

THE POTENTIAL OF POSTHUMANISM: REIMAGINING UTOPIA THROUGH
BELLAMY, ATWOOD, AND SLONCZEWSKI

by

JACOB MCKEEVER

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Abstract

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Jacob McKeever, M.A.

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Supervising Professor: Kenneth Roemer

In this thesis, I focus on posthumanist theory, utopia, and the evolving portrayal of technology in the novels of Edward Bellamy, Margaret Atwood, and Joan Slonczewski. The main argument of this thesis is that there is a posthumanist potential within utopia that can be seen as fermenting within Bellamy's *Looking Backward* as a way to eliminate social stratification, showing potentiality within Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* as a way to open up an other-than-human agency in the form of transgenic organisms, and becoming fully realized in Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* through an all-female, alien civilization that is fully grounded in a material posthumanist world-view of reciprocity, balance, and embeddedness within a larger web of life.

In terms of methodology, I draw out this potential posthumanism by focusing on how technology is portrayed in the context of each novel's categorization in the utopian genre. Specifically, where the relatively traditional and simple utopian form of *Looking Backward* portrays technology as an abstracted, inevitable force of utopia, both *Oryx and Crake* and *A Door Into Ocean* reflect transformations within the utopian genre that result in more complex works, thus portraying equally complex views of technology and scientific epistemologies as intimately tied to social structure, philosophy, and world-view. The result is that technology can be seen as an intrinsically good, driving force of utopia

in *Looking Backward*, a more complex biotechnological tool of transcendence for humanity and a *possible* path to either utopia or dystopia in *Oryx and Crake*, or fully integrated into a posthumanist society in *A Door Into Ocean*, whose posthumanist philosophy of reciprocity and material embeddedness quells the transcendent nature of technology and leads to a fully realized posthumanist eutopia.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“How, utopias ask, can we ensure food, shelter, safety, and fulfillment for all human beings? And what could be more important, more fundamental?”

Lyman Tower Sargent, “Choosing Utopia”

Perhaps the fact that Lyman Tower Sargent’s assertion that the fundamental question that utopia must ask is, in fact, human-centered is all the justification necessary to write a thesis on utopia and posthumanism. However, perhaps a better use of Sargent’s question is to situate it in a more appropriate context. In this way, it is no wonder that we find our starting point for this thesis just before the turn of the twentieth century and towards the end of the industrial revolution, a movement of industrial and technological progress that held the utopian perception of serving to not only answer Sargent’s proposed questions but also extending this utopian hope as a means for socio-economic and socio-political equality (Roemer, “Paradise Transformed” 82). Popularized by utopians of the late nineteenth century, the path to utopia rested on the notion that technological progress was not only inevitable but that it was intrinsically good. However, the progression of the twentieth century transformed that utopian hope into a dystopian realization (Baccolini and Moylan 1-3) in which technology increasingly became portrayed as a tool of transcendence for humanity, often depicted as leading to destructive and/or apocalyptic outcomes.

For this study, I track this progression of change in utopian literature by focusing on the relatively utopian portrayal of technology in Edward Bellamy’s late nineteenth century utopian novel, *Looking Backward*, as compared to the more dystopian view of

technology portrayed in Margaret Atwood's contemporary speculative fiction, *Oryx and Crake*. Additionally, when we consider Atwood and Bellamy as occupying two extreme ends of the spectrum—technology as salvation versus technology as destructive transcendence—Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* is seen as a reconciliation of sorts in that its portrayal of what we might consider a posthuman technology could suggest a return to a similar, yet revised, sense of utopian hope once expressed in earlier utopian literature.

What I want to draw out of this focus on technology is that this shift in the way technology is portrayed is bound-up with important transformations within the utopian genre, a move from blue-prints to cautionary tales, as well as socio-cultural and socio-political transformations within the United States. Specifically, the civil rights movements of the latter twentieth century emphasize the collapsing of dualisms and hierarchies attributed to a traditional humanist world-view, invigorating a growing anti-humanist sentiment and moving us into a more posthuman age (Braidotti 15-16). Thus, one of the aims of this thesis is to connect utopia to these social movements by underscoring how all three novels share in the utopian function of being in opposition to dominant hegemony. Moreover, in so much as we can consider posthumanist theory as growing out of this anti-humanist sentiment and following these socio-cultural movements of the latter twentieth century, I view all of these novels through a posthumanist lens in order to connect posthumanist thought to utopia as a method of envisioning social change.

Thus, the main argument of this thesis is that there is a posthumanist potential within utopian thought that can be seen as fermenting within Bellamy's *Looking Backward* as a way to eliminate social stratification, showing potentiality within Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* as a way to open up an other-than-human agency in the form of transgenic organisms, and becoming fully realized in Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* through an

all-female, alien civilization that is fully grounded in a material posthumanist world-view of reciprocity, balance, and embeddedness within a larger web of life. Moreover, I draw out this potential posthumanism by focusing on how technology is portrayed in the context of each novel's categorization in the utopian genre. Specifically, where the relatively traditional and simple utopian form of *Looking Backward* portrays technology as an abstracted, inevitable force of utopia, the contemporary novels reflect transformations within the utopian genre that result in more complex works, thus portraying equally complex views of technology and scientific epistemologies as intimately tied to social structure, philosophy, and world-view. The result is that technology can be seen as a biotechnological tool of transcendence for humanity and a *possible* path to dystopia in *Oryx and Crake* or fully integrated into a posthuman society in *A Door Into Ocean*, whose posthumanist philosophy of reciprocity and material embeddedness quells the transcendent nature of technology and leads to a fully realized posthumanist eutopia. In other words, this analysis supports the notion that utopia can be reimagined through the potential posthumanism of these works.

1.1 Overview of Thesis

This thesis begins with a brief, but necessary, overview of posthumanist theory as well as a historical look at Utopia as a genre and movement. The posthumanist overview is critical to understanding exactly how I define posthumanist theory and posthumanism in terms of this thesis. That is, I discriminate between the two strands of posthumanism that have found their way into both popular culture and academia. Though I address the transformation of Utopia as a genre and thought process throughout this thesis, my main goal with this historical overview of Utopia is to trace the varying views of Utopia among notable utopian scholars within the field and begin to form some recognizable terminology/concepts that will aid the overall discussion. Additionally,

I end the background section with a justification of the texts that I have chosen for analysis, stressing my reasoning in choosing *Looking Backward*, *Oryx and Crake*, and *A Door Into Ocean* over a myriad of other quality novels.

In chapters two, three, and four, I apply the framework set up in the background directly to the novels in terms of applying a posthumanist theoretical lens and identifying each novel's place in the historical transformation of Utopia. Specifically, I begin with chapter two and an analysis of Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* as a commentary on the tumultuous nineteenth century. In focusing on Bellamy's use of temporal displacement as a method for readers to both imagine Utopia and critique the socio-cultural milieu of the late nineteenth century, I want to draw out a fermenting posthumanism that is directly related to *Looking Backward's* utopian vision of a classless, technological utopia. In connecting this sentiment of eliminating class stratification to posthumanist thought, I also analyze how Bellamy's treatment of technology as an abstract, inevitable utopian force interacts with these utopian goals. Chapters three and four will differ somewhat from chapter two in that both *Oryx and Crake* and *A Door Into Ocean* are more contemporary pieces that represent sites of transformation in the utopian literary genre, meaning that part of each chapter will include a brief overview of the changes within the genre.

Though both contemporary works are written after the dystopian turn of the twentieth century, which will be discussed in chapter three, I focus on *Oryx and Crake* as a representation of the critical dystopia, a category by utopian scholarship's acknowledgement of the growing complexity of the genre in terms of identifying works that cannot be clearly distinguished as either utopian or dystopian. As part of this categorization, *Oryx and Crake* represents a complex blend of genres and utopian/dystopian viewpoints that intentionally blur some lines of distinction in terms of

genre and posthumanism. Similar to *Looking Backward*, I focus on *Oryx and Crake* as a commentary on the increasingly biotechnological age of the twenty-first century and how this affects the social-cultural milieu as represented in Atwood's work. Specifically, I focus on Atwood's representations of transgenic organisms as ethically complex creations of the Compounds, enclosed corporate owned employee live-in cities that are a blend of technology, corporatism, and capitalism. One of the main elements that I draw out is that these transgenic organisms represent a complex form of nonhuman agency, which tends to only represent a potential posthumanism because this agency ultimately comes at the hands of human ingenuity, blurring the lines between transcendent technology and the resulting posthuman creations.

In chapter four, I again begin by situating the novel to be analyzed within the important transformations within the utopia genre by focusing on how *A Door Into Ocean* is representative of a revival and transformation of the utopian form that ultimately gave birth to the critical utopia. Specifically, I review this transformation by showing how *A Door Into Ocean* represents some of the more important elements of this transformation such as its additional classification as a science fiction novel, its much more complex form in terms of comparing the "old/dominant society" to the "new/oppositional" (Moylan, *Demand* 44) in the form of an active binary opposition between the protagonist Sharer civilization and the antagonist Patriarchal empire, and its portrayal of a collection of non-traditional "social transformation heroes" in the form of the Sharer civilization, who are necessarily "off-center" from tradition in their representation of heroes that "are not dominant, white, heterosexual, chauvinist males but female, gay, non-white, and generally operating collectively" (Moylan 45). Moreover, it is out of this binary opposition and the Sharers as a necessarily "off-center" representation that I draw out the posthumanist eutopian tendencies within *A Door Into Ocean*, making the case that the

Sharer's posthumanist philosophy of reciprocity and balance within a larger web of life is a clear indication that *A Door Into Ocean* represents a fully realized posthumanist eutopia.

1.2 Background

The dual nature of this thesis—a focus on posthumanist theory as well as an historical look at the utopian genre—requires a certain amount of accuracy in terms of definitions and ideas that are covered within the text. That is, a clear historical overview of both posthumanist theory and utopian studies is necessary in order to clearly articulate the arguments that are presented in relation to the works that are analyzed. Moreover, that the nature of both posthumanist theory and utopian studies tend to encourage discussion, and often disagreement, in terms of definitions and descriptions makes a fairly detailed overview of these subjects all the more necessary, especially when we consider that both of these subjects tend to not only cross academic disciplines but also find their way into popular culture.

1.2.1 What Is Posthumanism

What is Posthumanism? It is a question that has become an increasingly popular topic of discussion across academic disciplines and in popular culture. Neil Badmington, who was saddled with the same task of trying to answer this question in an essay for the 2011 edition of *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science*, explains that posthumanism and posthumanist theory have a propensity to “cut across conventional disciplinary boundaries” by becoming a subject of concern in “literary studies, cultural studies, philosophy, film studies, theology, geography, animal studies, architecture, politics, law, sociology, anthropology, science and technology studies, education, gender studies, and psychoanalysis” (375). With this kind of broad scope, it is all the more troubling when Cary Wolfe points out in his appropriately titled book, *What is*

Posthumanism, that the answer to this question often elicits “different and even irreconcilable definitions” (xi). In other words, the posthuman question has found its way into nearly every crack of academic and daily life yet managed to not merely allude definition but actually evoke a myriad of definitions that vary in grossly different and often conflicting ways.

Though this thesis is not an attempt to definitively answer this question—and I might add that a definitive answer would likely be (in Wolfe’s words) irreconcilable with the posthumanist theorists whom I lean on in this thesis—the growing popularity of posthumanism in academics and popular culture has muddied the waters somewhat, making our goal of finding a workable definition that much more difficult. As we will see with Utopia, that there is a lack of agreement in terms of definitions and terminology is not necessarily surprising when dealing with a subject that is important to academics, especially when that subject becomes increasingly prevalent in popular culture. And we might even suggest that these types of tensions are often productive and conducive to progress in terms of broadening the conversation. However, the conflicting nature of how posthumanism and posthumanist theory get defined and used has far-reaching implications, thus we should consider the definition uncovered here as a working definition that is appropriate to the issues raised in this thesis.

As N. Katherine Hayles writes in both the opening and conclusion of her seminal work, *How We Became Posthuman*, the notion of moving from human to posthuman “both evokes terror and excites pleasure” (4, 283). This notion that the posthuman move causes either fear or excitement lies in the implications of simply moving away from a humanist world-view as well as the implications of where the path after humanism leads in terms of posthumanism, which addresses the nature of how posthumanism gets defined. Specifically, posthumanism generally gets split into two divergent paths: a

technoscientific/disembodied posthumanism that seems to find its way into the more technocratic visions of posthumanism, or those visions that often “emphasize a technofuturism that melds human and machine [...]” (Alaimo 150), or a material/embodied posthumanism that focuses on blurring borders, eliminating essentialism, and overturning the liberal humanist subject. In so much as this thesis takes the position that the move away from a humanist world-view necessarily excites rather than evokes terror, we can re-frame Hayles’s suggestion in a way that more clearly focuses on the posthuman question in terms of this thesis: disembodiment both evokes terror and excites pleasure. This re-framing of the statement makes it clear that an answer to the posthuman question comes from determining whether we see the subject as embodied and embedded or disembodied and transcendent. More importantly, this tension between a transcendent posthumanism and a material posthumanism plays out in the novels that we analyze in the second part of this thesis, reflected mostly in the way each novel portrays technology and the resulting implications for the portrayed utopian or dystopian society.

Though we want to be careful to echo Rosi Braidotti’s sentiment that posthumanism is necessarily a marker for “the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism” and the beginning of a search for “new alternatives” (37), there is a general consensus among theorists that material/embedded posthumanism is necessarily post-anthropocentric (de-centering the human) and has deep roots in anti-humanist thought (Badmington 374). I might echo Sherryl Vint as well in pointing out that humanism, liberalism, and liberal humanism have a complex, intertwined history as philosophical schools of thought (Vint 11), so I want to be clear that our sense of posthumanism as anti-humanism is necessarily bound up with the idea of a liberal humanist subject, which is based on a sense of “possessive individualism” (Hayles 4). Specifically, in addition to embracing the Cartesian mind/body split—effectively

disembodying the subject and privileging the mind over the body—this “possessive individualism” is based off of a notion of a “natural” state of the human that is pre-market relations, meaning that the human being is not only entitled to a mastery over “his” (in Sherryl Vint’s words, the pronoun is appropriate) own body but also of anything that can be “shaped and changed by” his labor (Vint 12). By creating a subject that “possesses” a body rather than “being” a body (Hayles 4), the liberal humanist subject is free to separate himself from both nature and other entities (including other humans) in order to exact control over them (Vint 12-13).

Thus, we can consider the anti-humanist movement as following general socio-political transformations of the latter twentieth century (in the United States at least) in which post-structural and civil rights movements emphasized the collapsing of dualisms and hierarchies attributed to a traditional humanist world-view (Braidotti 15-16). Specifically, the disembodiment of the liberal humanist subject is problematic across disciplines, creating rifts in environmental movements by reinforcing the human/nature divide and also undermining social-cultural movements by reinscribing the notion of a normative ideology. Following this anti-humanist sentiment, post-anthropocentric posthumanist theory becomes useful in various critical theories (e.g., feminist theory, queer theory, postcolonialism, animal studies, etc) in both a broader and narrow sense. One such broad approach is Donna Haraway’s (in)famous and often (mis)quoted essay (Haraway, *Reader* 4), “A Manifesto For Cyborgs,” which gives us the best metaphor for the spirit of posthumanism in the form of a cyborg, an embodied entity that represents the collapsing of socially constructed dualisms: male/female, nature/human, and human/nonhuman to name a few (Haraway “Manifesto” 2296). In addition to its fitting nicely with our relating posthumanist theory to poststructural theories, we can see the benefits from an encompassing, cyborgian approach to posthumanist applications that

allow more flexibility in terms of analyzing how multiple borders and dualisms can be collapsed. However, this thesis also takes into consideration narrower frames of posthumanist theory as well.

Specifically, theorists such as Cary Wolfe have taken a narrower post-anthropocentric posthumanist frame in order to argue for nonhuman animal rights, maintaining that post-anthropocentric posthumanism should blur lines of distinction between humans and nonhuman animals in order to subvert US legal frameworks and sovereign right's models that have historically privileged the human over the nonhuman animal, resulting in disastrous consequences in terms of factory farming and nonhuman animal rights (6-13). Additionally, theorists such as Stacy Alaimo have taken up posthumanism in the vein of arguing for a material environmental ethics, developing a framework using new materialism and her own theoretical site, trans-corporeality, to emphasize a posthumanist theory that is capable of "emerg[ing] from evolutionary paradigms that recognize the material interrelatedness of all beings, including the human" (151). Though I would consider these types of approaches to be fairly specific and narrow in terms of the field to which the posthumanist theory is being applied (i.e., Alaimo's transcorporeality is specific to environmental ethics while Wolfe's frame is biopolitical and focused on nonhuman animal ethics), it would be almost antithetical to suggest that these approaches (terminology and all) cannot be allocated to my causes in this thesis along with the broader, cyborgian approach of Haraway.

As pointed out by Badmington, Wolfe, and even Hayles, posthumanist theory as a subject of interest has happened to have co-evolved along with popular culture, science fiction, and, more importantly, work in cybernetics and information theory since the mid twentieth century (Hayles 2). The result is that the notion of posthumanism as an anti-humanist, post-anthropocentric, and material endeavor has to contend with a path of

divergence that is necessarily bound up with technological innovation. Because part of my focus in this thesis is the relationship between humanity and technology, it is imperative that we understand both how this particular techno-scientific strand of posthumanism has evolved and how it conflicts with our notion of the posthumanist subject as embedded in a material environment.

Specifically, technoscientific discoveries at Cybernetic conferences throughout the middle of the twentieth century changed the way we look at humanity by developing the ability to show how computers and machines could mimic human cognition, meaning that humans can be looked at as “information-processing entities who are essentially similar to intelligent machines” (Hayles 7). Moreover, Hayles stresses that the shift from human to posthuman is entangled with the ideas that information theory and cybernetics gave rise to a notion that “information” could lose “its body” and that “the cyborg was created as a cultural icon” after World War II (Hayles 2). In this way, both the cyborg as an embodiment of human enhancement as a “self-regulating man-machine system” (Clynes and Kline 30) in which humans could adapt themselves to “any environment” (29) as well as the notion of humans as disembodied information has contributed to the rise of our main strand of techno-scientific, disembodied posthumanism: transhumanism.

Thus, I want to make it very clear that my arguments are grounded in the idea that posthumanism is necessarily representative of a post-humanist world-view and, by extension, completely contradictory to the transcendent vision of a disembodied, technoscientific posthumanism that borders on reinscribing the liberal humanist subject of a humanist world-view. Moreover, I want to make it even clearer that this thesis sees posthumanism as completely separate from transhumanism, which is the main inheritor of the technoscientific, disembodied vision of posthumanism. Specifically, the problem with transhumanism, or what Cary Wolfe refers to as “an intensification of humanism”

(xv), is that it is fixated on a sense of “human perfectibility” that is directly “inherited from Renaissance humanism and the Enlightenment” (xiii). At the heart of transhumanist thought is the belief in humanity’s evolution into something beyond human, a sense of human enhancement through an open relationship with evolving technologies (Bostrom 493). As Oxford philosopher and noted transhumanist Nick Bostrom explains, the transhumanist sense of the posthuman is an age in which humans can use technology in order to “[...] overcome [humanity’s] biological limitations” (495). This idea of overcoming biological limitations smacks of a vision of technological disembodiment, or what Vint describes as a type of “post-embodied” vision of posthumanism that is necessarily representative of a “desire to transcend the limitations of the human body through technology or genetic design [...]” (8).

Thus, I echo Rosi Braidotti’s sentiment that “we need to be equally distanced from both hyped-up disembodiment and fantasies of trans-humanist escape, and from re-essentialized, centralized notions of liberal individualism” (102). Moreover, I lean heavily on posthumanist theorists such as Braidotti, Alaimo, and Haraway because their work not only helps to redefine the posthuman subject as grounded in a material environment as a co-constituted and co-dependent participant in a web of relationality but also because these theories generally have strong environmental underpinnings that prove highly useful when analyzing the two contemporary works, *Oryx and Crake* and *A Door Into Ocean*. Moreover, these environmental underpinnings and focus on the subject as grounded in a material web of relationality are essential to all three works analyzed here in that they address the hierarchical and transcendent tendencies brought on by the techno-cultural organization of the utopian/dystopian societies portrayed.

By understanding the tension between these two divergent visions of posthumanism and applying this knowledge to the way the novels to be analyzed portray

the relationship between technology and society, the relationship between posthumanist theory and utopia becomes both clearer and more productive. That is, seeing posthumanist theory and utopia as intertwined in similar functions as both elements of literature and socio-cultural change will ultimately be beneficial in allowing us to refine our understanding of both of these subjects.

1.2.2 *What is Utopia*

In 1516, Sir Thomas More published *Utopia* and effectively muddled the waters of the human concept of “perfection.” That is, the publishing of More’s work is the general marker for the beginning of the utopia conversation, a conversation that has not only set the stage for more than a few centuries of confusion over what constitutes utopia but has, in that process, developed into an academic subject that accompanied, and contributed to, major social reform in the United States (and beyond). In this way, it is almost customary that any essay, thesis, or book that concerns utopia in some form begin by traversing some of the already laid paths that attempt to describe utopia as both a term and a concept. In other words, I follow Kenneth Roemer’s advice, who has contributed much in the way of clearing and/or muddying those utopian paths, and agree that “Defining utopia is in itself a utopian venture [...]” and that “Before sending your readers on their journey, it’s only fair to give them some idea of where they are headed and to warn them about the terrain” (*America* 1, 2). Thus, in the same way that we asked, what is posthumanism, we inevitably turn to utopian studies with the same dilemma: what is utopia?

Beginning its life as a lexical neologism created by More to, in Fatima Vieira’s words, “baptize the island described in his book” (3), the word *utopia* is literally the combination of the Greek “*ouk* (that means not and was reduced to *u*) and *topos* (place)” with the added “suffix *ia*” to indicate a place, which etymologically means “a place which

is a non-place, simultaneously constituted by a movement of affirmation and denial” (Vieira 4). Of course, a simple etymology of *utopia* as a lexical neologism invented to name an imaginary island and title a book could never clear the paths that have been obscured over more than a few centuries’ worth of confusion. Specifically, as Vieira points out in her overview of the concept of utopia, the onset of the confusion begins with the fact that the first edition of More’s *Utopia* included a poem in which Utopia’s (the island) main characteristics are described in the stanzas. As summarized here from Vieira’s overview, Utopia is “(1) [...] isolated, set apart from the known world; (2) it rivals Plato’s city, and believes itself to be superior to it, since that which in Plato’s city is only sketched, in Utopia is presented as having been achieved; (3) its inhabitants and its laws are so wonderful that it should be called Eutopia (the good place) instead of Utopia” (5). Thus, from utopia (no place) More derives eutopia (good place), a city that “rivals” Plato’s Republic in its curious status of “achieved” as opposed to merely “sketched,” which ultimately creates the paradoxical dual meaning of a place that is “simultaneously a non-place (utopia) and a good place (eutopia)” (Vieira 5).

Thus, this curious wording and description by More has compounded the confusion and ambiguity in terms of defining utopia as both a term and a concept, leaving us in a difficult position: Does More’s Utopia represent the unachievable ideal of a no-place, a type of commentary on the fundamentally flawed nature of humanity, or is Utopia the good place and More’s detailed description of it a means of conveying the idea that it is an achievable society? Though these questions have remained virtually unanswered in a definitive way, this intentional ambiguity opened up a conversation and paved the way for More’s nomination as “the founding father of the utopia genre” as well as “the field of utopian studies” (Levitas 1-4). Moreover, many scholars in the field of utopian studies have attempted to ground the concept of utopia in a neat and tidy taxonomy in

order to give a working definition for the rest of the field. Specifically, these definitional explorations often attempt to define utopia in terms of form, function, content, or a combination of all three (Levitas 207). Though we can certainly dispute the degree of “neatness” of these attempts to definitively define utopia, we can readily admit that these more rigid attempts to classify utopia have at least led to some useful and agreeable terminology. Lyman Tower Sargent’s “The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited,” might be considered the gold standard in terms of attempts at a classification/taxonomy of utopia (Wegner 79), and it is a good starting place in terms of nailing down the terminology that is used in Utopian Studies as well as this thesis.

1.2.2.1 Traditional Definitions and Terminology

Though Sargent agrees with the sentiment that utopia seems to elude being definitively defined, he succeeds in breaking down utopia into three different types of expressions: literature, intentional communities, and social theory (4). Sargent’s dissection of the literary utopia is probably the most relevant part of his work, not only to this thesis but to research into the utopian genre in general, due to the key terms and categories it provides: *Utopianism* as “social dreaming”; *Utopia* as the “non-existent society” that fits the generic, blue-print form of utopian literature; *Eutopia*, the good place; *Dystopia*, the bad place; *Utopian satire* as “a criticism of [...] contemporary society”; *Anti-utopia* as “a criticism of utopianism”; and *Critical utopia*, a narrative that functions to invite a critique of the utopian genre itself by depicting a society that is “better than contemporary society but with difficult problems” (9).

I think it is important to note that Sargent’s “Three Faces of Utopianism” is largely the end result of a “roundtable session” that was actually “devoted to a draft” of the “The Three Faces” at a 1993 “Conference of the Society for Utopian Studies” (Baccolini and Moylan 3). In other words, this is a good list of terminology that will, at least, serve to

alleviate any confusion in terms of speaking about works of literature that we consider in this thesis. To that end, we can also add to this terminology a rough description of the typical form for utopian literature that has been one of the many ways that the utopian genre has been defined (in addition to function and content). Additionally, I use the following form to initially situate Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, which is also a reference point when reviewing how both *Oryx and Crake* and *A Door Into Ocean* differ in terms of their classification in the utopian genre.

Though descriptions and definitions in terms of form abound in utopian studies, I rather prefer the way Roemer defines the literary utopian form in his most recent book, *Utopian Audiences*. His "working definition" of a literary utopia is that of a

a fairly detailed narrative description of an imaginary culture—a fiction that invites readers to experience vicariously an alternative reality that critiques theirs by opening cognitive and affective spaces that encourage readers to perceive the realities and potentialities of their culture in new ways. If the author or reader perceive the alternative imaginary culture as being significantly better than the 'present,' then the work is a eutopia or, in the more popular usage, a utopia; if significantly worse, it is a dystopia. (20)

Roemer's definition is fairly productive because it not only covers the most important themes of what we consider a traditional view of the utopian literature form, but it emphasizes the notion that utopian literature relies on a sense of estranging readers from their own worlds in order to envision different worlds. Specifically, the typical utopian literature form relies on a traveler surrogate for the audience to experience these new worlds: a traveler to an imaginary society whose main function is to take note of the differences between the imagined society and what is generally the author's real society; if the society depicted is better it is considered a eutopia; and if the society is considerably worse it is considered a dystopia.

However, I also like Roemer's insistence in his introduction to *America as Utopia* that "utopian literature suggests a family of literatures" in which "The traditional head of

the clan is the utopia, and the best-known relative—especially during the twentieth century—is the dystopia” (3-4). This is an important characterization because it tends to connect utopia to dystopia, meaning that even though dystopias portray bad places they still serve a utopian function. Moreover, Roemer’s reference to dystopias as a mostly a twentieth century form is an important characterization that marks a change in form. That is, as Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini explain, works before the twentieth century typically follow the visitor guide model of a “eutopian narrative with a visitor’s guided journey through a utopian society which leads to a comparative response that indicts the visitor’s own society [...]” (5), with the inevitable turn toward the “dark side of Utopia,” or “dystopian accounts of places worse than the ones we live in [...]” (1), coming mainly after the turn of the century and not adhering to this “typical” utopian form. This is something that will be much more relevant in our discussion of the contemporary works.

Not that it changes my reliance on the terminology covered by Sargent nor my goal of situating the three works to be covered in this thesis in the utopian genre by way of these traditional definitions of form, function, and content, but there are, however, some rather important things to consider in terms of this “typical” utopian form that tend to put the question of what is utopia up for grabs. The first point of emphasis comes from Sargent’s explanation in the “Three Faces” for his exclusion of the word “perfect” in his taxonomy and list of terminology. Citing that equating utopia with the ideal and/or perfection not only opens utopia up for political attack (9), Sargent insists that equating utopia with the ideal is a blatant misuse and misunderstanding of More’s Utopia, writing that “People do not ‘live happily ever after’ even in More’s Utopia. I [Sargent] demonstrated in an article in 1975 that perfection has never been a characteristic of utopian fiction [...]” (6). He also makes an important point that socio-cultural shifts in

reality necessarily mean that the perceptions of utopia, as presented in literature, shift as well.

For example, he writes that “most sixteenth-century eutopias horrify today’s reader even though the authors’ intentions are clear. On the other hand, most twentieth-century eutopias would be considered dystopias by a sixteenth-century reader and many of them would in all likelihood be burnt as works of the devil” (5). In other words, these exclusions and points of emphasis from Sargent alone open up utopia, blurring its borders in a way that suggests that utopia is far too complex to be completely relegated to terminology, taxonomies, and rigid classification schemes that rely only on form. And though it is Sargent’s own explanations of these aspects that tend to lead us to the conclusion that rigid classification and definitions in terms of utopia can be troubling, it is important to note that Sargent insists on maintaining a sense of boundaries in terms of genre, writing that “without boundaries, we do not have a subject” (12). Though part of this thesis involves mapping the evolution of the utopian literary form, it is not in the purview of this study to attempt to overturn Sargent’s notion of boundaries. Moreover, the boundary conversation is ongoing and well documented by scholars such as Ruth Levitas.

