

Of Monster and Man: Transgenics and Transgression in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*¹

Chung-Hao Ku

University of Michigan at Ann Arbor

Abstract

This paper ventures on an inquiry into the fine boundary between human and monster in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. There are three parts in this article. The first section tackles the singularity of the human form and the anthropocentric hierarchy between human and other species. Inasmuch as the pigoons and the Crakers resemble human beings in corporeality and prove more adaptive to the post-apocalyptic wasteland, I argue that bioengineered creatures as such render the lone Snowman a Frankenstein's Monster. The second section focuses on Crake's scientific manipulation in terms of ethical transgressions. While Crake may be easily categorized as a "mad scientist," his destruction of the human race actually attests to a monstrous form of *homo faber* when science colludes with capitalism. The last section reads Snowman's storytelling as a "leftover" tale in contrast to Robinson Crusoe's "survivor" legend. As human monstrosity derives from anthropocentrism and ethical violations, Snowman must open up the enclosure and separation intrinsic in Crusoe's *homo faber* by respecting and tolerating others.

Keywords

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, xenotransplantation, transgenics, ethics, becoming, mimicry, anthropocentrism, humanity, "mad scientist," *homo faber*, monstrosity

¹ Here the phrase "Of Monster and Man" alludes to Homi Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man." I am indebted to Professor Hsiu-chuan Lee, Professor Kate Chi-wen Liu, and Professor Tsu-Chung Su for reading the manuscript at its early stage. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

Vast of Being! which from God began,
Natures ethereal, human, angel, man,
Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see,
No glass can reach! from Infinite to thee,
From thee to Nothing.

—Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Man*

[H]ow was I terrified, when I viewed myself
in a transparent pool! At first I started back,
unable to believe that it was indeed I who
was reflected in the mirror; and when I
became fully convinced that I was in reality
the monster that I am, I was filled with the
bitterest sensations of despondence and mor-
tification. —Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

When Mary Shelley conceived *Frankenstein* by Lake Lemman in 1816, hardly could she expect a myriad of issues to have emerged in the course of a ghost-story contest.² While critics may call this Gothic novel a paradigm of female writing (Ketterer 13, 15), a myth that “ingrain[s] itself in its culture’s consciousness” (Thornburg 1), or an inquiry into “modern freedoms and responsibilities” in an atheistic world (Baldick 5), it is the Frankenstein-Monster double that haunts and fascinates the public most. People tend to mistake Frankenstein for the Monster, and this “conflation,” according to Chris Hables Gray, “signifies that the doctor actually is monstrous in our minds. Equally revealing is that Mary Shelley never actually refers to Frankenstein as a doctor; only Victor or Baron Frankenstein. But it is the doctors we fear today, so we have made him a doctor, and a monster as well” (113). In like manner, when David Punter, addressing the British “decadence,” foregrounds *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and *Dracula* under the rubric of Gothic, what we see are not merely the eerie mutant offspring of Frankenstein’s creature but also the evanescent border between human and monster. Punter proposes a question I am further probing in this paper: “how much . . . can one lose . . . and still remain a man?” (240). If the Monster in *Frankenstein* is monstrous because he is a “filthy mass that moved and talked” (Shelley 99), what renders Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Moreau monstrous is not their physical deformity but their ethical transgression.

While these nineteenth-century cranky doctors, wayward scientists and gory vampires blur the physical and/or ethical line between human and monster,

² For the period during which Shelley conceived the plot and characters of *Frankenstein*, see J. Paul Hunter’s “Preface” vii-xii and Shelley’s own “Introduction to *Frankenstein*, Third Edition” 169-73; all in Shelley.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* makes a far bolder leap.³ Whereas the Romantic and Victorian monsters are eventually held in check, the bioengineered creatures of Atwood's post-apocalyptic wasteland do not merely reproduce themselves but also run amuck. As the lethal pandemic JUVE eliminates the human race, transgenic beings like pigoons, wolvogs, rakunks and Crakers, outnumbering human beings, also start to challenge their dominance. Even though Snowman (a.k.a. Jimmy before the plague), thanks to Crake's antidote, survives the calamity, he is nevertheless threatened by the rapidly evolving viruses and the creatures newly released from the laboratory. Since the pigoons and the Crakers are now endowed with human DNA, these two species push Snowman to reconsider what it means to be human in the age of transgenics.⁴ Monstrosity may be synonymous with either corporeal grotesquery or ethical transgression in the nineteenth-century imagination, but Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, while no doubt inheriting, modifying and critiquing the "mad scientist" stereotype of Frankenstein, further questions—if not totally confounds—the fine line between humanity and monstrosity with respect to their biological morphology and immanent hierarchy.

Critics have primarily focused on the impact of bioengineering in *Oryx and Crake*; only a few address the soft boundary between human and monster.⁵ Noting

³ The title *Oryx and Crake* derives from two main characters in this novel. Oryx, an allegedly child-pornography performer from South Asia, later becomes the Helen-like figure between Jimmy the copywriter and Crake the genographer. Oryx and Crake also designate two species of extinct animals: Oryx, "a gentle water-conserving East African herbivore" (311); Crake, namely "the Red-necked Crake, [an] Australian bird—never, said Crake, very numerous" (81).

⁴ Although Snowman in the end hears human voices on the radio and even witnesses three other human stragglers, he *believes* that he is the sole survivor for most of this novel. In any case, most of my discussion in this paper is based on this scenario, that is, Snowman as the allegedly last man on earth. The appearance of the three other survivors, while bringing Snowman hopes and fears of human company, does not contradict my exploration of humanity and monstrosity.

⁵ Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* touches on a wide range of issues centered on bioengineering. While most critics compare this novel with her other "speculative fiction," *The Handmaid's Tale*, others argue for the satirical or sensational nature of this novel, and still others compare the lone Snowman with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in terms of the castaway genre. For a comparison between *Oryx and Crake* and *The Handmaid's Tale*, see J. Brooks Bouson; John B. Breslin; Philip Hensher; Stephen Dunning; Sarah Gonzales; and Coral Ann Howells. While the first four place this novel within the dystopian genre and/or compare *Oryx and Crake* with George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Gonzales and Howells distinguish Atwood's novels in light of bodily autonomy or the causes of dystopia. Regarding the argument as to whether Atwood gets carried away by media sensationalism, Anthony Griffiths's and Hensher's respective readings epitomize a split between science and literature. While Griffiths criticizes Atwood for "tak[ing] the hype in the media as truth," thus "us[ing] genetic engineering as a lightning rod for wrath aimed at the negative outcomes of science in general" (192), Hensher defines *Oryx and Crake* as a "satirical [version] of contemporary society, and not

that human beings are divided by Atwood into “numbers people” and “word people” as if they were two species, and that bioengineered creatures may have human organs or may do without these organic limitations, Coral Ann Howells argues against the opposition between science and art,⁶ between human and animal. She asks: what does it mean to be human under the regime of transgenics?

This becomes notoriously difficult to answer in an era of gene splicing which produces pigeons with human neocortex tissue in their “crafty wicked heads” and the perfectly formed Crakers from whose

ideas of the future at all” (35). In this sense, what matters for Hensher is the “technology raised to the point of godlike capacities,” not the factuality of the splicing technique described in the novel (35). For a parallel between Snowman and Crusoe, see Richard A. Posner; Earl G. Ingersoll; and Danette DiMarco. Whereas Posner describes Snowman as “a knockoff of Robinson Crusoe” (31), Ingersoll emphasizes Snowman’s survivability among the Crakers as that of a collective “Friday”: “. . . as a Crusoe-figure thrown back on his ingenuity in exploiting the materials at hand to survive, Snowman . . . draws on the recent obsession in popular culture with *The Survivor*” (163). Between Posner’s derogatory and Ingersoll’s laudatory comments on Snowman, DiMarco’s reading is much subtler. For DiMarco, when Snowman sees those strangers’ footprints, a passage reminiscent of Crusoe’s anxiety at seeing the cannibals’ footprints, “he must choose: to retreat from, attack, or engage humanely the strangers with whom he is confronted” (171).

