ARTICLES

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RETELLING APOCALYPSE IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE* AND *THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD*

ABSTRACT: In this article, I analyse how Margaret *Atwood's Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) retell apocalypse in a revisionary and ironic way. Taking into account Marlene Goldman's observations about the apocalyptic theme in Canadian literature and James Berger's considerations on the representations of apocalypse, I read both novels as counterparts. In such a reading, *Oryx and Crake* is the tale of the reluctant elect and *The Year of the Flood* is the story of the non-elects.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) are dystopias that deal with the theme of apocalypse. In both novels, humanity comes to an end and few survivors are left to carry on human culture. The idea of apocalypse as the end of an order and the beginning of a new one is treated in an ironic and revisionary way in Atwood's novels. The texts appropriate notions of biblical apocalypse and play with the theme, presenting the so-called reluctant elects, those chosen by God, and depicting the violence directed at and perpetrated by the non-elects. This perspective counters the traditional biblical apocalypse in which the elects are often the focus. Although both novels subvert apocalyptic logic, each does so in different ways. Ultimately, they are retellings of apocalyptic narratives. They portray the arrival of a new order while the remains of the old are obliterated or appropriated by survivors who attribute meaning to this apocalyptic situation.

Oryx and Crake and *The Year of the Flood* are the first two volumes of the *MaddAddam* trilogy. In Atwood's dystopian scenario, a technology-driven society that devalues any form of art and critical thinking is the context that makes possible the creation of a deadly virus that destroys humanity. In Oryx and Crake, Snowman is the protagonist and last man, who tells the story before the catastrophe, when he was still Jimmy, a young man obsessed by literature and sex. However, Snowman's narrative is more about Oryx and Crake—Jimmy's lover and best friend, respectively—than his own life. Through his tale he attempts to understand the reasons for catastrophe and his own blindness regarding it.

The Year of the Flood is not a sequel to Oryx and Crake, but a simultaneous narrative that happens during the same timeline as the previous novel, focusing on different points of view. The protagonists are two women—Toby and Ren—who also attempt to survive in the post-catastrophe world as they remember their former lives as outcasts of a society without any scientific ethics. *The Year of the Flood* has been defined in relation to *Oryx and Crake* as "less satirical in tone, less of an intellectual exercise, less scathing though more painful. It is seen very largely through the eyes of women, powerless women" (Le Guin). Elsewhere (Sá), I have analysed how the novels work as counterparts on many levels—focusing on the matter of storytelling—but in this article I aim to discuss how they retell apocalypse in different ways. Atwood has released her third volume to the trilogy, *MaddAddam* (2013), but it is not part of my analysis here.

Marlene Goldman defines the narrative of apocalypse as "a story whose key vision portrays the 'old world' being replaced by the new" (3). She adds that Canadian narratives of the apocalypse present an "ironic tension" since they never convey a complete sense of a substitution of one order for the other. In her view, Canadian authors often explore the leftovers of apocalypse: the people who remain from the old order and cannot fully adapt to the new. According to her, this revision of apocalypse is done through often fragmentary and ironic texts. Goldman's stress on the fragmentary and ironic revision of apocalypse in Canadian literature is not an assertion that all Canadian texts are rewritings of the traditional biblical view. She mentions authors who do endorse apocalyptic logic (7), but her claim is that Canadian authors' appropriation of apocalypse has been more subversive than American authors'. She argues that this is due to the inherited mindset of the early pilgrims to the United States, who held the notion that the new land was actually a new heaven. She claims that in Canada this view could never fully take place.

Goldman shows that Canadian texts with ex-centric and fragmentary perspectives recurrently question the apocalyptic logic, although not all of them are dystopian narratives. Indeed, apocalyptic fiction does not mean dystopian or science fiction literature. For her and for critics such as James Berger, the apocalypse is an event that can divide the world into a before and an after. In his *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*, Berger presents three possible attributions to the word apocalypse: 1) "the actual image of the end" (5); 2) catastrophes that resemble the end, including traumatic events that cause a sense of rupture, of a before and after, such as the Holocaust; and finally 3) the revelation that "in its destructive moment clarif[ies] and illuminate[s] the true nature of what has been brought to an end" (6). In my reading of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* as counterparts, these three senses of apocalypse are present, as I shall discuss further in this article.

