing* 285–86 italics in the original)

Howells analyzes Atwood's dystopias—comparing *The Handmaid's Tale* with *Oryx and Crake*—from cultural and narratological perspectives that trace the author's

ideological concerns, because according to Howells her dystopias “represent a synthesis of her political, social, and environmental concerns transformed into speculative fiction” (“Dystopian” 161). The dangers of bioscience, “bio-perversity” and the strong intertextual references to Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) are at the center of Shuli Barzilai’s analysis of *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Sharon R. Wilson also underscores intertextual references with flood myths, legends and fairy tales that highlight the question of “whether or not people really are at the center of the universe” (Wilson, “Postapocalyptic” 334).

To these analyses of the first two novels of the trilogy, a number of independent academic articles on *MaddAddam* published in international journals must be added. Some of them have focused on the compliances, specifications and departures of the novel from the generic characteristics of the dystopian genre and apocalyptic narratives. A number of articles concentrate on ecological worries (Harland; Bone) or more specifically on ecofeminist concerns (Rowland). Similarly, there have been some attempts to define the relationship between transhumanism, posthumanism, and dystopian narratives traced from the first novel to the last one of the trilogy (Marks de Marques, “God”; “Children”; “Human”) and the rewriting of human identity after the Anthropocene (Ciobanu). Nevertheless, they seem to have failed to consider how *MaddAddam*, the last novel of the trilogy, presents a tentative shift from its two predecessors, in its ideological position about the definition of the human/posthuman.

A revision of the literature also reveals that the novel has never been read from the combined perspectives of the ideological and moral implications of the birth of the posthuman subject in the Anthropocene era and the generic consideration of the novel as cli-fiction within the dystopic genre. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to analyze the ideological position of *MaddAddam* in the construction of human and posthuman

identities with special attention to gender roles and relationships. Moreover, as a dystopia with an ethical purpose of warning, *MaddAddam* is sending a message of social criticism that has to be analyzed in depth; this is why I also seek to discuss the ways in which the novel may be contradictory and unwittingly promoting the social values that apparently, a priori, it warns against. The first section centers on how the characters represent the human and the posthuman being, the novel's attitude towards human imbrication with technology and, through a narratological approach to different sections of the novel, whose voice is heard and what the effect of this changing perspective represents. Issues such as how the novel depicts environmental damage, the relationship among time, nature, myths, history, and identity, and *MaddAddam* as an example of a cli-fi novel in the Anthropocene era are approached in the second section. Finally, in the last section the novel's ending is analyzed as a crucial part to decide both the ideological message *MaddAddam* conveys and a more specific generic classification of the novel within the utopian field.

As mentioned above, *MaddAddam*, published in 2013, is the volume that puts an end to the homonymous trilogy of dystopian novels that Margaret Atwood had started ten years earlier. *Oryx and Crake*, the first novel of the trilogy, introduces a post-apocalyptic scenario in which Jimmy/Snowman seems to be the only human survivor after a pandemic that has apparently eliminated the whole humanity. Through his recollections, we learn about the social, political and environmental degradation leading up to the present situation. In the narrative present, former Jimmy, now transformed into Snowman—his chosen and tortured apocalyptic identity—lives near the Crakers, a highly ecological humanoid species created in a laboratory by Glenn/Crake to take over the human race. The story oscillates between Jimmy's reminiscences of the previous years, before the spread of the pandemic created by Crake himself, and the present tense of Jimmy's

narration. Before the apocalypse the world was divided into the Compounds—inhabited by the scientific elite and guarded under tight security measures—and the Pleeblands—where the less privileged majority of people fought for survival, living in crowded slums under the rule of savage capitalism with no respect for civil, social or human rights. At the end of the novel, discovering that he is not the only human survivor, Jimmy/Snowman has to decide whether he should join the other humans and reveal to them the existence of the Crakers.

If in *Oryx and Crake* we only have the story from Jimmy's point of view, in *The Year of the Flood*, the second novel of the trilogy, the same chronological period is presented from the perspective of two other survivors, both of them women: Ren and Toby. By using the same narrative structure that moves from the past to the present, they show that the worth of human life was almost nothing outside the Compounds' walls. People in the Pleeblands could only be either intended consumers or raw material for an oppressive and unforgiving capitalist society. The main thread in the story follows the God's Gardeners, a deep ecologist religious group that rebels against the rule of the compounders. Readers also know about the existence of the Painballers, violent convicts dehumanized to a reptilian level who are forced to fight each other to the death. The stories in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* come together to almost the same chronological point, and *MaddAddam* continues from that moment onwards.

MaddAddam offers two main narrative threads: analepses of the life of Zeb—brother of Adam, the founder of the God's Gardeners' cult—and the events that happen at the narrative present filtered through Toby's focalization. In *MaddAddam*, the Earth is still ravaged by an inhospitable and harsh climate. The Crakers, Jimmy, Ren, Toby, a few God's Gardeners and a handful of former scientists that were involved in the Crakers' design are grouped together in the fight for survival. The violent Painballers—first

captured but shortly after run away—and biogenetically created wild animals like the Pigoons constitute the main dangers for the existence of the new community. At the end of the trilogy, a miscegenated society is born from a combination of humans, Crakers—and their hybrid offspring—and the Pigoons, now integrated as full members of the community.

2. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE POSTHUMAN BEING: HUMAN AND TECHNOLOGICAL IMBRICATION

When enquired about why she decided to write the third book of the trilogy, *MaddAddam*, Margaret Atwood's answer was that she wrote it for reasons related both to the plot itself, such as giving closure to the unfinished story of the two previous books, and to the "content" of the story; the sense that in the present "we already have the tools to create the *MaddAddam* world" (*Why* n.p.). She explains how we incessantly develop astonishing technologies that make possible things that seemed science fiction some years earlier. Moreover, we are witnesses to the destruction of our environment caused by human actions; surveillance technologies pose a threat to democracy because of the tight control of the population; and, eventually, we live in a society in which wealth concentrates on a minimal percentage of people, and large sectors of the population are excluded (*Why* n.p.).

"MaddAddam," as a title, is at first sight a shocking word, an evocative palindrome suggesting multiple interpretations; this is why it seems appropriate to begin the analysis quoting Atwood's words about the title of her trilogy and its last novel:

The word "MaddAddam" is a palindrome: it's a mirror word, the same word whether read forwards as backwards. (Why the double Ds? Two reasons: the intellectual excuse is that there are mirror Ds to go with the duplicated DNA used in genesplicing. But I made that up after the fact. The simple reason is that someone already had the domain name for "Madadam," and I didn't like the idea of my book title being used, possibly, for a porn site, as has been known to happen). (*Why* n.p)

Undoubtedly, this is a very expressive and symbolic title that could be pointing to human folly, to the madness of the first man according to the Book of Genesis. Moreover, thanks to the metaphor implied in the readability of a palindrome, the word may also suggest the possible circularity of human history and its “eternal return.” Beginning and ending are indistinguishable. Thus, if there is no distinction between the story’s beginning and its end, is it a way of suggesting the implicit message of the trilogy in only a word? To put it differently, is not there any possibility of redemption for humanity and are the posthuman descendants of the humans—the Crakers—doomed to repeat the whole human history once and again? Conversely, Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s idea of the eternal return is not a return of the same to the same, it is “Repetition, but the Repetition that selects, the Repetition that saves. Here is the marvelous secret of a selective and liberating repetition” (D’Iorio n.p.). In *MaddAddam* Atwood provides an ending to the two previous unfinished stories—*Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. Whether the ending of the dystopian trilogy supposes the eternal return of the same or a hopeful “Repetition that saves” is what this section seeks to discern. Thus, it focuses on how the novel represents the mad scientist, the “successful” posthuman being—the Crakers—and the effects of biotechnology, particularly on the female human body, are considered. Moreover, special attention will be paid to the issues of fertility and motherhood, recurrent topics for Atwood that were already central in her most canonical work, *The Handmaid’s Tale*. If in *The Handmaid’s Tale* the story was rendered by one of the few still fertile women—Gileadeans were mostly infertile due to biotechnological reasons—, *MaddAddam* concludes the trilogy mostly in the voice of the only female survivor who is infertile, together with the voice of the first literate Craker.

2.1. THE POSTHUMAN BODY, IDENTITY AND ETHICS

Man is by definition imperfect, say those who would perfect him. But those who would perfect him are themselves, by their own definition, imperfect. And imperfect beings cannot make perfect decisions. The decision about what constitutes human perfection would have to be a perfect decision; otherwise the result would be not perfection but imperfection. (Atwood, *In Other* 140)

Generally, when *MaddAddam's* plot is summarized, Glenn/Crake is described as a version of the mad scientist, a clear embodiment of that old fear humanity feels for science and progress. He creates a new ecological, nature-bonded and physically resistant race to take over the “imperfect” humans who have led their environment to the verge of exhaustion. Crake decides to exterminate humanity in order to save the Earth. But regarding his motivations, besides his being a “mad scientist,” he, apparently at least, is also driven by “ultra-ecological” principles. Furthermore, Crake puts into practice some of the most radical critical posthumanist and transhumanist tenets. In the metaphorical fight between an environment about to collapse and the human race, Crake situates himself by the nature/Earth side. He acts as a radical deep-ecologist who does not concede his fellow human beings any privileged position. The pandemic forces a preindustrial way of living, a radical reduction of population: “The people in the chaos cannot learn . . . So there is only one thing left to do . . . most of them must be cleared away” (*MaddAddam* 291). Crake—a scientist believer in the sciences’ superiority over the humanities—thinks that the combination of human body and brain is the main constituent of identity. Thus, by means of reengineering and mixing human/animal genes in a new colorful and handsome species, he expects to change and expel from the Earth the (destructive?) humanist thinking forever. He dismisses the humanist/Cartesian idea that our individual

identity or subjectivity relies on a place other than our bodies: the intangible “mind.” Crake is totally opposed to any kind of spirituality and traces all abstract thinking to the brain: “*God is a cluster of neurons, he’d maintained*” (*Oryx* 157). Thus, he could be seen as a real believer in the importance of embodiment for subjectivity—a position held by critical posthumanist and feminist thinkers like Haraway, Braidotti, Hayles, and more recently Vint (as explored in the theoretical chapter of this dissertation). However, his lack of concern for all those humans who would not have the opportunity to “posthumanize” embodies an extremely radical position. It is similar to that of the techno-enlightenment/transhumanist project. Crake’s beliefs recall Hans Moravec’s when he says: “It doesn’t matter what people do because they’re going to be left behind . . . Does it really matter to you today that the tyrannosaur line of that species failed?” (307). Close to a transhumanist point of view, Crake eliminates the intermediate step between humans and posthumans leaving all humanity behind. Moreover, he approaches Patricia MacCormack’s extreme idea of human extinction as ethical action (*Posthuman* 140–48): Crake thinks that there are “too many babies. They make a huge carbon footprint” (*MaddAddam* 238). By aligning himself with MacCormack’s model of posthuman ethics, Crake denies any privilege to humanity. In fact, in *MaddAddam*, he denies to his own civilization even the right to life. If the future is the real goal of posthumanism, for Crake the future is only open to the Crakers.

The Crakers are technically designed posthuman beings. They are the great unknown in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, since both books present the story exclusively focalized on and told by humans. Crake designed their bodies, which, in their proportions, resemble the humanist physical model of beauty:

The strange gene-spliced quasi-humans who lived by the sea . . . They were all colours—brown, yellow, black, white—and all heights, but each was perfect . . .

their naked bodies like a fourteen-year-old's comic-book rendition of how bodies ought to be, each muscle and ripple defined and glistening. Their bright blue and unnaturally large penises were wagging from side to side like the tails of friendly dogs. (*MaddAddam* 11)

However, he also modified “the ancient primate brain” (*Oryx* 305), their frontal lobes, trying to develop non-aggressive, non-hierarchical subjectivities. Moreover, the Crakers, in a satirical demonstration of an “eco-friendly race” taken to a seemingly ridiculous extreme, even “recycled their own excrement” (305).

Apparently, Crake was developing a very profitable scientific—transhumanist?—project in which he would be able to create individuals incorporating “any feature, physical or mental or spiritual, that the buyer might wish to select” (*Oryx* 304). If *The Handmaid's Tale* was a parody of a “women's society,” the feminist dream becoming a nightmare, the Crakers embody a witty parody of the physical perfection pursued and sold by our consumerist patriarchal society: sexual power, youth and beauty. They possess the traditional visual attribute of sexual power: “unnaturally large penises,” perfect bodies that still follow the Vitruvian/humanist model of proportion, and “eternal” youth. However, all the Crakers' “gifts,” as a parody, come with a negative side. If Crake is guilty of a genocidal act then how could the Crakers, his work, be a perfect race?

The Crakers' sexuality is unbound from pleasure and desire. Neither women nor men freely choose when and with whom to have a sexual relationship. Craker women are linked to nature's cycles and “turn blue” when they are ready to reproduce, accepting then a polyandrous relation with four of the men offered, whereas the male mate with any woman available whenever they smell “blue,” i.e., fertile. Craker women, “the women who can't say no” (*MaddAddam* 43), have lost any power of decision about their sexuality and reproduction. This is made even clearer when a group of Craker men “rape” two

young human women, Amanda and Ren, in what is described as “a major cultural misunderstanding” (13). When the group of Craker men smell a fertile woman, they ignore her rejection: “*She smells blue! She wants to mate with us!*” (12, italics in the original). The result is that Amanda, after being repeatedly raped by the “inhuman” Painballers, is—consciously or not—raped by the male “posthuman” Crakers. This passage is particularly telling when trying to consider whether the Crakers fail in being the compassionate and empathic creatures they are supposed to be, even more so when they were designed to avoid sexual abuse, rape or unrequited love (*Oryx* 165). Male Crakers do not understand a human woman’s refusal to have sexual intercourse. However, in what seems to be a contradictory gap within the plot, they feel the Painballers’ unrest for being tied and liberate them: “*This rope is hurting these ones. We must take it away*” (*MaddAddam* 13). Thus, the fact is that in the first encounter with their creators, the male Crakers are unable to empathize with a woman’s anguish but they do perceive the suffering of the (male) evil Painballers. Their inability to “read human malice” puts in danger the whole community of survivors and their own lives.

Crake was not the only scientist working on the “Paradice Project”²⁷; the surviving MaddAddamites were part of the laboratory group that originally worked in the profitable business of creating “babies à la carte,” customizing DNA information for the prospective parents. They were eventually forced to work with Crake to design and develop the new

²⁷ The name “Paradice,” a witty modification of the biblical “Paradise,” plays with the idea of indeterminism and uncertainty. When Einstein studied the behavior of the quantum particle, he involuntarily opened room for two different interpretations of the universe. In Einstein’s view “God does not play dice with the Universe,” that is, he believed in Spinoza’s formulation of God, indistinguishable from nature, deterministic and strictly following the lawful principles of cause and effect. In sum, a God who did not leave room for free will. In contrast, Danish physicist Niels Bohr claimed that “it is wrong to think that the task of physics *is* to find out how nature is. Physics concern what we can *say* about nature” (Baggot n.p.). However, Einstein could not accept Bohr’s interpretation that brought “indeterminism and uncertainty, with effects that can’t be entirely and unambiguously predicted from their causes” (Baggot n.p.). The debate is still unresolved and it seems that Crake chooses the name of the project as a further demonstration of his hubris, as he takes both God’s and Einstein’s side in the debate. However, the development of the Crakers throughout the story eventually contradicts his vision.

race, the Crakers (*MaddAddam* 43). But these other actual “parents” of the Crakers do not see their creation as “perfect.” In the novel, the Crakers are called “Frankenpeople” (19), both to remark their artificiality equated to monstrosity, from the human point of view, and with the intention to underline the evident intertextuality between Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *MaddAddam*. Teresa Gibert explains how Atwood has a “conspicuous desire to acknowledge Shelley’s influence” (46) in a story that is a rewriting of *Frankenstein*, with Crake as a modern Victor Frankenstein. While Gibert discusses in her essay the extent to which Crake coincides with and departs from “the stereotype of the mad scientist who plays God with life with disastrous consequences” (43), it seems that precisely the differences between Frankenstein’s monster and the Crakers are more determinant for the denouement of *MaddAddam*. While *Frankenstein* shows the delusion and failure of Victor Frankenstein’s attempt to create a perfect “new man,” *MaddAddam*’s Crakers apparently inspire hope and success in the evolutive step.²⁸ Margarita Carretero-González in her essay “The Posthuman Who Could Have Been” points to the fact that in *Frankenstein* the source of failure was the encounter between the creature and his creator and the latter’s inability to ethically recognize the creature’s humanness. That is, it was aversion to the monster’s ugliness and grotesque features that prevented the creator from “becoming with”²⁹ what would have been the transition between the transhuman to the posthuman.³⁰ Carretero-González describes Frankenstein’s monster as the most coherent

²⁸ See Newitz; Roberts; Chaplinsky.

²⁹ Carretero-González uses Haraway’s phrase “becoming with” (*When Species Meet* 17) as a combination of Levinas’ ethics of alterity—firmly based on the recognition of the other’s ethical status after the human face to face encounter—and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “becoming animal”—we humans are ethical only when we overcome the repulsion produced when the face of the other is perceived as different in any aspect. “Become with” is used then “to discern the epistemological position required to grant the Creature [Frankenstein’s monster] the ethical status it deserves” (Carretero González 62). In this way, becoming with other-than-human “will be looking at the world in the post-dualistic, post-hierarchical, post-human terms” (Carretero González 63).

³⁰ Carretero-González acknowledges in *Frankenstein* the coexistence between transhuman and posthuman discourses. While Victor Frankenstein initially begins with a transhumanist desire to enhance the human race through technology, the result he obtains is an other-than-human, a new species that he sees as a monstrous posthuman, a “catastrophe” (55–58).

and rounded character in the novel. In contrast to *MaddAddam*, *Frankenstein*'s readers have access to the creature's personal account that allows seeing him outside of the category of monster and empathizing with him.

The Crakers' arrival at the human survivors' camp involves the first real encounter between the creatures and their creators. In contrast to Shelley's monster, the Crakers are all attractive and "eternally" young—their cycle of growing up is shorter and faster than the human one. However, the price that they have to pay for never being old and not suffering any kind of illness is that they are designed to suddenly die at the age of 30 (*Oryx* 303). Their beauty and physical perfection are more evident when compared to the few human survivors. Whereas Victor F. was horrified in the meeting with his creation, due to the creature's ugliness, the MaddAddamites feel something between indifferent and curious about how their creatures have evolved outside the Paradise Dome—the Crakers' former laboratory habitat—where they were enclosed and controlled. However, as Gibert affirms, the MaddAddamites' reaction in the encounter is similar to that of Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake*, and Victor F. in *Frankenstein*, because they "retain an insensitive and mean attitude towards their childlike, innocent creatures" (44). Designed as the other side of the coin with regard to Shelley's "monster," the Crakers are seen by their creators—initially at least—as beautiful as "of a low intelligence" (Mohr 20). They are "creepo . . . walking potatos . . . the Paradise Dome circus" (*MaddAddam* 19). Jimmy, the person Crake chose to be the sole human survivor and the Crakers' guide in the external world, did not develop a relationship of equality with them. He was unable to find in them valid interlocutors in the communicative exchange. For Jimmy the Crakers were "blank pages, he could write whatever he wanted on" (*Oryx* 349). Jimmy's failure to see the Crakers as "people" led him to feel isolated, with the need to imagine a "narrative 'you,' an alter ego of the past, that allows the transgression of his solipsism

and implodes the divide between past and the present” (Mohr 17). Although Jimmy/Snowman did not feel for the Crakers the same aversion as Victor F. did for his creature, he discriminated against them because of their belonging to a species that was unrecognizable as human enough for him. He felt so far from the Crakers as Frankenstein’s monster was from human beings; this is why he cried for a female companion: “Why am I on this earth? How come I’m alone? Where’s my Bride of Frankenstein?” (*Oryx* 169).

However, Toby is not a scientist and she did not participate in the Crakers’ creation and development. When she meets the Crakers for the first time her reaction is one of awe. She admires their perfect features: “We must seem subhuman to them, with our flapping extra skins, our aging faces, our warped bodies, too thin, too fat, too hairy, too knobbly” (*MaddAddam* 36). Moreover, and central to the novel’s interpretation as having a hopeful ending, she is the first one who shares with them the notion that they are not “quasi humans” or “monsters” but people: “‘They’re people,’ says Toby. Or I think they’re people, she adds to herself” (34). Thus, Toby, a woman, is the first person that, borrowing Haraway’s words, starts to “become with” the Crakers and builds a bridge between them and the last humans. If the MaddAddamites eventually learn to live in a community with the Crakers it is not when they accept them as ethical subjects “in spite of” their belonging to a different race—the posthuman according to Carretero-González—, but it is precisely when the human survivors are able to see them as posthuman but still “human enough.” This assumption is related to a notion of the posthuman subject as defined by the critical posthumanist frame of thinking: “When the genetic code is no longer human, then we cannot speak of a posthuman because a posthuman being is still human” (Rossini n.p.). It is when the human survivors learn that Craker/human reproductive abilities are still possible and they start to share their

memories and culture that the bonds between the posthuman and the human are created. Moreover, female humans, both in terms of physical reproduction and cultural evolution, build the bridge between the posthuman Crakers and the human survivors: the fertile young women's miscegenation with the Crakers and Toby's role as the cultural/spiritual mother for Blackbeard.

Carretero-González argues in her essay that “had the ethical postulates coming from posthumanism informed Frankenstein’s choices . . . the ending of the novel might have been a very different one” (63). Furthermore, she affirms that the “cure” for dehumanization can only come from posthumanism. Critical Posthumanism is, according to Herbrechter and Callus, a “caring paradigm after all but also a paradigm for care” (109). Borrowing their rationale, I would say that the “cure” and hope in *MaddAddam* precisely comes from “care,” from “posthuman motherhood,” when the female human survivors shift from the idea that the Crakers are less than humans, almost animals, to accepting them as their fellow (post)human beings, prospective sexual partners and their metaphorical and real offspring. Toby “bypass[es] the dialectics of otherness” (Braidotti, “Animals” 526) through her relationship with Blackbeard, eventually her “child of the heart.” At the end of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Toby is the oldest woman and the only one who is infertile. She sold her eggs in the pre-pandemic times, caught an infection and lost her womb. Like Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, survival drove her to renounce her own maternity in favor of the maternity of the powerful ones. Gibert, in her analysis of *Oryx and Crake*, claims that this novel “does not imply a rejection of technology itself, *which is neutral*, but entails a warning about how people may use it” (46, emphasis added). However, following the line inaugurated by Atwood’s first dystopian novel—*The Handmaid’s Tale*—*MaddAddam* does not seem to share this aseptic view. As Marshall McLuhan affirmed already in the 1960s, there is not such a thing as a “neutral” use of

technology; in our embracing and acceptance of technologies “we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms” (46) and they have the potential to change human nature.

Technology is mostly designed by men and for men (see Turk; Davaki), but the effects of technology are stronger in women’s bodies, especially regarding reproductive technologies (Dickenson). Moreover, women have less access to health biotechnologies (Singh *et al.*). In terms of reproduction, fertile women in precarious economic or social conditions become a McLuhanian “extension” of other women’s and men’s bodies at the same time suffering a “self-amputation” that produces a state of “numbness.”³¹ Women become the victims under the rule of “utilitarian ethics” (Bieber-Lake 18) that allow other human beings to be used and commodified. In the present of the narration, Toby’s desire for motherhood has long been abandoned, first due to the loss of her womb, and now that she is a middle-aged woman, because her fertile years would have ended anyway. However, in the post-pandemic time, she is in love with Zeb, the high rank ex-God-Gardener, organizer and current “head” of the MaddAddamites. Nevertheless, deprived from her fertility, Toby does not feel she deserves his love and attentions: “he should be doing what alpha males do best . . . passing his genes along via females who can actually parturiate, unlike her” (*MaddAddam* 89). She fears to be abandoned by him because, in her view, his genes are, like the Commanders’ genes in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, “too important” to be lost. Toby, who ironically lost her fertility in the pre-pandemic times by acting as a handmaid—giving the gift of maternity to other women—now behaves like a “commander’s wife,” the infertile woman forced to share her “husband.” In the small community of human survivors, where the other women are much younger than she is, Toby thinks her love for Zeb must be seen as “comic” (89), whereas Zeb would still be

³¹This state of numbness is, according to McLuhan, a self-defense reaction of the body or the mind when it cannot locate or avoid the cause of discomfort and a way to confront the physical and psychic trauma and to endure the pain of the situation (41–45).

worthy, as sexual partner, for the younger women with his “precious sperm packet” (89). In spite of her pain and jealousy, she is resigned to sacrifice the monopoly of her relationship for the human community’s survival. Technology, for Toby, did not imply the “enhancement” of her body but the other way around. She is traumatized both physically—she has “scars inside [her]” (91)—and psychologically with “all of her future children precluded” (91). During the years before the pandemic, she lived in a state of “numbness” to endure the pain, but in the postapocalyptic time, when the survival of the human race depends on the procreation capacity of a few women, she would desire to procreate with the man she loves. She is reenacting her loss, her trauma. As in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, fertility and reproduction seem to determine women’s worth. Toby frequently thinks of human children, all of whom disappeared in the Waterless Flood. She misses their presence in every park, in every tool that was usually related to children (201; 220). In her first encounter with Blackbeard—the Craker child—he does the things that “a normal human child might do: idle fiddling, curious handling . . . as real children—as children do” (93-94). Blackbeard becomes Toby’s shadow (214; 221) and not only does Toby care for him but the Craker child also shows real affection for Toby. She teaches him to write and read, but besides this, it is through her conversations with him that she starts to understand the Crakers’ close relationship with any kind of animal and how they can communicate with them. Eventually Toby becomes Blackbeard’s spiritual mother and guide, creating the first sentimental bond and respect between the posthuman and human communities.

Furthermore, the source of real success and the possibility of physical continuity of the human race come from the young fertile human women: the “Beloved Three Oryx Mothers” (*MaddAddam* 386). Even if they are offered to be inseminated with human sperm from the Painballers to “provide genetic variety” (369), Ren and Amanda

(involuntarily because they were “raped” by the Crakers) and Swift Fox eventually give birth to Crakers’ hybrid babies. Swift Fox describes her pregnancy as “an experiment in genetic evolution. Reproduction of the fittest” (273). The few human survivors need the Crakers’ help and adaptation to the environment to survive. Moreover, miscegenation has a double effect: it is a demonstration of the Crakers’ physical humanity—still genetically close to the human body—and it also makes the Crakers accept and respect humans as “post-human enough.” The fertile women and their hybrid descendants constitute the definite link between the human and the posthuman: “our Beloved Three Oryx Mothers who showed us that we and the two-skinned ones [humans] are all people and helpers, though we have different gifts, and some of us turn blue and some do not” (386). Both survivors and Crakers are incorporated into the new community in which the concept of “personhood” is applied to all: animals, humans and Crakers. They put into practice Wenneman’s definition of “posthuman personhood,” open to non-humans. Personhood—who or what is considered to be a person—will include not only all biological or enhanced humans but also non-human persons (*Posthuman Personhood* 4–9).

2.2. WHOSE VOICE? HUMAN AND POSTHUMAN VOICES

The first chapter heading in the novel functions as an introduction for the whole book. It summarizes the Crakers' myth of creation—largely based on the Bible—impregnated by religious rhetoric as if a priest were talking, but beyond this, it is also a summary of the trilogy's whole plot and the Crakers' history:

The Story of the Egg, and of Oryx, and Crake, and how they made People and Animals; and of the Chaos; and of Snowman-the-Jimmy; and of the Smelly Bone and the coming of the Two Bad Men. (Atwood, *MaddAddam* 3, italics in the original)

In *MaddAddam* all human survivors—from the Compounds, God's Gardeners and pleeblands' people—are reunited. The MaddAddamites—scientists from the Compounds—, some former God's Gardeners, and Jimmy are together with the Crakers in the fight for survival. The Earth is still ravaged by an inhospitable and harsh climate, a lively reminiscence of the effects that technology, capitalism and the exploitation of nature have had over the environment. This state of things, in the Compounds' times, had provoked the creation of groups like the God's Gardeners. The Earth's degeneration, the corrupted and unequal workings of capitalist society and the loss of moral values in general were the reasons behind Crake's radical and controversial “punishing-God-like” reaction: the creation of a pandemic in order to end the whole human race, judged only by him and found guilty of the general disaster. The place is also inhabited by some bloodthirsty Painballers—former convicts that due to their isolated imprisonment were unaffected by the pandemic—and dangerous bioengineered animals like the pigeons—intelligent pigs with human cortex in their brains, biogenetically bred as suppliers of transplant organs.

However, Apocalypse and survival are not the only subjects and narrative threads in *MaddAddam*. As Lennon remarks, the novel's central narrative lines are two: Zeb's back story and the Crakers' evolution from an oral culture to a literary one (see Marks de Marques, "God"; Marks de Marques, "Children"; Marks de Marques, "Human"). The love story between Toby and Zeb serves too as a narrative strategy for the introduction of Zeb's past. Toby wants to know all the possible details about the man she loves and asks him to recall for her all his life from his early childhood until the "Waterless Flood."³² Through Zeb's memories—his disrupted family life during his childhood, the foundation of the God's Gardeners' religion by his brother Adam, and the tough and very often morally corrupted life in the Pleeblands—the reader gathers, at the end of the trilogy, a detailed narration of the causes, agents and motives that triggered the Apocalypse. The other line follows Toby's recollections of the God's Gardeners' rituals and festivities, the "adaptations" she makes of Zeb's stories and delivers to the Crakers at night, and the "chronicles" she keeps of everything that happens each day around the community created by human survivors and Crakers. When a male teen Craker, Blackbeard, learns how to write, helps, and eventually replaces Toby as the official "chronicler," readers also become witnesses of how oral stories and the mastery of the written word trigger the birth of the Crakers' sense of origin and history.

In the essay "Towards a Posthumanist Methodology. A Statement," Ferrando underlines the need of a posthumanist methodology. Her understanding of the term posthumanism—a critique on anthropocentric humanism "concerned with non-human experience as site of knowledge" ("Towards" 10)—would be in line with the theoretical

³² Crake created a pandemic to exterminate the human race. He believed human beings were destroying the Earth to a point of no return. On the other hand, The God's Gardeners, a green group, had environmental-religious beliefs and expected God's punishment to end with human destruction of the Earth. Many members of the group survived Crake's pandemic and named it, echoing Noah's story in the Bible, the Waterless Flood: "It travelled through the air as if on wings. It burned through cities as fire, spreading grem-ridden mobs, terror and butchery" (Atwood *Oryx* 24).

approach provided by Critical Posthumanism. Ferrando remarks that if posthumanism calls for the overcoming of all dualisms, this should also involve the end of the “traditional divide between theory and practice” (9). A posthumanist methodology avoiding dualisms should include “the human experience in its full spectrum” (13), as well as non-human experience and knowledge. This section attempts to analyze *MaddAddam*’s narratological strategies to include the posthuman experience, to give voice to the Crakers, the new inhabitants of the Earth after human extinction. *MaddAddam*, even if only in fictional grounds, echoes Ferrando’s debate about “the difficulty of including non-human voices. At present non-human standpoints are arduous to be engaged in, outside of an empathic approach by humans reflecting in an ‘as if’ mode. In the future, such limitation might be overcome” (13).

If Toby’s account can be considered a “last woman narrative” because she, even if not the only human survivor, is the only one still writing on Earth, what she depicts is not the total apocalypse or human extinction. As Ivan Callus affirms, “[t]he most literal posthuman state, humanlessness, is unavailable to representation” (299). Toby is the chronicler of the narrative present—the post-apocalyptic time—, and the keeper of human memories from the past, but my contention is that given that the last voice, the last narrator, is not a human being but a Craker, Blackbeard, the novel becomes an exercise of imagining and a way of recording the posthuman voice and experience. Thus, the novel becomes an example of posthuman narrative praxis, an attempt to overcome the difficulty to imagine the world without us, through the strategy of giving voice to the new inhabitants of the Earth: neither humans nor animals, but eventually hybrids, a new species. The narrative novelty that *MaddAddam* presents in contrast with its predecessors in the trilogy is that Toby’s human voice progressively gives the baton to the posthuman

voice of Blackbeard in an exercise of imagination ultimately aimed to decentralize the human and to portray life after the Anthropocene.

