

The Grotesque in Margaret Atwood's Fiction

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Abstract

The present paper aims to examine the presence of the grotesque in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*. The grotesque would be used in conjunction with the theory of ecocriticism. The ensuing concept – eco grotesque will be used to analyze the novel under three elements of the grotesque: *disharmony*, *abnormality*, and *the comic and the terrifying*. It is significant to highlight the grotesque aspects of Atwood's fiction so that future readers can see the symbiosis between her ecocriticism and the grotesque mode. Previous studies on her work especially, on *The Year of the Flood* have not been able to highlight these elements of the grotesque. This study will aim to provide this addition to the body of knowledge on her fiction. In *The Year of the Flood* the harmony within nature is disrupted. Gene splicing which leads to the creation of new life forms such as the *liobam*, *Pigoon*, *wolvogs*, and the post human *crakers* results in the reordering of nature. These new life forms are a direct contradiction of the natural order of things. Atwood's position has been that if the excesses of science and technology is not curbed through ethical regulations; there would be serious catastrophe. The privileging of science over all other forms of endeavor in our world should be urgently reviewed.

Keywords: Bioengineering, Gene Splicing, Life forms, the crakers, 'waterless flood'.

1. Introduction

Margaret Atwood's trilogy *Maddaddam* comprises *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *Maddaddam* (2013). Each of these books talked about human relationship to the environment. Atwood's thesis has been that the human-nature relationship has been negatively affected due solely to activities that are detrimental to a harmonious existence between humans and other life forms on the planet. Science and technology have been deployed by man to alter the natural balance and as such a catastrophe tend to ensue. Atwood believes that man should realize that apart from human beings, there are other life forms on earth. Their existence and preservation would directly translate to mean the very existence of man. This in essence means that man is not free to do what he wants on earth. Another key premise in the trilogy is that: technology and the activities of scientist who are in the quest of immortality or longevity of the human race could inadvertently be seeking the annihilation of the human race and other life forms. In *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* scientists have created new life forms through the splicing of genes and the result is the emergence of animal species that are in-between human and animal. These new life forms possess both human and animal genes thereby making them think and behave at times like human beings. Jimmy's father in *Oryx and Crake* was a top scientist at OrganInc Farms. He works on the Pigoon project:

The goal of the Pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but

would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were strains every year...The Pigoon organs could be customized, using cells from individual human donors, and the organs were frozen until needed. (*O & C* 22-23)

Obviously, in their quest to produce replacement organs such as kidneys, scientists have now created an ‘abnormal pig’ that has human tissues. This sort of scientific break-through would have a catastrophic effect on human – nature balance. Nature however, has the capacity to heal itself of man’s destructive activities. *The Year of the Flood* chronicles the ‘waterless flood’ that had swept through the earth. This momentous event has had a fundamental and far reaching effect on all life forms on the planet. The ‘waterless flood’ happened due to the uncontrollable activities of man most especially, the greed of corporate capitalism and the unethical scientific research. Scientists and private multinational corporations are in control of the apparatus of state. They virtually determine how things are done and run. They were engaged in unhealthy competition for maximum profiteering. In the dystopian world of Atwood’s trilogy, technology was deployed to absolutely control man and nature. Two types of realities were created in this world: The protected, clean, wealthy, and walled ‘utopian’ *Compounds*; and the ‘dystopian’ unprotected, dangerous, disease ravaged, and impoverished *Pleeblands*. This separate ‘worlds’ were highlighted by Atwood to underline the extremes apparent in that Post human futuristic setting. Both the title – *The Year of the Flood* – and the important event in the narrative – ‘the waterless flood’ are evocative of Christian religious dogma. When God destroyed the earth (due to man’s sins) using torrential rain in the Bible in the book of Genesis, He told Noah after the flood that He will never destroy the earth again using water. The God’s Gardeners are a quasi-religious group who draws their inspiration from the teaching of their leader Adam One. The God’s Gardeners knew about the impending disaster that would eventually consume the planet. They built ‘ararats’ – these are stores where food and other basic and essential items are kept by all the Gardeners in all their secret places. The doctrine of the Gardeners do not allow them to eat meat. They live a vegetarian existence. They grow their vegetables and generally, live in a Spartan and modest way. The main characters through whom Atwood presents her story – Toby and Ren - were both members of the God’s Gardeners before the ‘waterless flood’. When the flood finally hit, both Toby and Ren were saved from the devastation together with many of the other members of the God’s Gardeners. It is quite imperative to note that the God’s Gardeners had the most members who survived the flood more than any set of human beings. Atwood may be making a fundamental statement to the effect that only those who seek to preserve the planet (such as the God’s Gardeners) deserve to continue inhabiting the planet.

