

## Paradise Retold: Revisionist Mythmaking in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the subversive potential of myths by exploring Margaret Atwood's feminist revision of creation, more specifically the myth of paradise. According to Adrienne Rich's definition, the "re-vision" of myths signifies the critical adaptation, appropriation, and invasion of traditional texts. As such, myths have not only legitimized exploitative power relationships, but they have also served as a powerful means to participate in and subvert hegemonic discourses. By drawing on the theories of Aby Warburg, Ernst Cassirer, and Hans Blumenberg, for whom myths constitute cultural-artistic mediations that involve the polarities of affect *and* intellect, terror *and* logos, Atwood's revision of paradise in the *MaddAddam* trilogy may be approached in itself as—to use a term by Hans Blumenberg—a "work of logos." I argue that Atwood revises paradise by duplicating the ancient human dreams of paradise into Crake's techno pagan and Adam One's eco-millennialist "gardens of delights," both of which are refracted through evolutionary science and ecology. Characterized by human destructiveness, these posthuman paradises feature multiple Eves alongside the dominant male figures. Among Atwood's Eves, there is the brazen Oryx as exploited racial "Other" of white society in the *pathos formula* of the Asian "digital virgin prostitute." Atwood employs a self-reflexivity regarding myths that is characteristic of postmodern pastiche and thus highlights storytelling as the distinguishing characteristic of humankind, while her use of an evolutionary grotesque aesthetics erodes clear-cut distinctions between humans, animals, and post-humans. The myth of paradise, the trilogy suggests, is also always a myth of extinction.

*Keywords:* myth, paradise, ecocriticism, feminist revision, Margaret Atwood.

### Resumen

Este artículo se centra en el potencial subversivo de los mitos al explorar la revisión feminista de la creación de Margaret Atwood, más específicamente, el mito del paraíso. Según la definición de Adrienne Rich, la "re-visión" de los mitos significa la adaptación crítica, la apropiación y la invasión de los textos tradicionales. Como tal, los mitos no solo han legitimado las relaciones con poder de explotación, sino que también han servido como un poderoso medio para participar en los discursos hegemónicos y subvertirlos. Al basarse en las teorías de Aby Warburg, Ernst Cassirer y Hans Blumenberg, para quienes los mitos constituyen mediaciones artístico-culturales que involucran las polaridades del afecto y el intelecto, el terror y el logos, la revisión del paraíso de Atwood en la trilogía *MaddAddam* se puede abordar en sí misma como (por usar un término de Hans Blumenberg) una "obra de logos". Argumento que Atwood revisa el paraíso al duplicar los antiguos sueños humanos del paraíso en el tecno pagano de Crake y en los "jardines de las delicias" ecomilenialistas de Adam One, ambos refractados a través de la ciencia y la ecología evolutivas. Caracterizados por la destructividad humana, estos paraísos posthumanos presentan múltiples Evas junto a las figuras masculinas dominantes. Entre las Evas de Atwood está el descarado Oryx como el "Otro" racial explotado de la sociedad blanca en la *pathos formula* de la asiática "prostituta virgen digital". Atwood realiza una autorreflexión sobre los mitos característicos del pastiche posmoderno y destaca la narración de cuentos como la característica distintiva de la humanidad, mientras que su uso de una estética evolutiva grotesca erosiona distinciones muy claras entre humanos, animales y poshumanos. El mito del paraíso, sugiere la trilogía, es siempre un mito de la extinción.

Palabras clave: Mito, paraíso, ecocriticismo, revisión feminista, Margaret Atwood.

## Introduction: Myths and Their Revision

Myth theory and criticism have assigned different origins, meanings, and functions to myth. While some theories have established one of the functions of myths as legitimizing exploitative ideologies and unequal power relationships, others underline that myths function as powerful means for participating in and subverting hegemonic discourses. Indeed, whether for colonized peoples, racial minorities, or other oppressed groups, myths have provided—and continue to provide—rich repositories of stories, figures, and symbols that empower the marginalized, represent alternative knowledge systems and are, therefore, key to the resistance and survival of these groups. In conceptualizing the transnational and transgenerational project of women's "revisionist mythmaking," scholars and theorists have underscored its empowering potential, which targets structures of oppression as well as the representations of women perpetuated in myths. This notion of "revision" has famously been defined by Adrienne Rich as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a critical direction," and as "an act of survival" (18).

The relationship between women and Western myth has remained fraught with tension as well. When participating in a phallogocentric tradition, women writers inevitably risk complying with the "master's tools" of oppression—language itself. Feminist theorists like Luce Irigaray have insisted on the rigorous deconstruction of the androcentric hierarchies maintained through myth, while others, such as Hélène Cixous, encourage the engagement with myths even if it involves identifying with feminist antitypes (Zajko and Leonard 4). Importantly, the way in which myth is conceptualized shapes its relationship(s) with women, as do changing contexts and discursive constructions of knowledge, especially regarding gender (Zajko 392, 398-99). In particular, approaches to myth that understand myth in contrast to scientific knowledge as irrational, false, and archaic, run the risk of reproducing such gendered categories as the "female" reproductive, natural body versus the "male" metaphysical, rational mind. Ironically, some feminists have positioned their revisionist mythmaking in opposition to "male" logos in order to celebrate women's suppressed psychological, emotional, or spiritual energies. Even when undertaken for strategic reasons, such approaches have reinforced ideas about women's intuitive, embodied powers.<sup>1</sup>

Ecofeminist scholars have taken the connections of the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature as their cue for a "revision" of human-nature relationships in order to postulate an ecofeminist ethics committed to, among others, nature care,

