

# “God is a cluster of neurons”: Neo-posthumanism, theocide, theogony and anti-myths of origin in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*

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## Resumo

O presente trabalho almeja problematizar o recente ressurgimento de narrativas literárias distópicas nas literaturas de língua inglesa, sugerindo que as mesmas devam ser lidas a partir de uma perspectiva que considere a centralidade do corpo distópico, corpo este que deve ser entendido como uma entidade transumana. A partir das discussões de transumanismo e pós-humanismo, do impacto do desenvolvimento científico na construção do desejo e do papel do pensamento teológico na pós-modernidade, almeja-se discutir as formas como tais ideias aparecem e são apresentadas na obra *Oryx and Crake*, da escritora canadense Margaret Atwood.

**Palavras-chave:** transumanismo; pós-humanismo; distopias; corpo distópico; *Oryx and Crake*.

The rise of technological capitalism and the development of transhuman and posthuman ideas<sup>1</sup> have somewhat converged to the reinvention of dystopian fiction in English from the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. However, unlike their counterparts from earlier in that century, which Gregory Claeys defines as the second dystopian turn in literature (CLAEYS, 2010, p. 111-112), these contemporary dystopias, which form a third dystopian turn (MARKS DE MARQUES, 2013a, p.4), focus not upon a critique of a political system and its control over individuals but on the centrality of the bodies that result from the convergence of biology and technology. Following Francis Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history, it is possible to understand the (maybe temporary) demise of utopia as a literary mode:

We who live in stable, long-standing liberal democracies face an unusual situation. In our grandparents' time, many reasonable people could foresee a radiant socialist future in which private property and capitalism had been abolished, and in which politics itself was somehow overcome. Today, by contrast, we have trouble imagining a world that is radically better than our own, or a future that is not essentially democratic and capitalist. Within that framework, of course, many things could be improved: we could house the homeless, guarantee opportunity for minorities and women, improve competitiveness, and create new jobs. We can also imagine future worlds that are significantly worse than what we know now, in which national, racial, or religious intolerance makes a comeback, or in which we are overwhelmed by war or environmental collapse. But we cannot picture to ourselves a world that is essentially different from the present one, and at the same time better. Other, less reflective ages also thought of themselves as the best, but we arrive at this conclusion exhausted, as it were, from the pursuit of alternatives we felt had to be better than liberal democracy. (FUKUYAMA, 1992, p.42)

Despite the fact that Fukuyama himself has since revised his thesis, the general feeling that capitalism (in the guise of Western liberal democracies) has been victorious in the war against socialist/communist regimes has not only remained but declared the ultimate death of utopia. The end of history brings with it the impossibility (for lack of need, really) of imagining worlds better than our own.

The reappearance of literary dystopias is, thus, a reassessment of the utopian impulse. Such an impulse is at the core of Fredric Jameson's *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), where the Marxist critic examines the connections between utopia, politics, and their renderings as sci-fi. Part of Jameson's argument is to define the utopian impulse as present-to-future oriented – that is, an idea that is set to its fulfilment through a re-organisation and reinvention of the political system, the geographical loci and, just as importantly,

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars involved with transhumanism and posthumanism make a very strong point defining the former as the process of becoming the latter (cf. WOLFE, 2009, p. xiii; BRODERICK, 2013, p. 430).

of the corporeal relations to self, time, and others (JAMESON, 2005, p.4). The material body becomes central to understanding contemporary utopias. Jameson (2005) states that

[m]aterialism is already omnipresent in an attention to the body which seeks to correct any idealism or spiritualism lingering in this system. Utopian corporeality is however also a haunting, which invests even the most subordinate and shamed products of everyday life, such as aspirins, laxatives and deodorants, organ transplants and plastic surgery, all harboring muted promises of a transfigured body. (p.6)

This helps elaborate the thesis that the third dystopian turn in literature appears where the centre of Utopia is not in a centralised form of social, political and/or cultural control upon individuals but, rather, in the dystopian, posthuman body, which is the result of late capitalism, postmodern life and technological advances. Late capitalism postulates that the natural body is imperfect and, through its relation to technology, it has to aspire to perfection and to the prolongation of life (even immortality, if possible). Sociologist Bryan S. Turner, in his *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* identifies this body:

Our attitudes towards sexuality, women's social roles and gender are in part the arcane legacy of feudal Christianity and the requirements of property relations in modes of production based on private appropriation. Our attitudes have also been shaped by the ancient history of family life and patriarchal household. In late capitalism these attitudes in many ways no longer conform to the actual requirements of the economy or to the social structure of a capitalist society which is organized around corporate ownership. Because property and investment are now concentrated in corporate bodies, family capitalism no longer plays a major role in industrial economies. Capitalism no longer requires the unity of the family in order to guarantee the distribution of property. Although capitalism may still require the household as a unit of consumption, it is not a requirement of capitalism that these households should be of the nuclear variety. The ascetic mode of desire is thus not pertinent to contemporary forms of capital accumulation and largely inappropriate to individual consumption. The factory floor must have social regulations to ensure continuous and efficient production, but even in the case of productive arrangements it is perfectly possible to de-skill the labour force and replace it with the dead labour of machinery. Modern capitalism tends to foster hedonistic calculation and a narcissistic personality. Consumer culture requires not the suppression of desire, but its manufacture, extension and detail. (TURNER, 2011, p.29)

Thus, the posthuman body is the ultimate product of capitalism and consumer culture, one which renounces its organic imperfections and is submitted to the tentative fulfilment of the desire for perfection and immortality.

These debates are at the core of Margaret Atwood's novel, *Oryx and Crake* (2004), first in the Maddaddam Trilogy (followed by *The Year of the Flood* [2010] and *Maddaddam* [2013]). Atwood, who has been experimenting with dystopian and speculative fiction since the 1980s (*The Handmaid's Tale*, where Atwood describes the transformation, via *coup d'état*, of the United States into a dystopian patriarchal theocracy called Gilead, was published in 1986), places her trilogy in an unknown nation (very possibly the United States) in a post-apocalyptic future and her trilogy in fact confirms Francis Fukuyama's fear that

[t]he most significant threat posed by contemporary biotechnology is the possibility that it will alter human nature and thereby move us into a "posthuman" stage of history. This is important. . . because human nature exists, is a meaningful concept, and has provided a stable continuity to our experience as a species. It is, conjointly with religion, what defines our most basic values. Human nature shapes and constrains the possible kinds of political regimes, so a technology powerful enough to reshape what we are will have possibly malign consequences for liberal democracy and the nature of politics itself. (FUKUYAMA, 2003, p.7)

Following this, Russell Blackford, in his essay "The Great Transition: Ideas and Anxieties", problematises the current status of transhumanist thought stating that

[o]ne of history's lessons is to beware of apocalyptic thought systems that claim the endorsement of God or History. If God or History are on your side, demanding cataclysmic change, your ends can suggest terrible means. No one has been imprisoned, sterilized, starved, or burned at the stake in the name of transhumanism, and perhaps it will never happen. Transhumanists have no Heaven and Hell, no other world, or canons of conduct, or comprehensive creed. That is all reassuring. The danger, though, is if History becomes their God. (BLACKFORD, 2013, p.428)

In fact, Atwood's novel discusses what would happen if (or when) people took extreme actions on behalf of such an idea, questioning the very principles of God, History, Heaven and Hell. The narrator, Jimmy (also known as Snowman), divides his narrative between his post-apocalyptic future, when a pandemic decimated the entire human population, and his memories from childhood to adulthood. Jimmy the Snowman shares his post-apocalyptic existence with a group of hominids called Crakers. They were named after and created by Jimmy's lifelong friend, Glenn - who takes on the alias of Crake after playing the game *Extinctathon*, an online game where players are required to name extinct animals (ATWOOD, 2004, p.80). Crake's possible involvement with a group of radical religious dissenters, the Maddaddams, may have led to his belief that the only form of salvation for the planet would

be the full extinction of the current forms of human life and its replacement with bioengineered hominids.

