

## **“A Whole New Take on Indigenous”: Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* as Wild Animal Story**

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Résumé de l'article

Margaret Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy has met with popular acclaim and generated considerable scholarly interest since the 2003 publication of its first volume, *Oryx and Crake*. The implicit critique of Western capitalism presented in Atwood’s dystopian vision of a post-democratic, post-national, and post-human future seems to offer a wide appeal, particularly at a time of sustained environmental crisis. Instead of evaluating the merits of Atwood’s critique, however, this paper examines the ways in which the speculative future of *Oryx and Crake* and the warnings it contains are delimited by a problematic Second World paradigm. More specifically, the novel can be read in terms of the wild animal story, a genre first established in late-nineteenth-century Canada that Atwood herself was instrumental in defining as such in her controversial 1972 study *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. In keeping with the conventions of the wild animal story, boundary crossings in Atwood’s novel engage in indigenizing fantasy. Despite its powerful warning of imminent disaster, *Oryx and Crake* nevertheless obscures ongoing colonializing acts by privileging a settler subject-position conceived as endangered by the forces of modernity.

# “A Whole New Take on Indigenous”: Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* as Wild Animal Story

LEE FREW

**O**RYX AND CRAKE, the first novel of Margaret Atwood’s dystopian MaddAddam trilogy, presents the social order of the relatively near future as suffering from the effects of environmental degradation and dehumanization caused by a rapacious, globalized capitalism. In the novel, what Greg Garrard describes as the “corrosive power of modernity” (239) has not been productively resisted because democratic protections have been supplanted by neoliberal, transnational corporations. This system of domination is overthrown, however, once a brilliant geneticist nicknamed Crake engineers and unleashes a virus to exterminate humanity. In salvaging what remains of the earth’s biosphere from flagrant abuses, Crake’s “supreme act of bio-terrorism” (Glover 56) aims to make way for the “Crakers” or “Children of Crake,” a transgenic, humanoid species that Crake has created as a replacement for humans. After “zero hour” has passed and most of the people on earth have been murdered, the novel’s central character, Jimmy/Snowman, leads the Crakers from their corporate compound to a “lethal transgenic-infested environment” (Garrard 238), in which numerous other genetically modified animal species reside. Although *Oryx and Crake* speculates in such a way on a post-national and post-natural future, the novel’s representation of human-animal interactions nevertheless resonates with a tradition of animal writing established first in Canada in the late nineteenth century. As I will elucidate in what follows, *Oryx and Crake* largely conforms to the conventions of the wild animal story, which Atwood was instrumental in identifying as a genre in her contentious 1972 study *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. As such, Atwood’s novel inevitably rehearses the expedient disavowal of Second World cultural nationalism: ongoing colonizing acts are obscured by the text’s privileging of a settler subject-position imagined as beset by the imperium of modernity.

### *Survival* and the Settler Subject

Published six months after James Polk's 1972 article "Lives of the Hunted," *Survival*, as John Sandlos observes, "borrows the victimhood and survival motifs" that Polk analyzes in the wild animal story "and applies them to a wide range of themes in Canadian literature" (74). Atwood's thesis, that "[t]he central symbol for Canada . . . is undoubtedly Survival, la Survivance" (*Survival* 41), quickly produced a number of detractors, and eventually the scholarly critique that it generated extended itself to a broader rejection of thematic criticism's "national-referential aesthetic" (Lecker 4). Looking back to this period in her introduction to the 2004 edition of *Survival*, Atwood characteristically quips, "Who would have suspected that this modest cultural artifact would have got so thoroughly up the noses of some of my elders and betters? If the book had sold the three thousand copies initially projected, nobody would have bothered their heads about it" (3). By Atwood's own estimation, *Survival* became "a runaway bestseller" only because of the "good timing" of its publication, when "Canada [was] showing a renewed interest in its own cultural doings" (3). Yet, despite such an assessment, or that scholars now tend to approach *Survival* through the lens of its critique (notably Frank Davey's seminal 1974 rebuke "Surviving the Paraphrase"), one might wonder why *Survival* continues to cast such a long shadow.

Part of its continuing influence seems to lie in the siren call of its cultural nationalism — for readers either seeking or rejecting the notion of a singular Canadian identity. The basis of Atwood's thesis is the belief that the experience of living in Canada is unifying in itself: "Bare Survival isn't a central theme by accident, and neither is the victim motif; the land *was* hard, and we have been (and are) an exploited colony; our literature is rooted in those facts" (41). The homogenizing big tent of colonial exploitation here should give "us" pause, however; as Alan Lawson observes, "The national is what replaces the indigenous and in doing so conceals its participation in colonization by nominating a new colonized subject — the colonizer or invader-settler" (160). Not only does this idea of Canada as the unified colonial victim of its imperial masters overlook the ways in which hegemonic discourses privilege some groups over others in Canada — particularly in terms of race, gender, and/or class, to say nothing of species — but it also elides the colonizing status of Canada as, in Lawson's terms, a "Second

