



Instinct or Insight in Dystopia

Reading Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler
through a Darwinian Lens

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NÅR DET KJEM TIL STYKKET

År ut og år inn har du site bøygd yver bøkene,

du har samla deg meir kunnskap

enn du treng til ni liv.

Når det kjem til stykket, er det

so lite som skal til, og det vesle

har hjarta alltid visst.

I Egypt hadde guden for lærdom

hovud som ei ape.

Olav H. Hauge

Abstract in Norwegian

Margaret Atwood er en kanadisk forfatter som er kjent for romaner som *Tjenerinnens beretning* og *Alias Grace*. Octavia Estelle Butler er en amerikansk forfatter som har vunnet flere priser for sine romaner. Bøkene jeg har valgt ut for denne studien, er Atwoods *The Year of the Flood* (2009) og Butlers *Parable of the Sower* (1993). Førstnevnte er en oppfølger til romanen *Oryx and Crake* (2003), og Atwood skal gi ut tredje bind i det som blir en trilogi i løpet av året. Octavia Butler skrev en oppfølger til *Parable of the Sower* som heter *Parable of the Talents* (1998). Romanene kan karakteriseres som science fiction, apokalyptisk eller post-apokalyptisk litteratur, men i denne oppgaven vil det dystopiske aspektet ved romanene stå i fokus. Tekstene beskriver et imaginært amerikansk samfunn i nær fremtid hvor kapitalistiske krefter har taket på et samfunn preget av stort forfall. Kapitalen er det eneste som gir makt, og alt fra drikkevann til helse er privatisert. Hovekarakterene står i kontrast til det bestående samfunnet; de er outsiders som drømmer om et annet liv og som aktivt prøver å skape det. Romanene skildrer dystopiske, menneskefiendtlige samfunn, men antyder likevel et mulig håp. Jeg forsøker å analysere hva som får karakterene til å tenke og handle slik de gjør.

I denne studien bruker jeg ideer fra litterær darwinisme til å undersøke typisk menneskelige trekk i romanene. Forfatternes utforsking av hvordan *Homo sapiens*, som er utviklet gjennom svært langsom evolusjon, opplever og reagerer på plutselige og drastiske forandringer i levekår, er både utfordrende og lærerikt å observere. Jeg bruker blant annet Donald E. Browns teorier fra boken *Human Universals* til å beskrive det fellesmenneskelige, særlig for å vise hvordan tekstene fremstiller det krevende aspektet ved å leve i en kultur som forakter naturen. Konklusjonen viser at de karakterene som innehar en kombinasjon av de samme kvalitetene som har brakt menneskeheten fremover gjennom evolusjonen, også er dem som forfatterne har gjort til helter: De er fleksible, samarbeidsvillige og proaktive. I tillegg har de det nødvendige hellet med seg.

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Tragedies, both personal and national while working on my master's thesis, have put the writing into perspective. On the one hand, the work has, at times, seemed totally irrelevant, but on the other shown what fills our life with meaning. In a crisis we are forced to separate what is important from what is not. Everybody who has engaged themselves with such a large project as a master's thesis, will know how time consuming it is. I have made a list of all the things I am looking forward to doing once the thesis is handed in, and on top of the list I have put what most people would have put there: I will spend more time with the people I love. My youngest daughter can hold a lecture about Theory of Mind, so evidently there has been too much focus on mummy's interests lately.

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Introduction

The title of this thesis is inspired by Muriel Spark's novel *The Prime of Miss Brodie*, in which Miss Brodie categorically divides her students into two parties; those who tend to be driven by instinct as opposed to those who act on the basis of insight. This conflict, if there is one, intrigues me. I will, however, not examine any of Spark's novels. The goal of this study is to explore the two novels *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler (1993) and *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood (2009). I will examine the fictional societies and how the characters' emotions and motives are conveyed, by studying universal human issues in dystopian literature. According to leading researchers in palaeoanthropology, humans share more than 98% of their genes with chimpanzees, and most scientists believe that our ancestry is the same. The regional primate variants emerged through natural and sexual selection, and the separate species developed different features perfectly adapted to their particular habitat. Even though there have been many hominin species, all humans today belong to a single species: *Homo sapiens* (Stringer and Andrews 16-23). Evolution must have influenced more than our physical appearances, and it should be rewarding to explore how human nature is expressed through fiction.

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian author of fiction, poetry, and essays. She won the Booker Prize in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin*. However, her most celebrated novel is perhaps *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). *The Year of the Flood* (2009) is one of two novels she published, six years apart, concerning the same fictional universe, a dystopian world where all are under the surveillance of the corporation CorpSeCorps. Global warming has made the earth almost barren, and commercial cooperatives fight for control. The citizens – especially the lower and middle classes – experience a society in chaos, as the richest live behind walls, and the poor must fend for themselves. Consequently, the class divide expands, and only the bottom and the top classes persist. The protagonists of the first of the two novels, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), also play a part in *The Year of the Flood*, although they are now in the background. God's Gardeners, an eco-religious group of rebels, who are predicting and therefore preparing for a "waterless flood," take a central place in the novel. When "the flood" comes in the form of a manmade plague, the characters Toby and Ren, who are former members of God's Gardeners, survive, one by accident, and the other by careful planning. A third book in the series will be published toward the end of 2011.

Octavia Estelle Butler, who died in 2006, was one of very few African-American science fiction writers. She won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards, and in 1995, she received the MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant as the first science fiction writer ever. She saw herself as an “oil-and-water combination” with diverging interests and identities; she was black, a woman, a former Baptist, as well as a science fiction writer (“About the Author” 346). In *Parable of the Sower*, the setting is quite similar to that of Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*. The novel is usually classified as science fiction, but Frederick Buell points out that it can be read as “realistic, even naturalistic, fiction” (314). In the chaotic aftermath of economic and environmental crises, no one feels secure, and different strategies are carried out in order to safeguard people and property. Those who can afford it, live behind gates. The protagonist, Lauren Olamina, finds herself alone once the fences around her local community are torn down and its inhabitants slaughtered. Her faith in both God and humankind is challenged, and in her mind, she slowly reforms the Christian faith from her childhood. Her father is a Baptist minister, so the words of the Bible are in her inner repertoire. While walking through the dismal landscape of a shattered American continent, she assembles members for her new congregation, The Earthseed.

A dystopian novel will necessarily give a description of human conditions at its worst, and may therefore be perceived a political statement; so also with *Parable of the Sower* and *The Year of the Flood*. Some dystopian novels, however, have suffered serious sanctions: Orwell’s *1984* and *Animal Farm*, Zamyatin’s *We* and a number of other utopian/dystopian novels were openly critical to communism and consequently banned within communist regimes. From 1970-1990, there was a feminist wave in the dystopian genre, and the novels were often about women’s struggle for equal rights. Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* from 1986 can be read in this context. Jean Pfaelzer sees the relationship between American utopian and dystopian fiction thus: “While utopian fictions struggle with elaborate literary gimmicks to move history into the future, dystopian narratives conclude in social cataclysms which return America to a pre-socialist and pre-feminist state” (70). Toby and other women characters in *The Year of the Flood* all suffer on accord of their gender, both physically and with regard to hierarchal structure. They are raped with no consequences to the perpetrators, and there are no indications that even the meek Gardeners have planned for an “Eve One” equal to “Adam One.” Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* must disguise as a man in order to avoid sexual assaults, and providing for the residents’ basic subsistence is more urgent than doing politics or fighting for democracy. Pfaelzer maintains that dystopia, as a genre, relies on “the reader’s recognition of parallels between history and art” (65), and that by “reversing the

central utopian axiom, they assert that history is not inherently progressive” (63). Through *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, the reader understands that development is not always a change to the better, and that learning from past failures is imperative in order to avoid repeating them. Butler’s and Atwood’s texts portray a future no one wants, but few spend much energy in trying to avoid. It is as if humans suffer from a collective amnesia, and according to Tom Moylan, *Parable of the Sower* depicts the dystopian “erasure of political memory” (Moylan 149). Through history, debt-slavery has occurred repeatedly, but Butler’s narrative shows the human ability to forget: Lauren’s neighbours are willing to believe that the debt-slavery they are signing up for, is something else. The heroine Lauren thinks differently: She is learned, she has a “memory,” achieved by reading history books, and she decides to use her knowledge and spread it.

Although Butler’s novel has been discussed in some previous studies, it has not, to my knowledge, been examined through an evolutionary lens. As for Atwood’s novel, it was published as late as 2009, and thus it must still have unexplored qualities. According to the founder of literary Darwinism, Joseph Carroll, no critical dystopia has been under such scrutiny (“re: Literary Darwinism – Dystopia”). The closest is Brett Cooke’s analysis of Zamyatin’s utopian/dystopian novel *We*. It has been argued that “literary Darwinism” sounds “doctrinaire,” leading theorists to use other terms like bioculturalism, applied adaptationist or evolutionary psychology, evocriticism, biopoetics or evolutionary literary criticism (see Machann 22, 23). In this thesis I will mostly employ the term literary Darwinism, but I will also refer more generally to evolutionary theory and cognitive psychology.

The two novels in this study can be classified in many ways. Some categorize them as dystopian science fiction, but also as apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic novels. However, I will mainly focus on dystopian features. “Dystopia” is defined in different ways, but most often as a counterpart to “utopia.” According to Pfaelzer “eu-topia” and “utopia” are used in the meaning “good place,” and conversely “dystopia” as “bad place,” always contingent on the specific criteria as to the authors of what such places should or should not be like (62). Dystopian literature will often include glimpses of the author’s “utopia” through the insertion of hope in the otherwise bleak circumstances, and Raffaella Baccolini identifies the critical dystopia as a special sub-genre:

In classical dystopia, memory remains too often trapped in an individual and regressive nostalgia, but critical dystopias show that a culture of memory – one that moves from the individual to the collective – is part of a social project of hope. [...] Instead of

providing some compensatory and comforting conclusion, the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities. It is in the acceptance of responsibility and accountability, often worked through memory and the recovery of the past, that we bring the past into a living relation with the present and may thus begin to lay the foundations for utopian change. (Baccolini 521)

The Year of the Flood and *Parable of the Sower* both fit this category. The open ending offers the reader to equip the characters with several alternative destinies. Reaching their “utopias,” the characters plan for the future and share information freely. Both texts can be seen as political statements: People must change their behaviour, or suffer the consequences. In an interview, Butler says that Lauren Olamina from the *Parable* novels learns how to be an activist by finding the strengths in herself and in her community in order to create a better world. Butler hoped the book would make the United States, and even the human species, consider whether the future we are building is the best one or if individuals or groups should intervene (“A Conversation” 341). The Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* are not presented as typical heroes, but more like troublesome, but deeply loved relatives. Atwood presents the God’s Gardeners group as a caring community, but she equips the individual characters with human shortcomings and strengths. Her heroes do not take shortcuts, but think of the community rather than their own personal comfort.

The Year of the Flood and *Parable of the Sower* are comparable in several aspects. Firstly, both novels feature female protagonists on a mission where religion constitutes an important framework: Toby in *The Year of the Flood* is a prominent member of a religious group, and Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* is the founder of the Earthseed religion. In both texts, the protagonists exist within a fictional framework where their close communities are described as counterforces to the faltering capitalist states. Despite the futuristic settings, the technology is in regress for the protagonists: In *Parable of the Sower* the relapse is due to poverty, and in *The Year of the Flood* the religious group has declared technology its enemy. In Atwood’s texts, though, technology comes to play an important part in the plot. Easily accessible information about the authors’ political agendas will confirm that the novels may rightfully be called critical dystopias. Butler and Atwood have expressed their concerns regarding human maltreatment of the environment in their fiction and elsewhere, and they write in order to make people aware of the possible outcome of maintaining our modern lifestyle. Atwood shows through her web page, in daily updates on Twitter as well as through her fiction, that she is politically active. For the duration of a fortnight in May 2011, she

wrote about issues ranging from her authorship, Canadian elections, immigration, and her work on what will now become a *Mad Adam Trilogy*. May the 3rd 2011 she shared a quote by Alice Munro that may sum up her political view in a humoristic way: “Do what you want and live with the consequences” (“@MargaretAtwood.”). As I see it, even though Atwood shows an ironic distance to the religious group in her text, she has toyed with what such consequences might be, when she wrote *The Year of the Flood*. She makes her readers feel that they need activists like the Gardeners to help them change. When Octavia Butler is interviewed in 2005 about *Parable of the Sower*, she commences by saying she needed to write a book that would wake people up so that they saw the problem with climate change, not as mere matter of politics, but as something that concerned them. In the interview, she continues by stating that she wanted to write “a novel of someone who was coming up with solutions of a sort” (“Science Fiction Writer”). Her character Lauren Olamina’s answer to the assignment is a community built upon belief in human cooperation and flexibility.

The American biologist Edward O. Wilson states that “[o]verall there is a tendency as the century closes to accept that *Homo sapiens* is an ascendant primate, and that biology matters” (“Sociobiology” 99). He extends the importance of biology to the humanities and mentions several borderline disciplines: cognitive neuroscience, human genetics, evolutionary biology, and socio-biology (100-01). Also within literary theory, this approach has gained interest. Evolutionary literary criticism is one such “bridge” between science and literature. Joseph Carroll, seen as the founder of this line, expresses the essence of literary Darwinism thus:

The Darwinists can aim at extending, refining, correcting and contextualizing the common understanding. On the level of interpretive criticism, they can situate any given text or set of texts in relation to the pressure points in human nature. They can identify the biological forces that are invoked or repressed in any given work and can assess how those forces impinge on meaning. (Carroll, “Evolutionary Paradigm” 21)

Critics have inferred from the phrase “any given work” that Joseph Carroll wants literary Darwinism to exclude all other literary theories (see Jackson 212; Seamon 261). As I see it, Carroll only insists that literary Darwinism offers a means of investigating all sorts of texts, without excluding other theories. Carroll’s dream for the future is that “[h]umanistic expertise in manipulating cultural figurations will have flowed into a smooth and harmonious stream with Darwinian findings on the elemental features of human nature” (Carroll, “Evolutionary

Paradigm” 135), a dream that shows enthusiasm as well as an atoning attitude towards bringing science and the humanities together. However, all his ideas are not equally controversial and have been developed by other literary critics, for example Jonathan Gottschall and Brian Boyd. Literary Darwinists build their literary theory on research in biology as well as in psychology (Steven Pinker, Geoffrey Miller, John Tooby, and Leda Cosmides), aesthetics and the philosophy of art (Denis Dutton), and on for instance music (Ellen Dissanayake). The field is highly interdisciplinary. In the following, I will attempt to draw a line from the evolutionary theory of Darwin to the literary Darwinism of today. The interdisciplinary nature of the latter makes it necessary to have a look at for instance cognitive theory and evolutionary psychology when such theories seem appropriate, and my references to sources range from *The Bible* to *On the Origin of Species*.

Characters in novels are not living human beings; they “live” in language. Nevertheless, the author and the reader use their human experience and knowledge in creating an “inner theatre” where their imagination forms a make-believe world built upon words. This ability seems to be a “cross-culturally universal, species-typical phenomenon” (Tooby and Cosmides, “Does Beauty Build” 175), which means we are a species with the facility to both narrate and to understand narration. Narratives can give us physical and psychological reactions that are similar to real life experiences. According to Tooby and Cosmides, many such “surrogate experiences” will “engage emotion systems while disengaging action systems (just as dreams do).” Tooby and Cosmides give an example where people watch a lion attack in a movie; it would scare the viewers but not make them run out of the theatre (176). The gift of pretence seems to be vital in human interaction, something that is proven by the problems experienced by people lacking this ability. Whether pretence is an adaptation in itself or simply a by-product of evolution, is disputed by scientists.

Charles Darwin’s research started in 1831 with his voyage on the *Beagle*. He collected samples from plants and animals he found on the different islands he visited during his nearly five year’s voyage. He catalogued and described them, and gradually he discovered similarities and dissimilarities that puzzled him. Plants and animals seemed to be perfectly adapted to the environment in which they lived. He deduced that they were gradually becoming more and more suited for their location through what he called natural selection: “And as natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection” (“On the Origin” 54). As he had studied theology himself and was married to a religious woman, he accepted that his ideas would evoke controversy. It was one idea in particular that was, and still is, divisive: He

claimed that “probably all the organic beings which have ever lived on this earth have descended from some one primordial form, into which life was first breathed” (51). For many people, especially those who believed strongly that every living thing were created by God, Darwin’s idea of a gradual evolution of the species was blasphemy (Kermode 29). Darwin, however, saw it differently. In gradual evolution the species seemed to him to “become ennobled” (53), and he expected that his “classifications will come to be, as far as they can be so made, genealogies; and will then truly give what may be called the plan of creation” (52). A great time span was needed in order to “prove” his ideas, as “natural selection acts solely by accumulating slight, successive, favourable variations, it can produce no great or sudden modification; it can act only by very short and slow steps” (43). Moreover, he had to take human nature into consideration when introducing his innovative ideas, and he maintained that “the chief cause of our natural unwillingness to admit that one species has given birth to other and distinct species, is that we are always slow in admitting any great change of which we do not see the intermediate steps” (49). Apparently, the same holds true today, considering the challenges scientists must overcome in order to convince people about the dangers of climate change.

Darwin did not seem to be aware of the contemporary scientist Gregor Mendel’s experiments on pea plants, even though Mendel’s results would have been of great use to him. When Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* genetics was not yet a scientific discipline. It is ironic that such knowledge was at hand, but mere circumstances hindered communication between the two main contributors in the field. Darwin could have solved some of his greatest puzzles had he read Mendel’s papers giving the basis for genetics. Darwin never fully understood how traits were transferred from parent to offspring, and believed that some sort of blending took place. Mendel proved how dominant and recessive genes were passed on from one generation to the next and for instance how you could scientifically predict what possible colours a pea plant’s flowers would get depending on its genealogy.¹ Darwinian theory has evolved through scientific research and is thus very different today from Charles Darwin’s original design. Darwin’s ideas are constantly re-examined, and continuous discoveries in science are used to develop the field. Historical osteologists examine human bones in search of evidence for the different stages of human evolution. More than physical appearance, though, the human mind is of interest for literary theorists. Represented through literature, the reader gets a glimpse of the human mind in the present, the past, and the future.

¹ Ironically, Mendel is a saint in the religion of Atwood’s Gardeners, but Darwin is not.

In recent years, there has been an immense popular interest in post-apocalyptic fiction. Why do so many people hunger for after-the-end fantasies? Is there something in the human mind that triggers a need to think the unthinkable? Literary critic Frank Kermode suggests that we “set ourselves problems of the kind that would presumably not arise as a matter of simple biological necessity” (41). Brett Cooke uses ideas from evolutionary biology and cognitive theory when analyzing utopian literature, and he observes:

The mishandling of core human concerns in *We* and other dystopias triggers a powerful aversive reaction on the part of fictional characters and most sensitive readers. This shared response can help us understand how our common evolutionary heritage underlies both our daily behavior and our aesthetic preferences. (381-82)

Neither readers nor writers have experienced a post-apocalyptic world, but most people have probably fantasized about it. These fantasies may be hybrids of real-life horror stories, for instance about the Holocaust or other catastrophic trials. Frank Kermode explains that the atomic bomb in Nagasaki gave us an atrocious picture of the world after the end: “In short, we all had an informed and horrifying idea of the consequences of a nuclear attack, whereas the terrors, backed by no such hard evidence, were only fantasies” (182). The post-apocalyptic world is a product of our imagination, and according to Joseph Carroll, this literary power of imagining our future has been necessary in our struggle to survive and multiply: “Developing the power of envisioning the world imaginatively must have had adaptive value for our ancestors. Otherwise, they would not have devoted so much time to it or have developed so many cognitive aptitudes geared specifically for it” (“What is Literary Darwinism?”). It is a mystery how *Homo sapiens* may manage to adjust to a post-apocalyptic environment that will be radically different from the natural world that humans have evolved in. The writers of dystopian fiction address these problems when exploring the characters in dramatically changed conditions. Instinct alone is not sufficient to solve their problems, as no life form is “so simple that it is instructed by its genes to ‘do x’” (D. S. Wilson 115). Culture and nature work in perpetual interplay. Throughout history, humans have resolved problems they have met, or suffered the consequences. No matter how well adapted they have been, they have never reached perfection (Brown 104), and sudden changes in their habitat cannot be followed by sudden changes in the human build-up: evolution works slowly.

According to Richard Dawkins, we, and all our contemporaries, are products of “successful” genes, passed on from “successful” ancestors: “Not a single one of our ancestors

died in infancy. They all reached adulthood, and every single one was capable of finding at least one heterosexual partner and of successfully copulating” (“The Digital River” 54). How this happens, and whose genes will survive can be described in several ways: One explanation is “Gene’s Eye Thinking,” which means that a gene’s purpose is to be passed on, so the bearer of a gene should survive and be attractive enough to breed. A gene does not think, obviously, and is successful only if it belongs to a body that passes that gene on. A winner gene would use whatever means to survive and multiply (see Boyd, ”Getting It All Wrong” 201; Buss 28). Buss describes natural selection thus: “Darwin’s theory of natural selection requires that each and every step in the gradual evolution of an adaptation be advantageous in the currency of reproduction” (28). To state the obvious, our ancestors must have survived long enough to produce offspring, or else they would not be ancestors. Real people and literary characters struggle with mostly the same issues. They can improve their immediate conditions, but not their genes. However, it is only possible to improve the genetic material of the next generation by choosing a partner with high-quality genes: “Genes do not improve in the using, they are just passed on, unchanged except for very rare random errors” (Dawkins, “The Digital River” 56).

When combining science with traditional literary theory it is important not to reduce either the one or the other. Every human action is not determined by instincts, but by a combination of personality, human instincts and culture. Accordingly, my own study is based on the same principles as that of Paul Hernadi, when he writes “my present attempt to explore literature’s evolutionary reasons for being presupposes that the social, the natural, and the personal are intertwined dimensions of being human. ... Each of us, as well as literature, is 300 percent human: altogether natural, cultural, and personal” (23). By the same token E. O. Wilson is concerned with “inappropriate reductionism,” by which “human social behavior is ultimately reducible to biology,” and “genetic determinism” (“Sociobiology” 98). He maintains that our genes are important, but still they do not foretell our destiny. The examination of the products of *Homo sapiens*’ representational complexity and creativity, demands a different approach than the study of for instance an anthill. The “fuzziness” of traditional literary analysis is still important in order to “open” certain otherwise hidden aspects of literary art.

