Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* Trilogy as Dystopian Fiction

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ABSTRACT
This dissertation examines Margaret Atwood’s trilogy MaddAddam as a work of dystopian fiction, looking at three themes of dystopia that are present in the novels: totalitarianism, dysfunctional families, and loss of individuality. I consider the theme of totalitarianism in the dystopian trilogy to be inspired by current real-life situations, since the absolute corporate control in the novels is a reflection of contemporary Western society, in which neoliberalism is the standard. I examine the occurrence of dysfunctional families in the trilogy as a way to alienate citizens by not providing them with reliable support from family members. The replacement of real families by substitute communities in the trilogy is significant, since the citizens committed to these substitute communities are able to break from the totalitarian system. Support from a community helps citizens become unique individuals, which is why most citizens in the MaddAddam trilogy have trouble finding their individuality as a result of a lack of this support. Moreover, without a supportive familial or communal unit, citizens are vulnerable to the control of the regime. I examine how a loss of individuality can be perceived in the trilogy, since citizens in the story in general are not unique individuals that oppose the oppression they are under. Ultimately, I conclude that these three themes are interconnected, because the totalitarian regime in the dystopian trilogy depends on alienated individuals to remain in control, and individuals are alienated as a result of the dysfunctional family units they come from.
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Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy – consisting of *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013) – paints a frightening picture of a future that might not be very distant from modern-day Western society. The trilogy is often classified as science fiction, though, in Atwood’s words, the right classification would be ‘speculative fiction’, since her novels invent “nothing we haven’t already invented or started to invent” (*Writing with Intent* 285). Nevertheless, the genre that best describes the novels is dystopian fiction, as the story takes place in the future and the place described – the USA – is in a worse condition than it currently is.

To define dystopian fiction, the term ‘utopia’ must be defined first. In 1516, Thomas More first coined the term utopia, assembling the Greek words *ou*, meaning not, and *topos*, meaning place. The original description of the term utopia is therefore a place that does not exist. In the centuries after More, utopia evolved into referring to a place that does not exist but which is also better than society as the contemporaneous reader knows it, while the more recent ‘dystopia’ refers to a society that is in a worse shape. Utopia theorist Lyman Tower Sargent defines dystopia as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (9). Dystopia is primarily a literary term, as it refers not only to “to imaginary places that were worse than real places, but also to [literary] works describing places such as these” (Vieira 17). Apart from Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy, many more literary dystopian works have been published over the course of the past century, with *1984*, *Brave New World*, and the more recent young adult trilogy *The Hunger Games* being a few of the most notable examples.
While dystopia in general has a notable connection with societal issues, the more recent genre of ‘critical dystopia’ is more distinct in offering social critique. Dystopia theorist Tom Moylan remarks that Atwood, with her 1985 novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*, has begun “the trend of critical dystopias as it offers a social map that traces both the depredations of state power possible vectors of hope within the ambit of that hegemonic force” (“The Moment is Here” 137). The *MaddAddam* trilogy can also be described as a critical dystopia, a genre that – according to dystopia theorists – does not simply “reveal symptoms” of a dystopian society, but also “suggest causes” for why the society has become dystopian (Moylan, *Dark Horizons* 3). Because of this suggestive aspect, critical dystopias are endowed with a certain function of warning, since readers will be alerted to the potentially dangerous effects political systems that rule their own societies might have.

*Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* both describe different events taking place at the same time; the third novel *MaddAddam* describes later events and brings the stories of the previous novels together. The dystopian society in the trilogy is divided in Compounds, which are gated communal spaces where elitist scientists develop new biogenetic technologies for large corporations, and pleeblands. Meanwhile, a police force in service of the corporations called the Corporations Security Corps, or CorpSeCorps, keeps everyone and everything in place. While taking place only a couple of decades from now, biotechnology in the story is much more advanced than technology as it is today, with genetically modified pigs – called Pigoons – being used for human organ harvesting, and modified sheep – called Mo’Hairs – providing humans with long, sleek hair that can be used for wigs. In *Oryx and Crake*, protagonist Jimmy illustrates the elitist life led on the Compounds and his friendship with mad scientist Crake, while Toby and Ren’s lives in the pleeblands are described in *The
Year of the Flood. MaddAddam tells the story of Zeb, stepfather of Ren, acquaintance of Crake, and finally, lover of Toby, and also elaborates on human life after the ‘waterless flood’ – as the period of apocalyptic disease is referred to. The disease is caused by the BlyssPluss pill, designed by Crake with help from members of MaddAddam, manufactured at the corporation HelthWyzer.

In Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy, a hopeful element can be perceived within the story itself. In the novels, a futuristic dystopian society is ended with an apocalyptic disease, leaving only a small number of humans alive, who eventually find a way to establish a new, almost utopian-like society. Leading up to the apocalypse, Crake was not only designing the pill that caused it, but also a new human-like species that could replace humanity. These ‘Crakers’ represent the utopian element in the trilogy, since they earned only good personality traits from humans. Moylan argues this “utopian hope” is a typical element of critical dystopias, “for it is only if we consider dystopia as a warning that we as readers can hope to escape its pessimistic future” (Dark Horizons 7). Atwood agrees with this statement, and remarks that “within every dystopia is a little utopia … because we can’t imagine what is undesirable without having some idea what is desirable” (“Kicking down fences”). Initially, the Crakers come across as naïve and, as a result, Jimmy is quite irritated by them in Oryx and Crake. However, as Toby interacts more with them in MaddAddam, it becomes clear that they are smart and very eager to learn. She becomes particularly attached to a little Craker boy named Blackbeard, who she describes as having “perfect little teeth: enchantment. They are all so attractive – like airbrushed cosmetic ads” (MaddAddam 113). Toby teaches Blackbeard to read and write, and by the end of the novel, the story is told by him. In this conclusion of the story, the Crakers and the surviving humans live together
harmoniously, working hard on rebuilding population. The open ending aligns with what Moylan remarks: that “the utopian impulse within the work” is maintained (Dark Horizons 7).

Margaret Atwood reached word-class status when her best-selling novel The Handmaid’s Tale was published, which placed her among the twentieth century’s leading dystopian authors. Atwood was born in Ottowa, Canada in 1939, and studied at the University of Toronto and Harvard. She has written over sixty works, including numerous novels, essays, scripts, children’s books, critiques, poetry and short stories, still publishing new works at age 76. Apart from The Handmaid’s Tale and the MaddAddam trilogy, her list of dystopian novels also includes the recently published The Heart Goes Last (2015). Atwood has won multiple awards for her work, including the Man Booker Prize in 2000 for the historical novel The Blind Assassin. Oryx and Crake was short-listed for a number of awards, including the Man Booker Prize and the Giller Prize. While still living in Canada, Atwood usually sets her fictional stories in the United States. Her reasoning is that the US is “more extreme in everything … It’s also true that everyone watches the States to see what they country is doing and might be doing ten or fifteen years from now” (qtd. in Ingersoll 223). This setting may have been a reason for Atwood’s worldwide success, since her novels are not only popular in Canada and her work has been translated into over thirty languages. Moreover, both her novel The Handmaid’s Tale and her MaddAddam trilogy are currently being developed for television.

In my thesis, I analyze three themes of dystopian literature that can be found in the MaddAddam trilogy: totalitarianism, dysfunctional family relations, and loss of individuality. I mostly concentrate on the dystopian society described in the trilogy as it was before the apocalyptic events, as this is based mostly on the modern-day Western society that Atwood is critical of. Still, the utopian
community that is developed in the aftermath of the apocalyptic disease is addressed as well. Applying concepts of several dystopia theorists, I explore the specific themes in Atwood’s trilogy and demonstrate their significance in the narrative. Much has been written about Atwood’s fiction, but the three themes have not yet been analyzed together. As a result, the conclusion of my thesis offers new insights to how these themes work together and how they support the claim that Atwood’s trilogy is dystopian.

My methodology is as follows. I use several dystopian theorists and the theories and concepts they use in their works, and apply their theoretical claims to my own findings about Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy. I use the technique of close reading to look at nuances in Atwood’s work as part of my analysis of the three dystopian themes, since Atwood’s work is filled with clauses that find their meaning in nuance. The numerous dystopian theorists that are cited as a support to my claims have been recognized in the dystopian field of interest as experts. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini’s textbook Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination offers clear definitions of the genre dystopia and its often-used element of totalitarianism, also found in Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy. Mary E. Theis’ theory about mothers in dystopian fiction is a useful source on the topic of dysfunctional families, which is an omnipresent aspect in Atwood’s novels. Moreover, several other dystopian theorists, such as Keith M. Booker and Chad Walsh, provide insights that are helpful for the theme of loss of individuality.

