

Nightmarish Natures: Ecocritical Approaches to Apocalyptic Thinking in the 20th Century

An honors thesis for the Department of English
Savannah Christiansen

Tufts University, 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Professor Modhumita Roy for her guidance and patience throughout this writing process. I am very thankful for the advice and edits I received from Luke Mueller and Jessica Pfeffer. Thank you to Professor John Lurz for your generosity and conversation. I would also like to acknowledge those professors whose classes influenced my intellectual development in this field: Professor Lisa Lowe, Professor Elizabeth Ammons, Professor Andrea Haslanger and Professor Geoffrey Gardner.

A special thank you to those who always encouraged me to keep writing in order to reconcile my passions for both literature and the environment: Linda McLaughlin, Shane Karshan, Tim Larkin, and Jim Burke. Your instruction has helped shape this piece more than you know.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
1—Ivory: Ecocriticism and <i>Heart of Darkness</i>	17
2— Apocalypse: The 1970s Environmental Imagination and <i>Soylent Green</i>	48
3— Bioimperialism: Gender, Difference and <i>Oryx and Crake</i>	61
Afterword.....	90
Bibliography/References.....	92

Introduction

“How adaptable will the humanities prove in a less specialist environment? In particular, what kinds of connective corridors toward other disciplines can scholars creatively navigate in an intellectual milieu where habitat fracture is becoming increasingly pervasive? Certainly, the environmental humanities are entering a dynamic phase, as the long-established field of environmental history has in recent years encountered the ecocritical terrain of literary studies. We seem to be at a crucial turning point in the contribution literary scholars can make to the ecological humanities and, beyond that, to environmental studies at large”

-Rob Nixon,

Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor

‘Nature’ is perhaps one of the most alienating yet most central terms to understanding literature and culture. The English language often uses trees, animals and landscapes to talk about ‘nature’ as something that exists outside of ourselves (as humans). In North America especially, “wilderness” and its inhabitants are synonymous with ‘nature.’ Ecology is something different from ‘nature,’ and understanding how the two are connected will be crucial for the following ecocritical investigation. I will often be replacing the term ‘nature’ with nonhuman in order to interrogate Western connotations (and connotations) of nonhuman categories with ‘nature.’ All the while I will maintain consciousness that these distinctions are drawn onto and written into our perception of landscape and culture by those in power—and also at the expense of others.

Ecocriticism is a joining of literary criticism and environmentalism. Since literary criticism has existed for as long as it has, why did something like ecocriticism not emerge until the 1990s? Is it simply a product of modern environmentalism or does it have origins further back? Can ecocriticism only be applied to texts about ‘nature’? To answer some of these questions, an interrogation of ‘nature’ will be central to the following investigations. ‘Nature’ as it is taken to mean ‘nonhuman’ will be problematized, complicated, torn down and reconstructed throughout. Specifically, I will analyze how nature is figured as ‘other’ in contexts of the 20th century, although some of these texts begin in the early 21st, and their imaginations well into the

middle of the new century. I will apply an ecocritical lens to three primary texts, two of which are novels by literary giants and a shorter analysis on a dystopic film. Beginning with early industrial capitalism, I turn to a classic fiction of cultural ‘encounter’—Joseph Conrad’s 1902 novella *Heart of Darkness*. I will briefly consider the continuation of the ‘Heart of Darkness’ trope through Hupert Sauper’s 2006 documentary *Darwin’s Nightmare* before turning to Richard Fleischer’s 1973 film *Soylent Green*. This science fiction mystery, along with the other primary texts will set the stage for analyzing the ecocritical investments of Margaret Atwood’s 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake*.

To begin, I define ecocriticism as a field of literary and cultural theory. Next, I analyze its context in the ever-growing popularity of renaming our geologic epoch the Anthropocene age. I conclude by considering how the primary texts deal with apocalypse and how this trope functions in the context of ecocriticism and the Anthropocene age.

I. The History of Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between humans and the natural or physical environment. As a field of study, ecocriticism aims to bring together the principles of ecology and literary criticism by asking questions regarding the relationship between humans and the nonhuman, sometimes referred to as the ‘natural’ or ‘physical’ world. The field is tangentially related to other established subfields of ecological/environmental studies such as environmental history and environmental ethics. What ecocriticism does differently than these fields is pay special attention to language’s treatment of the earth or the biosphere through literature, which may include novels, poems, and films.

The first person to ever use the term “ecocriticism” was William Rueckert in a 1978 essay titled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." This essay was

subsequently incorporated into the first anthology of ecological literary criticism edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, titled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996). Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as, “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” and notes that “just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (xvii).¹ In taking this approach, ecocriticism works to expand the definition of the ‘world’ according to literary theory to include that beyond the social or human realm.

In the decades after Rueckert coined the term ecocriticism, scholars began creating foundations for the future practice of the field. In 1992, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) was founded and in the following year, Patrick Murphy created the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. Even with these advances, the field remained somewhat ambiguous in its aims. Ecocritics often note the significance of the 1993 Symposium of Western Literature Association at Wichita, when at the end of a session called “Ecocriticism: Reimagining the Way We Write about the West” a man who was still seated spoke up and asked, “But what IS ecocriticism??”² Motivated and inspired by this chain of events, when the WLA convened the following year in Salt Lake City, Michael P. Branch and Sean O’Grady published a collection of 16 position papers from the meeting by “younger” scholars to highlight the variety of uses to which scholars were applying the term. The diversity in their responses demonstrated how the field was still ambivalent about creating a

¹ Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.

² Association for Studies in Literature and Environment, ASLE. “Defining Ecocritical Theory and Practice Sixteen Position Papers from the 1994 Western Literature Association Meeting Salt Lake City, Utah--6 October 1994.” ASLE, 1994.

defining theory—and purposefully so. Although there is no single method of analysis, Glotfelty reinforced how ecocriticism was different from other discourses: “Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world. In most literary theory “the world” is synonymous with society—the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere. If we agree with Barry Commoner's first law of ecology, that ‘Everything is connected to everything else,’ we must conclude that literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, and ideas interact.” In other words, ecocriticism aims to view interactions rather than produce frameworks. Furthermore, it is concerned with global connections which allows comparative analyses to be made between texts from radically different time periods and schools of thought.

Early ecocriticism, however, drew mainly from nature writing, wilderness narratives and environmental literature to inform this new methodology of bringing together literary criticism with ecological/environmental studies. While ‘nature’ was clearly being foregrounded in theoretical discussions, scholars quickly found many limitations to this approach. Those working in the field of American nature writing often made use of British constructions of the pastoral ideal and of Romantic poetry, which quickly became environmental tropes and worked to uphold an idealized, sublime ‘nature.’ Much of the early ecocriticism also looked to the philosophies of American transcendentalists and other popular environmental thinkers for ecocritical analysis, such as John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Wendell Berry and Garret Hardin.³ While these philosophers were clearly experimenting with ‘nature’ as their primary analytical subject, in a way these studies continued to cement old notions that

³ See esp. Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1996.

‘environment’ and ‘place’ were restricted to the wilderness or country areas. In doing so, these studies of nature writing ignored alternative definitions of ‘nature’ and environmental interests of marginalized social groups. Ecocriticism then, is not just concerned the value of ‘nature,’ rather is has broader cultural and political interests.

The politically-oriented nature of ecocriticism has benefitted from other areas of theoretical critique. The rise in feminist and postcolonial critique developed simultaneously with ecocriticism and the joining of these fields in the later 1990s has greatly shaped ecocritical practice. In particular, feminist and postcolonial critique aided in broadening definitions of the environment to look at who has been excluded from environmental protection. One way of bringing these schools of thought together is through ecofeminism, another subfield of ecocriticism that have been growing since the 1990s. Ecofeminism sees a dual oppression of nature and women generated from a root dichotomy between nature/culture or human/nonhuman. One of the most prominent ecofeminist thinkers is Australian philosopher Val Plumwood, who advocates for viewing the interconnectedness of the oppression of women and nature.⁴ She argues:

Dualism has formed the modern political landscape of the west as much as the ancient one. In this landscape, nature must be seen as a *political* rather than a descriptive category, a sphere formed from the multiple exclusions of the protagonist-superhero of the western psyche, reason, whose adventures and encounters form the stuff of western intellectual history. The concept of reason provides the unifying and defining contrast for the concept of nature, much as the concept of husband does for that of a wife, as master for slave. Reason in the western tradition has been constructed as the privileged domain of the master, who has conversed nature as a wife or subordinate other encompassing and representing the sphere of material, substance beneath him. The continual and cumulative overcoming of the domain of nature by reason engenders the western concept of progress and development. (3)

Plumwood’s project is one of challenging the underlying causes of dichotomous thinking. She argues that this thinking is based on a logic first by creating a ‘superior’ category, and then

⁴ Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London; New York: Routledge, 1993.

denying its dependency on the ‘inferior’ category. Second, this logic requires a “radical exclusion” of the inferior by increased “hyperseparation” between the two categories (47-55). Plumwood’s philosophies have remained foundational for the practice of ecofeminism and continue to be expanded upon by other thinkers.⁵

Ecofeminist modes of critique are also complicit with the goals of Environmental Justice, which seeks the fair treatment of all individuals and communities to environmental well-being and protection regardless of race, class, gender, religion or nationality. Environmental Justice has its origins in the United States, where toxic waste dumping on primarily working-class communities and communities of color is unequally distributed in comparison to wealthy areas. Robert D. Bullard connects how this kind of environmental treatment, also known as “environmental racism,” is institutional to the formation of the United States.⁶ Ecocriticism that is attune to the goals of Environmental Justice asks questions such as: Who is absent from the text? Does the text reflect any biases towards the natural environment? How is the environment being defined, and by whom?

Ecocriticism then, is built from a wide-variety of disciplines and practices. To engage with ecocriticism is to try and imagine connections not just across national boundaries or geographical barriers but also imagine those from across time. To begin, my focus is to pay close attention to race, class and gender in formations of nature, culture and the environment of the 20th century. These categories of identity are useful for ecological thinking which privileges a focus on the interactions between groups and across time. Ursula K. Heise, in her 2008 book

⁵ See also Shiva, Vandana, and Maria Mies. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books, 1993. And Warren, Karen J., ed. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. First Edition edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997 and Gaard, Greta, and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

⁶ Bullard, Robert D. “Confronting Environmental Racism in the Twenty-First Century.” *Global Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 34–48.

Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global has outlined ways to theorize the global imagination from a social, cultural and literary standpoint.⁷ She suggests that we create an ‘eco-cosmopolitanism’ to “shift the core of [environmentalism’s] cultural imagination from a sense of place to a less territorial and more systematic sense of planet” (56). Surely as globalization grows ever increasingly a part of cultural frameworks, ecocriticism will have to shift into new ways of thinking globally in order to accommodate for these changes in the biosphere.

I will be applying the insights now derived from several decades of ecocritical frameworks to select texts. Although ecocriticism resists building from any defined, monolithic theory, perhaps the most appropriate term to inform my readings is something Serpil Oppermann calls an “Ecocentric Postmodern” literary approach in a 2006 essay titled “Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice.”⁸ Oppermann calls for an approach to the field which questions “all hierarchical systems which basically privilege the concept of domination” and gives authority to the idea of relationality in order for nature to no longer be perceived as ‘other’ (116). Oppermann’s approach is ecofeminist in nature for looking at the interlocking systems of hierarchy and dichotomous thinking. Furthermore, her emphasis on relationality will be key for informing my consideration of how each text offers pathways towards reconstruction.

While viewing these texts with special attention to how race, class and gender is categorized, problematized and deconstructed is useful, there are also a number of challenges posed in thinking of these categories in the context of the global. We live in a time when human

⁷ Heise, Ursula K. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. 1 edition. Oxford : New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

⁸ Oppermann, Serpil. “Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice.” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2006): 103–28.

beings as a species have exerted a significant amount of destructive force upon the planet through large processes of industrialization. This has led many scholars to support the idea that we are living in the ‘Anthropocene,’ or the age of humans. I will begin by looking at how the category of the Anthropocene troubles my ecocritical framework.

II. The Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is the proposed term for renaming our current geologic epoch. It was first coined by ecologist Eugene Stoermer in the 1980s and was brought to public attention by the Nobel prize-winning atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen at a meeting for the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) in 2000.⁹ Crutzen proposed that we rename the Holocene, the current geologic epoch, to the Anthropocene in order to reflect the force that humans have enacted upon the planet equal to that of a major geologic event.¹⁰ The term was introduced into the academic vocabulary at a time when there was increasing planetary alarm that climate change, largely caused by human activity, was inciting much of the global environmental degradation (habitat and species loss, pollution, flooding, weather catastrophes etc). Renaming the Holocene epoch to the Anthropocene would reinforce the assumptions of scientists who espoused human-induced climate change by self-labelling our species as capable of altering the environment.

⁹ See Purdy, Jedediah. “Should We Be Suspicious of the Anthropocene?” *Aeon Magazine*. Web. 30 Oct. 2015.

¹⁰ Crutzen had originally proposed that the Anthropocene begin with ‘The Industrial Era’ between 1800-1945, which he characterized by the invention of the steam engine by James Watt in the 1770s and 1780s. He then elaborated on this idea, by proposing that the second stage of the Anthropocene be called ‘The Great Acceleration’ between 1945 and 2015. He argued that the decades preceding World War II set the stage for the global-scale impacts of population growth, industrialization, mining, plantations (and resource extraction) along with the globalization of the world economy. See Steffen, Will, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill. “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature.” *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment* 36, no. 8 (December 1, 2007): 614–21.

How does the Anthropocene relate to ecocriticism? To begin, popular perception of this renaming is that soon, we will see the end of ‘nature’ if we are to dub every spot on earth “touched” in some way by human activity. Thus the Anthropocene might erase the notion of a natural world, separate and “untouched” by humans—it would erase nature as ‘other.’ From a scientific standpoint, the Anthropocene signifies how the globe is altered by human activity. Culturally, the name invokes old notions of places being ‘untouched,’ which again, assumes very specific connotations towards old tropes of “wilderness” and “nature.” Since many also see the end of the Anthropocene spelling out apocalyptic doom, we must also consider the relevance of apocalyptic rhetoric. In *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard reminds us while detailing a short history of the apocalypse trope that, “tragic narratives of the End... are radically dualistic, deterministic and catastrophic, and have tended historically to issue in suicidal, homicidal or even genocidal frenzies” (96). Jedediah Purdy supports Garrard’s point that the apocalypse trope is important for the environmentalist and green agendas, but most often produces crisis where there is none.¹¹ Purdy argues that, “as an offer to unify what might seem unrelated, ‘the Anthropocene’ is an attempt to do the same work that ‘the environment’ did in the 1960s and early ’70s: meld problems as far-flung as extinction, sprawl, litter, national parks policy, and the atom bomb into a single phenomenon called ‘the ecological crisis.’” In other words, the Anthropocene may be in danger of producing apocalypse rather than giving warning to our fatalistic thinking.

In light of these arguments, I will argue in the following chapters that apocalyptic thinking tends to produce its own kind of oppressive entrapments. Apocalyptic thinking often boxes in the imagination, implying no hope for regeneration. To demonstrate this idea, I pay special attention to the anxiety of impending doom in how it reinforces binaries drawn between humans and the natural world, humans and animals and the distinctions between race, class and

¹¹ Purdy, Jedediah. “Should We Be Suspicious of the Anthropocene?” *Aeon Magazine*. Web. 30 Oct. 2015.

gender. The polarizations present in the ideologies of patriarchy and imperialism coincide with many apocalyptic narratives of humanity transgressing from light into darkness. This thinking emerges in the canonical texts of the early 20th century (*Heart of Darkness*), are perpetuated in 1970s dystopia films (*Soylent Green*) and complicated in postmodern, environmentalist texts (*Oryx and Crake*).

How is the Anthropocene age helpful in a literary and cultural context? From an ecocritical perspective, thinking of our modern age as the Anthropocene may inform why the following texts imagine environmental doom on a large scale. The question of literature in this new epoch is considered by Tobias Boes and Kate Marshall in the opening section of special issue of *the minnesota review* dedicated to “Writing the Anthropocene.” The authors contend, “The art and theory of the Anthropocene... registers (and has registered) what is properly at stake in the self-naming by a species of an epoch of geologic time, often in a language unavailable to other forms of scientific discourse” (60).¹² Boes and Marshall argue that humanities scholars can use literature to reflect on how, “human beings in the new epoch can no longer simply be defined (as they have been in most, though by no means all, strains of humanistic discourse during the late Holocene) as *acting upon* the natural world. Instead, they must also be described as *being acted upon* by that same world on an ontological, rather than merely existential, level...Nature has of course always acted in turn upon human societies, often in catastrophic fashion and often in ways that were directly triggered by prior human interventions. But only in recent times have we had to confront the possibility that nature might also fundamentally alter our existence as a species and that, what is more, it might do so as the ultimate outcome of processes that we ourselves set in motion” (61). If nature can act upon us, in ways initiated by our own doing, how

¹² Boes, Tobias, and Kate Marshall. “Writing the Anthropocene: An Introduction.” *The Minnesota Review* 2014, no. 83 (January 1, 2014): 60–72.

does this trouble or reinforce dichotomous thinking? These questions about human/nature in the context of the Anthropocene will be used to guide the following investigations.

III. A Century of Apocalypse

In the scope of the following chapters, it is not possible to utilize all of the foundational terms and concepts created by ecocriticism, ecofeminism and environmental justice. However, some will be central to the analysis—including that of the Anthropocene age. In chapter 1, I begin with a canonical text: Joseph Conrad's 1902 novella *Heart of Darkness*. Set in Belgian-occupied Congo in the late 19th century, *Heart of Darkness* tells the story of Charlie Marlow, who sets out on a journey up the Congo River after obtaining a job with a Belgian "Company" that trades in the Congo. Marlow's journey to find the lost ivory trader Mr. Kurtz leads him into a world of destruction, deterioration, cannibalism and "darkness." Like other camps of literary theory, I begin my ecocritical investigation by looking at who and what is absent from the Canon. I also begin here to see how 'nature' is defined and how ecological damage is treated by dominating narratives. I will supplement this ecocritical analysis with the long history of postcolonial and feminist responses to the novella to inform my own reading. Chapter 1 will also briefly consider Hubert Sauper's 2006 film *Darwin's Nightmare* in relation to *Heart of Darkness*. This documentary details the degradation of Lake Victoria in Tanzania due to the careless introduction of the predatory Nile perch in the 1960s. One of the richest ecological environments has now become a "dead zone" due to industrial overfishing and international trade. In addition, this market has destroyed the lives and livelihoods of Tanzanian fishermen who live along the shoreline. Separated as they are by a century, the film demonstrates the continuities of global capitalism and empire and their role in destroying African ecologies for profit.

In chapter 2, I shift my focus to North America in the late 20th century to view the parallels between the apocalyptic outlook of *Heart of Darkness* with the imagination of 1970s environmentalism by turning to Richard Fleischer's 1973 film *Soylent Green*. This dystopic film is set in Manhattan in the year 2022, in a world in which overpopulation has resulted in total resource scarcity. Residents of Manhattan are forced to sleep on top of one another in staircases and churches and wait in line all day for their rations of Soylent manufactured by the Corporations. *Soylent Green* is set up as a science-fiction detective story around the mystery of murdered businessman. The further Detective Thorn works to uncover the mystery, the more he learns about the Soylent Corporations and their secrets in distributing "Soylent Green" to the masses. Not only is *Soylent Green* useful for understanding the apocalypse trope in popular thinking, the film also reflects many of the anxieties over population and resource scarcity that characterized mainstream environmentalism in the second half of the 20th century.

