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Exploring the manipulation of the natural world within  
Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and  
*MaddAddam* trilogy.

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in  
partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters by Research in English Literature

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## Abstract

This thesis will explore the work of Margaret Atwood and will evaluate her texts to find ecocritical trends within both her newer, more explicitly environmental texts, and her older, traditionally feminist works. It will focus upon the manipulation of the natural within her literary worlds, exploring the role of literature in identifying environmental issues facing both the natural world and humanity. The primary focus will be upon both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Maddaddam* trilogy, considering the exploitation of bodies, space/place and language to achieve power over the natural world. Through this, it will highlight the difficulty in truly defining 'nature' when nature becomes a commodified, ever-changing entity.

It will also explore the dynamic between humanity and the natural world itself and analyse the relationship that Atwood portrays between the two. Through considering the power dynamic between humanity and the planet, it will question whether it is possible to change a destructive, anthropocentric, manipulative relationship to a non-abusive, harmonious connection between human and non-human nature.

These texts will be viewed comparatively to argue that Atwood's environmental focus has always been rooted within her work, but has just become more prevalent as real life environmental concerns have grown. The thesis considers the power of literature and narrative itself as a vehicle for changing relationships with the world in order to incite a more positive and harmonious interconnection between humanity and the planet.

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## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a rise in ecocritical readings of texts. This is not to say that ecocriticism is new as a field of interest, more that, as people's concerns for the environment have increased, existing arguments and theories such as those by Richard Kerridge have been intensified and extended upon due to people's need to 'track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear' (Kerridge, 1998, p.5). This reaction comes from a need to find answers and solutions to the problems people are facing and thus people turn to literature to 'evaluate texts and ideas [ecocritically] in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to the environmental crisis' (ibid.). This thesis will explore the work of Margaret Atwood. Though Atwood has 'famously refused to be drawn into such an allegiance' (Tolan, 2007, p.2) with feminism, her works have largely been analysed through feminist theory, with theorists such as Fiona Tolan (2007) '[examining] the novels of Margaret Atwood in conjunction with the development of second-wave feminism' (p.1). This thesis will move away from such readings and instead evaluate her texts to find ecocritical trends within both her newer, more explicitly environmental texts, and one of her older works, which has been more traditionally viewed as a feminist text. It will focus upon the manipulation of the natural within her literary worlds, exploring the role of literature in identifying environmental issues facing both the natural world and humanity. It will explore literature's role in influencing ecological arguments and question how the novel can both be a way to challenge anthropocentrism and a way to document current issues with which we are faced. Specifically, it will consider the manipulation of the natural world within Margaret Atwood's books *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and the *Maddadam* trilogy (2004-2014). *The Handmaid's Tale* has seldom been considered as an environmental text,

but, by taking a comparative approach with Atwood's more explicitly environmental texts, this thesis will aim to prove that Atwood has always demonstrated an awareness of environmental issues; however, this has become more explicit within her more recent works.

*The Handmaid's Tale* explores many underlying environmental issues within the world of Gilead, which is shaped and controlled by the ruling bodies of a dictatorial theocracy. The novel demonstrates how simultaneous manipulation and destruction of both humans and the natural world can lead to the redefining of what it means to be 'natural'. Atwood's only trilogy, *MaddAddam*, will provide a point for comparison to further explore environmental issues facing the planet through the depiction of an extreme technologically and scientifically-focussed society. She presents manipulations of the natural world through gene splicing, control of space and eventually a devastating apocalypse as a result of capitalist, technology-focussed consumerism. Atwood makes the point 'that she did not include anything in *the Handmaid's Tale* "that had not already happened or was not underway somewhere"' (Beauchamp, 2009, p.14); similarly, Atwood states that 'although *MaddAddam* is a work of fiction, it does not include any technologies or biobeings that do not already exist' (*MaddAddam*, 2013, p.475). Thus, her texts will be explored as an exaggerated reflection of the world in their respective time periods, and as a warning about humanity's destructive potential, of what could happen to both the natural world and ourselves if our views continue to be anthropocentric.

### Green theory

Richard Kerridge discusses how humanity believes it is superior to the natural world. He states that we need to 'depart from the Cartesian tradition of dualism that separated mind from body and humanity from nonhuman nature' (2014, p.366), suggesting that currently

and historically, not only do humans separate themselves from the natural world, believing that they are superior or that nonhuman nature is 'other', but also that humans separate themselves from the naturalness of their own bodies, focussing more on the importance of their own intelligence. He states that one of the main aims of ecocriticism is to 'overcome splitting and reveal these hidden connections' (p.364), suggesting that he believes humanity should embrace its connections with the natural world. Christa Grewe-Volpp (2016) also argues against dualism and states that all aspects within the world are connected and that this connection should be recognised to both highlight the threats this poses to ourselves, but also to embrace the positives of this relationship.

These connections are labelled as 'interconnectedness', a key concept which will be discussed within this thesis. Grewe-Volpp explores the idea of interconnectedness by expanding Donna Haraway's idea that 'there has never been a pure origin, nor does any entity exist that is separate from its environment. Instead, all phenomena have developed with other phenomena' (2016, p.217); thus, she discusses how both humans and non-humans alike have developed and grown together. She thus concludes that there is an interrelation between all aspects of human identity and the material world.

She further builds on existing ideas of Haraway (cited in Grewe-Volpp, 2016, p.216), who poses the concept of 'natureculture' which concludes that interconnectedness demonstrates how 'social construction and the agency of matter are inextricably intertwined' (Grewe-Volpp, *ibid.*). This concept outlines how nature: 'matter outside of culture' (*ibid.*) and culture: 'a material world defined exclusively by text' (*ibid.*) are inseparable as they are co-constructed entities which are interrelated and influence one another. Matter is always subject to construction, yet is not completely defined by it. Both

theorists highlight the close relationship between natural elements and society, the interconnectedness of social constructions and material elements of nature (including the human body), and present this as inescapable.

Greg Garrard (2012) also concludes that 'culture and nature are naturalcultural throughout, interconnected in ways that are as likely to be uncanny or threatening as aesthetically inspiring or physically pleasurable' (p.205). Thus, this suggests that culture and nature are inevitably intertwined in a way which creates interdependence that can either be a mutually beneficial relationship, such as 'between bee or orchid' or, alternatively, 'can be painfully demanding' (ibid.), creating damage or over-reliance, such as human reliance on crops or animals for food. All cultural decisions have some form of impact upon the natural world and vice versa, meaning that any destruction caused to the planet will inherently have an effect upon humanity as well. This idea of interconnectedness is essential in considering the relationship between humanity and the natural world as it highlights the close connection between the two.

Braidotti (2013) also considers the concept of interconnectedness with the term 'panhumanity', which 'indicates a global sense of inter-connection among all humans, but also between the human and the non-human environment' (p.40) due to increasing use of technology within the modern world. The relationship between technology, humans and nature is constantly changing, but in ways which are causing more interconnection. However, she explores how this connection is not necessarily a positive relationship. She states that 'biotechnologies affect the very fibre and structure of the living' (ibid.); thus, humans become more dependent on technology and, as a result, increase the exploitation of natural entities, including human bodies. The growth of technology and the ease of

technological access means that more people can manipulate the natural world for their own purposes. Because of this process and an increase in interconnectedness, a sense of vulnerability and over-reliance has been created for humans in that they rely on both technology and the natural world simultaneously for their success. Due to this overdependence upon both technology and the natural as a resource, this destruction could eventually backfire and lead to dire consequences for humanity.

Through this, the natural world becomes commodified. Kidner (2012) states that 'even our well-intentioned efforts to "save" aspects of the natural world are colored by this unthinkable process of conceptual colonization' (p.19), for example, viewing trees as sources of wood rather than as natural entities. The phrase 'natural resources' implies that aspects of the natural world are known by their 'usable' qualities. Through this, natural aspects become decontextualized from the world and are, therefore, no longer known for their natural origins, but are identified by their purpose in human culture. Thus, by the time humans realise that these aspects have become endangered, our attempts to save them are futile as they are coloured by our created understanding of what they are and their purpose to humankind. This will be considered in terms of both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* by exploring how relative hierarchies of power come to remove natural origin and purpose from different aspects, such as land or bodies, in order to repurpose them for the benefit of the societies' success.

Further to this, I will explore the impact of humans demonstrating a belief in an 'established dualism of man and nature' (Garrard, 2012, p.42), believing themselves to be separate but also superior to the natural world. Plus, I will examine constant commodification in Atwood's worlds and how this can cause continual damage and destruction to the natural

world, and how the situations within Atwood's texts demonstrate the interconnectedness of humans and the planet.

### Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism explores the idea that the destruction of the planet and the inequality of women are connected. Shiva and Mies (2014) note that 'the relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature [...] and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women [...] were closely connected' (p.3) suggesting that there is a correlation in patriarchal societies between environmental destruction and female mistreatment. However, they also note that 'women were the first to protest against environmental destruction' (ibid.), meaning that we could consider Atwood's activism in relation to ecofeminism. The combination of gender-based and environmental critique found in *The Handmaid's Tale* would align with this definition of ecofeminism. Shiva and Mies also suggest that 'women are more concerned about a survival subsistence perspective' (p.304) in which they are more focussed on maintaining their base needs of survival such as food, water and shelter, than concerning themselves with technology, money and economic growth. Thus they suggest that women can be an environmental solution due to their differing priorities to men. Others, however, would certainly take issue with this gendered reading of environmentalism and Atwood would be unlikely to subscribe to this essentialist vision of ecofeminism, something that would be evident within her novels. Mary Phillips and Nick Rumens consider these critiques, pointing out the essentialism of some ecofeminist ideas, where 'ecofeminism argued for women's special affinity with and closeness to nature based on biologically determined and embodied experiences' (p.4). They also note that some claim that ecofeminism excludes women of colour. In outlining the critiques of ecofeminism, they then move to state that a new

contemporary ecofeminism is coming to the forefront. They argue that contemporary ecofeminism should not just examine the dichotomies of human/ nature and man/woman, historically created by man but should be 'an act of opposition and resistance to the instrumentalization and commodification characteristic of current social and economic life' (p.9), and should now 'intervene in ecological care of the world' (p.11), by actively trying to change and improve our relationship with the world. They state ecofeminism has 'a crucial role to play in nourishing the minds of men who are implicated in and responsible for reproducing male hegemonic power and ideologies' (ibid.), therefore suggesting that by making men aware of these historical patriarchies and manipulations of both women and nature, it may be possible to change them. Atwood therefore fits more broadly into this contemporary ecofeminism as she does seek to highlight issues of patriarchal and ecological inequalities and she seeks to change and improve our care of the world through her novels.

### Ethics and the Role of Literature

One of the main goals of ecocriticism is to explore the role of language and literature in 'discussions of environmental degradation' (Bartosch, 2013, p.9). Roman Bartosch suggests that 'by interpreting a text, a certain "environmental" awareness and processes of understanding are both presupposed and fostered' (p.116), showing how a text must create a level of environmental awareness and yet also play on a certain existing awareness from its audiences, to try and outline the issues facing the planet. Literature can help us identify and analyse these environmental messages, and, in theory, help us think both more critically and with more agency. Equally, environmental views are then portrayed to us within literature; the dominant ideals about the natural world are fictionalised as a way for the reader to see the issues facing the planet through a different medium. Hubert Zapf goes on to quote Lawrence Buell, who presents criteria for considering what makes an

environmental text. Buell proposes that 'human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation' (Buell in Zapf, 2008, p.855), and thus the texts present human accountability within their respective worlds; they raise doubts or question the ethics and morality of those within the world of the books. Atwood's texts can therefore be read as environmental texts as she examines real-life society and real-life ethical implications without becoming a 'moralistic' (Zapf, 2008, p.854) writer. Instead, she provides 'speculative fiction' in which she can consider the potential ramifications of technological and anthropocentric human advancements.

Zapf discusses the difficulty of ethics in ecological thinking as 'any ethical stance involves intellectual, moral, and emotional decisions by the individual subject as a culturally embedded agent' (p.850), suggesting that what we consider as ethical or unethical is shaped by laws and opinions put forward to us as culturally-immersed beings, also suggesting differences between cultures. Literature turns ethics into human stories, and thus helps impress upon the readership an exploration or critique of certain issues within society. Texts present 'a knowledge that is always mediated through personal perspectives, [and] reflect [...] the indissoluble connection between ethics and the human subject' (p.853). This can be seen within both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* trilogy as the stories are presented through the personal perspectives of Offred, Jimmy and Ren, who provide individual experiences through which Atwood can explore different ethical considerations surrounding widespread environmental and technological issues within the novels.

Raising environmental awareness allows people to reconsider their relationship with the physical world. Bartosch (2013) coined the phrase 'environmentality'. He explores the idea that fiction can allow people to consider their ethical stance towards environmental issues

and problems. From this, he notes the potential of fictional narratives, as stories often reflect beliefs, but ultimately contain the potential to 'transcend these influences by trying to establish new perspectives' (p.11). Thus, he believes that storytelling can help to change people's mentality towards the environment and provide a platform to change the ways in which people talk and think about environmental destruction.

Kerridge contemplates the best approach for ecocritics when analysing the impact of a literary text in terms of raising awareness of environmental damage. He suggests that within fiction, 'Ecocritics must be concerned with whether a concentrated revelatory moment is also an isolated moment, itself split off from practical daily life [...] should Ecocritics think rather in terms of slow incremental process, integrated with other areas in life [...]?' (2014, p.64). He goes on to question 'how will the [concentrated] moment continue to reverberate?' (ibid.) within the novel, and how this would be reflective of real-life concerns such as global warming. This raises a debate as to which literary approach would be most effective when portraying the potential damage that could befall the planet. Should authors demonstrate a gigantic, earth-altering event, shocking the reader in order to provoke outrage at the potential endpoint of civilisation as we know it, or should the damage be presented as a gradual deterioration in which the damage then reverberates through the different elements of life to the point of societal and planetary breakdown? Kerridge argues that the former would potentially disengage readers from the true impact of humanity upon the planet; because the event would be so cataclysmic, there would be the possibility of it becoming detached from everyday environmental issues. The latter, he argues, can present a more relatable vision of the destruction being inflicted upon nature.

Within *The Handmaid's Tale*, I would argue that Atwood shows the reverberation of environmental damage as opposed to the main causes of said destruction. The text hints that environmental disaster stemmed from an earthquake-triggered nuclear event; therefore the society of Gilead is presented as a product of environmental damage. The previous society deteriorated so extremely that a theocratic dictatorship has manifested as the possible solution. Atwood then moves to show how the consequences of creating Gilead impacts both its citizens and their relationship with the natural world.

On the other hand, Atwood demonstrates both approaches within her *MaddAddam* trilogy through both the pre-apocalyptic world and the apocalyptic event brought about by the titular character of Crake. There is merit in attempting to demonstrate the incremental damage to the planet alongside a concentrated event. Presenting a slightly hyperbolic version of our own society allows the reader to see the impact of gradual and ongoing manipulation of the natural world. Similarly, the *MaddAddam* trilogy presents us with the stark reality and impact of a cataclysmic event, and how the manipulation of both biotechnology and humanity's obsession with self-perfection can lead to disastrous consequences. Thus, showing gradual destruction helps to contextualise these problems and root them in real life, whilst having one concentrated moment helps to present a shocking outcome in order to affect a reader more profoundly.

### Dystopian, Climate and Speculative Fiction

Atwood's texts have also been viewed as dystopian. Lyman Tower Sargent defines a dystopia as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (cited in Donawerth, 2003, p.29); thus, a dystopia is a literary world which provides an opportunity to present darker alternatives to

our own society. Atwood's texts can be seen as dystopian narratives as they demonstrate clear tropes of the genre, including settings which show societies that are undoubtedly worse (if not simply more exaggerated) than our own. Each text opens '*in media res* [...] the protagonist is always already *in* the world in question, unreflectively immersed in the society' (Baccolini and Moylan, 2003, p.5), and thus the reader is immediately immersed within these oppressive societies.

However, the concept of dystopia is not clear cut as the terms 'concrete dystopia' and 'critical dystopia' create potential sub-genres. Maria Varsam (2003) describes a 'concrete dystopia' as a narrative with 'an emphasis on the real, material conditions of society that manifest themselves as a result of humanity's desire for a better world' (p.208), suggesting that dystopia emerges out of a failed desire for utopia, which is apparent within *The Handmaid's Tale*. The reader witnesses a theocratic society, founded on the beliefs of Christianity in order to try and prolong the human race, where these ideological beliefs create a totalitarian state which controls all elements of life and categorises humans according to their functionality in society. This creates a lack of hope and a sense that utopia cannot ever be achieved/created, even when there is an intention to do so. On the other hand, 'critical dystopia' is defined as '[including] at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with eutopia' (Sargent cited in Baccolini and Moylan, 2003, p.7), and therefore 'allow[s] readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure' (Baccolini and Moylan, 2003, p.7). In this sense, unlike traditional and 'concrete dystopias', 'critical dystopias' maintain elements of utopian dreaming in that they leave their narratives unresolved, allowing the reader some hope as to whether characters can escape their dystopian fates. *The Handmaid's Tale* provides an ambiguous ending and unanswered questions about Offred's fate, demonstrating traces of a critical dystopia. Plus

there are elements of hope and resistance found within examples such as the Mayday Resistance and the Historical Notes section which enlightens the reader that Gilead failed and therefore provides hope that Offred escaped and found freedom. However, I would also view *The Handmaid's Tale* as having elements of a concrete dystopia due to the expression of 'coercion (physical and psychological), fear, despair, and alienation' (Varsam, 2003, p.209) which dominates the narrative. Alternatively, I will argue that the *MaddAddam* trilogy maintains elements of the critical dystopia, not only due to the optimistic ambiguity at the end of the trilogy: the remaining humans and the new hybrid species, the Crakers, are left to try and navigate a new world together in order to survive, but also due to the sense of hope, for both the characters and the readers, that a better world can be created.

These works can also be described as 'speculative fiction', which is a genre Atwood considers to be different from science fiction in that 'everything that happens in her novels is possible and may even have already happened, so they can't be science fiction' (2011), a definition that Ursula La Guin disagrees with as she believes 'Atwood's works are SF because they blend an imaginative look at worlds that might be as well as satirizing the world that has been and is' (cited in P.L. Thomas, 2013, p.7). This demonstrates the fluidity and close proximity of both genres; however, for the purpose of this thesis, the texts will be deemed 'speculative fiction' as per Atwood's definition as '[she] defines science fiction as fiction in which things happen that are not possible today' (Atwood, 2005, p.92). It will be argued that her texts are 'speculative fiction' as they fit with a genre which focusses upon events or issues which are relatable to the real world, and do not include events which are otherworldly or impossible. Atwood herself has noted that all scientific and technological developments which are explored within the *MaddAddam* trilogy are based on existing technologies. Her texts are therefore 'purposeful, subjective, and rhetorical extrapolation[s]

from present circumstances' (Wyile, 2002, xii), and thus immerse themselves in current (at the time) environmental issues and present their narratives in ways which raise awareness of said issues for their reader to interpret.

