

Various Psychologies of Post-Apocalyptic Texts

Zarin Rafiuddin
Student ID: 08103002

Department of English and Humanities

December 2010



BRAC University
66, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka 1212.

Various Psychologies of Post-Apocalyptic Texts

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of English and Humanities
of BRAC University

by

Zarin Rafiuddin
ID: 08103002

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for The Degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

December 2010

**Dedicated To My
Abbu and Ammu
for listening to me roar and whine
and knowing I was the little oddity
but loving me powerfully still...**

Acknowledgements

Well Thanking God Almighty first for the recovery from Dengue. I finally got to finish.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Kaiser Haq, for weeding out the termites from my thesis paper.

I want to thank all the faculty and teachers of the English Department of BRAC University: Our Chairperson, Firdous Azim, Sohana Manzoor, Nausheen Naz Yusuf, Syed Manzoorul Islam, Rukhsana Rahim Chowdhury, Shenin Ziauddin, Tabassum Zaman, Mahmudul Huq, Sabreena Ahmed, Asifa Sultana, and Sayeed Mohammad Noman.

I want to Thank Rafiq Bhai, Ahad Bhai, Nazmul Bhai and Kobir Bhai for all their help.

I want to thank my friends who are abroad now Audity, Efad, Linh and Tyler for listening to me trying to write

I want to thank my friends at WDC especially Mystic and Tyson for supporting me

I want to give special thanks to Sonika, the sweetheart, who was there for me through thick and thin. Mushira for helping me out and giggle

All the people who are my Friends in the Department Thank You guys I won't forget you.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Chapter I: Civilization And Post-Civilization.....	6
Chapter II: Isolation.....	27
Chapter III: Androgynous Survival.....	48
Conclusion.....	60
Works Cited.....	61

Abstract:

The post-apocalyptic genre is quite a popular one. People are fascinated by what will happen at the end of the world as we know it. Most popular post-apocalyptic fictions, however, are more stereotypical in nature which posits causes and effects. Yet some writers do explicitly portray postmodernist elements in post-apocalyptic fiction. In my paper I will illustrate the various psychologies of post-apocalyptic texts. Some texts concern themselves with power hierarchies, others with isolation and some with the continuation of sexism even in a society of the future. I will analyze the texts I have chosen for this paper to illustrate these points.

Introduction

I would like to watch you sleeping,
which may not happen.

I would like to watch you,
sleeping. I would like to sleep
with you, to enter
your sleep as its smooth dark wave
slides over my head

...

I would like to be the air
that inhabits you for a moment
only. I would like to be that unnoticed
& that necessary.¹

When we are born we are told that inevitably we will die. That is the mortal equation: life persists through that. What happens in between is not truly predictable. No guarantee; but it happens anyway either by hands greater than ours (if you believe in God then for you it is divine ordinance and if you don't then it is always the uncontrollable X-factor) or by our own choices. These are usually the basics we are told.

The post-apocalypse is not really unique concerning that it does recycle many of the ideologies that we know. If apocalypse is the destruction of society then post-apocalypse is not entirely its renewal; it is also its analysis. It exposes what we already may encounter but has more scopes to testify against its injustice, tyranny and oppression.

Post-apocalyptic texts are derivatives of science fiction and mostly Christianity's concerns with apocalypse and its aftermath. In Jewish and Islamic scriptures and faiths the apocalypse or *Qiyamat* is the day of Final Judgment so the post-apocalypse is undeniably the Hereafter. Hindu scriptures call their post-apocalypse the coming of the Golden Age. However in all these scriptures the Second Coming seems imminent. In secular post-apocalypse the Second Coming is replaced by elements present in the temporal world. When Margaret Atwood received the Arthur C. Clarke award, which is delivered to the masters of Science fiction, she was told that the fans were angry at her for being given this award. Curious she asked why and the answer was a comical one – she had mentioned that her writings were not science fiction but speculative fiction to which the fans felt odd that she

Asimov's works of robots and how life becomes unbearable on the surface of the Earth that humans must live underground then science fiction seems far off in the future. Then what about *The City of Ember* series in this calculation? The *City of Ember* by Jeanne DuPrau series showed that humanity survived the apocalypse underground within a city called Ember. However, Ember is running out of resources so they must find a way out and they succeed in their mission and return to life on the surface. The definition of both speculative fiction and science fiction are hard to separate as many definitions are in our world today.

Postmodernism and post-apocalyptic thought go mostly hand in hand. This is because of the fact that post-apocalypse texts depict the pluralities of human discourse. Many critiques of civilizations are done via the Pataphysics of it present in the post-apocalyptic novel. Post-apocalyptic is not post-humanity nor is it post-civilization, rather they are variations to anything we may regard as kitsch or safeguard as what we might call sacred to us as people (the variations of sleep as Atwood calls it). Atwood's poem obviously illustrates the wide, enigmatic and dark psychologies present in the post-apocalyptic world.

Post-apocalypse seems antithetic to the word apocalypse but as most human/mortal concepts it is actually immanent, a paradox, as told by Frank Kermode in his book *The Sense of an Ending*. This tradition of post-apocalyptic texts was initiated by Mary Shelley with her novel, *The Last Man*, which illustrated the apocalypse and how the book's survivor must journey elsewhere as there is no one else left in the world and travelling the seemingly empty globe is the only practical solution left. Shelley has said to have based her book on the prophecies of a Sybil in a cave in Naples that she found with her husband. The book, in its time, was not received with praise as it is now. Her maiden voyage to post-apocalyptic terrain (which would follow soon an entire genre of its own) was called nothing but the grieving of a widow (she had written it after Percy Shelley's death: facts stated Wordsworth classics

Post-apocalyptic ideologies are diverse but some elements keep on reappearing in most texts such as the reshaping of civilization. The Post-apocalyptic genre is quite embedded into popular culture but most of those texts are not really postmodern. However, the books being discussed in this dissertation have their roots and fame in the literary circuit: *The Slynx* by Tatyana Tolstaya (2003), *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood and its sister novel *The Year of The Flood* (2009), and *Z for Zachariah* by Robert C. O' Brien. *The Handmaid's Tale* is not a classic post-apocalyptic text but if we follow the secular plurality given to the genre it possesses the necessary elements to mark it as a novel dealing with such ideologies.

The aim of this thesis is to illustrate how post-apocalyptic texts do use various psychologies to shape themselves; as this genre is flooded with various ideologies this thesis will focus more on how the aforementioned texts deal with the representations of civilizations, isolation and sexuality.

Chapter I: Civilization And Post-Civilization

If you ever get close to a human
and human behaviour
be ready to get confused

there's definitely no logic
to human behaviour
but yet so irresistible

there is no map
to human behaviour³

³ AZlyrics. *BJORK LYRICS*. 26 August 2000. 1 December 2010

<http://www.lyrics.com/lyrics/BJORK/humanbehaviour.html>

The world has ended or has it? This has always been the setting of the post-apocalyptic discourse. As Frank Kermode puts in his book *The Sense Of an Ending* we are the people of the middle so we do not truly see apocalypse as an ultimate end. Most post-apocalyptic novels retell the story of civilization; how it finally dies out (a post-apocalyptic apocalypse) or its unavoidable resurgence.

The word *civilized* has many connotations. Apocalypse may eradicate "civilization- - as-we-know-it" but civilizations as we know them are not the only pragmatic course of *civilized* means. When one ponders on the ruins of the Aztec, Rome, Sodom and Gomorra and even Ancient Egypt or even the centuries of Woolf, Marlowe and the arena of Kundera we see that civilization is a stimulation of the psyche. It appears differently for different people. In the post-apocalyptic world we see that each civilization has its own ideologies.

If Frank Kermode states that we are the people in the middle unable to unhinge the need for apocalypse it is also true we will not be able to eliminate our primitive desires despite how cultured we become. It is also quite impossible to take away our need for improvement and our grand drive for curiosity. Civilization in its forms dystopian, utopian or mixed is an instrument through which humans function.

So do we begin in the middle? The middle of what exactly?

Can one escape this curving back of history which causes it to retrace its own steps and obliterate its own tracks, escape this fatal asymptote which causes us, as it were, to rewind modernity like a tape? We are so used to playing back every film – the fictional ones and the films of our lives – so contaminated by the technology of

retrospection, that we are quite capable, in our present dizzy spin, of running history over again like a film played backwards.⁴

When Jean Baudrillard writes these words in his *The Illusion of the End* his capacity of understanding ends is that it is present in almost every avenue of life and that we humans have surpassed it to invite it once more. This end without ending is already the very core of the post-apocalyptic and also to Baudrillard's disdain there is both autopsy of the so called childhood of a "former" and also its revision – there seems to be an odd fusion of death and life which results in a world that is like the world before and so there seems to be no pure escaping this condition as Kermode would call it the need of the perpetual in secular fiction to represent/replace eternity.

Is eternity rooted in the religious? The primitive, or shall I say more accurately the perpetual? When post-apocalyptic writers write they do so with the intention of exposing the gravity of these questions be it consciously or unconsciously. Well if post-apocalyptic civilization is as Baudrillard disdainfully puts a revision and also an inerasable past (as disruptive as a force it can be) then obviously it is a chaotic paradox.

When one speaks of the word *natural* what does it mean? In Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* the natural is replaced when the protagonist opens the Iron Maiden and discovers the previous wife in it and now knows the veracity of her own fate. *The Bloody Chamber* is the retelling of *Bluebeard's egg* – history repeated and again past consulted to explain the future. What was not considered natural was the fact that the husband was sadistic and like his ancestors loved to kill women – to him this was a natural order. This, however, defied the definition of normal for our protagonist who is finally rescued by her mother. The

⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Illusion of an End*. California: Stanford University Press, 1992. p. 11.

antagonist is shot dead by his mother-in-law. If natural is fanaticism to some it may be decadence, heroics, religion or just plain survival to others.

The Chrysalids, by John Wyndham, plays with what is natural and not. The title itself is a neologism by the author; a derivative of the word *chrysalis* and it serves as a tool to explain the unpredictable post-apocalypse landscape and individual. The novel shows two factions of people living in a salvaged world after a disaster:

The commandments and precepts one learns as a child can be remembered by rote, but they mean little until there is an example – and, even then, the example needs to be recognized.

Thus, I was able to sit patiently and watch the hurt foot being washed, cold-poulticed, and bound up, and perceive no connexion between it and the affirmation which I heard almost every Sunday of my life.

‘And God created in His own image. And God decreed that man should have one body, one head, two arms and two legs: that each arm should be jointed in two places and end on one hand: that each hand should have four fingers and one thumb: that each should bear a flat finger-nail...

And so on until.

‘Then God created woman, also, and in the same image, but with these differences, according to her nature: her voice should be of higher pitch than man’s: she should grow no beard: she should have two breast...’

And so on again.