Specifically, Levitas argues that “definitions in terms of content or form or function” alone are ultimately “undesirable” in that they are too narrow to “incorporate a wide range of forms, functions and contents,” meaning that “a broad definition is essential” (207). Moreover, she argues that a broad definition “will necessarily leave the boundaries of utopia vague but while this may be problematic, it is greatly less so than the problems which arise from more restrictive definitions” (207). This idea of vague boundaries lies at the heart of Levitas’s attempt to define utopia as “the desire for a better

way of being,” which is ultimately an attempt to free the utopian genre from the restraints of form, function, and content (9). She writes that

Utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of being. This includes both the objective, institutional approach to utopia, and the subjective, experiential concern of disalienation. It allows for this desire to be realistic or unrealistic. It allows for the form, function and content to change over time. And it reminds us that, whatever we think of particular utopias, we learn a lot about the experience of living under any set of conditions by reflecting upon the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled. For that is the space which utopia occupies. (xxvi)

Levitas’s definition is a more popular contemporary view of utopia because it provides both stability and flexibility to the concept of utopia. That is, there is a common denominator for utopia in the form of desire, which can ground the concept, yet less rigidity in terms of form, content, or function—it is both stable and flexible.

Though Sargent insists on keeping boundaries for the sake of the genre, it is conceivable that it is not the actual form, function, or content that is being questioned but rather the rigidity by which they are used to definitively define a work as utopian. That is, both Sargent and Levitas contribute to the notion that definitiveness in terms of definitions lead to more problems than solutions, which necessarily pushes us towards a much blurrier concept of utopia. That is, much of the confusion in terms of the utopia conversation comes in the form of discriminating between utopia in terms of these classifications and terminology and utopia as, in Vieira’s words, an “attitude,” or a “kind of reaction to an undesirable present and an aspiration to overcome all difficulties by the imagination of possible alternatives” (7). This attitude, if you will, is a distinction between terminology and the broader idea of utopianism, or Sargent’s notion social dreaming, which is arguably a concept that pre-dates More’s *Utopia*.

1.2.2.2 Utopianism and Social Change

Sargent defines the “broad, general phenomenon of utopianism as social dreaming,” or “the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreams live. But not all are radical, for some people at any time dream of something basically familiar” (3). Moreover, Sargent identifies Ruth Levitas’s definition of utopia as desire as being “similar to what [he] calls utopianism” (3). However, though Sargent also makes it clear that Levitas would disagree that utopianism “is a universal human phenomenon,” it is rather clear that defining utopia as either desire or as social dreaming equally avoids trapping utopia within the rigid borders of form, function, or content. Moreover, we can make the argument that utopia as utopianism or social dreaming has a historical precedence.

Specifically, Vieira explains that More’s original name for his imaginary island was Nusquam, which “is the Latin word for ‘nowhere’, ‘in no place’, [and/or] ‘on no occasion’” (4). However, More’s use of utopia supports the notion that his intention was to connote a “new idea,” an idea that was born out of the enlightenment of the Renaissance and based on a “humanist logic” that nurtured a sense of “confidence” in the human ability to “use reason in order to build the future” as opposed to simply “accept[ing] his or her fate” (4). As Vieira points out, this backdrop was the inspiration for More’s *Utopia*:

More wrote his *Utopia* inspired by the letters in which Amerigo Vespucci, Christopher Columbus and Angelo Poliziano described the discovery of new worlds and new peoples; geographical expansion inevitably implied the discovery of the *Other*. And More used the emerging awareness of otherness to legitimize the invention of other spaces, with other people and different forms of organization. (4 emphasis in original)

When looked at in this context, it is fairly clear that More’s utopia and eutopia were based on an older and more fundamental notion that, until More, simply had no name. That is,

the term utopia is so useful that it has been retroactively applied to older traditions and “religious archetypes” based on the identification of this notion of utopianism, or an “aspiration to a better life” (Vieira 5-6). That in a religious context this better, or ideal, life is often in the afterlife, and thus rather unreachable in a material and practical sense, is of no consequence—utopia was a neologism that was created to name a much older idea in the form of utopianism. Moreover, the added context of More’s backdrop adds an important socio-cultural element to utopianism.

In an overview of the evolution of the literary utopia within his book, *Demand the Impossible*, Moylan echoes Vieira’s notions that More was writing on the backdrop of a changing paradigm but adds to this notion of an expanding geography, hope, and awareness, an equally productive notion that the literary utopia not only “developed as a narrative form in times of deep change” but actually “continued to thrive in tumultuous moments since the sixteenth century” (3). Though Moylan is careful not to broad brush with this categorization, alluding to the obvious observation that “not all utopias are written only in times of crisis,” he makes it fairly clear that “the form itself is suited to the sort of discourse which considers both what is and what is not yet achieved” (3). Thus, the literary utopia from More to 1850 functioned at its best in times of social change, serving as a testing ground for those sought after changes (Moylan 3-5), and the utopia as a medium to imagine social change remained intact throughout the nineteenth century. However, as we will see with Bellamy, the major change in the literary utopia became in how readers located utopia and how that utopia reimagined the world as it was structured.

As Moylan points out, utopias after 1850 relied on a sense of subversion in that they rejected the structures already in place in the world in favor of a “heuristic utopia” that looked to “subvert or at least reform the modern economic and political arrangement

from within” (6). Additionally, an ever expanding dominant class that was continually expanding geographically through land acquisition put even more pressure on the literary utopia to reimagine how readers could begin to locate utopia. That is, whereas More situated Utopia in an imaginary geographic space, literary utopias after 1850 began to relocate utopia in a different time as a response to the wealthier, dominant class’s land-grab and as a way to reflect utopia as heuristic. The result of these changes in how readers of the nineteenth century located utopia was twofold. First, utopia could no longer be found in the physical world as it existed—it had to be changed, and that process had to be shown through the literary utopia. More importantly, the literary utopia’s shift to, in Moylan’s words, “everyday values and to consideration of the revolutionary process” necessarily meant that “utopia was at its most subversive at the turn of the century” (7). Though this temporal displacement was not unique to the late nineteenth century—Roemer notes that time displacement novels trace back to at least 1771 in “Louis Sebastien Mercier’s *L’an deux mille quatre cent quarante*” and possibly even as far back as “Jacques Guttin’s *Epigone*” from 1659 (*Utopian Audiences* 26)—the literary utopian genre saw an explosion in popularity in terms of both “the number and influence of utopian novels” produced during this time-period as “a variety of social movements were forging a common opposition to the fast developing power of industrial capitalism and imperialism” (7).

Thus, when put into the context of this backdrop, we see a strong justification for a more focused study of the utopian novel in terms of its role during times of social change, which is an important part of how I analyze these novels and how I pair them with posthumanist theory. Specifically, I do not question the categorization of utopian novels in terms of form, function, and content, but rather the rigidity by which these categories are used to definitively define a work as utopian. Though one of the major

points of emphasis that I make within this thesis is how each of these novels to be analyzed fits within a particular categorization as defined by Sargent and other utopian scholars, I do not want to imply that these categories should be the only criteria by which a work is classified as utopian.

The major point of emphasis that I want to draw out of this historical overview of utopia, and the subsequent analysis of these novels as utopian works, is that I believe that the basic set of terminology and categories, the “broader phenomenon” of utopianism, and the context of social change is perfectly suited to situate *Looking Backward*, *Oryx and Crake*, and *A Door Into Ocean* into the utopian conversation. Moreover, my analysis is focused on the potential of posthumanist thought as it relates to utopia as a method of opposition to dominant hegemony, and my situating each work into a particular category or point of transformation within the utopian genre is directly related to how utopia fosters that posthumanist potential in terms of each novel’s ability, based on its categorization, to portray a commentary on the relationship between humanity, technology, and the environment. That is, I want to draw out how each novel deals with the precarious nature of the relationship between humanity and technology, and I want to connect that portrayal to how each novel represents a change in the utopian literary form.

1.3 Justifications

An important question might initially be why pair posthumanist theory and utopia with a focus on technology. In truth, this pairing might be the easiest part of this thesis to justify when viewed in the context of the very similar backgrounds of the two subjects. That is, as this thesis shows, these two subjects share common ground in their roles in socio-cultural change and reform, and this fact alone suggests the need for an in-depth analysis of the possible relationship between the two in these roles. However, perhaps more importantly, these are two subjects that have spurred conversation and

disagreement in both academia and popular culture, giving rise to conflicting and contradictory perceptions alike. In other words, these are two important subjects that need clarification, and I think treating them in an interrelated manner allows for a more productive analysis that will result in a more refined understanding of both. This is in the true spirit of how we treat posthumanism in this thesis—we set these two subjects up side-by-side, allow their borders to blur, and allow this more interrelated relationship to bear out productive results.

Further, the importance of my inclusion of posthumanism, utopia, and technology lies in the parallel transformations that this focus on the portrayal of technology brings out. In one sense, this gradually shifting portrayal of technology is bound up with transformations in the form, function, and content of utopian literature—notably how what we consider to be contemporary utopian/dystopian works are more along the lines of science and speculative fiction, functioning as cautionary tales as opposed to blueprints for creating utopian societies (Wegner 88). Additionally, these transformations in the portrayal of technology and utopian literature take place during major socio-political transformations in the United States. Specifically, the civil rights and post-structural movements of the latter twentieth century emphasize the collapsing of dualisms and hierarchies attributed to a traditional humanist world-view, invigorating a growing anti-humanist sentiment and moving us into a more posthuman age (Braidotti 15-16). This combination of technology, posthumanism, and utopia allows us to answer important questions: How and/or why does the portrayal of technology change from utopian to dystopian; in what way is this transformation related to the shift in what we consider to be the function of the utopian/dystopian novel; and how is this related to posthumanism?

Perhaps the most obvious question in terms of this thesis, notably a thesis that takes a posthumanist lens, is why the late nineteenth century and why *Looking*

Backward. As we have already seen through the historical trip through utopia, the late nineteenth century was a significantly ripe time-period in terms of producing all of the elements that allow utopias to flourish. As Roemer points out, “If the nineteenth century was not *the* Golden Age of utopianism, it was certainly a golden age” in that “All three major ‘faces’” of Sargent’s classification and taxonomy “flourished” (“Paradise Transformed” 79 emphasis in original). Moreover, Roemer points out that this particular time-period is significant in terms of “American culture” in that connecting utopian writing to the time-period might provide a useful tool in terms of determining the cultural milieu. In terms of the nineteenth century, he writes that “Most of the authors came from an important socio-economic group—the middle and upper middle classes. Hence their utopias may reflect how this group reacted to the rapidly changing world of late nineteenth-century America [...]” (*Obsolete Necessity* xii). In other words, not only is the late nineteenth century too important to ignore in a study on utopia, but the inclusion of Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* along with analysis from scholars like Roemer provides a good analog to my efforts in terms of analyzing the interconnection among utopia, posthumanism, technology, and social change.

Justifying Bellamy’s work by itself is also rather easy: it was an immensely popular book, outselling every other “American novel published in the nineteenth century” outside of the equally popular (and important) *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Auerbach 24), and it was a catalyst for a significant amount of social reform activism. As noted by Roemer, *Looking Backward* alone was responsible for the development of “several reform journals and numerous book-length fictional responses,” gained support from notable “Literary, social, labour and reform leaders as different as William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Upton Sinclair, Samuel Gompers, Eugene Debs, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Elizabeth Cady Stanton,” and influenced “at least 165 Nationalist or Bellamy Clubs” in the United

States, which eventually “grew into the Nationalist Part that influenced the national Populist Party” (“Paradise Transformed” 93). However, perhaps another question worth asking is why Bellamy’s work has remained so popular, being noted by Howard P. Segal as “the most popular utopian novel ever published in the United States” (20).

As Segal has argued in numerous essays and especially in his book, *Technological Utopianism in America*, and as I argue in this work, *Looking Backward’s* appeal and popularity lies not only in its perpetuation of the belief in a naturally progressive evolution of society but in its combination of this evolution with technological progress. That Bellamy’s work ties technological progress to his utopia (Segal 20-21) is not entirely unique in that Segal himself has documented what he terms the “technological utopians,” a set of twenty-five authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who “equated advancing technology with utopia itself” (1) and “believed that advancing technology would be the key to turning the impossible into the possible and even the probable” (2). Again linking the popularity of *Looking Backward* and other American utopian writing to the time-period, Segal emphasizes Bellamy’s success and popularity as related to his making technological progress the “panacea” of his utopia (20). Thus, Bellamy’s portrayal of technology in terms of utopia, specifically a utopian hope, will provide an important comparison to the much darker and complex visions that Atwood has in terms of technology, which is a partial start to my reasoning for including both *Oryx and Crake* and *A Door Into Ocean*.

In terms of posthumanism and technology, neither *Oryx and Crake* or *A Door Into Ocean* need much in the way of justification: there are clear posthumanist underpinnings in both works, and each makes technology an intimate part of the portrayed societies. My main justification for *Oryx and Crake* in terms of using it in a thesis on utopia lies in its categorization as a critical dystopia, a recent categorization added to the utopian genre

(and to be explained with *Oryx and Crake*) that emphasizes genre blending and complex mixtures of both utopian and dystopian elements. Thus, this complex mixture of elements provides a rich analysis in terms of the relationship between humanity, technology, and the environment as a whole. Moreover, I include *Oryx and Crake* in this analysis because Atwood's complex, and dystopian-leaning portrayal of technology is in stark contrast to Bellamy's simpler, purely utopian portrayal of technology, which will provide a thought provoking analysis in terms of addressing these relationships between utopia, posthumanism, technology, and social change.

If Bellamy and Atwood lie at opposite ends of the spectrum, then Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* might be more of a compromise in that it builds on both the strengths and weaknesses of each other novel by utilizing both utopian and critical utopian elements (another transformation with the genre) in order to portray a eutopian, posthumanist society. However, my inclusion of Slonczewski's work stems more from the portrayal of technology in terms of both utopia and posthumanism. Like *Oryx and Crake*, *A Door Into Ocean* portrays the complex relationship between technology, humanity, and the environment as grounded, material, and intimately related. However, where *Oryx and Crake*'s complex utopia/dystopian elements do not provide clear lines of distinction, *A Door Into Ocean* represents a clearly eutopian, technologically advanced society, which is more in the vein of *Looking Backward*. However, unlike *Looking Backward*, this technology is thoroughly grounded in a material posthumanist world-view that is extended beyond human society only, which necessarily avoids the pitfalls of reinscribing the liberal humanist subject (a death-knell for posthumanist theories that allow technology to become a "trans-humanist escape," in Braidotti's words). Taken as a whole, *A Door Into Ocean* is a unique combination of utopian hope, posthumanism, and technological utopianism that can serve as an example of a posthumanist eutopia.

Chapter 2

Looking Backward to Move Forward: Bellamy's Utopian Hope

"Looking Backward was written in the belief that the Golden Age lies before us and not behind us, and is not far away"

Edward Bellamy, Postscript, *Looking Backward*

Being almost entirely a response as provoked from a review of *Looking Backward* in which the suggestion is made that "[Bellamy] has made an absurd mistake" by placing his "ideal social state a scant fifty years ahead" when "seventy-five centuries" would have been more realistic (Bellamy 195), Bellamy's postscript response is nothing short of revealing in that it reaffirms his belief that society was on the cusp—or likely in the midst—of social change and exposes the foundational notion upon which the book is based:

Looking Backward [...] is intended [...] as a forecast, in accordance with the principles of evolution, of the next stage in the industrial and social development of humanity, especially in this country [US]; and no part of it is believed by the author to be better supported by the indications of probability than the implied prediction that the dawn of the new era is already near at hand, and that the full day will swiftly follow. (195)

Though this vision of the future was neither unique to Bellamy nor a consensus of the time period, Bellamy's response underlines a particularly hopeful perception of the late nineteenth century, a perception that had begun with both the American and French revolutions—two revolts that, in Kenneth Roemer's words, "proclaimed a concept of utopia that celebrated democracy and equality and maintained that the pursuit of a better life was the natural goal of human history" (81)—and gained traction with the industrial

revolution. In other words, Bellamy's underlying principle for a utopian future lied mainly in the idea that the evolution of human history is *naturally* progressive and democratic, and the scientific and technological progress of the industrial revolution had the potential to be utopian (Roemer, "Paradise Transformed" 82). It is this "potential" that we focus on for this chapter, following Bellamy's logic as it is laid out in his seminal work, *Looking Backward*.

For the first section of this chapter, I take a more typical approach in terms of analysis by situating *Looking Backward* into the utopian genre, focusing on Bellamy's use of temporal displacement as a means to both create a utopian society as well as critique the late nineteenth century. Specifically, one of the key elements that I focus on in this first section lies in how Bellamy's use of temporal displacement not only impacted the utopian genre, emphasizing utopia as temporally dislocated as opposed to geographically dislocated, but how it created a new way for readers to imagine a better society. Though we can typically view *Looking Backward* as a more traditional utopia in the sense that it follows the basic traveler story and imagines a eutopian society, this emphasis on *Looking Backward* as a social commentary on the late nineteenth century sets the stage for understanding utopia as a means of subversion to dominant hegemony. Not only does this unite all three of the novels that we analyze in this thesis in utopia as opposition, but this plays an important part in why *Looking Backward's* use of temporal displacement, though not unique at the time of its writing, created such an impact in the genre.

The second section focuses on technological utopianism as it is defined by Howard P. Segal, making the case that not only was *Looking Backward's* panacea technology but the entire foundation of Bellamy's utopian relies on technology as an abstract "force," working in the background as a utopian force of natural progress. The

most important element that I draw on in this section is how this abstraction of technology tends to be symbolic of how Bellamy's views the relationship between humanity, technology, and social reform. Moreover, this tendency of Bellamy to abstract these relationships tends to shape how we approach *Looking Backward* in terms of posthumanism. That is, the last section of this chapter focuses on uncovering a burgeoning posthumanist commentary with both Bellamy's text and the philosophy upon which it is built. That is, though *Looking Backward* is overtly humanist in the sense that it is absolutely human centered and exudes a sense of human agency, the last section of this chapter takes a look at key parts of the book with a posthumanist lens with the intention of finding some semblance of a posthuman undertone that could solidify a connection between social reform, utopia, and a burgeoning posthumanism. Because we have to consider these posthumanist undertones in the context of Bellamy's abstracted view of the relationship between humanity, technology, and utopia, the case can be made that these posthumanist ideas are fermenting, making a slow and steady expansion as the literary utopia makes its way into the twentieth century.

2.1 Genre, Time-period, and Social Reform

To understand what is meant by the idea of a potential or utopian hope in terms of the foundational notion of *Looking Backward*, we have to acknowledge that the potential of the industrial revolution was, indeed, merely a potential rather than reality—it provided the means for a utopian hope as opposed to a utopian reality. For example, In his essay, "Paradise Transformed," Roemer writes that "The primary socio-economic evidence for the perception of progress was the industrial revolution. Finally it seemed as if the basic goals of traditional utopias could be met: science, technology, mass production and improved distribution systems ensured that all humanity could be fed, clothed, and sheltered" (82). However, the reality of the late nineteenth century United

States was much more dystopian than utopian in that the industrial revolution, along with advances in science, technology, and mass production, also produced abject income inequality and introduced the general public to the terrifyingly real possibilities of high-tech weaponry such as the Gatling gun. However, as Roemer points out, all of this turmoil combined to make for “fertile grounds for utopian theory and literature” in that “Few forms of writing depend so heavily upon stark contrasts between what is and what could/should be” (82). In other words, the case can be made that a late nineteenth century audience, having suffered through “the financial panic of 1873 and the depression of 1893” as well as “numerous strikes and labour disturbances” (Roemer 94), was ripe for a utopian blue-print such as *Looking Backward*, especially a blue-print that is almost inarguably as much a utopian vision of the future as it is a critique of the time-period in which it was written.

To this end, it is no wonder that *Looking Backward* tells the story of Julian West, a late nineteenth century aristocrat who, as a self-prescribed insomniac so desperate for a good night’s rest that he constructed a secret subterranean sleeping chamber, completely sealed off from his main house and encompassed in “hydraulic cement” and “stone slabs” that were “hermetically sealed” (14), is put to sleep by his “quack” (14) doctor in the year 1887 only to finally awake in the year 2000. The narrative itself is told from West’s perspective as a temporal transplant to the future, consisting of back and forth dialogue mostly between West and the Leete family, the year 2000 Boston citizens who awake him from his 113 year sleep. Following the characteristically literary utopian form, the twenty-first century utopian society is explained in great detail during these conversations between West and the Leetes (mainly that of Dr. Leete and his daughter, Edith Leete), which tend to function as a retrospective comparison of the late nineteenth century to the “present” twenty-first century that West finds himself in. In this way,

Bellamy's use of this temporal displacement represented a new way to both historicize the present (late nineteenth century) and locate utopia within the traditional literary utopian genre.

As Matthew Beaumont points out in his introduction to the Oxford World's Classics edition of *Looking Backward*, Bellamy's use of this type of temporal displacement contributed in reimagining the traditional idea of utopia as created by Sir Thomas Moore in that it took utopia from being located "in unmapped space" to being located in "unmapped time" (xvii). Though temporal displacement was not a new method in terms of the genre, Bellamy's work did much to "cement" the utopian tradition's "formal association with unmapped time" (xvii). Moreover, Tom Moylan points out that utopias after 1850 relied on a sense of subversion in that they rejected the structures already in place in the world in favor of a "heuristic utopia" that looked to "subvert or at least reform the modern economic and political arrangement from within" (*Demand* 6). Specifically, the "closing of the American frontier" and the ever increasing power and land consolidation among the "dominant classes" meant that "Utopia on one island would not work" (*Demand* 5, 6). The importance of this reimagining of utopia lies in the fact that the far-future Boston that West finds himself in represents, in Beaumont's words, the penetration of a "temporal frontier" in lieu of the conventional utopian notion of "some hitherto untouched geographical" space from which "to build a perfect community" (xviii). In other words Bellamy's method, though not new to the genre, responded to the time-period by giving readers a better way to imagine a new society, undermining the dominant hegemony of late nineteenth century's "land grab" by moving utopia to the future and historicizing the present in a way that afforded readers a fresh way to locate utopia as well as the ability to more easily and objectively critique late nineteenth century society.

For example, the opening of the novel actually begins with a preface by an unnamed author who, representing the “Historical Section Shawmut College” in “Boston” on “December 26, 2000,” opens by declaring that “Living as we do in the closing year of the twentieth century, enjoying the blessings of a social order at once so simple and logical that it seems but the triumph of common sense, it is no doubt difficult for those whose studies have not been largely historical to realize that the present organization of society is, in its completeness, less than a century old” (3). Clearly solidifying the book’s use of this overarching theme of temporal displacement, this type of opening obviously serves to, in Beaumont’s words, not only “historicize the present” but foreshadows the book as being able to “map the future” (xxiii). More importantly, in adopting this type of “historical perspective” *Looking Backward* accomplishes what Beaumont labels as its “greatest achievement” in successfully defamiliarizing the “late nineteenth-century present” to its audience (xxiv). Specifically, this idea of defamiliarization owes much to Darko Suvin’s notion of cognitive estrangement, or as Tom Moylan explains, “the mechanism of the utopian text whereby it focuses on the given situation but in a displaced manner to create a fresh view [...]” (33).

Specifically, Suvin’s cognitive estrangement can be achieved by spatial displacement as well as temporal displacement; however, estranging an audience from their own time-period creates a more productive opportunity for critiquing that time-period (i.e., the time-period from which the audience is estranged). That is, when put into the context of the rapidly diminishing open geographic space due to the dominant class’s “land grab” during the nineteenth century, not only is estranging the audience to an undiscovered geographic space less realistic for the audience, but the use of temporal displacement alludes to a notion of inevitable social change by representing the problems of late nineteenth century as being solved in this future utopian temporal space. In other

words, Bellamy's use of temporal displacement created a narrative space in which the problems of late nineteenth century could be acknowledged through the dialogues between our late nineteenth century "time-traveler" Julian West while the solutions to those problems were represented in the year 2000 Leete family.

For example, the first chapter mirrors the very real socio-economic concerns of the late nineteenth century as summarized from West's perspective, wherein he makes references to the deteriorating and dislocating "relation between the workingman and the employer" and "between labor and capital" which had necessarily led to "demands for higher pay, shorter hours, better dwellings, [and] better educational advantages" among the working class (10). However, to more effectively critique these socio-economic conditions of the late nineteenth century, not only can a late nineteenth century audience effectively enter the dialogue through the surrogate Julian West, but the audience can experience a blue-print for utopia through Dr. Leete's answers to very specific questions that reflect the real socio-economic concerns of the late nineteenth century. For example, West comments that the nineteenth century's system of wages and compensation—in which "The employer paid as little as he could, and the worker got as much" (53)—made sense in that it was a "rough and ready formula for settling a question which must be settled ten thousand times a day if the world was ever going to get forward" (53). In critique, Leete replies that "Yes [...] it was the only practicable way under a system which made the interests of every individual antagonistic to those of every other" (53). Dr. Leete further makes the point in the same paragraph that the wage compensation system of the nineteenth century was hierarchical and nonsensical in terms of giving worse wages to those who labored the most (53). In other words, this type of defamiliarization not only allows the audience to more freely imagine a better society but by keeping the audience in a real space and merely displacing them into the

future, Bellamy effectively creates a space to argue for social reform in the present-late nineteenth century. That is, Bellamy can build a blue-print utopia grounded in a defamiliarized present that serves as a map for the future.

However, that Bellamy's use of cognitive estrangement in the form of temporal displacement sought to effectively estrange a late nineteenth century audience to a different time period in order to defamiliarize the social milieu and provide a better environment from which to critique is a rather obvious observation that has been analyzed and echoed by analysts since the book's publishing. In fact, Jonathan Auerbach makes a rather poignant point about the nature of analysis of *Looking Backward*, writing that "most critics have either taken the text as straight social theory, analyzing Bellamy's plans for nationalizing all industry as a domesticated brand of socialism, or treated the novel in terms of its utopian literary genre, tracing literary predecessors, examining its techniques for defamiliarizing the reader, and so on" (25). Thus, we might take Auerbach's observation to heart and suggest that a more important observation lies in how Bellamy sought to achieve a utopia along the lines of Julian West's new-found home of the year 2000 Boston, since it is clear from the text that building a better world was clearly thought by Bellamy as being achievable, as he writes through our surrogate West that "As every schoolboy knows, in the latter part of the nineteenth century the civilization of to-day, or anything like it, did not exist, although the elements which were to develop it were already in ferment" (5).

In other words, West's mentioning of these fermenting utopian ideas echoes Bellamy's postscript sentiment that late nineteenth century society was in the midst of social change, and this social change was necessarily a natural progression that simply needed to be allowed to take place. Though Bellamy's "how" in terms of this social change is bound up with the utopian novel's evolution into a method of subversion as well

as its relocation of utopia from the spatial to the temporal, the mechanism by which the year 2000 Boston could become a utopian reality as opposed to a mere potential lies in Bellamy's treatment of technology and his identification by historian Howard P. Segal as a technological utopian. Moreover, this identification of Bellamy's eutopian vision as tied to technology as well as his views of human history as naturally progressive and democratic combine to provide a productive analysis of Bellamy's portrayal of the relationship between humanity, technology, and utopia.

2.2 Technology: An Abstract Guiding Force

Being an era of "mechanical invention, scientific discovery, art, musical and literary productiveness" that surpassed even the "medieval renaissance" (94), the twentieth century that began shortly after Julian West fell asleep and greets him as he awakes a century later is full of technology: music halls spread throughout the city, attached to each house's personal "music room" through a "telephone" system, producing "Such music, so perfectly rendered, I [West] had never expected to hear" at the mere touch of "one or two screws" (66); an economic system that has created universal equality has led to "better conditions of existence," meaning that "old age approaches many years later and has an aspect far more benign than in past times" (116); and an admittedly shocked time-traveler in Julian west who, after being given a panoramic view of the year 2000 city of Boston from Dr. Leete's rooftop, can only admit that "If you had told me [...] that a thousand years instead of a hundred had elapsed since I last looked on this city, I should now believe you" (23). In other words, Bellamy's year 2000 is built on a foundation of technological utopianism. Moreover, this foundation of technological utopianism serves as the mechanism for the natural evolution of society into Bellamy's eutopia.

In *Technological Utopianism in American Culture* (1985), Howard P. Segal defines the key term “technological utopianism” as “a mode of thought and activity that vaunts technology as the means of bringing about utopia” (10). Though Segal claims not to have invented the term itself—instead only commenting that “a number of briefer publications had used the term” and that “no previous book-length study in English” had been carried out since before the publication of his work—his definition will suffice in that, in his words, all other interpretations have been “identical” to his own (10). As pointed out earlier in this thesis, Segal’s work on technological utopianism revolves around his identification of twenty-five authors who, writing on the tail-end of the American industrial revolution, provided utopian blue-prints that relied on their sense of technological utopianism as not only imminent but likely the most “effective instrument of progress than the various panaceas proposed by other contemporary utopians” (21). Specifically, these authors, of whom Bellamy was by far the most popular, shared a vision of “confidence” in technology’s ability to “solve mankind’s major chronic problems, which they took to be material—scarcity, hunger, disease, war, and so forth. [...] The growth and expansion of technology would bring utopia; and utopia would be a completely technological society, one run by and, in a sense, for technology” (21). Thus, when we consider that Bellamy was by far one of the more popular technological utopians, according to Segal, we can make the case that Bellamy’s sense of the natural evolution of social progress is necessarily tied to this idea of technological utopianism.