World cultural space" (159).<sup>1</sup> The politics of national identity in English Canada, as a settler colony, has been "formulated as a strategy of resistance toward a dominant culture" (Lawson 159). Glenn Willmott further observes that, while constituting "a deep structure in the rhetoric of a certain Canadianicity," this strategy is "based upon *ressentiment*" (133).<sup>2</sup> From very early on in its national history, English Canada's sense of inferiority to Great Britain and the United States has been culturally evidenced by its "anxiety . . . to address its dependency upon and belatedness in relation to the metropolitan centre" (Coleman 22-23). As the potential causes of this dependency and belatedness, Canada's harsh climate, agrarian economy, and remoteness — "the land *was* hard" — were refigured by an antimodern *ressentiment* to become the very aspects that define Canada's distinct goodness relative to the "overcivilization" of its more socially "advanced" metropolises.<sup>3</sup>

The curious disregard for even the most obvious of social differences among Canadians in *Survival* in my view results from an "identity politics [that] asserts the uniqueness and the homogeneity of the group in the hope that its undivided (if specious) unity will empower it against the apparent seamlessness of the hegemonic discourse" (Lawson 160). *Survival*, then, is perceptive in detecting a thematic *ressentiment* in Canadian writing — that is, the self-serving assumption that "the rigours of life in a stern, unaccommodating climate demand strength of body, character and mind while . . . [they] winnow away laziness, overindulgence, and false social niceties" (Coleman 24). What *Survival* is unaware of, however, is its own participation in the fantasy generated by this *ressentiment*: that Canadianness results from surviving the twin antagonisms of the local and the foreign, "the environment or the Empire" (Mackey 49). Indeed, Atwood's 2004 edition of *Survival* continues to leave us at the impasse of antimodern *ressentiment* by updating her original allegation that "the Americans are taking over" (41) with a warning to Canadians of "increased U.S. domination brought about by the 1989 Free Trade Agreement" (9).

Nonetheless, if we even tentatively accept Atwood's themes of survival and victimhood as part of "a persistent cultural obsession" (8) — her significant 2004 rephrasing of her "sweeping generalization . . . that every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core" (40) — then it is possible to view the pattern of textual representation that *Survival* isolates as indicative of a prevalent narrative

strategy to resolve a fundamental contradiction of Canadian experience. As part of the Second World, one of a number of “liminal sites at the point of negotiation between the contending authorities of Empire and Native” (Lawson 155), Canada is both “colonizing and colonized” (156). As such, not all colonial subjects are interpellated in the same way, so what Lawson identifies as the settler subject enjoys the greatest privilege in Canadian society, as “the very type of nonunified subject and the very distillation of colonial power, the place where the operations of colonial power as negotiation are most intensely visible” (155).<sup>4</sup> Yet, suspended as it is “between ‘mother’ and ‘other’” (155), this subject-position is faced with “always two kinds of authority and always two kinds of authenticity that the settler subject is con/signed to desire and disavow” (156). While on the one side there is the authenticity and authority of the imperial enterprise that the settler subject represents and is separated from, on the other there is the authenticity and authority of the indigene, who — along with the land — is an object of the settler subject’s desire (156).

Settler cultures have attempted to textualize a resolution to this contradictory position by recourse to romantic fantasy, which Lawson distinguishes as “a long series of narratives of psychic encounter and indigenization” (156).<sup>5</sup> For the settler subject, the “task is to go native, not to become gone native” (Goldie 215). As Lawson further explains, “The need, then, is to displace the other rather than replace him; but the other must remain to signify the boundary of the self, to confirm the subjectivity of the invader-settler” (157). This interminable process of “becoming indigenous” (Goldie 13), however, implies a similarly continuous abnegation of any attribute considered foreign to the settler culture, including those of “the atavistic inhabitant of the cultural homeland whom [the settler subject] is also reduced to mimicking” (Lawson 158). As I have proposed elsewhere (see Frew), the word *exogeneity* can be used to describe those subjective qualities of foreign otherness that settler societies invoke for the purposes of self-definition. The derivations *exogene* and *exogenous* would thus apply to any subjectivity viewed as beginning outside the political boundaries of a given settler society, whether internal or external to a given nation-state.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the authority and authenticity of that settler culture rely on indigenization as a concomitant process of de-exogenization to apportion for itself a moral superiority to its claim on the land. When not effaced outright as absent, the indigenous — the indigene, the wild animal,

the landscape — is survived by the settler subject in terms of hostile or romantic encounter. Correspondingly, when not dismissed outright as barbaric, the exogenous — the migrant, the cosmopolitan, the imperium — is victimizing and enviable in terms of antimodern *ressentiment*.<sup>7</sup> The concept of exogeneity is therefore as critical as that of indigeneity in discussions of Canadian settler subjectivity because “cultural difference and pluralism may be highlighted to distinguish from *external* ‘others’ . . . [and] managed *internally* so as to reproduce the structuring of differences around a dominant culture” (Mackey 28-29).

