

HUBRIS AND ‘PARADICICAL’ DESTRUCTION IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S ORYX AND CRAKE*

Gillian Mary Elizabeth Alban¹

ABSTRACT

Margaret Atwood’s dystopian, speculative novel, *Oryx and Crake* (2003) shows the devastating effects of the unbridled, scientific power or hubris of humans as they play god in attempting to contravene against devastation of the environment according to their own lights, whether reengineering humanity according to their own design, or taking drastic action to ensure the survival of the ecosystem, both of these in a desperate attempt to counteract the results of corporate greed which has virtually destroyed the ecosystem. Atwood presents the cataclysmic events of this novel through a double time frame. The past shows the ecological, climactic destruction of the globe effected by rapaciously capitalist multinational corporates which spreads a dark pall over Jimmy’s childhood. The present time leaves Snowman/ Jimmy almost the sole inheritor after an apocalyptic mass death has occurred. He remains trapped in a traumatic survival of these devastations, looking back to wonder at his own responsibility for this destruction, even as he remains caught within the consequences. Atwood’s imaginative presentation of the ecological destruction of the world, presented through the psychic traumas of her protagonist, shows us the possible consequences of human actions in disregard for the planet earth, which just might operate in warning us of the results of such destruction of our environment before they are actually upon us and it will be too late.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, apocalypse, hubris, destruction, ecosystem, bioengineering, multinational corporates, trauma, threat

MARGARET ATWOOD’un ORYX AND CRAKE’inde KİBİR VE CENNETSEL YIKIM

ÖZ

Margaret Atwood’un distopik, spekülatif romanı *Oryx and Crake* (2003) bize dizginlenemeyen bilimin gücünü veya insanların doğayı kendi ışıklarına göre mahfetmelerine engel olmaya çalışırken Tanrı rolünü oynamalarının yarattığı gururun yıkıcı sonuçlarını gösterir. Bu ya insanlığı kendi tasarladıkları yeni bir düzen içinde yeniden yapılandırmakla olur; ya da ekosistemi adeta yokeden bir ağgözlülüğü önleme çabasında global düzenin hayatta kalmasını garantiye almak için harekete geçmekle. Atwood bu dehşet verici olayları ikili bir zaman çerçevesinde bize sunar. Geçmiş; Jimmy’nin çocukluğuna gölge düşüren ağgözlü, kapitalist, çokuluslu şirketlerin dünyayı mahfetmesini gösterir. Günümüz ise bu kahredici olaylar arasında travmatik bir şekilde hayatta kalarak hapsolmuş hissedilen, geçmişine bakarak bunun sonuçlarına yakalandığı için bu

yıkımda kendi sorumluluğunu düşünen Snowman/ Jimmy'yi kıyametvari bir toplu ölümden sonra yegane varis olarak bırakır.

Atwood'un ruhsal travmalar yaşayan karakteri üzerinden gösterdiği dünyanın ekolojik anlamda mahfolmasıyla ilgili imgesel sunumu bize insanların olası hareketlerinin sonuçlarını gösterir, ki bu da yıkım öncesi bize yıkım sonrasında yaşanacaklar hakkında bir uyarı niteliği taşıyabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, kıyamet, gurur, yıkım, ekosistem, biyomühendislik, çökuluslu toplumlar, travma, tehdit

Science Gone Badly Wrong

D.J. Boorstin in *The Americans* (1965) describes the fifth rider of the apocalypse as Science, placing the potentially destructive force of Science after Pestilence, War, Famine and Death. Margaret Atwood's dystopian, which she calls a "ustopian" novel (in Lukes, 2012, p. 292), *Oryx and Crake* (2003) presents a catastrophic apocalyptic disaster erupting in the twenty-first century through human irresponsibility and unlimited hubris, almost terminating the human race. Reinforced by her Brown Box of clippings containing files on Animals-Extinction, Biotechnology, Climate Change, Nanotechnology, Stem Cell Research, as well as Slavery, Video Games, Bioterror and Bioerror (Howells, 2006, p. 171), she asserts that everything in this speculative novel is anchored on a reference to our present life. *Oryx and Crake* illustrates the possible consequences of bioterrorism, as a global pandemic escalates out of control through the megalomania of a technological Asperger Syndrome genius, gravely challenged in the then vastly underestimated areas of social and verbal intelligence. He responds to the rampant irresponsibility of the multinational corporations' absolute control over cosmic deterioration, in Atwood's imaginative world extrapolated from the present.