Due to these environmental issues, Atwood's works also demonstrate elements of Climate Fiction, a genre which has been defined by Dan Bloom as 'a narrative form that can communicate the seriousness of climate change' (2014, para. 2). However, the format and tropes of cli-fi narratives still have fluidity, in that the genre is still being defined. Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow (2013, p.60) states that 'most climate-change fiction is set, for obvious reasons, in the future'. Thus, climate fiction suggests that the best way to make people take climate change seriously is to show the potential ramifications for the future. Tuhus-Dubrow further argues that the slower effects of climate change are 'not especially conducive to dramatic plot', and this is why cli-fi is usually paired with dystopian settings, usually with apocalyptic or exaggerated consequences for both the planet and humanity. Yusuff and Gabrys (2011) discuss how climate change is 'being reimagined as an ethical, societal, and cultural problem' (p.517) within broader society, rather than just being seen as a scientific issue, which is why there has been a surge in climate fiction. They disclose how cli-fi tends to focus on 'climate-change catastrophism [...] caused by finite resources and environments gone awry as a consequence of human hubris' (ibid.). In order to raise awareness, authors tend to focus on extremes of climate, showing devastating and sometimes apocalyptic settings as a means to suggest the potential dangers humans can inflict. Historically, less focus is placed on *The Handmaid's Tale* as dystopian cli-fi or as a text which deals with the effects of environmental crisis. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* will be considered as cli-fi texts as they both focus on catastrophism. The state of Gilead is built as a result of an unknown catastrophe caused by humanity. *MaddAddam* shows the impact of a

man-made catastrophe as a result of human hubris. It evolves to show the damage and destruction humanity is currently causing to the natural world. Thus, over time, Atwood's representation of cli-fi has become more blatant in that the environmental damage is not foregrounded within *The Handmaid's Tale*; it represents an emergent form of cli-fi as there are more subtle representations of planetary destruction. Her later works become more explicit in portraying environmental problems.

Overall, *The Handmaid's Tale* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy contain tropes of speculative, climate and dystopian fictions and thus will be viewed as such. I will argue that Atwood's portrayal of cli-fi has become more blatant, in a similar way that elements of critical dystopia become more evident over time; though elements of cli-fi and critical dystopia are evident within *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood became more focussed on growing environmental awareness by the time *MaddAddam* was published.

### Literature Review

Atwood's earlier work has been analysed from an ecocritical perspective, most notably her 1972 work *Surfacing*. Rosemary Sullivan (2013) examines the symbolism of nature and wilderness in representing elements of thought. She infers that with this novel 'Atwood's underlying intention [...] is to challenge our way of relating to nature. Atwood's subject is the polarization of man and nature that results from our compulsions to explain and master nature' (p. 38). Thus, I will follow Sullivan and view Atwood as a long-term environmental thinker. Sullivan also interprets Atwood's potential message from *Surfacing*, concluding that 'objectifying it, destroying it, we turn ourselves into object. We destroy ourselves.' (p.40); this implies that *Surfacing* warns the reader about the self-harm that comes from humanity's destructive relationship with the natural world. I similarly see *The Handmaid's Tale* and the *Maddaddam* trilogy as texts that challenge us to rethink our relationship with

our environment. This article suggests that Atwood has long been an environmental thinker, challenging humanity's assumption that they may dominate and control the Earth, therefore I will analyse the above texts to evidence Atwood's longevity as an environmental thinker.

The *MaddAddam* trilogy has also been viewed ecocritically, one notable example being Roman Bartosch's *Environmentality: Ecocriticism and the Event of Postcolonial Fiction* (2013). Here, he examines his idea of 'Environmentality' (which is explored above) through readings of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. Bartosch examines the breakdown of dichotomies, language's role in the nature/culture relationship and the role of dystopian elements within Atwood's novels. He states that 'technoscience therefore successfully merges 'nature' and 'culture' into a ubiquitous singularity of human arrogance' (p. 233), thus he analyses levels of interconnectedness between nature and culture and explores how they have become one pre-apocalypse in a way which results in the commodification of the natural world. Bartosch then comments on Atwood's portrayal of nature as less definable due to its constant manipulation, noting that 'nature seems to have been abolished in a postnatural environment; it seems to be unrecognisable,' (p. 241). This manipulation and blurring of what it means to be natural and the use of language in society to assist in its alteration are things that I argue happen not only in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, but also in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The *MaddAddam* trilogy has scarcely been viewed comparatively alongside *The Handmaid's Tale*. Coral Ann Howells (2006) is a rare theorist who has considered these texts together; however, she focusses solely upon *Oryx and Crake*. Howells views *Oryx and Crake*, plus, Atwood's poetry and her novel *Surfacing* (1972), through an environmental lens. She discusses the natural imagery used by Atwood to reflect the relationship between humans

and the Earth, but also with each other. She notes that 'Nature – physical or human – seen as a commodity always represents betrayal in Atwood's work' (p.84), analysing how human connections with each other and the Earth are always ruined or tainted by humanity's inability to change their human nature and sense of self-importance. Howells further goes on to analyse *Oryx and Crake* alongside *The Handmaid's Tale*. Howells notes that 'together they represent a synthesis of her political, social, and environmental concerns transformed into speculative fiction' (p.161) and she focuses on these works as dystopias that highlight relevant issues of their respective times. She considers the differences between these texts, stating that 'Different situations demand different inflections of the dystopian genre' (p.170) and thus she argues that Atwood's work 'darkens' (ibid.) over time. I follow Howells in my environmental reading of Atwood's work, agreeing that it becomes more explicitly environmental. However, Howells focusses on *Oryx and Crake* and *The Handmaid's Tale* and their different portrayals of dystopia, whereas my thesis will compare them specifically as environmental texts and include the whole trilogy.

Historically, *the Handmaid's Tale* has been analysed in terms of its prominence as a feminist text. I plan to examine the role of the female body as a site for exploitation of the natural world and reproduction. Viewing the text in terms of reproduction is not necessarily new in the field of research; Pamela Cooper (2010) already discusses the body as politicised, similar to Heather Latimer (2009) who discusses reproductive politics and a lack of freedom for women. Carole Levaque (2017) further views the body as a commodified entity, something that will also be explored within this thesis. Further to this, this text has been viewed as a dystopian novel by Maria Varsam, Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (2003), as well as many others, due to the oppressive society portrayed. However, bodies and reproduction have rarely been viewed ecocritically; they have rarely been discussed in terms of eco-

politics and how the body, along with different areas of the society, is a site of ecological manipulation.

Similarly, this text has been explored by Jeanne Campbell Reesman (2018), Michael Greene (2016) and David S Hogsette (1997) in terms of language suppression and the links between language and power within society. This is also seen not only in Jagna Oltarzewska's (2016) analysis of the idea of testimony within a text, but also in the work of Hilde Staels (2008), who discusses the death of female language and identity through loss of power. I will explore these links between language and power; however, I will do so with the view that control over language leads to power over the natural world itself.

### Overview of Chapters

Chapter one will focus upon the manipulation of the natural body through the control of both reproduction and physical bodies to achieve anthropocentric goals. The work of Kidner will be used to explore how this manipulation is anthropocentric and how these acts are rooted in a focus upon commodified interests within the theocratic/industrialised society. Further to this, I will explore the impact of manipulation upon said bodies, and how this contributes to the destruction and changing of what it means to be considered 'natural'.

Chapter two will move to explore the relationship between humans and space/place within Atwood's dystopian worlds. This will include an exploration of the regulation and control of the natural world. I will use Buell to consider the concepts of 'space' and 'place' and how a physical space or area of land is changed and adapted to suit anthropocentric needs. I will move to look at how this manipulation alters our views of what nature is, questioning whether we can consider ourselves to have a positive view of nature if we constantly seek to adapt it.

Chapter three explores the role of language in manipulating both the natural world, and the views and ideals held by the characters within the story. I will consider how, as a result, this affects the relationship between humanity and the natural world. I will consider the relationship between language and power and question whether language (and, as a result, literature) can be a real platform for change, or whether language will always be controlled by those who hold societal control.

## Chapter One: Bodies and Reproduction

The primary aim of this chapter is to analyse the manipulation of both human and animal bodies as a way to promote and solidify the power of the ruling forces within Atwood's created societies. It will explore how, though years apart, *The Handmaid's Tale* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy share a recurrent theme of interconnectedness in which 'culture and nature [...] are seen to be inextricably interconnected but are also irreducible to each other' (Böhme, 2016, p.138). The novels highlight how all aspects of manipulation or destruction of either human, animal or plant life have some form of repercussion upon humanity as, though it is a complex relationship, humanity is undeniably connected to the world itself. I will explore how these texts demonstrate conscious efforts on the part of technocratic and theocratic states to try and suppress this interconnectedness and create a dualistic way of thinking to construct and sustain their own power. Through this, I will explore how this blurs the definition of what is conceived as 'natural' as 'nature' becomes a construct due to humanity's constant interference. This will be explored in both *The Handmaid's Tale* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy, as we see reconstructions and the redefinition of what is deemed as 'natural' take place in a way which allows the abuse of different bodies at the hands of the ruling powers to become socially acceptable.

The redefinition of nature is of particular significance to the female bodies represented in *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel which explores how 'our bodies are not only the product of the agency of matter, but also of a mingling of historical and political forces, cultural practices, environmental conditions' (Grewe-Volpp, 2016, p.218). The manipulation of the Handmaids' bodies is shaped by the theocratic rulers. The Handmaids' importance is created as a result of the mass infertility brought about by clear damage caused to the planet. Their

bodies are simultaneously idolised and manipulated due to their ability to procreate. The control of these bodies is inherent to the survival and functionality of the theocracy as without the normalisation of said manipulation the entire system would begin to unravel. As a result, the Handmaids' sense of connection to the material world (bodies and earth) is severed, and they are simultaneously represented as an embodiment of the natural without being able to embrace their own bodies for themselves. Offred states 'my body was [...] one with me. Now the flesh arranges itself differently' (p.84) highlighting her sense that her own body has been realigned. 'The flesh' highlights her detachment from herself and her own body, and the reader learns how she comes to view herself as nothing more than an instrument of Gilead, whose only purpose is to produce a baby. The instability of what it is to be natural occurs within the *MaddAddam* trilogy through the manipulation of both human and animal bodies for the purposes of the technocratic, science-obsessed ruling powers. This is demonstrated through technocentrism which Kidner (2014) explains is an imposed, false sense of anthropocentrism which disguises a 'technological-economic system into which both humanity and nature are being dissolved' (p.469). This chapter will seek to explore technocentric attempts to sever interconnectedness within all echelons of the pre-apocalyptic society, whilst considering the ambiguity of a reconnection in the post-apocalypse. Therefore, the semantics of 'nature' within *MaddAddam* are realigned according to the strength of the techno-focussed society.

### Controlling Bodies within *The Handmaid's Tale*

The concept of interconnectedness demonstrates the close link between manipulating bodies and the impact this has upon society and nature itself. Grewe-Volpp (2016) states that 'there has never been [...] any entity [existing] that is separate from its environment' (p.218). Therefore, *The Handmaid's Tale* not only reflects humanity's culpability in the

destruction of what is considered natural, but also demonstrates the cyclical nature of this destruction. The implemented changes to existing acts such as sex and relationships change perceptions about existing biology and heighten the manipulation of the female body. This blurs the lines of what is morally acceptable and said manipulation leads to accepted abuse and mistreatment of the Handmaids. The monthly rape of Handmaids at the 'ceremony' (a predetermined, mandatory act of sex), plus, the extreme re-education of said Handmaids by the Aunts demonstrate this. Offred notes a 'cattle prod hung on [Aunt Elizabeth's] belt' (p. 204) and she sees 'a bruise on [Moira's] cheek' (p.81), evidence of the ways in which Handmaids are physically abused or threatened. The Handmaids' bodies can thus be viewed as a symbol of the natural world and humanity's mistreatment of it. If the Handmaids are presented within Gilead as a symbol of all things natural, and their bodies are consistently abused, then perhaps it is a warning about the extent of humanity's abuse over natural entities.

Within Gilead, this abuse centres on a more specific anthropocentric focus: that of sustaining the Gilead theocracy. Gilead's reverence and commodification of fertile women stem from the implied damage that humanity has inflicted upon the Earth (which will be explored in chapter two) and the resulting infertility amongst remaining humans: we learn that even with a fertile Handmaid, the chance of a healthy baby is 'one in four' (p.122). This again demonstrates interconnectedness in that the theocracy attempts to fix the damage caused to the Earth by humans, through manipulating the bodies of the Handmaids: a cycle of damage to both the planet and humans alike. Offred describes the 'ceremony', stating that 'This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty' (p.105). Those in charge do not see this as a violation of the woman's body; similarly they do not see it as a pleasurable. They see it as a necessary act in trying to repopulate the Earth and therefore

keep Gileadean society thriving. This prioritises the success of society over the humane treatment of bodies, in that it demonstrates the theocracy's perceived self-importance over the rest of the planet, and its focus upon repopulation at any cost.

Kate Soper (2016) emphasises 'the formation or mediation of human culture in whatever comes to count as "nature" or "natural"' (p. 158), demonstrating how human interference changes and adapts what is considered to be natural. This suggests that what is deemed natural is changeable dependent upon what society deems it to be. Within *The Handmaid's Tale*, the theocracy is seen to control what society sees as natural, and they ensure the Handmaids themselves become an icon of what Gileadeans would consider to be natural due to their fertility. This presents a dualistic and jarring way in which to examine the perception of the Handmaids within the text. On one hand, there is their 'natural' image in that they are represented as sanctified female bodies and are revered for their ability to reproduce, yet this is a public perception of the Handmaids, an image meant to justify but also to mask the manipulation and abuse of the female body in order to enable the society function and continue. The reality of the situation is that the abuse and manipulation of the fertile body, something which is entirely human, is an ever present and common aspect within Gilead. Women's bodies are debased and used as the ruling powers deem necessary; in ways which would be deemed (by man's interpretation of the word) 'unnatural' in a real-world society due to the unorthodox methods used (the 'Ceremony', the Red centres).

Though they are publicly redefined as an embodiment of nature, Handmaids are heavily controlled and regulated by the households to which they 'belong'. Heather Latimer (2009) notes that 'the Handmaids are supposedly held in high regard, since it is only through them that the population will continue, but in reality it is for this reason that they are watched,

controlled, and under constant threat of death' (p.219), demonstrating the duality of the Handmaids both being revered by the public, yet kept powerless through their captivity. One Wife states 'little whores, all of them [...] you take what they hand out' (p.125), showing how, to the powers of Gilead, Handmaids are commodities. This is paradoxical in some senses as it again creates a dualism of how the Handmaids are viewed. In one sense they are cheap and vulgar women who sell their fertility to stay alive; on the other hand, they are essential, reproductive vessels who will enable the continuation of the Gileadean people. This redefines the relationship between humanity and the natural world as the female body is simply an instrument or tool required in order to have a baby, just as natural resources became an instrument in humanity's prosperity. Offred discusses the small tattoo on her ankle and how the Handmaids are described as a 'national resource' (p.75), creating the image of livestock or a barcode on a supermarket product. This branding and dehumanisation as a 'resource' likens the use of the Handmaids to the use of something such as coal or crops, thus emphasising their image as simultaneously of the Earth but also something to be used and manipulated by humanity.

Due to this duality, a climate is created which turns the Handmaid's body into something simultaneously desirable and yet undesirable. The body is considered to be (by man's interpretation of the word) unnatural to view as all women's bodies must be completely covered at all times. When in town, for example, Offred describes the meeting with some Japanese tourists who are 'nearly naked in their thin stockings' (p.38). She imagines how the handmaids look to the tourists: 'what they must see is the white wings only, a scrap of face [...] modesty is invisibility' (ibid.). She contemplates how quickly she comes to see outsiders as unusual and their dress as strange, sexual and scandalous. Yet, to inhabitants of Gilead, it is the Handmaid's covered body that is coveted, rather than this image of westernised

fashion. The Handmaid's body is desirable to those who do not possess it. Men of low standing are unable to see or touch the Handmaids; this leads to the guard, when the Handmaids venture into town, 'bend[ing] his head to try to get a look' (p.31). The Handmaids are completely covered, wearing 'wings' to avoid being seen, to maintain their illusion of desirability, but also to avoid the Handmaids being able to see, to keep them submissive and under control. Thus, they are simultaneously visible and 'on display' to the world, yet also invisible as individual people.

The other women in society - the Marthas, the Wives - both admire and envy the Handmaids because of their functioning bodies, but concurrently commodify them and view them as lesser beings due to the sexual nature of their role. There are frequent references to how Serena Joy resents Offred and the situation. During the 'ceremony', for example, Offred notes that 'the rings of her left hand cut into my fingers. It may or may not be revenge.' (p.104). Following the 'ceremony', Offred describes how 'there is loathing in her voice' (p.106). This suggests that Serena Joy is highly envious of Offred's ability to bear a child, whilst also hating the methods having to be used to try and impregnate her. It is suggested she detests Offred's sexual relationship with her husband, and as a result, views Offred as beneath her. Yet, despite this, throughout the novel, Serena 'is in control' (ibid.) and willing to commodify Offred for the sake of her real desire: having a child. She longs to be fertile herself and yet is willing to use Offred wherever possible (even flouting the rules through Offred's sexual arrangement with Nick) to try and achieve the ultimate goal of continuing her family. This further heightens the dualism in how Handmaids are outwardly represented and aligned with Gilead's definition of nature, contrasted with personal perceptions as 'little whores' (p.125) who are beneath their superiors. They are simultaneously placed on a pedestal as the embodiment of nature whilst also entirely

commodified and manipulated for the purposes of furthering the theocratic regime and increasing both the population and the status and power of those in charge. The possession of a Handmaid shows status, whilst the bearing of a child means power for the Commander and his wife as it furthers the Gileadean population.

