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Twenty-first Century Critical Dystopias

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Introduction

The twenty-first century, like the twentieth, has seen a flourishing of dystopian novels in which human actions and institutions have created powerful and destructive societies that control and manipulate human beings². Perhaps even more than the twentieth century, the twenty-first has seen an outburst of post-apocalyptic narratives that tell the story of what human life on earth is like after cataclysmic events that wipe out many people and institutions. Focusing on two recent twenty-first century dystopias in which apocalyptic events occur, i.e. Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, I wish to explore their relations to earlier twentieth century dystopias that project a totalitarian state, such as Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*³.

Bacigalupi's and Atwood's works, like the twentieth century dystopias, describe dystopian societies that have come about due to currently-existing tendencies and practices. They present their dystopias in order to educate us as readers about these

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³ Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* can be included with this group, but including it in the text would pose confusion anytime "Atwood's views" were mentioned. In the text I mean to refer to the *MaddAddam* trilogy when I use Atwood's name.

ominous trends and to warn us, so that we can act to try to prevent, mitigate, or reverse the dystopian tendencies. But Bacigalupi and Atwood also end their recent dystopias with overt utopian hopes and aspirations for the human beings who remain alive after the apocalyptic events and for their readers, who can speculate further about the possible post-apocalyptic good society and can also try to imagine how to act in the present to counter the growth of dystopian society.

Utopian/Dystopian Writings and the Twenty-first Century Dystopias

Ever since More's *Utopia*, which began the history of utopias and dystopias, good societies—"eutopias"—have frequently been characterized as an imagined or "non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 1994: 9). More's *De optimo reipublicæ* proposes alternative imagined good societies; it also criticizes More's contemporary England and Europe. More separates the explicit critique in Book One—where he presents an England rent by poverty, unemployment, inequality, and unnecessary suffering—and the description of Utopia in Book Two, where new, different, non-conventional thoughts, actions, and institutions occur.

More's *Utopia* creates "cognitive estrangement" (Suvin 1979: 136-37) and presents defamiliarization, especially for those who like Peter Giles cannot think that any society could be better than the one in which he currently lives (More 2010: 56). To be distinguished from More the author, More the character holds aristocratic values that appear unchanged from the beginning to the end of the dialogue of *Utopia*. An attentive reader, however, cannot help but see *Utopia's* critiques and proposals as challenges to complacency about and acceptance of the contemporary *status quo*; utopias "help to change the way we think [emphasis—P.S.]" (Levitas and Sargisson 2003: 17).

More begins the five-century utopian struggle against mental closure, against those who are unable to think beyond the conventional acceptance of the present as the only, best, natural, or inevitable society. When the character More simply repeats clichéd arguments against private property after Hythloday's description of Utopia in 1516, or when almost five centuries later Margaret Thatcher (1980) insists that "there is no alternative", then it becomes clear that "the Utopian idea [...] keeps alive

the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is" (Jameson 1972: 111).

Dystopias are presentations of imagined societies that—as a noted definition reads—"the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 1994: 9) and that grew out of trends and possibilities in the present. Despite dystopias' connections to current trends, they also create cognitive dissonance and present otherness, by isolating and intensifying trends, focussing them, and showing their future implications. For instance, in an age that celebrated rationalism, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) showed how too exclusive an emphasis on rationality can make rational beings unfeeling, discriminatory, and inhuman; in an age that celebrated material progress and mechanical innovation, E. M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) showed the destructive dystopia that can result from an over-reliance on machinery.

