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THE MACHINE, THE VICTIM, AND THE THIRD THING:
NAVIGATING THE GENDER SPECTRUM IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S
ORYX AND CRAKE AND *THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD*

by

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B.A. Gettysburg College, 2008

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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at the University of Central Florida
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Atwood's depiction of gender in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. In an interview from 1972, Margaret Atwood spoke on survival: "People see two alternatives. You can be part of the machine or you can be something that gets run over by it. And I think there has to be a third thing." I assert that Atwood depicts this "third thing" through her characters who navigate between the binaries of "masculine" and "feminine" in a third realm of gender. As the female characters—regardless of their passive or aggressive behavior—engage in a quest for agency, they must overcome bodily limitations. Oryx—the quintessential problematic, oppressed feminine figure—and Ren are both associated with sex as they are passed from man to man throughout their lives. Furthermore, as other females (namely, Amanda and Toby) adopt masculine traits associated with power in an attempt at self-preservation both before and after the waterless flood, men in the novels strive to subvert this power through rape to remind these women of their confinement within their physical bodies and to reinstitute the binary gender system. The men also span the gender continuum, with Crake representing the masculine "machine" and Jimmy gravitating toward the feminine victim. Crake, who seems to live life uninhibited from his body, appears to escape the bodily confinements that the women experience, while Jimmy's relationship to his body is more complex. As Jimmy competes to "out-masculinize" Crake, and Amanda and Toby struggle to avoid both identification with and demolition by the machine, readers of the novels are invited to think beyond the "machinery" of gender norms to consider gender as a continuum instead of a dualistic factor.

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Mary McCoy, who has encouraged my gift of writing since I learned to hold a pencil, and my father, William McCoy, who has shared with me a love of research and discovery. I also dedicate this effort to my husband, Eric Anderson, for his unfaltering encouragement in all of my scholarly endeavors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis director and committee, Dr. Kathleen Oliver, Dr. Patrick Murphy, and Dr. Lisa Logan. Without their patience, time, and helpful feedback, my thesis would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Anna Jones, Blake Vives, and JayJay Stroup for their support and discussions in my research on Margaret Atwood's work. They provided insightful commentary and questions that spurred me forward to complete this text. As mentioned in my dedication, I would like to thank my husband for his continual confidence in my writing abilities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: ATWOOD’S THIRD THING	1
Context and Review of Literature	6
Methodology	8
Chapter Outlines and Description	8
CHAPTER 1: “WHAT IS REALITY?”: THE GENDER EXTREMES OF ORYX AND CRAKE	13
Theoretical Background: Gender Binarism	15
Oryx and Crake: The Gender Bookends	17
CHAPTER 2: “WARRIOR MAIDENS”: THE MASCULINE FEMALES, AMANDA AND TOBY	35
Theoretical Background: Masculinities	37
“Amanda...didn’t know the limits of her own strength”: A Non-male Masculine Figure.....	40
There’s “ <i>Nothing sexual about [Toby]</i> ”: A Neutral Female.....	48
CHAPTER 3: “IT’S HOW YOU’D SAY IT TO A CHILD”: THE PROBLEMATIC FEMININE, REN AND JIMMY	55
Theoretical Background: Femininities.....	57
“It’s Only Little Ren”: The Child-Woman	59
“He’d been a good boy then”: the Boy-Man	66
Problematic Feminine Figures	78
CONCLUSION: DISTURBING SPECULATIONS—DON’T GET “MACHINE PARTS...BEHIND [YOUR] EYES”	81
REFERENCES	86

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Gender Spectrum.....	3
Figure 2: Crake and Oryx	13
Figure 3: Amanda and Toby	35
Figure 4: Jimmy and Ren.....	55

INTRODUCTION: ATWOOD'S THIRD THING

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, the two novels in her MaddAddam Trilogy published to date, explore liminal space, time, and identity. While Atwood's characters are intent upon compartmentalizing all aspects of existence, their struggle to divide space into parts paradoxically serves to highlight the overlaps and the areas in between. Although Atwood's pre-apocalyptic society stringently attempts to divide life into distinct geographical residences (the pleeblands, the Compounds, and God's Garden); into segmented time (years, months, weeks, days, and hours); and into distinct types of people (pleebs, Compounders, Gardeners, Painballers), the novels explore the overlap of spaces, times, and identities that occurs when these artificial borders and barriers bleed together, before and after the waterless flood.

After this waterless flood—the destruction of human life as it existed—pleeblands and Compounds alike are deserted wastelands, and the few surviving humans live alongside bioengineered humanoid creatures, known as the Crakers, in a state of limbo. The past and future messily converge in the present, as rigid time-keeping loses any meaning, and as the surviving humans, meant by Crake to be creatures of the past, coexist with the creatures Crake designed to inhabit the future. This collision of the past and future life forms subsequently results in tension and uncertainty over identity—where is humanity headed? Will humans still exist centuries from now? Will Crakers? Will both? In addition to emphasizing the liminal state of humanity, Atwood also highlights the intermediate identity of the animals, as scientists mix distinct species to form new ones (rakunks result from the genetic splicing of rats and skunks; wolvogs, from wolves and dogs; and snats, from snakes and rats). These transitional animals no

longer belong to just one of the categories assigned to the animals used to create them; instead, they now exist in a classification of their own, in a class between the two spliced species. Other animals hold an identity somewhere between animal and processed food, such as ChickieNobs, creatures raised as chicken parts, without eyes or beaks, so that they are ready to be cooked and served as food. In sum, in Atwood's fictional world, categories of space, time, and identity are blurred, spliced together, and/or transitional, and this liminal state is particularly true in terms of gendered human identity.

In an interview from 1972, Margaret Atwood spoke on survival: "People see two alternatives. You can be part of the machine or you can be something that gets run over by it. And I think there has to be a third thing" (as qtd. in Gibson 17). I assert that Atwood depicts this "third thing" through several characters in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* who navigate between the binaries of "masculine" and "feminine" in a third realm of gender. For instance, Amanda and Toby adopt masculine traits in their journey of survival both before and after the waterless flood, neither becoming "the machine" (like the masculine villain, Crake), nor allowing it to run them over (like the passive feminine victim, Oryx). By utilizing both masculine and feminine traits, they adapt to their surroundings and fight for a place in the world at the same time. While Amanda represents a non-male masculine figure, Jimmy represents the opposite: a non-female feminine character. Visually, the order of characters on a spectrum would appear something like the following chart. The chart is constructed vertically to represent a hierarchy in which power privileges masculinity. In an ideal society, power would be distributed evenly among the gender spectrum, resulting in a horizontal chart; however, Atwood's novel depicts the former (patriarchal) society:

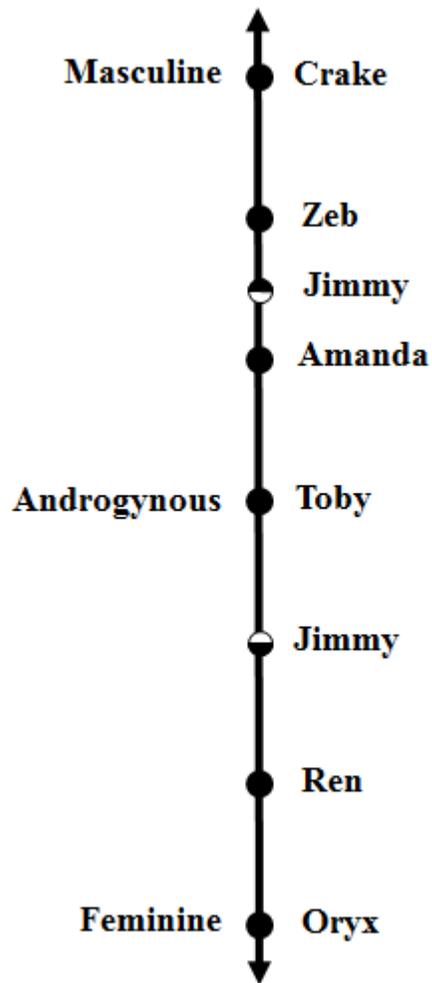


Figure 1: Gender Spectrum

However, as the female characters—regardless of their passive or aggressive behavior—engage in a quest for agency, they must overcome bodily limitations. Oryx and Ren are both associated with sex as they are passed from man to man throughout their lives. In fact, their commodified and sexualized bodies define both women in the novels. Furthermore, as other females (namely, Amanda and Toby) adopt masculine traits—or qualities associated with power—in an attempt at self-preservation both before and after the waterless flood, men strive to subvert this power through rape to remind these women of their confinement within their

physical bodies and to reassert the binary gender system. As Amanda and Toby struggle to avoid both identification with and demolition by the machine, readers of the novels are invited to think beyond the “machinery” of gender norms to consider gender as a continuum instead of a dualistic factor.

The men in the novels also span the gender continuum, with Crake representing the masculine “machine” and Jimmy gravitating toward the feminine victim. Each man’s relationship to his body affects his position on the gender continuum. Crake, who seems to live life uninhibited by his body, a trait that Domosh and Seager attribute to masculinity, suggests that he escapes the bodily confinements that the women in the novel experience. On the other hand, Jimmy constantly observes his languishing body and cannot seem to escape the confines of his physical self after the flood. Whereas Crake can inhabit an identity in virtual space, apart from his body, Jimmy cannot fully inhabit the virtual world. His inability to penetrate the virtual world is illustrated by the printed picture of Oryx, the object of his desire. While Crake claims Oryx both virtually and physically—he uses her image as a web portal and her physical body as his instrument—Jimmy carries a physical photograph of Oryx that was printed off the internet and is allowed access to her body solely because Crake permits it. Masculinity, then, is also subject to Atwood’s gender critique.

Moreover, as masculine and feminine characters struggle to survive in a problematic world, Atwood speaks through absences. Atwood, who included homosexual characters in several of her previous novels, such as *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Robber Bride*, does not present any gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual characters. Because Atwood novels tend to emphasize gender problems, one might be surprised to find that she omits GLBT characters from

her MaddAdam series (to date). Perhaps this lack is intended to emphasize the heteronormativity and the gender binarism that are present in society, both before and after the flood.

In this thesis, when I use the word “society,” I use the term to refer to the society that appears to have provided the inspiration for Atwood’s novel: early 21st-century white, middle-class, American society. Although Atwood does not specify the geographic location of the MaddAddam novels, certain indications suggest that the setting is the northeastern United States, most likely the Boston area¹. In addition, most of the major characters are white, upper middle-class (for instance, Crake and Jimmy) or lower middle-class (Amanda and Toby). Society, then, in the context of this thesis, refers to white, middle-class, American society, and “patriarchal society” refers to the gender norms (which privilege masculinity) as practices within this society. Although I am restricting the use of the terms “society” and “patriarchal society” in this way, it should be noted that the society depicted is one that possesses world-wide influence and power.

I should also mention that the character of Zeb eludes this analysis. On the one hand, Zeb seems very masculine, as he is described as “an Adam—a leading Adam” (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* 65) who lives according to his own set of rules and is frequently associated with hunting and sex. While Crake represents the masculine mind, Zeb seems to exemplify the masculine body. Because the body is often associated with femininity, Zeb becomes a complex character, especially as Atwood begins to reveal Zeb’s intelligence and his leadership role in MaddAddam. Atwood has indicated that Zeb will play a larger role in her next book (“Margaret Atwood Gives Readers a Hint”). Until this book is released, I will place Zeb tentatively toward the masculine end of the continuum, acknowledge that he is a complex character, and reserve him for future analysis. As Susan Bordo explains, “when we look at bodies (including our own

¹ The novels take place near an ocean and a large submerged city, and there is a significant number of biotechnology companies located in Massachusetts.

in the mirror), we don't just see biological nature at work, but values, ideas, differences and similarities that *culture* has 'written,' so to speak, on those bodies" (26). Gender is inscribed upon bodies. Similarly, Western liberal thought views the mind in gendered terms, as liberal humanism suggests that humans differ from animals in their ability to reason, to think, to comprehend; and normative dualism—wherein men are associated with the mind; women, with the body—privileges the “masculine” mind over the “feminine” body. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* present characters who struggle to escape the binary gender system that culture places on them and who fight to avoid society's attempt to push them back into the “place” of either extreme masculinity or extreme femininity. Why can't these characters be a third thing?

Context and Review of Literature

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and its sequel *The Year of the Flood* take place after the scientist, Crake, has dispersed a fatal virus under the guise of a libido enhancement and STD preventative drug, called the BlyssPluss pill.² During this “waterless flood,” as survivors call it, Crake annihilates most of humanity to leave space for his new creation, the Crakers. Crake genetically designs these Crakers, or humanoid creatures, intentionally omitting the traits that he disapproves of in humans, such as jealousy, competition, and power relations. The two novels describe the lives of the human survivors, including Jimmy (the man Crake has put in charge of the Crakers after his death) and several members of God's Gardeners (a spiritual group whose mission is to protect members from the dangers of the world and to live a life free from meat and

² While often referred to as a sequel to *Oryx and Crake*, *Year of the Flood* may be more appropriately defined as a companion piece, since the plot occurs simultaneously with the plot of the first novel, but from a different perspective.

technology). In both books, Atwood provides a series of flashbacks to life before the waterless flood to portray how Crake executed his plan to transform the world.

Both novels have attracted considerable scholarly attention since their publications in 2003 and 2009. Many scholars explore the power struggles prevalent among characters and corporations before the waterless flood, some focusing on the tension between pleeblands and Compounds (or, as Frank Davey examines, between the wilderness and the city), while others note the power struggle between the sexes. Several critics, such as Jennifer Lawn and Susan Hall, even investigate power relations beyond places and people to consider the abstract struggle between numbers and words (Lawn 368; Hall 188). Many approach the novels to explore patriarchy, focusing on the power-hungry Crake and comparing him to God. For instance, Giuseppina Botta calls Crake a “divine creative entity” (250), and several critics, including Earl Ingersoll, compare him to Dr. Frankenstein (167).

David Bieber has also explored Atwood’s reference to “the machine,” equating the machine to patriarchy, but his examination of five novels stops with Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale* (1985). Various critics also approach Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* from a feminist perspective, but such readings focus on the character Oryx, occasionally referencing Ren and Toby, and leave Amanda in the background of their analyses. Danette DiMarco discusses Oryx as a human instrument who “exists as a feminized territory that Jimmy and Crake . . . conquer” (184), and Hilde Staels calls her “Jimmy’s repressed Other” (443). On one hand, Oryx, who exemplifies the problematic female, embodies the passive victim of patriarchal oppression, providing a logical starting point for feminist analysis. On the other hand, the remaining female characters’ identities are arguably a bit more complex and deserve in-depth

examination as well. My work will utilize the gender continuum as a tool to analyze Atwood's characters and explore the methods with which Atwood discourages the binary gender system.

Methodology

In my analysis of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, I use both masculinity and feminist gender theories. I apply the work of feminist geographers, such as Mona Domosh and Joni Seager in *Putting Women in Place*, to explain how various gender stereotypes originated. I also employ the work of Todd Reeser and Arthur Brittan to set up a masculinity framework for my analysis of Amanda and Toby. Reeser explains that the body limits one's portrayal of gender. He asserts, "When masculinity is taken as a disembodied phenomenon, existing on its own outside the confines of a given type of body, then traits ascribed to masculinity—such as power and virility—can be considered on their own terms, without regard for the sex of the body possessing them," but he adds that men often exhibit negative responses to women who exhibit masculine traits in an attempt to become the sole source of masculinity (132). I also refer to the theories of Maoira Gatens and Judith Halberstam—who explain that the body is not the only element that defines sexuality—to discuss the tension between the fluid gender spectrum and the restrictive physical body.

Chapter Outlines and Description

Chapter One: "What is Reality?": The Gender Extremes of Oryx and Crake

In Chapter One, I define and illustrate the two end points of the gender spectrum. While characters in the novels navigate within the gender spectrum (between the two extremes), two characters represent the binaries. On the masculine extreme, Crake depicts the masculine,

scientific mind. On the opposing end, Oryx represents the feminine body. This chapter will explain the body/mind dualism that Atwood sets up clearly in her novels.

Crake represents extreme “masculinity” (a term, according to Reeser, associated with dominant traits adopted to gain power in white patriarchal society). Not only does he possess the ability to roam freely between the pleeblands, Compounds, and the Garden, but—unlike Amanda—he also displays a propensity to live in detachment from his body and other physical inhibitions, a freedom that Domosh and Seager ascribe to masculinity. Part of his identity resides in the virtual world through his leadership of the online group, MaddAddam, and he essentially lives on after the death of his body through his creation of the Crakers, controlling the new world from the grave as his humanoid creations replace human beings after the waterless flood.

The exact opposite of Crake, Oryx represents extreme “femininity.” Whereas Crake is the uninhibited mind, Oryx is the confined body. While Crake roams freely and is disassociated from his body, men constantly define Oryx by her body as they trade her and force her to engage in sexual activities, movies, and money schemes. She embodies the passive female, as men write her story and make her into whomever they want (for Uncle En, an economic goldmine, or for Jimmy, a sexual goddess).

