

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: **DISABILITY AND DISEASE IN UTOPIAN AND
DYSTOPIAN FICTION: JUSTICE AND CARE
PERSPECTIVES**

Sara Deutch Schotland, Doctor of Philosophy, 2011

Dissertation directed by: **Professor Kent Cartwright
Department of English**

This study addresses a neglected question: how are the ill, the deformed, and the disabled treated in utopian and dystopian fiction? It might seem obvious that those with disabilities will fare better in an ideal society where they receive adequate if not generous care. However, from the beginning of utopian thought, there has been ambivalence about how to treat those who are impaired and can no longer contribute productively to the state. How can such care be justified in a society with limited resources?

This is the first study that examines in detail the representation of individuals with disabilities in utopian and dystopian fiction. I apply a capacious definition to “disability” that includes not only physical or mental impairments but also significant illness and bodily deformity. I argue that in utopian and dystopian fiction, we are invited to appraise societies (in part) by the extent to which those who have physical or functional impairments are respected, and treated or neglected. I further argue that the perspectives

of “justice theory” and “the Ethics of Care” can illuminate our readings of texts which utilize the trope of disability in utopia and dystopia to critique or reform social institutions.

In utopian texts, generous care is provided to those who can no longer work productively. We see approaches that resemble today’s Ethics of Care. In contrast, in dystopian texts, human beings are used as means to ends; their bodies literally disabled and sacrificed to achieve ulterior societal objectives. The concept of medical care is subverted—hospitals are slaughter houses, and medicines are spiked to increase the profits of the pharmaceutical industry. In dystopian worlds, vulnerable human beings are used as means to ends in violation of Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative. These dystopian texts send a warning about the dangers of applying utilitarian approaches to medical care and skewing the allocation of scarce resources and therapies to those who are, or seem, most valuable and productive.

DISABILITY AND DISEASE IN UTOPIAN AND DYSTOPIAN FICTION:
JUSTICE AND CARE PERSPECTIVES

by

Sara Deutch Schotland

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Kent Cartwright, Chair
Professor Theresa Coletti
Professor Vincent Carretta
Professor David Wyatt
Professor Mary Ann Hoffman

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DEDICATION

A la mémoire de mon père et at ma mère

For my father, Michael Joseph Deutch, who rescued my mother, and brother and sister when the Nazis invaded Belgium; who was so proud of my mother for her learning; and who dedicated his whole life to his family's well being; and who taught that "every woman should have a PhD";

To my mother, Rachel Fischer Deutch, who taught her children that they should love learning;

To my husband, Roy Schotland, who gave his generous encouragement to both of my careers, and like my father, urged and insisted that I earn a PhD—he will always be my favorite professor;

To my grandchildren, Claire Wolsk, and to Eli, Mai, and Kai Schotland—with high hopes that they will love whatever they do and not be afraid to start life anew, even at age sixty.

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About Noon I saw coming towards the House a kind of Vehicle, drawn like a Sledge by Four Yahoos. There was in it an old Steed, who seemed to be of Quality, he alighted with his Hind-feet forward, having by Accident got a Hurt in his Left Fore-foot. He came to dine with our Horse, who received him with great Civility. They dined in the best Room, and had Oats boiled in Milk for the second Course, which the old Horse ate warm, but the rest cold. Gulliver's Travels, 4.2

INTRODUCTION

This study addresses a neglected topic: how are the ill, the deformed, and the disabled treated in utopian and dystopian fiction? At first glance the answer to this question might seem obvious: those with disabilities will fare better in an ideal society where they receive adequate if not generous care. In Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), for example, an old steed is treated with dignity in Houyhnhmland; he is served easily digestible oats boiled in milk. From the beginning of utopian thought, however, authors have been ambivalent about the challenge of how to treat those who are seriously disabled and who can no longer contribute productively to the state.

There has been excellent recent work on the general literary representation of individuals with disabilities. To date literary scholars have focused on the use of disabled subject as metaphor in their examination of a broad range of genres;¹ however, neither disability nor utopian studies has directly addressed representations of individuals with

¹ David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 22. See also Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

disabilities in utopian and dystopian fiction. My study intends to build a bridge between disability and utopian studies. I start from the premise that disability is key to understanding both the ideal society and dire alternatives—a society presents an ideal, or at least a better alternative, only if its most vulnerable members are better off than under the status quo. I apply a capacious definition of “disability” to include not only physical or mental impairments but also significant, long-term illness and bodily deformity.

I argue that in utopian and dystopian fiction, individuals with disabilities function as a critique: we are invited to appraise societies (in part) by the extent to which those who have physical or functional impairments are respected and treated, or neglected and abused. I further argue that the perspectives of “justice theory” and “the Ethics of Care” can illuminate our readings of texts which utilize the trope of disability in utopia and dystopia to critique or reform actual social institutions.

Why does it matter that we address the treatment of disability in utopian and dystopian texts? Because utopian texts by their nature convey reformist agendas, the position of the individual with disabilities is an important part of how the ideal society should be structured. For example, utopian texts claim that their ideal societies are economically viable, but a key question is how much medical care should be provided to individuals who cannot be productive. From the days of Plato, utopists have debated whether the problem of resource constraints should be considered in treating individuals with disabilities. Sir Thomas More’s answer to this question differs from Sarah Scott’s: the former proposes generous life-time care as a civic entitlement and an acknowledgment of past services to the community; the latter presents a philanthropic haven that not only shelters the elderly, maimed, and infirm, but also assigns them

productive and even profitable work. In the utopian texts that I consider there is recognition of empathy as a basis for care, and a rejection of the view that individuals with physical or mental impairments are subhuman, or unworthy of inclusion.

I provide a theoretical overview of relevant principles from disability scholarship and utopian studies in the first chapter. In chapter two, I consider Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* (c. 1387-1392), Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), and Sarah Scott's novel, *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762). Although these texts differ in time, style, and topic, each engages the critical question of how individuals with disabilities should be treated in utopia. In Part Two of the *Squire's Tale*, a proto-utopian narrative, caring involves an extension of sympathy, as well as physical treatment. An empathetic exchange takes place between Princess Canacee and a wounded formel: there is an emphasis on connection. In More's *Utopia*, the ill and aged are cared for with great generosity, partly in gratitude for their past contributions to society. I argue that the Utopians are generous towards the ill and the elderly because this policy is consistent with avoiding a property-centered and money-based economy. Scott's *Millenium Hall* squarely addresses the problem of the alleged unproductivity of the disabled worker. Writing against the background of proposals to exploit individuals with disabilities in work houses, Scott proposes an alternative society where employment is both gainful and humane.

Dystopian texts also advocate reformist agendas, typically by the mirror device of illustrating the alarming outcomes that are likely to occur if present trends continue. In dystopian texts illness is tolerated and disability may even be imposed to serve the goals of the ruler or society as a whole. In chapter three, I discuss Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones

Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1973) and Ninni Holmqvist’s *The Unit* (2006). In “Omelas,” an innocent child is confined in the cellar and physically and emotionally neglected to serve the interest of “normals.” The majority of the community have become convinced that the prosperity of the community depends on the sacrifice of this child who either was mentally deficient or has become an imbecilic through the suffering that (s)he has endured. In *The Unit*, older and “dispensable” individuals are required to enter a “Reserve Unit,” where their bodies will be exploited to donate organs and otherwise benefit younger and more productive members of society. These societies vividly illustrate Immanuel Kant’s critique of utilitarianism. Far from receiving care and just treatment, vulnerable individuals are sacrificed for “the greater good.”

Chapter four turns to two dystopian novels in which clones are created, Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005). I argue that we should analyze these clones as individuals with disabilities, clones who have been manufactured for reasons of eugenics and organ supply. The concept of medical care is subverted as individuals are impregnated with disease (*Oryx and Crake*), deprived of reproductive capacity (*Never Let Me Go*), formed as intellectually disabled humanoids (*Oryx and Crake*), and/or doomed to an early and inescapable death (*Oryx and Crake*, *Never Let Me Go*).

The most vulnerable individuals are “othered” and exploited in dystopian texts. Far from receiving care, bodies are literally invaded to harvest their organs. In dystopian worlds, human beings are used as means to ends in violation of Kant’s categorical

imperative.² The unequal distribution of health goods—even of vital organs—plainly violates John Rawls’s maxim that inequalities can only be tolerated if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, even the least advantaged.

Overview of the Dissertation

In Chapter one, I provide an overview of relevant disability theory, discuss the political agendas of utopian and dystopian fiction, and summarize two relevant approaches from moral philosophy, justice theory and care ethics. Utopian and dystopian fiction are by their nature reformist. Ruth Levitas identifies three justifications for utopian studies: First, because utopia highlights what is missing or lacking in any given society or culture, understanding utopian aspirations provides a window into understanding the society itself, and offers a way into interpretation of literary texts. Second, because the utopia is counterfactual, it explores what may be possible or impossible as an ideal against which the real world can be measured. Third, the aspirations of others may “constitute a resource for us in our own pursuit of the good society.”³ Dystopian fiction has transitioned in recent years from portrayals of the dangers of surveillance to the dangers of environmental collapse or bioengineering catastrophe. I show in this study that scientific developments are used to create disability: thus in *The Unit*, *Oryx and Crake* and *Never Let Me Go*, genetic engineering and medical advances are abused to impose physical and intellectual impairments, as well as to shorten lives.

² “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.” Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis Beck (Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill, 1959), 4.287, 47.

³ Ruth Levitas, “For Utopia: The (Limits of the) Utopian Function in Late Capitalist Society,” in *The Philosophy of Utopia*, ed. Barbara Goodwin (London, New York: Routledge 2001): 26.

I propose a new framework for analyzing the treatment of individuals with disability in utopian texts. First, in utopian texts no stigma attaches to disability; it is not a punishment for sins committed by an individual or his or her parents. Second, bodily deformity does not lead to a deformity in a person's character. Third, in utopian texts an individual with impairments is not mocked for his bodily difference. Fourth, an individual with disabilities expects to receive and in fact receives medical treatment: a key issue relates to the extent of care and whether the problem of finite resources should be considered. Fifth, in a utopian society no one's body is exploited to provide greater advantage to other, more privileged members of society. This principle follows from the application of justice principles, as articulated by Kant, Rawls, and other moral philosophers. Sixth, I argue that utopian texts reflect a philosophy that we today describe as the Ethics of Care.

I explain relevant Justice Theory and the Ethics of Care in some detail, as these moral philosophical approaches are central to my thesis.

In his *Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls offers as a framework for establishing principles of a just society that those setting up the rules posit that they are in an "original position" where they do not know whether or not they would be favored and how they would be situated.⁴ Under this "veil of ignorance," those in the original position would establish principles of distribution that would optimize even the position of those who are least advantaged and assure that offices are open to all. Rawls's theory has been attacked for its alleged lack of attention to care and personal interconnection as a basis for moral responsibility.

⁴ John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

In sharp contrast to Rawls, Martha Nussbaum has developed a “capabilities approach” to justice that treats health care as a basic human right. Justice requires that every human being enjoy a minimal or threshold level of “central capabilities,” without which “a life is not worthy of human dignity.”⁵ Nussbaum lists ten “central human capabilities” that include living a normal life span, enjoying bodily health, being able to use imagination and thought, experiencing emotional attachments, and exercising political expression.⁶ Nussbaum identifies reducing disparities in health care as an urgent priority. The goal is “to bring all children with disabilities up to the same threshold of capability that we set for other citizens.”⁷

The Achilles heel of Nussbaum’s approach is, obviously, the problem of insatiable entitlements: there is not enough money, even in the United States, to achieve her mandate. In his critique of Nussbaum, Herbert Stein endorses a utilitarian limit on redistribution: “People must only be called upon to give up things for the benefit of others if those others would benefit more; people must never have to give up things to others if those others would benefit less.”⁸

The Ethics of Care posits that human beings exist in interdependent relations with each other. According to its founder, Carol Gilligan, caregiving is gendered: women tend to experience a deep concern for the well-being of others, a commitment to

⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 76-78.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁸ Mark S. Stein, *Nussbaum: A Utilitarian Critique*, *Boston College Law Review* 50 (2009): 499-500.

cooperation, and a privileging of relationships.⁹ It is necessary to alleviate the physical burdens as well as the psychological harms of those who are suffering. Care ethicists emphasize a normative concept, reciprocal interdependence. It is an essential characteristic of human experience that we experience periods of dependency of varying length, certain to occur in childhood and often occurring in illness and old age. While justice theory focuses on questions of equality and individual rights, the Ethics of Care focuses on emotional interconnections and cultivating caring relationships.

In Chapter two, “Caregiving in Utopian Texts,” I consider three texts in which care is provided to those who are ill, disabled, or elderly: Part Two of Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*, More’s *Utopia*, and *Millenium Hall*. Princess Canacee’s friendship with a female falcon in Part Two of the *Squire’s Tale* represents a rare portrayal of female homosocial bonding in medieval literary culture. The formel has been deceived by a faithless tercelet who left her for a “newfangeled” love (V.610). Although she has the plumage of the bird, this bi-species formel feels a woman’s pain. Although Part Two does not represent a true utopia because it does not develop an alternative society, nonetheless I argue that Part Two represents a utopian interlude because of the care that Canacee provides to the formel. The lovesick formel has stabbed herself with her beak to the point that her life is in danger. I analyze the relationship between Canacee and the formel in terms of a caregiving dyad. Canacee tends to the swooning falcon’s wounds, administering medicinal herbs and constructing an infirmary mewe. If we see the formel as a disabled woman, there is a modernity to this Tale in which one woman gives care to

⁹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982). As discussed in Chapter one, the gendered or essentialist aspect of Gilligan’s claim is highly controversial.

another in need. Canacee's care of the formel anticipates the call by Nussbaum and care ethicists to attend to those who are impaired, to foreigners, and to non-human animals. Canacee's kindness provides balm that soothes the wounded formel both in her status as female and in her status as bird. The formel movingly thanks Canacee for her "gentillesse," "compassioun," and "womanly benignytee" (V. 480, 483, 486). Canacee displays her empathy for the formel by listening to and validating her complaint as well as by the physical act of nursing.

Like Canacee's treatment of the injured formel, Sir Thomas More's treatment of those with disabilities reflects an Ethics of Care. In *Utopia*, the ill receive optimal care, apparently without concern over community resources. Much scholarly debate focuses on the extent to which Raphael Hythloday's laudatory views about the Utopians should be skeptically received. While many aspects of *Utopia* appear problematic and even dystopian to today's reader, the treatment of the ill and disabled appears to fall into a category of Erasmian ideals which More himself espoused. More's brief treatment of those with disabilities is important in the context of the Utopians' abolition of private property. Capital accumulation is not only fueled by pride but also by anxiety about whether one has the wherewithal to support one's self and one's family in time of illness or in old age. The Utopian can do without money and subordinate his private interest to that of the larger community because the state will support him and his family in misfortune. Hythloday argues against the injustice of allowing laborers, who have benefited the community, to suffer in old age and sickness. By providing care for those who can no longer work, the Utopians have done away with insatiable covetousness,

eliminated much anxiety, and contributed to the general happiness which is the goal of their society.

Scott wrote *Millenium Hall* at a time of growing impatience with the problem of poverty and the proliferation of beggars, many of whom were maimed or disabled. In *Millenium Hall*, we see a society constructed on the basis of implied principles of the Ethics of Care, a society of mutual confidence, reciprocal services, and open communication. Scott's utopia argues for the employability of the maimed and disabled—her haven represents a practical and humane alternative to workhouses. Those who are impaired will be productive workers because they are thankful for a job and because the founders structure the work so that it is suitable to the specific abilities of the residents.

Both *Utopia* and *Millenium Hall* implicitly respond to the debate over how to reconcile utilitarian economics with the desire that each of us would have in the Original Position to be assured that we will receive care in the event that we (or our family) become disabled. While More's response is that providing generous treatment to those with disabilities will further the state's objectives (eliminating anxiety and the desire to accumulate private capital), Scott's response is to transform the disabled into an active workforce.

In Chapter three I turn to dystopian fiction, and discuss texts in which the body is sacrificed for the “good” of the larger community. It is a commonplace that today's dystopian fiction portrays political surveillance, ecological disaster, and/or apocalyptic catastrophe. I want to draw attention to another perspective on dystopia—the neglect and sacrifice of individuals' bodies to benefit the privileged majority. While More and Scott

implicitly advocate that society *benefits* from caring for those with impairments, in this dystopic fiction we see a utilitarian justification for *abusing* individuals for the good of the state because they or their bodies are devalued. I consider the treatment of disability in two dystopian works, Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas: Variations on a Theme by William James" and Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit*.

Le Guin describes an "ideal society" in which the residents are perfectly and permanently happy. But there is a cost: one small child remains locked in a cellar, where (s)he is neglected, starved, abused, and left to fester in sores and filth. This child, of marginal social status, was either mentally deficient when selected or has become imbecilic through isolation and confinement. The residents understand that this child is a necessary sacrifice, a scapegoat required for the continued happiness and welfare of their community.

While "Omelas" tells a story of child neglect, *The Unit* recounts an extraordinary mockery of the concept of care in which "dispensable" men and women are sacrificed for the greater good once they reach the prescribed age for organ donation. They are locked into a "Reserve Unit," where they will undergo experiments and donate organs for the benefit of more productive individuals. *The Unit* portrays an extreme form of eugenic control: treating older individuals is not just a waste of money; their bodies are mined for the benefit of younger individuals to whom society assigns greater value. Gradually, individuals who are physically healthy and were formally members of the normal, able-bodied population, become disabled. In this society the body has become a good, to be allocated by a Scandinavian democracy to serve the needs of others, even as authoritarian states decide who should be assigned to work in the fields or who should be sent to war.

In effect disability is redistributed from healthy men and women above age fifty and sixty who have no children to younger more productive members of society who are restored to health by virtue of the transplants. Once the body is conceived of as capital, the utilitarian objective of allocating vital organs to more productive members of society has a certain perverted logic. I situate *The Unit* within the context of current debates in Sweden, and elsewhere, about the critical shortfall in vital organs and the economic efficiency of allocating resources to expensive eldercare.

“Omelas” and *The Unit* illustrate an important aspect of how disability is treated in dystopia: the subordination of individuals for the sake of privileged others who benefit from their sacrifice. I argue that these texts represent a limit principle for utilitarian thought—both sacrifices are justified as necessary for the wellbeing of the larger community and implicitly raise the tension between utilitarian principles and the danger of using individuals as means to ends.

In the fourth and final chapter, I turn to two “clone novels” in which the authors envision dystopian worlds, Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and Kazuo Ichiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*. While clone novels are typically analyzed as a commentary on the dangers of bioengineering, I argue that in these two works, cloning functions as a device by which the authors explore disability in dystopia.

To date the scholarship on *Oryx and Crake* has focused on Atwood’s debt to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and her ecological critique. Critics have largely ignored that virtually all of the characters are disabled. We are first introduced to Jimmy, a “neurotypical” who grows up in the engineering compound. Jimmy’s boyhood is marked by fear of disease, the mental illness of his mother, and unnatural exposures to death as

spectacle. The earth is environmentally devastated, animals are contaminated, and cities cannot be safely entered without vaccination. Far from trying to heal people, the pharmaceutical industry spreads disease in its medicine to boost profits.

Jimmy's boyhood friend Crake is cold, evil, and brilliant—traits that are attributed to his Asperger's Syndrome. Crake is emotionally and socially alienated, exceptionally gifted in math and science, and obsessed with his bioengineering experimentation. In his pathological alienation, master scientist Crake decides to unleash a virus that, disguised as a rejuvenating aphrodisiac, will end the human race. I argue that Crake's Asperger's Syndrome is more than a plot device (what Mitchell and Snyder term a "narrative prosthesis"); here disability is used as a marker for abject evil. Atwood presents Crake's condition as a motivating factor in his species-destroying project.

The plague that Crake unleashes virtually wipes out the planet. Jimmy is one of a handful to survive (and indeed, until the last pages of the novel, believes that he is the only "remnant" of the human population). Jimmy, who has rebaptized himself as "the Abominable Snowman" after the plague, is desperately ill with multiple disabilities. He suffers from a wounded and infected foot; he is dying of hunger; he is unable to protect his blistered and itchy skin from the scorching, carcinogenic rays of the sun. Atwood is a classics scholar and it is not coincidental that Jimmy suffers from a foot wound. I argue that these injuries, reflect, as for Oedipus and Philoctetes, a punishment for transgression—in this case, Jimmy/Snowman's failure to stop Crake from disseminating a species-ending virus.

Crake creates a clone species (known as "Crake's Children" or "the Crakers") that by design are better adapted physically to the decayed environment than the humans

whom they replace. The Crakers are impervious to the carcinogenic effects of sunlight, able to recycle their own excrement, and physically attractive. However, I argue that Crake has deliberately designed clones who are intellectually disabled—the Crakers are naïve, infantile, and incapable of serious reflection.. Crake justifies his decision to substitute this sub-human race on utilitarian grounds: the only way to save humanity is to destroy it and substitute a new race of attractive, vapid automatons.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* describes a world where individuals are cloned to provide organs. As in *The Unit*, body parts are allocated to more privileged members of society: the difference is that in *Never Let Me Go*, human clones are created for this end, and their bodies will be plundered for organs even before they reach middle age. This is a fictional autopathography told by Kathy, a clone who as a “carer” nurses her fellow clones as they recover from their donations. Kathy will shortly begin her own deadly cycle of providing organs until she “completes” by making her fourth and final donation. This novel is set in the 1990s, and cannot be dismissed as a speculative horror story set in the remote future. Ishiguro criticizes the practice of “medical tourism,” in which wealthy individuals, generally westerners, travel to poorer countries to buy body parts. Ishiguro's donor clones are disabled not only because they are stripped of vital organs, but also because they are unable to bear children. Moreover, the donation process begets pain, illness, and weakness. Far from being subhuman like the Crakers, Ishiguro's donor clones are caring, creative, and sensitive. Yet the “normals” stigmatize the clones and view them with fear and loathing. Here, attitudes towards clones—individuals who have been created with disabilities to repair the bodies of the “normals”—function as a critique and moral test of western society today. Although they are deprecated and

exploited, the clones show a greater sense of interconnection and humanity than does the general population.

In both Atwood's and Ishiguro's novels, humans—or rather, the humanoid clones—are used as a means to an end: in the case of the Crakers to populate the planet, and in the case of Ishiguro's clones, to supply organs. In both cases, the clones will die young: the Crakers are scheduled to die at 30, and Ishiguro's clones will “complete” in their 20s or 30s.

The common denominator of the four dystopic fictional works in this study is that in each instance, utilitarian objectives become a pretext to create or tolerate disability, and to sacrifice an individual or subpopulation for the good of others who will benefit from the former's loss or suffering.

CHAPTER 1: A Theoretical Approach to Disability in Utopia and Dystopia

I argue that in utopian and dystopian fiction, individuals with disability function as a critique: we are invited to appraise societies (in part) by the extent to which individuals with disability are respected and treated, or neglected and abused. I further argue that the perspectives of “justice theory” and “care ethics” can illuminate our readings of texts which utilize the trope of disability in utopia and dystopia to critique or reform social institutions. In this chapter, I lay the groundwork for examining specific texts by summarizing relevant theory.

In the first part of this chapter, I provide background on disability as a social or political identity. I apply a capacious definition to “disability” that includes not only physical or mental impairments but also significant illness, infirmity, and bodily deformity.¹ While there are important differences in these classifications from the standpoint of cure, the relevance of age, and the extent of functional impairment, each has led to stigma. *Gulliver’s Travels* serves as an example for applying a theory of disability, identity, and stigma to a literary text.

¹ There is no universally accepted definition of “disability.” The *OED* defines disability in relevant part as “3. an instance of lacking ability; now spec. a physical or mental condition (usu. permanent) that limits a person’s activities or senses, esp. the ability to work. 4. Incapacity recognized or created by the law.” In contrast, disability may be temporary under the American for Disabilities Act and is characterized by limitation of major life activities, not only the inability to work:

The term “disability” means, with respect to the individual—(a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such an individual, (b) a record of such impairment, or (c) being regarded as having such an impairment.

42 U.S.C. 12101. Different definitions of “disability” have been adopted by the IRS and government agencies, international organizations, and foreign countries.

I then discuss current literary scholarship that addresses the representation of individuals with disability in narrative fiction. As several critics have observed, characters with disability are often “used” as a crutch or metaphor to propel the plot or convey thematic concerns. To date, scholars have described the use of the disabled subject as metaphor across genres, but have neglected the specific role(s) of characters with disabilities in utopian and dystopian fiction. This study examines how the genre of utopian/dystopian fiction addresses the vexed question of how to treat individuals with disability in a just society.

Why does it matter that we address the treatment of individuals with disability in utopian and dystopian texts? In the second part of this chapter, I argue that utopian texts by their nature convey reformist agendas; accordingly, the position of the individual with disabilities reflects the values and ethics of a given alternative society. For example, utopic texts claim that their ideal societies are economically viable, but the vital question is how much medical care should be provided to individuals who are not productive. Should the problem of resource constraints be considered in treating individuals with disabilities? Sir Thomas More’s answer to this question differs from Sarah Scott’s. Utopians are entitled to care from the state by virtue of their citizenship and in return for past service; the founders of Millenium Hall provide a haven for the elderly, maimed, and infirm, where each contributes productive work according to his capabilities.

I next discuss competing models of how to determine resource allocation for individuals with disability, including John Rawls’s contract and rights-based “Theory of Justice,” Martha Nussbaum’s “Capabilities Approach,” and the utilitarian calculus. In contrast to defenders of rights-based models, care ethicists advocate that human beings

live in relationships of reciprocal dependency. Care ethics was first described by Carol Gilligan and other feminist scholars, and it is frequently associated with women caregivers as a result of biologically or socially determined nurturing roles.

In the last part of this chapter, I provide a framework for analysis of caregiving in utopian societies which contrasts with the neglect or abuse of individuals with disabilities in dystopic societies. In dystopic fiction, caregiving is manipulated, medical treatment is withheld, and individuals with disabilities are exploited for the benefit of “normals” or sacrificed to fulfill external agendas set by the ruling elite.

Disability: Identity and Stigma

Today disability is viewed less as a static condition than as a consequence or function of social, physical, and institutional barriers. In a world of ramps, the individual who uses a wheelchair has access to opportunities even though physical impairment remains. In settings where sign language or captions are provided, the deaf can readily participate. Disability is often defined by reference to obstacles that must be eliminated to allow full involvement by individuals with disability. Paul Longmore explains:

Disability is not an entity that a clinical exam can correlate with numbers on a schedule of impairments. It is not located in pathological individual bodies. It is not simply caused by impairments or physiological features that depart from the typical. Instead disability is produced through the dynamic interplay of a complicated constellation of factors that includes not only stigmatized physical and mental limitations and physiological differences but also physical and architectural environments, social arrangements, cultural values, and the impact of public policies

themselves...Disability then is not a fixed thing, it is an elastic and dynamic social category. It is not an objective condition, it is a set of socially produced, highly mutable, historically evolving social identities and roles.²

This “cultural” or “social” model contrasts to the earlier “moral model,” in which disability was often associated with vice, and to the “medical model,” in which impairments are viewed as diseases for which a cure is sought. A chronological and progressive view, nonetheless, is overly simplistic—many thinkers in the early modern period questioned the association between physical deformity and moral character; likewise, in our own lifetime, individuals with AIDS have been stigmatized by association of their disease with non-heteronormative lifestyle choices. Notwithstanding the persistence of stigma, however, the view that disability is culturally enforced is now widely accepted.³ The conviction that institutional obstacles are removable provides the predicate for a rights-based approach for individuals with disabilities.

Disability activists reject the stereotyping of individuals with disabilities as weak, lacking in agency, and deserving of pity. As Joseph Shapiro writes, individuals with

² Paul Longmore, *Why I Burned My Book and Other Essays On Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 238.

³ While in the real world to date it is “normals” who have constructed disability, there is a theoretical possibility that a disabled community could attain hegemonic status. H.G. Wells envisions such a scenario in “The Country of the Blind” (1904), in which a sighted traveler/ narrator stumbles upon an isolated community where everyone has lost his or her sight. At first Nunez looks forward to assuming the reins in this country, on the assumption that in the land of the blind “the one-eyed man is king.” The blind rebuff Nunez’s attempted coup by making use of their better developed hearing and sense of smell. Chastened, Nunez falls in love with a blind girl, but she refuses to marry him unless he gouges out his eyes. Nunez at last decides that the loss of sight is a sacrifice that is too great, and decides to flee the “paradise” of the blind. We might read “The Country of the Blind” as a critique of a regime where blind individuals seek to privilege their status and reinforce their cultural dominance vis-à-vis a sighted stranger.

disabilities resent words “that suggest that they are sick, pitiful, childlike, dependent, or objects of admiration—words that, in effect, convey the imagery of poster children and supercrips.”⁴ Leading disability theorists do not deny the reality of impairments or reject the need for prevention and treatment. However, they seek to disentangle those impairments from myth and stigma that define individuals by reference to their condition, and to relegate them to roles as inevitable outcomes of their impairments. Simi Linton opposes the “medicalization” of disability:

Medicalization of disability casts human variation as deviance from the norm, a pathological condition, as deficit, and significantly as individual burden and personal tragedy. Society in agreeing to assign medical meaning to disability colludes to keep the issue within the purview of the medical establishment to keep it as a personal matter and “treat” the condition and the person rather than “treating” the social processes and policies that constrict disabled persons’ lives.”⁵

Linton argues that disabled individuals are bound together less by medical category than as a group that enjoys an identity forged from a common social or political experience:

Disability is best understood as a marker of identity. As such it has been used to build a coalition of people with significant impairments or

⁴ Joseph Shapiro, *No Pity: People With Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1993), 14.

⁵ Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York and London: NYU Press, 1998), 11.

conditions such as AIDS or mental or emotional illness that have subjected them to discrimination.⁶

An open question is whether the disability movement should adopt a “minoritizing” or a “universalizing” discourse. Rosemarie Garland Thomson discusses the practical difference:

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s distinction, for example, between a “minoritizing” and a “universalizing” view of difference can be applied to disability discourse. According to Sedgwick’s hybrid of feminist and queer theory, one minoritizes difference by imagining its significance and concerns as limited to a narrow, specific, relatively fixed population or area of inquiry.... Disability studies should become a universalizing discourse in the way that Sedgwick imagines gay studies and feminism to be.... Such terms from feminist theory can be enlisted to challenge the persistent assumption that disability is a self-evident condition of physical inadequacy and private misfortune whose politics concern only a limited minority.⁷

By casting the non-disabled as “temporarily able-bodied,” advocates seek to build the broadest possible base for funding, legal change, and social reform.

As I will argue in Chapter Two, disability is universalized in More’s *Utopia*, and Scott’s *Millenium Hall*: in these texts it is understood that illness and aging are an

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 22-23.

inevitable part of the life cycle. Raphael Hythloday expressly links the utopians' past service to the community as the basis for their entitlement to generous support in old age. Scott invites the reader to associate with the identity of the disabled subject by representing the broadest possible spectrum of impairments in *Millenium Hall*, including the debility of old age.

Stigma and the Body

Both in literature and in everyday life, the first encounter between individuals with disability and those who are "normates" (Garland Thomson's neologism) is a moment charged by anxiety and embarrassment. Garland Thomson describes the complex dynamic:

In a first encounter with another person, a tremendous amount of information must be organized and interpreted simultaneously: each participant probes the explicit for the implicit, determines what is significant for particular purposes, and prepares a response that is guided by many cues, both subtle and obvious. When one person has a visible disability, however, it almost always dominates and skews the normate's process of sorting out perceptions and forming a reaction. The interaction is usually strained because the nondisabled person may feel fear, pity, fascination, repulsion, or merely surprise, none of which is expressible according to social protocol. Besides the discomfiting dissonance between experienced and expressed reaction, a nondisabled person often does not know how to act toward a disabled person: how or whether to offer assistance; whether to acknowledge the disability; what words,

gestures, or expectations to use or avoid. Perhaps most destructive to the potential for continuing relations is the normate's frequent assumption that a disability cancels out other qualities, reducing the complex person to a single attribute.⁸

Individuals with disability frequently incur a form of social ostracism first described by Erving Goffman in his landmark work, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.⁹ The word "stigma" originates in the branding of slaves (the ancient Greek for "to prick" is *stig*.)¹⁰ As Gerhard Falk comments, usage of "stigma" "connotes a mark of disapproval," as likely to be invisible as visible, which allows "insiders" to draw a line that excludes outsiders.¹¹ In this way, the solidarity of "normal" is affirmed. Goffman divides stigmas into bodily imperfections, tribal difference, and deviations in conduct and behavior. Stigma is a social identity constructed as a result of contacts between individuals with stigmatizing conditions and "normal." When there is a discrepancy between "virtual identity" (attributed identity) and "actual identity" (felt identity), identity is "spoiled."¹² The stigmatized person may react to her perceived distance from the norm by experiencing shame or self-loathing or may adopt a compensatory strategy (for example, attributing all failings to the stigmatized

⁸ Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 12.

⁹ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).

¹⁰ Gerhard Falk, *Stigma: How We Treat Outsiders* (New York, Prometheus Books, 2001), 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Goffman, *Stigma*, 19.

condition).¹³ Those who are “discreditable” (possessors of invisible marks of unacceptable differences) must “manage information” about their deviation in order to pass.¹⁴ In contrast, those who have disabilities or other visible bodily imperfections are “discredited”; they are challenged to “manage impressions.”¹⁵ It is far more difficult for individuals with immediately visible stigmatizing conditions to “pass.” When “the discredited” attempt to pass, a kind of “mutual pretense” is created, in which normals and individuals with disabilities pretend as if the stigmatizing condition does not exist. Even today, individuals with disabilities may be subject to “health-related stigma,”¹⁶ in which social unacceptability leads to a sense of shame and fear.¹⁷ In a landmark article about AIDS early in the epidemic, Susan Sontag writes, “[n]othing is more punitive than to give disease a meaning – that meaning being invariably a moralistic one.”¹⁸

¹³ Ibid., 9-10.

¹⁴ Ibid., 126-39.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This phenomenon is discussed in M[itche]ll G. Weiss, Jayahsree Ramakrishna, D. Somma, “Health-related stigma: rethinking concepts and interventions,” *Psychology, Health, and Medicine* 11.3 (2006): 277:

Stigma is typically a social process, experienced or anticipated, characterized by exclusion, rejection, blame or devaluation that results from experience, perception, or reasonable anticipation of an adverse social judgment about a person or group. This judgment is based on an enduring feature of identity conferred by a health problem or health-related condition that is in some essential way medically unwarranted.

Ibid., 280

¹⁷ Graham Scambler describes a “hidden distress” model of epilepsy, which distinguishes between overt discrimination on the grounds of the social unacceptability of those with epilepsy (“enacted stigma”) and a sense of shame and fear lest enacted stigma be encountered (“felt stigma”). *Epilepsy* (London: Routledge, 1989), 58.

¹⁸ Susan Sontag, “Disease as Political Metaphor,” *New York Review of Books* (February 23, 1978).

Stigma theory and related issues of identity provide a useful lens through which to examine the portrayal of characters with deformity and other types of disability in older texts. For example, in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, although Gulliver does not bear a distinguishing mark, he experiences stigma when he enters other worlds because of his anomalous body. Because he stands six feet tall, Gulliver literally lords it over the Lilliputians, among whom he becomes a Nardac, and drives a coach in four. However, in Brobdingnag, Gulliver experiences terror when he is menaced by animal threats—giant rats, a monkey, a kite, and an eagle—and supersized giants:

As human Creatures are observed to be more Savage and cruel in Proportion to their Bulk, what could I expect but to be a Morsel in the Mouth of the first among these enormous Barbarians who should happen to seize me (75).¹⁹

Gulliver confronts the type of obstacles that complicate the lives of small and disabled individuals when he is too short to pass through tall hedges and to climb giant steps (74). He is bestialized as a “Toad,” a “Spider,” an “Insect,” and a “*splacknuck*” (77, 123). When Gulliver falls in muck, he becomes a laughing stock at court: “all the Mirth, for some Days, was at my Expence” (112). Gulliver's experience shows what it is like to be mocked for a non-conforming body. He reflects that in Lilliput he was regarded as “the greatest Prodigy that ever appeared”; it is “a mortification” to “appear as inconsiderable in this Nation [the land of the Giants], as one single Lilliputian would among us” [the English]. When a cruel farmer displays him in a freak show, Gulliver is

¹⁹ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Paul Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). All page references are to this edition and appear in parentheses in text.

subject to the “ignominy” of being shown with monsters (85). Far from caring for his miniature marvel, the master overworks Gulliver so that his health is greatly impaired—an accurate representation of the abuse that “freaks” suffered at public fairs in Swift’s England.

In the land of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver initially sees the Yahoo as a complete Other: “singular” and “deformed,” an “ugly Monster” (215-16). Unfortunately, the horse masters so frequently refer to Gulliver as a Yahoo that he must confront the resemblance, that he and the accursed Yahoo are kindred species:

My Horror and Astonishment are not to be described, when I observed, in this abominable Animal, a perfect human Figure; ... The Fore-feet of the *Yahoo* differed from my Hands in nothing else, but the Length of the Nails, the Coarseness and Brownness of the Palms, and the Hairiness on the Backs. (222)

Gulliver hears the horse masters in Houyhnhnm call him Yahoo “to my everlasting mortification” (221). Given that the Yahoos experience all aspects of Goffman’s three-fold stigma—tribal, bodily, and behavioral abnormality—it is no wonder Gulliver is mortified to be associated with this despised group.

Poor Gulliver is less than a Yahoo, given disadvantages in physique which make him slower and weaker than his fellow Yahoos. The horse master observed that Gulliver:

... agreed in every Feature of my Body with other *Yahoos*, except where it was to my real Disadvantage in point of Strength, Speed and Activity, the Shortness of my Claws, and some other Particulars where Nature had no Part... (252)

Gulliver is shamed to hear the horse master find fault with his human body, which is in all respects inferior to that of the horse:

...He then began to find fault with other parts of my Body; the Flatness of my Face, the Prominence of my Nose, mine Eyes placed directly in Front, so that I could not look on either Side without turning my Head: That I was not able to feed my self, without lifting one of my fore Feet to my Mouth ..., that my whole Body wanted a Fence against Heat and Cold, which I was forced to put on and off every Day with Tediousness and Trouble. (234-35)

When Gulliver describes his experience in England to his horse masters, they are incredulous about the venality of the medical profession, as well as about the neglect with which the English treat their bodies:

... I told him, we fed on a Thousand Things which operated contrary to each other; that we eat when we were not hungry, and drank without the Provocation of Thirst: That we sat whole Nights drinking strong Liquors without eating a Bit; which disposed us to Sloth, enflamed our Bodies, and precipitated or prevented Digestion. That, prostitute Female Yahoos acquired a certain Malady, which bred Rottenness in the Bones of those, who fell into their Embraces: That this and many other Diseases, were propagated from Father to Son; so that great Numbers come into the World with complicated Maladies upon them: That, it would be endless to give him a Catalogue of all Diseases incident to human Bodies; for they could not be fewer than five or six Hundred, spread over every Limb, and

Joynt: In short, every Part, external and intestine, having Diseases appropriated to each. (245)

In the Land of the Horses, diseases of this type are unknown, and the infirmities of old age are gently treated:

About Noon I saw coming towards the House a Kind of Vehicle, drawn like a Sledge by four *Yahoos*. There was in it an old Steed, who seemed to be of Quality: he alighted with his Hind-feet forward, having by Accident got a Hurt in his Left Fore-foot. He came to dine with our Horse, who received him with great Civility. They dined in the best Room, and had Oats boiled in Milk for the second Course, which the old Horse ate warm, but the rest cold. (223)

Gulliver suffers a sense of shame from a divided identity—what today we might characterize as post-colonial hybridity—when despite his human/Yahoo status, he tries to act like a horse. Gulliver must show the horse masters that despite his “deformity,” he is a creature of reason who can be clean and decorous. Gulliver is challenged to overcome stigma, to prove his worth where his body marks him as inferior. Swift’s text illustrates the self-loathing that results when a body is branded on the basis of presumably inferior physical characteristics.

There are, however, a multiplicity of ways in which individuals are displayed in fiction and scholars have begun to analyze and even classify these portrayals.

Literary Scholarship Addressing the Portrayals of Disability in Fiction

Several scholars have examined the role of disability in fiction. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder argue that in the Victorian and modern period, disability is used as a

“narrative prosthesis.” Mitchell and Snyder generalize that the presentation of a prosthetic narrative structure follows a four-stage sequence:

1. Deviance is exposed to a reader;
2. Narrative calls for the origin of deviance and formative consequences;
3. Deviance is brought to center-stage; and
4. There is rehabilitation or an effort to fix the deviance in some manner, shape, or form.²⁰

Since “disability cannot be accommodated in the ranks of the norm(als),” two options—which have come to be known as “cure or kill” – are frequently employed to drive the story’s plot: a disability is either left behind or punished for its lack of conformity.”²¹

The function of characters with disabilities in literature is twofold: “disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device.”²² Disability lends a “distinctive idiosyncrasy to any character that differentiates the character from the anonymous background of the ‘norm.’”²³ Disability also serves as “a metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse,” as illustrated by *Oedipus Rex*.²⁴ The term “narrative prosthesis” is intended to convey that “disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary

²⁰ David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²² *Ibid.*, 47.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight.”²⁵

In literature characters with disabilities are constructed to move the plot or make thematic points. Thus characters with physical or mental impairments tend to be portrayed solely in terms of disabilities just as in real life individuals with disabilities tend to be defined by their perceived “impairments.” Garland Thomson explains how stereotypes in life become stereotypes in representation:

Textual descriptions are overdetermined: they invest the traits, qualities, and behaviors of their characters with much rhetorical influence simply by omitting—and therefore erasing—other factors or traits that might mitigate or complicate the delineations. A disability functions only as visual difference that signals meanings. Consequently, literary texts necessarily make disabled characters into freaks, stripped of normalizing contexts and engulfed by a single stigmatic trait.²⁶

The character becomes nothing more than the representation of his single overriding trait, because the literary representation depends on the objectification of the disability:

Representation tends to objectify disabled characters by denying them any opportunity for subjectivity or agency. The plot or the work’s rhetorical potential usually benefits from the disabled figure remaining other to the reader—identifiably human but resolutely different. How could Ahab

²⁵ Ibid., 49.

²⁶ Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 10-11.

operate effectively if the reader were allowed to see him as an ordinary fellow instead of as an icon of monomaniacal revenge—if his disability lost its transcendent meaning? What would happen to the pure pity generated for Tiny Tim if he were portrayed as sometimes naughty, like a “normal” child? Thus the rhetorical function of the highly charged trait fixes relations between disabled figures and their readers. If disabled characters acted, as real people with disabilities often do, to counter their stigmatized status, the rhetorical potency of the stigma would be mitigated or lost.²⁷

Ato Quayson has coined the term “aesthetic nervousness” to describe the subliminal unease and moral panic invoked by the disabled as reflected within the structures of literature and in literary discourse.²⁸ Quayson suggests that the disabled remind “normals” of the “provisional and temporary nature of able-bodiedness and of the social frameworks that undergird the suppositions of bodily normality.”²⁹ “The embarrassment, fear, and confusion that attend the disabled in their everyday reality” is translated into literature and the aesthetic field through literary representation.³⁰ Quayson identifies nine overlapping categories for the portrayal of disability in literary texts:

²⁷ Ibid., 11-12.

²⁸ Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

²⁹ Ibid., 14.

³⁰ Ibid., 19

1. Disability as null set and/or moral test for the nondisabled character (the figure of the Loathely Lady);
2. Disability as the interface with otherness (race, class, and social identity) (Caliban, mad Bertha in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*);
3. Disability as articulation of disjuncture between thematic and narrative vectors (Disney films in which the contribution made by the disabled character is erased, and only the lesser contributions of the nondisabled character are recalled); Disability as bearer of moral deficit/evil (Caliban);
4. Disability as epiphany (revelation of Tom Robinson's withered arm in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*);
5. Disability as signifier of sacred or ritual processes (Oedipus and Philoctetes)
6. Disability as signifier of ritual insight (the blind Tiresias);
7. Disability as inarticulable and enigmatic tragic insight (Cassandra, Io);
8. Disability as hermeneutical impasse (various characters in Samuel Beckett's plays);
9. Disability as normality (as a commentary on social hypocrisy, as in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*).³¹

Quayson's typology provides a useful tool for analyzing the depiction of individuals with disability. I will frequently refer to his matrix in this study, especially in

³¹ Ibid., 52.

the discussion of dystopic novels. However, when we approach the question of how disabled characters are treated in utopian literature, neither this classification nor Mitchell's and Snyder's "literary metaphor" approach is sufficient. Because utopian texts by their nature convey reformist agendas, we need to consider the relationship between disability and structure of the alternate society.

The Reformist Agenda of Utopian Texts

Today the concept of utopia is on the defensive. The term "utopian," writes Peter Stillman, has become "a term of deprecation" on several grounds. To say that a proposal is "utopian" is to mark it as unrealistic and impractical.³² Utopian societies are often depicted as dangerously static and stultifying, on the one hand, or rather as dictatorial and totalitarian on the other. In such dystopias, individuals "must be molded to fit the blueprints; freedom must be repressed to satisfy the structural demands of society."³³ Stillman disagrees with this pejorative view, and defends the utopian thought experiment as a means to test theoretical ideas by offering sufficient detail as to how proposals would work in actual practice.

Margaret Atwood writes about the necessity of utopian thought experiments:

But it is by the better world we can imagine that we judge the world we have. If we cease to judge this world, we may find ourselves, very quickly, in one which is infinitely worse.³⁴

³² Peter G. Stillman, "Nothing is, but what is not: Utopias as Practical Political Philosophy," in *The Philosophy of Utopia*, ed. Barbara Goodwin (London, New York: Routledge 2001): 9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 14.

³⁴ Margaret Atwood, *Second Words* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), 313.

I argue that the disabled character functions as a trope through which utopian writers envision the “better world” to which Atwood alludes. In the three utopian texts that I discuss, care is provided to individuals with disabilities and their bodies are respected. In contrast in dystopian texts, individuals with disabilities are maligned, sacrificed, and or exploited for utilitarian ends. As background for an understanding of the role of the individual with disabilities in utopian societies, it is useful to review the mission of utopia, and definitional criteria. I illustrate some of the leading theories by examples drawn from the texts examined in my study.

The Utopian Mission. Ruth Levitas identifies a three-fold purpose: First, because utopia expresses what is missing or lacking in any given society or culture, understanding utopian aspirations provides a window into understanding the society itself, and offers a way into interpretation of literary texts.³⁵ Second, because the utopia is counterfactual, it explores what may be possible or impossible as an ideal against which the real world can be measured.³⁶ Third, the aspirations of others may “constitute a resource for us in our own pursuit of the good society.”³⁷

Utopian texts by their nature have a reforming agenda. Barbara Goodwin argues that the function of utopia is “constructive criticism of the present via an ideal alternative (future or present).”³⁸ Ideals serve two purposes: on the one hand, they can be used to

³⁵ Ruth Levitas, “For Utopia: The (Limits of the) Utopian Function in Late Capitalist Society,” in *The Philosophy of Utopia*, ed. Barbara Goodwin (London, New York: Routledge 2001): 26.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Barbara Goodwin, “Taking Utopia Seriously,” in *The Politics of Utopia*, eds. Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, (London: Hutchinson, 1982): 25.

vindicate the status quo by proving that existing social structures serve moral values; on the other hand, they can “serve to transcend present reality and point to a better future.”³⁹ Goodwin observes that the criteria for evaluating utopia are vexed: “One man’s Paradise is another’s Inferno. Should not a book purporting to deal with utopia include in its scope *Mein Kampf* as well as the *Republic*?”⁴⁰ It is not necessary for a society to be egalitarian to qualify as utopic, but Goodwin proposes that at a minimum, those who do not belong to the elect must be treated no worse off than if the utopia were not formed (for example, the slave should be as well off under Plato’s *Republic* as under the status quo in Athens).⁴¹ Utopia should “benefit the whole of the population so that one would choose to live under that regime regardless of one’s role or class.”⁴² Thomas More’s *Utopia* illustrates Goodwin’s point: Raphael Hythloday would certainly argue that the poor and the disabled are far better off in Utopia than in More’s London.