In chapter 3, I link the fears expressed by *Soylent Green* to Margaret Atwood's vision of a post-apocalyptic future in her 2003 satirical novel *Oryx and Crake*. This novel imagines a future that has been devastated by climate change and the reckless experimentation of Corporate-run genetic engineering projects. The main events take place somewhere on the east coast of the United States where the elite live in gated Compounds. These closed-off communities are shielded from the hostile environments of the pleeblands, which encompass the entirety of the outer world. Told through the narrator Jimmy, known as Snowman in the post-apocalypse, *Oryx and Crake* adopts the masculine, imperial tone like the one seen in *Heart of Darkness* towards the physical environment. The narration of *Oryx and Crake* alternates between Jimmy's childhood in the Compounds and his life living with the Crakers in the post-apocalypse. The Crakers are humanoid creatures dreamed up and created by his genius scientist friend Crake in

order to replace humanity, which Crake sees as full of social “ills.” In the post-apocalyptic setting Jimmy is barely able to keep himself alive, although this does not prevent him from continuing to tell stories to himself and the Crakers. I will argue that *Oryx and Crake* does its own ecocritical work by questioning the hierarchal system of competing dualisms originating from this nature/culture divide. Secondly, Atwood shifts those systems to a setting where they are deconstructed without the interruption of other humans.

Each text makes use of and questions the idea of apocalypse. Reading Conrad from the modernist perspective, *Heart of Darkness* is apocalyptic in that it sees an end to Western civilization on the “dark continent.” And while interpreting *Heart of Darkness* as an apocalyptic narrative is surely a popular one,¹³ viewing the text through an added ecocritical lens demonstrates how *Heart of Darkness* is more unsettled by a kind of relationality with the ‘Other’ than reaching an end of the world. The blurring of a civilized/savage binary between humans and the nonhuman world simultaneously distances Marlow from his surroundings, but also drives him to the center of the “dark continent.” As demonstrated by postcolonial and feminist scholarship, *Heart of Darkness* first defines a civilized/savage binary akin to the culture/nature dichotomy. This divide, in particular, works to reduce Black Africans to nonhuman status. Next, in order to uphold a civilized/savage spectrum the novel defines gender distinctions by contrasting men and women’s roles, conflating women with the wilderness and the world of unknown. Lastly, elephants are completely absent from the text, even though the ivory trade is one of the driving forces behind Marlow’s journey. This civilized/savage binary is troubled by the breakdown of Kurtz, in anticipating how a turn towards looking more deeply at one’s surroundings might lead to the subversion of that binary. Reading Kurtz as crossing over into the

¹³ One of the most popular adaptations of *Heart of Darkness* is Francis Ford Coppola’s 1979 *Apocalypse Now*. Coppola replaces the Belgian plunder in the Congo with American troops entering into the Vietnam War.

more “animal” more “African” world does imply an end, suggesting that with Kurtz extinguishes the last lights of “civilization” in a colonized space. But this chapter will be more concerned with how there are multiple binaries blurred underneath a mass of “impenetrable darkness.” The multiple dualisms interlock to simultaneously uphold a seemingly singular spectrum as demonstrated by the plethora of ecological absences.

Counter to Conrad’s, there are few absences in Atwood’s narrative. In fact, everything seems to be happening at once in *Oryx and Crake*, which foregrounds a number of satirical points of attack; global sex trafficking, free market capitalism, genetic engineering and transgenic species are all brought to the reader’s attention and critiqued to a degree. Like many of Atwood’s other works, *Oryx and Crake* is a critique of the dominating, consumerist culture. On top of this, *Oryx and Crake* also incorporates the use of genetic engineering into Atwood’s vision on the future, which makes it a prime text for ecocritical consideration.

One of the most prominent parallels between *Heart of Darkness* and *Oryx and Crake* is the dramatization of ‘encounter’ with an unknown landscape. How does each text go about doing this? In Conrad’s novel, Marlow’s journey ultimately fails to enlighten him. This narrative move is parallel to how Jimmy loses all hope for reconstructing a new life in the post-apocalypse. Atwood re-creates a postmodern world that reflects the masculine order of a dystopian imagination, similar to the one in *Heart of Darkness* and *Soylent Green*. Atwood satirizes the destruction of this order by challenging the dualisms that create it, although it is unclear if she is hopeful of their improvement. After a century’s worth of apocalyptic thinking, it appears we may have no other option than to consciously write into the system an entirely new mode of being.

Chapter 1

Ivory: Ecocriticism and *Heart of Darkness*

“Every imaginable kind of waste matter found its way into the pit. The fresh rubbish, the insides of chicken and guts of fish, were feasts for bloated bluebottles. They and the fruit flies buzzed angrily like bees, when the man and the boy reached the mouth of the pit. The crows circles above them, cawing noisily. Other forms of life bred in the empty milk, fish and beef cans strewn about the pit”

-Steve Chimombo,
The rubbish dump

First published in book form in 1902, Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* is one of the most widely read texts in the English-speaking world. Inspired by his own expedition to Belgian-occupied Congo in 1890, Conrad’s novella is generally viewed as a colonial adventure tale. An exemplary modernist text, it was considered a masterpiece in its own time and read as one of the greatest “yarns” about life at sea. Although sales of Conrad’s works declined after his death in 1924, interest in the novella surged again after World War II when *Heart of Darkness* was newly valued for its “moral sophistication” and “proleptic power.”¹⁴ Peter Lancelot Mallios notes that the reception of Conrad’s body of work immediately after World War II was controversial, but “generally ‘humanist’ in the sense both that its practitioners looked to the writer as an instrument of humane and humanizing culture and that they understood ‘Conrad’ to cast valuable light on the fundamental question of what it means to be human” (Mallios 123).¹⁵ Due to the increasing critical and moral awareness in British culture towards modern industrialization, these “humanist” attentions spoke to how Conrad’s work was seen to embody universal themes about the “human spirit” and was also valued for its ability to reach a wide

¹⁴Watts, Cedric. “Conrad, Joseph (1857-1924).” In *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by B. Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32533>.

¹⁵Mallios, Peter Lancelot, “Conrad’s Reception.” Stape, J. H., ed. *The New Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

audience. Throughout the 20th century, many of his novels including *Heart of Darkness*, have remained an integral piece in the English canon.

While *Heart of Darkness* largely takes place in Belgian-occupied Congo, the novella begins on the Thames River aboard a ship called the *Nellie* that is anchored near London. The unnamed narrator is accompanied by the Lawyer, the Accountant, the Director of Companies who is their Captain, and Charlie Marlow. Collectively, the crew represents the structures of colonialism and capitalism. Marlow, who is the only crewmember that still “followed the sea” according to the narrator, begins to tell the story of his voyage to the Congo (129).¹⁶ The narrator remarks that most seamen tell yarns that have, “a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut” (130). But Marlow’s story, he insists, “was not typical...and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine” (130). Here, the narrator sets the stage for the atmosphere which will encompass the rest of the novella—one full of shadows, haze and gloom.

While the narrator’s story is told when the crew is anchored near London, Marlow’s story moves from London to Africa, up the Congo River, in his mission to find the lost trader Mr. Kurtz somewhere in the heart of the Congo. One journey follows the other; Marlow retraces the path of Mr. Kurtz while as readers, we follow the narrator’s retelling of Marlow’s story. Initially, *Heart of Darkness* received some praise for this doubleness, although a few critics took issue with its obscurity and ambiguity.¹⁷ The noted critic F.R. Leavis commentated that this

¹⁶Pages correspond to: Conrad, Joseph, and Rudyard Kipling. *Heart of Darkness, The Man Who Would Be King, and Other Works on Empire*. Ed. David Damrosch. 1 edition. New York: Longman, 2006.

¹⁷See Murfin, Ross C. “A Critical History.” *Conrad, Joseph. Heart of Darkness*. Edited by Ross C. Murfin. 3rd edition. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin’s, 2010 for a summary of the critical response to *Heart of Darkness*. See

atmospheric style was part of the novella's strength. Mallios, in his survey of Conrad criticism also relates that commentators at this time focused on Conrad's treatment of colonial borderlands to reflect the trouble that these areas posed for British thought and nationalism. These hybrid "spaces of contact" were where British thought was "challenged, and estranged, comparatively and contingently exposed as less stable; less probative, singular and distinctive; less natural, moral and legitimate; and less comprehensive in understanding than one had thought" (Mallios 122). Despite some criticism of the novella's obscurity, reception of *Heart of Darkness* remained predominantly positive; especially its dual ability to present vivid descriptions and to pose certain questions about the truth of its narrative technique. Furthermore, up until this point in the history of European colonization of African spaces, not many accounts of the actual conditions in Africa had been published. Notable exceptions were the adventure stories of the explorer Henry Morton Stanley in the last decades of the 19th century and *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, published in 1798. Equiano was a former African slave who, once he settled in England, "worked with Methodist groups seeking the abolition of slavery, and wrote his *Narrative* to help the cause, promoting it on a book tour that provided a vital spark in the agitation" (Damrosch 218). His accounts were popular at the time, for exposing what Equiano called the "horror" of slavery. Despite these accounts being distributed among the European public, however, Belgian King Leopold's hold over the Congo Free State remained intact. Furthermore, the political dimensions of Equiano's *Narrative* continued to be largely ignored in the critiques of colonial literature, including those of *Heart of Darkness*.

Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's now famous 1977 essay, "An Image of Africa," initiated a new wave of critical attention to *Heart of Darkness*. Challenging the canonical status

especially from the first wave of commentary: Forster, E. M. *Abinger Harvest*. Pocket ed. London: E. Arnold, 1953 and Leavis, F.R. *The Great Tradition*. New York: G.W. Steward, 1948.

of the novella, Achebe shocked the academy by asserting that it was a racist text.¹⁸ He charges that Conrad's work posits Africa's "savagery" as a foil to Europe's "civilization" and that by and large, "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where a man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (Achebe 783). In other words, Achebe argued that *Heart of Darkness*'s assertion of "universal" moral values—of rationality, of compassion, and so on were reserved for Europeans, namely European men. The universal "savagery" that Conrad described was reserved essentially for the Africans. Thus *Heart of Darkness* renders, "Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor," and that Africa is reduced to "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril" which only "reduce[s] Africa to the role of props for the breakup of one petty European mind" (Achebe 788). Rather than bestow any humanity or description to Africa and the Africans, Achebe maintains that the text paints Africa as simply the setting for Kurtz's breakdown. In other words, the text reduces Africa to a backdrop and the Africans to nonhuman status in order to claim that Europe has risen above its "darkness."

This essay became the basis for Achebe's own 'writing back' to Conrad project and would later be used as the beginning to his famous novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's charge of racism also inaugurated a wave of postcolonial and feminist responses to *Heart of Darkness* in the 1980s and 1990s. Among those writers, postcolonial critic Edward Said saw what he called "two visions" in *Heart of Darkness*, which he outlined in his 1993 book *Culture and Imperialism*.¹⁹ Far from being an anti-imperialist novel as many claimed, for Said, *Heart of Darkness* is a self-enclosed narrative that is unable to imagine any anti-imperialist alternatives.

¹⁸Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa." *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no.4 (1977): 782-94.

¹⁹ See Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Reprint edition. New York: Vintage, 1994.

Whereas Achebe's reading of *Heart of Darkness* is more thematic, Said concentrates on the very form of the novella, arguing that its circularity is in itself an imperial gesture. Said asserts that, "Conrad wants us to see how Kurtz's looting adventure, Marlow's journey up the river, and the narrative itself all share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa" (Said 23). Furthermore, Said posits that, "the circularity, the perfect closure of the whole thing is not only aesthetically but also mentally unassailable" (Said 24). The enclosed form of the novel captures Conrad's realization that, "like the narrative, imperialism has monopolized the entire system of representation" so that no other alternative is possible (Said 25). Nor could Conrad imagine the Africans, or any other colonized people, as capable of independence from Europe.

Similarly, Nina Pelikan Straus' 1987 essay, "The Exclusion of the Intended from the Secret Sharing in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," which challenged the exclusion of female characters in the novella, inspired a number of feminist critiques during the last two decades of the 20th century (Mallios 128).²⁰ Straus focused on the treatment of masculinity and femininity in the novella observing how, "Marlow presents a world distinctly split into male and female realms—the first harboring the possibility of 'truth' and the second dedicated to the maintenance of delusion" (Straus 124). In doing so, the text generates an "inescapable element" of a gender dichotomy (Straus 125). Furthermore, Straus notes how the traditional distinction made by the male-dominated critical commentary between the two main female characters (the Intended and the African woman) usually "transforms misogyny into heroism or rationalizes Conrad's "aesthetic" function for women as morally necessary" allowing Conrad's racism and sexism to go unquestioned (Straus 126). Taken together, these politically-orientated critiques began to

²⁰Straus, Nina Pelikan. "The Exclusion of the Intended from Secret Sharing in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness.'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 20, no. 2 (1987): 123–37.

question of the novella's politics, especially its status as an anti-imperialist text. If *Heart of Darkness* was written with the intent to expose the Belgian King Leopold's atrocities in the Congo, why was everything so obscured?

Dominating ideological constraints may inform a reading of why Conrad conceals destruction even when it is essential to his supposed unveiling of imperialist atrocities. Terry Collits notes in a discussion of the theoretical context surrounding Conrad that the concept of 'Liberal Imperialism,' was a policy invented to, "mediate the harsh realities of imperialist subjugation that resulted from the mid-nineteenth-century liberal doctrine of free trade."²¹ So these realities were, in part, altered for the maintenance of imperial rule. At the same time, Marlow is describing an immense amount of ivory extraction and forced slave labor, even though most of it is hidden beneath the shadows. So how does this trail of ecological devastation occur in tandem with the other ideologies in the narrative?

My own focus in this chapter is to view *Heart of Darkness* through an ecocritical lens. Ecocriticism, which aims to bring together the principles of ecology and literary criticism, works to assess the changing relationship between people and the environment. Ecocriticism also sees early industrial capitalism as the beginning of the accelerated oppression and exploitation of nature and natural resources both human and nonhuman, that has incited climate change and accounts for the move by scholars to rename this era the Anthropocene. Because *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes the encounter between the colonizer and the "wilderness" of the African jungle at the beginning of the 20th century, when industrial capitalism and natural resource extraction was escalating, an ecocritical lens is useful in assessing the implications of this destructive relationship at work. In particular the ecocritics who have responded to the novel, such as Jeffrey Myers, aim to build upon and broaden the arguments provided by postcolonial

²¹ Collits, Terry. *Postcolonial Conrad: Paradoxes of Empire*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2005.

and feminist scholarship.²² Myers argues that Marlow's "critique" of imperialism responds to the growing popularity of Charles Darwin's idea of evolution by natural selection. The notion of a "civilized" Europe over a "savage" Africa would be made irrelevant by evolutionary theory, since that dualism is sustained by a separation between humans and the nonhuman world. Jeffrey James McCarthy takes Myers' ecocritical argument one step further and asserts that Kurtz represents the two "choices of nightmares" in ecological collapse: either Europeans must continue to extract unsustainably or create a connection with nature.²³ In being forced to develop a deeper understanding of nature, this would disrupt European notions of identity by pointing to how place could transform that identity.

I aim to build on these ecocritical assessments by positing that Marlow's anxiety about a disrupted dualism between the (white, European, male) 'self' and the natural world is furthermore revealed by his 'othering' of Africans, women and animals. This 'othering' is revealed largely through their ecological absence. So not only does *Heart of Darkness* demonstrate how the extreme polarization between what is considered "civilized" and "savage" creates a binary, it also creates a system of interlocking binaries. This layering of dualisms is employed stylistically through Conrad's use of ironic distancing from images of destruction that are at times extremely vivid and immensely vague in others. Specifically, this chapter will focus on looking at what is not present; including the bodies of elephants. From the descriptions of immense ivory extraction and exportation, we can infer that elephant carcasses must have been omnipresent in the landscape of the novella's setting. Although the carcasses are obviously there, these bodies are only present in their absence. The severed elephant tusks mirror the bodies of

²²Myers, Jeffrey. "The Anxiety of Confluence Evolution, Ecology, and Imperialism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 8, no. 2 (2001): 97–108.

²³McCarthy, Jeffrey Mathes. "'A Choice of Nightmares': The Ecology of Heart of Darkness." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 55, no. 3 (2009): 620–48. doi:10.1353/mfs.0.1624.

the female and African characters. In particular, the descriptions of ivory flowing from a heap of darkness mirror the ones provided about the slaves when Marlow first reaches the Congo. The African slaves are just “limbs” or “shadows” who recede into a gloom. And while there are moments when Marlow bestows the female African characters with slightly more vivid descriptions, they never speak. Even the members of this ecology who are mentioned concretely never appear as a whole and living being.

Other scholars of postcolonialism and ecocriticism have noted the absence of elephants and ivory in the discussion surrounding *Heart of Darkness*. In their book titled *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin outline the ways in which both *Heart of Darkness* and responses to the novel, such as Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, become “locked within a binary paradigm that never seriously challenges the crucial basis of the savage/civilised dichotomy” (Huggan and Tiffin 166).²⁴ Huggan and Tiffin support the idea that “Achebe’s critique of *Heart of Darkness* effectively establishes Africa’s status as absent referents, a manufactured absence that merely serves to reify the presence of the European civility they are imagined to oppose” (Huggan and Tiffin 162). However Achebe’s critique does not consider how “just as ‘Africans’ and ‘cannibals’ or ‘slaves’ become not interchangeable terms but similarly metonymic in these accounts, so ‘elephants’ disappear to become *their* metonymy-- ivory and meat” (Huggan and Tiffin 165). In other words, Huggan and Tiffin are highlighting the ways in which postcolonial attention to the treatment of Black African slaves mirrors trade in ivory and how both of those things connect. They argue that “as Derrida and others have shown, speciesism underpins racism, the latter cannot be addressed without reference to the former, as even the traditional linkage of ivory and slaves implicitly suggests” (Huggan

²⁴ Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. “Ivory and Elephants.” *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. 2 edition. London ; New York: Routledge, 2015.

and Tiffin 166). Huggan and Tiffin emphasize how each the treatment of each incomplete being interlocks in this system to create the singular binary of civilized/savage. I also will incorporate the lens of gender in this ecocritical assessment, as *Heart of Darkness* adds an additional distinction between masculine and feminine in its construction of a binary paradigm.

Viewing the postcolonial and feminist critiques to *Heart of Darkness* in isolation aids in understanding how the various dualisms are drawn out. This chapter will build on those assessments by considering how the simultaneous separation of the ‘self’ from nature, men from women, Europeans from Africans and humans against nonhuman life allows the colonizers to manipulate the image of the wasted landscape to work in imperial hierarchy towards commodification. In doing so, the text calls into attention how ecological relationality is in tension with masculine notions of progress, exploration and a singular, universal truth. This tension culminates in the breakdown of Kurtz who upholds these philosophies. He is consumed by a “wilderness” that is simultaneously racialized, feminized and sexualized. Using an ecocritical lens to approach the treatment of this “wilderness,” with particular attention to the ways in which the dead elephants mirror the incompleteness of other characters, will aid in navigating the future repercussions of an industrialized environment.

