Journal of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University
วารสารศิลปศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์
Journal homepage: https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/liberalarts/index

Becoming Less Human: Margaret Atwood's Climate Emergency and Posthuman Veganism in the MaddAddam Trilogy

Rattanasiri Kittikongnapang*

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University, Thailand

Article Info

Research Article

Article History:
Received 27 March 2022
Revised 9 December 2022
Accepted 8 February 2023

Keywords:
climate emergency,
anthropocene,
veganism,
posthumanism,
meat production and consumption

* Corresponding author
E-mail address:
ptitenfant@gmail.com

Abstract

The anthropocene geological period is characterised by how humans have rapidly become the dominant force driving the entire planet to climate and environmental destruction. Humanity's anthropocentrism values humans as the most important form of existence and all other nonhuman beings as commodities that exist for human ends. These situations of anthropocentrism and its catastrophe are exemplified in Margaret Atwood's dystopian climate fiction MaddAddam (2013). The article examines how this last book of the trilogy redefines humanity's place in the world among all nonhuman others by addressing veganism within posthumanist elements of MaddAddam — the hybridity of human and nonhuman animal characters: Crakers, Pigoons and Frankenbabies — as a way for Atwood to address humanity's ethics of eating from a non-anthropocentric perspective and to offer a way to carefully interrogate humans' ethics. All of the posthuman creatures' food ethics are intertwined with environmental and moral issues. It is my argument that posthuman veganism in Atwood's MaddAddam establishes how humanity must learn to respect other nonhuman beings to survive after the collapse of humanity's corporate-centred world that eventually drives humans off the top of a hierarchy to the brink of extinction. The article focuses on how Atwood utilises speculative fiction and veganism to push the human-animal boundary through the process of humanising and animalising to rethink humans' ethical condition, especially regarding eating, to terminate anthropocentrism in order to cohabit a multispecies world respectfully and so avoid the future of climate doom.

1. Introduction

As vegan characters and veganism are increasingly incorporated in fictional works, science fiction and veganism have become more capable of working hand in hand to estrange us from our everyday perceptions in order to interrogate humanity, directly and indirectly. Both threaten the status quo of human beings: science fiction examines our relationship with nonhuman beings, while veganism questions consumer choices that are sometimes intersectional with other moral concerns. When readers encounter nonhuman beings of various forms but maintain human characteristics or practise uncanny ethics, they may ask what defines human beings— behaviour or appearance? Toward the end of Margaret Atwood's apocalyptic speculative fiction the MaddAddam trilogy, a similar kind of troubling question is raised: whether a nonhuman race is more human than humanity in terms of its ethical qualities. But beyond acknowledging the humanity in nonhuman beings, Atwood aims to provoke something more to redefine humanity based on their ethics of eating for interspecies equality. Veganism is a practice that allows alternatives for environmentally responsible consumers, as opposed to the industrialised food system that is largely dependent on Big Meat. While it is worthwhile to ask what humankind is, an increasingly more important question to ask in this 21st century under the threat of climate emergency is: how or what can make humans overcome their human-animal moral status for a better chance of survival of all species in this warming planet? Atwood points to specific answers to this particular question in her novel.

2. Anthropocentrism and exploitation of nonhumans

In the history of humans as a species, Yuval Harari characterises humankind in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* as the ecological tragedy that kills off other nonhuman animals everywhere humans spread. "The tragedy opens with a scene showing a rich and varied population of large animals, without any trace of humans. In scene two, Sapiens appear, evidenced by a human bone, a spear point, or perhaps a potsherd. Scene three quickly follows, in which men and women occupy centre stage and most large animals, along with many smaller ones, are gone" (Harari, 2015, p. 80). Homo sapiens are scientifically and historically proven as the species who drive other

species to extinction, one after another over and over. Whether for food, fur or for fun, humans hunt down animals until there are none. The worldview that allows humans to believe they have no ethical obligations towards other species yet still feel justified in doing this known as anthropocentrism. Contrary to veganism and its stance against hunting and unnecessary suffering to animals, anthropocentrism regards humankind as a separate life form and superior to nature and nonhuman others. All other nonhuman beings are means to human ends. Narratives of the apocalypse often suggest a collapse of humanity as we know it and a transition to a better life. Our chances of surviving the end of the planet often come with a challenge to human's existing ideological system. While it cannot be denied that saving the world from the current and near-future anthropogenic climate apocalypse would probably entail the termination of anthropocentrism, this article attempts to find out if it also means the end of humanity is necessary by reading Atwood's trilogy as an experiment of a posthuman future for humankind— evolve or face the alternative.

Atwood's *MaddAddam* (2013) concludes the trilogy following its previous two novels, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of The Flood* (2009), bearing witness to the pre- and post- apocalypse worlds where a scientist known as Glenn or Crake creates a virus to wipe out all the human race and replace it with a better version of humans through a range of improvements that includes their being vegan, or rather having no instinct to consume other animals. The genetically engineered species look almost like humans but they are herbivores, insect-repellent and can communicate with nonhuman animals — all functions that Crake believes humans should possess to prevent the degradation of the planet. Following *The Year of The Flood*, *MaddAddam* prompts several questions of how to reconsider the ethics of humanity for a livable planet among nonhuman others. During the pre-apocalypse in *The Year Of The Flood*, the God's Gardeners, a group of eco-conscious people who practise an environmental-based religion and spirituality, hide themselves away from corporate capitalism, where Toby the protagonist learns from their teachings to outlast the plague. We learn in *MaddAddam* that it is the God's Gardeners' wisdom that helps Toby, other human survivors and the Crakers to live in the post-apocalyptic world of a human-devised pandemic with other nonhuman beings. *MaddAddam* ultimately forces readers to look through an environmental lens, of how humans deal with the consequences of manipulating

and exploiting other species and the planet beyond its limit, to the posthumanist lens in which Atwood expands the existing human-based ethics to find the balance of our place alongside nonhuman beings. Atwood's ecocritical message in the trilogy challenges these anthropocentric worldviews by depicting both humanity's success at driving many species to extinction and at engineering chimaera species that blur the boundary between humans and animals and even go beyond the human. In doing so, her novels also offer an opportunity to think through a different set of ethics and what it means to dismantle the anthropocentric worldview. In this article, I will consider the way that rethinking the relationship between human beings and nonhuman others in Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy enables us to address ourselves from a non-anthropocentric perspective and carefully interrogate humans' ethics. This article will therefore attempt to explore the question of ethics in anthropocentrism, specifically aiming critically to enquire into presuppositions about the meaning of human beings against or above nonhuman others.

