

**Echo of the Ruins: A Social-Ecological Reading of Margaret  
Atwood's *Oryx and Crake***

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**Abstract:**

The Present Study offers a social ecological reading of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) through the lens of Murray Bookchin's social ecological theory. The analysis of the novel highlights two significant aspects of the writer's artistic accomplishments. First, Atwood creates a dystopian world of the novel, where Snowman finds himself in a genetically engineered, post-apocalyptic world where capitalism has astounded the universe and affected every single detail of human life. Second, through Bookchin social ecological perspective and through exploring relevant contemporary concerns including, animal abuse, women's oppression and subjugation, the novel speculates a future destroyed by the unchecked exploitation of biotechnology and unbridled corporate greed that dominates society, leading to environmental collapse in the shape of species extinction, climate change, diminishing resources, failed genetic engineering and diseases.

**Key words:** Social –Ecology, Bookchin, Snowman, Crake, apocalypse, Oryx, Crake.

## 1. Introduction

The present paper traces Murray Bookchin's social ecological theory as reflected in the Canadian novelist, poet, literary critic and environmentalist Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003). The American theorist, author, historian and political philosopher Murray Bookchin (1921-2006), in his books *Our Synthetic Environment* (1962), *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1971), *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), and *Urbanization Without Cities* (1987), reflects unique social ecological ideas as well as revolutionary attitudes towards the degradation of the natural and social world (Best, 1998). He fused ecology with anarchism in a notion of anti-anarchism that goes against all kinds of oppression including capitalism, the state, organized religion, patriarchy, and others (Amster, 2018). At some point in the sixties, Bookchin was trying to mend the relationship between humanity and nature by concentrating on creating a free society based on ecological principles. As a result, he has proposed a technology with small solar and wind installations, utilizing local "natural resources" created by decentralized communities. However, he has realized that such measures are "merely cosmetics" and fail to address the ecological crisis that necessitates a "radical change in society." (Bookchin, 1991). Something led him to make use of his early training of his intellectuality on Marx and his ideas. He found out that the origin of environmental pollution is, in fact, social: "Environmental issues had developed in my mind as social issues, and problems of natural ecology had become problems of 'social ecology'" (1991, p.1) For that reason, he proposed his theory of social ecology in which he wished to bring the attention to the matter that environmental destruction is caused by hierarchal and domination structures among human kinds.

Through the creation of technological and biological engineered world feuled by capitalism and corporate greed, Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) depicts a dystopian sphere where a deadly disease drains the population of the earth and Snowman or Jimmy, the only possible human survivor, is struggling to endure a world shattered by human greed, a world that despite its exceedingly scientific development, lost its basic elements of existence. In the sense of Murray Bookchin's theory that the origin of environmental pollution is, in fact, social, *Oryx and Crake* through the character of Jimmy or Snowman, who has lost his beloved Oryx and his best friend and the one responsible of this destruction, Crake, is a picture of a hostile environment degraded by social conditions that humanity, though furtively, is already undergoing.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Murray Bookchin's thoughts on the theory of social ecology could be summarized in six essential aspects. The First aspect discusses hierarchy and domination that mark the main argument in this theory. In the Second aspect, Bookchin calls for decentralization and direct democracy, and the idea of a "nonauthoritarian Commune composed of communes" arises. It stands for a society where power is decentralized, communities operate democratically and members of such commune live harmoniously with each other and with nature (Bookchin, 1991). The third aspect reflects Bookchin's philosophy of "dialectical naturalism" to form an interconnection of nature and society. This philosophy recognizes humanity's place within nature in the context of accumulative and developmental processes, not as static ideas of interconnection: "Biological nature is above all the cumulative evolution of ever-differentiating and increasingly complex life forms with a vibrant and interactive inorganic world." (Bookchin, 1995, pp. 21-29). The Fourth aspect explains capitalism in modern days not as an economy but as a society. In the past, the mentality of competitiveness and grow-or-die philosophy was restricted to commerce and industry. However, according to Bookchin, nowadays, this mentality has percolated into the daily lives of familial, personal, sexual, religious, and community relationships. The Fifth aspect, Bookchin advocates what he calls "libertarian municipalism." He supports "libertarian municipalism" not because it "advances a new politics of popular control over the material means of life.", but because it offers solutions to the current political and economic problems, also ecological ones (Bookchin, 1991). Finally, Bookchin seeks to reconcile humanity with nature by creating an "ecological society". This society, based on ecological principles, replaces hierarchy with interdependence, characterized by harmony and cooperation among humans and between human society and nature.

Margaret Atwood debates in her novel, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), an entirely collapsed world due to scientific discoveries and unpredictable climate changes. The novel starts with Snowman alone in a post-apocalyptic world caused by humanity's hubris in the form of the JUVE (Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary) which annihilated the human race. Through his shifting memories, Snowman gives an unblemished depiction of the pre-apocalyptic world in which he has lived with his family. Before the apocalypse, the society of the novel is fragmented in which gated compounds protect the elites with scientific capacities. In contrast, normal people live outside in the poor and messy pleeblands. Crake, a scientist belonging to the elite and Snowman's friend since childhood, is determined to replace humanity

by unleashing a pandemic so that his genetically modified beings can thrive. The novel speculates a future destroyed by the unchecked exploitation of biotechnology by corporate greed that dominates society, leading to environmental collapse represented by extinction of species, climate change, diminishing resources, and failed genetic engineering. The main struggle of the novel is between the ideologies of Snowman who defends the humanistic view of the world and Crake who stands for the technological development of the world.