In many twentieth century dystopias, the critique—the equivalent of More's Book One—colonizes almost the full text: the dystopian society is described and criticized at length. The dangerous trends of the present can lead, these dystopian authors see, to a powerful authoritarian state, with a strong centralized government that diligently controls political and social life through state power and modern technology. The state manages information and thought and so controls personal memory and collective history. The state shapes individuals' material and psychological needs and their interpersonal relations by creating, facilitating, or prohibiting specific activities—so it can regulate emotions and sex, frustration and fulfilment, fear and love. The dystopias seek to warn readers about how totalising and oppressive the dystopian society could be, and to encourage readers to judge the disturbing tendencies of culture and government that can lead to dystopia, and act to prevent them before it is too late. Although these dystopian texts do make suggestions about what a good society might look like (the equivalent of More's Book II), these suggestions are frequently brief or indirect, potentially useful for the reader, but of no help to the protagonists.

Many students of dystopia see a change in dystopias in the second half of the twentieth century (and into the twenty-first), from the totalistic, despairing dystopias like Orwell's to what they label "dystopian optimism" (Miller 1998: 358), "critical dystopias" (Moylan 2000: 195), and "open" or "open-ended dystopias" (Baccolini 2000: 16). Like earlier dystopias, critical dystopias are "motivated out of a utopian pessimism so that they force us to confront the dystopian elements"; but critical dystopias

then “work through” those dystopian elements so that we can “begin again” (Miller 1998: 337). The earlier dystopias “invariably end with the victory of the totalitarian state over the individual” (Baccolini 2000: 39), use that victory as a warning, and hold to the hope that readers will act together to forestall dystopia; in a critical dystopia some characters can seek to live through dystopia and create a better life in the aftermath. So Moylan (2000) emphasizes that critical dystopias gain their significance and power from a utopian horizon, utopian space, or “utopian anticipations” presented or implied in the text or dawning just beyond the text, where “contestation and opposition” (Baccolini 2000: 18) develop or continue.

In critical dystopias power still exists, but it has shifted from the authoritarian state to the “more pervasive [and less visible] tyranny of the corporation” (Moylan 2003: 135) that reaches into culture and bodies: “everyday life in the new dystopias is still observed, ruled, and controlled; but now it is also reified, exploited, and commodified” (Moylan 2003: 135-136). Along with corporate capitalist power coursing through all of social life in these new dystopias are highly developed technologies, especially biotechnologies, environmental degradation, and a state that is non-existent, weak, or controlled by corporate power. The contemporary capitalist pursuit of profits and power to the exclusion of other values means that individuals’ lives are marked by chance, randomness, and discontinuities—by “a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous realities, whose frames range from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private life to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself” (Jameson 1988: 351)—and that the overall workings of society and power are difficult to comprehend synoptically for the characters⁴. The plurality of powers and institutions means that totalisation is marked by excesses, gaps, and conflicts.

These pluralities and excesses can be seen as manifestations of neoliberalism, which conditions the worlds imagined by Atwood and Bacigalupi. David Harvey helps begin the definition of neoliberalism by focussing on political economy:

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free market, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (Harvey 2005: 2).

⁴ In *We*, efficiency as the rationality provides order and predictability to life; in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, O’Brien can describe to Winston how the system works.

Harvey's characterization fits corporate capitalism. Neoliberalism includes corporate capitalism, but "is much more than economic policy and an accompanying free market ideology" (Brown 2016: 5). It entails "what Foucault called the ascendancy of a form of normative reason that extends market metrics and practices to every dimension of human life" (Brown 2016: 5); it governs the sayable, the intelligible, the visible, and the criteria of truth within these domains (Brown 2003). "To govern in this sense is to structure the field of action of others" and how they construct the relevant meanings (Foucault 1982: 790). So, the means and the goal of neoliberalism is "how the overall exercise of political power [and of other social relations] can be modelled on the principles of a market economy" (Foucault 2008: 131), which includes the use of "economic analysis to decipher non-market relations", i.e., "the application of an economic grid to fields defined in opposition to economics" (Foucault 2008: 239-243).