I knew it all, word for word – and yet the sight of Sophie's six toes stirred nothing in my memory. I saw the foot resting in her mother's lap. Watched her mother pause to look down at it for a still moment, lift it, bend to kiss it gently, and then look up with tears in her eyes. I felt sorry for her distress, and for Sophie, and for the hurt foot – but nothing more.⁵

This narration is from the book's protagonist, David Storm, who is of the elite class of people in Wyndham's world. They are elite as they fit the religious description of what natural should be. David's true understanding of the unfair, unjust and unstable world comes into play when he meets Sophie Wender, a young girl who seems to fall into the category that is not natural but instead of reporting her, as his society offers and instructs, he decides to be her friend and protect her secret — his first act of rebellion against his own society.

David's society is divided into two categories; the natural God-fearing fanatical elite and the ostracized deviated one whose occupants live in the Fringes and not only suffer expulsion from the natural elite but also from starvation as the Fringes is not really a habitable place. These reasons create intense animosity between the two societies. David discovers Sophie in his youth and when his young friend hurt her foot badly he sees her sixth toe. Sophie does not allow David to help her initially and soon enough she decides to crawl her way back home but this becomes difficult so David calls for her mother. At first David does not remember the sermons he was enforced to by his priestly, puritanical father and his mother but while going home he realizes that Sophie did not fit the proper image of man. He realizes then why Sophie's mother had made him promise not to talk about Sophie to anyone. But to him Sophie is not Blasphemy nor is she a Deviation. She is a brave girl – his belief in

⁵ Wyndham, John. *The Chrysalids*. Penguin Books, 1955.p. 7

the sermons ebb as his truce with Sophie grows stronger. Their friendship beginning with these pivotal lines:

I was abruptly perturbed – and considerably puzzled, too. A blasphemy was, as had been impressed upon me often enough, a frightful thing. Yet there was nothing frightful about Sophie. She was simply an ordinary little girl – if a great deal more sensible and braver than most. Yet, according to the Definition...

Clearly there must be a mistake somewhere. Surely having one very small toe-extra – well, two very small toes, because I supposed there would be one to match on the other foot – surely that couldn't be enough to make her 'hateful in the sight of God...?'

The ways of the world were very puzzling...⁶

David questions his society with the appearance of Sophie. The psychology of the post-apocalyptic is not truly stable; like any form of conditioning the people of David's elite believe in their elitism as God's blessed creatures and those who are not of this stock to be deviations that are rightly expelled and killed for the betterment of society.

When Roland Barthes wrote "Myth Today" in *Mythologies* he obviously did portray a very vivid description of civilization's hierarchal framework and the need to posit the rules of what *normal* and *natural* would be when in actuality there is no "actually". There has been no normal or natural method of observing things around us – there are all constructed to help

⁶ Wyndham, John. *The Chrysalids*, Penguin Books, 1955.p. 10

“someone” to gain power – obviously an oligarchy that despises the so-called deviations and wants to create an illusion of superiority.

Barthes speaks that Myth is a second-order semiological system which needs something pre-existent to work on and so it can produce and reproduce itself (myth uses the first order- semiological system’s [language’s] sign as signifier or form and then puts on its own signified or concept to create a sign all of its own). David’s world is functioning because of these myths and though it is not David’s intention to break them he does break them.

Ihab Hassan had made a table of postmodernist elements in which characteristics such as “metonymy”, “desire”, “mutant”, “dispersal”, “androgyny”, “antinarratives” and “immanence” had relevance. To Hassan these were the qualities that separated the postmodernism from modernism and he also did point out one crucial difference: whilst modernism depicts what it thinks is the “grand narrative”, postmodernism is all about “antinarrative”

If one reads carefully the post-apocalyptic text that is *The Chrysalids* then they will see postmodernist elements marked by Hassan present in this 50’s novel. Not only are these psychologically present in this text concerning the resuscitation of civilization or its decadence, but also present in other post-apocalyptic work dealing with similar themes.

When I was quite small I would sometimes dream of a city – which was strange because it began before I even knew what a city was. But this city, clustered on the curve of a big blue bay, would come into my mind. I could see the streets, and the buildings that lined them, the waterfront, even boats in the harbour; yet waking I had never seen the sea, or a boat...

And the buildings were quite unlike any I knew. The traffic in the streets was strange, carts running with no horses to pull them; and sometimes there were things in the sky, shiny fish-shaped things that certainly were not birds.

Most often I would see this wonderful place by daylight, but occasionally it was by night when the lights lay like strings of glow-worm along the shore, and few of the4m seemed to be sparks drifting on the water, or in the air.⁷

David's story begins with the phantasmal; an anti-society to his society, a sort of illusion. David's narration seemed to show the future intermeshing with the past as his ideas of society are still progressing while his dream city has already developed aircrafts for travel. When he asks the location of such a city his older sister; Mary tells him that obviously such cities do not exist anymore in their world and the fact that David can see it when others cannot becomes the metonymy (or David's mind exactly) to what the future of his story holds. That is because David is as Sophie only his mutation is not the physical or the obtrusive kind – it is subtle as in the inner workings of the human psyche – it is in his psyche – David is a form of telepath. He is not alone for there are others like him living within the framework of this fanatical society in secret.

David's odyssey to live from detection is crucial for he is a heterogeneous anomaly in a society that might eventually kill him. He is neither purely an elite nor is he on the Fringes but he is the hybrid. The person who discovers this about him is his Uncle Axel. Axel does not understand at first that David is talking to his cousin Rosalind with his mind and believes he is merely talking to himself, however, when he realizes it is serious he, instead of turning David in as is the usual protocol, swears him to secrecy and David swears in the others.

⁷ Wyndham, John. *The Chrysalids*. Penguin Books, 1955. p.1

David's telepathy is a transmission of shapes and words devoid of sight and sounds. When Uncle Axel tells him initially to forget about it he cannot as he explains it would be to forget something integral that comprises his identity.

David's and his friend's story are the antinarratives to that of the main base of his society and he understands this perfectly clear especially when he looks at his father who is the incarnation of all the things that this sort of society cherishes – he is a puritanical, fanatical extremist and his wife follows suit. David and his father clash earlier on in his childhood when David's innocence is always mentally corrupted by his father. David must be whipped when he does not view his father's views as his own.

The first case exhibiting this is a minor offence – paid dearly. David had just commented if he had an extra hand he could have helped himself when he got wounded (a splinter in his hand he had to take out and it bled so profusely that his mother had to help him bandage it; of course she had been busy thus angry at David). This leads to his father saying he had evoked on the devil and ousted himself out of God's grace. David keeps on stressing that he had used the word "if" and the poor boy is confused at his father's ferocity to his words (others silently mimic his intensity as when he spoke it everyone else in the room preparing supper had become silent). David is told to absolve himself through prayer through which they all participate. David, however, is sent to his room to pray alone so that his father could whip him as well. It is this whipping and prayer which is symbolic as moral control; as discipline and order – but the question is can the whipping dissolve David of his telepathy or his need to participate in it?

No. The answer is simple. David hungers to be free against the totalitarianism of his society and mostly the patriarchy constructed by his father. He cannot approach the same lines of thoughts as the other lambs and so he decides to turn to his Uncle Axel for guidance.

He does not want to follow his father's rules let alone oust Sophie – to him the plurality of the body is a simplistic equation not a devil-worshipping ceremony.

Taking stock of the scientific contradictions of the past 160 years that have made man the sacred being that he is, Foucault issues a bold declaration: “ If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea.” The figure of “man” is but a dim notation at the edge of the shore, awaiting the incoming tide of history, with his liquidation. For that tide will reveal man in his true aspect; not as a timeless, godlike being possessed of an immortal soul, but as an accidental, provisional creature, precariously poised between the “epistemological regions” of economics, biology and philology.⁸

Wyndham has Michel Foucault's statement illustrated when Sophie is discovered – ironically it was the footprint that was not washed away by the tides of a stream upon a flat rock that revealed Sophie's sixth toe to an outsider. A boy named Alan; an acquaintance of David's, comes along and asks of Sophie's identity. When Alan sees the mark of the deviation he gets more interested in chasing after Sophie and she flees. Despite David's best attempts of fighting him he does succeed in overpowering David but then gets hit by Sophie and they both run off. After this incident Sophie's parents escape the society knowing their daughter was in danger.

This altercation of David and Alan in regards to Sophie is unmistakably that one with which the postmodernist philosophy is battling an extremist one, as Paul Sheehan who quoted

⁸ Conner, Steven *The Cambridge Companion To Postmodernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. p.26

Foucault would say that the postmodernist philosophy fighting an extremist anthropocentric dogma. The unwashed footprint revealed the egotism of man and his feeling he must make the rules. The counter-ideology, which exhibited Foucault's statement, was David, who realized beforehand that man has no divine image and that its engineering of one has caused much disaster than good.

However, his father's perverted philology whips out Sophie's whereabouts from him (though David is told that they were caught before his confession) and he feels angered at these machinations. It is with these episodes he realizes that he cannot hope to stay in a place where people as innocent as Sophie are victimized. He tries to discuss his hopes of running away to Uncle Axel who does not encourage it. He, however, does tell David that there is no "true image" validating that he will stick out for David's ideologies as they share the same philosophies. They both see their civilization as a mythology constructed on the use of signifiers and signified that have no true relation to one another.

Though when David begins their conversation Uncle Axel is reluctant to reveal all that he knows. David notes that he answers like his father in response to the question to how if anything does exist outside their district Labrador excluding The Badlands (which are implied to be barren and radioactive). His answer is that they are Godless. When David states his disappointment Uncle Axel explains of his reticence to answer is a defensive reflex. The age-old model that Barthes has put forward and Foucault has also embodied: that knowledge can be mythology shaped by power and that is why Uncle Axel is attempting to choose his answers wisely because one wrong answer could have his Normalcy Certificate taken away and put in him a really bad predicament. As Axel was once a sailor he is acquainted with certain places outside of Labrador. He states that though there are no large towns around,

history having repetitions for doesn't it sound familiar that knowledge is being controlled even on a geographical basis? The post-apocalyptic has recycled history.

David's odyssey is not a rare phenomenon for his journey is followed by others in other apocalypses passed. Benedikt in *The Slynx* by Tatyana Tolstaya is on an Odyssey of his own and must see through the veil that which the new civilization functions, probes and establishes their version of order.