2. Atwood and Human Race

The Year of the Flood has proved that despite the extreme and destructive activities that are detrimental to the environment, nature has the ability to recreate and replenish itself. The novel had also highlighted the fact that man’s greed and quest for immortality will inevitably be his nemesis. Atwood shows how the characters in the novel had become the victims such that the life forms that were created by the scientists have now turned on man. The splicing of human and animal genes that has led to the creation of such life forms like the *Pigoon*, *Liobam*, *Rakunk*, *Wolvogs*, *ChickieNobs*, *Mo’ Hair*, and also the new ‘human beings’ – *the crackers*-indicates the efforts man had put in so that he can change the environment. This has however, backfired because it eventually led to the destruction of the whole earth. The key themes in Atwood’s fiction can be highlighted as: “despotism versus decency; obsessive control versus the spectrum of human desire; science and art; reason and the imagination – all contribute to her sense of the environment” (Hengen 72). To Atwood, man’s earnest desire has not changed over time. There is an innate yearning to alter the way man has been created by God. The consensus in her thesis

and that of others has been that in the present century science and technology have made it possible to change naturally occurring life. It is also feasible now to create new life forms. The implication will be that life and the attendant relationships as we know them would very soon disappear. "The adaptation and co-evolution that have characterized the naturally occurring environment, and so the very basis of survival among organisms, is being tampered with by current technologies." (Hengen 73). What would be the end result of this 'meddling' by man in the course of natural order? According to Hengen:

Environmentalism in the works of Atwood... becomes a concern with the urgent preservation of a human place in a natural world in which the term "human" does not imply "superior," or "alone," and in which what is fabricated or artificial is less satisfying than what has originally occurred. (Hengen 74).

Atwood, in her works is therefore sounding a word of caution that human beings must realize that this planet has other important life forms apart from them. The relationship between man and these other life forms must be one that is mutually beneficial and borne out of respect and consideration. Splicing genes to create new life forms in order to improve on the existing naturally occurring forms cannot lead to an improved relationship; it would rather lead to chaos. Bahrawi also asserted that both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*: imagine science as having enabled the creation of an incurable virus that had wiped out most of humanity, and in the process littered the world with dangerous hybrid creatures such as the Liobam, a genetically engineered creature that has the harmless appearance of a lamb but the hunting ability and razor-sharp incisors of a lion. Nature, used and abused, has returned to wreak havoc on earth with vengeance. (252)

The *Liobam* is also a product of gene splicing like the other creatures in the two novels. They are given a deceptively meek and friendly exterior but their genetic make-up is carnivorous and deadly. Another example of this deadly and horrific scientific endeavor is the *wolvog*. The private security firm CorpSeCorps in the two novels commissioned the bioengineering of this creature to be used as a security device:

They aren't dogs, they just look like dogs. They are wolvogs - they're bred to deceive. Reach out to pat them, they'll take your hand off. There's a large pit-bull component. "Why make a dog like that?" said Jimmy, taking a step back. "Who'd want one?" "It's CorpSeCorps thing," said Crake. "Commission work. A lot of funding. They want to put them in moats, or something. (*O & C* 205)

