

MARGARET ATWOOD'S "ORYX AND CRAKE" AS A CRITIQUE OF TECHNOLOGICAL UTOPIANISM

Murat Kabak

Department of English Language and Literature,
Istanbul Kültür University, Istanbul, Turkey



Abstract

While there are major works tracing the themes of belonging and longing for home in contemporary fiction, there is no current study adequately addressing the connection between dystopian novel and nostalgia. This paper aims to illustrate how the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood uses nostalgia as a framework to level a critique against technological utopianism in her dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003). The first novel in Atwood's "MaddAddam Trilogy" problematizes utopian thought by focusing on the tension between two utopian projects: the elimination of all suffering and the perfection of human beings by discarding their weaknesses. Despite the claims of scientific objectivity and environmentalism, the novel exposes the religious and human-centered origins of Crake's technological utopian project. Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is an ambiguous work of science fiction that combines utopian and dystopian elements into its narrative to criticize utopian thought.

Keywords: Dystopian fiction, Margaret Atwood, nostalgia, *Oryx and Crake*, technological utopianism

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Murat Kabak is a research and teaching assistant at the Department of English Language and Literature, Istanbul Kültür University, Istanbul, Turkey. He received his M.A. degree in English Literature at Boğaziçi University. He is currently a doctoral student in the English Literature program at the Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences, Boğaziçi University. His research interests include contemporary novel, contemporary theory and criticism, and media studies.

E-mail: m.kabak@iku.edu.tr

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4878-9808>

This paper analyzes the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) as a ground for the interplay of utopian-dystopian elements and intertextual references to the eighteenth-century texts to question the viability of technological utopianism. At its core, *Oryx and Crake* poses the questions: "*What if we continue down the road we're already on? How slippery is the slope?*" (Atwood, 2003, p. 383). This dangerous path, for Atwood, is the excessive human interference to ecology and its devastating effects. On the other hand, in the context of the novel's juxtaposition of various forms, the slippery slope points out the precarious and unstable nature of such categories as utopia and dystopia. In the novel, the dystopian scenario of wiping out the human race with a virus and replacing it with a genetically modified race, referred to as the Children or the Crakers, is at the center the utopian plan of a scientist named Crake. In other words, the elaborated solutions to the social, economic, and environmental problems can easily evolve into nightmarish possibilities in Atwood's text. *Oryx and Crake* problematizes the potential of science and technology to to actualize an ideal state by focusing on the incongruities of Crake's project. Observing the problems of overpopulation and environmental degeneration, Crake yearns for the simplicity of an idyllic existence. His utopian plan is based on the elimination of all suffering and the perfection of humans by discarding their weaknesses. Hence, a new life form which transcends the limits of the human, will be suspended in time, and enjoy this Edenic existence. Even though Atwood problematizes his utopian project by exposing its latent human-centered vision, and its complicity in the environmental disasters, another utopian alternative, the human-non-human hybrid future, is not welcomed in the novel either.

The novel's critique of the nostalgia for a fixed origin is ambiguous because the novel is nostalgic for a homogeneous identity. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", Jacques Derrida (1967/2001) argues that an "event" has enabled us to think about "the structurality of structure", meaning that each philosophical system in Western philosophy has a fixed point which governs the entire structure: a center (p. 352). This event corresponds to the influence of the linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure, which shows that the idea of a center is itself a construction (Derrida, 1967/2001, p. 354). Thus, the center is bound to change constantly, as God, human, and reason acted as the philosophical and intellectual centers of Medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment thinking, respectively. On the other hand, when confronted with this impossibility of a center which holds a universal

truth, there are two approaches according to Derrida, “the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic” attitude towards the lack of a center or “the joyous affirmation of the play” celebrating the de-centeredness (1967/2001, p. 369). While criticizing science and technology’s potential to achieve a perfect state, Atwood’s critique falls into the former, nostalgic camp in her treatment of Crake’s utopia. Instead of celebrating centerlessness and hybridity, the novel is nostalgic for a unified, structured, and homogeneous identity.