In addition to bioengineering, critics also draw attention to Jimmy/Snowman’s unique relation to words, but their observations are often descriptive rather than expository. For instance, Dennis Lim depicts “Jimmy [as] the word-smith [who] wanders the ravaged earth, haunted by the imminent extinction of his vocabulary, all too aware of his morbidly comic role in this cosmic disaster—the copywriter for the apocalypse, condemned to sell the end of the world, and then survive it” (52). On the other hand, Howells foregrounds the import of Snowman’s tenacious grip on words: “Caught on the edge between language and the silencing of human voices, his narrative celebrates words: ‘Hang on to the words . . . When they’re gone out of his head, these words, they’ll be gone, everywhere, forever’” (93). Even though Bouson strikes a balance by claiming that those clichéd phrases, whilst “discredit[ing]” Snowman, also “redeem him, in part, by revealing his reverence for art and language” (152), such interpretations only point out the fragility of language at a time of human extermination or regard it as the saving grace for a “word person” like Snowman. They fail to explain why Jimmy/Snowman sticks to words and how language can function when words lose their material referents.

⁶ In fact, the science-art distinction is arbitrary. Since Shelley in *Frankenstein* refers to language as “a godlike science” and the creation of the Monster as an “unhallowed art” (75, 172), Howells further questions, “But is there really an opposition between science and art? Is it not the case that the creative imagination is a distinctively human quality shared by both scientists and artists? Snowman is the artist figure, wordsmith and storyteller, and Crake is the scientist, a Mephistophelean figure perhaps, but also a failed idealist like Frankenstein or Dr. Moreau” (93). In this paper, I follow the general convention; that is, here “arts” designates such “liberal arts” as literature, painting and music, whereas “science” specifies subjects like physics, chemistry and mathematics. My point is not to lay bare the arbitrary division between science and art or to advocate their integration. Instead, I analyze the hierarchy inherent in their division.

brains all negative human impulses have been erased and who smell like citrus fruit. By contrast, the stinking, starving Snowman seems all too recognizably human, like King Lear reduced at zero hour to his primal condition as “a bare forked animal,” but also, unlike the Crakers, possessed of—indeed tormented by—imagination and memory, that “burning scrapbook in his head.” (93)

While most critics are either fretfully apprehensive or extremely confident about the progress of transgenics, Howells steers clear of this quagmire and turns a seemingly scientific polemic into an ethical one. Yet it seems to me that Howells’s exploration still does not investigate the ethical issue deeply enough. Above all, how do we really see the pigoons’ and the Crakers’ relation to and impact on traditional “humanity”? Are the former animals, humanoids, or monsters? How do they disrupt or perhaps topple Snowman’s human status—if the latter may still be considered a “human being”? Furthermore, is it not truthful that the technocratic system’s privileging of “numbers people” like Crake render “word people” like Snowman human beings *manqué*? Is the rejected, despised, outcast Snowman still a human being at all? Castrated by the phallic technology, can he retain his humanity, if not among “numbers people” (those human beings *par excellence*), then among the “brat pack” of bioengineered creatures?⁷ And though Crake, like Frankenstein and Dr. Moreau, plays havoc with “human” lives, can we really lump such figures together as “mad scientists”?

If this novel can be read as Snowman’s downfall from master to monster—he loses his lofty human status and becomes virtually a monster in comparison with the bioengineered creatures—I will inquire into the dynamics of this decline. Insofar as biotechnology renders the pigoons and the Crakers either part- or super- human and, under the aegis of international conglomerates, ushers in a hierarchy with the “numbers people” on top, “humanity” is no longer a monolithic and homogeneous appellation as in *homo sapiens* (man, the knower) or *homo faber* (man, the tool-maker). Instead, it becomes a collective, heterogeneous term that encompasses “numbers people” and “word people” before the plague, and afterward the bioengineered and non-bioengineered beings. Thus conceived, the (human) self/other (non-human) divide is in effect reversed: the genographer Crake and his

⁷ While I concur with Ingersoll’s claim that “[t]he power of scientific and technological knowledge further genders this futuristic society” (166), the split between “numbers people” and “word people” does not concern only Snowman’s manhood but his human subjectivity as well. To read his technological impotence as merely a form of castration is too reductionist.

superhuman Crakers now take priority as *the* favored human subjects on this side of the grand “self”; the non-bioengineered Snowman, even if more “human” in the traditional (organic) sense, now becomes the “other.”

Here then, contrasting Snowman with the pigoons and the Crakers, I will explore the notion of human corporeality in the context of an anthropocentric ideology. Comparing Snowman with Crake, I will also look at the convention of “mad scientist” and the ethical implications of the idea of *homo faber*. Clearly Darwin’s evolution ladder needs updating so as to accommodate bioengineered creatures, but this modification does not mean solely the insertion of the pigoons and the Crakers. Rather, now we must also be able to account for Snowman’s “monstrosity” in the new world of transgenics, his dehumanization at the hands of Crake’s techno-scientific manipulation. Cast amongst the dead and ruined, Snowman seems less a surviving castaway on Robinson Crusoe’s island than a returning “leftover” like Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner. Yet unlike the Mariner, who heartily tells his tale to the wedding guests, the irresolvable conflict between self and other holds Snowman’s testimony in check when he sees the other three human stragglers. In view of this, the redemption—and shamanic healing—of his storytelling rests on us, his readers “in the past” (41).

Mimicry and Monstrosity

Among Atwood’s bioengineered creatures, the pigoons and the Crakers prove to be the nemeses of transgenics because they eventually interrogate their human creators’ physical constitution and hierarchical supremacy. While things like the ChickieNobs, devoid of beaks and brains, no longer resemble poultry of any kind but take after “sea-anemone[s],” “hookworm[s]” or “wart[s]” in form (202, 203), the pigoons and the Crakers do not simply negate animality (as the ChickieNobs disfigure chickens); their partial resemblance to human beings actually challenges the human form as well. In addition, as the relationship between human and other species has always been one of binary opposition and hierarchy, the pigoons’ and the Crakers’ mimicry of human beings thus disrupts this ranking system. While they used to be dismissed as mere monsters because of their generic hybridity and their submission to the scientists’ will, the outbreak of a global plague enables the highly adaptable pigoons and the extremely refined Crakers to dethrone the merely “human” Snowman. Now that Snowman can scarcely take advantage of the bioengineered creatures, such disempowerment more or less dehumanizes him. To explicate the pigoons’ and Crakers’ challenge to human form and human superiority,

I will focus on four issues: xenotransplantation, eugenics, cannibalism as well as Snowman's becoming-ghost, becoming-animal, and becoming-monster. I will argue against the uniqueness of human corporeality insofar as human organs have become exchangeable with those of the pigoons and Crakers; then I will turn to the issues of a reversed human-pigoon food chain and Snowman's epistemological regressions *vis-à-vis* the Crakers, in order to more fully elucidate Atwood's nullification of Snowman's supposed ascendancy. In contrast to the Deleuzian "lines of flight" (237), Snowman's "becoming" promises little freedom from the shackles of identity politics. Rather, in the face of the Bhabhaian mimicry of bioengineered creatures, he loses his human authenticity and his status degenerates to that of Frankenstein's Monster.

The pigoons are what Gray calls "living pharmaceutical factories" in terms of xenotransplantation (123). Yet, inasmuch as their kidneys, livers, hearts and skin will not trigger any immunological attack in their human recipients (22, 55), these porcine hosts actually are more than "factories" supplying bodily parts for the automobile-like human beings. Their exchangeability negates the uniqueness of human corporeality. Besides, since the pigoons are hybrids of pig and human, those patients with diabetes, liver complaints, cardiovascular diseases and/or burned, damaged, and wrinkled skin who use pigoon "parts" will become something less than humans but more than pigs after transplantation. In other words, their humanity is more or less adulterated. Now that the pigoons' organs are compatible with human beings' immunological system, "xenotransplantation" in truth becomes an overstated, if not flatly erroneous, term. With this organic homogeneity between human and pigoon, such transplantation is in no way "strange" or "foreign." Crossing the frontier between human and animal, pigoons are now the double—the demoting yet curing, fearful yet adorable other—of human beings.