When textualized as indigenization narratives, the “anxiety of proximity” between the settler and the indigene (Lawson 157) thus extends to the exogene as well. Although the settler subject “acquires Indian” without becoming one (Goldie 215), these narratives are also concerned with policing the borders of settler subjectivity by precluding the exogene from indigenization. In the wild animal story specifically, this triangulated schema is traditionally mediated by human-animal interactions predicated on a character’s proficiency in woodcraft, a discipline that the exogene is invariably shown as being incapable of mastering. A complex form of specialized knowledge, the word *woodcraft*, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “(chiefly *N. Amer.*, *Austral.*, etc.) applie[s] esp. to such knowledge of forest conditions as enables one to maintain oneself or make one’s way” (“woodcraft”). More specifically, woodcraft includes the survival skills necessary to live in the wilderness, such as camping, hunting, and fishing, but it also includes the ability to identify plants and animals, an understanding of animal behaviours, and training in wilderness first aid.<sup>8</sup> Representing what Roberts would call a “part of the wisdom of the ages,” this skill set bestows on its possessor in the wild animal story a naturalized feeling of belonging in the untamed landscape without requiring a “return to barbarism” (29). The exogene, however, lacks the settler subject’s woodcraft because of some atavistic flaw, most commonly either an inherent unintelligence or an overcivilized unfeeling.<sup>9</sup> Woodcraft as learning “the ways of the land” thus reinforces differentiation among colonial subjects in Second World cultural spaces as a strategy of settler indigenization.

### The Wild Animal Story and *Oryx and Crake*

The third chapter of *Survival* is devoted to “Animal Victims,” and here Atwood describes the “‘realistic’ animal story, as invented by Ernest Thompson Seton and Sir Charles G.D. Roberts” in the late nineteenth century, as a “*genre* which provides a key to an important facet of the Canadian psyche” (87). She then goes on to refute Alec Lucas’s view in *A Literary History of Canada* that the wild animal story had “long passed” since its “heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (qtd. 90). She cites Fred Bodsworth’s *Last of the Curlews* and Farley Mowat’s *Never Cry Wolf* as contemporary examples of the genre:

The difference between the earlier Seton and Roberts stories and the later . . . ones is that in the former it is the individual only who dies; the species remains. But *The Last of the Curlews* [sic] is, as its name implies, the story of the death of a species, and Mowat indicates that not just the wolves but also the caribou and with them the whole Arctic ecological balance is threatened by the white man’s short-sighted and destructive policies. Man is again the villain, but on a much larger scale. (91)

Atwood’s sense of the intensification of environmental threat in the development of the genre holds true, and it is later echoed in Graeme Gibson’s afterword to the 1991 New Canadian Library edition of *Last of the Curlews*. As Gibson observes, “It is a commonplace that we live in an ‘Age of Extinctions’ — with technical man as The Exterminator. It therefore seems both appropriate and necessary that the individual tragedies found in earlier animal stories . . . be now ‘upgraded’ to the death of a species” (131). *Oryx and Crake*, set after the death of nature, the end of national sovereignty, and the near-total extermination of humans, can thus be understood as one possible “upgrade” in this teleology of escalating endangerment. Its futuristic setting, however, remains firmly grounded in the present. As Noah Richler writes, “The entire litany of disasters in *Oryx and Crake* is already familiar to us: man-made viruses, cryogenics, genetically manipulated foods and animals, and climate change. We have sown the seeds of these processes already.” For Atwood, writing speculative fiction means that “[y]ou have to be able to back everything up with facts” (qtd. in Richler). In part because she limited herself to writing about technologies that have already been developed — she kept a “big, brown box in the cellar” to file away such

information (qtd. in Richler) — *Oryx and Crake*, regrettably since it is dystopian, is a realistic wild animal story.

Once Atwood establishes in "Animal Victims" that the genre continues past the early twentieth century, she sketches a number of its conventions. The features that she outlines, however, tend to reflect her overarching nationalist concerns rather than provide an accurate description of the wild animal story. As Sandlos remarks, Atwood, to support her larger argument, discusses the genre largely in terms of "Polk's thesis of the American hunter and the Canadian victim" (74), a position that allegorizes endangered and dying animals in these stories as Canadians who feel "threatened and nearly-extinct as a nation" (Atwood, *Survival* 95). Yet a more thorough survey of the large corpora of Seton and Roberts reveals that they are neither "almost invariably failure stories" (88) nor necessarily "*told from the point of view of the animal*" (88-89; emphasis in original), nor do they, even in their decidedly post-Darwinian context, "present animals as victims" (90). Although the wild animals in these stories are unequivocally anthropomorphic — Atwood rightly notes that "'realism' in connection with animal stories must always be a somewhat false claim" (74) — this anthropomorphism does not necessarily mean that they *directly* represent the human. Misao Dean, for instance, takes a more nuanced approach in her more recent study of Roberts's stories, arguing that the representation of these animals is "*inflected* with assumptions about human personality and masculinity as norm" (1; emphasis added). Her argument can readily be extended to the genre as a whole, in which wild animals function as "(m)animals, reproductions of the ideological subject offered to turn-of-the-century readers of realist fiction" (5). Although she observes that they "masquerade as 'other'" (5), these wild animal representations, as her neologism suggests, retain some degree of signification for animality. Indeed, conflating these wild animals with humans into a single metaphor does not adequately account for the indigenizing function of the wild animal story.