The novel’s adherence to the traditional *Bildungsroman* form reflects this paradoxical critique. The *Bildungsroman* believes that there is a linear progression in the protagonist’s development leading into the protagonist’s emotional and psychological maturity, and his/her conformity to society’s norms and expectations. Franco Moretti (1987) defines the *Bildungsroman* as “the ‘symbolic form’ of modernity” (p. 5). “Youth”, who is at the center of the formation or initiation process represents “modernity’s essence, [who is] the sign of a world that seeks its meaning in the *future* rather than in the past” (Moretti, 1987, p. 5). In the corporate dystopian atmosphere of *Oryx and Crake*, however, the future cannot promise a better world, hence, the protagonists seek refuge in romanticized visions of the past. However, as noted, this is not a commentary on the modern belief in the individual subject. Rather, the individual is still at the center of Atwood’s novel. While *Oryx and Crake* engages in a critique of nostalgia, it has a conservative view in the protagonists’ failed initiation into the social norms. To Atwood, there is nothing pleasant in the novel’s present. Without any parental guidance, the education of the children of the pre-plague world, Glenn and Jimmy, is under the supervision of violent video games on the Internet, and child pornography. The collapse of the family structure, the invasion of the entertainment industry, and cultural degeneration disrupt the protagonist’s initiation process, as much as the environmental catastrophe (Barzilai, 2008, p. 88). In *Home-Countries*, Rosemary Marangoly George (1999) emphasizes the importance of identity formation in relation to one’s experience of home (p. 26). Due to this imagined future’s inability to provide the individual with a sense of belonging, a healthy identity formation is rendered impossible. In other words, in Atwood’s dystopia, as the nucleus of the social fabric, the family, is disintegrating, the youth cannot seek meaning in the future. Their direction lies in the past. In the following two sections, first, I will be discussing the relationship between nostalgia for the center and the search for a perfect society. Second, Atwood’s critique of technological utopianism will be analyzed with references to the Biblical flood and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726).

Utopia, longing, and belonging

In *Oryx and Crake*, the individual's sense of belonging is at stake due to the dissolution of the social fabric and the environmental disaster that is happening so rapidly and so thoroughly that no palpable relation can be found between the individual's past and present. Longing for a simpler and more stable time is Crake's reaction to mend this loss of sense of belonging. Set in the future, the novel's flashback scenes describe the life inside the enclaves owned by the pharmaceutical companies that dominate the world through bioengineered products. The novel's interrogation of the meaning of the home exposes the incongruities and paradoxes of this seemingly perfect society because, under its peaceful façade of corporate suburbs, there lies unethical bioengineering practices and a society under surveillance and coercion. The home in this gated utopia is but a compromised site that can only create an illusory sense of safety and belonging. Due to this loss of sense of belonging, Glenn/Crake longs for a center, an origin to mend his loss. This nostalgia for the center dictates that with the recovery of what has been lost, the effects of the loss would be canceled out.

Oryx and Crake questions home as a physical space that creates an illusory sense of freedom and security via extreme surveillance. One of the corporations which creates genetically modified beings, the OrganInc Farms, houses talented scientists within its gated suburbs, called "Compounds", supposedly protecting them from the chaotic "pleeblands" (Atwood, 2003, p. 27) outside its walls. When the protagonist, Jimmy, enquires as to why the compounds are so heavily protected, his father tries to communicate the situation first by describing the world outside the walls and then referring to what remains inside:

There was too much hardware around ... Too much hardware, too much software, too many hostile bioforms, too many weapons of every kind. And too much envy and fanaticism and bad faith.

Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies ... and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside. (Atwood, 2003, p. 28)

The too-muchness of technology, manufactured diseases, and extremism is kept away from threatening the secluded world inside the walls. Jimmy's father's emphasis

on the intensification of everything, noting the repetition of “too much”, shifts from external threats to medieval imagery. Such strong demarcations, “high walls ... drawbridges and slots on the ramparts”, however, only justifies extreme policing in the name of protecting the scientists inside the walls against the perceived siege. From its examples in early modern period to the twentieth century, the utopian genre’s fixation on protecting its boundaries by walls (Dusenbury, 2018, November 20) is satirized by Atwood in this passage. Bülent Somay (2010) observes that “a utopia, when walled in, generates an excess ... What remains inside is a series of rules, regulations, and arrangements” (p. 196). This excess, created to protect the scientist elite, ironically limits their movement inside the compounds.

Atwood further complicates what home is through looking at its inability to provide the individual with safety and unity. The scientists in the compounds are yearning for their lives before the ecological and cultural collapse: “*Remember when you could drive anywhere? Remember when everyone lived in the pleeblands? Remember when you could fly anywhere in the world, without fear? Remember hamburger chains, always real beef, remember hot-dog stands? ... Remember when voting mattered?*” (Atwood, 2003, p. 63). In the first three questions, the source of their yearning lies in mobility. The next two questions are about what Jovian Parry (2009) calls “nostalgia for meat”, or the romanticization of traditionally produced meat over the genetically modified organisms (p. 250), and the last question is about the lack of centralized government. The repetition of “remember” in the passage reveals the insistence of keeping the memory of the sense of control over one’s life and actions alive because these questions are posed rhetorically. It is not only the children who do not feel at home in this enclosed utopia but also the scientists. The interlocutors who exchange these questions do not expect an answer to the inquiry of whether they remember a time when voting mattered but expressing discontent with the current authoritarian and oppressive pharma enclaves because what is being limited is the individual’s ability to perform certain actions. As an enclosed space limiting the freedom of its inhabitants, Crake’s childhood home, as Eleonora Rao (2006) states, “is [already] a ‘compromised site’” (p. 108), unable to provide the sense of comfort and belonging.

Nostalgia provides the illusion that going back to a bygone time or space is possible. In his doctoral dissertation, Johannes Hofer coined the term nostalgia from the combination of the Greek words *nostos*, the return to one’s native land, and *algos*, signifying pain or sorrow. The term nostalgia was originally used to designate “the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one’s native land” (1688/1934, p.

381). Yet, as we have seen in the examples above, this wistful yearning does not have to be for a physical location nor is it only a mood disorder. Svetlana Boym (2001) suggests that nostalgia moved from the domain of pathology to a wistful longing for the past with the advancements in understanding human physiology (p. 11). For the children in Atwood's dystopia, there is nothing nurturing. There are only uncertainty and a sense of loss of connection with nature. Due to the loss of a sense of connection with nature, and the non-existence of home as a site providing safety and belonging, a romanticized past acts as a refuge. This romance with the past assumes the form of a pre-historic existence in Crake's case. While there is the acknowledgment of the non-existence of home, the pain of being separated from an origin, of the fall, is also present. Hence, his nostalgia provides the illusion that fixing the past would cancel out the fall. Fixing the past, in this context, is used in two complementary figurative senses: "To 'fix' something is to *secure* it more firmly in the imagination and also to *correct* – as in *revise* or *repair*– it" (Rubenstein, 2001, p. 6). Perceiving history as his playground, as the title of one of his childhood video games suggests, "Barbarian Stomp (See If You Can Change History!)" (Atwood, 2003, p. 77), confronted with the cultural and environmental collapse, Crake seeks the solution in fixing the history of humankind.