Human behaviour has peculiar similarities that cut across the boundaries of religion, ethnicity, or epoch. Donald E. Brown has composed a long list of traits typical for humans, exemplified by the use of a hypothetical tribe that he refers to as the Universal People, UP. In his seminal work *Human Universals*, he presents some of the universals and explains how

they might manifest in a society. I will repeatedly refer to Brown's list, as it can tell us something about typical human behaviour. Brown expresses doubt that culture is the key to the understanding of all human conduct. In opposition to cultural relativists, he finds that "the process that shaped the human mind, Darwinian selection, provides the most inclusive theoretical framework for the illumination of the human condition" (6). He deduces that human biology and evolutionary psychology thus should be of great interest to those who want to study human factors. He agrees that culture has a great impact on human behaviour, but adds that biology has as well. One example that well illustrates his point is a study of Japanese and American facial expressions. The Japanese and the Americans are often referred to as peoples with very dissimilar body languages, but this project showed that when alone or "offstage," their facial expressions were similar, whereas in a social setting facial expressions reflected what was considered correct behaviour (25). Brown posits that some emotions are expressed similarly in all societies: People will recognize signs of happiness, sadness, disgust, surprise, fear and anger in other people, regardless what tradition or culture they belong to (26, 134). Consequently, evolutionary approaches emphasize the importance of both culture and nature, and especially the particular elasticity of human behaviour, even though the theory is often accused of the opposite: rigidity and determinism. The literary Darwinists stress the impact of nature, but acknowledge that humans have a special talent for culture (Boyd, Carroll, and Gottschall, Introduction 3).

When disaster strikes we habitually believe that some people are more likely to survive than others: Who will still be there after a tsunami, and who will not? Dystopian literature follows this thought through as its protagonists face challenges within and beyond what humans normally will encounter. Thus, some of the questions I would like to address are the following: What enhances the "fitness" of the protagonists? Is it their genetic inheritance, their cultured minds, or a combination? How do the characters act and interact in the context of survival, kin assistance, mating and group living? Since the novels do express hope, I want to find out what this hope consists of and how it is conveyed. The two chosen novels stand out among a multitude of titles within contemporary dystopian fiction because of their combination of literary quality and features that I would like to explore in this study. This introduction has pointed out theoretical issues that are necessary in order to establish the basis of this thesis. However, theory is an integral part throughout, as I address specific concerns in the course of the reading of the novels. In chapter one I will look at how *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* represent the human habitat through fiction. Theory of Mind – the human ability to "read minds" – is the focus in chapter two, and in chapter three and

four, I will specifically look at religion, altruism, sex, language, and art which are typical features of human civilization, but also of our literature.

Chapter 1: The Fictional Habitat and its Inhabitants

In dystopias we typically find a civilization in ruins. Dystopian novels remind us of our mortality, where the depicted, deteriorating societies are like tombstones showing us that our existence is merely transitory: They function as *memento mori*. As Pinker observes, “Fictional narratives supply us with a mental catalogue of the fatal conundrums we might face someday and the outcomes of strategies we could deploy in them (“Art and Adaptation” 134). Dystopia is usually linked to a geographical space, and in *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* it is the USA. The readers are given a chance to glance at their present through the lense of a fictitious future. In this chapter I will describe the fictional human habitat and how the characters relate to it and each other. Since *The Year of the Flood* has a larger cast of characters than *Parable of the Sower*, the discussion will necessarily become assymmetrical.

Atwood’s and Butler’s narratives explore the utter consequences of a purely technological and capitalist worldview, and the picture is horrid. Humans have an ability of pretence; consequently, we can pretend not to see that our world is heading towards disaster, especially if there seems to be nothing to do about it. Critical dystopia can give us the incentive we need to take action. We learn what the cost of apathy might amount to, but at the same time we are given glimpses of hope telling us that there still is time. The characters in *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* adjust to their particular fictional environments in different ways. Rob Shields states that the key theorist on space Henry Lefebvre notes that geographical space is always divided into privatized “lots” in capitalized societies (210). In both novels, capitalist power counts more than the welfare of the individual, and people without estates are made insignificant. They are left to occupy marginalized space and “fashion a spatial presence and practice outside of the norms of the prevailing (enforced) social spatialization” (Shields 210). Money and technology take precedence over human concerns. Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* wants to run away, but “there isn’t any away” (158). Frederick Buell points to the fact that Butler’s protagonist, who has “no choice,” leads her group to a place that is perhaps is as “unfree” as the place they have left behind (318). Like many refugees, they have no guarantee that the new place will be any better than the old.

Habitat is what we think of as a species’ particular physical environment. The habitat for Eastern Rosella parrots, for instance, is trees in Queensland, Australia. It is much more

challenging to describe the human habitat. As Edward O. Wilson puts it, “[m]odern man has pre-empted all the conceivable hominid niches” (“Man” 79). Lawrence Buell is in this respect therefore right in describing humans as “natural aliens” as they do not resemble other species when it comes to the requirements for their habitat (71). In fact, as E. O. Wilson points out, people can live under almost all kinds of conditions: “*Homo sapiens* is ecologically a very peculiar species. It occupies the widest geographical range and maintains the highest local densities of any of the primates” (79). Today modern appliances have made it possible to live almost everywhere on the globe, but through the lengthy hunter-gatherer period, finding the right habitat has been vital for survival. Should modern societies fail in providing for their citizens’ needs, humans would again have to be careful choosing the right habitat. A sudden global change for the worse, like the environmental breakdown described in for instance *Parable of the Sower*, would once more make the ability to pick the perfect habitat an essential skill. Frederick Buell describes Butler’s dystopian narrative as a contrast to what the “contemporary American postmodern global culture celebrates,” as it instead shows “the limits on and vulnerability of the unassisted human body and the challenges of finding food and shelter, staying healthy, having children, tending the ill and dying, and building community in an ecologically deteriorated world” (317). What he describes are basic human needs, and the fictional habitats the two authors have put their characters in, do not provide for these needs.

In a democracy, there is an anticipation of predictability, as the processes that bring about social and political changes are relatively stable. People are supposed to be heard, and thereby alterations will be implemented rather slowly and deliberately. In dystopias, the inhabitants in general are without control as other forces are stronger, and thereby the citizens are at the mercy of those in charge. Thus, change may come suddenly and without warning, and those outside the centre of power have no influence in decision-making. Groups left in the periphery, will be put under great stress. There is a great divide between the “haves” and “have-nots” in Atwood’s and Butler’s narratives. Butler has made a distinction between those who live within walls, and those who do not. The second divide goes between those who can pay for protection and thereby secure that they will still be able to keep their homes and those who fear they cannot. In *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood has separated people into two major groups. In the compounds, we find those who possess knowledge useful for the corporations, and in the so-called plebees, are those who either have taken a stand against the corporations, or those who do not have the means to join them. The citizens and the government seem to be

secondary to the corporations, which even take care of punishment, as those convicted are put into a TV show called “Painball.” In *Parable of the Sower*, Christian fundamentalists are in the government, but the corporations are powerful and the politicians corrupt. Both societies seem to build on fear, as the citizens do not have a free choice; a “no” to the corporations is also a “no” to a good life. The corporations build on exploiting basic human needs, that is, they decide what those are and find a commercial answer to them. The need for sex is satisfied by pornography or with sex-pills, products sold with great profit satisfy the need for food, shelter is offered within expensive compounds, and eggs for making babies are commoditized.

Stringer and Andrews maintain that there seems to be one set of characteristics for all human habitats as they are “variable, diverse as opposed to uniform, encompassing many different habitats over short distances” (182). Denis Dutton, professor of aesthetics and the philosophy of art, posits in *The Art Instinct* that the most popular motifs reveal human fondness for quite particular features in landscapes. Strangely enough, these seem to be universal; a man in Sudan who has never lived by the sea will, in general, have the same criteria for a beautiful landscape as a woman in Australia. They would both prefer “a landscape with trees and open areas, water, human figures, and animals” (14). The scene is almost identical to the one Toby in *The Year of the Flood* discovers on an environmentalist Internet page: “a wide green landscape unfolded – trees in the distance, a lake in the foreground, a rhino and three lions drinking” (322). Nevertheless, the contrary of what Dutton describes is rather the case in the dystopian universes presented in Butler’s and Atwood’s novels. Even from the start, Toby’s and Lauren’s environments are closed as opposed to open, for instance. It is ironic, though, that what Toby can observe from her rooftop after the “waterless flood” is apparently a copy of the ideal landscape (4-5). However, on closer scrutiny, the water is polluted, the open areas as well as the animals represent danger, and the people Toby detects behind the trees are too perfect to be true. The reader will recognize, yet not recognize, the described place, and it will thus be perceived as uncanny (see Freud). It is interesting to observe that the perceived utopias in the novels, the places for the improvised new societies in *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, both are close to the ideal landscape.

According to Donald E. Brown, one characteristic humans have in common is that they “always have some form of shelter from the elements” (136). Uneasiness creeps up on the reader when Lauren starts walking north. Frederick Buell makes a point out of the fact that the protagonist does not stay put in a safe place, but becomes one of the many

“impoverished and vulnerable people out in the chaos” (315). Thereby Butler manages to shift focus from the rich minority to the unfortunate majority whose major goal is survival. Margaret Atwood makes the same shift in *The Year of the Flood*. As Fredric Jameson points out in his review, *Oryx and Crake* is narrated from “above,” whereas “*The Year of the Flood* gives us the view from below – always, as we well know, the most reliable vantage point from which to gauge and map a society” (“Then You Are Them”). Also within the narrative Atwood creates an inside-outside construction: Toby and Ren leave their safe haven to look for other survivors, thus leaving a relatively safe place behind in search, through chaos, for an unknown but hopefully better place. One illustrative example from other dystopian narratives is the scene in *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy where father and son have found a cellar full of everything they need: It offers shelter, it has lots of food and drink, even Coca Cola, but father and son leave it after a couple of days, anyway. Reading it, you want to beg them to stay. The lack of shelter from danger that these characters experience, and the stress it causes, is contrasted by the relative comfort zones that they more or less voluntarily choose to part from.

In *The Year of the Flood* the world is in ecological crisis even before the apocalypse occurs. Nose cones must be worn outdoors because of pollution, and people are restricted to certain areas, mostly indoors. Atwood describes an environment eerily similar to our own as the thought of global warming and other environmental issues disturb many people today. E. O. Wilson writes that he is “persuaded that as the need to stabilize and protect the environment grows more urgent in the coming decades, the linking of the two natures – human nature and wild Nature – will become a central intellectual concern” (“Sociobiology” 103). Atwood shows us what it could be like if an eco-religious sect like the Gardeners should take such concerns seriously. In her novel, “human nature” as well as culture interferes with “wild Nature,” and the result is disastrous. The Gardeners try to counteract the majority, but they only partly succeed: Some of them survive, but the costs are immense. Nature is not to be enjoyed anymore, so the Gardeners attempt to make miniature ecosystems on rooftops to grow crops and to pass on knowledge about how to live without modern appliances, meat and processed food. Moving about in the open is considered dangerous, and subsequently the rich live in gated communities. The Gardeners preach that there will be a Waterless Flood with “massive die-off of the human race [...] due to overpopulation and wickedness” (56). After the “flood,” nature itself, combined with genetically engineered “nature,” constitutes danger; the liobam has got the woolly fur of a lamb, but the disposition of a lion. What looks like a lamb, might be anything else. Atwood describes a society that does not pay attention to the

progressively deteriorating state of the world. Society in general ignores or covers up the signs of coming disaster, but the Gardeners and other “fringe cults” think differently and are consequently frowned upon by the majority. In the beginning, even Toby sees the Gardeners as “fugitives from reality” (57).

There is one group, however, who are destined to thrive. In fact, as products of genetic engineering, they are designed to be carefree: The Crakers “were perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses or tools or weapons, or, for that matter, clothing” (Atwood, *Oryx* 359). Glenn, who is “Crake” in *Oryx and Crake*, has customized them in such a way that they can find everything they need in nature. They eat grass and do not need clothes or shelter. In *The Year of the Flood*, Glenn is a rather remote character, and his invention, the new human species, is more visible than him in the narrative. On the other hand, his character is important for the plot because the apocalypse seems to be his creation as well. Ren makes his acquaintance when she is in HelthWyzer, a corporate community for the rich, but she has met him before when he came to visit Pilar on the Edencliff Rooftop Garden. He is observed in the background when Pilar is secretly buried. Jimmy and Glenn are obsessed with the computer game Extinctathon, but while Jimmy soon gets bored of naming extinct animals, Glenn plays until he reaches perfection. Ren describes him as a “braniac” that “always had an answer,” almost a “cyborg” (271-72). He seems to experience life as a game, perhaps like Extinctathon, and he says that in a complicated situation you should kill “the centre of power” (271). Zeb knows Glenn, and when describing him to Toby, Zeb says that “he’s a three-dimensional chess player, he likes a challenge. He’s nimble. Also he’s got no fear ... This guy’s one of a kind” (292). His personality profile resembles that of a mass murderer. He is bright, alienated, and disillusioned. In *Oryx and Crake*, Glenn seemingly takes pleasure from watching his mother die a horrible death. He finds it “impressive” to observe her dissolving the way a slug would if you put salt on it (207-08). He seems to have deviating personality qualities with a feeling of superiority, and he even thinks he can do better than God in creating people (*Flood* 177). He sees “[i]llness as a design fault” (176). His character is ambiguous, and he seems to be closely connected to the Corps and the Gardeners both, but most importantly to the MaddAddam group where he goes by the name “red-necked crake.” It is unclear whether Zeb, who is also in the group, is double-crossed by Glenn or if they have been in on the same project, but it seems that Glenn has pressured the members of the MaddAddam faction to fulfil his goals (466-77). Glenn’s approach is not to change the habitat; he changes the inhabitants instead.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren Olamina feels threatened by her surroundings in Robledo, a fictional city placed close to Los Angeles (10). She compares her neighbourhood to “a crouching animal” ready to leap (5). When Lauren and her family go outside their compound, they are always armed and in groups (8), as they cannot turn to the authorities if they need assistance (19, 23). In the streets, they often discover corpses, and the accretion of such experiences seems to desensitize Lauren: “One of them was headless. I caught myself looking for the head” (9). The choice of words shows she knows that it is insensitive to be searching for body parts only because you are curious, not because you care. People living in unwallled areas are easy targets. Lauren describes her surroundings as chaotic, and difficult to deal with (26). There are still politicians and some sort of democracy in the American society, but people have lost faith in the system (27). Like with the Gardeners, Lauren’s community have trained vigilantes organized into groups guarding their homes. The city itself, Robledo, is described as hell on earth with constant fires and torments (32). Friends and family, rather than the state, take care of their needs (35), so when Lauren loses her home, she can only rely on herself to solve the problem. She becomes a Sower: She spreads the words of her religion as seeds so that a new and better community may grow.

Lauren’s family comes close to signing a contract that would severely limit their personal freedom, by considering a position in Olivar. Olivar is an elite, privatized coastal city, owned by the multinational corporation KSF: Kagimoto, Stamm, Frampton and Company. It is described as an “upper middle class, white, literate community of people who once had a lot of weight to throw around” (118). Foreign companies have started to buy US cities, and KSF has Japanese, German, and Canadian ownership (121). In Olivar, the citizens might be physically provided for, but in consequence, they would never be able to pay their debt. Lauren explains in her diary that some are sceptical to Olivar, as they have heard about former company towns where its citizens have been “cheated and abused” (119). Lauren calls the situation the opposite of science fiction since characters in SF normally try to break away from “the company,” they do not seek them (123-24). In Olivar, only “company people” are allowed to carry guns (168) and Lauren is afraid that “people who have a little bit of power tend to use it” (122). Lauren’s father is sceptical to privatized cities as well, and realizes that no company would ever put their money in their town: “Robledo’s too big, too poor, too black, and too Hispanic to be of interest to anyone” (120). He understands that Robledo would have low market value. Mr. Olamina is wondering if the inhabitants of Olivar know that they have signed up for slavery (121). He is literate and knows America’s history. His character stands in contrast to what Tom Moylan calls “the erasure of political memory”

typical for dystopia (149). Lauren and her father both use their knowledge and historical awareness in decision-making. Mr. Olamina's wife, Cory, begs him to apply for a position in Olivar, insisting that they could at least try it. She seems desperate to secure her family, and she is devastated when her efforts of convincing her husband are unsuccessful (122). Her ignorance about recent American history makes her an easy prey.

Gradually the living conditions in Robledo worsen. Lauren has been waiting for an explosion of some kind, but finds instead that the world is "disintegrating bit by bit" (123). Neighbours are killed, and some move, more or less voluntarily, to Olivar. Her father disappears and finally their house is set on fire and scavenged. Lauren is alone, finding shelter where she can, and her home is now only in her memories. She continues writing in her diary, and this seems to be her only tie to her earlier life: "There is nothing familiar left to me but the writing" (158). She carries scraps from her past in her rucksack and a pillowcase. For several years, she has planned an escape and has stacked away food, seeds, guns, and clothes. She is angry with herself and her father that they have never settled on a meeting place in case of disaster (158). Yet, she later finds two survivors from her community, and they become the first two in her new congregation. The three of them start their quest north. Donald E. Brown writes that "locality or claiming a certain territory" defines human groups, and history has shown what it means to people to have this place taken away (136). Brown also states that a "sense of being a distinct people" is of great importance to humans (136). The reader will no doubt recognize the hopelessness in Lauren's situation. Even after her home is burnt down and she has escaped, she is drawn to her house: "No matter. I have to go and see. I have to go home" (*Sower* 158). She finds it is not her home anymore, and her sense of "home" is transferred to her hiding place for the night: "It was as though that garage was home now, and all I wanted in the world was to be there" (166).

Toby in *The Year of the Flood* is lucky. When the plague is released, she is in a safe place with lots of food and other necessities. She survives by locking herself up inside the health clinic where she has been working as the manager. For a while she knows a bit about the world outside through the radio and Internet, but when they are silenced, the state of her district is uncertain; she only knows what she can observe from her rooftop. In her place inside the health farm, she enjoys some security, but it is not "homely," and she is all by herself. Toby is one of two protagonists in *The Year of the Flood* and the focalized character of large parts of the third-person sections of the narrative. She is described as introvert, cautious and almost asexual. She struggles with religious doubt, and because of that, she feels like a fraud. Being a Gardener, and eventually an Eve, without sharing their faith, she seems

like a fake in her own eyes. This scepticism identifies her, and through the narrative, she seems to be struggling with ethical and religious questions. Reluctantly, she agrees to become an Eve after Pilar dies, and inherit her title, Eve Six, but she feels as if she is stepping into “a pair of stone shoes” (218). She does not feel worthy. In addition, she seems to have some identity issues. Living with the Gardeners, she is torn between what she learns from them and what her own intellect tells her:

Sucked into the well of knowledge, you could only plummet, learning more and more, but not getting any happier. And so it was with Toby, once she'd become an Eve. She could feel the Eve Six title seeping into her, eroding her, wearing away the edges of what she'd once been. It was more than a hair shirt, it was a shirt of nettles. How had she allowed herself to be sown into it this way? (224)

Throughout the narrative, she is searching for purpose and a place to belong, but she is always drawn in different direction. Only in the last pages, she seems to make her “shirt of nettles” more comfortable. She has adopted the Gardeners’ religious practice, if not their faith.

Toby goes by many names, and in the Internet chat room for MaddAddam, she seems to use the code name Inaccessible Rail, the name of a bird (321). Bird metaphors are used to describe her throughout the novel, which seems apt, since she wants to “feel free to quit” (201), and like birds, she is always looking for a way out. At the same time, she is longing for a place to call home and people to belong to. She seems relieved when she first joins the Gardeners, that friends finally surround her. In her solitude after the Flood, she wanders about more dead than alive, and when she finds Ren, she realises that she has been “the ghost” in a “haunted house” (431). Having a person there, even a very sick one, “makes the Spa seem like a cosy domestic dwelling” (431). Perhaps this is when she discovers that she must be a social human being after all. Besides, she is described as something almost otherworldly, almost a god, or a saint, and just like the latter, she seems asexual and without common human needs. Ren writes in her journal that she felt Toby was safeguarding her “with some space-alien type of force field” (357). When Ren is put in Toby’s care towards the end of the narrative, Toby’s maternal instincts are kindled, and she gets the urge to nurture and protect Ren. She is a character going against the grain. Albeit she listens to Adam One and Pilar, whom she admires, decision-making is made on her own terms. As I will discuss below, she trusts her instincts, but seeks insight. Pilar tells her that nature will never deceive her, but although she would never openly go against Pilar’s words, in her mind she decides

that Pilar is wrong (203). The less dogmatic Gardeners, Zeb, Rebekka and Amanda, come to her rescue when Blanco attacks their building, and her own violent defence indicates, as I will explain below, that she has more in common with them than with Adam One. Toby is a worrier and a sceptic, and she is constantly preparing for disasters. She has to be alert and ready to flee. After a while with the Gardeners, she lets her guard down, and for a short moment, she seems to settle down: “At night, Toby breathed herself in. Her new self. Her skin smelled like honey and salt. And earth” (121). Honey and salt are often mentioned. The first is used for food and medicine, and the latter for dehydration, and they are the most important supplies in Toby’s Ararat (425, 429, 435). Toby notices the “sweet, salty odour of unwashed children” on her first day on the Edencliff Rooftop Garden (51). It is as if she has washed off the synthetic stench of her former life and is left with a smell of pure nature. She has become a Gardener.

Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* experiences a terrible loss when both her home and her family is taken away from her, and it is the people she travels with who become her new family. They often do not have much of a shelter, but they look after each other’s physical and psychological needs. In addition, Lauren plans for the development and spreading of the religion Earthseed. As E. O. Wilson argues, “*Homo sapiens* is the only species which ponder upon the “finiteness of their personal existence and of the chaos of the environment” (*Conciliance* 245), as animals would pay no attention to other parts of their environments than those on which they currently depend. Those who represent the authority in both novels are quite similar to these animals: They do not care what happens outside their view of time or space. The outside world, in fact all space outside their own personal one, seems irrelevant. In *World City*, Doreen Massey proclaims that we should ask one particular question about any place: “What does this place stand for?” (10). The setting in *The Year of the Flood* is a country marked by commercialism, egotism, and intolerance, represented by multi-national companies like SecretBurger. Economic gain is more important to its leaders than sustainability, and they are indifferent to what today is seen as an ideal: Think Globally, Act Locally. What happens locally will, in a technological society, affect the rest of the world. For instance, an accident in a nuclear plant in Asia may destroy local nature for more than ten thousand years, and its radiation may reach the rest of the world. The private corporations in both *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* disregard the rules for Corporate Social Responsibility (most often referred to as CSR) which many serious companies today use as a principle for ethical standard. The corporate conscience in the dystopian societies seems to be in short supply. Hannes Bergthaller posits that a central concern in ecocriticism is that fiction

may help us develop an ethical awareness necessary for attaining sustainability, and he also refers to ecocriticism's claim that "the roots of the ecological crisis are to be found in a failure of the imagination" (730, 741). One might say that in a dystopia, the imagination is not valued, and thereby these societies are unable to grasp possible future scenarios. Bergthaller discusses the role of the imagination in *The Year of the Flood*, which he finds to be ambiguous:

However, this is often taken to mean that imagination is required in order to perceive properly what is already there – our kinship with the natural world and the obligations it implies. In Atwood's novels, by contrast, the imagination is needed to see something that is, in an important sense, *not* there – without thereby blinding oneself to that which is, that is, without distorting or denying the scientific and historical record. The behavioural patterns that lead to environmental destruction are not in any way "unnatural," Atwood suggests; they are indeed lodged in "the ancient primate brain" (*OC*, 305), which is why Crake's posthumanist scheme for attaining sustainability, horrifying as it is, must not be dismissed too easily. (741)

In this quote, Bergthaller suggests that Crake may have "honourable" reasons for wishing to annihilate *Homo sapiens* if he believes that the only way of saving the Earth is to remove those who represent a threat against it. He also possesses the means of implementation. As will be discussed later, humans naturally show human weaknesses, such as an unwillingness to deal with consequences that are unpleasant, especially if these will occur later, rather than in the present. Consequently, people will exploit their recourses.

Tom Moylan calls dystopian literature "the 'new maps of hell'" (xi). Almost the way ordinary maps of the world help us to perceive what we cannot actually see, dystopian literature visualizes possible bleak futures. Before the Renaissance people thought of the world in fragments, based mostly on what they saw themselves or heard from others. Ashcroft notes that commencing with the work of the great explorers, the "world" became more tangible, represented in a map (132-33). Mapping "is a means of textualizing the spatial," Ashcroft maintains (31-32). Nevertheless, in times of war, for instance, breakdown of communication may cause a breakdown in the way the world is perceived as well. Toby, in isolation after the Flood, could not know what the world outside her private community looked like anymore, not even whether borders between countries were still there or not.

People are normally quite at ease with not knowing in detail about their physical space. They will have an idea about it, and that will suffice. On a post-apocalyptic planet, our existing records of mapping the earth will probably prove inadequate. A city's name usually means more than a word on a map as it would include at least its culture and its people, but for Toby, locked up and without means of communication, a map would provide mostly irrelevant information of what once was. Frederick Buell describes the landscape Lauren Olamina and her group in *Parable of the Sower* walk through on their way north as one "from which all sense of comfort, location, and geographical distinctiveness has been removed" (316). According to Saussure, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, and in a post-apocalyptic setting, this will be more than evident: The signified, namely the terrain, has changed while the signifier, the map, remains the same.

Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* lives in a gated community, and she finds it "crazy to live without a wall to protect you" (10). Lauren's father works from home several days a week, and when he goes to his office in town he sleeps there to minimize time spent outside. Inside the walls, they grow a vegetable garden and they have an orchard, living in what Jerry Phillips calls "Privatopia... a fantasy of escape" (302). This private community provides for their basic needs. After the gates are torn down and almost all inhabitants are slaughtered, Lauren must find a way to survive in an environment very remote from the ideal human habitat that Stringer and Andrews specify. Her situation is unpredictable. Lauren does not know what the world outside her town looks like, and whether it is better or worse than her own. The place she calls home is destroyed; both the physical gated community and the one represented by friends, family, and neighbours. Ashcroft offers an interesting view: "It is when place is least spatial, perhaps, that it becomes most identifying" (125). Lauren has lost her home and her family, and to recreate her identity she needs to belong somewhere and to someone. As I will argue below, the new religion of Earthseed constitutes the backbone of her new life and becomes her "portable home." Lauren's mission from then on is to regain her place, in all inferences of the word: She wants a home as well as a community to belong to. Her approach is similar to that of many nomadic peoples or peoples in exile, as they often try to retain a sense of place through narratives and songs (L. Buell 91-92).

How can Atwood and Butler depend on their readers to abhor the societies they describe in their dystopian novels? According to Wolfgang Iser, the texts provide information or instruction of how to read them, and the reader fills in the gaps (1681). In order for this to happen, the author must have an idea of how a reader will react to her text. The reader will apply her own culture and experience in the interpretation, but the author may rightfully

assume that some reactions are universal. Humans and other primates normally seek the company of others. Typically, according to Stringer and Andrews, group living grants “protection against predators and protection of food resources; having a home and keeping enemies away from it” (200). Within the Gardeners’ community, Toby is relatively safe as the members look after each other; they are all trained vigilantes. She is now a part of a faction that works like a family or like a well functioning miniature state.

Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* lives with her extended family when the story begins. Within the walls, there are neighbours with approximately the same living standard. They are not poor compared to others in their community, but not rich either. Apparently, they do not expect their conditions to improve: “One way or other, we’ll all be poor some day. The adults say things will get better, but they never have” (15). They get by because her father still has a job, and they can eat their own produce, as well as sell some. Their small community within the walls is quite transparent, and people look out for each other with Lauren’s father, Mr. Olamina, as the driving force. This is their home, and it offers some sort of normality and protection. School is an important institution in a civilized society, but Lauren states: “none of us goes out to school any more. Adults get nervous about kids going outside” (7). In consequence, they are home-schooled. Other tokens of modern civilization are given up more easily. Petrol is scarce and cars are accordingly becoming quite superfluous, but as Lauren observes: “It’s a lot harder to give up water” (18). In contrast to for instance her stepmother, Lauren embraces change instead of looking back. She will “rather have the stars” and her stepmother will have the former “blaze of light” from the old cities (6). The outside world, representing the US in the year of 2024, is in chaos; the government is corrupt and virtually powerless. Paradoxically enough the country still upholds a space programme. Lauren takes some comfort from this: “Well, we’re barely a nation anymore, but I’m glad we’re still in space. We have to be going some place other than down the toilet” (21). To her, the space programme signifies hope. The characters have different ways of coping with the violent society. Lauren’s brother, Keith, leaves at fourteen, and he does what he needs to survive, even if it involves killing innocent people. He does not seem to mind murdering friends, if he has something to gain from it (109).

Chaos is also an apt description for the state of affairs in Toby’s world. The inhabitants lack a basic trust in the government. Even close neighbours must be treated with suspicion, as many are in the hands of a corporate security corporation, the CorpSeCorps. When still a teenager, Toby is left alone after her father commits suicide, but Toby cannot report it to anybody as the “local pleebmobs paid the CorpSeCorpsMen to turn a blind eye”

(40). In spite of this, most people, including Toby, feel they need the CorpSeCorps, because they can see no alternative (41). Toby learns how to avoid being discovered by the wrong people and to take care of herself. She will increasingly need these skills, as danger is a factor to be considered in all decision-making from then on.

Capitalism is the driving force in Atwood's future society. Demand leads to supply, and even SecretBurgers with a "swatch of cat fur" or perhaps a "human fingernail" are popular (40). The general morale is low, "because who could say no to a business with so few supply-side costs?" (41). The Gardeners are a group in opposition to this view. As their leader Adam One puts it, they no longer believe that "man [is] the measure of all things" (48). They live from what they grow on the rooftop garden or from what rubbish they find outside and will not eat "anything with a face" unless it is inevitable (48). The worldview of the Gardeners could be labelled as biocentrism, as defined by Lawrence Buell: "all organisms, including humans, are part of a larger biotic web or network or community whose interests must constrain or direct or govern the human interest" (134). The Gardeners pay the consequences of following their ideals, and consequently Toby will stay hungry rather than kill animals.

Toby finds the Gardeners strange when she first meets them, but easily adapts to her new way of life. She can develop her skills within holistic healing and teach others. Gradually she is transformed into a full member of the community of God's Gardeners. They have their own schools and religious services that all play a part in preparing them for the "Waterless Flood." They learn life skills so that they can survive in an environment that is rapidly changing. D.S. Wilson posits that "[l]earning and cultural evolution adapt organisms to their environment quickly, while genetic evolution is so slow that its products are essentially fixed over the time scales that matter most in contemporary human affairs" ("Evolutionary Social Constructivism" 118). The Gardener children, called Young Bioneers, are trained to trust their instincts; they are taught that human bodies are perfectly adapted to life on earth, but modern living has dulled their special talent. By chanting hymns from their oral hymnbook, the Young Bioneers learn survival skills by heart:

The Purslane, Sorrels, Lamb's Quarter's,
And Nettles, too, are good;
The Hawthorne, Elder, Sumac, Rose –
Their berries wholesome food. (153)

By building up a repertoire of plant names, their habitat, and their use, the gardeners teach the members to survive without supermarkets. Their teachers want them to be able to improvise and be flexible: “if there are no Sorrel, there may be Cattails” (150). They must contribute to the life of the community and they learn that there is “no such thing as garbage, trash, or dirt, only matter that hadn’t been put to a proper use” (83). Some of the names that the children give to their school subjects indicate their attitude: “Poop and Goop for violet biolett instruction, Guck and Muck for Compost-Pile Building” (210), yet in *The Year of the Flood* their lessons may prove useful in the end. The children learn proverbs like “vultures are our friends” and “beware of words” (7). These instructive rhymes are repeated until they become internalized “truths,” and Toby relies on them in her struggle to survive: “When the small birds hush their singing, said Adam One, it’s because they’re afraid. You must listen for the sound of their fear” (6). Before making decisions, she consults her inner guidebook, thus while evaluating security risks, she hears the Gardeners chant in her mind: “An Ararat without a wall isn’t an Ararat at all” (23). The Gardeners believe in human instincts, but are none the less stressing the importance of learning.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren’s highest goal seems to be the creation of an autonomous state within the state, a self-sufficient society where the members provide what the members need. It should be owned by its members, in contrast to cities like Olivar. Tom Moylan maintains that this is a typical feature of dystopian narratives: “the organization of a resistant enclave, a liberated zone” (xiii). Reading *Parable of the Talents*, the sequel to *Parable of the Sower*, the reader learns that Lauren’s initial attempt fails, and that she and her group end up in slavery. Lauren only succeeds when she changes tactics and spreads her seed on a larger scale. Earthseed becomes global rather than local, just as the name of the religion indicates. Ashcroft maintains that “global culture [is] making itself at home in motion rather than in a place” (213). Lauren seems to understand this, but only after watching her first Earthseed community being destroyed. She’s on a mission, and the mantra “God is Change” is both her instrument and goal. When she becomes the sower (hence the title), Earthseed cell groups are popping up everywhere and cannot be stopped by a national state that is slow in action.

The Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* are similarly divided into cell groups. They have secret factions prepared for the Waterless Flood. When one group is destroyed, a similar will soon spring up in a different location. Such flexibility may be the greatest evolutionary advantage of *Homo sapiens* contra animals. We can manipulate society to better suit our needs. According to Joseph Carroll, this plasticity gives our species a great advantage over

animals, as animals “operate mainly by means of instinct” whereas humans “create mental models of the world” and make choices based on the different settings within those models (“Human Nature” 87). Amanda in *The Year of the Flood* is taught to be flexible through a tough childhood, an ability she has refined nearly into perfection. Ren observes how Amanda changes like a chameleon and blends in everywhere she goes (*Flood* 101-03). Ren learns from Amanda that embracing change instead of fighting it is probably advantageous. “To grasp the world in perpetual motion is to confront the problem of future possible worlds” (Phillips 302). The Gardeners and the followers of Earthseed learn how to live under altered conditions and to change with them.

In a highly technological environment, instincts evolved through more than one hundred thousand years will still be important, but perhaps not sufficient: “*Homo sapiens* now lives in environments that must differ in numerous ways from the ‘natural’ environments in which its universal features evolved” (Brown 100). Human nature is rather tailored for living in a cave than in a modern city, in small groups as opposed to populous communities, and D.S. Wilson suggests that “we might be psychologically adapted to live in groups that vary in size from ten to a thousand, but genetically unprepared for the megagroups of modern life” (“Evolutionary Social Constructivism” 116). For quick decisions, we must rely on our instincts, but they may prove inappropriate. For long-term decisions, flexibility and knowledge will enhance our fitness. In their seminal work on evolution of cultures, Boyd and Richerson argue that in a novel situation “every species is forced to rely upon what is, in effect, a very general learning capability” (70). The capacity for learning and accordingly modifying their behaviour is a huge advantage for humans: Both Lauren and Toby benefit from playing along with nature and knowing nature, but also from learning life skills. In addition, they know the value of reciprocally sharing their talents with others. Lauren and Toby have the ability to plan – to imagine the future. Toby has her Ararat of supplies, and Lauren has her pillowcase for emergencies. Both learn from others; Toby mostly from fellow Gardeners, and Lauren from books. The story about Noah and the ark inspires both of them. Listening to her father’s sermon about Noah’s struggle to survive the flood, Lauren’s reaction is thus: “*But* if Noah is going to be saved, he has plenty of hard work to do” (68). It is as if she is preparing for her own rescue, and she has a pragmatic view of what it takes to be a survivor. She is determined to be one and simply tells her friend “I intend to survive” (58). Frederick Buell describes Lauren as “someone with no self-pity,” or a realist understanding that the only people they should trust, are themselves (317). Lauren’s friend is waiting for somebody to come and rescue them, but Lauren tells her the harsh reality: “Nothing is going

to save us. If we don't save ourselves, we're dead" (59). She has understood that she must find the strength within herself.

Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* does not find the utopian landscape she has dreamt of. Reaching the place of destination, the group understands that it is neither much better nor safer than the one they have left behind, but together they now form a diverse group that evolves into a community. Lauren does not find her Utopia; she creates it. With this, the text offers a solution: Humans can live almost anywhere if they join forces and form a humane and sustainable civilization. Lauren starts with one person: Herself. In *The Year of the Flood*, the Gardeners already live in a functioning community into which Toby strives to earn a full membership. The text suggests that a new society rises from the scraps of the old, consisting of the most fit and adaptable members from before the plague. Glenn's approach, however, is to shun cooperation and go solo. The hope lies within those who choose cooperation and thereby, through mutual efforts, can provide safety for each other in the human habitat. That secured, *Homo sapiens* can thrive almost anywhere.

Chapter 2: “I Know How You Feel”

Through observation and interaction, we form an opinion of other people’s thoughts and feelings. If they smile, we tend to think they are happy, and if they tell us about their experiences, we make a qualified guess of what it must feel like to be them. This ability comes with different labels. Cognitive scientists, for instance, call the talent intuitive psychology or folk psychology, but they most often refer to it as Theory of Mind. Steven Pinker explains that “‘theory’ here refers to the tacit beliefs held by a person ... not to the explicit beliefs of scientists” (*The Blank Slate* 60-61). Humans understand that fellow humans have their own motives and concerns and that they may well be different from their own. Donald Brown claims that “spontaneously and intuitively” the Universal People will interpret other people’s thoughts and emotions (135), and that they “interpret external behavior to grasp interior intention” (134). In this chapter, Theory of Mind will provide a perspective for my discussion of Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*. Theory of Mind will hopefully reveal structures in these dystopian narratives that make them in fact “dystopian”; that is, why we find them as describing “bad places.” I will examine the characters’ individual and communal traits and also look at the nature/nurture aspect as these may suggest how the dystopian societies inflict on their inhabitants.

Lisa Zunshine, a literary scholar with a special interest in Theory of Mind, calls it “mind-reading” and describes it as “our ability to explain people’s behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires” (6). She states that, “Theory of Mind appears to be our key cognitive endowment as a *social* species” (8). Theory of Mind and empathy may easily be confused, but the latter also includes an “affective component of empathic responses” (Goubert et al. 153), while Theory of Mind only describes the cognitive ability. With the exception of a small number of species, including some of the non-human primates, animals do not have Theory of Mind. Baboons, for instance, may have the ability to attribute simple mental states to others, whereas cats do not seem to be able to do the same. Dorothy L. Cheney and Robert Seyfarth have studied baboons’ social abilities and compared them to human social abilities. They found that when a baby baboon is separated from its group, it will use contact barks, but members of the group will typically only answer its barks if they find themselves in similar circumstances. If they are safe within the group, they do not seem to react to barks of distress, but if they are outside, they will usually respond. This means that

they probably can identify with other baboons' state of mind, but only if the other baboon's state of mind is similar to their own (160-61). Cheney and Seyfarth conclude by declaring that "the technological and innovative skills evident in rudimentary forms in chimpanzees (and hyperbolically so in humans) have their roots in the selective forces that originally favored the evolution of social skills" (282). A human mother would typically be in great distress if one of her children were lost regardless of her own situation, as humans have the ability to recognize other individuals' states of mind even if they are very different from their own.

Joseph Carroll hypothesizes that because humans are such a social species and because successful communication is so multifaceted as well as highly valued, a person excelling in this respect may be seen as especially attractive. Therefore, "having an intuitive insight into the workings of human nature can reasonably be posited as an evolved and adaptive capacity" ("Evolutionary Paradigm" 115). Theory of Mind seems to be innate as well as learned: The "architecture" of Theory of Mind is inherent, but the faculty is developed through interaction. As Paul Hernadi maintains, cultural exposure will enhance our ability to "read" others (33). Make-believe is an element of Theory of Mind, as we use our imagination to interpret for instance body language and verbal utterances. In fact, there seems to be a link between storytelling and Theory of Mind (see Sugiyama 189; Dutton 105, 109, 134). Sugiyama suggests that "storytelling may help or strengthen theory of mind, which in turn enriches storytelling, which further enriches theory of mind, and so on" (189). Thus, narration and Theory of Mind mutually and perpetually strengthen each other. The lack of this faculty is considered a deficit and is a defining feature of autism. People with autism or Asperger's syndrome typically do not see the point of make-believe (see Sugiyama 189; Tooby and Cosmides, "Does Beauty Build" 176; Wells 239-40; Dutton 119). Obviously, this impairment is a great disadvantage, as Theory of Mind is so important in human interaction. In *Oryx and Crake*, the Watson-Crick University, which students like Crake attend, actually goes by the nickname "Asperger's U." Ren, in *The Year of the Flood*, writes in her journal that the prostitutes had to be careful with the CorpSeCorps men because they "didn't understand make-believe" (155). There is no indication in the text that there are an increasing number of people without Theory of Mind, but they are, however, given more status, and may therefore be more successful over time as a result of sexual selection. A long lasting socio-political change that favors individuals without Theory of Mind, will therefore eventually make a possible impact on whose genes will be passed on.

In Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, when Blanco's men capture Amanda and Ren, and it is hinted that they do something horrendous to them, the reader will have to provide the

details themselves. The clues given in the text are scarce: “I don’t want to think about what happened next. It was worse for Amanda than for me” (409). Amanda has experienced something similar before, and Ren retells the story in her journal: “A lot of people drowned, but she and her mother held on to a tree and got rescued by some men in a rowboat. They were thieves, said Amanda, looking for stuff they could lift, but they said they’d take Amanda and her mother to dry land and a shelter if they’d do a trade. ‘What kind of trade?’ I said. ‘Just a trade,’ said Amanda” (100-01). Also on this occasion, Ren seems to tell, by not telling. Using Theory of Mind as a tool, the reader will think that what went on was too terrible for words and accordingly come up with the worst thinkable scenario. Narrative theorist H. Porter Abbott writes that Theory of Mind is an ability that emerges when we are toddlers, and that we tend to trust our particular skill to such an extent that we are stunned if we understand that we have misinterpreted others (718; see also Dutton 119). The “mindreading” takes place while reading books, as well; we guess what will happen, and even if we are often wrong, we make inferences based on the belief that we understand others. This is one possible method for interpretation of narratives; we make use of our mindreading ability to read characters as we would read real people. All literary texts contain gaps in the information provided for the reader. Authors often exploit Theory of Mind to create expectations, which they then violate for effect. Theory of Mind is essential in filling the gaps, and the reader benefits from this faculty as well as her experience when interpreting the information given in the text.²

If we did not possess the faculty referred to as Theory of Mind, our society would look very different. Communication would have to be more direct and less ambiguous, and because make-believe would be considered nonsense, the fine arts would probably be non-existent. On the other hand, what if we, through evolution, had developed an even stronger version of Theory of Mind? If we felt other people’s emotions instead of merely understanding them, we would become similar to some of the characters Butler has created. Lauren Olamina is a “sharer.” She and some other characters in *Parable of the Sower* suffer from hyperempathy, a damage caused by their mothers’ drug abuse. They feel the pain and pleasure they see in others. Lauren knows it is only a “false” sense; if someone is only pretending to be in pain, she will still feel it as if it were real (11-12). “Sharing” is above all a great disadvantage to her; it makes her vulnerable, as even watching others being injured results in immobility. In the dismal surroundings of her childhood, she must avoid looking at

² Wolfgang Iser does not use the phrase “Theory of Mind,” but he discusses our ability to interpret other people’s actions and intentions. He maintains that we rely on the ability of others to understand us: “We react as if we knew how our partners experienced us; we continually form views of their views, and then act as if our views of their views were realities” (1675).

people getting hurt and she must try not to reveal her weak spot. She calls it her “particular biological humility – or humiliation” (14). On the road, going north, Lauren and her companions encounter many violent groups, and they are attacked numerous times. Fending for herself, Lauren must endure also the pain of her enemies: “It wasn’t the worst pain I had ever shared, but it came close. I was worthless after delivering that one blow. I think I was unconscious for a while” (189). Thus, to avoid being left paralyzed and vulnerable by the pain, she must try to avoid putting herself in such situations.