3. Veganism and Posthumanism for a less anthropocentric planet

Atwood's *MaddAdam* will be used in this article to explore vegan studies and their relation to the posthumanist viewpoint and the climate emergency. Atwood has pointed out: "It's not climate change. It's Everything Change." (Atwood, 2015). This phase resonates with how Naomi Klein views the impact of the climate emergency: "this changes everything" (Klein, 2015), and calling for the proper actions from governments and corporations. As geologists have agreed, we now approach a new geological epoch of our own making: the anthropocene. The consequences of humans' egocentric actions substantially change everything and can alter every element and life form on earth. In order to understand *MaddAddam*'s challenge on the ethics of eating, we first need to understand veganism within the range of posthumanism.

Veganism's ethics were formed in opposition to anthropocentrism by seeking to find ethical relations that extend beyond the values of nature conservation and the interconnectedness of ecocentrism. They thus offer challenges to the existing animal-eating dominant world that comes with ideology and discourse constructed to justify exploitation of nonhuman others. The term "vegan" was coined in 1944 and currently The Vegan Society defines veganism as:

> A philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals. (The Vegan Society, n.d.)

It can be said that veganism is the foundation of ethics for sentient beings that reject the commodity status of nonhuman animals, for the sake of animals, humans and the environment. Veganism, in addition to environmentalism, is thus a critical tool to resist anthropocentrism that causes the large scale of the climate crisis, especially from animal production and consumption. That is also a widely held claim among theorists such as Elisabeth de Fontenay, Donna Haraway, and Jacques Derrida who suggest that readers “reconsider our own agency and that of other animals within the network of relations that we, as individuals, form with one another” (Khandker, 2014, p. 131). Not only is it a growing literary and philosophical field. Veganism challenges the logic of human ethics in the same way as posthumanism or the field of science fiction demonstrates that the notion of humans at the top of other species and nature no longer makes sense.

Industrial animal agriculture is one of the less-discussed causes of the climate crisis but accounts for a quarter of the global greenhouse gas emissions, and meat and dairy are mostly responsible. Globally, it is necessary to make the issue of meat reduction political to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels where storms, heat waves, droughts and food crises will become more severe. Rather than being limited to a ready message for the climate emergency, veganism’s idea of animal subjectivity also is useful for an effective action on climate goals to change the dominant ideologies that are obstacles to reducing meat consumption and production. The link between the abuse of animals and the world’s health is now no longer invisible. Like Atwood’s imagined plague, our global, profit-driven, meat-centred food system is making us and our planet sick and the principal driver of zoonotic diseases, such as Covid-19, Sars, Mers and Zika, which spread from animals to humans is industrial-based animal agriculture, and scientists have been stating this fact (Dutkiewicz, Taylor, Vettese, 2020). Set in an

apocalyptic dystopia after the deadliest man-made virus, the MaddAddam trilogy has not only addressed the environmental impact of the anthropocene, but also humanity's relationship and ethical stance with other species that are currently being taken as food and resources for humans. In Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet*, posthumanism is described as an ethical position and condition that humans need to figure out to cohabit a multispecies world by extending moral concern to those who are different from us—nonhuman animals. Likewise, veganism encourages us to decentralise and take the interests and rights of species that are different from us seriously. The MaddAddam trilogy confronts us in reconsidering human subjectivity through addressing how — in the time of climate emergency — anthropocentrism is ethically wrong by specifically highlighting the difficulty of applying models of morality to another being when ideological norms are different from our own, particularly when the ethics of eating have become intertwined with the ethics of living.

In the MaddAddam trilogy, Atwood adopts the mode of speculative fiction not to predict the future of the world but to unpack the layers of human beings and what evolves us to the apocalyptic stage. In the trilogy, genetically engineered animals are created merely to serve humans' endless and selfish needs of industrial food production and immortality. Similar to how veganism challenges the meaning of being human, it is my argument that posthumanist thinking in Atwood's novels is created with veganism in mind in order to explore how humanity must learn to cooperate with other nonhuman beings for survival after the exploitative corporate-centred world eventually drives humanity off the top of a hierarchy to the brink of extinction. Critics of the novels have been quick to notice the parallels between the future Atwood imagines and the real-world conditions of climate change. Mahinur Aksehir-Uygur argues that "Atwood's trilogy basically treats the possible catastrophic consequences of the modern materialisation of the mother earth through the depiction of a kind of future existence which obviously has strong parallelisms to our present world" and as a result, that futuristic world, Atwood presents issues of animal abuse disguised as scientific study, or food, to serve humans(Aksehir-Uygur, 2014, p. 44). Since *MaddAddam* is an apocalyptic novel, Aksehir-Uygur notes that "all the genetically altered animals become loose and the real apocalypse begins" and humans who play with nature eventually become prey to the Pigoons — pigs with human brains. As pointed out by literary scholars, Atwood's Maddaddam trilogy criticises how oppression of nonhuman others eventually brings

destruction of humanity and civilisation. Therefore, by applying veganism and posthumanism, it is my argument that Atwood is making some transparent equivalences between her imagined future and the climate crisis, calling attention to the urgent concern on human intensive food production and its direct consequences to the climate crisis. This emphasises that the future of the human species depends on admitting that to survive the climate catastrophe, human animals cannot be disentangled from the nonhuman others — no longer at the fixed central or most important element of existence.

