

**Tracing Her Footsteps: Traumatized Post-apocalyptic Women in Margaret
Atwood's *The Year of the Flood***

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1. Introduction

Margaret Atwood's dystopian trilogy *MaddAddam*¹ presents a world very much like our own – except for the fact that scientific developments made gene splicing, body modifications, and curious new species nothing out of the ordinary, and that glowing bright green rabbits roam around in the wilderness, and luxurious artificial hair is grown on sheep fit for a L'Oreal commercial. *MaddAddam* operates on the grounds of already existing technological inventions and socio-cultural settings, projecting them into the future and imagining their effects on humanity. However, these effects are devastating, as a vicious global pandemic wipes out almost every human on the Earth, and the few survivors are struggling to get accustomed to their new surroundings and a previously unknown, genetically engineered humanoid species, the Crakers. The alluring technological advances of the trilogy invite a discussion of bioethics, consumerism, and terrorism, which is underlined by the fact that critics, such as Lisa Appignanesi (*Independent.co.uk*) and Earl G. Ingersoll (172), focus on ecocriticism, global capitalism, and terrorism in their respective reviews. However, I would like to call attention to Atwood's commentary on women's current socio-cultural situation, which, although not in such an overtly politicized manner as in *The Handmaid's Tale*, constitutes a strong undercurrent throughout the trilogy. If, in line with Elaine Showalter's claim, "Oryx is the vehicle in the [first] novel for Atwood's indignation at child slavery, prostitution, sex tourism and other extreme forms of female victimisation" (380), then I would like to argue that *The Year of the Flood* can be regarded as a more thorough exploration of objectification, sexual transgression, and the dangers that science holds for women.

The chief interest of this paper is to explore how women are presented in this dystopian world in terms of body, identity, status, and trauma, and, in turn, how this image reflects on current society. I would like to examine this through uncovering the various layers of female experience in *The Year of the Flood*, and exploring the connection between the novel's major trauma, the apocalypse, and the smaller, personal traumas of the female characters. I would also like to trace how the traumatic wound becomes a multi-layered symbol, and how language, especially the language of trauma, re-constitutes ways of trauma narration depicted by the female characters. Following in the steps of Cathy Caruth, I argue that, here, personal trauma is almost invisible, inasmuch as the traumatic event is hidden, and

¹ In this paper *MaddAddam* will stand for the trilogy consisting of *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of The Flood*, and *MaddAddam: A Novel*; whereas *MaddAddam* will stand for the third book in the series.

only noticeable in the fact that it affects everyday life (4). The manifestations of traumatic experiences before the apocalypse are constructed in present tense narration, through the recollections of the female characters, and are more prominent in their prolonged aftereffects than the descriptions of the events themselves. Atwood sketches gruesome personal histories for the female characters, but does not go into details of rape, or abuse, relying instead on the post-traumatic self to do the talking for her and to support understanding.

2. Female experience

An inquiry into the representation of female experience in the case of *MaddAddam* is an interesting endeavour mainly because the structure of the trilogy favours a male experience due to the fact that both *Oryx and Crake* and *MaddAddam* focus on the story of male characters, while women only appear in passing, as brief encounters in bars, girlfriends, or temporary flatmates. *Oryx and Crake* has Jimmy, also known as Snowman, as its main character, whereas *MaddAddam* describes the lives of Adam One and Zeb. Their narratives are punctuated by the interconnecting fates of the other characters, but only *The Year of the Flood* gives voice to female characters through putting Ren and Toby into the center of attention. All stories, male and female, run parallel to each other and can all be characterised by a series of traumatic events. Young Jimmy is attempting to process the decomposing marriage of his parents, while trying to deal with the gradual alienation of his mother, who deserts the family. This results in Jimmy's inability to connect with women and to form a long-term relationship. Adam One and Zeb, who are brothers, are oppressed by their dominating father who advocates a quasi-religion of consumerism and capitalism. After escaping from home, they form a similar religious group called God's Gardeners, campaigning for a sustainable lifestyle, and preparing for the Waterless Flood, an apocalypse that would erase the entire developed world. Although the male characters seem to suffer from their difficult childhoods, the themes of experience are generally that of abandonment, lack of love, and delusion with ideals. There is a repetition in the stories of the female characters as well, which closely resonates with how the trilogy depicts the status of women in this universe. The common motifs are usually sex-related: child-abuse, pornography, prostitution, rape, and the female body as disposable or as an object only valuable in its sexuality.

The society of MaddAddam is strictly separated into two very distinct spheres: one is the compounds, the home of the technocratic elite, while the other is the pleeblands, where the less fortunate live. Moving between the two spheres is difficult, as the compounds only welcome people good with numbers, who can join the scientific work. The status of women seem to depend on their place of birth and intellect, as only those can work for big corporations who managed to get a suitable education, or who were lucky enough to marry a suitable man. For those from the pleeblands, there seem to be scarcely any way to move within society, as doors seem to stay locked without a degree. One of the main features of this new scientific world is that sex is available on demand in all forms any time of the day. Glenn and Jimmy, the young protagonists of *Oryx and Crake* grow up in a world where sexual violence and pornography are normalised. Although this novel offers the teenagers' lackadaisical attitude towards this, their perception is contrasted with the story of Oryx, who rose from poverty through child pornography. *The Year of the Flood*, on the other hand, introduces Ren, and illustrates how even women from originally well-to-do families without proper funding often end up as sex workers, as a financially beneficial way of supporting themselves:

Scales was part of SeksMart now, which was a legitimate Corp with health benefits and a dental plan, so it wasn't like being a prostitute. A lot of girls went into it, and some of them met nice men that way and did very well in life afterwards. So I thought I might try for it. I wasn't likely to get anything better without a degree. (*The Year of the Flood* 392)

Atwood describes a postfeminist, posthumanist world. Blind consumerism throws any form of ethics out the door, and the female body becomes the site of transgressions. Even women in cushioned positions, such as compound wives, are subject to these forms of trespassing. They, however, do not experience objectification the same way as sex workers do: stemming from the perfection-oriented trend of the fashion world, the emphasis on looks is getting more and more extreme, the expectation of being young unbearable. The compound wives visiting the spas for treatments are dreading the "signs-of-mortality thing" (352), and their phobia of getting old is the basis of the beauty industry, which is "selling hope" (352). To evoke Barbara Kruger's famous picture, their body is a battleground for corporations to sell their products, or, as it is elaborated in *The Year of the Flood*, their body is the product to which the corporations add value. The beautified women emerging after the pricey treatments, however, can never reach the ideal set by society, as making them young and beautiful would

obliterate the need for special beauty treatments, and would cause the collapse of the industry. There is always more and more value to be added, until the body loses all of its authenticity.

Things are even worse on the lower levels. Beside the dangers posed by the insane development of biotechnologies without a social discussion on bioethics, humanity seems to take a turn for the worse in other areas as well. *Oryx and Crake* standing on its own cannot be considered a real dystopia, since Atwood does not give a full description of the workings of the society except for those privileged layers that Jimmy encounters. *The Year of the Flood*, in my opinion, partly stands in to rectify this, and to elaborate on the socio-cultural trends which were only touched upon in the previous book. As society moves along with the tendency which disregards politics and intellect, body becomes the new focus: its wants and needs dictate a lifestyle constructed around instant gratification. Culture becomes a caricature of itself, with extremities taking over. The normalisation of pornography and violence depicts a world in which women are in constant danger, although it seems that, because of their postfeminist sexual liberation, they should be free to pursue a sexual life that they are comfortable with – even if it involves prostitution or pornography. The life stories told by Atwood, however, question this liberation. Amanda, who is a TexMex refugee, trades everything to have a better life, including her most valuable possession, her body. She manages to move higher and higher in society, and becomes an artist, but she is punished for her unorthodox success when she is raped by a group of aggressive convicts. Ren, who has already been mentioned above, after slipping out of her comfortable life and being cut off from family funds, becomes a dancer in Tails and Scales, as a high-end prostitute. The mysterious Oryx starts out from extreme poverty, and rises up via child pornography, later becoming a high-end call-girl. This sexual oppression, which seems to be beneficial to women, only ends with the Waterless Flood.

The women who survive the apocalypse consist of Toby, Ren, four scientists, and a God's Gardener, who used to work with Toby in the pleeblands. The fact that from this group Toby and Ren are the characters who are given a voice, survive, and thus become free of the constraints of this consumerist society, is a dire warning. Atwood claims that MaddAddam takes the trends of our current world and projects them into an imaginary future (*"The Handmaid's Tale and Oryx and Crake 'In Context'"* 513). Everything that exists in this dystopian universe has an origin in current society. If MaddAddam offers a possible simulation of our future, then women are in danger, as both cultural trends and the sciences pose a threat of oppression.

Earl G. Ingersol notes that “Atwood has emphasized that the novel functions as a “book end” to *The Handmaid’s Tale*”, and that by highlighting this connection, Atwood encourages the reader to look at the relevant themes of the novels and contemplate the changes in her approach (162). I would like to call attention to the fact that the discourse on the body is one of these major themes, and that if *The Handmaid’s Tale* imagined a society in which women’s bodies were only valuable in their ability to give birth, then the world of MaddAddam, although not exaggerated as much, seems to continue this line of inquiry. By extrapolating current western approaches to the body, Atwood outlines a milieu in which the female body loses even its importance as a reproductive symbol, and sinks to the level of sex toys.

3. Traumatic personal histories

In Trauma and Recovery, Judith Herman writes that

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the construction of self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis. (51)

Herman’s remark calls attention to the fact that traumatic events are not only destructive in the sense of causing problems on an intrapersonal level, but also because their effects ripple out to other areas of life as well. This idea is further developed by Katherine V. Snyder, according to whom in *Oryx and Crake* Atwood makes a point of concentrating on interpersonal relationships and exploring the series of personal traumas of Jimmy leading up to the cosmic event of the apocalypse. She draws a parallel between Jimmy’s repetition of the patterns observed in his parents’ failed marriage, and his own unfortunate personal life (473). In a similar manner, Toby’s traumas are presented as well in *The Year of the Flood*. A list of her experiences which would invite a traumatic response would be the following: 1. her mother dies due to over-the-counter pills which were designed to slowly kill her, and in the struggle to find a cure for her disease the family loses all their money. As a way of escape, Toby’s father commits suicide. With the death of her parents, she becomes a lawbreaker

because she owns her father's illegal weapon. 2. Toby buries the corpse of her father, and to avoid detection by the CorpSeCorps, burns her identity and goes underground. 3. She decides to become invisible, and while trying to stay afloat in the grey area, she is attacked by fetishists, which she does not consider rape, sells her eggs on the black market, and as a result of an infected needle, she becomes sterile. 4. She starts working at SecretBurgers, where her boss Blanco forces her into a relationship which can only end with her death. She is raped on a regular basis, and when she is saved by the Gardeners, she puts her life in danger by humiliating her former oppressor. Although she lives with the Gardeners, her sense of safety is lost forever: she lives in constant fear and her identity centers around being in danger.