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<sup>1</sup> An exception is the field of *Classica Africana*, where the revision of classical myths has been central to the struggle for the human and *intellectual* equality of African Americans (Walters 1). Black women writers in particular have provided counter representations to the stereotypical portrayals of black women and illuminated the double burden of gender and race.

biodiversity, and environmental justice. Similar to second-wave feminists in myth studies, early ecofeminists such as Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, or Vandana Shiva, have celebrated the “feminine principle,” claiming that women hold a special relationship with nature that offers valid alternatives to the exploitation of the environment and oppressed peoples (Leach 68). Since the 1990s, constructivist theories have countered these naturalizing approaches but, in turn, have neglected evolutionary, biological, and material aspects (Alaimo 3). In the past two decades, new materialist approaches have reconsidered the dynamics of human-nature relationships alongside the material-ecological and socio-historical contexts in which women and oppressed peoples relate to nature. Ecofeminists and post-humanist thinkers such as Mary Mellor, Val Plumwood, Karen J. Warren, Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, and Rosi Braidotti, have been reconceptualizing a nature-human continuum that foregrounds the autonomy and agency of (living) matter. Whether these ecofeminist and post-humanist endeavors contribute to a more fruitful dialogue between the humanities and the sciences, which, according to Ursula Heise, ecocriticism’s adherence to traditional literary foci has continued to obstruct, remains to be seen (“Remapping English” 28-29).

Scholarship of Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy dealing with myths and the environment has predominantly focused on apocalypse, with the exception of the work of Nazry Bahrawi and Richard Alan Northover. Both examine biblical (creation) myths without, however, considering the tensions involved in the nexus of gender, myth, and religion. Northover’s approach proves fruitful in that he illuminates the dialogic and polyphonic potentials of myth as opposed to myth’s enforcement of one dominant version (85). Like Bahrawi, he shares the general scholarly consensus that the green religion of the eco-activists of *The Year of the Flood* offers a hopeful, deep ecological vision as opposed to the apocalyptic, materialistic destruction in *Oryx and Crake*. It seems to me that this concurrence is indeed partly, as Heise criticizes, shaped by the ecocritical neglect of biological-material considerations, while also overlooking, as Donna Haraway reminds us, that neither “[f]unctionalism” nor “organicism ... remove the principle of domination” (“Primatology” 492). Furthermore, the understanding of myth as being irreconcilably opposed to reason and intellect may also contribute to scholars being less critical toward Atwood’s eco-religious cult than they are towards scientific-technological responses to the environmental crisis.

In this article I focus on the *MaddAddam* trilogy and Atwood’s revisions of the myth of paradise in times of environmental crisis by, on the one hand, elucidating the intellectual-aesthetic dimensions of Atwood’s mythical reconfigurations. In so doing, I draw on the myth theories of Aby Warburg, Ernst Cassirer, and Hans Blumenberg, who understand myths as cultural-artistic productions and mediations that oscillate in-between the dynamic polarities of affect *and* intellect, terror *and* logos. For them, myths are subject to an ongoing process of re-narration, reconfiguration, and interpretation, which involves intellect as well as aesthetic finesse. Blumenberg even defines myth itself as “a piece of high-carat ‘work of logos’” (12). I argue that Atwood’s produces two versions of paradise: Crake’s techno pagan *and* Adam One’s eco-millennialist paradise. Seemingly opposed to each other, both are patriarchal versions of human dominance

refracted through evolutionary science and ecology. Both feature multiple Eves alongside the dominant male figures, most prominent among them the brazen Oryx. Her image as Asian digital virgin prostitute re-writes Eve as exploited racial “Other” and central expressive visual trope (*pathos formula*) of human creation *cum* destruction. Written in the form of postmodern pastiche, the trilogy shows a self-reflexivity regarding myths that highlights storytelling as the distinguishing characteristic of the nature of humankind. At the same time, Atwood employs an evolutionary grotesque aesthetic that erodes clear-cut distinctions between humans, animals, and post-humans.

### “Herstory”: Myth, Logos, and Feminist Revision

Atwood’s trilogy unfolds as a “simultaneal” on two temporal sequences (Porter 1): the present, when the story is narrated; and the past, prior to the human-induced catastrophe that led to the final days of humankind. In *Oryx*, the focalizer of both temporal sequences is Jimmy. In *Year*, focalizers, narrators, and diegetic levels multiply, as the alternating stories of Atwood’s women protagonists—Toby and Ren—are punctuated by the sermonic orations and hymns of the environmental activist group of the God’s Gardeners. They model their ecological mythology on biblical myths and adapt the Christian liturgical calendar for their festivals in order to celebrate, for example, “The Feast of Adam and All Primates” or “Saint Euell of Wild Foods.” In *MaddAddam*, focalizers, narrators, and diegetic levels further diversify through the inclusion of alternating male (Zeb) and female (Toby), human (Toby’s) and post-human (Blackbeard’s) stories, while events follow those of the first two volumes. By taking over the role of storyteller and recorder, the post-human protagonist Blackbeard in the end grants authority to the “Story of Toby.”

Toby’s “herstory,” which replaces as well as continues the mythmaking Jimmy begins for the Crakers in the first volume, thus, functions as the final authoritative record of humankind and foundational source for the post-human Crakers. Additionally, Atwood uses it for one of the central concerns of feminist revisionist mythmaking: appropriating phallogentrism by invading and reconfiguring traditional mythologies in order to include women’s perspectives and self-images. Yet, as is characteristic of Atwood’s biting sense of humor, she does not exempt the “sacred” project of feminist mythmaking from revision either. For example, Jimmy remembers the statue of Martha Graham on the campus of his liberal arts-and-humanities college as follows: “There was a gruesome statue of her ... as Judith, cutting off the head of a guy in a historical robe outfit called Holofernes. Retro feminist shit, was the general student opinion” (*Oryx* 218).<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the gynocritical quest to recover mythological women figures is ridiculed as resorting to the very martial powers it desires to eliminate. Indeed, different generations use the forms and modes of representation popular at the time, adapting myths to their specific historical and socio-political concerns, anxieties, and hopes.

