

“Please, oh Snowman, what is toast?”:

Memories and Nostalgia for Food in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*

Manuel J. Sousa Oliveira

“Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past”,
repeated Winston obediently.

George Orwell, 1984

No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes taking place [...] And suddenly the memory returned. The taste was that of the little crumb of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray, [...] my aunt Leonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of lime-flower tea.

Marcel Proust, qtd. in Belasco 2008

In Paul Auster’s *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), famished characters engage in a sort of dreamlike conversation which, implicitly, corresponds to a nostalgia for plenty. The people in Auster’s dystopian city “break off from what they are doing, sit down, and talk about the desires that have been welling up inside them”; they go on describing a meal in meticulous detail and by concentrating on the food travelling down their throats and arriving in their bellies (Auster 1987: 9) the power lent to reminiscence is enough to almost nourish them. A feature of food which appears to be present in several dystopian fictions is exactly this: food memories.

It seems almost inevitable that characters in dystopia, or rather the dystopian protagonists in a process of awareness, must be confronted with “the irrecoverable nature of the past” (Hutcheon & Valdés 1998: 19), which lends nostalgia its “emotional impact and appeal” (*idem*: 20). This dissatisfaction with the present makes them look back into a time when things were better – or, at least, not as bad. As Linda Hutcheon¹ has said, “the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected into the past” (*ibidem*; emphasis in the original). However, the real question, I believe, lies in whether the dystopian protagonist can project the past into the future. Or, particularly relevant to my argument, if they can find the utopian function of their food memories.

This essay will consider the work of Margaret Atwood, whose preoccupation with food

and eating has been focused on by critics such as Emma Parker, Sarah Sceats, and Annette Lapointe. Given that Atwood has come to write multiple dystopian novels, one might expect that her imaginative preoccupations would also find themselves dealing with memory and nostalgia. In this essay, I will attempt to emphasise those uses of memory and nostalgia in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003).

Even though it could be argued that memories of this sort could occur in any type of fiction, it is my contention that they serve a specific purpose in dystopian fiction. In many dystopias, in contrast with the utopias of plenty, it can often be seen that there is a food shortage and/or dietary restrictions. Thus, by having the characters engage in recollections not only of times gone by, but of the food of those times, dystopias open up the possibility of hope and engage in a mode of critical dystopianism. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan have already noted that

the process of taking control over the means of language, representation, *memory*, and interpellation is a crucial weapon and strategy in moving dystopian resistance from an initial consciousness to an action that leads to a climatic event that attempts to change the society. (2003: 6; my emphasis)

Moreover, Baccolini has further problematised the issue of memory in dystopian fiction, which will greatly benefit the present study. I propose to explore the memories of food from before the dystopian setting came about. As I will argue, memories of food will work within the concept of the critical dystopia, as articulated by Baccolini and Moylan,² as forms of resistance, survival, and horizons of hope. For this, I will borrow Baccolini's distinction between two different uses of memory: conservative (or anti-utopian) and progressive (or utopian)³ (2005; 2007). Most important, I believe, is to understand how memory and food engage in a specific dialogue, and how their relation will be made clear if we consider the concept of critical nostalgia. As Baccolini explains, a critical nostalgia through being self-aware and reflective will acquire a social and ethical dimension in addition to the personal. Essentially, I argue that memories of food in their utopian function contribute to the definition of these two novels as critical dystopias – while I also suggest that this issue will be present across the critical mode of dystopianism. Or, as Baccolini would have put it, my ultimate aim will be to find utopia in dystopia (2007).

