

## Sent Out of the Garden: Posthuman Stewardship in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy

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### Abstract

The theme of bequeathing the human agency upon the ecosystem to post-human embodiments in literature is triggered by the wilful neglect of environmental hazards on the part of humanity in favour of capitalist concerns. The grave ecological concerns haunting the contemporary world culminated in the replacement of human stewardship to genetically modified, Crakers, in the *MaddAddam* trilogy by Atwood. Replete with biblical imagery, the new gardeners in the novel, are expected to salvage the sterile wasteland left by human civilization and transform it into a thriving Eden once again. *MaddAddam* Trilogy features a “fictional catastrophe” (285) written by a deeply unsettled Atwood while she was witnessing the receding glaciers on a boat in the Arctic. Although critics such as Marlene Holm and Bouson accuse Atwood privileging of humanist values and human traits at the cost of mocking “the idea of a bioengineered posthuman future” (Bouson 149) at all levels of the trilogy, introducing a new subjectivity to the otherwise anthropocentric vision of society remains significant. In this paper, my primary aim is to study the nature of posthuman embodiment conceptualized by Atwood as the better custodians of nature. Do posthuman hybrids signify a utopian fantasy of human improvement or a radical reconfiguration of human subjectivity?

**Keywords:** humanism, posthuman, wasteland, ecocriticism, hybrid

### Introduction

Atwood sets the tone for a postapocalyptic, posthuman future in *Maddaddam's* (2013) trilogy, with a tailored utopia fabricated by the scientist Crake. The Crakers are genetically modified non-human entities expected to salvage the sterile wasteland left by human civilization and transform it into a thriving Eden once again. Crakers are left in the care of Jimmy (mostly referred to as Snowman), who is chosen by Crake because of his empathy and general disregard for scientific temper. Crake with his absolute belief in biological determinism, deems human beings unfit to cohabit with nature and plots their extinction with no remorse. The rationale behind his bioengineered pandemic is that homo sapiens are genetically flawed, exploitative, and unintelligent beings with an ever-expanding population. He reasons that as a species, “the less we eat, the more we fuck” (Atwood 60). Thus, emerges the post-human Crakers as a superior species, thick-skinned with green eyes and built-in UV resistance.

Conceptualized in a posthuman body, the posthuman subjects are defined as beings whose “basic capacities so radically exceed those of present humans as to no longer be unambiguously human by our current standards” (Garreau 232). Since Crakers originated from genetically altered human embryos, the transhumanist impulse that led to their creation can be seen as anthropocentric, because it envisions the “enhancement of human intellectual, physical, and emotional capabilities” (Wolfe, xiii). The superior physical attributes of Crakers combined with the elimination of racism and sexual jealousy within their community, make possible a universe without

human malice and greed. They are herbivores and polygamous with no concept of race or hierarchies. “They were neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land, there was no territoriality... They ate nothing but leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two; thus, their foods were plentiful and always available” (Atwood 156). In short, they are more fit to survive and herald a utopian posthuman future, “one which will repair the damage of contemporary social reality, including environmental catastrophes, global wars, and natural disasters” (Yoo 622).

### **The Limitations of a Utopian Posthuman Future**

The grave ecological concerns haunting the contemporary world culminated in the replacement of human stewardship to genetically modified, Crakers, in the MaddAddam trilogy by Atwood. The substitution of Crakers as a superior species becomes an easy solution to the disastrous consequences of capitalism including climate change, overexploitation of resources, loss of biodiversity, and contamination of ecosystems. Crake deliberately engineered Crakers with biological characteristics that would exclusively benefit the planet and in no way would pose a threat to the environment. They do not require resources to survive and can cohabit with nature with ease. Curiously, Crakers absolved human beings of their ecological errors since the biology of human beings did not make for sustainable cohabitation with nature. In Crake’s bioengineered Paradise, Crakers are exemplary creatures in terms of ethics and morality, precisely because Crake has designed them in such a way. For example, Crake has eliminated racism from his Paradise model by switching their bonding mechanism. They cannot be racist as they lack neural complexes that would register the concept of hierarchy. In other words, Crake’s conceptualization of a world without hierarchy is to create hybrids that are unable to recognize skin color. Apart from racism, the sexual mechanism of Crakers is considerably less complex in comparison to humans. Their sexuality is not influenced by hormones as they come into heat at regular intervals, similar to other primates in the ecosystem. The tendency to do away with complex sexual and physiological desires of human beings cannot be considered as an alternative solution that heralds a utopian future. Crakers created by Crake would have no concept of family, kinship loyalty, or exclusive sexual connection:

As there would never be anything for these people to inherit, there would be no family trees, no marriages, and no divorces. They were perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses tools weapons, or, for that matter, clothing. They would not need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money. (156)

Crake eliminates all traits of creative thinking and spiritual yearning in Crakers, driven by his deep skepticism towards art. According to Crake, art stands for, “An empty drainpipe. An amplifier. A stab at getting laid” (86). When Crakers makes a figurine of Snowman and engages in chanting to it, as a way to help him guide home, their actions serve as a reminder that, despite Crake’s attempts, as a species, they are not immune to art and spirituality. On the surface, Crakers’ ability to engage in abstract thought and myth-making might indicate their potential to transcend their biomechanical functions. However, because Crakers’ utilization of art was exclusively intended to facilitate the deification of Crake and engage in ritualistic chanting centered around Snowman (whom they consider as a mediator between themselves and Crake) it becomes evident that their resemblance to humans is at the least retained

in a cultural sense. It would also further indicate that if humans were ever genetically modified to coexist with nature without the overconsumption of resources, they would not be an exploitative influence on the planet.

Ironically, bequeathing human stewardship to the bioengineered Crakers, absolves humans of their ecological sins, since as a species, they were not biologically equipped to survive in a non-anthropocentric environment. Human beings' genetic disposition dooms them to be exploitative and hierarchical over non-humans. As Gimbeek rightly points out, the utopian pastoral fantasy offered by Crake and Adam One “depend on apocalypse, as the largescale destruction of society is a prerequisite for fostering a new relationship between transhumans... and the nonhuman environment” (23). Human beings with their incorrigible greed and neglect towards the ecosystem have to be wiped out entirely for the emergent ecotopia. Without the apocalypse, there is no possibility for redemption on the part of humanity, and no need for a re-positioning of anthropocentric rationale. “At this point, post-apocalyptic wastelands have themselves become too reassuringly familiar” (Heise).

Crake has bred Crakers in such a way that their sexual feelings are never unrequired and they do not have any need for competition or resource guarding. Crakers' superior biology enables them to adapt to the environment more sustainably, without the consumption of non-renewable resources. Their transcended human body is supposed to nurture an ecotopia where nothing can go wrong. They have smooth clear skin with no excess fat, stretch marks, or cellulite. They are naturally devoid of body hair. According to Snowman, “they look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program” (50) and resemble “animated statues” (50). Perfect in every way, Crakers becomes almost a caricaturist, allegorical yearning for “a ‘pastoral fantasy’ of ecological humanism” (Bergthaller 735). The desire for a harmonious and idyllic posthuman ecotopia that is inhabited by perfect grass-eating herbivores reflects a longing to escape from the challenges and complexities of transformative political reforms.

### **Anthropocentric Subjectivity and Posthumanism**

The nature of posthuman subjectivity exhibited by Crakers remains ambiguous. Posthumanism as a philosophy seeks to decentralize man from any “particularly privileged position about matters of meaning, information, and cognition” (Wolfe, xii). A posthuman reconfiguration of subjectivity embraces fluidity, flexibility, constant reconstruction of boundaries, and devolution of the liberal human subject. According to Hayles, posthumanism “privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate” (3) and considers the body as the original prosthesis that can be manipulated and reconstructed along with other prostheses. However, Crakers in the novel exhibits extreme forms of biological predetermination that counters the disembodied nature of posthumanism.