Chapter Two: “Warrior Maidens”: The Masculine Females, Amanda and Toby

Chapter Two presents and examines two characters who can be classified as non-male masculine figures: Amanda and Toby. Amanda, like Crake, has fairly free movement as she navigates the streets as a homeless city dweller, successfully climbs to the top of the social scene in the Garden, and attends school at the Martha Graham Academy. However, she is not able to trespass security as freely as Crake; nor does she rule the virtual world. Thus she holds a

position near the masculine end of the spectrum, but does not reach it. Like Crake, she likes to exert control—for example, she enjoys vulturizing (destroying) words, because it makes her feel powerful, “like watching God thinking” (*Oryx and Crake* 245), drawing a disturbing parallel between Amanda’s and Crake’s drive for power. Moreover, Amanda and Crake both view sexual intercourse as a power struggle rather than a pleasurable act.

Toby holds a more neutral position on the spectrum, as she is often referenced in an androgynous, sexless manner. Even her name could be either male or female. Her liminal identity also manifests itself in her ability to access more physical space in the Garden than most of God’s Gardeners. As an Eve, she knows about the secret wall compartment behind the shelf of vinegar bottles and has access to the virtual world via a secret laptop that the leaders of the Garden can access. On the other hand, she also feels confined to the Garden, as she fears coming into contact with Blanco (a rapist) in the pleeblands. Thus she neither fully possesses the masculine trait of free movement nor the feminine trait of confinement; she is somewhere in between. Also, on several occasions, Toby mentions that others treat her like a non-sexual being.

While both Amanda and Toby navigate between the two gender extremes, men attempt to push them toward the feminine end through the act of rape. In what Reeser refers to as an asymptotic view of gender, “women are able to approach masculinity through these gendered traits, but in the end are not given the chance to reach it fully. Physical traits like the penis turn into proof, or reassurance, that the woman is unable to profit from masculinity in its fullness or totality” (138). In a sense, the Painballers’ “physical traits” remind Amanda of her limited masculinity, just as Blanco reminds Toby of hers. The men who rape Amanda and Toby are

determined to fit them into a dual gender system. Uncomfortable with Amanda and Toby's liminal gender, the Painballers attempt to subvert them into a feminine role.

Chapter Three: "It's how you'd say it to a child": The Problematic Feminine, Ren and Jimmy

Chapter Three examines the characters who gravitate toward the feminine end of the gender spectrum: Ren and Jimmy. Both characters are followers, and they live childlike lives as they look to others for survival and to make decisions. Ren, like Oryx, becomes involved in sexual exploitation, but in this case, she does choose to work at Scales and Tales (albeit, from a limited number of options). Furthermore, Ren always follows a leader. Initially her caregiver is Bernice, but later she switches to Amanda. Toby also rescues Ren from near-death experiences after the flood. Ren, like Oryx, works for a controlling man whom she sees as a father-figure—a man who values her for her monetary worth. Ren's name and even attire associate her with the image of a bird. However, while birds symbolize freedom and mobility, Ren often experiences bodily captivity. She is like a caged bird when she is locked in the Sticky Zone, and the irony of her wearing the ridiculous bird costume at the end of *The Year of the Flood*, being led by a rope tied around her body, stresses her physical confinement.

Jimmy, who is controlled by Crake (even from the grave, as Crake leaves him in charge of the Crakers to play a "mother-like" role for them), represents a non-female feminine figure. He appreciates language over numbers and science and attends the feminine Martha Graham Academy. While others do not seem to remind him of his body deliberately (through rape, etc.), he holds a fascination with it. Before the flood, he engages in more sexual intercourse than any other character in the novel. Furthermore, his deteriorating body becomes his focus in several passages of *Oryx and Crake*. It seems that instead of others "putting him in place," he reminds himself of his male body through sex and bodily examination. Interestingly, Ren and Jimmy are

two of the most sexually active characters, but sex seems to lack intimacy to them. Jimmy seems to view sex as a competition of manhood; he feels superior to Crake in this area as he engages in more sexual intercourse than Crake. Jimmy drags Ren along and engages in sex with her, but he cares nothing for her. Although Ren cares for Jimmy, she performs sex with many men, as part of her chosen job. Their approach to sex matches the sexual activities of the Crakers who engage in sexual intercourse without emotions attached to it. Just as the Crakers are new to the world, Ren and Jimmy seem childlike in their decisions and actions.

CHAPTER 1: “WHAT IS REALITY?”: THE GENDER EXTREMES OF ORYX AND CRAKE

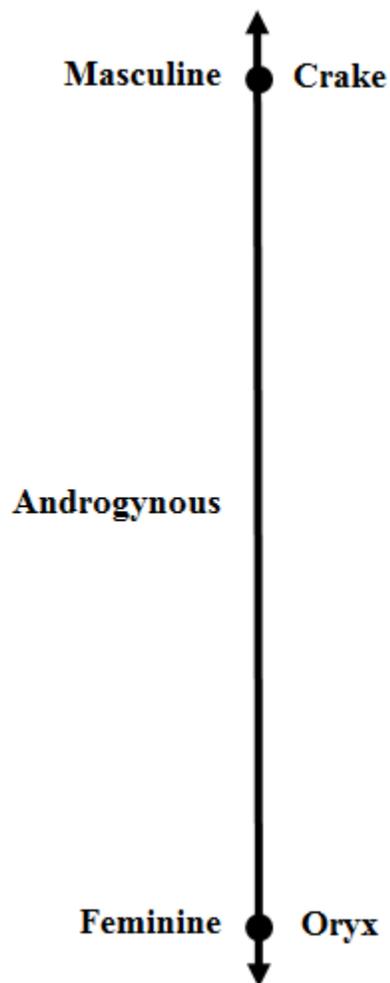


Figure 2: Crake and Oryx

In *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood uses two problematic characters—Crake (originally Glenn) and Oryx—to explore the detrimental nature of gender extremes. Within these two novels, Crake exists as almost pure mind; Oryx, as almost pure

body. Crake's intelligence, (bio)technological expertise, and arrogance engender his presumptuous belief that he alone knows what is best for all living creatures on the planet; he exists as the embodiment of Western white masculinity. In contrast, Oryx functions as a vessel for male fantasy; male characters view her as delicate, fragile, pliant, and sexual, and, because she is Asian, she is paradoxically seen as both utterly knowable ("all Asian women are alike") and utterly inscrutable ("other"). Oryx and Crake embody the problems that occur when men and women are pushed towards the poles of the gender spectrum, and their characters thus invite readers to reevaluate and critique gender norms in Western culture. Patricia Clasen describes the tendency of U.S. culture to view gender as a male/female binary with "rigid expectations for each." She suggests that, although "dualistic thinking is not inherently paradoxical, the inability to exist in multiple poles ultimately leads to paradoxical injunctions" that, in turn, pressure men and women to perform according to the restrictions that culture places on their gender (37).

These disparate extremes—masculine mind versus feminine body—are articulated through the respective voices of Crake and Oryx: While viewing online videos of executions with Jimmy, Crake suggests that the executions—and the emotions exhibited by those condemned to die and who are subsequently executed—are both "rehearsed" and "bogus" (83)—that, even if "real," one must ask "What is *reality*?" (83). In other words, for Crake, life is lived only at the intellectual level, without material and bodily consequences; life is merely an existential game. In contrast, Oryx views life in terms of its material consequences: When Jimmy questions the "reality" of rape within the porn movies of Pixieland, Oryx replies, "But Jimmy, you should know. All sex is real" (144), locating the acts of rape and sex within the realm of the real, the material, and the bodily. Even if gender is socially constructed—"bogus," "rehearsed," and not "real"—it nonetheless produces real material consequences. While some of

Atwood's characters, such as Amanda and Toby, seek to exist—and do exist—somewhere midway between the two gender poles, the characters of Oryx and Crake demonstrate that living gender in terms of rigid norms leads to dangerous consequences, as both characters are dead by the end of *Oryx and Crake*, and both have contributed (one knowingly; the other, unknowingly) to genocide on a massive scale. Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* asks, what is the “reality” of gender and how does it express itself in the real, lived world?

Theoretical Background: Gender Binarism

The masculine/feminine gender opposition encompasses a realm of gendered sub-dualisms, such as mind/body, subject/object, mobile/confined, spectator/viewed, Western/Eastern, and active/passive. In each of these dualisms, the masculine counterpart holds the privileged position of power. Judith Butler traces the mind/body dualism back to the philosophical tradition—beginning with Plato—and explains that the “ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy. The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether” (17). Gillian Rose, social and cultural geographer, reiterates this distinction when she discusses the masculine mind as an entity unhindered by its body—separate and boundless (78-79). With masculinity historically associated with the mind in Western culture, and femininity with the body, masculinity has become known as the subject that controls the feminine object.

The masculine mind's control over the feminine body is only one example of the many ways masculinity has become associated with power and privilege in our society. Masculinity has become affiliated with decision-making, control, and voice, leaving femininity intertwined with passivity, lack of agency, and no voice. As Todd Reeser explains, “A key aspect of power's

normalizing effect is the constructing of an abnormal other” (31). On one level, the male’s “other” is female, but any males who do not conform to society’s view of masculine will fall into the category of “other” as well. Simone de Beauvoir also describes the subject/object dualism, defining the other (object) as the counterbalance with which the subject fulfills himself (676).

Feminist geographers Mona Domosh and Joni Seager explore gendered agency further by examining men’s and women’s movement through space. They observe that, throughout history, men have been associated with free movement and mobility, while women’s mobility has been confined. For example, foot binding, “tight corseting, high heels, hobble skirts, the veil, prohibitions against women riding on bicycles or horses, restrictions (legal or social) on women driving cars—all suggest the extent to which ‘keeping women in their place’ is often a literal undertaking” (116). They add that while masculinity affords liberty to roam, “geographical ‘looseness’” in women is seen as sexual licentiousness (118).

The idea of controlling women’s movement is often translated onto the movie screen. Laura Mulvey, film theorist, describes the manner in which mainstream film adopts the male gaze, a perspective that controls the female object. Mulvey explains that the audience, by participating in the male gaze, experiences the methods by which the male seeks to overcome castration anxiety. She asserts that the male protagonist, in an attempt to overcome his anxiety and regain control, engages in scopophilia, or pleasure in looking (1174). Mulvey describes the roles of the male and female using dualistic terms: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure...” (1175).

As I will show, an analysis of the characters of Crake and Oryx in terms of gender binaries reveals their positions at opposite ends of the gender spectrum; they are Atwood's representatives of gender extremes.

Oryx and Crake: The Gender Bookends

Crake, the mastermind scientist who orchestrates the waterless flood, represents the masculine mind. Essentially, the realm of science—a discipline of the mind—becomes Crake's playing field, as science dominates the world depicted in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. Domosh and Seager explain that scientific occupations tend to be associated with masculinity, and that “[a]round the world, in industrial economies, social and cultural policing has kept women . . . out of most scientific and engineering professions” (61). In other words, while men are often associated with science and “thinking” professions, women are often associated with artistic and expressive activities. Atwood highlights this dichotomy between masculine science and feminine art, where science trumps art in terms of societal value and recognition, as implied in her depiction of the literally crumbling Martha Graham Academy of the Arts, where Jimmy and Amanda attend college, in comparison to the palace-like Watson-Crick Institute, where Crake attends (*Oryx and Crake* 199). While books are left unattended to mildew at Martha Graham (perhaps signifying the “less active mind”), the bio-scientific projects and students—highly valued resources within Atwood's pre-flood world—inside Watson-Crick's walls are heavily protected by CorpSeCorps men (195, 197).

Additionally, Jimmy's reactions to the two institutions reflect his society's views of science and art. Whereas Jimmy holds Watson-Crick in high esteem (even the food there tastes better, in his opinion), he is embarrassed to admit that he attends Martha Graham, named for the twentieth-century dancer and choreographer. Instead of contributing to the valued scientific

domain, like Crake, Jimmy downplays his own skills and degree, comparing his skills to window-dressing, “decorating the cold, hard numerical world in flossy 2-D verbiage” (188). Like the society he lives in, Crake also believes that art is inferior to science: “*Watch out for art, Crake used to say. As soon as they [the Crakers] start doing art, we’re in trouble*” (361). Crake of course is not satisfied with merely participating in a masculine field; he works hard to dominate it as he attempts to control humanity through his own creation of a new human race. He tries to remove creativity and art from the world, as he values and thrives on consistency and predictability. Perhaps the best example of this rests in the Craker humanoids that Crake designs. By removing hierarchy, territoriality, violence, race, leadership, and “turbulent hormones” (305), Crake has made this species both systematic and predictable. They are indeed the products of a scientific mind.

Crake’s view of art also relates to his treatment of words. While Jimmy finds value in language, Crake constantly belittles it. For instance, Crake implies that words cannot accurately reflect the signified concept’s true meaning when he alludes to the inconsistent and unreliable meaning of the word “real”:

“Why don’t we use a real set?” Jimmy asked one day when they were doing some chess. “The old kind. With plastic men.” It did seem weird to have the two of them in the same room, back to back, playing on computers.

“Why?” said Crake. “Anyway, this *is* a real set.”

“No it’s not.”

“Okay, granted, but neither is plastic men.”

“What?”

“The real set is in your head.”

“Bogus!” Jimmy yelled. (*Oryx and Crake* 77)

On a separate occasion, while watching executions on television, Crake again questions the meaning of the word “reality”:

“Do you think they’re really being executed?” he said. “A lot of them look like simulations.”

“You never know,” said Crake.

“You never know what?”

“What is *reality*?” (83)

In both of these scenes, Crake belittles Jimmy’s reliance on words by pointing to the precarious nature of language. By questioning the meaning of reality, Crake implicitly asserts that language is abstract and unreliable, unlike scientific equations that are thought to yield consistent and reliable answers.

Furthermore, Crake’s creation of the Crakers, along with the subsequent destruction of humanity via his virus-carrying BlyssPluss Pills, fulfills his two major goals. First, his creation lives on, establishing him as the creator of future humanity; thus he essentially controls the world from the grave. Second, Crake attempts to remove art from the future world through his creation of the Crakers, and initially he seems to succeed. Lawn points out Crake’s attempt to remove unpredictability from his new creatures: “Here, Crake plays his final, posthumous trump card against the arts, for the Crakers are doggedly literal in their comprehension . . . they have no capacity for what Crake termed ‘harmful symbolisms’ [305]” (Lawn 394). Crake literally programs them to be literal, systematic beings, and Jimmy (known as Snowman in the post-flood era) realizes that “irony is lost on the trees” (*Oryx and Crake* 162). Jimmy also observes that the post-flood world created by Crake has severed Jimmy’s own connection to language: “From

nowhere, a word appears: *Mesazoic*. He can't attach anything to it. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlists drifting off into space" (39). Jennifer Lawn points out that in this moment, the word floats beyond Snowman's attempts to grasp it, "echoing its own disappearance as a meaningful unit" (395). Like the Crakers, who do not understand all pre-flood language (they only know the words they have been taught by Oryx and Snowman), Jimmy begins to forget words from pre-flood times. As a final jab, Crake assigns all of the Crakers with names of significant historical figures from before the waterless flood. The names, however, mean nothing to the Crakers. In witnessing their ignorance, Jimmy must be constantly reminded that words and titles are rendered meaningless following the wipeout of humanity, reflecting Crake's view of words.

Crake certainly sends a message through the Crakers. In his own way, Crake deconstructs gender binarism by designing them to view sex as a means to reproduce (and not for pleasure or attachment), reflecting his disapproval towards the messiness and emotional attachments of sex. In addition, he is the "father" of the Crakers and thus has reproduced without women. Essentially, Crake desires a patriarchal society with no valuable roles available for women. Thus, instead of distributing power evenly among the gender spectrum, Crake prefers all the power on the masculine end.

On the other side of the spectrum is Oryx, who represents Crake's "counterbalance" or "other" as her identity is largely dependent upon her physicality. While Crake is the uninhibited mind, Oryx is the confined body, as men constantly define her by her body, trade her, and force her to engage in sexual activities, movies, and money schemes. Purchased as a child, as if she were a product to trade or sell, she is passed from one man's hand to another for the duration of her life. In fact, Oryx has a difficult time distinguishing between love and monetary value. Even

though she thinks that love is better, she associates money value with love: “love was undependable, it came and then it went, so it was good to have money value, because then at least those who wanted to make a profit from you would make sure you were fed enough and not damaged too much” (126). As a woman who is forced to internalize the views of Western society, once she is taken away from her childhood village to work in the Western-driven sex slave market, Oryx represents the idealized feminine “other” prized by Western society; she embodies the passive female, as men write her story and make her into whomever they want (for Uncle En, an economic goldmine; for Jimmy, a sexual goddess; for Crake, a tool and weapon). Oryx accepts that her body has been commodified, thinking, “there [are] many who had neither love nor a money value, and having one of these things [is] better than having nothing” (126).