Even though "people" like Snowman do not receive any transplanted organs from the pigoons, they are not secure from the identity whirlpool into which the organ recipients have been sucked. Noticeably, the second challenge the pigoons pose to humanity concerns dietary taboo. Since pigs and pigoons look alike, when some unidentified porcine meat appears on the table, it is hard to tell whether it is from the unaltered and edible hog or from the transgenic and therefore untouchable pigoon. The notion of devouring pigoons implies cannibalism; "it was claimed that none of the defunct pigoons ended up as bacon and sausages: no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own" (23-24). For those who have obtained organs from the pigoons, such consumption may seem even more horribly cannibalistic. Thus the pigoons are more than sources of

animal protein or pharmaceutical garages for spare bodily parts; considering their organic resemblance to human beings, they are men in porcine masks. To make matters worse, when the pigeons are released from their pen, the abomination of cannibalism gives way to a reversed “food chain.” Now that the pigeons have turned into robust, feral and aggressive beasts with “human neocortex tissue growing in their crafty, wicked heads” (235), Snowman’s former qualms about pork and his apprehension about transplantation prove ridiculous to these “brainy and omnivorous” predators who would fain eat him for dinner (235). These involuntary donors of human bodily parts or accidental servings at luau feasts have now rid themselves of their thralldom to humanity and begin to prey on humans. Due to their virtually human intelligence and their superb adaptability to harsh environments, the pigeons will probably also evolve to a more advanced level than that which Snowman will be stuck in for life. Besieged by the pigeons, Snowman cannot help regarding his doubles in awe: “if they’d had fingers they’d have ruled the world” (267).

Thus, once the pigeons have evolved from laboratory “guinea pigs” to “people in porcine masks” and from pig-people to creatures who prey on human beings, Freud’s criteria for human “civilization”—the utilization of tools, the employment of fire, the construction of dwellings, the upright gait, the sense of guilt, etc. (89-90, 99)—can no longer guarantee human survival in the face of the pigeons.⁸ Obviously, the pigeons do not need to study languages or learn to exploit fire in order to outdo Snowman. In a bioscientific wasteland, their omnivorous regimen and their stout physique have made it certain that they will outlive the last man on earth. By dint of their human neocortex, the pigeons might even merit the epithet *homo sapiens*, “man the knower.” The epithet *homo faber*, “man the tool-maker” has become obsolete because there are few tools available even to Snowman.⁹ True, the toolless Snowman may still congratulate himself on his sense of morality while the pigeons have evolved into a horde of amoral beings, yet ironically morality now becomes an evolutionary liability, making one less, not

⁸ Freud defines civilization as “the whole sum of the achievements and the regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes—namely to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations” (89).

⁹ According to Gray, tools precipitate the advents of new ages and ways of living: “Tools define ages (pastoral, agricultural, urban), especially war tools (bronze, iron, steel). Countless tools were invented while humans assembled increasingly complicated social machines to produce community (tribes, families, villages), war (armies), and economic development (irrigation systems, cities, ports), and to scratch our insatiable itch for knowledge (religion, art, magic)” (4). Now that Snowman is dispossessed of tools—knives, pitchers, computers, sprayguns, and so on—there is little chance for him to conquer the pigeons as human beings once had done.

more, fit for survival: when humans are stripped of the advantages of intelligence and tool-application, morality renders them “sitting ducks” to voracious carnivores with no such scruples.

While Atwood’s pigoons establish themselves as quadrupeds which can duplicate human organs and reverse the original food chain, the Crakers flaunt their eugenic superiority to humans. The Crakers theoretically cull and combine the best genes of all earthlings, and therefore can become the “hypothetical wonderkid[s]” of a couple like Jimmy’s father and his stepmother (250). Yet, inasmuch as they are not reproduced from a man’s sperm and a woman’s egg, but are “customized” from certain human embryos spliced with genes from other species (305), ancestry here no longer stays within the sphere of humanity, as in the cases of test-tube babies of conventional eugenics. Rather, it crosses species to form a superhuman race. The (re)production of Crakers thus turns out to be a far more radical breakthrough than cloning. While in the latter a human parent is exactly mirrored, thus rendering the parent-child relation in effect a twin-twin relation, the Crakers dilute humanity insidiously. Even though they remain human in form, their eyes, bones, flesh and body odor are extracted from jellyfish, coral, mango, and citrus fruit (96, 102). Moreover, when they start to reproduce themselves *sui generis* (303), their artificial relation to human beings is further attenuated. While they have a set percentage of human genes, they do not have any biological human parent. Disrupting human genealogy, then, the Crakers go on to gain dominance over humans by dint of their greater survivability. As agile and dexterous as human beings, they are more resistant to ultraviolet light, more repellant to insects and immune to microbes; their urine is repugnant to the wolvogs, thus fending off these atrocious predators, and they are capable of digesting coarse plant material (154, 304). Moreover, they have, according to Crake’s design, disposed of racism, hierarchy, territoriality, the torment of sexuality, and “any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money” (305).¹⁰ Consequently, whereas the Crakers seem to have purged themselves of the maladies of human “civilization” and can make do with the meager resources that remain after the plague, Snowman, by contrast, is increasingly ostracized, cast into the ghetto of the pathologized, animalized, monstrous other.

Morphologically the same but genetically more primitive, Snowman likens himself to an intruder, a pervert, a leper, a specter, an animal, and even a monster in contrast to the Crakers. Excluded from their merrymaking, he internalizes the image

¹⁰ Although the Crakers later start to make an effigy out of Snowman (360), thus attesting to Crake’s futile endeavor to get rid of religion and symbolism, these superhuman creatures are still harder than Snowman in view of their biological constitution.

of a stranger “enveloped in his cloak of contagious bad news,” his appearance resembling that of “some grotesque flasher exposing himself to schoolkids” (106, 153). An avatar of ill omens, Snowman finally begins whistling “like a leper’s bell” so that the Crakers can notice his arrival (153).¹¹ He even begins to regard himself as a phantom, slipping out of the realm of living things: “*I’m your past*, he might intone. *I’m your ancestor, come from the land of the dead. Now I’m lost, I can’t get back, I’m stranded here, I’m all alone. Let me in!*” (106; italics original). Although Snowman can be an “ancestor” to the Crakers, he is by no means a direct relative or kinsman in the usual sense. Much to his chagrin, his connection with these bioengineered creatures is as remote as that between humans and other primates, and now it is he who plays the role of the primitive. Thanks to his biological inferiority, death and disease haunt him. Snowman is further relegated to the domain of animals and monsters. While “he reeks like a walrus” (7), the Crakers also compare him to a pinioned bird, a stranded marine creature and even a castrated eunuch (8-9), thus making of him a sort of monstrous outcast or freak. Though he initially calls himself the “Abominable Snowman,” the creature he identifies with is “existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumors and through its backward-pointing footprints” (7-8).¹² This simian (and perhaps also ursine) imagery, of course, suggests not only a trans-human “aberration” but a pre-human atavism or evolutionary regression (307), and Snowman becomes so preoccupied with his inferiority that he eventually gets bogged down in nihilism. Abasing himself in the extreme, he comes to think of “Abominable Snowman” as an overstatement:

Maybe he’s not the Abominable Snowman after all. Maybe he’s the other kind of snowman, the grinning dope set up as a joke and pushed down as an entertainment, his pebble smile and carrot nose an invitation to mockery and abuse. Maybe that’s the real him, the last

¹¹ According to Peter Lewis Allen, when leprosy reached its height in medieval times, those afflicted were often ousted out of camps or at least forced to keep a distance from others: “In some areas, lepers (like Jews) were made to wear yellow badges; in others, the markers were red. To avoid soiling even the dirt . . . , lepers were forced to wear shoes at all times. They had to carry a clapper or a bell to warn people to keep their distance” (28). For more details about leprosy, especially its medical symptoms, its historical facts and its cultural (often religious) implications, see Allen 25-40.