The Slynx by Tatyana Tolstaya is a lyrical metamorphosis of the post-apocalyptic phenomenon. If the text is not postmodernism at its best then no other terminology may suit it. It also has similarities with *The Chrysalids* in terms on the hierarchy of civilization and the hierarchy of genetic transmission; however, unlike *The Chrysalids* this novel uses not merely a first person narrative style to tell us what has happened rather it intermeshes different narratives to symbolize hierarchy, superstition and hegemony. Benedikt is not completely as David per say – unlike David, who from an early age sees the hypocrisy of his society and decides to live in secret with other telepaths; Benedikt is more of a primitive man due to his culture. It is not an extremely religious culture rather it is more like a bunch of drunk adolescents are running the society on their own whimsical terms. Benedikt does as he is told as first but it is quite obvious that things won't stay like that for long. However, the novel itself represents the disoriented time as Baudrillard envisions it:

If we could escape this end-of-century moratorium, with its deferred day of reckoning, which looks curiously like a work of mourning – a failed one – and which consists of reviewing everything, rewriting everything, restoring everything, face-lifting everything, to produce, as it seems, in a burst of paranoia a perfect set of accounts at the end of the century, a universally

democracy everywhere, the definitive obliteration of all conflict and, if possible, the obliteration of all 'negative' events from our memories), if we could escape this international cleaning and polishing effort in which all the nations of the world can be seen vying today, if we could spare ourselves this democratic extreme unction by which the New World Order is heralded, we would at least allow the events which have preceded us to retain their glory, character, meaning and singularity.⁹

If it is a polishing effort than obviously in both the cases the polishing is a plastic casing that asphyxiates the denizens of each society. We see David trying to ignore what others think of deviations and stop feeling upset in every step of the way; he tries not to be ashamed of his identity. This is made clear when David's Aunt Harriet kills herself due to her sister, David's mother, and her brother-in-law condemning her actions to hide her mutant baby from the inspectors. She wants to borrow David's new born sister as her own child so her mutant one will not be noticed. David's father is furious at her proposition and demands she leaves their house for engaging in sinful thinking and trying to get others to join her in her actions. Aunt Harriet condemns them through speech for trying to 'clean' the world in their own image of normal. His aunt is later found dead with the baby not reported:

My father included Aunt Harriet's name in our prayers on the evening of the day the news came, but after that she was never referred to again. It was as if though she had wiped out of every memory but mine. There, however, she remained very clearly, given form at a time when I had only heard her, as an upright figure with a face drained of hope, and a voice saying clearly: 'I am

⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Illusion of an End*, California: Stanford University Press, 1992. p. 7

not ashamed – I am only beaten.’ And, too, as I had last seen her, looking up at the house.¹⁰

This episode scares young David into depression; he starts hoping and praying to God that he becomes *normal*. Uncle Axel later on tells him that there is nothing wrong in the way he is and that he should not feel negative about himself either. Though Axel’s words keep him strong as he grows up the viewpoints of others makes him feel uncomfortable with his society. He begins to understand that he is isolated without the other telepaths and that they must do their best to live in secrecy amongst the *normal* people. The genetic cleansing, his father’s way of polishing the world of its *imperfections*, have caused David and his friends the misery of being ostracized in their own homes.

It is ironic to note that the civilization of Tolstaya’s novel is the anti-civilization of the ideal fanatical community of Wyndham’s text for almost everyone in *The Slynx* has a genetic mutation or Consequence and they revere nothing aside merrymaking. However, the two societies seem to function in the same instability mirroring almost each other’s downfall and elements. They are both the facets of the post-apocalyptic yet both are eerily different-similar at the same time. We can see the odd balance of David and Benedikt – they can be interchanged if each environment is also cleverly interchanged. In *The Chrysalids* we see David grow from boy to man – a post-apocalyptic bildungsroman and through him and his body is tied also the details of the society he lives in, as in the events through which his society thrives. This is the same with Benedikt, whose story may not be the traditional bildungsroman but shows his growth and that of his society. The word “growth” here is multifarious and not really a personal ascension – like the postmodernist axis of being

¹⁰ Wyndham, John. *The Chrysalids*. Penguin Books, 1955. p. 67

heterogeneous “growth” here is the immanent nature of man; of developing and regressing. But with Tolstaya the statement of Foucault is very well placed – it seemed she has seen the tides and allowed herself to be washed away with them. She knows of the multifarious liquidations – the powerful spasms of decadence and life.

It is in *The Slynx*’s syntagmatical representations through which we can see the post-apocalyptic and postmodernist style going hand and hand. It is as Steven Connor detailed out in *The Cambridge Companion To Postmodernism* that postmodernism is not concerned to establish one or two “grand” philosophies but rather only involve in the illustration of itself. Postmodernist goes through, as Hassan noted, many elements that may seem elusive and post-apocalypse fuses with these elements to exist. Every line in *The Slynx* is a linguistic polymorph – it has the power of the first person, second person and third so it embodies the world of the novel through its language – it dissects the once revered holy trinity and shows that it is ubiquitous in society. Unfortunately, a trinity of man is not perfect: it is filled with lust, corruption and schizophrenic outlooks.

The evidence of it is seen by the hierarchal structures present in the novel. The Murzas form the oligarchy through which Benedikt’s society functions. The Stokers are people in charge of helping people stay warm by making fires. There are people who had survived The Blast (called the Oldeners who cannot die by aging for that is their Consequence) who are a minority whose ideologies are not really heeded. Thus even if they opinionated on philosophers such as Kant they are not understood or taken seriously. The Oldeners are seemingly the parody of Academics (As Arundhati Roy might say) at times for their endless bickering on what was present before The Blast. Then we have the Degenerators, people who are used as human sleigh-dogs. At first one thinks they are retarded mutants only to find out that they are able to talk and move about as other people; they even know how to write.

However, they are like horribly retired athletes or jocks who only seem to speak of the material riches that they had once had.

Benedikt society even regulates who invents what thus only the government are authorized to make fire or copy books and even make instruments such as an abacus. Freethinking is outlawed: you either live life by the governmental rules or you will be taken away by the Saniturations (strange health-care regulators). The whole society is monopolized by a government bent on being fascist and trying to over-simplify its populace.

Benedikt's world also takes a hierarchal shift when a Degenerator, Terety or Terenty Petrovich, is made Minister alongside him. This occurs when they overthrow the tyrant ruler and head Murza, Fyodor Kuzmich and his father-in-law takes control. However, that does not create any sort of Utopia for Benedikt because instead Terety, once his own Degenerator, turns on him and even pushes him to accept his father-in-law's plan to kill his friend, Nikita Ivanich. Benedikt only realizes until it is too late that his act of helping kill the tyrant has only created a new tyrannical regime. A regime where, as before his desires and outlooks will be monitored and controlled; sadly, he is still a puppet only now he knows his puppeteers. The ending of the novel leaves him on the tides that Foucault talked about but what he sees confuses him even more. He doesn't know what the future holds for him and his desolation is quite a frightful epilogue to the novel.

In Wyndham's novel David's apocalypse as a normal citizen of Waknuk occurs with his sister Petra's birth and Anne, one of their group member, decides to abandon them. Anne chooses to marry Alan – to the shock of David and the others. It is then implied that Uncle Axel kills Alan as he is a liability to the survival of David and his friends but as a side effect Anne kills herself. David realizes that their society is no longer safe and that suspicions on

choice but to leave. Petra helps them find their way of escape; she is their strongest telepath who even seems to be able to command others through her mind. She finds out that there is a whole other civilization that consists of Telepaths just like them, the Sealand people. After a battle between the Fringes people and that of the religious extremists (where David's father is killed by his Uncle Gordon, his father's exiled deviant older brother) David sees the Telepaths come in a futuristic aircraft and all the survivors look at it. David, Rosalind and Petra are taken away with their other friends soon to follow them.

According to this viewpoint, the putative cultural triumph of secular reason is necessarily haunted or shadowed by its presumed opposite – by that very absolution of belief that nihilism's prophet, Nietzsche, so reverently renounced. But this cultural haunting is not singular. Instead, like the ghost/spirit that Derrida describes as *le plurs d'un* – the more than one/no more one – it assumes manifold and different forms – including *phantasmatic* effects whose imaginative difference is uncanny because less substantial and familiar, because both like and unlike what is remembered as religion.¹¹

As Philippa Berry states postmodernism has allowed religion to be posited into different incarnations some even semi-religious to what we are used to experience. In fact that is how the post-apocalyptic civilizations in the mentioned texts have persisted and survived. After The Blast in *The Slynx* people turn to a superstitious form of primitive semi-religion and in *The Chrysalids*' post-apocalyptic world it is religion that endures after the Tribulation. In both worlds their form of religious rules and regulations forms the basis of what can be done and what cannot be done.

¹¹ Conner, Steven *The Cambridge Companion To Postmodernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 170

As Barthes says naturalizing mythology is pretty easy thus when David meets Sophie again after so many years he finds her to be vulgar even before he recognized her. Unlike the women of his society Sophie does not wear a cross pinned to her dress. David may have escaped the myth of divine image but what his society has naturalized he cannot completely get rid of. Even Rosalind has a hard time taking off her cross when Sophie recommends it. Sophie says that cross will only harm Rosalind in the Fringes because it represents the ideology that had rejected the so-called deviations and delivered them to starvation and decadence.

In *Oryx and Crake* and its companion novel *The Year of the Flood* the God's Gardeners are a pantheistic group but they are not the only one. As Derrida put it, there are plural concepts of pantheism in the novel as well. We see this manifest when their authoritarian government attacks them for something the Wolf Isaihists had done because to them pantheism is but a singular concept.

Postmodernism even criticizes law and this critique is manifest in the post-apocalyptic texts concerning civilization:

The starting point of postmodern jurisprudence is the recognition that postmodern legality defies both the positivist and the moralistic image. Law is constituted through a myriad rules and regulations, of statutes, decrees, administrative legislation, and adjudication; formal judgments and informal interventions and disciplines; multiform institutions and personnel; plural nonformal methods of dispute avoidance and resolution that can no longer be seen as a coherent ensemble of rules and judgments. Legal language games have proliferated and cannot be presented as the embodiment of the public

some other coherent system of principle. The distinctions between public and private and between rule and discretion, the hallowed bases of the rule-of-law ideal are gradually becoming anachronistic as rule-makers couch their delegations of authority in wide terms, while administrators adopt policies, guidelines, and rules to structure the exercise of discretion and protect themselves from challenge.¹²

This is noticed by David when he is a young boy when his house there are slogans that he sees from as a child as “ONLY THE IMAGE OF GOD IS MAN”, “BLESSED IS THE NORM”, “THE NORM IS THE WILL OF GOD”, “REPRODUCTION IS THE ONLY HOLY PRODUCTION”, “WATCH THOU FOR THE MUTANT!” and of course “THE DEVIL IS THE FATHER OF DEVIATION.”¹³

Of course, the critique is manifested when we learn what happened to Sophie. She is not killed like the two-headed calves in their society for being a deviation. Rather she is neutered like an animal so that she cannot reproduce (it seems there is a difference between Offences which are animals and vegetation destroyed for not being “normal” and Blasphemy who are human mutants treated as the devil’s instruments to confuse normal humans). Sophie is devastated at her loss of being able to be a mother; she confesses to David that it was better if the people of his society killed her instead.

