

Postmodern Culture and Identity Implosion: A Dystopian view of Posthumanism in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

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ABSTRACT: Dystopian narrative offers a reductionistic view of human identity in postmodern culture which is the culture of the coevolution of late capitalism and technoscience. This coevolution has given birth to a technoculture which is defined more by science and technology than social values, religion, arts and language. The idea of posthumanism has been theoretically originated from structuralists and poststructuralists who rejected humanism as a philosophical illusion and proposed that human identity and subjectivity is structured by language, desire, socioeconomic system, media and technology. This new dimension of human subjectivity and posthuman discourse offer an imploded version of human identity in dystopian fiction. This paper investigates identity implosion in the representation of posthuman which is manifested through genetically engineered humanoids (Crakers) in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. They indicate the reductionism and control indoctrinated into their genetic structure which display complete acquiescence and conformity. Humanoids are the symbolic representation of human identity in postmodern fictional and cultural narratives. Late capitalism through corporocracy, consumerism and technoscience inculcate an implosion of human identity to ensure uniformity, predictability and conformity.

Keywords: Postmodern culture, Dystopia, Identity Implosion, Posthumanism, Simulacra, Technoscience

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Human identity has been a momentous intellectual, philosophical, religious and sociopolitical concern over the times. Renaissance provided the necessary impetus to shift the view of identity from a theocentric to homocentric model which gave birth to the cult of individualism and which had been a vital tenet of Renaissance, Enlightenment philosophy and Modernity. Hence, the individual subjectivity became the nucleus of cultural and scientific productions during these periods. However, postmodern culture marks a shift from individualism to centralized identity politics under the covert as well as overt assemblage and supervision of corporocracy and technoscience which have decentered the human subject. The central impact of this relatively new identity politics is the dissolution of human subjectivity. Internet, social media, media consumption devices and simulacra have played a tarnished role in the implosion of human identity in postmodern space and time. Implosion implies an inward violent collapse, compression or reductionism. It implies a sense of control, hegemony and exploitation. In this regard, identity implosion points toward the inward collapse, compression, or reductionism of essential human features such as imagination, sense of beauty, spirituality, emotions, eroticism, rebelliousness etc., which define human subjectivity and humanness. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner point out that globalized obsession with scientific development, political hegemony, and commercial growth have put the ethical, philosophical, spiritual and ecological wisdom of civilizations and cultures in serious threats of extinction. Similarly, technoscience and late capitalism have created diverse mutations in human identity, nature, and lived experience of everyday life (256). Though, fragmentation, gender politics, patriarchy, racism and colonial politics have been prompting different identity crises, but in posthuman scenario the very identity of human as a species is in potential danger. Posthumanism, as Lars Schmeink argues, engages the contemporary society from a posthumanist outlook. It takes into consideration not only the technological changes to the ontology of human existence but also considers the consequences “social, political and technological changes have wrought on the conceptualization of the human” (Schmeink 41).

Dystopic representations of posthumanism project a technoscientific cultural scenario which is redefining and reshaping the traditional narratives of human nature and its essence. These narratives portray that corporocracy, biotechnology and genetic engineering are altering previous concepts of human identity, culture and society. They project the age of posthumanism where humanity have been superseded by genetically

