2015

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Original Publication Citation

Boyd, S.(2015). Ustopian Breakfasts: Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*. *Utopian Studies* 26(1), 160-182. Penn State University Press. Retrieved June 29, 2015, from Project MUSE database. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/utopian_studies/v026/26.1.boyd.html

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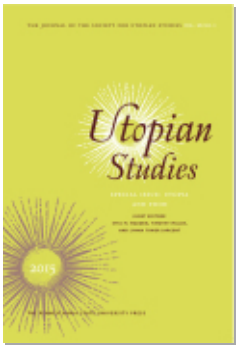

Utopian Studies, Volume 26, Number 1, 2015, pp. 160-182 (Article)

Published by Penn State University Press

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ABSTRACT

In the third novel of Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam *trilogy, breakfast creates a sense of hope and adaptability in the most dire of dystopias. In this postpandemic world where civilization is all but destroyed, the human survivors, who form a makeshift community with the Crakers, initially cling to reverse-utopian breakfasts: nostalgic replications of past meals that offer solace but have no long-term future because the material circumstances of their existence have ceased. Eventually recognizing that storytelling and food are powerful, interrelated tools for humanity's future reproduction, this tenuous community survives precisely because they imagine and reimagine themselves and their modes of consumption. In this way,* MaddAddam *offers a humble sense of hope through ever-changing breakfast foods that serve as both the physical means and symbol of humanity's imaginative reconstitution into the future.*

KEYWORDS: *Margaret Atwood,* MaddAddam*, breakfast, storytelling, reproduction, egg symbolism, overconsumption, ustopia, hope*

Utopian Studies, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2015

Breakfast has long been known as the most important meal of the day, and for Canadian author Margaret Atwood, it happens to be her favorite. She once described this meal as "the most hopeful . . ., since we don't yet know what atrocities the day may choose to visit upon us."[1] In light of this daily serving of optimism, breakfast's recurring presence in *MaddAddam* (2013), the final novel of Atwood's dystopian trilogy, appears both unusual and necessary. Having the most hopeful (or utopian) meal repeatedly frame this account of civilization's destruction is in keeping with Atwood's theory that utopias and dystopias are not opposites but, rather, co-related. Combining models of "good" and "bad" societies to coin her term *ustopia*, Atwood suggests that if you "scratch the surface . . . you see . . . within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia, if only in the form of the world as it existed before the bad guys took over."[2] Atwood's trilogy plays with this duality in a number of ways. The first novel, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), presents a dystopian world of environmental exploitation and excessive consumerism, where science is pursued for financial gain and power. The scientist Crake bioengineers a pandemic, to destroy the human race, and a replacement species, the Crakers, resulting in a posthuman hell for the seeming sole survivor, Jimmy.[3] The second novel, *The Year of the Flood* (2009), which is a "simultaneal" to the first, depicts the eco-religious cult the God's Gardeners, who opt for a cultural solution, as opposed to Crake's genetic fix, to the world's ecological crisis.[4] In this "utopia embedded within a dystopia," the God's Gardeners preach a green lifestyle and system of beliefs that contrast with the wasteful societies of the elite Compounds and lower-class Pleeblands central to *Oryx and Crake*.[5] In the third novel, Atwood's ustopian narrative gathers the surviving characters—humans and Crakers—from the previous dystopian/utopian novels to form their own makeshift community of sustenance and care. The humans look to each other and to the Crakers for food ideas, companionship, and protection, just as the Crakers tend to an injured Jimmy and seek daily stories from Toby during his convalescence. Advancing the narrative, *MaddAddam* begins at "zero hour," the moment to which Jimmy originally referred both at the beginning of his novel, when he looks at his broken watch, and at the end of his novel, when he decides to approach a group of humans on the beach: the clock reset, but not on human time.

This final installment of the trilogy marks, then, both endings and beginnings, with breakfast, that "most hopeful" and forward-looking meal, appearing repeatedly, albeit not in its usual form and often with a dwindling menu. A culinary remnant from the human past, breakfast in *MaddAddam*

symbolizes Atwood's guarded optimism, her sober offering of near-future worlds (and meals) not unlike our own. Despite the environmental depredations that humanity has wrought, this new society, while initially resistant to change, eventually strives to better its circumstances for future generations. The fictional morning repasts—both the food and the framing narratives—are a sign, therefore, of the characters' hope and adaptability persisting in the most dire of dystopias. These improvised and dynamic meals, like the dark future of Atwood's narrative, may not always be appetizing, but they are essential if humanity is going to greet a new day, prepared and fueled for the challenges to come. In other words, the *MaddAddam* breakfast scenes reveal how this tenuous community survives precisely because they imagine and reimagine themselves into the future, with food serving as both the physical means and symbol of their reproduction and sustainability.

Beginnings and Stories Served with Breakfast

Atwood has long recognized and played with breakfast's invariability, as she once described life, itself, as "a kind of eternal breakfast" with its routine serving of daily expectations.[6] In her fiction, literal breakfasts and their larger figurative counterparts (the unfolding life stories of the main characters) work in tandem as Atwood typically showcases anomalous meals that bring conflict, change, and the future sharply into focus. In *The Edible Woman* (1969), Atwood's first published novel, chapter 1 opens with the protagonist's morning egg having to be skipped and replaced with a bowl of cold cereal. As Nathalie Cooke reveals, the breakfast scene, hurried and unsatisfying, prepares the reader for this anxiety-ridden story where the future seems foreboding and off-course. Readers must "start to search for clues about what might have gone wrong," and eggs (as well as other foods) become symbolic of this difficult process of maturation as the character Marian McAlpin systematically loses her appetite.[7] Eventually an entire breakfast menu is excluded from Marian's regimen; only after she exerts her will and takes control of her life do her appetite and hope for her future resume.