In this genre, the wild animal must represent a radical alterity to convey that nature, as an antimodern space open exclusively to the settler subject, cannot be colonized by exogenous forces. As with the indigene, the indigeneity of the wild animal "must be approached but never touched," since the settler "is to displace the other rather than replace him" (Lawson 157). To achieve such an end, the discursive strat-

egy of the wild animal story has traditionally been to valorize woodcraft discourse while insisting on a Darwinian kinship between humans and animals. Once again wild animals are then able, like the indigene, to “demonstrate a potential bridge to the freedom of the non-man in nature” (Goldie 25). Although I agree with Sandlos’s argument that “the stories are about human relationships to animals, about how observed animal behavior . . . positions them in relation to ‘us’ within a larger ecological and philosophical framework” (75), I would hasten to add that this framework itself is mediated by “our” Second World history in North America. Indeed, it is precisely because they are indigenization narratives that “It is upon this boundary between human and animal, instinct and reason, biological fact and creative myth that the animal stories of Seton and Roberts sit, along with much of the subsequent Canadian animal literature that has appeared in the last century” (Sandlos 75-76).

Brian Johnson takes a similar position in his discussion of “the strategic blurring of the species boundary” in Mowat’s *Never Cry Wolf* (337). Explaining that the wild animal story is “an important site for the exploration of ecological themes and the popularization of conservationist ideals” (334), he observes that, to pursue their conservation goals, practitioners of the wild animal story such as Seton, Roberts, Grey Owl, Mowat, and Bodsworth regularly contested the species boundary to insist on “a fundamental kinship between animal and human subjects” (335). As with *Oryx and Crake*, the transgression of this boundary in *Never Cry Wolf* works as a conservation strategy while at the same time “overlap[ping] with and reinforc[ing] cultural metanarratives of romantic nationalism and indigenization, creating a veiled ‘postcolonial’ allegory” (337). Whereas Johnson ultimately argues that “*Never Cry Wolf* demonstrates the way in which the violation of species boundaries in conservationist discourse” provides for an animal “indigeneity that cannot answer back and contest the desires of settler-invader nationalism” (350), *Oryx and Crake* takes a different tack by initially depicting a nightmarish future in which indigenization is impossible because this animal indigeneity has been overrun by modernity. That is, the rustic bridge that once imaginatively connected the settler subject to an imaginary freedom of nature has been paved over in Atwood’s novel by an oppressive, exogenous modernity.

However, once zero hour has come to pass, *Oryx and Crake* pre-

sents the obverse of what Johnson reads as the conservationist rhetorical strategy at the end of *Never Cry Wolf*. Rather than concluding with Mowat's "reassertion of the species boundary through the rhetoric of self-exclusion" (349) to deny the reader "a virtual or utopian possibility" of indigenization and "interspecies harmony" (348), Atwood's novel leaves this boundary wrenched open so that transgenic species can repopulate a recreated wilderness as the nominations of new forms of indigeneity. That is, the SF future of *Oryx and Crake* enables a fantasy of indigenization in which both the colonial need to survive nature resurfaces and the lost objects of primitive wilderness are resurrected after the fall of modernity. Crake's Paradise Project in effect successfully initiates the rebirth of the Second World, in which the settler subject's proximity to indigeneity can be imagined as playing out in the morally improving context of rigorous pioneer life: surviving a hostile indigenous environment as the victim of exogenous forces.

Before zero hour can resurrect settler identity politics in this way, however, the novel presents nature as having become entirely subjugated by modernity or what Philip Armstrong describes as "a world in ruins as the legacy of the modern constitution" (173). For instance, the effects of anthropogenic climate change are total: "the coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes" (Atwood, *Oryx* 24). As part of its warning of a dystopian future, the novel also reveals that many wild animals — a "long, long list" — have become extinct (344). However, such a representation of "the projected extinction of animal species," as Johnson observes of Mowat, "when read in [its] national-postcolonial context" (339), also evokes the "'performative' discourse of proleptic elegy" (338), a paradigmatic feature of indigenization narratives by which the loss of indigenous objects might be lamented as the outcome of fate rather than colonization. Although traditionally this discourse has been employed to sanctify "indigenous effacement and appropriation" (338) as the natural results of competition between civilization and savagery, in *Oryx and Crake* it is used to effect the text's dire warnings. The first warning, of course, concerns the future of wildlife — recall here Richler describing the novel's bleak future as "already familiar to us" because "[w]e have sown the seeds of these processes already." What might be less familiar, however, and

therefore might lead to even greater disquiet, is the novel's more abstract second warning: the settler subject-position will be lost in the future to modernity. Not only is this a world in which mass extinction can be commodified as an online computer game, but it is also one in which Crake and Jimmy can be so entertained by playing it. Their lack of humane concern for the environment is emphasized by the narrator's ironic description of "Extinctathon" as "an interactive biofreak masterlore game," which has its competitors challenge each other to name "some bioform that had kakked out within the past fifty years" (80). "It helped," the narrator also informs us, for Crake and Jimmy to consult a list maintained by the Extinctathon website of every extinct species, even though it is "a couple of hundred pages of fine print and filled with obscure bugs, weeds, and frogs nobody had ever heard of" (81). In the absence of nature, the novel's main characters are precluded from the process of settler indigenization because they embody the overcivilized unfeeling of the exogene.