altered humanoids and clones. Daniel Dinello points out that posthuman evolution is a beginning of a long-awaited decline of humans as species. The mad scientists, clones, humanoids, cyborgs and genetically mutated animals and monsters in dystopian narratives express the technophobic fears of losing essential human identity, independence, values, emotions and lives to technoscientific paraphernalia. The significance of subjectivity and self becomes central in posthumanism. The present-day technologies are blurring the divide between humans and machines. Dinello further elaborates that rapid developments of posthuman technologies will have negative impact on the world, particularly in the context of war and profit. Technological superiority of machines reduces the value of human individuality, physical bodies, consciousness and power of the mind which can be felt intuitively. These fears are augmented by corporate hegemony and corporate funding of technologies. Dinello points out that dystopian fiction puts forward an inherently totalitarian view of robotics, computer and biological technology which enhance government and corporate power (203). This refers to the profit-oriented mindset of corporates and abdication of reformative responsibilities by the governments. Dinello, Best and Kellner and Francis Fukuyama voice their dystopic concerns about the technoscientific progress in general and genetic engineering in particular. Dinello points out that instead of enhancing the body by replacing flesh with machine, biotech scientists aim to perfect the body through genetic manipulation. In this context, biology-based technologies are considered controversial because these unleash too much power to change the essential status of human beings as natural species. The posthumanist discourse has utopian as well as dystopian poles. For instance, genetic manipulation can help to eradicate certain diseases and biological complications, yet it is feared that in the pursuit of profit making and hegemony these technologies will lose their true potential (14). Schmeink points out that dystopian view of posthumanism displays the "loss of human nature through technologization and cyborgization" (38). Similarly, Fukuyama also reveals his fears that contemporary biotechnology has the potential to alter human nature and push humanity into a posthuman stage of history. Schmeink considers the tools of genetic engineering, such as DNA splicing, germline engineering and mapping of human genome, have the potential to biologically manufacture genetically enhanced posthumans. Though, theoretically it seems a utopian prospect, but in the politics of capitalistic hegemony and corporocracy it is dystopic because it opens window for all sort of tinkering with human subject. The worst aspect, according to Dinello, is the

consideration of human beings as a biological object and a store house of tissues, organs, cells and genes which can be manipulated and reshaped (186). Along with the objectification of humans, Dinello refers to eugenics movement in Europe and America in 1920s which advanced the ideas of engineering better people and sterilizing the poor and the worse, resultantly making biotechnology a tool of social control and political domination. Dinello discusses Aldous Huxley's vision of a eugenic civilization in *Brave New World* whose individuality is suppressed by state-controlled reproduction, genetic engineering, euphoric drugs, implanted electrodes, in vitro fertilization and hormonal injections. As a satire on utopian thinking, Dinello elaborates that dystopian novels depict a world free from madness, disease, depression, boredom and social conflict but profoundly monotonous and repulsive in its repressive control (190). This repressive control and monotony refer to the implosion of human identity in this paper. The beauty of human life lies in its diversity and uniqueness. Though, there are certain chaotic elements in human nature, yet no tangible effort is made to channelize the essential chaos into orderliness. Instead of rejoicing the difference and diversity of human subject, all efforts are being utilized to ensure conformity, predictability and elitism at social as well as the genomic level of human beings in the disguise of social development and genetic enhancement, respectively. Dystopic futures show that ultimate beneficiary of biotechnology, genetic engineering and other technological advancements are the corporations and the wealthy elites. Biological themes in dystopian narratives reflect the current fears that include cloning, eugenics, genetic engineering, commodification of human body, experimental hazards and genetic imperialism practiced by transnational corporates. In this way, dystopia serves as a critique of biotechnology by voicing the possible negative sociopolitical consequences that serves the interests of mad bio-scientists, corporate elites and status quo. Dinello warns that posthuman technology impends to reengineer humanity into a new biomechanical species by exterminating the current one. The technophobic devotion of dystopia refers to the inherent structure of technology which demands suppression of human extemporaneity and conformity to its rudiments of order and proficiency. Dystopia signifies that implosion of human identity will sabotage essential human values like emotions, empathy and intuitiveness because these technologies strengthen social stratification, surveillance, absolutism, genetic discernment, environmental dilapidation, mind control and obliteration (273). Similarly, dystopian narratives also explicate the sinister alliances of corporate powers,

militarism and political agendas which exhibit markets monopoly, corporate manipulation, infiltration in other countries and monetary gains from wars. Dinello further explains that pessimistic outlook of dystopian fiction illuminates the darker aspects of technology, corporate hegemony, commodification of human society and identity. In this way, dystopian fiction argues for a progressive political agenda by confronting the ideology of techno-despotism (275).