¹² The term “Abominable Snowman” derives from “the Tibetan *yeh-teh*, which literally means ‘little man-like animal.’” It is reportedly “an unknown primate, a remnant hominid, or a type of bear” (“Yeti”).

Homo sapiens—a white illusion of a man, here today, gone tomorrow, so easily shoved over, left to melt in the sun, getting thinner and thinner until he liquefies and trickles away altogether. (224)

Both the legendary “Abominable Snowman” of the Himalayas and Frosty the Snowman of bourgeois, upper-middle-class America (we think of the popular Christmas song) are elusive: while the former is at best a subhuman bordering on spurious reality, the latter is not even a living thing. But if “abominable” has more or less signified Snowman’s diminished humanity, in truncating this term from his name, he now is reduced to an inanimate snowman, denying himself any “human” meaning. In the brave new world of the Crakers, Snowman has become a marginal, evanescent plaything. Seeing the Crakers’ rapidly reproducing themselves, he feels like “an orang-utang . . . groping some sparkly pastel princess” (169). A Frankenstein’s Monster incarnate, he whimpers to Crake: “. . . Where’s my Bride of Frankenstein?” (169).¹³

Snowman’s relentless regressions are not so wholly liberating as Deleuze and Guattari’s “becoming.” His symbolic metamorphoses into ape, walrus, bird, and even back-yard, suburban snowman, though suggesting the Deleuzian “lines of flight” (237),¹⁴ still cannot escape hierarchical classification. Deleuze and Guattari claim that “[b]ecoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree” (239), yet Snowman’s becoming-ghost, becoming-animal, and becoming-monster, while taking off from the original classificatory tree and thus disrupting the established “genealogical chart” of humanity, must ultimately perch on another tree with a modified structure. In other words, though his animalization takes the form of “unnatural participation”—which *à la* Deleuze and Guattari has nothing to do with such biological facts as evolution, filiation, descent, heredity and sexual reproduction (238, 241)—it must still be understood in terms of a hierarchal language, that is, in terms of allocation, position, status, and classification. Whereas those

¹³ Noticeably, the phrase “Bride of Frankenstein” here does not designate Elizabeth in Shelley’s novel. Instead, it refers to the horror film *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), in which Dr. Henry (not Victor) Frankenstein creates a female monster at the Monster’s demand. For a thorough film review of *The Bride of Frankenstein*, see Dirks. “*Orang-utang*” means in Malay “man of the woods.”

¹⁴ In contrast to Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical rhapsody, Claire Colebrook gives a more or less concrete definition of “lines of flight”: “In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari refer to life’s production of ‘lines of flight’, where mutations and differences produce not just the progression of history but disruptions, breaks, new beginnings and ‘monstrous’ births. This is also the *event*: not another moment within time, but something that allows time to take off on a new path” (57; italics original).

transgenic beings are incessantly evolving (e.g., the pigeons) or are already “perfect” in every aspect (e.g., the Crakers), Snowman is *anomalously* fading, aging and melting.¹⁵ Due to his genetic inertia, the bioengineered creatures’ rapid evolution generates a sense that Snowman is “receding” into the evolutionary past. As an animal, he does not acquire the ape’s strength, the walrus’s ivory, or the bird’s wings, but shares with them the inferior status formerly imposed on them by human beings.

Clearly, the mimicry of the pigeons and the Crakers, to borrow Homi Bhabha’s terms in “Of Mimicry and Man,” is at once “mockery” and “menace” (127). Although Bhabha’s mimicry is set in a colonial context, the parallel between his critique of Eurocentric hegemony and my analysis of the anthropocentric ideology is worth exploring.¹⁶ For Bhabha the colonial institution creates a class of “mimic men” who are “Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect,” and so these “*almost the same but not quite/white*” subjects appropriate and thus undermine the authenticity of the whites by means of their “‘partial’ presence” (126-28, 130, 132; italics original). In like manner then, insofar as the pigeons’ organs are compatible with their human recipients’ immunological system and the Crakers’ physique resembles that of a well-proportioned human being, the singularity of human morphology is ruptured. Moreover, now that the pigeons start to prey on Snowman and the Crakers force him to identify with disease and death, his original human superiority is subverted and reversed. A Frankenstein’s Monster in the age of transgenics, he is monstrous not because he is a botched mixture of human corpses but, ironically, because of his genetic immobility—that is, his lack of genetic “upward mobility,” or perhaps his genetic “downward mobility.”

“Mad Scientist” and MaddAddam

While Snowman, confronted with the pigeons and the Crakers, is sliding downward from humanity through animality to monstrosity, in terms of a certain

¹⁵ Here I use “anomalously” in the Deleuzian sense. As Deleuze and Guattari put it, “The abnormal can be defined only in terms of characteristics, specific or generic; but the anomalous is a position or set of positions in relation to a multiplicity” (244).

¹⁶ Interestingly, Bhabha begins his critique with a farcical inversion of English colonialism: while the whites are intent on civilizing the “human and not wholly human” barbarians, the result is “the traditions of *trompe l’oeil*, irony, mimicry, and repetition” (126). Here my paper, too, takes a perverse turn; that is, those bioengineered creatures’ mimicry of the human race ironically undermines the latter’s assumed humanity.

presupposed trans-species hierarchy, we now turn to the monstrosity within human beings themselves in order to facilitate a sober “[r]e-vision” of biotechnology (Rich 90).¹⁷ If Snowman’s post-apocalyptic monstrosity results from the outbreak of JUVE and the rise of transgenic creatures, we then must reexamine this bio-engineering apparatus in relation to scientists. Yet, inasmuch as transgenics research relies heavily on funding from corporations, we are forced to study scientists together with capitalists. Interestingly, whereas most scientists (e.g., Jimmy’s father) simply take orders from their investors and make biotechnology a “money-spinner” for capitalism (295), Crake and his MaddAddam colleagues are not only the biggest beneficiaries of this biotech machinery but also its harshest opponents. In other words, their relation to capitalism is simultaneously one of “critique” and “complicity” (Hutcheon 4).¹⁸ Indeed, inasmuch as the technocratic system privileges “numbers people,” allowing Crake to abuse his power and ultimately leading to the demise of the human race, we need to rethink the conception and ethics of *homo faber*. Although Crake looks like a cynical misanthrope who would fain rid himself of humankind, he is less a “mad scientist” than a product of the capitalist machinery. After all, Crake cannot destroy the world without the conspiracy between technocracy and capitalism.

Not surprisingly, people tend to blame Crake for all the mishaps to which Snowman is subject. Richard A. Posner calls Crake a “twentieth-first-century intellectual psychopath, with his faintly autistic, ascetic hyper-rationalism and his techie-bureaucratic talk” (31-32), and Danette DiMarco reads him “as the quintessential *homo faber*, making it unlikely that any kind of positive social change will happen directly through him” (170). Such interpretations only perpetuate the “mad scientist” stereotype. On the other hand, Stephen Dunning and Earl G. Ingersoll both note Crake’s scientific idealism, thus allowing readers to see

¹⁷ According to Adrienne Rich, “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history; it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves” (90). Although Rich intends to shed light on phallogocentrism, her stance is perfectly in accord with my re-vision of transgenics, which for some is also a form of male appropriation of a feminized Nature.