As the sense of danger grows, Toby's attempts at survival grow more and more dire and desperate. Snyder claims that the unconscious repetition and modification of childhood traumas result in the birth of imbalanced adults in *Oryx and Crake*, and that without the successful processing of these traumatic patterns the characters have stronger and stronger responses to cataclysmic (or even everyday) events as the magnitude of unprocessed traumas grows (484). Toby is not a character who recounts her story to the others, and there is no-one among the Gardeners who would have personal knowledge about her either. Her traumatic experiences are unprocessed and repressed, which Atwood turns into an unstoppable avalanche resulting in her loss of self-image.

The body is closely related to one's sense of identity as this is the medium through which information is filtered from the outside world, and what mediates the thoughts on the inside. The image of the body constitutes a great part of the sense of self, and that is precisely what Toby loses. As an attack on the rooftop puts her life in danger, she is sent into hiding, and for her own safety body modifications are performed on her. What was considered her own image vanishes in this process, together with Toby's life before the trauma of the attack and its direct aftermath. People don't recognize her as Toby any more, she stops being herself, and becomes Tobiatha instead.

"Think of yourself as a chrysalis," Zeb had told her before the transformation process had begun. Sure enough, she'd gone in as Toby and had come out as Tobiatha. Less angla, more latina. More alto. (*The Year of the Flood* 350)

She does not recognise herself, either. Her eye colour and shape, skin tone, hair, and voice changed, and her new personality has no roots. Any personal history is meaningless in the light of rape and MaddAddam joins the canon of attacks. Atwood repeats the situations in which Toby has to lose her sense of self and has to switch to survival mode. What Toby was before

the Sewage Lagoon and among the God's Gardeners loses credibility and becomes a distant memory to give space to a new identity, which is built upon the need to be invisible, to be safe. Tobiatha emerges in society as a manager in the AnnoYoo Spa, and her personal history in this identity does not stretch beyond her time spent there. The constant sense of danger and the need to adapt to situations beyond her control seem to repeat the time of her life when she first went underground, both in terms of losing her identity, and adopting a persona that she does not recognise as her own.

4. Post-apocalyptic fiction and trauma narratives

With its global pandemic obliterating almost all life on Earth, MaddAddam joins the canon of post-apocalyptic texts describing life after the end of humanity. The literature of the apocalypse has a long-standing tradition, stemming from Judeo-Christian canonical texts (Daschke 457) and enjoying constant popularity ever since. James Berger notes that "the science fiction apocalypses of the 1950s came in the wake of the atomic detonations in Japan" (7), which brought heightened attention to texts engaging the idea of total destruction because of manmade inventions and natural disasters. In her 1965 essay, "The Imagination of Disaster", Susan Sontag categorizes the underlying plots of science fiction movies, and emphasises that the popularity of movies depicting all-encompassing disasters is a natural psychological response to the fact that the 20th century individual has to come to terms with the idea of death which is beyond his personal sphere. She writes that

there is a historically specifiable twist which intensifies the anxiety, or better, the trauma suffered by everyone in the middle of the 20th century when it became clear that from now on to the end of human history, every person would spend his individual life not only under the threat of individual death, which is certain, but of something almost unsupportable psychologically-collective incineration and extinction which could come any time, virtually without warning. (48)

MaddAddam is built upon this fear of global destruction, and tries to foretell what happens after the unthinkable. It confronts the reader with the trauma, disillusionment, dissatisfaction, or rage of the apocalypse in the fictional universe. Ronnie Janhoff-Bulman, who studies aspects of victimisation, argues that trauma calls into question the following three basic assumptions about the world: that the world is benevolent, that the world is meaningful, and that the self is worthy (6). The shattering of these beliefs can lead to self-blame, a feeling

of incompetence, and fear in the wake of what happened. The world ceases to be the safe environment that it once was, all previous knowledge fails, and the identity is called into question. There is a need to reinterpret everything, to make sense of life, but this process is characterised by the fact that it is structured around the traumatic event.

A major trauma that affects a lot of people has similar effects on its survivors, which is visible in *MaddAddam*. The apocalyptic event transforms life and becomes the alpha and omega of their existence. The end of the world as the survivors know it and the beginning of something new seem to coalesce around this moment in time, which, although not directly accessible, seems to lack any logical meaning. Covering alone with no news from the outside world, Toby and Ren separate their lives into two distinct halves: the pre- and the post-apocalyptic. The memories of their previous life surface through their reflections on the devastated landscape around them, and contrast the loneliness of their new lives with the vivacity of the old one. The pandemic becomes the starting point of attempts at understanding the underlying reasons of the trauma, as the only palpable evidence, and the world becomes understandable only in its relation to this traumatic event. The slivers of information which play an important role in understanding how and why the virus was set loose on the world (both for the reader and the characters) emerge from their past recollections. Cataclysmic events are major traumas: they are incomprehensible with previous tools of understanding, and for the survivors, there is a need to find a hidden meaning or explanation for the unimaginable. The new approaches towards a new comprehensibility become the building blocks of life after the event in question.