As Butler explains, the mind subjugates the body. In the world of *Oryx and Crake*, this assertion holds true. Oryx never gets to make up her own mind. Jimmy—who claims to love Oryx—objectifies Oryx just as much as the men who buy, trade, and exploit Oryx’s body. Like those other men, Jimmy ignores Oryx’s voice and molds her identity to match his own fantasies. At one point he almost realizes this: “sometimes he felt that her [Oryx’s] entire past—everything she’d told him—was his own invention” (316). Furthermore, Oryx accepts her passive, malleable role, and when Jimmy tells her that he doesn’t buy the story of her childhood, Oryx simply says, “what is it that you would like to buy instead?” (142), indicating a willingness to change her life story to match Jimmy’s imagined one. She even questions her agency directly when she asks, “What is my will?” (141). Oryx’s identity and voice become so overshadowed by what Jimmy thinks about her that the reader cannot distinguish the truth about Oryx from Jimmy’s imagination. Oryx surrenders, over and over, to the identity Jimmy and other males create for her.

Oryx also surrenders in terms of language. The ability to name—the Adamic “right” to name—resides with Crake, and represents a source of tremendous power, one that is also intimately associated with science. The Extinctathon website emphasizes the link between Adamic naming and MaddAddamic naming: “*Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones*” (*Oryx and Crake* 80). As Lynda I. A. Birke writes, “Naming, as feminists have often stressed, is a powerful process. In scientific accounts, women have too often been described as being limited by their biology; if we are named as being victims of hormones, say, by the authority of science, then it is unsurprising if some people come to believe it (and act upon it)” (7). Adamic naming signals male dominion over the beasts and plants; Linnaean scientific naming, which replicates the Adamic naming that signals domination of the natural world, functions principally as an act of classification and categorization, one that, interestingly enough, further reinscribes gender binaries.³ Self-naming exists as an act of self-empowerment, whereas to be named is to be categorized and classified by another (a more powerful another), in accordance with that individual’s view.

As a teenager, Glenn renames himself “Crake.” Crake’s dismissal of his own original name “Glenn” is most probably because of its association with the arts; Crake’s father named his son after “a dead pianist, some boy genius with two n’s” (*Oryx and Crake* 70). Crake rechristens himself with the common name for the *rallina tricolor*, the family and class of the red-necked crane; Crake also renames Jimmy, providing him with the detested name of “Thickney.” Crake offers Oryx a limited choice of names; notably, the name “Oryx Beisa,” as her nametag reads, is based on the Linnaean classification system of genus and species. Crake also names each and

³ The Linnaean system of scientific classification is based on the gender organs of plants; plants engage in “marriages,” stamens are “husbands,” pistils are “wives,” who may share the “same bed” or “separate beds.” See Carl Linnaeus, *A System of Vegetables*, II.22.

every one of the Crakers. In addition, although the reader views the world of *Oryx and Crake* through Jimmy's eyes, Crake is not "voiceless" within the text, as Jimmy functions, for all intents and purposes, as Crake's amanuensis, remembering and recalling Crake's numerous pronouncements for his own benefit (and for that of the reader). And, for all Crake's dismissive attitude toward language, he nonetheless demonstrates command over it, not only through the act of naming, but through his ability to confound even the wordsmith Jimmy, as Crake continually strips meaning away from words, as he does with the words "real" and "reality." In contrast, Atwood never provides Oryx with a reliable voice of her own; Oryx's words are always transmitted through the hazy, erotic memories of Jimmy, the Snowman, who almost always remembers the speaking Oryx as a naked Oryx. Oryx also possesses absolutely little or no command over language. She has no name other than what men happen to call her: Uncle En names her "SuSu" (129). Although she chooses the name Oryx, it is from "the list provided by Crake" (311). She can't even recall her "real" name: With Uncle En, the children "were told to forget their old names, and soon they did" (129). Jimmy also recalls how little Oryx actually spoke: "No answer, no response. She was never very forthcoming at the best of times" (114).

Crake and Oryx also differ in terms of their mobility, and, perhaps, Crake's power and free agency are best depicted in his ability to move freely through all spaces and environments. After all, in a world that is so fragmented with CorpSeCorps men guarding and controlling who enters and leaves the Compounds, mobility is a privilege. Crake not only transcends spatial limits to freely enter all spaces in the novels, but he also receives respect and exhibits power in each space. As previously established, Crake dwells in—and essentially rules—the Compounds. In *The Year of the Flood*, one learns that Crake, or Glenn as the Gardeners call him, interacts with the leaders of God's Gardeners in ways that greatly affect their community. He smuggles

Pilar's tissue samples to the diagnostic labs at HelthWyzer West to confirm that she has cancer (178). While Pilar does not explicitly point to Crake's involvement in her death, her amanitas pill, also known as The Death Angel, seems to have effects that are ominously similar to the BlyssPluss pill, as there is "a respite period during which the patient appears to improve. But meanwhile the liver is slowly being destroyed" (179). This connection between the BlyssPluss pill and the "medicine" for Pilar's sickness suggests that Crake may have assisted in her suicide. Regardless of his possible role in Pilar's death, his interactions with Pilar, Zeb, and other MaddAddam members demonstrate that he not only has the ability to enter the protective God's Gardener's community, but also that he is well-respected among the Adams and Eves of the Garden. Also, Crake's freedom to move in and out of the Compounds and pleeblands is evident in his trips from the Paradise Project to Scales and Tales with Jimmy. In both spaces, people treat Crake with respect and awe, as the Compound and Paradise Project workers value him for his intellect and the Scales and Tales employees value him for his money. Arguably, Crake is freer to roam than members of the CorpSeCorps, as he has no need to use force or spray guns to access various spaces; he enjoys the masculine freedom of mobility to the fullest extent.

Not only does Crake freely enter and dominate physical spaces, but he also has unrestricted access to the virtual world. For instance, Crake has mastered Extinctathon—an online game in which each player competes against an opponent to identify an extinct bioform—by earning the title of "Grand Master." Moreover, his powerful presence in the virtual world is confirmed when he shows Jimmy his gateway into MaddAddam (215). Significantly, Crake uses the picture of Oryx as the portal to his online game, which emanates a message of control in multiple ways. First, this picture represents the very point that this chapter demonstrates—Crake controls others, while Oryx is constantly objectified and manipulated. Crake sets this picture of

Oryx's naked body as his portal without permission from the passive (and unknowing) Oryx. The fact that members of MaddAddam gain entry through the bodily image of Oryx suggests the act of sex, with Oryx figuratively penetrated by the male-dominated group, aligning Crake's use of Oryx's naked image with her naked image in the Pixieland sex movies filmed by Jack; if this image is indeed of Oryx, it is a downloaded still shot taken from one of the Pixieland movies, with a presumably eight-year-old naked Oryx licking whipped cream from an adult male torso. In addition, with this online image, Crake controls when he can gaze at her and when to turn off the computer (and thus eradicate the picture from view), and he provides other members of MaddAddam with this same masculine privilege. Crake's male gaze (and the gaze of the MaddAddams) defines her as object (and foreshadows the future gazing at Oryx's nude body by Crake and Jimmy in the Craker Dome). But Crake also uses the picture to exercise control over Jimmy, who obsessively dotes on this image of Oryx and who has carried a physical print of this image with him for years. Crake's virtual image of Oryx allows him to click on her eye and enter through her; Jimmy's picture serves as a reminder of what he cannot have, a reminder of "a private thing: his own guilt, his own shame, his own desire. [He wonders] [w]hy had Crake kept it? *Stolen* it?" (215). Thus, this picture of Oryx reiterates Crake's ability to navigate in virtual space and block Jimmy out of it. While Jimmy keeps the picture hidden and secret, Crake openly views the picture in front of Jimmy, in a sense taunting Jimmy with his power to control others and transcend spatial boundaries—and secrets. Crake's picture of Oryx reiterates the authority he has over Jimmy, Oryx, and the virtual world.

In contrast, Oryx's movement through physical and virtual space depends upon men. Oryx remembers leaving her village when "Uncle En" had come to buy children from families there. The children are treated like animals as he checks to see if they are ill, asks them if they

are obedient, and examines their teeth (because they would need to smile a lot). Then he picks four children—the “cream of the crop”—because “that was the number he could manage” (120). Thus, after being examined as if she were at an animal auction, Oryx is bought, taken out of her village, and forced to obey the commands of Uncle En and a series of other men following his death. When Oryx is forced to star in child pornography, she is directed on and off the screen, as the cameraman, Jack, “wanted to do movie things with her when there were no movies” (141). As men dictate her life and direct her future, her past identity becomes less memorable. Her home becomes a hazy memory and her mother’s voice grows fainter (128). In fact, the closest Oryx ever gets to managing the way she spends her time is when she asks Uncle En if she can listen to his watch tick (133).

Later in her life, when she is sent by Crake to market the BlyssPluss Pill, her movement is entirely dictated by Crake’s desire. Crake is very aware of his control over Oryx. He says that if he were to die, Jimmy should take care of the Crakers, and he adds, “If I’m not around, Oryx won’t be either” (321). Men also dictate Oryx’s presence online. Her movies are posted online and, as previously mentioned, Crake makes her his gateway onto MaddAddam. Oryx’s movement through virtual space depends on men, and she has absolutely no control over it (men can view her online at the click of a mouse), whereas Crake actively signs onto Extinctathon, choosing when to enter and leave the virtual world.

Not only is Oryx the object of the male gaze in virtual space, but she often becomes the object of scopophilia in the physical world as well. As a young girl, when she worked for Uncle En, and men took her into hotel rooms and asked her to take off her dress, “Oryx was obedient and did as she was told” (131). Furthermore, when Oryx interacts with the Crakers in the dome,

the dome becomes a three-dimensional lens through which Crake and Jimmy watch her naked body. Mulvey discusses the male gaze in cinema:

Going far beyond highlighting a women's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimension of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire. (1179-80)

Oryx becomes an object of the male gaze in the dome, which essentially performs the same function as film. Just as the director controls the audience's gaze through filming and editing, Crake controls time (he created the Crakers to experience life without aging or fear of mortality) and space (he creates an illusion when he builds an artificial Craker world sealed off from reality on multiple levels—compound walls, extra security, the bubble dome, etc.). By controlling these aspects of time and space, Crake has created a lens with which to gaze upon the Crakers and Oryx; the glass dome of the Craker bubble replicates and magnifies the glass lens of the movie camera. In fact, the dome provides the ultimate voyeuristic gaze as it provides a three-dimensional experience where Jimmy and Crake can watch the Craker world from all angles, much like the perspective of a surrounding, circular, stadium-like view.

It is almost as if Mulvey describes the Paradise Dome in her discussion of the cinema when she says that film portrays “a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy” (1174). Even after Oryx's death, Jimmy watches the Crakers through the dome where Oryx used to stand. He would peer in at them “like a voyeur. Scrap the

simile: he was a voyeur” (*Oryx and Crake* 339). Mulvey also adds that in extreme situations, the male gaze can warp into a perversion, where obsessive voyeurs can only receive sexual satisfaction from controlling the objectified other through watching her. While I do not believe that Crake and Jimmy *only* receive pleasure from *watching* Oryx through the dome (as they both seem to enjoy physical contact with her as well), their relationships with Oryx do contain an element of control, as they take turns sleeping with her and each possesses her naked picture at some point. Therefore, their view through the dome is not innocent; their voyeuristic gaze indicates their desire to control Oryx.

When Oryx and Crake die, Jimmy’s voyeurism becomes obvious as the plot stops, causing the reader to also adopt the male gaze and observe Oryx’s lifeless body with Jimmy: “As for Oryx, she’s face down, she’s turned her head away from [Crake] as if in mourning. The ribbon in her hair is as pink as ever” (335). Therefore, even after Oryx dies, Jimmy finds pleasure in viewing Oryx’s body; in death, Oryx’s corpse is objectified by the male gaze.

Oryx obviously lacks agency in all areas. She has no free will to make choices, no voice, no free movement, and no control over who views her in the virtual or physical realm. The males in the stories sadly dictate Oryx’s life, leaving her in a completely passive role. Although both Crake and Jimmy seem infatuated with her, it seems that a big part of their attraction lies in competition. Because her identity is so malleable and unidentifiable, Oryx’s body literally becomes the site of competition for Crake and Jimmy—a playing field for their tense relationship.

Furthermore, her elusive identity raises the question, who is Oryx? Is she even the same person throughout the duration of the novels? Jimmy thinks that the adult woman Crake hires to work with the Crakers is the same person whose pornographic childhood picture he printed out

when he was younger. However, Crake explains to Jimmy that he asked Watson-Crick Student Services (which obligingly provides a female escort service for its male students) to find him a woman who resembles the girl in his portal picture. Thus, no one actually knows if the person named Oryx is indeed the same person as the child whose picture functions as Crake's online portal. Jimmy believes she is, but he is an unreliable narrator of Oryx's life. Jimmy acknowledges that he may have had a role in shaping Oryx's story: "Sometimes he suspected her of improvising [her life story], just to humour him" (*Oryx and Crake* 316).

Jimmy also reflects on how hard it was to "piece [Oryx] together from the slivers of her he'd gathered and hoarded so carefully" (114):

There was Crake's story about her, and Jimmy's story about her as well, a more romantic version; and then there was her own story about herself, which was different from both, and not very romantic at all. . . . There must once have been other versions of her: her mother's story, the story of the man who'd bought her, the story of the man who'd bought her after that, and the third man's story—the worst man of them all, the one in San Francisco, a pious bullshit artist; but Jimmy had never heard those. (114)

After the waterless flood, Jimmy (referred to as Snowman post-apocalypse) realizes how difficult it was to get to know Oryx, whether it was because of Oryx's desire to please, or because he himself didn't really want to know the reality of her life. Perhaps this is why, when Jimmy tries to visualize her after her death, he has difficulty seeing her clearly. He can only conjure up a shadowy image, "floating towards him through the air, as if on soft feathery wings" (114). Oryx thus remains a blank canvas onto which each man—and each reader—can project his—or her—own visions. For Jimmy, she is an oppressed, sexual partner he desires to protect;

for Crake, she is a supporter of his vision to change the world. Thus, it is unsurprising that Oryx has no real name. As Jimmy thinks about her name Oryx, he repeats it, realizing that it is “not even her real name, which he’d never known anyway; it’s only a word. It’s a mantra” (110). Is Oryx’s entire existence a mantra composed by Jimmy and Crake—is it “bogus,” “rehearsed,” not real?

But, of course, a real material human being does exist to whom “real” things happen and with whom Crake and Jimmy have “real” sexual relations; however, even the disparate ways in which Crake and Oryx view their sexual relationship demonstrates extreme gender differences. Crake views sexual activity as a game to win. While the relationship between Oryx and the men in the novel remains tinted with uncertainty, one should not be surprised that Crake sleeps with Oryx even with his knowledge that Jimmy has long been infatuated with her (for if Storey and Storey are accurate in their assertion that Crake brought Oryx into his plan to lure Jimmy in, then he knows that Jimmy loves her⁴); Crake uses Oryx as a pawn in a game. His apparent emotional detachment from Oryx supports the idea that “observed gender differences in emotion expression can be described in terms of men being less inclined than women to express ‘powerless’ emotions, such as fear and sadness” (Timmers, Fischer, and Manstead 974). Throughout the novels, Crake takes this masculine view of sex to the extreme as he labels passionate sex as “humiliating, because it put[s] you at a disadvantage, it [gives] the love object too much power” (*Oryx and Crake* 193). Thus, it seems that Crake’s sexual experiences are more about power than love, and so he dominates the “love triangle” (comprised of Crake, Oryx, and Jimmy) by

⁴ Storey and Storey suggest that Crake may have hired Oryx as a strategy to recruit unsuspecting Jimmy into the scheme, “for it is a madly jealous Snowman who murders Crake to avenge his love, in what Snowman later assesses to have been a form of assisted suicide, when Crake slits Oryx’s throat” (para. 3). Crake manipulates Jimmy to fulfill his plan of achieving absolute domination over the world.

treating Oryx as a game piece and, in the end, claiming her as his own by slitting her throat. Through this act, he performs a nonverbal “check mate” against Jimmy, as he now controls her fate much like he controls Jimmy’s future and the fate of humanity.

While Crake uses sex to manipulate and control, Oryx is manipulated and controlled as the sexual object of numerous men. When Jimmy gets upset about the cameraman, Jack, engaging in sexual activities with Oryx as a child, Oryx replies that she did not do as many things with Jack as she does with Jimmy. When Jimmy tries to say that the circumstances are different because Oryx engages in sexual activities with him willingly, Oryx laughs, indicating that perhaps her experiences with Jimmy are not that much different from her interactions with Jack. She has always been the one acted upon; she no longer knows what a choice really is. “What is my will?” Oryx asks.

Not only do men in the novel “other” her due to her gender, but Oryx is also “othered” due to her race. Jimmy possibly projects his own image onto Oryx in order to veil the reality of Oryx’s “Oriental” ancestry—or, perhaps, it is Oryx’s ancestry that allows Jimmy to view her life entirely in terms of his own erotic fantasies. As an Asian woman, Oryx embodies the views that Western society holds about foreign women. Edward Said discusses this act of othering. He asserts that the Other is manufactured to benefit oneself, and this division is created for the purposes of domination and knowledge: “the Orient was created—or, as I call it, ‘Orientalized’ . . . [and] [t]he relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (5). Uncle En not only uses little Asian girls as sources of profit, but he especially uses Oryx’s foreign appearance to gain money from Western males: He tells her to adopt the name “SuSu,” to act as if she does not understand English, and to follow men into hotels so that he could catch them trying to gain sexual favors from her.