¹⁸ My observation on the unique relation between Crake and capitalism derives from Linda Hutcheon’s critique of politics in the age of postmodernism: “. . . it must be admitted from the start that this is a strange kind of critique, one bound up, too, with its own complicity with power and domination, one that acknowledges that it cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine” (4).

the “fatally hedonistic” nature of modernity’s “therapeutic project” (Dunning 87)¹⁹ and appreciate “the Whiz Kid aspects of Crake’s budding genius [without rejecting him] as either evil or hopelessly insane . . .” (Ingersoll 167). Yet in both cases, the forces of capitalism lying behind the technocratic-scientific system are left uncriticized. Even when J. Brooks Bouson calls attention to Crake’s probable Asperger’s syndrome—“a high-functioning type of autism sometimes called the ‘little professor’ syndrome, characterized by narrowly focused, obsessional interests and prodigious feats of memory, but also poor social skills and a lack of empathy” (145)—this pathological reading, though explaining (if not exonerating) Crake’s destruction of humankind, still fails to take into account such exterior forces as capitalism and technocracy. In fact, as Atwood herself has pointed out, the “mad scientist” image is a projection of human “fear of the unknown” (“Life after Man” 40); by attributing all cataclysms to Crake alone, people forget that it is the collusion between science and capitalism that may lead to the doom of the human race.

In this paper, I define “mad scientists” as those who would achieve their own goals or sate their own desires at the sacrifice of others; that is, the word “mad” here designates an ethical violation, not necessarily a mental or psychotic disorder. While Frankenstein, according to Chris Baldick, is regarded as a prototype of the “mad scientist,” he is mad insofar as he “dabble[s] among the unhallowed damp[s] of the grave,” “torture[s] the living animals to animate the lifeless clay,” and above all, takes little responsibility for the Monster (Shelley 32).²⁰ With his invention of the Monster attesting to the scientist’s ability to “pursue nature to her hiding places” (Shelley 32), Frankenstein not only epitomizes the male appropriation of a feminized nature but also exemplifies a breach of ethics with regard to the self/other relation. In other words, even though Frankenstein’s body snatching, vivisection, and desertion of the Monster might be justified from a certain anthropocentric perspective, they are outrageous transgressions in the light of human beings’ ethical

¹⁹ Dunning in his endnote emphasizes his sense of modernity as “an early seventeenth-century philosophical development,” rather than the “literary modernism, a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century movement” (99). For Dunning, “modernity undoubtedly began as a therapeutic project intended to free society from the repressive pathologies of the past,” but such a therapy “has proven fatally hedonistic, simply because it debunked medieval asceticism without providing its own effective alternative ethic” (87).

²⁰ My definition of “mad scientist” is slightly different from Baldick’s. For Baldick, “[a]fter *Frankenstein*, the figure of the scientist in fiction has, almost as a rule, to be 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). Here I focus rather on the mad scientist’s willful manipulation of others, humans and animals alike.

responsibility to and for other species. When Frankenstein unhesitatingly takes advantage of the dead, of animals, and of the Monster, he has violated not only an ethics which assumes the equality of all living (and perhaps even non-living) beings but also Kant's ethics, according to which we must treat other people as "ends in themselves," not as mere means to our own ends.²¹

Crake is a more complicated case of the "mad scientist" issue. Insofar as the distinction between "numbers people" and "word people" in an age of transgenics is not purely a well-intentioned placement of individual aptitudes but also an efficient assortment of mental labor and a predestination of one's future accomplishments, the technocratic system figures prominently in sanctioning Crake's power to manipulate others for his and/or the system's own ends. By contrast, Jimmy's failure to be one of the "numbers people" has put him into the seedy Martha Graham Academy, a school forced to bend its knee to utilitarianism by changing its Latin motto "*Ars Longa Vita Brevis*" to "Our Students Graduate With Employable Skills" (188). Sadly, it seems that all works of art are useless and redundant; what really count are technology and its concomitant profits. Upon visiting Crake at the illustrious Watson-Crick Institute, Jimmy experiences a sense of jet lag—caused not by the maladjustment of his biological clock but by his inability to catch up with the up-to-the-minute technology.²² Coeval with Crake as he is, Jimmy feels like a "troglodyte" or a "Cro-Magnon" (201, 203). Indeed, while "word people" often spend hours consulting the thesaurus only to find *the* right word, "numbers people" are constantly inventing things that may easily redirect human history. So tremendous are their differences that Jimmy is driven to compare his brain to that of a primitive. Parallel to his later monstrosity (as Snowman) among transgenic beings, Jimmy feels like a hominid among scientific geniuses.

If this technocratic society is one of classification and hierarchy, it is important to see how easily scientists may fail to respect others' lives. A case in

²¹ If Frankenstein can be referred to as the "mad scientist" prototype—even though he never claims to be a scientist himself—Giacomo Rappaccini in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" can then be the "mad scientist" *par excellence*. As Signor Pietro Baglioni comments, "he [Rappaccini] cares infinitely more for science than for mankind. His patients are interesting to him only as subjects for some new experiment" (1290). When Rappaccini renders his daughter a human "sister" for the beautiful but poisonous shrub and plots against Giovanni Guasconti in order to keep his daughter company (1303, 1305), he has become a "mad scientist" on account of his willful control of other people's lives.

²² Atwood herself relates the Watson-Crick Institute chapters to "[t]he Laputa or floating island portion of *Gulliver's Travels*": as those idealists on Laputa have "the advantage of air superiority," the scientists at the Watson-Crick Institute are superior to Jimmy by their expertise in transgenics ("Context" 517).

point is the sexual tonic BlyssPluss Pills. During the experimental stage, “[a] couple of the test subjects had literally fucked themselves to death, several had assaulted old ladies and household pets, and there had been a few unfortunate cases of priapism and split dicks” (295). In the face of such casualties, Crake does not pass any comment on the emotional level; for him, these failures only prove that his medicine “still need[s] some tweaking” (295). Another example is Crick’s associates at Watson-Crick. Extremely sensitive to individual differences, “[t]hey referred to other students in their own faculties as their conspecifics, and to all other human beings as nonspecifics” (209). A finer classification than that of the Linnaean taxonomy,²³ this divide actually verges on racism: it discriminates among people according to some artificial standard. When technocracy serves scientists to the degree that it uncritically consents to their arbitrary categorizations of specimens and to their experiments on vivisections, bioengineers are at best systematically playing with lives. Recalling the nineteenth-century anxiety about surgery which, says Ruth Richardson, “was widely believed to be little more than live butchery . . . practiced upon the poor” (44), transgenic scientists are the new generation of butchers operating on humans and animals. Saving lives has become an experimental praxis rather than a calling, and whatever genetic secrets may be uncovered, the scientists are totally controlling over lives.

As technocracy more or less sanctions the bioengineers’ deliberate experiments on species, scientific breakthroughs will still be impossible without financial sponsorship by such corporations as OrganInc Farms, HelthWyzer and RejoovenEsense. Yet the relation between scientist and capitalist is not simply one of patronage or symbiosis; it is also one of intrigue, betrayal, and foul play. When Crake divulges to Jimmy the secret of HelthWyzer’s vitamin pills—that is, they put hostile bioforms in their drugs while hoarding the precious antidotes—it turns out that this pharmaceutical company is asking scientists to create diseases so as to make great profits (211). If there is anyone who is (like Crake’s father) against this “elegant concept,” he or she shall be “[e]xecuted” for treason (212). Scandalously, when enterprises like HelthWyzer amass fortunes by increasing people’s chance of infection, plotting a monopoly on antidotes and disposing of anyone who stands in

²³ Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) is acknowledged as “the Father of Taxonomy”; his “hierarchical classification and custom of binomial nomenclature,” which assort and name living things according to their proper kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species, powerfully influence the zoologists and botanists who come after him (Waggoner). The Linnaean nomenclature is one of the first biological systems to determine, classify, and sort out living things on the basis of their physical forms. For a brief biography and summary of the scientific thought of Linnaeus, see Ben Waggoner.

the way, it is bio-totalitarianism. In view of this, it will be a simplification to call Crake a “mad scientist” without considering the capitalists’ disregard for lives. Had the pharmaceutical corporation not killed his father for profit, Crake might not have been so cynical as to devise a virus to wipe out human beings. Unleashing the lethal JUVE just as HelthWyzer spreads their bioforms, Crake may be a mad scientist but he is also taking a stand against the capitalist cupidity and obeying a very primitive human instinct: he is claiming *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye.²⁴

