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Address

• Vikram Nagar, Boudhi Chouk, Latur.
• Tq. Latur, Dis. Latur 413512 (MS.)
• (+91) 9922455749, (+91) 8999250451

Email

• aiirjpramod@gmail.com
• aayushijournal@gmail.com

Website

• www.aiirjournal.com

CHIEF EDITOR – PRAMOD PRAKASHRAO TANDALE

Feminism in the novel of Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake**Dr. Auradkar Sarika Pradiprao**

Assistant Professor ,
Department of English ,
Shankaituo Chavan College ,
Ardhapur, Dist.Nanded

Abstract

Margaret Atwood has emerged as a major figure in Canadian letters atwood's oryx and crake is set in the future in a new postapocalyptic dystopia. Atwood's novels engage the feminist conversation, using dystopian, genre as a way to show case equality within society and plight or women during 20th and 21st century, the most flagrant abuses by women in the novel are those of underage sex market. Oryx's circumstances are even more prilous, having been sold by her parents because of her money value. All the main characters in the novel fail to save one another, just as their mother failed to save themselves and their children
Keywords: Dystopia, Irony, genre, feminist, slavery, violence.

Margaret Eleanor Atwood has emerged as a major figure in Canadian letters. Using such devices as irony, Symbolism, and self-conscious narrators, she explores the relationship between humanity and nature, the dark side of human behavior, and power as it pertains to gender and politics. Popular with both literary scholars and the regarding public, Margaret Atwood has helped to define and identify the goals of contemporary Canadian literature and has earned a distinguished reputation among feminist writers for her exploration of women's issues. She was influenced by critic Northrop Frye, who introduced her to the poetry of William Blake, Atwood further developed this dichotomy in power politics in which she explores the relationship between sexual roles and power structures by focusing on personal relationship.

Atwed's novels explore the relationship between personal behavior and political issue as well. From her first novel *The Edible Woman*, she has mapped the syndrome eloquently. Her second novel *Surfacing* is clearly one of her finest novels and the novel can be read as a quest within a quest. Lady Oracle about a protagonist who fakes her own death and thereby creates a new life for herself. *Life Before Man*, Atwood's most realistic novel, continues her concern with how humans can break through predetermined, negative patterns, *Bodily Harm* is, as Atwood herself once described it, an "anti-thriller", and frustrates the reader's condition expectation that suspense will be resolved in the customary manner. *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian novel concerning an oppressive future society, *Cat's Eye*, a coming - of - age novel

that contains autobiographical elements. *Robber Bride*, a contemporary recasting of a folktale, which explores jealousy and sexual manipulation.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is set in the future in a new postapocalyptic dystopia. Dystopian literature allows for authors to create fascinatingly terrible worlds that examine some ill in modern society. The word "dystopia" is taken from the word "Utopia" a word created by Sir Thomas More in his treatise *Utopia* to describe a perfect and ideal society. Dystopias are the opposite of Utopias, they are imagined societies that are destructive or debilitating to their citizens. In the 1960, there was a torrent of feminist dystopian literature that used the genre to show the plight of women in modernity and the ills of inequality. There was fundamental change in the way that women viewed their lives. It was during this time that Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*, a classic dystopian novel on the dangers of religious and social conservatism.

Margaret Atwood's novels engage the feminist conversation, using the dystopian genre as a way to showcase inequality within society and the plight of women during the 20th and 21st century. Atwood divorces her novels, which she defines "speculative fiction" from the dystopian and science fiction genres. In a more famous quotation within the science fiction community, Atwood explained during an interview that *Oryx and Crake* is a speculative fiction, not a science fiction proper.

In *Oryx and Crake*, the tension resulting from the split personality of Jimmy, Snowman is reminiscent of Roman god Janus whose two faces are simultaneously gazing the past and the future. Indeed, Jimmy as Janus past inhabits the text in the form of a guide to the pre-apocalyptic Maddaddam world, a milieu wherein scientists were considered society's elites while artists led a proletarian existence. His counterpart Snowman, meanwhile, is introduced as Janus future, the sole human survivor of the post-apocalyptic Maddaddam world ravaged by the super virus that has killed most of humanity, a world now occupied by the naïve bioengineered post human race known as the Crakers. Through the text's ending reveals other human survivors, Snowman's memories of his childhood for the most part of *Oryx and Crake* effectively outline "overhumanisation as a critique of scientism. The following lines, which describes Snowman's thoughts as he encounters a 'Men at Work' sign, is a case in point:

Men at Work, that used to mean. Strange to think of endless labor, the digging, the hammering, the carving, the lifting, the drilling, day by day,

year by year, century by century, and now the endless crumbling that must be going on everywhere. Sandcastles in the wind.¹

