

# *Posthuman affect in Margaret Atwood's science fiction *Oryx & Crake**

**Afeto pós-humano na ficção científica  
de Margaret Atwood *Oryx & Crake***

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5902/2176148529424>

**Abstract:** This article analyses Atwood's novel *Oryx & Crake* (2003) as to identify if and how it sets forth a critique on affect during a post-humanist era. Therefore, we discuss how the narrative makes use of dystopian artefacts from XXI society as to elaborate on the matter of the interconnection established between human life and the machine, and the lack of affection resulting therefrom. What does the narrative inform us regarding the influence of a post-human society on our affective relationship with the environment, machines, and even to ourselves as post-human subjects? It is important to say we shall be looking at post-humanism in both ways: as a moment to debunk humanist naiveté, as well as the contemporary man-made society where the human and the non-human are deeply intertwined. The discussion proposed, therefore, reminds one of the pertinence of dystopia as a mirror to the society whence it surfaces – and especially concerning the new critical perspectives emerging from a post-human dystopia. The fruitful critique articulated by the affective world of *Oryx & Crake* (2003)'s characters regarding this post-human future, where everything seems to go wrong, is a response to the questionable idea that dystopias would not be pertinent if one lives distant from the shadow of an overtly tyrannical political regime possibility.

**Keywords:** *Oryx & Crake*. Margaret Atwood. Post-humanism. Canadian studies.

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**Resumo:** Este artigo analisa o romance de Atwood *Oryx & Crake* (2003) para identificar se e de que forma seu desenvolvimento integra a crítica sobre o afeto no pós-humanismo. Assim, discutimos como a narrativa faz uso de artefatos distópicos da sociedade do século XXI para elaborar acerca da questão da conexão entre o humano e a máquina, bem como a falta de afeto resultante dela. O que a narrativa nos diz a respeito da influência da sociedade pós-humana na nossa relação afetiva com o meio ambiente, com a máquina e entre nós como sujeitos pós-humanos? É importante dizer que olhamos para o pós-humanismo de duas formas: como o momento de descreditar a ingenuidade humanista, bem como a sociedade fabricada no qual o humano e o pós-humano se veem irreversivelmente interligados. A discussão proposta, portanto, nos lembra da pertinência da distopia como um espelho da sociedade de onde ela emerge – especialmente no que concerne à novas perspectivas críticas fornecidas pela distopia pós-humana. A crítica frutífera articulada pelo mundo afetivo dos personagens de *Oryx & Crake* (2003) acerca do futuro pós-humano, onde tudo parece dar errado, é uma resposta à ideia questionável de que as distopias não teriam pertinência em um mundo que se vê supostamente isento da possibilidade de um regime político absolutista global.

**Palavras-chave:** *Oryx & Crake*. Distopia. Pós-humanismo. Estudos Canadenses.

The real problem is not whether machines think, but whether men do. (Skinner, 1969)

## **Introduction: Introductory reflections on post-human affect**

When one thinks of affect theory, it is important to bear in mind that “some affect theory defends the therapeutic value of embracing unpleasant feelings such as shame, sadness, or loneliness. Its other branches highlight ‘ugly feelings’ as sources not of self-knowledge but of social critique”. A sociology of accidental encounters, affect theory approaches the world as to reorganise its symbolic meanings – to access what guides us therein towards this or that direction. Emphasising the invisible forces that lay the groundwork for our actions, “affect theory can also refuse psychoanalysis and try to make feelings speak for themselves, as if they will best do so if the conscious mind does not interfere. Stylistically, it has encouraged intensely personal scholarship” (FIGLEROWICZ 3). The importance of gazing through the lenses set forward from this specific set of analytical thinking in contempo-

rary times is unquestionable, given everything that has changed during our post-human developments. Berlant and Greenwald reaffirm such importance as this shift in perspective would provides us with the chance of asking “how we know what normative shape collective political affect has taken, if any (and its difference from media- or propaganda-orchestrated political emotion), and what it means to characterize something as ‘largely symbolic’” (71). Followingly, the authors enhance the necessity thus to invert the spectrum, as social, historical, cultural, and political events are covertly orchestrated, to many levels, by things we are unable to grasp at a first moment: “Episodes are defined first by causality, but their affective charge derives from confronting the enigma of their ultimate shape. Something has an impact: What will happen?” (72). As for our pondering differently upon these largely symbolic triggers motivating what indeed happens within such causality, literature seems to enrich such discussion to unimagined levels:

There are, I think, compelling reasons to hold that feelings are all-important in literature because they are present in and elicited both by what is represented and by the way it is represented. Literature, being a part of the rhetorical use and structuring of language, is, in fact, designed to call forth feelings. It does not represent a general principle, but an individual, albeit most often typical, case, i.e. the handling by individual persons (characters and narrators) of specific situations and events, and how they emotionally respond to such challenges. (Johansen 195)

Everything lies therefore in representation; hence the emergence of literature given the mimetic nature of its form. Calling forth feelings, the literary realm bestows voices and bodies that may raise our awareness to what it means to feel – and how varied such process might be depending on how it is discursively constructed. But, before getting to such considerations, it is essential for one to ask what it means to feel in a contextual moment that is gradually becoming less and less human. How thoughtful of our feelings can we be, if we are being suppressed from our ability to feel? If we praise usefulness and pragmatic actions, to the detriment of inner thinking and abstract reasoning? It is at this point that we get from affect to post-humanism. In a world where humans can no longer be separated from machines, where a vast part of our daily

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lives concern our relation to genetically modified products, it is no longer possible to dodge from a post-human prospect. Traditionally, our civilisation has tried to ignore such possibility, as “[h]umans have imagined for a long time that the ability to develop and control technology was one of the defining characteristics of our condition, something that assured us of our superiority over other animals and our unique status in the world” (3). Problem is that the very anthropocentrism that has motivated us to interfere so intensely in the world that surrounds us controversially turned against us – as the advent of a post-human condition puts the very idea of a human-centred society into question. This is to say that, ironically, our “sense of superiority and uniqueness is being challenged by the very technologies we [...] create, and it seems the balance of dominance between human and machine is slowly shifting” (PEPPERELL 14).

Human dominance over nature and over other animal species has resulted, it seems, in an unescapable conundrum: the need to make the other work for our benefit, instead of highlighting our autonomy and sense of self, has increased our dependence on this very other. In this sense, it is precisely because humans have so fervently ignored the needs of their environment as their own needs are emphasised in the process that there is no longer a way to think from a humanist perspective – to think of us as inherently autonomous in relation to the cosmos. In our agenda of trying to control the monsters that scare us, “there seem to be no ‘others’ more monstrous than the ones which are mere extensions of ourselves, and this is something beyond the compass of even our darkest ‘night thoughts’” (GUNN 179). That is the scenery of post-human contemporaneity, which is far from being a recent process; and the problem of such scenery is precisely that “when the environment has become but an extension of man himself, one is left yearning for a ‘world elsewhere’” (Gunn 180). But is this “world elsewhere” still available? In a world completely dominated by men, there is nothing to be imagined any longer; no idyllic places to be envisaged, no utopian idea to be envisaged in undiscovered lands: “As the nineteenth century progressed, the world underwent massive changes [...]; it was no longer an infinite realm of undiscovered territory. The locale of Utopia was thus transformed” (YOUNG 13).

