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Reading a Feminist Epistemology in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes an epistemological interpretation of Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* (2013). Set in a post-anthropocene world, Atwood's biopunk work indicates the rise of posthumanism after the "Waterless Flood" that proves apocalyptic. This interpretation is attempted through emphasis on the protagonist Toby's practice of epistemic writing and her art of storytelling. Divided into two major sections, the article illustrates a revival of an epistemological feminist subculture. The first section discusses the significance of a feminist standpoint in unravelling posthuman reality. It describes Toby's epistemological endeavor to enlighten the Crakers and enrich their bioengineered minds with the story of their creation. The second section builds upon the idea of bisexual writing and Toby as its prime pro-generator and practitioner. The conclusion remarks on the relevance of feminist epistemology in integrating the two communities in the post-anthropocene.

Keywords: feminism; epistemology; standpoint; posthumanism; bisexual; Margaret Atwood

Feministična epistemologija v delu *MaddAddam* Margaret Atwood

POVZETEK

Prispevek predlaga epistemološko interpretacijo dela *MaddAddam* (2013) avtorice Margaret Atwood. Zgodba se odvija v postantropocenem svetu, kjer Atwoodin biopunk kaže na vzpon posthumanizma po »brezvodni apokalipsi«. To se izraža s poudarkom na epistemološkem pisanju in umetnosti pripovedovanja protagonistke Toby. Članek je razdeljen na dva dela, v katerih predstavi ponovno oživitev epistemološke feministične subkulture. Prvi del obravnava pomen feminističnega vidika pri razkrivanju posthumane resničnosti. Opisuje Tobyjino epistemološko prizadevanje za razsvetlitev Koscev in obogatitev njihovih bioinženirskih umov z zgodbo o njihovem stvarjenju. Drugi del je zgrajen na ideji biseksualnega pisanja, kjer je Toby njegova glavna začetnica in izvajalka. Zaključek komentira relevantnost feministične epistemologije za vključevanje dveh skupnosti v postantropocen.

Ključne besede: feminizem; epistemologija; stališče; posthumanizem; biseksualnost; Margaret Atwood

1 Introduction

Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* (2013) visualizes a hybrid future for a handful of humans struggling for life and for the biogenetically engineered species, the Crakers. The article discusses the role of feminist epistemology in the novel through an in-depth study of the character of Toby. Her epistemological facility leads to successful mediation between the posthuman Crakers and the surviving humans in a post-anthropocene world.

Unlike *MaddAddam*, the previous two novels in the trilogy project Toby as a victim of the corpocratic order. Her employment at SecretBurgers in *The Year of the Flood* (2009) indicates her subjugation to technocratic patriarchy. Her boss Blanco, previously a Painballer, is a misogynist psychopath who tortures her both physically and mentally. Blanco's sexist contempt can be observed in the tattoo of an upside-down naked woman, chained with her "head stuck in his ass" (Atwood, *Year* 2009, 36). This grotesque image epitomizes the devaluation of female sexuality and reveals a sense of masculine pride in conquest and regulation. However, *MaddAddam* is about elements of liberation as opposed to victimization. Surrounded by the surviving humans and the non-human Crakers, Toby escapes the clutches of the pre-pandemic world – that is, the world that is inflicted by the "Waterless Flood" from earlier in the trilogy. The final novel of the trilogy contains the essence of her emancipated selfhood, which is reflected in her keen observation powers, her effective storytelling, her teaching of a Cracker child and her keeping a daily diary to record the post-pandemic world. As shall be shown, using the work of Cixous, *MaddAddam* can be regarded as representing feminist epistemology and *bisexual* writing.

The novel foregrounds a post-apocalyptic future. The previous two works, *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Year of the Flood*, merge in the final novel of the trilogy. Both *Oryx* and *Crake* are dead by this time. While Jimmy recalls fragments of the pre-apocalyptic past, Toby, Ren, and Amanda move towards finding their lost human mates. During this search, the remaining characters come across the biogenetically engineered Crakers and accept the conditions of their mutual survival. The transition between the pre- and post-catastrophic worlds impels the remaining population to collect the pieces of their fragmented lives. This reassembling takes place within the dystopian ambit where the characters (especially Toby) face a disintegrated reality. However, this reality is not an entirely destructive scenario but offers some hope for the inevitable posthuman future. Therefore, the notion of dystopia, as employed in this paper, questions the classic connotations of the term by critically dissolving its denotation of "bad place" and redefining its etymological topography.