4. Posthuman Veganism: Expanding boundaries beyond anthropocentrism

Scholars have located Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy within the debate about the posthuman perspective, both in the speculative elements of the novels and the hybridity of nonhuman characters, as a way to criticise the concept of humanism and its self-image of humans at the top of hierarchy. Marcus Rockoff writes in *Post-and Transhumanism: An Introduction* that: "This delusion of human supremacy [...] leads to the human inability to live in peace and harmony with nature" (Ranisch and Sorgner, 2014, p.266). And he further argues that the Crakers present an alternative to replace humanity by altering and enhancing "a variety of animal functions and characteristics so that they can live in harmony with nature. This transgenic species represents a dethronement of current humanity." (Ranisch and Sorgner, 2014, p. 266). Thus, his assertion on the posthumanist condition of Crakers aligns itself with what Sherryl Vint views as ethical and accountable posthumanism that is more than a biological change:

> The 'post' of posthumanism should be a 'post' to the heritage of humanism, which makes humans the only subjects in a world of objects. An ethical posthumanism must work against this boundary of the human from the nonhuman, refusing this final ground of abjection. An ethical posthumanism which acknowledges that self is materially connected to the rest of the world, in affinity with its other subjects, is an accountable posthumanism. It is a posthumanism that can embrace multiplicity and partial perspectives, a posthumanism that is not threatened by its others. (Vint, 2007, p. 189)

MaddAddam demonstrates a cautionary tale of the danger of humanity's failure to live in harmony with nonhuman others. Some critics notice the danger represented in humans' reckless use of new biotechnologies that abuse nonhuman animals in the pre-apocalyptic years of unrestrained capitalism which Bryan L. Moore puts as "consumerist-corporatist culture" that means "the earth is in trouble due mostly to global climate change, though the novel does not discuss this directly" (Moore, 2017, p. 233). Simona Micali, a posthumanist scholar even defines those bioengineered creatures as "new Frankensteins" (Micali, 2021, p.32) to describe the new species like the ChickieNobs and Pigoons, created to define the ethics of consumption as they are edible chicken parts without brains or eyes; or pigs with foolproof human life-saving lab-grown organs. As pointed out by Micali, Pigoons are creatures that humans cannot avoid having ethical scruples towards "as the new creature is literally, unmistakably, a humanized animal" (Micali, 2021, p.32). While the cultured meats are arguably designed with the goal of reducing the need to commit violence on conscious life forms in mind, the same cannot be said of the Pigoons, who are not only as capable of suffering as pigs, but with their modified bodies including human brain matter as well as other human organs, are literally humanised. By emphasising the entanglement of humans and nonhumans, the MaddAddam trilogy seems to reflect and reject the abuse of anthropocentric systemic violence by occupying the field of beyond posthumanism to address humanity's culture of endless exploitative consumerism under the control of corporate greed.

This violence of anthropocentrism to nonhuman animals in everyday practices is what veganism aims to disrupt. Both posthumanism and veganism situate themselves as a counter to humanism and anthropocentrism. However, in *The Routledge Handbook of Vegan Studies,* Eva Giruad addresses that posthumanism itself is "a messy category" (Wright, 2021, p. 58); the ethical practices articulated by posthumanism are often in conflict with vegan studies and at the present posthumanism offers little framework of ethical responsibilities with other species. Viewed in this light, posthumanism alone can only do little justice to Atwood's *MaddAddam* that employs more than a challenge to what it means to be human. Although some critics notice the vegan elements in *MaddAddam* on the Crakers' diet that is neither meat nor crops and on the landscape of exploitation for meat and humans' use in animals, there is still a gap in posthumanist scholars' discussion to directly include veganism as the main influence in *MaddAddam*.

My actual analysis is that Atwood strongly applies posthuman veganism in her literary experimentation, combining posthuman creatures and their ethics of eating, and providing the world of her trilogy with a complete guide on how humans can be ethical posthumans, as Vint suggests, with possibilities of veganism as a form of interspecies cohabitation. This article will focus on how deep the novel goes in the posthumanism of eating or even veganism of posthumanism, and how Atwood undermines a posthuman vegan reading in the portrayals of different hybridities in the architecture of the novel which includes animality of humans and humanity of animals, and Frankenstein's (vegan) monster, leading to how Atwood leaves the potential for changing humanity for species equality in the time of climate crisis.

In order to explore the necessary changes for cohabiting among other species to survive the climate catastrophe, posthumanism as an overarching ethical mode to reframe the concept of human and humanity's concepts of other nonhuman beings is useful to bring an open conversation. In *After the Human*, Vint takes an openly accepting stance toward postmodernism in relation to posthumanism and asserts "if so much of what is wrong with 'the human' lies in its claims to represent all while ignoring so much, it is fitting that approaches to posthumanism are multiple, even at times contradictory: what is required is a conversation, not a fixed concept" (Vint, 2020, p. 2). Such reduction of the human-animal boundary and ethical conceptions is critical for overcoming anthropocentric morality. How readers enter into a conversation with a nonhuman being in science fiction, more than in fiction, reflects such a desire to communicate with another nonhuman being to grasp some understanding from the nonhuman's point of view through having similar, relatable experiences via our imaginative capacities to recognise nonhuman beings with an empathetic stance. Building on Vint's suggestion here and earlier on posthumanism and ethics, the kind of open conversation that science fiction leads to further discussion about human ethics is what we need to break away from the same old sets of morality in this multispecies community where humanising anthropocentric ethics offers a limited scope and is no longer applicable. The same insight, I argue, that applies to Atwood's *MaddAddam*, the hybridity of human-animal Crakers themselves and also the human-Craker babies in the human-driven world indicate that the separation between different species, such as humans and other forms of nonhuman others, should not be taken as fundamental, but

can live in ethical coexistence. But does that mean we need to question all of our existing social norms and morality too? This should be treated as an important intervention in the scholarly debate that is currently seeking ways to challenge anthropocentrism that corrupts the relationship of human beings to nonhuman beings and becomes the root cause of our current climate crisis.