2.2.1. Human Voice

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Coogan 1:1)

The majority of the chapters of *MaddAddam* are introduced by a heterodiegetic narrator, in Genette's terminology, that delegates focalization in Toby. Narrative time moves from the present of the narration—when only a handful of humans have survived—to the past, through analepses focusing on Zeb's life before the pandemic. Within Toby's narration, Zeb's embedded stories are essential to give coherence to and details of the pre-apocalypse time. However, there are nine stories inserted within the main narrative that, together, present a different narrative approach. These stories, always preceded by the expression “The story of...,” are followed by a brief description of the events they narrate and written in the simplistic and direct ‘Craker’ style. For example, “The Story of When Zeb was lost in the Mountains, and Ate the Bear” (53), “The Story of Zeb and Fuck” (163), or “The Story of the Two Eggs and Thinking” (289). All of them compose the mythology that Toby creates for the Crakers following the style that Jimmy/Snowman inaugurated in the first novel, *Oryx and Crake*. Jimmy—one of the last people studying humanities in the pre-apocalypse time, where only technology and science were appreciated—was chosen by Crake to “educate” the Crakers, to answer their questions about their origin and about their new—unknown for them—surrounding world. Jimmy told the Crakers the same story day after day, but now that he—unconscious for days—

is unable to tell it again, Toby is chosen as their new “prophet” and has to perform the same ritual that they were used to attending:

They already know the story, but the important thing seems to be that Toby must tell it . . . She must put on Jimmy’s ratty red baseball cap and his faceless watch and raise the watch to her ear. She must begin at the beginning, she must preside over the creation, she must make it rain. She must clear away the chaos, she must lead them out of the Egg and shepherd them down to the seashore. (*MaddAddam* 45)

MaddAddam opens with a chapter entitled “Egg”. Eggs are, in many cultures, symbols of new life, fertility and rebirth; in sum, new beginnings. The novel is metaphorically a new beginning, not for the humans but for the Crakers. In the first page of the novel, Toby’s speech is directly reported when she is telling the Crakers the story of their origin. They are the explicit recipients, the narratees. The whole book is eventually an exercise of communication between Toby and the inheritors of her words, the Crakers. The omniscient narrator disappears in these exchanges between Toby and the Crakers, there is no mediation between Toby’s words either to the reader or to the Crakers. There is no distance but an effect of immediacy, a direct witnessing of the birth of a new myth of origin/religion. Toby’s talks are full of irony and winks to the reader, to the real human reader of the novel, like the paradox of “singing the praises” of a mass murder: “Yes, good, kind Crake. Please stop singing or I can’t go on with the story” (3). Crake, as the creator of the Crakers, is worshiped by them like a god, but since he tried to exterminate the whole human race to make room for his creation, his “goodness and kindness” are not such from Toby’s point of view. When Toby says, “please stop singing . . .” she also portrays the Crakers as noisy and naïve immature creatures, as if they were children, singing songs of praise and gratitude for that great mass murderer. They avidly

wait every night for Toby's words, and they believe everything she says as a new "faith dogma." In this first story for the Crakers, we start to learn about their concerns and the way they see the world, but mediated by Toby's filter. The reader does not have direct access to their words, only Toby's responses to their comments give a clue about what they think: "Yes, there was a bone in the soup. Yes, it was a smelly bone" (4). Paraphrasing John's words in the Bible: In the beginning, there was the Word and the word was human, because the "owner," the focalizer, of the story is a woman: Toby. The organization of the narrative constitutes a solid foundation for the understanding of the novel: it parallels the plot, the evolution from "human history" to "Craker history" passing through a period of shared "writing" of history when Blackbeard, with his own handwriting, starts to contribute to creating the chronicle of the post-pandemic world.

"The Story of when Zeb was lost in the Mountains, and ate the Bear" is the title of the second story that Toby addresses to the Crakers. They show further curiosity and demand more than the mere repetition of their creation by Crake: "We know the story of Crake. We know it many times. Now tell us the story of Zeb, Oh Toby" (*MaddAddam* 53). They want to know what the world looks like far away from their surroundings. However, once Toby has finished this tale for the Crakers, the omniscient narrator reminds the reader of that postmodern questioning of objective truth: "There's the story, then there's the real story, then there's the story of how the story came to be told. Then there's what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too" (56). The narrator's reflection reminds of the artificial and partial nature of knowledge and the unreliability of narratives. The new world, the new posthuman civilization after the pandemic will be forged upon one convenient version—for the Crakers—of human nature, history and culture initially controlled and censored by Toby: "She doesn't like to tell lies, not deliberately, not lies as such, but she skirts the darker and more tangled corners of reality"

(105). She chooses what to tell them and how to do it. She consciously creates a new hero for the Crakers' mythology: Zeb. Zeb is a real person for the Crakers, not only an "invisible god" like Crake, with new adventures and stories. He gradually replaces Crake as the protagonist and ideal model for the Crakers. Toby, conscious of the Crakers' reverence for a man that may not deserve and desire it, and curious herself about her lover's past, displaces the focus of the Crakers' interest and contributes to creating a new kind of "god."

If, as Ferrando claims, "a posthumanist methodology does not recognize any primacy to the written text" ("Towards" 11), Toby's tales would constitute the bases for an oral culture for the Crakers. But she also starts to write down on a notebook about the God's Gardeners' rites, Zeb's stories of the past and all the events that happen in the post-apocalyptic present. Why does she write? In her essay "Environmental Dystopias: Margaret Atwood and the Monstrous Child" Jane Bone, sanctioning the humanist idea of language—reading and writing—as the site drawing the frontier between humans and non-humans, still places Toby within the humanist tradition because of her writing. Moreover, Bone claims that Toby, even though she is aware of it, breaks a Craker child's innocence, Blackbeard's, by means of teaching him to read and write (634). However, in contrast with the oral tales Toby tells every night, her writings were not initially intended for the Crakers, but for the possible humans of the future. She starts writing "for the future, for generations yet unborn" (*MaddAddam* 135), because "[m]aybe acting as if she believes in such a future will help to create it" (136). Thus, her writing is a conscious chronicle of her time, culture and memories; in other words, writing could help her to survive and to save the world by creating a future.

Writing is the main source of hope in the novel beyond the creation of the Crakers. Borrowing neuroscientist David Eagleman's words in his novel *Sum*: "There are three

deaths. The first is when the body ceases to function. The second is when the body is consigned to the grave. The third is that moment, sometime in the future, when your name is spoken for the last time” (23). Toby’s survival, and with hers the survival of the human race, depends on the possibility of being known and remembered in the future. Through her writings Toby works for the persistence of human memory; even if the future readers are not humans, if they know humans’ names and history, humans will survive through their memory. Her written chronicle is part of her life instincts: survival, pleasure and reproduction, an attempt at keeping her version of human history that may help to create a different [post]human future. Life after the pandemic has been restored to the minimum needs for survival: “What to eat, where to shit, how to take shelter, who and what to kill: are these the basics? . . . Is this what we’ve come to, or come down to; or else come back to?” (*MaddAddam* 81). There is no pleasure in such a way of living and there is the risk of “*Giv[ing] yourself up. Give up*” (137, italics in the original). Toby feels that all the human survivors are not living but “drifting,” “waiting for meaningful time to resume” (136). She does not find any purpose in a life such as the life of the Crakers’ with “no festivals, no calendars, no deadlines. No long-term goals” (136); in sum, a life without shared beliefs, history, without a sense of cultural community. Furthermore, through her writing, Toby embodies the voice for the whole humanity. In her writing, she witnesses human agency and responsibility in the apocalypse through the recalling of the events that led to it.

Besides, Toby links writing with her own infertility—caused by an infection after selling her eggs to pay the rent in the pre-apocalypse times. She has inner scars, “writing on your body” (91) that tells about her longing for a child that she would never have. Now, in the present of the narration, writing will be the only guarantee of “human” reproduction in the future. Without Toby’s writings, there would not be any human or

posthuman culture, at least, in the near future of the novel. The other “beloved Oryx mothers,” the three fertile human women in the novel that miscegenate with the Crakers and give birth to human/Craker descendants, ensure the survival of the [post]human bodies, the hybrid bodies of Crakers and humans. In the novel all the new born are Craker hybrids with the characteristic luminescent green-eyes. The nature of their bodies, the features they might have inherited from the Crakers, are still an enigma: “Will they have built-in insect repellent, or the unique vocal structures that enable purring and Craker singing? Will they share the Craker sexual cycles?” (*MaddAddam* 380). These human/Craker descendants embody “the rise of the posthuman bodies . . . that reconceptualize the ‘nature’ of the humans” (Nayar 33), a new species derived from artificially created “gene-spliced quasi-humans” (*MaddAddam* 11) that, however, makes life in an intimate relationship with the environment possible and repairs any exclusion of the other who did not fit into the ideal humanist model.

2.2.2. [Post]human Voice

Now what have I done? . . .

What comes next? Rules, dogmas, laws? The Testament of Crake? How soon before there are ancient texts they feel they have to obey but have forgotten how to interpret? Have I ruined them? (*MaddAddam* 204)

In *The Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway underlines how “communication technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies” (*Cyborg Manifesto* 33). In her cyborg model, the body is the site where the transformation from human to posthuman is fulfilled. However, as stated in the theoretical chapter, Katherine Hayles defines human subjectivity as intimately connected to and formed from language. She

understands the posthuman as “a literary phenomenon” (*How We Became* 247). Without Toby’s writings, which ensure the survival of human culture, only the human body would have survived and turned into posthuman—an unknown part of human genetic information in the miscegenated Craker/human descendants. However, Toby is the only “mother” and person responsible for the survival of the [post]human mind, language and culture, in a posthuman future. She is the human chronicler, who registers the events before the pandemic, the history of how people lived in the compounds, how some of them—Zeb and the God’s Gardeners—fought against the status quo and tried to revert the Earth to a better former state, and how Crake decided in solitude to exterminate the whole human race. She is responsible for the overcoming of humanist dualisms by making possible the blending of the lessons of the human past and culture with the [post]humans of the future.

In the chapter entitled “Cursive,” Toby starts teaching Blackbeard to write and read. Cursive is the traditional font used for penmanship. Most of the official documents in the US are written in cursive: The Declaration of Independence, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, and the United States Constitution. It is the writing of the historical, foundational texts. However, nowadays there is a decline in the day-to-day use of cursive, mainly because of the widespread use of computers. Moreover, it is a “traditional skill that has been replaced with technology” (Rees Shapiro n.p.) because in the 21st-century US “cursive handwriting is disappearing from public schools” (n.p.). In the pre-pandemic world of *MaddAddam*, cursive had already disappeared as well, but it is part of the ancient, traditional human knowledge and the main tool for creating history, Toby’s legacy for the new generations. Toby is at work on her journal thinking about the reasons for writing it: “Why, but for whom? Only for herself...” (*MaddAddam* 203), when a Craker child, Blackbeard, expresses curiosity for her task. Toby teaches him the basics of

writing and immediately after she worries about the possible consequences of keeping written registers for the future: “Now what have I done?” (204). In this reflection, Toby expresses a concept of culture that links all knowledge and gives prevalence to written cultures, but “Pandora’s box” was already opened. Toby forgets about the stories she has been telling the Crakers every night, the stories that have already created myths and dogmas for the Crakers. Only the medium changes: from an oral culture to a written one. Furthermore, from the point of view of a posthumanist methodology that “does not recognize any primacy to the written text” (Ferrando, “Towards” 11), the oral stories are as important as their written versions. It is a scene repeated throughout human history, a group of people gathered and listening to someone telling a story. As Jean-Luc Nancy explains: “our beliefs, our knowledge, our discourses, and our poems derive from these narratives . . . [and they are] the origin of human consciousness” (44–45). The Crakers were created “like blank pages” (*Oryx* 349) that initially used language only for communicative purposes: “Of course they can speak . . . When they have something they want to say” (*Oryx* 306). Crake did not want them “to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money” (305). But thanks to Jimmy/Snowman first and to Toby later on they have their own new myth to create a new post[human] community: “there can be no humanity that does not incessantly renew its act of *mythation*” (Nancy 51, italics in the original). These oral stories at night, together with Toby’s and Blackbeard’s written chronicle, conform the foundation of a new civilization that departs from Crake’s ideas of “perfection” because of the mingling between humans and Crakers. The important thing is that Toby gives the Crakers their own voice, not only their written voice: “you need to be the voice of the writing” (*MaddAddam* 202), but also the “gift, the right, or the duty to tell. It is the story of their origin” (Nancy 43). When Blackbeard eventually replaces Toby in both roles of “oral prophet” and “official writer,” Crakers’

voices are heard and it is the end of “humans [imposing] upon other creatures whatever image or identity they deem appropriate” (Hamilton and Taylor 62). Agency shifts in the post-pandemic world, decentralizing humans from it.

In “The Story of the Battle” (*MaddAddam* 357), the 9th oral story of the novel, Blackbeard takes Toby’s place for the first time as the speaker for his people. It is his voice that renders the way the two groups of human survivors—MaddAddamites and Painballers—fight to the death. He explains how MaddAddamites “needed to clear away the bad men, because if they did not do it, our place would never be safe” (358). Toby never again tells a tale for the Crakers. “After the disposal of the two malignant Painballers” (373), a euphemism for their execution, she shows to be very tired, and Blackbeard offers himself to be the new voice in her written account: “Telling the story is hard, and writing the story must be more hard. Oh Toby, when you are too tired to do it, next time I will write the story. I will be your helper” (375). Blackbeard and with him all the Crakers’ voices are not mediated or filtered through any human voice now: “This is my voice, the voice of Blackbeard that you are hearing in your head. That is called *reading*. And this is my own book, a new one for my writing and not the writing of Toby” (*MaddAddam* 378). The final words in the book belong to Blackbeard as homodiegetic narrator, without any mediation. He is the hero of his own story and the cultural evolutionary step has been completed; now it is the [post]human who occupies the former human place. The “most literal posthuman state, humanlessness,” borrowing again Callus’s words, has been imaginatively reached in the diegesis. Nevertheless, the human voice does not disappear from the narrative level: Toby’s voice will remain in the process of storytelling. If we recuperate the opening words in the novel, we can infer that the [post]human voices have been present all through the book and could have been interacting with the human’s. Eventually, Blackbeard becomes also the “owner” of

Toby's words: "Now I have added to the Words, and have set down those things that happened after Toby stopped making any of the Writing. . ." (385) and he chooses, as Toby did before, the story he wants to tell: "That is the best answer . . . and I have written it down" (390). Furthermore, the final chapter in the novel is "The Story of Toby," told by Blackbeard and edited by himself:

This is the end of the Story of Toby. I have written it in this Book. And I have put my name here—Blackbeard—the way Toby first showed me when I was a child. *It says that I was the one who set down these words.* (MaddAddam 390, emphasis added)

In the final page, Blackbeard claims ownership over the whole narrative. He asserts his voice. Thus, *MaddAddam's* narrative accepts the challenge of posthumanity, that is, to include the voice of the posthuman subject that "is neither totally Same nor totally Other" (Gomel Source 180). Besides, the reader may wonder who has written the words that appear at the beginning of the book: "*The Story of the Egg, and of Oryx, and Crake, and how they made People and Animals; and of the Chaos; and of Snowman-the-Jimmy; and of the Smelly Bone and the coming of the Two Bad Men*" (MaddAddam 3, italics in the original). The syntax is very simple, the repetition of "*and of...and of...*" instead of more elaborate connectors and the use of vocabulary like "*smelly bone . . . the Two Bad Men*" give some clues about the possibility that it is Blackbeard who has eventually edited the whole book. According to Ferrando, a posthumanist methodology "finds its rhizomatic outlines in the postmodern critique of objective knowledge and absolute truth" (11), that is, there is an openness to different possibilities, multiplicity and uncertainty. If in *The Handmaid's Tale* the reader discovers, at the end of the book, that the story rendered is not the direct account of the narrator, Offred, but the random and arbitrary story noted down by a male academic from a collection of disordered cassettes, in *MaddAddam*

Atwood uses a similar strategy. At the end of the book, we eventually discover that Blackbeard could have reedited Toby's account.

3. THE ANTHROPOCENE AND *MADDADDAM*

The term Anthropocene, or geological Age of humans, evokes human beings' involvement in altering the planet; in other words, how our technological, agricultural and historical evolution has visibly affected the layers of the Earth. However, as De Cristofaro and Cordle explain, the Anthropocene goes beyond the physical consequences on the Earth. It concerns not only the Sciences but also the Humanities since the acknowledgment of human responsibility has implied widespread cultural reactions to try to understand and make sense of the situation (n.p.). According to Alaimo, the climate change phenomenon has been primarily studied and analyzed from the perspective of conventional sciences—largely based on principles of detachment and objectivity—which creates a binary structure composed of two separate and distinct parts: the object and the subject of the study. In her own words:

This stance of distant neutrality casts uncertainty not as something for which all responsibility, all accountability, all values, all risks, are magically erased. Uncertainty in this articulation does not point to the necessity of the precautionary principle, but instead serves as a prelude to apathy. (99)

Thus, scientific reports involve objectivity and certain detachment, characteristic of scientific methods of analysis and information—what Alaimo calls “the view from nowhere” (98). Moreover, she explains that scientific definitions of the phenomenon of climate change make use of language from the semantic field of the effects rather than of the language of vulnerability/risk. This kind of pure scientific analysis seems to be openly insufficient to create a clear acknowledgment of any individual responsibility. There is the need of a deeper understanding of the cause-effect relationship that human actions—at an individual level—may have upon the environment and climate change. It is in the

Humanities and more specifically in the field of fiction where, in addition to “real climate change science” (Abraham n.p.), individual and collective stories are brought to the reader in an attempt to render the experience of living under the risks, the dangers, and the effects of climate change. As explained in the theoretical chapter, the climate change novel or Cli-fi is born as a resource to think about a complex issue, a space for reflection about what relation humans should have to the natural world. Cli-fi employs fiction as a possible agent of action—for it tries to make readers react from their state of “stuplimity.”

A genre for some critics (see Tuhus-Dubrow) and a specific subject within different genres for others (see Johns-Putra; Trexler), the topic of climate change is mainly displayed in novels set in the future. However, “while global warming is prominent in contemporary environmental writing . . . literary criticism rarely directly addresses the topic in interpreting literature and culture. It is mostly at issue only obliquely or implicitly” (T. Clark 10). In other words, literary criticism discusses climate change as one of the topics included within the wider label of environmentalism. Literary criticism tends to focus particularly on the more “anthropocentric” effects provoked by the social—human—collapse that follows dystopian apocalyptic fictions. In this pattern, climate change is generally limited to be the backdrop or “setting” (T. Clark 11), in novels where the issues found central to their interpretation are the trope of apocalypse and human extinction. However, borrowing Clark’s words again, this non-central role of climate change as a topic “must be set to change” (11). Thus, this section’s purpose is to discuss how the novel *MaddAddam* engages with climate change in practical and daily situations, that is, how the novel portrays the “emotional, aesthetic, and living experience of the Anthropocene” (Trexler 9).

3.1. MADDADDAM AS CLI-FI FICTION

Johns-Putra distinguishes a different move between those Cli-fi novels set in a future closer to our contemporary time—in which climate change is addressed as a political, ethical or psychological issue that entails individuals’ action/reaction—and novels set in a more distant future, which portray climate change “as part of an overall collapse including technological overreliance, economic instability, and increased social division” (Johns-Putra 269). According to this critic, in the second category of Cli-fi novels, set on the more distant future, the focus moves from personal suffering, individual identity and the psychological effects to the collective and the global. In contrast to *The Handmaid’s Tale* Gilead, located in the former U.S.A., the setting of *MaddAddam* is the whole world and the effects are global. Crake wanted the human race to go extinct. He considered his fellow human beings guilty of “the biosphere being depleted and the temperature skyrocketing” (*MaddAddam* 140). *MaddAddam* emphasizes the physical drama, the difficulty of survival and the intergenerational responsibility. That is, the older generation, represented by Zeb and especially by Toby, takes as its priority the survival and security of the younger, both humans and Crakers, and their miscegenated offspring. This movement from the personal/psychological suffering in *The Handmaid’s Tale* to the issue of survival in an apocalyptic scenario in *MaddAddam* is a characteristic trait of cli-fi novels set in the more distant future, that is, it would fit into Johns-Putra’s second category of cli-fi novels.

Survivors in *MaddAddam*—both humans and Crakers—respect nature on the premises of deep ecology. Humans are forced to live primitively without technology in the postapocalyptic time. Toby teaches the youngest human survivors how to get food and cure the sick, still following as far as possible the God’s Gardeners’ ecological

precepts. Moreover, she cares both for the current next generation and for the unborn generations of the future. She starts writing a journal to “record the ways and sayings of the now-vanished God’s Gardeners for the future; for generations yet unborn” (*MaddAddam* 135). Environmental degradation plus an excessive reliance on technology led to a world in which technology does not exist anymore, and where the fittest for survival are those who do not need technological prosthetics or aids: the Crakers. They could represent an ideal race on deep ecological premises that propose the return to a pretechnological way of living. The Crakers, although artificially born, were designed to live in close contact with nature on an Earth now inhospitable for human beings. The Crakers do not need proteins; their skins are insect-repellent and resistant to the burning sun and freezing nights. Moreover, they “eat leaves . . . so they’d never need agriculture” (19). Crakers and humans could peacefully live together after Crake “got rid of the chaos and the hurtful people” (4), but the survival of some Painballers “set human malice loose in the world again” (9) and compromises both humans’ and Crakers’ safety. The Crakers are unable to resort to violent actions and are thus powerless in the face of Painballers.

The only way to avoid extinction in *MaddAddam* is through the collaboration among all kinds of creatures: humans, Crakers and new bioengineered animals such as the intelligent Pigoons. The alliance between humans and Pigoons emerged victorious in the confrontation with the dehumanized killers. In Blackbeard’s words: “The two-skinned ones [humans] and the Pig Ones [Pigoons] cleared away the bad men, just as Crake cleared away the people in the chaos to make a good and safe place for us to live” (*MaddAddam* 358). Human beings are confronted with the need of, borrowing Haraway’s expression, “making kin” with other creatures—including human miscegenation with the Crakers and the resulting offspring born with “the green eyes of the Crakers” (379).

3.1.2. Ecophobic Transhumanism vs Catastrophic Deep Ecologism

If *The Handmaid's Tale*—a proto-Cli-fi novel—was more subtle in its display of climate change worries, *MaddAddam* openly meets the requirements to be categorized as Cli-fiction. *MaddAddam*'s environmental scenario in the pre-Waterless Flood had reached a point of no return regarding nature and climate degradation. People living in the Compounds used technological advances to compensate for the unbearable natural conditions outside their artificial habitat. The inhabitants of the Compounds, mostly scientists and their families, adopted a “resource management approach” (Alaimo 105), and saw nature as a space in which “every living creature—be it a tree, insect, mammal, or virus—is out for itself. Everything is part of the food chain, and subject to natural law: consumption by violent murder in the preponderance of cases” (Istvan n.p.). The privileged Compound inhabitants are transhumanists³³ in practical terms, they have created “something better than an environment of biological nature” (Istvan n.p.). They have raised their standards of living, (ab)used natural resources and lived in a new technology-based environment more fitting to their needs.

However, economic disparities and geographical locations are, both in the novel and in real life, key points altering the extent climate change affects people's lives. Human life outside the Compounds is subject to the rule of Nature, now tremendously hostile to human needs; in some parts “the air ... was so toxic you mutated in about a week” (*MaddAddam* 120). Nevertheless, even though all humans are largely to blame for

³³ Transhumanism has been defined as a “social and philosophical movement devoted to promoting the research and development of robust human-enhancement technologies. Such technologies would augment or increase human sensory reception, emotive ability, or cognitive capacity as well as radically improve human health and extend human life spans. Such modifications resulting from the addition of biological or physical technologies would be more or less permanent and integrated into the human body” (“Transhumanism | Definition, Origins, Characteristics, & Facts” n.p.).

climate change—all are agents of change to a greater or lesser extent—only some of them try to adopt different environmentalist strategies to resist the change and help restore nature. Environmentalism, according to Changizi and Ghasemi, may be at the core of our tragic understanding of human existence. We experience tragedy through the anxiety produced by a powerful nature that “might stand as a formidable enemy against us” (57). Environmentalism, understood that way, becomes a human strategy of self-defense in our innate desire for self-preservation rather than a view of life born from a selfless interest for all creatures’ well-being. In the pre-Waterless Flood society, Environmentalism is exemplified in two very different and distinct groups: The God’s Gardeners, with their religious and deep-ecologist understanding of life, and some ecological movements like Bearlift—the company in which Zeb worked feeding polar bears.

The God’s Gardeners clearly saw Nature in an irremediable state of degeneration, so their predictions were absolutely fatalist pointing to a future in which non-ecological human beings would disappear: “when the enemies of God’s Natural Creation no longer exist” (*MaddAddam* 209). The God’s Gardeners fully expected apocalypse, it was something unavoidable for them and their lessons, training and way of life were almost exclusively focused on survival during and after the Waterless Flood: “Gardeners have survived because if anyone would know how to wait out the pandemic that killed almost everyone else, it would be them . . . they’d planned for catastrophe” (26). Adam, the God’s Gardeners’ founder, created the online game called “Extinctathon,”³⁴ monitored by someone called MaddAddam: “Adam *named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones*” (*MaddAddam* 194, italics in the original). It is through that website that

³⁴ “Extinctathon” was an interactive web created by Adam—the God’s Gardeners founder—as a way to recruit new members for the Gardeners. Players had to demonstrate their knowledge about extinct species and those, like Crake, who got the highest scores, achieved “Grandmaster” status and had access to the hidden side of the game, directly connected with the God’s Gardeners organization.

Crake established his first contact with the God's Gardeners group and eventually became its special collaborator. As "ecofreaks" that did not recognize any supremacy or superior right to life of humans over non-human lives, the God's Gardeners were perceived by some people as individuals posing a threat to general human survival, even to the point that they embodied evil for some population sectors that tried to counteract green movements through advertisement. "Their ads featured stuff like a little blond girl next to some particularly repellent threatened species, such as the Surinam toad or the great white shark, with a slogan saying: This Or This?" (182). The actual transhumanist capitalist ruling society in the Compounds and its lack of sympathy for the kind of ecologism represented by the God's Gardeners could be interpreted as a practical demonstration of the consequences of social "ecophobia," a situation in which human beings would perceive themselves as "victims" of the excesses of a Nature that embodies the threatening "Other" (Changizi and Ghasemi 59). In the pre-apocalyptic time, nature is for the compounders "evil not sacred" (Istvan n.p.), and humans and nature are involved in a world war in which humans try to avoid "death today or death tomorrow" (Istvan n.p.) for themselves and their offspring.

Yet, it becomes obvious that the Compounders were not totally strangers to the latent danger that the degeneration of nature involved for human survival. In an ironic metafictional comment that mirrors *MaddAddam's* plot—a Cli-fi novel fictionalizing the apocalypse to warn about it—the narrator tells how the "issue of apocalypse" due to climate change had become a pervasive subject for popular culture and general entertainment: "There had even been online TV shows about it: computer-generated landscape pictures with deer grazing in Times Square . . . earnest experts lecturing about all the wrong turns taken by the human race" (*MaddAddam* 32). The novel shows how the media functions as a useful tool for the population's appeasement, and the means to

achieve a non-innocent objective: “the ability to render reality into information, rather than to effect material change” (Alaimo 101). That is, people in *MaddAddam*, like people in real life, paradoxically and simultaneously perceive climate change as something real but incredible: “the prospect of a forthcoming catastrophe which, however probable it may be, is effectively dismissed as impossible” (Zizek 328). Nevertheless, the novel seems to take a critical stance on the efficiency of “superficial” modern environmentalism, as if it were not “enough.”

The God’s Gardeners had environmental-religious beliefs and expected God’s punishment to end in the destruction of humans from Earth. They named God’s punishment echoing Noah’s story in the Bible: the Waterless Flood. Paradoxically, they eventually become part of the factual trigger and vehicle of the apocalypse due to their unconscious support of Crake’s plans. The God’s Gardeners, an example of ecological response, are ironically a fatalist group expecting to see God’s punishment verified. On the other hand, non-religious environmentalism is portrayed as assimilated by the capitalist apparatus: “a fabricated deceit of and for the rich and powerful” (Istvan n.p.). Bearlift is a clear example of the hypocrisy of institutionalized environmentalism, an excuse for private corporations to dispose of their trash by feeding polar bears with city leftovers: “Bearlift a scam . . . lived off the good intentions of city types with disposable emotions who liked to think they were saving something” (*MaddAddam* 59). These responsible and worried citizens collaborated with Bearlift and knew of the problem of glaciers melting out there. However, this climate catastrophe was something distinct and unlinked from their own lives and their own role as agents of change. Furthermore, environmentalism, controlled by capitalism, becomes an effective tool to appease and control the more environmentally conscious population: “it served a function for them, sounded a note of hope, distracted folks from the real action, which was bulldozing the

planet flat and grabbing anything of value” (69). Consequently, technology adopts the role of the Compounds inhabitants’ defender from a hostile Nature, the solution being the creation of artificial habitats, anything but cutting down consumption, procreation, and progress; in other words, they follow the transhumanist approach. In the meantime, the conscience of those still worried by the degeneration of nature is mollified by insignificant “ecological” actions. *MaddAddam* shows how the pre-Waterless Flood society is mainly oblivious to the natural environment. As Bieber-Lake points out, the apocalypse in *MaddAddam* is designed to make our current society see our choices on a mirror reflection rather than “to predict its inevitable future” (13).

3.1.3. Food and Cli-fi

Being a deeply committed author, Atwood focuses her *MaddAddam* trilogy on some of her current worries, like human development of biotechnology and the use that may be made of it. However, as she affirms, “no matter how high the tech, *Homo sapiens sapiens* remains at heart . . . the same emotions, the same preoccupations” (*Writing* 286). In *MaddAddam*, there are many instances of different foods, food preparation and feeding. Indeed, she takes up some issues that we can already find in her earliest novels, like *The Edible Woman* (1969) or *Lady Oracle* (1976), such as the interest in food and its social value. According to Sceats, female authors in general attach great symbolism to food, which may include abundant narrative information. Furthermore, she states that it is precisely in women’s writing that “food and eating themselves convey much of the meanings of the novels” (Sceats 6). In any case, both in reality and fiction, food and eating are “instrumental in the definition of family, class, ethnicity” (1). Traditionally, food has an undeniable symbolic meaning to culturally define human beings—*homo sapiens*

sapiens. Reflecting on the difficulty to write a type of Cli-fi that could become a potential agent of change, in their essay “Food, Fears and Anxieties in Climate Change Fiction,” Wain and Jones put the focus on the intertwined nature of Cli-fi and food in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy. For them, food is used “to structure the narrative” (4) and “to develop and position characters” (6). Scarcity of food due to environmental conditions brought about by climate change is a visible and immediate effect, perceived by the reader as a real threat, which is frequently central to climactic moments in many postapocalyptic fictions such as *The Road* (2006) or *The Hunger Games* (2008). Food—what the characters can or choose to eat—is both a symptom of technological advances in history and a defining symbol of belonging. The above-mentioned intergenerational responsibility characteristic of Cli-fi novels set in the more distant future is exemplified in how Toby, the older woman, feeds the sick, grows a vegetable garden and obtains honey from her beehive, thus trying to overcome the difficulty to get food. Food defines, bonds, and separates not only species but also social groups and individuals in *MaddAddam* and is an effective strategy to add meanings derived from the cultural heritage that surrounds it and its preparation.

There is an evident connection between climate and the human ability to produce food: “The changed climate is shown to diminish people’s ability to produce food in the same way as done in the past” (Wain and Jones 5). That traditional old scene of farmers looking at the sky trying to guess whether the weather will be favorable for a good crop must be as ancient as human civilization. In the pre-Waterless Flood times, food is produced mainly with the help of technology, since natural resources are diminishing; natural sourced traditional food is disappearing. It is precisely due to climate change that, for instance, a highly appreciated product such as chocolate becomes something to mourn, irrecoverable. “The Choco-Nutrinols had been a *desperate* stab at a palatable breakfast

cereal for children after the world chocolate crop had failed . . . People used to eat this kind of stuff all the time . . . *they took it for granted*” (*MaddAddam* 140–41, emphasis added). Even in their technological/protective isolation, climate change has negative implications for the Compounders’ daily lives. Passively, they are able to witness how some species are annihilated and how the earth suffers changes produced by human agents, but they desperately try to imitate a kind of food—forever lost—that was a symbol of well-being and pleasure.

According to T. Clark, and despite its serious consequences, climate change has been mostly absent from ecocriticism: “As a global catastrophe arising from innumerable mostly innocent individual actions . . . its causes are diffuse, partly unpredictable and separated from their effects by huge gaps in space and time” (11). However, one distinct cause of ecological change is the kind of food manufacturing that brings about visible landscape transformations. The landscape is shaped not only by food production but by “the tastes and consumption of consumers . . . the food that is produced shapes the environment, eating is an agricultural act” (Wessell 2). In *MaddAddam*, Atwood makes an efficient use of food as a link between cause and effect, for food is not only a consequence of climate change but also a very significant trigger of it. As Toby explains to Blackbeard, people in the pre-Waterless Flood ate unethically, in the “wrong way” (92): “Bad people in the chaos ate the Children of Oryx [animals] . . . they killed them and killed them, and ate them and ate them. They were always eating them” (93). Excess of demand together with the lack of ethics around the production and consumption chain led people in the Compounds to eat meals of dubious composition: “quasi-meat products at SecretBurgers” (131), “fish fingers . . . twenty per cent real fish . . . who knows what was really in them . . . We ate them” (123). The Compounders ate technologically manipulated food without questioning their own possibilities and choices, blind to their

origins and the ethics of their production; they even accepted products like genetically manipulated chicken lacking sensorial inputs and brain, “ChickieNobs” (*Oryx* 237). Moreover, the weakest members of society were themselves at risk of becoming food in the Pleeblands; animals could eat their bodies: “The sex bazaar side . . . kids . . . from the favelas on a limited-time-use basis, turning them over, and fishfooding them at a fast clip” (*MaddAddam* 176). Even worse, some vulnerable and under-privileged women from the Pleeblands were first completely exhausted by sexual exploitation and then, in an exercise of soulless cannibalism, eaten by other “humans,” the predator Painballers: “Sex until you were worn to a fingernail was their mode; after that, you were dinner. They liked the kidneys” (9).