Human identity has been an important subject in anthropological debates, historical discourses, religious narratives and cultural principles. Human subjectivity and consciousness are considered cultural products as these play a vital role in structuring human identity. However, at the same time, individual diversity, intuitiveness, processing of social data, and physicality also play significant role in shaping human identity. The recent progression in biotechnology and genetic engineering prompt a shift in the previous understanding of human identity, philosophic humanism and the narratives of reality. Posthuman identities and human interaction with posthumans serve an insight to understand the complex web of human identity as well as the dystopic nature of the contemporaneous progression in genetic engineering. The representation of posthuman in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* explicates a critique of postmodern technoscience and the systemic maneuvers of postmodern technoculture which aim at the inculcation of identity implosion in postmodern subjects. Atwood has depicted the posthuman identities through the fictional representation of Crakers. The depiction is a fine example of Socratic irony and critique. It serves a dual purpose, on the one hand, it points out the genetic control and dystopian genetic engineering, while on the other hand, it brings to light the darker side of human endeavor which has caused wars, racism, greed, hatred, violence, exploitation and selfishness. The dystopian critique manifests the utopian impulse in the representation of human evils which Crake had eliminated in the DNA of these humanoids. Crake and his team at RejoovenEsense engineered humanoids by imploding their DNA. Crake used to call them floor models which were like the furniture models put on display. Crake's character can be equitably called, in words of Best and Kellner, guilty of the Frankenstein Syndrome which they defined as an obsession to control the process of natural selection, quest of knowledge for the sake of knowledge and an aversion from ethical, political and social consideration for human life. This refers to Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* which was the first critique of the destructive aspects of modern science and technology. Though, this novel was published in 1818, yet its appeal

is equally valid in the contemporary dystopian novels which project the apocalyptic futures. Best and Kellner exquisitely sum up the lesson from *Frankenstein* "...that the power of modern science and technology — if divorced from an ethical sensibility and insight into the contingency and unpredictability of complex systems — may bring disastrous results to human beings, other life forms, and the Earth as a whole" (158). In *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood portrays the regressive gene splicing and creation of unnatural animals. The creation of Crakers, in this regard, crosses all the boundaries as Crake had taken the role of nature by being a human. He is the fictional reincarnation of Frankenstein.

Jimmy, who is the narrator of the novel as well as childhood friend of Crake, was assigned the job of marketing manager for his BlyssPlus Project. At RejoovenEsense, a powerful corporate, Crake introduced Jimmy to the Crakers and told him the characteristics features of these posthuman subjects. Jimmy was dazed by the perfection of Crakers' physical appearance. They were naked but they did not have any moral scruples or self-consciousness. They were of all colors and extremely beautiful. They looked like mannequins. Crake had been designing them according to the environment where their essential identity would be no more different than other forms of life. They were supposed to fulfill a systematic cycle of life based on natural phenomena which follow a uniform, predictable and adapted pattern of life. Crake informed him that they were logical chain of development in the field of genetic engineering and biotechnology. The thorough analysis of DNA and splicing technologies paved way for these products. It took them seven strenuous years to produce these results. Crake had engineered rapid growth in their DNA. At the age of seven, they looked fully grown human beings. They were to die at the age of thirty without being old and sick. There would be no old age and all the subsequent anxieties with it. He had not given them the concept of death. There would be no wastage of time in bringing them up. There would be no education for them. Crake's concept of immortality was the absence of the fear of death. Though, he was planning the termination of humans, yet he did not disclose this to Jimmy. Rather, he told him the benefits of genetic control and how his investors along the world were interested in his project. He bragged that whole population could be created having predesigned features. Beauty and docility would be in high demands as several world leaders have shown interest in the creation of docile subjects. The Crakers have ultraviolet resistant skin, an innate insect repellent system, matchless capability to digest raw plants and innate immunity from