Continents have already been explored, the monstrous “others” have already been tamed by the epistemes of the self – and nature has been effectively conceptualised as an extension of ourselves. What was not “us” became an extension of “ourselves” – hegemonic reasoning

has shaped, through the master narrative of progress and development, the undiscovered territory into what would be most convenient given the needs of hegemony. Nothing to dream about besides the possibility of finding a way out from the nightmare whereto the cynicism and/or ecstatic frenzy of our yearning has been taking us – and to help us get off such path, dystopian fiction seems to play a significant role. That is to say: in the absence of an idealised dream, we are left with a nightmarish idea of the future. This condition takes us back to the paradox that is actually inherent to utopian fiction: “‘utopia’ carries in itself its own contradiction. It refers to a ‘good’ place that is at the same time a ‘no’ place [...]. In semiotic terms, utopia is a representational ‘fullness’ that carries and exposes its embedded ‘emptiness’ (a deferral in signification)” (CAVALCANTI 51). It is worth reminding that the term utopia is coined by Thomas More in his renowned book *Utopia* (1516), which regards a fictional trip of an unknown narrator to an imaginary and perfect country in the American continent.

The concept of dystopia was, on the other hand, conceived “in the nineteenth century by John Stuart Mill during a parliamentary debate in the United Kingdom” (YOUNG 10). Even though some might associate dystopian productions to periods when the emergence of totalitarian regimes was a shared worry, this is far from representing an objective guideline for the genre. It is true that some of these books – such as Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and *1984*, Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, and Huxley’s *Brave new world* – are all indeed representative of the genre, as well as situated in the locus of an absolutist dystopia marked by censorship and political silencing. Nevertheless, the fact that the genre has not only survived in the contemporaneity, but actually gained much more popularity (Scholes & Ostenson; LETOURNEUX 111-112), demonstrates that there are no boundaries to limit the scope of dystopian fiction – neither to envelop its motivational features. After all, “as the utopias of communism and cosmopolitan peace stand indicted, the neoliberal utopia of the market creeps up on us, now under the ideologically driven notion of a Smithian human nature” (YOUNG 13).

Our fear now is no longer the obsolete Stalinism and/or McCarthyism, but the Smithian human nature that has been guiding our capitalist interventions on the world – that, because of humans, has become post-human. As a matter of fact, the political circumstances of “the present moment – one which finds capitalism under question,

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widespread expressions of anxiety about ecological futures, and so on – have pushed critical energies in other directions” (SZEMAN 46). Conscious of this shift of critical energies towards these other directions, the overall context of our study is precisely the place occupied by contemporary dystopian fiction in terms of its contribution to boost such energies – i.e. in the relation established between dystopia and post-humanism in a society where an apocalypse with nonhuman attributes becomes, each day, a more imminent possibility.<sup>1</sup>

In what concerns such reassessment, even though positions within literature are multiple and ever-changing, “at a specific historical moment only a limited number of competing discourses are available, some having more power and status than others” (FUNCK 25). Here lies the essence of the literary discourse, as it might provide us with inventive lenses and operational tools to see and grapple with questionable premises of Western post-human ontology – precisely because it escapes the utilitarian means of contemporary civilisation, operating through back channels that, seemingly innocuous, end up contributing vehemently to our re-positioning concerning our space and time constraints. We take as our premise that our post-human society has given shape to an equally post-human dystopian possibility that, on its turn, has taken the place of political absolutism as a contemporary apocalyptic risk. Our reading of Margaret Atwood’s 2003 novel *Oryx & Crake* focuses precisely on if and how it sets forth a critique on post-humanism, making use of dystopian artefacts from XXI society as to elaborate on the matter of the contemporary interconnection established between human life, the machine and the feelings (or their absence) emerging from such dialogue.

Our specific purpose hereinafter is thus to analyse the emergence of dystopia after a utopian motivation in Atwood’s *Oryx & Crake* as to make out if and how the development of the narrative might be placed in parallel with dystopian tradition vis-à-vis the experience of a post-human civilisation. What does the narrative inform us regarding the influence of a post-humanism society on the environment, on our relation to others,

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1 Working with and through utopian and dystopian fiction is no novelty, inasmuch as both have “occupied an important position in Western culture, although by strict literary standards of aesthetic excellence [...they are deemed...] a hybrid minor genre between literature and political theory” (FUNCK 15). Literature is per se somewhere between itself and political theory; every piece of art is a response to its social construct and, as such, there are political issues inevitably involved in the process. The literary piece offers us with a new lens to appreciate the world, and the world of contemporaneity is a post-human one which is in an urgent need of reassessment.

on our feelings towards our inner selves and the outer selves surrounding us, on our relation to machines, and on our relation even to ourselves as post-human subjects? Our analysis is guided therefore not only by a negative idea of post-human thinking, inasmuch as one can also ponder upon “posthumanism as a form of anti-humanism, which is re-enlightened by modern science; on this view, posthumanism is characterised by the absence of humanist naïveté” (CHADWICK 5). Before stepping onto the arena of our analysis, it is important to say we shall be looking at post-humanism not only as a moment to debunk humanist naïveté, but also as the contemporary manmade society where the human and the nonhuman – the machine – are deeply intertwined.

*Posthuman  
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**Discussion:  
Dystopia as a disruption of the master narrative  
of progress**

Dystopian novels have accompanied Western civilisation for a long time, at different historical moments, whose epistemes triggered the surfacing of the most varied sort of fears. This discussion thus also concerns the ideological shift suffered in contemporary dystopian settings between rather distinct economic and governmental practices; under the premise that the advent of different political movements, the rise of technology, the empowerment of commercial trades and its inevitable reinforcement of excessive materialism have all helped to redesign the dystopian apprehensions of modern (neoliberal) society. The risk and uncertainty we now experience acquires its scale, complexity, and far-reaching implications due to processes “that have produced the massive industrial, technological, urban, demographic, lifestyle, and intellectual transformations and uneven developments that we have witnessed in the latter half of the twentieth century” (HARVEY, *Spaces* 222). Dystopian fictions still have a purpose in the contemporary world, their target being more complex and abstract than the absolutist regimes so criticized in other moments – such as the Russian Communism, German Nazism, and Italian Fascism – not in spite of the several advancements of neoliberal civilization but due to their emergence.

