“How would you know if you were the last man on Earth?”
A Comparison of Margaret Atwood’s and Cormac McCarthy’s Post-Apocalyptic fiction

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vorgelegt von
Lucy STELZHAMER

am Institut für: Anglistik
Begutachter: Ao. Univ. - Prof. Mag. Dr. phil. Martin Löschnigg

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(Lucy Stelzhamer)
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At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

–Albert Schweitzer,
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1. **Introduction**

"Nobody wants to be here and nobody wants to leave."

— Cormac McCarthy (*The Road* p. 169)

"After everything that's happened, how can the world still be so beautiful? Because it is."

— Margaret Atwood (*Oryx and Crake* p. 429)

When I started studying English back in 2009, one of my major drives was my passion for literature. However, while writing this thesis, I often found myself in doubt of the purposefulness of literature in general, and my diploma thesis in particular, especially when compared to applied sciences. However, in the midst of the writing process, I started to understand that literature and the arts are a mouthpiece for humanities’ concerns. Dennis Sansom argues that “the artist’s imagination, especially in literature, pictures what can happen...enables us to imagine what the pure reason of science and the practical reason of moral universalizability cannot enable us to know” (Sansom 2007:3).

Worldwide epidemics, nuclear disasters, and radioactive incidents, terrorism, thousands upon thousands of people fleeing their home countries due to inhuman treatment and ongoing wars – in 2016, it seems that end of the world is nearer than ever before. Without any doubt, humanity is constantly being exposed to continual unrest, and in a society that has been undergoing tremendous upheavals, post-apocalyptic and dystopian novels are more popular than ever. The amount of literature and media concerned with apocalypses has dramatically increased. It seems that readers are especially interested in literature which deals with the question: “What is going to happen after the end of the world as we know it?” The novels I deal with in my thesis can be seen as a warning of what will happen to the earth and humankind if we continue
to live the way we are used to. To some extent, they offer solutions and new ways of thinking about our behaviour.

Margaret Atwood, undoubtedly one of Canada’s most prominent writers, has published more than 30 books, among them several dystopic novels. Her most prominent is The Handmaid’s Tale, which was published in 1985. In 2016, she released another dystopic novel, The Heart Goes Last. In this thesis, I will deal with her dystopic MaddAddam trilogy, which includes: Oryx and Crake (2003), The Year of the Flood (2009), and MaddAddam (2013). In these three novels, Atwood creates a terrifying future landscape, and a world which has been subjected to extended consumerism at the cost of both humanity and nature.

Cormac McCarthy has written about rising and falling civilizations a lot in his border trilogies, but The Road is his first novel to deal with a post-apocalyptic world. It was published in 2006 and has achieved great popularity, which consequently led to the book being awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The Road paints a picture of a deserted microcosm, with a father and son wandering in an abandoned world, presumably destroyed by a nuclear disaster– the only “good guys” left on the road.

In this thesis, I want to take a deeper look at the dystopic societies created by Atwood and McCarthy. The main purpose of this thesis is to compare and contrast Cormac McCarthy’s The Road with Margaret Atwood’s trilogy, which includes Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam, by examining certain thematic aspects, namely, the role of religion, women, and nature in those four novels. First, I will give a brief overview of the novels’ plots, their narrative structure, and their settings. Since it is impossible to summarize the content of four novels in detail, this section will simply provide a short but necessary glimpse of the plot in order to facilitate the understanding of my thesis statement. The second part of the thesis will provide a short definition of dystopian science fiction and discuss how it has evolved, in order to clarify the term, and provide examples of other similar works. Furthermore, it will describe the development of utopian and dystopian fiction as a genre and then proceed to give a definition of post-apocalyptic fiction. The third part of this thesis will consist of a thorough analysis of the novels. It will place the most emphasis on how humanity is presented within the novels, as well as on what values humans attach great importance to, in particular, religion, the
treatment of women, and nature. I will discuss these aspects with regard to their effects on the post-apocalyptic society in order to obtain a more understandable picture of the fictive societies the authors have created. Ultimately, this analysis will attempt to achieve a better understanding of the post-apocalyptic worlds created by Cormac McCarthy and Margaret Atwood.

2. Theoretical Background – Dystopia and Post-Apocalypse

The term ‘utopia’ was coined by the English politician Thomas More in 1516, when he published his literary work *Utopia*. Its title was compounded from two Greek words: “no” (ou”) and “place” (“topos”) and therefore can be translated to “nowhere”. *Utopia* tells the story of a fictional island society which is presented as the ideal country (cf. Berghahn and Seeber 1983: 7; cf. O’Brien 2007: 43). The 1993 edition of the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* gives multiple definitions for the term:

(a) An imaginary or hypothetical place or state of things considered to be perfect, a condition of ideal (esp. social) perfection
(b) An imaginary or distant country
(c) An impossibly ideal scheme, esp. for social improvement (cf. Sargisson 2007: 30)

Originally, the term ‘utopia’ was used positively, in order to describe a vision of an ideal and perfect society. However, nowadays the term is generally used when talking about something unattainable and illusory, which seems not to be realizable. The term is not only used in literature, but also in philosophy, architecture, ideology, within political discourse, and concerning food. In the 20th century, the term underwent a boom, and now is particularly often used as a political buzzword (cf. Mohr 2005: 11-12; cf. Berghahn & Seeber 1983: 7).

There is no critical consensus regarding a literary meaning of ‘utopia’ and the utopian genre. Multiple critics (i.e. Darko Suvin, George Kateb, David Bleich, Tom Moylan) have discussed the term, but its definition remains contradictory. Margaret Mead argues that
utopias may be seen from many points of view – as projections from individual experience; as projections from individual experience stamped by the point of view of a particular period; as sterile blue-prints, too narrow to confine the natural varieties of the human mind for very long, as when they are lived out by small cult groups. . . . Or they may be seen as those visions of future possibilities which lead the minds of men [sic] forward into the future. (Mead 1971: 43, quoted in Mohr 2005-13)

However, Berghahn and Seeber argue that there are three recurring definitions which can be interpreted as constitutive of the genre:

(d) Entwurf einer alternativen Ordnung des menschlichen Zusammenlebens; [...] Im Vergleich zur Ursprungsgesellschaft [...] aber “anders” und hypothetisch möglich sein muss
(e) Die andere Ordnung verweist [...] kritisch auf die Mißstände der jeweiligen Entstehungszeit (utopische Intention)
(f) Rhetorik der Fiktion, die [...] dem Entwurf die Illusion des Wirklichen und “Wahrscheinlichen” gibt. (Berghahn and Seeber 1983:17)

Levitas (2005: 5) also adds that there are many different variations of utopianisms:

[i]n terms of content, certainly; but also in terms of form (a literary genre of utopia, political writing, golden age myths); in terms of location (past, future, Mars or Shangri-la); and in terms of function – for utopia may act as compensation, critique or as the catalyst of change.

Utopias are concerned with a current moment in history, but also represent this specific moment in a strange manner. The setting is taken to a place in which a better life for humankind is possible—the future (cf. Moylan 1986:35-38). A “literary utopia is commonly understood as a visionary reform, describing an imaginary, ideal commonwealth whose fictional inhabitants exist under perfect conditions in a perfect social, legal and political system” (Mohr 2015: 15).

Literary representations of utopia are often accompanied by other images of ideal worlds, for example, descriptions of religious anticipations such as the Garden of Eden and Paradise are common. Additionally, folktales, legends, fantasy worlds, as well as practiced communitarianism (i.e. based on the theories of Charles Fourier, Étienne Cabet and Robert Owen) are quite common. (cf. Mohr 2005: 11-14). Since the 16th century, literary utopia as a “narrative form in time of deep change” has prospered in “times of deep change” (Moylan 1986:3). After 1850, utopian writing became more rebellious since the dominant class’ control had become omnipresent by the mid-nineteenth century. The literary utopias published at that time were no longer situated in the present, but
rather relocated to a future time and showed what consequences the revolutionary and historical change had brought upon the future utopian society. Some examples of such utopian literature are H.G. Wells’ *Modern Utopia*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* and Jack London’s *The Iron Heel*. In the twentieth century, utopian writing became less common due to the threat of nuclear destruction, war, and massive famines.

Consequently, utopian literature re-emerged as dystopian (cf. Moylan 1986: 5-9). Sargent (1994, quoted in Donawerth 2015: 29) defines dystopian literature as a text in which

a non-existent society [is] described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived.

The term itself was first used by politician John Stuart Mills in a parliamentary speech in 1868 and means “a non-existing place” (Greek “dys” meaning “bad, hard” and “kakó-topos” meaning “wicked place”) (cf. Mohr 2005: 27-28.; Voigts 2015: 1). Jan Hollm argues that “dystopian narratives aim at raising awareness among their readers, which might lead to changing the current course of contemporary society in particular and of humankind in general” (Hollm 2015: 379).

However, utopia and dystopia should not be seen as opposing terms. Booker (1994a: 15) argues that “not only is one man’s utopia another man’s dystopia but utopian visions of an ideal society often inherently suggest a criticism of the current order of things as nonideal, while dystopian warnings of the dangers of ‘bad’ utopias still allow for the possibility of good utopias.” However, in contrast to utopia, dystopia describes the worst possible futures – while utopian visions show a desirable future, dystopic literature draws an appalling one. Moylan and Baccolini (2003: 7) argue that it is “traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story, where utopia(n hope) is maintained outside the story: it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape such a pessimistic future.”

The first examples of dystopian fiction were Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), and *1984* (1949) by George Orwell. Dystopian literature mainly uses defamiliarization since by “focusing their critiques on society on spatially or temporarily distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices [...]” (Booker 1994a: 19). Baccolini and Moylan
(2003: 2) argue that dystopia serves as a “prophetic vehicle, [...] for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could [...] turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia’s downside.” Keith Booker emphasises the fact that “the modern turn to dystopian fiction is largely attributable to perceived inadequacies in existing social and political systems” (Booker 1994a: 20). He argues that real-world dystopias, such as Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia, lend an air of tragedy and an urgency to dystopian fiction and its advice and warnings. Especially after the World War II, multiple dystopian narratives were published in the US; these included, for example, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Player Piano*, B. F. Skinner’s *Walden Two*, and Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (c.f. Booker 1994a: 20-21).

In the 1980s, the production of utopian fiction came to an absolute standstill. At the same time, more and more female writers discovered the dystopic genre. The first feminist dystopias were published at the beginning of the Women’s liberation movement in the late 1960s. In the 1970s, several feminist dystopias were published, mainly due to the strong women’s movement and the questioning of the primacy of heterosexual relationships; some examples of these include Piercy’s *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* (1970), Charna’s *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), and Fairbairn’s *Benefits* (1979). According to Mohr (2007:7), these feminist dystopian “texts interweave utopian and dystopian narrative strands,” and with this literary change “utopia went undercover: as utopian strategies contained in contemporary, predominantly feminist dystopias”.

The main focus of most examples of feminist dystopias was the question of gender hierarchy, sexual politics, and women’s rights. Moreover, it included new topics, such as restrictive gender roles, superior masculinity, the absence of females in literary texts, violence against women, and lesbianism. In Margaret Atwood’s first dystopic novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*, women are deprived of literacy. Although most feminist dystopias use a direct time prediction, some, including *The Handmaid’s Tale*, are applied to prehistoric times (cf. Mohr 2005:35-37).

Since utopias, which had been primarily written by male authors, did not have any radically different places for women, and, because, historically-speaking, women have often been citizens of real life dystopia, this turn of female authors towards the dystopic genre is not surprising. “Women’s dystopian visions exacerbated precisely
those critical issues [...] that lie at the basis of gender inequality, demonstrating to what extent gendered identities are not ‘natural’ but are instead the products of an androcentric, totalitarian discourse” (Baccolini 2006:2-3). However, Mohr argues that “a preference for temporal extrapolation and an increased interest in technological and scientific developments go hand-in-hand with a turning to [science fiction]” and that science fiction has become “a concomitant element of much of today’s feminist dystopian and utopian writing” (Mohr 2005: 37).

Mohr (2007:6) defines science fiction as an “umbrella term”, under which “utopia, dystopia, speculative fiction, fabulation, science fiction, and the like are often interchangeably lumped together.” Asimov goes as far as to say that “there are probably hundreds of individual definitions, but that is as bad as none at all” (Asimov 1953: 158, quoted in Mohr 2007: 6). Due to the lack of a singular definition, many literary works are listed under multiple labels and cannot be assigned a certain genre. In postmodern times, it is not only impossible to find a defining category for each published literary work, it is also not even expected because, due to its lack of classification, numerous generic crossovers are created. Contemporary literature and media in particular are characterized by a “generic hybridity that precludes clear demarcations,” since some works certainly offer dystopic thoughts while they are not science fiction (e.g. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians) while, for example Lord of the Flies is certainly not science fiction but contains a lot of dystopian aspects (cf. Voigts 2015:6). There are, however, certain distinctive features which are common of both utopian/dystopian and science fiction literature. They share a sense of distress about the future, as well as some narrative strategies, e.g. alternate societies, extrapolation and defamiliarization. A strict distinction between dystopia and utopia is impossible, since both genres show a generic variability (cf. Mohr 2007: 6-7). Additionally, Booker argues that numerous modern literary works contain dystopic elements even though they would not be considered clear examples of dystopian literature since any literary work which comprises political or social criticism can be said to provide a dystopian approach (cf. Booker 1994b: 3)

Several scholars have discussed the connection between dystopic and post-apocalyptic fiction. While Curtis (2010:7, quoted in Voigts 2015:5) argues that “post-apocalyptic fiction exists at a genre crossroads between science fiction, horror and
utopia/dystopia”, Mary Manjikian wants to draw a clear line between the genres. She claims that there are fundamental differences between dystopia/utopia “looking backward” and post-apocalyptic catastrophe narratives’ “backward induction” (cf. Manjikian 2014: 105-123, quoted in Voigts 2015:5). Hollm goes even further and argues that “the differences between the apocalyptic and dystopian discourses remain overwhelming,” but that it is in fact the “very amalgamation of the dichotomies involved that lends creative energy to this kind of fiction” (Hollm 2015: 380).

Both apocalyptic narratives and dystopic visions can be read as types of ‘littérature engagée’, which is defined as literature which actively engages with political, ideological and social topics and actively defends them (cf. Hollm 2015: 379). Margaret Atwood has also commented on the role of fiction:

> I believe that fiction writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community. Fiction is one of the few forms left through which we may examine our society not in its particular but in its typical aspects; through which we can see ourselves and the ways in which we behave towards each other, through which we can see others and judge them and ourselves. (Atwood 1982: 346)

The motifs of catastrophe and disaster are frequently applied in both dystopian narratives and science fiction scenarios. Synonyms for these post-apocalyptic narratives are ‘last-man’ and ‘post-disaster’ narrative, which consist, according to Florian Mussnug, of a “journey through the wasteland created by cataclysm; attempts to establish a new community; the re-emergence of violence and conflict; often, but not always, a return to civilization” (2012: 334). One of the first post-apocalyptic narratives was Mary Shelly’s The Last Man (1826), which, set at the end of the 21st century, tells the story of mankind’s erasure due to a global pandemic plague. The novel ends with a sole survivor, whose fate evidently is sealed. The Last Man can be called both dystopian and post-apocalyptic since it offers social criticism as well as a post-apocalyptic setting and plot (cf. Mussgnug 2012: 334; cf. Hollm 2015:380-381). Mussnug furthermore argues that “last man narratives do not constitute a canon in the strict sense of the word, and often appear unaware of the existence of other examples of their kind”. However, although they lack an “overt genre consciousness”, similarities can be found. These include the “suggestion of an essential and embodied masculinity lurking beneath the veneer of civilization” (Mussnug 2012: 334). Mussnug argues that these violent male fantasies play an important role in post-apocalyptic literature. Some examples of these male-centred last man
narratives are M. P. Shiel’s *The Purple Cloud* (1901), Sydney Fowler Wright’s *Deluge* (1927), Alfred Noyles’s *The Last Man* (1940), and George R. Stewart’s *Earth Abides* (1949). In the second half of the 20th century, authors began to incorporate more satire and irony into their post-apocalyptic novels. The degree of satire does vary, as can be seen in *The Road*, where only a low degree of satire is used, in contrast to the MaddAddam trilogy, which uses a high amount of irony and satire (cf. Mussgnug 2012: 334-335, cf. Voigts 2015: 6).

There are a variety of causes given for mankind’s downfall in literature, i.e. apocalyptic plagues, extra-terrestrial causes, eco-apocalyptic dystopias, and apocalyptic change through war (cf. Hollm 2015: 380-383). Jan Hollm argues that the two “most prominent reasons in fiction for the overwhelming destruction of human life on earth are extra-terrestrial intervention or pandemic plagues” (Hollm 2015: 380). Both *The Road* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy can be seen as post-apocalyptic dystopias and the reason for humanity’s devastation in these novels can be assigned to such causes. In an interview, Atwood was asked to which genre she would assign her trilogy:

Speculative Fiction involves things that we can do right now, so I would call my book speculative fiction stretched a bit. It’s made from components that we already have, but those are pushed forward into the future and expanded. A lot of my Twitter followers send me strange science stories that they think fit in with my book, and I have to say, there are more and more of them coming along and we do now have the ability to do a man-made virus. And we certainly have the ability to, to change or morph viruses that we already have, that is scary. (Online Bigthink)

She furthermore argues that her reason for writing the MaddAddam trilogy was a “number of burning issues that have now become even more burning” (Online Bigthink).

3. **Plot and Narrative Structure**

3.1. **Oryx and Crake**

*Oryx and Crake* is a dystopic novel written by Margaret Atwood in 2003 and is the first novel of the MaddAddam trilogy, which deals with the decay of humankind. The novel takes place after a plague epidemic nearly extinguished humanity. The protagonist is Snowman, formerly known as Jimmy, presumably the last human being alive, who
tries to survive in the burning sun with the help of the Crakers, a new, genetically modified, better version of human beings. In contrast to Snowman, they are designed to endure such heat and lack of food, and therefore are adapting to the post-apocalyptic scenery very well. Via flashbacks and memories, the reader learns how the epidemic came about: Crake, Snowman’s former best friend, created the epidemic in order to erase humanity and give the earth a new chance with its new inhabitants, the Crakers. Jimmy’s memories incorporate mainly Crake, as well as Oryx, a former sex worker, who becomes Jimmy’s girlfriend and a teacher to the Crakers. At the end of the novel, it becomes obvious that Jimmy is not the last human who survived when he meets several others. This is where Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood intertwine.

3.2. The Year of the Flood

The Year of the Flood (2009) and Oryx and Crake take place simultaneously and at certain points, the action overlaps. The narrative is told via two female perspectives: that of Ren and that of Toby. Both women survived the epidemic due to lucky circumstances and both were former members of the vegetarian environmental activist cult, God’s Gardeners. The religious group was dedicated to protecting nature and the Earth. The novel jumps back and forth from the present to the past. Through those flashbacks, the women’s pasts are examined. Toby finds shelter with the God’s Gardeners after losing her parents and being abused by her boss. She later becomes a teacher to Ren. Ren’s story frequently intermingles with Toby’s. She was a member of the Gardener’s as a child but later becomes a dancer at a high-end sex club. She is locked in the club’s decontamination’s room when the epidemic, or as the Gardener’s call it, the “Waterless Flood”, takes place, and therefore is not contaminated. She is saved by her childhood friend Amanda, and, together with Toby, they come across Jimmy/Snowman at the beach. This is where both novels end.
3.3. MaddAddam

*MaddAddam*, which was published in 2013, starts where the two previous novels left off. Many of the stories told in the last book of the trilogy took place earlier and are retold as stories to the Crakers. Those stories mainly include the childhood of Adam One, the Gods Gardener's leader, and his brother Zeb. In *MaddAddam*, all of the remaining humans dealt with in the prequels come together - the Crakers, the God's Gardeners and the MaddAddamites (a more radical splinter group of Gardeners, who actively engage in bio terrorism). Together they try to form a new society. The story is told through mainly through stories told to the Crakers in order to explain the world. Previously, those stories would have been told by Jimmy/Snowman, who in *MaddAddam* is too sick to do so. Another protagonist in the last novel is Blackbeard, a young Craker who shows special interest in Toby. Consequently, he spends a lot of time with her and she teaches him how to write. The group acclimatizes to their new environment and several women give birth to human-craker hybrids. The last chapter is written by Blackbeard himself after Toby has committed suicide. The fact that Blackbeard is able to write offers some relief for the future since Atwood provides a new author to tell the story of what is yet to come.

3.4. “The Road” by Cormac McCarthy

The Road is the tenth novel by Cormac McCarthy and was published in 2006. It is narrated via a third person narrator and located in a deserted post-apocalyptic setting, after a cataclysmic event. The reason for the apocalypse remains unknown throughout the novel. The protagonists are a father and child, referred to throughout the novel as “man” and “boy”. They are traveling south on the road, trying not to be killed by the fellow humans remaining who have turned to cannibalism. The boy’s mother has committed suicide since she was not able to cope with the external circumstances. The boy is characterized by his everlasting goodness since he wants to help most people they encounter. The man’s condition gets worse throughout the novel and on several
occasions he thinks about killing himself and the boy. However, in the end, the man dies due to sickness and the boy is united with another family who have survived the catastrophe, and who give him shelter and a home.
4. **Analysis**

4.1. **Religion and Spirituality**

“Human understanding is fallible, and we see through a glass, darkly. Any religion is a shadow of God. But the shadows of God are not God.”

— Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (p. 224-25)

“There is no God and we are his prophets.”

— Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (p. 170)

Religion seems to play a major part in post-apocalyptic novels. However, the question arises of why religion is of such importance in a world that is crumbling down to its very foundation:

[... The possibility of gaining meaning and understanding may be the single most important part of religion's appeal. Religion appeals most strongly to people who are confronted with misfortunes that are beyond their direct control. Sickness, accident, war, danger, and other events bring people to religion, and religion comforts them with ways of understanding and sometimes ostensibly dealing with these problems. [...] In simple terms, we are too well off to crave the comforts of religious explanation. When modern individuals confront severe misfortune, however, such as a life-threatening illness in the family, they often find themselves reaching for their faith again. (Baumeister 2005:158)

Baumeister suggests that individuals who are confronted with uncontrollable hardships turn to religion because some incidents seem so utterly unfair that society decides to look for answers in prayer, which is the case in all four novels covered in this analysis, although the approaches to God and religion vary.

According to Wielenberg (cf. 2011:3), contemporary research suggests a correlation between religiosity and misery. In fact, there is evidence that the happier a nation is, the less religious they are, while the highest levels of religiosity are encountered in countries which are the most socially dysfunctional. Zuckerberg (cf. 2008:4, quoted in Wielenberg 2011:3) argues that a contributing factor to this is that
misery requires faith. However, many philosophers stress the importance of God in that his nonexistence would leave human lives meaningless. For example, William Craig, a contemporary Christian philosopher, argues:

If there is no God, then man and the universe are doomed. Like prisoners condemned to death, we await our unavoidable execution. ... The contributions of the scientist to the advance of human knowledge, the researches of the doctor to alleviate pain and suffering, the efforts of the diplomat to secure peace in the world, the sacrifices of good men everywhere to better the lot of the human race—all these come to nothing. In the end they don't make one bit of difference, not one bit. Each person's life is therefore without ultimate significance. And because our lives are ultimately meaningless, the activities we fill our lives with are also meaningless. The long hours spent in study at the university, our jobs, or interests, our friendships—all these are, in the final analysis, utterly meaningless. This is the horror of modern man: because he ends in nothing, he is nothing. (Craig 1994:58-9, quoted in Wielenberg 2011:11)

Henceforth, since the protagonists in these novels are facing the end of the world, they turn towards a higher power to find meaning.