The Crakers were created to be the survivors of the apocalypse (referred to as the “waterless flood” in Atwood’s sequel to *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*) as part of Crake’s project to ameliorate humankind by “[eliminating] the G-spot in the brain” (ATWOOD, 2004, p. 157), meaning God. “*God is a cluster of neurons, [Crake had] maintained*” (p. 157) and, by this statement, it is possible to understand that Crake’s transhumanist project can only be achieved by the elimination of a number of cultural elements and the enhancement of other biological elements which reinforce humankind’s animal (that is biological) nature, following the notion that “[t]ranshumanists denounce religion. Why? Because what they think they see in front of them are roadblocks put there by religion. Religion, they believe, is Luddite. Through the eyes of today’s transhumanists, religion looks like a roadblock, an obstruction” (PETERS, 2011, p. 72). This distancing from humanity can be seen, for instance, in how the Crakers are expected to mate. Their bodies change physically when mating season arrives and

[s]ince it’s only the blue tissue and the pheromones released by it that stimulate the males, there’s no more unrequited love these days, no more thwarted lust; no more shadow between the desire and the act. Courtship begins at the first whiff, the first faint blush of azure, with the males presenting flowers to the females – just as male penguins present round stones. At the same time, they indulge in musical outbursts, like songbirds. 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 . . . 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. And that is that.

No more *No means yes*, anyway, thinks Snowman. No more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the price, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape. (ATWOOD, 2004, p. 165)

Ironically, Crake’s posthuman project had, as its central goal, a twisted idea of saving the world. Celia Deane-Drummond, in her essay on transhumanism and theology, explains that “[o]nce belief in God was no longer convincing, those who adhered to its secular residue still hoped for salvation through human mental aspirations. Expressions of transhumanity as they emerge in the Western context are therefore secular versions of very ancient theological and philosophical debates – but now stripped bare of any explicit theological reference markers.” (DEANE-DRUMMOND, 2011, p. 122). This means that, by erasing “the G-spot”,

the creation of the Crakers as posthumans follows some of the basic principles of transhumanism. On the other hand, however, such a project is anti-posthuman in essence as posthumanism, of course, is heavily dependent on the connections between the organic body, the cultural body, and technology. As Cary Wolfe states,

[posthumanism] comes both before and after humanism: before in the sense that it names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being in not just its biological but also its technological world, the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture) of which Bernard Stiegler probably remains our most compelling and ambitious theorist—and all of which comes before that historically specific thing called “the human” that Foucault’s archaeology excavates. But it comes after in the sense that posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatic, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (WOLFE, 2009, p.xv-xvi)

The Crakers, however, are posthuman in the sense that they exist chronotopically after humanity but their posthumanism is distant from the cultural body and technology. Such a statement creates an interesting yet central ambivalence: if, according to Jameson, materialism is central to utopia in regard to the “promises of a transfigured body”, which can only exist in its relation to the desire imposed by late capitalism to consume (and eventually be a part of) technology, it can be affirmed that the utopian body is essentially posthuman, much in the way Robert Pepperell defines the term in his book *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain*:

[...]the word ‘posthuman’ is employed to describe a number of things at once. First, it is used to mark the end of that period of social development known as humanism, and so in this sense it means ‘after humanism’. Second, it refers to the fact that our traditional view of what constitutes a human being is now undergoing a profound transformation. It is argued that we can no longer think about being human in the same way we used to. Third, the term refers to the general convergence of biology and technology to the point where they are increasingly becoming indistinguishable. In this sense the term posthuman is preferable to ‘post-biological’ (the two terms are sometimes interchanged) insofar as the decaying category of ‘human’ can be seen merely a subset of an increasingly virulent ‘techno-biology’ of which we might be but a transient phase. (PEPPERELL, 2003, p.iv)



The multiplicity of factors involved in Pepperell's definition of the term is telling of the complexities around posthumanism. Thus, if posthumanism is oriented from present towards the future, much like the impulse of utopia, the transfigured bodies that emerge from the convergence of biology and technology with the objective of making life easier – if not longer, – which Pepperell (2003) places transhumanism (p. iv), are utopian. However, what can be said of bodies that defy such convergence and appear, by contrast, imperfect and unfit? A number of contemporary dystopias, many of which are also – post-apocalyptic, focus on flawed bodies that defy the regular technology-driven order. In my essay "I Sing the Body Dystopic: Posthuman Corporeality in P.D. James's *The Children of Men*" (2013), I analyse this trend, arguing that