Post-apocalyptic texts show a similar tendency of evoking Janhoff-Bulman's three assumptions. Despite the numerous possible ways of eradicating human life from Earth, these texts share a common quality: the survivors are trying to make sense of what happened to them. They look for possible reasons or precursors in the past, and try to make sense of their new role as the sole survivors of the human race. After encountering the other survivors, Toby manages to piece together the mosaic of the pandemic, and what role each of them played in the events. Her process of understanding is further complicated by the fact that she also has to take care about the Crakers and tell them about what happened in a way that is understandable for them. The new life after the cataclysm is an unknown territory which resonates painfully with the unexplainability of the apocalyptic event, and where Toby has to tread lightly. The fact that destruction on such a magnitude was unforeseeable, unexplainable, and cannot be told will become the backbone of the traumatic experience.

The cataclysmic event of the MaddAddam trilogy is a genetically engineered pandemic that is set loose on the world. It is extremely frightening because it cannot be explained in terms of natural disasters such as floods or grand climatic changes, nor on the basis of manmade disasters that wiped out the population because of a mistake, such as an accidental nuclear explosion. These are horrible on their own, but they do not have that aspect which makes the epidemic so evil: they were not created by a person to kill everyone. The way the virus is constructed aims for total destruction: it is time-coded to break out at a precise moment, it spreads fast, it only attacks humans, and it has strategically placed starting point to insure one hundred per cent efficiency. The handful of survivors stay alive because of factors that the creator could not foresee, because they were isolated for a long period of time, with no chance of catching the disease. For the survivors, there is no frame of reference. Although they know how the event happened, and they suspect the reasons behind it, they have nothing to compare it to. There has never been a genocide on such a large scale, such a small amount of people to rebuild civilisation.

Cathy Caruth, in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, defines trauma “as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3). Moreover, “[i]n its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11). This description emphasises two very important characteristics of the traumatic experience. First, the delay in time reflecting on the peculiar tendency of trauma to unsettle the survivors’ normal perceptions of time, in which, through re-living the traumatic experience, present and past seem to intermingle. It is quite clear that the re-living of the event, however real it might seem, is not the actual repetition of the event, which leads on to the second observation, namely that the “intrusive phenomena” mentioned above are not real and only symptomatic. They can manifest themselves in numerous ways, such as hallucinations, recurring dreams, sudden bouts of anxiety, and strange voices, just to name a few.

This idea was further elaborated on by Dominic LaCapra, who claims that traumatic events possess such overwhelming power, that truly witnessing them is impossible, as the victims are incapable of experiencing them at the moment when they are happening (174). The traumatic event itself is often only available for understanding in its after-effects and its influence on life after the cataclysmic event. Trauma narratives, such as diaries, autobiographies, or letters often highlight that the incomprehensibility of the event lies in its unexpected nature. Accounts of rape, for example, often mention the fact that the victims of

the assault thought that such a thing would never happen to them. The idea of being in such a sudden and overwhelming situation seems foreign, and does not fit in with what the experiencer knows about the world. As the event itself is impossible to process at the moment of happening without previous knowledge or experience to give guidance, the body switches into survival mode, only concentrating on somehow getting out of the situation (Herman 42).

Due to its unprocessed nature, trauma seems to be unrepresentable. The very fact that there is no first-hand knowledge of the events that took place questions the reality of the event. The lack of directly accessible memory excludes the process of comprehending it, and, therefore, the possibility of talking about it. Trauma seems to profess no language (Edkins 7), as the traumatic event is both a void and an all-encompassing experience: it lacks a referential and cannot be easily described by language. Telling a traumatic event is also problematic, because traumatic memory defies what we understand as normal memory in numerous ways: memories surface at unexpected moments, they are uncontrollable, they are often fragmented, or sometimes they are lacking altogether. As it can be seen from the following quote by Sylvia Fraser in *My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing*, sometimes only the body remembers:

We tend to think of memory as only residing in the mind, but the body has specific memories too. My body remembered what my mind forgot, and when the memories came back, they came back as convulsions – the convulsions of a child being orally raped. (55)

Modern trauma research pinpoints the mode of healing in the telling and re-telling of the event as a means to processing the traumatic experience (Bussey 7). By working through traumatic memories, it is possible to construct a narrative which can be assimilated into the self and into the understanding of the world. This, however, is a rather difficult task, as the recounting and the evocation of memories might trigger the same responses as the event itself, thus becoming traumatic events themselves. Furthermore, the fact that traumatic memory does not exist as a single, closed past time complicates the issue. The interfusion of past and present muddles the production of a coherent narrative of the experience. The construction of this new narrative is only possible if there is someone listening to the survivor, someone who witnesses the secondary trauma of telling. Sharing the pain and acquiring a new understanding through empathy is vital for healing from a traumatic experience (Laub 64).

