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**Bio-Political Reading of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake***

**Key words:** postapocalyptic, virus, patriarchal tradition, subjectivity, Bio politics

**A.L Ruaa Jaddoa Galhem**

**Middle Technical University/ Institute of Administration-Rusafa**

**Abstract**

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) is a postapocalyptic novel set in the Maddaddam trilogy in which the "flood"—a man-made virus—has almost completely wiped out human life. Atwood uses the story of Snowman, the last human on Earth, and his struggle to survive in a difficult biological and ecological environment to attack present social, political, and economic structures, as well as traditional Western concepts of subjectivity. In this paper, the focus is mainly shed on the distribution of power in the novel. The research benefits from Foucault's concept of "Bio politics" which mainly refers to the idea of control on the functions of a human body.

**Introduction:**

Atwood's work is a replication of a network of corporately mandated structures of bio political surveillance, discipline, and control that integrate the subject within a combined setting of scientific and marketplace capitalism, ultimately leading to the commodification of the subject's body. Nonhuman, non-white, non-male bodies are denied subjectivity, political agency, and, ultimately, the right to life as a result of corporate capitalist bio power's perpetuation of an anthropocentric, patriarchal tradition that places the human, white, male subject at its center, thereby reducing them to the status of disposable others and denying them the right to life. It will be demonstrated that, through the figure of Oryx and the Craker-ruled post-apocalyptic fantasy, Atwood supplies us with alternative or liminal forms of subjectivity. These liminal subjects exist on the periphery of corporate power, and they have the ability to travel between and across surveilled biopolitical boundaries, breaking what appears to be well-defined, static binary structures in the process. Finally, these alternative subjects open up a space for thinking about subjectivity as possibly not wholly human, but rather as authorizing the creation of a post human or post-anthropocentric self rather than a human or anthropocentric self.

**Bio political Reading of *Oryx and Crake*:**

Reproducing a network of corporately-governed biopolitical monitoring and discipline, Atwood's novel integrates the subject into a scientific and commercial capitalism that results in the subject's body being commercialized. Non-white, nonhuman, non-male bodies are reduced to the status of "disposable bodies" by corporate capitalist biopower, which perpetuates patriarchal and anthropocentric tradition that places the human, male, white subject at its center,

thus denying nonhumans their right to subjectivity and life (Braidotti, 2013, p. 16).

Moreover, it is claimed here that Oryx and Crake's character, Oryx, and the Craker-ruled postapocalyptic imagination creates alternative and/or liminal forms of subjectivity. Liminal persons such as Oryx, a non-white woman, and the Crakers, a human/animal hybrid that can move across surveilled biopolitical boundaries, destabilize seemingly well-defined, static binary forms by occupying a position at the edge of corporate authority. Finally, the creation of a posthuman or post-anthropocentric self is authorized by these alternative subjects, allowing us to consider subjectivity as potentially not fully human.

It's the same with any form. You have to understand what the form is doing, how it works, before you say, 'Now we're going to make it different...', we're going to turn it upside down, we're going to move it so it includes something which isn't supposed to be there, we're going to surprise the reader (Atwood, 2000, p.138).

It is in this quote that Atwood's approach to genre and form in her prose fiction is most exemplified, since her work demonstrates the talent of someone who has been intellectually schooled and informed within old generic rules, yet refuses to submit to and perpetuate them. A hallmark of Atwood's work is how she uses the conventions of several genres to question and undermine the social, political, and cultural systems that underlie them. Because her novels straddle the line between literary, rhetorical, and general traditions, it can be difficult to place Atwood's work in any one genre or theoretical framework. A large part of this can be attributed to the increasing instabilities in generic definitions caused by the diverse and divergent viewpoints of literary criticism in the twentieth century, in particular the role of post-structuralism in complicating the functions of literary genres and boundaries between them.

To portray her condemnation of a traditional, male-dominated literary legacy on one hand and of economically driven, patriarchal political regimes on the other, Atwood uses the unsteadiness of generic limits. Genre barriers are becoming increasingly unprotected and things are slipping through them "with insouciance," according to Atwood (Atwood, 2012, p. 8). By slipping back and forth between general boundaries, Atwood's novels demonstrate the ephemerality and ultimately unsustainable nature of the biosocial and political systems they portray, as well as the inability of its protagonists to completely engage in or conform to those systems.

Atwood's generic ambiguity and refusal to conform to enclosing categories – which has garnered considerable criticism from science fiction and feminist authors – becomes particularly significant in the particular instance of her non-realistic fiction. In which the author incorporates aspects of speculative fiction, as well as references to canonical tropes and texts of Western culture, in order to make her poignant critique of the imperfect.

