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## Post-humanist food pedagogy in Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction: *the maddaddam trilogy*

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**Abstract.** The multifaceted relationship between pedagogy, food and the human condition within Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, delving into themes of consumption, identity, and ethics from a post-humanist perspective provides rationale to this research paper. Drawing upon the concept of “post food,” which emerges from the industrial food chain's influence on consumption patterns, the study examines how technological advancements and industrialization that reshape human interactions with food are transacted in learning. In *MaddAddam*, Atwood presents a post-apocalyptic narrative that highlights the intricate interplay between food, technology, and humanity's future. The novel portrays food production and consumption as ethical choices imbued with individual agency and linked to sustainability, challenging conventional environmentalist paradigms. Furthermore, examines the significance of edibility as a means of negotiating identity, belonging, and cohabitation within the post-apocalyptic community depicted in *MaddAddam*. It explores how food acts as a humanizing factor amidst the post-human landscape, where remnants of the past evoke nostalgia for “real” food. Through a synthesis of these analyses, this research paper offers a comprehensive exploration of food's role in shaping the post-human condition in Atwood's trilogy, shedding light on the implications of technological advancement, environmental degradation, and societal transformation on human interactions with food and the broader ecosystem, framed within the context of critical food pedagogy.

**Keywords:** post-humanist, food, technology, identity, dystopian, environment

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## Постгуманистическая пищевая педагогика в спекулятивной фантастике Маргарет Этвуд: «Трилогия Безумного Адам»

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**Аннотация.** В трилогии Маргарет Этвуд «Безумный Адам» рассматриваются темы потребления, личной идентичности и этики с постгуманистической точки зрения. С опорой на концепцию «постпродукции» изучается влияние технологических достижений и индустриализации на процесс обучения, а также культуру питания. В «Трилогии Безумного Адам» Этвуд представляет постапокалиптическое повествование, где показывает сложную взаимосвязь между культурой потребления, технологией и будущим человечества. В романе производство и потребление рассматриваются как этический выбор, основанный на индивидуальном подходе и связанный с устойчивостью нового порядка, что бросает вызов традиционным экологическим парадигмам. Кроме того, в исследовании уделяется внимание значению гастрономической идентичности – принадлежности и совместному проживанию в постапокалиптическом сообществе. Показывается, что еда в условиях постчеловеческого ландшафта действует как гуманизирующий фактор.

**Ключевые слова:** постгуманистический подход, еда, технологии, идентичность, анти-утопия, окружающая среда

**Вклад авторов.** *Анупама Т.П.* – разработка идеи исследования, сбор исследовательских данных, анализ данных, написание и редактирование рукописи. *Андерлин Д.Л.* – разработка идеи исследования, сбор исследовательских данных, анализ данных, написание и редактирование рукописи.

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### Introduction

Pedagogy in a broader sense is the process of learning and teaching in both the pragmatic and theoretical sense. Behaviorism is a learning theory that exclusively considers objective behaviors in humans and animals. It is possible to

study concepts like food and culture from a pedagogical perspective by simply fusing Behaviourist theory with the idea of teaching. Wendell Berry, cultural critic, initiates the link between food and pedagogy thus in his essay: What do we learn, and unlearn, from the food we eat? How is the food on our plate connected to such issues as food systems, food politics, food justice, food security, food sovereignty and food movements? (Berry, 2010).

Food pedagogy is the integration of food-related information and hands-on learning as a simultaneous happening. The analysis and resolution of food-related problems, together with the power dynamics that exist in society, are fundamental elements of critical theory. Critical food pedagogy is the result of merging food pedagogy and critical theory (Lewis & O’Neil, 2018).

Thus far, food pedagogy has been used to explain the problems associated with food production, consumption, and health difficulties that arise from changing globalization. The subjects explored include unhealthy eating behaviors, food habits, a departure from traditional food and culture, social isolation, and environmentally unsustainable practices. There is a growing focus on pedagogical methods, including food pedagogies, to tackle these issues.

Critique of the food issues relating them to a behavioristic overview surpasses observational science and facts around food and food issues. It encompasses cultural amalgamations that lead to fusion in the production and consumption of food, politics in the food trade, and the influence of fusion cuisine on relationships spanning racial and cultural divides.