I. Constructing the Nature of the ‘Other’

The first image of Africa is drawn out in the memories of a young Marlow, who begins to impose a notion of a human/nonhuman dichotomy on the landscape before he even arrives to the African continent. He describes looking at a map of Africa in a store window as a boy, which he says used to be full of unmapped “blank spaces:”

True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery...It had become a place of darkness... But there was in it one river especially, a

mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I looked at the map of it in a shop window, it fascinated me as a snake would a bird—a silly little bird. (133)

In these opening lines, Marlow reiterates the Western attitude that these charted spaces are “blank,” absent of humanity and history prior to European arrival. This idea is one used to justify the space being exploited for profit, since no one is there to previously claim it. Furthermore, the young Marlow sees the river on the map resembling a snake, which tempts him as it would a bird, drawing our attention to the fact these notions of blank, natural and what he will ultimately call more “savage” spaces are associated both with more animal-like and child-like qualities. Furthermore, this division suggests that those in closer contact with the natural world are more susceptible to the forces of animalistic “savagery.” Marlow hints at both his anxiety over these spaces being filled in by colonization and the recognition that he is not of one world or the other. The metaphor of the silly little bird suggests Marlow views these animal-like qualities within himself as well. Unlike the snake, he remains airborne and on the periphery of the events on the ground. Therefore, the text’s concern over evolutionary reversion, the kind of reverse transformation counter to the ‘progress’ directed by imperial ivory trade, is undercut by the realization that there is a multiplicity to his own nature. Already Marlow draws into question how constructions of the civilized/savage spectrum are not as stable as previously thought to be, but also reinforces how he maintains distance from those projects that generate such spectrums. Caught in the grey area between the binary, Marlow suggests it is easy to be tempted into one realm or the other, putting the stability of European civilization on shaky ground.

In either sense, the more animal realm of the natural world is in tension with that of the civilized human one. It appears that these more naive, animal-like beings are not as advanced as those civilized enough to rise above it. If at the surface, one can only move laterally between the

states of human or nonhuman, this puts a limit on how much the text can view the overlapping effects of one on the other. This point is later complicated, however, by Kurtz's reversion into "madness" as both a product of capitalism and a gesture towards ecological relationality. It is key to note is that this narrative path of vision beginning from the Thames River to the African continental center, the kind of penetrative and notion of grasping at a singular and universal truth through grand exploration is what propels Marlow into the ecology that will ultimately cause him anxiety. Fueled by capital and an exoticized vision of Africa generated by his childhood fantasies, Marlow begins his journey:

Then I remembered there was a big concern, a Company for trade on that river. Dash it all! I thought to myself, they can't trade without using some kind of craft on that lot of fresh water—steamboats! Why shouldn't I try and get charge of one. I went along Fleet Street, but couldn't shake off the idea. The snake had charmed me. (133)

It is the promise of trade and profit that comforts Marlow in thinking of how Africa got filled in since his childhood. Here, there is a transparency of economic interests built into colonial expansion which in turn, obscures the inner workings of the ecology. This obscurity is reinforced by Marlow's suggestion that humans are able to rise above the "charming" draw of the natural world by contorting these anxiety-inducing natural elements into monetized objects. Furthermore, it is the fluidity of the river space that will allow Marlow to slip through Company rules (and artificial boundaries) and enter the continent with relative ease.

Despite his removed position, Conrad's narrator experiences unease encountering the elements unfamiliar to him in this ecology, unique from the blank spaces he constructed this world on previously. He includes some concrete images of the jungle, the coastline and the slaves, most of which manifest in blurred and vague descriptions. But when Marlow reaches the land he notes,

A rocky cliff appeared, mounds of turned up earth by the shore, houses on a hill, others, with iron roofs, amongst a waste of excavations, or hanging to the declivity. A

continuous noise of the rapids above hovered over this scene of inhabited devastation. A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants. A jetty projected into the river. A blinding sunlight drowned all this at times in a sudden recrudescence of glare. (141)

At first glance, this passage is a clear picture of destruction on the landscape, as indicated by the use of phrases such as “mounds of turned up earth” and “excavations.” However, it is not the elements of the original scene that are deteriorating in this passage, rather those elements created by the colonizers such as the “houses on the hill” and “iron roofs” that are falling to their demise in the land of “inhabited devastation.” The “waste of excavations” also suggests that whatever has been extracted from the landscape leaves behind something disposable to the colonizers. Here, Marlow is evoking images of machinery as the “jetty project[s] into the river,” the mechanical mass that carries out the ivory leaving behind a trail of death. Meanwhile, the slaves “move about like ants,” reinforcing the idea that the indigenous people who lived this space prior to colonial disruption are observed to be more animal-like than human-like. This also strengthens their ties to the untouched and ‘Other’ world that is distinct from Europe’s civilized one. The weight of destruction presses down more on the elements of European excess that have been torn from the earth than it does to the indigenous people, suggesting that the elements of civilization imposed here deteriorate as they are built like a surface layer to fill in the “blankness.” The “sudden recrudescence of glare” quickly obscures this glimpse into layering and hierarchy and erases any residual notice of destruction.

Instead, the text gives a delayed description of the enslaved Africans and the effect of their relation to the European elements a few pages later:

They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. (143)

Observing these people to be “shadows”—as a representation of an indistinguishable object—distances Marlow from the ecological subjects he writes about. The greenish gloom suggests they blend in with the vegetation of the “colossal jungle” previously mentioned—the space that is so vehemently asserted to be “blank” and “untouched.” Furthermore, this scene is one of the preliminary instances of Marlow being in bodily contact with the continent, putting him into the position of the snake that charmed him. Despite this contact, the people he sees still blend into the background. Rather than acknowledging how their ties to this land have been disrupted, their bodies have been rendered just as transparent and intangible as the whispers of ivory we see later flowing from the vague heap of darkness. He also notes that in blending into the jungle, people are “sickened” and “inefficient” which indicate a diseased space. He also notes they have been brought to the coastline “in all legality of time contracts,” suggesting that the disruption is only temporary. So the passage does point to Marlow’s apprehension of uprooting people to being as violent as ivory extraction, but does little to relate the colonial practice of forced slavery to industrial operations, revealing a blindness to the overlapping and exploitative practices.

II. Ecological Absences as Threats to the ‘Self’

In his now famous article, Chinua Achebe asserts that a reading of *Heart of Darkness* is not, as many readers in the English speaking world have concluded, that we have an animalistic savagery residing within all humans, rather savagery resides essentially within the Africans themselves. As many postcolonial and feminist critics of the novella also note, the language used to describe the indigenous people upholds racial stereotypes. This distancing also speaks to Marlow’s privilege in his ability to keep participating in his journey down the river.²⁵ For

²⁵ McIntire, Gabrielle. “The Women Do Not Travel: Gender, Difference, and Incommensurability in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 48, no. 2 (2002): 257–84. doi:10.1353/mfs.2002.0032.

Achebe, *Heart of Darkness* pits Africa and Europe as foils of one another: “Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate” (Achebe 792). Just as ivory is forcibly detached from the elephants for imperial trade, the leftover product is a flow of profitable commodities and devastated ecology. The maintenance of these polarizations between Europeans and Africans, and between humans and the natural world around them, upholds how a flow of commodified goods from an interrupted ecology creates a space of “inhabited devastation.” In essence, Africa becomes the ‘Other’ in the eyes of Europe.

This ‘Other’ that characterizes what Marlow calls the “wilderness” is racialized in being associated with Black, African slaves. In fact, Marlow’s move to categorize the indigenous people he meets as part of the “blank” mass he penetrates through, also speaks to how this ‘Other’ force threatens displacement of the human ‘self’—the white, male self—from elevated ecological significance. In addition to it being racialized, the jungle is also transformed into something feminized, which becomes more clear in later passages. The haziness of the scene, however, is still suppressed from coming into focus:

I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver—over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a sombre gap glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute while the man jabbered about himself... I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn’t talk, and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from there, and I had heard Mr Kurtz was in there. (155)

Once again, Marlow’s steamer is transformed into a something dead once it reaches the shore. What’s more, the ship is like “a carcass of some big river animal” as if this archaic landscape were initiating this death scene. This land belongs to an older, “primeval” and less civilized time.

Without comparing the land to any previously constructed image, the moonlight sets about mystifying the place and spreads over the landscape the sense of antiquity. Feminist scholarship connects how the “mute” air which flows by “without a murmur” echoes Marlow’s statement from earlier when he says the women are “out of it.” In relation to the women, Marlow tells his shipmates that, “we must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse”—in understanding the horror of the darkness that is (179). In effect, the silent women stand on equal footing with the mystery of the jungle, their bodies echoing this hollow place of gloom.

As readers we can infer that this “great,” “expectant” and “mute” jungle also contains the presence of elephants, as indicated by the heaps of ivory. Elephants, whose presence is always encapsulated in the whispers of ivory flowing from the darkness, seem to be just as threatening as the tribes who stand at the ready in the blur (like the ones who fire arrows in an attack on Marlow’s steamboat). Simultaneously, the looming jungle is used silence all of the marginalized subjects, reinforcing how it is both racialized, feminized and symbolic of a nonhuman ‘Other.’ This kind of separation between humans and nature entails a lot more than just a distancing between humans and their ‘natural’ or ‘nonhuman’ surroundings. The detachment of ivory from its referent body to commodify the tusks indicate the level of destruction on the landscape. Upon reaching the Inner Station, Marlow observes the heaps of ivory in conjunction with the waste of a landscape: “Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below the ground in the whole country” (180). Again, without reference to the elephants whose dead bodies provide the material for “heaps” of ivory to fill the steamboat, the land becomes something without direction

or filling. The carcasses are not even mentioned, revealing how this commodification is built on a hollow interpretation and extraction without feeling or nuance.

Myers maintains a similar reading of the jungle when he argues that, “the Western metaphysical construction of the self over and against the “Other” that characterizes the oppressive stance of the colonizer towards the colonized has at its root the alienation of that self from the natural world” (Myers 98). For Myers, it is this separation that caused Conrad to symbolize the jungle as an “Other,” even though other environmental thinkers at the time, such as John Muir and Aldo Leopold, advocated for the belief that humans were but a small part of a larger web of beings. Also at this time, a new understanding of ecology based on Darwin’s ideas on evolution troubled the notion of a linear transformation towards progress and human civilization, which helps inform our understanding of Marlow’s constant need to extract a “singleness of purpose.” Like Myers, I agree that it is an ecological realization about the human position that can help explain Kurtz’s reversion into madness. However, it is also necessary to specify that this notion of the human self is an extremely masculine approach, one that also carries a gender bias in addition to a racist and speciesist attitude.

In the description of the jungle above, the ‘Other’ is “mute” and “deaf” like most of the women in the text who remain silent, since to Marlow it is “queer how out of touch with the truth women are” (138). The underlying assumption here, is that women also pose a threat to human’s elevated ecological significance, since women’s positions might also transform the mobility of the male characters.’ A feminist reading, such as the one produced by Johanna M. Smith, argues that Marlow tries to silence the women characters by distancing himself from them.²⁶ In creating this position, he relies on their respective geography to maintain this distance. For example,

²⁶ Smith, Johanna M. “Too Beautiful Altogether”: Ideologies of Gender and Empire in *Heart of Darkness*. *Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism*. Murfin. New York: St. Martin's, 1996.

Marlow's uses his Aunt's connections in Belgium to get a job with the Company. As a final act of his dark adventure, Marlow must deliver the last of Kurtz's information to the Intended at the end of the novella. This positioning of the European women as the ends works to configure them as keepers of civilized society by only occupying European spaces. Meanwhile the "African" women remain on the "dark continent" and conflated with the "wilderness."

Even while the women characters are relatively static, categorizations between race and gender continue to play a role in how women are portrayed. For example, Achebe makes a distinction between the woman at Kurtz's post and the Intended. While the Intended converses with Marlow, the African woman never speaks and she is described as even less human than the Intended. Even though the two women are grouped in a similar category of vagueness, race lets one speak over the other. This interlocking polarization drawn between race and gender is thus transformed under the imperialist framework.²⁷ Gabrielle McIntire specifies this phenomenon, arguing that women's static positions are used to "reinforce a sense of extreme separation between the colony and the metropole, and as such they are crucial for guarding and preserving difference between Africa and Europe" (McIntire 259). In other words, the simultaneous distancing between race and gender are both used to uphold geographical distinctions of identity.

Because the looming force of the wilderness is feminized, it thus creates tension with masculine notions of a singular, extractive practice, and elevated significance. This is perhaps most obvious in the discussion of the woman at Kurtz's Inner Station:

She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witchmen, that hung about her,

²⁷ One of the fundamental principles of ecofeminism is that race and gender are an interlocking binary, rooted in the dualism between nature/culture. This dualism is drawn by a patriarchal and imperialist hierarchy. A further consideration of ecofeminist principles is followed in later chapters.

glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. (194)

The woman at the Inner station receives a great amount of detail compared to most other women in the novella. She is exoticised, but also as mysterious as the jungle enigma, reinforced by how she “tread[s] the earth proudly.” At the same time, her body is commodified by the details of the “brass leggings,” “glass beads” and “bizarre things” that decorate her. She is similar to the other women in that Marlow maintains his distance to her. Smith notes that, “as Marlow creates these women to symbolize the enigma of the jungle, his ideological project is to distance and control both mysteries.” In other words, her presence and meaning is transferred from her body to the jungle in order for Marlow to keep her in the realm he can dominate. At the same time she is a part of the “impenetrable” jungle, she is also a reflection of it, since the “immense wilderness” sees through her as if “it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.” Although he commodifies her body, Marlow does notice how she wears something from an “elephant” and not the detached “ivory,” which animates her in a manner distinct from the characters who come to embody death itself, such as Kurtz. Furthermore, because she is attached to something life-giving, her image resists blending into the haze. Her “barbarous ornaments” and “hair done in the shape of a helmet” mark her as armed. This reading may lead us to read her like a warrior, but like Smith notes, “If such an interpretation demystifies Marlow’s, however, it also runs the risk of forgetting that the savage woman is finally ‘an inaccessible blankness, circumscribed by an interpretable text’” quoting a passage by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.²⁸ In

²⁸ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism.” *Race Writing and Difference*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985. 262-80.

other words, we run the risk of presuming her to speak in a certain way when she is really silenced like the other indigenous women. But in noticing these details, Marlow's singular world is slightly broken to expose an underlying complexity at work. Her multiplicity is striking as someone of extreme difference, but also related to the surroundings that contains elements both familiar and unfamiliar to the narrator. Smith also notes that Kurtz is consumed by her presence in a kind of cannibalism, which is perhaps as unsettling as an evolutionary reversion, but can also be thought of it as a gesture towards relating to one's surroundings. If the women characters in this novella are tied to ecological relationality, then the idea of broad ecology comes into contrast with the masculine and scientifically-driven ideology of the Enlightenment.

III. The Enlightenment and Masculine Approaches to Conquest

Towards the latter half of the novella, Marlow's narration no longer gives much description to the altered landscape. Instead the reader is propelled entirely into the civilizing mission and the impediments to understandings this "darkness" created by capitalism. Marlow deviates from discussion of maps and blank spaces and instead zeroes in on what he anticipates he will gain from a meeting with Kurtz. Concentrating all his hope by focusing on the words ahead of him, the other "pilgrims" he meets recall familiar echoes of the universalist

Enlightenment ideals:

He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and the devil knows what else. 'We want,' [the officer] began to declaim suddenly, 'for the guidance of the cause intrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose.' (153)

Marlow's focus is now completely taken up by the hopes of the other "pilgrims" at the stations—the same hopes that are echoes of the civilizing mission imported from the Continent. In doing so, the novella begins to ironize the suggestion that a "singleness of purpose" can be extracted

from this expanse of hazy images. He can only cling to the suggestion of a “guidance” offered by these voices. Each time Marlow draws up the image of light coming out of the darkness, he recalls the discussion of light coming from the Thames when the Romans conquered it: “it is like the running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightening in the clouds” (130). The force of the light is destructive, but temporary at best and the process of shedding light, “exposing” and tearing it down is bound to recur. Furthermore, the “guidance” the officer speaks of is associated with the words “higher,” “wide” and “singleness” demonstrating the contradictory and ultimately abstract nature of this supposedly concrete force. This conflicting nature is pushed to the forefront in one of the novella’s leading ironies—that what Marlow clings to is rendered as equally as abstract and helplessly unattainable as the flow of commodities and singleness of voice he clings to. However, since his focus on these alternative abstractions comes later in the novella, the form suggests that the echoes of the Enlightenment are delayed in reaching this landscape. Those earlier glimpses into devastation acknowledge Marlow’s growing attention to ecological complexity and relationality, but are destroyed when he regains “civilized” senses. Looking forward in searching for Kurtz’s voice, something that, “[carries] with it a sense of real presence,” Marlow never specifies exactly what from this “gift of expression” will enlighten him (178). Only that it will “pulsate” from the light coming out of the darkness, in a violent and display of puncturing through.

The irony of Marlow’s situation is layered by another irony—that even without the directing gaze of the metropole to watch over their practice in this occupied space, this unstable position lets Marlow expose the horrors in the structures he observes. Marlow’s position is put at risk the same time he participates in the structures that benefit him. After all, a few pages later Marlow tells his listeners that the only concrete things he can grasp from the jungle is that “[he]

could see a little ivory coming out from there, and [he] had heard Mr Kurtz was in there,” suggesting that the only worthwhile things to take away from this vague expanse are commodities and European ideals (155). In fact, we are also told later that most of this ivory is “fossil,” revealing how these “pilgrims” have extracted past a limit in how much the landscape produces. In such a hollowed landscape, what else is there to turn for building an identity against the jungle?

Regardless, Marlow successfully excuses himself from acknowledging any previous relations within this ecology and continues being relatively blind to the violence of these disrupted spaces. His descriptions of others who are different from himself continue to blend into the gloom, and the ivory almost gone to the point that it exists only in fossilized form. The Congo has become a wasteland. Extractive projects of this nature parallel the Enlightenment hope that one can withdraw enough resources to legitimize an anthropocentric bias of humans as an exceptional species. At the same time, the logic of these projects are continually broken down as they are built up. Just as the commodified ivory grows to embody death, the foundations of Marlow’s philosophy are threatened by precarious conditions being on the brink of collapse.