Roemer echoes this idea in some respects in an entire chapter devoted to technology from his work, *The Obsolete Necessity*, in which he explains how utopian authors of the late nineteenth century envisioned technology. Specifically, the utopian hope attached to technology was that advanced machinery would create a social domino effect: more efficiency meant cheaper goods; cheaper goods meant more people could

afford luxuries generally only afforded to the wealthy aristocracy; and the overall result would be a reduced gap between the rich and the poor (111). Moreover, Roemer sets this as the basis for Bellamy's work in *Looking Backward*, writing that "Bellamy implied the same argument in *Looking Backward* when he described the marvelous system of mechanical umbrellas that covered all the sidewalks of Boston when it rained. Formerly, only the rich could afford umbrellas" (111-112). In other words, technology could serve as a way to flatten the social ontology of humanity and eliminate social stratification, a major element/concern that permeates *Looking Backward*. That is, much of the technology and technological industries that West experiences throughout the book are portrayed in this same ontologically flattening manner, supporting the notion that an increasingly efficient technology would lead to a decrease in the social stratification and inequality that plagued the late nineteenth century.

For example, one of the main social critiques of *Looking Backward* lies in Bellamy's focus on the abject inequality between the rich and poor of the late nineteenth century. The first chapter alone serves as a summary of late nineteenth century social stratification from the perspective of West, who describes his late nineteenth century self as being "Rich and also educated" and admits that he "possessed [...] all the elements of happiness enjoyed by the most fortunate in that age" (5). With the fortunate, of course, being the upper class of the late nineteenth century, West's major indictment of social stratification lies in his identification of the "immemorial division" of late nineteenth century "society into four classes," mainly that of "the rich and the poor" and the "educated and ignorant," which, in West's words, exhibited "far greater differences than those between any nations" when compared to the eutopian world of the year 2000 (5). Thus, one of the great hurdles for technology to have cleared between the late nineteenth century and the year 2000 would be to eliminate social inequality in the form of access by virtue of

privilege and/or monetary position. Though Bellamy glosses over education quite quickly in *Looking Backward*, access to goods by way of a technologically advanced distribution system is one of the highlights of Julian West's year 2000 experiences.

With pneumatic "transmitting tubes" for distributing goods from the warehouses, "credit cards" that are punched by the clerks as a method of payment, and a distribution process that is, in Edith Leete's words, "certainly perfect" (63), Julian West's trip to the shopping center with Edith is highly emblematic of the type of technological utopianism that underlies Bellamy's year 2000 Boston. In fact, West's description of the shopping center in the Leetes' ward, one of many which are arranged "in each ward of the city" so "that no residence was more than five or ten minutes' walk from one of them" (60), is noteworthy for both its inclusions and exclusions. For example, goods are not displayed nor "any device to advertise wares, or attract custom," and there is no "sort of sign or legend on the front of the building to indicate the character of the business carried on there" (60). In place of the nineteenth century-esque marketing and advertising is instead "a majestic life-size group of statuary, the central figure of which was a female ideal of Plenty, with her cornucopia" (60). Moreover, West's description of "the first interior of a twentieth-century public building" that he "had ever beheld" is also noteworthy for its technological overtones: West describes a "vast hall full of light, received not alone from the windows on all sides, but from the dome, the point of which was a hundred feet above"; beneath the dome, "in the centre of the hall, a magnificent fountain played, cooling the atmosphere to a delicious freshness with its spray"; a myriad of "chairs and sofas" spread around the fountain, "on which many persons were seated conversing"; and "Legends on the walls all about the hall indicated to what classes of commodities the counters below were devoted" (60).

Two things from West's visit to the "shopping" center tend to stand out. First, the exclusion of advertising and traditional nineteenth century "clerks" speaks to Bellamy's broader vision of a much different economic system in terms of capital and production. As Edith explains, as opposed to how the late nineteenth century's clerks' and store owners' very "livelihood" depended on a certain amount of coercion of their customers, in utopian Boston "The goods are the nation's. They are here for those who want them, and it is the business of the clerks to wait on people and take their orders" (61). Second, as the great goddess of Plenty and her cornucopia symbolize (and by virtue of Dr. Leete's shocking revelation that all wages are equal for every citizen), a correction in the system of production and economy would create an abundance for all, effectively equalizing all citizens in terms of their "purchasing" power. Even when West assumes that perhaps the selection differs among wards, Edith assures him that even though they can "buy where [they] please" they would "gain nothing by visiting other stores" as the "assortment in all is exactly the same," and even the rural areas operate the same way in that all of the distribution centers are "connected by transmitters with the central county warehouse" (62-63). Thus, with technology comes not only equal purchasing power but also equal access.

Though this type of technological utopianism is an integral part of *Looking Backward* in that these very obvious examples of material and in some cases prophetic technology (see: credit cards) physically show the utopian nature of technological gadgetry and invention, technology's existence in Bellamy's year 2000 Boston is not so much an overt display in terms of material use as it is almost a given. That is, technology in *Looking Backward* is necessarily bound up with Bellamy's confidence in the natural evolution of society in that it operates in the background as an abstract "force," driving society toward utopia. This cannot be any more evident than in Dr. Leete's reply to Julian

West's inquiry as to how the "labor question" that had plagued the late nineteenth century US was eventually solved. "The solution," as Leete explains, "came as the result of a process of industrial evolution which could not have terminated otherwise. All that society had to do was to recognize and cooperate with that evolution, when its tendency had become unmistakable" (29). In other words, not only does Bellamy's underlying principle for a eutopian future rest with the idea that the evolution of human history is *naturally* progressive and democratic, but the overall foundation is built on the *naturally* progressive and utopian nature of technology as a guiding force. Thus, when we combine this foundational notion of a naturally progressive human history with a naturally progressive sense of technological development—a notion of technology as *intrinsically* good—we can begin to see how Bellamy's eutopia tends to rest on a more abstract relationship between humanity, technology, and utopia.

For example, upon his second attempt to wake from his century long sleep and determine his whereabouts—his first attempt is mostly inconsequential in that he was only awake long enough to "drink some broth" at Dr. Leete's "suggestion" and drift back to sleep for half a day (16-19)—Julian West's initial reaction is, understandably, one of shock, near anger, and disbelief. Thus, Dr. Leete's only choice is to allow West to see the year 2000 for himself, taking West up "two flights of stairs" and onto "a belvedere on the house-top," asking him to "tell [him] if this is the Boston of the nineteenth century" (22), and giving us one of the more often quoted and important passages in the book:

At my feet lay a great city. Miles of broad streets, shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings, for the most part not in continuous blocks but set in larger or smaller inclosures, stretched in every direction. Every quarter contained large open squares filled with trees, among which statues glistened and fountains flashed in the late afternoon sun. Public buildings of a colossal size and an architectural grandeur unparalleled in my day raised their stately piles on every side. Sure I had never seen this city nor one comparable to it before. Raising my eyes at last towards the horizon, I looked westward. That blue ribbon winding away to the sunset, was it not the sinuous Charles? I looked east; Boston

harbor stretched before me within its headlands, not one of its green islets missing. (22)

When taken with Dr. Leete's own suggestion that humanity simply had to "recognize" and "cooperate" with what was simply a natural evolution of industry and technology, this abstracted rooftop view certainly represents Bellamy's sense of technological utopianism as bound to his sense of utopia as the inevitable end-result of technological development. That is, West's obvious awe of this future utopian Boston, an awe that leads him to believe that he "had never seen this city nor one comparable to it before" (22), certainly suggests that this progressive technological development would instill a sense of great change, but his simultaneous recognition of the Boston of old—"Boston harbor stretched before me within its headlands, not one of its green islets missing" (22)—suggests an equal sense of utopia as an inevitability that is driven by a progressive and intrinsically good technology.

However, labeling West's rooftop scene as nothing less than a "spiritual revelation" (xx), it is also hard to disagree with Beaumont when he describes how the utopian Boston "appears to be absolutely empty," that "The absence of people signals the absence of social contradiction," and "Indeed its status as a utopia seems to be premised on its impeccable abstraction" (xxi). Moreover, it is a far cry from the late nineteenth century Boston as experienced by West at the end of the book, a dream that transports him from the relatively abstract view of utopia back to the relatively material world of late nineteenth century Boston, where West spends a day wandering the streets and experiencing the "squalor and malodorousness of the town" and the "glaring disparities in the dress and condition" of the citizens (182). Thus, Bellamy's two "views" of two different time periods—his "privileged," (Beaumont xxi) utopian view of the year 2000 Boston and his dystopian view of the late nineteenth century—translate into a surprisingly productive binary that tends to suggest a possible flaw in Bellamy's treatment of the

relationship between humanity, utopia, and technology. That is, we can make the case that Bellamy's view of technology as an intrinsically good driving force may prove to be rather naïve in both the context of the rest of this thesis as well as other utopists of the time-period.

As Roemer explains, there are hints that not all utopian authors writing in a similar time-period saw technology as intrinsically good (113). More specifically, Roemer gives examples of utopian works such as such as Will N. Harben's *The Land of the Changing Sun* that certainly entangled technology and the social realm in a similar fashion as Bellamy, but by focusing on the negative effects of technology through human use these works show technology as neither intrinsically good nor bad rather how technology can have "bad effects when controlled by the wrong people in the wrong economic and moral environment" (Roemer 116). In other words, technology may not be *intrinsically* good nor *intrinsically* bad, but the case can be made that it is *intrinsically* tied to the social, material world and, thus, *intrinsically* tied to utopian and dystopian visions. Moreover, we can make the case that one of the more obvious critiques of *Looking Backward* is Bellamy's more abstract treatment of this relationship between humanity and technology, that this inability to ground technology in a material reality is not only one of the major roadblocks in our mission to find a posthumanist undertone within this work but that this abstraction is an overall hindrance to the utopian genre that will be exposed as we make the dystopian turn.

2.3 A Burgeoning Posthumanism

As laid out in the argumentation of this thesis, posthumanist theory as a post-anthropocentric movement necessarily has its roots in anti-humanism, and that *Looking Backward* is practically universally human-centered, relying on a sense of human agency to build a human-centered utopia, it might seem rather bizarre and possibly even futile to

apply a posthumanist lens to Bellamy's late nineteenth century work. However, as *Looking Backward* takes up a cause of social reform in the vein of eliminating social inequality, Bellamy's year 2000 Boston, though again significantly human centered, espouses a line of reasoning that is essentially anti-humanist in the sense that it calls into question some of the basic principles of the possessive individualism on which a humanist philosophy is based. Or, in Jonathan Auerbach's words, Bellamy's work "signals a breakdown in the politics of possessive individualism" and seeks out "fundamental reformulation" of what it means to be an individual and to possess" (27). In this way, this section focuses on connecting utopia to posthumanist thought through *Looking Backward* as a method of social reform and forming these connections out of an understanding of both posthumanist thought and *Looking Backward* as dependent on a philosophy that emphasizes interrelationality in a web of life that goes beyond the individual.

After explaining that his late nineteenth century life as an aristocrat was a life lived in "Luxury," concerned only "with the pursuit of the pleasures and refinements of life," and done so entirely from the "support from the labor of others" and with the full knowledge that "no sort of service in return" was required (5), Julian West asks a fundamentally important question: "But how could I live without service to the world?" (5). Though the question is mostly rhetorical in that he merely asks it in order to explain his status and membership in the late nineteenth century's aristocracy, the question itself is more than revealing in that it foreshadows Bellamy's year 2000 utopia's need for an acknowledgement of a certain amount of interrelationality between people and the world they live in order to create the type of social equality that Bellamy sets as the basis for this better world. Thus, Bellamy's Dr. Leete, and by extension utopian Boston, use a rationale that should be more aligned with that of a material posthumanist theory along

the lines of Rosi Braidotti or Donna Haraway in order to stress a more collective, interrelated social philosophy over the individualist, hierarchical philosophy that is constantly criticized and blamed for the plight of the late nineteenth century throughout the book.

For example, Braidotti's posthumanism is certainly anti-humanist in that it extends a certain notion of "de-linking the human agent from" his (again, the pronoun would certainly be appropriate) self-assigned position "at the centre of the world" (23). However, being "rather materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded, firmly located somewhere" (51), Braidotti's posthumanism is also significantly focused on the subject and subjectivity "because a theory of subjectivity as both materialist and relational, 'nature-cultural', and self-organizing is crucial in order to elaborate critical tools suited to the complexity and contradictions of our times" (52). Thus, Braidotti explains her posthumanism as aiming "to reinscribe posthuman bodies into radical relationality, including webs of power relations at the social, psychic, ecological and micro-biological or cellular levels" (102). In other words, this is necessarily a posthumanism that looks to the subject as embedded in a material reality—it is not analytical (102) but rather active and material. More importantly, Braidotti's posthumanism is useful to our goals here in that we can uncover what should be a similar commentary within Bellamy's text in terms of his goals of universal social equality. That is, Bellamy's goals and posthumanism's goals should be strikingly similar in terms of social reform in that Bellamy's own philosophy of solidarity as laid out in his essay, "The Religion of Solidarity," is built on a notion of humanity's mutual dependence upon each other.

Specifically, written in 1874, "The Religion of Solidarity" represented what Arthur E. Morgan called a fragmented collection of Bellamy's "over-all philosophy" and "the best single statement we possess as to [Bellamy's] general concept of life and the nature of

things" (4). Commenting on this essay in 1887, Bellamy went as far as to admit that even though it was written when "[he] was twenty four," it "[represented] the germ of what has been ever since [his] philosophy of life" (43). With these thoughts being written down well before the publication of *Looking Backward*, Bellamy's philosophy is highly relevant in that we can see a clear connection between these earlier ideas and their subsequent manifestation in the imaginary landscape of *Looking Backward*. Moreover, this is an important connection to make in that Bellamy's philosophy as initially laid out in "The Religion of Solidarity" and then re-purposed in *Looking Backward* as a social commentary essentially work together to solidify the posthumanist undertones of Bellamy's work.

Specifically, the main element of Bellamy's philosophy as espoused in his earlier work is firmly embedded in the idea that the natural evolution of society is grounded in a flatter social ontology that emphasizes society as an interdependent web of relationality and ultimately questions the traditional notion of a possessive individualism. Bellamy writes that

On the one hand is the personal life, an atom, a grain of sand on a boundless shore, a bubble on a foam-flecked ocean, a life bearing a proportion to the mass of past, present, and future life, so infinitesimal as to defy the imagination. Such is the importance of the person. On the other hand is a certain other life, as it were a spark of the universal life, insatiable in aspiration, greedy of infinity, asserting solidarity with all things and all existence, containing the limitations of space and time and all other of the restricting conditions of the personality. (15-16)

Thus, Bellamy's philosophy is an acknowledgment of the individual as a mere "atom" or "grain of sand" in a much larger, "universal life" (15). Whereas Bellamy stresses that "Individuality, personality, partiality, is segregation, is partition, is confinement" (19), his philosophy in "Solidarity" tends to celebrate a notion of enthusiasm for an acknowledgement in this larger life, that the soul becomes "vivified, glowing, expanding as it is touched with some inspiration of enthusiasm or some sentiment of sympathy with the larger life" (17) and that "The instinct of universal solidarity, of the identity of our lives

with all life, is the centripetal force which binds together in certain orbits all orders of beings” (24). Moreover, this idea of the larger life as fundamentally more important than the individual life is not only similar to our posthumanist philosophy of interrelationality in a larger web of life but it leaks into the narrative space of *Looking Backward* and serves as an even more potent element of Bellamy’s goals of eliminating social stratification. That is, the imaginary landscape of Bellamy’s novel allows this philosophy to address these ideas of mutual dependence in the larger life by allowing a “what if” type of scenario—we can see how subjects relate to an acknowledgement of this type of acknowledgment of interconnected, co-constituted dependence within the larger life.

For example, Dr. Leete’s reply to Julian West’s question of how the industrial army accounts for those incapable of self-support ultimately rejects the notion of said self-support entirely, asking “Who is capable of self-support?” He continues, explaining that “There is no such thing in a civilized society as self-support. In a state of society so barbarous as not even to know family cooperation, each individual may possibly support himself, though even then for a part of his life only, but from the moment that men begin to live together, and constitute even the rudest sort of society, self-support becomes impossible. As men grow more civilized, and the subdivision of occupations and services is carried out, a complex mutual dependence becomes the universal rule” (77). Even further, Dr. Leete explains that one of the more ridiculous aspects of late nineteenth century society lies in the fact that “men engaged in the same industry, instead of fraternizing as comrades and co-laborers to a common end, should have regarded each other as rivals and enemies to be throttled and overthrown” (136). Even though Bellamy’s utopia is certainly human-centered, Dr. Leete’s year 2000 Boston seems to locate the subject within Braidotti’s social web of relationality. By acknowledging their materially constituted subjectivity—that is, they have a place in the material world with a

sense of “mutual dependence” (77)—the citizens of the year 2000 Boston not only acknowledge their existence in a co-constituted web of relationality but they seem to acknowledge it as an active part of the path to utopia. In other words, it is awfully enticing to make the case that Bellamy’s path to utopia and his path to universal social equality is necessarily a posthuman path.

Moreover, that there is a link between the destruction of social inequality and the reliance on twenty-first century Boston’s acknowledgment of every citizen’s duty to “serve” and participate in this web of social relations becomes a recurring theme throughout the book, taking on an almost didactic quality and culminating in a scene where Julian West listens to a twenty-first century sermon that seemingly reinforces a posthuman undertone while assaulting the individualistic late nineteenth century. As Mr. Barton preaches of the “stupendous change” that a mere century can make in terms of the “material and moral conditions of humanity” (161), the overarching theme becomes a reinforcement of how a simple “change in the environment,” that is, from “a form of society which was founded on the pseudo self-interest of selfishness, and appealed solely to the anti-social and brutal side of human nature,” to one with “institutions based on the true self-interest of a rational unselfishness, and appealing to the social and generous instincts of men” (162), necessarily paves the way for a utopian society. That is, Bellamy’s utopia seems to reflect some of the same principles of a material posthumanism in its rhetoric, citing the inability of the individual to exist outside of these relational social webs and acknowledging a co-constituted, interdependent social existence as the foundation of a utopian society.

One important note that we might make is that though *Looking Backward’s* ability to question possessive individualism represents a fundamental posthumanist element, this posthumanist commentary is almost entirely tied to *Looking Backward’s*

categorization as a social commentary only—this posthumanist line of thought can only be a burgeoning posthumanism. Specifically, it might be best to consider this burgeoning posthumanism within *Looking Backward* as resting on a fairly precarious and (possibly) unstable foundation that is a direct culmination of all of the elements up to this point. Specifically, even if we consider the connection between *Looking Backward* as a medium to develop methods of social reform and posthumanism as growing out of anti-humanist movements that equally serve as methods of social reform, there are at least three destabilizing concepts that we have to contend with: Bellamy's eutopian vision is overtly human-centered; his mechanism to achieve utopia depends entirely on technology as an abstract, guiding force; and his ideal society relies on a fairly rigid sense of hierarchy in terms of organization, using the industrial army as a the main organizing principle of the year 2000 Boston utopia. The overall result is that Bellamy's tendency toward abstracting the relationship between humanity, technology, and his eutopian vision (as we saw in previous sections), though not dispelling the posthumanist undertones, certainly keeps *Looking Backward* from expressing a fully realized, material posthumanism. Moreover, it gives something to build on in terms of making the dystopian turn.

Though it is important to stress that one of the key elements for Bellamy's elimination of social stratification was the elimination of economic hierarchy, it is significant that Bellamy's goal of building a utopia based on eliminating class stratification champions the highly stratified and absolutely hierarchical industrial army as its ultimate organizing principle, or the "national organization of labor under one direction" as Dr. Leete explains (36). That the industrial army's logical organization mimics the organizational model of the military only serves to underscore the highly hierarchical nature of the organization: citizen members are necessarily arranged and ordered into

“first, second, and third grades according to ability” and then “in many cases subdivided further into first and second classes” (73); hierarchical language is used to differentiate between low grades and high grades, of which “high grades” are noted to garner “special privileges” (74); and there is a highly complex promotional system that further classifies members into different levels of “officer grades,” ranging from “lieutenancies” and “generals” up to the highest level of “President of the United States” (110). In this way, instead of questioning the hierarchical nature of possessive individualism, and certain core humanist principles by extension, Bellamy’s social organizing principle of the year 2000 borders on a symbolic reinforcement of the liberal humanist subject and the hierarchical, individualism that is questioned throughout the dialogues. Thus, we might lean on Auerbach’s work in order to understand that Bellamy’s seemingly contradictory way of dealing with possessive individualism is possibly more of a relocation rather than a complete elimination of possessive individualism.

Specifically, Auerbach writes that “What most critics take to be Bellamy’s wholesale rejection of individualism is thus more narrowly a rejection only of the power that attends any social relation. Distribution conceived in terms of transcendental Over-Soul thereby strategically allows Bellamy to ascribe other important attributes of individualism to the Nation as a whole, while the individual conversely gets ‘enfranchised from discipline and control’” (27). Perhaps the most revealing support for such a notion is in West’s description of late nineteenth century social relations between the rich and the poor as analogous to a “prodigious coach” in “which the masses of humanity were harnessed to and dragged toilsomely along a very hilly and sandy road” (6). Through the toil, the privileged class sits atop the coach where it is “breezy” and “comfortable” (6), certainly having “compassion” (7) for the toilers pulling the coach yet holding onto their high seats with desperation, believing both “firmly and sincerely [...] that there was no

other way in which Society could get along [...]” (8). More enlightening still is West’s indication that not only was it believed that “those on top of the coach” held a general opinion “that they were not exactly like their brothers and sisters who pulled a the rope, but of finer clay, in some way belonging to a higher order of being who might justly expect to be drawn” (8)—West assures us that he “ought to be believed” since he “once rode on this very coach” (8)—but that even those few whom managed to climb up to the top of the coach from the bottom “began to fall under its influence” even “before they had outgrown the marks of the rope upon their hands” (8).

Though meant to be a parable to describe the social stratification and social relations between the rich and poor of the late nineteenth century, Auerbach points out that this parable does more to highlight the fact that by relocating the “dislocated relation between labor and capital” to the “friction between coach and road,” the emphasis of the parable is noticeably relocated from the social relations between people to the relation between the riders, the coach, and the ground, a relationship in which “both passengers and the harnessed toilers are at the mercy of mysterious forces that have nothing to do with their relations to one another” (29). In other words, we can make the case that Bellamy’s tendency towards an abstracted view of the relationship between humanity, technology, and eutopian social relations is amplified in this parable to a certain degree in that these relationships between the riders are abstracted rather than grounded and material. That is, rather than emphasizing a sense of interrelationality between the riders themselves, the parable tends to focus on the more abstracted relationship between the riders and “forces” that are simply not under the control of the riders.

For example, West’s description of the coach is careful to highlight the fact that seats on the coach could be “very insecure” at times, “and at every sudden jolt of the coach persons were slipping out of them and falling to the ground,” leaving them to take

the rope up and begin pulling (7). Moreover, West describes that “commiseration” (7) was often its highest “when the vehicle came to a bad place in the road, as it was constantly doing” (7). Thus, in the same way that the coach and the road seem to operate independently of the passengers, supporting a notion of powerlessness of the passengers to necessarily guide the coach, the evolution of progress in terms of late nineteenth century socio-economic relations lends a similar notion of powerlessness among the citizens “to change the direction of the nation” (Auerbach 29). To this end, the case can be made that Bellamy does not so much overturn possessive individualism but rather relocate it to an abstract, guiding force, putting these utopian notions of social reform “at the mercy of mysterious forces” (29). Moreover, we can possibly diagnose this tendency to merely relocate possessive individualism as an outcome of the earlier symptoms identified within the Bellamy’s more abstract treatment of the relationship between humanity, technology, and utopia.

However, a point of emphasis that needs to be restated is that our expectations for the posthumanist nature of *Looking Backward* really only lies in its ability to express a potential or burgeoning posthumanist thought—*Looking Backward* is not a fully realized posthumanist eutopia for obvious reasons, and our application of a posthumanist lens is multi-functional. For example, our identification of a burgeoning posthumanist thought allows for a very productive connection between social reform, utopia, and posthumanist thought that opens the door for a more interrelated engagement between these concepts. That is, we can begin to see the utopian novel as a medium for engaging social reform from a posthumanist perspective, which can then be further analyzed in terms of actual productivity—can it translate to the real world in a more effective way? However, another major connection that we can make from this analysis is between Bellamy’s seemingly inability to completely stray from a hierarchical and abstract way of imagining utopia and

the transformations of the utopian genre within the twentieth century—does the genre respond and adapt to this burgeoning posthumanist thought that is being suffocated under some of these antithetical ways of imagining these relationships?

2.4 Conclusion

Looking Backward tends to set the foundation upon which we build the rest of the argumentation within this thesis in that it represents a number of “potentials.” That is to say, Bellamy’s main argument for a utopian future rests on the “eutopian potential” of the industrial revolution, that a mere change in perception could open the door to social reform and a better society. Bellamy’s method of changing a late nineteenth century audience’s perception is bound-up with his “main contribution to the utopian tradition” in that his vision of utopia as a temporally displaced location, though not unique to the genre, tended to actually “cement” utopia’s “formal association with unmapped time” as opposed to the “unmapped space” in the tradition of Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* (Beaumont xvii). Thus, Bellamy’s utopia represented a potential map to a eutopian future that was grounded in a defamiliarized present, or a present-late nineteenth century that was suffering under the very real negative effects that the industrial revolution had brought: abject income inequality, social stratification, a “land-grab” by the dominant classes, and the frighteningly reality of technological inventions such as the Gatling gun (Roemer, “Paradise Transformed” 82). However, the narrative landscape of *Looking Backward* provided a potential space in which the positive effects of technology good be amplified to provide solutions as opposed to compound these problems—it served as a medium for Bellamy’s vision of human history as naturally progressive and democratic.

However, this potential of technology is where we tend to begin encountering potential problems within Bellamy’s eutopian vision. Specifically, Bellamy’s eutopian Boston rests on a sense of technology as an intrinsically eutopian force, operating in the

background and driving society towards an inevitably better world. Moreover, this notion of utopia as guided by an abstract technological force is similar to Bellamy's notion that human history was naturally progressive and democratic. Thus, we can make the case that Bellamy's main problem was that he underestimated the degree to which technology, humanity, and both socio-cultural and socio-economic systems could become intertwined. That is, by abstracting technology as an inevitable utopian force, Bellamy quite possibly overlooks the material nature of these relationships and the fact that, as other utopists of the time saw, technology can become a material dystopian force by being placed in the wrong "hands." Moreover, we can even make the case that Bellamy's misstep in terms of underestimating these relationships, which we certainly cannot blame him for as we have the benefit of hindsight, is one of the main warnings from twentieth century dystopias in that technology often becomes used by humanity as a tool of oppression, dominance, and transcendence.

However, it is both highly relevant and important to understand that *Looking Backward's* categorization as a fully realized posthumanist eutopia is simply not a realistic expectation in that we fully expected a posthumanist lens to uncover these potential problems while simultaneously uncovering a burgeoning posthumanist thought embedded in *Looking Backward* as a social commentary. Specifically, Bellamy's goal of social reform takes on a line of rhetoric that is more closely aligned with posthumanist theories that revolve around interrelationality and an acknowledgement of mutual dependence within a larger web of life. Though Bellamy's eutopian vision is clearly human centered, his goal of eliminating social stratification is based on his philosophy of solidarity and human acknowledgement within a larger life—he stresses a collective interdependence over the individual and uses this as the basis for *Looking Backward's* argumentation and eutopian vision. Thus, these potential problems and potential

posthumanist undertones provide an interesting starting point in terms of our transition to the other novels of this thesis.

Specifically, as we prepare to historically turn from utopia to dystopia in terms of genre, Bellamy's work represents a breakdown in the traditional utopian literary form. As pointed out by Moylan and referenced earlier in this chapter, post-1850 utopian thought was already experiencing a turn toward a type of "heuristic utopia" in order to subvert the hegemony of the time-period (Moylan, *Demand* 6). Or, in Moylan's words, "System building in some abstracted other place no longer suited the demands put on the utopian narrative: the process of change itself had to be included in the literary operations of the text" (*Demand* 6). In other words, static eutopias such as Bellamy's year 2000 Boston, and in turn utopian novels that portrayed these types of blue-prints to utopia, were becoming less useful in terms of serving as opposition to dominant hegemony and thus giving way to a transformation into dystopias and more process-oriented works.

