

CREATE, DESTROY, REFIGURE: CAPITALOCENE IDENTITY IN MARGARET  
ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE* AND *THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD*

A Thesis  
by  
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## Abstract

### CREATE, DESTROY, REFIGURE: CAPITALOCENE IDENTITY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE* AND *THE YEAR OF THE FLOOD*

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This thesis examines and interrogates the presence of the new term “Capitalocene identity” in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. In defining Capitalocene identity as “the compilation of climate crisis and late capitalism-altered experiences, available social roles, and economical and physical spaces that influence the formation of human identity,” this study brings together developing climate crisis studies research such as climate psychology and trauma response theory, etymologies of “identity” and its related terms, and the understanding of Atwood’s narrative as a work of speculative fiction rather than science fiction proper. As such, traditional components of identity—memory, relationships, class and social status, and gender identity—are examined as being inherently warped through Capitalocene structures and experiences, thereby creating a Capitalocene identity in Atwood’s characters.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to offer my sincere admiration and gratitude to my thesis chairperson, Dr. Kathryn Kirkpatrick, as this work had its genesis in her classroom and has been fostered by her continued belief in its importance. Thank you, Dr. Kirkpatrick, for the many readings, the editorial suggestions, and for every other element of your support throughout the writing of this work. Additionally, I extend my appreciation to my thesis committee members, Dr. William Atkinson and Dr. Leslie Cook, for supplying me with a theoretical foundation for this work, as well as insightful and poignant questions to challenge my thinking consistently through this process. Thank you for your time and your commitment to this thesis, especially in light of the past year's uncertainty.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my academic confidante and dearest friend, Mallory Flanagan, for her determination to disrupt Capitalocene structures through animal studies, but, most of all, because she reads.

“I read for pleasure and that is the moment I learn the most.” – Margaret Atwood

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## Introduction

This thesis study approaches Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) as leaders in the evolution of climate crisis narratives from "science fiction" to "speculative fiction." While the *Oxford English Dictionary* has traditionally defined science fiction as "an imagined alternative universe," our current circumstances (climate, societal, etc.) preclude the ability to view many of these works as existing in full imagination and therefore outside of probability. As a result of this potentiality, speculative fiction, a term created in 1941 by science fiction author Robert A. Heinlein and currently defined by Atwood as something that "could really happen" (Potts), has claimed its place as the cousin of science fiction; thus, speculative fiction explores truths in our contemporary period and magnifies them into a possible, or even probable, future.

Here, I must acknowledge that Atwood's use of "speculative fiction" is not without criticism. Ursula Le Guin wrote in a review of *The Year of the Flood* that Atwood's "arbitrarily restrictive definition seems designed to protect her novels from being relegated to a genre still shunned by hidebound readers, reviewers and prize-awards" (Le Guin). However, Atwood herself refutes the classification of her work as science fiction, insisting in her essay collection, *Moving Targets*, that "*The Handmaid's Tale*, *Oryx and Crake* [and *The Year of the Flood*] is a speculative fiction, not a science fiction proper...[I]t invents nothing we haven't already invented or started to invent. Every novel begins with a what if, and then sets forth its axioms" (Atwood 330). In summary, though critics such as Le Guin bristle at Atwood's use of "speculative fiction," the author herself does not shy away from explaining her reasoning for rejecting the label of "science fiction."



Within this thesis, I add to the rapidly evolving conversation surrounding speculative climate crisis fiction by asserting that Atwood's work marks the emergence of what I refer to as "Capitalocene identity"—the compilation of climate crisis and late capitalism-altered experiences, available social roles, and economical and physical spaces that influence the formation of human identity. Such a term advances what I call "climate crisis identity"—the lived experiences of and interactions with climate crisis structures, environment, and warped spaces—by acknowledging the undeniable factors of a dying capitalist system that are so prevalent in Atwood's narrative. In adding this term to the environmental humanities, I rely heavily on Jason Moore's own addition of the term "Capitalocene," which he describes as the "historical era shaped by relations privileging the endless accumulation of capital" (162). In Moore's view, the Capitalocene is a more accurate representation of our current climate crisis era than the term "Anthropocene," which presents our geological era as the "consequences" for humanity's negative influence on nature beginning in the industrial age (159). However, Moore argues that the Anthropocene

does not challenge naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity's strategic relations of power and production...it does not ask us to think about these relations *at all*. The mosaic of human activity in the web of life is reduced to an abstract Humanity: a homogenous acting unit. Inequality, commodification, imperialism, patriarchy, racial formations, and much more, have been largely removed from consideration. (159)

In other words, the Anthropocene places all of humanity in the same category of responsibility for the current ecological crisis, avoiding a critical look at certain groups who wield more environmental and social power and their implemented structures of inequality and violence. What's more, Moore argues that the Anthropocene offers a problematic portrayal of what Will Steffen and others call "human enterprise" and its actions within "the great forces of Nature" (614). Moore further suggests that there "are two major dimensions

of the Anthropocene argument today. One is a strict emphasis on atmospheric and geological change and its proximate drivers. The other is an argument about history, and therefore about the crisis today. There is frequent slippage between the two” (160). In other words, the Anthropocene ultimately concerns itself with either a focus on “the consequences of human activity” or “the construction of humanity as collective actor” (161), nearly eliminating any hope for discussion on class inequality, violent enforcement of power hierarchies, or other aspects inherent to the merging of climate crisis and late capitalist systems. Therefore, it is clear that the Anthropocene is not quite a strong enough concept to fully address *all* of the contributing factors to our current era (an era which I argue is projected into a possible future in Atwood’s narrative, continuing to mount in catastrophic certainty). As such, the term that works best with the formation of identity in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* is “Capitalocene identity,” as the Capitalocene *does* take into account the power imbalances and dangerous late capitalism that create a truly inseparable “humanity-in-nature,” rather than the Cartesian dualism of “Humanity *and* Nature” that the Anthropocene cannot help but fall into.

In order to effectively approach the formation and reformation of the human in Atwood’s work, this thesis also works alongside Rosi Braidotti’s approach to posthumanist theory as “the historical moment that marks the end of the opposition between Humanism [the idea that humans are of central importance] and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive framework, looking more affirmatively to new alternatives” (Braidotti 36). Relying on Braidotti’s description of posthumanist theory for this thesis, I define posthumanism as “existing beyond the scope of the traditional and recognizable human-centered system.” In slight contrast to Braidotti’s claim that the posthuman is the “end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism,” this thesis also acknowledges the

posthuman as a separation from the aggravated humanism of the novels' late capitalism. In this way, there is a clear link between the human exceptionalist impulse to situate humanity at the top of all life forms and the transhumanist actions that seek to continue this hierarchy through technological and genetic advancement. As a result, a posthuman narrative evolves, decentering traditional humanism in favor of questioning the importance of the human presence as well as demonstrating the evolution of the traditionally understood human identity into a Capitalocene identity.

With this in mind, however, I also explore the notion that, within the bounds of Atwood's narrative especially, posthumanism is not only multifaceted, but can also be appropriated and manipulated by late stage capitalism. As discussions of the late-stage capitalist entities like the CorpSeCorps, Compound laboratories, and other dangerous institutions will demonstrate, humanist components often manage to masquerade as posthuman mannerisms. As such, the narrative's capitalism-influenced transhumanism, the "belief that the human race can evolve beyond its current [physical and mental] limitations, especially by the use of science and technology" (*OED*), often attempts to hide itself behind the cover of posthumanism's endeavor to move beyond the bounds of a traditional human-centered world. In this way, the humanist actions of many of the novels' characters try to usurp posthumanism's use of "beyond" (a word that it shares with transhumanism in name only) to force it back into the will of the same human-centered mindset that true posthuman approach would attempt to leave behind. However, though the humanist components in the narrative's social and environmental sphere attempt to hold primary authority, it is the rejection of this humanism from the posthuman ideologies of several characters and institutions that put up significant opposition to humanist constructions. As a

result, a posthuman narrative manages to claw out an existence, despite repeated attempts of the humanist, late-capitalist entities to quash its existence ahead of its own collapse.

In interacting with relevant research, I provide a brief overview of three critical areas of scholarship as paramount to situating this thesis at the intersection of climate crisis studies (comprised of climate psychology, environmental studies, and Capitalocene class studies) and literary fiction: the etymology of terms related to “identity” and its branches; the already noticeable effects of the general climate crisis and specific Capitalocene on human experiences, psychologies, and physical bodies; and the current relationship between the Capitalocene and contemporary literary fiction. I make use of these three areas of scholarship in developing the foundation and parameters of my engagement with Atwood’s narrative, especially as I seek to create a new understanding of the novels.

Working towards this new understanding, this thesis ultimately creates the term “Capitalocene identity” in order to provide an accurate name for the human that Atwood creates in the *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* narrative space. As Atwood’s two novels engage extensively with the no longer ignorable influence of capitalism-in-climate-crisis landscapes and societal structures on human identity, so then must “identity” as a critical term evolve to reflect this influence. By approaching this aspect of the study, I begin by exploring the evolution of speculative fiction by reflecting on the etymologies of words related to this study. Though it is important to acknowledge the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s current definition of “identity”—the characteristics determining “who or what a person or thing is”—as a foundation for my exploration of identity’s presence in Atwood’s work, I also draw attention to the *OED*’s etymology of this term, moving from the Middle French concept of “same” or “quality of being identical” (taken from the Medieval

Latin), to the updated understanding above (*OED*). “Identity” has its roots in line with our knowledge of the kind of “sameness” present in “community” or “kinship.” In terms of our current understanding of the mental, physical, and social structure of the concept, identity “has been associated with the perennial mind-body problem in philosophy since the time of John Locke” (Gleason, 911). This “quality of being identical” in societies, while not a “twinned” notion by any means, holds power in an individual’s acceptance into a community, as the recognition of “sameness” is a driving force in the building of societal bonds.

Therefore, “identity” is far from the only word to which this thesis must attend. Related terms such as “society,” “family,” “class,” and others are essential to understanding “identity” as a circular concept that both accepts influence from outside sources and affects these systems in turn. Along these lines, I connect identity’s current definition back to this concept of “sameness” as it relates to society, family, class, and other terms of community. In short, I argue that this “sameness” (or lack thereof) with other individuals determines “who or what a person or thing is” in Atwood’s work.

I further propose that the connection of “identity” (and that of related terms) to societal and literary spaces is crucial for appreciating the cultural work that Atwood’s fiction performs and understanding this narrative as a speculative projection of these terms as they relate to present society. Accordingly, I review the presence of identity-related words in four books that examine their meanings across cultural and societal settings. These four books—Raymond Williams’s *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (second ed., 1983), Frank Lentricchia and Tom McLaughlin’s *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (second ed., 1995), Tony Bennett and others’ *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (2005), and Colin MacCabe and others’ *Keywords for Today: A 21st Century*

*Vocabulary* (2018)—cover over twenty years of vocabulary progression within the bounds of contemporary society.

Williams's *Keywords*, while not defining "identity" itself, does turn its focus to related terms such as "individual," "class," "personality," "family," "experience," and "humanity." *New Keywords* continues Williams's work, updating (and altering in some instances) these definitions, retaining the original list of terms while expanding their reach. For example, while *New Keywords* holds fast to "individual," it also adds the word "identity" as a companion term. While Williams's "individual" denotes a "singleness" (163) from which the collective grows, Bennett et al.'s "identity" compounds "individual" with the "collective" to form the whole of the self. Thus, *New Keywords* asserts that the collective is now regarded as influencing the individual and vice versa, rather than the previous historical rendering of the collective as only the *influenced*. In a nutshell, the influence of many is required to make up the individual's identity, building a kind of "loop" around the term as society advances its meaning. This evolution of terminology (and the addition of companion terminologies) complicates the concept of "identity" in the way that seems appropriate with the similarly complicated world that Atwood seeks to build. Just as *New Keywords* acknowledges the societal and cultural progression of "individual" and "identity," among other terms, Atwood's fiction retains recognizable attributes of such concepts while fostering them ever forward into new complexities.

Colin MacCabe et al.'s *Keywords for Today: A 21st Century Vocabulary* further expands our understanding of "identity." Like *New Keywords*, this book acknowledges that identity is influenced by a variety of sources, yet MacCabe's definition suggests that identity becomes politicized in our postmodern sphere, becoming "multiply ambiguous; it is what

you can't help being, but also what you choose to become" (MacCabe et al. 187). In this sense, a contemporary understanding of identity is one that recognizes that not only is such a concept influenced by outside forces, but it also represents distinct choices on the part of the individual. Ultimately, *Keywords for Today* asserts that identity, at its core, functions as "a perpetually shifting construction as individual and world interact" (187).

Social class has been discussed as having a direct tie to the actual *formation* of several facets of human identity. Annette Lareau and Dalton Conley's book *Social Class: How Does it Work?* argues that class has a particularly strong influence on one's societal experience and, by extension, identity development itself. To start, the authors argue "against the view that we are becoming a classless society," instead insisting that "class works in a variety of domains including politics, health, education, gender, and the family... remain[ing] an integral part of identity" (Lareau & Conley Abstract). What's more, social class is capable of influencing these listed identity factors indirectly, as the class experiences of parents lend themselves to the formation of similar experiences of children. In summary, while an exploration of transforming class structures is necessary, it is important not to conflate transition with the actual *end* of these structures. That is, the transformation of class structures does not mean that unequal social classes have ceased to exist. As Lareau and Conley discuss, social class is not only extremely present, but it continues to alter identity formation in myriad ways.

While each collection adds to the etymologies that precede it, these catalogs demonstrate the metamorphosis of identity-related terms that will assist in this thesis's goal of marrying the narratives's place in the literary world with one based in believable speculation due to its use and advancement of recognizable cultural attributes. In other

words, the novels both reflect and expand the operations of current human identity, working to portray its potential future as we move deeper into the climate crisis. In this regard, I make the distinction between speculative and science fiction—while both perform necessary cultural work, speculative fiction like Atwood’s work is birthed from identifiable societal and cultural aspects, transforming recognizable identity into the realm of “Capitalocene identity.” To this end, it is imperative to look at the same evolution of the very terminologies that “identity” encapsulates and relate these terminologies to the literary space of Atwood’s work. Therefore, this thesis relies on the keyword guides listed above to demonstrate the etymologies of “identity” and its associated terms as they evolve in culture and society while looking to Lettrichia and McLaughlin’s collection in relating such terms to literary study specifically.

As noted above, the second area of discussion related to this review of scholarship is the presence of climate crisis already visible in human experience, psychology, and physical bodies. Examining climate change’s current impact on aspects of identity is vital to viewing Atwood’s work as speculative literature rather than science fiction—the foundation for the narrative’s events must be currently present in order to be projected into an imagined future. Stacy Alaimo’s *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* discusses the connection between nature and the physical body, focusing on the notion that “conceptions of the human self [are] profoundly altered by the recognition that ‘the environment’ is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves” (4). To summarize, Alaimo posits that though our repeated “movement” through our environment may not always be acknowledged, this movement nevertheless demonstrates the inseparable bond between human physicality and the environment. This knowledge of cyclical influence,



especially in the face of the climate crisis, is essential for understanding the ways that speculative fiction expands and deepens this environmental connection to the embodied aspects of identity.

Though Alaimo analyzes the relationship between the material body and the environment in its general sense, she also highlights how manipulating the environment's products physically affects human identity. The seizure and manipulation of natural resources have created large-scale structures of capitalism, racism, and class systems. Alaimo explains that not only do these structures tip the scales in favor of certain groups while disparaging the value of others, but they have also birthed the possibility for different "bodily" identities. For example, Alaimo claims that the creation of the working class under capitalistic formations of power molded the "working-class body," the physical embodiment of the upper class's manipulation of the environment and the relationship between the working class and surrounding nature. Additionally, the physicality of the "working-class body" is not resigned to a singular representation; Alaimo examines the emergence of 20th-century representations of bodily relationships with the environment. She describes these representations as sometimes envisioning "nature and working-class bodies in a utopian manner, wresting them away from capitalist economies in which they are mere resources, granting them their own alternative economies of abundance and desire," while others "depict a more sinister trans-corporeality...[allowing for] a broader interrogation of how modernization itself refigures the body... in ways that may be empowering to workers as well as destructive" (22; 46). In these ways, Alaimo discusses the representation of various physical bodies and natural surroundings, as well as how these bodies interact with structures formed through environmental manipulation that "refigure" the understanding of "the self." She outlines the

foundational understanding that human identity's physical aspect is inseparable from its relationship with nature; both affect and are affected by the other. This knowledge of cyclical influence, especially in the face of the climate crisis, is essential for understanding the ways that speculative fiction expands and deepens this environmental connection to the physical embodied aspects of identity.

Along with Alaimo's exploration of the relationship between environment (and its warping through climate crisis) and the physical aspects of identity, other scholars have made connections to less-tangible identity components, such as experiences of trauma and their impact on human psychology. Donna Orange's *Climate Crisis, Psychoanalysis, and Radical Ethics* addresses the fact that while psychoanalysis actively addresses "difficult" or traumatic human experiences, "it has been slow to address climate change" (iii). However, Orange attempts to lay bare climate change's impact on political and societal spheres, associating these effects with the more profound result of altered human identity. Orange digs deep into this concept, pulling from scholars such as Roger Gottlieb in order to depict human identity as reliant on the multiple interactions between society and environment within the climate crisis, ultimately distorting the formation of individual identities as society distorts the surrounding environment. In this regard, Orange's ideas connect easily to Atwood's work and this project as a whole, as much of the identity formation found in the novels can be directly linked to the warping of the environment and the societal structures that falsely depict its stability. Albeit outside of literary fiction, Orange engages with a notion similar to Atwood's work: the formation of identity and the status of natural environments are entirely interdependent, with the damage to one negatively affecting the other. Through discussing extensive examples of the climate crisis's psychological impact on humanity, Orange aims to

provide a more cohesive guide for “psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, philosophers, and environmental studies scholars” encountering and addressing the issues that the crisis will exacerbate (iv).

Like Orange, a growing number of academics are joining forces to discuss the climate crisis’s psychological impact. Paul Harland approaches a similar notion, as evidenced in his article “Ecological Grief and Therapeutic Storytelling in Margaret Atwood’s *Maddaddam* Trilogy.” Harland’s article deals specifically with Atwood’s work, rather than a more generalized climate crisis discussion, theorizing that the sensation of grief in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* stems largely from the notion that recognizable humanity is nearing complete erasure. Harland points out that this “ecological grief” has a specificity about it—Atwood’s characters know the likely cause of the impending “end,” as well as what that end might look like because they have seen it happen to others before them. As will be discussed in later chapters, Atwood’s novels engage with specific situations of grief, often tied to the witnessed deaths of family, friends, or, worse yet, the lack of confirmation of their fates, due to the rapidly deteriorating Capitalocene era. In this sense, specific losses, such as the loss of recognizable environment and loved ones, plays a significant role in the identity formations of Atwood’s characters.

Perhaps the most pertinent source for the scholarship surrounding the relationship between the climate crisis systems and contemporary fiction lies in the very work that I seek to respond to, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Great Derangement*. Ghosh offers up an exploration of the climate crisis capitalism and its impact on identity formation, writing, “since identity and performativity are now central to public discourse, climate change too has become enmeshed with the politics of self-definition” (136). In addition to discussing this inevitable change of

identity creation in the face of the climate crisis, Ghosh argues that the perfect avenue for exploring this shift in identity construction is, in fact, fiction endowed with climate change-related elements. In this argument, Ghosh posits that climate change narratives need not only express contemporary experiences but rather “imagin[ing] other forms of human existence is exactly the challenge that is posed by the climate crisis...We need, rather, to envision what it [those other forms of existence] might be (128). Ultimately, Ghosh calls for the move toward the type of speculative climate crisis fiction realized by Atwood.

These three key areas—the social and cultural etymology of “identity” and its related terms; the current effects of the climate crisis and, specifically, the Capitalocene, on human experiences, psychologies, and physicalities; and the current representation of climate crisis in contemporary literary fiction—supply the necessary critical context for reading Atwood’s novels. While the scholarship surrounding the relationship between climate crisis understandings and contemporary literature may indeed reveal some complicated (and at times even contradictory) scholarly opinions, these debates are essential to providing the foundation for this thesis’s approach to and untangling of the complex concept of Capitalocene identity in Atwood’s work.

I apply each of these three areas of scholarship to the five chapters of my thesis project. In doing so, I focus my analysis on the primary characters of Glen/Crake, Oryx, Jimmy/Snowman, Ren, and Toby. Through each of my chapters, I make use of the already visible presence of the climate crisis on identity factors. In this manner, I demonstrate Atwood’s success at answering Ghosh’s challenge that climate crisis fiction “envision what [the world] might be,” effectively “imagin[ing] other forms of human existence” that may occur the deeper we venture into the climate crisis timeline. Additionally, I address distinct

identity components within specific chapters, though I acknowledge that this method will consist of overlap in places (furthering the notion that aspects of identity cannot be entirely separated).

My first chapter concerns itself with the presence of memory—particularly that of pre-pandemic and traumatic memory—in the characters of Snowman, Oryx, Toby, and Ren. Snowman repeatedly recalls memories of when he answered to the name Jimmy, revealing a previous identity within these reflections. Oryx remembers her pre-pandemic life as a trafficked child who still tried to cling to concepts of family and hope. Like Oryx, Toby’s childhood memories are rife with violence and fear, as her family’s death causes her to have to fend for herself against an unforgiving environment and ruthless persons. Ren’s memories also bear witness to crumbling societal and environmental structures, as her traumatic memories continue to plague her during her wait for rescue in a biocontainment unit at the beginning of her post-pandemic existence. This section of my thesis looks at *when* these memories come back to the characters of Snowman, Oryx, Toby, and Ren, the circumstances that create their recall, the language used to describe them, and what actions or reactions they may cause in the individuals that affect their emotional response (or lack thereof) to narrative events. What’s more, this chapter makes use of climate crisis studies concepts such as Pre-Traumatic Stress Disorder, ecological grief, and Anthropocene horror in order to effectively link this projected identity aspect back to its present-day climate crisis and Capitalocene sources.

My second chapter focuses on the relationships represented in the novels, with subsections focusing on familial, romantic, and environmental relationships. As noted earlier, the aspects of identity that I discuss in this thesis cannot be fully separated from one another,

as their individual functions intertwine to form the collective whole of identity. While my first chapter discusses memory's presence in the narrative, my second chapter looks at the *content* of those memories in terms of relationships, as well as exploring relationships occurring in the narrative's present. In exploring this facet of Capitalocene identity, I examine the familial relationships of Jimmy/Snowman, Toby, and Ren as they unfold over the three novels. Jimmy's childhood provides an excellent backdrop for this chapter, allowing for a deeper look at the relationship between his mother and father as it is affected by the problematic HelthWyzer compound, as well as how this marital relationship affects Jimmy's inability to form a clear understanding of healthy relationships. Moreover, Toby's own family tragedy, directly linked to the rising climate crisis and capitalist battleground of a speculative future, reveals the dissolution of the traditional nuclear family and the manner that this loss informs her future relationships. Additionally, I look at Ren's experience of the repeatedly destroyed and reconstructed concept of family, exploring the notion that Ren's familial relationships undergo such alteration due to engagement with late-stage capitalism, disintegrating what Michael Spiegel refers to as the "unified source of identity" within family structure. This chapter ultimately outlines the evolution of each family model and the relationships that stem from their various structures, thereby affecting these three characters in their view of healthy marital/romantic relationships and their understanding of the concept of family. In continuing this exploration, I keep with Jimmy as he embarks on his very manipulative and harmful approach to romantic relationships, eventually resulting in his viewing women, even Oryx, as property, in much the same way as Crake does. The volatile relationship with the post-pandemic environment will serve as the last discussion within this chapter, as I analyze the ways in which pre-pandemic memory and pre-pandemic

environmental relationship informs, for better or worse, the relationship that characters form with their post-pandemic environment. In this context, I contrast the environmental relationships that Snowman and Toby participate in, particularly in regard to the way humanist responses to the environment continue to linger post-pandemic, especially in Jimmy's experiences, while Toby is able to engage with a much more positive environmental relationship due to her cultivated posthuman approach to her pre-pandemic environment. As this work relies on the definition of humanism as the "system of thought which places humans, or humanity as a whole, at its centre" (*OED*), such humanist reactions, responses, and approaches will not serve pre-pandemic humans in a post-pandemic landscape that no longer submits to human command. As a result, these novels signal that a move towards a posthumanist mindset, such as the one that Toby adopts, is necessary for continued survival, though it acknowledges that humanist response still remains in Jimmy's own approach to his post-pandemic environment.

My third chapter focuses on the aspect of class and status, concerning itself with the characters of Oryx, Crake, Jimmy, Toby, and Ren. Here, I outline the ways class is constructed in a capitalism-in-climate-crisis social and environmental sphere, as well as how this understanding of their status impacts their actions and reactions to the surrounding environment and narrative events. For example, while Crake and Jimmy's childhood is replete with financial and physical security behind the Corporation's literal walls, Oryx, Toby, and Ren largely experience lower class and underclass standing, resulting in Oryx's mother selling her and her sibling to a sex trafficker, and Toby and Ren experiencing sexual violence in various sex work roles they take on in order to survive. Consequently, this chapter will examine the ways in which class status denotes not only who can make

purchases of what, but also the idea that human bodies themselves can be purchased within such a hyper-capitalist society that turns to bodily “resources” to make sure impoverished individuals remain under the feet of the wealthy. In this regard, the class system in Atwood’s speculative fiction again insists that it is far from a fabricated relationship between late-stage capitalism and climate crisis, but rather a speculative future of an already visible partnership, capable of creating both emotionally and physically violent spaces for those outside of the “preferred” class category: upper class. This thesis also acknowledges that this narrative space relies on an evolved capitalist class structure that effectively eliminates the traditionally understood “middle class.” However, I argue that there are still three “levels” of class present in the novels, only they are now upper class, lower class, and the underclass, a term defined by Gunnar Myrdal in 1963 as a “class of unemployed, unemployables, and underemployed, who are more and more hopelessly set apart from the nation at large, and do not share in its life, its ambitions, and its achievements” (10). In the context of these two novels, this “nation at large” is the CorpSeCorps, mostly, though those living behind the Compound and Corporation walls arguably make up a smaller portion of the global sphere than the lower and underclasses they direct. As such, the “nation at large” is really referring to the sectors that convincingly lay claim to the title of authority, rather than the majority of the population. Through the exploitation of the “underclass,” the powers of the CorpSeCorps and other upper class elite enact violent consequences against those who are not accepted inside the literal walls separating their space from the space of the lower class.