It would thus be naïve to think that such terms as utopia/dystopia can have universal characteristics. Let us look then more carefully at *Oryx & Crake*, novel published in a period when dictatorships' popularity, repeatedly and globally carped at, had already decreased. There-

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by, it is possible to test possibilities for the adaptation of dystopian attributes in a money-based society; where the danger is not the absolute government, but the absolute capital – i.e., the control, censorship, and biased decisions once exerted by this or that political party is replaced by the needs of the market. It is up to dystopian fiction to reassess the main features of such market, providing us with an opportunity to look at our neoliberal society from the outside, from the blatant possibility of an environmental, social, and human catastrophe – a catastrophe that can be taken as a mere metaphor or literally understood. How post-human are we, and how post-human shall such disaster be? *Oryx & Crake*, as a dystopian aide-mémoire, is constructed on both these questions – the post-human debates it raises hint that, to the left or to the right, the possibility of disaster is always there.

The narrative is told from the perspective of Jimmy – or Snowman, as he baptises himself after the apocalyptic disaster that he is about to explain – whose personal story is, at the beginning, a mystery to readers; his particular narrative is explained gradually, as we learn through his voice about the events that have taken him to the condition wherein he finds himself at the moment. Snowman is like a ghost, walking through the dead roads of an abandoned planet surrounded by semi-robot animals – that consist in some unsuccessful inventions of human race. But the danger does not come only from such beasts: “Snowball pulls the sheet up over his baseball cap to protect himself from the sun’s glare, and plods on, picking up the pace as much as he can. He knows he’ll burn some even through the sheet if he stays out here long enough: his best hope is speed” (Atwood 25). This is an indication that the conditions of the environment are now irredeemably inhospitable, for the ozone depletion has reached unimagined levels, but so far readers do not know if the apocalypse that has left Snowman as the last human alive was a natural disaster or one carried out by men.

In the process of our getting to such information, through the eyes of the narrator, readers meet a very weird group of animals that look like human beings, but are slightly different in physical and behavioural terms. This especially when it goes to their feeding, their colour, smell, and especially excretory and reproductive system (which are all much more “comfortable” and less “repulsive” when compared to the attributes of human race). When it goes to these animals, controversial-



ly, everything whereby they differ from human beings regards aspects of our condition that make us more animal and savage – that is, in what concerns the need that, regardless of how developed, civilised, and artificial our society becomes, our very nature is unable to surpass. These aseptic creatures correspond to what contemporary society would like to be, and, as such, they remind us that deep inside human beings are not as different from the savage world they despise, notwithstanding their façade of domesticated lives, instincts, and needs. Readers realise there is a sort of mutual dependence established between the “Snowman” and these strange creatures – as s/he often visits them to assess their well-being and is in return fed and helped by them – but the nature of such relationship is not revealed at first. When that happens, we learn that Snowman was once called Jimmy, and had a normal life in a society rather similar to ours; it was after he met Crake, when he was a teenager, that everything started to change.

Both boys live in a post-human world, and both understand such post-humanity differently: Jimmy is scared by the huge social inequality and by the capitalist utilitarian approach on everything and everyone. Crake, on the other hand, is deeply interested in genetic manufacturing (of animals, nature, and even humans themselves), which seems to him a fruitful field for his trying to build a planet that fits perfectly human purposes. This idea that makes total sense until he realises that dilapidating the planet makes no sense if the human race is not likewise genetically enhanced. Notwithstanding their differences, Jimmy and Crake develop a strong affective relationship, until Oryx – the Asian girl with whom both fall in love – appears, causing deep commotion between them. Nevertheless, before all that, Snowman tells his own story, when there was no Crake, no Oryx, and no strange creatures to be tutored. As a child, Jimmy is already able to realise that, in the world wherein he lived, “some lives are more perfect than others”. He is mesmerised, for instance, by the poverty that surrounds the rich bits of the dystopian Canada created by Atwood; Jimmy is one of the few who belong to the privileged fraction of the country’s population, and shockingly observes the ones who have not been so lucky, sharing his feelings with the readers through the narrator’s omniscience: “How did such people exist? Jimmy had no idea. Yet there they were, on the other side of the razor wire. A couple of them [...] shouted something that the bulletproof glass shut out” (ATWOOD 185).

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Showing us a reality that is not related to something already surpassed, but actually a contemporary issue, the critique elaborated by the narrative focuses not on the government as the only sphere to blame, but actually in commerce and in the profiteering enterprises of private capitalist enterprises. Nurturing competition to the benefit of private and rich elite, not necessarily part of those in power (as the one in power is not the capital), the bulletproof glass that separates hegemony from periphery becomes accessible to all of those who are able to pay. Therefore, remodelling the tradition of post-apocalyptic narratives, in *Oryx & Crake* Atwood “sets her dystopia apart from standard dystopian models” (Beaulieu 61). What the plot of the novel points to, in some sense, is precisely the fact that the progress propaganda of contemporary neoliberal enterprises is based on a dystopian necessity. That is to say that the focus on the capital set off from the questionable premise that the construction of utopia requires the destruction of everything that is detrimental to the artificial veils of a developed society. That is true both for the social inequality in *Oryx & Crake* and for the inequality regarding the sort of investments made in institutions, regions, and realms that, depending on their financial applicability, tend to trigger a greater or lesser interest from the authorities. In the dystopian world of the novel, Jimmy is required to adapt his affective interest in art into something more “applicable” as one of the only available courses in humanities is on advertisement. The social reality of the narrative is one where everything comes prior to humanities, and the difference between the spaces occupied by academic courses and on the investments made in each of them are a clear evidence of that. The distinction becomes blatant when it comes to the difference between Jimmy’s university and the one where Crake studies, called “the RejoovenEsense”; while the former studies in an old and abandoned smelly structure which is almost falling apart, suffering with the lack of rooms, lack of courses, and lack of professors, the condition of the latter is the very opposite.

Such is made clear when Jimmy visits the university of his friend: “Next morning Crake took him for a preliminary tour of the RejoovenEsense Compound in his souped-up electric golf cart. It was, Jimmy had to admit, spectacular in all ways” (290). Everywhere Jimmy looks there is something beautiful and so clean that, he wonders, must be unimaginably luxurious – regardless of the apparent simplicity of everything he describes (e.g. pure air, green lands, lack of walls, etc.). During his

visit, readers understand how, in the dystopian future where Jimmy lives, that edenic scenery can only be artificial, and with a very expensive maintenance. If the foreground of the RejoovenEsense is one which does not fit in its dystopian condition where both kids find themselves, its background is like any other: “Crake’s university was surrounded – Jimmy observed as the train pulled in – by [...] huts put together from scavenged materials – sheets of tin, slabs of plywood – and inhabited no doubt by squatters” (ATWOOD 184). With an excuse to Atwood’s neologisms, here, the critique articulated by the author, as the novel envelops the structure wherein Crake studies with a vast landscape of misery and deprivation, is again nothing but an elaboration on a rather contemporary issue – the coexistence of progress and decline.