Goodwin offers a taxonomy of utopian and dystopian political theory. (I have inserted the texts that I discuss into her classification in parentheses).

1. Idealization of the past and criticism of the present such as comparisons to a Golden Age (the *Squire’s Tale*, Part Two).
2. Justification of the present by reference to a hypothetical past, as in Hobbes’s justification of the social contract by reference to the prior warring state of nature.

³⁹ Goodwin, *Politics of Utopia*, 22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 19.

3. Justification of the present by reference to a hypothetical present, such as justification of Western democracies as consistent with justice norms.
4. Inversion of the present for critical purposes (*Gulliver's Travels*).
5. Constructive criticism of the present via an ideal alternative (future or present) (More's *Utopia*).
6. Justification of the present by reference to a worse future (dystopic fiction such as Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit*, Ursula Le Guin's "Those Who Left Omelas," Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*; Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*)—texts which offer warnings about present trends.⁴³

Feminotopic fiction represents a subgenre of utopian fiction. Alessa Johns identifies five characteristics of feminist utopias:

1. Feminist utopias see education and intellectual development as central to the individual and to women's empowerment;
2. They embrace a view of human nature as malleable and social rather than determined, fallen, and individualist;
3. They favor a gradualist approach to change, a cumulative approach to history and a shared approach to power;
4. They view the non-human natural world as dynamic rather than as an inert receiver of human impulses; and

⁴³ Ibid., 22-28.

5. They are usually pragmatic.⁴⁴

When we apply Johns's list to Scott's *Millenium Hall*, there is some mis-match. The founders of the Hall do not commit to "a shared approach to power"; as discussed in Chapter Two, the Hall is hierarchical and the founders remain in strong control.

Moreover, Johns's list is incomplete in failing to attend to care giving—which is a central preoccupation of *Millenium Hall* and the utopian interlude in the *Squire's Tale*. Patricia Huckle argues that feminotopias "provide a framework for exploring the consequences of full development of women's potential. They challenge the idea that biology determines options. They propose a collective, cooperative future without oppression, in which lives are fully integrated and meaningful."⁴⁵ *Millenium Hall* provides an excellent example of Huckle's thesis, because the residents in the Hall work together for mutual betterment.

While not equally situated in the governance structure, everyone at the Hall—the founders, the ill, the elderly, the maimed, the "freaks," and the poor—progresses towards a common goal.

Defining Dystopia. Lyman Sargent proposes a thematically neutral definition of "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."⁴⁶ Gregory Claeys defines dystopia as an anti-utopia, a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil or

⁴⁴ Alessa Johns, "Feminism and Utopianism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 178.

⁴⁵ Patricia Hunkel, "Women in Utopias," in *The Utopian Vision: Seven Essays on the Quincentennial of Sir Thomas More* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1983): 136.

⁴⁶ Lyman Tower Sargent, "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies* 5.1 (1994): 9.

negative social and political developments “have the upper hand.”⁴⁷ In contrast to science fiction which is fantasy “pure and simple,” there are no extraordinary or utterly unrealistic features in dystopic texts.⁴⁸ For Claeys, the common theme of dystopic texts is

the quasi-omnipotence of a monolithic, totalitarian state demanding and normally exacting complete obedience from its citizens, challenged occasionally but usually ineffectually by vestigial individualism or systemic flaws, and relying upon scientific and technical advances to ensure control.⁴⁹

Claeys’s definition applies not only to classic dystopias such as Yevgeny Zimyatın’s *We*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but also to the dystopias examined here: *The Unit*, “Omelas,” *Oryx and Crake*, and *Never Let Me Go*.

Dystopic fiction has transitioned in recent years from portrayals of the dangers of surveillance to the dangers of apocalyptic catastrophe, often the result of environmental collapse. Margaret Atwood’s own oeuvre illustrates this trend, as she segues from *The Handmaid’s Tale* to *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. Benjamin Kunkel distinguishes between futuristic scenarios: dystopia which envisions “a sinister perfection of order,” as in authoritarian regimes, and end-of-the world apocalypse, where there is

⁴⁷ Gregory Claeys, “The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley, Orwell,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010): 107.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

anarchic chaos.⁵⁰ Kunkel comments that the apocalyptic genre offers only a restricted set of plot scenarios, most frequently, a survival tale when a brave and good individual seeks to defend his or her family against a foreign menace or evil elements: “The contemporary apocalypse pits family values against the cannibal universe—good versus the bad guys, in McCarthy unironic terms.”⁵¹ While the family is privileged in apocalyptic novels as a haven, in clone novels, a subgenre of the dystopic category, romantic outcomes are impossible. According to Kunkel, in clone novels, “a totally commodified world transforms would-be lovers into commodities themselves and destroys the possibility of love.”⁵²

Kunkel’s rubric is useful, although there is not a perfect fit when his observations are applied to the dystopian fiction in this study. *Oryx and Crake* is both a tale about survival of worldwide apocalyptic catastrophe and a clone novel. After a worldwide plague, Snowman believes himself a sole survivor. Like Robinson Crusoe on the island, Snowman eventually sees footprints in the sand that disclose to him that there are a few other survivors—the last remnants of humanity. Atwood’s clones—the Craker children—are incapable of romantic love. These simple-minded humanoids are designed to mate whenever they see blue genitalia. In contrast, the donor clones in *Never Let Me Go*, although sterile, are capable of rich emotional experience, including romantic love

⁵⁰ Benjamin Kunkel, “Dystopia and the End of Politics,” *Dissent* (Fall 2008): 90.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 95.

and close friendship. These bonds are broken by their ineluctable fate; they are doomed to donate organs until they die before they reach middle age.

Kunkel argues that while the apocalyptic version generally derives from the historical romance or the adventure story, totalitarian dystopic fiction emerges as a subgenre of the gothic or horror novel.⁵³ Here Kunkel offers an interesting insight. Of course, in eighteenth and nineteenth century literature, gothic spaces are associated with dark and claustrophobic castles, dungeons, and monasteries. The antiseptic halls of hospital wards, such as those found in *Never let Me Go* or *The Unit*, are equally terrifying—they are twenty-first century analogues to gothic enclosures.

Two of the dystopias discussed in this study (*Oryx and Crake* and *Never Let Me Go*) involve abuse of genetic engineering. Brian Stableford reminds us that the risks of biotechnology are not a new invention. As early as the 1920s, J.B.S. Haldane dueled with Aldous Huxley's brother Julian about the promise and danger of tissue culture.⁵⁴

The chemical or physical inventor is always a Prometheus. There is no great invention, from fire to flying, which has not been hailed as an insult to some god. But if every physical and chemical invention is a blasphemy, every biological invention is a perversion. There is hardly one which, on first being brought to the notice of an observer from any nation which has not previously heard of their existence, would not appear to him as indecent and unnatural. The biological invention then tends to begin as a

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁴ Brian Stableford, "Biotechnology and Utopia," in *Philosophy of Utopia*, ed. Barbara Goodwin (London, New York: Routledge 2001): 189.

perversion and end as a ritual supported by unquestioned beliefs and prejudices.⁵⁵

Stableford regrets the propensity of writers of speculative fiction to oppose developments in biotechnology and to describe these trends as catastrophic: “The time has now arrived for those writers of speculative fiction who draw their inspiration from the biological sciences to become utopians in the most ambitious sense of the term.”⁵⁶ For Stableford, scientific innovation is a “fundamentally and definitively human” activity and today’s dangerous invention is tomorrow’s promising invention.⁵⁷ Notwithstanding this view, most recent dystopic fiction associates bioengineering with disaster.

Dystopic novels about genetic engineering can be regarded as the subgenre of science fiction that address alternative societies. Darko Suvin distinguishes “science fiction by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional ‘novum’ (novelty or innovation)”.⁵⁸ For Ursula Le Guin, science fiction is a “thought experiment”⁵⁹—a terminology that many use to describe utopian and dystopian fiction. Carl Malmgren writes that “alternate society” science fiction involves a “social novum”—where the story is located within an estranged or alternative social order.⁶⁰ For Malmgren, the most

⁵⁵ J.B.S. Haldane, *Daedalus; or, Science and the Future* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923): 49-50.

⁵⁶ Stableford, “Biotechnology and Utopia,” 202.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 63.

⁵⁹ Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969, rpt. New York: Ace 1976) (Preface, no page).

⁶⁰ Carl Malmgren, *Worlds Apart: Narratology of Science Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 17.

sophisticated “alternate society” fiction involves conflicts between self and society. Obvious examples from political genres include Zamyatin’s *We*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the “self versus society” narrative, the protagonist resists a monolithic and oppressive society. Malmgren points out that utopias are predicated on “the belief that humans can work together rationally to shape their social life; these works therefore valorize qualities such as community, cooperation, and collectivity.”⁶¹ In contrast, dystopic societies are characterized by “distrust,” and the protagonist envisions self-realization in the form of “alienation and conflict.”⁶²

In the texts that I discuss, there are varying degrees of conflict between “self and society.” In “Omelas,” a child is kept in the cellar under conditions of abject neglect as a condition for the well-being of the greater community. The child in “Omelas” has no subjectivity and no agency: it is not even clear that he or she can reason, much less protest. In *The Unit*, “dispensable” women and men are fated to donate vital organs as they reach ages fifty or sixty, again for the well-being of the community as a whole. They do not actively resist, although, in contrast to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the mechanism through which the state exercises control is invisible and unexplained. Individuals rebel in *Oryx and Crake*: for example, Jimmy’s mother protests against the creation of animal-human clones and Crake’s father protests against the pharmaceutical industry’s deliberate contamination of their own medicine. However, these rebels are killed and their deaths are broadcast as a warning against future

⁶¹ Ibid., 80.

⁶² Ibid.

transgression. The donor clones in *Never Let Me Go* suffer from the knowledge that they will die from a course of organ donations before they reach middle age, yet they do not, or cannot, rebel. Ishiguro details the contrast between the narrator Kathy, who acquiesces to the inevitable, and her lover Tommy, who periodically erupts in fury against the inexorable destiny of donor clones.

Malmgren draws attention to barriers that serve narrative and thematic functions in dystopic fiction—barriers which are designed both to keep disorder out and to confine docile inhabitants within a secured space.⁶³ In Holmqvist's *The Unit*, the doors of the Reserve Unit are sealed precisely to prevent these expendable individuals from evading their duty to donate organs. In *Oryx and Crake*, the state has erected gated communities to protect the elite families in the engineering compound from the disease and disorder of the plebeian cities; one leaves the protected compound at one's peril. In the elite laboratories of the "Paradise Project," air locks are used to secure the scientists from hostile bioforms. As it turns out, the barriers are all too permeable and they do not protect the world's population, or even the scientists who worked in the lab, from life-ending plague. In *Never Let Me Go*, the donor clones appear to have freedom of movement, yet they do not try to escape their destiny. As discussed in Chapter Four, one of the achievements of this novel is the epistemic suspense that is created by Ishiguro's invisible and perhaps non-existent barriers.

⁶³ Ibid.

Disability in a Just Society: Perspectives from Justice Theory and the Ethics of Care

I argue that utopian texts function as a critique of medical care extended (or not extended) to the ill, elderly, and other individuals with physical or functional impairments. In a utopian society we can assume that the ill and the disabled will receive some medical treatment, but the question arises about the extent of that care. Because this issue is central to utopian texts, it is important to consider some of the leading theory on how to address the treatment of individuals with disability given resource constraints.

Rawls's Contract-based Justice Principles. John Rawls in his *Theory of Justice* offers as a framework for establishing principles of a just society, that those setting up the rules posit that they in an “original position” where they do not know whether or not they would be favored and how they would be situated.⁶⁴ Rawls’s Original Position starts from a premise of respect for human autonomy, and builds upon Immanuel Kant’s famous dictum: “act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.”⁶⁵

Under this “veil of ignorance,” those in the Original Position would establish principles of distribution that would optimize even the position of those who are least advantaged and assure that offices are open to all. For Rawls, conditions of cooperation arise when individuals in the same territory who live in conditions of “moderate scarcity” are “roughly similar in physical and mental powers” so that none alone can dominate the

⁶⁴ John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁶⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis Beck 4.287, 47 (Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill, 1959).

others.⁶⁶ Rawls describes the theory of justice that would be adopted by representatives of parties in the Original Position while they are operating under a “veil of ignorance” about their future position (wealth, health status, nationality, intelligence). By design, Rawls’s principles of justice will be fair—or at least impartial—because in the original position “no one knows his situation in society nor his natural assets, ... therefore no one is in a position to tailor principles to his advantage.”⁶⁷

In the Original Position, one would choose the principle of equal basic liberty and the difference principle. The first requires equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties, while the second holds that social and economic inequalities ... are just only if they “result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society.”⁶⁸ According to the difference principle, the only justifiable deviations from socioeconomic equality are those that increase the size of the economic “pie” that is to be divided—and thus work to benefit the least advantaged.⁶⁹ The related principle of fair equality of opportunity requires that persons of equal abilities and motivations have the same chance of attaining any office or position in the just society, regardless of their circumstances of origin.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 126-27. Rawls drew on David Hume’s insight that given the reality of human selfishness and the comparative scarcity of material goods (*Treatise on Human Understanding* 3.2.2), there is a need for social cooperation through a system of laws.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 64, 81.

Rawls did not address the issue of health care in *Theory of Justice*, because he focused there on political principles that underlie the just society, what he called “basic goods.” Rawls classified health as a “natural good,” along with vigor and intelligence. He deferred health policy to the later phase in which the veil of ignorance is lifted and specific policy problems are addressed through legislative action. In his subsequent treatise, *Political Liberalism*, Rawls responded to the criticism that his actual system provides too little redistribution to the disabled.⁷¹ He briefly remarks that the list of primary goods could be expanded to cover “certain mental states such as freedom from physical pain.”⁷² Rawls adds:

The variations that put some citizens below the line as a result of illness and accident (once we allow for these) can be dealt with, I believe, at the legislative stage when the prevalence and kinds of these misfortunes are known and the costs of treating them can be ascertained and balanced along with total government expenditure. The aim is to restore people by

⁷¹ Supporters of a broad right to treatment have argued that such a right is implicit in Rawls’s framework on the grounds that health is a basic liberty, a precondition of equality of opportunity, and that distribution of health care satisfies Rawls’s “maxmin” principle by benefiting those who are worst off. Ronald Green, “Health Care and Justice in Contract Theory Perspective,” in *Ethics and Health Policy*, eds. Robert Veatch and Roy Branson (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing, 1976). There are problems with each of these approaches, notably that they are absent from Rawls’s own work and it is debatable whether the disabled or the poor should be regarded as “the least advantaged” for purposes of allocating scarce resources. Dani Filc grounds a right to health care based on the principle that all humans are of equal worth. Thus, one has a right to the amount of services and goods needed to provide a level of health equal to other persons’ health, where inter-individual differences are the result of social organization or can be reduced by treatment. Dani Filc, “The Liberal Grounding of the Right to Health Care,” *Theoria* 54 (112): 51.

⁷² John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 182.

health care so that once again they are fully cooperating members of society.⁷³

Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach. In sharp contrast to Rawls, Martha Nussbaum, has developed a “capabilities approach” to justice⁷⁴ that treats health care as a basic human right. Justice requires that every human being enjoy a minimal or threshold level of “central capabilities,” without which “a life is not worthy of human dignity.”⁷⁵ Nussbaum lists ten “central human capabilities”:

(1) living a normal life span; (2) bodily health, including adequate nourishment; (3) bodily integrity (including freedom of movement and security against assault, as well as freedom of choice in reproduction and in sexual relations); (4) being able to use the senses, the imagination, and thought (including freedom of expression and religious exercise, and adequate education), and being able to have pleasurable experiences; (5) experiencing normal human emotions, including longing, grief, anger, etc., and having emotional attachments to others (i.e., love, friendships, and the normal range of affective emotions); (6) development of one's capacities for practical reason, including the capacity of critical reflection upon one's good or plan of life ...; (7) capabilities for affiliation ...with rights to nondiscrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity,

⁷³ Ibid., 184.

⁷⁴ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).\

⁷⁵ Ibid., 78.

caste, religion, and national origin); (8) living with other species; (9) play, including the ability to enjoy recreational activities; (10) control over one's environment (including rights to political participation, freedom of association... and equal opportunities).⁷⁶

Nussbaum's mission is sweeping, inspiring, almost jaw-dropping. Her vision extends to all citizens of the world, the severely disabled, and even in a modified form to non-human creatures.⁷⁷ Nussbaum opposes Rawls's approach because the concept of the social contract is predicated on selfishness: people enter into an agreement for mutual advantage. Since nations differ greatly in economic and political resources, Nussbaum asks what principles of justice apply when there is no mutual advantage in cooperation yet some people are living in dire need. Nussbaum offers no principle for resolving below-threshold conflicts. She insists on the need to meet these *minimum* standards: if not, justice has not been done.⁷⁸

Nussbaum describes disparities in health care as an "urgent" priority."⁷⁹ The goal is "to bring all children with disabilities up to the same threshold of capability that we set

⁷⁶ Ibid., 76-78.

⁷⁷ Nussbaum argues that it is not simply a matter of avoiding pain and cruelty to animals, but of extending "existing mechanisms of basic justice, entitlement, and law ... across the species barrier." Her capabilities approach focuses on nonhuman animals living a "dignified existence" in which they are able to flourish by exercising species-specific capabilities. Ibid., 326.

⁷⁸ Nussbaum emphasizes that "all ten of these plural and diverse ends are minimum requirements of justice, at least up to the threshold level. In other words, the theory does not countenance ... tradeoffs among them. The constitutional structure ... demands that they all be secured to each and every citizen, up to some appropriate threshold level. In desperate circumstances, it may not be possible for a nation to secure them all up to the threshold level, but then it becomes a purely practical question what to do next, not a question of justice. The question of justice is already answered: justice has not been fully done here." Ibid., 175.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 3.

for other citizens.”⁸⁰ A severely retarded person who can benefit from education has the right to be provided with it. For those not able to attain all the capabilities, society should strive to give them “as many of the capabilities as possible directly; and where direct empowerment is not possible, society ought to . . . [give] the capabilities through a suitable arrangement of guardianship.”⁸¹ Caregivers for the disabled must be provided with direct payments so that they too can live decent lives; to give dignity to the role, the payment would be a salary, not means-tested .⁸²

Nussbaum believes that justice requires every nation to raise every citizen to or above a threshold level of each of the capabilities.⁸³ If it is not possible to give some people all the capabilities up to the threshold level, a society must give “as many of them, and as fully, as is possible.”⁸⁴ Below-threshold interests have absolute priority over above- threshold interests. Nussbaum looks to the United Nations, international agencies (such as the IMF and World Bank), and non-governmental organizations to carry out the redistributive efforts needed to achieve minimal justice globally among all persons.⁸⁵ “All institutions and (most) individuals should focus on the problems of the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 190.

⁸¹ Ibid., 193.

⁸² Ibid., 212.

⁸³ Ibid., 75, 82, 85, 166, 182, 279, 290.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 222.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 319-20. To alleviate the gap between “North” and “South,” “prosperous nations have a responsibility to give a substantial portion of their GDP to poorer nations.” Ibid., 316. She advocates some sort of global resource tax transfer wealth from richer to poorer nations: “The figure of 2 percent of GDP, though arbitrary, is a good sign of what might begin to be morally adequate.” Ibid., 317.

disadvantaged in each nation and region.”⁸⁶ Special areas of focus are care for the ill, the elderly, children, and the disabled, and the responsibility to support education as a key to the empowerment of currently disadvantaged people.⁸⁷

The Achilles heel of Nussbaum’s theory is, of course, the problem presented by insatiable entitlements. Below-threshold conflict will always exist since there will always be people below the threshold for whom more could be done but for the lack of sufficient resources. Even in the relatively wealthy United States, there is the question how much to allocate for primary education versus secondary education versus special education versus medical care versus care for the elderly versus public works (the list is endless): the problem is all the greater in the context of poor countries.

Utilitarian Balancing of Scarce Resources. Mark Stein, an advocate of utilitarian theory, harshly criticizes Nussbaum’s theory for its failure to consider resource limits:

It is impossible to raise everyone to the threshold of all of the capabilities. Some people will not have the capability to “live to the end of a human life of normal length,” even if all the world’s resources are devoted to prolonging their lives. Similarly, all the world’s resources will not suffice to enable some people to rise to the threshold of other capabilities: to “have good health,” to be “able to use the senses,” to be “able to form a conception of the good,” and so forth. The impossibility of raising every

⁸⁶ Ibid., 320.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 321-22. Nussbaum’s list of capabilities, emphasizing as it does freedom of political expression, opportunities for aesthetic enjoyment and sexual autonomy, has been criticized as reflecting bourgeois western values. Susan Okun, “Poverty, Well-being and gender: What counts, Who’s Heard?” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31.3 (2003): 280.

person to the threshold of all capabilities is not, in itself, a problem for Nussbaum's theory. The problem is that even when it is impossible to raise people to the threshold, it is often possible to spend an unlimited amount of resources raising them *toward* the threshold. Often enormous investments--another doctor, another hospital, another medical research project--can make some improvement, however small, or can increase, however slightly, the likelihood of achieving a large improvement. This is the problem of insatiable entitlements, also known as the problem of voracious needs or the bottomless-pit problem.⁸⁸

Stein endorses a utilitarian limit on redistribution: "People must only be called upon to give up things for the benefit of others if those others would benefit more; people must never have to give up things to others if those others would benefit less."⁸⁹ Nussbaum criticizes utilitarianism in this respect because, she suggests, utilitarianism treats people as means, in violation of the Kantian injunction not to treat people as means to an end.⁹⁰ However, those who would incur the loss of their above-threshold property under the Nussbaum régime would argue that they are being used merely as a means. Utilitarianism would halt redistribution in favor of the disabled, even if the disabled are far from achieving equality of welfare, if the disabled would no longer benefit more from resources than would the nondisabled poor:

⁸⁸ Mark S. Stein, *Nussbaum: A Utilitarian Critique*, *Boston College Law Review* 50 (2009): 499-500.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 515-16.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 351-52.

Therefore, the first question a utilitarian will ask, in evaluating a proposed redistribution, is whether the gainers from redistribution gain more than the losers lose. Utilitarianism can support redistribution to the disabled when the benefits to the disabled are substantial—as with, for example, the provision of wheelchairs and similar mechanical aids. On the other hand, utilitarianism can oppose further redistribution to the disabled when such redistribution would confer only slight benefits on them.⁹¹

Ethics of Care: What is Our Obligation to Those in Need of Our Help?

Today caring has become a central preoccupation of society, both because our population is aging and because we are concerned for the legal and moral rights of individuals with disability.⁹²

Before addressing the Ethics of Care, we need to pause to consider what we mean when we use the term “caring”? Daniel Engster suggests that while “caring” can include everything that we do for another, specific goals include:

⁹¹ Mark S. Stein, “Rawls on Redistribution to the Disabled,” *George Mason Law Review* 6 (1998): 997.

⁹² A Federal Government report explains the concern:

There is no question that we are on the threshold of a “mass geriatric society,” a society of more long-lived individuals than ever before in human history. For this great gift of longer and healthier life for ourselves and our loved ones we are, and should be, enormously grateful....At the same time, however, there are good reasons to be concerned about the human and moral shape that a mass geriatric society will take, especially if the “price” many people pay for the gift of added years of healthier life is a period of protracted debility, dementia, and dependence stacked up at the end before they eventually die. Such a reshaping of the lifecycle will create enormous challenges for nearly every family and for the entire society. The economic challenges facing Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid are more or less well known. A looming crisis of long-term care for the incapacitated has received less attention, partly because we prefer to avert our gaze, largely because we lack an adequate human and ethical understanding of this issue.

President’s Council on Bioethics, *Taking Care* (President’s Council on Bioethics, 2005), xvii-xviii.

1. To satisfy the basic biological needs for food, sanitary water, clothing, shelter, rest, a clean environment, basic medical care and protection from harm; ...
2. To develop or sustain [the individual's] basic capabilities for sensation, emotion, movement, speech, reason, imagination, affiliation, and in most societies today, literacy and numeracy...
3. To avoid harm or relieve suffering and pain.⁹³

In 1982, Carol Gilligan published *In a Different Voice*, a landmark study of differences in approach between men and women on ethical and social concerns.⁹⁴ She claims that men tend to privilege the autonomy of individuals and an ethos of rights in their approach, whereas women are more likely to privilege communitarian values and an ethos of care.⁹⁵ The Ethic of Care is characterized by “cooperation, relationship, and interdependent nurturance,” and emphasizes the deep obligation that we owe to one another to protect vulnerable individuals and groups from harm.⁹⁶ An important aspect of Ethics of Care is the concept of reciprocal interdependence. Virginia Held observes that

⁹³ Daniel Engster, “Care Ethics and Animal Welfare,” *Journal of Social Philosophy* 34.2 (2006): 522.

⁹⁴ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 73, 100.

⁹⁶ Mary Raugust, “Feminist Ethics and Workplace Values,” in *Explorations in Feminist Ethics*, eds. Eve Browning Cole and Susan Coultrap-McQuin (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992): 125.

no one would be alive without having been cared for as an infant. Caring relations “are often reciprocal over time if not at given times.”⁹⁷

An ethic of justice focuses on questions of fairness, equality, individual rights, abstract principles, and the consistent application of them. An ethic of care focuses on attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need ...and cultivating caring relations. Whereas an ethic of justice seeks a fair solution between competing individual interests and rights, an ethic of care sees the interest of carers and cared-for as importantly intertwined rather than as simply competing.⁹⁸

Feminist philosopher Eva Feder Kittay draws attention to the pivotal role of caregivers. Kittay observes that many view dependency with fear and loathing. This aversion to “mutual dependence” is dangerous, and threatens to exclude “both significant parts of our lives and large portions of the population from the domain of equality.”⁹⁹ It is an essential characteristic of human experience that we experience periods of dependency of varying length, certain to occur in childhood and often occurring in illness and old age.

My point is that this interdependence begins with dependence. It begins with the dependency of an infant, and often ends with the dependency of a very ill or frail person close to dying. The infant may develop into a person who can reciprocate, an individual upon whom another can be

⁹⁷ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 42.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁹ Eva Kittay, *Love's Labor, Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), xii.

dependent and whose continuing needs make her interdependent with others. The frail elderly person . . . may herself have been involved in a series of interdependent relations. But at some point there is a dependency that is not yet or no longer an interdependency. By excluding *this* dependency from social and political concerns, we have been able to fashion the pretense that we are *independent* -- that the cooperation between persons that some insist is interdependence is simply the mutual (often voluntary) cooperation between essentially independent persons.¹⁰⁰

While caregiving dyads can result in reciprocal advantage, not all caregiving can be justified in terms of direct reciprocity. Some caregivers will never themselves receive dependency care and some dependents will never give care. However, because “society is an association that persists through generations” we require “an extended notion of reciprocity.”¹⁰¹ Kittay envisions an ethos of “nested dependencies,” linking those who help and those who require help in order to give aid to those who cannot give help.¹⁰² Kittay calls this relationship “*doulia*” after the Greek word for the slave who assists the mother at childbirth.¹⁰³ Robin West argues that women are more able through empathetic understanding to make connections with the point of view of others: by virtue of biology

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., xii.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁰² Ibid., 68, 32

¹⁰³ Ibid., 108-09.

and their maternal destiny, women differ essentially in the extent to which they are materially connected with other human lives.¹⁰⁴

Other ethicists have criticized the “gendering” of care ethics by Gilligan, Kittay, and West. Among other grounds for criticism, Catherine MacKinnon writes that women’s predominant role of care giving is the result of male dominance.¹⁰⁵ For many feminists, it is essentialist to tag women as nurturing and more suited to this domestic role.¹⁰⁶ Other scholars question the evidentiary basis for a conclusion that men care less than women. West’s association of caring with women’s biologically-linked maternal role begs the question of whether the woman who is not a mother feels a similar connectedness.

While it would be anachronistic to apply some aspects of the debate about the connection between care ethics and gender to the texts in this study, nonetheless the issue of gender is squarely presented by the relationship between Princess Canacee and the formel in the *Squire’s Tale* and by the gynocracy of *Millenium Hall*. The princess is able to establish an empathy with the formel because they are both female, each susceptible to injury from male betrayal. In the case of *Millenium Hall*, it is less clear that the founders experience empathy with their charges, men and women who belong to a lower social and economic class. Rather, the caring reflects a philanthropic project, a demonstration that it is possible to establish a nurturing but economically productive alternative to

¹⁰⁴ Robin West, “Jurisprudence and Gender,” *University of Chicago Law Review* 55 (1988): 1.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 34.

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of this topic see, e.g., “From Arachne to Charlotte: An Imaginative Revisiting of Gilligan’s In a Different Voice,” *William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law* 13.3: 751 (2007); Elizabeth Spelman, *Inessential Women: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1988).

workhouses. Unlike Canacee and the formel, whose objective is marriage, the founders have set their sights on social reform.

The Ethicss of Care is not necessarily a “woman’s thing,” as More’s *Utopia* reflects. Engster presents a coherent rationale that is independent of gender:

All human beings can be assumed to value their survival, the development and functioning of their basic capabilities, and the avoidance of unwanted pain and suffering ... Given the necessary facts of human existence, all human beings depend upon others to help them meet their biological and developmental needs and maintain basic well-being... Since all human beings depend upon the care of others for our survival and basic functioning ..., we must logically recognize as morally valid the claims that others make upon us for care when they need it, and should endeavor to provide care to them when we are capable of doing so without significant danger to ourselves, seriously compromising our long-term well-being, or undermining our ability to care for other individuals who depend on us.¹⁰⁷

Empathy plays an important role in the Ethics of Care. This term has been formally defined in the context of psychology as “[a]n awareness of the thoughts and feelings of another person; the capacity to understand and in some measure share another person’s state of mind.”¹⁰⁸ Philosopher David Woodruff Smith defines empathy as

¹⁰⁷ Engster, “Care Ethics and Animal Welfare,” 522-525.

¹⁰⁸ Robert M. Goldenson, *The Encyclopedia of Human Behavior: Psychology, Psychiatry and Mental Health*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 395.

“understanding another’s experience from the other’s point of view, projecting oneself into the other’s place as subject of her experience.”¹⁰⁹ More colloquially, we might call it the ability to “walk in another’s shoes.” Martin Hoffman defines empathy as “the involvement of psychological processes that make a person have feelings that are more congruent with another’s situation than with his own situation.”¹¹⁰

Ethicists emphasize the importance of the *manner* of caring, and identify as core virtues attentiveness, responsiveness and respect. Lawrence Blum relates empathy to attentiveness to another person’s needs. Without empathy, it is difficult to anticipate needs and make an appropriate response with moral perception and attentiveness. Blum offers as an example a supervisor who dismisses a subordinate’s request for workplace adjustments because, although she recognizes a legal obligation to respond to disability, in the particular case she fails to appreciate the extent of another’s pain or the urgency of her subordinate’s need.¹¹¹ A related issue is responsiveness, an act that requires that we engage in communication while we give care, and monitor the effectiveness of the care that we provide through dialogue. The virtue of respect need not include a concept of equality, but care should be provided in a manner that does not degrade.

In the texts that we examine, we see a variety of approaches to the manner in which care is provided. In *Utopia*, the functioning elderly are given respect in the home

¹⁰⁹ David Woodruff Smith, *Circle of Acquaintance: Perception, Consciousness, and Empathy* (Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer, 1989), 112.

¹¹⁰ Martin Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30.

¹¹¹ Lawrence Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 34.

and in public settings, for example during communal meals. Those elderly who suffer painful illness are offered euthanasia solely at their election. In *Millenium Hall*, the elderly who can do so care for younger children and thus contribute to society. The founders repeatedly visit their charges to oversee the arrangements, in particular monitoring cleanliness and preventing jealous squabbling. While several scholars have analyzed this surveillance from a Foucauldian perspective, these visits provide an opportunity to assure that needs are met and problems are addressed. Most of the residents are socially as well as economically inferior to the founders; their needs are met with respect and attentiveness although there is no pretense of equality.

Perhaps the most difficult issue lies at the intersection of the Ethics of Care and resource constraints. In considering the distribution of the duty to give care, care ethicists typically prioritize duties to one's immediate family, the individuals for whom we feel most emotional attachment and the greatest sense of obligation, and whose needs we can most readily anticipate and satisfy. Our secondary duty is to care for friends, neighbors, and others in our community, however that is defined. The third and most challenging duty is to care for all those in need, persons who are unknown to us. Given this hierarchy of priorities and finite resources, those with dispensable funds are far more likely to provide not only basic care but a range of amenities to their own family and then to others in close proximity, with the result that urgent needs of those of strangers remain unmet.

The problem of extension of care to strangers is, of course, not a twentieth-century invention. Adam Smith comments on the tension between self and benevolence in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*:

Let us suppose that the great empire of *China*, with all its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no sort of connexion with that part of the world, would be affected upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity. He would, I imagine, first of all, express very strongly his sorrow for the misfortune of that unhappy people, he would make many melancholy reflections upon the precariousness of human life, and the vanity of all the labours of man, which could thus be annihilated in a moment. . . . And when all this fine philosophy was over, when all these humane sentiments had been once fairly expressed, he would pursue his business or his pleasure, take his repose or his diversion, with the same ease and tranquility, as if no such accident had happened. The most frivolous disaster which could befall himself would occasion a more real disturbance. If he was to lose his little finger to-morrow, he would not sleep to-night; but, provided he never saw them, he will snore with the most profound security over the ruin of a hundred millions of his brethren, and the destruction of that immense multitude seems plainly an object less interesting to him, than this paltry misfortune of his own.¹¹²

Yet the man of humanity is not so heartless that he would sacrifice the live of strangers for his own petty concerns:

¹¹² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, eds. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, vol. I of *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 3.1. iii: "Of the Influence and Authority of Conscience," 134-35.

To prevent, therefore, this paltry misfortune to himself, would a man of humanity be willing to sacrifice the lives of a hundred millions of his brethren, provided he had never seen them? Human nature startles with horror at the thought, and the world, in its greatest depravity and corruption, never produced such a villain as could be capable of entertaining it. But what makes this difference? When our passive feelings are almost always so sordid and so selfish, how comes it that our active principles should often be so generous and so noble? When we are always so much more deeply affected by whatever concerns ourselves, than by whatever concerns other men; what is it which prompts the generous, upon all occasions, and the mean upon many, to sacrifice their own interests to the greater interests of others? It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct. ... It is he who shows us the propriety of generosity and the deformity of injustice; the propriety of resigning the greatest interests of our own, for the yet greater interests of others, and the deformity of doing the smallest injury to another, in order to obtain the greatest benefit to ourselves. It is not the love of our neighbour, it is not the love of mankind, which upon many occasions prompts us to the practice of those divine virtues. It is a stronger love, a more powerful affection, which generally

takes place upon such occasions; the love of what is honourable and noble, of the grandeur, and dignity, and superiority of our own characters.¹¹³

The texts that I discuss implicitly take up the issue of generosity to strangers. In *Utopia*, Hythloday comes close to describing a community which does not begrudge supporting an unproductive stranger, either because the Utopians regard their fellows as friends or because they judge it to be in everyone's interest to support those who are no longer productive against the day when they themselves will be vulnerable. Scott offers a different answer to this question in *Millenium Hall* and *Sir George Ellison*; here the message is that philanthropy to strangers is a gift that will repay the donor, financially or emotionally.

Given resource constraints, is the objective of caring simply to achieve a basic level of survival and well-being or rather to enable individuals to function with the full spectrum of capabilities, as suggested by Martha Nussbaum? A related question is whether the definition of capabilities should vary by country and socioeconomic condition, either out of respect for diversity of culture or out of practical considerations such as limited funds and political reality. For purposes of this study, I argue that "caring" includes mitigation of illness; provision of food and shelter; avoidance of pain, exhaustion, and physical danger; and promotion of capabilities so that individuals can function meaningfully in their own society. In *Millenium Hall*, for example, individuals with a broad spectrum of impairments—the elderly, the maimed, the deaf, and the

¹¹³ Ibid., 135.

blind—are not only provided with room and board, but enabled to function productively and happily so that they make a contribution.

A Proposed Framework for Analyzing Individuals with Disability in Utopian Texts

I propose a framework for analyzing the treatment of individuals with disability in utopian texts:

First, in utopian texts no stigma attaches to disability; it is not a punishment for deviant behavior nor is the individual with disabilities ostracized. In *Never Let Me Go*, the narrator, a donor clone, describes the feelings of shame that she and her students experience when an encounter with “normals” elicits a shudder of revulsion. Although the students have done nothing wrong, and are in fact well-behaved, artistically creative teenagers, their status as clones elicits revulsion. We might contrast this revulsion to the haven that Sarah Scott provides to “freaks” in *Millenium Hall*. At the Hall, those with anomalous bodies who have been displayed in degrading “freak shows” and exploited for their bodily abnormality are sheltered from the prurient gaze of curious gawkers.

Second, bodily difference does not lead to a deformity in a person’s character. Utopian texts implicitly reject the claim that an individual’s personality is warped in response to physical limitations and that a man will get even with nature for malformation. This argument has a rich provenance. In Essay XLIV, “Of Deformity,” Francis Bacon denies that defects reflect divine judgment, but argues that a deformed body leads to warped character:

Deformed persons are commonly even with nature, for as nature hath done ill by them, so do they by nature, being for the most part (as the Scripture saith) void of natural affection; and so they have their revenge of nature.

Certainly there is a consent between the body and the mind, and where nature erreth in the one, she ventureth in the other.¹¹⁴

In *Millenium Hall*, not only is there no indication that the character of maimed and crippled individuals has been warped by their experience, in fact, they make the most productive, grateful, and responsible workers.

Third, in utopian texts an individual with physical or mental impairments is not mocked for his or her bodily difference. In his 1754 autobiographical essay, *On Deformity*, William Hay, a member of parliament, complained that because he had “a mountain on his back,” he was derided as comical and malevolent.¹¹⁵ Hay noted that while he was insulted for a congenital malformation, those who have become corpulent through overindulgence were not similarly mocked.¹¹⁶

Utopian fiction critiques mockery of the odd body. As discussed, in *Gulliver's Travels*, the giants of Brobdingnag make fun of Gulliver, call him derogatory names, and subject him to degrading display because of his miniature size. Through satire, Swift

¹¹⁴ Sir Francis Bacon, *The Essays*, ed. John Pitcher (London: Penguin, 1985).

¹¹⁵ William Hay, *Deformity: An Essay*, ed. Kathleen James-Cavan, English Literary Studies Monographs 92. (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2004). Similarly, Alexander Pope's enemies accused him of spitefulness attributed to his physical disabilities; as a result of his crooked body, he was mean and envious. For Lady Wortley Montagu, Pope was “A signpost likeness of the human race/That is at once resemblance and disgrace.” “Verses Addressed to the Imitator of Horace by a Lady,” March 8, 1733.

¹¹⁶ Mockery remains a continued issue for individuals with disability, as reflected by protests from the National Federation of the Blind against cartoons ridiculing the incompetence of Mr. Magoo, Marc Maurer, “Of Mr. Magoo, Disney and the National Federation of the Blind,” <http://nfb.org/legacy/bm/bm98/bm980202.htm>; “What’s all the Fuss About Mr. Magoo?” <http://www.nfb.org/images/nfb/Publications/fr/fr16/Issue3/f160303.html>. Similarly, individuals with intellectual disability have condemned use of the word “retarded,” which will be eliminated from federal government publications in favor of use of the term “intellectually disabled” under a statute known as Rosa’s Law. National Down Syndrome Society, *Condemnation of Use of the Word “retarded.”* http://www.ndss.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=153:position-papers&catid=54:public-relations&Itemid=140

attacks the cruel mockery of dwarfs, giants, and others with peculiar characteristics at Bartholomew's Fair. In *Utopia*, it is not permitted to mock dwarves or others with physical abnormality; rather slurs and jeers reflect adversely on those who would attempt them.

Fourth, an individual with disabilities expects to receive and in fact receives medical treatment. The care that Princess Canacee provides to the wounded formel in the *Squire's Tale* is empathetic, responsive and respectful. The Princess not only tends to the formel's wounds, but also provides her shelter and a sympathetic ear to listen to her complaint. More's Utopians will be taken care of in illness and old age in gratitude for their past service, apparently without regard to resource limitations. In *Millenium Hall*, the freaks who have been exhausted by ruthless exploitation in public fairs are restored to their health as well as their dignity.

In the dystopic texts covered in this study the very concept of "hospital" is perverted; these institutions have become places where the organs of dispensable "others" are harvested (*The Unit, Never Let Me Go*). The pharmaceutical industry injures donors in *The Unit* in the name of experimentation, and deliberately creates disease in *Oryx and Crake* for the pursuit of profit.

Fifth, in a utopian society no one's body is exploited to provide greater advantage to other, more privileged members of society. Respect for persons may be grounded on legal principles, religious doctrine, and or moral philosophy— Kant's dictum that people matter not in relation to their ability to benefit or harm society, but as ends in and of themselves. In the United States, prisoners enjoy a legal right to health care, whatever the gravity of crimes that they commit. In China, and perhaps in other countries, condemned

prisoners may be required to donate organs.¹¹⁷ Dystopic “clone” novels such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* or Ninni Holmqvist’s *The Unit* warn against a horrifying future where a dispensable person’s organs are harvested for the benefit of advantaged members of society.

Sixth, I argue, utopian texts reflect avant la lettre the philosophy that we today describe as Ethics of Care. In Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*, Princess Canacee nurses a wounded anthropomorphized formel (female falcon), who gives the Princess valuable lessons about male treachery and receives in exchange urgently-needed care. In Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*, individuals contribute to the communal well-being in proportion to their abilities so that the deaf, the elderly, and the maimed become productive workers. In each instance we see the emotional connections and reciprocity of caregiving that is endorsed by Gilligan, Kittay and other ethicists.

I illustrate the Ethics of Care as applied in *Squire’s Tale*, More’s *Utopia*, and *Millenium Hall* in Chapter Two.

¹¹⁷ “Death Row Organ Donation Scandal Exposed in China,” *The Sunday Times* (August 26, 2009), <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6810287.ece>

CHAPTER 2: Caregiving in Utopian Texts

At first glance, it would be difficult to conceive of three texts more disparate in time, style, and topic than Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, and Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall*. I argue, however, that each engages the critical question of how individuals with disabilities should be treated. Each writer applies a quite different technique and perspective. In the *Squire's Tale*, the Princess befriends an injured anthropomorphized bird, whom she treats not only with medicinal herbs but also with generous sympathy. More's *Utopia* envisions a world where the ill and elderly receive unlimited care. In Scott's feminotopia,¹ individuals with disabilities work productively in humane conditions: far from being a drain on society, they make money. Despite their differences in topic, time, place, genre, and perspective, there is a common denominator, which we might describe as the Ethics of Care.

At its most basic level, caring involves providing medication to the sick and elderly, alleviating physical and emotional pain, assisting individuals to obtain the maximum possible physical functioning, and providing shelter. The argument for care is frequently based on human dependency. We all depend upon the care of others at various times during our lives: capable human beings should therefore assume a duty to care for other human beings in need. Individuals capable of extending care are induced to do so

¹ Marie Louise Pratt is credited with inventing this term in the context of women's travel writing. Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 166-67. The term has been frequently applied to *Millenium Hall* and other work involving female utopias, including by Alessa Johns in *Women's Utopias of the Eighteenth Century* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003), and Felicity Nussbaum in *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century Narrative* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

by the recognition that if no one cared for others, their own claims for care would be undermined.²

In each of these texts, care is provided to those who are ill, disabled, or elderly. However, the authors propose very different approaches to care giving. In the *Squire's Tale*, caring involves an extension of sympathy, as well as physical ministrations. In *Utopia*, generous medical care is a matter of entitlement and reflects the communitarian regime where treatment is extended to those who can no longer labor. In *Millenium Hall*, the elderly and infirm work for their keep and so contribute to the common good.

I analyze each of these texts to uncover the justification for caregiving and the manner in which care giving is implemented.

Between “Women”: Caregiving in *The Squire's Tale*

Part Two of the *Squire's Tale* recounts a story of betrayal that wounds, and of caregiving that heals. Princess Canacee befriends a formel falcon³ who has been deceived by a faithless tercelet. Although she has the plumage of the bird, this bi-species formel feels a woman's pain. As Leslie Kordecki writes: “We do not seriously entertain this story as one of birds.”⁴ In what exactly does the formel's hybridity consist? The formel is primarily avian in appearance. Of course, the formel's complaint about betrayal is

² See generally Daniel Engster, “Rethinking Care Theory: The Practice of Caring and the Obligation to Care,” *Hypatia* 20.3 (2005): 50; Martha A. Fineman, *The Autonomy Myth: A Theory of Dependency* (New York: The New Press, 2004); Eve Feder Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

³ “Formel” is used to refer to a female falcon; the male is a “tercelet.”

⁴ Leslie Catherine Kordecki, “Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*: Animal Discourse, Women, and Subjectivity,” *The Chaucer Review* 36.3 (2002): 289.

anthropomorphic—the length and depth of the formel’s complaint is her primary humanizing feature.

In the first part of the *Squire’s Tale*, a foreign knight comes to the Mongol court while the king is celebrating his birthday. The knight brings with him magical gifts from the courts of India and Arabia: a flying horse that allows instantaneous transport, a sword that simultaneously gives deadly wounds and heals with a touch, a mirror that allows the gazer to perceive falsehood, and a magic ring that not only heals but also enables the bearer to talk with birds. The mirror is an especially appropriate gift since the Mongol court is a site of political and amatory treachery (V.283-87). The knight gives the mirror and the ring to the king’s daughter, Princess Canacee (V.140), a young woman of indescribable beauty. Just as technology creates the fictive realm described in contemporary utopic and dystopic fiction, we should interpret the knight’s four gifts, each having fantastic magical properties, as facilitating the creation of a utopian interlude in Part Two.⁵

The *Squire’s Tale* represents a utopian interlude rather than a true utopia, because Chaucer does not offer a developed concept of an alternative society. However, I argue that Part Two represents a proto-utopia. Part Two provides a hiatus between the rough and treacherous life of the king’s court and the princess’s eventual marriage—itsself a fraught event given the possibility that she may be required to marry her brother. Canacee presides over a gynocratic realm where, in contrast to the royal court, there is temperance

⁵ It is not usual to read any of the *Canterbury Tales* as a utopian text. Patricia Ingham discusses the relationship of the Wife of Bath’s Tale to Arthurian legend. See Ingham, “Pastoral Histories: Utopia, Conquest, and the *Wife of Bath’s Tale*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 441.1 (2002): 34.

instead of drunkenness, caregiving instead of rivalry, and trust instead of treachery. This setting is utopic not only because it is set in a *locus amoenus*, but also because it represents a caring space where those who are injured receive sympathetic treatment and those who are strangers can communicate across borders.⁶ Although Part Two does not describe a fully-formed alternative world, Chaucer explores utopian principles of care that would undergird a utopia. I present here what I believe to be the first extended discussion of disability in the *Squire's Tale*.

The Ethics of Care prioritizes connection and communication. Marshal Leicester comments that the *Canterbury Tales* involve the “attempt, continually repeated, to see from another person’s view, to stretch and extend the self by learning to speak in the voices of others.”⁷ In Part One, the narrator claims that he is unable to offer an adequate description of Canacee’s beauty: “To telle yow al hir beautee, / It lyth nat in my tonge ...” (V.34-35). Part Two, on the other hand, represents an open channel of clear communication between Princess and bird. For Alan Ambrisco, the *Squire's Tale* is about linguistic sovereignty.⁸ However, this emphasis on language is open to an alternative

⁶ We should read Part Two as a utopian space that allows those who make the effort to communicate across borders. Both the “strange knight ... of Arabe and of Inde” and the “faucon pergryn ... of fremde land” are foreign (V.89, 110, 428-29). As John Fyler observes, the *Squire's Tale* addresses “three interrelated attempts to imagine the other: a man imagining a woman, a Christian European imagining a heathen Tartar, and a human being imagining a formel.” Fyler, “Domesticating the Exotic in the *Squire's Tale*,” *ELH* 55.1 (1988): 12.

⁷ H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., “The Art of Impersonation: A General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*,” *PMLA* 95. 2 (1980): 221.

