

“ODD APOCALYPTIC PANICS”:
CHTHONIC STORYTELLING IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S *MADDADDAM*

by

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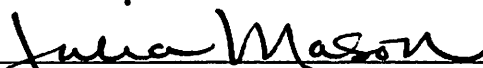
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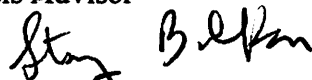
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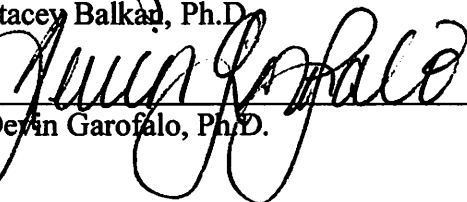
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ABSTRACT

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I argue that Margaret Atwood’s work in *MaddAddam* is about survival; it is about moving beyond preconceived, thoughtless ideology of any form with creative kinship. Cooperation and engagement cannot be planned in advance, and must take the form of something more than pre-established ideology. I will discuss *MaddAddam* in light of Donna Haraway’s recent work in which she argues that multispecies acknowledgement and collaboration are essential if humans are to survive and thrive in the coming centuries. By bringing the two texts into dialogue, one sees that Atwood’s novel constitutes the kind of story deemed necessary by Haraway for making kin in the Chthulucene. Various scenes depicting cooperation and interdependence among humans and other animals offer chthonic models of kinship; these relationships, as opposed to ideological and anthropocentric isolation, will serve as the means of surviving and thriving within an ongoing apocalypse.

“ODD APOCALYPTIC PANICS”:

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INTRODUCTION: “A QUEASY FORM OF POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT”

Speculations about what the world would be like after human control of it ended had been – long ago, briefly – a queasy form of popular entertainment. There had even been online TV shows about it: computer-generated landscape pictures with deer grazing in Times Square, serves-us-right finger-wagging, earnest experts lecturing about all the wrong turns taken by the human race. (*MaddAddam* 32)

How can we think in times of urgencies *without* the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse . . . ? (*Staying with the Trouble* 35)

Apocalyptic environmentalism, as a political strategy, along with the literary genre of ecocatastrophe have traditionally been interpreted as a “call to action,” yet more recently critiqued as disabling, or paralyzing.¹ It would be easy to simply categorize Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam*, and indeed the entire *MaddAddam Trilogy*, as apocalyptic fiction, yet that label, while recognizing the implicit warning, fails to acknowledge the complexity of the novels. The idea that some action may be taken assumes, first, it is within human capacity to act, and, second, it is not too late. The twin assumptions that humans are powerful enough to effect change upon an environment and

¹ See, for instance, Morton, Streeby, and Latour for recent discussion of apocalyptic thought potentially resulting in political inertia.

within a timeframe amenable to our brief lives, are hallmarks of humanism and reflect deeply ingrained anthropocentric attitudes.

As a species and cultural force, the Anthropos has so fundamentally affected our planet that many are calling this era the Anthropocene. While the earliest evidence of human impact can be detected in landscape alteration attributable to the Neolithic transition to agriculture, the industrial revolution and especially the introduction of the coal-burning steam engine is often considered the decisive moment and start of this unofficial period (Morton 4). As a result of these sedimentary traces, in 2000 a Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist proposed the new geological title “Anthropocene” as a way to capture the enormity and magnitude of impact humans have had on the physical Earth. It has become a near-ubiquitous term, and many, complains Donna Haraway, find the “term mandatory in their naming and thinking” (*Staying* 45).² The “story” of the Anthropocene is that humans are simultaneously so bad and so powerful that we have permanently destroyed the only home for all who live here. Not everyone is convinced that a participation trophy of such magnitude is warranted for what is arguably at least equal parts harm. Haraway is particularly critical of calling this epoch the Anthropocene in her recent work, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). Stories of the Anthropocene, she writes, “invite odd apocalyptic panics . . . rather than attentive practices of thought, love, rage, and care” (*Staying* 55-56). She critiques the current narrative of the Anthropocene, finding it an unsuitable and overly circumscribed story for thinking about the world: “It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters

² For notable exceptions and precursors to Haraway’s critique of the Anthropocene, see J. Moore, and Bonneuil & Fressoz.

what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what stories tell stories” (*Staying* 35). In its place, Haraway offers an era of tentacled, Gaia-like complexity, webbing, and kinship, which she calls the Chthulucene. Haraway has multiple reasons for avoiding the word Anthropocene. She notes that it is not an “idiomatic term for climate, weather, land, care of country, or much else” (*Staying* 49). Moreover, although it may be “usable by intellectuals in wealthy classes and regions,” it is meaningless “in great swathes of the world, especially but not only among indigenous peoples” (*Staying* 49).

The relative inaccessibility of the term makes for an exclusive conversation, yet paradoxically, its overly inclusive nature is even more worrisome to Haraway and others. The problem is that the term flattens meaningful differences among human communities and individuals, falsely positing unified action and equal responsibility for environmental degradation, when in actuality the Global North is disproportionately responsible. As Haraway writes, “Intending to make kin [by applying a universal term like *Anthropos*] while not seeing both past and ongoing colonial and other policies for extermination and/or assimilation augurs for very dysfunctional ‘families’ to say the least” (*Staying* 207). Forcing distinct and reluctant participants to “make kin” denies real differences among individuals, and the term Anthropocene does this with its broad, undifferentiated application. Bruno Latour admits he finds the forced union brought on by ecological crisis in some ways “refreshing,” for “all the collectives from now on . . . share the certainty that they fear nothing but ‘being crushed by the falling sky’ giv[ing] a totally different idea of universal solidarity” (216). However, he says, “we don’t emphasize enough that the New Climate Regime is astonishing in that it imposes a terrible and

totally unforeseen solidarity between the victims and the responsible parties” (Latour 216).

Jason Moore is also skeptical of the Anthropocene narrative, believing its wide acceptance rests on its familiarity (595). He argues: “The Anthropocene is a comforting story with uncomfortable facts. It fits easily within a conventional description – and analytical logic – that separates humanity from the web of life. This makes for a familiar story, one of Humanity doing many terrible things to Nature” (J. Moore 595). The problem for Moore is that this “ignores early capitalism’s environment-making revolution”; “explain[ing] these transformations without identifying how they fit into patterns of power, capital and nature” is “fruitless” (J. Moore 594). An emphasis on capitalism and the rise of what he calls “Cheap Nature,” provide a more fitting explanation (J. Moore 607).

The very act of naming this period the Anthropocene, according to Haraway, is problematic. Even where that manifests as accusation rather than aplomb, the notoriety is unmerited. The “wanted poster” for humankind provides unwise attention and merely feeds the ego. In her words, the Anthropocene, “lend[s] [itself] too readily to cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions, like the ‘game over, too late’ discourse. . . . in which both technocratic geoengineering fixes and wallowing in despair seem to coinfect any possible common imagination” (*Staying* 56).

The “‘game over, too late’ discourse” of the Anthropocene, which Haraway decries (*Staying* 56), is substantively similar to the deficits of apocalyptic thinking and each reinforces the other. While the popular notion of an apocalypse is one of rapid cataclysmic change, such as an asteroid strike or volcanic explosion, Bruno Latour and

Timothy Morton view the apocalypse as an ongoing feature of modernity. Morton writes that although “the idea of the end of the world is very active in environmentalism,” that mindset is ineffective, “since, to all intents and purposes, the being that we are supposed to feel anxiety about and care for is gone” (6). Moreover, “the strongly held belief that the world is about to end ‘unless we act now’ is paradoxically one of the most powerful factors that inhibit a full engagement with our ecological coexistence here on Earth” (Morton 7). In other words, if all hope is lost, then why bother?

In *Facing Gaia*, Latour has much to add to the conversation surrounding apocalypse and apocalyptic discourse. He makes clear that he conceives of the apocalypse not as a singular, cataclysmic event, but rather as an ongoing way of life: “Modernity is living entirely within the Apocalypse, or more precisely *after* the Apocalypse So we have to agree finally to engage for real in an apocalyptic discourse *in the present times*” (Latour 194). His call for focus on the present moment is comparable to Haraway’s insistence that we must not partake in the “double death” discourse of the Anthropocene, but instead immerse ourselves fully within the ongoing Chthulucene (*Staying* 49). He perceives that an individual’s relationship to apocalypse acts as a marker for or indication of that person’s recognition or denial of the uncertainties of life. He asks:

‘And you, do you situate yourselves before, during, or after the Apocalypse?’ This is the shibboleth that might allow you to sort out the forms of attention to the world. If you situate yourselves *before*, you are living in sweet innocence or in crass ignorance – unless, by an incredible stroke of luck, you have still avoided all forms of modernization and are

thus ignorant of the bite of the counter-religion. If you situate yourselves *after*, no trumpet of the Apocalypse will ever be able to arouse you from your slumber, and you will head down like sleepwalkers toward more or less comfortable forms of annihilation. You are interesting to me only if you situate yourselves *during* the end time, for then you know that you will not escape from the time that is passing. Remaining in the end time: this is all that matters. (Latour 217)

Latour, then, views apocalypse not as the end of life, but as an unavoidable condition of life. His strictly rationed interest rests on one's acceptance of that uncomfortable paradigm. How though, is one to accept, let alone thrive in, the end times?

Haraway's Chthulucene, from the Greek word *khthonios*, or *of the earth*, offers just such a model for remaining in the end times, within the apocalypse (*Staying* 173). The Chthulucene is an era "made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet" (*Staying* 55). Haraway's choice reflects an awareness and desire to engage temporally, situationally, and appropriately, as in the case of other non-human Earthbound species. Unlike the discourse of the Anthropocene, "human beings are not the only important actors in the Chthulucene, with all other beings able simply to react. The order is reknitted: human beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of the earth are the main story" (*Staying* 55).³ The Chthulucene is comparable to an eco-centric or bio-centric model but goes further to engage with the living members of those systems and is not bound by scientific or

³ See also Eben Kirksey's discussion of *oikos* in *Emergent Ecologies*.

mathematical protocol. It is “an ongoing temporality that resists figuration and dating and demands myriad names” (*Staying* 51). To limit discussion of the world to bounded units, like “code fragments, genes, cells, . . . ecosystems” and other “relations described mathematically in competition equations,” is often is to overlook or discount individual agency (*Staying* 62). Because conceptions like an eco-centric model remain “rooted in units and relations, especially competitive relations” they are not useful for discussing living, biological matters like “embryology and development, symbiosis and collaborative entanglements of holobionts and holobiomes, the vast worldings of microbes, and exuberant critter biobehavioral inter- and intra-actions” (*Staying* 62-63).