ORYX AND CRAKE: THE TALE OF THE RELUCTANT ELECT

In Oryx and Crake, apocalypse strikes when humans reach near-extinction because of the lethal virus in the BlissPlus pills created by Crake. As Oryx says when the plague starts spreading, "It was in those pills I was giving away, the ones I was selling. It's all the same cities, I went there" (380). Snowman is apocalypse's reluctant elect. He is given immunity to the disease without knowing it and is suddenly responsible for the humanoid creatures, the genetically engineered Crakers, without wanting to do so. He acts out Crake's wishes, but he accepts his role of survivor reluctantly. Crake assigned to Snowman the role he would later on perform: "Then, one lunchtime, [Crake] said, 'If anything happens to me, I'm depending on you to look after the Paradice Project. Any time I'm away from here I want you to take charge. I've made it a standing order'" (375-76). Later, in the same conversation, Jimmy contests this leading role in case of emergency: "but one, your security's the best, and two, there's people in here much better equipped than I am" (376). At first Jimmy thinks Crake means to replace him in case of a kidnapping event, a common act in the corporate world of the novel, but later on as Snowman, he is able to connect the facts and see that Crake had arranged it all, including his supposed death or "assisted suicide" (404), as initially referred to in the letter he writes after his apocalyptic experience.

In Crake's plan, the Crakers are the inhabitants of the new heavenly world, the elects: those chosen to survive the apocalypse. The destruction of humanity is just a side effect in his plan for expurgating evil from the world and trying to transform it into a better place. As Crake explains, the new world would have "no more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape" (194). His vision is not only to eradicate problems concerning sex, but also those related to food, since the Crakers do not need to hunt or cook because they are caecotrophs, meaning they can digest unrefined plants by eating their own excrement. For Crake, solving the problem of power (regarding sex and leadership, which would be eradicated), dealing properly with the environment (no problems getting food in the caecotrophs' diet), as well as erasing the possibility of symbolic thinking (no art and no religion) are keys to a better society, and he makes these characteristics genetically inherent to the Crakers.

Crake's vision of a better society can be linked to the Western tradition of apocalyptic narrative, which derives mainly from the Bible with the visions of St John the Divine. It is no wonder that Crake's project is called "Paradice." The pun ("Paradice" instead of paradise) signals an Atwoodian marker (Dvorak 114), and highlights the fact that Crake's paradise is different; it is man-made. One might read the change of letter, which forms the word "dice," as a hint of Crake's playing dice with human lives and to a certain extent playing God. The non-elect (humanity in general) are to be destroyed so that the elects (the Crakers) can live in their paradise. In the biblical narrative, similarly to Crake's plan, the non-elect are unimportant, punished with extreme violence and left to die so that a new heaven can take place.

The presence of a reluctant elect, Snowman, troubles the traditional apocalyptic logic in the novel. Katherine Snyder points out that Jimmy, Snowman's persona, has followed Crake's script and that only in the end of the narrative is he able to "revise the script ... even while he unavoidably plays out his assigned part" (481). In his role of reluctant elect, Snowman can retell the apocalypse. The novel could be read as Snowman's attempt to find and attribute meaning to his apocalyptic experience. When he narrates his past or creates a cosmology for the Crakers, he is rewriting apocalypse in an attempt to subvert the role Crake had earlier assigned to him as a mere caretaker of the Crakers.

Crake wants to have someone to take the Crakers to a new environment, ensure they are able to survive in it and then disappear. When Jimmy asks Crake why he does not entrust the position of second-in-command to another Paradice Project specialist regarding the Crakers, Crake says, "You have a great ability to sit around not doing much of anything. Just like them" (*Oryx and Crake* 376). Crake does not expect Jimmy to do much, let alone survive. The assumption Crake makes about Snowman's death is implicit in the text, since the genius Crake seems to believe that his best friend does not possess the knowledge nor the skills required for survival in the long run, and the beginning of *Oryx and Crake* asserts this: Snowman is starving to death. But even though Snowman's role in the apocalypse is designed by Crake, he is the one who tells the events after all; he is the one in charge of choosing a perspective from which their version of the story is told. The narrative then presents the perspective of the reluctant elect, and not of the elects themselves, as in the biblical apocalypse.