Dystopia, as defined by Lyman Tower Sargent, is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" (quoted in Grimbeek 2017, 9). Traditionally, dystopias are cautionary tales, giving the readers a pessimistic alternative to their present-day reality from a sharper, more vigilant perspective (Gheluwe 2015, 145). However, Atwood's novel contests the limits of this definition. This is because the narrative, unlike customary tales of a frightening future, provides the potential for amelioration. She terms this presence of hope in a dystopian setting *ustopia*. *MaddAddam* shows humans and bio-spliced organisms successfully coming to terms

with the reality of the new world. Together, they look forward to a viable future for the upcoming (post)humanity. Toby plays a pivotal role in this critical dimension of *ustopia*. Her epistemological perception endows her with the ability to aid in turning the post-apocalyptic situation into a scenario optimal for the survival of post(humanity). Toby engenders this *ustopian* sensibility with her polyphonic narrative and bisexual writing.

The art of storytelling dominates the narrative, with Toby as the principal mediator between Zeb and the Crakers. Atwood endows the strongest female survivor of the apocalypse, Toby, with the skill to engage the Craker community. She becomes the messiah who enlightens them with the story of Oryx and Crake and the birth of the new world. This dynamic exchange between Crakers and humans highlights the posthuman element in the novel. Shelley Boyd (quoting Joseph Carroll) regards this versatility of “story-telling and language [...] as ‘the chief medium for conveying information in non-genetic ways’” (Boyd 2015, 173). It is through this non-genetic transference that Toby enlightens the Craker child, Blackbeard, and encourages him to write. The act of a sterile Toby instructing a fond Blackbeard amounts almost to the adoption of a posthuman child by a human female, as they form a filial bond. In this case, feminist epistemology also has a maternal angle.

The Crakers inherit Toby’s lens for visualising the past through the oral storytelling medium, as opposed to the genetic configuration of their bioengineered minds. Toby’s imaginative flexibility and creative endeavor to tell stories daily, for the Craker become the foundation of the novel. In the face of apocalyptic crisis, she can efficiently narrate a fresh tale every night and humorously manipulate past human events. The beginning of the novel confirms this. It starts with “the story of the egg, and of Oryx and Crake, and how they made people and animals; and of chaos; and of Snowman-the-Jimmy; and of the smelly bone and the coming of the Two Bad Men” (Atwood 2013, 3).

These lines initiate the reader into the text, its extraordinary sequence of stories and the manner of their narration. Night after night, Toby, following the storytelling tradition, completes the residual threads of the past. Beginning from the story of Oryx and Crake and the birth of the Crakers, Toby ingeniously recites the story of Zeb and the Bear, Adam and Zeb, Zeb and Crake, and Pilar and Crake. The structure of each story involves a satirical deconstruction of the actual incidents prior to the Waterless Flood. The stories interweave the past with the present, so that “memories, dreams and flashbacks often [...] create a type of psychological realism and the way in which the protagonist has arrived at the present, both psychologically and physically, is explored in minute detail” (Grimbeek 2017, 48).

Toby’s performance as a committed storyteller advances the intimacy between the two species. It suggests her efficiency in understanding the Crakers’ minds. The balance of this paper examines this knowledge function in detail. It aims at establishing the female side of the story and comprehending the interrelation between feminism and the episteme. The rest of this paper is subdivided into two major sections. The first explores the politics of knowledge from a feminist standpoint, while the second investigates the importance of speech, storytelling, and writing for women. Both sections suggest how the female imparts knowledge to the posthuman world of hybrid pigoons and genetically engineered Crakers. These further challenge the phallogocentric ideals of knowledge creation and propagation.