*Oryx and Crake* make the most sense when viewed through this lens of generic and political criticism. The novel's structure parallels past and present events, emulating the formal structure of classical authors in English literature such as William Faulkner. Resulting in a break in the text that gives rise to two narratives. The dystopia of a pre-flood heavily scientific and corporatized and society the hostile and dangerous post-apocalyptic landscape of the novel's present, which, while culturally and contextually distinct. They are both infused with thematic elements of the the pre-flood dystopia appears to be just as dangerous and hostile as Snowman's post-apocalyptic world, albeit for quite different reasons that will be discussed later.

Atwood identifies herself as a political writer because she examines how, as she mentions, "people react to a power structure and vice versa" (Howells, 1996, p. 6). As a result, it appears that Atwood's novels serve as a means for the author to express her thoughts on contemporary social, economic, and political challenges, particularly the oppression of voices that are not Western, masculine, or even human. On the subject of power relations between men and women, she has frequently employed female characters who are able to tell their own stories as a form of resistance to the patriarchal discourse and its appropriation of women's self-perceptions and their bodies.

Women's bodies are treated as commodities in male-dominated societies like those shown in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Edible Woman* (Hutcheon 1983, p.19). By contrasting the repressed body of a woman with a body that subverts masculine discourse, Margaret Atwood creates two separate forms of female bodies in *Oryx and Crake* (*Oryx*, while integrated in a clandestine system of male satisfaction, refuses to allow Jimmy or Crake to speak for her). *Oryx and Crake's* pre-flood society's segregationist divide between pleeblands and compounds, which keeps the uneducated and the poor: "the addicts, muggers, paupers, the crazies" (Atwood, 2004, p. 28). In lawlessness and closed off by heavy security and surveillance from the seemingly idyllic environment, is a powerful example of Atwood's concern for the preservation of human rights against institutional injustice (Howells, 1996, p. 7). Ecological problems are also a route to Atwood's ecological worries, which have grown unsustainable due to an ultra-capitalist exploitation of natural resources and morally questionable scientific endeavors to improve the well-being of the compounds' inhabitants. Throughout *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood weaves environmental and ethical critiques together, creating an extreme utilitarian society led by Crake, whose quest to perfect the human being ultimately reifies human nature and the human body, bringing them closer to nonhuman animals' biology and status.

As each of Atwood's novels sets up a double discursive continuum between Western literary heritage and specific historical and sociopolitical settings, they appear to be ontologically dialogic. To express the social critique that goes beyond the text, Atwood relies heavily on the reader's familiarity with specific literary conventions and Western literary tradition. Post structuralism

appears to have a large role in Atwood's use of intertextuality, as she challenges patriarchal and imperialist systems in Western literary tradition and history by constructing her narratives both in accordance with and in opposition to Western textual norms. Atwood incorporates, reformulates, and questions classic storylines and motifs in her intertextual game, and *Oryx and Crake* is no exception. Atwood's literary and rhetorical reinterpretation of Genesis' Creation Story, a central narrative in Christian Western civilizations, is the most obvious.

On the other hand, the Binary oppositions that can be traced in Atwood's novel help her to depict the notion of power. De Saussure defines language in his *Course on General Linguistics* as a system of binary oppositions, where linguistic signs only have meaning and value if they are placed in relation to other signs – in other words, against other signs (2004, p. 71). If we take this view of language, we can say that a sign only has meaning when it is not another sign. Cultural objects and conceptions can only be understood in relation to one another, according to the views of structuralism (Culler, 2002, p. 17). As a result of structuralist thinking, we now have a way of classifying things based on whether or not certain characteristics are present. This is already a binary construction that favors the existence of something over its absence.

In both Foucault and Derrida's view, this binary structure was insufficient and essentializing, perpetuating and creating cultural binaries such as woman/man, poor/rich, uncivilized/civilized, black/white, which tended to subordinate the latter to the former, thus closing off meaning within unsurpassable hierarchies (Eagleton, 2008, p. 115). In contrast to Foucault, Derrida called for a deconstructive move that would reveal the flaws in, and collapse, the binary, thereby allowing for the creation of new concepts – the "intervals" – "that can no longer be, and never could be, in a binary" (Derrida, 2020, p. 41).

It appears that Atwood's narrative universe in *Oryx and Crake* is based on binary systems that aim to arrange all sociobiological beings into closed-off, preset categories that are maintained and governed by a patriarchal, discriminatory corporation system. When it comes to the distribution of humans within social and biological systems of power and of power within social and biological interactions, Atwood builds numerous dichotomous structures throughout the novel.

Neoliberal economic systems have engulfed the pre-flood world of *Oryx and Crake* and have integrated all areas of sociopolitical, economic and even family life into the interests of the companies that govern the markets of consumption and production. Scientific and habitational infrastructures and power supported by competing corporations are centralized in the hands of a scientific elite. Because of their "decentralized commercial culture oriented to the preservation of youthfulness and convenience," these corporatized elite feeds the system of economic and social inequality indicated by the

compounds/pleeblands distinction. Rather than a more idealistic depiction of a global community united by economic markets and enriched by technological advancements, Irwin argues that a more realistic and grimmer picture depicts a world economy in which a small socioeconomic minority exercises total control over the social, political, and technological structures that organize and produce wealth.