Rewinding history through science and technology

The themes of rewinding, resetting, and reversing history to achieve a state that is analogous to the Edenic existence are central to the novel's critique of the scientific utopian ideal of Glenn/Crake. Crake denies the validity of the claims of progress for the sake of overzealous environmentalism. From his perspective, humanity's so-called progress has caused the destruction of nature. For Crake, due to "the ancient primate brain", the course of civilization runs through a thread of "idols and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife ... [to] slavery and war" (Atwood, 2003, p. 361). Without positive or negative valence, the things Crake lists are all human activities which distinguish human from non-human animals: religious practice, war, slavery. However, Crake confuses human culture with what he perceives as human nature. Due to his insistence on understanding humans as a mechanical being, Crake's basic premise is that human beings cannot be rehabilitated. Hence, the only way to achieve an environmentalist utopia, for Crake, is to destroy humans, and create a genetically modified version of them by eliminating these destructive features so that these hybrid beings can replace humans. As Crake believes that these new hybrid beings will enjoy a paradise-like existence, he names this utopian plan "Paradice Project" (Atwood, 2003, p. 302). Yet, as the extermination of all human beings is required in the realization of this utopia, the

alternative spelling of paradise, as “Paradice” in the novel, suggests that the name can also be read as a “pair of dice” thrown against humanity. The irony in Crake’s environmentalist project is that it relies on scientific knowledge in rewinding history to go back to an idyllic state without science and progress. *Oryx and Crake* problematizes the use of scientific knowledge without any ethical or moral oversight in attaining an ideal society by showing that it is not only totalitarian but also inherently human-centered.

Despite the claims of scientific objectivity and environmentalism, the novel exposes the religious and human-centered origins of Crake’s utopian project. As Crake is convinced that what he perceives as human nature is responsible for the environmental catastrophe, and it is the only obstacle on the path to his perfect society, he develops a method of genetic editing of human embryos to create an enhanced race based on specific pre-selected characteristics to repopulate the earth after he eradicates humanity:

What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world’s current illnesses. For instance, racism ... had been eliminated ... the Paradise people simply did not register skin colour. ... [T]here was no territoriality: the king-of-the-castle hard-wiring that had plagued humanity had, in them, been unwired. (Atwood, 2003, p. 305)

This method of gene editing is inspired by the real-life technique used in biogenetic research called “gene splicing” which allows the researchers to edit certain parts of the genetic material of an organism so that certain characteristics or traits can be combined with other organisms. To understand Crake’s concealed human-centric understanding, it is important to note his word choice describing the human: destructive features, register, hardwiring, and unwiring. It is as if there is a mechanical aspect to human nature to process the external stimuli, and these mechanical parts are composed of permanently connected circuits. Hardwiring, a term from computer science, describes how the particular function of a device is physically built into the device, as opposed to programming. In other words, what Crake deems as the destructive parts belong to the human’s hardware, as opposed to software, that is cultural, social, and political elements that are outside. And by undoing these features, Crake aims to cure “the world’s current illnesses”.

Crake’s method of genetic elimination of certain human features is problematic for two reasons. First, this method presumes a core that defines what is human. By reversing Sartre’s central claim in his existentialism, Crake goes back to the thesis that essence precedes existence, i.e., the human is inherently destructive, or in his terms,

hardwired to be evil. The paradox of this thesis is that even though it wants to get rid of what is evil in human, Crake's project posits human in a special place among beings. The salvation of non-human nature depends on one human's *techne*, in other words, the devastating effects of human can only be reversed through ultimate belief in science and technology to isolate the evil. In this way, to rewind history to a pre-historic state is possible. Second, this method reveals the totalitarian aspect of Crake's nostalgia for a paradisiacal existence, as the hybrid beings are renditions of Adam and Eve's state before the Fall. Even though the attempt to redress all existing conflicts is well-intentioned, sacrificing the individual's right to choose between right and wrong for the greater good is imperative to the realization of Crake's utopia. The promise of a peaceful existence through genetic alteration can only be achieved by removing all differences. Hence, Crake's yearning for a paradisiacal existence where Adam and Eve had no choice between good and evil reflects the totalitarian side of his nostalgia: not only does he get to play god but he will enforce a homogeneous, unified vision of (post)human by removing the hybrid beings' ability to tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong.