Before writing this book, Atwood visited the Aboriginal cave dwellings in Australia over tens of thousands of years old which show how people may live in harmony with their environment; she also observed the climate deterioration seen in receding glaciers on a visit to the Arctic. While Atwood appreciates that science and fantasy may help us to realize human dreams, such as "eternal youth, godlike beauty, hyper intelligence, Charles Atlas strength" (qtd. in Howells, 2006, p. 170), she also acknowledges that scientific experimentation has the power to wreak havoc in the world. The mad scientist and his monstrous attempt to create immortality in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) haunts Atwood's novel, *Oryx and Crake*, showing how human attempts to play god could destroy the earth.

Derrida, in his writing, "No Apocalypse, Not Now" (1984) focuses on the threat of nuclear war in his horror at the "anticipatory assimilation of that unanticipatable entirely-other" (1984, p. 23), wondering whether humanity is able to negotiate with nuclear power, or whether we have taken on too powerful an adversary by releasing this weapon.

He published his seven missiles/ missives in an appeal for the “aleatory destinerrance of the envoi” (1984, p. 29) or the random wandering-as-its-own-end in the message sent, in order to alert his readers to the possibility that in engaging in such perilous discussions regarding threats to life on earth, unthinkable planetary destruction may take a random, uncontrollable path or swathe through the world, leaving any remnants of humanity reduced to helplessly observing the results of the technological horrors that humanity is already unleashing on our world.

Oryx and Crake was published on the fiftieth anniversary of Crick and Watson’s discovery of the structure of DNA, and when the human genome was fully sequenced (Howells, 2006, p. 163-4). In the society shown in this novel, despite medical advances which can treat or prevent all human disease, no control is exerted over these developments, with power vested in rapaciously greedy multinational corporates and their escalating profits. Any government role in this work appears negligible; as the characters watch *dirtysockpuppets.com* with endless digital gene alteration, it is no longer possible to tell if frequently toppling generals and leaders are real or not any more (Atwood, 2003, p. 94), in a world where politics is seen alongside media games as hyperreal, suggesting the simulacra described by Baudrillard, with television broadcasts offering merely virtual reality.

Oryx and Crake shows the time of Jimmy’s youth, with increasing ecological destruction of the earth, massive flooding, destruction of crops and livestock, as well as attempts to perfect humanity, and the creation of hybrid animal forms which are destructive to other life forms, all of which can be read in our current situation. The result of such flagrant disrespect for the earth leaves one human survivor, Jimmy, also called Snowman, and the humanoid, manufactured Crakers, surviving the disaster into a post-apocalyptic time. In the lead-up to the disaster, the putative benefits of genetic manipulation and human ‘perfectibility’ are retained almost entirely within elite, professional communities gated in high security zones populated largely by scientists. Outside such privileged communities, the working class pleeblands stretch in uncontrolled chaos. Both these ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups are increasingly vulnerable to genetic and pharmaceutical terrorism. Jimmy’s art student friends describe the mass consumerism of humanity as “like a giant slug eating its way relentlessly through all the other bioforms on the planet, grinding up life on earth and shitting it out the back-side in the form of pieces of manufactured and soon-to-be obsolete plastic junk” (Atwood, 2003, p. 285).

The Olduvai theory of Richard Duncan offers a similar warning that human history’s industrial bell curve has peaked, and we are now declining into a crash which will bring a likely return to the technology of the

Neolithic age, as he takes the “transient pulse theory of industrial civilization” (Duncan, 1996). His graph shows humanity’s technology peaking between 1930 and 2025, then descending into a steep decline, bringing a return to a post-industrial, primitive world. Technology may turn out to be a one-off opportunity, and if we continue to over-exploit the planet and live beyond our means, industrialism may be non-repeatable, since the metals necessary for industrialisation have already largely been mined (Atwood, 2003, p. 261). This is the situation Jimmy inherits as the novel opens, in a “devastated world littered with the wreckage of late twentieth-century civilization reminding him daily of what he has lost” (Howells, 2006, p. 172). Dawn breaks as of old, with a “rosy, deadly glow” (Atwood, 2003, p. 3) and the tide comes in, but not over rocks on the beach, but over “ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble sound[ing] almost [but not quite] like holiday traffic”. The entire natural world has been destroyed through the rapacious excesses of multinational corporations, and humanity has been terminated by the devious manipulations of the genius but socially challenged Crake, in his overreaching attempt to ameliorate the ecological disaster.