In addition to the various environmental factors that have led to the widespread annihilation of wild animals, *Oryx and Crake* heightens the urgency of its ecological warning with its ingenious violations of the species boundary. As Jayne Glover observes, "It is the confusion of boundaries which is partly what allows Crake to assume that the natural world — including its human inhabitants — is part of an enormous laboratory which he has the right to control" (53). As a member of an elite corporate scientist class living within the protected compounds, Crake displays a lack of ethical consideration of "instrumentalist meddling with nature" that is problematized by the financial gains that motivate his class's scientific research (53). Intended to generate corporate profits, the numerous transgenic species created by Crake and his fellow genetic engineers are in effect self-reproducing environmental pollutants replacing rather than simply displacing nature. Transgenic plants threaten to "spread, make inroads, choke out the native plants" (228), and the proliferation of transgenic animals, whose unimaginative names belie their monstrousness, have made "[t]he whole world now," as the narrator remarks, "one vast uncontrolled experiment . . . and the doctrine of unintended consequences is in full spate" (228). Because the corporations that have created them do not value language, which the growth of their high-technology industries has long been outpacing, they use simplistic neologisms — such as rakunks (raccoon-skunk hybrids), wolvogs (wolf-dogs), spoat/

giders (spider-goats), snats (snake-rats), and bobkittens (bobcat-cats) — in a sad parody of Genesis.

Perhaps the most immediately threatening boundary crossing in the novel involves the pigeons that Jimmy's father helps to create as a genetic engineer at the OrganInc Farms Compound. These animals, formally *sus multiorganifer*, have been designed "to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host — organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses, of which there were more strains every year" (22). The narrator continues, "now they were perfecting a pigeon that could grow five or six kidneys at a time. Such a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then, rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs" (22-23). The text initially casts aspersions on the human-animal kinship of transgenic species by employing the trope of cannibalism: despite the official claim of OrganInc Farms that "none of the defunct pigeons ended up as bacon and sausages [because] no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own" (23-24), the workers at the compound cannot help but notice "how often back bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies turned up on the staff café menu" (24). When Jimmy's father then announces the success of his "neuro-regeneration project," in which his team has "genuine human neo-cortex tissue growing in a pigeon" (56), Jimmy's mother protests and leaves him and Jimmy to enter the political underground. She responds to her husband's professional enthusiasm by stating derisively, "That's all we need. . . . More people with the brains of pigs. Don't we have enough of those already?" (56). Her objection to his work purposely confuses the direction of its boundary crossing and by doing so references *The Odyssey*, in which the sorceress Circe transforms the men accompanying Odysseus into pigs. Far from seeing his father's work as an important contribution to the common good, Jimmy's mother fittingly likens it to black magic: "What you're doing — this pig brain thing. You're interfering with the building blocks of life. It's immoral. It's . . . sacrilegious" (57; ellipsis in the original).

At the least, the pigeons represent a considerable danger to Snowman after Crake's virus wipes out the human population, and the text raises the spectre of cannibalism again to reiterate the threat that exogenous modernity presents to the settler subject-position: "Those beasts are

clever enough to fake a retreat, then lurk around the next corner. They'd bowl him over, trample him, rip him open, munch up his organs first. He knows their tastes. A brainy and omnivorous animal, the pigeon. Some of them may even have human neocortex tissue growing in their crafty, wicked heads" (Atwood, *Oryx* 235). Their craftiness, wickedness, and penchant for cannibalism, while all aspects of the pigeons' alterity, are nevertheless characteristics that can be traced back to the labs and lunchrooms of Jimmy's father and his team at OrganInc Farms. Moreover, such monstrous hybridity presents the opposite of the ideal of indigenized settler subjectivity: degenerated atavistically into the body of an animal, this "human neocortex tissue" is also exogenized by both the pigeon's status as a commodity and the Old World origins of "the pig host" itself.

Because transgenic techno-science is presented as monstrous in *Oryx and Crake*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is often read as one of its intertexts. For instance, Glover characterizes Atwood's novel as "a postmodern remaking of the Frankenstein story" (52), and Mark McCutcheon observes that "Atwood's plot . . . adapts both *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, Shelley's 1826 novel about the world of 2097" (217). In a similar vein, Giuseppina Botta contends that "Crake embodies the Faustian myth, the representation of an insatiable desire both for knowledge and for possession" (249). In each of these intertexts, the nature of that knowledge — as dangerous, hyper-modern, and exogenous — gestures to the dystopian aspect of *Oryx and Crake* most pertinent to settler subjectivity: in the absence of the indigenizing *Bildung* of nature in an SF future, the settler subject remains into adulthood the exogene of a globalized social order. That Crake wishes to use the same techno-scientific knowledge of a corrupt system to bring it down thus positions him, in antimodern terms, as heroic. He is hopelessly flawed as an exogene, and his actions lead to his death and the downfall of his social order, all of which is replaced by another of reduced scale.