When it comes to Atwood's dystopian novels, this same attentiveness to measured optimism and transformation aligns with the utopian tradition and humanity's unending enterprise of "social dreaming."[8] According to Lyman Tower Sargent, healthy utopias acknowledge that "change is possible, even

expected, just not radical change," while dystopias "tell us it is not too late to change."[9] This drive to imagine a future and what is possible is the reason why Cosimo Quarta has termed the human race *Homo utopicus*: a species "which has hope as its moving force and the future as its ever-moving horizon, promising the better."[10] Particularly relevant to Atwood's *MaddAddam*—where traditional breakfast foods, including those ever-symbolic eggs of growth and new beginnings, are difficult to come by—is Quarta's linking of humankind's evolution to a changing food supply. Long ago, the search for alternative food sources during times of scarcity meant the development of an intellectual capacity for perceiving "new possibilities."[11] For Joseph Carroll, a proponent of literary Darwinism, this adaptive flexibility is directly related to the fact that humans are a "story-telling species": humans "generat[e] plans based on mental representations, . . . engag[e] in collective enterprises requiring shared mental representations, and produc[e] novel solutions."[12] In *MaddAddam*, the hungry survivors dream of dietary innovations when they discuss raiding seabirds' nests atop derelict office towers. Their imaginations propel them into future scenarios as they weigh the risks and benefits of such an egg-seeking venture. In other words, readers witness the *Homo utopicus* impulse at work—the same desire that drives Atwood to experiment with future worlds: "The Utopian-Dystopian form is a way of trying things out on paper first to see whether or not we might like them, should we ever have the chance to put them into actual practice."[13]

In *MaddAddam*, then, food and storytelling (the literal breakfast and the account of life's "eternal breakfast") operate as future-oriented practices. Together, they enable society, since new edible materials, if procured, turn mental projections into realities. Examining power as exercised through the body, Mervyn Nicholson concurs that while "sex is the means of species-reproduction . . . eating is the means of self-reproduction. . . . . To exist is an activity of daily transformation; one continually forms and transforms oneself, and the material means by which one performs this act of self-creation is food."[14] A lack of dietary staples, a change in food preferences, or a shift in social values and food taboos means that the process of eating is rarely straightforward. The fact that the survivors in *MaddAddam* never consume eggs and decide against their risky quest "for the sake of a few gull eggs, which are likely green and taste like fish guts anyway," suggests that they are struggling with the material limitations of a postpandemic world as well as the imaginative hurdles involved in creating a new beginning.[15] Curiously,

the "pro-eggers" of the group counter the majority's objections with the claim, "An egg is an egg"—suggesting that perceptions and creative fortitude are powerful tools when it comes to a society's survival and betterment.[16] As Etta Madden and Martha Finch argue in their analysis of utopian foodways, when it comes to a community's vision, food is a persuasive, everyday means of "reshap[ing] . . . practices according to personal tastes and desires" because "even members at the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy are agents of change, altering communal identity."[17] Food communicates and initiates transformation; however, this reproductive process is contingent upon a group's ongoing narratives of what constitutes nourishment and sustainable cultural practices.

Breakfasts of the Future: Fantasies and Nightmares

When imagining the future, Atwood admits that she "like[s] to wonder what people would have for breakfast. . . . Breakfast can take you quite far."[18] Food in her dystopian fiction is especially revelatory in that processes of transformation are often curtailed because existing social hierarchies demand replication to maintain the status quo. Atwood defines power politics as "who is entitled to do what to whom with impunity; who profits by it; and who therefore eats what," which means that breakfast frames her dystopian novels in symbolic ways, signaling fixed, dark circumstances, as well as impetuses for social change.[19] In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Atwood's first speculative novel, the main character, Offred, partakes in repetitious, solitary breakfasts that reflect her marginal status in the dystopian society of Gilead and her singular role as the fertile womb within the Commander's home: "Another plate with an eggcup on it, the kind that looks like a woman's torso, in a skirt. Under the skirt is the second egg, being kept warm."[20] The controlled reproduction of both the self (through regimented daily sustenance) and the repressive society (through enforced procreation and exploitation of the handmaid's ovum) is conveyed through the meal. The two eggs, Glen Deer argues, remind Offred of her situation: a handmaid "literally gives birth—lays her egg—while seated in a special 'birthing stool,' a chair that allows the Commander's wife to sit behind and above the surrogate mother."[21] According to Atwood's theory of ustopia, an "us" versus "them" mentality, so clearly exhibited by Gilead's elite, inevitably leads to oppression since some "people . . . just don't or won't fit

into [a] grand scheme."[22] As critics note, Gilead depends upon the women's sexual and symbolic cannibalization, a process that the Commander describes through a destructive/productive image of breakfast food: "'You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs.' . . . Thus the women become for him the eggs which are broken and consumed to create a better life for the patriarchal ruling class."[23] Although Offred's breakfasts are unvarying, occasional disruptions offer alternative starts to the day and, therefore, small signs of hope within the otherwise totalitarian regime.[24]