My thesis is divided in three body chapters, which address the three themes as used in the MaddAddam trilogy. The first chapter examines the function of the totalitarian regime, a dystopian element which makes the protagonists feel oppressed. Additionally, the neoliberalist nature of society
in the novels is noted, since this shares similarities with contemporary Western society, enhancing the
dystopian fear that arises from it. The second chapter addresses the role of the dysfunctional family
bonds in the novels, and how communities that act as substitute families can help citizens of dystopia
feel less isolated. In the third chapter, the result of a lack of motherly guidance and being oppressed
by a totalitarian regime is demonstrated, which, in the MaddAddam trilogy, is a loss of individuality
and a loss of choice.
1 THE TOTALITARIAN REGIME

The presence of a totalitarian regime with absolute power over society is one of the most important aspects of the dystopian genre that can be observed in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy. According to utopia theorist Lyman Tower Sargent, a dystopian society is a society worse than the society the contemporaneous reader lives in (9). Therefore, a number of dystopian elements are needed to invoke the sensation that the society described in *MaddAddam* is worse than contemporary Western society. Most Western societies today are composed of democratic governments, which generally consist of the following political elements: “elected officials”; “free, fair and frequent elections”; “freedom of expression”; “access to alternative sources of information”; “associational autonomy”; and “inclusive citizenship” (Dahl 188-189). Since none of these freedoms are apparent in a totalitarian regime, this form of governing can be considered as being worse than the democratic governments found in contemporary Western societies. Hence, the aspect of a totalitarian regime enhances the general sensation of a dystopian society being a detrimental alternative to society as contemporaneous readers know it. Dystopia researcher Erika Gottlieb confirms this link between dystopia and totalitarian states by claiming that a totalitarian regime is the model for dystopian societies:

In searching for a definition of a dystopic society, dystopian fiction looks at totalitarian dictatorship as its prototype, a society that puts its whole population continuously on trial … that is, in disenfranchising and enslaving entire classes of its own citizens, a society that, by glorifying and justifying violence by law, preys upon itself. (Gottlieb 40-41)

Since dystopian societies rely greatly on totalitarianism to be considered worse than contemporary Western society, traces of a totalitarian regimes can be found back in most dystopian literary works.
The dystopian novels written by Atwood – *The Handmaid’s Tale* and her newest trilogy *MaddAddam* – contain political messages, since they encompass societies that are under the rule of a totalitarian regime. Both stories take place about twenty years after their publishing date, “with *The Handmaid’s Tale* scenario occurring around 2005 and that of *Oryx and Crake* around 2025” (Howells 163). While *The Handmaid’s Tale* has a clear political agenda, *Oryx and Crake* and its follow-up novels project “a world defamiliarized not through military or state power but through the abuse of scientific knowledge” (Howells 163). Still, the trilogy sends out a political message, as citizens in the novels are under the control of a totalitarian force, namely the CorpSeCorps – short for Corporation Security Corps. The control of the CorpSeCorps is deeply rooted in the society in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, and adds to the general dystopian feel of the story. This can be noted from many examples in the novels, of which the following is leading:

Already, back then, the CorpSeCorps were consolidating their power. They’d started as a private security firm for the Corporations, but then they’d taken over when the local police forces collapsed for lack of funding, and people liked that at first because the Corporations paid, but now CorpSeCorps were sending their tentacles everywhere. (*Flood* 30)

While the CorpSeCorps are not part of an official state body – which is practically absent in the story – but employed by the large corporations such as HelthWyzer, they do have absolute power over citizens. Because of this, the *MaddAddam* trilogy still sends out a political message and can be analyzed as dystopian works that make use of one of the most significant elements of the dystopian genre, which is totalitarianism.
The fact that there is no actual political state body in the *MaddAddam* trilogy serves as a perfect reflection of contemporary Western society’s neoliberalism. Since the USA and countries in Western Europe are continually becoming more neoliberalist, with corporations having more influence than nation-states, the message that can be read from the novels is specifically dystopian. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, there is no mention of anything that could be political and the rules that citizens of dystopia live by have been generated by big global corporations. There are no politicians, no representatives of people’s opinions, and thus no democracy. In a society that is totalitarian but which at the same time does not have an actual state body that rules over the people, oppression is more subtle and perhaps less noticeable than in societies that have a clear totalitarian state body, such as the government in George Orwell’s acclaimed dystopian novel *1984*. Corporations have all the power, because they decide which products people can buy. In fact, citizens using these products might be fooled into thinking they are not actually being controlled. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, society is corrupt. Corporations such as HelthWyzer make up the rules, which are subsequently enforced by the CorpSeCorps. Their ruling is entirely influenced by their desire to earn money, and what they gain from governing in a totalitarian manner. If doing policing work means that they could lose out on business opportunities, the potential consequences will make them decide against taking action. This can be noted in the following example:

The CorpSeCorps could have shut down the Happicuppa riots. … why didn’t [they] move in openly, blitz their opponents right in plain view, and impose overt totalitarian rule, since they were the only ones with weapons? They were even running the army, now that it had been privatized.
[Zeb]’d said that officially they were a private corporation Security Corps employed by the brand-name Corporations, and those Corporations still wanted to be perceived as honest and trustworthy, friendly as daisies, guileless as bunnies.

… That was the short answer: people didn’t want the taste of blood in their Happicuppas. (Flood 317-318)

Essentially, in the society described in the MaddAddam trilogy, there is no state that protects citizens from the control of corporations. This is in line with what dystopia researcher Tom Moylan has found. He states that “in many works of the dystopian turn … portrayals of the state disappear” (“The Moment is Here” 138). This is reflective of today’s Western society, where corporations have more control than governments and where neoliberalism is the standard. Moylan concludes that “if indeed the ruling ideas of an era are those of its ruling forces, then the narrative step from state to economy as the motor of society can be read at its least self-conscious register as a symptomatic echo of neoliberal hegemony” (“The Moment is Here” 140). Therefore, the fact that there is no governmental body in the MaddAddam trilogy, but a ruling force that consists of the corporations and the CorpSeCorps, is merely a reflection of today’s Western society.

As corporations rule society in the MaddAddam novels, everyday life in the story consists mostly of consumerism and exploitation, and everything and everyone is only valued as a commodity. Citizens as well as directors of the corporations are only interested in products, which is why the corporations can exploit citizens. In the dystopian society in Atwood’s trilogy, people often become commodities themselves; they can only see themselves as products since everything around them is only valued by how much money it is worth. In the MaddAddam trilogy, the corporations produce
the commodities, and the people in the pleeblands buy them. Citizens no longer have a mind of their own, and they only care about merchandise. This can be noted from the following example: “Accepted wisdom in the Compounds said that nothing of interest went on in the pleeblands, apart from buying and selling; there was no life of the mind. Buying and selling, plus a lot of criminal activity” (Oryx 231). Oryx grows up starring in child pornography films and photos online, and therefore she soon learns how commodified life in this dystopian society is:

“That everything has a price.”

“Not everything. That can’t be true. You can’t buy time. You can’t buy . . .” He wanted to say love, but hesitated. It was too sappy.

“You can’t buy it, but it has a price,” said Oryx. “Everything has a price.”

“Not me,” said Jimmy, trying to joke. “I don’t have a price.”

Wrong, as usual. (Oryx 162-163)

Even the example Jimmy mentions – time – can be bought in the world Atwood illustrates. Every person – pleeblander or Compounder – can go to the AnooYoo Spa and buy themselves a new face, thereby prolonging their youth. Apart from a disappearance of the state, Moylan remarks that societies in dystopian works are often marked by commoditization. He claims that “in the dystopian turn of the closing decades of the twentieth century, the power of the authoritarian state gives way to the more pervasive tyranny of the corporation. Everyday life in the new dystopias is still observed, ruled, and controlled; but now it is also reified, exploited, and commodified” (Moylan, “The Moment is Here” 135-136). Society in the MaddAddam trilogy is commodified insofar that another layer of dystopian fear is added, since the power of the corporations seems interminable.
Typically, citizens in the society in the MaddAddam trilogy do not rebel, because they are unaware of the fact that they are being oppressed and therefore do not feel the need to be rebellious. In Oryx and Crake, Jimmy’s mother attempts to defy the system by destroying important data and by fleeing the compound she and her family live in. Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that her rebellious action was quite rare, since no one that lived on the compounds would think of doing something similar: “None of them wanted … to run away to the pleeblands with him, not that this was very possible anymore. … The CorpSeCorps security at the Compound gates was tighter than ever” (Oryx 295). Additionally, the members of MaddAddam, the MaddAddamites, need to go to extreme measures to contact each other, as they are under constant surveillance. Zeb can receive messages from Adam when he is undercover at HelthWyzer, but only when he passes several secret portals so that he cannot be traced:

He wiggled through it, found himself outside the HelthWyzer burning ring of firewalls, then lilypadded his way into the Extinctathon chatroom. A message was waiting for him: Use only when needed. Don’t spend long. Wipe all prints. A. He logged out quickly, then erased his trail.