5. Making new worlds in a meat-centric society

Opposing anthropocentrism does not mean that we hate humans. What it means is seeing how we humans are included in the biosphere equally as one species among others. Carol Adams reflects on this issue by saying: “Vegetarianism is an act of imagination. It reflects an ability to imagine alternatives to the texts of meat.” (Adams, 2010, p. 232). A reimagined alternative setting that perhaps includes a vegetarianism perspective can be found in Atwood’s Maddaddam trilogy. “No Meat! Don’t eat death!” (Atwood, 2013b, p. 48) This scene happens very early in *The Year of The Flood* when the God’s Gardeners protest in front of SecretBurgers, the place where its ingredients are so secret that it is rumoured that it contains human meat. This scene is a small yet significant event in Atwood’s story and characterises Toby’s growing consciousness about the ethics of eating and living, which also later occupies an enormous connection to Atwood’s creation of the new race to replace humanity — the hybrid human-animal Crakers and their children who are herbivores.

By being fully conscious of the environmental impacts of Big Agribusiness and the meat industry, Atwood’s choice of words defining meat as death is how she raises a voice for the made-absent animals in the place of meat, as termed by Adams, by changing the discourse and unmuting the violence of meat eating. Atwood’s use of discourse contributes to the (re)production of power relations in society in order to promote change by imagining a range of vegan responses to a world that has been brought about through an extrapolation of bad tendencies in the real present, including the meat industry’s treatment of animals. Significant emphasis is put upon language and social customs, the same way that the God’s Gardeners radically apply deep eco-spirituality into their chants. The way Atwood resets the root of beliefs and the discourse that comes with it means refusing or disrupting an anthropocentrism that normalises nonhuman animal oppression. Gabriele Griffin explains that language can control public perception

and understanding ideological assumptions can lead to possibilities of resistance. (Gabriele Griffin, 2013, pp. 99-100) In the Maddaddam trilogy, The God's Gardeners' teaching and culture are principally concerned with the role of language that shapes the thoughts, behaviours and actions of human beings toward other beings on earth, exclusively for consumption that leads to the apocalypse. The God's Gardeners' small act is seen as the attempt to deal with the climate crisis, "the Waterless Flood" that is coined by them with the obvious reference to the biblical flood of Genesis.

Veganism provides an alternative and possible world. It is as if Atwood is also implying that, if to be human is to be carnivorous to an extreme level that destroys other lives on earth as the novel seems to suggest, then to live peacefully with other creatures is to be like the God's Gardeners or Crakers, the creatures created by humans to be vegans. For centuries, humans have modified and exploited nonhuman others for our own benefit and, worst of all, for the profits of a few large multinational corporations as results of neoliberalism and corporate capitalism. The corporations' gain is the public pain, and climate injustice. Millions of lives around the world are already suffering from the catastrophic impacts of climate breakdown — unusual hurricanes, bigger floods, heatwaves and extreme droughts. While the agribusiness firms keep gaining profits, the social and environmental costs are shifted onto marginalised people, nonhuman lives and the planet. Veganism and my effort are to challenge the ideological processes of meat and rearrange them to change our conceptions in equally dramatic ways that can lead to behavioural and systemic change. In *MaddAddam*, the third and the final book of the trilogy, I notice Atwood's strategy for changing our views of the human and nonhuman animal relationship by constructing the way we make sense of the world and the possibilities for changing is evident in its deployment and interrogation of the hybridity of different characters and humans. I believe that Atwood intentionally leaves the role of the narrator to a young vegan Craker with ability to communicate with nonhuman animals and willingness to tell the story of peace and coexistence among all creatures on earth to imagine a co-created community with nonhuman animals and dwell with them, not only in a shared physical environment, but a social world. At the end of the trilogy, humans live in harmony with nonhuman others; among them are Pigoons who they join to fight together in the great war against vicious humans who rape and take lives for entertainment. This is how science fiction that has a vegan

agenda helps us develop an understanding of the multispecies community which refuses to reduce animals to our commodity but rather sees them as equal beings on a more just planet.

6. Hybridity of Crakers and Pigoons: Animality of humans and Humanity of animals

To rethink the human-animal boundary, firstly I want to explore how Atwood uses the hybrid children of male Crakers and female humans to negotiate the ethical perspective of anthropocentrism and examines a way of thinking about human nature beyond the division of the human-animal boundary and its dualism. The dualistic thinking of human/animal and its boundaries are being challenged in science fiction, opening up ideological space for debating humanity and animality, especially the consequences of humans' dietary habits hugely influencing the climate crisis. The anxiety about the hybridity of the babies reveals a number of interesting things about the morality we construct for ourselves. The moment Ren tells Toby that Amanda is pregnant, everyone is worried and the girls want to get rid of the baby as they believe the baby is the product of the evil humans, Painballers, who rape and plan to eat Amanda's liver after they have used and had enough of her. The idea of having a baby to a Painballer father even dehumanises Amanda's life to be "like a zombie." When Toby recalls the situation in her mind, she thinks there can be another possibility that the child's father is one of the Crakers. The nature of these male humans and hybrid humans described by Toby is completely contrasting. Toby compares the two men as murderers, rapists and torturers with Crakers as "the flowers, the signing and the enthusiastic tangle." (Atwood, 2014, p. 264) Even though both of the different species force Amanda into sexual intercourse without her consent, Toby refers to the Crakers' sexual incident as being "not as bad as you think" and "a cultural misunderstanding." But to Ren, as another victim of this cultural misunderstanding of rape, the male species to choose as fathers of children are either "an ultracriminal or some kind of gene-spliced weirdo monster" (Atwood, 2014, p. 265) and that the child of these Crakers is a Frankenbaby. Such a description leads readers into thinking: what is better for them, carrying the child of a monstrous human being or the child of an innocent monster who is good at heart but not yet accepted in human society? Yet in striving for such thinking or rethinking,

rather than critiquing the ethics of Crakers, the appropriate questions to ask in this context are what organises human beings to certain norms such as the concept of consent, which ends up reinforcing the human-nonhuman boundary, and why at the end of the story does Atwood trust that gene-spliced Frankenbabies are a new beginning for a multispecies planet.