To some extent, the novel's socioeconomic and political divide between the compounds and their surrounding pleeblands appears to mirror today's polarization between developed and developing countries, where unregulated Western-based corporations use Third World nations' ecological resources and labor power to generate profit that is never reinvested in their economies, much like in *Oryx and Crake*. Because of the drastic exclusion of the majority from sociopolitical and economic agency, this results in a very hierarchical power structure that assures the safety and success of the minority. A big and united world is refuted in the novel, according to Irwin, because compounds' walled-in scientific elite exclusively use technical might and power.

There are layers of human and technical supervision that seek to prevent any unwanted intrusion from one socioeconomic space into another. This generates the deep division between the rich compounds and the rotting pleeblands. Elites describe the pleeblands and the compounds in quite different ways. A comparison between the compounds and castles is made by Jimmy's father during one of their many conversations:

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, said Jimmy's father, 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, p. 27).

The recovery of feudal titles by Jimmy's father to classify the people of the complex and explain the social and architectural duality to his son indicates a strong social inequity that appears to be woven into the social fabric of this planet. Castle-like compounds have been reimagined by replacing towering walls and drawbridges with the human and technological lines of defense, such as fingerprint identity cards and video monitoring. Their occupants are aristocrats who live like "kings" and "dukes" inside their unbreakable walls.

Those who live in the Pleeblands are described by Crake as "a giant Petri dish: a lot of guck and contagious plasm." The immune systems of the people who live there become "a feast" for the disease-ridden atmosphere (p. 288). It is hard to get into the castle, but the Petri dish looks like a place where one can do experiments and look at things at the microscopic level. Petri dishes are not like kings and dukes who rule their homes and lands. They are places where a biologist stands with a microscope to look at his or her cellular work. Afterward,

it becomes a place where things are tested, but also where there is hierarchy, because the biologist is a member of the elite, and no one else.

Pleeblands look a lot like the slums that have been built up in places like China, Bangladesh, and Nigeria after a lot of people moved to cities. Atwood does not give any information about how these spaces came to be. It is made up of the urban spaces that make up the landscape. The pleeblands are where the poor, the uneducated, and the "addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies" live (p. 29). Ingersoll says that they were "abandoned to the masses by the elite." This means that they are both visually and politically messy. When people from outside look in through TV feeds or bullet train windows during work commutes, the "endless billboards, neon signs, and long buildings" and "endless vehicles of all kinds" overwhelm them, they can't tell what is real (p. 29). The "dirty" and overcrowded streets also pose a number of biological threats. The "thousands of people, hurrying, cheering, rioting," who breathe the same polluted air, spread viruses and other diseases (p. 29).

In Jimmy's first trip outside of CorpSeCorps, the danger of pleeblands land is very clear. All-purpose vaccine: Before leaving the compound with Crake, Jimmy is given a nose cone that filters and purifies the polluted air of the Pleeblands. Later, it is revealed that this vaccine is an immunization against the virus that wipes out humans (p. 287). The young men are also seen to be afraid of people's bodies, because they are taken to and from the compounds in "an official Corps car with an armed driver"; they are also escorted by CorpSeCorps agents the whole time they are there (p. 287).

The compounds, on the other hand, are gated communities owned by multinational corporations and used to house the scientific elite and their families in a safe place. Scientists and biotechnologists work together to find cures for diseases, beauty and anti-aging products, and better medical treatments that play with both human and animal biology. They are at the heart of this progress because they spend all their time and money on these things. Crake is one of the people who made the "flood," which is why their schools and labs like the Watson-Crick Institute teach the next generation of scientists to be brilliant but not very interested in their work. With no architectural style of their own, the houses in the compounds are a mix of different styles from a time that Jimmy's generation doesn't understand. The house Jimmy used to live in was "a Cape Cod-style frame house." He then moved to "a large Georgian center-plan with an indoor swimming pool and a small gym" (p. 26). Each house is filled with "reproductions," pieces of furniture that, like the structures they fill, remind us of a different time and place, which may be a way to keep the current socioeconomic divide in place or, better yet, to pretend that nothing has changed.

The more control the corporations have over what people can buy and how much they eat, the bigger the power gap between the compounds and the

pleeblands. On the other hand, the difference in economic and political power between the corporately owned compounds and the anarchically organized pleeblands is based on a double logic of corporate tribe and erratic excess. This is meant to cut down on the time between desire and pleasure. However, both desire and its fulfillment are made by the corporations for profit and science. Companies keep coming up with new beauty products, anti-ageing treatments, and pills to increase libido, among other things, which make people more concerned about their bodies and more aware that life is a purely physical and limited event. Corporate bosses run and trap people in a never-ending, always growing machine of consumerism where people are both consumers and objects of consumption. Scientists and their families live in compounds that are far from dirt, disease, old bodies, and morals. People in the pleeblands serve as test subjects for these new scientific avenues, which they then eat, unaware that they play a role in the development and commercialization of them. Pleeblanders, especially, play a big part in a double process of eating and drinking. They first test the product or spread it around, and then they eat and drink what they helped make. This is called "ingestion/consumption," and it is a two-step process.