Reminiscent of Gilead's maintenance of established hierarchies, the dystopian world of *MaddAddam* initially includes morning meals characterized by replication and a resistance to change. The human characters enact their former status as top consumers in a world of abundance, even though they find themselves struggling to survive in a postapocalyptic world of scarcity. Of the half-dozen breakfasts featured in *MaddAddam*, early renditions appear as dreams, memories, or poor copies of a former civilization's scripted menus: those twenty-first-century iconic North American plates of eggs, bacon, and toast with coffee. Of course, this traditional fare appears earlier in *Oryx and Crake* when a half-starved Jimmy dreams about a leisurely seduction over breakfast: "'Bring home the bacon,' he says. He can almost smell it, that bacon, frying in a pan, with an egg, to be served up with toast and a cup of coffee. . . . Cream with that? whispers a woman's voice. Some naughty, nameless waitress, out of a white-aprons-and-feather-dusters porno farce. He finds himself salivating."[25] In *MaddAddam*, Toby's present-day narrative alternatively begins with an innocent dream of childhood in the chapter "Morning": "From the kitchen comes the sound of her mother's voice, calling; her father, answering; the smell of eggs frying."[26] Both characters' reveries play with connections between food and reproduction—offering "eternal breakfasts" of hope for the continuation of life, even though their present scenarios seem finite. His girlfriend, Oryx, having been murdered by Crake, Jimmy appears the sole human survivor—a "leftover" without a mate whom Chung-Hao Ku reads as monstrous because of his "genetic immobility."[27] As for Toby, having lost her parents and then her fertility because of an egg-harvesting-for-pay procedure, she (like Jimmy) cannot have a family of her own. Their breakfast fantasies belong to the past, and as Toby awakens, her idyllic dream descends into an apocalyptic nightmare with everything going up in flames. She recalls the words of Adam One: "The fate of Sodom is fast approaching. Suppress regret. Avoid the pillar of salt. Don't look back."[28] The biblical tale

of Lot's wife nostalgically peering at her lost home frames Toby's mornings at the cobb house (a shelter made of clay, sand, and straw that is located at the edge of Heritage Park, where the humans and Crakers have gathered), as the group continually mimics breakfasts of old. There are, however, visible gaps in the routine. On her first morning, Toby stands up from bed, chooses a bedsheet for her toga-like attire, and then has little to do: no shower, no mirror, no toothbrush. She lacks the material items to perform the practice of getting up to greet the day before she heads out for breakfast.

With civilization destroyed, the notion that breakfast will simply continue as it always has is an illusion that is neither sustaining nor sustainable. Nevertheless, the initial cobb-house mornings feature reverse-utopian breakfasts: nostalgic replications of past meals that provide temporary solace but have no long-term future because the material, technological circumstances of their existence have ceased. Readers witness breakfast scenes composed of gleaned leftovers (mismatched tableware and scavenged food products, including a single box of Choco-Nutrinos cereal) as well as edible substitutes for popular menu items that situate this meal of Atwood's near-future in a backward-looking light. Rebecca, the former chef from the God's Gardeners who was praised by Adam One for her ingenious recipes, is in charge of cooking. Hot coffee is always on offer, but in reality it is "what they've all agreed to call coffee," since the beverage no longer exists.[29] Rebecca hopes that the caffeine-free concoction made out of "burnt twigs and roots and crap" will have a "placebo effect," as long as its drinkers ignore the taste and texture.[30] Each morning, the residents maintain a fiction when they request this iconic beverage and consume their fry-up.

While this "coffee" offers temporary comfort, other more disturbing fictions pervade the meal. Rebecca's menus consistently include protein, or "ham again," a staple that is really pigoon, a genetically engineered pig that was crossed with human DNA to farm replacement organs for humans.[31] On Toby's first morning, this former God's Gardener who took the "Vegivows" is greeted with "pig in three forms: bacon, ham, and chops. . . . Burdock root, Dandelion greens. Dog ribs on the side."[32] This radical break from vegetarian cuisine is explained by the fact that Rebecca cooks with what is readily available. At the conclusion of *The Year of the Flood*, when Toby first arrives at the cobb house, Rebecca welcomes her longtime friend with a serving of cold pork and declares, "Needs must when the devil drives. . . . Anyways, at least we know what's in it—not

like at SecretBurgers."[33] In the more extended survey of breakfasts in *MaddAddam*, however, something other than necessity seems to be taking place, as Atwood uses breakfast to address humanity's proclivity not only for hope but also for creature comforts procured at great environmental and ethical expense.

The multiple "ham" dishes (which are really pigoon) create a problematic illusion of past abundance on a number of levels. First, eating pigoon meat is a transgression of dietary taboos from the Compounds featured in *Oryx and Crake*, since, as Ku explains, "the relationship between humans and other species has always been one of binary opposition and hierarchy," and the consumption of pigoons not only challenges this status but seems "horribly cannibalistic."[34] Second, referring to pigoon meat as "ham" reverts to a time when pigoons neither existed nor posed a threat to the breakfast menu and human subject. Although this collective delusion offers reassurance to cobb-house residents by mimicking the past circumstances of top consumers, this reverse-utopian foodway is at their expense in much the same way that Gilead's symbolic cannibalization of its own (its handmaids) is ultimately destructive to that society's future well-being.[35] Exploring similar kinds of monstrous selfishness at work in *Oryx and Crake*, Danette DiMarco contends that Atwood often turns to motifs and myths of cannibalism in order to expose "western culture's unhealthy and systemic commitment to over-consumption."[36] In *MaddAddam*, the "ham" dishes point to the survivors' misdirected hope for continuity and familiarity despite human-wrought ecological devastation. This disturbing ustopian foodway ironically captures what Quarta describes as the quandary that often lies at the heart of utopian projects: the desire to meet the "concrete needs of a particular society, even if these needs are not immediately realisable due to the unreadiness of the times."[37] Unfortunately, as former members of and witnesses to a civilization destroyed by its own overconsumption, the cobb-house residents have chosen to emulate practices that will only lead to entropy and decline.