If these ideas of decentering the human subject and opening up to other nonanthropocentric ways of thinking sound like posthumanism, they are quite similar. Cary Wolfe, author of *What is Posthumanism?*, writes that posthumanism:

names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms . . . , a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (xv-xvi)

Yet Haraway makes clear that she wishes to distinguish her ideas:

We are compost, not posthuman; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities. Philosophically and materially, I am a compostist, not a posthumanist. Critters—human and not—become-with each other,

compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff in sympoietic tangling, in ecological evolutionary developmental earthly worlding and unworlding. (*Staying* 97)

She repeats, “We are humus, not Homo, not anthropos; we are compost, not posthuman,” (*Staying* 55). Her main reason for rejecting posthumanism is its myopic focus on the “human,” decentered, or otherwise, that “saps our capacity for imagining and caring for other worlds, . . . [such as] those we need to bring into being in alliance with other critters, for still recuperating pasts, presents, and futures” (*Staying* 50).

The chthonic attention to the exuberant actions of and interactions among various critters stands out when compared to the tone-deaf insistence of human exceptionalism required by the story of the Anthropocene. Arrogance and individualism are illusory for both Atwood and Haraway: “no species . . . acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and other kinds too” (*Staying* 100). Illustrating this point, Atwood’s work blurs the line between humans and other animals questioning anthropocentrism as a biological given, seeks to question discursive norms which privilege human language, and prompts us to consider life moving on without “us.” Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy* serves as a fitting story of life in the Chthulucene, or within an ongoing apocalypse.

The *MaddAddam Trilogy* is a story of humans, critters,⁴ and those in between; it reflects and reveals the crowded complexity of life within the Chthulucene. The Anthropocene is an unsuitable, unreliable, and ineffective model for considering the

⁴ I use “critter” at Haraway’s suggestion. As she writes, “The taint of ‘creatures’ and ‘creation’ does not stick to ‘critters’; if you see such a semiotic barnacle, scrape it off” (*Staying* 169n1).

integrated, communal, overlapping, living, breathing world the Earthbound live in and on. Various scenes in *MaddAddam* depicting cooperation and interdependence among humans and other animals offer alternative models of interpersonal and interspecies relationships in which collaboration, rather than anthropocentric isolation and individualism, will serve as the means of surviving the apocalypse. Atwood's unique flora and fauna include an array of hybrid species like the Crakers, the snat, rakunks, gidlers, and pigoons. These hybrid species exist as physical reminders of the mutability of life and prompt one to question assumptions about the differences in knowledges and languages of each of these creatures. Moreover, *MaddAddam* takes place before, after, and most importantly during an ongoing apocalyptic event. Society is entirely disordered and reordered, yet, life goes on and these remaining individuals offer a model of community and kinship within this ongoing apocalypse.

Atwood is not the first speculative fiction writer to critique anthropocentrism in her work. In “‘Evidences of Decadent Humanity’: Antianthropocentrism in Early Science Fiction,” Bryan L. Moore offers an excellent catalogue of early science fiction in an ecocritical frame. He provides a detailed discussion of H.G. Wells, in particular, that anyone who appreciates Wells' vision, hopes, and fears will enjoy. As a foil for anthropocentric thought, Moore says, “ecocentrism denotes the view of the world by which nonhuman nature has intrinsic values similar if not equal to those of humans. A literary or philosophical work with an ecocentric view addresses the imbalance resulting from a strict, ‘hard’ anthropocentrism that has dominated the world, explores the nature of that imbalance, and, often, espouses a restoration of balance” (B. Moore). Moore notes that ecocatastrophe often arises as a response to real world disaster: “In the wake of

several widely reported global environmental disasters,” ecocatastrophe, typically considered a subgenre of science fiction, “flourished . . . and peaked in the early 1970’s” (B. Moore).⁵

Ecocatastrophe as a genre has evolved with contemporary writers and current thought regarding the trouble of conceiving of apocalypse as a singular, cataclysmic event. The “trouble” as Haraway suggests, is not over; it is only by “staying with the trouble” that one can thrive in the Chthulucene. Storytelling is one such way of learning to stay with the trouble. Haraway discusses the value of speculative fabulation and its ability to offer alternative models of living. Haraway is particularly fond of Octavia Butler and Ursula K. Le Guin, whose stories offer the “kind of situated, mortal, germinal wisdom we need” (*Staying* 118). Haraway describes Butler’s work as focusing on the “problem of destruction and wounded flourishing—not simply survival—in exile, diaspora, abduction, and transportation” (*Staying* 120). Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* follows the story of Lauren Oya Olamina, a teenage “hyperempath,” who grows up in an increasingly dysfunctional and dangerous Los Angeles. Olamina forms a new religion, which she calls Earthseed. The main tenet of Earthseed is that “God is Change” (Butler 3). As Haraway notes, “the seeds of life on earth can be transplanted and can adapt and flourish in all sorts of unexpected and always dangerous places and times” (*Staying* 120). *Parable of the Sower* focuses on new kinds of people (the hyperempaths, for instance), change as the only constant, alternative visions and revisions of familiar stories and figures, and offers a chthonic story of life in an ongoing apocalypse.

⁵ See also discussions of speculative fiction by Shelley Streeby, Adrienne Maree Brown, Rob Nixon, and Amitav Ghosh.

Ursula K. Le Guin's work, too, offers a model of chthonic narrative. Her "theories, her stories, are capacious bags for collecting, carrying, and telling the stuff of living" (*Staying* 118). Haraway considers *The Word for World is Forest*, Le Guin's 1976 story about the planet Athshea and the green, furry Athsheans, who are distant relatives of humans, called Terrans. In the story, the native Athsheans must overcome the Earth-borne Terrans who are trying to strip the planet Athshea of its timber. Haraway finds the "consequences of the freedom struggle bring the lasting knowledge of how to murder *each other*, not just the invader, as well as how to recollect and perhaps relearn to flourish in the face of this history" (*Staying* 121). Once again, this story offers a chthonic model of life, messy and complicated, in the face of ongoing and lasting change to the environment and its inhabitants.

Like *Parable of the Sower* and *The Word for World is Forest*, Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* takes place during several interrelated and ongoing environmental and social crises, including extinction, overpopulation, peak oil, the release of genetically engineered hybrid species, and climate change. The ongoing downfall is punctuated by a more cataclysmic event, but the novel's setting in the day-to-day aftermath situates this novel firmly within the growing tradition that posits apocalypse as an ongoing event. Flashbacks focus on the unforgiving, ruthless exploitation of the planet by humans unwittingly committed to and invested in an anthropocentric worldview. In the first novel, *Oryx and Crake*, the storyline switches back and forth between the past and present, after a mysterious and acute disaster is followed by societal collapse. Jimmy, or Snowman, as the childlike, genetically modified human "Crakers" call him, lives in a hut near the beach, where he scavenges for food, ducks wild animals, and appears to be the

last living non genetically modified human. There are about twenty of these childlike Crakers, named for Crake, their laboratory designer and the man behind the plague that kills all but a handful of human survivors. Through the simple stories Jimmy tells the Crakers, his present day drunken tirades directed at nearby shrubbery and the hybrid rakunks, and flashbacks to the pre-apocalyptic dystopia, the reader learns of a flashy, consumerist world predicated on the idea that anything or anyone has a price, political power is rooted in brute force, and medical science can and should be marshaled entirely in the name of plastic surgery. The wealthy elite live and work in isolated, fortified compounds while the poor masses scrape by in the “pleeblands.”

The popular first novel ended on a cliffhanger: does the human race survive? It was followed in 2009 by *The Year of The Flood*, a second perspective on the same events. *Year* focuses on members of a religious group called the God’s Gardeners who interpret the Christian bible as a *green* text, calling for love, care, attention, devotion, and protection of the planet and all its creatures. This sect, likened to Noah and his family, prepared for the “waterless flood,” or what they believed would be a second annihilation of the Earth, by training from early childhood in survivalist practices and storing goods and supplies in hidden “ararats,” named for Mt. Ararat where Noah’s ark is supposed to have ultimately landed. The Gardeners, with their kind, apparently naive leader, Adam One, reuse scraps and garbage “gleaned” from the pleeblands, tend a lush rooftop vegetable and medicinal garden, practice strict vegetarianism, venerate ecological role models, such as Jane Goodall, meditate, experience mushroom-aided vision quests, talk to their honey bees, share, cooperate and live generally peaceful lives immersed, yet cocooned, within the dangerous pleeblands. They appear eccentric and are mocked and

shunned by mainstream pleeblanders for their baggy clothing, and lack of cell phones and other technological luxuries. *Year of the Flood* is punctuated with song lyrics taken from *The God's Gardeners Oral Hymnbook*. True to the spirit of the Gardeners' religious beliefs, the songs are earnest, instructive, and ostensibly Christian, but more accurately described as pantheistic.

