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COEXISTENCE, A KEY FOR SURVIVAL: A STUDY OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S
SPECULATIVE FICTION *ORYX AND CRAKE*

Dr. SUMATHY K. SWAMY¹, C. NANDHINI DEVI²

¹Associate Professor, Dept., of English, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore

²(Corresponding Author) Ph. D., Scholar, Dept., of English, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women, Coimbatore



ABSTRACT

Literature has been known to portray the lives of people of the period of genesis of the particular piece of literary work. At some times it can also foretell things as in the case with the speculative fiction. Speculative fiction are imaginary stories that are based on actual happenings of the earth. Those events could either have happened in the past or might have likelihoods of happening in the future. Margaret Atwood is one of the most prominent contemporary writers who writes stories about the future that could warn people about the impending disasters if he continues to destroy nature in order for him to live an easier and comfortable life. *Oryx and Crake* is one of her recent novels, which is the first book of the Maddaddam trilogy, that prophecies about the tragic events because of the misuse of genetic engineering. She, through this novel, tries to caution humanity and advice it to mend its ways so as to preserve itself and also the nature.

Keywords: Speculative fiction, *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood, Coexistence.

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Literature is known as the mirror of life. It could also be defined, in the recent times, as a mirror which foretells the future, as in fairy tales. The speculative fiction could be described as the fairy tale mirror which prophesies about the future, if not exactly, at least to a certain extent. One of the most popular genres of the present time is speculative fiction, which is said to revolve around events that might happen in the future.

The term speculative fiction has possibly been coined by Robert A. Heinlein, a popular science fiction writer. Speculative fiction can be defined as imaginary stories that are based on actions that occur on earth, that have either happened in the past or present, or have the possibility of happening in the future. Most

of the time there arise confusion between science fiction and speculative fiction. In fact, they are not the same. Science fiction deals with things that are purely imaginative. They may not have any scientific base. On the other hand, speculative fiction have some scientific base. They have the possibility of happening sometime on the earth. In Margaret Atwood's words, speculative fiction ". . . contains no intergalactic space travel, no teleportation, no Martians . . . it invents nothing we haven't already invented or started to invent" (MT 330).

Oryx and Crake is a speculative fiction which deals with events that happen because of advancement in technology such as genetic engineering. The novel is set in the future where the

world is divided into two: the Compounds, where scientists who work for top corporations and their families live, and the Pleeblands, where the other common people live. However, it is to be noted that both the worlds are scrutinized by the corporations and the CorpSeCorps- the degenerate policemen who work for the corporations. It is also to be noted that both the worlds are corrupt and unethical.

The protagonist of the novel is Jimmy, who is also known as Snowman. He is the only son of two scientists of one of the top corporations. His mother, who feels guilty about her job of working against nature and humanity, quits her job in the Compounds when Jimmy is a young boy. His father, however, becomes one of the top scientists who develop the Pigoons, which are invented so as to produce extra body organs that can be easily transplanted to humans.

Jimmy grows up with almost no care from either of his parents. His father, who could not realise that kids cannot understand ironic humour, does not have time or interest in the upbringing of Jimmy. His mother is, for the most part of the day, seen mourning something or the other. Whenever he tries talking to her, he ends up making his mother cry or getting himself whacked by her. When Jimmy is a young boy, his mother escapes to the Pleeblands abandoning her family. He finds it difficult to make friends and at one point Crake enters Jimmy's life and they connect over online gaming and become even more closer with their common obsession with a child porn star, who would be later known as Oryx in the novel.

Jimmy and Crake part ways after high school. Jimmy, a words person, goes to Martha Graham Academy, a third rate college, while Crake, a numbers person goes to Watson Crick Institute. Later in the novel it could be found that they come together once again when Crake is a top scientist at one of the top corporations and Jimmy writes for an advertising agency.

Crake, in his position as a top scientist, finds that the Corporations could not only be used to cure diseases, but also to invent diseases so as to destroy the defective world and create a new, ideal world.

With the vast resources in his hands and the putrefied familial history, Crake has nothing do with the crooked world and no introduction to humanity, hence is encouraged to destroy the world which is fruitless to him. Neither he nor the people he meet have any traces of humanity left in them. Even Jimmy, who shows hints of humanity, tries to hide it from Crake for the fear of losing the convictions Crake has on him and who shows no such feelings in front of Jimmy.

It could not be ignored that there are people who are left with a little bit of humanity in them, such as Jimmy's mother. She, from time to time, argues with her husband about the immoral activities he does in the name of science. In one of their arguments, she says:

Why can't you get a job doing something honest?

Something basic"

"Like what and like where? You want me to dig ditches?"

"At least your conscience would be clean."

"No yours would. You're the one with the neurotic guilt.

Why don't you dig a few ditches yourself, at least it would get

you off your butt. Then maybe you'd quit smoking- you're a one-woman emphysema factory, plus you're single handedly

supporting the tobacco companies. Think about that if you're so

ethical. They're the folks who get six-year-olds hooked for life by

passing out free samples."

"I know all that." A pause. "I smoke because I'm

depressed. The tobacco companies depress me, you depress me,

Jimmy depresses me, he's turning into a..." (OC 57).

Atwood, in this first book of the Maddaddam trilogy, has portrayed a dystopic world from which she expects people to learn something so that they can prevent themselves, the next generation and even the

whole world with their actions. Dystopia is an imaginary place where everything is disagreeable, immoral and corrupt. George Orwell's *1984*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* are listed under the dystopian category of fiction.

Jimmy and Crake grow up as single children in the novel. It could be noted that many of the characters like Toby, Brenda, and Amanda are also raised as single children. It is important to note that this is one of the current trends of the society. She wishes to convey that this is also one of the major reasons for these characters to become such people later in their lives. Atwood has highlighted this throughout her trilogy, through almost all of her characters. If these characters had siblings, their characters could have been different. Jimmy, at one point in the novel, keeps his Rakunk as a pet to whom he confesses almost everything. This, as Spiegel in *Character in a Post-national World: Neomedievalism in Atwood's Oryx and Crake* notes, "... only further illustrates the disintegration of the family as a unified source of identity" (125).

Indifference is also one of the reasons for people to be like this. The people of the novel, like Crake, are indifferent to things around them. He is unmoved even by his mother's death. Instead, it is very distressing to note that, he is excited about it. When talking to Jimmy about his mother's death, Crake says: "It was impressive," Crake told Jimmy. "Froth was coming out." (177). When he is unmoved by his mother's death, it could not be expected of him to show any compassion towards any of the other humans.

Atwood is a person who strives hard to do some good to the planet earth and its beings. The Maddaddam trilogy is one such work through which she intends to do this. As Linda Hutcheon remarks:

"This novel is certainly written from the perspective of a certain ideology: it tries to show the reader a dystopian view of what might happen to the world if we continue with our immoral treatment of nature for our own good. The novel therefore does not claim to stand outside ideology but tries to

show that certain current dominant ideologies need to reassert themselves, a stance which is characteristic of postmodernism" (22).

In *Oryx and Crake* Atwood has tried to speculate about the future so as to create a fear in the minds of the readers which would prevent them from doing things that are against the earth. She intends to warn the society about their acts and force them to alter their ways of living so that man could co-exist with his co-beings without any problems. It should be kept in mind that man is not the superior one; instead he is one of the beings on the earth. He should "... coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere . . ." (Rueckert 107) to keep the green planet green.

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