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<sup>2</sup> The dancer Martha Graham (1894-1991) was a precursor in feminist revisionist mythmaking.

Furthermore, their re-narrations challenge their predecessors' versions of individual myths.

Atwood herself has long been participating in this trans-generational and transnational project of feminist revisionist mythmaking. Never simple, Atwood's revisions have been examined for their complex deconstructions and artful subversions, their intricate narratology and innovative poetics, their multilayered intertextuality and surprising metafictionality. An example is Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005), a postmodern rendition of the Odysseus myth, which includes the perspectives of Penelope and her twelve maids while also illuminating the patriarchal prerogatives that are perpetuated in the relationship of these female figures. By filling these lacunae, Atwood's postmodern variant responds not only to ancient male writers such as Homer or Herodotus, who barely mention the maids and cast Penelope in the role of the stereotypical faithful wife, but also to James Joyce's modernist *Ulysses* (1918-1920). Likewise ignoring the maids, Joyce represents Molly Bloom as the mythical counterpart to the loyal Penelope. Atwood, in turn, highlights the joint but unequal oppression of both classes of women, suggesting that, despite her solidarity, Penelope is complicit in the hanging of the maids.

With the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood shifts her focus to accounts of creation myths—especially paradise—and interweaves them with the scientific knowledge of the evolution and extinction of life forms on earth. In myth theory, the relationship between (sacred) myth and science has also remained fraught with tension and has been considered by some as the antithesis between myth and “truth” (“mythos” vs. “logos”). Historically, in this opposition, myth is seen as belonging to an archaic, primitive stage of human society, which Enlightenment thought gradually replaced by reason. This notion of myth as opposed to reason was perhaps most famously expressed by the German Romantics and later by Wilhelm Nestle in *From Mythos to Logos* (1940) (Blumenberg 48-49). This antithesis still informs our current understanding of myth as fiction, or false truth. There is, however, a critical approach, which underlines the logos of myth not in the sense of truth claims, but in its *apotropaic* function. That is to say, theorists understand myth as rationalizing the human *Angst* triggered by the threats of the natural and social environments into aesthetic forms of representation, be they written or visual. Seen from this critical perspective, myth is, as Blumenberg explains, an ongoing “work” of storytelling that continues to be of significance and that has survived as “a miracle of interwoven reception and construction” despite the fact that it cannot compete with the empirical evidence put forth by science (351). Notably, for Blumenberg the “reception” of myth always involves acts of reflection and representation beyond the mere recognition and reiteration of forms, symbols, and stories.

### **From Theories of the Symbol to the Logos of Myth**

In his philosophy of myth, Blumenberg draws on the work of two other German scholars and their theories of the symbol: Aby Warburg (1866-1929) and Ernst Cassirer

(1874-1945). Both emphasize the representative function of symbols based on an understanding of symbols as constitutive forms of meanings and insights in a process that involves cognitive expression and rational articulation. Although, as Cassirer noted, the different symbolic forms of language, myth, or science vary in the ways in which they produce the meanings and insights they provide, they nevertheless all share their transcending of a merely sensual, associative or affective view of the world and place humans in a reflective relationship with their environment (Cassirer 13, 128). In his cultural philosophy, Cassirer subsumed all of these symbolic forms under the broader structure of rational thought and logos. Based on this structure, he claimed, humans seek to explain, structure, and make accessible the world they inhabit even though mythical thought differs from scientific logic as it has no “independent, law-bound structure” or “general principle of order” (Skidelsky 104, 119).

Warburg, who explored the survival and continued significance of myth from antiquity into the twentieth-century visual arts, likewise discerned in the symbol “a connection between image and meaning” (Wind 27).<sup>3</sup> Theorizing about the polarity of the symbol, he identified what he called “*Denkraum der Besonnenheit*,” meaning a space in-between the polarities of the “magical-linking” and the “logically-dissociative” symbolic figuration (Warburg 484-85). As Edgar Wind explains, this intermediary space is a critical point at which “the psychological excitation ... is neither so concentrated by the compelling power of the metaphor that it turns into action, nor so detached by the force of analytical thought that it fades into conceptual thinking” (Wind 27-29). Warburg located these intermediary contemplative spaces in *pathos formulae*—visual tropes that simultaneously distill and make visible the polarities of affect and reason in the ceaseless oscillation between living image and intellectual abstraction. As *mnemonic* forms with conventional iconographies and meanings, these *pathos formulae* continue to shape the aesthetic forms of contemporary cultural expressions at the same time as their usage in altered historical and cultural circumstances provides novel meanings and new figurations.<sup>4</sup> Cassirer and Warburg’s perspectives, thus, paved the way for Blumenberg’s philosophy, according to which myth is not only “one of the modes of accomplishment of logos,” but also carries subversive potential, since it is always in the process of aesthetic reception (27).

Like musical themes and their variations, Blumenberg explains, mythical versions and transformations are inexhaustible even though they remain—if at times only barely—recognizable. He argues that although myth may lend itself to ideology and tradition, it nevertheless engenders innovation and revision because of its characteristic variability. As in ancient times, myth still functions as a means for humans to attain a reflective distance from the threatening and terrifying powers of the world that surrounds them. Even the advent of modern science and technology, Blumenberg

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<sup>3</sup> Warburg left behind a flood of essays, fragmented manuscripts, and notes. It was his colleague and friend Edgar Wind (1900-1971), who put Warburg’s theory of the polarity of the symbol into writing.

