

DIGITAL DYSTOPIA AND THE COLLAPSE OF ECO-HOLISM: A STUDY OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE*

A. Thiviya Alexander,

Head & Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Don Bosco College of Arts and Science, Keelaeral, Thoothukudi, Tamilnadu
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli

Abstract

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* reflects the threats posed by the digital era to socio-cultural living and the harmony of eco-consciousness. The novel's characters reveal this deformation: Crake embodies scientific determinism and technological domination, while Oryx reflects the life in a digital and distorted world. Snowman (Jimmy) illustrates the alienation of the human subject, marked by the collapse of relationships and spirituality. Their fractured identities highlight the annihilation of human values. This study serves as a warning of a bleak world where a futuristic digital world faces a crisis in human association and ecological consciousness.

Keywords: computer, digital, dystopia, ecology, seclusion, surveillance, technology.

The dystopian literature encompasses the themes such as unrestricted power, ethical imbalance and the ruin of societal reputation. The word dystopia has its roots in the eighteenth century, during which myths, fables and religious manuscripts played a pivotal role. Digital dystopian novels embody this particular tradition by demonstrating the nexus of digital culture, societal advancement and human life, often envisaging a bleak and foreboding future

Oryx and Crake, a dystopian novel, delves in to the erosion of human dignity through the manipulation of ecological system and the creation of artificial comfort zones. According to Coral Ann Howells, *Oryx and Crake* is blend of "dystopia, satire, wilderness survival narrative and castaway narrative, tragic romance triangle, and the quest to the Underworld" (171).

Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on 18 November 1939 in Ottawa, Canada. Carl her father, an entomologist was the supportive instrument and lead the family along with his exploration in science as well. Harold was her older brother and she was the second of three children in the family. Margaret Atwood was away from regular schooling and so paid interest to self-learning by learning through

literature and reading various fairy tales, myths and legends from different cultures. Later after much hard work and commitment in her excellence in studies, she became a Canadian writer best known for her prose fiction, feminist perspective and the author of thirty-five books like novels, poetry, short story collections and books of essays. In her books, Margaret Atwood loves to deal with challenging genres that would create an impact on politics, society and intellects. Today, Margaret Atwood considered as a key figure in contributing to Canadian culture.

The present culture presents the scenario in which individuals and groups are exceedingly engrossed in digital platforms having real world rendezvous resulting in bleak mode of pathetic existence. Such reflections are predominantly exhibited in contemporary digital narratives. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* reflects the contemporary digital anxieties through the character of Jimmy. Jimmy is the narrative character of *Oryx and Crake*, a male, whose life journey can be picturized into four different phases that of, during his innocent childhood, encountering denial at various levels by his beloved parents and as adolescent endures suffering as a slow learner and low achiever in the school.

Jimmy has been raised up in the Compounds of 'OrganInc Farms', confined to 'OrganInc' security personnel, Of course, away from the 'pleeblands' considered to be 'normal' cities, with immoral atrocities, and pleasure loving in the form of internet porn and drugs. He does grow up in "Terrific Parenting" by "Evil Dad" who "blustered and theorized and dished out pompous bullshit" and "Righteous Mom" who "complained and accused" (68).

Digital fascination drives the character into seclusion from the parents and the creatures on his father's farm. The epoch of computers and digital culture have distorted the humans life, as digital invention has been on bar just because of messing up with prioritization of time consumption and communication with the objects and the people. According to Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish*, "The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by collection of separated individualities" (203). Therefore, the digital activities tend to dissociate individuals, creating distance and isolation; individuals like become increasingly fragmented rather than unified.

Crake, who is called as Glenn, has a super brain and outsmarts the other with his intelligence and establishes success in creating artificial creatures which is something against eco-holism. "Crake was very smart... he had no trouble floating at the top of the list" (85). Jimmy and Crake who enjoy close friendship at times are driven with spending time together on computer watching and having voyeuristic pleasure, as they have lost the focus of themselves in the computer era. Moreover,

they started to ruin their career together at the computer playing games and watching obscene stuffs on television, such as kiddie-porn and public executions. And this is affirmed as Snowman himself goes back to his memories, “This was how the two of them first saw Oryx... she looked eight.. ..Her name wasn’t Oryx, she didn’t have a name. She was just another little girl on a porno site.” (90)

As Stephen Dunning comments: “They do not use these technologies to communicate, so much as to entertain and distract themselves, a point Atwood emphasizes by having them augment their voyeuristic excursions into the Internet with mind altering substances” (91).

The digital divide is evident in the type of shows that captivate stirs Jimmy and Crake having a novel gaze at several young girls of those but Oryx fascinated most. Many young girls starred in that type of show, but Oryx had a way about her that captured them.

She smiled a hard little smile that made her appear much older, and wiped the whipped cream from her mouth. Then she looked over her shoulder and right into the eyes of the viewer - right into Jimmy’s eyes, into the secret person inside him. / see you, that look said. I see you watching. I know you. I know what you want. (OC, 90-1)

Television shows which are known as romance, gradually lead Jimmy and Crake in to games such as Extinctathon, Barbarian Stomp, Kwiktime Osama, or Three-Dimensional Waco. As there is a further development in playing games Jimmy and Crake step ahead involving themselves with the games of violence and genocide, rapes and murders.

Another concept that is found in *Oryx and Crake* is surveillance control that has been exerted by Corporations. The intricacy of the surveillance that is found in *Oryx and Crake* reflect the surveillance with using security systems like CCTV, spy voice recorder, network controller and many other controlling system. This particular system is exercised not with good intention of ensuring people’s safety and security but rather monitor the individuals and their walks of life. And so, the digital narratives are the means of manipulation at the lives of human freedom and their expressions.

This paper has focused exploring and discussing the discrepancy made by the digital gadgets that intrude the culture, human lives and ecological embodiment. In the name of digital era the genuine characters of humane been lost as there is a domination of ethical imbalances created by the greedy mongers of the society like Crake, partially Jimmy and accidentally Oryx herself in the novel *Oryx and Crake*.

The future is at stake while there is a constant design evolved against Human nature, culture and ecological holism.

Work Cited:

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. Virago Press, 2011

Claeys, G. *Dystopia: a natural history*. Oxford University Press, 2016.

Dunning, Stephen. "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: the Terror of the Therapeutic". *Canadian Literature*, 2005.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books, 1995.

Howells, Coral Ann. *Margaret Atwood*. 2nd ed. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.