Lauren also shares pleasure, but as she writes, “there isn’t much pleasure around these days” (12). Hyperempathy would make nursing very difficult, and Lauren finds it very hard to tend to people who are injured because she has to share their pain. The only satisfaction Lauren gets from her special sensitivity is through sexual activity since she will enjoy the sensation of both parties (12). The overdose of empathy makes her stand out from the cold, uncaring society. It makes it difficult for her to cause pain to others and it makes her more sensitive to all the suffering caused by the political system (or the lack thereof). Butler equips her heroine with this particular Achilles heel and makes it her greatest forte. Lauren becomes an activist for a better world.

Lauren in Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* suffers from malevolence caused by fellow humans. She experiences anarchy, hunger and despair. Her solution is to fight for a better future, but in Robledo, she obviously belongs to a minority. She observes that “people are setting fires because they’re frustrated, angry hopeless. They have no power to improve their lives, but they have the power to make others even more miserable” (143). Even though it seems as if the citizens of Robledo have become less human, there is nothing more human than taking pleasure in causing other people pain. The term “human” is usually associated with positive traits, such as compassion and altruism, but being human also means being capable of evil. Because humans possess a full-fledged Theory of Mind, they are able to purposely inflict mental or physical pain upon others. Nonhuman animals, most of whom are completely “mindblind,” are fully capable of causing injury to one another, but always as a means to some other end. They fight and steal to attain commodities that would otherwise be out of their reach, such as a desired food or mating partner. Humans pose an entirely different type of threat. They are uniquely able to deliberately choose behaviours that affect other people’s mental states in certain ways, such as torture to cause pain or threats to cause fear. A “mindblind” animal would not be able to understand the causal relationship between these conducts and the mental states of other beings.

There seems to be a difference between the antagonists in *Parable of the Sower*: Some inhabitants of Robledo have lost their ability to feel empathy partly due to modern drugs. In addition to legal medicines with side effects like the ones that cause hyperempathy, they also have an illegal drug, Pyro, turning people into arsonists (144). The Pyro addicts are described as inhuman in many respects. They are hairless with painted heads, faces and hands, and they have “crazy eyes” (154). Pyro thereby seems to make humans “mindblind,” and consequently unable to see the harm they cause. Women and children in Robledo are seen as gift baskets of “food, money, and sex” (154), so Lauren must expect to be raped or robbed if she is not extremely cautious. She does not regard the Pyro addicts as fully human, and calls them “scavengers,” “painted faces,” and “maggots” (158-59). The same dehumanizing technique is used in *The Year of the Flood* as Amanda describes people who have got the plague as “clot[s] on legs” and “zombie people” (387). Jerry Phillips describes Butler’s future America as “an atavistic, nihilistic world in which people are either predator or prey” (304). It is not a description of a reciprocally altruistic society, but an extremely asymmetrical one where both the middle class and the lower class get little or nothing, and a few collects the rest. If you show weakness, you will be prey. Lauren Olamina in *Parable of the Sower* is aware of how her own body exposes her emotions, so she tries to hide them as best as she can, even to those close to her. She is not totally honest with her childhood boyfriend, either (140). There is another reason why she has to be especially careful: Lauren has normal Theory of Mind in addition to her own hyperempathy, and must be meticulous in channelling her feelings where they can do good, while not jeopardising her own safety. In *Parable of the Talents* Lauren’s daughter, Larkin, says that her mother hated her talent, but in spite of this Larkin wonders what it would feel like to have her mother’s sensitivity. She thinks it would help her understand other people and “really know them” (296).

Lauren starts her journey north together with two young adults from her community, Zahra and Harry, who have lost their families. The three of them have seen friends and neighbours being slaughtered, and must share information so as to gain knowledge of what has happened to everybody. They have a hard time coming to terms with the cruelty they have witnessed. Harry cannot believe that the Pyro addicts kill little children (170). Lauren and Harry need time to adjust to a new understanding of what people may be capable of, but Zahra, who has lived outside the walls before, enlightens them: “‘They kill little kids,’ she said. ‘Out here in the world, they kill kids every day’” (170). Harry learns that people can be even more callous than he had expected, and this new knowledge changes him. As explained above, Theory of Mind has innate components, but cultural input and experience will teach us

more specifically what behaviours and responses we should expect when interacting with other people. Sudden cultural change will consequently challenge our ability to “mind-read,” for learning is a rather slow process.

Toby in *The Year of the Flood* is portrayed as quite the reverse of Lauren. She is a loner, and she claims she never knows what others are thinking. At least that is her reply to the incessant queries from Lucerne, Ren’s mother, about Zeb’s possible motives (138). Lucerne wants Toby to see Zeb through her eyes, and then tell her what his intentions might be, but Toby is either unwilling or unable to do so. Toby seems to notice Zeb more than other men, so perhaps her answer indicates that she does not want to get involved in other people’s problems, especially if one of these individuals is Zeb. In fact, Toby seems to have a well-developed Theory of Mind, even though she claims the opposite. There are several occasions in her description of Nuala, a fellow Gardener, where Toby seems to have seen through the woman’s manipulative behaviour. When Nuala pleads for Adam One’s absolution, Toby sees that Nuala “gave him her only-you-understand-me look” (200): If Toby recognizes this look, she must have seen it earlier and made the same inference then. Toby is especially attuned to Zeb, and by listening to his voice, she seems to get hidden messages: “Lucerne was having a lot of headaches, he said. His voice was neutral, but there was an edge to it. By which Toby understood that the headaches might not be real; or else that they were real enough but Zeb found them boring anyway” (132). The last part might be wishful thinking because she does not want Zeb to find other women interesting. Lucerne is everything Toby is not: Sexy, voluptuous, and seemingly empty-headed. She seems to use her sexuality to avoid doing any household chores, and she gets away with it. Her constant chatter indicates that she does not understand that Toby feels any animosity towards her.

Toby’s body language seems to be hard to read, and she is often misinterpreted. Nobody suspects that she is interested in Zeb, for instance. We get the impression that Toby does not speak unless it is required. Instead she spends most of her time observing the actions of others as well as analysing their intentions and emotions. She extends this analysis to animals, and accordingly, calculating what pigs may or may not do, she equips them with human cunning. The pigs surround the health clinic where she has found shelter, and they are dangerous. When Toby estimates the danger factor of going outside to look for food, she takes into consideration that the pigs may figure out the range of her pistol (383), thereby showing that she believes they have the cognition of human cognitive abilities. In Toby’s view, the pigs might even feel revengeful so that “they’ll keep her in mind, they won’t forgive her” (22). According to the research cited above, Theory of Mind is probably present in some

of the great apes, but even apes are not revengeful, only people are. Because the pigs Toby sees are uncommonly large, she thinks that they must have escaped from an experimental farm. Consequently, they might be “pigoons” rather than just normal pigs, with “human stem cells and DNA” made to be producers of human spare parts (262). The border between human and non-human becomes fuzzy, as Atwood’s future animals could be equipped with Theory of Mind.

A Gardener, it seems, should preferably not expose feelings too openly. Such an ideal puts pressure on people’s ability to mind read. Pilar, one of the older Gardeners, is obviously gifted in this respect, and in Toby’s opinion, “Pilar could usually guess what she was thinking” (203). Since the Gardeners are not supposed to talk about their personal feelings, Toby appreciates Pilar’s particular sensitivity. Adam One is also described as a good reader of human expressions, even though it takes some time for Toby to realize it (117). He can discover when Toby and others are in distress, but he is good at hiding his own intentions and emotions. Toby reminds herself not to take too lightly on Adam One’s well-hidden skill. It’s a strong weapon to be able to foresee other people’s actions, and Toby understands that “it would be a mistake to underestimate him” (117). Toby ponders upon humans’ almost autistic approach to facts: “As with all knowledge, once you knew it, you couldn’t imagine how it was that you hadn’t known it before” (224). The Gardeners proclaim their scepticism towards technology, and teach the children not to trust computers, so when Toby discovers that the Adams and Eves have had secret laptops all along, she feels stupid for not having understood this earlier. Toby wants to learn as much as she can, but the outcome does not make her happy. The mould set out for her is too narrow and uncomfortable, and she does not seem to know whom the real Toby is. The children trust her, and it seems the rest of the Gardeners do as well, hence she is eventually elected an Eve. Toby is seen as unwavering and solid, and Ren writes in her journal that “we trusted Toby more; you’d trust a rock more than a cake” (75). Ren sees her as “leathery inside and out” (75). She hides her emotions like a good Gardener, and is therefore often misunderstood. Twice she gives in to tears: The first time is when Adam One saves her, and she experiences almost a religious sensation, and she cries in relief (52). The second time she cries, it is not from happiness but from a feeling of bereavement. She remembers her mother and father and realises that her past is not real anymore – it is only “a mirage” or some “neuron pathways” in her brain (284). Science does not console her, and she is looking for something to replace it, but she fights hard not to let others know how she feels.

Ren is younger than Toby, and during the events described in *The Year of the Flood*, she is first a child and then a maturing woman. She never seems to reach the same level of mindreading as Toby. Ren's empathy seems to correspond with characters in similar conditions to her own at a given time, almost like in the example with the lost baby baboon above. When interpreting Jimmy's feelings, Ren projects her own, rather than fully comprehending that he is a different human being with different emotions and intentions: "I could tell he was sad underneath, because I was that way myself" (259). She thinks that Jimmy is sad, only because she herself is sad, which is a rather primitive assumption. Earlier Ren has come to understand how Bernice must have felt when she heard her father was having an affair, but not until she finds herself in similar circumstances (242). At the same time, Ren is capable of intricate mind games, and is able to manipulate the way other people perceive her. After she has left the Gardeners and rejoined HelthWyzer, she entertains her schoolmates with stories from her life with the Gardeners in order to gain acclaim, but it does not make her feel good: "I saw myself the way the Adams and the Eves would see me: with sadness, with disappointment" (258). She sees herself through the eyes of the Gardeners, and she does not like the image.

Ren attributes mental states to others, but she is perhaps better at using people as mirrors than empathizing with them. Therefore, it is quite surprising to see the change in her when she meets Croze again – the young man who was with her, Amanda and Oates when they were attacked by Blanco and his men. Ren knows that Oates is dead, because she has seen his body, and she wonders what she should tell Croze when he asks her:

"Did you see Oates?" He sounds worried. I don't want to spoil this time by telling him about something so unhappy. Poor Oates, hanging in a tree with his throat cut and his kidneys missing. But then I look at his face and realize that I've misunderstood: it's me he's worried about, because he already knows about Oates. [...] If I say no, he'll most likely pretend that Oates is still alive, so as not to upset me. "Yes," I say. We did see him. I'm sorry. (464-65)

Ren has matured. She is now able to see that Croze is a discrete human being, and that he has his own set of feelings and emotions. In order to protect her, he asks her an ambiguous question: He leaves it up to her to reveal if she has seen Oates dead or not, and Ren recognizes this. With Blanco, it is different. He never seems to mature. The reader never learns what he thinks, but based on a conversation Toby and Ren overhear, he is not a good

mind reader. He seems to think other people are like him, and consequently he warns his friends about what the Crakers will do: “Tear us apart and eat us” (501).

Atwood creates a brand new species in *The Year of the Flood*. Glenn and his group of scientists have developed the new humanoids through the Paradise Project. Ren calls them “Glenn’s made-on-purpose people” (490), but they go by many different names: “the splice people,” “[t]he perfect ones” (475), “the blue people” (476), but also “the savages” (501). In *Oryx and Crake*, they are called “the Crakers.” Clearly, it is difficult to label a different hominid species so similar to, yet so different from, *Homo sapiens*. The Crakers are all young, good looking, come in a multitude of colours, and Ren thinks they look like “ads for the AnooYoo Spas” (491), something that indicates that they appear flawless. Fredric Jameson describes them with the term “Noble Savages” (“Then You Are Them”), pointing toward Rousseau’s romantic ideas of uncontaminated human beings living in harmony with nature. It is obvious that Toby and Ren are unsure of how to define these new creatures, and that their instincts cannot help them decide whether to treat them as animals or as humans. They therefore try a combination where they talk with them, without ever turning their backs to them. When Toby and Ren meet them, Toby comments that, “The same rules [apply] as for animals” (491).

Based on the original make-up of the Crakers, it seems as if Glenn has intended to make a species without Theory of Mind. For instance, instead of interpreting words and body language to find out if females are sexually receptive, they use visual signals. Their genital areas turn blue (475), reminiscent of a baboon’s red bottom, so the Crakers can get visible evidence for states of mind instead of going through the hassle or joys of interpreting more subtle body signals or oral language. Even so, they seem to be capable of reading body language, as they describe a woman who “smelled blue, but didn’t act blue” (492). The utterance shows that they have the ability to reflect, not only react, as when the Crakers understand that they can make Jimmy happy by offering him fish (494). Besides, they seem to be equipped with a body language interpretable to *Homo sapiens*, as Toby and Ren seem to understand the Crakers when they observe that “something’s worrying them” (494). The Crakers worry in a way animals would not do, as they feel concerned that Jimmy lies sick somewhere, and they intend to go looking for him (494). Their features indicate that Glenn has planned to create a perfect people, leading a carefree, perfect life. By signalling with their blue, erect penises, they will have sex when they feel like it and thus “[e]liminate romantic pain” (945). However, the result seems to deviate from the master plan, as the Crakers can both read body language and worry about others. They are even religious, and see Glenn as a

sort of god: “Glenn lives in the sky. He loves us” (494). They seem to have a basic version of Theory of Mind, or the ability is developing quickly.

Ren compares the CorpSeMen to machines, and Glenn is “a top guy at the Rejoov Corp” (364-65), which means she finds him machinelike, as well. In her journal, Ren writes that Glenn is “such a cold fish, but he [can] have sex, all right, just like a human being” (366). She concludes that he only acts human when he is with Oryx, his girlfriend (366). Glenn is a mystery. He is obviously intelligent, and he understands that others think differently than him. Accordingly, he knows that he is inflicting pain on others, but he does not seem to care. He manipulates the CorpSeCorps to fund his research by promising them immortality. The vicarious motive ensures a steady flow of money pouring into his personal project. To Glenn, an eradication of the human race might serve a higher purpose, namely to save the planet. In that case, it is strongly inconsistent, however, that he intends to allow himself and Oryx to survive the plague. Perhaps they are meant to be the second Adam and Eve in Paradise. *Neanderthals* and *Homo sapiens* once lived concurrently on earth, and consequently there were two human species in competition. In *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood might try to recreate the scenario in fiction and explore what species will win this time.

Murray Smith, claims that filmmakers tend to be careful of showing a villain’s expressions of distress, because it is human to mimic them (264-65), and directors normally do not want the viewers to connect emotionally with the crook. By mimicking, we also feel what we think they feel, albeit in a mitigated form, based on the premise that we “are capable of complex, sympathetic reactions even to our enemies” (266). Ellen Dissanayake supports this view: “Simply making the facial or vocal correlate of an emotion tends to release the brain chemicals that cause people to *feel* the emotion” (149). Smith suggests that empathy has its origin in a stronger form, much like Lauren’s hyperempathy, with which “individual members of social species would be sensitive to, and feel as if their own, the emotional states of their conspecifics” (265). One should think that what Smith and Dissanayake refer to, also applies when reading fiction. The reader is encouraged to sympathize neither with Blanco in *The Year of the Flood* nor the Pyro addicts in *Parable of the Sower*, as we are not given the chance to “see” their facial expressions, for instance. Blanco is the villain in the story. Both Ren and Toby’s narratives describe him as a stereotypical evil person, a sociopath. Toby thinks of him as a “beetle” and a “fuck-pig” (458-59). He habitually rapes her when he is her boss at Secret Burger, and when she escapes, he wants revenge. Toby even imagines Blanco beheaded: in her daydreams, she sees him “headless, hanging upside down” (118), and without his head present, it is conveniently impossible for her to look at his face and thereby

mirror his emotions. She uses the same technique when Blanco is raping her. She makes herself focus on his hands and other parts of his body as if they are cut off and with blood pouring out (116). The blood she imagines is not even red, it is grey, as if it was waste oil from a machine. Ren seems to be aware of this mirror effect and plans to use it if she is attacked. She will try to look directly into the eyes of the attackers, as she assumes “they’re more likely to swarm you from behind” (397).

For genes to be transferred to the next generation the body they are in must survive long enough to procreate; therefore, the successful genes will be the ones that contribute to their vessel’s staying alive. With this requisition, it is logical to think that a mechanism only fending for itself would be the best vessel. If this were the case, egotism in humans would be enhanced through evolution. Scientists and philosophers discuss whether humans are basically good or evil, selfish or selfless. Even a selfish man could act in ways that help others if the consequence is a returned favour. According to Stephan Shennan, reciprocal altruism relies on self-interest. If you help others, they will in turn help you, and this will go on until one of you breaks the “contract” (29). Thereby there is no real cost. People, however, continually demonstrate selfless behaviour (see Boyd and Richerson 145). Why some humans donate organs to total strangers, for instance, is difficult to explain. It does make evolutionary sense to donate when a child who carries your genes needs your help, but people tend to show generosity also towards people in general; altruism is common human practise. Donald E. Brown finds that humans give each other gifts, whether the favour is returned or not (138).

Humans demonstrate altruism not only in practical situations, for the moral code of the Universal People also includes rules about making and keeping promises (139). As to why this is so, there are many theories. Game theory suggests that people more easily show altruism in groups not exceeding 6-10 individuals. If there are more, people tend to fear that egotistic persons may take advantage of them (see Shennan 215). Walter Flesch posits one possible explanation to altruism: we tend to think others are like ourselves, and if we help, or do not help others, it will eventually influence our own successfulness (29). Altruistic behaviour in others is appreciated, and when reading narratives, “we can cheer on the altruistic character” while also appreciating “the storyteller who arranges these things” (Flesch 361). The reader wants Lauren and Toby to succeed, because they both are good-doers. We like reading in the newspapers about people who have rescued others while risking their own life. The cold, hard-hearted societies depicted in *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, illustrate what our world could look like if people lost faith in reciprocal

altruism. As discussed above, people tend to distrust the morale of a large group more than a smaller. If experience shows an individual that he/she is right in being sceptical, scepticism will increase (see Shennan 214-15). This phenomenon is illustrated in both narratives. The characters stop relying on the society to protect them, and they therefore organize private security. They fend for themselves, for their kin and near kin, but selfless behaviour seems only to be evident in smaller groups like Earthseed and the Gardeners. Lauren tries to change the society by personally changing one individual at a time. Atwood's text indicates that the Gardeners may have started in the same way, but that they have expanded into a whole community of smaller, autonomous groups spreading through the country.

Scales and Tails, the brothel in *The Year of the Flood*, demonstrates how humans have become commodity in the novel. Those buying sex there are not interested in people; in fact it seems as if they want the girls to look like perfect sex animals rather than members of the human species. The "Scalies" are dressed in "biofilm" and resemble fish or birds, something that makes it easier for the customers to ignore that they are indeed human. As noted above, Murray Smith describes how people typically mimic the facial expressions of others, which in this case would make them connect emotionally with their "victims" (265). In both *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, the society requires from its members that they have something to barter; if they have nothing, they will get nothing. Everything has a prize. Consequently, it is vital to improve the product, even when they themselves are the products. Ren and Toby in *The Year of the Flood* both live, at one point, in institutions made to improve the "value" of the "product"; the female bodies: Ren in the brothel, Scales and Tails, and Toby in the beauty parlour, AnooYoo, an establishment designated to make your new body more valuable than the old. At a crucial moment Ren stops seeing herself as "a time-share meat-hole" (402), and she does it by listening to her emotions: Instead of giving Croze sex only because he wants it, she decides to refuse him (473), and her rejection is accepted (476). When Amanda first came to the Gardeners, she had lived on the streets for a long time, and she had managed on her own. Ren sees her as having a high market value, because she seems to know how to work the market to her benefit. Amanda sells people what they want from her; her body, as well as her artwork: "She wanted everything to be a trade, because giving things for nothing, was too soft" (388). Amanda is careful only to take part in bilateral exchanges, and love is seen as trade with skewed distribution. Ren writes in her journal that Amanda "said love was useless, because it led you into dumb exchanges in which you gave too much away, and then you got bitter and mean" (260). Only with Ren she shares, most often without a thought of getting anything in return. Once, as a child, she even sells sex to be

able to give Ren a gift (187-88). Almost to the end, Amanda is in control of her actions. She knows her value and does not let anybody use her without getting anything in return. Towards the end of the narrative, Blanco and his men seem to have broken both her will and her body. Ren comments on how the men will see Amanda now: “I see Amanda as they see her: used up, worn out. Worthless” (501). Amanda is invaluable to Ren, but has lost all value in the market.

Glenn’s genocide can be seen as an ultimate altruistic act. Jimmy elaborates over this when he hears about Glenn’s plans:

“I didn’t know you were so altruistic,” said Jimmy. Since when had Crake been a cheerleader for the human race?

“It’s not altruism exactly,” said Crake. “More like sink or swim. I’ve seen the latest confidential Corps demographic reports. As a species we’re in deep trouble, worse than anyone’s saying. They’re afraid to release the stats because people might just give up, but take it from me, we’re running out of space-time. Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply *for everyone*. With the BlyssPluss Pill the human race will have a better chance of swimming.” (*Oryx* 347)

However, Glenn can also be viewed as a misanthropic mad scientist, as he totally disregards the sanctity of human life and is ready to start Der Totale Krieg against humanity. The question is whether he plans for the perfect society for people in general, or for himself and *Oryx* exclusively: It seems he wants them to be the only ones to “swim.”

