

## Thinking beyond the World: An Eco-post humanist Approach to Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

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The term Posthumanism, despite having a layered of meanings, basically emphasises a change in human's understanding of self and their relationship to other non-human world and artifacts. The term post-humanism in ecocritical context concerns the very survival of human beings in the age of unregulated technological experiments. Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake*, a depiction of the dystopian world, responds to such an issue. The text is a pertinent portrayal of Crake's post-apocalyptic wasteland as the inhabitant is the hybrid animals produced by genetic-engineering. In this regard, Dunlap writes, "Crake 'seeks [...] to move beyond human-dominated hierarchy and its associated suffering; to achieve this goal he creates the Crakers, thus enacting his ecotopian dream" ( 10). Crake's attempt to replace the existing human order turns the utopian vision offered by scientific exploration and provokes the researcher to study *Oryx and Crake* from a combined approach of ecocriticism and post-humanism.

Atwood's world in *Oryx and Crake*, though it is different in certain aspects of the real world at the same time shares many features of the contemporary world. The desire for sex and divided community living at different places in the novel, make the readers identify the world with their real world. Keenan, one of the keen observers of Atwood fiction, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* writes that Atwood "sees the book as a kind of warning, in the tradition of Orwell's 1984 or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, in that it extrapolates from the present to show how the future could be". Further, Keenan explaining the vision of Atwood as our near future writes "much closer than (she) thought when (she started the book).....Jimmy is born. In fact, he's probably about four right now. And next year he'll be eight because it's growing exponentially" (Keenan). Atwood being a serious social thinker is well aware how quickly and efficiently human beings are devastating the ecological system. She believes that the unlimited scientific explorations at the cost of the ecosystem will

lead the human civilisation towards doom. Nevertheless, it is not the science which is the cause of trouble but those who have the power to misuse science for their selfish benefit.

Though the world in the novel was destroyed by the Crake's pandemic, before that, through the presentation of the offensive acts of the characters, Atwood makes her readers to visualise impending apocalypse. Atwood writes, "The coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane and the drought in the mid-continental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes, and meat came harder to come by" (OC 27).

The gloomy symptom which is seen in *Oryx and Crake* shows environmental distress and makes it easy for the reader to identify the current world with the world of Crakers. The novel finds human civilisation as well as modernity in hazard, in crisis, and in question. The jeopardise situations depicted in the novel bring the readers closer to the anticipated apocalypse. The mutual humanity in the pre-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake* just like the real world seems moving away from the societies. The journey of humanity seems to be reached its nadir. The education has become a means to collect money what DiMarco called "educational utilitarianism" (OC 179). The complete commodification of knowledge is repeatedly demonstrated in the novel. The people like Crake who have taken the degree from prestigious institutions are given more value and live in the most prestigious compound.

As it has been already said Atwood wrote *Oryx and Crake* as a reaction to existing human actions but much of it seems just a mourn in the face of imminent doom. She wishes to stop the human's abnormal actions to save the earth. Atwood's wish to stop the time is evident in the pre-apocalyptic society of *Oryx and Crake* when Jimmy's father cooperates with "engineer the Methuselah Mouse as part of Operation Immortality" (OC 25). Such genetic operation can be easily seen in current society. Atwood says that the greed and selfishness have increased because humans have a sense of their end. The "grief in the face of inevitable death" and wish to "stop the time" directly arises fearful situation and link it the terror of apocalypse. A

discourse and politics of apocalypse have started to stop the apocalypse and slogan of the earth first is advertised.

The deeply layered novel opens with analysis from an eco-posthumanist study, and Crake can be seen as a symbol of post-human thought. *Oryx and Crake* is basically a dystopian novel criticising the utopian principles of science and technology. The portrayal of Crake in the text is the epitome of modern humans who exploit nature and tries to satisfy his desire. But, the critic like Danette DiMarco portrays Crake as *homo faber*. *Homo faber*, a phrase, suggests 'man the creator'. DiMarco points out that the Crake wants to change the existing nature deliberately. He believes in ecological utopianism that is possible only by 'sweeping plan'. The action of Crake is to move beyond the anthropocentric world and its allied pain. To achieve his ecotopian dream, he creates Crakers. But Atwood has given less value to the vision of ecotopian dream because she has portrayed Crake as an antagonist in the novel. She is afraid of the notion of the clean sweep and asks the readers to be cautious about such practice.