In the first subchapter I will take a look at how religion is used to provide hope in the post-apocalyptic novels. In the second subchapter I will deal with the abuse of religion as a means to an end,

4.1.1. Finding Hope in Religion

Particularly in The Road, where all moral and cultural institutions known to humankind have been extinguished, religion and belief in supernatural beings are at the forefront of the father's thinking. In a world where humanity and kindness are virtually extinct, it is evident that the father adheres to the thought that a God-like figure may actually exist. Religious and spiritual terms are sprinkled heavily throughout the novel, although the man often doubts the existence of a God and repeatedly curses him:

He started down the rough wooden steps. [...] Coldness and damp. An ungodly stench. The boy clutched at his coat. He could see part of a stone wall. Clay floor. An old mattress darkly stained. [...] Huddled against the wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and stumps of them blackened and burnt. The smell was hideous.

Jesus, he whispered.

Then one by one they turned and blinked in the pitiful light. Help us, they whispered.
Please help us.

Christ, he said. Oh Christ. (TR 110; emphasis mine)

McCarthy uses three different religious terms within this passage. The man, when he sees the slaves/prisoners, utters “Christ” and “Jesus” and describes the stench as “ungodly.” Describing the scene as “ungodly” leaves behind the impression that even though the man at times seems to be a non-believer, he still acknowledges that there might be a higher power, a God-like figure, and this God would have not condoned such a situation.

Over the course of the novel the father tries to create a world for his son which seems meaningful and less frightening. According to Rambo, he accomplishes this by using the elements of mission and identity which are mainly conveyed through often repeated verbalizations e.g. “We’re carrying the fire” and “Are we the good guys?” (TR 128f.) (cf. Rambo 2008: 104). For instance, after having broken into the cellar where cannibals are holding victims’ hostage to eat their flesh, the boy asks his father whether they would ever eat another human being.

[Boy] We wouldn’t ever eat anybody, would we?
[Man] No of course not.
Even if we are starving?
[...] 
No. We wouldn’t.
No matter what.
No. Not matter what.
Because we’re the good guys.
Yes.
And we’re carrying the fire.
And we’re carrying the fire. Yes.
Okay. (TR: 128f)

Throughout the novel, the boy often needs his father to reassure him that they are the “good guys”. However, the term ‘good’ is often used to justify actions which would be questionable in another context. Rambo suggests that the moral structure we are used to cannot be applied to this post-apocalyptic world. Furthermore, she concludes that the boy asking his father if they are still the “good guys” at numerous essential points in the novel may be interpreted as the boy’s growing awareness that good and bad
cannot always be differentiated (cf. Rambo 2008:104). After having encountered so many “bad guys”, it is certainly surprising that the man and boy have not turned into similar bestial figures as most other people have. However, by allotting them the special task of “carrying the fire” McCarthy attributes godly features to the father and son. The father, just before he dies, tells the son that the fire is inside him because the boy questions its mere existence (cf. TR 279). Søfting argues that

[... it could well be that the father is right and that this is how we are meant to see these two remarkable characters; as people chosen by God to carry the light on through the darkness, to preserve humanity within themselves as examples, and that this is the reason why they seem somehow predestined to avoid moral degeneration. (Søfting 2013:711)]

The man tries to instil in the boy the belief that he carries the fire inside him in order to make him go on after his father passes away – so the fire is an apologue which should keep the boy going. However, Wielenberg suggests that there may be more to this statement than keeping the boy on the road:

Carrying the fire and being a good guy are closely related: only good guys carry the fire. Before he dies, the man also tells the child: “You’re the best guy. You always were” (279). Prior to this point, the man has always maintained that they are the good guys and that they are carrying the fire. As he is dying, the man seems to be saying that the child is the true good guy. What are we to make of this? (Wielenberg 2010:4)

There are many different scholarly opinions regarding the metaphor of fire in The Road. Rambo labels it as a “statement of mission”, which helps the father to find a purpose in their otherwise futile journey (Rambo 2008:104). Michael Chabon argues that “as they travel the father feeds his son a story, the nearest that he can come to a creed or a reason to keep on going: that he and his son are 'carrying the fire'" (Chabon 2007, cited in Rambo 2008:104-105). Several authors have established connections between the fire carried by father and son and the fire Prometheus stole from Zeus (cf. Pudney 2015: 295; Wielenberg 2014:4). Prometheus stole the fire from Zeus and gave it to humanity. As a consequence, he was punished for the theft and tied to a rock, where he does not die but is eaten over and over again, day after day. Thus, the after-effect of helping humanity is suffering – which resembles the situation of the man and child. Pudney (cf. 2015: 294) even links this story to the book of Genesis and the story of the fall of humanity due to Adam and Eve’s disloyalty to God. Furthermore, Pudney argues that
if fire is a precondition for technological development and civilization, it may well be that Prometheus’ gift also led to disaster in the long run. If the actual cause of the disaster was a nuclear war, as some critics have concluded, then technological development is clearly not an unmixed blessing. At the very least, it is ironic that “carrying the fire” represents goodness in a world which has been destroyed by fire. (Pudney 2015:294)

Regardless of the fire’s source, its destruction is omnipresent: “The city was mostly burned. No sign of life. Cars in the street caked with ash, everything covered with ash and dust” (TR 11). Dust and ash appear repeatedly in the Bible and are further used in religious contexts such as funeral services. By taking a look at the Old Testament, one reads that God created Adam from “the dust of the ground” and Abraham says he is “but dust and ashes.” Hence, Pudney suggests that “this association raises the disturbing possibility, that parts of what the father and his son are breathing in are in fact human remains, reduced to the dust and ashes out of which humanity was created” (Pudney 2015:295). Schaub prefers to put the emphasis on the physical fire itself rather than its cause. He argues that this may be a biblical resonance – the fire of the end of time. Moreover, he claims that readers have no other option other than to read The Road as an “allegory of spiritual survival” (Schaub 2009:154).

Besides this obvious use of religious and spiritual vocabulary and metaphors, there is yet another point that critics cannot come to a consensus on – the boy’s possible divinity. Some regard the boy as having messianic features, while others disagree. Within the first pages of the novel, McCarthy introduces the father as a man who in some way sees his son as holy: “He only knew that the child was his warrant. He said: If he is not the word of God, God never spoke” (TR 5). Pudney (2015: 301) argues that there is a degree of ambiguity in this statement—it leaves open the possibility that God never spoke—but despite his occasional doubts, the man maintains his belief that the boy is a messiah. Certainly, the boy is good—perhaps impossibly so, given the nature of the world he has grown up in.

Wielenberg (cf. 2010:1) deepens the ambiguity of this statement and compares it to the Book of Genesis, which portrays God as a creator through speech – he creates the whole universe by verbalizing what the cosmos should look like (Genesis 1:1-31). However, this would result in the fact that a God who does not speak is, in fact, a God who does not create, meaning that the “man’s declaration is [...] either his son is the word of God, or,

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1 Gen 2:7.
2 Ibid, 18:27.
for all practical purposes, the universe is a godless one” (Wielenberg 2010:1). Just like Pudney, Wielenberg agrees that it seems inexplicable that the boy, despite being permanently exposed to danger, death and horror, maintains such a pure soul. There are several scenes when the boy, in contrast to his father, tries to help everyone he encounters instead of merely caring for himself and for his father. This is the case, for example, when father and son meet an old man named Ely, who is nearly at the point of starvation, and the boy insists on helping him. The father tries to have a conversation with him and asks him for his name:

What’s your name?
Ely.
Ely what?
What’s wrong with Ely?
Nothing. Let’s go. (TR 167)

Just a few pages later, the old man admits that Ely is not his real name:

Is your name really Ely?
No.
You don’t want to say your name.
I don’t want to say it.
Why?
I couldn’t trust you with it. To do something with it. I don’t want anybody talking about me. To say where I was or what I said when I was there. I mean, you could talk about me maybe. But nobody could say that it was me. I could be anybody. (TR 171)

Although Ely revises his statement, many critics have established a connection between the character of Ely and the Prophet Elijah, who appears in the Old Testament Book of Kings, and is a harbinger of death. The name Ely stands for “My God is Yahweh”, which blatantly contradicts Ely’s paradoxical statement, “there is no God and we are his prophets” (TR 170) (cf. Collado-Rodriguez 2012:66). Since Ely tells the father that he saw it coming (TR 168), and the book is set at the end of the world, this reading of the character seems reasonably logical (cf. Stark 213: 76). Wielenberg (2010:2) also draws comparisons between Ely’s actions in the novel and those of the prophet Elijah in the Bible:

Elijah predicted a drought (1 Kings 17:1); Ely says he knew that the catastrophe (or something like it) was coming— “I always believed in it” […] Ely wonders about being the last person left alive: “Suppose you were the last one left? Suppose you did that to yourself?” […]. Elijah tells God that “the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away”
As can be seen, McCarthy seemed to draw numerous similarities between the Ely in *The Road* and the prophet Elijah. Additionally, Stark proposes that Ely, due to his bad eyesight, could similarly be read as a cross reference to Eli from the book of Samuel. A priest who ultimately loses his vision, Eli is the mentor of Samuel, who was born to Hannah after she asked God for a child. Later on, Samuel is visited by God and told that Eli’s sons will be punished for their wickedness. The sons are then consequently killed in action. This allusion becomes most important when *The Road* is read as a cautionary tale about anthropogenic climate change resulting from human behaviour (cf. Stark 2013: 76). In *The Road*, Ely argues there is no human race anymore and “where men can’t live gods fare no better” (*TR* 172). However, Cooper claims that the reverse of his logic holds true as well. Human beings create God, the novel seems to argue, in the sense that they create what there is of meaning and morality. Where humans live, then, God also survives. The father in fact enunciates this very creed. Facing his child, who has come (again) close to death, he holds the boy and thinks: ‘Where you’ve nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them’ (*TR* 74).” (Cooper 2011:229)

The sole probability of God’s perseverance seems to be a fearful outlook for Eli (cf. Skrimshire 2001:7). When the man tells him that his son might be a god, Ely responds: “It’s better to be alone. So I hope that’s not true what you said because to be on the road with the last god would be a terrible thing so I hope it’s not true” (*TR* 172). Ely seems to fear that boy’s potential godliness. He has learnt that in this world it is better to be alone – being alone means not having to be afraid of others, including gods. “His prophecy is for total extinction; old religious myths have no room in his understanding of the situation, and he openly scorns the boy’s role as mythos” (Collado-Rodriguez 2012: 66). When Ely leaves the father and son again, the boy insists on giving the stranger some food for his journey. It is not only Ely who does not understand the boy’s resolution; the father himself does not fully comprehend it. Ely asks the father why the boy did it, to which the man answers, “You wouldn’t understand [...] I’m not sure I do.” Ely responds:

Maybe he believes in God.

[Man] I don’t know what he believes in.
He'll get over it.
No he won't. (TR 173-74)

In this very scene, the father apprehends that although the boy has been raised in this cruel, post-apocalyptic world, his values exceed mere survival (cf. Schaub 2009: 162). Since he was born after the apocalypse and has never experienced pre-apocalyptic society, the boy has never seen animals or flowers and is not used to any form of kindness besides the one given to him by his father. Nevertheless, the boy displays an incredible amount of morality – in his mind, being a “good guy” even outranks having food. The man sees himself as chosen by God to take care of the boy – the boy, to him, is a gift from God (cf. Søfting 2013: 710). Not only does this conversation between Ely and the father refer religion and the belief in God, it also shows the reader how cruel and self-centred the world has become. After the boy has given food to Ely, the father addresses him after he does not express any gratitude:

You should thank him, you know, the man said. I wouldn't have given you anything. Maybe I should and maybe I shouldn't. Why wouldn't you?
I wouldn't have given him mine. (TR 173)

Although Ely has encountered limitless hospitality from the boy and his father, he still would not have given them food if he had had some. Eli’s behaviour reminds the reader of the fact that those who travel on the road are on their own. Even God has left them. It seems to be one of the greatest tragedies of The Road that, that although there are only a few humans left in this world, they opt for distrust and turn against one another.

When taking all these comparisons into account, it seems unrealistic that McCarthy chose Ely’s name for any other reason than a religious one. However, Hage (cf. 2010: 143) warns us that it is difficult to draw a clear parallel to biblical themes in The Road since all the religions and cultures have dissolved in the novel. Towards the end of the book, father and son again encounter the man who earlier stole all of their belongings. While the son begs the father to be kind to the man, the father commands the man to strip naked, then takes all his possessions and leaves him to die (cf. TR 256-258). Pudney (cf. 2015: 301) compares the father’s actions to Old Testament morality (cf. Leviticus 24:20), while the boy presents the love of forgiveness presented in the New Testament. Moreover, he compares the incident to the narration of the thief who was crucified next to Jesus. The thief in The Road, as well as the thief in the Bible,
Comprehend the goodness that they are exposed to: “The thief looked at the child and what he saw was very sobering to him” (TR 256). After having left the man behind, the boy wants the man to go back and help him:

[Man] What do you want to do?
The man looked back up the road.
He was just hungry, Papa. He’s going to die.
He’s going to die anyway.
He’s so scared. (TR 259)

Besides all the inexplicable incidents that the boy witnesses on a daily basis and the fact that the man had previously robbed them and would have left them to die, the boy’s humanity and goodness still override the appalling events that have been happening to father and son.

In the same conversation, the father tells the boy that he is not the one who should worry about everything: “The boy said something but he couldn’t understand him. What? he said. He looked up, his wet and grimy face. Yes I am, he said. I am the one” (TR 259). Although this could just be a foreshadowing of the father’s oncoming death and the fact that the boy has matured into his role as sole survivor, it can also be seen as the novel’s most explicit suggestion that the boy is, in fact, a divine figure (cf. Pudney 2015: 304). By admitting he is “the one”, the idea is supported that the boy indeed is “the one for whom the world is waiting” (Kunsa 2010:66). It is the first time the boy explicitly states who he is and what he wants – previously he has always relied on the father and his reassurance that they are the “good guys”. Kunsa (2010:66) argues that the “certainty and clarity” of the boy’s statement contribute to the “decidedly messianic ring” of the statement. Furthermore, she draws a line between the boy’s statement and two biblical quotations: Matthew 16:15, where Jesus encourages his followers by asking them “But whom say ye that I am” and John 14:6 when Jesus announces that he is “the way, the truth, and the life”. Schaub argues that “the words are startling. Their two meanings — the secular and the sacred — co-exist within the text, for the words “I am the one” signify both for the reader” (Schaub 2009: 162). It is the responsibility of the reader to interpret this sentence. The boy resembles Christ, who “must struggle on, so that he can be present at, or somehow contribute to, the eventual rebirth of the world” (Chabon
2008: 112, cited in Kuns 2010:60). On one occasion, during a conversation with Ely, the man even declares that the child is God:

[Man] I didn’t know what he was. I never thought to see a child again. I didn’t know what would happen.

What if I said that he’s a god? (TR 172)

Moreover, Graulund remarks that one should take a look at the use of capital and small initial letters here. “Not God, capital G, but a god, a prophet of the world to come once the leftovers of the old world have been laid to rest, a spark of life that will enable creation to begin anew” (Graulund 2010: 76).

In the novel’s closing pages, the father starts to draw connections between the boy and the image of light. When the father is too sick to go on, and rests on the street, "the boy would go on and then stop and look back and he would raise his weeping eyes and see him standing there in the road looking back at him from some unimaginable future, glowing in the waste like a tabernacle” (TR 273). A tabernacle is “the tent that housed the presence of God in ancient Israel “(Cooper 2011: 224). Despite all the negativity surrounding him and approaching death, the man still holds the belief that the boy represents hope for a good future. The father describes the boy both as a grail and a house when he calls the boy a “[g]olden chalice, good to house a god” (TR 75).

Although the man tries to keep moving, trying to take care of the boy since he “was appointed to do that by God” (TR 77), it sometimes seems as if the man is losing all of his faith:

He saw for a moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it. (TR 130)

Evidently, in this scene the man accepts their fate: he and his son are “two hunted animals” in a “darkness” which seems “implacable”. He describes the world as “intestate”, “meaning in the literal sense that it has not made a will, and therefore will not be (figuratively) inherited by the meek or the godly, who are nearly all dead” (Pudney 2015: 297).
Wielenberg (cf. 2010:1) implies that many events throughout the novel can be interpreted according to the two possibilities that either the boy is the word of God or the universe is godless. For example, there is a frequent pattern of near-death experiences followed by redemption, which repeats itself over the course of the novel. The man and the boy, just before once again nearly starving to death, discover a hidden underground bunker filled to the top with food and helpful supplies: “Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef. Hundreds of gallons of water in ten gallon plastic jerry jugs. Paper towels, toilet paper, paper plates. Plastic trashbags stuffed with blankets” (TR 138). Subsequently, again facing starvation, they find an abandoned house which also turns out to have food in it (TR 206). Wielenberg discusses whether or not these events are just strokes of good fortune or actual divine intervention. He argues there are always hints of divine action – but they are never more than just hints. He names, for instance, the scene when the father swims out to sea to explore a boat called “Pájaro de Esperanza” (TR 223) by his previous owners. “Pájaro de Esperanza” means “bird of hope” – the dove. It is also the dove which carries olive leaves to Noah, signalling to him that the flood is subsiding. On the other hand, the reader learns that the boat is from Tenerife, which is far from their current whereabouts and thus denotes that the catastrophe has spread all over the world. So, instead of bringing relief, the “bird of hope” actually shows there is none (cf. Wielenberg 2011:1).

Although McCarthy can easily be taken for a nihilist, there is also evidence of “a profound belief in the need for moral order, a conviction that is essentially religious” (Arnold 1999:46, quoted in Graulund 2010: 65). In none of McCarthy’s works of fiction has this need for moral order been as certain as in The Road. We can observe the man constantly addressing God and cursing him: “Are you there? he whispered. Will I see you at the last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh God” (TR 11-12). His anger demonstrates that despite all the horrifying experiences he has gone through, he is not an atheist. Furthermore, he needs to believe that God exists and that he is simply absent—not non-existent. This image of God as absent enables the man to blame him: maybe the apocalypse happened because God failed. Or, which seems to be more
reasonable, because he wanted it to happen. Additionally, hoping that God is absent leaves open the possibility of his return (cf. Graulund: 2010:75).

Specifically, the boy’s encounter with the man and woman after his father’s death and the fact that they take him under their wings could be interpreted as a sign of divine intervention (*TR* 240 ff). Rambo has dealt with the ending of *The Road* in detail and looks at in how far one can call it redemptive in a religious sense. By making the boy meet his “new parents”, McCarthy leaves us with a redemptive ending which appears “sentimental, unrealistic, and inconsistent with the rest of the book and its unrelenting picture of doom” (Rambo 2008:100). She suggests that by allowing the boy to survive, McCarthy presents a necessary ending to the struggle the man endured as well as a sign of regeneration and hope (cf. Rambo 2008:100). However, the end does not provide any real relief, because the reader cannot be certain that the boy is in safe hands. All the encounters that father and son have experienced over the course of the novel have ended badly – why should it be different this time? Rambo even points out that the arrival of the boy’s new guardians “throws the reader again into the tenuous territory of remaining: When trust and meaning are shattered, what remains? When there is no promise of life ahead, what remains?” (Rambo 2008: 114). The reader is left with the unexpected ending which can be interpreted as proof that God’s will will be done, as a kind of divine intervention – or even that the boy’s goodness will form a new divinity (cf. Graulund 2010: 76). Once again, however, the readers are left to their own interpretation, uncertain as ever.

In comparison to *The Road*, Margaret Atwood’s trilogy raises the matter of religion in a different way, although in the world of *Oryx and Crake*, people also find themselves drawn to God and religion when they face the worst. Crake’s virus is in the process of spreading over the world, and Jimmy observes on TV: “Crowds packed the churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples to pray and repent, then poured out of them as the worshippers woke up to their increased risk of exposure” (*OC* 396). When confronted with death, the people of the compounds turn towards a higher power. However, before the catastrophe, scientists had trespassed certain boundaries and even invented animals and other genetically altered species: “There had been a lot of fooling
around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God (OC 57; emphasis mine). In Oryx and Crake, research has progressed so far that scientists are able to alter DNA, clone animals, or crossbreed them, e.g. the pigoon transgenic pig with human stem cells in it:

> The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would be able to fend off attack by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year. […] Now they were perfecting a pigoon that could grow five or six kidneys at a time” (OC 25f)

Although the majority of the population’s has accepted this targeted gene modification, a few see the ungodly in it, including Jimmy’s mother. She argues with his father about it:

> ”[Mother] 'It’s wrong, […] it’s a moral cesspool and you know it!’
> [Father] ‘We can give people hope. Hope isn’t ripping off.’ […]
> [Mother] ‘What you’re doing – this pig brain thing. You’re interfering with the building block of life. It’s immoral. It’s . . . sacrilegious.’ […]
> [Father] It’s just proteins, you know that. There’s nothing sacred about cell and tissues [...]’ (OC 64 f.)

Jimmy’s mother believes that what they are doing in their research is utterly wrong - “sacrilegious”, as she calls it. For her, modifying genes is violating something sacred.

*The Year of the Flood* deals with religion and spirituality in a more explicit way. The novel deals with a religious group called God’s Gardeners, who combine environmental and Christian elements in their religion. All of the chapters of this book, except for the first, start with songs from the God’s Gardeners Oral Hymnbook:

> Who is it tends the Garden.
The Garden oh so green?

> ‘Twas once the finest Garden
That ever has been seen.

> And in it God’s dear Creatures
Did swim and fly and play;

> But then came greedy Spoilers,
And killed them all away. (YF 1)
The novel’s chants were even recited and sung by a choral group on Margaret Atwood’s tour to promote the novel, probably as a means of raising people’s awareness that the fall of humanity has already started (cf. Mallick 2009).

These sermons do not only lay out the Gardeners’ theology. As the novel progresses, they also come to provide an increasingly dark commentary on the situation of the group as it is first driven underground, then riven by a schism, and finally largely wiped out by the plague: (Bergthaller 2010: 738)

The chants accompany the novel’s events, and although one could simply read them as a kind of hippy mysticism, it is almost as if Margaret Atwood means what she says. In the novel’s Acknowledgements, she provides links to websites with the songs so that the reader can listen to them for “amateur devotional or environmental reasons” (YF 754). The hymns also severely criticize parts of the Bible and the way religion was practiced:

But Man alone seeks Vengefulness,  
And writes his abstract Laws on stone;  
For this false Justice he has made,  
He tortures limb and crushes bone.  
Is this the image of a god?  
My tooth for yours, your eye for mine?  
Oh, if Revenge did move the stars  
Instead of Love, they would not shine.  (YF 564-65)

The Gardeners are a non-violent ecological resistance church, which “tries to intertwine faith and science putting an accent on the idea that everything on earth is God’s creation, and therefore sacred and should not be disturbed but cherished” (Prioteasa n.d.: 1). Adam One, in the speech below, explains that science and religion are interconnected but that the bible chose “terms that could be understood by the old” so that everyone is able to understand its meaning:

The Human Words of God speak of the Creation in terms that could be understood by the men of old. There is no talk of galaxies or genes, for such terms would have confused them greatly! But must we therefore take as scientific fact the story that the world was created in six days, thus making a nonsense of observable data? God cannot be held to the narrowness of literal and materialistic interpretations, nor measured by Human measurements, for His days are eons, and a thousand ages of our time are like an evening to Him. Unlike some other religions, we have never felt it served a higher purpose to lie to children about geology. (YF 13-14)
Children who are brought up with the Gardeners are not taught religious subjects, but rather survival skills such as “Bees and Mycology,” “Predator-Prey Relationships and Animal Camouflage”, “Fabric Recycling”, “Healing with Plant Remedies“, “Emergency Medical”, “The Human Reproductive System” (cf. YF 80). Consequently, the majority of their principles have their roots in science.