The CorpSeCorps is the private security firm that is charged with the responsibility of putting people in line within the dystopian world of these novels. The wolvogs will be more efficient than an alarm system because there is no way that an intruder can disarm them. Another bioengineered life form is the *pigoon*. This is a pig that has human genes and tissues. It was gene spliced so that its extra kidneys can be harvested for those who are in need of these organs. The *pigoon* is not an ordinary pig because it behaves just like a human being. In *Oryx and Crake* this creature is under the control of the scientists. It was kept for the replacement organs it produces. After the 'waterless flood' in *The Year of the Flood* it became a ravaging carnivorous monster. Human beings became its target. Thus, Jimmy 'Snowman', Toby and the rest of the surviving humans are being hunted down by these monsters. It is rather ironic that man created these life forms for his own selfish ends, but now these life forms have turned against their creator who can no longer control them. It is therefore obvious that the 'waterless flood' happened due solely to man's inordinate greed:

Greed-driven disregard for the environment emerges as the palpable surface cause. Atwood's two novels depict a corporate capitalism, or corporatism, constantly pushing its limits by

privileging unregulated techno-scientific endeavours with high financial yield. This lack of regulation – legal, ethical, moral – constitutes the main critique of the two companion dystopias. The absence of legal regulation facilitated through a neoliberalism taken to its logical conclusion makes the State absent in these novels. (Talpalaru 241).

The corporate unregulated greed exhibited in these two novels led to the creation of these new but deadly life forms. In the quest for immortality man had created grotesque bioengineered life forms that are now virtually out of control.

3. Conceptual Framework

The concept eco grotesque implies a relationship between ecocriticism and the grotesque. It also shows the impact of the grotesque mode on writings about the relationship between human beings and the environment. In the Maddaddam trilogy Atwood highlighted the effects of man's activity through the unimpeded actions of science and technology on the environment. Specifically, in *The Year of the Flood*, she shows the possible end-result of overhumanisation of our world. Atwood as had already been cited is of the view that in the absence of regulation through proper ethical guidelines technology in its quest for immortality would inevitably lead to a major catastrophe for man and the entire planet.

In order for us to draw a clear relationship between ecocriticism and the grotesque, there is a need to examine the definition of the term 'ecocriticism'. Many eminent scholars in the field had provided important clues to the meaning of ecocriticism. The term, according to Branch can be attributed to William Rueckert which first appeared in an essay he wrote in 1978. It was later revitalized by Cheryll Glotfelty and who was supported in the use of the word by Glen A. Love. (1). Rueckert's seminal article drew attention to man's activities and its effects on nature. He maintained that:

The problem now, as most ecologists agree, is to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community, and with it the human community. This is what ecologists like to call the self-destructive or suicidal motive that is inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude toward nature. The conceptual and practical problem is to find the grounds upon which the two communities - the human, the natural – can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere. (Rueckert 107)

The Year of the Flood seems to be echoing the above view by Rueckert that if there is no proper regulation in man's activities as far as the natural world is concerned then a major catastrophe will ensure. Thus, in this context Atwood's works serve as a timely warning to the human race. A very clear implication from Rueckert's view point is the apparent interconnectedness between nature and man. This is further underscored by Glotfelty when she asserts that:

... ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment...Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. (xviii-xix)

The close relationship between literature and the environment is a critical factor in any work of art that can be termed as ecocriticism. To Glotfelty, literary artist in the mode should highlight important aspects of the symbiotic nature of association between human beings and other species on the planet. This will also seek to underline the mutuality of the existence of all species – both human and nonhuman – and this implies that survival of both is intertwined.

To Cokinos, "...ecocriticism is the critical and pedagogical broadening of literary studies to include texts that deal with the nonhuman world and our relationship to it" (3).

