

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

15 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 15 ISSUE-6 DECEMBER 2024

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**

www.the-criterion.com

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

From Eden to Apocalypse: Exploring Ecological Concerns and Environmental Degradation in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

Aarzo Hajj

Research Scholar,
Department of English,
Gujarat University,
Ahmedabad.

&

Dr. Kanubhai Patel

Research guide,
Associate Professor,
Smt. A. P. Patel Arts and Late Shree N. P. Patel Commerce College,
Naroda, Ahmedabad.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14606212>

Article History: Submitted-30/11/2024, Revised-24/12/2024, Accepted-26/12/2024, Published-31/12/2024.

Abstract:

Margaret Atwood, one of the versatile geniuses of English Literature, often talks about environmental degradation and its consequences in the late twentieth century in her narratives. Through its vivid portrayal of a postapocalyptic world, the novel "*Oryx and Crake*" highlights the catastrophic consequences of humanity's disregard for nature and the ethical dilemmas posed by scientific advancements, a dystopian vision of a future ravaged by genetic engineering, climate change and environmental collapse. Ultimately, the narrative underscores the urgency of rethinking our relationship with the environment and a call for deeper reflection on our ecological footprint. The proposed study analyzes the ethical implications of scientific experimentation and the consequences of human interference with natural ecosystems since the time of garden of Eden to the postapocalyptic. By drawing parallels between fictional Crake and real-world environmental concerns, the paper is an attempt to analyze Atwood's work within contemporary ecological discourse, highlighting the unchecked ecological degradation.

Keywords: apocalypse, post-apocalyptic, bioengineering, climate change, ecocriticism, environmental degradation, ecological emergencies, cli-fi.

Introduction

The near-future world of Margaret Atwood's 2003 dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* is marked by environmental deterioration, genetic engineering, and ecological catastrophe. *Oryx and Crake*, as many other pieces of Atwood's writing, deals with concerns of human responsibility, ecological emergencies, and the fallout from unbridled technological progress. The protagonist of the tale, Snowman (formerly known as Jimmy), muses over his past and the circumstances that brought about the end of the world. Atwood tackles important topics like biodiversity loss, climate change, and the moral ramifications of scientific discoveries in Snowman's story.

The protagonist of the work, Snowman, believes in the pre-apocalyptic environment that resulted in the annihilation of humanity and the part that ecological mismanagement, biotechnology, and corporate greed had in the demise of civilization.

One of the ways to interpret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is as an ominous narrative that challenges the direction of current environmental and ecological issues. Atwood addresses substantial issues concerning the sustainability of human activities, the morality of genetic engineering, and the susceptibility of natural ecosystems via the perspective of speculative fiction. The book traces the shift from an Edenic world, which was formerly rich and fertile, to a postapocalyptic setting devastated by ecological collapse, overconsumption, and environmental degradation.

In this paper, questions such as how Atwood's concerns about ecological degradation are reflected in *Oryx and Crake* and how the book criticizes humanity's part in causing this damage are addressed. Also, the ecological issues brought up by the story, especially the damaging effects of biotechnological advancements and the exploitative nature of corporate capitalism, are investigated by examining the novel's setting, themes, and characters.

Margaret Atwood has brilliantly set up two contradictory realms in *Oryx and Crake*: one is the Garden of Eden, and the contrasting one is the post-apocalyptic future. These two opposite environments provide vivid, powerful illustrations of how people communicate with technology, the natural world, and morality.

The Garden of Eden: Reimagination of the Garden of Eden in the tale

In the narrative, The Garden of Eden is depicted symbolically. It is portrayed in both its lush, pristine forms and its eventual degeneration. Crake's bioengineered paradise is Atwood's recreation of Eden Garden; the "Crakers" have been designed to coexist peacefully and harmoniously with nature and are not plagued by human foibles. In order to maintain and safeguard harmony and environmental balance, both humans and animals have undergone genetic mutation in this engineered Garden of Eden. For instance, the Crakers are prohibited from being sexually aggressive, jealous, or subject to the destructive tendencies of humanity.

However, there are also substantial issues with this Eden. There is an unnerving sense of dominance in this paradise, and human individuality and liberty have been given up for its ideal state of peacefulness and cleanliness. On one hand it is a place without prevailing any kind of conflicts, war, illness and suffering. Nevertheless, on the opposite hand, it is a place where liberty, choices, actual growth of individual and of the whole the society lack. This celestial body is an alter ego of the actual biblical Eden, where everything seems flawless but is manipulated, controlled and created. It is a twisted version of the Garden of Eden where beauty and tranquilly conceal the darker, artificial foundations of its establishment.