Crake's model of destruction gives a warning and at the same time draws a model of ecotopian world. Crake, a born genius is the cleverest person at Heith Wyzer High. He believes that society should not be as it is. To clean the existing evils, he was left with nothing but to 'clean slate' aspect of apocalyptic thinking. The notion of 'clean slate' advocates that to remove all the existing evils from the earth, apocalypse is must. Apocalypse will clean out all the objectionable things from the earth and will give a fresh start. Crake, since his childhood, is preoccupied with the thought of what should be and what should not. His early nature of righteousness later changed into the belief that he has the right to make decisions which unconsciously leads him to ecotopian dream. He started playing like a god to remove what he feels fatally flawed. Crake functions as nature's balancing power and finds science to control the future of the globe. He believes that the poetics and politics of environmental protection are incapable to stop the ecological destructions. Atwood is in doubt with the idea of the clean slate; she argues that future cannot be controlled but just can be improved by non-anthropocentric practice. Atwood is not

only against the clean slate but also against the posthumanist vision of the world. The live description of wasteland caused by science does not allow her to support the notion of the clean sweep. She writes:

Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving; listening to the tide coming in, wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is still asleep... On the eastern horizon there's a greyish haze, lit now with a rosy, deadly glow. Strange how that colour still seems tender. The offshore towers stand out in dark silhouette against it, rising improbably out of the pink and pale blue of the lagoon. The shrieks of the birds that nest out there and the distant ocean grinding against the ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble sound almost like holiday traffic.... Out of habit he looks at his watch – stainless-steel case, bur-nished aluminium band, still shiny although it no longer works. He wears it now as his only talisman. A blank face is what it shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is. (OC 4)

Such is the scene caused by Crake's invention which does not allow Atwood to support the notion of ecotopia. Crake as a god figure produced a new species of hominid so that he can control many of the evils that he finds in the world. These evils as it is already discussed contain unlimited sexual desire, brutality, and voracity and capital economy. Crake, as a superman, creates Crakers, genetically engineered creatures, and ensures that they are free from all the humans' evil. In fact, he shares it with Jimmy that the 'destructive features of current civilisation which have been in the practice from ancient traditions have been removed from the new species. The elements responsible for discrimination, feeling of superiority and territoriality have been eliminated from the Crakers genetic make-up in order to be free from any kind of the feeling of superiority or inferiority. The Crakers resemble "retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program" (OC 115).

They are free from all the imperfection and have achieved physical perfection that the current society is aspiring to.

Apocalypse can be avoided if human develops respect to the environment. Atwood through the Crakers teaches her readers how to be eco-friendly. Crakers are designed to suit natural habitats without the need of houses or clothes so they do not interfere in nature's law. They are the ecotopian human and survive on caecotrophs- a semi-digested pellet of vegetation that are emitted and then re-swallowed. The sexual desire has been replaced by mating. The mating cycle starts after every three years and when a female reaches at season she shows her physical appearances. Atwood writes:

There'll be the standard quintuplet, four men and the woman in heat. Her condition will be obvious to all from the bright-blue colour of her buttocks and abdomen ... Their penises turn bright blue to match the blue abdomens of the females, and they do a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs. From amongst the floral tributes the female chooses four flowers, and the sexual ardour of the unsuccessful candidates dissipates immediately, with no hard feelings left. Then, when the blue of her abdomen has reached its deepest shade, the female and her quartet find a secluded spot and go at it until the woman becomes pregnant and her blue colouring fades. (OC 194)

The imagined process of mating described by Atwood promotes a society free from sexual appetites. Further she writes:

No more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape... It no longer matters who the father of the inevitable child may be, since there's no more property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war. Sex is no longer a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright

loathing, conducted in the dark and inspiring suicides and murders. Now it's more like an athletic demonstration, a free-spirited romp. (OC 194)

The posthumanist world demands humanity that is free from suffering. The old age, illness and the fear of death can be seen as a motivating power to develop a destructive behaviour in human beings. The death of an individual is a kind of individual apocalypse and one's attempt during his whole of the life span is to alleviate this personal catastrophe. Crake has given the Crakers immortality. Crake says to Jimmy, "if you take mortality as being, not death, but the foreknowledge of it and the fear of it, then immortality is the absence of such fear" (OC 356). Thus, it can be seen that Crake was working towards total sweeping because he wanted to regenerate a world that is free from all the evils. He holds the position of God the creator who wants the humanity to filter from all the evil by the process of the clean sweep. He has his faith in eco-posthumanism and tries to save the planet in his own ways. The eco-posthumanist approach to Oryx and Crake does not offer a pessimist idea or the end of civilisation but presents a new potential for humans to be in intimate relationship with nature. It leads towards a humanity that can save both humans and the planet.