Uncle En thus encourages Oryx to play into the stereotypes that Western men hold concerning Asian women.

In an interview, Said explains that the difference between the Orient and Occident is “not genetic; it’s manufactured. It’s a political reflex developed for other reasons, whether resources—oil for example—or geo-strategic ideas about who should control what area for what reason” (“Edward Said” 2:04-2:27). The sex trade and sex tourism are fueled by enormous profits, by economic disparities (clients in wealthy countries purchase the sexual services of women from impoverished countries), and by Western desire for the “exotic” other. Notably, the “majority of sex tourists come from four regions: Australia and New Zealand; Western Europe, especially Germany and Scandinavia; the United States and Canada; and the Middle East”; “a thriving sex tourism business has long existed” in Southeast Asia (Domosh and Seager 137). Uncle En manufactures and highlights the “exotic” differences of the little girls in order to make money, but, back in the States, Jimmy and Crake also help to perpetuate these racial and ethnic differences. First of all, they watch pornographic videos of Oryx and other little girls engaged in sexual acts with a Western male, and, by watching these videos and by freezing the frame of Oryx (or the girl who Jimmy thinks is Oryx), Jimmy and Crake demonstrate their belief that it is acceptable to exploit young foreign girls. By printing out her picture, carrying it around, and using it as an online portal, both Jimmy and Crake signify that Oryx is someone who can be objectified and controlled. Jimmy’s need to position and control her as exotic “other” is further demonstrated by his pressing desire to tie her childhood to a specific foreign geographical space: “‘There were canals in this city?’ Jimmy ask[s]. He [thinks] maybe they would give him a clue as to which city it had been” (135). Although he claims to love Oryx, he treats her as an exotic and erotic Other.

Uncle En, Jack, Crake, and Jimmy—all these men attempt to draw a distinguishing line between Orient and Occident in order to control Oryx. Not only is Oryx’s story filtered through an upper-class, white, Western male perspective, but it seems that the men in the novel attempt to dehumanize the East in order to gain power over an unfamiliar person. Jimmy, our unreliable narrator, asks if Oryx has ever scrubbed floors (*Oryx and Crake* 115), applying the stereotype of Asian women as the “perfect ‘docile’ workforce” (Domosh and Seager 134). Finally, Oryx asks Jimmy where he gathered all of these stereotypes: “You have a lot of pictures in your head, Jimmy. Where did you get them? Why do you think they are pictures of me?” (*Oryx and Crake* 114). Ironically, Jimmy responds to this question by stroking her hair, as if she were an animal or pet, not an adult woman. Jimmy, however, is not the only person who strokes her head. When Oryx worked for Uncle En, “[t]he other children petted her, because she was the littlest one. They took turns sleeping beside her at night; she was passed from one set of arms to another” (130). Oryx becomes dehumanized—made even more “other”—as she is petted, controlled, sold, and caged up in small spaces. At one point Jimmy observes Oryx and the other little girls on the porn site and calls their tongues “kittenish” (90). He watches as the girls are prodded with a stick when they stop licking the man in the video, much like a farmer would poke a disobedient animal. Later Jimmy watches Oryx sit on the bed, licking her fingers with “her pink cat’s tongue” (119). Another time, she comforts herself by licking her hand (126).

Why is Oryx often compared to animals? This act of dehumanizing is just another (perhaps subconscious) technique used by men in the novel to control her. By comparing a human to an animal, body is also emphasized over mind. If Uncle En views the children as cat-like (127) and Jimmy compares Oryx to a cat, they can feel justified in their attempts to control, to make use of the female body. Said asks, “Isn’t there something profoundly anti-humanist

about knowledge that's based on difference and inferiority and submission of the other and the alienation of the other?" (3:40-3:50). This gross dehumanization can be seen in the way Oryx is treated and viewed by men in the novel, and it does alienate her—it pushes her to the far pole of the gender spectrum, positing her as the feminine, animalistic, and exotic other.

In Atwood's dystopic world, Crake embodies the problematic masculine extreme, while Oryx represents the problematic feminine extreme—they represent the binary “self” and the “other” in all its myriad expressions. The privileged and powerful white Western man is counterbalanced by the mysterious, passive Asian woman. Margaret Atwood presents these two figures to caution her readers against binaries that “other” one's counterpart. Atwood invites us to move beyond the rigid machinery of gender binaries—past the masculine machine and the passive feminine victim who repeatedly gets run over—and think about gender from a broader perspective, by demonstrating the real, material problems that occur when “bogus,” “rehearsed,” and “unreal” social constructs are unthinkingly employed on real material human beings.

CHAPTER 2: “WARRIOR MAIDENS”: THE MASCULINE FEMALES, AMANDA AND TOBY

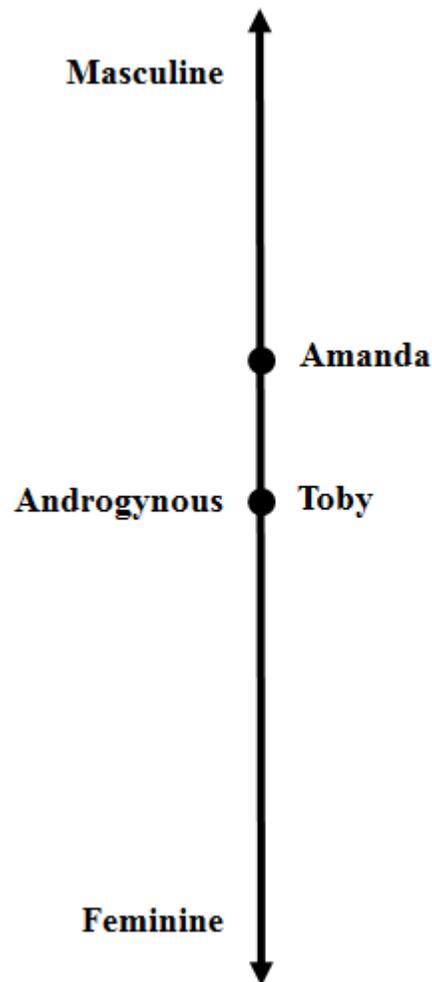


Figure 3: Amanda and Toby

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* portray characters who must fight to survive in a post-apocalyptic world after Crake administers the fatal BlyssPuss pill to society. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Crake represents patriarchal power and extreme masculinity as he controls the fate of humanity by marketing the pill and inventing the Crakers.

He is the embodiment of Atwood's "machine," who runs over everything in his path.⁵ On the opposing end, Oryx represents the feminine figure, the victim who, as Atwood describes it, "gets run over" (as qtd. in Gibson 17). Crake first uses Oryx to distribute the viral pills that result in the nearly complete genocide of humanity, then murders her. In this way, Oryx gets used and defeated by the machine. Atwood, however, offers alternatives to the gender extremes embodied by Oryx and Crake: Amanda and Toby, two of Atwood's masculine females. They shed light on Atwood's alternative depiction of gender, and, thus, provide an entry into the process of exploring gender beyond the masculine/feminine binary.

Amanda's and Toby's respective quests for agency reveal the limitations they must overcome in order to avoid defeat by the masculine machine. Specifically, for self-preservation, Amanda and Toby must overcome the constraints of their physical (female) bodies as men strive to subvert or destroy their agency through rape. As Reeser explains, "Negative responses to women who exhibit masculinity help insure men's domination over masculinity, making them its sole purveyor" (132). Although numerous men within the MaddAddam novels attempt, in the words of Domosh and Seager, to "put women in place" by reminding female characters of their "femaleness" (their female sex) through violence or the threat of violence, women possessing masculine gender attributes are at equal or greater risk of sexual violence (though not of sexual exploitation). However, those women—Amanda and Toby—who do possess or adopt "masculine" traits seem more adaptable, more resourceful, and in possession of significantly greater agency, both pre- and post-flood, than their "feminine" counterparts. Yet, for all their masculine traits—for example, their physical freedom of movement; their bodily performances; and their views on sexual intercourse—Amanda and Toby demonstrate that non-male masculine

⁵ Crake also represents capitalist power in addition to patriarchal, but—as this lies outside the scope of my argument—I will primarily focus on power related to gender in this thesis.

authority can exist without becoming an expression of the machine. After the flood, Amanda and Toby navigate as the “third thing,” operating as a third type of gender between the extreme binaries of the gender spectrum, by adopting masculine characteristics when necessary, but also holding onto some feminine traits. Essentially, they learn how to utilize the best of both genders in order to survive—and potentially thrive—in the post-apocalyptic world. After hearing about “Amanda’s knee-in-the-groin and eye-gouging moves, and her piece of glass with the duct tape,” Zeb laughingly responds with “See you later, warrior maidens. Don’t kill anyone” (*The Year of the Flood* 135). Amanda and Toby exist as the “warrior maidens” of Atwood’s post-flood world.

Theoretical Background: Masculinities

As previous scholarship on Atwood’s MaddAddam novels attests, questions of power pervade both works: How does one gain authority within these novels? And how does one survive in dire circumstances? Power relations among genders often masquerade as simple and authentic in Atwood’s novels. If left unquestioned or unchallenged, those with power remain in control and reap its benefits. Arthur Brittan and Stephen Whitehead, pro-feminist theorists, both discuss the pressure men face to adapt to the standards of masculinity in an attempt to gain a position of power.⁶ Both theorists recognize the diversity of masculinities in the ways men express their manliness across different time periods, locations, and contexts (Brittan 18; Whitehead 97). Brittan asserts that, while ideas of masculinity change with location and evolve over time like hairstyles and clothes, the substance of male power does not (2). In other words, these theorists echo Judith Butler’s claim in *Gender Trouble* that gender is a performative act and is culturally constructed through the “stylized repetition of acts” through time (179).

⁶ “Pro-feminism” refers to support of the cause of feminism without implying that the supporter is a member of the feminist movement.

Similarly, Todd Reeser explains how the relationship between power, masculinity, and discourse shapes this performance:

One of the purposes of discourse is to normalize human beings and to make them conform to the power that institutions want to exert over people. Masculinity plays an important role in this exertion of power: because there are certain advantages and privileges accorded to it, masculinity functions as an effective carrot to normalize those within discourse. If you allow power to make you into what it wants, you will reap the benefits of masculinity in exchange. (31)

In the world depicted in Atwood's novels, success prior to the apocalyptic flood seems to follow certain characteristics of masculine privilege. In other words, characters who adopt certain masculine traits improve their ability to thrive in pre-flood worlds. After the flood, gender relations are redefined as characters navigate the world from the perspective of a third gender, one neither purely masculine nor feminine. In my analysis, I will use the term masculinity to refer to the dominant traits—those adopted to gain power in white patriarchal society—as defined in Reeser's explanation above. By employing the term masculinity in this manner, I do not intend to position it into a box, as masculinity is complex—many factors affect people's perceptions of masculinity, including gender, race, and culture. However, this definition, along with feminist geography theories established by Mona Domosh and Joni Seager—who suggest that perceptions of space often result from gender relations—will afford me an opportunity to deconstruct power relations through an examination of how gender is performed and shaped in Atwood's texts.

Because Amanda and Toby are raped repeatedly, it is important to address the relationship between biological body and gender. The continued cultural insistence that biology

defines male and female bodies—“that the penis alone signifies maleness” (Halberstam 128) and that a woman’s body is principally a vehicle for sexual activity and procreation—finds its fullest expression in sexual violence against women. Yet the body is not the only thing that defines sexuality. As Moira Gatens notes, “to claim a history for the body involves taking seriously the ways in which diet, environment, and the typical exercises of a body may vary historically and create its capacities, its desires and its actual material form” (228); she urges that attention be drawn “to the complex dialectic between bodies and their environments” (228), and “the historical effects of the ways in which power constructs bodies” (229). In other words, Gatens suggests that sexual bodies are also socially constructed. In “F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity,” Judith Halberstam discusses the transsexual body, similarly suggesting the social construction of the sexed body:

We are all transsexuals except that the referent of *trans* becomes less and less clear (and more and more queer). We are all cross-dressers but where are we crossing from and to what? There is no ‘other’ side, no ‘opposite’ sex, no natural divide to be spanned by surgery, by disguise, by passing. We all pass or we don’t, we all wear our drag, and we all derive a different degree of pleasure—sexual or otherwise—from our costumes. It is just that for some of us our costumes are made of fabric and material, while for others they are made of skin; for some an outfit can be changed; for others skin must be resewn. There are no transsexuals. (127)

Gatens and Halberstam suggest that the body as indicator of male or female, of masculine and feminine, is unreliable, but, nonetheless, rape (regardless of whether the victim is male or female) is enacted on the bodies of living, breathing individuals, and, in *The Year of the Flood*,

rape is always an act of aggression against women, a means to enact and reestablish gender binaries, with the “man on top,” a form of aggressive masculinity.

Teresa de Lauretis suggests, “If at any one time there are several competing, even contradictory, discourses on sexuality—rather than a single, all-encompassing or monolithic, ideology—then what makes one take up a position in a certain discourse rather than another is an ‘investment’” (16). In other words, those with power want to preserve their power. De Lauretis continues to discuss the problem of women only being defined in terms of men: “. . . woman, *as* subject of desire or of signification, is unrepresentable” outside of the “phallic order of patriarchal culture and in its theory” (20). Thus, when women in Atwood’s novels attempt to navigate away from the feminine binary—the extreme that is defined in terms of its masculine counterpart (as its “other”)—the men become uncomfortable with these women who are stepping outside the “phallic order” and they thus attempt to preserve their patriarchal power through violence and rape.

“Amanda...didn’t know the limits of her own strength”: A Non-male Masculine Figure

Amanda, like Crake, exhibits several dominant, masculine traits in *The Year of the Flood*, yet she does not use her power “to run over” others. By comparing her to Crake, one can see how she gravitates toward the masculine end of the spectrum in many areas but never to the extreme that Crake does. For example, Amanda’s role as a homeless city dweller (prior to becoming a God’s Gardener) situates her towards the masculine end or “Crake extreme” of the gender spectrum as she wanders the streets during day and night, unafraid. According to Domosh and Seager, the city is perceived as masculine, while the women’s place is at home (100). In terms of this designation, Amanda gravitates toward the role of masculine as she spends all of her time on the city streets and literally has no home. Furthermore, society believes

that women should “avoid walking in certain places, at particular times, and [should] not go out alone . . . [a belief that] reflects and reinforces the traditional notion that women belong at home, not on the streets” (100). Amanda does not take such precautions. When she first meets Ren on the street and takes her to the alleyway near Scales and Tales, the strip club, Ren recalls that she and the Gardener kids were told never to roam the alleyway or go to Scales and Tales, “especially not girls” (*The Year of the Flood* 74). In this way, Amanda demonstrates masculine freedom of movement as she roams the streets day and night.

While Amanda’s masculine traits are emphasized in her ability to permeate various spatial boundaries, her mobility is more limited than Crake’s but less constrained than Oryx’s. Amanda, who originally roamed the pleebland streets, moves to the Garden after meeting Ren, and she thrives in this setting. She also attends college at the Martha Graham Academy, thus entering the edges of the Compound world. While many people spend their whole lives confined to either the pleeblands, the Compounds, or God’s Garden, Amanda and Crake have traveled to and from them all. However, while Crake can pass through Compound security without being questioned, Amanda is neither well known nor valued in the Compounds. Amanda also differs from the passive feminine extreme because her physical movements and her “places” are not completely dictated by men as those of Oryx are. Men determine Oryx’s movements throughout her life, beginning when Uncle En purchases her from her family, continuing through Jack’s direction of her in child pornography, and ending with her role as sexual object for Jimmy and pawn for Crake. Whereas Amanda becomes a victim of assault on occasion—both before and after the flood—she does not accept this violation passively. In fact, she shows the other girls in God’s Garden “how to ram a guy in the crotch or trip him up and then kick him under the chin and break his neck” (*The Year of the Flood* 86). In this way, Amanda’s bodily movement

through space lies on the gender spectrum somewhere between the masculine and feminine extremes.

Amanda and Crake also share the masculine trait of competition. Domosh and Seager explain, “[t]he masculine realm [is] portrayed as one of equal individuals going out into the world to show themselves through economic competition” (4). Crake gains utmost authority through deception (marketing the BlyssPuss pill and manipulating others), and quickly becomes the city’s most respected and well-known scientist. While Amanda has no official job to dominate, she quickly climbs to the top of the social chain among God’s Gardeners, as she “sucks up” to others to gain approval and information by feigning interest in various Gardeners’ areas of expertise; for instance, she pretends to enjoy sewing when interacting with Surya and takes a “sudden interest in mushrooms” when in the presence of Toby (*The Year of the Flood* 83-84). Certainly, Amanda’s form of manipulation is less harmful than Crake’s, but she still uses deception to gain power (similar to Crake’s manipulation of Jimmy in his plot to establish control).