Despite its scientific claims, this assumption of an evil human essence not only assumes a mechanistic understanding of human, but it is also rooted in the Judeo-Christian belief system. Nostalgic for human's pre-historic unity with nature, Crake can only actualize his utopia by exterminating an entire species. Under the guise of his scientism, he assumes the role of Yahweh who, after seeing the evil in human beings, is displeased with his creation. The Biblical flood is later quoted in the novel where Snowman depicts the time before the creation of the Children: "[S]o Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away ... this is how Crake ... cleared away the dirt, he cleared room..." (Atwood, 2003, p. 103). Snowman's allegory is simple: Crake cleared human beings, who were the source of the chaos, and made space for the Children. Yet, the implications of this allegory's connection to the Biblical flood are significant because this passage reveals Crake's latent human-centered thought. Crake acts as the judge who condemns human beings to death but at the same time, not unlike the Hebrew God, appoints Noah as the protector of all non-human animals, and appoints a human protector for the Children, Snowman. The same religious story of human ascendancy is given a technological/scientific makeup in Crake's utopian vision of the Children, who still need human protection, despite their genetic superiority over human beings.

Moreover, the novel problematizes Crake's Paradise Project by revealing that the scientific methods without any philosophical or moral supervision are unable to

provide a sustainable or a viable solution to environmental problems. During a key scene in the novel, Crake expresses that “as a species we’re in deep trouble” (Atwood, 2003, p. 295) because the problem of overpopulation leads to habitat loss, pollution, and famines. Crake’s solution is to develop a drug that would both enhance one’s sexual performance and prevent any sexually transmitted disease. In fact, what the drug actually performs is to sterilize the users without their knowledge. During the clinical trial stage of the drug’s development, Crake reports his observations to Jimmy:

It was an elegant concept ... though it still needed some tweaking ... several [test subjects] had assaulted old ladies and household pets ... Also, at first, the sexually transmitted disease protection mechanism had failed in a spectacular manner. One subject had grown a big genital wart over her epidermis ... but they’d taken care of that ... at least temporarily. In short, there had been errors, false directions taken, but they were getting very close to a solution. (Atwood, 2003, p. 295)

The solution that Crake believes that they are ‘getting very close’ is the prevention of human reproduction so that he can solve the problems of overpopulation and environmental degradation. However, Crake’s mocking tone in this passage reveals a complete disregard for human life under the guise of his environmentalist, humane, or altruist scientific program. While describing the “errors” and “false directions” in the trials, he says that the drug needs some “tweaking,” as if the test subjects who suffer from the side effects are mechanical objects. In the experiment, sexual intercourse is also reduced to a mechanical act without emotion or passion. It only seeks an object to satisfy its carnal desire, whether it is “old ladies” or “household pets”. Moreover, Crake mentions that they have taken the epidermal eruptions of a test subject under control, only to add “at least temporarily” later in a nonchalant manner. Presuming that the end will justify the means, Crake thinks that to achieve the desirable outcome, the wrongdoings can be disregarded as false directions. Moreover, one of the scientists who is working on the production of ChickieNobs, a genetically modified strain of fast-growing and headless chickens, explains these chickens do not need any growth hormone as “the high growth rate’s built in. You get chicken breasts in two weeks ... And the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain” (Atwood, 2003, p. 203). The future corporate scientists believe that by removing their heads or their ability to feel pain, they can override ethical boundaries concerning animal cruelty. In this short passage, Atwood shows that such problematic inventions are not the consequence of overpopulation. The main issue is the intellectual hubris and the predatory mode of production that would allow the scientists and the

pharmaceutical corporations to capitalize on the non-human life forms. Crake, on the other hand, is caught up in his tunnel vision and is unable to reflect on his complicity in the destruction of the environment.