Therefore, what can become private property is expanded to include organisations such as schools, prisons, mercenaries (like Blackwater), and police, as well as intellectual property. Because capital is identified with individual speech (they are both resources for the individual to use), unlimited amounts of money can be spent in the attempt to buy or influence elections. Wage labour becomes defined as human capital, where each of us becomes an "enterprise unit" concerned with our genetics and "educational investment" so that when we deploy our social capital, like an entrepreneur, we can earn the highest return. In that process, we become investors who choose, not labourers who work and produce—in a modern economic science that has become the "science of substitutable choices" (Foucault 2008: 219-229). For neoliberalism, the "citizen is calculating rather than rule-abiding, a Benthamite rather than a Hobbesian" (Brown 2003: par. 16); individual freedom rests in the making of economic decisions, not the exercise of political rights and participation; and personal morality values self-interest, self-promotion, efficiency, and entrepreneurial success, not the common good or the moral law.

Market language, practices, and rationality—like the enterprise form, social capital, and the economy of relations—are extended into non-market spheres of life, like the family, child-raising, and education, where schools are evaluated and rated on, among other criteria, how happy their students (as consumers) are and how much income their graduates make (Foucault 2008: 229, 243-244). The rule of law, protecting individual rights, is replaced by the quest for social order and pacification. The state itself and its laws are to be subject to market criteria of efficiency, cost-benefit

analysis, and consumer satisfaction, and can be judged or tested in those economic terms, so that there is “a permanent economic tribunal confronting government” (Foucault 2008: 247).

In Atwood’s trilogy, the tribunal has judged the government an inadequate failure, and so various corporate capitalist entities shape the society according to their needs and economy. Policing, for instance, has been privatised into the hands of CorpSeCorps. In Bacigalupi’s dystopian future, the Thai government still exists and is potent (unlike in many other countries), but two factions are in conflict, Environment favouring the (non-neoliberal) government regulation of trade, public health, and environmental matters, and the Department of Trade favouring a neoliberal abdication of those social justice concerns in favour of open markets dominated by foreign corporate capitalists. The book can be read as the attempt by foreign corporate capitalists, in alliance with Trade, to impose a neoliberal regime on Thailand.

Bacigalupi gives the reader a vivid “mental image” (More 2010: 56⁵) of Bangkok, with its political conflict between the Ministries of Trade and of Environment, existing in a city on the edge of breakdown: the threat of rising sea levels, the quest for energy, the leftover buildings from the previous economic expansion, its slums and areas for foreigners, and the predatory global calorie companies competing with each other and trying to break into the closed Thai market. The conversations among the foreigners allow the reader to understand some important aspects of the workings of global capitalism: a neoliberal world where corporate capitalism is trying to expand into every possible niche of society, with the aid of government if it can, and manipulating government if it must. The reader also receives a quick history that gets to the novel’s present: the fossil fuel global expansion crashed, and only now is a new food-based expansion occurring. But some important matters are not accounted for. What does the global system look like and how does it function to produce and reproduce itself? The reader may be given enough information to infer an answer, but much is not described; the reader never learns what unspeakable tragedy befell Finland—because no character tells the reader of those dire events (Bacigalupi 2009: 151).

Similar to Bacigalupi, Atwood also presents information primarily from the perspectives of the characters. Life in the corporate compounds is filtered through the

⁵ The English text’s “conception” translates More’s Latin *imago*, which is better rendered as “image” or “mental image”.

responses of Crake and Jimmy to the events and culture within the compounds (Atwood 2003); life outside, in the pleeblands, by the members of “God’s Gardeners” (Atwood 2010). So, Atwood’s trilogy contains little or nothing about government, beyond the privatised policing and administration of justice of CorpSeCorps, which, as her characters suggest, is corrupt and self-serving, uninterested in the poor or in justice, happy to help a corporation employee who has strayed commit “suicide” (Atwood 2003: 211-212). HelthWyzer and the other large corporations with their compounds are described in some dimensions but not others; the reader learns a lot about the corporate culture and its effects, but little directly about corporate structure or governance. Moreover, the reader can glean enough to see that Atwood, like Bacigalupi, portrays a world dominated by corporate capitalism unchecked by government, undertaking whatever projects it wishes, using science to drive profits, and all of that in competition with other corporations (Atwood 2003: 303).