Like Crake’s manipulation of Jimmy, Amanda involves Ren in a plot of deception as she competes for her friendship. Whereas Crake’s plot destroys most of humanity, Amanda’s plan causes destruction on a smaller scale by destroying Bernice’s life in the Garden. Amanda pushes Bernice aside in an attempt to secure an unwavering friendship with Ren. Bernice is initially Ren’s best friend, but once Amanda enters the Garden, Amanda and Bernice enter an unspoken rivalry for Ren’s friendship. Eventually Ren bonds with Amanda and no longer hangs out with Bernice after school (136). Amanda officially banishes Bernice from her social circle (and from the Garden) by making up a story about Bernice’s father, Burt, and an affair with a woman known throughout the Garden as “the Wet Witch.” At first Amanda and Ren laugh and upset

Bernice by leaving her out of the joke. Then Amanda fills her in, adopting a “virtuous, Eve sort of voice” (suggesting that she deliberately inflicts embarrassment on Bernice) when she says, ““The fact is, we don’t know for sure. We just *suspect* that your father is humping the Wet Witch. Maybe he isn’t. But you could understand him doing it, with your mother in a Fallow [depressed] state so much. He must get very horny—that’s why he’s always groping little girls’ armpits.”” Ren even comments that statement is cruel (143). This leads to Bernice telling her mother about the supposed affair, followed immediately by their departure from the Garden. Through her manipulation, Amanda wins Ren as her loyal and obedient best friend. Like Jimmy and his devotion to Crake, Ren longs to belong and exhibits loyalty to Amanda throughout the entire novel. Amanda and Crake certainly target the same type of people to control, but Crake manipulates Jimmy more severely than Amanda manipulates Ren; while Crake ruthlessly controls Jimmy, Amanda’s manipulation is less intense; if Crake’s wrath resembles a stomp, Amanda’s resembles more of a push.

Whether she tries to or not, Amanda (like Crake) also dominates a “love triangle.” Just as Crake establishes a relationship with Oryx, despite or because of Jimmy’s long-term crush on her, so too does Amanda enter a relationship with Jimmy, the object of Ren’s affections. Ren had dated Jimmy in high school and still loves him post-breakup; Amanda dates him years later. When Ren tells herself that Amanda had not done it on purpose (*The Year of the Flood* 301), it is a defensive reaction to an unspoken accusation that Amanda dated Jimmy deliberately to hurt Ren. After all, Ren had earlier predicted that Amanda might “[scoop] some glittery piece of junk [Ren] wanted for [her]self” (219). While Amanda *seems* unaware that Ren and Jimmy had previously dated, Ren’s defense raises the question, *did* Amanda know that Ren had dated Jimmy? Is Amanda sensitive and concerned or is she feigning ignorance when she abruptly asks

Ren if anything is wrong (301)? It seems that one may never know if Amanda's motives to date Jimmy are innocent or cruel, but the fact remains that she claims Jimmy last; she dominates the love triangle, while Ren feels like a nail has pierced her heart (301). This positions Amanda's treatment of relationships toward the masculine end of the spectrum, but since she does not control Jimmy or Ren to the extent that Crake controls Jimmy and Oryx, she again lies between the two binaries, closer to the masculine side than feminine.

In addition to asserting control over relationships, Amanda also exhibits a desire to control language. As Jennifer Lawn and Susan Hall point out, the dichotomy in the novels between words and numbers represents the split between feminine and masculine, respectively. Although she attends the degenerating Martha Graham Academy of the Arts—where many enrolled students value words, placing the school as a feminine residence—she still exerts a form of masculine control. While Crake questions the value and accuracy of words, Amanda follows suit as she manipulates words in an artistic display; she “vulturizes” words in a project called Vulture Sculptures, in which she arranges large animal carcasses into the shapes of words in vacant fields or abandoned parking lots and, from a helicopter, photographs the scene once the vultures descend to tear them apart (*Oryx and Crake* 244). Ultimately, Crake and Amanda both demonstrate authority over words. While Crake destroys words by belittling their capability to convey accurate truth, Amanda literally destroys them.⁷ Also, while Crake enacts the role of God in his creation of the Crakers, Amanda thinks of herself as a divine observer: “Vulturizing brought [the words] to life, was her concept, and then it killed them. It was a powerful process—

⁷ As explained in chapter one, twice Crake questions the meaning of the word “reality” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 83, 77). In both of these instances, Crake belittles Jimmy's reliance on words by pointing to the precarious nature of language. By questioning the meaning of reality, Crake implicitly asserts that language is abstract and unreliable, unlike scientific equations which yield consistent and reliable answers.

‘Like watching God thinking’” (245). This reference to God draws a disturbing parallel between Amanda’s and Crake’s drive for power.

Furthermore, Amanda and Crake possess similar views of sex. Like Crake, Amanda also acknowledges the powerlessness that sex can create if a person becomes emotionally vulnerable. She ridicules sex and believes that “[y]ou [can] snigger at it or trade it or both, but you [can’t] respect it . . . Gardeners kids often [make] up rude stories about the sex lives of the Adams and Eves. It [takes] away some of their power to imagine them naked” (137). Consequently, Amanda typically detaches herself emotionally from her sexual partners as she trades sex for sodas and other items. She asserts that love is useless and leads to exchanges in which one gives too much away (219). She, like Crake, worries about giving “the love object too much power” (*Oryx and Crake* 193). As a female, she occasionally becomes a sexual object, but never to the degree that Oryx does. Whereas Oryx allows men to write her story and make her into whomever they want (for Uncle En, an economic goldmine; or, for Jimmy, a sexual goddess), Amanda uses her body to obtain specific items or desired outcomes, from sodas to sexual fulfillment. Thus, she is neither extremely masculine nor feminine—like everything else, she navigates the sexual realm from a third perspective, between the two extremes.

Amanda exhibits many gendered traits similar to Crake’s throughout the two novels, but their similarities are limited in the end, mainly by Amanda’s role as a non-male masculine figure. “When masculinity is taken as a disembodied phenomenon, existing on its own outside the confines of a given type of body, then traits ascribed to masculinity—such as power and virility—can be considered on their own terms, without regard for the sex of the body possessing them” (Reeser 132). This proves to be true when Amanda’s traits are considered apart from her body; however, her female body ultimately curtails her masculinity when the Painballers

repeatedly rape her. Amanda becomes reduced to a female body, which the men use merely to gain power and pleasure and to assert their dominance:

“We gonna feed her [Amanda]?” says the shorthair [Painballer]. 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.” (418)

While Amanda exemplifies power and masculinity in her confident actions and aggressive attitude, the Painballers reduce her to mere body, one that they have almost “used up” (417). She has “a rope around her neck, with the other end tied to the leg of the dark-bearded guy She has a purple bruise under one eye, and there are other bruises on the bare parts of her arms” (416). After repeated rape, Amanda is “used up, worn out. Worthless” (417) in the eyes of the Painballers. They have “put her in her place” (or the place they believe she should occupy, which is one stripped of power). In what Reeser refers to as an asymptotic view of gender, “women are able to approach masculinity through these gendered traits, but in the end are not given the chance to reach it fully. Physical traits like the penis turn into proof, or reassurance, that the woman is unable to profit from masculinity in its fullness of totality” (138). In a sense, the Painballers’ “physical traits” remind Amanda of her limited masculinity, just as Blanco uses his penis to remind Toby of hers. Reeser asserts that negative responses to women who demonstrate masculine traits help to guarantee men’s domination over masculinity, making them its sole source (132). In other words, the men who rape Amanda are determined to fit her into the dual gender system, which they intend to preserve. It is unclear from the text if the

Painballers are uncomfortable with her liminal gender, or would treat any woman in this way; nonetheless, the Painballers cannot think outside gender binaries, and, thus, rape exists as an expression of masculine prerogative and privilege.

Although Amanda gravitates toward the masculine end of the gender spectrum in terms of her characteristics and attitudes, she is nonetheless precluded from becoming another Crake because of her sex (female), her social class (non-Compound), and, most significantly, her physical body. While Crake never exhibits any form of extreme emotion, Amanda does after the rape. She breaks emotionally, after she and Ren are reunited: “She’s crying, big gulping sobs, and [Ren] know[s] it must have been very terrible” (*The Year of the Flood* 420). Timmers, Fischer, and Manstead observe that “observed gender differences in emotion expression can be described in terms of men being less inclined than women to express ‘powerless’ emotions, such as fear and sadness” (974). When one contrasts Amanda’s heart-rending sobs with Crake’s cool lack of emotion, one can see that, although Amanda approaches the masculine side of the gender spectrum, she can never reach the extreme.

Earlier in the novel, Toby had informed Ren that “Amanda had a tendency to go too far, she didn’t know the limits of her own strength” (*The Year of the Flood* 299); however, the repeated rapes and abuse ultimately reveal to Amanda her limits—at least in a society where masculinity is unquestioningly privileged. For Amanda, it is perhaps the physical vulnerability of her female body that prevents her from becoming like Crake, an uninhibited figure of power. We cannot know for sure if Amanda has the potential to become a negative figure of power like Crake, but throughout the novel she does exhibit leadership capabilities as well as a propensity toward manipulation. The rapes, however, (temporarily) strip her of her masculine powers and, quite possibly, make her permanently unable to discover what her masculine power could

accomplish, whether good or evil. This is not to suggest that rape is a good thing, but merely that, in a patriarchal society, rape is the ultimate assertion of masculine power and that none of Amanda's other masculine attributes can help her in this situation—though they may prove helpful in the future.

There's "*Nothing sexual about [Toby]*": A Neutral Female

While Amanda is positioned toward the masculine end of the gender spectrum, Toby holds a more central position, and possibly exists as Atwood's best representative of "the third thing," a character who embodies the best of masculine and feminine traits and in ways that render them gender ambiguous. Curiously, Atwood has stripped Toby of any attribute that denotes gendered sexuality, and her gendered traits are an equal blend of masculine authority and feminine nurturing. In many respects, Toby's character may be associated with gender neutrality, suggesting an exemption from gravitation towards either binary of the spectrum; she holds a place in the middle.

Her proper name is Tobiatha, yet she is referred to as Toby throughout both novels, a gender neutral name. Furthermore, people often treat Toby as a non-sexual being. For instance, when Toby tells a member of God's Garden that the children make sexual jokes about the adults, Lucerne seems surprised. "'You?' Lucerne [says], opening her large eyes with their dark lashes. 'Why would they make dirty jokes about you?' Nothing sexual about *you*, was what she meant. Flat as a board, back and front" (*The Year of the Flood* 114). This moment is not the only time Toby's lack of feminine curves is noted; later Toby admits that she is fond of Zeb, but figures that she has the "wrong body type" and is "[t]oo muscular" (244). Even when Toby's attacker, Blanco, finds her—which leads her to alter her appearance, from her skin tone and hair to her eye color and shape—she still does not feel feminine. Instead, she just feels more invisible

(262). Toby's physical appearance signals gender ambiguity. When Nuala, apparently a promiscuous woman in the Garden, squeezes Toby's arm, Toby thinks, "Get your moist palms off me...I'm not a man" (177). This defensive reaction suggests that others tend to associate Toby with masculine traits and treat her like a man. When Zeb tells Toby that she must have been a "babe" until the Gardeners got to her, Toby feels pleased, since it had been a long time since she had received a gender-related compliment (185). Therefore, Toby's interactions with others—men and women—suggest that she embodies an androgynous identity—others view her as neither masculine nor feminine. Unlike Amanda, who leans more toward the masculine end of the spectrum during the novels, Toby navigates more towards the middle.

Toby holds the leadership position of Eve Six (Eve and Adam serve as the titles of Garden leaders), responsible for healing members of the Garden community with natural remedies in addition to taking care of the community beehive; her role is that of both leader and healer. Since Toby is an Eve, she has access to space in the Garden that most others do not know of: a wall compartment concealed by a shelf of vinegar bottles where the Adams and Eves hide a laptop (since such a device defies their "no technology" rule) and hold biweekly meetings (*The Year of the Flood* 109); she has access to more physical space than most of God's Gardeners, but also to virtual space (if she chooses to operate the laptop). On the other hand, Toby feels confined to the Garden, as she is scared of running into Blanco, a man from her past who repeatedly raped her and at one point threatened to kill her. For a long time, this fear keeps her from leaving the Garden and entering the pleeblands without a disguise. Even when she wears a costume to conceal her identity, "she [can] never shake the feeling that someone [is] sneaking up on her" (242). Even after Toby's face has been altered cosmetically, she becomes hyperaware of her bodily entrapment: "Nobody likes it, thought Toby—being a body, a thing. Nobody wants

to be limited in that way. We'd rather have wings" (264). Therefore, she initially transgresses spaces that most people do not (as does Crake), but her movement is heavily constrained by a man (as is the case with Oryx, whose fate initially rests on the man who buys her from her family's village). Thus, Toby's physical freedom of movement lies midway between the two gender binaries.

Like Oryx, Toby is often associated with animals, but with significant differences. Oryx is repeatedly compared to cats and kittens, which are frequently gendered as feminine; by noting her kittenish aspects, men reduce her to a plaything, an object or "other" that requires masculine protection, intervention, and control. In contrast, Toby seems one with animals; she doesn't view them as "other," but as integral and intelligent contributors to the planet. She is also compared to insects and birds, which are often (albeit, not always) referred to as neutral beings, as many people refer to a singular insect or bird as "it," utilizing the gender-neutral pronoun. At the opening of *The Year of the Flood*, Toby utilizes animalistic characteristics, as she listens to the sounds of animals—birds chirping, dogs barking, mice tittering, crickets chirping, and frogs "grumphing" (5)—and she joins in with the music of the animals as she sweeps dry leaves away with her broom. The "*katoush katoush, katoush*" of the broom enters her ears, joining the concert of the other night critters. Then she goes to bed, and "[e]ven when she sleeps, she's listening, as animals do—for a break in the pattern, for an unknown sound, for a silence opening like a crack in the rock" (5). When she lives above Slink, an endangered-species luxury couture company, she can hear animals being slaughtered below and smell the fumes of skinned carcasses, chemicals, and rancid animal fat (31). At another point in the novel, Toby describes her hair as smelling like mutton (17). Due to this lamb-like odor, cats take an interest in Toby

(262), further linking her with animals. Even her movements mimic animals, as she often crouches as if she is an animal on the prowl for food (4; 21) and she grins like a dog (41).

Toby is indeed acutely aware of animal language, as later reiterated when she literally talks to the bees. As she takes over Pilar's job as Bee Keeper, she finds herself conversing aloud with the bees, becoming their queen bee in a sense. In fact, Toby is once referred to as "worker bee" (114)—an interesting inversion of the phrase "bee worker"—which links her identity to the bee instead of the worker. At other times, Toby's movements resemble those of birds, such as when she vulture-like stumbles across a severed dog tail along a walking path (16) or when she circles around a barricade in the dark streets (21). Instead of calling her homeless, Atwood explains that Toby has no "nest egg," thus continuing the bird metaphor (29). Also, she sells her eggs for money, turning them into a commodity, much like farmers snatch and steal animals' young. When Toby faces complications donating her eggs the third time, she becomes sterile, removing from her a characteristic associated with femininity—reproduction.

Toby's attitudes toward sex are complicated: On the one hand, she finds herself attracted to Zeb; on the other, she views sex as an act of dominance instead of pleasure. As Blanco repeatedly rapes her, Toby feels the opposite of pleasure or love; the violation only serves to remove pleasure from the act. Sexual intercourse, which she once enjoyed with a boyfriend Stan as she "rub[bed] her flower preparations and herbal extract projects on him" (32), becomes dreadful and violent as Blanco forces himself on her, reminding Toby of her inability to separate her body and mind. For Toby, sex is not located principally in the mind, as it is for Crake, nor in the body, as it is for Oryx, but in a conjoining of the two. Later, Toby realizes that "[s]he'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. Freedom from Blanco was

worth a lot” (103). She concludes that her “neural connections for sex are blocked” (104). The closest to sex that Toby encountered since her interactions with the violent rapist, Blanco, include another aggressive attack by an old member of the Garden, Mugi. At one point, Mugi pulls Toby off the treadmill and onto the floor, groping her under her skirt before Toby manages to push him off (103). Thus it is unsurprising that Toby views sex as dominance; she primarily experiences sex as forms of assault. Her view is similar to Amanda’s—while she is the victim of sexual assault, she learns to fight back, like when she kicks Blanco in the head and digs her elbow into Mugi to push him off of her. Yet, although Toby does not passively accept sexual victimization and exploitation like Oryx, she is the repeated target of rape and sexual violation. At one point, Toby even works as a furzooter, an advertiser in a fur animal suit who wears advertisements around her neck. In the first week she is violated:

...she suffered three attacks by fetishists who knocked her over, twisted the big head around so she was blinded, and rubbed their pelvises against her fur, making strange noises, of which the meows were the most recognizable. It wasn’t rape—no part of her actual body was touched—but it was creepy. (31)

Even when her body is disguised as an animal, Toby’s body is violated, suggesting the “creepy” and unnatural ways in which sexuality and gender are constructed in our society. As Reeser notes, “female masculinity is a threat to male masculinity, a challenge to its hegemony” (137), and, although Toby in many ways appears gender-less and sex-less, even this seems a threat and challenge to masculine hegemony. Ultimately, Toby’s body limits her from fully navigating her liminal gender status, though, of all of Atwood’s MaddAddam characters, Toby is the most representative of the positive aspects of gender neutrality.