If the HelthWyzer incident exemplifies the conflict between scientist and capitalist, Crake’s Paradise Project and his MaddAddam contingent best illustrate the genographers’ critique of and complicity with capitalism. Originating from the online interactive game EXTINCTATHON, with its logon message reading “*Adam named the living animals, MaddAddam names the dead ones,*” these MaddAddam Grandmasters are not only erudite about species long since extinct but later join together in manufacturing malign bioforms, thus generating panic among the other Compound residents (80; italics original). When these “splice geniuses” design new bioforms so as to wreck the other transgenic beings or paralyze the urban infrastructure, their menace to the glocal economy and security has made of them “anti-Compound” bioterrorists (298, 299). Yet no sooner does Crake recruit them into his Paradise Project than these geniuses become the principal contributors to RejoovenEsense in creating the Crakers. Intriguingly, while these MaddAddam bioengineers seem to have become good citizens they are actually to side with power rather than justice. Besides, though their attacks on the Compound may seem unforgivable, their naming of extinct species in fact resurrects those dead animals and plants from oblivion, and this serves to foreground the capitalist’s fatal impairment of the ecosystem. Thus these MaddAddam Grandmasters, by recording the recent history of ecocide, are also attacking the *laissez-faire* capitalism endorsed by the economist Adam Smith. Ironically, it is when these scientists are destroying the Compound that their critique of capitalism really carries weight. Their relinquishing of bioterrorism signifies their capitulation to capitalism.

The creation of the BlyssPluss Pills, the birth of the bioengineered creatures, and even the invention of the plague JUVE all suggest what Hannah Arendt claims is the original sense of *homo faber*: one “who makes and . . . fabricates the sheer

²⁴ Ingersoll parallels Crake with Hamlet in that they both attempt to avenge their fathers’ scandalous deaths: “The narrative may be making a gesture toward *Hamlet* in Crake’s discovery that his ‘Uncle Pete’ conspired in his father’s murder and that his mother may have quickly remarried her dead husband’s boss out of fear that she, too, could become the victim of a mysterious ‘accident’” (169).

unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice” (136).²⁵ In effect Crake, his Watson-Crick associates and his MaddAddam colleagues are all trying to create a new order by dint of their expertise in transgenics. However, partly because of their egotism and partly because of their collusion with capitalism, they tend to end up in hectic pursuit of profit or in fatal blows at the ecosystem. Take the creations at Watson-Crick for example: the Rockulators, though able to “[absorb] water during periods of humidity and [release] it in times of drought,” will explode “during heavy rainfalls” (200); the Smart Wallpaper, claiming to “change colour on the walls of your room to complement your mood,” actually “could not tell the difference between drooling lust and murderous rage, and was likely to turn your wallpaper an erotic pink when what you really needed was a murky, capillary-bursting greenish red” (201). Evidently, though science has helped human beings get rid of thousands of daily nuisances, such products as the BlyssPluss Pills, Rockulators, and Smart Wallpaper also indicate the fallibility of scientific inventions. When Crake starts producing JUVE, *homo faber* has been contaminated by greed and animosity. Although the ingenuity is still there, it has taken a monstrous form, that of an infernal machine.

With capitalism producing a corrupt form of *homo faber*, bioengineers have become so venal that even their attempts at ridding humans of social maladies are doomed to fail and at great cost. Empowered by biotechnology and fuelled by capitalism, Crake tries to cleanse the world of rituals, metaphors, religions, courtship, and eventually human beings themselves in favor of his innocent Crakers. Unfortunately, these superhuman creatures eventually have few differences from *homo sapiens*. While it is claimed that the Crakers have forgone symbolism and other maladies of human civilization, their gradual development belies this claim. The male Crakers’ urination goes beyond being a mere bodily function to become a territorial behavior as well: “The men are performing their morning ritual, standing six feet apart in a long line curving off into the trees at either side. They’re facing outward as in pictures of muskoxen, pissing along the invisible line that marks their territory” (154). Contrary to Crake’s original design, this marking of territory repeats a mammalian and primitive human instinct. Then when Snowman leaves for the Paradise dome, the Crakers make “a scarecrowlike effigy” of him (360), thus breaking Crake’s prohibition against idol worship. Judging from this relapse into territoriality and the idolatry of

²⁵ In the footnote Arendt adds, “The Latin word *faber*, probably related to *facere* (“to make something” in the sense of production), originally designated the fabricator and artist who works upon hard material, such as stone or wood; it also was used as translation for the Greek *tektōn*, which has the same connotation” (136; italics original).

Snowman, it seems not unlikely that the latent human potential for hierarchy will eventually rekindle among the Crakers: although Crake contends that their different skin colors are purely “aesthetic” (8), these cutaneous nuances are subject to the political manipulation of racism, and the fact that the Crakers are led by a male “Abraham” can be seen as a crude form of patriarchy or gerontocracy.

Thus we have seen two kinds of human monstrosity in *Oryx and Crake*: on the one hand, Snowman becomes a monster when his human form and human superiority are questioned by the pigoons, the Crakers, and above all by himself; on the other, the conspiracy between transgenics and capitalism engenders a monstrous form of *homo faber*, who would sacrifice any life for scientific breakthroughs, commercial profits, or/and personal retaliation. Although Crake is in one sense an idealist intent on redeeming this world from social maladies, his Paradise Project turns out to be a farce. In fact, reflecting on the plague that kills off human beings and the Crakers who render Snowman a Frankenstein’s Monster, Atwood tells us that the problem does not lie in transgenics itself but in its application: “It’s not a question of our inventions—all human inventions are merely tools—but of what might be done with them; for no matter how high the tech, *homo sapiens sapiens* [“very wise man”] remains at heart what he’s been for tens of thousands of years—the same emotions, the same preoccupations” (*Oryx* 383). As transgenic bioengineering itself is a border-crossing between species, this confusion or dissolution of biological demarcations makes us rethink the anthropocentric ideology of Darwinism, the construction of monstrosity through pathology and marginalization, and the manipulation of lives by technocratic *homo fabers*. Transgenic creatures mock and menace human beings, and Snowman’s monstrosity actually finds its roots in his sense of hierarchy. If scientists and techno-capitalists can resist the lure of profits and always take others’ well-being into consideration, *homo faber* might still put biotechnology back on track.

Leftover and Storyteller

In the previous sections I have explored the soft boundary between human and monster, something directly experienced by Snowman. Transgenics may lead to human annihilation when scientists violate that larger ethical code which includes the relations between humans and other species, as well as between human beings themselves, and Snowman’s story of the apocalypse allows us to *preview* a future of unrestrained science. Yet while Ingersoll interprets Snowman as “a Crusoe-figure thrown back on his ingenuity in exploiting the materials at hand to survive” (163), I

tend to read him as a “leftover.” Indeed, whereas Crusoe’s survivor tale manifests the grandeur of *homo faber*, Snowman’s lack of tools suggests an elegy for technocivilization. As such, Snowman shares with Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner the “woeful agony” of recounting his “ghastly tale” and the shamanic power of communal redemption (Coleridge 19), but he can only instruct his listeners by communicating with those he now perceives as his all-too-human others. Thus the shamanic ceremony of “storytelling” actually works better, for Snowman, in a written rather than oral form. While the other three human stragglers may or may not listen to Snowman’s tale, we as Snowman’s “past readers” can access his story through the medium of Atwood’s text.

Intriguingly, Snowman, albeit a gifted “word person,” has problems putting down words in a wasteland devoid of human beings. Unlike Iris in *The Blind Assassin*, who relies on words to cure her own eating disorder, liberate her granddaughter Sabrina from the shackles of “identity,” and forge a female community (Ku 112-27), Snowman mourns for the dissolution of language: “Language itself had lost its solidity; it had become thin, contingent, slippery, a viscid film on which he was sliding around like an eyeball on a plate” (260). Even though he once tries to keep a journal so as to “give his life some structure,” the absence of readers makes such an attempt seem fruitless: “But even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who’ll come along later and find his bones and his ledger, and learn his fate. Snowman can make no such assumptions: he’ll have no future reader, because the Crakers can’t read. Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past” (41). If Iris and Snowman, as Ingersoll claims, share the same “authorial anxieties” (171),²⁶ Snowman’s problem is that the writer may survive his/her word. When words breathe their last even before their speaker does, this death of language actually poses a greater crisis than that of the author him/herself.