<sup>4</sup> The “Ninfa Fiorentina” is Warburg’s most famous *pathos formula*, which can be traced from water-bearing maenads on ancient sarcophagi to a fruit-carrying woman servant in a Renaissance fresco by Ghirlandaio or the figure of a hysterical woman in a late nineteenth-century oil painting by Moreau de Tours.

contends, has not terminated human attempts to contain the uncanny and unfamiliar through myth, since new technologies and knowledge generate new and unknown adversities. In view of myth's alleviation (*Depotenzierung*) of these terrors, Blumenberg argues, "one should think not only of attitudes of reverence and seeking favor but also of those of provocation, of forcing commitment, and even of malicious cunning, like that of Prometheus and of the 'trickster' figures known all over the world" (16). He underscores the centrality of frivolity, parody, and mockery in the "work on myth" (7), which he sees aimed to "deplete superior power[s]" (31) to the point of "bring[ing] myth to the end, to venture the most extreme deformation" and, thus, "the fiction of a final myth" (266). Yet Blumenberg concludes that, in spite of these aesthetic feats, there is no end to myth (633). Because of its *apotropaic* function and characteristic metamorphosis, myth constitutes a ceaseless "work of logos" (12). Atwood's interweaving of science and evolution with creation myths, then, must in itself be seen as one of those intellectual-aesthetic feats in the ongoing work on myth and, hence, as logos.

### Myth, Religion, and Feminist Revision

By focusing on myths from biblical texts, Atwood's trilogy participates in yet another contested area of myth theory, namely the relationship between myth and religion. As Robert A. Segal states, scholars have identified myth either as "part of the religious explanation of the world or part of the religious means of controlling the world" (2). Others have defined the relationship between myth and religion, specifically the Bible, as a relationship of "dissonance" since their "distinct aims, interests, [and] worldviews" are fundamentally at odds with one another (Callender 27). Blumenberg also sees myth clashing with religion: with its imaginative and flexible repository of figurations, myth is always "already in the process of reception" as it is always already re-narrated and adapted, whereas religious stories aim to affirm the one correct version and to delegitimize multiple, changing interpretations (216). Despite religion's "mythical features," Blumenberg notes, its "dogmatic mode of fixation" and iconoclasm have resulted in a comparatively scarce manifestation of "work on myth" in literature (218).

However, religious dogma and iconoclasm have by no means deterred artists from rendering their own versions of biblical stories. Ironically, among the visual arts the prohibition of religious images incited their proliferation, while women writers have been taking issue with women's representations in patriarchal religion by adapting and appropriating scriptural stories since long before the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Referring mostly to European male writers, Blumenberg excludes the long history of art as well as the revisionist mythmaking by women writers of the 1970s and 1980s in and beyond Europe. Prominent among the North American women writers who aim to transform biblical myths is the poet and scholar Alicia Suskin Ostriker.

Ostriker belongs to those gynocritics whom Jimmy's memories of the Judith figure of Martha Graham mock. Yet, Ostriker has remained an indefatigable contributor

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<sup>5</sup> The medieval French writer Christine de Pizan (1364-1429) is considered as one of the foremothers of feminist revisions of myth (McKinley 353-66).

to and spokeswoman for feminist revisions of scripture. One of her main concerns has been women's appropriation of this "ur-text of patriarchy" in order to re-write themselves and their stories within the "existing power structures" (*Feminist Revision* 27-28). Not only has Ostriker traced women writers' multifaceted re-imaginings of biblical women figures and their stories throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in her scholarly work, but her own poetry has contributed a body of scriptural adaptations that aim to critique as well as renew contemporary spirituality. Her claim that "new meanings must generate new forms" is evident in her poems, which show the formal and aesthetic innovations of women's revisionist mythmaking ("Thieves of Language" 236).

Since the 1990s, Ostriker has shifted her focus to the reception of biblical texts. She especially underscores the contemporary concerns of writers, artists, and readers, which, as she states, illuminate biblical stories in novel and meaningful ways (*Feminist Revision* 62). Her recent approach affirms Blumenberg's definition of myth as always being already in the process of reception. Yet Ostriker maintains that, as an authoritative text that "both inspires and repels" (57), the Bible "invite[s] transgressive as well as orthodox readings" (31). These versions, she insists, are rarely clear-cut adversarial revisions, but generally include a mixture of a hermeneutics of suspicion, desire, and indeterminacy (66-67). While she also sees the religious impetus for "truth claims" (67), she nevertheless stresses the palimpsestic texture of scripture as "a kind of paradise of polysemy," being "radically layered, plurally authored, [a] multiply motivated composite ... full of fascinating mysteries, gaps, and inconsistencies" (62).

Wolfgang Iser has suggested that Blumenberg's distinction between myth and dogma is not one that must necessarily constitute an opposition. Rather, it can be seen as a convergence, in that the ever-changing variants of myth shed light on the rigid absolutes of dogma and vice versa (Fuhrmann 541). Iser's comments may not silence Blumenberg's critics (for example Jean Bollack, Jacob Taubes, or Robert A. Segal), but they highlight one of Blumenberg's accomplishments in *Work on Myth*, namely his reclaiming of the potential of myth to provoke, revise, and subvert.