[t]he posthuman body, therefore, does not allow any features that can be seen as imperfections. Whatever characteristics either culturally perceived as flaws or actual organic defects one has can only be seen as dehumanising and, as such, as something that has to be corrected and/or perfected by technological interference. The "original" human body is essentially inhuman and it has to become (post)human by embracing late Capitalism and its technologies. (MARKS DE MARQUES, 2013b, p. 39)

However, the apparent dichotomy human/dystopian and transhuman/utopian does not sustain in the light of what Dunja M. Mohr calls transgressive utopian dystopias. Mohr (2007) finds two main pillars for her definition, namely:

First, they incorporate within the dystopian narrative continuous utopian undercurrents. Second, these utopian strategies criticize, undermine, and transgress the established binary logic of dystopia. These 'dystopias' refuse a logic of sameness, dissolve hierarchized binary oppositions, and embrace difference, multiplicity, and diversity. Transgressive utopian dystopian texts discard the polarization of static dystopia and of static utopia, of thesis and antithesis, and thus never arrive at a definite synthesis that comprises the classical utopian notion of a blueprint for perfection. In the logic of transgression, thesis and antithesis do not exist; transgressive utopian dystopias are neither, and in a movement of fluidity they describe the interplay and incorporate both. (p. 10)

The constant interplay between utopias and dystopias Mohr describes—and which can also be found, in a similar fashion, in what Margaret Atwood calls "ustopia" (ATWOOD, 2011, p.66)—is what allows the understanding that not all transhuman bodies are utopian in essence (or even dystopian, for that matter) as the boundaries between utopia and dystopia are fluid and blurred.

Ironically, though, the Crakers can only exist as Crake's posthuman project *because* they ignore most (if not all) cultural and technological elements that define humans nowadays and focus their existence on the animal side of their biology. Theology

professor Ted Peters states that “[e]ven though transhumanists invoke the term “evolution” to refer both to humanity’s past and to its future progress, these two differ. Evolution’s past was characterized by the struggle for existence, the survival of the fittest. Evolution’s future, in contrast, appears to be concerned with human fulfilment” (PETERS, 2011, p.71). If Peters is correct, the Crakers are evolutionary and involutory simultaneously: evolutionary because they act as the fulfilment of human desire, even if it is the desire of one single human, Crake; involutory because their existence is devoid of most – if not all – traits that define transhumanism nowadays, most visibly, the deep necessity of technological contact. In this sense, the Crakers may be seen as what Celia Deane-Drummond calls postanimals. She explains that

[t]he word “postanimal” as applied to animals other than humans may also be understood in a further sense as referring to the trajectory of posthumanity in the manner understood by Bostrom and his collaborators. This is different from what might be termed “cultural” posthumanity that serves to unsettle traditional interpretations of what it means to be human, because the kind of posthumanity that Bostrom advocates is associated with modernity – through science and technology – and seeks to be grounded in that, even while projecting this into future scenarios that seem, to most readers at least, to be speculative rather than residing in concrete technologies. (DEANE-DRUMMOND, 2011, p.120)

The postanimal, in *Oryx and Crake*, is not distant from the human. In fact, Crake’s Paradise project had always been one to replace humans with the Crakers, who are at the same time posthuman (coming after humans and, in many ways, from humans since they are engineered from human DNA) and postanimal (as they have their animal, natural, biological features enhanced in lieu of culture).

The herbivore, peaceful Crakers dominate language, though, and this is the key element in the ironic (de)construction Atwood gives to this posthumanist project as designed by Crake. As part of the so-called Paradise project of bioengineering, Crake had the Crakers learn basic botany and zoology (before the decimation of humankind) as part of their preparation to live in harmony with the environment. These lessons were taught by Oryx, who acts as both Crake and Jimmy’s love object and whose past and identity (as well as her real name) are never clarified. For such lessons to happen, Crake had a simulacrum of the woods developed into one of the compounds and that was the place where Oryx could interact with the Crakers:

The lessons Oryx taught were short: one thing at a time was best, said Crake. The Paradise models weren’t stupid, but they were starting more or less from scratch, so they liked repetition. Another staff member, some specialist in the field, would go over the day’s item with Oryx – the leaf, insect, mammal, or



reptile she was about to explain. Then she'd spray herself with a citrus-derived chemical compound to disguise her human pheromones – unless she did that there could be trouble, as the men would smell her and think it was time to mate. When she was ready, she'd slip through a reconforming doorway concealed behind dense foliage. That way she could appear and disappear in the homeland of the Crakers without raising awkward questions in their minds. (ATWOOD, 2004, p. 309)

After the waterless flood, a pandemic deliberately spread via BlyssPlus, a pill that would act as a powerful aphrodisiac, protect from venereal diseases and prolong life simultaneously (ATWOOD, 2004, p. 294), playing, thus, with the ultimate hedonistic desires of humankind, the only human (in the classic sense) the Crakers come in contact with is Jimmy, who had been immunised against the effects of the deadly virus by Crake himself. This is part of Jimmy's dilemma in this post-human world: what should he do and, most importantly, what should his role be amongst the Crakers? What he does in order, also, to guarantee his own survival is create a mythology to explain the Crakers their very existence: the hominids were created by Crake (the Children of Crake) and the other animals, by Oryx (the Children of Oryx):

*The Children of Oryx, the Children of Crake. He'd had to think of something. Get your story straight, keep it simple, don't falter: this used to be the expert advice given by lawyers to criminals in the dock. Crake made the bones of the Children of Crake out of the coral on the beach, and then he made their flesh out of a mango. But the Children of Oryx hatched out of an egg, a giant egg laid by Oryx herself. Actually she laid two eggs: one full of animals and birds and fish, and the other one full of words. But the egg full of words hatched first, and the Children of Crake had already been created by then, and they'd eaten up all the words because they were hungry, and so there were no words left over when the second egg hatched out. And that is why the animals can't talk. (ATWOOD, 2004, p.96, Atwood's emphasis)*

In order to create a cosmogony that made sense to the Crakers, Jimmy needed to establish a theogony first. Oryx and Crake become deities in a world that should be godless. It is interesting that, despite the aesthetic elements of the myth of creation, the hominids were made by Crake himself, which gives Crake a divine status in the Judeo-Christian sense whereas the egg-laying Oryx resembles Leda, whose daughter Helen (later of Troy) was hatched after she was seduced by Zeus in the shape of a swan, thereby mixing elements of what is seen nowadays as religion and myth together. In either case, this movement towards the creation of a myth of origin can be explained by Ted Peters's observation on the goals of transhumanism:

Transhumanism seeks more than merely new technological gadgets. It seeks to construct a philosophy of life, a total worldview, a grand metanarrative. Transhumanists want to replace

both the modern and postmodern narratives. What is wrong with modernism? Our Western religious tradition has failed to hold us together in our modern age. What is wrong with postmodernism? Postmodernism is failing, because this nihilistic philosophy refuses to recognize the gifts of the modern scientific age, namely, reason and progress. What we need at this moment is an inspiring philosophy that reveres scientific reason and that will pull us toward a positive future. To meet this post-post-modern need, transhumanists offer a “totalized philosophical system” with a three-level worldview – meta-physical, psychological level, and ethical. (PETERS, 2011, p. 66)

Peters’s remark, clearly from a theological perspective, indicates that the transhumanist endeavour cannot flourish without the acknowledgement of what he refers to as a positive philosophy of life.

Also, Jimmy has a certain degree of control over the Crakers’ actions by telling them the commands come from Crake himself – especially when it comes to Jimmy’s dietary needs: he has the Crakers bring him a weekly offering of fish as part of the commands (or commandments, even) passed on to him by Crake. In this, Jimmy actively destroys Crake’s transhuman project, firstly because:

[i]f things had gone as Crake wanted, there would be no more such killing – no more human predation – but he’d reckoned without Snowman and his beastly appetites. Snowman can’t live on clover. The people would never eat a fish themselves, but they have to bring him one a week because he’s told them Crake has decreed it. They’ve accepted Snowman’s monstrosity, they’ve known from the beginning he was a separate order of being, so they weren’t surprised by this.