Though we can certainly make the case that *Looking Backward* expresses some form of process in terms of Bellamy's use of temporal displacement—i.e., blurring temporal boundaries and placing utopia in the future is suggestive of a process that had to take place—we cannot ignore the potential problems within Bellamy's work. Specifically, what the next chapters of this thesis attempt to build on is whether or not we can use both this potential posthumanist thought as well as these potential problems in order to determine whether or not this abstracted technological utopianism in *Looking Backward* becomes a tool of opposition or a tool of transcendence for humanity when compared to the contemporary works. That is, when utopian blue-prints begin to turn into dystopian cautionary tales, is their warning in some ways connected to this utopian hope that works such as Bellamy's tended to attach to technological utopianism? Or can we find an answer for why, as Beaumont puts it, "in the twentieth century, so many of the

social dreams of the late nineteenth century subsequently darkened into nightmares”

(xxx)?

Chapter 3

Transcendent Technology: Rationalizing the Critical Dystopia of *Oryx and Crake*

In a 2004 essay on *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood categorizes her writing as Speculative fiction as opposed to Science fiction. Recalling this distinction in her response to a science fiction fan's protest, she writes the following: "I said I liked to make a distinction between science fiction proper—for me, this label denotes books with things in them we can't yet do or begin to do, talking beings we can never meet, and places we can't go—and speculative fiction, which employs the means already more or less at hand, and takes place on Planet Earth" (513). In making this distinction, Atwood actually further elaborates that *Oryx and Crake* is more speculative fiction with dystopian elements as opposed to what she defines as a "classical dystopia," a form that falls along the conventional border as defined and/or "inspired" by George Orwell with *1984* (516). Thus, unlike *1984* (and *The Handmaid's tale*), Atwood describes in her words that *Oryx and Crake* is "an adventure romance [...] coupled with a Menippean satire, the literary form that deals in intellectual obsession" (517). Quite simply, the Speculative fiction genre is capable of, in her words, being able to "speak of what is past and passing, but especially of what's to come" (515).

Starting with Atwood's own observations about her work and the social climate in which the work is written is rather strategic in that it tends to ground the work in an active, material reality. In fact, I think we can lean on Earl Ingersoll's observation that literary analysis has moved some distance from the New Criticism's tendency to concentrate "on 'the work itself'" and "eliminate the author as an authority" in that authorial intention and/or voice has continued to grow out of the necessity of authors to "become primary marketers of their work, encouraged by publishes to spend weeks 'on the road', doing readings, signing copies, granting interviews, and generally extending themselves as

authorized readers of their most recent publications” (162). This connection of authors to their work in turn creates a connection between the socio-cultural climate in which the author is writing and the imaginary worlds they create, giving us more tools by which to decipher the message of the text. Seeing how we leaned on this type of analysis when connecting Edward Bellamy to the tumultuous social change of the late nineteenth century United States, we can make the case that taking a similar approach to Atwood’s work is more than relevant. Moreover, it tends to help us decipher this notion of how her work speculates on “what is past and passing, but especially of what’s to come,” as Atwood puts it (515).

The following chapter analyzes *Oryx and Crake* from three perspectives. After a brief, but necessary, outline of the dystopian turn in utopian literature, I use a fairly similar method to other analysts who have worked with *Oryx and Crake* in that I concentrate on a surface analysis of Atwood’s work as a cautionary tale and how that relates to the broader conversation on utopia and dystopia. What I want to draw out of this first part is Atwood’s blending of multiple genres, how that fits in with our previous discussions on dystopia, utopia, and/or critical dystopia, and also how these elements relate to this work as a social commentary. Moving on, the middle section of this chapter is heavily invested in explaining the structure of the imaginary Compound system in the narrative of *Oryx and Crake*, which is a fusion of technology, corporatism, and capitalism. Understanding this hierarchical and rigid system of organization is a key element in understanding *Oryx and Crake* as a cautionary tale in that it sets the tone for how much of the novel can be analyzed, and the very nature of this structure provides an interesting contrast in terms of our focus on posthumanist theory in that its rigidity and unhindered blend of technology, corporatism, and capitalism tend to reinscribe the liberal humanist subject.

Finally, the last section of this chapter focuses more closely on our posthumanist lens and the transcendent tendencies portrayed in *Oryx and Crake* through the unhindered biotechnological progress pursued by the Compounds. With a focus on genetic engineering and transgenic organisms, environmental concerns, and the antagonist of the novel, Crake, I analyze how *Oryx and Crake*'s speculation on biotechnology ultimately leads us down a rather paradoxical path in which the peak of biotechnology provides conflicting results in terms of posthumanism: The post-apocalyptic narrative space provides a unique environment to see the agency of transgenic organisms and other nonhuman animals but only at the cost of an ultimate transcendence through technology by humanity.

3.1 From Dystopia to Critical Dystopia: Blurring Genres in *Oryx and Crake*

Raffaella Baccolini describes the classical dystopian form in the vein of Huxley and Orwell as "a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope within the story" (18). She elaborates that the utopian hope of the generic dystopia is in fact "only outside the story" in that the narrative merely serves as a "warning" for readers, who can only "hope to escape such a pessimistic future," as opposed to the "protagonists" of such classical dystopias such as *1984* and *Brave New World* for whom an escape "option" does not exist: "Winston Smith, Julia, John the Savage, and Lenina are all crushed by the totalitarian society; there is no learning, no escape for them" (18). However, naming it as "one of the preferred forms of resistance for the end of the century," Baccolini describes the critical dystopia as in direct contrast to this generic, closed-ended dystopian form: it is open-ended, "critical and ambiguous"; it is "multi-oppositional," "impure," and a "new site of struggle and resistance"; and it is defined by a notion of genre blending, "hybridity," and "fluidity" (18). Thus, when Atwood categorizes *Oryx and Crake* as speculative fiction as opposed to classical dystopia, I tend to agree with her but for different reasons than

she gives, and it has everything to do with the evolution from classic dystopia to critical dystopia.

3.1.1 *Dystopia to Critical Dystopia*

In the opening of his broad-sweeping overview of utopia and dystopia, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, Tom Moylan writes that

Dystopian narrative is largely the product of the terrors of the twentieth century. A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination. (xi)

In light of the socio-cultural circumstances as described here by Moylan, the title of his and Raffaella Baccolini's collection of essays on dystopia and science fiction, *Dark Horizons*, seems all the more relevant and even more appropriate when we consider that the twentieth century is nearly unanimously considered to be the century of the "dystopian turn" (Moylan, *Scraps* 147). As "the dark side of Utopia," dystopian narratives fed off of the political and social turmoil of the twentieth century, experiencing a slight reprieve during a brief utopian "revival" during the 1960s and 1970s, and then turning again towards the dark side "as a way to come to terms with the changing social reality" that had been the 1980s: "In the face of economic restructuring, right-wing politics, and a cultural milieu informed by an intensifying fundamentalism and commodification, sf [science fiction] writers revived and reformulated the dystopian genre" (Baccolini and Moylan, *Dark Horizons* 2). Though certainly darker visions, or what Kingsley Amis labeled as "new maps of hell" (Baccolini and Moylan 1), the dystopian narrative opened up the conversation for a reevaluation of the utopian genre as a whole, paving the way for the development of a more complex category.

As we saw with Bellamy, Moylan firmly establishes the role of utopia as being in opposition to ideology, writing that "Produced through the fantasizing powers of the

imagination, utopia opposes the affirmative culture maintained by dominant ideology” (*Demand* 1). More importantly, this idea of utopia serving to undermine hegemony plays a key role in the rise of dystopia during the twentieth century. Specifically, Moylan explains how utopia became “coopted” (*Demand* 8) by the reigning cultural hegemony (consumerism in the US/state socialism in USSR) during a majority of the twentieth century, advertising—both literally and figuratively—the notion that utopia was already here in the form of these hegemonic social systems (*Demand* 15-20). In other words, much of the dystopia produced during the twentieth century was in reaction to this “cooptation” by dominant ideology, which is comparable to how we saw Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and other late nineteenth century utopias as a reaction to dominant hegemony. However, where Bellamy created positive visions as critique, authors of the twentieth century such as Huxley and Orwell created negative visions as critique: maps of hope versus new maps of hell (Amis 1960).

However, as the twentieth century historically progressed so did the literature, meaning the simple explanation of dystopia as Utopia’s dark side could not account for the rising complexity within the genre. Again stemming from the round table discussion of Sargent’s “Three Faces” at the 1993 Utopian Studies conference, the actual reevaluation of dystopia owes much to the recognition that dystopian novels from 1980 and on were notably more complex works than they appeared on the surface (Baccolini and Moylan 3). As described by Sargent, “The traditional dystopia was an extrapolation from the present that involved a warning. The eutopia says if you behave thus and so, you will be rewarded with this. The dystopia, in the tradition of the jeremiad, says if you behave thus and so, this is how you will be punished” (“Three Faces” 8). Further still, Sargent’s description is extended in the traditional view of the dystopia as leaning toward the anti-utopia in that the overly negative/dystopian societies provided by authors such as Huxley

and Orwell were taken up in a political vein and used as evidence of “the failure of utopia,” that a utopian future was merely “a dream incapable of attainment” because of the fundamentally flawed nature of humans (Moylan, *Demand* 9).

Moreover, as Sargent notes in the “Three Faces,” complex novels produced in the latter half of the twentieth century such as Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* necessarily made a mess of “all neat classification schemes” in that they often represented “both eutopias and dystopias,” meaning that “the terms good place and bad place simply [did] not work” (7). With this phenomenon being considered by Moylan in terms of the socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic environment of the 1980s and 1990s (Moylan specifically cites the more dystopian elements of the Reagan, Bush Senior, and Clinton administrations), he analyzes it in terms of the response of writers to the era, that “sf [science fiction] writers turned to dystopian strategies as a way to come to terms with the changing, and enclosing, social reality” (*Scraps* 186). Moylan continues, adding that “Although they reached back into its classical and science fictional roots, they did not simply revive dystopia but rather reworked it in the context of the economic, political, and cultural conditions of the decade” (*Scraps* 186). Paired with Sargent’s and other scholars’ similar observations, the call for a reevaluation of dystopia was not only obvious but heeded in the formation and acknowledgement of the *critical dystopia* (Baccolini and Moylan 3).

As described by Baccolini, the critical dystopia is an “open-ended dystopia” that has “both utopian and dystopian elements” and “maintain[s] a utopian core at their center, a locus of hope that contributes to deconstructing tradition and reconstructing alternatives” (“Gender and Genre” 13). Moreover, this evolution of the generic dystopia—the “classic, male dystopias like George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, on which the dystopian conventions rest”—into the critical dystopia is due in part

to “blurring borders between genres” and the borrowing of certain “convention” (Baccolini, “Gender and Genre” 13). As Moylan explains, Baccolini’s notion of genre blurring and borrowing necessarily liberates the “dystopian form,” allowing it to “expand rather than diminish its creative potential for critical expression” (*Scraps* 189). More importantly, these blurry genre lines lead to a “dystopian narrative” that “is further rendered an ‘impure’ text that can renovate the ‘resisting nature’ of dystopian sf by making it more properly ‘multi-oppositional,’ which necessarily links it historically to “poststructuralist critiques” (Moylan, *Scraps* 189).

3.1.2 *Blurring Genres*

This transition to the critical dystopia (as well as the transition from utopia to dystopia) is bound up with a gradual change in form, which is necessarily tied to the “expanding genre of science fiction” (Wegner 88). Specifically, Philip E. Wegner explains that while early utopian novels tend to function as blueprints, using a visitor/guide dialogue to describe an ideal society in great detail in order to build a model (e.g., *Looking Backward*), contemporary works of what we might consider to be utopian or dystopian “are increasingly identified with speculations concerning the future,” making them more in the vein of science fiction and speculative fiction (88). Paired with how we have seen the opening up of the definition of dystopia to account for the increasing complexity of novels staking claim to both utopian and dystopian elements, this gradual shift from a blue-print to a cautionary tale is bound up with an increasingly genre blurring tendency within these works. Thus, what we consider to be utopian and/or dystopian tends to become more flexible, generally allowing for more works of science and speculative fiction to be included in the utopian discussion.

Thus, that scholars such as Jenny Wolmark, Raffaella Baccolini, and others tend to include Margaret Atwood’s novels in the discussion of critical dystopia tends to make

more sense when put into the historical context of this gradually expanding definition of utopia and dystopia. Though *The Handmaid's Tale* tends to get the most attention from utopian/dystopian scholars, Atwood's work in general is noted by Baccolini as among other authors whose novels tend to add to the genre blurring tendency of the critical dystopia, "challenging the traditional expectation that dystopian science fiction must end tragically" and opening up "spaces of resistance" in order to "maintain the utopian impulse within the story" ("Gender and Genre" 19). With this in mind, Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is not only a good example of this genre blurring but the analysis provides an avenue for seeing posthumanist theory in relation to these elements of the critical dystopia.

As Valeria Mosca points out, *Oryx and Crake* tends to be "difficult for many critics" to define particularly because of its "multiple genre affiliation" which "draws on elements from science fiction, the Bildungsroman, quest romances, survivor stories and revenge tragedies" (38). In other words, *Oryx and Crake* is not a classical dystopian narrative along the line of *1984* and *Brave New World* in that it blurs borders and borrows from other genres—it is an impure work that better aligns itself with the critical dystopia. Moreover, this genre blurring tends to take on a posthumanist-esque questioning of borders in general, making the case that critical dystopias such as *Oryx and Crake* are always-already posthumanist through their affiliation with blurry borders.

For example, we can clearly see this type of genre blurring in the opening narrative of *Oryx and Crake*:

On the eastern horizon there's a greyish haze, lit now with a rosy, deadly glow. Strange how that colour still seems tender. The offshore towers stand out in dark silhouette against it, rising improbably out of the pink and pale blue of the lagoon. The shrieks of the birds that nest out there and the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble sound almost like holiday traffic.

Out of habit he looks at his watch—stainless-steel case, burnished aluminum band, still shiny although it no longer works. He wears it now as his only talisman. A blank face is what it shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is. (3)

On the one hand, this opening fits nicely with Early Ingersoll's own description of Atwood's use of a typical SF (science fiction) opening: "*Oryx and Crake* begins, as have countless SF novels and stories, by dropping readers into a vaguely familiar yet overwhelmingly hostile and alien world in which a viewpoint character is struggling to survive. Readers are immediately encouraged to get involved in some quick Sherlockhoming to figure out when and where they have been dropped and what's happened to this world" (163). Thus, in truly SF fashion, Atwood opens *Oryx and Crake* by dropping the audience into a setting that is filled with mostly unknowns, which are only steadily revealed by the protagonist, Snowman, who leaks the details through a combination of recalled memories of his former life and an account of his day-to-day life in the present.

However, the opening passage is also filled with hints of a past-calamity and, by extension, a post-apocalyptic present. These elements alone suggest a multiple genre affiliation in terms of apocalyptic narrative, survivor narrative, and the buildings of a classical dystopian narrative in the form of a warning (is this the bad place?). Of course, the fact that the narrative is driven by flashbacks and told from the perspective of a survivor (Snowman) tends to open up the novel in a way that classical dystopian fiction would not in that the existence of a survivor suggests an escape. Moreover, the nature (utopian, dystopian, or otherwise) of this setting that the reader has been dropped into, and this world that the protagonist exists in, is rather unclear and ambiguous, which sets the tone for the rest of the novel and again underlines *Oryx and Crake*'s value as a

critical dystopia—it is a complex cautionary tale that does not show its hand right away (and possibly ever).

3.2 Compounds

From the opening scene onward Snowman's narrative is a gradual revealing of his former life as Jimmy, who we follow from early childhood to early adulthood, as well as a present-tense account of his day-to-day life as the only (known) human survivor of an only hinted at apocalyptic event. Surrounding himself with a precious few relics from the past—an "authentic-replica Red Sox baseball cap" hanging on a tree, "a precious half-bottle of Scotch [...]" and an "energy bar scrounged from a trailer park" that could "be the last one he'll ever find" (4)—Snowman spends his days in this postapocalyptic landscape as the caretaker of the Children of Crake (or Crakers), a posthuman race of beings genetically engineered by Crake, Jimmy's childhood friend and, as the narrative eventually reveals, the gifted genetic engineer responsible for the apocalyptic event.

The unfolding of the narrative gets at the core of Atwood's speculation in that Snowman's past life as Jimmy reveals a society—notably a society that is considered near-future to a contemporary audience—that is heavily invested in biotechnology and in turn structured quite rigidly by that technology. Snowman's earliest memories as Jimmy reveal that his father worked as a "genographer" at "OrganInc Farms" where "he'd been one of the foremost architects of the pigoon project," an attempt "to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host" (22). Moreover, OrganInc Farms is only one of many similar "Compounds," or corporate owned, enclosed cities that serve as both biotech companies and homes to those employed by said Compound, and working for the Compounds generally meant living within their walls. As Snowman recalls, his family had once lived outside of the Compounds in "a Cape Cod-style house in one of the Modules" but eventually moved into "a large Georgian centre-

plan with an indoor swimming pool and a small gym,” noting that “The house, the pool, the furniture—all belonged to the OrganInc Compound, where the top people lived” (26).

Moreover, Jimmy recalls that his father insisted that “it was better that way, because nobody had to commute to work from the Modules. Despite the sterile transport corridors and the high-speed bullet trains, there was always a risk when you went through the city” (27). Having “never been to the city” himself (though the narrative reveals that he does go later in life), Snowman recalls that “Compound people didn’t go to the cities unless they had to, and then never alone. They called the cities *the pleeblands*” (27 emphasis in original). In this way, there is a fairly rigid line of distinction between inside and outside, serving not only as a material separation between “Compound people” and what we can only assume are the plebeians but also an economic separation in that the plebeians, as we learn later in the novel, are the main consumers of the multitude of diverse biotechnological products engineered by the Compounds, meaning that there is a certain dependence on a constant symbiotic reinforcement of these barriers between the inside and outside.

Thus, as Mosca points out, the more dystopian speculation within *Oryx and Crake* tends to rely on this “rigid separation between the inside and the outside—the inside being the Compounds, safe and enclosed areas that the various corporations have bought for their members to live in, and the outside being the increasingly unsafe rest of the world” (40). Moreover, this speculation is tied to *Oryx and Crake*’s ability to mirror the more troubling socio-cultural, socio-economic, and technological trends of contemporary society, becoming, in Mosca’s words, “a large-scale, extreme version of recent (Western) scientific and economic trends” (40). In other words, Atwood’s caution in this cautionary tale seems to center on the very real possibilities of this type of fusion between consumerism, corporatism, and technology, and then mirror this speculation in the novel

in truly satirical form such as the Compound names themselves: OrganInc Farms genetically engineers human organs; Helth Wyzer and subsidiary NooSkins produce “skin-related” biotechnologies; AnooYoo pushes genetically engineered health supplements and any other item concerned with self-improvement.

Moreover, this rigid structure and contrast between inside and outside that is driven by this fusion is repeated throughout the narrative, permeating both the school system—secondary and higher education—and ultimately even creating stratification among the Compound system itself. For example, Snowman recalls his father being “headhunted by NooSkins” and eventually relocating to the HelthWyzer Compound, a move that represents a certain amount of additional stratification within the Compounds in that “The Helth Wyzer Compound was not only newer than the OrganInc layout, it was bigger,” containing “two shopping malls instead of one, a better hospital, three dance clubs, even its own golf course” (54). Being prevalent among the technologically focused corporate Compounds, this type of headhunting ultimately results in Jimmy’s meeting Crake, who transfers to HelthWyzer High as a result of “some headhunt involving a parental unit,” which was “frequent among the Compunds. Kids came and went, desks filled and emptied” (71). Thus, even though all of the Compound people participate in the same technological industry to some degree, the factor(s) by which those degrees vary are amplified by the hierarchical tendencies inherent in the driving force of the society, or this fusion of capitalism, technology, and corporatism that is speculated as both passing and on the horizon.

This stratification and rigidity is reinforced, reflected, and possibly grounded in the education structure of the Compounds. Specifically, Snowman explains that High school in the Compounds was not “like the Pleeblands,” where “it was rumoured, the kids ran in packs, in hordes. They’d wait until some parent was away, then get right down to

business—they'd swarm the place, waste themselves with loud music and toking and boozing, [...] trash the furniture, shoot up, overdose. [...] But in the Compounds the lid was screwed down tight. Night patrols, curfews for growing minds, sniffer dogs after hard drugs" (73). Not surprisingly, the Compound school system necessarily represents a type of brain drain in terms of the rest of society, meaning that the "Compound schools were awash in brilliant genes" while the "Module school" or even the "dump bins they still called 'the public system'" (174) were, in the (possibly unreliable) words of "Compound people," notably inferior and less rigid. However, this same stratification exists within and between the Compounds and schools of higher education, or "EduCompounds" (174).

For example, when compared to Crake and the majority of the Compound students, Jimmy was "a mid-range student, high on his word scores but a poor average in the numbers columns" (173-174). Thus, "If Jimmy had been from a Module school" or a public school "he'd have shone like a diamond in a drain," but having "inherited" none of those so called "brilliant genes" from "his geeky, kak-hearted parents" that were so prevalent among Compound students meant that "his talents shrank by comparisons" (174). The ultimate result is that upon high school graduation, while Crake and the other "brainiacs were tussled over by the best EduCompounds" in a "Student Auction" that ultimately fetches a "high price" for Crake from the Watson-Crick Institute—an EduCompound much like "Harvard had been, back before it got drowned"—Jimmy and the other "mediocre" students' "transcripts" were "fingered and skimmed and had coffee spilled on them and got dropped on the floor by mistake" (174) which culminated in Jimmy's underwhelming auction rights going to Martha Graham Academy, an "Arts-and-Humanities college"(186) that was "falling apart" and "surrounded [...] by the tackiest kind of pleeblands [...]" (185).

Moreover, the identification of Crake as a “numbers person” (25) and Jimmy as a “word [person]” (25) ultimately sets their post-education fate, sending each down divergent paths of the techno-corporate ladder. Graduating “from Martha Graham with his dingy little degree in Problematics” and not “expect[ing] to get a job right away” (241), Jimmy is eventually hired by “AnooYoo, a minor Compound situated so close to one of the more dilapidated pleeblands that it might as well have been in it” (245). As a “drudge and helot” in this techno-corporate society, Jimmy was hired to “spend ten-hour days wandering the labyrinths of the thesaurus and cranking out the verbiage” to promote “Cosmetic creams, workout equipment, Joltbars to build your muscle-scape” and “Pills to make you fatter, thinner, hairier, balder, whiter, browner, blacker, yellower, sexier, and happier” (148). Meanwhile, coming out of the prestigious Watson-Crick Institute, Crake had “graduated early, done post-grad work, then written his own ticket” to “RejoovenEsense” which was “one of the most powerful Compounds of them all” (252). Moreover, Crake’s own technological ability had afforded him the ability to create his own unit within RejoovenEsense, the Paradise unit.

Thus, this highly rigid social system that is expressed in the form of the Compound system serves as the basis for how we tend to judge *Oryx and Crake* in terms of its status as both a critical dystopia as well as a cautionary tale for the remainder of the analysis. Specifically, leaning on the critical work of Ziauddin Sardar, Soraya Copley writes that “the most immediate impetus of science fiction is ‘horror, fear, disquiet and disaffection at the power of the human intellect’,” all of which seem to apply to “*Oryx and Crake*” in that “nature, all living creatures, and ultimately the human race itself, fall victim to the overreaching of unscrupulous manipulators of the biological sciences” (45). Thus, as satirically and humorously as Atwood depicts some of these Compounds, much of their business is nothing short of this observation by Copley. That is, in addition to the

highly rigid structure and contrasts between the Compounds and the Pleeblands and between the Compounds themselves, this fusion of corporatism, capitalism, and technology bring about the more serious concerns of the novel in the form of biotechnology.

3.3 Biotechnology: The Real and the Imagined

In one of his first recollections of his life as Jimmy, Snowman recalls being “five, maybe six” and attending “a huge bonfire” at the OrganInc Compound that consisted of “an enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs” (15-16). The bonfire being necessary to, in Jimmy’s father’s words, “keep [the disease] from spreading” (19), it is the ultimate result of corporate competition between the Compounds, speculated by Jimmy’s father as being a new “bug” possibly “brought in on purpose” to “drive up the prices” (18-19). Though Jimmy describes that he was “anxious about the animals, because they were being burned and surely that would hurt them,” Jimmy’s father reassures him that “The animals were dead. They were like steaks and sausages, only they still had their skins on” (18). Though the narrative landscape of *Oryx and Crake* is littered with similar scenes that put the ethics of the Compounds into question, this opening memory from Snowman is both a poignant extension of that rampant fusion of techno-corporate capitalism that structures the Compounds as well as a step towards the “slippery slope” of biotechnology from which Atwood posits “What if we continue down the road we’re already on?” (Mosca 39).

In her essay, “Dis/integrating Animals: Ethical Dimensions of the Genetic Engineering of Animals for Human Consumption,” Traci Warkentin explains that “*Oryx and Crake* provides a transitional narrative space for the discussion of current biotechnological philosophies and practices in Western society and where they might lead to in the not-so-distant future” (83). In other words, Warkentin uses the speculative

biotechnological age represented in *Oryx and Crake* to work through the very real ethical implications of bioengineering that we face both in the present and in the future. Copley echoes this notion of *Oryx and Crake*'s ability to intertwine these imaginary visions with reality, writing that

Thus we see that this is a world [the society in *Oryx and Crake*] in which the deadly combination of capitalism and science is running rampant at the expense of innocent creatures—a world not dissimilar to our own, in which, as Peter Singer points out, “each year, US industrial laboratories slaughter an average of 63 million animals—primates, dogs, rabbits, pigs, frogs and birds.” (45)

Whether it is the bonfires held in Snowman's earliest recollection as Jimmy, a memory that certainly embeds a message concerning animal ethics into the gradual evolution of human technological capabilities, or our eventual introduction to the creation and consumption of ChickieNobs, bioengineered chickens created at the Watson-Crick Institute (Crake's alma mater) that are headless and brainless with “a mouth opening at the top” to simply “dump the nutrients in” (202), both of these observations by Warkentin and Copley push the ethical implications of biotechnology, both present and near-future as well as real and literary, to the forefront.

For Warkentin, a point of emphasis is how Western technoscience's affinity for “mechanomorphism,” a process of “labelling animal bodies, and describing behaviour, in mechanical terms” (86), makes its way into Atwood's cautionary tale. To be clear, instead of anthropomorphizing nonhuman animals—a recognition of “human characteristics in animals” (86)—mechanomorphism eliminates the intrinsic value of nonhuman animals by turning them into “mechanical instruments” (85), reducing “organic” bodies to a mere assemblage of parts and “components” (86) to be used and manipulated for scientific purposes. The best examples of this type of reduction are what we should consider as the end goal of biotechnology: the creation of “transgenic organisms,” or organisms that “[have] been microgenetically engineered so that [their]

genome contains genetic material derived from a different species” (83), for human consumption. To connect this biotechnological reality—something humanity can do right now—Warkentin compares the fictional pigoons from *Oryx and Crake*—OrganInc’s transgenic, human organ incubators (*Oryx and Crake* 22)—with the nonfictional Beltsville pigs that were “produced from single-cell embryos that had been injected with a human growth hormone gene” (Warkentin 89).

With the Beltsville pig experiment report including observations such as the pigs showing “improved weight gain, greater feed efficiency, and reduced subcutaneous fat, but at the cost of a wide range of pathological side-effects,” Warkentin’s accusation that “Clearly, there is no moral consideration for the individual pigs involved, only the potential human benefits of increased agricultural efficiency are of value” (89) seems more than justified. Moreover, this observation seems even more relevant when compared to Jimmy’s own recollection of the pigoons at OrganInc Farm as mere machines and/or biotechnological creations for human enhancement and consumption. Specifically, a pigoon’s worth, so to speak, was in incubating human organs that would not only “transplant smoothly and avoid rejection” but also be able to “fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses” (22). OrganInc was also continually evolving the technology, resulting in such advances as “A rapid maturity gene” being able to be “spliced in so the pigoon kidneys and livers and hearts would be ready sooner,” as well as “perfecting a pigoon” that could grow multiple kidneys at once (22). Such a pigoon, as explained to Jimmy, could “keep on living and grow more organs,” which would be “less wasteful, as it took a lot of food and care to grow a pigoon,” which was necessarily a good thing in that “A great deal of investment money had gone into OrganInc Farms” (23).

This Compound-specific brand of techno-corporate capitalism is further extended by the fact that “the kidnapping of a pigoon and its finely honed genetic material by a rival outfit would have been a disaster” and thus pigoons “were kept in special buildings” that were “heavily secured” (25-26). Moreover, the culmination of the Pigoon project as described combined with the notion that the “pigoons were much bigger and fatter than ordinary pigs, to leave room for all of the extra organs” seems all too comparable to Warkentin’s description of the Beltsville pig experimentations, with Jimmy’s own empathy in his disclosure that “He was glad he didn’t live in a pen [...]” (26) corresponding to Warkentin’s suggestion that “The corporeal results of [the Beltsville pig] experiment failed dramatically in terms of animal welfare” (89). Ultimately, this correspondence between the real and the imaginary lends a certain amount of credibility to Jennifer Wagnor-Lawlor’s observation that “Atwood is of course particularly concerned with the capitalist ideology of our own culture, in which ‘absolutely everything is a consumer good’” (67). Specifically, this notion of rampant consumerism combined with a seemingly unquestioned blend of techno-corporatism that is being driven by an equally rampant capitalism is amplified by the prevalence of hybrid, transgenic organisms created for human consumption.