The God’s Gardeners are not the only cult practicing their religion in The Year of the Flood. When Toby observes a religious group she has not seen before, she thinks about all the cults that she knows: Lion Isaiahists, Wolf Isaiahists, Pure-Heart Brethren Sufis, Hare Krishnas (cf. YF 50). However, Atwood emphasizes in the Acknowledgments that

the Gardeners themselves are not modelled on any extant religion, though some of their theology and practices are not without precedent. Their saints have been chosen for their contributions to those areas of life dear to the hearts of the Gardeners; they have many more saints, as well, but they are not in this book. (YF 573)

Bergthaller (2010: 738) argues that it might come as a surprise to many readers of Oryx and Crake that the Gardeners are at the centre of the sequel. Since they are only mentioned in passing, and mostly interpreted as lunatics in Oryx and Crake, their importance in The Year of the Flood comes as unexpected. However, while there are of course less appealing features of their lifestyle, like their communal living arrangements and the considerable limitations placed on the members’ personal freedom, their ultimate goal is, in fact, a rather good one:

A reconciliation of the nature of human beings as evolved biological creatures, with all the frailties and flaws it entails, with their need for an imaginary order that transcends and, as it were, extenuates these biological givens. This is the underlying theme of all of Adam One’s sermons, which often read like an odd crossover between biology lesson and theological treatise. (Bergthaller 2010: 738)

The novel revolves around the experiences of Ren and Toby, two women who have come into contact with the God’s Gardeners in different ways. Ren was brought up by the Gardeners, after her mother brought her there and started an affair with Zeb, one of their leaders. She remembers the first weeks with the Gardeners as unpleasant: “[…] I didn’t like it at all. They smiled a lot, but they scared me: they were so interested in
doom, and enemies, and God. And they talked so much about Death” (YF 77). She experiences difficulties trying to fit in. She misses meat, which they are forbidden to eat, electronic devices, which they are prohibited to use, and she cannot cope with the basic lifestyle they are leading. These things bother her a lot, whereas the children who were born into the cult do not mind at all.

Toby, on the other hand, joins the cult when she is seeking shelter after having been terribly abused by her boss. She eventually becomes an Eve, a female leader and preacher to the God’s Gardeners. Despite joining the Gardeners for different reasons, both of them have their difficulties with the sect: Ren is bored and envies the Pleebland kids since they are allowed to wear fashionable clothes and own electronic devices. Toby, for her part, does not ultimately agree with the Gardener’s beliefs and repeatedly considers leaving the group. In her initial time with the cult, she observes the internal hierarchy within it and compares it to a monastery, with the Adams and Eves ranked higher than the others, depending on their knowledge and expertise in certain areas (cf. YF 59). There are also certain rules and standards she has to follow in order to align herself with the Gardeners, i.e. when she is told that she should grow her hair long, since “the aesthetic preference was God’s” (YF 60).

When Toby is asked to become an Eve, she responds that it would be hypocritical since she does not believe in everything they preach. Or, to be more accurate: “She believed in very little” (YF 224) However, Adam One argues that “in some religions, faith precedes action. […] In ours, action precedes faith. You’ve been acting like you believe, dear Toby.” He delves into the subject: “We should not expect too much from faith […] Human understanding is fallible, and we see through a glass, darkly. Any religion is a shadow of God. But the shadows of God are not God” (YF 224 f.) Apparently, the Gardeners still question people who blindly trust in organized religion and preachers. Furthermore, Adam One also suggests that humans should approach religion and God in a rational manner and deal with them objectively:

Nature’s full strength is more than we can take, Adam One used to say. It’s a potent hallucinogen, a soporific, for the untrained Soul. We’re no longer at home in it. We need to dilute it. We can’t drink it straight. And God is the same. Too much God and you overdose. God needs to be filtered. (YF 435)
As will be discussed with regard to MaddAddam, Adam One takes a very different approach to this from that of his father, who was also a reverend. He once again wants people to question religion rather than just following it blindly. Moreover, he feels certain that the “Waterless Flood” is part of the evolutionary process of humanity:

According to Adam One, the Fall of Man was multidimensional. The ancestral primates fell out of the trees; then they fell from vegetarianism into meat-eating. Then they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology; from simple signals into complex grammar, and thus into humanity; from firelessness into fire, and thence into weaponry; and from seasonal mating into an incessant sexual twitching. Then they fell from a joyous life in the moment into the anxious contemplation of the vanished past and the distant future. (YF 251)

According to the Gardeners, it is technology and humanity’s way of using it incorrectly which brought the catastrophe, and which can only be atoned for by finding one’s way back to nature, and a simple lifestyle, with the help of God.

Toby asks for more time to make her decision about becoming an Eve, and leaves. While thinking about it, she asks herself why it is so hard for her to believe in what the Gardeners preach:

Why can’t I believe? she asked the darkness. Behind her eyelids she saw an animal. It was a golden colour, with gentle green eyes and canine teeth, and curly wool instead of fur. It opened its mouth, but it did not speak. Instead, it yawned. It gazed at her. She gazed at it. "You are the effect of a carefully calibrated blend of plant toxins," she told it. Then she fell asleep. (YF 228)

Despite having already been with the Gardeners for a longer time, Toby is still not able to believe. Her telling the animal that it is a perfect blend of plant toxins is the word of the voice of reason and the belief in science rather than faith in God and nature. However, despite having many doubts about the Gardeners, Toby decides to stay within the cult:

Gradually, Toby stopped thinking she should leave the Gardeners. She didn’t really believe in their creed, but she no longer disbelieved. [...] She wasn’t quite a Gardener, yet she wasn’t a pleeblander any more. She was neither the one nor the other. (YF 129)

The cult provides her with a sense of safety, greatly needed after her flight from Blanco, who had regularly sexually abused her and threatened to kill her. She still does not feel comfortable there, but there is no other place she can go. Thus, religion and the church-
Like community offer her something missing from most people in this post-apocalyptic setting: steadiness, and hence, hope.

In MaddAddam, the God’s Gardeners are not the church they used to be – they are just some people left behind trying to survive. Although Toby had a hard time believing when she joined the Gardeners, even later on when she was already an Eve, in MaddAddam she finds herself whitewashing the time she spent there:

Toby has a flash of memory: herself, back when she was Eve Six among the Gardeners, reciting this prayer along with Old Pilar just before they set to work on the bean rows, doing their required stint of slug and snail relocation. Sometimes the homesickness for those days is so strong and also so unexpected that it knocks her down like a rogue wave. (MA 209)

While it could be that Toby just misses the security of these times, the reader gets a clearer insight into her mind when Zeb brings her a swarm of bees. Toby talks to the bees like Pilar had taught her. However, it does not seem like pure reminiscing but rather an act of actually believing in it. This argument is reinforced by her not wanting Zeb to listen to her while she speaks to the swarm, making Toby seem ashamed of her beliefs (cf. MA 211). She is further ashamed when she tells Zeb she wants to talk to Pilar, who at this moment is already buried. Zeb is shocked: “First you talk to bees, now you want to talk to dead people? Even the Gardeners never went that far” (MA 219). However, Toby sticks to her beliefs; she is firmly convinced that a deep prayer to Pilar, an enhanced meditation, will give her the answers she needs. However, the mediation does not work out as planned. When she asks Pilar to at least send her a sign on how to deal with the pregnant women, a group of pigoons appears, but Toby is not presented with a proper answer to her questions. In the third novel, the Gardeners discover that the pigoons have their own type of religion. The Crakers are able to translate what the pigoons say for the Gardeners. As a result, the pigoons are able to ask the Gardeners for help in taking revenge on the people, assumedly the Painballers, for killing their offspring. When the pigoons bring a dead piglet with them, Toby realizes that they are celebrating a funeral: “Now the whole head is deploying itself in a semicircle around the – what? The bier? The catafalque? The flowers, the leaves – it’s a funeral. […] Elephants, she’d thought then. They do that. When someone they love has died” (MA 269). Pigoons are indeed able to grieve and perform certain religious acts it seems, which could be an effect of the human
tissue incorporated into them – so religion and belief may be something that is in every person, an inherited urge to believe.

Not as many references to beliefs and theology can be found in MaddAddam, as in the other novels. However, the reader nonetheless gets a different view of the Gardeners than in The Year of the Flood. Zeb, although he is Adam One’s brother, does not approve of them, literally calling them an “ecofreakshow” (MA 329). Pilar is frequently mentioned, and Zeb tells Toby that Pilar really was a believer, “but she [Pilar] wasn’t bullshitting. [...] She believed the whole sackful, in a way. That’s why she was willing to run the risks she did at HelthWyzer” (MA 330). The remaining Gardeners still celebrate the Feasts like they used to, to some extent holding on to the beliefs and also the safety emanating from a particular routine. Toby uses those festivities and other religious occasions and activities to keep track of time. Additionally, she even invents “The Feast of Pigoons” and adds it to the regular Gardener feast calendar because she believes that they deserve to have a Feast named after them (cf. MA 378).

4.1.2. Religion Misused as a Means to an End

Religion is frequently abused as a means to an end, which can be seen primarily in the MaddAddam trilogy. By being interested in immortality, Crake oversteps the mark between man and God: “Immortality [...] is a concept. If you take ‘mortality’ as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then ‘immortality’ is the absence of such fear” (OC 356). By inventing the Crakers, Crake goes one step further in profaning God – he raises himself up to be a Godlike figure, the creator of a whole new humankind, in his view an even better humanity, virtually perfect and flawless. When Crake introduces Jimmy to the Crakers, he tells him that “they would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money” (OC 359). Crake, in fact, sees God and religions as a threat to what he is planning, as something unnecessary, and apparently as something daunting. A bit earlier in the novel, Jimmy notices that Crake still has fridge magnets, like he used to, but the sayings on them have changed, e.g. “Where God is, Man is not” (OC 354), which reveals the fact that Crake is
a real atheist. In fact, he seems to despise godly figures. He decides what (he thinks) is best for the population: he once again takes up the position of God by inventing the BlyssPluss pill. The medicine is meant to increase libido and prolong the youth of those who take it, and, at the same time, to protect them from any sexually transmitted diseases. However, it also makes everyone who takes it infertile. This side effect is not mentioned to consumers and is meant to serve as a means to control the population. When Jimmy uncovers this knowledge, he asks, “So basically you’re going to sterilize people without them knowing it under the guise of giving them the ultra in orgies?” “That’s a crude way of putting it,” said Crake” (OC 347). Crake once again makes a decision for all of mankind in a godlike way—it is up to him who will reproduce and who will not.

Later on, after the deaths of Crake and Oryx, Snowman becomes a prophet like figure to the Crakers. Crake and Oryx become their God and Goddess – although this is something Crake fiercely sought to avoid. The Crakers are developing their own religion, leading to the assumption that humanity needs religion and something to believe in. After having several lessons with Oryx, the Crakers even want to know where they come from, although Crake initially argued that “that stuff has been edited out” (OC 366). Despite not being entirely human, the Crakers are looking for someone or something to look up to, a godlike figure, and it ends up being Jimmy (or rather Snowman, since this is his identity after the catastrophe) in whom they find their prophet. For example, one of the Crakers gets bitten by a bobkitten, a genetically modified crossbreed of a bobcat and a kitten, and the Crakers are forced to defend themselves by hitting it with a rock. Later on, they tell Snowman they have to apologize to Oryx since bobkittens are “Children of Oryx” (OC 185). Oryx represents the concept of Mother of Nature to them, with Goddess-like features. Since she is already dead, Snowman wonders how they are going to apologize to her:

He’s never seen the women do this – this communion with Oryx – although they refer to it frequently. What form does it take? They must perform some kind of prayer or invocation, since they can hardly believe that Oryx appears to them in person. Maybe they go into trances. (OC 185f.)

Thus, the Crakers follow the custom of praying although they have never been taught to, which strengthens the assumption that humanity needs a higher power to believe in,
and in this case, Oryx acts as a godly figure to the Crakers. However, Crake argued that he had taken away this feature, that he had eliminated this part of the brain, since “God is [just] a cluster of neurons” (OC 186). Moreover, after the apocalypse, when it is just Snowman and the Crakers at the beach, they regularly approach Snowman and want him to contact Crake via his watch – once again a hint that Snowman acts as a prophet to them, whereas Crake is their God. They ask him why they cannot have feathers (Snowman explained to them that his beard is made of feathers):

“Why not, why not”, sing the two smallest ones.

“Just a minute, I’ll ask Crake.” He holds his watch up to the sky, turns it around on his wrist, then puts it to his ear as if listening to it. They follow each motion, enthralled. “No,” he says. “Crake says you can’t. No feathers for you. Now piss off.” (OC 9f.)

Additionally, he regularly uses Crake, who the Crakers deify, as a means to an end, for example, for getting food. Every week the Crakers bring him a fish because he has convinced them that this is Oryx’s will: “Here is your fish, oh Snowman.” [...] This is the fish chosen for you tonight” [...] “This is the fish Oryx gives you” (OC 116). In exchange for this weekly meal, Snowman has to tell them a story about Crake. He has turned the real story into a kind of myth, a story that gives the Crakers something to have faith in, which stands in great contrast to what Crake would have wanted. For this reason, he starts the story as follows: “In the beginning, there was chaos” (OC 118), in a way which closely resembles Genesis: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light”\(^3\). In spite of inventing all of these stories himself, he becomes angry with the Crakers for believing them and praising Crake for everything he has done:

Their adulation of Crake enrages Snowman, though this adulation has been his own doing. The Crake they’re praising is his fabrication, a fabrication not unmixed with spite: Crake was against the notion of God, or of Gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification (OC119f.). Although Snowman tells them these stories on purpose - to mock Crake, who, while he was alive, was a rigorous atheist and now after his death is being praised as a God - he despises the thought that they imagine Crake to be someone honourable. However, this

\(^3\) Genesis 1.1-4
could also be a critique of religion and churches nowadays – people believing in what preachers tell them and trusting them blindly without criticizing anything. However, after a while, the Crackers’ religion gets out of hand – they start forming their own rituals.

When Jimmy has left them for a while and returns, he finds the Crakers praying to a kind of statue of himself, with “a face of sorts – one pebble eye. One black one, a jar lid it looks like” (OC 419). The Crakers explain to him: “We made a picture of you, to help us send out our voices to you” (OC 419). The Crakers have hyped up Snowman and idolized him as a prophet of their own, without any further input. Crake had warned him about that:

Watch out for art, [...] . As soon as they start doing art, we’re in trouble. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave gods, and the afterlife, and sin [...] and then slavery and war. (OC 420-21)

When the Crakers ask him if his journey to the sky was difficult, he begins to wonder why they think he has gone to the sky since he has never told them that: “’Why do you think I’ve been into the sky’, Snowman asks, as neutrally as possible. He’s clicking through the legend files in his head. When did he ever mention the sky?” (OC 420). The Crakers answer that they know that Crake lives in the sky, and they had seen some whirling wind which they assumed had taken Jimmy to the heavens to visit Crake. There always seems to be a legitimate explanation to the Crakers’ behaviour. However, it also leads to the assumption that the Crakers are developing spiritually, although it is the one thing Crake wanted to prohibit so badly.

As can be seen, the role of religion in Oryx and Crake is only a minor one, apart from its connections to the God’s Gardeners, who become considerably more important in The Year of the Flood. The readers are first introduced to the group via Jimmy’s former roommate at Martha Graham, who was a “fundamentalist vegan called Bernice, who had stringy hair held back with a wooden clip in the shape of a toucan and wore a succession of God’s Gardeners T-shirts” (OC 211). Jimmy, later on, sees Bernice as one of the victims after a raid on a God’s Gardeners safe house. However, only a few minutes later, he observes his mother being executed live on TV – therefore, it stands to reason that Jimmy’s mother was also involved with the sect, although there is no other proof of this in Oryx and Crake. Kraus (cf. 2010: 94) brings up the importance of the title, as well as
the numerous references to the Bible and mythology in the novel. The title itself *Oryx and Crake* resembles the names of mythological couples such as Adam and Eve or Isis and Osiris. Additionally, mythology is important throughout the novel since it has itself been shaped after the mythological theme of hubris. As Kraus puts it, “humanity strives for ever more knowledge, misuses nature for its own ends, tries to achieve immortality and eternal youth, but disregarding the cost, is eventually smitten down” (2010: 94).

In *The Year of the Flood*, the reader is introduced to Adam One as a very religious man with high moral values. However, as Toby spends more time at the Gardeners, she finds that Adam One is not as religious as he pretends to be. He admits to Toby that he “must sometimes say things that are not transparently honest. But it is for the greater good” (*YF* 246). In the following passage, he furthermore admits the real reason for his “pseudo-biblical preaching” (Del Villano 2014: 160):

> The truth is,” [...] most people don’t care about other Species, not when times get hard. All they care about is their next meal, naturally enough: we have to eat or die. But what if it’s God doing the caring? We’ve evolved to believe in gods, so this belief bias of ours must confer an evolutionary advantage. The strictly materialist view – that we’re an experiment animal protein has been doing on itself – is far too harsh and lonely for most, and leads to nihilism. That being the case, we need to push popular sentiment in a biosphere-friendly direction by pointing out the hazards of annoying God by a violation of His trust in our stewardship. [...] There’s a penalty without God in the story too, needless to say. But people are less likely to credit that. If there’s a penalty, they want a penalizer. They dislike senseless catastrophe. (*YF* 321-22)

Adam One evidently does not believe in God as much as he pretends to – he uses theology and the belief bias as a way to get people to save the world. This statement contains a high degree of truth: humankind mainly thinks about itself without taking responsibility for its actions towards nature, etc. People follow the mantra “every man for himself”– and Adam One uses the image of God as a vehicle to turn them in the right direction, even if it means using him as a raging and penalizing god.

In a way, Adam One and Glenn/Crake represent two sides of a coin. Although they are both motivated by their concerns for the planet, they take different paths in order to achieve their goals and recreate “the Garden”. While Crake plays God and creates his personal utopia of a new humankind, the Crakers, Adam One chooses to spread myths and religious imagery in order to create a community with values which are repugnant to the Corporations and their scientists. He adapts the Biblical myths in
a creative way and thereby adjusts them to the current state the world is in (cf. Del Villano 2014: 160-6).

In MaddAddam, the reader discovers how Adam One became so religious. He is Zeb’s brother, and they were both brought up in a religious family, with a father who was a reverend himself. The brothers, however, they take different paths: Adam One becomes the leader of the pacifist Gardeners, while Zeb, later on, decides to leave the group in order to engage in active bio terrorist opposition. In the course of the novel, it becomes apparent that Zeb was not close to his father. While Zeb wanders around after a helicopter accident, his mind wanders to his him:

Your head’s the most shallow part of you, his sociopath of father had been the habit of saying. Except for your brain. And your soul, supposing you’ve been blessed with one [...]. The Rev had been a big cheerleader for souls, in addition to which he thought he was the boss of them. (MA 57)

Zeb criticizes his father, calls him a sociopath, and mocks his beliefs. Most of the religious hints found in MaddAddam, besides the daily life of the Gardeners, are references to the time before the Waterless Flood. Zeb tells Toby about his father, who had his very own church. He tells her that his father made a lot of money in this way: “By the time Zeb came along, the Rev had a megachurch, all glass sloberery and pretend oak pews and faux granite, out on the rolling plains. The Church of PetrOleum [...]” (MA 111) The Reverend is a parody of modern day TV preachers, everything he does is exaggerated, and he is only in it for the money. Zeb tells Toby that he and his brother were told not to pray for forgiveness or similar wishes but natural gas and oil: “The Rev had nailed together a theology to help him rake in the cash. Naturally he had a scriptural foundation for it. Matthew, Chapter 16, Verse 18: ‘Thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church’” (MA 112). Peter stands for the Latin word “rock”, moreover ‘Peter’ referred to petroleum and therefore was sounding the bell for the Age of Oil. Zeb’s father used religion to make money and exploited people’s beliefs in order to enrich himself. Zeb despises his father, not only for his religious beliefs but also because his father openly shows him that he prefers Adam to him. He hates his father to such an extent that he hacks into the Church’s computers and transfers money from the Church’s account to his own. Meanwhile, he also finds out which disturbing webpages his father
has been visiting (porn, live beheadings of women, etc.). The Reverend seems to be a rather troubled soul (cf. MA 113 ff.)

4.2. The Role of Women

“What restless woman can resist a man with a shovel in one hand and a glowing rose bush in the other, and a moderately crazed glitter in his eyes that might be mistaken for love?”

— Margaret Atwood, The Year of the Flood (p. 156)

Both The Road and Oryx and Crake present us with a scarcity of female characters, while The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam are mainly told from female perspectives. Atwood has been confronted with the issue of female scarcity in Oryx and Crake several times and answered that there are female characters in the novel, but they are filtered through the lens of Jimmy’s (or rather Snowman’s) perceptions. “Sharon, Oryx, and his multiple girlfriends all add to the feminine contingent of the narrative, and all are colored by Jimmy’s reality” (Galbreath 2010: 45). Additionally, Atwood comments that not many men are “fully conversant with the inner lives of women who are the objects of their affections” (Halliwell 2006:255, quoted in Galbreath 2010:45). Roman (2015: 160) argues that the women in Oryx and Crake challenge post humanism by “complementing the liberation of post-feminism.” Many critics were puzzled to discover that the protagonist of Oryx and Crake was a man since Atwood usually emphasizes the female voice in her writings. Weimbs (cf. 2010: 155) argues that this signals a shift of emphasis in Atwood’s writing. In comparison to her earlier fiction, e.g. specially Cat’s Eye (1988) and The Robber Bride (1993), which suggested that what links science and patriarchy is control of the body, Oryx and Crake takes a different stance. Not only the female body is being colonized, but the entirety of humanity. According to Weimbs, this idea is conveyed
more easily with a male protagonist, since a female protagonist would invite the reader to adapt a certain mode of reading (presumably a feminist one).

A male protagonist therefore allows for forms of irony that would not work equally well if the protagonist was female, mainly because the ‘problems’ Snowman encounters are genuinely known and identified with female writing and the construction of female subjectivity. (Weimbs 2010: 156)

In the first subchapter of this section I will analyse maternal failure, which is a motif found in all four novels. The second subchapter will deal with the exploitation of women in these dystopic settings, and will give an insight into the feminist view towards women in dystopic fiction.

