Paratextuality and Parody in a Post-cataclysmic Wasteland: Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*.

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We no longer feel that we penetrate the future, future penetrates us.

- John Clute

(Oryx and Crake, published in 2003, is one of Margaret Atwood’s most recent novels and is often discussed in the light of her widely acclaimed dystopia The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), as it can be regarded as a continuation of the bleak perspective of the world she presents in the totalitarian state of Gilead. As “matters have become more acute”, Atwood now tells a story that is even more grim, as it is about the last human survivor of a Man-instigated world-wide plague (Atwood qtd. in Bethune). Because of its alarming subject matter, the novel raises many questions about our current condition in a world dominated by capitalism, scientific enhancements and social injustice.

As a writer, Atwood is known for her socially critical writing and for the fact that she does not hold back to “force you to face what you would very much rather not” (Bethune). By telling this story, she aims to make the reader feel uncomfortable about, amongst others, the contemporary path our species is taking regarding our scientific conduct, the omnipresent extermination of animal species, and the exploitation of poorer and weaker people. Through the inscription of the five main functions of what she calls
‘speculative fiction’, she aims to warn people about their own actions, as she tries to make them come to realize that there are dire consequences for our behaviour as a species.

In this dissertation, I will mainly focus on how Atwood makes use of paratextuality, parody and irony to strengthen the critical message she is trying to convey. I will draw on the theoretical insights of Genette and Hutcheon, as they both stress the value and importance of intertexts, and put emphasis on the fact that their reworking is done in a serious manner with a clear purpose. First, I will show how Atwood uses and abuses the typical characteristics of three literary genres that are renowned for their social criticism, as Oryx and Crake can be regarded as an ironic inversion of the major traits of Gothic fiction, science fiction and dystopian fiction. Secondly, I will discuss both the novel’s epigraphs and the function they serve when viewed in relationship to each other, drawing on Genette’s paratextual theory of peritexts. Afterwards, I will discuss what I consider to be the novel’s three most vital hypotexts: Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and The Last Man, and Wells’ The Island of Doctor Moreau. Apart from dealing with their relevance concerning the subject matter and the plausible authorial message, I will illustrate how Oryx and Crake is in many ways a parodic reworking of these novels, drawing on textual comparisons and striking parallels. Finally, I will shed more light on the problematic questions Atwood poses and how these are presented in Oryx and Crake through parody and irony.
About the Author

I believe that fiction writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community.

- Margaret Atwood

(qtd. in Staines 23)

The Canadian prizewinning author Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born in 1939, and is considered to be one of Canada’s leading contemporary writers. She made her literary debut as a poet with Double Persephone (1961), and broke through with The Circle Game in 1964. Her first novel, The Edible Woman, was published in 1969, followed by her widely acclaimed novel Surfacing in 1972 in which the conflict between nature and technology is already present (Godard). She has been awarded the Arthur C. Clarke Award for her dystopian novel The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), the Giller Prize for her historical novel Alias Grace (1996), and she won the Man Booker Prize with The Blind Assassin (2000).

Famous for the underlying criticism and irony in her work, Atwood has published several works of fiction which lay a finger on society’s sore spot. In novels such as The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), Oryx and Crake (2003) and its successor and her most recent novel The Year of the Flood (2009), Atwood presents possible future scenarios of

1 Future references to The Handmaid’s Tale will be abbreviated to THT.
oppressive and totalitarian regimes or of the human and natural world as desolate and destroyed by mankind.

Atwood’s work is saturated with social critique, offering a “lens focusing ... on the world around her” (Staines 15). While commenting on art, she states that “[it] must say something about the world at large” (qtd. in Staines 15). This is reflected in the themes of her novels. For instance, she recurrently focuses on the endangered balances between Nature and Man’s technological craze, arts and science, and between women and men. The notion of what constitutes humanity is a question often raised in her novels. As she stated herself in a lecture on science fiction, “[h]ow far can we go in the alteration department and still have a human being?” (qtd. in Hengen 72). For Atwood, the full recognition of “our physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual state”, is what defines our humanity as such (Hengen 74). Profound existential questions as these are typical of her novels, both on a micro-level concerning specific fictional characters as well as on a macro-level concerning our entire species.

Despite the fact that she is most known for her work as a novelist, Atwood has also published fifteen volumes of poetry so far, and is a renowned literary critic. Her *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972) is still considered one of the groundbreaking works on Canadian literature (Godard, Howells, “Introduction” 1-11, *Margaret Atwood Online*).
Plot summary of *Oryx and Crake*

*Snowman, tell us please about the deeds of Crake.*

- *Margaret Atwood (OC 117)*

Situated in a post-apocalyptic setting, *Oryx and Crake* tells the story of mankind’s demise as a result of a worldwide epidemic deliberately caused by the idealistic scientist Crake. It is a story about how the Crakers, a scientifically created race meant to outstrip humanity, take over Man’s place. The story is told from a third-person point of view, through the eyes of Snowman, the last known survivor of the human race. Atwood provides us with Snowman’s memories, contemplations and snatches of long-gone conversations in order to construct a cinematic picture of what happened before this global catastrophe, while at the same time telling us the tale of Snowman’s current situation, the Crakers’ adjustment to a real and unbounded environment, and how the future looks for mankind.

Through the character of Snowman, or Jimmy as he was called before the disaster, we learn about the futuristic world of spectacular scientific realizations, the division of the general living area into compounds for the rich and pleeblands for the poor, and the widely-accepted selling of bodily upgrades through bioengineering, in order to attain a “personalized design of identity” (Toffler, qtd. in Proietti 118). The story preceding the actual time of telling in the novel can be split up into five major periods: Jimmy’s time
together with both his parents in the OrganInc compound; his years as a teenager after his mother abandoned him and his father, during which he befriends Crake; Jimmy’s time at the Martha Graham Academy and his working period before he reconnects with Crake; the period during which he works for Crake in the RejoovenEsence compound and starts an affair with Oryx up to the epidemic’s breakout and the death of Oryx and Crake; and the period after Jimmy/Snowman’s exodus with the Crakers from Paradice into the wildlife refuge, which fades into the time of Snowman’s telling of the narrative.

As the son of two genetic scientists, Jimmy has a troublesome youth. Not only do his parents neglect their parental duties to a large extent, his mother Sharon also quits her job when Jimmy is six because of a nervous breakdown. She starts to ignore her son even more, and she gets into a quarrel with Jimmy’s father about the ethics of his work, which eventually leads to her running away and fleeing into the pleeblands, taking Jimmy’s pet Killer with her. Jimmy cannot connect with his father and has a hard time making friends at school. After a few years, he befriends the transfer student Glenn, later called Crake after an extinct red-necked bird, with whom he shares his interest in online gaming and perverse porn sites. During one of their visits on HotTotts, a site specialised in movies of sex tourism, they see the child porn star who will later get the name Oryx. Her looks make an indelible impression on Jimmy. As the years pass by, the boys graduate from high-school and start to attend institutes for higher education. The newly-graduated are distributed among numerous institutes in a manner close to an auction: Crake gets to attend the highly prestigious scientific Watson-Crick Institute, also referred to as Asperger U. given its large amount of genius but socially inept students, whereas Jimmy
has to settle for the third-rate Martha-Graham Academy, where he takes courses in Problematics. The two of them keep in touch via email, until after a year Jimmy pays Crake a visit at Watson-Crick, where he is stunned by the technological inventions he sees, which leave him with a dubious feeling regarding the benefits of these advances. After graduation, Jimmy initially has a job as a librarian, but eventually he has to switch jobs as he cannot find it in him to throw away books. He starts writing advertisements for self-improvement products at AnooYoo, something he does not enjoy despite the fact that he is considered very good at it. His skills eventually lead to several promotions, and he starts to climb the corporate ladder. During this period he meets Amanda, who becomes his girlfriend and with whom he shares a flat. Eventually, their relationship reaches a breaking point as soon as Amanda starts to talk about ‘love’ in Jimmy’s presence. Jimmy then moves to an apartment in the AnooYoo compound, and during this period, he becomes a real Lothario, starting loose affairs with several married women, luring them into his bed by gaining their empathy through recounting the story of the abandonment by his mother. This trauma of having been abandoned is strengthened when the CorpSeCorps, the law enforcers working for the compounds, show Jimmy a movie in which the execution of his mother takes place, an event ultimately leading to a grave depression.

At this point in the novel, Crake re-enters the scene. He currently works for a project called Paradice in the RejoovenEsence compound, and decides to employ Jimmy to write the advertisements for his BlyssPlus pill, a prophylactic pill promising endless sexual energy and desire that will eventually extirpate mankind. Here, Jimmy meets Oryx for the
first time, the girl he once saw as a child porn star and whose printed picture he still keeps, and he immediately falls in love with her. Oryx works as a teacher for the Crakers, the genetically altered creatures created by Crake and his fellow scientists, and has become Crake’s girlfriend, despite the fact that he met her through a prostitution service at the Watson Crick Institute. Sold by her mother, Oryx spent her youth as a child porn star, after which she was sold as a prostitute and learned English in turn for sexual favours, which ultimately led her to finding work in the higher regions. Jimmy starts having an affair with her, and it even seems as if Jimmy is really capable of loving her, possibly drawn to her by their shared painful past, emotional trauma and history of parental neglect. Throughout this period, Crake and Jimmy pay frequent visits to the pleeblands, during which Crake presents his idealistic vision of the perfection of a new and better race to Jimmy. On these excursions, Jimmy is vaccinated against the germs that are widespread in the pleeblands, but we later learn that he was injected with an antidote against the future virus.

One evening, the news reports of a worldwide plague called JUVE, the Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary, killing thousands of people. Later on, we learn that the virus was spread through Crake’s BlyssPluss, the drug that by then was sold over the entire world by Oryx. That same evening, we reach the climax of the novel, as Crake creates a stage for his own death: he slits Oryx’s throat in front of Jimmy, who shoots Crake out of revenge for killing the only person Jimmy loved. Being the only person vaccinated against the virus, Jimmy spends the next weeks mourning in Paradise, while the rest of humanity is dying out. Eventually, he decides to head out, and to lead the Crakers to a nature
reserve. Here, the life of the new species that are to replace mankind with all its vices and follies is brought into the real world, and the character of Snowman is born. It is Crake's rule that no one in the new society of the Crakers can have a personal name. Thus Jimmy adopts the name of the legendary creature, consisting of something that will be extinguished due to the immense global warming: snow.

Here we reach the point in the novel where the past borders with the present-day moment of telling. Snowman settles in the arboretum near the sea close by, and keeps a close watch on the Crakers, whom he regards as his flock. He tells them stories about times past, and invents myths about the world, himself, and Oryx and Crake, making himself the prophet of the new race. He describes the post-apocalyptic world he is in, and narrates about his present-day circumstances and how he is under constant threat of wolvogs, starvation and losing his mind. In desperate need of supplies and food, he decides to temporarily leave the Crakers behind, and to go back to the RejoovenEsence compound. After a fierce voyage during which he severely injures his foot, he arrives at his destination. Once at the compound, he notices a large smoke cloud coming from the arboretum, and starts worrying that something is wrong with the Crakers. Going through Paradice in search for supplies, he sees the dead bodies of Oryx and Crake, after which he sets sail to his former office. Here he finds a note that he wrote during the outbreak of the JUVE virus, explaining to whomever may find and read it that Crake was the one responsible for all this malice. Snowman eventually crumples up the piece of paper and gets rid of it. He then returns to the Crakers, and is bewildered when he hears them sing around a just-erected statue of him. After partially healing him with their purring skills,
the Crakers tell Snowman that three humans like him had visited their home, after which Snowman goes in pursuit of them. When he finds them near the beach, he ponders whether he should shoot them, make contact, or surrender himself; all three of these acts that will undoubtedly determine his future fate. Yet, the novel ends before we know his final move, leaving us with the uncertainty of what is to become of the human race.
1 Theoretical Framework

1.1 Gothic Fiction

1.1.1 The Literary Tradition

Reading Gothic makes us see things.
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Scott Brewster (281)

Giving an account of the Gothic literary tradition is not a clear-cut case, as critics agree that there is no “single, straightforward answer” to the question of what constitutes the genre (Spooner and McEvoy 1). As stated by Punter, the notion of the Gothic is often considered as “a contested site” (viii), as it is an “uneasy conflation of genres, styles and conflicted cultural concerns” (Hogle 2). Apart from the fact that there is a lot of variation to be found in different attestations of the genre, it is also considered highly “dynamic” and “endlessly reinvent[ing] itself” (McEvoy 7). This leads to the contemporary view that the Gothic is viewed as “a mixed genre”, something “assembled ... out of other discourses” (Gamer 85). Despite this typical “fragmentation” (McEvoy 24) and our “own anachronistic usage” of the term (Clery 34), critics agree on the fact that Gothic literature was born “in darkness” (Kaye 180) in eighteenth-century England as “a product of the Enlightenment” (Cornwell 27, Botting, “In Gothic Darkly” 3). It started as a genre with the publication of Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto in 1764, which got its subtitle a Gothick Story from the third print onwards (Botting, “In Gothic Darkly” 4, Sage 81, Hogle 1), leading
the Gothic to flourish immensely from the 1790’s up to the 1830’s (Hogle 1). After a period of marginalisation, it resurfaced at the end of the nineteenth century with writers such as Bram Stoker, Robert Stevenson and Nathaniel Hawthorne (Sage 84-87). From that point on, the Gothic steadily “replicated ... like a virus”, and up until today, is used as a mode as such or in a parodied form (Mulvey-Roberts, “Introduction” xvii).

Often called a “literature of nightmare” (MacAndrew), the Gothic is known for its combination of both “high” and “low” culture to evoke anxieties and fear in order to both create a narrative which can “reassert the values of society, virtue and propriety” (Botting, “Gothic” 5) as well as to foreground social issues that are at stake at the time of publication (Hogle 8, Horner and Zlosnik 243, Punter xi, Kaye 181). Playing with a created disequilibrium of the binary oppositions between life/death, conscious/unconscious or natural/unnatural and by transgressing the boundaries between these dichotomies, the Gothic tends to “function as the mirror of ... [society’s] mores and values” (Botting, “In Gothic Darkly” 5) in an effort to “re-establish good” (Horner and Zlosnik 243) by telling “a gruesome tale” (Punter xiii.). Jerrold Hogle explains it as follows:

Gothic shows us our cultural and psychological selves and conditions, in their actual multiplicity, in ways that other aesthetic forms cannot manage as forcefully or with such wide public appeal. (19)

This “self-exposure” gives the reader a valuable chance to re-examine the ideas and prejudices he/she has about the world, be it social, cultural or political. The Gothic then

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2 For a more exhaustive list of these dichotomies, see Horner and Zlosnik or Hogle.
can set in motion “its revolutionary and boundary-changing impulses”, helping us to deal with our deepest anxieties (Hogle 19).

As Botting states in *Gothic*, providing an exhaustive taxonomy of the typical traits and conventions of Gothic literature is as good as impossible after the period of the 1820s (“Gothic” 10). Therefore, I will merely focus on the most typical characteristics of both the original and the later Gothic as they are reflected in Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. According to Anne Williams, the setting is predominant in the Gothic (14). Typical spatial examples for the original Gothic are an abbey, a prison, a palace, a graveyard, or most predominantly, a castle (Hogle 2, Botting, “Gothic” 2). These spaces were often accompanied by “desolate” and “alienating” landscapes such as labyrinths or mountainous scenery (Botting, “Gothic” 2-3), mostly the Alps, and are “tormented by savage atmospheric conditions” (Vercooren 32). The typical stock characters figuring in these early Gothic stories are “imperilled heroines, dastardly villains, ineffectual heroes” and monsters (Spooner and McEvoy 1, Botting, “Gothic” 2). These characters are often alienated and subjected to narcissistic longings, and they become “products of both reason and desire” (Botting, “Gothic” 8). It is also worth mentioning how writers go to extreme ends to accentuate the purity of their heroines (MacAndrew). Nonetheless, Michelle Massé as well as Elizabeth MacAndrew consider these characters as “flat” and “useful for the embodiment of ideas” (MacAndrew), and state that this allows them to be seen as typical allegories, making them important “because of what they represent” (Massé 233). This adds up with the fact that the Gothic can serve as a mode for social, cultural or political critique, as I have mentioned earlier. Important themes that are often dealt with
in the original Gothic are, amongst many, the haunting ghosts of the past, fear, the split self, need and desire, madness, interior life, the degeneration of Man, isolation, the absent mother, and the notion of otherness (Hogle 1, Botting, “Gothic” 7, Bruhm 261-270, Brewster 281 and Small 157, Hurley, “Gothic Body” 3, Tracy, “Gothic Romance”, 103, K. Ellis 264).