Without a narrative description of the historical conditions that have led to Jimmy's sociopolitical setting, corporations appear as pre-existing and ubiquitous institutions whose power and authority extend beyond the scientific and commercial areas into sociopolitical structures of control. There are no democratic governments or equitable laws in the novel, instead being substituted by the anarchic governance of businesses that act within and around the law without public government control, in order to protect their commercial and capitalist interests. Capitalism's cyclical nature is also evident in the corporate battle for control over social issues, political and legal ones, as power shifts from one organization to another based on market trends, which tends to result in the increase of wealth and authority for the corporate elite, which, as mentioned earlier, become tools in this political-economic apparatus. Appleton (2011) asserts that "corporations control the government," resulting in a "Corpocracy" or "Corp(Se)ocracy" (p. 64). According to Margaret Atwood's critique of globalized economic power structures, democracy in the novel is replaced by a political system of "corporatocracy," echoing Jeffrey Sachs' criticism of a corporatized US system in *The Price of Civilization*. Where the author claims that the US government was unable to effectively address phenomena like globalization, ecological crisis, and the rise of immigrant populations in this country (Appleton, 2011, p. 46).

The governmental institutions in *Oryx and Crake* appear to have crumbled as corporate influence has shattered state lines and brought together all national economies under the banner of private interest. When power is possessed and used by companies, all other spheres of society — including politics, business, law, education, and health care — fall under the sway of corporate capitalism.

The borders between public and private authority are blurred as an all-encompassing corporate structure gains control of the landscape. Kouhestani (2012) sees a parallel between *Oryx and Crake* and political theorist Fredric Jameson's concept of "late capitalism," as he argues that Jameson's work "represents the portrayal of hegemonic system change in tandem with the shift from modern to postmodern economic conditions might be explained in this way" (p. 173). The concept of "late capitalism" is actually derived from Mandel's three-stage definition of the capitalist mode of production, which begins with "freely competitive capitalism" and progresses to "monopoly capitalism," culminating in the era of "multinational corporations, globalized markets, and mass consumption," in Postmodernism, or, *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) (Kouhestani, 2012, p.173). Despite this, Jameson's critique delves deeper into how economics and culture are intertwined, as he was primarily interested in a dialectical analysis of Postmodernism rather than a political debate, although Jameson (1991) asserts that "every position on Postmodernism in culture...is...an implicit or explicit political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (p. 2). A process of "aesthetic colonization" by corporate capitalism, according to the author, is to blame for the erasure of distinctions across various sectors of action (social, cultural, political, and economic) (Jameson, 1991, p. 19). *Oryx and Crake* serves as a literary representation of this late capitalist phase, in which all power structures – governments, law enforcement agencies, and other public services – have come under a corporate banner that transcends national and ideological boundaries and subjects individuals to the capitalist wheel of production, consumption, and competition. The people are led to buy and use the products produced by the corporations without realizing the fierce competition between the organizations behind the glossy billboards and deceiving slogans, which is "less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and allpervasive" (Jameson, 1991, p. 1).

Since democratically elected governments and public law enforcement have been rendered obsolete, businesses have turned to the CorpSeCorps to maintain social order. They are, as the name implies, a private security firm hired by the compounds to patrol the boundaries and ensure that no one or anything exits. They operate in a border area, which allows them to extend their power over the compounds and the pleeblands, allowing them to function above and eventually replace the faulty and mostly nonexistent public police. In the lack of a government, the enforcement of the law and administration of justice appears to fall on the CorpSeCorps, which tailor the legal system to meet the demands of their current employers. Similarly, there is no independent legal body. It appears that the CorpSeCorps are essentially "a system of paid mercenaries...outside the reach of public interest" (Irwin, 2009, p. 46). As they enforce the corporations' law on every aspect of people's lives by trading allegiance for money and profiting from the tense competition and increasing paranoia between the corporations.



When one company pays another to protect its interests and monitor the competition from other similar organizations, it denotes that there is a decentralization of power in this globally connected society, as one company must pay another company to protect its interests and monitor the competition from other similar organizations. Corporations, as well as other organizations like the CorpSeCorps, need to share power in order to ensure their long-term viability. According to Foucault, power is a universal force that flows and leaks out of all social and political interactions, regardless of whether they are hegemonic or subservient:

It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization...; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. Power's condition of possibility, or in any case the viewpoint which permits one to understand its exercise, even in its more 'peripheral' effects, and which also makes it possible to use its mechanisms as a grid of intelligibility of the social order, must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. (Foucault, 1978, p. 94).