In Atwood's MaddAddam novels, the treatment of female bodies demonstrates the problems with viewing gender as a mechanical, dualistic entity. Yes, female characters like Toby and Amanda may share some masculine characteristics with Crake, but their physical (female) bodies limit them in a manner that Crake's (male) body does not; while most of the main female characters are victims of sexual violence, no male characters are raped. Women are targeted and violated in a way that men are not for stepping out of their "feminine place." As de Lauretis discusses, women are defined in terms of men; when they step out of the position of male counterpart, men feel threatened. It is important to note that this reaction is a culturally-imposed limitation, which accepts and naturalizes sexual domination of women and which insists upon privileging the male penis as the principle marker of masculinity and of masculine power. Thus, in the end of *The Year of the Flood*, it is fitting that Amanda would kick a Painballer in his genitals; in a sense she lashes out against the male signifier that she lacks and which has been used to humiliate and degrade her. Similarly, when a farmer tries to molest her, Amanda sticks her thumbs in his eyes, again fighting back. And what about Toby? Toby, in addition to kicking Blanco in the head in revolt, subdues her attackers in the end with her rifle, a re-appropriation of the phallic male signifier. Interestingly, however, Toby never uses the gun to dominate men, but only to provide a level playing field. She certainly utilizes the gun for protection, as its very presence offers the threat of fatal retaliation—a phallic representation of masculine violence and power. However, when Toby has a chance to kill her long-time abuser, Blanco, she does not shoot him; instead she poisons him, which she views as "an act of mercy" (382).

With Amanda and Toby, Atwood has created powerful liminal figures who navigate—on the whole, successfully—within the middle range of the gender spectrum in an attempt to survive. They neither develop into monstrous machines like Crake, nor do they become passive

victims of the machine, like Oryx whom the machine eventually crushes. Amanda and Toby each represent an aspect of the “third thing,” which the machine attempts to destroy, in its attempt to retain its privileged masculine position within a binary system of gender; gender liminality disrupts the binary system, and, as a result, threatens the dominance of masculinity. Yet, interestingly, this liminality also provides these characters with attributes and characteristics that are essential to survival, particularly in Atwood’s post-apocalyptic world. As Atwood plays with gender in her novels, one cannot help but see the danger in viewing the world through two distinct gender extremes. While the world attempts to push characters into one extreme or the other, Amanda and Toby demonstrate that hope exists for those who navigate between the extreme feminine and masculine stereotypes.

CHAPTER 3: “IT’S HOW YOU’D SAY IT TO A CHILD”: THE PROBLEMATIC FEMININE, REN AND JIMMY

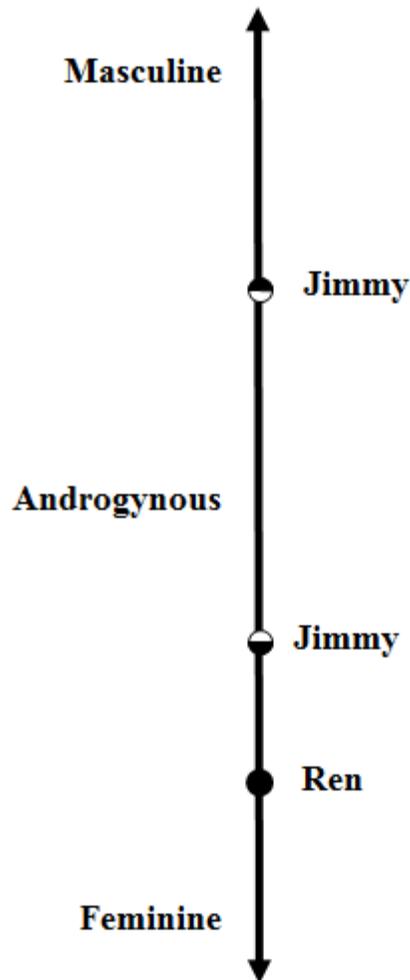


Figure 4: Jimmy and Ren

Crake’s waterless flood kills the vast majority of humanity. In fact, shortly after the viral outbreak, Jimmy believes he is witnessing “the end of a species...*Homo sapiens sapiens*, joining the polar bear, the beluga whale, the onager, the burrowing owl, the long, long list” (*Oryx and Crake* 344). Despite Jimmy’s initial perception, other (albeit, few) humans survive in addition to

Jimmy. Post-flood survivors tend to include those who were physically isolated during the epidemic, but who also possess the survival skills necessary to live in the post-apocalyptic world: “a clutch of one-time scientists, a handful of renegade Gardeners, two psychotics on the loose with a nearly dead woman” (*The Year of the Flood* 414). Yet two of Atwood’s principle characters—Jimmy and Ren—seem unlikely survivors, as they are passive, emotional, somewhat naïve, and a bit lazy, inclined to let others dictate their actions. Jimmy survives the flood because Crake has immunized him against the virus, planning that Jimmy should take Crake’s children—the Crakers—to a place of safety and watch over them. Jimmy’s survival skills, however, resemble those of a boy: He builds a treehouse to sleep in and scavenges for leftover snack food instead of hunting. Similarly, Ren survives the flood only because Mordis had locked her inside the “Sticky Zone”; if Amanda had not found her and unlocked the door, Ren would have died inside that room. Later, Toby rescues her, nursing her back to health and saving her life once again. Clearly, Ren must always be taken care of, and an exhausted Toby asks God about his choice of companions for her: “Couldn’t you have picked someone less fragile [than Ren]? Less innocent? A little tougher?” (414).

Rosemarie Putnam Tong writes, “Psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists tend to define the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ in terms of prevailing cultural stereotypes, which are influenced by racial, class, and ethnic factors. Thus, to be masculine in the middle-class, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant United States is, among other things, to be rational, ambitious, and independent, and to be feminine is, among other things, to be emotional, nurturant, and dependent” (36). In terms of culturally assigned gender attributes, Jimmy (the Snowman) and Ren tend towards the feminine end of the gender spectrum, but their “femininity” is not necessarily viewed in a positive fashion in the novels. Through the characters of Jimmy and

Ren, Atwood provides a cultural critique of the feminine as defined within Western society. Although neither Jimmy nor Ren are as passive and self-effacing as Oryx, their feminine, child-like character traits limit them—and indeed threaten their very existence.

Theoretical Background: Femininities

As Sara Crawley, Lara Foley, and Constance Shehan explain, although “our physiological bodies emerge from nature, gender—as a part of social organization—defines what is ‘appropriate’ in the uses of our bodies” (5). Judith Lorber adds that physical differences between male and female bodies do exist, but she asserts that these differences are “socially meaningless until social practices transform them into social facts” (576). Linda McDowell discusses these “social facts”—these characteristics that society has associated with femininity and masculinity:

...women and their associated characteristics of femininity are defined as irrational, emotional, dependent and private, closer to nature than to culture, in comparison with men and masculine attributes that are portrayed as rational, scientific, independent, public and cultured. Women, it is commonly argued, are at the mercy of their bodies and their emotions, whereas men represent the transcendence of these baser features, mind to women’s body. (11)

McDowell explicates more fully “the *social* characteristics of femininity . . . and masculinity”: the feminine is associated with “docility, passivity, nurturing or emotional behavior and so forth”; the masculine with “aggression, rationality, controlled emotions, etc.” (228).

In addition to the aforementioned attributes, the feminine has long been associated with the child-like. In Edmund Burke’s 1757 aesthetic treatise, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, he describes feminine beauty in terms of

frailty and weakness: beauty “almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection. Women are very sensible of this; for which reason, they learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit weakness, and even sickness” (144); in other words, historically, society has encouraged women to feign child-like attributes and behaviors. The *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society* notes the continued connection between the feminine and the childlike: “The Judeo-Christian virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness also fostered the belief that women are most virtuous when vulnerable, dependent, and weak. Apparently in need of protection and guidance, women are stereotyped as childlike, suggesting they are immature, incompetent, and in need of assistance” (II:379). And, finally, Martha C. Nussbaum urges that a stand be taken “against some very common ways of treating women—as childlike, as incompetent in matters of property and contract, as mere adjuncts of a family line, as reproducers and caregivers rather than as having their own lives to live” (16).

An ardent feminist, Atwood is obviously not anti-feminine, but, as she articulates in an interview about *The Handmaid's Tale*, she is interested in “what happens when certain casually held attitudes about women are taken to their logical conclusions.” In *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood presents Ren as a type of child-woman, whose survival is entirely dependent upon others, particularly on women (Toby and Amanda) who possess “masculine” traits. While the feminized Snowman possesses slightly more survival skills than Ren, these skills are more aligned with those of a boy than a man. Atwood encourages the rethinking of the feminine, particularly the stereotypical association of femininity with childlike weakness and innocence.

“It’s Only Little Ren”: The Child-Woman

Ren’s body prevails over her mind, as those around her define her by her physical body; however, her mind is more present to readers of the novels than Oryx’s, as Atwood allows Ren’s thoughts to be revealed throughout *The Year of the Flood*, something that she does not do with the character of Oryx. In addition, Ren certainly has a bit more agency than Oryx, who is literally told how to perform and what to do with her body, and although Ren clings to Amanda for guidance, she demonstrates that she can make some decisions of her own. After all, Ren does decide to join the dancers at Scales and Tales; in fact, Ren’s sexual performance at Scales and Tales is a job that Ren chooses (albeit, from a limited number of options).

Yet, while Ren makes more decisions than Oryx, she is also very different from Toby, who can fend for herself after the flood. In fact, until she rescues Ren, Toby is living alone, managing a garden, washing her laundry, bathing regularly, and using her gun to protect herself from post-flood dangers (like pigeons). Ren, on the other hand, has always depended on others. Ren remembers how she used to rely on her friend Bernice, as she would have felt insecure in the Garden without an ally (*The Year of the Flood* 70). Later, she ditches Bernice for the more independent Amanda, who immediately takes charge of Ren. Ren’s propensity to cling to a strong leader becomes clear when she quickly switches from relying on Bernice to following Amanda. After talking to Amanda for ten minutes and identifying her as a strong and interesting person, Ren compares Bernice to Amanda, thinking that Bernice’s neck needs to be more like Amanda’s, and she thinks, “She’d [Bernice had] come to collect me, except now I didn’t want her” (77). Ren upgrades to a new leader in a matter of minutes; Amanda becomes Ren’s new caregiver. Ren is so desperate to be led and protected that she constantly seeks out potential guardians. For example, when she works at the AnooYoo Spa with Toby, Ren senses that Toby

is guarding her, protecting her “with some space-alien type of force field” (298). Later, at Scales and Tales, she views Mordis as a protector. Instead of taking initiative, Ren waits for others to rescue her, like when she texts Amanda to come free her from the Sticky Zone, or when she runs to Toby after being held hostage and injured by the Painballers.

Ren’s experiences at Scales and Tales hold eerie similarities to Oryx’s experiences “working” for Uncle En. Much like Oryx defends Uncle En and feels like he is family, Ren praises Mordis. Oryx interprets Uncle En’s compliments (which only occur when she makes him money) as love, or at least “as close to love as Oryx could get” (*Oryx and Crake* 133). Furthermore, when Jimmy points out that Uncle En only cared about money, Oryx simply agrees and asserts, “Everyone likes that [money]. But he could have done much worse things to me, and he didn’t do them” (136). Oryx defends Uncle En as if he were a loving father figure. Similarly, Ren praises her boss, Mordis, at Scales and Tales. She describes the employees as “one big family” and says that Mordis gives her a sense of security (*The Year of the Flood* 8). When Mordis dies, she views him as a martyr. Since he did not reveal the code to the Sticky Zone door to the Painballers, Ren attributes her survival to what she views as Mordis’ act of bravery. But was it bravery that prompted Mordis to protect Ren? Does Mordis guard the Sticky Zone door code because he cares for her, because he knows how much money she is worth for his business, or because he knows that he will be killed anyway? When contemplating her fate in the Sticky Zone, Ren thinks, “I wasn’t only a disposable, I was a talent.” This thought indicates that she knows that Mordis valued her as a commodity. Regardless of his reason for protecting Ren, his actions hardly resemble those of a martyr: he runs a brothel-like business and disposes of the girls who do not make him money, as if they were garbage to toss aside. Ren does not fully comprehend this. She does a Meditation, giving him an imagined funeral of honor: “Put

Light around Mordis...Let him go into the Universe. May his Spirit go in peace. [She] pictured him flying up out of his demolished body in the form of a small, brown beady-eyed bird” (282).

Of course, the inaccuracy of Ren’s words seem to leap off the page and shock the reader. As Ren describes her workplace as positive, the reader cannot help but be struck by the irony of her words: “Scales was part of SeksMart now, which was a legitimate Corp with health benefits and a dental plan, so it wasn’t like being a prostitute” (294). While Ren paints her job as a safe haven and her boss as a father figure, Atwood does not conceal the brutality of her situation to the reader, by making Ren a naïve narrator. In other words, although Ren labels Scales and Tales as positive, her descriptions reveal the opposite: Mordis treats foreign girls as disposable and worthless, and he demonstrates repeatedly that he cares more about making and saving money than the well-being of the girls. For instance, Ren explains how Mordis treats the “temporaries”:

[He] smuggled Eurotrash or Tex-Mexicans or Asian Fusion and Redfish minors scooped off the streets because the Painball guys wanted membrane, and after they were finished you’d be judged contaminated until proved otherwise, and Scales didn’t want to spend Sticky Zone [the recovery area] money either testing these girls or fixing them up. I never saw them twice. They walked in the door, but I don’t think they walked out. (130)

Furthermore, one of Ren’s earliest encounters with Scales and Tales—even before she works there—involves watching a “scaly girl running down the street in daytime, with a black-suited man chasing her” (75). Later, she encounters a dead girl in a vacant lot: “She didn’t have any hair or clothes: she only had a few green scales left clinging to her” (75). Ren knows that some girls die on the job, but she explains that she is safe because she is a skilled artist, and “any

damage to [her] would be pricey” (130). Thus, like Oryx, she seems to realize that her worth is based on her ability to make money, but she accepts it as a form of love and safety.

Ren is the only character within *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* who tells her story from a first-person point of view. Thus, Ren is given a voice. Since Oryx’s story is told in a third-person point of view and mostly limited to being told from Jimmy’s unreliable perspective, the reader gets a vague, precarious sense of who Oryx actually is. Ren’s story is delivered directly to the reader, yet we still sense the ironic disconnect between the world she describes and her interpretation of it. Perhaps this is why Ren is given a voice. Her naivety toward her situation is so transparent in her firsthand descriptions of her circumstances that the reader can infer the brutal truth of her situation, as well as realize Ren’s continued childlike innocence as she responds to and defends the world of Scales and Tails. Much like Jimmy’s words unknowingly praise harmful products in his advertisements, Ren’s words unsuspectingly praise a violent and corrupt workplace. Henri Lefebvre asserts that “spaces conceal their contents” and “sometimes lie” by hiding the relations of production on which they are founded (92), and Atwood brings this theory to light as she allows Ren to believe such lies but reveals the murderous violence to the reader, a violence that results from a capitalistic calculus of profit-and-loss in which women are the commodity.

As Lefebvre suggests, spaces sometimes lie, and perhaps the spaces that Ren inhabits cause her to believe that she has chosen where to move and dwell, yet few of the choices have been her own, as she is forced into specific spaces by lack of options. Ren’s life with the Gardeners begins when “Lucerne and Zeb first took [her] away from the Exfernal World to live among the Gardeners” (58). Her later removal from the Gardeners occurs when her mother, Lucerne, decides to leave after a fight with Zeb. Although Ren begs to stay, Lucerne insists

upon her removal, which Amanda knows will be permanent: “Once you’re in there [the Compounds] she’ll never let you out. Those Compounds are like castles, they’re like jails” (*The Year of the Flood* 206). Ren only leaves the Compounds to attend Martha Graham Academy, a move engineered by Lucerne: “My marks were poor, and I didn’t think I’d get in anywhere for college . . . But Lucerne pulled some strings” (229). Ren leaves Martha Graham because, once again, she has no choice: Her “biofather” (292) has been murdered and Lucerne has remarried a man for whom “money was tight” (293), and “he had three young children of his own to support” (294). As Lucerne puts it, “she could hardly ask Todd to pay for me in addition to everything else he was paying for. So I would have to stop coasting along at college, and leave Martha Graham, and take responsibility for myself” (294). Ren ends up next at the AnooYoo Spa, because no other employer—other than Scales and Tails—wants her: “I saw hiring teams from Happicuppa, and ChickieNobs, and Zizzy Froots, and Scales and Tails, and finally Anoo Yooo. The first three didn’t want me, but I did get an offer from Scales and Tales” (295). Toby rescues Ren from the sex trade, however, by hiring her as an “apprentice” (295) for AnooYooo, where Ren works for a year.