⁸ Alan Ambrisco interprets this emphasis on communication as Chaucer’s affirmation of the English language: “The *Squire's Tale* is ... about privileging the English language, about giving the English language the ability to translate great distances and foreign languages.” Ambrisco, “‘It Lyth Nat in my Tong,’ *Occupatio* and Otherness in the *Squire's Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 38.3 (2004): 219.

reading, that the tale advocates efforts to make connections across borders of rank, nationality, and even species.

On the morning after the king's birthday celebration, while the men sleep off a night of drinking, the Princess and her entourage rise early to take a walk in the garden:

Up riseth fresshe Canacee hireselve...
And forth she walketh esily a pas,
Arrayed after the lusty seson soote
Lightly, for to pleye and walke on foote,
Nat but with fyve or sixe of hir meynee;
And in a trench forth in the park gooth she. (V.387-92)⁹

The park presents an Edenic landscape, not only because it is lovely in the morning sun but because within it the Princess can understand the birds' song:

The vapour which that fro the erthe glood
Made the sonne to seme rody and brood;
But natheles it was so fair a sighte
That it made alle hire hertes for to lighte,
What for the seson and the morwenynge,
And for the foweles that she herde synge.
For right anon she wiste what they mente.
Right by hir song, and knew al hire entente. (V.393-400)

⁹ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Line references to *The Squire's Tale* are to this edition and presented in parentheses in the text.

As Canacee and her retinue walk in the garden, they come upon a horrifying sight. A formel in a withered tree is crying in a piteous voice, her body covered in blood. The beautiful bird has stabbed herself with her beak. Her grief is so distressing that even a tiger would weep to hear it:

Ther nys tygre, ne noon so crueel beest
That dwelleth outhere in wode or in forest,
That nolde han wept, if that he wepe koude,
For sorwe of hire, she shrighete alwey so loude. (V.419-22)

Even as the formel bleeds, our hearts are meant to “bleed” in sympathetic response to her betrayal by her mate.

Canacee immediately tends to the swooning falcon’s wounds, administering medicinal herbs and constructing an infirmary mew. Canacee also responds by sympathizing with the formel’s plight: “Ye sle me with youre sorwe verrailly,/I have of yow so great compassioun” (V.462-63). The Princess appeals to a God that oversees relations between species and acts kindly to those in need: “wisly help me grete God of kynde” (V.469). Canacee weeps “as she to water wolde” (V.496). Canacee’s kindness provides balm which soothes the wounded formel both in her status as female and in her status as bird. The formel movingly thanks Canacee for her “gentillesse,” “compassion,” and “benignytee”:

“That pitee renneth soone in gentle herte
Feelynge his similitude in peynes smerte,
Is preved alday, as men may it see,
For gentil herte kitheth gentillesse.

I se wel that ye han of my distresse
Compassion, my faire Canacee,
Of verray wommanly benignytee
That Nature in youre principles hath set.” (V.479-87)

In response to Canacee’s asking whether it weeps from sorrow of death or loss of love (V.450-53), the formel tells a story of seduction. She was lured by a seemingly devoted tercelet into surrendering her body and her heart. However, the faithless tercelet left her for a kite, a “newfangled” love (V.610). The formel, who fell prey to male hypocrisy, warns Canacee about the dangerous trap of male deceit; in effect, the formel represents an experienced woman warning the young Canacee to beware of men. (It is certain that the tercelet symbolizes the perfidious male since the falcon lapses into describing herself as a “woman” and the tercelet as a “man” [V.608, 609]). After two years of bliss, the tercelet betrayed the formel’s love, fleeing the confinement of a monogamous relationship to pursue a kite:

“Men loven of proper kynde newfangelnesse
As briddes doon that men in cages fede.” (V. 610-11)

However fair and silky is his cage, the male bird, like a human lover, seizes the opportunity to flee as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

“For though thou nyght and day take of hem hede,
And straw hir cage faire and softe as silk,
And yeve hem sugre, hony, breed and milk,
Yet right anon as that his door is uppe
He with his feet wol spurne adoun his cuppe

And to the wode he wole and wormes etc;
So newefangel been they of hire mete,
And loven novelries of propre kynde,
No gentillesse of blood ne may hem bynde.” (V. 612-20)

Eventually we learn that the formel and the tercelet are reunited through the intercession of Prince Cambalo, although no details are provided in this fragmentary tale.

The magical exchange between Canacee and the formel lasts only for one brief shining moment. The narrator does not linger on the moving story but returns abruptly to the world of chivalry, which, we surmise, attracts the Squire more than the world of women’s complaints. The Squire leaves “Cancee hir hauk kepyng” to rejoin the narrative of “aventures and of batailes” (V.651, 658-59).¹⁰

Situating a Disability Reading within the Context of Current Scholarship

The *Squire’s Tale* is far from Chaucer’s most admired work. William Kamowski summarizes the debate about whether the Tale represents “romance” or “burlesque of romance.”¹¹ Jerome Mandel claims that the *Squire’s Tale* has a “well-defined courtly

¹⁰ Carol F. Heffernan comments that “to the squire-narrator, the male world of chivalry is more full of marvels than the one we have just left,” even though it was provided with a woman who could speak with birds.” “Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*: Content and Structure,” *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance*, Studies in Medieval Romance (Woodbridge, Suffolk, U.K.; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 74.

¹¹ William Kamowski, explains the debate as follows:

The *Squire’s Tale* belongs to that perverse realm of literature that offers critical asylum to contentious and antithetical interpretations. On the one hand, Chaucerians such as Alfred David, Jennifer R. Goodman, and David Lawton regard it as the poet’s genuine attempt at romance; on the other hand, writers like Robert S. Haller, Stanley J. Kahrl, Robert P. Miller, and Joyce E. Peterson view the tale as the poet’s ironic critique of inadequate social or aesthetic sensibilities represented by the Squire’s flawed narration. Such contrasting assessments of the poet’s tone constitute an especially formidable obstacle to critical dialogue, since the disagreement over tone is also a controversy about what genre the tale represents: is it romance, for example, or burlesque of romance?

love relationship, but neither the tale, the teller, nor the context allows for a serious exploration of courtly love”:

The weepy tale about the courtship and betrayal of a peregrine falcon by a tercelet is told by the peregrine herself whose excessive self abasement in the context of Canacee’s excessive response renders her tale comic. Indeed, by depicting courtly love in terms of a relationship between birds, Chaucer vitiates any pretense the tale may make to explore the courtly love tradition. Chaucer’s birds almost invariably diminish human concerns and make them comic. As such, they are antithetical to courtly love.¹²

Instead of reading the *Squire’s Tale* as a feeble imitation of his father’s narrative, I argue that the squire adapts the chivalric narrative to emphasize care and empathy. I argue here that Canacee’s care of the formel is anything but comic. The Princess can be situated within a tradition of womanly courtly ethos. While a detailed examination of all aspects of the extensive criticism of this tale is outside of the scope of this study, some aspects of the scholarship are relevant to our focus on disability. First, it is important to consider recent scholarship on disability in the *Canterbury Tales*. Scholars primarily examine Chaucer’s portrayals of disability in the *Merchant’s Tale* and *Wife of Bath’s Tale*. Tory Vandeventer Pearman notes that January’s blindness cannot be ascribed to a religious model. Instead she relates January’s blindness to the inappropriate lechery of an

Kamowski, “Trading the ‘Knotte’ for Loose Ends: The *Squire’s Tale* and the Poetics of Chaucerian Fragments, *Style* 31.3(1997): 391.

¹² Jerome Mandel, “Courtly Love in the *Canterbury Tales*,” *The Chaucer Review* 19.4 (1985): 280.

old man and to the agency of May's dangerous female body.¹³ Pearman reads the Wife of Bath's deafness as a punishment for her excessive and unruly behavior.¹⁴ After the wife is abused by Jankin, her "sovereignty remains ambiguous," as she gains control over his estate but at the cost of becoming a submissive wife.¹⁵ Yet as Edna Edith Sayers comments, the wife's deafness is not disabling in the sense that she is disempowered; she is one of the most fully described characters among the pilgrims and a likely stand-in for the poet in her commentary on marital and social issues.¹⁶

I argue that although the Tales are notably silent about the plague, this catastrophe is relevant to a disability reading because of the extraordinary need for caregiving in the wake of the Black Death.¹⁷ In the *General Prologue*, the friar is satirized for eliciting donations of silver for his own benefit, and for preferring amusement over charity to beggars and lepers:

¹³ Tory Vandenventer Pearman, "'O Sweete Venym Queynte!': Pregnancy and the Disabled Body in the *Merchant's Tale*," in *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations*, ed. Joshua Eyler (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2010), 25.

¹⁴ Tory Vandenventer Pearman, *Women and Disability in Medieval Literature* (Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 65.

¹⁵ Pearman, *Women and Disability*, 69.

¹⁶ Edna Edith Sayers, "Experience, Authority, and the Mediation of Deafness: Chaucer's Wife of Bath," in *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe: Examining Disability in the Historical, Legal, Literary, Medical, and Religious Discourses of the Middle Ages*, eds. Wendy J. Turner and Tory Vandenventer Pearman (Lewiston NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2011), 81. Mikee Delony interprets Alisoun's body in the context of pervasive male domestic violence; Jankin's blows are etched into his wife's bruised body. Delony, "Alisoun's Aging, Hearing-Impaired Female Body: Gazing at the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*," in *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe: Examining Disability in the Historical, Legal, Literary, Medical, and Religious Discourses of the Middle Ages*, eds. Wendy J. Turner and Tory Vandenventer Pearman (Lewiston NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2011), 313.

¹⁷ Peter Beidler proposes that the old man found under the tree in the *Pardoner's Tale* is a plague survivor and that the three rioters resemble the carousers in Boccaccio's *Decameron* who choose to revel as the epidemic spreads. Beidler, "The Plague and Chaucer's Pardoner," 16 *Chaucer Review* (1982): 257.

He knew the tavernes wel in every toun
And ever ich hostiler and tappestere
Bet than a lazar or a beggestere,
For unto swich a worthy man as he
Acorded nat, as by his facultee,
To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.
It is nat honest; it may nat avaunce,
For to deelen with no swich poraille,
But al with riche and selleres of vitaille. (I. 240-48)

The “fremde” formel, herself a “peregrine” or pilgrim falcon, may be likened to the human pilgrims who journey to Canterbury. Thomas Becket’s shrine was famous for cures: Becket is a saint “that hem hath holpen whan they were seeke” (*General Prologue*, I. 17-18).¹⁸

Although the *Squire’s Tale* has not been read from the perspective of infirmity and healing, this tale also relates a narrative about disability. The tercelet abuses the formel through his infidelity rather than the bodily blows that Jankin inflicts on Alisoun, yet the tercelet’s cruelty is the proximate cause of his mate’s anguish and self-wounding. I argue that behind its parodic veneer, the *Squire’s Tale* offers serious messages about the need to care for the sick.

Several scholars have written about the stylistic and thematic relationship between the *Squire’s Tale* and the *Knight’s Tale*. According to Lindsey Jones:

¹⁸ See Robert A. Scott, *Miracle Cures: Pilgrimage and the healing Powers of Belief* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 76, 105-07.

The *Squire's Tale* is not a tale intended to tell a story; it is instead a narrative poem designed to examine the craft of poetic composition...It does so by contrasting the poetic craftsmanship of the Squire with that of the Knight and by showing the relative unease with which the Squire handles the complexities of his poetic craft.¹⁹

Derek Pearsall reads the Squire as “a young man among his elders,” men who have made their way in the world.²⁰ The Squire, according to Pearsall, shows an acute, sometimes painful awareness of his place among more accomplished writers, most notably his father. Thomas Hatton argues that Palamon and Arcite are “two lovers much like the Squire. Their misadventures illustrate the troubles knights may bring on themselves when they sacrifice their chivalric duty for love of a lady that is a temporal good.”²¹ Hatton contrasts this vice of concupiscence with Canacee's temperance and avoidance of immoderate sensual pleasure.²² The lesson, Hatton argues, is that “the pleasures of the senses ultimate betray one,”²³ a lesson that the formel learned to her cost.

I argue that it is a mistake to dismiss the *Squire's Tale* as a parody, on the basis that the squire is a pale shadow of his father. Rather we should situate the tale within the

¹⁹ Lindsey M. Jones, “Chaucer's Anxiety of Poetic Craft: The *Squire's Tale*,” *Style*, 41.3 (2007): 300.

²⁰ D. A. Pearsall, “The Squire as Story-Teller,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 34 (1964): 83.

²¹ Thomas J. Hatton, “Thematic Relationships between Chaucer's Squire's Portrait and Tale and the Knight's Portrait and Tale,” *Studies in Medieval Culture* 4 (1974): 456.

²² *Ibid.*, 457.

²³ *Ibid.*

courtly love tradition and focus on Canacee's care of the formel as an example of her nobility, kindness, and "gentillesse."

"Pittee Renneth in Gentle Heart"

A long line of women are victims of male abuse in the *Canterbury Tales*. Jill Mann focuses on the similarity between "Suffering Woman/Suffering God."²⁴ Mann's principal example is Griselda, who is tried beyond all reasonable limits by her husband in the *Clerk's Tale*. Mann writes, "Human suffering and divine patience are united in one person, as Christ united manhood and the Godhead. And it is [Griselda's] 'wommanede' that is the ground of the union."²⁵ Mann's comment that "[p]atience, like pity, is a womanly quality,"²⁶ also applies to the description of the females in *Squire's Tale*: Canacee is the epitome of pity, and the formel is the embodiment of patience in its original etymological sense, the act of enduring suffering.

It is important to interpret *Squire's Tale* within the context of other narratives in which Chaucer emphasizes women's pity and compassion. For example, in the *Legend of Good Women*, Ariadne and Phaedra show "compassioun" for Theseus and think his imprisonment "great pite" (1974-76). Dido feels pity for Aeneas as well:

Anon hire herte hath pite of his wo,
And with that pite love com in also;
And thus, for pite and for gentillesse,

²⁴ Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, *Chaucer Studies* 30 (Woodbridge, Suffolk, U.K.; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Refreshed moste he been of his distresse. (1078-81)

In the *Knight's Tale*, Emelye is positioned in an idyllic garden—but she is menaced by male pursuit.²⁷ Laura Howes, who writes about Emelye but not Canacee, describes Emelye's garden both as a prison and a showcase, as she is of marriageable age. Howes writes:

Theseus's garden in the *Knight's Tale* represents the way in which men control, guard, and imprison women for their own purposes: political, personal, and narrative. As wives or as prospective wives, women must be contained, this tale explains indirectly, because if left to their own devices women would live among themselves, like the Amazons, or in chaste service to Diana, as Emelye desires.²⁸

Here again, there are similarities between the *Squire's Tale* and that of his father.

Princess Canacee, like Emelye, is vulnerable to the marriage arrangements imposed on

²⁷ The Knight says of Emelye:

Yclothed was she fressh, for to devyse:
Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.
And in the gardyn, at the sonne upriste,
She walketh up end down, and as hire liste
She gadereth floures, party white and rede,
To make a subtil gerland for hire hede;
And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong. (I.1048-55)

²⁸ Laura Howes, *Chaucer's Garden and the Language of Convention* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 87.

her by the patriarchy. In fact the text leaves open the horrifying possibility that the king could order that she marry her own brother.²⁹

In the *Knight's Tale*, the murals that decorate the Temple of Diana display scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which men pursue women who were devoted to the cult of the virgin Diana with the intent to ravish them (I.2056-66).³⁰ Given that the formel talks like a woman, cries like a woman, and beats her breast like a woman, we can compare her to an Ovidian heroine, a woman transformed into a formel as a result of a male predator.

In both the *Knight's Tale* and the *Squire's Tale*, a victim of love suffers the disability of lovesickness. Mary Frances Wack has defined lovesickness as a "disease of love," a "disorder of the mind and body closely related to melancholia and fatal if not treated."³¹ Arcite and Palamon suffer from "the loveris maladye/of Heroes" (I.1373-4), an affliction caused by their unfulfilled love for Princess Emelye.³² Arcite is pale, lean, swooning—hollow and sunken-eyed. Chaucer frames lovesickness as a disease in the *Canterbury Tales*; in the *General Prologue*, (I. 429-43), for example, he lists physicians associated with lovesickness, such as Constantine, who wrote the leading text on diagnosis and treatment, the *Vitaticum*. Wack points out that under the influence of Peter

²⁹ For a discussion of the question, see Elizabeth Scala, *Absent Narratives, Manuscript Textuality, and Literary Structure in Late Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 71 and Ambrisco, "It Lyth Nat in my Tong," 221.

³⁰ For a discussion of ekphrasis in the *Knight's Tale*, see James A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1.

³¹ Mary Frances Wack, *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: the "Viaticum" and its Commentaries*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), xi.

³² *Ibid.*

of Spain (c. 1246-72), medieval opinion began to shift from considering men as most likely to suffer from lovesickness to regarding women as the most likely victims.³³ Those who were afflicted with lovesickness displayed physical symptoms from pallor to palpitations to pale complexion to depressed appetite but this is also a socially constructed disability. The male version of the illness was characterized as melancholy, but the female version was branded as a form of hysteria, associated with the womb and female hypersexuality.³⁴ Herbal remedies were applied to relieve the body of the humours associated with lovesickness³⁵—the medicine which Canacee applies to the formel's wounds. The formel suffers not only from the emotional pain of lovesickness but in addition from physical injuries that she has inflicted on herself in response to unrequited love and abandonment.

In both of these tales, womanly pity is a soothing balm that heals anger and pain. For example, the queen and Emelye successfully plead with Theseus not to condemn Palamon and Arcite to death when he comes across them fighting in the grove.

The queene anon, for verray wommanhede,
Gan for to wepe, and so dide Emelye,
And alle the ladyes in the compaignye.
Greet pitee was it, as it thoughte hem alle,
That evere swich a chaunce sholde falle,

³³ Wack, *Lovesickness*, 123. Marion A. Wells, *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Romance* (Palo Alto: Stanford, 2007), 223-24.

³⁴ Wells, *Secret Wound*, 223.

³⁵ Michael Solomon, *The Literature of Misogyny in Medieval Spain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University 1997), 58-59.

For gentil men they were of greet estaat,
And no thyng but for love was this debaat;
And saugh hir bloody woundes wyde and soore,
And alle crieden, bothe lasse and moore,

‘Have mercy, Lord, upon us wommen alle!’ (*Knight’s Tale*, I.1748-57)

Theseus submits to the women “for pitee reneth soone in gentil herte”; he has “compassioun” for the women’s tears (I.1761, 1770). These are the very same lines that the Squire repeats, in reference to the pity and compassion that the Princess feels for the formel.³⁶ Princess Canacee exemplifies “compassion, pitee, and benignytee” as she expresses her sympathy for the formel and tends to her physical and emotional wounds.

If we see the *Squire’s Tale* as responding to, or “quiting,” the *Knight’s Tale*, it is instructive to notice two significant changes. First, in the *Squire’s Tale*, as discussed further below, the Princess is not the cause of lovesickness, as is the case when Arcite and Palamon suffer for love of Emelye; rather, Canacee is a locus of healing who attends to the wounds of a patient who suffers from lovesickness. Second, Canacee designs murals for the mewe in which she treats the injured formel, and thus exercises a kind of agency that eludes Emelye.

³⁶ As Jill Mann points out (*Feminizing Chaucer*, 108) in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, as in the *Knight’s Tale*, women’s suffering is an agent for the male ruler to feel compassion:

The kynges herte of pitee gan agryse,
Whan he saugh so benigne a creature
Falle in disese and in mysaventure ...
This Alla kyng hath swich compassioun,
As gentil herte is fulfild of pitee,
That from his eyen ran the water doun. (II. 614-16, 659-61)

Caregiving in the Squire's Tale

I begin my discussion of caregiving by focusing on the bond between the Princess and the formel. Karma Lochrie writes that while the “Middle Ages is positively verbose on the topics of male friendship ... it was relatively silent about female friendship and love.”³⁷ Lochrie suggests that this neglect of exchange among females might reflect anxiety about the potential that female-female relations might trespass on taboo subjects or lead to proto-lesbian relations.³⁸ Assuming that female friendship is more acceptable or at least more common when there is a gap in status,³⁹ the difference in species between Princess Canacee and the formel provides a suitable space for friendship to form. Chaucer knows his birds, and he chooses as a companion for the Princess a species associated with royalty and aristocracy. As a bird of noble rank and with beautiful “plumage” and “gentillesse” (V.426), the formel is a suitable companion for a princess. Falconry was a socially-approved pastime for women of noble class, in contrast to other forms of hunting that require weapons.⁴⁰

³⁷ Karma Lochrie, “Between Women,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, eds. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 70.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 73, 78-80. For an example of a homoerotic reading, see Kathy Lavezzo, “Sobs and Sighs between Women: The Homoerotics of Compassion in *The Book of Margery Kempe*” in *Premodern Sexualities*, eds. Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (New York, 1996), 175. Lavezzo addresses men's concern over Margery's relation to other women: she “constitutes a powerful and disruptive form of female homoerotic bonding” which emerges in her religious devotion. *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁹ Joanne Findon explores female homosociality in the medieval romance, *Ywain and Gawain*, an instance where an aristocratic woman forms a bond with her servant, a friendship that arises in spite of, or perhaps because of, the difference in their social status. Findon, “The Other Story: Female Friendship in the Middle English *Ywain and Gawain*,” *Parergon* 22.1 (2005): 71.

⁴⁰ Medieval tapestries in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum as well as the Musée de Cluny show aristocratic women with their falcons. William H. Forsyth, “The Noblest of Sports: Falconry in the Middle Ages,” *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series 2.9 (May 1944): 253.

Most important, the relationship between the Princess and the formel is decorous, even exemplary, because Canacee personifies the role of the ideal nurse or caregiver who tends to the formel's emotional and physical wounds. The fact that the formel's pain is self-inflicted does not diminish its reality. For Susan Crane, the formel's pitiful self-wounding signifies "a profound helplessness in the face of events"; because "externally directed action is impossible," she turns to self-destructive violence.⁴¹ Esther Cohen writes about self-inflicted suffering in her study of attitudes towards pain in the medieval world.⁴² "Self-inflicted suffering was never gratuitous... It had a specific Christian context, and was the most common form of *imitatio Christi* in the late Middle Ages."⁴³ Self-mortification and self-injury was practiced by holy women, nuns, and laywomen alike.⁴⁴

This tale has been criticized as an example of the worst excesses of anthropomorphism. Lynch complains that the "talking bird, which ought to seem a strange and exotic thing, becomes comically indistinguishable from any swooning courtly

⁴¹ Susan Crane, *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 76-77.

⁴² Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Medieval Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27. The formel is found in a withered tree, a Christian symbol. For a discussion of the legends associated with the Dry Tree, including its association with the Crucifixion, see Fyler, "Domesticating the Exotic," 7. The tercelet is described as a snake in the grass who deceived the formel as Satan deceived Eve (V. 518-23). As Charles Owen, Jr. observes, the tercelet is denounced as an "ypocrite" (V. 520); Christ denounces hypocrisy in *Matthew* 23.27. Owen, "The Falcon's Complaint in the *Squire's Tale*," in *Rebels and Rivals: The Contestive Spirit in The Canterbury Tales*, eds. Susanna Greer Fein, David Raybin, and Peter Braeger (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1991), 177.

maiden.”⁴⁵ Far from representing comical anthropomorphism, I suggest that Chaucer’s use of the formel to stand in for a woman calls forth significant associations between women and birds.

Anna Roberts writes that in romance legend, “the fundamental metaphor of violence against women is the image of the wounded bird.”⁴⁶ Avian metaphors stand in for male sexual possession; the physical destruction of the bird is an act of aggression.⁴⁷ Ovid compares Philomela after she has been raped to a dove whose breast has been bloodied by an eagle.⁴⁸ In *Laiistic*, a late twelfth century lai by Marie de France, the nightingale is at once the sign for erotic attraction and the innocent victim of brutal violence.⁴⁹ A jealous husband mutilates the nightingale, the symbol of his wife’s love for another man. The blood-stained burial cloth in which the innocent bird is buried resembles the linceuil wrapped around the body of Christ.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Lynch, “East Meets West,” 542.

⁴⁶ Anna Roberts, “Introduction: Violence against Women and the Habits of Thought,” in *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1997), 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* trans. A.D. Melville (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), V.VI.528-290.

⁴⁹ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. G.S. Burgess, and K. Busby (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 95. An unmarried knight loves his neighbor’s wife, a beautiful young woman who reciprocates his affection. The wife tells her husband that she leaves her bed so frequently in the middle of the night so that she can listen to the song of the nightingale. The amorous couple converse through a window, and share a fervent although unconsummated love. Although the encounters between the lady and her beloved were chaste, her husband reacts with jealous rage when he discovers her romance. He arranges for the brutal killing of the nightingale and throws the corpse at his wife so that her tunic is splattered with blood. After wrapping the dead nightingale in a cloth, the wife sends the little corpse to her lover with a message telling him that their love has been discovered.

⁵⁰ Because the bird sang all night, in the Middle Ages the nightingale not only appeared as a symbol of erotic love but also as a sign of Christ’s passion. For example, in the poetry of Sir John Pecham, the nightingale weeps all night in sympathy for Christ’s suffering before dying during the day. F. J.E. Raby, *A*

Canacee's use of herbs to cure the formel recalls the healing actions of women in romance legend. In the *Tristan* legend, as Laine Doggett has pointed out, Tristan believes that only Iseut, with her folk knowledge of medicine, can cure him of his physical wounds.⁵¹ In Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligés*, Thessala engages in a variety of healing and magical practices in order to unite Fénice and Cligés.

However, the herbs that Canacee applies represent a serious application of healing art, rather than a risible device from the realm of fairy tale. Herbal pharmacology was the principal means by which medieval women sought to relieve pain.⁵² While today these herbal remedies would be dismissed out of hand, they represented state of the art medicine at a time when egg yolk, animal fat, and animal excrement were also employed to relieve pain.⁵³ Nor should we anachronistically dismiss magic as the antithesis of medicine. Katharine Park points out:

The contours of the body of early medieval medical practitioners were fluid, its members relatively undifferentiated, and its clientele varied....Lay healers treated the religious and the religious the laity. Magic played a part in the natural medicine of both rich and poor.⁵⁴

History of Christian-Latin Poetry: From the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 426.

⁵¹ Laine Doggett, *Love Cures: Healing and Love in Old French Romance* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2009).

⁵² Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*, 90.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 92-95.

⁵⁴ Katharine Park, "Medicine and Society in Medieval Europe, 500-1500," in *Medicine in Society*, ed. Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 70.

The Princess's communion with the formel represents, and even performs, consolation as a healing function. Canacee expresses her sympathy for her injured friend in words, in caregiving, in tears, and in her art. In addition to the Princess's verbal expressions of sympathy (V. 462, 469, 496), the other women in the retinue wail their grief: "Greet was the sorwe fro the haukes harm, / That Canacee and alle hir women made ..." (V.632-33). While a solitary woman finds herself in danger, solidarity with women is restorative.⁵⁵

Princess Canacee's charity can also be situated within secular tradition. Chaucer's contemporary, Christine de Pizan, wrote *Le Livre des Trois Vertus* (1405-06) which offers a *guide d'emploi* for aristocratic women. Rosalind Brown-Grant observes that Christine had a double agenda: to encourage women to live devoutly and to defuse the misogynist myth that women are inferior in their rationality.⁵⁶ The text offers the married princess lessons in prudence that will enable her to live virtuously and to be perceived as living virtuously. The *Wife of Bath* and the *Legends of Good Women* have been compared to Christine's works and their common sources have been discussed.⁵⁷

I argue that Canacee's performance of charitable acts towards the formel can be situated in the tradition of the duties of the courtly lady as advocated in *Le Livre des*

⁵⁵ Compare the precarious and ill-fated situation in which Dorigen finds herself in the *Franklin's Tale* or Criseyde's solitude after she is bartered away from Troy in an exchange of prisoners. She is "with women fewe, among the Grekis stronge. ..." (*Troilus and Criseyde*, .V. 688). There was no one with whom she could complain; she was alone and in need of friends (V. 728, 1026-27).

⁵⁶ Rosalind Brown-Grant, *Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women: Reading beyond Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 183).

⁵⁷ See Judith Laird, "Good Women and Bonnes Dames: Virtuous Females in Chaucer and Christine de Pizan," *The Chaucer Review* 30.1 (1995): 58; S.H. Rigby, "The Wife of Bath, Christine de Pizan, and the Medieval Case for Women," *The Chaucer Review*, 35.2 (2000): 133.

Trois Vertus. As noted, Canacee is a young princess about to be married. Like her friend the formel, Canacee may be required to endure the pain of an adulterous mate—a disappointment attendant to marriage which Christine addresses in her manual. Regardless of her husband's transgressions and deficiencies, Christine advocates that the virtuous wife exhibit proper conduct and good works—among them acts of charity such as visits to the poor and hospital patients, and distribution of alms. Acts of charity to the poor and the infirm serve multiple purposes: fulfilling the role of the princess as benefactress, confirming her worth, and comforting the poor and the ill especially if they received alms directly from her own hand.⁵⁸ Susan Dudash offers a detailed analysis of Christine's devotion to the poor through analyzing her prose works.⁵⁹ Christine distinguishes between the deserving and undeserving poor and those who have become impoverished through imprudence.⁶⁰ Four hundred years later, Scott and her contemporaries will make a similar effort to establish that the objects of their philanthropy are worthy recipients of charity.

Canacee offers a multi-faceted, even multi-media, response to the formel's physical and emotional wounds. The medieval approach to disability differed from our own, among other reasons, because of the preeminent role of religion in the care of those

⁵⁸ Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre des Trois Vertus*, ed. Erick Hicks with introduction by Charity Cannon Willard, *Bibliothèque du XV Siècle* (Paris, 1989), part 1, chap.10, 37-38.

⁵⁹ Susan J. Dudash, "Christine de Pizan and the Menu Peuple," *Speculum* 78.3 (2003): 788.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 795, discussing Christine, *Trois Vertus*, 1.10, 37.

who were impaired.⁶¹ Edward Wheatley observes that religious figures demonstrated their holiness by their care for the sick:

Impairment in general and blindness in particular functioned in ways largely structured by Jesus's miracles. The impairment was a site where a saint or holy figure was to prove his or her holiness, and the religious figures were aided in that effort if the person with an impairment claimed to have immutable faith in the curer.⁶²

Irina Metzler observes that while Deuteronomy and Leviticus linked illness and impairment to sin and punishment, the New Testament emphasized the role of Christ and the saints in achieving miracle cures.⁶³ Many medieval saints were canonized because they healed disease and ministered to those with bodily impairments.⁶⁴ Medieval charity was strongly influenced by saints who cared for lepers. After St. Francis kissed a leper, the disfigured man transformed into an apparition of Christ.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Edward Wheatley argues that in medieval times, the church controlled discourse over disability just as today modern medicine attempts to maintain control over discourse related to disability. Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶³ Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment during the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 63. Metzler observes:

In the New Testament a shift from punishment to healing occurred with respect to physical impairment. Numerous instances of miracle healings by Christ and the apostles testified to this. Especially the perceived link between sin and resulting illness or impairment became of far less importance in the New Testament. *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 127-29.

⁶⁵ Raymond Stiker, *A History of Disability*, trans. William Sayers (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) (1997), 82.

Canacee thus fulfills the obligation of the Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46 to treat whomever came in need as Christ himself. To this extent she resembles St. Elisabeth of Hungary and other healing saints in her caregiving ministrations to the wounded formel. There is no indication that Canacee performs a medical miracle in tending to the formel's wounds, but her magic ring gives her a dual supernatural skill: it combines the healing properties of all herbs, and it permits her to communicate across species.

As Theresa Coletti observes, it was a tenet of medieval medicine that both the body and the soul needed to be healed as a precondition for recovery:

The convergence of physical and spiritual care-giving in the activities of the hospital was shaped by medieval understandings of the holistic relationship between body and soul. Because physical illness was considered a sign of deeper spiritual affliction, medical treatment was closely bound to spiritual health.⁶⁶

In her discussion of the Digby saint play, *Mary Magdalene*, Coletti points out the congruence of physical and spiritual illness, in that the Madgalen's sinful condition is "a spiritual sickness whose treatment is in the 'helth and medsyn' of Jesus."⁶⁷ Linda Keyser emphasizes the "inclusive and holistic tenor of medieval medicine."⁶⁸ The medieval

⁶⁶ Theresa Coletti, "Social Contexts of the East Anglian Saint Play: The Digby *Mary Magdalene* and the Late Medieval Hospital," in *Medieval East Anglia*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2005), 291.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁶⁸ Linda Migl Keyser, "Examining the Body Poetic: Representations of Illness and Healing in Late Medieval English Literature" (PhD diss., University of Maryland 1999), 40. Keyser contrasts the holistic medieval approach with the more reductive modern approach, a "biomedical construct," which relies on biological indices as the ultimate criteria for recognizing disease. *Ibid.*, 41. In the decade since Keyser's dissertation, there has been increasing recognition of the role of emotion in healing. See Mark Lumley, et

medical concept envisioned a “dichotomous but interconnected body and soul” that “blurs the boundary between the physical and spiritual domains.”⁶⁹

It was the special province of women nurses to take care of the body by providing physical and spiritual treatment that proceeded “hand in hand.”⁷⁰ Carole Rawcliffe writes that one of the functions of the women nurses in St. Giles’s hospital was to encourage their charges to confess and repent as a precondition to recuperation.⁷¹ According to the Fourth Lateran Council, spiritual health was closely related to bodily suffering:

As sickness of the body may sometimes be the result of sin...so we by this present decree order and strictly command physicians of the body, when they are called to the sick, to warn and persuade them first of all to call in physicians of the soul so that after their spiritual health has been seen to they may respond better to medicine for their bodies: for when the cause ceases so does the effect.⁷²

When Canacee asks the formel to tell her what has caused her distress, she performs a similar function, eliciting the formel’s complaint to ease her spirit. While the formel’s narrative is more of a complaint than a confession of sin, the act of telling eases the formel’s suffering.

al., “Pain and Emotion: A Biopsychosocial Review of Recent Research,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 67.9 (2011): 948.

⁶⁹ Keyser, “Examining the Body Poetic,” 3.

⁷⁰ Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, 170.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Ruling of the fourth Lateran Council, cap. xxii quoted in Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, 7.

Charity was a duty of the Christian and an essential precondition of the donor's own salvation. According to Christ's Sermon on the Mount, those who do not perform charitable acts will be denied entry to the kingdom of heaven.⁷³ By donating to hospitals that care for pilgrims, as well as those who are sick and infirm, a benefactor could secure his or her salvation.⁷⁴ As Nicholas Orme and Marjorie Webster comment: "Whoever came in need was Christ himself; what you did to the needy was done for Christ with an everlasting reward..."⁷⁵

I have argued that Canacee resembles a caring nurse in her care of the formel: charity to the sick was a religious duty and an office typically performed by women. Moreover, Canacee tends to the formel's emotional state as well as to her physical condition. Canacee constructs for her feathered friend the avian equivalent of a hospital bed—a comfortable mewe. She tends to the formel in a garden space by applying medicinal herbs. Gardens were an attractive and important part of medieval hospitals; for example, at St Giles's in Norwich, the nuns raised medicinal plants in a walled garden.⁷⁶ I might push the comparison even further by comparing the murals on the formel's

⁷³ *Matthew*, 5.23-26.

⁷⁴ Nicholas Orme and Margaret Webster, *The English Hospital, 1070-1570* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 57-58.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death, and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital, St. Giles's Norwich, c. 1249-1550* (Phoenix Mill, U.K.: Sutton Publishing, 1992), 51.

mewe to the murals and paintings that decorated the walls and chapels of medieval hospitals—art that was designed to uplift the patient and spiritually heal her wounds.⁷⁷

Canacee's murals present a damning narrative of the faithlessness shown by false male fowls: by falsely depicting himself as a devoted lover, the tercelet concealed his true indifference, just as cosmetics conceal a blemish. While the tercelet "seemed welle of alle gentillesse/al were he ful of treson and falseness. ... So depe in greyn he dyed his coloures/Right as a serpent hit hym under floures" (V.505-06, 511-12). The tercelet "peynted" his "words" and his "countenance" (V.560-61). It is a fitting contrapasso that art is used to rebuke the tercelet's deception:

And by hire beddes heed she made a mewe
And covered it with veluettes blewe,
In signe of trouthe that is in wommen sene
And all withoute, the mewe is peynted grene,
In which were peynted all thise false fowles,
As ben this tidyves, tercelettes and owls;
Right for despit were peynted him bisyde
Pyes, on hem for to crie and chide. (V. 643-50)

Feminist critics express disappointment about Canacee's passivity and marginalized status.⁷⁸ Kordecki reads this as a very negative story: the tale ends with a

⁷⁷ The great medieval hospitals, not only in England but the most splendid of these institutions in Florence and Sienna, decorated the walls of their chapels and their halls with paintings related to their healing mission and spiritual project. For a micro-historical analysis of painting in a European medieval hospital, see Marcia Kupfer, *The Art of Healing: Painting for the Sick and the Sinner in a Medieval Town* (University Park PA: Penn State, 2003).

“silent woman” and a “tragic birdcage,” a tale of “discourses abbreviated and circumscribed.”⁷⁹ The formel “cannot be allowed to be more than a woman and the woman must conform to the passive marginality of the lady of romance.”⁸⁰ However, far from subordinating women, the tale celebrates the Princess’s quick sympathy and generous response: Canacee epitomizes “pitee,” “compassion,” “gentillesse” and “benignytee.” Moreover, while Theseus controls the construction and decoration of the Temples in the *Knight’s Tale* apparently without consulting Emelye, Canacee is the artist who creates the formel’s mewe. In fashioning the mewe, Canacee decides on its structure, selects the colors (for example the blue of fidelity), and supplies soft velvet bedding. As artist, Canacee exercises creative agency not so different from that of the poet himself. To the extent that she is a stand-in for the poet, we can infer that Chaucer stands behind Canacee’s sympathetic response to the formel’s physical and emotional injury.

Instead of reading the *Squire’s Tale* as a pale shadow of his father’s, we might see the tale as the son’s adaptation of a chivalric narrative to emphasize feminine aspects of the chivalric ideal, including empathy. Carol Gilligan describes a woman’s “conception of morality” as one that is “concerned with the activity of care ... responsibility and relationships,” in contrast to a male “conception of morality as fairness,” one that is more

⁷⁸ Kathryn Lynch compares Canacee unfavorably to “the headstrong, resourceful, and libidinous” Shaharazad, who famously stayed alive by regaling the ruler with enchanting tales in the *Arabian Nights*. Lynch, “East Meets West in Chaucer’s *Squire’s* and Franklin’s *Tales*,” *Speculum* 70. 3 (July 1995): 542. However, Chaucer tells an entirely different tale with an entirely different purpose. Against the threat of male perfidy, the *Squire’s Tale* suggests, women have available a defensive strategy: becoming forewarned and thus forearmed about the potential for treachery. Moreover, Canacee demonstrates agency and imagination in the care that she provides the formel.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 293.

concerned with “rights and rules.”⁸¹ Perhaps Chaucer suggests, through the Squire, that the Ethics of Care has its place in the chivalric ideal.

More’s *Utopia*: Why it Makes Sense to Care for the Gravely Ill

The treatment of care giving in Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* is a neglected topic: far more attention has been given to other aspects of the Utopians’ social, political and economic arrangements. *Utopia* presents several categories of disabled individuals: the ill, who are cared for in hospitals; mothers with young children, who have ready access to nurses; fools, who may not be mocked; the incurably ill, who may die with dignity if they so choose; and the aged. We even have the beginnings of preventive public health policy: the cities are spacious, and beasts are slaughtered cleanly to avoid the spread of disease; wine shops are forbidden.⁸²

How should the ill, elderly, and disabled be treated in the ideal society? Plato reserves medical care for those who are basically healthy but suffer occasional illness, accidental injury, or battle wounds. Those who are seriously ill should be left to die or kill themselves.⁸³ A seriously ill individual cannot fulfill his role as an active and productive member of society and is thus a burden to himself and to the community. By contrast, in *Utopia*, the ill receive optimal care, apparently without a limit dictated by concern over community resources. I read More’s treatment of those who are ill and

⁸¹ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 13.

⁸² Elizabeth McCutcheon writes that Book Two offers a vision of an “ecologically balanced society of evenly-spaced garden cities” that reflects respect for nature and harmonious ecology. McCutcheon, “More’s *Utopia*, Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, and *Biosphere 2*,” in *More’s “Utopia” and the Utopian Inheritance*, eds. A. D. Cousins and Damian Grace. Lanham: University Press of America, 1995: 69.

⁸³ *Republic*, 408b, 410a.

elderly as a dialog with and reply to Plato. To take one well-known example, Raphael Hythloday expresses sympathy for Plato's refusal to make laws for any people who refuse to share their goods equally. Although More limits his discussion of the ill and the aged to a few passages, I argue that disability is an important component of *Utopia*: there is a connection between the Utopians' generous care of the physically disabled and the viability of their organization as a society in which property is held in common.

Utopia was written in 1516, at a time when Henry VII was concerned over the state of English hospitals: in his 1509 will, he lamented that an insufficient number of hospitals had caused "an infinite number of poor needy people" to "miserably die, no man putting hand of help or remedy."⁸⁴ Robert Copland described the state of English hospitals in *Highway to the Spitalhouse* (1530). Copland sought to draw attention to "sundry hospitals" where "many have lain dead without the walls and for lack of succor have died wretchedly."⁸⁵

Accordingly, the issue of hospital care receives considerable emphasis in *Utopia*:

But first and chiefly of all, respect is had to the sick, that be cured in the hospitals. For in the circuit of the city, a little without the walls, they have four hospitals, so big, so wide, so ample, and so large, that they may seem four little towns, which were devised of that bigness partly to the intent the sick, be they never so many in number, should not lie too throng [crowded] or strait, and therefore uneasily and incommodiously; and

⁸⁴ Orme and Webster, *The English Hospital*, 148.

⁸⁵ Robert Copland, *Highway to the Spitalhouse* (1530) in A.V. Judges, *The Elizabethan Underworld: A Collection of Tudor and Early Stuart Tracts and Ballads* (London: Routledge, 1936), 1.

partly that they which were taken and holden with contagious diseases, such as be wont by infection to creep from one to another, might be laid apart far from the company of the residue. These hospitals be so well appointed, and with all things necessary to health so furnished, and, moreover, so diligent attendance through the continual presence of cunning physicians is given, that though no man be sent thither against his will, yet notwithstanding there is no sick person in all the city that had not rather lie there than at home in his own house. (64-65)⁸⁶

The ill are provided with the best food, and served even before the rulers (65), in defiance of expectations that the governors should be nourished before those who are incapacitated.

Utopia does not shrink from the reality that there are incurables who, despite the best of care, experience pain. Hythloday reports that for these individuals, euthanasia is offered as an option, not as a requirement:

The sick (as I said) they see to with great affection, and let nothing at all pass concerning either physic or good diet, whereby they may be restored again to their health. Such as be sick of incurable diseases they comfort with sitting by them, with talking with them, and, to be short, with all manner of helps that may be. But if the disease be not only incurable, but also full of continual pain and anguish, then the priests and the magistrates

⁸⁶ *Three Early Modern Utopias: Thomas More: "Utopia"/Francis Bacon: "New Atlantis"/Henry Neville: The "Isle of Pines,"* trans. Ralph Robinson (Oxford and New York: Oxford World, Classics, 1999). All page references to *Utopia* are from this edition and are presented in text in parentheses.

exhort the man (seeing he is not able to do any duty of life, and by overliving his own death is noisome and irksome to other and grievous to himself), that he will determine with himself no longer to cherish that pestilent and painful disease. And, seeing his life is to him but a torment, that he will not be unwilling to die, but rather take a good hope to him, and either dispatch himself out of that painful life, as out of a prison or a rack of torment, or else suffer himself willingly to be rid out of it by other. And in so doing they tell him he shall do wisely, seeing by his death he shall lose no commodity, but end his pain....They that be thus persuaded finish their lives willingly, either with hunger, or else die in their sleep without any feeling of death. But they cause none such to die against his will, nor [do] they use no less diligence and attendance about him, believing this to be an honourable death. (89)

In *Utopia*, euthanasia is a mercy, in effect, a last-ditch treatment when there is no cure and the patient is in pain.

The Utopians treat the elderly with respect. Elderly individuals are given the opportunity to share their anecdotes and perspectives at meal time. Yet the Utopians recognize that as a person ages, he or she will become ill and dependent. To abandon one's spouse when he or she has become infirm is disgraceful:

For they judge it a great point of cruelty that anybody in their most need of help and comfort should be cast off and forsaken, and that old age, which both bringeth sickness with it and is a sickness itself, should unkindly and unfaithfully be dealt withal. (91)

Just as the elderly have a place within society, so does the “fool” who can delight others with his antics. Neither the fool (under today’s terminology, the intellectually disabled), nor the individual with bodily deformities, suffers derision:

They [the Utopians] have singular delight and pleasure in fools. And as it is a great reproach to do any of them hurt or injury, so they prohibit not to take pleasure of foolishness.To mock a man for his deformity or for that he lacketh any part or limb of his body is counted great dishonesty and reproach, not to him that is mocked, but to him that mocketh. Which unwisely doth embraid any man of that as a vice that was not in his power to eschew. (93)

Is More’s Utopia an Erasmian Paradise or a Surveillance Dystopia?

Much scholarly debate focuses on whether Hythloday’s laudatory views should be skeptically received. J.H. Hexter writes that More’s *Utopia* represents the embodiment of Erasmian ideals and in particular the condemnation of injustice, oppression of the poor and weak, and abuse of power.⁸⁷ Hexter argues that More borrowed from Erasmus, first, the position that one of the best and most effective ways to combat stupidity and evil was through satire. Second, Christianity was not an academic, Scholastic pursuit but a way of life defined by charity. More distinguished between

... those who know God in the bottom of their heart and those who merely acknowledge Him with the top of their head. The latter avowed their faith

⁸⁷ J.H. Hexter, “Utopia and its Historical Milieu,” in *The Complete Works of Thomas More*, eds. Edward Surtz and J.H. Hexter, vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), xxiii.

and performed the required ritual motions of a Christian but denied Christ in every other act of their lives.⁸⁸

Hexter praises the Utopians' charity towards each other, in contrast to the "Christian" practice as followed in the England of his day:

The Utopians ... have faith in a God in whose goodness and mercy they trust. Along with that faith goes *spes*, hope for life eternal. And along with faith and hope goes *charitas* [sic], or love. The Utopians repay their benefactors with *charitas* and share a *mutuus amor charitasque* while magistrates and citizens deal with one another lovingly like fathers and children.⁸⁹

Quentin Skinner seeks to answer a key critical question: does More endorse the Utopians' society as the best possible state, or are his own feelings ambiguous?⁹⁰ Skinner argues that More writes in the tradition of Cicero and his humanist disciples, who believe that true nobility is found in civic engagement and a commitment to work for the common good. Hythloday explains that only by abolishing private property is virtue achieved and the best possible commonwealth attained. If that commonwealth is unachievable it is our loss: "Doubtless we have no hope of ever living in the manner of the Utopians; but the

⁸⁸ Ibid., lxxvii.

⁸⁹ Ibid., lxxv.

⁹⁰ Quentin Skinner, "Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and the Language of Renaissance Humanism," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Antony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 147.

thought we are left with is that, for all that, theirs may nevertheless be the best state of a commonwealth.”⁹¹

In contrast to Skinner’s reading, Hannan Yoran insists on “the dark side” of More’s *Utopia*, such as the ruthless treatments of enemies, and the establishment of an oppressive surveillance state, where one cannot even choose the color of one’s clothes or where one sits at meals.⁹² Far from being humanist, the “quasi-totalitarian” Utopian society, Yoran claims, “produces subjects devoid of individuality, reflective capacity, and inwardness.”⁹³ For George Logan, this suppression and dreariness is the price that must be paid to eliminate acquisitiveness, vanity and pride.⁹⁴

We can turn to More’s formal choices as evidence that in most respects, the Utopians’ way of life is a far better alternative than the oppressive poverty that

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Yoran Hannan, “More’s Utopia and Erasmus’s No Place,” *English Literary Renaissance* 35.1 (2005): 7.