The 2019 report of the FAO’s—Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations—on the state of food and agriculture concludes that one of the greatest challenges for people working along the food chain is how to get “more food for more people with less resources and emissions” (in Flachowsky *et al.* 66). The report remarks that, in order to achieve this goal, “the changing of consumption behavior of humans” is of major importance (in Flachowsky *et al.* 66). Besides this, as Wessell affirms, the food we choose to eat and the way we do it “shapes the landscape . . . and the history of a place” (12). Conversely, the landscape of the Compounds and the Pleeblands was shaped by the consumers’ lack of ethics, empathy and humanity: a desolate landscape in a dystopian story. However, some citizens in the pre-Waterless Flood times were already conscious of the ethical power of food consumption: The God’s Gardeners. They used food as a tool of resistance against the status quo and in contrast to the rest of the population’s acquiescence. They cultivated vegetable gardens on the old buildings’ roofs, they had “Vegivows,” they did not eat animals and tried to preserve non-aggressive and ancestral agricultural traditions. They ate “ethically,” rejecting everything the capitalist scientific

dominant class had manufactured or manipulated. If “people are defined by what they eat” (Sceats 1), regarding their food choice, the God’s Gardeners were the only force of resistance and practically the sole attempt at preservation of an environment led to destruction.

Climate change, in the era of the Anthropocene and the sixth mass extinction of species, is caused by human actions, one of them being the unethical consumption of food. However, in the novel, after the Waterless Flood, survivors and Crakers have crossed the frontier, they have survived the Anthropocene. *MaddAddam* draws from the “post-Anthropocene” epoch when the environment—understood as animals and plants—lives a renaissance period. Once “Anthropos” is no longer at the center of creation, “the enemies of God’s Natural Creation no longer exist, and the animals and birds—those that did not become extinct under the human domination of the planet—are thriving unchecked. Not to mention the plant life” (*MaddAddam* 209). A very well known quote, dubiously attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, reads: “I cannot remember the books I’ve read any more than the meals I have eaten; even so, they have made me” (*Quote Investigator* n.p.). In other words, if culture plays a key role in the formation of identity and by extension of shared community, there is truth in the popular saying that “we are what we eat.” MaddAddamites are led to a state of forced primitivism. They are humans reincorporated into nature at the same level as any other species. In the post Anthropocene period, following the Waterless Flood, feeding becomes equated to survival but it is also still a distinct feature to define who one is and what community one belongs to. As Sceats states: “food clearly is a signifier of belonging” (139).

The main threat for the MaddAddam community still comes from some humans. The Painballers are genetically and biologically human beings, ex-convicts, combatants in a cruel form of penal punishment that made them fight each other to the death.

Moreover, the extremely bloody conditions of the Painball “game” resulted in the fact that those who had survived it “more than once had been reduced to the reptilian brain” (*MaddAddam* 9). The consequence is that the “dehumanized” Painballers became predators, unable to feel empathy for the others’ suffering, no matter whether human beings or animals. Their choice of food functions as a systematic indicator for their loss of humanity. They practiced cannibalism without any remorse already in the pre-Waterless Flood times, and in the post Anthropocene period they still abuse any living creature that comes into their hands: they eat whoever and whatever they find. Beside this, there is another instance of cannibalistic practices in the novel, when Zeb resorted to it in order to survive. After his helicopter crashed in the middle of the snow with no food available, Zeb took “some of Chuck” (*MaddAddam* 70)—his dead enemy—to eat. This scene resembles a real-life event that took place in the 1970s, when the survivors of the Uruguayan Air Force Flight 571 eventually resorted to eating part of the corpses of those who died before them. In these cases, cannibalism is exclusively the last and only chance to survive, not a gratuitous choice. Zeb ate part of a fellow human being, but he “didn’t feel too bad. He’d have done the same” (70). These two examples of cannibalism in the novel—the Painballers’ and Zeb’s—underlie the difference between eating in the “wrong” and in the “right” way, in other words, the difference between voluntarily becoming predators even of their own kin, and cannibalism for survival. In the case of the Painballers, “hatred and viciousness are addictive . . . Once you’ve had a little, you start shaking if you don’t get more” (11). Eating part of a corpse for “*Nutrition, capital N*” (77, italics in the original), is a test that reminds Zeb of his childhood, when his father—the reverend—forced him to eat his own vomit. In both occasions, Zeb had to

overcome his “abjection”³⁵ and deprive the act of eating from any symbolic meaning: “See no Evil, Hear no Evil, Speak no Evil” (77), in order to keep his own sense of human identity.

Toby, after liberating the traumatized Amanda from the Painballers, makes a soup to feed all the humans, including the Painballers (*MaddAddam* 10). Eating and sharing the same meal traditionally create community. Toby even cherishes the hope that the ex-convicts could be reincorporated into humanness. It is the day of the old Gardener festivity of St. Julian, “a celebration of God’s tenderness and compassion for all creatures” (10). This is why Toby, still very much influenced by her pre-apocalypse beliefs as a member of the God’s Gardeners, feels a parental responsibility towards all humans present. She behaves like a “kindly godmother, ladling out the soup, dividing up the nutrients for all to share” (11). Offering food has traditionally signified friendship and welcoming, “Food offered . . . is good relations. Food not offered on the suitable occasion or not taken is bad relations” (Counihan 103). Nevertheless, the evicted and animalized Painballers are unable to respond to human solidarity and re-enter human society. Their capacities of feeling empathy and developing fondness or love have been permanently damaged. They have become no more than “other predators in the forest” (*MaddAddam* 14). They have become threatening creatures for the new posthuman community.

Then, what kind of food makes us human? In *MaddAddam*, eating is one of the main traits that initially separates humans from the Crakers. As Jimmy explained to them at the very beginning of the trilogy: “their food was not his food” (*Oryx* 187). The Crakers do not eat any kind of animal, but only leaves that are not edible for human beings. The

³⁵ The feeling of abhorrence that cannibalism provokes in Zeb is linked to the eating of his own vomit, a feeling that recalls Julia Kristeva’s concept of abjection. Kristeva defines abjection as the subjective horror that individuals feel when confronted with the materiality of their bodies. This confrontation supposes a disruption in the distinction between self and other, that is, a collapse in the definition of individual identity. She explains that it is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4).

fact that they eat their own excrements positions them at another level as a species, at first sight very far away from human identity. As pointed out above, human beings experience a feeling of abjection when confronted with our own fluids, blood or vomit. The very idea of eating our waste is nauseating apart from unhealthy and pointless. Through abjection, “primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder” (Kristeva 12–13). This Craker characteristic makes them look more like animals and less like humans. Their shocking “self-recycling” behavior is a powerful representation of that abjection that disrupts the idea of human identity: “What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva 4). The posthuman Crakers are situated in a middle ground between animals and humans. However, there is reciprocity between humans and Crakers in the feeling of rejection of the other group’s way of feeding. In spite of a feeling of guilt, the ex-vegan survivors have abandoned their promise not to eat animal proteins, their Vegivows: “It hadn’t taken them long to backslide on the Gardener Vegivows” (*MaddAddam* 34). The MaddAddamites think there would be no point in being a Gardener after the Anthropocene. Yet, in the time of the Compounds, the Gardeners’ diet was a tool of resistance and a call for change in an overpopulated world living in a dying land. Human feeding practices proved to be a direct link between the degeneration of the environment and the “waste land” created by climate change. After the Waterless Flood, human quasi extinction has brought about a new flourishing of nature, a restart of human history that allows for the mere eating for survival without compromising the environment and other species’ continuity. On top of that, MaddAddamites’ carnivorous diet is as nasty for the Crakers as the consumption of excrements can be for the humans: “The Crakers withdraw to a safe distance; they don’t like to be too close to the odours of

carnivore cookery” (48). The Crakers do not understand why humans have to eat animal proteins, this “smelly bone” that was in the soup that Toby made for all the humans including the Painballers. This is why the “smelly bone” is present in many instances of the novel. More significantly, it already appears in the first chapter title, as part of the account of their myth of origin, “*The Story of the Egg, and of Oryx and Crake, and how they made People and Animals; and of the Chaos; and of Snowman-the-Jimmy; and of the Smelly bone and the coming of the Two Bad Men*” (4, italics in the original). What humans eat is so important and shocking for the Crakers and so incomprehensible for them, that they include it among the significant things to remember in their religious/myth making narratives.

The MaddAddamites eat dog ribs and Pigoon Chobs: “Frankenbacon, considering they’re splices . . . They’ve got human neocortex tissue” (*MaddAddam* 19). They self-justify their scruples and the ethical implications of eating their former company species and their genetic relatives by means of attaching greater importance to the Pigoons’ animal side. Traditionally, our concept of human identity in Western civilization prevents cannibalism. However, the prohibition of eating our kin is very difficult to fulfill in a post-Anthropocene Earth now populated by many new animals with human genomes in their DNA. Yet, according to Wenneman, what defines humanity is the fact that humans are not only a biological species but also moral creatures. In the posthuman age, he claims for the traditional concept of personhood, though not exclusively based on rationality. Personhood should be amplified to give room for other non-human animals (*Postuman Personhood* v–viii). A posthuman personhood in the posthuman age should be able to incorporate new inhabitants in the moral community that used to be the sole possession of humans. “What to eat” is at first a mere issue of survival for MaddAddamites. Nevertheless, it becomes an ethical choice when they are able to communicate with the

Pigoons and recognize their ability to think: “They’re smarter than ordinary pigs” (*MaddAddam* 263). Furthermore, it is even more important when they know about Pigoons’ feelings and suffering. The Pigoons are “Children of Oryx [animals] and Children of Crake [people like the Crakers], both” (268) and with the help of Blackbeard as a translator, humans can communicate with them as equals. The Pigoons ask the MaddAddamites for help for they know the Crakers are unable—at least for the time being—of any violent act. They want an alliance to protect their offspring—their baby pigs—from the remnant human predators: the Painballers. Once the MaddAddamites recognize the Pigoons as non-biological humans, they are incorporated into the moral community. Humans accept the Pigoons as allies. Humans, Pigoons and Crakers ethically recognize each other and share “posthuman personhood” in the posthuman age. The Pigoons have their own ethical way of feeding. They think it is morally right to eat any animal that is already dead, but “not kill and then eat, no” (271): it is their idea of eating in the “right” way. However, with the recognition of the Pigoons’ personhood, the implication for the humans is that they are kin to them, and eating their kin would have been a kind of “cannibalism”: “you are not the friend of those who turn you into a smelly bone” (268). The new posthuman inhabitants of the Earth have to adapt their food consumption behaviors in order to create a peaceful society. The Pigoons promise the humans: “Not eating the garden, not killing them” (270), whereas the MaddAddamites—paradoxically since they could live peacefully without killing any living creature—renounce definitely their Vegivows, and find in deer “an acceptable source of animal protein” (377). Moreover, in the non-written contract among Pigoons, humans and Crakers to form a community, the Crakers also make some adaptations. Blackbeard, although unable to eat any living animal because of the repugnance that this action causes to his own sense of identity, eventually “performs” the act of eating a fish as part of the

ceremony and the rites he has to display as the new chronicler and “priest” for his people, the Crakers:

Now I will eat the fish. We do not eat a fish, or a smelly bone; that is not what we eat. It is a hard thing to do, eating a fish. But I must do it. Crake did many hard things for us, when he was on the earth in the form of a person . . . so I will try to do this hard thing of eating the smelly bone fish. It is cooked. It is very small. Perhaps it will be enough for Crake if I put it into my mouth and take it out again. There. I am sorry for making the noise of a sick person. Please take the fish away and throw it into the forest. The ants will be happy. The maggots will be happy. The vultures will be happy. Yes, it does taste very bad. It tastes like the smell of a smelly bone, or the smell of a dead one . . . The hard thing of eating the fish, the smelly bone taste—that is what needs to be done. First the bad things, then the story. (357–58)

Blackbeard tries to be closer to the humans through this performance. Nevertheless, eating an animal provokes in the young Craker a reaction of horror and abjection. He has been created to be only vegetarian. Then, biologically he is non-carnivorous and eating an animal for him is as intolerable as it is equally unacceptable for humans to eat their own vomit or their excrements. Despite the disruption that this action implies for his own identity, Blackbeard will repeat the action once and again. The decision of eating the fish is for the young Craker a serious breakdown with his own nature that could be followed by other unexpected changes in his biotechnologically designed behavior. If the development of their own myths and culture shows that the Crakers are moving away from their projected way of thinking, Blackbeard’s self-imposed eating of an animal implies that there is also the possibility of evolution in the Crakers’ initially naïve behavior and nature.

Furthermore, Blackbeard commits what for him is an extremely bad action and validates it for the sake of the story. He shows certain moral relativism when the death of an animal is justified as part of a “religious” ritual destined to entertain his people. Although the fish tastes very bad for him, he is participant of its killing and disposal. Is that eating in the “right” way? In other words, humans kill animals for eating, but, is it an ethical way of eating for a Craker? This apparently insignificant death seems to be the unavoidable first step to create a new story, “that is what needs to be done” (*MaddAddam* 358). In a myse-en-abyme, Blackbeard makes a metafictional commentary about the novel’s plot: sometimes, bad things are needed in order to have a story. In our reality, as Atwood herself explained, climate degeneration, savage capitalist consumption, and uncontrolled biotechnological development are the things “needed” to write *MaddAddam* (see “Why” n.p.). Within the diegesis, human extermination is an extremely bad thing that Crake had to do to create the *MaddAddam* post pandemic history, whereas the eating of a fish is the bad thing Blackbeard does to have his own tales. The Crakers know about human extinction but they understand it as something necessary for having their own beginning, their own myths and civilization. The end of human civilization as well as the act of eating a fish are not “pleasant things.” Yet, both actions, although on a very different scale, are about death, and seem to be understandable and essential for having a story. Additionally, stories are needed as the only possibility to live others’ lives and meditate about them. Stories are born as a way of thinking about and learning from un-lived experiences to avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future. Both stories, Blackbeard’s tales for his people and the *MaddAddam* trilogy have didactic aims. Still, within the diegesis, Blackbeard’s tales are tales from the past and *MaddAddam*, in our reality, is still a tale for the future, a dystopia that fortunately is not bound to be real.

4. MADDADDAM AS DYSTOPIA

Margaret Atwood's first dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, was one of the books that marked the dystopian turn in the fiction of the 1980s. Moreover, according to Tom Moylan, *The Handmaid's Tale* "opened up the dystopia to new possibilities for its creative realization and reception" (150). *The Handmaid's Tale* is not what Moylan describes as a "pure" dystopia, for it offers the possibility of a hopeful future in its ending at the Nunavit conference—which reverses the dystopic conclusion by giving the novel a "potential utopian gesture" (165). Although Moylan still classifies *The Handmaid's Tale* as a classical dystopia—mainly for reasons related with its publication date—, other critics such as Baccolini and Cavalcanti inscribe Atwood's novel within another specific label: the critical dystopia. The critical dystopia is a variant within dystopian fictions in which discourse retains a hope for a better future, a utopian space or a movement towards utopia (in Moylan 190). It is precisely in the presence of a non-yet defeated utopian core in an open ending narrative that Mohr distinguishes the feminist dystopia's specificity:

Strictly speaking, the classical dystopia has often (if not always) contained a utopian, but a defeated, utopian core . . . The utopian subtext of contemporary feminist dystopias can be found precisely in this gap between the narrated dystopian present and the anticipated realization of a potential utopian future that classical dystopia evades . . . However, in contrast to a classical utopian narrative and like the 'critical utopias,' they resist narrative closure (perfection). Without ever narrating or exactly defining utopia, these new feminist dystopias map not a single path but rather several motions and changes that may lead to a potentially better future. (Mohr 9)

Consequently, the utopian mood would be still alive, particularly in the modern feminist dystopias, but disguised as dystopia, in a new derivation within the genre that Mohr calls “transgressive utopian dystopias” (4). From the 1990s onwards, feminist dystopias have added to their initial more exclusive focus on women’s agency an increasing concern with racism and climate change. As Moylan and Baccolini argue, critiquing “this correlation between gender and genre, feminist fiction in general and feminist utopian/dystopian writing in particular have from the beginning deliberately crossed genre boundaries and questioned the stability of genre conventions” (164). Atwood herself, who formerly defined her most successful novel—*The Handmaid’s Tale*—as “a negative form of utopia that is called dystopia” (*Writing* 92), acknowledges the frequent and inherent hybridity of utopia and dystopia in what she calls “ustopia”; that is, “a combination of the imagined perfect society and its opposite” (*In Other* 66). Accordingly, it can be inferred that the clues for *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s generic classification, and with them the specific ideological message of the novel, are precisely to be found in the novel’s ending, when the glimpse of utopia appears as readers learn that Gilead’s regime is toppled in the future of the narrated events.

In contrast to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *MaddAddam* opens the story with “the actual process of building utopia” (Mohr 5). The trilogy’s denouement conveys the positive—utopian—or negative—dystopian—mood that determines the novel belonging to a specific genre and, what it is more, its ideological message. Traditionally, an ending offering multiple possibilities would easily categorize a work of fiction into the transgressive and liberal corner. However, as Brian Richardson remarks, “close endings with fixed solutions were inherently conservative while open endings were necessary liberatory . . . [but] open endings soon became widespread, even conventional” (332). If *MaddAddam* plunges the reader into the very process of building a utopian community,

it would be interesting to consider the openness of the ending to make a tentative reading about the ideologically “liberatory” or “inherently conservative” final message of the trilogy. I would like to discuss whether *MaddAddam*’s open ending could be understood as anti-patriarchal/utopian, and thus the book could be labelled as a “feminist critical dystopia,” or quite the opposite. In other words, the openness of the ending might be displaying a dystopian—and patriarchal—future, in an ironic demonstration of the impossibility of changing human nature for the better. The narrative world depicted after the Anthropocene frontier in *MaddAddam* can be interpreted mainly as dystopian, especially for women. In order to assess this hypothesis, I will consider the characterization and the depiction of human women and their place and role in the new society created after the Waterless Flood.

4.1. TOBY, THE UNWOMANLY WOMAN

Together with Zeb, Toby is portrayed as the most skillful and strongly ethical character in the trilogy. Even when confronted with her own survival needs, Toby is unwilling to hurt any living creature. Physically Toby is very far away from the voluptuous woman type: she is skinny, muscular and not sexually eye-catching (Atwood, *Year 20*). Moreover, her body is described as almost androgynous. According to McCoy Anderson, Atwood would be questioning male dominance by means of giving certain utopian potential to the “androgynous” woman. Apparently, Toby occupies a liminal third space between the masculine and the feminine, which seems to question the inherent western binary thinking that links males with agency and females with passivity: “liminality disrupts the binary system, and, as a result, threatens the dominance of masculinity. . . . Toby demonstrate[s] that hope exists for those who navigate between the extreme

feminine and masculine stereotypes” (McCoy Anderson 50). However, the mere act of qualifying Toby, a slender woman with small breasts, as “androgynous” can be another way of perpetuating stereotypes and describing women through men’s eyes and expectations. Furthermore, the idea of attaching skillfulness, resolution and capacity of survival to the only woman in the story that is not sexually attractive and fertile, that is, to the “de-feminized” woman, may reinforce gendered binary thinking by attaching specific abilities only to specific body types. In other words, standardly beautiful and fertile women are once again relegated to the role of being guided and cared for by men and by the “de-feminized” woman as well. Nevertheless, it is my contention that in spite of Toby’s non-standard appearance, she is not actually neutral or liminal in her sexuality or feelings. What is more, she would have internalized patriarchal expectations both for her and for the other women to the point that at the end of the novel she has become an “ugly duckling” or “Cinderella.” The denouement of her story comes ironically close to a romantic fairy tale and adds to the novel touches of consolation in the form of “they lived happily ever after, until parted by death.”

In the pre-Waterless Flood times, after the death of her ailing mother—who died of a strange illness provoked by infected pills disguised by the Corporations as vitamin supplements—and her father’s suicide in the same days, Toby has to struggle alone for survival, without legal identity, money or friends. She moves to the Pleeblands, the area that is considered the lowest among the low levels of society, a place where she could have made business with her only possession “of marketable value ... her young ass” (*Year* 35). However, even though she resists losing the ownership of her whole body, she trades with some “fragments” of it. She sells first her hair and then her eggs with the eventual consequence of being rendered infertile after an infection (*Year* 38—39). In spite of her apparent lack of sex appeal, which should make her invisible to the male gaze, she

is elected as forced lover by Blanco, her boss in the SecretBurguers place and the most wicked of the Painballers later on. She is raped several times, and thus eventually deprived of her body's ownership. Blanco exerts brutality and abuse over everyone around him, but only women suffer his sexual violence. Moreover, when Toby is rescued and integrated within the God's Gardeners, she goes through another episode of molestation attempt (124). This time the rape is not perpetrated and Pilar—a high rank God's Gardener—recommends Toby to forget about the incident: “He's tried that on more than one of us . . . The Ancient Australopithecus can come out in all of us. You must forgive him in your heart” (124).

Laurie Vickroy underlines that Atwood recurrently reveals and considers the subject of “women's vulnerability to physical, sexual, and psychological violence in situations of male domination” (254). Atwood's protagonists are often sexually abused, and the *MaddAddam* trilogy is not an exception: Toby, Amanda, and Ren—female narrators and focalizers through the trilogy—are raped. Nevertheless, although Amanda and Ren are sexually assaulted by the Crakers, these rapes are minimized, devoid of any significance and forgiven. Amanda and Ren are encouraged not to make too much of a fuss about the incident. Toby, Amanda and Ren suffer this traumatic experience and seem to use typical psychological defenses trying to work through their trauma, like forgetfulness and emotional or physical dissociation. Vickroy explains how the effort to overcome their trauma is what may guide Atwood's female characters' behavior as “overly passive and emotionally paralyzed, unreliable and overly defensive, unheroic and even unethical—failures that are manifestations of trauma” (256). This seems to be the scheme employed by Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*: passivity and adaptability as strategies of survival, and writing as an act of resistance. However, Offred's account is so biased by her need of self-justification that it jeopardizes the reliability of her narration.

Toby adopts a different method to survive to her extremely hard life conditions. Apparently, she adapts to her situation by becoming a tougher person, emphasizing her visible lack of physical traits typically associated to femininity. She produces a self that is split between an aging and neutral outside and a careful and tender inside. Toby hides her feelings by putting an extremely thick cover layer between her and the rest of the world. However, as Adam One—the God's Gardeners' founder—easily understands, “that hard shell is not your true self. Inside that shell you have a warm and tender heart, and a kind soul” (*Year 49*). She is always touched by the presence of children—or their absence after the Waterless Flood—no matter whether human or Craker. This special sensibility to children may be considered as an unconscious manifestation of her inability to become a mother. After being repeatedly raped by Blanco and thus having her body assaulted by undesired fondling, she is hugged and welcome by God's Gardeners' children. This asexual and friendly physical contact becomes the first instance of a clear touching emotion in Toby, the first crack on her shell (51). She relives and expands this emotional link with her mother-like relationship with little Blackbeard, the Craker child, to the point that she feels sadness when she recognizes in him the signs of adulthood and consequently the end of her “motherhood”: “very soon he will be grown up. Why does this make me sad?” (*MaddAddam* 378). Children provide her with comfort and strength. Children, and eventually her love story with Zeb, are the triggers that break her protective shield, because she did not have any hope of being either loved or appreciated before: “alone is how she'll always be . . . She'd waited so long, she'd given up waiting” (49).

Toby has internalized the way others see her. Her lack of an exuberant femininity makes her feel diminished in the presence of overtly sexual and attractive women. Her bodily insecurity prevents her from establishing bonds with other women. She resents these women using their bodies and sexuality as “the tools” she does not have to attract

men. When Toby meets Zeb, he is having a sexual affair with Lucerne, an attractive married woman who eloped with him. Lucerne sees “nothing sexual about [Toby]” (*Year* 137), and does not consider Toby as a rival for Zeb’s attentions. Yet Toby, attracted by Zeb, feels jealous of Lucerne when she tells her about her first meeting with Zeb (141). Toby, very aware of her apparent sexual “invisibility,” does not sympathize with visually appealing females, and judges them harshly to the point she is sometimes ashamed of her own critical thoughts. It is an ambivalent feeling that ranges from envy to moral superiority complex that Toby shows with Lucerne, Nuala³⁶ and, after the Waterless Flood, with the more threatening woman for her, the younger and fertile Swift Fox. After the apocalypse, Toby’s body is not only anodyne but also aging. Toby uses self-deprecating humor in the construction of her identity through the interaction between herself and the younger woman, and tries to hide her love for Zeb because “women learn to see themselves and other women through men’s eyes” (Davies 62) and she has internalized the stereotype for a middle-aged woman:

Naturally they see it as funny . . . romance among the chronologically challenged is giggle folder. For the youthful, lovelorn and wrinkly don’t blend, or not without farce . . . They must feel she’s passed that moment. Brewing herbs, gathering mushrooms, applying maggots, tending bees, removing warts—beldam’s roles.

Those are her proper vocations. (*MaddAddam* 89)

Toby, “the sexually invisible woman,” has been silently in love with Zeb from the very moment she met him. The hope of seeing him again was her main motivation in the time after the spreading of the virus, when she was alone and enclosed trying to survive. After

³⁶ Nuala is a God’s Gardener accused of having a sexual affair with a male God’s Gardener engaged with another woman. Nuala denies the accusations, but Toby personally thinks she is actually very promiscuous, and the allegations easy to believe “considering the way [Nuala] rub[s] against pant legs. Nuala flirted with anything male” (Atwood, *Oryx* 200).

the pandemic, when she has already had sexual intercourse with him, she is insecure of her own value and attractiveness for Zeb, an alpha man. This is why she suffers and is resentful towards the woman who may be her rival for Zeb's attentions:

Toby feels a rush of anger . . . Toby knows she's resenting the snide innuendoes Swift Fox aimed at her earlier, not to mention the gauzy shift and the cute shorts. And the breast weaponry, and the girly-girl pigtails. They don't go with your budding wrinkles, she feels like saying. (*MaddAddam* 143)

In a time in which fertility seems to be the most valuable thing, Toby, infertile and older than her rival, is not even able to say aloud her worst worries: the fear of not being enough for Zeb. However, Toby, the “androgynous Cinderella,” who has not lost her modesty, kindness and diligence, is finally “chosen” by the alpha man and achieves her personal “fairy tale like” ending with wedding ceremony included. The skillful woman, which demonstrated an equal blend of masculine authority and feminine nurturing, ends up as in a teen comedy, when the “ugly girl” is chosen and preferred to her younger and prettier rival. However, Toby and Zeb's ending is as happy as any human life can be expected to be. Although questionably realistic, it is nevertheless closed and even utopian for the last recognized “purely human” couple. Yet, the outcome of Toby's fate twists to a romantic tragedy when Zeb disappears and is given up for dead, Toby cannot recover from the grief she feels over her husband's death: “She did not ever become happy again” (*MaddAddam* 389). Several months after Zeb's death, she discovers she has an incurable illness—presumably cancer—and goes to the forest to commit suicide before being painfully terminal. Ironically blurring the limits between dystopias and romantic novels, Atwood gives a love story ending to Toby, demonstrating that human happiness is only achieved at an individual level. This quite conventional ending—girl meets boy and lives happy until death—has, however, a final hint of transgression in the form of female agency and

a movement towards drama: Toby could not choose to retain the ownership of her body when she was raped but she decides when it is time for her to die. When life is no longer desirable, for it offers only suffering to her, she does not renounce to her body control and faces the last possible act of agency by committing suicide.

4.2. AMANDA AND REN, THE YOUNG WOMEN

The three fertile women—Amanda, Ren and Swift Fox—are the first mothers of hybrid Craker/human descendants, but with the exception of the last one, theirs was not a conscious and voluntary decision. Both Amanda and Ren are raped. When Amanda—“who was so traumatized she was almost catatonic” (*MaddAddam* 11)—and Ren are sexually assaulted by the Crakers, both ask Toby to help them, but the “major cultural misunderstanding”—never named as rape—is done. Both women are encouraged to understand and forgive the Crakers’ acts, because they are completely ignorant of the concept of rape. However, the defense of the “assaulter’s” different cultural patterns may imply a defenseless state of the victim. In other words, the fact of having a different cultural background is sometimes invoked to trample women’s right to be safe. It seems that any difference in cultural patterns is always sanctioned to women’s detriment. This controversy echoes the present debate between feminism and multiculturalism. It is what Sheyla Benhabib explains as the liberals’ dilemma: “The attempt on the part of liberal courts to do justice to cultural pluralism and to the varieties of immigrants’ cultural experiences had led to the increased vulnerability of the weakest members of these groups—namely, women and children” (88). This is the argument brought about by the “cultural defense strategy” in legal cases involving immigrants from non-Western cultures. There is a clash resulting from the interaction of distinct cultural groups’

coexistence that leads to the question posed by some feminist thinkers: “is multiculturalism bad for women?” (Benhabib 86). The issue of accepting as mitigating circumstances that one’s own primitive and patriarchal culture justifies criminal actions—like marriage by rape, parent-child suicide or washing the family honor with murder—has as a consequence that “doing justice to the defendant, injustice is done to the victims” (Benhabib 84 —88).

Moreover, when Amanda, unsure of the paternity of her baby after being raped by both Painballers and Crakers, demands Toby to help her to have an abortion—“I want this thing out of me” (*MaddAddam* 216)—she finds out that in the new world the sudden loss of technology goes to the detriment of women’s rights as well. A woman can no longer decide whether she wants to be a mother or not. Amanda fears the genetic conditioning that a Painballer’s descendant could have, and expresses her intention of killing the baby in case of its being totally human: “who could expect her to give birth to a murderer’s child?” (215). The prospective father’s genetic information seems to be the only thing that conditions and defines the baby’s identity and belonging. If in *The Handmaid’s Tale* the newborn was “the commander’s baby,” in *MaddAddam* the baby would be either a “Painballer’s baby” or a “Craker’s baby”. There is the shadow of eugenics in this passage of the novel.³⁷ Moreover, it seems to be a patriarchal thinking that which supports genetic determinism “only” by the father’s side. Atwood avoids the controversy of nurturing or not the Painballer’s baby: all the newborns are Crakers’ children, children of the “good” rapists. On the other hand, Amanda risks her own life during her pregnancy, since the Crakers’ different growing pattern could have caused a very large baby and an increased danger of dying in childbirth. However, when she gives

³⁷ Eugenics, as defined by its founder Sir Francis Galton, is “the science which deals with all influences which improve the inborn qualities of race; also with those which develop them to the utmost advantage” (Squier 57).

birth to a hybrid baby, she suddenly recovers from her traumatic state of passivity and detachment. Motherhood is the magical tool that heals her from her trauma, and she becomes very fond of the newborn (380).

The new society between humans and Crakers is born through and thanks to women's bodies, this time functioning as mediators not only between nature and culture but also between species:

The sphere of sexual and reproductive lives is a central focus of most human cultures. The regulation of these functions forms the dividing line between nature and culture: all animal species need to mate and reproduce in order to survive . . . Nature does not dictate who should mate with whom; but all known human societies regulate mating for reproductive or nonreproductive purposes and create a symbolic universe of significations in accordance with which kinship patterns are formed and sexual taboos established. Women and their bodies are the symbolic-cultural site upon which human societies inscript their moral order. In virtue of their capacity for sexual reproduction, women mediate between nature and culture, between the animal species to which we all belong and the symbolic order that makes us into cultural beings. (Benhabib 84)

Borrowing Benhabib's rationale, there is a "new kinship pattern" and a new "symbolic universe of signification" in *MaddAddam's* post-apocalyptic community. Curiously enough, only human women mate with the Crakers, there is no mention of any sexual relationship between human men and Craker women. The remaining question is whether this new hybrid society is really a new one for women. In other words, from a cultural perspective, is *MaddAddam's* rebuilding of the world leading to a better future for women? Fertile women's bodies are returned to nature's ownership. Amanda's and Ren's involuntary motherhood and happy acceptance of the hybrid children can be inferred as

a patriarchal backlash to traditional gender roles. In *MaddAddam*'s society, motherhood only brings happiness, even when it is not the result of free choice, and lack of motherhood, as the case is with Toby, calls for substitution and sadness.

The birth of hybrid children brings hope for the future and seems to represent the return to an idyllic time, a blissful ending for the human survivors: they “lived happily together and had many distinguished descendants.” However, there is still too much uncertainty surrounding *MaddAddam*'s foreseeable future for it to be idyllic. Toby encountered her personal happiness in her love relationship with Zeb, and personal love is an element that is not shared between Crakers and humans. Women break traditional monogamy only for the conception, since they mate with four Crakers each time, but eventually the nuclear heterosexual family with its classical structure is the proposed solution. Human women procreate with the Crakers but they only find love and support in their fellow “pure” human beings: “Crozier and Ren . . . Shackleton is supporting Amanda, and Ivory Bill has offered his services as soi-disant father to the Swift Fox twins . . . [and] she tolerates his help” (*MaddAddam* 380). Moreover, they do not know for sure whether hybridity will be possible beyond the first generation. In the long run, maybe the future will exclusively belong to the Crakers: “A horse plus a donkey gives you a mule, but it's sterile” (206—207). If the hybrid project fails, human beings will live only within Toby's and Blackbeard's chronicles, within language and memory.

In sum, Toby's characterization, rather than breaking feminine and masculine stereotypes, is perpetuating them. Atwood's choice of an androgynous woman as the most skillful and resolute model of female in the *MaddAddam* community can be interpreted as a reaffirmation of gender stereotypes: It is the “unwoman”, the only one able to “protect” and defend the other women. However, like in a fairy tale, her narrative is still developed around the love story, a male-female encounter, and her final suicide does not

seem enough to claim female agency. Furthermore, the other survivor women, those who are still fertile, are meant to be happy through the most traditional female role: motherhood. Pregnancy becomes the only synonym of future and hope. “One might say that it is easier to imagine the end of the world, and the end of capitalism, than it is to think outside the structuring fantasies of gender” (Colebrook, *Sex After Life* 150). Even though the ending is still open, it does not seem either subversive or liberatory enough for *MaddAddam* to be labelled as a feminist dystopia, or a transgressive utopian dystopia in Mohr’s terms. The utopian society “under construction” that appears at the beginning of *MaddAddam* evolves, at the end of the story, to a community with fixed gender roles. The ending conveys an ideological message that rather than utopian is open to dystopian implications; thus, *MaddAddam* would become—borrowing Mohr’s coined term—a not-so transgressive dystopian utopia rather than a “transgressive utopian dystopia.”