The process of commodifying the Handmaids takes place within a re-education centre (nicknamed the Red Centre) in which the Handmaids are taught the ways of the new society and have their beliefs realigned to those of Gilead before they are deemed suitable enough to be posted to a Commander. Pamela Cooper (2010) notes that the Red Centre embodies how the 'female body is explicitly politicized as the function, focus, and means of indoctrination' (p.94), and highlights how successful the theocracy is in brainwashing the masses and the Handmaids themselves to redefine what they see as natural. Offred suggests that they are drugged 'to keep us calm' (p.80) and to enhance their subservience. She also describes 'testifying' where, within the Red Centre, the Handmaids are made to confess past sins; they are then shamed by the rest of the Handmaids to make them feel disgusted by their past identities: '*her* fault, we chant in unison' (p.82), and are put on show: 'she looked disgusting: weak, squirmy' (ibid.). This is a tactic to make their past actions seem sinful and unnatural and make them more willing to commit themselves to their new role within society. Aunt Lydia, a prominent figure in the Red Centre, states 'this may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary' (p.43), which expresses how easy it is to manipulate and change the old society and thus change beliefs and behaviours to create a new normal. We notice that most women and citizens have resigned themselves to the new order even though they may disagree with it and, like Offred, may yearn for the older society. The novel itself is interspersed with Offred's memories of the past, memories of Luke and her daughter, whilst also visions that outline her hopes that she

may one day be reunited with them. She states: 'I'm dreaming that I am awake [...] she's running to meet me' (p.119); these thoughts themselves are an act of rebellion, highlighting the text as a critical dystopia. Yet, Offred and characters such as Janine do demonstrate subservience to their situations. Offred's acts of rebellion are largely at the requests of her superiors- her meetings with the Commander and her affair with Nick. Janine is described as a 'puppy that had been kicked too often [...] she'd tell anything for a moment of approbation' (p.139), demonstrating how many women do in fact become resigned and fully submissive to Gilead, whilst also showing the success in manipulating these women. The Red Centre reflects how Handmaids and citizens are forced to change their belief systems and their way of life to fit in with the theocracy's ideals. Aunt Lydia's sermons are another example of this, one sermon condemning the way women used to dress and present themselves: '*Things*, the word she used when whatever it stood for was too distasteful or filthy or horrible to pass her lips.' (p.65); her words discredit old ways of living, painting them as sinful and unnatural and serve to change the Handmaids' ways of thinking through both guilt and disdain. This proves effective as Aunt Lydia's words are frequently recounted, showing their impact upon Offred. This shows both a physical and psychological re-education, and demonstrates how a new normal and a new definition of nature comes to be accepted within Gilead.

Because of this new normal, the Handmaids come to envy each other. For example, Offred describes seeing Janine pregnant for the first time, stating that 'she's an object of envy and desire' (p.36). The Handmaids themselves come to idealise the fertile body to some extent, and this creates a yearning to succeed in their role. Also, pregnancy allows a reprieve from the monthly ritual as Handmaids are treated as though they are sacred and their bodies are sanctified whilst they are pregnant. This simultaneous idealisation and envy of the

reproductive body suggests a dual functionality for the state of Gilead. The Handmaids are created for the purpose of trying to sustain the population, but their idealisation and glorification also makes them pivotal in maintaining societal balance. Without these women and their bodies, the other roles within society become meaningless. The Aunts' roles are to educate and prepare the Handmaids: 'I'm trying to give you the best chance you can have' (p.65); the Marthas feed and look after the Handmaids within their assigned household: 'Cora has run the bath,' (p.72); the Wives eventually hope to gain a child and become Mothers as a result of them: 'she wants it aright, that baby' (p. 271). Without Handmaids, these other women become less useful to society. Hence, Handmaids are simultaneously protected from those who envy them, whilst being heavily guarded and controlled to ensure they stay in line and do not realise their true power within society.

However, this control over her body makes Offred feel distanced from it as she begins to view herself as undesirable. She becomes alienated from her own body and thus begins to see herself as something she is unsure of and even repulsed by. During the 'ceremony' she describes 'this state of absence, of existing apart from the body' (p.169). She talks of her body as a separate entity from herself, something 'other'. Her body is abused for the purpose of the higher powers, and thus, when she sees her body or uses her body for its reproductive purposes, the restriction placed upon her makes her feel alienated from herself. She begins to see herself as the commodity that society sees her as. She further declares that 'I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely' (p.73), showing her awareness that she is in fact being manipulated and used as a resource. She becomes detached from her body, and her perceptions of her own body change to align to the ideals of those who oppress her. The novel cites the book of Genesis: 'Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her: and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by

her' (30:1-3, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, p.9), using the Handmaid's ability and duty to bear a child as a cornerstone of Gilead's theocracy. Thus, Offred views herself as a baby-maker and states 'each month I watch for blood... I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which have become my own' (p.83); she begins to show resentment towards herself as she is unable to bear a child, something which is now ingrained as her duty to society. This highlights the power of the theocracy in not only changing what people perceive to be natural/normal, but also in changing what is valued. The emphasis upon the story of Rachel and Bilhah means Offred's inability to fall pregnant is displayed both as a failure of her duty to society but also as a failure to God. The oppression of Offred diminishes her self-worth and demonstrates the eradication of individual identity and, in its place, there is now conformity to a theocratic-centred way of thinking.

Within *The Handmaid's Tale*, the abuse of bodies is not only a form of commodification, but also a key aspect in furthering and controlling reproduction. The abuse of the female body is reflective of the abuse of natural resources: the ruling powers take and use which females they wish as 'fertility is considered an important commodity' (Levaque, 2017, p.526), and do so repeatedly. Janine gives birth to a healthy girl and it is said that 'she will be transferred, to see if she can do it again,' (p.137) once she is able. She will be reused and expected to reproduce for as long as she is physically able. This draws some parallels with the ChickieNobs of *Oryx and Crake* (which I will analyse later in the chapter), as the Handmaids are seen as commodities who are used for their functioning body parts, the same as the genetically created animals in *Oryx and Crake*. . At the time of the original publication of the novel there were growing concerns around women's rights as well as around the increase of technologies to aid reproduction such as the 'first case of IVF with donor eggs [...] performed in Australia in 1983' (Lahl, 2017, p.241). Also, there were debates about 'problems surrounding

surrogacy and custody [and] the pervasiveness of foetal personhood [...] following the widespread growth of the “pro-life” movement in the late 1970s’ (Latimer, 2009, p.214). Thus, ‘Atwood’s storyline [is] an engagement with the backlash against women’s reproductive rights’ (ibid.) as well as mass debates around abortion and whether women’s rights outweigh a foetus’ right to life. Her narrative also explores issues of medicalising the female body and a woman’s control of her own body and reproductive choices. Latimer (2009) notes how American leaders, at the time, ‘called for a “return to basics” and to the fundamentals of the heterosexual, nuclear, patriarchal family’ (p.216). This is reflected within Atwood’s portrayal of Gilead; it is a world in which all females’ bodies are controlled by the patriarchal theocracy and reproduction is ritualised and commodified to heighten birth rates. Surrogacy has become the norm, yet any technological aid and abortion are illegalised. The text is perhaps a warning against the abuse of women, but also against humanity’s assumption of dominance over any living entity that can be of use to the prosperity of society. Levaque (2017) notes ‘the dissociation of sexuality from reproduction’ (p.526), in that the people of Gilead consider reproduction to be a transaction, as the female body becomes an important cog that must fulfil its commodified role.

This is further emphasised by the exploitation of these women. Fertile women are passed around different households, moving on once they have either provided a child, or if the couple becomes unhappy with the Handmaid. If successful, the Handmaid is moved on to try and avoid any emotional connections with the child. Conversely, it is also suggested that the Handmaid will move on after a period of time if no child is produced. Offred announces that the Commander’s household is her third. In either instance, the Handmaid is viewed almost like a non-human entity; ‘so, you’re the new one’ (p.23) declares Serena Joy upon Offred’s arrival at their household. Handmaids are dispensable and are judged based on

their ability to provide a baby for the couple to which they are assigned. This frequent changing of Handmaids further emphasises the view of the individuals as insignificant. It is the overall vision and narrative of what the Handmaids represent which the society's functionality is built upon; on the surface of things, the individual Handmaid is of little personal importance until she becomes pregnant. The individual is dispensable as we learn when Offred replaces a previous Handmaid who, it is rumoured, killed herself: she is forgotten and replaced seamlessly. Offred questions the Commander on her predecessor and he states "She hanged herself," he says; thoughtfully, not sadly. [...] If your dog dies, get another.' (p.197) suggesting emotional detachment towards previous Handmaids and a lack of care about their fate. We also see a lack of individuality through the possessive and concrete naming of the Handmaids within post. Offred states 'My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden.' (p.94); their individual identities are no longer of importance, only their function within society. They lose their original name and are assigned that of their Commander, and thus a name is assigned more worth than that of the individual who holds the name at that time.

Further to bodies (and therefore identities) being controlled; the process of sex is both modified and recreated by the ruling powers in a way that becomes ritualistic, sanctified and mechanical. Though the biological act remains the same, the ritualization of sex is seen as the normal process in which people become pregnant and becomes a part of the religious belief system, and thus 'the state has reduced women to nothing more than vehicles of procreation' (Worth Books, 2017, p.26). The women are housed with members of the elite and then made to partake in a monthly 'Ceremony' in which the men try to impregnate the Handmaids and thus carry on their lineage. Offred describes the experience:

I lie on my back, fully clothed except for the healthy white cotton underdrawers [...] above me, towards the head of the bed, Serena Joy is arranged [...] below it, the Commander is fucking (p.104).

The act of sex is transformed into a duty which must be performed, the body of Offred being some form of necessary vessel between husband and wife. This act is presented as part of a sanctified ritual including prayers and a pre-ritual bath. The juxtaposition of the accepted ceremony and the stark reality of Offred being held down by her superiors whilst 'the Commander fucks' (ibid.) creates an uncomfortable vision of a woman unable to escape or have any control over her own body. This represents control over both reproduction and female bodies. All personal connection is removed, all forms of personal contact except with the genital areas are banned. Thus, all clothing must remain in place to remind everyone of the purpose of the 'ceremony'. This destruction of intimacy and freedom and the creation of one uniform method of performing a sexual act can be seen to create a dualism between the female body and the individual/the act of reproduction. The theocracy makes unsanctified and unregulated acts of reproduction unnatural. Within the Red Centre, the women are shown extreme videos of 'women kneeling, sucking penises or guns' (p.128) to suggest how awful and violent unsanctified methods of sex used to be and to deter them from 'what things used to be like' (ibid.). They are also told that any unlawful acts would be punished. When discussing her affair with Nick, Offred points out 'it's my life on the line' (p.216); similarly she discusses with the Commander how 'you could get me transferred [...] to the Colonies.' (p.171). Therefore, the ceremony and this detached form of reproduction are, in Gilead, the only 'natural' and only safe form of reproduction. Thus, reproduction has become almost formulaic, dependent upon a select number of women's ability to conceive

and the act of conception, in Serena Joy's words, has been reduced to 'a business transaction' (p.25).

Offred's fully functioning body is a symbol of what once was before mass infertility; however, the regime she belongs to highlights how nature is being used for man's own profit and survival. Yet it is suggested that many men have become infertile, though 'there is no such thing as a sterile man [...] there are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren' (p.71) in the eyes of the law. This demonstrates the patriarchal and theological domination of these women as these men in power are chosen to help further the population, yet fail to do so. Thus, women are doubly cheated as they bear the responsibility of furthering the population but are also blamed for male infertility. We are shown an example of the doctor who offers to impregnate Offred in order to save her; he states 'I could help you [...] lots of women do it' (p.70-71), suggesting that this is quite a common, even if forbidden, practice. The ruling men hold all of the political and cultural power; however, it is these idealised women who inevitably hold the key to this society's survival. Therefore, this theologically-accepted abuse and manipulation over bodies does not breed success for Gilead in the end. The Commander's suggested infertility is perhaps a foreshadowing of both his and Gilead's own self-destruction. Within the Historical Notes the reader learns he 'met his end, probably soon after the events our author describes' (p.321-322), demonstrating how those responsible for the continuous use of female resources without a care for the consequences will ultimately find themselves a victim of that destruction.

Overall, all aspects of female bodies are controlled within Gilead. The Handmaid's body becomes a symbol of all things 'natural', yet the definition of nature becomes skewed to fit

the agendas of the elite. The body is commodified and manipulated to appear a certain way and women are restricted in their actions. Plus, reproduction is heavily controlled; though it is presented as returning to nature as all medical or assistive methods are banned (women are not allowed medication or treatment if anything goes wrong), this ritualised form of reproduction (and birth) is further evidence of control over bodies as a means to ensure the survival of Gilead.

### Manipulating Bodies within the *MaddAddam* trilogy

The *MaddAddam* trilogy differs from *the Handmaid's Tale* in that it presents a pre-apocalyptic world which epitomises human-focussed technological advances. The world is ruled by corporations whose main purposes are genetic engineering and profiteering, and who's 'values, identity, and understanding of the world are uprooted from the natural order and relocated in the industrial system' (Kidner, 2014, p.270). Their main focus is 'gene splicing', in which they adapt and alter many different forms of being to suit their own purposes and to prolong human prosperity. Within the pre-apocalyptic world, humanity attempts to thrive technologically and scientifically in order to exploit organic beings in the pursuit of profit and pleasure. In doing so, they blur the concept of nature by changing and adapting different species to suit their own consumption. Braidotti (2013) discusses the concept of changing and adapting existing bodies in ways which 'blur [...] the distinction between the human and other species when it comes to profiting from them' (p.63), suggesting that those in power do not make distinctions between different bodies when they are viewing them as a commodity, and therefore it becomes difficult to define what we consider natural outside the parameters and products of a profitable society.

The reader is introduced to gene splicing upon protagonist Jimmy's visit to the Watson-Crick Compound, where he is given a tour of the labs by antagonist Crake. Here he sees the ChickieNobs:

What they were looking at was a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing. [...]

"Those are chickens," said Crake," (p.237)

The 'bulblike object' with 'twenty thick fleshy tubes' is a monstrous creation. The reader/Jimmy is then informed that these are chickens, presenting an example of how extreme the gene splicing has become, to the point where animals become unrecognisable. A lab woman further clarifies that 'they'd removed all of the brain functions' (p.238), rendering this animal no more than a money-making commodity. All nature has been taken out of the growth and reproductive process, and all natural elements of the chicken can no longer be visually seen. The 'ChickieNobs' reduce the chicken to a mere vegetative species, removing all irrelevant aspects of the animal and only allowing the consumable parts of the animal to remain. Soraya Copley (2013) describes this manipulation as 'the shocking and potentially lethal corruption of the food chain' (p.46), commenting upon how, within the novel, humanity's uncaring use of animals leads to the destruction of what is deemed natural, and how closely this reflects real-world bio-engineering. Atwood's grotesque depiction of the lab-grown chickens offers a blunt and bleak picture of the relationship between humans and non-humans, highlighting humanity's disregard for animals and a model of 'anthropocentric dualism humanity/nature' (Garrard, 2012, p.26) in which humanity prioritises itself over the natural world and views itself as superior. Kidner would define this as 'industrialism's

insidious takeover of all of nature' (2014, p.473) as the ChickieNobs represent a technocentric focus where all ethics or care for the animal have been removed. The motivation behind their production is to remove unnecessary processes from the production line and to control the being in order to produce as much money as possible. Crake even notes that 'investors are lining up around the block' (p.239), highlighting the main priority of the Compound. This demonstrates an anthropocentric focus, humanity's exploitation of the animal kingdom; however, I would argue it specifically demonstrates a technocentric line of thought since the main focus is upon furthering the gene splicing production in the most efficient and profitable way.

Susan McHugh (2010) coined the term 'real artificial', and questions 'whether and how tissue-cultured meat remains animal' (p.191) due to extreme manipulation and alteration through bioengineering. This raises the issue as to whether animals who have been genetically altered can be considered 'real' anymore, or whether they should be considered 'fake natural'. The aforementioned lab technician declares that 'the animal-welfare freaks won't be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain' (p.237). This statement in itself reflects an awareness by the corporations that what they are doing is neither ethical nor natural, and demonstrates 'the manner in which [the corporation] manipulates consciousness in order to facilitate this commodification' (Kidner, 2014, p.475). However, their solution is not to find a better way to raise and treat the animals, but is to remove all known brain function related to pain or awareness instead, and, as a result, (as far as they are concerned) remove any issues or problems with the extreme manipulation they carry out. The use of the noun 'thing' destabilises our conceptions of this being even remotely resembling what we would consider to be a chicken, and objectifies the animal's body to the extent that it can no longer be considered a real animal, but is instead 'real artificial'. The

novel thus presents a corporate mindset that destroys biological aspects of living animals, ignoring all ethical ramifications and blurring the boundaries of what can be considered natural.

The ChickieNobs reflect existing, real-world gene splicing and provide a warning about how far corporations may venture in the pursuit of success. Though 'genetically modified animals are banned from the EU food chain' (Ian Tucker, 2018), they are being developed. For example, 'scientists in both China and Argentina have genetically engineered cows to produce milk similar in composition to that made by humans' (ibid.), suggesting that, before long, gene splicing will become more widespread and commonly used. The ChickieNobs demonstrate the public's obliviousness to the manipulation of the food chain in industrial/technocentric societies. Jimmy considers that 'he couldn't see eating a ChickieNob' (p.239) due to the horrific conditions in which they are raised, but also because of the grotesque appearance displayed before him. However, we later learn that he becomes an avid consumer of the product: 'the stuff wasn't that bad if you could forget everything you knew about the provenance' (p.284). He himself demonstrates an anthropocentric and self-centred viewpoint as he becomes desensitized to the horrors he has previously experienced. This disregard for the food's origin again demonstrates an attitude that Kidner would argue is prevalent in modern day society. He (2012) notes how 'a commodity is necessarily separable from its surroundings and context' (p.18), arguing how people are unconcerned with a product's natural origin and are able to ignore said origin in favour of viewing it in terms of its conceptual or industrial purpose.. This demonstrates a disregard for how it is made or obtained, instead highlighting a focus upon its use as a consumable product.

The Pigoons are another key product of gene splicing, though arguably, are the opposite of the ChickieNobs. They are 'sites of invested resources and potential returns' (Bedford, 2015, p.78) in that they were originally created as designer organ donors 'using cells from individual human donors' (*Oryx and Crake*, p.27). We can see that the Pigoons blur the boundaries between human and animal in that they contain human cells in order to regrow organs for ill patients. Unlike the ChickieNobs, which are degenerated to the lowest possible state, the Pigoons in essence become more humanised. They are thus important in raising ethical questions as to where human/ animal boundaries lie, and whether there are any boundaries left due to humanity's determination to prolong human life at any expense. The Pigoons are saviours in that they save lives, yet they are a prime example of commodification as every aspect of them is used by the corporations either to help improve human health or as consumables. It is described that after the Pigoons were harvested of their extra organs, they would end up 'as bacon and sausages' (ibid.), though this is vehemently denied by the corporations. Even though the Pigoons are biologically part human, they are still used for human consumption, essentially meaning that consumers become cannibals through eating human/Pigoon remains. Thus, the Pigoons serve as another reminder that the technocracy has no regard for maintaining biological or ethical boundaries.