Jimmy Snowman’s Traumas Maturing within Global Destruction

The dual time frame of *Oryx* and *Crake*, between the destroyed if already fragile past of Jimmy which had been ticking away like a time bomb, and the devastated world which his surviving persona, Snowman, inherits, suggests itself to Katherine Snyder for a reading through trauma theory, in “Time to Go”: the Post-Apocalyptic and the Post-Traumatic” (2011). In trauma theory, the victim repeatedly returns to the event which caused them suffering, while at the same time leaving its site, in a situation of temporal delay and evasion of the trauma, which “produces repeated, uncontrollable, and incalculable effects that endure long after its ostensible ‘precipitating cause’” (Marder, 2006, p. 1). Freud calls this effect ‘afterwardsness’ or deferred action; *Nachträglichkeit*. Cathy Caruth describes the two moments of trauma as being caught in an eternal loop of repeating the past in memory, as its full impact is only felt in retrospect. The future activates the meaning of the past moment, while the past gives the future moment meaning, in the “doubled temporality of trauma” (Snyder, 2011, p. 472), with memory reprinting the trauma in the later experience. “The impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time” (Caruth in Marder, 2006, p. 2). This leaves the sufferer of trauma surviving in a ghostly fashion, haunted or possessed by their traumatic experiences. Thus Snowman appears trapped within an endlessly circling loop as he retraces the sufferings of his former self, Jimmy, through his childhood traumas, including the early loss of his mother, and the failures and advances in experimentations for which he feels responsible. He also suffers guilt for his retrospective sense of implication in the crimes of his mad scientist friend Crake. Between Jimmy’s past

and Snowman's present, the double schema of trauma operates for "proleptically mourning a global fate that may already be unavoidable or, alternatively, for prescriptively re-writing humanity's seemingly inevitable demise" (Synder, 2011, p. 474). His remembered traumas continue into his solitary human survival of the JUVE virus pandemic, when he is locked in the 'Paradice' dome, as the final loaded 'dice' against humanity is tossed, with Jimmy left responsible for the alternate, humanoid Crakers, who have apparently outlived humanity.

Thus Snowman is trapped in the post-apocalyptic solitary present, desperately trying to understand what went wrong. He works back to the destructive pandemic, while also retracing early childhood memories of personal, familial, and social burdens which imbue him with guilt and alienate him, implicating him in the troubles of the world. The novel's time lines meet in the activities at the Rejooven Essence Compound, the BlyssPluss drug campaign and the Paradise Project, as past events catch up with the present. Snowman returns from the flashback of the cataclysmic events under the Paradise dome, where he actively terminates his companions, to the journey back to his lonely shelter on the beach, from which he will finally walk towards the stray remnants of humanity on the beach. The book ends as he decides how to act towards these other survivors in the Zero hour his dead watch shows: "Time to go" (Atwood, 2003, p. 433). Will he embrace these post-apocalyptic humans, or exterminate these stray survivors of a fragile humanity, thereby leaving himself entirely alone on planet earth?

In his childhood, Jimmy saw how "the 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, and meat became harder to come by" (Atwood, 2003, p. 27). As global warming melted the icecaps, a tropical climate of heat and floods caused a rising sea-level to totally immerse major coastal areas, including America's entire east coast, drowning the Ivy League universities and the government in Washington, followed by a "huge tidal wave, from the Canary Islands volcano" (2003, p. 71). Exposure to the sun makes life almost unendurable for humans, while whole life styles are swept away as Florida orchards dried up without rain; "Lake Okeechobee had shrunk to a reeking mud puddle and the Everglades had burned for three weeks straight" (2003, p. 72). Ecological feminist, Val Plumwood, suggests that people need to deeply care about their part of the world, in order to enforce controls which may prevent climatic deterioration. Desertification occurs in continental zones, and after extensive coastal flooding, the climate that Snowman experiences in the tree house and lean-to he erects alternates between unbearably scorching under a burning sun, with torrential stormy showers each afternoon.