One might dare to claim that Atwood's first dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is also her most popular and most studied work. The story revolves around the handmaid Offred who has been forced into serving as a surrogate mother for the leaders of the Gileadean regime. One of the main justifications for the totalitarian practices and abuses of the Republic of Gilead is an ecological crisis which has both caused an upsurge of infertility rates, and a food shortage. Consequently, variety in nourishment is limited for all, but particularly for handmaids who are additionally under a very restricted diet of bland but healthy food (Atwood 1985: 78), and are not allowed to have liquor, coffee, tea, or cigarettes (*idem*: 22).⁴

As Baccolini affirms, "in a novel like Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, nostalgia is recovered as the desire for what could have been" (2007: 176 n13). Sarah Sceats argues that Offred's food

memories⁵ have a potency which "may also be seen as that of appetite, of fundamental connection, something that propels resistance" (Sceats 2003: 112). Here a connection between desire and appetite seems ripe to be drawn. Baccolini explains that "it is desire for a change, for a better place, and a better life, that moves Utopia, and it is desire for a lost place and a lost time that informs nostalgia" (2007: 159). Seen through an added lens of food, this desire can be equated with the lost meals of the past, with a plentiful table, with a satisfied appetite, in contrast to the hunger inflicted by Gilead both literally and symbolically (Rubenstein 2001: 19).

It is Offred's desire and appetite for the past that often leads her to drift off into her memories; at one moment in particular she recalls "The good weather holds. It is almost like June, when we would get out our sundresses and our sandals and go for an ice-cream cone" (Atwood 1985: 53). Even though Offred is thrown back to a nostalgic idea of a summer day, this cannot be sustained when confronted by her harsh present. Hence, her next remark is that "There are three new bodies on the Wall" (*ibidem*). In this passage one can identify Linda Hutcheon's argument that "[t]he postmodern does indeed recall the past, but always with the kind of ironic double vision that acknowledges the final impossibility of indulging in nostalgia, even as it consciously evokes nostalgia's affective power" (Hutcheon & Valdés 1998: 23).

The power of food as nostalgia is also present through smell, which as Jon D. Holtzman has pointed out is a common element of sensory memories of food: "the sensuality of eating", he writes, "transmits powerful mnemonic cues, principally through smells and tastes" (Holtzman 2006: 373), and he adds that in individuals such as immigrants in a foreign country it evokes a longing for their "lost homeland" which "provides a temporary return to a time when their lives were not fragmented" (*idem*: 367). For the protagonists of critical dystopias, however, "the knowledge and the memory of their lives complete with the feelings, desires, and emotions attached to those lives (nostalgia) can represent a form of resistance and hope" (Baccolini 2007: 180). As Offred smells yeast she returns to her past life, to her lost home(land), if you wish:

I walk around to the back door, open it, go in, set my basket down on the kitchen table. The table has been scrubbed off, cleared of flour; today's bread, freshly baked, is cooling on its rack. The kitchen smells of yeast, a nostalgic smell. It reminds me of other kitchens, kitchens that were mine. It smells of mothers; although my own mother did not make bread. It smells of me, in former times, when I was a mother. (Atwood 1985: 57-58)

However, she knows she must not fall into the trap of a conservative nostalgia and displays self-awareness by affirming that: "This is a treacherous smell, and I know I must shut it out" (*idem*: 58). As Rubenstein explains,

The yeasty aroma of baking bread, one of the few pleasant smells in Gilead, also recalls comfortable kitchens and "mothers": both Offred's own mother and herself as a mother. Accordingly, it is a "treacherous smell" that she must resist in order not to be overwhelmed by loss. (Rubenstein 2001: 18)

The mother is here also seen in her relationship to food. In both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* the mothers are dissident figures, and in neither case is the mother of the protagonist present in their lives after the dystopia. In the former, Offred's mother is a radical feminist, while in the latter, she is a former microbiologist turned environmental activist. Warren Belasco claims that childhood memories are very much associated with the mother, and particularly the mother as a figure who provides comfort and nurture. The earliest conscious experience of eating is traditionally that of a baby at the maternal breast. And later on, the traditional figure of the mother as the homemaker will be an object of nostalgia – as, for example, “the special foods for sick children [...] may become the ‘comfort food’ of adulthood” (Belasco 2008: 28). In her painful yearning, Offred even wishes to turn Serena “into an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who would understand and protect [her]” (Atwood 1985: 23). Besides mothers, the invention of family meals also becomes an idealised moment of sharing and happiness. Ironically, Gilead also draws heavily on the nostalgia for mothers and families. Their perspective, however, is that of the regressive invented tradition as opposed to the critical nostalgia Offred displays. In this aspect, we can also see similarities with *Oryx and Crake*.