Dwindling Menus, Waning Hope

Breakfast, as the cobb-house residents remember it, can only be maintained as long as both their material world and cultural views permit it, and there are signs that past traditions are breaking down. When Toby arrives at the table

for her first morning, she recalls one of Adam One's litanies about how after the waterless flood, tree roots would destroy urban infrastructure including electricity generators, to which Zeb had added at the time, "Then you can kiss your morning toast goodbye."[38] The remembered exchange connects to *Oryx and Crake* when Jimmy-as-Snowman uses the "arcane metaphor" of "toast" to warn the Crakers against the consequences of asking too many questions.[39] Just as Jimmy realizes that he is the one who is "toast" because of his ties to an obsolete technological civilization, Toby confronts a breakfast world that is literally disappearing. The only toast-like substance to appear in *MaddAddam*—"a slice of toasted sawdust"—is recounted in Zeb's story of working in the north prior to the BlyssPluss pandemic.[40] Back then, authentic breakfast foods were expensive and scarce because of an overpopulated world, and Zeb's story foreshadows the fact that the meal has been nearing the end of its life-span for some time because its very existence is contingent on a world of abundance defined solely in human and industrial terms.

Ironically, the nostalgic perspectives of some cobb-house residents lead to misperceptions of the expired past as a time of easy sustenance, whereas the future represents hunger and decay. In Rebecca's mind, food has a terminal future, as she refers to their morning gathering as the "Last-chance café."[41] The limitations of this backward mode of thinking become especially apparent when Rebecca requests that someone glean replacement baking powder and soda from a mini-supermarket. Her entreaty is cut short, however, by Ivory Bill's observation: "Did you know that baking soda comes from the trona deposits in Wyoming? . . . Or it used to come from there."[42] The interruption foregrounds the fact that a food system—designed for consumer convenience and facilitated by industry, long-distance transportation, and grocery stores—has ceased. The notion that breakfast ingredients come from the store is not far removed from the beliefs of Zeb's father's cult, the Church of PetrOleum, which preached that "oil . . . put the food on the table" because it fueled the machinery used in production and delivery.[43] In direct contrast, the God's Gardeners taught their children that food grows from the earth (not the supermarket), yet even Rebecca, the former eco-cult's cook, has a difficult time extracting her thinking from civilization's industrial foodways: their complexity abets almost total consumer dependence. In the long run, the cobb-house residents' only choice is to learn to eat local, but even when they attempt to do so, their approach is not sustainable. When "coffee" is in short supply, Rebecca announces, "We need to dig some dandelions. We've used

up the ones around here."[44] Residing in one location, this small community overconsumes and fails to produce the surplus that food historians claim is necessary for breakfast's existence.

As staples become exhausted, the purpose of breakfast likewise wanes without a meaningful cultural context for the future. When Toby first admires the communal table setting of china and crystal, she reflects that the dishes have become merely things, and Rebecca comments that eventually their devotion to ceremony will break down: "I can see the day coming when we're not gonna be bothered with dishes anymore, we'll just eat with our hands."[45] Continuity in mealtime rituals is typically taken for granted, but Atwood implies that the human survivors will necessarily turn in a new direction, become part of a different order as their material culture falls away.[46] This prediction holds true when the morning meal loses its priming effect for the day's activities. While some are up early to tend to their tasks, others drift. At one point, Toby sees the daytime as "irrelevant" and spies "others slacking off as well. Standing still for no reason, listening though no one's talking. Then jerking themselves back to the tangible, visibly making an effort."[47] In a statement reminiscent of Offred's private reflections in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Toby admits that she now lives for the night, losing herself in her lover, Zeb, and in his stories and her dreams of the past.[48] The daytime world appears upside down, a dystopia in which the reverse-utopian morning meal fails to break the fast. Darkness becomes the most fulfilling time, but "it's dangerous to live for the night."[49] Without a forward-looking sociocultural milieu, life and breakfast lack purpose.

Signs of despair emerge especially when Toby yearns for her former life with the God's Gardeners but believes that this utopian cult would now prove pointless, as there is nothing against which to define itself: "The enemies of God's Natural Creation no longer exist," and animals and plants are "thriving unchecked."[50] Pruning the kudzu vine, Toby doubts the relevancy of the human gardener even though, as Annette Giesecke and Naomi Jacobs claim, "the links between gardening and utopian dreaming are ancient and deep," with gardens appearing in everything from world religions to Thomas More's *Utopia* and beyond.[51] Toby's speculation is disturbingly close to what some critics argue is a contemporary form of ironic utopian dreaming: where we imagine "a world without people and take solace in the presumed resilience of nature" as it flourishes without us.[52] As the worlds of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* fall away, the reverse-utopian breakfasts of *MaddAddam*

seem part of an empty system of meals that punctuate a pointless sense of human time. Indeed, their dwindling substance in terms of food, effect, and significance marks a transition past "zero hour" when the human "us" seems expendable. Such a complete dissolution of utopian dreaming seems unlikely, however, because of Atwood's fundamental belief in life as "an eternal breakfast" and the fact that, as Quarta observes in his theory of *Homo utopicus*, it would be "the sound of an alarm bell for humanity."[53] In other words, if the makeshift cobb-house society is to survive with some degree of hope, they must first let go of their reverse utopianism, since the material world can no longer support past culinary practices and lifestyles. Looking to the future means reimagining both life and breakfast in light of the present environment while also incorporating tragic lessons from the past.

Eternal Breakfast/Eternal Kudzu

Despite breakfast's initial familiarity and iconic status, then, Atwood systematically recasts the nostalgically prepared meals in a dystopian light to make room for critical change. If *MaddAddam* is about moving forward, then humanity's former control and normative status will lose traction. The Crakers are set to inherit the earth, and their daily experience does not include breakfast: "These people do not have meals as such. They graze like herbivores."[54] At one point, when Toby tries to send the young Craker named "Blackbeard" on his way so that she can get on with breakfast, she begins to see how the meal may appear through Craker eyes as she revises her narrative:

> "Is it a fish?" says the boy. "This breakfast?"
>
> "Sometimes," says Toby. "But for breakfast today, I will eat part of an animal. An animal with fur. Perhaps I will eat its leg. There will be a smelly bone inside. You wouldn't want to see such a smelly bone, would you?" she says. That will surely get rid of him.
>
> "No," says the child dubiously. He wrinkles his nose. He seems intrigued, however: who wouldn't want to peek from behind the curtain at the trolls' revolting feasts?[55]

Here, humans and their breakfasts have become monstrous. Toby tries to justify that cobb-house residents are eating animals in the "right way" as

opposed to consumer ways of the past, but the difference seems minuscule since the reverse-utopian breakfasts have ostensibly bypassed the God's Gardeners' strict vegetarianism and depleted all edible resources.