She has become romantically involved with David’s uncle and despises the fact that she can’t get pregnant for she wants to bear Gordon’s children. She feels that Gordon will

¹² Conner, Steven *The Cambridge Companion To Postmodernism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. p. 202

¹³ Wyndham, John. *The Chrysalids*. Penguin Books, 1955. p. 14

abandon her for her inability to bear children and feels that the extremists may just have killed her instead. David first met Gordon when he was a child in Waknuk. Of course, at that point he had no idea that this man from the Fringes was his uncle who had come to rescue a couple of captured mutants. He just remembered the spidery limbs of the man. Then when he is the Fringes and meets Gordon face to face he realizes that Gordon was expelled after he lived for a certain time in Waknuk. This is because some other extremist elsewhere had stated that his spidery limbs were a deviation so he was ousted. However, just like David's father thinks he is free from challenge for his normalcy and uses religion to keep his possession of Watnuk, his older brother is eager to kill him whenever he gets the chance. To Gordon Watnuk was wrongfully stripped away from him, as he is the older brother he feels he should rule. He is bitter because he was robbed of what he could have only for his longer than average limbs. It is as Barthes says myth does do more than rob language – it robs people's chances with the power it imprints through language.

So what is the bloody chamber? It all depends on who's in power. Who can write the mythologies of the era one lives in. Myth does not only steal language as Barthes stated; it creates hierarchies so that one will not be able to speak. What is frightening is that those hierarchies can change in an instant and one may find themselves from being a leader to being the outsider in a few seconds. The flux of civilizations, its oligarchic systems, its morals and its way of dealing with its citizens are as the post-apocalyptic texts always uncertain as the human mind. As Bjork concludes rightly:

there is no map

to human behaviour

they're terribly moody

then all of a sudden turn happy

but, oh, to get involved in the exchange
of human emotions is ever so satisfying

there's no map and
a compass
wouldn't help at all

human behaviour

Chapter II: Isolation

With a palm full of stars
I throw them like dice
Repeatedly
I shake them like dice
And throw them on the table
Repeatedly
Repeatedly
Until the desired constellation appears
And I ask myself:

How am I going to make it right?
How am I going to make it right?
How am I going to make it right?
And you hear
How am I going to make it right? ¹⁴

What is isolation? What is alienation? If we use Mikhail Bakhtin's classic metonymy of a bridge being the instrument that connects people, allows communication, than isolation is a disruption of communication through any particular discourse. The post-apocalyptic

¹⁴ AZLyrics. *BJORK LYRICS* 26 August 2000. 1 December 2010
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bjork/desiredconstellation.html>>.

elucidates this isolation as something that is diverse and that is quite important in understanding the psychology of the individual.

The Handmaid's Tale, then, is a dystopia. What about *Oryx and Crake*? I would argue that it is not a classic dystopia. Though it has obvious dystopian elements, we don't really get an overview of the structure of the society in it, like the one provided in the epilogue of *The Handmaid's Tale*. We just see its central characters living their lives within small corners of that society, much as we live ours. What they can grasp of the rest of the world comes to them through television and the Internet, and is thus suspect, because edited. I'd say instead that *Oryx and Crake* is a combination antigravity ray and marshmallow toaster. It's an adventure romance that is, the hero goes on a quest coupled with a Menippean satire, the literary form that deals in intellectual obsession. The Laputa or floating island portion of Gulliver's Travels is one of these. So are the Watson-Crick Institute chapters of *Oryx and Crake*. The fact that Laputa never did and never could exist though Jonathan Swift put his finger correctly on the advantage of air superiority, an advantage that in his day he could only imagine and that the Watson-Crick Institute is very close to being a reality doesn't have much to do with their functions as aspects of a literary form.¹⁵

¹⁵ Atwood, Margaret. "The Handmaid's Tale and Oryx and Crake "In Context"." *Special Topic: Science Fiction and Literary Studies: The Next Millennium*(2004): p.517.

Tolstaya's *The Slynx* also echoes these aspects from Atwood's novel. We do not get an overview of Benedikt's society separately either rather we see it in the paratactic language-play of the author. We can deduce by ourselves the dreary, dark, comical and satirical elements of that society with its promises as well through Tolstaya's language. Her language breaks dimensions and becomes immersed with Benedikt's own voice making both narrator and character seem one and the same at times and totally different entities at others. It is Bathkin's model of polyphonic novel; however, it is a postmodernist polyphonic model. It also possesses elements of heteroglossia as each individual in Benedikt's society (concerning their caste system) adopts their own way of speaking.

Unlike David Storm from *The Chrysalids* Benedikt is mostly isolated, not only from others in his society but from his own true potential. This is because of his hybridization and because of his own metamorphic delay (he doesn't realize the power-play around him until it is too late). In the end of the novel, his post-apocalyptic-apocalypse leaves him in the dark to question the nature of his own being. Thus Benedikt is Tolstaya's incarnation of the philosophy of ontological paradox; of man going through a form of intellectualism or a form of primeval mentality.

He is the Neo-primitive man but also the Oldener but at the same time he is something else that the current equation does not accommodate – here lies his separation from David. David survives with his dream of the city (which turns out to be a *real* city) and his miniature group which in turn becomes an entire civilization of Sealand people all capable of telepathy. David escapes from primitive man and becomes integrated into a neo-technological landscapes. Thus David's true struggles where with his society which culminates as soon as he is rescued by people he can identify with. This miraculous advent does not reach out to Benedikt. Instead even in the epilogue of the book he seems most forlorn – we empathize with Benedikt, sympathize with his misfortunes and see him as the isolated man in this crazy

Alice in Wonderland-type society. Incidentally, a fan had commented that Tim Burton's new Alice in Wonderland is an independent story based on Lewis Carroll's world. In the same Tolstaya depicts human isolation and mocks human idiocy in her novel by creating a world we cannot think of with our logic but her Wonderland is more perverse and infinitely more emotionally brutal:

Ouch. Nikita Ivanich, the Head Stoker, put up these posts. An old friend of Mother's, may she rest in peace. Also one of the Oldeners. He's about three hundred years old, maybe older, who knows. Who counts time? Do we know? Winter, summer, winter, summer, but how many times? You'd lose count just thinking about it. There are ten fingers, and on the feet ten toes—though some people have as many as fifteen, it's true, and some have two, and Semyon, the one from Foul Ponds, has a lot of tiny fingers on one hand, just like little roots, and nothing at all on the other. That's the kind of Consequence he got.

Nikita Ivanich would spend time with Mother. He'd come to the izba, wipe his feet off, "May I?" he'd say, and plop down on the stool and start talking about Oldener Times.

"Polina Mikhailovna, do you recall Kuzminsky? Ha, ha, ha. And how Vaisman used to drop by, do you remember? Oh ho ho. And Sidorchuk, the son of a gun, remember, he was the one who concocted all those denunciations, and where are they now? Dust, it's all dust! And how Lyalya made coffee! I wouldn't object to a cup of coffee right this minute . . ."

Mother would laugh or start sobbing, and the thought of deportment stores and booticks would drive her out of her mind. Or she'd suddenly ask, Where did all the lilac go? Lilac—that was flowers, they grew on trees, it's said, and had a wonderful

smell. The old man couldn't stand these conversations, he'd run out into the yard and start chopping wood: Whack! Hack! Smack! Crack! . . . You could get mad all right, but how could you say a word to Nikita Ivanich?

He's Head Stoker.¹⁶

Benedikt's wish to be Head Stoker, or torch-bearer as we could say, is because of the need to be in power. It is not because he is a stereotypical male but rather because of an immature need of being people's favourite. However, he does acquiesce to his mother's wishes of being in the book copying profession:

When you've got the governmental approach to things you get respect from people—what a strict Stoker, they say, that's our batiushka, our father, for you—and then there's always little surprises after people leave. As soon as the door closes, you check in the window: Is he gone? And go straight to the package. I wonder what he brought. It might really be pancakes. Maybe lard. A baked egg. Another guy, if he's poor, might have just picked some rusht. It comes in handy too. Ay, gone off dreaming again! It all ended the way Mother wanted. She got stubborn: there were three generations of intellyjeanseeya in the family, she said, I won't allow trodishin to be stepped on. Ay, Mother! She would run to Nikita Ivanich to whisper, and she'd drag him by the arm to the izba so they could both work on Father together, and she'd wave her hands

¹⁶ Books, Harbour. *harbourbooks*. 33 December 2010
<http://www.harbourbooks.co.uk/extract_pdfs/slynx.pdf>.

about and set to screeching. Father gave up: ayyy . . . go to hell all of you, go on and do what you want . . . Only don't come complaining to me later.¹⁷

There is obviously a rift in Benedikt as he is of both the Oldener stock and that of the new masses (the neo-post-colonial subject of his world). He primarily identifies with his father but cannot completely withdraw from his mother too. It is easier to identify with his father who more or less is a neo-primitive and their sociological structure embodies his line of thinking not his mother's Oldener's logic of thinking. The Oldener society is a great past and just like John Keats mourning for the glory days of the pagan-ritual we see the Oldeners do the same – however, given the post-apocalyptic landscape, the question is if that is understandable. Well, for a society that endorses so many forms of what our generation would deem immoral behaviour the Oldener ideology is ours. And as Oldeners are but a few left we begin to think it is Tolstaya's way of saying that our time is running out as well.

Tolstaya's world is a disoriented postmodernist one. It allows heterogeneous outlooks but with a totalitarian influence. That is why the government in charge allows the Oldeners to live among them without the feeling of any interference – they are clever enough to know that the Oldeners lack the numbers and strength they possess. In short, it is the manner in which popular culture wholly captures us than the literary and science discourses of our time. But this obviously isolates the Oldeners as they pine for the way things were before and want those ways back many a times. There is also isolation in the union of Benedikt's mother and his father; it's obvious their marriage is probably not the best match because their intellectual capacities are different.

¹⁷ Books, Harbour. *harbourbooks*. 33 December 2010.
<http://www.harbourbooks.co.uk/extract_pdfs/slynx.pdf>.

Whereas we see that Benedikt's mother does strive for improvement in small ways (as she encourages Benedikt to join a book-copying profession) and holds her era as a golden age; Benedikt's father does not hold any such ideas and feels angry whenever she brings up the old times. Their relationship is mismatched and one existing only for convenience. And the isolation the Oldeners feel is displayed by their difference in manner, speech and actions; to them this society is also a convenience, a compromise or else their existence would be at stake. Benedikt keeps on referring to Oldeners customs and actions throughout the book to point out that their difference and show that though not directly ostracized they are outcasts either by their own tendencies of being reclusive or through their difference in social customs.

The Oldeners thus are the manifestation of Baudrillard's Simulacra and unfortunately that is the very reason no one understands them. They represent "the desert of the real"¹⁸ and so they are already the negation of what was once real – they are considered nothing but living relics. It is as Baudrillard's spoke they represent "the kingdom of the dead" which has somehow been resurrected and being dragged about. But for what purpose? If *The Slynx* is analyzed then it can be assumed to create and project not only the psychological Other but the otherness already present in Benedikt.