Eden and the Pre-Apocalyptic World

The pre-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake* is portrayed as being rich in diversity and natural beauty, but it has been polluted by technology exploitation and human involvement. Because it provides an abrupt juxtaposition to the post-apocalyptic society that follows, Atwood's depiction of the pre-apocalyptic world is important. The environment of the narrative is separated into two main sections: the "wild" areas outside of metropolitan centers, where nature is allowed to decay, and the human-controlled areas, such as the corporate-controlled cities and the "Compounds," where genetic engineering is practiced. The story starts with the impression that humanity has not yet wholly recognized or comprehended how delicate the natural world is. On the other hand, *Oryx and Crake's* world is already on the verge of ecological catastrophe, and references to environmental deterioration serve as a warning of this approaching collapse.

An idealized world that has been polluted and destroyed by human activity; the biblical Eden has been symbolized by Atwood's portrayal of the environment in the pre-apocalyptic world. The main character, Snowman, recalls his early years spent in the compound, where he and his friends lived in an apparently ideal setting away from the troubles of the outside world. But this world's seeming serenity and prosperity are a façade. Much of the natural world's beauty has been lost to corporate interests and technical breakthroughs, and the environment is artificial, controlled, and manipulated. Eden's once lush landscape has been replaced by a regulated, automated setting that lacks the natural and impromptu characteristics that once characterized it.

The development of genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, like the Crakers, bioengineered creatures created to coexist peacefully with their surroundings, embodies this conflict between the natural and the artificial. The Crakers are the result of human intervention, but they also symbolize a possible restoration to an Edenic state devoid of environmental devastation, human aggression, and greed. Atwood's criticism of humanity's aspirations to use science and technology to control and dominate nature is reflected in the dichotomy between the natural world and the artificial, genetically modified world.

With metropolis in ruins, toxic panoramas, and perished organisms, the post-apocalyptic landscape is forlorn and devastated. Nature has lost its lushness and resources, and what remains is often a skewed image of what was once present. Corporations govern the entire globe, controlling commodities and the existence itself, constantly by mutating the human genome and breeding genetically engineered species of animals. There is an impression of loss, anxiousness, and isolation around the planet in the novel.

The Role of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering

The moral and environmental ramifications of genetic engineering and biotechnology are among the main topics of *Oryx and Crake*. Strong businesses that profit from genetic modification rule the fictional civilization in the book. In this universe, genetic engineering is employed to generate new species and modify existing ones for human benefit, and scientific knowledge is commodified. Once a scientist for the biotechnology company OrganInc, the main character, Snowman, muses on the consequences of the experiments he took part in, especially the

development of the Crakers, a new species of humans genetically modified to be immune to the destructive tendencies of their creators.

One of the novel's primary aspects is the development of the Crakers, which poses important queries regarding how humans will influence the course of life on Earth in the future. The Crakers' genetic makeup predisposes them to live in harmony with nature, abstain from violence, and reject the self-centred impulses that caused human civilisation to fall apart. In many respects, they embody a romanticised view of humanity, devoid of the defects and shortcomings that have resulted in the ecological disaster. But their presence also highlights the basic moral conundrums raised by genetic modification. To satisfy the demands and preferences of their makers, the Crakers are genetically altered and produced in a lab. Their presence begs significant problems regarding the ethics of interfering with life itself, as they are the result of human involvement in the natural world.

Atwood examines the risks of genetic engineering through the development of the Crakers, focussing on how it might upset the natural order and cause ecological disaster. Biotechnology has been pushed to its breaking point in the *Oryx and Crake* universe, with terrible repercussions. The Crakers' creation is ultimately a reflection of humanity's ambition to play god, even though it appears to be a solution to the issues of environmental degradation and human aggression. Despite their capacity for good, the Crakers are also the result of a risky and defective scientific endeavour that ultimately brings about the end of human civilisation.

Apart from the Crakers, the book also examines other examples of biotechnology gone wrong, such the "pigoon," a genetically altered pig raised for the goal of harvesting organs. The commercialization and exploitation of genetic modification for financial gain is the pigoon's dark side. These corporately motivated trials have significant ecological repercussions. Ecosystems are upset, dangerous new species are created, and the natural world eventually collapses as a result of the genetic engineering of plants and animals for financial benefit.