In fact, though Snowman is later given the opportunity to recount his experience to the other three human stragglers, he does not rush to his own kind as does the Coleridgean Mariner but hesitates to identify himself. True, he is at first eager to exchange stories with the strangers— “They could listen to him, they could hear his tale, he could hear theirs. They at least would understand something of what he’s been through” (374). But at the next moment his instinctual defense

²⁶ According to Ingersoll, “If Iris introduces readers to the nightmare of an Author who could herself *end* before her novel, Snowman opens up the mother of all nightmares—a future in which no one can, or *will*, read what the Author writes” (171; italics original). While Ingersoll then interprets Iris as an “archetypal Modernist” who, “as a Blind Assassin, even sacrific[es] a sister to [construct] her artistic masterpiece” (171), the romance *The Blind Assassin*, as Iris herself confesses, is a collaboration between her and Laura (Atwood, *Blind* 512).

mechanism curbs this gregarious impulse. Pondering every possible scenario inside his head, he cannot rid himself of the self/other conflict:

Or, *Get the hell off my turf before I blow you off*, as in some old style Western film. *Hands up. Back away. Leave that spraygun*. That wouldn't be the end of it though. There are three of them and only one of him. They'd do what he'd do in their place: they'd go away, but they'd lurk, they'd spy. They'd sneak up on him in the dark, conk him on the head with a rock. He'd never know when they might come. (374; italics original)

Though Snowman is willing to “wear nothing but his baseball cap” (372)—an ambiguous gesture of open candor and primitive savagery—he holds fast to his spraygun for self-protection. The old anthropocentric self/other antagonism has apparently outlived the plague, since Snowman regards his others with a mixture of love and fear. He wants to be congenial, a pacifist, an instructive storyteller, but such wishes are qualified—if not totally quenched—by his aggressive instincts, his desire for dominance, his belief in hierarchy, his aspiration for control, his distrust of strangers, as well as his concern about the weapons both parties possess.

When we see his enclosed subjectivity—his irresistible compulsion to stake out a claim, his ineffable craving for a border against others—in the context of *homo faber*, we may want to contrast Snowman with Defoe's Crusoe. Though both are marooned in the midst of nowhere, Crusoe establishes himself as an accomplished enterpriser while Snowman falls short, becoming a deteriorating remnant (if not a revenant). Despite being a castaway, Crusoe sets up fortresses against intruders, develops agriculture and animal husbandry independently, keeps journals, colonizes Friday and fends off the cannibals. By contrast, Snowman fails in each of the aforementioned categories: he comes to grief against the deceitful wolvogs, the cunning pigeons, and the “perfect” Crakers; he rummages about for what little has been left by the dead; he has no future readers to whom to dedicate his writing; finally he regresses into the apelike Abominable Snowman, leaving “backward-pointing footprints” in the snow. In brief, if Crusoe represents the solid, self-reliant “I” who later becomes a paragon for the budding bourgeoisie, Snowman exposes the “I” as a “fragmented body” before the Lacanian mirror (6)—there is no

longer even a narcissistic misrecognition.²⁷ At best a parody of the perfect *imago*, Snowman is simian, bestial, a Frankenstein's Monster.

While Snowman really resembles a snowman during the spring thaw—a plaything physically and psychologically melting away—his inability to survive amongst the bioengineered creatures actually belies Crusoe's *homo faber* façade. Indeed, hardly could Crusoe's plantation prosper if he had not fetched the tools from the ship. While he makes tables, chairs, shelves, and other necessities, all these comforts actually derive from his adze, hatchet, nails, and other iron work, rather than just from his bare hands. As he regards his collection of tools with vainglorious relish—"So that had my Cave been to be seen, it look'd like a general Magazine of all Necessary things, and I had every thing so ready at my Hand, that it was a great Pleasure to me to see all my Goods in such Order, and especially to find my Stock of all Necessaries so great" (Defoe 68-69)—this order of things equates the praxis of *homo faber* with civilization. If Crusoe becomes deprived of his tools, it is unlikely that he could build this "Magazine." Instead he would be struggling to survive—like some kind of variation on Snowman. Clearly, Crusoe's own fragility, his vulnerability in this "other" world designates what Robert P. Marzec calls the "*Robinson Crusoe Syndrome*":

In order to cope with an entirely Other form of land than that to which he is accustomed, [Crusoe] introduces an ideological apparatus to overcode the earth. In this fashion, he can "quiet" his mind, relieve his anxiety, and resist the nightmare of actually "being there" on the island: the terror of inhabiting an Other space *as Other*. (131; italics original)

²⁷ In "The Mirror Stage," Jacques Lacan defines the term in two senses: while temporally it designates a certain phase before the Oedipal phase, theatrically it is a platform on which the *trotte-bébé* performs in front of a mirror:

the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an 'orthopedic' form of its totality—and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. (6)

While Crusoe exemplifies "an alienating identity" that realizes what a subject would "anticipat[e]" in front of the Lacanian mirror, Snowman lays bare the "insufficiency," the "fragmented image" in short of the "'orthopedic' form of its totality."

Crusoe's paranoiac anxiety about the uninhabited island thus triggers the praxis of *homo faber*, and he is able to shape a subjectivity through the framing of enclosure and separation. However, the complicity between biotechnology and capitalism renders *homo faber* a monstrous idea in this technocratic age, and Snowman simply cannot afford such a facile image. Whereas Crusoe exploits others—nature, animals, Friday, cannibals, etc.—to form a fortified, enclosed, and secure subjectivity, Snowman's becoming-ghost, becoming-animal, and becoming-monster (in contrast to the Crakers) actually disrupt the hierarchy implicit in the anthropocentric *homo faber*. As the human form becomes exchangeable with other species and human superiority encounters an insurmountable challenge in the age of transgenics, "man" will like Snowman become demonized, his monstrosity perhaps the price humans must ultimately pay for their centuries of anthropocentric "making." In *Oryx and Crake*, it is the unethical scientists as *homo fabers*, after all, who commence to occupy the soil by force, demand submission from other people or animals, and experiment on lives at will. What Snowman can learn from this illusion of self-importance is to decenter himself—that is, distance himself from or get outside the self/other hierarchy—to tolerate and to respect others as equals.

In *Negotiating with the Dead* Atwood devises an "eternal triangle: the writer, the reader, and the book as go-between" (123). When we apply this notion of the book as messenger between author and reader to texts like *The Blind Assassin* and *Oryx and Crake*, Iris and Snowman turn out to be writers and messengers at the same time. Iris functions as an agent when she brings provisions to her lover Alex and translates Laura's coded notes into a romance published in her sister's name. Then, as a romance and a memoir writer, she discloses her affair with Alex and reveals Sabrina's pedigree.²⁸ On the other hand, though Snowman, as John B. Breslin shows, is a "shaman" communicating between Crake and the Crakers (25), his aspiration to converse with the "future reader" as a writer proves problematic. Partly because the Crakers cannot read and partly because Snowman is still

²⁸ It is worth noting that the name "Iris" alludes not only to mythology but also to optics, cinema, and gardening. Optically, "iris" is "the colored part of the eye that can expand or contract to allow the right amount of light to enter the eye" (Glaucoma Research Foundation), a prominent "feature" in a text abounding with images of blindness. In film production, "iris" is a "an earlier cinematographic technique or wipe effect, in the form of an expanding or diminishing circle, in which a part of the screen is blacked out so that only a portion of the image can be seen by the viewer" (Dirks, "Cinematic Terms"). Interestingly, this technique also suggests Iris's manner of editing her (and Laura's) romance *The Blind Assassin*. Then, inasmuch as "iris" is also a flower that blooms in the wake of winter, it is more than a coincidence that Atwood sets this novel in the freezing wintertime, hoping that Iris's life story shall survive the cold and blossom in spring despite her material death.