In this rewriting of apocalypse, Atwood exposes the cruelty in the logic of the apocalypse, which, as in the Bible, follows the notion that human history has a clear beginning and ending. In the beginning there was Creation, followed by the Fall of Man, a worldwide catastrophe that leads to the Resurrection of Christ, who will choose the ones to be saved, and culminates in the End, apocalypse itself, with the replacement of the current world order by a heavenly paradise for God's chosen people (Goldman 21). Within this logic, violence takes place to be forgotten later on. Forgetting is, after all, required for the new world order to take place. For the idea of a new heaven to be beheld, and for a new era of peace and justice to be successful, the previous experience of extreme violence needs to fade away from the memory of the elects.

In contrast, in Oryx and Crake, the eradication of all humans is treated as a major catastrophe and not as a necessary measure. Through the eyes of Snowman, the reader is shown the destructive aspect of apocalypse and the violence regarding the non-elect. When Jimmy first sees signs of the plague, he calls it "the Red Death" (381) and later on he stands as the only witness to the global pandemic. Snowman later states that Jimmy was not in shock from the things he was seeing live on TV about the plague, and he goes on to say that, "The worst part of it was those people out there—the fear, the suffering, the wholesale death—

did not really touch him" (400). Jimmy's experience of accompanying the pandemic on TV is described like being in a movie, and Snowman/Jimmy's perception of things as fiction is intensified when the apocalyptic event per se—the plague—strikes. When he kills Crake, the scene is experienced and described "in slow motion" (383), and his final confrontation with his friend is depicted by him as "melodrama so overdone that he and Crake would have laughed their heads off at it" (382).

The epitome of Snowman/Jimmy's narrative impulse is when he finally writes a letter considering all that has happened and the reasons for the apocalypse (404), which tellingly stops when he is about to elaborate on Crake's reasons, a sign that maybe Snowman can see his own involvement in the catastrophe and avoids dealing with it. Even though Snowman claims that Jimmy did not care for what was happening, his incarnation as Snowman proves the contrary: his guilt haunts him and is a constant reminder of the fate of humankind. Because of Snowman's presence as a reluctant elect, the violence directed at the non-elect is not forgotten, thus subverting the traditional apocalyptic logic that demands the erasure of this violence so heaven can properly take place.

Furthermore, Atwood complicates Snowman's position when she has him perpetrate violence against non-elects. When taking the Crakers out of the Paradice headquarters to a new environment by the beach, he sees a man and a woman in the late stages of the disease, which is evident because "the sweat of blood was on his forehead" (410), and he shoots them when they try to come closer. Moreover, when the Crakers point out that these people are actually similar to Snowman by saying, "it has extra skins, like you" (411), he replies: "It's nothing. It's a piece of a bad dream that Crake is dreaming" (411). He attributes the current situation to Crake, and his guilt and mourning are directed at his dead friend, who is now a deity in the cosmology Snowman himself created for the humanoid creatures, making him thus responsible for creating an apocalyptic myth. Snowman's ambiguous position—being a reluctant elect who at the same time rejects and perpetrates the violence against non-elects—is one of the elements that contribute to the revisionary quality of Atwood's rewriting of the apocalyptic narrative in this novel.

Snowman, in Oryx and Crake, is the one who narrates the apocalyptic events and tells what the world was like before and after Crake's genocide. However, his vision is not that of an elect living happily in the peaceful world promised, but of a disruptive presence. He did not fit into society before, but he does not fit the Crakers' way of living either. He is a kind of ghost who, according to James Berger, is "the ultimate survivor, for it has actually died and continues to exist," returning to tell a story (50). Jimmy does not in fact die in the novel, but one may account for his symbolic death as Jimmy who then adopts a new name, Snowman, which relates both to his status as a last man and to his situation as an aberration. Ildney Cavalcanti points to the significance of the name Snowman. According to Cavalcanti, it is a metaphor for his current situation, since the well-known "abominable Snowman," the yeti,

has its feet pointing backwards ("Restos de Natureza" 76), which draws a parallel to Snowman's fate of looking constantly back to his past. He is the last of his kind (or so he believes) and he is too different from the Crakers to live among them. Like the legendary yeti, he is isolated.