III. Breakdown of the ‘Self’ and Ecological Multiplicity

Kurtz remains troubling but integral to understanding the ideologies of *Heart of Darkness*. The descriptions of “wilderness” as untouched spaces superimposed with Western images work to contribute to Kurtz’s ultimate configuration as an abstraction of death and deteriorated ideals. His obsession with ivory, a commodity that represents death to an elephant is not stated explicitly (mind the scattered whispers in the air). But the dead elephants let him live as everything else seems to crumble around him. In this sense, Kurtz’s transformed condition is useful in accounting for the gaps between bodies in a novel to which ecological devastation is so

central. Kurtz is so obsessed with ivory that his body literally becomes that of an inanimate object. His greed in consuming the ivory is repeated: “my ivory..my Intended, my ivory, my station my river, my—’ everything belonged to him” (180). On the one hand this obsession leads to Kurtz looking like death, but on the other he appears to have created a connection with the landscape around him. First, when Marlow finally meets Kurtz at the inner station he is nothing more than a ghost of a human being:

I resented bitterly the absurd danger of our situation, as if to be at the mercy of that atrocious phantom had been a dishonouring necessity... It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. I saw him open his mouth wide-- it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had wanted to swallow the air, all the earth, all the men before him. (192)

In a horrific image of death, Kurtz is equated with the profit source itself. He’s described as an “image” which adds another layer of depth between himself and a life source. As a secondary representation, Kurtz becomes an abstraction. His clinging to ivory, something white, pure and lucrative echoes the earlier sentiments around the extraction of truth. His capitalist-driven need to consume hollows out his body, leaving him with the need to “swallow” all of the earth. His body a useless and disposed of carcass, like the elephants we can assume lie around him without their tusks. The commodified portion of their body is now gone and flowing away out of the darkness to some distant market. What’s left behind is the body of Kurtz who is “carved out of old ivory.” Although he is dying from his obsession with capitalist accumulation, this passage does begin to indicate the moral implications of unsustainable resource extraction. After consuming past the point where there are no more elephants to sustain him, Kurtz becomes carved out of the commodity. In effect, his alienation from the world around him also starts to deteriorate.

The act of consuming becomes reversed as the jungle quite literally begins ‘consuming’ the elements of civilization as the narration progresses: “you would have thought the earth had opened to let an avenging fire consume all that trash,” referring to the calico, cotton prints and beads that fill one of the inner stations (151). In fact, this earthly response of burning European goods is written as a sort of religious punishment to the pilgrims who, “bewitched inside a rotten fence,” go around whispering ivory like they are praying to it. Meanwhile, “the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion” (150). Here, Marlow suggests that the European adventure carries with it a sense of impermanence. He can penetrate into the darkness to grasp at understanding the incomprehensibility of “the horror” because he is mobile, and in position to extract the truth. At the same time, his presence is but a passing “invasion” which would be threatened by any sort of connection. Just as the “civilized” elements are burned because they do not belong, Europeans are punished for being out of place and for extracting ivory beyond an appropriate limit.

While Marlow becomes more obsessed with hearing his voice, Kurtz’s anticipated form is lost from the text, his body just as transparent as the tokens of ivory that are very clearly absent from their life-giving bodies. He becomes a “vapour exhaled from the earth,” a hollow being like the whispers of capital that float through the air. But there is something unique about Kurtz’s monstrosity that strikes Marlow so deeply. At the surface, Kurtz lapses into the state that Marlow calls “savage:”

The fact is, I was completely unnerved by a sheer, blank fright, pure, abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct shape of physical danger. What made this emotion so overpowering was—how shall I define it?—the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly. This lasted of course the merest fraction of a second, and then the usual sense of commonplace, deadly danger, the possibility of a sudden onslaught and

massacre, or something of the kind, which I saw impending, was positively welcome and composing. It pacified me, in fact, so much, that I did not raise an alarm. (198)

What is so horrifying to Marlow is that Kurtz is “monstrous,” something that has been transformed into being unrecognizable. Even more extraordinary is that Marlow sees through to this new way of being which “pacifies” him, silencing him from putting up a wall between himself and the landscape. His being stupefied creates an inverse relation of pacification, in which the force of the ‘Other’ silences Marlow. Similar to the mystical enigma of the jungle which includes the indigenous people and animals, Kurtz is drawn into and accepted in that realm of the nonhuman which is equally as terrifying to Marlow as reverting back to ‘savage’ ways. McCarthy elaborates on this connection: “Kurtz is identified with wildness to indicate the contested subjectivity that leads Europeans to understand themselves sometimes as part of nature and sometimes as nature’s masters” (McCarthy 623). This window into multiple paths of relationally with a new landscape is something entirely different from the “shackled form of a conquered monster” that Marlow used to describe the “unearthliness” of the jungle earlier.

Kurtz’s form is lost from the text and following this hollowed body leads towards the jungle. To relieve his condition of suffering, Kurtz must turn towards the backdrop of his surroundings:

I tried to break the spell—the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness—that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. (200)

At the surface, Marlow calls Kurtz’s condition a lapse back into the practices he considers true to the nature of the “Africans.” And if these indigenous people are meant to be more “savage,” Kurtz’s lapse into that end of the spectrum would then uphold Achebe’s point that the text situates the “heart of darkness” in the Africans. Indeed, a fear of mutual influence would destabilize the binary drawn between continents and within the human species itself. But there is

also something different about Kurtz that Marlow has yet to describe. He doesn't continue to categorize Kurtz into the nonhuman space he defined it on previously. In fact, the categorization that would put Kurtz into that realm is obscured even more; "There was nothing either above or below him—and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces. He was alone—and I before him did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air" (200). For Marlow, there is no hierarchy Kurtz can rise or fall from. His position does not belong to the elevated human world or mass of impenetrable darkness, resisting the lateral movement between "civilized" and "savage." Like the colonizers before him, Kurtz "kicked the earth to pieces" in an act of destruction, excavating the earth to hunt down elephants and extract more ivory. Perhaps this is why Kurtz, in Marlow's eyes, crossed over a line between sanity and insanity:

He rose, unsteady, long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent before me; while at my back the fires loomed between the trees, and the murmur of many voices issued from the forest.... But his soul was mad. I had—for my sins, I suppose- to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence of could have been so withering to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it,—I heard it. I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself. (200)

Kurtz lack of "eloquence" lets Marlow down in terms of finding his humanity intact as expected, his hollowness reflecting back on Marlow's struggle through the darkness. Describing him as a "vapour" imitates the "whispers of ivory," and also puts him into the vague world of mystery as something "misty" and "silent" as the wilderness consumes Kurtz into its being. The line between him and the jungle is blurred here, the murmur of voices surrounding Marlow seem to close in around him, and separate Kurtz as something only struggling with himself and not with his surroundings. Even Kurtz's behaviors have been transformed as Marlow looks at his surroundings closer:

Then I went carefully from post to post with my glass, and I saw my mistake. These round knobs were not ornamental but symbolic; they were expressive and puzzling, striking and disturbing—food for thought and also for vultures if there has been any down looking at the sky. (190)

As atrocious as lining up head on a post appears to be, it does not necessarily make him more nonhuman. Rather, Kurtz is something completely different. Animals don't line up heads on posts. There's no indication that this was done by the tribe he lives with. However, placing the heads on the post is described as "symbolic," so it is human in a metaphysical sense, but it also contains a kind of mutual communication with the landscape. The severed heads, like severed tusks, are prey for both humans and animals, "food for thought" to those around him and the vultures in the sky. In fact those severed heads, force Kurtz into a state of introspection indicated by their position as being, "turned to the house" rather than towards the jungle. The hollowness of his surroundings is a waste, one in which Marlow experiences death in a grey area in between categories. He's trapped in a place of "impalpable greyness, with nothing underfoot, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism... If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of thus think it to be" (205). The answer to this riddle, "the horror" at the end remains ambiguous. Even so, Kurtz's breakdown is getting closer to understanding relationships between the different bodies in this narrative. The issue with this transformative identity, in a text like *Heart of Darkness*, is that it is done at the expense of others. Even though Kurtz is getting closer to transformation, the Africans, the Intended and the dead elephant remain the same.

VI. Conclusions: Imperialism, Patriarchy and Environmental Destruction

Kurtz's abstraction is not just tied to money and to ivory, he is the only European to develop some sort of relationality with the new landscape. His famous last words of "The horror!

The horror” remain ambiguous and trouble the idea of a singular truth. One may read Kurtz as going “mad,” “savage” or “going native,” either because he goes through evolutionary reversion, or because he’s displaced from ecological significance. The most likely answer is that he realizes a combination of these things. Kurtz is transformed as entirely novel being, a capitalist “monster” who at first aimed to appear to the natives as a ‘deity,’—a concept reminiscent of 16th century Spanish Explorations to the New World. But adhering to this kind of colonial adventure tale would have also been a kind of reversion. Perhaps Kurtz really is meant to expose the horrors of being driven by capitalistic greed. Such a distinction would pervert the narrative that Marlow grew up with, the exploration tales created by fantasies of discovery. Transferring Kurtz into a gray area between “civilized” and “savage” allows him to remain of both worlds, in anticipation of the breakdown of this ‘self’ in the face of ecological multiplicity and relationality.

While the marks of destruction upon the landscape are obscured in *Heart of Darkness* for the purposes of maintaining imperial projects, the repercussions of these ideologies exist as residuals in the era of globalization. Environmental destruction is often treated as the cause to other earthly woes, rather than as a symptom of other extractive practices and ideologies. The underlying cause to many of these “environmental” problems can be unearthed by looking holistically into ecological complexity through multiple narrators and paths of vision such as those in *Darwin’s Nightmare*. Although they exist in different forms of imperialism, unchecked capitalist expansion and patriarchy are really internally self-destructive, a concept explored in a later chapter on *Oryx and Crake*. In response to the dominating, masculine narrative, I will turn to Margaret Atwood’s novel for an exploration into alternative modes of relation with the environment.

Edward Said argued long ago that *Heart of Darkness* traps itself in an inescapable circularity, unable to imagine any alternative beyond the imperial narrative. Immediately before the novella ends, however, Marlow goes to the Intended in Europe to deliver the last of Kurtz's things. Marlow lies and says Kurtz's last words were her name, but she also finishes Marlow's sentence in asserting how it was impossible not to "Love him." McIntire reads this abrupt end as Marlow directing the Intended away from the masculine world of knowledge, "to leave her believing in a false romantic vision of Kurtz's final words. Instead of allowing for the positivity of difference and otherness, Marlow refuses to risk the sort of incommensurability that might flourish if he tried to convey "the horror" to the Intended" (McIntire 279). If anything, *Heart of Darkness* points to the weaknesses of this masculine order over the colonized environment. Perhaps the nothingness that *Heart of Darkness* imagines to be under the flow of goods and people across continents is better understood by looking at women's positioning in the global web. While Kurtz's new relationality with the 'Other' may "symbolize the breakdown of the comfortable evolutionary misreading that placed white men above and beyond nature," it does not provide any hope or indication of how women, people of color and the poor may also develop a relationality with the changing environment (McCarthy 633). *Heart of Darkness* may trap itself, but it also reveals the weaknesses in its foundations. To look beyond these dominating systems will require a conscious injection of an ecologically-minded attitude, one that is tolerant and accommodating of ecological difference.

It is important to note that since Conrad's time, Africa in many ways is still thought of as the "Dark Continent." The name was first used by the explorer and journalist Henry Morton Stanley who in 1878 published his account of journeying through Central Africa titled *Through*

the Dark Continent (Damrosch 234). Contemporary attention on Africa from the West continues to be one of dark, ecological collapse. Hubert Sauper's documentary *Darwin's Nightmare*²⁹ is such an example, and can be read as a 21st century "Heart of Darkness." The film is set in the town of Mwanza, Tanzania, a fishing community on the shores of Lake Victoria, the largest tropical freshwater lake in the world. In a description of the film, Sauper called his documentary "Filming in the Heart of Darkness,"—a clear reference to Conrad.³⁰ Only Sauper's documentary is a reverse journey from the one in *Heart of Darkness*. It begins in the middle of what Sauper is referring to as the "darkness," and moves outward following the trail of effects that the Nile perch has on the Tanzanian people, economy and environment. The colonial presence is still clear, first indicated by the name of the lake (Lake Victoria was named after Queen Victoria of Britain by the explorer John Hanning Speke) and furthermore by the introduction of the Nile perch as the result of a "scientific experiment." Sauper's film follows the lives of Tanzanians and others affected by a globalized economy. The film begins its focus on the subject of the Nile perch, an invasive species in the lake that is exported by the ton to mainly European and Japanese markets. As the film progresses, an alternative agenda quickly emerges—the pilots are helping to fueling of civil wars in neighboring countries. To reveal this situation, Sauper's interviews with local Tanzanians come back to the same question; what do the planes carry in?

A once-rich environment, Lake Victoria became devastated in the 1960s when the Nile perch was introduced into the ecosystem as an experiment by European scientists and local governments. Once present in the lake, the Nile perch caused many native species to go extinct and greatly decrease the lake's biological diversity, making it into a "dead zone." Furthermore, once the amount of fish species declined past a certain point, the Nile perch began consuming its

²⁹ Sauper, Hubert. *Darwin's Nightmare*. Celluloid Dreams/ Capri Releasing, 2007.

³⁰ Sauper, Hubert. "DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE by Hubert Sauper." Accessed March 27, 2016. <http://www.darwinsnightmare.com/darwin/html/startset.htm>.

own young. The introduction of this fish, now turned cannibalistic, was considered at the time, an “environmental issue.” The Nile perch appears, first and foremost, as the primary subject of the documentary. What grew from the introduction of this fish species was an industrial system of extraction, processing and exportation. There is widespread poverty in the shantytowns surrounding the lake, high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, and prostitution. Nonetheless, the film paints the social, economic and environmental issues as connected in one way or another to the Nile perch. Sauper described his motivation in focusing on the fish:

In DARWIN’S NIGHTMARE I tried to transform the bizarre success story of a fish and the ephemeral boom around this "fittest" animal into an ironic, frightening allegory for what is called the New World Order. I could make the same kind of movie in Sierra Leone, only the fish would be diamonds, in Honduras, bananas, and in Libya, Nigeria or Angola, crude oil. Most of us I guess, know about the destructive mechanisms of our time, but we cannot fully picture them. We are unable to "get it," unable to actually believe what we know. (Sauper)

Referencing not only Darwin’s theory of evolution and globalization, Sauper confirms the use of the fish as an allegory for the larger, and historically reaching subject of globalization.

In a 2012 essay, Helen Hughes considers the history of intense scrutiny to Sauper’s documentary due to its categorization as an “activist” film.³¹ Contrary to the amount of pushback the documentary received, Hughes asserts that, “films like *Darwin’s Nightmare* are not playful. They do not experiment with the idea that truth is relative, but work with the ways in which individual perceptions and interpretive processes construct varied representations of events” (Hughes 248). Hughes also focuses on the relationship between a viewer in the Western world

³¹ Hughes, Helen. “Scrutiny and Documentary: Hubert Sauper’s *Darwin’s Nightmare*.” *Screen* 53, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 246–65. doi:10.1093/screen/hjs023.

watching a film like *Darwin's Nightmare*: "It can be understood here as an acceptance of its representation of the life of the poor and destitute in Mwanza, a representation which can be understood as 'abstract' in the sense that it is the truth of the image that is disturbing. All of these scenes involve dialogue with the filmmaker, are filmed with a handheld camera so that they both show and mean, and are both evidence of and part of an act of communication" (Hughes 250). A full analysis of the film is beyond the scope of this project, but it is a useful consideration to look at how the "anti-globalization" message of the film, which continues as a matter of heated critical debates, creates parallels between the two texts. While *Heart of Darkness* and *Darwin's Nightmare* are a century apart, the similarities between the two texts concerning globalized forces and ecological collapse are still inextricably intertwined.

Chapter 2

Apocalypse: The 1970s Environmental Imagination and *Soylent Green*

Apocalypse—the imagined, catastrophic end of the world! *Heart of Darkness* contains elements of apocalypse in its vision and it may, according to some interpretations, see an end to “civilization” on the “dark continent.” *Darwin’s Nightmare* gestures towards the entrapment of Tanzanians, Russian Pilots and others in the framework of global capitalism, which is also a kind of apocalyptic gesture. These “apocalyptic” glimpses into ecological devastation have very tangible effects in the real world, but how are these visions conceptualized in imaginative thinking?

In this chapter I shift my focus to North America, to look at how the apocalypse trope is treated in popular culture and scientific thinking. In particular, this chapter will focus on the use of the apocalypse trope in American environmental literature. Most often, the rhetoric surrounding ‘environmental’ apocalypse is used to call alarm on what is eroding the quality of the environment, or on human behaviors which might catalyze us towards the “end.” In his discussion of the apocalypse trope in environmental literature, Greg Garrard connects the biblical notion of apocalypse, which creates an “extreme moral dualism that divides the world sharply into friend and enemy” to contemporary fears about global, ecological disaster (Garrard 94).³² In particular, Garrard traces the religiously inspired dualisms in modern ‘environmental’ visions of authors such as Rachel Carson’s 1962 book *Silent Spring*, which is a critique of the increasing use of DDT pesticides and arguably the first American ecocritical work. ‘Environmental’ apocalypse can also be seen through Paul Ehrlich’s 1972 demographic text, *The Population Bomb*, which argued that global starvation would soon take place in the 1970s and 1980s due to

³² Garrard, Greg. “Apocalypse.” *Ecocriticism*. 2 edition. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2011.

worldwide overpopulation. These authors, to varying degrees, were both concerned with the connections between the state of agriculture, an increasing population and food security. Carson and Ehrlich's environmentalist texts were groundbreaking in their time and were also largely influenced by Thomas Malthus' 1798 demographic work, *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Garrard argues that, "Malthus was the first thinker to insist that social policy be guided by ecological necessity, and his theories of population founded the science of demographics, providing the basis for the theories of natural selection of Charles Darwin (1809-82) and Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-193) and, later, the emergence of ecology" (Garrard 102). Since Malthus' time there have been a number of articulations of his theories in topics relating to ecology and environmental science. The outlook of these visions are rarely positive and most of these depictions get labelled by what critics like to call "neo-Malthusian" nightmares.

A recurrent and persistent anxiety associated with environmental apocalypse is overpopulation. Popular perception of overpopulation is invariably linked to resource scarcity and the ecological theory of 'carrying capacity.' A fundamental feature of ecological science, 'carrying capacity' is the idea that an environment can only support a maximum number of organisms before it corrects itself. Once the correction has brought a population down to a sustainable level, the population is then at 'optimum carrying capacity.' Meaning, if a population consumes beyond the ecological limit of a natural resource—such as water, plants or fish—the environment will work to alter part of the population. The idea that an environment can exert a force over an entire population often inspires visions of disaster: the world will "end" by flooding, disease, starvation, overconsumption, and so on. Most importantly, Garrard argues, the rhetoric surrounding these visions of the end, "fosters a delusive search for culprits and causes that may be reductively conceived of a singular, imminent 'environmental crisis'" (Garrard 115).

In the imagination of the apocalyptic, even isolated environmentally-related incidents appear to be collectively hurtling towards imminent doom.

This purpose of this chapter is to analyze how overpopulation is articulated in popular culture. Specifically, this chapter will focus on representations of overpopulation in Richard Fleischer's 1973 film *Soylent Green*, which warns of imminent disaster.³³ *Soylent Green* depicts Manhattan in the year 2022, in a world so overcrowded that all natural resources have been depleted and where ideal 'nature' is lost. *Soylent Green* also resembles a police procedural, utilizing the science fiction form of a detective novel for its storytelling. At the outset of the film, we learn that Detective Thorn, the protagonist and hero, is investigating the murder of a wealthy businessman named William Simonson. With the aid of his colleague Sol, Thorn's "police book" who helps him with research, the pair work to uncover that Simonson was involved in the Soylent corporation. Soylent is not only responsible for providing crucial food supplies to the masses, but also for maintaining the waste disposal plants which we gather exist somewhere outside the cities.