Within the post-apocalypse, the reader sees the products of gene splicing claim the world for themselves and this provides a clear example of interconnectedness. Hughes and Wheeler (2013) state that, in both real and fictional worlds, 'the decimation of plant and animal life entails the potential destruction of humanity' (p.1), suggesting how the destruction of animal bodies has repercussions for humanity. Within *MaddAddam*, this backfires within the post-apocalypse as the humans become secondary in the new

landscape, apparently now ruled by the Pigoons. This creates a sense of irony in that the Pigoons remain an invaluable resource; however, this time they are an ally and saviour of the remaining humans who, after a while, 'follow the lead of the Pigoons' (*MaddAddam*, p.427), showing a change in power dynamics and also a growth of respect for animal bodies. It is discovered that the Pigoons, in fact, have increased intelligence and brain function due to the modifications made by the Compounds, and this shows a further blurring of human/animal boundaries as the humans become dependent on their modified animals in a different way; this time not as products to make them money, but as a superior species who can help them strategically. This demonstrates how interconnected and 'naturalcultural' (Garrard, 2012, p.204) humans and the planet are, as humans begin to shift from a dualistic way of thinking to a dependency on the Pigoons for help. Similarly, it shows how they are 'interconnected in ways that are [...] uncanny or threatening' (ibid.) in that humanity becomes affected by the damage it has caused to other animal bodies and thus struggles to survive with what is left. Interestingly, Crake ensures no flora or fauna is destroyed during the virus outbreak, only humans, as a means to allow the Earth and these animal bodies to recover and thrive away from humanity's destruction. This represents a fatal hubris to humanity's technocentrism as the survivors become dependent on their engineered animals to help them survive; Jimmy states "'Thank God for the pigs,'" (p.428) following the Pigoons' agreement to assist the humans against the Painballers; without their assistance the humans would not have survived. This therefore shows the reader how much humanity is affected by its own destructive actions (pre-apocalypse), as they struggle to deal with the remnants of what is left.

Reproduction within the *MaddAddam* trilogy is presented in a very different way, compared to *the Handmaid's Tale*. Where the latter focusses upon controlling the physical act of sex,

the *MaddAddam* trilogy looks at how changing the product and method of reproduction can help to further the safety of the planet and prevent any further corruption of the Earth. The most extreme example is the creation of the Crakers themselves, beings who are made in a lab yet 'represent the art of the possible' (p.359) in terms of minimising destructive tendencies towards the Earth. Crake ensures that the Crakers 'came into heat at regular intervals' (ibid.) as animals do, to avoid overpopulation and to create a more controlled yet instinctual version of reproduction. However, similarly to *The Handmaid's Tale*, this is presented somewhat ironically as, in order to save what they consider the natural, the natural is redefined and altered. The Crakers become the most prevalent version of humanity after the Waterless Flood, yet their entire genetics are created and selected within a scientific lab. Humanity's manipulation of existing bodies and genetics through gene splicing, as well as humanity's own vanity, is what eventually brings about humankind's downfall. The manipulation and corruption of bodies backfires as Crake wipes out humanity in order to stop its exploitation of the Earth, and replaces it with the genetically engineered Crakers who will go on to populate within themselves and with the remaining humans.

After the apocalypse, we see the Crakers come to the forefront of a new civilisation where there is an attempt to 'overcome the deeply entrenched culture-nature dualism' (Bohme, 2016, p.139), suggesting that the Crakers represent a technologically-mediated attempt to establish a more positive relationship with the world. We learn that antagonist Crake's creation of this new species is an attempt to try and prolong and sustain the Earth and to change humanity's destructive tendencies through creating an eco-friendly human-hybrid. The Crakers present a technocentric approach to reproduction, due to the fact they were genetically created within a lab. On one hand, this demonstrates the amount of power that

humanity holds over reproduction and the furthering of the human race due to Crake's ability to create a 'designer human' without the weaknesses of the current human population; an irony similar to *the Handmaid's Tale* as ecological ideals are created from a harmful, dystopian world. Elements of Atwood's Crakers pay homage to Donna Haraway's (2016) utopian cyborg in that they succeed in 'subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of "Western" identity' (p.57) as well as demonstrating 'powerful possibilities' in 'those closer to nature' (p.58). The Crakers present a possible solution to current dualistic (and therefore destructive) relationships with the Earth and can be seen as an example of how humans should alter their behaviours to have a more peaceable relationship with other earthly bodies. The eco-friendly characteristics attributed to the Crakers, in essence, make them cyborgs and, in Crake's view, a superior species. Haraway's view of cyborgs can further be seen to align with Crake's beliefs in that they both believe 'we [humans] require regeneration, not rebirth' (p.115), demonstrating a belief that humanity in its current form is self-destructive as well as damaging to the Earth and to other species. Thus, it would suggest that Crake's method tries to turn reproduction into regeneration of humanity's genetic make-up as well as conditioning people's behaviours and mindset. Within *Oryx and Crake*, the reader is given Crake's description of the hybrid-beings:

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, [...] the king-of-the-castle hard-wiring that plagued humanity had, in them, been unwired [...] They ate nothing but leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two [...] they were perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses or tools or weapons (p.358).

Crake's vision for the Crakers is one which presents a harmonious relationship, removing the notion of the Crakers as a burden upon the Earth. He attempts to solve the significant issues that humans pose to the Earth: overcrowding, war, the abuse of land and animal life, which, on the surface, presents the Crakers as the ideal species. However, this ideal is arguably flawed in that once the reader comes to know more about the Crakers, we realise that some of the inherent traits they still hold stem from 'old world' binaries and beliefs, such as the women being the child raisers and the men asserting territory (peeing in a line). They have built-in, gendered traits, which suggests that Crake's vision for a new, unified world may contain some flaws. The men are the foragers whilst the women take care of their offspring; equally, men are instinctually inclined to mate with any woman who they deem to be in heat, suggesting that historical binaries of gender expectations alongside their animal instincts, are still ingrained into them. When Amanda first encounters the Crakers, they cry 'She smells blue! She wants to mate with us!' (*Maddaddam*, p.21) which results in her impregnation through what the Crakers would describe as mating, but a human would class as rape. To them, they have done nothing wrong as they have adhered to their expectations as males, yet to the remaining humans this is seen as a horrible act. This suggests that it is not necessarily possible to solve all problems through scientific genius, as some destructive or repressive states are doomed to be repeated as they are a reflection of Crake's socialised beliefs.

The way in which the Crakers come to exist not only complicates the notion of what is natural, but also what it is to be considered truly human. Braidotti (2013) discusses her idea of the post-human, which she outlines as 'an expanded, relational self that functions in a nature-culture continuum and is technologically mediated' (p.61). This suggests that the post-human is an extended version of ourselves who embraces an equal relationship with

the natural world; however, it uses technology to establish this relationship. She questions not only the limits and consequences of human intervention in altering humans and non-humans alike, as modification can bring forward a more positive relationship with the Earth, but also the evolution of humanity. This raises the question of what it means to be human and whether the Crakers are 'natural' beings; this is explored through the Crakers as they are a combination of all the different environmentally-friendly aspects of various 'natural' species. This suggests they potentially have a more positive interconnected relationship with the Earth in that they both give and take equally from nature. They 'ate nothing but leaves and grass and roots [...] best of all, they recycled their own excrement' (*Oryx and Crake*, p.359), meaning that they only take from the Earth which is absolutely vital for survival, but then help to fertilise the land to regrow what has been taken. However, on a cellular level, the surviving humans are, by our current definition of the word, more 'natural' in that they have been produced through a process of reproduction rather than through gene splicing. It raises the idea that 'natural' is still a fluid concept depending on where the concept has originated from. For example, Jimmy describes the Craker women as '[looking] like retouched fashion photos' (*Oryx and Crake*, p.115) showing how he views them as unusual and fake looking, yet similarly, they question his beard hair as the Crakers have 'no body hair' (ibid.); they each see each other as unnatural or strange. Yet, the Crakers see themselves and their behaviours as 'natural' in the same way as the humans see their genetic make-up and ways of living as 'natural'.

This blurring of boundaries reinforces the idea of interconnectedness in which all elements of life are 'inextricably intertwined' (Grewe-Volpp, p.216), and presents a tangled web of dependence. The human characters, who are physically unaltered by technology or 'the old world', become dependent on the Crakers for reproduction just as the Crakers become

dependent on humans to teach them about the world around them. The Crakers were conceived within a lab and are a product of technological and scientific progress and can therefore be deemed a product of science rather than reproduction. Without the Crakers to reproduce with, arguably, humanity's time is limited (the reader learns, within the final instalment, that a significant number of males never return from a dangerous scouting mission, leaving less possibility of human-to-human conception). Yet, this only serves to further complicate the relationship and definition of what can be considered natural. In the final instalment of the trilogy, we learn that three human characters (Ren, Amanda and Swift Fox) all give birth to human-Craker hybrids. Ironically, the character of Ivory Bill states 'this is the future of the human race' (*MaddAddam*, p.462) when, in actual fact, all babies are said to have the green eyes which are a prominent feature of the Crakers. This presents a third species, another hybrid containing aspects of both humans and the Crakers, a hybrid who will become an important aspect of the future. Blackbeard questions 'What other features might these children have inherited?' (p.461-2), showing how these acts of reproduction may have simultaneously prolonged and yet further diluted the human race. On a genetic level, this means a furthering of human DNA. Conversely, this means that as long as Crakers reproduce with humans, there will never be a pure concentration of human DNA, as it will continue to contain the other genetic elements that the Crakers possess. Thus, the Crakers are a symbol of a nature-culture relationship which could provide a positive future for both humanity and the Earth itself. I propose that this interspecies reproduction is a symbol of how humanity can alter its current destructive anthropocentric ways of living, to reconnect with nature in order to redefine a new eco-centric relationship which will prolong the most positive and productive aspects of humanity whilst also

conserving and reviving the important aspects of nature which are needed in order to allow the planet to thrive.

### Conclusion

Overall, there are prominent elements of bodily and reproductive control within both *The Handmaid's Tale* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy. However, if we consider the time gap between the texts, we can see that Atwood's texts shift to show a greater focus on technocentric thought and control. Both demonstrate control over reproduction and different bodies in order to assist the relative controlling powers; however, I would argue that Atwood makes this control more blatant as time has passed. *The Handmaid's Tale* 'offers an eerie parody [...] of some of the major reproductive issues that were circulating at the time' (Latimer, 2009, p.214) such as issues around surrogacy and the surge of the pro-life movement, which is reflected in the theocratic control of Handmaids' bodies, whereas *MaddAddam* 'explores the consequences of new and proposed technologies' (Atwood, 2004, p.515) and how these can impact the manipulation of bodies for financial gain. The control of the natural is there within *The Handmaid's Tale*, though done so in a manner which seems as though it could happen within any society. However, once Atwood reaches the *MaddAddam* trilogy, our concern for the environment has grown and therefore she becomes exaggerated and brazen in her portrayal of bodily and genetic manipulation. She openly demonstrates a potential trajectory for our own society and shows the extremes our technological concern may eventually reach if our relationship with natural bodies does not begin to change.

## Chapter Two: Space and Place

Within this chapter, the focus will move to consider the relationship between humans and space/place and how control of space/place is integral to the domination of both nature and the inhabitants of Atwood's worlds. I will explore how Atwood draws attention to people's relationships with the land and the control of both bodies and space, plus how this manipulation makes everything/one disposable in the eyes of those with power. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The MaddAddam* trilogy portray worlds which are spatially dominated and regulated by either technocentric or theocentric ruling bodies, presenting extreme versions of existing society. Within Gilead, all aspects of space and landscape are controlled by the elite; plant life and grown foods are regulated and rationed. People are given vouchers which they can exchange for goods: Offred '[takes] the tokens from Rita's outstretched hand' (p.21) in order to collect food items such as cheese or eggs. Rita reminds her to 'tell them who it's for and then they won't mess around' (ibid.), as those with more power receive better produce. *MaddAddam* also presents a segregated and controlled world; however, we see not only the control of space and landscape, but also a more prominent attempt to manipulate wildlife and landscape to further technological advances. What will be explored is the significance of how constructions of space and land reflect a complex relationship with nature, focussing on the portrayal of gardens and wild spaces as well as the rise of simulacra of nature, and how these representations affect human perceptions of the natural world. I will also explore how the construction of space lends itself to the creation of hierarchy within Atwood's worlds, nature being not only a commodity but also a reward for those in power.

Lawrence Buell, Elisabetta Di Minico and David Kidner debate the links between power and land, linking the control and use of land with the idea of created space and control of citizens. Buell discusses the difference between space and place, noting that, though to many these terms are interchangeable, their usage can determine and reflect levels of control and power over the Earth. Buell (2005) states that 'space as against place connotes geometrical or topographical abstraction, whereas place is "space to which meaning has been ascribed"' (Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993: xii)' (p.63), demonstrating that how we think about space and place can be conceptually different. Space relates to land and geography, whereas place is thought about in terms of meaning and human significance. Thus, it can be argued that areas considered as space are those areas of the physical and natural world which have a detachment from humanity, either in the sense that they are not of use, or that they are outside of designated boundaries of human-made areas. However, Buell quotes Carter et al. in explaining that space very quickly becomes place when it is given purpose or is regimented by humanity. Di Minico (2019) extends this concept of place and discusses the correlation between control of space and power. She states that 'by limiting spaces, power shows its grandeur, supervises its citizens and identifies the nonaligned, converting places and setting into (both real and symbolic) extensions of authority' (p.2), suggesting that authority figures rely upon regulating areas of land and space in order to exert their control and authority over their citizens. She discusses this theory specifically in terms of *The Handmaid's Tale*; however, I will explore how the limitation and control of space/place is also apparent in *The MaddAddam* trilogy as a means to control and extend unseen authority into the different segregated areas of society. Kidner (2014) considers the idea that humanity's control over land and space is destructive; he considers this to be the fault of industrialism and the power that an 'industrocentric'

society holds over its populations. He states that 'nature is often viewed as "socially constructed", so that a foundational nature is made to seem unreal in comparison to a more immediately present artifactual environment' (p.473). This explores the idea that how we define and perceive nature has become a construction based on industrialist and technocentric ways of thinking. Thus, a 'foundational nature' within this sense refers to how humans have become divorced from any aspect of land which grows and flourishes outside of human control. Spatial control becomes commodified to suit the purposes assigned by ruling powers, and thus human-grown landscapes come to be seen as the norm and unmodified areas seem unusual to the human eye. This spatial control becomes explicit within both of Atwood's worlds, from the creation of gardens to the stratification of people by space.

I would, therefore, like to consider, within Atwood's worlds, how the creation of places that hold significant meanings helps to strengthen ideologies and further this argument by considering that the use of regimented place heightens the level of control over humanity by those in power. Through this, I will consider how this affects humanity's relationship with the natural world and how the creation of place becomes tied up with power.

### Spatial restriction within *The Handmaid's Tale*

The world of Gilead is built upon the notion of external environmental destruction. 'The world Atwood has created is a radiation-soaked one with chemicals in the air and the water. The causes of this are wars (especially the use of nuclear weapons), pollution, and a general collection of irresponsible actions against nature' (irembaskan, 2015). Thus Gilead exists in a world damaged and poisoned at the hands of humanity. This external damage is implicit through Offred's account; she hints at said damage through her contemplation of the past. She states 'men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers.

Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, [...] the earthquakes' (p.122), describing the destructive past that caused irreparable damage to the planet. Gilead therefore presents itself as a saviour from these horrors, and presents control over space/place as a necessary means to protect its citizens from the toxic landscape outside of Gilead.

Though the world of Gilead is confining and restrictive, to the residents it is presented as a preferable alternative to facing the destruction that humanity has caused itself, an irony in that eco-messages are used to maintain control. Lauren A Rule (2008) notes how 'Gilead adapts the rhetoric of the natural to authenticate its reign' (p.632) as the rulers use their power over language and imagination to make existence outside of constructed places seem terrifying. In the novel, the outer spaces of society (uncontrolled spaces) are presented as toxic to life and this toxicity is all humanity's fault. This is seen within Gilead, as uncontrolled spaces are presented as other. The Colonies represent the consequences if inhabitants are not subservient. The Colonies are a form of exile and therefore inhabitants view the Colonies as a thing to be feared; they are dangerous and terrifying. Moira tells Offred that 'The other colonies are worse, though, the toxic dumps and the radiation spills. They figure you've got three years maximum, at those, before your nose falls off...' (Atwood, *THT*, p.260). People are said not to survive on the outskirts of society, away from the regulated and controlled use of space, due to high levels of toxicity within the land, another reminder of the damage humanity has inflicted upon the planet. Of course, it is the pre-Gilead manipulation of land and resources which has led to such an extreme society. Where Gilead tries to revert to a more ecological way of living in some senses (the consumption of naturally grown foods, car usage only for the elite), they also use the environment as a threat to those who do not conform. Those who do not comply will be sent to the Colonies. Therefore, human imagination is used as a tool in maintaining obedience and spatial

segregation. External and unseen spaces represent the unknown and the horrifying images of places such as the Colonies therefore threaten what could happen if people do not follow Gilead's way of life.

Within the confines of Gilead, the construction of Gilead's places highlights Di Minico's notion that places are organised hierarchically as a way to control their citizens. The world of *The Handmaid's Tale* is organised spatially; Gilead itself is an enclosed state separated from the outside world, its citizens being unable to leave. Within these confines, the rulers ensure that inhabitants experience rigid spatial restrictions. Commanders have more freedom, are allowed to venture to more places, including marginal places where illicit activities take place, such as the secret brothel Jezebels. Women such as the Handmaids are restricted to their homes, the shops and the Red Centres; the Marthas are mainly restricted to the households; and, even though Wives have slightly more freedom due to their higher status – Offred notes 'you don't see the Commanders' Wives on the sidewalks. Only in cars' (p.34), their use of cars giving connotations that they can travel further – they are still only permitted access to certain areas of Gilead. Places therefore reflect power, status and freedom within society, which highlights how place is used to maintain gender inequalities within Gilead. Gilead is seen through a first-person lens; the reader witnesses both the restricted places that are open to Offred and a hierarchical designation of space and nature. Di Minico (2019) notes that 'there is a strong connection between power and spaces' (p.4), making clear how the rulers of Gilead use place to their advantage. The places Offred visits are constructed spaces, designed to help her know her position within society. She is confined to the Red Centre for a period of time in which she is 're-educated' on the ways to be a Handmaid and essentially how to behave as a woman. She is allowed to visit the shop to purchase produce, to go to 'the football stadium [...] where they hold the Men's

Salvagings' (p.40), and 'towards the central part of town' (p.29), though only if she is paired with another Handmaid. She is only allowed to visit certain places at certain times; thus, she is consistently spatially and temporally regulated. All these places ingrain into her that she must be subservient, and reaffirm traditional female gender roles in society. Thus, the only examples of natural space which Offred is exposed to are constructed and mediated by the rulers of Gilead. Even when Offred rebels against the control of space – through visiting Nick's place, through entering the Commander's office, through Jezebel's, though this gives her a greater sense of freedom and power, she has still received permission to do so by those who are in charge of her. On the surface, it feels as though she is gaining an element of control in her life and is less subservient in these spaces; for example, she asks the Commander for 'hand lotion' (p.166), despite the fact that cosmetics are prohibited. But she is in fact only inhabiting these 'other' spaces at the insistence and permission of those in power.