In the Gothic of the fin de siècle however, some of these typical traits are rendered into a different form. Foremost, the city as a hotbed of peril and wretchedness becomes the standard locus of the Gothic story, portraying all that the city, even civilisation, expelled and does not acknowledge (Byron 134, Mighall 54). This late nineteenth-century Gothic focuses more on “the modernity of the setting” (Spencer 2010), putting emphasis on the equality between the real and the fictional world as a result of technological progress and the surge of scientific theory typical of the time (Botting, “Gothic” 8). With this change of the Gothic landscape came also a striking change in the villain, who shifts from the figure of the power-mad aristocrat or horrific monk to that of a male scientist unbound by moral or scientific constraints in his quest for ultimate knowledge (Byron 134). Typical of this “mad scientist” is on the one hand his obsessive fascination for reaching “arcane intellectual goals redolent of ideological evil”, and on the other hand his lack of human feelings (Stiles 323). According to Chris Baldick, the prototypical scientist in the fiction of this period is

that of an aspiring young medical student who dabbles in galvanism, and whose long hours in the seclusion of the laboratory engender or reinforce a misanthropic, or at best insensitive, disregard for his social bonds and duties. (142)
Even though this figure of the scientist was already partly present in earlier Gothic fiction (see Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, published in 1818), it was not as ubiquitous as it came to be in the later Gothic (ibid. 134). Typical of these scientists is that they can be described as “men on a rampage” (K. Ellis 263). Implied in this male quest for knowledge and domination of the Natural world, is the powerlessness of women to stop these “rampages” which often turns them into mere objects (ibid.). This change in major villain logically also led to a change in subject matter. Generated by a discourse focussed on science and an awareness of the downside of technological progress, the focus shifts from the notions of evolution and devolution to an emphasis on “dismantl[ing the] conventional notions of ‘the human’” (Hurley, “Gothic Body” 5). Questions such as “what is human?” and “what constitutes Man?” particularly rise in the works of H. G. Wells, R. L. Stevenson and A. Machen (Byron 132-133). Other themes which are omnipresent in this later Gothic are, among many, the “ruination of the human subject” (Hurley, “Gothic Body” 3), “alternate trajectories of evolution” (ibid. 10), a plethora of possible monsters and a tendency to depict these monsters as closer to Man, eliciting a much higher level of sympathy and identification than the original Gothic (Tracy, “Contemporary Gothic” 38-39).

One significant feature that both the original, the later and even the contemporary Gothic share, is an undefined and open ending. Gothic writers mostly leave their readers with an unclosed narrative, leaving several possibilities open, one more morally acceptable than the other (Hogle 12-13): will evil be defeated? Is the human race saved? Is there any hope left? Nonetheless, even though Gothic stories mostly deal with fears and anxieties of the readers’ time and age, it is predominantly a “conservative” genre (Jackson
We can agree that Gothic literature crosses boundaries and subverts morality and ethics, but at the same time it also tries to “preserve” these social and moral boundaries (Botting, “In Gothic Darkly” 8). The typical Gothic “open ending” thus clears the ambivalence created by the imbalance of the dichotomies discussed earlier, and (almost) always aims to reach an equilibrium between the two sides of the boundary (Botting, “In Gothic Darkly 8”). Therefore, the typical “tragic ending” of the Gothic novel can be regarded as “symbolically optimistic”, as it tallies with “a symbolic rendering of moral order restored” (MacAndrew). However, most critics agree that these endings leave far more questions unresolved than often claimed (Hogle 13). Nonetheless, the sum of all these characteristics allows us to follow Bruhm when he describes Gothic literature as a “barometer of anxieties plaguing a certain culture at a particular moment in history” (261).
One aspect typical of Gothic literature which deserves special attention in relation to *Oryx and Crake*, is the notion of the monstrous. Within Western beliefs, the monstrous is said to be a representation of the “other”, that which is not part of the ruling culture and morals (Semenovich 26). If we take a look at the word’s etymologic history, we find that the original meaning was someone or something “to be shown” (Foucault 70). Both Chris Baldick and Russel Kilbourn draw further on this notion, and trace the word back to its Latin origins, namely the verb *monstrare*, linking it to the French and English equivalent: respectively *montrer* and *to demonstrate* (Baldick 10, Kilbourn 170). Baldick also stresses its “purpose”, namely “to reveal visibly the results of vice, folly and unreason, as a warning”, as in the Latin verb *monere*, to warn (10). As Fred Botting states,

> [a]s visible demonstrations of vice, monsters displaced – and cautioned readers against – indulgence in improper behaviour, thereby emphasising the benefits of virtuous conduct and signalling the proper – disgusted – reaction to examples of vice. ("Monstrosity" 162)

These early connotations of morality hint at the dangers of boundary crossing, and are still implied in its modern meaning as “something frighteningly unnatural” (Baldick 10). This results in a “double narrative” which is implied in fictional monsters; on the one hand,
there is the narrative behind their manufacture, but at the same time, they also serve a distinctive cultural purpose (Cohen 13). Functioning as a functional moral critic, the monster in Gothic literature serves to make human identity less familiar (Botting, “Monstrosity” 163, Hurley, “Gothic Body” 23). As Botting states, these monsters are often “deformed” and “irregular”, and subvert the boundaries of “reason and morality” (“Monstrosity” 163). This deformity can be traced back to the myths of the Classics, in which it was a strict rule that monsters should be manufactured of “ill-assorted parts” or as a combination of different life forms (Baldick 13). Their “disturbing” appearances thus violate the notions of the picturesque\(^3\), and put them in the category of the grotesque, which is regarded as “an artificially contrived violation of Nature” (14). For Mikhail Bakhtin, this grotesqueness comes with a notion of “degeneration”, as it reduces the “high, spiritual, ideal [and abstract]” to a mere “material level” (Bakhtin 19). This “material level”, as Bakhtin calls it, focuses for instance on bodily excretions, and reminds one of Kristeva’s abject, as Kelly Hurley points out (“Abject” 138). This “abject”, which etymologically means “cast off” or “cast away”, is often linked with the “debased [and] degraded” (138), but in her *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva also ascribes another important meaning to the abject, namely that of the “in-between, ambiguous [or] composite” (“Powers” 4). According to her, this abject is “the place where meaning collapses” (ibid. 2), as it distorts essential dichotomies such as nature/culture, human/animal and living/dead (Hurley, “Abject” 139). This state of inbetweenness is often referred to as “liminal”,

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\(^3\) For an in-depth analysis of the “picturesque”, see Horace’s *On the Art of Poetry*. 
something “impure” which is intangible for the governing culture’s taxonomies (Douglas qtd. in Hurley, “Abject” 139).

Thus “blurring the boundaries” of what is generally known and familiar to Man, the Gothic novel questions the ruling values of society (Botting, “Monstrosity” 162). This is achieved by using the monstrous as a means to *show* what happens if cultural dominant borders are subverted to implement a sense of fear into the reader (ibid.).
1.2 Science Fiction

The sense of wonder is the emotional heart of science fiction.

- Farah Mendlesohn (3)

As a result of its status as a low genre (Armitt, “Where” 1), science fiction (SF) as a literary genre has only started receiving scholarly attention for the last couple of decades, during which it became clear that the world of SF is a hard one to describe (Clute and Nicholls vii-viii). Apart from discords on what defines it as a genre as such, a lot of different opinions can be found on what is to be seen as the starting point of SF. Whereas some critics assert that SF “emerges in the twentieth century”, others also include texts which date back to the eighteenth century (Mendlesohn 1). This discussion is also reflected in the ongoing debate on what is to be seen as the prototypical SF novel. Critics such as Fred Botting and Brian Aldiss trace the genre’s origins back to Frankenstein (Botting, “Gothic” 102, Seed, “Gothic” 272), based on the fact that Shelley’s “method of extrapolation has since become the generic method for judging science” (Seligo 69-70). Some critics agree with the fact that Frankenstein to a certain degree functioned as “formative template” (Stableford, “Science Fiction” 19), whilst others totally oppose the fact that this novel can be seen as SF’s “most direct ancestor” (Paschalidis 41) on the basis that its science is “indistinctly represented and technologically improbable” (M. Ellis 2). One of them is Patrick Parrinder, who considers Edgar Allen Poe’s cosmological essay “Eureka” as “the nearest to generic science fiction” one gets (“SF” 24), whereas Kingsley
Amis assigns this merit to Jules Verne and H. G. Wells (31). Darko Suvin, one of the leading critics of SF, disagrees with all the above, and argues that it was solely H. G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* that set the stage for contemporary SF (James 30). Suvin builds on the fact that Wells’ narrative technique revitalized the “obsolete narrative frameworks” of his time, and elevated the slowly rising genre to a level of “rational enquiry”, which made the futuristic “central devices” far more credible (Stableford, “Science Fiction” 24-25).

Despite these differences of opinion, most critics tend to agree that SF’s evolution can be defined as characterised by three “historical stages” that are preceded by a genre-founding stage (Parrinder, “SF” 23). This initial stage is characterised by writers who wanted to disgrace, ridicule, or satirize the science of their times, and is represented by authors such as Swift, Mary Shelley and Poe. This stage was followed by a move away from satire and towards a “mode of literary prophecy” (24), in which it seemed as if the writers genuinely meant what they wrote in order to “convince” their readers to take their writings as warnings (25). Typical representatives of this period are Jules Verne and H. G. Wells (24). In the 1920s and 1930s, however, another stage of SF came into being; a shift from the prophetic to a “mythopoetic” mode, building on the modern fantasy literature (26). During this stage, SF “achieved considerable maturity as a genre” because of writers such as C. S. Lewis and Olaf Stapledon, and the mythopoetic would remain dominant until the 1960s (Attebery 45). From the 1960s onwards, however, SF “discovered” the contemporary (Aldiss 24), and came to be seen as “a metaphor for the present” (Parrinder, “SF” 27). This view on SF has been dominant until today, and became the leading paradigm in the academic studies of SF, which started in the 1970s. As stated
by Suvin, these metaphors are used by SF as “a playful experiment, shaping a possible world” which would not be accessible otherwise (“Afterword” 258). He even takes this notion of SF as a metaphor further, as he describes metaphors as “heuristic fictions” that always serve a cognitive function, thus ascribing an instructive layer to modern SF and hinting at its underlying function (Suvin, “SF as Metaphor” 194).

When looking at SF’s function, it is best to first focus on its content. A clear-cut definition is provided by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, as he states that

SF ... ha[s] been concerned with imagining progressive alternatives to the status quo, often implying critiques of contemporary conditions or possible future outcomes of current social trends. Science fiction, in particular, imagines change in terms of the whole human species, and these changes are often the results of scientific discoveries and inventions that are applied by human beings to their own social evolution. (113)

These “scientific discoveries and inventions” are SF’s mainspring, as they evoke a certain sense of wonder in the reader, though often entwined with “a note of alienation” (Mendlesohn 10). This wonder is the result of a certain newness, what Suvin coined as the *novum*, which he considers to be the “distinguishing hallmark of SF” (“Novum” 16), as it “generat[es] the estranged formal framework or world of the SF text” (Parrinder, “Revisiting” 41). These new and unimaginable elements are not based in the supernatural as in the Gothic, but can be explained by means of “physics, technology and the general sciences” (Currie). This novum is what leads to what Victor Shklovsky coined “defamiliarization”, which typifies SF in that a recognisable world is presented with

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4 Note that Suvin talks of a possible world. Genres such as fantasy also play with these metaphors in creating a world estranged from that of ours, but they do not stress the genuine possibility of this world in the future.
certain distinct features unfamiliar to the reader’s own world, but imaginable due to the close link with the contemporary (Varsam 206). This new world is related to our own through “allegorical association[s]” (Jackson 43). This allows SF to “transport” its readers to “other worlds” (Parrinder, “Introduction” 1), which helps us to “redescribe the known world” and permits the reader to “interven[e] into it” (Suvin qtd in Parrinder, “SF” 30). As the “critical genre par excellence” (C. Freedman 72), SF allows for “social commentary and critique” (James 32) in that it defamiliarizes our view on the present and becomes a “machine for thinking” (Shippey 108) about the consequences of “our own condition” (Parrinder, “Revisiting” 40). This implies the “ineluctably historical character” of the novum (Suvin, “The SF Novel” 76), in that its “revolutionary effect [only] functions in relationship to the changing, historically specific structures of feeling out of which it develops” (Moylan, “Look” 58-59) and that it is significant merely “to the extent that it effectively intervenes in the author’s historical context” (ibid. 57). From the twentieth century onwards, the default temporal setting of SF has been the future, in which the fictional is projected, stressing the difference in time and creating a possible future scenario in doing so (A. Roberts 57-58). Another important theme is how people are to live with “the impact of developments or revelations derived from the human or physical sciences” in the light of the intense societal changes these bring forth (Scholes qtd in Stableford, “Sociology” 90).

5 Darko Suvin later turned the term “defamiliarization” into “cognitive estrangement”, the term mostly used today (Varsam 206).
In short, keeping in mind that the imagined community in the novel is based on scientific “radically different principles” rather than “socio-political” elements (Suvin, “Theses” 188), SF is best defined as

a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment. (Suvin, “Narrative Logic” 66)
1.3 Dystopian Fiction

_We need to pass through the critical dystopias of today_  
_to move toward a horizon of hope._  
- _Raffaella Baccolini (“Persistence” 521)_

As opposed to SF, the roots of dystopian fiction are easier to excavate, as it is generally accepted as a subgenre of the utopia, a literary genre coined by Thomas More’s _Utopia_ in 1516.⁶ The term _utopia_, Greek for “no place”, shows the intended fictional status, and grants it a critical undertone as a “socio-political” genre (Suvin, “Metamorphoses” 61). Describing utopia as a distinctive genre, however, is more complicated, as it “flow[s] easily into other literary genres” (Firchow qtd. in Franko). This “hybridity” is to be found in the genre’s entire time span, as well as the subgenres derived from it (ibid). A clarifying definition, however, is given by Lyman Tower Sargent, describing it as “a non-existing society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space” (“Three Faces” 9).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, utopia as a genre was “cognitively dead” (Suvin, “Novum” 21), and the “utopian tendency came to an abrupt end”, only to be revived as the dystopian genre (Baccolini and Moylan, “Introduction” 2). As an adaptation of the term utopia, dystopia is Greek for “bad place” and was coined by John Stuart Mill in 1868 (Milner). It is best defined as

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⁶ It is important to point out that More did not introduce a new literary genre with _Utopia_, works as Plato’s _Politeia_ and Augustine’ _Civitas Dei_ can be regarded as early examples of utopian literature.
a non-existing society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived. (Sargent, “Three Faces” 9)

Anne Cranny-Francis also adds the notion of a society “apparently” worse than that of the reader/writer (125), hinting at the fact that it is “ultimately impossible [to] decid[e] whether a fictional society is worse than our own” (Cavalcanti 48, my emphasis).

It is important not to confuse dystopia with some of its “relatives”. First of all, the distinction with anti-utopia should be emphasised, since this genre is “intended to [be] view[ed] as a criticism of utopianism” (Sargent, “Three Faces” 9). It should also be contrasted with the classical dystopia, as the main distinctions are dystopia’s looser plot, as opposed to the rather fixed one of the utopia (Sargent, “Problem” 226); dystopia’s focus on its status as worse than that of the reader; the fact that dystopias tend to “open directly on the nightmarish society”, without contextual explanation (Baccolini qtd. in Moylan, “Look” 63); its focus on the control and preservation of language (Baccolini and Moylan, “Introduction” 5); and its narrative quality, focussing on “what happens to a specific subject” rather than putting the emphasis on the system behind the story (Jameson 56).

Dystopian literature thus serves as a “prophetic vehicle ... warning us of terrible socio-political tendencies that could ... turn our contemporary world into the iron ages portrayed” (Baccolini and Moylan, “Introduction” 2).