In the words of Galeano, “wealthy capitalist centres in our own time cannot be explained without the existence of poor and subjected outskirts: the one and the other make up the same system” (30). This specific aspect of our city life illustrates this formative partnership of capitalism, established between enrichment and impoverishment – i.e. given such necessary conjunction, the utopian project where there would only be abundance and no scarcity is completely debunked, as, for the farewell of the neoliberal top stratum, inequality is not a drawback to be solved, but actually one of the most concrete organisational premises. The basis of the capital is inequity and, therefore, “overdevelopment, [...] consumption, pollution, and scarcity are critical issues confronting all of humanity; through these contrasting stories, we can see both progress and decline in different places at different times” (MERCHANT 4). There would be therefore a direct connection between overdevelopment and consumption with pollution and scarcity – decline and progress are, in this picture, two sides of the same coin, and not antagonistic to one another. The inequality required by the focus on the capital reinforces the idea that is evinced in *Oryx & Crake* – that is, the fact that often poverty is produced and reproduced because an excessively materialist behaviour is fomented. Hence the control of the market, which might have indeed been empowered to an extent that now finally goes way beyond the control of any contemporary government.

The dystopian fiction developed in *Oryx & Crake* is in this sense the token of an already money-guided and post-human society where what is taken as pleasant is only so because it is artificial, and where there is nothing natural in the natural world – its savagery has al-

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ready been for good turned into a human garden wherein such nature now has to fit. In our post-humanity, we are no longer part of the environment surrounding us. In this domesticated land that is being designed to the benefit of humans, there are still paradoxically many humans who are, gradually, even more distant from these benefits. In other words, the fact that the market has been gradually amplifying its thriving status does not necessarily imply that the population has responded likewise. “The geographic landscape of capital is perpetually evolving, largely under the impulsion of the speculative needs of further accumulation and only secondarily in relation to the needs of people” (GALEANO 49). That is, the general idea that market growth and improvement would naturally result in the betterment of peoples’ lives is not accurate whatsoever.

A concrete and ideological barrier separating the poor (living in the “pleebands”) from the middle class (living in the “compounds”) provides us with an evidence of that: “Compound people didn’t go to the cities unless they had to, and then never alone. Security in the pleebands was leaky [...], not to mention the addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies. Outside our walls and gates things were unpredictable” (ATWOOD 27). Things are unpredictable outside the walls and gates of the compounds because therein everything is controlled: the air, the water, the food, and ultimately the people. In the compounds technology offers a partnership between men and machine to make things flow smoothly; and what scares people so much about the pleebands is that this sort of control does not exist. There some things might happen without any sort of intervention, and oblivious to one’s prediction. Notwithstanding their peripheral status, these characters Jimmy fears are actually what move the city: the engine that makes it function. This is why it would be wise to say that, even though things have changed from the past to the present (i.e. from a dystopian absolutist society to a dystopian money-based society), there is still much to be learned. This especially in what concerns the role forced to and consequently played by the poor for maintaining the system as it is – which evinces the importance of a Marxist reflection upon the means of production. After all, “human labour is alienated under capitalism. The intention of Marxism as a political project is to restore to workers control over what they produce so that the benefits also accrue to them” (GALEANO 99).

It is true, however, that not only the poor, but actually any subject who believe in the master narrative of neoliberalism end up deceived by hegemonic interests. This is where money gets in, as a token of fallacious achievement, and as a confirmation that well-being has nothing to do with it. Atwood's novel elaborates on that, as the medical "advancements" designed by Jimmy's father do not aim at improving human life or curing diseases, but purely at selling. Every feeling, every affective possibility is choked by this utilitarian approach of capitalist reasoning; the purpose of any job has no more humanitarian mission involved – people are good professionals as long as money is being produced, their success has nothing to do with their affective ambitions. Published in 1932, Huxley's *Brave new world* also addresses the matter of medicine being canalised to make people feel better about their appearances – even though, in the process, they end up dying much earlier. In such society, moreover, it is Fordism – a sort of religion concocted by an absolutist regime – which convinces subjects to "consume" antidepressants as well as other pills as mere merchandise, eliminating the notion that medicine has anything to do with health, only with profiteering and cosmetics.

In the narrative, Jimmy's father explains how he created a medicine that replaced older epidermis with a fresh one; during the explanation, he overlooks possible collateral damages and focuses on the rewards in the case of success: "What well-to-do and once-young, once-beautiful woman or man wouldn't sell their house, their gated retirement villa, their kids, and their soul?" (55). Mesmerised by such discourse and aghast at the prospects of such enterprise, Jimmy decries his father intention to take advantage of other people's weaknesses; his mother seems to share the kid's opinion, as she questions her husband's former and commendable ideas regarding his role as a pharmacist. "Don't you remember the way you used to talk? Making life better for people – not just people with money. You used to be so... you had ideals, then.' 'Sure,' said Jimmy's father in a tired voice. 'I've still do. I just can't afford them no longer' (ATWOOD 57). That is precisely how the master narrative operates, both in *Oryx & Crake* and in contemporaneity: it provides us with a single story, which convinces us to do things clearly against our interests as if they were entirely self-willed. Recovering such values requires altering the kernel of our society's functioning inasmuch as, in the words of Harvey (*Spaces* 214), "grappling with

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responsibilities and ethical engagements towards all others entails the construction of discursive regimes and different modes of action from those [...] so typical of the capitalist entrepreneur”.

From the excerpts analysed so far, it seems to be unquestionable that, in Atwood’s novel, from the moment that the basic needs of security, education, and health are placed in the hands of private interests they simply stop to function as they should. This has nothing to do with bad management, it is a matter of logic: one cannot think of basic needs from the perspective of profit, because, in most cases, profit occurs to the detriment of people’s necessities. Jimmy does not take long to find that out. When he meets Crake, Jimmy would get much deeper into the genetic engineering companies that sponsor the projects of the university where the former studies. Thereby, he understands quite well not only the logic of the market, but even the commercial interests behind inventions seemingly carried out simply for the benefit of human needs. But this atmosphere is not devoid of feelings; as the post-human reality alters our affect channels, but is unable to turn them off for good. Oryx, the porn actress whom both Crake and Jimmy fall in love with, exposes how she has found out the maxim which she needed to acknowledge in order to survive in the capitalist world. This happens when she describes how those who direct the pornographic films convey their intention: “[T]here would have to be a discussion about how much that new thing ought to cost. ‘So I learned about life’, said Oryx. ‘Learned what?’ said Jimmy [...]. ‘That everything has a price’ said Oryx” (138). Even feelings, the manner whereby our affect relationships are built, has a price in Oryx’s world – in order to live and to survive, people in her condition cannot feel whatsoever, for feelings make everything unbearable. The critical articulations of the narrative, through the experience of its characters, on profiteering enterprises completely destitute of ethical or moral preoccupations, offer the reader a chance to ponder upon how dystopian is the future whereto we have been walking. Such is also suggested when Jimmy shares with readers his reluctance to believe in the information provided by the products he consumes. Although package copies are supposed to say the truth about what is being traded, “he’d written enough package copy not to believe this” (ATWOOD 252).