Hitherto, there is a dearth of texts about the relationship between the human and the nonhuman world in school and university curriculums. Ecocriticism as a broad field of critical study according to Cokinos, should seek to fill-in this vacuum. Dean, in his view maintained that:

Eco-criticism is a study of culture and cultural products (art works, writings, scientific theories, etc.) that is in some way connected with the human relationship to the natural world. Eco-criticism is also a response to needs, problems, or crises, depending on one's perception of urgency. (5)

Dean further explicates on the concerns of ecocriticism as a critical field. His definition also encompasses all the areas of human endeavor that has a connection with the natural environment. He highlighted the importance of ecocriticism to core issues that may arise in the complex relationship between the human and the nonhuman world. To him, ecocriticism can help resolve these contending issues. All the definitions are concerned with works of art that looks at the interconnectedness of the relationship between the human and the nonhuman world. There is a consensus among these critics that man and the other species on the planet depend on each other for their basic survival. As a result of this therefore, ecocriticism should orchestrate this intertwined and mutual relationship.

This essay will focus on the grotesque element in *The Year of the Flood*. Inevitably, however, references will constantly be made to *Oryx and Crake* as a companion book. Kayser, provided a connotative meaning of the word *grotesque*:

By the word *grotesco* the Renaissance, which used it to designate a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity, understood not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one – a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid (21).

In the first instance, the grotesque does not only mean something excitable and extremely good; but in the second instance, it can be categorized as fearful and dangerous. The fusion that gave birth to this relationship of unequals tended to create something that is totally new from what is the norm. In this context, Kayser suggests that in the grotesque scenario the inanimate is fused with the animate. Natural order is no longer applicable and thus, there is a new form of reality. According to Thomson, the grotesque can be seen,

... as a fundamentally ambivalent thing, as a violent clash of opposites, and hence, in some of its forms at least, as an appropriate expression of the problematic nature of existence. It is no accident that the grotesque mode in art and literature tends to be prevalent in societies and eras marked by strife, radical change or disorientation (11).

Thomson's view tends to underline the fact that the use of the grotesque in a literary work indicates an attempt by the literary artist to highlight the complexity in relationships between the human and the nonhuman world. In the context of these two definitions of the grotesque we can surmise that Atwood's novel *The Year of the Flood* and the other two Maddaddam books have presented new bioengineered life forms that are both excitable and good but at the same time fearful and dangerous. The *Crakers* can be categorized as quite an exciting phenomenon; on the other hand the *liobams* and the *wolvogs* are extremely dangerous especially after the 'waterless flood'. The *pigoons* for instance resembles human beings in their uncanny ability to behave like humans. They have human tissues in their brain. Thus, the existence of these new life forms in the novels lends credence to the new reality that Kayser highlights in the grotesque mode.

There are prominent writers who has used the grotesque mode in their works quite successfully. These writers used different genres in an attempt at highlighting the inherent complexity in relationships that subsist between the human and nonhuman entities on the planet. The writers of the *Theatre of the Absurd* – Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov, Harold Pinter, and others used this mode in their works. Generally, the literary works underscores the meaninglessness and futility of human existence when human communication breaks down. Within the plays there is a mixture of comedy, horror and tragic images. The concept of comedy and tragedy which is a key theme of the grotesque is therefore apparent in the absurd theatre. Samuel Beckett for instance, attracted world attention with his 1952 play: *Waiting for Godot*. This play did not use the normal conventions of drama. Earlier in 1950 Eugene Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* was performed. Both plays presented a situation whereby human beings are trapped in a world that is not only incomprehensible but disharmonious. The balance in relationships has been disrupted and what ensued is confusion and disjointedness. Charles Dickens, a major writer of the Victorian Age gave a picture of his times especially, the disharmony that was caused by the invention of the locomotive engine. The general advancement brought about by science in Dickens' England meant a disruption in the harmonious existence between man and nature. Some of his novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* highlighted the futility and harshness of human existence.