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

MaddAddam suggests circularity and return in its palindromic title. Whether this circularity is an eternal return of the same cycle or a repetition that selects and leaves aside the most negative aspects of the old one is the question that this section has tried to discuss.

Crake is undoubtedly an updated version of the mad scientist led by good principles but blind in his hubris to the point of losing compassion and any bond with his fellow human beings. He satirically embodies the most radical ideas of deep ecologism, transhumanism and critical posthumanism in a practical and ironic demonstration of how similar extremisms are. The Crakers, his “Frankenstein creatures,” are a quite humoristic version of the old dreams always pursued by humanity: powerful sexuality, physical perfection and eternal youth. However, like the gifts given by a witty genie, “perfection” at first sight comes with enormous losses: the loss of desire, intelligence, and a longer life span. These modern Frankenstein creatures eventually succeed in the encounter with their creators, and it is through human women that community and understanding are made possible. Women, after being more negatively affected by technology than men, are the artificers of a new hybrid civilization that is closer to nature. In other words, the cure for dehumanization comes from posthumanism, a paradigm for care, borrowing Herbrechter and Callus’s words. However, care in *MaddAddam* is associated, as is traditional in patriarchal societies, with women and more specifically with women’s bodies. Women, through their traditional roles as mothers and caretakers, set out the bases for the new (post)human community.

The ending is interpreted as “hopeful” by some critics, in the sense that there is continuity of (posthuman) life, a new race supposedly without humanity’s old faults.

However, it seems that the post-human miscegenated society born in *MaddAddam* does not show real reasons for believing in any “hope” other than the demonstration of the futility and the defeat of the mad scientist’s plan. The Crakers develop abstract thinking, “religious” beliefs and sentimental bonds with human beings, in opposition to Crake’s plans when he designed them. Then, his bio-scientific project of “enhancing” human nature takes an unexpected turn. It seems that the tenets of the transhumanist project, based on scientific human enhancement, are put into question. Moreover, the Crakers are created physically and sexually homogenized; all Crakers’ sexual relations are heterosexual, and their gender roles still are clearly divided between men and women: women are in charge of rearing children, and fertility and procreation are seen as the main source of “hope.” Thus, the posthumanist “perfect” model to take over the imperfect human being reproduces from its very basis the solid binarism of humanist/patriarchal society; even more so, MaddAddamites only understand and accept the posthuman being, as Janicaud explains, “in direct relationship to [their] own humanity” (29).

The narrative poetics of the novel parallels *MaddAddam*’s diegetic world, in which hybridization is the proposed solution. There is no option of “human purity” either in the plot or in the narratological construction because the ending generates considerable uncertainty regarding whose voice corresponds to what part. Toby and Blackbeard share responsibility for the creation of both the new myths/stories and chronicle/history that will conform this new [post]human future. Moreover, all the chapter headings are written in italics, cursives, the style Blackbeard was taught by Toby. There is hope for a future in *MaddAddam*, as Toby’s notes are first intended to keep memories, maybe to remind the humans of the future that certain things should not happen again. However, her memories are unreliable in the sense that they are not only subjective but also consciously manipulated to offer not the truth but the version she thinks should be remembered.

Moreover, it seems that in her satirical portrait of this new ideal society Atwood implicitly defends the ideals she should be satirizing. Thus, she links survival to the same old values that led to apocalypse: writing—the first technology, the basis for humanist thinking and the way to keep ancient human knowledge for the future—, myth—as the origin of religions and abstract thinking—and heteropatriarchy as the only model of society. As happened in *The Handmaid's Tale*—in which the epilogue points to the reconstruction of the values behind Gilead—*MaddAddam* has in its hopeful and utopian ending the seeds for the original dystopia in its narrative, so the only solution is trying to do it better this time. It seems that without human extinction, repetition is unavoidable, even for the posthuman beings, which are human at their core after all, but this time it can be a “repetition that saves.”

MaddAddam as a Cli-fi novel tries to suppress the distance that scientific analysis puts between the individual as agent of action and climate change. The novel substantiates the difficult task of rendering in writing a mirror in which readers can see a reflection of their own society. *The Handmaid's Tale* as a proto Cli-fi novel illustrates the consequences of climate change at an individual level: we witness Offred's psychological and emotional drama in a novel more overtly centered on social power issues. Widespread infertility caused by environmental degradation is used as justification to institutionalize the figure of the handmaid, but human extinction does not seem to pose an immediate threat. On the other hand, *MaddAddam*, written 30 years after *The Handmaid's Tale*, describes the Earth inhabitants' way of living in the time before and after the Anthropocene, a border stage. What we have is a movement towards an overall collapse, in which emotional dramas lose their importance in the face of the impossibility of the survival of the ‘pure’ human race, in which the responsibility of one generation over the next is crucial, as well as the association and collaboration of all kinds of creatures. In

order to find a path to survive the Anthropocene the novel presents an eventually non-anthropocentric chance: miscegenation. If they want to survive, the offspring of the remaining human beings need the Crakers' non-invasive and adaptable condition to natural resources and the harsh climate together with a non-violent coexistence with the Pigoons—intelligent like humans but physically stronger and more powerful—, if they want to survive. In sum, *MaddAddam*, a transparent cli-fiction product, has an explicit purpose of warning and reminds the readers that our destructive actions against nature have consequences. *MaddAddam* portrays a pre-Apocalyptic time in which the population in general live in blindness to the self-inflicted destructive Anthropocene era, and the climate change as its visible consequence. To exemplify the recognition of individual agency on climate-change, this analysis has taken as practical examples the many instances in the novel of the use of food and feeding, and their implied symbolic and cultural meanings. Food consumption is considered before and after the pandemic—the Waterless Flood—as an individual ethical election, and as an agent of change that defines and positions each living creature within the world. In the post-apocalyptic nascent society that *MaddAddam* is, food is first a distinctive feature that separates, rather than links, human survivors from the new inhabitants of the Earth. However, it is precisely after reaching a common understanding on what it is ethical to eat, and the non-egotistic sharing of the feeding resources, that the bonds of the new “polyspecies” community are created. It becomes a unique society, the posthuman society constituted by all the inhabitants of *MaddAddam*. The novel is not a prophecy, but maybe our time as the dominant form of life on Earth is inevitably coming to an end. The narrative is metaphorically a book of Genesis, a new beginning for the Crakers, Pigoons, and human descendants, but it is also the Apocalypse, the predicted end of an Anthropocentric way of living.

The presence of some “utopian move” or certain openness in the ending is what would distinguish *MaddAddam*'s classification as a feminist critical dystopia or even as a “transgressive utopian dystopia,” in Mohr's word. The ending necessarily had to be liberating and offer new positive paths for women. However, *MaddAddam*'s final ideological message is not essentially feminist or even liberating. The alleged transgressive power of giving prominence to a non-standardized “androgynous” woman seems to enlarge the traditionally hierarchical gender regime, attaching qualities of resolution, skillfulness and agency only to certain types of bodies, those which are deprived of “feminine weakness.” In addition, it is precisely the internalization of the effects of the male gaze that generates difficulties in Toby's empathy with other women and the construction of her own identity. Moreover, with the exception of the final wink to women's agency in the shape of her suicide, Toby's ending is a reinforcement of gender essentialism, a fairy-tale conclusion in which the good and deserving girl achieves her dream: marriage with her lifelong love.

The ending is quite conventional for Toby. Besides, it involves a backlash for women's expectations—the reestablishment of fixed gender roles and patriarchy—, and a probable dystopian story of extinction for humanity in general. The apparent satisfactory closure of the ending affirms procreative heteronormative standards and thus binarisms are not overcome, the hopeful happy end is only apparent, what lies behind is bitter. Women are determined more than ever by their bodies and their fertility. *MaddAddam*'s proposed solution is hybridity: kinship and respect for all kind of creatures. However, hybridity compromises only women's bodies and their return to an obliged state of nurturers, with motherhood as the panacea for happiness. Even the infertile woman, Toby, finds her substitute motherhood. In the end, the new society created in *MaddAddam* is not so new. Rather, it is a parodic community duplicating the most traditional patterns, a

circular move. It seems that in *MaddAddam* when questions around gender are addressed, it is often the case that the critique is at best only partially carried out. Paraphrasing Mohr, *MaddAddam* would be a not-so-transgressive dystopian utopia rather than a “transgressive utopian dystopia” for it opens in the very process of building utopia, but the ending, even though it is not totally closed, is anything but hopeful for women. The only “feminist” achievement is to have deprived human men from paternity in exchange for women conceiving hybrids out of any sentimental relationship. However, woman’s role is mainly to reproduce, and happiness is to be found only through motherhood, even after suffering one of the most traumatic events for a woman, as is the case with rape. If, as Howells remarks, “the issue of language and power has always been crucial in the construction of dystopias” (“Dystopian” 165), in the end women do not retain either language or power. Women, and with them human beings, even lose control over the story and language, for the last words belong to Blackbeard. There is not any guarantee for the continuity of human life on Earth, or even for the hybrid community’s stability. Zeb’s, Black Rhino’s and Katuro’s disappearance—after looking for the origin of a tall smoke (*MaddAddam* 388 —389)—still points to the existence of violent humans in the surroundings. The irony is that showing such an undesirable future for humans, and specifically for women, makes our present look not so bad. Thus, the didactic purpose that any fiction in the field of utopianism aspires to have does not seem to be present in *MaddAddam*.

CHAPTER 4: *THE HEART GOES LAST*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Heart Goes Last (2015) is both an exception and a novelty in Margaret Atwood's oeuvre: a rare exception because it is Atwood's academically less valued dystopian novel, and a sheer novelty since it was not released as a printed novel but as e-literature. *The Heart Goes Last* was formerly a "byliner" originally entitled *Positron*.³⁸ It was initially composed of four chapters and published in installments in 2012. Atwood declared to be genuinely interested in experimenting with the classical serial novel—a *la* Charles Dickens—and the possibilities brought about by the use of new technologies for writing (in Kellogg n.p.). The Internet provides real immediacy and connection between writer and readers, so that a writer can modify the plot or the development of a character attending to the readers' preferences. In Atwood's own words: "if characters weren't well received . . . [I] could push them off a bridge" (in Kellogg n.p.). Since Atwood is a highly acclaimed and world-famous writer, both critics in academia and the general press are eagerly looking forward to reading her next publication. Each of Atwood's writings becomes global news. Thus, *The Heart Goes Last* received numerous reviews in newspapers like *The Guardian* (Harrison, September 2015; Sethi, August 2016); *The New York Times* (M. Johnson, September 2015; Lyall, September 2015; Alter, September 2015); *The Independent* (Johnstone, September 2015); *The Globe and the Mail* (Fowles, September 2015); *Huffpost* (Fallon, February 2015); *NPR* (Neary September 2015; Robinson, October 2015); *The Irish Times* (Battersby, September 2015); *The New*

³⁸ *Byliner*, launched in 2011, was an online platform for the publication of original fiction. The company had a vertiginous expansion and "went on to launch new initiatives like subscriptions and signed deals to bring its works into print . . . and partnerships with companies like *The New York Times*" (Owen n.p.). However, after only three years of activity, the continuous (maybe too fast) growth of the company reached the top and it was forced to close.

Republic (McCormack, October 2015); and *The Washington Post* (Charles, September 2015).

A number of positive reviews highlight the subversive character of the novel as a dystopia dealing with many of Atwood's paramount concerns about present day society such as mass imprisonment and human greed (Fallon), economic crisis and exploitation (Sethi; Fowles), collective deception and corporate control (Battersby), and human desire and self-deception (M. Johnson). While critics do not entirely agree, and consequently there is disparity in the novel's appraisal, most of them remark the plot and characters' uneven development. The novel is "first a classic Atwood dystopia, rationally imagined and developed, [but] it relaxes suddenly into a kind of surrealist adventure . . . we don't know whether to laugh or cry" (Harrison n.p.).

Most of book's harshest reviews agree that *The Heart Goes Last* is very promising at the beginning, but progressively squanders its potential and "suffers in comparison" with Atwood's previous books. The story "loses its memory and emerges as a strange quasi sex romp concerned almost exclusively with erotic power, kinky impulses and the perversity of desire" (Lyll n.p.). Johnstone coincides with ambivalent critics and recognizes the presence of thought-provoking proposals, but "quite a lot of nonsense . . . which is a shame because the author's central ideas are, as always with Atwood, fascinating" (n.p.). Moreover, according to several reviewers, Atwood focuses far too much on her shallow characters' sexual obsessions, instead of developing their minds and showing her well-known insight into human nature (Robinson n.p.). Furthermore, according to Charles, the novel is a "silly mess . . . [in which] having abandoned any intelligible pursuit of its dark themes early on, the story limps to a tidy and thoroughly false resolution. Some disasters can't be avoided. This one can be" (n.p.). Nevertheless, other critics are not so negative in their analyses, even if recognizing the novel's

failures—“the further one reads, the less clear the novel becomes on a philosophical level” (Wiersema n.p.)—and affirm that “however different and strange . . . it is definitely worth a read” (Spalding n.p.).

Maybe due to the lukewarm critical reception of the book or because of its relative recent publication, analyses on *The Heart Goes Last* are just beginning to appear in the field of academia. There are a few journal articles, and hardly a few chapters included in some masters’ theses. Yet, there is no monograph or book chapter from Atwood’s most prominent critics at the time of writing this chapter (June 2020), with the exception of a brief article published by Coral Ann Howells at the end of 2017: “True Trash: Genre Fiction Revisited In Margaret Atwood’s *Stone Mattress*, *The Heart Goes Last*, And *Hag-Seed*”. Howells makes a direct reference in her paper’s title to “True Trash,” a short story published by Atwood within the collection *Wilderness Tips* (1991). “True Trash” is the name given to the “True Romance” comics read by the young female characters in Atwood’s short story. In other words, in Atwood’s “True Trash,” the word “trash” is an effective way to acknowledge the usual lack of quality and poor critical consideration of “True Romance” fiction. In her paper, Howells borrows Atwood’s phrase to outline the links between popular culture and *The Heart Goes Last*. Furthermore, while other critics consider a certain imbalance in the narrative as the main weakness of the novel—which reduces it to the status of a minor work—, Howells understands the book’s structure and plot as consciously designed to attract the average reader of popular fiction. On the packaging of an “easy-to-read” piece of popular fiction, the reader is compelled to confront very serious issues. Howells discusses the generic characteristics of the novel and, against the most widespread views, affirms the following:

[*The Heart Goes Last*’s] fractured narrative form and fantastic plot twists offer an updated version of Atwood’s genre-crossing strategies, exploiting the appeal of

popular cultural material in order to engage readers' interest in her satirical analysis of North America mass consumerism and her warning against uncontrolled corporate power. ("True Trash" 304)

Barbara Miceli examines *The Heart Goes Last* from its generic consideration as a "ustopia," paraphrasing Atwood, which nostalgically recreates an idealized past and "the relationship between prison and the civil society using the categories defined by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1976)" (80). Both nostalgia and the past are also central in Ewe Kowal's article, but she specifically focuses on how the duo Consilience/Positron represent an artificial and kitsch reconstruction of the American frontier (145). Monika Kosa describes *The Heart Goes Last* as "a typical Atwoodian *magnus opus*" (264), and discusses how the novel "dismantles the notion of corporate America and proposes an altered environment after an economic collapse, much reminiscent of the post-Great Depression era" (256). In her paper, Lidia Cuadrado explores Atwood's whole *MaddAddam* trilogy and *The Heart Goes Last* as examples of Canadian literature and the author's "posthumanisms" (26). She particularly discusses the implications of surgery procedures for free will and accountability in *The Heart Goes Last*. Finally, Rebeca Fraser in her masters' thesis explores the relationship between gender and genre in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy and *The Heart Goes Last*. She affirms that the objects of technological control are mainly women in *The Heart Goes Last*'s dystopian society, and thus, the loss of freedom is still a gendered issue (Fraser 19).

The literature on *The Heart Goes Last* still seems by now very limited and insufficient, and it shows that the novel has never been exhaustively approached from the perspective of the construction of the—already—posthuman subject in a posthuman society. It is my contention that, even if Atwood's 21st century fiction seems to experiment a recognizable shift towards popular fiction—and for some critics towards a

“worse” kind of fiction—, the basic features have not changed; that is, serious subjects and concerns are still present in her novels. At a philosophical level, *The Heart Goes Last* deals with thought provoking themes such as the ethical limits in the fight for survival, what it means to be human, the relationship between biotechnology and ethics in the context of global capitalism, and the construction of gendered identities and limited freedom in the utopian field. Yet, Atwood seems to pack carefully serious issues in a lighter kind of novel, which may be tentatively defined as a parodic dystopia. Likewise, I agree with the reviewers’ general opinion that *The Heart Goes Last* strongly focuses on sex, which has numerous and different manifestations in the novel. Therefore, this chapter discusses the presence of sex and sexual practices in the novel as an effective vehicle to raise wider issues of gender and identity. In order to accomplish the analysis and trace both the novel’s concerns and its generic belonging, I will be guided by a famous literary journey, and a metaphorical passage of human transformation: the nine circles in Dante’s Hell.

Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1320) is a paramount work that marked the transition from Middle Ages theocentrism to Renaissance anthropocentrism. Starting from the idea that Dante’s *Inferno* is the representation of human progression towards the “transhuman” or the “posthuman,” still in anthropocentric terms, I will draw a parallel journey in which the characters of *The Heart Goes Last* try to reach their particular Heaven, but end up imprisoned in a contemporary representation of Dante’s Hell. More specifically, in the novel, there are several possible examples of the sins epitomized in the nine circles of Dante’s *Inferno*. The first section, “The Posthuman Collapses,” centers on the first two circles of Hell. First on “Limbo,” as the apocalyptic dystopian setting where the desperate are waiting for Heaven, and then on “Lust,” in which I discuss sex as an element of resistance, as well as the representation of posthuman pleasures in the form of sex

between humans and machines and its ethical implications. The second section, "Surveillance and Biotechnology," is composed by three circles: "Gluttony," or renouncing to freedom for "food," "Greed," or the human body's commodification, and "Anger," or the representation of the wrathful and vengeful woman, the reversal of gender roles. The last section, "Generic Considerations of *The Heart Goes Last* as Dystopia," is divided into three parts. First, "The circle of the heretics," or destroying systems from within. Then, "Violence," or the technological modification of the human body and its links with the debate of human cloning. To close, "Fraud," or how the novel breaks and mocks the patriarchal "Doris Day" stereotype by means of putting a coldblooded murderer inside her. Finally, in the concluding remarks I will pin down the previous sections' findings and discuss "the final treachery," or how far we are willing to go to maintain our status and system.

The Heart Goes Last is the story of Charmaine and Stan. They are a young married couple trying to cope with a strong economic crisis that has led them to live in their car. First, they lose their jobs and, then, are evicted after being unable to stop the foreclosure of their mortgage. They move from one parking lot to another trying to avoid the assault of wild gangs of people even more desperate than them. Unable to find a job fitting with their educational background, Charmaine works as a waitress in a burger chain while Stan takes care of their car, their only possession and home. The lack of opportunities to find decent jobs forces them to enroll in what seems to be a utopian social experiment: The Positron Project. The Project takes place in two locations: the town of Consilience and the Positron Prison. All the participants in the project have to live in alternate months in both places, one month as civilian citizens, and the other as working prison inmates. The Project's apparent goal is to achieve economic sustainability and prosperity for the whole population. The trouble starts when Charmaine has an affair with the man who is Stan's

alternate—the husband in the couple that live in their house when they are serving their month in prison. The affair is the trigger for the discovery of the Project's darker and hidden side: the real source of economic profit is the trading with some prison inmates' organs, together with the production of sexual robots, the project of selling babies' blood for resurfacing treatments, and brain surgery to transform people into willing sexual slaves.

In narrative terms, the novel has a typical Atwoodian structure. It starts in *medias res*, when Charmaine and Stan are a homeless couple living in their car. Their happy life in a comfortable house is just a memory from the past, accessible to the reader by the insertion of analepses. Throughout the development of the plot, the reader has two different points of view, as the heterodiegetic narrator renders both Charmaine's and Stan's consciousness, ideas and motivations; they are the source of information and the internal focalizers in the novel.

2. THE POSTHUMAN COLLAPSES

2.1 LIMBO: THE APOCALYPTIC DYSTOPIAN SETTING

Heaven is the apex of human existence, and as such it is like no other state of being. Humans must be transformed in order to enter its regions. Significantly, this state is so unprecedented that Dante indicates that there are no words to describe it. Therefore, he creates a new word, a neologism, *trasumanar*, which is a verb meaning “to transhumanize.” The word *transhuman* was thus coined by Dante in the fourteenth century to capture the event whereby a human being becomes something entirely other-than-human, or posthuman. (Pasulka 51)

Diana W. Pasulka’s quotation, which traces the origin of some important words in the field of the posthuman, outlines that the search for human transformation, as a process of improvement in the spiritual and material realms, is no news. Dante presented his particular view of Heaven as a place-state only achievable when humans have been “perfected,” or enhanced, not only spiritually but also physically, after a process of “transhumanization.” Even thinkers like Francis Fukujama—very suspicious of the idea of human enhancement by technology—recognize that human beings have always been changing themselves by means of cultural self-modification. This social modification is “what lead[s] to human history and to the progressive growth in the complexity and sophistication of human institutions over time” (13). Consequently, human beings have always been immersed in a constant process of transformation. Nevertheless, the huge advances in communication technologies and biotechnologies have exponentially increased the speed and scope of changes. As McLuhan claimed, the interaction between

human beings and our technological extensions transforms the human at a very quick pace with the result that technology becomes a quasi-biological extension of the human (46). That is, technology has a direct and appreciable effect upon human nature in a compressed time than any other extension of man had in past times. Some voices are concerned and pessimistic about the possible negative consequences of these precipitated alterations in the form of socio-political and ethical changes. This is why Fukujama claims that humans should protect “our complex, evolved natures against attempts at self-modification. We do not want to disrupt either the unity or the continuity of human nature, and thereby the human rights that are based on it” (172).

Not only human rights, but also the construction of human identity undergo changes brought about by technology and its effects on everyday moral decisions and experience. To map these changes, in this section I would like to discuss how the identities of *The Heart Goes Last*'s main characters, Charmaine and Stan, are influenced by their gradual acceptance of new rigid socio-cultural patterns, especially shaped and altered by the intervention of technology. Technology and biotechnology form a tandem in the novel that compromises Charmaine's and Stan's civil rights, identity formation, and that ultimately triggers their evolution into specific kinds of (post)human beings. Charmaine and Stan live in the margins of the capitalist society in the USA. They voluntarily enroll in the apparently utopian Positron Project in the hope it would enable them to lead a dignified life, free from danger. Within the project, their lives are tightly controlled. Everything is regulated, and the rules state where to live, where to work, what to eat, what news and films they can watch, what music they can listen to, and much more important: how they need to behave both in the public and in the private sphere.

Limbo is the first and uppermost circle of Hell. It is not a place of punishment so much as it is of regret: “Limbus means ‘hem’ or ‘border’ for those who are not saved

even though they did not sin” (*Dante's Inferno* n.p.). *The Heart Goes Last* starts with Charmaine and Stan living in their particular first ring of Hell. Before the economic crisis and the loss of their jobs they did not “sin,” they only lived immersed in an “average” kind of Heaven, the capitalist society, where they pursued happiness by means of embarking on the home buying process, and the accumulation of goods for domestic comfort. Furthermore, domesticity, and the idea of home as refuge, is a primary motivation for Charmaine in particular, and the apparent ideal solution to working through a childhood trauma, probably of sexual abuse.

Charmaine is a “charming” girl raised by her grandmother, Win. Charmaine’s mind is frequently rendered as being engaged in a dialogue between her split selves. One of them is a recurrent mental representation of Grandma Win’s pieces of advice. All Charmaine’s “good” decisions in life are guided by Grandma Win’s voice in her mind; the imprint the old woman made in her thoughts is not something she can easily get rid of: “Sometimes she wishes Grandma Win would bug off out of her head” (Atwood, *Heart* 252). Italics are sometimes used to indicate Charmaine’s soliloquizing and so to enhance her self-fragmentation:

Your mother didn't kill herself, that was just talk. Your daddy did the best he could but he had a lot to put up with and it got too much. You should try hard to forget those other things, because a man's not accountable when he's had too much to drink. And then she would say. Let's make popcorn! (4; italics in the original)

Charmaine was led to believe that the enclosed space of home and domestic activities are the best way to cope with a hostile outside. Besides this, the rendering of Grandma Win’s voice in Charmaine’s mind is the only, and so indirect, source of information of Charmaine’s trauma, because the recollections from her childhood are fragmented and incomplete: “she more or less remembers a different house from when she was little”

(*Heart* 25). Trauma victims usually suffer from memory loss that is an unconscious defense mechanism, instrumental in relieving the pain linked with certain experiences. According to Vickroy, a shared feature of many of Atwood's female characters is that they "are victim-survivors who are ethically or emotionally compromised by their fears of male violence and exploitation" (254). After being abused by her father, Charmaine is encouraged to forget about the issue, and hide and calm her fears within the domestic realm. Total silence is the rule during and after the abuse. In her childhood, she was not allowed to talk back to her father either, or even to cry to express her sadness. If she complained, her father used her laments as an additional excuse to abuse her: "*Don't talk back . . . Look at me. You're a bad girl, aren't you? No* was the wrong answer to that, but so was *Yes. Stop that noise. Shut up, I said shut up! You don't even know what hurt is*" (25; italics in the original).

Grandma Win knew about Charmaine's childhood harmful experiences, and tried to make her forget about her pain by means of focusing on trivial domestic things: popcorn, flowers, and home cleanliness: "Forget those sad things, honey . . . Let's make popcorn. Look, I picked some flowers . . . Think about those flowers instead, and you'll be asleep in no time" (*Heart* 26). Charmaine's learned behavior pushes her to restrain the expression of her feelings—to "behave well"—, and triggers a quest for security that she has learnt to locate in the domestic realm. Charmaine is emotionally mutilated from her childhood in the ability to speak out to express her opinions and fears, and thus, she develops two differentiated personalities: the visible beautiful, sweet, charming girl, and her egotistic, and even unethical, inner side—which will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. The commercial and capitalist image of the ideal home is for her a synonym of safety and happiness. Neither love nor passion are important values or principles taught by Grandma Win. Moreover, she imprinted in Charmaine's mind the

almost “religious” idea that happiness is to be found in order and a fetishistic view of material commodities³⁹—“Cleanliness is next to godliness and godliness means goodliness” (4). Grandma Win had a very patriarchal vision of marriage. She imagined the relation between genders as a commercial exchange, in which a woman cannot maintain her husband’s “interest” unless he lacks enough “market value” to find another woman: “Sincere is better than handsome. Really handsome men were a bad idea, said Grandma Win, because they had too much to choose from” (26). Therefore, Grandma Win taught Charmaine about her conviction of the superiority of steady and smooth relationships, even if devoid of passion.

Charmaine marries Stan because he is an “adequate candidate,” reliable and secure: “He does love her, he said he’d love her forever. She was so grateful when she found him . . . He was so steady and dependable” (*Heart* 14). Charmaine and Stan’s beach honeymoon was their highest point of happiness before entering the Positron Project. Their honeymoon is mainly a “visual” memory, represented by a picture they keep as their most valuable souvenir, which fulfils all the capitalist commercials’ requirements and aesthetics, from sunlight and sunglasses to tropical cocktails and clothes with flowered patterns. This image represents the “pinnacle of success” for Stan. Stan had a long-standing fraternal rivalry with his brother Con, but as he is very proud of his “achievements,” and wants to boast, he sends the honeymoon picture to his brother Con, who was not invited to the wedding ceremony. Charmaine and Stan’s happiness is directly linked to consumerism, with the self-imposed need of acquiring as soon as possible the

³⁹ The term “commodity fetishism” is not used here in a Marxist sense that focuses on social relationships and “the mistaken view that the value of a commodity is intrinsic and the corresponding failure to appreciate the investment of labour that went into its production” (*Commodity Fetishism - Oxford Reference* n.p.), but in the sense that commodities are fetishes that acquire specific values depending on our personal beliefs.

material possessions that will allow them to be “happy.”⁴⁰ The young married couple embark on the purchase of their ideal home and appliances at the limit of their possibilities: “It seemed affordable, but in retrospect the decision to buy was a mistake” (7). After the economic crisis depicted in the novel⁴¹—which originated because “someone had lied, someone had cheated, someone had shorted the market, someone had inflated the currency” (6)—, Charmaine loses her dream of happiness, her domestic safety. Charmaine and Stan are expelled from their particular “Heaven on Earth” to the “Limbo” of being homeless and forced to live in their car. Charmaine confronts their economic ruin still clung to Grandma Win’s escapist ideas. She has deeply etched in her mind that she should never show her irritation or even complain in any situation (4). Nevertheless, Charmaine’s idea of happiness has not changed, and when a television commercial mentions the Positron Project, she grasps the opportunity to reach her ideal capitalist/domestic “Heaven” again.

While Charmaine married Stan—a reliable and dependable man—looking for domestic safety, Stan married an image, a trophy. He only knew Charmaine’s external side, the sweet blondie who embodied an old-fashioned prototype of women and values encapsulated in Doris Day’s persona. If domesticity epitomizes security and happiness for Charmaine, it is the representation of success for Stan. Moreover, Charmaine herself is both an embodiment of Stan’s triumph, and his most valuable possession. Furthermore,

⁴⁰ As Holland affirms: “Commodities never fully appease or release, but keep us coming back for more. Addictive and toxic, capitalism is an entropic and self-destructive system that ‘eats up’ the future and endangers the very sources of its wealth and power” (in Braidotti, “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities” 41).

⁴¹ *The Heart Goes Last*’s economic crisis is a literary reference to and commentary on the 2008 financial crisis that was called “the Worst Crisis Since the Great Depression” (Amadeo n.p.). During the crisis—which began within the housing sector but eventually reached the whole banking system—“there were too many homeowners with questionable credit, and banks had allowed people to take out loans for 100% or more of the value of their new homes” (Amadeo n.p.). Many real families with credit at the limit of their incomes, like Charmaine and Stan, were trapped into the impossibility of refinancing the loan or the prospect of losing their homes.

Charmaine symbolizes for Stan the victory in his old fraternal competition with Con, Charmaine is “a girl of Stan’s that Con couldn’t poach” (*Heart* 7). Still, Stan did not marry the real Charmaine, but an ideal patriarchal and old-fashioned woman’s stereotype:

She was an escape from the many-layered, devious, ironic, hot-cold women he’d tangled himself up with until then. Transparency, certainty, fidelity . . . He liked the retro thing about Charmaine, the cookie-ad thing, her prissiness, the way she hardly ever swore. (*Heart* 48)

Stan’s motivation for marrying Charmaine demonstrates a clear double standard and gender stereotyped vision of sexual behaviors and beliefs. He wanted “the angel in the house,” whereas his own role was that of the home guardian, as if living in a Victorian age of separated gender spheres. Although *The Heart Goes Last* is another of Atwood’s dystopias about a bleak vision of the future, this time a strong economic crisis and the shaking of the capitalist model provoke the disaster: “the whole card castle . . . fell to pieces” (*Heart* 7). Now, after losing all their possessions and their only home being parking lots, they are living in “Limbo,” where Stan reckons he has failed in his role of “home protector.” He feels “like he’s blown by a vicious but mindless wind, aimlessly round and round in circles. No way out” (4). Furthermore, Charmaine makes him feel worse since he does not count on Charmaine’s support as an equal adult. Stan feels solely responsible for the situation, “he’s let her down” (5), and now in “Limbo,” where the only income they have to subsist is Charmaine’s, he “[feels] useless” (8).

Charmaine’s and Stan’s “Limbo on Earth” is a space only for the weaker strata of society. The economic crisis leads to collapse and job losses but “not to everyone . . . not to rich people” (*Heart* 6). *The Heart Goes Last*’s economic apocalypse is not global either in terms of space—it affects an unspecified northeastern part of the US—, or in terms of how it affects people: only the middle class and socially disadvantaged groups are to pay

for the consequences. While Charmaine and Stan cannot flee from Limbo, the big corporations—banking, manufacturing—and rich people escape from the catastrophe and move west leaving jobless people to their fates. Furthermore, economically powerful people are the only ones who are secure and “can afford to have police” (13). The lack of solidarity of the rich extends to the point that they do not pay taxes to support public expenditure, they “are floating around on tax-free sea platforms” (9), while the people who have lost their jobs and become homeless face the threat of gang violence and the danger of being raped.

In *The Heart Goes Last*'s dystopian scenario, many people are abandoned to their fates, with inadequate provision of public safety by police authorities. Charmaine and Stan are potential victims, particularly as gangs of homeless people beat, steal and rape any person weaker than them; this is why their car is the last barrier between them and total despair. Even the practice of sex is for them another loss, which appears to make greater impact on Stan, because Charmaine does not seem to miss it. Without the protection of one's home, the private sphere disappears. Their car back seat is the only place they have to engage in sex, and it is a place for all to see, without separateness. One of the main motivations for Stan to enter the Positron Project scheme is the desire to recuperate sex with Charmaine. Charmaine, determined to apply, does not hesitate to use sex as a tool to convince Stan: “she'll dangle the promise of sex . . . If necessary, she'll even put up with that cramped back-seat car ordeal tonight, as a reward if he says yes” (*Heart* 27). Consequently, lust is one of the “sins” that push Stan into the next circle of Hell.