The intertextual references to *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) draw parallels between eighteenth-century scientific utopian thought and the detached scientific attitude in the novel. The ultimate reliance on scientific knowledge and technology only creates tunnel vision, which does not allow the utopian projectors, such as Crake in the novel, to see the social, environmental, ecological problems with their complex dimensions. The first connection with Swift's novel is the epigraph of *Oryx and Crake*. The epigraph appears at the beginning of the concluding chapter of *Gulliver's Travels* when Lemuel Gulliver addresses his "gentle Reader":

I could perhaps like others have astonished thee with strange improbable Tales; but I rather chose to relate plain Matter of Fact in the simplest Manner and Style; because my principal Design was to inform thee, and not to amuse thee. (Swift, 2005, p. 272)

As Claude Rawson (2005) points out, "the 'familiar' form of the second person singular (thee) is here aggressive, addressed to an inferior" (p. xxvii). Despite the content of his "strange and improbable tales" from flying islands to the land of a race of intelligent horses, Gulliver presents them as "plain matter of fact" to inform his reader who is his inferior. This introductory quotation not only connects *Oryx and Crake* to the tradition of satire but also hints at Atwood's intention of warning the reader: i.e., the technological and scientific developments mentioned in the narrative, the gene-splicing and the creation of hybrid beings should not be taken as "strange and improbable tales," but are already a part of the reader's reality.

Atwood (2011) cites the influence of the Laputans in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* as a model to the scientific clique in the novel (p. 195). The Laputan scientists are so immersed in their research that they need servants who tap their eyes and ears "with a blown Bladder fastened like a Flail to the End of a short Stick" (Swift, 1726/2005, p. 146) so that they remember to see or hear. Crake's indifference to human life and the unnamed scientist's explanation of the ChickieNob production are, both in tone and content, reminiscent of the experimental projects that Gulliver sees in his visit to "the grand Academy of Lagado" in Chapter 5 of Part III. From "extracting sun-beams out of cucumbers" (Swift, 1726/2005, p. 167) to turning ice into gunpowder (Swift, 1726/2005, p. 168), these experiments are meant to be satirical representations of not only the Royal Society but also of all sorts of planners of political, scientific, or social

schemes, as the name of the researchers, “the projectors”, suggests. The most striking similarity that Crake’s disinterested, scientific look shares with the projectors is where a doctor tries to solve stomach and bowel disorders with a pair of bellows. The physician’s experiment with a dog consists of pumping and withdrawing air from the dog’s anus with a bellow. As this experiment explodes the dog, Gulliver reports that “the Dog died on the Spot, and we left the Doctor endeavoring to recover him by the same Operation” (Swift, 1726/2005, p. 169). Crake’s indifference despite the failures “in a spectacular manner” is closely connected to Enlightenment thought, which would put the ultimate faith in science and reason; and it also reflects Atwood’s skepticism towards scientific exploration without oversight. While Swift satirizes the scientific utopianism of his contemporary Britain, Atwood’s satirical tone and her depiction of Crake as a scientist without any moral codes show that Atwood warns her reader against the worst results of this unchecked research. Even though they are presented as utopian solutions to environmental problems, with complete irreverence for human and non-human life alike, these methods are the main cause of environmental degradation. Whether the test subjects are human or animal, the desired products in both *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Oryx and Crake* serve a human end.

While most critics praise Atwood’s detailed characterization of Jimmy/Snowman and the depiction of his anguish in an apocalyptic world, the same critics perceive Crake as a caricature of a mad scientist whose only function is to give Jimmy/Snowman character motivation. Oliver Morton argues that Crake is a mere a plot device to set the events in motion (2003, May 9), and Michiko Kakutani maintains that he is “a cardboardy creation” (2003, May 3). However, as I have tried to illustrate, as Crake reflects the idiosyncrasies and paradoxes of Atwood’s dystopian society, he is the most complex character in the novel. While he argues that god is but a creation of human mind, or “a cluster of neurons” (Atwood, 2003, p. 157), he plays the role of god for the Children. He yearns for an idyllic existence but aims to achieve it with technology. He does not believe in progress but aims to perfect the human condition. As the product of the corporate dystopia, he represents everything that is paradoxical in the novel. Atwood imagines the logical conclusion of our prevailing human-centered worldview and its devastating effects on the environment. Yet, the novel also warns against the dangers of relying upon advanced technology and science as the solutions to these problems. The precariousness of Crake’s “Paradise” lies in its presupposition that there is a human essence, distinct from non-human animals, and it yearns for a time before this essence. From Crake’s perspective, which has been influenced by a wistful yearning,