MaddAddam, is the final chapter of the trilogy and like the first two novels, it alternates between present day and flashbacks. Much of the background information is related as stories told to entertain the Crakers and pillow talk between Toby and Zeb. These skeptical but participatory members of the God's Gardeners, begin a long-awaited romantic affair, the group searches for Adam One, and everyone is edgy because two surviving "Painballers" are lurking nearby. Atwood offers a detailed history of Adam One and his brother Zeb's background growing up in the Church of Peteroleum, an etymological portmanteau for *rock oil*, which had encouraged parishioners to use *more* fossil fuel because, according to their sadistic, televangelist father, oil is sacred in the bible. It is a crude and selfish, vicious dystopia. Readers learn much more about the Crakers as well. These genetically modified humans were designed to lack the ability to understand more complex ideas like story, narrative, humor, abstract thought, malice, jealousy, and anger and it comes as a surprise to the MaddAddamites, as the surviving humans are called, and to the reader that part of *MaddAddam* is narrated by a Craker. Crake edited and spliced these humans' DNA in an attempt to eliminate many of *homo sapiens'* worst flaws. They turn blue in estrous to signal fertility (to eliminate competition), mate five at a time (to avoid jealousy), eat grass and kudzu (considered environmentally friendly), reach maturity around age four (more efficient), die at age

thirty (also more efficient) and are mosquito repellant (*res ipsa loquitur*). Contrary to what Crake intended, they are curious about language, reading and writing and begin to enjoy stories and even books.⁶

Much has been written about Margaret Atwood's provocative, award-winning body of work spanning four decades, including her *MaddAddam Trilogy*. Echoing the traditional interpretation of ecocatastrophe as a warning, many critics agree that "much of what we find in *Oryx and Crake* is a large-scale extreme version of recent (Western) scientific and economic trends" (Mosca 40). Following unbridled expansion of corporate power, the private police and military wing of the corporations has usurped control and supplanted any real form of democracy. Some see this as a warning against capitalism, specifically neoliberal trends as we see in the privatization of police and the powerful biotech corporations. Berthold Schoene describes, "a world ravaged by neoliberal market forces predicated on the total commodification and exploitability of life" (98). Rosario Arias views the novels as a warning against scientific hubris and writes that Atwood "shows us the dramatic consequences for the human race of crossing the line between scientific advances and unregulated experimentation" (380-81). Others see a warning to control otherwise lawless and haphazard technological tinkering. The world of *MaddAddam*, says Valentina Adami, is a "dreadful future of environmental destruction," predicated on the "consequences of uncontrolled technological progress" (254). Adami compares *Oryx and Crake* to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, "which voiced contemporary concerns about women's rights, health-care and unmonitored research" (250). The

⁶ The strange cosmogony—that is the deification of fossil fuels—resonates with new work in the Energy Humanities. See Imre Szeman & Dominic Boyer.

trilogy, in this regard, “belong[s] to the same tradition and depict[s] a dreadful future where uncontrolled techno-science has led to ecological destruction and to the creation of a new post-human race” (Adami 250).

That does not, however, mean Atwood is simply skeptical of technology; she is a vocal, yet ambiguous writer refusing to be boxed in by *isms*. As she says, “Writing and *isms* are two different things. Those who pledge their first loyalties to *isms* often hate and fear artists and their perverse loyalty to their art, because art is uncontrollable and has a habit of exploring the shadow side, the unspoken, the unthought” (qtd. in Hengen 29-30). Likewise, in a review of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Atwood again writes that “Literature transcends ideology” (“*Reading Lolita*” 318). She publishes often, operates an active website, frequently gives interviews, and even writes editorials for news magazines, but does not typically align herself with specific ideologies. Rama Gupta calls Atwood an “elusive writer” (2). He says her fiction is not easily, “fixed within the conventional labels like feminist, nationalist, modernist and post-modernist” (Gupta 2). That ambiguity emerges as non-judgmental, yet biting observation of scientific trends. Atwood is not shy in her social criticism, but leaves it to the reader to offer a final judgment of human action in the *MaddAddam Trilogy*.

Atwood’s attitude toward apocalypse as warning or cautionary tale is likewise subtle and indirect in the *MaddAddam Trilogy*. Mosca highlights what she considers Atwood’s, “ambivalence toward apocalyptic fictions” (Mosca 43). Wilson agrees that “contrary to some readers expectations, rather than dictating what people ought to be doing, Atwood uses characteristic comic, parodic, and ironic techniques, multiple unreliable narrators, and other literary devices . . . to explore these questions” (Wilson

334). Atwood describes the novel as a, “Fun-filled, joke-packed adventure novel about the downfall of the human race” (SciFri Interview). Like I said, it is tough to pin Atwood down. But she reminds us, “While you’re laughing, you’re still alive” (SciFri Interview). Atwood is not afraid to laugh at herself and her readers, as the opening quote regarding the “queasy” quality of apocalyptic narrative reveals.⁷

Atwood’s avoidance of *isms* and skeptical attitude towards ideology does more than she realizes; in her work apocalyptic fiction functions as a model for living within an ongoing apocalypse and existing within Haraway’s Chthulucene. I argue that Atwood’s work in *MaddAddam* is about moving beyond thoughtless ideology toward a model of chthonic living. I wish to be clear that this paper is not suggesting that Atwood is critical of a particular ideology, but wrestling with and critiquing ideology as a concept. Ideology exists in multiple forms and sustains various and differing political groups and platforms. It is the inflexible and absolutist aspects of any ideology that I wish to consider. I call ideology thoughtless because it implies predetermined action and decision-making, stripping away the chance for contextualized thought and consideration. Cooperation and engagement with other people, other species, other ideas, and other moments cannot be predicted in advance and must take the form of something more sensitive and responsive than ideology, which is prescriptive and restrictive. Even mere cooperation is not enough; terms like this can mask Haraway’s emphasis on a network of competing agencies that might resonate, but may very well conflict with one another, sometimes destructively and other times productively. Haraway’s call for chthonic engagement is the answer that Atwood seeks, and the vocabulary of the Chthulucene becomes indispensable for a

⁷ See again Nixon, for discussion of spectacle as it relates to apocalypse.

discussion of the *MaddAddam Trilogy*.

In this project I discuss *MaddAddam*, both the novel and the trilogy, in light of Haraway's work in which she argues that multispecies acknowledgement and collaboration is essential for a new chthonic story and the future of the human species. Atwood's novel and Haraway's philosophy work well in tandem. By bringing the two texts into dialogue, one can see that Atwood tells a story of the Chthulucene with her vision of an abundant, complicated, and present apocalyptic world. Each chapter of this paper focuses on interplay between humans and nonhuman animals because these cross-species relationships and scenes offer particularly rich material for questioning the Anthropocene and anthropocentrism, and for experimenting with the Chthulucene and chthonic models. In chapter one, "Piggyback Rides," I focus on an image of Jimmy riding a Pigoon into battle as a mockery of the traditional hero on horseback trope and discuss what this new chthonic image says about interspecies collaboration. In chapter two, "Shattering the Glass Pane," I analyze a scene in which Zeb, stranded in bear country with no food, begins to lose language and feel his human identity slipping away. As Atwood describes, he senses the fragility of the "glass pane of language" cordoning off his identity and fears that the fictional pane and fragile identity based thereon will shatter. For Zeb, the differences between humans and animals, and the self and others are shown to be porous and largely fictive; under stress these fragile constructs founded on a belief in bounded individualism will crack. In chapter three, "Hive Minds," I discuss the relationship of Toby and a hive of wild bees using Haraway's multiheaded, poly-faced Medusa as a chthonic figure representative of holding and believing tandem, possibly conflicting, potentially discordant thoughts and finding creative ways to communicate

and relate to the world and its varied, various beings.

CHAPTER ONE: PIGGYBACK RIDES AND INTERSPECIES COLLABORATION

[T]he herd of giant Pigoons is already advancing into the clearing in front of the cobb-house fence.

There are fifty or so in all. Fifty adults, that is: several of the sows have litters of piglets, trotting along beside their mothers. In the center of the group, two of the boars are moving side by side; there's something lying crossways on their backs. It looks like a mound of flowers – flowers and foliage.

What? thinks Toby. Is it a peace offering? A pig wedding? An altarpiece? (*MaddAddam* 267)

I wish to first draw attention to an image of cross species unity, a model or figure of interspecies collaboration. Towards the end of *MaddAddam* there is a tactical raid by a joint human-Pigoon team against a separate, extremely violent group of humans, the Painballers. For help discussing the collaborative effort I will rely on a particular section of Haraway's recent work, "Playing String Figures with Companion Species" (*Staying* 10-29). Haraway includes stories of passenger pigeons and their human companions as an example of complex interspecies adventure, research, and education. Haraway details a human-pigeon "artistic research project" in San Francisco in which monitors were fitted to pigeons who then flew around the city collecting data on pollution and air quality (15). Haraway focuses on pigeons because of their similarities to and coevolution with humans. They are social, opportunistic, intelligent, sometimes and someplaces cherished,

while “elsewhere and elsewhen” vilified as dirty, feral “rats with wings” (*Staying* 15). These various characters in her real life story are players in her world of “Terrapolis,” a “fictional integral equation, a speculative fabulation,” an “n-dimensional niche space for multispecies becoming-with” (*Staying* 11). Haraway tries to look from new perspectives including “dimensions-yet-to-come,” because, as she has learned from ethnographic anthropology, “it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories, what thoughts think thoughts” (*Staying* 12). This is more than walking a mile in someone else’s shoes. This is acknowledging assumptions of gender, species, metric unit, language, bipedalism, terrestrialism, familiarity with metaphor, idioms, and walking. It is decentering, disentangling, unknotting, and un-knowing language, identity, relationships, and species. Looking at *MaddAddam* from this perspective, one can see that by collaborating with, being-with, and making kin with other animals, humans, such as Jimmy, working with the Pigoons are able to go beyond typical temporal-spatial-sensorial limitations. Collaboration with the Pigoons serves as a new chthonic model for thinking outside of and beyond the myths of the Anthropocene. Atwood’s new story of interspecies collaboration and “becoming-with” resists the expected hierarchy of the cavalry trope and offers a model of making kin with “oddkin” such as bioengineered and genetically modified others.