microbes. Crake was excited at the marvelous achievement of his team. He boasted that they have altered the ancient primate brain whose destructive features were responsible for the world's existing sickness. For instance, racism had been eliminated in these model groups. They do not develop superiority or inferiority complexes on the basis of skin colors. He has altered the bonding mechanism in them. They do not develop relationships on the basis of likes and dislikes. They would not be able to establish their hierarchies because they do not have the complex neural systems which would have created such patterns. They are neither hunter nor agrarian, therefore, there would be no feuds and greed for territoriality. The greed and desire to own lands had plagued mankind for centuries. Their food is very simple as they only eat leaves, roots and a few berries which would be in ample supply. Besides, they could recycle their waste as well. Similarly, sexuality would not be torment for them. The chemical turbulence caused by sexual hormones would be absent in them. They would be like most of the mammals who come to heat at regular intervals. There would be no need for marriages, divorces and family trees as these new people would not inherit anything. They are exquisitely adapted to their habitat; therefore, they would not need clothing, housing and tools. They would not need any symbolism such as race, civilization, kingdoms, gods and money to run their lives. For Crake, they were the art of possibilities. These were the best possible alternative for the defective, quarrelsome, greedy and violent mankind. He had also simplified their language system. They speak when they want to say something. Their speech was plain and blunt. They did not know anything about euphemism and evasion. They do not have any concept of imagination, philosophical reflections, critical analyses, and symbolic interpretation of life and nature. He indoctrinated a new linguistics which defies the structuralist system of language. For him, the sign is equal to signifier which must be in direct relationship with the object. He wanted to end the unending chain of signified because these create complication in human subjectivity. "It was one of Crake's rules that no name could be chosen for which a physical equivalent — even stuffed, even skeletal — could not be demonstrated" (Atwood 8). Crake was of the view that Man is the ultimate problem of this world and due to his evil nature, he had destroyed the balance of life. Crake used to mock human ingenuity, curiosity, instinctive mechanism and acquired intelligence. He labeled human intellect to monkey curiosity. There is no way to reform mankind, therefore, they must be eliminated. These were the main features of posthuman Crakers. Though, they seem perfect, but their posthuman imploded subjectivity offers a critique of the cultural

implosion in the current techno as well as late capitalistic culture which also implode human identity by sophisticated ephemeral simulacra, commodification, marketing, social media craze, video games, pornography, objectification, gender politics, consumerism, and corporatization of society. The cultural logic of late capitalism coupled with internet, social media craze, media consumption devices and the culture of the image have imploded human identity which is reflected through a general depthlessness encompassing the human social experience.

Crakers also represent the culture of the image or simulacra. Their perfection brings to mind the images which are edited and photoshopped for creating an immense demand for certain products. However, their beauty was not skin deep. Though, they were extraordinarily beautiful, yet they were like an image which lacked substance. Jimmy considered the Crakers' women as the embodiment of human perfection. They are of various heights, colors, and features, and they all were well proportioned. They did not have any human imperfection. Their teeth, skin tones and muscles were perfect. None of them had any extra ripples of fats around their stomachs. "They look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program" (Atwood 115). However, their beauty and perfection did not arouse Jimmy. He recalled his memories and cherished the beauty of human imperfection. The diversity and imperfection are the major features of human phenomena. Crake had replaced them with uniformity and predictability. He had deprived them of the aesthetic sense and concept of beauty. These men and women were not aware of their beauty. They did not know anything of human emotions and feelings which are associated with happiness and misery. Their activities did not have any creative potential because they had been deprived of human intuitiveness, the will to do good and evil, and relative purpose of life. For them, life was not a concept, it was the fulfillment of biological routine. Jimmy reflects their ingenuousness and raises questions about Crake's aesthetics and rationale for this creation at the cost of mankind. Though, he had not programmed them to believe in fables, yet, they have developed certain love for stories. Crakers used to bring a grilled fish every week as Jimmy had taught them. They were not programmed to kill any species because they were wired to love and respect all forms of life. But he had improvised a fiction that it was a decree of Crake that he must be offered a fish every week. They used to come in a procession to offer him this offering. On every fish day, they used to listen the story of chaos from Jimmy as a payment for the fish which they had killed for

him. They were always interested in listening Crake's deeds during Chaos. He narrates them the story that in the chaos people were killing other people and Children of Oryx. They were doing all kind of bad things. So, Oryx and Crake cleared the chaos and created this emptiness for their children. The ending would amuse them, and they would adulate Crake for his benevolence, though, it used to annoy Jimmy. After all, their god was his fabrication. Crake was against any notion of god because it leads to the power politics which is one of the biggest miseries of human world.