there is a fixed point in human's past, and it is possible to go back to this point of origin. We, as a species, have been separated from this imagined, pre-historic, and pre-cultural origin due to our "destructive features", which influenced our culture and civilization. However, the Paradise Project's reenactment of paradisiacal existence is unable to provide a solution to environmental problems because it is informed by the Judeo-Christian heritage, an inherently human-centered ideology. Through literary and Biblical allusions, Atwood exposes that the roots of technological utopianism lay deep in the human-centered thinking, and when inspired by a wistful yearning for the pre-cultural existence, these utopian solutions are neither desirable nor viable.

While the novel questions the possibility of unified identity and human's perceived superiority over their environment, the implications of human - animal or animal - animal hybridity is not welcomed in the novel either. Hybridity, as presented in the novel, is used as a technique to intensify certain genetic characteristics of a species by splicing their genes with another species. This type of hybridity is always artificial and depends on the fusion or grafting of different animals. Hybridity is neither a viable nor a desirable solution to Atwood's dystopian imagination. The hybrid beings are a threat to their habitat, as they are the creations of a misdirected group of scientists whose aim is commercial benefit. The myth of Chimera captures the terrifying presence of hybrid beings in the novel. As the fire-breathing lion, goat, and a serpent hybrid, the Chimera is the product of an unusual combination of species. An example of the threat that chimeric beings pose is the wolvogs. A hybrid of a certain wolf and canine species that is created for CorpSeCorps security purposes. However, when they broke free from the control of their creators, the third person narrator describes their rampage: "As for the real dogs: they never stood a chance: the wolvogs have simply killed and eaten all those who'd shown a vestigial domesticated status" (Atwood, 2003, p. 108). We should note the narrator's emphasis on the distinction between "real" dogs and what is perceived as unnatural wolvogs. As the products of a social Darwinist ideology, they represent the survival of the fittest. Hybridity does not present a solution to the environmental collapse in the novel. It rather serves a parodic purpose, to criticize the ultimate faith in science and reason.

Even though the novel criticizes the human-centered ideology, its nostalgia critique is paradoxical because the novel believes in a white, European, human-centered vision. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* does not revel in its implications of the death of the human. Atwood's account of environmental catastrophe and the extinction of humanity is a bleak one. As the hybrid beings in the novel are the creations of out-of-

control bioengineering, they threaten the habitat. Pigoons, the human - pig hybrids, or wolvogs, the wolf - dog hybrids, are a threat to Snowman, as they are to the other life forms in their habitat. The hybridity of human and non-human, in the case of the Children, can neither produce a positive change nor is able to promise a better future. Secondly, the novel's literary and philosophical sources are composed of exclusively white, European, male writers, and philosophers.

In conclusion, Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is an ambiguous work of science fiction that combines utopian and dystopian elements into its narrative to criticize utopian thought. The utopian yearning, Crake's rewinding and resetting of history to achieve an Edenic existence, is problematized on a simple basis. However well its intentions are, so long as it depends on the source which it seeks to contest, the solutions the project offers are unviable. This source is the human-centered ideology that causes environmental degeneration. Crake's nostalgia for an idyllic existence and his utopian solution to the environmental catastrophe are informed by his reliance on scientific knowledge. Yet, the solution he offers is unable to provide an alternative to the environmental or societal issues because it does not directly address the main contradictions and assumptions of the human-centered world. Instead of addressing institutional, social, and cultural causes of habitat loss, pollution or overpopulation, the solution is sought in authoritarianism and the elimination of all differences.

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Reviewers:

1. Anonymous
2. Tadd Graham Fernée, PhD, New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria

Handling Editor:

Stan Bogdanov, PhD
New Bulgarian University