Snyder comments on this relation between Snowman and his past: "Snowman is haunted by memories of the past, or rather, he is himself a kind of ghost, a specter of the past who haunts an unimaginable present yet is denied the consolation of a future" (473). His presence in the novel is certainly haunting as he continually lingers on, mourning over his personal losses: "Had Oryx loved him, had she loved him not, did Crake know about them...? ... And so on and so forth, spinning the emotional wheels and sucking down the hooch until he could blank himself out" (*Oryx and Crake* 400-01). Even when Snowman comes back from his trip to the Paradice headquarters, when he confronts the skeletons of *Oryx and Crake* and acknowledges his responsibility in the genocide, he is still marked by his loss. When Snowman enters the place in which both the plague and the Crakers started, he reflects, "Darker than the dark, and some of that darkness is Snowman's. He helped with it" (389). The realisation of what happened does not bring him relief but rather a sense of failure, being the sole survivor of the apocalypse. His use of words and stories as saving graces mark in language the way he deals with apocalypse. He tries to save words, collect them, but still words themselves are a constant reminder that the old order is doomed since their referents no longer exist in the material world. The Crakers are not able to understand what the remains of the old world order are: for instance, what buildings or books are for.

In Oryx and Crake, there is no allegory for divine vision. The presence of intertexts is observed mainly through Snowman's "burning scrapbook in his head" (12), which is marked by the voices of his father, teachers, mother and lovers, as well as by literary references to novels such as *Frankenstein* and *Robinson Crusoe*, and colonisation manuals and castaway reports. These intertexts emphasise the fragmented nature of the apocalyptic experience. Goldman says, "[Canadian rewritings of apocalypse] invoke these tropes to highlight the fragmentation generated by the apocalyptic storms that continually threaten to destroy all traces of human history" (20). For Goldman, this fragmentary quality is necessary for the ironic tone of the text to be grasped, since it exposes the logic of apocalypse as artificial and not as a natural course for humankind. The punishment of the non-elect is shown as cruelty and the settling of a new order of things is made ambivalent.[i]

Oryx and Crake is certainly a narrative pervaded by nostalgia that divides the world into a before and an after. In the beginning of the novel, Snowman is at the beach helping the Crakers amongst the remains of his world. The previous world order is encompassed within the items he finds there: technology (the computer mouse and the hubcap), unethical genetic engineering (ChickieNobs), recklessness towards the environment (the pop bottle), a broken piece of art (the piano key), and the embodiment of human greed and selfishness and

the cause of humanity's destruction: the BlissPlus. Snowman asks himself if he is feeling nostalgic when watching the Craker kids play at the water, but he dismisses it. What he is unable to see is that his nostalgia is related to the wreck he sees in the seashore, that is, the remains of humanity.

Berger says that this nostalgic attitude towards the remains is more complex than it appears, and adds that in "many science fiction post-apocalypses, what survives is some version of humanity in the midst of the inhuman. Humanity in its essence—such is their claim—is what apocalypse unveils" (10). For Berger, nostalgia is not a reactionary position, but rather a mechanism for transmission of culture that brings the past into the present. When Snowman looks at the remains of humanity, his attitude is not simply one of stating that the world before was necessarily a better place; on the contrary, he feels tormented by the past. He acknowledges his failure and his useless previous life, but he is still compelled to revisit that past—his personal past, especially—viewing in it a way to understand what is human in himself.

Snowman is not only a storyteller, but also a collector, first of words, and later of memories of humanity. The three senses of apocalypse, according to Berger, are presented for him: 1) the image of the end (when he sees people dying live on TV); 2) the division of the world before and after (his nostalgia); and 3) a final revelation (the unveiling of himself and his own role in the plot that brought humanity to extinction).

THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD: CHALLENGING THE NOTION OF ELECT

In *The Year of the Flood*, the rewriting of apocalypse is rather different. Notions of elect and non-elect are made more ambivalent since there are two ways to read apocalypse in the novel. The first relates to the supposed Waterless Flood, the belief of the God's Gardeners in a happening that will strike humanity and start a new beginning: "For the Waterless Flood is coming, in which all buying and selling will cease, and we will find ourselves thrown back upon our own resources, in the midst of God's bounteous Garden. Which was your Garden also" (126). The second is the actual reason apocalypse happened: Crake, the scientist who designed the BlissPlus pill that killed almost all humans. In the novel, these two visions of apocalypse collide, creating a more complex questioning of apocalyptic logic. In *The Year of the Flood*, it is not mentioned if the God's Gardeners were involved in Crake's plan.