Irony is once again detectable in the above passage if one considers its temporal aspect. As his future Snowman self, jimmy is channeling the more ancient literary figure, Ozymandias, from percy Bysshe's sonnet of the same name. On the statue of this "king of Kings" is inscribed the words, serving a reminder to all who encounter it of the perishability of worldly things. In the same way, the above passage makes us think about the fleeting nature of the material world, it takes this trope one step further. Here, the 'Men at Work' sign can be read as an allegory for progress on the back of wondrous scientific breakthroughs that punctuate jimmy's world. As janus future, Snowman, has come to see the seedier side of progress as he mulls over the importance of the sign in positing the idea that science's 'endless labor' is no longer about bettering the here and now, as much as its unravelling, its deconstruction. Before, the outbreak, these oversized man made pig hosts were used to harvest human organs. After the outbreak, they were Snowman's names is, always eyeing him as food, 'a delicious meat pie just waiting to be opened up'. Read this way, the defamiliarization of everyday object is also de familiarisation of science. If the labor of science was once seen as important to human flourishing, all that hammering, carving, lifting and drilling that have resulted in the pigoons and other bioengineered species are in fact symptomatic of over humanization. With the pigoons, the tern 'overhumanisation' becomes ironically apt in the way these creatures resemble humanity in their behavior. The following passage from Oryx and Crake in which jimmy was being hunted down the pigoons outlines the latter's ability to be conniving.

They have something in mind, all right. He turns, heads back towards the gatehouse, quicknes his pace. He's far enough away so he can run if he has to. He looks over his shoulder. They're trotting now. He speeds up, breaks into a jog. Then he spots another groups through the gateway up ahead, eight or nine of them, coming towards him across No Man's Land. He's almost at the main gate, cutting him off in that direction. It's as if they've had it planned, between the two groups; as if they've known for sometime that he was in the gatehouse and have been waiting for him to come out, far enough out so they can surround him.²

In shedding light on the less flattering aspect of human progress, the Maddaddam novels speak to an existing train of thought that puts science on a pedestal, or the ideology known as scientism.

The most flagrant abuses by women in *Oryx and Crake*, are those of the underage sex market. While there are multitudes of examples in the world of *Oryx and Crake* of female oppression, this oppression manifests itself most visibly in the young, third world girls sold into sexual slavery. Because of the heavily commercialized setting there is thriving industry for underage pornography and underage sex trafficking. Both Jimmy and Crake discover HotTots, a website specially designed for pedophilic pleasures, with relative ease. No firewall or government attempts to block their access to these websites; it does not even seem that the underage pornographic industry is more than mildly affected by laws and restraints. Though it is a lucrative industry, girls are exploited in the process. And though *Oryx* describes her experience as underage pornographic "actress" candidly and with little anger or humiliation, her childhood was severely blemished by her experiences. She recalls her childhood without her parents and that having a money value was no substitute for love '.

good to have a money value every child should have love, every person have it.³

Despite the fact that *Oryx* could use her sexuality to eventually accomplish her goals, she is still fundamentally missing a loving family. *Oryx* fundamentally lacks even the possibility of a loving family, as her birth family sells her away with little pain described in the decision.

Even *Oryx*'s transportation to the West, supposedly a society that epitomized freedom, is an exploitative undertaking; *Oryx* mentions that the man who kept her in his garage for sex.

Was a kindman He was rescuing young girls. He paid for my plane ticket, just like he said.⁴

Even though *Oryx* seems comfortable with the economic transaction, her sexuality is the only real power that she has in the commercially centered world of the novel. Because this world is so profit driven, a woman's sexuality is the most powerful economic bartering card that she has. These women intrinsically have an item that men desire; their bodies. Thus, they can use their own bodies as currency for men's sexual desires.

Because of Oryx's Candidness concerning her previous sexual exploitation and her seeming acceptance of the situation she found herself in while still young. Atwood upends many conceptions that traditional feminists hold towards underage sexual violence. Though she experiences abandonment, statutory rape, film pornography, and sex slavery, she has no visible regrets concerning her previous life. Her life seemingly prosed because of is sution boat she found herself in and her use of be sent to complish ber gols in fact se chastises juny for eing these stort into har locked in a garapenasa bad person Ozx comments that

you always think te wors of people. jimmy and that she should not care about things that happened so long ago.⁵

Modem psychology would dictate that Ox must hne some negative emotions or tomatic memories covering these events, is it possible the see has raised these memories into positive experiences in order to cope with them? Orx is too unisonable for the reader to provide a clear answer about her psycbe. Yet Onx's seeming contenment with her past raises questions about Atwood's inten: for Oax's character, is Arwood trying to say that sex-work is a respectable career that must be celebrated and not chassised, or is sex work a product of commercialism and corruption that leaves young girls without alternatives?

