

Science Fiction by Margaret Atwood with a Post-human Impact *Crake* and *Oryx*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Margaret Atwood's 2003 novel Oryx & Crake to see if it presents a criticism of emotion in the post-humanist era. We discuss how the novel explains how human existence and machines are connected with the lack of compassion that arises from this by using dystopian artefacts from XXI society. What does the narrative teach us about how a post-human society affects our emotional ties to the environment, machines, and even ourselves as post-human subjects? It's important to highlight that we will be looking at post-humanism from two angles: as a chance to show humanist naïveté and as an illustration of the contemporary man-made society in which humans and non-humans are closely intertwined. As a result, the suggested debate serves as a reminder of how helpful dystopia may be as a mirror for the society from which it arises, particularly in respect to the new critical perspectives emerging from a post-human dystopia. Oryx & Crake's (2003) protagonists' astute appraisal of this post-human future, when everything seems to go wrong, disproves the unwarranted assumption that dystopias would not be relevant if one lived beyond the possibility of an openly authoritarian governmental authority.

Keywords: Oryx & Crake. Margaret Atwood. Post-humanism. Canadian studies

I INTRODUCTION

(a) Introductory reflections on post-human affect -

It's crucial to keep in mind that "some affect theory argues the therapeutic usefulness of embracing negative sensations such as guilt, grief, or loneliness" when thinking of affect theory. Other branches of it emphasise "ugly sentiments" as sources of societal criticism rather than self-knowledge. Sociology of chance meetings, affect theory looks at the world as a way to reorganise its symbolic meanings and to discover what leads us there in one direction or the other. Affect theory, which emphasises the unseen forces that form the basis for our behaviours, might reject psychoanalysis and attempt to let feelings speak for themselves, as though they will do so most effectively if the conscious mind stays out of the way. Style-wise, it has promoted deeply individualised scholarship. Given all that has altered during our post-human advances, the significance of seeing through the glasses developed from this particular type of analytical thinking in modern times is beyond dispute. This change in perspective would allow us to ask questions like "how we know what normative shape collective political affect has taken, if any (and how it differs from media- or propaganda-orchestrated political emotion), and what it means to characterise something as "largely symbolic," according to Berlant and Greenwald. The authors then emphasise the need to invert the spectrum because many social, historical, cultural, and political events are subtly orchestrated on levels that are beyond our initial comprehension.

II DISCUSSION

(a) As a rupture of the dominant narrative of development, dystopia

Western civilization has long been accompanied by dystopian literature, which at various historical junctures brought the widest range of fears to the surface.

The idea behind this discussion is that the emergence of various political movements, the development of technology, the empowerment of commercial trades, and the ensuing reinforcement of excessive materialism have all contributed to redefining the dystopian fears of contemporary (neoliberal) society. This discussion thus also addresses the ideological shift experienced in contemporary dystopian settings between rather distinct economic and governmental practises. The scope, complexity, and wide-ranging implications of the risk and uncertainty we currently face are due to the processes "that have produced the massive industrial, technological, urban, demographic, lifestyle, and intellectual transformations and uneven developments that we have witnessed in the latter half of the twentieth century."

Despite the numerous advancements of neoliberal civilization, dystopian fiction still serves a purpose in today's world because its target is more complex and abstract than the absolutist regimes that have been the subject of so much criticism in the past, such as Russian Communism, German Nazism, and Italian Fascism. Therefore, it would be naïve to assume that concepts like utopia and dystopia may have defining qualities.

So let's take a closer look at *Oryx & Crake*, a book that was written at a time when the popularity of dictatorships had already begun to decline despite widespread criticism. By doing so, it is possible to test the viability of adapting dystopian ideals in a society based on money, where the threat is not an all-powerful government,

However, market demands have taken the role of absolute capital, which refers to the censorship, control, and skewed judgments formerly exercised by one political party or another. By giving us a chance to view our neoliberal society from the obvious possibility of an environmental, social, and human catastrophe, dystopian literature might help us reevaluate the key elements of such a market.