Sol's character also serves to remind us of the world that is now lost in this future—a world in which 'nature' was still alive and available. We often see Sol lamenting the past, rambling on about a time when people could buy "real" food in grocery stores. He's seen riding a stationary bike to turn a generator as he comments: "When I was a kid, food was food! Before our scientific magicians poisoned the water, polluted the soil, decimated plant and animal life... why in my day you could buy meat anywhere! Eggs they had, real butter, fresh lettuce in the stores. How could anything survive in a climate like this?" *Soylent Green* thus sets up for viewers an environmentally devastated future in which the comforts of the 'natural' world no longer exists. This 'nature' used to house the nation's agricultural operations which produced the

³³ Fleischer, Richard. *Soylent Green*, (MGM) 1973. DVD.

“real” food, although we don’t see what this ‘nature’ used to look like until the end of the film. Sol decides to “go home” by admitting himself to the euthanasia center, where he’s treated to a private theater with classical music and a show containing video clips of this lost scenery: fields of wildflowers, running alpine streams, coral reefs and a pack of sheep grazing on an open mountainside. By comparison, the conditions of the everyday Manhattan appear nightmarish now that people have consumed so much of the world, leading to the total degradation of natural surroundings.

In this resource-scarce world, all of Manhattan relies on different flavored Soylent crackers manufactured by the Soylent Corporation. In an opening scene, a TV host announces the arrival of the “new delicious Soylent Green, the miracle food of high energy plankton gathered from the oceans of the world.” Even in the face of resource scarcity, Soylent has managed to feed the masses using nutrition from the world’s oceans. Although by the end of the film the horrible truth is revealed that it isn’t plankton, but that “Soylent Green... is people!” Thorn, after following the bodies from the euthanasia center out to the processing factories, connects the dots to the mystery of how people are surviving these nightmarish conditions. The Corporations, in an effort to continue feeding the masses and maintain control over a monopolized food market, have resorted to using people for food products. The secret plot of the corporations to capitalize on the excess of human bodies is to cannibalize the whole operation.

Categorized by most reviewers as “science fiction” and “quotidian apocalypse,”³⁴ *Soylent Green* is characteristic of the 1970s environmentalism which expressed deep concern over what was seen as linked phenomena of “unchecked” population growth and resource depletion. In his 2014 article, “Global Warming as Literary Narrative,” Frederick Buell accurately situates

³⁴ Sragow, Michael. “Soylent Green.” *New Yorker* 87, no. 30 (October 3, 2011): 18–18.

Soylent Green in the political and environmental attitudes of the late 1960s and early 1970s.³⁵

Buell argues that because the film laments the loss of pristine nature, it falls in line with the environmental movements of the postwar U.S. which, “idealized nature as original, pure, redemptive, foundational, other, pristine, healthy, balanced, equilibrical, beautiful, and/or sublime” (Buell 262). The flip side to this idealization of nature, Buell argues, is that it works to avoid what the public viewed as, “imminent environmental apocalypse, which threatened to end the biosphere or at least human civilization in several decades if nothing was done” (262).

Soylent Green already begins to imagine what a world leading up to that apocalypse might look like, depicting a biosphere that is decimated by industrial activity. For this reason, many people at the time read *Soylent Green* as a warning of current behaviors. A 1973 review of the film in *Newsweek* called it a “cautionary tale about the perils of ecological abuse, conjuring up a near future in which every dire forecast of today’s conservationists has been realized in spades.”³⁶ In other words, *Soylent Green* was read as a warning about increasing consumption patterns and an expanding global population, which would cause subsequent food shortage.

The issue with the film is that it blames the victim of the capitalist system which sets out to control nature for profit-making. *Soylent Green* appears to pinpoint the cause of increasing consumption patterns on the poor masses by associating overcrowding with urban spaces. Because of this relation, the poor are marked as the source of “uncontrolled” reproduction and overpopulation which was thought to lead to decimation of resources. This misconception is created from the idea that famine is an ‘environmental’ issue rather than a political one, something pointed out long ago by the Anglo-Irish satirist, Jonathan Swift. Swift mocked this

³⁵ Buell, Frederick. “Global Warming as Literary Narrative.” *Philological Quarterly* 93, no.3 (Summer 2014): 261-94.

³⁶ Paul Zimmerman. “Soylent Green.” *Newsweek* 81 (May 7, 1973): 104.

attitude toward the poor in his famous satirical piece, “A Modest Proposal”³⁷ which was first published in 1729. He proposed that the poor and starving people of Ireland ought to sell their children to the rich for them to eat as a “fair, cheap and easy method” of preserving the nation. Swift’s group of attack was the greedy landlords, whom he blamed for enforcing a system of poverty in the first place. His solution to feeding these starving masses was to begin consuming the children as food for the “useless mouths and backs” of the nation, savagely attacking the system which treats humans as expendable. The satirical commentary of Swift’s piece resonates with *Soylent Green*, in that it points to a paradox in labelling causes of “overpopulation:” those who consume very little (the poor) are those most often blamed for famine and hunger by those consuming the most (the wealthy).

Although it is now more commonly accepted that hunger is caused by the perpetuation of poverty itself rather than the other way around,³⁸ this notion has historically led to disastrous consequences, as highlighted by Swift’s piece. In this chapter, I will analyze *Soylent Green* through an ecocritical lens to argue that the film incorrectly pinpoints the root cause of hunger, among other political issues, to the poor as the source of environmental devastation. I will argue that the film reflects the classist fears of the 1970s over the loss of space and privacy due to increasing urban density. *Soylent Green* repeats Swift’s solution to the problem of widespread food shortage and famine but in a slightly different way: the film applies corporate profit-making as another element in the cycle of aristocratic arrogance which treats humans as expendable. *Soylent Green* satirizes the capitalist system’s need to control nature to function—it points to how the pristine “nature” that the white middle-classes longed for is never really attainable

³⁷ Jonathan Swift. “A Modest Proposal,” Originally published in 1729. <http://art-bin.com/art/omodest.html>.

³⁸ See Anup Shah. “Causes of Hunger Are Related to Poverty.” *Global Issues: Social, Political, Economic and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All*, October 30, 2010. <http://www.globalissues.org/article/7/causes-of-hunger-are-related-to-poverty>.

because of the rise of the urban. However, because the film directs viewers into thinking that people in the urban spaces have depleted the world of natural resources, it begins on an incorrect premise. The other element of satirical focus is to notice how the environment never corrects the population to optimum ‘carrying capacity.’ The corporations take care of this growth by the secret plot to cannibalize the masses. If anything, *Soylent Green* reinforces a key requisite of corporate capitalism; this system both needs people to function and also to consume them as its fuel.

I. The Rise of the Urban and Overpopulation

Soylent Green begins trafficking in overpopulation to its scenery by laying out a short history of the U.S. through photographs. In the opening shots of the film, the viewer is led through a montage of images, beginning with frontier life and European settlements in North America, to the first railroads and on to photos where there is a proliferation of automobiles, factory lines and crowds of people often with masks over their faces. The speeding up of film time grips the viewer into feeling the acceleration of environmental change until we get to the final images that show landscapes saturated with industrial activity. The sequence displays changes in transportation as well; there are photos of packed subway cars and a maze of highways. The acceleration reinforces the notion that society is hurtling towards doom by way of industrial development. This opening sequence also suggests an antagonism towards the urban spaces- more specifically, towards the “slums” which are cast as the repositories of overpopulation and therefore the cause of resource scarcity. Furthermore, the images of people wearing masks over their faces indicate the level of air pollution; as if air pollution was caused by a congestion of bodies. Pollution also seems to arise from mountains of waste that is produced by the urban spaces, indicated by the photos of landfills and rivers overflowing with trash. The

film then shifts to the *mise-en-scène* of future Manhattan as the site to articulate what a world would like if overpopulation and overcrowding have led fresh food to go scarce. A title screen flashes the words: “The Year: 2022. The Place: New York City. The Population: 40,000,000.” We see that the city is overpopulated and polluted, and people are forced to wait all day in a line for Soylent products. Residents are suffering from heated conditions and walking around in an omnipresent, greenish smog. The overcrowded streets and tenements suggest that with the rise in population and increased density of the American landscape, a drastic response is needed in response to this growth.

This dire need for action is iterated in a later scene, when Detective Thorn is called into to “crowd control” as one of the markets. The scene begins outside in the green smog, where consumers are haggling with vendors for plastic ware and brightly-colored Soylent products wrapped in clear bags. “Quick-energy, yellow Soylent made of genuine soybean!” yells one woman standing next to a tub of “Soylent Crumbs” which go for two dollars a kilo. In the next instant, a woman is seen upset and yelling about having waited in line all day for just a quarter-kilo. Like the others around her, she’s dressed in rags. In fact, most people are completely covered, wearing masks over their noses and mouths, pointing to how the area is polluted. The woman is promptly taken away by the police as she keeps yelling to those around her; “Are you all going to put up with this?” Thorn whispers to another officer about how “they’re running out of the damn green.” The police then make their final announcement; “the supply of Soylent Green has been exhausted” and in the atmosphere of increasing anger, a riot quickly breaks out. People start shoving up against the police and falling into store windows. In response, the police call in “the scoops” which are literal construction machines that begin to haul people into dumping trucks. The scene is a hint, gesturing towards the casual disposability of people. People

become waste in this film once the overcrowding is too much for the authorities to control. The use of the scoops suggests a mechanized intervention is needed to clear away the obstacles to peace and control, which in this case is human bodies.

II. Urban Density and the Middle-Class

Ecocritic Ursula K. Heise, who reads *Soylent Green* in context of the evolution of overpopulation as a literary topic, notes that the film essentially reflects a classist fear about the urban experience, particularly about the loss of space and privacy.³⁹ Heise argues that the neo-Malthusian texts of the 1970s, such as *Soylent Green*, often “link the abstract demographic concept of overpopulation to experiences of intense anxiety in urban environments that are described as consisting principally of human bodies, as if physical crowding were the most immediate or the most significant consequence of excessive population growth” (Heise 6). In effect, Heise argues, the notion of overpopulation becomes more a fear of the “erasure of individuality” (Heise 6). This fear is also clearly demonstrated in the “crowd control” scene by how the masses are all more or less dressed in the same garments. Since these misconceptions about overpopulation in urban spaces are rooted in a class bias, wealth divide contributes to the distortion of where “city” ends and where “nature” begins. This divide also fuels the idea that society must work to preserve what is left of the non-urban spaces.

Whereas Heise’s ecocritical analysis looked at the film’s classist biases in its conception of environmental apocalypse, recent ecocritical attentions to the film focus on the motivations behind preserving an ‘ideal’ nature. In a 2013 article, Rowland Hughes argues that, “the great fear expressed by Fleischer’s film is not that human industrial activity will decimate the natural

³⁹ Heise, Ursula K. “The Virtual Crowds Overpopulation, Space and Speciesism.” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 1–29. doi:10.1093/isle/8.1.1.

resources of the planet and overwhelm the green areas, but that our standard of living will be impacted upon by this” (Hughes 28). Hughes reinforces Heise’s argument that *Soylent Green* expresses a deep class anxiety about the distribution of resources: the enemy in the film is overpopulation and overconsumption which will threaten white, middle-class standards of living. Furthermore, Hughes argues that the environmental lament of the films is that “living comfortably requires the control and mastery of nature, which must be consumed at a restrained, regulated pace. If not, we will be forced to start consuming ourselves” (Hughes 29). Hughes is right to suggest that the film’s anxiety about overconsumption and dwindling resources, lead inevitably to cannibalistic tendencies. What he fails to point out however, is that the response in preserving nature by distributing it in a sustainable manner, most often happens at the expense of those contributing the least to this degradation.

III. Overpopulation, Reproduction and Gender

Reproduction is never mentioned explicitly in *Soylent Green*, although we can assume that the film is engaged with this issue by virtue of the fact that it deals with overpopulation. In *Soylent Green*, the poor are associated both with overpopulation and the infectious, disorderly conditions of the urban realm. In one particularly violent scene, Thorn picks up a child who is tied to his dead mother’s body and brings him to the nearest church. The deranged priest mutters to himself how there are “far too many poor.” This church is overflowing with people, wandering miserably with dirt-stained faces in a haze of suffocating air. The despondent tone signals to how these conditions are deemed polluted and infectious. Because the church is overloaded with bodies, specifically with bodies of the poor, poverty is yet another factor associated with the overcrowding. This coupling of poverty with overcrowding, and by extension with a warming atmosphere, leads viewers to also link unchecked reproduction with the

perpetuation of dwindling resources. The miserable atmosphere contributes to the sense that the poor are doomed by a cycle of producing more bodies even when there is no material left to support them. The “paradox” of how the poor are being fed even when there is no longer any fresh food is kept secret until the very end when Thorn solves the mystery. We learn that the system has taken to consuming the excess bodies to fuel more food production, thus continuing the cycle that locks people into impoverished conditions.

The oppression of the poor in an inescapable cycle is also echoed in the film’s treatment of the “furniture girls.” During his investigation at the apartment of the murdered William Simonson, Thorn meets Shirl who tells him she works as “building furniture.” In this imagined future, each apartment of the elite comes with a “furniture girl” and each new tenant has the choice to keep her when they move in. These women are treated as commodities and they rarely leave the building, forced to pose as stationary objects in the seductively cool, air-conditioned apartments. Their ignorance of the outside world demonstrates how closed off they have become in this enclosed and cannibalistic system. For example, once Thorn begins a relationship with Shirl, she tells him they should run away together. Only she doesn’t know this isn’t an option, so when she says they could move to another city Thorn responds:

Thorn: “What for? They’re all like this.

Shirl: “The country?”

Thorn: “That’s not allowed, those farms are like fortresses!

Shirl: “Why?”

Thorn: “Good land’s gotta be guarded the way they guard the waste disposal plants and the Solyent factories...and there are idiots in this world that want to take away everything we got.”

Thorn and Shirl's conversation gives indication to how this society has resorted to militarizing "farmland." Shirl's naivete over the conditions of the country reveals the blindness built around those spaces of the elite. The roles of these women as furniture in an inescapable cycle echo those of the city-dwellers who live trapped in polluted conditions. Dennis M. Lensing connects this apocalyptic outlook on the state of "good land" to the conditions of the "furniture girls" in a 2006 article titled, "The fecund androgyne: Gender and the utopian/dystopian imagination of the 1970s."⁴⁰ Lensing argues that in *Soylent Green*, "any role for women other than the subservient and the sexual is erased; reproduction is never mentioned. In fact, not a single character in the entire movie ever refers to any family at all" which, according to Lensing, works "to reinforce the film's vision of the entire world as an oppressively closed system, a dead end" (Lensing 100). In other words, Lensing is pointing to how there is something inherently oppressive about the apocalyptic imagination. In regard to the women in *Soylent Green*, the apocalyptic outlook leads to their commodification dictated by the elite. In terms of the poor, this outlook leads to their forced confinement in overcrowded and polluted conditions.

IV. Conclusions

Soylent Green, at its most basic, is about overpopulation and the depletion of natural resources. The apocalyptic outlook of the film is that the loss of nature will result in covert cannibalism created by the greedy and profit-seeking authoritarian corporations. In creating this vision, *Soylent Green* draws attention to the cannibalistic nature of an enclosed system with no hope for alternatives. The film attempts to point out this paradox of such a system by mocking the self-indulgent tendencies of Corporate profit-making, which treats humans as expendable.

⁴⁰ Lensing, Dennis M. "The Fecund Androgyne: Gender and the Utopian/dystopian Imagination of the 1970s." *Socialism and Democracy* 20, no. 3 (November 1, 2006): 87–103. doi:10.1080/08854300600950251.

Only the film begins on the wrong premise—it blames the poor for uncontrolled reproduction. In this regard, we see the influence of texts such as Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb* on *Soylent Green* because it ties overpopulation with increased poverty, reproduction and apocalyptic doom. The satirical solution to cannibalize isn’t new; Swift already proposed this solution in order to call attention the destructive nature of those in power. The use of satire will be crucial for the following chapter on Margaret Atwood’s 2003 novel, *Oryx and Crake*, which imagines what the system in *Soylent Green* would look like if genetic engineering allowed us to manufacture our own food.

Chapter 3

Bioimperialism: Gender, Difference and *Oryx and Crake*

“Biotechnology and patenting of life forms is now the new frontier for conquest, and Africa ought to be weary because a history of colonialism and exploitation is repeating itself...Industry has in fact already managed to gain private monopoly rights (patents) on some living materials, by distorting the original concept and intention of patenting—as life is obviously not an invention.”

- Wangari Maathai,

“The Link between Patenting of Life Forms, Genetic Engineering & Food Insecurity”

“If during colonialism the concept of Terra Nullius, empty land, allowed the takeover of land and territories by the colonizer, a new concept of Bio Nullius, empty life, is being used to claim “intellectual property rights” on seeds, biodiversity and life forms. But life is not empty. Seeds are not an invention. They employed millions of years of biological evolution, and thousands of years of cultural evolution and farmers breeding”

- Vandana Shiva,

“GMOS, Seed Wars, and Knowledge Wars”

Environmental devastation is central to Margaret Atwood’s 2003 futuristic novel, *Oryx and Crake*, which imagines a future where a single “experiment” has left the world rid of humanity. Jimmy, or “Snowman” as he is known in the post-apocalypse, is the only person left standing after the unidentified catastrophe has caused humans to become extinct. Like *Soylent Green*, many critics have identified the novel as “science fiction,” although Atwood calls her work “speculative fiction.” Atwood has insisted in interviews that *Oryx and Crake* is based on an exaggeration of what is already present—the misapplication of scientific knowledge, pollution, genetic engineering, sex trafficking and the effects of transnational corporations’ reckless behavior for profit, to name a few. Atwood draws us into her dark speculation through the voice of Jimmy and the focus on his friendship with his genius, scientist friend Crake. As her first novel written completely in the voice of a male narrator, *Oryx and Crake* is closer to a traditional, masculine tone of dystopian fiction. In fact, *Oryx and Crake* has been praised for

using dark and “Swiftian” satire through its “multi-layered” narrative” (Bouson 141).⁴¹ This multi-dimensionality has also been cause to for many critics to compare the novel to the philosophy of ecofeminist Val Plumwood.⁴² Ecofeminists like Plumwood look at the way in which the root dualism between nature and culture set up other social and racial/ethnic groups as inferior to the traditional white, male subject which is most often associated with culture. By questioning many competing dualisms at once, such as that between nature/culture, man/woman and mind/body, *Oryx and Crake* experiments with the logic that creates these dualisms and their relation to environmental destruction. This experimentation makes *Oryx and Crake* a prime text for ecocritical analysis.⁴³ My focus in this chapter is to view how the novel performs its own ecocritical work, particularly through the ways in which Atwood uses language and storytelling to pose ecocritical questions not just about colonialism and takeover of land, but also about the entire history of the West.