Traditional Food Pedagogy looks at food and food-related issues to elaborate on the learnings made from them, but it often ignores these crucial facets of hegemony, such as race, culture, etc. A less commonly used term, “critical food pedagogy,” refers to the anthropological and cultural aspects of food that have an impact on human interactions through dietary decisions, cooking customs, and habits. With the ascent of critical food pedagogy, common hegemonic aspects, on the contrary, brought about harmony since food cultures were borrowed and accepted across countries and times. This was brought about by rampant food trade in the rapidly developing world of progress in business and technology.

In his book *Experience and Education*, John Dewey describes the kitchen as a laboratory, which is an ideal environment for teaching and learning many subjects. Dewey popularized the notion of integrating theoretical learning with experiential learning, asserting that both are indispensable: “the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative” (Dewey, 2007, p. 25). This approach is regarded as the forerunner of experiential education and has provided guidance to numerous scholars in adult and formal education.

The intersection of food pedagogy and post-humanist fiction lies in their examination of how food systems and consumption both mirror and influence human identities and relationships within larger ecological and technological frameworks. Post-humanist fiction, such as Atwood’s fiction, frequently explores

the ethical and existential inquiries that emerge from technological progress and its consequences for the environment. They explore the concept of human identity in a society where the distinction between humans and non-humans is becoming less clear.

By embedding food pedagogy within post-humanist fiction, authors can effectively critique contemporary food practices and envision alternative futures. This integration enriches the narrative, allowing for a more profound examination of how evolving food systems impact identity, ethics, and ecological balance in a post-human world. The future of food is not just about what we eat, but about how we think about eating ... and how we think about ourselves and our place in the world (Pollan, 2006).

### **Methodology: critical food pedagogy in literature**

foregrounding food pedagogy in literature distinctly bridges boundaries created by existing feuds caused due to differences in cultures and ethnicities, since food is often depicted as a unifying factor between two or more cultures. In critical food pedagogies, food is seen more critically, as Sumner describes, food is a cause for celebration, an inducement to temptation, a weapon for wielding power, an indicator of well-being, a catalyst for change, and a vehicle for learning (Sumner, 2013, p. 41)

Meredith Abarca has noted in her essay that, due to food's materiality and our daily consumption of it, thinking critically goes beyond the level of discourse and enters into the realm of action (Abarca, 2016, p. 205). Because food is a basic human need and understanding of the food system is made tangible at every meal, food narratives are therefore in a unique position to inspire action.

As Sumner states in his work *Eating as a pedagogical act*, eating can become a transformative learning experience, opening the possibility of more inclusive, and more sustainable, ways of life (Sumner, 2008, p. 352). Food is frequently portrayed as healing or transformational not only in contemporary works but also in classic literature:

As I ate the oysters with their strong taste of the sea and their faint metallic taste that the cold white wine washed away, leaving only the sea taste and the succulent texture, and as I drank their cold liquid from each shell and washed it down with the crisp taste of the wine, I lost the empty feeling and began to be happy and to make plans (Hemingway, 1964, p. 21).

Most studies on transformative learning have occurred in areas other than food. Researchers and practitioners from a wide variety of theoretical persuasions and practice settings, yet it is a complicated idea that offers considerable theoretical, practical, and ethical challenges (Dirkx, 1998, p. 1).

Critical food pedagogy analyses the educational and societal consequences of food production and consumption, promoting a more profound comprehension of the interdependence of food, culture, and sustainability. Food pedagogy, when incorporated into post-humanist narratives, offers a framework for examining

how characters engage with food in manners that mirror wider societal transformations and difficulties. It emphasises the consequences of genetically engineered foods, the decline in biodiversity, and the commercialization of nature, asking learners to reassess their personal connection with food and the environment.

## Results and discussion

### ***Post-humanist food pedagogy in Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction***

Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy – comprising *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*, – offers a complex depiction of food systems, genetic engineering, and the socio-environmental consequences of human actions, making it a fertile ground for research on critical food pedagogy. The trilogy's storyline is intricately connected to topics that are fundamental to critical food pedagogy, making it an outstanding example for examining these concepts.

The posthuman condition is characterized by a blurring of boundaries between the natural and the artificial, the human and the non-human. This is particularly evident in the realm of food, where genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and synthetic biology challenge traditional notions of what it means to eat (Mosca, 2013).