4.2.1. *Is a Bad Mother Worthy of Our Sympathy? – Motherly Malfunction in the Novels*

Maternal malfunction is a leitmotif running through all of the books I have analysed. Although there are a few rare exceptions to the rule, mothers in the post-apocalyptic societies described by both Cormac McCarthy and Margaret Atwood tend to fail at being a good mother. The *MaddAddam* trilogy in particular offers plentiful examples of failed mother-child relationships, for example, Jimmy’s mother, Crake’s mother, Toby’s, Ren’s and Zeb’s mothers all fail in some way or another to care for their children.

Although the role of women is a minor one in *The Road*, it is certainly important to further examine the role of the mother. The boy was born after the cataclysmic event; his mother was already pregnant when the disaster happened: “She was standing in the doorway in her nightwear, clutching the jamb, cradling her belly in one hand. What is it? she said. What is happening? I dont know” (TR 52-53) The reader is privy to very little information concerning the mother, and she remains unnamed in the novel. Moreover, she strikes the reader as a heartless person since she decides to leave her husband and child after having gotten weary of their situation. The man remembers when his wife communicated her decision to leave the family for good:
[The Woman] Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us. They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it. You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I can't. I can't. She sat there smoking a slender length of dried grapevine as if it were some rare cheroot. Holding it with a certain elegance, her other hand across her knees where she'd drawn them up. She watched him across the small flame. We used to talk about death, she said. We don't any more. Why is that?

[The Man] I don't know.

[The Woman] It's because it's here. There's nothing left to talk about. (TR 56)

Additionally, his wife confronts him with the fact that there was a time when they had the chance to leave this world together:

I should have done it a long time ago. When there were three bullets in the gun instead of two. I was stupid. We've been over all of this. I didn't bring myself to this. I was brought. And now I'm done. I thought about not even telling you. That would probably have been best. You have two bullets and then what? You can't protect us. You say you would die for us but what good is that? I'd take him with me if it weren't for you. You know I would. It's the right thing to do. (TR 56)

Crosswhite argues out that “each of the bullets has a direct correlation to the life of one family member: three bullets, three pieces to the family. As each bullet is relinquished, a member of the family is sacrificed” (Crosswhite 2011: 146) The boy, looking first at this mother and then at his father, acts as a foreshadowing of the preceding events– he looks at them in the order in which they are going to depart from this world. As the man reflects on a dog which followed the family, he also recalls the time when there were three bullets in the gun. Oddly, this is the only time in the novel when the narration shifts from a third person to a first person narrative:

The dog that he remembers followed us for two days. I tried to coax it to come but it would not. I made a noose of wire to catch it. There were three cartridges in the pistol. None to spare. She walked away down the road. The boy looked after her and then he looked at me and then he looked at the dog and began to cry and to beg for the dog's life and I promised I would not hurt the dog. (TR 87)

Later in the novel, the man remembers his wife’s words when he faces the fact that there is only one cartridge left: “He wrapped [his son] in his own parka and wrapped him in the blanket and sat holding him, rocking back and forth. A single round in the revolver. You will not face the truth. You will not” (TR 68). It is possible that the man recalls his wife’s allegations because he now regrets not having them killed all of them when he had the chance. However, perhaps his thoughts are not a
despairing admission but rather as an exhortation to himself not to face the truth. He realizes that if he faces reality he is likely to despair entirely, so he turns his wife’s accusation into a rallying cry. Facing the truth means giving up, so he urges himself not to face the truth. (Wielenberg 2010:3)

The mother takes her life with a flake of obsidian, probably slitting her wrists with the sharp stone. The boy asks his father, “She’s gone, isn’t she? And [the man] said: Yes she is” (TR 58). Presumably, the boy had the presentiment that the mother would leave them first. Moreover, he does not ask if she has been killed or the like but rather if she is gone. Thus, he comprehends that she left them of her own free will. The mother is portrayed as a cold and relentless woman. The man tells her he would never leave her, to which she responds: “I dont care. Its meaningless. You can think of me as a faithless slut. I’ve taken a new lover. He can give me what you cannot. [Man] Death is not a lover” (TR 56–57). By calling herself a “faithless slut” her motives are not as clear as they may appear. One the one hand she is deeply afraid of being raped and murdered, on the other hand, this statement implies that the mother has lost her connection to her child and husband beforehand. In fact, she may not have loved the child at all:

My heart was ripped out of me the night he was born so dont ask for sorrow now. There is none. Maybe you’ll be good at it. I doubt it, but who knows. The one thing I can tell you is that you wont survive for yourself. I know because I would never have come this far. A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love. (TR 57)

The boy’s mother does not feel compassion for them anymore and challenges the man’s ability to care for the boy on his own. The man even tells her that he “cant do it alone” (TR 57). Her coldness stands in contrast to an earlier metaphoric representation of the sun: “By day the banished sun circles the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp” (TR 32). “In this metaphoric shift, the sun plays the role of the mother abandoned by her child, while the boy’s human mother is an embodiment of the egocentrism and faithlessness that are swiftly killing the planet” (Cooper 2011: 223). Furthermore, Cooper debates the novel’s role as a type of grail narrative, with the boy being both the symbolic grail as well as a Perceval figure. However, she states that the only difference is that the mother abandons them in contrast to Perceval, who, in order to pursue knighthood, left his mother to die of sorrow (cf. Cooper 2011:222-23). Her son, however, is the opposite of his “mother’s nihilistic belief in the pointlessness of human survival” (Cooper 2011: 223). In fact, it may even be his mother leaving him that awakens his distinctive goodness and
hope. That said, it might be this abandonment which offers the boy a chance to be a hero, a (by him) so-called “good guy”.

The fact that the mother no longer cares about her family raises several questions. Why is there a relational break between her and them? Despite certainly loving his wife, the husband has a flashback to her giving birth, which reveals the further complexity of the matter. While she delivered their child, “her cries meant nothing to him” (TR 59). It is evident that he cares about the boy more than he does about his wife. It is highly probable that the man’s love for his child and his major interest in caring for the boy lead him to neglect his wife (cf. Wielenberg 2010:10).

Even though the mother is illustrated as being ruthless, her depression is still intelligible. She did not choose to take this path; she was forced to by both the external circumstances and her husband pressuring her to keep going. She is genuinely afraid and has given up on this life - if it were not for her husband and child, she would not have endured so long. However, Wielenberg argues that the mother’s suicide is used to raise the important question of what makes life meaningful. “What is it that bestows value on human life? [...] Human life can be meaningful, even in circumstances as desperate as those depicted in the novel” (Wielenberg 2010:9). The father blames himself for her suicide and believes “that he should have kept her in their lives in some way but he didn’t know how” (TR 54). He feels guilty for letting her choose this path: “He did not take care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark” (TR 32). “Her death does not sever her connections with others; rather, it frees her from an existence in which all such connections have already been severed. Again, what is true in the world of the novel is true of our world as well: the best predictor of suicide is social isolation” (Wielenberg 2010: 11).

Several years after her suicide, the man empties his wallet, throws it away and then lays a photograph of his deceased wife, his last physical memory of her besides the boy, on the road and walks away (cf. TR 51). Taking into account how important a wallet is to everyone these days, throwing it away can be put on the same level as throwing away your identity. Maybe he needs closure from what happened and also from the guilt he carries with him in order to find strength to survive in this wasteland.
The Road, however, also offers hope as far as maternal figures go. The boy finds refuge with a couple after his father dies. Although his new foster mother only appears in the final lines of the book, she offers hope for a better future for the boy and finally constitutes the motherly figure the boy has lacked most of his previous life: “The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am glad to see you” (TR 288). We do not know how much time the boy can spend with them and how his life will evolve – however, the encounter with his “recent mother” leaves the reader with a pleasurable feeling, being optimistic that the boy’s future might not be as bad as estimated throughout the course of the novel. Her embracing him in her arms, uttering “I am glad to see you” conveys the impression that the two know each other and that the boy has finally found the mother he has been seeking for so long.

The boy’s real mother and his newly found mother are in stark contrast to each other. Together they “embody the archetype of women as Madonna or whore” (Stark 2013: 81). The man dreams of the boy’s real mother, who describes herself as having a “whorish heart” (TR 57), in a sexual way, as a “pale bride”, who draws herself nearer to death (TR 18). Having said that, the woman the boy encounters at the end immediately provides him with the love and care only a mother is able to give. By talking to him about God, she is “positioning her[self] within the familiar trope of woman as bastion of moral order within the domestic sphere” (Stark 2013:82). With this in mind, The Road opens with an abandoning, at times selfish motherly figure and ends with a warm and caring woman, who is even willing to take in a child who is not her own.

Similar to The Road, Oryx and Crake is a male centered piece of art. Two protagonists shape the content of the novel in complete contrast to Margaret Atwood’s previous pieces of art, who have mainly been described from a feminine point of view and therefore let Atwood acquire a reputation as a feminist writer. Oryx and Crake presents us two further examples of failed mothers: Jimmy’s mom – Sharon - as well as Crake’s mom. Both Jimmy and Crake have been abandoned by their mothers (or rather by their parents). Three months before Atwood started composing Oryx and Crake, she was asked if a “bad mother [was] worthy our sympathy.” In the interview, she answered:
Well, it depends what kind of sympathy you’ve got on hand. *Hamlet* is about bad parenting. You know, every single parent in *Hamlet* is rotten, including the ghost [. . .]. He says, What about me? Take care of me. It’s your job to get revenge for me. He doesn’t think of Hamlet at all; therefore, should we feel sympathetic towards the ghost? We do when we see the play. You know, often we feel sympathetic towards people not because they are models of character whom we should all emulate, but because they aren’t. (Solomon 2000: 226, quoted in Barzilai 2008: 95)

Sharon is the only parent in the novel whose name the reader learns. She is Jimmy’s mother and is presented via dialogue mainly through his father and his new wife, Ramona. Formerly, Sharon was a brilliant scientist on her husband’s team until she started to suffer from depression and quit her work. Their relationship appears to have been difficult from the start since Jimmy remembers his first complete memory – his mother acting towards him as if he was dumb.

She often tried to explain things to him; then she got discouraged. These were the worst moments, for both of them. He resisted her, he pretended he didn’t understand even when he did, he acted stupid, but he didn’t want her to give up on him. He wanted her to be brave, to try her best with him, to hammer away at the wall he’d put up against her, to keep on going. (OC 24)

His mother does not bother talking to him since he does not understand her scientific vocabulary. However, all Jimmy wants is for his mother to keep interacting with him. Having said that, after having fallen into depression, her interest in science fades, which is commented on by Ramona, his father’s co-worker: “It’s such a shame, a waste. I mean, she was so smart” (OC 29). Jimmy is well aware of his mother’s profound sense of ethics concerning the research her husband is carrying out. “Her stance, however, marginalizes her and ultimately marks her as a subversive” (DiMarco 2005:189). While she wants to use science in order to create a better life, e.g. helping stroke patients, she accuses her husband and his associates of capitalism, that they have simply “thought up yet another way to rip off a bunch of desperate people “(OC 64).

Jimmy remembers her in her different states of mind. Sometimes she was “like a real mother and he was like a real child. But those moods of hers didn’t last long” (OC 34). During his flashbacks Snowman/Jimmy gains a clear image of her, sitting at the kitchen tables, having “a cup of coffee in front of her, untouched; she would be looking out the window and smoking. The bathrobe was magenta, a colour that still makes him anxious whenever he sees it. […] She sounded so tired; maybe she was tired of him. Or
maybe she was sick” (OC 35). He suffers from her depression too, since he just wants “to make her happy. [...] As he grew older and more devious, he found that on the days when he couldn’t grab some approval, he could at least get a reaction. Anything was better than the flat voice, the blank eyes, the tired staring out of the window” (OC 35-36). Snowman furthermore remembers the arguments his parents had and his father’s statement that “women always get hot under the collar” (OC 19). Additionally, he repeats himself when he compares women to the weather and comments: “hotness and coldness, coming and going on in the strange musky flowering variable weather inside their clothes—mysterious, important, uncontrollable” (OC 17). Farooq (2015:82) quotes Catherine Keller’s statement in Carol Adams Ecofeminism and the Sacred wherein she points out:

The weather-like nature has readily been woman-identified alternately enchanting and frightening, nurturing and withholding, rhythmic and capricious, moody and unstable, subject to the modern and manly sciences of meteorology, climate control and other modes of social management. (Adams 1993:31)

Neither his father nor Jimmy himself appear able to manage this unpredictability in women and nature (cf. Farooq 2015: 81).

There are days when Sharon feels better, gets up, puts make up on and pretends to be a normal mother. Jimmy, however, knows that this is merely an act of superficial bonding between the two; she reminded him of “porcelain sink: clean, shining, hard” (OC 36) on those days when she put herself together and tried to act like a real mother. The reader only partially discovers the reason why she changes later on in the novel. Sharon estranges herself from the Compounds, and consequently from Jimmy since she disapproves of the scientific experiments they are implementing. “Sharon maintains her sense of the real, of immutable right and wrong, and refuses to be seduced by economic comforts and a ruthlessly maintained social stability for a privileged few” (Tolan 2007: 279, quoted in Roman 2015: 164). Instead of obeying the institutional regulations, she is well aware of the mistakes they are making. Her resistance is demonstrated in refusing them her services and hence failing as a mother to Jimmy, but, instead of leaving, Sharon continues to live in the safety of the compound. “The nature of resistance itself has changed within the protocological age . . . There is a new category of enemy. And this new category of enemy is not at all similar to the bosses, barons, or bullies of yore” (Galloway 2004: 150, quoted in Roman 2015: 165). Sharon drives herself into depression
by withdrawing from the criminal experiments they are carrying out, but also by continuing to dwell there. Therefore, the only way for her to truly oppose what is happening in the compounds is to remove herself from the proceedings. She leaves without telling anyone and joins the God’s Gardeners. Tolan diagnoses Sharon’s intentions and argues that her political principles pushed her to the margins of society which forces her to join the Gardeners, who are well known for terroristic attacks towards profit-oriented businesses, i.e. Happicuppa coffee. She becomes invested in violent resistance and a part of the anti-globalization movement confronting commercial and governmental power structures. (cf. Tolan 2007: 280, quoted in Roman 2015: 165) While Sharon seems to be weak as a mother and wife, she does fight for what she actually believes in, even if it means leaving her son, whom she loves nonetheless, behind. However, she does not have a choice. She either leaves the morally corrupt system or she stays and thus continues to assist capitalism as practiced by Compounds such as RejoovenEsense, HealthWyzer, and AnooYou (cf. Roman 2015: 165). She leaves the same year that Crake comes into Jimmy’s life.

His mother leaving him haunts Jimmy. Even when he has already taken on the identity of Snowman, he still sees her in his dreams: “In the small hot room he dreams; again, it’s his mother. No, he never dreams about his mother, only about her absence. [...] On a hook her dressing gown is hanging, magenta, empty, frightening” (OC 325). Barzilai (cf. 2008: 96-97) compares Sharon to Shakespeare’s Gertrude. Similar to Gertrude, Sharon puts her needs and desires first, and her interiority is mostly unrevealed to the audience. She abandons her son and husband and escapes in a, as it seems, very carefully planned way from HelthWyzer. She leaves her son nothing but a note on the kitchen table:

Dear Jimmy, it said. Blah blah blah, suffered with conscience long enough, blah blah, no longer participate in a lifestyle that is not only meaningless in itself but blah blah. She knew that when Jimmy was old enough to consider the implications of blah blah. [...] A decision not taken without much soulsearching and thought and anguish, but blah. She would always love him very much. (OC 61)

Thus, she puts her own needs before her son. Similar to Gertrude, “who transfers her allegiance from one husband to another, Jimmy’s mother makes a life choice that orients her son in a mortal direction for which she may be deemed indirectly, albeit unforeseeably, responsible” (Barzilai 2008:96).
According to Galbreath, many labels shape Sharon’s identity: “wife, Jimmy’s mother, microbiologist, former OrganInc employee, runaway, radical protestor, and martyr” (2010: 47). However, she does not live up to traditional social expectations when it comes to being a wife and mother, and her highly ethical morals block her career. Galbreath (2010: 47): emphasizes “Sharon’s agency as illusion masquerading as empowerment” as long as she sticks to the rules, is a good mother and wife as well as a trustworthy employee she is allowed to be anything she wants. Conversely, by failing as a mother, she impersonates the resistance to what is known as the essential nature of women – being a mother. In fact, she even demonstrates that raising a child well is not an innate female capacity (cf. Galbreath 2010: 47). By leaving her son and the compounds, she not only battles the essentialism of motherhood but also repels the rewarding and seductive masculinized science construct. Furthermore, she sees the dangers inherent in the authoritarian facilities represented by Compound protection, “she is the voice for the ideologically pure science objectives which Compound employees relinquish for the trappings of material prosperity” (Galbreath 2010:48). Galbreath furthermore mentions that by questioning the empiricist paradigm, it is observable that there is a gendered dualism which infects scientific processes, including nature/feminine and nature/culture couplings. Moreover, a gendered active/passive construct can also be detected. Traditionally, masculine and feminine spheres are separated into external (active) and domestic (passive) areas. Science and technology have become naturalized as masculine domains since women were excluded from its Classical and Enlightenment incarnations (cf. Galbreath 2010: 49-50).

However, Myers (cf. 2011: 29) argues that Jimmy’s and Sharon’s complicated relationship is developed most thoroughly. She draws a comparison between Sharon and Offred’s mother in The Handmaid’s Tale, since both of them are busy working and therefore not able to take care of their children. “Her distance, depression, and distraction stem from the work [Sharon] does” (Myers 2011: 29). However, it is her work, too, which threatens her sanity and therefore forces her to leave the compounds. Jimmy is a unique example among Atwood’s protagonists (since he is the only male) and shows the reader that not only daughters can be hurt by their mother’s poor upbringing. For example, Snowman recalls that he never liked his birthday after Dolores, the live-in Philippina left, since his mother often forgot about it:
He’d have to remind [his mother], at breakfast; then she’d snap out of her trance and buy him some mortifying present – pyjamas for little kids with kangaroos or bears on them, a disk nobody under forty would ever listen to, underwear ornamented with whales – and tape it up in tissue paper and dump it on him at the dinner table, smiling her increasingly weird smile, as if someone had yelled Smile! and goosed her with a fork. (OC 56)

With Crake’s mom, Barzilai (cf. 2008: 96) draws another, though not as complex, analog to Shakespeare’s Gertrude. This allusion is rather obvious since the reader finds out tardily that his mother did not take any steps to prevent his father’s homicide (cf. OC 248-49). Crake’s mom only appears on rare occasions. However, Jimmy gives us a detailed description: she was always “in a hurry”, and seemed to be absent with her thoughts. Sometimes, when she made them sandwiches, “she would stop in the middle of her preparations – the dumping of stale crackers onto a plate, the sawing up of chewy orange-and-white-marbled hunks of cheesefood – and stand stock-still, as if she could see someone else in the room” (OC 101). Since “she believes in respecting a child’s privacy”, she never disturbs them when they are playing videogames and hanging out (OC 101). Although his father dies when Crake is still at a very young age, he and his mother do not develop a tighter bond, which would generally be expected in this situation. “Crake’s mother does not fit the mold of typical patriarchal mothers of sons, whom Adrienne Rich [in Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution] depicts as living only for their boys […] However, Crake’s mom does not share a close relationship with her son” (Myers 2011: 36), which is evident when observing his reaction to his mother’s death. One month before Crake’s college graduation, his mother dies:

It was an accident, or so went the story. (Nobody liked to say the word sabotage, which was notoriously bad for business.) She must have cut herself at the hospital – although, said Crake, her job didn’t involve scalpels – or scratched herself, or maybe she’d been careless and had taken her latex gloves off and had been touched on a raw spot by some patient who was a carrier. (OC 207)

After her death, Crake feels nothing; he even describes watching her through the observation window as “impressive” (OC 207). Crake’s feelings for his mother are of a cold nature and Jimmy is upset about how emotionless Crake acts: “Jimmy didn’t understand how he could be so nil about it—it was horrible, the thought of Crake watching his own mother dissolve like that. He himself wouldn’t have been able to do it” (OC 208). Although Jimmy’s mother wasn’t a good mother herself, he still would feel compassion if she died. It is easier to identify with Jimmy than Crake.
Barzilai draws attention to the fact that because Atwood’s revisionary narrative superimposes the story of one avenging son (Crake) onto that of another (Hamlet), and because both sons know the grisly manner of their fathers’ deaths, the dissolution of Crake’s implicated mother may be intended to tally with how the Danish king is dispatched. (Barzilai 2008:103)

According to Myers, his antipathy for his mother might emerge from her inattention to him. However, while Jimmy forgives his mother even though she left him, Crake seems to be relieved to have his mother out of the way (cf. Myers 2011:37).

Temporarily, it seems as if Jimmy has found a new mother figure in Ramona, his father’s girlfriend, who used to be his former lab assistant at OrganInc Farms. When Jimmy meets her as a child, he initially likes her, although he has the impression that she may not be so intelligent:

She wasn’t stupid, said Jimmy’s dad, she just didn’t want to put her neuron power into long sentences. There were a lot of people like that at OrganInc, and not all of them were women. It was because they were numbers people, not word people, said Jimmy’s father. (OC 28)

After his wife has vanished, the two of them start an affair. Although Ramona tries to bond with Jimmy, he has difficulties accepting her because he still misses his mother. Additionally, during puberty he develops feelings of a sexual nature towards her:

Sometimes she would watch DVD movies with him, sitting beside him on the couch, making them a bowl of popcorn first, pouring melted butter substitute onto it with greasy fingers she’d lick during the scary parts while Jimmy tried not to look at her breasts. (OC 76)

Henceforth, growing up with a surrogate mother he felt attracted to may have resulted in the view he holds about women in general– he is mainly interested in sexual affairs than having a deep connection with women (besides Oryx).

Snowman, when he thinks about them, tries to convince himself that the affair started after his mother left the family:

[…] He’s convinced that Ramona and his father had refrained. They’d waited till Jimmy’s mother had buggered off in a splatter of pixels before toppling into each other’s arms. Otherwise they wouldn’t have done so much earnest, blameless gazing at each other in Andre’s Bistro at OrganInc. […] They wouldn’t have salivated on each other over the greenery and pork pies while using Jimmy as a human shield.

Not that Snowman passes judgment. He knows how these things go, or used to go. He’s a grown-up now, with much worse things on his conscience. So who is he to blame them? (He blames them.) (OC 75-76)
Jimmy’s feelings have been bruised by the events of his life. His mother left him, and then Ramona stepped in, the intruder, his father’s new girlfriend, and after marrying his father, “now officially his stepmother” (OC 206). Although he formerly uttered that he was okay with the wedding, he “got as drunk as it took. He propped himself against a wall, grinning stupidly as the happy couple cut the sugary cake” (OC 206). After moving away to go to college, Jimmy decides to cut ties with his remaining family and refuses their invitations to visit. Ramona and his father are trying to have a baby, and Jimmy envies the unborn child for all the attention it’s going to get (OC 206): “Any minute now Ramona would be planning a baby, a more satisfactory baby than Jimmy had ever been to anybody” (OC 206).