The God's Gardeners' religion is apocalyptic, even though they subvert the most traditional views of apocalypse. In a Christian framework, they believe in the advent of the Waterless Flood, an event that will hit the planet and leave only a few survivors. Unlike the traditional Christian view of Jesus Christ judging and selecting people to live, the God's Gardeners preach that survival is a matter of having the right knowledge. The Gardeners *cherish* knowledge, although they do not brag about it or claim that they are the only ones

who have it. In their credo, they do not mention that they are the ones chosen by God; on the contrary, they see themselves as people who have paid attention to the coming disaster, comparing themselves to doctors, not prophets. They do not claim to have received a call from God. In fact, for them, the call was made to humanity, but they were the ones who listened to it and were able to see the signs of disaster on Earth through analysis.

Anyone can survive, provided they have the knowledge to do so. The members of the cult, through Adam One's speeches, are instructed to prepare Ararats, storage of food supplies, and to learn how to hunt and recognise hostile species. Ararat is the biblical place where Noah's ark landed. The God's Gardeners are open to accepting new members and they even help people who do not share their religious beliefs. Their knowledge for survival is not considered exclusive to their group and their way of passing it on through storytelling is never considered the only possible way to survive. Of course, one may argue that by the end of the novel the group of survivors consists mainly of Gardeners, but there are others as well. The God's Gardeners' appropriation of Christianity and its assimilation with science erases the belief of a god choosing people, one of the basic elements of apocalyptic logic. Survival relies on knowledge of how to do so, not on an arbitrary decision made by a deity.

Thus, God's Gardeners criticise the arbitrariness of some religions regarding apocalyptic views. Moreover, the group combines different kinds of eschatology, a branch of theology concerned with the end of the world or of humankind. As Goldman puts it, eschatology consists of the teachings of the "last things" (14), and is either prophetic or apocalyptic. The prophetic kind of eschatology includes the notion of a new world being built in the "here and now" (15), that is, real politics and plans to follow in order to transform the world into a better place. The Gardeners recycle and reuse products, forbidding any kind of material derived from animals. Conversely, in the apocalyptic kind of eschatology, the logic is that redemption cannot happen in this world, because divine intervention will destroy it and a new order will start. The Gardeners combine prophetic eschatology's view of making the world a better place with the apocalyptic eschatological vision embodied in the concept of the Waterless Flood. Toby is vocal about this apparent contradiction when she, fresh among the Gardeners, thinks about their strict rules: "why be so picky about lifestyle details if you believed everyone would soon be wiped off the face of the planet?" (*The Year of the Flood* 47). By presenting contradictory views on apocalypse and questioning their logic, Atwood, in *The Year of the Flood*, exposes and subverts the apocalyptic logic as found in the Bible. Both eschatologies coexist for the Gardeners without one annulling the other.

Goldman states, "Canadian writers are particularly drawn to intertextuality and frequently parody canonical narratives" (19), and I analyse in my thesis how Adam One's speeches can be read as a parody of Christian sermons. However, this mixture of prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology can also be read as a kind of parody. The God's Gardeners are taking actions to make the world a better place (recycling materials, reusing objects, not

killing animal life and so on) but they simultaneously believe that these efforts will lead to nothing because the world will end with the Waterless Flood. Critics such as Fredric Jameson have pointed out how *The Year of the Flood* is a novel about religion ("Then You Are Them") and how religions are constructed through discourse. The interesting aspect of this novel is that Atwood apparently erases the binary opposition of apocalyptic logic in her portrayal of the God's Gardeners and their actions. In their unusual view of the world—science in a Christian framework—and their disregard for the categories of the elect and the non-elect, there is no call from God. Moreover, their focus on action co-existing with their faith in "the End" questions the central opposition between prophetic and apocalyptic eschatology that lies in the heart of apocalyptic logic.

Considering that apocalypse is the result of Crake's plan—Crake chose the elect, the Crakers, and the non-elect, the humans—the novel can also be read as a view of apocalypse from the perspective of the non-elect. Ren and Toby (and later on, Amanda, Shackie, Croze and Oates) are incidental survivors, people who were not supposed to have lived according to Crake's intention of substituting humanity for the Crakers. They are the non-elects who suffer the violence of the destruction of the old order in favour of a new one.