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7 For a drawn out discussion of the typical utopian plot, see Sargent “The problem of the ‘Flawed Utopia’: A Note on the Costs of Eutopia”. 
The dystopia as a genre itself also fell victim to a schism in the 1990s, “in response to the conservative political retrenchments of the Reagan-Thatcher era” (Wegner 169). Under the influence of Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984) and Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), the dystopian turn came into being, splitting the landscape into on the one hand the classical dystopia, with paragons such as Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (Seed, “Cyberpunk” 69), and on the other hand the critical dystopia (Moylan, “The Moment” 137). It is vital that some of the critical differences between these two types are highlighted. The first one can be found in the leading definition of the critical dystopia by Sargent, adding that it “normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia” (“US Eutopias” 222). The important element here is that they “allow their protagonists and readers to hope”, which is almost always to be found in “the ambiguous, open endings” (Baccolini, “Useful Knowledge” 130). These endings make the protagonists – and implicitly the readers - responsible for their own choices (ibid.), which “teach[es] us that choices have consequences” (Baccolini and Molyan, “Conclusion” 241). This critical and instructive undertone is typical of critical dystopia, and highlights its role according to Tom Moylan: “to mak[e] room for and giv[e] voice to emergent forms of political consciousness and agency that speak to the conditions of the times” (“Scraps” 192), or as Jameson puts it: “[it] lets us apprehend the present as history” (Jameson qtd. in Donawerth 29), which allows us to “provoke historical change” to improve our present condition (Varsam 210). This inevitably fixes it in its “historical context for [proper] understanding” (Baccolini, “Useful Knowledge” 114). This critical stance shows itself not only in warning
us and suggesting us what to do about the dystopian features present, but also in the fact that the critical dystopia clearly discusses “how the dystopian situation came about” (Fitting 156, my emphasis). Another clear difference is the new focus on who is responsible for the dystopian society. Despite dystopia’s general “critic[ism] of capitalism” (Levitas and Sargisson 23), the critical dystopia builds further on this condemnation of life as a commodity in putting the focus on corporations rather than on the state, which can be considered “a symptomatic echo of [the] neoliberal hegemony” dominating the 1990s (Moylan, “The Moment”135-140). A final point of difference I will discuss here, is the classical dystopia’s focus on the “humanist perspective” and the individual as the criterion, whereas the critical dystopia puts emphasis on society and the world as a whole that needs to be re-examined and reconfigured (Jacobs 93).

To conclude, it is clear that the critical dystopia is a counteraction to the classical dystopia’s mere literary status, in that it puts emphasis on the moral undertone and the underlying message that something needs to be done about the threatening events presented in these novels.
1.4 **Paratextuality (Gérard Genette)**

*My name is Legion:*

*for we are many.*

- *New American Standard Bible, Mark 5.9*

As generally claimed, reading submerges us in “a network of textual relations” (Allen 1). Discovering and correctly interpreting these relations is the pathway to giving a valuable meaning to any given text (ibid.). This “structural relation between two or more texts” is referred to as intertextuality, and as one of the foremost traits of contemporary literary theory, it is a widely discussed and seldom agreed upon subject (Landwehr 2). Most critics tend not to concur in a sole definition, which results in a wide array of different theories about the nature of this “web of allusions” (Dentith 5).

Coined as a term in the 1960s by Julia Kristeva, intertextuality’s roots are to be found in the linguistic theories of Ferdinand the Saussure on the one hand and Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories on language and literature on the other hand. It was Kristeva who first combined these theories, which gave way to intertextual theory (Allen 3).\(^8\) Her image of the text as “a mosaic of quotations” (Kristeva, “Word” 37) and her emphasis on the vital elements apart from the text itself – author, reader and other exterior texts – still prove valuable in contemporary theories (Hutcheon, “Parody” 87). As stated by Roland Barthes, the basis of intertextuality can best be exemplified with the image of a text as a

“multidimensional space in which a variety of writings ... blend and clash” (146). How these “writings” relate to each other and what the purpose or intention of these “blends” is, is the grounds for many a quarrel between critics. In what follows, I will focus on the theory of the French structuralist Gérard Genette, one of the leading critics concerning the theory of intertextuality.

Genette’s work on intertextuality is to be found in the three related works *The Architext* (1979), *Palimpsests* (1982) and *Paratexts* (1987), in which he aimed to provide a map of what he called transtextuality, based on Claude Lévi-Strauss’s notion of the *bricoleur* and the poetics of structuralism. This transtextuality or textual transcendence is defined as “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts”, and can, quite confusingly, be perceived as what other critics merely call intertextuality (Genette, “Palimpsests” 1). In dismissing Kristeva’s term, Genette redefines her term “intertextuality” as one of the five subgenres of transtextuality, comprising solely the micro-levels of allusion, quotation and plagiarism (Orr 106). The four other subgenres, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality and architextuality complete Genette’s taxonomy of “second-degree texts” (Genette, “Palimpsests” 1). I will only discuss paratextuality and hypertextuality here, as these two subgenres are of greatest importance in what follows.

Let us first take a look at the paratext. As Genette himself defines it, it sums up

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all those things which we are never certain belong to the text of a work but which contribute to present – or “presentify” – the text by making it into a book. It not only marks a zone of transition between text and non-text, but also a transaction. (Genette qtd. in Allen 104).

These paratexts are typically regarded as “the threshold of the text” and are meant to help to guide the reader to an accurate perception of the text (Allen 103). This works on two different levels; one inside the text, and one outside. Textual elements present in the novel such as titles, prefaces, the jacket cover and epigraphs fall under the first category, and are labelled peritexts, whereas those elements that are typically found outside of the text are referred to as epitexts: for instance interviews, publicity announcements and reviews (ibid.). According to Genette, these paratexts serve not only to highlight the text’s intentions, they can also have a major influence on how the reader interprets the text. Not only does an epigraph suggest the writer’s literary influences, it simultaneously “sets up important resonances” prior to the commencement of the reading session (ibid. 104–105). This implied guidance in the paratexts inevitably puts emphasis on the role of the authorial intention, and is a clear resonance of Michel Foucault’s “author-function” (ibid 107). However, the presence of this deconstructive element in his work does not downplay Genette’s paratexts’ importance, as they “ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author’s purpose” (Genette, “Paratexts” 407) and “constitute the pragmatic dimension of the contract between text and reader” (Morgan 268). It is characteristic of Genette’s theory that the focus is on works that are intentionally paratextual, which explains as well as justifies this focus on the author’s aims (Allen 108, my emphasis).

The second subgenre of transtextuality I will discuss, constitutes the main part of Genette’s theory: hypertextuality. Genette delineates this phenomenon as any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext) upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary. (“Palimpsests” 5)

It is important to point out that what Genette means with the hypotext, is what most other critics call an intertext, that is, “a text which can be definitely located as a major source of signification” (Allen 108). Genette’s image of “grafting” one text upon another, explains his usage of the term “palimpsest”:

a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing. (Oxford English Dictionary Online)

This layering of writing is the key to Genette’s theory of hypertextuality, in that the hypotext is present underneath the surface of the hypertext, be it visibly or not. This omnipresence of the hypertext’s source once more shows Genette’s reliance on the writer’s intent, but this time the challenge for the reader is considerably harder. The meaning of the hypertext is to be found and understood by the reader, but since this hypotext is often implicitly present, it draws on the reader’s acquaintance with the source text. Should the reader be unfamiliar with the hypotext, then an important part of what the author intended with the novel is inevitably lost (Allen 108-109).

11 Not to be confused with the “ethereal, ever-expansive hypertext of cyberspace” (Keenoy and Oswick 137).
Despite the fact that Genette’s work is criticised for its superfluous invention of terminology and is castigated because of its enforced authorial intention, which at some times is considered aberrant to the rest of his theory, his work on transtextuality proves extremely valuable in that it rejects the opinion that all intertextuality should be implicit, thus also including epigraphs and jacket covers (Morgan 267). Critics also comment on his taxonomy as it is said to be contradictory in certain instances, despite Genette’s emphasis on the categories’ “reciprocal contact or overlapping” (Genette, “Palimpsests” 7). Contrary to other theorists on intertextuality such as Harold Bloom, he does not extract the work from its cultural and social context, which allows him to underscore once again the intention of the author’s reworking of the hypotext. This, in sum, provides us with a valuable theory on intertextuality when analysing a novel as a prophetic or alerting piece of writing with a clear intent of the author.
1.5 Parody (Linda Hutcheon)

It’s not where you take things from -

It’s where you take them to.

- Jean-Luc Godard

(qtd. in Jarmush)

Omnipresent in contemporary literature (Hutcheon, “Parody” 29), parody is regarded as one of the most vital literary devices of postmodernism (Hutcheon, “Poetics” 118). Often regarded as a “subspecies of satire” (Chatman 30), it is the perfect mode to “incorporat[e] the past”, while at the same time “moving forward in new directions” (L. Hutcheon and M. Hutcheon 753). This crossing of boundaries imposed by culture along with the blending of conventions is typical of postmodern writing, and is easily achieved by means of parody (Slethaug 27).

The word parody itself can be traced back to Aristotle’s Poetics, in which he used parodia to refer to “a narrative poem, of moderate length, in the metre and vocabulary of epic poems, but treating a light, satirical, or mock-heroic subject” (Dentith 10), but it was used for more neutral imitations as well (ibid. 193). The term has a long history, and is branded with many different meanings and connotations, according to its spatial and temporal condition (ibid. 11). Etymologically, the word can be split up in the roots para and odos. Whereas the latter undisputedly is translated as song, the prefix para can have

12 For an extensive history of parody, see for instance Markiewicz’s “On the Definitions of Literary Parody” (1967), Eidson’s “Parody” (1970) or Genette’s Palimpsestes (1982).
two meanings, namely *counter or against*, as well as *beside* (Hutcheon, “Parody” 32). This split already hints at the discord found in parody’s definition. Some critics follow Mikhail Bakhtin, who sees parody as “a subversive, carnivalesque cultural force”, whilst Roland Barthes stresses its conservative undertone (Elliott 228). Others, such as Margaret Rose, put the focus on parody’s metafictionality in defining it (Dentith 14-15), whereas critics such as Linda Hutcheon condemn the overall attitude that parody should contain ridicule and mockery (“Parody” 32).

If we take a look at the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we find parody defined as

> [a] literary composition modelled on and imitating another work, esp. a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are satirized by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects, or are otherwise exaggerated for comic effect. (Oxford English Dictionary Online)

It is notable that the OED mentions the satirical. Even though critics such as Gerard Genette place parody within the boundaries of satire (“Palimpsests” 34), many other critics see these as dissimilar genres (Hutcheon, “Parody” 20), pointing to the fact that Genette underestimates the importance of the social and historical background in which the text was produced (Dentith 14). The mention of “inappropriate” and “comic” is often enlarged to the point that parody is considered “parasitic and derivative” (Hutcheon, “Parody” 3), even to the point of defining it as “artistic recycling” (Rabinowitz qtd. in Hutcheon, “Parody” 15). Drawing on this first definition, parody can thus be seen as a “bitextual synthesis” (Golopenţia-Eretescu, qtd. in Hutcheon, “Parody” 33). Despite the useful aspects in the definition by the OED, it is perhaps better to define it as
a complex narrative mode involving both implication in the story and critical
distance from it: a mode of indirect self-reflective discourse which, far from
becoming fully autonomized or narcissistically speculative, may be one of the most
compelling ways to address ... certain problems. (LaCapra 174)

Particularly LaCapra’s focus on both implication and distance are elements worth
highlighting, as well as the notion of self-reflexivity and problem addressing. A final
definition I will discuss here, is Linda Hutcheon’s, who defines parody as “a form of
repetition with ironic critical distance, marking difference rather than similarity”
(“Parody” xii). Her focus on irony and difference are the main points that make her theory
stand out.

In what follows, I will focus on Linda Hutcheon’s notion of parody, despite the
criticism that her definition of parody is considered as “too broad” (Chatman 34), or that
her theory is seen as inadequate in that she “see[s] coherence [that] no normal reader
would experience” (Jameson qtd. in Duvall 383). Regardless of these reproaches, her work
is most valuable in that it stresses that parody does not go at the expense of the parodied
text (“Parody” 6); thus ruling out the notions of ridicule found in Bakhtin’s carnivalesque
(40).13 In this line of work, parody becomes “a serious mode” (Burder qtd. in Hutcheon,
“Parody” 101) which “constitutes praise for the original” (Chatman 25).

According to Hutcheon, parody can be seen as an “indirect” as well as a “double-
voiced discourse”, characterized by both its “formal, ideological, and pragmatic
complexity” as its “unerring ability both to delight and to confound” (“Parody” xiv-xvii). It
aims not to copy, but to “revis[e], replay, invert and trans-contextualiz[e]” previous works

13 Hutcheon, however, stresses the fact that ridicule is possible, as it is “one of a range of possible
ethos or intended responses”, but she nuances that it is no obligation whatsoever (“Parody” 67).
of art (ibid. 11) by “inscribing continuity while permitting critical distance” at the same time (ibid. 20). It aims to “use and abuse” the established conventions in chorus (Hutcheon, “Poetics” 130), serving concurrently as “parallel and contradiction” (Šklovskij, qtd in Hutcheon, “Parody” 29), and thus simultaneously “reinforc[ing]” and “debunk[ing]” what it parodies (ibid. xii). This leads to what is generally called “the paradox of parody”, in that parody “seeks to preserv[e] the very text that it seeks to destroy” (Dentith 36).

How then is this “bi-textual synthesis” achieved (Golopenţia-Eretescu, qtd. in Hutcheon, “Parody” 33)? Since parody itself works on two levels, explicit and implicit, a fitting trope is needed (ibid. 34). Proclaimed “the trope of our century” (Fry et al. qtd in Hutcheon, “Splitting” 9), irony becomes the “chief rhetorical strategy” of parody (Ryan 59). Northrop Frye defines irony as follows:

> a technique of saying as little and meaning as much as possible, or, in a more general way, a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning. (40)

This typical double voicing both permits the distance that Hutcheon included in her definition of parody, as well as implying the typical undertone that characterises parody as a literary device (“Splitting” 142). This undertone, however, comes with certain expectations of the reader; if the reader cannot successfully decode what the writer intended with his or her ironic inversion, the intention of the parody cannot be fully realized. In line with Bertold Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, parody thus seeks to both “distance” and “involve” the reader at the same time (Hutcheon, “Parody” 92-93), but this
always comes with “a problem of access” (Hutcheon, “Splitting” 18). Therefore, it is compulsory that the writer steers the reader’s understanding (Hutcheon, “Parody” 89).

In short, according to Linda Hutcheon, parody is to be defined as a “contemporary sign of intertextuality at work” (O’Donnel and Davis xvi), achieving rejuvenation through differentiation, whilst implying a certain commentary either on a specific work or on a genre as a whole through modifying the subject without modifying the style. This is attained by working on two different levels; one being a “conservative” level which affirms the parodied texts literary value, and the other being a “revolutionary” drive that leads to “complexity” as a result of the double-voicing (Hutcheon, “Parody” 97). This shows contemporary parody’s tendency to “renew” (ibid. 115) in that it “enshrines the past” while at the same time questioning it (Hutcheon, “Historiographic” 6).
2 Genre Discussion

Not real can tell us about real.
- Margaret Atwood (OC 118)

Due to its complex structure and striking themes such as scientific bioengineering, corporate power, social relations, the end of mankind, the notion of humanity as such, the monstrous, social hierarchy and other social issues such as child abuse, parental neglect and repression, Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* can be read in numerous ways. This consequently implies that the novel cannot be considered a clear-cut genre example, as there are Gothic elements galore, as well as typical traits of dystopian and science fiction. In line with many of her other novels, Atwood thus managed to create a generically hybrid novel, leaving critics in two minds about the novel’s genre (Barzilai 87), resulting in the fact that critics like Dunja Mohr place it under science fiction (Semenovich 2), whereas others see it primarily as a dystopian novel (Barzilai 87).