Similar to Foucault's view of the interchangeability of power in social and political relationships, Atwood's novel depicts the omnipresence of power as coming from various institutions, particularly the competing corporations and the CorpSeCorps, which wield similar social, political, and economic influence, though perhaps to a lesser extent (2005, p. 391). "Power is everywhere... because it emanates from everywhere," says Foucault (Foucault, 1978, p. 92). A dominant governmental apparatus and hegemonic domination of one social entity over another are ultimately, where it is represented. By using CorpSeCorps surveillance services to monitor their employees, corporations have supplanted the state as the ultimate hegemonic power structure in the novel's dystopia.

It shows that law and order are being made into things that can be sold to make money for corporations. Corporation-funded institutions use them to keep corporations in charge of public and private affairs, and they act arbitrarily and unrestrictedly based on their own interests, not the interests of the people they serve. The CorpSeCorps are all over the place, especially because they live in a border area, which is a space that both connects and separates the fields of the

socioeconomic binary. This allows their influence and authority to spread across both sides of the binary, eventually overriding even the corporations' own. Agents from the CorpSeCorps keep an eye out for people who don't belong at the compounds. They keep people from getting into the clean, sterilized labs and the old-fashioned homes of the elite. However, they also have a tight surveillance system that tracks the compounders' every move and keeps them in their lab or living space because they don't want one of them to work with environmental activists or other groups to sabotage the biomedical work done at labs like HelthWyzer, OrganInc Farms, or RejoovenEsence. Prostitution and pornography markets in the pleeblands are kept and regulated by the CorpSeCorps, but they never completely stop them. They satisfy the compounders' need for entertainment and sexual release, and they give the pleeblanders an economic way to make money. Despite keeping the borders well-guarded, these guards allow bodies to move between spaces. Men often slip through checkpoints with short-term passes to find sexual relief in the unstable bodies of female pleeblanders.

It becomes clear that the CorpSeCorps' containment action is repressive, because freedom and privacy are violated in the name of compound safety. Besides having to show fingerprint ID cards to get into and out of the compounds and having video cameras all over the compounds, CorpSeCorps agents can also control the compounders' personal communication and even spy on their homes by pretending to be housecleaners (Atwood, 2004, p. 54).

*Oryx and Crake's* repression of individual freedom is compared to the "loss of civil liberties in America, veiled under the notion that it is necessary for Americans to forfeit such rights in order to achieve national security" by Sutherland and Swan in the context of the post-9/11 world (2009, p. 221). Corporately controlled global markets have dismantled national borders, nearly eliminated national economies (although not entirely, as Crake refers to his compounds' competitors' nationalities instead of corporate affiliations) and any sense of national or patriotic loyalty from its citizens in the novels, in fact, in the novel's compounds. The "national security" argument. Local patriotism among the compounders has taken its place, with many willing to give up their rights for the sake of the "greater good," which in this case is their employers' well-being and profitability. In Jimmy's father's defense, Sharon complains about the "tight security at the...gates—the guards [are] ruder, they [are] suspicious of everyone, they [like] to strip search people, women especially," and she believes that their phones and e-mail have been bugged and that the housecleaners are CorpSeCorps spies (Atwood 2004, p. 55).

A woman with a hostile bioform disguised inside of a hairspray bottle recently attempted to blow up Sharon's house, and her husband dismisses her fears as "paranoia." He uses rhetoric similar to that used by Sutherland and Swan in post-9/11 political discourse to justify the increased security measures, saying that it is "for our own safety." "At the same time" (p. 54). For companies

and the CorpSeCorps, the intrusion into people's private life and the deletion of their individual rights are justifiable because of a combination of local allegiance and a misleading rhetoric of personal and community safety. As early as page 27 of his book, he even calls the CorpSeCorps guards "our people," implying that the compounders and the men assigned to keep them, their families, and their scientific accomplishments safe have a mutually beneficial relationship. Residents of the compounds are lulled into complacency by Hall's (2008) assertion that they "feel no real fear toward a system that primarily punishes those who commit big violations" (p. 43). As the CorpSeCorps go after and prosecute anyone who threatens the safety of their employers, this reciprocity becomes a naive fantasy. When the legal and law enforcement systems are used by CorpSeCorps to protect the compounders, they are actually looking out for themselves and their employers' best interests.

For the sake of keeping their reputations intact, Crake advises that they cover up atrocities, such as the murders of corporate dissidents. Even though the death of Crake's father was ruled accidental, Crake believes and indicates that he was murdered by corporate agents in order to keep their secrets hidden (Atwood, 2004, p. 182). After Crake's father and several other scientists who refused to assist with him on the BlyssPluss project "accidentally" fall off a Pleebland overpass, the story implies that he has gotten rid of them (Atwood, 2004, p. 182).