Pigeons and Pigoons have different roles in these collaborative projects, roles determined by the particular goal, relative degrees of agency, and specific abilities. The Pigoons are the ones who approach the humans in Atwood’s story, whereas the pigeons are captive companions. *MaddAddam* focuses more than the other novels on the Pigoons, fantastic super pigs developed by scientists, including Jimmy’s father, to grow and house

spare human organs. They communicate with an increasingly complex language with each other and telepathically with the Crakers. They are extra large to accommodate the human organs, hyper intelligent because they have human neo-cortex tissue in their brains, and aggressive towards humans after their treatment in the labs at the HealthWyzer compound. They threaten surviving humans after they escape from the laboratory and into the wild where they begin breeding. After continued hostilities between surviving humans and the Pigoons – sprayguns fired, gardens wrecked, dead piglets, humans tracked and cornered, “Frankenbacon” breakfasts – it comes as a surprise to readers to find the Pigoons and the humans working together in a collaborative assault against the Painballers. In the pre-plague dystopia, Painball is a brutal game to the death prisoners may choose to play for a chance at freedom. Survival, though rare, means the sentence is commuted and the offender is released, typically more brutal and dangerous than before. The two surviving Painballers in *MaddAddam* have been terrorizing humans, Crakers, and Pigoons alike, kidnapping, raping, killing, and even cannibalizing survivors.

In “The Battle” as it comes to be called in the Craker legends, a multi-species troop of Pigoons, humans, and a Craker interpreter all work together. Jimmy, still weak from an infection is unable to keep apace. As he falls behind, several Pigoons, having sniffed out his injury, begin to nudge Jimmy and offer to carry him. Jimmy reluctantly agrees and is, “tied onto the Pigoon like a parcel” (*MaddAddam* 350). A new legend arises: “When reciting the story in later years, Toby like to say that the Pigoon carrying Jimmy-the-Snowman flew like the wind,” though admittedly, “at the time, things are somewhat different” (*MaddAddam* 351). Jimmy bounces, nearly slides off, yelps when tickled and the progress is slow and “lumpy” (*MaddAddam* 351).

What makes this image of Jimmy riding a Pigoon into battle so important is the way Atwood challenges the trope of the conquering hero. Vicki Tromanhauser discusses the “conceit of the horse and charioteer as a figure of human intellect directing the instinctual animal body,” and an example of “ontological⁸ or species hierarchies” (82). In the usual anthropocentric scenario, a brave hero mounts a steed, and drives a reluctant horse into battle, controlling direction, speed, and destination. The horse, for its part, is saddled, trusting, obedient, wears blinders, and runs screaming and terrified if the rider is lost. It is an impressive display of man over nature, and a potent metaphor for what many see as human supremacy over the physical world.

One sees, then, two interpretations of the model functioning in distinct ways. The warrior hero on horseback draws power from cultural ideas about rigid distinctions between the human and the animal and fits squarely within humanist ideas of the relationship between humans and non-human animals, namely that humans occupy an entirely distinct realm intellectually, spiritually, physically, and emotionally. In the traditional image the horse is merely an extension of the human rider’s body, a bioform making the rider taller, faster, and capable of covering great distances. Horses are portrayed as mere biotechnology deployed like boots, or binoculars, or weapons.

Atwood’s subversion of the heroic warrior on horseback offers insight on the difference between an anthropocentric scene and a chthonic one in which Jimmy and the Pigoon are becoming-with each other a sympoetic hero. In the Atwood scene the roles of human and pig are entirely different and a chthonic interpretation is more helpful. That is not to say the roles are inverted – that would be too simplistic for Atwood, or for the

⁸ See again Kirksey for discussion of ontology.

Chthulucene. Rather, neither is in charge. From a chthonic reading, in the case of Jimmy and the Pigoon they appear to be fraternizing, or even just horsing around. Jimmy has not “mounted” anyone. Rather, he is tied on “like a parcel,” or like a mere object (*MaddAddam* 350). The Pigoon’s “back is round and slippery. Jimmy bumps up and down, and is in danger of sliding off, first on one side, then on the other. When this happens the flanking Pigoons give him a sharp upward nudge with their snouts, under the armpits, which causes him to yell maniacally because it tickles” (*MaddAddam* 351). The heroic warrior laughing out loud when tickled is classic Atwood irreverence. Other details are more nuanced and several important themes of the trilogy converge in this image. First, this collaborative, multi-species troop blurs the stark division between humans and pigs, and, second, it illustrates the strength of working with others, of “making kin,” as Haraway says. This chthonic coalition with pig noses and human fingers is a stronger group, shows Atwood, in an effort to question the privileging of solely human qualities and abilities while relegating smell, spatial mapping, and other senses to which humans are not so attuned, to second class status.

It is a collaboration agreed to by mutual assent, and supported by unique abilities. It is the pigs who first approach the humans and suggest the truce and joint assault, but they each need each other. Pigs have extremely sensitive noses and can anticipate the location of the Painballers. Though Jimmy is familiar with the layout of the battle site, he recognizes his limitations, specifically his limited sensorial abilities: “‘Thank God for the pigs,’ says Jimmy. ‘Without them, needle in a haystack. The place is a labyrinth’” (*MaddAddam* 351). Wondering why the Pigoons even bothered to include the humans, Toby, on the evening before battle, says, “The Pigoons are fit enough.” Yes, but, “They

can't pull triggers," replies Zeb (*MaddAddam* 335). Humans in this scene are figured as limited, and the Pigoons allow them to move beyond those limitations. Moreover, one could argue the pigs have co-opted the humans for their opposable thumbs, using them as an extension or supplement to their hooves.

In this scene several human characteristics, which many have traditionally valued as all-powerful and of superior importance, are proven fallible. Human language comes out as gibberish, when Jimmy "yells maniacally" (*MaddAddam* 351). Not only is laughing uncontrollably undignified of a warrior hero, that lack of control reveals an involuntary reaction to a stimulus which is precisely how animals have historically been described. According to Aristotelian philosophical tradition, the "difference between human and nonhuman animals [is] in terms of the human's ability to properly 'respond' to its world rather than merely 'react' to it" (Wolfe 63). That involuntary, mindless, thoughtless reaction, however, is also a human quality for Atwood. Moreover it is a liability: "'Can't you get him to shut up?' says Zeb. 'We might as well be playing the bagpipes.' 'He can't help it,' says Toby. 'It's a reflex'" (*MaddAddam* 351).

Going a step further, Atwood suggests the pigs are actually using the humans. Zeb notes, "We're just the infantry as far as they're concerned. Dumb as a stump, they must think, though we can work the sprayguns. But they're the generals. I'd bet they've got their strategy all worked out" (*MaddAddam* 341). His comments reveal a shifting political hierarchy among the surviving species toward a kinship model of being-with. Zeb continues with physical complaints about the human species in comparison to the Pigoons, noting that "Compared with them, humans on foot must seem like slowpokes. Are they irritated? Solicitous? Impatient? Glad of the artillery support? All of those, no

doubt, since they have human brain tissue and can therefore juggle several contradictions at once” (*MaddAddam* 348). These ideas require a lessening of anthropocentric ego and that newfound humility is what allows for effective communication, trust, and ultimate success.

There is a tension here in regards to the bioengineering of the Pigoons. They were genetically modified by humans to grow spare human organs and they contain human brain tissue. Because of this one cannot say definitively they are truly non-human. Cary Wolfe explores analogous ethical questions and implications of bioengineering in *What is Posthumanism?* Wolfe considers an art project by Eduardo Kac featuring transgenic mice, fish, plants and amoebas genetically modified by the introduction of green fluorescent protein (GFP), which causes them to glow green in certain light. Wolfe’s primary purpose is to examine how Kac’s “projects ethically intervene in our received views of the human/ animal relationship and, beyond that, in the question of posthumanism generally” (160-61). These “received categories” are no longer useful, or at least as definitive in *MaddAddam*. The neat dichotomy of humans and nonhuman animals, which an anthropocentric reading might look for, is disturbed by this enmeshing and demonstrates a central contradictory paradox. A chthonic reading acknowledges the inability to neatly categorize the Pigoons, Crakers, rakunks and other hybrid species, and bases kinship not on who they are but on what each individual contributes.

An early analogue of *MaddAddam*, which explores the role and place of other hybrid species, is H.G. Wells’ *Island of Doctor Moreau*. In *Moreau* the shipwrecked narrator, Prendick, details his nightmarish experience on a remote Pacific island, where a monstrously callous scientist in exile, Moreau, uses cruel surgical techniques in his

experiments on live animals to reshape them into humanoid creatures. Moreau is trying to create a perfect human but fails each time because “the beast begins to creep back, begins to assert itself again” (Wells). Bryan L. Moore writes that much of H.G. Wells’ work focuses on the place of humans in the world and “reflect[s] the author’s Darwin-based rejection of anthropocentrism” (B. Moore). While this explicitly happens in *Island of Dr. Moreau*, Moore adds that “most of Wells’s best fiction centers on shaking up well-entrenched views of humans and the world, including a thorough subverting of anthropocentrism within an ecological framework” (B. Moore). The hierarchical framework, which exists in many Western minds, stationing humans at the apex of our ecosystem is based in deeply rooted, sedentary ideology. Cultural norms, religious doctrine, and tradition often maintain that hierarchy in place without reflection or reconsideration. Like the Pigoons, the Beast People, as Moreau calls his human-animal creatures, are hybrids, neither fully human, nor indisputably non-human. They exist across boundaries and disturb neat categories of species.

How is one to treat these hybrids? Who counts as a worthy individual? Do they deserve the same rights? An anthropocentric answer would say that only a “human” counts. However, the hybrid species of Pigoons and *Moreau’s* Beast People make received categories like human and animal unworkable. The chthonic question stops short of asking which individuals count and examines rather what actions count as making kin. That is the standard by which individuals are included or excluded in *MaddAddam*. The sadistic acts by the Painballers lead to their permanent exclusion by execution from the MaddAddamite community. Making kin is what counts in a chthonic sense; the Pigoons have made kin, and the Crakers have made kin; the Painballers have not made kin, but

rather enemies and hence they are excluded from the community.