Benedikt's world is filled with superstitions and Freethinking is outlawed. We see him struggle to fit into his society though he desires to also do Freethinking. He thinks suddenly of stars not being there for everyone. He starts thinking they shine because they have to and it's to tease him of possibilities that are there but that which he cannot find.

What is happening is that Benedikt is becoming restless for he is a hybrid of the Oldeners and the neo-primitive society he is born in. He has a good day at the market buying

¹⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Procession Of The Simulcra." Storey, John. *Cultural Theory And Popular Culture*. Essex: Prentice Hall, 1998. p.350

things and trading mice and envisioning a grand life for himself but then that life for him loses meaning and he becomes despondent. So, despondent that he gets a high fever out of his fear and Nikita Ivanich has to take care of him for a short time. During this psychological crisis of his, instead of not perceiving what was truly happening to him he blames the Slynx for all his fears.

What is interesting is that whenever Benedikt suffers from any psychological affliction it is blamed on the mysterious creature called the Slynx. The Slynx is represented as a demonic animal out to feed on people after ripping out their spines. Yet no one has had any direct encounter with it. As Freethinking causes one to see through the discordance present in one's society it is clear that the Slynx is a mythological concoction designed to stop people from transgressing against the government's laws and regulation. However, the Slynx is not a foolproof plan as we see Benedikt does not forgo either his hybridized psyche or the need to do Freethinking.

The Slynx is somehow an ingenious wordplay on the mythical Sphinx who confused humanity by asking them complicated riddles and devoured them if they failed to answer. As Helena Goscilo comments:

Superstition, dread, oblivion, and illiteracy form the base of the society, supporting a manipulative, cynical minority. While reflexively eulogizing the despotic tyrant who debases and enslaves them, the populace irrationally fears the fabulous creature bred by its own animistic imagination: the semi-feline, semi-avian slynx-a mysterious, sinister agent of doom dwelling in a forest that is a metaphor for the society's collective unconscious. Ultimately, the slynx

symbolizes an ineradicable national mythology that paralyzes the entire culture and chains it to self-perpetuating atavism.¹⁹

Benedikt thus is more affiliated with the Slynx because of his constant tendency to think outside the box though this may irritate him also and cause him much distress. The Slynx reflects Benedikt's ideological dualism thus his inevitable isolation from a society that has set stereotypes and hierarchies.

In the movie *The Matrix*, the protagonist Neo is given two choices by the character Morpheus: The Red pill symbolizes reality and his ultimate escape from the dream-powered world of machines; The Blue pill that will allow him to go back to his comatose state and the world he thinks is real. When Varvara Lukinishna, his good hearted co-worker, shows him an Oldenprint book (a book before The Blast) Benedikt gets so scared that he runs away from her and the book. Varvara Lukinishna had told him that Fyodor Kuzmich was lying to them and that the books they copy are not the tyrant's own creations but books before The Blast. Benedikt does not wish to join her circle of intellectuals nor when he runs outside does he find any ease. He had seen an Oldenprint book before and it was his mother's and he saw his father get scared and destroy it. Benedikt fleeing from Varvara Lukinishna's home indicates he has swallowed neither Red pill nor Blue pill but is still immersed in the zygotic fusion of ideologies of two sides of people.

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extend from the fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call

¹⁹ Goscilo, Helena. "Dystopian Dreams." *The Women's Review of Books*, (2003): p.10.

orthopaedic – and lastly, to the armor of an alienating identity which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development.²⁰

Jacques Lacan believes that the way we perceive ourselves in the mirror of our own is important as it allows the "libidinal dynamism" to come forth; the dynamism that the self has many different variations. These variations are always interrupted by social conditionings so we are left with a certain lacking and the way we see ourselves is always distorted. Robert Eaglestone in "Postmodernism and the ethics against the metaphysics of comprehension" questions the metaphysical detonation of the word "I" which he translates as a subject feeling that she/he is free and that he/she has a freedom of choice and allows the construction of the Other as being the opposite. Yet these identifications are false and Benedikt, being Tolstaya's model of the ontological paradox, is the proof of Eaglestone's "Omnivorous philosophy." The Being that is "I" is not really stable and completely separated from that which is called the Other and so the possibility of these too having fusions and/or being manipulated by the other is quite immanent. Thus the "I" doesn't always grant the freedom of choice and as Lacan said we can be at a loss in the application and perception of semantics due to the "I" becoming diverse concept. Mario Vargas Llosa's book *The Perpetual Orgy* is an appraisal for Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* where Flaubert's heterogeneous style impresses the Nobel Laureate. Benedikt is a version of "The Perpetual Orgy" and his unstable "I" gets more unstable as the novel progresses. His escape from the house of his co-worker is a futile attempt to escape his hybridity for he is but confused by it. He had been invited to Varvara

²⁰ Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function on the I." Ryan, Julie Rivkin and Michael. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998.p. 444.

Lukinishna's home for what he thought was an orgy which turned out to be a literary orgy and he is tied to both these categories of flesh and mind throughout the novel.

Suddenly, an Oldener dies and Nikita Ivanich asks him to help him carry the coffin; after the funeral, he decides to teach Benedikt more about different subjects and disciplines (though this task is not a grand success). It is then revealed to us that Benedikt has a tail. It surprises Nikita Ivanich who thinks he should cut it off. Benedikt believes his individualism is being interfered on and what's worst being interrogated by the Oldener's view that as it is a minor atavistic trait it can be cut off (though the society is overrun by such traits Nikita Ivanich thinks the tail is quite unnecessary). Benedikt complies because of infatuation. He wants to marry Olenka, a beautiful co-worker, who looks so normal from the outside thus he is afraid she will get disgusted by his tail. However, it is because of Olenka and her family that Benedikt's isolation grows and the instable "I" comes out clearly.

Ironically, Olenka and her family have atavistic traits of their own, claws. Unlike Benedikt Olenka does not seem too keen about the idea of removing them. Olenka's father is the head of the Saniturations; the dreaded medical service which can be summed as a form of post-apocalyptic asylum or medical institution. Benedikt's father-in-law is a parody of a conspiracy theorist and tries to instigate Benedikt into helping him assassinate Fyodor Kuzmich. Benedikt now bored and seeing that his whole previous lifestyle has changed (he had moved in with his in-laws) remembered his father-in-law once showed him an Oldenprint book. He decided to read his father-in-law's books and gets interested in them. He even starts ignoring Olenka but after Olenka dresses up for him and things go back to "normal" for a bit he feels grim and thinks something is missing in his life.

Benedikt finishes reading all the books in his father-in-law's house and decides to go

Lvovich, talking about reinstating civilization. They are both drunk and their ideas thus are fallible and Lev Lvovich mournfully states he wants a Xerox. Baudrillard's thoughts on "The Xerox degree on culture" are reproduced by the Oldeners talking and reminiscing on conferences, pornography culture, coffee, Jeans and even terrorism (they speak out the categories as labels; it is the proof of their ennui). They get astounded at Benedikt's lifestyle which in his father-in-law's house is called "spiritual" but in actuality is as gluttonous and glamorous as any wealthy elite of civilizations old and passed.

Benedikt then shows Nikita Ivanich a book he brought to him as a present; Nikita Ivanich does not want it and Lev Lvovich starts arguing on how stubborn he is to avoid change and accept totalitarianism. Unfortunately, this ideological debate escapes Benedikt – he does not understand the very nature of their discourse – he uses his intellect but his neo-primitive self keeps on making his lusts more important than comprehension. So, he keeps on attempting to get them to trade books with him. Lev Lvovich mourning has an uncanny resembling to Baudrillard's theory of archaeological remnants resembling industrial waste – how things are losing meaning.

Benedikt's isolation from the Oldeners and his society is further illustrated when he goes to visit Varvara Lukinishna. He finds her dying but does not realize this for his lust to find her book but when she does die Benedikt is confused at what to do. He acts indifferently at first but then he starts to mourn uncontrollably and remembers Varvara Lukinishna's kindnesses. He had always been afraid of her for her appearance (she seemed to be mutated and had cockscombs on her head which he feared were throughout her body) but still felt connected to her. The death of Varvara Lukinishna becomes quite symbolic in Benedikt's post-apocalyptic world; it is the death of someone similar to Benedikt. Varvara Lukinishna is

the totalitarian regime. Yet her death mirrors the death of innocence, curiosity and also that of intellect. These are the reasons to why he does not know how to bury her at first; he wonders if he should bury her in the manner of the rest of the society or the Oldener's way. Benedikt's people bury others in a manner close to the Egyptians; they disembowel their dead and even put in some objects with the dead as they are buried. The Oldeners bury their dead in the usual Christian method. As Varvara Lukinishna was no longer ignorant like others in their society and understood books he feels that burying her as an Oldener seems more appropriate. In the end he hybridizes Varvara Lukinishna's burial style by putting an idol in her hand (he had crossed her hands as Terety told him that's how one does it). Yet all these preparations go to waste – he hungrily starts looking for the book; even takes her off the bed and then knocks the idol out of her hand but does carelessly put it back on her unceremoniously. He realizes there is no book and feels that life is as the scurrying feet of a mouse. Benedikt starts kicking Terety as soon as he goes outside – he feels that something has been lost. The death of Varvara Lukinishna shatters the already shattered mirror that shows Benedikt's unstable "I" and we see worst things will come as his psyche, unfortunately, becomes more and more confused.

He starts thinking that spiritual life is that of the glutton (a complete antithesis to spirituality). He keeps on thinking as Pushkin as his brother-in-arms (he feels Pushkin's writings and ideology reflect his desolation). He starts thinking that the protectors of culture are Olenka's family thus they have their claws (ironically his father-in-law hordes books afraid to show them to others due to fear of contamination) and he gets more and more frustrated with the way things are.

He also has a row with the Oldeners who refused to give him a book they hand (comically he tells them not to be a Jew about handing over the book). Lev Lvovich does not want to give him the book telling him that he can't read. This obviously enrages Benedikt

who then feels as though Lev Lvovich is telling him that he was not Benedikt for obviously his whole life has become that of a new age bibliophile.

However Lev Lvovich answers that Benedikt does not comprehend the “alphabet of life”. This is the actual revelation, the apocalypse in short for the world of *The Slynx*. It also describes Benedikt’s isolation due to his hybridity – the neo-primitive man in him is always at a tug-of-war with his intellectual side so he cannot always comprehend what he reads or derive from it something that can satisfy his anxiety. He starts to realize that there is something wrong with his world but cannot break free from that “something”. Lev Lvovich then also, paradoxically, illustrates his own advice: being an Oldener and knowing of the basics of what is satisfactory but just talking isn’t always helpful to a revolution either. However, Benedikt is finally reaches a climax to his evolution (ovulation) as he does finally hatch an ultimatum; kill Fyodor Kuzmich and escape his feeling of confusion. Like the mutated chickens of his society (whose eggs are used to make *kvas*, a kind of alcohol) he does hatch an egg only to further intoxicate his present condition.