As the CorpSeCorps agents conduct criminal investigations into alleged conspiracy and corporate espionage, which are equated in the novel with terrorist acts, such as in the case of the crazy woman who manages to bring a contagious bioform into the HelthWyzer compound and then rule on and enact punishment without legal regulation, this becomes even more apparent. In their inquiry of Jimmy's mother's disappearance, their legal reach is made clear. Before she left the HelthWyzer property, Sharon questioned the ethics of the experiments that modify, splice and deform nonhuman animals for the benefit of humanity, among which is Jimmy's pet rakunk Killer (Atwood, 2004, p. 62).

The fact that she is the wife of a HelthWyzer headhunter and a former scientist makes her suspicious of corporate espionage right away, bringing her under the jurisdiction of the CorpSeCorps' arbitrary and prejudiced court system. Agents from CorpSeCorps descend on Jimmy's now-divided family as soon as she flees, searching for "what coded messages she might have been sending, what information she might or might not have downloaded and taken out with her" (p. 62). Going through their belongings and questioning his dad and any other people who may have spoken to her before her escape, coaxing Jimmy into revealing anything about his mother's escape. When Jimmy is a child, the CorpSeCorps reads his mail, tracks him, and interrogates him several times; playing on the assumption of a motherly bond to lead them to the criminal, and they do not give up until they have finally found, arrested, and executed Sharon

on live television as they so often do. With no legal system, the CorpSeCorps are forced to act as both judge and executioner.

This milieu of constant surveillance and physical imprisonment of the populace is reminiscent of Foucault's "disciplinary societies," except that corporate corporations and their CorpSeCorps henchmen have taken the place of the modern nation state in *Oryx and Crake*. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault charts the evolution of Western penal systems' mechanisms of punishment throughout the modern era, noting a shift away from ritualistic scenes of public torture and execution. Intended to expose and annul the crime by enacting violence against the body that committed it – the mutilation and disfigurement of one's physical frame functioning as a form of penance as the "body [produces] and [reproduces] the truth of the crime" (Foucault, p.185). Institutional structures such as schools, hospitals and factories are echoes of this process of normalization of deviant behavior, which in the novel are individuals and bodies who are unable to conform to and reside within the limits of binary constructions and therefore challenge its ideological and ontological boundaries. As Foucault puts it, these are the "arts of distributions" of bodies, in which individuals are assigned specific spaces according to their task and rank in the disciplinary machine that, on one hand, allows them to more efficiently perform their duties within the economic structures they inhabit; on the other hand, it facilitates observation and control on the state's part (p. 140). Disciplined procedures of observation assessment would be used to bring about this process of normalization, which is to say, conformance to the prevalent norms. Foucault sees discipline as a means of enacting biopolitics on a conforming majority through the use of a technology of control and correction. According to this apparent "growing leniency of punishment," with the substitution of violence and torture for jail, surveillance and a set of behavioral instructions, a "disciplinary society" founded on tools of regulation and inspection will emerge.

On the one side, the CorpSeCorps' widespread surveillance and control system is used to "normalize" Oryx and Crake's society; on the other, the entertainment and commercial mediums are used to "normalize" the population. The CorpSeCorps perform the "art of distributions" by ensuring that people are kept in their assigned spaces: the scientific elite inside the compounds, the rest of the population in the pleeblands, the "numbers people" in the labs, and the "words people" in Humanities schools like the Martha Graham Academy, which are all located within the compounds. This organizational pattern is viewed as a threat to public safety and is punished with persecution and murder on live television if it is broken. Throughout the novel's society, the characters are subject to microscopic surveillance by the policing forces of the CorpSeCorps with only a vague awareness of the level of inspection taking place, as these security measures are not too invasive or even visible at times, the video surveillance going mostly unnoticed within the landscape, and are usually perceived by most compounders as necessary to their protection and security

(Atwood, 2004, p. 26). A fictional society based on Bentham's panopticon, which is a circular prison with all cells arranged around a central well, appears to have achieved the ultimate architectural structure of discipline, with the CorpSeCorps acting as the single supervisor over every inmate. Despite this, the panopticon is not physically achieved in Atwood's fictional society, but it appears to have been achieved ideologically.

Surveillance is concealed, but punishment is made completely public, and this is done as a source of amusement rather than as a disciplinary tool in the novel. There is a considerable spectacle component involved with what once was the enactment of the law, which is now broadcast live on television and websites like "hedsoff.com" and "alibooboo.com." Instead of watching sports, Jimmy and Crake spend their free time observing the deaths of dissenters and criminals in other countries:

There they could see enemies of the people being topped with swords in someplace that looked like China, while thousands of spectators cheered. Or they could watch alibooboo.com, with various supposed thieves having their hands cut off and adulterers and lipstick-wearers being stoned to death by howling crowds, in dusty enclaves that purported to be in fundamentalist countries in the Middle East....Shortcircuit.com, brainfrizz.com, and deathrowlive.com were the best; they showed electrocutions and lethal injections. Once they'd made real-time coverage legal, the guys being executed had started hamming it up for the cameras (Atwood, 2004, p. 81).