(MaddAddam 241)

Still, the MaddAddamites are one of the few rebelling against the totalitarian control of the corporations, and most other citizens do not make attempts. Citizens of the dystopian society incorrectly experience a sense of freedom, and therefore they do not feel like they have to rebel against anything. Dystopia theorist Naomi Jacobs claims that this lack of rebellion is an aspect of the genre dystopia: “the citizens of dystopia are gripped in a social formation so powerful, a web of control so densely woven, that at worst they do not even know they are not free” (Jacobs 92). Moreover, as Robert
Jay Lifton states, in a totalitarian society “there is an overall assumption that there is just one valid mode of being” (298). Citizens simply assume that society as it is cannot and does not have to change. Because citizens are not rebelling, the corporations in the MaddAddam trilogy can remain in control and keep their absolute totalitarian power. That is, before Crake unleashes his BlyssPluss pill and disrupts society entirely.

The corporations in the dystopian society created by Atwood have a monopoly on distributing information. Therefore, citizens do not have access to any kind of information that might be oppositional to the system in place, which makes it very difficult for citizens to rebel. Anti-government movements have almost no way of acquiring influence because the corrupt governing body in the MaddAddam trilogy has ways to shut these people down before they can share their knowledge with others. Because of this, the only information people receive comes from the government and is therefore one-sided. In the trilogy, media such as the internet are used for providing information, but these are still heavily monitored by the CorpSeCorps and therefore cannot be browsed freely. When Jimmy and Crake are on the internet, they know that they need to be careful when looking for and sharing information that could be defiant against the corporate government, since they are constantly being watched.

“It could be a CorpSeCorps flytrap,” said Jimmy. The Corpsmen were in the habit of setting up schemes of that sort, to capture subversives in the making. Weeding the pea patch, he’d heard it called. The Compounds were said to be mined with such potentially lethal tunnels. “You need to watch your step.” (Oryx 255)
Jimmy is afraid of what the CorpSeCorps could do if they knew Crake was illegally communicating with the members of MaddAddam. For this reason, he does not ever rebel himself. Jacobs states that in a dystopian society, “the individual who would choose to act “otherwise” will be reprogrammed, exiled, or killed, so that the social fabric may maintain its impenetrability” (92). The fear that comes to exist as a result of the regime’s constant surveillance and methods of punishment keeps citizens from attempting to communicate with other citizens that might be rebellious. As a result, the only information the larger part of society receives comes from the corporations.

Still, the MaddAddamites in Atwood’s trilogy attempt to share information with others and hold on to memories of the past. In the dystopian society in MaddAddam, there are hardly any traces left of the world as it currently is. Moreover, there is no mention of earlier historical events, though the story takes place only a decade from now. The MaddAddamites are some of the few people that still hold on to the past, which is reflected in their choice of names, as these names are all based on extinct species: “Each of the staff had a name tag with block lettering – one or two words only. BLACK RHINO. WHITE SEDGE. IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER. POLAR BEAR. INDIAN TIGER. LOTIS BLUE. SWIFT FOX” (Oryx 351). Eventually, the MaddAddamites also help create Crake’s new species, who are the ultimate embodiment of going-back-to-basics. The Crakers are different to humans in many ways but also similar to how humans used to be, before industrialization and any other kind of revolution. Meanwhile, corporations such as HelthWyzer control the media and make sure that people who share information about the past are shut down. In fact, people working on the Compounds are not allowed to keep any of their personal items when they leave a Compound. Their
identities must be burned, so personal history is diminished as well. Utopia theorist Theo Finigan finds that Atwood uses totalitarianism as an attempt to manipulate and ultimately destroy the past as a means of completely dominating the present and future. Resistance to the totalitarian regime seems, in both texts, to consist largely in the obsessive search for fragmentary traces of the past as manifested in memory, language, gesture, and materiality. (Finigan 448)

In the MaddAddam trilogy, this search for the past is demonstrated by the MaddAddamites, who are ultimately one of the few groups of humans who are able to resist the totalitarian regime. The species they eventually help produce – the Crakers – have a deep hunger for information about the past, and because of this they are less likely to develop their own totalitarian society in the future.

Since society in MaddAddam lacks a political governmental body, there are no laws in place and no powers that could enforce these laws and make sure the corporations abide by them. Because of this, there is no way of stopping corporations from developing potentially dangerous products. In Oryx and Crake, it is explained that HelthWyzer, along with other corporations, manufactures products for consumption that are possibly dangerous for people’s health, from which they profit enormously financially:

“Don’t they keep discovering new diseases?”

“Not discovering,” said Crake. “They’re creating them. … HelthWyzer,” said Crake. “They’ve been doing it for years. There’s a whole secret unit working on nothing else.” …

“Are you making this up?” said Jimmy.
“The best diseases, from a business point of view,” said Crake, “would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally – that is, for maximum profit – the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out. It’s a fine calculation.” (Oryx 247-248)

In *The Year of the Flood*, it can be noted that the reliability of the corporations is not questioned when an illness arises after the consumption of the corporations’ products:

Then Toby’s mother came down with a strange illness. She couldn’t understand it, because she’d always been so careful with her health: she worked out, she ate a lot of vegetables, she took a dose of HelthWyzer Hi-Potency VitalVite supplements daily. … No doctor could give her a diagnosis, though many tests were done by the HelthWyzer Corp clinics; they took an interest because she’d been such a faithful user of their products. (*Flood* 30-31)

Without a political government keeping track of what corporations are producing and making sure that there are laws in place to prevent potentially dangerous products from being manufactured, citizens become helpless. Therefore, the element of corporate control as part of totalitarianism further enhances the dystopian sensation raised by Atwood’s novels.

Moreover, the biogenetic technology and genetic manipulation that take place in many of the Compounds in the *MaddAddam* trilogy are part of the reason why true democracy cannot exist in the society in the novels. Genetic manipulation influences the structure of society and therefore certain groups of people with similar opinions may get the upper hand, whereas they would not have if nature had had its way. Changing genetic material or influencing fertility can completely change the structure of a society, as it disrupts evolution. If biotech corporations have all the power in society, they can decide who may procreate and who may not. This gives them the ability to shape the future population.
Atwood’s trilogy offers many examples of genetic manipulation, which mostly function as a critique to current genuine developments in the biotech area. Similar to the pills made by HelthWyzer that promise to cure people but which actually make them sicker, pills are invented to make people infertile. The BlyssPluss pill is one of the newest inventions of the biotech industry, described as followed:

[T]here would be a fourth [selling point], which would not be advertised. 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. This effect could be made reversible, though not in individual subjects, by altering the components of the pill as needed, i.e., if the populations of any one area got too low. (*Oryx* 347)

David Gurnham remarked that genetic manipulation is often used in correlation with a totalitarian regime in dystopian novels. He remarks that “eugenic programming would erode commitment to the values that make human rights and democracy possible … because the power of genetic pre-determination draws a formal distinction between the decision-making powers of one generation and the next” and that this imbalance is “fundamentally incompatible with liberal democracy because it can never be rectified” (Gurnham 159). The aspect of biogenetic technology and genetic manipulation in the *MaddAddam* trilogy is therefore a useful addition to the totalitarian aspect, enhancing the fact that the society in the story has no democratic values.