Through this construction of place, an illusion of power is created for certain women. Heather Latimer (2009) notes 'how choices become limited by circumstances, how rights are as easily taken away as given when based on concepts such as freedom or privacy' (p.213), suggesting that people's lack of rights within Gilead have a strong correlation with their lack of spatial freedom; thus, women such as the Wives are given the illusion of having more power and freedom through the control of elements of place within Gilead. This creates hierarchy among women, as those women who are deemed powerful enough to rule over places are deemed powerful enough to have control over other women (i.e. over Handmaids and Marthas). This is significant in terms of hierarchy in that Commanders control the state of Gilead and therefore control women. Yet, the control of some places (houses, gardens and the Red Centre) by women creates a façade of power and freedom, despite the fact that they are still

expected to adhere to and abide by the theocratic rules of the state. Offred states 'this garden is the domain of the Commander's wife' (p.22); thus, she is led to believe that Serena Joy holds some element of control due to having fewer spatial restrictions as well as having control over her own 'natural' space. Yet, Serena Joy is equally as controlled and also holds lesser overall value to the state than the Handmaids themselves. Aunt Lydia describes the Wives as 'defeated women' (p.56) as they are unable to bear children and then goes on to tell the Handmaids that 'the future is in your hands,' (p.57), demonstrating that the Handmaids hold more overall importance than the Wives.

Within Gilead, old places are reutilised to fit the agendas of the theocracy, demonstrating how meanings of place/ space can change. Buell (2005) argues that 'place must be thought of more extrinsically, as an artefact socially produced by the channelling effects of social position' (p.76), suggesting that place is produced as a reflection of social hierarchies. This is evident within the repurposing of places in Gilead. Football stadiums are now used for salvagings (public killings); gymnasiums have been turned into Red Centres (places to educate new Handmaids); a church is described as 'a museum', evidencing the theocracy's power to turn places into institutions supporting Gilead's belief system. Offred describes one neighbourhood as being 'like the beautiful pictures they used to print in magazines [...] doctors lived here once, lawyers, university professors. There are no lawyers anymore, and the university is closed.' (p.33); this highlights that hierarchical organisation of space also took place in pre-Gilead society, but also draws attention to how these areas of space reflect the changing of priorities within the society. Before, knowledge and intelligence were power, yet now these houses are inhabited by Commanders. Designation of place and the natural world (Commanders are allowed to own gardens and lawns) is now given through obedience and power within the theocracy. The church is described as 'a museum' (p.41); a

place previously of worship and hope has now become an educational tool in which people can 'see paintings of women in long sombre dresses [...] our ancestors' (ibid.). Therefore, any area which previously would have been used to show freedom of movement or thought has been closed and reshaped to fit the purposes of the ruling elite.

This designation of place and power also serves to present some ecological ironies as Gilead uses an illusion of returning to nature as a way to strengthen its belief system. All aspects of Gilead are presented as a salvaging of nature, yet this is a mask for the theocentric priorities of the society. The attempts to revive flowers within the gardens of the elite, the attempts to revive 'natural' reproduction, the attempts to regulate space to avoid further physical destruction of the planet, ironically disguise the fact that the powers of Gilead depend upon these narratives in order for Gilead itself, as a dictatorial, abusive, regulatory power, to survive. The restricted ways in which information is transmitted helps to solidify this.

Women have very little access to what is happening within the outside world. The television provides one of the few sources of information and the household gather within the living room as Serena Joy watches this. Offred doubts the truth within the bulletins, stating how the announcer is 'possibly [...] an actor' (p.93). She also notes that 'what he's telling us, his level smile implies, is for our own good. Everything will be alright soon' (P.93). Offred states 'I sway towards him, like one hypnotized,' (p.93); even though she is aware of the potential falsities she is told, she is drawn in by what he is saying and more willing to believe the narratives Gilead gives.

The shops that Offred visits show how the society returns to an older, nostalgic tradition of using natural products and how they present Gilead's organisation of produce as an altruistic return to a better way of life, which results in political strength. The shop signs

promote this idea: 'Our first stop is a store with another wooden sign: three eggs, a bee and a cow' (p.35). They no longer sell processed foods and can only sell things such as eggs, meat and vegetables due to lack of resources; due to environmental damage, as well as conflict with external countries, Gilead has no choice but to be more environmentally friendly. For example, Offred states that 'oranges have been hard to get' (ibid.). Due to limited availability, remaining products are seen as precious and luxurious commodities; thus, the distribution of the products from the natural world reflects the hierarchy of society. Due to food shortages, certain items are coveted and only those in power are able to obtain them. Commanders and their families are given privileges, and therefore lead better lives. Offred, for example, is given the task of shopping by the Martha: "'tell them fresh, for the eggs [...] tell them who it's for and then they won't mess around'" (p.21). This society presents the idea that Gilead is trying to return to a more harmonious relationship with nature, presenting the state as a saviour to both citizens and the environment, yet in reality it looks after the interests of the elite.

Within Gilead, human contact with the natural world becomes restricted. Natural elements become simulacra within constructed spaces, reflecting the detachment of citizens from elements of the natural world. Kidner (2012) notes, within the real world, a 'radical *disembedding* of human praxis from the natural world and the destruction of cultural frameworks that previously might have rooted us into nature' (p.28), suggesting that society distances inhabitants from the natural world through the destruction of previous cultural practices which immersed them into natural spaces. For example, Offred describes the river pre-Gilead, with 'green banks where you could sit and watch the water' (p.40); however, she then proceeds to say that she doesn't 'go to the river anymore' (ibid.) due to the restrictions placed upon her. Something that used to be a commonplace thing to do is now

no longer permitted and serves to detach women further from the natural world through regulation and fear. I would argue that Atwood offers a version of this detachment within the world of Gilead. Simulacra of nature become commonplace, as is symbolised within Offred's bedroom. She describes a picture on her wall as 'a picture, framed but no glass: a print of flowers, blue irises, watercolour. Flowers are still allowed' (p.17). The irony is that 'real' flowers are not permitted for Handmaids; they are a luxury afforded to those attached to a position of power, such as Serena Joy. This floral image reflects a firm control over both plant life and also the Handmaids themselves. The picture is a reminder of what used to be before Gilead's reign upon both human infrastructure and the organisation of the state. Nature was exploited in the pre-Gilead days and, ironically now to avoid this further, it is controlled and quashed into a picture version of itself. Significantly, floral imagery is seen throughout the Commander's house with 'coloured glass: flowers, red and blue' (p.19). Flowers further symbolises the role of the Handmaids as, similar to flowers, they are now a luxury for the powerful and are presented to Gilead as a symbol of hope and fertility. Offred notes how 'they are supposed to show us respect, because of the nature of our service, (p.31). In reality, flowers and Handmaids become simulacra, the flowers literally and the Handmaids reduced to Gilead's ideal image and defined by their reproductive functions. Further to the creation of simulacra, Gilead also creates constructed places. Buell (2005) discusses the difference between space and place, describing 'place as more a human than a natural construct' (p.68). Thus, I would argue that most areas within Gilead are constructed places. Specifically, I would argue that one prominent 'place' displaying Gilead's manipulations of land is Serena Joy's garden as it highlights the specific control of land and space and is Offred's (and the reader's) only interaction with the natural world. The confinement of space and land is shown through the regulation of gardens. Serena Joy is

permitted a private garden due to her status as Commander's Wife. This garden is the only true area of greenery that Offred sees throughout the novel, and yet it is rigorously controlled and looked after by Serena Joy (Offred's own captor of sorts), who in turn is also regulated by Gilead.

Due to heavy regulation, Offred becomes nostalgic for landscapes of the past, especially when faced with places which offer contact with elements of the natural world, such as Serena Joy's garden. Offred states 'I once had a garden. I can remember the smell of the turned earth, the plump shapes of bulbs...' (p22); her memories seem to highlight her nostalgia for what used to be and highlight a potential for a human-nature connection. Hooker (2006) states "Offred's oral synesthetic experience of the mythologically resonant garden suggests a world [...] where the boundaries between the human and the natural world are not so rigidly drawn' (p. 280). Offred's overly descriptive account promotes an image of garden as Eden, where any element of the natural world is viewed as paradise, where the natural world and humanity co-exist harmoniously. The world that Offred remembers is idealised within her memories and presents a world where both humans and land are not segregated or controlled and where landscapes are allowed to flourish of their own accord, even if in reality Gilead was created as a result of a destructive relationship with the planet. She even notes that 'there is something subversive about this garden of Serena's, a sense of buried things bursting upwards' (p.161) as it reminds her of the old world, of her own garden and reminds her of a previous feeling of freedom and power. Before Gilead's creation, despite any assumed environmental destruction, there was a freer relationship between human and earth, where each was allowed to flourish in more spaces. Plant life flourished in both gardens and wild spaces; whilst humans were allowed to pursue lives, jobs and love in ways that they saw fit, and lived where they wanted. Within Gilead,

'the lawns are tidy, the facades are gracious, in good repair; they're like the beautiful pictures they used to print in the magazines' (p.33). Thus, the reader is presented with conflicting images: controlled areas of natural land within gardens, alongside control-free land in Offred's memories. Thus, there is a conflicting idea that our existing world presents more natural freedoms than that of Gilead, yet our existing world could lead to a society such as Gilead as a last resort to try and reverse damage we have inflicted upon existing lands and spaces.

Through the image of the garden, Hooker (2006) discusses the correlation between natural space and the female within *The Handmaid's Tale*. She cites Plumwood in saying "like nature, each woman has become a 'terra nullius, a resource empty of its own purposes or meanings, and hence available to be annexed for the purposes of those supposedly identified with reason and intellect'" (p.287). Plumwood (1993) discusses an idea she labels 'backgrounding', which defines how Gilead's reliance on both women and constructed space for society's success is backgrounded and instead, Gilead's theology, restrictions and, to some extent, men are foregrounded as the main pillars of society. Thus, like the gardens, the rulers of Gilead claim females in order to control them in ways they see as beneficial. They also modify people's views of land/ Handmaids through the creation of regulated spaces which affects how they physically interact with land/ Handmaids. The Guardians 'salute us raising three fingers to the brim of their berets' (p.31) as the Handmaids pass through a check point; 'The Angels stood outside with their backs to us,' (p.14), protecting and guarding the Handmaids. Both Guardians and Angels are not allowed to have physical or verbal contact with the Handmaids, yet are also pivotal in the spatial regulation of the Handmaids. Just as movement through space is regulated, so is contact with Handmaids: only those in a position of power such as Aunts are allowed to address the Handmaids, and

even then only to educate and discipline within the confines of the Red Centre. Parallels between nature/Handmaid become clear in that both come to be seen as commodities owned by the elite of Gilead, but also as unattainable to those who have less power.

This comparison between land and Handmaids becomes more specific as Atwood describes the lifecycle of flowers within the garden. As the novel progresses, the flowers come to reflect Offred's journey, showing not only her imprisonment, but also the hope that the natural world/Handmaids can never be fully controlled. The different stages within a flower's lifecycle symbolise a correlation between the freedom of both landscape and person. Further to this, the tulips also symbolise the abusive relationship nature/Handmaids have had with those in power. Hooker argues that 'the flower quite often signifies a wound' (2006, p.283), in this case, not only the destruction of natural spaces but also the abuse of the Handmaids. At the beginning of the novel, 'tulips are red, a darker crimson towards the stem, as if they have been cut and are beginning to heal' (p22); this implies that the cutting and healing of the tulip signifies the persecution of the Handmaids, and their attempt to heal following the continuous abuse and rape to which they are subjected. The dark red colour makes a clear comparison between the flower and the outfit of the Handmaid, also signifying the Handmaids' ability to menstruate. However, the darkness of the tulips represents the repressed anger and rage of the Handmaids. Similar to the tulips and the garden, the Handmaids have been pruned to fit the desire of the society, restricted to their small confines and regulated by the rules forced upon them. Further into the novel, the reader is brought back to the image of the tulips; in this instance they do not only foreshadow Offred's end, but also reflect nature's destruction under human control. Offred muses that 'when [the tulips] are old they turn themselves inside out, then explode slowly, the petals thrown out like shards (p.55). The opening of the tulips, due to their

impending deterioration, reflects the collapse of nature, and Offred's sense of self. The metaphor of the tulips 'exploding slowly' (ibid.) further demonstrates how the Handmaids eventually lose their sense of identity and also how they eventually will lose their use to the theocracy. The Handmaids are made to reproduce and be passed from household to household until they are no longer able, similar to how the natural world is utilised until the resource has run out. Thus, just as Offred questions why she allows her body to be used and volunteered or 'thrust up' to the cause, and why she allows her options to be limited to Handmaid, the Colonies or Jezebels, Atwood suggests we should question why we allow natural space to be commodified and destroyed for our own purposes.

Overall, Atwood presents the spaces within Gilead as controlled, manipulated places. Areas are modified to perform a specific purpose as well as being restricted based on a person's status within society. Elements of the natural world become commodities due to environmental circumstance, and access to natural space becomes associated with power as those with power have more access to natural resources.

### Controlling space/ place within the *MaddAddam* trilogy

Spatial segregation is also seen within the pre-apocalyptic environment of *MaddAddam*.

Buell's notion of place is equally as relevant to these novels in that 'the concept of place also gestures [...] toward environmental materiality, toward social perception or construction, and toward individual affect or bond' (p.63), suggesting that place is created simultaneously as a result of understanding environmental issues, people's views and understandings of different areas and how they 'should' be constructed for human purpose, and how individuals impact that area. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and the *Maddaddam* trilogy highlight how place is organised based on a person's role and usefulness within society. However, where environmental awareness is evident within construction of place in *the*

*Handmaid's Tale*, I would argue that the construction of place within *MaddAddam*, reflects 'industrialism's insidious takeover of all of nature' (Kidner, 2014, p.473) and a focus upon how natural space can be commodified to fulfil the purposes of the technocracy.

Within *Oryx and Crake*, the main places we see under human control are the Compounds, coveted places where the intellectual elite live. They live in relative luxury and the places are owned by high powered corporations. Within *The Year of the Flood* we are shown the pleebands, the lower class areas of society which are crowded, overrun and generally seen to be in poor condition. The third place seen is the garden created by the God's Gardeners; this is a place within the pleebands where an attempt is made to regrow a natural landscape, this being viewed by the masses as completely strange and out of place amongst the different run-down buildings. This is later contrasted within the post-apocalypse of *MaddAddam* where we see the world return to an uncontrolled space, where the natural world tries to reclaim itself.

The creation of spatial hierarchies highlights how place is used to fit the purposes of the technocracy. The quality and quantity of space awarded to different people reflects their social standing, similar to the spaces we see within Gilead, though in the *MaddAddam* trilogy it is their abilities to contribute scientifically and technologically to society which allows them bigger and more prestigious places to live. Jimmy describes his father's house: 'they lived in a large Georgian centre-plan [...] [which] belonged to the OrganInc Compound, where the top people lived' (*Oryx and Crake*, p.30). His father accepts a job at a 'top' Compound to allow them a better, safer lifestyle away from the unpredictability outside of the Compound's walls, though Jimmy's mother argues that his decision was more about selling out for the money and prestige. These constructed landscapes within Compounds

allow the powerful and the elite to thrive in order to benefit the capitalist corporations who rule over the Compounds. This demonstrates 'the manner in which [the technocracy] manipulates consciousness in order to facilitate this commodification' (Kidner, 2014, p.475) as workers of the corporations are given incentives to modify and manipulate the natural world, and are rewarded with elite places in which to live and work. What is interesting with this hierarchy, unlike in *The Handmaid's Tale*, is that although there is clear authority, there are no clear, specific rulers; instead, scientists gain power and privilege through experimentation and as a result are willingly subservient to their unknown rulers. Jimmy compares the family's new compound house with one he grew up in, describing how 'they'd lived in a Cape Cod-style frame house' (p.30), but now they were 'where the top people lived.' (ibid.) due to his father's dedication and subservience to the Corporations. The organisation of people into restricted spaces also shows that it is not just the natural world that falls victim to this technocentric regime, but humanity itself becomes dependent on these places in order for them to both feel a sense of purpose and to survive; therefore, they allow themselves to be used and segregated to fit the agendas of the society.

Within the pre-apocalypse, society holds the firm belief that scientific and technological advancement is the key to success, in turn pushing people to further manipulate the space and land around them, which leads to a cycle of commodification which people come to believe is a result of their own drive, not a result of beliefs which have been ingrained into them. Kidner's (2014) idea that society 'manipulates consciousness in order to facilitate [human and spatial] commodification' (p.475) notes how industrialism shapes perceptions of nature and does so in a way which makes people believe that the commodification of nature is done in their best interests. However, this also demonstrates how complex the relationship is with the natural world as humans are dependent on natural resources in

order for society to function. This is seen within the creation of garden areas in the trilogy, similar to *The Handmaid's Tale*, as humans are given an illusion of a remaining connection with nature. Ren describes 'a deep green lawn and some shrubs pruned into round balls' (*The Year of the Flood*, p.256) outside the high school, highlighting the number of constructed garden areas. However, these gardens create a place for scientists to adapt plant life under the illusion of promoting the wellbeing of inhabitants. Ren's mum Lucerne even states '[the compounds are] so much more truly green than those purist gardeners' (p.255) suggesting that the inhabitants truly believe their control of nature enables them to live a more ecologically friendly life. Instead, they take advantage of natural elements, and manipulate the willingness of inhabitants; thus, they heighten the commodification of space and nature.

The Compounds themselves can be viewed as garden, as all areas are commodified through the manipulation of non-human nature and are used to build an illusion of the natural world inside the technological and segregated Compounds. Thus, an artificial and pleasant place is seen within the Compounds through the persistent experimentation of scientists (inhabitants); this keeps them happy and, as a result, encourages them to keep working to their full capacity. For example, the Compounds create 'fake rocks' as a solution to droughts which are increasing due to human-made climate change. The rocks 'absorbed water during periods of humidity and released it in times of drought, so they acted like natural lawn regulators' (p.235). They replicate an object which has come from the Earth and turn it into a commodity for the purpose of the Compounds as a means to try and combat the destructive consequences of humanity's influence on the planet. This is presented as a positive for the inhabitants as it is a productive measure for conserving water in periods of either drought or extreme downpour. However, they are produced from a

technocentric standpoint as a capitalist enterprise, and therefore there is a disregard for unintended consequences. It is stated that 'you had to avoid them during heavy rainfalls, though, as they'd been known to explode' (p.235). This demonstrates a lack of care for the citizens of the Compounds as the rocks have become potentially unstable and volatile.

Scientists focus more on accounting for extremes of weather than trying to fix the causes of extreme weather, and are more concerned with having these rocks in place than perfecting them and making them less dangerous. This serves as a metaphor for wider unintended consequences of human interference with nature, and represents not only the idea that human action will inevitably have repercussions on the planet, but also that not everything can be controlled as nature is unpredictable.