The reader could, like Professor Pieixoto at the end of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, complain about what Bacigalupi and Atwood leave out, and wish for a few pages of computer print-out from the printer of a powerful member of each dystopian society (Atwood 1987: 393). But I think that Bacigalupi and Atwood are trying to make a number of points about contemporary dystopian societies (and how they differ from the nightmares by Zamyatin, Huxley, and Orwell). For Bacigalupi and Atwood knowledge is perspectival and carries the biases of the observer; and so most of what we as readers know is only what the characters let us know. Many of the characters are trying to figure out the bigger picture, which itself is frequently uncertain or in flux, or at least how they may fit into certain pieces of the puzzle; but no character is able to discern and present the full picture, nor to act with any but a partial and flawed understanding⁶.

That perspectival and partial knowledge reflects the condition of the societies Bacigalupi and Atwood depict. Power flows throughout the societies, and any concentration of power is always in competition or in tension with other concentrations, so that the corporate balance of power may be shifting and the means of control may change. For instance, among the biotech pharmaceutical companies there are ongoing battles for profits, power, control of spaces, and control of bodies; in Thailand

⁶ A dystopia of totalizing government, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* nonetheless is told by Offred, and so is perspectival and partial.

the Environment opposes Trade and the struggles for control between the two of them are unceasing. In those struggles, crises and upheavals will occur, but when and how are both uncertain, and whether the neoliberal actors will come out victorious (and what victory means) is also uncertain. As Hock Seng reflects, “nothing is certain, nothing is secure”; “we are like little monkeys, trying to understand a huge jungle” (Bacigalupi 2009: 67, 312). Snowman, reflecting, says that “The world is now one vast uncontrolled experiment—the way it always was, Crake would have said” (Atwood 2003: 228).

In the struggles among calorie companies and as they attempt to aid Trade to dominate Environment, the reader does see that corporate capitalism attempts not only to grow in wealth and power through their relentless pursuit of profit and power but also to grow in power through crises or shocks. Thus the calorie companies assist Trade in fomenting a civil war in Bangkok against Environment, what Naomi Klein (2007) has called “disaster capitalism”. Inevitably, then, the changes that dystopias undergo are unpredictable and uncontrollable, because capitalism operates by disasters, in which actors may be seeking their own gain but are doing so in circumstances that they can neither comprehend nor control.

Whereas Zamyatin’s, Huxley’s and Orwell’s dystopias focus on governmental control, the neoliberal dystopias present the power of government as either highly contested—Environment’s power in Bangkok—or effectively non-existent, with disciplinary power hived off to CorpSeCorps. For them, it is not so much political power that readers need to fear as it is the power of contemporary large corporations engaged in genetic modification and in the marketing of genetically modified products—agribusiness in *The Windup Girl* and pharmaceuticals in Atwood’s vision. In these two twenty-first century dystopias, government is not the problem. Rather, the problem is corporate power establishing neoliberal rationality, which contests and frequently defeats governmental regulation, takes policing onto itself, and allows no limits to the “market”. Agribusiness wishes to impose its idea of “free trade” onto Thailand (Bacigalupi 2009: 148); big Pharma uses patients as experimental subjects for drug tests (Atwood 2010: 25-26); and in both dystopias plagues and disease are introduced by competing large corporations (Bacigalupi 2009: 150; Atwood 2003: 210-213). In other words, agribusiness determines that exchange is the normative relation among Thais; big Pharma regards human beings as a bundle of cells like any other animal; and plagues and disease increase fear, introduce a new “normal”, and heighten dependence on the corporations.

For Bacigalupi and Atwood, then, we—the twenty-first century individuals—live in a world that can be comprehended only partially; we act with only limited knowledge; and power courses through the society, not from the single point of an all-powerful government, but from the plural sources of corporations bent on genetic modification, on creating locales for profit-seeking beyond the bounds of any traditional marketplace, and on using power in any manner to maintain or augment their position. It is not only that corporations are knowledgeable and powerful but also they use their knowledge and power throughout the society in ways that assure drastically limited knowledge and power for the members of that society.