⁹³ Ibid., 8, 9.

⁹⁴ George M. Logan, “The Argument of Utopia,” in *Interpreting Thomas More’s Utopia*, ed. John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 30-32. Dominic Baker Smith suggests that we read *Utopia* as “a state of mind rather than a specified state of society”: More “unsettles familiar attitudes and prompts acts of political imagination.” Baker Smith, “Reading Utopia,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, ed. George M. Logan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 162. For Stephen Greenblatt, *Utopia* is an expression of internal conflict related to More’s own role in the public sphere. “More’s acute sense in his life of being ‘More,’ a made-up figure played on a stage, is manifested directly in his becoming just that: Morus, a character in an imaginary dialogue.” Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), 34. In *Utopia*, according to Greenblatt, role playing is precluded even as individuality is suppressed:

More’s work propounds communism less as a coherent economic program than as a weapon against certain tendencies in human nature: selfishness and pride, to be sure, but also that complex, self-conscious, theatrical accommodation to the world which we recognize as a characteristic mode of modern individuality. Utopia then is not only a brilliant attack on the social and economic injustices of early sixteenth-century England but a work of profound self-criticism, directed at the identity More had fashioned for himself and that he would play for increasing amounts of time, should he accept the proffered royal appointment. (37)

characterized More's own society. Krishan Kumar points out that in utopian writing, satire is used as a vehicle to point to better ways of living, optimal forms of social organization:

Satire holds together both negative (anti-utopian) and positive (utopian) elements. It criticizes, through ridicule and invective, its own times, while pointing—usually implicitly but sometimes explicitly—to alternative and better ways of living.⁹⁵

Kumar refers to the “Janus-faced character of satire, its encompassing of both negative and popular qualities.”⁹⁶ He cites *Utopia* and *Gulliver's Travels* as paradigmatic examples of the double-image presented by “the two faces of utopia.”⁹⁷

Brian Vickers argues that in both *Utopia* and *Gulliver's Travels*, representatives of remote worlds expose damning characteristics of English society. “The Houyhnhnms and the Utopians view us with amazement and puzzlement, and by use of this *tabula rasa* we are forced to take fresh stock of cynical or corrupt assumptions about the actual nature of life and society,” including pride, cupidity, malice and envy.⁹⁸ One difference is that More presents a fully-formed and positive view of an alternative society for our

⁹⁵ Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1987), 104. Kumar points out that “eventually the literary forms of utopia and anti-utopia were to pull these two elements apart, assigning them to separate genres or sub-genres. But the separation was never final or complete; and in the early period utopia and anti-utopia familiarly jostle each other within the same satirical form, often confusing the reader as to the author's true intent.” *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 104-05.

⁹⁸ Brian Vickers, “The Satiric Structure of *Gulliver's Travels* and More's *Utopia*,” in *The World of Jonathan Swift: Essays for the Tercentenary*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968), 246.

consideration, while Swift refrains from presenting an alternative system except by inference and indirection.⁹⁹ “Whereas More is a social reformer who uses satire, Swift is a satirist who hopes to vex society into reforming itself.”¹⁰⁰

Elizabeth McCutcheon observes that More proceeds by a process of “denied negations”: when the speaker seems to be looking at some new world, he describes the world closer to home.¹⁰¹ She counts 140 instances of *litotes* in the Latin text of *Utopia*.

As More uses litotes again and again, continuously affirming something by denying its opposite, the figure becomes, ultimately, a paradigm of the structure and method of the book as a whole, echoing, often in the briefest of syntactical units, the larger, paradoxical and double vision which will discover the best state of the commonwealth in an island called Noplace.¹⁰²

Litotes encompasses not only contradictions but alternatives in between extremes (non-white can allude to a range of colors, not just black).¹⁰³ It is no wonder that “in a larger sense we’re never quite sure where we stand” in More’s work.¹⁰⁴ Litotes also reflects “a

⁹⁹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth McCutcheon, “Denying the Contrary: More’s Use of Litotes in the *Utopia*, in *Thomas More, Utopia: a Revised Translation, Backgrounds, Criticism*, ed. Robert M. Adams, third edition (New York and London: Norton, 2011), 221.

¹⁰² Ibid., 222.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 223.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 224.

habit of mind, a tendency to see more than one side to a question.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, McCutcheon suggests, More invites us to weigh or try to balance different ideas and values.¹⁰⁶

Robert Elliott similarly comments on “the two sides of Utopia: the negative, which exposes in a humorous way the evils affecting the body politic; the positive, which provides a normative model to be imitated.”¹⁰⁷ Elliott situates More within the tradition of formal Roman verse satire, especially Lucan’s work.¹⁰⁸ More’s satire and values should not be confused with those of his characters; “the interesting and delicate critical question throughout Utopia is to determine where possible the relation between the two.”¹⁰⁹ Elliott argues, however, that in the main Hythloday describes a realm “designed to foster the good, and to suppress wickedness.”¹¹⁰ More seems to express exasperation that “with nothing save Reason to guide them the Utopians do this; and yet we Christian Englishmen...”¹¹¹

Like Hexter, Skinner, and Elliott, I favor the interpretation that in many if not most respects, the ethics of the Utopians exceeds the morality of the nominal Christians. I argue that, in particular, More intends us to praise the care that the Utopians provide to the ill, the elderly, and the infirm.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 226.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 30.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 35.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 41-42.

A Disability Reading of Utopia

My reading cannot definitively resolve the question of More's actual position regarding utopian society. However, I argue that the treatment of the ill and disabled appears to fall into a category of Erasmian ideals that More himself espoused. The Utopian regime is a model to be contrasted with the neglect from which the ill and the aged, like the poor, suffered in sixteenth-century England. I further argue that More's brief treatment of those with disability is important in the context of the Utopians' abolition of private property. Capital accumulation is not only fueled by pride but also by anxiety about whether one has the wherewithal to support one's self and one's family in time of illness or in old age:

Certainly in all kinds of living creatures either fear of lack doth cause covetousness and ravin, or in man only pride, which counteth it a glorious thing to pass and excel other in the superfluous and vain ostentation of things. The which kind of vice among the Utopians can have no place.

(64)

Hythloday describes his community as "the best" and possibly the only "commonwealth" because the state will take care of him and his family in misfortune (119). Thus, the Utopian can do without money and subordinate his private interest to the public good:

For in other countries who knoweth not that he shall starve for hunger, unless he make some several provision for himself, though the commonwealth flourish never so much in riches? And therefore he is compelled even of very necessity to have regard to himself rather than to the people, that is to say, to other[s]. Contrariwise, there where all things

be common to every man, it is not to be doubted that any man shall lack any thing necessary for his private uses, so that the common store, houses and barns, be sufficiently stored. For there nothing is distributed after a niggish sort, neither there is any poor man or beggar. And though no man have anything, yet every man is rich. For what can be more rich than to live joyfully and merrily, without all grief and pensiveness...(119)

In other societies the rich and powerful live in idle splendor while carters, smiths, and ploughmen are tormented with the apprehensions of want in their old age, but in Utopia “there is no less provision for them that were once labourers and be [are] now weak and impotent, than for them that do labour and take pain” (119). There is justice in Utopia that is lacking in other states:

For what justice is this, that ... poor labourers, carters, ironsmiths, carpenters, and ploughmen ... get so hard and poor a living and live so wretched and miserable a life, that the state and condition of the labouring beasts may seem much better and wealthier? ...But these silly poor wretches be [are] presently tormented with barren and unfruitful labour, and the remembrance of their poor, indigent, and beggarly old age killeth them up. For their daily wages is so little that it will not suffice for the same day, much less it yieldeth any overplus that may daily be laid up for the relief of old age. (120-21)

Hythloday argues that it is wrong to allow goldsmiths, and other idle gentlemen to earn fat fees without making “gentle provision” for the old age of poor laborers:

Is not this an unjust and an unkind public weal, which ... maketh no provision for poor ploughmen, colliers, labourers, carters, ironsmiths, and carpenters ... But after it hath abused the labours of their lusty and flowering age, at the last, when they be oppressed with old age and sickness, being needy, poor, and indigent of all things, then ... not remembering their so many and so great benefits, recompenseth and acquiteth them most unkindly with miserable death? (120).

By providing care for those who can no longer work the Utopians have done away with insatiable covetousness, eliminated much anxiety, and contributed to the general happiness that is the goal of their society.¹¹² Hythloday describes a society that provides for the needs of its citizens even when they are unproductive in order to avoid greed, maintain social order, and further the commutarian plan. Thus, More's decision to ignore the obvious question of resource limitations is not necessarily an oversight or indicative of a conviction that such concerns have no place in utopia. Utopians would argue that generous provision of medical care was just as pragmatic as Plato's resource-conscious restriction on treatment.

Like Hexter, David Wootton subscribes to the view that More admired the institutions of the Utopians and that Erasmian ideals permeate Utopia.¹¹³ Wootton argues

¹¹² J. C. Davis draws a distinction between Arcadians and Utopians. The former wish away "sociological and material scarcities" and devise a Land of Cockaigne. The latter, he argues, are more realistic: they seek to reconcile "limited satisfactions exposed to unlimited wants." The designers of Utopia adopt a strategy to maintain social order in light of the imperfections of human nature. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: a Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 56.

¹¹³ David Wootton, "Friendship Portrayed: A New Account of *Utopia*," *History Workshop Journal* 45 (1998): 30.

that its “peculiar characteristics—communism, equality, universal labor were not invented by More but presented to him by Erasmus.”¹¹⁴ More borrowed from Erasmus two adages: “Between friends all is common and friendship is equality.”¹¹⁵ Although Wootton does not discuss the Utopians’ attitude towards medical care in his essay, I would extend his thesis about the importance of friendship to the Utopian design. If Utopia is an extended community of friends, its members would logically offer generous care to each other.¹¹⁶

While the Utopians are not vegetarians, their attitude towards hunting reflects an interconnection with other living creatures and an aversion to brutality. They relegate the exercise of hunting to bondmen because it is “the lowest, vilest, and most abject” activity; “they kill beasts only for necessity” (81). The Utopians slaughter the animals that they use for food outside the city to promote hygiene and to protect the population from a barbarous sight that could habituate their citizens to cruelty:

For they permit not their free citizens to accustom themselves to the killing of beasts, through the use whereof they think clemency, the gentlest affection of our nature, by little and little to decay and perish.

Neither they suffer anything that is filthy, loathsome, or uncleanly to be

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹¹⁶ The prevalence of slavery in Utopia might seem to undermine the argument that this is a caring society, a community of friends. However, the Utopians limit the scope of slavery and mitigate its severity. The slave class consists of convicts, adulterers, prisoners of war taken in battle, and men condemned to death in other countries who are redeemed and kept in hard labor. Slavery is neither racial nor hereditary. Slavery represents an essential component of the criminal justice system. The enslavement of convicts deters crime because it is a severe punishment, yet as practiced in Utopia slavery offers the potential for rehabilitation because it is a temporary status.

brought into the city, lest the air, by the stench thereof infected and corrupt, should cause pestilent diseases. (64)

Just as today the Ethics of Care recognizes duties to non-human creatures,¹¹⁷ so too did the Utopians. I suggest that there is a close connection between the Utopians' concern about hunting and concern for the infirm and the elderly. The Utopians regard it as despicable to set dogs upon a vulnerable hare: so too, the ill, the disabled, and the elderly are vulnerable and require protection.

The Utopians reject the numbers calculus—cost benefit calculation of the greatest good for the greatest number. This society seeks to achieve the greater good by abolishing private property, eliminating want, relieving anxiety about illness and old age. In contrast to Plato who regards it as a waste of state resources to care for those who are no longer productive, the Utopians believe that by establishing the ultimate welfare state they will secure the prosperity and stability of their commonwealth. Care for the infirm and elderly is an integral aspect of Utopia given the communal values on which this society is founded.

Millenium Hall: An Experiment to Show that Care Ethics Makes Economic Sense

Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762) challenges the status of the individual with a defective body as helpless, unproductive, and invariably dependent. I begin with an overview of the scholarship on *Millenium Hall*. I then consider how Scott's haven addresses bodily defect and disability. First, the haven shelters "freaks," individuals who have been exploited and ridiculed because of their bodily difference.

¹¹⁷ Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan, *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

Second, individuals with physical impairments are engaged in dignified and productive work at the Hall. Scott's utopia inverts conventional expectations by showing that those with impairments can be productive. Finally, I consider Scott's companion novel, a *History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), in which Scott re-visits her argument that treating individuals with respect is not only ethical but economically productive. In both novels it pays to give care; the donor experiences both personal gratification and economic returns for his or her generosity.

Reading Millenium Hall as an Experiment in Social Arrangements Directed by Women

There has been substantial scholarship about Scott's feminotopia. While some critics read the novel as a description of proto-Lesbian relationships, other scholars have examined its institutional arrangements. Several scholars have commented on the hierarchical structure of the Hall, in which the founders exercise a close surveillance over the cleanliness and behavior of their charges. The novel has also been analyzed as an essay on philanthropy, an occupation which not only provided aid to the necessitous but also engaged the energies of educated women, especially those who were unmarried.

George Haggerty interprets the novel as a "lesbian narrative" that "insists on intimate relations between women as an alternative to the male-centered experience of marriage."¹¹⁸ Sheltered from abusive men, Miss Mancel and Mrs. Morgan establish an alternative society where they can control their own destiny. The Hall offers a haven from unhappy marriages, such as the "nauseating fondness" (85) to which Mr. Morgan

¹¹⁸ George E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 102.

subjected his wife. Sally O’Driscoll writes that the Hall not only rejects “the assumption of celibacy” for unmarried women but anticipates “a pattern of positive intimacy”; here women are choosing to live with each other as equals, rather than only “fleeing as refugees from heterosexuality.”¹¹⁹

Several critics have analyzed Scott’s utopia as a site where women restructure social institutions under conditions that are fundamentally hierarchical and conservative. Vincent Carretta describes the Hall as a strict hierarchy where “women are the earthly surrogates for God the Father because the intervening males are lacking.”¹²⁰ Order is maintained from the top down, as “the heads of society” exercise “continuous, vigilant supervision of those below them.”¹²¹ In particular, the supervising ladies assure that everything is clean and neat, because, as one of the old women says, “we cannot be healthy if we are not clean and neat” (40). Carretta notes that the presence of a male authority figure, Sir George Ellison, legitimizes the founders’ reforms: “The masculine perspective is essential to the conservative ideological message.”¹²²

Lisa Moore writes that far from threatening eighteenth-century culture, Scott’s novel enjoyed widespread popularity because it was fundamentally conservative.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Sally O’Driscoll, “Lesbian Criticism: Readings of *Millenium Hall*,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 22.1 (2003): 71.

¹²⁰ Vincent Carretta, “Utopia Limited: Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* and *The History of Sir George Ellison*,” in *Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* 5 (1992): 312.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 303.

¹²³ Lisa, Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

Millenium Hall went through four editions in the sixteen years following its publication in 1762.¹²⁴ According to Moore, the novel constructs

a particular form of power—bourgeois, domestic female virtue—as the legitimate property of the middle-class women characters of *Millenium Hall*. Defined in opposition to public, political, and particularly sexual power, this class-specific form of female agency sketches out the possibility of female homosocial institutions and practices that work with rather than against class and gender hierarchies.¹²⁵

As in Foucault's Panopticon, the women in charge set up a society characterized by surveillance.¹²⁶

Moore writes that *Millenium Hall* is a utopia because it represents a haven from brutal male sexual aggression:

Several of the characters come to live at *Millenium Hall* after having been victimized by male sexual power; female friendship is defined in opposition to the violence of male sexuality, as a refuge from it.¹²⁷

However, as James Cruise writes, it is not only men who are vicious and unprincipled but also wicked mother surrogates who perform poorly by the young women in their

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

charge.¹²⁸ “By exposing the vanity, invidiousness, and competition that characterize female relationships,” Scott seeks to impart an important lesson about the rarity of excellent female role models and the vulnerability of female autonomy.¹²⁹

Felicity Nussbaum argues that *Millenium Hall* “represents a respite from colonialism, from the travails of being a slave owner, and an alternative to the tyrannizing curiosity and rapacity of empire.”¹³⁰ The domestic enclosure of chaste, “stubbornly nonsexual” English gentlewomen poses an antithesis to the “teeming sexuality of empire and its torrid zones.”¹³¹ Nussbaum compares the “monsters” of *Millenium Hall* to the “exotic deformed, the emasculated eunuchs of the seraglio who, in turn, resemble the assembly of women both in their failure to engage in reproductive sex and in being sublimely agreeable, even in their deformity.”¹³²

Dorice Elliott, Ann Van Sant, and Johanna Smith examine the novel in the context of contemporary philanthropic projects. Elliott rejects characterizations of *Millenium Hall* as a lesbian novel, since this reading “reenacts domestic ideology’s definition of women by their sexuality.”¹³³ “The ladies of *Millenium Hall* are not wives or mothers; instead of graciously presiding over a home and family, they establish and

¹²⁸ James Cruise, “A House Divided: Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall*,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 35.3 (1995): 561.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 562.

¹³⁰ Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth Century English Narratives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 156.

¹³³ Dorice Williams Elliott, *The Angel out of the House: Philanthropy and Gender in the Nineteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 52.

manage a philanthropic community.”¹³⁴ Van Sant sees Scott’s utopia as an example of a “household family.” She points out that most women in the eighteenth century were not married; widows often served as heads of households.¹³⁵ Like other critics, Van Sant regards the disciplinary supervision exercised by the founders as indicative of sound household management.¹³⁶ Johanna Smith comments that the founders’ display of generosity is intended to encourage the “reverence” of the beneficiaries.¹³⁷ The founders establish a “gratitude economy”;¹³⁸ they are repaid by “the pleasure of being gratefully loved and esteemed” (63). This is not a leveling benefaction; rather, “a class hierarchy” operates in the Hall that assures that the inmates will be docile bodies carrying out the regime that has been established.¹³⁹

Liberating “Freaks” from Abusive Exploitation

The founders of *Millenium Hall* provide a haven for roughly two categories of individuals with disabilities—those with anomalous or “freakish” bodies, and those with functional impairments such as the lame, the crippled, and the infirm. Society enacts disability when it treats non-conforming bodies with derision. In the case of those whose bodies have unusual features or dimensions, disability is imposed under circumstances

¹³⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹³⁵ Ann Van Sant, “Historicizing Domestic Relations: Sarah Scott’s Use of the Household Family,” *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 17.3 (2005): 378-79.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 387.

¹³⁷ Johanna M. Smith, “Philanthropic Community in *Millenium Hall* and the York Ladies Committee,” *The Eighteenth Century* 36.3 (1995): 266-282, discussing Catherine Cappe’s report on her “Observations on Charity Schools, Female Friendly Societies and other Subjects” (1805), 269.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 273.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 256, 272.

where there is no functional or sensory impairment. Scott, like Jonathan Swift, excoriated the abusive display of freaks for profit at Bartholomew Fair and similar venues. Like More, Scott constructs a utopia where it is unthinkable to mock freaks for their bodies; thus, the freaks are cordoned off from the public gaze. When Ellison and his companion first come across the enclosure that shelters the freaks, they assume that this is a pen to hold wild animals. In fact it is a refuge for “those poor creatures who are rendered miserable from some natural deficiency or redundancy” (72).

The connection between slavery and disability is close,¹⁴⁰ as the alleged intellectual disability of the black man became a justification for his enslavement.¹⁴¹ Nussbaum has drawn attention to the interrelationship between bodily anomaly, race, and gender in eighteenth century fiction.¹⁴² Discourses of defect centered on bodies that are freakish, scarred, disabled, or differently colored. Women were regarded as “defective” males.”¹⁴³ Moore comments that women arguing for their own advancement tended to refer to themselves as “slaves.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ In his magisterial study, Orland Patterson characterizes slavery as “the permanent violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons.” Orland Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 13. Slavery establishes a “relation of domination” in which slaveholders annihilated people socially by first extracting them from meaningful personal relationships and communal identity and then incorporating them into the master’s world. Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Douglas C. Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, eds. Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 33

¹⁴² Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁴³ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

The identification of freaks with slaves in *Millenium Hall* fits into this discursive framework. The founders are appalled that the freaks have been confined to small rooms and kept from air and sunshine (73-74). The ladies have “purchased” these “slaves” from abusive masters in order to “enfranchise” them (73).

This miserable treatment of persons, to whom compassion should secure more than common indulgence, determined us to purchase these worst sort of slaves, and in this place we have five (74)

It is instructive to compare references to slavery in More’s *Utopia* and in *Millenium Hall*. In *Utopia*, bodily difference does not trigger slave status. The Utopians allow slavery as a consequence of war—a detested institution—and as an alternative to hanging—a relatively merciful punishment. Slavery figures in Scott’s novel, first, as a means to describe the horrific conditions that freaks endured at public fairs; and, second, to describe the relation of domination that oppresses wives in the most brutal marriages.

Scott invites the reader to deconstruct the expected hierarchy where the able-bodied (or, to use Garland Thomson’s term, the “normate”) is superior to freak, and man to beast. Miss Mancell comments on the cruelty of men who exploit animals in zoos and circuses for their own profit and amusement. Too often one sees

a man, from a vain desire to have in his possession the native of another climate and another country, reduce a fine and noble creature to misery, and confine him with narrative inclosures whose happiness consists in unbounded liberty... (71).

When a freak is shown in a side show as if he or she were an animal on display in a circus or zoo, there is a similar confinement of a creature who should enjoy unbounded

liberty. The “masters” who show freaks in public fairs are “wretches” (72). “They seem to think that being two or three feet taller gives them a right to make [the freaks] a property, and expose their unhappy forms to the contemptuous curiosity of the unthinking multitude” (72).¹⁴⁵

The masters not only humiliated those who were exhibited, but also deprived these “unfortunates” of their health (72-73). It is the abusive “monster mongers” who are the true “monsters” (73). Psychologically the freaks were so affected by “the horror they had conceived of being exhibited as public spectacles” that when they arrived at the hall, they “feared being seen by any stranger” and hid whenever they heard a stranger coming (75). The founders explain that the protective isolation of these individuals need not be permanent: by bringing other residents food and wine and helping with odd jobs, the freaks will familiarize themselves to their neighbors and gradually be able to mingle in the community without being a spectacle.

Both Moore and Elliott¹⁴⁶ claim that the women who have retired to Millenium Hall are portrayed as if they themselves were also freaks or monsters. Moore argues that

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of exploitation in the freak show, see Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 57. Spectators were lured to the tent by publicity that focused on the anomaly to be hawked. *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Elliott takes a critical view of the founders, even comparing them to the freaks: both are monstrous for their overweening vanity. Elliott, *Angel Out of the House*, 50. Elliott’s comparison misses the mark. In a freak show, the “monsters” are passive objects of display who cannot escape the public gaze; the female founders voluntarily retreated to the Hall. Scott advocates that women should discard vanity and coquettishness because such disabling traits restrict their potential development. Vanity is a universal failing; physical freaks are no different than “normal-bodied” humans in their false pride. *Millenium Hall* sends an important message that beauty is neither a guarantee of character or happiness. In fact, the nested narratives of Miss Mancel, Mrs. Morgan, Lady Mary Jones, Miss Selvyn, and Mrs. Harriet Trentham all illustrate the dangers that lurk in physical beauty. Scott’s own 1754 novel *Agreeable Ugliness* signified her own view that ugliness is not a moral vice; the ugly sister has a finer character than her sibling.

the women founders “are physically ‘monstrous,’” either because they are “marked and made ugly by disease or simply represented as sexless.”¹⁴⁷ Moore overstates her case. Scott presents Mrs. Trentham’s pock marks and the single status of the four founding ladies not as “freakishness,” but as an opportunity. The founders’ decision to establish their refuge is enabling both because they devote their energies to useful and innovative philanthropy (the positive aim) and because they escape the confinement of unwanted and potentially disastrous marriage (the negative to be avoided).¹⁴⁸

Challenging the Unemployability of the Disabled: Utilitarian Ethical Care

I argue that *Millenium Hall* should be read as a precursor of feminist versions of the Ethics of Care—but one that is structured so as to demonstrate that the disabled can be economically productive. Scott’s innovative utopia forges a community of human connectedness that incorporates disabilities and deformities. While this vision has its idyllic elements, it also reflects an eye to the pounds and the pence. The founders recognize the need for philanthropic ventures to balance the books and, if possible, turn a profit.

In *Millenium Hall*, a sisterhood of women organizes society on the basis of inchoate principles of Care Ethics. Miss Mancel explains:

¹⁴⁷ Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies*, 46.

¹⁴⁸ As Alessa Johns comments:

[Scott’s] Utopia is not a privileged person’s theoretical construct set into practice, but a cascading, reproductive movement in the face of personal pain and recognition of the pains of others. All of Scott’s utopian characters . . . make the best of bad situations by applying themselves benevolently in the economic, contractual realm” while carrying out Christian responsibilities.

Johns, *Women’s Utopias of the Eighteenth Century*, 108.

What I understand by society is a state of mutual confidence, reciprocal services and correspondent affections; where numbers are thus united, there will be a free communication of sentiments, and we shall then find speech, that peculiar blessing to man, a valuable gift indeed(111)

The characteristics of this society are that it provides a haven for the aged, the poor, and the deformed; that it abhors slavery; and that it values freedom of speech.

In *Utopia*, the governors watch over their community as if they were shepherds guarding their flock. Similarly, *Millenium Hall* begins with a similar pastoral vision. As Sir George Ellison and Lamont approach the Hall, they encounter an idyllic scene right out of Theocritus:

Our pleasure was not a little heightened to see, as the scene promised, in reality a shepherd watching a large flock of sheep. We continued motionless, listening to his music till a lamb straying from its fold demanded his care, and he laid aside his instrument to guide home the little wanderer. (56)

Pheasants, squirrels, hares, and wild turkeys frolic in the wood: they have “forgot all fear” in the shelter of the Hall; the Edenic scene anticipates the happy time when the lion shall lie down with the lamb (69).

However, Scott offers a different answer than More to the question of entitlement: how can we provide for all those who demand support given resource limits? How can we distinguish who are the deserving poor? Scott’s answer is that the poor can be made clean, productive, and grateful—in other words, deserving.

Scott wrote *Millenium Hall* at a time of growing impatience with the problem of poverty and the proliferation of beggars, many of whom represented themselves as maimed or disabled. The Seven Years War resulted in large numbers of maimed soldiers who were “allowed to beg in public as a reward for their sacrifice to king and country.”¹⁴⁹ Often the discharged soldiers displayed their wounds on the street. A popular ballad is illustrative:

The Soldier disbanded and forc'd to beg,
May talk of his Wars, and his Suff'rings so hard;
But tho' seamed o'er with Scars, and with never a Leg,
His Wants we neglect, nor his Courage regard ...
But if you have Money
All Honours done ye,
A Coward's a hero, a Whore is a Saint.¹⁵⁰

Far from regarding beggars as objects of sympathy, Joshua Gee complained that those who were maimed sought to exploit their deformity:

Great numbers of sturdy Beggars, loose and vagrant Persons, infest the Nation, but no place more than the City of London and parts adjacent. If any person is born with any defect or Deformity, or maimed by Fire or other Casualty, or any inveterate Distemper, which renders them miserable Objects, their way is open to London, where they have free liberty of

¹⁴⁹ Carol Watts, *The Cultural Work of Empire: The Seven Years' War and the Imagining of the Shandean State* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2007), 67-68. This global conflict occurred between 1756-1763.

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Watts, *Cultural Work*, 68.

showing their nauseous sights to terrify People, and force them to give money to get rid of them; and those vagrants have for many years past moved out of several parts of the three Kingdoms, and taken their station in this Metropolis... ¹⁵¹

One pamphlet writer wrote that although Londoners should feel compassion when they see “an Object over-run with Sores, or afflicted in any visible manner which are indeed sometimes the Effect of Art,” a passer-by is inclined to walk by and ignore this unsightly “Object.”¹⁵² John Clayton complained that the streets were overrun by “idle Vagrants, sturdy Beggars, and such wretched Objects as provoke Resentment rather than kindle Compassion.”¹⁵³ Lady Mary Wortley Montague was favorably impressed by Rotterdam, where “one is not shocked with those loathsome cripples so common in London, nor teased with the importunities of idle fellows and wenches.” ¹⁵⁴ Apart from the nuisance factor, Londoners feared that the vagrants were potential carriers of smallpox.¹⁵⁵ As Sarah Jordan comments, the bodies of the poor were viewed with revulsion: “disgustingly

¹⁵¹ Joshua Gee, *The Trade and Navigation of Great Britain Considered* (London, 1755) 37 (1729). Joseph Massie lamented that notwithstanding the many laws that were passed to provide for the poor, instead of achieving the result of reducing beggars, the number of beggars gives the impression that “we have not any Poor’s Laws” (sic) to provide relief. Joseph Massie, *Considerations relating to the Poor and the Poor’s-Laws of England* (London: T. Payne, 1758), 50.

¹⁵² Anon., *A Proposal for Relief and Punishment of Vagrants Particularly such as frequent the Streets and Public Places of Resort* (London: E. Amey, 1748), 2-3.

¹⁵³ John Clayton, *Friendly Advice to the Poor; Written and Publish’d at the Request of the Late and Present Officers of the Town of Manchester* (Manchester: Jos. Harrop, 1755), 3.

¹⁵⁴ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Turkish Embassy Letters* (New York: Little Brown, 1994), 4.

¹⁵⁵ Ann Van Sant, *Eighteenth Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 18.

appetitive, dirty, and uncontainable. Conversely, bodily attributes considered grotesque were seen as signs of idleness, and therefore of undeservingness.”¹⁵⁶

The institution of the workhouse emerged as a means to provide severe discipline and to force all who were physically able to work. Dorothy Marshall writes that the Poor were despised for having caused their own misery: “the Poor were poor because they would neither work nor save, and because they were at once lazy and extravagant.”¹⁵⁷ The poor were divided into three categories: those physically unable to work because they were lame, blind, or otherwise incapacitated; children; and the unemployed able-bodied poor. Among numerous ideas for reducing the poor rolls, Lawrence Braddon proposed to build three large institutions to confine the poor: one for the sick and lame, one for the aged, and one for children under three years old.¹⁵⁸ He suggested that “any Person, past Twelve Years of Age, that had neither Eye, nor Hand, and but one Foot, by the motion of that Foot, twelve Hours in a Day, and without much force, should get, six Pence per Day.”¹⁵⁹

Ladies’ philanthropies offered an alternative to work houses, charitable projects which were intended to reform prostitutes and otherwise transform the poor. As Johanna

¹⁵⁶ Sarah Jordan, “From Grotesque Bodies to Useful Hands: Idleness, Industry, and the Laboring Class,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25.3 (2001): 62.

¹⁵⁷ Dorothy Marshall, *The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Social and Administrative History* (London: Routledge, 1926), 14.

¹⁵⁸ Laurence Braddon, “Corporation Humbly Propos’d, For Relieving, Reforming, and Employing the Poor. Herein There Will Be More Private Gain to the Subscribers, and More Publick Good to Great Britain, than by All Unparliamentary Subscriptions Already Taken. In a Letter to A Justice of the Peace of Middlesex” (London: Thomas Warner, 1720).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

Smith points out, the sponsors of Magdalen House and the Philanthropic Society for the Poor intended that their results be seen: those who had been reformed were displayed “as evidence of the institution’s utility.”¹⁶⁰ As Vant Sant argues, the goal of such philanthropy was to combine “humanity and policy—humanity to the individual, policy for society.”¹⁶¹

The residents of Millenium Hall manifest that they are “deserving poor” worthy of the assistance that they receive. The founders exercise a strict surveillance over their charges as they reform their behavior.

[The ladies] watch with so careful an eye over the conduct of these young people as proves of much greater service to them than the money they bestow. They kindly, but strongly, reprehend the first error, and guard them by the most prudent admonitions against a repetition of their fault.
(167)

The Hall challenges the view that the deformed and disabled were inevitably dirty, disgusting, and unproductive. The founders offer incentives for cleanliness and decorum:

By little presents they shew their approbation of those who behave well, always proportioning their gifts to the merits of the person; which are therefore looked upon as the most honourable testimony of their conduct, and are treasured up as valuable marks of distinction. This encouragement

¹⁶⁰ Johanna Smith, “Philanthropic Community,” 269; Van Sant, *Eighteenth Century Sensibility*, 21.

¹⁶¹ Van Sant, *Eighteen Century Sensibility*, 23.

has great influence, and makes them vie with each other in endeavours to excel in sobriety, cleanliness, meekness and industry. (167)

Far from being a drag on the economy, many residents of the Hall work in a profitable factory. Scott thus subverts the conventional wisdom that the poor inevitably drain local resources. As Elliott observes:

Parliamentary acts in 1722 and 1723 made it easier for parishes to establish workhouses, and to deny relief to those who refused to enter them. But the workhouses were expensive to maintain, did not turn the profit they were expected to produce, and proved extremely unpopular with the poor who were supposed to be served in them. The carpet and rug manufacture established by the Millenium Hall ladies is thus put forward as an explicit alternative to the workhouse. Not only does it provide employment for the poor of all ages within their own parish, but it has “enrich[ed] the country round about” and, since the fourth year, “has much more than paid its expenses.”¹⁶²

Scott employs several strategies to convey the employability of the maimed and disabled. First, those who are impaired will be more productive workers because they are thankful for a job (and perhaps, in the case of women, unable to marry). Because the housekeeper’s hand is maimed:

what had hitherto been an impediment was a stronger recommendation than the good character I had from my last place; and I am sure I have

¹⁶² Elliott, *Angel Out of the House*, 45.

reason to value these distorted fingers more than ever any one did the handsomest hands that nature ever made (168).

As the housekeeper explains, the rest of the household help is also physically or functionally impaired:

The cook cannot walk without crutches, the kitchen maid has but one eye, the dairy made is almost stone-deaf, and the house maid has but one hand; and yet, perhaps, there is no family where the business is better done; for gratitude, and a conviction that this is the only house into which we can be received we exert ourselves to the utmost. (169)

Second, the founders astutely structure work assignments in a manner that is appropriate to the residents' abilities. When the old ladies came to the Hall, they were half dead with hunger, and had insufficient food to keep body and soul together (65). Now twelve old women help each other to thrive in dyads of reciprocity: "Susan is lame, so she spins for Rachel; and Rachel cleans Susan's house, and does such things for her as she cannot do for herself" (66). Aware that Jane is stone deaf and "would have a melancholy life if she was to be always spinning and knitting, seeing other people talking," the ladies busy her "in making broths and caudles, and such things, for all the sick poor in this and the next parish" (66). Musical harmony accompanies the pursuits of this harmonious society, as a lame boy plays the French horn and a blind youth plays the bassoon (63). Elderly women are not idle; rather they raise the small children of large families. Charity fulfills the divine command

to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to relieve, the prisoner and to take care of the sick. Those who have not an inheritance that enables them to

do this are commanded to labour in order to obtain the means to relieve those who are incapable of gaining the necessities of life. (244)

Third, the founders' philanthropy is reciprocated, in that the poor are thankful for the ladies' beneficence:

“But do not think the poor can make no adequate return. The greatest pleasure this world can give us is that of being beloved, but how can we expect to obtain love without deserving it? Did you ever see anyone that was not fond of a dog that fondled him? Is it then possible to be insensible to the affection of a human being?” (113)

The metaphor is notable; in this hierarchical domain, the residents belong on an entirely different plane—almost to a different species—from the founders. However, despite the wide gap in socioeconomic class, the founders benefit from the care they provide because the poor give them love and gratitude in exchange for food and shelter.

This utopia presents such a broad spectrum of anomalies that, as in *Gulliver's Travels*, there are more odd bodies than bodies that we would recognize as “normal.” *Millenium Hall* invites the reader to consider that deformity and dependency are such common conditions that all of us may at some time have need of the type of caregiving one finds in Scott's utopia. Scott anticipates the agenda of today's activists who seek to universalize the condition of disability and acceptance of mutual dependency.¹⁶³ Scott also anticipates the attention that care ethicists give to cycles of dependency, in which

¹⁶³ Irving Zola, “Toward the Necessary Universalizing of a Disability Policy,” *Milbank Quarterly* 83.4 (2005): 1; Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 22.

carers and cared for reverse roles: over time, those with the greatest ability can become dependent and require the aide of others.

Utilitarian Caregiving in The History of Sir George Ellison: Here, It's a "Guy Thing"

In *The History of Sir George Ellison*,¹⁶⁴ Scott revisits the issue of caregiving; she emphasizes the potential for reciprocity and economic return. The novel is situated in two locations, Jamaica, where George Ellison insists on treating his slaves with great humanity, and England, where Ellison is a philanthropist of boundless generosity. We see many of the same themes as in *Millenium Hall*: caregiving is both a Christian duty and a sound investment; generosity benefits both the giver and the recipient; everyone may become dependent at some time in his or her life.

Ellison assures that his slaves on his plantation in Jamaica are fed well, taught to read, and encouraged in their religious devotion. He houses the slaves in comfortable cottages, and allows them sufficient leisure to cultivate their gardens. He refuses to allow his slaves to be beaten:

The thing which had chiefly hurt him during his abode in Jamaica was the cruelty exercised on one part of mankind; as if the difference of complexion excluded them from the human race, or indeed as if their not being human could be an excuse for making them wretched (10).

¹⁶⁴Sarah Scott, *The History of Sir George Ellison*, ed. Betty Rizzo (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press 1992). All page references are to this edition and indicated in parentheses in text.

Ellison tells his mean-spirited wife, who resists his merciful plan,¹⁶⁵ that blacks are their “fellow creatures,” despite differences “in the complexion or turn of features” (13):

When you and I are laid in the grave, our lowest black slave will be as great as we are: in the next world, perhaps much greater, the present difference is merely adventitious not natural. (13).

However, Ellison’s plantation is not color-blind; for example, he does not permit unions between those “of different complexions, the connection appearing indelicate and almost unnatural” (147).¹⁶⁶

As in *Millenium Hall*, a benevolent regime increases worker productivity and therefore brings Ellison prosperity: “By plentiful food, and a comfortable life, Mr. Ellison’s negroes became stronger than any in the island; the natural strength of those who belonged to other masters, being consumed by hardships and hunger” (17). As Alfred Lutz observes, Ellison’s benevolence “both legitimates and causes his economic success.”¹⁶⁷ Ellison

made it the object of his constant endeavors to prevail with all his acquaintance to treat their negroes with humanity; but his arguments might possibly have proved ineffectual, had not the good conduct of his own

¹⁶⁵ Lisa Moore points out that Ellison’s first wife seeks to hold him in a kind of bondage, as if he were a slave. Moore, *Dangerous Intimacies*, 40.

¹⁶⁶ As Felicity Nussbaum observes, this novel “reflects the contradiction that complexion is ephemeral and arbitrary, on the one hand, or on the other, that complexion explicitly reveals inherent properties as the nation continues to define the parameters of the racial and gendered complexion of British identity vis a vis colonial others.” *Limits of the Human*, 143.

¹⁶⁷ Alfred Lutz, “Commercial Capitalism, Classical Republicanism, and the Man of Sensibility in The History of Sir George Ellison, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39.3 (1999): 557-74.

slaves, their more than common industry and dispatch of business, shewed the advantages arising from it to their master. (34)

After his wife obligingly dies, Ellison returns to England. Here he continues the same benevolence as on his Jamaican plantation, for example, by allowing his laborers time off, even in harvest season, to tend to their own land (50). When his cousin Sir William Ellison twits him about his social improvements, Ellison explains that his generosity gives him great satisfaction:

The good which necessarily follows the indulgence of our inclinations should excite the laborers' gratitude to God, not to us, since it is owing to the wise and gracious order of his Providence that we cannot gratify ourselves without in some degree benefitting others (51).

Ellison decides to reform poor relief by assuming the burden of providing for the poor in the parish in return for half of the monies previously collected for poor relief. Ellison relocates the poor into a row of cottages, and sets the poor men to cultivate their gardens and grow enough for their subsistence (66).

Ellison sets those who are disabled to gainful employment. The women who had been on the poor rolls are sent to nurse needy children, attend the sick, and spin and knit clothing (66). Ellison rejects his cousin's suggestions that Ellison hire additional footmen; such an equipage would have no utility unless the maimed and the blind could be employed in that capacity (81). Ellison's own garden is tended by "skipping children and hobbling old men and women" (82). When the "worn out fellows" strain to lift a stone or log, they call out to their grandchildren for assistance, and are proud of the joint

accomplishment (83). This regime not only provides employment but also sows the seeds of future industry in the young:

I look on idleness as so great a curse, that I think I make old age happy in employing it; the decrepit by this means preserve their independency, and while they see they are of some use, they are less sensible of their own infirmities; they even admire their own powers, when they behold the beauties which they have had share in producing; and I verily believe, for that reason, think my garden the finest thing the world ever contained since the destruction of paradise. (83-84).

When a short-sighted gardener fails in his work, Ellison allows the labor to continue, lest he mortify the old man with a sense of his deficiency. The scheme gives Ellison “great amusement” (83), and he certainly does not begrudge the expense. Ellison considers “everything I possess, my fortune, my talents, and my time, as given me in trust, to be expended in the service of the Giver. I am but a steward, and must render an exact account of all that is delivered in my hands” (84). Sir William finds himself sufficiently moved to add his own money to enhance Ellison’s charities.

Ellison assumes the role of the patron of the local community. As Carretta points out:

Ellison’s wealth, ultimately derived from slavery, enables him to act as God’s surrogate, bringing good out of evil, acting behind the scenes to manipulate the lower orders for their own welfare, and constantly scrutinizing the actions of all who come within the range of his influence. And his virtue is self-rewarding: his acts of benevolence allow him to

control his temporarily frustrated passion for the former Miss Allin, now married to Dr. Tunstall... .The lower orders give the higher “refined pleasure” and “in accepting their bounty, ... seem to confer an obligation, and do in reality confer a benefit.”¹⁶⁸

When Sir William goes insane, Ellison hires the wife of a paralyzed clergyman to watch over Sir William because Ellison had observed the good care that the woman provides to her own husband. Sir William’s carriage is now used not only to provide excursions for the lunatic but also to give outings to the invalid clergyman that improves his health. Ellison regularly visits debtors’ prisons to release men from debt; he hires one of these young men, who is highly educated, to serve as tutor to his brother’s children. He undertakes the duties of guardianship when one of his neighbors, Blackburn, entrusts Ellison with the upbringing of his grandchildren.

Ellison’s own disinterested generosity is repaid in turn, albeit not always immediately. To Ellison’s immense disappointment, a beautiful young woman rejects his marriage proposal, and instead marries Dr. Tunstall, to whom she was previously betrothed. When her husband turns to drink, Ellison discreetly and anonymously supports Mrs. Tunstall and her children by donating needed funds through the agency of Mrs. Tunstall’s father. After Ellison becomes dangerously ill from a fall and infection, Mrs. Tunstall nurses him back to health. Caregiver and cared-for have exchanged places, an illustration of the dependency that even the most affluent experience at some time in their

¹⁶⁸ Carretta, “Utopia Limited,” 319.

lives. Like the United Way slogan that emphasizes that anyone can need the help of charity, individuals from all classes, even the very rich, can become dependent.

Late in the novel, after Dr. Tunstall's death, Ellison is finally able to marry the woman he has always loved. The couple is blessed with their own children, and Ellison raises Mrs. Tunstall's daughter as his own. Past kindness is again repaid: Young Blackburn, Ellison's ward, marries Ellison's pock-marked step-daughter. Because young Blackburn was educated under Ellison's guardianship to value inner merit, he willingly marries a young woman whose disfigurement would have repelled other suitors.

The poor and the disabled who receive charity from Ellison and his second wife are experimental subjects for a utopian philanthropic project, as were the slaves on Ellison's Jamaican plantation. Nussbaum points out that when Scott invited chimney sweeps for a garden party each May day, she referred to them as her "sable guests."¹⁶⁹ As Carretta comments, the future that Scott imagines in *Millenium Hall*:

...must be a Utopia of confines because restrictions and boundaries define the conservative concept of a benevolent hierarchy overseen by a loving patriarch that Scott accepts as necessary to the happiness and order of human existence. By circumscribing her female voices with authoritative masculine discourse and locating them within a familiar hierarchy of rank, Scott makes her feminist call for economic and educational equality that would alter social realities appear "truly moral and sensible" even to eighteenth-century male readers. The images of confinement that pervade

¹⁶⁹ Nussbaum, *Limits of the Human* 145.

Scott's bipartite depiction of a brave new world recuperating an idealized and feminized aristocracy may strike a twentieth-century reader as oppressive, but Scott employs them to represent the desirable delimitations essential for the implementation of her vision of utopia limited.¹⁷⁰

Scholars have deplored pervasive surveillance in *Millenium Hall* and in *Utopia* as a repugnant aspect inconsistent with a supposed ideal society. However, against the backdrop of late eighteenth century England, philanthropists had to show that their charges were clean, disciplined, and orderly. What Carretta calls "utopia limited" may be the best that can be achieved—perhaps we can even label it *optimo rei publicae*.

In conclusion, two of the texts that I have discussed, *Squire's Tale* and *Millenium Hall*, promote feminotopias as an ideal of care giving. These two texts resemble each other in that women are in charge of a hospital or haven. The context is gendered because Canacee must heal wounds inflicted by the formel's deceitful mate; the founders of *Millenium Hall* are themselves victims of male treachery and abuse. However, in *Sir George Ellison*, the eponymous hero displays a commitment to caregiving as deep and consistent as the philanthropy of the founders of *Millenium Hall*.

Chloe Houston has commented that "ambiguity and irony have always been a feature of the utopian mode of discourse."¹⁷¹ Just as the Houyhnhnms dominate the Yahoos in *Gulliver's Travels*, More's Utopians exploit the Zapoletes and their slaves.

¹⁷⁰ Carretta, "Utopia Limited," 323.

¹⁷¹ Chloe Houston, "Utopia, Dystopia, or Anti-utopia? *Gulliver's Travels* and the Utopian Mode of Discourse," *Utopian Studies* 18.3 (2007): 425.

There are discordant and even dystopic elements for those who belong to disfavored categories. For Houston, this ambiguity raises a question of genre:

There is a distinction between those critics who take utopian to mean idealistic or perfectionist about human society and perfectibility, and those for whom the deciding factor is the nature of its engagement with the utopian tradition or with a particular utopian text, usually (indeed, almost exclusively) More's *Utopia*.¹⁷²

I have argued, however, that even though the many aspects of Utopia fail to address an idealistic or perfectionist state, More stands behind the care that the Utopians provide to individuals with disabilities. The reader is invited to consider whether extreme generosity in caregiving—at first blush a wildly impractical proposal—may yet be justified as a means of discouraging hoarding and contributing to individual happiness. More appears to have anticipated the concept of a generous welfare system—the safety net—that today represents an ideal (realized to varying degrees) in several European countries.

In contrast to More, Scott's utopic fiction expressly deals with dollars and cents concerns by arguing that philanthropy pays. *Millenium Hall* offers a better alternative to work houses—more satisfying for the residents, more profitable for the community. When properly “managed,” many individuals with disabilities can engage in productive work that turns a profit. Even those who are too infirm to do useful work can “pay back” their benefactors through psychic return.

¹⁷² Ibid., 426. Houston reads *Gulliver's Travels* not as “utopian in the sense of idealistic or optimistic,” because it is also “anti-utopian, or dystopian;” *Gulliver's Travels* is a self-reflexive satire on utopian form. Ibid.

Today there is a stark contrast between care ethicists and utilitarians regarding the appropriateness of applying a financial calculus to caring for individuals with disabilities. In particular, Martha Nussbaum has been criticized for her disregard of resource constraints in her visionary call to provide health care and other core human capabilities to individuals of disabilities across national frontiers. More's Utopians regard care for the impaired as a community right and responsibility: generous care is not a waste, but a foundation of a society that in which goods are shared and the necessity to hoard is eliminated. Scott valiantly tries to reconcile care ethics and utilitarian perspectives by arguing that philanthropy is economically viable. These utopian writers suggest that care for the infirm can be reconciled with the interests of the greater good—these objectives are not inevitably in conflict.

In contrast, the salient characteristic of dystopic societies, as discussed in Chapter three, is that utilitarian principles are applied to exploit marginal individuals for the good of the state. In these dystopias, economic calculus demands neglect, sacrifice, and abuse to achieve the prosperity and happiness of the greater number.