For example, where some organisms such as rakunks, a raccoon skunk hybrid that did not endure the typical fate of other hybrids that “were destroyed because they were too dangerous to have around” and instead “caught on as pets” because of their “nice disposition” (51), were created “as an after-hours hobby” by some labs because “create-an-animal was so much fun” and “it made you feel like God” (51), other hybrid organisms such as wolvogs, a cross between a wolf and dog bred to “deceive,” were envisioned as pure “Biodefences” that were superior to “an alarm system” (205). In other words, whether created as tools of human servitude or as a source of human

entertainment, all transgenic organisms within *Oryx and Crake* seem to initially serve this consumerist function of the unregulated techno-corporate system as a form of human consumption. Moreover, these rampant biotechnological creations play an important role in reinforcing the structure of the Compound system.

Specifically, the structure of the of Compounds and their rigid barriers (i.e., barriers between different Compounds, as well as barriers between inside and outside) begins to make a certain amount of sense when paired with the prevalence of hybrid, transgenic organisms—especially those considered valuable to the techno-capitalist machine (e.g., pigoons)—and the overall notion that the biotechnological age is full of danger. Specifically, in addition to serving as economic and class barrier between the Compound society and the Pleeblands, the Compounds themselves, with their “tight security” and often over-the-top protocols (53), tend to serve as a material guardian against the dangerous effects of biotechnology. For example, Snowman recalls an incident at the HelthWyzer Compound where “some fanatic, a woman, with a hostile bioform concealed in a hair spray bottle” had “nuked a guard who’d unwisely had his face mask off” (53). The standard protocol was followed for the incident: the woman was “spraygunned” and the guard “whisked into HotBioform and stuck into an isolation room, where he’d dissolved into a puddle of goo” (53).

The ultimate result of “Some vicious Ebola or Marburg splice” (53), the ironic nature of this episode at HelthWyzer is, of course, that this type of bioform threat is part of the circular nature inherent in the structure of the Compound. That is, the prevalent fusion of biotechnology, corporatism, and capitalism in *Oryx and Crake* seems to run “unchecked” as the result of what seems to be a lack of “regulation” (Sanderson 236). The irony lies squarely in the fact that the tight security and extreme protocols in terms of eliminating perceived biotechnological threats are a direct result of this lack of regulation,

and the rigid Compound structure—both materially and economically—is a measure to keep their own creations out. And because this reliance on biotechnology is built into the corporate structure and driven by capitalism, the continued creation of (sometimes) threatening biotechnology cannot be stopped—it is a circle of steady reinforcement of these material and economical borders. Moreover, this type of seemingly unstoppable pairing of unregulated biotechnological invention with an equally unscrupulous blend of corporatism and capitalism paves the way for the climax of the novel in Crake's Paradise project and *BlyssPluss* pill.

Having its "own park around it" as well as a separate "security installation" to further isolate it within the RejoovenEsense Compound, the "dome complex" (297) that was Paradise was the brain-child of Crake and under his full control. In fact, Snowman explains that the security units within Paradise were not the typical Corpsmen of the Compounds (i.e., the Corpsecorp)—they wore "Paradise uniforms" and were the only security allowed in the Paradise gates (297). With the actual entrance into the Paradise dome requiring passage through several levels of checkpoints and an "airlock" that could, according to Crake, "be sealed off" in order to prevent against "Hostile bioforms, toxin attacks, [and/or] fanatics [...]" (298), "nobody" on the staff at Paradise was "allowed out of the complex" due to the high risk of leaking information to rival Compounds about the projects (303).

In Crake's words, Paradise was about "immortality" (292), that "eliminat[ing] the external causes of death" meant "you were halfway there" (293). Crake explains: "War, which is to say misplaced sexual energy, which we consider to be a larger factor than the economic, racial, and religious causes often cited. Contagious diseases, especially sexually transmitted ones. Overpopulation, leading—as we've seen in spades—to environmental degradation and poor nutrition" (293). As Crake further explains, the

BlyssPluss pill was the first step to dealing with these external factors in that it “was designed to take a set of givens, namely the nature of human nature, and steer these givens in a more beneficial direction than the ones hitherto taken” (293). The BlyssPluss Pill, in Crake’s words, would do the following:

protect the user against all known sexually transmitted diseases, fatal, inconvenient, or merely unsightly; [...] provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, coupled with a generalized sense of energy and well-being, thus reducing the frustration and blocked testosterone that led to jealousy and violence, and eliminating feelings of low self-worth; and would prolong youth. (294)

Of course, the bonus side effect, “which would not be advertised” according to Crake, was that “The BlyssPluss Pill would also act as a sure-fire one-time-does-it-all-birth-control pill, for male and female alike, thus automatically lowering the population level” (294). In defense of Jimmy’s initial negative reaction of the bonus effect, Crake assures him that the pill would have a globally positive impact: “The investors were very keen on it, it was going to be global. It was all upside. There was no downside at all” (294).

Moreover, the BlyssPluss Pill is merely one peak of the biotechnological power at Paradise. Specifically, the pinnacle of research at Paradise is the Paradise project, the “result of a logical chain of progression” and “seven years of intensive trial-and-error research” that has culminated into what Jimmy refers to as “Crake’s life’s work” (302): the development of a biogenetically engineered posthuman race of humanoid beings, affectionately categorized as the Children of Crake, or the Crakers. Regardless of Crake’s actual intentions—we have the benefit of hindsight—his initial description of the Crakers is that they are mere “floor models,” meant as an example of Paradise’s ability to completely bioengineer a customized being: “They’d [consumers] be able to create totally chosen babies that would incorporate any feature, physical or mental or spiritual, that the buyer might wish to select” (304). Moreover, Crake explains that “present methods on offer were very hit-or-miss” and “The customers never knew whether they’d

get exactly what they paid for [...]” (304). However, Crake explains that ““with the Paradise method, there would be ninety-nine percent accuracy”” (304).

In terms of comparison to the technological vision of *Looking Backward*, this type of technology as consumption rings all too familiar in that, according to Matthew Beaumont, “It is not production that excites Bellamy, who deliberately excludes descriptions of the act of labour from his book, so much as consumption” (xv). Though Beaumont points out that the pinnacle of consumption within *Looking Backward* lies in the shopping trip taken by Julian West and Edith Leete—with the great goddess of Plenty and cornucopia over the entrance—this obsession with consumption certainly lies in the fact that increasing technology of the nineteenth century, with its improved methods of production in advanced machinery, meant more efficiency and cheaper goods. Thus, a social domino effect in the evolution of technology was created in that increased buying power—poor people could afford luxuries normally reserved for the wealthy—would create a flatter social ontology. Thus, technology for Bellamy tends towards being *intrinsically* good.

On the surface, Atwood’s portrayal of this relationship between consumerism and biotechnology leans heavily to the dystopian side of her speculation of the future, meaning that this blend of consumerism and technology simply reinforces hierarchies throughout the Compound system and between the Compounds and the pleeblands. That is, we might make the case that Atwood’s caution about technology is more along the lines of other utopian novels that entangled technology and society in the same way that both Atwood and Bellamy do but emphasize a more neutral, extrinsic view of technology. In fact, Kenneth Roemer’s reading of Will N. Harben’s *The Land of the Changing Sun* rings even truer in this context in that Harben and other utopians had similar conceptions of technology: “machines weren’t intrinsically bad, they had bad

effects when controlled by the wrong people in the wrong economic and moral environment” (*Obsolete* 116). This idea of the “wrong people in the wrong economic and moral environment” adds a great deal of complexity and depth when we think about it context with Crake and Paradise.

Thus, Crake’s Paradise, while at the same time representing the peak of biotechnological ability, also seems slightly different than the familiar blend of technology, corporatism, and capitalism that we have seen with transgenic organisms and hybridity earlier in the novel in that it is multi-layered. On the one hand, Crake’s BlyssPluss Pill alone is a unique blend of highly questionable ethics, uber techno-capitalism, but also a hint of altruism. Specifically, Crake’s disclosure of the BlyssPluss Pill’s ability to be “a huge money-spinner” in that “it would be the must-have pill, in every country, in every society in the world” is ultimately his merely extending the narrative of biotechnological consumption that started with pigoons, rakunks, wolvogs, chickenobs, and all other manner of biotechnological creations in the world of *Oryx and Crake*. However, Crake wraps his reasoning for taking advantage of the system—by ultimately extending this biotech as human consumption—into an ethical situation, explaining that his invention is not “altruism exactly” but more like “sink or swim” for humanity (294). “As a species we’re in deep trouble,” Crake explains, “With the BlyssPluss Pill the human race will have a better chance of swimming” (295).

Thus, Crake’s complex notion of altruism is where the path gets a little muddier in terms of how we, the audience, are supposed to analyze Crake’s Paradise. That is, Crake’s disclosure is an amplification of the subtle hints of a steadily deteriorating environment that litter the narrative, and the pairing of this disclosure with Crake’s Frankenstein-eque creation in the Crakers as well as the altruistic-esque aspirations of

the BlyssPluss Pill leave the narrative open but turn us down the posthuman and environmental path.

3.4 Environment

In what she calls “an exploration of my lifelong relationship with a literary form, or forms, or subforms, both as reader and as writer,” Atwood’s book, *In Other Worlds*, is an enlightening journey of the author’s engagement with literature, especially her own writings. Though not all of this work is applicable here, I want to start with a full two paragraph quote on how she responds to multiple inquiries “about the ‘inspiration’” for writing *Oryx and Crake*, and subsequently *The Year of the Flood*:

Of course there are proximate causes for all novels—a family story, a newspaper clipping, an event in one’s personal history—and for *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* there are such causes as well. Worries about the effects of climate change can be found as far back as 1972, when the Club of Rome accurately predicted what now appears to be happening, so those worries had long been with me, though they were not front-page stories in the spring of 2001 when I began *Oryx and Crake*. As with *The Handmaid’s Tale*, I accumulated many file folders of research; and although in both there are some of what Huckleberry Finn would call ‘stretchers’, there is nothing that’s entirely without foundation.

So I could point to this or that scientific paper, this or that newspaper or magazine story, this or that actual event, but those kinds of things are not really what drive the storytelling impulse. I’m more inclined to think that it’s unfinished business, of the kind represented by the questions people are increasingly asking themselves: how badly have we messed up the planet? Can we dig ourselves out? What would a species-wide self-rescue effort look like if played out in actuality? And also: Where has utopian thinking gone? Because it never totally disappears. (94)

When we consider how we ended the last section, citing the possible ambiguity and complexity that arises from Crake’s admission of humanity’s looming problems and his Paradise projects, Atwood’s own questions and admissions on the writing of *Oryx and Crake* both amplify the complexity—her questions of “Can we dig ourselves out” and “What would a species-wide self-rescue effort look like if played out in actuality” are

highly interesting—as well as get us moving towards clearing the path by highlighting an environmental undertone (or overtone).

Basing her knowledge on the fact that much of the “critical work about Margaret Atwood” as well as Atwood’s own “official website” allude to the author’s connection to environmental activism, Mosca insists that “Atwood, always very vocal about her environmental concerns—as an author and as an activist—, depicts a scenario in *Oryx and Crake* that plausibly results from current environmental policies” (39). Thus, a particular memory from Snowman’s life seems to put the environmental question right into perspective. Being questioned about his mother’s leaving the Compounds—that Jimmy’s father held such a high position at the HelthWyzer Compound meant that Jimmy and his mother might have compromising information—Snowman recalls that

There were the things his mother rambled on about sometimes, about how everything was being ruined and would never be the same again, like the beach house her family had owned when she was little, the one that got washed away with the rest of the beaches and quite a few of the eastern coastal cities when the sea-level rose so quickly, and then there was that huge tidal wave, from the Canary Islands volcano. (63)

As Mosca points out, Atwood’s caution about humanity’s dangerous environmental path is necessarily “embedded within fiction,” which creates a narrative space within which to estrange the audience and open up the conversation about these environmental concerns (39). Moreover, the flashback style narrative of *Oryx and Crake* opens up a rather unique space in that the story is told from a post-apocalyptic perspective, meaning that both the end of the path and the journey can be experienced by the audience.

Specifically, hints of a steadily degrading environment are littered throughout the novel, starting as early as Snowman’s first memory of the bonfire at the Compounds with his admission that “The month could have been October, or else November; the leaves still turned colour then, and they were orange and red” (16). This admission that the leaves still turned color could be an optimistic message that there is still time to change

“the road we’re on,” whereas staying on this road will have disastrous consequences. To that end, the examples of the steadily worsening environment tend to become more punctuated and amplified as the narrative moves forward, regarding climate change in the past-tense as an unchangeable, inevitable event. That is, whereas Snowman’s first memories seem to indicate a hint of optimism, his memory of Jimmy and Crake’s high school graduation ceremony some years later tends to reinforce the notion of the inevitable, noting that “The ceremony used to take place in June; the weather then used to be sunny and moderate. But June was now the wet season all the way up the east coast” (173). Now, he explains, the ceremony took place on a “warm humid day in February” (173).

Of course, Atwood’s environmental warnings are not limited to climate change alone. There is Crake’s teenage obsession with the videogame *Extinctathon*, an “interactive biofreak masterlore game” in which players attempt to determine the name of an extinct species that “ [died] out within the past fifty years” (80). Snowman explains that a “printout of every extinct species” was available to aid a player in the game, but that it “was a couple of hundred pages of fine print and filled with obscure bugs, weeds, and frogs nobody had ever of” (81) not only makes the printout near useless in Jimmy’s world, but it provides a rather satirical example of the dangerous consequences of such aloofness in terms of mass extinctions. That is, it is especially poignant when viewed in the context of the narrative as a foreshadowing of the coming apocalypse, and it is especially useful when viewed as a function of the critical dystopian novel in that it has the ability to provoke an active engagement between the real world and the estranged world of the novel. Specifically, my repeated citation of our move towards at least some consideration for authorial intent, or authorial connection, is helpful in that we can connect much of what we see in *Oryx and Crake* to what we see in our world today as

part of the function of Atwood's tale as a critical dystopia. That is, we have to consider the ambition of *Oryx and Crake* in context.

In addition to Atwood's own disclosure that begins this section, Ingersoll cites the "brief afterword" from Atwood titled, "Writing *Oryx and Crake*," as speaking to "Atwood's sense of *Oryx and Crake*'s urgent message" in that "She writes of getting inspired to write the novel in Australia, where she was deeply impressed by reminders of how indigenous peoples had lived in close connection with their environment" as well as "a journey to the Arctic where she observed evidence of the shrinking polar icecap" (163). The result was, in Ingersoll's words, a willingness to "risk the horror of being thought 'prolific'" in her revelation "that she began the project shortly after the publication of *The Blind Assassin* and *well* before she had expected to write another novel" (163, emphasis in original). To that end, *Oryx and Crake*'s obvious environmental message does not stand alone nor fall on deaf ears, taking its place in a cross-disciplinary conversation on the steadily changing view of the relationship between humanity and the environment.

In "The Climate of History: Four Theses," Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that "Now that humans—thanks to our numbers, the burning of fossil fuel, and other related activities—have become a geological agent on the planet, some scientists have proposed that we recognize the beginning of a new geological era, one in which humans act as a main determinant of the environment of the planet. The name they have coined for this new geological age is Anthropocene" (209). Paul Crutzen, who is typically given credit for the development and proposal of the Anthropocene, adds that though humanity's role as a "global forcing agent" is not a particularly new idea (new eras that denote this human agency have been proposed as far back as a century ago), the proposal of the Anthropocene roughly ten years ago (2002) has stuck mainly because "[...] it was coined at a time of dawning realization that human activity was indeed changing the Earth on a

scale comparable with some of the major events of the ancient past. Some of these changes are now seen as permanent, even on a geological time-scale” (2228).

Based merely on the sheer immensity of the Anthropocene—that humans are affecting the planet on a Geological Scale that is typically reserved for “meteorite strikes, extraordinary volcanic outbursts, colliding continents, and disappearing oceans” (Crutzen et al 2228)—the way we tend to view nature, culture, and humanity has changed. Chakrabarty’s initial points on these changes—most notably, the fracturing line of distinction between humanity and nature—re-frame the relationship between technology, posthumanist theory, utopia/dystopia, humanity, and the environment in terms of their roles within literature, especially within *Oryx and Crake*. Some of the re-framing of these relationships certainly comes in the form of Atwood’s portrayal of the degrading environment throughout *Oryx and Crake*, but this environmental commentary is only the beginning of seeing all of these elements—utopia/dystopia, technology, posthumanism, and humanity—in a new frame. Moreover, it takes a re-evaluation of all of these elements as well as the elements we have already analyzed (hybridity, the fusion of technology, corporatism, and capitalism that structure the Compounds, and the environmental commentary) to get to a more posthuman frame in terms of this novel.

3.5 Posthumanist Implications

We really cannot be blamed for seeing Atwood’s dystopian angles more clearly in that one of the main reasons for the inclusion of *Oryx and Crake* in this thesis is that it does have a fairly clear warning: technology is transcendent. This idea of a type of transcendence through technology is wrapped up in the idea of Crake as *homo faber*, or “he who labors to use every instrument as a means to achieve a particular end in building a world, even when the fabrication of that world necessarily demands a repeated violation of its materiality, including its own people” (DiMarco 170). Thus, in DiMarco’s words,

Crake is the “quintessential homo faber” (170) and his main tool is his biotechnological capability.

Up until now, all of these accusations has been true not only for Crake, but for all of the biotechnology and other elements that make *Oryx and Crake* a speculative fiction in the vein of a cautionary tale: transgenic organisms have been questioned as unethical, the structures of the Compounds and their inner-workings have been shown to have troubling socio-economic consequences, and Crake’s label as a contemporary Frankenstein, as well as creator of the apocalypse that Snowman has survived, has been mostly descriptive and straightforward. In essence, our trip through this novel has been speculative with a slight lean towards dystopian. But *Oryx and Crake* is not a pure dystopian novel, not according to Atwood herself and likely not according to most scholars. In fact, we have already outlined how *Oryx and Crake*’s ability to blur genre lines puts in more in the vein of a critical dystopia, in some ways bordering on anti-utopian, but somehow also keeping its borders open and providing a surprising narrative of agency, empowerment, and potential posthuman utopia.

3.5.1 Hybridity, Liberation, and the Imaginary Landscape

On the surface, the hybrid, transgenic organisms such as rakunks (hybrid cross of raccoon and skunk), pigoons (pigs spliced with human DNA in order to grow human organs), and wolvogs (hybrid dog and wolf) seem to initially occupy the narrative landscape as mere tools of consumption (Mosca 41). Specifically, the mechanical reduction of these transgenic organisms—a process of “mechanomorphism” in which “organic” bodies are reduced to parts or components to be manipulated as tools of science (Warkentin 83-86)—certainly seems problematic in that it tends to align itself with a more technoscientific version of posthumanism, or transhumanism. That is, hybridity as mechanomorphism, on the surface, does not move us away from the liberal humanist

subject in that it actually does more to reinscribe this (false) universal humanist subject by allowing this biotechnology to be wielded as a tool of human transcendence, giving humanity power over subjects and the environment. However, there are at least two ways in which we can make the case that transgenic organisms tend to actually border on being posthuman bodies in a more material, post-anthropocentric posthumanist sense.

Specifically, though we may not be able to quell the transcendent tendencies of *homo faber* and avoid a paradoxical situation altogether, the case can be made that genetic engineering can provide the opportunity to de-center the human and overturn the (false) universal humanist subject by leaning on Donna Haraway's work in her "Cyborg Manifesto." That is, being both (in)famous and often (mis)quoted (Haraway, *Reader* 4), Haraway's "Manifesto" changed the image of the cyborg from the popular representation of a "man-machine" to a metaphorical entity capable of breaking boundaries, collapsing dualisms, and tearing down the hierarchies created by the liberal humanist subject. Paving the way for a new (cyborgian) theoretical framework from which to view posthumanism, Haraway's "Manifesto" is nothing short of what she describes in the first line of her work: "This essay is an effort to build an ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism" (2269).

Haraway sees the cyborg as occupying a unique space that allows for the subversion of the liberal humanist subject and traditional Western ideologies. She writes that "The cyborg skips the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. [...] The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (2271). In other words, the cyborg's uniquely hybrid nature—the literal melding of organic and inorganic—allows it to claim exemption from, in Vincent Leitch's words, "myths of essential identity and original

unity—the myth of the garden of Eden, a belief in a pure, coherent social identity that separates the truly human from animals, machines, and other races and ethnic groups” (2267). Thus, undermining this type of essentialism, an essentialism that has paved the way for the “domination of all constituted others” (Haraway 2296), is the territory of Haraway’s cyborg in that it acts as a metaphor for the collapsing of socially constructed dualisms: “self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man” (2296). Thus, the cyborg comes to be representative of an embodiment of an always-already other—a cyborg is not a “pure” human or a “pure” machine.

As an entity with no traditional sense of some “pure essence” due to its hybrid nature, the cyborg is not capable of reinforcing the (false) universality of the liberal humanist viewpoint because its very being brings into question any sort of normative or universalized view of the subject. Haraway’s cyborg is an embodied, post-anthropocentric posthuman body. Moreover, the case can be made that transgenic organisms share these cyborgian characteristics. Specifically, that “pigeon organs could be customized, using cells from individual human donors” (*Oryx and Crake* 23) suggests a breaching of species boundaries. Comparing this fictional scenario in *Oryx and Crake* to real-life genetic engineering, Warkentin points out that “Success in genetic engineering depends upon similarity between and among different individuals and species,” which necessarily “challenges concepts of species as fixed” by blurring these boundaries (94). Thus, this is a direct “challenge” to the traditional “Western understanding of humans and animals, of nature and culture, and related patriarchal dualisms” (Warkentin 84). Moreover, that these transgenic organisms—both fictional and real—claim “no natural habitat, no place of origin in this world, and therefore always present an ecological risk if

released from the laboratory” (Warkentin 92), is cyborgian in the sense that they have no concept of essential identity.

Additionally, we can make a strong case for the agency of these transgenic organisms by utilizing the form of the novel. That is, we have to agree with Sherryl Vint’s assessment that “SF is particularly suited to exploring the question of the posthuman because it is a discourse that allows us to concretely imagine bodies and selves otherwise” (19). In other words, this is where the imaginary narrative space of a novel, especially a critical dystopia, becomes a necessity in our ability to imagine alternatives and solutions to problems we see in our own social reality. That is, one of the most interesting points that *Oryx and Crake* can address is the fact that we often only analyze the ethical implications of transgenic organisms in an environment of indefinite, human-controlled captivity—these analyses all assume that the organisms are confined to a laboratory (Warkentin 92). However, Atwood’s imaginary postapocalyptic, narrative allows us to create a what-if scenario and speculate on the possible effects of a transgenic organism, being spliced with human and nonhuman DNA, breaking the confines of the laboratory and embedding itself into the environment.

For example, Snowman’s post-apocalyptic present (i.e., when not recalling memories of life as Jimmy) is filled with scenes of unhindered transgenic organisms ranging from rakunks, which are described by snowman as only a “nuisance, scuffling through the leaves and sniffing at his toes” (38), to the more dangerous wolvogs, which had forced Snowman to live up in a tree (39). However, it is the pigeons that the narrative tends to show as not only surviving but thriving, taking full advantage of the fact that their specific genetic manipulation—being spliced with human DNA to be human organ incubators—has led to their having , in Warkentin’s words, “clearly evolved human-like traits [...]” (93). That is, by creating havoc for Snowman as he attempts to outsmart

them on his journey to the long abandoned RejoovenEsense Compound, we get a sense that the liberation from the confined space of laboratories becomes somewhat of an “empowering” moment for the pigoons. For example, Snowman complains that “Those beasts are clever enough to fake a retreat, then lurk around the next corner. [...] A brainy omnivorous animal, the pigoon. Some of them may even have human neocortex tissue growing in their crafty, wicked heads” (235).

As Warkentin explains, though “The idea of pig-human hybrids running rampant in the streets may be taking current genetically modified organisms to an absurdly extreme end of the range of possibility,” the “experience does suggest that organisms can and will respond to biological and ecological changes in unpredictable ways” (94). In other words, this scenario not only affords a sense of “agency of power” among “transgenic organisms” that can only be achieved by utilizing the unique space created through Atwood’s speculative novel but, more importantly, it “remind us of the agency of animals, which tends to be ignored or denied all too often” (94).

3.5.2 Rationalizing Crake’s Desire

Shortly before Snowman decides to take a journey from his tree back to the RejoovenEsense Compound, the site of the Paradise dome and birthplace of Crake’s ultimate plan to wipe out humanity with the BlyssPluss Pill, Snowman offers an insight into Crake that does not occur as a part of the flashback narrative:

Monkey brains, had been Crake’s opinion. Monkey paws, monkey curiosity, the desire to take apart, turn inside out, smell, fondle, measure, improve, trash, discard—all hooked up to monkey brains, an advanced model of monkey brains but monkey brains all the same. Crake had no very high opinion of human ingenuity, despite the large amount of it he himself possessed. (99)

These little snippets of insider knowledge from Snowman are a regularly occurring part of the narrative. Coming between flashbacks and giving the audience insight into Snowman’s life as the chosen survivor of Crake’s apocalypse, these small passages of

knowledge also give us hints of Crake's desire. But what does Crake desire? One way we can approach an answer to understanding the nature of Crake's desire is to draw out the more activist and/or oppositional elements within the narrative. Specifically, there is an activism within the narrative that begins with Jimmy's mother and ends with Crake.

Being formerly employed as a biologist at OrganInc Farms—"That was how [Jimmy's] mother had met his father" (29)—Jimmy's mother's environmental and anti-biotechnology rhetoric grows exponentially within the narrative, culminating in her eventual abandonment of Jimmy, Jimmy's father, and the Compounds. For example, in response to Jimmy's father's excitement over the success of "the neuro-regeneration project," a project that amplified the "possibilities" for people such as "stroke victims" by getting "genuine human neocortex tissue" to grow "in a pigoon" (56), Jimmy's mother lambasts the project as "a moral cesspool" concerned only with finding "yet another way to rip off a bunch of desperate people" (56), describing it as "interfering with the building blocks of life," "immoral," and "sacrilegious" (57).

Adding another layer to her activist/oppositional rhetoric, she pleads to Jimmy's father, "Don't you remember the way we used to talk, everything we wanted to do? Making life better for people—not just people with money. You used to be so...you had ideals, then" (57). This last admission provides a certain amount of intrigue when paired with the fact that Crake was, in Snowman's words, "among the scant handful of Jimmy's friends that his mother liked" (69). "Your friend is intellectually honourable," she told Jimmy, "He doesn't lie to himself" (69). Snowman even relates the fact that Jimmy's mother saw Crake as "more adult than a lot of adults" and that "You could have an objective conversation with him, a conversation in which events and hypotheses were followed through to their *logical conclusions*" (69 emphasis mine). Moreover, we also cannot ignore Crake's obsession with the game *Extinctathon* in that his Paradise dome

complex is literally filled with a staff of, in his words, “splice geniuses,” all of which Crake recruited from MaddAddam, a group of anti-compound activists that used *Extinctathon* as a front.

Knowing what we know about Crake, that Jimmy’s mother finds Crake honorable might seem odd in light of her obvious anti-biotechnology rhetoric. However, when viewed in context of the insight that Snowman gives from his postapocalyptic vantage point, that “Crake had no very high opinion of human ingenuity” (99), we can begin to piece together a certain rationalization of Crake that hinges on this activist and/or oppositional nature, a certain desire to change a world he believes is broken. Hannes Bergthaller writes that

it is quite clear that Crake, underneath his veneer of cynical aloofness, nourishes a deep disgust of the world he grows up in, and that he is motivated not by greed but by a genuine desire to change it. [...] His Paradise project is not a money-making enterprise, but an attempt to cut the Gordian knot that is human nature [...]. (735)

To that end, Earl Ingersoll makes the equally relevant point that “[Crake] knows that even homo sapiens cannot survive in an environment devastated by the 20th century’s insistence on burning fossil fuels and by a mushrooming population. Because the species is headed for extinction, along with all the others unable to adapt to a hostile environment, Crake concludes that science must create a species with a better chance of surviving in a damaged ecosystem” (166). Thus, Crake’s solution is to wipe-out humanity and pave the way for the Crakers.

As explained by Jimmy, Crake’s design of the Crakers was intended to eliminate what he (Crake) saw as the “destructive features” of the ancient primate brain: Racism was eliminated by “switching the bonding mechanism” meaning that the Crakers simply “did not register skin colour”; hierarchy was eliminated by simply leaving out “the neural complexes that would have created it”; the fact that they were designed to only eat

“nothing but leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two” meant that food would always be “plentiful”; and perhaps the most important aspect of Crake’s design, however, was the notion that “ [The Crakers] would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money” in that the need for this type of symbolic thinking was simply engineered out (305). The overall result was that “ [The Crakers] were perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses or tools or weapons, or, for that matter, clothing” (305).