Atwood criticises the unbridled optimism and hubris that can accompany scientific and technical breakthroughs through these made-up devices and experiments. The novel argues that because

the effects of human attempts to manipulate nature through biotechnology are frequently unanticipated and irreversible, they will ultimately result in ecological catastrophe.

The Destruction of the Natural World

The devastation of nature lies at the heart of *Oryx and Crake*. In the future depicted in the book, environmental deterioration has reached disastrous proportions. The decline of the natural world has been caused by the emergence of artificial, bioengineered life forms, the breakdown of ecosystems, and the depletion of natural resources. Atwood's depiction of this environmental catastrophe serves as a critique and a warning about how humans have acted towards the world.

The natural world is now a place of destruction and ruin rather than richness and beauty in the world of *Oryx and Crake*. The once-diverse animal and plant species are either extinct or genetically altered beyond recognition, and the once-luxuriant forests have given way to arid, filthy landscapes. Every element of the environment is affected by industrialization, deforestation, and climate change. It is common to describe the air as dirty, the water supplies as poisoned, and the sky as foggy. In this way, the book captures the escalating worries about environmental damage and how human activity affects the planet's ecosystems.

The natural world is now a place of destruction and ruin rather than richness and beauty in the world of *Oryx and Crake*. The once-diverse animal and plant species are either extinct or genetically altered beyond recognition, and the once-luxuriant forests have given way to arid, filthy landscapes. Every element of the environment is affected by industrialization, deforestation, and climate change. It is common to describe the air as dirty, the water supplies as poisoned, and the sky as foggy. In this way, the book captures the escalating worries about environmental damage and how human activity affects the planet's ecosystems.

The narrative also emphasizes how ecosystems are delicate and how human intervention can have far-reaching effects. Ecosystems are being disrupted by the introduction of genetically modified organisms into the natural environment, the extinction of species, and the polluting of water sources. According to Atwood, the devastation of nature is a moral as well as an ecological problem. The story cautions that the downfall of mankind itself will eventually result from the

exploitation of the environment and the manipulation of life itself, which is an affront to the natural order.

The Apocalyptic Vision

The apocalyptic picture of *Oryx and Crake* is a result of both human self-destructive inclinations and environmental degradation. As the story goes on, it becomes evident that the demise of human civilization is closely related to the demise of the natural world. The unbridled quest for financial gain, the misuse of genetic engineering, and environmental deterioration all play a part in humanity's demise. A topic that speaks to current worries about climate change, environmental damage, and the moral quandaries of technological growth is Atwood's vision of the future, which holds that humanity is to blame for its own extinction.

The devastating effects of human disdain for the environment are made abundantly clear in the novel's concluding chapters. The appearance of the Crakers, the sole survivors of the apocalypse, signifies the end of humanity. They stand for both the failure of human civilisation to cohabit with the natural environment and the possibility of a future free from violence and greed.

Conclusion

Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood is a potent examination of ecological issues and environmental deterioration that functions as a warning and a critique of modern environmental policies. The novel emphasises the critical need for ecological knowledge and ethical responsibility through its complex narrative structure, likeable characters, and thought-provoking interactions.

This essay examines Atwood's contributions to ecocriticism and her critique of the moral consequences of scientific advancement by looking at the ecological themes and environmental degradation present in *Oryx and Crake*. A timely warning of the adverse effects of human hubris and the significance of sustainable practices is provided by the novel's depiction of a planet in ruins. The novel *Oryx and Crake* provides a moving and provocative meditation on the

relationship between human behaviour and the natural world in a time of persistent environmental problems.

This research study argues for a more peaceful and moral approach to scientific innovation and ecological stewardship, highlighting the significance of reconsidering our relationship with the environment. The Garden of Eden and the post-apocalyptic environment are two conflicting worlds which act as both settings and reflections on human nature, the ethical aspects of the use of genetic technology, and what might come out of humanity's desire to rule over life in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. Atwood challenges the audience to ponder over what does it actually mean to coexist harmoniously with the nature around and whether this is feasible or unavoidably dangerous through this interaction.

Works Cited:

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. Nan A. Talese, 2009.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary & Cultural Theory*. Viva Books Private LTD, 2018.

Botkin, Daniel B. *Discordant Harmonies: A New Ecology for the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Branch, John, and Brad Plumer. “*The Year You Finally Read a Book About Climate Change*”, The New York Times, 19 April, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/climate-change-books.html>

Clark, Timothy. “*The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*.” Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom*. New York: Routledge, 2012.