Despite Snowman's claims that “he needed to forget the past” (Atwood 2003: 406), this proves not to be possible as he is haunted by memories and even voices from his past life as Jimmy. His ambivalent relationship with the past can be exemplified by a dream:

Jimmy's in the kitchen of the house they lived in when he was five, sitting at the table. It's lunchtime. In front of him on a plate is a round of bread – a flat peanut butter head with a gleaming jelly smile, raisins for teeth. This thing fills him with dread. Any minute now his mother will come into the room. But no, she won't: her chair is empty. She must have made his lunch and left it for him. But where has she gone, where is she? (*idem*: 311)

Not only can we see here a type of nostalgia which is deeply unsettling, closer to trauma than comfort, but the mother in her association with the meal seems to be the focal point of Jimmy's distress.

This second dystopian novel written by Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, pays more explicit attention to the science and ecology issues already hinted at in *The Handmaid's Tale*.⁶ Told by a third-person narrator, the story follows Jimmy/Snowman⁷ around a post-apocalyptic landscape and makes use of Snowman's memories⁸ to explain how it got to that point. Still, “utopian glimpses” (Mohr 2007: 18) abound in elements such as the open ending, the power of storytelling and the potential hope for humanity that the Crakers come to represent.

Oryx and Crake, it could be argued, is centrally about the decline of belief in progress and how humanity has been downgraded in favour of science. In this one can pinpoint the ultimate dystopia the novel wants to portray, which results in a worldwide plague to destroy humanity. Postmodern theorists have claimed that the Enlightenment belief in infinite progress through modern science (Habermas 1987: 4) has come under attack, and Lyotard, for instance, has claimed that technoscientific development can no longer be called progress, since it has started evolving independently of human

needs and no longer seems to answer them (Lyotard 1993: 48-49). Thus, the novel's “doubts about progress” (Hutcheon & Valdés 1998: 23), a feature of postmodernism as Linda Hutcheon argues, clarifies why nostalgia is important. In this context of food, the novel makes it clear that, if progress means artificial food, the good old days and their real food are simply better.

One of the main problems of transgenic science as raised by the novel are the pigoons and the ChickieNobs. The pigoons were created by the company OrganInc Farms where Jimmy's father works. Originally supposed to grow human-tissue organs for transplants, “[t]he pigoons blur uncomfortably with food” (Lapointe 2014: 139). Similarly, the ChickieNobs are chickens reduced to parts. Initially described as “a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin” (Atwood 2003: 237), Crake explains to Jimmy that ““Those are chickens [...] Chicken parts. Just the breasts, on this one. They've got ones that specialize in drumsticks too, twelve to a growth unit”” (*idem*: 238). Considering the utopian tradition, Lyman Tower Sargent notices how “food production, mostly as farming, is [...] a significant concern, but a concern that obviously changes dramatically over time [...] [and] recently the concerns have shifted to ecology and organic farming” (Sargent 2015: 20).

In *Oryx and Crake* the most curious imaginative treatment of nostalgia for food can be seen in this dichotomy between real food and transgenic food. Aline Ferreira comments on the “deep sense of nostalgia for what used to be unenhanced humanity and the putatively natural world, namely real flowers, *real food*, real, unpolluted air” (Ferreira 2006: 152; my emphasis). Throughout the novel the importance given to real food will be emphasised repeatedly, and it will contribute to a critique of scientific progress.

Understood through postmodern theory, this sort of food can be equated with Jean Baudrillard's simulations. Food such as the ChickieNobs is past the point of being real, it has become a laboratory simulation of what food should be. Artificial food sacrifices sustainable agro-farming production for convenience and mass-production; it sacrifices the sensory elements of food for the mere appearance of food and satisfaction of hunger. As a consequence, “[w]hen the real is no longer what is used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning” (Baudrillard 1993: 197). In other words, one cannot escape the desire for those authentic meals of an idealised past.