The walled communities in *Parable of the Sower* are built on a belief that friends and families there “know,” and “help” each other and they “depend” on each other (35). Since they cannot rely on society, they have to make sure their alliances are reliable. Lauren is worried when they let the “Payne-Perrishes” into their community,³ as she “wouldn’t want to depend on them” (35). In a neighbourly relationship where all members must put their lives in the hands of the others, it is not easy to accept the weaker links. Lauren realizes that her only hope is that there are better places elsewhere, and that she should go looking. Her loyalty to her stepmother, half-brothers and neighbours, makes it difficult for her to think that she would

³ Note that also a character in *The Year of the Flood* has this name: (Amanda) Payne

leave them. It also makes it difficult to stay. She could bring them with her, but it would be dangerous and she does not want to ask them to “walk away from food and shelter” (141). In the end, there is nothing holding her back, as there is no one left to leave behind. When she meets her future husband, Bankole, she learns that he has a similar background (264). They have both lived in communities that have offered protection, and in return, they have helped with what means they have. Bankole has regularly used his knowledge in medicine in give-and-take situations, and he will be a vital contribution to Lauren’s first Earthseed community. When building it, she must try to make it as robust as possible by choosing members that will be able to secure each other’s needs.

The way the protagonists of both novels are described, they seem to benefit from their instincts as well as their culturally acquired knowledge of how to interpret the behaviour of others. They rely on Theory of Mind to help them read others and anticipate their actions, and they have reciprocally shared and received within their groups. It is not possible to draw a border between where their cultural upbringing stops and their instincts take over. Conversely, the Gardeners and the Earthseed community clearly value the safety and cooperation that will exist in a well-composed group. Jerry Phillips suggests that Earthseed is the manifestation of Lauren’s realization that she needs others and that others need her: “Earthseed is the practical ethics of this heightened consciousness of what it means to experience being as, irreducibly, being-with-others” (306). Lauren gathers people that will fill different positions in her new society, much in the same way Toby and Ren appreciate the safety and comfort they experience when finding members of Maddaddam and God’s Gardeners after the “flood.”

Not only scientists, but also scholars of almost all disciplines discuss humans as products of nature and nurture. Darwin, in *The Descent of Man*, stated that “[man] still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin” (78). In other words, Darwin posits that our features show that we have descended from species considered inferior to humans. His research shows that human behaviour has gone through evolution in the same manner. Darwin’s results were misinterpreted then, and today as well, to imply that our behaviour is determined by our instincts. However, as D. S. Wilson proclaims, all life forms are flexible: “No organism is so simple that it is instructed by its genes to ‘do x’” (115). The Gardeners, through their hymns and Adam One’s sermons, pronounce scepticism towards the results of modern culture, where the word “fell” reveals their negative attitude towards so-called progression: “The ancestral primates fell out of the trees ... They fell from instinct to reason” (224). Adam One emphasises repetitively that humans are primates that developed

through natural and sexual selection. According to Richard Dawkins, “[t]he world becomes full of organisms that have what it takes to become ancestors” (56), but it seems the Gardeners believe that the evolution has stopped or has gone in the wrong direction. Evolution is no longer a natural process, but it is made technological through human intervention.

Fredric Jameson claims that the Fall that Adam One refers to should, against the background of Atwood’s earlier work *Surfacing*, be “understood to be a fall into Americanism” (“Then You Are Them”; see also Bouson 19), thereby giving the biblical allusion a political edge: The world has lost its innocence due to the contagious American lifestyle. The biblical Fall of Man is a fall from innocence into guilty knowledge, and Jameson suggests that Atwood’s version of the Fall attacks “technology, mechanisation, mass production,” which in Atwood’s dystopia have become global (“Then You Are Them”): The Gardeners live according to restored ideals, almost like an exemplification of the Rousseauian “Noble Savage.” They try to live in symbiosis with nature, as the rest of the world has become parasitical. While the Crakers can be described as the “Noble Savages” of a perfect society, the Gardeners are “Noble Savages” with flaws, between fellow faulty human beings. While the compounders, the elite, try to elevate themselves as far from nature as possible, the Gardeners go in the opposite direction. The compounders despise the natural: Aging, imperfections regarding breast size, and hair loss must be avoided or altered. The Gardeners are children of the same culture, but they try to unlearn what they have learnt, and instead listen to their instincts. Hannes Bergthaller calls it “to behave like a part of nature because they *are* a part of nature” (731). He points to the implied paradox that lies in the fact that “humans, in order to behave naturally, must cultivate themselves” (731).

Glenn, on the other hand, believes in neither culture nor nature. He will take action, not to let evolution work alone, but give it extensive help: He creates a totally new human species without what he sees as flaws. At the same time, he tries to eradicate the whole human race. After having read both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, it is still not clear if he wants himself and his girlfriend to be the only *Homo sapiens* left alive. To infer from his high ego and idolization of Oryx, he plans for them to be the next Adam and Eve in his Paradise Project. The Adams and Eves on Edencliff may have given him the inspiration, but they seem to outsmart him. Many of them survive, but he does not. Members of the Gardeners seem to have survived the apocalypse to a larger extent than the rest of the population. Their planning for the disaster seems to pay off. They learn to rely on their animal instincts, and foraging plays a vital part. Their so-called Ararats provide them with what they

need to survive the first critical phase of the apocalypse. Lauren Olamina in *Parable of the Sower* has made similar arrangements. Both the Gardeners and Lauren seem to benefit from their minds and their ability of imagining the impossible in addition to listening to their instincts. Lauren has learnt to live and deal with her innate hyperempathy, and her knowledge of human instincts helps her in dealing with people. She gathers information she might need in an unforeseeable future by reading everything from science fiction to science books.

The Gardeners are urged to study nature and learn from it. Toby has paid attention and shows her superior aptitude in playing along with her instincts: she is constantly watching her back (73), and is careful not to look like prey. Adam One holds up the animals as ideals in his sermons and tells his congregation that what animals are born with, people must learn. Their oral Hymnbook contains the verses telling them that: “God gave name unto the Animals / A wisdom past our power to see: / Each knows innately how to live, / Which we must learn laboriously” (281). At other times, Adam One states that the Gardeners should combine instinct and reason, like he says the snakes do, and the same hymn recommends: “Not only with a thinking Brain / But with a swift and ardent Soul” (281). Humans have a particular instinctive fear of snakes (see Dutton 18, 26), and Adam One explains that “Sometimes it is shown as an evil enemy of Humankind – perhaps because, when our Primate ancestors slept in trees, the Constrictors were among their few nocturnal predators” (278). Adam One proclaims nonetheless that humans should seek “Serpent Wisdom” and be more like them, because the serpent “experiences God in all parts of itself; it feels the vibration of Divinity that runs through the Earth, and responds to them quicker than thought” (279), thus proclaiming that instinct is most important and almost like the voice of God.

That humans have fallen “from instinct into reason” is one of Adam One’s decrees (224), thus indicating which is preferable. Jimmy, when left alone with the Crakers, starts living in a tree, as though reversing the process of evolution. He is climbing the trees that the Gardeners’ “ancestral primates fell out of” a long time ago. Our ancestors climbed trees probably to be able to stay safe from predators especially. At their most vulnerable, for instance at sleep, the trees were a good place to hide. The Gardeners seem to think that humans should find back to the instincts they once had by kindling it carefully. Toby recalls one of Adam One’s speeches where he proclaims that nature is “a potent hallucinogen, a soporific, for the untrained Soul. We’re no longer at home in it. We need to dilute it. We can’t drink it straight” (392). Adam One’s exaggerated praise of the instinct is sometimes ambiguous. When talking about our nature, the Gardeners often refer to the old “Australopithecus” coming to the surface (65, 124, 363), and then nature equals the primitive

and sinful. This could be considered a parallel to how Christians refer to “the old Adam coming through” when they have a relapse and forget to live as Christians. Atwood, however, has changed “Adam” into a character that does not come from Eden, but from our evolutionary past.

Toby fights with her instincts, and in addition, even though she claims not to believe in everything she is taught by the Gardeners, it does trouble her when she goes against their rules. She is so hungry, she nearly starves to death, but none the less, she is still unwilling to eat meat. She has learnt by the Gardeners that meat eating is sinful, but her body tells her otherwise. When she can smell a dog being cooked, it makes her nauseous, but hungry (472). When Toby is put through ultimate pressure, she seems to feel her instincts more strongly: She has the opportunity to kill Blanco, and as if she were a common predator, “the edges of her teeth glint through her lips” (500). Still she is able to control her actions, and she lets the villain live. Her instincts seem to be in constant battle with her cultural upbringing, but her insight tells her what to do. The same incident shows that Toby tries to control her facial expression: She wants to smile reassuringly to Ren (498), but is not very successful, for Ren sees Toby as the predator she feels like at that particular moment (500). Perhaps this is an example of how Theory of Mind enables humans to mind-read what others wish to remain hidden. Because Atwood switches between two narrators describing the same event, the readers are given a clear sense of how an incident may appear different from different perspectives. Ren has become almost like Toby’s child, because Toby had to take care of her when she was so injured that she was incapable of taking care of herself. Toby was reluctant to take on that responsibility, and in a watershed moment, she even wanted her dead and considered mercy killing (428). She had sat by what she thought would be Ren’s deathbed, listening to the girl’s breath the way parents do with their little children, and the experience changed her attitude. Reminding herself that the Gardeners would have called Ren “a precious gift,” it is as if she finally finds peace. She lets down her guard, falls asleep, and for the first time she forgets to be cautious like a bird and consequently nearly causes the building to burn down (428). The next time they are in a possibly life-threatening situation, her maternal instincts are awakened, and make her defend Ren (498).

The liobams and the other genetically altered species in *The Year of the Flood*, have lost most of their animal instincts, and thereby behave in peculiar ways (283). Some of them, for instance the Mo’Hairs, which are genetically altered sheep created for the production of human hair, seem to be a confusing genetic concoction. When Toby and Ren observe them, they discuss their behaviour: “‘They’re not afraid of us,’ I say. ‘They should be,’ says Toby”

(68). Neither animal nor human know what to expect from other species. Ren writes in her journal about Jimmy's genetically altered pet being set free, and how worried she is that it will die because "the wild was totally wrong for Killer" (265). If Darwin was right, "each and every step in the gradual evolution of an adaptation [must] be advantageous in the currency of reproduction" (Buss 28). The species in *The Year of the Flood* are no longer moving forward in a gradual evolution, as human interference has taken over nature's slow development in an attempt to take giant steps into perfection. In consequence, nature's equilibrium is disturbed, and if you change one part of the equation, everything else will be affected. The corporations in *Parable of the Sower* and *The Year of the Flood* exploit the natural resources for instant profit with no regard for the long-term consequences. The binary tension between culture and nature is represented in the novels by the deteriorating environment, caused by human interference. Therein lies the paradox: In *Parable of the Sower* and *The Year of the Flood*, the border between nature and culture are blurred, as nature is customized by humans.

Chapter 3: Procreation, or How to Become an Ancestor

In chapters one and two, I have discussed how basic needs for food and shelter are vital to human societies and how the characters cover these necessities, as well as looking into typical elements in human group formation as they are expressed through the two texts. In addition to these basics, in order to save our species from extinction, humans must find partners and breed, and for most people, it is a priority to find someone to love and to be loved by. Men and women are different. Since the sixties, we have been told the reverse, at least in the Western countries, and equality is often and easily confused with identicalness. Women and men are of equal worth, but the build-up, both inside and out, is different. Buss writes that the reason why this is so, has puzzled scientists: “Why would the sexes differ so much, Darwin pondered, when both have essentially the same problems of survival, such as eating, fending off predators, and combating diseases?” (Buss 25). This led Darwin to the theory of sexual selection as an addition to natural selection. Where the latter was based on “successful survival,” the former was based on “successful mating” (see Buss 25). The individuals who can attract the opposite sex and mate with him/her, has succeeded in the sexual combat. This – for the most part intra-sexual – warfare, is a strong impetus in humans, as it is in literature. The aim is to capture the mate with highest possible “quality” or “status.” The “mismatch motif” is repeatedly found in literature, for instance in Jane Austen’s novels. Toby in *The Year of the Flood* dates a boy she considers a good match as “he was ambitious and fully intended to prosper,” but decides that she must let him go when she understands “she couldn’t afford” him (39).

In *The Year of the Flood*, there are several examples of so-called dishonest signalling. Bimplants, or breast implants, are in common use to increase female appeal, and Jimmy uses phrases from old books to impress the ladies with his eloquence. Dishonest signalling is the label Denis Dutton puts on the use of a false Rolex or a push-up bra to send out advantageous signals of wealth or youth (152-53). What poses as a problem today is that the evolution of mate preference in *Homo sapiens* took place in the Pleistocene epoch more than 12 000 years ago, not in our time (see Dutton 140-41). Denis Dutton exemplifies this by describing many females’ admiration for male muscles: Physical strength was vital in the Pleistocene, but today a man has sufficient muscles if he can open a jam jar (142). The Crakers can be said to be all dishonest signalling, at least to *Homo sapiens*. They are equipped with everything that

should make them sexually attractive, but Jimmy/Snowman must admit they do not make him feel the faintest shadow of lust. For the Crakers, sex is just one way of expressing themselves, and is not given a more vital role than other skills or gifts. For humans, sex is such a strong driving force, that few areas in life can be said to be without its influence. Glenn takes advantage of this knowledge in creating the sex pills, BlyssPluss, for “multiple orgasms and wuzzy comfy feelings” (240), while keeping to himself that the users will also get the plague. In *Parable of the Sower* the Pyro drugs are also connected with sex, and their vendors promise the pills will make “watching a fire better than sex” (54). Thus, the fires are spreading all over the continent, transforming the environment into a burning hell.

The Gardeners are not very prudent about sex or going to the toilet, but they do try to keep an illusion of privacy. They separate bedrooms and bathrooms from the common rooms with plastic curtains, but everyone can hear what happens behind them (80). Donald E. Brown posits that “adults in particular, do not normally copulate in public, nor do they relieve themselves without some attempt to do it modestly” (139). Sex is supposed to be reserved for couples who have “exchanged green leaves,” but the Gardeners do not seem to take this particular rule very seriously (86). Ren hates hearing her mother having sex with Zeb. She is maturing, however, and her mother’s choices in life suddenly make more sense when Ren experiences sex with her boyfriend Jimmy for the first time. Now she can understand that people can do almost anything for sex. She describes it in her journal as something she did “in honour,” like a celebration of another human being (265). Overall, she seems unfamiliar with physical kindness and struggles with how to explain the feeling it gives her. Poverty, however, leads her into making sex not a part of a personal relationship, but a factor in a business deal. Towards the end of the narrative, Ren reaches an important decision: She will never have sex without love again as it has been “just acting, with other people’s kinky scripts” (473). Sex is an act or theatre in the pre-apocalyptic society: The Scales and Tails, where Oryx was an “actress,” and similar businesses offer pornographic “shows” to be consumed by those with money, and to be acted out by those without. In human history the need for love and sex has been exploited and sold. In evolution mating is vital for producing offspring, but in Atwood’s narrative all that is left is the act itself: It does not produce offspring and the arousals are chemically generated. Natural selection thereby becomes artificial. Atwood’s novel raises an important question: Do we know and do we care what the consequences might be if we interfere with nature? The text advises caution.

From a young age, Ren has been in love with Jimmy, who seems to have a lot of sexual relations. Jimmy, also called Snowman, is one of the protagonists of *Oryx and Crake*,

but in *The Year of the Flood*, he is more in the background. He is, however, linked to many of the Gardeners. He is Ren's boyfriend at HelthWyzer, and later he is Amanda's. Bernice is his roommate and calls him "the animal-murderer," and "meat-breath," so he does not charm everybody. He does not want to commit himself to a stable relationship, and tells the girls that he has been hurt before, and therefore is unable to bond. Jimmy fights with sexual guilt, because he has watched child porn and fallen in love with one of the "actresses." Through Ren's diary, we learn that his best friend is Glenn, also called Crake. The information given in *Oryx and Crake*, tells us that Jimmy has been intimately connected to the Paradise Project, and that he is desperately in love with Glenn's girlfriend, Oryx, who happens to be the "actress" mentioned above. Jimmy's appeal to females seems to come from his apparent vulnerability, in addition to the eloquence he has gotten from classic literature no one reads anymore.

It is obvious that the child porn incident is something that triggers Jimmy's conscience. It is a part of a large industry, though, and the Gardener children are repeatedly warned against roaming the streets on their own to avoid being kidnapped. As long as society does not protect those who do not pay for it, poor women and children are "up for grabs." Sexual abuse is considered almost normal, and even the Gardeners do not view child molestation as a particularly serious crime, especially not if the victims are female (198, 342). In fact, eating meat seems to be a bigger taboo, as it is "obscene" (75). Incest avoidance is a human universal and the lack of concern shown in the text to female victims of the crime of incest, stresses the gender hierarchy that permeates the society. Even within the Gardeners, whose ideals seemingly are equality and humanism, females are inferior to men. There is nothing else to do than taking precautions like locking their door to avoid "date rape," or other sexual assaults (342). It takes Ren many years to realize what Bernice, a fellow Gardener child, has gone through by being sexually abused by her father, Burt (345). Amanda, coming from the streets, seems to recognize what has happened to Bernice, and judging from the text, she is the one who makes it stop. She seems to detect the danger on her first day with the Gardeners, and decided not to live with Bernice's family (97), and it is as if she later organizes for Burt to be arrested by the CorpSeCorps by starting rumours. She recognizes that what Burt is growing, is weed, not innocent herbs, and knows she can use that information (164); they will take action against illegal weed production, not child abuse. The Gardener community in general is blind to the harm caused by adults seeing children as sexual objects, and fails to notice all the signs Bernice is sending out. This lack of concern for

women and children as victims for cruelty is a marker for deteriorating societies in Atwood's narratives, Hannes Bergthaller maintains (733).

The Gardeners call their leaders Adams and Eves, and it is as if they grow into a member of their sex rather than into an individual. They live in heterosexual, ideally monogamous, relationships. The Gardeners have a "hands on" approach to "the generative act"/sex. It is a clearly patriarchal society where the Adams, especially Adam One, "revered founder and guru" (289), are more important in decision making than the Eves. Adam One is a first-person narrator in parts of the novel, but is only heard through his homilies. In addition, the readers hear about him in Toby's and Ren's narratives. His real name is not revealed. Regarding sex, Adam One's ideology seems to coincide with Glenn's, as he preaches that humans have gone "from seasonal mating into an incessant sexual twitching" (224). The Crakers' genital areas turn blue as a sign that their bodies are ready for sex, the same way the baboons' bottoms turn red, and Adam One seems to agree that such signalling would be better for humans, as well. There seems to be no indication as to what sexual preferences Adam One has. He expresses a pragmatic attitude towards sex in his sermons, not very dissimilar to the rest of the society where sex is more like a business deal than an act of love: You have to give something to get something.

The Year of the Flood is full of examples of characters pondering about the nature of love. Adam One teaches the Gardeners that love is merely chemistry, but it seems Toby still has a hope that love is more transcendental than that (430). The Gardeners children call her "Dry Witch" because she is so "thin and hard" (74). After her boss at Secret Burger, Blanco, rapes her, it is as if she locks out all sexuality. This is evident when one of the more vain Gardeners cannot fathom that anybody could "make dirty jokes" about Toby, and Toby self-consciously translates the utterance into: "Nothing sexual about *you*, was what she meant. Flat as a board, back and front. Worker bee" (137). She obviously succeeds in making herself sexually invisible, but the rare moment she receives a compliment, she feels delighted, as people hardly ever admire her for her female qualities (see 221). Blanco has sexually abused her, she has used sex as payment, and what she calls her "neural connections for sex" are numbed (124). She does not miss sex, and she wonders why. Love is a different matter, and she has not dismissed the thought of it. The text suggests on many occasions that Toby loves Zeb, but that she is afraid he will not find her body feminine enough: "No doubt he likes the jiggle" (291). He is described as ultra-masculine with his large frame and macho attitude towards fighting. On many occasions, he protects or promises to protect them with his

physical power (222, 299, 300, 302). Zeb is a male that uses his muscles not only to do household chores; his muscles are not false signalling, either; they are put into real use.

There seems to be a struggle within the group as to who should be the Alpha male, and Toby notes that Zeb might be “tired of being the Beta Chimp” (289, see also 300). Zeb, or Adam Seven, is what people would call the typical Alpha male. We learn that he is a muscular man (293), and judging by the reaction from the females around him, he is very eye-catching. Toby is obviously very attracted to him, and so is Lucerne. He is like a stepfather to Ren, who adores him. The bear symbol is repeatedly associated with Zeb. Ren even dreams about him in a bear’s costume (254), and his voice is that of a “Russian-bear” (78). To the children his abilities reach almost super human proportions and they tell each other that he has eaten a bear (131). His nickname on MaddAddam’s website is Spirit Bear, and the name seems to emphasize both his physical and psychological power. Zeb’s ethical rules are evidently flexible. The result is what counts, and he readily lies or uses violence if it can help him reach his goals. He has a practical approach to religion and proclaims that he “leave[s] the finer points of doctrine to Adam One” (221). The children call him “Mad Adam” (123), and the information given in the text, leads us to assume that he has had something to do with the formation of the group MaddAddam (398). He has certainly been an active member (399). Zeb is Adam One’s opposite: where Adam One talks, Adam Seven acts. There is a lot of secrecy about Zeb’s character, and he comes and goes without telling what he is up to (123). Toby thinks that he is not “a true Gardener” (123). Zeb’s attraction seems to lie in his bodily features and his high position. Adam One, however, has an even higher position kept with eloquence rather than muscles. The fact that he is the leader of a religious group, puts him in a position where he can define right from wrong and have God on his side: God is a strong opponent for anyone who might want to challenge Adam One’s position. The constant tug of war between Zeb and him seems to be about power and masculinity, not about seeking attention from one particular female. The dystopian environment is tough: Attributes like those possessed by Zeb are not only remnants from an evolutionary past or sexual signalling; they are vital for the survival of the owner and those he protects.

Had Atwood let the characters Zeb and Adam One also compete about the same female, there is a chance the conflict would have become not merely a tug of war, but an open conflict. She has created such a love triangle between Crake, Oryx and Jimmy, and the outcome is horrifying. Jimmy and Crake have been childhood friends and now they are deeply in love with the same woman. Marcus Nordlund maintains that there are good

evolutional reasons for jealousy: “we are sexual and affectionate mammals, endowed with a capacity for active choice that we usually prefer to exercise if we can” (335). Thus, according to Nordlund, humans like to choose their partners, and when two or more compete about the same individual, there will logically be jealousy and “mate guarding” (335). Were it not for Oryx, Glen’s only weak spot, he might have succeeded with his mischievous plan for the world. He would, in practise, become God. Jimmy is an element in another love triangle: Ren loves Jimmy, but he is Amanda’s. Because the opponent is Amanda, and Ren loves her as well, there is no hostility. The main love story in *The Year of the Flood* is the one between the Earth and its tenants; on Atwood’s wuthering height lies Edencliff, and the relationship is in deep trouble.