Atwood's approach to Crakers seems to be signifying a number of ideas with the humanesque development of Crakers. She goes beyond the traditional apocalyptic narrative technique. Sometimes it appears to be odd but after all her anxiety of apocalypse lies in the impact which civilisation is having on the environment as well all the scientific experimentation which creates the 'sense of an ending'. Indeed, being part of endemic society, Atwood's presentation of apocalypse suggests that she is also in the sense of paranoia and the apocalyptic narrative is an ideal medium to draw the picture of social evils. Since Atwood does not believe in the notion of the clean slate, she demands to save the earth by improving humans' actions.

The ecocritical sense of the ending is a warning to humans and promotes the sense of an ending to make the sense of lives, regardless of whether one is theist, atheist and

religious or from any nation and place. Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending* writes, "there is still a need to speak humanly of life's importance in relation to the (world)- a need in the moment of existence to belong, to related to a beginning and to an end" (Kermode 2-3). The terror of apocalypse encourages to restore the existence of higher order and destiny. It defines the anguish of humanity in larger context. Talking about the discourse of apocalypse, Webber says that it highlights "human suffering in cosmic terms, as part of cosmic order...catastrophe is dignified, endowed with meaning, and hence made bearable" (Webber 235).

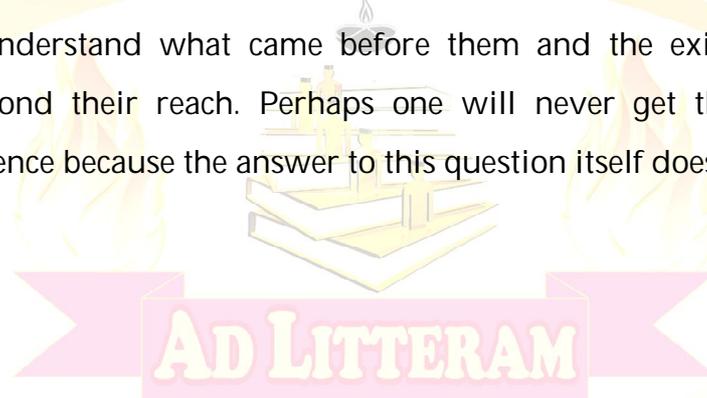
Atwood thinks that the humans are fated to reiterate themselves. Not only this, she suggests that even the idea of God might be "*cluster of neurones*" (OC186). She is of the view that human body is much more than Crake thinks and that is beyond the physical property. Crake tries to control the human body in order to control the destiny of humanity, the destiny that a scientist thinks as being coded in DNA. But, Atwood has different opinions and suggests that there is something in the human that Crake cannot decode, and in the end, it will make Crakers human and something better than their genetic modifications.

Atwood is fully against the notion that science can stop the apocalypse or change the lot of humanity. In this respect, she goes with Derrida. Derrida in his work *No apocalypse, Not Now* writes, "the critical zeal that leads us to recognize precedents, continuities, and repetitions at every turn can make us look like suicidal sleepwalkers, blind and deaf *alongside the unheard of*; it could make us stand blind and deaf alongside that which cuts through the assimilating resemblance of discourses" (Derrida 21). Derrida is of the view that people should not deny the possibility of apocalypse just because it never occurred, but he advises that humans should be eco-friendly to avoid such crisis.

Atwood through her satirical novel *Oryx and Crake* strongly advocates that the future of the earth is in the hands of nature-oriented humanity. Science can make life easy on the blue planet but cannot save the future of the earth. This can be understood from the presence of Snowman in the post-apocalyptic world. Apocalypse can be avoided only through the betterment of humanity. She believes that a better human

can develop a better environment. Though Atwood has left many social issues unresolved in the novel, she has clearly articulated the ways in which human beings can follow to save the humanity on the earth.

Like humans, Crake feels the need of apocalypse to bring the clean slate on which the destiny of humanity can be started afresh. But, Atwood in her speculative fiction expresses a contradictory thought that humans have for the apocalypse. She declares that the end is eminent and uses apocalyptic setting to review the human nature and portrays the human as having negative impacts on the environment, whether these impacts are going to be the reason of apocalypse or not. She questions the probability of restoration or a reflective revelation after the doom. As already discussed, the apocalyptic world of Crakers is similar to the present world in many aspects, so perhaps present humans are in the world which started after the end like the world of Snowman. Like Snowman, humans are also in absurd situations and always try to understand what came before them and the existential questions remain just beyond their reach. Perhaps one will never get the answer to the question of existence because the answer to this question itself does not exist.



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