The dystopian critique serves as a warning for the absurd social reality of postmodern culture. The cultural logic of late capitalism proliferates absurdity and depthlessness in social experience as the sole purpose of this logic is the intensification of economic growth at any cost. It does not consider the ethical deliberations which vouch for the sanity of social reality. Crake's fatal attack on mankind through BlyssPlus is an obvious instance in this regard. The interminable sexual orgies, endless libido and carefree sex were the motives behind this scientific marvel. The successful marketing and the demand of the pill showed the eternal degeneration of humans as well as scientific knowledge. The absence of moral values and vigilance on the technological progression provided space for Crake to enact his penultimate act. The regressive social experience, greed for profits and violent aspects of humanity were enough factors to justify his plan to terminate mankind. He did not consider the factors which had formulated these human actions. He did not consider the impacts of postmodern cultural products, regressive education, social stratification and cultural implosion in formulating the present identity of mankind. The identity is a cultural product, which can be altered by reforming the culture. But he was the product of postmodern technoculture, where humans are not sovereign subjects, but products and products are replaced if they started to malfunction. The Crakers were the alternative products. At symbolic level, the imploded identities are the requirement of late capitalistic culture. The cultural logic of late capitalism does not require any reflective, philosophic and critical understanding from its subjects. They must not ask questions; they must consume whatever is marketed to them; they must perform the absurd daily grinds seriously; they must not have any spirituality; they must be happy in aimless as well as meaningless sexual relationships; they must base their relationships on physical grounds; there must not be any beauty which is skin deep; there must not be any social bonding; there must not be any ethics, morality and social empathy. These were

the features which Crake indoctrinated into the Crakers which were to be the alternative of ailing mankind. Jimmy describes their daily grind. They start their morning by performing the ritual of pissing to mark their territory and it is performed twice a day. Crake had given special features to their piss which used to keep Bobkittens, Pigoons, Rakunks and Wolvogs away from their territory. He took this inspiration from Canids and Mustelids. Jimmy relates the seriousness of their ritual: "Their expressions are grave, as befits the seriousness of their task. They remind Jimmy of his father heading out the door in the morning, briefcase in hand, an earnest aiming-for-the-target frown between his eyes" (Atwood 182). They urinated with extreme concentration, so that, the urine may land on the exact place. These men were also smooth skinned, well-built and well-proportioned. They look like affable statues. Crake had also inculcated the quality of purring in Crakers to treat the incidental wounds and cuts. He took the idea from cats which had this self-healing mechanism. He "discovered that cat family purred at the same frequency as the ultrasound used to bone fractures and skin lesions..." (Atwood 184). Jimmy saw some of the women and a man purring a child who had been bitten by a Bobkitten. What surprised Jimmy was the invocation which one of the women suggested that they must apologize and request Oryx to stop their Children to bite them. It was against Crake's principles. For Crake, god was a cluster of neurons, therefore, he could not permanently delete this concept. He used to say, "It had been a difficult problem, though: take out too much in that area and you got a zombie or psychopath" (Atwood 186). He had not anticipated them to converse with the invisible. Jimmy used to get a smug smile when Crake was proven wrong. Similarly, Crake had modelled their digestive system on the pattern of Leporidae, hares and rabbits. The Crakers used to excrete in caecotrophs which could be used for eating as well. Jimmy found it disgusting but Crake highlighted that the caecotrophs were enriched with vitamin B1 and other minerals which would be essential for them. Similarly, their mating system also explicates the reductionism and implosion which had been inculcated in their genetic material. The mating was a rare enough occasion for the Crakers. "Crake had worked out the numbers, and had decreed that once every three years per female was more than enough" (Atwood 193). Crake had simplified the sexual system. He had removed the emotional attraction and sexual hormones which influence and are influenced by human subjectivity. There was no unrequited love in these new subjects; no place for disillusioned lust, and above all no more shadow between the desire and its fulfillment. The abdomen and buttocks of woman in heat would turn blue which would