Peter Singer's ideas on equality are useful in this discussion of liminal and hybrids species. In *Animal Liberation*, Singer argues, "the ethical principle on which human equality rests requires us to extend equal consideration to animals too" (28). This idea of equal consideration, as opposed to equal treatment, works well in a chthonic story and can explain the differing treatment, rights, responsibilities, and privileges of various species in *MaddAddam*. Singer explains, "The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical *treatment*; it requires equal consideration. Equal consideration for different beings may lead to different treatment and different rights" (Singer 29). This explains why during the final vote the remaining humans, or MaddAddamites, and the Pigeons vote, but the Crakers do not (*MaddAddam* 370). The Crakers do not understand what a vote is and so are not afforded that right; hybrid creatures deserve hybrid consideration in the Chthulucene.

The inclusion or exclusion (by execution in *MaddAddam*) is a necessary part of making kin for Haraway. She writes, "Kinships exclude as well as include, and they should do that," for "Making kin must be done with respect for historically situated, diverse kinships that should not be either generalized or appropriated in the interest of a too-quick common humanity, multispecies collective, or similar category" (*Staying* 207). Inclusion and making kin is the chthonic way, but that does not mean that one has no choice as to one's community; it's not a "false universal kinship" (*Staying* 207). The MaddAddamites do not admit the Painballers to the group. They debate what to call the Painballers, but this debate over naming is more accurately viewed as a decision to admit or exclude them from the community: "Are they common prisoners? Or prisoners of

war? . . . How about soul-dead neurotrash? . . . Fellow human beings” (*MaddAddam* 367). They refuse to call them people: “‘Who cares what we call them,’ says Rhino. ‘So long as it’s not *people*’” (*MaddAddam* 367). Toby recognizes the futility and difficulty of categorizing the men because in the chthonic setting categories are not important: “Hard to choose a label, thinks Toby: three sessions in the once notorious Painball Arena have scraped all modifying labels away from them, bleached them of language” (*MaddAddam* 367). The basis on which they exclude the two Painballers turns not on who they are, or to what category they belong, but rather on what they have done: “They killed our brother . . . Rapists and murderers. . . They shot Jimmy” (*MaddAddam* 367). The real reason the MaddAddamites are seeking to exclude them from the community is based on the Painballers’ actions. Rhino’s refusal to call them people can be understood as a relic of an anthropocentric attitude. They are holding a vote in which hybrid pig-human creatures are also voting, and so the insistence that the Painballers do not meet standards of humanity is by this time in the story a moot point and their refusal to label them people is irrelevant.

Atwood’s new model for interspecies collaboration resists both the expected hierarchy of the cavalry trope and the patronizing responsibility model; both are revealed as forms of static ideology, which has no place in honest, dynamic engagement for Haraway. This new era proposed by Atwood is “neither sacred nor secular; this earthly worlding is thoroughly terran, muddled, and mortal – and at stake now” (*Staying* 55). It is withdrawn from or pre-ideology. In *Facing Gaia* Bruno Latour argues that seeking certainty, which I compare to ideology here, will ultimately not succeed regardless of the subject matter: “the failure of these projects – religious, scientific, technological,

revolutionary, economic, governmental, the adjective hardly matters – leads those disappointed in Gnosticism [for Latour, “assured knowledge” (203)] to scorn matter . . . for its inability to rise to the level anticipated by the Ideal” (209). This ideal, to which Latour refers, is unobtainable; existing in the muddle renders the search for certainty, sanctity, or any trending ideology obsolete.

In “The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” Lynn White Jr. argues that Western cultural attitudes, even wholly secular views, which devalue the physical body, the physical world, ecosystems, and all non-human life, can be attributed to the Judeo-Christian bible. White argues that Genesis, in particular, provides a basis for subjugation by teaching that man is in control, man names the animals, and man alone is in God’s image (*King James Bible*, Gen. 1.26-27). Latour, while explicitly discounting White’s interpretation, also finds religion and what he calls “counter-religion” to blame for much of the “remarkable indifference” to environmental degradation (185). Although Latour’s criticism of White is persuasive, White’s ideas, nevertheless, more than adequately inform a reading of the patronizing attitude of certain *MaddAddam* characters toward nonhuman animals. The God’s Gardeners in *MaddAddam* take the same biblical stories and interpret the creation story of Genesis as a call for stewardship of other animals. It is an entirely different, yet equally plausible model. The God’s Gardeners’ view posits humans as members of an ecosystem in which the smallest, most humble creatures are protected. Consider, for instance, this prayer:

Thank you, Oh lord, for creating the Cyanophyta, those lowly blue-green Algae so overlooked by many, for it is through them, so many millions of years ago—which timespan however is merely an eyeblink in Thy sight –

that our oxygen-rich atmosphere came to be, without which we could not breathe, nor indeed could the other land-dwelling Zooforms, so various, so beautiful, so new each time we are able to see them, and intuit Your Grace through them (MaddAddam 137)

The Gardeners also have days dedicated to lichen, algae, and even intestinal parasites. In an anthropocentric reading of this prayer, one could argue that this “responsibility” towards the other animals is merely the kinder, gentler face of humanism and anthropocentrism; after all the reason one is to be thankful for Cyanophyta is because the algae provide oxygen for human life. Wolfe draws an interesting distinction between “humanist posthumanism” and “posthumanist posthumanism” which hinges largely on the “internal disciplinarity,” or methods employed (123-24). As an example Wolfe explains, “most of us would probably agree that cruelty towards animals is a bad thing But . . . the philosophical and theoretical frameworks used by humanism to try to make good on those commitments reproduce the very kind of normative subjectivity – a specific concept of the human – that grounds discrimination against nonhuman animals . . . in the first place” (Wolfe xxix). In other words, responsibility for nonhuman animals, “lesser” by necessity in this sense, is always patronizing and the God’s Gardeners serve as a model of humanist posthumanism, albeit a benevolent version. They have turned their attention to improving the lives of “God’s small creatures” within their enclave, however they remain limited by their perspective.

Atwood likens and compares humans and nonhuman animals in several other important ways further upending the rigid hierarchy and ideology of anthropocentrism and situating humans as member species living in the Chthulucene. The humans in

MaddAddam have a conflicted view as to whether they should eat the Pigoons. Many of the human survivors were members of the God's Gardeners religious sect, which viewed eating animals as an abuse of power and God's creatures. It is understood that all animals share a genetic legacy, yet, by situating and describing the Pigoons as containing and sharing modern human DNA, Atwood explicitly reminds the reader of that fact. As Moore writes, "post-Darwinian science, which shows that all living creatures have a common ancestry, precludes a hard anthropocentric view" (B. Moore). When the details of that kinship are so blatant, it is more difficult to ignore. After the onset of the plague and the God's Gardeners are forced to abandon their lush, ample, productive rooftop farms, they are simultaneously confronted with hostile animals, such as the vicious wolvogs, and hunger; this served as a perfect recipe for "backsliding" on the "vegivows" they had taken. Ideology, which I posit as preventing chthonic engagement, proves a limitation and hindrance when new situations arise. Even as the Pigoons dig up the MaddAddamites fledgling gardens and threaten their lives, many of the survivors feel guilty about eating the pigs, specifically because of the interconnectedness between the Pigoons and humans. Eating the pigs, or "Frankenbacon, considering they're splices," feels strange; "They've got human neocortex tissue," says Manatee (*MaddAddam* 19).

Non-hybrid humans, in *MaddAddam*, find themselves on the menu as well, further upending traditional notions of superiority. The MaddAddamites are considered as food, both as meals for other animals and even other humans. Positioning people as food, as somewhere other than at the "top of the foodchain" reminds us that this "top" spot is a fiction. Throughout the second novel, *The Year of the Flood*, Jimmy spends his time ducking Pigoons he fears will eat him. They stalk him as he scavenges the Paradise

Dome for supplies and try to trick him into coming outside. This is before the pig-initiated truce, of course. Toby uses maggots to clean Jimmy's wound and, to the Crakers, it appears they are eating Jimmy: "Why do you put those little animals on Snowman-the-Jimmy? Are they eating him?" (*MaddAddam* 21). They are, of course, eating the rotten flesh – it is an old and effective remedy for treating an advanced infection and although it is reciprocal in that Jimmy benefits from the treatment, the maggots appear nonetheless to be "eating" Jimmy.

The issue of cannibalism arises several times. This dually suggests that humans are food, and that humans are like other cannibalistic animals, which eat for the base sake of sustenance rather than using discretion. In *The Year of the Flood*, SecretBurgers, a popular fast food restaurant in the pleeblands, serves meat containing ground human corpses to willfully blind consumers. The Painballers "liked the kidneys" of their victims (*MaddAddam* 9). After they kill Shackleton and eat his kidneys, the men leave him hanging from a tree. His brothers go back to retrieve him, but, "there wasn't much left of him – the crows had been assimilating him, and God knows what else" (*MaddAddam* 373). Zeb also eats part of Chuck, the would-be assassin who dies in the thopter crash in the northern Barrens. Zeb acknowledges, "this is gross," but there is "not much to eat up there in the Barrens," and so he, "took some of Chuck. Hacked it off with the pocketknife. Kind of sawed it" (*MaddAddam* 70). "Chuck" is also a kind of cheap steak so, while the cannibalism by Zeb was a surprise, Chuck's fate was predetermined; in literature, etymology is destiny.

Haraway writes that like humans, pigeons are incredibly (incredible to humans, that is) intelligent: "the capabilities of pigeons surprise and impress human beings, who

often forget how they themselves are rendered capable by and with both things and living beings” (*Staying* 16). That is a humbling and oft overlooked point. A member of a community lives beyond his or her personal means, because of information, cooperative economics, and technology shared over tens of thousands of years. As Atwood imagines a world in which people are trailmix and human-pig collaboration saves the human race from our crueler impulses, and as Haraway explores complex, real stories of interspecies companionship a common theme emerges: resist the expected story and traditional hierarchy of the Anthropocene.