In other words, the Crakers are necessarily a posthuman race in that they already overturn the notion of a liberal humanist subject just in their design, collapsing negative dualisms and hierarchy as a Harwinian-esque cyborg, and existing in a state of absolute acknowledgement of their relationality with the rest of the environment—“they [even] recycle their own excrement” (305)—making them materially embedded, co-constituted, intra-active posthuman participants in their environments. Thus, the case can be made that what we see in the Crakers is Crake’s posthuman answer to a world that has suffered from the results of a humanist worldview, one that has championed technological progress without regard for consequences and reinforced rigid lines of separation through a hierarchical structure that reflects an unchecked blend of technology, corporatism, and capitalism. If we had to answer the question, *what is Crake’s desire*, a good guess would be, *a world without humanity*.

However, one of the main elements of Crake’s method—Crake as the “quintessential *homo faber*” (DiMarco 170)—and the out-right transcendence through technology is certainly not lost in translation. That is, we fully acknowledge the paradoxical nature of the Crakers, that they are the ultimate solution to human-made environmental, socio-cultural, and socio-economic problems yet find their genesis at the *hands* of a human genetic engineer, using the same technological means that brought on

the problems in the first place. It is a paradox in terms of our posthumanist lens that Atwood does not provide a clear answer for. However, there is also the problem of genre that Crake's method poses. Specifically, buying into Crake's solution to the planet's problems could mean buying into a notion that humanity is fundamentally flawed, which creeps a little too close to anti-utopia. Thus, the question becomes one of hope.

Moylan and Baccolini write that "Whereas the traditional dystopia maintains hope, if at all, outside its pages, the new critical dystopias preserve hope inside their pages as they 'allow both readers and protagonists to hope' by imagining resistant utopian enclaves within the dystopian world and by proffering—through a strategy of 'genre blurring'—ambiguous open endings that resist closure" (7). Do these transgenic organisms offer a glimpse of utopian hope in the same way they seem to offer posthuman hope? That is, in the same way that we can argue for the agency of transgenic organisms, ultimately created by human ingenuity, can we see a possibility that *Oryx and Crake* leaves the door open?

At the end of the novel, when Snowman returns from his journey he notices that "[The Crakers are] sitting in a semi-circle around a grotesque-looking figure, a scarecrowlike effigy" (360) made in his own likeness by the Crakers. "We made a picture of you," they say, "to help us send out our voices to you" (361). A warning from Crake immediately comes to Snowman: "Watch out for art [...]. As soon as they start doing art, we're in trouble. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall" (361). In other words, was Crake's plan all in vain? And then again, at the very end of the novel, Snowman's hidden encounter of three new human survivors: "What next?" he asks himself, "Advance with a strip of bedsheet tied to a stick, waving a white flag?" (373). Or does he "finish it now, before they see him, while he still has the strength," he wonders,

“Should he kill them in cold blood?” (374). It is still a question at the end for Snowman, but nevertheless an open end in critical dystopian form.

3.6 Conclusion

Could Edward Bellamy have envisioned a world like Jimmy and Crake's, a world where capitalism, corporatism, and technology were allowed to intertwine and evolve into an unregulated, hierarchical, and rigidly structured techno-industrial world of Compounders and pleebians? Moreover, could Bellamy have envisioned the world of Snowman, a human-made post-apocalyptic, post-industrial, and post-technological world filled with transgenic organisms and posthuman Crakers that are better equipped for an environment that has been ravaged by humanity? Perhaps the better question is whether or not Bellamy could have envisioned a world where technology did not inevitably lead to a utopian *salvation for mankind* but rather to an inevitable dystopian *downfall for humanity* at the *hands* of its own ingenuity.

We cannot blame Bellamy for taking what he saw as the problems of late nineteenth century and envisioning a future world in which those problems were ultimately solved based on the belief that technology would serve as an abstracted utopian force, that human progress was naturally progressive and democratic, and that an optimal version of a nationalized style of capitalism would entirely eliminate social stratification. In that same vein, we cannot blame Atwood for taking Bellamy's vision of technology as an abstract utopian force to the extreme and envisioning her own type of transcendent technological force, allowed and encouraged to evolve in a society structured around an unregulated fusion of technology, capitalism, and corporatism that culminated in, to quote Crake, “the result of a logical chain of progression” (302), which was necessarily the end of humanity.

Both *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake* show evidence that posthumanist thought has a place in utopia and dystopia as an element in understanding how to critique the present and envision a better way, regardless of the method. That is, we have been able to see a fermenting posthumanist thought in *Looking Backward* in that Bellamy's goals of eliminating social stratification necessarily meant seeing humanity as more interconnected and mutually dependent upon each other in an almost material, posthumanist sense. That is, this burgeoning posthumanist thought is a direct manifestation of Bellamy's own philosophy of solidarity, that humanity is interconnected through solidarity and acknowledgement within a larger life. However, Bellamy's eutopian vision cannot be a fully realized posthumanist euopian vision because of its equally "potential" problems. Specifically, Bellamy's more abstracted treatment of the relationship between technology, humanity, and utopia ignores the material nature of these relationships. Not only does this open the door for humanity's disconnection from the material world, but it also opens the door for scenarios that are portrayed in *Oryx and Crake*—a transcendence through technology.

Specifically, Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* certainly takes a more direct approach in terms of a material, posthumanist thought by showing us the (always-already present) agency of transgenic organisms such as the pigoons and the Crakers, projecting them as cyborgian posthuman bodies that break boundaries, collapse dualisms, and overturn the liberal humanist subject by "skipping" the "myth of original unity and essentialism" (Haraway 2267). Moreover, we can also make the case that where Bellamy failed to accurately reflect the material relationship between humanity, technology, and utopia, Atwood's cautionary tale makes this material relationship its primary focus by envisioning a world that is structured entirely out of this material relationship, allowing a uniquely dystopian blend of technology, capitalism, and corporatism to drive the social-cultural

milieu. Thus, the posthumanist agency that is built through this unregulated technocorporatism is ultimately at the cost of human exceptionalism and transcendental technology—this posthumanist agency’s genesis is at the hands of Crake, the “quintessential *homo faber*” (DiMarco 170).

Thus, as we move towards the last chapter of this thesis and towards a hopeful compromise, we are apt to address at least one question that might aid our transition. Is utopian hope by way of technology simply not possible? Bellamy’s pure utopia-as-static-blueprint can be argued as being too simplistic and bordering on naïve in that a blue-print utopia is too restrictive and does not account for processes and change. However, Atwood’s complex critical dystopia that blends genres and leaves the door to utopia open does not seem to work either in that we are left with more caution than hope. Additionally, whatever sense of utopia that either of these works portray is certainly representative of a utopia with problems: Bellamy’s intrinsically good technology can obviously swing towards dystopia in that technology as a utopian driving force has the potential for devastating consequences as we have seen with Atwood. However, the posthuman, transgenic, near-utopian world in *Oryx and Crake*—notably a world without a strong human presence—suffers from the same problems as *Looking Backward* in that that world had to come at the expense of humanity and the total transcendence of humanity through technology. In other words, our notion that both *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake* show posthuman potential but neither comes close to an outright posthumanist eutopia seems to be a fairly accurate prediction thus far.

Chapter 4

Oppositional Cultures: *A Door Into Ocean* as Posthumanist Eutopia

Referencing a number of questions that she is often asked “as a writer of science fiction,” Joan Slonczewski, in her 1994 article, “Science in Science Fiction: Making It Work,” sets her own vision of science fiction (SF) apart from other notable SF authors such as Michael Crichton, Ursula Le Guin, and Maureen McHugh, explaining that her “own work explores the interactions between science and society, and the human beings caught between them” (14). Moreover, in a round table discussion between SF authors who are also involved in the biological sciences to some degree—Slonczewski is a professor of biology at Kenyon College, specializing in microbiology—she also discloses a notion that not only does she “teach a course on biology and science fiction” from the perspective that it helps students learn “standard science” but she ultimately “find[s] science to be inspirational for science fiction” (“Biologists Strike Back” 1, 3). Thus, not only does Slonczewski’s vision situate her work directly into the subject matter of this thesis, finding common ground among both *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake* in her notion of using the narrative space of the novel to understand these complex relationships between science, humanity, and society, but her ideas of using the science fiction novel as a medium for productive engagement and inspiration situates her work in a much broader conversation about the SF novel as a method of envisioning utopia.

Specifically, Slonczewski’s notion that SF serves to inspire and engage is echoed by theorists such as Sherryll Vint who writes that “The world itself must be imagined anew in SF and the conventions of the genre require the author to explore and explain the relationship between changes in the material world—which might include new technologies—and changes in the human subjects who inhabit this world” (19). Moreover, Vint moves into an even more relevant direction when she notes that “SF is

particularly suited to exploring the question of the posthuman because it is a discourse that allows us to concretely imagine bodies and selves otherwise, a discourse defined by its ability to estrange our commonplace perceptions of reality” (19). In other words not only does SF create a more productive space for imagining alternative societies that can work through these complex relationships, but this type of estranged engagement is necessarily a utopian engagement of posthumanism.

Moreover, as Moylan and Baccolini point out, Slonczewski is one of a handful of authors of the 1980s to resist the outright dystopian turn in utopian literature, noted as keeping “social dreaming alive” even as the brief utopian revival of the 1960s and 1970s faded during a decade of “economic restructuring, right-wing politics, and a cultural milieu informed by an intensifying fundamentalism and commodification [...]” (*Dark Horizons* 2). Even Peter Fitting listed *A Door Into Ocean* (*A Door*) as part of a growing and “ongoing feminist utopian tradition” as far back as 1992 (32), and Patrick D. Murphy echoed Fitting’s categorization as recently as his 2012 article, “The Procession of Identity and Ecology in Contemporary Literature,” adding that this initial categorization has, in fact, evolved into *A Door*’s consideration as “an ecofeminist eutopia” (84). These are highly relevant categorizations for Slonczewski’s work in that they all highlight the fact that *A Door* not only sits at the intersection of a number of poststructural theories (i.e., ecocriticism, feminism, posthumanism, etc.), but it occupies a significant space in the historical evolution of the utopian genre that witnesses the birth of the critical utopia, a literary form that finds roots in both utopia as well as SF, and makes the case that this work is a posthumanist eutopia.

This chapter focuses on *A Door* as both a posthumanist work as well as a utopian work, making the argument that where we initially only found a potential posthumanism in both *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake*, Slonczewski’s novel

portrays a fully realized posthumanist eutopian society in the Sharers, a far-future all female (alien) civilization. Being published in 1986, the first section of this chapter situates *A Door* into the utopian conversation with a necessary overview of the transformation of the utopian genre in the late 1960s and 1970s, making the case that *A Door* shares certain important elements within the new category of utopian literature that grew out of this time-period, the critical utopia. One of the main critical utopian elements that I draw on for this entire chapter lies in how the narrative space of the critical utopia, unlike traditional utopias, is utilized as a more process-oriented space. Specifically, by portraying two distinctly different societies in a binary opposition in order to allow the audience to see a eutopian society as actively engaged with a competing dystopian society, I make the case that we can view *A Door* as necessarily utilizing these types of critical utopian elements as a method to enhance the ability of the audience to engage the text.

Building on these elements, the remaining sections concentrate on how the narrative space of Slonczewski's work, by portraying these two societies as binary oppositions, creates a productive engagement with the competing philosophies and world-views. One of the main elements that I draw on is that the Patriarchal world-view and philosophy is built on a notion of sovereignty as embodied by the Hobbesian social contract, a theoretical model that tends to reinscribe the liberal humanist subject by reinforcing anthropocentric frameworks for determining sovereign rights. By being placed in opposition to the Patriarch, the Sharers serve as a model for undermining this embodiment of the traditional sovereign rights model through their overtly posthumanist philosophy and world-view, which is based a notion of reciprocity and balanced within a larger web of life.

The last section of this chapter is a culmination of sorts in that I build upon this vision of the Sharers as models for undermining the Patriarch and extend it into the technological realm, showing how the Sharers' posthumanist philosophy and world-view informs their scientific epistemology. Specifically, I make the case that the Sharers' philosophy of reciprocity and balance within a larger web of life is intimately tied to their scientific epistemology in terms of their application of their highly advanced biotechnology and life science. Moreover, by extending the use of the binary opposition between the Patriarch and Sharers we again get a productive comparison between two drastically different epistemologies, both of which are informed by their philosophies and world-views: the Patriarch extends its adherence to the traditional sovereign model by embodying a scientific epistemology of force, violence, and power over nature, whereas the Sharers extend their posthumanist philosophy and worldview into their scientific epistemology, portraying an advanced technological know-how that fulfills the utopian function of creating a better society while avoiding the transcendent nature of advanced technology.

4.1 Genre and Utopia

As we have already done with every other work in this thesis, we have to situate this novel into the utopian conversation by connecting it to the changes within the utopian genre at the time of its writing. Specifically, though typically characterized and analyzed mainly as a feminist novel, *A Door* was born out of a brief revival of the utopian genre in the 1960s and 1970s. Rising in the midst of the dystopian turn of the twentieth century, Moylan and Baccolini describe this revival as emerging from "the oppositional political culture of the late 1960s and 1970s" which "occasioned a revival of distinctly eutopian writing, the first major revival since the end of the nineteenth century" (2). Being "Shaped by ecological, feminist, and New Left thought," this revival was more along the lines of a

major transformation in utopian writing in that it “had to pass through the destruction of utopian writing as it had been known in order to preserve it” (2). In other words, as opposed to a simple revival along the lines of an increase in published works, the overall result was a major transformation in the genre that led to the birth of the critical utopia.

Similar to how we situated posthumanism as being rooted in a growing anti-humanist sentiment during the social revolutions of the middle twentieth century, the rise of the critical dystopia followed a similar path, finding its own birth as a response to the growing oppositional culture of the 1960s and 1970s. In *Demand the Impossible*, Moylan writes that “in the 1960s, at the very time in which utopias appeared to be a literature of the last century with their radical impulse absorbed by consumer capital or smashed by heretofore unheard of repression, suffering, and destruction, a series of new utopian novels emerged from the ferment of opposition and creation in the United States” (41). Citing these “new utopian novels” as that of authors such as Joanna Russ, Ursula LeGuin, Marge Piercy (note that Piercy’s *He, She, and It* is a novel that spurs the creation of the critical dystopia classification), Samuel Delany, and others, Moylan takes special care to situate these authors in the science fiction realm, noting that they all started off in the “so-called ‘sub-culture’ of science fiction” (42). That is, Moylan credits these science fiction roots as being responsible for the transformation of the utopian genre, citing “the literary space opened up by the science fiction of the 1960s” as creating this new and more complex utopian novel (42).

Described by Moylan as being “a uniquely privileged symbolic response to the conditions of existence in [the twentieth] century,” science fiction’s value is in presenting itself as a genre concerning “the ‘future’” while actually “giv[ing] a fresh look at the present as it is represented in the past of a fictionally extrapolated future” (42). That is, “Science fiction demonstrates our incapacity to imagine the future and brings us down to

earth to apprehend our present in all its limitations” (42). Moreover, the evolution of the science fiction novel from the simpler and clichéd “adventure narratives” of the “1920s and 1930s” into the “open narrative” forms of the 1960s represented a literary form that was “especially capable of resisting the affirmative culture of contemporary capitalism [...]” (42). In other words, we have continually pointed out that utopian writing is an act of estrangement in that readers have to be estranged from their own time-period and/or geographic space in order to imagine better societies through a process of defamiliarization. Thus, the combination of the utopian imagination with the gradually evolving flexibility of the science fiction novel provided a particularly useful and lucrative narrative space within which to critique contemporary society.

Moreover, the critical utopia is in a unique position to maintain a culture of opposition, envision a eutopian world, and yet still not succumb to the downfalls of the utopian tradition by becoming trapped in the rigidity of utopian convention. Specifically, novels that contain these critical utopian elements “reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream,” generally “dwell on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated,” and often “focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives” (Moylan 10-11). That is, where a traditional utopia generally always starts with a traveler/visitor to the utopia, proceeds with a tour and detailed dialogue between the traveler/visitor and a member of the utopian society, and ends with the return of the traveler/visitor to her or his own society, the critical utopia “breaks with previous utopias by presenting in much greater, almost balanced, detail both the utopian society and the original society against which the utopia is pitted as a revolutionary alternative” (44). That is, it represents a more complex parallel between “old/dominant and

new/oppositional” in the form of a “binary opposition” between the two societies (Moylan 44).

It is important to note that part of the “critique” in the critical utopia is a sense of the negation of a static ideal in that the eutopian society is often depicted “in a more critical light” (Moylan 44). Thus, this change seems to engender a sense of process over static ideal, perhaps grounding the depicted utopia as portraying more realistic solutions to contemporary socio-cultural issues, and implying a sense of opening-up of the utopian genre and form. However, this is where *A Door* tends to stray from the typical critical utopian form in that the two binary societies are not ambiguous—there is a fairly clear distinction between the eutopian society and the dystopian society within this work. This is a rather important departure for this thesis in that it allows us to make the case that *A Door*, by being less ambiguous in its portrayal of these competing societies, is a fully realized posthumanist eutopia. However, this is not to say that the other critical utopian elements within *A Door* are negated, and we can further make the case that these other important critical utopian elements is what allows *A Door* to be viewed as a non-traditional, or revised, utopian novel—it does not succumb to the same pitfalls of a work such as *Looking Backward*.

For example, we can clearly see these critical utopian elements as they permeate the narrative space of Slonczewski’s *A Door*, not necessarily providing an ambiguous critique, but providing a more active engagement for the audience. Specifically, *A Door* revolves around the binary relationship between Valedon, a rocky planet of proto-typical human beings that is part of the larger empire of the Patriarch, and Valedon’s moon Shora, the Ocean Moon “whose sea had no shore” (5), which is inhabited by an all-female race of beings, the Sharers, who have lived “in peace for at least ten thousand years” (33) while maintaining independence from the rule of the

Patriarch. Moreover, the narrative as a whole is driven by this extremely productive and visual binary opposition, which allows for a more active engagement in terms of comparing the eutopian society to the “original society” in much better detail than the traditional utopian form (Moylan 44). Making this binary its focus, the narrative follows the story as the Sharers and the Patriarch, by way of Valedon, head into an inevitable confrontation, which opens the narrative up to a thorough comparison of each society.

Moreover, the entire first section of the book not only foreshadows this notion of an inevitable confrontation and sets up these productive binaries—i.e., Shora/Valedon, Feminist/Patriarch, posthuman/human, utopian/dystopian—but it also encompasses a more critical utopian like cast of heroes and travelers. Or, as Moylan explains, critical utopian heroes “of social transformation” tend to be “off-center” in that they are typically “not dominant, white, heterosexual, chauvinist males but female, gay, non-white, and generally operating collectively” (45). Thus, this provides a productive visual analog to poststructural movements within the same time period of this transformation within the utopian genre. However, the critical utopia maintains the traditional utopian traveler but with an equal sense of evolution in terms of flexibility in that, as Moylan puts it, the traveler is portrayed as having multiple options: they can become “the hero, or in some cases the anti-hero”; the traveler sometimes “reverses directions and goes from utopia to explore and learn from the original society”; or, more appropriate to *A Door*, the traveler is often portrayed as “a non-utopian misfit trying to live in utopia” (45). The overall result is a utopian novel that negates static ideals and is opened up in a refreshing, and likely more readable, manner.

A clear example of these “off-centerd” heroes as well as the nontraditional traveler/visitor can be gleaned from the first section of the narrative. Specifically, the first section revolves around the arrival of two Sharers in the Valan city of Chrysoport,

Merwen and Usha, whose goal on the planet is to “share learning” (7) as well as “find out why the Valan guests on their home world dumped noxious waste chemicals and raised trade ‘prices’ without warning” (26). Having “flesh” that “bloomed deep amethyst,” “hairless scalp” and “nailless fingertips,” and “overlong fingers” with “scalloped webbing that shone translucent against the sun,” Merwen and Usha stand out in the Chrysoport market square as a truly “off-center” spectacle, giving credence to the third person narrator’s notion that “No such creatures had ever been heard of on the planet of Valedon” (4). Moreover, in drawing the gaze and attention of most of the market-goers, they also draw the attention of Spinel, a native Valan and resident of the harbor-town of Chrysoport, whose curiosity of the Sharers ultimately leads to his agreeing to travel to Shora with Merwen and Usha. Thus, we are presented with a traditional utopian narrative in terms of gaining a traveler in Spinel, but we also gain “transformational heroes” in Merwen and Usha who are certainly “off-center” from any kind of normative ideology, which helps to support our categorization of *A Door* as a critical utopia.

Moreover, Spinel’s journey to the ocean world of Shora is not in the traditional vein of a work such as *Looking Backward* in that Shora is not initially viewed as a eutopia by Spinel, who spends the first few days in absolute culture shock, refusing to immerse himself in the culture—he refuses to eat from the “pudding plant” (55) at the home of Merwen and Usha, waiting a full day to visit the Valan traders for Valan food—and thinking of how “He would do anything to get off [of Shora] and back to Chrysoport [...]” (67). Further still, Spinel spends much of his time ridiculing Shora, exclaiming early on that out of the thousands of inhabited worlds that the Patriarch had claimed to have once controlled, “he would never find one as ridiculous as [Shora]” (61). In contrast, though Julian West awakes from his hundred year sleep with a certain air of disbelief about his surroundings, his rooftop view of the year 2000 Boston—his first action after fully

awaking—evokes an immediate eutopian reaction: “Surely I had never seen this city nor one comparable to it before” (22).

Moreover, though the fact that West quite literally wakes up as a displaced late nineteenth century “time-traveler” serves as Bellamy’s main method of defamiliarization, estranging the audience in order to open up a critique of the late nineteenth century, this temporal displacement combined with West’s consistent view of the year 2000 Boston as a eutopia tends to create a sense that this year 2000 Boston is a static ideal. In this way, the process of achieving eutopia is relayed through the dialogue between Dr. Leete and West but it lacks a sense of active engagement in that the action of achieving utopia has already happened, our surrogate traveler is simply dropped into the middle, and we have to rely on a method of historicizing the present in order to make the narrative work. However, though the narrative setting is temporally displaced, allowing for a productive type of defamiliarization, Spinel is a geographically displaced visitor in the traditional vein of More’s *Utopia*, which tends to allow the narrative to take on a more active, present-tense engagement that, when combined with the fact that he does not immediately view Shora as a eutopia, provides a more process-oriented experience. That is, this engagement between Spinel and Shora is more objective, allowing us to see Spinel’s perception of Shora evolve throughout the narrative, changing from negative to positive with experience: refusing to eat early on evolves into his wanting to “try everything” as he had gradually found “more than enough to delight his tongue” (91).

Our situating *A Door* in the critical utopian realm is certainly advantageous in terms of our argument for seeing the posthumanist potential from *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake* come to fruition in Slonczewski’s work. That is, *A Door* is in the unique position to portray a eutopian society in the vein of *Looking Backward*, but it also remains a more open-ended, process-oriented work that avoids getting trapped into convention.

In other words, in the same way that we clearly understood Bellamy's year 2000 Boston to be a static, "ideal" society when compared to late nineteenth century Boston, we should see the Sharer civilization as not only "better" than the society from which we are estranged—a society that is represented by the Patriarch—but also as a more grounded, process-oriented society that negates the ideal but offers solutions. Moreover, this characterization of *A Door* drives the narrative through our surrogate traveler, Spinel, as he experiences a better world as well as the non-traditional transformational heroes, the Sharers, in their opposition to the Patriarch. These narrative elements necessarily lead to a more active engagement for the audience, allowing a constant compare and contrast between Shora, which represents a material posthumanism, the Patriarch, which represent a hierarchical possessive individualism—this focus on the two competing world-views of the becomes a fundamental element in terms of our viewing this work as a posthumanist eutopia.

4.2 Hobbesian Social Contract: Rationalizing Patriarchal Force

Our ability to make the case that *A Door* is a posthuman eutopia lies in our understanding of this work as engaging the relationship between humanity, technology, social/political structure, and power at the level of the body. Specifically, *A Door* deals directly with what Vint terms as the "critical currency for late twentieth and early twenty-first century" in the form of "biopower, biopolitics, [and] posthumanism" as well as "their objects of enquiry—embodiment, subjectivity, [and] the human/animal boundary" (444). *A Door's* engagement of this "critical currency" is driven by the Patriarch's symbolic representation of the Hobbesian ideal of the social contract, a theoretical model of sovereignty as envisioned by Thomas Hobbes's in his political fable, *Leviathan*. That is, the Patriarch as emblematic of the Hobbesian social contract creates a hierarchical form of control that permeates the novel in the Patriarch's use of centralized authority as a

form of domination, which is reflected in the highly rigid social systems of Valedon, and serves as the point of opposition for the eutopian society of the Sharers—the entire narrative is a means of seeing the Sharers as a method of overturning Patriarchal authority, which is an authority that acts on bodies.

4.2.1 The Patriarch as Sovereign

As explained by Vint, Hobbes' theoretical "model of sovereignty" relates a fable in which men (pronoun is appropriate), based on a "violent and insecure" state of nature where "force was the only form of legitimacy," would "come together and form society through a mythical social contract in which each agreed to give up his innate sovereignty and submit to a stronger ruler, who would then represent the combined sovereignty of all and insure order through his monopoly on the use of force" (445). Leaning on the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben, Vint explains how this "Hobbesian ideal of the social contract" is not only the basis from which we form our contemporary understanding of sovereignty and the state, but it rests almost fundamentally on the reinforcement of the human/animal boundary in which, according to Agamben, the "state of nature" is historically "a realm of indistinction between human and animal" (444, 445). That is, in this traditional view of the sovereign as based on the Hobbesian model of the social contract, the only subjects that can remain "outside or beyond" the contract as envisioned by Hobbes are the sovereign—Hobbes's Leviathan and *A Door's* Patriarch—and nonhuman animals (Vint 446).

In other words, the social contract serves as a line of distinction between entities that are considered "fellow members of the social contract" and entities that are considered as lying outside of the social contract, or in the state of nature that exists before or without a social contract—it is a line of division between inside and outside. Traditionally, this negotiation of the social contract in terms of drawing these lines of

distinction between outside/inside often centers on the human/nonhuman animal boundary, not just merely placing humans within the contract and nonhuman animals outside of the contract but using the social contract as a means of “differentiation from animals” in that the traditional sense of the social contract is not extended to nonhuman animals (Vint 446). Moreover, we can make the case that by drawing a distinctive line between the social contract and the state of nature, the Hobbesian notion of sovereignty is an extension of the liberal humanist subject in that it not only reinforces the human/nonhuman boundary but it forms a line of distinction between humanity and nature, creating a “distanced relation to nature” that often leads to humanity’s sense of having power over nature, which extends to nonhuman animals (Vint, *Bodies* 11).

More importantly, through this creation of a line of division, the use of force and violence becomes permissible and targeted: “Violence against fellow member of the social contract constitutes a violation of its terms, but violence against those who remain in the state of nature is unquestioned” (Vint 445). Thus, when we consider that the traditional notion of the social contract is based on this human/animal dichotomy, we can see a familiar and dangerous rhetorical discourse being formed out of these lines of distinction in the form of, in Vint’s words, a “discourse of animality” (445). Specifically, this discourse of animality is not only, according to Agamben, “the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict,” but it is a discourse that, in Vint’s words, is “often invoked against marginalized social groups” in order to “justify violence and to exclude those so labeled from the realm of ethical consideration” (Vint 445). Moreover, the Patriarch of *A Door* not only mirrors this monopoly of force but it uses this inside/outside rhetoric as a way to rationalize this use of force, acting as a symbolic embodiment of this Hobbesian notion of sovereignty and the social contract.

For example, taking place shortly after Merwen and Usha have landed on Valedon, one of the first interactions between the two Sharers and Spinel not only highlights the notion that the Patriarch embodies the Hobbesian ideal of a social contract, but the social contract is embedded to such a degree within Valan society that the Sharer's notion that Shora "has no Protector" as per the social contract is a shock to Spinel, leading him to conclude that "The Patriarch would never allow such a thing" (15). In Spinel's mind, the idea of having "No human Protector" per the Patriarch's social contract is an impossibility, as he explains that

Before the rule of Torr, men throughout the galaxy had lived free as gods, with firecrystals more plentiful than grains of sand. But then, men who live as gods die as gods, as the saying goes. They had died by the planetful until those who remained gave up their powers to the Patriarch to keep the peace among them. His Envoy came to Valedon every ten years, and there was no help for those who disobeyed. (15)

Thus, not only does this passage reinforce the notion that Shora and Valedon operate on extreme ends of a binary opposition with the foreshadowing of an eventual conflict, but this model of Patriarchal control and power necessarily represents the Hobbesian theoretical model of sovereignty in that entire planets, under the vast Patriarch empire, have given over all sovereignty in exchange for peace. Moreover, the implications of "disobeying" suggest a connotation of violence and/or force to those who either lie outside the social contract or try to break the social contract (as we will see).

4.2.2 Sovereign Power to Biopower

In the modern era, sovereignty has continually evolved to be seen as, in Vint's words, a "governance of bodies" (445). Specifically, Vint explains that whereas the traditional notion of "Western philosophy has encouraged us to think about the specificity of human identity through associations with the abstract mind or soul," our contemporary understanding of human identity and sovereign power is one that, "as Foucault has continually pointed out, grasps and governs its citizen/subject at the level of the body"

(444). Moreover, Vint explains that “This new political relevance of the body forces us to confront our continuity with other animals, and to rethink the nature of governance in a biopolitical era in which power acts upon bodies and forms subjects through this action” (444). Thus, in this era of biopower and biopolitics, the “Liberal political institutions” that are “based on notions of possessive individualism that separate the body from the self and offer protection to the individual under the rubric of rights (similarly based on an ideal of personal ownership of self and a premise of individual sovereignty) are inadequate to respond to this political reality” (444). That is, a sovereign power and notion of gaining rights based on possessive individualism necessarily reinscribes the liberal humanist subject, judging all entities in a framework that is created for humans by humans.