This discussion of the violent repercussions of class in the characters of Oryx, Toby, and Ren continues into my fourth chapter, which concerns gender identity’s interaction with narrative’s class system and the formation of collective identity as a whole. In addition to the



concept of class affecting sexual violence in the novels, the gendered experience plays a major role as well. While Crake and Jimmy do not grapple with the fear or experience of rape or sexual assault, the narratives of Oryx, Toby, Amanda, and Ren are rife with both events. In furthering this conversation of gender identity's place within the speculative narrative, I make connections between how this aspect of identity engages with present climate crisis studies as well as how it informs and converses with the other Capitalocene identity components of memory, relationships, and class. In doing so, I attend to the ways in which Atwood's female characters must often rely on strategically compromising their physical safety in order to hopefully secure a brief reprieve from the sexually violent social environment, as well as how male characters are often witnessed exploiting and even enacting these violences.

In conclusion, I have chosen these three works in their entirety as they function as parallel narratives, unable to be separated from the other just as these identity aspects cannot be fully broken apart. In engaging with this thesis, I would like to invite readers to view Atwood's work as different from other climate crisis novels. I propose that Atwood propels her narrative out of the "science fiction" genre into the "speculative fiction" realm in more ways than just an evolution of climate change characteristics, but through the application of these characteristics onto human and posthuman identities. As such, his thesis attaches a new term, "Capitalocene identity" to the etymologies listed at the beginning of this prospectus, while demonstrating that Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* have fulfilled this term through a wholly unique approach to speculative climate crisis fiction.

## Chapter 1: Memory and its Formation, Resurgence, and Influence on Identity

Throughout Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, memory presents itself in myriad ways, encroaching on the territory of the characters' present and altering responses, emotional connections, and the identity of those it possesses. I use this terminology since, as becomes clear throughout these narratives, memory is uncontrollable. Instead, memory often appears unsummoned and undesired by those it approaches, seeming to grasp rather than *being* grasped. As such, this examination of memory works from an understanding that memory holds agency itself and consists of multifaceted characteristics: experience, relationship with that experience, and re-emergence of the experience. Additionally, this chapter posits that, despite the wide variety of memory's formation among Atwood's characters, the common factor is the notion that memory is not just the practice of *recalling* experience, but that memory is, in fact, an experience itself. In working with such an understanding of memory's function in the narrative's creation of Capitalocene identity, this chapter is divided into two primary sections of memory's narrative function—pre-pandemic memory and triggered traumatic memory. While these two sections provide a close reading of Atwood's presentation of memory, they also incorporate memory theory and research.

### Pre-Pandemic Memory

For the most part, Atwood's characters are intimately connected with the part of their identity that existed before the global pandemic that, assisted by the climate crisis building to a crescendo, succeeded in wiping out most human beings from the earth. While these pre-pandemic memories can elicit both pleasant or painful reactions, they are all essential in creating the post-pandemic identities in the narrative's present. In addressing the expanse of

pre-pandemic memory material, this section focuses on the childhood memories of characters Jimmy and Oryx in *Oryx and Crake* as well as the adolescent/adulthood memories of Toby in *The Year of the Flood*.

Perhaps the greatest source for this notion of pre-pandemic memory lies in Stanley Klein and Shaun Nicols's neurological study on memory and personal identity, which focuses entirely on an individual "who has accurate memories of scenes from his past, but for whom the memories lack the sense of mineness" (677). Klein and Nicols's study certainly has applications outside of the purely scientific, especially when looking at the mental divide between "then" and "now" that so many of Atwood's characters experience. As such, this section aims to incorporate Klein and Nicols's work in building the notion of "pre-pandemic identity." In focusing on the "sense of mineness" as it is subtracted from an individual's "accurate memories," I define "pre-pandemic memory" as "the recollection of events and experiences *before* global and personal disaster that inform and shape the post-pandemic self." Since they occur mostly on the brink of global disaster, these often-traumatic memories may be approached and regarded in a wide variety of ways, as trauma invites distinct responses from the individuals it affects. As such, these memories can shape the post-pandemic self by provoking denial as to their traumatic essence (as with Oryx), or, alternatively, they may invite spite and despair in the post-pandemic individual (as with Snowman). However characters respond to their pre-pandemic traumas, the influences of climate crisis systems, structures, and entities are largely responsible for the development of the memories themselves, steeping these experiences in climate crisis engagement and contributing to the larger Capitalocene identity.

Though Oryx does not survive Crake's intention to destroy human life (hers at his own hands), her childhood pre-pandemic memory still illuminates quite a lot of her adult identity. Likely more than any other character in the two novels, adult Oryx makes a significant effort to banish any possession, any "mineness," from her childhood memories. When Jimmy presses her for details surrounding her experience as a trafficked child, including identifying factors of the man who initially purchased her, Oryx dodges the discussion as long as possible:

So [Jimmy] would ask, and then she might say, "I don't know. I've forgotten." Or, "I don't want to tell you that." Or, "Jimmy, you are so bad, it's not your business." Once she'd said, "You have a lot of pictures in your head, Jimmy. Where did you get them? Why do you think they are pictures of me?" (*Oryx and Crake* 114)

By coupling such dialogue with Klein and Nicols's discussion of the missing "mineness" in the recollection of some memories, I argue that Oryx is not only attempting to rid herself of such possession by these traumatic memories—she is also trying to keep others, even her lover Jimmy, from attaching any of their own "mineness" to her past experiences.

Each village had its own such man, who would make the dangerous journey from the city at irregular intervals, although it was always known ahead of time that he was on his way.

"What city?" asked Jimmy.

But Oryx only smiled. Talking about this made her hungry, she said. Why didn't sweet Jimmy phone out for some pizza? Mushrooms, artichoke hearts, anchovies, no pepperoni. "You want some too?" she said.

"No," said Jimmy. "Why won't you tell me?"

"Why do you care?" said Oryx. "I don't care. I never think about it. It's long ago now." (117)

Oryx's attempts at distracting—herself, Jimmy, or both—from both the memory recall itself as well as the experience of those memories take on multiple forms. Oryx's initial request for Jimmy to order pizza proves to sustain a certain amount of diversion from feeling the full force of her childhood memories. It becomes easier to view Oryx's use of the meal as a

barrier between herself and her memories (or between Jimmy's desire for details and the memories she guards) when the food has been finished and Oryx seems to search for another barrier to block the continuation of her childhood memories, if even for a little while:

“Here, Jimmy. Open your mouth. I give you the last piece.”  
 Remembering this, Snowman can almost taste it. The pizza, then Oryx's fingers in his mouth.  
 Then the Coke can rolling onto the floor. Then joy, crushing his whole body in its boa-constrictor grip.  
 Oh stolen secret picnics. Oh sweet delight. Oh clear memory, oh pure pain. Oh endless night. (122)

As Oryx's ability to use the meal as a deflection of Jimmy's questions eventually runs out, she uses the last piece of the pizza to transition into what can arguably be read as another diversion. Though Oryx has repeatedly expressed her lack of desire in experiencing her childhood memories and utilizes diversionary tactics to distract Jimmy from his intrigue, it hasn't been made clear throughout their shared dinner whether Oryx is *unable* or *unwilling* to recall these childhood memories. However, Jimmy's own narration of their sexual encounter reveals deeper insight into Oryx's approach to these memories.

Jimmy's fond remembrance of this sexual moment in his relationship with Oryx is abruptly punctured by the seemingly out-of-place “Oh clear memory, oh pure pain.” While initially appearing as a misplaced thought, this sentence has several meanings attached to it. Firstly, the focus on *whose* pain Jimmy is referencing brings along its own complexity. Though he describes the pain as likely belonging to himself, I posit that Jimmy is in fact describing his desire for Oryx herself to experience the delayed pain of her trauma. This reading becomes clearer when combined with the fact that “Oryx continued, later that night, or on some other night” (123) with her recall of these childhood memories, this time with alarmingly precise detail, the notion of “Oh clear memory” takes on a more informative role.

Until now, the waters have remained muddied; Oryx has been unable to bring herself to either remember her traumatic upbringing or to retell such a narrative to Jimmy. What's more, she has kept herself as detached as possible from what she does remember, informing Jimmy, "You don't understand...Many people did it. It was the custom" (119). When Jimmy declares his desire to kill the man who bought Oryx from her mother, she scoffs at him, sarcastically laughing "Oh Jimmy, would you like it better maybe if we all starved to death?" (119). However, Oryx's detachment ceases quite quickly after this exchange with Jimmy. Though it is likely due to Jimmy's insistence on her reliving these traumatic moments, Oryx goes into more detail, explaining her background to Jimmy and dodging fewer of his direct questions. Additionally, she allows herself to experience these memories as emotional, even painful, recollections, admitting that the child sex trafficker who asked if she would like to marry him "was as close to love as [she] could get right then, so she felt happy" (133). In this sense, reviewing Jimmy's comment of "Oh clear memory, oh pure pain," the only two of the five statements made that are linked with a comma rather than existing in their own sentence, makes plain that there is a deeper link between the two notions than simply their proximity to one another. Oryx allowing herself to attach ownership (or "mineness") to the pain in those memories, and therefore allowing the painful experience of memory itself, demonstrates the connection between the two concepts that Jimmy linked earlier. However, as Jimmy's voyeurism is absolutely present in this scene, and will be discussed more in-depth in chapter four in terms of his appropriation of Oryx's sexual abuse, it is quite possible to read this exchange as Jimmy obtaining his "goal" or Oryx attaching her "mineness" to her traumatic pre-pandemic memory, despite the fact that this avoidance of "mineness" has so far been essential to her emotional and mental survival. Therefore, there is an added trauma here: the

pre-pandemic memory does not only create the re-experience of trauma, but it becomes a traumatic experience itself through Jimmy's assistance. In short, Jimmy's need to make Oryx feel the pain that he thinks essential to such a traumatic narrative forces her to both re-live her sexual abuse as well as create the new wound of this memory encounter.

As noted earlier, Oryx does not live to exist in the post-pandemic landscape of Crake's creation. However, her pre-pandemic childhood memories still have a great deal of influence over her character in *Oryx and Crake*, and these experiences have influenced significant aspects of her complex identity. While Oryx tends to reject ownership of painful recollections, I propose a deeper investigation into the manner in which such memories nonetheless create deep, identifiable markings on her adult self.

Possibly the aspect of Oryx's adult identity most impacted by her childhood memories of being a trafficking victim is her perspective on love and relationships. Though chapter two of this thesis will delve deeper into the formation and function of human relationships as they relate to Capitalocene identity in the novels, the overlap between relationships and memory cannot be fully separated. After Oryx allows herself to experience these memories and the pain they induce, she provides insight into how they have shaped (and likely warped) her recognition and approach to love and relationships as an adult.

Of course (said Oryx), having a money value was no substitute for love. Every child should have love, every person should have it. She herself would rather have had her mother's love...but love was undependable, it came and then it went, so it was good to have a money value, because then at least those who wanted to make a profit from you would make sure you were fed enough and not damaged too much. Also there were many who had neither love nor a money value, and having one of these things was better than having nothing. (126)

Here, Oryx's own insight into how her childhood experiences impacted her approach to even the *general* concept of love, nevermind love she may feel or anticipate from a partner, speaks

directly to the presence of these memories in her adult life. Whether through her romantic relationship with Crake or Jimmy, Oryx demonstrates an approach steeped in memory and knowledge of temporary connections and disposable love based on monetary profit. As Crake quite literally “purchases” Oryx to be both his romantic partner and his business associate, Oryx experiences a repetition of her initial pre-pandemic memories. Katherine Snyder highlights this notion of the “repeated traumatic memory,” writing that if “the doubled temporality of trauma requires repetition without origin and an endless regression of love and loss, it nonetheless also permits repetition with a difference, repetition as reworking” (485). In this manner, I argue that Oryx’s notion that “love was undependable” is now being “reworked” into her adult identity as a method of exerting control over previous trauma in her present situation. Oryx rejects the notion of reliable love or emotional connection as hazardous, a decision that both reinvigorates the presence of pre-pandemic childhood memory in her adult relationships and serves as a subconscious reach for control and stability in a profit-obsessed world that she recognizes all too well.

Though Oryx’s time spent as a trafficked child is connected to her adult identity, responses, and relationships, there have been several critiques as to the manner in which her identity is constructed through these memories and her background in general. Peter Paik provides specificity to such a critique, explaining that Atwood leans into stereotypical portrayals and that “such a representation runs the risk of reinforcing the image of the subaltern woman as hyper-sexualized, lacking inwardness and the capacity for unconditional loyalty, or reproducing the idea of feminine desire as inherently harmful to the institutions that run civilization” (Paik). However, I argue that the detailed description of Oryx’s childhood memories, combined with her difficult romantic relationships in adulthood, do not



actually form the type of identity Paik is concerned about, at least not from the reader's position. Rather, it is the *reaction* to these memories by both Jimmy and Crake that create, in their minds, such a problematic identity construction.

For example, Jimmy's own memories of Oryx make it plain that he and Crake, among other men, have altered Oryx's pre-pandemic identity and memory for their own benefit. Both men participate in the hyper-sexualization of Oryx's character through their additions to what her pre-pandemic memories must "mean" in reference to her current self (i.e. the problematic portrayal of the subaltern woman that Paik cites), and how they may take advantage of these perceptions they have of her. Jimmy is at least somewhat able to admit their joint problematic approach to Oryx, confessing:

How long had it taken him to piece her together from the slivers of her he'd gathered and hoarded so carefully? There was Crake's story about her, and Jimmy's story about her as well, a more romantic version; and then there was her own story about herself, which was different from both, and not very romantic at all... There must have been other version of her: her mother's story, the story of the man who'd bought her, the story of the man who'd bought her after that... (*Oryx and Crake* 114)

From Jimmy's own admission, he focuses on the "romantic" version of Oryx that he has constructed from the "slivers" of her memories that she has allowed him to witness. Jimmy further demonstrates his construction of the problematic version of the "oversexed" woman that Paik addresses, as he repeatedly discusses the "voice" of a highly sexual nature whispering to his post-pandemic self. Though Jimmy at first regards this voice as "some tart he once bought," and *The Year of the Flood* does reveal this voice to be the "sex skills expert" Jimmy thinks it belongs to, the voice quickly changes to be that of "some girl he knows, or knew" (11). Katherine Snyder notes the connection between this hyper-sexual voice and Oryx, noting that as the voice

continues to whisper in his ear throughout the narrative, in tones ranging from seductive to mocking, from consoling to demanding, from wistful to matter of fact, we come to recognize its imaginary female speaker as both utterly generalized- an every woman who is variably a prostitute, his mother, a friend, his lover- and at the same time utterly specific: Oryx playing all of these roles. (478)

In this regard, Paik's objections to Oryx's problematic portrayal would be accurate, especially in terms of Oryx's hypersexualization as a South Asian woman. However, it is important to recognize that these representations explicitly derive from the men she discloses her pre-pandemic identity to rather than a purely authorial representation of her character.

Additionally, I argue that critiques of Oryx's place of birth and childhood, combined with her pre-pandemic memories of an existence as a trafficked child and young woman, fail to take the rapid growth of sex trafficking and child sex tourism<sup>1</sup> during the climate crisis into account. Stepping away from the literary sphere and into the sociological and scientific, Nicole Molinari underscores this detrimental connection between climate change's various branches and the growth of child sex trafficking, writing, "to better understand the rooted drivers of vulnerability to human trafficking, key areas to account for in the evidence of vulnerability factors relate particularly to climate change and its linkages to environmental degradation, livelihood stress, impoverishment, and forced migration" (50), all of which are present in Oryx's pre-pandemic memories. Though Molinari is specifically addressing the Indian Sundarbans in her statement, Oryx's undisclosed location in South Asia, combined with her remembered poverty and "normal" selling of children to traffickers, would likely still fall into this category of a climate-crisis affected area with a large increase in sex trafficking as a result. What's more, Michael Spiegel notes that "Oryx (along with her

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<sup>1</sup>Camela M. Tepelus writes in "Social responsibility and innovation on trafficking and child sex tourism: Morphing of practice into sustainable tourism policies?" that "child sex tourism is booming worldwide...Asia is at the centre of child prostitution, with 60,000 child prostitutes in the Philippines, 400,000 in India, 800,000 in Thailand. Most of them are girls under the age of 16" (Tepelus 104).

memories and origin) present[s] the best idea of how the psyche functions amid the fragmentation of a post-national world. Oryx moves from a village to an urban centre and then from metropolis to metropolis until ending up within the walls of a heavily fortified corporate compound. Her extensive experience interacting with the global community enables her to maintain multiple loyalties and identities” (127), implying that even her earliest memories of social bonds steeped in convenience rather than genuine communal support are already working to develop her later Capitalocene identity. In short, I posit that criticisms of Oryx’s construction through pre-pandemic memories, and the adult identity these memories formulate (especially the multiple identities she fills in the minds of problematic male companions), are neglecting to acknowledge the factual evidence behind Atwood’s speculative fiction. Not only does Oryx come from the general area where sex trafficking and child sex tourism has increased exponentially due to the poverty and desperation influenced by the climate crisis, but male characters such as Crake and Jimmy warping these pre-pandemic memories into a “romantic,” or otherwise beneficial-to-them false identity of Oryx is entirely in keeping with the gendered Capitalocene identity issue, later discussed in chapter four, of appropriating the sexual violence of female characters for emotional, monetary, or physical profit. Whether consciously or subconsciously, both Jimmy and Crake have digested the social climate’s teaching of women-as-resource, manipulating Oryx’s pre-pandemic memories and priority of pure survival in order to construct this faux identity to avoid guilt over their sexual and emotional exploitation of her.

Another significant pre-pandemic memory of childhood, that of Snowman’s “dead” identity of Jimmy, further demonstrates the relationship between pre- and post-pandemic existences. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Jimmy/Snowman’s adult identity is composed

of several problematic approaches to the world around him. I argue that these approaches primarily consist of a tendency to romanticize and usurp the trauma of his partners for his own advantage, a proclivity for disassociating himself from emotional engagement, and an inability to experience pre-pandemic memories without the presence of suspicion or detestation.

Snowman's post-pandemic cynical state is quickly revealed to be a near-total rejection of the memories of his pre-pandemic existence, particularly in regard to emotional connection and response. The first revelation of this previous identity in Snowman's pre-pandemic memory comes early in *Oryx and Crake*, soon after a proper introduction to Snowman's hard-bitten character. To begin with, the narrator arguably reveals himself to be a third person limited narrator attached emotionally and mentally to Snowman, detailing the innermost thoughts and reactions of his character. What's more, the narrator further unveils an alternative version of Snowman—an identity so separate that it requires another name:

Once upon a time, Snowman wasn't Snowman. Instead he was Jimmy. He'd been a good boy then.

Jimmy's earliest complete memory was of a huge bonfire. He must have been five, maybe six. He was wearing red rubber boots with a smiling duck's face on each toe; he remembers that, because after seeing the bonfire he had to walk through a pan of disinfectant in those boots. They'd said the disinfectant was poisonous and he shouldn't splash, and then he was worried that the poison would get into the eyes of the ducks and hurt them. He'd been told the ducks were only like pictures, they weren't real and had no feelings, but he didn't quite believe it. (*Oryx and Crake* 15)

With the emergence of the third person limited narrator, and the introduction of the one-time-Jimmy, Snowman's identity can effectively be witnessed as a three-part composition of Jimmy, Snowman, and Snowman's narrator: two beings that retain names and one that exists without any sort of alias. If this is the case, the fracturing of identity into three separate sources potentially signals Snowman's inability to fully reconcile himself with either

his past or his present: he must assign monikers to (or subtract them from) these separate entities in order to even begin working through their experiences and traumas. In comparison with Snowman's current growling pessimism, however warranted it may be, this childhood pre-pandemic memory of concern and innocent emotional response feels entirely foreign, perhaps as much to Snowman as it is to his audience. And for the post-pandemic Snowman, a being "considered to be an expert on potential accidents: scalding liquids, sickening fumes, poison dust. Pain of all kinds" (7), it is. Though the identities of Snowman/Snowman's narrator and Jimmy's identity are both forcibly separated by chronology and traumatic experience, as well as eagerly and willingly pulled apart by Snowman's changing of his name, the bridge between these seemingly separate existences soon becomes quite visible: they are more tethered to each other than Snowman might prefer.

In regard to Snowman's approach to the opposite sex, his pre-pandemic memory of his father's influence often comes into play. After a particularly tense argument with Jimmy's mother, his father informs him that "Women always get hot under the collar" (16), insisting on the problematic, illusionary difference in emotional standards that Jimmy will eventually attempt to manipulate as a teenager and adult. Jimmy's father's influence on this aspect of his later personality becomes even more apparent the longer Snowman thinks on this interaction:

Women, and what went on under their collars. Hotness and coldness, coming and going in the strange musky flowery variable-weather country inside their clothes - mysterious, important, uncontrollable. That was his father's take on things. But men's body temperatures were never dealt with; they were never even mentioned, not when he was little, except when his dad said, "Chill out." Why weren't they? Why nothing about the hot collars of men? Those smooth, sharp-edged collars with their dark, sulphurous, bristling undersides. He could have used a few theories on that. (17)

The seeds of later, full-fledged emotional manipulation planted, Jimmy's pre-pandemic memories further reveal the first moments of testing out these newly-learned skills. Jimmy's

mother is repeatedly described as having a difficult time maintaining her mental health, an issue likely compounded by a lack of support from her spouse and growing disillusionment with the inner workings of the compound they inhabit. Due to these characteristics, her relationship with Jimmy is erratic, often akin to a game of emotional ping-pong, and Jimmy subconsciously selects her for his emotionally manipulative experiments.

As he grew older and more devious, he found that on the days when he couldn't grab some approval, he could at least get a reaction...She might start crying and jump up and run out of the room, banging the door behind her, whuff...She might even slap him, and then cry and hug him...He loved her so much when he made her unhappy, or else when she made him unhappy...And he was sorry, but there was more to it: he was also gloating, congratulating himself, because he'd managed to create such an effect. (33)

In building on such interactions, Snyder notes that “Jimmy has no memories of his mother as fully present to him, only as alternating erratically between inauthentic attempts to simulate ideal motherhood and more genuine, but equally disturbing, emotional vacancy” (484). In this manner, Jimmy’s early childhood is filled with emotionless parent-child encounters, faux demonstrations of “ideal” motherly behavior, or his own emotional manipulations of his mother in an effort to trigger even a minute level of emotional reaction, all with some connection to late capitalist entities such as the corruption of the CorpSeCorps and the ethical grey areas in transhumanist experimentation that Jimmy’s parents routinely argue over. By Jimmy’s adolescence, but not before strings of emotionally confusing interactions similar to the one described above, Jimmy’s mother manages to escape her volatile marriage and the watchful eyes of the corrupt HelthWyzer Compound, abruptly abandoning Jimmy and taking his pet rakunk, a genetically altered raccoon-skunk hybrid and Jimmy’s only real friend at this juncture, with her. Having buried any emotional reaction to this loss of parent, and the quickness with which his father moves his mistress in to fill the motherhood role, Jimmy’s

Capitalocene identity formation is setting the stage for his later post-pandemic identity of Snowman. Snyder approaches these pre-pandemic memories as they intertwine with Jimmy-turned-Snowman:

*Oryx and Crake* further blurs these lines by juxtaposing the putative ultimate catastrophe of human extinction in Snowman's present with a series of smaller scale traumas that shaped his past from his earliest childhood memories...Losing one's mother at a tender age is not the end of the world. It just feels that way. But that is Atwood's point...the trauma of the protagonist's early losses, his delayed incorporation of unmourned losses and possibly of the unmournable absences upon which his very subjectivity is founded, sets the stage for the re-enactment of cataclysmic trauma on the global stage. (473)

In this sense, then, perhaps Jimmy's "delayed incorporation of unmourned losses" creates his adult desire to pull this sense of "loss" from Oryx, to make her grieve the theft of a "normal" childhood due to Capitalocene influence in the way he refuses to grieve the theft of his own. If so, not only do Jimmy's pre-pandemic memories of his mother and their volatile relationship have a hand in creating the "final" hardened Snowman, but they also succeed in formulating an emotionally manipulative version of Jimmy *during* that evolution.

These emotionally-detrimental pre-pandemic experiences are further cultivated through Jimmy's teenage experiences with Crake, then simply known by his real name of Glenn. Crake and Jimmy engage in near-constant internet exploration to increasingly graphic sites, with Snowman explaining that "they might watch hedsoff.com, which played live coverage of executions in Asia...Shortcircuit.com, brainfrizz.com, and deathrowlive.com were the best; they showed electrocutions and lethal injections...Then they went to HottTotts, a global sex-trotting site" (*Oryx and Crake* 82-83; 89). This last site is where Jimmy first sees Oryx, and, unlike Crake, genuinely "felt burned by this look—eaten into, as if by acid...Before, it had always been entertainment, or else far beyond his control, but now he felt culpable" (91). Oryx is the first person able to generate an emotional response in Jimmy,

even from a world away, in a long time. Additionally, she is the only woman he never intentionally attempts to emotionally manipulate, though he does indeed do so. Possibly due to her background, Jimmy goes on to romanticize his relationship with an adult Oryx as his being a “savior” of sorts for her, reflecting on this pre-pandemic memory as the moment he felt that call. Snyder elaborates on Jimmy’s memory as it informs this “savior” mindset, noting that although “he wants to believe that he has glimpsed the real Oryx in this image of her contemptuous gaze, in his fantasy what he sees is only her seeing the ‘secret person inside him.’ That is to say, he sees primarily a reflection of himself” (483). Through this understanding, then, perhaps Jimmy’s “savior” complex derives from his own inability to rescue himself from previous traumas, as different as they may be from Oryx’s. In this way, Jimmy manages to further complicate his appropriation of Oryx’s sexual abuse and trauma for his own emotional benefit. Not only is Jimmy relying on the details of Oryx’s trauma to potentially trigger a vulnerability that allows him to accept the role of emotionally comforting authority figure, but this manipulation may serve the additional goal of healing himself of his own emotional traumas without taking on that vulnerability himself. This attempt is, however, ultimately unsuccessful as Snowman continues to grapple with hauntings of his previous traumatic memories, consistently reliving them during his time away from other forms of human contact.

Furthermore, witnessing Oryx’s childhood abuse is also the moment that facilitates both Crake and Jimmy’s problematic approach and warping of Oryx’s adult identity based on their viewing, for all appearances, one of her most traumatic pre-pandemic memories. Angela Laflen also acknowledges this instance as particularly telling for the later relationships that both boys will have with Oryx, explaining that “Jimmy comes to perceive of his feelings



toward the image as love, and, except for Crake, she remains the only other person Jimmy does love throughout the novel. Crake is also captivated by the image and uses it to locate an adult Oryx later in his life. Both he and Jimmy transfer the bond they felt with her image to the living woman” (116). In short, their joint emotional and physical exploitation of Oryx’s adult self can be traced to their participation (though they do not physically molest her) in her childhood trauma: each situation signals their desire to possess her in any form possible.