From a humanist point of view, according to Abby Hafer, sex is regarded as "a means of positive personal expression, pleasure, intimacy and/or bonding, and communication, as well as sometimes for reproduction" (Hafer, 2021). While humanism sees sex as meaningful and intimate "means", Crakers see it as an "act" for reproductive purposes only. According to Glenn, the scientist who engineers the Crakers: "Sex is no longer a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing, conducted in the dark and inspiring suicides and murders" (Atwood, 2013a, p. 195). To Glenn/Crake, and from this nonhuman perspective, sex and courtship are seen as only a few first acts before the reproduction process, just as some animals do; as simple as how male penguins present round stones or the male silverfish presents a sperm packet to its mate. Crake eliminates all unnecessary feelings such as jealousy and sexual competition because he sees them as the destructive root cause of much global violence and many problems. So Crakers are created to not acknowledge the morality of consent as it is not against their culture — their practice involves mating four men with a single woman once every three years. Looking at morality from this perspective, Toby seems right to think that this is "a cultural misunderstanding" (Atwood, 2014, p. 265) after all. Humans are subject to cultural limitation and imperialism that get to define the ethics of good and bad based on their own narcissistic cultural parameters which may or may not make sense to other beings.

Readers may feel uncomfortable with the Crakers' mating ritual because they come from different cultural settings and related values. Yet, these values are also what humankind applies and dehumanises nonhuman others outside the humanist morality and categorise those who are equipped with different ethics as less-than-human. Thus, uncomfortable feelings in us readers as well as in human characters in Atwood's trilogy constitute the mechanism by which science fiction texts push us to think beyond humanism to explore possibilities of new ethics for the cohabitational future of a multispecies planet that mutually respects difference. This is, therefore, how the

MaddAddam trilogy attempts to decentralise the human subject and ask human culture to seriously question the exclusive tradition of humanism, similar to how posthumanist literature and veganism challenge the meaning of being human. It is our responsibility to respect the morality and subjectivity of nonhuman others in both fictional and real world. Or as Vint puts it: “undoubtedly, new ethics are needed, but the work that remains is collectively to negotiate what they might be, from a perspective of solidarity that simultaneously leaves space for difference” (Vint, 2020, p. 7). Humans’ existing morality must give way to ethics of multispecies and being open to what “culture” means among different community practices of different species that no longer fit into any inherited cultural categories of humans.

When the humans in Atwood’s trilogy make first contact with the Crakers, they presume them to be an inferior species of a pre-human uncivilised era, with a hint of innocent idyllic look to them that is otherwise neither savage nor noble. Compared to the Pigoons, creatures who are genetically equipped with human brains, the Crakers are not fitted to our current standard version of humanity — in terms of their thinking and morality. In contrast, Pigoons are seen as strong, heroic and ethical creatures who are willing to fight and sacrifice themselves for their community. In the trilogy, it is clear to everyone in the pre-apocalypse that Pigoon meat is undesirable for humans’ appetite because they do not want to eat human cells, regarding it as semi-cannibalism. Pigoons are used to grow human organs, or as Atwood puts it, “an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host — organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejections” (Atwood, 2013a, p. 25). Although Pigoons are materialised for human purposes, gene-editing techniques such as CRISPR also used to grow human organs in live pigs in real life is seen as a progression of life. For Nadine Ehlers, a specialist on the socio-cultural study of the body, the thought about life in relation to posthumanism is a shift in the concept of life and a way that humans have pushed the possibilities of and for life beyond its perceived limits — “new forms of human-animal entanglements – chimaeras – where animal material is replaced with human tissues and cells” (cited in Vint, 2020, p. 122). I am inclined to disagree with insights on gene-editing techniques that objectify nonhuman others as Ehlers suggests it is a shift of life. However, it is as if Pigoons are tasked by Atwood to humanise the animal subject to leverage nonhuman beings for anthropocentrism and serve as a workspace

or reconsidering the ethical stance of human beings — in their dietary stances especially. Pigoons, as a result, are new posthumans under veganism with an existing morality and culture we can associate with, but more humble and noble in the form of nonhuman animals — ones that are no longer inferior but we can now see as equal.

If Pigoons are pushing the human-animal boundary through the process of humanisation, the Crakers should also be generally read as combining animalising and dehumanising forces as two complementary processes of post-anthropocentrism to deconstruct hierarchies and exclusions of nonhuman species. The world consists of a vital web of complex multispecies interrelations and posthuman ethics humbly urges us to embrace differences of nonhuman others by removing both the obstacle of anthropocentrism and its negativity. But to eliminate all the barriers, such posthuman ethics take time for humans to understand. Before the human characters accept the Crakers, they struggle with the concept of dualism constructed in human society, as reflected in Toby's mind:

> Toby tries to think of something to say – something upbeat and soothing. Genes aren't a total destiny? Nature versus nurture, good can come of evil? There are the epigenetic switches to be considered, and maybe the Painballers just had very, very bad nurturing? Or how about: the Crakers may be more human than we think? But none of it sounds very convincing, even to her. (Atwood, 2014, p. 265)

Thinking about nonhuman creatures under the human perspective enables an oppositional dualistic mode of thinking. Adams remarks in *Neither Man nor Beast* that dualism such as human/animal, male/female, culture/nature and human/nature are seen as oppositional and reduce diversity to two categories: either it is A or B. "We are people, they are beasts." (Adams, 2018, p. 179). This oppositional dualism discourages nonhuman consciousness and upholds the logic of domination. Right now humans are at war with many life forms on earth, human life included, because of this destructive logic. Building on Adams' observation on 'either man or beast' dualism, *MaddAddam* makes a point that humanity's logic of dualism as suggested by Adams, either it is A or B, is proven wrong — and therefore ethically wrong for classifying other species and putting

humans above them all. So it is ethically wrong to classify the human species as the centre of ethics. One is defined to be this or the other. Toby's thought clearly reflects the dualism of scientific (genes)/ destiny, nature/nurture, good/evil. And one can presume that nonhuman beings are lower or worse than bad human beings, as can be seen in the fact that Toby cannot convince herself that the Crakers may be "more human" than we think. (Atwood, 2014, p. 265) This stresses the binary division of human-nonhuman beings. The dilemma in Toby's mind reflects how dualism should be overcome to open up new considerations of nonhuman agency and its identity and meaning beyond the anthropocentric perspective. And Atwood aims to demonstrate whether it is possible for us to erase the separation between different species, such as humans and other forms of nonhuman others, so that we can live in ethical coexistence.