For example, we see this type of human-centered/human-created principles of personhood in the legal and political frameworks of United States Law. Specifically, posthumanist theorist Cary Wolfe’s work is predicated on analyzing how these legal frameworks and sovereign rights models serve as immaterial anthropocentric barriers, creating separation between humans and nonhuman animals. That is, extending this inside/outside rhetoric determines “what we recognize and what we don’t, what counts and what doesn’t [...]” (Wolfe 6). In Wolfe’s case, nonhuman animals are denied rights because they are considered *things* as opposed to *persons* according to US law, putting them outside the social contract (Wolfe 13). Thus, Wolfe seeks a posthumanist ethics, or one that looks “before the law,” or pre-framework, so that nonhuman animal rights are not predicated on fitting into these anthropocentric frameworks (Wolfe 50). From Wolfe’s perspective, getting outside of these frameworks requires moving to a biopolitical frame, which “acts fundamentally not on the ‘person’ or the ‘individual’ [...] but rather at the even more elemental level of ‘flesh’” (Wolfe 50).

This notion of a pre-framework environment in the era of biopower is significant in terms of seeing *A Door* as a posthumanist eutopia in that it suggests that undermining the social contract and traditional notion of sovereignty lies in reevaluating these frameworks from a fundamentally different perspective, a perspective that Vint argues is particularly suited to the SF novel. Specifically, in considering that this traditional notion of sovereignty as embodied by the Patriarch is based on a political fable (Hobbes' *Leviathan*), Vint argues that returning to the fable-like narratives of science fiction might, in fact, be the most appropriate medium for addressing these issues, writing that "SF, like all cultural productions, forms a part of the world of available subject positions, of possible models for identification" (20). In other words, the narrative space created by *A Door* allows us to not only view the Patriarch as an embodiment of this Hobbesian notion of the social contract and the subsequent impact of this contract, but it also allows us to see how this model of sovereignty can be overturned or reimagined through the Sharers as a type of posthumanist model in opposition to the Patriarch.

4.3 Binary Structures: Undermining Sovereignty

It is significant that the narrative space of *A Door* is predicated on a sense of opposition between the Patriarch and Shora, following the struggle of the Patriarch to bring Shora under Patriarchal law and portraying the contrasting world-views at the same time. That is, the portrayal of the struggle as well as Shora's successful rejection of Patriarchal law is symbolic of the rejection of these anthropocentric frameworks, which undermines this sense of sovereign power as per the Hobbesian social contract, overturns the liberal humanist subject and this notion of sovereign rights per possessive individualism, and projects a posthumanist model for reevaluating similar anthropocentric frameworks that emphasize harmful lines of distinction similar to the Hobbesian/humanist model. Moreover, Slonczewski's narrative is set up in such a way that the Patriarch's

embodiment of this notion of the social contract and sovereign power is capable of being fully explored through the narrative, highlighting all of the consequences that such a contract entails: The Patriarch's logic of domination, social stratification, and centralized authority. Thus, this section is predicated on drawing on this oppositional nature and building on the Sharers as a successful posthumanist answer to the human-centered Patriarch's mission to turn them into subjects of Patriarchal law.

4.3.1 Posthumanist World-View: Reciprocity and Relationality

The first method of challenging the traditional sense of sovereignty as described by Hobbes' political model of the social contract and, in turn, embodied by the Patriarch is to thoroughly ground the Sharers in a material, posthumanist world-view. Specifically, we can make the case that the structure of the Sharer's civilization is ultimately representative of a material/embedded posthumanism in that it functions on a foundation of reciprocity, which in turn permeates every part of the Sharer's society: technology, civic and social structure, and language. Moreover, much of the posthumanist theory that we can use to support the Sharers as posthumans is typically engaged by theorists and scholars in order to find a path to a posthumanist environmental ethics, lending support to the notion that the Sharers, as representative of a posthuman eutopian society, can also serve as a more productive model for engaging some of these more complex relationships between environment, technology, and bodies.

For example, Stacy Alaimo writes that "A posthuman environmental ethics denies the human the sense of separation from the interconnected, mutually constitutive actions of material reality [...]" (157). Specifically, Alaimo describes a posthumanist ethics that is based on a notion of seeing "human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (2). Specifically, seeing bodies as trans-corporeal "underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is

ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (2). Moreover, a trans-corporeal ethics is one “in which the flows, interchanges, and interrelations between human corporeality and the more-than-human world resist the ideological forces of disconnection” (142). This sense of an environmental ethics as grounded in an acknowledgment of a material reality in which humans cannot separate themselves from nature is not only a posthumanist world-view—it necessarily overturns the liberal humanist subject’s possessive individualism, that sense of having power over nature through a distance from nature—but it is ingrained in the Sharer’s sense of built-in reciprocity in their seeing themselves as embedded in a “web of life” in which “Every creature has its niche, its function” (350). Moreover, this sense of reciprocity permeates every part of their society including their language, their social ethics as a whole, and their use of technology.

For example, Lady Berenice, a Valan noble who spent most of her youth on Shora and is thus a trusted friend of the Sharers, explains to the High Protector of Valedon that “Sharers know their own limits” and “that, perhaps, is their greatest strength. They don’t like to alter the life balance. [...] Every ‘lesser ‘sharer’ had its purpose, Sharers claimed” (90). Thus, when Spinel questions why Merwen goes through the trouble of physically spreading fingershells, which “eat parasites that ravage the silkweed when they grow too many,” all throughout the undergrowth of the raft when they could simply “spray the raft with something to clear out the pests,” she explains that “Then seasilk would choke the raft. And fingershells would go hungry, and tubeworms die of the poison; then fish and octopus would have nothing, and what would Sharers eat?” (60). In this way, this adherence to an environmental ethics based on reciprocity structures their ethical outlook as a whole in that their sense of interconnectedness to this “larger web of life” necessarily shapes the way they interact within that web of life.

Moreover, this sense of balance even extends to those entities that pose no immediate sense of reciprocity in the greater web of life.

Specifically, even in the wake of the bi-annual migration of seaswallowers—“Beasts of the deep, they swallow all in their path” (16)—the Sharers adhere to their sense of interconnectedness, refusing to “exterminate [the seaswallowers]” because “something worse might replace [them]” (90). This type of “balance” and sense of “mutual exchange” is not only a trans-corporeal way of thinking, where the “human is never an isolated unit” but rather “reciprocally engaged” with the environment (Alaimo 146), but it also stresses a sense of interdependent responsibility within the environment. That is, based on their sense that “Even seaswallowers have a place on Shora” (78), we can look at the Sharers and entities on Shora as “posthuman bodies” that are “reinscribed” into “radical relationality, including webs of power relations at the social, psychic, ecological and micro-biological or cellular levels” (Braidotti 102). Moreover, this sense of relationality, reciprocity, and balance with a larger web of life is built directly into the Sharer’s language.

As their very name implies, Sharer’s use their language in a way that promotes the same type of reciprocity and relationality as their ethics. Their language, or what they call “word-sharing” (36), is “based on verb forms that embed the notion of reciprocity in every action” (Vint 447-448). For example, the Sharer’s language reflects their understanding of the notion that, in Merwen’s words, “Each force has an equal and opposite force,” which means that if the Patriarch “rules everyone in Valedon,” as Spinel explains, “Then everyone rules him” (36). Examples of these verbs, or “share-forms,” such as “learnsharing, worksharing, [and] lovesharing,” not only reflect the built-in reciprocity of the Sharer’s world-view but also tend to denote the Sharer’s sense of equal and opposite forces as both a given and a requirement of their world-view. That is, this

understanding of their verbs and language both implies and requires an acknowledgement of interdependent relationality: “Does the world for ‘speak’ mean ‘listen’ just as well,” Spinel asks. “What use is one without the other,” Merwen replies (36).

However, one of the more important outcomes of this built in reciprocity of the Sharer language is that it enhances their communication with other entities on Shora. “Clickflies know everything,” Merwen explains to Spinel, “you’ll have to learn to share speech with them” (53). This is a crucial point to contrast with the way we might look at how we often use language as separation, serving merely as anthropocentric framing that “gives access to things ‘as such,’ as opposed to language understood as ‘communication,’ ‘information,’ and the like” (Wolfe 5). That is, the traditional model of sovereignty and sovereign rights is reinforced by, according to Derrida, the “human monopoly on language” (Vint 449) in that membership within the social contract requires “the capacity for language use” (Vint 448). By using the human-conceived system of “semiotics” (Vint 448) to determine membership in the social contract, these models always-already reinforce the human/nonhuman animal boundary.

However, the Sharer’s sense of language as word-sharing can be seen as a conception of language that is necessarily outside of these types of anthropocentric frameworks. That is, the built-in reciprocity of word-sharing, which is based on the Sharer’s sense of relationality as determined by equal and opposite forces, connotes a type of interconnected communication among all entities within the larger web of life. That is, as Vint explains, “The Sharer language and social order is premised on the capacity of other species to respond, not merely react” (448). In other words, word-sharing implies a capacity for language of some kind within all entities. Thus, in some ways, we can consider it a rather groundbreaking idea to think of language as “word

sharing” as opposed to “word giving,” which implies that the Sharers recognize the agency of other entities outside of themselves. Thus, the Sharer’s world-view, in its capacity to acknowledge a type of reciprocity and relationality among the larger web of life, is necessarily contradicted by the Patriarch and Valedon in their position as oppositional forces.

4.3.2 Social Stratification

Before their departure from Valedon to Shora, Merwen, Usha, and Spinel travel to the Valan capital of Iridis to retrieve Lady Berenice, a Valan noble who is known as “Nisi” to the Sharers and had “shared life with [the Sharers] for many years” (24). After spending her youth on Shora as the daughter of the now Councilor Hyalite, “founder of the Trade Council” (31) and first Valan trader to set up trade with Shora (88), Berenice found herself traveling “endlessly between” Shora and the “upper level” of Iridis, the location of the Palace of Iridium as well as the location to which her parents “had returned with their fortune rebuilt in the moon trade” (25). Building on these subtle hints in the narrative, Berenice’s first encounter with Spinel, while learning that he will be accompanying Usha, Merwen, and herself to Shora, enlightens the audience to what appears to be a fairly acceptable and built-in sense of class stratification within Valan society. Specifically, Spinel’s own admittance that he “wouldn’t know a lady” and that “it was unthinkable that he, Spinel, might find himself consorting with Iridian nobility” (24) is equally supported by Berenice’s own surprise at his presence with Merwen and Usha. Looking at Spinel, she describes him as “clearly a commoner, his coarsely woven shirt buttoned askew. His olive face and his hair looked clean, but he still might have lice” (44). And she wonders, “Had she not explained to Merwen about nobles and commoners?” (44-45).

In contrast to the Sharer's notion of relationality and reciprocity, this type of social stratification and hierarchy seems to be an intimate part of Valan structure as a whole, permeating every aspect of their society from social systems all the way down to their architecture. Specifically, the social stratification on Valedon is necessarily a mirroring of the Patriarch's obvious top-down, hierarchical system of power and control, which is quite poignantly reflected in the architecture and symbolism of the Palace Iridium itself as described by Berenice:

A blunted triangle, to symbolize the never-seen Patriarch above all, the façade inclined slightly so as to rise like a steep mountain slope. Mosaic tiles, a million shining tesserae set in iridium, depicted scenes from the founding of the Patriarchy: the First Nine Protectors, with their planets and legionary symbols, then smaller panels below for the hundreds of planets brought under protection before Iridis assumed the High Protectorship of Valedon. The uppermost panel, which could easily cover a city block, showed the Torran Envoy Malachite. The Envoy was ageless, enthroned with eternity in his gaze. He had brought the Patriarch's word to Valedon for nearly a thousand years. (28)

Thus, the Palace Iridium itself is quite telling in its historical portrayal of the rise of the Patriarch and the obviously hierarchical nature of its rule. Specifically, the Patriarch—as the never seen, abstract force—governs through a system of hierarchical control, leading from the Envoy Malachite as surrogate for the Patriarch, to the High Protector Talion—put in place by the Patriarch and, thus, answering to “none but the Patriarch” (25), and eventually to Commander of the Protectoral Guard, who, on Valedon, happens to be not only the “second most powerful man in Valedon” but also the fiancé of Lady Berenice (29).

Moreover, the contrast between the Patriarch as producing a very hierarchical and stratified social system is not only an obvious affirmation of the liberal humanist subject and the Western Philosophical tradition of determining rights and sovereignty through the mind/body split, but it is certainly in direct contrast with the Sharer's posthumanist world-view. However, we can also build on *A Door's* ecofeminist roots and

make the case that this is a rather pointed critique by Slonczewski in that Shora, an all-female eutopian society, is placed in opposition of the Patriarch. That is, the notion that Slonczewski's work is often analyzed as a feminist novel makes Fitting's assessment that *A Door* "is a tale about the disruption of a utopian world of women by the arrival of men and male values" (39) all the more appropriate in the sense that overturning the liberal humanist subject is a shared objective of both posthumanist thought as well as the poststructural and socio-cultural movements produced in the middle to late twentieth century (in the US).

Specifically, as Eric Otto points out, feminist novels such as *A Door* tend to draw out what Karen J. Warren labels as "male-centered thinking" which "follows a 'logic of domination' that promotes the oppositional pair male/female, places a higher value on males in their pair, and as a result justifies inequalities between men and women" (13). Moreover, this logic of domination not only opens up a space for privileging males but it also applies in a more encompassing sense in that it can be used in terms of environmental criticism. That is, this type of "androcentric logic" is necessarily the same as the "the cultural logic that constructs a culture/nature opposition, places a higher value on culture, and as a result authorizes human domination over nonhuman nature" (13). Thus, not only does Slonczewski's Patriarch reflect this same logic of domination as a representation of the Hobbesian social contract, but Shora as an oppositional society to the Patriarch tends to also reflect this rejection of the logic of domination and the social contract as expressed by both feminism, environmentalism, and, as we have already seen, posthumanist theory. That is, we can clearly see that these movements have a shared objective in de-centering normative ideology and essentialism, which tends to also unite these movements under utopian social dreaming as opposition to dominant hegemony.

For example, the fact that the Sharers are an all-female race of sisters, as they call themselves and all other entities on their moon and abroad, already implies an opposition to this Patriarchal logic of domination in the form of the total absence of males on Shora. That is, though they are genetically close to the humans of Valedon—the Sharer’s “genetic character allows a possibility that they descend from human stock” (32), which is acknowledged by both Sharers and Valans alike—the Sharers continually debate whether or not the Valans are even human, with some sisters noting that “Only lesser races produce males” and perhaps the “persistence of malefreaks has kept the Valan race in a primitive state” (80). As Fitting points out, though this absence of males and male-centered thinking is a distinction “between male and female values,” it “is not ultimately tied to biological sex” in that “There is no essential difference between men and women” (40). Specifically, Fitting points to the fact that Spinel, as a male, is able to become “a full member of Sharer society” and even take on a “Shoran partner/lover” necessarily suggests that A Door “makes a clear distinction between values and [biology]” (40). This is further supported by the fact that the female Valan chief of staff, Colonel Jade, serves as dual “interrogator” and torturer (Fitting 41) during the Patriarchal siege of Shora.

Moreover, there is a notion that the presence and dominance of male values, as opposed to merely biology, has a direct correlation to the structure of society. That is, the Sharers’ sense of reciprocity and relationality is reflected in their lack of a rigid class stratification system as compared to Valan society. For example, this notion is clearly supported by Spinel’s first impression of landing on Shora when he suggests that Lady Berenice’s first action when getting off the transport ship, when she “Brushed past him, her manicured hands empty” of luggage—hers was “To be delivered”—, seemed to suggest that “Clearly she meant to keep her place above him” (50). “Yet Merwen

ingenuously treated her little different from himself: with respect but not obeisance,” Spinel acknowledges, “Did Merwen not know the difference? Did Shora lack nobles, as well as men?” (50). Thus, the social structure of Shora and the Sharer society, by exuding a subversive, alien quality to the “masculine power” (Otto 32) and hierarchical structures of the Patriarch and Valedon, tend to emanate a sense of social and ontological flattening. Moreover, in the same way that we saw the Valan physical structures as emblematic of their socio-cultural stratification, we can similarly see the Sharer’s physical world as symbolic of their ontology.

That is, the moon of Shora itself lacks a sense of rigidity in that it is a shoreless ocean, containing “no landmarks of any kind, just the flat horizon” (53) and maintaining a sense of porousness by its very physical, material nature. Moreover, where Valedon is a world of mechanical technology, from starships and hovercrafts to robot servants (Servitors) and hierarchical skystreets, Shora is a completely organic world of biological technology, where Rafts of “a hundred years’ growth of raftwood” (49) criss-cross the ocean moon as an organic answer to the Valan skystreets, forming above water homes and walkways as well as elaborate systems of tunnels below water. As Merwen explains to Spinel when they arrive on Shora, the raft that they land on is “a good strong raft, it flexes well” and “is many person-lengths thick” (51). Moreover, she points out that the one they land the ship on “is shared by traders,” pointing to the “the concrete buildings that lay behind the ferryship,” and that their “home raft is stronger yet, twice as thick at the center” (51).

4.3.3 Centralized Authority

The logic of domination as embodied by the Patriarch in *A Door* is necessarily an extension the Patriarch’s operating on the notion of a Hobbesian social contract. Specifically, the Patriarch is necessarily mirroring the monopoly of force as allowed

through the social contract through this logic of domination. Moreover, this obvious monopoly of force is not only an extension of the Patriarch's logic of domination, which was symbolized through the hierarchical and stratified structural, social, and even architectural/infrastructural systems of Valan society, but it also tends to permeate the narrative in the form of the Patriarch's completely centralized control of energy and technology.

For example, those ruled under the Patriarch submit to a central authority in terms of heavily regulated power usage—"Only the High Protector, in Iridis, had the consent of the Patriarch to draw electrical power from an atom-smasher" (21)—and, as we learn from the novel, the Patriarch's notion of central authority is fused with its logic of domination and extended in the unregulated use of force in the face of opposition to this authority. For example, the Valan city of Pyrrhopolis, "the city that dared to build its own power plant in defiance of Iridis" (21), initially finds itself "under siege by the High Protector" and ultimately "Leveled. At the hand of Malachite" (131). This fusion of force and central authority is ultimately rationalized through this Hobbesian-esque, Patriarchal social contract in that it rests on the historical notion that a lack of centralized, Patriarchal authority "was the lesson of the dead gods: too many people smashed too many atoms—and planets, in the end" (21). Thus, not only does the Patriarch's fusion of central authority and logic of domination function as a highly effective tool of territorial and power expansion, but its ultimate rationalization as a savior of humanity through this guardianship of technology is an act of monopolization, never allowing those that become dominated to become a technological threat by consuming their technology and resources.

It is, in fact, this method of monopolization that eventually sends the Patriarch after Shora and the Sharer's "life shaping" biotechnology, which, according to Lady

Berenice, “went far beyond anything known on Valedon” (82). For example, the envoy Malachite visits Shora, analyzes their technology, and insists that they will be brought under Patriarchal Law as a way of protecting them from both themselves and other worlds, again rationalizing its logic of domination and central authority through the social contract: “You could learn on your own, as most do,” Malachite explains, “but if you were to survive, as many do not, your abilities would threaten Valedon and all other inhabited worlds” (160). However, as the inevitable siege of Shora is planned, Malachite makes it clear to the High Command of Valedon, Realgar, who ultimately leads the siege, that the Sharers “possess invaluable knowledge of life science—knowledge lost to [the Patriarch] from before the rise of Torr” (207). Moreover, considering Malachite’s insistence that he “wants those natives alive” and Realgar’s first order of duty during the siege being “to start with inspection of one of the subversive ‘lifeshaping places’ where the natives conducted their forbidden science” (208), the Patriarch’s mission to “control Shora” (207) is not only an attempt at the extension of a Hobbesian like social contract, but it is an overt use of the Patriarch’s logic of domination and central authority for the purpose of monopolization of power by consumption.

In stark contrast, the Sharer’s notion of authority is again informed by their investment in a posthumanist world-view that acknowledges reciprocity and relationality of all entities of Shora. Specifically, this reciprocity and relationality is extended into the socio-political realm of Sharer society in that Sharer civic structure is based on a system of Gathering, a method of political proceedings that implies a sense of collective decision making among all selfnamers of Shora, the collective “protectors of Shora,” as opposed to the Patriarch’s top-down, centralized method of authority. Though the gatherings are often specific to one raft, with each raft having a gathering of its own, selfnamers from other rafts often gather from all across Shora “to strengthen the bonds of Shora’s web”

(75). Though this civic structure does seem to privilege humans to a degree in that Gatherings are typically only attended by selfnamers, it comes in the form of responsibility based on a notion that “Shora had said that Sharers must share care for all the lesser sharers as for themselves” (267).

Merwen explains this to Spinel after his arrival on Shora when she instructs him to look at the water and explain what he sees. “A lesser creature sees its rival on the water and jumps in to fight it,” she explains. “A human sees herself and knows that the sea names her. But a self-namer sees every human that ever was or will be, and every form of life there is. By naming herself, she becomes a ‘protector’ of Shora” (61). As Vint explains, this notion of the selfnamer as collective protector of Shora, as seeing “in their reflection not merely individuality but rather” the collective past, present, and future of “every form of life there is” (448), is a fundamentally different way of seeing authority and responsibility when compared to the Patriarch and its Hobbesian social contract model. That is, that selfnamers are “those who see beyond individual autonomy and subjectivity” in their reflection suggests that “The civic state of Shora, then, includes species beyond Homo sapiens among those represented/protected by the state” (Vint 448). Though there is still a “human/non-human” line of distinction that, as in Vint’s words, “still function as concerns those with the capacity to take on this role of their protector,” the difference lies in how those considered “nonhumans” is a direct result of “radically different cultures and ethics” (448).

Specifically, that Sharers and Valans continually question whether or not the other is human—Merwen and Usha “went to Valedon to share judgment of [Valans] in their own habitat, to judge if they can be human” (57)—is a running theme throughout the narrative, and the consequences of either a human or nonhuman classification from these oppositional standpoints is a major indictment of each society’s world-view. That

is, the culmination of the Patriarchal world-view with a determination of a nonhuman status for the Sharers results in a verdict of “genocide” (Vint 449), which is necessarily allowed under the rules of the social contract. It is an extension of the Patriarch’s logic of domination and male-centered value system, which dictates either hierarchical domination through the social contract, or violence for remaining in the state of nature. In stark contrast, as long as Valans are considered human the Sharers must keep the door open to sharing with them, whereas a nonhuman classification for the Valans under the Sharer’s posthumanist world-view of relationality and reciprocity results in the passive resistance of unspeech, a method of not sharing speech (Vint 448).

Thus, this particular nonviolent or passive resistance strategy as an extension of the Sharers’ posthumanist philosophy is necessarily bound-up with their sense of responsibility for the entire life web of Shora as selfnamers, or as humans. It is this sense of responsibility for the life web of Shora that forces the Sharers to act in resistance to the Valans, who they see as “children” who are “locked into childhood” as long as they do understand the need for a selfname. Though the Sharers disagree on how to deal with the threat of Valedon and the Patriarch—some see them as a threat to “the very web of life of Shora,” which convinces some selfnamers that Sharers “must tear them from the web, before it’s too late” (80)—their methods of resistance are still grounded by their sense of reciprocity. Even Merwen, who lobbies hardest for “keeping the door open” for sharing with Valans, admits that “They are dangerous, more dangerous than you can imagine” and “If they are not human, if they have no door to the self, then they are surely the most deadly creatures Shora has ever known” (81).

Thus, the contrasting world-views between the Patriarch and the Sharers can really be summed up by the equally contrasting perceptions that each society has for the others’ sense of authority and use of force. That is, where the Sharers see the Valans

and Patriarch as children in their inhuman sense of responsibility, or their inability to take on a selfname, the The High Protector Talion, and the Patriarch by extension, view the Sharers as “A primitive, childlike people, who knew nothing of will and power” (82). To that end, we can see the Sharers’ posthumanist world-view of reciprocity and balance within a larger web of life as informing their sense of responsibility toward the larger web of life as their position of selfnamers, or humans. This sense of responsibility is not only reflected in their general life—keeping balance by not using their abilities to disturb the web—but it shapes the way they face adversity: passive resistance to Patriarchal authority, which reflects the sense that Sharers, according to Valans during the siege, will not “take any action toward you that they would not gladly accept for themselves” (349).

4.4 Posthumanist Eutopia: Lifeshaping Technology

One of the main elements of a posthumanist eutopia that we named at the beginning of this chapter was that a posthumanist eutopia, if possessing technology or a scientific epistemology, has to be able to avoid a type of transcendence through technology because such a transcendence reinscribes the liberal humanist subject and reinforces problematic lines of distinction such as nature/culture and human/nonhuman. Moreover, because we have been able to view two societies that embody oppositional world-views, the Sharers’s posthumanist world-view that undermines the traditional view of sovereignty and overturns the liberal humanist subject and the Patriarch and its traditional view of sovereignty that necessarily reinscribes the liberal humanist subject, we are in a much better position to determine whether or not the Sharers’ posthumanist world-view informs their scientific epistemology in a way that provides an alternative from the typical transcendence through technology.

The type of hierarchy and social stratification embodied by the Patriarch is a direct correlation to what some scholars point to as a more patriarchal and masculine

scientific epistemology. As Vint explains, scholarship concerned with the intersections of “science, nature, and the relationship between the two” often point to “the degree to which patriarchal culture has influenced the axioms of scientific practice” and the ultimate need for an “alternative epistemology [...]” (“Science” 418). Citing Evelyn Fox-Keller’s notion of “pluralism, which would see science as the product of community rather than individual perception,” as well as Sandra Harding’s idea for a “successor science emerging from feminist epistemologies” that would “transcend the damaging subject-object, inner-outer, reason-emotion dualities of Enlightenment science,” Vint makes the case that the Sharers in *A Door* might serve as “models” for this type of epistemic change in terms of their more ethical use of technology (418) as well as the productive SF narrative space that allows for eutopian solutions to these epistemic problems. Moreover, it is this sense of serving as a model for a change in science and technological epistemology that drives *A Door*’s categorization as a fully-formed (as opposed to potential) posthuman eutopia for a contemporary, technological society.

As Fitting observes, the perception of what constitutes technological know-how in *A Door* again reflects the binary/oppositional nature that has permeated the text in that Valedon and the Patriarch reflect an “inorganic nature of metal and machines” which equally “reflects the violent world-view and philosophy of the Patriarch’s galactic empire” (41). In other words, the Patriarchal use of technology is thoroughly grounded in its logic of dominance and portrayed to that end by the Patriarch’s willingness to use its advanced technology to turn the disobedient city of Pyrrhopolis, as we already saw earlier, into “A vast beach of sand” (131). In direct contrast, the Sharers’ technology is grounded in a dual sense of what we can think of as an “organic’ technology” in that they possess “very advanced biological and agricultural sciences” that “have grown out of and are a part of their lives on an oceanic world” (41). That is, whereas Patriarchal technology

encompasses the inorganic world of machines and metals (Fitting 41), the Shares' lifeshaping technology is a *life* science that is developed out of *life*, a fact that is expressed through both application and hardware.

For example, on Shora and feeling sick with "indigestion," Spinel is sent into the tunnels below the surface of the home raft to the "place of lifeshaping" (91). Following the tunnels, which "extended through the raft, winding in an eerie phosphorescent maze," Spinel finds Usha, the lifeshaper (scientist/doctor/geneticist), in one of the "brilliantly lit chambers" that opened up every so often within the maze (91-92). "Usha took between her hands a fine, leafless vine which descended from a profusion of foliage at the ceiling. She set the vine below his ribs, and it swiftly snaked around his waist," he explains. "As his eyes adjusted to the brilliance, he spotted sources of light tucked away amid leafy patches, but no sign of firecrystals. Vines like the one on his arm extended and curled in all directions, like cobwebs come alive" (92). Moreover, the Sharer's lifeshaping places as embedded and organic are in direct contrast to the Valan perception of what constitutes a scientific laboratory, extending this binary between inorganic and organic to an even more productive level in the Valan's apparent confusion of such a system.

For example, under inspections from Valan soldiers and their head geneticist, Siderite, the Sharers' lifeshaping places present an initial alien quality in their complete organic nature. "Oh, they're genuine yes," Siderite responds to Realgar's question to their authenticity. "There's work space, there's plumbing. No glassware, bottled chemicals, or autoclaves, much less recognizable analytic hardware. But those vines you saw, they form galls whose cavities can be inoculated with pure cultures of microorganisms" (215). Moreover, when pressed about whether or not there are no other "hidden laboratories," Siderite explains that "In a sense one might say...the whole planet is their laboratory" (215). In other words, the purely organic and interconnected nature of

the Sharer's "laboratories" is a reflection of the Sharers' posthumanist world-view and supports the notion that they possess a posthumanist (utopian) technology.