Where the creation of the rocks serves a practical and clear purpose, genetic modification of existing nature is carried out as a means to push experimentation to its limits. This is seen as the Compounds continue to adapt people's perceptions of nature and space through the modification of flowers. Jimmy explains how 'the students in Botanical transgenics (ornamental division) had created a whole array of drought-and-flood-resistant tropical blends, with flowers or leaves in lurid shades of chrome yellow and brilliant flame red and phosphorescent blue and neon purple' (p.234); the flowers are grown to be resistant to extreme conditions which may damage them, similar to the rocks. Nevertheless, their description as 'lurid' and 'neon' highlights the sense that these flowers are not of natural origins and furthers the impression that Jimmy sees these flowers as unsightly and the modifications as unnecessary. This creates a sense that modification is carried out as a symbol of power and control, rather than as a necessity. Whereas within *The Handmaid's Tale* flowers symbolise the control of both space and human, within *MaddAddam* they also serve as a warning that manipulation may go too far.

This manipulation is not seen in all elements of *MaddAddam*. The God's Gardeners, within *The Year of the Flood*, demonstrate an attempt to create a non-toxic, utopian environment through their own creation of place. This raises the question of whether it is possible to still create natural spaces or whether this is impossible due to technocentric control over created place, as well as the pollution of the natural environment. The Gardeners create a rooftop garden where they try to regrow and revive (not modify) plants to create elements of a seemingly utopian natural space amidst a world that puts human needs above nature's. Harland (2016) states 'The religious sect God's Gardeners exemplifies an environmental practice that celebrates biological balance and diversity, and attempts to minimize human harm to the natural world' (p.588). This place attempts to show the diversity of the natural world, but also serves as a sanctuary for social outcasts. This is important as, in Atwood's world, unmodified natural entities and nonconforming humans are cast aside or are destroyed. The garden demonstrates that there will always be a place in the world for unmodified natural elements, and that every plant or person is 'of the world' (Grewe-Volpp, 2016, p.218), meaning that everyone or thing originates from or returns to the natural world itself. In theory, the Gardeners present an ideology which focusses on turning their attention to 'old' ways of production, growing plants and vegetation in gardens rather than in factories. Ren notes how 'upmarket trendies [...] claimed to prefer our Gardener vegetables to the supermarket [...] The Gardener produce was the real thing. It stank of authenticity' (*The Year of the Flood*, p.170), suggesting that returning to organically/ garden grown foods is a positive for both human consumption and for the environment. Young members also take lessons in areas such as 'wild botanicals' (*The Year of the Flood*, p.179) to teach them about naturally grown foods and how to have a positive relationship with the planet. Ironically, the rooftop garden is situated on top of an old, derelict factory building.

This demonstrates their desire to reuse and reclaim place previously used for the benefit of capitalist organisations, and reimagine it as a space which can help to heal the destruction caused by humanity.

The Garden represents a symbol of hope and shows the potential for a harmonious relationship with the natural world. Within *The Year of the Flood*, main character Toby finds sanctuary in the garden after escaping near death at the hands of her psychopathic boss, Blanco. Her initial reaction is one of awe: 'she gazed around at it in wonder: it was so beautiful, with plants and flowers of many kinds she'd never seen before. There were vivid butterflies: from nearby came the vibration of bees. Each petal was fully alive, shining with awareness of her. Even the air of the garden was different' (p.52). The picture created is one of salvation, in which all aspects of plant life and insects are thriving under the care of the Gardeners. Where the flowers in Serena's garden reflect the destructive journey of Offred, for both Toby and Offred, the natural world brings a sense of hope and peace and demonstrates a reaffirming of 'our sensory connections to the world' (Kidner, 2012, p.21). This is in direct contrast to the overrun pleebands (run down areas of society) which surround the garden's location, the garden being in an area nicknamed 'the sinkhole'. The Gardeners see this place as an area of hope, a place which is alive amongst other dead and derelict areas. However, Adam One, the leader of the God's Gardeners, states that society views them as 'twisted fanatics' (p.58), showing how anthropocentric society has become, viewing space and land as areas to conquer and ruin according to human need. The use of space as somewhere for the natural world to thrive rather than be developed is viewed as 'unnatural' and other members of society view this idea of returning to nature as strange and unacceptable.

Though the Gardeners attempt to replace what is lost, the areas they tend are created and grown by humans, showing advantages and disadvantages of utopian dreaming. They cannot replace what has been destroyed, but they can regrow what is available to them. The Garden presents an example of a potentially undamaging, interconnected relationship with nature. Within the Compounds, this sense of interconnection is a dependent one in which humanity depends on nature for its own profit, whereas the Gardeners show the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship. Adam One presents this as an altruistic attempt by the gardeners to bring back what has been lost; it is a symbiotic relationship as both are co-dependant for survival and nourishment. The comment that 'even the air of the garden was different' (p.52), highlights the benefits of having these aspects back within the world; it shows a positive effect on the environment around them, but also on the people within the garden. However, it still raises the question of whether these attempts are futile; the Gardeners are eventually disbanded; Toby tells Ren that 'they'd been outlawed and the Garden destroyed' (*The Year of the Flood*, p.356). The Gardeners' hard work and their plant life eventually die off, highlighting their limitations in presenting a solution to saving the world. Though they present themselves as utopian, they are limited due to power of the technocentric society. This depicts the difficulties in utopian dreaming as segregated attempts at utopia can never be successful. Atwood's message, therefore, is that 'real' change requires people of a higher power to back these campaigns in order for them to work, otherwise nothing can change on a larger scale.

Antagonist Crake is also seen to try and recreate an area reflective of the natural world through the creation of the Paradise dome. However, by creating an advanced landscape, the boundary between artificial and real is blurred. Similar again to *the Handmaid's Tale*, Crake tries to reinstate what has been destroyed, but uses simulacra as a means to

reimagine the natural world through a scientific yet idealised lens. The Paradise dome symbolises the confusing relationship between humanity and the Earth, creating a landscape which is both separate from but also controlled by humanity, which questions whether natural space can ever be completely removed from human influence. Kidner (2012) notes that a 'single stranded' focus within society (within this sense the continuous focus on scientific and technological commodification) 'suggests a detachment from the natural world' (p.18) implying that people's focus upon profiting and commodification lessens people's care towards the natural world. This is reflected within Atwood's world, as, whilst humanity does not care about its impact upon the natural world, it will continue to interact and manipulate it in order to succeed in society. The Paradise dome is physically detached from the rest of society in order to give it the best chance of survival. Yet, it is also situated within the technological compounds, symbolising how integrated the natural world is into human life. The dome is described as:

A large central space filled with trees and plants, above them a blue sky. (Not really a blue sky, only the curved ceiling of the bubble-dome, with a clever projection device that simulated dawn, sunlight, evening, night. There was a fake moon that went through its phases, he discovered later. There was fake rain) (p.355).

It is revealed that Crake and his engineers have recreated an ecological landscape reminiscent of a world which, because of human meddling, no longer exists. This space encompasses an ideal image of how space could be idyllically used. It shows a nostalgia for a time before human intervention; however, this time, it is in a protected and perfected form. Thus, no humans are allowed within the dome except Oryx, so they cannot interfere with the created environment. This world is a constructed one and is based on pre-existing,

romantic ideas of what a 'perfect nature' could be if humanity was to ever truly extract itself. Kidner (2014) notes how humanity has a history of making fantasy reality; however, due to the materialisation of the natural world, 'pristine wilderness [...] is a romantic fantasy' (p.473), suggesting that untouched, unpolluted nature, absent from humanity's influence, no longer exists and is impossible to return to, no matter how hard people try. This shows the potential dangers of using simulacra to reclaim a romantic vision of nature as it is, in essence, the fantasy of one unstoppable individual with an unrealistic mindset. The dome blurs the boundaries of what 'nature' is and how it is conceived, the irony being that, though Crake tries to recreate natural space, the Paradise dome is created and run by humans and becomes obsolete after humans die. This demonstrates the level of interconnectedness between man and space as each becomes dependent on the other for survival.

The post-apocalyptic world throughout the trilogy presents a struggle between the newly modified landscape and those who survive the pandemic. Each book demonstrates a landscape ravaged not only by the effects of humanity but also by climate change. Within *Oryx and Crake*, the landscape is dangerous as different animals and plants try to reclaim their environment. It demonstrates the impact that the Compounds have had on the new environment as 'the whole world is now one vast uncontrolled experiment- the way it always was' (p.267); it highlights how humanity has always tried to adapt and change the world, and although humans have been taken out of the picture, their creations continue to adapt and change to find a new state of existence which helps them survive their new environment. The post-apocalyptic landscape presents a new, unclear definition of nature, as what once was no longer is and what is, is a result of mass experimentation and gene splicing. In *The Year of the Flood*, Ren describes the carnage left behind following 'the

flood': 'burnt things, broken things. Not only cars and trucks. Glass- a lot of that.' (p.404), showing how the landscape is destroyed by humanity. Yet, Toby's account as the novel progresses includes more wildlife-orientated imagery; she says 'everything looks so fresh, as if newly created' (p.460), suggesting that the landscape begins to thrive away from the control of humanity. Throughout, the reader gets a sense of old and new worlds fighting for dominance, and then eventually surviving mutually together. Within *MaddAddam*, as the survivors and Crakers make their way to the Paradise Dome to battle the Painballers, it is described how 'out of the swelling foam of vegetation the curved dome rises' (p.430), showing how a new landscape comes to be and a new version of nature tries to reclaim the world for itself. This further highlights the unpredictability of the new world.

All the novels also demonstrate the effects of climate change; Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake* notes that 'A mile or two to the south, a salt marsh is forming on a one-time landfill dotted with semi-flooded townhouses' (p.174), highlighting how there is a reclamation of the land that humanity has destroyed with pollution, yet also an indication of climate change; landscapes are now destroyed and underwater. This is also seen within *MaddAddam* as the post-apocalyptic world is depicted as being ravaged by climate change. The effects have become commonplace; for example, Toby's third-person narrative notes that 'the afternoon thunderstorm comes and goes' (p.345) as though this is a regular occurrence.

Atwood gives a glimmer of hope that interconnectedness could be successful through the Crakers' relationship with land and space. The Crakers are appreciative of all things upon the Earth, finding amazement and glory in most objects that are introduced to them. This perspective is in complete contrast to that of the humans before the global pandemic, who view the landscape as a commodity to be changed and conquered. There is a sense of irony

within this, as their creator was himself a deeply flawed human who was responsible for the extermination of the human race, and although they do not understand the concept of 'manmade', through a system of beliefs instilled in them through Jimmy, their ideals about the land are a construction. Wang (2009) discusses the relationship between humanity and nature and states 'this sort of relation should be harmonious, for man comes from nature and should thus get along well with nature.' (p.291), arguing that humanity should be able to live peaceably with aspects of the land, in a way which does not cause damage to either party. The Crakers appear to view the landscape with reverence, believing that 'after a thing is used, it must be given back to its place of origin' (*Oryx and Crake*, p.422) and see every aspect of the landscape as a gift from Oryx and Crake. They state that 'the ground is our friend' (p.409); believing that the Earth is to be appreciated and used in harmony with themselves. This creates an optimistic view that humanity can change its relationship with the Earth and work harmoniously to rebuild the Earth to a state of health. This supports Wang's view that it is possible to co-exist harmoniously with nature, in a way which protects both nature and humans from the consequences of humanity's manipulation. With Atwood's invention of the Crakers, she presents an idea that humans can change their way of thinking, to involve a more cooperative relationship between the land and humans.

### Conclusion

Overall, it is evident that Atwood has shown a clear link between space/place and power throughout her texts. However, this portrayal of control shifts between her novels. *The Handmaid's Tale*, similar to control within the *MaddAddam* trilogy, shows a regimented, confining distribution of place, dependent on perceived usefulness to society. However, *MaddAddam* highlights the potential outlined by Wang (2009) of a return to a more harmonious balance with the natural world, through the post-apocalyptic setting in which

the surviving humans must learn to navigate a peaceable relationship with new creatures, living in a world which is no longer under humanity's control. Humans begin a more peaceable relationship with the Pigoons, who as the texts progress seem to be the most dominant species. They begin mutual disciplinary proceedings such as 'the Trial' of the Painballers (*Maddaddam*, p.450) and show a mutual respect for each other's differing cultural practices: 'the Pigoons understood we did not want to eat Adam and Jimmy' (p.455).

Within Atwood's work, there are also clear links between Christian theology and technoscience, both of which help to promote designation and control of space. Lynn White (1967) discusses how 'Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny-that is, by religion' (p.1205), suggesting that Western culture's relationship with both technology and nature stems from 'the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man' (p.1207). Thus all technological and scientific decisions come from ancient theological beliefs that humanity controls the Earth and may manipulate it as they wish. This can be seen within both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Maddaddam* as ruling powers use these principles to assist in the creation of their theocracies and dictatorships and in turn reflect this in their creation of constructed places. With *Maddaddam*, Crake becomes revered as though a God, even though he is a man of science. The Paradise Dome becomes a place in which to recreate and reclaim some form of Eden, creating a sense of Utopia, a hope that the Earth can be returned to a form of paradise. This demonstrates the extent to which technology and science are used to further affirm embedded Christian narratives and ideologies of how the Earth should be.

Similarly, Atwood describes elements of the natural world and a nostalgia to return to a world unaffected by corrupted and manipulated space. Offred describes the bulbs and flowers within Serena Joy's garden, just as Toby describes the beauty she witnesses with the rooftop garden of the God's Gardeners. This suggests that Atwood has always attempted to highlight the potential to find beauty within the natural world, rather than just commodification and usability. As time has passed, this sense that the natural world has the potential to reassert itself has become more prominent in her work as the destruction and manipulation of space has continued in the real world.

## Chapter Three: Language and Power

Literature is a powerful tool in conveying various messages and approaches to different environmental issues. Zapf (2008) discusses how all individual ethical standpoints on nature are 'mediated and ultimately made possible by the communicative medium of language and text' (p. 850). He therefore highlights that our views are not just shaped by personal opinion, genetic disposition or independent thought, but are also shaped by all verbal or written influences around us. In this sense, he notes that creating an ethical view of ecology through literature is not possible without some mediation by language. Therefore, I would argue that equally, the opposite is also true. If language and communication are key to creating a more ethical approach to nature, then it is also language and text that have influenced current anthropocentric, selfish views about nature. Thus, I will explore the power of language within Atwood's texts and how she portrays language as a way to control views of the natural world but also as a medium for change.

Richard Kerridge (2014) presents the idea that 'the fundamental purpose of the [ecocritical] work is to be part of an attempt to change culture, and through culture change policy and behaviour' (p.363); novels can be seen as a part of this attempt at change. Atwood categorises her novels as 'speculative fiction' in which she presents ideas of what could be if humanity continues to live such an anthropocentric and technocentric existence. Her use of technology close to our own increases the impact of her novels upon readers as it causes them to re-evaluate their views about our relationship with the world. Within Atwood's novels, I will explore a two-fold interpretation of the importance of language, the first being how Atwood presents language as a source of control, and the second, which links to

Kerridge's focus upon changing culture and behaviour, being how Atwood's work serves to raise environmental issues for the reader.

It is first of all important to distinguish between both literary narrative and ordinary speech, both of which play important roles within Atwood's works. The importance of the language of literary narrative is explored by Lejano, Raul, et al (2013), who argue that language used within stories, literature and sacred texts, 'shape how we behave, and [thus] by paying attention to our stories we can better understand— and change—our behavior' (p.1); this highlights the potential of literary narratives as they have the power to influence people's beliefs and behaviours. Similarly, they discuss the importance of narratives in creating groups of people with similar viewpoints and note that 'stories, or narratives, create the glue that binds people together in networks' (p.2). They discuss this explicitly in terms of environmental networks, noting that literature and narratives help generate these discussions about how we treat the planet. I would argue this is evident within Atwood's novels as we see the influence of sacred texts and narratives on the behaviour of people in Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* and also on the Crakers within the *Maddadam* trilogy. This can be extended to the narratives of the novels themselves as Atwood's work can help generate discussions about our relationship with the planet. Whereas narrative language has the power to inform en masse, spoken language, I would argue, holds a different, but still important power. Where narrative language holds influence, it is spoken language which helps to reaffirm or negate these beliefs. Hogsette (1997) states that 'language can be used as a force of resistance' (p.269) as will be explored in this chapter, and therefore spoken language has the potential to hold more power on a person-to-person basis in supporting or resisting overarching narrative language.

Firstly, language is traditionally viewed within both dystopian and speculative fiction as a significant tool for controlling and establishing power, as seen in texts such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* reflect this, and suggest that whoever controls the societal narrative, controls the beliefs and ideologies of its citizens. This, therefore, problematizes how nature itself is defined within these texts. Kidner (2012) argues that 'the changes that underpin commoditization colonize the farthest reaches of human life so that nothing remains as it was before, [...] colonizing the language we use and permeating our thought processes' (p.28), demonstrating how commodification plays a significant part in maintaining power through language and thus redefining what is deemed as natural. Within *The Handmaid's Tale*, we are presented with a theocracy which relies on its control of words to control the natural body for its own purposes. Similarly, within *MaddAddam*, we are shown a highly technocentric world, run on the commodification of the natural, where language is used within industry and ad campaigns to promote the view of nature as a resource to be exploited. Both sets of texts depict a '[manipulation] of consciousness' (ibid.) through language in order to maintain their societal narratives about the natural.

However, an alternative interpretation suggests that language itself is not solely oppressive, as it can have subversive powers which enable us to question dominant discourses. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* trilogy present highly regulated speech as a means of control, but also represent the possibility of subversion of this control through the reclamation of individual voice and group narratives. At the same time, the texts also raise the question of whether true subversion is ever possible if our ethics and ideals have always been manipulated by those in power.

### The Power of Language within *The Handmaid's Tale*

*The Handmaid's Tale* presents the idea that language is linked to power over nature.

Hogsette (1997) argues, 'The Republic desensitizes individuals to social and political horrors by manipulating language so as to create a different reality' (p.268) and, therefore, assert its dominance over its inhabitants. Though scepticism can be seen through Offred's narrative, she describes how Gilead uses imposed narratives to redefine how individuals are expected to see the world and see their relationship with nature. This can be seen through the control over female bodies which was explored in chapter one. The normalisation of the monthly ritual with the Handmaids, for example, becomes seen as essential to Gilead's survival rather than as a violation of women's bodies; the use of the name 'The Ceremony' (p.104) gives the act religious and ritualistic connotations. The process of giving birth again becomes a mass celebrated ritual; the other Handmaids attend and continuously chant pre-learned words such as 'Pant! Pant! Pant!' (p.134) and 'Push. Push. Push' (p.135). The group chanting converts this singular event into a group effort, which culminates in the elite rejoicing in its ongoing survival, rather than a natural birthing process in which a new life enters the world. The Handmaids become thankful that they have served their purpose. After one of the Handmaid's has successfully given birth, Offred notes that 'nevertheless, we are jubilant, it's a victory, for all of us. We've done it' (p.137). The birth of a healthy baby becomes a rare yet joyous occasion; it brings a sense of pride and boasting as the Handmaid has fulfilled her role and her natural body has still worked. Yet, the Handmaid is soon reassigned to another household, to try and bear another child. The mother's suffering and pain (Gilead does not believe in anaesthetic) are ignored. The fact that a baby is torn from its mother becomes inconsequential. The narrative is one of a collective success for Gilead and demonstrates how language controls the female body through silencing female suffering and placing

emphasis upon the collective importance of a body's functionality and its contribution to Gilead's success.