A tragedy that can be perceived metaphorically or literally. How post-human will this calamity be, and how post-human are we? Both of these issues are addressed in *Oryx & Crake*, a dystopian guidebook. The post-human issues it poses suggest that any direction you turn, calamity is always a possibility.

The story is told from the perspective of Jimmy, also known as Snowman, as he gets baptised after the apocalyptic disaster he is about to explain. Jimmy's personal story is initially a mystery to readers; however, as we learn through his voice about the circumstances that led up to his current state, it gradually becomes clear.

Snowman appears to be a ghost as he moves through the deserted streets of a planet that has been abandoned, accompanied by semi-robot creatures made of failed human innovations. However, such animals are not the sole threat: "Snowball plods on, picking up the pace as much as he can, as he pulls the sheet up over his baseball cap to shield himself from the sun's glare. His best chance is speed because he knows he'll burn some even through the sheet if he stays out here for long enough: his best hope is speed".

Since ozone depletion has reached unprecedented levels, this is a sign that the environment is now irredeemably unfriendly. However, readers are still unsure as to whether a natural calamity or human-caused catastrophe caused the apocalypse that left Snowman as the last person alive.

Through the narrator's eyes, readers see a very strange collection of animals that resemble humans but are somewhat different in terms of physical characteristics and behavioural patterns as we work our way toward learning this knowledge. This is particularly true when it comes to their food, colour, scent, and, in particular, their reproductive and excretory systems (all of which are far more "pleasant" and less "repulsive" than the characteristics of the human race). Controversially, everything that separates these creatures from humans

has to do with the traits that make us more savage and animal-like; specifically, it has to do with the needs that, no matter how advanced, civilised, and artificial our civilization gets, our own nature cannot satisfy.

These aseptic animals remind us that, despite our appearance of tamed lives, impulses, and desires, humans are really not that different from the wild environment they abhor. They are a representation of what modern civilization aspires to be. Readers realise that the "Snow-man" and these odd animals have developed a type of mutual dependency since s/he frequently visits them to check on their well-being and is in turn fed and supported by them.

Both boys reside in a post-human society, but they have different perspectives on what it is to be post-human. Jimmy is alarmed by the extreme socioeconomic inequality and the capitalist utilitarian attitude toward everyone and everything. While aiming to create a planet that is perfectly suited to human needs, Crake, on the other hand, is keenly interested in genetic engineering (of animals, plants, and even people themselves). This concept seems to make perfect sense until he realises that destroying the world is pointless if humans are not also genetically improved.

Despite their differences, Jimmy and Crake form a close emotional bond that lasts until *Oryx*, the Asian girl they both fall in love with, shows up and causes significant conflict between them. Snowman, though, relates his own tale before any of that happened, back when Crake, *Oryx*, and other unusual animals didn't need to be taught.

Jimmy can already understand as a young child that "some lives are more flawless than others" in the world he lived in.

Jimmy is one of the few people who belong to the privileged portion of the population of the dystopian Canada that Atwood has created, and he is horrified to see the ones who have not been so lucky, shockingly observing them and sharing his feelings with the readers through the omniscience of the narrator: "How did such people exist? Jimmy was clueless. On the opposite side of the razor wire, though, they were. Some of them yelled, but the bulletproof glass blocked everything out.

III FINAL REMARKS

(a) Towards a post-human (non-dystopian?) future

As an American book, *Oryx and Crake* sparks dystopia from the place of paradise. That is to say, even though America is regarded as one of the first obvious sources of utopian imagination during the

great navigations, it is now the region from which a fertile dystopian response to such images calls into question not only utopia but, when considered as encircled within small and constrained patterns, even dystopia itself.

Although we are so stubbornly moving in that direction, the story warns us of a future we do not desire. It reflects the possibilities of our perceived self-importance. However, as the conclusion of our research reveals, this narrative is still malleable; we might choose how Atwood wants to end her story.