Concerning the specifics of meat, Jovian Parry is right in affirming that there is a nostalgia for real meat in *Oryx and Crake*, but the novel is far from taking a stand against vegetarianism or simply “a profound nostalgia for a simpler, better time that has since passed” (Parry 2009: 254). Instead, the novel becomes critical of its present situation by recalling, not just meat, but real food in general. This does not make *Oryx and Crake* regressive, it instead acknowledges that better ways of food production have existed, and by going back to that “past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire”, (Hutcheon & Valdés 1998: 20) Jimmy/Snowman can find through taste some sort of solace. Additionally, from a young age Jimmy has shown concern over animals being burned. In contrast to his father, who dismisses those animals as “steaks and sausages”, Jimmy is troubled by their heads,

Steaks didn't have heads. The heads made a difference: he thought he could see the animals looking at him reproachfully out of their burning eyes. In some way all of this – the bonfire, the charred smell, but most of all the lit-up, suffering animals – was his fault, because he'd done nothing to rescue them. (Atwood 2003: 20)

This passage could be seen as an appeal for a more humane treatment of animals. Through an ecofeminist approach, Lapointe rightly comments on the statement *Oryx and Crake* makes on a masculine techno-culture – as embodied by Crake – which has contributed to the demise of humanity.

A nostalgia for a pastoral ideal can be found here, since real food is never defined but is always contrasted with the genetically engineered sort. Thus, as Jimmy can see that the quality and sensory power of food are being replaced by cheaper simulations, this means, I believe, that some elements of a past natural world should be recovered, but not the past itself.

Another critical standpoint assumed by the novel is on who has access to this real food. The class divisions informed by the contrast between the Compounds and the pleeblands clarify how, despite the Compounds developing and producing transgenic food, they naturally prefer to eat real food while the former is restricted to feeding the poorer pleeblands.

The Crakers, on the other hand, designed to have a more harmonious relationship with their environment, such as being vegetarians, have no recollection of the past and at a certain point Snowman struggles to explain to them what toast is. In a passage that ends with an image parallel of Offred lying “on [her] single bed, flat, like a piece of toast” (Atwood 1985: 114), Snowman is presented as the last keeper of the past world's memories, with the double meaning of symbolic cannibalism and his certainty of being destroyed:

“I was telling him”, says Snowman, “that you ask too many questions”. He holds his watch to his ear. “And he's telling me that if you don't stop doing that, you'll be toast”.

“Please, oh Snowman, what is toast?”

Another error, Snowman thinks. He should avoid arcane metaphors. “Toast”, he says, “is something very, very bad. It's so bad I can't even describe it. Now it's your bedtime. Go away”.

“What is toast?” says Snowman to himself, once they've run off. Toast is when you take a piece of bread – What is bread? Bread is when you take some flour – What is flour? (Atwood 2003: 112-13)

Snowman continues to imagine how the interaction would go until he finally realises the pointlessness of such an endeavour⁹ and declares: “Toast is me. / I am toast” (*idem*: 113). Nevertheless, the Crakers also embody a nostalgic Edenic hope for humanity – or posthumanity – since, regardless of the genetic engineering designed to rid them of humanity's “flaws”, they gradually start to show signs of being more human than initially presupposed.

Given Atwood's preoccupation with food and eating, further research should be conducted on utopia and food in her novels, including the remaining two novels of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, her

recent *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) and *The Testaments* – the recent sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*. Moreover, I believe that further research on the utopian function of memories and nostalgia for food could potentially benefit the definition of critical dystopia.