In 1988, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) found that the planet is likely to warm by over two degrees Celsius, leading to ecological chaos and rendering environmental conditions unable to support life. One factor contributing to climate change is consumers failing to conduct proper cost-benefit analyses of their purchases. Consumers must recognize that life on Earth cannot survive if costs outweigh benefits. Consequently, capitalism currently evaluates everything, including natural capital, in monetary terms (Park, 2015). The term capitalism emerged in the mid-nineteenth century. Harald Wolf, a University of Ulm professor, defines it as: “Capitalism is a concept of motion that expresses the dynamic of the modern economy: its tendency of unlimited growth, rapid increase, and incessant mobility and its society-shaping drive of melting all that is solid into the air.” (2004, p.76). Atwood, a prominent figure in Canadian literature, uses capitalism to express her environmental concerns. The settings of her fiction extend beyond Canadian borders, highlighting the urgency of global environmental issues. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, extreme capitalism and climate change lead to environmental devastation, paving the way for peculiar biotechnological experimentation (Grimbeek, 2017).

The use of science fiction and utopian or dystopian writings to critique capitalism possibly started with *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More. Generally, in contemporary dystopian visualization, capitalism or “Big Businesses” takes the place of Orwell’s Big Brother – a term originating from his seminal novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1948), the best example of dystopian literature symbolizes monopolistic control and pervasive surveillance (Shaalan, 2010). In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Atwood explores the many threats that can be dangerous to the individual, group, and global survival; she is aiming to reflect contemporary anxiety about cooperate domination. The most prevalent is capitalism, which is a profit-driven and distinctive value system (Bedford, 2015). Murray Bookchin in *Urbanization Without Cities* (1921) comments on capitalism: “capitalism, conceived not simply as an economic system structured around commercial transactions or trade but, in its truly modern sense, as an accumulative

system (what Marx called “expanding reproduction”) in which industrial expansion became an end in itself” (p. 191).

Capitalism has produced a new social condition. After the Second World War, capitalism undertook a fundamental transformation, as it was no longer concerned with old social issues that demanded improving wages, hours, and work conditions. Instead, it creates environmental, gender, hierarchical, civic, and democratic issues (Bookchin, 2015). Moreover, the current social situation replaces the simple old class division between workers and capitalists with a new hierarchical one that includes managers, bureaucrats, and scientists who possess powers without owning capital. These groups complicated the class-based view of society and “they blur the conflict between wage labor and capital that was once so central, clearly defined, and militantly waged by traditional socialists.” (Bookchin, 2015, p.5). Reason, science, and technology’s noble goals have been transformed into means of exploitation and control:

capitalism warped these goals, reducing reason to a harsh industrial rationalism focused on efficiency rather than a high-minded intellectuality; that it used science to quantify the world and dualize thought and being; that it used technology to exploit nature, including human nature—all of these distortions have their roots in society and in ideologies that seek to dominate humanity as well as the natural world. (Bookchin, 1989, p.166)

The theory of social ecology by Bookchin proposes that domination among humans through a system of hierarchies is the main factor in causing ecological destruction, as he wonders: “if the domination of humans by humans gave rise to the notion of dominating nature.” (1991, p. 66). In the post-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake* (2003), this starts around the year 2025, Snowman, possibly the only human survivor in the novel, struggles in a destroyed world created by Crake. Atwood pictures the environment through Snowman. He not only describes the environment after the apocalypse but also, through flashbacks, he displays the degradation that has started earlier, particularly later in the 1990s (Marks, 2014).

In *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (2011), Atwood combines utopia and dystopia to create Ustopia. She views these worlds as interconnected. Ustopia, defined elsewhere, describes a storyteller who embarks on two journeys- one to another place and the other to report back. While traveling through space can be challenging, writers often find traveling through time, especially to the future, easier. Thus, no genre examines information systems like SF, particularly ustopia. Atwood suggests dystopia and utopia are interdependent concepts, each containing potential for the other

(Atwood, 2011). This characteristic in ustopia is used so the narrator, Jimmy (now Snowman) can easily revisit the past.

### **3. Discussion: Social and Environmental Collapse**

As the novel begins, Snowman portrays the sunrise in a catastrophic world as “lit now with a rosy, deadly glow” (Atwood, 2003, p.3), wondering how this color feels tender after everything. Snowman lives on the beach, taking shelter under the shade of the trees and “wrapped in his decaying sheet ... because of the punishing sun” (Atwood, 2003, p. 6), which is a strong metaphor used by Atwood to portray environmental climate change. He wears a filthy bed sheet and grieves the death of both his beloved Oryx and his childhood friend Crake. Snowman, once called Jimmy, remembers the days when he was a little boy five or six years old. What he recalls is the big bonfire, “the bonfire was an enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs.” (Atwood, 2003, pp.15-16). These animals are burned to prevent a disease from spreading as Jimmy’s father, who is the best genographer in his field and works for OrganInc Farms explains, “This bug is something new though. We’ve got the bioprint.” (Atwood, 2003, p.19). The potentially engineered virus uncovers how profit-motivated corporations are dominating the environment. Illustrated by the speech of Jimmy’s father and the man with him who says “Drive up the prices ... [to] Make a killing on their own stuff, that way.” (Atwood, 2003, p.18). These corporations, one of which is the OrganInc Compound, are willing to create a crisis to increase financial gain. It is important to pay attention to the confusion of Jimmy’s father as he wonders “how did they do it? ... I thought our people had us sealed up tight as a drum” (Atwood, 2003, p.18) and how he anticipated “It could’ve been bribery,” (Atwood, 2003, p.19) not only bribery is the problem but also a lax in security measures. From the conversation between Jimmy’s father and the man, it is clear that they live in a highly protected place secured with a closed system and a strict control over their biotechnological resources. Yet this measure of protecting their interests fails to maintain security and prevent harm because of the corruption of its people. It is worth mentioning that in the novel, there are multiple institutions of technopower. Jimmy’s family and the other families of the workers of OrganInc Farms live in the OrganInc Compound, a place filled with technological advancements in which technocrat elites live and use these technologies to control society and retain the authority to discipline its residents. This compound is a capitalist one because it is fake, masking its profit-driven practices by pretending to benefit humanity (Sharma, 2023).