Jimmy's father, a genographer in OrganInc Farms, had helped engineer the Methuselah Mouse in a drive for immortality (Atwood, 2003, p. 25). He is happy to enjoy a comfortable life-style; why bash it? He is shocked at his wife's anachronism in suggesting they are sacrilegiously and immorally "interfering with the building blocks of life" (2003, p. 64), in ways like our current attempts at germline genetic engineering (Howells, 2006, p. 163), creating a moral cesspool. His mother is an early rebellious microbiologist who stalks the novel like Cassandra, shades of Atwood herself, predicting that human insatiability will lead to cataclysmic destruction. She refuses to connive in the current manipulations of human and animal DNA, such as in creating the pig-like pigeons with human brains (Atwood, 2003, p. 63) in order to create a supply of available organs to enable humans to harvest kidneys, livers and hearts, which later leaves Snowman struggling to survive against teams of super-pigs who attack him on his journey. She protests their final achievement of growing human neocortex tissue in pigeons, purportedly to help stroke victims: "That's all we need. More people with the brains of pigs" (2003, p. 64). Protesting the unpredictable results of technological advances which creating havoc while manipulate the world's dwindling natural resources, she loses her job or quits in disgust, then falls into depression. Deserting her family and their exclusive compound, she protests unencumbered from the pleeblands outside. She probably hoped Jimmy would develop a social conscience. At least implicated in realizing Crake's dire plot (2003, p. 389), Jimmy makes no attempt to prevent the destruction of human society.

Snowman tries to work out his position in relation to the voices he hears from the past; his mother, father, and friends like Crake and his lover Oryx, working through absence, loss, and the shocks which traumatise him. He grows up playing the fool between his divided parents, as they spar over earning a living or enjoying a comfortable lifestyle while working on genetic manipulation. His irresolution culminates in his passive attitude towards Crake and his Extinctathon and terrorist proclivities, as Crake manipulates genetic life forms as well as pharmaceuticals, culminating in his Promethean crimes of birth: "recreating humanity in an image of his own making" (Snyder, 2011, p. 480), and death, in "bioengineering the germ of genocide". Both these actions are framed by the primal embrace which Snowman creates in shooting Crake who returns with Oryx in his arms, leaving the bodies behind in Paradise, the scene which predates the novel's start, and to which Snowman returns during his journey back to these disintegrating corpses in the dome's airlock after the final dice has been thrown.

On the fatal evening as the JUVE pandemic breaks out, Oryx calls Jimmy in distress at the cataclysmic effects of the pills she has been selling around the world as a libidinal panacea and prophylactic against disease and unwanted births. Crake, her "brilliant genius" (Atwood, 2003, p. 369), did not confide the fatal

bite in this medication to her. He aimed to solve, by terminating, all human and global problems in one fell swoop. Weeping about the suffering caused by this pill, a heavy-handed Crake takes over, preventing her from confiding in Jimmy. Crake assures Jimmy that everything is under control, while Jimmy witnesses on television the worldwide plague or Red Death decimating humanity as a result of Crake's BlyssPuss Pills.

Jimmy's first action is self-defensive, locking out all his colleagues, determining to be the sole survivor; he lets them walk away without considering a possible antidote. Crake returns with Oryx draped over his arm. Then Crake slits her throat in what he had previously described as a mercy killing, leaving the heritage of the humanoid Crakers to Snowman, with words similar to those his mother had used: "I'm counting on you" (Atwood, 2003, p. 385), as Jimmy shoots him. This suggests Walter Benjamin's "Theses" which presents Klee's *Angelus Novus* looking back at the "Angel of History" as he is blown from Paradise by the storm we "call progress" which "propels him into the future towards which his back is turned" (Djerassi, 2014, p. 1). Civilization piles up a wreckage of debris, horror and monstrosity at his feet, as he turns his head away. Snowman is similarly left surveying the debris of the so-called progress of the twenty-first century towards which he had turned a blind eye, leaving him carrying the heritage of humanity alone.