awaiting and watching for the three strangers, the writer-reader communion here is not so optimistic as in Iris's case. Yet the forlorn Snowman can also be Atwood's messenger insofar as he does encounter his readers (us as Atwood's readers) in the past. He becomes a "shaman" for us, in one sense not just a "leftover" waiting for us to come into the future to meet him but also a "returnee"—even a ghostly "revenant"—from the world of the future.²⁹

The message communicated to us by this "future shaman" is that of the necessary coexistence of, and need for tolerance, between and among self and other (selves and others). In our discussion of human monstrosity, we have attributed the problems to ethical transgressions in an age of transgenics. Insofar as Snowman's perceived monstrosity derives from the collapse of his sense of human superiority, that is, of his hierarchical ranking of self in relation to others—he must open up the enclosing, separating boundary of subjectivity intrinsic to the anthropocentric *homo faber*. And when the mastermind Crake wrecks the human race, the manipulations of this new and even more monstrous *homo faber* also make clear the potentially disastrous effects of a techno-scientific capitalism running wild in pursuit of profit, with no regard for ethics. Thus regarded, when Atwood depicts the encounter between Snowman and the other three stragglers as another "[z]ero hour" (374), we know that the healing power of Snowman's storytelling lies in mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance. In contrast to the "zero hour" at the beginning of the novel, one that signifies stasis, death, and silence, this "zero hour" in the end is a moment for the reconstruction of "humanity" through mutuality, communication, and communion.

Works Cited

- Allen, Peter Louis. *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1958.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Blind Assassin*. New York: Anchor, 2000.
- . "The Handmaid's Tale and Oryx and Crake in Context." *PMLA* 119.3 (May 2004): 513-17.
- . "Life after Man." *New Scientists* 3 May 2003: 40.

²⁹ In discussing *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* as "speculative fiction," Atwood makes a passing comment: both novels "take place in the future, that never-never land equivalent to the other world visited by shamans . . ." ("Context" 516).

- . *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.
- . *Oryx and Crake*. New York: Nan A. Talese, 2003.
- Baldick, Chris. *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28 (1984): 125-33.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. "'It's Game Over Forever': Atwood's Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx and Crake*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 39.3 (2004): 139-56.
- Breslin, John B. "In Their Own Image." Rev. of *Oryx and Crake*, by Margaret Atwood. *America* 18-25 Aug. 2003: 24-25.
- Colebrook, Claire. *Gilles Deleuze*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner Together with Selected Old English Ballads*. Ed. A. Guthkelch. London: Bell, 1931.
- Defoe, Daniel. *Robinson Crusoe*. Ed. J. Donald Crowley. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- DiMarco, Danette. "Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained: *homo faber* and the Makings of a New Beginning in *Oryx and Crake*." *Papers on Language and Literature* 41.2 (Spring 2005): 170-95.
- Dirks, Tim. "Cinematic Terms: A Film-Making Glossary." 13 July 2005 <<http://www.filmsite.org/filmterms11.html>>.
- . Rev. of *The Bride of Frankenstein*, dir. James Whale. 17 pars. 30 June 2005 <<http://www.filmsite.org/bride.html>>.
- Dunning, Stephen. "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: The Terror of the Therapeutic." *Canadian Literature* 186 (Autumn 2005): 86-101.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. 1930. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and trans. James Strachey. Vol. 21. London: Hogarth, 1964. 57-145. 24 vols.
- Gonzales, Sarah. Rev. of *Oryx and Crake*, by Margaret Atwood. *Ms.* Summer 2003: 91.
- Gray, Chris Hables. *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Griffiths, Anthony. "Genetics according to *Oryx and Crake*." *Canadian Literature* 181 (Summer 2004): 192-95.

- Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "Rappaccini's Daughter." 1844. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. Nina Baym, et al. 5th ed. Vol 1. New York: Norton, 1998. 1285-1305. 2 vols.
- Hensher, Philip. "Back to the Future." Rev. of *Oryx and Crake*, by Margaret Atwood. *The Spectator* 26 Apr. 2003: 35.
- Howells, Coral Ann. "Bad News." *Canadian Literature* 183 (Winter 2004): 92-93.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *Politics of Postmodernism*. 1989. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Ingersoll, Earl G. "Survival in Margaret Atwood's Novel *Oryx and Crake*." *Extrapolation* 45.2 (Summer 2004): 162-75.
- "Iris." Glaucoma Research Foundation: Glossary of Medical Terms. 13 July 2005 <<http://www.glaucoma.org/learn/glossary.html#iris>>.
- Ketterer, David. *Frankenstein's Creation: The Book, The Monster, and Human Reality*. Victoria: U of Victoria P, 1979.
- Ku, Chung-Hao. "Eating, Cleaning, and Writing: Female Abjection and Subjectivity in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 30.1 (January 2004): 93-129.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: A Selection*. 1966. Trans. Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Lim, Dennis. Rev. of *Oryx and Crake*, by Margaret Atwood. *The Village Voice* 2-8 July 2003: 52.
- Marzec, Robert P. "Enclosures, Colonization, and the Robinson Crusoe Syndrome: A Genealogy of Land in a Global Context." *Boundary 2* 29.2 (Summer 2002): 129-56.
- Pope, Alexander. "An Essay on Man." 1733. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Ed. M. H. Abrams, et al. 7th ed. Vol 1. New York: Norton, 2000. 2554-62. 2 vols.
- Posner, Richard A. "The End Is Near." Rev. of *Oryx and Crake*, by Margaret Atwood. *New Republic* 22 Sept. 2003: 31-36.
- Punter, David. *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*. New York: Longman, 1980.
- Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." 1971. *Adrienne Rich's Poetry*. Ed. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi. New York: Norton, 1975. 90-98.
- Richardson, Ruth. *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*. 1987. London: Penguin, 1989.
- Shelley, Mary W. *Frankenstein*. 1818. Ed. J. Paul Hunter. New York: Norton, 1996.

- Thornburg, Mary K. Patterson. *The Monster in the Mirror: Gender and the Sentimental/Gothic Myth in Frankenstein*. 1984. Ann Arbor: UMI Research P, 1987.
- Waggoner, Ben. "Carl Linnaeus." 7 July 2000: 10 pars. 12 June 2005 <<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/linnaeus.html>>.
- "Yeti." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 23 June 2005: 29 pars. 29 June 2005 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abominable_Snowman>.

About the Author

Chung-Hao Ku is pursuing a doctoral degree in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. His research interests include the Gothic, as well as the intersection between disease/disability and race/gender. His recent article, "Eating, Cleaning and Writing: Female Objection and Subjectivity in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*," is published in *Concentric* 30.1 (January 2004): 93-129.

[Received 15 October 2005; accepted 6 January 2006; revised 9 January 2006]

Human/nature: ecological philosophy in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. *English Studies in Africa*, Vol. 52, Issue. 2, p. 50. CrossRef. Google Scholar. Atwood's hypothesis about narrative beginnings assumes a particular urgency in relation to her two near-future novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), for both of them are an imaginative writer's response to contemporary situations of cultural crisis as they suppose what may happen at what Atwood has called "definitive moments" after which "things were never the same again." Already the shifts between past, present, and future in my opening remarks will have illustrated the distinctive qualities of the genre to which these two novels belong, namely the dystopian novel. It is Margaret Atwood's response to the question: "Though the book's premise is serious, you included many wordplays and moments of deadpan humour. Was this difficult to achieve, or did it arrive naturally during the storytelling process?" During my reading process of *Oryx and Crake*, I also noted Atwood's use of dark humor - or in her words "gallows humor" - because I had many moments of amusement and sorts of laughter, which simultaneously provoked my confusion since the novel in fact deals with serious and grave topics. *Oryx and Crake* can be assigned to a dystopian novel. Although set either in the future or in an alternative present, dystopias attack contemporary society by showing an extreme and present a hard satirical look at the way things are today (cf. Elliott 2013, 5-20).