In contrast to the humans' questionable practices and dwindling menus, the Crakers are situated in a world of reliable, daylong sustenance. Kudzu vine is the Crakers' favorite plant: "The stuff gets in everywhere. It's tireless, it can grow a foot in twelve hours, it surges up and over anything in its way like a green tsunami."[56] While this green flood seems disastrous for humans, it brings bounty to the Crakers, who enjoy "eternal mouthfuls of leaf."[57] Eventually, this plant-specific abundance precipitates a move on the humans' part toward Craker-style breakfasts: kudzu pancakes, kudzu fritters, kudzu with other forage. There is even talk of creating kudzu wine. But the most radical change is when the humans remove their one staple, pigoon, from their breakfast menu. The pigoons and humans join forces to stop the Painballers, psychopathic prisoners roaming loose and inflicting violence on both animals and humans as "meat," and this interspecies alliance is expressed through new food taboos. The pigoons will no longer dig up the cobb-house garden as long as the humans do not kill and consume pigoons. This agreement carries considerable weight because no "ham" is served during what is clearly a "battle breakfast" and the last meal of Jimmy's life, which he consumes before being killed at the Paradice dome during the confrontation with the Painballers.[58]

While a formal pigoon–human alliance establishes new dietary regimens, there are earlier signs of shifting practices when Toby loses her morning appetite for pork. Following her ingestion of an Enhanced Meditation formula, Toby communes with the spirit of Pilar (her deceased mentor from the God's Gardeners), which appears in the body of a mother pigoon and her piglets—their eyes glowing the color of elderberries, the bush that was used for Pilar's composting following her death in *The Year of the Flood*. The experience pushes Toby to revise her categories of food versus nonfood, animal versus human. In his discussion of food and power, Nicholson presents the agency of self-reproduction in terms of the human consumer, but Toby experiences the inverse of this scenario. Humans are not so much self-reproduced but, rather, partially carried forward within other creatures. Hence, Toby witnesses Pilar-turned-compost-turned-elderberry-turned-pigoon. The perishable-permeable nature of bodies is similarly experienced by Zeb when he ingests a bear and acknowledges, "It was living on in me."[59] These survivors rediscover food consumption as a transformative process of

sustainment not simply from the standpoint of the consumer but from the position of the consumed. The realization points to a food ecology, which was one of Toby's salient lessons from her past: "Everything digests, and is digested. The Gardeners found that a cause for celebration, but Toby has never been reassured by it."[60] In other words, the notion that humans are at the top of the food chain with breakfast always available for self-reproduction is inherently flawed. Ultimately it is not merely eating but also digestion by another that facilitates continuation, albeit in the most humble of ways.

The Fate of Leftovers

At the end of human civilization, when breakfast is dwindling, then, Atwood suggests that there is hope, but only through interspecies communion. For the cobb-house residents, their reconstitution occurs not so much by being eaten (the Crakers are herbivores) but by being interbred. As Nicholson has argued, eating and breeding facilitate reproduction, and in *MaddAddam*, Atwood foreshadows humankind's plight of perishability when Zeb recounts his story of Bearlift, an organization dedicated to saving starving polar bears. In the past, Bearlift conducted aerial food drops of urban leftovers in the hope that the animals would learn to adapt. Toby muses that the word *adapt* is "another way of saying tough luck," and indeed, the polar bears did not survive intact but migrated south and interbred with grizzly bears, resulting in pizzlies and grolars: offspring with variable physical traits and temperaments.[61] The polar bears' predicament is not unlike that of the cobb-house residents, who scavenge until their dependency on finite food supplies leads to other methods of species continuation. By the conclusion of the novel, four "green-eyed Craker hybrid" children have been born.[62] While these sexual exchanges alter the so-called integrity of the human genome, which has already been manipulated through bioengineering, alternative means of procreation are necessary. Thus, the males of the group seem eager "to pitch in" with the raising of the hybrid children; as Ivory Bill observes, "This is the future of the human race."[63]

This move away from replication (so often pursued in Atwood's dystopian fiction) and toward reproduction necessarily means that transformation and new forms of social dreaming are possible. Alongside genetic reformulations, then, vestigial human survival occurs through the sharing of narratives with

the Crakers. Social dreaming is "impregnated with the historical," Quarta observes, as the hopeful projections of *Homo utopicus* advance generation by generation in the collective imagination.[64] The depleted material world of *MaddAddam* curtails the group's chances, but storytelling and language serve as "the chief medium for conveying information in non-genetic ways."[65] Even though Toby cannot bear children because of the past egg-harvesting that left her infertile, her voice lives on in the Book, which the Craker Blackbeard relates: "Now this is the Book that Toby made when she lived among us. . . . This is the Book, these are the Pages, here is the Writing. . . . And she showed me how to turn the marks back into voice, so that when I look at the page and read the words, it is Toby's voice that I hear. And when I speak these words out loud, you too are hearing Toby's voice."[66] Undoubtedly some stories will fall away in time or be lost to the elements as books face their own material limitations. Yet Toby has provided ample instructions to the Crakers, who must recopy the Book and include blank pages at the end. This way the Book—not singular but plural—can be added to through new voices and carried forward in an open-ended fashion, affording stories a much longer shelf life and reproductive capacity than a single box of expired cereal.