To begin, the style of the novel is to alternate between past and present and between Jimmy’s childhood and his life in isolation. We learn that before the “experiment” happened, Jimmy lived a comfortable life in the sheltered Compounds even though the outside world was suffering from the effects of global climate change. In the futuristic landscape of the present,

⁴¹ Bouson, J. Brooks. “‘It’s Game Over Forever’: Atwood’s Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*.” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 139–56. doi:10.1177/0021989404047051.

⁴² See: Glover, Jayne. “Human/Nature: Ecological Philosophy in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.” *English Studies in Africa* 52, no. 2 (October 1, 2009): 50–62. doi:10.1080/00138390903444149. See also: Mayer, Sylvia. “Literary studies, ecofeminism and environmentalist knowledge production in the humanities.” *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*. Amsterdam; New York (NY): Editions Rodopi BV, 2006.

⁴³ For other ecocritical analyses see: Volkmann, Laurenz, Nancy Grimm, and Ines Detmers, eds. *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities: Ecocritical Perspectives on the New English Literatures*. Amsterdam ; New York: Rodopi, 2010. This anthology contains four essays that foreground *Oryx and Crake* as the primary ecocritical text for analysis, including: “The Medium is... the Monster?: Global Aftermathematics in Canadian Articulations of *Frankenstein*” by Mark A. McCutcheon, “Reading as an Animal: Ecocriticism and Darwinism in Margaret Atwood and Ian McEwan” by Greg Garrard, “Faustian Dreams and Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*” by Giuseppina Botta and “Science ad Deconstruction of Natural Identity: Arthur Conan Doyle’s “When the World Screamed” and Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*” by Ingrid-Charlotte Wolter.

Snowman lives a semi-lonesome life among a pack of humanoid creatures called the Crakers, so named because they were created by Crake. Snowman spends his time teaching the Crakers about the environment, telling them stories about their creator which mimic familiar, Biblical creation myths. He starts laying out the ways of the world for the Crakers through mythmaking, in a vague hope of having something to leave behind when he dies. His outlook is pessimistic though, as he also recognizes that, “he’ll have no future reader, because the Crakers can’t read. Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past” (41).⁴⁴ A lost world of readers, however, doesn’t prevent Snowman from telling himself stories to keep sane. He also continually conjures up memories of Oryx, the Asian woman who is the object of Jimmy and Crake’s childhood desires. Crake and Jimmy first encounter Oryx watching “HottTotts,” one of the many pornography websites used to occupy their dull, teenage years in the Compounds. Like the other bodies on the pornography channels and assisted suicide shows, Oryx is commodified and treated like an object to be exchanged the rest of the novel. Eventually, Oryx is hired by Crake to work in his *Paradise* project, where she meets Jimmy and they begin an affair. It is here she begins telling him her story of being a child sold into the global sex-trafficking market, which occupies almost the exact center of the novel, although her role in the story remains somewhat unclear. It may or may not be her voice that haunts Snowman as he grows weakened by the day, but in the post-apocalypse Snowman has transformed Oryx into an Eve figure. Snowman explains to the Crakers that all other life descends from her, known as the “Children of Oryx” and Crake their dual Adam and God figure.

Storytelling is another driving force behind the plot of *Oryx and Crake*. Not only does Snowman use myths to construct a world for the Crakers, he also uses storytelling for his own

⁴⁴ Pages correspond to: Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. New York: Anchor Books: A Division of Random House, Inc., 2003.

survival and to keep moving forward. Because of this, we learn from his flashbacks that the novel is set somewhere (possibly Boston) in the near future on the east coast of North America where the wealthy, intellectual, and scientifically-minded elite live in gated “Compounds.” Each Compound revolves around a multinational biogenetic corporation involved in the production of genetically-altered life forms such as wolvogs (wolf/dog), rakunks (rat/skunk), and pigoons (pigs with human brain tissue). Some “body-oriented” Compounds even make products to alter the human form, such as NooSkins, a method to replace older skin with one that is “wrinkle- and blemish-free” (55). The splicing together of different animals and human body parts is done just as casually as the mixing of artificial food products (ChickieNobs Nubbins, SoyOBoy Burgers, Happicuppa coffee) used to feed the Compounds residents.

In the Compounds reigns the freedom to customize life dictated by human will. Both the absurdity and humor in this setup have been cause for many critics to claim the novel is ‘unfocused’ in that it treats ecological disaster as an “afterthought.”⁴⁵ I argue, however, that this surreal style is part of the novel’s strength. Atwood’s choice to constantly introduce new genetically-spliced inventions, while alternating between past and present, creates a fragmented narrative that occurs at a speed like flipping through TV channels. From reading this style, we might be led to believe that this exaggerated era of media saturation has led the state of global ecology to have gone awry in this imagined future, although it is revealed through later passages that there is a clear order to the chaos. At the same time there appears to be no regulation around gene splicing and no clear chain of events, Atwood subtly writes into the disorder a persisting biopolitical schema.

⁴⁵ Adam Trexler is quick to disregard *Oryx and Crake* as too “unfocused” in his collection: *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press, 2015. Trexler’s critique being that Atwood treats climate change as an “afterthought or symptom of wider environmental collapse” (6).

In the midst of global environmental degradation, Atwood creates a world that mirrors present societal fears of a warming climate. That is to say, it is as if the fears of an overpopulated and resource-scarce world which led to the class division in *Soylent Green* were taken to the extreme. *Oryx and Crake* raises the same concerns expressed by 1970s environmentalism, but in the dialectic of the early 2000s, in which global media exchange has allowed violence and pornography to become commonplace forms of entertainment. In this chapter I will argue that Atwood's novel performs its own ecocritical work by questioning who is involved in creating apocalyptic visions of environmental collapse. To do so, *Oryx and Crake* first calls attention to the imperial and patriarchal tendencies of a world dominated by technoscientific projects. The novel satirizes the strength of this coded (masculine) dominant order first by reproducing it in the setting of the Compounds, and then demonstrates its undoing by showing how it is self-destructive. Crake, who obsesses over what he sees as paradoxes to human behavior, uses his science genius (and corporate funding) to remake these behaviors by creating his perfect "model" Crakers. He manufactures a global pandemic in an act of "bioterrorism," so that these Crakers can "replace" what he sees as a society doomed by its inability to calculate the most efficient way of living, unlike other animals.

By blurring the line between objective "experimentation" and capitalist greed at the outset of the novel, Atwood satirizes visions of impending doom by highlighting their dramatic tendencies to erase artistic value and imaginative thinking. Once Atwood sees the old order through to its undoing, the underlying narratives of Biblical creation and Romantic adventure through imperial expansion are exposed as being built into the framework. For instance, Jimmy starts painting Oryx and Crake as Eve and Adam figures respectively, in order to explain to the Crakers where they came from. Jimmy, weakened and slowly starving to death, also begins

reiterating scenes of colonial ‘encounter’ and pioneer expansion into the American West to keep himself moving forward, which will be discussed in the following sections. Only in the post-apocalypse, these narratives no longer hold any value. Instead, Jimmy must look to the Crakers for his own survival in the new landscape. In doing so, the binary paradigms of the world order start to collapse, leaving open the possibility of alternatives to accommodate for ecological difference.

I. Bio-imperialism and *Oryx and Crake*

One way Atwood writes in an order among global chaos is to create a divide between the Compounds and pleeblands. From Jimmy’s flashbacks we learn that the Compounds were built specifically to be closed off from the surrounding “pleeblands,” which are the cities on the outside. The pleeblands are where, a young Jimmy excitedly tells us, that kids “waste themselves with loud music and talking and boozing, fuck everything including the family cat, trash the furniture, shoot up, overdose” which he calls “glamorous” (73). The Compound kids glorify these wild and unruly lands, creating fantasies out of places rumored to be filled with exotic sexual opportunities, drugs, and undisciplined children. At the same time, the pleeblands are cast as repulsive by the elite; they are described as being filled with “asymmetries, deformities” and where security is “leaky” (288, 27). The oppressive stance toward the pleeblands sets the stage for future interactions between the two realms.

“Pleeblands” also clearly invokes the word ‘plebeian,’ signifying a divide between wealth and poverty. The Oxford English Dictionary defines plebeian as originating from Roman History to denote the commoner, as opposed to the privileged patricians. Furthermore, plebeian carries with it a derogatory connotation: “having qualities or features characteristic of or attitude to the lower

classes.”⁴⁶ The Compounds have to protect themselves from interference with these commoners, Jimmy’s father explains. What’s more, the threat from the ‘pleebs’ is more than just a few “addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies” which Jimmy calls “loose change” (27). The threat is multi-dimensional:

When there was so much at stake, there was no telling what the other side might resort to. The other side, or the other sides: it wasn’t just one other side you had to watch out for. Other companies, other countries, various factions and plotters. There was too much hardware around, said Jimmy’s father. Too much hardware, too much software, too many hostile bioforms, too many weapons of every kind. And too much envy and fanaticism and bad faith. (27)

Thus the division in this narrative, between the center of power and the unruly masses, is an internal and domestic division. Although the pleeblands are the markets for the Compound corporations, residents never leave the confines of the “walls and gates and searchlights” (27). With the advances in biotechnology, there is no longer any need to venture outward to gather resources for capital. There is no territorial expansion in order to maintain control and stability, so the Compounds operate in insular spheres. Because the threat to Compounds comes from multiple sides, there’s also a heightened sense of militarism around the division. The paranoia over “hostile bioforms,” “envy” and “fanaticism” force the CorpseCorps men, the Compounds’ private police force, to be on “constant alert” defending what Jimmy’s father calls “*our people*” (27). The pleeblands become the foil to the Compounds regulated set up akin to a “theme park,” which is how Jimmy’s mother refers to the Compounds (27).

The great irony of this setup, between the Compounds and the rest of the world, is that while what’s “at stake” always appears to be collapse of this global order, the novel exists in a world that has already become devastated from free-market capitalism. Because the Compounds continue to engage in reckless experimentation, always creating new transgenic animal species

⁴⁶ "plebeian, n. and adj.". OED Online. March 2016. *Oxford University Press*. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/145604?redirectedFrom=plebian> (accessed April 24, 2016).

and human-enhancement products to fuel the markets in the pleeblands, this leads to a lack of regulation over environmental damage. For instance, in the OrganInc Compound where Jimmy grows up, his parents work on creating pigoons, or pigs with human brain tissue to be used for organ harvesting to “fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year” (22). Adults lament a past before the effects of global climate change took full force. Jimmy reiterates those stories: “The coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes and meat became harder to come by...” (24). While advertising themselves to protect against the disastrous effects of a hostile environment, the Compounds can remain in denial of their role in causing this damage.

Oryx and Crake, like *Soylent Green*, is a vision of apocalypse in which the world as conceived of by humanity comes to an end. Unlike *Soylent Green*, which creates a world decimated by capitalist cannibalism, Atwood’s novel produces a human-induced apocalypse which is manufactured by one man’s paranoid, scientific experiment. Furthermore, by incorporating the development of genetic engineering as a tool of corporate control into the equation, Atwood makes explicit the gendered implications of scientific development. For instance, the male characters in this novel, such as Jimmy’s father, defend the legitimacy of the Compounds to engage in constant experimentation on products that enhance the human form. Thus the dominant order in this narrative is coded as masculine, drawing out a very traditional gender binary. By mapping this binary in the Compound/pleebland setup, Atwood projects the gendered world of the present as continuing into the future.

The development of biotechnologies is a relatively new phenomenon in American culture generally and in consumer culture, in particular. It wasn't until the second half of the 20th century that new developments in genetic engineering became more readily available. It was argued that by using these new technologies, life itself could be altered in nonviolent ways to increase crop yields, creating drought-resistant strains and enhancing plant and animal species. But since its introduction into the world's ecosystems, genetic engineering has been likened to imperial conquest. For instance, in a 1998 article, Nobel Peace Prize winner and founder of the Kenyan Green Belt Movement, Wangari Maathai compared the patenting of life to the creation of a capitalist monopoly. Maathai's comparison is between the agricultural use of genetic engineering and territorial conquest. But her connection between life as intellectual property and imperial expansion informs a reading of how an artificially altered world can benefit corporate biopower. *Oryx and Crake* invests itself in viewing the effects of this imperial venture by imagining the consequences of when corporate greed meets the arrogance of 'science.'⁴⁷

In Atwood's world, narratives of imperial conquest have been normalized by the computer games that Jimmy and Crake play as kids, such as "Barbarian Stomp (See If You Can Change History!)," "Bloods and Roses" and "Extinctathon." The Bloods and Roses game in particular provides Snowman with material to ruminate over in the post-apocalypse. It is a trading game that uses "human atrocities on a large scale" and "human achievements" as bargaining chips in a Monopoly-like schema (77). Jimmy informs us that "one *Mona Lisa*

⁴⁷ Empire has long relied on the legitimacy of 'science' for the management of exploitative projects. This phenomenon can also be seen through *Heart of Darkness* when the Belgian doctor tells Charlie Marlow that entering into the tropics would alter his brain: "I always ask leave in the interest of science, to measure the crania of those going out there," referring to the colonizers' "missions" down the Congo River. "'And when they come back too?' [Marlow] asked. 'Oh I never see them' he remarked; 'and moreover, the changes take place inside you know.'" The doctor rattles on, undermining his own objective, scientific process (Conrad 137). The doctor's rationale is a common misapplication of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, in which scientists would directly apply his concept of "survival of the fittest" to human societies. In effect, this misapplication upheld a civilized/savage spectrum and functioned as yet another tool of control over the colonized people and resources.

equalled Bergen-Belsen, one Armenian genocide equalled *Ninth Symphony* plus three Great Pyramids” (78). Weakened and dazed by his condition in the land of after, he tries to remember: “*The Divine Comedy*. Greek statuary. Aqueducts. *Paradise Lost*...Rembrandt. Verdi. Joyce. Penicillin...Baudelaire. Bartok. Yeats. Woolf. There must have been more. There were more” (78). The most salient of these games, however, is Extinctathon, “an interactive biofreak masterlore game” which becomes Crake’s obsession and also where he adopts his name, from the extinct Australian bird called the Red-necked Crake (80). Knowing the classification of recently extinct species is what advances you in the game and Crake’s obsesses over becoming a grandmaster player. He carries the scheme of Extinctathon through to his Paradise project where he locks Jimmy into the game that he plays with humanity—a project that results in an act of mass genocide.

II. Crake’s Experiment and the Misapplication of ‘Carrying Capacity’

The apocalyptic event which initiates Jimmy’s life as Snowman arises from Crake’s paranoia over what he calls human “conundrums.” Growing up, Crake continuously expresses his many qualms to Jimmy over what he sees as paradoxes to human nature:

Jimmy, look at it realistically. You can’t couple a minimum access to food with an expanding population indefinitely. *Homo Sapiens* doesn’t seem able to cut himself off at the supply end. He’s one of the few species that doesn’t limit reproduction in the face of dwindling resources. In other words—and up to a point, of course—the less we eat, the more we fuck. (120)

This passage is one of many where Crake continues to apply ‘carrying capacity,’ among other ideas, to human society. In this sequence, Crake starts deducing what he sees as the fundamental problems in the world by calculating where resources are being used up. He treats “*Homo Sapiens*” as a collective that will eventually surpass its global ‘carrying capacity,’ or the maximum number of organisms that can fill an environment before that environment corrects

itself. Crake sees the collective human tendency to reproduce in spite of dwindling resources as a “desperate” need to pass on some version of ourselves. Since “men” can imagine their own deaths, unlike other animals, this desperation “acts like an aphrodisiac,” according to Crake, as if unchecked sexual behavior prevents people from thinking economically, and therefore sustainably (120). Crake calculates the environmental impact of human bodies as if it were an equation or a game, like playing Bloods and Roses.

The obsession over human “conundrums” also complicates Crake’s rational lens on society, and it continues to plague him even after he leaves the HelthWyzer Compound to study at the esteemed Watson-Crick University. Jimmy, on the other hand, is left with no other option than to attend the lowly Martha Graham Academy where he studies subjects such as “Applied Rhetoric.” It is during this time that Crake begins his secret project working on the “Crakers,” his fantastic population of a perfect “model” humanoid species built from his own transgenic methods in order to replace what he sees as a flawed human population. Whereas in *Soylent Green*, the problem of “expanding population” and “dwindling resources” is solved through a secret plot to cannibalize, in this novel the quest for a solution to the “problem” leads this one man to adopt an all-encompassing “experiment” that sterilizes the population. Not only that, the experiment is distributed in the form of a pill that ultimately releases the JUVE virus and destroys all of human life.

In a later scene, Crake has recruited Jimmy to work in his “Paradise” dome. He explains to Jimmy how he will disguise his sterilization project by selling a pill called BlyssPluss which will solve the world’s social and environmental woes by acting as a “sure-fire, one-time-does-it-all-birth-control pill, for male and female alike, thus automatically lowering the population level” (294). Crake attributes overpopulation, environmental degradation and poor nutrition to war,

which he believes is really “misplaced sexual energy” (293). He also starts comparing humans to other animals, assuring Jimmy that the first stage of the project is based on the (now extinct) bonobo chimpanzee, a peaceful species which “had spent most of its waking life, when it wasn’t eating, engaged in copulation. Its intraspecific aggression factor had been very low” (293). Crake takes deliberate pains to assure Jimmy the changes he’s making, “namely the nature of human nature” are more beneficial because these changes are based on other more efficient and more peaceful species (293). Crake turns to other species as models as if they were neutral territory, although his outlook is anything but objective. Crake’s biased associations with human “illnesses” are built into his rational outlook by way of a structuralized blindness.

To address what he has boiled down to as a handful of “illnesses” in the world, Crake explains that once the BlyssPlus pill stopped reproduction all together, the Crakers would then “replace” society:

It was amazing—said Crake—what once-unimaginable things had been accomplished by the team here. What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world’s current illnesses. For instance, racism—or, as they referred to it in Paradise, pseudospeciation—has been eliminated in the model group, merely by switching the bonding mechanism: the Paradise people simply did not register skin colour. Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it. Since they were neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land, there was no territoriality: the king-of-the castle hard wiring that had plagued humanity had, in them, been unwired... Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones: they came in heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than man. (305)

Crake’s “floor models” cannot create hierarchy, which he thinks will rid humans of these “illnesses.” Among these “illnesses” is sexuality which he calls a “cloud of turbulent hormones,” equating weather patterns with the “chaos” of sexual drives. He assumes sexuality to be a “torment” to man, and therefore another defect. Sex, among other behaviors, is yet another piece to be calculated into Crake’s equation of a perfect and regulated world. But by erasing social hierarchy and the historical value of race and racial difference, Crake’s project is essentially one

of manufacturing blindness. Rather than accommodate for difference, he desires to rewire the “ancient primate brain,” associating the project with a straightforward, Darwinian notion of evolution. Crake calls racism an “illness,” pinpointing sources of destruction to a defect in human development. Crake thinks in a linear fashion, and his solution to completely smooth out irregularity echoes this thinking. We know from the beginning that the Crakers are marked by skin color, but by a perfectly equitable spectrum. Jimmy tells us, “they’re amazingly attractive, these children—each one naked, each one perfect, each one a different skin colour—chocolate, rose, tea, butter, cream, honey—but each with green eyes. Crake’s aesthetic” (8). The Children of Crake are marked by difference in skin color, but in effect these codes on the body no longer carry the same significance. Marked only by “Crake’s aesthetic,” these bodies carry no codes at all. Smoothing out difference is its own kind of violence because it has to be forced. By making everyone perfectly aesthetically ‘diverse,’ there is no more difference.