2 Epistemological Feminism: Anticipating Storytelling and Feminist Speculative Fiction

Classical philosophy has often associated knowledge with the phallus. Thus, a ‘masculine’ outlook orchestrates epistemic perspectives and enslaves individuals in its hegemonic clasp. Both Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions regard truth and rationalism as products of male sensibility, and philosophy as an enterprise concerning powerful men. Plato’s *Symposium* demeans women’s physicality and devalues them as reproductive machines. Men, according to Plato, on the other hand, possess an innate quality that is the procreation of knowledge, an intrinsic phallic characteristic (Isikgil 2017, 399). The phallic knowledge coefficient perceives women as bodies that crave the contentment of the flesh and ignore logical thinking. Aristotle too, in his *Politics*, questions the deliberative abilities of women which, according to him, render them inefficient in exercising authority, as compared to men. He sees them as bereft of practical knowledge and political expertise, guaranteeing their inferiority in the patriarchal world (Karbowski 2013, 235). This ideological framing bestows on the male philosopher the right to appropriate woman’s subject position and devalue her ability to know and perceive the world.

To summarize, classical philosophy creates a bias against women, denying them the right to epistemological practice. In the words of Lorraine Code, there is “no legitimate space for women to claim cognitive authority, credibility, or acknowledgment. The universal pretensions of the story of knowledge told by and about men mask its partiality in both senses of the word, thus rendering women’s lives invisible” (2006, 147). Patriarchy perpetuates and shapes epistemic sensibilities. It empowers men to frame epistemic knowledge within the phallic order. Women, on the other hand, are compelled to accept the masculine standpoint and adhere to its normative patterns. This article constructs an argument against this androcentric prejudice. It destabilizes the oppressive masculine standpoint and proposes a feminist standpoint theory to elaborate the importance of knowledge in *MaddAddam*’s posthuman world. Moreover, this section studies “Situated Knowledge” and its veritable link with feminist epistemology. It conjugates *utopia* and feminist speculative fiction while drawing a character sketch of Toby.

Feminist Epistemology aims to construct feasible models of knowing. Also known as Epistemological Feminism, it proposes varied methods to understand one’s social reality. Kirsten Campbell writes:

Feminism’s most powerful epistemological insight is the recognition that legitimization of knowledge claims is intimately tied to networks of domination and exclusion...For this reason, it aims to reconstruct epistemic practice as a political practice. It links the production of knowledge to the transformative value of feminism and hence the production of new models of epistemic practice. (2004, 12)

Accordingly, the identity and situation of the feminist knower acquire immense importance. This feminist knower is committed to exercising epistemic responsibility. Campbell defines epistemic responsibility as “a responsible cognitive practice...one in which the knowing [female] subject acknowledges that it exists in relation to the other members of its epistemic

community and its knowledge has political effect for which its knower is responsible” (2004, 137–38). With ‘political,’ Campbell refers to how knowledge of the subject transforms the objects of knowledge. The term “epistemic community” captures how humans and Crakers share and transfigure knowledge to promote a posthuman continuity. In the present context, the objects of knowledge refer to the non-human epistemic communities (the Crakers in *MaddAddam*), and Toby plays the role of the feminist knower. While the feminist knower exercises power and responsibility to disperse the gift of knowledge among its objects, object communities also understand and circulate the knowledge gained from the subject. They do so by formulating their own gospel, based on articulation skills inherited from Toby, for future posthumans. In this way, the subject and the object function as equal partners within the ambit of epistemological dissemination. The woman’s standpoint revolves around the entire epistemic community and authorizes her in facilitating epistemological transactions.

Feminist standpoint theory refers to the acknowledgment of the female perspective within the accepted and the standard order. It celebrates the counter-philosophical argument, and challenges masculinity as the basis of epistemological profusion of reality. Proposed by the feminist philosopher Sandra Harding, feminist standpoint theory interrogates the basis of feminist knowledge creation. “All knowledge is generated from a standpoint, i.e., from a particular, social and historically mediated perspective,” summarizes Nancy McHugh (2011, 187). Feminist standpoint theory scrutinizes female oppression as opposed to the hegemonic male perspective. It situates women’s oppression within the periphery of power, enabling it to voice its own feminist concerns. In “Feminist Politics and Epistemology: The Standpoint of Women,” Alison M. Jaggar writes:

The standpoint of the oppressed is not just different than that of the ruling class; it is also epistemologically advantageous. It provides the basis for a view of reality that is more impartial than that of the ruling class and also more comprehensive. It is more impartial because it comes closer to representing the interests of society as a whole; whereas the standpoint of the ruling class reflects the interest only of one section of the population, the standpoint of the oppressed represents the interests of the totality in that historical period. (2003, 57)