According to Haraway, our constructs of nature/culture come "with major consequences of life and death, health and illness, longevity and extinction" (Haraway, 2008, p.278) and constitute a setup that blocks peaceful cohabitation among species. She strongly suggests that the dualism must be seen as diversity, not binary:

> There is only the chance for getting on together with some grace. The Great Divides of animal/human, nature/culture, organic/technical, and wild/domestic flatten into mundane differences—the kinds that have consequences and demand respect and response—rather than rising to sublime and final ends. (Haraway, 2008, p.15)

At the end of *MaddAddam*, after the battle, the girls become quite fond of the hybrid babies, even Amanda. While the human survivors also do not reject the babies, Toby also finds it is interesting to learn more about the hybrid babies and their environmental-friendly features — such as being a vegan, no need of clothes, no destructive emotions—inherited from the Crakers. Here Atwood leaves it open for us to reconsider whether humanity can change the foundation of ideology to be more inclusive with the diverse species. And posing yet another question, or perhaps several questions at once. Should we stick to that ideology in the time of climate apocalypse? And what does it mean to be human, or "more human"?

7. Veganism in posthumanist bodies to displace humanity's anthropocentric ethics

The major transformation toward a more ethical humanity in the trilogy is in the direction of posthumanism with the distinctive trait of veganism as we see in the Crakers. The posthuman subjects in Atwood's trilogy precisely exemplify veganism as the critical eating and living ethics that influence co-evolution for humans to survive the climate catastrophe. To affirm a constructive posthumanity, according to Glenn/Crake the scientist who aims to solve the ongoing moral and climate crisis, the vast majority of the human race with a virus is wiped out and a new race of genetically modified Crakers is created to replace Homo sapiens and its corrupted values. The Crakers are designed to be environmentally friendly and mutually connected to other organisms on earth — they listen and understand the nonhuman beings in the natural world. The Crakers seem more associated with animality than human beings, regarding our narrow anthropocentric ideological foundation, due to the lack of human's logic and reason. Crakers are described as having beautiful skin and are equipped with features such as being immune to UV damage, which is useful for living in the catastrophic levels of warming. Their diet is compared to herbivores animals who enjoy meat-free, simple vegetation. For the Crakers, love and romance are entirely absent and the female's reproductive organ would turn blue when it is time, like baboons, emitting pheromones to lure many males at once to impregnate her once every three years. One significant feature of the Crakers with which humans can associate themselves or at least distinguish the Crakers from nonhuman others is their ability to communicate in language that human beings understand. This way, Atwood's Crakers are constructed in an aesthetic production of posthumanist technique of consciousness and communication that stirs the unity of the humanist subject, according to Bruce Clarke's discussion of the nonhuman within literature, in which he asserts that posthumans are more than just the "evolutionary state after the human" (Clarke and Rossini, 2016, p. 190) but he argues that the nonhumans are "explicitly posthuman when what comes after the human involves the elimination or replacement of the human" (Clarke and Rossini, 2016, p. 147).

Atwood does not provide us an answer to Toby's doubt as to whether the Crakers are "more human". Instead, she lets us witness the subjectivity of other nonhuman beings to encourage us to give up human exceptionalism. As a consequence, resistance to human exceptionalism requires resistance to humanisation and the

embodiment of animalising the Crakers' characteristic is deemed useful here for posthuman science fiction reading. The Crakers take the human form —but go beyond the humanity's boundaries — making them, and us, difficult to identify humanness or animalness. The vegan posthuman body of the Crakers also challenges speciesist logic of domination of humanism and its definition on who is exploitable or killable by human beings. By inheriting both traits of humans and the new human Crakers, Atwood's Crakers are here not to replace humanity entirely but to displace the reigning humanist biases within existing corrupted ideologies to promote better relations between humans and nonhumans. To overcome the Anthropocene, the Crakers remind us that new humanity needs a transformative co-evolution that breaks down human and nonhuman categories, in order to successfully live in cohabitation on this interspecies planet.

The co-evolution of the mixed organic–technological, cross-species and cross-culture hybrid breed for the human race is brought here to explore how transhumanism and veganism work together to shape the future so that all beings can coexist and, if possible at all, prevent climate apocalypse. Yes, transcending human's biological limitations is desirable, but are transhumans who come with different values like the Crakers acceptable in human society? Atwood seems to question our common-sense morality to see if it is applicable for our survival against the environmental crisis. We may need to evolve more than just our bodies, but our minds too. Robert Ranisch asserts that genetic engineering offers new momentum to debates on moral enhancement and we might be able to directly influence human behaviour for the better:

> This is necessary because human's biological and psychological nature is ill equipped to deal with the most serious and pressing problems of the 21st century. Our common-sense morality may have worked for a long period of our evolutionary history. But today we have to tackle global problems such as [...] climate change and the weapons of mass destruction, which make possible for a small number of criminals to cause great harm to the whole of humanity. (Ranisch and Sorgner, 2014, p. 164)

Crucial to Ranisch's suggestion regarding morality and transhumanism, climate change should not concern just the physical change of the planet, which has long prevented us from addressing the crisis adequately, because the climate crisis has become an existential threat for the human species, but should instead require a change in our moral status, like the one envisioned by Atwood. The Crakers already question the ethics of humans and the cultural representations of animals that tell us so little about the real identity of animals but too much about animal representations in human ideology. Yet, before the human characters in Atwood's trilogy come to any acceptance about the new human race in their social group of human circles, the hybrid babies even further the debate and our struggle to accept the borderless possibilities of human-animal relations in human bodies and morals.