Furthermore, growing up with Crake in the midst of an emotionally unhealthy home environment creates in Jimmy a tendency to dismiss warning signs that his friend is not nearly as stable as Jimmy wants to believe. Spiegel notes that, just as Jimmy romanticizes Oryx’s pre-pandemic identity, he “applies the same expectations to Crake. In constructing Crake’s narrative, he repeatedly alludes to an emotional depth and psychological complexity based almost completely on speculation” (130). Jimmy’s attachment to Crake derives almost entirely from an unfounded sense of admiration for his character. Snowman explains that “there was something about Crake. That kind of cool slouchiness always impressed Jimmy” (*Oryx and Crake* 71). In addition to this curious admiration, Jimmy seems obsessed with providing excuses for Crake’s often emotionless behavior. Having significant pre-pandemic memory of hyper-emotional scenarios with his mother, Jimmy seems convinced that he needs to draw out emotional responses (as with Oryx) or create them where they may never have been in the first place (as with Crake). As Spiegel observes, Jimmy regards Crake’s lack of response to the violent death of his parents as “just an act” (177) to convince himself that his friend really can’t be that devoid of feeling. Or can he? Spiegel goes on to note that, as “with Oryx, Jimmy/Snowman forces expectations of ‘plausible’ human behaviour onto Crake and attributes his failure to match such expectations as deception (131). In this manner, Jimmy’s

pre-pandemic memory of his earliest lessons on women, sex, violence, and emotional manipulation feed into his later adult and post-pandemic identity in often problematic and highly detrimental ways.

But how is adult pre-pandemic memory constructed and utilized in the speculative narrative at large? Though Jimmy presents several flashbacks of such material, I suggest an exploration of Toby's character in *The Year of the Flood* for a more detailed demonstration. As the second installment in Atwood's collection is largely a flashback through Toby's collective adult experiences, her pre-pandemic memories provide deeper insight into how this previous identity influences her post-pandemic existence. For example, near the beginning of Toby's narrative, she provides ample evidence that her pre-pandemic memories haunt her arguably more than Jimmy's haunt him. Rather than one voice ringing into her isolated life at the barricaded spa she now resides in, Toby lives with many ghosts from her past:

“Go to sleep,” she says out loud. But she never sleeps well, not since she's been alone in this building. Sometimes she hears voices—human voices, calling out to her in pain. Or the voices of women, the women who used to work here, the anxious women who used to come...Or the voices of the Gardeners, murmuring or singing: or the children laughing together, up on the Edencliff Garden. (*The Year of the Flood* 5)

Here, Toby provides evidence of her full adult life-once-lived in a manageably pleasant pre-pandemic time. Her pre-pandemic memories seep into her post-pandemic present until her narrative simply reverts into a winding memory itself. From there, Toby's memories from her time with God's Gardeners, the eco-religious cult that offered her protection, relationships, and purpose, demonstrate key moments that continue to affect her new reality.

Toby herself links several of her post-pandemic reactions to lessons learned in the Edencliff Garden. Her hyper awareness of her surroundings stems from such a lesson, as even “when she sleeps, she's listening, as animals do—for a break in the pattern, for an

unknown sound, for a silence opening like a crack in rock. When the small creatures hush their singing, said Adam One, it's because they're afraid. You must listen for the sound of their fear" (5). This is far from an occasional intrusion of the memory of Adam One's (the leader of the God's Gardener's troop) teachings. Perhaps one of the most notable of these intrusions is linked to Toby's hesitation to kill one of the genetically altered pigeons, despite the imminent danger they pose: "She holds one of the pigs in the scope—the boar, an easy shot, he's sideways—but then she hesitates. They're God's Creatures. Never kill without just cause, said Adam One" (18). Though Toby does indeed overcome her hesitation, several moments later and costing valuable ammo, she feels the twinge of what she *should* be feeling, given her Gardener vows: "Toby's hands are shaking. You've snuffed a life, she tells herself. You've acted rashly from anger. You ought to feel guilty" (18-19). Toby's daily thoughts are rife with such musings, making it clear that the intense memory of preparation for the Waterless Flood, the end of times prophesied by the Gardeners, has refused to leave her. Though her pre-pandemic life has more readily prepared her to adopt a post-pandemic identity than, say, Jimmy's memories that still ring in his head, these anticipations are not always sufficient for her actual engagement with the post-pandemic landscape. This preparation has, in some instances, merely informed her of this new identity's arrival.

In peering past these isolated moments and into Toby's cavernous pre-pandemic memory of her Gardener rescue, induction, and years of experience as a participating member, her memories of the Gardener's belief system before the pandemic are of particular interest to the relationship with these memories and climate crisis studies.

A massive die-off of the human race was impending, due to overpopulation and wickedness, but the Gardeners exempted themselves: they intended to float above the Waterless Flood, with the aid of the food they were stashing away in the hidden storeplaces they called Ararats. As for the flotation devices in which they would ride

out this flood, they themselves would be their own Arks, stored with their own collections of inner animals, or at least the names of those animals. Thus they would survive to replenish the Earth. Or something like that. (47)

Though the Gardener prophecy of course contains influence from Christian texts surrounding the end of human history on Earth, it also gestures to an emerging notion in the field of climate crisis studies: Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PreTSS).

Ann Kaplan explores the notion of PreTSS directly, outlining the impact of the climate crisis as it affects a major proponent of identity—mental and emotional wellbeing, identifying the condition as “but one of several mental health conditions being theorized in the humanities and social sciences as a result of climate change and the environmental desecration resulting from it” (81). In other words, PreTSS may very well be a member of a larger group of new climate crisis-related mental and emotional challenges, all of which would be capable of altering identity through our responses, approaches, and consideration of new anxieties. In light of this relatively new concept, defined by Kaplan as “trauma future tense,” or, “anxieties about what has not yet happened” (82) in the climate crisis, the Gardener’s actions of food storage and all other measures of apocalypse preparation can be seen as a climate-crisis-imposed influence on actions, method of thinking, and survival instinct.

Kaplan explains that PreTSS is not a potential issue, but rather an already identifiable clinical term that, like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), centers itself around a response to trauma. However, in contrast to PTSD, there is nothing “post” about this new clinical reference. Rather, PreTSS is a response to anticipated trauma linked to the climate crisis, the intensity of which is arguably a form of trauma itself, and “can be applied to anxieties about human beings able to survive dramatic ecological and species changes” (84).

Kaplan arrived at the name PreTSS through an exploration of “modernist, post-modernist, and postcolonial contexts...[and] fiction about future worlds in which human action had brought about the collapse of both the natural world and civil infrastructures” (82), such as Atwood’s speculative fiction. Kaplan argues that this focus on dystopian futures holds very real anxieties surrounding the future of humanity, identity, and the planet as a whole, and these reactions to anticipated trauma are already making an appearance in current society, as more mental health professionals are “already seeing pre-traumatic stress disorder in clients” (90). What’s more, diagnoses of PreTSS are becoming so frequent that environmental activist and psychiatrist Lise Van Susteren suggests that perhaps “the disorder is *not* having a Pre-Traumatic Stress condition” (Hopkins). In responding to Susteren’s position that having PreTSS is, in fact, more common than *not* grappling with the condition, Kaplan asserts that those who are not concerned for the ecological future experience a “denial [that] conveniently protects people both from panicking and from doing anything to remedy humanity’s dire situation” (90). Especially since many scholars find that “creating narratives about humanity’s dire condition might be more effective than gathering scientific facts and data” (81) since “ecosickness narratives involve readers ethically in our collective bodily and environmental futures” (Houser 3), Atwood’s fictional dystopia can be read as having a dual function—Toby’s experience in the Gardeners represents current societal fears of the future while also critiquing the contemporary actions, and indeed, the *denials*, that might result in the narrative she provides. In other words, this aspect of Toby’s adult pre-pandemic memory is highly emblematic of the building anticipation of climate crisis catastrophe already present in current reality.

### Triggered Traumatic Memory

Along with the pre-pandemic memories found throughout the novels, pre-pandemic traumatic memories are often triggered by the violence and uncertainty of post-pandemic events. Due to the isolation and longing for human interaction experienced by many characters in the narrative, these memories have a tendency to center around societal trauma such as the complete elimination of communal (even faux communal) existence with a desperation for individual survival, long-ago peaceful memories no longer possible in the present, and grief over familial trauma.

The longer Toby lives alone, the more she reminisces on a previous relative safety that, if not entirely secure, at least offered her moments of comfort and companionship. Often, these memories are centered around her stagnant grief over those she has lost either before the Waterless Flood or those for whom she has no confirmation of survival or death. Toby's decision to open the last remaining honey jar in the spa triggers not a specific memory exactly, but more the experience of an entire relationship capsuled in one memory.

It's the last one remaining from the honey she extracted so long ago - she and Pilar - up on the Edencliff Rooftop. She's been saving it all these years as if it's a protective charm. Honey doesn't decay, said Pilar, as long as you keep water out of it: that's why the ancients called it the food of immortality. She swallows one fragrant spoonful, then another. It was hard work collecting that honey...but in her memory the whole experience is one of unblemished happiness. She knows she's deceiving herself about that, but she prefers to deceive herself. She desperately needs to believe such pure joy is still possible. (*The Year of The Flood* 96)

In Toby's pre-pandemic memory, Pilar functions as both a mentor and a welcome substitute for the mother she lost long before she joined the Gardener's. Though in a different way than Snowman/Jimmy, Toby does participate in a fair amount of romanticizing about the pre-pandemic period of her life. She admits that nothing has ever really had the chance to be perfect (as pre-pandemic memories are still clouded with the *anticipation* of catastrophe), but

these triggered memories are at least a small comfort in comparison to others that plague Atwood's characters. What's more, Toby's experience of these arguably more pleasant remembrances ameliorate the triggered memories that prove *why* such small happinesses are a reprieve from the usual pre-pandemic memories. Toby's use of these "happier" pre-pandemic memories is in line with Sharon Wasco's examination of trauma response, in that "some survivors are able to avoid chronic shock by finding safe places...close family or friend networks, and faith-based organizations" (318). Though Wasco is discussing the trauma response of rape survivors, this is still not at all separate from Toby's narrative, as chapter four will point out later. Additionally, Toby's retreat into such pre-pandemic memories incorporate both the safe spaces of family and friend connections and the "faith-based organization" as Pilar is simultaneously mother figure, friend, and a member of the God's Gardener's religious group. In this sense, Toby's attempt to convince herself that "such joy was still possible" through these pre-pandemic memories serves as a trauma response to her catastrophic surroundings and isolation from positive human interactions.

Though this chapter has so far focused on Toby's adult pre-pandemic memories, her memories of adolescent experiences of family trauma and violence are often triggered by events in her post-pandemic struggle for survival. One of the most notable of these traumatic memories lies at the beginning of the pandemic as Toby must go in search of protection, wading through the sick and fending off potential attackers along the way. This memory trigger, unlike several others, was not instantaneous, but rather came in sections that formed the whole of the trigger: the witnessing of the sickness around her, the search for her family's rifle for protection, and the return to her childhood home. The actual experience of the

familial traumatic memory is delayed by adrenaline until Toby finally reaches relative safety, meaning she must now fully confront the pain looming ahead.

She stood for a moment, calming herself down, listening to the blood in her head: katoush, katoush, katoush. Either the rifle was still there or it was gone. If it was there, she'd have a rifle. If it was gone, she wouldn't have one. Nothing to panic about...It was there. Don't cry, she told herself. Just cut open the plastic, grab the rifle and the ammunition, and get out of here. (22-23)

After digging up the rifle, Toby then re-experiences the worst of her pre-pandemic traumas—the deaths of her parents. After suffering from a long illness heavily implied to be caused by the HelthWyzer corporation's use of “supplements” to cause sickness and charge for treatment, Toby's mother dies, much to the distress of Toby's father. Shortly thereafter, her father commits suicide with the very rifle she has had to dig back up in an effort to survive, albeit entirely alone. Toby's triggered traumatic memory of her parents continues the prevailing theme of horror and grief in her post-pandemic life, joining already-established instances of witnessed and experienced trauma such as dead car crash victims on the spa property, decaying bodies along the road, and avoidance of attack from other individuals, particularly if they may be infected with the plague.

Though Toby is left to struggle through much of her grief and intense fear in isolation, she is far from alone in terms of experiencing such trauma. Ren, the one-time student of Toby during her time with the God's Gardener's is also forced to bear witness to the first moments of societal violence as a result of Crake's unleashed plague. Ren's traumatic experience, interestingly, begins as she is in the middle of a pleasant memory of her life at the Garden, beginning a meditation “which would be one way of dealing with the fact that there was nothing to do inside the Sticky Zone” (279), the biocontainment unit in which she is awaiting test results after a possible infected bite. However, her memories shift



from pleasant to horrific, as she is confronted again and again by the remembrances of watching the murders of her coworkers while she is trapped, yet physically safe, inside the Sticky Zone. Such traumatic memories are inescapable, and they are triggered multiple times as Ren waits for someone to find her in the sound-proof, locked biocontainment unit she is stuck in. Though far from each other in distance and time, Toby and Ren's triggered and traumatic memories mirror one another in terms of grief, personal loss, and horrific uncertainty about their own futures and the futures of other people in general.

As with the earlier discussion of Toby's pre-pandemic memories as Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, the level of post-pandemic horror that Toby and Ren experience with triggered memories and traumatic experiences also finds a place in contemporary climate crisis studies. A growing number of academics are joining forces to discuss the climate crisis's impact on more than just the environment (rejecting the notion that we were ever truly separate beings from our surroundings). Several are looking to climate change as a source of experienced trauma alarmingly similar to what Toby experienced pre-pandemic and what continues to haunt her post-pandemic.

Timothy Clark's "Ecological Grief and Anthropocene Horror" explores our current geological age in the climate crisis (widely regarded as the Anthropocene) as it evokes specific reactions of "grief" and "horror" from humanity. Clark defines ecological grief as "grief for the loss or threatened destruction of a specific landscape, place or species," while Anthropocene horror is "a sense of horror about the changing environment globally, usually as mediated by news reports and expert predictions, giving a sense of threats that need not be anchored to any particular place, but which are both everywhere and anywhere" (61). Though Anthropocene horror and ecological grief are not clinical terms such as PreTSS, they

are still significantly applicable to the anticipated trauma that PreTSS acknowledges. In relating this discussion on ecological grief and Anthropocene horror to the climate crisis's influence on identity, I argue that Clark's definition of ecological grief would also be able to incorporate specific, personalized events of trauma such as Ren and Toby's abrupt and violent pre- and post-pandemic experiences, while the Anthropocene horror would include the generalized isolation, uncertainty, and preparatory measures against potential threats that both characters contend with in the first days of the pandemic.

As described earlier, Toby's specific fears and traumas are compounded both events outside of her own experience, as she makes note of multiple signals of the specific anxiety of the "end," such as the car crash victims she passes every morning and the remnants of the bodies that succumbed to famine, violence, or plague. Clark outlines the climate crisis's effect on recognizable identity in that it creates both specific and generalized fear around experience, climate change-related events, and the view of one's own future, such as Toby's turn from focusing on extended time periods in order to focus on the immediate next steps for survival. In this manner, Toby's triggered memories shifting between specific recollections of survival tactics, overwhelming grief for the loss of the specific people she knew and the many she didn't, and the general uncertainty concerning the future of humanity in general all connect at the intersection of Anthropocene horror and ecological grief, forming a unique speculative partnership.

Pre-pandemic memory and traumatic memory are not only major components in the lives and experiences of Atwood's characters, but they also interact significantly with terminologies and concepts of budding climate crisis studies. These memories of pre-pandemic preparatory measures, mounting trauma caused by the far-reaching branches of

late-capitalist entities, and grief over specific and general Capitalocene creations all act as a speculative projection of PreTSS, ecological grief, and Anthropocene horror. Especially as these memories engage with present understandings of climate crisis influence on identity construction, they ultimately work to shift identity formation into the speculative Capitalocene identity, making use of experiences, traumas, and reactions grounded in climate crisis encounters to do so.

## **Chapter 2: The Construction and Implications of Capitalocene Relationships**

Like memory, relationships in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* also undergo transformation based on lived climate crisis experiences. Here, I argue that Atwood constructs these relationships within a climate crisis environment in a manner that not only contributes to the overall identity of characters, but that also impacts the reaction to surrounding atmosphere, ability to recognize and bond with other climate crisis-shaped individuals, and the chosen approach to a broad spectrum of relationships in the post-pandemic terrain. Within these constructions, relationships presented within the narratives of Atwood's characters are consistently shaped by remembered emotional attachments and family connections, as well as both pre- and post-pandemic events. As such, the action of remembering such emotional attachments to loved ones is just as essential to the construction of Capitalocene identity as the memories themselves. In keeping with that understanding, this chapter specifically addresses the ways in which familial relationships, romantic relationships, and the relationship with self are all altered, often due to traumatic experiences rooted in late-capitalism, furthering the understanding that this aspect of Capitalocene identity feeds into the broader arena of identity formation and representation in the novels.

### Familial Relationships

In this section, I begin with an analysis of Jimmy's relationships with his mother and father as separate entities, as well as his witnessing of the relationship that his parents have with one another. Though Jimmy regards his parents in dramatically different lights, it is repeatedly made clear that his post-pandemic adult self, Snowman, acknowledges both as causing substantial damage in their relationship with him and their marriage as a whole. For

example, Jimmy's pre-pandemic relationship with his parents is fraught with emotional whiplash. Even as a young boy, Jimmy experiences the two extremes of being consistently ignored by his father and mother and being intently focused on in an overdone manner that he recognizes as an attempt to "make up" for the earlier behavior. Perhaps the prime example of this movement between two extremes arrives in the form of Snowman's memory of Jimmy's birthday (pointed out to be one of many, as this scene repeated itself nearly every year). Snowman notes that he "repressed his birthdays: they weren't a matter for general celebration" after his nanny (and surrogate mother) left the household (*Oryx and Crake* 50). Rather, Snowman recalls the intense negativity that pervaded his birthday experiences, a day that *should* be remembered with fondness but is dreaded in his memory:

His mother on the other hand could never seem to recall how old Jimmy was or what day he was born. He'd have to remind her, at breakfast; then she'd snap out of her trance and buy him some mortifying present...Then his father would put them all through an awkward excuse about why this really, really special and important date had somehow just slid out of his head, and ask Jimmy if everything was okay, and send him an e-birthday card...and come up with a gift for him the day after, a gift that would not be a gift but some tool or intelligence-enhancing game or what? (*Oryx and Crake* 50)

Snowman's memory of his childhood birthdays reveals a great deal of his relationship with both of his parents, as well as their tendency to demonstrate two parenting modes: ignoring him and over engaging with him to undo damage that can't be undone. In this manner, this scene is a significant example of the multifaceted detrimental effects that both of Jimmy's parents have on the development of his identity and future interactions with others.

Perhaps the only solace Jimmy finds in these disappointing interactions is the fleeting united front that his parents present in their effort to assure their son (and likely themselves) that they do indeed care for him. However, this attempt at care is quickly abandoned, as they

are soon back to arguing over the ethical gray areas of Jimmy's father's position at the HelthWyzer corporation, along with his mother's deteriorating mental wellbeing. And clearly, aspects of late capitalism, such as transhuman experimentation and creating profit wherever possible, feed into the toxicity and tension in Jimmy's parents' marriage. J. Paul Narkunas highlights these components of late capitalist society, noting that these novels depict

a world where transgenics fill gaps in human existence by offering new possibilities for monetizing existence. Jimmy's father is on the front lines of "genography," headhunted by various corporations because he can grow human neocortex tissue in pigs to create "pigoons"... For Jimmy's mother, the sacredness of human life—the divine read through the human—should provide a barrier to technological intervention; such intervention is morally repugnant to her... the perspective of Jimmy's father is merely an aspect of a more generalized view of life itself as a game or puzzle to be mastered by human will. (204)

Here, Narkunas notes the major themes of contention within the marriage of Jimmy's parents. They exist in a world in the end stages of the Capitalocene, an era that brings along a more obvious focus on the human body as potential resource and profit. The effects of such a terrain produce those, like Jimmy's father, who seek to provide as many symptom soothers as possible rather than address the larger issue at hand, while others, like his mother, object to such practices. Such constant ethical conflict results in an internalized danger (threat to the familial construct at hand) that mirrors the looming environmental and societal danger ahead.

In keeping with the impact such aspects have on Jimmy's parents' relationship, Snowman recounts a specific argument surrounding his father's latest scientific experiment, resulting in his wife's growing protestation of his unethical actions and culminating in a more intense fight than usual. Snowman recalls that "Jimmy's father yelling wasn't a complete novelty, but combined with the swearing it got Jimmy's full attention. Maybe there would be

action, broken glass. He felt afraid—that cold lump in his stomach was back again—but he also felt compelled to listen. If there was going to be a catastrophe, some final collapse, he needed to witness it” (*Oryx and Crake* 58). Here, it is worth noting the beginnings of Jimmy’s awareness of the state of his parents’ marriage, as he pays rapt attention to the argument taking place below him. Though he admits his fear, there is a level of anticipation for the climax of this latest fight, an event he feels he needs to bear witness to. In summary, there is something in their tempestuous marriage that Jimmy latches onto, and, combined with his individual relationships with his mother and father, these familial connections have a hand in the construction of Jimmy as a manipulative partner in his future relationships, always ending things when each girlfriend is most vulnerable. But more on that later.

In order to understand the full impact that Jimmy’s familial relationships had on his adult Capitalocene identity, it is necessary to look at his relationships with each parent. His father undoubtedly holds a certain amount of power in Jimmy’s future regard for the feelings and approaches to the women in his life, imparting many “lessons” fraught with sexism and selfishness. For example, Snowman recalls Jimmy’s father telling him that “Women always get hot under the collar,” prompting the young child to think further on “Women, and what went on under their collars. Hotness and coldness, coming and going...mysterious, important, uncontrollable. That was his father’s take on things” (*Oryx and Crake* 16; 17). These teachings reproduce themselves in Jimmy’s future relationships, as he tends to regard his female companions, aside from Oryx, as disposable due to their “uncontrollable” annoyances when they became too bonded to Jimmy for his liking. Just as his father repeatedly writes off women in general, but specifically his wife, as overly emotional, so Jimmy reenacts similar behavior, though he may not be conscious of it.

Additionally, Jimmy's relationship with his mother fuels aspects of his later Capitalocene identity. This relationship is arguably even more complex, as Jimmy is flung from desperate attempts for her attention to masking his extreme pain upon her abandonment of him late in his childhood. Snowman remembers that Jimmy's mother "often tried to explain things to him; then she got discouraged. These were the worst moments, for both of them. He resisted her, he pretended he didn't understand even when he did, he acted stupid, but he didn't want her to give up on him. He wanted her to be brave, to try her best with him, to hammer away at the wall he'd put up against her, to keep going" (21). This desperate attempt at attention leads to Jimmy adapting his behavior to meet what he believes are his mother's needs, therefore earning her love for him. Such a moment is highlighted during one of his mother's better mental health days when she is the bubbly, bright persona Jimmy yearns for the most. In his attempt to "hold" her in her pleasant mood, Jimmy "knew he was expected to appreciate all the effort...so he too made an effort...rolling his eyes, rubbing his stomach in a caricature of hunger, overdoing it. But he'd get what he wanted, because then she would laugh (32). Though Jimmy resists his father's overdone attempts at bonding with him, he himself makes very similar attempts in attaching himself to his mother. In this way, I argue that his perceived rejection by her does infinitely more damage than his father's tendency to ignore him.

As Jimmy grows older, his witnessing of his parents' disastrous relationship affects his own relationship with them individually, creating a divide that covers his desire to earn their love in some form. As noted earlier, Jimmy's parents' marriage is severely affected by climate crisis aspects, particularly his father's job at the OrganInc Corporation and later HelthWyzer. These symptoms of the Capitalocene (selling promises of youth, health



“supplements,” and the creation of pigs birthed only to provide human organs and tissue) lead to Jimmy’s mother eventually trashing her husband’s computer, releasing Jimmy’s pet rakunk, and fleeing the home and her family. Snowman recalls that “Jimmy had mourned for weeks. No, for months. Which one of them was he mourning the most? His mother, or an altered skunk?” (61). Jimmy also experiences a shift in maternal figures through his father’s affair with Ramona, who eventually comes to inhabit the space his mother once occupied. Michael Spiegel draws attention to this familial shift specifically, observing that “fragmentation of the family is not evident solely in the absence of the nuclear family, but also in the absence of loyalty to the family as a unit. This can be seen in Jimmy's ambivalence towards his father and stepmother Ramona” (124). Through Spiegel’s observation, then, Jimmy’s sense of loss and abandonment goes unacknowledged, as his father is quick to “replace” Jimmy’s mother with Ramona, effectively sealing the family off from emotional recognition of any trauma or confusion surrounding the shifting familial sphere.

Jimmy’s feelings of grief and abandonment are compounded years later, when Jimmy is contacted again by the Corpsmen concerning his mother’s disappearance. This time, however, they have a videotape to share that details his mother’s execution. Having answered questions afterward, including confirming that “Killer” was, in fact, his pet rakunk that his mother set free, Jimmy feels a renewed sense of betrayal, both from himself and his mother. He grows further concerned that he has created some danger for her, despite having seen her die moments earlier. Katherine Snyder closely examines this scene, writing,

[Jimmy’s] fantasy that she still lives is inseparable from a complex, even self-contradictory, sense of betrayal, a sense both that he has betrayed her and that she has betrayed him. He cannot wish for her to be alive, moreover, without the fear that he has or will let her down, that he has given away or will give away secrets that

might be essential to her survival. In Jimmy's anguished consciousness, wishing his mother alive means being always in danger of causing her death. Yet, as the addressee of this videotaped farewell, he can only feel, once again, betrayed by the absent mother who has, once again, left him. (484)

In this manner, Jimmy's Capitalocene identity is further endowed with abandonment, trauma, and warped, fractured familial relationships. Not only do his parents demonstrate an unhealthy pattern of behavior with one another that Jimmy goes on to mirror in his own relationships, but his mother's execution at the hands of the Capitalocene authorities of the CorpSeCorps drastically affects his own mentality, emotional response, and feelings of abject desolation when he finally is, to his mind, alone in the post-pandemic environment. Though in a social and psychological sense rather than literary, Ron Eyerman discusses such trauma's impact on the formation of an identity repeatedly impacted by trauma, writing that the

wounds that incur are collective and social as much as they are individual. Individual and collective trauma may also be thought of as reinforcing one another, making the shock and sense of loss even greater. In economic crisis as in war, one's personal loss is intimately tied to those suffered by others. The cumulative impact would only intensify the trauma, where a sense of belonging, a collective identity, is shattered along with individual identity. (43)

While some may hesitate to liken Jimmy's familial traumas to war, I posit that the two experiences are nearer than they might seem. The hunting down and execution of citizens that demonstrate a refusal to bend to the will of the Corporations is quite war-like in the opposition of two parties and the physical violence that culminates from that opposition. What's more, Jimmy is not alone in his experience of losing a parent, as his childhood friend Crake also endures the murder of his father for strikingly similar reasons. In this sense, Jimmy and Crake experience both the "shattering," as Eyerman puts it, of both individual and collective identity, as their traumas feed into one another and result in the "cumulative trauma" of Capitalocene experiences. While the experience of war is a trauma that many can

attest to, the experience of this type of capitalist Corporation was steeped in climate crisis characteristics of muddied ethics, political violence, and execution of disobedient citizens creates recognizable changes to Capitalocene identity, as Jimmy experiences alarming emotional health issues the closer he inches to his post-pandemic self, and Crake's rage at and disjointed response to his climate crisis-related parental loss is, at least in part, what helps plant the seeds of his "ideal" world without corruption and violence, though he must engage these aspects even more to move past them.