This does not sound as a dystopian possibility to us whatsoever. Each day our society is actually much more knowledgeable about the fact that television commercials, products’ description, written advertisements, etc. work just like Squealer does in Orwell’s *Animal Farm* when he

provides the other animals with “information”. The genre of advertisement has become analogous to false data – to the point that we are much less prone to, for instance, believe in any commercials. *Oryx & Crake* package copies, likewise, do not convey any truthful information – and Jimmy is aware of that because his job was to write such information before the disaster that, at this point we know, surfaces from an insane move of one of Crake’s projects. Jimmy has much in common with the contemporary subject. Today people know that they cannot believe in how a brand describes its products, in how the news broadcast events, and in what politicians promise in their campaigns since everything is unconditionally permeated by endless lies. Another issue that is advertised (but, now, less objectively) by the master discourse of hegemony, and that all characters in the novel also seem to be led into believing, regards the priority of capital accumulation logic: working. Again, instead of addressing an agenda against political absolutist threat, the threat of *Oryx & Crake* is other, as the narrative cautions us against common aspects of our supposedly “free” and “liberal” civilisation.

One of such aspects, that the story elaborates upon, concerns something that has become second nature to contemporary society: the fact that, due to traffic issues, raising criminality, and financial benefits, living close to or even inside the places where we work is seen as a great advantage. “Jimmy’s father said it was better that way, because nobody had to commute to work from the Modules. Despite the sterile transport corridors and the high-speed bullet trains, there was always a risk when you went through the city” (ATWOOD 27). As easier and more comfortable as it may sound, this process applauded by Jimmy’s father entails a vast array of drawbacks. Not to mention its post-human aspects, as the acceptance – and even willingness – to be fused with the machine of capital accumulation makes it growingly difficult to separate people from the machine itself.<sup>2</sup> If traditional dystopias show how people are forced to work relentlessly by dictatorial regimes, *Oryx & Crake* is a reminder that such regimes are not always required. Observing the leftovers of civilisation, Snowman reflects

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2 There is another dystopian fiction, written by Dave Eggers in 2013, whose main premise is situated precisely in this machinery of capital accumulation. In *The Circle*, readers are presented to a context where an eponymous company aims at conquering all spaces and peoples; by providing a seemingly pleasant environment, its managers are gradually able to control and access all aspects of society. This thematic recurrence evinces that, today, in our hope to profit, and due to the high position our job has started to represent in our lives, the frontier dividing public and private sectors have been blurred.

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upon a sign he stumbles upon: “*Men at Work* that used to mean. Strange to think of the endless labour, the digging, the hammering, the carving, the lifting, the drilling, day by day, year by year [...]; sandcastles in the wind” (ATWOOD 45). In the narrative, subjects never learn the castles built by their work are made of sand; as a mirror image of our own civilisation, the narrative demonstrates how the logic of profiteering affects human life. But effects go way beyond that; influenced more to work than to think, subjects’ alienation results in their lack of feelings, of affection, of critical abilities to understand, judge, and position themselves before social and political issues. As a result, when such positioning occurs, it is generally devoid of sympathy or compassion for others and actually even to themselves – taught to believe we are born selfish and inconsiderate, civilisation is deprived of pity and of repulsion to suffering. What makes us human is forgotten, and what makes us post-human emphasised.

Less per chance than one might imagine, such process is responsible for restraining us from subversion, from rebelling against the system; divested of humanity people become as sadistic and fiendish as the system itself, trying to think and feel as the system – i.e., making an effort not to think and not to feel whatsoever, about anyone and anything. Coherent with the post-human project, internet serves that very purpose, as Jimmy and his friend Crake look for websites where they could watch videos of “various supposed thieves having their hands cut off and adulterers and lipstick-wearers being stoned to death by howling crowds, in dusty enclaves that purported to be in fundamentalist countries in the Middle East” (ATWOOD 82). The virtual reality provided by the machinery of internet broadcasting has everything subjects might need in the narrative. Such reality provides them with events of great and deep meaning, such as death and sexual life, but it does so simplifying such events, naturalising their banalisation, transforming everything into a bare and crude material, without anything to be felt or reflected upon. As it seems to be happening in our very reality, feelings are left aside; characters are, for instance, taught how to kill and how to have sex, but they forget how to live and how to love – how to grow and develop affectively. Making money out of very specific approaches on sex and violence, the experience of affect is replaced by a very specific approach on it. One where everything is legal, precisely because it is prohibited. The



legality of prohibition is, per se, an evidence of this second wave of dystopian fiction: the control once exerted by the government is now the control of the machine, it is not up to the rules to decide if we are authorised or not to access a certain material. It is now the interests of the market that have the final wor(l)d.

In the novel, Jimmy explains that, even though the broadcasting and sharing of such material is prohibited by the governments where these videos are recorded, people need money so much that they do not think twice before risking their lives with their hidden cameras. Issues like these are not solved, though, by prohibiting a former subject from filming such video – but by preventing the latter from watching. Alienated, Crake and Jimmy do not realise the role they play just by clicking on such videos; alienation leads them into believing they are not responsible for those subjects – it is the machine that has made a choice when providing the video in the first place, if it is already there, in their view, nothing they do is capable of making any difference. This is a world not so different from ours, growingly more devoid of feelings, guided by an invisible machine that digests everything for us; our choices can vary, from time to time, but we are given an opportunity not to feel responsible for what we touch and touch us, not to feel empathy, not to feel at all – hence this intricate sense of freedom: the freedom not to value the inner meanings of anything or anyone. This is why freedom represents today a rather intricate concept, “as people became obsessed with freedom as if the only model of freedom was a kind of libertarian pastiche [...]. Freedom was turned then in an end in itself, with no other purposive goals” (EAGLETON, *Marxism* 79).

Jimmy's friend, Crake, gets to the conclusion that there is no possibility of redemption to modern society; in his view, human beings achieved a level of dystopian behaviour whose nature makes it impossible for their condition to be resolved. Hence Crake's idea: to wipe out the world by annihilating all human beings and create a brand new species to inhabit and colonise it; a species that would not make as many mistakes as we, the way he sees it, have made – precisely because we feel too much. Every affective relation that is constructed, must, through such lens, have a practical and precise determination. As one looks at it more attentively, it is easy to realise that Crake's point is one that has become second-nature to many contemporary thinkers. The post-apocalyptic world of his making is created “with a utopian vision

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[...] that has long plagued Western society: scientific advances will lead not to a progressive utopian future but instead will result in humanity's reversion to a savage dystopian pre-human past" (RODDIS 20). Crake, thereby, endorses the romanticisation to this return to nature – as if resuming our primitive condition would necessarily result in the possibility of a less detrimental prospect. He wants to solve the drawbacks of a post-human world by obliterating human species and providing such world with an even more post-human life – paradoxically, his idea is to solve the problem by emphasising it. This is a common mistake of thinking ambivalently about “nature”, as such logic nurtures a fallacious dichotomy separating scientific reasoning and an ideal, rural, natural society – devoid of technology, of science, and of things that per se, by definition, do not consist of the problem.