Utopian Possibilities

Both Bacigalupi and Atwood propose utopian possibilities: societies or forms of human interaction that develop after the collapse and flooding of Bangkok and after the catastrophic plague. Both authors envision that the transformed world is post-capitalist, despite the “capitalist realism” that sees no alternatives to capitalism (Fisher 2009), even though “someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (Jameson 2003), and regardless of Le Guin’s having watched us:

[...] blighting our world irrevocably, irremediably, and mindlessly—ignoring every warning and neglecting every benevolent alternative in the pursuit of “growth” and immediate profit. It is quite hard to live in the United States in 2001 and feel any long term hopefulness about [...] technologies that could and should be useful and productive—fuel sources, agriculture, genetic engineering, even medicine (Le Guin 2001).

Contemporary capitalism with its powerful corporations and pervasive neoliberal rationality is too destructive of the environment, relations among human beings (and between human beings and other beings), and individual growth and development; as the dystopias show, capitalism cannot be included in the utopian possibilities⁷.

⁷ It is worth noting that many twentieth century totalitarian dystopias consider nature as oppositional or as a solace to the dystopia, whereas in the twenty-first century, the anthropocene era, nature is no longer separable from human beings (Bacigalupi 2009: 243–249). Conversely, both Bacigalupi and Atwood see religion as oppositional: Jaidee and Kanya (and the monks) seem profoundly affected by their Buddhist beliefs (Bacigalupi 2009: 214, 348–351), and *The Year of the Flood* is basically about the theology and practices of “God’s Gardeners”, an environmental, pacifist, generally egalitarian and open religious sect whose members are the only known human survivors of Crake’s cataclysm other than Jimmy/Snowman and two Painballers. These religions are in part a response to neoliberalism’s exclusion of the spiritual and emphasis on instrumental rationality. Kanya can successfully negotiate the crisis in Bangkok because she does not think only instrumentally, but asks about the meaning of life—whereas Anderson and his allies think instrumentally (how are we going to gain power) as they watch hundreds die in the civil war. God’s Gardeners similarly doubt the values of the

Beyond seeing the need for a post-capitalist society, Bacigalupi's utopian possibilities are fewer and less well-developed than Atwood's. In part, of course, only in Thailand has the rule of agribusiness been thwarted, and then only by the flooding of the city; so, corporate capitalism still dominates worldwide, and Bangkok is but a flooded remnant of itself. Nonetheless, Bacigalupi suggests utopian anticipations, small scale flashes of what might occur more extensively⁸.

One involves time, memory, and collective history. One climax of the novel occurs when, after Trade's victory in the civil war, Kanya murders the AgriGen emissaries who come to seize the precious Thai seedbank, their spoils from the war; she then distributes the seeds to the monks charged with protecting them, who take the seeds to new hiding places (Bacigalupi 2009: 348-353). Kanya is a complex character. Originally a spy for Trade within Environment out of bitterness because her childhood home and village were burned by Environment to head off a plague, over time she develops loyalty to Jaidee, her boss at Environment who is brutally murdered, and to Environment's goals of environmental stability and social justice. Her own memory is invigorated when, as Head of Environment, she has to order a village burned after a young girl from the village reports possible viruses there. Thus, she participates in the collective memory of Thailand. She is Buddhist. Her Buddhism lets her recognise flux, change, and chance—and so opens her to radical change (like murdering AgriGen's representatives). Her Buddhism also makes her sceptical of science: she admires Gibbons's generipper skills, but when he offers to help her and "be [her] god" she replies, "I'm Buddhist" (Bacigalupi 2009: 243). She also feels a deep connection to Thailand, its independence from the integrated, globalized world of agribusiness, and its own traditions⁹. For Kanya, with those connections, "the culture of memory [emphasis—P.S.] allows for the formation of a collective resistance" (Baccolini 2003: 127).