The predominance of these GMOs and synthetic foods is a prominent feature of the dystopian future depicted in *Oryx and Crake*. As the story opens, the protagonist is seen saying he has stored some mangos, knotted in a plastic bag, and a can of Sveltana No-Meat Cocktail Sausages, and a precious half-bottle Scotch, along with a chocolate-flavored energy bar scrounged from a trailer park, limp and sticky inside its foil (Atwood, 2003). This compilation of food resembles discarded kitchen refuse rather than a palatable selection that would be appreciated by modern people.

The readers only discover much later that Snowman, the protagonist, is not a homeless person in the present-day world, but rather a resilient individual in a world that has been devastated by an apocalypse. The story begins with the snowman's insatiable hunger amidst the remnants of human civilization. This episode highlights a list of food items that symbolize the leftovers of a broken modern industrial food system. It serves as a representation of the history of human food consumption, exploring the reasons why humans need food and how they go about producing and preserving it. As opined by Marcy Galbreath, the ethical implications of food consumption in a posthuman world are profound. As we move towards a future where food is increasingly engineered and manipulated, we must consider the long-term effects on our bodies and the environment (Galbreath, 2010).

The novel presents a world where natural food sources has significantly diminished, and corporations exert dominance over food production by



bioengineering. The story explores the concept of genetic manipulation and its impact on food production. One example is the invention of *ChickieNobs*, chicks that have been genetically altered to produce numerous varieties of meat concurrently.

One account from the novel illustrates that the *ChickieNobs* lack both heads and feathers and are cultivated in big vats. This disturbing image emphasizes the excessive alteration of nature for the purpose of food production. Fruits and vegetables have undergone genetic engineering to improve their visual appeal, flavor, and nutritional content.

Another instance involves the *pigoons*, which are pigs that have been genetically modified to cultivate human organs for transplantation. These *pigoons* ultimately consume a genetically produced fruit called *snats*. This exemplifies the novel's depiction of a universe in which the distinctions between natural tastes and borders blur.

As Catriona Sandilands notes, the novel offers a nuanced portrayal of post-human food, depicting both the destructive consequences of corporate greed and the potential for resilience and sustainability through alternative food movements and practices (Sandilands, 2011). The story depicts the hegemony of major corporations in the food sector, exerting control over the manufacturing and dissemination of genetically engineered foods. The novel also delves into the ecological ramifications of post-human food production, including the devastation of habitats and the contamination resulting from industrialized agricultural methods. This situation raises significant inquiries on the moral implications of altering food, the decline of biodiversity, and the commercialization of the environment. These concerns are strongly related to critical food pedagogy, which promotes an analysis of how food production systems impact health, environment, and social justice.

*The Year of the Flood*, the second novel, centers around the God's Gardeners, an eco-religious organization that promotes sustainable living and urban agriculture. Their dedication to organic farming, preservation of seeds, and adherence to plant-based diets presents an alternative perspective to the corporate control shown in the first novel. This juxtaposition offers an opportunity to explore alternate approaches to food education that prioritize sustainability, ecological equilibrium, and ethical consumption.

The story also delves at other methods of meat production, such as meat substitutes and lab-cultivated proteins. One example of this is the "soy-chicken nuggets" produced by the God's Gardeners, which replicate the flavor and consistency of genuine chicken without the requirement for slaughtering animals. In a particular scene, Toby, a prominent character, contemplates the procedure of creating soy-chicken nuggets from basic ingredients, emphasizing the cleverness and creativity of those who have managed to survive in a world devastated by an apocalypse.

The novel *The Year of the Flood*, like *Oryx and Crake*, delves into the issue of corporate dominance in the realms of food production and delivery. Corporations

such as *HelthWyzer* exert significant control over the market by manufacturing genetically engineered crops and patented seeds. Characters in the novel not only grow their own food, but also depend on foraging and hunting for wild foods to sustain themselves. This underscores the capacity of individuals to adjust and thrive notwithstanding environmental and societal collapse. These aspects from *The Year of the Flood* offer a nuanced portrayal of post-human food, depicting both the destructive consequences of corporate greed and the potential for resilience and sustainability through alternative food movements and practices. These practices exemplify the concepts of critical food pedagogy, promoting a renewed relationship with nature and a refusal of oppressive food systems.