Moreover, a loss of privacy as a result of the totalitarian regime can be perceived in Atwood’s trilogy. Orwell introduced the concept of ‘Big Brother’ in his novel *1984*, referring to an almighty power that keeps constant track of everything citizens do. In *MaddAddam*, the CorpSeCorps are quite similar to Big Brother, since they keep citizens under constant surveillance. They deprive citizens of
privacy, and private life completely dissolves into public life. When Crake wants to communicate with the other members of MaddAddam, he needs to sign in through a secret gateway on the Extinctathon website, because the CorpSeCorps know exactly what people are looking at on the internet. As a way to keep track of citizens, the CorpSeCorps register their genetic information:

As for the CorpSeCorps, they favoured official marriages only as a means for capturing your iris image, your fingerscans, and your DNA, all the better to track you with. Or so the Gardeners claimed, and this was one claim of theirs that Toby could believe without reservation. (*Flood* 137)

From other examples it can also be noted that citizens in *MaddAddam* have no objections to blending their private life with public life. When Jimmy is locked down in Paradice and sees humanity die out on television, the only reason he does not commit suicide is because he feels it is pointless when he is just by himself: “Once in a while he considered killing himself – it seemed mandatory – but somehow he didn’t have the required energy. Anyway, killing yourself was something you did for an audience, as on nitee-nite.com” (*Oryx* 402). Dystopia theorists note that the loss of privacy in a totalitarian regime is an often-used aspect of dystopian novels. M. Geetha lists a number of aspects of dystopian literature and claims the genre usually contains the aspect of “constant surveillance by [the] state” (117). According to Erika Gottlieb, the main aspects of the totalitarian regime of the twentieth century are “thought control, the annihilating and redemptive powers of the elite, the brutish delight of the masses, […] the instinct of confession, and the total subordination of private to public life” (53). The loss of privacy that can be perceived in the *MaddAddam* trilogy is a valuable aspect of the totalitarian regime, as it keeps citizens from being able to offer resistance against the corporations and the
CorpSeCorps. Without privacy, citizens will not be able to work together to start a resistance movement.

However, the totalitarian regime in *MaddAddam* finds its ending with the waterless flood, demonstrating that on some occasions, resistance movements do find a way to overthrow the system. The greatest consequence of the totalitarian regime is the fact that some elements of the past that have been destroyed by it can afterwards not be restored. In the trilogy, the corporations have genetically modified pigs, wolves and sheep in order to supply humans with organs and fake hair. When the waterless flood takes place, most of humanity is destroyed, but the Pigoons, Wolvogs and Mohairs survive. Since these animals are not part of what nature had intended, once they are set free in the wild after humans have died out, they can disrupt existing ecosystems. They can be responsible for the extinction of other species, because they share a food source with other animals. In this sense, a new world can be built up again after the fall of the totalitarian society in *MaddAddam*, but the animals that have gone extinct in the story, such as the polar bear, can never be retrieved. Totalitarianism theorist Hannah Arendt says that the danger of totalitarianism

is not that they might establish a permanent world. Totalitarian domination, like tyranny, bears the germs of its own destruction. Its danger is that it threatens to ravage the world as we know it – a world which everywhere seems to have come to an end – before a new beginning rising from this end has had time to assert itself. (Arendt 176)

Therefore, the dystopian sensation the totalitarian regime in *MaddAddam* delivers is partly influenced by the fact that after totalitarianism, some traces of the past cannot be recovered.
Ultimately, though, Atwood’s trilogy does contain hope, in the form of the God’s Gardeners and finally, the Crakers, whose political system is entirely different from the totalitarian establishment that previously dominated society. The religious community going by the name of God’s Gardeners promotes back-to-nature ways of living as well as democracy. They are led by a number of Adams and Eves, all of whom are chosen to lead by the rest of the community once they are sufficiently respected. After the waterless flood hits, the Gardeners are one of the few groups of humans that survive the destruction of humanity. The Crakers have been designed specifically to be better than humans and they are therefore living together harmoniously. There is no hierarchy in the Craker community, and the group together decides what the next course of action will be. The Crakers embody a sense of hope and are in way the utopian element of the dystopian trilogy, as most aspects that have gone wrong in the case of humans have been corrected in their design. Utopia and dystopia theorist Raffaella Baccolini remarks that hope always persists in dystopian literature, though not always directly in the novel itself:

Utopia is maintained in dystopia, traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with no space for hope in the story, only outside the story: only by considering dystopia as a warning can we as readers hope to escape such a dark future. … But recent [dystopian] novels … allow readers and protagonists to hope: the ambiguous, open endings maintain the utopian impulse within the work. (Baccolini 520)

This open ending can be perceived in MaddAddam as well: people are living together with Crakers, procreating and mixing genes, already creating a new generation. With this ending, a sense of hope is maintained in the novels.
2 Dysfunctional Families

A second theme that is highly significant in dystopian fiction is the deterioration of the institution that is the family – an aspect that can also be seen in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* series. In many dystopian novels, the main characters come from dysfunctional families and in some cases, family relations are practically nonexistent. In Huxley’s *Brave New World*, for example, children are bred in laboratories and expressions like ‘family,’ ‘father’ and ‘mother’ are seen as taboo. Moreover, the theme of the totalitarian state examined in Chapter One is related to the depreciated role of the family; as utopia and dystopia theorist Mary E. Theis claims: “the alienation of the individual in a scientifically sophisticated totalitarian state is represented by the disintegration of familial ties” (35). This chapter will examine the theme of the dysfunctional family in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy, and how the value of familial relations decreases in the novels because of communities replacing the function of actual families.

In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, the corporations that control society and the CorpSeCorps depend on dysfunctional families, since citizens in the story do not object to the corporate control as a result of not being able to depend on family members for reliable information. Citizens that receive only one-sided information from a totalitarian state are generally unquestioning individuals, since it is difficult for them to receive oppositional information that might help them question the state’s authority. In *Oryx and Crake*, protagonist Jimmy is a child of a dysfunctional family, and his parents generally do not talk to him about anything that might be anti-government. He is the perfect example of an unquestioning individual – a subject of a totalitarian government – as he does not object the state’s authority and does nothing to object the system. He observes society as it is with wariness, but
he does not do anything to change the situation. His mother abandoned him when he was a child, and while it later becomes clear that she was actually one of the rebels that opposed the regime, she was absent during much of Jimmy’s childhood. Even before the actual abandonment she did not have much attention for Jimmy, which resulted in a troubled relationship between the two of them.

Dystopia theorist Gregory Claeys acknowledges that in a dystopian society, dysfunctional families and totalitarianism cannot be seen separately. He notes that “the family and private life are sacrificed to or subsumed under the greater identity of the society, state, party and/or nation” (Claeys 15). Theis also remarks that this loss of familial bonds is characteristic for dystopian literature, because the totalitarian regime that controls the dystopian society can only work when children are not properly guided to adulthood by their parents.

Such perversion of the child-parent relationship is essential to the perfect stability of the totalitarian state first because it makes the individual emotionally insecure and dependent on it and second because it breaks the vital familial link essential to the transmission of a multiplicity of other traditions, resulting in the individual’s total dependence on the state for a knowledge of the past. (Theis 36)

Since Jimmy does not have a good relationship with his parents, he does not talk to them about society as it used to be or events that were influential in the shaping of society as he knows it. Because of this, he and other citizens like him believe most of the information that is given to them by the corporations is true, and therefore, the corporations are able to remain in complete control.

While Jimmy’s family situation is dysfunctional in its entirety, the relationship between him and his mother is the main reason why Jimmy does not grow up to be a questioning, unique individual,
since proper maternal guidance is crucial in the path to adulthood. The lack of guidance Jimmy receives from his mother is another dystopian aspect of the MaddAddam trilogy, as “the loss of maternal guidance in actual fact or as a result of the state’s manipulation of memory is a ubiquitous theme in dystopian literature” (Theis 33). In Oryx and Crake, Jimmy’s family does at first appear as a typical nuclear family – with a father, a mother, and a child – but it soon becomes clear that Jimmy’s mother, in particular, is not actively guiding Jimmy through the process of growing up – also before she takes off and abandons him for good. Jimmy often feels isolated because his mother does not at all seem to care about him and she makes no effort to try and explain the problems she is dealing with:

She often tried to explain things to him; then she got discouraged. These were the worst moments, for both of them. He resisted her, he pretended he didn’t understand even when he did, he acted stupid, but he didn’t want her to give up on him. (Oryx 21)

Jimmy’s mother is essentially a stay-at-home mother but apart from feeding Jimmy she really does not raise him. While it does turn out later that she opposes the totalitarian system, she does nothing to teach Jimmy exactly how oppressive this system is and therefore he does not learn to question it. He grows up isolated and unaware of the critique he should be having against the totalitarian system, and the lack of guidance from his mother is a principal reason for this.