Atwood herself, however, considers *Oryx and Crake* as speculative fiction, drawing on the argument that the story “takes place on planet earth” and thus cannot be regarded as situated in an elsewhere (Atwood, “Context” 513). It also “invents nothing we have not already invented or started to invent” (Atwood, “Writing” 285). In this argumentation, Atwood neglects the fact that speculative fiction is often seen as an umbrella term for fiction that “imagines scenarios that transcend normal reality”, embracing among other
genres fantasy, science fiction and dystopian fiction (Heberle 142). Instead, she personally redefines speculative fiction as the perfect genre to “bring us that other kind of news, [in that] it can speak of what is past and passing, but especially of what is to come” (Atwood, “Context” 515). It is therefore no surprise that Atwood chooses to implement this novel in these realms rather than in that of dystopia and science fiction, as she “issues her strongest warning” thus far (Howells, “Bad News” 92). She distinguishes five different functions that this genre can fulfil: exploring “the consequences of new and proposed technologies”, exploring “the nature and limits of what it means to be human”, exploring “the relation of humanity to the universe”, exploring “proposed changes in social organization” and, finally, exploring “the realms of the imagination”, all of which are clearly dealt with in *Oryx and Crake* and which will be discussed later on (Atwood, “Context” 515).
3 Paratextuality and Parody in *Oryx and Crake*

*I have been here before,*

*But when or how I cannot tell.*

- Dante Gabriel Rossetti (*Sudden Light)*

As is clear from the genre discussion above, Atwood inscribed a certain intention in *Oryx and Crake*. But the question is how she achieves this intention. Through the use and abuse of literary genre conventions which typically serve a moralising or warning function and by parodying important intertexts rooted in these genres, Atwood manages to add an additional layer to her novel. This allows her to construct a novel that is clearly critical and that serves all five functions of speculative fiction as described in the previous chapter. In what follows, I will first point out how Atwood paradoxically uses and abuses the conventions of the Gothic, science fiction and dystopian fiction. Afterwards, I will discuss the main hypotexts on which Atwood based her story, as well as put the epigraphs of Swift and Woolf in context. Finally, I will further discuss the critical message Atwood is trying to convey by putting the questions the novel poses both in their textual and worldly context, focussing mainly on the dangers of genetic bioengineering, the notion of humanity in the light of degeneration, and the question of hope for mankind.
3.1 Use and Abuse of Genre Conventions

*All fiction is metaphor.*

- *Ursula Le Guin*

(qtd. in Broderick 42)

As was already clear from the genre discussion, *Oryx and Crake* is a hybrid textual construct drawing on conventions of numerous literary genres. The main genres it draws on, however, are Gothic fiction, science fiction and critical dystopian fiction. In what follows, I will discuss how the main characteristics of each of these genres are parodically inscribed in Atwood’s novel, drawing attention to their altered presence in *Oryx and Crake.*
3.1.1 Gothic Fiction

*We live in Gothic times*

- *Angela Carter* (460)

One of the most important features of Gothic literature is the setting. Its harsh and merciless characteristics serve to fortify the tensions and fears generated by the novel, and leave the reader with an unpleasant feeling. What is presented in *Oryx and Crake* is a devastated wasteland, destroyed by mankind's ambition and ravaged by pollution. Not only does the entire planet lie in ruins, it has become nothing more than one gigantic graveyard, and the environment has become totally manipulated and unpredictable (OC 136), even to the point where climate changes turn entire cities to dust, to blow them away afterwards (OC 287). Nonetheless, Atwood plays with this convention of obliteration, as elements of the fauna and flora have managed to survive their cruel environmental circumstances. This is exemplified by the arboretum near the sea that proves to be a fitting home and natural environment for the Crakers where plants and fish are plentiful. Snowman's home is found in this arboretum as well, as the protagonist lives in the top branches of a tree, protecting him from constant threat and terror of pigoons, wolvogs and bobkittens. Another Gothic element that can be found in the setting, is the symbol of the haunted castle. Not only are the compounds described as impenetrable “castles” (OC 32) and is Paradice surrounded by “black cube-shaped shatterproof-glass fortresses” (OC 266-267), the dome in which the Crakers are created can be seen as a
parodied Gothic castle in itself. Described as a self-repairing “blind eyeball” (OC 350) that “shin[es] like half a moon” (OC 328), the dome evokes a feeling of anxiety, playing both with the Gothic symbolism of vision and moonlight. It is a place where boundaries are transgressed and the staging platform for the end of mankind. Finally, the image of the castle tower also turns up as a grim safeguard when Jimmy flees into the watchtower after being chased by a pack of unflinching pigoons. This chase of the protagonist by the villains serves as a fitting example of Atwood’s parodic use of Gothic conventions, as the villain in this case is a genetically modified organism hunting the last of its creator’s kind. We do not find an aristocratic male villain pursuing a virginal heroine, but a pack of furious animals chasing after a man wearing nothing more than a sheet. The fact that this thrilling event is accompanied by a tornado, yet another natural disaster, only adds to its Gothic outcome.

In terms of characters, some major characteristics of the Gothic can be found as well. Snowman as the protagonist undeniably suffers from the absence of his mother, and is slightly becoming mad due to his guilt complex. Like many Gothic protagonists, he is narcissistic, for he cannot pass a mirror without admiring himself in it (OC 271), and has excessive sexual longings, shown in his loose relationships both as a student and later as an adult (OC 82). Crake, on the other hand, is far more emotionally stable and focussed, and can be seen as a paragon of the unbounded mad scientist who challenges both Nature and God. His vision on transgressing the boundaries of human creation and replacing mankind with a superior race shows his villainous nature and leads to the manufacture of a monstrous new race. He is a troglodytic sadist, and in line with the Gothic scientist, he
eventually becomes the victim of his scientific experiments himself, albeit parodically in a staged suicide. Oryx, on the other hand, perfectly fits the image of the objectified female character who undergoes the power games of men and is no more than a toy without real power. The irony, however, is that it was the powerless Oryx who distributed the BlyssPuss pill and by doing so played the leading role in exterminating mankind, as well as being the main reason for Snowman’s lovesickness and melancholia. This irony is even strengthened by the fact that Oryx is repeatedly presented as an undisturbing child with pink ribbons and sandals (OC 103, 271, 374, 375, 384, 391) or is compared to a sweet and harmless kitten (OC 133, 138, 148, 299). This shows how Atwood inscribes typical Gothic character traits in her three protagonists while also deviating from these conventions in creating her characters. Furthermore, in line with the typical Gothic character, all three can be viewed as typically liminal, in that they are in an in-between status that results in important evolutionary changes. A perfect illustration is their changing of names: Jimmy temporarily becomes Thickney and later renames himself as the Abominable Snowman; Glenn changes his name to (Rednecked) Crake; and Oryx (Beisa) is the result of a transition from no known name to SuSu to Oryx. These name changes all metaphorically reflect their inner characteristics or actions: the Thickney is a “defunct Australian double-jointed bird that used to hang around in cemeteries” (OC 93), the Red-necked Crake is a rare but intelligent bird (OC 93) and the Oryx Beisa is characterised as a “gentle water-preserving East African herbivore” (OC 365). This usage of animal names for humans can be seen as a parody of the theme of degeneration of man, in that mankind regresses to the use of extinct animals to typify itself, and is in itself parodied in the novel by the figure of
Killer: a pet raccoon with a villainous human name that cannot even look after itself in the wild.

Another trait that typifies Gothic literature is the transgression of boundaries between binary oppositions. The entire novel as such deals with the transgressing of moral and scientific borders in the creation of the Crakers, but other examples of boundary-crossing are Sharon’s fleeing from the constraints of high corporate society to join a resistance group, the team of MaddAdam’s criminal activities to boycott the omnipotent corporations and the overt presence of violence and (child) pornography in websites such as Blood and Roses (OC 89), brainfrizz.com (OC 95) and HotTotts. Some important dichotomies are highlighted in the novel as well, such as the notion of arts versus science and human versus non-human. Whereas Art is symbolised by the character of Jimmy, a “words person” (OC 28) who attended the old-fashioned Martha Graham college where books were still kept in their original shape, Crake is the agent for scientific progression unbarred by ethical or religious constraint. Having studied at the WatsonCrick institute, named after the discoverers of DNA and in the novel referred to as Asperger University due to its abundance of “demi-autistic” students (OC 228), Crake does away with art in the creation of his Crakers as he considers it “an empty drainpipe” (OC 198). The clash between human and non-human, then, is exemplified by the inscription of animal traits in the bioengineering of Man (OC 194), the breeding of pigoons in function of human donor organs (OC 25) or the bestial decay of mankind, for instance portrayed by the team of scientists eating as animals (OC 245) or Snowman wishing he was more like a dog (OC 44) and his renouncement of underwear (OC 392).
The last main characteristic of the Gothic that is present in a subverted manner, is the element of the monstrous as inverted into Man. This monstrousness is parodically presented in two different ways: on the one hand in the presence of the Crakers as an obscene scientific project meddling with the principles of natural creation, and on the other as the post-apocalyptic Snowman with all his flaws who is considered monstrous by the Crakers. Considering the Crakers, they clearly are the result of an experiment gone awry. Apart from not being created in a natural manner, their monstrosity not only builds on the fact that they are much different from Man in that they are genetically altered to smell like lemons (OC 117), grow incredibly fast (OC 187), and can heal each other through purring (OC 184), but also in the fact that Man’s distinctive features are removed: the Crakers lack the possibility to think abstractly or to make art or jokes (OC 359). Their status as “composite” and “in-between” human and not human is a perfect example of Kristeva’s abject, as the Crakers without doubt present us with a situation in which meaning has collapsed and important dichotomies have ceased to exist (Kristeva, “Powers” 4). Nonetheless, their alleged superiority is ironically criticised when Jimmy points to the fact that by recycling caecotropes they merely eat their own excrements (OC 188). Jimmy himself, however, can also be regarded as monstrous. As the rest of Man is devoured by the JUVE-virus, he becomes the “creature of dimness, of the dusk” in the society of the Crakers (OC 6). This is referred to on several occasions, such as the fact that the Crakers “accepted Snowman’s monstrousness” (OC 116) or by his whistling “like a leper’s bell” on approaching their settlement (OC 181), as well as the choice of his own name. Not only is the Abominable Snowman a legendary monster as such, it also serves in making him
“humanoid, hominid, an aberration, abominable” (OC 361), in addition to referring to something that will never be seen again due to the changes in the environment: snow (OC 8). Snowman is a “castaway of sorts” (OC 45) and idly wanders the earth without making progress, metaphorically alluding to the backward-pointed feet of the legendary Snowman (OC 8). In making her main protagonist monstrous, Atwood parodies the typical relationship between the monster and the rest of the world, as well as criticising that Man loses his distinctive features when interfering with Nature.
3.1.2 Science Fiction

If science fiction is the mythology of modern technology, then its myth is tragic.

- Ursula Le Guin

(qtd. in Khalid)

As discussed earlier, science fiction is characterised by two major traits: cognitive estrangement and the novum. This estrangement is achieved by the allegorical presentation of a world uncannily familiar to our own, but which is on the other hand so distinct from it that it is hard to consider it as a possible, even plausible, world. This alienation typically comes with a sense of wonder for what is achieved, and it is this feeling of astonishment that Atwood both enshrines and subverts. As is clear from the futuristic setting of the novel, the scientific enhancements are plentiful: chicken breasts and drums are artificially created from a gigantic head- and brainless chicken mother and are called ChickieNobs (OC 238); there is Happicuppa, a coffee made from genetically modified coffee beans that can be mechanically harvested and exclude the need for manual labour (OC 209); or one can visit the Valhalla of advertisements called the Street of Dreams where any desired bodily adjustment or enhancement can be purchased (OC 339); and these are just a few of the many examples present in the novel. Despite these scientific breakthroughs in terms of making life easier and more comfortable, most of these advancements are met with opposition from the lower classes: revolts and resistance
are legion (OC 210, 253). The dominant society’s ethical considerations are reflected in the character of Jimmy as well, who serves as the representative critical character of the novel. Already from the novel’s start, Jimmy is presented as melancholic about the loss of old-fashioned practices such as a classic chessboard instead of a computerised version (OC 88), and as a defender of long-lost values such as caring for the well-being of animals; he feels their suffering is his fault, even to the point where he worries about the ducks imprinted on his plastic boots (OC 17, 20). His first memory as a boy speaks volumes in this light, as he vividly remembers the burning pile of dead cows and pigs which were eliminated in the light of an epidemic outbreak, hinting at the burning of cows and sheep as a result of the foot-and-mouth disease in Great Britain (Wagner). Most striking about this memory is how he is severely touched, even haunted, by the dead animals’ eyes looking right at him (OC 20). When as a student at Martha Graham he first sees and hears about the concept of the ChickieNobs, he cannot imagine himself ever eating them (OC 238). But as a result of the success of these advancements, even Jimmy comes home with a bucket of them one day (OC 284). Another example of this irony is found when Jimmy feels confused about “who should be allowed to eat what” while he unknowingly eats the very pigoons he feels so sorry for (OC 27). This is even strengthened later on, as he asks himself “who cares” about the riots and the people killed in them when drinking a cup of Happicuppa (OC 245). But Atwood’s ironic way of handling these novums reaches further, as the scientists themselves preventively counter protest against the abuse of

14 Notice how this motif of the gaze of a dead or “caged, trapped and tormented” animal is a recurring symbol in Atwood’s works (Atwood, “Survival” 29). See for instance various examples in her novel Surfacing (80, 147, 167). This reoccurrence only strengthens the symbolic weight Atwood puts on Jimmy’s empathy with suffering or dead animals.
animals by removing the part of the cerebrum that creates pain, stating that this way “the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word” (OC 238). Jimmy’s mother targets these scientific milestones by means of irony as well, as she quarrels with his father about the implementation of pigoon neocortex tissue in the human brain and replies with “that’s all we need, more people with the brains of pigs. Don’t we have enough of them already?” (OC 64).

Another important feature of science fiction is the notion of timelessness. Since time is such an important theme in science fiction, it is striking to see how Atwood places her main protagonist in a timeless world and almost literally traps him in this web of eternity known as “zero hour”: from the very beginning of the novel, we are confronted with Snowman’s broken watch which shows zero hour, just to see this repeated in the final sentence of the novel: “Zero hour, Snowman thinks. Time to go” (OC 433). As a result, Snowman lacks any sense of time and can no longer tell days from weeks. This only stresses the fact that for mankind, time has become frozen and no more progression is to be made; evolution and enhancements managed to rid the earth of humanity forever. By ironically inversing this important characteristic of the science fiction genre, Atwood manages to deal a crushing blow to licentious scientific research by showing us a possible future world that is doubtlessly estranged from ours while being strikingly familiar at the same time.
3.1.3 Dystopian Fiction

*Our only true life is in the future.*

- George Orwell (176)

If we take a look at *Oryx and Crake*’s formal dystopian features, the first striking notion is how the novel typically starts *in medias res*. We are thrown into the post-apocalyptic world from the first sentence on, and it is only in time and through narration that we learn what actually happened and how this world came about. This formal element directly implies the necessary usage of expository flashbacks, creating a disruptive narrative fluctuating between the past and the present – and even the future. If we look at the novel’s ending, we observe that no closed ending is to be found, leaving the reader in total ignorance about what is to follow, denying any possible guarantee that Man will survive this scientific Ragnarök. Atwood’s deliberate choice of a Last-Man-narrative, however, creates several problematic consequences which make it hard to speak of a genuine dystopia. Not only is there no auditor for Snowman’s cries for attention, there is also the problem of the absent – and even exterminated – future reader: “Any future reader he can possibly imagine is in the past” (OC 46). This makes it hard to claim that the novel formally coincides with the conventions of traditional dystopian fiction, underscoring Atwood’s inclusion of the typical traits of the critical dystopia.

In line with Sargent’s definition of the critical dystopia, the reader is to view the presented society as “considerably worse than the society in which the reader live[s]”,...
thus stressing the downsides of this scientifically superior community (“Three Faces” 9). Atwood highlights these negative sides of a successful society by inscribing a “second wave of xenophobia and intolerance for cultural, class and racial diversity” by focussing on the stark contrast between the affluent people in the strictly governed compounds and the poor and inferior plebeians in the pleeblands, an infested place where chaos and crime are rampant (Rao 112). These plebeians’ status as substandard is also reflected in their treatment as test subjects by compound scientists, and is presented in an at times grotesquely humorous manner, for example in the colloquial description of some unforeseen side effects of scientific experiments which often result in the pleeblanders’ death or an improvised cure in exceptional cases, ensuring “at least temporarily” their survival (OC 348). The compounds in the novel are metonymies for the corporations governing them, and are in line with the critical dystopia’s focus on corporations instead of the malevolent treatment of states and governments; the government remains unmentioned as it is replaced by “the corporate power of global capitalism” (Somacarrera 55). The power struggle between these “rival outfits” is central in the novel, and their products determine the balances on the social ladder as well as the unconscious desires of the common people (OC 29). However, most of the scientific breakthroughs advertised by these corporations are “scams”, stressing the consumer’s weak position (OC 296). Still, Atwood subverts this totalitarian consumerism invoked by the companies by putting the “intellectually honourable” Crake in charge of the Paradice project (OC 79). Crake tricks the entire Board of Directors into believing that his creations will serve as models for the creation of fabricated babies with characteristics on demand, while all the time he staged
the worldwide extinction of Man in order to replace them with a “superior method” (OC 358). By strategically undermining the authority of the corporations, Atwood once again treads the established conventions while at the same time remaining true to them by clearly stating whose fault the outcome of the disaster is.