In order to rid the world of “illnesses” in human nature, Crake manufactures a plague so that the Crakers can replace the human race. He assigns Oryx the job of selling the BlyssPluss pill to sex clubs in the pleeblands, which spreads the JUVE virus, killing everyone and inciting the apocalypse. So the world that Atwood imagines never ends because her society reaches ‘carrying capacity.’ The Compounds never extract past an ecological limit, nor does an overpopulated world consume resources to a point of scarcity. Rather Crake’s paranoia leads to the system’s (and his own) self-destruction before anything is ever used up completely. Crake, as a member of the wealthy elite, has the privilege to remain blind to how the Compound system has enacted this mentality. There’s no threat of “overpopulation” or “poor nutrition” because the Compounds have the wealth and power to manufacture their own food. Here, Atwood is clearly satirizing the paranoia of wealthy areas to claim they are vulnerable to collapse. In retrospect, it

is clear that the quality of life is already so decimated that the Compound residents must live off an entirely artificial diet. Although nutritional intake and media consumption appears entirely artificial, the state of this world is never so nightmarish to be considered in a full-blown dystopia. Crake and Jimmy accept the reality of their artificial lifestyles. Though now, in the post-apocalypse, Jimmy is reminded how Crake used to wake up in the middle of the night screaming when he would visit him at Watson-Crick. Crake says he doesn't remember his dreams, but now Snowman is "immersed in them, wading through them, he's stuck in them. Every moment he's lived in the past few months was dreamed first by Crake. No wonder Crake screamed so much" (218). Immersed in the destruction of the world, Crake's vision has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In one scene, Jimmy's listens to one of his girlfriends' artist friends discuss their view on the fate of the world: "According to them it had been game over once agriculture was invented, six or seven thousand years ago. After that, the human experiment was doomed, first to gigantism due to a maxed out food supply, and then to extinction, once all the available nutrients had been covered up" (243). This dystopian vision within the nightmarish conditions of the present embody a great irony; the line between where full-blown disaster begins and ends is never clear, the conditions of the present "experiment" are never bad enough to give warning of already alarming tendencies. Here, Atwood begins mocking the destructive tendencies of the elite; herein lies her great satire.

Because Crake chooses not to look at power, his logic in comparing humans to other species does not hold up to the same ecological principles. Garrard reminds us that carrying capacity is "rendered meaningless when applied to human societies that always mediate food supply with political, military and economic power" (Garrard 106). Crake is unable to separate those scientific principles from the world around him and ignores how those systems are

inherently political. Yet, somehow he also recognizes the limitations of this logic. Crake hires Jimmy, the “words man,” to market the BlyssPluss pill with the ultimate goal of getting Jimmy to lead his perfect “models” after everyone else is gone. His choice to hire Jimmy, who got hired out of Martha Graham Academy to sell fake health products at the AnooYoo Compound, speaks to both the absurdity and very dark nature of this project. Jimmy’s reputation, as someone who passed “Film-making and Video Arts” by putting on naked renditions of *Pride and Prejudice* and *To the Lighthouse*, matches this surreal reality full of cheapened arts. There’s humor in this setup, in that Jimmy and Crake are the ones who both spent the majority of their early Compound life using Crake’s uncle’s computer passwords to watch suicide channels, executions and pornography. In the midst of this postmodern era of media saturation, the boundary between what is real and what is fake is also blurred. Nevertheless, there’s a sense of finality to Jimmy’s life as a “words man” who is engaged with the performing arts. “What’s his life worth anyway, and who cares? Out, out, brief candle. He’s served his evolutionary purpose, as fucking Crake knew he would. He’s saved the children” (107). If anything, the performance of the final catastrophe concludes his dramatization of the conditions in the present. Once the virus hits, Jimmy tells us it was like “porn with the sound muted, it was brainfrizz without the ads. It was melodrama so overdone that he and Crake would have laughed their heads off at it, if they’d been fourteen and watching it on DVD” (326). The drama of the scene closes the curtain on this part of Jimmy’s life, erasing the tensions which set the stage for this final, apocalyptic moment. Now, everything that happened before exists only in his memory.

IV. Gender and Ecological Chaos

In building up to the destruction caused by Crake’s “experiment,” other tensions in Jimmy’s childhood result in smaller catastrophes. Specifically, the system inside the Compounds

is also bound up in a tense gender dichotomy, resulting in hostility between men and women. Traditional gender roles persist in this future, embodied by Jimmy's scientist parents; his father is dedicated to maintaining freedom of the Compounds to experiment as they please while his mother, although she also a former scientist, takes issue with the ethics of the setup. In fact, this society is also traditionally gendered in that the majority of scientists are male. There's a sense of fraternity around creating new cross-species: "There'd been a lot of fooling around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God," remembers Jimmy (51). This world associates the realm of science with men and reason. Meanwhile, women are associated with the realm of emotion. This division leads to the oppressive stance towards women, including Jimmy's mother who falls into a depression.

Oppressive relations between men and women are not new for Atwood's writing. For example, Coral Ann Howells reads *Oryx and Crake* as a sequel to Atwood's 1985 dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* in the 2006 collection of *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Howells begins her assessment by looking at Atwood's most famous dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is set in a future Cambridge, Massachusetts, in a world where women are forced to bear children for men of elite standing. As a Handmaid, the novel's protagonist Offred is "deprived of her own name and identity, she has no rights as an individual but instead has been conscripted into sexual service to the state, reduced by its doctrine of biological essentialism to her female role as a child breeder" (Howells 165). Whereas *The Handmaid's Tale* is more concerned with the oppression of women under totalitarian rule, Howells argues that *Oryx and Crake* is a more satirical commentary on "late modern American capitalist society" (164). *Oryx and Crake* can be read, she contends, as a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, if the outlook from Atwood's first dystopian novel, "resulted in an American

lifestyle of consumerist decadence in a high-tech world which is ultimately death-doomed by one man's megalomaniac project of bioterrorism" (Howells 161). Here, Howells is referring to Crake's genocidal experiment. For Howells it is this American "lifestyle" that fuels the destruction of humanity, providing an additional layer to the kind of oppressive stance taken against women. This "lifestyle" most likely refers to that of the mostly wealthy and mostly white elite, a lifestyle that benefits a few at the expense of other social groups.

The articulation of gender binary in the Compounds, however, doesn't cancel out the possibility of a future to be rewritten by imaginative possibility. In 2014, *the minnesota review* dedicated a special issue to "Writing the Anthropocene," in which Calina Ciobanu looked at Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy.⁴⁸ Focusing on the way in which the trilogy as a whole focalizes the question of human disposability, Ciobanu argues that Atwood's three novels, "which is about the downfall of *mankind*, necessarily doubles as a canvas for figuring *woman*" (154). In creating a post-apocalyptic setting, the article argues, Atwood leaves open new possibilities for defining sexual difference. Specifically, Ciobanu insists, the reconfiguring of binary paradigms at the end of the Anthropocene suggests that "imagining a fundamentally different kind of future for humanity will require destabilizing the dominant biopolitical order by injecting into it a female ethics of incommensurability" (157). In other words, the future cannot be strictly hierarchal as before, although we cannot risk forgetting how this setup was created by masculinist tendencies in the first place. The post-apocalyptic space, by comparison, can provide opportunity to rewrite the gender divide. To begin imagining how to go about doing this, we must first pay attention to exactly how women are brought to an emotional torment onset by the misogyny present in the Compounds.

⁴⁸ Ciobanu, C. "Rewriting the Human at the End of the Anthropocene in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy." *the minnesota review* 2014, no. 83 (January 1, 2014): 153–62. doi:10.1215/00265667-2782351.

The first memory Jimmy relates to the reader is about his home in the OrganInc Compound, where his parents work on creating pigoons, or pigs with human brain tissue that can be used for organ harvesting. Jimmy's father takes on the responsibility of maintaining a sense of masculinity against his mother's constant request to think of the ethics behind gene splicing different species. From these multiple arguments, Jimmy's mother reacts in angry outbursts while his father reassures Jimmy, "Women always get hot under the collar. She'll cool down." From childhood then, there is an association between the kind of emotional chaos Jimmy experiences in his home with a distinction between men and women's bodies:

Women, and what went on under their collars. Hotness and coldness, coming and going in the strange musky flowery variable-weather country inside their clothes—mysterious, important, uncontrollable. That was his father's take on things. But men's body temperatures were never dealt with; they were never even mentioned, not when he was little, except when his dad said, "Chill out." Why weren't they? Why nothing about the hot collars of men? Those smooth, sharp-edged collars with their dark, sulphurous, bristling undersides. He could have used a few theories on that. (17)

In conflating women's bodies with the weather patterns, the "variable-weather country" which is reminiscent of the brewing storms that plague the outside world where "things were unpredictable," Jimmy's father suggests that women's emotional functioning is just as unruly and threatening as the pleeblands (27). The descriptions of "musky" and "flowery" mark the climate as something fragile and ephemeral. "Musky" connotes something scented and naturally-occurring, which is in contrast with the manufactured sense around "sharp-edged collars" of men. This passage also indicates yet another stereotypical gender divide in associating women with the body, essentializing their role in being closer to nature, while the men are associated with the manufacturing of culture. In this flashback, Jimmy also remembers a bonfire made from a pile of burning livestock and having to walk through a tub of disinfectant immediately after. That violent memory from OrganInc morphs into other memories of his parents arguing. For instance, the recollection of "charred flesh" propels Jimmy into remembering a fight between his

parents over when he tried burning his hair (16). The violence of his domestic life echoes the burning of the outside world, like when “Lake Okeechobee had shrunk to a reeking mud puddle and the Everglades had burned for three weeks straight” (63).

Although the division between the Compounds and the outside is seemingly secure, it doesn't shield Jimmy from experiencing the trauma of a marriage strained by competing morals. The parallel structure of the Compound/pleebland divide with that between man/woman creates an echoed sense of trauma. For instance, when Katherine Snyder reads *Oryx and Crake* through the lens of trauma theory she argues that, “the doubled temporality of dystopian speculative fiction... bears a marked resemblance to the doubled temporality of trauma. Whereas trauma theory conceives of the present in its vexed relation to the past, dystopian speculative fiction imagines the present in its vexed relation to the future” (Snyder 472).⁴⁹ Snyder's argument provides a possible explanation for how Jimmy remembers the past in this doubled way. Meaning, the way in which Jimmy relates to his past echoes how his society was built to create dichotomous divisions. Snyder argues that the smaller traumas in Jimmy's domestic life reflect the larger global catastrophes in that occur later in the novel: “The pandemic that marks the split between the novel's two time schemes stands as a singular, time-stopping, world-ending event, and it also stands as a repetition of earlier traumatic events in Snowman's private life” (Snyder 473). In particular, this early life trauma is heightened by the tension between what is coded as masculine and feminine, taking place in the form of arguments between Jimmy's parents over the ethics of their work. His mother calls the pigoons with neo-cortex tissue, “immoral” for “interfering with the building blocks of life” while his father believes there is “nothing sacred about cells and tissue” (57). In essence, his parents' stances highlight an extreme moral polarity.

⁴⁹ Snyder, Katherine V. “‘TIME TO GO’: THE POST-APOCALYPTIC AND THE POST-TRAUMATIC IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S ‘ORYX AND CRAKE.’” *Studies in the Novel* 43, no. 4 (2011): 470–89.

This division also continues to overlap with others—Snyder points out that in building up to the final act of destruction: “Atwood’s plotting of pandemic in the novel thus emphasizes the futility of attempting to quarantine an individual’s subjective interiority from relations among historical subjects who are connected to each other in an ever-widening, overlapping circles of power and obligation: the familial, the corporate, the national, the global, the nonhuman and the post-human” (Snyder 473). Focalized first through his parents, Jimmy’s trauma is a domestic one. The trauma in his domestic life continues to expand, accumulating larger effects as the novel progresses and deals with larger catastrophes. There is also an underlying assumption that these events are not new. For instance, Jimmy grows up in a home where, “The furniture in it was called *reproduction*. Jimmy was quite old before he realized what this word meant—that for each reproduction item, there was supposed to be an original somewhere. Or there had been once. Or something” (26). For each catastrophe, there is a copy of it somewhere else. For each traumatic event, there is a repetition of that event somewhere else in the globe or someplace else in time. The overlapping anxieties in Jimmy’s domestic life, then society as a whole, and the global catastrophe intertwined in one way or another through historical interconnection.

Not only is there a strained attention to the morality of “gene-splicing,” this practice also shifts the blame to the “uncontrollable,” and feminized chaos for threatening the “stability” of the Compounds. The reader learns later that the devastation on the outside includes a slew of flooding and burning ecosystems. This weather, coded as feminine, is thus associated with what threatens the center from within itself. Furthermore, it is women’s clothing which holds in this chaos, in contrast with the “sharp-edged collars” of men which are more characteristic of the Compound walls. Inside this hyper-capitalist space, stability is threatened by its tension with a feminine voice of ethics. Once his mother slips into a depression, it is this “trauma” of the

tension that leads Jimmy to push his mother into giving him an emotional reaction: “He was frightened, as well. There was always that knife-edge: had he gone too far?” (33). Women’s bodies are under attack in this narrative—Jimmy pushes his mother up to a “knife’s edge” gesturing towards violence. This violence towards women is hinted at in other places. In fact, it’s because of a woman’s infiltration into the OrganInc Compound that Jimmy’s family has to move to the HelthWyzer Compound: “Some fanatic, a woman, with a hostile bioform concealed in a hairspray bottle” broke in and had to be “spraygunned at once and neutralized in a vat of bleach” (53). This scene indicates a growing desensitization to violence. The woman is literally “neutralized,” her body sterilized because she “infiltrated” and was immediately labelled as a “fanatic.” This set up is also a warning—Jimmy’s mother can no longer take feeling like a “prisoner” and so she abandons the family (53).

Not only is there an attack on women’s bodies, the reckless experimentation on the pigoons fuels an abuse of the nonhuman that strikes Jimmy enough to come back and haunt him. Every time the pigoons become infected with a new strain of disease, the OrganInc Compound has to burn them. While Jimmy watches the pigoons, his father reassures Jimmy they are more like steaks than animals:

And their heads, thought Jimmy. Steaks didn’t have heads. The heads made a difference: he thought he could see the animals looking at him reproachfully out of their burning eyes. In some way all of this-- the bonfire, the charred smell, but most of all the lit-up, suffering animals—was his fault, because he’d done nothing to rescue them. At the same time he found the bonfire a beautiful sight—luminous, like a Christmas tree, but a Christmas tree on fire. He hoped there might be an explosion, as on television. (18)

Standing in front of this horrific image, Jimmy can only think of the animal's’ consciousness in focusing on their heads. This passage also gives an indication regarding how the transition from his early life in being attuned to the gender roles and their emotional and physical limits manifest in his parents, to the kind of numbing sensation produced by televisions that occurs here at the

sites of violence. The young Jimmy worries about having a disease and being thrown into the pile: “He didn’t want to be put in a heap with all the cows and pigs. He began to cry” as if he is the same kind of being as the animals he grows up with (19). He switches quickly, however, into thinking how there might be an explosion like on the television, the medium he and Crake use to occupy most of their time once his mother leaves.

After these multiple traumas have taken place, his mother escapes and leaves Jimmy abandoned, taking his pet rakunk Killer with her (a crossbreed between a skunk and a rat). From this point on, Jimmy begins to distinguish himself from the animals around him. He no longer pays attention to pigeons and tries to forget whatever involvement his mother had with the mass protests against the Happicuppa Coffee plantations, which now pervade the daily news. Increasingly, Jimmy develops an attitude of misogyny towards women, using his mother’s abandonment as a point for drawing sympathy from the women he involves in his sexual escapades. As he becomes blinder to the world around him, his perception towards the pleeblands also alters slightly from before.

To visit Crake at Watson-Crick University Jimmy has to board a bullet-train that passes through the pleeblands. He consumes this image through a lens of sterility and non-sterility:

Rows of dingy houses; apartment buildings with tiny balconies, laundry strung on the railings; factories with smoke coming out of the chimneys; gravel pits. A huge pile of garbage, next to what he supposed was a high-heat incinerator. A shopping mall like the ones at HelthWyzer, only there were cars in the parking lots instead of electric golf cars. A neon trip, with bars and girlie joints and what looked like an archeological-grade movie theater. He glimpsed a couple of trailer parks, and wondered what it was like to live in one of them: just thinking about it make him slightly dizzy, as he imagined a desert night, or the sea. Everything in the pleeblands seemed so boundless, so porous, so penetrable, so wide-spread, so wide-open. So subject to chance. (196)

Gazing out over the landscape of limitless desolation, Jimmy imagines how the density of this urban scene must feel like a “desert” or the “sea.” To him, the scene is “boundless” and so he begins to imagine situating himself in the middle of the expanse. This gesturing towards a land

that appears to be undulating is also what makes it “penetrable” in his imagination, something subject to domination in a sexualized way. This passage recalls how Jimmy characterized the outside world earlier—it is feminine, sexual, chaotic, porous and also disease-ridden. Here it the projection of something subject to domination that Jimmy consumes to satisfy his boyhood fantasies of travelling into “glamorous” pleeblands. Parallel to how he continues in his quest to find sad women who will “go the extra mile” in their favors, these new ‘encounters’ with the pleeblands also become highly sexualized (100). The sea of possibilities becomes an erotic adventure, another game to produce narratives as part of Jimmy’s performance for his (possible) future listeners.

V. Deconstruction in the Post-Apocalyptic

While Atwood is re-drawing gender and human/animal divisions throughout the novel, these structures are effectively destroyed once Jimmy is the only human left in existence. In fact when the novel opens on the edge of the sea, in the unknown landscape where “Snowman” appears to be the only thing being, it is here that the reader is led to believe that Snowman is standing as a “Last Man,”⁵⁰ a lone survivor of some event in an “absence of official time” (3). In other words, he lives in a world without mechanical markers, without others like himself to remind him of the passage of time. Out of habit he recites:

‘It is the strict adherence to daily routine that tends towards the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity,’ he says out loud. He has the feeling he’s quoting from a book, some obsolete, ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations of one kind or another. He can’t recall ever having read such a thing, but that means nothing. There are a lot of blank spaces in his stub of a brain, where memory used to be. Rubber plantations, coffee plantations, jute plantations. (What was

⁵⁰It has been observed by many critics that *Oryx and Crake* evokes Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel *Frankenstein* by framing Crake as a Victor Frankenstein character. It has also been noted that *Oryx and Crake* bears a marked resemblance to the plot of Shelley’s 1826 novel *The Last Man*. The latter novel is an apocalyptic science fiction narrative, in which humanity is wiped out by the end of the 21st century by a plague. Lionel Verney, the novel’s central male character, must wander Europe as humanity’s sole survivor.

jute?) They would have been told to wear solar topis, dress for dinner, refrain from raping the natives. It wouldn't have said *raping*. Refrain from fraternizing with the female inhabitants. Or, put some other way... (5)

Alone and attempting to maintain mental stability, Snowman jokes about old colonial encounters between colonizers and “natives.” Encased within this world of isolation, he anticipates a meeting with a group unlike himself. The “blank spaces” in his brain echo Marlow’s “blank spaces of delightful mystery,” those places that became synonymous with wasted landscapes. Only now, those blank spaces have retreated into his memory. There is nothing to fill in those blanks without others around. Snowman can only recall the words that he most likely reiterated inside the walls of a classroom—walls within walls of the Compounds that surface later in the novel—which carry no meaning or use for him. The repetition of textbook scenes of ‘encounter’ echo a distant past. There’s no one to indicate whether or not he is sane and so he resorts to repeating directions from “European colonials running plantations of one kind or another.” Yet these narratives are now a waste for him to use in his navigation of the new landscape. He’s living in the world of his computer games, yet another pawn in the long line of events used as the playing pieces for Bloods and Roses. He may or may not be on the winning side, remembering how, “the Blood player usually won, but winning meant you inherited a wasteland” (80). Without listeners and no more cataclysms to define history, Jimmy is left with a useless desert of a landscape. The language of his old world is failing him.