The scene that unfolds is that how Lacan says one sees themselves through dreams: the “I” becomes almost like a fortress. Well, Benedikt has the watch tower cleared out of its guards; he has reached his unstable “I”. He then proceeds with his father-in-law and accuses Fyodor Kuzmich of all his tyranny. However, the Oldeners were right about Benedikt not comprehending what he reads for he even accuses Fyodor Kuzmich of stealing the invention of the wheel from Pushkin. The way in which Benedikt kills Fyodor Kuzmich actually imitates the way the mythical Slynx is supposed to kill people: he breaks the man’s spine.

Thus the murder culminates to what Baudrillard had said: the hyperreal has replaced the real. The Slynx has become more real than Benedikt to put upon him the trace of its own

methods of killing humans. The father-in-law becomes the new tyrant and ironically Benedikt becomes a minister in the new government of his father-in-law.

However, Benedikt realizes his mistakes until they are too late. It is when his father-in-law wants to kill Nikita Ivanich that he realizes his father-in-law is as bad as Fyodor Kuzmich. Benedikt tries to reason with him but to no avail. He then accuses his father-in-law of being the Slynx but then his father-in-law mischievously states that he, Benedikt, is the Slynx. The power play is now evident and Benedikt gets some idea that he has been used. He is horrified when he realizes that he and the Slynx truly have no variance and that he has become the embodiment of the very thing that he feared.

Benedikt's psychological crisis then gets transferred to the mathematical symbol, Theta. When Lev Lvovich had spoken about the 'alphabet of life' he had mentioned "Theta" as one of the letters that Benedikt did not know. Benedikt had answered rather contemptuously that he knew his alphabets and that "Theta" was not an alphabet in their system. Ironically, it is in his life system, as the Oldener had said. Theta is the eighth letter of the Greek alphabet but it also refers to unknown angles in mathematics and the limited time in which one must make a decision. Thus the penultimate chapter of the novel is "Theta" as it becomes clear that Benedikt has not fought off his position as a puppet; if his life was unpredictable from the beginning (the unknown angles) then it has remained unpredictable even now after Fyodor Kuzmich has been overthrown. The totalitarian regime will get him to do what it wants (as Big Brother finally subdues the protagonist of George Orwell's *1984*). Benedikt roams outside for a bit for his psychological turmoil of being labeled as the Slynx by the new ruler of the country (which obviously has unnerved him). When he returns home he finds Olenka and Terenty are throwing out his books. What finally makes him decide (the Theta) is when he sees his mother-in-law about to throw his children outside the window too. He has no choice but to go get Nikita Ivanich. However, when they tie to burn Nikita Ivanich

like a Salem witch he uses his other Consequence of being able to breathe fire by causing a second Blast:

Inasmuch as it comprises a series of static vignettes that never wholly cohere, *The Slynx* partially reproduces the mayhem it attempts to depict. Like the image of Russia it presents, the novel operates by repetition, not development. It has nowhere to go, for the process of repeated deconstruction ultimately leads to a blind alley. The end of the novel is self-consciously indeterminate: A failed auto-da-fe that effects Nikita Ivanich and Lev Lvovich's ascension to heaven. This conclusion sooner resembles a desperate device to escape the consequences of the narrative than a secure command of plotting and closure. The unconvincing playfulness of Nikita Ivanich's disengagement-when in response to the question, "So you mean you didn't die? Huh? Or did you?" he responds, "Figure it out as best you can!" -in fact registers authorial impasse. Tolstaya's juxtaposition of elements from high and popular culture, of tragic and trashy, heinous and hilarious, tempts critics to situate her within Russian post-modernism. (The dust jacket of *The Slynx* advertises it as a "postmodern literary masterpiece.") But Tolstaya as an impassioned allegiance to humanistic values and a reverence for language, literature, and high culture-which she always identifies with Pushkin. Noncommittal linguistic games, the juggling of ironic and ultimately discredited positions, and the absence of an implicit center have little place in her works, which, on the contrary, celebrate culture

and its perceived achievements while mourning their erosion in the contemporary world.²¹

Goscilo is right – the ambiguity in the end further illustrates the bridge that has become wrecked; communication is still difficult for Benedikt. The Oldeners ascend into the air in an odd ritualistic manner (either indicating they have found Nirvana or that they are in control now to freely do whatever they wish and are no longer in threat of extinction). Yet Benedikt cannot ascend with them. He is grounded, with the dead of his society surrounding him. He is the ontological paradox – the man left in the middle of things. He is the hybrid thus he is alone.

Motifs of hybridity are woven into the very texture of Atwood's novel. Bio-engineered animals roam the future world freely, posing a constant threat to Snowman; his memories of the lost past, responsible for the horrors of this (future)p resent, are replete with images of "unnatural" foods, insects, flowers, and animals. Given its Orwellian undertones, it is not surprising that the novel is anything but celebratory in its constructions of hybridity (in contrast to many recent discourses of the postmodern). Hybridity here represents the unnatural, the transgressive, the grotesque and monstrous results of technoscientific stupidity and greed. It is the hybridity of the gene-splice, of the transgressions of an absolutely commodified technoscience, of the ultimate collapse of nature into culture. After Crake, Jimmy's boyhood friend, has introduced Jimmy to some of the wonder products of the new genetic

²¹ Goscilo, Helena. "Dystopian Dreams." *The Women's Review of Books*, (2003): 10-11.

sciences-such as "ChickieNobs," a particularly revolting fast-food product- " Why is it [Jimmy] feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed? How much is too much, how far is too far?" (250). *Oryx and Crake* strongly dramatizes our collective anxiety that we are-even now-engaged in a process of irrecuperable violation.²²

What Veronica Hollinger speaks of *Oryx and Crake* in "Stories about the Future: From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern Recognition" is partly true. Atwood herself has wanted Jimmy's adventures to be that of the heterogeneous kind (as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter) so hybridity is not merely an antagonistic element in her novel rather it serves heterogeneously: as being neither too optimistic nor cynical.

The protagonist in the novel *Oryx and Crake* is Jimmy alias Snowman who attempts to live in an isolated world. The humans are all extinct only his life is spared to be the messiah and executive teacher of the new breed of beings called the Crakers. Jimmy is still a young man (it can be estimated he is in late twenties or early thirties) thus all of this overwhelms him. He does not know how to behave thus attempts to be like a mysterious human creature amongst the populace of Crakers; who seem to admire him and ask him things for reference. Snowman has been forced into this role by his own best friend, Crake, or properly known as Glenn. Aside from never being "Glenn" and using his username from a popular game online the prodigious young boy had become "Crake" to most.

In the novel Crake finally creates the apocalypse he wanted (it seems he does not like humans much or life in general) by creating the Crakers but what happens is that the Crakers are beautiful beings who seem to mock and parody our perspective of beautiful. They are derivatives of human beings; their anatomies are slightly different seeing that they have

²² See also Veronica Hollinger, "Stories about the Future: From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern Recognition," *Science Fiction Studies*, 34 (2007), 1-15.

different colours that make them look like animals yet their physique is that of the celebrities of the human culture. Ironically, they are the perfections that people searched for throughout human history but they bring discomfort rather than satisfaction. Jimmy himself comments on how abnormally perfect they are making it uncomfortable for him to bond with them. They are polyandrous-type breed (the female breeds with several males when parts of her body turn blue; signifying she is in heat) and they seem too innocent and clueless for Jimmy, who longs for actual human contact.

Jimmy takes the Crakers out of Paradise, the research orb of Crake's, and trudges on near to the beach where a new world can thrive. Crake had administered the vaccine to his virus to Jimmy without his friend knowing about it as he had pre-planned Jimmy's identity in the consequential future. The post-apocalyptic depicts the illusion of death and the odd nature of immortality which has somehow become integrated into our culture. It is as Baudrillard predicted in *The Illusion of an Ending* with a model called Biosphere 2 which polishes and perfects human lifestyle so in the end actually destroys it. It even destroys the very concept death we understand. It removes sickness and imperfections to bring us a better life by ironically destroying the very foundations of life. It seems that Baudrillard's Biosphere 2 model integrates itself with Atwood's concept of Paradise. The Crakers are Biosphere 2 being lived out – the Xerox to humanity. Obviously it is as unpleasant as Baudrillard presents it and it seems that even death has become a form of isolation. Jimmy is the last man; however, these human-like beings remind him of humanity so death becomes a Simulcra through them. It does not console Jimmy rather presses him of new responsibilities which he is not prepared to take. But his Theta is also unknown angles: what will happen next he does not know.

Like Wells's Time Traveller, Jimmy/Snowman looks to the stars for comfort,

but, unlike the Traveller, he finds no comfort in the vast expanse of the universe;

"he lies on his back ... gazing up at the stars through the gently moving leaves. They seem close, the stars, but they're far away. Their light is millions, billions of years out of date" (133).²³

Like Benedikt Jimmy is in a tug-of-war himself. There is nostalgia to bother him while he takes care of himself and the Crakers. Yet in *The Year of the Flood* it is shown that most of the God's Gardeners have survived the so-called prophesized Waterless Flood. It seems death has become an illusion. These people see Jimmy from afar and see him talking to himself and do not approach him thinking he is mad. He only gets to meet them at the end of Atwood's companion novel but he is too sick to properly communicate with them (among them is his old childhood love Ren and ex-girlfriend Amanda).

Like *The Time Machine*, *Oryx and Crake* is a story about evolution, but this is no longer the "natural" evolutionary process that so fascinated Wells's late-nineteenth-century imagination. Rather, it is a new and "unnatural" evolutionary process set in motion by our human "tampering" in biotechnology-this has sometime been referred to as "participatory evolution" by writers more optimistic than Atwood about our abilities to guide such a process.' Atwood's new world on the other side of technoscientific disaster, product of culture's ultimate reconstruction of nature has all-too-quickly arrived at the same "end of history" as Wells gives us in *The Time Machine*. Human civilization/human society is no more and the new earth is becoming populated by bio-engineered plants and animals that are in the process of

wiping out natural species. It will also, perhaps, be repopulated by Atwood's version of Wells's future posthumans.²⁴

In the end, post-apocalyptic isolation depicts the isolation of what can we call self and even the isolation of death. We think we are the last survivors to some catastrophe but then we are proven wrong. We think we are free only to see we are puppets. The post-apocalyptic isolation mirrors our own in the postmodern world.