Kristi Myers (cf. 2011:46-47) draws a parallel between The Handmaid’s Tale and Oryx and Crake since both novels argue that any mother is better than an absent mother. It is clear that all children need the nurture and supervision of their mothers, even if the mothers feel insufficient or overwhelmed with their purpose. “One goal for Atwood here may be to encourage readers to pay attention to the smaller, everyday problems as well as the larger, worldwide events that affect their lives” (Myers 2010: 46). The children in the novels suffer because their parents became the victims of a technologically ruled society. Crake’s and Jimmy’s moms were not able to take care of them because of their work in pursuit of technological advancement while Oryx’s mom is forced to sell her due to poverty. However, “technology, like the patriarchy of Gilead, fails to provide workable substitutes for mothers. All three main characters in Oryx and Crake fail to save one another, just as their mothers failed to save themselves and their children” (Myers 2011:47).

Another weak motherly character can be found in Ren’s mother, Lucerne, who leaves the Compounds (and subsequently her husband) to be with Zeb. Her story is told by Ren in The Year of the Flood and also in part by Zeb in MaddAddam. She is a hopelessly romantic woman who feels abandoned by her husband: “She was really very restless, because her husband was cold as a crypt, and they never made love any more because he was too busy with his career. And she was a sensual person, she always had been, and her sensual nature was being starved to death” (YF 154). Lucerne is described as “sensitive” and “sensual” (YF 154), attributes often connected to women. However, her
flight to the Gardeners and living with Zeb has not provided her with the romantic life she longed for, and her relationship with Zeb is also not working out faultlessly. Thus, Lucerne tries to be a “good housewife” for Zeb:

   Usually Lucerne stayed in bed until we were gone [...] but today she was in the kitchen area [...] and she was actually cooking. She’d been making that effort more often lately. Also she was keeping our living space tidier. [...] I think she was trying to make things nice for Zeb, though they were having more fights. (YF 117)

Apparently, Lucerne assumes acting like a housewife would save her relationship with Zeb, which obviously is not enough. She gets more jealous after a while, accusing him of cheating on her, which results in him not coming home for several days in a row.

   After a certain amount of time of being neglected by Zeb, Lucerne decides to leave the Gardeners in order to lead an independent life. Adams draws attention to ecofeminism, which takes the dilemma of neglected women into account:

   Look at the way women have been treated. We’ve been completely controlled, raped, not given any credibility, not taken seriously. It’s the same thing with animals. We’ve completely mutilated them, domesticated them. Their cycles, their entire beings are conformed to humans’ needs. That’s what men have done to women and the earth. (Adams 1996: 116, quoted in Nanda 2013: 76)

Ecofeminism raises the awareness that women (and the earth) are victims of the male dominated society, and, therefore, that females are partly reactions to their surroundings and the things happening to them. “By portraying the women in the novel as victims to male abuse and objectification, Atwood expresses the fear that the feminist movement is only temporary as women show acceptance to the sexist cultures and do not protest against being seen as sexualised objects” (cf. Bouson 2011: 13-1).

   However, instead of starting over again, Lucerne takes the easiest way out by returning to her husband and telling the people in the compound that the God’s Gardeners had kidnapped herself and Ren:

   She said it wasn’t the fault of the cult itself — it was one of the male members who’d been obsessed with her and wanted her for his personal sex slave, and had taken away her shoes to keep her captive. This was supposed to be Zeb, though she said she didn’t know his name. I’d been too young to realize what was going on, she said, but I’d been a hostage [...] (YF 282)
This way she can return to her husband and the luxury of the compounds as a victim, and not as having left them voluntarily. Her lies lead to a broken mother-daughter relationship, especially since Lucerne fears Ren will eventually tell the truth and threatens her in order to stay quiet: “Amanda’s back there. Keep that in mind” (YF 283). She uses Ren’s friendship and her desire to protect Amanda in order to keep her silent. She starts calling her Brenda and acts as if their past with the God’s Gardeners never happened. Lucerne appears to be a lonely character and continues to act to her own advantage. Despite her husband still treating her the way he used to before they left the Compounds, she tries to find her happiness there once again, overcompensating with clothes, manicures, and other luxuries. However, Lucerne never truly creates the impression of being happy, neither while living with the Gardeners nor after her return to her former husband. For this reason, it is particularly sad that Lucerne never tried to bond with her daughter, which Ren comments on after being forced to leave college because her mother cannot pay for it anymore: “I was out of the nest in one swift kick. Not that I was ever in much of a nest: I’d always been on the edge of the ledge with Lucerne” (YF 391). Lucerne is another example of the fact that Atwood creates mainly weak maternal figures in her MaddAddam trilogy. All of the mothers presented throughout the novel are either weak due to their physical conditions or their mental state. Veena, Bernice’s mother, is another fragile parent unable to take care of her daughter because she’s in a “fallow state”, as the Gardeners call it since they do not believe in depression. Veena is not able to take care of herself, let alone of Bernice. She is described as a ghost-like figure, who genuinely relies on everybody else to stay alive:

She had on her usual shapeless dress; her knees were covered with an old yellow baby blanket; her pale hair hung limply on either side of her round, soft, whitish face; her hands lay curled slackly, as if her fingers were broken. On the floor in front of her was a scattering of dirty plates. Veena didn’t cook: she ate what Bernice’s father gave her; or else she didn’t eat it. But she never tidied up. She hardly ever spoke [...] (YF 105-06)

Lucerne also fits into the category of “bad mother”. Although she was always physically there, she did not pay attention to Ren and was more occupied with finding real love than raising her daughter. “Lucerne ignores Ren largely, but uses her as a convenient excuse when it serves her” (Myers 2011: 53). Ren says that her mother’s “story was that I’d been traumatized by being stuck in among the warped, brainwashing cult fold. I had
no way of proving her wrong. Anyway maybe I had been traumatized: I had nothing to compare myself with” (YF 284). Eventually, Ren meets her mother again at the spa, where Toby is providing a hideout for Ren. However, instead of finding common ground, Lucerne only shows a lack of interest. Ren narrates the incident by saying: “I think she recognized me, but she blew me off like I was a piece of lint [...] it was like being erased off the slate of the universe—to have your own mother act as if you’d never been born” (YF 401) (cf. Myers 2011: 53-54).

The tragedy of bad parenting continues in MaddAddam, when the reader gets to know how Adam One and Zeb were brought up. Adam One’s mother left the family to “mate with more than one male, not only with Zeb’s father. Or that is what Zeb’s father told him” (MA 108). The reverend then marries Trudy, and she gives birth to Zeb. However, although she is his birth mother, she does not pay a lot of attention to her son: “[...] Zeb’s mother was often taking a nap, or doing other things that interested her. She was not very interested in small children”, especially not Zeb which can be proven by the fact that she told him “You will be the death of me” (MA 108), which is a very harsh comment towards her child. It is not only her words that demonstrate this uncaring nature, but also her actions: “Sometimes she helped Zeb’s father lock up Zeb in a closet” (MA 109). Moreover, she repeatedly compares Zeb with his older brother and holds Adam up as an example: “Why couldn’t Zeb behave well, the way his brother did? Sit up straight, don’t squirm, eat properly, your hand is not a fork, don’t wipe your face on your shirt, do what your father says, say yes sir and no sir, and so on” (MA 114). Apparently, Zeb is not able to please his mother (or his father) in any way and therefore he is treated poorly by his parents. Consequently, Zeb begins to wonder how he could turn out so badly if his mother, according to the Reverend, “was the goody-goody” and Fenella, Adam’s birth mother, was the “shag-anything trashbunny” (MA 110). Therefore, Zeb starts to
daydream that he’d been left behind by Fenella, who must have been his real, worthless mother. She’d been forced to flee in a hurry, and hadn’t been able to tote him along when she was running away – she’d dropped him on the doorstep in a cardboard box, to be taken in and trodden underfoot by this Trudy person, who was unrelated to him and lying about it. Fenella – wherever she was – deeply regretted her abandonment of him, and was planning to come back and get him once she could manage it. (MA 110)
Additionally, Zeb gets jealous of Adam for having Fenella as his mother when all he has is Trudy (cf. *MA* 115). He plays pranks on his brother in order to find an outlet for his envy. He cannot believe that he has the same DNA as the Reverend and Trudy:

> Since the two of them claimed that Zeb was so freaking useless and they were so righteous, naturally he thought he’d been adopted, since he couldn’t possibly have come from two such pristine sources of DNA as them. [...] (*MA* 110)

Zeb acknowledges that “[Trudy] wasn’t a sadist as such, not like the Rev. But she was the centre of her own universe, big-time” (*MA* 114), and this is what makes a bad mother. Trudy is another textbook example of a bad mother: she only cares about herself, does not pay attention and, what is even worse, compares the two children with each other and runs Zeb down for not being as great as his brother Adam.

Furthermore, the reader finds out that Trudy was involved in the murder of Fenella when Adam admits that he saw his father and Trudy dispose of Fenella’s body in the garden when he was only four. So Fenella did not leave the family but was rather eliminated because the Reverend wanted her out of the way. Zeb is shocked since he has relied deeply on the hope of a “secret helper waiting out there” (*MA* 121). Adam argues that Trudy may have helped because “she wanted Fenella out of the way, to clear her path. My guess is she was already pregnant with you. The Church of PetrOleum doesn’t sanction divorce, what with the Holy Oil at the marriage ceremony” (*MA* 124). They uncover that the whole story was a lie since “bad mothers are always a good story, for them [the church]” (*MA* 124). Once again, two figures in the novel are abandoned by their mothers. I argue that Adam One also gets left behind by his mother since she is not there (although it certainly was not her fault since her husband killed her and thus deprives her of the possibility of fulfilling her role as a mother). Trudy, who may be physically there, actively decides to act both emotionally and physically abusive towards her natural child. Eventually Adam One and Zeb blackmail their father, steal some money from him and run away. (cf. *MA* 125-128)

Zeb tries to cope with the feeling of being left alone by singing: “It was a habit left over from his so-called youth, when he’d whistle in the dark, whatever dark he’d been locked into. In the dark, in the darkness, in the darkness that was there even when it was light.” One of his songs for instance dealt with his mother and fathers and resembles
a kind of lullaby: “Dad's a sadist, Mom's a creep, [c]lose your eyes and go to sleep” (MA 73).

Remarkably, it is only the birthmothers who fail at being nurturing mothers. As already seen with the boy's surrogate mother at the end of *The Road*, the foster parents are an exception. In Pilar, for example, Toby finds a substitute mother. Pilar is a member of the Gardener's and is known as Eve 6, one of the leading preachers at the cult. Not only does she teach Toby about natural remedies, survival, and beekeeping, she also helps her navigate more profound incidents, such as the death of Toby’s real mother, which was “an orchestrated occurrence rather than an accident” (Myers 2011: 49-50). Pilar becomes like a mother to her, and it is her who helps Toby find her calling as a healer. However, Pilar eventually commits assisted-suicide since she was terminally ill and Toby once again loses a maternal figure. She takes her position as Eve 6 and therefore comes into Pilar’s inheritance.

However, not only does Toby search for a motherly figure for herself, but according to Myers (cf. 2011: 50-51), she takes on a maternal role on several instances throughout the novel. She becomes a teacher at the Gardeners, and although she is a very strict one, she also scolds them like a mother. For example, Toby gives a boy a special errand and tells him that they depend on him because she believes that “it was good to let boys that age believe they were doing the jobs of men, so long as they didn’t get carried away” (YF 233). In teaching, she finds a satisfying chance since she cannot have any children herself. Although Toby is not their biological mother, she acts as a role model for all the other mothers in the novels by only paying attention to the children. Furthermore, she takes in Jimmy’s mother, known as “Hammerhead” by that time, and takes care of her even though she finds her cause egocentric. She provides her with shelter and medicine and therefore once again takes on the role of the mother. In addition, she risks her safety in order to hide Ren at the spa, and their relationship resembles that of mother and daughter. When she finds Ren outside the spa, she reasons that “she’d like to cure her, cherish her, for isn’t it miraculous that Ren is here? That she’s come through the Waterless Flood with only minor damage?” (YF 477).

Amanda, Ren’s friend, gets pregnant in *MaddAddam* after being raped by both Painballers and by Crakers. Her mental state, which had already been bad, gets worse:
She “is walking around like a Zombie” (MA 215) and Toby understands her situation very well: “Who could expect her to give birth to a murderer’s child? To the child of her rapists, her torturers?” However, there is still the possibility of Amanda “harbouring a baby Craker.” Toby asks herself if that is “even possible? Yes, unless they’re a different species altogether. But if so, won’t it be dangerous? The Craker children are on a different developmental clock, they grow much faster. What if the baby gets too big, too fast, and can’t make its way out?” (MA 215). Amanda utters the wish to be dead and to abort the child: “I want this thing out of me,” says Amanda. “Can’t I drink some kind of poison? Some of your mushroom stuff?” (MA 216). The Craker women do not understand why Amanda is unhappy since they “are always happy when [their] bone cave is full” (MA 216). Ren wants to talk Toby into giving Amanda an abortion, but Toby does not have the skills for the operation. Ren is also afraid of having “one of those Frankenbabies inside me too” (MA 216). Blackbeard, the little Craker boy, tries to comfort them: “Oryx will help, and the baby will come out of the bone cave, and then Amanda will be happy. Everyone is very happy when there is a baby that has just come out” (MA 217). However, this turns out to be a deception. While the Craker mothers are good nurturers, all of the other mothers in the dystopic novels I have been analysing do not meet the requirements for being good maternal figures. Hence, it stands to reason that the Crakers are in fact a better human race then the previously existing one. They are not preoccupied with themselves and other distractions, but are happier with less and enjoy taking care of their babies. Toby declares that “those Craker women just love babies. They’d go berserk if you did cruel and hurtful things to it” (MA 218). Zeb admits that he could “have used a mom like that: protective, cuddly, and so forth” (MA 218). Although he turned out to be a vigorous and independent, Zeb still longs for a mother who would have taken care of him when he was little. It seems that the abundance of maternal figures in the novels leads to a higher sense of responsibility in the protagonists: Zeb leads the MaddAddamites, Toby takes care of everyone she comes across, Jimmy looks out for the Crakers, while the boy in The Road feels in charge of his father. It seems that they are adopting the motherly position that they unfortunately lacked themselves.

Eventually, Ren’s nightmare comes true, and she is, in fact, pregnant with a Craker baby. Many difficulties are associated with bearing a hybrid since “their fetal growth rates are different, their heads are bigger when they’re born, judging from the
kids some of those women are toting around, so it could get stuck. [...] What if there's a blood incompatibility?” (MA 218). Swift Fox is pregnant too, after “doing an experiment in genetic evolution. Reproduction of the fittest” (MA 219). She mated with the Crakers on purpose, but has also had sex with various MaddAddamites (cf. MA 274). Towards the end of MaddAddam, the reader learns that all three women have given birth to Craker hybrids, and that all of the babies have their unmistakably green eyes. However, they are not sure which further features they will inherit. Luckily, Amanda has also given birth to a hybrid, and though Toby had been “worried that Amanda might reject the baby, [...] she didn’t. She appears to be quite fond of it” (MA 379). This seems surprising since beforehand, Amanda had uttered that she would hand the child over to White Sedge in order to take care of it or “the Pigoons can eat the thing; they’d appreciate it” (MA 369).

In the process of bringing up the children, the Craker women are ever-present, purring, tending, and bringing gifts” (MA 380). Apparently, the idea of motherhood seems to have a chance at survival towards the end of the novel, since all the remaining mothers are taking care of their babies in a loving manner and receive the help of the Craker women who are born nurturers. Moreover, the end of MaddAddam, leaves the reader with a positive afterimage as far as motherhood is concerned. The babies are brought up in a family-like circle and even obtain father figures within the MaddAddamites: “Crozier and Ren appear united in their desire to raise Ren’s child together. Shackleton is supporting Amanda, and Ivory Bill has offered his services as soi-disant father to the Swift Fox twins” (MA 380). It seems the novel makes a turn around at this point in terms of motherhood, since they are all helping together in raising the children, a fact which has not been overserved a lot in the other novels. Sometimes it takes a complete breakdown to determine what is most important. Humankind continues to carry on, which is observable during the last pages of MaddAddam written through the voice of Blackbeard, who is now a grown man/Craker:

“[...] Swift Fox told us that she was pregnant again and soon there would be another baby. And the fourfathers were Abraham Lincoln and Napoleon and Picasso and me, Blackbeard; and I am very happy to have been chosen for that mating. And Swift Fox said that if it was a girl baby it would be named Toby. And that is a thing of hope” (MA 390).
There is no end as long as there is a mother. Seemingly, Atwood has given the story a twist here: the malfunction of mothers comes to an end, and the reader is left with the hope that the future may be brighter than the past.

4.2.2. Ecofeminism and the Exploitation of Women

A prime example of the exploitation of women can be found in Oryx in *Oryx and Crake*. “Oryx’s history is one of sexual enslavement grounded in a system of instrumental, late capitalist exchange” (DiMarco 2005: 185). Oryx, who was sold by her mother, is first introduced to the reader when Jimmy and Crake are watching porn online on a site called “HottTotts”, a global sex trotting site, which also offers child pornography:

This was how the two of them first saw Oryx. She was only about eight, or she looked eight. They could never find out for certain how old she’d been then. Her name wasn’t Oryx, she didn’t have a name. She was just another little girl on a porno site. (OC 103)

The boys were used to watching similar pornographic content. However, Oryx strikes Jimmy as remarkably different, being “small-boned and exquisite” (OC 103), with a “hard smile that made her appear much older” (OC 104). Oryx turned into the camera and looked “right into Jimmy’s eyes, intro the secret person inside him. I see you, that look said. I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want” (OC 104). Considering the past, Snowman realizes that meeting Oryx was a “fatal moment”— “Because now he’s come to the crux in his head, to the place in the tragic play where it would say: Enter Oryx. Fatal moment” (OC 361), imagining a play script. Snyder states that

[Jimmy’s and Oryx’s] relationship is fundamentally mediated by the visual technology of the closed-circuit camera and by the prior claim that Crake holds over Oryx’s affections. The onscreen image of Oryx is clearly a stand-in for Oryx’s presence, but even in person she is a substitute for an always already lost object. (Snyder 2011:483)

Atwood herself has written an essay on the subject of porn and confirms that “a large part of the market for all kinds of porn, soft and hard, is drawn from the 16-to-21-year-old population of young men,” who think of it as an “an educational tool and a powerful
propaganda device” (Atwood 1988: 426, quoted in Galbreath 2010: 58). Bouson has dealt with Atwood’s “uneasiness” concerning pornography and concludes she wants to portray the “degradation of culture in a society where violence and pornography have become cheap, and readily available, forms of entertainment” (Bouson 2009: 143). “Technology, not science, serves as the key element defining Oryx. Her very presence in the narrative is attributed to her online subjugation as a child sex-slave; without witnessing her ‘performance,’ Jimmy would not have become infatuated [...].” (Galbreath 2010: 55)

Oryx provides an opposing character regarding feminist agendas in comparison to Sharon, Jimmy’s mom.

While Sharon’s struggle is clear-cut resistance to a traditional patriarchal enemy, the institution of the Compounds, Oryx’s struggles are contested with non-figured opponents: poverty, environmental degradation, and commodified sexuality. She has fictitious names, many stories, and many faces: third-world peasant, child sex slave, prostitute, teacher, lover, and goddess.” (Galbreath 2010: 58-59)

When it comes to Oryx, her story is connected to the loss of her mother. In contrast to Jimmy and Crake, who were neglected by apathetic mothers, Oryx’s mom was forced to sell her because she could not take care of her properly. While Oryx’s mom leaves her out of desperation, Sharon and Crake’s mother were not able to give them attention since they were otherwise occupied. Consequently, since her experience of being brought up by a mother ended very early, Oryx only remembers little of her mother. Given her suffering as a child, there may be an explanation for Oryx’s decision to help Crake raise a human race. In the hope of helping the greater good, she condones Crake’s true aim (cf. Myers 2011: 42).

When Jimmy meets her at Paradice many years after the porn incident and for the first time in real life, he does not recognize her at first, but then he “saw her face. She turned into the camera and there it was again, that look, that stare, the stare that went right into him and saw him as he truly was” (OC 362). Subsequently, Jimmy and Oryx start a relationship, and Jimmy is very interested in Oryx’s past and asks her if she was the little girl in the porn. He had kept a screenshot of her and confronts her with it. Oryx cannot (or does not want to) confirm whether she is the little girl or not:

Another woman in her place would have crumpled up the picture, cried, denounced him as a criminal, told him he understood nothing about her life, made a general scene. Instead she
smoothed out the paper, running her fingers gently over the soft, scornful child’s face that had – surely – once been hers. (OC 105)

Jimmy’s interest in her former life annoys Oryx; she has put her past behind her already. The exploitation of women is something conventional to her. She even argues that this kind of enslavement is necessary since it only meets the growing demand for it (cf. DiMarco 2005: 185). Oryx is well aware of the patriarchal society she is living in and therefore accepts it. In contrast to Jimmy, she has put her past behind, but he insists on clinging to it and continually asking her about it:

[Jimmy] “Did they rape you?” [...] What answer was he expecting, what did he want?
“Why do you want to talk about ugly things?” she said. [...] “We should think of beautiful things as much as we can. There is so much beautiful in the world if you look around. You are looking only at the dirt under your feet, Jimmy. It’s not good for you.”

She would never tell him. Why did this drive him so crazy?
“It wasn’t real sex, was it?” he asked. “In the movies. It was only acting. Wasn’t it?”
“But Jimmy, you should know. All sex is real.” (OC 168-69; emphasis mine)

Weimbs argues that Oryx actively discards her victimization. She refuses to tell Jimmy the real story and hence refuses to take on the role which Jimmy seems to have chosen for her: the role of the victim. Furthermore, she tells Jimmy that “it’s not good for [him] (OC 169) and therefore shows her refusal to be a victim of either rape or abuse (cf. Weimbs 2010:132). Oryx refuses to take the passive role of the victim while “Jimmy pines over it, expressing guilt for the despicably patriarchal and passively consumerist society he lives in and which preys on her” (Roman 2015: 160). Oryx realizes that the past cannot be changed, that they should live in the present and not think about it. However, the future can be shaped, and it may be therefore that she agrees to teach the Crakers. When she is taking care of the Crakers, she understands that her position is a subordinate one, that “Crake is [her] boss” (OC 368). For her, working at Paradise is a promotion, “a move from slave status to citizen” (DiMarco 2005:184), which seems ironic since she is a slave to Crake’s will later on.

Oryx’s view on sexuality is rather problematic. Rosalind Gill argues that a postfeminist appraisal of sexuality comprises
the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. (Gill 2007: 14, quoted in Galbreath 2010: 59)

The reader learns that Oryx was originally sold to sell flowers to foreigners but is then used as a child prostitute due to her beauty and obedient behaviour. Jimmy’s particular interest in her past also includes getting to know where those terrible incidents happened to her. His interest in Oryx differs vehemently from the one he offered other women.

“There were canals in this city?” Jimmy asked. He thought maybe that would give him a clue as to which city it had been. [...] He’d wanted to track down and personally injure anyone who had ever done harm to her or made her unhappy. He’d tortured himself with painful knowledge: every white-hot factoid he could collect he’d shove up under his fingernails. The more it hurt, the more – he was convinced – he loved her. (OC 158)

Seemingly, his love for Oryx and Oryx herself have a destructive effect on Jimmy. There has never been a woman he loved more, but also no woman who could hurt him this much. Oryx’s view on love is a pragmatic one, and Jimmy often suffers from her being realistic and distant.