2.2. LUST AND POSTHUMAN PLEASURES

Here [in the second circle of Hell, Lust] Dante explores the relationship—as notoriously challenging in his time and place as in ours [present-day society]—between love and lust, between the ennobling power of attraction toward the beauty of a whole person and the destructive force of possessive sexual desire. The lustful in hell, whose actions often led them and their lovers to death, are “carnal sinners who subordinate reason to desire” (Inf. 5.38-9). . . . it appears that for Dante the line separating lust from love is crossed when one acts on this misguided desire. (Raffa 29)

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, many reviewers resent and seem disturbed by what they consider an excessive presence of sex in *The Heart Goes Last*, which would devalue the novel’s quality for paying attention to “kinky” issues like its characters’ sexual desires and obsessions. Therefore, it seems that, for some critics at least, sex and lust are not “deep enough” issues to be brought to the front by a septuagenarian famous writer in a “serious” dystopian novel. However, sex and the passion it generates—sometimes lust—are undeniably strong human motivations. Furthermore, for some scholars, sex is situated on the same level as any other physiological need, like eating or breathing. The classification of sex among primary needs was already included in American psychologist Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, published as early as 1943. Sex is at the root of the symbolic pyramid of essentials (370).

Sexual desire, occasionally transformed into lust, is a very strong driving force for *The Heart Goes Last*’s protagonists, not only for their decisions and for the development of the plot, but also as a powerful element that contributes to drawing the posthuman

situation led by a controlling society and its technological tools. The town of Consilience, where the Positron Project is located, is designed as a “retro” scenario, that is, a pseudo-historic recreation of a real town, because it rather emulates 1950s movie sets. It is an idealized aesthetic version of the happy “olden days, before anyone was born” (*Heart* 32). Yet, Stan understands from the very beginning that “it’s not real” (33). They are told that if they choose to be part of the project the choice will become a permanent election—it is an “either/or” decision to be “in or out.” Stan’s brother, Connor, knowing about the project, tries to prevent him from “signing into that thing” (35), but Stan, though suspicious about the project and the “meaningful life” it offers, is still clung to their fraternal rivalry, and therefore unable to ask his brother for support; he “wants to believe” (37).

Consilience recreates the fifties because “it was the decade in which most people had self-identified as being happy” (*Heart* 41). In the fifties, the world’s most prosperous economy, the U.S., an “exceptional” nation, had won World War II. The post-war period was characterized by very conservative politics, anticommunism, and a very strong emphasis on traditional values. Consilience replicates the fifties’ mood and temper; it is a simulacrum, and it includes all everyday life aspects. Moreover, it is a visual, aesthetic, and more remarkably, moral replica. Consilience’s citizens are only allowed to listen to music from the 1950s, especially songs by Doris Day—who seems to be the “model to follow”—, Bing Crosby, the Mills Brothers, soundtracks from vintage Hollywood musicals, but “no rock or hip-hop” (43). TV programs do not include any kind of sexual reference and even less to pornography: “there is no pornography or undue violence” (43). Everything is aseptically designed to live “honorably” inside a tightly moral and very conservative code of behavior.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the enactment of a code of strict “moral” rules—controlling private sexual life—was a consequence of the imposition of religious precepts. However, Positron is not a religious project, but a social utopian experiment. Yet, it vigorously enforces conservative models of behavior, among others the assumed prohibition to have sexual intercourse outside wedlock. According to psychologist Martin Klein, traditionally conservative political and social movements have offered a narrative of sex in direct relationship with sin, danger, and self-destructiveness. The fight to control sexual elections is, for Klein, an attempt “to restrict our choices and shape the political/cultural/psychological environment in which we make choices . . . [to] chang[e] our norms, culture, laws, vocabulary, and our very emotions” (3). In other words, every totalitarian state seeks to control its citizens’ sexual behavior, not necessarily driven by moral reasons, but because the control of sexuality “encourages passivity and narrow thinking. . . . [T]o those in power, desexualized adults are less threatening than full adults” (Klein 58).

If the name “Gilead,” in *The Handmaid's Tale*, was a religious intertextual reference to the biblical “city upon a hill,” or model of perfection (Coogan, “Genesis” 31:12), the names Consilience and Positron make reference to technology in their intertextuality. The word “Consilience” points towards the possibility of a new phase on the human evolution, a city created thanks to the unity of every field of knowledge,⁴²

⁴² Consilience is an arcane word rescued by biologist Edward O. Wilson in his book *Consilience: the Unity of Knowledge* published in 1998. He supports a new Enlightenment vision that seeks for the integration of humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences that seems to be nowadays very much related with the transhumanist project. He argues: “in recent decades rapidly ripening research into genes, behavior and the brain has been bringing biology ever closer to the domains occupied by the social sciences and parts of the humanities, especially ethics and the interpretation of art. The core of [Wilson’s] claim is this: Thought, ethics, creativity, culture—indeed, the mind in general—are all materially grounded in the physicochemical activities of the brain and its interactions with the body. The modern brain sciences, particularly neurobiology and brain imaging, have revealed that the functions of the mind are describable in terms of neurotransmitters, hormone surges, neural networks and the hundred billion intricately connected nerve cells that make up our three pounds of custardlike gray matter” (in Kevles n.p.).

whereas Positron also offers technical references to sciences by alluding to the antielectron's positive charge. Nevertheless, living in Consilience/Positron demands a strict observance of the social rules. "Anything goes, out there in the so-called real world; though not inside Consilience" (*Heart* 192). Ed, the visible head of Consilience/Positron, implicitly acknowledges that the whole social experiment scheme is an "infringement of individual liberties . . . but . . . you can't eat your so-called individual liberties" (38). The loss of individual and social freedom are the payments required to enroll in the "profitable solution" to homelessness and hunger. According to Michel Foucault, the historical repression of sexuality, inherited from the Victorian bourgeoisie, coincides entirely with the development of capitalism. Rules, recommendations, and constraints about sex are in a direct relationship with social control and cannot be separated from its analysis:

Repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality . . . [and] it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality. (*History of Sexuality* 5)

However, since sex becomes a tool of control under a totalitarian rule, it may also end up as a tool of resistance: the last and not conquered individual frontier for both, Charmaine and Stan.

2.2.1. Charmaine and Stan

Grandma Win's pieces of advice led Charmaine to develop the "disguise" of a non-sexually threatening woman. Even her smile shows "asexual teeth . . . bland is good

camouflage” (*Heart* 51). Charmaine has strictly followed her granny’s rules, but her “good girl image” is an artificial creation that does not correspond with her inner desires. Before living in Consilience/Positron, she imagines herself working as a prostitute and having new sexual experiences with unknown men, thereby feeling “a tiny flash of excitement, like peering in through a window and seeing another version of herself inside” (19). She meets Max in the exchange day, when she and Stan have to leave Consilience to spend a month within Positron, the prison. If Charmaine’s marriage with Stan and her life in Consilience follows to the detail the ideal life she was taught to desire, her relationship with Max becomes the breaking of the conservative rules of moral correctness, a rebellion against Grandma Win’s precepts—Charmaine’s own expectations of her ideal self—, and the Positron Project’s imposed norms. Max is, in contrast with Stan, the “wrong kind” of man for her, an embodiment of danger. Grandma Win warned her against the type: a handsome man, “a man who’d had choices” (55). Charmaine rejected sex with her husband in her car’s backseat for the inconvenience of the place. However, she finds lust and passion with Max in dirty and dim vacant houses invaded by dead flies, without appliances, current water or even electricity (55). The domestic charming girl is involved in an extra-marital affair that breaks down every part of her carefully built personality. Cleanness, domesticity, and obedience to Grandma Win’s precepts disappear when having sex with Max. Her sexual passion is stronger than the reasons that led her to enter Positron, than any kind of loyalty. Through Max, Charmaine connects with “this other person inside her” (56), and knows about a “morally wrong” lusty woman whom she perceives as her real “abject” self (58). This passionate woman does not obey the rules, even though she is aware of the risk of being discovered and punished. The “abject” Charmaine listens only to her own inner voice and desires. Sex is the medium for Charmaine to find her own agency and make decisions, although many

of her acts will not be ethical. Nevertheless, “if [Stan] doesn’t know about the missing time and the missing kisses, how is she hurting him?” (90). As Stan’s wife, Charmaine is a simulacrum, a copy of a “safe, simple, clean” Doris Day like girl: the “naïve sexy [girl]” (93). In a fake city from the fifties, she impersonates the fifties’ perfect wife: “There have been art thieves who’ve made exact copies of expensive paintings and substituted them for the real ones, and the owners have gone for months and even years without noticing. It’s like that” (91). Appearance, performance, is what counts, if the copy is indistinguishable from the original. When she is with Stan, she behaves like an old prototype of “good wife,”⁴³ which adheres to Grandma Win’s tips, although the inner speech that she identifies as her real self speaks with her own voice. Charmaine does not want to lose Stan because “Max is like quicksand . . . [and] Stan is solid” (98), “though why shouldn’t a person have both? says the voice in her head” (146). What Charmaine feels for Max is not love but lust, which connects her with the little girl Charmaine, who existed before⁴⁴ living with Grandma Win in her domestic “paradise”.

Living in Positron implies living with no deadlines, no long-term goals. It is a life without passion, like the posthuman Crakers’ life in *MaddAddam*, in which “It’s tempting to drift” (*MaddAddam* 136), and “you can get into a drifting mood” (*Heart* 45). Charmaine performs the “good decent wife” role-play for Stan, they only have “sex that Charmaine enacts” (45).⁴⁵ Nevertheless, “no government, no religion, can eliminate the

⁴³According to Klein, conservative political and social movements and fundamental moralists make a “crucial distinction between good people who repress their sexuality and bad people who don’t (and who suffer as a result)” (81).

⁴⁴ As Lamia explains, “Implicit memory plays a primary role in the process of falling in lust and can be considered akin to what resides in you unconsciously—emotional memories concerning early attachment and love that direct your behavior, goals, passions, and interests in the present . . . numerous philosophers and psychological researchers have found that people are affected by early impressions that are not consciously remembered” (n.p.).

⁴⁵ “With sex in America firmly public-ized [read public-eyed], how are ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ sex to be differentiated? . . . antisex people feel that passion is dirty, lust is dirty, pleasure itself is suspect, even within the context of monogamous, heterosexual intercourse. . . . For those afraid of sex, in fact, that’s the definition of kinky: anything that attempts to heighten the intensity of so-called normal sex. As recently as

desire for sex, for sexual experimentation, for the taboo, the naughty, the novel, the intense . . . no one can stop people from somehow creating erotic entertainment and pleasure outside the bounds of whatever is considered ‘decent’” (Klein 27–28). After having all his basic needs covered, Stan longs for passion and having a real “meaningful life.” When he comes across with the note Charmaine—signing as Jasmine—wrote to Max saying that she “starved for [him]” (*Heart* 46), Stan creates in his mind a fantasy and becomes obsessed with an unknown lusty woman, very different from Charmaine: “What a slut, that Jasmine. Flaming hot in an instant, like an induction cooker. He can’t stand it” (48). Stan awakes from his apathy and his drifting mood thanks to the passion he develops for the imaginary Jasmine: “it’s good to have goals again, among them the discovering and seduction of Jasmine” (61). Even though he knows he can be discovered and punished, Stan installs a monitoring device to find “Jasmine” (72). Life without passion passes by almost unnoticed in Positron, but lust is the engine that makes him rebel and break the rules. Furthermore, as psychologist Mary C. Lamia affirms, lust is motivational, even if it can provoke feelings of self-disgust and shame. Yet, if one can overcome this negative emotional state, it can bring a profound self-learning about one’s own real drives in life (n.p.). Eventually, Stan learns that his idealized and desired woman, Jasmine, is no other than his own wife, Charmaine, “the slutty cheat—withholding sex from him . . . how dare she show herself to be everything he was so annoyed with her for not being?” (*Heart* 85). After the realization that this lusty woman is his own wife, and when eventually Charmaine has allegedly undergone a brain procedure to transform her into Stan’s willing sexual slave, she becomes “everything he once longed for in the imaginary

50 years ago, many Americans considered oral sex kinky, done only by prostitutes and other taboo subcultures” (Klein 158–59).

Jasmine, and more . . . [however], *the routine has become slightly predictable*" (302; emphasis added).

By the end of the novel, both Charmaine and Stan have their dreams come true. Charmaine has her pretty house, appliances and even a beautiful baby, but she "still does think about Max. *In that way*" (*Heart* 303; emphasis added). Lust has a power of attraction much bigger than a normative life. While Charmaine believed that she had undergone a brain procedure and had no choice, she conformed to her domestic life. However, when she learns that the brain surgery was not performed on her, she has to admit her inner desires. She even cherishes the hope of meeting someone in the future: "A Max-like person. Someone who isn't Stan" (306). Even though Charmaine has tried to repress her inner "abject" self, "the taboo, the naughty, the novel, the intense" (Klein 27) are what make her life "meaningful." As Holland reminds us, "commodities never fully appease or release" (in Braidotti, "A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities" 41). Neither Charmaine nor Stan attain any utopian state of bliss after their desires become manifest. According to psychologist Denise Furnier, "happiness happens to be an inside job" (n.p.), and Charmaine and Stan do not reach it, either living in the fifties simulacra or back to their contemporary America. They escape from poverty and by the end of the story they belong to the privileged part of the town (*Heart* 302), enclosed in an artificial milieu that can be understood as a bigger version of the Positron Project, only for the "chosen ones." Stan has what he desired as well, a lustful wife, with her brain "reborn." He compels Charmaine to imitate her sex-sessions with Max, and she, obedient, "is toffee in his hands. She'll do it all, she'll say it all" (302). Yet, what Stan attains is again a "copy," a "simulacrum," not real lust, not the sincere surrender of real human passion.

2.2.2. Prostibots

In contemporary times, transhumanism is the practical result of the hyper-technologized West, a consequence of the human desire to enhance our physical and psychological capacities trying to overcome human limitations. In *Genesis*, we read that human beings are created in God's image (1:27). "God-like" humans have always been fascinated, even before the posthuman age, by the idea of replication instead of reproduction: to create a being with body, intelligence, thought, and cognition, in our likeness. As Alexander D. Ornella explains, one of the main appeals of technology is the possibility it offers "to rethink and recreate ourselves as well as our longing to overcome whatever seems to limit us in our development as human beings" (315). Ornella correctly recalls how this desire is already mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*, in which Hephaestus⁴⁶ fabricated golden handmaids, not sculptures but autonomous entities (315). Besides, sex has always been a key ingredient in the ancient desire to replicate the human body. Humans aimed for the creation of beings able to have sexual intercourse with us, without the problems that could eventually arise when confronted with someone—traditionally a woman—freely able to refuse sexual intercourse. The creation of the sexual surrogate is as old as is the "ivory girl" in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ "[Hephaistos (Hephaestus)] took up a heavy stick in his hand, and went to the doorway limping. And in support of their master moved his attendants. These are golden, and in appearance like living young women. There is intelligence in their hearts, and there is speech in them and strength, and from the immortal gods they have learned how to do things. These stirred nimbly in support of their master" (*Kourai Khryseai, Automotons of Greek Mythology* n.p.).

⁴⁷ "One man, Pygmalion, who had seen these women/Leading their lives, shocked at the vices/Nature has given the female disposition/Only too often, chose to live alone, /To have no woman in his bed. Meanwhile/He made, with marvelous art, an ivory statue, /as white as snow, and gave it greater beauty/than any girl could have, and fell in love/with his own workmanship. The image seemed/That of a virgin, truly, almost living" (*The Story of Pygmalion from Ovid's Metamorphoses* n.p.).

Many characters in Atwood's dystopias are either raped or sexually submissive women. Some of them are forced to accept anything in order to survive—Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Toby in *Oryx and Crake*—, and others—Craker women in the *MaddAddam* trilogy—are technologically created “unable to say no” (*MaddAddam* 43). In the representation of Consilience and Charmaine, *The Heart Goes Last* is a novel that plays with the idea of the relationship between the authentic and the replica. Actually, the whole scheme is an enormous factory that imitates an “ideal” reality. In Positron, the prison, some inmates collaborate in the fabrication of “prostibots”—humanoid robots for sexual use. Created to fulfill the buyers' secret desires, many of them have the appearance of famous people from the popular culture field: Princess Dianas, Ophras, Rihannas, Marilynns, but also Denzel Washingtons, Bill Clintons, Elvises, and Marlon Brandos (*Heart* 201). This commercial use of cybernetics in relation to sex is no surprise, and seems very real, as the logical final step in a Western technological society that is also a celebrity-worshipping- culture. As Klein affirms, “humans are hungry for sexual imagery. They fantasize about sexual opportunity” (105). Technological development has always been intimately linked to sex. Even the omnipresent Internet was buoyed by sex: pornography, chats rooms, and fetish sites were the first profitable businesses on the web. Possibly, the posthuman identity will be also a technologically-sexual one. As history demonstrates, “those yet-to-be invented technologies will be adapted for sexual purposes” (Klein 106). A priori, it does not seem ethically dangerous to have sex with a more or less humanoid machine, a cyborg created for the purpose; after all, one cannot rape an entity without “personhood,” or without an autonomous “will.”

In the book, Positron manufactures different kinds of humanoid “prostibots” to meet the demands of their many local, national, and international clients. Some of them are “kiddybots”—sex-cyborgs with the appearance of human children. Ethically, the idea

of a faithful copy of a child for sexual use is a thought-provoking exercise, because “that is fucking sick . . . but they aren’t real” (*Heart* 201). If they are not real, why is their possible existence so disturbing? Some can argue that the animation of artificial replicas could diminish real children molestation and sexual abuse cases. On the other hand, it provokes at first sight an undeniable uneasiness. Moreover, what happens if we grant the condition of personhood to artificial replicas and thus a place in the “moral community”?⁴⁸ Are these cybernetic children worthy of moral consideration as real children are? For they are created like man in Genesis, “on our likeness.” Yet, prostibots in the novel do not meet any of philosopher Mary Ann Warren’s traits (in Perry n.p.), that are fundamental to be considered persons, even in the posthuman age: they do not have consciousness, reasoning, autonomous capacity to communicate, self-awareness, and the ability to develop activity without external control. One can argue that they are no more than sexual toys alike to dildos, or to the contemporary sales record “Satisfier.” On the other hand, one can reason, in line with the 1998 Alabama statute of Anti-Obscenity Enforcement Act, which criminalized the distribution and selling of sex toys, that “they’ll use these for dry runs, they’ll practice up, then they’ll...” (*Heart* 202). In the Alabama statute, banned in 2009, outlawing the sale of sex toys and signed by six other states, the court forecast that “if they established a right to sexual privacy, they might be required to uphold that right in cases ‘including, for example, those involving adult incest, prostitution, obscenity, and the like’” (Klein 89). Is the whole issue of building prostibots ethically wrong, or is only the construction of sexual child-like replicas objectionable?

Furthermore, technically, the construction of a human body without autonomous will, covered by “flesh,” and indistinguishable from the original is not easy. Moreover,

⁴⁸ As explained in the theoretical chapter, Wenneman’s concept of posthuman personhood in the Posthuman Age may apply to “genetically altered human beings, robots, computers, and aliens (should they exist)” (*Posthuman Personhood* viii).

why fabricate a replica, “when a self-standing device already exists?” (*Heart* 262). In *The Heart Goes Last*, humans can be “customized” through a surgical intervention in the brain. After the surgery, any previous attachment or love will disappear, and “when the subject wakes up she imprints on whoever’s there” (204). That is, the subjects will become sexual flesh “machines” happy to be subdued to their owners’ will. As the common disclaimer says, “No animal or people were harmed during the process,” nonetheless, this kind of surgery is problematic from an ethical perspective, and connects with the issue of identity—personhood—in the posthuman age. However, at the same time, it recalls the actual international crimes of human trafficking and enslavement for sexual purposes, including the use of drugs to break the victim’s will. What can be taken without denaturing the human and change him or her into a mere commodity? What is inalienable? In other words, if critical posthumanism is a means by which to study the evolution of the human condition, what is irreducibly human? Are still human those who undergo the surgical procedure in the novel or who are abducted by means of drugs that annul their will in actual life? In the novel, the result after characters undergo the behavior-modifying surgery is a new kind of humans—men and women, because the procedure is “a unisex thing” (*Heart* 263)—that are deprived of their most basic instincts and feelings, such as spontaneous sexual desire, and their right to decide for themselves whom and when to love. Definitely—and in contrast with actual cases of drug use in human trafficking—they keep intact most of the characteristics that philosopher Mary Ann Warren considered traits central to personhood: consciousness, reasoning, the capacity to communicate, and self-awareness (see Perry). Nevertheless, sex marks the difference; after surgery, individuals are not able to develop any self-motivated sexual activity that is not dependent on external control. They lose the possibility of any autonomous sexual decision, showing no sexual “agency.” Therefore, the blurring of the

frontier between the robotic sexual-slave and the human is done. Modified humans retain the right to moral consideration; they belong to the moral community but now as biologically modified yet not “enhanced” posthuman persons. In any case, for readers, at the back may still remain the ethical parallel with the actual crimes related to human trafficking.

3. SURVEILLANCE AND BIOTECHNOLOGY

3.1. GLUTTONY OR RENOUNCING FREEDOM “FOR FOOD”

The third circle in Dante’s Hell is called “Gluttony,” and it is dedicated to those who have an extreme appetite for food and drinks, the gluttonous. Gluttony and lust are two “minor” sins closely linked to one another, since both are associated with the corporeal aspects of human needs. Moreover, one can find the old biblical connection between the temptation to fall into gluttony and lust in Genesis—Eve ate the forbidden apple and tempted Adam to do the same (Raffa 33). Besides, it seems that Dante saw gluttony as a more diverse and complex kind of sin than the mere obsession for food and drinks. That is, it would be a sin related to a broader view of personal degradation because it can also refer to any type of compulsive consumption. When Dante and Virgil enter the circle of Gluttony, they find the souls of the damned overlooked by Cerberus, the monstrous three headed-dog that is the guardian in this circle. The horrific guardian can be bribed by the offering of food, as he seems to be tearing the dead people apart and eating them. Whereas in the circle of Limbo and in the circle of Lust Dante, as protagonist of the poem, mainly focuses on his inner perception and feelings, in the circle of Gluttons Dante’s mind is “assailed from the outside by the sight and sound of strange torments from which there is no turning away” (Heilbronn n.p.). In other words, Dante is no longer centered exclusively on himself, but he starts to be affected by the sufferings of others.

As the Gluttony circle has its Cerberus, vigilant of the circle’s entrance and exit gate, the Positron Project is a closed and monitored system too: once you get in you cannot get out of it. Trying to escape from the painful consequences of the economic crisis,

Charmaine and Stan “voluntarily” sign for the Positron Project, and blindly sell their freedom as Esau in the Bible sold his birthright for lentil stew. The Project is, at the same time, a disciplinary society and a global panoptic system in Foucauldian terms; it has a “multiple headed Cerberus” monitoring system for there is surveillance in the Consilience town streets, in the Positron prison, and even inside each home.

In *Discipline and Punish*, first published by Michel Foucault in 1977, he explained the model of a disciplinary society and its methods in the context of a town suffering the effects of a plague. The controlling measures, which would have seemed something of the past, or even science fiction some weeks before the writing of this chapter—March 2020—, have sadly become timely in the current climate, now that a global pandemic is under way. The COVID-19 keeps us, citizens of the whole world, apart from our friends, family, jobs, and usual way of living. For the common good, but subjected to discipline measures that undermine our civil rights, we are living under the threat of the virus, while many things that we had taken for granted have become dreams from the past. Furthermore, we can see, in a dystopian novel like *The Heart Goes Last* that was written years before this state of things, an opportunity to stand back and reflect on the fragility of our society, and on how reality may outdo fiction. While in the *MaddAddam* trilogy the trigger of the apocalypse was—prophetically—a laboratory made virus, in *The Heart Goes Last*, the plague is the scourge of hunger due to a strong economic crisis and the subsequent increasing unemployment and growing crime rates. One does not need to be as prophetic as Atwood is to anticipate that, in our reality and after the COVID-19 lockdown measures, the world will probably sink into a global economic crisis very difficult to measure beforehand. The enormous disruption provoked by the major health crisis in the last hundred years, and the unavoidable subsequent economic disaster, will probably affect the social structure with consequences impossible to predict now.

Historically, extreme situations call for actions that, dangerously, may reproduce old authoritarian schemes, like the “temporal” establishment of a disciplined society. In *The Heart Goes Last*, the Positron Project is theoretically conceived as a solution for an extreme situation, and, as usually happens in troubled times, iron discipline—a new disciplined society—is the offered “gateway” (*Heart* 31).

There is more than social restraint once one enrolls in the Positron Project. “The Project wants serious commitment” (*Heart* 33), which, in fact, implies the participants’ collective renunciation of their civil rights, the first of them being free movement. Before being accepted as members of the project, Charmaine’s and Stan’s eyes “are scanned and their fingerprints taken and a plastic passcard with a number on it and a barcode is issued to each of them” (32). As Foucault states, in a disciplined society, the “documentary techniques make each individual a ‘case’ . . . an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power” (*Discipline* 191). Each person undergoes a process of classification and commodification in terms of utility. In times of crisis, people will do whatever they have to, no matter how dangerous and difficult, to provide for their families. Consequently, Charmaine and Stan accept the offered solution, their becoming members of the Positron Project. Nevertheless, the problem is that their renunciation to their civil liberties is not a temporal measure, but a permanent one. This cancellation of civil rights in the novel reminds the reader of news headlines in present day reality, during the 2020 coronavirus crisis. Quarantines and movement control have been imposed over the centuries, but the controversy arises when democratic governments have to balance the issue of individual liberty with communal interests. Some of the moves to confront the crisis provoked by the coronavirus are perceived by the U.S.A. population as threats for their constitutional rights. In other words, the fear is that “the ‘cure’ can become worse than the disease” (Biskupic n.p.). The debate reaches the extent and duration of some

measures, for there is fear not only of the virus, but also of the possibility of a strong conservative backlash during the health crisis and its permanence later on, during the unavoidable economic crisis with unforeseeable—and probably catastrophic—consequences for the whole world. Liberal sectors of the population are suspicious of the long-term implementation of governmental tracking and screening technologies, and how easily they can be spread once smartphones have become the almost universal means of communication. On the other hand, different political sectors and interested parties try to exploit the situation in order to introduce a higher level of governmental control. They reclaim, for instance, more presence of state troops, and because of ideological reasons, they have tried to seize the opportunity brought about by the crisis to impose the closure of services that they do not consider essential, such as abortion clinics (Biskupic n.p.).

The Positron scheme in the novel is not a philanthropic one. It follows the model of prison/factory in which the inmates are workers, like slaves almost without wages, in a cost-effective production. Each person is classified and assigned to a position; each one is a link in the chain. Moreover, the new Consilience/Positron citizens are registered as data, part of the system. Explicitly, they become information. Charmaine and Stan acquire their citizenship within the Project only once their codes and cards are activated. They need to be recorded to “exist,” otherwise they would come back to “limbo” (*Heart* 96). The structure seeks for the maximization of profit. Moreover, workers are now defined by their “rank,” no longer individuals but interchangeable elements determined by “the place [they] occupy in a series” (Foucault, *Discipline* 145). A simple rearrangement in the identity code allows Max to take Stan’s place inside the Positron prison (*Heart* 85). The identification card, like the handmaid’s tattooed body, is a passport “in reverse” since they can never leave the town. In *The Heart Goes Last*, the members of the project undergo “a procedure of objectification and subjection” (*Discipline* 192), they become

interchangeable parts in a virtual working machine without any power of decision about their functions. As the visible founder of the project, Ed explains that American society “remain goodhearted despite everything” (*Heart* 39), and, at least openly, is unwilling to improve the competitiveness of the American productive market by means of degrading any worker’s quality of life. Consequently, The Positron Project represents another “turn of the screw” against the American system of public liberties, an attempt to create a hidden and independent disciplined society freed from American society’s remaining “democratic scruples.”

The Project follows to the letter some Foucauldian characteristics of disciplined societies such as enclosure and distribution of individuals in space, “spatial partitioning” (*Discipline* 191)—each individual is classified, and each place is individual. Men are separated from women into different workshops, because “there will be different challenges and duties and expectations for each” (*Heart* 36). Both men and women have two different roles: “prisoners one month, guards or town functionaries the next” (42). Single people share two bedroom apartments with another single person, married couples have detached houses and teens and children stay only with their mothers in the “women’s wing” when they are inside the prison (43). Thus, control of free movement is combined with the strict allocation of the space. All people have their exclusive place, prearranged by the Project apparatus, and are located and organized at every moment.

Furthermore, not only the space is systematized, but also any personal activity. The Project imposes strict timetables and rhythms—“chronological schemes of behavior”—and “cycles of repetition” under constant supervision (Foucault, *Discipline* 141–54). No matter what kind of job people had before, the system decides what work is suitable for every one and the jobs are not chosen but “given” (44). The project discards the applicants’ old identities and work experience. They are forced to change and forget

about their past lives and professional training because “backward glances are not encouraged” (61). For instance, a former actuary—Clint—is now the prison barber and “play[s] the part of a Trusty” (61). Moreover, these drastic changes in people’s roles that happen in *Consilience* recall the way Gilead was built in *The Handmaid’s Tale*: Offred, the forced handmaid, was a former editor, Aunt Lydia—the re-educator Aunt—was a family court judge and teacher, and Commander Fred—head of Offred’s household and a Gilead’s authority—worked in a marketing agency. Thus, being part of the disciplined society implies the death of any former identity, the death of the person one was before and the enforced construction of a new designed identity.

On the other hand, a disciplined society not only controls the “place” and “roles” of the body, but the “flesh,” the body itself: “Discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (Foucault, *Discipline* 138). Atwood in *The Handmaid’s Tale* already displayed the strict control of the body through social constrictions—non-fertile women were either “discarded” or expelled to the Colonies. Later on, bodies were technologically altered and determined in the *MaddAddam* trilogy—the posthuman Crakers died suddenly at the age of thirty. Based on her previous dystopian novels, it seems that Atwood fears that totalitarian states and utopian societies have room only for the young and perfect bodies. The Positron Project in *The Heart Goes Last* follows this scheme. It lacks older people; the average age is thirty-three. No matter the contract they sign is a contract for life since “there were no guarantee about how long that life might last” (*Heart* 96). In sum, the Positron disciplined society appropriates its citizens’ bodies: it suspends their rights, forces their labor, and confines them within limited space. Furthermore, and, what is worse, apparently the Project limits their life span to the extent of their utility. The Positron Project displays a

society of punishment supported by “physical penalties . . . [that] directly affect the body . . . [and] an economy of suspended rights” (Foucault, *Discipline* 10). In other words, discipline controls bodies and their movements with its coercive rules. However, in order to make citizens bow to the system their bodies are not enough, the system needs to control their minds.

Submission, as “imprisonment of the mind,” can be achieved by the consciousness of being permanently under a vigilant eye, by the intense surveillance of the panoptic system. Foucault explains that any disciplined structure finds in Panopticism—“a system of permanent registration” (*Discipline* 195)—an elemental tool of invisible control. The configuration of the Panopticon is systematic: first the “lock up,” secondly the role of the people is established, the space is divided, “the individuals inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded” (197). Ultimately, the success of the panoptic system lies in the fact that the individual is conscious of the supervision, each person becomes the bearer of the functioning of power, “he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (203). Within the Positron Project, the vigilant eye is mainly a technological eye. There are “spyware cameras” (*Heart* 66), “Surveillance cameras” (67), “Surveillance cars” (70), “Surveillance videos” (86), cell phones tracking and control (82), and “cameras hidden in the vacant houses” (84). Even though the surveillance technology effectively works against Positron citizens’ privacy, what matters is its deterrent effect: the panoptic system increases the docility of the “inmates” who metamorphose into their own and their peers’ vigilant eye.⁴⁹ As Foucault explains, the panoptic system typically develops from a disciplined society. The danger is that this transformation is something “natural” once the disciplinary society has been

⁴⁹ It is remarkable how in the present and actual state of quarantine—2020 Spring—many people at their homes have become “balcony’s police,” accusing neighbors of breaking the quarantine—very often unjustly—and insulting people walking on the street (Mahtani n.p.).

established for whatever reason, such as an obliged quarantine to prevent the spread of a virus:

One can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social 'quarantine,' to an indefinitely generalized mechanism of 'panopticism.' Not because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all the others; but because it has infiltrated the others, sometimes undermining them. (*Discipline* 210)

Charmaine and Stan gradually realize how the Positron Project works and their role within it. As stated before, the couple meekly adapt themselves to the Project—discipline and surveillance—, lust seems to be the only force strong enough to make them break the rules. As happens with Dante in the first circles of *Inferno*, when they enrolled in the Project they were exclusively centered on their inner feelings and needs. Nevertheless, after some time within the system, they start to be aware of the sad luck of many others. They learn about the ultimate commodification of the human body: the harvesting of organs to make them replacement parts for the rich.

3.2. GREED: BIOTECHNOLOGY AND ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Greed—or Avarice—is the name of the fourth circle of Dante's Hell. The sin of avarice can be defined as a "variety of lust" in which the irresistible desire is for material/economic profit. Dante judged harder the greedy than those guilty of the "sins of the flesh," like lust or gluttony. Avarice is for Dante the worst sin of all, for he blamed it "for ethical and political corruption in his society" ("Avarice and Usury in Dante's *Inferno*" n.p.). Consequently, he followed the biblical definition of greed as the major evil, and "the scourge that more than any other had condemned society to moral and civil

disorder” (n.p.). In other words, a greedy society that puts economic profit above any ethical consideration would not impose any limit to questionable practices, such as the rich minority’s purchase of health and youth at the expense of the many powerless citizens’ bodies. Moreover, the uncontrolled development of biotechnologies, especially regarding its commercial applications, might “increase the disparity between the top and bottom of the social hierarchy” (Fukujama 157).