Moreover, that this organic technology is completely alien to Valan scientists and soldiers is a subversion of the traditional frameworks and male-centered scientific epistemology as obviously practiced by the Patriarch as a reflection of the real world. As Vint explains, the Sharers' "practice of science reflects their epistemology: they do not have a concept of 'power over' and take for granted an egalitarian world, shared with all life; in contrast, Western science emerged from a culture of hierarchy and is often defined as the power to control nature" (418). In other words, their sense of reciprocity and relationality informs their sense of ethics and knowledge, which in turn shapes their use of their technology. For example, as Vint explains, the Sharer's "ecofeminist technology is based on ways of working with the natural capacities of other species [...]. They do not use pesticides or herbicides but instead nurture the ecosystem to balance population and food supply" (447). Specifically, as we have emphasized earlier in this chapter, this sense of mutual exchange is what keeps the Sharers from using their technology to overtly change the balance of Shora by eliminating threatening entities such as the seaswallowers, which come twice a year and can completely destroy entire raft systems.

As an oppositional force, we can make the same connection between the Patriarch's sense of ethics and its use of technological domination and force in that it necessarily reflects an inorganic sense of "distance from nature," a clear allegiance to a possessive individualism (and reinscribing of the liberal humanist subject). Moreover, that the Patriarch uses its technology to violent ends indicts the Patriarchal world-view by implicating it in this unethical use of technology. For example, during the siege of Shora, Realgar explains that "The House of Aragonite, a member of the Shora Development Consortium, was developing potent toxins for seaswallowers" (213) which would

eventually be used as “a repellent” to keep “the seaswallowers away from all military bases” (284). As we find out later in the narrative, the repellent had indeed worked on the seaswallowers, but “The web of life had still not recovered” from their absence: “certain weeds were hopelessly overgrown, stifling the silkweed groves, and fanwings were still scarce” (344).

Thus, Realgar’s confusion about “why the traders had not” used similar repellent “years earlier,” and his admission that the fact that the Sharers did not approve of this use of toxins to eliminate such a threat “made little sense to him” (284), is an indication that the Patriarchal world-view and epistemology influences its sense of ethics in terms of technological application, which reinforces a sense of power over and necessarily indicts this patriarchal world-view based on the fact that the web of life had suffered from the Patriarchal-made toxins. Thus, the narrative itself opens up an alternative in which the Sharers’ posthumanist world-view and their sense of balance is necessarily the better path in terms of the repercussions of human-centered technological use.

In fact, perhaps the most relevant implication that these two drastically different technological epistemologies represent in their binary opposition lies in the fact that the Sharers are an example of a model for moving outside of those frameworks established by Western scientific thinking, which necessarily turns the Sharers into an example of a scientific epistemology that does not ultimately succumb to transcendent technology. Moreover, this ability to see a scientific epistemology that encourages reciprocity, responsibility, and balance in opposition to its inverse in the Patriarch opens up a real conversation about the possibilities for such a change in how we view these patriarchal scientific epistemologies. That is, the success of the Sharers, who have “lived in peace for at least ten thousand years” with an advanced lifeshaping technology that is practically “incomprehensible to Valan doctors” (33), undermines the Patriarchal notion

that any human with such technology would have perished, ultimately consuming the Patriarch and pushing Realgar and the Valans to extreme measures in order to discover the extent of Sharer capabilities.

As Siderite informs Realgar towards the end of the novel, the Sharers possess a scientific epistemology that is likely more advanced than anything on Valedon. “As it is, every cell of every living raft contains a whole library of all the basic knowledge and skills Sharers possess,” he explains. “A chromosome library. Trillions of bits of data on molecular chains, coiled up so small you can’t even see it. In every cell of raftwood. Billions of cells in every raft seedling, each the seed of an entire Sharer life and culture” (284). In other words, the Sharers collection of knowledge and scientific know-how seems to underline Lady Berenice’s own assessment much earlier in the novel: “I told you how those ‘clickflies’ store more information by the genetic code than does the data bank of Palace Iridium,” she says to Talion. “I told you how Sharer ‘lifeshaper’ regenerate mangled limbs and construct new living species to order, and you told me I was fooled by witchcraft” (89). To this end, the Valan siege becomes a mission to push the Sharers to expose their capabilities by using technological force to quell the Valan siege, which is a fundamental misunderstanding of the Sharer’s ability to reject these traditional frameworks and likely the most critical indictment of the Patriarchal world-view and scientific epistemology.

Specifically, in the face of the Sharers’ ethical extension of lifeshaping/healing technology and passive resistance to their would-be conquerors—staging sit-ins and silent protests but not revealing the full extent of their technological capabilities in the form of violence—the Valan High Commander, Realgar, resorts to taking prisoners (including children), using “mind invasion” (267) techniques, and eventually committing genocide on a massive scale, killing “Forty thousand” Sharers in the span of a month

(366) at the height of the Patriarchal siege. In the face of such brutality, the Sharers continue to extend their lifeshaping technology to injured Valan soldiers: “On the night of the explosion they fished us from the sea. I’d been stripped to the bone by fleshborers, but the natives pulled me through,” one of the rescued soldiers explains to Realgar. “In one of those lab warrens, they grew this sort of green film all over me—it was weird as the devil,” he explains, “But my flesh grew back underneath” (356). Not only is this a testament to the technological capabilities of the Sharers, but it is an indictment of the Patriarchal scientific epistemology in that the Sharers refuse to reinforce a traditional use of technology to transcend and obtain power over their would-be conquerors.

Moreover, that the Patriarchal world-view is completely embedded in its scientific epistemology as a reinforcement of these anthropocentric frameworks of sovereignty that ultimately drive this notion of using technology as a violent means of domination is clearly evident by the events of the end of the novel in which the Valan High Command departs from Shora, failing to bring Shora under Patriarchal Law. Specifically, after the High Protector Talion orders Realgar to “activate the satellites to burn out the entire native population of the Ocean Moon” (393), the order is ultimately rescinded in the face of a fear that the Sharers had infected the Valan invaders with “lifeshaped pathogens” that “only [the Sharers] can cure” (392-393). Though this notion is only speculation at the suggestion of Siderite, and it is used by Realgar to keep from being the scapegoat for annihilating an entire planet, it implies an understanding that the Patriarch and Valedon are trapped within their own paradigm. Or as Fitting point out, the decision to not “exterminate” the Sharers ultimately stems from the Valans’ own paranoid notion of “what a Valan would do if he or she had the Sharers’ lifeshaping skills” (40). This notion of what a Valan would do with lifeshaping technology is a pointed critique of the Patriarchal

scientific epistemology and necessarily reinforces the obvious need for an alternative epistemology.

4.5 Conclusion and Comparisons

One of the goals of this chapter has been to analyze *A Door* as a fully realized posthumanist utopian novel, making the case that Slonczewski's Sharer civilization not only represents a model for a eutopian society but that this eutopian model is an overtly posthumanist model. Though we can clearly see how Slonczewski's Sharer civilization exudes a clear posthumanist philosophy in their emphasis on reciprocity, balance, and acknowledgement of an embeddedness in a larger web of life, it is the ability of *A Door* as a critical utopia to allow an active engagement between the Sharers and the Patriarch as binary oppositions that allows a full realization of the Sharers as a posthumanist eutopian society. Specifically, by embodying the Hobbesian notion of a social contract, the Patriarch necessarily embodies a sense of violence, domination, and social stratification that necessarily informs their social philosophy and world view as well as their scientific epistemology. Moreover, the Sharers' successful rejection of the Patriarch's mission of enacting its Patriarchal Law on Shora through their posthumanist philosophy shows how the narrative space of the SF and critical utopian novel can be used to imagine new models of sovereignty and scientific epistemologies that are outside of these Patriarchal, anthropocentric frameworks.

However, in the same way that Slonczewski's work stands out as overtly posthumanist and eutopian against the Patriarch, we can apply a similar framework in our comparisons of *A Door* to the other two novels that have already been analyzed in this thesis, *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake*. That is, in seeing *A Door* as overturning flaws and building on the strengths of *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake*, its posthumanist eutopian nature becomes more evident. Specifically, we started this thesis

with the notion that *A Door* occupied a space somewhere between *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake*, which ultimately operated at two extremes of a binary opposition: Edward Bellamy's inevitable utopian hope and Margaret Atwood's biotechnological cautionary tale.

The flaw within Bellamy's utopian hope might simply lie in the form of his utopia. That is, Bellamy's year 2000 Boston was a static ideal that rested on a hopeful, naïve notion that eutopia was an inevitability that was driven by technology as an abstract utopian force that mainly operated in the background—it was not grounded in any kind of material process. In contrast, *A Door* addresses technology head on by providing a narrative space in which a thoroughly posthumanist technology can be described and imagined in a eutopian sense. That is, the Sharers' world-view is intimately tied to their scientific epistemology in that Sharers' social structure and civic structure tend to exhibit an interconnectedness in which their use of technology is informed by their posthumanist philosophy of reciprocity and balance. The narrative space of *Looking Backward* simply does not allow this same type of *engagement* between Bellamy's philosophy and his sense of technology because technology is an abstracted force as opposed to a grounded reality.

Additionally, the form of the critical utopia provides a more productive use of binary oppositions in that Slonczewski's oppositional societies are compared side-by-side as they engage each other, whereas Bellamy's temporal displacement between the two competing societies might be seen as too disconnected when compared to *A Door*. Seeing that *A Door* is written right after the revival of the utopian genre in the 1960s and 1970s and represents the transformation of the genre in the form of the critical utopia, we cannot necessarily see this as a flaw within Bellamy's work in that *Looking Backward* simply conformed more to the convention of late nineteenth century utopian writing—it

was a product of its time just as Slonczewski's *A Door* is a product of its time. However, we can make the case that the critical utopian form, unlike the more traditional form, is simply more equipped to deliver a posthumanist eutopia.

However, Bellamy's own philosophy of solidarity permeates *Looking Backward* in the form of a burgeoning posthumanism. Specifically, Bellamy writes that "The instinct of universal solidarity, of the identity of our lives with all life, is the centripetal force which binds together in certain orbits all orders of beings" ("Solidarity" 24). Thus, where Bellamy's sense of technology may not have satisfied our posthumanist criteria, his utopian notion of eliminating social stratification through this philosophy of interconnectedness is not only a more posthumanist way of thinking but it begins to build a bridge between Bellamy and the Sharers, finding common ground in a philosophy of relationality. Though Bellamy's sense of mutual dependence and relationality is generally human-centered, we can make the case that the Sharers' ability to build on this similar philosophy, taking this relationality and expanding it to encompass all entities, is what turns that burgeoning posthumanist thought within *Looking Backward* into a fully realized posthumanist utopia in *A Door*.

Though *Oryx and Crake* is really more of a critical dystopia in that it mixes genres and exhibits a very complex narrative in terms of blurring the lines between utopia and dystopia, we can find some common ground between Atwood's work and *A Door* in that both narratives portray societies whose social philosophy is bound up with their scientific/technological epistemology. Moreover, we can even make the case that Atwood's more intimate portrayal of this connection between society and technology is a concept that *A Door* similarly builds on but necessarily expands by showing the Sharers as a posthumanist eutopian society whose social philosophy and world-view informs their scientific epistemology. That is, in the same way that both the Sharers' society as well as

the Patriarchal influenced society of Valedon are portrayed in the narrative in way that allows the audience to see how their social philosophy interacts with and informs their world-view, the fusion of technology, capitalism, and corporatism of the Compound system in *Oryx and Crake* is similarly portrayed as having an influence on all of the action within the novel—both of these novels portray intimate connections between social philosophy and technology. However, it is this ability of *A Door* to draw lines of distinction between eutopia and dystopia by engaging the Sharers' binary opposition, the Patriarch, that make it a fully realized posthumanist utopia.

Specifically, *Oryx and Crake* is a genre-blended, complex work that does not necessarily make these utopian/dystopian distinctions clear. This is an important distinction in that one of the fundamental roadblocks to a posthumanist eutopia lies in the precarious and paradoxical relationship that exists between humanity, technology, and the rest of, to borrow from the Sharers, the web of life. To that end, a posthumanist eutopia has to portray a technology that avoids reinscribing the liberal humanist subject by becoming a tool of transcendence over nature and wielded as a method of human consumption and/or dominance. The nature of this relationship is paradoxical and precarious because we have already seen the complexities play out in *Oryx and Crake* in the form of unregulated human consumption of biotechnology that culminated in a self-inflicted human apocalypse at the hands of Crake, our quintessential *homo faber* and anti-humanist activist.

However, as right as Crake may have been about human “nature” in terms of Atwood’s portrayal of the degrading environment and the unregulated fusion of technology, capitalism, and corporatism that sought profits at the expense of ethics, there were some blurry lines in terms of how to view the postapocalyptic world in terms of transgenic organisms. For example, we were able to see some instances in which this

apocalyptic setting at the hands of Crake allowed for transgenic organisms such as the pigoons to thrive in an environment that allowed their agency to come to the forefront. We were also able to make a posthuman connection to these transgenic organisms, building the case that they were symbolic of a cyborgian posthumanism in that their hybrid nature necessarily collapsed dualisms by blurring the human/nonhuman line of distinction. Like Donna Haraway's cyborg, *Oryx and Crake's* hybrids have no affiliation with "myths of essential identity and original unity" (Leitch 2267). However, these transgenic organisms came at the "hands" of transcendent technology that had been abused.

Where *Oryx and Crake* certainly opened up a space for the audience to envision a posthumanist engagement of the nonhuman-centered agency of other nonhuman animals and also portrays the intimate relationship between society and technology, this nonhuman-centered agency comes at the expense of human exceptionalism and adds an amount of complexity to the relationship between humanity and technology that blurs the utopia/dystopia line of distinction. Yes, we could argue that this blurring is, in fact, quite posthumanist, but it is problematic in terms of our ability to imagine posthumanist solutions that lead to a better society. However, *A Door* takes this "flaw"—and I use the term loosely here—and gives us a clearly eutopian posthumanist society in the Sharers. They are not perfect, as Spinel's initial reaction does not reflect a static idea but rather a process, but the portrayal of their posthumanist philosophy of reciprocity and balance in a larger web of life against the Patriarch as an embodiment of violence, dominance, and social stratification creates a clear line of distinction between the two world-views. The result is that we can more clearly see *A Door* as a fully realized posthumanist utopia.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

All three works analyzed in this thesis share in the utopian ideal of opposition, being conceived of as a way to imagine alternatives to a particular dominant hegemony. As we saw with Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, the utopian literary form can be used to estrange an audience in an "unmapped" future space, allowing a contemporary social commentary to grow out of a surrogate traveler's experience of a future eutopian society. Bellamy's use of this type of temporal, cognitive estrangement was necessarily a reflection of his own notion that not only was the evolution of human history *naturally* progressive and democratic, but the scientific and technological progress of the industrial revolution had the potential to be an abstract utopian force. That is, Bellamy's future eutopia suggested that the abject inequality and class stratification of the late nineteenth century could be eliminated through the utopian hope of technology, an inevitable outcome that merely needed humanity to, in Dr. Leete's words, "recognize and cooperate" with the "industrial evolution" that would inevitably bring about utopia.

However, Bellamy's utopian hope of technology turned into the dystopian nightmares of the twentieth century in that utopia became "coopted" by dominant hegemony, meaning that a new form of literature had to be born in order to undermine such opposition and keep social dreaming alive. This canonical turn of the twentieth century transformed the utopian imagination into a dystopian nightmare in which, as Moylan and Baccolini explain, the utopian novel became "a prophetic vehicle" from which "writers with an ethical and political concern" could necessarily warn "us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside" (1-2). Thus, these "new maps of hell" (Amis 1960) became the dominant form of utopian expression for much of the

twentieth century, producing a number of dystopian works in the canonical form of Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984* in which utopian hope was typically lost "inside the pages" (Baccolini and Moylan 14).

However, we can make the case that the dystopian turn in utopian literature, though at times being coopted itself for an anti-utopian line of rhetoric that espoused the impossibility of utopia, ultimately opened the genre up by paving the way for two important transformations within the literary form: the critical utopia and the critical dystopia. Though occurring at different points in the twentieth century, both the critical utopia and critical dystopia contributed to the utopian form's transformation by opening the utopian narrative up through the incorporation of genres such as science fiction and speculative fiction to create a more flexible and less mundane narrative space within which to imagine social-cultural alternatives. In terms of the critical dystopia, this "impure," blended genre (Moylan, *Scraps* 189) narrative form ultimately aided in the utopia's transition from static ideals (or inescapable nightmares of the pure dystopian form) to process-oriented, cautionary tales that kept the door to utopia open. Moreover, it is in this impure form that we find the main contribution of a potential posthumanism within *Oryx and Crake*.

Specifically, *Oryx and Crake* as a cautionary tale becomes a way to understand technology as a path to transcendence as opposed to the utopian driving force that Bellamy envisioned in *Looking Backward* in that Atwood grounds technology and puts it in the hands of the engineers and scientists of her speculative fiction in a way that mirrors contemporary society's continual development and use of similar technologies. Unlike the classless society that Bellamy envisioned, *Oryx and Crake*'s Compound system, with its blend of technology, corporatism, and capitalism, represents a vision of technology as a means to create rigid lines of social stratification, putting up both material and

economical walls between those on the inside, the Compound people, and those on the outside, the Pleeblands. Moreover, whereas the narrative landscape of *Looking Backward* provided utopian visions of efficiency that create an abundance for all through technological invention, biotechnological creations in the form of transgenic organisms litter the narrative landscape of Atwood's tale as creations of human consumption, pushed by the Compound system as a way to further social/economic stratification between the Compounds and the Pleeblands, as well as between the Compounds themselves.

Thus, one conclusion we might draw on is the fact that *Oryx and Crake* as a cautionary tale takes up *Looking Backward*'s major utopian notion that technological progress is both inevitable and intrinsically good and, building on the lessons of the twentieth and early twenty-first century, proceeds to ground it in the reality of a biotechnological age. Whereas the result of Bellamy's work portrayed a simpler and (possibly) more naïve relationship between humanity and technology that could only result in a eutopia for humanity, the result of Atwood's work is a complex, blended genre work that portrays the precarious relationship between humanity, technology, and nature in a way that blurs the lines of eutopia, dystopia, and ethics in an age of biotechnology. Moreover, these contrasting ways in which Bellamy and Atwood each envision this relationship between humanity and technology can be applied to how we analyze the posthumanist potential within each work.

Specifically, though both *Looking Backward* and *Oryx and Crake* share in the fact that each work has a posthumanist potential, they differ in very important aspects. As I have shown, the posthumanist potential within *Looking Backward* was more of a fermenting posthumanist undertone that mostly shared in Bellamy's vision of social de-stratification as a means to a better society. Specifically, posthumanist thought as an

anti-humanist, anti-possessive individualism movement stresses relationality and mutual dependence as an embedded entity within an intra-active web of life. This particular thought process and world-view permeates Bellamy's novel by mirroring Bellamy's own philosophy of solidarity, a philosophy that stresses a "universal identity" that is an "identity of universal solidarity" in which humanity must move past the idea of the individual as disconnected and move toward a notion that "there is in every human being a soul common to nature with all other souls" (Bellamy, "Solidarity" 29, 31). Though necessarily human centered, this sentiment of relationality between humans is the philosophical drive of Bellamy's eutopian notion of class de-stratification. And in so much as we consider this type of acknowledgement of a sense of the collective over the individual, Bellamy's philosophy follows posthumanist thought as a movement of social reform in the vein of social-cultural and civil rights movements of the mid-twentieth century, which seek to overturn the notions of false universalism that are associated with the liberal humanist subject and possessive individualism.

However, Bellamy's path to solidarity in *Looking Backward* was built on a notion that the potential good from technological advances of the industrial revolution could create a better society and that *Looking Backward's* eutopian vision could be a way to change a late nineteenth century audience's perception, defamiliarizing the present and opening up a critique of nineteenth century society. The end-result might be Bellamy's biggest flaw in that he ultimately built this path to utopia on a notion of technology as an abstract, guiding force. Though I use the term "flaw" rather loosely, we can clearly see that by underestimating the material relationship between humanity and technology, Bellamy's abstraction of technology does not account for the far-reaching material effects that humanity's technological capabilities have within the environment as a whole. Moreover, this inability of *Looking Backward* to more accurately gauge the relationship

between humanity, technology, and the environment is one of the main reasons that we can argue that *Looking Backward* lacks the ability to portray a fully realized eutopia, much less a fully realized posthumanist eutopia.

Though *Oryx and Crake* necessarily grounds technology in a material reality, portraying the relationship between humanity, technology, and the environment as materially related, *Oryx and Crake's* posthumanist potential is necessarily hindered in its own categorization as a critical dystopia in that we find this potential in the paradoxical, open-ended nature of the text itself—the eutopia/dystopia line is too blurry due to the ambiguity of the work. Specifically, *Oryx and Crake's* posthumanist potential lies in its ability to create a narrative space in which the very same biotechnological creations that served as creations of human consumption, being used by the Compounds as a means to reinforce economical and class barriers, are also sites of posthumanist agency in that they literally bring into question human/nonhuman lines of distinction through their hybrid nature. Specifically, as hybrid organisms in the vein of Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto," these transgenic organisms bring into question species boundaries and undermine essentialism in that their cyborgian nature literally collapses the human/nonhuman dualism, paving the way for the elimination of other troubling lines of distinctions that tend to reinforce the liberal humanist subject. However, this posthumanist border blurring comes at the expense of human-centered, transcendent technology in that these organisms' very cyborgian nature is a human creation.

Moreover, this paradox extends further in that part of *Oryx and Crake's* critical dystopian categorization lies in the fact that it blends multiple genres in order to create a more flexible narrative space. As part of this blending, *Oryx and Crake* provides a post-apocalyptic narrative space in which these transgenic organisms are allowed break the confines of the laboratory, embed themselves in an environment, and respond to

“biological and ecological changes in unpredictable ways” (Warkentin 94). That is, by escaping the human-controlled confines of the laboratory, these transgenic organisms are able to undermine the human sense of power over their creations, leading to a sense of agency that is not given but always-already in existence. However, the paradoxical nature of *Oryx and Crake* is extended by the fact that this ability to create a space in which we can appreciate the non-human centered agency of transgenic organisms is the result of Crake’s ultimate transcendence through technology. Regardless of his intentions, beliefs, activism, or desire for a better society, Crake as our “quintessential *homo faber*” (DiMarco 170) creates the “quintessential” paradox in terms of our ability to see *Oryx and Crake* as a posthumanist utopia. It is this paradoxical nature of *Oryx and Crake* and this inability to envision a clear utopian path for a technological society that we ultimately turn to *A Door Into Ocean*.

A Door Into Ocean (*A Door*) sits at the intersection of an important transformation within the utopian literary form, the critical utopian form, as well as a number of socio-cultural movements. Specifically, being born out of a brief revival in eutopian writing in the 1960s and 1970s, the critical utopia followed the “social upheavals” and the “emerging oppositional culture of the late 1960s and 1970s” (Moylan, *Demand* 9-10) as a revived yet transformed method of imagining better societies. That is, as much as the critical utopia was a product of the social movements of the 60s and 70s, it was only under “the influence of science fiction and experimental fiction” that “utopian writing was given new life” (Moylan 10). Moreover, critical utopias are not trapped in the blue-print convention of traditional utopias in that they typically do not portray eutopias as static ideals, instead opting to “dwell on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated” (Moylan 10). Though we cannot consider *A Door* as a pure critical utopian in that it would

have to include a certain amount of “critique” in terms of its portrayal of a eutopia, we do consider that *A Door*’s drawing on these critical utopian elements that emphasize “process” over static ideals as an important element of its ability to portray a fully realized posthumanist eutopian society.

Moreover, *A Door* works really well as a posthumanist, utopian work that contains these critical utopian elements in that it portrays a clear, unambiguous eutopian society but avoids what we might consider as “flaws” in the other two works. Specifically, unlike Bellamy’s eutopian year 2000 Boson, the eutopian Sharer civilization of *A Door* is not a static ideal in that it is actively engaged with an oppositional society (the Patriarch and Valedon), and this active engagement also tends to influence how we view the Sharer civilization as both posthuman and technologically advanced. That is, whereas *Looking Backward* projected technology as an abstracted, driving force of utopian hope, the Sharers’ sense of technology is clearly articulated as a material reality that is necessarily influenced by their posthumanist world-view and philosophy—their technology is not an abstracted utopian hope but a grounded and material posthumanist eutopian reality. In other words, we might say that *A Door* takes the best parts of *Looking Backward*, that envisioning eutopian societies as opposed to solely dystopian societies is a relevant method of social reform, and re-packages them in a way that works better in our contemporary, technologically advancing reality.

However, even though we could make the case that a contemporary critical dystopia such as *Oryx and Crake* is capable of portraying the technological realities of contemporary society in a way that productively and actively critiques humanity’s relationship with technology and the environment, *Oryx and Crake*’s lack of a clear line of distinction between eutopia and dystopia leaves us unable to view a work such as *Oryx and Crake* as a capable model of alternative epistemologies and/or paradigms. It is

ultimately a problem of paradox: Atwood's transgenic organisms represent a posthumanist agency through their cyborgian nature and Crake's activist/apocalyptic desires hold some merit in his identification of the unethical system in which he lives; however, both the transgenic organisms and Crake's self-inflicted apocalypse tend to reinforce the liberal humanist subject by being the ultimate representation of humanity's transcendence through technology. We can certainly see the posthumanist potential in *Oryx and Crake*, which is a necessary element in my connecting posthumanist thought and utopian thought, but this paradoxical representation of technology, humanity, and the environment requires another step.

Thus, my analysis of *A Door* as both a utopia with critical elements and as a work that builds on the strengths and weaknesses of the other two novels in this thesis shows how *A Door*, by portraying a technologically advanced civilization that is grounded in a material, posthumanist world-view, can be viewed as a fully realized posthumanist eutopia. Specifically, in *A Door*, the Sharer civilization actively engages and undermines the liberal humanist subject, possessive individualism, and traditional sovereign right's models with a successful campaign of passive resistance against the Patriarch, a symbolic embodiment of these reciprocal ideals. Moreover, it is the Sharer's own posthumanist technology, a product of their posthumanist world-view and philosophy of reciprocity, balance, and responsibility as embedded entities within a larger web of life, that confounds and ultimately ends the Valan siege of their home-world in failure. That is, the Sharers' posthumanist scientific epistemology rests on a notion of responsibility and environmental awareness in terms of technological application, which represents a radical epistemic change in terms of the Patriarch's and Valan High Command's application of technology as a means to dominate and maintain power over subjects.

In this way, Sharer civilization is representative of a posthumanist eutopia because it represents a technological epistemology that is a clear reflection of posthumanist values of reciprocity, balance, and responsibility within a larger web of life. This shares with *Looking Backward* a vision of eutopia, but *A Door* materially grounds technology in a more productive way and even extends its world-view to include all entities—it is more representative of an increasingly posthumanist age in that it is not human-centered only. In turn, *A Door* and *Oryx and Crake* tend to share this vision of the material relationship between humanity, technology, and the environment, but *A Door* provides a clearer path to a posthumanist eutopian society by avoiding the paradoxes of Atwood's works—the Sharers do not transcend through their technology, which provides an alternative epistemology for avoiding such transcendence. We may stop short of calling *A Door* a blue-print in order to avoid the pitfalls of the utopian static ideal, but it is certainly suggestive of a model for developing alternative epistemologies.

At this point I think it is more than appropriate to return to Sargent's notion that "utopias ask, can we ensure food, shelter, safety, and fulfillment for all human beings" (303) and reframe it in a way that makes more sense for a contemporary audience operating in an increasingly posthuman age. Specifically, we would certainly hang on to the fact that utopia's ability to answer such questions is fundamental, but we would do well to extend this fundamental function of utopia to the much larger web of life, including a notion of responsibility and embeddedness of humanity. In other words, by not extending this fundamental function into the posthuman realm, any attempt at utopia in a technological age is in danger of reinforcing those elements that lead to dystopia. That is, when you do not ground your eutopian vision of technology in a material reality and unite all entities in solidarity, or when you appropriately ground technology in a material

reality but do not clearly ground it in a posthumanist philosophy, maps to utopia have the propensity to become new maps to hell.

Since this thesis has only taken into consideration three novels in terms of identifying posthumanist thought as directly related to utopia, I will end with a suggestion that future research into the posthumanist potential within utopian works would be a productive engagement within the field of utopian studies, posthumanism, and even environmental criticism. That is, finding alternative scientific epistemologies in an age of exponentially increasing technological capabilities that affect the environment as a whole is certainly within the purview of utopia as an attitude, a movement, and a field of study. And, moreover, finding alternatives that hold a posthumanist potential would seem to be a utopian endeavor in that, as these novels show, it is through this potential posthumanism and the narrative landscape of the utopian novel that we can begin reimagining better, eutopian worlds.

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Biographical Information

Jacob McKeever received a Bachelor of Arts in anthropology from the University of Texas at Arlington in 2008 and returned to pursue a graduate degree in English in 2012. His research interests include utopian studies, science fiction, posthumanism, science studies, and creative writing. He plans to continue both his academic and creative projects in the future, which will hopefully culminate in a number of successful published works in the near future.