The ruling class, in the present context, constitutes the masculine knower, while the myriad of experiential women comprise the oppressed. However, to understand the truth behind women’s oppression, one needs to consider the plurality of female experience. This is because different women undergo varied levels of oppression and, therefore, cannot be contained under a single rubric. Donna Haraway asserts “there is no single feminist standpoint because our maps require too many dimensions for [the Standpoint] metaphor to ground our vision” (quoted in Code 2006, 156). A Feminist Standpoint centralizes female experience as per the spatio-temporal dimensions of their specific location when inserted within a particular set of social relations.

Toby’s position within this Feminist Standpoint opens a productive space for contestation and opposition, as her subject position in *MaddAddam* resists a defined bracket. The notion of ustopia sustains this space while emphasizing Toby’s special situatedness within feminist speculative scholarship. Feminist Speculative Fiction, according to Barr, “acts as a microscope

in relation to patriarchal myths. [It] presents blueprints for social structures that allow women's words to counter patriarchal myths" (Barr 1993, 7). It views "womanists and feminists... as our time machines, test tubes and windows to the future. They present possibilities which can help us develop alternatives" (Barr 1987, 81–82). In the light of Barr's statements, Toby's standpoint entails a polyphonic sensibility tracing how "the control of the word shifts from male domination [from Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake*] through female mediation to the non-human Crakers" (Northover 2016, 84). In this way, her standpoint maps multiple versions of reality, where no single version commands a specific standpoint.

The storytelling activity demarcates the end of androcentric oppression and welcomes the beginning of a new post-apocalyptic age. It also indicates the advent of an anticipated anthropocene feminism unfixing the phallic quintessence in the narrative. In her article "Anthropocene Feminism, Companion Species, and the *MaddAddam Trilogy*," Jennings points out Richard Grusin's argument in *Anthropocene Feminism*, namely, that "many scientists and theorists of the Anthropocene tend to produce 'masculinist' narratives that take for granted the dominance of the human species" (Jennings 2019, 17). She goes on to discuss Atwood's trilogy as speculative anthropocene feminism, offering an insightful picture of a counter-apocalypse with a re-emergence of posthumanism and a renewed hope for life after the Waterless Flood. The term counter-apocalypse suggests "an enactment of hope, without or despite, totalitarian expectations, or absolute ends and new beginnings" (Hoogstraten 2020, 188). In the words of Catherine Keller:

Wherever overtly apocalyptic hope has been literalized it has been proven literally wrong; the normative hope, however, cannot be falsified. It can be named: hope for mutual respect in proximate and in political relations, for justice and mercy upon the land and within the city, for transnational, trans-species, healing and renewal. This hope can only be verified, however, by being made true: spirit practiced, materialized, spun, performed (Keller 1996, 308).

We argue that epistemology plays a substantial role in establishing Toby's character as a metaphor for this counter-apocalyptic anthropocene feminism. It makes her the prime force for the posthuman renewal and replenishment and promotes cordiality between the remaining species. As an epitome of "Situated Knowledge," her spatio-temporality engenders a better understanding of the pre- and post-catastrophic environments. The concept of "Situated Knowledge," similar to feminist standpoint theory, contributes to the formation of Epistemological Feminism. Coined and interpreted by theorist Donna Haraway, the term refers to a feminist form of knowledge detached from the mimetic phallic discourse. "Situated Knowledge" redefines objectivity, where one's social location is responsible for shaping and upholding the process of knowing. In Haraway's view, a typical gender (female) dimension fosters a better purview of knowledge than that of the ones in power. She asserts that situated knowledge "is preferred because [it] seems to promise more adequate, sustained, objective and transforming accounts of the world" (1988, 584). Thus, from Haraway's perspective, "we are bound to seek perspectives from those points of view, which can never be known in advance, that promise something quite extraordinary, that is, knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination" (Haraway 1988, 585).