Motivated by this purportedly selfless ideal, Crake produces the first colony of a genetically engineered human-like species he names “the crakers”. The Crakers had “no self-afeto, none at all. At first he [Jimmy] couldn't believe them, they were so beautiful. Black, yellow, white, brown, all available skin colours; each individual was exquisite. ‘Are they robots, or what?’ he said” (ATWOOD 302). The crakers are no robots, but they are indeed post-human: an enhanced species of human beings. “Playing god”, Crake tries to set off from everything he deems detrimental in human life to shape such species, oblivious to the fact that no behaviour is fixed to our nature, but more likely to be developed during years of transformation – a process that the crakers would inevitably also go through. During the narrative, most of the descriptions of the crakers highlight their beauty, innocence, and purity – like angels, they are nothing but the idealisation of what human beings wanted them to be: flawless and perfect. Closest to that characterisation, readers might associate such description to the common idealisation of children: seemingly distant from the dystopian reality wherein adults find themselves, as they become gradually corrupted by society.

There are, indeed, many things in common – the naiveté of the crakers is the naiveté of children, they are nothing but the embodiment of an attempt to stop corruption, as if the reality provided by nature were per se pure and untouchable. Crake's post-human idea, therefore, idealise the notion of the human – notwithstanding his ambition to get rid of every men. This aspect of *Oryx & Crake* thus places this novel in parallel with many other dystopias, as it addresses the is-

sue of returning both to nature and to infancy as an attempt at reaching utopia – which is doomed not to work, as one would expect. In 1954, William Golding’s dystopia *Lord of the Flies* had already provided us with a similar approach to the matter. In a nutshell, the narrative is about a group of kids who are castaway in an island after an aeroplane crash; for them to effectively survive until they are rescued, they form a committee and have the idea of creating a society of their own, as it happens in the adult world. The idea seems perfect at the beginning, as they imagine mistakes made in the case of their parents would not be repeated in the island; but the formed scenery of utopia is soon replaced by dystopia, as boys become aggressive towards one another and end up taking up the same (or even worse) actions that used to occur in the world they lived before. What the novel implies is therefore that the boys endeavour “does not eliminate the basic problem, human cruelty” (PASOLD 96).

Moreover, what this inability to eliminate the basic problem demonstrates – both in *Lord of the Flies* and *Oryx & Crake* – is that romanticising about getting rid of science, technology, and developments brought forward by civilisation is a two-edge sword: no one can control what might happen later. An indication that Crake’s plans would not happen as he imagined concerns his certainty that, by genetically designing his humanoids, he could stop them from ever believing in a God like figure – in his view a defect that has always accompanied human society. Paradoxically, it is precisely Crake who ends up being adored by his creation; before dying after the disaster, he had asked the only survivor – Jimmy – to help out the crakers, also telling them the story of their invention. Doing so, the result is that Jimmy’s stories are transformed into a sort of religion by the crakers. As he realises the result of his interference, Jimmy realises that, since “Crake was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind, he would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification” (ATWOOD 61). Society, human or post-human, has no defined path – and no one can master and/or design its evolution. That is utopia, and trying to take us back to our supposed pristine condition, as Crake does, means to overlook and underestimate all possibilities technology has also given us to evade our condition – moving towards a less dystopian future to the detriment of dreaming about a more utopian past (that has actually never existed).

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“The shift from human to posthuman describes nature not as pristine wilderness, but rather as the postnatural liminal space where organic and non-organic overlap” (RODDIS 31). Based thus on the overlapping of organic and natural with the non-organic and man-made, post-humanism gives us an opportunity to dodge technocracy and anthropocentrism; it opens up a discussion regarding our need to accept human impact on the world. Such impact has left us with no possibility of escaping, nor of being rescued. In the post-human world where everything is domesticated and reassessed through our profiteering and alienated lenses, even the manner people learned to grapple with other species and even nature itself is not devoid of anthropocentrism – and that is true even when the agenda seems to be that of environmental consciousness raising. In Harvey’s view, the environment “is now an open and critical focus of discussion and debate among the capitalists and their allies – many of whom are obsessed with the issue of long-term sustainability” (ENIGMA 213). Many of the contemporary discourses regarding sustainability are a symptom of our need to control even what might go way beyond us. Of course there are commendable aspects of our consciousness raising regarding the nature surrounding us, but in many occasions such consciousness is not raised at all – and the sources of problems are then not assessed. Harvey is indeed concerned about our relationship with nature – which has already proved to be far from healthy – but he nonetheless does not believe that talking about it from the same anthropocentric perspective, which has accompanied us throughout history, is quite enough. “We are now obliged–by our own ‘achievements’–to work out in the imagination as well as through discursive debates our individual and collective responsibilities” (ENIGMA 213). Such imagination and discursive debates are not to be based on humans as the centre, but as part of a whole – to think of environmental issues in what touches that which we deem important or not does not help us out altering the logic of its destruction. Problematising our dealing with the world is analogous to problematising us in the first place, and the position we believe to occupy in the cosmos. Crane, after all, provides his solution to save the world because he bases his judgement on the questionable premise that he has all answers, and that he objectively knows what is good for the environment.

It is obvious nonetheless that nowadays human beings can indeed change the world, the point is how and why to do it: “we have accumulated massive powers to transform the world, and the way we exercise those powers is fundamental” (HARVEY, *Spaces* 114). Power de-

serves much attention: an attention that we tend to nurture only when inspired by our anthropocentric intentions – i.e. power is used mostly for us to shape the world according to our needs and interests, not to reshape our attitudes towards the others that are directly and indirectly affected in the process. Atwood’s narrative elaborates a rich critique on such matter perhaps especially when Jimmy talks to his father about the programme “create-an-animal”, which regards a dystopian software which is nothing but the embodiment of everything that the pet and the meat “industry” already does. The genetic engineering of animal species is already a reality, and one that has created monstrous animals which suffer from diverse issues, as they have been artificially evolved by the market, to which our human purposes are completely oblivious. One could easily think of such analogy for the programme, as it is a means for animals, especially domestic, to be produced and traded as “goods” that serve the needs of humans. No affect dimension is regarded, the anthropocentric position of men above the other animal species (a strong reality of contemporary times) allow them to see not only in these animals an inability to feel as they do, but, especially, to believe there is no problem in the former’s absence of feelings towards the latter in the first place. Animals are goods, useful; they have no life that matters to us.