The construction of a coherent narrative is not only possible on a personal level. In the way that Toby recounts stories to the Crakers about the pre-apocalyptic world, she opens up the narrative of the trauma to the whole community. Literary texts set out to tell the

untellable, to build a linguistic frame around the cataclysmic event that caused the break in consciousness. Sometimes this consciousness is the cultural memory, as major cultural traumas, such as wars, acts of terrorism, natural disasters, etc. live on in the memory of whole societies. In this case, trauma is not merely an issue for an individual isolation, but lives on as history. Cultures tell their own traumas in forms which are processable by their members (Caruth 4): in schools in History lessons, with films, memorials, and by remembering. These, however, are examples of the healing process, as trauma often encompasses silence. The confrontation with the impossible has a numbing effect, and it takes time to accept it as the truth, and this results in a belatedness of response. On an individual level, the person surviving the traumatic event cannot talk about what he or she experienced, because the memory is too painful. At times, they do not even want to talk about it, as Toby herself resists remembering her family: “[e]ver since her family had died in such sad ways, ever since she herself had disappeared from official view, Toby had tried not to think about her earlier life. She’d covered it in ice, she’d frozen it.” (49) Similarly, there is a silence encompassing traumas effecting whole cultures as well.

Trauma exists in a peculiar place, its location hard to find: it is not only there in the psyche of the individual, it also appears outside the boundaries of any single place or time. In the case of major cultural traumas, such as the Holocaust, for example, trauma is also a symptom of history. The witnesses of the impossible cruelty could not bear to truly register the events, so the traumatic event is both questionable because it is unimaginable and also too accessible for those who survived it. This creates a peculiar duality explained by Laub as

the very circumstance of being inside the event that made unthinkable the very notion that a witness could exist, that is, someone who could step outside of the coercively totalitarian and dehumanizing frame of reference in which the event was taking place, and provide an independent frame of reference through which the event could be observed. (81)

Those who are there would have to be both outside and inside the event to witness it, but since trauma is not there in the original event, the attention has to shift to its “unassimilated nature” (2), as Caruth puts it, and be found in the post-traumatic acts of the survivors.

Literature is a powerful tool of bearing witness. The text serves as a link between talker and listener, between survivor and witness, and forms a relationship between them by creating a language to represent trauma. Said language, however, has to be markedly different in order not to hide the lack of referentials, but to let them come to light in order to foster the process of understanding and healing. Witnessing by reading is again a traumatic experience

in itself, but is part of the necessary dialogue between writer and reader to construct a comprehensible narrative together.

The person experiencing the lasting effects of trauma has to rebuild his/her identity after the traumatic event: has to accept what happened in its entire reality, and has to accept him/herself as the survivor/victim of said event. This happens on two levels: first on a day-to-day basis, to be able to go on after the event, and as the incorporation of a bigger, incomprehensible event into the self. However, the characters featured in the MaddAddam trilogy are not survivors of one single trauma. Their lives are a series of traumatic events, in which the global epidemic and the disappearance of their civilisation represents an outstanding trauma as it rises above their isolated lives as individuals, and encompasses something much bigger than them. The question arises whether it is possible to rebuild one's identity if life is a series of traumas, and can this be complete in the wake of a catastrophe that renders every previous building block of life without meaning?

In “‘Time to go’: The Post-apocalyptic and The Post-traumatic in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*”, Katherine V. Snyder examines Jimmy, the focal character of the first novel in the series. She calls attention to the similarities between the double temporality of dystopian speculative fiction and the doubled temporality of trauma, and examines how these are represented by the novel’s doubled time scheme. Jimmy-the-Snowman’s present, and the pre-apocalyptical past are connected by the figure of the lone survivor, the only witness. Snyder claims that Jimmy’s personal traumas which stem from childhood correlate with novel’s major traumatic event, the apocalypse, and that at least on the level of Jimmy’s consciousness, the repetition of his traumas is a factor in the demise of humanity. She also talks about the traumatic event as a way of healing, as “repetition with a difference, repetition as reworking” (487). Such a psychoanalytical reading is perfectly valid in the case of *Oryx and Crake* standing on its own, as Jimmy is the only character, whose personal history is mirrored by the apocalypse. By introducing new characters (who are also female!.) it is an important and interesting endeavour to see how Atwood’s commentary on trauma narratives develops, and what new layers of meaning are added by bringing in experiences vastly different from Jimmy’s.

The Year of the Flood has a similar double structure as *Oryx and Crake*, although it is further complicated by the fact that it has not one but two narrators. One of them is young Ren, who survives the epidemic quarantined in an isolated room of a striptease bar, and the other is Toby, who barricades herself in a spa. Jimmy’s masculine narration is contrasted by the past and present stories of the two women, resulting in a storyline that runs in four

different planes which meet up in the end. The world described here is markedly different from Jimmy's protected life in the secure compounds, and later, at a not so prestigious university. There is almost no mention of the illustrious corporations and luxurious life, as these women travel a road that is much more difficult. If, according to Snyder, Jimmy's life was a repetition of consecutive traumas closely linked to the novel's major trauma, then I would like to argue that by reading the lives of the female characters in a similar manner, Atwood showcases that a woman's life is unavoidably traumatic, and gives a sharp critique of the role of women in our current society.