Crake meets Oryx first at Watson-Crick, the college he is allowed to attend as a consequence of his tremendous academic success:

“I’ve known her for a while. Ever since post-grad at Watson-Crick.”

“She was studying there?” [...]  

“Not exactly,” said Crake. “I encountered her through Student Services.”

“You were the student, she was the service?” said Jimmy, trying to keep it light. (OC 364)

Apparently, ordering prostitutes, so called “services”, is common practice at this dystopian university. Jimmy even has a romanticized view on pornography: “But the body had its own cultural forms. It had its own art. Executions were its tragedies, pornography was its romance” (OC 98). Sex, and consequently women, are just a provision of service, even offered by the University student services. Crake is the consumer whereas Oryx is at the opposite end of the scale: she sells herself in order to survive. For her, it is simply an exchange of favours – her body for money. To Oryx,
having a money value was no substitute for love [...]. But love was undependable [...]. But love was undependable [...]. At least those who wanted to make a profit from you would make sure you were fed enough and not damaged too much. Also there were many who had neither love nor a money value, and having one of these things was better than having nothing.” (OC 146-47)

Oryx needs to be highlighted in a particular way since the Jimmy-Oryx-Crake love triangle is a rather complex one. "She exists as a feminized territory that Jimmy and Crake emotionally (for Jimmy) and sexually (for Crake and Jimmy) conquer. She is virgin and whore—and acts as an instrument in each case” (DiMarco 2005: 184). Crake uses Jimmy’s love for Oryx to make him do things he wouldn’t normally do. Oryx is used as a means to Crake’s “assisted suicide” (OC 400), as Snowman calls it in the aftermath of the happenings. Jimmy and Crake face each other in the air locked dome in Paradice as the plague, which was a consequence of the BlyssPlyss pills, has already spread worldwide:

He had his other arm around Oryx, who seemed to be asleep; her face was against Crake’s chest, her long pink-ribboned braid hung down her back.
As Jimmy watched, frozen with disbelief, Crake let Oryx fall backwards, over his left arm.
He looked at Jimmy, a direct look, unsmiling.
“I’m counting on you,” he said. Then he slit her throat.
Jimmy shot him.
(OC 384-85)

Crake was aware of the fact that Jimmy would kill him if he harmed Oryx in any way. When slitting her throat, he knew Jimmy would pull the trigger. Oryx functions merely as a functional instrument for Crake. She has taken care of the Crakers, and Crake knows that Snowman will take care of them as a way of paying his last honour to her. Thus, it is not obvious if Crake’s love for Oryx was ever authentic. Barzilai adds that “if blame must be apportioned, and audiences do tend to sit in judgment, the finger should be directed not at Crake alone but also, if not more so, at a world that has made him lucidly and damningly mad” (Barzilai 2008: 107).

After the apocalypse, when Jimmy lives as Snowman on the beach and tells the Crakers stories about Oryx, he does not describe her as a human instrument which was used to serve personal needs (which she indeed was) but reinvents her as a goddess with an honest concern for nature. Likewise, he constructs Oryx to be an instrument to sustain community and love within the Crakers and between them and him. He thus changes Oryx from an instrument of self-validation into an instrument to preserve the wellbeing of others (cf. DiMarco 2015: 186-187).
“Oryx [...] manifests multiple roles, ‘incessantly self-inventing’ in the context of her sex work, as the Crakers’ teacher, as a business woman, and as a goddess. [Her] multiplicity of identities ‘seems to point to a postfeminist agency,’ while her reincorporation by Snowman as the Crakers’ nature goddess is symptomatic of ‘“ecofeminism and spiritual feminism’ (Galbreath 2010: 47)

According to Galbreath, Oryx is a symbol for both supporting and disproving the idea of empowerment through sexuality. (cf. 55-56). On the one side, she uses her sexuality to manipulate men and she “feel[s] strong to know that the men thought she was helpless but she was not” (OC 155), but on the other side, the usage of sex does not automatically disclose the power relations.

Tolan notes that Oryx’s sexuality is not freely hers to give, but is controlled by “capitalist power structures” instead (Tolan 2007:290, quoted in Galbreath 2010: 60). Galbreath argues that Oryx only fits a postfeminist agenda. It is the same westernized global economy that changed the climate and is responsible for mass extinctions, which produces the demand for sex workers and their digital alter egos, and therefore helps Oryx’s body become an item of financial value. However, second-wave feminism might view Oryx’s body only as a manifestation “of oppression, exploitation, misrecognition, and disrespect” (Herr 2005: 80), but Oryx herself is a much more complex character, and she uses sex work as her foot in the door of western culture. (cf. Galbreath 2010: 60)

In an attempt of self-determination, Oryx trades sexual favours for English lessons, since she associates this language with opportunities (OC 166). However, even if Oryx tries to create self-definition, she still is limited by the men since she relies on the “masculine forces” in her life (Galbreath 2010: 62), and is compelled to act in the way that they expect her to. “The image of her child-pornography, the revelation of her physical perfection, and her naturalized femininity continue to shape her identity even after her death” (Galbreath 2010: 62) Furthermore, Roman (2015: 160) argues that Oryx is intrinsically the product of capitalism’s grasp in highly industrialized nations. Correspondingly, Fiona Tolan writes that Oryx “articulates significant tensions surrounding the notions of sexual liberation, free will, exploitation, commercialism, race, exoticism and ethnicity that congregate around the theme of pornography” (Tolan 2007:286, quoted in Roman 2015: 161). Tolan uses an entirely different approach to analyse the complexity of Oryx, who is mostly examined as an anti-feminist and dispassionate figure, and applies the term ‘post-human’ as well as ‘post-feminist’ to her.
‘Post-feminist’ means that “women are no longer victims, but are now free to construct and explore the lineaments of their own sexual gratification” (Tolan 2007: 285, quoted in Roman 2015:162). Thus, with the help of this post-human post-feminist view, Oryx’s contradictions can be balanced. Stephanie Roman has tried to link Oryx’s sexuality and deification to Margaret Atwood’s construction of feminism. To conclude, she suggests that Oryx is best understood by employing a process called “‘double-think’: she’s pacifist, ignorant, sexist, sexy, academic, uneducated, whore, Madonna, nobody, everyone, product, producer, and so on. She is capable of inhabiting all of these roles, and because she does, she is the perfect candidate to be the Crakers’ instructor” (Roman 2015:162).

Oryx continues to live on in Jimmy’s memory as a kind of ideal woman. Before meeting her again years later in the RejoovenEsense Compound, he measures all women against her iconicity. Even after her death and the epidemic, Snowman tries to retrieve her in his remembrance, and her metaphysical appearance feels tangible to him: “He can feel Oryx floating towards him through the air, as if on soft feathery wings. [...] If he put out his hand he could touch her; but that would make her vanish” (OC 131). Snowman also tries to talk to her:

“It wasn’t the sex,” he says to her. [...] “It wasn’t just the sex.” A dark smile from her: that’s better. “You know I love you. You’re the only one.” She isn’t the first woman he’s ever said that to. He shouldn’t have used it up so much earlier in his life, he shouldn’t have treated it like a tool, a wedge, a key to open women. [...]”No, really,” he says to Oryx. (OC 132; emphasis mine)

It is obvious that Jimmy was not only deeply in love with Oryx, but also that he used declarations of love as a means to getting women to do what he wanted, as a “key to open” them.

According to Lützen (cf. 2013:50), Ramona, Jimmy’s stepmom, is a visualization of how beauty and aging are very central aspects in the dystopian world of Oryx and Crake (not very different to the world we are living in). However, it is only Jimmy, who is a true product of his superficial environment, whereas Crake’s values are not as affected by it. Jimmy’s superficiality is demonstrated by his perspective on women. As Jimmy gets older himself he notices the physical changes in Ramona as well:

Ramona’s push-up-bra breast tops were freckled from too much sun ... and anyway he found Ramona’s new matronly air repellent. She was getting little creases on either side of her
mouth, despite the collagen injections; her biological clock was ticking, as she was fond of pointing out. (OC 205).

Jimmy seems to be obsessed with wrinkles and the signs of aging when they occur on women’s faces. He reacts similarly when observing his mother’s life execution: “Jimmy was shocked by how old she’d become: her skin was lined, her mouth withered” (OC 304). Amanda, Jimmy’s university girlfriend, although she is young, is similarly evaluated by Jimmy when he notices: “She had a very fine ass too, and the tits were real, but – and he’d noticed this early – she was a little flinty around the eyes” (OC 286) (cf. Lützen 2013: 48-9). Apparently, Jimmy finds aging in women repulsive, on the whole, he appears to be a rather superficial young man until he meets Oryx. Jimmy is an excellent example of how women are regarded in the dystopic society of the compounds: “After his indiscriminate adolescence he’d preferred sad women, delicate and breakable, women who’d been messed up and who needed him [...] A grateful woman would go the extra mile” (OC 115). He is looking for a woman he can mend instead of an equal partner.

Similar to Jimmy, in MaddAddam, Zeb compensates for his missing maternalistic support with increased sexual exploitation of women. After fleeing from his father, he works at Secrets Burgers where he meets Wynette, a “brownette with big, dark-ringed, starved-looking eyes” (MA 132) and starts an affair with her.

In addition to her alluring personality – a euphemism, he now has to admit, for her somewhat meagre snatch, which was the part that fascinated him, and he apologizes for that, but such is the case with hormone-sodden adolescent males, and it’s nature’s plan, and he thought he was in love, so fuckit – she offered the advantage of a tiny room. (MA 132) He sometimes grabbed a bottle of paint remover to “ply Wynette with before sex because she said it helped her relax” (MA 132). Zeb and Wynette sleep together for some time until one day “Zeb woke up next to Wynette, the SecretBurgers meatslinger, and realized that she smelled like grilled patties and stale cooking oil” (MA 166). He loses his interest in her and realizes that “there’s no future in this” (MA 160). Moreover, he cannot cope with the fact that Wynette is getting, what he calls, “nosy”:

In the name of love and getting to know and understand the real, total him, [Wynette] wanted to explore his deeper depths, figuratively speaking. She wanted his lid off. If she pried too hard – if she unwrapped one after another of his flimsy cover stories, which he hadn’t constructed with enough care, he realized, and he vowed to do better next time he conned someone – if she did the unwrapping, there was nothing very convincing immediately underneath. (MA 167)
He seemingly mistrusts her and is afraid of her finding out who he really is since she could tell his father where he was. He admits that he is one of the guys who will “bonk anything with a cavity, and Wynette had been the beneficiary in [his] case” (MA 167). Wynette wants Zeb to pay more attention to her, and he decides to leave her: “He wasn’t a complete shit about it. He left Wynette some cash and a note of undying adoration, with a P.S. saying that his life had been threatened because of a dirty deal – he didn’t say what kind – and he couldn’t bear the thought of putting her in peril because of him” (MA 168). In short, Zeb is not able to face Wynette and, after exploiting her sexually and misusing her for a place to stay, he simply leaves her. Zeb’s father himself was a “frequent visitor to the haptic wanksites” (MA 117) which Zeb finds out while raiding his computer. Additionally, Zeb enjoys

the historical re-enactment beheading sites [...] – “Mary, Queen of Scots: Feel This Hot Red-Head Spurt,” “Anne Boleyn: Royal Slut! Did It with Her Brother, She’ll Do It with You, Then You Get to Slice Her Dirty Little Neck,” [...]”Lady Jane Grey: Make This Elite Virgin Pay the Price of Snotiness, Blindfold Optional.” These gave you the sensation, right in your own hands, of what it felt like to decapitate a woman with an axe. (MA 118)

Although Zeb is not sure if those women are real or not, he enjoys watching these naked women be decapitated.

Galbreath argues that feminine re-naming in *Oryx and Crake* is an act of self-liberation. However, it is only moderately successful since Sharon’s new identity does not keep her from being executed. Additionally, Oryx only achieves her redefinition under the auspices of a masculine framework (cf. Galbreath 2010: 63-64). “Sharon and Oryx each exhibit a different mechanism for action: Sharon pulls away from the ethical stance of the Compounds, fighting against the grain, and Oryx accepts and acquiesces, not questioning any of the science and technology she witnesses, and unwittingly participating in Crake’s extinction plot for humanity” (Galbreath 2010: 64).

*The Year of the Flood*, in contrast to *Oryx and Crake*, is centred around women as it is told from two female perspectives, Toby’s and Ren’s. These two are women, both with connections to the God’s Gardeners, who tell their stories about what happened both before and after the apocalypse. Besides both being part of the God’s Gardeners cult, they are both victims of a male-dominated society. *The Year of the Flood* is indeed a novel centred around feminism and many critics use the term ecofeminism when referring to the novel. The term itself was coined by Francoise D. Eaubonne, a French
feminist, who wrote Le féminisme ou la mort (Feminism or Death) in 1974, wherein she first used the term ecofeminism. The term is used to explain

how society’s disregard for women is comparable to its contempt for the environment. [...]. In this particular work, her overall goal is to describe and analyze how impacts on the biosphere, the question of energy choices, genetic engineering and the control of women’s reproductive capacity are all concrete manifestations of the intersections of ecology and feminism. She also speculates about how control over all of these issues was wrested from women with the advent of patriarchy, and elaborates upon the regressive changes that ensued from such a shift. (Roth Johnson 2001: 53)

Many critics have discussed ecocriticism when it comes to Oryx and Crake, but also, more frequently when it comes to The Year of the Flood. Farooq has dealt with the topic in more detail: “Ecofeminism reflects the affinity between the domination of nature and subjugation of women in history, experience, religion, literature, ethics and epistemology” (2015: 79). After the term was coined, it drew attention to the current ecological crisis compounded by overconsumption, overpopulation and pollution combined with the patriarchal oppression of women which has been practiced for millennia. Eaubonne’s intention was to make women aware that their cause was to head towards a post-patriarchal, genuinely humanist, as well as an ecologically sustainable, future. Often called third-wave feminism, ecofeminism stands for a multi-elemental cultural perspective which blends feminism, women’s spirituality, and ecology (cf. Farooq 2015: 79-80). Patrick Murphy emphasizes the logical relationship between ecology and feminism:

To be a feminist, one must also be an ecologist, because the domination and oppression of women and nature are inextricably intertwined. To be an ecologist, one must also be a feminist, since without addressing gender oppression and the patriarchal ideology that generates the sexual metaphors of masculine domination of nature, one cannot effectively challenge the world views that threaten the stable evolution of the biosphere in which human beings participate or perish. (Murphy 2000: 48, quoted in Farooq 2015: 79)

According to Nanda (cf. 2013: 180), the ratio of women to men who fled the corporations in the MaddAddam trilogy is three to one. One possible reason for this could be the suffocation of women in the technocratic environment. Moreover, women appear to have higher ethical standards and cannot tolerate the demolition of both nature and human beings (Sharon, Jimmy’s mother, is an example of this as can be seen in Oryx and Crake). However, those women decide not to remain passive, but rather to
release themselves from the male dominated society and their suffocating environment. “In particular [Atwood] voices her concern over the dangers posed by the ‘gene rush’ and the impacts of bio-technology as they ruthlessly upset the ecosystem” (Suka 2007: 107, quoted in Nanda 2013:80)

Toby, who joins the Gardeners as a young adult, has to flee from her violent and abusive boss, Blanco. After her mother’s death and her father’s suicide, she starts working at a place called Secret Burgers, “but then she discovered the catch. The catch was the manager” (YF 44) Rebecca, her co-worker, said that she should stay off his radar, because “he’s real jealous. He’ll take a girl apart” (YF 44). However, Toby is unlucky and finds herself the object of Blanco’s attention and is consequently coerced into starting an affair with him:

His view was that a woman with an ass as skinny as Toby's should consider herself in luck if any man wanted to stick his hole-hammer into her. [...] He demanded a thank-you after every degrading act. He didn’t want her to feel pleasure, though: only submission. (YF 48)

“Women are metaphorically consumed in the novel, as Toby is prey for Blanco – that is meat, which reduces her to an object of flesh” (Tomic 2012: 63). Since Blanco treats animals and women in the same manner, Nanda (cf. 2013: 163) discusses the fact that ecofeminists dispute whether or not men oppress them both equally. Additionally, Seager draws a parallel between the violence used on women and on animals: “A number of women have drawn parallels between the treatment of animals in factory farming, and especially in experimentation, and the treatment of women. One of the frightening aspects of this overlap is the use of male violence as a tool of domination” (Seager 1993: 209, quoted in Nanda 2013:163). Toby was trapped in her work situation since she depended on the income. The status of women in the workplace is yet another topic ecofeminists concern themselves with, since women too often find themselves at the lower end of the hierarchy. In contrast to Toby, Blanco is the at very other end of the scale – shamelessly abusing her, nearly starving her to death by raping her in her lunch breaks, and therefore prohibiting her from having a meal. Not only does he degrade her, he also dominates her in every way. Accordingly, Atwood has linked the consumption of women in workplaces to the consumerist culture of international corporations (which here can be found in Secret Burgers). Unfortunately, sexual harassment, rape, and male
oppression are habitually practiced within a patriarchal society and often takes place within the victims’ families, their other relatives, or their circle of friends and acquaintances. In the United States, every three out of four women who have been molested were victimized by someone that they knew (cf. Nanda 2013: 164). Furthermore, Karen Warren and Duane Cady add that

much of the current “unmanageability” of contemporary life in patriarchal societies, is then viewed as a consequence of a patriarchal preoccupation with activities, events, and experiences that reflect historically male-gender-identified beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions. Included among these real-life consequences are precisely those concerns with nuclear proliferation, war, environmental destruction, and violence toward women, which many feminists see as the logical outgrowth of patriarchal thinking. (Warren and Cady 1996:12, quoted in Nanda 2013: 165)

Toby manages to flee from Blanco with the help of the God’s Gardeners. The oppression of women is linked to the disregard of nature in *The Year of the Flood*. Chiefly, at Secret Burgers not only are women are exploited and forced into sexual acts, but ecological and environmental ethics are also compromised:

> The secret of SecretBurgers was that no one knew what sort of animal protein was actually in them: the counter girls wore T-shirts and baseball caps with the slogan SecretBurgers! Because Everyone Loves a Secret! [...] The meat grinders weren’t 100 per cent efficient; you might find a swatch of cat fur in your burger or a fragment of mouse tail. Was there a human fingernail, once? (*YF* 42-43)

On the other hand, at the Gardeners, Toby and all the other women live in accordance with nature, tilling the gardens on their rooftops and enjoying freedom. It is evident that society must turn towards eco-communities to regain and retain humanity (cf. Nanda 2013:194).

Over the course of the novel, Blanco, who is now beset with a thirst for revenge, continues looking for Toby in order to kill her. As a result of the abuse she has endured, Toby’s desire for sex appears to have vanished.

> “She’d had no sex recently, nor did she miss it: during her immersion in the Sewage Lagoon she’d had far too much sex, though not the kind anyone would want. [...] Maybe it’s temporary, Toby thought. Maybe it’s like having your arm go to sleep. My neural connections for sex are blocked. But why don’t I care? (*YF* 137-38.).

Toby is freed from Blanco’s degradation by the God’s Gardeners, where she meets Ren, who becomes her student. Her strength is apparent, and the children she teaches at the
Gardeners give her the nickname “Dry Witch Toby,” well aware that they should not cross her:

We could never make Dry Witch Toby cry. The boys said she was a hardass — she and Rebecca were the two hardest asses. Rebecca was jolly on the outside, but you did not push her buttons. As for Toby, she was leathery inside and out. (YF 81)

Although striking us as a born fighter, Toby has her soft moments, too, which is most observable in the third part of the trilogy, MaddAddam. After becoming an orphan, Toby sells her eggs for money, and, after the procedure, she finds out that “could never donate any more eggs, or — incidentally — have any children herself” (YF 41). As a result, Toby starts thinking about whether she had ever truly wanted children: “But it seems she’d wanted children after all, because when she was told she’d been accidentally sterilized she could feel all the light leaking out of her” (YF 42). In a way, Toby is deprived of a women’s birth right: the possibility to bear and take care of her own children. The “light is leaking out of her”, she temporarily loses her interest in life and starts using drugs as well as sleeping with a lot of men. When Toby, despite thinking she did not want any children, faces the fact that she is unable to have children, it becomes clear that ecofeminism views birth and children as part of womanhood. Choosing not to want children is a very different matter from having that possibility taken away. Ecofeminism worships the unity of women and nature and aims at sabotaging a patriarchal society. One of the leitmotifs of ecofeminism is the link between the domination and suppression of both nature and women. Significantly, The Year of the Flood underlines how technology and industry affect nature and women, in this case, their reproductive system. Technology engages with the laws of nature and thereupon trespasses certain limits (cf. Farooq: 79).

Toby, who was always depicted as being strong, becomes weak when she and Zeb start an affair.

She’s crying now. This is pathetic, like baby mice, blind and pink and whimpering. It’s not what she does. But she’s doing it. [...] She turns away to leave: if she’s going to snivel, she should do it alone. Alone is how she feels, alone is how she’ll always be. You’re used to solitude, she tells herself. Be a stoic. Then she’s enfolded. She’d waited so long, she’d given up waiting [for Zeb]. (MA 49)
Despite the fact that Toby is still characterized by her strong will and toughness, her love for Zeb makes her more vulnerable – she becomes jealous and is afraid of losing him. When she observes Swift Fox, a fellow MaddAddamite, flirting with Zeb, she needs to suppress feelings of anger and jealousy: “She consciously suppresses the word slut: a woman should not use that word about another woman, especially with no exact cause” (MA 97). She constantly tries to eliminate those feelings because “nobody cares. There’s no fairness, there’s no ownership. She has no claims. If Zeb tumbles into bed with Swift Fox [...] what she is entitled to say about that is exactly nothing” (MA 97).

Former relationship models are not applicable in the post-apocalyptic world of the MaddAddamites, which is not very surprising. Since they are living from day to day, hoping to survive, traditional relations are no longer pursued. Moreover, Toby completely falls for Zeb, leading her to become incautious: “[...] [I]t’s hard to concentrate on the idea of a future. She’s too immersed in the present: the present contains Zeb and the future may not. She longs for tonight, she longs to skip the day that’s just begun and plunge headlong into the night [with Zeb]” (MA 136).

However, towards the end of MaddAddam, Zeb and Toby undergo a Gardener’s ritual analogous to a wedding. The Crakers ask them about it and Toby answers: “It is a custom we have. It shows that we love each other” (MA 378). Unfortunately, one day Zeb does not return from an adventure, and Toby falls into a depression, similar to what has happened to other women in the novel:

Toby was more sad than anyone, because Zeb was gone. And although [the Crakers] purred over her, she did not ever become happy again. Then she became thinner and thinner, and shrunken; and after several months, she told [the Crakers] that she had a wasting sickness that was eating parts of her away, inside her body. (MA 389)

Eventually, Toby disappears into the forest, with a “very old packsack”, with “a jar of Poppy, and also a jar with mushrooms” inside and never returns. (MA 390). Her suicide resembles that of the boy’s mother in The Road. Despite being depicted as the strong feminine character throughout the entirety of almost two novels, she decides to end her life instead of facing the challenges without Zeb. Women are consistently portrayed as the weak ones in the novels, either falling victim to men, or suffering from mental illnesses and consequently committing suicide. In a way, Toby’s suicide can be seen as a version of male exploitation: her love for Zeb was so strong that eventually, without it, she could not live. Although it is not a typical case of sexual exploitation as I have
described in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, Toby is co-dependent on Zeb on a different level.