I now turn attention to the presence of fluctuating parental roles and relationships throughout the novels. As the Capitalocene environment continues to take shape, and more people either go missing or are put to death for treason or other crimes against the reigning powers, it becomes apparent that bonds once regarded as generally strong on the whole (marriage, parent-child relationships, etc.) begin to loosen. As such, there is a fair amount of slipping in and out of parental roles during the events of the narrative. Here, I discuss the shifting parental roles experienced by Ren, Zeb, and Toby.

In recalling Jimmy's own experiences of shifting parental and familial roles described earlier, I propose a look at some of the more complex and changeable parental figures that Ren engages with. To start, Ren makes a point of referring to her mother by her first name, Lucerne, both in childhood and adulthood remembrances of that childhood. Having been swept away from her home at one of the compounds, as well as cut off from her biological father, Ren develops extreme hostility towards her mother. Spiegel notes that, though "Ren and Lucerne's relationship seems one of hostility, Ren's relationship with her father Frank is nonexistent" (124), furthering the shift in parental roles. What's more, Spiegel considers the depth of this familial relationship fracture in the narrative, explaining that the fact that "each

of these characters - Jimmy, Crake, Ren, Bernice, and Toby - have no brothers or sisters only further illustrates the disintegration of the family as a unified source of identity” (125). In building on Spiegel’s observation, the removal of family as the “unified source of identity” is intrinsically tied to detrimental characteristics of late-stage climate crisis. Recognizing that most of the families in the novels only consist of one child, with an ever-changing roster of parental figures, denotes that likely more factors are at play than simply personal preference of family structure: I argue that class and environmental social standing, which I describe as “the merging of established capitalist social systems as they are influenced by growing climate crisis hazards,” are woven into the family structures found in the speculative narrative. Ian Angus directly discusses a similar phenomenon in his book *Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil Capitalism and the Crisis of the Earth System*, noting that the “countries with the highest birth rates generally have the lowest standard of living and produce the least pollution...if the poorest 3 billion people on the planet somehow disappeared tomorrow, there would be virtually no reduction in ongoing environmental destruction” (112). In this regard, though Ren, Toby, and Bernice are not exactly at the top of the class system like Jimmy and Crake may be, they are closer than, say, Oryx, who remains one of the only characters to be discussed as having multiple siblings. In this regard, the family structures at hand are highly influenced by emerging environmental social standing: multiple family members are required to support a lower class family financially, though this also requires more resources and often results in the risk of exploitation due to poverty; fewer family members are required for upper class existence, and they also use fewer resources, keeping the family as wealthy as possible; finally, in keeping with the “underclass” notion as defined by Gunnar Myrdal in the introduction to this thesis, the “middle class” standing of

Toby and Bernice really exists in name only, as the concept itself is quickly deteriorating. Toby and Bernice may not experience the method of family exploitation that Oryx does, but it would also be too expensive to support multiple family members, resulting in a similarly small family grouping as upper class families, but for entirely different reasons. In essence, the number of children in a family often speak to the class status of the family unit as it is influenced by Capitalocene characteristics in some format, resulting in the breakdown of the family unit either through the exploitation of the lower and underclass or the benefits of this exploitation by the upper class.

In looking at other aspects of family fracturing, Ren finds herself incapable of relating to her mother in the expected parent-child manner, and she also subconsciously fills another parental role, one left empty by her separation from her birth father. As such, Ren shifts Zeb, her mother's lover in the God's Gardeners group, into the role of a surrogate father figure, though she remains resistant to him. Ren herself describes this shift in parental roles, explaining, "I had mixed feelings about Zeb. He could be frightening, but also it was reassuring to have someone so important in my family" (*The Year of the Flood* 64). These "mixed feelings" become even more complicated, as Ren states that her childhood self "wanted my real father, who must still love me: if he'd known where I was, he'd surely have come to take me back" (65). Younger Ren's focus on what is "real" and what she feels is make believe (her mother's relationship with Zeb and her life with the God's Gardeners as a whole), manages to embody an interesting aspect of what Timothy Clark refers to as "ecological grief," that is, "the most intense realization of the underlying but often unmet alienation and repressions of modern personhood" in the wake of climate crisis (65). Clark's discussion of this form of grief lends itself to a deeper understanding of Ren's unwillingness

to accept her present familial situation. By accepting the changes to the familial structure as being influenced by Capitalocene aspects, as discussed earlier in this chapter, it becomes easier to see Ren's rejection of her changing familial sphere as denial that these changes are actually occurring—the only thing permanent in her family structure now is the fact of its impermanence. In this sense, Ren's rejection can be viewed as the “denial” stage of an ecological grief created through detrimental shifts in Capitalocene society, landscape, and even family structure. Clark touches on such a form of denial, explaining that “we have lived for so long with variously frightening possible futures, that even emerging news...has an insidious sense of *déjà vu* and the inevitable, so its resistance to being felt slides easily into being effectively a form of denial. It can also be a feeling of intense panic, yet it can seem like the grief of a bereavement, a useless panic at what has already happened” (73). By incorporating Clark's idea of denial in the realm of ecological grief into a reading of Ren's panic at leaving her biological father and recognizable family structure, as well as her belief that her circumstances will come back to familiar territory, Ren's experiences are able to be identified as symptoms of ecological grief, specifically the denial that signals the inability to fully confront the drastic changes and desolation that accompanies late-stage Capitalocene. In short, as Ren's denial is indicative of ecological grief and the ever-shifting family composition linked to the narrative's depiction of Capitalocene influence, these specific experiences further impact her Capitalocene identity. As Ren is unable to rely on the constant repositioning of her family unit, she constructs her own family unit, and therefore her identity within that unit, ultimately coming to view her relationship with Zeb as one of stepfather and stepdaughter of sorts. I argue that it is this restructuring of familial roles that lends itself to

the formation of Ren's identity, as such an identity relies on one's ability to both interpret and adapt to quickly changing environmental spheres and the social roles that exist within them.

Lucerne has a hand in creating this component of her daughter's Capitalocene identity, as she again disrupts Ren's adaptation to her family unit, this time with Zeb, taking Ren back with her to her biological father and the Compound from whence they came.

However, Ren and her father are not able to fully complete the shift back into their former relationship, and Ren describes the discomfort in their reconstructed relationship:

All those years I'd kept an outline of my father in my head, like a chalk line enclosing a father-shaped space. When I was little, I'd colored it in often enough. But those colors had been too bright, and the outline had been too large: Frank was shorter, greyer, balder, and more confused-looking than I'd had in mind...I'd thought he'd be overjoyed to find that we were safe and sound and not dead after all. But when he saw me, his face fell. Now I realize that he'd last known me when I was a small girl, so I was bigger than he expected, and probably bigger than he wanted. (210)

From an outside perspective, that too-large shape of her father has clearly been rearranged through her relationship with Zeb, as his burly character altered the "outline" of the parental space. Though Ren and Frank find their interactions awkward, they try to perform the expected roles of father and daughter, though Ren admits that "Frank treated me like a window: he never looked at me, only through me" (214). However, this relationship is maintained to some degree until Lucerne again informs Ren of a shift in parental roles with the news that Frank has been killed by a rival corps. Along with Lucerne's curt delivery of such graphic news, Spiegel highlights the presence of the loosened familial ties in Atwood's narrative space, writing that "this social fragmentation, like that of Oryx's village, is manifested through the family...whether by assassinating a whistle-blower...or exacerbating class division, the transnational corporations that drive global integration bear significant responsibility for the social, cultural, political, and economic fragmentation in the world of

*Oryx and Crake*” (125). Not only is the physical fracturing of familial relationships through the deaths or imprisonments of parental figures a result of the authorities in Atwood’s climate crisis terrain, but the unseen fracturing—the ambivalence towards such violent ends of the family unit—is also a product of this warped system. In mirroring the lack of care or emotion for other individuals, even those in the same social or familial unit, personal ambivalence towards violence demonstrates the infiltration of capitalist regard for human bodies overall. In short, everyone is always disposable.

### Romantic Relationships

Like the discussion of the novels’ familial relationships above, Atwood’s constructions of romantic relationships also experience heavy influence from climate crisis-altered experiences. This section analyzes the degree to which these shifts in experience are linked to the warped social spaces of the speculative narrative. For example, Ren, having previously engaged in a high school relationship with Jimmy-turned-Snowman, seemingly begins a relationship with Crozier, whom she knew from her Gardener days, as an adult. However, the relationship itself is heavily impacted by their lived post-pandemic experiences. Having survived a brutal assault at the hands of the Painballers, Ren’s emotional and mental wellbeing has taken a substantial hit, creating new obstacles to navigate in her interactions with Crozier. Ren feels a particular divide in her ability to be intimate with Crozier, and notes that this difference is directly tied to her experience with the Painballers’ cruelty:

Croze is curled around behind me, and I can tell he’s worried and sad; so I turn around and then we’re hugging each other, and he wants to have sex. But all of a sudden I don’t want to have sex without loving the person, and I haven’t really loved anybody in that way since Jimmy...Also there’s a dark place in me, like ink spilled into my brain - I can’t think about sex, in that place. It has brambles in it, and something about Amanda, and I don’t want to be there. So I say, “Not yet.” And even



though Croze used to be kind of crude he seems to understand, so we just hold onto each other and talk. (*The Year of the Flood* 394)

In this interaction, it becomes clear that Ren still suffering from the immense emotional and psychological pain of her sexual assault, and this experience may have succeeded in altering her reaction to relationships entirely. As a result, there is a distinct shift from Ren before the trauma and Ren after, when she finds herself requiring assured safety in “loving the person” in order to feel comfortable in sexual activity.

This alteration of Ren’s comfort level in a romantic relationship, I argue, is in keeping with the atmosphere of brutality cultivated in Atwood’s speculative space. The concept of the Painball arena, a gladiator-style prison option for hardened criminals, is at first rejected by the various corps. However, this public rejection is quietly undone, as the top CorpsMen begin investing, even betting, on the “games” in the arena. Therefore, the Painball arena is shaped in the same way, argues Spiegel, that many other socio political aspects have been shaped in Atwood’s narrative, meaning that

the political and social realms have been integrated into the market. Moreover, this power reflects the ability of these corporations to challenge the state's monopoly on violence and citizen loyalty, thereby undermining its authority and legitimacy...The inability of the state to provide security allows the private sector to use violence legitimately, ostensibly to "defend the peace," but really to protect their products and maintain the flow of capital. (125)

In other words, the Corporations create a formula of obtaining exclusive control of “safety” methods that are, in actuality, merely another avenue for monetary profit. By creating a lack of trust in state systems of protection, the Corporations successfully provoke a mutiny against this infrastructure, a move that not only results in effective appropriation of its predecessor in civilian trust in security, but also allows these entities to warp the system in a way that incurs additional wealth *and* distorts the way individuals experience it inside and outside of its

walls. For example, while the Painball “participants” and their identities are drastically contorted inside the parameters of the Corporation-designed system, functioning as game pawns in more than just the literal sense, they are also capable of affecting the identities of those they encounter *after* their time in Painball, becoming extensions of this aspect of Corps modifications to the concept of “civilian security.” In this sense, Corps seizure of such a large system as security and protection demonstrates both the fiscal and political power they already possess, as well as the lengths they will go to protect and encourage additional growth of that power, even at the violent expense of other human beings. To this end, the construction of the Painball arena and its culpability in unleashing its creations back into an already unforgiving climate crisis-ravaged landscape further “demonstrates the worst perils of environmental destruction and corporatized nature, namely through the horrific sexual violence and mercantile exploitation” (Carrière 163) that Ren and Amanda experience. In this way, though the Painballers that attacked Ren and Amanda were likely murderous and lacking in empathy before their incarceration, their time spent in the Corps-regulated prison system did nothing to regulate these traits, only enhance them for the “flow of capital” and enjoyment of those at the top of the system at hand.

Ren isn’t the only one whose romantic relationship is affected by structures of late-stage capitalism—Toby experiences unprecedented changes and hurdles in her own relationship with Zeb as a result of pre- and post-pandemic endurances. Just as Toby’s pre-pandemic memories of her drastic loss of family and forced abandonment of the known and the secure dramatically affect her approach to various situations, these memories also affect her interactions in her romantic partnerships. In her relationship with Zeb, Toby’s lived experiences have created trepidation and suspicion despite her longing for a loving, safe

space. As a result, she denies herself the feeling of contentment, along with the feeling of safety, in her budding connection with Zeb. Despite her conscious effort in forbidding herself safety and comfort, Toby eventually grows exhausted enough to accept the security that Zeb offers her:

[Toby] turns to leave: if she's going to snivel, she should do it alone. Alone is how she feels, alone is how she'll always be. You're used to solitude, she tells herself. Be a stoic. Then she's enfolded. She'd waited so long, she'd given up waiting. She'd longed for this, and denied it was possible. But how easy it is, like coming home must have been once, for those who'd had homes. Walking through the doorway into the familiar, the place that knows you, opens to you, allows you in. (*MaddAddam* 49)

Though this excerpt comes from *MaddAddam* (2013) rather than *The Year of the Flood*, this passage speaks to the fact that Toby continues to grapple with her pre-pandemic traumas, questioning whether the relationship she shares with Zeb is truthful, safe, and able to last as long as she hopes it will, this initial acceptance of the comfort he provides is reminiscent of the memories she has of safety and love. For example, she constructs this reunion with Zeb as a space of feeling, rather than simply the feeling itself. She refers to being enfolded as “walking through the doorway” into “home,” revealing her formation of such a feeling as existing in a familiar home environment, such as one she once shared with her parents.

Through this connection, I argue that Toby is inadvertently linking these two safe spaces, and the loving relationships she has known, through the tunnel of climate crisis experiences that connect them together. At the beginning of her increasingly violent and damaging encounters, Toby loses both the physical space of her family, their home, owing to the growing financial strain from her mother's “treatments” from the HelthWyzer corporation. Shortly after, she loses her mother to the mysterious illness she developed by way of the HelthWyzer supplements. Having abandoned the physical home in her run from the scene of

her father's death, her use of the word "home" in describing Zeb's presence is indicative of a feeling of "return" to the safe space she has existed without for years at this point.

However, as described earlier, Toby finds it difficult to settle fully into her comfort with Zeb, continuing to question his stability and truthfulness. While not completely unwarranted on account of Zeb's refusal to be purposefully vulnerable with Toby either, Toby insists on preparing herself for Zeb's departure as her partner:

Ever since they've been lovers, Toby has been dreaming that Zeb is gone. In real life he is in fact gone while she dreams, as there isn't enough room for both of them on Toby's single bed-sized slab in her broom closet of a room...But in the dreams he is really gone - gone far away, nobody knows where... "He won't be back," says a watercolor voice. "He won't ever be back." It's a woman's voice: is it Ren, Amanda, Toby herself?" (90)

Once again, Toby's discomfort in her romantic relationship can be traced back through her previously cherished connections, particularly that of her family. The focus on the concept of being "gone" and not ever coming back hearkens to the finite type of "gone" Toby experienced in the deaths of her parents. Additionally, Toby considers that this "watercolor voice" insisting on Zeb's rejection may, in fact, belong to her own mind, cementing the notion that Toby herself retreats into a sense of preparedness, defending herself against unpredicted negative outcomes by always remaining ready, much in the same way that the deaths of her parents left her determined not to be caught off guard again.

### Relationship with Self

Toby's relationship with Zeb, especially her hesitancy in allowing herself to feel comfortable, is also related to another of this chapter's approaches: the relationship with self. It is Toby's romantic relationship that provides a great deal of insight into her relationship with herself, which proves to be littered with self-blame, identity crisis, and other tragic products of her lived experiences. A primary source of Toby's self-blame for her inability to

enjoy unfiltered, unquestioned happiness lies in the earlier parts of her life, shortly after her parents' deaths, when she sells her eggs in a bid for survival. However, this experience soon breaches a pain more than physical:

But she could only pull the egg stunt twice because the second time the extraction needle had been infected...When she tried a third time, they told her there were complications, so she could never donate anymore eggs, or - incidentally - have any children herself. Toby hadn't known until then that she'd wanted any children...But it seems she'd wanted children after all, because when she was told she'd been accidentally sterilized she could feel all the light leaking out of her. (*The Year of the Flood* 32-33)

This specific brush with the brutality of even the pre-pandemic world affects Toby well into adulthood, continuing to impact her relationship with others, but especially herself. It is this botched procedure, combined with her “drug fueled holiday from reality” (33) following the news of her sterilization that prompts the decision that creates the hyper-aware, distrustful Toby from the moment she recognizes that “she had to make a decision: did she want to live or did she want to die? If *die*, there were quicker ways. If *live*, she had to live differently” (33).

This decision, as well as its predecessor of the egg harvesting, arguably serves as the source for a significant portion of Toby's problems with her own identity and relationship with self. Though Toby tries to avoid any hint of vulnerability in her romantic relationship with Zeb, the Craker child, Blackbeard, manages to bring many of Toby's issues with herself bubbling to the surface. Having taken Blackbeard under her wing in an effort to feed him the stories of Oryx, Crake, and Snowman that he seems ravenous for, Toby's continued visits with the child provoke renewed reactions to her sterilization so many years ago. After Blackbeard becomes more comfortable around Toby, even offering small physical touches as a sign of his affection for her, Toby allows herself to slip into a possible alternative future

where she had had children: “[Blackbeard] takes her by the hand, tugs her forward. He knows the drill, he’s her little shadow, he’s absorbing everything. If I’d had a child, thinks Toby, would he have been like this? No. He would not have been like this. Don’t repine” (*MaddAddam*138). Toby’s relationship with Blackbeard can be viewed in light of the shifting parental roles found earlier in this chapter, but, like her romantic relationship with Zeb, it also reveals more details surrounding her view of and relationship with herself. In this pseudo-motherhood position, Toby finds the opportunity to experience more of the emotional pain she quelled for so long in the name of survival, and, while difficult for her to confront, she is ultimately able to alleviate some of the damage done to her through her experiences in a capitalist, climate crisis-affected social and economic environment.

In addition to the previous trauma haunting Ren’s relationship with herself throughout the narrative, there are two other major sources of identity construction and alteration that affect relationships with self. Here, I discuss the presence of identity reconstruction through literal, physical means and shifts in names found in the narratives of both Toby and Ren. In this vein, Toby’s relationship with herself is affected by her pre- and post-pandemic experiences with others, as well as her experiences with her own bodily alteration. Following a close call with Blanco, her one-time boss and rapist from her time at the SecretBurgers establishment before God’s Gardeners, Adam One and Zeb make the decision to remove Toby from the group and arrange for her to undergo a noticeable identity change, complete with a new name, fingerprints, voice, skin tone, eye color, scalp, and hair color. The dramatic alteration, especially combined with the swiftness of its execution, leaves Toby quite literally unable to recognize herself in a mirror:

Her fingertips lost their sensitivity...and her throat was sore from the voicework, and her head itched a lot while the Mo’Hair scalp was bonding...Sure enough, she’d gone

in as Toby and come out as Tobiatha. Less angla, more latina. More alto. She looked at herself - her new skin, her new abundant hair, her more prominent cheekbones. Her new almond-shaped green eyes...The alterations hadn't made her stunningly beautiful, but that wasn't the object. The object was to make her more invisible. (*The Year of the Flood* 261-262)

Considering that the object of the literal identity change is to help Toby hide in plain sight, it goes without saying that this is another experienced trauma that she needs to bury deep within herself. Like her parents' deaths, the threat of Blanco, and many other experiences, there is no room for proper mourning of her former identity. As such, Toby never manages to process this drastic, albeit necessary, change to her entire appearance and voice—significant components in the regard for self. As a result, Toby's relationship with herself inherently consists of a level of foreignness, deepening the fragmentation in her regard for her own thoughts, emotions, and physical body.

Though not as extensive as Toby's identity change, Ren also undergoes a serious warping of her own identity during her teen years, which carries over into her relationship with self as an adult. As with Toby, "most of the major characters in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* possess the multiple identities necessary to navigate the neomedieval world they inhabit. Ren identifies as 'Ren' among the God's Gardeners but she becomes 'Brenda' when she returns to the Compound with Lucerne" (Spiegel 127), a name that Ren says her mother "claimed...was my real name" (*The Year of the Flood* 215). By Spiegel's description, such a "neomedieval world," defined as when "sovereign states might disappear and be replaced not by a world government but by a modern and secular equivalent of the kind of universal political organisation" (Bull 245), is rife with relations akin to those of a feudal system. Also in a similar vein as Toby, Ren's name change, along with her clothing changes and social expectations, are not of her choosing: her mother, Lucerne, conducts these

alterations to her daughter's identity, seeing to it that her return to the compound comes with a return to a life and mannerisms that Ren has little to no memory of. Narkunas points out that "Ren/Brenda in *The Year of the Flood* begins life in the compounds, flees with her mother to live with God's Gardeners in the pleeblands, and returns to her privileged life in the compounds" (215), completing a full loop within her mother's quickly-changing loyalties and desires and effectively returning "Ren" to the literal and figurative confines of "Brenda."

What's more, just like Toby's final piece of her new identity, Ren-turned-Brenda is saddled with a new narrative, a new backstory, one that erases her previous loving relationships, especially her complex pseudo-father/daughter relationship with Zeb, in order to fit Lucerne's lie that they had been kidnapped by cult members. Ren begins to question whether part of Lucerne's story wasn't factual, even if not in the way she constructed it, noting that her mother's "story was that I'd been traumatized by being snuck in among the warped, brainwashing cult folk. I had no way of proving her wrong. Anyway maybe I had been traumatized: I had nothing to compare myself with" (213). Lucerne's insistence that Ren move past her former identity, one that she isn't even allowed to be remotely truthful about, culminates in her encouragement of Ren going back to school with the persona and new name that Lucerne forces upon her: "I needed to get out and make a whole new life for myself, as she was doing. It was a risk for her - I was a walking cluster bomb, the truth about her might come popping out of my mouth at any time" (214). However, her mother's insistence that Ren "make a whole new life" for herself is nothing compared to the genuine discomfort she feels in her new "compound clothes." Though not literally a physical transformation like Toby undergoes, Ren still describes her separation from herself when it comes to the new attire she is forced to don: "My new clothes felt like a disguise. I couldn't



get used to how tight they were compared to my old loose dresses, and how my bare arms stuck out from the sleeves and my bare legs came out from the bottom of the knee-length, pleated skirt. But this was what the girls at HelthWyzer High all wore, according to Lucerne” (214-215). In this way, Ren mirrors, albeit to a lesser extent, the physical identity changes that Toby herself takes on, even down to the notion of invisibility. While Toby’s identity change is designed for her own safety and Ren’s for the comfort of her mother, each character gains experience in both the pressure and ability to disappear as much as possible for self-preservation, whether it be physical or social. In this regard, both Toby and Ren’s forced identity alterations drastically affect the relationships they have with themselves, both at the time of the identity changes and beyond.

#### Relationship with Environment

Perhaps the most pervasive relationship found within the two texts is the relationship between the narrative’s characters and their post-pandemic environment. This relationship is by far the one closest to the core of the emergence of the Capitalocene identity, as its very existence relies on the burgeoning environmental desolation *created* by mounting late-capitalism impact. As such, this section attends to several aspects of the relationship between character and environment, including the ways in which pre-pandemic environmental memory informs an acceptance of a post-pandemic environment and the reconfigured approach to environmental space as a result of the unraveling of humanist philosophy.

As we have seen earlier, pre-pandemic memory heavily informs post-pandemic actions, relationships, and identities as a whole. These memories of pre-pandemic experiences inform the whole of the Capitalocene identity as they relate to one’s ability to

form a relationship with a post-pandemic environment. For instance, Jimmy's early memories of pigeons, the genetically-altered pigs designed to grow human organs, work their way into his adult relationship with the post-pandemic environmental space. Not only do these experiences support his ability to *recognize* post-pandemic environmental spaces and their occupants, but they also succeed in helping him accept the post-pandemic environment as a result of pre-pandemic actions. In short, Jimmy's earlier experiences create his later approach to his environmental surroundings whether he is consciously aware of this influence or not. For example, Jimmy's earliest memory of a bonfire, built to burn "an enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs" (*Oryx and Crake* 16). Though Jimmy gathers that the animals were put down due to a new kind of sickness or "bug" (19), his reaction to the burning pile of animal carcasses is quite unlike those of his father and his coworkers:

At the bonfire Jimmy was anxious about the animals, because they were being burned and surely that would hurt them. No, his father told him. The animals were dead. They were like steaks and sausages...Steaks didn't have heads. The heads made a difference: he thought he could see the animals looking at him reproachfully out of their burning eyes. In some way all of this - the bonfire, the charred smell, but most of all the lit-up, suffering animals - was his fault, because he'd done nothing to rescue them. (18)

Though it may be easy to write off this pre-pandemic memory as indicative of childlike hyper-empathy, it is worth acknowledging that Jimmy stands completely alone in the "look" he exchanges with the burning animals. Such a scene signals the early ways that Atwood allows the narrative to "open negotiations of human-animal relations...accept[ing] an interconnection of humans with their environment...allow[ing] for the posthuman view to be expressed" (Schmeink 96). In building upon this notion of the "posthuman view," Jimmy's recognition of animal life departs from the ways other humans around him tend to recognize it, and the "gaze" he exchanges with animals, particularly the pigeons, continues to appear

throughout his childhood. On a visit to the pigoon laboratory, Jimmy's father warns him "Don't fall in...They'll eat you up in a minute" (26). Jimmy, however, disregards this statement because "I'm their friend, he thought. Because I sing to them. He wished he had a long stick, so he could poke them - not to hurt them, just to make them run around. They spent far too much time doing nothing" (26). Though Jimmy rejects the idea that the pigoons would hurt him, he dips himself further into the humanist mindset of his societal circumstances: the pigoons and animals like them were there for human use, whether this is as food, genetic advancement, or, in a childlike sense, entertainment. Curiously enough, this scene undergoes a rewrite of sorts when Jimmy's post-pandemic self encounters the liberated pigoons in a wilder environment:

He raises his stick, shakes it at them. Usually they bolt if he does that...but this time they stand their ground...What can he do if they charge? Only one option: scramble back through the window. Does he have time for that?...They'd bowl him over, trample him, then rip him open, munch up the organs first. He knows their tastes. A brainy and omnivorous animal, the pigoon. (235)

The return of Jimmy's stick alone, this time a literal presence rather than a wishful one, might be enough to link this post-pandemic event to the pre-pandemic memory of Jimmy's childhood. However, other aspects of the pre-pandemic pigoon encounter show up as well. Jimmy's father's notion of "don't fall in" seems to have returned as well, as Snowman is effectively "in" the pigoons' environment, this time without the safety of the fence, frantically looking for a method of escape. What's more, his father's warning that the pigoons would "eat [him] up in a minute" rings throughout Snowman's panic, as he fully understands that they are "omnivorous" and fully capable of tearing him apart. The final connection between Jimmy's pre-pandemic relationship with the pigoons, at least as it is informed by his father, and this post-pandemic encounter is the notion that Snowman "knows

their tastes.” In this sense, Snowman’s relationship to his current environment, complete with the presence of the pigeons, is formulated from his pre-pandemic lessons on their nature, as well as witnessing the evolution of what was once caged to what now runs free, without fear of those who once imprisoned them. In short, his one-time “gaze” with the burning animals and the pre-pandemic pigeons has now resulted in a deep understanding that he lives in an environment that favors *them* now, though he continues to rely on literal and figurative “sticks” to obtain some sense of security while traversing their territory.