Chapter III: Androgynous Survival

Excuse me

But I just have to

Explode

Explode this body

Off me²⁵

In the popular TV series *Sex and the City*, one of the protagonists, Miranda, gets into an argument with her boyfriend, Steve. Though Steve shows great enthusiasm in wanting to live in together with Miranda and share an apartment with her she does not share his exuberance. Miranda is reluctant to get into this kind of commitment and tries to decline Steve's offer at such a proposal. Steve finally gets upset and comments with disdain that Miranda is acting just like a "man". Despite the show's premise of a liberated woman who can be sexually independent and economically self-reliant it is clear that even Western society, with its countless advertisements of the liberated woman, has obviously some gender biased notions of how men and women should act and work.

If post-apocalypse does not completely eradicate life as we knew it then there is always gender hierarchies that persist even after the so-called end. Gender hierarchies are mostly detailed in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. The protagonist herself over there is not allowed a name rather she is called Offred because she is the Commander, Fred's, possession. The narration of the protagonist, Offred or June as it is

²⁵ AZLyrics. *BJORK LYRICS*. 26 August 2000. 1 December 2010

<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bjork/blute.html>

implied to be her real name, is that of a woman who lives in a dogmatic, patriarchal society which has reduced women into nothing more than breeding vessels. In *Z for Zachariah* Robert C. Clarke shows the same process only between one teenage girl and that of an older man. Ann Burden, who lives in a Valley by herself after the apocalypse, has her Eden interrupted by Mr. Loomis, a sick scientist. Ann takes care of him only to realize that he wants to make her his subordinate as well which she will never acquiesce to. Ann and June are androgynous characters, who despite their weaknesses, internally refuse to be made into an inferior Other.

Most popular post-apocalyptic fiction does not really expose androgyny however in the *City Of Ember* series Lina Mayfleet is the more masculine character than Doon Harrow as she is more outspoken and able to express herself better than Doon. Though Doon embodies the silent male archetype his insecurities are addressed on from the beginning of the series as the reason why she and Doon had stopped being friends when they were younger. Doon is more of a loner and a bit eccentric but Lina is more athletic than Doon and unique in her own way. She has tremendous speed, a visionary and in the conclusion of the series is also responsible for creating the architecture of the future. Doon, on the other hand, is impatient though technologically inclined. Also when the role of "Messenger" is given to Doon he forcefully rejects it. This brings him to the altercation with the Mayor who feels that Doon is not supposed to ignore any job of aiding Ember. Doon argues that Ember, being the constructed city made underground to save humanity, is losing resources fast and they must look at alternatives to ensure their survival. He doesn't want the role of "Messenger" but exchanges jobs with Lina who would deeper underground as a pipe-works worker – which in comparison is a mundane profession. Doon wants to learn more about the generator that uses hydraulic energy from the underground river to power Ember. The act of "Messenger" is that of significance: Lina carries messages around the city as a bike-messenger and keeps people

interconnected; she loves exploring Ember; and find multiple routes to the same destination. Unlike Doon she is more level-headed and less emotionally aggressive. As a Messenger she is almost like a messiah keeping people connected to each other.

. The characterization of Lina and Doon are quite androgynously geared and shape up the post-apocalyptic as a Pangaea --- it is as if the super-continent, the zygotic of all land masses surrounded by water in a balanced form, has come back with the characterization of the male and female not having a coined personality but a hybridized one.

Atwood's makes Jimmy a person charged with emotions and lacks western doctrine's view of logic. Jimmy identifies with both the traditional male and female models of behaviour. We see Atwood also make him very "feminine" at times with his sensitivities (which Crake gets irked by many a times). In *The Year of The Flood* when Amanda's and Ren's stories are told (who both were involved with Jimmy) they are upset their relationship didn't work but they confess that being angry at Jimmy is quite hard. This shows that Jimmy's characteristic flaws, though upsetting, are not really his fault. Jimmy is always caught between his androgynous nature and that of his cultural expectations of being a sexually charged male. In one scene he feels that he is detached from his libido which, to his irritation, seemed to possess this life of its own. So his addiction to have sex is fostered by his culture not by his own accord.

Crake is the traditional masculine: effective and logical and robotic. This is what destroys him and makes him destroy the world he had been grown into. Glenn acknowledges that Jimmy possesses something he does not and it is an intuition to feel, empathize and survive conflicts. Crake is killed by Jimmy yet that is what he desired. To be killed by the messiah of the new age while he, the representative male of the neurotic-logic based age, must be annihilated. Apocalypse has occurred with the death of Crake and the Post-

Apocalypse is Jimmy who is the androgynous being. Thus it is Androgyny which lives and not stereotypical binary. The New world requires a messiah that cannot be traditionally feminine or masculine but it needs heterogeneity.

It is as Teresa Heffernan says in her book, "Woman" are subjects too – mostly sexual subjects who play equally active parts. To her non-stereotypical men is like this "Woman" too and not the stereotype of *ex nihilo* (Atwood shows this stereotype in Crake which obviously brings forth no "sun energy" as D.H. Lawrence predicted but rather destruction). Androgyny is important and it is a great survival tool in the post-apocalyptic world.

Offred's numbing account of her present reality in what is apparently the walled town of Cambridge, Massachusetts (where Harvard University is closed and the football stadium is used for executions), often takes the form of describing such Orwellian rituals as Testifying (chap. 13), communal prayers (chap. 15), the Ceremony (chap. 16), Birth Day (chap. 21), Prayvaganzas (chaps. 33 and 34), Salvaging (chap. 42), and Particicution (chap. 43). Testifying is the Gilead equivalent of what usually happens at group therapy sessions. The evening communal prayer session begins with the Commander reading appropriate bits from the Bible—most notably: "Behold my maid Bilhah. She shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" (15:84), an abbreviation of verse 3 of one of the novel's epigraphs, Genesis 30:1-3, which is surely the essential seed of *The Handmaid's Tale*. The Ceremony is modelled directly on the Genesis passage. A Handmaid is fucked by a Commander as she lies between the legs and holds the hands of the Commander's Wife, in Offred's case a one-time gospel singer whose real name is Pam but who called herself Serena Joy. Of particular importance is Birth Day, when one of the Handmaids gives birth with the Wife's legs once again

about her, in the presence of the other Handmaids. This occurs in the seventh and central of the book's 15 sections, the section entitled "Birth Day." Only "Birth Day" and "Salvaging" (Section XIV) are dignified as section titles. Women's Prayvaganzas accompany group weddings; "men's are for military victories" (34:206). At Salvagings, the Handmaids symbolically take part in the hanging of "criminals." The bodies are subsequently conveyed to the main guarded gateway of the Wall and left hanging there. At Particicutions (the word is, of course, an amalgam of "participation" and "execution") the Handmaids are encouraged, by way of catharsis to literally tear a male offender-in the instance described, a supposed rapist-to pieces.²⁶

David Ketterer explains the society very well: basically it is a hierarchal structure based on gender binaries. The binaries, obviously, produce the stereotypical masculine and feminine models and insists one follow them through. The male sexual drives are taken into account and administered as a norm. In fact the society has legalized rape in the form of handmaid service ("substitution" of forced prostitution). Also if the Handmaid can't breed then she is exported off to the Colonies where degenerates (the people who opposed Gilead) live with fear of radiation sickness. But even in such a fanatical society it is hard to keep these binaries stable. Rather because of the puritanical, Atwood is able to illustrate that there is a natural Androgyny being repressed so that the illusive binaries can persist. It is Atwood's way of depicting that humans may immaturely like labels but obviously the world is more heterogeneous than one thinks. So, labels are just hollow in the end. They don't really illustrate anything and they only give satisfaction to egocentrism. Why is there such a desire in women and men to be different? It could be assumed that it is to create systems that *seem* to be accessible; most humans understand opposites easily.

²⁶ Ketterer, David. "IncMargaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale': A Contextual Dystopia ('La servante d'Édouard')". *Science Fiction Studies* (1989): p. 211.

Midway through Margaret Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale*, the Commander sends a message to his wife's handmaid, Offred, that she is to meet him that evening in his study. Imagining that the Commander may ask her to engage in some kind of forbidden sexual activity, Offred is surprised when he expresses his desire: "'I'd like you to play a game of Scrabble with me'" (179). As the Commander takes the Scrabble box from his desk drawer and dumps out the counters, Offred realizes that this game is forbidden sexual activity. Under the Commander's watchful eye, Offred, no longer allowed to read or write, takes up the wooden counters, delicious, "like candies, made of peppermint, cool like that," and shapes them into luxurious words: "*Larynx*, I spell. *Valance*. *Quince*. *Zygote*" (180). On subsequent evenings, Offred and the Commander repeat their game. Initially, she moves slowly: "My tongue felt thick with the effort of spelling. It was like using a language I'd once known but had nearly forgotten, a language having to do with customs that had long before passed out of the world" (199). During early meetings, Offred and the Commander obey the rules of the game, of the language. When Offred, for example, spells "Zilch" ("A convenient one-vowel word with an expensive Z" [238]) the Commander challenges her, and she suggests "'We could look it up It's archaic'" (238). But as time passes, these two Scrabble players begin to alter the game. After a few drinks, the Commander "becomes silly, and cheats at Scrabble. He encourages me to do it too, and we take extra letters and make words with them that don't exist, words like smurt and crup, giggling over them" (271).²⁷

²⁷ Miner, Madonne. "'Trust Me': Reading the Romance Plot in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, (1991): p. 148-149

Our protagonist starts her interactions slowly with the commander concerning the fact that she is still the prisoner in his game. She does not yearn to seduce him rather learn what he aims to do with all these deviations to his norm. In fact, she uses the word "Reconstruction" to describe what she tells us many a times because when he first proposes this idea of playing Scrabble she is too stunned to make any bold move. Later on she envisions killing the Commander in one of these interactions. Though she never goes on with the plan it is clear that there is an animosity between them.

Ann faces this same situation when Loomis makes her read for him. Ann had read to him when he was sick but now that he is getting better she feels the task is unnecessary. Yet there is something odd about the presence of Loomis that makes Ann uncomfortable so she does read to him. In the process of reading she says she missed a page or two and apologizes. But then she notices that he was not really paying attention and that he was almost asleep. Ann realizes that the task wasn't to read at all but to just make her do something by his order; though Ann is a teenager this disturbs her deeply. She, like June, felt Loomis going into a forbidden territory which she has not given him permission to enter. She knows to some extents some line of security has been breached. It is implied to us that Loomis is dangerously inching nearer to Ann's sexuality and there is something violent in his approach.

Atwood's condemnation of Gilead's born again theocracy is never in doubt, because Handmaid relentlessly exposes the total hypocrisy of a regime which preaches biblical virtue but where vice reigns everywhere-from the brutal executions of dissidents to the institutionalized sexual promiscuity enjoyed by the commanders. The representatives of the new way are consistently monstrous. The sadistic aunts are frustrated older women who brutalize their younger, fertile charges out of jealousy and fear. The seemingly mild-mannered commander Fred cheats on his wife with alacrity and calmly

justifies the oppressive regime which he partly masterminded with the observation that in the old society men felt they were no longer needed by women; he thereby suggests that women's liberation forced American men to take this drastic action; ergo the present regime is ultimately the women's "fault." And Atwood's most ironic portrait is certainly that of Fred's resentful and cruel wife Serena Joy. Neither serene nor joyous, this high-ranking wife is a former "total Woman" activist who is enraged and embittered by the existence which her successful advocacy now imposes upon her.