According to Tomic (2012: 63-64), *The Year of the Flood* divides the generations into feminists and post-feminists. Toby, being middle aged and aware of the impending dangers which are implied in male-female relationship, presents the feminist stance, whereas Ren, who grew up in the privileged Compounds most of her life (besides her temporary stay with the Gardeners), represents the post-feminists, who actively decide to become a sexual commodity. In contrast to Toby, Ren, who is also a strong character, is more dependent on others throughout her life and after the plague since she is trapped in the Sticky Zone and relies on other people to help her escape. Ren becomes a high-class prostitute after being forced to leave the Martha Graham Academy due to her mother not being able to pay the fees. She goes to work at the high-end sex club “Scales and Tales” and is a “valuable asset” there, “the cream of the crop” (*YF* 9). It gradually becomes more clear how this sexist dystopian atmosphere affects women. The female body is used as a means to get what you want, as a commodity that women can use for trade. One day, Ren wonders what her family and friends would think if they ever found out she worked as a prostitute:

Some of them would be disappointed, like Adam One. Bernice would say I was backslidden and it served me right. Lucerne would say I’m a slut, and I’d say takes one to know one. Pilar would look at me wisely. Shackie and Croze would laugh. Toby would be mad at Scales. What about Zeb? I think he’d try to rescue me because it would be a challenge.

Amanda knows already. *She doesn’t judge. She says you trade what you have to. You don’t always have choices.* (*YF* 76; emphasis mine)

However, not all women working in the business are there of their own free will. As a child, Ren observed a female sex worker trying to run away:

“One day we'd seen a scaly girl running down the street in daytime, with a black-suited man chasing her. [...] The man caught up with her and scooped her up, and carried her back to Scales [...]. Her feet were bleeding. Whenever I thought of that, a chill went all through me, like watching someone else cut their finger. (*YF* 98-99)

In contrast to her best friend Amanda, Ren believes in romance and love, as can be seen in her relationship with Jimmy at HelthWyzer. However, it is precisely this love which leads Ren to appear as a weak and co-dependent female character. She is strongly
attached to Jimmy, who destroyed her belief in love and misused her trust. She still clings to Jimmy even after he has left her, for example, when Croze approaches her and wants to have sex with her she realizes she does not want to have sex with anyone besides Jimmy: “All of a sudden I don’t want to have sex without loving the person, and I haven’t really loved anybody in that way since Jimmy” (YF 522). However, by taking a look back at Oryx and Crake Ren never played such an important role on Jimmy.

Ren is not afraid of using her body to get back at Jimmy, an action she is “still ashamed of” (YF 304). She tries to seduce Glenn to hurt Jimmy’s feelings. However, her plan does not unfold as anticipated: “Jimmy did see us together at the mall, and he did seem taken aback; though not for long, because I caught him giving Glenn a thumbs-up, as if saying, Go for it, buddy, be my guest! As if I was his property and he was sharing” (YF 306). Likewise, Ren is just a trophy to Jimmy, who symbolizes the patriarchal system which Atwood has created in her dystopian world. In contrast to Toby, Ren also survives the plague, but is not self-determined after the incident since she depends on others to save her as she is trapped in the Sticky Zone, a place which is used for ill Scales and Tales workers to recover. She was able to remain virus free during the time that she spent there. Finally, Amanda frees her (cf. Tomic 2012:64-65). However, there are more similarities between Ren and Toby than may appear at first glance. Both were left by their parents, although in different ways – Toby’s father committed suicide whereas Ren’s parents never show particular interest in their daughter despite being still alive –, both are forced to leave college due to financial problems, and both finding temporary shelter within the religious cult. Toby’s and Ren’s relationships with their mothers are both very damaged. While Toby’s mother dies when Toby is still young, Ren’s mother was admittedly physically present but was neither loving nor nurturining.

Both characters’ mothers suffered at the hands of the corporations and both girls find solace and nurturing when they join God’s Gardeners. Toby reluctantly fills the role of her own mother figure Pilar after Pilar’s death. Ren finds a sister in her friend Amanda, and later Toby cares for Ren in a motherly way. (Myers 2011: 54)

However, while they may have a similar biography, the two female characters developed in very different ways.

Amanda, who develops a very tight friendship with Ren at the Gardeners, sees sex only as a way to get the things she wants. She asserts that “men’ll have sex with anything, given the chance” (YF 273) and as teenager trades sexual services in order to get items
she wants, i.e. a very special kind of weed. They boys she traded with, approach her and declare that “You owe us two fucks,’ said Croze. One each. We ran a big risk, and we could’ve got killed!” (YF 209). Ren is shocked that Amanda trades her body for drugs although she “knew [Amanda] used to do that kind of trade, for food, when was hungry after the Texas hurricane, but she’d told [her] she’d never liked it and it was strictly business, so she never did it any more because she didn’t have to” (YF 210). In this case, the situation is different. Amanda uses her body to get what she wants. She does not necessarily need the things she trades for, but for her, sexual intercourse is merely a medium to obtain her desires. However, Amanda is also aware that trading sex is never a fair deal. When Jimmy breaks Ren’s heart, Amanda asks her:

   Why are you being so weak? Love’s never a fair trade. So Jimmy’s tired of you, so what, there’s guys all over the place like germs, and you can pick them like flowers and toss them away when they’re wilted. But you have to act like you’re having a spectacular time and every day’s a party. (YF 303)

Importantly, Amanda argues that Ren should “act” as if she was feeling well which leads to the assumption that Amanda may not be as detached as she appears to be. With Amanda, Atwood has created a cold and distant female character, who does not allow anyone to get close to her. As an illustration, her relationship with Shackie was in fact, as she calls it, a “fair trade: she got someone watching her back and helping her lift stuff and sell it, and he got sex” (YF 293). Amanda has as pragmatic a view of sex as she has of love, which she assumes to be “useless because it led you into dumb exchanges in which you have too much away, and then you got bitter and mean” (YF 293).

So much the worse that Amanda falls victim to two Painballers at the end of the novel. Painballers are convicted criminals, who are forced to fight mortal combat in an arena against each other. Their fight can be watched onscreen and in the course of The Year of the Flood, Blanco is also sentenced to become one of them (cf. YF 129). The Painballers hold Amanda as a slave, dragging her on a rope around her neck and use her whenever it pleases them. Before freeing her, Ren, overhears them talking about Amanda:

   “We gonna feed her?” says the shorthair. He’s licking his fingers.
   “Give her some of yours,” says the bearded one. “She’s no use to us dead.”
   “No use to me dead,” says the shorthair. “You’re such a pervert you’d plank a fuckin’ corpse.”
   “Speaking of which, your turn first. Get the pump primed. I hate a dry fuck.”
“It was me first yesterday.”
“So, we arm-wrestle?” (YF 555)

To them, she is nothing more than a piece of meat, “used up, worn out. Worthless” (YF 554). Consequently, Amanda is not the same anymore. “She’s crying, big gulping sobs, and [...] it must have been very terrible [...] because it takes more than a lot to make Amanda cry” (YF 557). From Amanda’s last words in The Year Of The Flood, it becomes obvious that something inside Amanda has been broken:

“But we’re not finished yet! Are we?” She says this last thing to Amanda.
“Kaputt,” says Amanda. Her voice is so small.
“Don’t think about it,” I say, but she begins to cry again, softly: she’s in a Fallow state. I put my arms around her. “I’m here, you’re here, it’s okay,” I whisper.
“What is the point?” says Amanda. (YF 570-71)

As can be seen in the quotation above, Amanda is not the woman she used to be. Atwood took the one protagonist who actually believed in sex as a means to get what you want and made her a commodity to the Painballers, who used her to their advantage. Once again, a woman becomes a victim of the male dominated society.

After being raped by the Painballers, Amanda again falls prey to men and their sexual longings. In MaddAddam, Toby, Ren and Amanda come across the Crakers after finding Jimmy the Snowman in the bushes. The Craker men have been programmed to detect fertile women, which is described in the novel as them “smelling blue”. The men turn blue themselves, and their penises glow in blue. When the Crakers come across Amanda, they sniff her and utter: “She is the blue one! She smells blue! She wants to mate with us! Give her the flowers! She will be happy!” (MA 12). Ren and Toby try to get the Crakers away from her but fail: “Toby looks over, across the fire: Amanda has disappeared in a flickering thicket of naked male limbs and backs. Ren throws herself into the sprawl and is quickly submerged” (MA 13). Both Ren and Amanda are raped by the Crakers. Amanda, after having endured sexual assault twice, falls into a “fallow state”, the Gardeners’ diagnosis for a “wide range of conditions, from depression to post-traumatic stress to being permanently stoned” (MA 30). Amanda mostly does nothing after the rape, and Toby hopes that it may be just a slow healing process. However, Amanda is at least trying to make an effort and more and more helps with the chores.
She seems depleted and does not act like herself after the incidents. The reader initially knows Amanda as an independent and fierce woman, but it then becomes clear that the abuse at the hands of the Painballers and afterwards by the Crakers has left deep scars on her soul. However, after the incident, the Craker men act cautiously towards the MaddAddamite women as they are now aware that mating with them is not acceptable. They are nervous and confused, discussing the situation:

One is blue. Two others were blue, we joined our blue to their blue but we did not make them happy. They are not like our women, they are not happy, they are broken. Did Crake make them? Why did he make them that way, so they are not happy? Oryx will take care of them. Will Oryx take care of them, if they are not like our women? (MA 100-101)

In fact, in contrast to the Craker women, the few women left after the apocalypse are broken. They have seen a lot and endured many hardships, and thus are unable to enjoy themselves anymore. For them, the only goal is to stay safe and alive. The Craker women do not have such sorrows since they are mostly occupied with nursing their children, singing and purring (a cat-like feature which enables them to cure one another).

At the end of MaddAddam, there seems to be a rebellion towards the exploitation of the female body. It is suggested that the few remaining humans “shouldn’t waste any increasingly rare human DNA”, and instead of killing the Painballers who raped Amanda, “their generative fluids should be, as it were, siphoned off, to provide genetic variety” since, an “ingrown gene pool must be avoided” (MA 369). When the women disapprove of the idea of having sex with them, fertilization via a turkey baster is proposed. The idea is heavily rejected: “‘Use it on your own self,’ says Swift Fox rudely. ‘Men are always telling women what to do with their uteruses. Excuse me, their uteri’” (MA 369). In contrast to the women of the pleeblands, who have sold their bodies for money (selling their eggs, like Toby, or working as a stripper, like Ren) women now avow for their rights in the new society they are forming.
4.3. **Nature and Science**

“Oh, and then you have people arguing about fatuous things like the environment and human rights. Go three days without water and you don’t have any human rights. Why? Because you’re dead”

- **Margaret Atwood** (McCrum 2010)

Nature and science are of great interest in the novels I am analysing. While Cormac McCarthy deals with the destruction of nature after the apocalypse has happened, Margaret Atwood concentrates more on how the apocalypse came about – a tragic consequence of science and the human desire to alter nature.

In the first subchapter, I will analyse how the drawbacks of science are described as well as the events that led to the apocalypse. I will also further investigate which scientific progress has taken place (and if it was progress at all).

In the second section, I will examine how Atwood and McCarthy describe nature in their novels and which consequences science brought to the cosmos.

### 4.3.1. One Step Ahead Equals One Step Back – The Drawbacks Of Science

Whereas the source of nature’s destruction is not revealed in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*, it is clear that the apocalypse in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy is based on the drawbacks of science. To blame for this catastrophe, called the “Waterless Flood” in the novels, are the scientists in the compounds, and primarily Crake.

Jimmy’s first childhood memory, the burning of an “enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs” (*OC* 18) clearly demonstrates that scientists have interfered to a great extent in the past. The animals were suffering from a disease, which according to some people “was brought in on purpose” (*OC* 19). Jimmy’s father is sure that this is how it will
proceed “once things get going” (OC 18). It is not clear what exactly Jimmy’s father means by “things” but the threat of biological warfare stands to reason. In those days, Jimmy’s dad used to work for OrganInc Farms as a genographer where he was mostly invested with the pigoon project.:

The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year. A rapid-maturity gene was spliced in so the pigoon kidneys and livers and hearts would be ready sooner, and now they were perfecting a pigoon that could grow five or six kidneys at a time. Such a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then, rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs, much as a lobster could grow another claw to replace a missing one. (OC 25-26)

Dinello (2005:247) argues that “the virus of technology is the satanic machine, humanity’s terminator, and the source of death in a techno-apocalypse” and he is proven right in the MaddAddam trilogy. Technology, in fact, terminates the majority of people in Atwood’s dystopic setting. Creating so-called pigoons in order to harvest organs from them and implant them into human beings nearly crosses an ethical border. However, although the apocalyptic society Atwood creates appears far from the reader’s everyday life, transplant operations of porcine heart valves are already being performed. In MaddAddam, it becomes apparent that the pigoons not only cultivate human organs but that they also have human attributes, e.g. when they are mourning the dead piglet and organize a funeral for it (cf. MA 269-270). Given this circumstance, their sole creation for organ harvest seems even more immoral. Pigoons are not the only genetically modified animals – other transgenic inventions include the wolvgogs (a crossbreed between wolf and dog, created as an alarm system for safety reasons) (cf. OC 241), the rockulators (fake rocks that are able to absorb water and release in times of drought) (cf. OC 235) and spoats/giders (a goat-spider crossbreed which produces high-tensile spider silk filaments in its milk used for bullet proof vests) (cf. OC 234). “It is a veritable buffet of organic parts and capabilities that the genetic scientists deconstruct, select, and build again in entirely new formations” (Ng 2010: 176). Not only does science eventually lead to the extinguishing of humanity, but in the past, it has also led to the loss of several parental figures in the MaddAddam trilogy. Sharon, Jimmy’s mother, leaves the compounds because she cannot endure the corporation’s constraints any longer. Before
she leaves, she makes several remarks that everything the organization does is wrong, that it’s a “moral cesspool” (OC 64) and denounces Jimmy’s father for his inventions:

Your hype your wares and take all their money and then they run out of cash, and it’s no more treatments for them. They can rot as far as you and your pals are concerned. Don’t you remember the way we used to talk, everything we wanted to do? Making life better for people – not just people with money. You used to be so . . . you had ideals, then.” (OC 64)

Jimmy sometimes overhears arguments between his parents which clarifies his mother’s stance when it comes to modifying genes etc. Barzilai (2008: 94) calls these arguments overtly didactic scenes since Atwood’s usual witty ridicule gets lost in these discussions. The primary fight emerges when his father wants to celebrate a breakthrough in the laboratory: “We now have genuine human neo-cortex tissue growing in a pigoon. Finally, after all those duds! Think of the possibilities for stroke victims” (OC 63). Jimmy overhears his mother interrupting: “More people with the brains of pigs. Don’t we have enough of those already?” (OC 64). Sharon leaves the compounds since she cannot longer cope with its destruction of nature and humankind. However, before she departs, she leaves behind a “wordless message” (OC 70) by destroying her husband’s computer —

thus retrodetermines the meaning of the bonfire that opens the novel and is itself retrodetermined by the pandemic that marks the novel’s climax. Like those acts of biological sabotage that precede and follow it [by the group of MaddAddamites], his mother’s act of domestic and corporate sabotage reveals the permeability of the lines, the supposedly inviolable cordons sanitaires, that seem to separate inside from outside, us from them, home from away. In Oryx and Crake, extinction starts at home. (Snyder 2011: 485; addition mine)

Jimmy is not the only one who suffers the loss of his mother to science. Toby’s mother also falls victim to the reckless scientists within the corporations:

She took more supplements, but despite that she became weak and confused and lost weight rapidly: it was as if her body had turned against itself. No doctor could give her a diagnosis, though many tests were done by the HelthWyzer Corp clinics; they took an interest because she’d been such a faithful user of their products. They arranged for special care, with their own doctors. (YF 32)

Years later, after joining the Gardeners, Pilar tells Toby that her mother was “guinea pig” and the pills she took were, as Pilar puts it, “the pills of death” and that she was only an experiment for them (cf. YF 139-140). In addition, Toby has not only lost her mother due to scientific interference, she is also deprived of becoming a mother herself. She sells her
eggs to science, and, in return, it destroys her possibility of becoming a mother because
the procedure goes wrong (cf. YF 41). Furthermore, Crake’s father was murdered by his
employers and the people he trusted most. Crake finds this out by hacking into his
father’s account (OC 248). He had discovered that HelthWyzer was creating new
diseases in order to make as much profit as possible:

There’s a whole secret unit working on nothing else. Then there’s the distribution end. Listen,
this is brilliant. They put the hostile bioforms into their vitamin pills – their HelthWyzer
over-the-counter premium brand, you know? [...] The best diseases, from a business point of
view [...] would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally – that is, for maximum profit –
the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out” (OC 247-
48.)

Looking at Toby’s mother, it is clear that this is exactly what happened in her case. Her
condition stayed the same – she was in bad shape but alive – until her husband could
not afford any more supplements, which consequently lead to her death. Presumably,
these incidents played a part in Crake’s personal evolution and his decision to destroy
humanity.

Crake’s history is mainly described via Jimmy the Snowman in Oryx and Crake
and only partially continues in fragments of The Year of the Flood and MaddAddam. The
readers get to know Crake as a teenager who befriends Jimmy shortly after Jimmy’s
mother has gone missing. He is a brilliant young man who is more interested in science
than girls, quite contrary to Jimmy. His name is a nickname he picked for “Extinctathon”,
a computer game which later turns out to be a means of communication for the
MaddAddamites (cf. OC 92) Crake is a student at Watson-Crick, which offers science’s
power as well as the liberty to invent whatever scientists want. Jimmy attends Martha
Graham, which is a metaphor for the downfall of arts and humanities since they are not
of importance anymore compared to science. They are, however, taught “applied
humanities”, which are abilities that, in the long-term, can be used to aid science (cf. OC
221). Jimmy is well aware of the fact that his studies are not as important as Crake’s and
is sad about having to study there. However, not all inventions at Watson-Crick are
successful. Some turn out to be quite dangerous, for example the bobkitten, which was
“introduced as a control, once the big green rabbits had become such a prolific and
resistant pest” (OC 192). They were assumed to be less aggressive and

were supposed to eliminate feral cats, thus improving the almost non-existent songbird
population. The bobkittens wouldn’t bother much about birds, as they would lack the
lightness and agility necessary to catch them. Thus went the theory. All of which came true, except that the bobkittens soon got out of control in their turn. Small dogs went missing from backyards, babies from prams; short joggers were mauled. (OC 193)

The bobkittens went astray and after the apocalypse are a further threat to the remaining population. Jimmy, while visiting Crake at Watson-Crick, is mostly apathetic to the thought of ChickieNobs, a “large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing” (OC 237). ChickieNobs are in fact chickens, but without a head or any other functions besides meat growth. Their sense is easy to explain: “You get chicken breasts in two weeks-- that’s a three-week improvement on the most efficient low-light, high-density chicken farming operation so far devised. And the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain” (OC 238).

When Jimmy confronts Crake about the developments which are clearly interfering with “the building blocks of life”, as Jimmy’s mother had already objected, Crake answers that “he doesn’t believe in Nature. […] Or at least not with a Capital N” (OC 242). Crake does not believe that there is any morality in what science generates which becomes most visible with his invention, the BlyssPlyss pill, which caused the great pandemic. The pill had several effects:

a) [it] would protect the user against all known sexually transmitted diseases, fatal, inconvenient, or merely unsightly;

b) would provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, coupled with a generalized sense of energy and well-being, thus reducing the frustration and blocked testosterone that led to jealousy and violence, and eliminating feelings of low self-worth;

c) would prolong youth. (OC 346)

However, at the same time, the pill was also a “sure-fire one-time-does-it-all birth-control pill, for male and female alike, thus automatically lowering the population level” (OC 347). Nevertheless, the consumers would be deprived of this information, and the pill would therefore lead to mass sterilization. Thus, the corporations wanted to control the population growth rate. Crake is firmly convinced of the benefits of the pills. However, the undertaking is risky since it is a large secret experiment. During the testing phase, several side effects had occurred: “A couple of the test subjects had literally fucked themselves to death, several had assaulted old ladies and household pets, and there had been a few unfortunate cases of priapism and split dicks” (OC 348). Ng (2010:180) draws a parallel between Darwin and Scientists in Crake’s and Jimmy’s world: Darwin’s
“survival of the fittest” claimed that natural selection would ensure the number of people would not exceed the limited resources, Crake and the other scientists prefer artificial selection. Since “there is a prevalent tendency in medicine nowadays towards expanding life expectancy, another intrinsically-human attitude” (Faure 2015:13), scientists have to cope with the problem of population overgrowth in a different way. By prolonging people’s life spans, the scientists faced the challenge of too many people for too few resources and hence the BlyssPlyss would have been an excellent solution. Undeniably, the BlyssPlyss pill has horrendous consequences – it leads to a global epidemic and is responsible for the death of nearly all of the world’s population. Jimmy remembers this cataclysmic event:

Meanwhile, the end of a species was taking place before his very eyes. Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species. [...] Site after site, channel after channel went dead. A couple of the anchors, news jocks to the end, set the cameras to film their own deaths – the screams, the dissolving skins, the ruptured eyeballs and all. How theatrical, thought Jimmy. Nothing some people won’t do to get on TV. (OC 401)

The worldwide plague wipes out the majority of people on the planet; only a few can save themselves. A similarity to some current viruses can be drawn. Dinello (cf. 2010: 248) argues that science had already been on the cusp of preventing infectious diseases which was proven wrong when, in the 1970s, the first cases of AIDS were diagnosed. The epidemic continued to grow and still is a major threat to humankind. According to Bouson (2015:8), the EarthFirst! Movement, which has been a model to the MaddAddam resistance group argued that AIDS and similar illnesses might aid with the problem of overpopulation. “Even more misanthropic was the claim that the emergence and spread of viruses like the hemorrhagic Ebola virus is nature’s way of defending itself by trying to ‘rid itself of an infection by the human parasite’ — the ‘flooding infection of people’ that threatens ‘to shock the biosphere with mass extinctions’” (Preston 1994: 288; 287, quoted in Bouson 2015:8). Bouson draws comparisons between those diseases and the massive plague in the MaddAddam trilogy. In the last novel, the readers learn that Adam One was well aware of Crake’s plan to kill off humanity since it was him who gave Crake the prototype of the virus after poisoning his father with it, and eventually turning the Reverend into “raspberry mouse” (MA 307). Bouson addresses the idea of seeing Crake as an
adherent of deep ecology and a radical and apocalyptic environmentalist who, in the face of an imminent human-created ecological catastrophe, determines to use his genius at bioengineering to save the biosphere by replacing destructive humans with his non-aggressive and primitive tribal hominoid species, the Crakers. (2015:8)

Before destroying humanity, Crake invents the Crakers, an entirely new humankind, which are a revised edition of imperfect humans: beautiful, obedient and immune to sicknesses. Crake has equipped them with certain characteristics, such as the ability to purr, a feature taken from the cat family, which enables them to heal each other (cf. OC 184-85). Above all, Crake has created them to be flawless:

Every time the women appear, Snowman is astonished all over again. They’re every known colour from deepest black to whitest white, they’re various heights, but each one of them is admirably proportioned. Each is sound of tooth, smooth of skin. No ripples of fat around their waists, no bulges, no dimpled orange-skin cellulite on their thighs. No body hair, no bushiness. They look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program. (OC 115)

However, Jimmy the Snowman does not feel attracted to these women at all since “it was the thumbprints of human imperfection that used to move him, the flaws in the design: the lopsided smile, the wart next to the navel, the mole, the bruise” (OC 115). The Crakers are seemingly perfectly constructed, but they are also all alike. Dinello goes as far as to say that “despite their cheerful, optimistic disposition, the Crakers are shown as the mindless mutant culmination of the 1950s life-is-a-machine cybernetic/behaviourist philosophy (2005: 260). In contrast to humans, the Crakers only have a limited lifespan and “are programmed to drop dead at age thirty – suddenly, without getting sick” (OC 356). Hence, there is no likelihood of population overgrowth.