CHAPTER TWO: SHATTERING THE GLASS PANE

Not-him was seeping into him through his defenses, through his edges, eating away at form, sending its rootlets into his head like reverse hairs. Soon he'd be overgrown, one with the moss. He needed to keep moving, preserve his outlines, define himself by his own shockwaves, the wake he left in the air. (*MaddAddam* 80)

Language is often touted as evidence that humans are intrinsically, and even ontologically different from other animals. We have declared language the “shibboleth,” for determining subjectivity, to use Cary Wolfe’s term (129). This rests on the belief that language is required for thought, a belief that Wolfe challenges in *What is Posthumanism?* Atwood’s conception and treatment of language as a “glass pane” between the self and others encourages an examination of the complex and evolving notion of human language as one medium of communication among many (*MaddAddam* 80). To consider possible forms of nonhuman language is a difficult conceptual problem and Atwood’s metaphor is sharp: glass is delicate, prone to break, shatter, crack, distort, refract, or reflect. One must, as Haraway writes, “question the tissues of one’s knowings and ways of knowing in order to respond to nonanthropocentric difference” (*Staying* 122). To live in the Chthulucene and survive in the world of *MaddAddam*, one must be attentive to other forms of communication and language, for “Terrapolis is a chimera of materials, languages, histories” (*Staying* 11). Language, especially as most humans

conceive of language, is not essential for thinking as Atwood demonstrates; understanding nonhuman communication is a matter of escaping the bounds of one's vocabulary and engaging the chimera.

In *MaddAddam*, Zeb serves as a chimeric figure. He is continually likened to a bear, once again softening the distinction between humans and animals, as discussed in Chapter One. He is gruff, burly, hairy, strong, gentle, dangerous, sulky, and hulking. Zeb works for a time at Bearlift, a dubiously helpful operation in which human garbage is airlifted north to feed starving polar and grizzly bears. After an accident, Zeb is stranded alone in bear country. Bear country is a strange place: "Some bring tales of alien abductions, some of talking foxes, some of human voices on the tundra at night. Or semi-human voices. Trying to lure them" (*MaddAddam* 81). In a fit of hunger, Zeb feels himself, or, perhaps more accurately, his consciousness slipping away. He loses his identity, yet maintains and experiences a sort of realization that beneath the words and constructed identity of the individual something remains.

He becomes an animal, a bear, and this is described not as a loss of consciousness, but as a loss both of self and of words. Zeb senses there is no longer a:

glass pane of language coming between him and non-him. . . . Was he hungry any more? Hard to tell. He could sense words rising from him, burning away in the sun. Soon he'd be wordless, and then would he still be able to think? No and yes, yes and no. (*MaddAddam* 80)

Is Atwood's pane of glass more accurately described as an impenetrable barrier or as a porous medium? There are certain traits that many have long heralded as superior and claimed as strictly "human." Language, thinking, rationality, temporality, empathy, and

tool use are hallmarks of human supremacy—according to humans, that is. The idea that use of language serves as a shibboleth for subjectivity and humanity would posit this glass as an impenetrable barrier. Traditionally non-human animals have been considered to be unthinking, non-sentient beings. It was once believed that animals had no language, no desire, no feeling and they were more like biological machines. As Wolfe describes:

[this] discourse takes its place in a long line of philosophers from Aristotle to Lacan, Kant, Heidegger, and Levinas, all of whom, as Derrida puts it, “say the same thing: the animal is without language. Or more precisely unable to respond, to respond with a response that could be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction.” (Wolfe 42)

This long and distinguished line of anthropocentric thought would posit an inability to “respond” as an indication that the pane of glass is an impenetrable barrier. In the anthropocentric model, without language or “response,” there can be no thought. Even substantially new ideas about consciousness and language are met with intransigent anthropocentric ideas. In *The Animal That Therefore I am*, Jacques Derrida writes that despite new ideas about language and communication, many still would deny animals language. Even expanding the conception of language from rigorous human standards to broader “communication” has seen little change. Derrida writes, “It is thought that the [animal] is capable only of a coded message or of a meaning that is narrowly indicative [*signalisante*], strictly constrained; one that is fixed in programming” (120).

Derrida is not satisfied with this lack of imagination. “And Say the Animal Responded?” he asks (Derrida 119). For Atwood, Haraway, and Wolfe that response is possible and the barrier, though not entirely porous, is at least transparent. One can never

quite get to the other side, but the other side is still visible. Rather than a screen or barrier, words and language are a medium between the self and everything else. As Zeb loses himself, “not-him,” meaning everything else, “was seeping into him through his defenses, through his edges, eating away at form” (*MaddAddam* 80). This dissipation of form described by Atwood indicates several things. It suggests both mutability and a corresponding lack of control over those changes. It also suggests vulnerability to outside influence, and even mortality. In the chthonic world individuals are not isolated, they are subject to change, exist in the muddle, and eventually end as compost.

When Zeb considers whether he will be able to think without words, he reaches two conclusions: yes and no. The dual answers, yes and no, neatly represent alternative views on the links between language and consciousness. However, in Zeb’s case they are not mutually exclusive. The coordinating conjunction is *and* not *or*. Atwood suggests that yes, he can think; no, he cannot think like a human. He becomes “wordless” but retains thought, albeit in another form. It is those alternate forms of thought and communication that Wolfe, Haraway, and Atwood find so compelling in discussions of the boundaries between human and nonhuman animals.

In *Contingency, Irony, and Soliarity* (1989) Richard Rorty argues that because of the “contingency of language,” there is no way for humans to “step outside the various vocabularies we have employed and find a metavocabulary which somehow takes account of all possible vocabularies, all possible ways of judging and feeling” (Rorty xvi). For humans, language is like the Midas touch, offering complex, beautiful communication among those with that language, but gilding is inescapable. Rorty may be right that one cannot take account of “all possible vocabularies” (Rorty xvi.) No such

Rosetta Stone exists as yet, but Haraway's discussion of sympoiesis, or "making-with" and her stories of interspecies communication seek just such a metavocabulary. Haraway is especially interested in examining nonhuman and interspecies communication. Her definition of communication is much more expansive than what one would generally imagine and manages to outpace Rorty's more conventional notion. Haraway has long sought to question the boundaries of human and nonhuman animals. In "The Cyborg Manifesto" she writes:

... the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. The last beachheads of uniqueness have been polluted if not turned into amusement parks. Language, tool use, social behavior, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal Movements for animal rights are not irrational denials of human uniqueness; they are a clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture. ("Cyborg Manifesto" 293)

Staying with the Trouble goes much further to explore radically different languages and mental events. For instance, chemical emission, hormonal levels, or even mere proximity can each constitute communication for Haraway (*Staying* 122). In a discussion of plants, Haraway notes, "plants are consummate communicators in a vast terran array of modalities, making and exchanging meanings among and between an astonishing galaxy of associates across the taxa of living beings" (*Staying* 122).

Wolfe is likewise curious about alternative models of thought. In *What is Posthumanism?*, he considers the experience of Temple Grandin, a woman with autism who has written extensively about the interior life of persons with autism. Before

Grandin's groundbreaking work, "it had been medical dogma for forty years or more that there *was* no 'inside,' no inner life, in the autistic, or that if there was it would be forever denied access or expression" (Oliver Sacks qtd. in Wolfe 129). Wolfe says this "dogma is founded in no small part on the too-rapid assimilation of the questions of subjectivity, consciousness, and cognition to the question of language ability" (129). Grandin's work describing the inner life of an autistic person renders this view obsolete. Grandin says she thinks entirely without language: "I actually think in pictures. During my *thinking* process I have no words in my head at all" (qtd. in Wolfe 130). She compares her thought process to that of other animals and says the similarities give her special insight into how animals may think.

Atwood suggests that Zeb goes beyond or outside human language when he becomes unable to speak. This is simultaneously a limiting and expansive event for Zeb's consciousness. Because human language is endlessly combinatorial, without that language Zeb has surely lost an ability to communicate; yet paradoxically, without the restraints of human language he expands his mental awareness. Temporarily omitting words from his thoughts widens his range of perspective by pushing Zeb beyond his human boundaries. Zeb wonders, "Was he hungry any more? Hard to tell" (*MaddAddam* 80). It is "hard to tell" because Zeb now lacks the vocabulary of human language once familiar to him. Atwood relies on other cues, like his actually eating the bear, to portray his physical state of hunger. Language, for Atwood, is not in the brain, but in the heart. During the experience of wordlessness, Zeb meets and kills a bear: "Having eaten the heart," he asks himself, "could he now speak the language of bears?" (*MaddAddam* 81). The bear's language is not cognitive, but rather visceral and emotional. It is wordless and

inhuman, but nonetheless a language that can be accounted for in the Chthulucene.

Human language, then, for Atwood, is situated as just one of any number of expressive systems, each of which possesses its own affordances.

Shattering the “glass pane” of language between the self and others is just a first step towards a larger expansion of identity for Zeb. This scene for Zeb is not a reincarnation, or a rebirth as in many stories of transformation, but a fusion; he embodies the chimera Haraway describes. The next day, “he’s got new footgear – wraps of hide, fur side in, tied with crisscross strips like a fashion item in a cave-man comic. He’s got a fur cape, he’s got a fur hat” (*MaddAddam* 81). This functions as a visual representation of that fusion. Tellingly, he has not lost language. He still sings and thinks and speaks. So he is like a human with bear qualities, or a bear with human language. He is a posthuman hybrid, or, in Haraway’s words, he has “made kin” with the bear.

Even before his transformation Zeb recognized the practical value and necessity of communicating in irregular ways. As a child he grew up speaking in code with his brother to avoid their suspicious, malicious father, the Rev. The brothers “avoided text messages, phone calls, or anything else with an electronic signal: the internet, as was well known, leaked like a prostate cancer patient, and the Rev was most likely snooping” (*MaddAddam* 121). Similarly when he asks Pilar to analyze his DNA to determine whether he and the Rev are actually related, the coded results are arranged as follows: “Peach pit for no: no relationship to the Rev. Date pit for yes: worse luck, the Rev is your dad, hear it and weep because you’re at least half psychopath” (*MaddAddam* 321). What Zeb finds is a “Peach. Two pits. She’d underlined it,” interpreting the meaning of an unexpected, additional peach pit (*MaddAddam* 322). Symbols can even change meaning

for Zeb. Regarding the God's Gardeners marriage ceremony, he once described it as an empty gesture. After Zeb suggests the ceremony with Toby she teases him: "I thought you said it was a meaningless empty symbol.' 'Even a meaningless empty symbol can mean something sometimes,' says Zeb" (*MaddAddam* 335).