Idiot, he thinks. I should have made it three a day. He unwraps the warm fish from its leaves, trying to keep his hands from trembling. He shouldn’t get too carried away. But he always does. (ATWOOD, 2004, p.101)

In other words: Jimmy’s human needs – for meat, for instance – should not have a place in this post-waterless-flood world as Crake’s project to eradicate all traces of a possible human destruction of the natural world depended on the complete inexistence of pre-flood humans (which may help explain Jimmy’s confusion over why he was spared death after all).

Secondly, even if for merely selfish reasons, Jimmy resurrects “the G-spot” Crake wished to delete. By presenting himself as the only person who can speak to Crake directly, Jimmy acts as a post-apocalyptic prophet but he is also an apostle, a person responsible not only for teaching the lessons of the deities but for maintaining them alive as discourse and practice among the believers. Theologians like Brent Waters (2006), for instance, defend that the creation of a religious system is a key issue in a

transhuman world. Waters traces, initially, the changes in theology during the Enlightenment, with the rise of scientific thought, in order to trace a parallel with postmodern times. When discussing Modern theology, he states that

[t]he tactic deployed initially by theologians in defending providence was to seize the surgical instrument away from the adversary. Instead of challenging God's governance of the world, the new science confirmed God's wondrous work of creation; the laws of nature disclosed the orderly manner in which God governed creation. After all, none other than Isaac Newton – the quintessential scientist – insisted that his work did little more than illuminate the providential design of the universe. . . . To a limited extent, this was the tactic deployed by Edwards. Scientific evidence was used to blunt the force of philosophical attack by emphasizing the reasonableness of the theological doctrine he was defending.

This tactic was doomed to fail. With the accumulation of greater scientific knowledge, the gaps within a Newtonian framework could be filled without appeal to divine intervention. Newton himself had created the opportunity for this turn of fortune by contending that the universe reflected evidence of divine design, not specific acts of God. Since God had presumably not designed an imperfect universe, then there was little reason for God to be an active participant in the daily affairs of creation. Consequently, a number of theologians turned increasingly to nature, instead of revelation, to describe the relationship between God and the world. These natural theologies portrayed a remote and detached creator. (WATERS, 2006, p.9)

The movement seen above, from God-as-active-entity to God-as-consequence is interesting insofar as it tries to embrace the development of science not as a mere substitute for the divine but as a way to force a new interpretation of it. Crake's postmodern project – in the sense developed by Jean-François Lyotard, as a mode of "incredulity towards metanarratives [as] a product of the progress in the sciences" (LYOTARD, 1984, p. xxiv) – ignores the very fact that, as Peters stated earlier, transhumanism intends to replace all modern and postmodern narratives becoming, thus, a metanarrative itself. This raises a very interesting and unresolved paradox: the unreliability of the metanarrative of scientific progress, for instance, not only does not stop but fosters scientific progress which is, in turn, the very cause for its own collapse, in Atwood's ironic post-apocalyptic future.

Jimmy's theogony, with Oryx and Crake at the centre of the universe, is a response to the clash between postmodernism as incredulity, transhumanist desire, and posthuman theology. As neophytes, the Crakers need a myth of origin that should not address their bioengineered origins, since they would not have the intellectual scope to fully understand the truth. The choice

of Oryx and Crake is also relevant in this ambivalent universe. Oryx, whose real origins are never fully clarified in the novel, may or may not have been exploited by a child pornography ring and sold as a sex slave (Jimmy develops a life-long obsession for a young girl he comes across on a porn website as a teenager and who reminds him of Oryx). She is his cosmogonic version of Mother Earth and Crake, the possibly autistic bioengineering genius (there are several hints in the novel that allow readers to conclude that he may have had Asperger's Syndrome), is God, the creator (HOWELLS, 2006, p.171).