His father moved from the Modules to this compound because it is dangerous to go through the city. Jimmy explains that he has “never been to the city. He’d only seen it on Tv” (Atwood, 2003, p.27). The cities that the compound and its people are separated from and do not visit are called pleeblands. Living in the compounds reflects a social divide between those who work in the biotech corporation and those outside it: “Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, ... Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside.” (Atwood, 2003, p.28). Jimmy’s father regards the Compounds as the castles of the past. The system of hierarchy sought to protect the privileged, such as kings and knights, while the other was excluded and oppressed. In the novel, the Compound is the same, except the privileged are the corporate elite. Bookchin would categorize the compounds as a modern display of hierarchical domination, creating inequality between those inside and outside. Accordingly, he suggests that these systems of domination are the reason behind environmental decay, because they will separate themselves from the outside world by prioritizing power and security over equality and sustainability.

In this compound, where Jimmy’s father works, experiments on animals take place in the OrganInc Farms, and it all happens for the sake of material gain, although they explain it to the public otherwise. The most recent example is the project everyone calls pigoon and is known officially as “*sus multiorganifer*”:

The goal of the pigoon project was to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host – organs that would transplant smoothly and avoid rejection, ... A rapid-maturity gene was spliced in ... , and now they were perfecting a pigoon that could grow five or six kidneys at a time. (Atwood, 2003, p.22)

Many invested their money in this project even though it manipulates nature. People with money invested in this project permit themselves to exploit the pigs, reducing them to an instrument to serve the human need of profit. By doing this, they overlook the ethical consideration and ecological harmony that Bookchin is calling for. Bookchin’s theory sees that this manipulation of nature, engineering pigoons to become custom-made organ donors, emerges from a society built on anthropocentric, hierarchical values. The company’s marketing materials obscure the ethical dilemmas involved in using animals - and possibly humans - through cloning or “illegal baby orchards” (Atwood, 2003, p.23) in an attempt to reassure the uneasy serving as a means to an end. In Bookchin’s view, such practices

reflect a broader systemic issue; a society that views living beings, whether animals or humans, as resources to be exploited because of fundamental social hierarchies that place human desires above environmental well-being.

The destruction of the environment does not happen during and after the apocalypse only, however, it has been there in the world of the novel since Jimmy's childhood: "the coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes, and meat became harder to come by". (Atwood, 2003, p. 24). The post-apocalypse environmental degradation is portrayed through the hot hours during the day, especially at noon:

Noon is the worst, with its glare and humidity. At about eleven o'clock Snowman retreats back into the forest, ... because the evil rays bounce off the water and get at him even if he's protected from the sky ... he'd made himself a lean-to, using fallen branches and a roll of duct tape and a plastic trap he'd found in the trunk of a smashed-up car. (Atwood, 2003, p. 37)

Unfortunately, ants attack him the first night that he puts the cot legs into four tin cans filled with water, attempting to put a stop to the ants. This marks the attempts of the protagonist to survive in a harsh world. While he is trying to proclaim control by fending off the ants, he is left to struggle with another thing which is "the build-up of hot, damp air under the trap was too uncomfortable: at night, at ground level, with no breeze, the humidity felt like a hundred per cent: his breath fogged the plastic." (Atwood, 2003, p.38). It is clear here that Snowman is struggling to coexist with nature, which is trying to resist changes imposed on it by humans. The hot weather due to environmental decay causes Snowman's physical as well as mental decay. Atwood describes his physical decay: "He's sweating so hard he can almost hear it; ... He appears to be attractive to beetles. Beetles, flies, bees, as if he's dead meat, or one of the nastier flowers." (Atwood, 2003, p.39). Snowman is overwhelmed by the heat to the degree that he cannot recognize the dripping of his sweat from the crawling of insects. Also, the insects he attracts are often associated with decay and death especially the use of the comparison to "dead meat" and "the nastier flowers" Atwood here is drawing attention to human fragility in a hostile place.

Hostile environment often enhances human fragility and at the same time prompts human resilience. According to Mahmood and Taha, children who live in a hostile environment cannot develop a healthy self-image (2025, p.61) The extremely hot weather

emphasizes the limitations of Snowman's body. The despair he faces as he struggles to survive heat and humidity, and his incapability to recognize the dripping of his sweat from the crawling of insects truly reflect his mental fragility. The 'dead meat' and 'the nastier flowers' are but a picture of a life easily extinguished in such environment. Through Bookchin's concept of dialectical naturalism, which stresses energetic bond between nature and society, a hostile environment often enhances human fragility and promotes resilience. In other words, ecological hostility may threaten human systems, simultaneously, it encourages them to advance toward a more reasonable and maintainable form of organization. (Bookchin, 1990).