Moreover, the post-human Crakers do not challenge the hierarchical supremacy of humans, rather they submit to it. The posthuman embodiments of Atwood set forth a subject agency that is anthropocentric by reinforcing archetypal humanist stereotypes and reconfirming human binary hierarchical oppositions. Crakers believes in communion with Oryx, adulates Crake, and erects a figurine of Snowman with rags and string mops. Conceptualized as fetish creations of Crake's mind, the rationale they employ is derived from man. Crakers consider themselves part of the

divine dualism Crake set up between the Children of Crake and the Children of Oryx. The mythology narrated by Snowman supporting the categorization follows that “Crake made the bones of the Children of Crake out of the coral on the beach, and then he made their flesh out of a mango. But the Children of Oryx hatched out of an egg, a giant egg laid by Oryx herself” (48). Although Crakers are programmed to not register hierarchy, they do not question Snowman’s diet that consists of the Children of Oryx. They even offer fish to Snowman which is chosen by the women and killed by the men. “The people would never eat a fish themselves, but they have to bring him one a week because he’s told them Crake has decreed it” (84). Their willingness to override their veganism in favor of a man becomes problematic as it reinstates the exploitative domination of man over nature.

Despite the transhumanist impulse that led to the creation of Crakers, as a species they exhibit certain behaviors that can be regarded as prehuman. Crakers, with all their superior genetics, are perceived as both children by Crake and Oryx. Crakers are an amalgamation of pre-selected animal characteristics. Atwood herself likens Crakers to “clever primates” (Case and McDonald 43). Similar to dogs, Crakers routinely perform territorial urination to scare off other predators. Their reproductive system is designed to model the mating behavior of baboons. Crakes design their mating habit to be polygamous and quintuplet, with four men and one woman, and they came to heat at regular intervals like most mammals other than man. Their courtship rituals consist of male members doing “a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs” (Atwood 84). Modeled on variable pigmentation adopted from the baboons, the female oestrus will be indicated by the bright-blue color of her buttocks and abdomen and the male penises would turn bright blue to match. The female would inevitably end up pregnant and the “imperfectly monogamous” nature of humans would be corrected with “total guilt-free promiscuity” (85). Similarly, their diet is inspired by caecotrophy in rabbits and consists of semi-digested herbage, discharged through the anus and ingested again to make optimum use of available nutrients. Inherently harmless, Craker's predisposition to their animalistic nature displays an “ironic, distorted, and pessimistic view of human evolution” (Yoo 672). Seen in this light, “the Children of Crake, for all their innocence and peaceful ways, are fundamentally nonhuman – are fundamentally subhuman” (Parry 252).

In addition, the Crakers are also dependent on humans in formulating their epistemology and for adapting to the post-apocalyptic environment. Despite his aversion towards religion, Crake’s vision of utopia is rooted in Judeo-Christian theology and deliberately parodies the creation myth. Crake labels his posthuman embodiments as the Paradise model and his bioengineering laboratory as the Paradise dome. Conceptualized as a new Eden, “the new Adams and Eves were kept in an enforced state of innocence, cordoned off from all knowledge deemed by their human maker to be confusing, risky, or otherwise contaminating” (Snyder 475). They are taught by Oryx the fundamentals of botany and zoology and the necessary survival skills such as “what not to eat and what could bite. And what not to hurt” (Atwood 158). It is only after the indoctrination of humanist knowledge structures; that Crake allows them to interact with the natural environment around them. They demand

Snowman to tell them stories in exchange for slaughtered fish and readily accept the fabricated mythology constructed by Snowman as their origin story. Crakers are obsessed with the deification of Crake, and Snowman becomes their resentful prophet. Snowman's account of their creation story is drawn from the book of Genesis, and how he narrates the story reinforces the notion of God, a supreme being from the skies.