8. Those vegan monsters: A dietary stance to restore the absent referent

The hybrid babies of humans and Crakers pose a particular problem in the world of Atwood's story as they are at first regarded by Toby as "Frankenbabies", a name invoking the famous first science fiction monster and their place in social relations with humans: us and them. If veganism and animality in the posthuman body of the genetically modified Crakers presents otherness, or a monster to humanity, Atwood's texts here are to radically open new ways of equally accepting interspecies in social cohabitation. Mary Shelley's iconic *Frankenstein* explores quasi-human creations, and some other big questions about humanity such as human prejudice toward nonhuman creatures. The appearance of the Frankenstein creature is deemed so horrifying to human's sight that the creator abandons him, and is also rejected by human society in general. Looking beyond its physical look and its tragic life, Frankenstein's monster's otherness — looking like a human, with a mind of a human, but not "perfect" enough to be a human — blurs such distinctions of biological and cultural differences by including animality within its moral codes, but deeply seeking to be included within the moral codes of humanity. The becoming-human of the Frankenstein beast is violently rejected and discriminated against by human society. The almost similar situation arises again in Atwood's trilogy as the Crakers are also created to be more like animals, physically and morally, and also are discriminated against by humanity, although not violently like the fate of Frankenstein's monster but in a way that readers

feel is normal enough to exclude them from our race. The human circle is drawn in such a way that both the Crakers and the other animals are naturally excluded from it. However, as Atwood makes clear, the real threat at that time is not the otherness the Crakers bring but the corrupted human individuals that are causing harm to all beings in this interspecies community. In this way, the interspecies hybrid of the *MaddAddam*'s realm from a transhumanist perspective shines out as a better opportunity for cohabitation against speciesism of humans. Ranisch observes that interspecies hybrids are an indication that "no clear line can be drawn between human beings, nonhuman beings, and possible artificial life forms that could justify discrimination in moral status" (Ranisch and Sorgner, 2014, p. 156). This new interspecies and our new moral status thereby, hopefully, create a more equitable and livable world for all beings, especially a new ethical stance on eating animals.

In *Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams argues that Frankenstein's monster is a vegetarian, and "Mary Shelly's book bears the vegetarian word" of the feminism and Romantic radicalism (Adams, 2010, p. 148). Atwood's reference to Frankenstein's monster in *MaddAddam* similarly features some ethical significance of food consumption, especially meat. After the apocalypse, what the characters of humans and nonhumans choose to eat can be seen as a conscious act to create a respectful multispecies society. In *MaddAddam*, possibilities of meat eating at the end of human civilisation are questioned about its ethical implications through choices of eating of various characters. It can be seen that the ethics of eating are thus central to Atwood's decision to devote the narration of the final sections of the book exclusively to Toby and the young Crakers. Toby's choice of diet remains ethically committed even after the plague when food is scarce due to environmental collapse brought about by the Waterless Flood, or when other survivors adapt animal products into their meals: she keeps living on fruit and vegetables according to the God's Gardeners' beliefs. Nonetheless, the highest ethical and ecological practice of eating for human beings, as the novels may indicate, is to consume no animal products at all. The Crakers are created as herbivores with a trait of rabbit DNA to reset humanity, in the sense that they eat only leaves. For them, there is no need for agriculture which undeniably involves deforestation, massive industrial monocrop plantation and the use of pesticide, eventually contributing to the destruction of biodiversity for the profits of some Big Ag group or individuals. In a way,

Crakers are an ecologically perfected version— in the time of climate crisis— of the God's Gardeners who follow veganism, but moving beyond meat to the absolute zero carbon footprint of food production.

On the other hand, from the point of view of omnivores, the MaddAddam trilogy reinforces how the belief of might is right just to justify human dominion on top of the food chain above the weaker others is wrong. The ethics of eating between the painballers and the Pigoons are compared in parallel, and Atwood even experiments to the limit on the universal thought about the world as a place where the strong gobbles on the weak. *MaddAddam* represents humanity as starting to learn to be in a state of multispecies interconnection, with meat eating at its core interest. One of the most crucial lesson humans learn is that the way that humanity has been exploiting other beings carelessly is considered as the ethical question of right and wrong:

> "Snowman-the-Jimmy says the bad people in the chaos ate the Children of Oryx," he says. "They killed them and killed them, and ate them and ate them. They were always eating them."
> "Yes, they were," says Toby, "but they were eating them in the wrong way."
> "Were the two bad men eating them in the wrong way too? The ones who ran away?"
> "Yes," says Toby. "They were."
> "How are you eating them, Oh Toby? The legs of the Children?" His huge eyes are fixed on her as if she's about to sprout fangs and pounce on him.
> "The right way," she says, hoping he won't ask what the right way is."
>
> (Atwood, 2014, p. 114)

In this brief discussion of Toby and Blackbeard the young Craker here —by seeing humans in fangs and imagining himself being eaten — the act of killing and eating sounds cannibalistic to both Toby and Blackbeard, and Toby may at that time still feel reluctant to situate what is right and wrong behind consuming other beings. One of the most profoundly disgusting moments in the MaddAddam trilogy is the

cannibalism of the painballers who hunt the God's Gardeners and eat their meat. "Sex until you were worn to a fingernail was their mode; after that, you were dinner. They liked the kidneys" (Atwood, 2014, p. 17). The concept of the weak can be turned into food is an ongoing situation in the Pleeblands, the place where the majority of people live outside the Compounds, under the control of the CorpSeCorps, a corporation with an excessive amount of power over all humans and nonhumans. The poor or the weak of society in the Pleeblands can be edible sexually and physically "on a limited-time-use basis, turning them over, and fishfooding them at a fast clip" (Atwood, 2014, p. 215) by men and later by fish. However, the case for the Pigoons, although they kill and eat for living and sometimes eat the dead ones of their own kind, the Pigoons refuse to eat the painballers: "They do not want those ones to be part of them" (Atwood, 2014, p. 450). Ethics, for posthuman omnivore beings as Pigoons show it, are viewed to be more important than just eating as what you eat becomes a part of you — your choice as a part of a responsible society. And this, to Atwood and to the fight against climate emergency, the right way to continue consuming other beings and humanity needs to quit cannibalistic capitalist consumption as suggested in the ethical consumerism practice of the God's Gardeners.