To conclude, I would like to draw on Baccolini one last time. She recognises “slight suffering [as] the necessary condition of Utopia” (2007: 162). In other words, eutopia is not simply a place of happiness, nor is it an idealised past utopia, present or future. When Snowman or Offred recall an idealised past, they are confronted with this condition of slight suffering through memory and nostalgia. This contributes to a feeling of discomfort transposed from their utopian nostalgia to their dystopian present that “can point [them] toward action and change” (*idem*: 161) in the future. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* make use of food memories to, on the one hand, nostalgically help the protagonists survive by recalling “the good old days” and/or their childhood, while, on the other hand, the deferral to a later time recognises “the necessary condition of Utopia” as “acceptance and... awareness of [this] slight suffering” (*idem*: 180). These two standpoints converge in the symbolic power of food to traverse the private and individual towards a sense of sharing and community (Holtzman 2006: 373; Sutton 2008: 160). If one, then, takes a critical look at these memories of food and its self-conscious use of nostalgia, it becomes possible to find resistance and hope in dark times, and thus to find utopian feasts in the famished halls of dystopia.

Works Cited

- Atwood, Margaret (2006), *The Handmaid's Tale*, New York/London, Everyman's Library [1985].
- (2013), *Oryx and Crake*, London, Virago Press [2003].
- (2011), *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, New York/London, Doubleday.
- Auster, Paul (2005), *In the Country of Last Things*, London, Faber and Faber [1987].
- Baccolini, Raffaella (2007), “Finding Utopia in Dystopia: Feminism, Memory, Nostalgia, and Hope”, in *Utopia Method Vision: The Use Value of Social Dreaming*, ed. Tom Moylan & Raffaella Baccolini, Oxford/Bern, Peter Lang, 159-189.
- (2005), “Sometime, between Memory and Forgetting”, *mediAzioni*, no 1, <https://mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it/images/stories/PDF_folder/document-pdf/2005/dossier2005/rememberingtroubles/2%20baccolini.pdf> (last accessed at 15/09/2019).
- Baccolini, Raffaella & Tom Moylan (2003), “Introduction: Dystopia and Histories”, in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Raffaella Baccolini & Tom Moylan, New York, Routledge, 1-12.
- Baudrillard, Jean (1993), “The Evil Demon of Images and the Precession of Simulacra”, in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 194-199.
- (1998), “Simulacra and Simulation”, *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology*, ed. Paula Geyh, Fred G. Leebron & Andrew Levy, New York/London, W. W. Norton, 631-637.
- Belasco, Warren (2008), *Food: The Key Concepts*, Oxford/New York, Berg.
- Boym, Svetlana (2001), *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books.

- Canavan, Gerry (2012), "Hope, but Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*", *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, no 23.2, 138-159.
- Ferreira, Maria Aline Seabra (2006), "The *Übermensch* in the Laboratory: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*", in *Nowhere Somewhere: Writing, Space and the Construction of Utopia*, ed. José Eduardo Reis & Jorge Bastos da Silva, Porto, Editora da Universidade do Porto, 141-155.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1987), "Modernity – an Incomplete Project", in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Washington, Bay Press, 3-15.
- Holtzman, Jon D. (2006), "Food and Memory", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no 35, 361-378.
- Howells, Coral Ann (2006), "Margaret Atwood's dystopian visions: *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*", in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. Coral Ann Howells, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 161-75.
- Hutcheon, Linda & Mario J. Valdés (1998), "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue", *Poligrafías*, no. 3, 18-41, <<http://revistas.unam.mx/index.php/poligrafias/article/download/31312/28976>> (last accessed on 15/09/2019).
- Lapointe, Annette (2014), "Woman Gave Names to All the Animals: Food, Fauna, and Anorexia in Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Fiction", in *Blast, Corrupt, Dismantle, Erase: Contemporary North American Dystopian Literature*, ed. Brett Josef Grubisic, Gisèle M. Baxter & Tara Lee, Ontario, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 131-148.
- Lyotard, Jean-François (1993), "Note on the Meaning of 'Post-'", in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 47-50.
- Mohr, Dunja M (2007), "Transgressive Utopian Dystopias: The Postmodern Reappearance of Utopia in the Disguise of Dystopia", *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, no 55.1, 5-24.
- Moylan, Tom (2000), *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Colorado/Oxford, Westview Press.
- Orwell, George (1977), *1984*, New York, Signet Classics [1949].
- Parker, Emma (1995), "You Are What You Eat: The Politics of Eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood", *Twentieth Century Literature*, no 41.3, 349-368.
- Parry, Jovian (2009), "*Oryx and Crake* and the New Nostalgia for Meat", *Society & Animals*, no 17.3, 241-256.
- Rubenstein, Roberta (2001), "Nature and Nurture in Dystopia: *The Handmaid's Tale*", in *Margaret Atwood's the Handmaid's Tale*, ed. Harold Bloom, Philadelphia, Chelsea House Publishers, 11-20.
- Sargent, Lyman Tower (2015), "Everyday Life in Utopia: Food", in *Food Utopias: Reimagining Citizenship, Ethics and Community*, ed. Paul V. Stock, Michael Carolan & Christopher Rosin, New York, Routledge, 14-32.
- (1994), "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited", *Utopian Studies*, no 5.1, 1-37.
- Sceats, Sarah (2003), *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Spinozzi, Paola. (2018), "In a Prescient Mode: (Un)Sustainable Societies in the Post/Apocalyptic Genre", in *Cultures of Sustainability and Wellbeing: Theories, Histories and Policies*, ed. Paola Spinozzi & Massimiliano Mazzanti, New York, Routledge, 85-104.
- Sutton, David (2008), "A Tale of Easter Ovens: Food and Collective Memory", *Social Research*, no 75.1, 157-180.