Atwood’s sensitivity is not foreign to the strong controversy entailed by the biotechnology revolution’s astonishing possibilities and effects. In her dystopic novels published before *The Heart Goes Last*—*The Handmaid’s Tale* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy—she has already sent, borrowing Howells’ expression, “danger signals” to her readers, for her dystopic novels “represent a synthesis of her political, social, and environmental concerns” (“Dystopian” 161). Furthermore, within Atwood’s dystopic oeuvre, the issue of the ethical limits of biotechnology within its multiple variants is recurrent. While her canonic work, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, is thematically rich and complex, one of its possible readings would be related to “the feminist debate over scientific issues related to birth technologies” (Howells, “Dystopian” 164). Meanwhile, in the third chapter of this dissertation, I have considered the issue of how the *MaddAddam* trilogy scrutinizes Atwood’s fears of genetic manipulation that can lead us to “a catastrophic posthuman future as our scientific mavens sit in judgement of the world and play God” (Bouson, “Game Over” 107). Thus, *The Heart Goes Last* can be read as a further step within the wider context of the ethical debate over biotechnological interventions devoted to enhancing and prolonging human life. More specifically, in a milieu in which the dominant feeling is greed, *The Heart Goes Last* focuses, among others, on the issue of organ transplantation. In this section, I shall focus my analysis on how the fight against the natural aging process, and the illegal, but huge, profit involved

in organ trafficking lead to an immoral situation that, sadly, is not so far from real moral debates.

Charmaine and Stan are “guilty” of lust and gluttony after leaving Limbo. Both sins, even if morally questionable according to the Bible, relate to bodily needs, and the innate desire for survival. Although *The Heart Goes Last*’s protagonists are anything but exemplary and heroic, as discussed later in this chapter—Stan proves to be insubstantial, and Charmaine tentatively egotistic and superficial to the point of psychopathy—, they are not guilty of greed. Yet, profitability is the original and desirable goal for the Positron Project. This is why the Project transforms average American citizens into prisoners in jail to benefit from their slave-like work. As Jocelyn—Max’s wife and one of the Positron Project’s founders—explains to Stan, the Project was formerly genuine at its utopic intention of helping people. However, the projected scheme was not as lucrative as they expected and, once the investors “got greedy” (*Heart* 126), they sought for the possibilities given when “you’ve got a controlled population with a wall around it and no oversight, you can do anything you want” (126). Ed, the visible head of the Project, surrenders to the temptation to trade with the bodies of the prisoners: “organs, bones, DNA, whatever’s in demand” (126). Initially only real criminals—“undesirable” people—, even “imported” from public jails, were the involuntary organs’ donors, but once the business is working so well, Ed can decide who is “undesirable” enough to be “sliced up for organs” (127).

Intended, rather as a form to heal the sick than a method to extend the lifespan, organ transplants would not be—a priori—controversial, even more so when organ donation is largely regulated (see *Legislation, Organ Donor* n.p.), and does not conflict with the tenets of any major religion. However, as happens in the novel, the polemic surrounding prison inmates’ organ donation is very much alive in the real world,

especially in the U.S.A. for “the death penalty is rarely available or applied in most industrialized western nations, except for the United States” (*OPTN* n.p.). In the novel, as happens in real life, the controversy is not about organ donation or transplantation, but rather about their ethical limits. In *The Heart Goes Last*, Atwood shows how amoral figures working for a private company and blanketed by an evident lack of governmental control transgress all the boundaries.

The non-fictional debate around the donation of organs taken from prison inmates opened up the moment that very prominent figures in the U.S.A. proposed the passing of laws regulating prison population to become “voluntary” donors upon their deaths. Moreover, inmates could become living donors “in exchange for a commuted sentence of life in prison without parole” (*OPTN* n.p.). The U.S. department of Health and Human services’ publication summarizes the numerous issues raised by a hypothetical situation in which those condemned to death could trade their lives for the gift of an organ. First, statistics demonstrates that the death penalty seems to be applied discriminately over racial minorities and the poor. In that sense, the donation of organs would become an additional factual discrimination: the poor’s bodies would become spare parts for the powerful classes. Moreover, since the application of the death penalty depends on the jurors’ discretion, there is the risk of an increase in the number of death sentences “with a potential societal benefit in mind” (*OPTN* n.p.). The “stigma” attached to the simple act of donating could also result in a decrease in the donation rates among free citizens, who would be unwilling to be identified, even remotely, with criminals (*OPTN* n.p.).

Another issue is the question of free will in relation to the act of donation. How voluntary can a donation be in which one exchanges one’s life for an organ? To which extent a decision that may mean the difference between death and life is free? Prisoners are forced to “voluntarily” sell their bodies and blood. Real life prisoners would have to

make a choice as “free” as many fictional characters do in Atwood’s dystopian novels. Atwood studied in her previous works the issue of the truthfulness of free choice and its balance with the limits of moral acceptability in relation to survival. Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, “voluntarily” agrees to renounce her freedom, to the ownership of her body/sexuality, and to the fruit of her womb in exchange for her life. Toby, in *MaddAddam*, “willingly” donates first her eggs for money to survive—with the consequent infection and loss of her fertility—and later on surrenders her body to unwanted sex to avoid being killed by her boss. Yet, in *The Heart Goes Last*, the situation is taken to the extreme since the prisoners do not gain their lives in exchange for their organs. First, they are secretly executed without any legal justification, and then, their organs are sold. Even though some characters in *The Heart Goes Last* know about the existence of organ trafficking, their moral scruples are mollified by the idea that the source bodies for organs belong to people who are “society’s waste.” However, and echoing real life controversy about a possible increase in death sentences for any kind of communal benefit, the same greed that drives Ed to bring forward the execution of some prisoners propels him to name undesirable any person whose organs he wants to sell (127). The ethical warning is clear: if one does not care for the fate of these “undesirable” others, one day one can be named “undesirable” and one’s own fate decided for the sake of some greedy and unethical other. Once individual liberties and bodies have become only commodities to sell, there is not any ethical limit. If there is profit in human bodies’ trading, the next logical step could be the selling of our “soul.”

Every citizen living in the Positron Project is “on sale,” it is only a question of price. Ed is ready to satisfy his clients and sell not only organs to prolong the powerful classes’ lives, but, as mentioned above, also obedient sexual slaves, imprinted—irreversibly attached to and in love with their buyers. In *The Heart Goes Last*, Atwood

explores mental control devices through brain surgery. Once the individual goes through the medical procedure, it is reverted to a state of simulated childhood like a newborn animal. The surgery erases memories from any love or voluntary sexual relationship, although it leaves untouched any other trait of the individual's personality. It is the materialization of the old human desire of forcing "love" at any price. As the Little Mermaid tried to achieve her prince's love with a love potion, the powerful can attain ownership of their desired others. As Kosa emphasizes, "Atwood's mind control devices are a pastiche of traditional fairy-tale potions" (263). However, it is not a "fantastic" procedure that leads to the surrender of the other's will, but a technological intervention—"the kind where you get imprisoned by a toad prince" (Atwood, *Heart* 264). Beyond the questionable moral implications of trading with human fellows—reinstating slavery—this brain intervention has potential political repercussions, for, as Fukujama warns, the brain is "the source of all human behavior" (19). The loss of our brain control represents the most powerful exercise of slavery. Within the apparently ridiculous story of a woman imprinted by the first thing she saw—"a blue knitted teddy bear" (*Heart* 210)—lies the significant issue of the possible social control, exercised by other "social players than the state—by parents, teachers, school systems, and others with vested interests in how people behave" (Fukujama 53). Free will, a key element of human identity, is "concentrated in the brain and the genetic code, which alone sum up the operational definition of being" (Baudrillard in Hayles, *How We Became* 192). Atwood shows the dangers of the transhumanist definition of the individual as modifiable information located in the brain. Moreover, the modification of the brain for greedy reasons is "the ultimate horror for the individual [,] to remain trapped 'inside' a world constructed by another being for the other's own profit" (Hayles, *How We Became* 162). However, the idea of altering permanently human behavior through brain intervention may be,

hopefully, questionable. Hayles reminds us that “anyone who actually works with . . . the human neural system, knows that it is by no means trivial to deal with the resistant materialities of embodiment Discussing the complex mechanisms by which mind and body communicate . . . the body is more than a life-support system for the brain” (*How We Became* 245).

Biotechnological modification of individual behavior can respond to profitable goals, it can also be a tool for social control, and more specifically, it can be a form of punishment. As Foucault remarks: “If the penalty in its more severe forms no longer addresses itself to the body, on what does it lay hold? . . . since it is no longer the body, it must be the soul” (*Discipline* 16). Furthermore, through brain modifications, individuals can be adapted to be what is considered politically correct and acceptable for a given society, that is, according to mainstream ideology about how people must behave or must be (Fukujama 94). In *The Heart Goes Last*, Jocelyn has in her hands the power to modify, through brain surgery, her husband’s behavior, and she uses this power, as both revenge and punishment.

3.3. ANGER: WRATH, REVENGE, AND REVERSAL OF GENDER ROLES

The fifth circle of Dante’s *Inferno* is the place where two groups of people are, the wrathful and the sullen, both guilty of the same sin: Anger. They suffer different kinds of punishments related to the way they expressed their anger when they were alive. On the surface of the marsh of hate, the wrathful are condemned to torment each other for all eternity:

And we, accompanying the dusky waves, entered down by a strange path. This dreary streamlet makes a Marsh, that is named Styx, when it has descended to the

foot of the grey malignant shores. And I, who stood intent on looking, saw muddy people in that bog, all naked and with a look of anger. They were smiting each other, not with hands only, but with head, and with chest, and with feet; maiming one another with their teeth, piece by piece. (Carlyle 78)

Those who felt their anger in life but repressed it are stewing below the surface of the Styx: “Sullen were we in the sweet air . . . now lie we sullen in the black mire” (Carlyle 79).

If anger is suppressed, it frequently finds a way to express itself later on. Besides, anger is a normal reaction and demonstrating it seems sometimes justified. Anger is not only a sin from a religious point of view, it is also a human—negative?—emotion. Moreover, anger is raw material for characters’ motivations since, as Atwood herself remarks, novels “attempt to grapple with what was once referred to as the human condition” (*Writing* 129). Traditionally, some writers and traditions tend to “polarize morality by gender” (*Writing* 132). Thus, intrinsically, women showing their anger at what the world has offered them, and acting accordingly, do not fit into the model of “good woman”. Moreover, there is certain controversy around how harmful the depiction of wicked female characters in novels is for feminism. Nevertheless, female “bad behavior” as it exists in real life ought to be mirrored in literature, inasmuch as “women are multidimensional individuals who should never be condemned, even by feminists, to stereotypical roles” (Appleton 276). Throughout her professional career, Atwood has always delighted in the depiction of “wicked” women—not very likeable characters with morally questionable behavior. Women such as Elizabeth in *Life Before Men* (1979), Serena Joy in *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), Cordelia in *Cat’s Eye* (1988), Zenia in *The Robber Bride* (1993), Grace in *Alias Grace*, or Iris in *The Blind Assassin* (2000) are

treacherous personages who behave badly mainly towards other fellow women. As Appleton remarks, they are women who develop “survival strategies of their own” (276).

Jocelyn plays a twofold role in *The Heart Goes Last*: on the one hand, she is Max/Phil’s wife in her private sphere, and on the other professional aspect of her life, she is one of the founders and high-ranking members of the Positron/Consilience scheme. Furthermore, she is a doubly betrayed woman. Betrayed as a wife by her adulterous husband, and betrayed by the greedy Ed since his trade with human organs and lives destroyed the original intentions of the project—raising the quality of life of the people affected by the economic crisis. She does not remain passive and seeks solution and revenge. Like the majority of Atwood’s heroines, she is not a saint. As Barbara Hill Rigney reminds us: “in all of Atwood’s texts . . . women are capable of virtually demonic power” (60). Jocelyn, in contrast to the innocent and hyper-feminine Charmaine, is described as a slender, muscular woman with straight black hair (*Heart* 37-38). At first sight, the blond and feminine Charmaine and the dark and slender Jocelyn embody the classical binary “angel/whore . . . so popular among the Victorians” (Atwood, *Writing* 125). Atwood makes a tentative classification of women according to their nature and their acts’ motivations as several kinds of “bad female literary characters”: “bad women who do bad things for bad reasons, good women who do good things for good reasons, good women who do bad things for good reasons,. . . and so forth” (*Writing* 135). Neither the blond Charmaine, nor the dark haired Jocelyn neatly fit into the archetype angel/whore. If Charmaine can be described as an egotistic woman that makes bad things for unjustifiable reasons, I contend that Jocelyn is neither a good nor a bad woman who does bad things for, if not good, at least understandable reasons. My aim is to consider Jocelyn as a woman who takes revenge on the two men who have betrayed her privately and publically.

Jocelyn has been married to Phil/Max for a non-specified period. Phil is a womanizer, and Jocelyn has always known about his affairs. She describes her husband's infidelities as a "kind of problem" born from uncontrollable impulses that she has tried to unsuccessfully resolve through therapy (*Heart* 84). She uses Phil's "addiction" to push him to have an adulterous affair with Charmaine, breaking Positron's rules. Jocelyn has recorded evidence of the sexual activities as a chance of securing Charmaine's collaboration and forcing Stan to help her to discover Positron's underlying criminal activities. However, Jocelyn is not content with the public consequences of her conspiracy, and in the private sphere, she uses her husband's affair as an opportunity to take revenge and explore lust and morbid sex for herself. Moreover, it becomes a way to punish and force Stan into an undesired sexual relationship—close to sexual abuse—that, in practical terms, reverses traditional patriarchal oppression. No matter how powerful and successful Jocelyn is, her husband's unfaithfulness has "been humiliating for her personally" (85). She thinks "it's time [she] got a turn at playing Phil's game" (86). As Vickroy reminds us, in many of her novels Atwood explores the effects of gendered oppression on women through the use of "physical, sexual, and psychological violence" (254), but in *The Heart Goes Last*, physical, sexual, and psychological violence is exerted by Jocelyn, the powerful woman, over Stan first, and later on, over her husband Phil.

All the sexual encounters between Charmaine and Phil/Max have been recorded. Jocelyn, as high-ranking member of the Project and in charge of the surveillance systems, has total access to the footage, which initially was intended "only" to blackmail both Charmaine and Stan. Jocelyn describes the videos as "quite exciting" (*Heart* 86). Sexual pleasure by looking at nude bodies or others' sexual activity is named scopophilia or voyeurism. Scopophilia is, according to Freud, a sexual drive existent outside the part of the body sensitive to sexual stimulation, and it is related to a gaze that considers the other

individuals as sexual objects (in Mulvey 806). Traditionally, this gaze has been male and belonged to the patriarchal order, where there is inequality between women and men (Mulvey 837). Mulvey focuses her theory of the “male gaze” on cinematic narratives, although she acknowledges that in films “what is seen on the screen is so manifestly shown” (835). In contrast, outside the films, when hidden surveillance cameras record a sexual encounter, there is an unknowing victim, an object for the gaze, that in *The Heart Goes Last* is Charmaine. Whereas Phil is aware of Jocelyn’s control and gaze—“that’s part of the attraction for him: the certainty he’s performing for her” (*Heart* 84)—Charmaine is an unknowing and unwilling victim, a sexual object for Jocelyn’s gaze. Jocelyn reverses the stereotype, the objectifying “male gaze” into a “female gaze,” even if at the same time she is visually “raping” Charmaine.

Jocelyn has sex with Stan regardless of his desires in a kind of forced sex without willing consent that could be even called rape. After showing Stan the sexually explicit images, Jocelyn blackmails him in order to force Stan to live with her for a month “unless, that is, you want me to turn in a report on the rules you’ve broken” (*Heart* 86). Stan had been dreaming of a hot and lusty woman, the inexistent Jasmine, and now that he is in Jocelyn’s hands he feels like “a rat in a cage” (92). Stan is terrified by Jocelyn, she is “the source of his panic” (92). Deprived from any kind of pride, he becomes Jocelyn’s sexual slave. She obliges him to watch the videos together, dress up and perform role-play to have sex, and like a male version of a handmaid: “he feels so trapped, so hopeless, so dead-ended, so nutless that he’d do almost anything to get away” (94).

In *The Heart Goes Last*, Stan and Charmaine are the only focalizers; thus, readers get to know Jocelyn only through their eyes, Jocelyn’s inner world is inaccessible. Physically, she is an “unwomanly” woman, as Toby was in *MaddAddam*: “she has biceps, and shoulders, and her thighs are alarming” (*Heart* 86). In *MaddAddam*, androgynous

women, according to McCoy Anderson, occupy a third liminal space between the masculine and the feminine where the utopian potential for a better future is located (49—50). Jocelyn is the main agent in the process of dismantling Positron; thus, the link between agency and masculinized women is repeated in *The Heart Goes Last*, a strategy that can be read as both, breaking and reinforcing gender binary thinking and stereotypes. On the one hand, as happened in *MaddAddam*, a woman is the main agent of resistance against the oppressive regime and the key element that allows for a note of hope in the fictional future. On the other hand, the fact that agency is located in a woman outside the conventional parameters of female bodies may be a way of perpetuating gender stereotypes: a woman cannot be feminine and resilient at the same time. Nevertheless, Toby was a “good woman” doing good things, whereas Jocelyn punishes the sinners by questionable methods. She blackmails Stan, deprives him of his body and dignity, and acts as “an angel of revenge” with her husband Phil.

Phil was a handsome womanizer, an unfaithful husband with a kind of behavior that should not be a problem in the U.S, “a country devoted to individual choice” (Klein 2). However, as in the American conservative society’s war on sex that Klein describes, “poor” Phil’s sexual choices are a “sex-addiction problem” (*Heart* 287) that ought to be cured. Instead of simply divorcing him, Jocelyn arranges the brain surgery for Phil. He is imprinted to Aurora—a woman with a deformed face—as a reward for her collaborating with Jocelyn’s plans to uncover the corruption inside Positron. Fukujama claims “the deeper fear people express about technology is [that] biotechnology will cause us in some way to lose our humanity” (101). Disguised as the cure for an illness, and on the basis of a dreadful lack of respect for any individual sexual elections, Phil’s brain is modified. Phil is deprived of his sexual and sentimental autonomy; his human nature is harmed and becomes a cyborg in the flesh, maybe a safer and happier but undoubtedly a less free

posthuman. Is Jocelyn at the end so different from the male villains? It seems that in order to represent a woman with agency and determination, she has to show all the traditional elements attached to patriarchy and embody a faithful reproduction of the “male gaze.” Jocelyn has never been a victim, “ethically or emotionally compromised by [her] fear of male violence and exploitation” (Vickroy 254). Nevertheless, she is a strong woman who has been humiliated and unscrupulously seeks revenge through a twisted plan. Jocelyn allows Atwood to explore “women’s will to power . . . the scurvy behavior often practiced by women” (*Writing* 133), definitely not a model of morality, but a woman with her lights and shadows.

4. GENERIC CONSIDERATIONS OF *THE HEART GOES LAST* AS A DYSTOPIA

4.1. THE CIRCLE OF HERETICS: DESTROYING SYSTEMS FROM WITHIN

After passing through the walls of Dis, Virgil leads Dante across the sixth circle of Hell, a vast plain resembling a cemetery. Stone tombs, raised above the ground with their lids removed, glow red from the heat of flames. Buried in these sepulchers are the souls of heretics, each tomb holding an untold number of individuals who adhered to a particular doctrine but who are all punished according to the broadest notion of heresy: denial of the soul's immortality. (Raffa 46)

Even though Dante specifically focuses his sixth circle of Hell on the heresy of those who denied the soul's immortality, the sin of heresy in the Middle Ages comprised anything involving the negation of any dogma of the official Christian doctrine. In other words, a heretic was any ideological dissenter against the official set of beliefs.

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, a dystopia is a negative representation of the future with the didactic aim of warning about certain conditions regarding the author's contemporary society. In a dystopia, the author portrays the defects observable in her specific society from her subjective point of view. Skeptical about the possible historical development of her society, the author of dystopias is then critical with the rules and "dogmas" prevalent in her present: in a metaphorical sense, she is a heretic. Thus, since dystopian fiction focuses on social and political decisions of the present to get a better future, dystopian narratives would have a genuine ethical purpose of improving the world

we live in. Consequently, the dystopian critical impulse/heresy would not be a “sin,” but a tool of dissent, a necessary element to fight conformism and build a better society in the future.

Broadly speaking, Atwood’s dystopian novels to date—*The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), *MaddAddam* (2013), *The Heart Goes Last* (2015), and *The Testaments* (2019)—render the stories of dystopian societies, born from “utopian” projects that are eventually destroyed from within, by “heretics” to the doctrine. Besides, in Atwood’s dystopian novels, there is a clear evolution in the targets of her critique, which can be attributed to each novel’s specific historical context. *The Handmaid’s Tale*, a dystopia from the female point of view—focused on sexual oppression, on women’s agency and on patriarchal totalitarianism—was extensively analyzed and categorized as a feminist dystopia. Cortiel recalls how feminist dystopias from the 1990s onwards have developed “an increasing concern with ecological disaster, and more specifically with climate change” (157). Conversely, Atwood’s following dystopia, the *MaddAddam* trilogy, takes up some of *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s worries but putting a major emphasis on environmental degradation and the dangers of uncontrolled biotechnological developments under the rule of consumer capitalism. In contrast, Atwood’s next dystopia, *The Heart Goes Last*, almost forgets about the environmental agenda that was central to *MaddAddam*. Finally, *The Testaments*, the latest of Atwood’s works, which gives a clear conclusion to *The Handmaid’s Tale*, ends up not as a dystopia but as a happy-ending utopian text: “Instead of a new glimpse of hell, it’s a riveting and deeply satisfying escapist fantasy” (Goldberg n.p.). Nevertheless, the critique against totalitarianism and the loss of individual freedom is always present in Atwood’s dystopian novels. They mirror the corruption of a “consumer capitalism that destroys liberal freedoms without the mediation of a centralised state,

through a social order which authorises pleasure at every turn, and yet, like any fascist regime, inevitably relies on violence precisely because it cannot deliver the well-being it promises” (Vials 238). The case study of this chapter, *The Heart Goes Last*, is unique in the sense it places a greater emphasis on the unethical construction of the posthuman body and its social implications. The pursuit of the enhanced and perfected body, among any other ethical considerations, becomes an element that enlarges the social gap, and should worry us, as Fukujama warned (84). This stressed attention on the posthuman body is a characteristic that defines the new generation of dystopian fictions, a component that Marks de Marques relates to the posthuman turn:

The rise of technological capitalism and the development of transhuman and posthuman ideas have converged to the reinvention of dystopian fiction in English from the last decade of the 20th century However, unlike their counterparts from earlier that century . . . these contemporary dystopias, which form a third dystopian turn . . . focus not upon a critique of a political system and its control over individuals but, rather, in the dystopian, posthuman body, which is the result of late capitalism, postmodern life and technological advances. Late capitalism postulates that the natural body is imperfect and, through its relation to technology, it has to aspire to perfection and the prolongation of life (even immortality, if possible). (“From Utopian” 270)

Moreover, and outside the agenda of feminist dystopia, the desired enhancement of the [post]human body is not exclusive to one single gender, as discussed above, and makes “sex and gender differences . . . irrelevant” (273). In that sense, the issue of the technological enhancement of the [post]human body would go beyond the reach of the feminist agenda.

Furthermore, when analyzing Atwood's dystopias from a diachronic perspective, there is another significant change in relation to resistance and agency: the identity of the "heretics." According to Cortiel, another important characteristic in the categorization of the feminist dystopia is that "the change for a better future is initiated by the oppressed" (159). In other words, the destruction of the totalitarian regime and the hope for a better future are the result of the resilience and agency of the characters who are living inside the, for some, initially intended utopian society. With some nuances that problematize Offred's agency in *The Handmaid's Tale*, she is the main source of resistance in the novel. More specifically, the written account of her life as a handmaid is "both a report of and a challenge of the meaning system established by the rulers or the theocracy" (Staels 233). However, there are other sources of resistance that come directly from within the totalitarian regime, from the powerful elite constrained by the repression they imposed on others—the commander, the wives, the doctor—which make *The Handmaid's Tale* a "weak dystopia" (Moylan 164). Moreover, readers have recently learnt—in 2019—that the fall of Gilead, envisioned in the "Historical notes," was indeed provoked by a written report, by an act of language from "within" the privileged of the regime, by a woman's act of resistance: Aunt Lydia's truthful account of Gilead's atrocities. In *MaddAddam*, it was also a member of the ruling scientific society—Crake—the person able to dismantle from within a society that, without any doubt, he considered to be a nightmarish dystopian scenario that should be destroyed in order to create his perfect utopia.⁵⁰

In addition, in *The Heart Goes Last*, it is Jocelyn, not a victim but a founder of the Positron project, the main source of resistance to expose its illegal activities to the public

⁵⁰ The limit between utopia and dystopia is slippery, as was discussed in the theoretical chapter, since the notion of perfect, or imperfect, society depends on the author's ideology. For instance, Gilead was, for the ultra-conservative Sons of Jacob, a utopian society, an intended model of perfection, whereas the destruction of the whole humanity was for Crake the condition needed for the birth of a utopian state of bliss on the Earth.

opinion. Stan and Charmaine resist the Project and break its rules through their personal desires, but, without Jocelyn's plans and power, they would not have been able to escape. Formerly, the Positron Project was an intended utopia that evolved into a dystopia. However, the relationship between a projected utopian society—a positive image of the present—and civil rights is not always clear since the concept of utopia is not necessarily linked to individual freedom. As Claeys explains:

Following More, Davies, Skinner and others we may primarily portray utopia as part of a tradition of the ideal commonwealth or best city-state, a historical discourse, in other words, respecting the restraint and control of behaviour. Utopia portrays a system of enhanced sociability (and often suppressed individuality) in which institutionally enforced communalism mitigates the effects of excessive social inequality. (14)

In *The Heart Goes Last*, Jocelyn helps to create the “utopian” scheme for she was initially convinced of the legitimacy of the Positron Project: “I thought it was for the best . . . And it was true at first, considering the alternative, which was a terrible life for a lot of people” (*Heart* 126). However, once the Project's greedy investors discovered the enormous possibilities given by the uncontrolled access to the citizens' bodies and lives, the utopia clearly gives way to the dystopia. Moreover, lack of freedom is common to both: utopia and dystopia. As Vials remarks, Atwood criticizes uncontrolled capitalism and “shows us the tyranny inherent in its very utopian idea of freedom, which ultimately restricts human action through diffuse channels based on quotidian realms even with its total restraint of free will” (237).

If *The Handmaid's Tale* explored the power of censorship, information and the use of the media as a tool for population control, *The Testaments* shows a strong—unrealistic?—belief in the power of information/truth to overthrow tyranny, as if

information/truth endangered totalitarianism (Goldberg n.p.). On the other hand, *The Heart Goes Last* shows a more realistic portrayal of the effects of information: that is, truth, although partially, still saves. Supporting evidence of Positron's illegal activities is made public with journalist Lucinda Quant's help. Ironically, the novel shows how "corruption and greed . . . are no great surprise" (*Heart* 285), and even if general indignation is the first public reaction, there is not unanimous condemnation of Positron's activities. As the narrator's voice reminds us, "there's always two sides" (285). Some people justify the existence of Positron and others object to it: "'Communist' and 'Fascist' and 'psychopathy' and 'soft on crime' and a new one, 'neuropimps,'⁵¹ were whizzing through the air like buckshot" (285). The violation of citizens' civil and political rights, the killing of prisoners for organ trafficking, the modification of human brains to create compliant sex slaves, all is raw material for public debate rather than for any kind of action. Furthermore, no real action is taken at the end: there is no punishment for the guilty. Borrowing Alaimo's rationale, reality is transformed "into information, rather than to effect material change" (101). Thus, *The Heart Goes Last* rather than a dystopia becomes a utopian-satire⁵² at the end. Neither Ed nor any of the investors responsible for the crimes are condemned. Moreover, only a partial version of the truth reaches the media: "'You really think I'd want [Ed] giving full testimony in front of Congress?' says Jocelyn. 'Spilling all the beans? I myself am one of those beans, in case you haven't forgotten'" (290). Thus, the Positron Project is exposed, but not destroyed; the satirical ending is open to the continuation of the dystopian project. The brain modification surgery is still performed with Jocelyn's approval, and Ed, through the surgery, is attached to Lucinda

⁵¹ According to the urban dictionary, neuropimp is a "pimp of neuro music . . . A sub-genre of drum n' bass that originated with Ed Rush & Optical" (*Urban Dictionary* n.p.)

⁵² According to Sargent, dystopia is "a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" ("Introduction" 2), whereas a utopian satire is "a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as criticism of the existing society" ("Introduction" 2).

Quaint. There will be no sufficient means of keeping the Project in check within any definite bounds. The business goes on, and Ed's surgery, rather than his correction, is Lucinda's payment for services rendered; as Jocelyn says, she "is a client . . . and we have our standards" (291). It is an ambivalent ending, only "a temporal respite . . . [where Atwood] seems to be suggesting that communal delusion is the sole comfort in a world now controlled by corporate rhetoric" (Battersby n.p.).

4.2. VIOLENCE: TECHNOLOGICAL MODIFICATIONS OF THE HUMAN BODY AND HUMAN CLONING.

The seventh circle of the Hell is the place where the souls of the violent are punished. Dante's guide, Virgil, explains that there are three types of sins of violence depending on the victim: when violence is exerted against other people (murderers and bandits), violence against oneself (suicides), and violence against nature/God's offspring ([those] who harm industry and the economy, offspring of nature and therefore grandchild of God. (Raffa 66)

There is a remarkable parallel between the three kinds of sins related to violence and the workings of power in Atwood's view. According to Somacarrera, Atwood, in her fiction, distinguishes among three kinds of power: that of the powerful over the powerless—as in *The Handmaid's Tale*—, the power over the "physical universe" with the use of science and reason—as in the *MaddAddam* trilogy—and the power over oneself. The latter is "the search for which concerns most of Atwood's characters and indeed, most of us" (Somacarrera, "Power Politics" 55). In *The Heart Goes Last*, Atwood explores the three kinds of powers/violence. The novel renders many examples of brutality/violence against

the others, such as forcing sex slaves, or organs trafficking, which have been discussed earlier in this chapter. As a typical Atwoodian satire, and with her playful style—“a continual slippage between horror and comedy” (Howells, “True Trash” 308)—, it shows many horrors that are already happening in real life, most of them related to ethical problems triggered by technological progress. But there are other instances of violence against or power over the other, such as unethical rejuvenation bioscience or the selling of babies’ blood, that even if not covered in detail, appear as backdrop in the novel. *The Heart Goes Last* portrays an economically determined society, too similar to our reality, where “middle-class existence . . . can be sustained only by economic oppression” (M. Johnson n.p.), that is, the sin of “violence against nature/God’s offspring” (Raffa 66). Conversely, and by extension, middle-class “eternal” youth and health could be only sustained by conjoined economic and “biological oppression” of the weakest, the power over the physical universe. As Hayles affirms, “the varying relations between humans and technology are always invested with politics . . . The problem is never merely technological, but always social, political, and economic” (in Pötzsch 95). Throughout her professional career, Atwood has demonstrated as well a persistent awareness of the issues of consumerism and gender as closely intertwined with the biological exploitation of the economically weakest, usually women. In her canonical novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the fate of the handmaids and surrogate motherhood were coherently connected: Offred’s womb was a receptacle for the parenthood of the powerful others. The link was explicitly outlined in the “Historical Notes” chapter, which mentioned “artificial insemination” and the use of “surrogate mothers” (*Handmaid* 317) in connection to the issue of infertility in the pre-Gileadean times. It was precisely in the late 20th Century—when *The Handmaid’s Tale* was published—that the development of technologies to treat infertility (IVF) provided the technological capacities behind the birth of Dolly—a female

sheep and the first animal cloned from an adult cell (Haran *et al.* 178). Nevertheless, the issue of human cloning was raw material for some works of science fiction long before the existent possibility in reality. *Brave New World* (1932), a literary ancestor for many of Atwood's dystopias, introduced a totalitarian society where babies were no longer born but grown in incubators. From a contemporary point of view, as Atwood affirms, the novel is "still as vibrant, fresh, and somehow shocking as it was when [she], for one, first read it" (*Other* 193). Currently, human cloning has been relocated "from the realm of science fiction to that of techno scientific practice" (Haran *et al.* 176). In other words, fiction has foreseen reality. Present day research on human cloning is more interested in micromanipulation processes of cloning, that is, genetic engineering—"the blanket term used to cover interventions that make changes at the genetic level" (Camero 365)—rather than in the creation of a full individual. Consequently, women's bodies become the available resource to scientific experimentation and there are calls for women to donate their eggs for "therapeutic cloning experimentation in exchange for cheaper IVF treatment or 'altruistically'" (Haran *et al.* 178). This is the case of Toby, in *MaddAddam*, who donated her eggs in exchange for money to survive and her body paid the price for being an extension for the desired motherhood of the richest. After the infection provoked by medical malpractice during her eggs' extraction, she lost her womb and became infertile. Furthermore, in *MaddAddam*, Atwood goes a step further in the depiction of "violence against nature" or the power over the physical world in Somacarrera's terms, and tackles the ethical implications of the creation of new species for the provision of spare parts for humans. The Pigoons are created to die and supply replacement organs not for any human but only for the rich.