Two elements are worth discussing here. First, Oryx and Crake as Mother Earth and God-Almighty may be too reductive an analogy. It might be true that these two deities represent polar opposites in the religious spectrum: if we consider the Judeo-Christian construction of God, a powerful and all-encompassing masculine figure at one end of the continuum, then Mother Earth, the pagan, feminine deity would definitely be its polar counterpart. However, they are both not only necessary but complementary in this mythology. It is true that Crake is the creator of the neo-humans but Oryx, the Mother Earth, is given the status of creator of nature, flora and fauna – a fauna which is mostly comprised of bioengineered animals such as rakunks (a splice of rats and skunks) and pigoons (pigs whose organs can be harvested for human transplants). Gender issues aside, it is hardly irrelevant that Oryx, whose origins are not clear in the novel, becomes the creating deity of bioengineered animals who replace “natural” ones in this new environment. Together with the Crakers, these animals are science replacing and becoming nature and, thus, human control over them has to be symbolic rather than concrete and real. Neither the real Oryx nor the real Crake have had any features in life that would be worth canonising them for; however, they are the only possible candidates to occupy such roles more due to Jimmy's memories of them than for their real actions in life.

And this leads to the second element worth discussing. If Jimmy is (or believes himself to be) the last man on the planet, the relevance in telling this story becomes questionable, especially when, as Howells reminds us,

[a] Last Man narrative poses special problems: how to tell that story, who to tell it, and to whom? Snowman does not tell the story himself in the first person; he is the focalizer, but his story is refracted through an omniscient narrative voice. The novel takes the form of a third-person indirect interior monologue as it shifts between the fictive present (always in the present tense) and Snowman's memories of his own and other people's stories (always in the past tense), contextualized and written down by the other shadowy presence. (HOWELLS, 2006, p.171).

As an evangelist – a person responsible not so much for spreading as for maintaining a specific type of religious discourse alive – Jimmy acts in order to maintain his memories of himself, Crake, and Oryx alive for himself rather than as a form of mythical teaching for the Crakers and, simultaneously, he himself becomes a symbol in the Craker mythology, guaranteeing thus, his permanence post-mortem.

In the closing scene of *Oryx and Crake*, though, there is no closure: Jimmy has to choose how to confront three other humans he finds on a beach, whether to approach them peacefully (and, thus, be forced to re-evaluate his whole existence and his theology to the Crakers) or to kill them (and, thus, protect everything he has built to that moment). As J. Brooks Bouson states,

[b]ut even as Jimmy-Snowman works to thwart Crake, he remains, as the novel ends, a kind of living human joke trapped in the master Extinctathon game engineered by Crake. For when Snowman learns that there are three other human survivors in the vicinity, his mind races as he considers the possibilities. “Maybe all will be well, maybe this trio of strangers is good-hearted, sane, well-intentioned; maybe he’ll succeed in presenting the Crakers to them in the proper light. On the other hand, these new arrivals could easily see the Children of Crake as freakish, or savage, or non-human and a threat” (p. 366). Having taken on the role of the protector of the Crakers even as he mourns the loss of humanity, Snowman ponders whether or not he should kill the three human survivors as he sneaks up on them, realizing that if he tries to kill them he, too, will probably be killed in the process. Snowman’s final thought—“Zero hour. . . . Time to go” (p. 374)—is deliberately ambiguous. Does “time to go” mean that it is time to act as a peacemaker or that it is time to die? (BOUSON, 2009, p.107)

The open-endedness of the novel (resolved in its sequel) allows the readers to decide on Jimmy’s fate as either a peaceful envoi of the gods or as an angry, vengeful prophet who will do all means possible to maintain the world unchanged. Therefore, in the end, Atwood’s construction of a dystopian, posthuman, post-apocalyptic world depends heavily on the notion and existence of God (or gods), which is an important moot point among theologians, scientists, and philosophers involved in transhumanism and posthumanism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These debates on the role of religions in building her dystopian universe are the centre of the sequel to *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*.

### **Abstract**

*This paper aims to problematise the recent resurgence of literary dystopian narratives in Anglophone literatures, suggesting that such narratives must be read through a perspective that considers the centrality of the dystopian body as a transhuman entity. From the arguments raised*



by the discussions of transhumanism and posthumanism, the impact of scientific development in the construction of desire, and of the role of theological thought in postmodernity, the goal is to discuss how these ideas appear and are presented in Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*.

**Keywords:** transhumanism; posthumanism; dystopias; dystopian body; *Oryx and Crake*.

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