As with food-based and sexual reproduction, then, narrative reproduction is dynamic in its accommodation of changing circumstances, shifting points of view, and expressive needs and desires. In Atwood's trilogy, readers are served a succession of breakfast stories: a seduction plot, an apocalyptic nightmare, a fantasy of perpetual "coffee" and "ham again," a troll's feast, and experiments with kudzu. Cumulative knowledge and imaginative flexibility are essential for relating and fostering hope: in other words, for letting go of the past so as to embrace alternatives. In day-to-day existence, this means that a product such as Choco-Nutrinos can be described either as "a palatable breakfast cereal" for children or as "alien-looking granules from Mars," out of place in the world of "zero hour."[67] Tellingly, while the humans contend with "breakfast issues" and worry about "food options," the Crakers enjoy near-paradisal conditions that free their minds to focus on other matters.[68] Craker "meals" are often described in figurative terms suggesting that their physical and imaginative inheritances from their human predecessors go hand in hand. For instance, when Jimmy is unconscious and healing from his wounds, the Crakers keep vigil as "an oval of chairs is arranged around the hammock, as if Jimmy is the central offering at a feast."[69] The Crakers are similarly "insatiable" for stories of Zeb and demand a daily serving,

but with Jimmy incapacitated, Toby must act as a substitute storyteller, mimicking the past rituals by wearing Jimmy's hat, listening to the watch for Crake's voice, and eating the smelly fish.[70] In many ways the Crakers, like the cobb-house residents, appear to replicate their own "meals" of old. At one point, Blackbeard assumes the role of storyteller but only pretends to eat the fish. Just as Toby requests that the fish be cooked (not raw, which was Jimmy's oversight), Blackbeard refuses to eat what is, to his mind, abject (the fish both fascinates and horrifies the Crakers, who cannot bring themselves to assimilate it), suggesting that these "feasts" accommodate individual preferences and cultural taboos in the process of retelling and recontextualization. While literal breakfast foods of the past can only transport one back in time on a finite pathway of nostalgia until the material ingredients run out, stories of "life's eternal breakfast" appear to be dynamic, timeless offerings, moving both backward and forward as they are told, retold, and reimagined.

How Do You Take Your Eggs?

Because utopias are "typically invented and usually in story form," it stands to reason, then, that Atwood's ustopian breakfasts in *MaddAddam* move between the material level of food and the symbolic level of creation myth, as "eggs" assist in the imaginative reconstitution of a humanlike species.[71] The novel opens with "The Story of the Egg," as this iconic breakfast food—tellingly absent from cobb-house menus—appears as both the site and symbol of the Crakers' origins. From this single Egg (the Paradice dome), the Crakers came into being, an event described in the purest of terms with chaos on the outside. In this myth, Atwood draws upon egg symbolism: the creation of life and the universe, a reproductive unit that links generations, and a symbol of resurrection.[72] This initial version of "The Story of the Egg" later changes when Blackbeard travels to the Paradice dome, sees the destruction that the initial creation of the Egg wrought, and recounts the battle with the Painballers upon his return: "And the bad men went into the Egg, even though the Egg should only be for making, not for killing. . . . The Egg was dark, not light, as it used to be. We could see when we were inside the Egg, I do not mean that kind of dark. The Egg had a dark feeling. It had a dark smell."[73] In the case of ironic "back to the garden" utopias where humanity has doomed itself but nature persists, Mark Jendrysik believes that it is far too costly to imagine an Eden that "forget[s] the violence and destruction of its

creation."[74] Through this revised story of the Egg, Atwood similarly insists on an informed outlook, moving tragic lessons from the past forward as a significant part of the Crakers' narrative inheritance. *MaddAddam* may be about beginnings and life's "eternal breakfast," but readers cannot ignore the dystopian aspects: the tragic demise of humanity, for whom eggs and their symbolic potential seem almost out of reach.

With Blackbeard's revised story of a now-dark Egg situated alongside Toby's story of two smaller eggs (that Oryx laid inside the Egg), many readers may wonder if Atwood's recounting of these three eggs, as well as her naming of the one Craker "Blackbeard" (after a pirate), is the author's mischievous way of alluding to her own short story "Bluebeard's Egg." Atwood may be self-pirating her earlier fiction for egg symbols and its allusions to Bluebeard folklore: the dangers and benefits of the quest for knowledge, the human "desire to master and possess" nature and the other, and the notion that stories are not fixed but always in process.[75] While an in-depth analysis of this short fiction is not possible here—a story that, itself, reshapes a fairy tale within a contemporary setting—the Bluebeard folktale appears to have informed Atwood's ustopia.[76] The changing story of "The Egg" becomes, then, Atwood's metafictional gesture of cultural transmission through regenerations of her own storytelling, as well as its mythical and folkloric origins.

In the context of *MaddAddam*, where storytelling facilitates social renewal and hope, the narrative of the first Egg transforms, just as the two smaller "eggs" laid inside of it evolve through an ongoing creative process. In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy's version of these two additional eggs presents the hungry Children of Crake eating up all the words (hatched from the first smaller egg), with none left for the animals (hatched from the second smaller egg): "And that is why the animals can't talk."[77] In *MaddAddam*, Toby revises the story: "Some of the words fell out of the egg onto the ground, and some fell into the water, and some blew away in the air. And none of the people saw them. But the animals and the birds and the fish did see them, and ate them up. They were a different kind of words, so it was sometimes hard for people to understand them."[78] Through her story, Toby acknowledges the value of interspecies exchange, a form of communion at which human societies have not excelled in the past. Fortunately, the Crakers show more promise than their predecessors. Toby allows for the hidden power of "leftovers" (the words still remaining in the egg) to shape the course of the future and its stories in unanticipated ways. As with the eating of food, the eating of words is tied to the powers of reproduction: one "ingests" the means

of communication and thereby transforms oneself, existing narratives, and the future. Atwood used this edible-word image previously in *The Handmaid's Tale* when Offred, forbidden to read or to write, imagines eating the letters from the Commander's Scrabble game, enabling herself to challenge Gilead's fixed dystopian narrative. With animals now possessing expressive points of view in the revised creation myths of *MaddAddam*, humanity's hierarchical assumptions and narratives of overconsumption may be questioned. Of course, the power of leftovers similarly applies, but in a different way, to the remaining human survivors of *MaddAddam*, who will likely fade away but not without being incorporated into the new world. After all, by the conclusion of the novel, both Toby and Zeb have passed on, but their stories move into the future through Blackbeard's recounting.