Human cloning opens the path to radically transform human bodies and become "our own inventive selves: *Homo sapiens* in the hands of *Homo Faber*" (Camero 363). In

her analysis of *MaddAddam*, DiMarco understands Crake as the quintessential *Homo Faber* whose findings and achievements are “grounded repeatedly in a violation of nature” (181). Furthermore, this critic remarks that Crake “makes the bio-plague, in the form of BlyssPluss, for profit” (183). However, it is questionable to see in Crake’s motivation an attempt for economic profit since he destroys humanity, not for his own interest, but precisely for the goal of recuperating nature. The quintessential *Homo Faber* is present in *The Heart Goes Last* nonetheless: Ed—“part salesman, potential baby-blood vampire” (226)—does not hesitate to manipulate, and even destroy (human) nature, for profit.

Ed starts “working on a sort of blend” (*Heart* 236) between humans and robots, what within the field of posthumanism is called the singularity: “the envisioned state where the distinction between human being and manufactured being disappears into a seamless dress, weaving together our humankind and what we have fashioned it to be” (Camero 364). Ed justifies the customization of human beings through a brain procedure as “the greatest possible happiness of the greatest possible number” (262), the greatest possible number of people able to pay for their happiness. It is impossible to separate economic benefit from the development of bioscience. As Hayles outlines, “once you start to focus on how technology enables, for instance, longevity, one immediately becomes aware of the resource question” (in Pöttsch 95). With his resource management approach, Ed prefers the modification of an existent resource, the human body, instead of the more expensive solution of creating a new device. He does not have any ethical or political limitation and is “moving to the next frontier” (*Heart* 261). In real life, the next frontier has turned out to be therapeutic cloning as the “techno scientific vehicle for improving individual health and extending longevity” (Haran *et al.* 182). “Why suffer?” (*Heart* 251), if happiness is at the reach of one’s hand. Changes at the genetic level have

clinical applications in the cure of diseases. Nevertheless, the controversy around illness and its ethics comes when these changes are not a cure but an enhancement. Moreover, some genetic modifications may be inheritable. NBIC technologies—Nanotechnology, Biology and Medicine, Information Sciences, and Cognitive Sciences—may involve the posthuman making “via modified biological descent . . . [and] quasi-biological descent from synthetic organisms . . . or via some technogenetic process yet to be envisaged!” (Roden 23). As Camero affirms:

Changes in the germline that will affect the genetic constitution of every subsequent human being in that family, will offer the ultimate challenge to humankind: whether or not we should seek to “improve” our human nature and take control over the kind of beings that we are. (365)

This is the core of the present debate between transhumanism and its opponents. While transhumanists optimistically believe in the possibilities of biogenetic enhancement to improve human nature and eventually become posthumans, Fukujama, from his neoconservative position, fears the unavoidable unequal access to genetic engineering as a primary cause for the challenge of “notions of human equality and the capacity for moral choice” (82). Moreover, even transhumanists believe in the potential of the future and how “*some* humans may transcend their actual outfit in such radical ways as to become posthumans” (Ferrando, “Transhumanism” 439; emphasis added). This brilliant and superior future envisaged by transhumanists is only for some people, the powerful, whereas posthumanism seeks the empowerment of all previously marginalized and the end of the patriarchal system. Moreover, MacCormack’s radical posthumanism positions itself against transhumanism and defends that “posthuman ethics disavows the fetishization of technology and cyborgism, which overvalue human life as a concept over lived realities of all earth occupants, seen in *transhumanism*” (MacCormack,

“Posthuman” 346; italics in the original). If humans’ total control over the *Homo Sapiens*’s evolutionary future may result in something good remains to be seen. Nonetheless, if the ethical decisions are let in the hands of the *Homo Faber*, “the dominant consciousness of an advanced technological capitalist society clearly tends toward a utilitarian ethics, an ethic that permits other beings to be used—consumed—when it can be proven to serve the individual *or* the greater good” (Bieber-Lake 18; italics in the original).

The Heart Goes Last reproduces the public debate on the ethical implications of unauthorized brain surgeries in the Positron Project and the controversy around human modification/enhancement: “And as for the operation that imprinted you on a love object—if not of your own choice, then of somebody’s choice—what was the harm in that since both parties ended up satisfied?” (*Heart* 285). The novel uses a metafictional strategy to remind readers of its fictional and playful character but, at the same time, also of its commitment to serious issues and its thought provoking intention. Huxley’s novel already warned against a society where everybody was healthy and happy and no one suffered. However, it is a sort of happiness that seems threatening. Atwood invites readers to think critically and consider personal and collective choices. The ethical importance of reading fiction about the possibilities of human manipulation/enhancement is undeniable. If once upon a time human manipulation was transposed from science fiction to scientific practices, now there is the need to recuperate reading “as a social practice . . . by returning, in some way, to the ethical” (Bieber-Lake xv), and transpose ethical worries to techno scientific practices. As Atwood affirms, it is in humans’ nature to “imagine such enhanced state for themselves, though they can also question their own grandiose constructions” (*Others* 193).

4.3. FRAUD: CHARMAINE, BREAKING THE “DORIS DAY” STEREOTYPE

The sin of fraud, punished in the eighth circle of Dante’s Hell is related to an improper use of reason, “unique to human beings and therefore more displeasing to God than sins of concupiscence and violence” (Raffa 79). The eighth circle hosts more sinners than any other circle. There, the different types of sinners of fraud are distributed, among them seducers, flatterers, and hypocrites, are distributed in ten ditches. Fraud is from Dante’s medieval and religious point of view a hideous spiritual disease. Nevertheless, in a more mundane and contemporary interpretation, if committers of fraud have a disease that belongs to the spiritual realm it might have an emotional or psychic origin.

“Charmaine, Charmaine, whispers the small voice in her head. You are such a fraud. So are you, she tells it” (*Heart* 146). As previously discussed in this dissertation, Charmaine’s personality is split into two irreconcilable identities, a presumable effect of psychological trauma that dates back to her childhood, when she was abused. Embarked on a psychological quest for oblivion of her repressed earlier trauma, the far reaches of her conscious memory are from the time she was living with her grandmother, after the death of her mother. Rescued and raised by Grandma Win, she was taught to behave as was expected of a “charming beautiful white girl,” according to the conservative ideal of woman that was fashionable in the 1950s. Charmaine develops all the traits expected from the 1950s stereotype to the point that she ends up believing that this is her authentic personality. However, when she enrolls in the Positron Project, she has the opportunity to be “the person [she has] always wanted to be” (76), “this other person inside her” (56) far away from the nice girl ideal; her real thoughts, only visible for herself, show a shallow and egotistic person, incapable of putting herself in another person’s place. Thus, the

purpose of this section is to discuss Charmaine's outside, the Doris Day-like girl, and her inner side, more of a merciless murderer.

Charmaine is a beautiful blondie, but not excessively eye-catching or threatening in any sense, she is the ideal embodiment of innocence: "She has such guileless teeth. Nothing fanged about them. She used to worry about looking so symmetrical, so blond . . . [but] her small teeth alarm no one: bland is good camouflage" (*Heart* 51). The way others interpret her personality—guided only by subjective opinions based on her appearance—responds to the physiognomy fallacy:

The roots of physiognomy lie in the human propensity to interpret a person's appearance associatively, metaphorically, and even poetically. This kind of thinking, dat[es] back at least to the ancient Greeks The idea that there is a perfect correspondence between a person and their image is a psychological illusion fueled by our experience with familiar faces. (Arcas n.p.)

As Arcas explains, physiognomy has been considered rather as pseudo-science than as a scientific practice, even more when it has always been suspected of racist and biased assumptions about stereotypes. However, modern experiments with first impressions have tried to develop "scientifically" a relationship between some facial features and the observers' associations to specific kinds of personalities. With the help of technology and artificial intelligence, some psychologists have designed diverse facial shapes and collected data about people's reactions and first impressions. Attractive, competent, dominant, extroverted, frightening, likeable, mean, threatening and trustworthy faces have been identified from computational models. Conversely, mathematical models have learnt to "visualize stereotypes" (Arcas n.p.) with the unintended consequence of a revival of Physiognomy, now questionably supported by biased scientific data (Arcas n.p.).

In the novel, Charmaine's appearance corresponds to a famous model of white femininity in the 1950s U.S.A.—Doris Day: “that’s the role . . . chosen for her: good girl” (*Heart* 225). The cultural significance of this prototypical woman finds her perfect place in the Positron Project, a retrograde simulacrum of that particular decade. At the beginning of her career and in a still segregated Hollywood, Doris Day’s fair features represented “sexual and racial purity” (Sullivan n.p.). Moreover, stereotyped nice blond girls must be free from dark sexual desires because “[w]omen who ‘gave in’ became instantly undesirable, spoiled for any kind of long-term commitment. They not only betrayed their gender, but also their race” (Sullivan n.p.).

The blond Charmaine has faith in “the same sweet roundish baby-face she’s always relied on at home and school” (*Heart* 144). She behaves like the perfect chaste wife for Stan even when they are in intimate moments. She thinks of herself as an anachronistic but perfect model of a woman, a modest girl, “so hard to find a modest girl these days” (213). Charmaine is imprinted, not by brain surgery, but by the internalization of Grandma Win’s expectations for her, and by a castrating education that did not allow her to verbalize and overcome her trauma. Grandma Win forced her to adapt to conservative social conventions, to disguise and to pretend to be what she was not. Guided by Grandma Win, she came to believe that moral filthiness could be reversed with flowers, popcorn, water, and soap. Consequently, Charmaine tried to fight her self-perceived inner dirtiness through an obsession with external cleanliness. Therefore, she becomes imperceptible; the spotless nice girl like “white noise” (50), an unremarkable part of the perfect home background. Her own husband, Stan, judged by appearances and underestimated or simply ignored her dark side, “something skewed. A chip missing, a loose connection” (101) in her mind. When Charmaine has her affair with Max, she starts to lose control over her unbridled passions with him, and “betrays” her carefully

constructed Doris Day-like external persona. Besides, she has been chosen to have her own important job (141) in “Medical procedures” where she can be “the Charmaine of darkness” who rather than a Doris Day is an Adolf Eichmann. Desire for power concealed under a non-threatening physical appearance, conscious self-deception, and displacement of responsibility are the common denominators between the actual Nazi murderer and the sweet fictional killer.

On the first day of Adolf Eichmann’s trial, philosopher Hannah Arendt was deeply shocked by his anodyne physical appearance. She realized that evil was not committed only by monstrous people with frightening appearances. When she published her report of the trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1961), she claimed that murderers looked “normal,” like anyone. It was a chilling fact: Physiognomy could not predict anything, and what was worse, an “average ‘normal’ person, neither feeble-minded nor indoctrinated nor cynical, could be perfectly incapable of telling right from wrong” (n.p.), that is, evil came from a failure to think critically.

Eichmann was a traveling salesman with “a humdrum life without significance and consequence . . . a failure in the eyes of his social class” (Arendt n.p.) who found in the Nazi movement an opportunity to make a career and climb up the social ladder. As Arendt remarks, it was not coincidental that Eichmann was chosen to do this “job”—being responsible for the death and deportation of millions of Jews—because those who issued the orders “knew full well the limits to which a person can be driven” (n.p.). For her part, Charmaine was an insipid blondie with a life dedicated to being the perfect housewife. However, when she goes through a psychological test to determine exactly what she is apt for, the recruiters see that “she does have a gift . . . she executed well, she gives good death” (*Heart* 95), and her destined job is in “Medications Administration,” a euphemism concealing the murdering of some inmates to sell their organs. Charmaine is

happy because her job is very “important” (141). She mixes up the power of taking away a person’s life with respect: “it will be nice to feel respected again” (113).

“Language Rules” was Hitler’s first war decree, a very effective measure aimed to disguise the killing of millions of men, women, and children in what he called “The Final Solution” to the “Jew’s question.” The Nazis in Auschwitz did not “murder” any one, “the word ‘murder’ was replaced by the phrase ‘to grant a mercy death’ . . . and in [Eichmann’s] mind the unforgivable sin was not to kill people but to cause unnecessary pain” (Arendt n.p.). Arendt remarks how words such as “extermination,” “liquidation,” or “killing” were changed to “final solution,” “evacuation,” or “special treatment.” It was a perverse practical application of Benjamin L. Whorf’s theory on “the relation of habitual thought and behavior to language” (134), or how the use of language is not incidental because our world is unconsciously constructed, analyzed and understood according to “the language habits of the group” (Whorf 135). Language rules apply in *Positron* as well. When Charmaine injects the venom to kill an inmate, she is only carrying out a “Special Procedure” (*Heart* 68). Moreover, Charmaine uses in her mind language rules that camouflage her role as a killer, such as seeing herself as an “angel of mercy . . . providing the alternative . . . the escape . . . a better place” (69). Furthermore, she demonstrates her total lack of empathy and egotism by means of usurping the victim’s place: “the bad part happens to her, because she’s the one who has to worry about whether what she’s doing is right. It’s a big responsibility” (69). She can be seen even as a sadist who takes delight, real pleasure from the experience, lengthening the torture: “The head strokings, the forehead kisses, those marks of kindness and personal attention just before she slides in the hypodermic needle: they aren’t forbidden but they aren’t mandated . . . it makes the whole thing a more quality experience” (87). Nevertheless, Charmaine’s special care and tenderness, when she is really killing a person, erases her guilt since there is no explicit

violence in the process of murdering, as if death without visible violence and blood was not death. This rationale, as perverse as it is, was employed in reality, to minimize and deny culpability in the later stages of the Nazi Final Solution. At the end of the war, death “was not carried out by shooting, hence through violence, but in the gas factories, which, from beginning to end, were closely connected with the ‘euthanasia program’ ordered by Hitler in the first weeks of the war and applied to the mentally sick” (Arendt n.p.).

Murder is not a common inclination of normal people, but good citizens are always law-abiding. Therefore, Eichmann attempted to justify his crimes on the grounds that he had to obey orders and obeyed the law. As Arendt ironically comments, “many Germans and many Nazis . . . must have been tempted not to murder . . . and not to become accomplices in all these crimes But, God knows, they had learned how to resist temptation” (n.p.). In *The Heart Goes Last*'s fictional universe, Charmaine learns to displace any responsibility for her actions to those who order the murders—“rules are rules” (*Heart* 141). She avoids any critical thinking and does not feel as a bad person because she only did “bad things for reasons [she's] been told are good” (304). However, she does want to be a murderer; it is her conscious decision. When she is moved to the Towel-Folding section, she feels lowered in her status (97), and her only obsession is to recover the job for which she has the “talent and experience” (113), that is, for executioner. Shallowness, conscious self-deception combined with pure stupidity remove any regrets from Charmaine. As a modern female version of Pontius Pilate, she performs an absolutionary ritual before the killing and “washes her hands, and after that she brushes her teeth . . . she likes to feel pure in heart when going into a Procedure” (144). By cleaning her flesh, she absolves her conscience because at least “you make your own reality out of your attitude” (145). Charmaine is unwilling to accept any responsibility for her voluntarily executed actions, there is no discharge for her since she chose the role of

perpetrator (150). In spite of her hard work to justify herself, she still knows that if she is confronted to public trial people “wouldn’t understand the reasons for it, the good reasons She’d be the target of a lot of hate” (120). Thus, Charmaine is very happy when her brain is supposedly washed, cleaned. She believes she has had brain surgery to modify her natural instincts, and that makes her very happy, she has been made anew by science, purified of her sins. No guilt or responsibility when “every shadow of regret, and every shadow period has been lasered out of her” (296). However, her happy state of technical oblivion only lasts for a year, because Jocelyn reveals to her that there is not any surgery in Charmaine’s brain. Charmaine eventually has to confront the fact that she is responsible for her actions, and will permanently be for “the world is all before [her], where to choose” (306), as it always was.

5. THE FINAL TREACHERY: CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has arrived at its final stop in its metaphorical journey through Dante's Hell and its coincidences with *The Heart Goes Last's* "sins." Satan's home, the ninth circle, is reserved for traitors, especially for those who betrayed their kin and guests. This last stop sums up, and discusses the previous sections' findings in order to consider how open we, human beings, are to betray our own identity and values in our search for a better future. Traditionally, humanity has always been enrolled in a process of modification by cultural, social, technological, or material means that have affected human identity and its ethical limits. Francesca Ferrando claims that, in the posthuman age, human is not "a static notion, but a dynamic one . . . [that] can no longer be addressed in separation from its planetary and cosmic location . . . [or] in separation from technology and ecology" ("Leveling" 1—4). In other words, human identity is embarked on a permanent transformative journey that was already epitomized in Dante's *Inferno*. In this chapter's metaphorical journey through Dante's Hell, *The Heart Goes Last's* opening situation would represent the first circle, Limbo, where protagonists Charmaine and Stan are trapped because they are the direct victims of the "sins" committed by rampant capitalism and "soulless" corporations. Even though corporations and the capitalist system seem to be abstract formations free of human participation, individuals always have some weight and responsibility in the development of history and contribute to making society. In other words, in this age that is baptized as the Anthropocene period but also as the "Capitalocene,"⁵³ humans are both victims and perpetrators of the situation.

⁵³ As stated in the theoretical chapter, environmental historian and sociologist Jason Moore, among others, favors the term "Capitalocene" to name our present era instead of "Anthropocene," for he sees the capitalist system as the main cause and stimulant of human modification of nature (see M. Simon n.p.).

Trying to understand Charmaine's and Stan's motivations to be dangerously indebted to the limit of their possibilities, I have examined first Charmaine's family background. *The Heart Goes Last* outlines how her childhood history of unspecified violence, together with Grandma Win's escapist education, led her to crave for the domestic dream of happiness based on a safe home for her own, and eventually to marry Stan, a "sturdy" man. Besides this, it is precisely her traumatic childhood and Grandma Win's sanctification of the domestic sphere that provoke Charmaine's external self, the "charming" old-fashioned good girl who fulfills Stan's patriarchal beliefs about women. Stan did not marry a whole woman but an external prototypical identity, carefully developed by Charmaine to fulfill the others' expectations. He strongly relies too on gender roles attitudes and stereotypes and assumes the part of Charmaine's protector. After the overnight failure of the system, he blames himself and is unable to see Charmaine as an adult and his equal. In *The Heart Goes Last*, Atwood renders another version of the predicted apocalypse, but this time it is "only" the apocalypse of the weakest part of society. Atwood remarks how the capitalist system devours those who allow the system to determine their destinies, and buy the capitalist dream of success. The result is a wild unsupportive society populated by a new kind of humans who, devoid of any principles, become a kind of unethical [post]humans.

The minor "sin" of the acquiescence to capitalist, domestic, and conservative moral expectations materialized in a life in the "economic Limbo." The desire to escape from "Limbo" leads Charmaine and Stan to the second circle of Hell: Lust. Lust names a circle of Hell because such strong sexual desire is a kind of emotion traditionally understood as a destructive force. However, sex and lust—as a powerful representation of sex—are essential to human basic needs. In *The Heart Goes Last*—or Lust?—sexual practices and lust become, for both Charmaine and Stan, tools of resistance against the

impositions of the Positron Project regime. In an artificial society that replicates the most conservative period in the 20th century U.S.A., lust is for Charmaine a medium to connect to her inner non-conformist self, even if her real self is not ethically exemplary. Charmaine and Stan attain the “American dream” of success within the Positron Project; they apparently recuperate their private domestic sphere of happiness and the commodities they were dreaming of. However, privacy does not exist when the most private actions of the citizens, such as sexual behavior, are monitored by the public organization. As Foucault affirms, the implementation of conservative sexual norms is linked to the development of the capitalist system, not for moral reasons, but as an attempt to control a powerful drive force for humans to rebel. In *The Heart Goes Last*, lust is not a frivolous and anecdotic element of “kinky popular” culture, but a primary motivation for humans and, for the time being, a defining element of humanity.

The challenge to control human lust is not only an institutional but also an individual long-held ambition in human history. Humans want to possess the other’s body, but they also want to obtain the other’s “willing” desire, an old historical objective that provoked attempts to replicate human bodies with the help of technology. However, if we concede the ethical status of person to the android, there are tremendous ethical objections for the sexual use of technology in the future. Nevertheless, humans desire “the real thing,” not the replica. In the fictional realm of the book, the human body is transformed into a cyborg the moment the human brain is artificially modified. Any intervention in the human brain that leads to lose any power of decision—even if happiness is the result for the modified human—blurs the frontier between the human and the robot, leading the former human to a state of “posthumanness,” both android and modified human are equated in the loss of rights and of “personhood,” both become sexual slaves. This type of science-fictional surgery in the novel is an exaggeration, for

the time being, but we cannot forget that actually the human brain, and with it human behavior, are nowadays often modified using chemicals and surgery, with the result of “enhanced” humans or transhumans. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, Charmaine and Stan show that commodities and the “replica” of human lust are not enough to attain happiness. It seems that, once again, Atwood favors the old human free will, individuality and “true” human emotions as defining and essential elements of humanness. However, these characteristics are at risk of being lost in the novel as we enter the transhuman path of the posthuman age.

Gluttony, the third circle in *Inferno*, exemplifies the sufferings endured by those who surrender to a sin that is not only related to the basic needs of the body, but also, more widely, to a more extended type of personal degradation. The Positron Project offers Charmaine and Stan “food and shelter” in exchange for their freedom, because their civil rights are not “edible” (*Heart* 38). The despair and desire to survive has driven many people in history to accept total control over their acts and bodies, and may trigger the establishment of a discipline society, as happens in *The Heart Goes Last*. When a society is, for instance, in the grip of a deep health crisis or of an economic crisis, it is the perfect moment for some people “to fish in troubled waters.” In other words, opportunities are spawned from crisis, and the solution that the Positron Project offers to Charmaine and Stan, though apparently utopian, is no other than becoming a new kind of slaves for a profitable structure. The new scheme, which is provided as the miraculous solution, follows every step of Foucault’s description of a disciplined society; Positron de-individualizes and transforms people into interchangeable parts according to their usefulness. Moreover, the Project assigns each person a fixed position and place, a new role in life where anyone’s old identity has no room. Furthermore, if the Project’s rules control people’s bodies, the intense surveillance—the implementation of a panoptic

system—controls people's minds with its factual and deterrent effect. The new identities that emerge from this process represent an accelerated slide into an adaptation that supposes a degradation in human nature. The price paid for "food" is too expensive. The novel, even in a lighter style, offers a thought-provoking scenario that, sadly, has many things in common with the global situation of a pandemic. The decisions we take to overcome a crisis have to be carefully measured to avoid falling into a worse scenario.

Following the metaphorical journey with Dante as a guide, this chapter has measured the presence of Greed, the sin in the fourth circle of Hell, in *The Heart Goes Last*. Greed is detected in the profitable commodification of human bodies and the technological modification of human minds. The unlimited desire for economic profit without ethical scruples persuades Ed to enter the business of organ trafficking by selling Positron's prisoners' bodies. This section has considered the ambivalent ethical terrain of actual organ donation by prison inmates, and the issue of free choice when at the other side of the scale there is a longer sentence in prison, or worse, death. Atwood mirrors in the novel the public controversy on how any potential social benefit could justify the dispossession of some individuals' right to choose: "some say those who got their organs harvested and may subsequently have been converted into chicken feed were criminals anyway"⁵⁴ (*Heart* 285). Thus, it seems that the public understands and approves of the dispossession of the convicts' bodies. As happened in *MaddAddam* with the Painballers, there always seems to be a justified reason for killing and death. Apparently, the question of free choice in organ donors might be limited by people's good or bad deeds. If one is

⁵⁴ As was discussed in *MaddAddam*'s chapter, Atwood revisits the issue of Capitalism actual cannibalism and its biological oppression of the powerless. Human bodies are first dismembered, as every animal in the slaughterhouse. Once the "valuable" parts are separated from the "waste," human flesh—now waste—becomes food for the chickens that are bred for human consumption. The circle of consumption is closed, and both humans and chickens are turned into cannibals in an ironic but practical reminder of human corporeality and the absurdity of the idea of human exceptionalism.

a criminal, society should be compensated with the ownership of his/her body. Nevertheless, apart from criminal activities and in the terrain of what is morally acceptable for a given society, what is it to behave well or badly? Who decides what is correct?

It seems that in *The Heart Goes Last* only Jocelyn has that power. Jocelyn's wrath is poured upon Stan and Phil. First Stan's lust is used as weapon in reverse to change his behavior. Led by concupiscence, he broke Positron's laws to trace the inexistent Jasmine. His sexual desire—never materialized—seems to be a big sin; in an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth subjective and merciless justice, forced sex becomes a punishment tool. Jocelyn can have good reasons to force Stan to collaborate with the public discovery of Positron's illegal activities, but her "therapy" of behavior modification is closer to a rape and revenge than to justice. In a reversal of traditional patriarchal roles, Jocelyn uses sex to subdue a man, who in *The Heart Goes Last* represents the weaker sex. When Atwood is asked why she does not make stronger male characters, she answers: "This is a matter that should more properly be taken up with God. It was not, after all, I who created Adam so subject to temptation that he sacrificed eternal life for an apple God is just as enamored of the characters flaws and dire plots as we human writers are" (*Writing* 127). Stan ends up ashamed of his sexual impulses that, strangely, seem to stay outside what seems proper and desirable for humans. His sexual drives make him feel more like an animal than like a human, as if he were a "pre-human sex-crazed baboon" (*Heart* 228).

Phil, the seducer, is reconverted by brain surgery, "cured" from what Jocelyn has decided is an unacceptable addiction, an illness. After exploring her characters' "kinky" desires, Atwood reserves for them the correspondent punishment. Anyone who goes outside the moral codes around standard sex—unimaginative, monogamous, and homogenized—is condemned and punished by the avenger woman, that who decides

what is morally acceptable or not: Jocelyn. She uses all the characters' weaknesses to manipulate them as pawns in a game where only she know the rules. Even if there are good reasons to justify her, she does bad things, she could be considered an evil character. However, as Atwood claims, bad female characters are necessary, "we have not enough evil in us [women]" (West quoted in Atwood, *Writing* 138).

If the sixth circle of Dante's Hell focuses on the heretics, this section has discussed *The Heart Goes Last's* dystopian character and the writers of dystopias as heretics or dissenters against conformism: engines of social change. Atwood's dystopian novels have mirrored her commitment to social issues for decades. From the moment that she published *The Handmaid's Tale*, and without her approval, Atwood has been defined as a feminist writer and her dystopian novels widely considered as feminist dystopias. *The Heart Goes Last* has not been highly praised and it is measured, according to many critics, as a minor novel within Atwood's works; yet, as a dystopian fiction, important ethical issues and thought provoking questions are still present. With an unstable balance between caricature and dramatic contemporary problems, the novel puts special emphasis on the human body's manipulation that is characteristic of dystopian fiction in the time of the posthuman. The desire for enhancement, eternal youth, and thus immortality, is not the exclusive characteristic of any gender. Moreover, according to Cortiel, a key element in feminist dystopias that depict totalitarian societies would be that the element of resistance that finally drives to a hopeful ending comes from the oppressed. Nevertheless, in *The Heart Goes Last* and in contrast with *The Handmaid's Tale*, even though the main source of resistance is a woman, yet repented, she is one of the oppressors.

Another important contemporary topic in *The Heart Goes Last* is the importance of the media and their responsibility on behalf of individual freedom. The novel mirrors how the media's disclosing of information is sometimes devoid of any ethical meaning

for it may defend reprehensive practices and unethical positions, “for the good of all” (*Heart* 69). In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the Nunavit Conference of experts, through its aseptic and expert analysis, devalued Offred’s act of resistance, and, somehow, sanctioned the Gilead regime, a role that in *The Heart Goes Last* is performed by the popular media—talk shows—and the internet. The novel echoes how the information age’s infinite potential to help the construction of a better society is wasted in lengthy discussions full of moral relativism.

In the section focused on violence, the seventh circle of Hell, this analysis has remarked the obvious relationship between violence and power over the other, over oneself, and over nature. There is always an evident link between power and oppression, usually economic oppression since the middle classes’ wellbeing have relied for centuries on the exploitation of the powerless. With the advent of the transhuman pursuit, and a widespread desire for enhancement enforced by our capitalist society, there is a real possibility that the powerless’ economic oppression would extend to biological oppression. In the 20th Century, the first biologically oppressed were women, as this dissertation discussed above. Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and Toby in *MaddAddam* suffered the dispossession or mutilation of their bodies in order to make real the desires of the powerful others. *The Heart Goes Last* takes up the problem of the profitability of the modification of human bodies in the hands of the powerful: *Homo Faber* transforming *Homo Sapiens*. Enhancement is, a priori, the prerogative of the powerful. Moreover, the effects of genetic manipulation might be inheritable and extend in the future with incalculable consequences.

In *The Heart Goes Last*, brain surgeries are performed that produce eternally happy people, reminding us of the now classical dystopia *Brave New World*, a novel that has inspired Atwood. As this old dystopian novel forecast the future bio scientific

development inspiring reality, *The Heart Goes Last* and other novels inspire reality by recuperating the ethical power of fiction to question and transform reality.

In Fraud, the last section of analysis in this dissertation, the discussion has exposed, through devious Charmaine's personality, the contrast between what is expected from her physical appearance and what she really does. Physical stereotypes have been studied by Physiognomy, a pseudo-science that goes back to ancient times. Nowadays, with the development of AI devices that analyze facial patterns to infer their personalities, there is the danger of the scientific sanction of biased stereotypes that might increase racism and exclusion.

Charmaine has a split personality probably due to a childhood trauma: the dirty/dark and the exemplary Charmaine. She is the first "victim" of the fraud. There is a misleading contrast between her self-perceived persona, based on her blameless appearance and driven by her grandmother's opinions, and her obscure internal impulses. She gets to believe she is modest and old fashioned, and tries to adapt her life to what is expected from her. However, when she starts living in the Positron Project, her inner self, the dark side, has the opportunity to surface. Similarly to the historical Nazi murderer Adolf Eichmann, the contrast between Charmaine's physical body and her actions is shocking. As Arendt discovered, nothing prepares us to find evil within common, normal people. Firstly, like Eichmann, Charmaine is motivated by her lust for power and desire to be respected. Secondly, she creates her own reality by the use of compassionate language to refer to monstrous actions, a technique that was used by the Nazis as well. Finally, she rejects any call for accountability sheltered in the legitimacy of her actions, done for good reasons for the many, and the unquestioned obedience due to her superiors. Nevertheless, her explanations only disguised a masqueraded psychopath. As *The Heart Goes Last* makes clear, moral choice is an obligation and an inalienable commitment for

the individual to create a better society for the future because “Nothing is ever settled” (*Heart* 305).

This section’s analysis has debated the eight sins committed by humanity trying to reach an enhanced state, the posthuman; yet, one last sin illuminates the ethical meaning of the process of transformation. The issue is how to prevent the posthuman from becoming the final betrayal of our own human pursuit for perfection. The analysis has shown that the journey towards the posthuman is reserved for a small percentage of population: the powerful. In tune with the critical posthumanist approach that does not recognize true human universals but seeks for a new and inclusive concept of [post] human subject, this dissertation suggests that the latest technological and scientific advances, as reflected in the novel, are reinforcements for the continuation of an economically oppressive and gender biased society. Betrayal is the first condition to exert violence and oppression over the other and nature. It seems that treachery is inescapably linked with all the sins examined in this chapter. Western people that look for happiness in the limbo of the capitalist society are betrayed and abandoned once their economic value is squeezed. Thus, traitors to human nature are those seized by a destructive version of lust that fail to respect the other’s desire and will. Betrayal to human’s desire to achieve security is the implementation of measures for the construction of a dehumanized disciplinary society that denies individuality and only looks for profit. Betrayal is the use of a resource management approach regarding other human beings’ bodies and regarding nature. Betrayal is for a woman to use anger to reverse but at the same time duplicate a situation of gender oppression. Betrayal is the pursuit of eternal youth and beauty that cannot be reached without sacrificing the others’ expectations and lives. Finally, betrayal is to fail in the distinction between right and wrong and to deny our individual accountability in the construction of any oppressive structure.

CONCLUSION

As stated in the Introduction, the initial hypothesis that instigated this dissertation was that the three dystopian novels that have integrated its corpus form a whole in which I could map a diachronic reflection of the evolution of Margaret Atwood's ethical worries and commitment in the last decades. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, *MaddAddam*, and *The Heart Goes Last*, Atwood portrays and warns her readers against the flaws and errors of our society that might eventually lead to three different versions of a bleak future. Written along three decades, Atwood puts different emphasis on the pressing issues that pervade her calls of danger. In order to understand and review to what extent the initial hypothesis has been confirmed, I have provided a detailed analysis of the three novels. In this conclusion, I will revise the main aspects that have been scrutinized and the results achieved, informed by the critical framework of the posthuman—as critical posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism—and the dystopian genre's literary characteristics and variations.

The analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* has shown how a dystopian society was born almost without resistance. A contemporary concern that has gained strength in current times and belongs to the critical posthumanist agenda is how advanced technologies can affect humans' identities and bodies. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood prophetically shows both, how systematic strategies for population control are put into practice and affect the human self, and how the human body is transformed by environmental degradation. The establishment of the theocratic Republic of Gilead is possible due to a systematic and progressive application of measures supposedly aimed to defend the population from an external menace. In a society that was already technological, information and surveillance become key instruments for citizen control. The coup perpetrators regulate and censor the media by spreading only the news that may be favorable for their propaganda. The power of (mis)information to distort the truth and

transform reality is an issue that has pervaded Atwood's dystopias throughout her career. Information alters reality, adapting it to the purposes of those who want to erase social and political contestation. Lies and the manipulation of news addressed to citizens that fail to think critically allow for the creation of Gilead. It is not very surprising that Atwood has chosen "real" information as the tool that puts an end to the Republic of Gilead in her last novel, *The Testaments*. In 2019, Atwood uses and trusts "the power of truth to overthrow tyranny" (Goldberg n.p.). However, in her 1980s novel lack of critical thinking impedes citizens to make informed decisions. Consequently, tyranny is born when citizens do not question the motives and blindly believe a convenient version of the truth that maintains that every restriction of civil liberties is for the benefit of society. The restriction of fundamental freedoms is then justified, as happens in *The Heart Goes Last*, where the extraction of organs of the condemned to death—others, a threat to social order—is deemed understandable as it is carried out for the common good of society. However, of what society? Moreover, who are the others? Anyone can be "the other." In *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are the first target for objectification and control, and then all dissenters are first denigrated, marginalized, criminalized, and finally killed and hanged in public view as a warning threat to any other potential rebel. Gilead's theocracy transforms any individual identity into stored data that determines each person's position within the scheme and their variable degree of freedom: everything can change virtually overnight. What is more, not only women are the oppressed ones in *The Handmaid's Tale* because Gilead is a pyramidal structure. Surveillance technologies allow the implementation of the Benthan Panopticon scheme for prisons where all the citizens, even the powerful commanders, are conscious of being under the vigilant eye of every other single person, and under the gaze of the omnipresent technological eye. Once the individual is isolated under the dehumanized state, the danger is not only for the other—

“bad dreams dreamt by others” (*Handmaid* 66)—but for any citizen because no one is safe.

In the Anthropocene era, the impact of human action is visible on the layers of the Earth. Nevertheless, humans are vulnerable and endure the consequences of their own actions as well. The “Generation Anthropocene” (Macfarlane n.p.) does not live in isolation from the environment; it lives in a nature-culture continuum interconnected with “the material world, with its histories and events” (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2). In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, pollution affects not only the climate and animals but also humans; it is the trigger of the extended plague of infertility. The book, as a proto-clifi novel, shows the effects of environmental degradation and bio scientific experimentation on human bodies, not only on the women’s, since men are infertile, too (*Handmaid* 321). Nevertheless, the figure of the handmaid is created not only as a powerful example of gender inequality in an extremely patriarchal society, but as a demonstration of how the powerful can even possess the bodies of the weak. The handmaids are not necessary for the continuation of Gilead’s society but for the preservation of the biological offspring of the powerful. Gilead does not seek for a new generation of Gileadean babies; the Republic wants the conservation of the “right” genes, the commanders’ genetic information. In our reality, the desire for genetically related offspring is the driving force behind contemporary surrogate motherhood, an unbalanced agreement between the powerful prospective parents and “two legged wombs” (*Handmaid* 146). There is not any infertility plague in our present-day society; on the contrary, we live in an overpopulated world with major sustainability challenges where yet the economically powerful can rent the wombs of powerless contemporary “handmaids” to fulfill their desire of biologically related descendants. Thus, human bodies are not only affected by biotechnology, but they also become commodities for sale. Biological parenthood in *The Handmaid’s Tale* or in the

MaddAddam trilogy is the privilege of those who have power and money, and on the other side of the agreement there is a woman who “willingly” gives her womb and eggs. However, free choice is not possible for a woman when her own survival is at risk. Offred has an unreal “choice” (*Handmaid* 145)—to be a handmaid or to be an unwoman that would risk her life cleaning toxic waste—, and Toby in *MaddAddam* “voluntarily” chooses selling her eggs—in exchange for money to pay the rent—in an intervention that renders her infertile. Furthermore, women’s bodies are still the available and necessary resource for scientific research, as happens with modern cloning experimentation (Haran *et al.* 178). The analysis has shown that *The Handmaid’s Tale* foresees many issues that are central in critical posthumanism and in its efforts to enforce a post-humanist, post-anthropocentric and post-binary understanding of the world. Critical posthumanism underlines the fact that “not every human being has been recognized as such: some humans have been considered more human than others; some have been considered less than human” (Ferrando, *Posthuman* 439). As a proto-cli-fi novel, the book investigates how the effects on human bodies also affect the social thread and create a pyramidal theocracy where neither women nor any type of dissenter are ethically recognized as human.

The Handmaid’s Tale is then a dystopia with a clear warning purpose. Gilead eliminates dissent but there is the need of some resistance for survival for a dystopia to acquire meaning. Some early critiques of the book labelled the novel as a feminist dystopia, because the focalizer was a woman and precisely her sex was the source of her imprisonment (Howells, “Transgressing” 142). Recently, other critics have described how, in modern feminist dystopias, language is simultaneously the site of men’s domination and women’s liberation (Cavalcanti 152). Thus, Offred’s agency and resilience is located in her words, in her narrative. However, the analysis shows that her

story is questioned not only from the epilogue, the “Historical Notes” chapter, but also from within her own narration. Her story becomes a metafictional self-conscious reflection of the act of narrating that incessantly questions the validity and accuracy of her own words. Furthermore, following Moylan, who classifies the novel as a weak dystopia, since there are other forces of resistance in it, narrative analysis shows that the inner contradictions of her narrative not only challenge her reliability but also show a vital strategy of docility and passivity. Her detachment and self-centered attitude runs parallel to former American citizens’ lack of commitment, which enabled the creation of Gilead. Moreover, Offred comments on her own tale in a stratagem aimed to reflect about the role of narratives, language and the linguistic creation of reality and history.

The final subsection in the first analytical chapter offered an obliged review of *The Handmaid’s Tale* audiovisual versions, the 1990 film and the first season of the Hulu series launched in 2017—and their cultural impact. This evaluation seems even more necessary when the TV series has been a worldwide success and meant the revival and expansion of Offred’s story. The intertextual inferences between the series and the novel have become so evident that “we will never read the novel again without connecting it to the series” (Somacarrera, “Thank you” 92). The analysis has paid attention to a specific issue: in what ways the film and the series’ first season deal with ecological worries that were undoubtedly present in the novel. This section has considered that the approach to ecological issues has changed as a response to each historical moment, while also analyzing how the audiovisual versions have departed from the novel’s didactic purpose of warning to become “adaptations” to survive, that is, they are more attractive fantastic tales rather than dystopias.

The 1990s filmic version, which was a box office failure, was released in the shadow of a novel pre-categorized as feminist for the public. In a time when political

cinema was not in fashion, the film was less thematically complex than the novel, and almost exclusively focused on gender issues. However, in opposition to the 2017 series, the film preserves almost intact its ecological warning message—its proto-cli-fictional character—, probably because in 1990 American polls showed a high percentage of ecological awareness around pollution, radioactivity, and their effects on nature. It was precisely in the 1990s when cli-fi appeared:

Climate fiction kept pace with developments in climate change awareness, namely, the growing scientific and public recognition of the phenomenon of global warming as the effect of greenhouse gases, through to increased political—particularly international—efforts to understand and address climate change, and on to the widespread collective anxiety around humanity's impact on its environment that marks the Anthropocene. (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 232)

Likewise, in the 21st Century, a part of the American population, even if aware of the dangers of global warming, do not fully accept them as real risks for their daily lives; they do not want to change their way of living. They offer a vision related to a questionable concept of sustainability, a version of environmentalism “less disgruntled . . . [which] wants to preserve certain natural habits or reduce the quantity of particular harmful substance in the environment . . . *at the same time* allowing for further technological, economic, and social progress on a global scale” (Bergthaller 730; italics in the original). It is also the position of Trump's Republican administration: they want to “have the cake and eat it.” It does not come as a surprise that, in its first season, the TV series *The Handmaid's Tale*, intended for a 21st century global audience, does not pay excessive attention to the issue of the environmental degradation that was the trigger of the infertility plague. In fact, the first season of the series is less committed to environmental issues and loses the book's proto-cli-fictional intention. Yet the series, a fantastic tale,

does not meet the criteria to be classified as a dystopian product intended to criticize current American society, since it does not seem to be adequately linked to present-day American social and political issues. Besides, the analyses of the three novels have shown that Atwood reinforced the environmental subject in the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013), whereas it disappeared in *The Heart Goes Last* (2015). It might be interesting to see how the forthcoming Paramount adaptation of *MaddAddam* treats the environmental issue. Nevertheless, the negative impact of humanity on the environment sadly still constitutes a threat for our society. The reason for the diminished importance of the subject in Atwood's dystopias may be related to the negative stereotype linked to environmentalism, strongly politicized and associated with leftist fanaticism and primitivism. Yet, the new generation of millennials are eco-conscious (Katsnelson n.p.), even if they do not share deep ecological precepts.

Regarding *MaddAddam*, its palindromic title implicitly suggests circularity and eternal return. The analysis intended to evaluate whether the restarting of history presented in the novel would lead to an ethically better future with the actual construction of posthuman identities. The analysis has discussed how Crake, a 21st century version of Victor Frankenstein, is at the same time a fanatic ecologist, a believer in the importance of embodiment for subjectivity and an actual transhumanist. However, by discussing the Crakers' characteristics, the analysis problematized transhumanist notions of perfection and enhancement, because the transhumanist radical transformation through technology to become posthumans depends on subjective human criteria. In the book, it is Crake, an exterminator, who designs the ideal of perfection for the posthuman Crakers, who are based, once again, on the old humanist ideal of beauty and physical proportion. The result is a group of quite absurd posthumans, a demonstration of Atwood's irony and a caricatured version of transhumanism. Nevertheless, in contrast to the original

Frankenstein creature, these new beautiful monsters succeed in the encounter with their creators when the human survivors discover enough traces of humanity inside the posthumans. Miscegenation is the proposed solution for the future and [post]human motherhood opens the path for the new community: [Post]human care, which, however, is associated mainly to motherhood and women's bodies. Women are reincorporated in their traditional roles as mothers and caretakers to ensure the survival of humanity in a society that deeply reminds readers of a stereotypical patriarchal society.

Furthermore, the narrative mirrors in its structure the suggested hybridity in the story. The posthuman is a field of enquiry that seeks for a post-anthropocentric understanding of the world, and the text would reflect this impulse in an exercise of communication between the human and the posthuman being. The book is a conversation between the human, Toby, and the posthuman Crakers. The stories that both Jimmy and Toby tell the Crakers constitute their myths, the beginning of their oral culture. However, Toby gives the Crakers a consciously manipulated version of human history, and teaches the Craker child how to write. The Crakers' minds are shaped by these myths, the narratives that were the origin of human consciousness (Nancy 43). Thus, humans in the novel pass the baton to the posthuman, but not before ensuring the permanence of human memories and history for the future, not before "humanizing" the posthuman. Cultural procreation, fertility of the mind, is Toby's posthuman version of motherhood. Thus, in a circular movement, the future of the MaddAddam community is linked to writing, the first technology, and to myth, the origin of human consciousness and religion—the same principles that prompted humanist thinking, the anthropocentric view of the world behind the original dystopia in the story.

MaddAddam, as a cli-fi novel, describes the Earth inhabitants' way of living in the time before and after the Anthropocene, considered as a border stage. The novel's two

different versions of Environmentalism, located in the pre apocalyptic time, prove to be insufficient or even anecdotal to counteract the majority of the compounders' extended apathy and detachment. Recently, some critics locate the *MaddAddam* trilogy within the debate of Anthropocene Feminism, which identifies scientific knowledge with masculinity and passivity, and femininity with agency and non-technological solutions (Jennings). The Compounders' scientific interventions destroy the environment in the quest for food. In the nightmarish pre Waterless Flood Society, food—what to eat—is not only a primary need but also a space for action and ethical reflection available to any individual. Environmental concerns and their relation to gender are a recurrent point of discussion in Atwood's oeuvre; in *MaddAddam*, women and even children are “consumed, used, and disposed of as secondary and inferior” (Ferreira 147). Besides, as a novelty, the danger of the abuse of technology is added to the equation, and not only women are “edible,” all the weaker members of society can become food.

After the apocalypse, in common with other dystopias like *The Road* or *The Hunger Games*, feeding becomes more than ever an issue of survival and a demonstration of responsibility of the older over the younger generation. The voluntarily assumed intergenerational obligation and female agency would be personified in how Toby, the older woman, feeds the sick, grows a vegetable garden, and obtains honey from her beehive trying to overcome the difficulty to get food. But, besides that, feeding in *MaddAddam* becomes a distinct feature to define who one is, and “a signifier of belonging” (Sceats 139). Food is at first a distinctive feature that separates, rather than links, human survivors from the new inhabitants of the Earth. However, at the end of the novel, there is not only a right and a wrong way to eat, but a right and a wrong way to kill. Borrowing Wenneman's terms, the other's ethical recognition “depends on who and on what we consider to be a person” (“The Concept” 12). The Pigeons, non-humans and

new members of the MaddAddam community, will not be killed or eaten. Nevertheless, human survivors will continue eating meat, and a Craker—against his own nature—will eat fish. The survivors' definite rejection of veganism defines it as an ethical election linked with sustainability rather than a moral code: "in the contemporary world, veganism is motivated for many, first and foremost, by environmental concerns" (Quinn and Westwood 7); thus, in an environmentally safe society, the limits of edibility would be only marked by belonging to the community. However, the Painballers—humans—are killed. Consequently, the new posthuman community, *MaddAddam*, is not so different from the pre-apocalyptic one, since there are still legitimate reasons to exert violence. Furthermore, as Fukujama asserts, "there are no transcendent standards for determining right and wrong beyond whatever a culture declares to be a right" (113).

With the aim of assessing *MaddAddam*'s specific characteristics within the dystopian genre, this analysis has discussed the novel's ending, which some critics understand as containing a utopian move towards a better future (Moylan; Moylan and Baccolini) that would characterize the feminist dystopia specificity, and what Mohr calls the "transgressive utopian dystopia" (4). Bearing in mind that open endings have become conventional (Richardson 332), in order to examine to what extent the ending can be considered as utopian—positive—for women, this section has scrutinized women's portrayal in the novel with especial attention to gender roles. The fact of giving prominence and power of decision only to the androgynous woman, unable to procreate, instead of breaking traditional gender stereotypes, seems to promote the idea that biological motherhood precludes agency. Moreover, Toby has assumed the male expectations for a woman with her physical appearance to the point that she perceives the younger and fertile women both as her rivals and as a threat to her happiness. As happened in *The Handmaid's Tale*, fertility seems to be the treasure that gives value to women and

a matter of confrontation between females. Commanders' wives feared and hated the fertile handmaids just as Toby hates and fears her young rival. Furthermore, it is another example of the same patriarchal physiognomy fallacy, the internalized male gaze, which assumes that a pretty blondie like Charmaine in *The Heart Goes Last* has to be candid and innocent, whereas Toby, the "unwoman" does not deserve to be loved by the alpha man and must do "beldam" (*MaddAddam* 89) things. Nevertheless, Toby has her particular conventional fairy tale-like ending, yet a reinforcement of gender essentialism, and what the "ugly duckling" deserves: a wedding with the "charming prince."

The analysis shows that the depiction of the younger women involves a backlash in terms of women's roles. Procreation is a duty and more important than desire. Ren and Amanda, after being raped and pregnant without their consent, find in motherhood the panacea for happiness: they become loving and caring mothers for the hybrid descendants. Binaries are not overthrown; the heteronormative resultant society reincorporates women into their primitive roles of "two legged wombs," new handmaids responsible for the survival of this new Gilead called MaddAddam. The novel's proposed solution of hybridity only affects women's bodies, and even the sterile women long for children. The infertile Toby has to find a substitute motherhood by means of being Blackbeard's spiritual mother. The critique around gender issues in the novel seems incomplete. The openness of the ending marks the possible circularity of the story. MaddAddamites show a social organization that could represent a return to the starting point, that is, a reboot of the model of human society in the trilogy prior to the Waterless Flood. In terms of gender roles particularly, the new MaddAddam society reproduces patriarchal organizations too closely. According to Suvin, the difference between utopia and dystopia relies on the readers' subjective perception of what is the desirable or "perfect" socio-political organization (170). That is, as was stated in the first chapter:

“one person’s utopia is another’s dystopia” (Claeys, “Five Languages” 15). Therefore, *MaddAddam*’s open ending would suggest a positive ending only for patriarchal culture. Consequently, if this were the “positive” or utopian proposal of the ending, the novel would be actually promoting the goodness of patriarchal systems, compromising then *MaddAddam*’s dystopian impulse of social critique. Nevertheless, although the novel considers various scenarios and invites us to evaluate critically different options, there is not any clear or final ethical message in the trilogy; Atwood masterfully uses ambiguity and irony. In her own words: “Message? There is no message. Ha! Be nice to people If you want to do a message rent a billboard and do an advertising campaign” (in Christie n.p.).

The last analytic section has discussed *The Heart Goes Last* with the guide of Dante’s *Inferno*. In *The Divine Comedy*, Heaven is only reachable when humans have been physically and spiritually perfected, that is, transhumanized. Humans have to go through the nine circles and have their sins purified to deserve their place in Heaven. Thus, the analysis of *The Heart Goes Last* follows the protagonists’ process of “transhumanization” by means of tracing a parallel between Dante’s journey and Charmaine’s and Stan’s experiences within the Positron Project. In other words, the analysis evaluates how far humans are ready to go to transhumanize, to become posthumans, even if this process may imply betraying their ethical principles and becoming “Traitors” in the ninth circle of Hell.

At the beginning of the novel, Charmaine and Stan live in a contemporary version of Limbo—Hell’s first circle—on earth and with their decision of signing for the Positron Project, they start their personal process of transformation towards “Heaven,” in a journey that reflects the influence of technology and biotechnological experimentation on human identity. The journey might transform them into posthumans but questionably “better

beings” from the perspective of Western ethics. Charmaine and Stan are the forgotten victims of the economic game big players’ sins. The sand castle of the market economy falls only on the weakest who lose everything they have acquired, probably in a risky manner. In an age called Anthropocene but also Capitalocene, the collapse of the system is provoked by human actions but especially by the needs and demands of a capitalist society that relentlessly undermines traditional Western ethics. In the Limbo section, the analysis has tried to clarify why both Charmaine and Stan seek shelter in the capitalist model of happiness, specifically in the commercial model of home, extremely clean, with decoration accessories, and full of appliances. Charmaine’s conscious memories only reach to the time she lived with her grandmother Win. However, the novel shows many instances of her suffering from a split personality due to a childhood trauma of sexual abuse. Helped by Grandma Win, Charmaine buries her self-perceived dirtiness in domesticity and cleanliness. Grandma Win remains always inside Charmaine’s mind and is the driving force that tries to push her towards a superficial but safe life. Charmaine adapts her personality in accordance with Grandma Win’s old-fashioned model of chaste and domestic woman, and marries Stan in search for a conventional marriage, devoid of passion but sturdy. Stan, on his part, marries an image, a beautiful woman who is for him rather a commodity and a visible demonstration of success than a real woman. In a marriage with a strict division of gender roles, Stan is Charmaine’s protector, who fails in his role after the economic collapse and the loss of their home. The couple, whose only guilt was to buy the capitalist model of success, is the victim of the capitalist system that throws them into the wilderness of a Limbo-like society.

When Charmaine and Stan sign up for the Positron Project, they bow to all its rigid demands: rules, strict control, and prohibitions in order to regain their ideal capitalist way of living. Moreover, privacy does not exist in an organization that controls every

single moment in the lives of the citizens, even their sexuality. Traditionally, according to Foucault, capitalist systems have implemented conservative sexual norms in a further attempt to control human behavior, for the sexual drive is a strong primary impulse in humans and may become a motivation to rebel (*History* 5). In the book, strong sexual desire/lust—the sin in the second circle of Hell—is both an impulse to break any norm and an inalienable part of human identity. Lust is for both, Charmaine and Stan, a trigger for rebellion. Forbidden sex is for Charmaine the means to reconnect with her repressed personality, her “dirty” inner side, so carefully hidden inside her with the help of Grandma Win. Charmaine, usually obsessed with cleaning, is even able to accept “dirty” sexual practices in dirty rooms and houses (*Heart* 55). Lust prompts her to recuperate her real self and her own power of decision even if morally this does not make her a better being. The Positron project demands of its citizens a monotonous way of living, without goals or passion, where one can enter a “drifting mood” (*Heart* 45), but lust is motivational (Lamia n.p.), and in the search for the imaginary Jasmine, Stan too finds emotion and a motive to break the rules. The analysis reminds us that Atwood’s dystopias show protagonists that are subjugated to others’ sexual desires either for the menace of violence—Offred and Toby—, or by biotechnological design—the Craker women “unable to say no” (*MaddAddam* 43). In *The Heart Goes Last*, replicas are created and human brains are modified to satisfy the sexual demands of the powerful. Furthermore, the old historical desire to control human sexuality by artificial means produced attempts to replicate beautiful human bodies without autonomous desires. The dissertation has outlined how the novel raises a future ethical problem: the commercial use of increasingly more sophisticated artificial replicas for sex. This would be a very controversial ethical issue, especially when considering it within the field of posthuman ethics: an inclusive version of ethics that seeks to grant moral consideration and personhood to artificial

beings. However, in the fictional realm of the novel, humans might become cyborgs as well in the precise moment their brains are modified and they lose control of their own sexual desires. Without control over their emotions and primary desires, without free will, something intrinsically human is lost. Both humans and cyborgs become sexual slaves, equated in their loss of free will and thus in their loss of moral consideration and personhood.

In the second subsection of analysis of *The Heart Goes Last*, two pressing worries in the field of the posthuman have been expanded: the implications of surveillance and biotechnology for the construction of the posthuman subject. As the third circle of Dante's *Inferno*, Gluttony, has its vigilant Cerberus, the Positron Project is a closed technologically monitored system that follows to the letter the necessary steps, according to Foucault, to establish a disciplined society: de-individualization, fixed roles and places in the scheme, and intense surveillance that destroys and degrades human identities. The novel provides a space of reflection on how a society as a whole makes concessions to overcome a crisis that may end up in a dystopic scenario of total lack of freedom—a reflection that may be useful in our current crisis due to COVID19.

Greed is considered by Dante as the worst human sin, that which is the source of political and ethical corruption in the world, and it is greed, profit without any ethical limitations, the terrain where Ed develops the business of organ trafficking by killing and selling the bodies of the prisoners. Besides, the analysis has involved a parallel reflection on the actual controversy on organ donations by prison inmates. Both in the novel and in real life the issue of donation of organs is questioned and related to organ trafficking when the potential benefit of the many can justify the dispossession of the bodies of those who are outside the parameters of society. Moreover, not only greed but also moral issues are at stake when the achievement of organs can influence the motives for the death penalty.

A prospective organ transplant would become a justified reason for capital sentence: still violence and killing, but acceptable for a society that accepts that this is morally right.

In Anger, the fifth circle in *Inferno*, the scrutiny examines the subjective reasons, prompted by anger, that lead Jocelyn to seek revenge and break gender roles. Relativity in morals is dangerous, and it is quite clear from the analysis that even though Jocelyn's behavior is provoked by good reasons, the means she uses sadly suggest that, instead of gender equality, Jocelyn has taken the role of the abuser. Men in the novel are weak characters punished because of their sexual impulses. She blackmails and uses sex to control Stan's behavior, forcing him to collaborate in the discovery of the Positron Project's illegal activities. Even if it is a righteous aim, once again, for the common good, she does it without Stan's consent, so consequently she is a perpetuator of abuse and sexual coercion. Moreover, Jocelyn's unfaithful husband, Phil, has his punishment as well: the strong woman is as despicable as Ed intended to be and arranges Phil's brain modification surgery. Free sexual desire outside marriage seems morally unacceptable, something that deserves punishment, it is only Jocelyn who decides what is wrong and what is right. She uses a different set of rules for women and men and by doing bad things, she becomes an evil—"bad female"—character, yet a strong and multifaceted woman.

In the third and last subsection, *The Heart Goes Last* is tested to outline its generic characteristics as a dystopian text belonging to the second decade of the 21st Century that incorporates new issues and forgets about others in its negative illustration of a possible future. The sixth circle of Dante's Hell is dedicated to the heretics, those who challenge belief systems and opinions accepted in their society. In a sense, any dystopian novel is a heresy against the society the novel is criticizing. *The Heart Goes Last*, a dystopian fiction in the time of the posthuman, is a challenging critique and a thought provoking novel against pressing contemporary issues that are a field of research and source of profit for

the capitalist system: the manipulation of human bodies. The novel, departing from the worries of feminist dystopias, emphasizes the dangers of enhancement or the search for immortality, long-held desires not specific of any gender. Further, in feminist dystopias the source of resistance that gives meaning to the dystopian narrative is to be found within the oppressed (Cortiel). However, in *The Heart Goes Last*, the resistance against the nightmarish society comes from a woman, Jocelyn, who belongs to the oppressors' class; she does not really end with the dystopian society, but creates one version that is more adequate to her own taste. In addition, the book reflects on how contemporary media—talk shows, internet blogs, and user comments—contribute to expanding moral relativism and to creating an accepted version of reality that may support unethical practices for the common good. The novel reminds the readers how non-condemnatory and morally detached analyses—as that which was carried on the Nunavit Conference in *The Handmaid's Tale*—are daily developed in our present-day factual society, in the information, but not truth, age.

Violence is an aggression generally exerted over a weaker other, over oneself, or over nature. The subsection dedicated to the seventh circle of Hell, the residence of the violent sinners, traces the links between violence and oppression of the other in the transhuman desire for enhancement. In the 21st century, the more powerful classes in society need the bodies of the weakest to achieve their desired goal of enhancement; it is a time not only of economic but also of biological oppression because there is no possibility of biological experimentation without biological material, which in the novel comes primarily from women. *The Heart Goes Last* takes up the subject of the dispossession and mutilation of women's bodies—already tackled in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam*—and expands the implications towards the genetic manipulation of the bodies of the powerless in general, not only women. It is the powerful *Homo Faber*

transforming the weaker *Homo Sapiens*, and the effects, still immeasurable, that this transformation—enhancement?—will have in the future. A classical dystopian novel such as *Brave New World* considered the ethical implications of genetic experimentation within the realm of science fiction and anticipated currently real scientific developments. Whereas a novel like *The Heart Goes Last* tries to inspire ethically based critiques about our real time and thus recuperate the strong potential of fiction as a space for reflection that may question and transform reality.

The last sin investigated in this subsection of analysis is fraud, as exemplified in the characterization of Charmaine's physicality and identity: the contrast between the sweet, innocent Doris-Day-like blondie and the killings she willingly perpetrates. The association between particular physical features and specific behaviors developed in the field of Physiognomy, an ancient but questionable pseudo-science that has perpetuated for centuries biased stereotypes that have contributed to exclusion and racism. In addition, the advent of technologically supported psychologist practices has launched an involuntary revival of Physiognomy and the danger of exclusionary practices backed on biased scientific data. In the novel, Charmaine tries to adapt her personality to the others' expectations and genuinely tries to be "Doris Day," the good-girl type and embodiment of whiteness, sexual and racial purity, very far away from dark sexual desires. However, her affair with Max/Phil awakes her inner dark self, a murderer with a common external appearance, like the Nazi murderer Adolf Eichmann. Physiognomy fails—and does not caution us that average people are capable of the worst atrocities. Following Hannah Arendt's writings, which plainly described Eichmann's motivations and strategies for self-deception to become a murderer, the analysis has found almost total commonality between him and the sweet Charmaine. Both share their lust for power, the use of neutral and compassionate language to embellish an atrocious reality, and the rejection of any

responsibility for their acts hidden in the excuse of due obedience to orders. However, Eichmann and Charmaine are accountable for their acts, for moral choice is not renounceable but a mandatory, absolute, and fundamental duty for the individual to build a better future. At the end of the analysis metaphorical journey towards the posthuman Heaven, one last sin, Treachery, grants the opportunity to develop a broader reflection about how the pursuit of the posthuman enhancement might imply the betrayal of the major values we esteem are ethic: respect for the environment and for the other. The final betrayal to our ethical model of human behavior would be the expansion of all the negative effects of aggressive capitalism, that is, an increase in economic and gender oppression with the addition of biological oppression.

Undeniably, Atwood's literary project has a steady social dimension. Her fiction has been for decades a call for individual reflection and action against aggressive capitalism and the inherent social injustice in which it is based—which threatens any ethical action towards the environment and the other. The novels analyzed in this dissertation highlight the fragility of individualistic models of success sold to average citizens in a system where happiness is based on the accumulation of goods. The idea of home as a safe haven where the suffering of the others can be ignored is shaken: the middle and lower classes are always at risk, and even more so when individuals overlook the fate of their peers, where “the newspapers stories [are] . . . bad dreams dreamt by others” (*Handmaid* 66). Atwood's dystopias collectively draw attention to the dark side of present society, clearly manifested in the enormous gap that exists between the isolated and protected ruling class and the rest of the people, but also to the generalized power of human weaknesses and greed, even if the species is evolving into the posthuman. In their allegorical and speculative ethos, the novels of the corpus share a fundamental concern with the present status quo that structurally needs the sacrifice of new powerless victims

to maintain social injustice and class privileges. Moreover, periodic economic crises, in which only the lower strata of society are the victims, are the recurrent “debugging mode” of the system that once and again reemerges intact and with the incorporation of new elements for increasing social disparities.

Atwood depicts the evolution of our present society in its incorporation of biotechnology and surveillance technologies as new means to extend social discrimination. Thus, her fiction ends up portraying how a greedy society assimilates the transhumanist dream of posthuman immortality to transform it into a dystopia. *The Handmaid's Tale*, *MaddAddam*, and *The Heart Goes Last* describe human evolution helped by technoscience either as the ultimate step triggering human extinction or as an excuse for the appearance and consolidation of disciplined societies where individuals have lost any civil right and the ownership of their bodies. Atwood shows how economic and biological oppression of the other is an act of violence that can never be justified by the alleged common good. Thus, her dystopias actively participate in a collective project of fierce criticism of how advanced technologies and biotechnologies without any meaningful ethical oversight by courts or political representatives control citizens' identities and trade with their bodies. The novels bring to the fore how human beings live in a constant process of transformation, it is true, but the responsibility for each of the steps in the process is individual, too. Her fiction shows an underlying concern with issues that, sadly enough, are far from belonging to science fiction material: organ trafficking, surrogacy conditioned by some women's need to survive, and behavioral control by surgery or by the use of drugs. In other words, Atwood portrays how some lives matter more than others do and how the social gap becomes also the biological gap in societies where the powerless are no more than spare pieces for the powerful. The commercial corruption of the transhuman idealistic scheme shows a version of the posthuman subject

that, far from incorporating the proposals of critical posthumanism, reinstates anthropocentrism and binary thinking. Furthermore, biotechnological developments increase not only the supremacy of socially powerful human beings but also gender power imbalance: patriarchal structures seem to be reinforced since women become the source and site for biogenetic experimentation. Nevertheless, Atwood, who consistently claims that “women are human beings, with the full range of saintly and demonic behaviors this entails, including criminal ones” (“Am I” n.p.), subverts biased idyllic representations of the female by means of proposing alternative models of women that range from generous and brave to weak, egotistic, and evil. Female characters that, in the end, reveal the impossibility of stereotyping any human being.

In their political dimension, Atwood’s dystopias are real calls for action. They warn about surveillance technologies, implemented every hour and every day in present-day society and the perfect tool to destroy hard-earned citizens’ rights and freedom on the pretext of safeguarding the common good. Furthermore, her novels investigate the effective partnership between extreme surveillance and the manipulation of information to build totalitarian societies. Unfortunately, the conscious manipulation of news is very common in present-day society, where the spread of false and manipulative messages enable individuals to indulge in their prejudices and ideological differences. However, in practical terms, it does not matter how genuine or questionable the danger for the common interest is, whether society is terrified by terrorist threats, by the devastating effects of an economic crisis or imprisoned by an epidemic, like our COVID 19 catastrophe. Cumulatively, the novels contribute to show how Western society, from the 1980s to the 2010s, has to some extent fallen also into the trap of being increasingly dependent on technological extensions that inadvertently have become tools for controlling our lives.

The latest novels' latent critique of the pursuit of the enhanced [trans]human being call the attention on the notion that an anthropocentric view of the world cannot be sustained any longer. Humans are shown as part of a bigger structure where Atwood acknowledges not only the interconnection between humans and technology but also the interaction between humans and their natural surroundings. Her fiction puts forward a critique on environmental destruction by means of showing its effects on human bodies, on the social fabric, and consequently on individual rights and identities. Climate change, pollution, and—prophetically—a global virus trigger in the novels the possibility of human extinction. Critically and ironically, Atwood explores how environmental awareness has no significant effects when it is linked to a mainstream model of sustainability that does not promote any remarkable change in Western standards of living. However, individual ethical choices affect the environment, the others, and themselves. Therefore, individual accountability cannot be hidden in the crowd, which at the end is only the sum of many individuals. Environmental destruction transforms human bodies but also seems to corrupt human moral behavior. Those situated at the higher levels of the social pyramid do not want to renounce any benefit in favor of the survival of the powerless; no matter if they are other humans, animals or plants, and a major transformation is needed to check climate change.

Atwood's dystopias are a call for critical opposition and a call for action. Her fiction wants to awaken readers' consciences with their ethical and political claims but action is needed also outside fiction. The circular movement of the endings in Atwood's dystopias imply that we must also learn from the mistakes of the past to avoid dystopias to come true. Finally, Atwood's novels portray how meaningless is a life without purpose and meaning, "no calendars, no dead-lines, no long-term goals" (*MaddAddam*, 130). At the moment of writing these lines we are actually living within the limits of a dystopia, a

life without short-term goals or plans. We have to face the idea of an uncertain future that we had taken for granted only some months ago. Our present plight seems to recall the uncertainty that Atwood's dystopias transmit. However, Atwood's novels, even if ambivalent in their open endings, still present two main things that are worth saving: literature and love. Atwood's faith in literature reveals that, maybe, we still have time to react and change the ongoing process towards a dystopic future into a process that may result in a morally enhanced new being, because, as the writer claims "Nothing is ever settled" (*The Heart Goes Last* 305).

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