In a literary work such as Atwood's Maddaddam trilogy, which has as its main concern the relationship between the human and the nonhuman world; the grotesque can be seen when the balance between these two distinct yet mutually interconnected worlds is tipped dangerously. Thus, the concept of eco grotesque can be used in defining Atwood's vision of what our post human future would be. The concept would be sub divided into the following grotesque elements: *Disharmony, abnormality, and the comic and terrifying*. These elements would be used in analyzing relevant aspects of Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*.

3.1 Disharmony

The element of disharmony is very critical when using the concept of eco grotesque in an analysis of a literary text. "The most consistently distinguished characteristic of the grotesque has been the fundamental element of disharmony, whether this is referred to as conflict, clash, mixture of the heterogeneous, or conflation of disparates" (Thomson 20). In any work of art the disharmony should be discernible and must be felt not only by the reader, but it must move the writer to write. Discernible elements of disharmony in the relationship between nature and man can be felt when the balance and the stability of such relationship is tilted dangerously towards confrontation. This confrontation can be in the form of intrusion by technology in its attempt to introduce subtle yet, far reaching changes in the way the planet is co-habiting. Disharmony can also occur when scientists feel they can tinker with genes – both human and nonhuman – in order to play god by creating new life forms. These creations would become destabilizing factors in an already stable ecosystem. In *The Year of the Flood* there are many instances of this type of disharmony within the ecosystem when life forms such as the *liobams, wolvogs, pigoons, Mo'Hairs* and also the new 'human beings' *the crackers* were bioengineered by greedy and unethical scientists. The presence of these creatures caused some sort of havoc in the natural order of the planet.

3.2 Abnormality

The element of abnormality in the grotesque can refer to a condition of unnaturalness. When there are ambivalences such as "the experiences of amusement and disgust, laughter and horror, mirth and revulsion, simultaneously, is partly at least a reaction to the highly *abnormal*. For the abnormal may be funny ... and on the other hand it may be fearsome or disgusting" (Thomson

24). Writers in the eco grotesque mode tend to show the abnormalities in the relationships between the human and the nonhuman world. This is made possible when the boundary subsisting between the normal and the abnormal is breached. When this is done the balance that makes for a normal existence is affected and thus, the abnormal will set in and distort the natural law. “Grotesque figures can cause the dissolution of the borders separating the normal and abnormal, inside and outside, internal and external. One extreme flows into another. Territories will not be bounded as clear-cut divisions and dissolved” (Edwards and Graulund 9). In *The Year of the Flood* we see how the creation of new life forms through the splicing of genes had led to a dystopian world where nature had been reordered. Thus, this had led to abnormality within the biosphere.

3.3 The Comic and Terrifying

This concept is an important tool for writers who want to use the grotesque mode. They usually associate the grotesque with either the comic or the terrifying (Thomson 20). These two elements – comedy and terror – are used to draw the attention of readers by literary artists to the relationship of their chosen characters. In this mode of writing, the blend can be heightened when something so disgusting and repulsive is given an attribute that is quite incongruous to the reality presented. It could also start with a humorous scene and then it mutates into something horrible. All these could be created by literary artists in order to indicate a flaw in the interconnectedness between entities. The incongruity of disparate entities in *The Year of the Flood* is made apparent in the *crakers*. These creatures are a half way between full human entities and a monstrosity. Their physical make-up is human but their internal genetic configuration is quite terrifying. They have the disgusting attribute of eating faeces and their sexual behavior is disgusting and sub-human. Thus, they are not completely, naturally human.

4. The Eco Grotesque Mode in: *The Year of the Flood*

The relationship between nature and man in Atwood’s *Maddaddam* is quite obvious. In the first two novels of the trilogy readers have seen how science and technology occupies a privileged position at the detriment and exclusion of all other aspects of life. “Atwood critiques the privileging of the techno-scientific epistemology to the detriment of the humanistic one, and highlights the need for an integrated episteme in an immanent system” (Talpalaru 243). Talpalaru is of the opinion that what Atwood attempts to present in these novels stems from:

...forced separation and ensuing competition between different systems of organizing knowledge, with two different logics: techno-science and humanities. The former – the positivist, dichotomous, structural, chronological, and hierarchical – has risen to dominate humanity and, in Atwood’s imagination, also to condemn it to death, when it goes unchecked by the humanistic perspective (Talpalaru 244).