Therefore, the marginalized subject position becomes essential in subverting the dynamics of power. It demonstrates how knowledge from the gender periphery illuminates the epistemic superstructure. This position privileges “contestation, destruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformations of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing” (Haraway 1988, 585). Toby emblemizes Haraway’s “situated knowledge.” She is placed at the threshold between the two species. Embodying classic cyborgian dimensions, she negotiates between her human and technological selves. Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* recalls Toby’s cosmetic therapy that helped her to work as an undercover agent at the AnooYoo spa. Finally, after landing among the Crakers and replacing their guru Snowman-the-Jimmy, she becomes acquainted with many facets of knowledge because of her changing subject positions. This subjectivity enables her to add to the original story of Crake and his creation. “There is the story, then there is the real story, then there is the story how the story came to be told. Then there is what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too” (Atwood 2013, 56). Toby’s poly-faceted and perpetually transforming subjectivity associates her “situated knowing” with shifting patterns of women’s experience and the fluidity of their epistemic ideas.

Knowledge, according to feminist standpoint theory, is not universally confined. It is relational and discursive, varying according to women’s experiences. There is no single feminist standpoint theory, just as there is no single definition of a woman. The term “woman” is a site of a potentially complex set of experiences, without a monolithic essence of the self. Toby’s narrative widens the imaginative possibilities for exploring the same story in different voices. It also lays the foundation for the introduction of literacy among the Craker community, transcending the megalomaniac plans of Crake. In fact, the diffusion of knowledge among the Crakers leads to the empowerment of the non-human, which allows them to absorb learning and transmit it to their future progeny. Toby is astonished to see Blackbeard picking up the skill of writing, and, after initially encouraging him, she comes to fear ruining the Crakers by introducing them to this art, asking, “What can of worms have I opened?” and “Have I ruined them?” (Atwood 2013, 204). Discernment of this knowledge transmission through the eyes of a feminist knower challenges the overly optimistic inventiveness of Crake.

According to Crake, the bio-spliced Crakers have been designed as an improved replacement for the human population. Devoid of detrimental values and human extrapolations, the new species is free from societal paradigms such as inheritance, family, marriage, money, God and icons. To implement his plan, Crake eliminated the skills of reading and writing from their neo-cortex. He detached them from the dogmas of gospel, history, doctrine, and religion during their bio-fabrication and erased the rigidity of the spoken word from their humanoid brains. This erasure of morphological rigidity introduces polyphony to *MaddAddam*, while Toby’s voice adds a speculative feminist descant. Northover’s argument on the polyphony of the novel is relevant here. According to this critic,

The Crakers have come to expect Jimmy and then Toby to tell them stories. They especially enjoy the story of how Crake and Oryx created the world. They never seem to be tired of it, which means that the word of that narrative threatens to become the Word, a myth frozen into doctrine- their questions introduce a new doctrine to

the polyphony of narratives, extending their imaginative explorations and preventing them from becoming monologues. (Northover 2016, 92)

I draw attention to Toby's speculative position amid the breakdown of phallogocentric ideals. Toby regulates the narrative through her feminist agency. Exercising her feminist standpoint, she "subverts the deep [phallic] structural principles of language" (Armitt 2012, 123) and replaces these with lingual fluidity. Her epistemic faculty enables her to connect the pre- and post-pandemic experiences. Rather than waiting for the demise of knowledge and language that Crake always wanted, she indulges in the active dissemination of knowledge among the Craker community. She does so through her art of weaving bedtime stories for the Crakers. Knowledge thus becomes diffused among the two species through constant cross-questioning and seeking of innovative responses. Atwood writes:

Once Toby has made her way through the story, they urge her to tell it again, then again. They prompt, they interrupt, they fill in the parts she's missed. What they want from her is a seamless performance, as well as more information that she either knows or can invent. (2013, 45)

These remarks engender an optimal interaction between the two species. In the novel, though, Toby is the chief mediator between humans and the Crakers. However, I refrain from considering Toby the dominant voice, since "any Feminist Standpoint will necessarily be partial... None of us can speak for 'woman' because no such person exists" (Hekman 1997, 359). In that sense, Toby's position within the Feminist Standpoint argument emphasizes the inclusiveness of the posthuman world. Her voice not only speaks for the "woman" inside her but for the entire human and non-human species who survived the apocalypse. She becomes an active spokesperson for diverse communities, facilitating an active transmission of knowledge.