As for the mental decay "From nowhere, a word appears: *Mesozoic*. He can see the word, he can hear the word, but he can't reach the word. He can't attach anything to it." (Atwood, 2003, p.39) this can be interpreted as a breakdown in Snowman's ability to tie up or understand language and its context. Despite his ability to see and hear the word, he cannot assign a meaning to it. He assumes this is happening because of the heat "It's only the heat," (Atwood, 2003, p. 39) and he would be fine when it rains. The chaos in which Snowman is living leaves in him a desire to order his existence as a sign of human resilience to survive. His desire for order is reflected in his longing to play chess with himself, to make a diary like "captain of ships" (Atwood, 2003, p. 40) or to keep a journal like "castaways on desert islands" (Atwood, 2003, p. 41). Since he too is a castaway, making lists of what he can do, could add some kind of structure to his life.

The wheel of domination is proclaimed by nature in the post-apocalyptic world. Nature reflected in the storm of the afternoon dictates Snowman's movement from one shelter to another: "He's built himself an island of car tires back in the woods; ... keeping their insulation between himself and the ground until the storm is over." (Atwood, 2003, p.44) Something indicates that Snowman is deeply familiar with his surroundings and is resourceful in his adaptation to his environment. Snowman notices a rakunk, a spliced animal resulting from blending raccoon and skunk. The rakunk reminds him of his tenth birthday when his father gave it to him as a birthday gift.

The rakunks are a side hobby for the talented people who work in the OrganInc bio lab, for them "[creating]-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God." (Atwood, 2003, p. 51). The rakunk is not the only animal splicing; there are cane toad with a prehensile tail and a snat, a blend of rat and a snake. These practices conflict with Bookchin's views in social ecology. He puts the science of ecology simply as a science that deals with the dynamic

balance of nature, with the interdependence of living and nonliving things. He proposes that while nature includes humankind consequently, the science of ecology must embrace humanity's role in the natural world specifically, the character, form, and structure of humanity's relationship with other species and with the inorganic substrate of the biotic environment. The intelligent people who genetically modify animals stand in the spot Bookchin criticizes for they possess what he described as a mechanistic, instrumental outlook that sees nature as a passive habitat composed of "objects" such as animals, plants, minerals, and the like that must merely be rendered more serviceable for human use. Such practices, break the harmonious relationship between nature and humans. (Bookchin, 1991).

Again, the capitalist society of the novel has concealed its hunger for material gain with the cover of human needs. Jimmy's family has moved to HelthWyzer Compound after his father is hired by the HelthWyzer branch called NooSkins. In the NooSkins where Jimmy's father works now, there are pigeons smaller than the ones in OrganInc Farms and they are being used to:

develop skin-related biotechnologies. The main idea was to find a method of replacing the older epidermis with a fresh one, ... genuine start-over skin that would be wrinkle- and blemish-free...it would be useful to grow a young, plump skin cell that would eat up the worn cells in the skins of those on whom it was planted and replace them with replicas of itself, like algae growing on a pond. (Atwood, 2003, p.55)

Out of his criticism of it, Bookchin compares modern science with the Norse legend of Odin. Odin was a God who exchanged one of his eyes for wisdom and power. Now he can see more sharply but it is of a one-eyed man, because in his attempt to control nature he has lost the vision to see the deep connection with it, henceforth, breaking the natural unity: "science as we know it today is the fragmented one-sided vision of a one-eyed god, whose vantage-point entails domination and antagonism, not coequality and harmony." (Bookchin, 1991, p.41). This is exactly what happens to Jimmy's father when he thinks of the profit. Instead of thinking of the consequences of the experiment's failure, he only considers the enormous success he would gain. This reflects that he is not only indifferent to the pigeons but also to his own kind. Jimmy's father, like Odin, is blinded by his hope that his scientific project succeeds despite the cost of harmony and sympathy.

When the experiment succeeds, his wife and Jimmy's mother, Sharon, a former microbiologist used to work for OrganInc Farms; Warns her husband of the wrong he and his partners are doing and that

they exploit a bunch of desperate people, he answers: “We can give people hope. Hope isn’t ripping off!” (Atwood, 2003, p. 56). This is best understood through Bookchin’s description “In the Norse legends, this “wisdom” leads to Ragnarok, the downfall of the gods and the destruction of the tribal world. In our day, this one-sided “wisdom” is laden with the prospects of nuclear immolation and ecological catastrophe.” (1991, p. 41). Unlike the father, Jimmy’s mother is fully aware of the moral and ethical side of these practices in the NooSkins project. She explains to her husband that: “this pig brain thing. You’re interfering with the building blocks of life. It’s immoral. It’s ... sacrilegious.” (Atwood, 2003, p.57) Bookchin explains how the “good” and “bad” of organic communities have evolved into morality, which evolves into ethics, a more rational form of morality. Conscience, as an inner sense of right and wrong and “enormously powerful product of socialization” (1991, p.116), is shaped by society’s norms. Accordingly, the moral judgment of Jimmy’s father is shaped by the society of the elites he lives in. Sharon remains capable of distinguishing between right and wrong. She is rational and reminds her husband once again of the gravity of such practices. Bookchin asserts that the moment social constraints founded by ethics are destroyed, “technics could be released to follow no dictates other than private self-interest, profit, accumulation, and the needs of a predatory market economy.” (Bookchin, 1991, p. 254)