Arwood's suspicion of the term "feminism can be witnessed within Oryx herself Arood mentions that she is concerned about womens with in the third world who do not have access to even the most basic of protections from sex trafficking and sexual slavery. These are the women that Atwood apparently believes are overlooked by Bourgeois, first world feminists. By creating characters such as Oryx, Atwood illustrates how easily young women can be drawn into these horrendous situations. The female protagonists in Atwood's dystopian novel are sex workers in one way or another. She does not necessarily advocate this path. In fact, she creates conservative and fiscal dystopias to show how women are forced to use sex work as an option to survive. And though Oryx laments that she never received proper familiar love as a child, she is not a "broken" woman. Even though she has been victimized, she has an amazing resilience over that victimization. That price, of course, has come with the loss of a childhood and the gain of skills for seducing the male gaze, but she is not irreparable damaged due to her victimization. Even though there is a stigma that women who have been raped or victims of sexual assaults are somehow damaged. Atwood is portraying Oryx as a woman who is not necessarily "damaged good", though her experience as a sex worker and pornographic actress does affect her demeanor in other ways.

Oryx becomes a fetish for the men that she entrances. Even jimmy comments at one point that “ was there only one Oryx, or was she legion ?” throughout the novel, she comments her sexual past and multiple older men who used her sexually. Even then, she relies on the compassion of men in her life and is never truly in control . This should not understate the hardship that Oryx has incurred and the longing for a true family that she briefly mentions. While it might be simple to believe that Oryx is not a victim because of the manner in which she carries herself, her past has severe implications on her life in the west. Instead of being bitter, she is thankful for the experiences that she gave her and the care she received. She recalls her reaction to Uncle En's death.

He could have done much worse things to me, and he didn't do them. I cried when I heard he was dead. I cried and cried.⁶

Instead of contextualizing these experiences in order to hate and loathe these rapists, she views their sexual encounters as something oddly romantic or loving. Speaking, her experiences lead her to a revelation. That lives at the crux of *Oryx and Crake's* society. Everything has a price, even love. These discussions are marked with an extreme, and rather unsettling, level of candidness, Oryx is painting her nails while discussing her sexual history to jimmy, without 'a smudge on her'. The only means by which Oryx has any agency is through sex work and her ability to mystify the male gaze. Yet this lifestyle and means to an end have given Oryx no real familiar connection and no one whom she truly connects with. She gains some agency through fetishizing herself, yet she is never able to lower her guard and truly connect with any other characters.

Even though theorists such as kipnis argue that pornography is only an erotic and erotic experience. Crake carries this experience from his computer to the real world. He is so enamored by Oryx's persona from her videos that he searches for her. The fetish evolves into something more substantial to Crake. Pamela Paul postulates that

The porn star is a blank slate on which each observer can graft his own recipe for reciprocal lust and pleasure.⁷

This is exactly what Crake does with Oryx; he takes his own fantasy with the young girl that he once saw and transplants those feelings onto the physical Oryx. Worse, Oryx is herself enigmatic, making her the perfect blank slate for others' imaginations. Oryx spends much of her time with Crake and jimmy fulfilling their fantasies. While jimmy is dedicated

to "filling in" Oryx blank state with her true feeling and persona, Crake seems more happy than for Oryx to embody the fantasy that he holds.

Oryx's circumstances are even more perilous, having been sold by her parents because of her money value. Because there are no real regulations on underage pornography and prostitution, there is a thriving market for young girls such as Oryx. Oryx's third world nation also lacks any governmental regulations that allow for men to take advantage of girls such as Oryx without any real police force or government agency to stop them. This under age pornography is not explicitly filmed in the west, yet it is easily accessed as a commercial website for an international community. If there is a market for this type of pornography, why not exploit these young girls in the name of competition and consumerism? And because of the patriarchal undertones within this consumerist market, it is the women who suffer because their bodies have an inherent value in the eyes of men. Oryx's body certainly carries an inherent worth, most notable due to her enigmatic personality and sexual athleticism, Oryx's skills lie specifically in courting of men, though she knows little else. Since her youth, she has been deceiving men, showing men what they want in person and in film, all without her own wishes taken in consideration.