To support this claim, I would like to concentrate on Toby, and how the description of her life after the apocalypse hints at a case of unprocessed trauma. Turning back to Cathy Caruth, it is important to note her observation that "trauma is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality that is not otherwise available" (4). In the case of Toby, that wound is not singular, and definitely links back to older scars. I start my investigation in the novel's present time, and explore the episodes hinting at trauma. The signs that I am looking for are those that I would link to a sufferer of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (although I would not go as far as to try to diagnose Toby): problems of language, hallucinations, problem with sleeping, anxiety, dreams, and voices.

As discussed above, traumatic experiences have a special connection with language and writing. For Toby personally, writing is a double-edged sword. As a member of a green cult that idolises sustainability and natural resources, she learns that writing is a possible weakness, which leaves the writer vulnerable to attacks from the outside world. The God's Gardeners scorn leaving writing behind, as it is a means for others to glean information, therefore, a possible source of danger. After the Waterless Flood (as the gardeners call the apocalypse), however, writing becomes a tool of survival for Toby: it is a way to keep track of time and to preserve sanity. She notes down the passing of the days, the memorable saints, and the tasks she accomplished that day, similarly to how she would have done if the Gardener's community would still be in existence. There is a stark difference between partaking in the celebrations and labour of the Gardeners, and being on her own, holding on to the routines of her usual life. She ponders the strangeness of writing. Since she does not know about any other survivor, her notes on the pink paper become the new record of humankind, the record of the post-cataclysmic world.

Toby's been keeping track of the days on some old AnooYoo Spa-in-the-Park notepaper. Each pink page is topped with two long-lashed eyes, one of them winking, and with a lipstick kiss. She likes these eyes and smiling mouths: they're

companions of a sort. At the top of each fresh page she prints the Gardener Feast Day or Saint's Day. [...] Under each Saint's Day name she writes her gardening notes: what was planted, what was harvested, what phase of the moon, what insect guests. Mole Day, she writes now. Year Twenty-five. Do the laundry. Gibbous Moon. Mole Day was part of Saint Euell's Week. It wasn't such a good anniversary. (217-8)

Although she is writing and addresses the problem of the gap between pre- and post-apocalyptic existence, she cannot address the trauma itself at this point. There is no one to recount the story to, there is no audience, no witness to share her memories. The eyes on the notepaper seem to be mocking her, they are the remnants of a civilisation which is gone, much like Toby herself is a monument of times gone. The eyes are "companions of a sort", although only inasmuch as they substitute an audience. It is doubtful that anyone will see her writing at all. There is no possibility to process the events with anyone other than herself, so her knowledge about the trauma stays repressed. The only thing she can put down on the paper are the effects of the trauma, the materializations of the traumatic experience:

Two days back — on Saint Orlando Garrido of Lizards — she made an entry that wasn't about gardening. Hallucination? she'd written. She ponders this entry now. It did seem like a hallucination at the time. (218)

As she revisits the memory of the hallucination, she tries to make sense of what she saw based on what she knows about the world. However, her set of perceptions is not enough to comprehend the experience. She saw a strangely dressed man, and

[b]ehind him there were men and women and children, every known skin colour; as she focused, she could see that several of the naked people had blue abdomens. That was why she's decided it must have been a hallucination: the blueness. And the crystalline, otherworldly singing. She'd seen the figures for only a moment. They were there, then they'd vanished, like smoke. (219)

What she unknowingly witnessed was Snowman-the-Jimmy leading a group of Crakers in the distance. Toby's worldview cannot accommodate naked people walking around with blue abdomens, so she writes off the apparition as a hallucination, something she invented due to sheer loneliness:

She takes her pencil and scratches out the question mark. Hallucination, it says now. Pure. Simple. No doubt about it. (219)

Toby's viewpoint is built upon the fact that the global epidemic wiped out most of humankind and she as a survivor is producing unreal images to comfort herself.

On another occasion, Toby wakes up terrified from a dream sensing another presence in the room, which turns out to be a bee. Back at the Gardeners' Rooftop, she was a teacher, who specialised in mushrooms, bees, and potions. Her understanding of the animal is that of a friend and also a protector. As a daily routine she would recount the news of the worlds to the bees, who in turn helped her, once by attacking the intruders who wanted to kill Toby. The bee as a messenger becomes a form of contact to reach out to the spirit world, but because of Toby's belief in the power of bees, also a reach out to the other survivors.

"Send a message," she says to it. "Tell those in the Spirit world: 'Please send help soon.'" (424)

Without someone to talk to, the notion of language as a means of communication starts to feel less and less tangible. Toby evokes one of the recurring slogans of the trilogy, "*Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones*", while naming the birds she can hear in the morning on the roof of the spa. The slogan is that of Extinctathon, an online guessing-game that works similarly to 20 questions, except for the fact that one has to guess animals that are extinct.

Oodle-oodle-ooo. Oodle-oodle-oo. Chirrup, twareep. Aw aw aw. Ey ey ey. Hoom hoom baroom.