Throughout the novel, Jimmy operates against his antagonists, Crake and Oryx; she is seen as a defiantly returned gaze; her calm is only penetrated at the end. Her look at the camera while performing oral sex at a tender seven or eight, denounces Jimmy: "I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want" (Atwood, 2003, p. 104). Her contempt within her self-assurance and refusal to be diminished, places her supreme against the entire world. She returns her powerfully assured Medusa Gaze back onto others, untraumatized by her past, leaving Snowman in thrall to her and endlessly searching for her love and approval. Her look echoes that of his mother, Sharon, shown to him by the CorpSeCorps men who execute her, erasing while not erasing her. The "blue-eyed look, direct, defiant, patient, wounded. But no tears. Then the sound came suddenly up. Goodbye. Remember Killer. I love you. Don't let me down" (2003, p. 303), followed by her bloody crumpling, leaving Jimmy helplessly and hysterically "weeping with laughter" (2003, p. 304), immediately betraying their code word, "Killer"; betrayal, even as she tells him not to let her down. She had once been part of the system that she realized was destroying the world, and sabotaging her computer before she left was probably her last message to Jimmy — you don't have to go along with them, or play their game. The power of his mother's gaze reverberates with Oryx's gaze, which magnetizes both Crake and Jimmy, incorporating this gaze as a "fetishistic souvenir" (Snyder, 2011, p. 482) into their property. This novel is based on the misogyny of Jimmy and the scientific, twisted genius Crake, who decimates humanity. Both remain in thrall to the enigmatic, East Asian Oryx, who emerged from poverty

through child porn. Besotted by Oryx, Snowman calls out for her, his Bride of Frankenstein (Atwood, 2003, p. 199), while Crake decides to croak after causing mass desecration, leaving the Crakers as sole survivors in their dubious humanity. Atwood's speculative fiction shows these two men arrogantly discarding and decimating human life rather than cherishing it.

Crake's Twisted Genius and Hubris Destroying as he Creates

The few people protesting at the burden placed on Gaia or Mother Earth through the wilful destruction of the climate are mostly from the poor pleeblands of the dispossessed; the rich and powerful within the corporations appear indifferent to cataclysmic problems as long as they maintain their own lifestyle. Counter-attacks occur within groups of freak vegans and animal righters or striking environmentalists. Jimmy's mother is among the global protesters against rampant capitalism and consumerism's destruction of the rain forests for the asinine goal of a cheaper cup of coffee and unconscionable profits for multinationals. The Happicuppa beans all ripen simultaneously, making harvesting entirely mechanical and throwing all smaller operators into poverty (Atwood, 2003, p. 210). In the resulting riots the peasants are massacred by state armies, while the protestors vainly try to remind the American population of the Boston tea party in an appeal to nationalism as well as sense, begging people: "Don't Drink Death!" (2003, p. 211). Crake suggests the "guys should be whacked" (2003, p. 210), as the multinationals are "nuking the cloud forests" to produce the asinine result of tasteless coffee (2003, p. 210). The government is only obliquely referred to, in this world of virtual simulacra, but the biotechnical corporations of international capitalism (Rao, 2006, p. 108) have clearly gone rampant, driven by greed for an endlessly cosmetic and luxurious lifestyle.

Word people like Jimmy are almost unemployable and even called Neurotypical; the vocabulary to protest scarcely survives in this society of scientists. With the death of culture, Jimmy appears almost the only person to savour reading at his inferior Martha Graham college, losing his job of transferring books to CD Roms as they disintegrate in the humid climate as he is so reluctant to discard books. Culture has largely been dumped, leaving only virtual and electronic executions, pornography, violence and sex for leisure activities, alongside drinking and drugs, in a commodified world. The scientific Crake dismisses art as sublimation, a tool enabling men to get laid. He androcentrically derides female art as biologically confused (Atwood, 2003, p. 198), since men are deterred by clever women, and questions whether art survives civilization, as archaeologists only dig over "gnawed bones and old bricks and ossified shit" (2003, p. 197). Terrorism has ended travel and public gatherings in this world of castles defended against the hordes outside: "Live performance had suffered in the sabotage panics of the early twenty-first century" (2003, p. 219). With humanity divided between cities of poor pleeblands and intelligentsias trapped in secure

conglomerate compounds, the intensely protected elite becomes highly vulnerable towards those outside their communities. Physical and biological bioform attacks occur, and deviant forms are fatal, leaving victims dissolving in puddles of guck. Atwood in her *In Other Worlds* (2011) describes a world split between GenRich and GenPoor, and when the peasants inevitably storm the barricades: “To avoid the peasants, we’ll have to go into outer space. Having fun yet?” she quips (in Lukes, 2011, p. 293).