Perhaps to assert that he is a villain outright for committing mass murder, many critics limit themselves to "read[ing] Crake through the 'mad scientist' archetype" (Spiegel 120). Such a view is too limited, however, since, in spite of his emotional detachment, his actions are not only deliberate but also rationally motivated by revenge.<sup>10</sup> When Jimmy visits Crake at the Watson-Crick Institute, Crake tells him that his father was murdered by the compound for which he had worked: "He

was going to do some whistle-blowing," Crake says, because HelthWyzer for years had been creating new diseases and spreading them in its vitamin pills (212). "That's how come they pushed him off a bridge," Crake calmly tells Jimmy (211). Since neither of these secrets has ever been exposed, Crake reasonably adapts the same model of distribution for his own virus and the same method of disposal for the scientists whom he sequesters who refuse to cooperate with his plan. Indeed, as Hannes Bergthaller also observes, "it is quite clear that Crake, underneath his veneer of cynical aloofness, nourishes a deep disgust of the world he grows up in, and that he is motivated not by greed but by a genuine desire to change it" (735). His awareness of the risks involved in his seditious plan is evidenced by the name that he gives to his Paradise Project at the RejoovenEsense Compound in which he works. Although the complex that houses the Crakers might be "a living space which reminds one of the Bible's Earthly Paradise, full of all kinds of vegetation, and his inhabitants really recall Adam and Eve" (Botta 251), Paradise also clearly puns on "pair of dice." The wordplay here indicates that Crake has clearly understood that his whole project is a dangerous gamble.

Of course, his plan to replace humanity with the Crakers goes well beyond his desire to bring down the system. After all, a far less extreme act of bioterrorism could be devastating enough for the globalized modernity of the novel, presented as already both transient and precarious. As Crake himself claims, if "civilization as we know it gets destroyed," then, "[o]nce it's flattened, it could never be rebuilt" (223). He explains to Jimmy that this is "[b]ecause all the available surface metals have already been mined" and that even with the "metals farther down . . . the advanced technology we need for extracting those would have been obliterated" (223). "It's not like the wheel," he adds, "it's too complex now. Suppose the instructions survived, suppose there were any people left with the knowledge to read them. Those people would be few and far between, and they wouldn't have the tools" (223). It is telling that the novel informs the reader of all this without explicating why Crake thinks it necessary to take the extra step of replacing humanity once he has already wiped it out. His unexplained desire to create a new species of hominid is in fact the novel's priority: to resurrect the settler subject-position in a recreated Second World populated by individuals who can claim a superior connection to it.

Snowman's position as caretaker of the Crakers is unenviable

not only because he has not chosen it for himself but also because, as Bergthaller notes, the Crakers “are far better adapted to this new world than Snowman, who is painfully aware of his own atavism” (734). Genetically comprised of a “variety of features from the animal kingdom” (Glover 55), the Crakers can be read as examples of Donna Haraway’s liberatory image of the cyborg and “initially do seem to be a practical path to a utopian world based on some kind of ecological ethic” (Glover 54). Ostensibly, the utopian aspect of the Crakers is that they cannot modernize since biologically they lack the complexities of the “ancient primate brain,” described by the narrator as its “destructive features, the features responsible for the world’s current illnesses” (305). Designed to live in harmony with their environment and one another, they are vegans who do not require territory to hunt or farm, “lack the neural complexes” that would create social hierarchies (305), and are “programmed to drop dead at age thirty” (303). Additionally, they embody animal traits resulting from numerous gene splices, which give them a competitive advantage over humans: they have luminescent green eyes, they purr to heal wounds, they produce caecotrophs to digest cellulose, they reproduce only when the women are in estrus, and the men mark their territory twice daily with chemically enhanced urine to deter predators. Although they might thus reflect “many of the principles familiar to us through ecological philosophy” (Glover 59), the Crakers as such also appeal — and herein lies their underlying utopian aspect — to indigenizing fantasies of incorruptible, primeval indigeneity. By standing in as post-human indigenes, the Crakers serve as the noble savages from whom Snowman might continuously attempt to “acquir[e] Indian” (Goldie 215). In the section titled “Remnant,” the narrator explains why he changes his name to Snowman: “He needed to forget the past — the distant past, the immediate past, the past in any form. He needed to exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation. As the Crakers did. Perhaps a different name would do that for him” (348-49). That is, the fall of modernity has rendered Jimmy — the selfish, weak-willed, and irresponsible cad — obsolete, and Snowman sees the Crakers as something to emulate or become, all while attempting to shield them from exogenous threats.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, the name that he chooses for himself, shortened from Abominable Snowman, also suggests his exogenous status. The narrator explains the name’s allure for him: “The Abominable Snowman —

existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumours and through its backward-pointing footprints" (7-8). As defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *abominable* is derived from "*ab homine* away from man, inhuman" ("abominable"), so Snowman's choice of name represents both his liminality as potentially the lone human survivor of the pandemic and his atavistic unbelonging relative to the Crakers. "On some non-conscious level," the narrator later informs us, "Snowman must serve as a reminder to these people, and not a pleasant one: he's what they may have been once. *I'm your past*, he might intone. *I'm your ancestor, come from the land of the dead. Now I'm lost, I can't get back, I'm stranded here, I'm all alone. Let me in!*" (106). His potential to occupy the settler subject-position in Crake's new world, however, is ultimately left unrealized within the dystopian context of the novel's conservationist appeal. From the outset of the novel, it is clear that Snowman lacks the knowledge needed to survive outside a built environment, and it seems he also lacks the wherewithal to develop his woodcraft in the field. Instead, he spends his time getting drunk while pining for the dead Oryx, uncomfortably sleeping in a tree to escape hybrid animal predators, and slowly starving to death in spite of his reliance on a weekly offering of fish from the Crakers. Simply put, Snowman's previous life as Jimmy has not prepared him for roughing it in the bush. Not only is he permanently alienated from the Crakers, but he also cannot stop identifying with the old world. Because his experience of being exiled from humanity remains so painful, he crucially "ke[eps] the *abominable* to himself, his own secret hair shirt" (8).<sup>12</sup>

Snowman's status as an exogene is further emphasized by the ontological loss he experiences while trying to frame his interactions with the Crakers. He considers his relation to them as a colonial one, continuing a line of thinking from the start of the novel in which he imagines the recommendations made in "a book, some obsolete, ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations of one kind or another" (4). Later, having led the Crakers safely from the RejoovenEsense Compound to the seashore as per Crake's request, Snowman copes with his frustration by turning once again to colonial discourse. The narrator states,

*When dealing with indigenous peoples*, says the book in his head — a more modern book this time, late twentieth century, the voice a

confident female's — *you must attempt to respect their traditions and confine your explanations to simple concepts that can be understood within the contexts of their belief systems*. Some earnest aid worker in a khaki jungle outfit, with netting under the arms and a hundred pockets. Condescending self-righteous cow, thinks she's got all the answers. He'd known girls like that at college. If she were here she'd need a whole new take on *indigenous*. (97)

His misogyny aside, Snowman makes the pertinent observation that the collapse of humanity and the introduction of the Crakers have altered previous conceptions and relations of identity. It is telling, however, that, because these upheavals are framed in colonial terms, zero hour has permitted Snowman a return to the Second World, however brief his stay might be. Like Crake, Snowman is hopelessly exogenous, and the impossibility of his continued belonging is foreshadowed by the incongruity of his name in the crushing heat of the Anthropocene.

In its bid to warn the reader of a looming dark age ahead, *Oryx and Crake* participates in the linked romantic fantasies of indigenization and *ressentiment* to valorize the settler subject-position. Until Crake is able to overthrow his dystopian social order, settler indigenization has been rendered impossible by the demise of nature at the hands of globalized capitalism. In eradicating most of the world's human population with a virus that he engineers, Crake is able to recreate a wilderness to repopulate with a transgenic humanoid species of his own making. The claim to this wilderness of these post-human indigenes exceeds that of the humans who survive Crake's pandemic because they have been designed to live in this inhospitable environment. The representational economy made possible by Crake's Paradise Project signals a propitious resurrection of the Second World in *Oryx and Crake*, and, despite the open possibilities of an SF future, indicates the limits of our colonial episteme. As such, the novel conforms to the conventions and discursive strategies of the wild animal story, a genre that Atwood was pivotal in first defining in the 1970s. The contradiction presented by Second World cultural spaces as both colonizing and colonized prompts such writing, which imaginatively resolves the settler subject's "dilemma of anxious unbelonging" (Johnson 338) and attempts to mitigate his or her culpability in ongoing historical injustices.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rather than referring to the former Eastern Bloc countries, Lawson's notion of the Second World corresponds to "more or less that part of colonial space occupied by the postimperial, so-called settler colonies" (152). Lawson further notes that his "suggestion is to recognize the Second World of the settler as a place caught between two First Worlds, two origins of authority and authenticity: the originating world of Europe, the imperium, as source of the Second World's principal cultural authority; and that other First World, that of the First Nations, whose authority the settlers not only effaced and replaced but also desired" (158).

<sup>2</sup> In his discussion of how this Nietzschean concept relates to Canadian national identity, Willmott provides a particularly clear definition of *ressentiment* as an "ideological condition" in which "the group identity of the weak as constituted by an 'imaginary revenge' against the strong, which heroizes its own victimization and prophetically envisions a metaphysical justice beyond or above history, in which the moral superiority that has been alienated from power is vindicated. It is a group identity based upon negation of an opposing identity rather than the positive creation of a new one. To cast light on this inverted repetition, and the obsessively internal activities of envy, recall, and self-conscious reflection demanded of it, Nietzsche reinvents for the category of 'imaginary revenge' a French word, *ressentiment*" (133-34).