A final important critical dystopian element present in the novel, is Atwood’s inventive inscription of hope, which can be said to work on two different levels: the sticking to daily routines and formerly acquired customs and items; and the preservation of elements threatened with extinction. The first level can clearly be illustrated by how Snowman instantly, though unconsciously, establishes the link between his present actions and the rules of life that he picked up during his education, as he for instance comes up with the following line after his daily morning routine: “It is the strict adherence to daily routine that tends towards the maintenance of good morale and the preservation of sanity” (OC 4-5). His typical morning habit of peeing on the grasshoppers is present at both the beginning, middle and end of the novel, and substantiates the fact that he still dramatically adheres to performative rituals, stressing his refusal of breaking with what is considered as typically human (OC 4, 174, 430). This is also seen in Snowman’s compulsive refusal to discard certain items, such as his broken watch or an ice pick, an obsolete tool that will nevermore serve any function as ice has become something of the past (OC 4). Nonetheless, he seems to gain insight as he asks himself “why hoard the stuff?”, which hints at the fact that even Atwood’s protagonist abandons hope and thus sketches a grim future for mankind (OC 125). However, this abandonment of keeping relics from the old times merely concerns material items. Throughout the entire
novel, Snowman does everything in his power to ensure the preservation of antediluvian words, hanging on to them as the last guardian of their existence (OC 78, 175, 224, 230, 273, 291, 306, 367, 372, 382, 383, 401). If he forgets them, it will be “as if they had never been” (OC 78). This focus on language is a typical dystopian feature, but in line with Atwood’s way of writing, the inscription of this motif is once again transformed. Whereas the reoccurrence of irreclaimable words in the classical dystopia serves as a subversive power in the battle against the objectifying system, be it on a personal or organised level, in *Oryx and Crake* these words are merely used to ensure they do not die out; they lose their saving power and need to be saved from the abyss of time themselves. Snowman symbolically defines himself as “erudite”, and in calling this “a hopeless word” he foreshadows the bleak and disconsolate future of these words – and by extension mankind (OC 175).

By rewriting the conventions of literary genres which typically have a moralising and prophetic nature, Atwood manages to construct a novel that underscores the predictive and alerting function it serves, whilst also firmly placing the novel within literary traditions. The fact that the novel itself clearly has a hybrid form, only affirms its status as a parody serving a specific aim. The use of parody is not only restricted to the level of genre, however, but also stretches to the rewriting and integration of some canonized novels from the British literary history. These will be discussed in the following chapter.
3.2 Discussion of Important Paratexts

Every generation needs its own living art
that is connected to what has gone before
but that is not a copy of it.
- Jeanette Winterson (vii)

As is already clear from the previous chapter, Oryx and Crake is a novel constructed out of diverse materials. Whereas the novel is built out of conventions from different literary genres, the narrative’s architect can be said to be truly influenced by Mary Shelley’s protagonist in The Last Man. Furthermore, the novel’s blueprint could be said to be based on a combination of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and H. G. Wells’ The Island of Dr. Moreau, whilst it also draws on Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels and Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse.

These paratexts not only serve as an important generic backdrop, they also help to place Oryx and Crake in “an established web of meaning” (Brydon 452). In what follows, I will apply Genette’s theory of paratextuality and Hutcheon’s theory of parody to the discussion of the texts mentioned above. First, I shall highlight the epigraphs of Atwood’s novel in the light of their function as peritexts and discuss their relevance to Oryx and Crake, as well as the function they serve in opposition to each other. Next, I will discuss the hypertextual inscription of the novels by Shelley and Wells and their parodic transformation in Oryx and Crake.
3.2.1 Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726)

*We children of the future,*

*how can we be at home in this world of today.*

- Friedrich Nietzsche (241)

I could perhaps like others have astonished you with strange improbable tales; but I rather chose to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner and style; because my principal design was to inform you, and not to amuse you.

Thus goes the first epigraph of *Oryx and Crake*. It is the beginning of the concluding chapter of the fourth and final book in *Gulliver’s Travels*, one of Man’s “most widely read and enduring narrative satires” (D. Roberts v). The chapter can be seen as the biographical author’s justification for his writing, both to assert the story’s rationale and its veracity. Stating that he himself “strictly adhere[d] to truth” so that “the world would no longer be deceived as it usually is”, the author claims to tell a story constructed merely out of facts and truths, leaving behind any form of interpretation, speculation or improvisation (Swift 220). His intentions are pure and utmost clear: “I write for the noblest end, to inform and instruct mankind” (Swift 221). This “plain matter of fact” discourse imposes a degree of scientific objectivity on the story, despite the omnipresent use of fantastical and folklore elements (Swift 220). Regardless of these often comical interjections, the novel was written in an effort “to scourge ... the scientists” of Swift’s day, specifically the members of the Royal Society of Scientists in England, and was an attack against their positivistic compliance (Johnson 899). Swift was out to mock their excessive
pride as a result of their overriding reliance on “the all-sufficiency of reason”, which even inclined towards revoking God (D. Roberts xii). He puts the blame for this blind rationalism on the teachings of the Greek Stoics, which frequently served as a guideline in scientific conduct (ibid.). This imputation is continued in Oryx and Crake, as Crake advises Jimmy “to read up on the Stoics” in order to dispose of his emotions and to get a more objective view on the world, insinuating the scientific redundancy of impeding and paralysing feelings (OC 80). Nonetheless, there is more the matter in Swift’s satire than the mere mockery of science. The true value of Gulliver’s Travels lies in its thought-invoking exploration of problematic possibilities without giving a clear-cut conclusion and solution (D. Roberts xvi). Swift wrote about what was wrong in his days “with a desire to influence” his readers (ibid. xviii), just as Atwood herself stated that literature should “say something about the world at large”, which she makes clear in her five-point functional definition of speculative fiction (qtd. in Staines 15). Robert Phiddian concisely describes the underlying function of Swift’s parody, stating that

[i]t forces the readers to judge, rather than to submit to the author’s judgements, to look inside the semiotic and rhetorical lunacies that surround them, and to see themselves in the mirrors that [it] holds up. (60-61)

Just like the prophetic image Oryx and Crake draws, Gulliver’s Travels warns the reader against uncontrolled scientific conduct “cut off from reality” that claims to improve society and mankind while at the same time distorting and deteriorating it (Bar and Pazit 141). It aims to invoke critical thoughts and reaction against Man’s current state of affairs to prevent ourselves from degradation - or even extinction. This notion of degradation is
cunningly inscribed by Swift in, for instance, the Brobdingnagaians’ renowned righteous society that evolved to a blurred state of corruption, by Glumdalclitch’s telling of the declination of great births in comparison with the ancient times, in the image of the Struldbrug immortals who “horribly undermine the notion of human progress and perfectibility” (D. Roberts x-xi), or the Houyhnhnm’s civilization that is marked by totalitarian objectivity and the individual’s liability to society as the bigger whole (Keefer 212).

During his journey, Gulliver is confronted with a multitude of nations and societies, all of which share uncanny similarities with ours but are considerably different at the same time. His modesty towards many of these cultures “of whom [he] had so long the honour to be an humble learner”, however, gives rise to a possibly needed reposition of Mankind’s place in the hierarchy of development (Swift 221). This imposed inferiority itself questions what it means to be human in the light of other and superior races – or genetically modified super-beings in the case of Oryx and Crake – and is at the base of questioning scientific abuses and meddling in the affairs of creation and Nature (Howells, “Bad News” 93).

Apart from the alignment in terms of subject matter and moralistic and satirical warning, why then does Atwood decide to cite this specific part of Swift’s novel? As stated by Coral Ann Howells, “Oryx and Crake is a Gulliver’s Travels for the twenty-first century”, stressing Atwood’s critique on unbounded creation through science (“Bad News” 92). By choosing to quote the author’s defence of his objective and truthful writing, Atwood reinforces the weight of the claimed righteous and truthful influence of the
scientific enhancements described in *Oryx and Crake* in an effort to wake up the reader and make him/her think about the meaning and value of objective truth as such. The main difference between the two novels, however, becomes clear through the fact that Atwood leaves room for a hopeful interpretation by inscribing “tiny peepholes” (THT 31) of hope by leaving the story open-ended (Howells, “Margaret” 169). They permit a feeling of optimism and serve as an urgent call to arms on behalf of humanity as we know it. This revocation of a doom scenario due to the unstoppable power of destructive, male science is shrewdly intensified by opposing this first epigraph with the epigraph from Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. 
3.2.2 Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

*The waves no longer visited the farther pools*  
*or reached the dotted black line*  
*which lay irregularly marked upon the sand.*

- Virginia Woolf (*The Waves* 155)

Was there no safety? No learning by heart of the ways of the world? No guide, no shelter, but all was miracle and leaping from the pinnacle of a tower into the air?

The second epigraph is from *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf, who is one of the most influential modernist innovators of the novel (Svensen en Lewis). The fragment is situated near the end of the novel as Lily Briscoe suffers a surge of emotions when realizing that she has to accept living in a world that has no answers (Crater 134). “A highly accomplished writer of poetic prose” (R. Freedman 3), Woolf manages to vividly describe the inward journey her protagonist has to make to accept the loss of Mrs. Ramsay, her healing mother figure, in order to find her inner self and grow to be the true artist she aspires to become (McAfee). As the “aesthetic arranger” of the novel (Cobb 117), Lily tries to carve her way through the unregulated world by imposing a sense of order on her “otherwise chaotic life” through her art (Ingram 81). Her painting and art as such are at the very core of the novel (Yunis 129), causing the novel to be described as a “near-religious devotion to Art” (Ingersoll 93). It serves not only as a regulator of life in that it

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15 Abbreviated as TtL from here on.
“paint[s] mirrors” for everyday life “at the level of fiction” and as a guideline for our everyday lives (Koppen 387), it even proves to be an indispensible factor: no (human) life is possible without art (Ingram 89).

Apart from two seemingly meaningless “instances of name-dropping” of Woolf and her novel in *Oryx and Crake* which “help establish and substantiate Jimmy’s literary background”\(^1\)\(^6\), and the resonance of Woolf’s interludes typical of her novel *The Waves* in the opening of the initial and final chapters of *Oryx and Crake*, the subject matter and central theme of *To the Lighthouse* serve as a solid backdrop for explaining the use of this specific epigraph (Lowe). As stated by Nancy Bazin, Lily should be seen as Woolf’s “fictional self” trying to map her relationship with both Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, Woolf’s fictional parents (110). Just as in Jimmy’s case, Woolf’s mother “disappeared irrevocably” in the beginning of her teens, leading to Virginia’s crisis of identity (Folsom 123). The novel can be seen as “a burial rite”, and is written in an effort to come to terms with her relationship with her dead mother (Ellmann xviii). This way, it did for Woolf “what psycho-analysts do for their patients” (Woolf, “Moments” 81). By suggesting that one has to “re-examine and re-evaluate the past to make choices for the future”, Woolf presents us with a clear lesson that also holds true for Jimmy: he first has to overcome his inner trauma of maternal rejection in order to make his emotions, that which reshapes his status as being fully human, accessible again (Bazin 110). As long as this is not the case and his inner state does not manage to metaphorically receive “a wreath of white flowers” from his dead mother (TtL 172) as he “nurture[s] his sense of loss rather than try to overcome

\(^{16}\) Woolf is mentioned first in the list of great human achievements in the game Blood & Roses (OC 91), and later when Jimmy tells of how he composed a naked version of *To the Lighthouse* (OC 220).
it” (Foy 411), there is no chance that he will live through the drama that is imposed on him – or to expand the metaphor: man has no chance of surviving the threats of present and future if emotions are banned and not appropriately dealt with. This is strikingly well put into words by Shannon Hengen, as she states that “Jimmy must retune himself to his own heartbeat, to his own heart, to understand the term ‘human’” (82).

The emphasis on emotions and art that is present in Woolf’s novel and the resonances on the level of subjectivity serve as a fitting guideline for the reader in order to gain a deeper understanding of Jimmy’s inner state. Nevertheless, this epigraph serves an additional function, as the implied tension that is derived from the powerful opposition with the epigraph by Swift foreshadows one of the most important themes of the novel: the relationship between science and art, and between ratio and emotions. In a Cixousian manner, a gender dichotomy is presented with on the one hand male plain matter of fact rationality and on the other hand female artistic miracle and emotionality (Malpas 71-72), stressing the dominance of male ratio over female pathos (Zabus). This gendering of science and arts is also craftily exemplified by the description of the male Watson Crick and female Martha Graham university. Apart from the people they are named after, their mascots also serve as clear illustrations. Whereas the first is decorated with a respected sculpture from a spoat/gider (OC 234)17, the latter is characterised by its dilapidated statue “named after some gory old dance goddess” (OC 218) that is often vandalised (Lacombe 431). Whereas Martha Graham U is described as “falling apart” – both literally and

17 The statue is a replica of the first successful splice between a goat and a spider based on the DNA theory. The university itself is even named after two of the most prominent DNA researchers: James Watson and Francis Crick.
Van Steendam 68

figuratively - (OC 217), Watson-Crick U is compared to “a palace” (OC 234). The resulting creation of a “field of power relations” between science and arts is cunningly played out in the novel (Malpas 71), as art is clearly presented as inferior to modern science: it is denied its power to “humanize” and its only function in society is found in the advertising of scientific products (Brydon 448). Furthermore, any humane criticism on Crake’s scientific fulfilments is considered “purely aesthetic” and is therefore “a bad one” (OC 188). On different other occasions, we find Crake belittling art as “jabbering” (OC 196) or “a stab at getting laid” (OC 198), preventing any witty replies by quoting Lord Byron himself and thus affirming the impression that he knows what he speaks of (OC 196). Nonetheless, the presented possible outcome of an artless world dominated by competing scientific conduct is grim and even involves the end of mankind. This does not only raise questions on the level of a necessary re-evaluation of the place of art in a society dominated by science, but this also puts a finger on the problem of the debasing attitude of many scientists towards the humanities. For is it not as Howells states, that “the creative imagination is a distinctively human quality shared by both scientists and artists” (“Bad News” 93)? As Atwood explains herself, “arts express the emotions that guide scientific research” – suggesting that the two are inevitably entwined (qtd. in Hengen 75).

Itself a cry for a balance between imagination and realism, To the Lighthouse serves as the perfect opposition against the scientific language of Gulliver’s Travels (Stelmach 320). By placing these two texts next to each other and by using the specific excerpt where Lily becomes “renewed and healed” (Crater 134) as “the pain ... and the bitter anger ... lessened” (TtL 172), Atwood manages to create a plea for an ultimate
equilibrium between these two factors, stressing the redeeming capacity of artistic emotionality and its undisputable function in the light of a scientifically modernised society. In line with Genette’s claim that peritexts such as epigraphs serve to imply “important resonances” when reading a novel, the combination of these two introductory quotes not only hints at one of the central themes of the novel, it also conveys a certain intended message by the author, prior and in addition to the one exclaimed by the novel itself (Allen 105).
3.2.3 Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818)

“Man,” I cried, “how ignorant art thou in thy pride of wisdom!”

- Mary Shelley (F 153)

“Rooted in the authentic scientific ideas of the period” (Mellor 90), *Frankenstein* is often considered a Gothic classic and at times even a precursor of science fiction (Seed, “Gothic” 272). The novel itself is a hybrid of different narrative layers and multiple unreliable narrators (Crook 58-62) and can be regarded as “a Faustian tale on a fully human level” (Jackson 55). It primarily deals with scientific exploration of the human creation process and the implied consequences of artificial creation of man through science (Jansson ix). This notion of non-natural procreation of human life is already implied in the novel’s sub-title, as the name Prometheus means “forethought” (Graves 148) and hints at the god’s “legendary role as the creator of humanity” (Parrinder, “Shadows” 47). Apart from a tale on “humanity’s aspirations to divine omnipotence”, it is also considered a horror story and a creation myth “that explores the drama of guilt, fear, and flight surrounding childbirth” (Lefanu 182), as well as “an epistolary love story” that is doomed to failure (Crook 62).

Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is generally claimed to be one of the main sources of *Oryx and Crake*, based on the parallels between characters, themes, subject matter, symbolism,

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18 In what follows, I will work with Shelley’s own reworking from 1831, as it is “the most frequently used” version (Jansson xxiv). Textual references to *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* will be marked by (F).
inter textual references and underlying message, to name but a few (Brydon 450, Dvorak 126, Howells, “Margaret” 164, Lacombe 425, Staels, “Oryx” 434, Wilson, “Frankenstein” 399). Nonetheless, Oryx and Crake is more than a contemporary reworking of what typifies Frankenstein: Atwood transgresses Shelley’s story material and puts it in a completely new context, drawing on Hutcheon’s notion of ironic inversion. By cleverly inscribing this trail-blazing piece of literature whilst at the same time deviating from it, Atwood manages to create a narrative that “speak[s] to the mysterious fears of our nature” even more (F 3). No longer is the mad scientist “an over-reacher” (Sammells 252) empowered by “Faustian attributes” who is cast out of society because of unacceptable scientific behaviour (Dresser 266), but a socially accepted and respected marketing-like businessman, improving the human condition by indulging in the modern variant of Frankensteinian experiments: biogenetic engineering (Newman 91). That which is created is no longer a “hideous corpse” (F 4), a “monster” (F 109) or a “daemon” (F 124), dispelled by society and scorned by all who meet it, but a perfected adaptation of Man created to serve as a floor model for the biogenetic alteration of human babies. Human beings as we know them today are rebuilt, remodelled and reshaped and men evolve more and more to so-called cyborgs, “creatures simultaneously animal and machine” (Haraway 149). The boundaries between human and non-human grow thin, as Iain Hamilton Grant states that, steadily, “nature cyborgenetically coalesce[es] with machinic evolution” (263). It is through the creation of these superior man-like creatures that Atwood parodies Shelley’s “hideous phantom” (F 4): through the introduction of an advanced race and the extermination of mankind, Atwood makes the last surviving human on earth the new
monster (Staels, “Oryx” 438). In a world where physical disability is eradicated, the idea of human perfectibility – the absolute limit of improvement, not perfection as such (Godwin qtd. in Baldick 28) - is only a few steps away (Chivers 388), and by pushing the boundaries of human adaptation to the level of scientific creation of life, Man becomes obsolete and “a spectacle of depravity” (OC 117). However, the parodic image of Jimmy as a contemporary substitute for the monstrous goes even further. As Victor’s monster is initially deprived of a social context and lacks speaking and writing skills, it is only when he becomes eloquent that he manages to “compensate for his monstrosity” (Baccolini, “In-Between” 142). This contrasts with the image of Snowman, who was considered a words-person in the pre-cataclysmic era and now spends his time trying to save words from oblivion. At the same time, he is unintelligible to the Crakers, who do not understand these old words nor his symbolic and abstract language use; his eloquence is what makes him different and monstrous to “normal” society – that, and his exterior differences. The medium through which Victor’s monster eventually learns language, is on the one hand the close observation of the De Lacey family, and on the other hand the reading of several books, amongst which a hard copy of Milton’s Paradise Lost, one of the text’s most important paratexts. This myth of both “creation” and “transgression” not only serves as the epigraph to Frankenstein (Baldick 40), there are also several literal textual references to be found in the novel (F 82, 98, 105, 144, 155). This epic poem is also mentioned or implied in Oryx and Crake on several occasions (OC 91, 121, 178, 362), and “its anti-authoritarian themes” only strengthen Atwood’s satirical criticism on contemporary society (Blumberg 43). Some critics even state that Walton regards Victor as Milton’s
angel Raphael himself (Sherwin 902), drawing on his description of Victor as “unequalled for clearness and precision” and having a “voice whose varied intonations are soul-subduing music” (F 24). As “the leading role” among the unfa...
hopes to get rid of it forever, terrified by this monstrous offspring (F 45-47). This, however, is not at all the case in *Oryx and Crake*, as Crake teaches his children all they need to know in order to be able to survive on their own in the wasteland that earth has become – though he consciously leaves out elements that according to him lead to the ruin of Man, such as racism, possession and abstract thinking. The haunting guilt resulting from the maternal abandonment is not present in the artificial scientific creation, but in the new monstrous: Jimmy. He is haunted by his rejection and keeps hearing his mother’s voice even though he is the last human survivor (OC 272). Begging for “one more chance to make her happy”, he unconsciously longs for his “real, strange, insufficient, miserable mother” (OC 77). This absence and passivity of “self-effacing female characters” is clearly present in both novels as well (Hodges 157), as this exclusion leads to the “consistent marginalization and destruction of women”, reflected in the murder and convictions in *Frankenstein* and the objectified role of women in *Oryx and Crake* (Jansson x).19 In that way, Atwood’s novel can, in line with Shelley’s, be read as “a critique of male mastery” (Crook 60).

This absence of women is also presented by the lack of female companionship for both monsters. Where Victor’s monster demands a female companion from his creator to fight his loneliness (F 111), Jimmy has an affair with Oryx, Crake’s lover, resulting in a Sedgwick triangle with the two “vying for power” (Wilson, “Blindness” 186).20 His

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19 Note, however, how Atwood cunningly gives a voice to the “inferior” female race by placing the female protagonist’s name first in the novel’s title. A parodic inversion of Genesis’s *Adam and Eve* could be intended, and this is only strengthened by the book cover of the edition published by Doubleday in 2003, depicting a scene reminiscent of the Garden of Eden.

20 For more on the Sedgwick triangle, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles” (1991).
fascination for Oryx is what keeps him going, and when Crake kills her, he is outraged and kills him – just as Victor’s monster decides to go after Victor’s family after he terminates his project of a female monstrous counterpart. Snowman’s anxiety dreams in which Oryx walks away show his emotional unrest (OC 392), and the link between the two “giant form[s] of Solitude” (Sherwin 890) only becomes more clear in both novels’ recitations of Coleridge’s *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (F 18, 116, OC 11). Apart from both solely drifting in an estranged world, the parallel between Victor’s monster and Snowman eventually reaches its culmination point in Snowman’s desperate cry to Crake: “Why am I on this earth? How come I’m alone? Where’s my Bride of Frankenstein?” (OC 199).

However, there are more vital similarities worth discussing. Just like Victor, Crake chooses “the path of masculine adventure and exploration to its self-destructive terminus” by choosing to reject his social life in function of science, which eventually leads to his demise (Baldick 165). In line with Victor, he is also haunted by terrible nightmares after the creation of his Crakers (F 46, OC 255), which psychoanalytically signals his unconscious restlessness and which is “useful in figuring the intense conflict between creative inspiration and responsibility for the created object” (Martin 165). Nonetheless, some striking parodic differences can be found. Whereas Victor has “ameliorating positive aims” (Armitt, “Contemporary” 54), wishes to “benefit and ennoble” the human race through his scientific research (Crook 62), and implicitly risks his own life to prevent his monster from procreation by destroying the female mate (Jansson xii), Crake sees his own doings and the extermination of the human race in favour of his freshly created super race
- capable of reproduction without the creation of an additional mate, or “sui generis” as Crake calls them (OC 356) - as a good deed for humanity in the light of its certain death by overpopulation (OC 346-349). Despite their shared hubris, both scientists have an aim to do well for mankind, but their ideals of human enhancement could differ no more: whereas Victor aims at a way to “render man invulnerable to any but a violent death” (F 33), Crake wishes no more than to eradicate the entire human race.

Nonetheless, just as Victor could not predict how his creation would turn out once injected with “the spark of existence” (F 104), which reveals “how men can lose control of the monsters that they themselves create” (Mulvey-Roberts, “Mary” 211), Crake’s “genocidal project” does not work out as foreseen (Howells, “Margaret” 172): not only are there other human survivors apart from Jimmy, the Crakers revert to a state of humanity through their commencing abstract thinking and a belief in the mythology told by their prophet Snowman, a “blind Tiresias” of his time (Wilson, “Frankenstein” 404). This regression of their state as super-human raises the possibility that their innocent state does not prevent them from acquiring the “self-destructive characteristics” that are typifying for Man’s culture and ultimately lead to downfall, war and death (ibid.). Just like Frankenstein’s monster’s undisclosed fate, the fact whether the Crakers – and the surviving humans - will live or die remains in abeyance as both novels end unresolved.

The main message of Shelley’s novel, the dangers of scientific freewheeling and that these types of experiments are doomed to failure when unremittingly combined with the “exclusion of the feminine and the domestic” (Jansson x), is just like Atwood’s message one of balance (Gamble 47). This moralist undertone entwines the novels on a higher
level, albeit they are both situated in a different context and address their own contemporary situation. This only supports Hutcheon’s hypothesis that the parodic inscription of canonised literature serves to strengthen the underlying meaning and message while at the same time showing the value and contribution of the source text.
3.2.4 Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826)

*So lonely ’twas, that God himself*

*Scarce seemed there to be.*

- *Samuel Coleridge (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner)*

Despite being one of Mary Shelley’s more generally neglected novels, *The Last Man* (TLM) is regarded as the very first major futuristic novel to play with the idea of the obliteration of mankind (Bickley, “Introduction” vii). Often considered a “nadir of nihilism” (Mulvey-Roberts, “Shelley” 215), it tells a futuristic story set in an almost socially and politically perfected twenty-first century England, in which a mysterious plague has ridden the entire human race from the earth, leaving only one single survivor: Lionel Verney (Allen 38). This “eternal wanderer in search of a surviving fellow human” (Crook 63) serves as Shelley’s mouthpiece in this fictional prophecy that tries to heed mankind of its downfall as “the end of the world seemed near” (Bickley, “Introduction” xxvii). Not only is the inscription of Shelley’s “*danse macabre*” in Atwood’s novel a powerful paratextual act, it also helps to enforce *Oryx and Crake*’s subject matter and message (Crook 63).

While the JUVE-virus is an obvious reference to Shelley’s plague, “the invincible monster” (TLM 176), it adds a different layer to mankind’s responsibility at the same time. Whereas the protagonists in *The Last Man* have no clue as to the plague’s origin, the situation in *Oryx and Crake* is of a different nature; Man brought this upon himself and
created the disease single-handedly, and Jimmy as sole survivor had his part in its distribution – albeit that he does not acknowledge this (OC 50). As opposed to Shelley’s vision, Atwood stresses that humanity is seen as responsible for its own deeds, or in the words of Albert Camus: “Calamity has come on you my brethren, and, my brethren, you deserved it” (Camus 80).

On top of that, Atwood goes further than to merely rework this “apocalyptic nightmare” on the level of a symbolic plague (Mulvey-Roberts, “Shelley” 211). If we compare the two Last Men, some striking similarities are to be found. As stated by Hartley Spatt, Lionel can be regarded as the “archetypal Romantic artist” (qtd in Canuel 149) who was “wedded to literature” from an early age, which prevented him from “an active career or ambition” (TLM 124) – just like “the romantic optimist” Jimmy who, as a words-person, is unable to climb the social ladder (OC 404). It is salient how their interest in arts and words keeps them mentally stable in their “marche funèbre” across the earthly wastelands (Canuel 147). Lionel eventually sets sail to Rome “where he expects to be uplifted by art” (Bickley, “Introduction” xvi), and spends his days on leaving an artistic “monument” himself by writing the novel that is presented by the Sibyl in The Last Man (Parrinder, “Shadows” 72) – an act Jimmy himself considers, but eventually dismisses on the basis of the lack of a future reader: “any future reader he can possibly imagine is in the past” (OC 46).22

21 However, as Lionel is tormented to see how “the marble forms of divine beauty” mock him with their “unsympathising complacency” and “supreme indifference”, he sadly realises that art does not offer any solace for his desolate loneliness (TLM 370).

22 The fact that his story is told, however, can hint at his need for storytelling in the light of his fear of nearing death, the ultimate “impetus to write” (Perrakis 353). It is through this storytelling that he can feel at home, has a sense of hope of survival and can come to terms with his past (Rao 111).
The problem of this Last Man perspective is cunningly played out in both novels. In *The Last Man*, Lionel clearly contemplates “the nature of his audience” (O’Dea 300) and as “father of all mankind”, his authorship makes “posterity” his “heir” (TLM 124). Still hopeful of a future reader – and thus of other survivors (Melville 830) – Lionel tells his entire past and the story of how he and his close relatives lived through the plague, whilst he “sit[s] amidst the ruins and smile[s]” (TLM 319). Despite the fact that critics such as Sterrenburg state that Lionel has no audience whatsoever (342), others state that he does have one, irrespective of his situation (O’Dea 301). By clearly and directly addressing readers (ibid.), he devotes himself to “learn the deeds and sufferings of thy predecessors” to the person that will lay hand upon his manuscript (TLM 319). In Lionel’s view, a future reader is thus guaranteed, or, quoting Atwood herself: “I tell, therefore you are” (THT 279). This stands in sharp contrast with Snowman’s attitude, who has given up all hope of an auditor for his story (OC 361), which is symbolically inscribed by Atwood as he crumbles and tosses away “the last he’d ever written”: the note he wrote shortly after the outbreak of the JUVE-virus and in which he narrates everything that preceded this biochemical disaster (OC 403). Another vital difference between the two protagonists’ Last Man perspective, is a formal one. Whereas *The Last Man* is told as a memoir from a first person perspective, possibly in an effort to mitigate the distance between Lionel and his reader, *Oryx and Crake* is “refracted” through an omniscient narrative voice which turns the novel into a third-person interior monologue (Howells, “Margaret” 171). By opting for this way of story-telling, Atwood manages to draw the reader into the book by
letting him/her look from the sideline – a place from which he/she should cast a critical glance upon current society and science as well.

Apart from their status as sole survivors, the protagonists’ stories both start in solitude and with a general lack of friends, until during their teens their ‘saviours’ arrive in the form of brilliant youth companions: Adrian’s introduction into Lionel’s life is described as “the most fortunate day of [Lionel’s] life” (TLM 21), as it is he who leads Lionel “out of the obscure path” and “into the bright noon-enlightened highway of mankind” (TLM 125). The same holds true for Jimmy, as he starts to blossom and gets higher grades after his connection with Glenn. Nonetheless, both are doomed to become “infinitely more isolated than in [their] initial outcast state” once everyone around them starts to die, leaving them alone on earth as archetypal wanderers (Bickley, “Introduction” xvii). An important difference however, and this is where Atwood’s ironic inversion comes into play again, is found in the fact that where Adrian dies at sea in a storm as one of the last survivors, Crake is shot by Jimmy, who thus kills the one person who could have been injected with the antidote as well and who could have given Snowman solace from his loneliness. A striking dissimilarity between Adrian and Crake, however, is found in the inscription of the earlier discussed dichotomy between science and arts: whereas Crake is a scientist *pur sang*, Adrian is a philosophical altruist who manages to strike others’ “lyre of mind” (TLM 19). Whereas the latter helps Lionel in his personal development and can be seen as the source of his work of writing, Crake downplays Jimmy’s fascination for art and eventually makes him a vehicle of his own scientific piece of art.
A final link between the two novels worth discussing, is how Atwood plays with the message presented by Shelley. As Anne Mellor states, *The Last Man* is no strict prophecy about “certainties”, but must be read as a story of “possibilities” instead (qtd. in Melville 842). It is a fantasy playing with the ideas of “cleansing and regeneration”, which allows the reader to contemplate the option of building “afresh among the ruins” (Grossman) – though a certain “sense of destiny” and inevitability hovers over the characters, and by extension mankind (O’Dea 296). Nonetheless, by writing a story of mankind’s past and presenting it as a “superhuman prophecy told by the [futuristic] Sibyl”, Shelley conflates the past and the future to provide the reader with a fictional story that serves as a parable for the present (ibid. 291-294). Although the same intention can be said to hold true for *Oryx and Crake* - especially the concept of “cleansing mankind” - Atwood places her novel in the very near future; the year 2024 (Howells, “Margaret” 163)\(^{23}\), thus stressing the probability of her story to the reader. The fact that *The Last Man* ends with the burdensome image of man as doomed to isolation and tragedy puts the weight of the final insight all in the novel’s tail; Lionel and, by expansion, mankind, is disconsolately left alone (Luke xvii). Unwilling to give up hope, Lionel “ends his story but cannot conclude it” and thus implicitly leaves the story’s ending open when he goes in search of other humans near the seaside, “the most probable retreat” for any other survivor (TLM 373). The irony that it is the hope-ridden Snowman who eventually finds

\(^{23}\) There is no literal reference to this year as Atwood is “deliberately unspecific” about the date, but we know that Snowman is 28 at the moment of narrating and that he was born in 1996 (Howells, “Margaret” 163).
other men near the sea (OC 431)\textsuperscript{24}, links Lionel’s narrative even more to that of Snowman and adds an additional layer of uncertainty about what will eventually become of mankind (Bickley, “Introduction” xxiv).

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\textsuperscript{24} One could argue that this specific reoccurrence of the sea, the image “associated with the primal mother” (Staels, “Oryx” 436), hints at a possibility of further human reproduction and repopulation, especially as Snowman’s footprints in the sand are filled with water “as soon as he lifts his foot”, suggesting an embrace by the primal mother – and by expansion, his own mother (OC 431).}
3.2.5 Herbert George Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896)

*Injecting cells, dying eyes.*

*Feeding on the screams of the mutants he’s creating.*

- Tom Araya (Slayer)

The final important paratext I will discuss, is *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (IDM), an “atrocious fable” about the surgical alteration of animals into humans (Borges qtd. in Atwood, “Introduction” xiii), and a work that Wells himself described as a “theological grotesque” (qtd. in Philmus 166). Aided by hypnosis, lethargic brainwashing and “chemical alteration of the blood” (Hughes 64), animals are cut up and blended into “parodies of human beings” (Smith 61). This “irresponsible” (IDM 95) “holocaust of biomedical transformation” (Benston 552) stresses the fact that man needs to “burn out all the animal” (IDM 78) to ensure further evolution and sees “pain as the purgatory” that is necessary for this process (N. Mackenzie and J. Mackenzie 125). Apart from a reminder that “humanity is but animal rough-hewn to a reasonable shape” (Wells qtd. in Parrinder, “Note” xxxiii), the novel must be read as a ferocious attack from within science’s own centre on “bad” and “unethical science” (Smith 57) that not only godlessly aims to “create” human life, but even “cremates” humanity in the process (Gomel 400). Wells himself is generally considered “a prophetic writer with a social and political message” (Parrinder, “Bibliographical” x), and by parodying some of the most important themes and symbols of *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Atwood not only manages to bring to attention the
undeniable notion of degeneration and the scientific threat found in today’s practices of scientific xenotransplantation\(^{25}\), but she simultaneously joins in Wells’ obstinate dance with the Genesis story.

