Paper 1

Anticipating the Chthulucene: Exploring Margaret Atwood’s ‘tentacular thinking’ in the graphic novel trilogy Angel Catbird

Margaret Atwood’s graphic novel trilogy: Angel Catbird (Vol. 1: September 2016, Vol. 2: February 2017, and Vol. 3: July 2017), is ripe with characters who are animal-human chimeras. This interspecies world is threatened by the half-rat supervillain Dr. Muroid, who wants to use a super-splicer, which accidentally transforms the scientist Strig Feleedus into a cat-owl-human hybrid Angel Catbird, to bioengineer an army of half-rats geared towards world domination. In his struggle to defeat Muroid, Angel Catbird forms an alliance with half-cat, half-bat individuals; and thus, forms a group of multispecies justice seekers who are geared towards the mutual goal of survival. This paper seeks to explore how, in fabricating such a narrative, Margaret Atwood anticipates Donna Haraway’s Chthulucene, which is the epoch in which human and nonhuman survivors of a disaster cohabit. Haraway urges us to dwell on the way we think, and the things we think with; and it seems of utmost urgency that thinking via the multispecies graphic narrative of Margaret Atwood’s Angel Catbird trilogy would lend to a paradigm shift in understanding of the dangers faced by various forms of planetary life. The paper further wishes to establish that the Chthulucene seems to be the only way forward for Haraway, and that is how the narrative of Atwood’s trilogy also unfolds.

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Paper 2

The Catbird as The Playful Other:  
A Story of Neo-Baroque Criticism

While in speculative fiction it is traditionally the scientist who creates the monstrous other, it is a rare case that the scientist himself is turned into said creature. In Angel Catbird (2016 – 2017), though, this is not the only deviation from genre conventions. As a human-bird-cat-hybrid, the
eponymous hero Angel Catbird shares a fate with Frankenstein’s creature, i.e. being composed of different parts from various living beings, but unlike this creature, the hero finds himself suitable company. The natural half-cats are his peers. Not only does he find a mate amongst them, but he also finds comrades-in-arms for a war against an army of laboratory rats, trying to take over the world.

Margaret Atwood’s unlikely genre mix is as neo-baroque, as Omar Calabrese (1992) could have wished for. Her blend of science fiction and superhero story picks up nicely on various tropes from such diverse traditions as dystopian YA novels or animated humorous TV shows. I would like to argue that the seemingly random recombination, deconstruction, and reinterpretation of genre stock items serves as a playful distraction from the central themes of identity, social performativity and genre conventions hiding in plain sight: Strig Feleedus, the scientist turned catbird, should by all genre standards have trouble ‘fitting in’, and yet he feels not only comfortable with his new body, but is also accepted almost right away into half-cat society. Not only is withholding such genre tropes a comment on the genre, but it is also a reference to the superheroes of an era long before 1986 – the one’s without self-doubt, dark secrets, and grim faces. The ones that Margaret Atwood is referring to in the preface of Angel Catbird, Vol. 1, as her childhood reading pleasures.

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**Paper 3**

**War Bears: Resisting (Post)Modernity**

Many of Atwood’s novels feature layered narratives, with artists and the stories they create. *War Bears* (with art by Ken Steacy) is a graphic novel version of this story. The text grapples with art as a response to war, as commercial product, as that which captures the zeitgeist. This piece is situated in a particular time, when Canadian art and culture became more threatened by American pop culture and when the end of WWII marked the penumbra between modernism and postmodernism. This paper explores Atwood’s dually nostalgic and critical look at the shift to postmodernism as reflected in comics, at a time when comics have entered a new renaissance.

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