CHAPTER 3: Sacrificing the Vulnerable and Dispensable Body

In the utopian texts that I examined in the last chapter, sympathetic care was provided to individuals with disabilities. In *Utopia* and *Millenium Hall*, care of individuals with disabilities is congruent with the political and economic interests of the state. As I argued in Chapter one, it is characteristic of utopian society that individuals receive appropriate medical care and no one's body is exploited to provide greater advantage to more privileged members of society. This respect for persons may be grounded on a variety of ethical principles, including the Ethics of Care or justice principles, such as Immanuel Kant's dictum that people matter as ends in themselves rather than in relation to their ability to benefit society. In contrast, in dystopian societies, the bodies of vulnerable individuals may be sacrificed for "the greater good."

Here, I consider two dystopic texts, one involving a neglected child and the other involving the "dispensable" older members of the community—Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas: Variations on a theme by William James" (1973)¹ and Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit* (2009).² These works illustrate an important aspect of the treatment of disability in dystopia: the subordination of individuals for the sake of privileged others who benefit from their sacrifice. In Le Guin's short story, a child is locked in a cellar and encumbered with physical and emotional disabilities as the price of

¹ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (New York: Harper Row, 1975). All quotations are from this edition and will be presented in parentheses in text.

² Ninni Holqvist, *The Unit*, trans. Marlaine Delargy (New York, Other Press, 2008) (2006). All quotations are from this edition and will be presented in parentheses in text.

the continuation of this “utopian” community. The child is a scapegoat³—whether (s)he was selected because of mental defect or whether mistreatment has created an impairment that becomes an excuse to continue its incarceration. In *The Unit*, when adults who have no children reach the age of fifty or sixty (depending on gender), they are required to enter a “Reserve Unit” where they are required to donate organs—because this subpopulation is expendable.

These fictions are different in length and genre but they share a common theme. Both authors, I argue, send a message about a downward spiral in which society adopts a numbers calculus in the way that it evaluates an individual’s right to medical treatment. Gregory Claeys defines dystopia as an anti-utopia, a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil or negative social and political developments “have the upper hand.”⁴ In contrast to science fiction, which is fantasy “pure and simple,” there are no extraordinary or utterly unrealistic features in dystopic texts.⁵ We cannot dismiss these stories on the basis that the horrors that they describe are technically implausible: Le Guin’s story could have been set before the Industrial Revolution, and the technology to harvest organs has existed for decades.

As a threshold matter, it is important to point out that disability narratives encompass a variety of stories. “Omelas” may be regarded as an abuse narrative. The fact that the child in “Omelas” is consigned to the cellar represents a type of disability

³ A scapegoat is “one who is blamed for the sins of others.” *OED*.

⁴ Gregory Claeys, “The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley, Orwell,” *The Cambridge Companion to Utopia*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010): 107.

⁵ *Ibid.*

narrative in which those with disabilities are forgotten or isolated or neglected. In Holmqvist's *The Unit* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (discussed in Chapter four), disability is created by medical intervention which redistributes organs to more privileged members of society. Margaret Atwood recognizes the connection between "Omelas" and organ donation narratives:

Ursula K. Le Guin has a short story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," in which the happiness of the many depends absolutely on the arranged unhappiness of the few, and *Never Let Me Go* could be read as a sister text. The children of Hailsham are human sacrifices, offered up on the altar of improved health for the population at large.⁶

In her new essay collection, *In Other Worlds*, Atwood designs a flying outfit for "Kidney Boy," a twenty-first century super hero who can replicate body parts:

One of the recent—though minor—superheroes I've come across is named Kidney Boy. I picked him up on the Internet micro-blogging site Twitter, and, intrigued by his nom de plume, I offered to design a superhero outfit for him, complete with special powers and charm-word. In real life, Kidney Boy has a somewhat geeky alter ego—he's a nephrologist, or kidney doctor. He told me he would love to have a magic power, one that would allow him to create new kidneys that would be perfect matches for his dialysis patients. But if he couldn't have that, he said, could he please have "the flying-around thing"? In the event, I provided everything he

⁶ Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2011), 171.

wanted: an outfit with a purple kidney helmet; a magic scalpel that would never fail; a magic word—Nephro-Change-O!—that would not only create the desired kidneys but cause them to slide effortlessly into his patients without even an incision; and, to top it all off, “the flying-around thing.”⁷

Le Guin and Holmqvist challenge the viability of utilitarian justifications for subordinating the interests of the few for those of the many. I analyze these dystopias in the context of the principles of justice outlined in Chapter one, including John Rawls’s *Theory of Justice* and Kant’s *Categorical Imperative*.

Le Guin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”: The Abused Child in the Cellar

Le Guin describes her short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” as a fictional consideration of “the dilemma of the American conscience” (275). Le Guin takes off from the question posed by William James:

[I]f the hypothesis were offered us of a world in which Messrs. Fourier’s and Bellamy’s and Morris’s utopias should all be outdone, and millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torment, what except a specific and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse arose within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its

⁷ Ibid., 31.

enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain? (qtd. in Le Guin 275)

Le Guin invites us to consider a pseudo “ideal society” in which the residents are perfectly and permanently happy. The price of this communal bliss is that one child remains locked in a cellar, suffering from starvation, sores, mental infirmity, and emotional neglect. The community tolerates this sacrifice in the conviction that the neglect of this single child is the necessary condition to the city’s prosperity.

Because the child in the cellar is sacrificed ostensibly for the greater good, I begin my discussion with a review of René Girard’s Scapegoat Theory. I next consider the principal source of “Omelas,” Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” in which a scapegoat is sacrificed in an annual rite for the benefit of the community. I discuss the significant changes that Le Guin makes from this source story, including, most importantly, the selection of an impaired body as the scapegoat. I then analyze “Omelas” by applying leading justice theories that examine the appropriateness of sacrifice of the one for the many, including the utilitarian calculus implicated in the so-called Necessity Defense, and Kantian ethics.

Scapegoat Theory

Girard describes the phenomenon of sacrificial killing—the collective murder of a victim whose death expels the violence that would otherwise jeopardize the social order. Girard’s scapegoat theory begins from the premise that human beings act based on mimetic rivalry:⁸ “the subject desires the object because the rival desires it.”⁹ Mimetic

⁸ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1977) (1972), 146.

rivalries give rise to escalating violence and the social order threatens to disintegrate.¹⁰ A scapegoat serves as a focal point to stem the violence. “The function of sacrifice,” Girard explains, “is to quell violence within the community and to prevent conflicts from erupting.”¹¹ The Greek term pharmikon means both poison and its antidote. The sacrificial victim is identified not only as the cause of the violence that besets the community but also its cure:¹²

[A]ny community that has fallen prey to violence or has been stricken by some overwhelming catastrophe hurls itself blindly into the search for a scapegoat. Its members instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of.¹³

In a new phase of mimeticism, community members’ imitate each other in the vilification of the scapegoat.¹⁴ The surrogate victim becomes the target of all differences in the community, allowing the rest of the community to join against him or her in a

⁹ Ibid., 183.

¹⁰ Ibid., 26.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹² Ibid., 95.

¹³ Ibid., 79-80.

¹⁴ René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. (Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) (1982), 165.

communal bloodletting.¹⁵ The killing “of a single individual is substituted for the threatening spiral of reciprocal violence.”¹⁶

Victim selection is key to the success of the scapegoat ritual. Although it is often alleged that the victim is guilty of some transgression, this allegation is a pretext to justify the selection of a victim.¹⁷ The scapegoat need not actually be guilty of any crime or wrongdoing to unify the community; what matters is the community’s perception. Because the ritual has succeeded in quelling violence, it is subject to repetition. Another victim must be found who resembles the earlier victim(s) so that the community can continue to protect itself against divisive violence and achieve harmony. It is important that the scapegoat not appear too similar to other members of the community; if the victim is a full member of the community, his or her death would trigger a new round of violence initiated by those who identified the victim as one of their own.¹⁸ Signs of “otherness”—stigmas such as strange appearance, strange behavior, or strange origins—provide evidence of difference by distancing the victim from other members of the community.¹⁹ In addition, scapegoats may be selected from marginal subpopulations, such as prisoners of war, slaves, and children often become sacrificial victims.²⁰ Whole groups of human beings have been scapegoated in modern history, including “the Jews,

¹⁵ Girard, *Violence*, 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 287.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 271.

the aristocrats, the bourgeois, the faithful of such and such a religion, and miscreants of all kinds.”²¹ The “crucial” point is that the selection of the victim is “arbitrary”²²—the individual is perceived as guilty by the community in the absence of objective justification. What matters to the community is “the murder of somebody, no matter whom—a figure, chosen as it were, at random.”²³ Thus, the choice of the victim is “random,” or “arbitrary,” or undeserved, whether the selection was based on a visible sign or the scapegoat’s marginal status.

Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery”: Community Welfare and the Random Scapegoat

“The Lottery,” a much anthologized short story, begins with a description of an annual gathering of the community on the village green.²⁴ Based on the title and the innocuous opening paragraphs, most readers assume that the story is going to describe a lottery for a desired consumer good like a washing machine. Far from it. A member of the village hierarchy, Mr. Summers, pulls names from a hat. In the first phase of the lottery, the male head of each household draws pieces of paper from a black box. Once he draws a slip with an “X,” each member of that unfortunate family draws until another slip with an “X” is extracted. At that point, each member of the community—adults, children, and even members of the scapegoat’s own family—set upon the hapless victim and stone him or her to death. Tessie Hutchinson, a woman who arrives late to the ritual

²¹ René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundations of the World*, trans. Stephen Benn and Michael Matteer (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1987), 129.

²² Girard, *Violence*, 257.

²³ *Ibid.*, 218.

²⁴ Shirley Jackson, *The Lottery and Other Stories* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982) (1948), 291.

because she was doing the dishes, draws the fatal slip and protests that the selection “isn’t fair.”²⁵ Instead of protecting her, her husband tells her to “shut up.”²⁶ There are members of the community who protest the rationality of the annual rite, which has been abandoned by other communities. However, the rite continues in this town. As the aptly-named “Mr. Warner” explains, the stoning is essential to the community’s prosperity:

“Pack of crazy fools,” he said. “Listening to the young folks, nothing’s good enough for them. Next thing you know, they’ll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work anymore, live that way for a while. Used to be a saying about ‘Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon.’ First thing you know, we’d all be eating stewed chickweed and acorns. There’s always been a lottery.”²⁷

Shirley Jackson sends a warning against complacent acquiescence to authority, the kind of indifferent acceptance of injustice that led Germans to turn away from Nazi atrocities including the scapegoating of Jews, gypsies, and other despised groups. As in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Kafka’s “The Penal Colony,” and other dystopic fiction, public execution serves hegemonic purposes. Children are invited to participate so that the next generation is primed to continue the rite of execution.²⁸ Executions typically

²⁵ Ibid., 302.

²⁶ Ibid., 299.

²⁷ Ibid., 297.

²⁸ “The Lottery” has been read as a critique of the death penalty. See Earl F. Martin, “Tessie Hutchinson and The American System of Capital Punishment,” 59 *Maryland Law Review* 553 (2000). The percentage of convicted murderers who are executed is so low and the outcome is so dependent on the vagaries of local prosecution that the death penalty can be described as a lottery, even though concededly the condemned murderer has committed a heinous crime. Defenders of the death penalty argue that capital punishment is

escalate during times of violence; applying Girard's theory, one could argue that collective murder of the condemned is intended to quell a cycle of escalating violence.

Much scholarly debate has centered on the selection of Tessie as scapegoat. Gayle Whittier reads the story as a critique of misogyny: Tessie became the scapegoat because she was an uncooperative dissident and a scold.²⁹ In a Marxist interpretation, Peter Kosenko argues that the purpose of the lottery is to purge the social body of all resistance and thereby perpetuate the capitalist regime. Tessie's tardiness and rebelliousness set her up as a likely victim.³⁰

While these feminist and Marxist readings accurately describe community bias, there is no textual indication that Tessie's selection was fixed in advance. In fact, the text makes a point of underlining the randomness of selection of the scapegoat. Anyone is eligible to be the victim, regardless of age, gender, marital status, health status, or occupation, although there is an encouragement to fertility in the second phase of selection (individuals in larger families have a lesser risk of drawing the black "X").³¹ By setting her story in an anywhere town, Jackson in effect tells us that anyone of us anywhere could have been chosen if we happen to reside in a society where individuals are marked for sacrifice whether by lottery, physical sign, or tribal stigma. As Girard

required to achieve retribution for the community and deter further murders. Abolitionists argue that this most extreme form of punishment reflects scapegoating. See Donald L. Bechle, "What's Guilt (or Deterrence) Got to Do with It: The Death Penalty, Ritual, and Mimetic Violence," 38 *William and Mary Law Review* 487 (1997).

²⁹ Gayle Whittier, "The Lottery as Misogynist Parable," *Women's Studies* 18.4 (1991): 353-66.

³⁰ Peter Kosenko, "A Reading of Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" *New Orleans Review* 12.1 (1985): 27.

³¹ Richard H. Williams, "For the Record: A Critique of the Sampling Plan Used in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 79.3 (1979): 543-44.

points out, “the crucial fact is that the choice of the victim is arbitrary.”³²The story invites us to perceive that fairness in process does not necessarily equate to justice: even though the deck was *not* stacked against Tessie Hutchinson, the outcome is unjust. The community is either convinced that one of its number must be killed to maintain its prosperity or too cowed and passive to resist.

“Omelas”: Community Welfare and the Disabled Scapegoat

As is the case in “The Lottery,” the beginning of “Omelas” is a tease. At first blush, Omelas is a not only a successful community but a utopia. In fact, Le Guin refers to the Omelans as “utopians”—happy and joyous—who live an existence that resembles a “fairy tale” (280) There are great parks and public buildings, the bells peal, the swallows soar. Le Guin purports to be unable to offer an adequate description of the community. After expressing this inability to express the indescribable —“How is one to tell” this story of utopia (277)—Le Guin asks the reader to fill in the blanks to complete the description. Since each of us has our own vision of happiness, Le Guin invites us to supply our own utopian technology, sex, and drugs. There could be a lot of technology, or none of it: “it doesn’t matter. As you like it” (279). “Perhaps it would be best if you imagined it as your own fancy bids ... for I certainly cannot suit you all” (278). However each reader chooses to fill in the blanks, the point of emphasis is the happiness, “the joy” of the city (280). For experienced readers of dystopian texts, Le Guin’s emphasis on happiness is a dead giveaway that the society is dangerously flawed: happiness was the stated goal for example of Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*. The

³² Ibid., 257.

residents enjoy their “drooz” (279), a neologism that not only combines drugs and booze but evokes Huxley’s “soma.” The fact that “Omelas” takes place during a “festival of summer” is double-edged; typically this is the time of the year when communities seek renewal through sacrifice,³³ as in “The Lottery.”

The social *novum* is that the happiness of the residents of Omelas rests on the isolation, even the incarceration, of a small child in a cellar. Here again it is left to the reader to supply details—we must imagine the gender of the child, the location of the cellar, and the reasons for selection. It is not clear whether the scapegoat was already feeble-minded when selected, or has degenerated through neglect:

In a basement under one of the beautiful public buildings of Omelas, or perhaps in the cellar of one of its spacious private homes, there is a room. It has one locked door, and no window. ... In the room a child is sitting. It could be a boy or a girl. It looks about six, but actually is nearly ten. It is feeble-minded. Perhaps it was born defective, or perhaps it has become imbecile through fear, malnutrition, and neglect. (281)

The cellarized child is a disabled subject—or object—whether (s)he was born simple or has become an “imbecile” through isolation. Disability is not necessarily congenital: it is often acquired as a result of war, injury, accident, the progression of disease, or old age. Charles Dickens leaves open the nature and origins of Tiny Tim’s invalid status in *The Christmas Carol*; Captain Ahab’s injury is of course the result of his encounter with the whale. The cellarized child is a victim of physical and emotional

³³ See Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion, A New Abridgement* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), passim.

abuse whether confinement created or merely exacerbated its mental infirmity. As David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder explain in *Narrative Prosthesis*, disabled characters are often locked away in literary narratives even as they are often “locked away or sequestered from view.”³⁴ There is a long tradition of discarding defective children in dystopic texts. In Plato’s *Republic*, defective children were disposed of in secret.³⁵ In Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, defective “unbabies” are also eliminated.³⁶ We do not know the reasons or the background for the child’s selection in “Omelas”—as in “The Lottery,” the indefiniteness underscores that all are potentially vulnerable. Regardless of whether the child was already impaired at the time of selection, the child’s degenerated mental, physical, and emotional condition becomes a reason to continue its incarceration.

The child is an othered “it”; because its gender is unspecified, the narrator utilizes the article pronoun used for objects. Moreover, the child is objectified as if a sacrificial animal or magical talisman that assures the greater good. The child is starved, deprived of medical attention, and—in a most degrading and unconscionable abuse—left to sit all day in its own excrement:

³⁴ David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 166. Among other examples, Mitchell and Snyder discuss the treatment of Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mockingbird*; after he has stabbed his mother with scissors, Radley is locked in the house his entire life, and becomes a recluse too socially maladjusted to exit from his “prison.” *Ibid.*, 171-72.

³⁵ “The offspring of the inferior, and any of those of the other sort who are born defective, they will properly dispose of in secret, so that no one will know what has become of them. That is the condition of preserving the purity of the guardians’ breed.” Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Loeb Classics, 1930), 460c.

³⁶ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, (New York: Anchor, 1986), 44, 112.

It is so thin there are no calves to its legs; its belly protrudes; it lives on a half-bowl of corn meal and grease a day. It is naked. Its buttocks and thighs are a mass of festered sores, as it sits in its own excrement continually. (281)

The mop in the cellar gives off a foul smell and frightens the child (281). The child sits picking its nose and playing with its toes or genitals (281). When other youngsters visit the cellar, they stare at the child with “frightened, disgusted eyes,” and may even “kick the child” to make it stand up (281). Because of the lack of human contact, speech has disintegrated. At first the child, who remembers the sunlight and its mother’s voice, begs to be released: “Please let me out. I will be good” (281). Since no one answers, the child rarely speaks, and now only whines (281).

As in “The Lottery,” there are community residents who question the sacrifice, but as a whole they decide that the sacrifice is a necessary means to the welfare of the greater number:

Some of them understand why, and some do not, but they all understand that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weathers of their skies, depend wholly on this child’s abominable misery. (282)

Many of the young people have qualms about the neglect of the scapegoat. Eventually, however, the young accept the status quo, and rationalize that it is too late to “save” the child:

They may brood over it for weeks or years. But as time goes on they begin to realize that even if the child could be released, it would not get much good of its freedom: a little vague pleasure of warmth and food, no doubt, but little more. It is too degraded and imbecile to know any real joy. It has been afraid too long ever to be free of fear. Its habits are too uncouth for it to respond to humane treatment. Indeed, after so long it would probably be wretched without walls about it to protect it, and darkness for its eyes, and its own excrement to sit in. Their tears at the bitter injustice dry when they begin to perceive the terrible justice of reality, and to accept it. (282-83)

Le Guin challenges us to identify with the people of Omelas, to see that they are “not simple folk” (277), they are “not barbarians,” they are “not less complex than us” (278). Surely it is “credible” that they could become convinced that the happiness of the city depends on the sacrifice of a single individual (283). In fact, the narrator posits that it is unlikely that some residents of the community will have the moral courage to walk away from Omelas: “But there is one more thing to tell, and this is quite incredible” (283). A few brave souls depart from the orderly city and go into a great unknown:

They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas. (284)

The destination of those who walk away is left so indeterminate that the reality of the destination is as uncertain as the existence of Omelas. Those who walk away abandon an

unjust society with no assurance that their next society will offer them the same quantity of happiness or security or even that their new world will not be as problematic as the old.

Critical Readings of Omelas” as an Indictment of Exploitation of the Poor

Several scholars read the story as an indictment of current social problems and in particular the gap between rich and poor. Jerre Collins writes that Le Guin alludes to relations between the advanced West and the “backward” nations of the third world, or between privileged and unprivileged classes within the West.³⁷ Under a socioeconomic reading, the lower classes or the resources of the third world are exploited for the benefit of the third world. Collins suggests that that the child can also be read in the context of the religious story of the “suffering servant,” the one who suffers to ensure the happiness of the many.³⁸ Collins observes that the suffering servant story has been canonized in Christian redemption theology.³⁹ Collins argues that the “ur stories” of the suffering servant and the exploited underclass are related:

The same ur-story (or ur-ur-story) is involved: exploiting the peoples of the third world, or one’s indigenous unprivileged groups (blacks, women,

³⁷ Jerre Collins, “Leaving Omelas: Questions of Faith and Understanding,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 27.4 (1990): 525.

³⁸ *Isaiah* 52.13-53.12. Another potential source for the child in the cellar is the abused five year old in Dostoevsky’s *Brothers’ Karamazov* whom Ivan describes to Alyosha in a debate about the injustice of God. Le Guin said that she had read *Brothers Karamazov* decades earlier, but did not recall or consciously base “Omelas” on that precedent. Bruce Brandt, “Two Additional Precedents for Ursula Le Guin’s ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,’” *ANQ* 16.3 (2000): 51.

³⁹ Brandt notes that unlike the Suffering Servant, the child in the cellar is not rewarded and her suffering is not redemptive. *Ibid.*, 54-55.

the poor generally) is homologous to being redeemed by the “suffering servant.”⁴⁰

Logan Hill also offers a socioeconomic reading. Le Guin was painfully aware of racial discrimination and economic inequalities; the prosperity of America has been built on the backs of poor minorities. Hill argues that Le Guin was required to disguise her unabashedly moral intentions through a compelling story, since no one wants to be forced a didactic message.⁴¹ Barbara Bennett compares the child in the cellar to those children who work under conditions of hardship overseas or who suffer great neglect.⁴²

A second group of scholars focuses on the morality of those who walk away from Omelas versus those who stay. Elizabeth Cummins argues the majority view, that Le Guin privileges the walkers over those who stay in Omelas.⁴³ Cummins writes that the rhetorical questions that Le Guin poses in effect ask the reader “What trade-off will you accept for making people happy?”⁴⁴ Surely the great beauty of a quilt made by an African-American slave woman now hanging in a museum does not justify the terrible toll of slavery.⁴⁵ As Cummins notes, Le Guin wrote during the course of an Oxfam

⁴⁰ Collins, “Leaving Omelas,” 531. Charlotte Spivack also reads the story as a warning against “a prosperity built upon the suffering of others.” Spivack, *Ursula K. Le Guin* (Boston: Twayne, 1984), 84.

⁴¹ Logan Hill, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” in *Short Stories for Students* (Detroit: Gale, 1997).

⁴² Barbara Bennett, “Through Ecofeminist Eyes: Le Guin’s ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,’” *English Journal* 94.6 (2005): 67.

⁴³ Elizabeth Cummins, “Praise then Creation Unfinished”: Response to Kenneth M. Roemer, *Utopian Studies*, 2.1-2 (1991): 19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

protest against hunger: “No house worth living in has for its cornerstone the hunger of those who built it.”⁴⁶ Cummins compares “Omelas” to the dilemma faced by those who left America at the time of the Vietnam War because they believed that the war was unjust, and repatriated to Canada.⁴⁷ Shoshana Knapp draws attention to Le Guin’s narrative strategy.⁴⁸ We are “lectured, seduced, and importuned by an author” who wants to make us hear the sounds and see the colors of the summer festival at Omelas.⁴⁹ The grammar of the story “traps” the reader subtly: “we are stuck in the story, to be set free only when a few of the people of Omelas stride out of the land and story, headed for a country that the narrator cannot describe and that, consequently, may not “exist.””⁵⁰ Knapp argues that the Omelans face a moral choice—to stay or to go—as diabolical as William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice*—in which the Nazis force a mother to choose which of her children shall survive.⁵¹

Linda Simon examines the relationship between William James’s philosophy and Le Guin’s with a view to questioning most readers’ intuitive reaction that those who walk

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁸ Shoshana Knapp, “The Morality of Creation: Dostoevsky and William James in Le Guin’s Omelas,” *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 15.1 (1985): 75.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁵¹ Ibid., 79.

away from Omelas are to be congratulated.⁵² Simon suggests that William James would not have approved of their ethics:

The ones who walk away from Omelas do not enact a philosophical revolution among those who stay. They give no reasons for their defection, and they propose no alternative action for the community. They do not succeed in freeing the child. In fact, the fate of the child is the same, whether they live in Omelas or not. ...[T]hese men and women may be seeking their own version of utopia, a place where they can be true to their personal code of ethics. James, however, condemns that project. When an individual acts alone, “subject to no higher judge,” he or she “inhabits a *moral solitude*”.... Read in the context of James’s ideas on ethics, the Omelians who leave do not make a morally defensible decision. Rather, he would have them awaken the “strenuous mood” that he believed lies in every heart, to allow the hideous bargain to arouse their “wilder passions,” to infect Omelas with new ideas—about possibility, risk-taking, and courage; and to never lose their faith in one another.⁵³

Peter Fitting similarly argues that neither the Omelians who stay nor those who walk away make the right choice: the right choice is to stay and fight to end the child’s suffering.”⁵⁴

⁵² Linda Simon, “William James’s Lost Soul’s in Ursula Le Guin’s Utopia,” *Philosophy and Literature* 28.1 (2004): 89.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 101 quoting from William James’s essay, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life.”

⁵⁴ Peter Fitting, “Readers and Responsibility: A Reply to Ken Roemer,” *Utopian Studies* 2.1-2 (1991): 23, 29.

Kenneth Roemer offers a more controversial reading sympathetic to those who remain in Omelas. Roemer argues that to properly interpret “Omelas,” “we need to change our question from what is it about?, to, how is it told?, and focus on the first person narrator.”⁵⁵ Roemer draws attention to unusual aspects of the narrative voice, including, first, the narrator’s confession that she cannot invent a utopia that will suit all her readers and, second, her admission that there is much that she does not know about Omelas. Roemer argues that “the simultaneous coexistence of happiness, suffering and departure, can be related to a third significant characteristic of the narrative voice: she does not make forced attempts to privilege any one phase of her psychomyth over the others.”⁵⁶ Roemer contests the majority view that Le Guin privileges those who walk away from Omelas.

...Who is to say who has more moral responsibility and courage: those who know and stay, allowing their knowledge to drive them forward toward what the narrator describes as grand acts of generosity and beauty, or those who know and leave, sacrificing their happiness for a journey into the unknown?⁵⁷

In contrast to Roemer, I argue that Le Guin disapproves of those who remain in Omelas. Le Guin adopts vague description as a device to compel the reader to supply details to offer the starkest possible contrast between the idyllic life of the Omelans and

⁵⁵ Kenneth Roemer, “The Talking Porcupine Liberates Utopia: Le Guin’s “Omelas” as Pretext to the Dance, *Utopian Studies* 2.1-2 (1991): 7. See also Kenneth M. Roemer, “Dissensus Achieved, Apologies Offered, and a Hinge Proclaimed: A Response to the Responses,” *Utopian Studies* 2.1-2 (1991): 59.

⁵⁶ Roemer, “Talking Porcupine,” 13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

the extreme misery of the child. *Occupatio* or “*occultatio*” is, of course, a teasing rhetorical device that draws attention to attributes by pretending to be unable to describe them.

A trope of purported non-description, *occupatio* usually states that either the object to be described is beyond words, the demands of narrative economy prohibit lengthy description, or the rhetorician seeking to praise lacks the ability to string together appropriate words of description. While avowedly avoiding description, *occupatio* traditionally ends up describing at length...⁵⁸

Le Guin recognizes that one reader’s utopia is another’s dystopia : Disneyland and Las Vegas are paradise destinations for many Americans but certainly do not suit all. Le Guin, I argue, can only set up the injustice of founding a community on another’s suffering by describing a utopia that represents the individual reader’s personal ideal.

In the second part of the story, the narrator offers specific details such as that the room where the ten year old is kept is dark, dank, smelly, and locked; the child is starving, lonely, imbecilic; he or she is stared at, abused, and desperate to be released from its torment. However, the narrator invites the reader to imagine the child’s gender and to ponder the background of its confinement and abandonment. The purpose, or at least the effect, is to compel the reader to supply the details that will make the child appear most pathetic and abused.

⁵⁸ Alan Ambrisco, “It Lyth Nat in My Tonge, “Occupatio and Otherness in the *Squire’s Tale*,” *The Chaucer Review* 38.3 (2004): 209.

In an echo of Warner's "warning" in "The Lottery" that without the stoning," the crops won't grow, the Omelans convince themselves that all aspects of the happiness of their city depend on the scapegoat. Through ironic use of "know" and "understand," the narrator conveys the falsity of rationalization:

They all *know* it has to be there. Some of them understand why, and some do not, but *all understand* that their happiness, the beauty of their city, the tenderness of their friendships, the health of their children, the wisdom of their scholars, the skill of their makers, even the abundance of their harvest and the kindly weather of their skies, depend wholly on this child's abominable misery. (282) (emphasis supplied)

Surely it is irresponsible nonsense for the Omelans to rationalize that "*even* the kindly weather of their skies" depends on the suffering of the scapegoat. It is ironic, and oxymoronic, for the Omelans to claim that they *know* that a child's suffering is linked to their own supposed "compassion":

They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion...they know that if the wretched child were not there sniveling in the dark, the other one, the flute player could make no joyful music as the young riders line up in their beauty for the race in the sunlight for the first morning of summer. (283)

Of course there is no comparison between the lack of freedom of the child in the cellar and the liberty of other youngsters, who eat heartily, enjoy their families, got to school, play games, and attend festivals. There are many epistemic gaps: we don't know how the Omelans came to the conclusion that a scapegoat was needed to maintain their prosperity;

why this child was chosen; how it came to be imbecilic; what happened to the mother; whether the child ages and, if so, how a replacement scapegoat will be found. What we do *know* is that there is no logical justification for making the child a scapegoat; rationalizations to use the vulnerable for the happiness of the many are based on improbable or illogical deductive leaps.

In the third part of the story, the narrator again returns to *occupatio* and conditional language as she describes those who have the courage to walk away from Omelas. The destination of the walkers is uncertain: “The place they go toward is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist.” (284). The narrator leaves unspecified whether the walkers will find a more just society and, if so, how it will be structured. The ones who walk away have simply concluded that what has been left is intolerable. Readings such as Roemer’s that palliate the passivity of those who remain in Omelas must be rejected.

Le Guin’s Critique of Discrimination against the Disabled “Other”

“Omelas” resembles “The Lottery” in its condemnation of scapegoating and those who passively acquiesce in this unjust sacrifice of a single victim to bear a community’s burdens. However, “Omelas” differs from “The Lottery,” first, because the scapegoat is not killed and second, because the scapegoat is a child with disabilities. One can argue that the continuing torture to which the child is subject, a sentence of life imprisonment in a hole without care, represents a fate worse than death. While Tessie’s suffering will last only a few minutes, the child will suffer throughout his or her life.

There are many factors that can determine the selection of the scapegoat but typically the person has a marginal status. Girard writes: “ritual victims tend to be drawn

from categories that are neither outside nor inside the community, but marginalized to it.”⁵⁹ This borderline status is “crucial” to the success of the sacrifice, because the victim must “polarize the aggressive tendencies of the community.”⁶⁰ Thus “the victim must be neither too familiar to the community nor too foreign to it.”⁶¹ Sometimes the sacrificial victim is one who is distinguished from the rest of the community because he is “exceptionally beautiful and free of all blemish.”⁶² Alternatively, society may select the scapegoat from among “the lame, the blind, the crippled.”⁶³ The child in “Omelas” could have become the ritual scapegoat because (s)he bore a sign of disability such as lameness or imbecility, or the child could have been selected because of its marginal socioeconomic status.

Ana Zablah argues that the cellarized child illustrates Girard’s scapegoat theory; the Omelans convince themselves that the virtual incarceration of the child is justified much as Americans transform the poor into objects of hatred to appease a guilty conscience.⁶⁴ Le Guin’s victim is “a camouflage for the American dilemma,” and represents “a member of the disenfranchised minority.”⁶⁵ The Omelans are blameworthy because they have sacrificed someone who is in every respect innocent. Rebecca Adams

⁵⁹ Girard, *Violence*, 271.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Girard, *Scapegoat*, 32.

⁶³ Ibid., 31-32.

⁶⁴ Ana Zablah, “In America as in Omelas,” *Carceral Notebooks* 2.153 (2006): 134.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

also applies Girard's theory to "Omelas": Le Guin "problematizes the concept of utopia" that is almost literally built upon a "scapegoat victim."⁶⁶ Adams offers a feminist reading, by gendering the narrator as feminine (presumably because the author is female). Adams reads "Omelas" alongside Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which describes in detail a gynocratic alternative society. Adams reads "Omelas" as Le Guin's advocacy of "the non-violent, non-patriarchal character of a true utopia," a utopia which was inherently feminist."⁶⁷ As the child of a distinguished anthropologist, Le Guin was steeped in scapegoating, sacrifice myth, and blood violence.⁶⁸ Adams argues that those who walk away from Omelas reject the sacrificial economy and exit to the possibility of a feminine utopia, "an imaginary place beyond the reach of past speculations associated with happiness and suffering."⁶⁹

I argue that to understand the role of disability in this moral fable, we should apply Ato Quayson's insight that, among other "uses," disabled characters are used in literature as "a null or moral neutral" to test the moral conscience of other individual.⁷⁰ Thus the child in the cellar represents a testing of the morality of Omelans. The narrator sarcastically assures us that the citizens in Omelas do not feel guilt for their abuse of the disabled child: "One thing *I know* there is none of in Omelas is guilt" (emphasis supplied)

⁶⁶ Rebecca Adams, "Narrative Voice and Unimaginability in the Utopian 'Feminine' in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," *Utopian Studies* 21.1-2 (1991): 36.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁰ Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 46.

(279). In fact, when children between eight and twelve initially visit the child in the cellar, they are “shocked and sickened”; they express “anger” and “outrage” (282). Their resistance is quashed once they realize that there is “nothing they can do” (282). If the child were “cleaned and fed and comforted” instantly “all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas” would be destroyed (282). In exchange for “one single, small improvement,” they would “throw away the happiness of thousands for the chance of the happiness of one: that would be to let guilt in the walls indeed” (282). There is an ironic association between alleviation of the child’s “abominable misery” and an act of community guilt (283). Ultimately, we should judge the Omelans as blameworthy because they have sacrificed someone who is in every respect innocent.

I argue, further, that Le Guin’s critique of the abuse of the disabled child has implications that extend beyond the specific act of sacrifice described in the narrative. “Omelas” presents an extreme hypothetical fact pattern. It represents (and responds to) a philosophical thought experiment. However, the victimization of a child who was born with or who has acquired physical or mental disabilities reflects the prejudice of disablism. As Girard explains, society is repelled by those with abnormalities:

Sickness, madness, genetic deformities, accidental injuries, and even disabilities in general tend to polarize prosecutors. We need only look around or within to understand the universality. Even today people cannot control a momentary recoil from physical abnormality. ... The handicapped are subject to discriminatory measures that make them

victims, out of all proportion to the extent to which their presence disturbs the ease of social exchange.⁷¹

I argue that in “Omelas,” Le Guin draws attention to social neglect of one who is an “other” or “alien” in physical infirmity and mental status. Gregory Benford observes that in science fiction (“SF”), the otherness of the “unknowable alien” is a matter of degree, as humans cannot imagine those that are “utterly alien.”⁷² As Carl Malmgren writes,

Alien actants explore the limitations of being human and suggest the possibility of transcending those limits. They examine what we are not, in so doing intimating what we could become.⁷³

Although this story literally falls outside the confines of the SF genre because there is no technological novum, the cellarized child is stigmatized and exiled from mainstream society.

Throughout her work, Le Guin has expressed concern about neglect, in society and in literature, of those who are “other.” Le Guin writes that “when science fiction uses its limitless range of symbol and metaphor novelistically, with the subject at the center, it can show us who we are, and where we are, and what choices face us, with unsurpassed clarity, and with a great and troubling beauty.”⁷⁴ In her essay “American SF and the

⁷¹ Girard, *Scapegoat*, 18.

⁷² Gregory Benford, “Effing the Ineffable,” in *Aliens: the Anthropology of Science Fiction*, ed. George E. Slusser and Eric S. Rabin (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987): 14.

⁷³ Carl D. Malmgren, “Self and Other in SF: Alien Encounters,” *Science Fiction Studies* 20.1 (1993): 17.

⁷⁴ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. Susan Wood (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1979), 118.

Other,” Le Guin considers the relationship between one individual and another who is different in bodily form from one’s self:⁷⁵

The question involved here is the question of The Other—the being who is different from yourself. This being can be different from you in its sex; or in its annual income; or in its way of speaking and dressing and doing things; or in the color of its skin, *or the number of its legs and heads*. In other words, there is the sexual Alien, and the social Alien, and the cultural Alien, and finally the racial Alien.⁷⁶ (emphasis supplied)

Le Guin has drawn attention to those who are marginalized in her work, because so often SF ignores the poor and other minorities:

Where are the poor, the people who work hard and go to bed hungry? Are they ever persons, in SF? No. They appear as vast anonymous masses fleeing from giant slime-globules from the Chicago sewers, or dying off by the billion from pollution or radiation, or as faceless armies being led to battle by generals and statesmen...⁷⁷

Le Guin complains that SF writers have also neglected the “53% of the brotherhood of man” that is “the sisterhood of women.”⁷⁸ Le Guin calls for an end to this “brainless

⁷⁵ Laurie Langbauer notes that Le Guin’s father, the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, had a complex relationship with Ishi, a Yanan Indian “wild man,” who walked out of the woods sick and starving in 1911. Kroeber helped Ishi obtain a janitorial position at the Berkeley museum of anthropology, itself a sort of display. Langbauer, “Ethics and Theory: Suffering Children in Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Le Guin,” *ELH* 75.1 (2008), 101-02.

⁷⁶ Ursula K. Le Guin, “American SF and the Other,” *Science Fiction Studies* 2.3 (1975): 208.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 208-09.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 210.

regressivism” in favor of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.”⁷⁹ When we deny affinity with another human being, we have in effect alienated ourselves:

If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself—as men have done to women, and class has done to class, and nation has done to nation—you may hate it, or deify it; but in either case you have denied its spiritual equality, and its human reality. You have made it into a thing, to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship. And thus you have fatally impoverished your own reality.

You have, in fact, alienated yourself.⁸⁰

Le Guin challenges the reader, first, to see the child as a human rather than an object and, second, to affirm our own humanity in their response to the child’s neglect. By failing to treat the child as an equal, by denying it liberty, and by withholding fraternity, the residents of Omelas have “alienated” themselves and failed Le Guin’s criteria of humanity. They have failed not only to care for the child and treat him or her as an end with intrinsic value, they have treated the child as something other than a person.

“Omelas” as an Example of the Injustice of the Utilitarian Calculus

In the framework for assessing analyzing individuals with disability in utopian texts that I proposed in Chapter one, I argued that in utopia, no stigma attached to bodily

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

difference; those with disabilities receive appropriate treatment; and no one's body is exploited for the benefit of more privileged others. In "Omelas," these criteria are violated as in the other dystopias examined in this project—Holmqvist's *The Unit*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*.

In effect, the citizens of "Omelas" invoke a "necessity defense" to justify the torture of the small child: the welfare of the society depends on the misery of a single dispensable victim. In the landmark legal case, *Regina v. Dudley Stephens* (1884), a captain and his crew were stranded in the open ocean on a life boat, with insufficient food and water. They decided to kill a seventeen year old boy who was already ill and likely to die, and thereby spare healthier men and those with families to support. By eating the boy's organs and drinking his blood, the crew survived until they were rescued. On their return to England, the crew were arrested and charged with murder—despite unarguable demonstration that all of the crew would have died but for the killing and the cannibalism. The court rejected the numbers calculus inherent in the necessity defense: a special panel determined that it was never lawful to kill another human being so that others could live longer.⁸¹ By exercise of the royal prerogative of mercy, their punishment was reduced to six months imprisonment without hard labor.

In contrast, in a recent case involving Siamese twins (*In re Mary and Jodie*, 2000), an English appeals court determined that necessity required that the weaker of two conjoined Siamese twins be sacrificed to improve the prospects for survival of her

⁸¹ *R. v. Dudley and Stephens* [1884] 14 Q.B.D. 273 (U.K.)

sister.⁸² Over the objection of the parents, the court ruled that it was “the lesser of two evils” to kill Mary, the weaker twin, who was unlikely to live long in any event, to improve Jodie’s chances. The court observed that in cases involving the interests of minors, the “best interest of the child” was the touchstone. The court ruled that this was the very rare case when the necessity defense warranted murder, and expressly applied utilitarian principles.⁸³

The different outcome of these decisions may be explained by a variety of factors—the dates of the decisions, horror of cannibalism, lack of sympathy with killing ordered to save the lives of adult males, and divergence in views of the presiding judges about the necessity defense. It is significant that the necessity claim was factually undisputed in both the lifeboat case and the medical scenario posed by the case involving Siamese twins. Dystopic fiction raises the nightmare possibility that sacrificial deaths may be ordered by the majority on spurious grounds, motivated by prejudice, myth, superstition, tradition, or tyranny. Both the child voyeurs who observe the child in the cellar and the independent-minded Omelans who decide to walk away raise doubts about why the child has to suffer. These objections are silenced by the majority and the abuse continues.

Even if the citizens of Omelas were right that the sacrifice of the child was necessary for the happiness of the many, the decision to sacrifice the child is still unjust.

⁸² [Case of Mary and Jodie], Re A (Children) (Conjoined Twins: Surgical Separation) [2000], 4 All E.R. 961 (C.A. Civ.) (U.K.)

⁸³ For a discussion of the case, see Charles Lugosi, “Playing God: Mary Must Die So Jodie May Live Longer,” *Issues in Law and Medicine* 17 (2001): 123.

For Kant, the morality of an act is determined by application of moral principles and not by consequential utilitarian calculus. Kant's categorical imperative requires an individual to "Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only."⁸⁴ We should treat each other as moral equals who deserve the same treatment we ourselves would want. We have a moral duty to do no harm to others, a duty of non-maleficence. As a perfect duty, the duty of non-maleficence is inviolate. Just as we have a duty to our own liberty and integrity, we have a corresponding right to our own liberty and bodily integrity.⁸⁵ A utilitarian decision to sacrifice the one even where necessary to secure the survival or happiness of the many violates Kantian imperatives. Kant rejected the happiness principle as incompatible with morality:

But the principle of one's own happiness is the most objectionable of all. This is not merely because it is false and because experience contradicts the supposition that well-being is always proportional to good conduct, nor yet because this principle contributes nothing to the establishment of morality, inasmuch as it is a very different thing to making a man happy from making him good, and to make him prudent and farsighted for his own advantage is far from making him virtuous. Rather, it is because this principle supports morality with incentives which undermine it and

⁸⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis Beck 4.287, 47 (Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill, 1959).

⁸⁵ John Arras & Robert Hunt, "Ethical Theory in the Medical Context," in *Bioethics: Health care Law and Ethics* (Barry R. Furrow et al., eds., 3rd ed. 1997 & Supp. 1999): 5-26.

destroy all its sublimity, for it puts the motives to virtue and those to vice in the same class, teaching us only to make a better calculation while obliterating the specific difference between them.⁸⁶

The sacrifice of the child fails as well the justice test of John Rawls. As discussed in Chapter one, those who establish justice principles in an original position, where they do not know whether they and their families will be advantaged or disadvantaged, would under many circumstances allow for unequal distribution of benefits and burdens.⁸⁷ However, in the original position rational parties would only allow for inequitable distribution of burdens under a “maxmin principle”—that those who receive the least are better off than if the distribution were egalitarian. No one in these circumstances would tolerate the child in the cellar because that child is not better off by reason of the hardship that (s)he endures as a condition for the community’s prosperity.

Rawls’s approach to justice is fundamentally contractarian: the original position is based on a social contract theory of justice. Contractarian approaches to justice assume that the parties in the original position are in an equal bargaining position and that in the later phase when principles are implemented, offices that could fine tune the principles are open to all. In “Omelas,” insofar as we are aware, neither the child nor a representative of the interests of the hypothetical child participated in the decision to establish a scapegoat. The community has entered into a pact whose “terms” are that its happiness is founded on a child’s suffering:

⁸⁶ Ibid., 61

⁸⁷ John Rawls, *Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

If the child were brought up into the sunlight out of that vile place, if it were cleaned and fed and comforted, that would be a good thing, indeed; but if it were done, in that day and hour all the prosperity and beauty and delight of Omelas would wither and be destroyed. Those are the terms.

(282)

Hypothetically, parties in the original position might agree that one among them or those they represent would be randomly chosen to serve as scapegoat for the community good—an extremely unlikely scenario that might occur if the community believed that a scapegoat was necessary and each individual's chance of being selected was minimal. However, there is no indication that the child, or the child's parents or guardians, agreed to these terms or to the selection criteria. Even if the bargain on which Omelas's happiness depends is acceptable to the majority, there is no indication that this outcome was accepted by the child's parent or guardian.

Even under the conditions that are posited for the thought experiment, that the welfare of an entire community depends on this sacrifice, the outcome is unjust. The sacrifice of the child is in Roemer's words, "the rotten dystopian core of the eutopian (sic) apple."⁸⁸ Disability is used as a trope to highlight the unfairness of the selection because the child is innocent, vulnerable, and in pain. In "The Lottery," Tessie is a random scapegoat, no different and no more likely to elicit our sympathy than is any other quotidian housewife. In "Omelas," the emphasis on the congenital or acquired disabilities of the victim emphasizes the injustice of the sacrifice.

⁸⁸ Roemer, "Talking Porcupine," 10.

Holmqvist's *The Unit*: Sacrificing Dispensable Bodies for the Greater Good

In Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit*, the bodies of healthy individuals are plundered merely because they have reached an age of infertility.⁸⁹ Because the goal is to strip organs, the state must sacrifice the bodies of not-quite-senior citizens whose bodies have not yet deteriorated. As in "Omelas," the state imposes disabilities on a body that is sacrificed for utilitarian objectives. However, *The Unit* presents several contrasts to "Omelas," both in its political context and in its form. "Omelas" expressly responds to a philosophical work rather than to a specific policy debate, even though the story can be generally contextualized to concern over the neglect and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. *The Unit* responds to current controversy in Scandinavia and elsewhere about organ donation and about the cost of elder care.

The Unit recounts the experience of a woman required to donate organs because she has reached age fifty and has no children. In this society, individuals on the threshold of old age must give their bodies up to perpetuate the lives of younger and more valued members of society. Autopathography—a non-fictional personal narrative by an individual with disability—recounts "the human experience of what it means to have an identity, damaged as it can be by bodily affliction or trauma."⁹⁰ Holmqvist adopts the fictional patient narrative⁹¹ to point out the irony that the narrator Dorrit Weger, is, if you

⁸⁹ I am aware of no English language scholarly criticism that has yet been published on this novel.

⁹⁰ William Major, "Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*: Autopathography as Resistance." *Mosaic* 35.2 (2002), 39.

⁹¹ Stephen Moran suggests the utility of fictional autopathography to convey depression, "the despair beyond despair," and cites as examples the writings of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway who, as is well-known, battled alcoholism and depression. Stephen T. Moran, M.D., "Autopathography and Depression: Describing the 'Despair Beyond Despair,'" *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 27 (2006): 27.

will, an un-patient. Dorrit will deliberately be destroyed in an institution that parodies the Hippocratic Oath and the assumed goals of hospital care.

Dorrit is a talented woman doomed because her lack of family connections make her “dispensable.” As a young woman she focused on “self-realization” and development of her own character (24). Marriage and children would come later, or maybe this is “something you could choose to do without” (25). In a proleptic passage, Dorrit refers to her fear of “getting caught in a trap” (25). This fear includes both the snare of marriage with a man who is not her equal and confinement in a building where there are no escape routes (25). On her fiftieth birthday, Dorrit’s failure to marry and have children turns into a nightmare; she is caught in the worst trap of all when she is locked up in a facility where her body will be exploited for its organs.