Notes

- * An earlier version of this essay was presented on April 2019 at More Meals to Come: An International Conference in Porto. I am grateful to the organising committee and the ALIMENTOPIA Research Team, in particular Professor Fátima Vieira and Joana Caetano. I would also like to thank the attendees for their stimulating questions and comments, particularly Miguel Ohnesorge and Nora Castle.
1. The essay in question is described as "a dialogue between colleagues" and is divided into two parts. I am here quoting from the first part written exclusively by Linda Hutcheon.
 2. The concept of critical dystopia has been articulated by Tom Moylan in his *Scraps of Untainted Sky* (2000), and by Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan in their introduction to *Dark Horizons* (2003).
 3. I have decided to keep Baccolini's term *progressive* memory. Nevertheless, I must clarify that this does not imply the Enlightenment idea of progress but instead that "Memory is... necessary as it is an important step for a political praxis of change, action and empowerment" (2005). Equally productive would be Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, from which Baccolini borrows.
 4. Lyman Tower Sargent has already noted that "the prohibition of alcohol, coffee, tea, and tobacco" (2015: 22) can often be observed in utopian fiction, particularly when concerns over vegetarianism and health are raised. This idea, among others, supports the tension between eutopia and dystopia that the Republic of Gilead represents, "because, in [Atwood's] view, each contains a latent version of the other" (Atwood 2011: 66). In a very elucidative passage of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Commander explains that "Better never means better for everyone" (Atwood 2006: 241).
 5. Even though the generic classification of *The Handmaid's Tale* as an epistolary novel would define Offred's entire narrative – excluding the Epilogue – as her memories, here I focus on the memories from before the dystopian Gilead.
 6. Critics such as Coral Ann Howells have gone so far as to claim that "in many ways *Oryx and Crake* might be seen as a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*" (2006: 161). Even though these claims remain valid on many fronts, they may still be undermined by the subsequent publication of *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013) as completing the trilogy started by *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Testaments* – the recent sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*.
 7. For consistency, I use the name Jimmy to refer to the character during the pre-apocalypse, and Snowman for the post-apocalypse.
 8. Following Gerry Canavan, it is my contention that the novel describes two main dystopian moments: the pre-apocalypse and the post-apocalypse. The apocalyptic event per se is, however, primarily a moment of transition, being part of a tendency in post-apocalyptic contemporary novels to "avoid exact descriptions of what caused the apocalypse" (Spinozzi 2018: 102). Then, I will focus on those memories which go as far as Jimmy's childhood, and, even though I believe that the world in which Jimmy grew up is already dystopian, I will consider the post-apocalypse as the ultimate dystopia of the novel.
 9. Contrary to the example taken above from Auster, where the words used for food themselves acquire the characteristics of actual food, in the post-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake* these very same words are meaningless.