Sharon leaves the biotech industry due to her disillusionment with the unethical manipulation of nature and humanity, and exploitation in the society of the compounds for profit. But after her husband fails to check his morality, she abandons her family, as explained in the message she leaves for her son. Jimmy is one of the victims of the technocratic system that prioritizes control and profit over nurturing relationships. His mother is compelled to leave him following what her conscience dictates to her. This hints at how these systems disintegrate familial unity. At the end of her message, she writes “*I have taken Killer with me to liberate her, as I know she will be happier living a wild, free life in the forest.*” (Atwood, 2003, p.61) Jimmy feels “enraged” by his mother for taking the rakunk pet, Killer, his father’s gift, fearing that the animal would not survive outside the compound. Yet, when Snowman thinks back to what his mother has done, it makes perfect sense: “Jimmy’s mother and her ilk must have been right, and Killer and the other liberated rakunks must have been able to cope just fine” (Atwood, 2003, p.61).

While the CorpSeCorps (Corporation Security Corps), an ominous private security organization responsible for protecting the economic interests of the corporation of the compounds, is

interrogating Jimmy about his mother's whereabouts, they ask him whether his mother has ever said anything to him. Jimmy wonders what they mean by "*anything?*" and he immediately thinks of:

There were the things his mother rambled on about sometimes, about how everything was being ruined and would never be the same again, like the beach house her family had owned ... that got washed away ... when the sea-level rose so quickly, and then there was that huge tidal wave, from the Canary Islands volcano ... And she used to snivel about her grandfather's Florida grapefruit orchard that had dried up like a giant raisin when the rains had stopped coming, (Atwood, 2003, p.63)

In the above extract, the novelist captures the environmental collapse, a central theme in the novel, to evoke horror in the human race. The description of environmental catastrophes such as the rise in sea levels, the drought, and tidal waves is normalized in the speculative world of the novel. She also specifically mentions places from the real world such as the Canary Island volcano and others to make the fictional dystopia plausible.

Following Bookchin's theory, social decay stems from the domination of humans over humans. Capitalism plays an evident role in establishing a hierarchy in society, within which the domination of one group over another is based on what the dominant groups possess that the dominated groups lack:

By hierarchy, I mean the cultural, traditional and psychological systems of obedience and command, not merely the economic and political systems to which the terms class and State most appropriately refer. Accordingly, hierarchy and domination could easily continue to exist in a "classless" or "Stateless" society. I refer to the domination of the young by the old, of women by men, of one ethnic group by another ... and of nature by society and technology. (Bookchin, 1991, p.4)

In the novel, the domination system relies on the dominator's assets. Oryx, Crake's assistant and Jimmy's acquaintance from HottTotts, shares her childhood story. She recalls a nameless village described to Jimmy as "A village with trees all around and fields nearby, or possibly rice paddies." (Atwood, 2003, p.115). The village is poor, with its people living in huts that have "thatch of some kind on the roofs – palm fronds? – although the best huts had roofs of tin." (Atwood, 2003, p.115). Jimmy tries to ascertain the village's location but learns that Oryx can recall neither the village name nor its language. This ambiguity may represent Atwood's effort to universalize the social decay depicted in this dystopian setting. The village could be anywhere and nowhere. The villagers are so poor that

they sell their children. Oryx's mother sells her daughter and son after her husband dies of a lung disease. Young Oryx, usually disregarded, receives special attention after her father's death, with better food and a blue jacket, as village women strive to make her appear pretty and healthy, all to prepare for selling her. It is worth mentioning that the villagers have sugarcoated the deal and convinced the children that they are being trained to earn their living. Additionally, in the dimness of the selling process, the children of the village are divided according to their physical beauty and cleverness: "Children who were ugly or deformed, or who were not bright or couldn't talk very well – such children went for less, or might not be sold at all." (Atwood, 2003, p.116). The families have been left with two choices, one of which is worse than the other. The children, especially girls, must either be sold with their families taking the money, or stay and face the worst outcome: losing value, being given less to eat, or becoming the next generation to continue selling their children. The man who comes to collect the children is described by Oryx the way the villagers view him as "the villagers' bank, their insurance policy, their kind rich uncle, their only charm against bad luck." (Atwood, 2003, p. 118) every time he comes, he takes four children and assures their mother that he will treat them well and they will be selling flowers.

The pursuit of money, or at least the ability to live a life where one can afford basic needs, often comes at the expense of familial ties. Jimmy's family is shattered due to the capitalist corporations his father works for, leading his mother to abandon him. Similarly, this pursuit distances Oryx from her mother and, later, from her brother for life. Despite this, Oryx finds that nature is consolidating and nurturing her "The birdcalls were familiar, they were part of what she knew. She imagined that one of them – the one like a bell – was her mother's spirit, sent out in the shape of a bird to keep watch over her" (Atwood, 2003, p. 124). Bookchin argues that hierarchical systems undervalue the emotional role of humanity. Maternal care that involves warmth, protection, and mutual concern, which he describes as the starting point for a vulnerable yet highly adaptable society on its own is an indication of care, and interconnectedness essential for ecological and social welfare. Moreover, he explains the term "mother love" as "not only love that the mother ordinarily gives her child, but a rationality of "otherness" that stands sharply at odds with its modern arrogant counterpart." (1991, p. 306). The love the mother gives to her child also includes a way of rational thinking. This rationality is that the other person is not an object to be controlled or dominated. Oryx reflects this fact as she tells Jimmy "[the children] had no more love, supposing they'd had some in the first place. But they had a money

value: they represented a cash profit to others.” (Atwood, 2003, p. 126) she and the other children with her are away from the unconditional love of their mothers instead they are objects to whoever wishes to control them.