Ren (short for Brenda) is a first-person narrator in *The Year of the Flood*. Her story is the one of coming of age, and she is still young when the story ends. Ren is not as self-composed as Toby and writes that she “went overboard” with all her emotions (351), indicating that she sees exposed feelings as a flaw. As a child, this characteristic is more expressed than when she matures. Ren has lived in HelthWyzer with her parents, but moves to the Rooftop Garden with her mother, Lucerne. Lucerne has had an affair with Zeb, who has worked undercover as a gardener in HelthWyzer, and she leaves her husband to join Zeb and the Gardeners. Apparently, Ren quickly adapts to a completely new way of living, and this ability to conform, seems to be one of the reasons why she becomes one of the survivors. Ren does not see this, and cannot understand why she has made it. Repeatedly she writes that she has been lucky (8, 337, 381, 398, 475, 513). Toby also thinks of Ren as a person who has merely been fortunate (346), but Zeb is not surprised to see that she is a survivor (477). Ren seems like a social character, always on the lookout for love, and especially from Amanda and Jimmy. After spending her childhood partly with the Gardeners and partly with HelthWyzer, she seems to lack a sense of belonging. She gets a job at AnooYoo where Toby is, but it seems as if it becomes a liberty project for her to manage on her own, so she joins Scales and Tails as a trapeze artist, in other words, a prostitute. She has seen Scales people in her childhood, and she seems to be fascinated by them. She describes an episode where a Scales girl tries to escape but is captured, feet bleeding: “Whenever I thought of that, a chill went all through me, like watching someone else cut their finger” (90). It is as if she finds it thrilling and repulsive at the same time. Writing about her days at Scales, she sounds very positive about her occupation, her colleagues and her boss, Mordis. Mordis is a minor character in the novel, but he is perhaps one of the more complex. He is a brothel owner, an

occupation normally associated with negative personality traits, but if Ren is a reliable narrator, Mordis acts more like a father to the Scales girls. He sacrifices his life to protect Ren. His moral capital does not show through his choice of occupation, but through his treatment of his employees. In Atwood's dystopia, the heroes and heroines are practical beings, and if selling sex is necessary, they will sell sex, but keep their integrity. Scales and Tails is a brothel, but is a home, as well, and offers shelter and a family-like community.

In *Parable of the Sower*, the attitude towards sex does not differ greatly from what can be expected in many modern societies. Youngsters sneak away to investigate each other's bodies. Lauren has her sexual debut at twelve (106), and she enjoys the double pleasure caused by her sharing (12). In her journal, she writes about the joys of sex and how sex is discussed between the teenagers. Due to obvious lacks in the supply of for instance contraceptives, they use old condoms to avoid pregnancies (113). Lauren writes that she "need[s]" sex (139), thereby showing that she is not embarrassed about sex. To her, the need for sex is as natural as other needs. She loves her childhood boyfriend, Curtis, but it seems she has small problems leaving him behind (141). Her calling to go away and start Earthseed is stronger than her love for Curtis. Like in many societies, the father is not happy to know about his daughter being sexually active, and she is badly beaten by her father when he finds out she is sexually active at a young age (106). There is no indication in the text that Lauren finds her father's sudden violent behaviour strange in this context, and no indication that she will think worse of him for it. She interprets his behaviour as concern for her wellbeing. Because of the deteriorating public morale, there is an extensive abuse of women and children both inside and outside the community walls (13, 33, 154). Especially during the raids performed by the Pyros, rapes seem almost customary (163, 165). Because it is more dangerous to walk the streets as a woman, Lauren disguises as a man. That way she becomes a part of a peculiar triangle consisting of herself as a "man," the woman Zahra and the male proper, Harry. If there is an Alpha male, it is not Harry, but Lauren (198). Harry does not seem to have problems by acting subservient to Lauren, as he soon comes to acknowledge her superiority. Unlike Lauren, he is not able to suppress his instincts, and makes love to Zahra instead of guarding their group. Even Zahra, who has her instincts intact in addition to experience from living on the streets, forgets all about caution when she wants to have sex with Harry (200). She does not use birth control, either, and does not think past her sex instinct (204). Lauren is different. She is not led by her instincts, but considers the

consequences before she has sex with Bankole. Lauren and Bankole seem to be of the same caliber, as both reaches for condoms at the same time (266).

The characters in the novels are under constant pressure. They deal with this stress in different ways: some by lying low, and others by giving and receiving help from their communities. Some, however, choose to be egotists and will therefore only care for themselves and their closest kin. Nepotism, the Oedipus motif, and similar motifs where the relation between kin is problematized, are among of the most common in literature. Donald E. Brown maintains that humans distinguish between “close kin” and “more distant relatives” where the former is favoured (137; see also Dutton 43). One way of explaining this phenomenon is by the theory Gene’s Eye Thinking. Obviously, genes do not think, but genes that are successful, reproduce, and those that are not, perish. Hence, a gene should ideally inhabit a body that survives until it has produced viable offspring. The mother, father, and other relatives have copies of the gene, and the more genes they have in common, the more an organism benefits from also protecting their genes. Genes without this support will perish (see Buss 33; Brown 105-06). As discussed above, the concept of altruism has been problematic, because genes were thought of as “selfish,” with the sole purpose of being directly passed on (Buss 33). However, David M. Buss addresses this problem and concludes that “altruism could evolve if the recipients of help were one’s genetic kin ... The benefit to one’s relatives in fitness currencies must be greater than the costs to the self. If this condition is satisfied, then kin altruism can evolve” (“Evolutionary Psychology” 34). Thus, if you can help others in your family, and at the same time not jeopardize your own genes’ safety, then help will mean mutual benefit.

In *The Year of the Flood*, there are few examples of blood relatives or traditional nuclear families. The Gardeners live and act as if they were relatives, but they seem oddly indifferent to the distinction between kin or non-kin. Toby comes from what sounds like a normal family, but after her mother’s fatal illness and untimely death in addition to her father’s suicide, she seems to regard the Gardeners as her kin. Pilar takes on the role of a mother and guide, and when she dies, Toby goes through the normal reactions for people who lose their mother. She is worried it will be impossible to live without Pilar, who has always been there for her (202-03). As readers, we know that that is an exaggeration, as Toby was almost grown up when she came. When Pilar dies, Toby feels as if she is “orphaned” again (214). Other Gardener families are Burt and Veena, Bernice’s parents, and Ren’s rather dysfunctional family.

Ren proclaims that Lucerne is a bad mother, so there must be some good ones to compare with. Ren seems to have a distant relationship with both her biological parents: She does not seem to miss her father when she moves to the Gardeners, and her mother shows nothing of the affection we would normally consider typical behaviour. Whereas Donald Brown finds women to “have more direct child-care duties than do their men” (137), Lucerne does not seem to care for Ren’s upbringing at all, and when Ren’s biological father dies and Lucerne remarries, she cuts off all contact with her daughter. The reader does not know to what cost Lucerne does this, but Ren seems emotionally scarred by her mother’s withdrawal. She transfers her sense of belonging first to Jimmy and then to the brothel and to her best friend, Amanda. Ren and Amanda are like sisters. They live with Zeb and Lucerne at Edencliff, and after that, they are closely knit.

Children who grow up together, will feel like siblings, and will, for instance, rarely develop romantic feelings for each other. This phenomenon is observed in kibbutz communities, as well as with stepchildren and adopted children (Dutton 89; Brown 119-20). Ren writes how her relationship with Amanda is that of close kin: “We’re each other’s family; I guess when we were kids we were both stray puppies. It’s a bond” (67). She acknowledges the fact that they both have needed someone to belong to. Zeb is a substitute father to her, and fills the role of a loving father more than the man she calls her “biofather.” She admires him, or rather adores him, and in her eyes, he is invincible. She says he is her family (78). He has seen her, whereas her biological father has “treated [her] like a window” (254). Since her relationship with her mother is not a close one, she has to find comfort elsewhere. Her feelings towards Zeb seem ambiguous, as the language she uses when describing him in her diary could easily be about a person she has a crush on. She is disgusted when she hears the lovemaking between her mother and him (80). However, judging by their reunion after the apocalypse, it is only the young girl’s idolisation of her father, not a lover, and children do normally not want to know much about their parents’ love life. After the apocalypse she wants to find Zeb and tell him how well she has done “even though [it] was mostly luck” (477). Despite the fact that she is not tough like Amanda or a planner like Toby, she has still managed to stay alive, and it seems as if she wants her father figure to be proud of her. There is a clear change in attitude regarding sex after the apocalypse. Sex and love are again connected when Ren comes to the realization that her body is her own, and others respect her decision. There is, however, a disturbing detail in *The Year of the Flood*: As established above, successful mating means mating that results in genes being passed on: Glenn dies, but whose genes are in the genetically altered species, the Crakers? If they are his own, albeit

altered, he suddenly becomes an ancestor. The made-on-purpose species are designed for happiness, as Glenn has eliminated everything that can make them unhappy. Paradoxically, he thereby quenches their possibility of finding any meaning in their lives, as there are no “ghosts in the machines,” leaving only the machines (see Pinker, *The Blank Slate* 9).

There is a peculiar gap of information in *The Year of the Flood*: Children seem to simply appear (229). Births are hardly mentioned. When Jimmy and Ren have sex on a daily basis, there is no mention of contraceptives or the risk of pregnancy. As far as I can see, there is no description of toddlers, either. To have children the citizens need to buy a parenthood licence. Early in the novel, the reader is told that Toby is infertile. She has sold her eggs, and because of complications, she can never have children. It is as if she can “feel all the light ... leaking out of her” (39). Until then, she does not know she wants children, but it is clearly hard that others deprive her of the possibility. It throws her into an existential crisis where she has to decide whether there is still a reason to live or not. It is left to the reader to ponder upon why Atwood nearly has ignored pregnancies and babies in the rest of the novel. The amount of money and effort put into helping the childless fulfilling their needs for a baby in modern societies goes to show that having children is seen as a vital part of human existence. Leaving it out of the narrative, in fact fills it with a noticeable void: The society appears even less humane.

In *Parable of the Sower*, the families live in separate houses, and in separate households within the community walls. The families in the community seem to be close, but not like the Gardeners. Several romantic relations occur within the walls, but here the community members are not like brothers and sisters, only close neighbours, so there is no evolutionary reason why they should not bond. Lauren describes many so-called normal families. Lauren’s father marries Cory, and they have three sons. It is very important to Cory to keep her family safe, and under the extreme conditions in Robledo, that is not an easy task. Her son, Keith, is killed. She wants to move the rest of the family to Olivar where she thinks they will be safe, but her husband refuses. This seems to be her only hope, and she is devastated when she realizes there is nothing she can do (122). It is obvious that Lauren sees them all as parts of the same unit. After her house burns down, she feels compelled to find out what has happened to her neighbours, but even more to find out what has happened to her brothers and Cory: “But *where* was my family!” (164). Clearly, they all feel like family to Lauren.

Lauren is fond of Cory, but she does feel she comes second, after Cory’s biological sons. Lauren emphasizes in her journal that Keith, the oldest son, is her stepmother’s

favourite (9, 104). When Lauren is little, and they still live quite comfortably, she has a good relationship with Cory, and Lauren feels safe staying close to her (5). The more they are pressured by their violent society, the less Cory seems able to love her birth children and step child in the same manner. In crises, she prefers her biological offspring. Some scientists claim that there will be many conflicts between parents and children because they only share fifty percent of their genes (Buss 36), and thus, with stepchildren there will be more, because they do not share genes at all. Any adoptive parent will know this is not true, so there must be more complex reasons than pure nature behind the fact that families fight. Lauren's animosity against Keith might come from the fact that they are not biologically related, or because she is envious for the attention he gets, but it might rather be because he is not a nice person. Apparently, he has had a strained relationship with his father and eventually seems to hate him (106-07). It is as if he sees him as a rival to his mother, whom he seems to protect. Like Oedipus, he sees his father as a threat, and by scavenging, he brings home food and money to his mother, as if he were the provider in the family.

The Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* ask their members to discard everything but their animal instincts, while the corporations demand the opposite. To them all that is natural, like aging or sagging breasts, is unwelcome, and the synthetic and flawless is preferred. The heroines in the narratives listen to their bodies and minds in combination instead. They have sexual needs, but they are not dislocated from their decency or their morale. As the survivors' conditions change, they dare to hope, and their attitude towards entering relationships mirror this optimism. Lauren meets Bankole, Ren reunites with Jimmy and Croze, and Toby finds Zeb. They have survived, and now they can make their lives worth living.

Chapter 4: The Meaning of Life

I have borrowed the title of chapter four from Monty Python's movie with the same name. With humour, the film touches on what Tooby and Cosmides call "the quintessentially human problem, the struggle for coherence and sanity amid radical uncertainty" (180), a topic most anyone can relate to. From childhood to death, we try to make sense of the nonsensical. For some, life makes sense because they believe their existence has a higher purpose and that some divine entity has a plan for them. For others, the arts are what matters, and through art, performers or consumers manage to find meaning and purpose. Scientists discuss whether religion and art are so-called adaptive functions that have been vital to our species' survival, or whether they are merely a "bonus" or a handy by-product. Stephen Pinker maintains that some features of the arts help people in their struggle to survive and reproduce, "but most do not" (Pinker, "Art and Adaptation" 130). For example, he explains how art can function as a toolbox because "[c]haracters in a fictitious world do exactly what our intelligence allows us to do in the real world" and if you read or hear their stories, you can adopt or avoid their methods (132). For music, however, he does not find the same adaptive functions, only an element of pleasure. In hard times, when people suddenly realize the truth in the cliché "words lose their meaning" as there are no words that can cover what they feel, perhaps consolation is to be found in the language of music, or through words "made special," in poetry for instance. In the continuum between what can be expressed in words and what cannot, art in many forms may serve as a bridge. In addition, art offers a "time-out" from our ordinary lives, or as formulated by Lawrence Buell: "when I concentrate on writing ... I exist for all practical purposes only in the abstract space of ideas and books, my body immobile except for the flicker of fingers at the keyboard" (70). In this chapter, I will explore how the characters of *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* are written into situations and environments where the meaning of life is challenged.

People need more than food and shelter in order to thrive, and offspring to secure continuation of the species, but defining exactly what this "more" is, is difficult. In *The Year of the Flood*, Toby's physical needs are mostly met, and the Gardeners have a place to live and food to eat. Regardless, it is not difficult to identify with the problems the characters encounter. Butler's Lauren, on her quest north, lacks sufficient food supplies and protection, but she hungers for higher goals than pure survival. Lauren and her group are all on a search

for meaning in circumstances that seem chaotic as well as meaningless. Both novels place themselves in the tradition of the jeremiads. They warn us about current issues that might point in the direction of environmental, political and economic ruin, at the same time as they are telling the story of a world heading towards destruction. Religious thinking is distinctly human: Fredric Jameson claims that “with one signal exception (capitalism itself, which is organized around an economic mechanism), there has never existed a cohesive form of human society that was not based on some form of transcendence or religion” (“Cognitive Mapping” 355). In *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* capitalism has had its peak, and is rapidly spiraling downwards, offering comfort only to the few. Through evolution, humans procured a unique position among the species on earth, but it had a cost. E. O. Wilson maintains “they also exacted a price we continue to pay, composed of the shocking recognition of the self, of the finiteness of personal existence, and of the chaos of the environment” (*Concilience* 245). The knowledge of death and of the existence of evil must be dealt with in a way that makes life bearable, and there are different ways of coping. The Creationists’ principal enemy, ethologist and author of *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins, seems to be able to settle with science and reason, and so do many other atheists. Humans, however, typically “have religious or supernatural beliefs in that they believe in something beyond the visible and palpable. They anthropomorphize and (some if not all of them) believe things that are demonstrably false” (Brown 139). So even though Richard Dawkins, for instance, tries to convince people that there is no God, and proclaims he can prove it, people still believe. Atwood is often interviewed about her religious beliefs and about religious aspects in her novels. In an exchange with Bill Moyers in 2006, Atwood claims to be a sceptic and a strict agnostic, and she finds atheism to be just another religion. She states, “the universe without an intelligence in it has got nothing to say to us” (Atwood, “Faith and Reason”). Being an agnostic, she does not want to eliminate God. Hannes Bergthaller finds that in *The Year of the Flood*, Adam One preaches that faith is necessary in addition to “scientific insight” to avoid “nihilism and despair” (740). Living in a secular society, the longing for something beyond money and estate still is a vital human force. Atwood illustrates her point thus: In a narrative she can choose to insert a tiger in the plot or not, but she finds that people seem to like the story with the tiger better than the one without. The tiger, like God, adds zest.

Ellen Dissanayake discusses religious practices and their development through human history and elaborates on the importance of meaning:

What we call “religion” and “art” were for countless centuries intrinsic to the order of ordinary life and to the motivations of human minds. They were not optional practices to be indulged one morning each week or when there was nothing better to do, nor were they superfluous pastimes that could be rejected altogether. Pueblo Indian cosmology may seem quaint and dubious compared with Los Alamos physics, but it satisfies human needs and addresses non-scientific questions to which people want answers. (154)

Donald E. Brown goes even further, and states that people are eager to believe almost any explanation to a problem, because it is so important that life makes sense. If a good and logical answer is nowhere to be found, even a “false and harmful explanation” can be settled for (97). Dissanayake is more optimistic than Brown regarding the human intellect, when she claims that “for most human minds it seems insufficient simply to find and make order, nor are our minds easily convinced of something unless it is presented with emotionally appealing personalized relevance” (“Art and Intimacy” 154). She does, however, acknowledge that people might turn to the extreme to make sense of the senseless. If people experience a lack of or a longing for something in their lives, it is a problem that the empty space might “be filled by other emotion-laden explanatory schemes that satisfy the needs for belonging and meaning – say conspiracy theories, obedience to mind-controlling cults, or fanatical adherence to fundamentalist doctrines both secular and divine” (155). That is, both political and religious systems regularly take advantage of the human search for meaning.

The Gardeners’ religion is an amalgamation of scripturalism, environmentalism, animism, Darwinism, and philosophy. Moreover, expressions usually associated with millennialism appear in Ren’s journal when she writes that the Gardeners “were so interested in doom, and enemies, and God” (71). “The Waterless Flood” is used as a synonym for the Judgement Day, which only the Elect will survive. Adam One uses a mixture of borrowings from the Bible, scientific documents, and philosophic material for instance when he states: “we see through a glass, darkly. Any religion is a shadow of God. But the shadows of God are not God” (201). It is as though he has merged Corinthians 13.12 with Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave.” God’s Gardeners’ hymns follow the pattern of Anglican hymns (Atwood, “The Powells.com”). Adam One mocks those who say that religion is a fallacy because it cannot be proved, and the Creationists who believe that God has created every single creature separately. He explains that the Gardeners believe “God has created [them] through the long and complex process of Natural and Sexual Selection” (62). Overall, it is a religion built on “a

bit of this and that.” The members speak to animals as if they have souls, and both Pilar and Toby tell the bees everything that happens. Adam One’s words are often confusing, as he seems to say what serves him or the Gardeners best at any given moment. On the one hand he states that “[w]e cannot know God by reason and measurement; indeed, excess reason and measurement lead to doubt” (279), and on the other hand he tells Toby that he is reassured by her doubt (201). Occasionally, Adam One reveals his authority in religious questions because he argues that “untrained Soul[s]” should have a “filter” between themselves and God, or else they might “overdose” (392). It is as if he considers himself that filter, positioning him in power of knowledge, thereby giving himself supremacy when it comes to matters of faith. In Darwinian terms, he gives himself an advantage when it comes to sexual selection.

There are several Biblical borrowings in *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, like the use of the Noah’s Ark narrative: According to the Bible, people had been working against God’s will, so God must send a flood to wipe away all living creatures. Only Noah and some of his relatives survive together with the animals, two of each kind that he brings aboard his ark. After the flood, the first land they set foot on is the mountain, Ararat (*The Holy Bible*, Genesis 5-9). In *The Year of the Flood*, it is as if people, again, are wrongdoers and must be punished. They have ill-treated Earth by relying solely on technology and profit. The Gardeners’ bodies are the arks (111). Their bodies are the vessels they will “float above the Waterless Flood” (56). Their arks do not contain living animals, merely the remembrance of all the animals that have once existed. The text stresses how the Gardeners memorize extinct animals. The online game “Extinctathon” where the object is to name the dead animals is Jimmy and Glenn’s favourite. For the Gardeners, the Ararat is not only a mountain, but also the phrase they use for different places where the Gardeners store what they need for their “next” life. They call them “Ararats.” According to Christian belief, God created humans with a free will, but with the responsibility of tending to the earth. In Genesis 8, God makes a promise, a covenant with his people: “I will never again curse the ground because of man ... neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.” In *The Year of the Flood*, humans have not kept their part of the contract, and it is as if God, alias Glenn, lets the people eliminate themselves as a species, to save the Earth and the non-human creatures. Those who call themselves Adams and Eves try to make a new earth on the scraps of the old, and like Noah, they gather what and whom they will need for a new beginning. They make a second attempt to make Paradise work out.

Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* and Toby in *The Year of the Flood* are like Noah prepared for disaster. Lauren seems to take her father’s sermon about Noah as advice to be

ready for a disaster. As she sees it, “if Noah is going to be saved, he has plenty of hard work to do” (68). Following the example of Noah, Lauren tries to warn her family and neighbours, but she is not as successful; Noah manages to save his family, but Lauren does not. Nonetheless, her preparations will later save her life and make her more in command of events than if she had not been planning. Her newfound religion becomes like an ark. In it, she elects people to join her crew. Their new home, given utopian qualities, is like a new paradise. It is the first Earthseed community. *The Year of the Flood* is in numerous ways connected to stories in the Bible: Gardener leaders are called Adams and Eves, they live on the Edencliff, and Glenn is working on his “Paradise Project” (364, 474). Glenn is, it seems, perceived as a man working towards the ultimate invention, almost like Hjalmar Ekdal in Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*, but their implementation capacity differs greatly. Glenn, unlike Hjalmar, succeeds in engineering a new, and to him perfect, human species in what he describes as “Paradise,” a name alluding both to Glenn’s fondness for games and the word’s biblical counterpart. His task is too vast to comprehend, because it is considered impossible. Mordis describes Glenn as “harmless” (365). This “harmlessness” might be the reason why he can follow through his ideas. His character demonstrates the amount of evil one person can do if he wants to and if others do not believe him capable of it. The novel indicates that Glenn has lost faith in his own species, and believes himself capable of creating a new and better one to take over. Glenn takes the position of an almighty, punishing god, or perhaps a devil, and at a young age, he admits to Ren and Amanda he thinks he can do a better job than God (177). He is convinced of his own greatness. He equips the Crakers with traits that in his opinion will make their lives easy. It seems he has not intended for them to have Theory of Mind, but the way they are described in the text, they are quickly developing a basic version of it. In the same manner, they are created without the urge for religion, but also here, Glenn is mistaken. The Crakers soon show signs of religious belief. Ironically enough, it is Glenn/Crake they see as their deity, and Jimmy/Snowman as his earthly representative. Glenn has unsuccessfully tried to eliminate in the Crakers the Universal People’s “practice [of] divination” (Brown 139).

A key issue in religion is to believe or not to believe, but in the continuum between the two, are the different degrees of doubt. Glenn can be classified as very close to the latter, and Pilar to the former. He seems to be interested in religion, but only as a concept or a science project. He investigates the Gardeners’ belief by incessant queries to Ren (271). He asks Ren if she thinks religion is a vital part of natural selection, or if it is only a by-product (271). The questions seem to come from scientific examination, not religious pondering. Pilar, however,

seems to rely on her faith without any objection or contemplation. She simply believes and acts according to the Gardeners' religious rules. Ren has kept the faith from her childhood on the Edencliff. Her conviction seems naïve and unaltered. Despite her mother's efforts of removing her from the Gardeners both physically and emotionally, in her heart she believes what they have told her. Toby is "the doubting Thomas" of her group. She seems to long for a religious awakening, but she never manages to let go of her scepticism. She needs a new name when she goes undercover as a director of the beauty clinic the AnooYoo, and she chooses Tobiatha. Its religious meaning is "God is good." The choice of name indicates that, despite her doubt, she has a hope that God exists and that he is good. She and her family have been moderately religious, but what faith there has been, Toby loses during her teenage years. Meeting the Gardeners' decency, she again starts wondering if there is a god after all: "She didn't really believe in their creed, but she no longer disbelieved" (116). Why does she suddenly start believing or, to put it differently, doubting her doubt? Toby speaks to the bees at the same time commenting ironically that it is futile: "As if they could hear" (302). The statement is ambiguous and might express a hope that the bees in fact can hear. Conversely, this is one of many situations where she acts as if she is a believer.

As discussed above it is human nature to believe even when you know something to be untrue. Toby both believes, and does not believe at the same time. Working and talking with bees comforts her, and she experiences that rituals she does not believe in, helps her anyway (215, 382). Through the whole narrative Toby strives to believe, but reason constantly comes in the way of faith. "Why can't I believe? she asked the darkness" (204). The word "darkness," indicates that she really does not believe. In case she did, she would ask God, not the "darkness." Even when drugged during a vigil, she does not let go of her faith in reason (204). Towards the end of the narrative, there is a moment where Toby thinks she might die. She recognizes the situation as one where she could need the help of higher powers: "What Saint should I call upon? Who has the resolution and the skill? The ruthlessness. The judgement. The accuracy. Dear Leopard, dear Wolf, dear Liobam: lend me your Spirits now" (498). At last Toby can put her heart in a prayer, but it is not to the saints or to God. She addresses the animals - both the nature-made and the man-made. They are not spirit; they are flesh, and it is there she finds her peace. She gets a moment of illumination when she thinks her life will come to an end, and she ponders why this longing is innate in humans.

There is energy in Toby's search for meaning. She experiences a relentless pull between pure cognition and the comfort of religious certainty. In her, brain and heart battle

for control, and sometimes she tries to convince herself there is more to life than science: “But if Spirit wasn’t material in any way, it couldn’t influence a candle flame. Could it?” (215). Her relationship with the bees reveals the ambiguity she is struggling with. When she cries, the bees are, in her opinion, “nibbling gently at the edges of her dried tears. For the salt, a scientist would say” (216). The added phrase “a scientist would say” tells us that she also doubts the scientist. Adam One’s answer is to behave as if you believe, and faith will be the result (201). For the Gardeners, action comes before faith: “In some religions, faith precedes action,” said Adam One. “In ours, action precedes faith ...” (201). Toby does not share the Gardeners’ faith, but she does not totally discard it, either (116). In their company, she goes from what can be described as an atheist to an agnostic. Toby from *The Year of the Flood* and Lauren from *Parable of the Sower*, share some personality traits: They see the value of what Jerry Phillips calls “transcendent consciousness” (307), and they both have the ability to rise to the occasion and put in the effort required to make a change. The world changes – in that respect it is a perpetuum mobile – and the protagonists are realistic and understand that they must change with it in order to survive. To believe or not to believe is also the problem with climatic change. People have trouble believing what they cannot see, and especially something with consequences too terrible to conceive. If you start recycling today, it is not immediately obvious that it will help the environment. In *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, the environment cannot wait, and both authors seem to be afraid that only action counts, and whether you believe or not is superfluous to the outcome. Only for the individual is faith important. Religion provides hope, however, and the characters of the dystopian universe desperately need hope. Hope may lead to action, which is what Adam One and Lauren need.

The first chapter in *Parable of the Sower* describes a returning dream. Lauren writes that she often has this nightmarish dream where she has to pretend being somebody she is not (3). In this vision she is without power and is floating in the air, unable to control her own body that is slowly drifting into a burning wall and eventually catches fire (4). She wants to be a good daughter because she loves her father, but this is difficult once she realizes she does not share his religion. The pretence is taking its toll, and she feels tied up. The dream terrifies her and seems to be the seed that eventually makes her turn away from her father’s religion into a belief system that embraces change. Her attitude puts her in control of action, not the opposite, and the revelation makes her realize that she should teach others to work with, and adapt to, change. Lauren repeats “God is change” like a mantra (79, 103, 262, 315). The tenet seems to build on Heracleitus’ “All is Flux,” often translated “everything moves, nothing

stands still” (“Heracleitus”). As Frederick Buell has observed “shaping chaos is a harsh necessity now forced on anyone, not a desired state” (316), and consequently Lauren may be said to make the most of the conditions she is under. Buell suggests that Lauren’s bravery does not originate in “the (exciting) exercise of skills,” but depends on her persistence despite the pain it causes her (317). Buell maintains that Lauren’s religion can be described as “tough survivalism,” “endurance, self-reliance, and limited hope” (316).

The Earthseed religion offers great resistance to me as a reader. It is hard to believe that anyone would settle for a religion with so little substance. It is as if you must reconcile with the idea that there is nothing outside yourself: There is no deity, no saviour. Butler deals with this problem in *Parable of the Talents*, where the narrator, Lauren’s daughter, writes: “The problem with Earthseed has always been that it isn’t a very comforting belief system” (235), and that it is a drawback for some that Earthseed’s God does not “love you or protect you” (73) and “Neither needs nor wants / Your worship” (74). Later Butler lets her protagonist admit that she finds the power of “religion itself ... a great mover of masses” (278). Religion becomes a symbolic home, a shelter, a place to belong that also provides purpose and meaning. It appears that Earthseed deals more with reason than with faith. Perhaps Lauren has found a belief system, not because she is a spiritual person, but because it offers the means for convincing people, the means she needs in order to be the “mover of masses.” In *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren’s daughter makes a great effort to understand her mother’s position, and when she discusses the topic with others, she is told that “even rich people ... are desperate for someone who seems to know where they’re going” (326). She finds their current social and political system cannot fill the void, but a strong leader can; she fears that the wrong kind of leader will claim the position. Something that looks a lot like fascism might be the option people will choose, because it promises a firm leadership; the question is whether USA will get “A leader / Most will follow, / Or a tyrant / Most fear” (*Sower* 103). Jerry Phillips maintains that “fascistic aspects of modern societies” is a returning subject matter in Butler’s text, and that her novels function as a warning that fascism is a possible outcome of chaos (305). Through her narratives, she shows her readers that there is an alternative to fascism and that a “leader” is preferable over a “tyrant.” In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren decides to become a strong religious leader that will help her people survive and thrive.

Pragmatism seems to be the common denominator in both novels. It permeates the life philosophies of Lauren, Adam One, Zeb, Amanda, and Toby. If religion offers what they need to survive and also makes others survive, they will act as if they are believers. They all set

aside their ideals if it serves the greater good, and when Toby becomes an Eve, she discovers to what degree the Gardeners have double standards: They tell the group members that Pilar has died because of an accident, but she has committed suicide. Perhaps is Pilar the only one who really practices what she preaches, and she even dies according to their rules: She commits suicide by eating poisonous herbs to avoid becoming a burden and to let her body fertilize the earth (212-16). The Gardeners in general, are not as obedient as her. They are told they should not use cars and computers, but Toby finds they use both. Religion is their tool to make people behave in a certain way. Adam One mixes religion with pragmatism in his sermons. For instance, what seems like religious metaphors, are practical advice for survival: “Let us construct our Ararats carefully, my Friends. Let us provision them with foresight, and with canned and dried goods” (110). The Gardeners pretend to save snails so they can “find new homes,” but the snails are in fact just thrown over the Edenclyff rooftop and onto the street (99).

Many of the Adams and Eves are former scientists, and it is as if they use what they know about the power of religion: It may efficiently convince people to perform actions they cannot see the full range of. When The Gardeners have reached their goal, which is to survive the plague, all the pomp and circumstance are stripped off. They no longer say grace before meals and they even eat meat (478). One might argue that Adam One still is using the same rhetoric and practices, but he and his group do not seem to become survivors after all. They do not seem to be fit for the new earth. His last sermon in the narrative ends in a way that indicates that it might in fact be his last sermon. He seems to feel abandoned, almost like Jesus before the crucifixion. Where Jesus pleaded: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (*The Holy Bible* Luke 23.34), Adam One proclaims that “This Forgiveness is the hardest task we shall ever be called upon to perform. Give us the strength for it” (*Flood* 508). He appears disillusioned and like a man who has already given up. He explains to his group that God has not broken his covenant with humans, as God’s promise had been not to destroy the Earth again. This time, it is the humans who are annihilated to let “a more compassionate race to take over our place” (509). It is as if Adam One knows what Glenn has done, and that he, despite his efforts to become a survivor along with the Gardeners, admits his defeat.

My claim is that the survivors in *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* are not those who are religious, but those who live as if they are. They pretend, mainly because it serves them well. Toby plays a role: the role of a Gardener. She is saying the lines and acting according to the manuscript, but inside her mind, she seems aware it is all make believe.

Butler's Lauren and Atwood's Toby uphold a religious lifestyle, but they also keep their sense of rationality. For them, religion is a technique, a life skill, like other life skills. Apparently, they do not believe in a spiritual world, but they recognize people's need for one. Ren is different. There will always be an aspect of luck, and she seems to be the one who survives despite her lack of planning, despite her religious belief. Just as she can twist around the trapeze at Scales and Tails, she can be equally flexible in other aspects of life. Butler's Lauren would probably acknowledge Atwood's Ren's plasticity as a proof that "God is Change." Ren, in opposition to for instance the Corps men, has the gift of imagination, and she chooses to use it to imagine a better world. She knows her dreams are not real, but she prefers "make-believe" to "reality" (481). Here the Ren character touches upon the core function of religion, according to evolutionists: to provide comfort and hope (see Pinker, "Evolution and Explanation" 109).

In addition to the talent for religion, Denis Dutton asserts that humans have an art instinct (243). Steven Pinker claims they do not, but that the gift of art is rather a by-product of evolution that gives humans pleasure (*The Blank Slate* 404). Donald E. Brown observes that the Universal People decorate themselves or their clothes, and they have particular hairstyles (140). In addition, the Universal People ornament their other belongings, they "know how to dance and have music" (140), and these practices could be characterized as examples of artistic behaviour. Tooby and Cosmides claim that the narratives are both treasured and passed on because "the mind detects that such bundles of representations have a powerfully organizing effect on our neurocognitive adaptations" ("Does Beauty Build" 181; see also Buss 181). Everybody who has contact with children will know that information that is given them in the form of stories will be received both more easily and more willingly. Adults are not that different. D. S. Wilson sees narration as "a form of play in humans" that has been passed on through evolution, "not as an adaptation in its own right but as part of selection for juvenile characters in general" ("Evolutionary Social Constructivism" 113).

Both novels offer examples of how narratives are used to explore problems and to entertain (see Brown 132). Lauren, for instance, is familiar with the texts in the Bible, and they have formed her as an individual. She has an inner library of narratives she can use as guidance in practical as well as spiritual questions. The Gardeners are taught through simple songs and stories that are repeated over and over. The contents of them easily pop up in the Gardeners' minds when they need them. Paul Hernadi claims that the function of literature has always been to develop human consciousness towards how humans think, feel, and want, so they can be flexible enough to endure the constant changes in their living conditions. He

continues by stating that proficient communicators also may have made better and more flexible plans for the future, been more skilled in mindreading and thus more successful in interaction with fellow humans. Such skills could be the reason why they became ancestors while less skilled humans did not (21). Lauren spreads her religion the way she knows will work: she makes simple lyrics people will remember. Steven Pinker does not see artistic expression as a homogenous group, but makes a distinction between faculties that may have been vital for survival and reproduction through natural and sexual selection and those which probably have not (“Evolution and Explanation” 108). Music and religion are, for Pinker, in the second category. He can see how they can be important in keeping a group together, but not why (109). For this thesis it will suffice to state that art is typically human.

Art is “making special,” Ellen Dissanayake proclaims, and describes the human need to artify their experiences (“Beyond Words” 162). An event is scrutinized through the lens of an artist, professional or amateur, or as Dissanayake implies, art results from “treating ordinary objects, surroundings, sounds, movements, words, themes, motifs, ideas, and so forth in specified ways that make them *extra-ordinary*” (162). E. O. Wilson maintains that the arts may function as an organizer:

Early humans invented [the arts] in an attempt to express and control through magic the abundance of the environment, the power of solidarity, and other forces in their lives that mattered most to survival and reproduction. The arts were the means by which these forces could be ritualized and expressed in a new simulated reality. (142)

Like typical dystopian literature, both *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* exhibit societies with an extreme lack of creativity and artistic freedom. The fictional civilizations created by Butler and Atwood lack for both the “making special” that Dissanayake discusses above, and the possible organization of expressions that Wilson explores. In both *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, the societies value monetary gain at the cost of spiritual fulfilment. Artists are not respected, and nobody seems to care for creative industries at all. In *The Year of the Flood* nobody reads books, and the Martha Graham Academy for artistic studies, is not respected. Those who can, attend the Watson-Crick Institute, the university for the gifted in science and mathematics. “Numbers people,” not “word people” or “image people” – expressions used in both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* – will be of interest to the corporations, and fewer and fewer want to study the arts. Glenn is identified with the first group, Jimmy with the second, and Amanda

with the third. Jimmy is among the “word people,” but his problem is that he is all words, and he has no impact on anything. Ren, with her love for dance, but who also puts much effort into her written diary, is more difficult to place, but either way she is not considered to be among the numbers people.

However, the whole community seems to be built on the ideals of the numbers people, the ones Glenn calls “Demi-autistic” (*Oryx* 228). Not only have the citizens lost interest in pursuits that do not give profit; they are scared to come together like in a theater, because they will feel trapped in a large group. Even at the university for arts, Martha Graham, everything has “utilitarian aims”; consequently the academy changes its motto from “Ars Longa Vita Brevis” to “Our Students Graduate With Employable Skills” (*Oryx* 220). Since numbers people, like Glenn, strive for immortality, the society might not need “Ars Longa” anymore. The regime apparently disregards the insight that through evolution, “periods of protoliterary ‘time-out’ from ... productive pursuits” have been necessary for humans, even though the benefit has not been immediately obvious (Hernadi 26; see also Boyd, Carroll, and Gottschall 8). Instead, everything, even human bodies, becomes articles of trade. Glenn creates new humans, not as art, but as craft. These humanoids are customized and “perfect.” For humans, however, a perfect specimen of *Homo sapiens* is an anomaly, because a flawless “human” will seem uncanny as well as unnatural. Jimmy/Snowman reflects over his lack of sexual arousal upon his encounter with perfect, and naked, female Crakers: “They look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program. Maybe this is the reason that these women arouse ... not even the faintest stirrings of lust” (*Oryx* 115). In his production of humanoids, Glenn has swapped nature for culture, and disregarded the fact that aesthetics is not science. Beauty cannot be trapped in constants, even though it may sometimes be explained through mathematical terms.

In *The Year of the Flood* and *Oryx and Crake*, art is made redundant in the capitalist society and compared with “studying Latin, or book-binding; pleasant to contemplate in its way, but no longer central to anything” (*Oryx* 219). The Gardeners value art for art’s sake, but it seems as if this is only skin deep. There is no evidence in the text of the adults making art; it is more of a pastime for children. Music, on the other hand, is highly treasured, and they know all the psalms in the Oral Hymnbook by heart. Music has a function: words are easier to remember in the form of lyrics, so the position given to music fits nicely with the Gardeners’ practical approach. The striking lack of focus on imagination and creativity in the society makes some characters stand out. Amanda is a character whose work aims to subvert the dystopian universe. She is a professional artist, and she even manages to get generous funding

for her projects. Jimmy labels her as one of the image people, but the images she creates are composed of four-letter words that are selected with great care. Since childhood, she has lured insects into formation by tempting them with for instance jam. As an adult, her experiments have developed, and she uses animal corpses instead of jam, tempting not ants, but vultures to be trapped into “Vulture Sculptures” (*Oryx* 287, 290). She is in control of her life, makes the capitalists’ money work for her, and seems to be inexorable. In her vigorous creativity, she represents hope. Ren finds Amanda indestructible, but even Amanda must finally give in to evil. When the narrative ends, Amanda has been captured and raped, and it is left to the reader to decide whether there is any hope for her regaining sanity or not. The difference between a free Amanda creating art and the broken figure in the last pages of *The Year of the Flood*, makes it clear that freedom is an element we associate with a humane community.

Butler’s characters in *Parable of the Sower* are in the same way deprived of art. The daily struggle for survival overshadows everything else. Lauren is different from the others, also in this respect. She has inherited some science fiction novels from her grandmother, and she seemingly reads them much the same way as she does non-fiction, which serves to prepare her for a life outside the community walls. She does not read for pleasure, but to structure her possible future, almost illustrating Jerome Bruner’s idea of how the “narrative organizes the structure of human experience – how in a word, ‘life’ comes to imitate ‘art’ and vice versa” (“Narrative Construction” 21). In her journal, she keeps track of her thoughts, experiences, and religious development. It is mostly because she lacks equals to discuss with during large parts of her childhood that she learns from an inner dialogue instead. Nevertheless, she scoops up information from everything around her. Growing up, we gather experiences, and through storytelling and gossip, we share what we learn. According to Paul Hernadi, literature “expand[s] the cognitive, emotive, and volitional horizons of human awareness” by making us more flexible and equips us with what we need in order to survive through evolution, by providing the tools that may make us “more astute planners, more sensitive mind readers, and more reliable cooperators” (21). The study of how humans use language is therefore vital for scholars who want to find out more about our species. The most apt storytellers get the most attentive listeners, and many theorists believe that this talent is an adaptive function that has helped us to survive as a species (see Brown 132). We learn through storytelling, a fact that may explain why writers create critical dystopia; they want to show us what might happen if we don’t take action. As Pinker writes: “Fictional narratives supply us with a mental catalogue of the fatal conundrums we might face someday and the outcomes of strategies we could deploy in them (“Art and Adaptation” 134). Perhaps without

reflecting upon it, humans take pleasure in literary make-believe for great parts of their everyday life, through the telling of jokes and gossip and watching drama series on television, and this is similar in all human societies both before and now (Boyd, Carroll, and Gottschall, Introduction 11). Donald E. Brown calls language “a window” into the Universal People’s “culture, ... minds and actions” (130). If one of the Universal People is particularly eloquent, especially if it is a male, his status will rise because he can more easily talk people into behaving the way he prefers (Brown 132). Denis Dutton explains excess vocabulary as an element in sexual selection, as eloquence is a fitness signal (146-7). Adam One in *The Year of the Flood* is a character with such talents. Through his sermons, he seems to tell others both how to live and what to believe. He is not described as particularly masculine in other respects, but through his eloquence with words, he holds his position as the Alpha male. Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* also manipulates with words. She relies on her ability to rhetorically convince people into believing in her and what she says. She is “the sower” of words and she puts all her hope into her mission. In addition, she has an ongoing discussion with herself in her journal, and particularly in *Parable of the Talents* the reader realizes how Lauren’s dialogue with herself, both in her mind and on paper, refines her thoughts. Hence, it is a terrible loss to her when she is deprived of the possibility to do so. Through the written words, she seems to process and come to terms with her experiences: “Sometimes writing about a thing makes it easier to stand,” Lauren writes in her journal (*Sower* 113). Also Ren in *The Year of the Flood* uses inner monologue to cultivate her thoughts. By keeping a journal she bends the rules: She can now freely express her inner feelings. The Gardeners do not appreciate the written word, but in this respect, Ren does not succumb to their directives. In secret, she keeps writing all that she cannot say out loud, and at one point she even uses her diary to communicate with Jimmy by “accidentally” leaving it open. The language in her diary shows the change from a child to a young adult, where in the beginning, her vocabulary seems limited and immature.