serve as a signal for the mates. The blue tissues and the pheromones released by woman would stimulate the male. It is not that all the time they used to think about woman genitals. "Courtship begins at the first whiff, the first faint blush of azure, with the males presenting flowers to the females — just as male penguins present round stones..." (Atwood 194). The males would sing for the woman. Their penises would turn blue to match the abdomens of the woman. They would wave their penises to the woman who would choose four flowers. This selection would disperse the sexual ardor of the unsuccessful candidates and they would disperse with no hard feelings. The four males and a woman would perform sex turn by turn. "Then, when the blue of her abdomen has reached its deepest shade, the female and her quartet find a secluded spot and go at it until the woman becomes pregnant and her blue colouring fades" (Atwood 194). The three standing men would guard and sing while the fourth one copulates, and this process will continue turn by turn. Crake had equipped these men and woman with ultra-strong genital organs so that they may cope with such marathons. Sex was not a secretive and enigmatic ritual in this new system, therefore, there was no need to perform it in secretive ways. It was not subject to any loathing and moral scruples. It was more like an athletic demonstration without any concept of victory and defeat. Jimmy compares this system and recalls the degenerated sexual system of mankind. He feels relax that in this new system there would be no more prostitution, sexual abuse of children, rapes, haggling over price, pimps, and sex slaves. "Under the old dispensation, sexual competition had been relentless and cruel: for every pair of happy lovers there was a dejected onlooker, the one excluded" (Atwood 195). However, the portrayal of Crakers' sexuality depict the ultimate implosion of human subjective sexuality. It is undeniable fact that human social experience is replete with sexual perversions of all kind and sexual exploitation is one of the demeaning traits of mankind, yet sexuality is also the beauty of human phenomenon. Humans possess the ability to discern between need and pleasure as well as between right and wrong, but they do not use these faculties. Sexual disappointments lead to drugs, drinking and death. The representation of imploded sexuality foregrounds the complicated issues of human sexuality. Jimmy recalled one of his discussions with Crake when he was student at Watson-Crick Institute. Crake was of the opinion that human sexuality is stupidly complicated. There are biological mismatches, hormonal misalignment and fickleness of human passion of love. Humans are imperfectly monogamous. They would avoid sexual torment if they would inculcate "guilt free promiscuity" or cyclic sexuality as it is

in many mammals. Jimmy challenged his scheme of courtship behavior by pointing out the thrill and excitement of choosing a partner and loving a person, but he was rebuffed by Crake. According to Crake, humans were faulty hormonal robots. The art and poetry were about sexual frustration which would be of no use if humans have simplified sexuality. Jimmy protested: "When any civilization is dust and ashes, art is all that's left over. Images, words, music. Imagination structures. Meaning — human meaning, that is — is defined by them" (Atwood 197). This argument was again rejected because Crake considered it useless. For him archeology and poetry were not different subjects. He considered art and poetry as the amplification of human emotions which served only a biological purpose. By correcting human biology, there would be no need for any amplification. Crake's argument had a basic flaw that he could not discern between animals and humans. Humans cannot be defined on scientific grounds as their nervous system is way advanced and complicated in comparison with animals. However, Crake was already in posthuman mindset. The objective attitude and aversion for human imperfections have made him cynic. He had lost all sense of human subjectivity and diversity. He wanted to indoctrinate uniformity, predictability and conformity in human genes. Postmodern technoculture aims to inculcate these traits at social level. He could not formulate any logical reasoning to reform the contingent human imperfections. Instead, he had a plan to alternate human biological functions. Crake's indifferent discourse, and Crakers are fine example of identity implosion at genetic level. Crake's discourse resounds the Frankenstein Syndrome.

Atwood depicts the process of identity implosion in the representation of genetically modified humanoids. Genetic engineering and biotechnologies have become more lethal than nuclear technology in postmodern culture. The cultural logic of late capitalism has put forwarded the dystopian narratives of regressive genetic engineering because this logic follows the hegemonic enclosure. The transnational corporates possess immense financial budget that they can influence governments to implement their agendas. The corporatization of science and technology have imploded their progressive character. In Atwood's novel, the genetic implosion has been portrayed by indoctrinating uniformity, conformity and predictability in Crakers. They have been deprived of essential humanness. Though, they look like humans, but they do not have human subjectivity. These humanoids have been deprived of reflective and creative faculties. There is no essential difference between them and animals. They lack aesthetic sense,

emotions, and human empathy. They portray the other of human beings as postmodern culture seek such kind of subjects so that the powerful may continue their hold on the world.

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