## Paradise Retold

In her *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood re-envisioned paradise in present-day scientific-technological and ecological-millennialist terms, more specifically in Crake's "Paradise Project" and the "Edencliff Rooftop" of the God's Gardeners. She reconfigures the mythical garden of paradise as (1) a techno pagan post-natural and post-human space cultivated and engineered by humans; and (2) a thriving, urban green commons. Scholars have read Crake's experiment as ethically reprehensible and diametrically opposed to the environmental activism of the God's Gardeners, especially with regard to their differing positions vis-à-vis global capitalism. Indeed, Crake does not deliberately engage with specific myths of paradise, whereas Adam One explicitly draws on biblical myths. However, both Crake and Adam One equally participate in the Western tradition of human dreams of paradise by fusing ancient myths of the Golden Age with the biblical

myth of the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, both their “paradises” constitute two decidedly material-ecological as well as post-human “paradise gardens,” whose human population emerges as a creative yet also destructive and, hence, freakish species among manifold other life forms. In this way, both visions are simultaneously stories of creation as well as extinction.

The spelling and sound of “Paradice” (as opposed to paradise) resonates with the onomatopoeia of “splicing” and, thus, points to the implementation of genetic engineering and scientific management in its landscape architecture, atmosphere and weather, as well as its inhabitants—the post-human Crakers named after their “father” Crake, who adopted the name from the extinct bird. Handsome, well proportioned, and of all skin colors, the Crakers live a peaceful communal life without the “destructive features” of *homo sapiens* such as racism, territoriality, omnivorous behavior, jealousy, or malice (*Oryx* 358). Joint mating rituals have eliminated sexual desire, possessiveness, and abuse. They are “perfectly adjusted to their habitat” as they “recycle” what they digest, need neither clothes, nor houses or possessions, and can heal themselves (359). Moreover, they do not age and, like humans, they dream and sing, both features for which, when translated into Crake’s neuroscientific lingo, any (post-)human species is “hardwired” (411).

Despite all the contemporary bioengineering and splicing, Atwood’s post-humans bear a striking resemblance to the tall, strong, and supple inhabitants of the ancient Blessed Isles, who, according to Hesiod or Diodorus, lived in the open air without clothes or houses, and whose communal societies showed neither rivalries nor discord (Delumeau 6-10). Jimmy compares the lack of sexual strife among the Crakers to a “golden-age Grecian frieze” without the usual “pushing and shoving” and displaying instead “the gods cavorting with willing nymphs” (*Oryx* 199). The idea of a life of harmony, joy, and concord among men, women, and nature is also central to the religious myth of paradise, which—like Crake’s Paradise—is said to be devoid of the concepts of death, possessiveness, or enmity. Notably, one of the startling features of the post-humans, namely their “crystalline, otherworldly singing” (*Year* 197), likewise characterizes traditional visions of the Golden Age and Eden, which were described as filled with pastoral and angelic song (Delumeau 4-15).

Based on these resemblances, I propose reconsidering Atwood’s acknowledgement that, although fiction, *MaddAddam* “does not include any technologies or biobeings that do not already exist, are not under construction, or are not possible in theory” (Acknowledgements 393). I suggest reading Atwood’s adaptations not only with an eye to contemporary and future developments in the fields of biotechnology, bioengineering, or biomedicine, but also with respect to the long—and often wayward—history of how humans have dreamed about future life on earth in ancient and religious myths of paradise. In fact, Crake’s Paradise is inextricably intertwined with paradise myths of the past. On the one hand, it continues the dreams of a peaceable, song-filled, and communal life in a hospitable, pleasing, and abundant natural environment as told in stories about the Golden Age and Paradise. On the other hand, alongside the “perfected” post-humans and in view of the mass extinctions, rampant crime, and

economic and sexual exploitation of Atwood's dystopian society, the humans emerge as physically and morally flawed creatures as well as faulty and perverted constructions that mock ideas of Divine Creation or Intelligent Design.

The post-industrial revolution of the new technologies of the 1980s and 1990s has given rise to prospects of human enhancement, cyber utopias, and new life forms. Enthusiasts have been propagating these visions of a perfected post-human society in quasi-religious and millennialist terms, whereas critics have been warning against their ethical ramifications (Karim 15). Yet, no matter whether fervently hailed or damned, "[f]rom the start, these developments were fetishized simultaneously by techno-enthusiasts and techno-catastrophists; simultaneously, side by side, ultimate liberation and ultimate destruction were prophesized" (Buell 13). Crake seems to embrace both, techno-utopia and techno-destruction. His dream of Paradise as a "reboot" (*MaddAddam* 334) of the creation of "brave new humans" (352) is evidently driven by a deep pessimism about the planet's future. Always dressed in "his dark laconic" style (*Oryx* 86), he shows a predilection for web games about the extinction of humans and other life forms. He identifies human desire, and in particular "misplaced sexual energy," as the root cause for environmental and social degradation (345), which, in turn, triggers his own desire for the total eradication of the humans. The genetically engineered pandemic, which massacres the human population, associates Crake's act with "divine" punishment and leads to the Crakers' expulsion from Paradise. Crake's hubristic gesture recalls his earlier gaming obsessions, were it not for the mindboggling consequences for human life. Especially the ludic aspects of Crake's playing at Creator cast his usage of the sciences in a most sobering light. Indeed, he embodies the basic principle of what Ulrich Beck has termed *Risikogesellschaft* (risk society), namely a process in which societies produce uncontrollable, worldwide threats and uncertainties, which then "backfire on these societies" (Wimmer and Quandt 337).