The relationship between Ren and her mother Lucerne in The Year of the Flood differs slightly from Jimmy’s with his mother, but the egotist Lucerne also does not offer Ren much maternal guidance. The fact that Lucerne does not care about her leaves Ren insecure and isolated during childhood. “On the days when Zeb was away, she’d barely talk to me. … Then she’d be apologetic and say, “How are you feeling?” as if she’d done something wrong to me. … When I’d answer, she
wouldn’t be listening” (Flood 79). When Ren is older, she briefly works at the AnooYoo Spa, where she runs into her mother in the hallway:

I smiled at [Lucerne] in the neutral way we’d been trained. I think she recognized me, but she blew me off like I was a piece of lint. Although I hadn’t ever wanted to see her or talk to her, it was a very bad feeling to know that she didn’t want to see me or talk to me either. It was like being erased off the slate of the universe – to have your own mother act as if you’d never been born. (Flood 360)

Though Ren has never cared much about her mother, she does care about what her mother thinks of her. When she finds that Lucerne does not care about her either, her self-esteem is hurt quite badly. Once again, she feels isolated and abandoned by her mother. According to Theis, the feeling of isolation citizens of a dystopian society experience are undeniably tied to difficult relationships with their mothers. She remarks that,

to dramatize the extent of the state’s total control of an individual, his isolation and oppression are invariably associated with either the complete abolition of the maternal role as primary educator or with the complete regulation of family life that permits neither parent to educate their children or show their love for them as they wish. (Theis 33-34)

Theis further claims that in dystopia, “oppression and alienation are made complete by depriving the individual of maternal care and guidance” (37). The lack of guidance Lucerne offers Ren is one of the reasons why Ren sometimes feels unsure of her own identity and uncertain of where in society she belongs.
However, Ren does eventually develop some individualistic qualities, because she receives a form of motherly guidance from Toby when they reunite after the waterless flood has struck. Ren has known Toby since she was a child, as they were both members of the God’s Gardeners community. Toby, though distant and strict, was a mother figure to all children of the Gardeners, who considered her a wise and trustworthy teacher: “[Toby] was leathery inside and out. “Don’t try it, Shackleton,” she would say, even though her back was turned. Nuala was too kind to us, but Toby held us to account, and we trusted Toby more: you’d trust a rock more than a cake” (Flood 75). Ren’s upbringing, which involved several women acting as mother figures, differs greatly from Jimmy’s, who did not receive much maternal guidance. Ren grows up with the values of the God’s Gardeners, and the Gardener Community is one of the few communities that actually resist the totalitarian rule of the corporations. As a result, Ren is able to overcome many difficulties after the waterless flood strikes. However, she does, again, receive help from Toby:

[Ren] drops behind to join Toby, slipping her arm through Toby’s free left arm. ‘Thank you for letting me in,’ she says. ‘At the AnooYoo Spa. And for the maggots. I would have died if you hadn’t taken care of me. You saved my life.’

And you saved mine, thinks Toby. (MaddAddam 338)

The relationship between Toby and Ren signifies that citizens of the dystopian society in MaddAddam do have a chance to develop individualistic personalities when they do receive maternal guidance, even if that guidance does not come from the citizen’s actual mother.

Problematic familial relationships Atwood’s trilogy are not merely restricted to the bond between mother and child: the relationship between children and their fathers is also addressed when
Zeb recounts his personal story in *MaddAddam*. Zeb and his half-brother Adam grow up with a dictating father, who Zeb refers to as Rev, as he preaches at a church. Neither sons have a good relationship with their father or Zeb’s mother Trudy, but it is mostly Zeb that is bullied by his parents:

Since the two of them claimed that Zeb was so freaking useless and they were so righteous, naturally he thought he’d been adopted, since he couldn’t possibly have come from two such pristine sources of DNA as them. (*MaddAddam* 135)

Both the Rev and Trudy spend their days working for the Church of PetrOleum, of which the Rev is the leader. This cult worships oil and provides the Rev with ways of funneling millions of dollars to banks in the Cayman Islands. In the meantime, neither the Rev nor Trudy have much time for their children. Moreover, they treat their children badly during the moments they do spend together. “Zeb’s father was sometimes hurtful to them … He thought pain was good for children … Zeb’s mother was often taking a nap, or doing other things that interested her. She was not very interested in small children. And she said, ‘You will be the death of me’” (*MaddAddam* 134). Theis notes that the dysfunctional relationship between fathers and children is significant in dystopian literature:

> During the last half century, feminist authors of utopias and dystopias have made us increasingly aware that beyond the mere survival of the family, the most desirable family life, which permits all members of the family to realize their potential, is much more attainable if fathers participate more directly in the maternal roles of nurturer and primary educator. (Theis 104)

Since the relationship between fathers and children is often of poor nature in dystopian societies, family units cannot be incredibly strong. Growing up without an attentive father can be damaging during the process of growing up, and this can be noted from Zeb’s story in *MaddAddam*. Though he
eventually becomes a strong individual, he struggles with his identity while growing up as he cannot believe the Rev is really his father: “Once he figured out genetics, he decided that Trudy must’ve secretly had it off with some fix-it guy with a wrench who doubled as a housebreaker and petty thief” \textbf{(MaddAddam 136)}.

The relationship between Ren and her father is different from that between Zeb and the Rev, as Ren’s father is absent and passive instead of violent and cruel. Still, Ren’s identity issues are also related to her missing out on a good relationship with her father. During the years she spends with the Gardeners, she often longs for her father and life back on the Compounds. She feels out of place in the Gardeners community and desperately wants to go back to live with him. However, when she does return to HelthWyzer, she finds that she is conflicted about where she belongs again, because the Gardeners have changed her and HelthWyzer no longer feels like home. Moreover, her father is not the hero she expected him to be:

Before he’d come to the HelthWyzer gatehouse to identify us, I’d thought he’d be overjoyed to find that we were safe and sound and not dead after all. But when he saw me, his face fell. […]

He approached me as if I might bite, and put his arms awkwardly around me. \textbf{(Flood 249-250)}

The fact that Ren does not have her father around much while growing up means that she is never part of the ‘desirable family’ Theis describes. Despite the fact that she has substitute parents such as Toby, it is difficult for Ren to reach her full potential, since she does not receive support from her real parents.

Apart from dysfunctional families, the \textit{MaddAddam} trilogy features other communities that act as families that do not suitably support individuals and therefore contribute to citizens’ loss of a
way of identifying with others. These communities are meant to function as an addition to the unit of the family, but like the family unit, they fail in making their members feel like a unit. In *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy’s father tells Jimmy that the community they live in – the gated communities referred to as compounds – are similar to medieval castles. He says, “castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside” (Atwood, *Oryx* 28). It would seem that these castles are actually pleasant kinds of communities, but over the course of the novels it becomes clear that this pleasantness is mostly false.

The officially promoted view of HelthWyzer West was that it was one big happy family, dedicated to the pursuit of truth and the betterment of humankind. ... All staff were expected to be unremittingly cheerful, to meet their assigned goals diligently, and – as in real families – not to ask too much about what was going on. (*MaddAddam* 283-284)

This passage makes it appear that there really was not any freedom within the walls of the compounds. Moreover, consumerism has influenced people in the compounds insofar that they do not care about anyone but themselves, and the corrupt control by the CorpSeCorps has left people scared and guarded. Liene Gailis says that there is no freedom within the compound walls because the members of the community cannot deviate from the path they are expected to go according to compound rules. She claims:

> On account of this and the fact that contact with the outside is limited, the opportunity to create or envision an alternate community structure is dwarfed. This is in line with Shenker’s analysis of identity: the narrators who live in these communities are not able to align their sense of
identity with their communities nor are they able to create alternate communities, thus they live in a state of alienation. (Gailis 31)

In modern-day Western society, communities are the extended version of family: they consist of the people individuals can identify with and they make these individuals feel like they belong somewhere. In *MaddAddam*, communities are still a bigger form of family, but in this case they are an addition to the dysfunctional unit that the family is. These dysfunctional communities in the trilogy contribute to the members of the communities to disengage with other people and to thereby lose their own distinct identity.

The *MaddAddam* trilogy does also include a community that breaks from the dysfunctional society, since rebelling against the system is only possible when allies are involved. This is a typical feature of dystopian literature, in which a form of hope usually persists. Atwood introduces the God’s Gardeners in the second novel of the trilogy, *The Year of the Flood*, which is a tight community that bonds over a form of religion. While the Gardeners also have to follow a number of rules, the members of the community are free to express themselves, which is not the case in the compounds. The Gardeners community, or commune, is of a democratic nature: a large group of Adams and Eves, chosen to become Adam or Eve after they have earned enough respect from the rest of the community, together make important decisions about the group. Rosabeth Moss Kanter describes communes as utopias and as a “refuge from the troubles of this world as well as a hope for a better one” (1). She argues that commitment is what holds a commune together and that the ideas of the individual fit with the ideas of the group. According to Kanter, communes therefore only exist of committed people, and “a committed person is loyal and involved; he has a sense of belonging, a feeling that the group is
an extension of himself and he is an extension of the group” (66). The Gardeners can be seen as a utopian commune – particularly since they are one of the few groups of people that is able to survive the apocalypse, and, as a result, overcome the dystopian society. Therefore, the community represents a utopian element within a dystopian story.