Margaret Atwood's third novel *MaddAddam*, offers explicit examples that demonstrate the need of food pedagogy by thoroughly examining food systems, sustainability, and ethical concerns in a dystopian future. An example is the portrayal of the *Crakers*, genetically modified humans who survive on a diet intentionally created to be environmentally friendly and free from violence. Their main sources of sustenance consist of *pigoons*, a genetically modified plant species featured in *Oryx and Crake*, as well as leaves from the *kudzu* vine. This reflects an idealized vision of a sustainable food system, free from the environmental degradation associated with conventional agriculture, aligning with critical food pedagogy's emphasis on sustainability.

Another notable example is the manner in which characters in *MaddAddam* adjust to the limited availability of food in a world devastated by an apocalypse. Toby, a prominent character, exhibits a high level of knowledge and independence in relation to food by instructing others on the practices of gathering wild food, cultivating plants, and cooking meals using readily accessible resources. For example, she uses her knowledge of edible plants and mushrooms to sustain the group, embodying the principles of critical food pedagogy that emphasize the importance of resilience and practical skills in food production.

The story also explores the communal nature of food, emphasizing how meals act as a vehicle for creating bonds among the survivors. Communal dinners serve as pivotal occasions for the group to establish connections and provide mutual support, highlighting the significance of food in fostering and sustaining a sense of community. This is evident in moments where the characters gather to cook and consume meals, promoting a feeling of unity and reciprocal assistance. The community approach to food practices is a fundamental element of critical food pedagogy, which promotes inclusive and collaborative food systems.

The ethical quandary surrounding the consumption of these *Pigoons* compels the characters to reassess their dietary preferences and the ethical ramifications of consuming entities possessing human characteristics. This aligns with the objective of critical food pedagogy, which aims to cultivate ethical consciousness and accountability in relation to food intake.

Moreover, the novel functions as a pedagogical tool by employing narrative to communicate intricate concepts regarding food, technology, and ecology.

*MaddAddam* urges readers to engage in critical discussions regarding the future of food systems, the environmental impact of biotechnology, and the ethical aspects of food production and consumption. This aligns with critical food pedagogy's use of diverse educational methods to provoke thought and encourage informed decision-making.

The survivors' endeavours to build novel, enduring food practices in the midst of the wreckage of a destroyed society underscore the significance of resilience and adaptation in food systems. This narrative arc can be utilised to examine how critical food pedagogy tackles the requirement for education on sustainable practices and the establishment of robust food networks in the midst of a crisis.

### Conclusion

“People need such stories, because however dark, a darkness with voices in it is better than a silent void” (Atwood, 2013). This line of Atwood's serves as a metanarrative which highlights the pedagogical role of storytelling in addressing complex ideas about food, technology, and ethics, of which the trilogy by itself is a critical example. It serves as a profound narrative exploration of post-humanist food pedagogy.

Atwood examines the intricate interactions among food systems, technology, and the future of humanity from a speculative perspective. The trilogy rigorously analyses the repercussions of genetic engineering, corporate monopolies in the realm of food production, and ecological deterioration, prompting readers to contemplate the ethical, environmental, and sociological ramifications of their dietary decisions. In a post-apocalyptic society, the role of food becomes crucial. It is not just a matter of survival but also a reflection of the sustainability of the new world order. The posthuman food systems in these novels highlight the need for a balance between technological advancement and ecological preservation (Bergthaller, 2010). Atwood's depiction of genetically modified organisms, such as the *Crakers* and *Pigoons*, prompts essential inquiries regarding the viability and ethical implications of interfering with the natural order. The protagonists' acclimation to a post-apocalyptic world, depending on scavenging and sustainable food methods, highlights the importance of understanding food and being able to adapt in challenging circumstances. The significance of food in promoting social connections and mutual assistance is underscored by communal meals and shared food resources, which match with the emphasis on inclusivity and collaboration in critical food pedagogy.

Education researchers have used post-human pedagogy to indicate the practice that challenges anthropocentric views (Mustola, 2019). The trilogy, thus, not only critiques contemporary food practices but also offers a pedagogical tool through its narrative, engaging readers in discussions about food ethics, sustainability, and the potential future of human-ecosystem interactions.



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