Compound, and in asking about the value of life they for instance avoid eating meat or entering the commodity economy—and thus reject the BlyssPlus pill.

⁸ One dystopian alternative to agribusiness that Bacigalupi implies is that the decay of one form of corporate capitalism may simply serve as the beginning for another form. Current agribusiness dystopia is in fact a dystopian sequel to a previous worldwide neoliberal corporate dystopia, a world dominated by oil or energy companies, which expanded—"the first expansion", it is called—throughout the world, imposing their vision throughout the world. But with the exhaustion of oil that dystopia evaporated in a great contraction and the rising sea levels of a carbon-heated world flooded coastal cities everywhere. Oil energy, having been depleted, however, large American corporates started to deal in caloric energy. Bacigalupi (2009: 28, 150) does not describe in detail the first expansion and its contraction; but the dominance of calorie companies means that one serious problem of contemporary neoliberal corporate capitalism is that it can replicate itself: if oil is depleted, move to calories.

⁹ At one point she thinks: "We are alive. We are alive when whole kingdoms and countries are gone. When Malaya is a morass of killing. When Kowloon is underwater. When China is split and the Vietnamese are broken and Burma is

In her violent saving of the seedbank Kanya also engages in an act of generosity: she allows Hock Seng, who is acting as a translator, to escape the carnage. His Malaysian Chinese background and green card would normally make him the first person targeted in any violence in Bangkok, but here they allow Kanya to see that he is not of the AgriGen delegation, and she lets him go. That generosity feeds on itself: Hock Seng, who until the attack had always been concerned with his interest and advancement first and foremost, risks his escape by helping to rescue Mai (Bacigalupi 2009: 354).

Bacigalupi also presents a caring community of Emiko (the windup), Gibbons, and Kip (Gibbons's lady-boy companion). Quite sick as the floodwaters engulf Bangkok, Gibbons keeps Kip so that Kip does not have to work the streets; and the two of them invite Emiko onto their small patio. Emiko has frequently despaired about her condition: "I am a windup. Nothing will change. We will always be despised" (Bacigalupi 2009: 222). And indeed throughout most of the novel Emiko is despised, denigrated as a prostitute, and unable to be in public without giving away her status as a windup because of her halting movements (she revolts against being a mistreated sex-worker when the corrupt Lord Protector and his cronies come to gang-rape her; she kills them all, setting into motion the immediate events leading to the civil war). But she finds in Gibbons not the arrogant competitive taunting generipper who confronted Kanya (Bacigalupi 2009: 243-248) but a generous companion who offers community and connectedness and who is willing to use his skills to help her. Emiko's dejection about her condition especially derives from her inability to reproduce and the stutter-steps that expose her status. But Gibbons knows the strengths of the windups: especially in a world of plagues, "you do not fear cibiscosis or blister rust" and "you don't catch diseases like mine", he says to her. He also can improve her gait and allow her to reproduce (by reworking her genetic material, not by using old-fashioned eggs and sperm); "nothing about you is inevitable" (Bacigalupi, 2009: 358) and Gibbons promises that she can reproduce: "Oh yes. I can do that for you [...]. I can do that for you, and much, much more" (Bacigalupi, 2009: 359).

nothing but starvation. The Empire of America is no more. The Union of the Europeans is splintered and factionalized. And yet we endure, even expand. The Kingdom survives. Thank the Buddha that he extends a compassionate hand and that our Queen has enough merit to attract these terrifying farang tools without which we would be completely defenceless" (Bacigalupi 2009: 214).