Finally, the main characters in the *MaddAddam* trilogy that come from dysfunctional families and that do not have substitute communities to fall back on can usually find a way to escape the apocalypse by adapting and becoming part of a well-functioning community. As these characters are finding themselves without a clear sense of identity and alienated from others, they can decide to join a community that will help them find their identity. In the trilogy, there are many examples of people with a troubled sense of identity joining a community that helps them find it back. Toby is the best example: she grows into a hero and a leader after she is accepted in the Gardeners community. Likewise, Jimmy finds himself selected as the leader of the Craker community, which has communal values but which does not see importance in blood relations. In *Oryx and Crake*, the Crakers are mostly described as childlike creatures, too naïve to understand or survive the harshness of the modern world. Yet, in *MaddAddam* they are finally demonstrate that they are as Crake had wanted them to be: better than humans. They teach the humans who survive the apocalypse new values and eventually the Crakers and the humans form a new community, together. Gailis notes that the characters in the *MaddAddam* trilogy struggle with finding their identity, and remarks that they need to find a new kind of society if they want to salvage their sense of self. She says, “people can regain their sense of identity if they alter their beliefs to fit in with society’s values or if they create or find an alternate society that fits with their mores” (Gailis 28). Ultimately, when the citizens of the society in *MaddAddam* find that their family
does not offer them any kind of support, they try to find a new community to be a part of and they attempt to adapt to this new community’s values. The fact that they can escape the dysfunctional society with its dysfunctional communities means that a sense of hope persists in the dystopian novels.
3 Loss of Individuality

A consequential theme that is tied to dysfunctional family bonds in dystopian novels is a loss of individuality, in combination with a loss of choice, and this also addressed in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy. The society that Atwood has outlined in the trilogy largely consists of citizens without a clear sense of self, who struggle with their own identity, and who base their choices – mostly unconsciously – on what is prescribed by society standards. Crake’s BlyssPluss pill is an instant success, indicating that taking the pill is not even a choice people make anymore. They simply take it because everybody else does. Ren comes into contact with the pill while working at Scales & Tails and the only reason why she does not give in to her temptations of trying it out is because, as a working girl, she is not allowed to. Moreover, most of the protagonists featured in the trilogy have trouble defining who they are exactly. Toby is a strong and confident member of the God’s Gardeners community, yet at the same time she is unsure she is a good fit for the community and she is still afraid of the pleebland mafia that used to terrorize her before she joined the Gardeners. This loss of individuality and choice can be perceived in the current Western society as well, in which citizens base their opinions and identities on commodities produced by the major corporations. Therefore, this aspect of the trilogy is a significant contribution to the dystopian message that can be read from the novels, since it is a loss that citizens of the Western world can recognize and it serves as an example of what could become of their future selves.

One of the main reasons for the protagonists of Atwood’s trilogy having underdeveloped identities and weak senses of individuality is the fact that most of them have grown up in dysfunctional families, or, more specifically, with a poorly-functioning mother, since maternal guidance is an
important factor in the process of developing a sense of self. As discussed in the previous chapter, the
dysfunctional bond between mother and child is one of the key aspects of dystopian literature. Citizens
become easy targets for manipulation without the support of a maternal figure, since they feel isolated
and unsure of who to rely on. Adding to this, a lack of maternal guidance also contributes to citizens
being nothing more than plain citizens – with no self to express and no identity that separates them
from others. Though the story of the plague is told from Jimmy’s perspective in *Oryx and Crake*, he
remains a passive character that only observes, and this passiveness is largely a result of the fact that he
was abandoned by his mother. His mother actually rebelled against the corporations, but as she left
Jimmy when he was only a child, he missed out on her guidance into adulthood which could have
helped him develop a stronger personality and will. When Jimmy’s mother is captured by the
CorpSeCorps, years after he last saw her, he does not even consider lying as a way of protecting her.
“‘Killer,’” Jimmy said. He began to laugh. “Killer was a skunk.” There, he’d done it. Another betrayal.
He couldn’t help himself” (*Oryx* 304). As Mary E. Theis claims, a mother’s influence is essential in
the process of a person developing into someone with a distinct identity. She states that “as the core
of the family, the relationship between a mother and her children acts as a bulwark for their formation
of separate identities apart from their role as citizens” (157). According to Theis, the lack of maternal
guidance that citizens in a dystopian work receive contributes to the fact that the society in this work
consists of mostly common people, who do not have an identity of their own. Therefore, the
dysfunctional relationship between mother and child that can be perceived in Atwood’s *MaddAddam*
trilogy is one of the most important reasons for citizens to not have a sense of individuality. Without
motherly guidance, a person feels isolated and unsupported, and because of this they do not learn to be critical of the rules the state forces them to follow.

Moreover, in the dystopian society that is described in the MaddAddam trilogy, citizens often lack a sense of individuality and personal choice because the existence of these types of citizens is one of the main reasons why the corporations that form the totalitarian regime are able to remain in power. Apart from MaddAddam’s main characters, the citizens in society as outlined in Atwood’s trilogy generally do not question the political system and are simply one of the masses. The corporate control that is in place in the novels can only exist because of its submissive citizens, since these citizens largely abide by the rules placed upon them by the corporations that act as the state body, no matter how unsettling these rules may be. Because dystopian novels like the MaddAddam trilogy depend on the existence of a totalitarian state body, loss of individuality is also an important theme of the genre that Atwood effectively uses in her books. The regular citizens in the MaddAddam trilogy barely ever question the intentions of the corporations and most of them end up taking the BlyssPluss pill without hesitation. Starting with the people testing it, not many seem to wonder about the side effects the pill could cause:

“Where do you get the subjects?” he said. “For the clinical trials?”

Crake grinned. “From the poorer countries. Pay them a few dollars, they don’t even know what they’re taking. Sex clinics, of course – they’re happy to help. Whorehouses. Prisons. And from the ranks of the desperate, as usual.” (Oryx 349)

Crake does not doubt the effectiveness of the pill, because he knows most citizens will want to take it and the disease it holds will therefore spread easily. He sees how little the people around really think
for themselves, and how diminishing their sense of individuality is. Apart from the *MaddAddam* series, many other notable dystopian works – *We, Brave New World, 1984* – also feature societies inhabited by disengaged, non-individualistic people, who have no idea that they are constantly being manipulated. Naomi Jacobs states that “the ideal citizen of dystopia is fully integrated with the social formation and has no self to express” (92). State bodies or corporations that function as states – as described in the *MaddAddam* novels – can only be as controlling as they are because citizens do not object their authority. In short, a dystopian society such as Atwood’s society relies on passive citizens that have no opinion, because that allows the government to do what they deem necessary to remain in complete control.

In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, most of the characters – protagonist as well as secondary characters – have multiple names, which illustrates the dystopian trend of citizens being a part of one mass society, without a sense of individual identity and without a need to be called by a specific name that belongs with that identity. The common person in a typical dystopian society has no desire to be anything more than a number, part of one big community where everyone is the same. It should not matter by what name people go, then, since their individual identity is never clear, changing as the situations people find themselves in also change. The characters in Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy all go by more than one name, and their multiple names often go with the different communities they are a part of. For example, Ren goes by Brenda when she moves back to the Compounds and Toby becomes Eve Six when she joins the Gardeners. In *Oryx and Crake*, it is noted that Jimmy at one point goes by the name Thickney – a codename for the online game Extinctathon which Jimmy uses again while working at Paradice when he is older – but eventually tells the Crakers his name is Snowman:
“My name is Snowman,” said Jimmy, who had thought this over. He no longer wanted to be Jimmy, or even Jim, and especially not Thickney: his incarnation as Thickney hadn’t worked out well. He needed to forget the past – the distant past, the immediate past, the past in any form. He needed to exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation. As the Crakers did. Perhaps a different name would do that for him. (Oryx 406-407)

All of the characters in the MaddAddam trilogy choose a name that goes with the situation they are in at that moment, because they do not want to hold on to their old identity that is marked by that old name. As for the secondary characters in the trilogy: they often do not have names at all. Jimmy is frequently questioned by the CorpSeCorps people, but these people are never called anything else than simply Corpsmen. By choosing different names to go by, citizens of dystopia weaken their personal identity and thereby blend into society as a whole more easily. Consequently, the power of the state is strengthened, as a society consisting of citizens who are all the same and who do not have a sense of individual identity is easier to control. Utopia researcher Chad Walsh declares that dystopian authors purposely put less emphasis on names, as this is in favor of the state body. Walsh claims that “by weakening the sense of individual identity, they make it more likely that the average man will merge his own frail identity with the social whole and cease to demand that he be called by a name instead of a number” (143). Since the characters in the MaddAddam trilogy go by multiple names, there is an emphasis on the non-existence of individual identity in the dystopian society, as the fact that none of the characters identify by one specific name illustrates that they have no clear sense of self.