As Jimmy’s approach to the post-pandemic environment is informed by his encounters with similar spaces and beings before their evolution, so too is Toby’s relationship with the post-apocalyptic environment shaped by earlier interactions. However, unlike Jimmy, Toby spends a significant amount of time with God’s Gardeners before Crake’s outbreak, therefore allowing her approach to the “new” environmental space to be reconfigured before it even occurs. For example, Toby recalls several Gardener orations predicting an impending global disaster brought about by symptoms and constructions of end-stage Capitalocene. One of these orations specifically highlights the several-stage process of such a disaster, as well as its source:

According to Adam One, the Fall of Man was multidimensional. The ancestral primates fell out of the trees; then they fell from vegetarianism into meat-eating. Then they fell from instinct into reason, and thus into technology...Then they fell from a joyous life in the moment into the anxious contemplation of the vanished past and distant future. (*The Year of the Flood* 188)

Toby’s recollections of Adam One’s portrayal of the “Fall” directly speaks to the pre-pandemic narrative that Jimmy experienced first-hand. The heavy use of animal bodies, reliance on technology to the point of obsession, and the ever-increasing anxieties that fully take over his post-pandemic self are displayed in the Gardener belief of the

“multidimensional” path toward the apocalyptic environmental space. However, there is a further difference between Toby and Jimmy when it comes to their relationship between their new environment. Jimmy is cognizant of the fact that, while Crake’s pandemic ultimately shoved the world over the apocalyptic border, Capitalocene components opened the door for its possibility. However, his childhood notion that he did not attempt a “rescue” of any kind echoes throughout the difference between his and Toby’s approach to their new environmental relationships. While both Jimmy and Toby do indeed struggle in the post-pandemic space, Jimmy experiences significant injuries, prolonged starvation, and other inflictions: his new environment does not only seem to not favor him, but it seems to be actively seeking revenge. Toby, on the other hand, built the foundation for a kinder relationship with her post-pandemic environment during her pre-pandemic existence with the Gardeners. The early stages of this relationship are most evident in her recollections of the ways the Gardeners quite literally offered shelter to environmental life in their homes:

The Garden wasn’t at all what Toby had expected from hearsay. It wasn’t a baked mudflat strewn with rotting vegetable waste - quite the reverse. She gazed around it in wonder: it was so beautiful, with plants and flowers of many kinds she’d never seen before. There were vivid butterflies; from nearby came the vibration of bees. Each petal and leaf was fully alive, shining with awareness of her. Even the air of the Garden was different. (43)

Through the Gardeners’ teachings, Toby is also able to contribute to the assistance of the environment’s survival, as she engages with beekeeping and herbal remedies. However, Adam One makes it quite clear that such a place did not come about by happenstance, noting that on “Creation Day...this Edencliff Rooftop Garden of ours was a sizzling wasteland...By covering such barren rooftops with greenery we are doing our small part in the redemption of God’s Creation from the decay and sterility that lies all around us...” (11). Like the rest of the Gardeners, Toby puts in the work of caring for the environment and learning its ways,

acknowledging that it was “shining with awareness around her,” resulting in her experiencing a less dangerous relationship with the post-pandemic environment than others, namely Jimmy. Though Toby does not verbally acknowledge that her relationship with the environment is grounded in a desire to unravel the humanist philosophy that had long steered human engagement with environmental systems, this is in fact what is occurring. In this sense, Toby’s relationship with her surroundings prior to ecological collapse is precisely what allows her to come closer to a complete “unraveling” of those humanist tendencies that keep Snowman from being able to obtain any sort of mercy from his post-pandemic environment.

The construction and representation of familial relationships, romantic companionships, relationships with self, and relationships with the environment all manage to further cultivate the formation of Capitalocene identity as a whole in Atwood’s title characters, as well as demonstrate the heavy impact of Capitalocene experiences on such identity formations. Having witnessed his parents’ toxic relationship, as well as experiencing his father’s questionable ethics and his mother’s rapid emotional shifts, Jimmy’s future relationships with his romantic partners is marred with the problematic lessons from his father and the emotionally manipulative nature he learned to adopt with his mother. Additionally, parental roles are exchanged, altered, and shifted around as multiple scholars point out the loosening of relationship ties due to the increasing brutality of Atwood’s speculative societal spaces. Romantic relationships and relationships with self are further haunted by former traumas, replaced identities, and unprocessed detrimental experiences, leading to several moments of altered approaches and reactions to beginning romantic attachments. Finally, relationships with the post-pandemic environment appear to rely on the relationship cultivated *pre*-pandemic, engaging with pre-apocalypse approach of

environmental systems and the willingness of characters to adopt a more posthuman understanding (see introduction) of a world that no longer bends to humanist will. Ultimately, the types of relationships highlighted in this chapter are not only indicative of experiences of the past, but they also announce the presence of these experiences still residing in certain characters' actions, movements, and responses. In this way, pre-pandemic Capitalocene memories do not work alone to construct part of the Capitalocene identity, but they actively inform, shape, and engage with relationships found in the two texts to form a larger scale climate crisis-influenced sense of self.

### Chapter 3: Class Status Constructions and Hierarchies

As seen through many of the relationships in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, class and social status heavily influence the construction and development of Capitalocene identities. This chapter directly addresses this influence, focusing on the categories of underclass status, lower class status, higher class status, and the movement between these three sectors, all while interrogating the boundaries between. Here, it is necessary to describe the definitions of upper and lower class that this chapter will rely on. Through my approach to Atwood's use of class structures in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, I found that Michael W. Kraus and others' definition of social class rank best functions within the bounds of this work, since for

individuals from relatively lower-class backgrounds, belonging to a lower rank in society indicates that the social environment is a primary determinant of social behavior, and that one's own capacity to marshal material and social resources to overcome external threats or to pursue opportunities is reduced relative to others. In contrast, individuals from relatively upper-class backgrounds perceive themselves as higher in rank relative to others, and these rank perceptions heighten the sense that one can manage threats and seek social opportunities freely, without being encumbered by the external environment. (86)

Kraus and others go on to describe additional components of the class structure, with notions such as "threat vigilance," "social perception," and "climbing the social ladder" all approached differently depending on which class status one currently occupies. The presence of "threat vigilance" and the increase in violence done to lower class individuals by those in upper class standing is precisely what I explore in this chapter, engaging with both the manner and frequency that these violent altercations occur. Additionally, as described in the introduction of this work, this thesis also relies on the concept of "underclass" as it is defined by Gunnar Myrdal as a "a "class of unemployed, unemployables, and underemployed, who are more and more hopelessly set apart from the nation at large, and do not share in its life,



its ambitions, and its achievements” (10). This chapter again recognizes the “nation at large” as being primarily made up of Corporate upper class entities, and, therefore, is not “at large” in numbers, but rather in power and claimed authority.

As Atwood also demonstrates the ability for characters to move, or, rather, to be *thrown*, between under, lower, and upper class in the dangerously unstable capitalistic surroundings, chapter three analyzes the magnitude of violence of this ricochet between class systems, as well as how this movement impacts response to and existence in a previously unknown social and political sphere. In doing so, I rely on the concept of “social mobility,” a notion presented through a sociological and psychological lens and defined by sociologist Pitirim Sorokin as “any transition of an individual or social object or value – anything that has been created or modified by human activity from one social position to another” (133). In building on Sorokin’s definition for the purpose of this thesis, I again assert that social mobility, especially the movement between upper and lower class or lower and underclass, functions as a Capitalocene transitional space rife with violence for the characters who pass through it.

#### Underclass and Lower Class Status

This category aims a lens at the characters of Oryx and Toby spanning the length of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. Though Oryx’s experiences have already been discussed in the context of memory and relationships, I return to her narrative and identity construction through yet another approach, further analyzing the notion that the Capitalocene identities found in Atwood’s novels depend on the cooperation of the four aspects outlined in this text in order to function as the collective. Furthermore, I posit that Oryx’s relationship with her class status influences her understanding of what most would view as highly

traumatic experiences, engaging with these traumas as they compose her sense of normalcy.

For example, Snowman recounts Oryx's detailing of her class status:

This village was a place where everyone was poor and there were many children, said Oryx. She herself was quite little when she was sold. Her mother had a number of children, among them two older sons who would soon be able to work in the fields, which was a good thing because the father was sick...Something wrong with the lungs, Jimmy had guessed. Of course they all probably smoked like maniacs when they could get cigarettes: smoking dulled the edge. (He congratulated himself on this insight.) (*Oryx and Crake* 115-116)

Oryx's initial depiction of her family's class status briefly mentions her coming experience in sex trafficking, but also highlights that this experience is not one seen as kidnapping, but rather a familial decision. However, this revelation lasts for only a moment, as Jimmy is quick to usurp her narrative with his own "insight," a move that ironically mimics the actions of adults in Oryx's past who take over her childhood for their own financial gain, storylines, or depraved wills.

Oryx's experiences continue to be filtered through Jimmy's retelling, but, nevertheless, still detail a history of her class status. Her father's illness "had an element of shame to it; no one wanted to be contaminated by the illness of another. So the father of Oryx was pitied, but also blamed and shunned. His wife tended him with silent resentment" (116). Though on a much more personal scale than the monstrous capitalist forces that vilify sick individuals who cannot afford treatment in the novel at large, Oryx's father's illness and subsequent death provokes a similar level of repulsion from those around him. In this sense, the personal experience truly mimics the political and social structures at play in the speculative environment. From here on, Oryx becomes the catalyst through which the family's financial desperation finds some form of relief:

Oryx had been a younger child, often pushed to the side, but suddenly she was made much of and given better food than usual, with a special blue jacket, because the other

village women were helping out and they wanted her to look pretty and healthy...The village women might need to sell their own children one day, and if they helped out they would be able to count on such help in return. (115)

From this passage, underclass status in the novels is an exact replica of the surrounding systems that created this category in the first place. As with other social and class statuses in the narrative, the presence of community and communal assistance is an illusion, a false depiction steeped in political and transactionary alliances. This notion of a bartered support system, though relationships are easily broken and alliances sold to the highest bidder, is worth examining for its impact on Oryx's Capitalocene identity and conception of global operations as a whole. Having witnessed and engaged in a community forged only through the bonds of promised return on investment, she replicates this method of relationship building well into adulthood, telling Jimmy that "I learned about life...Everything has a price" (138-139). Having existed in an equally transaction-based social climate, yet failing to recognize the brutality that exists on either side of the "border" between underclass and upper class, Jimmy refuses Oryx's position, telling her "Not me...I don't have a price" only for his future self to muse "Wrong, as usual" (139) in response to Jimmy's denial.

While the presence of transactional bonds appears in underclass, lower class, and upper class narratives in the texts, Oryx's experiences also demonstrate the ability for upper class individuals to cross over the boundary into the underclass category, effectively stepping into a new form of the "bartered community" role. In order for Oryx to transform, at least in her family and community's eyes, from a financial obligation to a method of securing monetary profit, there must exist a force outside of the underclass system to provide this transformation. As it happens, Oryx's village is frequented by a man who "visits" specifically

to buy what the families have to sell, demonstrating capitalism in its most egregious form—the purchase of human bodies.

This man wasn't regarded as a criminal of any sort, but as an honourable businessman who didn't cheat, or not much, and who paid in cash. Therefore he was treated with respect and shown hospitality, because no one in the village wanted to get on his bad side. What if he ceased to visit? What if a family needed to sell a child and he would not buy it because he'd been offended on a previous visit? He was the villagers' bank, their insurance policy, their kind rich uncle, their only charm against bad luck. And he had been needed more and more often... (117-118)

In examining the village's regard for the child trafficker, it is interesting to note the level of praise the people heap onto him, in spite of knowing that he will buy their own children and become the reason for fractured families. Additionally, though he is viewed as being generous, going out of his way to help parents by purchasing their children, the unacknowledged boundary between the two classes lies in the transaction-based relationship itself. The child trafficker wields his financial power in a way that does not, as Oryx's family believes, free his victims' communities from their desperate situation. Rather, he utilizes the village purely as a resource. Like the capitalist system that produced him, he provides just enough financial relief to keep the community believing in his generosity, but not nearly enough to allow them to rid themselves of his practices. In short, financial instability supports his means of profit. In this manner, Oryx's understanding of the "price" of herself and others in lower class standing is first formed through witnessing the liminality of boundary crossers who, within their brief transition between class spaces, establish a transaction-based relationship with hidden sinister conditions.

Such boundary crossing is not only found in Oryx's narrative, but also presents itself in Toby's narrative in *The Year of the Flood*. While Toby's childhood and adolescence arguably offer a more secure upbringing than Oryx experiences, her family's desperate grip

on one of the upper rungs of the lower class ladder soon begins to slip as she nears adulthood. Though Toby does indeed seem to fill the space between Oryx's economic situation and that of, say, Jimmy or Crake, it is necessary to understand that this does not denote a "middle class" standing. As Atwood's speculative work unfolds, it becomes clear that while there may be varying degrees of lower and upper class, including the drop between lower and underclass, the concept of the middle class is, I argue, present in name only as a result of its eradication by the hyper-capitalism of the social and political sphere. This notion is not entirely based in Atwood's speculative future, either. Anthropologists such as Joseph Masco point out that our own point on the climate crisis continuum is signaling trouble for middle class stability even as it participates in its own destruction. For example, Masco explains that our current position within the climate crisis

makes the basic requirements for a middle-class consumer life (including food, transportation, heating, clothing, tourism) fundamentally dangerous to the future stability of the climate if they remain embedded in the current petrochemical-based global economy. The virtues of modernization, globalization, and technological revolution have thus been turned upside down by global warming: rather than extending equality, security, and comfort, the petrochemical economy has become a slow-moving and highly negative form of geoengineering. (352)

In keeping with Masco's understanding, Toby experiences the speculative future of high consumerism, in which environmental-supporting components such as solar cars *do* exist, but only as a result of dwindling petrochemical resources. In this sense, Toby's experience of the speculative future of the middle class (i.e., its eradication) traces the evolution of Masco's observations into a potential future. As a result, Toby's narrative offers a possible answer to the question: if the continuation of the middle class economy requires sacrifice of the climate and environment at large, then what occurs when there is nothing left to sacrifice? This is, I argue, one of the questions that Atwood's fiction answers, as uncomfortable as it may be. To

approach this answer, it is necessary to acknowledge Masco's further comment that current climate crisis data demonstrates that "American middle-class consumer economy [has had] an unprecedented force of violence in the world, one in which planned obsolescence, plastics, and petrochemical innovation have raised standards of living in North America at the expense of the collective environment as well as public health" (352). In terms of Atwood's narrative, the "violence in the world" can take on several different forms: extreme plastics production for the middle class houses bought cheaply and creating additional pollution, rampant animal-based food raising in unsanitary and environmentally devastating conditions, and even the air-pollutant vehicles can all be considered categories of environmental violence. However, this violence even extends to those assured that not only does the middle class exist, but they have a guaranteed safe space within its boundaries due to their cooperation with the systems in authority. Though Oryx and others like her in the underclass more immediately experience the physical violence of the upper class, those in what passes for the "middle class" often believe in their safety from such fates. After all, they are cared for by those above them, are they not? This belief in middle class safety is precisely what those controlling the narrative's class system rely on, as it allows them to drain the finances of those in the "middle" (something they cannot necessarily do with underclass individuals such as Oryx, as there is no money there) before finally absorbing the physical body as a resource in almost the exact manner as underclass citizens are absorbed. In the narrative examples provided below, it becomes clear that the notion of the "middle class" is a falsehood designed to convince individuals of a protection that does not actually extend to them, all while their finances and very bodies are siphoned off before they can hope to realize it. As a result, they are not actually part of a true "middle class," but rather exist in a lower

class category without recognizing it. In the end, then, *how* bodies are bought and sold between underclass and lower class is really the only difference between them.

In working with the notion that, rather than a true “middle,” there only exists a false “in between” to hide cavernous divide between upper, lower, and underclass in this late-capitalism space, it is easier to see the manner in which Toby’s family is also used to ultimately bolster the wealthier class. She reflects on the changes she witnesses, particularly in relation to her father:

He thought the world was still the way it had been fifty years before. He shouldn’t have been so stubborn. Already, back then, the CorpSeCorps were consolidating their power. They’d started as a private security firm for the Corporations, but then they’d taken over when the local police forces collapsed for lack of funding, and people liked that at first because the corporations paid, but now CorpSeCorps were sending their tentacles everywhere. He should have caved. (*The Year of the Flood* 25)

This passage illustrates the beginnings of the complete social collapse that eventually consumes Toby’s known life and family structure. However, her narrative becomes even more intertwined with that of Oryx when it comes to physical health, fulfilling Crake’s prophecy that the “best diseases, from a business point of view...would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally – that is, for maximum profit – the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out” (*Oryx and Crake* 256). The narrator explains Toby’s mother’s experience of the complete process of Crake’s notion, explaining that

She couldn’t understand it...she took a dose of HelthWyzer Hi-Potency VitalVite supplements daily...No doctor could give her a diagnosis, though many tests were done by the HelthWyzer Corp clinics; they took an interest because she’d been such a faithful user of their products. They arranged for special care, with their own doctors. They charged for it, though, and even with the discount for members of the HelthWyzer Franchise Family it was a lot of money; and because the condition had no name, her parents’ modest health insurance plan refused to cover the costs. (*The Year of the Flood* 25-26)

Sarah Appleton confirms this passage as indicative of Crake's prophetic vision of invented disease and sickness, noting that rather than "relying on supply and demand, the corporations have created artificial demands and promoted engineered dependencies. Manufactured diseases necessitate manufactured cures" (71), that is, if the sick have the funds to finance these miraculous cures. This process demonstrates, according to Lars Schmeink, that the "corporate machine works flawlessly" (78) in the novels' speculative space, turning the healthcare field into more of a loan shark "business" style of industry rather than concerning itself with genuine promotion of good health.

However, aside from this "flawless" corporate machine set-up foreshadowed by Crake in *Oryx and Crake*, Toby's narrative provides additional evidence of the pattern witnessed in Oryx's childhood memories, despite the two never meeting. Toby's family is visited by a systemic version of the man who visited Oryx's village to purchase and traffic children. Though Toby and her family are unaware, at this point, that the corporation her mother works for is intentionally poisoning her, they still experience the illusion of community felt by Oryx in her childhood. Even the notion of the "HelthWyzer Franchise Family" is designed to instill a feeling of security in those that don't belong to the "higher ups," lulling them into a false sense of safety even as the transactional relationship silently siphons off their finances under the guise of genuine concern. Toby will later be told by her God's Gardener's mentor, Pilar, that such an "illness, coupled with those supplements. No wonder the HelthWyzer people wanted to treat your mother themselves...Did it ever occur to you, my dear...that your mother may have been a guinea pig?" (*The Year of the Flood* 104), implying that Toby's mother was poisoned by HelthWyzer in order to be drained of the family's funds for the invented disease and the "treatments" the Corporation also creates.



Pilar's words are hardly surprising to Toby, though she had initially "thought it was the developer who wanted Dad's land" (105). Though Toby assigns the sinister action to the incorrect source, her assumption that someone was after financial or material profit and poisoned her mother to obtain it exhibits the deadly hierarchical system she occupies.

However, this system spreads far beyond the walls of the corrupt HelthWyzer hospitals. Toby's memories of her lower class adolescence, exacerbated by her mother's illness and HelthWyzer's attacks on their finances, reveal the complexities of the Capitalocene in which multiple aspects of society work together to drain the finances of those who have nowhere else to turn. As her mother gets sicker, these parasitic aspects openly prey on Toby's family:

Toby's father took out a second mortgage and poured the money into the doctors and the drugs and the hired nurses and the hospitals...Her father had to sell their white frame house then, for a much lower price than the one he'd first been offered. The day after the sale closed, the bulldozers flattened the place...Then he'd lost his thermal window job because he'd taken too much time off due to his wife's illness. His solarcar had to be sold. Then the furniture disappeared, piece by piece; not that Toby's father could get much for it. People can smell desperation on you, he said to Toby. They take advantage. (26)

Like Oryx's experiences in an underclass environment, Toby's loss of her mother signals the capitalist use of human bodies for as long as their finances, however meager they may be, continue to hold out before tossing them aside in search of new victims. This "business" of bodies is not confined to the space of corporations like HelthWyzer, however. Though Toby was incorrect about the developer poisoning her mother, the flattening of their house by the same man demonstrates that, though he may not have been directly responsible for the fracturing of Toby's family, he does not hesitate to step in and take the scraps of what HelthWyzer leaves in its wake.

The systemic practice of owning and selling bodies, whether directly as with Oryx or through the comfortable distance of poisoned medication, continues even after Toby's mother succumbs to her illness. After her mother's death, Toby's father commits suicide, leaving her in the position of having to bury his body in their backyard, as well as get rid of the illegal rifle. She knows she cannot accept ownership of the house now, as the corporations will wonder how her father died, so she walks away from the house entirely, pondering how her absence from college will be explained:

If her disappearance was of interest to anyone...the CorpSeCorps would spread it about that she'd been last seen with a cruising pimp on the lookout for fresh recruits, which is what you'd expect in the case of a young woman like her - a young woman in desperate financial straits, with no visible relations and no nest egg or trust fund or fallback. People would shake their heads - a shame but what could you do, and at least she had something of marketable value... (29)

Even though Toby is only considering what the explanation for her disappearance might be, her thinking aligns perfectly with the type of system that destroyed her family. This constant reflection on "marketable value," particularly in relation to human identities, bodies, and even pieces of those bodies, impacts Toby's Capitalocene identity in that she becomes used to viewing herself in terms of "worth." As described in chapter two, this reflection on her own existence as being "worthy" or "unworthy," sparked by her regulation to the underclass category, often drastically affects her romantic relationships in addition to her relationship with herself.

### Upper Class Status

Atwood does not only rely on characters in the lower or underclass categories to portray the catastrophic use, abuse, and consumption of human identities and physical bodies that the late-stage capitalist society encourages. Rather, the characters of Zeb and Jimmy each participate in this nexus of capital, albeit from an upper class standing. Zeb, Toby's

eventual lover and brother to the head of God's Gardeners, did not always exist in the humble environment of the EdenCliff rooftop garden. Rather, his backstory, told to Toby at the beginning of their romantic relationship, reflects a wealthier, though also highly abusive, childhood.

Though taking place in Atwood's *MaddAddam* rather than the first two novels, Zeb's childhood under the care of his father, whom he refers to as "the Rev" throughout his retellings, is equally as telling of the Capitalocene environment, social structures, and financial manipulation as Oryx and Toby's narratives. Though Zeb's narrative exists on the other side of the "line" between lower and upper class categories, he is still able to witness and process transactional relationships as cruel as those found in Oryx and Toby's memories. Zeb wastes no time in detailing his hatred for the Rev, especially as it is connected to his seedy "business" ventures:

The Rev had his very own cult. That was the way to go in those days if you wanted to coin the megabucks and you had a facility for ranting and bullying, plus golden-tongued whip-'em preaching...Tell people what they want to hear, call yourself a religion, put the squeeze on for contributions, run your own media outlets and use them for robocalls and slick online campaigns, befriend or threaten politicians, evade taxes. (*MaddAddam* 111)

Zeb's observations of his father's early practices speak to the same systemic structures that Toby and Oryx both experience, pulling back the curtain to reveal that the classes benefitting from the rampant exploitation are indeed as sinister as previous lower and underclass narratives have signaled. The ideology of the late-capitalist social and political structure finds a home in the higher class system as well. In this regard, it becomes clear that the celebration of the 1% and viewing upper class citizens as generous "benefactors" of lower class systems is not only a lie that men such as Oryx's abuser tell their desperate victims—it is a lie they willingly believe themselves.

Zeb further details his father's business of financial manipulation merged with pseudo-Christian doctrine, paying particular attention to the method that his father utilizes for maximum monetary profit. Not only does the Rev preach what people "want to hear," but he actively relies on the support of those who form another version of the transactional bond discussed earlier in this chapter:

By the time Zeb came along, the Rev had a megachurch...the Church of PetrOleum...They were riding high for a while, about the time accessible oil became scarce and the price shot up and desperation among the plebs set in. A lot of top Corps guys would turn up at the church as guest speakers. They'd thank the Almighty for blessing the world with fumes and toxins, cast their eyes upwards as if gasoline came from heaven, look pious as hell. (*MaddAddam* 111)

In this sense, the Rev's merging of Christian-like doctrine with seemingly religious faith in petrochemical economy installs yet another authority to back his doctrine—God. Through this highly manipulative use of religious rhetoric, the Rev is able to obtain more funding from his congregation, therefore succeeding in securing upper class-level financial gain. What's more, Kit Dobson posits that, rather than simply line his pockets with the dregs of the rapidly progressing late-capitalist movement, the Rev "is also linked to the crumbling of the state, the *rise* of the CorpSeCorps, and the ongoing environmental destruction" (280, italics my own). Through this lens, the Rev is not merely offering "guest speaker" titles to already powerful corporations (though they must have some form of power at this point). Rather, he provides a platform for this power to increase exponentially through manipulative rhetoric and monetary support.