Both dystopia and utopia are present; neither one is excluded from the other by the possibility of the other. Our object of study reveals, in one way or another, that we need fresh critical glasses in order to view the world around us less passionately than we formerly did. In other words, Atwood's dystopia's ugliness gives us a way to see its antithesis: a lovely, utopian potential.

At the end of the day, "[b]eing an absent figure, it [beauty] exists in literature by indirect reference to an object of comparison [...]. The stories in this setting resemble extended catachresis figures that conceal utopia within their folds. *Oryx & Crake* serves as a reminder to readers of the social as well as aesthetic worth of literature. As such, it will help us to think on our post-human situation, which is now institutionalized and is essentially an axiom of modern society rather than just a conceivable condition.

The proposed discussion, therefore, serves as a reminder of the usefulness of dystopia as a mirror to the society from which it emerges, particularly in relation to the new critical viewpoints emerging from a post-human dystopia. The insightful assessment of this post-human future, when everything seems to go wrong, offered by *Oryx and Crake's* protagonists is in opposition to the limited, oversimplified belief that dystopias are irrelevant if one lives far from the threat of an outwardly totalitarian governmental system.

The book serves as a warning: renouncing our convictions and cherishing the notion that the environment and other living things are integral components of our hierarchical pyramids (whose divides are more symbolic than real), forms the basis for the formation of a new and necessary network. The potential to transcend utilitarian reasoning is inherent in literature; it is, consequently, this provides a privileged avenue for rethinking hegemonic epistemes that portray modern time and space as dystopian.

The emphasis on capital, on the other hand, provides proof that inequality is ingrained in human society by creating a partnership between creation and destruction, wealth and poverty, scarcity and abundance. There is no chance for development

without getting rid of those who don't follow the logic of the market, or, more accurately, progress will always be partial.

The post-apocalyptic universe of *Oryx and Crake* is a fiction that, no matter how exaggerated, the more it reminds us of our own reality. Our species' extinction marks the beginning of Atwood's dismal future, and just as with any other animal, it is impossible to predict when or when that will happen.

The post-human crackers are the "Other" of our humanity as a result; they serve as a reminder of how insignificant we and our anthropocentric desires may ultimately be. No matter how realistic and reasonable they may seem, however, what we have been saying thus far is precisely that narratives are never deterministic; rather, they are just what we need to modify the destinies toward which we may be marching.

In the present, we embrace a variety of narratives, some of which—regardless of how harmful or false they may be—are really what provide us the physical structures for our social and political organisations. We have speeches like those delivered by *Crake* and *Jimmy's* father, as well as speeches from *Snowman*. Aside from dystopian novels, there are also other alternatives for the capitalist theory that everything is justified by the pursuit of profit. As stated in the opening and several times over the course of our conversation, literature serves as a fruitful platform for the transformation of current power structures by forms of consciousness and unconsciousness.

The realm where preserving epistemes is no longer required is fiction, where transgressive behaviour is accepted. However necessary they are as part of what *Jean Raynaud* refers to as "warning literature," stories like the one in *Oryx & Crake* are not sufficient in and of it to displace the master narrative of hegemonic interests.

If *Bauman* is correct in his claim that "questioning the ostensibly unquestionable premises of our way of life is the most urgent of services we owe our fellow humans and ourselves" (198), then the post-humanist elaborations in *Oryx & Crake*, which are grounded in a dystopian landscape, have much to offer in terms of helping us rethink the impact of our actions on the world. In the same way that the crackers do not already exist but may be created by a "crazy" scientist like *Crake* soon enough, *Jimmy's* narrative is fiction, but it could also be true.

It is not easy to just give up on coming up with concepts for a less anthropocentric future in which post-human and all-encompassing thinking could aid us in creating an ethically better society. Books like *Atwood's Oryx & Crake* will always be available if

we run out of new things to explore; after all, civilization has always progressed with the hope of a utopian future and the dread of a dystopian one. Even though we are unmistakably closer to the latter, we'll continue to hold out hope that there's still a chance we can reach the former.

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