Toby's practice of networking with stories connects epistemology with psychological diligence. Night by night, the mimicked anecdotes produce a feverish effect on Toby's psyche. This leads her mind to automatically hatch stories and serve them to the Crakers. "The story tells itself inside Toby's head. She doesn't seem to be thinking about the story or directing it. She has no control over it; she just listens" (Atwood 2013, 256), asserts the narrative voice. It implies that Toby's activity of recitation allows her deep self-contemplation. An abyss of thoughts characterizes her holistic personality, her ontological link with both her internal self and the world outside. Thus, her Standpoint position places her between an unpleasant past and an uncertain future.

In this way, *MaddAddam* illustrates Toby's polyphony in addition to her innovative storytelling in the tradition of feminist speculative fiction. She employs her knack for narration not only to enlighten the Crakers and hold their curiosity but also to realize her subjectivity. This further empowers her to connect past, present, and future under a single nucleus. The notion of "situated knowing" encourages her to associate her subjective epistemology with writing, an activity vindicating the link between knowledge, speech, and writing. The next section explores the impact of the written word on the oral and that written word's subsequent dissemination among the Craker community. It underlines the prolific aspects of women's writing and shows how this writing motivates the feminist episteme.

3 Women Writing/Writing Women: A Revival of Post Human Literacy

In *MaddAddam*, the relation between the oral and the written word epitomizes the representation of feminist epistemology. It depicts how writing stimulates women's experiences and opens a feasible pathway to connect with reality. The novel portrays writing as a means to memorize and preserve the remaining traces of the human footprint. It chronicles the dissociated threads and prepares the future for posthuman subsistence. Toby manages to catalogue the past by maintaining a daily journal. This allows her to record important events and keep the past intact. The narrative voice notes:

Toby is at work on her journal. She doesn't really have the energy for it, but Zeb went to all that trouble to bring her the materials and he's bound to notice if she doesn't use them. She's writing in one of the cheap schooltime drugstore notebooks.

[...]

Moon: Waxing gibbous. Weather: Nothing unusual. Noteworthy occurrences: Group pig aggression displayed. Painballer evidence sighted by Zeb's expedition: piglet shot and partly butchered. Discovery of a tire tread sandal: possible clue to Adam. No definite sign of Adam and the Gardeners. Jimmy is conscious and improving. Crakers continue friendly. (Atwood 2013, 201–2)

Toby's journal comprises day-to-day events that convey her liminal existence. Writing privileges her to evidence the present and commit towards its authentic documentation. The written word bestows meaning on her life. As a woman, she writes from changing subject positions and resists phallogocentric fixity. The intricacies of the written word recognize the plurality and fluidity of women's sexuality. According to Cixous, women's writing flows from the body. It perpetuates the polyphony and multiplicity of women's experiences and their call for an end to oppression. Writing, what Cixous terms as "*écriture féminine*," emancipates them from the hierarchal and repressive authority of the phallus. "She structures *écriture féminine* in the context of *différance*, which stems from the influence of the philosopher Jacques Derrida" (Friestad 2013, 2). Derrida, through his theory of "*différance*," critiques the structuralist notion of binary oppositions, while highlighting the difficulty in assigning signification to language which is self-referential. It means that the meaning of a word is always deferred – that is "each sign in the system has meaning only by virtue of its difference from the others" (Eagleton 1996, 97). Cixous connects Derridean *différance* with *écriture féminine* and urges women not to follow the masculinist writing discourse but instead, through *différance*, to disrupt the androcentric hegemony of writing. In her essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous asserts that:

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there is no other way. There is no room for her if she is not he. If she is a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the "truth" with laughter. ("Laugh of the Medusa" 1976, 886)

Thus, *écriture féminine* refers to a uniquely feminine type of writing that defies the rules of the phallic order. Drawing on the theories of psychosexual and linguistic development as advanced by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, *écriture féminine* constitutes the non-representational lack at the heart of women's writing. Cixous links this lack with Freud's idea of castration of the female child, while substantiating his theory of the Electra Complex (Eagleton 1996, 156). Cixous challenges this envy of castration and de-frames the notions of shame, inferiority, and punishment behind Freud's Electra Complex. Reacting against Lacan's argument that this lack of the phallus is nothing but a "desire" for the missing "other," Cixous writes, "Castration? Let others toy with it? What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meager desire" (1976, 891). By this, she means that the lack at the core of castration could be nourishing and optimal, as opposed to envious and shameful.