Further to this, Biblical narratives told within Gilead strengthen this control of the female body. The entire society centres on Gilead's extreme versions of Christian beliefs and myth-making. This includes the regular reading of scripture to the women of the house by the Commander: 'the usual stories. God to Adam, God to Noah. *Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the Earth*. Then comes the mouldy old Rachel and Leah stuff we had drummed into us at the centre' (p.99). The same narratives are repeated over and over to maintain power. Gilead adapt the Bible for their own purposes, focussing on stories of reproduction such as the story of Rachel and her surrogate/ servant Bilhah; this story becomes the basis for the new method of reproduction and the foundation of the 'Ceremony', which is seen as the normal and in some senses natural way of producing a child. They revert to non-medical and non-invasive means of birth, removing insemination, presenting them as 'unnatural' birthing methods, presenting their birthing methods as God's will. Similarly, their treatment of sinners, anyone who does not follow the laws of Gilead or goes against the 'natural' way of life (natural in this sense being interpreted as the way of life outlined by the God of the Old Testament) is sentenced to death or banished to the Colonies. For example, the term Gender Traitor is used to label homosexuals within society. Offred is out walking and notes 'There are three new bodies on the Wall. [...] Gender Treachery [...] caught together' (p.53). Gilead deems homosexuality as being unnatural and against the way of God and therefore those caught are sentenced to hang on the Wall. The word 'Treachery' implies crimes against the state and gives connotations of these people having committed a capital offence. This demonstrates how the powers of Gilead use the threat of God as a way to

justify their manipulation of religious scripture and, as a result, the manipulation and treatment of both male and female bodies.

The use of imposed Biblical, societal narratives further strengthens the control over women and thus removes individual identities. Hogsette (1997) states that 'the social and institutional dimensions of language play a part in how individuals use language to construct their own identities' (p.266), suggesting language used within the system of Gilead creates and imposes forced identities, whilst removing individuality. Women are categorised in relation to their purpose within society: higher class women are 'Wives', 'Marthas' are so called to reflect Saint Martha: the patron saint of servants and cooks, who served Jesus upon his visit to Bethany. The 'Marthas' are expected to serve those in power, as Martha did Jesus, acting as maids and cooks. Those with reproductive abilities are 'Handmaids', reflecting the role of Bilhah within the Bible. Greene discusses 'the function of Gileadean discourse to reduce identity to a set of roles or masks' (2016, para 1), highlighting how women are expected to embody a role based on Biblical narrative, fitting into society's narrative in a way which is of optimal use to Gilead's success. The discourse ensures that society runs almost regimentally, removing all individuality and ensuring all women function according to their given role.

It is the restriction of language for women which allows Gilead's narratives to spread. Di Minico (2019) notes how 'by limiting language, power spreads only the necessary concepts and messages' (p.2); thus, by banning reading and writing (all women are forbidden from doing either), the Handmaids are restricted to empty utterances which turn them into empty shells, removing their real voices and identities. Offred is permitted to walk to the shops with a fellow Handmaid in order to retrieve food from the shops, and though some

Handmaids bend the rules slightly when they are alone together, officially, their conversation is bound by the same accepted utterances:

“Blessed be the fruit,” she says to me, the accepted greeting among us.

“May the Lord open,” I answer, the accepted response.’ (p.29)

All ‘accepted’ language amongst women is controlled and rehearsed and most of this language refers to natural imagery such as flowers or fruit (in this case the fruit of the womb) or references the might of God. The Handmaids are therefore given an illusion of engaging with nature. They are unable to freely interact with nature itself, but instead are forced to recreate natural images with their words. The language allowed to them becomes a reminder of their lack of control and their lack of individual identity, whilst simultaneously reminding them that their purpose is to give over their bodies to a new natural order. Though they are ‘the fruit’, the fertile, those who can help to continue the human race amidst masses of infertility (and therefore those with the potential for great power), the suggestion that it is the Lord’s decision as to whether they should bear a child removes any sense of power or sense of worth they could potentially feel. This reinforces a traditional association of women and nature; both are seen as non-cultural and non-linguistic aspects of the world. Again, language reminds them that they are simultaneously being watched by God, but are also being monitored at all times by men within society. The parting expression “Under his eye” (p.54) serves as a frequent reminder that they are controlled and watched meticulously to ensure they do not stray from their given positions or disobey the rules assigned to them. Their limited language removes any threat they may pose and tries to ensure that they cannot become subversive or defiant in their ideas and actions. This is further seen with the renaming of the Handmaids; each loses her original name and adopts

the name of her Commander, such as 'Offred' who is named as the property 'of Fred'. This restriction of both names and transactional language helps to keep Handmaids obedient and removes the threat of subversive thinking.

Yet, language and communication cannot be suppressed and are arguably as natural to humanity as plants are to the Earth. Staels (2008) states that within *The Handmaid's Tale*, 'the total suppression of personal desire and personal speech causes an irrepressible yearning for gratification' (p.459). The Handmaids find ways to communicate, such as at the market and on paired walks to town. In the Red Centre, the Handmaids find ways to speak to each other in secret spaces such as toilet cubicles. Offred notes that 'there is something powerful in the whispering of obscenities, about those in power' (p.234) when recounting Moira's frequent slandering of people such as Aunt Lydia or her reworking of prayers such as 'There is a bomb in Gilead' (p.230), all of which are small acts of defiance. Despite the attempts of the theocracy to quash freedom of language, the Handmaids attempt to overcome their suppression through, for example, small forms of rebellion such as graffiti saying '*Aunt Lydia Sucks*' (p.234) scrawled in the toilets at the Red Centre. More significant rebellion is seen through the creation of the Underground which serves to try and subvert the views of Gilead and help people escape. This demonstrates how language can be used to overcome this control over women and try to give back freedom and power.

The difficulty in maintaining absolute control over language is also seen as Offred secretly begins meeting the Commander to play Scrabble. It suggests that even those in charge find it difficult to maintain the boundaries outlined by the state. Nevertheless, the Commander still uses language as a source of power over Offred; he uses her yearning for language as a way to use her for himself. Despite the known danger and rule breaking, she is drawn to

these meetings. She describes how 'Now it's forbidden for us. Now it's dangerous. Now it's indecent' (p.149). The way in which she describes his invitation shows how much power language holds for her and the society as a whole. Such a small, insignificant thing to the reader is seen as illicit, yet brings a sense that Offred yearns to feel her reconnection with language; she is willing to put herself in danger for the pleasure of reading. The way in which she goes on to describe words becomes almost sensual, something desirable: 'This is freedom, an eyeblink of it. [...] *Limp*, I spell. *Gorge*. What a luxury. [...] I would like to put them in my mouth. [...] The letter C. Crisp, slightly acid on the tongue, delicious' (p.149). The reader can feel Offred re-engaging with language through a mixture of different phonetic sounds in each word she chooses. It feels as though she begins to savour every word; the metaphor of putting the Scrabble tiles in her mouth is a way of demonstrating to the reader that she is ingesting what she has been forced to forget.

*The Handmaid's Tale*, like the *MaddAddam* trilogy, highlights how people can find hope within literature whilst also finding understanding about the world in which they live. Offred herself states repeatedly, 'I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance' (p.49).

Within this, she tells the reader/ listener how she tries to convince herself that the atrocities she experiences are fiction. She tries to use stories as a coping mechanism for her situation and to try and find hope and peace. Atwood is hinting to the reader that they should use literature as a means to understand their own worlds, to believe the realities of the horrors she describes. Therefore, literature helps us to critically engage with our own worlds, just as Offred's account becomes important in critically analysing the world of Gilead (as is seen later in the Historical Notes). Thus, Atwood suggests we should take heed of warnings we are given within literature, as they are usually grounded in some form of truth.

The novel itself, we learn, is a series of vocal recordings which had been unearthed years after the fall of Gilead itself; thus, Offred's story becomes a testimony in itself of Gilead's control over both women and nature, but also an example of how language can be a source of personal empowerment. Campbell Reesman (2018) states that 'It is Offred's voice that frees her from victimization' (p.307); therefore, through the physical act of documenting her story, through the help of Nick and Mayday, Offred hopefully steps into the light and manages to reclaim her own voice and thus the power over her own life which was taken away from her.

However, the character of Pieixoto shows how literature can be interpreted wrongly according to personal interest or context. Hogsette (1997) questions 'Does Offred break free of her oppressed state [...] or is it ultimately a chauvinistic man who gives Offred her voice?' (p.265), suggesting that the control over language interpretation plays a large part in the message we take from it. Prior to the 'Historical notes', the reader is given hope that Offred has subverted the system and reclaimed her body for herself. However, Offred's story is only heard as a result of Pieixoto (arguably a sexist and self-indulgent person who reconstructs the past of Gilead to further his own career). This presents the unreliability of interpretation in that we create understanding dependent upon the situation and context in which a narrative is presented to us. Offred states repeatedly that 'this is a reconstruction' (p.144), highlighting that her account is not completely reflective of what happened.

Furthermore, Offred's story is found many years into the future, after the downfall of Gilead, and is reconstructed as a means to understand and study Gileadean history from a personal perspective. Pieixoto's admission that 'it was up to Professor Wade and myself to arrange the blocks of speech in the order in which they appeared to go' (p.314) demonstrates that Offred's account, her voice, has once again been controlled by a man,

but also interpreted and constructed in a way which is beneficial to others. Her account is a declaration of reclamation of identity and defiance against this control, yet her words are being manipulated once again by those in charge. Though Offred reclaims her voice and therefore an aspect of her identity, her account is used to fit Pieixoto's almost metanarrative about the world of Gilead. He notes that 'all such arrangements are based on some guesswork' (p.314) informing the listeners/readers that he is sharing his interpretation of Offred and Gilead and is therefore using her account to support his own theories about Gilead. This highlights how language can be used to control our relationship with the world in a similar way that Pieixoto uses language and interpretation to control other people's views of both Gilead and Offred.

Overall, *The Handmaid's Tale* demonstrates the strong connection between language, power and the natural world. Language is used to manipulate narratives and, as a result, manipulate Gilead's inhabitants. Biblical narratives and the language used centre on natural imagery, such as the names of shops: 'Lilies', 'Milk and Honey' (p.35); and the rehearsed responses: 'Blessed be the fruit' (p.29). The imagery creates an illusion that Gilead is a nature-focussed society when, in reality, the integration of nature-based language reflects an attempt to control citizens. Further to this, whoever controls language can be seen to control both the inhabitants of Gilead and the natural world itself. However, it is suggested that if people can reclaim power over language, they can gain some control over their own lives and how the natural world is viewed. Offred reclaims herself partially through Nick and the power of naming; she shares that 'I tell him my real name, and feel that therefore I am known.' (p.282). Through this she reclaims her sense of sexuality and also feels she has reclaimed an element of herself.

### *MaddAddam*: Language as a medium for change

The structure of the *MaddAddam* trilogy also highlights a link between language, nature and power; however, it is more explicitly environmentally focused. Different stages of the trilogy represent different aspects of humanity's relationship with language and the environment. Jimmy represents the language of the old world. He represents old constructs of language and a reliance on old stories to understand the new world as '[the] post-world may have been conjured by Jimmy and composed of fragments of films, books, and video game plots (Appleton, 2008, p.9); he shows humanity's need to have narrative in order to define itself and to define its relationship with the world in which people live, and does so by reconstructing the past through existing narratives he already knows. For example, he renames himself 'The Abominable Snowman- existing and not existing' (*Oryx and Crake*, p.8). His story of creation for the Crakers is reflective of the story of Genesis, starting 'In the beginning,' (p.118) and many of his stories reference the Bible. These are seen to influence the Crakers later within the trilogy. Within *The Year of the Flood*, the narrative shifts to focus on the reclamation of the female voice. Ren and Toby are oppressed in different ways, and yet, as the novel progresses, we see them reclaim their bodies and their post-apocalypse lives in a way that Oryx cannot in the first novel. This book represents an attempt to establish new ways of dealing with old narratives about nature and how the world works. Finally, a new hope for our relationship with the planet arises in *MaddAddam*. Toby gives the gift of language to Blackbeard (the new generation), with a new way of storytelling and thinking about nature. Each book in the trilogy shows a desire to reclaim language and spread positive messages about humanity's relationship with nature.

In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood demonstrates how nature becomes a fluid term due to constant manipulation and redefinition through language. Kidner (2014) describes 'an

invisible corral of industrialist thinking [...] drawn around both ourselves and the natural world, redefining all within it in terms of industrial commodities' (p.473), highlighting how society's narratives and use of language within industry serve to redefine language for industrial purposes. We see this happen within *Oryx and Crake* as the natural world and space become defined and utilised to fit with the interests of the technocracy. Within *Oryx and Crake*, Crake states 'I don't believe in Nature either [...] not with a capital N' (p.242). This suggests that nature as a concept is not a fixed point, and that, due to industrialism's influence, the definition of nature is fluid. Crake is suggesting that nature is no longer an easily definable concept for two reasons: firstly, there is the physical modification of most plants, animals and landscapes, meaning that what we physically see as nature is constantly being changed and adapted, as is discussed in chapter one. Secondly, Crake suggests that mentally, we are able to redefine how we view nature; it is a fluid concept which changes according to what the Compounds (and Crake himself) say can be viewed as nature. Jimmy questions what is natural and what isn't; Crake responds that 'the process is no longer important' (p.235). This suggests that the concept of nature is no longer either concrete or necessary due to the significant blurring of what is real or manmade, but also due to the industrially focused mindset that it is the end product which really matters. This is shown through the use of language to promote, adapt and commodify nature to sell products such as 'Rockulators' (ibid.) and 'Crustaesoy' (p.244).

Within the pre-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake*, the rhetoric used by the Compounds ironically portrays the humanities as undesirable, unimportant and insignificant. We learn that Jimmy attends the famous Martha Graham University; however, the institution is far from ideal. It is considered a humanities institution and therefore 'a lot of what went on at Martha Graham was [...] no longer central to anything' (p.219). Schools promoting

humanities subjects are seen as less attractive than the clean and high-tech worlds of the Compound training programmes. This highlights this society's focus on the sciences and technologies as these are the main fields which help push the success of the society and assist them with the control of the natural world. Ironically, Bartosch (2013) claims that within the *MaddAddam* trilogy 'the humanities are like-wise complicit [in the destruction of nature] as they have become obsolete' (p.237) and therefore are not around to pose contradictory narratives in support of the natural world. The quashing of the importance of language is an attempt to control language and avoid critical thinking within this technocentric society. For example, Jimmy mentions a job 'going through old books and earmarking them for destruction' (p.284), demonstrating control over the written word. By making the study of language seem inferior and controlling which books are available for reading the Compounds can remain in control of their citizens and language itself, as well as remain in control of the natural world.

Further to language being seen as inferior to science, language is also ironically used as a key tool in controlling the citizens in both the pleebands and the Compounds. Bartosch (2013) notes how 'words are handmaidens to the technoscientific hegemony' (p.239); they are emptied of all real meaning and end up as a tool for consumerism. Both the Compounds' and Crake's control of Jimmy as a 'words person', highlight how words can become a tool which damages the planet and destroys humanity. The Compounds use Jimmy's language to corrupt and manipulate the natural for the benefit of humanity through using him as a creator of campaign slogans. Upon working on branding, he states 'not much of a challenge there [...] a few catchy slogans [...] he could churn this crap out in his sleep' (p.367), showing how even he does not see any significance in the work he has been assigned. He sees his job as something unimportant, holding the view that working with

words is uninspiring and can be done quite easily. However, he does not see the importance of his job until it is too late. It is after the 'waterless flood' that he fully understands the actual importance of words, when there is no longer anyone around to control them/ him. Jimmy is blindly coerced into running the promotion campaign for the Blyssplus pill, a pill which ends up destroying humanity. It is stated that 'Some of the darkness is Snowman's. He helped with it' (p.389). Jimmy feels extreme remorse as he returns to Paradise and surveys the death that has been caused by Crake and himself. This shows the full impact that language can have upon society as Jimmy becomes partly responsible for the genocide of the entire human race, through his words and through the power that language and rhetoric hold in a commercialised and subservient society. Ironically, this manipulation potentially saves the planet as humanity is no longer around to destroy the natural world. This serves as a warning that a society's narrative of how we should perceive nature or interact with it has major influences on how we use nature in day-to-day life. Within *MaddAddam*, this narrative promotes a harmful relationship with the planet and with species who are manipulated for monetary gain, yet Atwood suggests that control over language can be used as a tool for saving or changing our relationship with the natural world as much as it can be used to destroy or damage the Earth. This is evidenced through the God's Gardeners pre-apocalypse who use sermons to change this relationship, believing that 'covering such barren rooftops with greenery we are doing our small part in the redemption of God's Creation from the decay and sterility' (*The Year of the Flood*, p.14).

Although a clear attempt to remove critical thinking is made by the Compounds, there are still areas where citizens can be seen to try and reclaim language as an act of protest. Within *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy comes across a small group of friends when dating the artistic Amanda (ironically, a character who survives Crake's 'waterless flood'). Amanda and her

friends are artists, scoffed at by society, but they are extremely sceptical of the Compounds and everything they stand for, ironically predicting the end of the world at the hands of humanity. They state 'the human experiment was doomed [...] to extinction, once all available nutrients have been hoovered up' (p.285), highlighting humanity's exploitation of Earth's resources and their own inevitable demise as a result. They also claim that 'human society [...] was some sort of monster, its main by-products being corpses and rubble' (ibid.), foreshadowing what happens in the remaining novels once the human race has been erased. All that is left in the world is the ruins of what humanity built; even the idea of nature returning is blurred as 'it seems to be unrecognisable and too thoroughly altered' (Bartosch, 2013, p.241). Due to their lack of influence because they are artists, no one (including Jimmy) pays attention to the issues they raise or their points of view. Even Jimmy states that 'they had lots to say about all kinds of junk' (p.285). Unlike Jimmy, Amanda is described as an 'image person, not a word person' (p.286), even though her installations involve making words out of animal carcasses as a symbol of God's and man's ability to create and destroy life. She describes her work as having '[taken] a truckload of large dead animal parts [...] [arranged] them in the shape of words, [waited] until the vultures had descended and were tearing them apart' (p.287). Words she uses include 'PAIN [...] WHOM, and then GUTS' (p.288). This creates a jarring image as she is using shocking methods to try and openly express her opinions, something the Compounds try and avoid. Her use of carcasses is, perhaps, an intentional contrast to the Compound's subtle and hidden methods of manipulating natural species. She sees words alone as ineffective, and has to resort to large art installations to try and get her message across. Unfortunately, due to the society she was raised in, no one, including herself, places any power in what she is saying, even though her words are highly accurate in terms of society's treatment of nature.