June recognizes that Gilead has no true promise; however, her voice is maintained. She is cautious enough to act passive whenever needed but assertive when she has to be. She knows that what the Commander states makes no real sense and his logic is fallacious. However, because a prisoner's feedback is limited she just steers with simple responses meant to question his rule subtly. In these sessions it is obvious that June does wield power over Fred. The Commander tries to make her happy though to June these acts of so-called kindnesses are not really happiness. She takes them because she wants to do something; she's hungry for something that'll make her more than a handmaid.

Further reinforcing this positioning is the interest taken by both Luke and the Commander in "old things" and the ways of the past. When the Commander gives Offred a popular women's magazine from the 1970s and she asks why he has such forbidden material in his study, he responds, "Some of us . . . retain an appreciation for the old things" (202). Other "old things" appreciated by the Commander are on display at Jezebel's, a Felliniesque whorehouse with women dressed in an amazing melange of costumes from the past: Some of these have on outfits like mine, feathers and glister, cut high up the thighs, low

pajamas, the occasional see-through negligee. Some are in bathing suits, one piece or bikini; one, I see, is wearing a crocheted affair, with big scallop shells covering the tits. (305) As the Commander escorts Offred through this display of flesh, he observes, "it's like walking into the past" (306), and Offred senses that "his voice sounds pleased, delighted even" (306). She tries to remember "if the past was exactly like this," and concludes that although it contained these things, "the mix is different" (306). The "past" called up by the Commander, the past that brings delight into his voice, is one in which women are on display for men, and are dependent upon men.²⁸

June fails to realize that Luke is the same as her captor (it is heavily implied that Luke helped form Gilead and betrayed June); however, with the Commander it is different. She recognizes his imperfections more easily as he is in his playground, his arena of gratification. When June goes into the hotel room she sees it is one of the same ones she used to have sex with Luke before they were married. She had been Luke's extramarital affair. The Commander had brought her to the club to spruce things up between them but that does not happen. Though June thinks she should try to feel when they have sex she knows her soul cannot accept it. She can no longer be a plaything for men. Her androgynous self forbids it.

With Ann the relationship is the same. She wants to live peacefully with Loomis but he wants to get control over her and her land. Ann tries to ignore his personality which day by day becomes more domineering as he grows healthier. Then one night Loomis decides to rape Ann. Ann runs away hitting him in the process. In the morning, when she returns, she tells him that they can do all the farm work together but they will live on two different sides of the valley. Loomis, instead of showing remorse, has the audacity to accuse Ann of acting

²⁸ Miner, Madonne. "'Trust Me': Reading the Romance Plot in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Twentieth Century Literature*, (1991): 148-168

like a school girl and not an adult. Anne stays firm in her decision and tells him that she will live somewhere else in the valley and he won't know where.

That does not stop Loomis though for still trying to take control. We are shown Ann's horror when her dog Faro is used against her to seek her trail. Loomis even shoots Ann so that she is will dependent on him. Ann, however, still refuses. She hides in a cave and hopes that Loomis will not bother her. Instead he destroys her shelter when she is away (even burning sentimental objects such as her books).

It is then that Ann realizes that surely she cannot stay with Loomis. She steals his biosuit, the one that protected him from radiation and she aims her family's gun at him. In the end Loomis is shocked to know that Ann has knowledge on the fact that he killed his partner Edward to keep the biosuit. She makes him realize that he is nothing but a domineering fool who even killed his partner to get his way. Loomis almost starts crying when Ann begins to leave; pleading to her not to leave.

That is when Ann shows her strength by stating that he is truly responsible for this. She wanted them to live together in harmony but he started treating her like an animal; a possession: a possession to be hunted around the valley. She refuses to be his prisoner. Loomis does tell her then, accepting his faults, that he saw birds heading west. Ann determinably gears up and crosses over to the world outside the valley; a world filled with radiation and death.

One sign of Pieixoto's ignorance is that he doesn't know Offred's real name. Offred never tells us her name directly, but the list of names at the beginning of the novel, whispered in the Red Center, indicates that it is probably "June," since every other name in the list is assigned to a character. A name is perhaps the first word of importance to a person, and her name matters very much to

her. By the end of her tale it becomes a kind of password, when her lover Nick persuades her to go with the secret police, called "Eyes," by calling her by her real name. Pieixoto says she "does not see fit to supply us with her original name" (305), blaming her for not taking a risk he wanted her to take. Thus "June" becomes at once a password into the text for the reader and a sign of Pieixoto's inability to read the Handmaid's story. If this sounds like a petulant and irrational demand-"if you loved me, you would KNOW my name"-that is exactly what it is. Pieixoto doesn't care about Offred, and we do.²⁹

The ending of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* talks of history. It is, as Atwood uses satire, called "Historical Notes". We are introduced to a post-Gilead society but gender relations have gone back to the way they were before Gilead. We see a professor criticizing June's tale as a handmaid in Gilead society. Her fate is uncertain but we can presume either Nick, her lover, saved her or helped to seal her fate (The Eyes are the secret police of Gilead but Nick's character is ambiguous; he could be part of the resistance). The fact that she survived such a monstrous society as Gilead is not taken into account by the professor rather he criticizes her for her "restraints" in narration. However, as reader we know the interferences, struggles and anxieties of June who was turned to Offred. We know that she strived to bring balance to herself in the turmoil of Gilead: not overly passive, not overly aggressive, and inquisitive with caution while trying to keep herself intact despite the circumstances. She is androgynous unlike the Commander and his wife. It is to be noted that Nick comes for June when Serena Joy finds out that Fred is seeing their handmaid on the sly. She gets furious at June and not at Fred first. She was the one who had manipulated the

²⁹ Bergmann, Harriet F. "'Teaching Them to Read': A Fishing Expedition in the Handmaid's Tale." *College English* (1989): p. 853

situation between June and Nick as a way that Fred would be all hers. Obviously, she is angry to know that both men had desired June and not her. She calls June a slut – someone who could have left her something but took everything away. Serena Joy acts like the stereotypical woman who only can be jealous and silly. It was never June's desire to stay with the Commander and her affair with Nick is something that happened for Joy's own interventions. When it turned slightly romantic it is because both June and Nick were lonely. And it is this loneliness that reverberates in the novel that June tries to survive.

The post-apocalyptic world seems to favour Androgyny more because one cannot forgo logic and emotions - be it for one's own survival or something else – emotions help logic come through.

Conclusion:

So, what is post-apocalypse? Is it the chrysalis of man into new organisms or creation of new organisms? Is it the portrayal of humanity as an isolated being? Or, is it about gender relations?

All the novels focused on one central theme though most there are similar elements in all of them. All of them relied on the postmodern to help illustrate their facts. It is a genre that allows us to question ourselves. Are we truly liberated? Do we really have equality? Or, at the end of the day always establishing hierarchies?

The truth is that post-apocalyptic psychologies illustrate the various ways in which we see the world and experience it. We must see past gender, hierarchy and simulations if we are to exist. Yet, these novels remind us that in being human beings that is also quite impossible to do. We cannot always let go of our primeval selves let alone always think with logic.

Unfortunately, the post-apocalyptic is us – the genre is more of a cover to get our attentions.

Works Cited:

- Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. Virago, 2003.
- . *The Handmaid's Tale*. Vintage, 1985.
- . "The Handmaid's Tale and *Oryx and Crake* "In Context"." *Special Topic: Science Fiction and Literary Studies: The Next* (2004): 513-517.
- . *The Year of the Flood*. London: Bloomsbury, 2009.
- . "Variation on the word Sleep." 2006. *famouspoetsandpoems*. 2 December 2010
<http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/margaret_atwood/poems/333>.
- AZlyrics. *BJORK LYRICS*. 26 August 2000. 1 December 2010
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bjork/humanbehaviour.html>>.
- . *BJORK LYRICS*. 26 August 2000. 1 December 2010
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bjork/desiredconstellation.html>>.
- . "*BJORK LYRICS* 26 August 2000. AZlyrics. 1 December 2010
<<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bjork/humanbehaviour.html>>.
- Barthes, Roland. "Myth Today." Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Vintage, 1993. 109-159.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Illusion of an End*. California: Stanford University Press, 1992.
- Baudrillard, Jean. "The Procession Of The Simulcra." Storey, John. *Cultural Theory And Popular Culture*. Essex: Prentice Hall, 1998. 350-358.
- Bergmann, Harriet F. "'Teaching Them to Read': A Fishing Expedition in the Handmaid's Tale." *College English* (1989): 847-854.
- Books, Harbour. *harbourbooks*. 33 December 2010
<http://www.harbourbooks.co.uk/extract_pdfs/slynx.pdf>.
- Conner, Steven. *The Cambridge Companion To Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Dodson, Danita J. "'We lived in the blank white spaces': Rewriting the Paradigm of Denial in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Utopian Studies* (1997): 66-86.
- Goscilo, Helena. "Dystopian Dreams." *The Women's Review of Books*, (2003): 10-11.
- Hammer, Stephanie Barbé. "The World as It will Be? Female Satire and the Technology of Power in *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Modern Language Studies*, (1990): 39-49.

- Heffernan, Teresa. *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
- Hollinger, Veronica. "Stories about the Future: From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern Recognition." *Science Fiction Studies* (2006): 452-472.
- Hooker, Deborah. "(F)orality, Gender, and the Environmental Ethos of Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale'." *Twentieth Century Literature*, (2006): 275-305.
- Johnson, Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne. "Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in The Handmaid's Tale." *Utopian Studies* (1994): 70-86.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending*. Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Ketterer, David. "Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale': A Contextual Dystopia ('La servante écarlate' de Margaret Atwood: une dystopie contextuelle)." *Science Fiction Studies*, (1989): 209-217.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function on the I." Ryan, Julie Rivkin and Michael. *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998. 441-446.
- Malpas, Simon. "Introduction." Malpas, Simon. *The Postmodern*. Routledge, 2007. 1-10.
- Miner, Madonne. "'Trust Me': Reading the Romance Plot in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale." *Twentieth Century Literature*, (1991): 148-168.
- O'Brien, Robert C. *Z for Zachariah*. New York: Simon Impulse, 1974.
- Pearce, Lynne. "Bakhtin and the dialogic principle." Waugh, Patricia. *Literary Theory and Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. 223-230.
- Tolstaya, Tatyana. *The Slynx*. New York: New York Review Of Books, 2003.
- Wyndham, John. *The Chrysalids*. Penguin Books, 1955.