The Unit describes an extraordinary mockery of the concept of care. In this antiseptic and hyper-organized society, women over the age of fifty and men over the age of sixty are deemed “dispensable” if they have no children. They are rounded up and placed in a “Reserve Unit” where they will undergo experiments and donate organs for the benefit of more productive individuals. Apart from the ability to live without cost in a lovely suite, they dine in excellent restaurants, relax in a beautiful winter garden whose plants never die, and enjoy a wealth of entertainment facilities. They can avail themselves of unparalleled exercise and sports facilities. Although these dispensables are continually monitored by surveillance video, they are permitted to engage in free sex. As in *Brave New World*, promiscuity is allowed, or even encouraged, as a means to pacify the residents. It is as if the organizers of the Unit had studied concentration camps or prisons and decided that mistreatment threatened a revolt of the inmates and perhaps an end to

the institution. The residents are lulled into submission by being treated as if they were at a fine resort where all expenses have been paid—with the notable exception that the residents will be required to pay the state back by donating their vital parts.

This state-of-the-art facility is well organized, well-funded, and amply staffed by qualified medical professionals. However, the purpose of all this lavish care is to maintain the “patients” for organ donation, to fatten the pig for slaughter. Each patient is subject to physical and psychological experiments and to an escalating cycle of donations. At the beginning of the novel, a typical patient may last five years; at the close of the novel, life span in the Unit has declined to a year or less. An apparently well-run society has degenerated into a state of panic; one wonders if there will ever be enough organs to meet demand.

The Unit represents an extreme form of eugenic control. In *The Republic*, it was a waste of resources to treat elderly and chronically ill individuals. In Holmqvist’s dystopia, individuals who enter in good condition in late middle age sacrifice their bodies for the greater good. We have come a long way from *Utopia* where older individuals are respected.

After a few weeks or months in the Unit, almost all of the residents bear the mark of disabilities imposed since their induction. Some have lost their vision to cornea transplants; others have been deprived of hearing. As a result of myriad experiments with antidepressants, some patients can’t stay awake, and others exhibit medication-induced Alzheimer’s symptoms. While the newer patients avail themselves of fitness facilities, as a result of surgeries and drug trials, the veteran patients appear unnaturally elderly, tired, and weak. Although those who are subject to drug experiments consider themselves

relatively lucky as compared to those who are immediately selected for organ donation, we are reminded of the invasive nature of psychotropic drugs. In one botched experiment, nerve gas finds its way into antidepressant pills destroying the brains of study subjects.

The state takes a body that is in sound condition and disables it through a series of operations and surgeries—an assault that is justified because of the benefit that it offers to the community as a whole. Dorrit understands that she is required to donate organs, that her body is not her own:

...life is capital. A capital that is to be fairly divided among the people in a way that promotes reproduction and growth, welfare and democracy. I am only a steward, taking care of my vital organs. (123)

The body has become a good, to be allocated by the state to serve the needs of others, even as authoritarian states decide who should be assigned to work in the fields or who should be sent to war. We might read *The Unit* as a text in which privileged members of society set up a regime to respond to a scarcity scenario where there are a finite number of body parts insufficient to meet demand. The leaders take care of fellow privileged members of society by robbing healthy but “dispensable” individuals of needed organs. After the organs are taken, of course the donors become disabled (and eventually die) while the recipients are restored to health (and live longer). Here, disability is in effect a good that is distributed even as an individual’s body parts are distributed. This is a regime where the numbers calculus is most dangerous—allocation of organs determines who will live impaired or unimpaired (following transplant of a cornea) and who will live and who will die (following transplant of a vital organ).

The horror is increased because *the Unit* is set in a western democracy. Dystopias frequently discourage artistic expression. For example, in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, Crake decides to create a new species without artistic creativity. In Kate Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, the clone hierarchy is threatened by Molly's "dangerous" paintings, which are hidden from the rest of the community. In contrast, Majken, a talented resident of the Unit, is allowed to display her innovative work in an exhibit open to all the residents. However, Majken's creative abilities do not save her. She makes her previously scheduled final donation on the day after the exhibit. It is not that Majken is exterminated for her art, but rather that the status of artist is devalued and does not exclude one from status as "dispensable."

Majken's exhibit includes a walk-through tunnel that she has constructed—a space that might be characterized as a nested utopia within the dystopic Reserve Unit to which she is confined. Dorrit describes the unsettling experience of walking into the tunnel, which is dark except for a blue light. As the visitors/patients pass through, they sense that they are entering a cave in which they hear whispering voices. While the cave might on first impression appear to describe a death-like space, gradually there is an impression of pleasant relaxation including the sounds of soothing running water. The tunnel/cave comes to resemble, perhaps, a warm and encompassing womb—a return to a world in which the residents of the Unit were children, nurtured by their parents and enveloped within the community.

Other art works in the exhibit portray life in the Unit as a nightmare of disability and deformity. One of Majken's paintings shows a severely deformed fetus:

The fetus was shown in profile, but was twisted in an unnatural shape: the narrow, still transparent arms and legs were bent into the fetal position, while the upper body and head were turned to the front, facing the observer. The head was also bent slightly backward, and the slanting very dark oval eyes were squinting unseeing, it seemed to me in different directions. The nose was a still-undeveloped bump without nostrils in the middle of the pale blue face, with its thin, downy skin. And the mouth was the most striking part—unnaturally wide with full red lips, locked in a twisted, gaping expression perhaps a tortured grimace, perhaps a scornful grin, it was hard to decide. It was also difficult to decide whether the fetus was dead or dying, or capable of life but severely deformed. (86)

The work is titled “To be or not to be that is the question” (86). Majken’s allegory in effect asks, is it worthwhile for the fetus to come to life given the fate that awaits them when they reach age 50 (women) or age 60 (men)? For this reader, Majken’s painting recalled Edward Munch’s frightening iconic work, “The Scream.” Another patient, Miranda, creates sculptures of human beings in contorted poses; her clay figures depict “the beauty in the crooked, the misshapen, and the scarred” (256). These images illustrate life in the Reserve Unit, where residents who are made to consume experimental drugs or endure exhausting operations sit in slumped contorted poses. We can compare the art produced by the residents as a counterpart to another instance of protest art, Princess Canacee’s murals expressing outrage at the treachery practiced by faithless males in Chaucer’s *Squire’s Tale*, described in Chapter two.

Although the Scandinavian society exploits human bodies, it is nevertheless unthinkable to impose censorship on these transgressive works. Dorrit talks with Johannes, a fellow author who becomes her lover, about what will happen to their writing after they make their terminal donations. Johannes reassures her that their literary production will be preserved as part of the freedom of expression that is guaranteed by a “democratic” society (119). Even Johannes has bought into the underlying premise that as human beings “we mean nothing; not even those who are needed mean anything. The only thing of real value is what we produce” (119). As he nears his final donation, Johannes is comforted by the expectation (or hope) that creative writing will be preserved in some unknown archive. There is great irony here, because this “democracy” is the opposite of egalitarian—single older Scandinavians bear the burden of organ supply. Holmqvist implicitly warns that democracy is no guarantee of humane or rational social policy—it “can happen here,” even in a state with elected government and free expression

A staff psychologist, Arnold, tries to justify the benefits from Majken’s donation of her pancreas. Arnold offers a utilitarian explanation: Majken’s one life will have a multiplier effect, saving the lives of many other individuals:

It isn’t only this person [a nurse with four children] who’s got their (sic) life back thanks to Majken. Her heart has probably gone to someone, her lungs to someone else, her kidney—I assume she only had one left—to someone else, again and her liver too... A single brain-dead body can save the lives of up to eight people. (8)

Arnold explains to Dorrit that the nurse who received Majken's pancreas has type I diabetes, and struggles to care for her elderly and senile mother while raising four young children on her own. While Arnold paints the stresses of the nurse's life, Dorrit thinks how she would "have loved to be in her shoes" (106):

I would have gladly swapped places with this sick, worn down, fairly ugly woman, old before her time. I missed my mother; it wouldn't have mattered how confused and helpless she got, just as long as she had been around to grow old, just as long as she'd lived. And I would have happily lived, sick and exhausted and constantly worried with four small children and an IV stand. Because that was at least a life, even if it was sure to be hell. I would have liked a hell, just as long as it was a life. (106)

The medical staff differ in their adherence to the party line, and their acceptance of the necessity of the Unit. Most of the personnel, like the psychologist, either believe in the organ donation scheme, or are too cowardly to walk away from the institution and the community. However, one of the male nurses, Potter, establishes a connection with Dorrit when he talks to her about his family. At great risk, Potter smuggles in a photo of her beloved dog, Jock, shown playing happily in the home where Dorrit had placed him before she was rounded up.

There is hypocrisy to the state's apparatus, and inconsistency in its rationale. When Dorrit finds that she is unexpectedly, almost miraculously, pregnant with Johannes's child, she assumes that she will be liberated: by virtue of her maternal status, she is no longer "dispensable." In fact, however, she is doomed by her "dispensable stamp" never to leave the Unit. This stigma is a brand she cannot shake, even when the

rationale of the stigma no longer applies. Dorrit is informed that after she gives birth, she will have to give up her child and complete her final donation. There is no explanation for this inconsistency: perhaps the regimen is not flexible enough to address this exceptional circumstance; perhaps the state is so eager to rid itself of older citizens that it allows no exception to the rule that entry in the Unit is a death sentence from which there is no appeal.

A nurse whom Dorrit calls “Birthmark” seeks to help Dorrit when she finds herself in these desperate straits by slipping Dorrit a key card that represents her only hope in exiting the facility. It is notable that an individual marked by a physical stigma should have the courage to attempt to help Dorrit in a last-ditch attempt at escape. Birthmark assumes great risk in helping Dorrit; one might compare Birthmark to those who walk away from Omelas:

I can’t just stand and watch ... [Y]ou’re also a human being. And now you’ve succeeded in getting pregnant as well, and if that had happened just a year ago you wouldn’t even have ended up in here. And whatever happens, you ought to have the right, in the name of democracy—to own your own offspring ... (201)

Why is it that the patients in the Unit make no effort to escape their fate? When Birthmark hands Dorrit a key card, she expresses amazement that there are several exits from a facility that seemed so well-sealed. Birthmark points out that Dorrit has never seen these escape routes because inmates have been conditioned by “psychological methods and power games” used to control the residents “to make sure you have no

motivation to escape” (202). Birthmark suggests that there are ways out if Dorrit is determined to try:

But if you do manage to get motivated, if you really do want to survive, then you will find those exit doors. I know it sounds crazy, but that’s just how the human psyche works: we generally see what we are prepared for, what we expect to see (203).

Although she has been handed a life-line, Dorrit hesitates. She wonders how she would care for the baby without money, where she would live. The code is only four digits long, and Dorrit repeats it incessantly. Yet, after much delay, when a very pregnant Dorrit finally does see an exit door and moves towards it, inexplicably she fumbles and has difficulty remembering the simple numerical sequence. Dorrit passes through and escapes into a dark, starlit night. Yet the novel closes with Dorrit back in the Reserve Unit, where she has just given birth to an infant whom she will shortly surrender, just before her life is terminated.

Dorrit’s flight resembles other dystopic novels and films, such as Zamyatin’s *We*, Ayn Rand’s *Anthem*, and *Logan’s Run*, in that she attempts to break through barriers and flee to safety. The reader is teased into hoping that Dorrit can somehow escape her fate, that the novel will not end with her death/murder. Holmqvist leaves the reader with great uncertainty as to how and why she failed in her flight. Was Dorrit’s escape a dream? If she did escape was she recaptured and returned to the Unit? Or did she return voluntarily? It remains an open possibility that Dorrit turned around after crossing the barrier; she was aware that she would be marked by her pregnancy, and lacked a home or resources to care for her baby after it was born. Defeated by the system, she may have

“voluntarily” returned to the Unit because even after she opened the door and walked in apparent freedom, there was no exit.

In the final pages of the book, Dorrit writes that her last remaining friends, Elsa and Vivi, have gone for their final donation. Dorrit has been told that her hearts and lungs are going to a local politician. Now that Elsa and Vivi are gone “no one here needs me anymore, not even myself” (267). Dorrit’s inability to escape the Unit stands in for her failure and that of her compatriots to protest the mad scheme to sacrifice dispensable senior citizens.

As in “Omelas,” the sacrifice in *The Unit* represents official state-sanctioned policy, not the mad caper of some evil genius. However, at the end of the novel, the implications of exploitation of dispensable “others” are brought home to the entire population. There is a need for a greater number of donors, and the net is widened. Individuals are so desperate to parent that babies are stolen from prams and teen-agers deliberately conceive to take advantage of their fertility. The dispensable other has become the universal “we.”

Caregiving in Socially Engineered Death Chambers

In contrast to “Omelas” where the sacrificial victim is isolated, the Unit encourages the sacrificial cohort to bond and support each other. At the orientation meeting, newly-inducted patients are told that although their mission is a painful one, at least they have “each other,” the comfort and support from fellow residents (6). The Reserve Unit hosts monthly “meet and greet” parties where new arrivals are introduced to their peers. One by one, the friends whom one has made disappear; new friends are forged from recent arrivals. From the perspective of the regime, emotional attachments,

like the free sex and other entertainments, will increase the passive acquiescence of the residents as they accommodate to “life” in the Unit. From the perspective of the residents, close friendships help them deal with the physical and psychological reality that their bodies will be harvested to death.

Dorrit evolves in her attitudes towards emotional attachments, family, her society, motherhood, and the meaning of her life. Dorrit attributes her single status to a fear of involvement with a man—a fear in part instilled by her mother’s dire warnings. When she was in the outside world, although she had a lover, Dorrit’s closest bond was with her dog. The irony is that Dorrit, a loner for most of her adult life, only learns the meaning of friendship, connection, and emotional commitment when she enters the Reserve Unit. As she lies on her hospital death bed, she experiences, however briefly, close connection with her infant daughter. As Dorrit prepares to make her final donation, she realizes that the bonds that make life worth living in the Unit have been sundered: Johannes and the friends she has made among her fellow patients have been killed, and her infant daughter has been taken away. A woman who previously lived her life to avoid attachment—although it was desperately dangerous to remain single—accepts her death because, once she is again single, life is no longer worth living.

Because the residents of the Unit cannot rely on the medical staff to heal or give care, they provide care for each other. Sometimes this support takes the form of rendering emotional support through hugging. Other times residents spend the night with friends who are recovering from organ donations. Within the Unit, caregiving dyads form readily and repeatedly because individuals can suddenly degenerate from able bodied to dependent after a single session on the operating table; the residents extend support to

each other in full awareness that in a fortnight they will urgently require the assistance of their peers. We return to the concept of the Ethics of Care, as discussed in Chapter two, which recognizes inevitable dependency and posits the likelihood that those who give care and those who receive care will exchange positions based on need and health status over the course of their lives.

Dorrit's friendship with Alice illustrates the communication and connection that characterizes these caregiving dyads. While Alice is dying, Dorrit stays in her room and helps her as Alice drifts in and out of delirium. During a lucid moment, Alice thanks Dorrit for her help. Dorrit reminds Alice how often she had provided help to Dorrit when she was in need. It can be harder, Dorrit suggests, to look after a physically healthy person who is seriously depressed than a person who is seriously ill. Often the most important gift, when a friend looks after someone she "can't do anything for" is just to listen (235). What matters is that we have "the ability to hear. And a little calm in our body. The ability to sit still and listen" (235).

Utilitarian Dystopic Fiction: Precursors of The Unit

Holmqvist's novel is not the first to consider the question whether those who have helped to build a society—individually or collectively—are entitled to maintenance in their old age and if so, to what extent. In More's *Utopia*, Hythloday argues against the injustice of neglecting individuals who have benefited the community to suffer in old age and sickness:

Is not that government both unjust and ungrateful, that is so prodigal of its favours to those that are called gentlemen, or goldsmiths, or such others who are idle, or live either by flattery or by contriving the arts of vain

pleasure, and, on the other hand, takes no care of those of a meaner sort, such as ploughmen, colliers, and smiths, without whom it could not subsist? But after the public has reaped all the advantage of their service, and they come to be oppressed with age, sickness, and want, all their labours and the good they have done is forgotten, and all the recompense given them is that they are left to die in great misery.⁹²

While More's Utopians implicitly value the entire category of the elderly as deserving of a life-time of health care in return for past contributions, this is not the result that obtains in the dystopic fiction that served as sources for *The Unit*. In these precursors, the sacrifice of a subset of the population (the elderly or clones) is justified on the basis of the greater good.

Anthony Trollope's satire, *The Fixed Period* (1882), takes place in Britannula, a fictitious offshoot of Britain.⁹³ Britannula is a land of great prosperity, that resembles the

⁹² *Three Early Modern Utopias: Thomas More: "Utopia"/Francis Bacon: "New Atlantis"/Henry Neville: The "Isle of Pines,"* trans. Ralph Robinson (Oxford and New York: Oxford World, Classics, 1999), 71.

⁹³ Trollope's novel was inspired by *Old Law*, a play by Thomas Middleton, William Rowley and Philip Massinger (1656). The Duke publishes an edict requiring that men be executed at eighty and women at sixty is justified in the interest of the state. According to the decree

That these men, being past their bearing arms to aid and defend their country, past their manhood and livelihood to propagate any further issue to their posterity, and, as well, past their counsels (which overgrown gravity is now run into dotage) to assist their country; to whom, in common reason, nothing should be so wearisome as their own lives; as, it may be supposed, is tedious to their successive heirs For the women, for that they were never defence to their country, never by counsel admitted to the assist of government of their country, only necessary to the propagation of posterity, and, now, at the age of threescore, be past that good and all their goodness; it is thought fit, then, a quarter abated from the more worthy member, [they] be put to death as is before recited... (1.1)

Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works, eds. by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

mother country in many respects, save that its legislature has adopted a law requiring that at age 67, each resident is to be “deposited” in a college for a year of contemplation, after which he will be executed. The law is justified on two grounds: that it will avoid the suffering attendant to old age and that the money saved will contribute to the financial welfare of the community.

We should save an average of 50L for each man and woman who have departed...the sum actually saved to the colony would amount to 1,000,000 pounds a year. It would keep us out of debt, make for us our railways, render our rivers navigable, construct our bridges, and leave us shortly the richest people on God’s earth! And this would be effected by a measure of doing more good to the aged than to any other class of the community.

Although he had supported the law as a necessary measure as a young man, when Crasweller, a prosperous landowner, becomes the first member of the community to reach the prescribed limit, he seeks to avoid his death sentence. Crasweller is vigorous, mentally alert, and successful—negating the assumption that at a certain age, all are infirm. President Neverbend seeks to carry out the execution, although he is opposed by his wife, by Crasweller’s devoted daughter, and by his own son, Jack, who wishes to marry her. There is a contrast between the attitudes of two suitors for Crasweller’s daughter’s hand. One suitor eagerly advocates Crasweller’s death, so that he can inherit from his prospective father in law; however, Jack Neverbend, who will eventually marry

Crasweller's daughter, joins her in opposing his execution.⁹⁴ Eventually Crasweller is saved by gunboat diplomacy, as the British Navy intervenes to prevent the barbarous implementation of "the Fixed Period."⁹⁵

In both *The Fixed Period* and *The Unit*, the law requiring that the elderly be sacrificed was adopted through democratic process. Crasweller and his peers, like Dorrit and her cohort, are fully aware that they face a terminal deadline at a certain age. Yet neither Crasweller nor Dorrit leave the community. In Trollope's work, the motivation of the fixed period is economic; in Holmqvist's novel, the motivation of forced organ donation is eugenic. *The Fixed Period* is a satire with laugh-out-loud moments, and the reader looks forward to a comedic ending, provided by the British Navy that appears as *deus ex machina*. In contrast, *The Unit* is a serious work that is chilling and foreboding from the first page to the last. While in *The Fixed Period* the execution law is designed to allow each resident to enjoy the same prescribed life span, in *The Unit*, a combination theory is applied: one is allowed a certain number of "fair innings" (age fifty or sixty depending on gender), but then one is stripped of organs depending on family status.

In *The Unit*, the state adopted the drastic policy of diverting organs from the elderly to the younger population as part of a multi-faceted master plan of encouraging fertility in a society where too few babies are being born. In another likely source for *The*

⁹⁴ Here, Trollope closely follows *Old Law*, in which a greedy and a devoted son debate the value of their aged parents and the desirability of the edict that condemns them.

⁹⁵ As President Neverbend wryly comments, however, Britain, which was so self-righteous in opposition to Brittanula's edict, routinely carried out capital punishment (at that time) on hapless felons.

Unit, P.D. James's *Children of Men* (1992),⁹⁶ Great Britain is running out of people and resources. No babies have been born in 26 years and the men are infertile. A dictator rules England as society struggles to survive. One of the techniques that the Warden uses to avoid waste is to encourage mass euthanasia, a ritual called the Quietus where the elderly are executed in mass drowning. The term is derived from Hamlet's famous soliloquy about suicide, when he debates whether "he himself might his quietus make."⁹⁷ While in *Children of Men* suicide by the elderly is supposedly voluntary, those who resist the state's encouragement are forced to end their superfluous existence. A woman who resists drowning is clubbed to death. The pace of executions accelerates as resources become increasingly strained, just as the harvesting of organs increases at the end of in *The Unit* due to rising demand.

In contrast to P.D. James's dystopia, where a brutal dictator compels compliance with his edicts, Holmqvist insists on the democratic nature of Swedish society; in *The Unit*, the clubs remain in the closet. Just as Le Guin's story invites us to consider whether we would walk away from the comforts of Omelas—or whether alternatively it would be better to stay and fight the regime—Holmqvist leaves unanswered why Swedes remain in this society with a sword of Damocles hanging over their heads and why, if indeed the state is democratic, they do not overturn the regime. While P.D. James critiques totalitarianism in her devastating portrayal of the Warden's authoritarian rule, I suggest that Holmqvist, like Shirley Jackson, rebukes the passivity of a population that fails to

⁹⁶ P.D. James, *The Children of Men* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

⁹⁷ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.1.

revolt against the sacrifice of their elderly. While the dispensables in *The Unit* are not as old or infirm as the elderly subject to P.D. James's quietus (necessarily as organ donation requires healthy donors), as discussed below, Holmqvist writes against the background of controversy in Sweden over allocation of medical resources to the elderly.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, which I discuss in Chapter four, provides the most immediate source for Holmqvist. Both novels are fictional autopathographies narrated by female organ donors. In both cases, we develop great sympathy for the narrator and for her fellow donors. Both narrators are creative and value artistic endeavor. Both of the women form close bonds with male lovers and value friendships with other women. The donors show deep emotional attachment and a willingness to care for each other in the context of a cold, impersonal, and aggressively dangerous "hospital" environment. In both novels, there is a juncture when the reader has some hope that donation can be postponed or avoided, but these outcomes prove illusory. In neither case are we told how society exercises its rigid control over the donor population: these are deliberate epistemic gaps. While Ishiguro's donor clones are sterile by design and the residents of *The Unit* are presumed infertile by virtue of their age, Dorrit is capable of having a child. Since Dorrit (unexpectedly) becomes a parent and thus is by definition no longer dispensable, the fact that her pregnancy does not exclude her from her doom shows an illogical inconsistency in the rationale for the Swedish regime.

However, *Never Let Me Go* involves the creation of a clone species and the allocation of the burden of donation to young adults. Holmqvist's departures from Ishiguro are important to her theme. While Ishiguro's characters belong to a humanoid species that does not yet exist, *The Unit* involves no technological novum: it is set in the

here and now. Thus Holmqvist's warnings about organ donation or diminution of health care for the elderly cannot be dismissed as speculation about future developments.

Second, Ishiguro's donors will die in their twenties; he heightens the tragedy by emphasizing that the donor clones will be sacrificed before they reach maturity. By focusing on an older population, Holmqvist underscores the ingratitude of her Scandinavian dystopia when after a long life of contribution, they are no longer useful.

Holmqvist's Challenge to Utilitarian Allocation of Health Care Resources

I argue that, as with so much other dystopic fiction, *The Unit* has a thematic agenda: a challenge to utilitarian allocation of health care resources. There is debate now in Sweden, as elsewhere, about the large share of the welfare budget consumed by elder care and about ways to encourage and allocate organ donation. By positing extreme scenarios, in which the elderly are required to undergo organ donation and become experimental guinea pigs, *The Unit* challenges application of the utilitarian calculus to health care choices.

Sweden leads the world in the proportion of persons over the age of 65 and in the proportion of persons over 85.⁹⁸ Given that Sweden is a welfare state,⁹⁹ the drain of public dollars on elderly care is an especially pressing issue.¹⁰⁰ A large proportion of the

⁹⁸ Ake Bergmark, Marti Parker, Mats Thorslund, "Priorities in Care and Services for Elderly People: A Path Without Guidelines?" *Journal of Medical Ethics* 26.5 (2000): 313.

⁹⁹ For an official description of the regime, see Government Offices, "Care of the Elderly in Sweden," <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/12073/a/129494>. For a discussion of the cost problem, see Per Edelback, "Ways of Funding and Organizing Health Care in Sweden," <http://www.demogr.mpg.de/books/drm/008/5.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Cristoffer Green-Pedersen, "Market-type Reforms of the Danish and Swedish Service Welfare States: Different Party Strategies and Different Outcomes," www.sog-rc27.org/Paper/Okla.doc (2002).

population, concerned about its own economic vulnerability, continues to favor strong welfare services.¹⁰¹ However, in light of resource limits, medical economists propose allocation strategies to assure that health care funds are rationally distributed. Bergmark et al., identify three competing theories of distribution: the principle of need, the principle of merit, and the principle of contribution.¹⁰² Each of these criteria is vexed, and fails to offer a persuasive rationale. In prioritizing “need,” there is debate over how to rank the severity of medical conditions, how to factor in age, and how to determine the level of services to be provided. The principle of “merit” takes into account moral judgments about desirable behaviors. Even if this debatable guideline for allocation were accepted, the question arises as to how considerations of merit should be applied to individual elderly individuals or to the elderly as a sector. Principles of “contribution” raise similar issues, including whether the individual or the cohort should be considered, and how to value economic versus other kinds of contribution.

Allocation of health care dollars remains complex even if one ignores the subjective element of contribution. Need-based allocation would logically prioritize those who face immediate threats to life.¹⁰³ However, medical ethics might alternatively prefer to apply the test of capacity to benefit from treatment (those most likely to recover). A utilitarian focus prioritizes the patient likely to gain the greatest amount of good health over his or her projected lifespan based on age and health condition. In contrast,

¹⁰¹ Bergmark *et al.*, “Priorities in Care,” 313.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ See Richard Cookson and Paul Dolan, “Principles of Justice in Health Care Rationing,” *Journal of Medical Ethics* 26.5 (2000): 323

egalitarian principles aim at reducing inequalities in health to equalize each person's opportunity for a similarly long and healthy life (the "fair innings argument").¹⁰⁴

Allocation of Scarce Organs: Should Utilitarian Principles Apply? In *The Unit*, the psychologist justifies the system of age-based forced organ contribution under the utilitarian numbers calculus. One old person's death allows eight other individuals to live, and because the recipients are younger, the organs would prolong life for many years in many individuals.

Holmqvist's novel is prompted by the current and pressing policy debate, how to address the extremely serious, and worsening, worldwide organ shortage. In the United States there are more than 100,000 people on the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN) organ waiting list.¹⁰⁵ In Europe, there are 60,000 people waiting for an organ transplant.¹⁰⁶ Each of these individuals requires an organ vital to human existence—heart, lung, liver, pancreas, or intestine. The organ shortage reflects an upsurge in demand, resulting from increased longevity and increased success in the procedure. Inter-generational tension arises when the laboring sector of the population, which is shrinking in size relative to the percentage of elderly citizens, is asked to pay the costs of this expensive procedure. Supply has failed to keep pace with demand, as a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network, at <http://www.optn.org/data/> Eighteen Americans die each day for lack of an organ transplant. U.S. Department of Health Organ Donation and Transplantation Fact Sheet, <http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/organ-donation.cfm>

¹⁰⁶ See "Organ Shortage in Europe Must be Tackled Urgently." <http://www.alde.eu/press/press-and-release-news/press-release/article/organ-shortage-in-europe-must-be-tackled-urgently-23477>

result of donor reluctance and tight health care budgets that have led many hospitals to avoid the procedure.

Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and many other European countries follow a “weak” presumed consent model for obtaining permission to remove organs from a cadaver.¹⁰⁷ In Sweden, organs may be removed only if the deceased has consented or, in the absence of the deceased’s expressed will, her relatives agree.¹⁰⁸ Shortly before *The Unit* was written, there was a study of attitudes of potential donors in Sweden, which has one of the lowest donation rates in Europe.¹⁰⁹ To increase the donation rate, the government established, Dotationstradet, the Swedish Council for Organ and tissue Donation,¹¹⁰ but donations continue to lag. In a survey of attitudes towards organ

¹⁰⁷ European governments tackle the shortage of organ donation in different ways. A few countries (Austria, Poland, and Switzerland) have implemented a strong presumed consent model of organ donation, in which organ removal is only precluded when the deceased has clearly expressed opposition. The strong presumed consent model works: since its adoption in Austria, the rate of organ donation has increased from 4.6 donors per year to 57 donors per year. Abena Richards, “Don’t Take Your Organs to Heaven...Heaven Knows We Need Them Here: Another Look at the Required Response System,” *Northern Illinois University Law Review* 26 (2006): 365.

¹⁰⁸ Gabriele Wolfslast, *Legal Aspects of Organ Transplantation: An Overview of European Law*, 11 *J. Heart & Lung Transplantation* S160, S161 (1992).

¹⁰⁹ A study was done of organ outcomes of all deceased patients at intensive care units in the Southern Health region of Sweden. According to the abstract:

3,114 patients died during the five years from 1999 to 2003. Only 174 cases (5.6 per cent) were classified as potential organ donors according to the definition of total brain infarction (brain death) without medical contra-indications against organ donation. Consent for organ donation was given in slightly more than half of these cases. In 42 per cent of the cases relatives were not aware of the attitude of the deceased, and in 40 per cent of these cases they used their right of veto against organ donation.

N.H. Persson, K. Karud, M. Lundell, R. Källén, M. Omnell Persson, H. Ekberg, [“Potential for organ donation in Sweden, Analysis of five-year registration of all ICU deaths in southern Sweden”] (Title in English translation), *Lakartidningen* 9 (2005): 638-41.

¹¹⁰ “About the Swedish Council for Organ and Tissue Donation,” Donationsradet, <http://www.donationsradet.se/sites/English/Startpage/about/Sidor/default.aspx>.

donation among inhabitants of a university community, Margaret Sanner found that negative attitudes predominated: opposition attributable to death anxiety; belief in life that lingers beyond apparent death; protection of the value of the individual; distrust, anxiety and alienation; and deference to corporal limits set by nature or God.¹¹¹ Other surveys attribute the shortage in part to a concern that if they give their consent to become organ donors, a physician may not take extraordinary measures to save the potential organ donor's life.¹¹²

The kidney shortage is so severe that proposals have been advanced to allow the sale of organs. Proponents argue that there is a moral duty to save as many lives as possible, and that commercial incentives would increase the availability of organs just as financial payments have encouraged blood and sperm donations.¹¹³ Organ transplant frequently fails for lack of a valid match; if the supply increased, more biocompatible transplants could be achieved. The contrary argument is based, first, on a respect for dignity of persons, and second, on a concern that sale of organs would necessarily result in donations by the poor of body parts for the benefit of the rich who are available to pay. A free market in sale of body parts would invite abuse as pressure will be put on those who are poor, ill-informed, and vulnerable, to donate to make ends meet.

¹¹¹ Margareta Sanner, "Attitudes toward organ donation and transplantation. A model for understanding reactions to medical procedures after death, *Social Science Medicine* 38.8 (1994):1141-52.

¹¹² See Jennifer Krueger, "Life Coming Bravely out of Death: Organ Donation Legislation across European Countries," *Wisconsin International Law Journal* 18 (2000): 321.

¹¹³ For a balanced statement of the issues, see Claire Andre and Manuel Vasquez, "Kidneys for Sale," *Issues in Ethics* 1.2 (1988), <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v1n2/kidneys.html>.

The prioritization of individuals waiting to receive scarce lifesaving organs raises sensitive allocation questions, including the relevance of age and family status. Under one approach, the only fair means of allocation is by random lottery that allows each individual an equal chance. James Childress advocates a two-tier selection system for the allocation of “scarce lifesaving medical resources” (SLMR).¹¹⁴ The first step involves the use of medical criteria to exclude patients who are not “medically acceptable.” The second step applies some form of randomization, such as the natural chance of “first come, first served” or the contrived chance of a lottery. Childress advocates randomization because of the impossibility of reaching consensus on social value as well as the difficulty of accurately predicting “which persons will fulfill their potential function in society.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, randomization preserves the personal dignity of individuals rather than reducing persons to their social roles and provides equality of opportunity for all medically acceptable patients.

The alternative approach is to maximize the benefit of the scarce resource through an allocation process that distinguishes between persons in need of the same resource.¹¹⁶ The pivotal question for those who advocate selection criteria is how to achieve consensus on the criteria for organ allocation.¹¹⁷ Nicholas Rescher proposes that both

¹¹⁴ James F. Childress, “Who Shall Live When Not All Can Live?” in *Bioethics; an Introduction to the History, Methods, and Practice*, eds. Albert R. Jonsen and Robert A. Pearlman (Sudbury MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 1997): 19.

¹¹⁵ *Id.* at 22.

¹¹⁶ See generally Robert F. Weir, “The Issue of Fairness in the Allocation of Organs,” *Iowa Journal of Corporate Law* 20 (1994): 91.

¹¹⁷ The Cadaveric Organ Donor Act is a model act that would impose upon health care institutions in the United States an affirmative duty to check the status of the decedent in the national registry. If the deceased

biomedical and social criteria should be considered. The biomedical criteria include: (1) the “relative likelihood of success” factor, which consists of case-by-case comparisons of candidates in terms of their individual chances of benefiting; and (2) the “life-expectancy” factor, which gives preference to younger, healthier candidates. The social criteria consist of (3) the family role factor, which gives preference to parents of minor children over single adults; (4) the “potential future contributions” factor, according to which society should choose to “invest” a scarce resource in individuals who are thought likely (based on age, talents, training, and past record) to give a valuable “return” on the investment in terms of prospective service; and (5) the “past services rendered” factor, a morally necessary correlate in which society recognizes and rewards the retrospective service rendered by individuals.¹¹⁸

The Swedish regime at issue in *The Unit* squarely poses the critical allocation question, how does one decide who lives and who dies? Through the extremity of imagining forced donation by older “dispensables,” Holmqvist implicitly challenges two of the primary allocation priorities in current organ donation, age and family status. *The Unit* asks us to consider whether it is possible to reach agreement on qualitative measures

has expressed a desire to donate, the facility has the legal authority to excise and harvest the transplantable organs (or specified organs in the case of restricted donors.) For decedents who are not registered, organs may be removed in the absence of objection by the decedent’s spouse, guardian, or immediate relatives. CODA provides a general framework for allocation which considers: (1) the familial relationship of an individual on the waiting list to the donor, (2) the individual’s length of time on the waiting list, (3) the probability of nonrejection of the organ, (4) medical urgency, (5) the age of the individual if medically relevant, (6) the expected years of additional life, (7) the physical characteristics affecting the likelihood of transplant success, and (8) other unspecified factors that may mitigate the inequitable distribution of organs. See Sheldon F. Kurtz & Michael J. Saks, “Cadaveric Organ Donation Act,” *Journal of Corporate Law* 18 (1993) 527, 530; Proposed Federal Statutes: Cadaveric Organ Donor Act--Report, *Journal of Corporate Law* 18 (1993): 543, 551-52.

¹¹⁸ Nicholas P. Rescher, “The Allocation of Exotic Medical Lifesaving Therapy,” *Ethics* 79 (1969): 173, 178-79.

for allocating organs to those whose lives are more valuable. The Unit is populated with writers and artists; these individuals are engaged in occupations that are deemed unproductive. How do we value an individual's contribution to society? Is it fair to prioritize the lives of those with families over the lives of those who are single?¹¹⁹

The sacrifice at issue in *The Unit* reflects donations that are medically justified in the sense that organs transplants will prolong the lives of recipients. There is no suggestion that the sacrifice here is a matter of superstition or blind acceptance of authority (in contrast to "Omelas"). Is it appropriate to apply a "necessity defense" to achieve the desired outcome of allocation of life-saving organs? One of the leading jurists of the early twentieth century, Justice Benjamin Cardozo, rejected the application of utilitarian numbers analysis to mining accidents, lifeboat shortages, and other common disasters:

¹¹⁹ A prominent court case, *United States v. Holmes*, addressed the question implicit in *The Unit*, whether family status is relevant to allocation. In 1841, an American ship hit an iceberg in the North Atlantic near Newfoundland. The crew and half of the passengers managed to get off the ship and into two available lifeboats, but one of the boats disappeared. After several hours, the second life boat began to founder in the rough sea because the boat was overloaded. The crew addressed a crisis: unable to stay afloat and with immediate rescue doubtful, how should they determine who should be allowed to remain on the lifeboat and who should be sacrificed? The crew adopted two selection criteria: to spare married couples and to avoid jettisoning any woman. As a result, they threw fourteen men into the freezing water, and two sisters elected to dive overboard to join their brother in death. The survivors were rescued and taken back to Philadelphia where one of the crew was tried (the rest of the crew had disappeared). Although Holmes had acted under orders from a superior he was convicted of manslaughter. Holmes's attorney argued in vain that the crew had adopted humane selection criteria in allocating seats on the lifeboat. The judge did not question the need to save the lives of as many as possible by throwing some individuals over board, but ruled that a method of randomized selection criteria should have been used rather than marital status: only a lottery was consistent with principles of justice. *U.S. v. Holmes*, 26 F. Cas. 360 (E.D. Pa. 1842); see also, John Broome, "Selecting People Randomly," *Ethics* 95 (1984): 38 (discussing the Holmes decision).

Where two or more are caught up in a common disaster, there is no right on the part of one to save the lives of some by the killing of another. There is no rule of human jettison.¹²⁰

In contrast to Justice Cardozo, a Canadian court decision accepts that in principle a necessity defense can be invoked to excuse a killing.¹²¹ However, to justify this extreme defense, first, there must be imminent peril of danger; it is not enough that the peril be foreseeable or likely. Human instincts must cry out for immediate action. Second, there must be no reasonable legal alternative. Third, the harm inflicted must not be out of proportion to the peril to be avoided.¹²² In the case of forced organ donation of the type described in *The Unit*, none of these criteria is met as there is no imminent peril, there may exist alternatives (such as stronger presumed consent laws or incentivizing sale of organs), and the result of forced extraction is the severe disabling of the donor and, eventually, his or her death.

Experimental Therapies: a Throwback to the Nazi Doctors.

Many residents of *The Unit* elect to undergo experimental therapies as the lesser of two evils compared to organ donation. Holmqvist here recalls the precedent of Nazi doctors who experimented on human beings. Although ostensibly the research was intended to benefit the war effort, many experiments run by Dr. Joseph Mengele and

¹²⁰ Benjamin Cardozo, *Law and Literature and Other Essays and Addresses* (Buffalo: Fred B. Rothman [now William Hein Publishing] 1986), 113. Cardozo is regarded as one of the greatest jurists of the twentieth century.

¹²¹ *R. v. Latimer*, No. 26980 Can Sup. Ct. LEXIS 1 (Sup. Ct. Can. 2001 (Can.)) (rejecting father's request to kill his severely disabled daughter).

¹²² *Ibid.*

other doctors lacked military justification.¹²³ As to those experiments with a military nexus, the doctors defended themselves by applying a utilitarian defense of numbers.¹²⁴ The lives of large numbers of German soldiers would be saved by experiments such as drinking seawater, replicating submersion in ice-cold water, and simulating conditions of falling from high altitudes without oxygen or a parachute. In addition to the defense that they were following orders, the doctors argued that the deaths of these experimental subjects, who were in any case already condemned to death, were justified for the greater good of the war effort, as well as for the advance of science.

In connection with the 1947 trial of the Nazi doctors, the Nuremberg tribunal articulated principles today known as the Nuremberg Code of Medical Ethics. This code affirms the primacy of autonomy of the body over utility and the need for free and informed consent of experimental subjects. Most important, no experiment is possible if death or disabling injury will result. The goal of experiments must be humanitarian, with the ultimate goal to benefit the patient, to cure, treat or prevent illness: The code stipulates several major provisions:

the voluntary consent of the subjects is essential (and they should be competent to give it — not children, the mentally ill, or captive

¹²³ Eva Mozes-Kor, “The Mengele Twins and Human Experimentation,” in *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code: Human Rights in Human Experimentation*, eds. George J. Annas & Michael A. Grodin eds., (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1995, 1992), 53. For example, Dr. Joseph Mengele unsuccessfully attempted to create conjoined twins, whom he surgically connected by their backs, blood vessels and other organs. The twins suffered incredible agony. Gangrene set in and they died after three days of screaming in pain.

¹²⁴ Telford Taylor, “The Opening Statement of the Prosecution, December 9, 1946,” in *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code: Human Rights in Human Experimentation*, eds. George J. Annas & Michael A. Grodin eds., (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1995, 1992), 67. Most of the defendants were found guilty, and seven of the doctors were hung.

populations such as prisoners, where coercion might be used); the experiment must yield fruitful results for the good of society unprocurable by other means; the study should be based on the results of animal experiments; the experiment must be conducted to avoid all unnecessary physical and mental suffering; no experiment should be conducted if there are good reasons for supposing that death or disabling injury will occur; the degree of risk should never exceed the humanitarian importance of the question; proper protective precautions should be taken; the experiment should be conducted only by scientifically qualified personnel; the subject should have the right to end the experiment, and the physician ought to end it if continuation is likely to cause injury or death.¹²⁵

Applying these criteria, virtually all of the experimentation done in *The Unit* is unconscionable, except that the medical personnel are professionally qualified.

When a resident of the Unit believes that he has become indispensable because of his position as librarian and protests that he should not be subjected to drug experiments, Dorrit's initial reaction is unsympathetic. The librarian should have known that he too would eventually be required to undergo debilitating and eventually fatal sacrifice. However, when Dorrit shortly thereafter comes across the librarian and sees the devastating impact of brutal drug therapy, she appreciates the horror of these mind-altering experiments.

¹²⁵ Nuremberg Code, Medical Ethics <http://www.jrank.org/health/pages/33349/Nuremberg-Code.html>.

Whatever the immorality of harvesting organs from Dorrit and her peers to save the lives of young individuals, at least there is a medical rationale. However, there is no justification for destructive drug experiments that are ill-conceived, unnecessary, or at least, unexplained. Dorrit's friend, Alice, is dying of a brain tumor as a result of high levels of radiation, for no apparent reason:

You see, I'm involved in an experiment with some kind of radiation.

Something radioactive.

"But why?" asked Görel.

"Why? Because I'm a dispensable person and a lab bunny, of course!"

said Alice...

"No, no" said Görel. "I mean: what are they going to use the radiation for?"

What's the point of the actual experiment?"

"The point?" said Alice, waving one hand dismissively. "My dear friend, I haven't the faintest idea." (225).

In "Omelas," a small child becomes an "it," an object abused for the good of the community. In *The Unit*, an older woman becomes a "lab bunny," an experimental animal, ostensibly also for the good of the community. Those who are the victims of these experiments at the very least become narcoleptic or mentally incompetent; at worst, like Alice, they are being "zapped" to death through radiation.

In conclusion, Le Guin and Holmqvist both recount the sacrifice and deliberate disabling of vulnerable bodies. The child in the cellar lives alone, and in a state of abject neglect. The child is virtually speechless and imbecilic; (s)he cannot protest his or her fate. For all the solitude and misery of his or her condition, at least the child lives—if

such a condition of virtual imprisonment can be considered a life. The residents of the Reserve Unit, in contrast, for a time enjoy a supportive community, fine dining, and even some luxuries. The sacrifice of these older citizens represents a calculated political decision to exploit the organs of a less needed segment of the population for one that is younger, fertile, and productive. For all the creature comforts that the patients enjoy, the end game is death by extraction. As one of the residents of the Unit describes it, this medical facility is “a luxury slaughterhouse” (212). These dystopias reflect not inadvertent neglect or failure of care giving but instead deliberate exploitation and wanton indifference. The authors of “Omelas” and *The Unit* warn against the slippery slope of justifying social engineering on utilitarian grounds.

CHAPTER 4: Clones and Catastrophe: Disability in Dystopia

In this last chapter I turn to a discussion of cloning and disability in dystopian fiction. The U.S. government defines cloning as “a technique involving the transfer of a DNA fragment of interest from one organism to a self-replicating genetic element such as a bacterial plasmid. The DNA of interest can then be propagated in a foreign host cell.”¹ Typically the purpose is to create an identical new animal (reproductive cloning) or to produce human embryos for research (therapeutic cloning). Dystopic fiction in the twenty first century has highlighted the dangers of cloning.² My study of disability in dystopia adds a disability perspective to analysis of clone novels.

In Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, clones are allegedly created for utilitarian perspectives: in the former one instance, to replace human beings with a species better suited to the decayed environment and in the latter instance, to provide organs needed by “normals.” In neither case does cloning serve beneficial or therapeutic objectives.

Oryx and Crake offers multiple layers of disability. Jimmy’s boyhood is marked by disease, fear of contamination, and his mother’s mental illness. Hybridized animals like the feral and cunning “pigoon” are a predatory threat—we have come a long way from the formel in the *Squire’s Tale*. Care is inverted: disease is deliberately disseminated through pills that are consumed by the populace with no awareness of their

¹ U.S. Government, Human Genome Project Information, Cloning Fact Sheet, [genocis.energy.gov. http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/elsi/cloning.shtml](http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/elsi/cloning.shtml).

² In addition to *Oryx and Crake* and *Never Let Me Go*, examples include Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Kate Wilhelm’s, *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, Ira Levin’s *The Boys from Brazil*, among other works of adult and juvenile fiction.

lethal properties. Following a plague, mankind as we know it is on the verge of extinction. Jimmy, now known as Snowman, is disintegrating from the combined effects of starvation, an infected wound, and the scorching sun. This plague is not the inadvertent result of infection or a break down in sanitation; rather it is deliberately instigated by an evil genius determined on replacing the human race with a new species of subhuman clones. The master scientist Crake creates clones that lack basic human capabilities; they are intellectually disabled by design. The evil genius who invents these clones, is himself afflicted with Asperger's Syndrome. For all that we associate Atwood with a spectrum of enlightened advocacy (concern for the environment, advocacy of rights of women, opposition to the slave trade), she creates a character whose villainy is closely associated with, if not attributed to, his social alienation and disability.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* describes a world where individuals are cloned to provide organs. In contrast to the subhuman Crakers, the clones in Ishiguro's novel are caring, creative, and sensitive. The horror arises from the practice by which "normals" harvest the organs of clones so that the normal "human population" can thrive while the sacrificed clones fall ill and die. In this dystopia, the clones are a stigmatized subpopulation whose bodies are exploited—broken down and disabled through a series of donations until they die before they are thirty. The caregiving is provided by other donor clones who, ironically, nurse their peers only to keep them alive long enough to make additional, ultimately fatal donations. The "carer donors" themselves must enter the vicious and terminal cycle. The Ethics of Care is turned on its head: disability is allocated to "clones" to repair "normals"; the donor clones whom we respect and even admire are exploited and sacrificed.

Oryx and Crake: Disseminating Disease and Bioengineering Intellectually Disabled Clones

Atwood describes *Oryx and Crake* as dystopic in her new collection of essays, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*:

Oryx and Crake is dystopic in that almost the entire human race is annihilated, before which it has split into two parts: a technocracy and an anarchy. And, true to form, there is a little attempt at utopia in it as well: a group of quasi-humans who have been genetically engineered so that they will never suffer from the ills that plague *Homo sapiens sapiens*. They are designer people. But anyone who engages in such design—as we are now doing—has to ask, How far can humans go in the alteration department before those altered cease to be human? Which of our features are at the core of our being? What a piece of work is man, and now that we ourselves can be the workmen, what pieces of this work shall we chop off?³

In what does the dystopia consist? I argue that there are multiple ways in which the novel describes a dystopic society. It is not only that the planet is ecologically destroyed and that genetic engineering is menacing, but that those whom we trust to care for us—scientists and the pharmaceutical industry—are purveyors of death and disease. The ability to clone human tissue is used not to advance human welfare but to replace the human species. In addition to a total abandonment of caregiving, there is a like

³ Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2011), 91.

abandonment of respect for humans as ends and of principles of justice: the poorest individuals become human subjects for ghastly and reckless experimentation.