Zeb's experience in the upper class doesn't only provide him with narratives of corruption from his father and his CorpSeCorps co-conspirators. Rather, he also witnesses the upper class's penchant for violence, whether it be threatened or real bodily harm, again aligning his narrative with those of Oryx and Toby's, just through the lens of another class

status. After his brother Adam reveals that he watched the Rev bury his murdered mother, Zeb suggests they call the CorpSeCorps and “Tell them to bring shovels” (*MaddAddam* 124). However, Adam quickly vetos this option, explaining the danger they would be putting themselves in due to the number of OilCorps members in the PetrOleum church:

There’s a lot of overlap because of the benefits to both parties. They’re agreed on the need to crush dissent. So the OilCorps would cover up for the Rev over a pure and simple wife murder that didn’t per se threaten its holdings, since they’d know there’d be much credibility lost through scandal. They’d accuse the two of us of mental instability. Shut us away, use the heavy drugs. Or, as I said - dig a couple of new holes in the rock garden...Blood is thinner than money. (125)

As the upper class is also rife with threats against those who defy their complete authority, even if those individuals are the children of one of their greatest supporters, I argue that Zeb doesn’t experience significantly more safety than Oryx or Toby. Zeb’s calculated rejection of the Rev’s “business,” along with his theft of a great deal of his assets, demonstrates, according to Dobson, “the increasingly fugitive nature of existing outside of cultural and corporate norms...the possibilities for being validated as a legitimate, fully human being become narrower and narrower up until the species’ demise” (280). As such, Zeb’s upper class childhood and adolescence shapes his Capitalocene identity both through his knowledge of the way that system functions, as well as teaching him some, if undesired, pandemic-necessary lessons such as “the importance of staying off the grid...and how religion can be used to justify economic goals and power politics” (Narkunas 218). Ultimately, this knowledge does not only form the inner workings of Zeb’s mind, but it also presents itself in outwardly visible ways. According to Paul Narkunas, Zeb and Adam’s childhood and indoctrination by the Rev isn’t something they can fully move away from, even as they attempt to reject the anti-environmental teachings themselves. This desire to cut themselves away from their father results in the ceremonial beginnings of the God’s

Gardener cult in which each member “shunned his or her former life and [had] been reborn, taking the name Adam or Eve and a number” (218), unknowingly mimicking the same shunning of a former life that Adam and Zeb experienced. Additionally, Narkunas posits that, in their attempt to “correct environmental degradation,” the brothers “take this idea to its logical extreme and erase vast sectors of humanity before it can continue to imprint its destruction on the natural world” (219), poisoning members of the CorpSeCorps in an effort to prevent further damage to environmental systems. Jennifer Atkinson supports such a position, arguing that

while it is true that members like Adam One adhere to a rather pacifist—even fatalistic—philosophy, there also exists a more radical strain within the Gardeners. Under the leadership of Zeb, a militant subgroup refuses simply to bear witness to the ongoing social and environmental destruction of the Anthropocene, pushing for “bio-resistance” and an insurgency against corporate governance. (146)

As children, Zeb often bore the brunt of their father’s brutality, and Adam protected himself by remaining as passive as possible. As adults, their personalities reflect the evolution of these traits. As such, I argue that their survival mechanisms have become almost their entire Capitalocene identity, as the need for survival is constant. Though not as hands-on as the Rev, Zeb’s violence combines with Adam’s cult-like leadership of God’s Gardeners to echo the experiences of their youth. The continuance of these behaviors ultimately signal the complete alteration of their Capitalocene identities through their lives within the caustic inner circle of the late-capitalist system.

Zeb’s eventual complete destruction (murder isn’t quite the right term) of his father again recalls the rage at both the upper class system that tried to mold him and the violent father who repeatedly beat, tortured, and otherwise brutalized him. After seeing the Rev enter the Scales and Tales club where he is tending bar undercover, Zeb removes three of the

disease-ridden pills intended for further testing by the MaddAddamites, placing each of them in the cocktail intended for his father. Though some may expect Zeb to be at least slightly hesitant in unleashing an unknown and, as it turns out, literally body-destroying disease on his father, instead he is impatient to see the effects of his handiwork, yearning “to excuse himself from bar duty and slide into the video viewing cubicle...Maybe the effect was long-term: maybe those babies didn’t kick in for a day, a week, a month. But if it was anything more rapid, he sure as hell wanted to watch” (*MaddAddam* 304-305). In addition to this eagerness, Zeb provides further commentary on his feelings about his actions against his father with a made up song: *My dad loved walloping little kids, / He loved it more than nooky, / I hope he bleeds from every pore, / And chucks up all his cookies* (305). Through this action, along with to the remnants of violence even in the brothers’ turn from the teachings of their childhood, the Rev’s abuse and the upper class system’s rampant dysfunction and vicious tendencies continue to influence Zeb and Adam’s Capitalocene identities in ways that both assist their survival and further numb them to trauma.

Like Zeb’s, Jimmy’s experiences in the upper class also heavily influence his Capitalocene identity. Like Adam and Zeb, Jimmy’s early environment is entirely informed by the “higher up” mindset of his OrganInc Compound surroundings “where the top people lived” (*Oryx and Crake* 26). Lars Schmeink notes that the divide between under, lower, and upper class is most noticeable in Jimmy’s childhood memories, highlighting that the walls of the Compound serve as a literal boundary line, as the

elite population now lives in class-segregated communities (‘Compounds’) and revels in bacchanalian ignorance and consumption, while the masses barely survive in squalor (‘pleeblands’) and constant fear of disease, crime, and natural catastrophe. Nation states have given way to global corporate rule, and especially biotechnological progress and its capitalist consumption have had a major impact on society and environment. (73)

The perspective of his Compound environment as cleaner, nicer, and generally “better” than what could be found outside of the walls can be seen in the descriptions Jimmy applies to his knowledge about the pleebland cities, calling them “dingy-looking” and noting that there lurked “the addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies. So it was best for everyone at OrganInc Farms to live all in one place, with foolproof procedures” (27). That young Jimmy sneaks “the paupers” into his list of criminal-like activity is interesting, and demonstrates the developing notion in his mind that to be poor is to be criminal, full stop. What’s more, the alienation of present self from past self again comes into play, as Snowman’s memories of Jimmy’s ideas consistently bring up ideals from his father and his father’s professional colleagues. Though Jimmy has a difficult time conjuring up his father’s physical features, his voice permeates most of his memories concerning class:

Outside the OrganInc walls and gates and searchlights, things were unpredictable. Inside, they were the way they used to be when Jimmy’s father was a kid, before things got so serious, or that’s what Jimmy’s father said. Still, the CorpSeCorps men - the ones Jimmy’s father called *our people* - these men had to be on constant alert. When there was so much at stake, there was no telling what the other side might resort to. The other side, or the other sides: it wasn’t just one other side you had to watch out for. (27)

Here, it becomes alarmingly apparent how much of Jimmy’s father’s rhetoric has sunk in, even so early in his childhood. This passage not only portrays the growing belief in the upper class’s ideology concerning “the other side” and its inherently nefarious nature, but it also, curiously, denotes the same desperation for “community” found in Oryx’s narrative.

However, though Jimmy’s father is adamant about the loyalty of *our people*, this communal bond is just as transaction-based as those in lower class systems, as demonstrated in the next section. Here as well, the concept of the “other side” is made even more plain for Jimmy, in



language a child is likely to grasp quickly, furthering the idea that such indoctrination is meant to be passed on as early as possible:

Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies, said Jimmy's father, and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside.

"So are we the kings and dukes?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh absolutely," said his father, laughing. (28)

Such descriptors manage to represent the feudal class system as being a "long ago" ideal, yet also implies that this system has infiltrated present society by suggesting that Jimmy's class status is that of "kings and dukes." However, though this dialogue demonstrates the very physical "castle" nature of the OrganInc Compound, there is a hidden version of the same construct embedded deep in Jimmy's mind from this point forward. Harkening back to the discussion of Oryx's class category earlier in this chapter, Jimmy "congratulates" himself on the "insight" that her family and community "probably smoked like maniacs" (116). This pride that his adult self feels in being able to see what he views as an addiction brought on by poverty stems, I argue, from these early interactions with his father and the OrganInc Compound on the concept of class and criminality. While Jimmy doesn't intend Oryx herself in this position, he desperately tries to get her to share his anger at what was done to her, and he can't understand how she views her trafficking experience as "normal," as his idea of what should be considered "normal" is entirely separate from her narrative.

Jimmy's rejection of anything he doesn't deem as acceptable (and, if the situation itself cannot be acceptable, then a rejection of the lack of anger at said situation) can also be linked to his father's further teachings on upper class business ventures. As the transhumanist and capitalist forces continue to weave together, transgenics quickly becomes the next

marketable tactic. As such, Jimmy's father reveals his hope for using the pigeons to formulate "start over skin that would be wrinkle- and blemish-free" (55), providing physical perfection to those who are desperate enough for it, as well as making obscene amounts of money doing so:

The rewards in the case of success would be enormous, Jimmy's father explained...What well-to-do and once-young, once-beautiful woman or man, cranked up on hormonal supplements and shot full of vitamins but hampered by the unforgiving mirror, wouldn't sell their house, their gated retirement villa, their kids, and their soul to get a second kick at the sexual can? NooSkins for Olds, said the snappy logo. (55)

Once again, Jimmy's father unwittingly provides a double dose of rhetoric. Not only is Jimmy informed that physical perfection can be bought and sold, and that *he* should be the one selling it if at all possible, but he is also subconsciously taught that perfection itself *can* be achieved even in the midst of the crumbling societal structure, if you have the money to buy it. Additionally, almost as an afterthought, Jimmy's father throws in the idea that fellow humans can serve as guinea pigs if you promise them enough—a promise doesn't mean you have to deliver. After detailing the significant financial gain to be made from the desperate and wealthy (who, of course, have already spent countless amounts on supplements not dissimilar to Toby's mother), Jimmy's father admits, "Not that a totally effective method had been found yet: the dozen or so ravaged hopefuls who had volunteered themselves as subjects, paying no fees but signing away their rights to sue, had come out looking like the Mould Creature from Outer Space - uneven in tone, greenish brown, and peeling in ragged strips" (55). This admission from his father further instructs a young Jimmy that "hope" itself is a vital part of making a profit off of people, especially their physical bodies. In this regard, Jimmy's memory of his upper class experience not only connects with that of Zeb, but it also

coincides with the unavoidable presence of financial manipulation and complete control of human bodies as both product and resource found in the narratives of Oryx and Toby.

### Movement Between Class Status

Aside from the more noticeable categories of “underclass,” “lower class,” and “upper class,” Atwood presents a transitional space within this aspect of Capitalocene identity—the movement between class and social status. Here, it is worth highlighting that I am not acknowledging this “grey” space as a *destination*, but rather the movement itself between these categories. This shift in class not only impacts Capitalocene identity in the novels by offering the experiences of upper and lower social status, as well as dipping into the underclass experience, but the movement among the three categories also shapes this identity by creating a level of discomfort and lack of recognition of this “new” transitional space not designed for long-term habitation.

For example, though Jimmy’s childhood is spent in the relative safety of the upper class, his early adulthood signals a sharp disappearance from this known space, creating confusion and his desire to retain aspects from his former position. What’s interesting about his movement between classes is that, unlike characters such as Ren, his shift into the lower class has little to do with a familial situation and is most connected to the growing transhumanist focus on transgenics and other profitable ventures to be found in human bodies. Just as his father explained that business endeavors like “NooSkins” made them the “kings and dukes” of the social sphere, Jimmy’s drop from the desired scientific career path is enough to drastically change his class status. Such a shift in class status is foreshadowed even in Jimmy’s high school days, as he is moving further from Crake’s genius-level intellect by the standards of the Compounds:

Crake was top of the class. The bidding for him by the rival EduCompounds at the Student Auction was brisk, and he was snatched up at a high price by the Watson-Crick Institute. Once a student there and your future was assured. It was like going to Harvard had been...Jimmy, on the other hand, was a mid-range student, high on his word scores but a poor average in the numbers columns. (*Oryx and Crake* 173-174)

As with nearly every other instance of systemic class rankings, the physical body, in this case the brain, is engaged in some literal or figurative form of “auction.” Every aspect of the human body is up for sale, whether this be a genuinely beneficial transaction for the individual on the auction block, such as Crake, or one with no real “good” meaning, such as Oryx’s being purchased in some format throughout her childhood and adulthood. However, through either scenario, there is always more in it for the powers doing the bidding than there is for the one being bid on. However, there is perhaps even more at stake by not being “bought” at all, as can be witnessed in Jimmy’s dramatic shift in status. In this manner, upper class, lower class, and underclass spaces all experience the indoctrinated *desire* to be purchased, signaling the alarming success of the capitalist system’s molding of priorities and collective social impulses.

Jimmy’s class change is demonstrated as being heavily linked to the intellect expectations of the Compound children that Jimmy does not succeed in living up to, at least in the eyes of the upper class decision makers. In this way, the loss (or, rather, forcible exile) of the humanities is hardly noticeable by the surrounding societies—like so much of this narrative space, they are easily disposable without mourning. Moreover, the upper class space Jimmy initially inhabits plays a major role in his shift into the lower class:

If Jimmy had been from a Module school, or - better - from one of those dump bins they called “the public system,” he’d have shown like a diamond in a drain. But the Compound schools were awash in brilliant genes, none of which he’d inherited...so his talents shrank by comparison...Jimmy was knocked down at last to the Martha

Graham Academy; and even that only after a long spell of lacklustre bidding. Not to mention some arm-twisting - Jimmy suspected - on the part of his dad... (174)

Jimmy's experience in the upper class continues to inform his approach to "inadequate" education and "undesirable" spaces, even as he struggles to gain entry into the schools he deems unworthy. In this manner, his transition to what his former companions considered to be lower class carries over his previous methods of thinking and, until this point, his belief in his inherently untouchable status, into this presently unknown environment and social standing.

Jimmy is not alone in his traversing of this transitional space in the narrative's class divide. Ren, later reverted back to Brenda by her mother upon their return from the God's Gardeners, experiences this radical shift in social status as well. Though she also "drops" in social status from her Compound upbringing due to her academic performance and attendance at the Martha Graham Academy, Ren's class transformation is three-fold. Her first journey over the class border occurs as a young child, when her mother, Lucerne, takes her from her known life in the HelthWyzer Compound to be with her lover, Zeb, in the God's Gardeners. Ren initially recalls this shift as an annoyance, remembering, "I couldn't remember ever being hungry at the HelthWyzer Compound. I really wanted to go back there...I wanted my real house, with my own room and the bed with pink bed curtains and the closet full of different clothes in it" (*The Year of the Flood* 65). However, after four years of her childhood and early adolescence with the God's Gardeners, she not only finds it harder to remember her old identity and her former class status, but she finds it very difficult to say goodbye to her current reality when Lucerne decides to leave Zeb and return to the HelthWyzer Compound, and therefore upper class life.

Having endured Lucerne's lie that they were kidnapped by a cult, Ren not only returns to an upper class existence as a child broken by the "outside" world, thereby perpetuating the fear of the lower or underclass, but she herself is used as a resource and pawn in her mother gaining re-entry to the Compound lifestyle. Ren's repeated crossing of the border between upper and lower class forces her to remove herself from emotions that will, ultimately, manifest in her adult Capitalocene identity. As a result, like Jimmy, she experiences a distinct level of foreignness in this new space compounded with these subtracted emotions:

I was back at the HelthWyzer Compound and I was reunited with my father, just as I used to wish long ago. But nothing felt right. I missed the smell of my own skin, which had lost its salty flavour and was now soapy and perfumy. I thought about what Zeb used to say about mice - if you take them out of the mouse nest for a while and then put them back, the other mice will tear them apart. If I went back to the Gardeners with my fake-flower smell, would they tear me apart? (209-210)

As Ren's crossing of the class status boundary is not singular like Jimmy's, she undergoes an arguably more difficult transformation. Rather than carry one method of thinking, of being, over the transitional space of the class system, she has now done so twice. In doing so, it can be said that Ren has inadvertently created two distinct class identities, and her attempts to merge them together to adapt to her new role as an escaped kidnapping victim returned to her "normal" life results in her fears of violence, of being "torn apart" by either system if her hidden identity is discovered.

Despite the trauma of repressing her identity formed through both class categories, Ren again is forced to undergo another journey from upper class to lower class. This third crossing is like Jimmy's in that it results partially from her academic performance being deemed unacceptable by the Compound standards and only landing a Martha Graham acceptance, but it is also due to her father's brutal murder at the hands of a rival Corps:

HelthWyzer had done a cost-benefit analysis, said Lucerne, and they'd decided the disease germs and formulas were worth more to them than Frank was...Therefore Lucerne had lost her top-wife position at HelthWyzer, and the house along with it...So I would have to stop coasting along at college, and leave Martha Graham, and take responsibility for myself. I was out of the nest in one swift kick. Not that I was ever in much of a nest: I'd always been on the edge of a ledge with Lucerne. (292-294)

In this manner, Ren's academic status demotion to the Martha Graham academy is only part of the stumble on her way into the full lower class category. Here, it is worth noting that I am not suggesting that, as with Toby, Ren moves completely into the underclass category.

Though the next chapter of this thesis examines the similarities between Oryx and Ren's experiences with sexual exploitation, there is a distinct difference between the two in that Ren manages to retain some semblance of financial security through her work at the sex club Scales and Tales. In this way, unlike Toby and Oryx, Ren is able to cling to a certain amount of autonomy, both physical and financial. For example, Ren is ultimately able to maintain employment with an intact ID, unlike Toby can do as she has quite literally burned her identity to escape CorpSeCorps detection. Additionally, though Ren and Oryx engage in remarkably similar "employments," both experiencing sexual exploitation in some format, Ren manages to retain at least some of her personal finances and health benefits, while Oryx is merely kept healthy and presentable for purchase, missing the crucial autonomy of her own healthcare. In these ways, I propose that Ren is able to avoid the classification of the "underclass" category. Though she remains on the edge between lower class and underclass, she is still able to retain the bare minimum characteristics necessary to stay on the lower class side of that border.

Furthermore, the upper class system has completely consumed her mother's priorities, and the typical familial support system is eliminated for Ren entirely, resulting in her new desperate financial situation. In addition, the disappearance and likely murder of her

biological father is yet another example of the “bodies for resources and profit” ideology represented from the upper class authorities. While Frank is deemed a resource and source of profit due to his high status in the Corporations, working on disease research, he still remains disposable if the stakes become too high. In an ironic twist, Adam One’s words that the God’s Gardeners are “viewed as twisted fanatics who combine food extremism with bad fashion sense and a puritanical attitude towards shopping. But we own nothing they want” (48) echo in the violence of Frank’s kidnapping and abandonment. While the Compound higher ups desperately want to spread the narrative that the pleeblands and those who inhabit them are dangerous, murderous even, there is a surprising level of true communal protection found within the God’s Gardeners that counteracts the faux communal bonds in most upper and underclass groupings. Though the pleeblands are indeed rife with violence, something that can clearly be seen through Toby and Ren’s experiences, the Compounds refuse to acknowledge the similar level of violence and betrayal within their “safe” walls. As a result, Ren is thrown from the false community with overwhelming ease, once again traversing the transitional space of the speculative class system.

In conclusion, character experiences of underclass, lower class, upper class, and movements between the classes do not merely inform Capitalocene identities as a singular force. Rather, these encounters with the capitalist-infused class system affect most of the other surrounding aspects of Capitalocene identity that this thesis examines, including memory, relationships, and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, gender identity and experience. Though Atwood details staggering violence as it emerges from the class system’s construction, scholars such as Luke Morgan discuss this violence as birthing the characters’ narratives of resilience, however graphic they may be, positing that in approaching “class as



[a lens] for understanding Anthropocene culture as it informs Atwood's series...scholars are rightfully skeptical of any interpretation of Atwood's series that glosses over the hard problems of our deeply engrained [sic] biocentrism and our attachment to cultural and economic excess" (26). In other words, the notion of capitalism-formed class status within the texts, complete with its faux communities, illusionary bonds, and transactional relationships, not only constructs the bones of the Capitalocene identities found within Atwood's work—it creates the environment that allows their construction in the first place. In short, novels' conception of a class status infused with the partnership between climate crisis and capitalist entities provides the foundation for many of the traumatic memories and relationships to form the way that they do in the narrative, projecting present-day aspects into a speculative space and irrevocably altering a "traditional" human identity into a true Capitalocene identity.

## Chapter 4: Gender Identity and Gender Experience

As in the previous discussion of class and social status, gender plays an especially significant role in the molding of Capitalocene identity. Not only does gender provide a key component for the development of identity in itself, but, like class, it also manages to alter other aspects such as memory, relationship with environmental space, and relationship with others. This is certainly not to say that gender and class hold *more* power than other components over the formation of Capitalocene identity, only that Atwood's narrative positions gender as yet another source that traumatic memory and other factors may be traced to. While this chapter approaches the concept of gender identity<sup>2</sup> as it informs these other features, it also seeks to recognize gender's specific interaction with class status throughout Atwood's work. As the previous chapter hinted, there is more to the notion of class than social status alone. Rather, experiences of class rely a great deal on the gender of the character performing, or being forced to perform, their predetermined role within the hierarchical structure of late capitalism. As such, this chapter continues the examination of survival methods briefly touched on in terms of underclass and lower class standing and the movement between class status, while also interrogating the sexual violence experienced by Atwood's female characters and the exploitation or direct creation of these violences by the novels' male characters.

### Gender and Economic/Physical Survival

Similar to the examination of lower class and underclass status, this section again attends to the character of Ren, deepening the connection between her gender identity and

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<sup>2</sup> It is necessary to note here that Atwood's narrative restricts the representation of gender to a traditionally binary depiction of women and men. Though this thesis fully acknowledges the fluidity of gender identity, it is essential to recognize that the capitalist forces plaguing the novels seek to enact a rigid gender inflexibility in order to more successfully manipulate, exploit, and prey upon female bodies.

her particular experience of a hyper-capitalist system that creates desperation for those not safely behind the Compound walls. In building upon the preceding chapter, Ren's movement between upper and lower class status not only impacts her desperation for survival, but it also opens up more gender-based approaches to *how* she can survive in such a system. For example, without the academic background in what the economic authorities consider "marketable" skills, Ren recognizes that her options are limited, with many of the only occupations offering security and financial security also in the business of exploiting women's bodies. Ren is even encouraged to "try out" for such positions due to the dangerous territory a young woman without a degree might find herself in:

My Dance Calisthenics teacher said I should talk to Scales and Tales. I was a good enough dancer, and Scales was part of SeksMart now, which was a legitimate Corp with health benefits and a dental plan, so it wasn't like being a prostitute. A lot of girls went into it, and some of them met nice men that way and did very well in life afterwards. So I thought I might try for it. I wasn't likely to get anything better without a degree...And I didn't want to end up as a meat barista at some place like SecretBurgers. (*The Year of the Flood* 294)

Ren's acceptance and internalization of the dangerous gender politics of her environment inform her approach to her search for and position in what she considered to be a "safe" space. However, the notion of "safety" in such a world rife with gendered violence is inherently warped, even from our often-violent present timeline, due to the increasing scarcity of true "safety" without compromise, debt, or expectation. In this regard, "safety" becomes an entirely gendered construct as it applies to the overall Capitalocene identity, taking on separate meanings and concerns for female and male characters. For instance, Ren's professor insists that "it wasn't like being a prostitute," in that Scales and Tales offered "health benefits and a dental plan." However, Ren explains that a woman (later revealed to be Toby) saw her "trying out" for the Scales and Tales proprietor, Mordis, and "took me aside

and asked me if I was in trouble” (295). Based on Toby’s panicked reaction, Ren realizes that a job at Scales and Tales, despite the benefits it promises, must not be as safe or secure as Ren’s professor claimed, only safer than “some place like SecretBurgers.” In this sense, it becomes clear that for women in Atwood’s narrative, safety is an inherently compromised notion—Ren and other women in her situation are not necessarily looking for a wholly secure space, only one that poses the least amount of risk in an increasingly brutal atmosphere.

Once at Scales and Tales, Ren clings to this understanding of “safety,” even going so far as to praise the often sexist, assault-laden environment of the sex club, noting, “Scales and Tales took care of you, they really did. If you were talent, that is. Good food, a doctor if you needed one, and the tips were great, because the men from the top Corps came here” (7). Though Ren’s expressions of gratefulness may come as a slight shock, they actually reveal the depth of the threat of gendered violence in this narrative space, as well as the desperation to achieve some semblance of security. However, as noted earlier, this security is often compromised, making it nearly impossible to avoid gendered violence no matter how tight the security or caring the employer. Ren highlights such a compromise when she describes how she came to be locked in the biocontainment unit at Scales and Tales:

I’m lucky. I’m really very lucky...First, I was lucky to be working here at Scales when the Flood hit. Second, it was even luckier that I was shut up this way in the Sticky Zone, because it kept me safe. I got a rip in my Biofilm Bodyglove - a client got carried away and bit me, right through the green sequins - and I was waiting for my test results...I wasn’t that worried. Still, they checked everything, here at Scales. (6-7)

Ren herself describes how her employment at the sex club “kept [her] safe,” not only through pre-pandemic hazards, but also through the emergence of the pandemic itself. Ren’s narrative especially illustrates that the concept of safety for women in this narrative is two-fold:

financial and physical. Not only does gender impact economical survival, but physical survival as well, making it highly desirable to find a secure enough space that allows female characters to obtain both, even if this safety is breached occasionally. Additionally, the casual manner with which Ren admits that a client bit her hard enough to rip through costume material further reveals the relativity of “security” in this world, as a bite without breaking skin is not acknowledged as “true” violence.

Ren feels “lucky” to have managed to find relative financial and physical safety in the Scales and Tales club, and she also attributes the primary “savior role” in this situation to Mordis, the club manager.

He’d been in the business ever since he was a kid, and when they outlawed the pimps and the street trade - for public health and the safety of women, they said - and rolled everything into SeksMart under CorpSeCorps control, Mordis made the jump...he was easy as long as everything was cool. But he’d stand up for us if the clients got violent. “Nobody hurts my best girls,” he’d say. It was a point of honour with him...we were a valuable asset, he’d say. (7)

Ren’s use of the word “honour” as it applies to Mordis is particularly interesting. She notes the fact that sex work has essentially been “purchased” as a whole system by the capitalist forces of the CorpSeCorps, and that Mordis is willfully participating in the sale of women’s bodies, but she approaches his character with an air of understanding and gratitude. Like Oryx, Ren can only expect a relative safety since she cannot hope to find full security in such an environment. As a result, she accepts Mordis as a protective figure: though he participates in selling her body, he also shields her from outright violent attacks, and he does not inflict himself on her or any other Scales and Tales employee. Curiously, Ren’s regard of Mordis as a “protector” echoes Oryx’s insistence that Uncle En repeatedly rescued her, even when these rescues were staged by him. Through these actions, Mordis and Uncle En consistently place Ren and Oryx in harm’s way (although Mordis does eventually give his life to protect Ren in

an extreme situation), risking their safety for financial gain while providing false promise that they care for their “best girls.” However, since every aspect of economic and physical survival is highly influenced by gender in this speculative world, individuals offering even a small sense of protection are a welcome reprieve from the daily threat of physical violence against women characters.