The language used by the characters of *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* shows signs of degeneration. Like society in general in the novels, language seems to fall apart. People apparently do not read books, metaphors are scarce, and the clichés plentiful. An advanced Theory of Mind is essential in order to understand and to employ irony, as both parties must recognize the intention of the other. Evidently, the Crakers do not understand irony, but it seems the rest of the society is unaccustomed to advanced language use, as well. Even Toby, who seems to be intelligent and with a philosophical mind, seems to struggle with metaphors. She does use them, but it seems they are merely clichés like

“[n]eural gymnastics” (204) and “head trips” for “vigils” (203). She does, however, use similes, but it seems as if it is with great effort: “She’d crumbled into his arms like – like a dead fish – no – like a petticoat – no like damp tissue paper!” (141-42). Zeb reveals that he must have had a different cultural upbringing than her, as he knows Mozart – “See you around, Queens of the Night” (243) – and he creates metaphors. He uses the phrase “gone dark,” and it leaves Toby uncertain whether he means “a pigmentation makeover” or something else (290). Jimmy, who is a lover of old novels, tells himself that “[h]e should avoid arcane metaphors” (*Oryx* 112). The language becomes shallow, and on many occasions, it does not suffice to the users, as they seem unable to express themselves. Especially when it comes to existential questions, the texts reveal how the characters struggle with words. Love, for instance, is obviously hard to describe for the characters. It is here the reader realizes how the classics have provided us with apt language to express intense emotions. The word “sadness,” for instance, is mentioned repeatedly in both novels, and the characters try different strategies to express the feeling. Toby seems unable to find phrases that cover it and must make new ones: “Maybe sadness was a kind of hunger” (313). It shows she has a flexible mind; even though she suffers from cultural famine, she is able to create neologisms. Eviatar Zerubavel describes “the flexible mind” as one that can be both “rigid” and “fuzzy,” as it will “notice structures yet feel comfortable destroying them from time to time” (120). Instead of an original use of language, the societies in the texts seem to appreciate clichés. Ren knows she has stolen expressions from “country-and-western” when she states that “[t]here was a hole in my heart that only Jimmy could fill” (348).

Another sign of degenerated language is the extensive use of oronyms and other homophones. The beauty parlor is called AnooYoo, Zizzy Froots is a fruit company, and HelthWyzer is supposed to look after their health. In fact there are few companies in the novel with names made from a different idea. The dystopian society revealed in *The Year of the Flood*, does not see the value in words. They do not read poetry or other quality literature, and the poor condition of language in public spaces mirrors the status of the written word. Artists let us see the world with new eyes; without them, everything looks the same. A more sophisticated use of oronyms is where Atwood has given the character Amanda Payne a name that sounds like “amend the pain.” Amanda is doing a good job modifying her pain by altering her life story into language less agonizing. Her character thereby shows a different quality: She is able to manipulate with language, whereas the large corporations show their lack of creativity by making infantile company names. D. S. Wilson posits that “narratives have a powerful effect on human behavior and adaptation to current environments proceeds in

part through the creation and selection of alternative narratives” (113). Amanda rewrites her experiences into her own stories and in doing so, she stays in control. Ren also applies this technique and writes in her journal that she and Amanda told each other how they had managed to stay alive (381): They thereby tell “stories,” as opposed to personal “events.” When Amanda is kidnapped, Ren applies the same method, but with less success. She tries to visualize Amanda smiling and singing, but she knows she is “just making it up” (339). The harsh reality is seeping through in the end as she finds that language is losing its power of redefinition.

Language is in fact so closely connected to being human that the loss of it is a common sign of mental breakdown. For some characters, language ceases to mean anything. In *The Year of the Flood*, the Gardener members who withdraw and stop speaking are said to be “Fallow,” “stoned,” or “depressed” (96). In *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* we read about Jimmy who is gradually losing his sanity when he realizes he is probably the only survivor of the “flood.” This is described through his deteriorating language. He starts talking gibberish, and when other humans finally discover him, he does not recognize them. As Ren sees it, he is barely Jimmy anymore: “Oh Jimmy, ... Where have you gone?” (514). Toby obviously knows about language loss as a sanity marker, and she becomes conscious that if she must continue living in the monotonous and secluded environment of the AnooYoo building, she will lose her mind: “Soon her own language will go out of her head” (418). In *Parable of the Sower* Lauren is in lesser risk of losing her language when she is left alone because she still keeps her diary, much the same way Ren in *The Year of the Flood* keeps up her spirit while waiting to be rescued from Scales and Tails. Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* describes in her journal others who have not been able to keep their sanity, like their traumatized neighbour who “wandered around, not talking” (149). To Lauren, strong impressions cause a temporary loss of language. The day her brother dies, her log entry consists of one single sentence: “Today, my parents had to go downtown to identify the body of my brother Keith” (112). Octavia Butler relies on the reader’s ability to understand why that sentence is all there is. The worse the characters’ situation gets, the less they speak. Zahra tries several times to tell Lauren and Harry what happened on the day of the fire, but does not succeed. The third time she tries, she manages to give them some details of how she was raped and about her child being killed. She is still not able to tell what has happened to Cory and to Lauren’s little brothers. When Harry understands what has happened to his own family, he reacts much in the same way: he “stopped talking, stopped doing anything” (170).

In both novels, there is a dichotomy between written and oral language. In *Parable of the Sower*, the tenets of Earthseed are expressed in *The Book of the Living*, which contains short hymns or lines of poetry expressing the essence of the religion. They are easy to learn and thereby more easily spread. In *The Year of the Flood* the Gardeners are sceptical to all written material, and the members are not allowed to write anything on paper: “all that permanent writing that your enemies could find – you couldn’t just wipe it away, not like a slate” (256). They acknowledge the power of language, and like Shakespeare in *Shall I compare thee to a Summer’s day?* they keep people and animals “alive” through language. The game Extinctathon’s aim is to teach its players to remember the names of extinct animals, the same way Adam One teaches them to “Say the Names” (55). Ren repeats the names of her friends “in order to keep them alive” (55). Their anxiety about the written word makes it more difficult to share knowledge over a distance, and the Gardeners will have to trust their leaders, as so much information necessarily will originate from them. Amanda does in fact make a living out of writing words: As described above, her words are there one second and gone the next, leaving no trace. They are like symbols of how the existence of *Homo sapiens* might seem in the perspective of eternity.

The Crakers, customized for a carefree life, are illiterate, and will not be able to communicate other than face-to-face. A people without a written language, will more easily be manipulated by other, literate people, even though Atwood claims the opposite (*In Other Worlds* 92). What she has in mind is perhaps that people like the Crakers will never be influenced by what they read, because they do not read, but in my opinion they will be easy prey for others who do. Through *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler stresses the importance of literacy. Her protagonist sees it as her task to teach others to read and write, first in Cory’s improvised school, then to Zahra and later to the members of the Earthseed community, as illiteracy seems to be widespread. Even her brother, Keith, sees the potential in teaching others, and earns money that way on the street (105). In *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren understands that her religion will be more widespread if there is written material, and the marketing of a written *The Book of the Living* is very successful. Both through the written and the oral material, the Gardeners and Earthseed spread their gospel.

Words are also used for less arcane purposes, and gossip seems to be a vital part of the communication flow in both novels. Verbal manipulation is a universal human trait (see Brown 130; Pinker, “Art and Adaptation” 131). Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* calls gossip their “neighborhood theater” (114), and in *The Year of the Flood* we are told that “[r]umour was the daily news among the Gardeners” (131). Those who are sociable will get hold of

more information. Therefore conformity and flexibility pay off, so when Amanda is busy making friends with everybody, it is helping her climbing the hierarchical ladder as well as giving her useful information (100). When people cannot trust what the authorities tell them, they must come up with alternative routes to knowledge, and this is what happens in these novels. In *The Year of the Flood*, information is mostly based on rumour, both in the pleeblands and within the HelthWyzer communities as they are equally denied a free flow of information: They must listen to gossip, as there are no official, reliable news. Important information means money, and is therefore, like everything else, for sale (57, 206). Gossip and rumours are entertaining, and humour is vital in human interaction (see Brown 131). Therefore, it is worth noticing that the Crakers are constructed without this sense (*Oryx* 359). They are not able to understand metaphoric language, and therefore metonymy and puns will be wasted on them. Like the autistic students from Glenn's university, they will only understand the literal meaning of words. The aim of the Paradise Project has supposedly been to create a utopian society, but a place without humour does inevitably seem bleak and dull, for happiness is for most people associated with pleasure, not only with the absence of horror. There is, however, a lot of cheerfulness and humour in the Gardener community. Toby even makes jokes when she is left alone at the AnooYoo: "hack off any extraneous parts that might need trimming. Your head, for instance" (282). Humour constitutes a major contrast between Atwood's and Butler's novels: *Parable of the Sower* reveals a total lack of humour, whereas *The Year of the Flood* is literally flooding over with it. The result is therefore a picture of a bleaker, more desperate and hopeless future in the former than in the latter. Even though Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* manages to create her Earthseed community in the end, it seems as if the people there only exist, they do not lead truly humane lives with both sorrow and laughter. Such a society will not be very robust.

The corporations know how to sell: "We're not selling only beauty, the AnooYoo Corp said in their staff instructionals. We're selling hope" (*Flood* 315). Advertising agencies earn their money from analyzing how humans think and act. According to Ellen Dissanayake, people in the search for meaning and belonging might fill the void with "conspiracy theories, obedience to mind-controlling cults, or fanatical adherence to fundamentalist doctrines both secular and divine" (155). The characters in both novels struggle with hope, and Ren in *The Year of the Flood* spends much time pondering upon what will help her to survive. She decides to believe in her own ideas, not only adopt others, when she towards the end of the narrative chooses "wishful thinking" instead of "reality." She is not as pragmatic as the rest of the Gardeners, and changes Adam One's tenet "We are what we eat" into "We are what we

wish” and continues by stating what can be described as the essence of hope: “Because if you can’t wish, why bother?” (481). It is a deliberate action on her side to use her imagination to create a better world, instead of seeing the “reality [that] has too much darkness in it” (481). Hope is essential in the process of motivating people to make an effort beyond the present. In *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, people’s need for hope is exploited by the corporations: In the former by offering people eternal beauty and mind-blowing sex, and in the latter by promising food and shelter. The protagonists look for hope in what seems hopeless, and they seem to find it in quite similar ways: human cooperation and sharing. Especially the teaching/learning-aspect is prevalent in the novels. Even though our genes are important, learning is no less essential. E. O. Wilson argues that the large amount of genes in the human organism do not “encode more than a minute fraction of the variants of human behavior” and draws the conclusion that learning is the basis of diverse cultures (“Foreword from the Scientific Side” viii). Even the titles of the novels indicate that teaching is the key: a parable is a narrative which purpose is to teach something by giving an example. The title *The Year of the Flood* indicates that somebody is telling the story about this particular year in history, implying a “teacher” as well as a “pupil,” and thereby the hope that there is someone to teach and also somebody left to be taught.

Adam One in *The Year of the Flood* tells Toby that “we must be a beacon of hope, because if you tell people there’s nothing they can do, they will do worse than nothing” (296). By teaching, the Gardeners give their children hope, as teaching is always future-oriented. Adam teaches his fellow Adams and Eves to teach in order to avoid hopelessness and destruction: “It is better to hope than to mope!” (107). Hope lies in the power of imagination; a visualisation that a situation will change for the better. Toby from *The Year of the Flood* and Lauren from *Parable of the Sower* share some personality traits in this respect: They are both realists, but believe in teaching. In other words, they never lose hope, but are not in any way optimists. Where their contemporaries strive for instant fulfilment either through the BlyssPluss pill, the AnooYoo or the Pyro drug, these characters see teaching as a special calling. Toby is a teacher in the Gardener community, and she continues educating others also after the plague. Teaching is to show others the way, and Toby takes on more and more leader responsibilities even though it weighs heavily on her shoulders: “I’m not up to this.... I’m too old.... Forgive me, Ren. I’m leading you to doom” (498). She teaches Ren to refine her instincts, to listen to the birds; the “wrong kind,” meaning crows, or no birdsong at all, is a warning, she advises Ren (480). Her “shirt of nettles” has become more agreeable (224) when it is voluntarily put on. Toby steps forward as a true leader. She rises to the occasion, and

consequently it is not an Adam but an Eve that takes charge in the new world. The tableau created by Atwood picturing Toby as Eve Six giving a speech to her small congregation as if she was Jesus at the last supper, illuminates that a new era is about to emerge: “Dear Adams, dear Eves, dear Fellow Mammals and Fellow Creatures – all those now in Spirit – keep us in your view and lend us your strength, because we are surely going to need it” (515). She speaks as if she has now taken Adam One’s position. Adam One, however, seems to hold his last sermon simultaneously with Toby’s, on top of the old Edencliff Rooftop Garden, but his is that of a broken man without hope: “My dear Friends, those few that now remain” (508). Until the last moment he teaches, but now how his topic is to enter death gracefully, as they believe they are infected with the plague: they intend to die with dignity, singing like only humans can.

Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* soon understands that she must teach in order to give people hope. Robledo’s schools are closing down, and the common man will soon be illiterate. Lauren teaches, both as a young girl helping her stepmother in their improvised school, and from the moment she starts her quest north. She is the teacher, the sower, of Earthseed, and she intends to educate other sowers. She counteracts the despair and pessimism of others by working harder, teaching more people. The classic utopian idea is challenged in *Parable of the Sower*. Jean Pfaelzer maintains that the utopian hope is that of an eternal and static state of contentment (70). Lauren Olamina’s utopian society, Acorn, is built on embracing change; create change instead of being led by it. On the last page of the novel, Lauren’s addresses her small congregation by talking about “the friends and family members [they have] lost,” and leading the group in songs and discussions. The narrative thus ends much in the same way *The Year of the Flood* does, by a group sitting by the fire, planning for the future fronted by a visionary female leader. That signifies hope.

While the meaning of life cannot be summed up in a word or a sentence, the novels offer some suggestions. The Toby character illustrates the human need for answers. Through her religious pondering the reader recognizes a longing for something outside the palpable or measureable. Toby believes and does not believe at the same time, something which is “impossible,” but the narrative makes it believable. The main characters in *The Year of the Flood* regain their humanity by repossessing a language that has been limited and vulgarized by the corporations. Amanda starts the process by “vulturizing” them.

In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren learns from people in her community and from books, and she uses it to better lead her small congregation to their new place. She acknowledges their human need for a strong leader and becomes one. Lauren Olamina from *Parable of the*

Sower and Toby from *The Year of the Flood* are always somewhere in the continuum between faith and doubt: They are never certain. That means they are dynamic and flexible rather than rigid, a human feature that has always been an evolutionary advantage. They are setting examples for their communities, showing that everybody must take part in mutual learning and teaching to bring their societies forward.

Conclusion

I have called this thesis *Instinct or Insight in Dystopia*, and the title has been there from the start. During the writing process, it has become increasingly clear to me that the “or” could easily be exchanged with “and”: there is no actual antinomy between the two concepts, as insight does not exclude instinct. But there is a tension between them that is interesting. The protagonists of *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* can be characterized by their employment of both features, and their “success” in becoming survivors is largely due to their ability to combine them. The antagonists fail for the opposite reason: they seem to rely entirely on one or the other. Those who are associated with the corporations ignore human instincts and try to move as far away as possible from anything natural, and the “leftover” citizens that do not succeed in the capitalist community, sink to a level where only survival instincts can help them. Consequently, the altruistic aspect falters, and individual characters like Glenn forget that humans are more than their instincts, that they have a conscious mind and a free will. Those I will characterize as having insight in these narratives are the ones who combine culture with nature: They utilize what is given them by nature, and they learn what they can from their communities to be able to use nature to the benefit of themselves as well as their group.

Dystopian narratives go to the core of what a civilized and humane society means by showing us the opposite. Atwood and Butler have both created fictitious worlds stripped of all the attractions of consumer society. Thus, Atwood places her character Toby in *The Year of the Flood* in the scraps of what was once the AnooYoo Spa. As the name indicates, the spa’s purpose is to scrape off any signs of nature and make “a new you.” Atwood shows us that a new you is not you at all. Both authors have written stories that remind us of our own vulnerability as well as the vulnerability of the earth: the earth can exist without humans, but mankind cannot survive if nature does not. Atwood and Butler have created fictional universes where the most intelligent species on the planet have destroyed nature and made an enemy of it. The authors have given us a hint of hope through their novels, though. Their protagonists take a stand; where other citizens are apathetic or dehumanized, the heroes are proactive and creative. It seems as though the authors think readers need the shock factor, as the protagonists are put in horrible situations. The authors’ main message is that there is hope if people only learn from their mistakes. Atwood’s and Butler’s novels teach us a lesson: We

must tend to the earth and to the creatures on it, and we must influence others to do the same. Lauren, Toby and Ren are survivors because they possess the main features that have been vital through human evolution: They learn from others in their communities, they teach others, and they listen to their instincts, but are not led by them. Most importantly, they are flexible.

A certain combination of traits seem to give the characters, as they have given *Homo sapiens*, the assets needed to survive under difficult conditions: the ability to find meaning through transcendence, which is not necessarily a religious faith; to use art in its many forms; to show altruistic behaviour as opposed to egotistic; and, last but not least, to be flexible and pragmatic. When the narrative in *The Year of the Flood* ends, Jimmy is seemingly dying. He has been unable to bond with other people, and even though he has survived the first wave of the plague, he is now either infected or going mad. The dogmatic Adam One and his group are seriously weakened, and whether or not they are the group we find singing in the penultimate sentence of the novel, is uncertain, but the text indicates that all the group members are infected (509). Zeb is very much alive, and like Toby, Ren and Amanda, he is a pragmatist, and makes the rules as he goes along. Even though it is human to ignore signs of coming disasters too horrific to comprehend, Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* and Zeb and Toby in *The Year of the Flood* do make plans. They are realists. Evolution will always be subject to instances of luck and pure chance, as natural selection does not “think,” and there will always be other forces in play besides natural selection, such as, for instance, natural disasters and human intervention. All the survivors in *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower*, have, in addition to all other traits, luck when they survive the plague. Pilar does not survive, for instance, even if she was extremely careful. Her approach is passive, illustrated by her tenet: “time is not a thing that passes, said Pilar: it’s a sea on which you float” (121). This quote illustrates the essence of both narratives: To survive in a world that is in constant change, you cannot just “float”; you must also steer and paddle. Those who adapt and take charge stand a better chance of becoming survivors and future ancestors. By presenting their protagonists as survivors, Butler’s and Atwood’s critical dystopias offer us hope and satisfy our sense of justice: We want to be told that our actions matter, because it means we are still in control. In real life, luck is probably the most important factor when it comes to surviving for instance a tsunami, but if the authors had let chance be the only way to success, their texts could no longer be characterized as critical dystopia, for hope would be turned into hopelessness.

The novels' ethos may be summed up in the words by Jerry Phillips who claims that "history is not something that simply happens to us, irrespective of our will and desires, but is, indeed, ours to make" (299). His declaration stands in direct opposition to Pilar's passive approach quoted above. Reading the novels, it is rewarding to discover that it is Toby and Lauren that survive, not Glenn or Keith. It only seems fair. Glenn, Keith and also Jimmy are symptomatic of Atwood's and Butler's dystopian societies: they are uncaring, cold and without love. Atwood and Butler have created narratives that are frighteningly realistic, despite the fact that they are classified as science fiction. They have built fictional universes that are so like our real universe that readers must think that it might be closer to what our possible future will look like than we want to think about. Both can be seen as attacks on Americanism – or consumerist society. It is impossible to read the novels just as entertainment without reflecting over the possibility that the horrors they describe actually can happen. The Glenn character shows us that even mankind can be dispensable in such a society, as he demonstrates the consequences of losing all that is sacred.

The theory I used in my thesis is based on different sources, most of them somehow related to literary Darwinism. Literary Darwinism has met a lot of opposition, and I was at first hesitant to refer to theory that obviously evokes antagonism. Dylan Evans, who has written *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, for instance, describes in "From Lacan to Darwin" that his transition from being a promoter of Lacanian theory to one who supports Evolutionary Psychology was in his opinion received by other critics as "a betrayal, an apostasy, a fall from grace" (38). I have not written a thesis to test or to promote evolutionary theory, but it was the approach that seemed to offer the most interesting and rewarding angle when human nature represented in dystopian narratives was what I wanted to study. Critics like Frederick Buell and Fredric Jameson have analysed Butler's and Atwood's novels, but from different theoretical points of view. Especially since literary Darwinism is a relatively recent direction in literary theory, it has been difficult to find interesting analyses of literary texts informed by evolutionary theory. Consequently, much of the time spent on this study has been dedicated to reading theory, trying to decide on an angle of approach. In my opinion, the two novels are especially suited for a study from the perspective of literary Darwinism, as they thematically discuss some of the same problems that Darwin evidently speculated upon, for instance: What enhances human fitness? Especially Theory of Mind proved to offer an interesting perspective for looking at communication situations and human relations in the novels.

The attentive reader has probably noticed that there are major issues in the texts upon

which I have scarcely touched. I have been selective, and conscious of what elements should not be a part of my study; not because they are not important – they certainly are – but because some of these issues are so vast and would overshadow all the other questions I wanted to examine. Firstly, there is the race issue in both texts that is worth looking at. Secondly, there is the gender question; both authors are women, and the protagonists are strong female characters. In addition, Butler's text problematizes sexual preference while Atwood's text ignores it. I do, however, not feel that I do the authors any injustice by focusing on other aspects of their works of fiction, as these themes have been thoroughly examined in many previous studies. Other interesting aspects have not been explored to the same extent, and it would, for instance, be interesting to study how the novels make use of the diary form, here represented by Ren's and Lauren's journals.

It seems to me that *The Year of the Flood* and *Parable of the Sower* are particularly well suited for a Darwinian literary analysis, and further studies applying an evolutionary approach might yield interesting results by focusing on other works belonging to the genre of the critical dystopia. Where my thesis has discussed many aspects in the two novels, one could narrow the scope down. What would really be interesting was if the feminist aspect of the novels was examined through an evolutionary lens. Perhaps history will show that women were better at taking care of the world than men. The two novels by Butler and Atwood seem to suggest that there is no reason why women cannot be the ones who help humanity through the self-inflicted problems they are in. With modern appliances, physical strength is hardly of vital importance. Lauren in *Parable of the Sower* proves to be a capable woman, and only needs to dress as a man to fool others into believing she is one. Margaret Atwood shows us a female character who is taking charge: Glenn is dead, Jimmy is talking gibberish, and Adam One seems to be at his wits' end, so perhaps Toby, as Eve Six, and Zeb, as Adam Seven, will take on the roles of the new managers in Paradise. And as far as ranking goes, six does, after all, come before seven.

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