Oryx is exploited by Uncle En, both of them existing within a system that thrives on mistreatment and abusing the vulnerable. One day, while she is selling flowers, a man approaches and offers her more money than she could ever hope to earn. She agrees to accompany him, prompted by Uncle En’s encouragement. Not long, Uncle En storms into the room sweeps Oryx in his arms, calls her his little treasure, and yells at the man, who appears frightened and hastily tries to put on his clothes, and “[gives] money to Uncle En, a lot of money, all the money in his wallet, and Uncle En went out of the room carrying Oryx like a precious vase” (Atwood, 2003, p.132). In this scene, Oryx is reduced to a puppet in a “game” that Uncle En benefits from. At the same time and at another layer of social degradation, the men who have abused Oryx permit themselves to exploit impoverished individuals; a sign of the dominance of man by another man.

A subsequent act of violence that resonates with Bookchin’s theory as another indication of society’s degradation is the murder of Uncle En. Oryx and the other children who sell flowers for Uncle En are treated as possessions. They are sold to another man, just like the flowers they are selling. Also, the brutality of the murder reflects nothing but violence and collapse. Uncle En is not only stripped of his life but also reduced to a resource for scavenging by others. His corpse is treated with apathy and with no regard for the dignity of the dead, not only on the part of the thief and the person who murdered him but also on the part of the girl who is telling his story to Oryx. The girl’s comment: “No pockets, so no money!” (Atwood, 2003, p. 135) reveals how Uncle En’s possessions reflect his status; with his possessions gone, he is reduced to nothing, and sketches the society’s missing morality and humanity. Bookchin’s idea of social domination as a root for the domination of the natural world is evident in Oryx’s remark “And rivers. The rivers are so useful, for the garbage and the dead people and the babies that get thrown away, and the shit.” (Atwood, 2003, p.135).

Oryx and the other girls are then sold to a man who makes movies. Staying in his house, she learns, as she tells Jimmy, “That everything has a price.” (Atwood, 2003, p.139). She has to do movie things with Jack, the cameraman, and in return, he teaches her English. Throughout the chapter, Jimmy keeps asking her how she feels about the things that have happened to her. For example, when

Uncle En makes her play games with the men, she feels bad for them. And at the end of the chapter, when he asks whether such men have raped her, she simply responds “Why do you want to talk about ugly things?” (Atwood, 2003, p.144) This response exemplifies her attempt to survive her past by repressing it. Oryx’s character serves as a reminder of the world in which the reader lives (Ingersoll,2004). In *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* (2007), Fiona Tolan views Oryx as a signification of “the corrupting pervasiveness of pornography, pedophilia and prostitution.” (p.275).

The memories of Snowman are arranged in a disorganized way as he remembers the past in a non-sequential manner. Snowman goes back to the time when he was Jimmy and when he meets Glenn, who is later known to be Crake in the novel. Crake is transferred to HealthWyzer High because his parents are like Jimmy’s father. Jimmy and Crake become best friends throughout high school, especially when Jimmy’s mother vanishes. However, the two friends have to be separated when they graduate. In the Compound system, students who graduate from high school are displayed in a student auction to be bid upon by the EduCompunds. Crake, recognized as the top student, is quickly recruited at a high price by the Watson-Crick Institute. Admission to this institution guarantees a secure future. In contrast, Jimmy, a mid-range student with strong verbal scores but a weak performance in mathematics, is accepted by the Martha Graham Academy. In earlier chapters Jimmy has mentioned that the people in the OrganInc Compound among them his father and Ramona, his father’s assistant, “were numbers people, not word people, said Jimmy’s father. Jimmy already knew that he himself was not a numbers person.” (Atwood, 2003, p. 25). The Compound system distinguishes its people based on their mental ability. If one has been categorized as “number people” like Jimmy’s father, Ramona, Crake, and Crake’s family, then they are privileged more than “word people” like Jimmy.

In the novel, the mind is an asset or ticket guaranteeing a compound membership. A word person like Jimmy lacks this asset; therefore, he got accepted into the academy that is located in the pleeblands. The Martha Graham Academy is outside the compound borders, yet it is under its control. The academy has abandoned art and humanities and shifted to practical, profit-driven disciplines. Jimmy chooses Problimatics, which suits a word person like himself. It is described as “Spin and Grin” because it replaces genuine intellectual thinking with rhetorical manipulation and superficiality. Jimmy realizes that human creativity is reduced to serving the capitalist interest and his miserable future as a “window-dresser [who is]

decorating the cold, hard, numerical real world in flossy 2-D verbiage. ... The prospect of his future life stretched before him like a sentence; not a prison sentence, but a long-winded sentence with a lot of unnecessary subordinate clauses,” (Atwood, 2003, p.188). Atwood uses this metaphor to criticize the loss of creativity and social responsibility in a world dominated by the corporate system and warns against the consequences of profit at the expense of suppressing human potential, which will lead to cultural, intellectual, and environmental decline.