The Edencliff Rooftop of the God's Gardeners also draws on the long-cherished idea of paradise as an earthly "garden of delight" (Delumeau 3), while redefining it as an abundant botanized city space: "[Toby] gazed around in wonder: it was so beautiful, with plants and flowers of many kinds she'd never seen before. There were vivid butterflies; from nearby came the vibration of bees. Each petal and leaf was fully alive, shining with awareness of her. Even the air of the Garden was different" (*Year* 52). Located in an abandoned urban space as opposed to "a prosperous countryside (*eden*)" (Delumeau 4), Edencliff unites the classical *locus amoenus* with biblical paradise. The Gardeners interweave an Evangelical environmentalism with a New Age eco-consciousness and contemporary ecological and evolutionary knowledge. Needless to say, their urban paradise is plagued by similar oxymoronic discrepancies to Crake's Paradise.

The sermons include encouragement characteristic for their conviction of impending doom. At the same time, the Gardeners' green eschatology includes a noticeable dose of pragmatic advice, ranging from such banalities as the use of sunhats, "butter substitute," or recyclable materials for festivals to concrete survivalist techniques, shrewd warnings against surveillance, and reminders of the importance of

political subterfuge (*Year* 150). Adam One intersperses his simultaneous preaching of creation care and imminent eco-disaster with rhymed instructions such as “It’s better to hope than to mope!” (107), or “if in doubt, spit it out!” (149). Like the songs that follow his sermons, these short reminders undercut pathos with bathos, the high with the low. Playful, irreverent, even anarchic, these elements invite a parodic, undogmatic reading of the Bible (as opposed to the totalitarian theocracy in Atwood’s Republic of Gilead in *The Handmaid’s Tale*).

In lieu of the traditional emphasis on human sinfulness and God’s curse of the serpent and the earth, Atwood’s eco-millennialists revere all life forms (including the serpent, but also bacteria and viruses) and advocate human earth care alongside survival training and political resistance against a corporate take-over.<sup>6</sup> What emerges is the creation story of a fascinatingly diverse and alive but long-lost “garden”: exploited and overpopulated by what Adam One describes as a “less than Angelic” species, whose “knots of DNA and RNA” tie it “to [its] many fellow Creatures,” this lost paradise is now struggling for survival—politically and biologically (*Year* 64). The Gardeners’ greened version of political resistance and creation is—like Crake’s—deeply pessimistic and undeniably this-worldly. As Adam One predicts, “not this Earth [will be] demolished,” but “the Human Species” (508-09), as it will soon “become part of God’s great dance of proteins” (486).

### **Bruised Yet Brazen: Atwood’s Multiple Eves**

Atwood’s revisions of paradise feature numerous Eves, most prominently Oryx and Toby.<sup>7</sup> Jimmy first sees Oryx on an Asian child porn website that he visits with Crake. The porn site shows her as one of three little girls locked in cyberspace in the century-old role of Eve—childlike, playful, and sexualized. However, in the figure of the Asian digital virgin prostitute (Mathews 35), Atwood stresses the fourfold burden of gender, age, race, and class:

She was small-boned and exquisite, and naked like the rest of them, with nothing on her but a garland of flowers and a pink hair ribbon ... . She was on her knees, with another little girl on either side of her, positioned in front of the standard gargantuan Gulliver-in-Lilliput male torso ... . The act involved whipped cream and a lot of licking. The effect was both innocent and obscene ... . (*Oryx* 103)

The childlike nakedness and flowers associate Oryx with Eve in Paradise. Otherwise, Atwood’s representation eschews the iconography of Eve’s temptation and the fall, which traditionally shows Eve with Adam alongside the tree of knowledge and the serpent, where Eve either offers Adam the forbidden fruit, or seduces him as personified

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<sup>6</sup> Harry O. Maier observes that green Evangelicals in the U.S. are already interpreting Scripture through an environmental lens. By “foregrounding one set of texts over another,” their eco-millennialism “counters a heavy emphasis on the Fall, the cursed earth of Gen. 3.17 and notions of depravity” (256).

<sup>7</sup> On the deeply gendered nature of Western visions of paradise, that is, Adam as “heroic agent” and Eve as “virgin land” to be exploited and improved, see also Carolyn Merchant’s *Reinventing Eden*, especially chapters 5 and 6.

serpent. Rather, Oryx's posture revives Warburg's *pathos formula* of the ancient nymph who crouches down or is seated in erotic "play" in a *locus amoenus* or paradisaal landscape, an iconography Warburg also recognized in Manet's figure of the bathing woman in *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Latsis 16).<sup>8</sup>

Atwood reconfigures Oryx and the other little girls' "fall" as staged phallus worship in cyberspace performed by three prostrate virgin prostitutes. As quickly becomes clear, the virtual sexual act involves no play, and the terrified faces of the girls belie the overdubbed sounds of pleasure. Oryx's pause and "hard little smile" (Oryx 103) in the middle of her "workout" (104) expose her "fall" as sexual and economic labor within an institutionalized global industry. Even so, Oryx openly challenges the spectators'—Jimmy and Crake's—voyeuristic male gaze by looking "right into the eyes of the viewer," as if to say, "*I see you watching. I know you, I know what you want*" (104). Her gaze simultaneously underlines and defies her exploitation and commodification. While her look into the webcam confirms its presence, it at the same time elicits feelings of guilt, shame, and desire in Jimmy, forcing him—and by implication other (male) customers—to recognize her as a human subject rather than a virtual sex object (252). He indeed acknowledges that, "for some strange reason Oryx was three-dimensional from the start" (103). Atwood's version of Eve in cyberspace, then, not only represents the "downfall of *mankind*" (Ciobanu 154), but also places the moral burden of the girls' "fall" on the male consumers of the porn site.<sup>9</sup>

When Oryx joins Crake's Paradise Project, she slips into the traditional role of Eve as the "unwitting accomplice to the corruption of humanity" (Held 199), meaning Crake's destruction of the human species. A prototypical temptress, she quickly and expertly seduces Jimmy. With Oryx, Atwood creates an ambiguous Eve figure: sexually and economically exploited, she nevertheless "refuse[s] to be a victim" (*Surfacing* 197), be it through her challenging outward gaze, her active sexual choices, or her varying stories about her past. It is these in particular that position her as "*creative non-victim*" (38), despite her own exploitation by global sex trafficking on the one hand and her role as Crake's handmaid on the other.