Amongst this new population of Crakers, Snowman functions as a prophet and holder of knowledge, he describes himself as “a cross between pedagogue, soothsayer and benevolent uncle” (7). It is the same human system, but redesigned with Crake’s aesthetic. All the children have green eyes, now a universalized style. The Crakers are melodic, harmonious, and they chant in a “singsong way” (6). In contrast, Jimmy stands not just as a “Last Man” who is alienated

from the world around him, but as someone of extreme difference from the rest of the living. He's bound on the periphery, now a fragmented 'self,' and a monster who no longer belongs because of apocalyptic collapse. He lives in a "blank" space, which is first and foremost, the absence of time:

Out of habit he looks at his watch—stainless-steel case, burnished aluminum band, still shiny although it no longer works. He wears it now as his only talisman. A blank face is what shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is. (3)

Without the reverberations of other people's voices, Jimmy is lost in a landscape without human markers, and nothing to mark him as different or the same. The stainless-steel case reminds him of a lost and industrial world. The blank face gives indication to the waste of his state in being unable to calculate time. The old, masculine tendency to calculate value no longer holds up.

Snowman describes how he lives in a perpetual "zero hour" where he starts to dissolve into something white and blank:

The Abominable Snowman—existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumours and through its backward-pointing footprints. Mountain tribes were said to have chased it down and killed it when they had the chance. They were said to have boiled it, roasted it, held special feasts; all the more exciting, he supposes, for bordering on cannibalism. (8)

Snowman, neither human nor animal, "existing and not existing," functions as a hybrid being not of one world or the other. He is monstrous in being the only one left of his kind. As someone who only exists on the edges, there's the sense of fragmentation. Besides the obvious paranoia of being hunted down, Snowman's affinity for telling stories begins to surface in this passage, thinking of how others will describe him in the future. In thinking of how others will chase him down and eat him, he imagines that the other species of this landscape will consume him in a kind of "cannibalism," which also points to how he is looking for others like himself. Being on the edge reinforces how he recognizes his blindness in being undeniably complicit in Crake's

“experiment.” Snowman tells us: “He’d grown up in walled spaces, and then he had become one. He had shut things out” (184). Only now, this construction is destroyed and there’s no turning back. He once had the privilege of being blind to the destruction on the outside world, and now he is living it. “He’d meant well, or at least he hadn’t meant ill. He’d never wanted to hurt anyone, not seriously, not in real space-time. Fantasies didn’t count” (284). The insulation of the Compound walls allowed him to be blind. Now that he is actually living on the outside, the myth of ‘encounter’ with these unknown lands, has broken down—it’s become a false romance.

Since there are no familiar markers on this landscape, Snowman ignores how things are still living. On his journey back to the Paradise dome we are told: “Already the weeds are thick along the curbs. The street is circular; in the island in the middle, a clutch of shrubs, unpruned and scraggly, flares with red and purple flowers. Some exotic splice: in a few years they’ll be overwhelmed. Or else they’ll spread, make inroads, choke out the native plants. The whole world now is one vast uncontrolled experiment—the way it always was, Crake would have said—and the doctrine of unintended consequences is in full spate” (228). Life is growing back in the post-apocalypse. It is still an uncontrolled “experiment” but the signifier is also breaking down. Later in that same passage of being trapped, he remembers how, “once it got started, the thing was airborne. Desire and fear were universal, between them they’d been gravediggers” (273). In starting to realize his own complicity in Crake’s project, the repercussions of his actions resonating with his morals, leading to a final admission that he was a “gravedigger” for the world as he knew it. Although the plague had eroded difference in feeling, bringing everyone under the umbrella of being susceptible to “desire” and “fear,” this prevents Jimmy from seeing how his surroundings are not gone—they are just simply changed from before.

Atwood closes *Oryx and Crake* with Snowman leaving the Crakers to seek out the other humans the Crakers say have passed through. Immediately, Snowman starts worrying about this meeting: “these new arrivals could easily see the Children of Crake as freakish, or savage, or nonhuman and a threat” (366). So he starts thinking about how he should, “make a speech of some kind to the Crakers. A sort of sermon. Lay down a few commandments, Crake’s parting words to them. Except they don’t need commandments: no thou shalt nots would be any good to them, or even comprehensible, because it’s all built in. No point in telling them not to lie, steal, commit adultery, or covet. They wouldn’t grasp the concepts” (366). In effect, Snowman begins to set up another Biblical myth. He starts rehearsing scenes from old-style Western films, other scenes of ‘encounter’ and massacre: “Images from old history flip through his head, sidebars from *Blood and Roses*: Ghenghis Khan’s skull pile...the Arawak Indians, welcoming Christopher Columbus with garlands and gifts of fruit...soon to be massacred, or tied up beneath the beds upon which their women were being raped. But why imagine the worst? Maybe these people have been frightened off, maybe they’ll have moved elsewhere. Maybe they’re ill and dying” (366). While it is obvious where these stories come from, whether or not Jimmy is conscious of their origins is unclear. He notices it’s, “Zero hour... Time to go,” ending on a note of ambiguity or perhaps leaving the possibility of a new genesis for when he leaves the Crakers (376). Only the landscape he leaves behind is not so empty as before. Snowman notices, upon his return from the Paradise dome that the Crakers have made a picture of him:

Watch out for art, Crake used to say. As soon as they start doing art, we’re in trouble. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kinds, and then slavery, and war. Snowman longs to question them- who first had the idea of making a reasonable facsimile of him, of Snowman, out of a jar lid and a mop? But that will have to wait. (361)

This passage suggests that even a manufactured species contains some element of humanity. The nonhuman will continue to represent the current environment, with or without human intervention. The fear expressed is that the pattern of history will repeat itself. Only now, it will be done by a different species. The Crakers have made a new canvas from this world no longer deemed of importance to humans. The Anthropocene, perhaps officially at its end, gives way to a new order. Atwood suggests here that this new order will be dictated by representation, as it was before. It is also here that our role as a reader is to be aware of these changes, and to continually invest ourselves in the text. At the same time, we must also accept the possibility that representation in the future will happen across species, something away from the anthropocentrism of the present.

VI. Conclusions

Atwood's satire draws readers' attention to who has drawn the lines around apocalypse. *Oryx and Crake* maps various binaries on top of one another in order to challenge the many dualisms which are present in thinking of impending, environmental crisis. The world appears a mess but it's structured by the road map of old binaries—and the structure collapses. Atwood's critical commentary on a world that has devalued the social authority of art, history and recurring narratives still exists in her imagined future. Only in the face of what is coded as the masculine dominant order, these art forms are put aside for the projects of biotechnology. In particular, Atwood explores the tensions in a man/woman dichotomy in relation to how they play into perceptions of chaos and order. The dramatization of impending collapse, rooted in notions of a feminized force capable of altering the order, leads to its own destruction before the environment ever acts upon the Compound system. Since Jimmy and Crake are so far removed from the world around them, given the amount of media saturation they experience and their privilege in

remaining blind to their own complicity in the system, they fail to recognize how the world is still living. For Jimmy in particular, he fails to realize how life is growing back in the post-apocalypse. Because this novel is set in the 21st century, imagining the effects of global warming is essential in Atwood's formulation of the future, which she suggests will not be as dramatic as apocalyptic thinking has made it out to be. Lastly, Atwood leaves the human body to navigate a world by the guidance of others we have not met. Her speculation of a self-destructive system may be at a close end. She suggests that we won't have to rethink these dualisms or this world order because we are doomed to self-destruct. From what is left, someone else will have to make sense of. I don't believe Atwood has a solution for us at the end. We can articulate the problem, the limitations, but to presume a solution may be counter-intuitive.

Afterword

“How do you calculate upon the unforeseen? It seems to be an art of recognizing the role of the unforeseen, of keeping your balance amid surprises, of collaborating with change, of recognizing that there are some essential mysteries in the world and thereby a limit to calculation, to plan, to control. To calculate on the unforeseen is perhaps exactly the paradoxical operation that life most requires of us.”

-Rebecca Solnit,
A Field Guide to Getting Lost

While the narratives of environmental destruction that I have analyzed certainly correspond to tangible effects in the real world, it is beyond the scope of this project to enter into a full discussion of those effects. What is clear is that after a century’s worth of apocalyptic thinking, it is easy to feel dismal about the future. One of the goals of Environmental Justice is to incorporate a polyphony of voices into environmental thinking to guarantee future protection. With this in mind, my project is not meant to speak on behalf of anyone in particular, rather I offer it as a contribution to understanding the underlying theoretical dimensions of how cultural alienation from the natural environment gives rise to ecological damage.

I have paid particular attention to the ways in which dichotomous thinking privileges masculine perceptions of ‘nature.’ Through *Heart of Darkness* I argued that the weakness in this perception is revealed through its tension with femininity, with racial difference and with difference from nonhuman life, namely elephants. In shifting focus to North America, *Soylent Green* reflects some of the same tensions and it is more overtly apocalyptic in its outlook. Due to the nature of its imagination, *Soylent Green* traps itself in a traditional environmentalist way of thinking. This thinking is that overpopulation will lead to total resource scarcity. Because the film laments the loss of idyllic ‘nature,’ it expresses a fear of increasing urban density and overpopulation. The film is a warning that these social changes will lead to the complete loss of

resources. From the film, we can see how apocalyptic rhetoric forms the foundations of 1970s environmentalism and reinforces conventional treatment of the marginalized social groups in relation to the environment, namely women and the poor (nonwhite) masses. Furthermore, there's a "Swiftian" satirical element in the film for proposing that the system turn to cannibalism to regulate the population. Lastly, *Oryx and Crake* incorporates some of these satirical elements to mock how the global order will lead to its own self-destruction before any resources are used up completely. In doing so, Atwood also points out how the ones in power consume the most at the expense of those consuming the least. Atwood proposes that storytelling and imaginative reinvention is one way to invest ourselves in writing the future after the old order has broken down. To take responsibility for our actions will require we keep passing down stories and incorporating narratives from all corners of the earth into our conscious.

Another way to inject a new ethics or way of being into the world order is to imagine a utopian ideal. Of course, any new vision runs the risk of essentializing identity categories. For example, in *Oryx and Crake*, Crake got rid of the historic value of race and inserted his own aesthetic for the model Crakers. In doing so, he reproduced a system that is blind to difference. But the Crakers also end up behaving differently from what Crake imagined. An ambiguous future is open to alternative interpretations outside the dominating discourse. There are a number of utopian fictions produced in the 20th century whose ambiguous tone speak to this possibility. Many of these fictions are distinctly feminist in their aims, in hybridizing multiple ways of being and projecting this multi-dimensional and adaptable model into the obscurity of the future. Investigating ecofeminist philosophies in utopian literature will be an important undertaking for the future of ecocriticism.

Bibliography/ References

Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa." *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 782–94.

Anup Shah. "Causes of Hunger Are Related to Poverty." *Global Issues: Social, Political, Economic and Environmental Issues That Affect Us All*, October 30, 2010.
<http://www.globalissues.org/article/7/causes-of-hunger-are-related-to-poverty>.

Association for Studies in Literature and Environment, ASLE. "Defining Ecocritical Theory and Practice Sixteen Position Papers from the 1994 Western Literature Association Meeting Salt Lake City, Utah--6 October 1994." ASLE, 1994.

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. New York: Anchor Books: A Division of Random House, Inc., 2003.

Boes, T., and K. Marshall. "Writing the Anthropocene: An Introduction." *the minnesota review* 2014, no. 83 (January 1, 2014): 60–72. doi:10.1215/00265667-2782243.

Bouson, J. Brooks. "'It's Game Over Forever': Atwood's Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2004): 139–56. doi:10.1177/0021989404047051.

Brydon, Diana. "'The Thematic Ancestor': Joseph Conrad, Patrick White and Margaret Atwood." *World Literature Written in English* 24, no. 2 (September 1, 1984): 386–97. doi:10.1080/17449858408588906.

Buell, Frederick. "Global Warming as Literary Narrative." *Philological Quarterly* 93, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 261–94.

Buell, Lawrence. "Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends." *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 19, no. 2 (2011): 87–115.

———. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 1996.

———. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. 1 edition. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Bullard, Robert D. "Confronting Environmental Racism in the Twenty-First Century." *Global Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 34–48.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "The Climate of History: Four Theses." *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (January 2009): 197–222. doi:10.1086/596640.

Chimombo, Steve. "the rubbish dump." *Contemporary African Short Stories*. Heinemann, 1992.

Ciobanu, C. "Rewriting the Human at the End of the Anthropocene in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy." *the minnesota review* 2014, no. 83 (January 1, 2014): 153–62. doi:10.1215/00265667-2782351.

Collits, Terry. *Postcolonial Conrad: Paradoxes of Empire*. London; New York: Routledge, 2005.

Conrad, Joseph, and Rudyard Kipling. *Heart of Darkness, The Man Who Would Be King, and Other Works on Empire*. Edited by David Damrosch. 1 edition. New York: Longman, 2006.

Coppola, Francis Ford. *Apocalypse Now*. Drama, War, 1979.

Fleischer, Richard. *Soylent Green*, (MGM) 1973. DVD.

Forster, E. M. *Abinger Harvest*. Pocket ed. London: E. Arnold, 1953.

Gaard, Greta, and Patrick D. Murphy, eds. *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. 2nd edition. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011.

Gersdorf, Catrin, and Sylvia Mayer. *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism*. Amsterdam; New York (NY): Editions Rodopi BV, 2006.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Glover, Jayne. "Human/Nature: Ecological Philosophy in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*." *English Studies in Africa* 52, no. 2 (October 1, 2009): 50–62. doi:10.1080/00138390903444149.

Heise, Ursula K. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. 1 edition. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

———. "The Virtual Crowds Overpopulation, Space and Speciesism." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 8, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 1–29. doi:10.1093/isle/8.1.1.

Howells, Coral Ann, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. 1 edition. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. 2 edition. London; New York: Routledge, 2015.

Hughes, Rowland. "The Ends of the Earth: Nature, Narrative, and Identity in Dystopian Film." *Critical Survey* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 22–39. doi:10.3167/cs.2013.250203.

Jonathan Swift. "A Modest Proposal," Originally published in 1729. <http://art-bin.com/art/omodest.html>.

Leavis, F. R. *The Great Tradition*. New York: G. W. Stewart, 1948.

Lensing, Dennis M. "The Fecund Androgyne: Gender and the Utopian/dystopian Imagination of the 1970s." *Socialism and Democracy* 20, no. 3 (November 1, 2006): 87–103. doi:10.1080/08854300600950251.

Maathai, Wangari. "The Link between Patenting of Life Forms, Genetic Engineering & Food Insecurity." *Review of African Political Economy* 25, no. 77 (September 1, 1998): 526–28. doi:10.1080/03056249808704335.

McCarthy, Jeffrey Mathes. "'A Choice of Nightmares': The Ecology of Heart of Darkness." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 55, no. 3 (2009): 620–48. doi:10.1353/mfs.0.1624.

McIntire, Gabrielle. "The Women Do Not Travel: Gender, Difference, and Incommensurability in Conrad's Heart of Darkness." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 48, no. 2 (2002): 257–84. doi:10.1353/mfs.2002.0032.

Myers, Jeffrey. "The Anxiety of Confluence Evolution, Ecology, and Imperialism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 8, no. 2 (2001): 97–108.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Gld edition. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Oppermann, Serpil. "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 13, no. 2 (2006): 103–28.

Paul Zimmerman. "Soylent Green." *Newsweek* 81 (May 7, 1973): 104.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London; New York: Routledge, 1993.

Purdy, Jedediah. "Should We Be Suspicious of the Anthropocene?" *Aeon Magazine*. Accessed October 30, 2015. <http://aeon.co/magazine/science/should-we-be-suspicious-of-the-anthropocene/>.

Roos, Bonnie, and Alex Hunt. *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*. University of Virginia Press, 2010.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Reprint edition. New York: Vintage, 1994.

Sauper, Hubert. *Darwin's Nightmare*. Celluloid Dreams/ Capri Releasing, 2007.

Sauper, Hubert. "DARWIN'S NIGHTMARE by Hubert Sauper." Accessed March 27, 2016. <http://www.darwinsnightmare.com/darwin/html/startset.htm>.

Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text*. Edited by Marilyn Butler. Reprint edition. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

———. *The Last Man*. Edited by Morton D. Paley. Reprint edition. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Shiva, Vandana, and Maria Mies. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books, 1993.

Snyder, Katherine V. "'TIME TO GO': THE POST-APOCALYPTIC AND THE POST-TRAUMATIC IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S 'ORYX AND CRAKE.'" *Studies in the Novel* 43, no. 4 (2011): 470–89.

Solnit, Rebecca. *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Reprint edition. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985): 243–61.

Sragow, Michael. "Soylent Green." *New Yorker* 87, no. 30 (October 3, 2011): 18–18.

Stape, J. H., ed. *The New Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Steffen, Will, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill. "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature." *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment* 36, no. 8 (December 1, 2007): 614–21. doi:10.1579/0044-7447(2007)36[614:TAAHNO]2.0.CO;2.

Straus, Nina Pelikan. "The Exclusion of the Intended from Secret Sharing in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness.'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 20, no. 2 (1987): 123–37. doi:10.2307/1345873.

Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. University of Virginia Press, 2015.

Vandana Shiva. "GMOs, Seed Wars, and Knowledge Wars." *ZCommunications.org*, October 31, 2012.

Volkman, Laurenz, Nancy Grimm, Ines Detmers, and Katrin Thomson. *Local Natures, Global Responsibilities: Ecocritical Perspectives on the New English Literatures*. Rodopi, 2010.

Warren, Karen J., ed. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. First Edition edition. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

Watts, Cedric. "Conrad, Joseph (1857-1924)." *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by B. Harrison. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32533>.

William, Rueckert. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader. Landmark in Literary Ecology*, 1996.

Wilson, Sharon. *Myths and Fairy Tales in Contemporary Women's Fiction: From Atwood to Morrison*. 2008 edition. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Wisker, Gina. *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction*. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.