Jimmy and Crake spend their time on terrorist and destructive computer games — *Waco*, *Barbarian Stomp*, *Kwiktime Osama* (Atwood, 2003, p. 45) and *Blood and Roses* (2003, p. 89), which perpetuate low socialisation and aggressive competition, capitalising negative outcomes: “That was the trouble with *Blood and Roses*: it was easier to remember the *Blood* stuff”. Balancing civilization against barbarisms and totting up achievements against devastations, more often than not prophetically “winning meant you inherited a wasteland” (2003, p. 91). These games first imagine the nightmare, then bring its inevitable fulfilment, in self-creating prophecy through what Crake calls monkey brains, monkey paws; the desire to take apart, improve, and then discard (2003, p. 114), of which he himself is guilty. The final game is the ingenious *Extinctathon* which lends itself to minds of pernicious genius. The *MaddAddam Grandmasters* plan to sabotage corporate projects like the *Happicuppa* coffee bean, or introduce a microbe into asphalt and destroy highways, or a parasite wasp in *ChickieNobs* installations, developing a miniature rodent to devastate cars (2003, p. 254). Unable to break through the corporates’ monolithic power, these subversive bioterrorist attackers are reintegrated into the system by Crake. *Snowman* becomes caught up in a system beyond his understanding, trapped in Crake’s nightmares, which Crake refused to acknowledge, even as they break out unconsciously in his screaming each night, while such horrors were still only imagined. Crake creating the metonymous product of his sick mind; Jimmy as *Snowman* ends up living Crake’s nightmares after his friend croaks (2003, p. 255).

Crake had sent out various verbal feelers to Jimmy, like informing him of the hostile bioforms within vitamin pills the corporates were creating in order to make diseases linger, in randomly distributing a virus within vitamins, to manufacture wealth for the companies through such expensive remedies. When Jimmy remarks how evil that is, Crake says that was exactly his father’s opinion. Crake’s father had cracked the pernicious pharmaceutical system which went into reverse; after having cured all diseases, they now fine tune treatment in order to cure or kill the client just as their money runs out, with diseases continuing rampantly out of control. Crake’s father tried to warn his wife and friend Pete before he blew the whistle on *HelthWyzer* (Atwood, 2003, p. 249); they must have exposed him, causing his “execution” (2003, p. 249) by going over a pleebland overpass in an engineered “accident” (2003, p. 214).

When Jimmy announces his job with AnooYoo, his friend Amanda states that “it was a collection of cesspool denizens who existed for no other reason than to prey on the phobias and void the bank accounts of the anxious and the gullible” (2003, p. 290). Even with the evidence of these scams increasingly visible to people, the power of the corporations remains invincible. Crake assumes Jimmy’s mother must have been onto a similar scam in his father’s work, but Jimmy dismisses this out of hand, hiding behind his fatigue while refusing even to reply to Crake or engage with this issue. Both Crake’s mother and his Uncle Pete must have finally fallen prey to their own efforts, as they die from a sabotage virus causing meltdown. The entire novel can be evaluated as working through “the recovery of Jimmy’s buried traumatic memories of the unhappy hypercapitalist system of which he is now the last survivor” (Canavan, 2012, p. 142), leaving Snowman tossed between the confusions and traumas of his lost past while he remains trapped in the horrors of the present.