Later, after an encounter with Amanda, where Ren learns Amanda has dated Jimmy, and a run-in with Lucerne, where Lucerne acts as if Ren had “never been born” (301), Ren turns to Scales and Tales, not because it is a delightful sanctuary, but because she feels that “[e]verything [is] ruined and destroyed, and there [is] no safe place for [her]; and if [she] had to be in an unsafe place it might as well be an unsafe place where [she] [is] appreciated” (302). Scales and Tails certainly provides a better option than her other remaining alternatives (being left to roam the streets and becoming vulnerable to violent rape, starving in the pleeblands, etc.). Within Scales and Tails, Ren’s movement becomes increasingly confined, once she is placed within the Sticky

Zone—an isolated, airtight room with a “double virus barrier” of protection; this space of initial safety soon feels like a cage when Ren realizes that she is locked in a room with no one left alive to unlock the door and let her out. She panics when she realizes that the only man who knows the security code to the door lies dead outside the door. Ren texts “CUM 2 SCLS” (284) to Amanda, and Amanda does release Ren from her prison, only to have Ren’s movement once again confined by Blanco and the Painballers. While it may initially seem—to Ren and Atwood’s readers—that Ren possesses more freedom of movement than Oryx, it becomes clear that this is not the case, as the spaces Ren inhabits and the movements she engages in are always determined by others.

The nickname “Ren” (short for Brenda) suits her well, as her character intermittently shifts between the representation of a free bird and a caged bird. She feels like a caged bird in the Sticky Zone, a free one as she dances around Scales and Tales in a bird costume with Amanda, and a trapped bird again when she is being led around with a rope tied around her neck: a bird-woman. “No wings. A noose around her neck” (351). Clearly, Ren depends on others to lead her movements and make decisions for her, and she ironically is literally led by the Painballers. Ren would be one of the passive feminine figures who gets run over by the masculine machine, if it weren’t for Amanda and Toby who repeatedly rescue her.

Toby sums up Ren’s ineptitude and inability to take care of herself, as she talks to God in preparation of meeting the Painballers:

Then there’s Ren. Couldn’t you have picked someone less fragile? Less innocent? A little tougher? If she were an animal, what would she be? Mouse? Thrush? Deer in the headlights? She’ll fall apart at the crucial moment: I should have left her back there on the beach. But that would prolong the inevitable, because if I go down, so will she. Even

if she runs, it's too far back to the cobb house: she'll never make it, and even if she outruns them she'll get lost. And whose going to protect her from the dogs and pigs, in the wild woods? Not the blue folks back there. Not if the Painballers have a spraygun that works. Much worse for her if she doesn't die immediately. (414)

Without Toby or Amanda or someone else to take care of her, Ren is utterly helpless. As Ren herself notes, "if you're drowning, a soft squashy thing is no good to hold on to. You need something more solid" (8). Ren, of course, might as well be commenting on herself: "a soft squashy thing."

Although Atwood provides Ren with her own voice—a privileged distinction, as Atwood does not do so with any other character—it ultimately reveals a paradox in American culture: Although Ren (and presumably all women in Western cultures) is provided with a voice and some measure of agency, she has so imbibed cultural ideas regarding femininity, that she is unable to use this voice or employ this agency. While the circumstances of Oryx's life—a childhood as sex slave—make readers sympathetic to her views on the world (even if they don't agree with them), the circumstances of Ren's life don't call for similar sympathy, as her early life and young adulthood were similar to or better than those of Amanda and Toby. One of the God's Gardeners says, "Ren is too easily led" (79), but the question is whether this is an innate part of Ren's personality or Ren's porous consumption of stereotypical notions of femininity.

Curiously, the great love of Ren's life is Jimmy, who not only dismisses Ren as inconsequential, but who is also someone who needs to be led. While Ren identifies only one similarity between herself and Jimmy—"I could tell he was sad underneath, because I was that way myself. We were sort of like twins that way" (218)—there are numerous more.

“He’d been a good boy then”: the Boy-Man

Jimmy challenges the dual gender system, as Atwood portrays him as neither fully masculine nor totally feminine. While he is often portrayed as a non-female feminine character, he does not face bodily confinement and oppression in the same ways that the female characters do. As a male, he still has privileges that no women in the novel have, and he takes full advantage of his ability to “gender shift.” He can put different genders on and off without facing the penalties that Amanda and Toby face. As de Lauretis explains:

If gender representations are social positions which carry differential meanings, then for someone to be represented and to represent oneself as male or as female implies the assumption of the whole of those meaning effects. Thus the proposition that the representation of gender is its construction, each term being at once the product and process of the other, can be restated more accurately: *The construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation.*

(5)

The character Jimmy, in true Atwood fashion, complicates the gender spectrum, as he would be better represented in more than one area. On one hand, Jimmy represents a non-female feminine figure. As mentioned in chapter two, Todd Reeser describes how, when gender is taken as a “disembodied phenomenon, existing on its own outside the confines of a given type of body,” traits can be considered on their own, without being attached to the sex of the body possessing them (131). When Jimmy’s traits are considered apart from his biological male body, he holds more in common with Oryx and the feminine realm than with Crake and the masculine extreme. As Linda McDowell notes:

...women and their associated characteristics of femininity are defined as irrational, emotional, dependent and private, closer to nature than to culture, in comparison with men and masculine attributes that are portrayed as rational, scientific, independent, public and cultured. Women, it is commonly argued, are at the mercy of their bodies and their emotions, whereas men represent the transcendence of these baser features, mind to women's body. (11)

Jimmy the Snowman may be viewed as "irrational, emotional, dependent," at the mercy of his body and his emotions.

Instead of being driven by the mind, Jimmy lives principally through his body. Although his body is not sexually commodified or victimized like the bodies of Ren and Oryx, Jimmy is very physical, particularly in terms of sexual activity; in fact, he is one of the most sexually active characters in the two novels, along with Oryx and Ren, and as with Oryx and Ren, sex seems to lack intimacy for him. Initially, Jimmy finds value in sex because it is an area in which he feels he can dominate Crake, though, ironically, Crake's attitude toward sex is "one of detached but not very strong interest, as if he were conducting a survey of people's less attractive personal habits, such as nose-picking" (167). Nonetheless, Jimmy likes to brag about his various sexual partners to Crake: "He couldn't help boasting a little, because this seemed to be—from any indications he'd had so far—the one field of endeavour in which he had the edge over Crake" (*Oryx and Crake* 193). He also feels proud when his sexual partners compare him to Crake: "The girls Jimmy accumulated had found Crake more than a little creepy, and it had made Jimmy feel superior to come to his defense" (173).

Jimmy's (Snowman's) focus on his body post-flood reveals his continued identification with his body. In fact, the reader's first flashback into Jimmy's earlier life is interrupted and

brought back to present time as Snowman observes his degenerating body: “the grimy, bug-bitten skin, the salt-and-pepper tufts of hair, the thickening yellow toenails...He used to take good care of himself; he used to run, work out at the gym. Now he can see his own ribs: he’s wasting away” (11). Jimmy’s observation of his grimy body and his recollection of the pride he used to take in it reveals that he holds a strong attachment to his body. Later, when he returns to the Compounds in search of food, he takes the time “to take stock of himself in the oval mirror”: “He can’t resist the mirrors in the places he breaks into, he sneaks a peek at himself every chance he has. Increasingly it’s a shock. A stranger stares back at him, bleary-eyed, hollow-cheeked, pocked with bug-bite scabs. He looks twenty years older than he is. He winks, grins at himself, sticks out his tongue: the effect is truly sinister” (231).

In terms of his sexuality and sexual appetite, Jimmy is portrayed more like Amanda than Ren or Oryx—a sexual predator rather than sexual prey. Yet, in terms of his bodily attachment, he shares some similarities with Oryx and Ren. Certainly, as an adolescent, Jimmy associates himself with those who value the physical body over intellect or spirituality:

When did the body first set out on its own adventures? Snowman thinks; after having ditched its old travelling companions, the mind and soul, for whom it had once been considered a mere corrupt vessel or else a puppet acting out their dramas for them, or else bad company, leading the other two astray...It had dumped the other two back there somewhere, leaving them stranded in some damp sanctuary or stuffy lecture hall while it made a beeline for the topless bars and it had dumped culture along with them....(85)

Although the commentary is framed as an observation of *society*, Jimmy clearly identifies with this disjunction of body and mind, as the passage concludes by linking his general commentary

on society to his own personal experiences—the “stuffy lecture hall[s]” and “the topless bars” he frequents. Things like “music and painting and poetry and plays” (85), which Jimmy presumably prizes, take backstage to the body: “Sublimation, all of it; nothing but sublimation, according to the body. Why not cut to the chase?” (85)—that is, why not go directly to the “literary texts” of executions and pornography: “But the body had its own cultural forms. It had its own art. Executions were its tragedies, pornography was its romance” (85). Executions emphasize the transition between living body and dead body; pornography focuses on the sexed body of a young woman or man or the sexualization of the unsexed body of a child. Both online executions and pornography treat the body as valueless in any respect other than as commodity, used for entertainment purposes. Pre-flood Jimmy—and post-flood Snowman—is, in his own way, as trapped by his body as Ren and Oryx.

Of course, I must emphasize my use of the phrase “in his own way,” as Jimmy’s limitation is different. As a man—even if he is viewed as a feminine man—still holds a more privileged position than women in society, and he employs gender as a strategy. He manipulates girls by emphasizing his emotional side when convenient—by putting on and taking off his feminine and masculine traits:

He’d [Jimmy had] discovered that he projected a form of melancholy attractive to a certain kind of woman, the semi-artistic, wise-wound kind in large supply at Martha Graham . . . They had a few scars of their own, they were working on healing. At first Jimmy would rush to their aid: he was tender-hearted, he’d been told, and nothing if not chivalrous. He’d draw out of them their stories of hurt, he’d apply himself to them like a poultice. But soon the process would reverse, and Jimmy would switch from bandager to bandagee. These women would begin

to see how fractured he was, they'd want to help him gain perspective on life and access the positive access of his own spirituality... the end product, a happy

Jimmy. (*Oryx and Crake* 190)

The above passage clearly demonstrates that Jimmy uses his feminine traits (especially his emotional and artistic attributes) in a very masculine way: to gain power and, in this case, to exploit women for sex.

Thus, he exists in both the masculine and feminine "realms." Unlike Toby, he is not androgynous; he utilizes both masculine and feminine traits, which is why I have placed him in two positions on the gender spectrum. Perhaps this dual existence brings him power in some circumstances, but in others he feels the tension of not fully mastering a masculine persona. While he certainly has the power to manipulate women, he notes that he also feels somehow diminished by the sexual aspect of his existence, as he does when he contemplates his "voice clock":

It was pink, phallus-shaped: a Cock Clock, given to him as a joke by one of his lovers. He'd thought it was funny at the time, but this morning he found it insulting. That's all he was to her, to all of them: a mechanical joke. Nobody wanted to be sexless, but nobody wanted to be nothing but sex, Crake once said.

Oh yes siree, thought Jimmy. (284)

Like Oryx and Ren, Jimmy seems defined principally by his sexed body. Even post-flood, Snowman lingers on the idea that all that anyone—any thing—wants from him is his body: He yells at a hungry wolvog, "All you want is my body!" (109).

Although Jimmy views his sexual prowess as a source of superiority over Crake, Crake views Jimmy's sexual appetite as a source of weakness, of which he takes advantage. Jimmy

requires sex to mend the holes in his soul, and he is particularly attracted to women who need mending themselves, mirroring his strange relationship with his mother: “He loved her so much when he made her unhappy, or else when she made him unhappy: at these moments he scarcely knew which was which” (33). Jimmy notes that “[t]here was always an element of melancholy involved in sex. After his indiscriminate adolescence he’d preferred sad women, delicate and breakable, women’s who’d been messed up and who needed him. He’d like to comfort them, stroke them gently at first, reassure them. Make them happier, if only for a moment. Himself too, of course; that was the payoff. A grateful woman would go the extra mile” (100). He uses the story of his “scandalous mother” and his Rakunk to gain sympathy: “Soon the women would be consoling him, and he’d roll around in their sympathy, soak in it, massage himself with it. It was a whole spa experience in itself” (191). Jimmy’s obsession with the child whom he believes to be Oryx appears to have its roots in her vulnerability and his own self-contempt. She sees the real him, so he believes: “she looked over her shoulder . . . right into Jimmy’s eyes, into the secret person inside him,” and “Jimmy felt burned by this look—eaten into, as if by acid. She’d been so contemptuous of him” (91). When he later recalls that moment, “He remembered himself watching. How could he have done that to her? And yet it hadn’t hurt her, had it?” (92). Crake is able to exploit Jimmy’s emotional need for sex by supplying him with girls (one of whom is Ren) at Snails and Tails—and by dangling Oryx in front of him. Notably, the first time Jimmy sees the adult Oryx (or the woman known as Oryx), she is holding a small rakunk. Crake also uses Jimmy as a benchmark by which to judge the efficacy of the BlyssPluss pill—that is, whether people will opt for “high-grade sex” (295) without knowledge of the consequences. Crake asks Jimmy, “If you were ninety and you had a chance for one last fuck but you knew it

would kill you, would you still do it?” Jimmy responds, “You bet,” to which Crake simply says “Addict” (272).

If being constructed as the “object” of sex reduces one to a “feminine” state, with the inability to control how she/he is (literally and figuratively) positioned within the sexual act, then masculinity is constructed as being in control of sex, as being the “subject” who controls the sexual experience, either through physical, mental, emotional, or visual domination. In this way, although Jimmy may be termed as a sexual predator, his lack of power may be viewed in his lack of control over his relationships to both Crake and Oryx. Jimmy feels like he is tipping the scales of power in his favor each time he has sex with another girl, as he knows that this is one area in which he can “outperform” Crake. In reality, his competition with Crake is childish and immature, and his sexual relationship with Oryx, specifically, emphasizes the reality of his situation: his powerlessness. Jimmy has made Oryx into an unattainable love object—one that can never be fully understood or accessed in totality—and, while Oryx is indeed objectified throughout *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy also puts himself in a position of objectification. Jimmy becomes a servant to his constructed, unattainable vision of Oryx. After all, according to Slavoj Žižek, “It is the servant, therefore, who writes the screenplay—that is, who actually pulls the strings and dictates the activity of the woman [*dominatrix*]: he stages his own servitude.” In this way, Jimmy becomes a “man-servant” (1183-84). Not the least, his love affair with Oryx (or the idea of Oryx) is one that has always, from its inception, been controlled by Crake, “who’d decide what to watch and when to stop watching” (86); who sets up Oryx as the portal through which MaddAddam—and Jimmy—must enter; and who (re)introduces the living, breathing embodiment of Oryx into Jimmy’s life. The Oryx of Jimmy’s childhood sexual fantasies is not only a real little Asian girl, but an imaginative construct of Jimmy’s imagination; however, the

real human being who is Oryx (or who seems to be Oryx) is manufactured by Crake entirely to entrap, ensnare, and enslave Jimmy. Thus, Jimmy is a sexual predator, but one who is also controlled by his powerlessness in dominating Crake and possessing Oryx.

Like Ren, Jimmy's limited physical movement also exemplifies his feminine lack of agency. His early life is spent entirely within the Compounds. He attends Martha Graham Academy due to "some arm-twisting—Jimmy suspected—on the part of his dad" (174). After graduation, Jimmy gets a job with "Anoo Yoo, a minor Compound situated so close to one of the more dilapidated pleeblands that it might as well have been in it" (245); it is a job that few others want. The greatest period of freedom occurs when Jimmy receives the privilege of roaming in and out of the Compounds, into the pleeblands, because of his new position with Crake. Thus his mobility becomes dependent on Crake. Post-flood, once Crake is dead, Jimmy remains confined to his tree house and the beach. Although he says to himself that "he isn't locked up, he's not in prison," he feels trapped, "as if he were some caged, wired-up lab animal" (45). When he travels after the flood, it is rare and his mission is mainly to gather food and supplies. Even his post-apocalyptic name, Snowman, suggests immobility.

Furthermore, like Ren who repeatedly epitomizes a caged bird, Snowman also resembles one. When the Crakers ask him about the hair on his chest, Snowman tells them, "These are feathers. Little feathers. Oryx gave them to me, as a special favour. See? More feathers are growing out of my face" (349). The Crakers believe him and expand on this information: "*Snowman was once a bird but he's forgotten how to fly and the rest of his feathers fell out, and so he is cold and he needs a second skin, and he has to wrap himself up*" (8). Thus he becomes associated with a bird (a bird who has forgotten how to fly). Like Ren, he spends much of his time trapped, confined to one location. For much of the story, Jimmy remains on the beach.

During his first major excursion to gather food and supplies, he finds himself trapped in a watchtower with pigeons circling his exit. Ren and Jimmy, the child-people, find themselves rendered immobile like caged birds on several occasions. Whereas Ren relies on Amanda and Toby to free her, Jimmy is able to escape the watchtower through his own cunning efforts. Essentially, he leaves one cage for another as he heads back to the beach and his tree house. While he certainly engages in limited movement, Jimmy possesses more mobility than Ren: he has a spraygun and knows how to use it, and he is not in danger of rape.

