Margaret Atwood, *Maddaddam*, Bloomsbury, 2013

*Maddaddam* is the third and final instalment in Canadian author Margaret Atwood’s dystopian trilogy, skilfully blending together the tales of *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2007). The two previous books occur over the same timeline, but from different sides of the sociological fence and *Maddaddam* picks up where the two texts came together. This dark and entirely too likely post-apocalyptic story of survivors could be a joy to read for the scientifically inclined, as each instance of science and technology in the book is possible in our current world.

Atwood herself stresses this in her Acknowledgments at the end of the book, stating that ‘although *Maddaddam* is a work of fiction, it does not include any technologies or biobeings that do not already exist, are not under construction or are not possible in theory’ (416). Atwood is known to disagree with the genre-label of speculative fiction or dystopia; however, the post-apocalyptic setting and the glimmer of hope for the future carried by her characters evidence her use of the dystopian genre. Though Atwood’s depiction and understanding of gene-splicing and current technological capabilities must be praised, her clichéd portrayal of computer hacking may roll some eyes – ‘Zeb had magic fingers: he could play code the way Mozart played the piano, he could warble the cuneiform, he could waltz through firewalls like a tiger of old leaping through a flaming circus hoop without singeing a whisker’ (119). Furthermore, the book claims to take place within the twenty-first century, which is not only a stretch of the imagination, but also dates it uncomfortably close.

Atwood tells each book in a dual narrative thread style, creating a curious stylistic blend of oral story-telling and speculative fiction as her characters recount pre-apocalyptic events and struggle to survive in their harsh new world. The survivors are joined by Crakers – fascinating gene-spliced and bio-engineered humanoids designed without human flaws – and it is their naivety that forces readers to reevaluate how they see the world as the central character Toby attempts to explain it to them. Questions arise, however, over Toby’s nature as an unreliable narrator. We switch from Zeb’s version of his past, brutally real, to the watered-down stories Toby then feeds the Crakers and we cannot help but wonder if sheltering them is helping or hindering them in the long-term. Toby, a God’s Gardener from *The Year of the Flood*, takes this storyteller role from *Oryx and Crake*’s Jimmy, or Snowman-the-Jimmy as the Crakers call him, wearing a Red Sox baseball cap and pretending to listen to the words of now-deceased bio-engineer Crake through a plastic watch. The Crakers are almost childlike in their innocence and belief in the all-powerful Crake and uncomfortable parallels can be drawn between them and children. Many of these terms – Crakers, God’s Gardeners, Painballers etc. – may cause new readers to struggle and it is obvious that *Maddaddam* does not work as a standalone book. Too many terms and references are taken for granted as common knowledge within its pages and, as such, the book can only be read after at least one of *Oryx and Crake* or *The Year of the Flood* have been read first. Most of the human characters go by the names they took as Crake’s bioengineers, which had to be the names of extinct animals, so many new readers and even some readers familiar with the previous books may be confused over the identities of Swift Fox, Ivory Bill, Manatee, Black Rhino, Katuro and Zunzuncito. This confusion turns to amusement with the names of the Crakers, as Crake sought to take human power away from history by naming each Craker after a historical figure: Abraham Lincoln, Empress Josephine and Blackbeard each grace the pages of *Maddaddam*.

The Crakers aren’t the only bio-engineered life forms to make a return appearance in *Maddaddam*: murderously clever pigs with human brain tissue, originally designed as organ farms, return in force to hound the survivors. The Pigoons, as they are called, are well-crafted characters...
that are deviously sly, with a better understanding of strategy and warfare than the human survivors. The Pigoons were first introduced in Oryx and Crake as massive pigs designed with extra human kidneys, livers, hearts and brain tissue and are a subtle pleasure to read as Atwood continually outsma…
in the flashback scenes. *Maddaddam* does not work as a standalone book; however, as part of the trilogy it is a wonderful conclusion to a chronologically complex and emotionally diverse story of the follies and destruction of humanity, rich with a scientifically accurate exploration of genetic engineering, the end of humanity, what it means to be human and what happens when those definitions become blurred.

*Caitlin Roper*