People who watch executions in the novel's society are entertained by the violent display of the bodies of people who are deviant or criminal (Foucault, 1995, p. 45). In the novel, people who watch the executions in their homes when they are bored are moralizing and disciplining. It is possible that the CorpSeCorps is trying to be disciplined by letting the public see the executions of criminals and dissenters. This will make the compounders feel safe and trusting, and it will make people think twice about going against them or the corporations they work for. Spectators, on the other hand, become part of this disciplinary technology because they both become objects of observation and subjects who watch others. This kind of observation has become so common that people have to do it, which is the job of proving that the CorpSeCorps did the right thing. As Hall (2008) points out, the compounders start to "look at other people out of habit," which is bad (p. 45). Even when Jimmy was a child, he used these kinds of tools to keep an eye on his parents. He would hide mini-microphones around the house so he could listen in on his parents' conversations. In this way, the people who are being watched and punished keep this system of hidden surveillance and public punishment going. They become their own instruments of observation and control.

Consumer culture also plays a big role in this society because spectators have access to a virtual network through which they can see live feeds of events and quickly find out what is going on all over the world. Also, Jimmy and Crake watch live surgeries, animal snuffing, and even assisted suicides with a "this was your life: family albums, interviews with relatives, brave groups of friends standing by while the deed was taking place to background music"; they also watch the public executions (Atwood, p. 83). Once again, the spectacle of the live feeds is very important to making sure that people enjoy them. The more violent the executions or the more melodramatic the suicides, the more successful and wide-reaching these live feeds will be. Webcam feeds like "alibooboo.com" usually show low-quality footage of stonings of women in the Middle East because filming is banned there. Feeds like "shortcircuit.com" and "brainfrizz.com", on the other hand, show real-time coverage of electrocution and lethal injections, where you can "watch them [the prisoners] making faces, giving the guards the finger, cracking jokes, and occasionally breaking free" (p. 83). In the same way that people watch commercials for beauty and anti-ageing products made in corporate labs, they look at these images and start to think about how important they are to their happiness. In Hall's view, people become "obsessed with observation" after watching violent images. They become "obsessed with watching one another and observing the behavior of others" (Hall, p. 45). As Crake says, the corporations make it legal for people to watch these types of public broadcasts. This way, they can profit from people's voyeurism and feed their desire for drama and violence.

As a teenager, Jimmy and Crake spend a lot of time together, but they often play video games and watch surgeries and executions with their backs turned to each other, looking at their own computer screens. This voyeurism makes the characters even more isolated. The boys live in the same infrastructure as the prisoners in Bentham's panopticon, but their interaction is mediated by the two-dimensional feed that comes through the computer screens. In the same way, the panopticon prisoners live in the same prison but are separated from each other by the walls of their cells (Hall, p. 45).

The commodification of the flesh as a useful and subordinate object in the capitalist consuming wheel is evidenced by our voyeuristic fascination with the mutilation and death of humans and animals. It appears as if the human body has been reduced to a commodity by the inclusion of "spot advertising, for things like car batteries and tranquilizers, as well as brands painted in bright yellow on the background walls" (Atwood, p. 84). This corporate society's globalized consumer culture and the Foucauldian technologies of discipline and surveillance – cameras, news feeds, physical distribution and separation of individuals across landscapes – create a new ontology of the human as what Foucault (1995) calls "Man-the Machine," which acts on and transforms the individual into a biological entity, a "body that is controlled and shaped and trained and which obeys and responds" (p.136).

The corporately dominated media establish an emotional and moral disconnect between the observer and the observed, the consumer and the consumed, as living matter becomes a source of capital, as living matter becomes a source of capital. (Braidotti, 2013, p. 8). Humanity and even life are rendered meaningless in this setting.

As a result of Foucault's (1995) disciplinary societies, people's bodies become both objects and targets of the control structures and devices of whoever is in power. Institutions like schools, prisons, hospitals and the military serve a "normalizing" function by using techniques of observation and examination to create "docile bodies" that "may be subjected to, used, transformed and improved" (p. 136). Because their bodies must be both productive and subordinated, individuals are constrained by this concept on the political as well as the economic levels; this means that individuals are "caught up in an oppression system" that shapes and subordinates them to the demands and goals of the dominant governmental structure (p. 26). While boosting the body's economic and political value, discipline deprives it of any autonomy over its own self-determination (p.138). As a result, the body of an individual becomes an object – a product – of the political and economic structures into which it has been gradually integrated.