Atwood's story begins with the recollections of Jimmy/Snowman, the adult narrator who wakes to the "rosy, deadly" glow of breaking dawn (3).⁴ The survivor of a plague that has destroyed humankind, he calls himself "the Abominable Snowman." Through flashbacks, Snowman recalls his boyhood as Jimmy when he lived with his parents in a sequestered compound. In the enclave, families of elite engineers were sheltered from the "pleeblands," decimated and disease-infested cities. The climate has disintegrated through ecocatastrophe: "Coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes" (24). In More's *Utopia*, animals are slaughtered under sanitary conditions. In contrast, Jimmy as a young child is frightened by a bonfire in which livestock are burned; since this is how diseased animals are destroyed, he worries that his own cough might lead to a similar fate.

Like the other engineers in the compound, Jimmy's parents create animal hybrids. Sometimes the scientists succeed, as in the breeding of adorable pet rakunks (rats and skunks); sometimes vicious animals result. The engineers clone pigeons using cells from human donors that are intended to produce extra life saving organs. Unfortunately, the pigeons become huge feral monsters who track down their prey with deadly cunning because they have an admixture of human brain cells (38). The breeding

⁴ Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (New York: Random House, 2003). All quotations come from this edition and page references are provided in text in parentheses.

of snats (snakes and rats) produced “rats with long green scaly tails and rattlesnake fangs”—an unspeakable nightmare that required total extermination (51). The bobkitten was another unfortunate hybrid:

Smaller than bobcats, less aggressive – that was the official story about the bobkittens. They were supposed to eliminate feral cats, thus improving the almost non-existent songbird population. The bobkittens wouldn't bother much about birds, as they would lack the lightness and agility necessary to catch them. Thus went the theory. All of which came true, except that the bobkittens soon got out of control in their turn. Small dogs went missing from backyards, babies from prams; short joggers were mauled. (164)

While Jimmy grows up to be a “neurotypical” (194), his boyhood friend Crake becomes the premier manipulator of genetic experimentation. Explaining that the human population has become too numerous to survive, Crake determines to replace it with a new species of humanoid clones, known as Crake's Children or the Crakers. Crake enlists his Jimmy and a young woman whom both men love, Oryx, to assist in marketing a new product, the BlyssPlus pill. Although advertised as the ultimate aphrodisiac, the pill is intended to sterilize the race, allowing for the substitution within a generation of better-adapted Craker clones. BlyssPlus not only sterilizes, it exterminates, by unleashing a plague that kills almost everyone then alive. Insofar as Snowman and the reader are aware, Snowman is the lone survivor; only in the last pages of the book do we learn that three other human beings remain alive.⁵

⁵ We have no closure within the four corners of this novel on whether Snowman survives, just as we have no closure on whether the human species survives. We don't know whether he will find food, die from

Like the best satire, this is a novel that both amuses by its wit, and sends a serious warning. For Atwood, the dangers of environmental degradation are even more serious than that of political oppression, because regime change is more reversible.⁶ While clearly this dystopian fiction sends a warning about ecological catastrophe and the risks of cloning, I argue that the trope of disability serves to warn against the use of humans as means to ends. In this dystopia, living creatures—animal species and then human beings—become quite literally experimental subjects. It is no accident that Crake’s malady is Asperger’s. Atwood signals here not merely that he is a genius but also that he lacks essential connection to value his fellow human beings.

Focus of the Scholarship on Oryx and Crake: The Influence of Frankenstein

Most of the criticism focuses on the characterization of Crake, and the reasons for his species-ending actions. While this scholarship offers many useful insights, the role of disability in the novel has largely been ignored.

Denette DiMarco analyzes Crake under the rubric of *homo faber*,⁷ the individual “who labors to use every instrument as a means to achieve a particular end in building a world, even when the fabrication of that world necessarily demands a repeated violation

infection, or survive his encounter with the three other survivors. It is clear, however, that the three people who Snowman sees huddling over a fire at the end of the novel are also barely alive, struggling “remnants” (348). Snowman reappears in Atwood’s sequel, *Year of the Flood* (2009).

⁶ Margaret Atwood, “Oryx and Crake Revealed,” <http://mitworld.mit.edu/video/196> (August 2004) (“MIT Lecture”).

⁷ Danette DiMarco, “Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained: *Homo Faber* and the Makings of a New Beginning in *Oryx and Crake*,” *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature* 41.2 (2005): 170 (sic).

of its materiality, including its people.”⁸ For DiMarco, the concept of “*homo faber*” is inextricably related to the destruction of nature.⁹ “The supposed ‘good’ life that homo faber has fabricated, and that has been reified in modernity, finds itself in question in this novel.”¹⁰

Many critics compare Crake’s actions to the promethean arrogance of the paradigmatic mad scientist, Victor Frankenstein (Joyce Carol Oates, Coral Ann Howells, Earl Ingersoll, Sharon Rose Wilson).¹¹ Ingersoll argues that Crake resembles Victor Frankenstein most obviously because Crake “plays God with life,” even if this means that he must “destroy the world in order to save it.”¹² Like Victor, Crake is “physically remote and repressed” and uses women “as passive objects of exchange.”¹³ However, Hilde Staels identifies Jimmy/Snowman with Frankenstein’s monster.¹⁴ After Jimmy is deserted by his mother, the boy becomes obsessed with the forbidden and turns to alcohol, pot, and sex; like the monster, he is so miserable that he is capable of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 174.

¹⁰ Ibid., 172.

¹¹ Joyce Carol Oates, “Rack and ruin,” *The New Yorker* 83.10 (April 30, 2007); Coral Ann Howells, “Margaret Atwood’s Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 161; Earl G. Ingersoll, “Survival in Margaret Atwood’s Novel *Oryx and Crake*,” *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy* 45.2 (2004): 162; Sharon R. Wilson, “Frankenstein’s Gaze and Atwood’s Sexual Politics in *Oryx and Crake*,” in *Margaret Atwood: The Open Eye*, eds. John Moss and Tobi Kozakewich (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2006), 397.

¹² Ingersoll, “Survival,” 167.

¹³ Wilson, “Frankenstein’s Gaze,” 402.

¹⁴ Hilde Staels, “*Oryx and Crake*: Atwood’s Ironic Inversion of Frankenstein,” in *Margaret Atwood: The Open Eye*, eds. John Moss and Tobi Kozakewich (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2006), 433.

“destructive rage.”¹⁵ Staels writes that in the aftermath of the plague, Snowman is “monstrous” because he is “hybrid or mixed,” the “sole remnant of what was once a human being.”¹⁶ Chung-Hao Ku identifies Snowman with the monster because after the plague Snowman is a dehumanized and disempowered survivor.¹⁷ Chu points out that Snowman, as he wanders alone, asks “Where is my bride of Frankenstein?” (169).

Staels’s comparison of Jimmy to Frankenstein’s monster is unconvincing. Jimmy, for all of his angst, does not kill. Ku’s comparison of Snowman to Frankenstein’s monster is flawed: while the latter is physically strong, Snowman is weak and ill; while Frankenstein’s monster becomes increasingly violent following the neglect and abuse that he receives as a result of his ugly body, Snowman is not similarly reviled. The parallel between Crake and Victor Frankenstein makes more sense—Crake plays God when he clones humanoids. However, as I discuss below, H.G. Well’s Doctor Moreau, who creates humanoids from animals, represents an even more important source for Crake.

Several critics read Atwood’s novel as a survival tale. For Ingersoll, Snowman is a “castaway” who cannot hope that his message-in-a-bottle will find a reader, since the cosmos is vacant.¹⁸ Richard Posner sees Snowman, as “a knockoff of Robinson Crusoe” who locates the footprints of other survivors at the close of the novel.¹⁹ But Snowman is

¹⁵ Ibid., 440.

¹⁶ Ibid., 439.

¹⁷ Chung-Hao Ku, “Of Monster and Man: Transgenics and Transgression in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 32.1 (2006): 107.

¹⁸ Ingersoll, “Survival,” 171.

¹⁹ Richard A. Posner, “The End is Near,” Review of *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood,” *New Republic*, Sept. 22, 2003, 31

no Robinson Crusoe: with neither tools nor confidence nor faith, Snowman barely lasts from one day to the next. Ku correctly characterizes Snowman as a “left over,” rather than a successful survivor.²⁰ One of the final chapters, describing Snowman’s travails, is captioned “remnant” (348). Snowman’s failure may result not from his personal inadequacies, but from a planet whose devastation contrasts with Crusoe’s more fertile island. While Crusoe suffers from occasional bouts of illness, he enjoys plentiful food and general good health. Snowman is hungry because there is no food and the environment is irremediably toxic.

Roger Davis situates the novel in the context of Atwood’s interest in the survival story as the Canadian master narrative.²¹ Davis claims that Snowman’s description of himself as a “white illusion of a man” (271) embodies “colonialism” as manifested in exercise of “consumption, expansion, and oppression.”²² Etymologically the name “abominable” is related to “away from man,” “bad for man,” and “bad omen.”²³ For Davis, “the bad omen” signifies the embodiment of technological, masculine, and cultural practices as “unspoken and white ideals of progress.”²⁴ While there is much in the novel that opposes excessive consumerism, Davis errs in his equation of whiteness with colonial oppression. The name Snowman reflects that he is barely there, a shadow of a

²⁰ Ku, “Of Monster and Man,” 126.

²¹ Roger Davis, “A White Illusion of a Man’: Snowman, Survival and Speculation in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*,” *Hosting the Monster*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), 237-258.

²² *Ibid.*, 253.

²³ *Ibid.*, 243.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 253.

man who is on the verge of disappearing from a combination of hunger, infection, animal predators, toxicity, relentless sun, and solitude.

The novel ends with Snowman uncertain whether to approach three other individuals who have survived the holocaust:

What next? Advance with a strip of bed sheet tied to a stick, waving a white flag? *I come in peace* [...]. Or, *I can show you much treasure*. But no, he has nothing to trade with them, nor they with him. Nothing except themselves. They could listen to him, they could hear his tale, he could hear theirs. They at least would understand something of what he's been through. Or, *Get the hell off my turn before I blow you off* He could finish it now, before they see him, while he still has the strength But they haven't done anything bad, not to him And if he starts killing them and then stops, one of them will kill him first. Naturally.... Zero hour, Snowman thinks. Time to Go. (373-374)

Howells, who characterizes Snowman as “morally responsible,” predicts that he will hazard the encounter.²⁵ Ku optimistically regards the end of the novel as a “moment for reconstruction of ‘humanity’ through mutuality, communication, and communion.”²⁶ But such readings do violence to a text which has deliberately been left open-ended. Atwood wants the reader to think, to be an “active participant” in pondering alternative

²⁵ Howells, “Margaret Atwood’s Dystopian Visions,” 169.

²⁶ Ku, “Of Monster and Man,” 130.

resolution.²⁷ At the close of this novel, we do not know whether Snowman will approach, just as we do not know whether mankind will heed warnings that the climate is headed towards ecological disaster.

Scholars have debated the interpretation of Crake, Snowman, and Oryx as a Christian trinity, with Snowman in the role of Jesus. This is the view taken by Dunja Mohr²⁸; similarly for Stephen Dunning, Crake is God the Father, Snowman is the Sacrificial son, and Oryx is the feminine “Spirit.”²⁹ However, Helen Mundler writes that it is “a clear parody of Christianity” when the Crakers erect an effigy of Snowman while he is away and in effect begin to worship him, *faute de mieux*.³⁰ I side with Mundler in this interpretation. While the Crakers look to Snowman as a Christ-like shepherd at the end of the novel, there is no implication that he is divine. Far from it. The Crakers’ pathetic erection of an effigy, that they hope will recall the absent Snowman, is another indication of their intellectual disability. They are so gullible and bewildered that they conceive of Crake as God and Snowman as his emissary.

The one scholar who directly addresses disability, Sally Chivers, insists on the *absence* of disability in the novel.³¹ Because disabled bodies are inconsistent with the

²⁷ Atwood, MIT Lecture.

²⁸ Dunja M. Mohr, “Transgressive Utopian Dystopias: The Postmodern Reappearance of Utopia in the Disguise of Dystopia,” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik: A Quarterly of Language, Literature and Culture* 55.1 (2007): 5.

²⁹ Stephen Dunning, “Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*: the Terror of the Therapeutic,” *Canadian Literature* 186 (2005): 95.

³⁰ Helen Mundler, “Heritage, Pseudo-Heritage and Survival, in a Spurious Wor[l]d: *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood,” *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 27.1 (2004): 89.

³¹ Sally Chivers, “Margaret Atwood and the Critical Limits of Embodiment,” in *Margaret Atwood: The Open Eye*, eds. John Moss and Tobi Kozakewich (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2006): 385.

eugenic ideal, “there is no blindness, deafness, mobility impairment, or even prosthetic limbs in the near-future world of *Oryx and Crake*.”³² She argues that “physical conformity as a common human (and inhuman) goal blatantly dominates *Oryx and Crake*.”³³ Atwood’s novel “makes an argument, albeit subtle, that the eugenic logic that motivates the pursuit of the new physical normalcy begins with the extermination of disability.”³⁴ The scientists progress in their experiments

from the hybridization of pigs with humans, through the development of “vitamins” that promise to improve human embodiment, and finally to genetically spliced human-like creatures. This progression proposes, perhaps satirically, that no amount of technology or biomedical understanding can eliminate the centrality of the human body to social and individual welfare. Attempts to make the body redundant in the novel prove more than fatal. (389)

The Disease-Ridden World of Oryx and Crake

I argue that both physical and mental disability are front and center in this novel, and important to Atwood’s warnings about the dystopic direction in which our world is headed. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of the physical disabilities portrayed in this novel is that they are manmade. In Jimmy’s childhood diseases flourish not only as a result of environmental pollution but also as a result of genetic experiments gone awry.

³² Ibid., 392.

³³ Ibid., 388.

³⁴ Ibid.

When the efficacy of their medicines threatens to reduce profits, the pharmaceutical industry instigates illnesses to boost sales.

In *Oryx and Crake* there are two dystopias: we need to consider the treatment of disability in both the pre-plague and the post-plague world. I organize my discussion of disability by rearranging Atwood's anachronic narrative so that the characters' experience with disease, disability, and death is roughly presented in the chronological order of the *fabula*. Jimmy's youth is marked by the threat of disease and the fear of infection, as well as by his mother's mental illness and desertion. The principal antagonist, the arch genius Crake, is presented as having Asperger's Spectrum Disorder. Disassociated from his fellow humans, Crake disseminates a pill to eliminate the human species and create a race of substitute "clone children." After the plague, Jimmy, now Snowman, has multiple disabilities: believed to be the only survivor, he is only barely alive. I argue that Snowman's injuries, which include a wounded foot, reflect, as for Philoctetes and Oedipus, a punishment for transgression. Physical disability is indicative not only of intellectual or cognitive deficiency, but also of "bastardy of soul," of spiritual and even moral and ethical failing.³⁵ An individual's lameness is understood as a sign of their parents or other ancestors having done something wrong—in Greek mythology, usually some offense committed against the gods. While Jimmy did not know the full extent of Crake's plan to disseminate a world-ending virus, Jimmy knew that Crake planned to sterilize humanity within a generation. He stood by and watched as Crake planned his speciesticide, much as the western world failed to act to prevent Hitler's

³⁵ Jean Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1990), 211.

holocaust. Snowman's multiple disabilities can be contrasted to the superior physique of the Crakers. However, Crake has designed these clones with intellectual deficiencies; they are challenged to cope with a world that passes their understanding. I read this novel as a catastrophic example of violation of the Ethics of Care: humans have become lab animals for Crake and for the pharmaceutical industry, used as means instead of ends.

Illness and Death in Jimmy's Youth. Although Jimmy's family is ensconced in the engineering compound rather than the more problematic pleeblands, disease presents a major threat even in this privileged community. As a small child, Jimmy witnesses the burning of infected animals, comparable to incineration of livestock infected by "mad cow disease" (18-19). Jimmy asks his parents "If I have a cough, will I be burned up?" (19) His mother provides a less than reassuring explanation:

A disease, she continued in that calm, stretched voice, a disease got into you and changed things inside you. It rearranged you, cell by cell, and that made the cells sick. And since you were all made up of tiny cells, working together to make sure you stayed alive, and if enough of the cells got sick, then you ... "I could get a cough," said Jimmy. "I could get a cough, right now!" (20-21)

Jimmy's life is determined by microbiology: his mother's job involves protecting pigeons from infection; there is more attention to protecting pigeons from hostile bioforms than to protecting humans. Jimmy's boyhood is so permeated with disease control that he plays computer games in which healthy cells make war on infected cells (30). Jimmy's anxiety has another source: his mother suffers from serious "depression," in large part caused by anger over her husband's role in the animal cloning projects (57).

“More than anything,” Jimmy wants “to make her laugh—to make her happy, as he seemed to remember her being once” (31). If he can’t make her laugh at least he can try to elicit some emotional reaction: “Anything was better than the flat voice, the blank eyes, the tired staring out of the window” (32). It is rare that she is able to respond to Jimmy in a traditional nurturing role:

His mother ... could never seem to recall how old Jimmy was or what day he was born. He’d have to remind her, at breakfast; then she’d snap out of her trance and buy him some mortifying present ... and tape it up in tissue paper and dump it on him at the dinner table, smiling her increasingly weird smile, as if someone had yelled *Smile!* and goosed her with a fork (50).

Jimmy’s mother deserts her family to join an environmental protest movement. She is unable to bear a world in which her husband and the other engineers create transgressive and dangerous animal-human clones.

Jimmy’s stepmother, Ramona, reflects yet another pathological anxiety, desperation to ward off the effects of aging. She receives injections of collagen, and will shortly undergo the “NooSkins BeauToxique treatment” that “paralyze[s] wrinkles forever” (75). Once this treatment fails she can take the “Fountain of Youth total Plunge, which rasped off your entire epidermis” (75). This is a world that is traumatized by the fear of growing old, and losing sexual attractiveness and potency.

Unsupervised by their parents, as teen-agers Jimmy and his friend Glenn (later Crake) become internet voyeurs. They watch kiddy porn, live executions, and assisted

suicide. While in More's *Utopia*, euthanasia is a merciful option offered as a last resort for the incurable, in Atwood's dystopia, assisted suicide is a reality Internet show:

There was an assisted-suicide site too – nitee-nite.com, it was called – which had a this-was-your-life component: family albums, interviews with relatives, brave parties of friends standing by while the deed was taking place to background organ music. After the sad-eyed doctor had declared that life was extinct, there were taped testimonials from the participants themselves, stating why they'd chosen to depart. The assisted-suicide statistics shot way up after this show got going... (83)

Here, the experience of dying has been turned into entertainment: individuals pay for the privilege of ending their life on television (84). Jimmy is surprised that Crake finds the site "entertaining" and "hilarious" (84). While to Jimmy it is unimaginable to end one's own life, Crake said that it "showed flair to know when you'd had enough" (84). This is a proleptic moment as Crake's own existence will end with a violent and bizarre act of "assisted suicide."

Crake's voyeuristic reaction to his own mother's death reflects his derangement. Crake is more interested in telling Jimmy the gruesome details of her demise than sharing any emotional experience from her loss:

It was an accident, or so went the story. (Nobody liked to say the word sabotage, which was notoriously bad for business.) She must have cut herself at the hospital – although, said Crake, her job didn't involve scalpels – or scratched herself, or maybe she'd been careless and had taken her latex gloves off and had been touched on a raw spot by some

patient who was a carrier. It was possible: she was a nail-biter, she might have had what they called an integumental entry point. In any case she'd picked up a hot bioform that had chewed through her like a solar mower. It was a transgenetic staph, said some labcoat, mixed with a clever gene from the slime-mould family; but by the time they'd pinned it down and started what they hoped would be effective treatment, she was in Isolation and losing shape rapidly. Crake couldn't go in to see her, of course – nobody could, everything in there was done with robotic arms, as in nuclear-materials procedures – but he could watch her through the observation window. “It was impressive,” Crake told Jimmy. “Froth was coming out.” (176)

The boys' respective responses to disease and death reflect their characters: for Jimmy, disease is a source of fear; for Crake it is a source of intellectual fascination.

“*Villainizing*” *Asperger's*. In contradiction to David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's generalization that disabled characters are confined to supporting roles in literary narratives,³⁶ Crake dominates the novel as he does the MaddAdam regime. Crake is the cold, evil, brilliant genius who triggers the most important action in the plot. Crake is emotionally and socially alienated, exceptionally gifted in math and science, and obsessed with his solitary interests. Crake represents the exaggerated embodiment of clinical features associated with *Asperger's*: impairment in social interaction, a lack of

³⁶ David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

empathy and concern for others' feelings,³⁷ mathematical or other genius.³⁸ The prestigious university that Crake attends, Watson-Crick Institute, is known as "Asperger's U":

Watson-Crick was known to the students there as Asperger's U. because of the high percentage of brilliant weirdos that strolled and hopped and lurched through its corridors. Demi-autistic, genetically speaking; singletrack tunnel-vision minds, a marked degree of social ineptitude — these were not your sharp dressers – and luckily for everyone there, a high tolerance for mildly deviant public behavior. (193-94)

Crake's father named the boy "Glenn," in honor of another "boy genius," the pianist Glenn Gould (71). Atwood was fascinated by the pianist, who, she believed, had Asperger's syndrome. Gould wrote an opera at age ten in which all of the people died and only the animals survived.³⁹ As a teen-ager, Crake enjoys playing the game Extinctathon where one identifies extinct animals; as chief scientist, he renders humans extinct. Posner aptly characterizes Crake as "an intellectual psychopath."⁴⁰ Atwood may well have been

³⁷ Stal Bjorkly, "Risk and Dynamics of Violence in Asperger's Syndrome: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 14 (2009): 306.

³⁸ Michael Fitzgerald, "Asperger's Disorder and Mathematicians of Genius," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 32.1 (2002): 59-60.

³⁹ J. Brooks Bouson, "It's 'Game Over Forever': Atwood's Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in *Oryx* and *Crake*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 39.3 (2004): 155.

⁴⁰ Posner, "The End is Near," 31-32.

influenced by recent media reports and suggestive scientific studies that associate Asperger's with rage, crime, and violence.⁴¹

Crake explains to Jimmy that, unbeknownst to consumers, BlyssPlus is a sterilizer that will bring the world's population into balance. Crake tells Jimmy that his invention is motivated by "sink or swim"; mankind is "in deep trouble" and is "running out of space-time" (296). BlyssPlus will be falsely and irresistibly marketed for providing three-fold benefits: as a boost to sexual performance, protection against sexually transmitted diseases, and a fountain of youth. The fact that Blyssplus is distributed worldwide increases the catastrophic consequences when Blyssplus unleashes JUVE ("jetspeed ultravirus extraordinary"), the most powerful possible plague. Unlike the bubonic plague or nuclear bombs which at least allow a pool of survivors, BlyssPlus is a species-ending agent of death. Crake, who as a boy admired those who had the "flair" to engineer their own demise, performs his own bravura assisted suicide. As the full extent of the damage becomes clear, Crake slits Oryx's throat and gives Jimmy a gun with which Jimmy kills his boyhood friend.

There has been much critical debate over the reasons why Crake invents the BlyssPlus pill. Hannes Bergthaller claims that Crake's "Paradise project is not a money-making enterprise, but an attempt to cut the Gordian knot that is human nature, to complete the transfiguration of life which art also aims at."⁴² Bergthaller argues that

⁴¹ Although the suggestive, the limited scientific studies to date fall short of establishing a link between Asperger's and violence. See Bjorkly, "Risk and Dynamics of Violence," 307-08.

⁴²Hannes Bergthaller, "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*," *English Studies* 91.7 (2010): 735.

Crake has a genuine desire to change the world.⁴³ Dunning regards the invention of the BlyssPluss pill as a “drastic therapy to remedy the ills of a world in deep distress.”⁴⁴

However, contrary to altruistic readings of Crake’s conduct, Crake confides to Jimmy that Blysspluss is going to be “a huge money spinner” (295)—an admission that is inconsistent with readings that ascribe benevolent motives to Crake’s conduct. Crake used the same phrase when he told Jimmy that “rockregulators,” fake rocks that were intended to release water during periods of drought (but in fact exploded), were “money spinners” (200). Crake and his team test-market new inventions that are intended to make huge profits without knowing, or perhaps even caring, that they are safe.

Crake presides over a staff of “splice geniuses” who can “pull capers” like neon-covered herpes and asphalt-eating microbes (298). Not content with the fun of creating new species, they invent sabotage animals like the pox-infested wasps that kill the new hybrid “ChickieNobs” (216). Crake conducts an experiment in which human subjects ingested a pill designed to improve sexual performance—the results were disastrous and excruciating for the individual test subjects (295). However, for Crake, the mad math genius, human beings hardly “count.” He is a “numbers person” (25). Crake explains to Jimmy that his human subjects come “from the poorer countries. Pay them a few dollars, they don’t even know what they’re taking. ... Whorehouses. Prisons. And from the ranks of the desperate, as usual” (296).

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Dunning, “Terror of the Therapeutic,” 89.

In a for-the-record letter after the plague, Jimmy states that JUVE was a deliberate act on Crake's part (346). While Jimmy says that he can only "speculate" about Crake's "motives" (347), Jimmy's final letter makes clear that Crake was "cognizant" of what the "effect of BlyssPluss would be," that he adopted "a time-lapse factor" so that "social disruption was maximized, and development of a vaccine was effectively prevented" (346). Although Crake had himself "developed a vaccine" when he invented the virus "he had destroyed it prior to his death" (346).

There is a long tradition in literature associating evil and disability, including, for example, Shakespeare's Richard III, Herman Melville's Ahab, and J.M. Barrie's Captain Hook.⁴⁵ Martin Norden observes that "the embodiment of evil is almost always an adult male who in the name of revenge relentlessly pursues those he believes responsible for his disablement, some other moral-code violation or both."⁴⁶ Captain Ahab's doomed and demented pursuit of Moby Dick is triggered by the loss of his leg. Mitchell and Snyder write that Ahab's "monomaniac woe" that endangers the life of his crew is the direct and immediate result of his crippling.⁴⁷

Although Crake is psychologically rather than physically crippled, the parallel is quite close between Atwood's Crake and these other villains. Under Ato Quayson's typology of representation of disability, Crake falls under the category of "moral

⁴⁵ Martin F. Norden, "The 'Uncanny' Relationship of Disability and Evil in Film and Television," in *The Changing Face of Evil in Film and Television*, ed. Martin F. Norden (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007): 125.

⁴⁶ Norden, *The Changing Face of Evil*, 128.

⁴⁷ Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 120.

deficit/evil.”⁴⁸ Atwood portrays Crake as malignant, programmed to evil by Asperger’s Syndrome. Crake is an egotistical and obsessed scientist whose life-altering ambitions dwarf those of Victor Frankenstein. Crake epitomizes genetic engineers who believe that “Create-an-animal was so much fun ... it made you feel like God” (51). While it is fun to make an animal, it is even more fun to alter the human species: for Crake the ultimate goal is to determine the future of the planet. As a boy, Crake played Extinctathon; as head scientist, he presides over a staff which administers extinction. Notably, Crake has given each of his subordinates the name of species that have become extinct (“black rhino”; “polar bear.”) “‘It’s more than the names,’ said Crake, ‘These people *are* Extinctathon’” (298). Crake stages the ultimate gene-splicing stunt: to lure humans to ingest pills marketed as increasing potency, which are in fact designed to eradicate humanity. Crake was “sitting in judgment on the world, thought Jimmy, but why had that been his right?” (341)

Under my reading, Crake is obsessed by megalomania, a desire to create the ultimate MaddAdam stunt, and an extreme indifference if not antipathy to his fellow man. Norden argues that obsessive avengers exhibit a “death drive,” and thus care little if their actions put their own lives in peril.⁴⁹ Crake in fact might have relished participating in his own assisted suicide. Still less does Crake care about the effect of his actions on the rest of the planet. Mary Midgely comments that obsession carries with it “the atrophy and

⁴⁸ Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 41.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

gradual death of all faculties not involved in whatever may be the obsessing occupation. Among these faculties is the power of caring for others.”⁵⁰

Far from decoupling stigmatizing linkages between disability and difference, Atwood reinscribes the connection by constructing Crake as villain *because* he has Asperger’s. In opposition to the thinking that resists defining individuals by reference to their disabilities, Crake’s Asperger’s invests him with an extreme form of alienation that motivates his world-destroying violence. Atwood has used Crake’s disability as a literary crutch to explain his dire actions—to propel the narrative by providing an explanation for what is otherwise inexplicable.

Snowman as Disabled Survivor. Although Snowman survives the plague as a result of vaccination, he is desperate and ill. He is literally dying of hunger. As he prowls for food, he hides his blistered and itchy skin from the scorching, carcinogenic rays of the sun that burn through a depleted ozone layer. Even when he hides his body under a sheet, he is afraid of the “evil rays” that bounce off the water and cause his skin to redden and blister (37). While the sun is associated with protective divinity in many cultures, here the sun is not only a hostile force, but a killer. When he goes to search for food, Snowman is harassed by predatory animal threats, like the pigeons and wolvogs, but if he stays in place he will starve to death. “He appears to be attractive to beetles. Beetles, flies, bees, as if he’s dead meat...” (39) Snowman identifies with a leper (153). The name with which he has re-baptized himself, “Abominable Snowman,” connotes not

⁵⁰ Mary Midgley, *Wickedness: A Philosophical Essay* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 155.

only a legendary figure who may or may not exist but also a vulnerable snowman that disintegrates into nothingness as it is melted away in the sun:

Maybe that's the real him, the last *Homo sapiens*—a white illusion of a man, here today, gone tomorrow, so easily shoved over, left to melt in the sun, growing thinner and thinner until he liquefies and trickles away altogether. (224)

Perhaps Snowman's most immediate concern is that he will die from an infected wound on his foot.

He sits down at the kitchen table, pulls the foot up as high as he can to examine it. Looks like there's a sliver of bourbon-bottle glass still in there. He picks and squeezes and wishes he had some tweezers, or longer fingernails. Finally he gets a grip on the tiny shard, then pulls. There's pain but not much blood. Once he's got the glass piece out he washes the cut with a little of the beer, then hobbles into the bathroom and rummages in the medicine cabinet. Nothing of use, apart from a tube of sunblock – no good for cuts – some out-of-date antibiotic ointment, which he smears on the wound, and the dregs of a bottle of shaving lotion that smells like fake lemons. He pours that on too, because there must be alcohol in it. ... He'll just have to cross his fingers, wish for luck: an infected foot would slow him right down. He shouldn't have neglected the cut for so long, the floor downstairs must be percolating with germs. (276)

Snowman suffers not only from a spectrum of physical maladies but also from a serious case of guilt. He did not know the BlyssPluss would unleash JUVE, but he

certainly knew that Crake intended Blysspluss to sterilize human kind. Post-plague as Abominable Snowman, he wears his guilt as a “secret hair shirt” (8). Snowman describes himself as “abominable” in a sense of the French meaning of “abominable” as loathsome:

Snowman—goon, buffoon, poltroon—crouches on the rampart, arms over his head, pelted from above like an object of general derision. He’s humanoid, he’s hominid, he’s an aberration, he’s abominable; he’d be legendary if there were anyone left to relate legends. (307)

Quayson proposes that the characters with disabilities test the moral fiber of non-disabled characters, as illustrated by the “loathsome lady” in chivalric tales. Jimmy’s moral standards are certainly tested by his relationship with Crake. Quayson refers to Philoctetes as an illustration of the ritual use of disability: he had committed a polluting transgression by stepping on a sacrificial snake.⁵¹ Always aware of the passivity that led to World War II, Atwood’s totalitarian fiction criticizes those who stand by and fail to protest destructive force. Although Jimmy did not know the full extent of the horror that Crake planned, Jimmy knew that BlyssPlus would sterilize. Jimmy’s polluting transgression was that he did not blow the whistle on Crake.

The Sub-human Crakers. Crake’s creation of a whole new species surpasses the hubris of Victor Frankenstein, who created one test tube creature but aborted a potential mate lest he create a race of monsters. Feminist readings of *Frankenstein* have focused on the monster’s single-sex parenting, his male-engendered conception in a test tube.⁵² The

⁵¹ Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 46.

⁵² Ellen Moers, “The Female Gothic,” in *The Endurance of “Frankenstein”*: *Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel*, eds. George Levine and U. C. Knoeflmacher (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of

Crakers are the result of an experiment in which their male creator Crake plays God, working in a laboratory where the creation of species is a game of chance. As Ingersoll has noted, the name of the “Paradise Project” itself expresses risk or dicey-ness.⁵³ Can these humanoids possibly substitute for man?

Crake resembles yet another malevolent scientist who tried to play God and create life, H.G. Wells’s Doctor Moreau. Atwood has identified *The Island of Doctor Moreau* as a primary influence on *Oryx and Crake*, and wrote the introduction to the new Penguin edition of H.G. Wells’s novella.⁵⁴ The narrator of Wells’s 1896 tale, Edward Prendick, is, like Jimmy/Snowman, a survivor of disaster—Prendick has been rescued from a shipwreck. The vessel that rescues Prendick carries a cargo of wild animals to a remote island, where Prendick is left along with the beasts. Prendick is amazed by the deformed and bizarre creatures he sees on the island; they look like men but have odd dimensions and animal features. It emerges that the presiding genius of the island, Doctor Moreau, is engaged in painful experiments in vivisection designed to turn the beasts into men.

Moreau is a prototype for Crake in many respects: he is a (malevolent) God figure creating a new species; he is an abuser of science; and his clones are intellectually disabled. Moreau describes his first effort at transforming a gorilla into a human in creationist terms: “All the week, night and day, I molded him [i.e., a gorilla],” and on the

California Press, 1979): 77. See also Anne K. Mellor, “Usurping the Female,” in *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, ed. Anne K. Mellor (New York: Methuen, 1988): 115; Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 127.

⁵³ Ingersoll, “Survival,” 172.

⁵⁴ Margaret Atwood, MIT Lecture.

seventh day “I rested.”⁵⁵ His island is described as an Eden in that the vegetation is luxurious, but it is in fact a dystopian torture chamber where animals are transformed into “beast people” through the discipline of pain. There is a satanic serpent. Moreau explains to Prendick the tissue manipulation in which he is engaged:

“Monsters manufactured!” said I. “Then you mean to tell me—”

“Yes. These creatures you have seen are animals carved and wrought into new shapes. To that, to the study of the plasticity of living forms, my life has been devoted. I have studied for years, gaining in knowledge as I go. I see you look horrified, and yet I am telling you nothing new. It all lay in the surface of practical anatomy years ago, but no one had the temerity to touch it. It is not simply the outward form of an animal which I can change. The physiology, the chemical rhythm of the creature, may also be made to undergo an enduring modification,—of which vaccination and other methods of inoculation with living or dead matter are examples that will, no doubt, be familiar to you. You begin to see that it is a possible thing to transplant tissue from one part of an animal to another, or from one animal to another; to alter its chemical reactions and methods of growth; to modify the articulations of its limbs; and, indeed, to change it in its most intimate structure.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ H.G. Wells, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, ed. Steve Maclean (London: Penguin, 2005), 76

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

What is most amazing to Prendick is that “these things—these animals talk!”⁵⁷

Moreau explains that it is easy to reform behavior and mental structure:

“...[T]he possibility of vivisection does not stop at a mere physical metamorphosis. A pig may be educated. The mental structure is even less determinate than the bodily. In our growing science of hypnotism we find the promise of a possibility of superseding old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas. Very much indeed of what we call moral education,” he said, “is such an artificial modification and perversion of instinct; pugnacity is trained into courageous self-sacrifice, and suppressed sexuality into religious emotion...”(73)

Moreau’s beast people are in many respects antecedents for the Crake children.

The beast folk walk like humans and talk in simple phrases. They are programmed to be vegetarians (a status that proves precarious, and ultimately fails). The beast people look and act like humans, but not quite. “Hi non sunt homines.” he tells Prendick. “Sunt animalia qui nos habemus ...vivisected. A humanizing process.”⁵⁸ The beast folk have very limited intellectual capacity. Their minds were “happily slow.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 62.

However, the Crakers differ from Moreau's beast people that the former are physically beautiful, while the latter are repeatedly described as "deformed,"⁶⁰ "horrible cripples and maniacs," "grotesque caricatures of humanity."⁶¹ The common element is that both Moreau's monsters and Crake's children are intellectually disabled—naïve, vulnerable, and incapable of sophisticated human reflection.

Moreau's hybrids are also prototypes for the Crakers because their makers can train them to compliance through mock religious ritual. The beast folks have been trained to repeat an "idiotic formula," a perversion of the Ten Commandments, which reminds them to walk on all fours and (most challenging of all) refrain from eating meat:

"Not to go on all-fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?

Not to suck up Drink; that is the Law. Are we not Men?

Not to eat Fish or Flesh; that is the Law. Are we not Men?

Not to claw the Bark of Trees; that is the Law. Are we not Men?

Not to chase other Men; that is the Law. Are we not Men?"

The mad litany resembles an inversion of a Judeo-Christian hymn:

"*His* is the House of Pain.

"*His* is the Hand that makes.

"*His* is the Hand that wounds.

"*His* is the Hand that heals."

... "*His* is the lightning flash," we sang. "*His* is the deep, salt sea"....

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15, 33, 67.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

“*His* are the stars in the sky.”⁶²

Prendick comes to realize that Moreau “had infected their dwarfed brains with a kind of deification of himself.”⁶³ After Moreau dies, Prendick lies to the beast men, and pretends that Moreau still lives. The Master “is not dead...Even now he watches over us...Even now he listens above you.”⁶⁴ Similarly, Snowman poses as a religious shepherd to the Crakers. He reassures them—of course falsely—that their maker Crake is watching over them, even though Crake is dead.

At the end of Wells’s novella, Prendick reenters everyday society, but, like Gulliver when he returns to England from Houyhnhnm, adjustment is difficult. Prendick perceives that all men have something of the bestial, are animal-beast hybrids. Similarly, Snowman post-plague “laughs like a hyena or roars like a lion” (10). He cannot function comfortably as a human.

The Eloi in Wells’s *Time Machine* (1895) represent another important source for Atwood’s Crakers. The Eloi spend their time idling in the river, playing gently, and making love. Yet they are a fragile species—fearful of being abandoned, afraid of the elements, deferential to false divinities. They have the minds of five year old children:

Then one of them suddenly asked me a question that showed him to be on the intellectual level of one of our five-year old children—asked me, in fact, if I had come from the sun in a thunderstorm! ... I nodded, pointed to

⁶² Ibid., 59.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 120.

the sun, and gave them such a vivid rendering of a thunderclap as startled them. They all withdrew a pace or so and bowed.⁶⁵

Crake designs his clones to replace human beings and endows his creations with physical adaptations appropriate to the decayed environment. The Crakers are impervious both to serious threats such as the carcinogenic effects of sunlight as well as trivial annoyances (they are immune from mosquito bites) (7-8). They are well proportioned and smooth of skin; no layers of fat, no body hair (100). They look like they came out of “fashion photos” or a well-designed workout program (8). They are fashioned in a rainbow of exquisite skin colors; they all have green eyes (8). Crake has designed the Crakers to be free from the tyranny of romantic love; instead, to achieve population balance, the Crakers mate every three years when their genitalia turn blue (164-65). In a world where food is short they are programmed to eat grass and their own excrement (305). Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden the Crakers wear no clothes (8), but the ruined planet that they are designed to repopulate is no paradise. Because of the Crakers’ physical superiority to humans in adapting to the new environment, Dunning argues that their creation is an act of “drastic therapy.”⁶⁶

However, far from representing an ideal, in fact the Crakers are cognitively deficient and dangerously naïve. Crake has created clones who, I argue, are deliberately designed as mental defectives. They cannot read, they cannot write, they cannot think, and they speak like simple children. They mistake the hair growing out of Snowman’s

⁶⁵ H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 25.

⁶⁶ Dunning, “Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*; The Terror of the Therapeutic,” 89.

face for “moss”; Snowman tells them that they are looking at his “feathers” (8). The Crakers accept Snowman’s ludicrous explanation that he “was once a bird but he’s forgotten how to fly and the rest of his feathers fell out” (8). These clones ask questions, a human trait, but their questions are infantile. When the Crakers ask Snowman, “what is toast?” (97), it is impossible for Snowman to answer, because they can’t understand explanations. For the Crakers, “toast” is an “arcane metaphor”; a term that they cannot understand because they cannot comprehend “bread,” “butter,” or “electricity” (98). A broken watch is to them a telephone with which Snowman talks to the divine Crake (97). The Crakers purr, a property that Atwood believes is, for cats, a form of self-healing.⁶⁷ If so, healing in a Craker populated world would be pathetic. When Snowman leads the Crakers away from the Paradise compound after the catastrophe, they are puzzled by the awful stench and dead bodies. Snowman reassures them that this is “chaos” which Crake and Oryx have created “because they love you—but they haven’t quite finished yet” (352). The Crakers accept that Crake lives in the sky and has attributes of thunder and lightning (361). These vulnerable clones cannot survive without someone to help them. In their anxiety while Snowman is away seeking food, they construct a quasi magical, quasi religious scarecrow effigy to call him back to their midst (361).

For all their physical superiority, as a result of cognitive limitations their life is useless. The primary function of the males, except for triennial mating, is to urinate in a prescribed ritual (155). Crake explains that the purpose of the Craker mating ritual is to dispense with the mismatches involved in romantic love:

⁶⁷ Atwood, MIT Lecture.

How much misery ... how much needless despair has been caused by a series of biological mismatches, a misalignment of the hormones and pheromones, realizing that one you love so passionately won't or can't love you ... (166).

Under Crake's plan, the successors of humans are just "a bunch of hormone robots" (166). The Crakers are bereft of emotional attachment and aesthetic appreciation. In an extension of Plato's *Republic*, Crake has deprived his clones of art and poetry—no Petrarch, *Vita Nuova*, no John Donne, no Byron (167). These Crakers are so lacking in individuality and in reflective capacity as to resemble the fungible and mindless Epsilons of *Brave New World*. It is not enough that Crake has taken it upon himself to create a race of intellectually and emotionally disabled clones; he has also deprived them of a normal life span. Ironically, creatures that lack many of the dreaded manifestations of aging like wrinkles and body paunches are doomed to die before they reach middle age. Like objects that are programmed to self-destruct before they reach obsolescence, Crake has programmed each of these sub-humans to self-destruct at age thirty (303).

Failure of Caregiving

Surely, the most serious failure of care is Crake's implanting of JUVE in the Blysspluss pills. All the peoples around the world experience high fever, bleeding from the eyes and skin, convulsions, and break down of internal organs. Oryx is horrified to discover that the pills that she and Jimmy have been marketing have caused a world-ending outbreak. Her last desperate phone call to Jimmy serves as an epigram for the novel: "It was in the pills... Those pills were intended to *help* people" (325).

This is a world where multinational pharmaceutical companies like HelthWyzer have run amok. To keep their profits high they introduce hostile bioforms into vitamin pills so that a certain percentage of the population will become ill enough to purchase their products. Today, the pharmaceutical industry has been accused of “hyping” diseases, such as exaggerating the incidence of ADHD to promote Ritalin.⁶⁸ Lennard Davis implies that these same companies have inflated the prevalence of obsessive compulsive disorder in the interest of promoting Prozac and related drugs.⁶⁹ Atwood implicitly compares drug countries to the tobacco industry, which has been charged with spiking their products with nicotine to encourage the addiction of smokers:

Now, suppose you’re an outfit called HelthWyzer. Suppose you make your money out of drugs and procedures that cure sick people, or else – better – that make it impossible for them to get sick in the first place.”

“Yeah?” said Jimmy. Nothing hypothetical here: that was what HelthWyzer actually did. “So, what are you going to need, sooner or later?” “More cures?” “After that.” “What do you mean, after that?”

“After you’ve cured everything going.” ... “Remember the plight of the dentists, after that new mouth-wash came in? The one that replaced plaque bacteria with friendly ones that filled the same ecological niche, namely your mouth? No one ever needed a filling again, and a lot of dentists went bust.” “So?” “So, you’d need more sick people. Or else – and it might be

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, “Methylphenidate: A Background Paper” (October, 1995) <http://www.ritalindeath.com/Methylphenidate.htm>.

⁶⁹ Lennard Davis, *Obsession: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 220.

the same thing – more diseases. New and different ones. Right?” “Stands to reason,” said Jimmy after a moment. It did, too. “But don’t they keep discovering new diseases?” “Not discovering,” said Crake. “They’re creating them.” “Who is?” said Jimmy. Saboteurs, terrorists, is that what Crake meant? ... “HelthWyzer,” said Crake. (211)

Caregiving also fails because there are no others to provide a nurturing presence. Jimmy is deserted by his mother, who flees the scientist compound to become an environmental activist. Nathalie Foy analyzes Sharon’s abandonment of Jimmy as a reworking of the “absent mother” trope. It is a tenet of “momism” that no decent mother deserts her children, and that a woman must devote her full being to raising children as they remain the best primary caretakers.⁷⁰ Sharon abandoned Jimmy not for selfish motives, but to join a movement that protests the degradation of bioengineering for the “greater good” of effecting change.⁷¹ However the reader reacts to this abandonment, it is evident that Jimmy is psychologically affected and as he grows up, he anxiously watches the media to see if she has been killed.

Oryx is also abandoned by her mother, who sells her to support the family after her husband falls ill and dies. Because in their community illness carried a moral stigma; Oryx’s father is blamed by her mother and by the community for the disease that consumes him:

⁷⁰ Nathalie Foy, “The Representation of the Absent Mother in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*,” in *Margaret Atwood: The Open Eye*, ed. John Moss and Tobi Kozakewich (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2006): 407.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 417.

The villagers set the father's illness down to bad water, bad fate, bad spirits. Illness had an element of shame to it; no one wanted to be contaminated by the illness of another. So the father of Oryx was pitied, but also blamed and shunned. His wife tended him with silent resentment. Bells were rung, however. Prayers were said. Small images were burned in the fire. But all of this was useless, because the father died. (111)

It follows that the mother will have to sell one of her children, an unblemished scapegoat, as a means for the others to survive:

Everyone in the village knew what would happen next, because if there was no man to work in the fields or in the rice paddies, then the raw materials of life had to come from somewhere else. Oryx had been a younger child, often pushed to the side, but suddenly she was made much of and given better food than usual, and a special blue jacket, because the other village women were helping out and they wanted her to look pretty and healthy. Children who were ugly or deformed, or who were not bright or couldn't talk very well – such children went for less, or might not be sold at all. The village women might need to sell their own children one day, and if they helped out they would be able to count on such help in return. In the village it was not called “selling,” this transaction. The talk about it implied apprenticeship. (116)

The mothers earned enough money “to give the remaining children a better chance in life,” (118-119). As Elaine Showalter writes, “the elusive Oryx is the vehicle in the novel

for Atwood's indignation at child slavery, prostitution, sex tourism and other extreme forms of female victimization."⁷²

While Oryx's experience may appear to be a digression reflecting Atwood's personal indignation over the slave trade, it is also closely related to the failure of care in this dystopia. The Ethics of Care is founded on an under-appreciated reality, generational interdependence.⁷³ The mother nurtures a helpless child who will grow to maturity and one day care for his or her mother when she becomes helpless in old age. In contrast to this paradigm, the link between Oryx and her mother is severed and they cannot help each other in their phases of dependency. Thus in this dystopia there is no hope that Kittay's cycle of generational interdependence will come to pass.

The plight of the Crakers turns on the lack of nurturing and the failure of caregiving. Oryx had filled the role of teacher and surrogate "mother" figure to the Crakers, but because Crake kills her when JUVE breaks out, she cannot save them or guide them in the post Plague world. It is a characteristic of dystopian societies that the persona of the mother is disparaged or even eliminated: in *Brave New World*, hatcheries have replaced the role of the mother. Given their mode of generation, there is no mother to care for the Craker child in the absence of Oryx. Without any other leader, the helpless Crakers follow Snowman, who becomes an "improbable shepherd" (353). We have come a long way from Sir Thomas More's vision of utopia, governed by a ruler who tends his

⁷² Elaine Showalter, "The Snowman Cometh," *London Review of Books* 25.14 (24 July 2003), Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 246 (Detroit: Gale, 2008).