Gender is again portrayed as a contributing factor to economic and physical survival *outside* of Ren’s personal experience at Scales and Tales. Ren repeatedly calls attention to the fact that she considers herself “lucky” to be in a financially and physically protected space like the sex club, and she also describes what being a woman means for those separated from these spaces:

After the SeksMart roll-in, anyone left outside the system was not only illegal but pathetic. A few wrecked, diseased old women wandering the alleyways, practically begging. No man with even a fraction of his brain left would go anywhere near them. “Hazardous waste,” we Scales girls used to call them. We shouldn’t have been so scornful; we should have had compassion. But compassion takes work, and we were young. (7)

Ren’s confession of her initial attitude towards such women rejected by the SeksMart Corps not only establishes the hyper-competitive nature engendered by economic desperation, but also echoes the previous novel’s understanding of hierarchical capitalist culture. As with Oryx, Ren and her colleagues find themselves *grateful* for the fact that they were *chosen* to be sold repeatedly by the numerous capitalist entities. J. Paul Narkunas calls attention to this internalized acceptance of the capitalist system’s use of female bodies as resource and product, noting that such a perspective indicates that “Atwood’s novels depict critically the appropriation of women’s bodies as receptacles of male biological instinct, often violently through rape. Indeed, the younger women in the novels are all raped or forced into sex slavery due to essentialist notions of gender, and consequently come to perceive their bodies

as their only means of exchange” (215). In a space where the purchase and sale of one’s body provides even a miniscule amount of physical safety and financial solvency, Ren and others in her position reject placing themselves outside of that protection, as what lies beyond is much worse than their current situations.

Ren is far from alone in her search for survival in an environment that insists on gendered violence. Amanda, whom she meets in childhood and maintains a close friendship with as an adult, experiences this aspect of Capitalocene identity as well, and she is exposed to it much earlier. Unlike Ren, Amanda does not undergo a movement between class statuses. Rather, she internalizes the gendered system as a young child, subconsciously recognizing her gender identity as a pawn and resource for others, a realization she turns into an economic survival method in this environment ravaged by late, late capitalism. Amanda reveals this internalization early by explaining to Ren how she survived an environmental catastrophe compounded with Capitalocene desperation and social violence, often relying on the term “trade” to discuss the ways she exchanged sexual encounters for survival:

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...There was a lot of trading going on: people would do anything for twenty dollars, Amanda said. (84)

Though Amanda’s explanation of “just a trade” is dismissive, it nevertheless illuminates how commonplace the exchange of sex for survival is for girls and women in this narrative space. Narkunas comments specifically on Amanda’s perspective as a young girl in such a sexually violent atmosphere, noting that she “learns that her body provides one of the few mechanisms of ‘trade’ that can enable her survival. Amanda is a resourceful, strong, and

intelligent female character, but her body is reduced to a tool because of its fungibility...she considers her body's strategic deployment a good trade" (215). In other words, having something to "trade" is better than going without in the books' unforgiving social hierarchy, as seen throughout both Ren and Amanda's adolescence and adulthood.

However, this concept of "trading" is not limited to situations of catastrophe. Like Ren, Amanda retains this understanding of the female body as currency, whether forcibly robbed or (somewhat) willingly exchanged, long after she finds her way out of the Texas hurricane disaster. Recognizing that her gender identity puts her at great risk for assault or other gendered violence, Amanda attempts to control her body-as-resource situation to the best of her ability. In doing so, she relies on fear mongering methods in order to scare potential attackers away from her, attempting to manipulate the system that caused this necessity in the first place. Ren explains that in harassment or potentially sexually violent situations, Amanda

had their respect. She had a piece of glass with duct tape along one edge to hold it with, and she said this glass had saved her life more than once. She showed us how to ram a guy in the crotch or trip him up and then kick him under the chin and break his neck. There were lots of tricks like that, she said - ones you could use if you had to. (86)

Amanda's use of the phrase "if you had to" ironically recalls Ren's own contemplation of joining Scales and Tales as a protective measure. In a sense, Ren's decision to join the sex club in an attempt to avoid the violence of places such as SecretBurgers directly correlates with Amanda's decision to fight back in order to avoid her own gendered violence or even murder. Though both women find themselves in markedly different territories, Ren and Amanda each make moves to create a semblance of physical and economic safety, whether this is through Ren's job at Scales and Tales or Amanda's carving out her own physical safety



by force, “trading” her body for survival on her own terms and subtly recalling Oryx’s rejection of Jimmy’s insistence on her sexual abuse because she views it as a method of survival.

Amanda’s narrative continues to draw connections between gender identity and economic survival in a manner quite similar to Ren’s experiences: each character must rely on the capitalist exploitation and commercialization of the female body to find small amounts of safety, yes, but also to supplement this safety through monetary gain. While Ren is under employment at Scales and Tales, relying on the club profiting from her body in exchange for a somewhat protected environment, Amanda sets out to create her own business system. Though Amanda’s decision to continue “trading” her physicality for survival outside any “protective” system might initially recall the “hazardous waste” women that Ren describes earlier, this turns out to be far from the case. Whether it is Amanda’s intimidation tactics, weaponry, or shrewd “business” moves, she manages to separate herself from such classification and instead creates a partnership between herself and one of the boys in God’s Gardeners, Shackie:

After Shackie went offscreen, Amanda said they were partners - the two of them were boosting things from malls. But it was a fair trade: she got someone watching her back and helping her lift stuff and sell it, and he got sex.

“Don’t you love him?” I said.

Amanda said I was a romantic. She 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. (*The Year of the Flood* 219)

Amanda’s gender identity and class status have converged entirely: she recognizes the monetary value that the Corps-controlled societal environment has placed on her physical body and she has decided to cut out the middleman. Additionally, since Amanda did not experience Ren’s upper class existence, Ren’s question of “Don’t you love him?” strikes her

as not only irrelevant, but preposterous in the context of a business partnership. As such, her relationship with her gender identity, combined with her class status, have formed an understanding of the female body as profit for whoever forcibly claims ownership of it.

Unlike many others, however, Amanda makes sure that if her body must be used to ensure physical protection and economic survival, she will make certain that she is the one in control of that transaction.

### Gender and Sexual Violence

In systems that rely heavily on the possession, sale, and exploitation of the human body, especially the female body, the presence of sexual violence is inevitable. In this section, I regard “sexual violence” as consisting of rape and other sexual assaults, but also as the term relates to a sense of forcible ownership of another human body. In this sense, sexual violence in the novels encompasses specific personal, bodily trauma *and* functions as a physical figure of late capitalism.

Like Amanda, Toby’s lower class status and the deaths of her parents create a dangerous situation when combined with her gender identity. Having run away from her family home, and the location of her father’s suicide, Toby fears that “there was still a chance the CorpSeCorps might come after her for her father’s debts...there were stories about female debtors being farmed out for sex. If she had to make her living on her back, she at least wanted to keep the proceeds” (*The Year of the Flood* 31). The connection between Amanda and Toby is interesting in this passage, as not only do they face similar economic and physical safety concerns, rife with the potential for sexual violence, but both women seem resolute in their decision to “keep the proceeds” if their bodies must be up for sale, a move that differs from Oryx’s narrative. However, it seems that women characters attempting to

escape certain sexual exploitation or violence must gamble on *potential* sexual violence as the better option, as Toby avoids the CorpSeCorp by “[sinking] deep down - down where names disappeared and no histories were true” (30) into a danger that is not directly from the Corps themselves, but is a danger nonetheless.

The further Toby runs from CorpSeCorps discovery, the more common sexual violence becomes. This is certainly not to say that things would have been better if she had stayed within Corps visibility, only that such sexual violence lurks in nearly every area of this speculative society. Toby’s job as a “furzooter” (essentially an anthropomorphic animal suit) resulted in a traumatic first week in which

she suffered three attacks by fetishists who knocked her over, twisted the big head around so she was blinded, and rubbed their pelvises against her fur, making strange noises, of which the meows were most recognizable. It wasn’t rape - no part of her body was actually touched - but it was creepy. (31)

Toby’s use of the word “creepy” rather than “assault” to distinguish between this experience and physical rape, is telling. As with Ren’s gratitude for having her body exploited in a “preferable” way (i.e. a way in which she feels at least marginally physically safe with a protective layer of BioFilm), Toby’s language suggests almost a sense of relief that it “wasn’t rape.” To Toby, this trauma is preferable: it is not even recognized as trauma in the grand scheme of things.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Ren’s search for economic safety ultimately forces her to turn to Scales and Tales out of fear of ending up in “some place like SecretBurgers.” Though Ren does not elaborate on whether she regards the position itself as demeaning or if her fear has a more insidious prompting, Toby’s narrative reveals this hesitation is not without merit. After the deaths of her parents and her flight from her first furzooter experience, Toby reluctantly goes to work at SecretBurgers so that “she could pay the rent,

she wouldn't starve. But then she discovered the catch" in the form of Blanco, the horrifically violent rapist and abuser who manages the SecretBurgers franchise (35). Through her experience at SecretBurgers, Toby endures the place—both physical and figurative—where economic survival methods and sexual violence meet. Blanco's background as a Scales and Tales bouncer speaks directly to this convergence, as it represents the capitalist system's approach to women as largely disposable, but worth protecting for as long as they provide both resources and profit:

He'd ripped up a Scales girl - not a smuggled, illegal-alien temporary, they got ripped up all the time, but one of the top talent, a star pole dancer...As it was, they'd stuck him in to run the Sewage Lagoon SecretBurgers outlet. It was a big comedown and he was bitter about it...But he figured the girls were his perks. He had two pals, ex-bouncers like himself, who acted as his bodyguards, and they got the leavings. Supposing there was anything left. (35-36)

Although Blanco is fired for brutally abusing (and possibly killing) a woman, that only occurs because she was more valuable to Scales and Tales alive than dead, unlike so many others. As such, he isn't arrested for this altercation, only punished by removing him to an area where the CorpSeCorps *can* allow him to abuse women—where their bodies are not nearly as marketable from their physical appearance alone. Thus, Blanco's eventual sexual violence towards Toby is not only predictable by his vicious backstory, but it is entirely connected to the intersection of her gender identity and class status: she, like Blanco's previous SecretBurgers victims, is easily replaceable.

The motif of gratitude in spaces of sexual violence or exploitation continues even into Toby's experience of sexual assault at the hands of Blanco. While Ren expresses her gratitude for finding relative safety in Scales and Tales, and Toby is grateful not to have been raped during her time as a furzooter, Blanco's rape and physical abuse of Toby also recalls

the notion of gratitude. However, this time Toby's thankfulness is entirely forced, pushed upon her by Blanco himself:

She'd been Blanco's one-and-only for less than two weeks, but it felt like years. His view was that...She'd be even luckier if he didn't sell her to Scales as a temporary, which meant temporarily alive. She should thank her lucky stars. Better, she should thank him: he demanded a thank you after every degrading act...She'd be used up soon. (38)

While Ren and Toby's gratitude for avoiding "worse" sexual exploitation in their Scales and Tales and furzooter positions is a warped coping mechanism to compartmentalize the social and economic trauma of their gender identity, Blanco forcing such gratitude onto Toby manages to further distort the novels' concept of relief and safety in gendered spaces.

Dominique Héту engages with Blanco's continued distortion of an already warped notion of "safety," deciding that, since his violence lies in the economic space, "Blanco symbolizes the ongoing oppression of neoliberal and patriarchal dynamics by exploiting both financially and sexually the disposable bodies of women workers...[his actions] typify Atwood's concern with the historical disposability of women" (Héту 100; 97). In other words, Blanco is both a product of the system-at-large and an agent of its violent will.

As Blanco's abuse of Toby exemplifies, the monetization of sexual abuse both engages with and informs socialized approach to such actions. Ren and Amanda, I argue, also reveal the customary tradition of socialized sexual violence through their separate narratives and joint encounters. Ren's experiences with sexual violence, like Toby's, begin first with the understood threat of its presence, especially in the transition from girlhood to womanhood. Once in college, Ren stays aware of a particularly dangerous man, Buddy, explaining that "I'd lock the door on my side of our shared bathroom because the guys on the football team were known for date rape and I didn't think Buddy would even bother with the date part of

it” (*The Year of the Flood* 286). Though the threat of sexual violence seems to be present at all times, it is, perhaps, Ren’s witnessing of the brutality of the Painballer group against her coworkers at Scales and Tales that most directly presents the full horror of the socialized sexual violence:

I went to another camera...The lights were still on and the music was playing, but the room was a shambles...Savona was lying on the bar: I could tell it was her by the sparkly costume, even though it was half torn off...Crimson Petal was hanging from the trapeze; one of the ropes was around her neck, and between her legs was the glint of the bottle - someone must have shoved it up her. Her frills and ruffles were ripped to shreds. She looked like a limp bouquet. (280)

In Atwood’s usual style, she refuses to walk through the details of the actual sexual violence itself, but still portrays the gruesome aftermath. This passage further demonstrates that the sexual violence that Ren witnesses, separate in situation if not in action from the assaults that Toby experiences from Blanco, is brought about by the same sinister entity. In creating a system where women’s bodies are both resource and profit, the late capitalism instills a general approach to women as easily disposable, inconsequential objects. What’s more, characters’ repeated use of terms such as “ripped” and “torn” in relation to sexual violence toward women further exemplifies the destruction to be found in this violence: the goal is complete demolition accompanied by physical pleasure.

Amanda and Ren’s joint experiences of sexual violence offer additional insight into the way this brutality shapes the whole of Capitalocene identity in the novels. Each woman endures both the *fear* of sexual violence as well as the physical action of it. For instance, after Amanda rescues Ren from her biocontainment unit at Scales and Tales, the two women enjoy a rare peaceful period with one another, behaving almost giddily in what they believe to be the safest space they have ever experienced due to the pandemic’s eradication of most threatening human life. However, this peace is short lived when, while Ren and Amanda are

dancing together, three men arrive at the sex club, sparking a familiar fear in both women. Ren berates herself for allowing them to be so vulnerable, noting that it “was stupid of us, the whole dancing event: we’d cranked the music up really loud, and it was going right out through the open door, and if there was anyone in the neighborhood they’d be sure to hear it” (331). Here, the vigilance that female characters have developed to avoid sexual violence is visible in Ren’s self-deprecation of actions she sees as “inviting” sexual violence into their safe space: she chastises herself for failing to maintain that vigilance at all times. Upon hearing the clapping of the men who found their way into the club, Ren explains that they “stood there as if frozen. I felt a chill shoot through me: I had a flash of Crimson Petal hanging from the trapeze rope with a bottle shoved up her, and I couldn’t breathe” (31). Not only do both Ren and Amanda immediately panic at the possibility that the beings they cannot yet see are men, but Ren’s violent memory of her murdered friends is further evidence of what she has come to see as the “usual” behavior of men in the sex club: sexual violence. Though both women stand “frozen,” for a moment, a survival instinct, carefully cultivated from childhood, kicks in for Amanda:

“Don’t run,” said Amanda to me in a quiet voice. Then she said, “You alive or dead?” She smiled...

“Anyone else here?” said the tallest one. “Like, any guys?”

“None that I know of,” said Amanda... “Take off your face,” she said to me. She meant the green sequins, the Biofilm... She was peeling off her own Biofilm headpiece, and I knew what she was thinking: Make direct eye contact like Zeb taught us. Don’t turn away, they’re more likely to swarm you from behind. And the less we looked like sparkly birds rather than people, the less likely we’d be mangled. (332)

Amanda’s method of protection as an adult seems to be an evolution from that of her childhood, as the overarching theme here is feigned confidence bordering on flirtation: invite

sexual attention in an effort *not* to invoke sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> Through this reaction, Amanda reveals an interesting aspect of the sexually violent social sphere in Atwood's narrative—for many violent men in the novels, sex itself is only enjoyable, only *worth it* even, if it is resisted and taken by force. In this regard, Amanda's tactic of flirtation and over-insisting on her humanness through the removal of costume is perhaps one of their only avenues to safety. Even as Amanda insists on looking less “like sparkly birds,” the real insinuation here is that the less the two women look like *prey to predators*, the more chance they have for survival. Within Amanda's notion, there is also the paradox that all of the technologization and transhumanist aspects of the Capitalocene era have only managed to advance the presence of what many in the novel would describe as the “animalness” of predator-prey relationships. In other words, the attempts at fully separating “human” and “animal” have inadvertently created an even deeper merge with environmental systems: men have taken on the understood violence of “predator,” while women have become “prey” in the ungoverned space.

What's more, Ren's connection between Amanda's actions and Zeb's teaching from the God's Gardeners' “predator prey relations” class is also worth examining. Ren demonstrates that so much of their adult identities have been shaped through their childhood memories and experiences, and recalling this specific memory as it relates to her gender identity is especially telling. Zeb's class on this topic was not for preparation against human attackers, at least not in its general course material. Rather, the class was designed to prepare the young God's Gardeners for encounters with *animal* predators, instructing them on the

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that any of Atwood's women characters do, in fact, “invite” or “provoke” sexual or physical violence at any point. Rather, Amanda's tactic at avoiding “inviting” sexual violence is based on the internalization of the gendered space in which women are blamed if they do something “stupid” as Ren phrases it. The possibility of actually “inviting” such violence does not actually exist, but the characters' belief in causation functions as a feeling of control over the potentially violent situation.



best ways of exiting the situation alive and unharmed. However, Amanda's application of this material to the situation at hand, along with Ren's understanding of the method being used, speaks to two notions: first, the two women are recognizing a type of humanness present in themselves that is *not* reflected in the three men standing before them—human empathy is not a guarantee in this social space; second, the immediate use of “predator-prey relations” knowledge signals the assumption that sexual violence rarely presents by itself—it is usually closely followed by being “ripped” or “torn” apart by the human aggressor. Additionally, this fear is only abated by Ren recognizing the three men standing in front of them as their childhood friends Shakleton, Crozier, and Oates. Atwood leaves us to wonder if the men were different men, would they still have left them unharmed? Or, more unnerving yet, if the *women* had been unknown to the three brothers, would they have torn them apart? Neither question can be definitively answered, of course, but Atwood sets their possibility before readers, indirectly suggesting that their presence alone demonstrates the detrimental toll of social sexual violence in the narrative.

While Amanda and Ren do not experience sexual violence at the hands of Shakleton, Crozier, and Oates, they are brutally assaulted by the three escaped Painballers later on in *The Year of the Flood*. Atwood does not walk through the violence itself, but demonstrates the horror of the situation through Ren's description:

There were bodies on the ground, and one of them was mine, and that must have been when I got hit.  
 When I woke up again, Shakie and Croze and Oates weren't there. But Amanda was. I don't want to think about what happened next.  
 It was worse for Amanda than it was for me. (342)

These assaults, as well as their emotional and mental aftermath, reckon with not only the continual and almost inescapable fact of sexual assault as a component of women's gender

identity in the novels, but also with the formation of trauma relationships among female characters. As Ren successfully locates Toby after her encounter, finding some semblance of hope in not only a familiar individual but the understood safety of being found by a woman rather than another potentially violent man, the trauma of her gendered experiences in such a merciless space takes on a new form. This form, explains Dominique Héту, is the emergence of “caring” rhetoric and action. In recognition of Toby’s care for Ren as she heals, Héту argues that what is most prominent is “as Toby and Ren try to cope with different forms of violence...a language of care illuminates a relational proximity that fosters solidarity and care between the [female] protagonists. This language also exposes the difficulty of generating new responses to vulnerability and to oppressive social institutions and structures...” (Héту 96). In this manner, the act of sexual violence offers traumatizing transformation in and of itself, but it also continues to shape the approach to one’s self and those with the same gender identity. In this sense, not only do the gender identities of the novels’ women mold their awareness in social surroundings and approach to economic survival methods, but these identities also have a hand in creating trauma bonds among most of the other surviving women—bonds that are, in a sense, one of the few remaining methods of establishing trust in survivor social groups.

#### Appropriation and Exploitation of Gender Identity and Sexual Violence

In examining the exploitation through sexual violence inflicted on Atwood’s women characters, this section relies on the experiences of Oryx as they are manipulated and taken advantage of by characters such as Jimmy and Crake. Here, it is necessary to first outline how Oryx’s experiences interact with those of Ren, Toby, and Amanda.

As discussed in earlier chapters, Oryx is perhaps the character who experiences sexual violence and sexual exploitation for the longest period of time (through childhood and into adulthood without much reprieve). As such, her relationship with her gender identity morphs into one of expectation of sexual violence, as she endures enough to begin considering some of this violence outside the bounds of “abuse” at all. Like Toby and Ren, the concept of gratitude for certain experiences not being “worse” weaves itself into Oryx’s language: violence is normalized, therefore there is a degree of violence attached to each experience. She expresses her memories of incidents that were markedly “better” than others she personally had or others she had heard of, classifying her second time being sold as not traumatizing, since they “were fed - better food than usual” (*Oryx and Crake* 137). She even describes the child pornography as a cure for boredom, noting that it “was less boring for the children to make the movies than to do what they did the rest of the time, which was nothing much” (139). Through the use of such language and descriptors, Oryx subconsciously harnesses the trauma response of gratitude in order to deaden the impact that the detrimental exploitation of her gender identity has on her adult identity.

One of Oryx’s retellings in particular speaks to another attempt at situation-control that is markedly similar to that of Amanda. While Amanda seizes control of her gender identity’s exploitation through the use of seduction, Oryx exhibits another type of dissonance from “the expected” as she also veers from the anticipated response to her sexual exploitation. In her reiteration of the “game” her abuser Uncle En “plays” with her—tricking men into thinking they are able to rape young Oryx before En bursts in and steals their money—Oryx betrays her peculiar feelings towards her would-be attackers:

She felt a little sorry for the men: although Uncle En said they deserved what happened to them and they were lucky he never called the police, she somewhat

regretted her part. But at the same time she enjoyed it. It made her feel strong to know that the men thought she was helpless but she was not. It was they who were helpless...From time to time they would cry. (*Oryx and Crake* 133)

Oryx utilizes emotion as a method of control, finding power in her ability to feel something other than fear of her would-be rapists. In doing so, her feelings of pity, guilt even, give way to triumph and enjoyment—for once, she does not feel that she is at anyone’s mercy. Though relying on a slightly different method than Amanda, Oryx latches on to any semblance of strength or control over the trauma she is subjected to, even if this control is a falsity, as her “rescuer” is the man exploiting her. Nevertheless, Oryx searches desperately for autonomy however she can find it. In short, she feels in control of the trauma by tapping into feelings of remorse and triumph, just as teenage Amanda exerts whatever ownership of her body she can come by.

Perhaps the most glaring example of Oryx’s exploitation, outside of her childhood as a sex trafficking victim, is Crake’s search for her as an adult, ultimately culminating in his “possession” of her body. This act of possession is rooted early in Crake’s adolescence, when he and Jimmy watch the molestation of Oryx on a child porn site. Crake captures her image, prints it, and remarks to Jimmy, “This a keeper?...You want it?” (91). Somehow, both in a physical and figurative sense, Crake ensures that he can possess Oryx by printing this photograph of her in her most vulnerable situation while seemingly not acknowledging, or at least remaining unbothered by, Oryx’s returned gaze. Though Jimmy is rendered frozen by Oryx’s “look” at him, Crake, I argue, both fetishizes and attaches ownership to this returned gaze, effectively making it something that he and Jimmy share by printing out the photo. Not only does Crake’s action confirm the global reach of Oryx’s exploitation through the use of the internet, but this voyeurism also extends the sexual violence she experiences, as her video

and image now provide Crake and Jimmy with physical pleasure as well as the men actively abusing her.

In this vein, Chao Xie relates Oryx's existence as a product, like so many of the narrative's women, to the genetically modified food found throughout the two novels. Through Crake and Jimmy (and no doubt others) viewing her molestation through their computer screens, "Oryx's body becomes a commodity on the global market...Like the pigeons, ChickieNobs, and Happicuppa, which are genetically manipulated by the capitalist patriarchy, Oryx is exploited sexually on a global scale" (607). Xie is not the only scholar to acknowledge Oryx's "commodity" existence in this way, as Vandana Shiva's notions on neo-colonialism's relationship with food products also finds a focal point in Atwood's work. Though not speaking directly on Atwood's work, Shiva specifically highlights that food "and women's bodies as sites of regenerative power are, in the eyes of capitalist patriarchy, among the last colonies" to be conquered (45). In this light, then, Xie suggests that Atwood "pushes us to think through the intersections among neocolonialism, feminism, and environmentalism" (607), as the exploitation of female bodies, particularly in the way that Oryx is exploited, indicates an alarming malevolence toward lower class women from the capitalist forces at large. In this way, Crake supports more than one aspect of Oryx's exploitation, as he helps provide a global platform for her molestation as the audience that her exploiters need to continue "purchasing" children like Oryx from lower class families.

If there were questions about whether Crake's possession of Oryx is physical or figurative, these queries disappear when he explains to Jimmy how he finally "purchased" Oryx through his student account:

"You were the student, she was the service?" said Jimmy, trying to keep it light.

“Exactly. I told them what I was looking for - you could be very specific there, take them a picture or a video stimulation...Then, when I came here to head up this place, I was able to offer her a more official position...I have to say she’s a devoted employee.” Crake gave a smug little smile, an alpha smile, and Jimmy wanted to smash him. (310)

Crake’s “relationship” with Oryx falls more into the category of “ownership” rather than a genuine romantic partnership. Not only does Crake literally purchase her for sex during his college years, but he essentially makes his “rental” of her body permanent through “offering her a position” at the Compound he works at as an adult. While Crake insists that “the work intrigued her,” he primarily focuses on the fact that working for him permanently “was triple the pay she’d been getting, with a lot of perks” (310), sealing the arrangement through the manipulation of economic survival factors, like many other abusive men throughout the novels. Through this understanding, Crake is merely displaying a different method of abusing and exploiting women through what he views as “weaknesses” in their social and economic standing.

Chapter two spotlighted many of the problematic ways that Jimmy approaches his relationship with Oryx. Here, I would like to specifically examine his exploitation of her trauma as a method of soothing his own guilt over his voyeurism of her molestation, and, I argue, to obtain subconscious physical satiation through emotional abuse. For example, Jimmy repeatedly presses Oryx for details regarding her trauma as a trafficked child, despite her obvious discomfort:

“That’s all,” said Oryx.

“What do you mean, that’s all?”...

“Please, Jimmy, tell me what you are asking.” Oh, very cool. He wanted to shake her.

“Did they rape you?” He could barely squeeze it out. What answer was he expecting, what did he want?...She would never tell him. Why did this drive him so crazy? (144)

This passage demonstrates that Jimmy's need to know more about Oryx's childhood goes speeding past nosiness alone. His brief thought of violence—wanting to “shake her”—betrays an aspect of these questions, unacknowledged by Jimmy himself, that he feels he is *owed* these traumatic details of Oryx's sexual abuse. Jimmy does not elaborate directly on why these feelings of possession seep into his relationship with Oryx (or, indeed, his relationship and preoccupation with her sexual exploitation), but it is possible that this flash of anger stems from his feelings of guilt over his own voyeuristic journey into Oryx's trafficking: “He remembered himself watching. How could he have done that to her? And yet it hadn't hurt her, had it?” (92). Whereas some may debate the origin of Jimmy's need to know the graphic details of Oryx's abuse—his own guilt or an alarming pleasure at her retelling—I posit that it is possible for both reasons to occur at once. Not only does he use his guilt to excuse his lack of care for Oryx's visible discomfort, but his growing obsession with the most graphic aspects of her molestation signal a concerning eagerness to knit himself into her most violent and abusive experiences. Perhaps most unnerving of all is the lack of clarification of whether or not Jimmy is consciously desiring to take part in Oryx's abuse by attempting to place himself within the most painful of these memories, to be a violent emotional force that pushes her to speak on the violently physical.