Beyond codes and symbolism, Zeb is particularly adept at understanding unspoken language and he is able to easily intuit what others are thinking. After he crash lands in bear country he watches an ornodrone come to survey the crash site:

It went straight to the crash and made a couple of passes, transmitting visuals. Whoever was controlling it back at its base made a decision. It fired at the broken wing Then it blew up whatever was left of the 'thopter. It was as if Zeb could hear the voices: *Nobody left alive. You sure? Couldn't be. Both of them? Has to be. Anyway, made sure, scorched earth now.* (*MaddAddam* 75).

Again, when Zeb, dressed in bear skins, grabs a cyclist he says, "What will they say? He can imagine" (*MaddAddam* 82). This fluency with alternative, coded, and even unspoken language prepares him for communication with other species. He sings a song to communicate his presence, to "warn the pizzlies [polar-grizzly hybrids] so neither he nor they would be surprised" (*MaddAddam* 73).

Atwood shows that perceiving and understanding alternative forms of communication is not as intuitive for everyone. Toby initially fails to understand and is likewise not understood. Toby, "sits up and plants her feet squarely on the floor, a sign for the boy to leave. Though not a sign he understands" (*MaddAddam* 93). Toby resents the idea that "We'll have to learn smoke signals all over again, she thinks. One for he

loves me, two for he loves me not. Three for smouldering anger” (*MaddAddam* 153). The fact that the Crakers are communicating in some unknown way becomes apparent to Toby, but she is still doubtful. She is reluctant to admit that the Crakers are actually communicating with the animals: ““You sing to the animals? Says Toby. ‘They like music?’” this question seems to merely puzzle him. ‘Music?’ he says. ‘What is *music*?’” (*MaddAddam* 214).

Toby longs to communicate outside of human language, specifically with the dead. She wonders whether the dead, as Pilar had told her are, are still able to communicate: “if only such messages could be recognized and deciphered. People need such stories, Pilar said once, because however dark, a darkness with voices in it is better than a silent void” (*MaddAddam* 154). After an encounter with a mother Pigeon, Toby begins to change and understand that there is more to language than she initially realized, though she still is unclear about the meaning. She recognizes that there is a message, but it is only when she stops trying to translate it into human words that she understands. She tries to describe it: “What the sow communicated to her is still with her, though she couldn’t put it into words. It was more like a current. A current of water, a current of electricity. A long, subsonic wavelength. A brain chemistry mashup” (*MaddAddam* 262). Moreover Toby begins to see that being open to other forms of expression is necessary and that choosing the appropriate manner is a matter of survival: “In the open you look, because a predator will be seen before it’s heard. But among the trees you have to listen, because it will be heard before it’s seen” (*MaddAddam* 210). Once Toby realizes the Crakers and Pigeons have language, she begins to look and listen to the world and its animals in a new way wondering about bird language: “The crows are abroad, signaling

to one another. *Caw! Cawcaw! Caw!* What are they saying? *Look out! Look out!* Or maybe: *Party time soon!* Where there are wars, there will be crows, the carrion-fanciers” (*MaddAddam* 340). She speculates about the specifics of Pigeon language: “Odour radar, thinks Toby. What vibrations well beyond our blunted senses are they picking up? As falcons are to sight, these are to scent” (*MaddAddam* 346). Toby begins to realize the value of expression, whatever form that may take.

Likewise she begins to appreciate the ways that another language may be taught when she teaches a young Craker to write. She writes Blackbeard’s name on a sheet of paper, but he does not understand at first.

“This is how your name begins,” she says. “B. Like bees. It’s the same sound.” Why is she telling him this? What use will he ever have for it?

“That is not me,” says Blackbeard, frowning. “It is not bees either. It is only some marks.” (*MaddAddam* 203)

Only later does Blackbeard begin to grasp the possibilities of writing. For the Crakers, who communicate with song, scent, and telepathy, his adoption of a new form of communication symbolizes a chthonic willingness to engage with terran others on their terms. The Crakers are more mutable than Crake intended or believed.

Toby learns from the writing lesson as well. Toby’s experience with the alternative languages of the Pigeons and Crakers leads her to share this story of the creation of language:

The other egg [Oryx] laid was full of words. But that egg hatched first, before the one with the animals in it, and you ate up many of they words, because you were hungry; which is why you have words inside you. And

Crake thought that you had eaten all the words, so there were none left over for the animals, and that was why they could not speak. But he was wrong about that. Crake was not always right about everything.

Because when he was not looking, some of the words fell out of the egg onto the ground, and some fell into the water, and some blew away in the air. And none of the people saw them. But the animals and the birds and the fish did see them, and ate them up. They were a different kind of word, so it was sometimes hard for people to understand the animals. They had chewed the words up too small. (*MaddAddam* 290)

This beautiful new creation story is an example of the way that stories can illustrate a new model for living in the Chthulucene. While it was once believed that only humans have language, as Toby says, “Crake was not always right about everything” (*MaddAddam* 290). Atwood’s imaginative conception of language and its many alternative forms fulfills Haraway’s call for stories of the Chthulucene and multitudinous perspectives. As Haraway says, “We relate, know, think, and tell stories through and with other stories, worlds, knowledges, thinkings, yearnings. So do all the other critters of Terra, in all our bumptious diversity and category-breaking speciations and knottings” (*Staying* 97). This bumptious diversity of language and story baffles the mind. Language and consciousness and the interrelation therebetween is mysterious even in regards to humans. When it comes to other species on the other side of Atwood’s glass we do not even know the question to ask. Yet, Atwood does not shy away from these questions; she refuses to be bound by glass walls and is willing to speak the language of bears.

CHAPTER THREE: HIVE MINDS AND THE BEE QUEEN

There's the swarm, a large bee ball the size of a watermelon, hanging in the lower branches of a young sycamore. It's buzzing softly; the surface of the ball is rippling, like golden fur in a breeze. (*MaddAddam* 210)

After Pilar, the head beekeeper, dies, Toby takes over her responsibilities which include protecting the hive from inclement weather, keeping the peace, collecting honey, and bringing news to the bees each morning. That relationship, developed in the second novel, carries forward into *MaddAddam* in which Toby relocates a wild hive to the MaddAddamites' stronghold, the Cobb House. Bees in *MaddAddam* are said to carry messages "between the seen world and the unseen one" (153). Unlike humans, bees can see ultraviolet light and even polarized light, which allows them to navigate in the dark; the idea that bees navigate the unseen world is therefore true in this sense (Riddle).⁹ Moreover, when considered as a unit, a swarm of bees has an omnidirectional field of vision offering an expansive awareness of the physical environment. The bees act as an extension of vision and thought for Toby, the "Bee Queen," and this collaboration between Toby and the bees can be viewed as a model of Haraway's "tentacular thinking" (*Staying* 32). Toby, encircled by a swarm of bees, acts as a chthonic Medusa figure in the way she maintains evolving and even discordant perspectives, a requirement for thriving in the Chthulucene.

⁹ "Science fiction and science fact cohabit happily in this tale" as well (*Staying* 7).

In “Tentacular Thinking,” Haraway offers a revised version of the Medusa story, linking her to legends of other ancient figures such as Potnia Theron, Potnia Melissa, Lady of the Beasts, and the Mistress of the bees, “draped with all their buzzing-stinging-honeyed gifts” (*Staying* 52). According to Greek legend, Medusa’s beauty attracted the attention of Poseidon, who then raped her in Athena’s shrine. Jealous Athena cursed Medusa by transforming her hair into writhing snakes; she became a woman so ugly that anyone who looked directly into her face would be turned to stone. Most legends of Medusa, the only mortal among the three Gorgon sisters, cast her as the monstrous villain, slain by the conquering hero Perseus. However, like Atwood, Haraway is skeptical of this trope and offers a chthonic reading of the story which fundamentally alters the perception and role of Medusa.

By all accounts the Gorgons turned men who looked into their snake-ringed faces to stone. Haraway wonders, “what might have happened if those men had known how to politely greet the dreadful chthonic ones” and “if such manners can still be learned, if there is time to learn now, or if the stratigraphy of the rocks will only register the ends and end of a stony Anthropos” (*Staying* 54). Even the word Gorgon, is usually translated as “dreadful,” but Haraway speculates that translation is an “astralized, patriarchal hearing of much more awe-ful stories and enactments of generation, destruction, and tenacious, ongoing terran finitude” (*Staying* 53). Haraway’s chthonic “Medusa give[s] faciality a profound makeover, and that is a blow to modern humanist . . . figurations of the forward-looking, sky-gazing Anthropos” (*Staying* 53). The isolated, individuality of Anthropos is likewise challenged by Medusa’s chimeric nature. Moreover, assumptions of and desire for control over nonhuman animals are thwarted in her figure. The snakes

writhe not in accordance with Medusa's will, but each in its own direction (limited though it is); each snake twists and turns at its pleasure undermining assumptions of anthropocentric agency.

These tentacular images and critters figure prominently in Haraway's work. By "tentacular," as opposed to isolated and anthropocentric, Haraway means the:

cnidarians, spiders, fingery beings like humans and raccoons, squid, jellyfish, neural extravaganzas, fibrous entities, flagellated beings, myofibril braids, matted and felted microbial and fungal tangles, probing creepers, swelling roots, reaching and climbing tendrilled ones. . . .