Society as described in Atwood’s trilogy is of neo-medievalist nature, since the story takes place in – what would have been – the US, but none of the characters define themselves as American.
Because of this neo-medievalism, citizens do not only have multiple names, but also multiple loyalties. Dystopian works are often of neo-medievalist nature (Spiegel 121), and this adds to the dissociated identities that can be seen in the protagonists, who have multiple loyalties and not one set identity. Neo-medievalism is an International Relations theory, which is related to post-nationalism and which can be described as “a system of overlapping authorities and crisscrossing loyalties that hold all people together in a universal society” (Bull 246). In a neo-medievalist world, people no longer consider the nation-state as their primary means of identification, since corporations take over the regulatory role of the state body as is customary in a post-nationalist society and national borders therefore become less evident. As societies in critical dystopian works of the last few decades are mostly defined by corporate control, they are of post-nationalist nature and by that also contain neo-medievalist features. In the MaddAddam novels, the citizens’ loyalties lie not with the nation-state, but with other communities, such as the Compounds or the community of the God’s Gardeners. Dystopian researcher Michael Spiegel claims that Crake is the prime example of someone that has a fragmented personality as a result of the neo-medievalist society he lives in. He states: “That Crake can both collude with the system and conspire against it demonstrates the schizophrenia of a neo-medieval world and the necessity of affective detachment” (Spiegel 128). Crake’s loyalties are terribly ambiguous, as he appears to be loyal to the Compounds at first, but finally betrays them by designing the BlyssPluss pill. In short, it is because of a dystopian society’s neo-medievalist nature that its citizens have fragmented identities, because they identify with several kinds of communities. With a fragmented identity, one can never have a clear sense of self, and therefore this aspect of fragmentation contributes to the loss of individualism in Atwood’s story.
Moreover, this instability of loyalty in the *MaddAddam* trilogy is largely a result of the fact that citizens move around frequently, preventing them from becoming attached to a certain place and the other people living in this place. The post-national, neo-medievalist world found in the *MaddAddam* novels consists of people who are not tied to a particular country, since corporations are causing a disappearance of national borders, resulting in a world that is becoming one global community. As moving around becomes easier, people are forming transnational identities, since they no longer identify with a specific nationality. When people are not loyal to a country or place, they do not consider this part of their identity, hence their sense of identity is unstable. In the trilogy, this unstable identity as a result of a transnationality can mostly be perceived in Ren, who, pre-plague, does not feel at home anywhere and does not have a clear sense of identity, which is partly a result of moving from the Compounds to the pleeblands and back. When she has just arrived at HelthWyzer, after living with the God’s Gardeners for a few years, she feels like she does not belong with either communities anymore:

> I missed the smell of my own skin, which had lost its salty flavour and was now soapy and perfumy. I thought about what Zeb used to say about mice – if you take them out of the mouse nest for a while and then put them back, the other mice will tear them apart. If I went back to the Gardeners with my fake-flower smell, would they tear me apart? (*Flood* 250)

Apart from Ren, other citizens of the society described in *MaddAddam* are also not really tied to one place, since the Compound residents move from Compound to Compound frequently and the pleeblands are never described as being anything other than not-the-Compounds, so it does not matter in which part of the pleeblands people live. Naturally, that does leave the distinction between identities...
of people that live in the pleeblands and those that live on the Compounds, but since the pleeblands are so broadly scaled there is no way of pleeblanders identifying themselves with other pleeblanders. Researchers of globalization theory have observed the link between transnationality and unstable identities. Stephen Castles has found that “transnational identities are complex and contradictory” (1158). Furthermore, he states that individuals who frequently move to a different place “probably have contradictory and fluctuating identities” (Castles 1158). Since citizens of the dystopian world as described in MaddAddam are not bound to any particular country or place, their identity is transnational and therefore fluctuating. The transnational nature of the citizens’ identities adds to the weakness of their identities in general, which is essential for the dystopian society to remain in place, since a society that is dystopian needs citizens with unsteady identities who can be easily controlled by the totalitarian government.

The social obedience in combination with a loss of individuality that can be perceived in the MaddAddam trilogy is a vital aspect that makes the novels dystopian, since the totalitarian regime in the fictional society can only be maintained when its citizens abide by the rules placed upon them. The opposition between social obedience and individual freedom is what distinguishes a dystopian society from what can be seen as a democratic society, in which individuals have freedom over themselves. Hence, the existence of a totalitarian regime in dystopian fiction depends entirely on the citizens of this regime having no sense of individual identity or freedom of choice. In Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy, the CorpSeCorps can only be in control of society because the passive citizens that inhabit the Compounds do not object their control. Throughout the novels, there are subtle notions that address the fact that most citizens of this society are not interested in going against the
CorpSeCorps laws. When the BlyssPluss pill is released, not many people hesitate to take it, and the fact that law and order is maintained by corporations is not usually questioned. Meanwhile, the CorpSeCorps are doing everything in their power to keep citizens under their control, by giving people false information and by keeping them distracted:

The Corps didn’t like Bearlift, but they didn’t try to shut it down either, though they could have done that with one finger. It served a function for them, sounded a note of hope, distracted folks from the real action, which was bulldozing the planet flat and grabbing anything of value. (*MaddAddam* 85)

Dystopia researcher Keith M. Booker has found that this lack of individuality in dystopian literature can be linked to Althusser’s thoughts:

Althusser’s suggestion that individuals live very much in the power of large impersonal forces that exist beyond their understanding or even perception also shares a great deal with the depictions in many works of dystopian literature of manipulation of individuals by oppressive governments. Althusser’s mediations on the opposition between individual identity and social demands deal directly with the individual vs. society opposition that is probably the single most important issue dealt with by dystopian literature. (Booker 15)

Social obedience and individual freedom are directly opposite each other; if citizens are to be obedient, as is standard in a dystopian society, they cannot be free to make their own decisions. Since the *MaddAddam* trilogy contains a form of a totalitarian regime, there is also a need for citizens who do not object the lack of individual freedom they have, since the regime depends on the loss of individual choice to remain in place.
The main reason why citizens of the dystopian society in the *MaddAddam* novels generally do not object the oppression by the totalitarian regime is that they are heavily influenced by consumerism and sexism, undermining their confidence and their ability to form their own opinions and to make their own choices. Technological developments and the consumerist nature of most dystopian societies distribute to citizens losing their sense of self, since they cannot make out the difference between their own preferences and what is prescribed by society anymore. As it is hard to see this difference, citizens go along with what is decided for them without even realizing they are being manipulated. Moreover, sexism as a result of consumerism causes people to experience a lesser sense of confidence, which in turn makes them easier to manipulate. Atwood’s trilogy uses this aspect of dystopia comprehensively, since society in the novels is dominated by both consumerism and sexism. Life on the Compounds is all about consuming, since each Compound is designed to produce a certain product, but outside the Compounds, in the pleeblands, people are consuming – mainly SecretBurgers and Happicuppa’s – abundantly as well. Sex as a commodity is nothing out of the ordinary in the society described in *MaddAddam*, with young Jimmy and Crake looking at pornography online – along with everyone else – and with Ren working as a trapeze dancer and escort girl at Scales and Tails. Additionally, identities become a commodity as well. If people need a new identity, or they want to make their way into the Compounds, they can simply buy a new name and face. In Atwood’s novels, everything and everyone is commodified and because of this, it is difficult for citizens to have a strong and confident sense of self. According to Mary E. Theis, the lack of confidence that can be seen in citizens of dystopia is responsible for the fact that these citizens are eventually overpowered by society. She claims that all dystopias “describe the ultimate corruption of individuals by society: their standardization made
possible by technological means or their sense of grotesquely reduced self-worth ingrained by institutionalized sexism and racism” (Theis 41). It is because of this reduced sense of self-worth influenced by consumerism and sexism that citizens in society as described in the MaddAddam trilogy are less likely to question the fact that they are being oppressed and therefore, they do not rebel against the totalitarian regime.