The scientist of Wells’ story, a doctor who was cast out of the scientific community because of his obscure work on vivisection and who goes by the name of Moreau, is described as a “Frankenstein in a post-Darwinian guise” (Bergonzi qtd. in Baldick 154), and is just like Victor and Crake crazed with “the illusion of omnipotence” (N. Mackenzie and J. Mackenzie 126). In line with Crake who locks himself and his creations away from the rest of the world - and especially the board of directors of RejoovEsence - as they will and cannot grasp his advanced vision, Moreau retreats to the deserted Noble’s Island\(^{26}\) to complete his “monomaniacal quest” (Stiles 333) of finding “the extreme limit of plasticity in a living shape” (IDM 75). Just like Victor in his hideaway laboratory, Moreau does away with the principles of nature and tries to generate human life through science.

Yet, Moreau’s creations have a lot more in common with the Crakers than Victor’s monster does. Whereas the latter is brought into the world without any knowledge or guidance and his enclosed story of self-development can be read as a form of Bildungsroman, Moreau’s “Beast People” (IDM 60) are given the power of speech, human doctrine and abstract theology from their creation on and evolve in a different direction: that of degeneration (Byron 134). Both the Beast People and the Crakers can be said to

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\(^{25}\) Xenotransplantation is the “transplantation of animal cells, tissues and organs into humans” (Mortensen 39). Despite the potential to save lives, it holds an enormous risk for both a person’s health and for our entire race, as there “exists a risk of viral escape in the transgenic cross” (ibid. 40).

\(^{26}\) In her introduction to the Penguin Classic publication of The Island of Doctor Moreau, Margaret Atwood herself points to the fact that the name of this island may be read as “no blessed island”, thus metaphorically foreshadowing the profane practices that take place on it (Atwood, “Introduction” xix).
recess “as soon as [their creator’s] hand is taken from them”, and the beast respectively the human “begins to assert itself again” (IDM 78). Despite Moreau’s arduous efforts, “the unmistakable Mark of the Beast” cannot be removed, just as Crake’s hard work evidently does not achieve its intended goal (IDM 42). Apart from their dissimilar creation process – Moreau surgically reshapes animals into chimeras\textsuperscript{27} (Clayton 572), whereas Crake indulges in xenotransplantation as he genetically splices together genes of different species in his creation process -, the main difference between the Beast People and the Crakers can be found in their creators’ vision on theology. Despite the fact that both Moreau and Crake install themselves as Godlike creators, the first in the form of a “post-Darwinian Christ” (McConnel qtd. in Gomel 413) who “hedg[es] his enterprise with religious sanctions” (Hughes 65)\textsuperscript{28}, and the latter initially as their name-providing creator and later as their mythical originator of the world\textsuperscript{29}, they inscribe their creations’ sense of mythology in a strikingly dissimilar manner. Moreau installs a “diabolic worship” (Smith 61) of himself in his creations through a “litany of praise” (Gomel 413) that parodies Kipling’s Law of the Jungle (Smith 61): “His is the Hand that makes / His is the Hand that wounds / His is the Hand that heals” (IDM 59). Through this repetitive prayer that “the Sayer of the Law” (IDM 60) preaches to the “Children of the Law”, Moreau manages to uphold his divinity

\textsuperscript{27} As defined by Karpowicz et al., a chimera is an “interspecies xenograft of tissue into postnatal hosts” (331). A more common and down-to-earth definition, however, is a mixed creature as a result of mingling different species (Clayton 572).

\textsuperscript{28} When working out this metaphor of Moreau as God, critics also point to the “unholy trinity” found in Moreau, Montgomery and M’Ling. Despite the shared initial consonant in their name, they can be regarded as respectively God, Christ the son with “the face of a sheep” and God “in living but non-human form” (Atwood, “Introduction” xxi-xii).

\textsuperscript{29} This, of course, can be argued in light of the fact that it is Snowman who invents the myths about Crake. However, the fact that Crake names the Crakers after himself (OC 355) and makes them in line with his own vision – both figuratively in their lack of religious belief and art and literally in their “green eyes” (OC 8) that resemble his own (OC 82) – allow for this notion of hubris to be extremely plausible.
in the eyes of the Beast People (IDM 103). When Moreau is eventually killed by the infuriated puma, Prendick tries to take over the vacuum of power by stating that Moreau’s Law lives on as “even now he watches us”, substantiating Moreau’s divine status and installing himself as the prophet to this god (IDM 120). However, Prendick is mentally too weak “to emulate Moreau’s self-transcendence” and fails at his one chance at a coup (Gomel 414):

> Had I kept my courage up ... I might have grasped the vacant spectre of Moreau, and ruled over the Beast People. As it was, I lost the opportunity, and sank to the position of a mere leader among my fellows. (IDM 117)

Despite this failure, he tries to leave his mark on the animals by becoming the new proclaimer of the Law. This is remarkably reminiscent of Snowman’s situation, who fills in the gap as the Crakers’ overseer and as their clairvoyant guide and “benevolent uncle” (OC 7) and who at times wishes he had created a more favourable position for himself through what he tells the Crakers (OC 120). Despite this similarity, the irony is found in the difference between these mythologies’ outset: whereas Moreau himself painstakingly aimed at conserving his divine position, Crake consciously intended to do away with symbolic thinking and religious veneration when creating his super-race (OC 359) in that he “was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind” (OC 119). Through the – unconscious – intervention of Snowman, however, an entirely new Genesis story is invented in which Crake as the God of lightning (OC 121, 420), ironically residing in “Paradice” (OC 421), plays the leading role, as he “did the Great Rearrangement and made the Great Emptiness” (OC 119). Through his repetitive narration of this global birth myth,
Snowman himself becomes the mouthpiece of Crake’s Law and feels like the telling itself “is becoming a liturgy” (ibid.). The Crakers eventually further develop this incentive of symbolic thinking and “reverence” (OC 186), exemplified by their “communion with Oryx” (OC 185) and their liturgical singing (OC 122, 418) around the “effigy” (OC 418) they created and that assists them to “send out [their] voices to [Snowman]” (OC 419). As a Moses for the new race, Snowman contemplates to “lay down a few commandments”, but eventually renounces this idea as he doubts whether the Crakers will understand his sayings (OC 426). Nonetheless, he eventually leaves them with the expressions “Crake is watching over you” and “Oryx loves you”, once more enhancing the downfall of the symbolic-free super-race as it is only a small step from symbolic reverence to understanding symbolic language (OC 426).

Just like Oryx and Crake, The Island of Doctor Moreau shows through its sense of inevitable degeneration not only how unnatural creations are bound to become “beyond human control” (Botting, “Gothic” 106), irrespective of how hopeful their creator is (Hughes 64), but also “how the destruction of animal life makes possible the destruction of human life” (Fiamengo 179). By making Prendick “a representative of his species”, Wells consciously puts emphasis on Man as a species and not as an individual in this novel, and in doing so warns against the degradation of humanity as such as a result of the scientific alterations of nature (Vernier 73). In The Island of Doctor Moreau, Prendick is clearly regarded as “The Man” in opposition to the Beast People – as is clear in chapter titles such as “The Crying of the Man”, “The Hunting of the Man” or The Man Alone – and his mental state as a result of the period he spent among the Beast People is alarming (ibid.):
without desire “to return to mankind” (IDM 129) and stating that he “may have caught something of the natural wildness of [his] companions” (IDM 130), Prendick has qualms about “the proper function of ‘human’ values in the order of natural creation” (Benston 553). These questions of “what does it mean to be human?” and “what is our role on this earth?” are clearly reflected in Oryx and Crake (Howells, “Bad News” 93). The weight of these questions is only strengthened by Atwood through the Crakers’ specific scientific creation process when compared to that of the Beast People: no longer are animals rebuilt to become more like humans, but human blueprints are upgraded with genes from different zoological classes in order to achieve something that is better than human.

As becomes clear from the discussion above, Atwood’s parody of The Island of Doctor Moreau is undeniable. The fact that she herself wrote the introduction to the Penguin Classic publication of the novel only asserts her knowledge of Wells’ story. Nonetheless, despite the striking allusions to Wells’ characters, the moral question of what defines humanity and the altered Genesis myth, the question “why this specific novel?” remains partly unanswered. As Wells was never considered “an explicit moralizer” (Hughes 66), his message that this scientific “imitatio dei” (Gomel 413) shows the “aimless” (IDM 95) and “destructive power of human intelligence without values and ideals” is implicitly inscribed (MacDonald 42). As “th[e] most rational of science fiction writers” (B. Grant 155), Wells’ detailed “pseudo-objective scientific accounts of the phenomena described” (Vernier 72) are told through the objective and scientifically well-educated Prendick, a “rational eyewitness observer” who serves to avoid the novel’s
otherwise possible “displacement” (Parrinder, “Imagining” 133). Through this “journalistic approach” (Atwood, “Introduction” xvii), Wells manages to play a “game of possible-impossible with the reader” (Chernysheva 36) by creating a strict tension between on the one hand “his awareness of the possible or perhaps even probable doom of the human species” and on the other hand “his humanistic commitment to intelligent collective action against such a catastrophe” (Suvin, “Introduction” 13). By telling a tale of grotesque “interspecies tissue grafting and transplants” (Kramer 221) so “matter-of-factly”, Wells makes it particularly hard for the reader to consider it “either an invention or an hallucination” (Atwood, “Introduction” xvii). This inscribed veracity not only strengthens Wells’ prophetic warning against science which threatens to eradicate humanity, but also underscores “an equally profound respect for [its] importance” (Clayton 586). Through the inscription of this specific novel in Oryx and Crake, Atwood manages to continue Wells’ ironic scientific descriptions in order to achieve a sense of truthfulness through her depiction of scientific enhancements. In addition, she succeeds at providing a contemporary parodic reworking that grotesquely enlarges the scientific malpractices found in The Island of Doctor Moreau, and in modernizing the symbolic and religious undertone of Wells’s novel, she provides an up-to-date version of the Genesis myth for our contemporary secular – and at times even godless – times.

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30 Prendick followed lectures by Thomas Henry Huxley (IDM 29), one of Darwin’s respected contemporaries who was a devout defender of evolutionary naturalism and a pioneer in the elevation of the place of science in society (Encyclopædia Brittanica), just as Wells did (Parrinder, “Bibliographical” viii).
3.3 Why Paratextuality and Parody?

"Art is a lie that tells the truth."
- Pablo Picasso

(qtd. in Hyde 13)

As I have made clear in the preceding chapter, Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* is without doubt a highly paratextual novel. Apart from literal references to such works as Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Virgina Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (OC 97, 219), Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (OC 96), Burns’ *A Red, Red Rose* (OC 198), Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (OC 220) and the mentioning of many more literary pioneers (OC 91), Atwood also unmistakably rewrites several ground-breaking works that are hidden underneath the story told by Snowman – to use Genette’s metaphor of the palimpsest. Not only do these references demonstrate Atwood’s profound knowledge of the literary canon, they also serve to ventilate the author’s message and offer the reader a paratextual guideline by reworking the point of the novels inscribed.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will discuss Atwood’s use of Genette’s interpretation of paratextuality and Hutcheon’s theory of parody in the context of the overall message she aims to bring across, focussing mainly on how *Oryx and Crake* must be read as a warning against the science of our times, how she poses the question of what
it means to be human in the light of contemporary evolution, and whether she consciously inscribes a sense of hope or inevitably damns us to this apocalyptic nightmare.
3.3.1 *Oryx and Crake* as a Warning?

The advancing tide of matter threatens to drown their souls.  
- Thomas Huxley  
(qtd. in O’Gorman 239)

In line with the general characteristic of parody, *Oryx and Crake* aims to “both assert and undermine prevailing values and conventions” (Dvorak 114), and can be read as “a frontal satirical attack on contemporary society’s advances in and abuses of genetic engineering” (ibid. 117). Atwood plays with the possibilities of what may happen if we continue down the road we have been taking for the last decades (Howells, “Margaret” 161), and regards our present state as a “definite moment” after which “things were never the same again” (Atwood, “Robber” 4). As stated by Wilson, Atwood’s focus is undoubtedly on the “contemporary social and political issues” (“Blindness” 176, my emphasis), and is concerned with the world and the human race at large, as opposed to most of her novels that focus on Canada instead (Rao 112). In an effort to ventilate “danger signals to [her] readers” (Howells, “Atwood” 161), Atwood provides us with a “fable of our time” (ibid. 173) that offers us two possible roads: continuing on “our current blind path ensuring extinction” (Wilson, “Frankenstein” 399), or choosing to adapt our current route in an effort to reach a more global ethic that can “align ... human endeavours in the sciences with those in the arts” (Brydon 447). Atwood’s stance is clear, as she implies that “scientific imagination should be restrained for the public good” (ibid.
and she “guide[s] readers to contemplate seriously the ethical implications of particular choices” (DiMarco 172). In doing so, Atwood follows Jay Clayton, who stated that literature can “shape public attitudes towards science” and can have a “crucial pedagogic value” not only for the readers, but also for politicians and students when reading a literary text “about the human condition” that is situated in their “own historical moment” (575). Or as Dr. Kass appropriately puts it into words: “it can contribute to a richer understanding and deeper appreciation of our humanity, necessary for facing the challenges confronting us in a biotechnical age” (qtd. in Clayton 575).

One of the main scientific misconceptions that Atwood is trying to warn us of, is that despite our contemporary ability to alter “the genetic makeup and phenotypic expression” of a “modified genotype”, man cannot in any way be in command of evolutionary processes. Just as Moreau could not in any way foresee the disastrous regression that led to his vengeful murder, scientists today cannot but guess about the changes and adaptations that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) can and will undergo through “mutations” and “reproductive processes” (Warkentin 92). Just as the Beast People’s long-term evolution could not be anticipated, scientists remain in the dark about the possible – and plausible - implications of genetic splicing (ibid.). The perfect exemplification are the pigoons in *Oryx and Crake*, or the *sus multiorganifer*. As their Latin name already shows, their function is to provide mankind with a surplus of organs:

The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, but would also be able to fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses. (OC 25)
Van Steendam 95

Pigoons are genetically modified pigs that are altered to be able to “grow five or six kidneys at a time” (OC 26), and are injected with both a “rapid-maturity gene” (OC 25) in order to force up their productivity and pieces of “human neocortex tissue” (OC 63) to ensure that the organs will not be rejected by the human host body. The name ‘pigoon’ already hints at the fact that they have undergone such “dramatic genetic modifications” that they can no longer be regarded as real ‘pigs’ (Warkentin 88). Not only is this useful in distinguishing them from ‘regular pigs’, it also helps to make the organ donor less ‘pig-like’, thus partly eradicating the “feeling that there is something undignified for the recipient in receiving a pig’s heart” (Aldridge 132). Due to their commercial value, these pigoons have begun to “play a pivotal role in human medical and commercial enterprise” in the pre-apocalyptic world of Oryx and Crake (Warkentin 88). However, after the outbreak of the JUVE-virus, the pigoons managed to break out of the compounds and started populating the remnants of the earth, quickly adapting to their new environment. Not only are they described as having become strikingly “smart” (OC 126), “cunning” (OC 319) and having gained exceptionally “long memories” (OC 275), they have also tasted human flesh and ironically have become “a tangible threat to human survival” (Warkentin 88). Extremely successful in their “ecological adaptation” (ibid. 93), Atwood lashes out at irresponsible science as she states that “if they’d have had fingers, they’d have ruled the world” (OC 314). And there is even more. Not only does the pigoons’ eating of flesh signal an evolution in an unforeseen direction, they have also physically adapted in function of their new choice of food. Whereas Snowman initially doubts whether he really saw a pigoon with small tusks (OC 43), he later is gruesomely confronted with the fact that the
pigoons have become “team players” with “yes, sharp tusks” (OC 314), thus signalling not only impressive mental progression but also an evolutionary leap on a physical level.

Apart from the implied warning that scientific ‘creations’ may turn against mankind, the pigoons also function as an “allegory for the ecological risks of transgenic organisms” (Warkentin 93). Like the pigoons, other transgenetic organisms in *Oryx and Crake* have proven to have an unanticipated effect on the ecology system, for instance the luminous green rabbits that escaped their cages and started breeding with the wild rabbit population which resulted in their “population spiral[ing] out of control” (OC 241), leading to a severe “nuisance” not only for human beings, but also for the species beneath them in the food chain (OC 110). Another example is the rampage of the wolvogs, a splice between wolfs and dogs that was created to serve as security hounds. Despite the scientists’ certainty that “they won’t get out” (OC 241-242), they eventually did and exterminated other canine species in no time (OC 110). A final illustration found in *Oryx and Crake*, are the bobkittens, a smaller version of the bobcat that was created to eliminate feral cats in order to “improve the almost non-existent song-bird population” (OC 193) – but soon after these bobkittens were set free in nature they also “got out of control in their turn” (OC 193).32

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31 In line with Wheale and McNally, I regard transgenic organisms as organisms “that have been microgenetically engineered so that its genome contains genetic material derived from a different species” (285).