Mourning dove, robin, crow, bluejay, bullfrog. Toby says their names, but these names mean nothing to them. Soon her own language will be gone out of her head and this will be all that's left in there. Ooodle-oodle-oo, hoom hoom. The ceaseless repetition, the song with no beginning and no end. No questions, no answers, not in so many words. Not in any words at all. Or is it all one huge Word? (462)

Toby names the animals, just like the Biblical Adam did, but in this case, it means the dissolution of language. Without someone to talk to, she will lose the ability to speak, and consequently to think. The text seems to suggest a return to an animal-like state, which is quite ironic, contrasted with the fact that hordes of gene-spiced pigeons are trotting around, who seem to get smarter and smarter due to the human brain tissue inserted in their skull. If Toby is gone maybe there will not be anyone remembering these names, but the birds and pigeons will still exist after the disappearance of a namer. This looks like the caricature of Creation: instead of God creating the animals and Adam naming them, Adam's race waves hello to the animals by naming them one last time, then disappears into oblivion, while manmade gene-spliced animals take over the world.

Toby's secluded life at the spa is ruled by fear and anxiety. The means of survival are scarce and she is in constant danger because of the predators lurking around the building. She has no news from the outside world, so she is still terrified of being attacked by still-alive people who are infected with the bug. She lives in a constant state of vigilance:

It's daybreak. The break of day. Toby turns this word over: break, broke, broken. What breaks in daybreak? Is it the night? Is it the sun, cracked in two by the horizon like an egg, spilling out light?

She lifts her binoculars. The trees look as innocent as ever; yet she has the feeling that someone's watching her — as if even the most inert stone or stump can sense her, and doesn't wish her well.

Isolation produces such effects. She'd trained for them during the God's Gardeners Vigils and Retreats. The floating orange triangle, the talking crickets, the writhing columns of vegetation, the eyes in the leaves. Still, how to distinguish between such illusions and the real thing? (18)

The world as she knew it does not exist anymore, and the new world is full of dangers. She is constantly occupied by thoughts of survival: whether her pre-apocalyptic stash of food can sustain her, and if she can secure a new source of nutrition in an environment that defies even the Gardeners' self-sustaining lifestyle. These thoughts never let her rest peacefully, and come back in her dreams as well. Although the exact nature of these dreams is not described in the text, there are allusions to voices that she hears:

"Go to sleep," she says out loud. But she never sleeps well, not since she's been alone in this building. Sometimes she hears voices — human voices, calling to her in pain. Or the voices of women, the women who used to work here, the anxious women who used to come, for rest and rejuvenation. Splashing in the pool, strolling on the lawns. All the pink voices, soothed and soothing.

Or the voices of the Gardeners, murmuring or singing; or the children laughing together, up on the Edencliff Garden. Adam One, and Nuala, and Burt. Old Pilar, surrounded by her bees. And Zeb. If any one of them is still alive, it must be Zeb: any day now he'll come walking along the roadway or appear from among the trees. (6)

The voices she hears are those of people from before the flood. The complete disappearance of humanity on such a grand scale is inconceivable. In an environment where the only audial background is constituted by animal voices and the sounds of natural phenomena, such as the rustling of the leaves, or the approach of the thunderstorm, Toby is strangely alone without

the constant white noise of human talk. The fact that she is hearing voices reminds the reader of the voice of Oryx in *Oryx and Crake* that keeps Jimmy company. Although here the voices are always different, they are connected to places and times when Toby felt relatively safe: the rooftop garden which was her first shelter after she escaped her abusive boyfriend, and the spa, where she was hidden after the attack on the Edencliff Garden. They keep her connected to the memory of a time before the Waterless Flood, although they do not communicate with her as Oryx's voice did with Jimmy. The imagined past voices and the real natural sounds of the present are framed by the apparition of the Crakers already quoted above. Although Toby cannot place them, their eerie singing is the precursor of the new voices of a new race to inhabit the world.

The relative peacefulness and silence of Toby's life in the spa is disrupted when she encounters other survivors. There has always been a theoretical possibility of other people staying alive besides her, this is the first moment when she actually encounters anyone: suddenly she is not alone. The people sadly turn out to be the kind of survivors she does not really want to get to know better, as they are a group of Painballers (extremely aggressive criminals), who have two women in captivity. Earlier, when Toby thought she hallucinated the appearance of the Crakers, her first response was to run and greet them – this time around, she is much more careful. Her natural reaction of seeking the company of fellow humans is sacrificed for her own safety, even though it might mean that she will never be part of a community, as her sole focus is survival.

Toby is haunted by apparitions from the past with no means to find a sure footing in this new world. Her survival is questionable at best, and her mental health is, although not as severely as Jimmy's, affected by the trauma of the pandemic. The apparition of the wounded Ren opens up the possibility of healing and gives new hope to Toby. The girl's deplorable condition first puts Toby in a moral dilemma: should she lower her own chances of survival by sharing her resources with Ren, or should she let the girl die with the help of a mushroom elixir. The lone survival mode she is in would necessitate the latter option, but her inner Gardener takes the lead and she nurses Ren back to life. Finding a familiar face she can relate her experiences to would be a way for Toby to address the issue of the pandemic, but Ren is not someone she can share her pain with. As a former teacher, and as the adult in the relationship, she shields Ren as best as she can, and only opens up and finds her own community when they reach the Cobb house where the other survivors are gathered. This place has the answers to Toby's question about the apocalypse, and become the starting point of understanding the traumatic event that she witnessed. The mending of the narrative of the

Flood only begins in the third book of the trilogy, *MaddAddam*, where she recounts her memories to the Crakers and writes them down in a book – the new version of her recordkeeping on pink paper at the spa. This time around, however, Toby knows there are listeners she has to tell her story to, both humans and Crakers. This is where the double-facedness of trauma resurfaces: she constructs two narratives: one that is comprehensible for the Crakers, who have their own mythology constructed around Oryx, Crake, and the survivors of the apocalypse, and another, private, one. For herself.