<sup>3</sup> Antimodern sentiment, according to the historian T.J. Jackson Lears, was widespread throughout Europe and America at the turn of the twentieth century, and "the feeling of overcivilization . . . was a sign of a broader transatlantic dissatisfaction with modern culture in all its dimensions" (4). For more on antimodernism, see his seminal work *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*.

<sup>4</sup> Although the Canadian settler subject corresponds to "the dominant white Anglophone majority" (16), as Eva Mackey also explains, "To study 'whiteness' is not to suggest that all white people are the same, or that whiteness is a biologically relevant category" (34). Nevertheless, "In Canada . . . the white Anglophone majority undoubtedly has cultural, economic, and political *dominance*. If Canada is the 'very house of difference', it contains a family with a distinct household head" (25).

<sup>5</sup> As a cultural phenomenon first described by Terry Goldie as "the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous" (13), indigenization involves both the discursive integration of settler cultures into their physical environments and the discursive management of what Goldie further identifies as the image of the indigene to justify the ongoing dispossession, oppression, and effacement of Aboriginals (9).

<sup>6</sup> I derive *exogeneity* and *exogene* as nominalizations of the adjectives *exogenetic* and *exogenous*, synonyms that generally mean "[h]aving an external cause or origin" ("exogenetic"). The exogene is thus understood as having biological and/or social origins external to the settler society that imagines it. Because exogeneity is determined by arbitrary criteria, to say nothing of the eliding of the exogenous origins of the settler subject, it should be unsurprising that the image of the exogene does not correspond reliably to any referent homeland.

<sup>7</sup> My discussion of the ways in which Canadian *ressentiment* imagines the exogenous as a threat relates well to Robin Mathews's reading of John Richardson's 1832 novel *Wacousta*. Mathews believes that "the tensions inherent in Canadian survival, character and definition of being" (13) derive from a dialectical relation not between the exogenous and the indigenous but between settler subjectivity and the exogenous. By pitting Colonel Charles De Haldimar, "representing the 'law and order' philosophy of the British Empire" (13), against Wacousta, who is a "compellingly attractive representative of despotic anarchism incarnated

in its richest expression in the new world of British North America" (13), Richardson "can place in conflict as *character types* representatives of the political philosophies he sees as typical of the British and American" (14; emphasis in original). As a typical example of "the Canadian phenomenon of double-rejection" (25), both political models are firmly repudiated by the novel, as neither exogenous figure is "fit to rule what is today Canada: a synthesis of them, eventuating in a new generation[,] and a new philosophy is required" (14). Once again, however, we see the settler subject-position idealized and homogenized (if not indigenized) by Second World identity politics. Mathews claims, less convincingly, that "Canadian experience and Canadian literature reveal that the battle is not between garrison and wilderness — a polite way of saying white man and native. The battle is between an alien exploiter or imperialist class and the settlers or community builders" (19).

<sup>8</sup> Woodcraft features more heavily later in the MaddAddam trilogy. Most notably, members of the God's Gardeners, an eco-centric religious cult, prepare themselves for the end of the "Exfernal world" and the creation of "a New Eden" in *The Year of the Flood* (2009). Their efforts to grow and store food, practice and disseminate medical knowledge, and learn basic survival skills pay off by the end of *MaddAddam* (2013) since many of them survive the fall of modernity and are able to start rebuilding a workable community.

<sup>9</sup> My dissertation focused in part on the representation of humans in the animal stories of Roberts and Seton. Exogeneity in their works is mostly embodied in figures of squatters and trophy hunters. The former, such as Mrs. Gammit in Roberts's "Mrs. Gammit and the Porcupines" (1911) and Cuddy in Seton's "Redruff, The Story of the Don Valley Partridge" (1898), tend to be marked by their use of dialect or non-standard English. The latter, such as those in Roberts's "A Treason of Nature" (1902) and Seton's "Krag, The Kootenay Ram" (1901), are made callous by their ignorance of basic woodcraft principles.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Spiegel makes a compelling argument that, rather than "evidence of an author's waning storytelling skills" (120), as some critics have implied with their complaints of "cardboardy" characterization in *Oryx and Crake* (119), the emotional detachment of Atwood's characters here is more reflective of the novel's post-national context, in which "shouldering multiple loyalties and identities" might require, in Jamesonian terms, "embracing 'the waning of affect'" (128).

<sup>11</sup> Later in the MaddAddam trilogy *Snowman* is joined by a number of other human survivors of Crake's pandemic who can be read as settler subjects. Belonging mainly to the ranks of the God's Gardeners and MaddAddamites, they work as benevolent pioneers and protect the Crakers from roving exogenes such as the atavistic Painballers.

<sup>12</sup> Although *Snowman*'s inability to learn survival skills may be understandable in light of the severity of his circumstances, it nevertheless stands in sharp contrast with the views of the God's Gardeners featured later in the trilogy, who renounce modernity and welcome its demise.

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