Gibbons's words end the novel, but they also suggest how open-ended, ambiguous, or uncertain are utopian anticipations in critical dystopias, or at least in Bacigalupi's critical dystopia. Because other generippers can probably do as Gibbons can with windups, then "someday, perhaps, all people will be New People [i.e. windups—P.S.] and you will look back on us as we now look back at the poor Neanderthals" (Bacigalupi 2009: 358); Gibbons, playing God with Emiko as he tried to do with Kanya, would usher in a post-natural, post-human world¹⁰. That vision, however, seems to contrast with Kanya's final acts of memory and generosity, acts done from human memory by human agency; what specifically the utopian anticipations will mean and they might interact are, ultimately, left open.

Bacigalupi's characters suggest other utopian possibilities. Gibbons keeps in mind that human issues are not like "the decay of uranium or the velocity of a clipper ship. [They are—P.S.] not predictable" (Bacigalupi, 2009: 249) and throughout the novel the unpredictable occurs, not only in physics and mathematics but in the purposes and instrumental reason of the actors (Anderson, AgriGen's chief agent, sought to win the Lord Protector to the calorie companies' side by promising him something he had never had, sex with a windup. Unintended and unpredicted consequences ensued). So the instrumental reason and calculation by economic rationality promises more than it can deliver, and needs to be replaced by a reasoning more open to contingency and chance.

In Bangkok, individuals' roles, status, and class are defined and determinative in most instances: for instance, Emiko is labelled unnatural, a windup, alien to human beings, owned by a man who keeps her in sexual servitude. But she breaks down the natural/artificial or human/unnatural binary: despite being bred to obedience, she finds a human-like agency when she kills her rapists and transgresses her limitations. The predetermined social role into which she is placed proves transient and the binary that marks her "inevitably" as less than human can be overcome. The segmentation and divisions that marked Bangkok are not inevitable but changeable.

¹⁰ For Gibbons it would not be "post-natural" in any significant sense because he sees that human beings naturally manipulate and transform nature: as he says to Kanya, "The ecosystem unraveled when man first went a-seafaring. When we first lit fires on the broad savannas of Africa. We have only accelerated the phenomenon. The food web you talk about is nostalgia, nothing more. Nature... We are nature. Our every tinkering is nature, our every biological striving. We are what we are, and the world is ours. We are its gods. Your only difficulty is in your unwillingness to unleash your potential fully upon it. [...]. If you would just let me, I could be your god and shape you to the Eden that beckons u" (Bacigalupi, 2009: 243).

Atwood's utopian anticipations, like Bacigalupi's, include time, memory, and collective history, generosity, caring communities, alternative rationalities, and the breaking of binaries. By the end of the trilogy, the surviving human beings have survived in large measure because of their active memories of their collective history. What brought God's Gardeners together was, originally, a revulsion against life in the Compounds and the pursuit of biogenetic knowledge with experimentation on human beings; many of God's Gardeners first worked with Crake. In reaction to Crake and the pursuit of human power over (or human transforming of) nature, they established a relatively long-lived and relatively successful religious community, many of whose values become valuable after the "Waterless Flood", the destruction of human beings by Crake's BlyssPlus pill. Partly, the group learned how to work in concert, protecting friends and working against enemies (such as the Painballers) when necessary. They became vegetarians to lessen their ecological footprint, and—despite backsliding on occasion—were able to reassert their vegetarianism when they needed to work together with the Pigoons (genetically engineered pigs with human brain tissue). Their extensive time together, in co-operation and in disagreements, gave them collective memories and a collective history that allowed them to confront the post-apocalyptic crises as a unified, thoughtful, and co-operative community. Much of that collective history involved the generosity and caring communities of the Gardeners. They are selves who see themselves in relation to other individuals, and care for the others frequently without regard for their own well-being and without the expectation that they will obtain some kind of individual benefit or reward. Thus, they have an alternate rationality to the market or individualistic rationality.

They break down important binaries and prepare for an uncertain future of hope and possibility when they undertake to kill the dangerous remaining two Painballers and when they engage in educating the Crakers, who are a genetically engineered species whom Crake created without the "destructive features" of human beings like hierarchy, property, jealousy, racism, and religion (Atwood, 2003: 305). They also have certain characteristics to make life easier and environmentally sound: their skin automatically contains sun-screen and insect repellent, they eat only vegetation, and they recycle their own excrement.