In an ironic reversal of Oryx's story, the "Asian-Fusion hybrid" Katrina Wu features as an Eve who never sets foot in Adam One's urban eco-paradise but establishes herself as adept businesswoman in the sex industry (*MaddAddam* 171). Her erotic high-wire performances as "snake woman" (172) revise the traditional associations of Eve with the serpent in terms of female weakness and susceptibility into an empowering flexibility and adaptability reminiscent of the trapeze artist and contortionist in Atwood's *Lady Oracle* (Rao 145). Unlike Oryx, Katrina Wu avoids becoming Adam One's inadvertent accomplice; but like Oryx, she fails as businesswoman in her own right when, ultimately, the power structures of the corporate sex industry, overpower her.

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<sup>8</sup> Eve is also a prominent syncretistic figure in (Neo)Renaissance art and literature, a prime example being John Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Milton identifies her with Venus and Flora, the goddess of flowers and "the nymph Chloris transformed by the touch of Zephyr into a fruitful woman" (Boyette 344).

<sup>9</sup> Gillian M. E. Alban mistakes Oryx's look as a "powerfully assured Medusa Gaze" (91).

In contrast to their racial “Others,” Atwood’s white Eves—Pilar and Toby—are attributed far more power to survive the fictitious sexist, racist, and corporatized North America of the *MaddAddam* trilogy. As beekeepers and mushroom cultivators, Pilar and Toby represent the creative qualities of Eve.<sup>10</sup> However, theirs are not the traditional procreative Judeo-Christian roles of domesticated women and mothers. In her struggle for economic survival, Toby first sells her ova, but later, through an infection contracted from the harvesting of her ova, loses her reproductive capacity altogether, a feature which she shares with “old walnut-faced Pilar” (*Year* 118). Instead, Atwood equips both Eves with the knowledge of nature’s life-giving and life-taking forces in the forms of bees and mushrooms, associating them with ancient Mother Goddesses and their powers of creation, which transcend (mortal) women’s reproductive functions.

Honeybees, Pilar teaches Toby, are “messengers between this world and the other worlds” (*Year* 215). Atwood does not invent Pilar’s “bee lore” (129), but draws on the cultural history of bees, according to which they are emblems of the prelapsarian Eden (Preston 76). Although the presence of the mushrooms is puzzling at first sight, Atwood here reconfigures ancient matriarchal fertility rituals—involving the consumption of psychedelic mushrooms—with the biblical story of Eve eating from the tree of knowledge in the form of giant Amanita mushrooms.<sup>11</sup> In contradistinction to pagan, religious, or feminist myths that celebrate and define women predominantly as sexual, reproductive beings, Pilar and Toby’s superior knowledge of the Amanitas as either invigorating tonic, consciousness-enhancing drug, or deadly poison, becomes a powerful tool in an oppressive phallogocentric society. Thanks to “one of the amanitas” the terminally ill Pilar ends her life (*Year* 214), whereas Toby uses them to kill—and liberate herself from—the sexually abusive Blanco. Tellingly, his infernal brutality and perversion are symbolized in his body tattoo, which shows “snakes twining his arms” and, on his back, an upside-down Eve in chains with her head “stuck in his ass” and her “long hair waving up like flames” (43-45). Still, there is a significant difference between Toby and Pilar as Eve figures: where Pilar links sacred myths of nature with the Gardeners’ millennialist ecology, Toby’s irreverent comments as a novice provide built-in reflections on the continuities as well as the gaps in past and present creation myths.

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<sup>10</sup> Both are assigned the number six (“Eve Six”) which, in mythology, carries a host of ambivalent meanings: a perfect number for ancient Pythagoreans, the number six refers to sin as well as to the (good) work of creation in the bible (Yu 11).

<sup>11</sup> One well-known representation of the tree of knowledge in the form of an Amanita is the thirteenth-century fresco in the Chapel of Plaincourault (<http://www.herbmuseum.ca/content/fresco-plaincourault-possibly-depicting-fly-agaric>). Since the 1990s, R. Gordo Wasson and John M. Allegro’s theories, according to which the Christian creation story originated from ancient mushroom worship, have undergone serious scholarly reevaluation and are no longer considered as unscientific.

## Pastiche and Evolutionary Grotesque

Toby's reflections provide the trilogy with the self-deprecatory playfulness and self-reflexivity characteristic of pastiche (Eagleton 194; Dyer 93).<sup>12</sup> Harboring grave "doubts" about Pilar's ritualistic communication with the bees, Toby questions not only the effectiveness of these rituals, but also their sacredness (*Year* 120). When relocating the bees from the forest into the human community, in her mind she exposes the ostensible claim to protect the bees as the actual theft of their honey (*MaddAddam* 214). Similarly, her meditative vision of a yawning liobam does not bring about the desired divine guidance, but bathetically reveals the spiritual exercise as mere "child's play" or being "stoned" (222-23). By substituting the biblical revelation of a peaceable kingdom for a material, bioengineered hybrid, which unites the scientific-technological as well as evolutionary-biological aspects of post-humanism and deflects the human gaze with a yawn, Atwood decenters not only the notion of providential design, but also that of any moral and epistemic human high ground.<sup>13</sup> In so doing, Atwood pastiches the elevated, sacred aspects of myth by "shifting from high seriousness to comedy" together with the notion that humans distinguish themselves from other animals through a higher spiritual or intellectual consciousness (Howells 64).