Artificially transforming lives into goods, buying meat and domestic animals is a normal event, as we need them for food and for company, regardless of their needs and regardless of the possibility that we are directly altering the natural flow of evolution. In what regards the specific pet industry, the narrative does allow one to think of this culture where domestic animals are “produced” as to be owed by humans, with the appearance and behaviour proper to domestic life, even though that often makes them naturally ill, weak, and debilitated. “Create-an-animal made you feel like God, and pets had no foreign microbes, in addition to which they were cute [...]. ‘No smell,’ said Jimmy’s father. ‘It’s a clean animal, with a nice disposition. Placid’” (ATWOOD 52). Cute, placid, clean, with no microbes and no smell: is this still an animal? The point is then not science per se, but science vis-à-vis our Christian anthropocentric reasoning: our erroneous logic that, somewhere between God and the world, humans are given all rights to do what they wish with those who divide such world with them, and actually even the world itself. This empowerment has made us act on nature in a rather pastoral fashion – i.e. that is, promoting the maintenance

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of colonial tradition, which saw in the environment and in other animals nothing else than artefacts to be controlled and taken advantage upon. Regardless of how obsolete our colonial ideals might seem to be nowadays, it would be a mistake to believe that the pastoral dream has been abandoned by contemporary views on the land and on animals other than us. On the contrary; “the edenic and the pastoral are often replaced [...] by a modernising extractive vision” (PRATT 150).

Notwithstanding how controversial it may seem, our post-human civilisation was and still is capable of placing the edenic and the pastoral close to the destructive and greedy processes undertaken by developmentalist enterprises. Our tradition is a hypocritical one which discursively defends nature and animals (by romanticising both) at the very same time as it effectively destroys them (by acting and reacting anthropocentrically upon both). Such paradox enabled a society that is based on the needs of a few and the deprivation of many “to continue defining its purposes as the pursuit of rural happiness while devoting itself to productivity, wealth and power” (MARX 226). Western desire is not (and has never been) to preserve the environment, but to preserve a man-made garden; not to respect nor try to understand nature, but to institutionalise it, to cut its deviating branches. Thence the need for a post-human thinking to reassess an already post-human world – where even life has been put in operation as or into the machine of profiteering. This is why the post-human condition surfaces as both problem and solution, inasmuch as, at the same time as it reminds us of how problematic the contemporary lack of humanity might be, “posthumanism also names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human [...] is increasingly impossible to ignore” (WOLF 16).

While he carries out his researches on the crackers, Jimmy’s friend also develops a project on genetically modified animals that attracts interest from the meat industry. Again, the post-human and anthropocentric side of our ecological concerns is unveiled: “The thing was a nightmare; they’d removed all brain functions that had nothing to do with digestion and growth [...]. ‘Chicken breasts in two weeks! And the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain!’” (ATWOOD 203). Besides this reference to the profiteering logic of privileging price and time on top of everything else, there are many interesting aspects in this excerpt, but it is perhaps the allusions made by Crake to the “animal-welfare freaks” that most draws

one's attention. His genetically modified chickens are scientifically manipulated in a way that no complaint could be made, because all of these complaints tend to concern issues that are actually men-centred (e.g. our inability to deal with the suffering of the animals we eat, our tendency to humanise beasts that are genetically close to us, our problematic definitions of "pain", etc.): "animal-welfare freaks" would never be able to romanticise such monster. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the absence of pain, it is conceptually cruel to remove the brain functions of such animal – as it is, for instance, conceptually cruel to castrate pets. When the basis for this or that solution regarding the environment and/or other animals is grounded on our purposes, our ambitions, and what makes us comfortable the issue of anthropocentrism is still what guides us. Epistemologically, altering the genes of an animal for it to grow faster and/or to feel no pain because of our need for food as well as castrating a pet because of our need for a "placid" and "cute" company (to use Jimmy's father words) have both nothing to do with the well-being of such animals.

These are, on the contrary, illustrations of our self-interest, of our dominance upon nature, of our need to mould and control rather than to understand and interact less detrimentally and hierarchically with it. As a matter of fact, if the self "is continuous with nature, rather than set over against it, so the need to dominate nature as an impersonal object must be replaced by the need to cooperate in nature's own projects" (WOLF 170). In order to cooperate with the unknown, we must be willing to dialogue with it, rather than to inclosing it into our ready-made conceptual boxes – we must not provide the other with space, we must open up our spaces for the other to enter and alter the status of things as they are and work for us. The sense of affect per se does not help – it has been precisely our obsession in trying to "take care of" this or that environmental issue that more often than not has resulted in the emergence of more issues to be solved. It is in this sense that thinking from a post-human perspective might contribute for such picture to change eventually; and here we mean thinking from a perspective that unchains itself from a standpoint wherefrom the gaze is only directed to and from what is human. To think post-humanly is to go beyond the focus on the human as to assimilate other needs, realities, and possibilities – understanding that our consciousness only exists in cahoots with the consciousness of everything else.

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Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan (24) remind us of how hegemonic contacts with realms previously unvisited by colonial conquests pastorally express the exotic, but also envelop it; “in scanning the past, they compile an inventory of domesticated mysteries, and yet they are made to confront the unexpected strangeness of the present”. The environmental rhetoric that arises from this domestication of mysteries has provided contemporary civilisation with a vast array of literary material that romanticise the other and the unknown. Prompted by an overt political agenda, ecological romanticised discourses, such as the one that *Oryx & Crake* seems to prevent us from accepting, “underemphasised the inherent dynamicism of ecological processes in favour of more static images of harmonious, balanced, and homeostatic ecosystems that seemed to provide more reliable sociopolitical models” (HEISE 401). Notwithstanding how important it is to evade these pre-given socio-political models, in general terms, they are still what configure people’s main line of reasoning. It is in this sense that post-humanism might provide us with a new discursive channel – in a post-human world, there is no reason why the access to the framework of such world should focus simply on what makes us human.<sup>3</sup>

We close our analysis then precisely when Jimmy gets ensorcelled by the atmosphere of the establishment where Crake works – which is again, like the university, much more comfortable than his. “Everything was sparkling clean, landscaped, ecologically pristine, and very expensive. The air was particulate-free, due to the many solar whirlpool purifying towers, discreetly placed and disguised as modern art” (ATWOOD 291). Readers should make no mistake here: in the dystopian future of the novel, the air breath in Crake’s compound is so pure just because of the solar whirlpool purifying towers disguised as modern art. The idea of the disguise is apropos very meaningful, for it suggests people needed to forget that the puri-

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3 This is so for one must be aware that the contemporary world system can hardly be thought today “without reference to the larger–and until recently unthinkable–totality of the ecological system which both sustains and interpenetrates with the political-economic system” (IVAKHIV 99). That is, in order to effectively address nature one must first demystify it by analysing the apocalyptic scenario that might be waiting us if our political-economic system is not rethought from a less anthropocentric perspective. That is precisely what *Oryx & Crake* seems to be doing – precisely by ridiculing such mystification, and by exposing the putrefaction of our romanticising of nature, as we look forward to shape a comfortable world, as long as our needs and epistemes are not altered theretofore.



fication of the air is required for them to breathe properly. Artificial wood, artificial beaches, artificial everything: the destruction of nature has provided us with an unescapable replacement, which is an artificial nature. The purifying towers, like our plastic flowers, only mask the post-human condition wherein we now find ourselves – at the same time as they help us postponing more effective actions towards less artificial solutions. Furthermore, as readers finish reading *Oryx & Crake* they realise that this romanticisation and domestication of nature cannot happen forever. In the narrative, the environment is only pleasant where it is modified and engineered to be so; even the pristine and pre-human future desired by Crake is one guided by his scientific adjustments. Crake is but an extension of contemporary reasoning, of the common subject as the only things that matter are those that serve our needs, as we resist to accept putting such needs into question and accessing them from a post-human standpoint. The previous excerpt mocks the contemporary approach to nature, as the environment it idealises is one that does not exist, one that surfaces only from lyric poems, romantic paintings, and travel books.