Atwood uses her creative linguistic skills to identify human manipulations of nature in genetic enterprises with pharmaceutical and reproductive ends. The corporates use names suggesting cosmetic desires like NooSkins (for old) or Beau Toxique, a part of HelthWyzer, where the pigoon research is developing a new epidermis on the principle of an algae replacing itself on the pond, with some ghastly mould problems along the way. Ramona hopes to try the “Fountain of Youth Total Plunge” which replaces the entire epidermis (Atwood, 2003, p. 205), whatever the results. Jimmy’s job with AnooYoo is to write the advertising blurb for pills and devices to make you “fatter, thinner, hairier, balder, whiter, browner, blacker, yellower, sexier and happier” (2003, p. 291). In the pleeblands these are marketed as “Blue Genes Day? ... Try SnipNFix! Herediseases Removed. Why Be Short? Go Goliath! Dreamkidlets. Heal Your Helix. Cribfillers Ltd. Weenie Weenie? Longfellow’s the Fellow!” (2003, p. 339). These products of RejoovenE-sense and Paradise and its fatal loaded punning are driven by “Grief in the face of inevitable death ... The wish to stop time. The human condition” (2003, p. 344), reviving memories of Mary Shelley’s mad scientist, Frankenstein, and his desire to end death.

Through the “[n]ot real telling us about [the] real” (Atwood, 2003, p. 118) the reader sees the consequences of endless genetic manipulation, in the pursuit of human greed and desire for “perfectability”, including spare body parts or cloned substitutes, the perfection of offspring, and beautification of the human body. Offspring are manufactured to order under trade names like Infantade, Foetility and Perfectababe (2003, p. 293); Jimmy imagines his father and Ramona recycling baby parts until they had a “math whiz [child as] beautiful as the dawn”, then loading this “hypothetical wonderkid up with their bloated expectations until the poor tyke burst under the strain” (2003, p. 293), leaving Jimmy not envying this hypothetical half-brother, while also envying him. In spite of a technically high level of intelligence, the

availability of endlessly manipulated products is rampantly indifferent to the destruction of the ecosystem, the balance of surviving life in almost all natural mammal species, causing increasingly vulnerable life forms to crash into extinction, facilitating widespread destruction of the physical environment, and the decimation of humanity and most other life forms.

In this world of borderline scientific geniuses and polymaths, with artists impoverished in a world where the corporates wield absolute economic power, in spite of the expected desire for beautiful, brainy kids, Crake shortlists the desired qualities in offspring as including beauty, docility, which world leaders express considerable interest in, as well as complete adaptability to the environment, in the increasingly tough climate, with negligible intelligence, in the floor models he creates. Jimmy's girl friend Amanda suggests that the development of social intelligence had become fatal – it was “game over once agriculture was invented six or seven thousand years ago. After that, the human experiment was doomed, first to gigantism due to a maxed-out food supply, and then to extinction, once all the available nutrients had been hoovered up” (Atwood, 2003, p. 285). And since one generation gap is enough to obliterate knowledge, and as further metals are too far down below the earth's surface to be used once technology implodes, modern life would therefore come to an abrupt end, as suggested by Duncan, in his “Olduvai Theory”; he presents the idea that we are on a one-way journey “From the Caves, to the Moon, to the Caves”.

The desiderated beautiful cloned humanoids which Crake creates are scarcely human at all. They are UV resistant with insect-repellant skin, immune to all microbes, surviving on a vegetarian diet, including recycling their own excrement in caecotrophs digested in an appendix. Perfectly adapted to their habitat, they need neither clothes nor shelter, and are ideally built to survive cataclysm. They really have no needs, they live a speeded-up human life of marvellous beauty and physical maturity till the age of thirty, when they drop dead. Produced in a range of colours, their resistance to disease is physically inbuilt (Atwood, 2003, p. 187). Accidental body wounds they purr away, along the lines of ultra-sound vibrations which were found to be healing, and so they are almost invulnerable to mishap. Such “market-driven technoscientific models of human perfectionism: the utopian desires for bodily optimization and immortality [were] mocked later by Slavoj Žižek” (Lukes, 2011, p. 293).

These humanoid creatures produced after intensive cloning and now self-replicating almost look human, but they have had most of their intelligence purged, as well as being stripped of emotional intensity or commitment. They do not register pseudospeciation, or different races or skin colour, the neural complexes that might foster a sense of hierarchy have been omitted, and they have no need to hunt or plant and are thus non-territorial. Crake has tried hard to eliminate the need for symbolism, such as “kingdoms, icons, gods, or

money” (Atwood, 2003, p. 359), as well as trying to eliminate jokes, for which you need some sharpness. Despite his best efforts, he cannot eliminate dreams, singing, narrative or curiosity. Although Crake determined to eliminate bogus symbolic, religious or moral feelings, Snowman enjoys fostering the budding religious sense of these Crakers, the Children of Crake whom he encourages to revere Crake as their creator, with Oryx as Earth Mother of the animals, the Children of Oryx, as he answers their questions regarding origins. He fosters their questions and stimulates potential moral awareness through their prayer-like requests and sense of moral self-beration when things go wrong. By the end of the novel they make a “totem” image of Jimmy to “pray” for his return from his exploration (2003, p. 419).