As a vegetarian monster, as Adams argues in *Sexual Politics of Meat,* the Frankenstein's monster and his vegetarianism restores the absent referent of animals in meat eating that humanity ignores. Additionally, this is the failure of critics, as Adams notices, to acknowledge vegetarianism within this famous literary text attempting to put a stop to the meat culture in conventional narrative. However, I argue that there is more to the monstrous vegetarian creatures of both Shelley and Atwood than to call for remembering vegetarianism in words and narratives. By drawing a connection between the vegetarianism of Frankenstein's posthuman creature and how Toby refers to the hybrid babies as "Frankenbaby", the meat-free dietary principle of human animals and companionship of nonhuman animals, I argue, are how Atwood demonstrates that multispecies can live in mutual consumption and dependency without reducing some species to objects under some discriminating ethics. The Frankenstein's creature claims: "My food is not that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid, to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment" and by adding his vision to have a partner who joins his vegetarianism and live a life peacefully and equally to all beings,

among animals as companions. “My companion will be of the same nature as myself, and will be content with the same fare. We shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on man, and will ripen our food. The picture I present to you is peaceful and human” (Shelley, 2010, pp. 128-129). With vegetarianism as his ethics, animals’ parts will not be used for their bed or their food. Living under the sun, the creature proposes that himself and other life forms should be recognised as equal to man, not as separated. Likewise, under the moon in *MaddAddam*, after they join forces to rid the world of the evil human beings, the funeral rites of humans and Pigoons implies a hopeful future of co-culture of multispecies that the Frankenstein’s monster fails to see. At the conclusion of the novels, Atwood imagines and entrusts the civilisation in the hands and the writings of the young Craker, aligned with the pig society, and these vegan, carbon footprint-free beings are developing the culture to inherit the earth in harmony with humans and other creatures. In Vint’s book about posthumanism, *After the Human,* she argues that posthumanist work does not “get rid of” the human but rather explores ways in which the human is embodied in the world and, through this, connected to other species and matter. Considering this, *MaddAddam* also stops short of not getting rid of humans, but finding ways—in reality as much as in fiction—for humans to coexist in respect to other species we share our world with. Above all, there is one thing that is clear — a cross-species cohabitation is made possible, even though it means changing the foundation of ideology and ethics of eating.

We, human beings, perhaps will start to learn to coexist with other beings. But will that save us in time before the apocalypse comes? In *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Buell, 1995), Lawrence Buell claims that “apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” and a powerful narrative template in the twenty-first century. Heise (2020) argued further that it has long been “a staple of environmental storytelling.” Nonetheless, the current planet’s biggest existential threat is beyond partially environmental problems; it is a climate crisis that we should treat it like an emergency and it really is. As the Guardian updated their terminology in 2019, “Climate change is no longer considered to accurately reflect the seriousness of the overall situation” (Zeldin-O’Neill, 2019), what we associate with an emergency is we need to take bold action urgently. My emphasis, and perhaps what Atwood emphasises

as well, is that to avoid the trajectory of the downfall of humanity — as the result of the collapse of Earth's biodiversity — humanity's anthropocentrism must be terminated. Ultimately by imagining a posthumanist and non-anthropocentric future, Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy demonstrates that to ethically recognise nonhuman others as equal in society to cope with the climate emergency present, ethical eating is a crucial human action that needs to be evolved — to a just and ethical plant-based food system that respects all beings.

References

Adams, C. J. (2010). *The sexual politics of meat: A feminist-vegetarian critical theory*. Continuum.

Adams, C. J. (2018). *Neither Man nor Beast : Feminism and the defense of animals*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Aksehir-Uygur, M. (2014). Utopia and dystopia intertwined: The problem of ecology in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake, the year of the flood and MaddAddam. *The Journal of International Social Research*, 7(31), 41-48.

Atwood, M. (2013a). *Oryx and Crake*. Virago Press.

Atwood, M., (2013b). *The year of the flood*. Virago Press.

Atwood, M. (2014). *MaddAddam*. Virago Press.

Atwood, M. (2015). It's not climate change: It's everything change. Medium. https://medium.com/matter/it-s-not-climate-change-it-s-everything-change-8fd9aa671804

Buell, L. (1995). *The environmental imagination: Thoreau, nature writing, and the formation of American culture*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Clarke, B., & Rossini, M. (Eds.). (2016). *The Cambridge companion to literature and the posthuman*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316091227

Dutkiewicz, J., Taylor, A., & Vettese, T. (2020). The Covid-19 pandemic shows we must transform the global food system. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/16/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-food-animals

Griffin, G. (Ed.). (2013). *Research Methods for English Studies* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.

Pinn, A. B. (2021). *The Oxford handbook of humanism*. Oxford University Press.

Harari, Y. N. (2015). *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Vintage.

Haraway, D. (2008). *When species meet*. University of Minnesota Press.

Heise, U. (2020). The Planetary Futures of Eco-Apocalypse. In J. Hay (Ed.), *Apocalypse in American literature and culture*. Cambridge themes in American literature and culture (pp. 268-280). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108663557.021

Khandker, W. (2014). *Philosophy, animality and the Life Sciences*. Edinburgh University Press.

Klein, N. (2015). *This changes everything*. Penguin Books.

Micali, S. (2021). “What if they could speak?: Humanized animals in science fiction.” In A. Masschelein, F. Mussgnug, & J. Rushworth (Eds.), *Mediating vulnerability: Comparative approaches and questions of genre* (pp. 19-37). UCL Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1nnwhjt.5

Moore, B. (2017). *Ecological literature and the critique of anthropocentrism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ranisch, R., & Sorgner, S. L. (2014). *Post-and transhumanism: An introduction*. Peter Lang GmbH.

Shelley, M. (2010). *Frankenstein*. Collins Classics.

The Vegan Society. (n.d.). Definition of veganism. Retrieved December 7, 2022, from www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism

Vint, S. (2007). *Bodies of tomorrow: Technology, subjectivity, science fiction*. University of Toronto Press.

Vint, S. (2010). *Animal alterity: Science fiction and the question of the animal*. Liverpool University Press.

Vint, S. (Ed.). (2020). *After the human: Culture, theory and criticism in the 21st century (After Series)*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108874427

Wright, L. (Ed.). (2021). *The routledge handbook of vegan studies*. Routledge.

Zeldin-O’Neill, S. (2019.) ‘It’s a crisis, not a change’: the six guardian language changes on climate matters. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/16/guardian-language-changes-climate-environment