In Margaret Atwood's novel, the human body is used as a biological laboratory for scientific experimentation, manipulation, and consumption. A utilitarian and scientific mindset pervades our society, and it views all living things, including humans and nonhuman animals, as merely cells and tissues that can be studied and manipulated in a laboratory in order to develop new cosmetic products and biomedical procedures to enhance human anatomy and enhance human lifestyles. Individuality and consciousness seem to have been removed from the human body, which can now be shaped, transformed and integrated into capitalist market structures for the purpose of consumption and exploitation. To the extent that they are subject to a corporate political system's structures of control and distribution, individuals become socially political agents trapped in these globalized market structures, but they are also exploitable organic matter that serves as the source and testing ground for progress. This denotes the ontological shift in the understanding of the human pointed out by Foucault from "man-as-body" to "man-as-species," which has an opposite effect to that of the surveillance techniques of the disciplinary society: while the technology of discipline promoted the individualization of bodies to enable their surveillance, what Foucault calls "biopower" or "technology of power" has a massifying effect that perceives the human and the human body as a set of biological processes "such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population" (p. 243).

This biopolitical method provides for the management and organization of the people on a mass scale, as well as their relationship with other species and their surrounding environment. There is now a greater body of humanity that is

both biological and political and must therefore be managed by methods of the scientific as well as the political. People are increasingly being commodified in this way, as their physical, biological, and genetic make-up is structured according to the norms of supply and demand in corporate markets. In Braidotti's (2013) view, advanced capitalism reduces bodies to "informational substrate in terms of energy resources" and subjects them to testing and monitoring techniques such as "DNA testing, brain fingerprinting, neural imaging, body heat detection, and iris or hand recognition," among other things (p. 62). Atwood's narrative uses these tools to monitor and sterilize the characters' movements across the environment and their interactions with one another and other animals. Furthermore, this process seeks to break the boundary between human and nonhuman species, which are classified as commodities inside the corporate capitalist frameworks of a corporation.

Biomedical chemicals in *Oryx and Crake* splice human and nonhuman genetic material to generate cutting-edge procedures and products that extend human life and profit from it. This is fair game. Using pigeons as living organ incubators is a good example, as scientists implant human cells into the pigs in order to grow human organs for transplantation (Atwood, 2004, p. 21). Splicing animal DNA together to create hybrid creatures, such as the spoad/gider (a combination of spider and goat DNA) and the rakunk (a combination of the rat and skunk DNA), which Jimmy later acquires as his pet, are other genetic experiments. When humans are treated as a scientific and economic commodity, much like animals, the global economy, according to Braidotti, becomes "post-anthropocentric." Approximation between humans and other animals in terms of their bio-genetics eventually results in "if not erasure, at least a blurring" when it comes to benefitting from them (Braidotti, p. 61).

### **Conclusion**

*Oryx and Crake's* reification of the human body and its rising scientific and economic identification with nonhuman organisms paradoxically serves as a tool for species amalgamation and differentiation. Splicing human and nonhuman animal cells, such as in the pigeons project, appears to reveal a process of biological equalization between human and nonhuman animals, whereby human and animal biology are no longer perceived as fundamentally different, but as having similar traits that allow the latter to be used with and to benefit the former. To some extent, the use of pleeblanders as test subjects for new products and the dissemination of newly created diseases as a tool for population control show that human biology has also become malleable and valuable, similar to that of nonhuman animals. In the same way, this relationship seems to perpetuate the hierarchical bond between human and nonhuman animals, as the human subject still has power and possession over the animal's body without acknowledging their biological and biomedical interdependence. Despite the equalizing impacts of capitalist markets, the scientific elite is still



trying to keep the frontiers between human and nonhuman species tightly shut in the novel. Traditional humanist ontologies place humans above nonhuman animals because they have unique mental faculties like reasoning, language, and, above all, an individual consciousness. This allows the scientific elite to continue manipulating pigs and goats' genes in the name of science and progress, all for our own benefit.

### قراءة سياسية حيوية لمسرحية Oryx و Crake من Atwood

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد المروع ، الفيروس ، التقليد الأبوي

م.م رؤى جدوع جلم

الجامعة التقنية الوسطى/ معهد الإدارة-الرصافة

تاريخ قبول نشر البحث ٢٣/١/٢٠٢٣

تاريخ استلام البحث ٢٩/١٢/٢٠٢٢

#### الملخص

تعد رواية مارجريت أتوود (2003) *Oryx and Crake* رواية ما بعد نهاية العالم تدور أحداثها في ثلاثية مدادام حيث قضى "الفيضان" - وهو فيروس صنعه الإنسان - على حياة الإنسان بالكامل تقريباً. تستخدم أتوود قصة *Snowman* وهو آخر إنسان على وجه الأرض ، ونضاله للنجاة في وسط بيئة بيولوجية وبيئية صعبة لتهاجم من خلاله الكيانات الاجتماعية والسياسية والاقتصادية الحالية ، فضلاً عن المفاهيم الغربية التقليدية للذات. يسلط البحث الضوء بشكل أساسي على توزيع القوة في الرواية. حيث يستفيد البحث من مفهوم فوكو عن "السياسة الحيوية" والذي يشير بشكل أساسي إلى فكرة التحكم في وظائف الجسم البشري.

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