A Final Serving of Hope

In *MaddAddam*, what we know as breakfast persists, but through an evolutionary, highly literary process, as the novel serves up disappearing substitute foods and memories of past meals alongside ever-changing "eggs" in symbolic form. This process of breaking down and being reconstituted invariably gives this "meal"—in both a literal and figurative sense—a capacity to generate fearful apprehension, as well as hope for redemption. For some readers, Atwood's ustopia will not sit easy, as it invites them to imagine and then reimagine the future in discomforting ways. In his study of Atwood's apocalyptic imagination, Mark Bosco notes that "just as Dickens's Scrooge has a dreadful experience but wakes up the next morning, so readers of *Oryx and Crake* . . . can 'wake up' after reading her book and say 'It hasn't happened yet, I can still mend my ways.'"[79] In the final book of the trilogy, Toby awakens from an apocalyptic nightmare only to discover that it is her reality. Hope lingers, but on a modest scale, reflecting the novel's larger message that humanity needs to be humble in our expectations for the future: to view our ecological existence in a deferential and responsible light. For cobb-house residents, survival is possible, but only as a remnant, as they are materially and culturally reproduced with the help of other creatures. Relinquishing the past and its material comforts is necessary, since the replication of a flawed status quo fails to address changing circumstances or allow for transformation.

While the reverse-utopian breakfasts offer temporary solace, they also disturb readers who recognize these fantasy meals as being oddly close to their own. As such, Atwood effectively closes a gap between her dystopian novel and her readers' present, a strategy similarly used in *The Handmaid's Tale* to "prompt readers to change the world."[80] Readers must heed Atwood's warning that what they take for granted—that "eternal breakfast" of human life—is, in fact, finite when perpetuated through self-deluding, unchanging fictions of bountiful food. Perhaps there is time for the human imagination and its propensity for social dreaming to break fixed modes of consumption and to create sustainable paths forward. Clearly, Atwood believes that we must heed the alarm, awaken, and change our ways, but ideally not until we have had our breakfast—that is, if there is anything to be had of our daily serving of hope.

Notes

1. Margaret Atwood, "Spotty-Handed Villainesses: Problems of Female Bad Behaviour," in *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing* (London: Virago Press, 2005), 173.

2. Margaret Atwood, "Dire Cartographies: The Roads to Ustopia," in *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2011), 85.

3. See Allison Dunlap, "Eco-dystopia: Reproduction and Destruction in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*," *Journal of Ecocriticism* 5, no. 1 (January 2013): 1–15, Directory of Open Access Journals, http://ojs.unbc.ca/index.php/joe/article/view/389/402. Dunlap reads Crake as a misguided dreamer set on saving the earth by ridding it of humankind—a form of ecological utopianism that "Atwood condemns" (10).

4. Sheryl Ubelacker, "Atwood as Inventive as Ever in Promoting New Novel *The Year of the Flood*," *Canadian Press*, September 10, 2009, CBCA Complete, http://ezproxy.kwantlen.ca:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/360115833?accountid=35875.

5. Atwood, "Dire Cartographies," 93.

6. Atwood, "Spotty-Handed Villainesses," 173.

7. Nathalie Cooke, *Margaret Atwood: A Critical Companion* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 33.

8. Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1994): 3, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20719246.

9. Lyman Tower Sargent, "In Defense of Utopia," *Diogenes* 209 (2006): 13–14, DOI:10.1177/0392192106062432.

10. Cosimo Quarta, "Homo Utopicus: On the Need for Utopia," trans. Daniele Procida, *Utopian Studies* 7, no. 2 (1996): 161, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20719515.

11. Ibid., 158.

12. Joseph Carroll, *Reading Human Nature: Literary Darwinism in Theory and Practice* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), Ebook Ebrary Academic Complete, 25, 23.
13. Margaret Atwood, "Writing Utopia," in *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing* (London: Virago Press, 2005), 88.
14. Mervyn Nicholson, "Food and Power: Homer, Carroll, Atwood, and Others," *Mosaic* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 37.
15. Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2013), 206.
16. Ibid.
17. Etta M. Madden and Martha L. Finch, eds., *Eating in Eden: Food and American Utopias* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 13.
18. Joe Berkowitz, "How Margaret Atwood Creates Scary-Plausible Future Worlds," *Fast Company*, October 28, 2013, http://fastcocreate.com.
19. Margaret Atwood, "Amnesty International: An Address (1981)," in *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose, 1960–1982* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1995), Ebook Canadian Publishers Collection, 394.
20. Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 120.
21. Glen Deer, "*The Handmaid's Tale*: Dystopia and the Paradoxes of Power," in *Margaret Atwood: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000), 101. See also Emma Parker's article "You Are What You Eat: The Politics of Eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 349–68, http://www.jstor.org/stable/441857, for a discussion of the handmaids' indoctrination: "The handmaids . . . are permitted to consume only that which the authorities consider will enhance their health and fertility," and during their training, breakfast is "accompanied by biblical exegesis" (354).
22. Atwood, "Dire Cartographies," 84.
23. Karen Stein, "Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal: *The Handmaid's Tale*," in *Margaret Atwood: Modern Critical Views*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2000), 200–201.
24. One such variance occurs when the housekeeper drops the breakfast tray and Offred agrees to pretend that she ate the ruined eggs, feeling buoyed by this momentary alliance.
25. Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, Seal Books ed. (Toronto: Random House, 2004), 184.
26. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 25.
27. Chung-Hao Ku, "Of Monster and Man: Transgenics and Transgression in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 32, no. 1 (January 2006), Communication and Mass Media Complete: 112, 118.
28. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 25.
29. Ibid., 140.
30. Ibid., 34.
31. Ibid., 140.
32. Ibid., 34.

33. Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2009), 392.

34. Ku, "Of Monster and Man," 112–13.

35. Although cannibalism is sometimes necessary in times of great need, it is usually not pursued to the excessive degree of cobb-house residents. In contrast, pigoons restrict cannibalism among their own kind: "Dead farrow are eaten by pregnant mothers to provide more protein for growing infants, but adults . . . are contributed to the general ecosystem" (Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 373).

36. Danette DiMarco, "Going Wendigo: The Emergence of the Iconic Monster in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Antonia Bird's *Ravenous*," *College Literature* 38, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 135, DOI:10.1353/lit.2011.0038.

37. Quarta, "Homo Utopicus," 163.

38. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 32.

39. Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 118.

40. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 65.

41. Ibid., 141.

42. Ibid., 143.

43. Ibid., 113.

44. Ibid., 207.

45. Ibid., 34.

46. Toby and Rebecca's exchange brings to mind the opening of *Much Depends on Dinner* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), in which Margaret Visser contemplates the meaning of everyday household items: "None of these objects is necessary; many cultures eschew them altogether, and there was a time when our ancestors lived very happily without them. We invented them, however, to fill needs: chairs, forks, and hallways were required by the sort of people we have become; having them now prevents us from being different" (11).

47. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 136.

48. In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, almost every other chapter is titled "Night." Nighttime allows Offred, who is otherwise powerless, a small degree of self-defined freedom: "The night is mine, my own time, to do with as I will, as long as I am quiet" (47). During the night, she is free to remember her birth name, identity, and former life—a seeming utopian world destroyed by Gilead.

49. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 136.

50. Ibid., 209.

51. Annette Giesecke and Naomi Jacobs, "Nature, Utopia, and the Garden," in *Earth Perfect? Nature, Utopia, and the Garden*, ed. Annette Giesecke and Naomi Jacobs (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2012), 9–10.

52. Mark S. Jendrysik, "Back to the Garden: New Visions of Posthuman Futures," *Utopian Studies* 22, no. 1 (2011): 35, DOI:10.1353/utp.2011.0027.

53. Quarta, "Homo Utopicus," 164.

54. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 93.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 209.
57. Ibid., 367.
58. See Heather Arndt Anderson's comments on the "battle breakfast" in *Breakfast: A History* (Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2013). Anderson notes that breakfast is sometimes "the last meal of one's life," and during World War I, soldiers were served steak and eggs if the battle was anticipated to be especially dangerous (3). This same menu has been served to astronauts and is still served to "death row inmates . . . if no other request is specified" (3).
59. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 331.
60. Ibid., 221.
61. Ibid., 59.
62. Ibid., 380.
63. Ibid.
64. Quarta, "Homo Utopicus," 160.
65. Carroll, *Reading Human Nature*, 17.
66. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 385.
67. Ibid., 140–41.
68. Ibid., 205.
69. Ibid., 99.
70. Ibid., 106.
71. Marius de Geus, "Ecotopia, Sustainability, and Vision," *Organization and Environment* 15, no. 2 (June 2002): 188, DOI:10.1177/1082602015002006.
72. For further discussion of these prominent egg-related themes, see Anna Marie Fisker's "The Language of the Egg" and Joan P. Alcock's "The Egg: Its Symbolism and Mythology," in *Eggs in Cooking: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2006*, ed. Richard Hosking (Blackawton, U.K.: Prospect Books, 2007), http://www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk.
73. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 359.
74. Jendrysik, "Back to the Garden," 44.
75. Sherrill Grace, "Courting Bluebeard with Bartók, Atwood, and Fowles: Modern Treatment of the Bluebeard Theme," *Journal of Modern Literature* 11, no. 2 (1984): 254. For further discussion of this short story, see Carol Merli, "Hatching the Posthuman: Margaret Atwood's 'Bluebeard's Egg,'" *Journal of the Short Story in English* 48 (Spring 2007): 81–94, http://jsse.revues.org/780.
76. Readers can find the story in the same-titled collection: Margaret Atwood, *Bluebeard's Egg* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1983), 115–46. In the story, Sally, the married protagonist, learns from her Comparative Folklore class that the egg symbolizes many things: "a fertility symbol, or a necessary object in African spells, or something the world hatched out of" (139). Initially the egg seems "innocent and passive" in Sally's interpretation of the Bluebeard fairy tale, but she eventually revises her understanding of this symbol, her world, her marriage, and herself: she sees past the shell's pristine surface to something "red and hot inside it" that one day "will hatch" (146). In the context of my reading of the optimism present in *MaddAddam*, it is telling that Atwood scholar

Reingard M. Nischik reads the dark stories of *Bluebeard's Egg* as "hold[ing] out a glimmer of hope—alternative realities that provide a source of comfort for the (usually female) protagonists by rendering the situation more tolerable" (*Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood* [Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2009], 78).

77. Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 116.

78. Atwood, *MaddAddam*, 290.

79. Mark Bosco, S.J., "The Apocalyptic Imagination," in *Margaret Atwood: "The Robber Bride," "The Blind Assassin," "Oryx and Crake,"* ed. J. Brooks Bouson (London: Continuum, 2010), 171.

80. Stein, "Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal," 193.


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