Orax and Creak moves back and forth between Snowman trying to survive in this future that has no future, and his past where his only enjoyment of life was his friendship with Crake and his love for Oryx. Jimmy is not a particularly likable character and his actions especially his obsession with Oryx's past, make you want to shake some sense into him at times. Yet we all can empathize with his longing for love, whether the material love his mother could not offer or the love for Oryx that he could never fully have to himself. It is a testament to Atwood's literary skill that we are always interested in Jimmy and want him to find happiness. In lesser hands, Jimmy could be a disenfranchised protagonist, both from the story and from the reader's interest. Jimmy's pointless existence is just a reflection of his society's pointless existence. Life in the compounds, controlled and sterile, exists only to further the profits of the biotech companies science is not used as means to understand the world, but as a vehicle to maximize corporate profits by controlling the environment and people's bodies. Life in the pleeblands with its constant action and threats of danger appears a more exciting lifestyle to Jimmy at times. Seven Birkeer is says:

The past 20th century world is itself already significantly gone to the dogs, though those days are more likely to be 'pigoons' or some other strange genetic hybrid at organizing firms, where Jimmy's father works. Jimmy's home life is

alienated, scarred by the strife between his dutiful researcher father and his unhappy mother, who hates scientific protocols and protests her husband's meddling with "the building blocks of life."⁸

Oryx is the product of this patriarchal consumerism because she is the perfect product for patriarchy; a woman with seemingly no needs or cares of her own who has been groomed since her youth to fulfill the wishes of men. Even Jimmy realizes that his intrigue for Oryx originates from his innate curiosity with her mystique. The only regret that Oryx verbally admits is that love is more important than a money value.

She herself would rather have had her mother's love - the love she still continued to believe in, the love that had followed her through the jungle in the form of a bird so she would not be too frightened or lonely.⁹

That is, she would rather her parents kept her and loved her, even if that meant living in squalor. Crake's actual goal is to create the ideal human and erase the social ills that plague humanity. Crake is a Utopian, though his utopia is a world without any higher order thought and populated with the uncanny child like Crakers. The Crake's Utopia is certainly not Utopian for Jimmy or any of Atwood's readers.

The drug, in combination with the genetically engineered children created in Crake's laboratory, comprise the ultimate plan Crake has masterminded. Jimmy's work on the newly developed creatures or "Crakers" as Jimmy comes to call them, was related to marketing and advertising. Crake's premise is to offer:

Totally chosen babies that would incorporate any feature. Physical or mental or spiritual, that the buyer might wish to select.¹⁰

Crake's real goal is for these beautiful, docile, and healthy creatures to replace the human race. Jimmy's job doesn't allow to access so that of information, and he works in ignorance of Crake's master plan.

Once Crake's plan succeeds. Jimmy sees Crake's some motives, and he is left alone with a small group of these new creatures. Crake believed their own time was the dystopia. The future seemed so bleak to Crake that he decided to wipe the slate clean and hope that his engineered beings would fare better. Crake took on the role of mother by creating these beings, but he either could not handle the intense responsibility of caring for them or he simply had no interest in living through the horrifying aftermath of his action. Crake's world view allowed him to simultaneously create and destroy. This can be interpreted as a direct

result of his upbringing. Without a mother or substitute figure to nurture him. Crake works under the assumption that he alone set's the impossibility of fixing what is wrong in the world. He recognizes that patriarchal capitalist oppression has been replaced by technology: Crake's resonance represents the most extreme result of what could happen and Crake consciously removes any human connection almost completely from the new life forms he creates.

While designing the new, ostensibly more perfect creatures, crake tries to streamline childcare. Crake's inability to cope with the outcomes of his actions explains why he hands the "Crakers" over to jimmy. Crake's childhood provided little for him aside from access to education and technology; he has a nurturing modes to follow. Crake's death force jimmy into the mothering role, even though his upbringing also failed to prepare him for it. Once the Crakers begin to ask questions about their origin, jimmy assigns Crake the role of creator and depicts Oryx as Earth - mother. Their questions persist, and they want to know how Crake was born. Jimmy has to think of a simple story that eliminates any mother for crack making him essentially motherless reduces complications.

Jimmy reveals how he has internalized the mothering to receive when his first response under stress is to flow like his own mother did, quickly, though, he realizes he cannot leave them. He knows he is all they have and they on all ho has. His accounts of the stories he tells the Crakers make a great deal of sense to any parent who really has no idea what he / she is doing: Readers get to see one positive, it imperfect, mother figure in jimmy as he attempts to help the Crakers make meaning out of the confusing world.

Like *The Handmaid Stale*, Oryx and Crake argues that any mother is better than an absent mother, children need guidance and nurturing even it their mothers feel overwhelmed or inadequate, one goal for Atwood here may be to encourage readers to pay attention to the smaller everyday problems as well as larger, worldwide events that affect their lives. Jimmy Oryx, and Crake all suffer because their parents were victims of a society judging by technology, Jimmy and Crake suffer because their mother's work in pursuit of technological advancement supersedes their interest in their sons, Oryx suffer because poverty forces her mother to sell her to a man who uses her as entertainment to the technologically saturated wealthy class, all three main characters in *Oryx and Crake* fail to save one another, just as their mothers failed to save themselves and their children. Crake, especially, offers an extreme example of the tragedy that could result if mothers stop believing that the future might be better than the past and present. At the end of *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy appears to

be the only remaining human; once he is dead, the remains of the old world will have died with him.

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