On the other end, Watson-Crick Institution “*Compared to this place, HelthWyzer was a pleebland*, Crake replied.” (Atwood, 2003, p. 194). Once he and Jimmy start emailing, he compares people who inhabit the HelthWyzer Compound with those in the institution as “Neurotypicals”. Crake uses this term to imply that people in the HelthWyzer are normal, yet they lack the brilliance or “the genius gene”. This reflects Crake’s superior and utilitarian worldview as he measures people’s worth based on their intellectual abilities. This offers an insight into Crake’s character and his radical scientific pursuit. When he invites Jimmy to a visit, which eventually happens during Thanksgiving Week. The CorpSeCorps, which is the corporate security force to protect the intellectual people, highlights the paranoia of the central power that stands on those people’s valuable assets. Once those people are gone, the corporate process will destabilize. Jimmy feels like an outsider when he is coldly treated by the CorpSeCorps, as solid proof that people with normal intelligence are inferior in the dystopian world of the novel.

Crake decides to take Jimmy on tour to visit the “wonders of Watson-Crick” (Atwood, 2003, p.201) and to see all the projects taking place at that time: “What they were looking at was a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing.” (Atwood, 2003, p. 202). This object turns out to be chicken or just breast parts. They justify their work as: “No need for added growth hormones,” said the woman, “the high growth rate’s built-in. You get chicken breasts in two weeks – that’s a three-week improvement on the most efficient low-light.” (Atwood, 2003, p.203). This example from the novel resonates with Bookchin’s thoughts as he talks about two types of scarcity, and it is important to distinguish between the two. The first kind is material scarcity, which happens when resources do not meet the needs. The second kind is “a socially induced scarcity,” which he defines as “a point at which society begins to intervene in the formation of the needs to produce a very special type of scarcity” (1991, p. 68). Social structures like the

capitalistic one in the novel construct a scarcity that is not necessary. The woman who works on the project justifies this transgression biologically by stating that “they removed all the brain functions that had nothing to do with digestion, assimilation, and growth.” (Atwood, 2003, p.203).

Another example that echoes Bookchin’s thoughts is at the last stop at the BioDefences, where the wolvogs are created. Crake describes the wolvogs that look like dogs but are more vicious and are particularly made for the CorpSeCorps: “they’re bred to deceive. Reach out to pat them, they’ll take your hand off. There’s a large pit-bull component.” (Atwood, 2003, p.205). Hence, the project that Crake defends as being useful is a reflection of his justification of domination over ecological concerns and an addition to his alienation from the natural world. The profit-driven projects of Watson-Crick highlight Atwood’s criticism of humanity’s concern about materialism that will lead to a moral and ecological void. On the night before the last of Jimmy’s visit, Crake reveals to him disturbing information about HelthWyzer. HelthWyzer has been creating diseases as it takes advantage of people suffering to profit: “There’s a whole secret unit working on nothing else. Then there’s the distribution end. ... They put the hostile bioforms into their vitamin pills” (Atwood, 2003, p.211). Crake reveals the greedy intentions of healthcare in the dystopian world. The HelthWyzer prioritizes economic gain over its ethical responsibilities, as it creates a disease, embeds it in vitamin pills, and distributes it to people, and at the same time, it manufactures an antidote and holds it back to maximize demand and profit. This is a clear symptom of a system invaded by parasites like capitalism. The disease starts in the pleebland, a poor area outside the walls of the compounds. Here, Atwood displays the dangers of scientific advancement affected by capitalism and how it leads people to overlook their humanity and ethics. It is worth mentioning that Crake’s father is “executed” because, according to Crake: “They’d have said he was about to destroy an elegant concept. They’d have said they were acting for the general good.” (Atwood, 2003, p.212).

Bookchin in *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (1986) considers man through the imbalances he creates in the social and ecological world as: “a highly destructive parasite who threatens to destroy his host—the natural world—and eventually himself ... [He] has produced imbalances not only in nature, but, more fundamentally, in his relations with his fellow man and in the very structure of his society.” (pp. 83-84). Bookchin returns what he refers as a crisis in social ecology to the imbalances in the social world that are highlighted in society due to “a highly industrialized agriculture and, capping both, a

swollen, bureaucratized, anonymous state apparatus.” (p. 84) creating a society driven by a central system of control and alienated from nature.

Now Snowman returns to the present time. He needs food and weapons to defend himself. He decides to go scavenging for food, and to do so, he must leave the beach. He takes off on his trip, heading towards RejoovenEsense Compound, which was once the most powerful among the Compounds. As he ventures forward, he draws a grim picture of how the world turned out after the catastrophe. When he reaches the pleeblands, he finds nothing but wreck. This description by Snowman reflects that he used to live in a technologically advanced society, now turned into a complete dismay. It also suggests a sudden and chaotic event that has taken place during which humanity was not able to maintain order in the face of the disaster. Snowman then states that what man has been laboring to build throughout the years is gradually vanishing. At the beginning of the catastrophe, things get violent. Buildings are burned, and others exploded, demonstrating that human civilization is now ruined. Any sign of human attempts to dominate nature is now gone, and instead, nature rises to reclaim what belongs to it from the beginning. In addition to the twister, which is a natural disaster, Snowman’s ordeal intensifies on this trip as he faces the dangers of the pigoons, genetically modified creatures with human neocortex tissue, as a reflection of humanity’s hubris and its unintended consequences, making them the embodiment of human-made disaster. Atwood merges these threats to blur the boundaries between human-made and natural disasters; both the twister and the pigoons are reminders of the capacity of nature to reclaim dominance.