⁷³ Eva Kittay, *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 68. See Chapter one for a more detailed discussion.

flock as if he were a shepherd. Snowman is barely able to keep himself alive, much less tend to the Crakers.

A Postscript about The Year of the Flood

Atwood's sequel, *The Year of the Flood*, resembles and complements *Oryx and Crake* in its main outlines, and continues the description of a world devastated by the plague. The remnants post JUVE include animal hybrids, and a few struggling survivors. *Year of the Flood* is focalized on the lives of Ren and Toby, two women from modest backgrounds who have been abused by men and seek refuge with God's Gardeners, an activist environmental group. Health Wyzer continues to implant disease and germs in medicine so that they can make profits.⁷⁴ When Toby joins God's Gardeners, she is told by one of the senior "Eves" that under no circumstances should she ever take one of the medicines that they manufacture and that "we must teach the children to avoid these pills—their evil."⁷⁵ Health Wyzer seeds humans with disease as if they were "free lab animals."⁷⁶ Those who attempt to blow the whistle end up dead.⁷⁷

The sequel narrates the encounter between Snowman and the three survivors whom he saw at the end of *Oryx and Crake*—Ren, Toby, and Zeb, a man whom Toby loves. Jimmy is on his last legs:

Jimmy's in bad shape. He has a high fever, and a festering sore on his foot. Toby says if only we can get him back to the cobb house she can use

⁷⁴ Ibid., 293.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 244.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 244, 293.

maggots—these might work in the long run. But Jimmy may not have “the long run.”⁷⁸

Apart from the fever, there is the risk that he’ll broil to death in the sun. Mentally, he is “gone”; he talks to owls, not to the survivors he encounters, and he seems not to recognize Ren, although she was formerly his girl friend.⁷⁹ The reader is left in suspense at the end of this novel as well: we don’t know whether these individuals will survive the multiple threats that they face, much less whether Ren will connect with Jimmy or whether other romantic interests will be fulfilled.

When the Crakers make a brief appearance at the end of *Year of the Flood*, they are presented as naïve and sex-driven, consistent with their representation in *Oryx and Crake*. The Crakers ask the survivors if they are “friends of Snowman”; the Crakers want to help by bringing him fish and “purring” to cure his injured foot.⁸⁰ The men point their penises at the women who “smell blue”—penises that “wag from side to side like the tails of happy dogs.”⁸¹ The Crakers are sure that Crake “lives in the sky. He loves us.”⁸²

There is less emphasis on disability in this second volume of Atwood’s projected dystopic trilogy, and more of a romantic plot. Yet, as the above references make clear, Atwood reaffirms her concern about unlimited corporate greed and the consequences of extreme indifference to human life.

⁷⁸ Atwood, *Year of the Flood*, 429.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 430.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 411.

Oryx and Crake: *The Relationship between Genre, Characterization, and Disability*

Atwood has often denied that *Oryx and Crake* and *Year of the Flood* belong to SF genre, as if such an association were as toxic as the decimated planet which Snowman inhabits after the plague. The most prestigious literary prizes often elude SF authors, and some readers shy away from SF as a low-brow genre that is not “literature.” In 2003 Atwood pointed excluded *Oryx and Crake* from the SF rubric:

Like *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Oryx and Crake* is a speculative fiction, not a science fiction proper. It contains no intergalactic space travel, no teleportation, no Martians. As with *The Handmaid’s Tale*, it invents nothing we haven’t already invented or started to invent. Every novel begins with a *what if*, and then sets forth its axioms. The *what if* of *Oryx and Crake* is simply, What if we continue down the road we’re already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who’s got the will to stop us?⁸³

Atwood wrote in 2005 that her work should instead be classified as “speculative fiction”:

If you’re writing about the future and you aren’t doing forecast journalism, you’ll probably be writing something people will call either science fiction or speculative fiction. I like to make a distinction between science fiction proper and speculative fiction. For me, the science fiction label belongs on books with things in them that we can’t yet do, such as going through a

⁸³ Margaret Atwood, “Writing *Oryx and Crake*,” *Randomhouse.com/features/atwood*. [Random House](http://www.randomhouse.com/features/atwood/essay.html). <http://www.randomhouse.com/features/atwood/essay.html>. (January 2003).

wormhole in space to another universe; and speculative fiction means a work that employs the means already to hand, such as DNA identification and credit cards, and that takes place on Planet Earth.⁸⁴

In a 2009 article, she distinguished her work as concerned with today's problems such as SARS, world hunger, environmental degradation and genetic engineering, in contrast to the "far out" topics of SF—"Planet X," "talking cabbages," and "the attack of lizard men."⁸⁵

Proponents of science fiction have responded to Atwood's disdain of this genre. John Howell writes that "taking even the narrowest definitions of science fiction, I'd suggest Atwood would have trouble arguing that some of her novels are not part of the genre."⁸⁶ Le Guin expressed indignation about Atwood's efforts to avoid the SF label:

To my mind, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Oryx and Crake* and now *The Year of the Flood* all exemplify one of the things science fiction does, which is to extrapolate imaginatively from current trends and events to a near-future that's half prediction, half satire....She doesn't want the literary bigots to shove her into the literary ghetto.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Margaret Atwood: "Aliens Have Taken the Place of Angels: Margaret Atwood on Why We Need Science Fiction," *The Guardian* (June 17, 2005).
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2005/jun/17/sciencefictionfantasyandhorror.margaretatwood>

⁸⁵ Margaret Atwood Interview with Jim Lehrer, "Novelist Atwood Imagines Dark Future in New Book," PBS News Hour September 21, 2009, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/july-dec09/atwood_09-21.html.

⁸⁶ John Howell, "Why Science Fiction Writers Just Can't Win," *Science Fiction World*, <http://sciencefictionworld.com/books/science-fiction-books/417-why-science-fiction-authors-just-cant-win.html>.

⁸⁷ Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood," *The Guardian*, August 29, 2009.

In her 2011 essay collection, *In Other Worlds*, Atwood extends an olive branch to the SF community by acknowledging an association between SF and her three major novels (*Handmaid's Tale*, *Oryx and Crake*, and *Year of the Flood*). Atwood praises Le Guin's literary achievements and dedicates the collection to her. However, Atwood still distances herself from the "wildly paranormal" world of the *Martian Chronicles*, and prefers to align her work in the tradition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.⁸⁸

Despite Atwood's defensiveness about genre, it is evident that Atwood's work belongs both to the domain of SF as well as to dystopian fiction. Her work is replete with technological innovations: today scientists cannot create pigeons to solve the organ shortage, or chickens that are all breasts or microbe-eating tires—much less can we clone humanoids that recycle their own food and repel annoying insects. Atwood's dystopia warns about the dangers of genetic engineering by describing a nightmare extension. Like her predecessors Mary Shelley and H.G. Wells, Atwood creates animal-hybrids and humanoid clones that are like human beings but not quite—through an extension of today's science.

Ironically, reviewers have charged that one of the principal criticisms of SF, absence of psychological characterization,⁸⁹ applies to *Oryx and Crake*. Detractors complain about stylistic deficiencies. Unlike Atwood's Booker Prize-winning predecessor *The Blind Assassin*, *Oryx and Crake* received lukewarm reviews when it

⁸⁸ Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 2-3.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Sben Birkets, who argues that without psychological characterization, SF cannot be great literature. Birkets, "Present at the Re-creation," Review of *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, *New York Times*, May 18, 2008, A12.

appeared in 2003. Michiko Kakutani calls the novel “a lumpy hodge-podge of a book.”⁹⁰ Sven Birkets⁹¹ and Oliver Morton⁹² complain about the superficial characterization of Crake and Oryx.

While there is an absence of interiority to each of the characters, this lack of psychological depth reflects the multiple disabilities that Atwood portrays: Crake has Asperger’s, Oryx is a victim of sexual abuse, and the Crakers have been programmed to lack intelligence and a soul. The flat characterization of Crake and Oryx is consistent with the emotional and psychological injuries that are being portrayed. Because Crake is emotionally disabled and pathologically alienated from mainstream society, it is no surprise that his emotions are flattened out. Survivors of childhood abuse often manifest symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.⁹³ Although Jimmy finds it puzzling that Oryx suppresses rage and refuses to blame the slaver who held her captive in a garage, these are traits that are pathognomic of emotional trauma arising from extended prostitution.

Jimmy/Snowman might be the character with whom we would identify, as he is an “everyman figure” who struggles to deal with family problems such as his mother’s depression and his father’s remarriage, and experiences a rather typical twenty-first

⁹⁰ Michele Kakutani, “Lone Human in a Land Filled with Humanoids,” *New York Times* (May 13, 2003) <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/13/books/books-of-the-times-lone-human-in-a-land-filled-with-humanoids.html?src=pm>

⁹¹ Birkets, “Present at the Re-creation,” A12.

⁹² Oliver Morton, “Crake’s Progress,” Review of *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood, *Entertainment Weekly*, May 9 (2003), 79.

⁹³ Marylene Cloitre, Karestan C Koenen, Lisa R. Cohen, Hyemee Han, “Skills training in affective and interpersonal regulation followed by exposure: A phase-based treatment for PTSD related to childhood abuse,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 70.5 (2002): 1067.

century adolescence (fascination with porn and video games). Yet Atwood presents Jimmy as a distant figure, in part through her choice of third person narrative—an obvious contrast from her choice to frame *The Handmaid's Tale* as a first person narrative. Jimmy is presented in an unappealing fashion—especially his manipulation of women for sex. As Snowman, he manipulates the helpless Crakers in a similar fashion—avoiding direct answers to their naive questions (why do feathers grow in Snowman's face?) and spinning wild fictions, even myths, about Crake, Oryx, and the devastated planet. This is not a novel that invites reader empathy or identification with any of the characters.

It is no surprise that we would find that the Crakers are wooden: Atwood argues against designer clones as a substitute for human beings. If we continue to destroy our climate by neglecting the environment as Atwood fears, the planet will be uninhabitable by ordinary human beings; only genetically engineered soulless robots like the Crakers could survive. I suggest that the absence of psychological characterization is not endemic to the SF genre or indicative of the author's limitations. Rather, Atwood describes a pre-plague world where humans have become de-humanized by their obsession with genetic engineering, their indifference to art, and their alienation from the environment. Post-plague, the world is inhabited by a few human "remnants," and the robotic clones that substitute for extinct humans. Almost all human beings are dead, the survivor Snowman is so physically disabled as to be barely alive, and the clones are so intellectually disabled that they cannot be counted as humans.

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*: The Humanity of Clones

Like *Oryx and Crake*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) deals with the creation of clones.⁹⁴ However, in Ishiguro's novel expectations about the inferiority of clones are inverted because they are intelligent, sympathetic, and creative. The clones are used as a trope to criticize societal choices that discriminate against "othered" bodies and use human beings as means to ends. To save their own bodies, "normals" create donor clones who are like them in their faculties—and probably even more empathetic and emotionally connected. While the normals engage in exploitation, it is the clones who do the caring. A U.S. Government fact sheet expresses the "hope that one day therapeutic cloning can be used to generate tissues and organs for transplants."⁹⁵ Ishiguro explores the nightmare possibility that a society that has that capability might use it to create human clones for purposes of organ donation. While we cannot yet create clones, in many parts of the world, organs are sold by poor individuals who incur disability to make ends meet, and at least in China, donation has been imposed on condemned prisoners.

In the opening pages of the novel, the clone Kathy introduces herself as someone good at her job, as "carer" for those who make "donations" (2). She identifies herself as a proud graduate of an admired institution, Hailsham, which at first appears to be a privileged if peculiar boarding school. To be an alumna of Hailsham is to arouse envy among one's peers who have gone to less favored institutions. Soon we realize that the school that is "hailed" is a "sham"; it is a place where young clones are raised to

⁹⁴ Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (New York: Knopf, 2005). All page references are to this edition and are provided in text in parentheses.

⁹⁵ U.S. Government, "Cloning Fact Sheet," http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/elsi/cloning.shtml#organsQ.

adulthood when their body parts will be harvested so that “normals” can flourish free of cancer and other dread disease.

It emerges that the teachers at Hailsham are “guardians” exercising surveillance to prepare the clones for their defined role, as donors and as caregivers for other donors. Woods lie beyond the school but the students never cross the barrier and flee to the woods—as occurs, for example, in Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* or Wilhelm’s *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*. The students believe a rumor that once a boy fled the school and his mutilated body was found tied to a tree, with hands and feet chopped off (50). One of the many epistemological gaps is whether the story is truth or legend; in fact, its validity is irrelevant because it has the terrifying effect of assuring obedience.

Yet the school encourages the students to be creative; the best art works are taken away to be placed in a mysterious gallery. The donor clones pride themselves on their art work; Tommy is distressed that his creations do not measure up. As they grow into adolescence, three students—the narrator Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy—form a close friendship. After graduation, the trio goes to a sort of holding station or cottage complex where they work on their “final projects”—projects which the clones come to realize are make-work as they wait to begin the donation cycle. While at the cottages, the young adults form romantic liaisons, some casual and some quite serious. A rumor develops among the clones that couples who are really in love can seek and obtain a few years’ reprieve from their obligations to donate, and that art works stowed in the mysterious gallery are used to confirm the validity of these couples’ claims that they are soul mates.

Eventually Tommy and Ruth begin their role as donors while Kathy becomes a carer. Ruth is declining even after her first donation and Kathy becomes her carer. Ruth

encourages Kathy to reconnect with Tommy, a three- time donor who is “recovering” at a nearby hospital. Kathy and Tommy become lovers and seek out one of the school’s former guardians to see if they can obtain the hoped-for three year postponement. Their old headmistress Miss Emily reveals that there is no possibility of deferral. Tommy will “complete” after his fourth donation and Kathy will shortly begin as an organ donor.

Focus of the Scholarship on Never Let Me Go: The Debate over Cloning

Henriette Roos reads the novel in the context of contemporary debate in government and academe about the ethics of cloning. Ishiguro’s novel asks

not only whether it is technologically feasible or safe but also what society’s responsibility should be toward these “products”, people who are feeling, loving and dying like all of us. It may even prepare the reader for a new age of humanity in which cloned children will be welcomed as “properly human.”⁹⁶

However, contrary to Roos, as I discuss below, the donor clones are *not* welcomed as properly human, although they are “feeling and loving,” given their short life span.

Hélène Machinal notes the prominent role of art and creativity in the novel, creativity that is jeopardized by the market economy in the form of the demand for organs.⁹⁷ Mark

Jerng observes that the novel upsets genre expectations because of the non-mechanistic

⁹⁶ Henriette Roos, “‘Not Properly Human’: Literary and Cinematic Narratives about Human Harvesting.” *Journal of Literary Studies/Tydskrif vir Literatuurwetenskap* 24.3 (2008): 40.

⁹⁷ Hélène Machinal, “From Behind the Looking Glass: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* and Beyond,” *Etudes Britanniques Contemporaines* 37 (2009): 115.

portrayal of the cloned world.⁹⁸ Jerng comments on the lack of explicit reference to bioengineering in the novel and the absence of technical jargon. For Jerng, this novel presents “science fiction without the technological. Indeed the novel seems almost technology-phobic.”⁹⁹ For Gabriele Griffin, science is nevertheless at the core of the work because human reproductive cloning for therapeutic purposes is the subject of a current debate:¹⁰⁰ among other examples, the U.K. courts have been considering the permissibility of allowing the parents of a child who is suffering from a rare blood disorder to screen tissue for a potential donor sibling.¹⁰¹

Rachel Carroll applies queer studies analysis: while nominally the donor clones are heterosexual, the fact that they are born without parents and are themselves unable to become parents gives them a marginalized or queer identity vis a vis heterosexual norms.¹⁰² Bruce Robbins offers a complex reading of the characters’ responses to the cruelty of harvesting.¹⁰³ While Kathy consistently accepts her fate, even to the point of indifference, her friend and lover Tommy rages with anger against the system. Robbins suggests that the ordinary ethical platitudes—avoid cruelty, value love—may not make

⁹⁸ Mark Jerng, “Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human,” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 6.2 (2008): 369.

⁹⁹ Jerng, “Giving Form to Life,” 381.

¹⁰⁰ Gabriele Griffin, “Science and the Cultural Imaginary: The Case of Kazuo Ishiguro’s ‘Never Let Me Go,’” *Textual Practice* 23.4 (2009): 645.

¹⁰¹ “Designer Baby Creates Ethical Rift.”
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2002/aug/03/genetics.medicineandhealth>

¹⁰² Rachel Carroll, “Imitations of life: cloning, heterosexuality and the human in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 19.1 (2010): 59-71.

¹⁰³ Bruce Robbins, “Cruelty Is Bad: Banality and Proximity in *Never Let Me Go*,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 40.3 (2007): 289.

sense in a welfare state such as the clones confront: anger “may be a necessary part of a genuine concern for people’s welfare.”¹⁰⁴ While the clones are clearly subject to surveillance while in school at Hailsham, it appears that they have considerable freedom of movement as adults. Several critics raise the question why the donor clones do not rebel or even try to flee¹⁰⁵; the lack of rebellion stands in obvious contrast to slave narratives that describe revolt.

A Disability Reading of Never Let Me Go

I focus on five aspects of the donor clones as disabled subjects: their physical disability (pain, weakness, sterility); Ishiguro’s insistence on the “humanity” of the donor clones; the stigmatization of the donor clones; the implication of Miss Emily’s disability; and the perversion of caregiving.

The Physical Disability of the Donor Clones. The clones are disabled in the sense that they are unable to bear children; consequently they will be disabled in an additional way by being harvested for organs. Moreover they are disabled in the sense that the donation process begets pain, illness, and weakness. Although in their twenties, the donors are frail and sickly. As Kathy says of one of her charges:

He’d just come through his third donation, and it hadn’t gone well, and he must have known he wasn’t going to make it....
What he wanted was not just to hear about Hailsham, but to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 301.

¹⁰⁵ Leona Toker and Daniel Chertoff, “Reader Response and the Recycling of Topoi in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* (2008): 163; see also Earl G. Ingersoll, “Taking off into the realm of metaphor: Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*,” *Studies in the Humanities* 34.1 (June 2007): 40.

remember Hailsham, just like it had been his own childhood. He knew he was close to completing and so that's what he was doing: getting me to describe things to him, so they'd really sink in, so that maybe during those sleepless nights, with the drugs and the pain and the exhaustion, the line would blur between what were my memories and what were his. That was when I first understood, really understood, just how lucky we'd been-Tommy, Ruth, me, all the rest of us. (5-6)

Of course Tommy, Ruth, and Kathy are not lucky. Ruth is mortally ill and Tommy will die or be stripped of his remaining organs after his fourth and final donation; Kathy will shortly begin her donation cycle.

Stigmatizing Difference. As Erving Goffman writes and as discussed more fully in Chapter one, physical disability can give rise to stigma, a form of discrimination that excludes the stigmatized from normal social interaction. Goffman defines stigma as “the process by which the reaction of others spoils normal identity.”¹⁰⁶ Stigma can result from disability (physical disability, mental illness, loathsome disease), from deviant personal traits (addiction, homosexuality, criminal behavior), or from tribal associations (nationality, religion). Stigma is associated not only with loss of self-esteem but with social, economic, and political discrimination.

At issue for the donor clones is whether they will be “stigmatized” both by their destiny as suppliers of organs for normals and by their creation from underclass

¹⁰⁶ Erving Goffman, *Notes On The Management of Spoiled Identity* (London: Penguin Group, 1990).

“originals.” Kathy peruses pornographic magazines to see if she can locate the prostitute from whom she is derived, and from whom she fears she may have inherited strong sexual urges. Ruth is pathetically obsessed with locating an office worker who, she hopes, is her original, as if finding her model would boost her self-esteem or change her own prospects.

Increasingly, disability scholarship has focused on “extraordinary bodies” and the phenomenon of freak gazing. In the freak show—from Bartholomew Fair through Barnum and Bailey—the promoters rake in profits from display of human curiosities. As Rosemarie Garland Thomson has observed, all human complexity is reduced to a single highlighted characteristic on the freak show stage.¹⁰⁷ Robert Brogdan uses the word “freak” not to denote individuals with certain physical conditions, but to describe “a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about and presenting people.”¹⁰⁸ In spite of (or perhaps because of) the hardship that the freaks endured, pity was nearly absent from the staged spectacle. In Ishiguro’s novel there is no freak show in the sense of Bartholomew Fair or the Barnum and Bailey sideshow, but there is a similar subordination of the clones and a sense of their own “freakishness.”

Kathy describes the moment in early childhood when the clones realize that the guardians “shudder at the very thought of the clones,” and “dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs” (33, 34). In Lacanian terms, Kathy describes this uncomfortable

¹⁰⁷ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 61.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Bogdan, “Freak Shows as a Cultural Spectacle,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: NYU Press, 1988), 35.

realization as the experience of walking “past a mirror you’ve walked by every day of your life and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange” (36). When one of the guardians, “Madame,” encounters the Hailsham students they “see her stiffen—as if a pair of large spiders was set to crawl towards her” (227). Kathy recognizes that “Madame never liked us. She’s always been afraid of us. In the way people are afraid of spiders and things” (263). Miss Emily confirms that, although Madame worked as hard as she could for the students, she and Miss Emily feel fear and revulsion when they see the donor clones:

We’re all afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you almost every day I was at Hailsham. There were times I’d look down at you from my study window and I’d feel such revulsion... (264)

As young adults in the cottages, the three friends visit an art studio in response to Ruth’s quest for her “possible.” They are mistaken for “art students” (164). Ruth muses that they would never have been welcomed in the gallery “if she’d known what we really were” (164). The gallery owner would “have thrown us out” if she’d known she was talking to clones (164).

Caregiving perverted. Kathy’s takes pride that she is a good caregiver; the clones whom she nurses have shorter recovery times and are hardly ever “agitated” even before their fourth (and final) donation (1). Like other caregivers for individuals with physical disabilities, even cheerful Kathy finds that it is emotionally and physically taxing. Caring “wears you down. You don’t have unlimited patience and energy” (4). Kathy’s comment that “carers aren’t machines” (4) is, of course, ironic. Although ostensibly offered in the context of describing her exhausting day, Kathy’s assertion that she is not a machine

claims her similarity to humanity in a context where her deviance from “normals” is continually challenged. Kathy gamely defends the system and insists that the hospital recovery rooms although small are comfortable (15). Yet the reality is that those in recovery are extremely weak (101) and, of course, they are all doomed. Kathy describes a life in which she is “always in a rush,” alone with “no one to talk to about [her] worries,” and the feeling that she is always “exhausted” (207-08). There is a similarity between Kathy’s experience and that of caregivers in everyday society today. Apart from the problem of fatigue, Kathy is depressed and demoralized when a donor dies, especially if no complications had been expected. She deplores caregivers who “shrink” from doctors and fail to speak up on behalf of their patients (207-08).

The key difference between the “normal” and normative concept of caregiving and that provided for the donor clones is that, in *Never Let Me Go*, one becomes a carer not to give life but to prolong the life of a donor so that (s)he can survive to make additional donations. After the fourth donation there is no longer a pretense of keeping the donor alive; their remaining organs are harvested in a manner that even Kathy characterizes as barbaric:

... You’ll have heard the same talk. How maybe, after the fourth donation, even if you’ve technically completed, you’re still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on the other side of that line; how there are no more recover centres, no carers, no friends; how there’s nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off. It’s horror movie stuff, and most of the time people don’t want to think about it. (255-56)

Tommy, Kathy's sensitive friend and lover, is about to be stripped of the last of his body parts in this parody of medical treatment. Tommy asks Kathy whether she ever tires of being a carer: Why is it "really so important? The donors will all donate, just the same, and then they'll complete" (281). Kathy replies that of course being a good carer is important: "A good carer makes a big difference in what a donor's life is actually like" (282). The reader may disagree: as Tommy perceives, Kathy is caring for a clone to extend his or her life for the benefit of the normals.

The Humanity of Ishiguro's Donor Clones. There is no doubt that Ishiguro was closely influenced by Atwood, who writes the preface to his novel. Both of these novels implicitly address a violation of Kant's categorical justice principles, in that humans—or rather the humanoid clones—are used as a means to an end: in the case of the Crakers to populate the ruined planet and in the case of Ishiguro's clones, to supply scarce organs. In Atwood's dystopia, experimental subjects come from the poorest sector of society; similarly, the donor clones reportedly derive from prostitutes or other undesirables. In both cases, the clones will die young: the Crakers are scheduled to die at thirty and Ishiguro's clones will "complete" by around the time they are thirty.

However, the differences between the two novels are pronounced. In Atwood's dystopia, we are preoccupied with Crake, the malevolent the technocratic genius rather than with the Crakers. In Ishiguro's dystopia, there is no comparable identified villain: those who have set in motion the creation and sacrifice of the organ donor clones remain anonymous and in the background. Our interest is centered on "the carers" and "the donors" with whom we are asked to identify.

The major difference lies in the deep humanity of Ishiguro's donor clones, whom we come to know as three dimensional individuals. Perhaps because they are fated to give until their organs run out—the euphemism is that they “complete”—the donor clones form close bonds not only of friendship but also of romantic love. While the Crakers are incapable of complex thought and Crake deliberately divests them of artistic creativity, the students at Hailsham vie to produce beautiful and original works. At the end of the novel we learn the true purpose of the gallery: Miss Emily confides to Kathy and Tommy that “we took away your art ... to prove that you had souls at all,” that is, to enable the defenders of clones to prove that they were real children (255). Miss Emily's mission calls to mind real-world projects in which defenders of children born to prostitutes in Calcutta brothels display their creative photography to show that these forgotten children have intrinsic worth.¹⁰⁹

Kathy's struggle to keep her memories of lost loved ones alive also reflects her humanity. Kathy here resembles those English poets who, having survived the devastating toll of World War One, record the stories of comrades who died in battle. Kathy is preoccupied with all aspects of retrieving memory: searching for an old cassette, remembering a happy day spent with Tommy, recording her recollections of her doomed friends. On a visit to Norfolk, the site where the Hailsham students naively believe lost objects will eventually be found, Kathy recreates the friend and lover whom she has lost:

I half-closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where

¹⁰⁹ See “Born Into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids,” (2004), a documentary directed by Zana Briski and Ross Kaufman, about the efforts to enlist worldwide sympathy for the children of prostitutes by showing their artistic photography.

everything I'd ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing there in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I'd see it was Tommy, and he'd wave and maybe even call. The fantasy never got beyond that—I didn't let it—and,

although the tears rolled down my face, I wasn't sobbing or out of control. I just waited a bit, then turned back to the car, and drove off to wherever it was I was supposed to be. (282)

In this novel the process of remembering is fraught with difficulty. Many of the characters disagree about their recollections of events and Kathy becomes irritated with Ruth when she misremembers details about their schooling. Jerng suggests that the difficulties that Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy experience in remembering specifics raises questions about the reality of Hailsham and the need for corroboration of one's past.¹¹⁰ I would emphasize that Kathy's memories are of special value given her repeated need to come to terms with the loss of her class mates and peers. "I lost Ruth, I lost Tommy, but I won't lose my memories of them" (286). The clones' preoccupation with the effort of recollection is especially poignant because, of course, they are certain to lose their friends to early death, in contrast to the "normal" young adult population. As we age, the typical adult clings to memories that fade of vanished scenes and lost friends or family; the effort

¹¹⁰ Jerng, "Giving Form to Life," 388.

to stabilize memories assumes great importance in the telescoped lives of Kathy and her circle.

Miss Emily's Disability. Late in the novel, Kathy and Tommy visit their former guardians in the futile hope that they may gain a reprieve based on their genuine love. It is significant that Miss Emily is herself disabled: she is in poor health and uses a wheelchair. Miss Emily's physical helplessness is identified with political powerlessness: she is unable to walk and unable to change a cruel and unjust regime. Nearly all humans will experience physical or mental impairments as they age. Ishiguro universalizes the condition of disability through the elderly woman's physical deterioration: like the clones, elderly "normals" will gradually become weak and helpless.

Miss Emily tells Kathy and Tommy that she is "proud" of both of them:

"I'm so proud of you both. You built your lives on what we gave you. You wouldn't be who you are today if we'd not protected you. You wouldn't have become absorbed in your lessons, you wouldn't have lost yourselves in your art and your writing" (268).

Jerng writes that Miss Emily here speaks as "a true parent," proud that her "children became people with meaningful lives."¹¹¹ However, I argue that the portrayal of the guardians is less benign. Miss Emily confesses that she was "afraid" of the students; at times she would "look down" on them from her study window and feel frank "revulsion" (264). Kathy's and Tommy's visit with Miss Emily must be curtailed because movers are coming to take away her bedside cabinet. Despite her sympathy with her former

¹¹¹ Jerng, "Giving Form to Life," 389.

students, Miss Emily is preoccupied with the furniture move. She still doesn't "get it," doesn't appreciate the full horror of the donor clones' suffering. Nor does Miss Emily come to terms with her own mortality. Just as the bedside cabinet is being taken away, and although she is a "normal," gradually Miss Emily's life will be stripped until she fades away.

The Sacrifice of the Donor Clones for "The Greater Good"

Ishiguro's novel provides a nested narrative in which Hailsham functions as a pseudo-utopic space within the donor clones' dystopic universe. The Hailsham graduates regard themselves as special or privileged because Hailsham gave them a nearly normal education in contrast with other donor schools. Yet in fact Hailsham was anything but utopic; the school "was a panopticon where the students were under constant surveillance."¹¹² More's *Utopia* criticizes the status quo in England, where the regime is constructed for the benefit of the rich and the common laborer is impoverished and untended when he becomes ill or elderly. In Ishiguro's dystopia, the disfavored clones are not merely untended, but pro-actively sacrificed for privileged normals. Here I apply Quayson's typology in which individuals with disabilities are "completely normalized and exist within the full range of human emotions, contradictions, hopes, fears, and vague ideas, just like other characters."¹¹³ This normalization of clones, like other normalizations of disabled characters, functions as a critique of a selfish and hypocritical society where those in power exploit a subclass that unable to resist.

¹¹² Toker and Chetoff, "Reader Response," 168.

¹¹³ Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 51.

The psychological characterization, especially of Kathy, is quite complex. Mark Currie explains Kathy's passivity and failure to run away as the result of "relative deprivation," a phenomenon in which Kathy continues to be constrained by routines to which she has become accustomed at Hailsham and in the cottages.¹¹⁴ I would add that Ishiguro illustrates relative deprivation in the context of psychological response to discriminatory treatment. Note the contrasting reactions of Kathy, who appears to accept her lot and counsels her donors not to be "agitated" and the angry outbursts of Tommy, who rebels against imminent "completion." Studies of working women in the 1980s found that women were not as angry about conditions of unequal pay as one might have expected: the women compared their condition with that of other women and felt that they were better off.¹¹⁵ Individual responses to discrimination vary; serious grievances do not always engender protest.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) Kathy's being such a sympathetic figure, I argue that Ishiguro's novel invites the reader to condemn a passive reaction to the outrage. As Kathy comments, although the normals are "uncomfortable ... about your existence, the overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neuron disease, heart disease" (261). Normals in need of organs want to cure their own disability and normals who fear that they (or their families) may require organs want to create a race to provide them with

¹¹⁴ Mark Currie, "Controlling Time in *Never Let Me Go*," in *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, eds. Sean Mathews, Sebastian Groes (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2009), 102.

¹¹⁵ Iain Walker and Heather J. Smith, *Relative Deprivation: Specification, Development, and Integration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4.

spare body parts. If we read this as a protest novel, we may be able to answer the intriguing unanswered question of why Ishiguro sets his novel in the 1990s. While most dystopic novels warn about what will happen in the future if a present trend is not arrested, Ishiguro plays with our notions of time by setting his novel in England at a time and place when clones have not been harvested for donations. However, the practice of institutionalized organ donation prevails in China and other parts of Asia where organs are sold to an international clientele. In these parts of the world, Ishiguro's dystopia describes today's reality, as affluent and desperately ill patients buy organs from healthy individuals who are so desperately poor that they sell their own body parts.

Comparing Approaches to Clone Narratives

Notwithstanding her distancing from the domain of SF, Atwood populates *Oryx and Crake* with scientists and engineers; Crake attends a university that is an MIT clone; and the laboratories spawn endless gene-busting technological innovation. While Ishiguro's work belongs to the SF genre in that cloning is based on a technological novum, we never meet the scientists who have created the donor clones and we never encounter the techno-speak of the MaddAdam universe. Ishiguro gives the lie to the myth that SF is incompatible with psychological characterization.

Atwood argues against designer clones as a substitute for human beings because the clones are not human; Ishiguro's clones are not only human but are portrayed with an interiority that belies their marginalization as "others." While the Crakers are cardboard, and that is Atwood's point, in *Never Let Me Go* the reader forms a bond with the sympathetic donors. In part this bond results from characterization which emphasizes the

donor clones as human, and in part from a narrative style that invites the reader to identify with the donor clones and imagine herself in Kathy's shoes.

Tommy is perhaps the most moving character in the novel; Ishiguro portrays his angst as a sensitive child and his frustrated rage as a young adult. Tommy suffered at Hailsham child because he was not as creative as his classmates. This was a notable failing given that the school had as its mission to showcase the creativity of the donor clones as an indication of their humanity. Kathy is surprised to discover that Tommy in fact is able to produce a kind of art work, cleverly-constructed mechanical animals:

I was taken aback at how densely detailed each one was. In fact, it took a moment to see they were animals at all. The first impression was like one you'd get if you took the back off a radio set: tiny canals, weaving tendons, miniature screws and wheels were all drawn with obsessive precision, and only when you held the page away could you see it was some kind of armadillo, say, or a bird

. . . . For all their busy, metallic features, there was something sweet, even vulnerable about each of them. (185)

Tommy, who is himself a kind of mechanized creature, has created animal-machine hybrids. Although Tommy has been manufactured, he is nonetheless a living creature, "sweet" and "vulnerable."

Kathy's breezy and cheerful narrative draws us into the life of a clone. She uses simple and direct language, as if she were engaged in conversation with the reader, as she recounts her recollections of her childhood and adolescence:

All of this reminds me of something that happened about three years later... We were in Room 5 on the ground floor at the back of the house, waiting for a class to start... Maybe I am exaggerating, but my memory is that for a whole class to sit into the room, students literally had to pile on top of each other. (56)

We are engaged both because of the anecdotal style of narration and because of the superficial similarity between Kathy's classroom experience and our own memories of our school days. The characters experience adolescent tiffs, complex friendships, and sexual flirtations that are almost, although not quite, like our own. McDonald situates Kathy's account within the "school days genre"—a context that is especially poignant for clones who have no expectation of adult longevity.¹¹⁶ McDonald compares Kathy's fictionalized autobiography to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* where an alien figure and his creator offer competing autobiographical accounts.¹¹⁷ This comparison is unconvincing: while Victor and the monster both offer competing narratives of the monster's youth and the social rejection that led to him to commit heinous crime, there is no alternative narrator to compete with Kathy for our attention. There is nothing alien or dangerous about Kathy, who compliantly accepts her fate.

Ishiguro's use of direct address also forges a tight link between the narrator clone and the reader such as is never made—or even attempted—in *Oryx* and *Crake*. Referring to the collections of objectively worthless souvenirs which the students at Hailsham

¹¹⁶ Keith McDonald, "Days of Past Futures: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* as 'Speculative Memoir,'" *Biography*, 30.1 (2007): 77.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

treasured, Kathy comments, “I don’t know if you had ‘collections’ where you were...” (38). Kathy tells us: “I don’t know where it was it was where you were, but at Hailsham we had to have some form of medical almost every week—usually up in room 18 at the top of the house...” (13) The reader is asked to consider what it would be like not only to be “othered” and to have one’s body constantly inspected, but to be harvested and sacrificed.¹¹⁸

The novel presents the donor clones’ perspective as “patients” who, as in *The Unit*, are primed to die rather than to live. Just as the reader is invited to recall her own school days and compare them to Hailsham, so the reader is invited to recall her own hospital stays where cure was the goal, and contrast them to the donor clones’ experience. Far from being distanced as in *Oryx and Crake*, Kathy’s and Tommy’s hospital experience could be our story, our organs might be harvested. Ishiguro’s reader hopes for a reprieve just as readers of *Old Curiosity Shop* or *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* hoped that Little Nell or Eliza would somehow survive.

Although fictional, Kathy’s narrative in many ways resembles Lucy Grealy’s *Autobiography of a Face*, a first person account of Grealy’s struggle to deal with the aftermath of severely disfiguring facial reconstruction surgery.¹¹⁹ As a child, Lucy was never told the truth about the extent of her disfigurement, much as Kathy and the other Hailsham students were kept in the dark about their condition. She perceives that others

¹¹⁸ Toker and Chertoff, “Reader Response,” 167.

¹¹⁹ Lucy Grealy, *Autobiography of a Face* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994).

are repulsed by her condition, she feels like a “freak.”¹²⁰ She lives her life avoiding mirrors, and only “comes out” on Halloween. Her body determines her destiny, as she is the victim of prejudice and spoiled identity.

John Mullan characterizes Kathy as an unreliable or perhaps inadequate narrator of her experiences because she repeatedly expresses concern that she is “remembering it wrong (13).¹²¹ However, this very uncertainty about the accuracy of her recollections seems to testify to her “will to truth.”¹²² We can rely on Kathy as a narrator because she makes an effort at accurate recollection, and seeks collaboration from Ruth and Tommy as she tries to fix her memories. Currie writes about Ishiguro’s careful deployment of tenses.¹²³ For example, Kathy narrates in a proleptic past perfect tense that refers to events that are previous to other events in the past, thereby functioning “both as recollection (in relation to the narrator), as anticipation (in relation to the narrated), and even as both (as the recollection of anticipation).”¹²⁴ As an example, Currie cites the passage in which Kathy tells us that “Ruth and I often found ourselves remembering these things [events at Hailsham] a few years ago, when I was caring for her down at the centre in Dover” (215). The use of the proleptic past tense not only focuses us on the

¹²⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹²¹ John Mullan, “On First Reading Never Let Me Go,” in *Kazuo Ishiguro: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, eds. Sean Mathews, Sebastian Groes (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2009), 104.

¹²² Ibid., 109.

¹²³ Currie, “Controlling Time,” 91.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 94.

difficulty of remembering, but also on a recollection of forgetting.¹²⁵ I would add to Currie's analysis that Kathy's effort at reconstructing the past is part of her effort to understand her fate and anticipate her future: here again she is normalized. The reader recalls times of crisis when one has painstakingly pieced together a chain of events to try to make sense of the dilemma or unravel an intractable problem.

Ishiguro's narrative proceeds through a series of epistemological gaps. What kind of carer is Kathy? What kind of school is Hailsham? Does Kathy's sexual desire reflect that her "possible" or "original" was a prostitute? Can the donor clones escape their fate by going to America or by becoming film stars or by showing that they are genuinely in love? What is the gallery? Why raise the Hailsham students to be creative when they are doomed? What happened to Miss Lucy, the kindly guardian who disappeared? Why do the clones acquiesce to their fate when they appear to have some liberty of movement. Is the failure to "run" only a matter of conditioning or is there an external enforcement?

I argue that *Never Let Me Go* is so effective precisely because Ishiguro tees up critical questions that he deliberately leaves unanswered. First, Ishiguro's strategy of "epistemological gap" is a valuable technique for engaging the reader. We want to learn why it is that the donors are chosen, whether they can escape their fate. As in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, the reader to make sense of an obviously unjust and extremely puzzling predicament. Ingersoll aptly compares *Never Let Me Go* to a detective story.¹²⁶ Second, we bond with the clones more closely as they try to learn the truth about their

¹²⁵ Ibid., 94-95.

¹²⁶ Ingersoll, "Realm of Metaphor," 44.

destiny, especially, the urgent question whether they can postpone their donation cycle for a few years by a showing of genuine love. We learn the answers to some of unanswered questions in the novel at the same time as Kathy. One of the guardians overhears the teen-age students building castles in the air about their future prospects.

Miss Lucy dispels these fantasies:

None of you will go to America, none of you will be film stars. And none of you will be working in supermarkets as I heard some of you planning the other day Your lives are set out for you. You will become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs... You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. (81)

We are disappointed a second time when Miss Emily reveals that, contrary to the myth that circulated among the clones, they earn no postponement of their obligation to donate by demonstrating that they have fallen in love. The effect of this isochronic technique is to bind us to the donor clones, as we realize that our hopes that some of the characters may escape their fate are futile and naive. The fictional outcome is more realistic than the fantasy that the reader has spun and shared with the donor clones. They live in a society where the normals simply do not value such attachments: for the normals, the clones are body parts, not so dissimilar from the pigeons in *Oryx and Crake*.

Significantly, we never learn how or why the “normals” become privileged, how the “originals” for the donor clones are chosen. The entitlement of the normals is so engraved in the system that the question of why they are privileged is not even asked, much less answered. To the extent that the normals build their own welfare on the

disabling of others, their society, whatever its other strengths is no utopia. Injustice has been imposed in the form of an unfair allocation of disabilities because the donor clones—like the child in “Omelas” or the residents of *The Unit*—bear the burden of disability without adequate, or even any, compensating benefit.

To conclude the discussion of these works, it is useful to consider the authors’ own statement of their intent. Atwood has explained that through her “speculative fiction,” *Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*, she has been able to explore some issues that “socially realistic novels cannot do”:¹²⁷

- They can explore the consequences of new and proposed technologies in graphic ways, by showing them as fully operational. We’ve always been good at letting cats out of bags and genies out of bottles, we just haven’t been very good at putting them back in again. These stories in their darker modes are all versions of “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice”: the apprentice finds out how to make the magic salt-grinder produce salt, but he can’t turn it off.
- They can explore the nature and limits of what it means to be human in graphic ways, by pushing the envelope as far as it will go.
- They can explore the relationship of man to the universe, an exploration that often takes us in the direction of religion and can meld easily with mythology...

¹²⁷ Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, 62.

• They can explore proposed changes in social organisation, by showing what they might actually be like for those living within them. Thus, the utopia and the dystopia, which have proved over and over again that we have a better idea about how to make hell on earth than we do about how to make heaven. The history of the 20th century, where a couple of societies took a crack at utopia on a large scale and ended up with the inferno, would bear this out. Think of Cambodia under Pol Pot.¹²⁸

In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood depicts the dire alternatives that happen when technology runs amok, when having pulled the genetic engineering switch, we just can't "turn it off." Atwood considers this dilemma in the context of "what it means to be human." Crake and his MaddAdam cronies have "pushed the envelope" of humanity as far as it can go—they have become "numbers people," who have become addicted to invention, and immune to the impact of their experiments on human subjects. Crake's extreme alienation—attributed to Alzheimer's—presents us with a twenty-first century arch villain. Crake is so disassociated from humanity that he launches a killing spree worse than Pol Pot. The substitute humanoids that he creates, the Crakers, are as intellectually disabled and emotionally vapid as Dr. Moreau's beast men.

Never Let Me Go also addresses the question of what it means to be human, and suggests that caring and empathy are a litmus test as important as any other. In an interview, Ishiguro explained that by constructing clones as central characters he was able to address "the oldest questions in literature ... What does it mean to be human?"

¹²⁸ Ibid.

What is a soul?”¹²⁹ At the end of the novel, Miss Emily justifies the guardians’ policy of keeping the clones in the dark as long as possible. The donor clones enjoyed a relatively normal school experience, a memory that could not be taken away:

.... We did that principally by sheltering you. Hailsham would not have been Hailsham if we hadn’t. Very well sometimes that meant we kept things from you, lied to you. Yes, in many ways we fooled you. (268)

This failure to disclose recalls the Noble Lie of Plato’s *Republic*, where the guardians lie to the citizens that they have gold, silver, or bronze in their souls that determine their fate in the state.¹³⁰ The irony is that although the donor clones are manufactured, and their fate is determined by their test tube origin, they have real souls. Yet their sacrificial role in society has been predetermined: as in Plato’s caste scheme, their fate is sealed.

The most obvious disability in *Never Let Me Go* is the physical weakening and eventual extinction that results from organ donation. However, this novel also universalizes disability by its implied focus on the need to come to terms with death faced by everyone who lives into adulthood. Ishiguro has explained in an interview that this novel treats the most universal of dilemmas—and even of disabilities—that we are all doomed to die.¹³¹ For most of us the life span may be eighty years or longer; for the donor clones, it is thirty years. Kathy and her peers live a compressed existence where

¹²⁹ Kazuo Ishiguro, “Future Imperfect,” *The Guardian* 25 March 2006, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/mar/25/featuresreviews.guardianreview36>.

¹³⁰ Plato’s *Republic*, 414b- 415d.

¹³¹ Kazuo Ishiguro Discusses “Never Let Me Go,” April 11, 2008. <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=ishiguro+interview+never+let+me+go&mid=01C1958AA63AD1C852801C1958AA63AD1CC8528&view=detail&FORM=VIRE3>

they must live their lives, and come to terms with what really matters in a drastically reduced life span. For these donor clones, the answer is emotional attachment, perpetuated by memories.

CONCLUSION: What Have We Learned?

What have we learned from study of the neglected topic, the treatment of disability in utopian and dystopian texts?

A key lesson, I suggest, is the need to confront the tension between humanity and polity, between the Ethics of Care and utilitarian concerns. In More's *Utopia* and Scott's *Millenium Hall*, generous caregiving is provided and mocking of deformed bodies is prohibited. While Plato would abandon treatment of the chronically ill and elderly for the good of the state, I argue that More responds to Plato by implicitly justifying care of the infirm as beneficial to the state. There will be no need to accumulate wealth if the state provides for us when we become infirm or disabled. Scott provides a different reconciliation: she argues that individuals with a myriad of disabilities—the maimed, the deaf, the blind, and the elderly—can be put to productive work. It benefits the state to match their remaining abilities to available jobs because they can become productive workers.

In contrast, in the dystopian texts that I have examined, utilitarian principles of “the greater good” have been deployed to exploit vulnerable and disabled individuals. Each of the four dystopian texts that I examine offers a pretext for abuse. In *Omelas*, a child is neglected as a sacrifice to the existence of the “utopia”—to maintain the happiness of everyone else in the community. In *The Unit*, more productive members of society benefit from the experiments conducted on “dispensable” older individuals and the organs that are extracted from their bodies. In effect, as organs are transplanted to

more valued members of society whose bodies are in need of repair, disability is transferred to those who are deemed expendable. In *Oryx and Crake*, supposedly in order to preserve the species, an elite scientist decides to eliminate human beings and replace them with environmentally adapted, subhuman clones. In *Never Let Me Go*, young clones are sacrificed before they reach the age of thirty for the wellbeing of the “normal population.”

In each of the dystopian texts, there is a flagrant violation of care giving. In “Omelas,” the child in the cellar is left to wallow in her wounds and endure physical and emotional misery. There is no effort at treatment. In *Oryx and Crake*, the mothers are absent and/or themselves too disabled to care for their young. Far from healing, the pharmaceutical industry disseminates disease in its pills to boost profits. In *The Unit* and *Never Let Me Go*, hospitals are killing fields, where the bodies of [older citizens] [young adults] are plundered for the sake of prolonging the lives of [productive younger adults with families] or [the “normal” population].

In each instance—the abuse and disabling of the cellarized child, the deliberate disabling of humans and the creation of clones—there is a violation of Kant’s categorical duty to respect humans as ends in themselves. This deliberate disabling also violates Rawls’s principles of justice which require that inequalities in distribution are justified only when they are of the greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members of society. The individuals who have been impaired and the clones who have been engendered are not better off by their disproportionate share of social burdens, nor does it appear that they have had a chance to participate in determination of their outcome. As we study disability in utopian texts, we see the close link between justice and caregiving.

These dystopian visions are closely related: Le Guin expressly asks whether we would leave Omelas, a society whose prosperity depends on sacrifice of the most vulnerable. Ishiguro implicitly invites us to consider whether we would travel to China to obtain an organ transplant needed to save our lives.

I hope that this study will stimulate further critical thinking about the connection between disability and utopian studies.

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