It is at the Lacanian Symbolic stage that Cixous draws her theory of *écriture féminine* and critiques androcentric writing. For Cixous, *écriture féminine* constitutes women's creative energy, which is located at the margins of the Symbolic Order and closely associated with the Real. After the anthropocene, Toby's writing engenders this creative energy enveloped within a non-representational lack. It comprises the intricacies of a "split" language that is the language of the "Other," unlike the "Self." Here, the "Self" refers to the Lacanian subject as marked by the linguistic phallus while the "Other" refers to the vehicle of *écriture féminine*, denoted with a "lack" or, in misogynist terms, a woman.

However, to see *écriture féminine* as a space for women only could be erroneous. According to Cixous, even the writings of male writers like James Joyce (for example, in his novel *Ulysses* (1922)) could be classified as *écriture féminine*. This is because the term denotes writing that transcends the rigid boundaries of phallic regulations. It is more focused on the writing style rather than the gender of the writer. In "Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous defends her concept of *écriture féminine* with the notion of bisexuality. In her essay, she gives two definitions of bisexuality, where the first definition refers to "each one's location in self of the presence-variously manifest and insistent according to each person- male or female- of both sexes, non-exclusion either of the difference of one sex," while the second definition concerns "with writing where writing is bisexual in the sense that it is neuter" (1976, 884).

Therefore, for Cixous, femininity and bisexuality go together in a combination that varies according to the individual, spreading the intensity of its force differently and (depending on the moment of their history) privileging one component or another ("Sorties" 1998, 583). Bisexuality in *écriture féminine* refers to the inclusive and non-linear elements in women's writing that are different from the masculine ones. It obliterates rigidity in writing and is open to multiple interpretations that subsequently evade the primacy of the phallus. In this way, Cixous revolutionizes women's writing and celebrates its plentitude.

Toby's journal manifests these characteristics of *écriture féminine*. After the apocalypse, she begins writing, an activity of the past. The word "past" emphasizes the absence of the written word from the Craker community. For Toby, writing a journal indicates her ontological plurality. The use of short sentences, colloquialism, and fragmented phrases makes her language flexible and versatile. The following lines exemplify this argument:

[Toby] turns back to her journal. What else to write, besides the bare-facts daily chronicle she began? What kind of story – what kind of history will be of any use at all, to people she can't know will exist, in the future she can't foresee? *Zeb and the Bear*, she writes. *Zeb and MaddAddam*. *Zeb and Crake*. All of these Stories could be set down. But why, but for whom? Only for herself because it gives her a chance to dwell upon Zeb. *Zeb and Toby*, she writes. But surely, that will only be a footnote. (Atwood 2013, 203)

In addition to Toby's obsession with the future of humanity, the passage features disintegrated syntax and uneven use of punctuation. Comprising features of feminine/bisexual language, Toby's journal embodies elements of escapism (what Cixous terms as *sortie*) from hegemonic theorization and enclosure. Her writing reveals the peculiarities of exclusion and celebrates lingual torrents. Each word in the journal has the potential to challenge the existing logic and invent a new poetics of bisexuality. Both Cixous and Toby believe in the power of the written word. They acknowledge the significance of experience and their inclusion in the domain of writing. This novel thus offers an important exemplar supporting the bisexuality of women's writing, as Toby teaches writing to the Craker child, Blackbeard.

While engineering the Crakers, Crake excluded many elements of the human world from their neo-cortex. This is because he did not want the new species to develop any complicated cerebral functioning that might interfere in their eco-friendly development. Reading and writing were among the prohibited capacities. Although the stories of Snowman-the-Jimmy and Toby acquainted them with the oral word, they were still unfamiliar with written text. Through her journal, Toby familiarized Blackbeard with reading and writing. Skeptical at first, she introduced the Crakers to the forbidden activity. With this, she began the human education of the Crakers, a moment of anxiety for Toby:

What comes next? Rules, dogmas, laws? The Testament of Crake? How soon before there are ancient texts they feel they have to obey but have forgotten how to interpret? Have I ruined them? (*MaddAddam* 2013, 204)