Aesthetically, Atwood's post-human paradises rely on an evolutionary grotesque with which she has the human characters of her trilogy enact travesties of mythical animality on the one hand and exhibit a shocking bestiality on the other. Blanco, whom the corporations have reduced to a "Painballer" with a "reptilian brain" (*MaddAddam* 9) through torture, exemplifies human beastliness and brutalization; whereas the "reptilian lovelies in skintight green scales" of Katrina Wu's pleebland nightclub (252), or Zeb's "grinning like a fairy-tale wolf, [and] holding out his paw of a hand" to Toby (209), represent moments of mythical animality. All these comical and satirical representations underline the evolutionary relationship and relatedness between humans and animals. Ironically, the (genetically modified) animals turn out to be less "savage" than the human society, while the post-human Crakers become life-saving mediators between animals and humans. In this way, Atwood's human animals become merely one—albeit rather freakish—species among numerous interspecies relationships.

Yet, like other species, Atwood's freakish humans will soon be extinct. In this context, Zeb's mythical bear flight in the mountains is also a story about the loss of stories in an age of mass extinction (Heise, *Imagining Extinction* 45). His "bear drag" simultaneously signifies the performance of his death as a human being and the resurrection of the mythical Sasquatch or Bigfoot: "Within a week, Bigfoot-believers

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<sup>12</sup> The built-in self-reflexivity of Toby's perspective regarding myths continues and brings to an end Jimmy's inner monologues about the myths that constitute the world in which he comes of age as well as his mythmaking about the Crakers' origins. In *Oryx*, it is through his comments that Crake's otherwise implicit myth of Paradise is illuminated.

<sup>13</sup> The issue of biotechnology, including the genetically modified hybrids, has been the focus of a number of scholarly studies, also in the context of dystopian and science fiction (Anderson 2013; Marks, 2014; Mohr 2015; Defalco 2017). However, scholars have neglected the question of Atwood's literary aesthetics, which constitutes a central aspect of the trilogy's revisionist mythmaking.

from around the world have ... mounted an expedition to the site of the discovery, and are combing the area for footprints and tufts of hair ... and then the scoffers will be shown up for the corrupt, fossilized, obsolete truth-deniers that they are" (*MaddAddam* 83). Zeb's performance of (mythical) animality displays the unwillingness of a society to "accept the demise of a culturally significant species" (Heise, *Imagining Extinction* 38) as well as its very own imminent extinction. Even worse, this society has "lost any firm grip on the distinction between fact and fiction" (40).

Zeb's struggle for survival also becomes a struggle against becoming "wordless" and losing the "glass pane of language" that normally "com[es] between him and not-him" (*MaddAddam* 80). Imminent death threatens him with the loss of language and storytelling and, therefore, the ability to distinguish his self from the living matter that surrounds him: "Soon he'd be overgrown, one with the moss" (80). The human species, Atwood suggests, distinguishes itself from other life forms through storytelling—mythmaking—as a means of taming the terrors and uncertainties of the universe they inhabit. Where Toby seeks to contain her dread of death with storytelling, Zeb wards off "the darkness" in his life with the creative powers of childish rhymes and vulgar ditties (73, 78-79). Indeed, it is in myths' apotropaic function that I see fond notes entering into Atwood's satire, particularly when Blackbeard authorizes Toby's myths at the end of the trilogy:

This is the end of the Story of Toby. I have written it in this Book. And I have put my name here—Blackbeard—the way Toby first showed me when I was a child. It says that I was the one who set down these words.  
Thank you.  
Now we will sing. (390)

Here, Blackbeard playfully, even lightheartedly, brings to life the human species in the Crakers' creation mythology while glossing over its (self-)extinction. Rather than establishing human exceptionalism, then, creation myths in Atwood's lost paradises alleviate the human terrors in the ongoing drama of evolutionary change and species extinction.

### **Conclusion: Extinction in Creation Myths**

With the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood continues her lifelong occupation with feminist revisionist mythmaking. Combining as well as pastiching ancient and religious dreams of paradise, she duplicates the vision of the harmonious coexistence of men, women, and other life forms into Crake's techno pagan and Adam One's eco-millennialist quests for a perfected (post)humanism. Atwood's postmodern variants of paradise feature multiple Eves, none of whom identifies with either traditional devaluations of women as sexualized and domesticated, or with (eco)feminist celebrations of women as fruitful and close to nature. The haunting *pathos formula* of Oryx as "virtual virgin prostitute" shows that, as racial yet brazen "Others," the Asian Eves demonstrate a remarkable adaptability and agency. Ultimately, however, they remain excluded from an equal share in co-creation. In contrast, their white western counterparts—Pilar and

Toby—possess the powers to command over life and death, although they do not escape economic and sexual victimhood either.

What these paradises and their resident Eves have in common is the rejection of the spiritual in favor of the material as Atwood's revisions of paradise replace sacred knowledge with evolutionary science. In this way, Atwood tells the story of a freakish species whose pleasures and perversities enmesh with a world of material-ecological as opposed to divinely ordained life processes. Deeply related to other animals on the one hand, the human species distinguishes itself through its myths on the other, an idea that the trilogy displays in its self-awareness with regard to myths as well as in an evolutionary grotesque aesthetic. In a final twist, Atwood further pastiches paradise myths as extinction myths, revealing that each creation myth always also contains the demise of other animals.

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