In the beginning, there was chaos... the people were all mixed up with the dirt... they were eating up all the Children of Oryx, against the wishes of Oryx and Crake... Oryx said to Crake, Let us get rid of the chaos. And so Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away... For his children! For the Children of Crake! For us! For us!" say the women. It's becoming a liturgy. (52).

According to Schmeink, "the Crakers are not allowed subjectivity, but that they are allowed humanist subjectivity only, in which they are children: inhuman, unfinished, and in need of education" (105). In addition, Crakers with their extreme form of biocentrism radically differs from the reconfigurable nature of posthuman subjectivity which "is emergent, rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world" (Hayles 291). Crakers respond to their animal instincts programmed by Crake and they operate according to the laws laid down by Snowman. Jimmy labels them "hormone robots" (Atwood 85) who do not have free will to act on their own. However, Atwood cannot be blamed for privileging anthropocentric subjectivity, because "human character is in the foreground of all fiction, however humanity might be disguised" (Burroway).

### **God's Gardeners as Reconcilers between Humanism and Posthumanism**

Apart from Crakers, Atwood also features God's Gardeners, a biblical vegan cult led by Adam One with their eco-religious and self-reliant worldview as a foil to anthropocentric rationalism. Gardeners are mocked as "twisted fanatics who combine food extremism with bad fashion sense and a puritanical attitude towards shopping" for practicing a sustainable and non-materialistic way of living. Their deviation from the humanist rationale of anthropocentric exceptionalism challenges the primacy of man over the nonhuman. Decentralization of man conceptualized by posthumanism places equal emphasis on both the nonhuman as well as the human "others", the human categories that historically have not been recognized in a hierarchical scale. In the novel, the privileged elite lived in class-segregated communities called "Compounds" where they were given maximum security and were subjected to constant surveillance. The cities were called "pleeblands" and the people who inhabited these areas lived in constant fear of diseases, criminal activities, and natural disasters. The people living at the Compounds indulge in hedonistic consumption of media including live executions and child pornography as a way to escape from the horrific reality of a doomed planet. However, for the masses in the cities, nothing distracts them from "more plagues, more famines, more floods, more insect or microbe or small-mammal outbreaks, more droughts, more chickenshit boy-soldier wars in distant countries" (129). Gardeners differ from the suburban rich and the city dwellers in that they are committed to finding sustainable solutions to reverse the human damage to the ecosystem. The Gardeners adhere to a strict vegan diet with

minimal use of resources and anticipate the advent of a Waterless Flood that will rejuvenate Earth.

Gardeners propose an alternate way of cohabiting the earth, one that is not rooted in human exceptionalism. They believe in the condemnation of human greed and the resurrection of God's garden from decay and sterility. The term gardener represents an agency that nurtures and destroys weed, an agency not particularly human, within the post-human context. Gardeners anticipate the advent of Crakers, the perfect species that did not lose their innocence by committing ecological sins. Crakers are expected to restore the fertility of the sterile wasteland and bring back biodiversity to the depleted ecosystems. The future that Atwood depicts in her trilogy is already bleak with uninhabitable sterile land due to rising sea levels and toxic waste deposits. "The coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to dunes" (24). The fertile southern shores of the Mediterranean become a desert due to droughts induced by climate change and "slaughter of ecosystems" (Atwood).

It is to this precarious wasteland the Crakers are being thrust. However, they manage to peacefully settle in a coastal area with white sand, rustling trees, and overflowing birds. The serene tropical picture is often rudely interrupted by human transgressions of the past. Snowman recognizes the sound from the distant ocean as the grinding of "rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble" (4), waste deposits of a preapocalyptic era. He is followed around by vicious pigeons, bio-engineered pigeon hybrids, made for human consumption. The contrast between the tropical forest and the human wasteland postulates a reconciliation of the human and posthuman, a return to the new Eden, one that was corrupted but reclaimed nonetheless.