However, as previously mentioned, because language holds power, it can be used as a means to subvert discourses and raise awareness of environmental issues. Within *The Year of the Flood*, we are presented with the God's Gardeners, a group who use language to try and create a form of eco-religion. They reject the morals and narratives of society and try to create their own; through this they try to build a more positive relationship with nature. Within the God's Gardeners, '[they] are taught to cherish nature and respect animals' (Brooks Bouson, 2011, p.19). The main leader of the group, Adam One, uses sermons (similar to Jimmy, post-apocalypse) as a way to spread and enhance the message that 'the global "virus" of Americanism- is greedily consuming and destroying the environment' (ibid). They try to teach and send a message that there should be a more nurturing relationship between humanity and nature in order to allow both to thrive. They hold different 'feast days' to commemorate different animals or plants upon the Earth. Adam One preaches:

Ours is a fall into greed: why do we think that everything on Earth belongs to us, while in reality we belong to Everything? [...] God's commandment to 'replenish the Earth' did not mean we should fill it to overflowing with ourselves, thus wiping out everything else (*The Year of the Flood*, p.63).

The Gardeners again try to present an alternative narrative and viewpoint to that of the controlling Compounds. Similar to *The Handmaid's Tale*, they use a theological approach; however, they use a modern spin on Christianity, creating an eco-religion which recognises the damage humanity is causing to the world, nature and themselves. They highlight both anthropocentric and technocentric priorities and arrogance. This in some ways presents the idea that language can help to spread alternative narratives about nature and to try to reverse some damage that has been caused. The Gardeners represent an attempt to regain

some power within this society. Adam One preaches hopes of salvation through identifying humanity's follies by professing 'How much have we wilfully destroyed! How much do we need to restore within ourselves!' (p.15) but also through preparation to survive: 'Let us construct our Ararats' (p.110). By drawing on religion, they claim their more environmentally-friendly narratives hold more weight and power than the capitalist and commercial narrative and that they will save them from the 'waterless flood'. This proves in some ways true as in the post-apocalypse we learn that Toby and other surviving members of the God's Gardeners do use these provisions to survive. Religion has historically been a source for morality and guidance; thus, they seek to pursue this and lead their followers into an eco-friendly way of life through the power of their words.

However, The Gardeners' language lacks power due to its limited audience and its opposition to that of the Compounds and therefore becomes dangerous to the Garden's inhabitants. Ren tells the reader that 'writing, it was dangerous [...] because your enemies could trace you [...] and use your words to condemn you' (p.7), referring to mainly the Compounds. They would try and find 'rebellious' groups in order to shut them down and in some cases would kill those who believed in alternative ways of living; writing was one traceable way for them to find her. This highlights that it is dangerous to hold alternative beliefs to the societal narrative about nature. Though The Gardeners fought to reclaim some power back through their verbalised language, written language can be seen to hold too much power and gives the Compounds evidence of the Gardeners' defiance. The Compounds further use their power over language to spread the idea that the Gardeners are fanatics and to eventually disband them and thus end their attempt to regain control. This suggests that, in order to fully create a more harmonious relationship with nature for ourselves, it cannot be just a small number of people, that it will take a drastic change in the

way society as a whole thinks. Within the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood tries to present effective ways of thinking about nature through the different characters she creates. In *The Year of the Flood*, the Gardeners are trying to accomplish a philosophy which sees nature as something to be nurtured and protected; Harland (2016) notes that '[their] sermons and hymns continually remind followers of the original harmony of nature' (p.589). Importantly, these beliefs are based upon existing or 'old' ideas about both spirituality and nature, highlighting the potential that humanity holds within itself to change, should it choose to. We see a more prominent version of this philosophy through the Crakers in *MaddAddam* and the narratives that Toby creates for Craker Blackbeard as by the end of the trilogy, Blackbeard and the Crakers have adopted both the teachings of Jimmy/ Oryx but also the adoption of feast days such as 'The Feast of Saint Fiacre of Gardens' (*Maddaddam*, p.460) and 'The Festival of Quercus. The Feast of Pigoons. Full Moon (p.461) in which they embrace some philosophies of the surviving Gardeners.

Before Blackbeard takes over as storyteller within *MaddAddam*, Toby finds herself with the power of language and therefore the power over the Crakers and the potential that they hold, similar to Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake*. Jimmy originally told narratives to the Crakers which were spur of the moment, based on existing narratives from his own upbringing and life within the pre-apocalypse. He portrayed Crake and Oryx as deity-figures as well as convincing the Crakers that he himself was a Jesus-like figure who could only communicate with Crake through wearing his watch: "Just a minute I'll ask Crake." He holds his watch up to the sky [...] then puts it to his ear as if listening to it.' (p.9) this presents Crake as an ethereal being whilst giving himself scope to create whatever truths he desires. He recreated the story of the Creation as well as inventing bizarre rituals such as the wearing of his hat and the eating of a fish before he can tell stories to the Crakers. However, Toby tries

to create practical narratives which reflect negative images of the world before, to try and prevent repetition with the new species. She declares:

The people in the chaos cannot learn. They cannot understand what they are doing to the sea and the sky and the plants and the animals. They cannot understand that they are killing them, and that they will end up killing themselves (p.33).

The Crakers are appalled and confused by the way humanity used to live, and show the promise that people can change their perspectives on how to live and how to coexist with nature peacefully. Toby's stories, which are then passed on to Blackbeard, become more of a way to document history, to help the Crakers learn from humanity's past mistakes. These narratives become a Bible equivalent in that each story provides an important message or piece of understanding about the world, and presents a series of morals to live by. Toby gives a narrative, which is arguably more effective than that of Adam One's due to its roots in practicality and lack of ulterior motive. She questions 'What kind of story- what kind of history will be of any use at all, to people she can't know will exist, in the future she can't foresee?' (p.249). She therefore considers carefully what information to impart to the Crakers, hoping that the stories she leaves behind will serve as morals or methods by which to live a peaceful and environmentally minded future. This can be passed along to future generations, and shows the potential power held within language, not just science and technology, to change the world for the better.

Atwood does suggest that we can begin a new narrative for future generations which will promote a healthier and less damaging relationship with the natural. Though Crake tries to eliminate the Crakers' need for understanding through narrative, something he believes causes damage to the planet, it becomes clear that language and storytelling are embedded

into the Crakers' nature, as they are in ours. Where Crake sees science as the way to fix our relationship with nature, it proves to be language that holds most potential. Atwood (2015) states in an interview that 'there are a number of things that [children] pick up very, very readily [...] the ability to understand and then tell narrative sequences [...] and some of the thinking about that is that would've given a species who developed it, a very big edge in survival'. This shows Atwood's belief that, in order to change our relationship with the natural world and save both the planet and ourselves, we need to develop new narratives to pass on to our children as they hold the potential for the future. These narratives need to be more environmentally friendly and present solutions to the ever growing environmental problems within society. The Crakers symbolise these future generations. They mirror children in that they are new to Earth and share a childlike fascination with anything that they do not understand. This manifests in constant questioning, ranging from small curiosities such as 'What is *piss off*?' (*Oryx and Crake*, p. 10) to larger philosophical questions such as 'Today they asked who made them' (p.366). This is where characters Jimmy and Toby are seen to try and fill in the blanks for them. The Crakers have a literal way of thinking and thus take things at face value, similar to children. Craker Blackbeard is given the power of language by Toby. Blackbeard states 'she showed me how to turn the marks back into a voice' (*MaddAddam*, p.467), demonstrating how Toby taught him to both write and read; he is given the tools necessary to carry on and create narratives based on what he has been told of the world and what he witnesses of the world. He notes 'I have done this so we will know of her, and how we came to be' (p.470), showing his intent to carry on the tradition of documenting history for future generations. The use of the noun 'voice' is prominent here; it does not just reflect Blackbeard's ability to read and speak, but shows how Toby gives him a potential way to spread positive narratives about the Crakers' positive

relationship with nature. He can go forward to spread warnings about what could happen if this relationship became negative.

However, the Crakers themselves raise a certain ambiguity as to whether changing this relationship is possible in that they themselves are a post-human species. Braidotti (2013) discusses how the post-human is 'linked to the compounded impacts of globalisation and of technology-driven forms of mediation [...] and shifts the parameters that used to define *Anthropos*' (p.57). The Crakers redefine what it is to be human; they represent a possible future for humanity. However, even though the Crakers subvert our current relationship with nature, they themselves are products of scientific development. Without humanity's current manipulation of nature, they would not exist. It is the drive of science and biotechnology which creates them to be at one with nature; this is therefore only achieved because they are changed on a genetic level. Nevertheless, they still embody a new definition of what it could mean to be human: kind, peaceful and at one with nature. However, there is the suggestion that perhaps humans will never fully be able to change to live peaceably with the Earth. Within Atwood's trilogy, it is only a post-human species who can truly change its relationship with the Earth, and even then we begin to see them fall back into human patterns through the creation of deities, through singing and through acquisition- all traits Crake had hoped to eradicate.

It is suggested that it is harder to completely alter human ethics or belief than one would think. Crake initially believes he has 'edited out' all questioning or interest in narratives; he believes his scientific creations only care about survival, very similar to mammals. However, early on, they show signs of intrigue. "Today they asked who made them" (*Oryx and Crake*, p.366), Oryx mentions to both Jimmy and Crake, showing early on that humanity's concern

with answers cannot be edited out: humans will always need stories to help provide reasoning and explanation. This is further symbolised by the Crakers' increasing interest in story time as the trilogy goes on. When Jimmy further queries whether the Crakers themselves questioned the information they were given, Oryx merely states 'They didn't seem interested' (ibid.); therefore although they do go on to ask a lot of questions, they never question the validity of the information. This shows the Crakers' blind faith in the narratives given to them by those in power and shows that perhaps the only true way to change our relationship with the natural world is not through science or technology, but through taking back control of language and narratives about the human-nature relationship. Perhaps it is impossible to change through action before beginning to change people's beliefs and internal narratives about why we should help save the natural world. Equally, similar to the Crakers, if it does not concern us personally, we do not show interest; thus, we need to try and alter 'nature' narratives to include the potential damaging effects to ourselves as well as the Earth. Kidner (2012) notes how people refer to the natural world as 'natural resources' and 'raw materials' (p.20); only once internalised narratives and the jargon associated with the commodification of the environment are changed, can any true, positive changes be made.

In order to make positive changes, human beliefs need to be influenced through ethics within literature. As previously mentioned, Toby tries to ensure that all narratives she tells the Crakers hold ethical standpoints; she worries over the knowledge she imparts questioning 'What comes next? Rules, dogmas, laws? [...] Have I ruined them?' (*Maddaddam*, p.250). She tries to ensure that the things she tells them may be beneficial to theirs and the planet's future to try and enable a more positive and harmonious approach towards the natural world. Zapf states that 'narrative seems to be a form in which this

discourse [of ethics] can find a specifically instructive, complex, medium of (self-) exploration' (p.854), allowing people (and the Crakers) to explore their own versions of right and wrong without being directly ordered to view the world in a certain way. The Crakers act as an example that our ethical standpoint can be shaped by the literature and narratives that we engage with, and that we can therefore begin to change our relationship with the natural world as a result. It is therefore suggested that literature helps with reasoning and rationality in terms of coming to terms with the state that the natural world is in and in finding ways to change this for the better.

### Conclusion

Within both the *MaddAddam* trilogy and *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood shows the importance of controlling language in order to maintain power. Within *The Handmaid's Tale*, this is seen mostly through the control of societal narratives about both the Handmaids and their purpose/importance to society, as well as the focus upon Christian myth-making and doctrines in order to keep all citizens inline and in order to uphold a regime which is built on the power of religious language and morals. This control is also seen to influence how elements of the natural world, including bodies, should be used as well as the control of day-to-day utterances as a means to quash potential contradictory thoughts. This is also seen within the *MaddAddam* trilogy within many different instances. Pre-apocalypse the Compounds control all language, both through the suppression of it (they make the humanities seem irrelevant) and through controlling the narratives around the importance of the natural world in upholding a successful society. However, this is also seen more subtly within the post-apocalypse as the Crakers believe whatever Jimmy and Toby tell them. Overall, both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* trilogy show the correlation between language, power and humanity's relationship with nature. It is evident that

whoever controls language, controls this relationship, which results in both the exploitation of the natural world as well as manipulation of humans.

However, both show the potential for language to subvert these oppressive powers and negate existing narratives about nature. Through the reclamation of individual thought and freeing of language comes a freedom of natural elements. Through this freedom comes an essence of hope. Where *The Handmaid's Tale* shows an underlying hope that things can change, *MaddAddam* shows the reader that subverting existing narratives and how we educate future generations about our relationship with the natural world, holds the potential to avoid destroying both the planet and ourselves in the long run.

All of the novels also suggest that it is possible to subvert these opinions and change our outlook on the planet. If compared, *The Handmaid's Tale* presents this focus on nature a lot more subtly and suggests that unfortunately our beliefs may always be shaped or manipulated by others. This is seen both through the regulation of accepted language and the forbidding of reading within Gilead, but also through Pieixoto's control over Offred's account post-Gilead. *MaddAddam*, on the other hand, presents the issues facing the world a lot more explicitly, highlighting how these issues have come more to the forefront in recent years. Both texts also end ambiguously, never completely committing to either a positive or negative outcome for the characters; Atwood, therefore, leaves the outcome up to the decisions of the reader, allowing them to contemplate the possibilities that are created to better the future.

## Conclusion

Overall, considering both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Madaddam* alongside each other, the texts clearly present precarious and destructive relationships between humans and the natural world, as well as a clear correlation between the control of the natural world and the control of bodies, space, language and power. Kidner (2012) clearly points out that 'the destruction [of the Earth] is not simply external to ourselves' (p.25) and Atwood's novels highlight how any control or manipulation of the natural world has the potential to destroy both Earth and humanity. Due to our interconnection with the natural world, humanity becomes victim to its own destructive powers. Kidner reaffirms the belief that our perception of our actions as anthropocentric is also deeply rooted in our subservience. Thus, our actions are not solely our fault on a person-to-person level, but are destructive because of our ignorance and blind willingness to live in a nature-damaging way which is instilled in us through the beliefs put forward by the rulers of society.

Within *the Handmaid's Tale*, the reader is given a world post-destruction. Though we are not told specifically the details of what has happened, there is a suggestion that humanity's destruction of the planet became so bad that people were forced to address these problems and try to rectify them before any more permanent damage ensued, so much so that they found themselves bound to a rigid theocracy and therefore rigid controls of space, land and people as the only viable solution to try and find salvation. However, within the *Madaddam* trilogy, the reader is an active witness to the destruction which is being wrought within the pre-apocalypse through the rigid control of space and manipulation of non-human nature itself. Humanity's blind subservience to a technocratic society and ignorance to its own (and the planet's) destruction serve as a harsh wake up call, to see a world mirroring the present

day. Atwood suggests that we are in fact not only the villains of the narrative (as Crake sees humans), but also victims of our own actions (or lack thereof), which is highlighted within the struggle the survivors face in the post-apocalypse. She explores the complex relationship between the natural world and the human and how we are linked in a dependent survive-or-destroy cycle. This is rooted again in our beliefs of what we imagine nature to be versus what nature actually is. The version of nature we believe is the one which causes our self-destruction. Our imagined ideal that nature is in fact a commodity serves to further destroy existing areas of the natural world and eventually creates harsh and destructive realities.

Thus, the lapse in time between works perhaps implies that the destruction we, the reader, are causing is accelerating at a vast rate. Where, with *the Handmaid's Tale*, the destruction of the natural world and ourselves is backgrounded as the cause of such a regulated and thus oppressive society (Atwood foregrounds other issues such as the treatment of women), Atwood feels the need to make a more exaggerated version of the physical damage we are causing to the Earth a clear focal point of the *MaddAddam* trilogy. Through presenting the control of language and an uncaring population, Atwood highlights the commodification of each aspect of bodies and space. Thus, she presents a bleak, yet possible future for ourselves if we do not change our relationship with the Earth.

However, Atwood suggests that all hope is not lost. Susan Watkins (2012) states that 'like dystopian fictions, apocalyptic fiction exists in a similar state of suspension, self-consumption, or unfinished process' (p.133), showing how apocalyptic texts provide little resolution within their narratives. The uncertain endings to both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* present open-ended narratives which imply that there is still time to change

humanity's and the Earth's outcome. By embracing our interconnected relationship with the planet and changing narratives about the natural world, humans (like the Crakers) hold the potential to have a positive relationship with the Earth and, as a result, can save the world and its inhabitants from the oppressive and destructive forces of those in power.

These open endings suggest that Atwood's texts fall into the category of 'critical dystopias' in that they leave an element of hope for the reader that things can be resolved and that it is not too late to change human behaviours. However, they also reinforce traditional tropes of the concrete dystopia in that they 'designate [...] events, institutions, and systems that embody and realize organized forces of violence and oppression' (Varsam, 2003, p.209), emphasising issues and structures of control that are relatable to our own world. Over time, Atwood's texts also encompass elements of climate fiction, to help raise awareness of ongoing issues and how they are increasing in frequency. Dan Bloom (2014) notes that 'cli-fi is a fiction genre that might be helpful in waking people up and serving as an alarm bell'; this is apparent within the texts discussed as Atwood uses the harsh conditions of dystopian worlds to show the potential ramifications of human actions.

Atwood has further shown interest in cli-fi through her work 'Time Capsule found on a Dead Planet' and through her involvement in *The Handmaid's Tale* mini-series which has brought the issues this text presents back to the forefront of popular culture. Thus, even outside of the works explored in this thesis, the issues presented are still being discussed and applied to current day society.

I would therefore conclude that Atwood's works do help to evaluate present day society and help to draw frightening conclusions about the way that the world is heading. Since their publication, the world has seen increases in environmental disaster including, most

recently, issues such as the burning of the Amazon rainforests. *National Geographic* (2019) noted that '76,000 fires were burning across the Brazilian Amazon at last official count, an increase of over 80 percent over the same time period last year', highlighting how, due to both global warming and humanity's exploitation of the Amazon, this destruction is ongoing and increasing. Also, reminiscent of *MaddAddam*, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has seen the human world come to a standstill with illness and death tolls beginning to rise. This is an unprecedented situation which, like Crake's virus, has caused survivors to consider their way of life. Though this is an ongoing issue, there is a suggestion that the retreat of humans is causing the planet to begin healing itself slowly. There are reports of wildlife returning to urban areas and a suggestion that pollution levels have drastically dipped, causing air and seas to become cleaner due to the necessary shutdown of the industrialised world as a result of COVID-19. Atwood's novels, therefore, not only reflect issues of their time, but ongoing issues in present society, and help us to understand humanity's potential options going forward. Their open-ended conclusions suggest that it is not too late to change our anthropocentric and industry-focussed ways, and that it is still perhaps possible to revive a more harmonious and positively interconnected relationship with the world around us.

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