Atwood's black humour and irony make it difficult to recapitulate briefly the serious episodes that end the book. First, to kill the Painballers an alliance is formed among the remaining human beings, the Pigoons and the Crakers (who are kind, gentle, and pacifist, but who can communicate or translate between humans and

Pigoons); in the campaign, the Painballers are captured because of the strategy and quick actions of the Pigoons, the weapons of the human beings, and the cross-species communication and translation by a Craker. In the campaign the human beings are not the lead species but they follow the commands of the Pigoons and listen to the Craker. Human agency and human action are effective only when undertaken in co-operation with (non-human) others. After the battle, the human beings, the Crakers, and the Pigoons work out terms for living together in peace and aiding each other—the Crakers make the human women pregnant to continue (changed) humanity¹¹, the human beings and Pigoons protect the Crakers, human beings promise to eat no bacon, and Toby teaches the young Craker named Blackbeard to write (Atwood 2013: 339-375). When four “green-eyed Craker hybrid children are born to the human women”, this is the “future of the human race” (Atwood 2013: 380). The binary of human/nature and the hierarchy of human beings over nature are broken, and in the newness of the birth each hybrid child “is a thing of hope” (Atwood, 2013: 390).

The second “episode” at the end of the book is the education of the young Craker, Blackbeard, the battle translator, who seeks and gains a cultural education far beyond what Crake would have wished: “Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war” (Atwood 2003: 361). But his Crakers have potentials beyond what he imagined, “their brains are more malleable than Crake intended” (Atwood 2013: 273). Blackbeard, fascinated with human storytelling and writing, learns how to write. When Toby (the chief human storyteller) in her sorrow cannot write or tell of the final battle, Blackbeard steps in and based on first-hand accounts writes the history of the event, for the Crakers as well as for others. At this point, “the Crakers become potentially autonomous individuals in the sense that they are responsible for their own history” (Marques 2015: 144).

¹¹ Having sex is more complex than it might seem. At the beginning of *MaddAddam*, some Craker men take two human women, Ren and Amanda, into the bushes and have sex with them by force without the women’s consent—from the human perspective, rape—because they were “blue”, i.e., in their fertile period, when Craker men were genetically programmed to court and impregnate females—from the Craker perspective, natural sex (Atwood 2003: 165; Atwood 2013: 12-13). Later in the book some human women voluntarily go to the Craker men (Atwood 2013: 273-74); and finally, after the post-battle agreements, Toby insists, and Blackbeard and the Crakers accept, that the Crakers “must be respectful, and always ask first, to see if a woman is really blue or is just smelling blue, when there is a question about blue things”, i.e., about sexual intercourse (Atwood 2013: 386).

Toby taught Blackbeard not only to write but also to keep writing alive, crafting pens and ink, insisting that the historical stories of the Crakers (and their creator Crake and first teacher Oryx), the relevant stories of the human beings the Crakers know, and some other stories (Atwood 2013: 385) be copied and preserved, and that each new book have blank pages on which future beings will write and “will teach these things to the younger ones” (Atwood 2013: 387). Storytelling, history, and the continuation of both hold a promise of learning, community, and communication among the Crakers and the hybrids.

Conclusion

Atwood’s and Bacigalupi’s utopian aspirations hold hope not only for a post-catastrophe world of plagues and floods. The contemporary reader can also see them as model or metaphor for critique and action for our present. Combining traits of Crakers and Pigoons, working together with time and memory and against segmentation and separation, contemporary human beings can work to develop those principles and practices needed to live non-destructively and harmoniously in the present. For the sake of contemporary human beings, the utopian aspirations of the *MaddAddam* trilogy and *The Windup Girl* need to be instantiated in today’s human (and more-than-human) community.

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