Nature, as it is, became unbearable to our shallow and sophisticated way of living; the real world is apocalyptic, the garden of Eden exists only in the bible. Intertextually, what this suggests then is that it would be possible for one to read the setting of Atwood's novel as coherent with that of Huxley's *Brave New World*. As in the former, the latter's focus is on the urban setting as the perfect place for modern life; in Huxley's narrative the city is "extremely clean and ordered – without families, without love, and everybody looks happy [...]. The countryside is not idealised; it is ugly and filthy" (PASOLD 53). It is ugly and filthy because it was turned into that; now the only way to "fit in nature" is when we are armoured with our urban, scientific, technological shields – i.e. provided that we carry with us all cleanness, order, and organisation of city life. We have privileged our humanity, forgotten what makes us savages, and created the post-human context wherein we now find ourselves. *Oryx & Crake* seems to us to be elaborating upon a narrative that has actually already started, but its course is not yet ascertained. After all, if "the structure of a text both puts down roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context onto a recontextualization" (DERRIDA 63).

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## Final Remarks:

### Towards a post-human (non-dystopian?) future

*Oryx and Crake* is an American novel and, as such, it triggers dystopia from the locus of utopia. That is to say: if America is considered one of the first clear sources for utopian imagination during the great navigations, it is now the space wherefrom a fertile dystopian response to such images puts not only utopia into question, but actually even dystopia itself when considered as encircled within narrow and limited patterns. The narrative mirrors the prospects of our imagined self-importance; a narrative that alerts us to a future we do not want, even though we are so steadfastly walking towards it. As the final part of our analysis suggests, nonetheless, this narrative can still be manipulated; we might finish Atwood's story in the way we opt to. Dystopia is right there, but so is utopia; the possibility of the former is never devoid of the possibility of the latter. One way or another, our object of analysis exposes how new critical lenses are required for us to look at the world surrounding us less romantically than we once did. That is: the ugliness of Atwood's dystopia provides us with a path to acknowledge its contrary: a beautiful, utopian, possibility. In the end, "[b]eing an absent figure, it [beauty] exists in literature by means of indirect reference to an object of comparison [...]. In this context, the stories appear as extended figures of catachresis, hiding Utopia in their folds" (CAVALCANTI 50).

*Oryx & Crake* reminds readers of the social – besides aesthetic – value of literature; and, as such, shall provide us with a fruitful reflection on our post-human condition, given that this is no longer simply a possible condition, but an institutionalised one that consists actually in a very axiom of contemporary society. The discussion proposed, therefore, reminds one of the pertinence of dystopia as a mirror to the society whence it surfaces – and especially concerning the new critical perspectives emerging from a post-human dystopia. The fruitful critique articulated by the characters of *Oryx & Crake* regarding this post-human future, where everything seems to go wrong, is a response to the narrow – surpassed – view that dystopias would not be pertinent if one lives distant from the shadow of an overtly tyrannical political regime possibility. The novel is like a warning: abandoning our certainties and cherishing an idea of the environment and of the other beings as fundamental part of our pyramids (whose hierarchical divisions are more symbolic than concrete), consists in the cornerstone for the emergence of a new and required network. Literature is per se in-

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herently empowered with the possibility of surpassing utilitarian logic; it is, thus, a privileged channel to rethink hegemonic epistemes that model contemporary time and space as dystopian. Establishing a partnership between construction and destruction, richness and poverty, scarcity and abundance, the focus on capital is, on the other hand, an evidence that inequality is inherent to human society. Without eliminating those who do not fit in the logic of the market, there is no possibility of progress – or, better, progress shall always be a partial instance.

Besides, what the analysis demonstrates is that Atwood's dystopian narrative is a consequence and response to our post-human condition – and it has indeed much to say about such condition. There is no text without context, no fictional work that serves no political purpose – on the contrary, literary texts that purport to be neutral are responsible for maintaining the master narratives in vogue. The world of *Oryx & Crake* is what is left from an upcoming apocalypse; it is an invention that, regardless of how exaggerated, the more it reminds us of our own world. Atwood's dystopian future is one whose onset is the annihilation of our species – and, equal to any other animal, there is no way to know if we are prone to be extinct or how soon shall that occur. It is for that reason that the post-human crackers are the “Other” of our humanity – a token of how small we and our anthropocentric needs might be, in the end. What we have been arguing so far, however, is precisely that, no matter how realistic and plausible they might be, narratives are never deterministic – on the contrary, they are precisely what we need to alter the destinies whereto we might be walking. In contemporaneity, there are many narratives we embrace, some of which (regardless of how detrimental or misleading) are, actually, what provide us with the concrete frameworks of our social and political organisations. We have discourses such as the ones uttered by Crake and by Jimmy's father, and we have the ones provided by Snowman. Other possibilities for the capitalist logic where profit justifies everything are still peripheral; and dystopian fiction is also a way to put such logic ultimately into question.

As alleged in the introduction, and at many moments during the development of our discussion, literature is a resourceful ground for forms of consciousness and unconsciousness to transform existing systems of power. Fiction is a place where transgressive behaviours are allowed, the sphere where maintaining epistemes is no longer an obligation. Stories such as the one told in *Oryx & Crake* are not, per se, enough for the master

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narrative of hegemonic interests to be left aside; they are nonetheless an indispensable step and correspond to what Jean Raynaud calls “warning literature” (62). If Bauman is right when he asserts that “questioning the ostensibly unquestionable premises of our way of life is the most urgent of services we owe our fellow humans and ourselves” (198), *Oryx & Crake* elaborations upon post-humanism as grounded on a dystopian scenery have much to contribute for us to rethink our actions in and upon the world. Jimmy’s story is a fictional one, but it could be real; just as the crackers do not exist, but could be invented by a “crazy” scientist such as Crake soon enough. Coming up with ideas for a less anthropocentric future, where a post-human and all-encompassing reasoning might help us build a ethically healthier society, is not something which one might simply give in. If it happens that we lack any more ideas to keep on trying, books like Atwood’s *Oryx & Crake* are always going to be there; after all, society has always moved on with a desire for an utopian future and the fear of a dystopian one. Although we are clearly closer to the latter, we shall keep hopeful we might still have a chance to get to the former.

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*Recebido em maio de 2017*

*Aceito em agosto de 2017*

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