### **Literature and Ecocide**

The employment of an external posthuman agency to cure the wasteland created by human civilization also points to the representational challenges in literature to address the degradation of the ecosystem. Even though climate change and other global ecological catastrophes are at the forefront of our imagination, literature lacks a certain seriousness when approaching the subject. To quote Amitav Ghosh,

The age of global warming defies both literary fiction and contemporary common sense: the weather events of this time have a very high degree of improbability. They are not easily accommodated in the deliberately prosaic world of serious prose fiction...It is surely no coincidence that the word uncanny has begun to be used, with ever greater frequency, about climate change. (Ghosh)

The trilogy itself was written by a disconcerted Atwood, while she was witnessing the receding glaciers on a boat in the Arctic. Atwood recounts the pessimistic apprehensions that haunted her at the time: "It's deeply unsettling when you're writing about a fictional catastrophe and then a real one happens" (285). Harland addresses the deep sense of grief that ecological destruction can induce in our psyche. Here, fiction becomes a mediatory device to mourn the past: "a climate more hospitable, plant and animal species before they were threatened or genetically modified, an

unspoiled landscape, and social structures that had motivations other than profit” (586).

Posthumanism emerges as a device to tackle the dearth in the environmental crisis narration, “the broader imaginative and cultural failure that lies at the heart of the climate crisis” (Ghosh). The creation of bio-engineered posthumans compensates for humanity’s vulnerability in the face of global environmental catastrophe indicated by turbulent climate patterns, shrinking glaciers, and rising sea levels. The posthuman embodiments are reduced to utilitarian beings, endowed with genetically altered superhuman features to resolve the grave ecological concerns haunting the contemporary world. Their existence indicates the incapability of humanity to devise solutions for the environmental crisis at hand. Man is perplexed by the complexity of the ecological crisis at hand because “the human animal, being small and limited, has only a small view of the world and a limited comprehension of how to act within it” (Sale 53). The gravity of the situation makes him reach for absurd and abstract reparations. Thus, bioengineered humanoids with superhuman capacities become commissioners for the emergent ecotopia. According to Gerry Canavan, the Crakers “should be understood as a hyperbolic version of the fantasy that we might turn back the clock and begin history anew, this time avoiding the mistake of so-called civilization” (152).

### **Conclusion**

Atwood portrays a post-apocalyptic, posthuman future in the MaddAddam Trilogy where the scientist Crake creates a modified bioengineered species to replace humans. Crakers' existence as a superior species, serves to absolve humans of their ecological sins following the notion that as a species we are genetically flawed. The post-human Crakers emerges as an attempt to defer the responsibility of discovering sustainable means of resource consumption and harmonious cohabitation with nature. In addition, Crakers are expected to salvage the sterile wasteland left by human civilization and restore it to its former glory as a thriving Eden. Posthumanism as depicted in the novel takes on an anthropocentric approach as Crakers are not considered as either intelligent or complex. They are treated as children by the characters in the novel and are taught humanist precepts. Crakers become cartoonish creations of Crake’s mind as they are confined by their biology which consists of pre-selected animal characteristics. Their subscription to a humanist mythology that perpetuates binary distinctions between humanoids and other animals, the deification of Crake, and allegiance to Snowman’s rules make their epistemology distinctly humanist. The posthuman subjectivity manifested by Crakers remains ambiguous as they submit to the hierarchical supremacy of humans. They exhibit extreme forms of biological centrism, resulting in an ontology that is neither disembodied nor constantly reconstructed. Posthumanism becomes a utilitarian device when the end is to erase humanity’s ecological sins. The employment of posthumanism as a trope also indicates the representational challenges in literature to address environmental destruction. On a positive note, Atwood’s depiction of God’s Gardeners symbolizes the hope for an alternative relationship with the environment and the non-human others, one that is not rooted in the predominance of man over nature.

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