The above view underlines the fact that the excesses of science and technology which has gone unchecked is responsible for the creation of life forms that tended to totally change the whole idea of a natural setting. Thus, what used to be natural and conforming to natural order has become unnatural and in direct opposition to sustenance. In essence, the free reign that science and technology enjoys in Atwood’s dystopian world led to a situation whereby extremes were reached and the world was virtually condemned.

4.1 Disharmony in: *The Year of the Flood*

In *The Year of the Flood* readers would come in contact with a world that has become quite awry. The events discernible within the planet are not the normal everyday activities that people are used to seeing and participating in. The novel begins with a hymn from *The God’s Gardeners Oral Hymnbook*: “Who is it tends the Garden, /The Garden oh so green? /’Twas once the finest Garden/That ever has been seen. /And in it God’s dear creatures/Did swim and fly and

play; /But then came greedy Spoilers, /And killed them all away” (Year 1). The God’s Gardeners plays an important role in *The Year of the Flood*. They are a quasi-religious group who have decided to be anti-establishment in order to resist the excesses of techno-science. Their leader Adam One was once a scientist. The God’s Gardeners as a group symbolizes a set of people who craves for the old natural order. Although, within the novel we see them relating with Crake, (Glen) yet, they want to preserve the environment. The existence of The God’s Gardeners thus, indicates a struggle for harmony in a world full of disharmony. This disharmony is heightened by the presence of the deadly, roving and carnivorous newly bioengineered life forms:

Toby turns her binoculars skyward, at the crows racketing around. When she looks back, two liobams are crossing the meadow. A male, a female, strolling along as if they own the place. They stop at the boar, sniff briefly. Then they continue their walk. Toby stares at them, fascinated: she’s never seen a liobam in the flesh, only pictures. ... They don’t look dangerous, although they are. ... Still the liobams seem gentle enough, with their curly golden hair and twirling tails. They’re nibbling flower heads, they don’t look up; yet she has the sense that they’re perfectly aware of her. Then the male opens its mouth, displaying its long, sharp canines, and calls. It’s an odd combination of baa and roar: a bloat, thinks Toby. (Year 94).

Toby has survived the ‘waterless flood’ and she was holed up in the luxurious spa that she was working in before the *BlyssPluss* virus wiped out nearly the entire human population. The destructive effect of the virus from that pill which was created by Crake in *Oryx and Crake* was what is referred to as the ‘waterless flood’ in *The Year of the Flood*. Apart from the pill that carries the virus Crake and the other scientists bioengineered the life forms such as the liobam that are now laying siege to Toby. They have now become the hunter and man has become the hunted. The liobam was:

Designed as a splice between the lion and the lamb, the liobam resembles very little of the existing natural world outside the Maddaddam novels. This sense of abnormality is intimated through Toby’s reaction (‘Am I imagining things?’) as she encounters them (Bahrawi 260).

The presence of these bioengineered creatures whose behavioral patterns and brain tissues have been enhanced brought about a physical and psychological destabilization not only to the natural order, but also to surviving humans in this dystopian setting.

The pigeons are also bioengineered creatures that have the uncanny habit of human beings yet, they are pigs. When Toby killed one of them in order to protect her vegetable garden they came back for revenge. These intelligent pigs knew that destroying the garden would affect Toby much more than anything they could do in response to her killing of one of them:

She walks to the garden side of the roof, looks over. Sure enough, the bad visit has already occurred: the pigs have been back. They’ve dug under the fence, then gone on a rampage. Surely it was less like a feeding frenzy than a deliberate act of revenge. The earth is furrowed and trampled: anything they haven’t eaten they’ve bulldozed ... There are pigs, peering at her above the daisies. They have a festive air. Are they snorting in derision? Certainly there’s some grunting going on, and some juvenile squealing, as there used to be when the topless bars in the Sewage Lagoon closed at night. (Year 319-321).