The Crakers live together in a family association and mate with each other without any emotional attachment:

There’ll be the standard quintuplet, four men and the woman in heat. Her condition will be obvious to all from the bright-blue colour of her buttocks and abdomen—a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the baboons, with a contribution from the expandable chromospheres of the octopus. [...] Since it’s only the blue tissue and the pheromones released by it that stimulate the males, there’s no more unrequited love these days, no more thwarted lust; no more shadow between the desire and the act. (OC 193-94)

Although Jimmy sees the advantages of this kind of reproduction – “no more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape” (OC 194) – he still is not a supporter of the new humankind. It stands to reason that Crake spread the epidemic on purpose since he gave Jimmy an
antiserum and prevented Oryx from taking the pill. In MaddAddam, his story is clarified. Toby tells the Crakers the story of Crake’s reasoning behind destroying humankind:

For a long time, Crake thought. [...] The people in the chaos cannot learn. They cannot understand what they are doing to the sea and the sky and the plants and the animals. They cannot understand that they are killing them, and that they will end by killing themselves. And there are so many of them, and each one of them is doing part of the killing, whether they know it or not. And when you tell them to stop, they don’t hear you. So there is only one thing left to do. Either most of them must be cleared away while there is still an earth [...] or all must die when there are none of those things left. [...] They have had many second chances. **Now is the time.** [emphasis mine] (MA 291)

However, it is not clear why he kills himself (or rather provokes Jimmy into killing him) and Oryx at the end of Oryx and Crake. He probably knew that he would not be a good teacher to the Crakers, and that Jimmy would be the better option. By taking a look at his fridge magnets, we can see that they evolved from a scientific stance - “No Brain, No Pain”, “The proper study of Mankind is Everything” (OC 245) - to a more philosophical one - “Where God is, Man is not”, “To stay human is to break a limitation”, “Du musz dein Leben andern” (MA 354). However, Jimmy is more gifted with words and profound philosophic knowledge than Crake. Crake’s last words address Jimmy: “I’m counting on you” (OC 385). It may well be assumed that he had planned it all from the beginning since he was a very calculating person, which would explain why he immunized Jimmy without his knowledge long before the plague hit. In other words, it is important to realize that Crake may not have meant any harm in the beginning. His inventions may have been for a greater good but unfortunately went awry. Mahinur Uygur cannot help but notice that there are also utopic aspects to the story Atwood tells in the trilogy. He further argues that it is because of those “paradoxical representations” she is able to make “meticulous criticism of the abuse of nature and possible consequences” (Uygur 2014: 42). Bhalla et al. likewise argue that in fact “most of the terror and chaos portrayed in dystopian fiction, results from utopian aspirations (2015:26). Instead of evolving society, “his utopian vision generates societal chaos, obliterates earth’s populace, and most importantly, reforms a novel scientific social order that transforms nature into an unruly, dystopic organism” (Bhalla et al 2015:26). The more Crake interferes with life, the more hazardous it becomes.

The MaddAddam trilogy should inspire the reader to re-examine how they view science, gene modification, and cloning since biotechnology has made considerable progress in
recent years. In fact, modern life depends on electronic devices and gadgets, and medicine is accomplishing miracles every day. Bandyopadhyay (2011:1) claims that while we seem to have proof of such existence every day in our computer-dependent lives, the ethical implications of such existence for both the human and the natural world are hotly debated in ecocriticism, the study of the nature, extent and significance of environmental and ecological degradation represented in literature. Literature also serves to reflect various contending eco-ethical standpoints and warn us about the impending disasters of our own creation.

While I was analysing the novels, I often noted that our modern society bares many similarities to the events that take place in Margaret Atwood’s novels. “With dark humour disguising her pessimism, she challenges us to reflect on the virulent virus as a dark metaphor for utopianism as propaganda, biotechnology as addictive blind power, and corporate greed as a devouring monster (Dinello 2005: 260). The MaddAddam trilogy, in my opinion, is a warning to its readers and the world in general. It points out that the constant development of science may lead to the disappearance of certain species and life from Earth. As far as fauna and flora are concerned, this is already happening. Ng (2010 :174) wonders that “as the science of genetics evolves from evolutionary theory to radically transform the world and humanity, Oryx and Crake [and the other parts of the trilogy] can be seen as an attempt to ask: What does it mean to be – and remain – human in a world dominated by science?”

4.3.2. An Ecocritical Approach – A Return to Nature and a Fearful Outlook to the Future

All four novels I have analysed deal with environmental topics and therefore need to be approached in from an ecocritical perspective. Kate Rigby suggests that ecocritics should not only be open-minded, but also more open to interdisciplinary analyses of texts:

Transposed to literary studies, it is clear that this principle necessitates a radical shift in the way in which texts are interpreted and contextualised. This is the second way in which ecocriticism recasts the canon, and it demands of the critic an acquaintance with new areas of knowledge and understanding. Whereas, in the past, literary critics might have leant on history, philosophy or the social sciences in framing their readings of particular texts, ecocritics need to draw also on geography, ecology and other natural sciences. (Rigby 2002: 7; emphasis mine)
Ecocriticism, a term introduced by William Rueckert in “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978, can be defined as an “ecological extension of post structural Criticism” which first occurred in the 1990s as “the analysis of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty 1996: XIX, quoted in dell’Agnese 2014: 329). The field was rapidly enlarged, incorporating the kind of human representation in nature, the critical analysis of the term “human” as well as the relationship between humans and nonhumans (Garrard 2012: 5, quoted in dell’Agnese 2014: 329). Nowadays, ecocriticism is not only a method employed in literature but also in theater, cinema, and other kinds of arts. Dell'Agnese explains that

> from a methodological point of view, practitioners of ecocriticism suggest going beyond the analysis of plots and characters to verify the presence of metaphors and other rhetorical figures connected to the world of nature, or to assess the quality of landscape descriptions. From this perspective, the storyline is just one of the many elements to be taken into account, whereas the narrative strategy, the genre, the use of a given lexicon, of specific tropes, and of certain figures of speech are equally significant. (dell’Agnese 2014: 329)

Cormac McCarthy’s novel, The Road, offers a lot of geographical hints and detailed descriptions of the post-cataclysmic wasteland in which father and son are traveling. Ibarolla-Armendariz states that one of McCarthy’s “major strengths as a writer is his ability to depict natural landscapes in wonderfully delicate ways and to draw ingenuous analogies between the features of those environments and some of his characters’ psychic qualities” (2009:90). Having said that, Ibarolla-Armendariz wonders how McCarthy, who is usually is dependent on nature and the countryside, fares “when the world has mostly been reduced to a featureless wasteland in which animal life and flora have vanished completely?” (2009:91). Furthermore, he argues that McCarthy finds his greatest paradox in The Road in that although the catastrophe has left the country almost colourless and naked, there are still hints of what it looked like in the past (cf. Ibarolla-Armendariz 2009: 91):

> On the far side of the river valley the road passed through a stark black burn. Charred and limbless trunks of trees stretching away on every side. Ash moving over the road and the sagging hands of blind wire strung from the blackened lightpoles whining thinly in the wind. A burned house in a clearing and beyond that a reach of meadowlands stark and gray and a raw red mudbank where roadworks lay abandoned. Farther along were billboards advertising motels. Everything as it once had been save faded and weathered. (TR 6)
McCarthy’s description of the landscape is very detailed and gives the reader a vivid impression of how the catastrophe left the world behind. According to dell’Agnese (2014: 332 f.) *The Road* serves as a typical post-nuclear holocaust narrative since the landscape is described as inhospitable and suffers from environmental alterations. In this case, it is the recurring theme of ash. In the morning the man awakens and observes what is before him: “Everything paling away into the murk. The soft ash blowing in loose swirls over the blacktop. He studied what he could see. The segments of road down there among the dead trees. Looking for anything of colour” (*TR* 4; emphasis mine). After the apocalypse, nature comes to a standstill; nothing grows anymore: “The road was empty. Below in the little valley the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a burden of dead reeds. [...] Then they set out along the blacktop in the gunmetal light, shuffling through the ash, each the other’s world entire” (*TR* 6; emphasis mine). Blasi (2014:90) claims that “via its setting – a land barren of beautiful and sublime nature – McCarthy’s novel challenges symbolic and romantic visions of the natural world.” Moreover, the “post-apocalyptic landscape is uninhabited but scattered with the remnants of human presence; it is strewn with abandoned cars and other technological devices [...], it is covered by ruins” (Dell’Agnese 2014: 332). Bragard (2013: n.p., quoted in Dell’Agnese 2014: 334) calls this kind of landscape a “wastecape”, which describes a scene in which “nature has disappeared and [which] is crammed with the waste and ruins of the past.”

Johns-Putra (n.d.- 3) argues that the novel’s “appeal in a time of climate change is far from straightforward.” She further suggests that the reader should not only “read it as a simple censure of human exceptionalism and a plea for us to ‘care’ more for our children and for the planet”, but also as a recognition of “the anthropocentricism that underpins its account of environmental destruction—the novel mourns the loss of human rather than nonhuman nature” (Johns-Putra n.d.: 3). Even though Johns-Putra may be partially right with her statement, I want to add that without “nonhuman nature” the loss of the human is unavoidable. Graulund (2010: 68) argues that “in a world in which nature has been so decimated that it cannot rightly be said to exist anymore, it is of course appropriate to question whether the author has meant his book as a warning to a humanity run rampant.” By not taking care of nature, we are not taking care of our future. Both, *The Road* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy represent this fact.
Elena dell’Agnese, in her essay “Post-apocalypse now: Landscape and environmental values in The Road and The Walking Dead” discusses the “matter of environmental awareness and the question of the role of popular culture in shaping it”. (dell’Agnese 2014:328). She states that since the 1990s the “production and consumption of environmental meanings” have started to be examined in consideration to “post-structuralism, in connection with mass media, popular culture and other sources of information” (dell’Agnese 2014:328). However, since the cause of the catastrophe is not mentioned in The Road, critics opt for different interpretations. For example, while Ibarolla-Armendariz (2009:84) declares that “although the cause of this global disaster that has filled the atmosphere with soot and transformed the earth into a greyish, barren desert is never explicitly established in the text, we do know that it is human-created and probably related to nuclear weaponry”, Tim Blackmore (2009: 18, quoted in Dell’Agnese 2014: 333) confirms that “McCarthy’s book opens after some kind of undetermined human-created global spasm of destruction (not necessarily nuclear, although it seems very likely) has injected soot into the high atmosphere and rendered the Earth a barren, increasingly chilled wasteland of floating ash, dirty snow, and polluted rivers.”

The Road’s “elegiac ending” offers the reader a more optimistic vision of nature “in the face of ruins and death”, (Blasi 2014: 90) and leaves the option that nature, eventually, will recover:

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the fl. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculite patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not to be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (TR 287)

In Oryx and Crake Jimmy assumes himself to be the sole survivor of the epidemic besides the Crakers. He is proven wrong at the end of the novel when he observes two men and a woman (in fact, his former girlfriend Amanda) at the beach. This is where The Year of the Flood and Oryx and Crake overlap.

In "Different Shades of Green," Michael Bennet argues that, “the new wave of ecocriticism is interested in the interconnections between urban and non-urban space,
humans and interconnection, interconnectedness and experimental genres, as well as the impact of race, class, gender, and sexuality on how we use and abuse nature” (Bennet 2007: 207, quoted in Bhalla et al. 2014: 25-26). According to Bhalla et al, Atwood can therefore be anticipated as the forerunner of ecological aesthetics in literature as far as her MaddAddam trilogy is concerned. Moreover, Bhalla refers to Patrick Murphy (2000) and James C. McKusick (2000), two ecocritics, who claim that Atwood’s dystopias can be differentiated from traditional dystopian fiction due to their settings, which evoke ecocritical as well as ecological concerns (cf. Bhalla et al. 2014: 25).

Margaret Atwood has frequently commented on the topic of environmentalism in interviews: "The threat to the planet is us. It's actually not a threat to the planet - it's a threat to us.” (McCrum 2010). Apparently, Atwood feels the need to raise awareness towards the continued exploitation of the planet and in her second novel of the trilogy, The Year of the Flood, she “mixes together science, religion and environmentalism as she imagines the eco-religion of the pacifist and vegetarian God’s Gardeners” (Bouson 2011: 18). As already discussed, the Gardeners are an organized religion, which in addition to God, is also interested in the environment and reads the Bible as a green text. In addition to the usual religious ceremonies, they honor environmental saints in their religious calendar, e.g. Saint Euell Gibbons, Saint E.O. Wilson, Saint Rachel Carson, Saint James Lovelock, Saint Stephen Jay Gould, Saint Jane Jacobs and Saint Dian Fossey (cf. Bouson 2011: 18) The book opens with a rather critical hymn from the Gardener’s hymnbook:

Who is it tends the Garden, /The Garden oh so green?  
'Twas once the finest Garden /That ever has been seen.  
And in it God's dear Creatures /Did swim and fly and play;  
But then came greedy Spoilers,/ And killed them all away.  
And all the Trees that flourished /And gave us wholesome fruit,  
By waves of sand are buried, /Both leaf and branch and root.  
And all the shining Water / Is turned to slime and mire,  
And all the feathered Birds so bright / Have ceased their joyful choir.  
Oh Garden, oh my Garden, / I'll mourn forevermore  
Until the Gardeners arise, /And you to Life restore.  (YF prologue)
The hymn depicts the epidemic Crake has cast and which the Gardeners called “the waterless flood”. It both explains how the earth has been destroyed by humankind and how the Gardeners intend to save it. The Gardeners’ leader, Adam One, often incorporates environmental issues into his sermons and speeches: “God’s commandment to “replenish the Earth” did not mean we should fill it to overflowing with ourselves, thus wiping out everything else” (YF 69). The Gardeners lead a simple life in harmony with nature, trying not to harm any other species. However, they do not accept the political-economic order but battle the society’s rampant consumption and environmental and social exploitation” (Bouson 2011: 19). Over time, they gain more power and are able to recruit former scientists, who, like Jimmy’s mom, oppose the current system: “They also had cells of hidden Exfernai sympathizers embedded at every level, even within the Corporations themselves. The information provided by these sympathizers was indispensable” (YF 253). They communicate via the Extinctathon chatroom and plan to demolish the system from within. However, Adam One is trying to find a peaceful solution while his brother Zeb thinks “peace goes only so far” (YF 336). Zeb is outraged by the way the Corporations treat nature: “There’s at least a hundred new extinct species since this time last month. They got f**king eaten! We can’t just sit here and watch the lights blink out.” (YF 336-37) Adam One thinks that they only way to save the planet is by living sustainably in harmony with nature as well as rejecting technology and “if all were to follow our example, what a change would be wrought on our beloved Planer” (YF 13). Adam One connects technology and science to the downfall of men (cf. Faure 2015:18-19):

The Fall of Man was multidimensional. The ancestral primates fell out of the trees; then they fell from vegetarianism into meat-eating. Then they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology; from simple signals into complex grammar, and thus into humanity; from firelessness into fire, and thence into weaponry; and from seasonal mating into an incessant sexual twitching. Then they fell from a joyous life in the moment into the anxious contemplation of the vanished past and the distant future. (YF 251)

According to Adam One, humankind has not actually evolved but has gradually regressed and become worse. As a result of their opposing views, Zeb and Adam One’s paths separate and “Zeb’s MaddAddam group of eco-activist scientists and eco-warriors commit public acts of bio-resistance” (Bouson 2011: 20). They are spreading “new
diseases, or peculiar infestations — the splice porcubeaver that was attacking the fan belts in cars, the bean weevil that was decimating Happicuppa coffee plantations, the asphalt-eating microbe that was melting highways” (YF 361), which are meant to destroy the infrastructure in order to save the earth. Consequently, the Gardeners are suspected of having committed these crimes and are therefore attacked and have to leave their rooftop (cf. Bouson 2011-19-20).

According to Bouson (2011: 23-24) Toby, before joining the Gardeners, embodies the average person who, like most of the others, has ignored the warning signals of the pending apocalypse. Although she "knew there were things wrong in the world” since she had seen them “onscreen”, she refuses to believe them since “the wrong things were wrong somewhere else.” However, when she is a college student, “the wrongness had moved closer.” Toby admits that she tried not to listen to their assumptions since they were “both so obvious and so unthinkable” (YF 319). Toby’s behavior in fact reflects that of the majority of people – we tend to ignore problems for as long as possible.

*MaddAddam* offers us further examples of how human action has exploited nature and the environment. Zeb, after fleeing from the Reverend, eventually finds a job at Bearlift, a “scam”, which "lived off the good intentions of city types with disposable emotions who liked to think they were saving something” (MA 59). According to Zeb, the idea was “simple: the polar bears are starving because the ice is almost gone and they can’t catch seals any more, so let’s feed them our leftovers until they learn to adapt, adapt being the buzzword of those days [...] (MA 59). Thus, people donated money in order not to be “guilty of bearicide” (MA 69). At the beginning of the operation, the Corporations even supported it with money since it distracted the population from “real action, which was bulldozing the planet flat and grabbing anything of value” (MA 69). Bouson (2015:6) argues that Atwood, by describing Bearlift, not only “voices criticism about shallow environmentalism but also reflects in a more sustained and complex way [...] on the radical environmentalist movement, in particular on the Earth First! movement, which drew on the fears of a looming environmental crisis that began to surface in the culture in the 1970s.” In addition, he refers to Dave Foreman, a co-founder in 1980 of the movement, who called for a reassessment of humankind’s anthropocentric approach to issues of the Earth and names deep ecology as a solution. In *Confessions of
an Eco-Warrior, Foreman declares that all living creatures “possess intrinsic value, inherent worth”; that “all living beings have the same right to be here”; and that people do not have any “divine mandate to pave, conquer, control, develop, or use every square inch of this planet” (1991: 26–7; 3; 4, quoted in Bouson 2015: 6–7).

“Seeing her cautionary tales, Oryx and Crake and The Year of the Flood, as a form of environmental consciousness-raising, Atwood seeks a wide public readership for these works as she challenges her readers to think the unthinkable” (Bouson 2011: 23). Besides her literary work, Margaret Atwood has also commented on environmentalism in interviews:

We’re facing growing climate change, more floods, more droughts, more crisis on a planetary level, and the systems we put in place in the twentieth century are just not going to work. We’ve run out of stuff. Our big problems are going to be energy supplies and food supplies. This is not a right-left issue. It’s a people issue, and it cuts across all our categories. The problem is huge. We’ve just added seventy-five million people to the already large proportion of people in the world who are malnourished all the time, whose bodies are being starved. (Online The Progressive)

MaddAddam ends with a group of survivors – some MaddAddamite scientists, Zeb, Toby, Amanda, and Ren, as well as the Crakers – who are trying to create a new, presumably better world by “rebuild[ing] society and set[ting] up a new social-political utopian enclave among the dystopian ruins of the old order” (Bouson 2011: 23). But while Bouson (2011:24) highlights that although the endings of McCarthy’s The Road and Margaret Atwood MaddAddam-trilogy offer a glimmer of hope, they should still serve us as a “grim warning” that mankind’s existence is at stake if we keep on ignoring the fact that “we’re using up the Earth. It’s almost gone” (YF 319; emphasis mine).
5. Conclusion

“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.”

— Margaret Atwood (*MaddAddam* p. 56)

The main purpose of this thesis was to compare and contrast Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy in terms of three thematic aspects. I dealt with the topic of spirituality, femininity, and the environment in detail. All novels address those topics in different manners.

First, I investigated the role of religion in the post-apocalyptic narratives. All four novels contain spiritual and religious aspects. Despite mostly being used in different contexts, religion is used to reassure people that conditions will get better, to calm them and give them hope. Although *The Road* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy deal with a different kind of apocalypse, religion is used by the protagonists to provide them with reliance and security, which can be primarily seen in McCarthy’s *The Road*. Nevertheless, especially in Atwood’s trilogy, the approach to theological thoughts and religion is a rather critical one. Religion, even in the God’s Gardeners cult, is used as a means to sway people and lead them in the preferred direction. The main message concerning religion in *Oryx and Crake* is that no man should try to play “God”. Moreover, there is a hidden disapproval of theology, which can be read between the lines since religion likely seems to be a means of manipulating people into doing what you want, as can be seen in Snowman/Jimmy’s treatment of the Crakers. However, by Crake removing the Crakers’ capacity of believing in something, he also took away a very human attribute. *The Year Of The Flood*, or more specifically, the God’s Gardeners cult, shows us that it is “not enough to simply survive—what is needed is a symbolic order within which the fact of survival can appear as meaningful and “good”” (Bergthaller 2010: 738).
religion in *The Year of the Flood* gives people strength and hope, but is also critically examined throughout the novel. The main preacher, Adam One, even admits he sometimes stretches the truth as long as the end justifies the means.

Subsequently, I looked at how women are presented in the dystopian novels. One of the main ideas all of the novels share is that biology seems to be the least of what makes someone a good mother. Surrogate mothers take the place of birth mothers and are indeed more functional. The abandonment of children by their dysfunctional mothers is a leitmotif which draws itself through all novels. The exploitation of women is a recurring theme in the novels, both physically and mentally. While it is common in these dystopic settings to accept this fact, *MaddAddam* provides some hints suggesting that after the apocalypse women will claim their rights. Women, when interpreted as the source of life, signify the downfall of earth, both being exploited as well as not able to take care of the one’s they love, but may rise again after the cataclysmic events.

Lastly, I investigated the environmental aspects of McCarthy’s and Atwood’s novels. Both, *The Road* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy try to raise awareness of the environmental problems humankind is causing. With her *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood communicates her concerns about current societal tendencies, and, in her *Acknowledgments* in *The Year of the Flood*, she admits that “many of the details in it are alarmingly close to fact” (YF 573). All four novels show the potential of how the world could turn out to be if humanity does not make a U-turn in terms of how it treats nature, which is a very dystopian trait all novels share. As I have quoted Moylan and Baccolini (2003:7) before, dystopia offers little hope within its plot but hope is offered “outside the story: it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape such a pessimistic future.”

The main drive of Margaret Atwood’s and Cormac McCarthy’s novels is to alert the readers to issues such as environmental destruction, genetic engineering and pollution. The images both authors create in their novels force readers to rethink their behaviour in order to prevent those calamitous visions from happening. All of them can be seen as warning of how humanity’s current behaviour may influence our own future and that of our descendants.
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