Jimmy's pleasure from inflicting emotional abuse is not new. Quite the opposite. As Jimmy's childhood memory of and relationship with his mother demonstrates, he repeatedly engages in manipulation of her emotions, reveling in his mastery in provoking her reactions, even if they are wholly negative. Having learned to equate emotional pain with attention, Jimmy continues this trek into emotional abuse with his manipulation of his mother's

narrative and the possibilities of what could happen to her as a woman on the run. He relies on this event to again provoke emotional response, this time from his girlfriends:

They knew about his scandalous mother, of course, these women. Ill winds blow far and find a ready welcome. Snowman is ashamed to remember how he used that story - a hint here, a hesitation there. Soon the women would be consoling him, and he'd roll around in their sympathy, soak in it, massage himself with it. (191)

These events are strikingly similar to Jimmy's lunchtime mocking of his parents' volatile relationship with each other, especially in the attention he gains through manipulations of his familial narrative. However, simply creating an emotional response in his partners soon becomes boring and far from satisfying, and Jimmy begins specifically seeking out women he viewed as "broken"—women he could emotionally manipulate without much effort. Snowman reflects on Jimmy's obsession with "imperfection" in his female companions, insinuating that it wasn't the "flaw" itself that attracted him, but his ability to exploit that flaw for their emotional dependence on him:

These were the places he'd single out, putting his mouth on them. Was it consolation he'd had in mind, kissing the wound to make it better? There was always an element of melancholy involved in sex. After his indiscriminate adolescence he'd preferred sad women, delicate and breakable, women who'd been messed up and needed him. He'd liked to comfort them, stroke them gently at first, reassure them. Make them happier, if only for a moment. Himself too, of course: that was the payoff. A grateful woman would go the extra mile. (100)

The return of the notion of "gratitude," this time from the perspective of Jimmy, speaks to another side of the gratitude experienced by Oryx, Toby, and Ren. While gratitude for Atwood's women characters functions more on the level of "relief" or "comfort," even in a warped sense, "gratitude" for Jimmy is yet another aspect of that gender identity to manipulate and exploit. With Jimmy and the larger institutions that molded him, safety itself is a notion fraught with danger. While both male and female characters experience the heightened need for safety, the gendered environment significantly alters this search for, and



indeed, seizure of, safe spaces based on gender identity. Jimmy's search for safety, especially that of emotional safety, takes on a more sinister formation than that of his female counterparts. Though female characters are more likely to seek out "shelter" with each other or male characters they trust, building a safe space through mutual vulnerability, Jimmy forcibly obtains his own experience of safety by appropriating this vulnerability. In short, Jimmy manipulates the need for safety in his romantic partners, securing his own sense of security by betraying theirs—his exploitation of others' search for safety proves to be yet another method that female characters are violated, emotionally and physically, by male characters in Atwood's speculative future of late-stage Capitalocene.

What's more, these passages indicate a more malevolent side of Jimmy's relationship with Oryx, one that might explain the brief, but unmistakable, sparks of anger that streak through their conversations about her trauma. As Snowman admits that Jimmy "preferred sad women" who "needed him," he grows quite frustrated when Oryx never does break down enough to require his consolation. Snowman acknowledges that "Oryx had neither pity for him nor self-pity. She was not unfeeling: on the contrary. But she refused to feel what he wanted her to feel. Was that the hook - that he could never get from her what the others had given him so freely?" (191). Though it may be tempting to read this reflection as indicative that Jimmy keeps returning to Oryx purely because of her refusal to bend to his will, I argue that the real reason is a slight, but nevertheless dangerous, shift away from that. Rather than love Oryx for her rejection of pity (whether for him or for herself), I propose that Jimmy's infatuation, and constant demand for graphic details of her past, comes from an overwhelming need to *make her* finally bend. Whether he attempts to achieve this through a romanticized version of his own sadness or through pushing her to her own emotional

breaking point, Jimmy is constantly looking for the crack in the wall, the fissure that exposes the weak area in Oryx's composition. In this way, I submit that his exploitations echo the widespread appropriation and manipulation of women's gender identity within the speculative space in both physical and emotional arenas.

In summary, Atwood's female characters and their experiences of gender identity—complete with struggles for economic and physical survival, the threat of and actual physical experience of sexual violence, often through exploitation by numerous male characters—signal crucial shifts to the other aspects of their entire Capitalocene identity. Atwood's women experience class differences, relationships, and search for safety on an entirely different scale than the narrative's men do, largely due to contending with the constant threat and reality of sexual violence. This experience of sexual violence does not merely leave most of the men in the novel unmarked, but it proves to be a tool that characters such as Blanco, Uncle En, Jimmy, and Crake, among others, are free to appropriate for their own physical, financial, and emotional benefit. Thus, the death throes of late capitalism both engage with and exacerbate climate crisis structures, promoting a hyper-monetization of human bodies that results in the ungovernable sexual violence witnessed across the narrative's expanse. As such, the conversation between collapsing capitalism and an increasingly violent social environment creates an even more dangerous space for female characters, altering the approach to memories that inform present actions, relationships (even relationship with self), and the experience of the class structure. In this manner, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* create a space that allows these aspects to be visible individually as they work together to create the whole of Capitalocene identity.

## Conclusion

This thesis found its footing in the space where the personal and the academic were further blurred by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The deeper we ventured into the “unknown” that the pandemic created, the more this space revealed itself as a harbor for a variety of experiences and emotions: confusion, anger, identity questioning, and uncertainty about our collective future made their home there. As such, this work came about as an academic investigation into many of these present events, experiences, and alterations to the “known” through the lens of fictional works filled with increasingly familiar narratives, looking specifically at the ways these alterations impact the development of a very specific identity formation that I have named “Capitalocene identity,” which relies on the essential definition of the Capitalocene put forth by Jason Moore. In examining this restructuring of identity, I ultimately analyzed four of the major determinants of identity creation—memory, relationships, class status, and gender identity—and the manner that each is shaped through the novels’ engagement with Capitalocene entities.

Though Margaret Atwood’s speculative novels are meant to function within the speculative fiction genre, there are growing connections between these imagined events and the current state of our own world as we enter our second year of pandemic-influenced society, environment, and social roles, particularly in terms of the movement towards a complete Capitalocene identity. As this thesis has demonstrated, while global pandemics may function as a horrifying symptom of a larger illness, they are far from the main source of looming environmental and social collapse. For that, we must examine the climate crisis at large, depicted both in Atwood’s fictional scape and our present global situation.

In looking at how the speculative late-stage climate crisis and its structures influence identity formation, it was essential to examine the ways that present-day climate crisis, and, by extension, the notion of the Capitalocene, has already affected identity, branching outside the bounds of literary study in order to consult the fields of environmental studies, psychology, sociology, and even trauma response theory. Works on concepts such as memory's engagement with personal identity, the burgeoning notions of "ecological grief" and "Anthropocene horror," and Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome all serve as the foundation for this thesis's approach to analyzing the formation of Capitalocene identity. The contrast between Timothy Clark's ideas of "ecological grief" and "Anthropocene horror" is especially relevant to examining the speculative space as a "crossed boundary" between our current period and what may come after we finally fall from the precipice on which we already struggle to maintain balance. Both concepts are grounded in the burgeoning field of climate crisis-affected mental health issues, cultivated with the understanding that while "climate anxiety can affect anybody, for some people it can exacerbate other sources of despair or stress" (Ray 20), leading to the need for new terminologies within climate crisis mental health research. Clark is far from alone in his use of new words and phrases linking mental and emotional health to the negative impact of visible climate change, as Leslie Davenport, a climate psychologist, notes that such terms are becoming even more necessary as we move deeper into the climate crisis scape, since more individuals "witness climate-change-induced trauma of loved ones, communities, species, and lands" (113). To further our understanding of these terms, Clark posits that ecological grief is more in line with *specific* fears such as losing a particular species, witnessing landscape destruction, or the elimination of certain environmental places, while Anthropocene horror is a more generalized sense of impending

trauma—a panic without anything to tether itself to. In this sense, the specific losses in Atwood’s fiction, often found within the pre-pandemic memories of characters as they reflect on their earlier lives and identities, can be categorized as the “ecological grief” of watching specific species, spaces, and even individuals cease to exist as they inch close to global apocalypse. While this ecological grief absolutely continues past the crossing of the pandemic “border,” generalized Anthropocene horror begins to take a bit more control the more post-Crake’s pandemic the narrative becomes. In short, there comes a point where there is less and less “specific” fear to have, as the disappearance of more environmental structures and the further societal collapse signals the shift from fear into genuine horror.

Ecological grief and Anthropocene horror each work their way into the pre-pandemic memories and the post-pandemic identities of Atwood’s characters. Toby and Ren, for example, engage with both of these emotional states, as their anxieties shift from fear of the extended “unknown” to specific next-step survival tactics and back again. What’s more, I argue that Toby experiences the clinically diagnosable Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, clarified by Ann Kaplan to be merely one of many emerging mental health considerations of the climate crisis at large, “and the environmental desecration resulting from it” (81). Specifically, Toby’s indoctrination by the God’s Gardeners and their teachings informs her ecological grief and Anthropocene horror even pre-pandemic, creating a preparatory response to the impending apocalypse, or “trauma future tense” as Kaplan puts it (82). Through these preparatory measures, Toby and the Gardeners apply action to the grief and horror of the earlier concepts, relying on a *response* to these anxieties rather than just the feeling of them, much in the same way that PTSD functions. However, while the recognizable *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* does indeed find its way into the characters of

Atwood's speculative world due to experienced trauma of Capitalocene structures and events, *Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome* works alongside its clinical cousin to inform the development of not just identity, or even climate crisis identity, but a *Capitalocene identity* through response, reaction, and mounting anxiety in relation to an unknown, unfolding global collapse. As noticeable through characters' preparatory measures, heightened awareness of ecological collapse, and attempted preemptive reaction to trauma *in anticipation of* trauma, Atwood creates a link between identity formation through traumatic events centered around the climate crisis and its extensions. Though the field of climate crisis studies has not claimed a distinct title as of yet, clinical terminology such as PreTSS is grounded in extensions of this research area (such as climate psychology, which *is* a named category) and conceived as a term to be "applied to anxieties about human beings able to survive dramatic ecological and species changes" (84). I venture to extend this application of these anxieties within the bounds of Atwood's novels, arguing that PreTSS does not merely encompass the anxieties about *whether* human beings will survive such drastic changes, but what that survival may look like. Furthermore, the combination of preparatory measures in pre-pandemic memories can be directly linked to this clinical diagnosis. In this way, PreTSS memories in characters, like PTSD, succeed in dramatically altering these characters' approaches, responses, and behaviors through engagement with both endured and anticipated climate crisis trauma. While PreTSS creates the trauma in anticipation of late climate crisis catastrophe, PTSD occurs when these anticipations of trauma actually come to pass.

Concepts in the present interdisciplinary field of climate crisis studies also manage to work their way into Atwood's speculative narrative through the relationships that characters have with each other, themselves, and their surrounding environment. What's more, these

studies undergo speculative expansion in Atwood's novels to shape relationship identities in insidious ways. J. Paul Narkunas highlights such a notion, insisting that the narrative signals the result of our move towards a society enveloped by transhumanism, defined as the philosophical movement that encourages "the research and development of robust human-enhancement technologies...[that would] augment or increase" human lifespans, health, or other physical/mental components (Hays). Narkunas notes that such transhuman proponents such as transgenic advancements differ from the other aspects of posthumanism in Atwood's specific text, in that transgenics serves to "fill gaps in human existence by offering new opportunities that monetize existence" (204), a quality, I argue, that heavily impacts developing familial relationships in the narrative. Not only do Jimmy's parents oppose each other's leanings and beliefs on purely ethical grounds, but these leanings demonstrate the manner in which personal becomes political, in both family politics and the greater societal platforms. Jimmy's parents represent an increasingly common opposition in the climate crisis environment: the conflict between posthumanism and humanism. This thesis relies on Rosie Braidotti's definition of posthumanism as marking "the end of the opposition between Humanism [the idea that humans are of central importance] and anti-humanism" in order to move "more affirmatively to new alternatives" (36). I rely on Braidotti's explanation to define this thesis's definition of posthumanism in Atwood's first two novels in the *MaddAddam* trilogy as a method of "existing beyond the scope of the traditional and recognizable human-centered system." With these two definitions in mind, it becomes clear to see that, though Braidotti argues that posthumanism is "the end of the opposition," there is still a distinct tension in the novels between posthuman ideology and the reigning humanist tradition that continually births transhumanist ventures within the novels.

In Jimmy's parents' marriage, personal morals give way to political leanings, with Jimmy's father celebrating the monetary profit to be made in developing artificial youth, health, and other human enhancements, while Jimmy's mother balks at the fact that such "achievements" come at the heavy price of those shut out of the "human" category as the upper class transhumanizes. In this way, Jimmy's father mirrors the stance of the CorpSeCorps, while his mother portrays, at least in certain ways, the political leanings of the MaddAddam anarchists who seek to upend the status quo of the standing hierarchy through attack on this hierarchy's most valuable tools. Ultimately, Jimmy's familial relationships portray the manner in which growing climate crisis hazards, such as decreased overall health, can result in heightened transhumanist responses at the expense of those without the coveted title of "human," as well as a growing posthuman approach to an already crumbling world from those most desperate to save it.

And it gets trickier: the posthuman perspective can, in the realm of the texts, be successfully appropriated by capitalist culture and entities who cannot maintain the upper hand through the use of anthropocentric humanism alone. As an examination of Jimmy's parents reveals, this tension between humanist and posthumanist thinking (though Jimmy's mother's ideology is more in line with a different side of humanism merely *appearing* posthuman), particularly when combined with an extreme social, political, and ecological environment, has the potential to turn violent, resulting in both a personal and global "catastrophe, some final collapse" (*Oryx and Crake* 58). However, this tension is not only through the use of a binaried opposition between humanism and posthumanism. Rather, Jimmy's father and his coworkers even rely on posthuman technologies to enact additional humanist goals, especially when it comes to transhuman technologies. In this way, it gets



much more difficult to filter the true posthumanism from the humanism *masquerading* as the posthuman. Through this analysis of Jimmy's entanglement with his parents' conflict, it is clear that relationships in the narrative reflect current debates around humanism and posthumanism while also demonstrating humanism's ability to take on the appearance of the posthuman. As such, the narrative engagements with climate crisis philosophical theory ultimately endow characters with relationships wholly shaped through climate crisis experiences, perspectives, and approaches.

Narkunas's notion that the transhumanist aspects of the novels (that seek to make a "super human" population that advance, rather than move beyond, a human-centered approach) "monetize existence" can also be found in relationships outside of the familial sphere, especially the relationship with self. Here, it is important to recognize that such a "monetized existence" is an incorporation of climate crisis structures built with the assistance of a late-capitalist system. As the two concepts of late capitalist society and climate crisis become so enmeshed with one another that it becomes impossible to separate them, capitalism-in-climate-crisis manages to create an especially complex relationship with one's self, particularly in Toby's case. As Toby's pre-pandemic memories demonstrate, she experiences symptoms of ecological grief and Pre-TSS, as well as the physical monetization of her body at the hands of a late-capitalist economy that seeks to profit from every aspect of the human body. From selling her hair to scalpers to having her eggs purchased on the black market, Toby's experiences with a monetized existence demonstrate the partnership between collapsing social/environmental spheres and late climate crisis, as well as the manner in which a dying capitalist system informs and exacerbates this monetized identity. In short, Toby's engagement and approach to herself is literally and figuratively marked through these

brushes with a crumbling social and ecological space that is unafraid to project its violence onto the identities within its reach.

Perhaps the most obvious climate crisis relationship within Atwood's narrative is the relationship with the post-pandemic environment as it is informed by one's pre-pandemic memories and approaches. Through Jimmy's childhood consideration of animals, such as the genetically altered pigeons, his mother's more posthuman perspective leaks into his environmental approach without him realizing it, though her methods are far from entirely anti-humanist or perfectly posthuman. While Jimmy-turned-Snowman possesses an often angry and fearful approach to the now-autonomous pigeons, recognizing them as wild and violent if provoked, his pre-pandemic memories still influence his approach to them and their territory. The "gaze" between him and these animals has not been lost, but arguably strengthened through their repeated encounters in the post-pandemic environment—he recognizes this space as belonging to *them* now.

Snowman's pre-pandemic memories, especially those that seem to be influenced by his mother's more posthuman (at least in regard to the other versions of humanism in pre-pandemic characters) approach to non-human, or at least genetically modified, animals, create a post-pandemic understanding of a world that can no longer be controlled by the sheer will of humans. Nevertheless, he still maintains a few humanist symbols of his pre-pandemic self. Even while sharing the "gaze" with the penned pigeons at the OrganInc Labs as a child, Jimmy wishes he had a stick "just to make them run around" for his own entertainment (*Oryx and Crake* 26). This humanism-infused object of the stick follows Jimmy when he crosses into his identity of Snowman as he "raises his stick, [and] shakes it" during a post-pandemic interaction with the pigeons (235). In this manner, Snowman's

pre-pandemic humanist understanding of animals and their territory as able to be (even expected to be) intruded upon by human force alone impedes his ability to release his feeling of “control” over the post-pandemic space that removes such control from the traditionally understood human.

By contrast, Toby’s relationship with the post-pandemic environment again engages her pre-pandemic ecological grief and Pre-TSS-infused preparation for such an environmental space. As such, her environmental relationship takes on a markedly different tone than Snowman’s experiences. While Toby does indeed still threaten pigeons to keep them away from her food sources while trapped at the abandoned spa, and the general outline of the “stick” returns in the form of a rifle, her reasonings, approaches to her environment, and regard for that environment’s life outside of her own is quite separate from that of Snowman. The preparation for an environment that no longer serves the human animal presents itself within Toby’s experiences with the God’s Gardeners, reducing her dependency on animal products for food, educating her on safe wild foods, gardening, natural medicine, and seeking effective shelter. Through these preparations, Toby is able to barricade herself inside a suitable fortress, sustain herself through a generally successful garden, and remain aware of her surroundings. In contrast, Jimmy relies on a mattress flung into a tree for sleeping quarters, remains sunburned and dehydrated due to lack of shelter, and is slowly starving to death because he cannot find or grow sustainable food. Through the opposition of these two experiences, it becomes clear that Toby’s engagement with post-pandemic preparation, arguably a result of Pre-TSS anxieties about the future from the God’s Gardeners combined with a posthuman approach to ecological surroundings, is largely the reason for her survival. In short, her work to understand her environment beforehand, establishing an

equal standing with one another, results in a kinder relationship with the post-pandemic terrain.

However, climate crisis-affected memory and relationships are not the only aspects that feed into the construction of a Capitalocene identity. Rather, the climate crisis and late-stage capitalism also drastically affect class status and gender identity's meaning in Atwood's narrative space. Again, I posit that Atwood is not actually *creating* the Capitalocene identities of her characters insofar as creating the ability for their identities to form in this space, but she is merely *projecting* an already present connection into a speculative future of climate crisis and capitalism's last performance together. Characteristics evident in present-day climate crisis studies are again brought into play, with notions such as class instability due to capitalism wrestling with growing climate crisis structures, thereby forming Jason Moore's notion of the Capitalocene, already visible. While the class system in Atwood's novels is certainly derived from our present capitalist society, this system's power and danger is inherently exacerbated by the relationship between climate crisis and late-stage capitalism (the Capitalocene), with the notion of the "middle class" already in jeopardy. Anthropological studies have found that capitalist aggravators of climate crisis instability are already negatively impacting the "future stability" of the "middle class" instead of "extending equality, security, and comfort" (Masco 352). What's more, current climate crisis data further portrays a damaging relationship with late-stage capitalism, regarding the middle class as "an unprecedented force of violence in the world" that falsely promises a "secure" lifestyle all "at the expense of the collective environment as well as public health" (352). However, even in enacting this violence against the collective and itself, the recognizable middle class is a fiction in Atwood's work, a completely untenable concept that exists in

name only. Though the lower class is forced to consume at the present rate of the middle class, the divide between middle and upper class grows wider, effectively reducing the “middle class” status to that of lower class, while moving lower class standing into the concept of the “underclass.” In short, social, economic, and even physical protection are illusions, especially the closer we advance towards, to use Jimmy’s words, “the final collapse.”

Atwood’s work directly addresses this present danger, exploring possible answers for what may happen when late stage capitalism is no longer able to secretly sacrifice the financial and physical health of middle class citizens to the point that such a class category does not really even exist. The narrative’s reigning capitalist forces ultimately attempt to encourage a belief in the “middle class,” though these authorities ultimately keep such a class status far from a realized reality. Once again, Toby’s narrative sheds light onto such a question, as her family experiences the barbaric exploitation of the “middle.” By recognizing the “middle class” as a false promise of secure space, encouraged to participate in its own destruction, the drain of Toby’s family’s finances and their physical health feels uncomfortably close. Toby’s mother is implied to have been purposely poisoned by the Corps she works for in order to siphon off the family’s assets. Whether this is a factual theory remains unclear, but certainly possible, but it is confirmed that the Corps does steal the financial and physical health of the family under the guise of genuine care. In this manner, Narkunas’s idea of the “monetized existence” again appears in relation to the climate crisis at large and its relationship with capitalist entities. As the climate crisis-impacted environment crumbles, it begins to take social and economical structures down with it, even as these

structures actively participate in the destruction of the people and natural world that give it life in the first place.

As noted above, class and gender identity often converge, especially in the case of lower class female characters. For Toby, Ren, and Oryx especially, the monetized existence within the bounds of climate-crisis-capitalism becomes an even more apparent reality: Toby experiences the “purchase” of her body by the horrifying Blanco, Ren relies on the sex club Scales and Tales to secure her financial and physical survival, and Oryx experiences the increasingly normalized system of child sex trafficking. Oryx’s narrative in particular demonstrates a growing connection between capitalism and the climate crisis, according to recent data. Nicole Molinari asserts that sex trafficking has experienced an increase in activity due to the “vulnerability factors...[of] climate change and its linkages to environmental degradation, livelihood stress, impoverishment, and forced migration” (50). As Oryx comes from an impoverished area, selling children into the trafficking trade serves as the only form of relief for several families, including her own. Here again, we see the return to the false promise of financial security in late capitalism, as the families in Oryx’s village never do seem to find lasting financial relief from these sales, only the ability to tread water until the child trafficker returns to town for the next purchase. Additionally, though boys from the underclass were also sold into the child sex trafficking trade like Oryx, the relationship between her class status and her gender identity place her at an even higher risk, as seen in the rampant sexual violence against female characters.

Though Ren and Toby do not experience child trafficking like Oryx, all three characters undergo extreme sexual violence across their narratives. Blanco’s physical and sexual abuse of Toby, Ren’s experiences with violent clients at Scales and Tales, and Oryx’s

experience with rape all contain the notion of *gratitude* in some format. The financial desperation of lower class women in the novels is routinely exploited by male characters intent on forcibly utilizing female bodies for their own benefit: their physical gratification is often obtained through female characters understanding that their survival depends on their participation in such a system. As lower class female characters are intensely aware of the fact that their physical safety is entirely relative to each situation, and therefore must often be “bought” through strategically compromising this safety, male characters are often witnessed exploiting this experience, insisting that the women should be “grateful” for their “rescue.” What’s more, the readily apparent “purchase” of these women’s safety, desperation, and lack of options denotes an even more sinister quality of the relationship between climate crisis and late-stage capitalism. Both the most naked form of capitalism as well as its most violent form within the climate crisis-affected economy, the purchase of human bodies affects the novels’ female characters in myriad ways. While Oryx is quite literally purchased by several traffickers and child molesters, her narrative intertwines with those of Toby, Amanda, and Ren in terms of social engagement with her gender identity and class status: Amanda grows up understanding sex and their physical body as something to “trade” for protection or other necessities, and all four women experience sexual violence from men who have internalized the capitalist understanding of women-as-resource. Not only are purchases of female bodies rife within the narrative’s boundaries, but such an approach feeds into the general regard of women as a “thing” to be forcibly taken if not willingly provided, drastically increasing the risk of sexual violence and trauma. In this sense, class status and gender identity can be seen interacting with and informing one another, and they create a stark difference in male and

female traumatic memories, thereby also shifting approaches to relationships and overall identity formation.

Through the texts' visible engagement with present climate crisis studies concepts, applications, and experiences, including clinical terms such as Pre-TSS, as well as academic notions of ecological grief and Anthropocene horror, it is entirely possible to view this work as an effective speculation on our present state in a climate crisis enmeshed with late capitalist ideology. The formation of the identities present in Atwood's work are entirely dependent on traditionally acknowledged aspects of a "complete" identity—memory, relationships, class status, and gender identity—as they are informed and shaped by climate crisis entities. As such, "memory" becomes "pre- and post-pandemic" memory, relationships are forged and broken based on the growing ethical ponderings of a collapsing world, class status is affected immensely by who can afford to purchase both *what* and *whom*, and gender identity almost certainly signals sexual violence done *to you* or *by you*. The aspects of identity formation that I have highlighted in this thesis are shaped by a shifting environment in the last stages of the relationship between climate crisis and a dying capitalist system, warping and tailoring a "recognizable" identity into that of a Capitalocene identity. However, if these identity components merely engaged with climate crisis characteristics projected from our present time period, there would not be the potential for them to successfully create a whole identity. In order to accomplish this, each component must work within the confines of climate crisis study as well as with one another. I again submit that I have "separated" these categories of identity formation in name and chapter only: in actuality, they are entirely unable to be pulled from each other in any capacity. Even within these specific chapters, the presence of memory, relationships, class status, and gender identity repeatedly leaked into



each other in some format. In this manner, Atwood's construction of Capitalocene identity components effectively work in tandem as with traditionally understood identity construction, only this specific identity is repeatedly created, destroyed, and refigured through a relationship with the climate crisis itself as well as its entities. In closing, though these aspects on their own form the scaffolding of Capitalocene identity, their engagement with one another successfully breathes life into this skeletal structure, revealing a wholly interwoven, complex system entirely derived from Capitalocene influence and experience.

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### **Vita**

Holli Lynn Flanagan was born in Greenville, North Carolina to Scott and Lynn Flanagan. She grew up in Eden, North Carolina and graduated from John M. Morehead High School in 2014. In the fall of the same year, she began her undergraduate career at Appalachian State University studying English and French, and in May 2018, she was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree. In the spring of 2020, she began her Master of Arts program in English at Appalachian State University. During this time, she completed an assistantship with the university's Writing Across the Curriculum program, focusing especially on accessibility in university and writing spaces and developing an accessibility guide for faculty. This M.A. will be awarded in May 2021.

In the autumn of 2021, Ms. Flanagan will commence work towards her Ph.D. in Environmental Humanities from the University of Delaware, pursuing a dissertation on disability construction and representation in speculative fiction. Though presently living in Boone, North Carolina, she will soon reside in Newark, Delaware with her partner.