These intelligent life forms knew that Toby would be powerless without any food and so it will be just a matter of time before they attack her and make her their prey. It is quite uncanny the way they are gloating over what they’ve done – just like human beings.

4.2 Abnormality in: *The Year of the Flood*

The sub-human ‘human beings’ the *crakers* are an abnormal addition to an already dystopian world within this novel. The creation of these post human entities had effectively reordered the way nature has been. By creating these new life forms Crake believes man’s innate

problems and the problems of the world would be solved. He believes in a new reality and so he had bioengineered the crakers without certain genetic functions such as racism, limited vocabulary, and a reordered sexual drive. The crakers are also wholly vegetarian. Emotional feelings such as hate and jealousy had been removed in their genetic make-up. The crakers by virtue of their genetic make-up could hardly blend successfully with their previous older cousins, the natural human beings such as ‘snowman’, Toby and Ren; part of the survivors of ‘the waterless flood’. These creatures’ limited vocabulary and childlike behaviors coupled with the general containment of their genes inevitably, caused them to relate with their kind only. “After a while we hear voices, but they aren’t singing, just talking. There’s the smell of smoke – a wood fire – and children laughing. It’s Glen’s made- on-purpose people. It has to be” (Year 408). It is out of place and abnormal for children to be laughing and I supposed playing within the background of their parents talking calmly in the chaotic scenario of this dystopian setting. In the midst of this palpable confusion the crakers are immune to everything because they are actually, ‘new’ like new-born babies into this eerie world.

When they spot us – first one of the children, then a woman, then all of them – they stop whatever they’re doing and turn to stare at us, all together. They don’t look frightened or threatening: they look interested but placid. It’s like being stared at by the Mo’Hairs, and they’re chewing like the Mo’Hairs as well. Whatever they’re eating is green: a couple of the kids are amazed enough by us that they keep their mouths open. (Year 409).

It is quite horrific and laughable at the same time encountering these entities. They seem to have come out straight from a horror clip. Their habit of chewing grass and other vegetation like the Mo’Hair (sheep) in a placid manner evokes a feeling of revulsion. Their palpable innocence in the midst of the surrounding confusion highlights the inhuman quality of the crakers. This post-apocalyptic society looks quite abnormal to human beings such as snowman and the reader of this novel. The basic standards for living are clearly absent. Thus, according to Roddis, “the ‘new society’ belongs to the Crakers, and humans like Snowman struggle to survive...For the Crakers, the post-apocalyptic world is a utopia, but for Snowman it is the opposite” (Roddis 22). In essence therefore, the odd behavioral patterns of the *crakers* is in line with not only their genes – but also the new envisaged reality of their maker – Crake.

4.3 The Comic and Terrifying in: *The Year of the Flood*

The Crakers have “different colours – black, brown, yellow, and white – but not one of them is old. And not one of them has any clothes on.”(Year 408). It will be terrifying for anyone to come upon a group of adult men and women with skin color ranging from yellow, black, brown and white completely nude and behaving as if they do not have a care in the world. Remember that these entities are within an environment that has been devastated. Their odd sexual habits is both funny and fearful: Their group sex mentality smacks of a rape scene. The act of sniffing is also animalistic and horrifying for any natural female. When Amanda encountered them earlier she had to deal with two types of fear – that from her captors and now from these post human entities with their odd sexual drive. Ren who smells ‘blue’ – meaning she is in season – (like a bitch) excites the sex hormones in these post human entities. Ingersoll, points out that these creatures – the *crakers* – like Crake their maker “are essentially without desire, because eros, even more than intelligence, makes for human discontent” (168). The sexual behavior of these entities is therefore culled from that of animals who engage in the act not because of any emotional feeling or attachment but rather a “mere sexual reflex. The Children of Crake represent a restoration of the sexuality once shared with other mammals” (Ingersoll 168). The childlike naivety of the Crakers is also a terrifying aspect of these

bioengineered post humans. Toby instructed them on how to behave just like you would little children:

If Snowman told you to stay here, you must stay here,” says Toby. They look at one another: something’s worrying them. “We will stay here,” says the tall man. “But you must come back soon.” “And bring Snowman,” says one of the women. “So we can help him. Then he can live in his tree again.” (Year 411).

Their knowledge of both the complexities and the dangers that are inherent in the world they are inhabiting is as yet not apparent to their naïve genetic physiology. This naivety in the *crakers*’ genetic make-up was deliberately bioengineered in them by Crake so that the complexities of intelligence would not create disruption in this otherwise ‘utopian’ post-apocalyptic world.

5. Conclusion

The Year of the Flood is a speculative novel that gives the reader a chilling glimpse into a future that is by all accounts virtually upon the human race. This is clearly so when we take into consideration the events within the last half of the twentieth century and the second decade of the twenty-first century. Atwood has clearly shown in the Maddaddam trilogy that the privileging of techno-science over the humanities has grave consequences for mankind. She had also highlighted the excessive greed of large multinational corporations such that they have inevitably taken over governments and its institutions thereby becoming the new de-factor government. In the pursuit of profit these corporations are willing and able to finance huge scientific researches into different aspects of life. The quest for a post human life is thus, being pursued in earnest. Another critical view within the novels is the clear separation between science and technology on the one hand and the arts and humanities on the other. Science and technology is given a special niche in the new scheme of things. The humanities on the other hand is openly relegated and snubbed. Readers would therefore encounter in these novels a situation in which excessive funding into scientific research is approved. On the other hand humanities have little or virtually, no funding at all. This demarcation has translated into a division between the *numbers* people and the *words* people among students in the novels. Crake (Glen) is good with numbers and so he ended up attending the Watson Crick Institute – an elitist school where future scientific researchers were trained. Jimmy (Snowman) is a word person and so he ended up attending the Martha Graham Institute – a school for the humanities. In later life we see both Crake and Jimmy ending up where their careers inevitably leads them. Crake became a top scientist at the HelthWyzer facility. Jimmy was floating until Crake offers him a job as an artist for his *BlyssPluss* pill. In this dystopian world we see how the society was separated between the gated *Compounds* – secure, clean, and developed and the *Pleeblands* – insecure, unhealthy, and a slum; this separation also indicates the privileged position that science occupies in this society.

In the quest for longevity or a post human existence we see how scientist in this novel and the other two books of the trilogy spliced genes in order to bioengineer new life forms. These new life forms in some instances are bioengineered for their organs which could be harvested at the appropriate time for people who need them. The *Pigoon* for example, is a gene splice between pig and human. This procedure is done so that extra kidneys can be grown within the genetically modified pig. The *Liobam* is a gene splice between a lion and a lamb. The bioengineered creature that emerged looks innocent but deadly. It will be used by the security outfit *CorpSeCorps* in order to control the world. It is also noteworthy that scientists in this trilogy go into the science of gene splicing not just for necessity, but for the pleasure of it. They bioengineer life forms just because they can and have adequate funding to do so. The creation of

the new post humans – *the crackers* – by Crake (Glen) is his idea of ridding the world of all its problems after he had released the deadly virus in the pill *BlyssPluss* which wiped away almost every human being during the ‘waterless Flood’.

The events that were narrated in the Maddaddam trilogy of which *The Year of the Flood* is a part is an apt testimony to the current events within our society today. There is a clear privileging of science and technology in the area of priority and funding over the humanities in both universities and governments across the world. The scenario in the novels are thus, being gradually played out.

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