About the events of that evening – the events that set human malice loose in the world again – Toby later made two stories. The first story was the one she told out loud, to the Children of Crake; it had a happy outcome, or as happy as she could manage. The second, for herself alone, was not so cheerful. (30)

Talking about the trauma to others has two main features, one of revealing, and one of concealing. Even if the trauma has to be recounted, the speaker has to make decisions about what can be told and what has to stay hidden, similarly to the selection of the traumatic memory. The survivor differentiates between what is that the self can bear and what is that remains repressed. In a sense, the re-telling of the trauma is a form of processing it. Toby's dual narration of the apocalypse is a new commentary on how trauma narratives work. The traumatic event can never fully be processed on a personal level, but attempts can be made to make it understandable by the repetition of it on a broader cultural level. The traumatic experience can never be fully narrated, it evades full representation, but there is an ever-persistent need to try to tell the untellable. The narrative of the trauma, in its changed and reinterpreted version known by the Crakers is one way the cataclysmic event is represented, but is not the only attempt to trace the void that the global pandemic created in the psyche both of the society and the individuals. Atwood weaves together the stories and the re-telling of the stories by the characters to create a trauma narrative that is constantly self-reflective and multi-faceted.

5. Conclusion - The wound that cries out

Cathy Caruth compares trauma to a wound that keeps on reminding the survivor of the traumatic events experienced (4). In Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, this wound does not

only appear in the Caruthian sense as the emotional wound on the psyche, but also as a symbol that pervades different levels of the text. Concerning the plot, the wound appears as an actual injury inherent to survival in the dangerous landscape of the post-apocalyptic world, threatening the life of the individual. On a narrative level, it appears as the void that trauma creates in the symbolic system of language, by hindering the understanding, and hence, the expressability of the event. Besides these, the wound is also the injury of the major trauma, of the complete eradication of humankind. It hovers over the text as a constant reminder, engaging the biggest fear of the individual in the 20th and 21st century. These injuries are crippling both for the individuals and for the society. The festering bodily wounds might become lethal at any given moment, the emotional burden makes the comprehensibility of life after the apocalypse immensely difficult. The knowledge that the human race was almost obliterated and that survival is dependent on the mentally inferior group of Crakers requires the characters to reflect on the apocalypse in an entirely new manner. The wound in the language seems to heal through the telling and re-telling of the events of the apocalypse, but due to the fact that the Crakers appear to be the new heirs of the Earth, this re-telling is a conscious reinterpretation of what happened. The new narrative overwrites the central characters' experiences in order to assimilate it into the culture of the Crakers in a way that is understandable to them.

Trauma researchers distanced the definition of trauma from the actual bodily experience, but Atwood's work reminds the reader that trauma, at least for the women of MaddAddam, is a bodily experience as well. Existing in a female body in MaddAddam is presented as a traumatic experience because being a female predetermines a set of specific female experiences before the apocalypse that are bound to be traumatic. *The Year of the Flood* presents female characters, who have trauma coded in their bodies: not because of some trauma preceding their existence, but because the society surrounding them makes it very hard for women to get along in life without having to cope with external factors which oppress them. Unless they are in very exceptional positions with the leading technocratic elite, they become disposable through the social acceptability of commoditized aggression, extreme forms of sexual fetishes, and everyday pornography. The female body in its sense of belonging to an individual loses its significance, as women are only valuable as a mass of bodies, serving the appetite of a society used to instant gratification. These bodies are nameless in *Oryx and Crake* and only gain significance by being ascribed a personal history, told through the narratives of Ren and Toby in *The Year of the Flood*.

These personal stories are intertwined with how the women survived the apocalypse and the challenges they faced in the wake of destruction. The pandemic recalls their previous traumatic experiences and forces them to revisit their past sufferings. Reading their stories through the glasses of trauma studies brings the conclusion that they are, indeed, traumatised people. One cannot help but notice that they fit the scheme almost too perfectly. The repetition of the traumatic events in their personal histories and their behaviour after the apocalypse give a convincing portrayal of trauma survivors, although a rather flat one. The characters lack motives and engaging personal traits, they drift through life in a semi-conscious state, waiting for the next big event to hit and trying to recover from the last one. It is the apocalypse that makes their personal histories meaningful, which lifts them out of the sea of invisible, nameless women. This might not be obvious while reading the trilogy as Atwood's masterful portrayal of the brave new world and its wonderful new creations diverts the attention from the characters. The realistic portrayal of an unreal world that is similar to our own, but curiously different in some ways, creates a sense of awe and estrangement in the reader, especially since the roots of those differences are recognizable in the contemporary world. If one disregards the enticing novelty of nanotechnologies and gets used to the plethora of fantastic animals, the stories of these women are rather disappointing, at times frustrating. Their sufferings serve to illustrate the warning that female experience differs from male experience in a negative way, because besides the emotional traumas of childhood, their life has the added danger of assaults on their body, and this situation seems to be static as scientific development will not only fail to rectify it, but will even make it worse.

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