Even when Jimmy returns to the beach to interact with the Crakers, he submits to Crake's wishes. Thus, Crake controls Jimmy and, by extension, the Crakers after his death. Jimmy really is a masochist as he seems to orchestrate his lack of agency—he dotes on the at-least-partially-invented, unattainable Oryx and obeys Crake's postmortem wishes. Jimmy teaches the Crakers that Crake is God and he adheres to most of Crake's instructions. In fact, Jimmy's major act of "rule breaking" is hardly rebellious: while Crake told Jimmy that no name could exist in which a physical equivalent could be demonstrated (not even a stuffed replica), Jimmy felt pleasure pushing these limits and adopts the name "Abominable Snowman—existing and not existing" (7). Yet he keeps the "Abominable" to himself.

Like Ren, Jimmy is given a voice, as the events in *Oryx and Crake* are told from his third-person perspective. He dictates (and likely invents) much of Oryx's story, thus controlling the reader's perception of her, and in this way, his use of language places him in a dominant, masculine role. As previously discussed, he also knows how to manipulate women's emotions by telling them stories of his flawed childhood. However, Jimmy's command over language is shown to be terribly flawed, as Jimmy's language is never valued within the pre-flood world and his command over language utterly fails in the post-flood world, where he "grunts and squeals

like a pigoon, or howls like a wolvog: *Aroo! Aroo!*” (10). Most significantly, although Atwood allows Jimmy’s thoughts to be the medium through which we as readers access and attempt to understand Oryx, the fact that Oryx remains utterly elusive reflects the flawed command that Jimmy holds over language.

Jimmy’s language skills are viewed with disdain in the pre-flood world. Although, in school at HelthWyzer High, Jimmy is “high on his word scores” (174), his command of language fails to impress Crake, who calls it “doodling, scribbling” (167). At Martha Graham, literature and writing have been replaced by “Problematics. Problematics was for word people, so that was what Jimmy took. Spin and Grin was its nickname among the students. Like everything at Martha Graham it had utilitarian aims. Our Students Graduate With Employable Skills, ran the motto” (188). Command of language is valuable only when it can be used to sell products. As a wordsmith, Jimmy finds that the “system had filed him among the rejects, and what he was studying was considered—at the decision-making levels, the levels of real power—an archaic waste of time” (195). In a (pre-flood) world that devalues traditional literary skills—the crafting of poems, plays, and even essays—literary skills become marginalized, feminized. After all, wordsmiths like Jimmy can’t “name” things, like Crake does; their only value is in repackaging words as marketing aids. Jimmy is reduced to penning trite advertising tripe: “He fiddled around at his job: not much of a challenge there. The BlyssPlus Pill would sell itself, it didn’t need any help from him. But the official launch was looming closer, so he had his staff turn out some visuals, a few catchy slogans: Throw Away Your Condoms! BlyssPlus, for the Total Body Experience! Don’t Live a Little, Live a Lot!” (312).

After the flood, the ability to use language effectively fails Jimmy (now Snowman) in almost every aspect. As argued in chapter one, Jimmy has trouble creating meaningful language

in the new Craker world: “From nowhere, a word appears: *Mesazoic*. He can’t attach anything to it. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlists drifting off into space” (39). Language, the only area (besides sex) that Jimmy can master, now escapes him. Although the Crakers are human beings, Jimmy notes that his “irony is lost on the trees” (162), precisely because Crake wished to eliminate irony from the world. Writing is no use, because “even a castaway assumes a future reader Snowman can make no such assumptions: he’ll have no future reader, because the Crakers can’t read” (41). Whereas Jimmy once viewed language as a potential tool for manipulation and control, his rhetoric does not have the same affect on his Craker companions. Now all he can do is imagine words drifting away into space as they lose their meaning. Therefore, his voice slowly gets taken away from him until we meet him again at the end of *The Year of the Flood*, when his words no longer make sense and he admits to Ren, “I’m such a mess” (420). At times he even resorts to animal noises: “Sometimes he laughs like a hyena or roars like a lion”; other times he swears at the ocean: “*Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!*” (*Oryx and Crake* 10); still other times, he spends “howling at the stars—*Aroo! Aroo!*” (108).

Most significantly, Jimmy’s lack of command over language can be seen in terms of Oryx’s story, which Jimmy essentially constructs. Oryx’s identity is elusive precisely because the reader has no idea if the person in Jimmy’s and Crake’s picture is the same as the girl guarding the Paradise Dome: “Was there only one Oryx, or was she a legion?” (*Oryx and Crake* 308). Jimmy’s unreliable narration leads us to realize that he has constructed even our perceptions as readers, leaving us with an unattainable Oryx as well.

After the flood, Jimmy tries to create her again in his mind, but he fails:

Sometimes he can conjure her up. At first she's pale and shadowy, but if he can say her name over and over, then maybe she'll glide into his body and be present with him in his flesh, and his hand on himself will become her hand. But she's always been evasive, you can never pin her down. Tonight she fails to materialize and he is left alone, whimpering ridiculously, jerking off all by himself in the dark. (*Oryx and Crake* 110)

Jimmy thus fulfills the role of feminine object as he essentially creates a situation to which he is slave. Žižek describes this "game" as a theatrical masochism in which the "man-servant" creates the screenplay in which the "woman-master" is rendered inaccessible through artificial obstacles. Jimmy will not let himself believe that Oryx will ever love him back, and he blames Crake. He believes that "Crake was her hero, in a way. An important way. As he, Jimmy, was not" (322). Jimmy kept waiting for her to reveal something that she could never reveal—to provide him with something she would never provide. He felt that at any moment she would "reveal to him the essential thing, the hidden thing at the core of life, or of her life, or of his life—the thing he was longing to know. The thing he'd always wanted. What would it be?" (314). Obviously, Jimmy has expectations for her that can never be met. As the screen writer of his love story with Oryx, Jimmy not only objectifies her by writing her story, but he also puts himself into a vulnerable position as he makes himself into a slave of her unreturned affections and unobtainable expectations.

In Jimmy's relationship with Crake, he is always placed in the position of the feminine. In the ultimate act of masculine dominance, Crake forces Jimmy to take on Oryx's role as "mother" to the Crakers. Although Jimmy adopts this role, he is not necessarily very nurturing. In fact, while he does look after the Crakers, he has little patience with them, often telling them

to “piss off” or “go away” (9; 98). Perhaps this is because Jimmy (even as the Snowman) acts the part of the child, longing for some sort of emotional reunion with his missing mother (initially a metaphorical absence and then later a physical one), “his real, strange, insufficient, miserable mother” (67). Even as a child, he played games and “pretended he didn’t understand when he did...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” (21). When his mother leaves, Jimmy wears her bathrobe, associating him with his mother—a woman who was not often a nurturing mother figure for her son. Even as a grown man, post-flood, on his return trip to the Compounds, the “back of his neck prickles again. Why does he have the feeling that it’s his own house he’s broken into? His own house from twenty-five years ago, himself the missing child” (233). Post-flood, he dreams: “again, it’s his mother. No, he never dreams about his mother, only her absence” (277). He sometimes reverts to a “sniveling child’s voice” (45), when he sulkily broods on his existence. Although Snowman insists “I am not my childhood” (68), his childhood has defined him in significant ways: He is “irrational, emotional, dependent” (McDowell 11), a boy stuck in a man’s body.

Problematic Feminine Figures

Atwood’s “feminine” characters—whether male or female—do what they are told, rely on other people for guidance, exercise stifled voices, and move very little without prompting from someone else. Why is the feminine portrayed negatively in Atwood’s novels?—or is it? Nurturing, strong women (such as Toby) and femininity are seen as mutually exclusive; society overlooks and undervalues this important type of woman, and puts boundaries on what the term “feminine” encompasses. Indeed, Toby displays many positive feminine traits: she is nurturing, motherly, holds onto traditions and rituals, and interacts with nature. Toby seems to embody the

feminine traits that society does not value in Atwood's novels—traits that Atwood does respect. Yet Toby is not a mother, and the two mothers within the text—Jimmy's mother and Ren's mother—show the detrimental ways in which femininity is most often constructed within Western cultures. Jimmy's mother feels "like a prisoner" (*Oryx and Crake* 53), trapped within the rigid life and lies of the Compound; Ren's mother, Lucerne, is a "hot-house flower" (*The Year of the Flood* 78), interested only in her own beauty and her attractions for men. The former is asked to stifle herself intellectually, resigning from her job as microbiologist at OrganInc Farms (*Oryx and Crake* 29) because of her ethical outrage over the animal and human experiments. The latter spends her days—even at God's Garden—sitting "at the table brushing her hair, staring at herself in our one small mirror" (*The Year of the Flood* 65). In one instance, the woman's intellect is denigrated; in the other, the woman's body and beauty is privileged. Both result in terrible mothers—and in children who never really grow up, like Ren and Jimmy.

It appears that Ren and Jimmy long for nurture in their lives to fill the lack of motherly attention they received growing up. Ren seeks out Amanda and Toby to make decisions, while Jimmy tries to forget about his loneliness through sex (for instance, after his mother leaves, he cries while Ren holds him and they "slid[e] tenderly into [her] bed..." [223]). They gain a false sense of power and agency through a reliance on others: Ren feels safe and powerful when she is near Amanda or Toby, and Jimmy feels most happy when he is intimate with Oryx. (Jimmy also feels more powerful because when Oryx is with Jimmy, it means that she is not with Crake). Toby does not often rely on others for her strength. Perhaps she gains strength through her memory of Pilar, who showed Toby love and nurture before dying and passing on her role in the Garden to Toby. Certainly, Toby would make the best mother out of the characters who are analyzed in this thesis, yet she is sterile. Instead Jimmy is associated with motherhood (the

mother of the Crakers, to be specific), but he is too childish to mother the Crakers. He lies to them and loses his patience with them on various occasions. He represents a combination of problematic feminine and negative masculine traits. Where are the strong, supportive mothers? Where are the strong, capable feminine figures?

As Atwood holds an interest in seeing “what happens when certain casually held attitudes about women are taken to their logical conclusions,” the MaddAddam novels show readers what happens when only stereotypes of femininity exist: a chaotic world in which women are identified by their bodies—one adhering to a gender dichotomy in which the masculine overpowers the feminine—leaves no place for the positive aspects of femininity to exist.

CONCLUSION: DISTURBING SPECULATIONS—DON'T GET “MACHINE PARTS...BEHIND [YOUR] EYES”

So what does Atwood leave her readers with? Fear? Confusion? Uneasiness? Teresa de Lauretis explains “space-off,” a term used to describe the space not visible in a film’s frame, but “inferable from what the frame makes visible” (26). In her own way, Atwood brings such a technique to her text. With the absence of a resolution comes a desire for one. Perhaps Atwood leaves us in the mess of her post-apocalyptic society—one where past ideology regarding gender normativity and masculine power has begun to seep into the present, as evidenced by the Crakers’ interactions with Snowman and each other—to draw attention to the problems. As she does in many of her novels, she leaves us in a state of irresolution to speculate.

Margaret Atwood explains that she found “[her]self scaring [her]self silly” (Lee) as she explored the potential results of certain casually held attitudes (“An Interview With Margaret Atwood”). Because her novels speculate about the future, Atwood describes her novels not as science fiction, but as “speculative fiction.” So what does Atwood teach us about gender as she projects a potentially problematic future for society? What can her readers learn from her speculations? Perhaps the question of importance is this: What is missing from Atwood’s world? When viewing where Oryx, Ren, Jimmy, Toby, Amanda, and Crake fall along the gender spectrum, we see that there are holes in the spectrum. Where are the strong, independent, nurturing women on the feminine side? In other words, why is Toby portrayed as androgynous and Amanda as masculine? There is a gap on the masculine side as well. It seems that there is no space for artistic, sensitive men in the masculine realm; otherwise, Jimmy would be positioned differently. Atwood’s books suggest that the extremes (represented by Oryx and

Crake) are problematic; thus viewing gender through a binary system—which consists of only the two extremes—is also a problem.

Henri Lefebvre explains that spaces often lie to us, as they may deceptively appear to “have nothing particularly mendacious about them” (92). He describes a house. Society often views houses as stable, immovable, and impenetrable. Upon closer examination, however, the house contains “a nexus of in and out conduits” (93) as energy runs in and out of the house from multiple routes (e.g. electricity, water, telephone lines, television signals, etc.). Atwood’s novels see past the binary to bring a hidden gender spectrum to light. When one critically examines the manner in which society views gender, one will find that the gender binary does not encompass our diverse societal population; nor would we want it to. In between these two binaries is a “third thing,” a spectrum of traits. As Atwood presents a spectrum from masculine to feminine, she also demonstrates that it can be harmful to label people as “masculine” and “feminine.” After all, the two most successful characters—the characters who demonstrate the most survival skills—are Amanda and Toby. Amanda and Toby fall more toward the center of the spectrum and escape cultural expectations for their sex. Amanda, as a non-male masculinity figure, breaks the mold for a woman, conveying traits that would not be considered “feminine” by her society’s standards. Toby, as an androgynous figure, also abandons societal “requirements” for being feminine in Western culture, as she represents a powerful, gun-wielding rescuer.

The question that emerges from all of this is: Why can’t Amanda and Toby be considered feminine? Similarly, why can’t Jimmy be considered masculine? By evading the expectations for their sexes, Jimmy, Amanda, and Toby are portrayed as different and perhaps even unruly for stepping out of the boundaries of their society’s expectations (namely, men must be masculine and women must be feminine). Atwood suggests this is not the case, and in doing

so, she infers that these expectations can be costly. Toby constantly struggles with not meeting “feminine standards”: as a sterile (*The Year of the Flood* 33), un-sexualized, “doggie-type” of woman (244), Toby is very aware of cultural expectations for gender; at one point, she makes a point of indicating to Shackleton that he is in charge: “‘We’re depending on you.’ It was good to let boys that age believe they were doing the jobs of men . . .” (174). She also senses that she does not meet the qualifications to be feminine, and she resents it: “Nobody likes it, thought Toby—being a body, a thing. Nobody wants to be limited in that way. We’d rather have wings” (264). Both women are physically assaulted on numerous occasions due to the strength and independence they exhibit, as men attempt to “put them in their place.” Toby wishes she could detach herself from her body and fly away, evading the pressure of the gender stereotypes associated with her physical appearance.

Jimmy also senses that he cannot meet the “masculine” marker, and he constantly compares himself to Crake, desperately wanting to “out-masculinize” him. This proves to be harmful, as Jimmy can never quite win in this competition of manhood. Jimmy is sensitive and artistic, and he knows that society would not accept him this way. On one occasion, Jimmy decides, “If he’d [Jimmy had] been a girl he could have burst into tears” (*Oryx and Crake* 64). Jimmy, like Toby, wants to be disassociated with his body—he wants to be invisible (66). It seems that they realize that their physical bodies trigger expectations and associations for their gender, ones which they wish to escape.

Amanda, on the other hand, uses her body to manipulate others. Much like Crake, she uses sex to her advantage, as she trades it for things that she wants, like food. She, like Crake, warns others not to enjoy sex; you can laugh at it or trade with it, but you should never respect it (*The Year of the Flood* 137). She also possesses some awareness of the gender struggle. When

viewing gender as a binary, it becomes a mutually exclusive power struggle, in which women should fit in the feminine box, and men should adhere to the masculine box. Amanda, as a woman treading towards the masculine end of the gender spectrum, cannot enjoy sex, as she views it as a mechanism men use to subdue women. She instead tries to subdue the power of sex by laughing at it or using it to her advantage in a transaction. In the end, she realizes that her plan doesn't work; when the Painballers rape her, she cannot detach herself from her body and she breaks emotionally.

In Atwood's speculative fiction, the post-apocalyptic world is like a giant piece of swiss cheese. The survivors struggle to stay alive, and the leaders—those with strength and agency—work hard to stay on the surface as others push them towards the holes. Human existence is quite precarious after the waterless flood, especially for the feminine characters. Characters like Toby hold the weaker characters above the surface, confusing the reader who views the world through the gender binary. Who is this strong, asexual woman? Snowman adds to the reader's confusion. What do we make of this emotional, child—the male mother of the Crakers? As Atwood turns the world in her novels upside down, the reader is faced with questions—speculations.

What would happen if Atwood's society's expectations would shift? What if this society also valued men who exercised creativity, mastery of language, and sensitivity? What would happen if society appreciated strong, independent women? What if society did not place femininity in opposition with agency and nurturing leaders? Amanda and Toby would be allowed to succeed instead of constantly working to endure the push from men towards the feminine binary. Men like Jimmy and women like Amanda and Toby could live their lives confidently without the fear of being shoved in a different direction. When there are two

specified “choices” regarding how gender can look, conformity often wins. When the binaries are removed (or at least viewed as harmful), then there is more freedom for people to exercise their strengths without fear. Let us disassociate ourselves with the “machine parts...behind [our] eyes” (307). Ideally, it would not take a flood for society to see past the machinery of the gender binary. Perhaps Atwood is onto something: maybe speculating can help us avoid catastrophe.

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