Tentacularity is about life lived along lines – and such a wealth of lines – not at points, not in spheres. (*Staying* 32)

Haraway writes, "the tentacular are also nets and networks, IT critters, in and out of clouds" (*Staying* 32) and bees would certainly fall into what Haraway describes as the "tentacular." Multiple faces acting in imperfect unison, as in the case of Toby and the swarm of wild bees, or Medusa and her writhing snakes challenge assumptions of and undermine preferences for bounded individualism. This is a paradigm shift befitting Haraway's curiosity. She wants to know "what happens when human exceptionalism and bounded individualism, those old saws of Western philosophy and political economics, become unthinkable in the best sciences, whether natural or social" (*Staying* 30). There are questions but not necessarily answers.¹⁰

Atwood too questions the very idea of bounded individualism with her likening of Toby to Medusa. Orphaned in her late teens and left with nothing, Toby moves to the

¹⁰ Haraway trusts that the answers will come, so long as we think. "We must think!" she repeats (*Staying* 57).

pleeblands where, like Medusa, she is raped by her sadistic boss Blanco. There is no irrationally jealous woman in Atwood's story however. Rather, an older female co-worker rescues Toby and takes her into hiding with the God's Gardeners. There she studies medicinal herbs, psychoactive mushrooms, and bee keeping, a fitting vocation for a modern Mistress of the Bees. This Medusa figure, however, manages to exact revenge on her rapist. She does not turn Blanco to stone, but does kill him with poisonous mushrooms.

In a chthonic reading, one can view Toby as a Medusa figure, or the Lady of the Bees. She and the bees form a loose, wireless figure of kinship and tentacularity and Zeb calls her the "Bee Queen" (*MaddAddam* 212). Toby, when viewed alongside her bees, appears as a woman with a swarm of independent, yet linked insects in a cloud surrounding her. The bees "walk on her arms and face, their tiny feet touching as gently as eyelashes, as lightly as a cloud passing over" (*MaddAddam* 153). They "fly down and land on her face. They explore her skin, her nostrils, the corners of her eyes; it's as if a dozen tiny fingers are stroking her" (*MaddAddam* 211). Physically then, Toby becomes a chimera and resembles Medusa with teeming creatures joined to her person; each is composed of "more-than-human flesh" (*Staying* 52). Toby challenges both the idea of the isolated human, and, like Haraway's Medusa, gives "faciality a profound makeover" (*Staying* 53).

Much of Toby's strength lies in her ability to think from multiple and even competing perspectives at once, which I compare to the multi-headed Medusa's 360 degree vision. Toby's ability to see the world from multiple perspectives positions her as a fitting model of one who has made kin in the Chthulucene. Her brain jumps between

competing options, weighing and considering various outcomes. Toby is never satisfied with a single, simple perspective. From the beginning Toby claims to tell two stories: “The first story was the one she told out loud, to the Children of Crake . . . [t]he second, for herself alone” (*MaddAddam* 9).

Toby refuses to be committed to a singular perspective or way of life and instead maintains competing and even discordant beliefs and values. Despite having lived with the God’s Gardeners for many years, Toby never fully adopts their values and sees beyond the orthodoxy because, she admits, “part of her remains an outsider” (*MaddAddam* 210). As for God’s Gardener’s beliefs about bees, Toby is likewise torn:

The bees are messengers, Pilar used to say. They carry the news back and forth between the seen world and the unseen one. . . . Had she believed all that? . . . No, not really; or not exactly. . . . but it was a reassuring story: that the dead were not entirely dead but were alive in alive in a different way; a paler way admittedly, and somewhere darker” (*MaddAddam* 154).

Belief, disbelief, qualified belief, and willing suspension of disbelief all appear in one thought by Toby. It is a kaleidoscope of dynamic perspectives symbolized by the wild bees. Toby is likened to a hive, in which thousands of insects are individuals, yet also facets of one singular hive. Each works individually, and works in a group, and they all work as one. A hive “mind” consists of thousands of tiny individuals that amount to an expanded consciousness.

This expanded consciousness, however, does not imply certainty, unity, or any other peaceful Nirvana-like state. For Toby the expansion can be overwhelming, leading to indecision and discomfort. Toby feels “weird” talking to the bees and is initially

reluctant to participate in an activity she does not wholeheartedly support. Yet, she continues to bring news to the bees, “faithfully each morning” (*MaddAddam* 276). Later, even when she has “no excuse” for belief she continues to tell the bees the news. That ability to simultaneously believe and doubt, trust and mistrust, question yet perform faithfully, reflects a complex, multi-faceted way of thinking that favors an outcome over ideology.

Indeed the format of the trilogy itself echoes this idea. There are multiple narrators and the plotlines braid and diverge and intertwine like ropes, or snakes. These sister stories, each contextually true, demonstrate Toby’s flexibility and adaptability that Atwood’s novel, as a chthonic story, requires of characters. Sometimes Toby is the storyteller, other times the audience, other times, still, the subject of the story. She is a teacher and student; caretaker and patient; victim and killer and hero; eyewitness and judge and jury and executioner. Medusa can be viewed both in similarly conflicting terms. She is generally portrayed as a monster, yet even in standard versions she is a sleeping victim when Perseus sneaks into her home and murders her (Schwab 68).

In an Anthropocentric reading, Toby’s vacillation could seem like mere feeble indecision or wishy-washy waffling; human rationality would dictate a singular and logical perspective. However that firm, unchanging, ideological, heels-dug-in perspective ends in nothing but trench warfare. Latour is especially critical of certainties and blames the ecological crisis on the movement of society from one of tolerance (of religion and other ideas) to intolerance (187). Haraway says, “Latour is determined to avoid the idols of a ready-to-hand fix, such as the Laws of History, Modernity, the State, God, Progress, Reason, Decadence, Nature, Technology, or Science, as well as the debilitating disrespect

for difference and shared finitude inherent in those who already know the answers toward those who only need to learn them – by force, faith, or self-certain pedagogy” (Haraway 41). For Latour and Haraway, vacillation, indecision, uncertainty, and change are not weaknesses, but strengths.

Toby’s strength falters when she does unquestioningly adhere to the Gardeners’ ideological pacifism, and she regrets it. In the first chapter the Painballers escape and Toby blames herself for not killing them when she had the chance. This instance of dogmatic adherence to religious teaching allows the Painballers to go free and eventually kill several more people, and Toby bitterly regrets her decision. Looking back on the evening, she recognizes that she acted in alignment with an ideology and views her actions as a performance or rehearsal, rather than an authentic response: “Then she’d played the kindly godmother, ladling out the soup, dividing up the nutrients for all to share. She must have been mesmerized by the spectacle of her own nobility and kindness” (*MaddAddam* 11). Toby sees herself *playing a role*, serving as a *spectacle*, mesmerizing herself. As she recognizes herself both as actor and audience, she displays yet another perspective, that of an outside observer.

Toby does find ways to integrate her perspectives. Some of her most insightful moments come when she is able to reconcile a paradox with a new metaphor or newly expanded view. During her mushroom-aided vision quest she meets the long-dead Pilar in the form of a mother Pigoon. Initially Toby does not know how to interpret what happened, but she is eventually able to reconcile her doubts:

You know the Gardener way. I was communicating with my inner Pilar, which was externalized in visible form, connected with the help of a brain

chemistry facilitator to the wavelengths of the Universe; a universe in which – rightly understood – there are no coincidences. And just because a sensory impression may be said to be “caused” by an ingested mix of psychoactive substances does not mean it is an illusion. Doors are opened with keys, but does that mean that the things revealed when the doors are opened aren’t there? (*MaddAddam* 228-29)

Toby, aided by her swarm of bees, is able to see beyond the door what many cannot see.

Holding and believing conflicting, potentially discordant thoughts allows and, indeed, compels one to find creative ways to communicate and relate to the world and its varied, various beings. Haraway believes that Medusa, a misunderstood chimera, will “heighten our chances for dashing the twenty-first-century ships of the Heroes on a living coral reef instead of allowing them to suck the last drops of fossil flesh out of dead rock” (*Staying* 52). Toby’s ever-changing beliefs and willingness to fully consider other and others’ perspectives are what make her such a powerful actor in this chthonic story.

CONCLUSION

“Life, life, life, life, life, life. Full to bursting, this minute. Second. Millisecond.
Millennium. Eon.” (*MaddAddam* 223)

Haraway writes that, “At least one more . . . thread is crucial to the practice of thinking, which must be thinking-with: storytelling. It matters what thoughts think thoughts; it matters what stories tell stories (*Staying* 39). The story of *MaddAddam* is a verdant, vivacious story of life, language, and looking with new eyes. To stay with the trouble is to exist within an ongoing apocalypse, where chthonic collaboration, rather than thoughtless creed, will carry flora and fauna on this adventure into the future.

MaddAddam's interplay between human and nonhuman animals, on which this paper focuses, is interesting in both theoretical and practical ways. In a theoretical sense, Atwood's boundary-breaking relationships and entanglements offer rich material for questioning anthropocentric assumptions about living beings, and provide ideas for imagining Haraway's Chthulucene. If society is to tell Gaia stories, as Latour and Haraway suggest, then Atwood's *MaddAddam* is a story “full to bursting” with life and chthonic complexity (*MaddAddam* 223).

Haraway's call for storytelling and Latour's call for Gaia stories are not just calls for theoretical exercise, however. The practical and political implications, though they may seem secondary in this paper, are of utmost importance. Familiar character-critters, like pigs, bears, and bees, prod society in a direction where ethical implications of animal

treatment must be addressed. As Haraway says, “If there is to be multispecies ecojustice, which can also embrace diverse human people, it is high time that feminists exercise leadership in imagination, theory, and action to unravel the ties of both genealogy and kin, and kin and species” (*Staying* 102). The political implications of one’s choice of theory, in this case anthropocentric or chthonic, are compelling. Wolfe suggests:

pragmatic pursuits [such as laws protecting animals] are forced to work within the purview of a liberal humanism in philosophy, politics, and law that is bound by a historically and ideologically specific set of coordinates that, because of that very boundedness, allow one to achieve certain pragmatic gains in the short run, but at the price of a radical foreshortening of a more ambitious and more profound ethical project: a new and more inclusive form of ethical pluralism that it is our charge, now to frame.

(Wolfe 137)

Unbinding and relearning the dynamic place of humans in the world will allow for radical shifts in the treatment of animals. Ethical pluralism in a chthonic setting would take seriously Peter Singer’s call for equal consideration of other critters. “Terrapolis is for companion species, *cum panis*, with bread, at table together” (*Staying* 11), and living in the Chthulucene means inviting and making kin and oddkin alike.

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