More than a question, the last sentence implies a psychological dilemma for Toby. She believes that education would lead them to adopt some of the human traits that Crake sought to eradicate. However, instead of reading this event as banal dissemination of knowledge, we interpret it as an instance portraying bisexual epistemic creation. Toby's act of sharing the artistry of writing with Blackbeard reflects both a posthuman and a bisexual interaction on her part. As suggested previously on the basis of Cixous, her journal expresses a bisexual writing style that is fluid and flexible. It encapsulates an open-ended and freestyle writing along the lines of the plurality of the posthuman world and its genetically fabricated creatures. Toby's endeavour to teach and Blackbeard's eagerness to learn indicate the bisexuality of language and its healthy conveyance between them. "Oh Toby, what have you been writing," says Blackbeard, to which Toby replies "I am writing the story...the story of you, and me, and pigoons, and everyone" (Atwood 2013, 374). This conversation draws attention to the posthuman bisexuality of writing.

In teaching Blackbeard orthography and the aspects of writing, Toby passes on the gift of *écriture féminine* to a posthuman man and eventually to his entire community, both

male and female. Rather than ruining the Crakers, writing liberates them and furnishes the transmission of knowledge. It gives them a voice to promulgate the gospel of (post) humankind. Blackbeard glows as he says, “telling the story is hard, and writing the story must be more hard. Oh Toby, when you are too tired to do it, next time, I will write the story. I will be your helper” (Atwood 2013, 375). This help subsequently blends the story of Toby and the story of Blackbeard. It endows Blackbeard with the capacity to acquire learning and channel it further. Writing truly becomes bisexual when Toby declares that “Blackbeard has his own journal now... I have given him his own pen and a pencil” (Atwood 2013, 378). In fact, this exemplar indicates Toby’s adoption of Blackbeard, after she was subjected to accidental sterilisation in *The Year of the Flood*. And this transmission of the written word to Blackbeard suggests a transference of knowledge from a mother to her progeny. For Toby, making Blackbeard her heir is an act of a dialogic convergence that will percolate through the ages. The penultimate chapter of *MaddAddam* asserts this. It begins with Blackbeard’s voice masking the voice of Toby beneath it:

Now this is the book that Toby made when she lived among us. See, I am showing you. She made these words on a *page*, and a page is made of *paper*. She made the words with *writing*, that she marked down with a stick called a *pen*, with black fluid called *ink*, and she made the pages join together at one side, and that is called a *book*. (Atwood 2013, 385)

The book typifies Toby’s cognitive labor that Blackbeard yearns to imitate. It not only presents the first written account of posthuman reality but also describes the meta-fictionality of the novel itself. It is writing about *writing*, how writing came into existence. The book charts Toby’s words uttered through Blackbeard, merging the two voices into one. Blackbeard’s voice embellishes the genre of writing by fusing itself with Toby’s narrative. Ultimately, he inserts Toby into the story of his own, one that he undertakes to complete after Toby’s death.

MaddAddam begins with the voice of Toby and ends with the voice of Blackbeard, integrating feminine and masculine, human, and posthuman entities into a unique dialogue. “This is the end of the story of Toby,” says Blackbeard. “I have written it in this Book. And I have put my name here – Blackbeard – the way Toby first showed me when I was child. It says that I was the one who set down these words,” he continues (Atwood 2013, 390). Blackbeard asserts his individuality in these lines. However, his statement carries the essence of Toby’s teaching, a lesson that gave him knowledge worth sermonizing among the new audience. This learning becomes a progressive interface to connect with the surviving community and cultivates an optimal outlook on life. It develops an assured affinity among the living and invigorates them with the idea of a better tomorrow.

4 Conclusion

This article has attempted to substantiate the function of epistemology in oral and written cultures. It has elaborated on the diffusion of knowledge across generic borders and cataclysmic transformations. We have located Atwood’s novel in the feminist speculative canon and interpreted Toby’s polyphonic function in the narrative. This means that Toby’s different versions of the same story allow no single Word or line of thought to take predominance over

the rest. The fluidity of *MaddAddam's* narrative provides depth to the learning of the Crakers, in which Toby distils inchoate event into story, through a feminist knowledge praxis.

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