Ren describes the post-apocalyptic world around her: "There were bundles of rag and bone. 'Ex-people,' said Croze. They were dried out and picked over, but I didn't like the eyeholes. And the teeth—mouths look a lot worse without lips" (*The Year of the Flood* 339). The corpses of the victims are scattered throughout the remains of the old cities. Ren escaped by chance, because she was locked up in the strip club where she used to work. The new environment is hostile to human life not only because of the terrible weather conditions but also because of the now wild genetically engineered animals that run freely. As the narrative goes on, other human survivors also come to be a threat. Nevertheless, because of the instruction received from the God's Gardeners, Ren and Toby do have the knowledge to survive, even though they suffer the destruction of the world they know and have to face a new reality. They are able to keep track of the days and, as Adam One instructed, they ration their food supplies and know how to hunt when necessary.

Berger claims that "the survivor's knowledge is often knowledge of a radical transgression of moral boundaries" (48). He gives the example of the victims of war crimes and of the Holocaust. He considers the figure of the survivor as post-apocalyptic per se. In *The Year of the Flood*, Toby, Ren and Amanda obtain this kind of post-apocalyptic knowledge. The three of them have experienced violence and abuse, but certainly during the Waterless Flood their suffering becomes more intense as they face human cruelty in a manner they have never felt before. If formerly their abuses were influenced by greed, fear or money, now they are victims of senseless evil. When their persecutors kidnap them, they do not steal or try to extract from them the knowledge to survive, but rather kill and rape for violence's sake. Besides bearing witness to genocide, these three women characters face difficult situations:

Toby euthanises her former rapist and Amanda is kidnapped, tortured and gang-raped by another group of survivors. Finally, when Amanda, who is traumatised, is rescued by Ren and Toby, she asks, "What is the point?" Toby replies: "This is not the time ... for dwelling on ultimate purposes" (430). But the question pervades the entire novel. Why is such evil being committed? What is the point of surviving? In the name of what, since the previous world order is gone? It is not the focus of this work to analyse the matter of evil, but this questioning helps us to think about apocalypse through the eyes of the non-elect and to examine the consequences of extreme violence perpetrated simply because they are non-elects. They first survive the plague and later on have to survive the chaotic remains of the old world.

Unlike traditional approaches to apocalypse, the novel presents the perspective of the "traumatized victims" (Goldman 18). These perspectives are very ambivalent, as it is most traumatic testimony. There is no nostalgia in Ren's and Toby's narratives. Unlike Snowman, they do not have a complex relationship with their past as moments to treasure, even though in Snowman's narrative these moments are compellingly ambivalent. Ren and Toby—and the same can be said of Amanda—have been survivors long before the advent of the Waterless Flood. Their experiences with poverty and abuse have already shaped them as people surviving an unfair system. These characters' storytelling abilities are linked to a more practical use, the one that makes survival—bare survival—possible. Contrary to being collectors of words, hanging onto them in order to preserve an old order, they use the knowledge conveyed by such stories in very practical ways.

Toby has the necessary tools to survive because she listened to Adam One's speeches carefully. She uses her pink notes to keep track of time and not lose her mind. She is aware of the environment around her and she is able to perceive when the genetically engineered pigs start attacking her. Toby is always prepared both mentally and physically for the changes in the post-apocalyptic world because of Adam One's preaching.

Ren, in turn, learns at a young age how stories can affect people's lives. The first episode occurs when she and Amanda invent a story about Bernice's family that is not true and she feels incredibly depressed about the terrible consequences of their lie, which include a killing. She later regrets: "I hadn't meant any harm, or not that kind of harm. But now look what had happened" (152). Moreover, when Ren's own mother comes up with a story to justify her inconsequent actions, the girl feels how it is to be the victim of a story: "I had no way of proving her wrong" (213). The way her mother's storytelling affects Ren teaches the girl how one could manipulate others using words. She later sees that she herself could do the same if she wanted to gain the acceptance from the other kids at the Compounds: "I saw the temptation. I saw it clearly" (217). She even uses the power of words to get some kind of vengeance on Jimmy: "Your enemies could use your writing against you, I thought, but also you could use it against them" (226). In the post-apocalyptic scenario, she uses some knowledge from Adam One's stories to endure her lonely isolation at the airlock, thus being

able to survive: "Adam One used to say, If you can't stop the waves, go sailing. ... Which meant that even bad things did some good because they were a challenge and you didn't always know what good effects they might have" (279). With this knowledge, she is able to deal with her present situation.