The Crakers who survive the cataclysm replace the “virus of Americanism” of “rapacious violence and cannibalistic consumption of contemporary culture” (Bouson, 2011, p. 16, 15) in these “noble savages that are environmentally friendly, peace-loving and socially and economically egalitarian” (2011, p. 17). Crake has so carefully crafted these creatures to be bland in character and perfect in physical form that they are actually no longer human, lacking personality or significant intelligence. Even Jimmy, who evaluates women entirely according to their physical appearance, feels no desire for these women, finding their perfection off-putting and unappealing, without any foible into which to insert emotion; sex with them wouldn’t be like sex with a human being at all. Their breeding is polyandrous and numerically controlled, the women bearing children every three years. They come on heat by turning blue triannually, as the men woo the woman with flowers and rampant blue penises, when she makes a selection of four men for a mating orgy. When she becomes pregnant, her colour returns to normal, and its object achieved, the orgy is terminated (Atwood, 2003, p. 194). These cloned humanoids are Crake’s panacea for misery; excited when describing them, he appears motivated by altruism, in his attempt to save the planet by leaving these creatures inheriting humanity in this his last-ditch attempt. “Demand for resources has exceeded supply for decades in marginal geopolitical areas, hence the famines and droughts; but very soon, demand is going to exceed supply for everyone” (2003, p. 347). Thus his birth control pill, coupled with his Craker invention, leaves a mere handful of these less greedy and less wasteful pseudo-people to inherit the earth.

Response to Atwood’s Warning of Oryx and Crake

How might we respond to Atwood’s warning in this doomed perspective on the world’s fate? She shows the perils of our present life style, before the ecosystem and humanity are irreversibly destroyed. Frederick Jameson suggests the need for a radical break: “forcing us to think the break itself” (in Canavan, 2012, p. 155, original emphasis); “the grandest of all the ruptures effectuated by the Utopian Imagination: namely, the thought of abolishing money and private property” (2012, p. 157, note 18), which takes us back to the

original Utopia of that name by Thomas More. Derrida clearly found humanity's direction constituting an unimaginable threat to life, although it was a nuclear threat he feared.

The ecological feminist, Val Plumwood, critiques the hegemony of rationalism as offering an inadequate response to environmental crisis. Instead of dualistic thinking that places mind over body, rationality over empathy, male over female, she suggests we need a combined stance of continuity with and distinctness from nature, a clear sense of self from which to operate as well as a defined sense of other, whether animal creatures or inanimate nature. She suggests the need for identification in empathy, which will enable us to reach out in concern for the parts of the world personally known to us in a sense of kinship and friendship. In this respect it is striking that Crake's significant failure to destroy and recreate the world in a superior form arises from his scientific rationality. In death he drops his mantle onto the shoulders of Snowman, an inadequate word man. It is over to us how we read Atwood's warning. Carry on with the current greed for endlessly and supposedly superior life forms, financial gain, a 'perfectable' lifestyle, ultimate beauty and perfect offspring, with far too many people jostling for the world's resources, in a world of haves and have-nots, and we are surely doomed. Margaret Atwood's novel, *Oryx and Crake*, offers a chilling warning of the possible consequences of irresponsible manipulation of our ecosystem and human life on the earth, whether in endless manipulations for perfection, or greedy consumption, or irresponsible reproduction, suggesting, after Derrida, that the writing may already be on the wall for humanity. Atwood presents a poignant footnote to this novel in her "Time capsule found on the dead planet" (2009). She writes: first we created gods, then money; then we made money into our god. We finally created deserts. She ends with these words: "Pray for us, who once, too, thought that we could fly" (2009, p. 1). How long do we have before we realize the possibility of this terrifying future; how much of our beautiful world will have perished before we understand the consequences of our rampant lifestyle on earth?

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