32 It is striking to see how Atwood revives this topic in her most recent novel, *The Year of the Flood* (2009). In this novel, the green rabbits, bobkittens and rakunks have increased in number unexpectedly as well, as Toby states that “it’s astonishing how quickly they’ve been multiplying” (Atwood, “Year” 15). The fact that Atwood also inscribes this epidemic problem in a later novel only strengthens the moral message she is trying to spread.
This mention of the near-extinction of song-birds is in line with the warning Atwood is trying to convey concerning the unpredictability of “foreign” organisms “polluting” our ecological system (Warktentin 92). Apart from the fact that Oryx and Crake overtly deals with the notion of extinction, it can be regarded as a plea for the preservation of endangered species as well. Not only does the title of the book itself expose the ecological calamity caused by disappearing species through its use of two wiped-out animals, other references such as the Extinctathon game, “an interactive biofreak masterlore game” (OC 92) focussing exclusively on extinct animals, only strengthen this claim (Brydon 449). The fact that all protagonists and Crake’s scientists take on names of died out animals is only more proof of Atwood’s concern. Yet, apart from merely signalling the problem of animal extinction, the adaptation of these names can also be read in another way, as it also shows the characters’ “dawning realization that the human also ... is bound to the fate of these other creatures and may well also be on the road to extinction” (Brydon 449). Not only through worldwide eradication by the JUVE-virus, but also due to the vanishing of “the human” as such, a topic I will discuss in the next chapter.
3.3.2 The Loss of Humanity as Such

"More human than human" is our motto.

- Dr Eldon Tyrell (Blade Runner)

As a result of the enhancements in the field of science and since the revolutionary discovery of “the secret of life” (Watson qtd. in Noble), the double helix structure of DNA, by Watson and Crick in 1953, genetic adaptations have entered our daily lives (Noble). However, the ubiquitous presence of these modifications threatens to do more than make our lives easier. Through the genetic alterations that have become possible today, the borders between human and non-human, be it animal or machine, have become increasingly blurred. Despite the fact that in the majority of cultures the combining of species “used to be the subject of taboos” as “it was exclusively reserved to superhuman beings”, it is now a widespread element in contemporary science (Becker 7). Or as stated by Warkentin: nowadays, these actions can only be regarded as “once controversial” (98, my emphasis). By posing the question of what it means to be human in our contemporary situation and “[h]ow far [we] can ... go in the alteration department and still have a human being”, Atwood denounces the loss of these values and the genetic crossing of boundaries for two reasons: not only does it eradicate the border between mankind and the animals, but it also leads to the loss of our humanity as such (Atwood qtd. in Hengen 72).
Concerning our relation to animals, Richard Ryder provides a thought-provoking idea in his essay “Pigs Will Fly” when he asks the following:

How many human genes make a sufficiently human creature to have human rights in the eyes of the law? How many human genes can you give a humanized pig before you feel obliged to send it to school rather than to the slaughterhouse? (qtd. in Wheale and McNally 190)

By implanting animals with human genes and neocortex tissue, we rid them of their identity as purely animal and bring them closer to the level of the *homo sapiens sapiens*. Apart from the danger of unforeseen evolutionary changes as discussed earlier, this may also lead to a needed re-evaluation of the position of animals in society. What Ryder asks is clearly meant ironically, but that does not mitigate the weight of the implied question: can we keep treating animals in the same manner when they are becoming – or perhaps even better, are being made – more human? Some scientists claim that in order to enhance the animals’ situation, there can be no moral opposition to genetically altering animals that serve nutritional ends so they become “decerebrate food animals” (Rollin 193) that no longer feel pain (ibid. 171-172). Atwood ironically inscribes this “No Brain, No Pain” (OC 245) motif in *Oryx and Crake*, as one of the leading scientists of the ChickieNob project states that the chickens’ suffering is humanly alleviated because of the removal of the neurons that instigate pain, ensuring that “the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a thing” (OC 238). The irony here is that these animals are not brought closer to an elevated state – assuming that the removal of pain *could* be seen as ‘elevated’ - out of human ethics, but are turned into brainless machines with greater productivity instead.
However, the necessary re-evaluation of mankind as the dominating species also works the other way around. As stated by Crake in his speech on the endless possibilities of genetic science: “[t]hink of ... any adaptation, and some animal somewhere will have thought of it first” (OC 194). The potential to install animal-like traits in the human body in order to ‘upgrade’ it, is endless. Nonetheless, by instilling humans with features from animals, our status as ‘completely human’ becomes inevitably lowered, leading it to converge with the rising position of the animals injected with human genes. In the end, the once distinct border between man and animal is doomed to vanish, leaving only human-like animals and animal-like humans, or worse, only one conflated grotesque species (Warkentin 101).

This is the second and even more ominous danger that Atwood is trying to warn us of. Due to the endless possibilities of splicing together different organisms and the ecological dominance of these new creatures, all human and animal life is plausible to become a GMO eventually, and may in the long run even be reduced to nothing more than “biological machines” (Warkentin 99). As stated by Bowring, this “mechanization of nature” is bound to result in the “mechanization of ourselves, our sentiments, judgements, fears and dreams” (143), “distorting” not only our “experience of the world” (Warkentin 99), but also eradicating “the capacity to relate to other animals, our own bodies and other human beings” (ibid. 100). In doing so, man would become scarily close to what Haraway coined as ‘the cyborg’, “a hybrid of machine and organism” (Haraway 149). When

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33 Despite this ‘spreading’ of the human genes which may lead to the vanishing of ‘the strictly human’, some critics state that the human genes “must have something special about them”, which can be regarded as “humanness” (Birke 84). These theories state that despite the blurring of boundaries between man, animal and machine, the notion of ‘strictly human’ cannot be eradicated as it is intrinsic to what constitutes ‘humanity’ (ibid.).
comparing ‘a genuine human’ with a cyborg, one cannot but conclude that the latter is in many ways superior. Haraway’s theory is clearly present in *Oryx and Crake*, as “Atwood’s characters all operate ... on a shifting scale of cyborg identities and cyborg politics” (Lacombe 424).

Nevertheless, in light of the impending loss of humanity as such, the fusions between man, animal and machine can also teach us a great deal about “how not to be Man” as well (Haraway 215). This is presented in a severely ironic way in *Oryx and Crake*, as the specific physical characteristics that typify us as being ‘human’ are grotesquely mocked, as they signal the status of “a cripple” (OC 181), something “deformed” (OC 48), when compared with the cyborg Crakers (Chivers 389). Atwood describes the typical traits of humanity as destructive, and ascribes amongst others the lust for possession, racism and savage sexual drives as being the essence of Man, all of which have been eradicated in the Crakers’ mind in an effort to permanently ban war from our world. As the Crakers manage to do away with territoriality (OC 358), prostitution, rape (OC 194) and “pseudospeciation” (OC 358), mankind’s acclaimed superiority fades in the light of “Crake’s Houynhnhmlike creatures” (Howells, “Margaret” 172). It is as Lionel says when he recites Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in *The Last Man* (Bickley, “Notes” 391): “we had called ourselves the ‘paragon of animals’, and lo! we were a ‘quintessence of dust!’” (TLM 318).

However, some critics point to the fact that although the Crakers are called ‘super’-human, they can be regarded as less than human as well. Because man clearly is at “a hinge moment in world history” at which the need of changing our current course is inevitable if we want to preserve our species, Atwood stresses our very possibility to
actually do so, thus clearly alluding to mankind’s free will and choice (Atwood qtd. in Bethune). This, however, is not the case for the Crakers, as is exemplified not only in the fact that they have no individual choice in how and who they wish to be or how to express themselves (Wilson, “Frankenstein” 404), but also by their complete lack of symbolic thinking and literacy, especially as literature is to be seen as the “last holdout of free will” (Brydon 448). As said by Snowman, they lack “the thumbprints of human imperfection, ... the flaws in the design” (OC 115). This could mean that Atwood does more than merely presenting us a possible future doom scenario, as perhaps a feeble touch of hope is to be found in *Oryx and Crake*.
3.3.3 The Notion of Hope

Hope is Memory that Desires.

- Honoré de Balzac

(qtd in Baccolini, “Useful Knowledge” 129)

Despite the fact that our species are considered as “doomed” (OC 139) and our world is described as “hopelessly messed up” (Wilson, “Frankenstein” 404), certain critics stress the fact that some “optimism” is to be found in Atwood’s novel (Howells, “Margaret” 169). Even though it may seem hard to assume that a lot of hope for mankind is inscribed in this post-cataclysmic world, some critics do believe that Atwood deliberately inscribed a possible chance of redemption. Already discussed as one of the main images that pervade the novel, it is precisely through the character of the mother that Atwood hands out an “antidote to the passive surrender to corporate culture” and the “abuses of scientific knowledge” (Foy 418). Through Sharon’s running away and her joining the protest groups against the corporations, we are presented with a possible reaction that is unmistakably at odds with Jimmy’s passivity – a severe criticism against mankind if we keep up the image of Jimmy/Snowman as the representative of the human race. By inscribing that the exercising of free will and choice is still a possibility, albeit an extremely dangerous and difficult one, the novel’s desolation is partly redeemed through this undermining of the austerity of the CorpSeCorps. However, this image of Sharon as the saving Grace needs to be taken with a pinch of salt, as it is inscribed in an ironic and rather sadistic manner, for
she is eventually executed for her actions by the very corporations she was fighting against (OC 305). Despite the fact that this could be regarded as an extremely bleak form of pessimism, Atwood’s stance considering this possible ‘hopeless’ reading is very clear, as she states in an interview about *Oryx and Crake* that “if I really were a pessimist, I wouldn’t write these books” (qtd. in Bethune). Although she insists on the fact that there are still “grounds for hope” to be found, she does stress that we are running out of time as what she writes about is “not very far off at all” (ibid.).

This implicit and austere notion of hope is also to be found in the concluding lines of *Oryx and Crake*, just as the three paratexts discussed can be said to end with a moral and hopeful message. In Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, hope can be found in the fact that Walton gives up on his megalomaniac and dangerous scientific quest and decides to return home to his loving sister, thus exchanging the male ratio for the female pathos and suggesting a new-found balance in the Cixousian gender dichotomy. In *The Last Man*, however, hope is to be found in the fact that Lionel refuses to accept that he is the sole survivor and writes his story with a view to a future reader, just as he hopes that someone will read the “inscriptions” he placed in numerous villages to call the potential readers to Rome (TLM 369). At the end of his story, he eventually sets out in a search for other human beings himself, and though we are left without any certainty that he does, we are not told that he fails in these aspirations. The final line of Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, then, stresses the fact that despite the horrors he has seen as a result of scientific misconduct that even threatened his own life, Prendick has not given up all hope for mankind to come to terms with the wrongs that we are doing: “And so, in hope and solitude, my story
ends” (IDM 131). These paratexts are clearly alluded to in the final chapter of *Oryx and Crake*, as Snowman decides not to shoot the three others on sight, leaving the very possibility that they keep the human race alive.

Atwood clearly places the future of mankind in Snowman’s hand, which is stressed even more by the antepenultimate line of the novel: “Don’t let me down” (OC 433). As she herself is not completely sure “what he should do” (Atwood qtd. in Bethune), Atwood clearly prefers to ask questions and “engage the reader as an active participant” (Semenovich 5) in thinking about a solution for the future of mankind, instead of providing them with an answer herself (Bethune). As it is said on one of Crake’s fridge magnets, “Du musz dein Leben ändern” (OC 354), and it is this message that Atwood is trying to convey by inscribing a parodic form of socially critical literary genres and some of the most significant works of literature that warn mankind that the value of true science is to be found in “research that acknowledges humanity’s kinship to the universe” (Clayton 586). Just like Mary Shelley, it is now Atwood who “bid[s] [her] hideous progeny [to] go forth and prosper”, in an effort to awaken mankind and urge them to dire actions (F 5).
Conclusion

*But a human soul can only go as fast as a man can walk, they used to say.*

*In that case, where are all the souls?*

*Left behind.*

- Margaret Atwood (*qtd. in Goodreads*)

Let it be clear: *Oryx and Crake* can in many ways be read as a warning against our contemporary society’s scientific practices. Atwood is trying to warn us to take action before it is too late, and does so by presenting us a world where mankind as we know it is eradicated on numerous levels: the status of mankind as ‘purely human’ is grotesquely contaminated; animals are on the verge of becoming as ‘human’ as ourselves; humanity has become near-extinct as a result of a biologically created virus; and mankind as a species has been replaced by a super-human race that is in many ways our superior. The entire world has been reduced to “one big experiment” (OC 267) which has got out of hand, and we have entered a state that cannot be described more accurately than by Crake: “when the water is moving faster than the boat, you can’t control a thing” (OC 398). By commenting and criticising on this state of affairs in the form of speculative fiction, punctuated by paratextual and parodical references to critical literary genres and pioneering novels treating science’s eradication of mankind, Atwood succeeds in fulfilling the five bullet points definition of speculative fiction.
As stated in her essay “The Handmaid’s Tale and Oryx and Crake in Context”, the first important characteristic of critical speculative fiction is that it explores “the consequences of new and proposed technologies”, which is made directly obvious through the post-apocalyptic story told by Snowman (Atwood, “Context” 515). On an indirect level, I have shown that the scientific enhancements in bioengineering and genetic alteration can have severe consequences, not only on an ecological and epidemic level, but also on a strictly human one as it threatens our very existence, be it literally or figuratively. Regarding this subject matter, Atwood clearly explores “the nature and limits of what it means to be human” as she not only urges us to re-examine our acclaimed superior status as human beings in the light of the super-human Crakers, while at the same time vehemently confronting us with our destructive nature characterised by greed, lust and destruction (ibid.). Thirdly, the novel plays with “the relation of humanity to the universe”, as it both raises questions of the power relations between Man and animal life and Man and Nature as a larger whole: is it justifiable to meddle in the natural creation process and to genetically alter creatures and adapt them to the level of GMOs or cyborgs (ibid.)? And what with the extermination of animal species as a result of mankind’s destruction of the earth? Also, the novel questions the relationship between human beings in this universe, as the dystopian separation between the rich and powerful compounders and the poor and oppressed pleeblanders suggests not only a necessary rearrangement of our species in the light of our destruction of the universe, but also explores “proposed changes in social organization”, the fourth pillar of Atwood’s definition (ibid.). As shown from the fact that the pleeblanders are used as test dummies for the compounds’ science
projects – which often do not meet the target – a clear class and status dichotomy is found in *Oryx and Crake*, only strengthened by the topological division between them. Finally, speculative fiction that aims to evoke a response in the reader should explore “the realms of the imagination” in an effort to warn us about a possible – and often plausible – future (ibid.). As is clear from the numerous ‘inventions’ in the novel, such as the ChickieNobs, the genetically spliced animals and the treatment of bodily alterations as a commodity, Atwood offers us a wide array of imagined though alarming concoctions.

In order to bolster up her argument, Atwood makes use of clear paratextual and parodic devices in *Oryx and Crake*. Through the ironic inversion of the main aspects of three socially critical literary genres, she presents to us monstrous world that is uncannily familiar to our own. The resulting thought-provoking effect is only strengthened by the dichotomy between science and arts that she presents through the use of peritexts preceding the novel. As opposed to Swift’s, the quote from Woolf urges us to see that contemporary science no longer serves ‘humanity’, in that it threatens the very existence of our species if it is irreparably separated from arts – and pathos by expansion. This affirms Genette’s theoretical insight that peritexts serve to bring across the novel’s message more vividly – though indirectly. Additionally, Atwood inscribes several important literary intertexts that not only help to throw a new light on the end of mankind and the dangers of scientific misconduct, but that are, in line with Hutcheon’s theory of parody, also respectfully reworked in an effort to both enshrine the original and to convert its material to present the reader with a reworking that serves to convince our own time and ages of the threats that result from this biogenetic altering of Nature.
Through the overt presence of irony in *Oryx and Crake*, we are left with an at times tragicomic novel, which can be said to help to address a larger public. Nonetheless, despite this presence of sardonic humour and irony, the fact remains that the core of the novel is a powerful and urgent cry for action if we want to preserve any hope for our species.


Perrakis, Phyllis Sternberg. “Negotiating with the Looking Glass: Atwood, Her Protagonists, and the Journey to the Dead.” *Margaret Atwood: The Open Eye.* Eds.


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