Individuals in the society in Atwood’s novels are similar to Marx’s alienated worker, since they are struggling to find their own individuality in a society that is defined by social oppression, and they often perform labor that goes beyond their own awareness. Marx’s theory of labor alienation posits that labor is always “something alien” to a worker, which eventually “becomes a power on its own confronting him” (Marx 72). Alienation is a key aspect of dystopian literature, as citizens who are under the control of a totalitarian regime often are not even aware of the fact that they are being oppressed, let alone the fact that they partake in this oppression by performing labor that contributes to the regime remaining in control. In Oryx and Crake, Jimmy works for Crake and the Paradice Project, but he does not realize that he is helping Crake develop a pill that can destroy most of humanity until it is already too late. After the waterless flood, he begins to realize that the signs were already there, he simply did not see them:

“Change can be accommodated by any system depending on its rate,” Crake used to say. “Touch your head to a wall, nothing happens, but if the same head hits the same wall at ninety miles an hour, it’s red paint. We’re in a speed tunnel, Jimmy. When the water’s moving faster than the boat, you can’t control a thing.”

I listened, thought Jimmy, but I didn’t hear. (Oryx 398)
Similarly, the scientists working at the Compounds knew of the dangerous consequences genetic splicing could have – Jimmy’s father said the Pigoons could “eat you up in a minute” if you fell into their pen (Oryx 30) – but that did not stop them from further developing the splicing. They did not seem to realize what could actually happen. Booker says that the concept of the alienated worker is familiar to readers of dystopian literature, the protagonists of which are typically alienated individuals who attempt to assert their individuality against the oppressive power of a dehumanizing social system … genuine human freedom can only be achieved through the renunciation of certain aspects of bourgeois individualism which anticipates the official attitudes of societies depicted in modern dystopian literature. (Booker 33)

Individuals of the dystopian society as described in Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy can only re-claim their freedom by becoming aware of their labor, since this alienation keeps them from recognizing the power the state has over them. The alienated worker is a concept that is notably used in the trilogy because of its efficacy in combination with the totalitarian regime – a combination which is a significant aspect of the dystopian genre as a whole.

A message that can be read from the MaddAddam trilogy, then, is to always remain vigilant, since citizens of dystopia have lost all sense of caution and have to pay the cost for that by being oppressed by a totalitarian government. While more awareness is being raised about the control corporations like Apple have over citizens, most people are still in the dark. Therefore, dystopian authors are illustrating extreme examples of what today’s Western society could turn into. Atwood makes use of several myths that tell citizens of the MaddAddam world how they should live, make love, eat, and look. As an inhabitant of the Compounds, you are expected to go to the AnooYoo Spa every
once in a while to get a makeover, and if you are ever by yourself, everybody else automatically thinks you are spending your time watching pornography, since that is the only way for you to find out how you should be making love. Jimmy and Crake already learn this at a young age, and they spend most of their free time playing games and looking at pornography online: “One afternoon … the two of them were watching porn in Crake’s room. … Then they went to HottTotts, a global sex-trotting site. “The next best thing to being there,” was how it was advertised” (Oryx 102). This myth, that tells people they should learn how to make love from websites instead of doing what they think is right themselves, is one of the many ways in which Atwood is trying to make contemporaneous readers aware that they should be cautious of blindly following the rules that have been set by corporations. 

Theis sees a resemblance between the MaddAddam trilogy and Atwood’s earlier novel The Handmaid’s Tale, which both send out warning messages about what could happen to society. She states that The Handmaid’s Tale and Oryx and Crake “together illustrate what the author perceives as the greatest threats to the survival of the human spirit: lack or loss of vigilance due to promised pleasure, power, or security against ideologically motivated violations of human dignity” (Theis 132). While warning readers is an important message dystopian authors are trying to send out in general, it can be stated that the dystopian aspect of a loss of individuality and choice is an important part of this warning function.
CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have led me to find that the dystopian themes of totalitarianism, dysfunctional families and loss of individuality can all be perceived in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy, supporting the claim that the novels are in fact dystopian. I conclude that these themes contribute to the overall sensation of dystopian fear readers may get from reading the novels, as society as well as its citizens in the trilogy are not far off from contemporary Western society.

A totalitarian regime – while not in the form of a political state body – can be found in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, serving as a reflection of the current neoliberalist Western society. As I have demonstrated in Chapter One, society in Atwood’s novels is under complete corporate control, and there is no kind of political force to keep track of what the corporations do. While the picture painted in *MaddAddam* is quite extreme, corporations are gaining power in the Western society of today as well. I conclude that the dystopian theme of totalitarianism contributes to the message that can be read from Atwood’s trilogy: to be vigilant of corporations becoming a too powerful force in society.

Citizens of today’s Western society have come to care too much about consumerism and see everything and everyone only by their value as a commodity. This is also addressed in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, in which the protagonists even see themselves only as a commodity. Additionally, the totalitarian regime in *MaddAddam* erased certain aspects of the past – such as animals that have gone extinct as a result of the technological advances of society – alerting readers to the effects the lifestyle in today’s Western society could have.

Moreover, the dysfunctional families featured in the *MaddAddam* trilogy relate to both the theme of totalitarianism as well as loss of individuality. Firstly, a dysfunctional relationship between
citizens and their family members is a significant reason for them to be vulnerable for the influence of a totalitarian regime, since family members can be part of a support system that offers people information that might be contradictory to the information provided by the regime. Without the support of a family unit, citizens of a dystopian society can be influenced more easily. Secondly, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Two, motherly guidance is highly significant in the process of a citizen developing into an adult, since this bond helps people become unique individuals, as opposed to simply one of the masses. In *MaddAddam*, the dysfunctional relationship between Jimmy and his mother is the most notable example of how this absence of motherly guidance influences the shaping of Jimmy to adulthood. The relationship between Ren and her substitute mother Toby supports the argument that maternal guidance can help a citizen become more individualistic, as Ren becomes a stronger person because of Toby.

The dysfunctional bond between fathers and children is also addressed in the novels, and I have found that this relationship can contribute to a citizen’s individuality just as much as the relationship between mother and child. For instance, Zeb and Adam do not have a good relationship with their father, and this has affected Zeb’s sense of identity. I also demonstrated that the dystopian element of replacing ‘real’ families with substitute families in the form of communities is used in Atwood’s trilogy. The God’s Gardeners are more like a family to both Toby and Ren than their actual family members were, and the community offers support to both of them, eventually helping them grow into individualistic adults. Additionally, I demonstrated that the Crakers are the utopian solution to the dystopian society of *MaddAddam*, since they help the surviving humans to find back the goodness in them that they thought they had lost. I conclude that the dystopian theme of dysfunctional
families is significant in the MaddAddam trilogy, since citizens have trouble finding their personal identity and uniqueness as a result of a lack of familial support.

In addition, the dystopian theme of loss of individuality and loss of choice is used in MaddAddam as well. As I have demonstrated in Chapter Three, the theme of loss of individuality also ties in with the theme of totalitarianism, since a totalitarian regime can remain the force in power only when citizens do not object to their oppression. In the MaddAddam trilogy, the MaddAddamites and the God’s Gardeners are the two of the few groups that do object the regime’s oppression. The Gardeners do this by living simplistic lifestyles, and the MaddAddamites offer resistance by helping Crake design the BlyssPluss pill, which eventually overthrows the regime altogether. Most of the main characters in MaddAddam have multiple names. For instance, Jimmy also goes by Snowman, Ren also goes by Brenda. This points to a weakened sense of identity, since names are highly significant in the defining process of a person’s identity.

Moreover, the neoliberalism that can be perceived in the novels, in the form of absolute corporate control, also contributes to a weakened sense of self, as national borders become less important and people no longer identify with their country. Related to corporate control, consumerism is also a significant reason for citizens losing their sense of individual choice, because the line between what people have decided themselves and what has been decided for them by corporations has become very unclear. I conclude that all of these aspects contribute the theme of loss of individuality.

Finally, I conclude that the three themes of totalitarianism, dysfunctional families and loss of individuality contribute to MaddAddam’s dystopian message that can serve as a warning to
contemporaneous readers. In the modern-day Western society, aspects of corporate control, disconnected family members and loss of choice are already present, and it can be noted that Atwood is bringing awareness about this with her dystopian trilogy. According to dystopia theorist Coral Ann Howells, “the primary function of a dystopia is to send out danger signals to its readers” (161). Tom Moylan agrees with this claim, noting that “many dystopias are self-consciously warnings. A warning implies that choice, and therefore hope, are still possible” (Scraps of the Untainted Sky 136). Moreover, the MaddAddam trilogy is a critical dystopia. Therefore, Moylan’s claim that critical dystopias do not merely “reveal symptoms” but also “suggest causes” (Dark Horizons 7) can be applied to MaddAddam, as the society described by Atwood is suggestive of what Western society could look like in the very near future. Thus, it is wise for contemporaneous readers of MaddAddam to take notion of these symptoms, in order to prevent modern-day Western society to eventually turn into a society similar to that in the trilogy.
Works Cited