Moreover, she manipulates her own story in order to be welcomed among other survivors, the *MaddAddam* group. Romantically involved with Croze, she does not mention her past as a prostitute to him: "But then I'd have to tell all about what I used to do at Scales—not just the trapeze dancing ... but the other things, the feather-ceiling room things. Croze wouldn't want to hear about that" (395-96). In my counterpart reading of the novels, I say that Snowman/Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake* is a collector of words, a keeper of human culture, while Toby and Ren in *The Year of the Flood* are actual recipients of stories. They learn through them and incorporate them into their lives, changing them at times, as in traditional oral cultures.

I agree with Susan Watkins when she says that many contemporary apocalyptic fictions written by women avoid the tragic narrative of blame and suggest "the importance of plural, hybrid narratives and spaces that reproduce or rewrite the contortions or conundrums of the apocalyptic future(s) that face us" (134). Watkins uses Greg Garrard's concept of tragic and comic apocalypse, which is defined by the level of the individual's acceptance of the apocalyptic event (128). *Oryx and Crake* preserves to some extent the narrative of guilt and tragedy, even though it ironically rewrites apocalypse with the presence of a reluctant elect, whereas *The Year of the Flood* represents the survival of women, reversing the logic of the last man narrative presented in Oryx and Crake. When the novels are put together, it is possible to read the 2009 text as a rewriting of the tragic apocalypse presented in the previous novel, in this case, an even more complex rewriting of apocalypse.

According to Watkins, tragic apocalypse—considering tragic and comic in Aristotelian terms—occurs when, in an apocalyptic tale, the individual is unable to influence the outcome. This is the situation with Snowman; he may be able to reevaluate his life and deal with his guilt, but he cannot or may not change the situation around him. He is the last survivor and is dying, giving *Oryx and Crake* a tragic tone. In *The Year of the Flood*, a comic frame of apocalypse takes place, according to Watkins. Human intervention is possible; the survivors may be able to rebuild society once more as the narrative does leave room for this kind of interpretation. Watkins states that Atwood "associates the tragic apocalyptic narrative with masculinity in *Oryx and Crake* and the comic with femininity in *The Year of the Flood*" (128). The women survivors face the post-apocalyptic situation and revert it in their favour; survival in *The Year of the Flood* implies shaping a new reality, not simply denying it.

Another difference between *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* is the racialised and gendered aspect of apocalypse observed in the latter novel. Goldman points to how

extremely violent the actions towards women portrayed in the biblical Revelations are and discusses how the "silence that surrounds apocalyptic violence also raises an important question: is it a coincidence that people remain ignorant of the gendered and racialized violence at the heart of apocalypse?" (26). For her, the answer lies in the fact that apocalyptic violence needs to be forgotten so a new heaven can be founded. The Babylon Whore is tortured, brutally murdered, and her flesh is eaten, according to St John the Divine, but it is necessary to erase the memory of the elects doing so once the new heaven is installed. Therefore, Revelations is a paradoxical kind of text, a palimpsest even. In the rewritings of apocalypse from ex-centric points of view, this gendered violence is foregrounded and exposed.

In Atwood's novel, Amanda suffers tremendous abuse in the hands of another group of survivors, as does Ren, even though she claims it "was worse for Amanda than for me" (*The Year of the Flood* 242). Women seem to be a target of apocalyptic violence. The same seems to happen in Oryx and Crake, when Crake murders Oryx in the first apocalyptic scene Jimmy witnesses. In *The Year of the Flood*, Shackie, Croze and Oates go to Scales after the end of the world, claiming the place "had a reputation" (335), and, initially, they feel entitled to watch and stalk the two reminiscent girls dancing there. Not only does women's situation after the apocalypse mirror the gendered inequality of the world before, it also amplifies its scope.

The novels present two different approaches to apocalypse in which the women in the latter novel refuse the tragic frame of apocalypse and decide to take action and protect each other. *The Year of the Flood* presents this oppositional view because the God's Gardeners erase the difference between elect and non-elects. Also, the non-elects guide the narrative, depicting the apocalyptic violence they suffer. With these two novels, Atwood subverts and rewrites apocalyptic logic, exposing the cruel logic of traditional views on apocalypse.

NOTES:

[i] Oryx and Crake, like most of Atwood's novels, can be read as a parodic text. I acknowledge this characteristic, even though I do not tackle it in this article. In my master's thesis, however, I discuss this aspect extensively.

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