Snowman waits for the storm to end in the checkpoint cubicle. when the storm ends, he continues through the compound with extra caution from the pigoons. Snowman is near the bubble-dome called Paradise. However, he is delayed by his injured foot, and noon is upon him. The past attacks him again, he remembers the days from his graduation from Martha Graham Academy to the day he learns about his mother’s execution by the CorpSeCorps. The news of his mother’s death deeply affects him, plunging him into depression. This reminds him of Crake’s visit, suggesting that they go to the pleeblands, and Jimmy agrees. This would be the first time Jimmy visits the pleeblands located north of New New York. The pleebland is not a sanitized place because Crake has to vaccinate himself and Jimmy. Also, this visit shows how people who live in the compounds see themselves as superior. Additionally, the society of the pleeblands

itself is divided into rich and poor “Rich pleeblanders in luxury cars, poor ones on solarbikes” (Atwood, 2003, p.288).

During this visit, Crake provides a job for Jimmy at the RejoovenEsense. When Jimmy returns from the trip, he moves to the RejoovenEscence where Crake tells him about his work, something that turns out to be the beginning of the end. In the RejoovenEscence Compound and more specifically in Crake’s unit which is called Paradise, they are working on immortality, on two major initiatives. The first is the BlyssPluss Pill, which he describes as “prophylactic in nature, and the logic behind it was simple: eliminate the external causes of death and you were halfway there.” (Atwood, 2003, p.293). By external cause, Crake refers to wars, which he views as misplaced sexual energy and identifies as a key factor of humanity’s self-damaging inclinations and environmental degradation. This pill has four capabilities: the first is to “protect the user against sexually transmitted diseases,” the second is to “provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, coupled with a generalized sense of energy and well-being, thus reduces the frustration ... and eliminating feelings of low self-worth;” third is to “prolong youth.” The fourth and final unadvertised capability of the pill is to act as “a birth-control pill, for male and female alike, thus automatically lowering the population level.” (Atwood, 2003, p.294).

Crake’s attempt to solve the problem of overpopulation and scarcity of resources that will lead to ecological problems is loaded with domination and primarily motivated by profit. The pill causes sterilization to whoever takes it without their consent. This reflects Crake’s view of humans as objects to be exploited for profit, especially since his clinical trials will be conducted on people “[f]rom the poorer countries. Pay them a few dollars, they don’t even know what they’re taking.” (Atwood, 2003, p. 296), from places like prisons, whorehouses and people who are desperate for money, something that highlights how marginalized population are expendable for the benefit of wealthier societies. Crake’s attempt to control and lower the population level through the birth control pill could be best understood through Bookchin’s dialectical naturalism. He proposes: “Theories of work, society, behavior, and even sexuality turn on an image of necessitarian nature that must in some sense be “dominated” to serve human ends-presumably on the old belief that what is natural disallows all elements of choice and freedom.” (1991, p.73). In this sense, Crake’s designed pill, premeditated to regulate human production aligns with what Bookchin presumes associated with Aristotle and is still alive in our midst. It comes as a cosmic justification for domination in general - in its more noxious cases, for

racial and sexual discrimination, and in its most nightmarish form, for the outright extermination of entire people, and as a disconnection from ecological harmony that Bookchin supports. Crake's tactic represents a method that ignores both the social and the ecological reasons that have led to overpopulation and environmental damage. The pill created by Crake, instead of nurturing a relationship that maintains a balance between humanity and nature and instead of addressing the root causes behind the problem of overpopulation, such as exploitative social hierarchies and unsustainable consumption, demonstrates a totalitarian attitude that eventually contributes to ecological imbalance. This lines up with Bookchin's criticism of environmental decay as an artifact of hierarchical and oppressive social organizations, which prioritize control over cooperation. (Bookchin, 1991).

Then, Crake takes Jimmy to the "right side of the Rejoov Compound." Once they enter, Jimmy notices that it looks like the other complexes and compounds, only newer ones. Crake explains to Jimmy that "what really counted in a research facility was the quality of the brains." (Atwood, 2003, p.298). Jimmy connects the dots and finds out that the brains Crake is talking about are the players on Extinctathon. In *Oryx and Crake*, Crake plays a game called Extinctathon. It is an online game where players resemble nonexistent species. Both Jimmy and Crake used to play this game when they were children. As they grow older and drift apart, Jimmy stops playing, but Crake continues until he attains the rank of Grand Master. Reaching this rank is an intelligent way for Crake to recruit like-minded people for his future plans, as it introduces him to MaddAddam, a network of ecologists, instigators behind the operations involving asphalt-eating microbes and outbreak of neon-colored herb simplex on the West Coast, and genetic engineers.

Crake's obsession with this game shows his attempt to "fix" humanity. Therefore, he creates genetically engineered, and eco-friendly beings—the Crakers. While it seems like a scientific project, Crake treats it like a game where he manipulates life to reach his dream of a perfect world. This project highlights Crake's god-like complex and his unsympathetic, deliberate method of solving humanity's failings. Lastly, Crake takes Jimmy to see "Crake's life work" (Atwood, 2003, p. 302) and the result of seven years of intensive research. The Crakers, those altered ordinary human embryos, are the second part of Crake's plan of the BlyssPlus Pill that would put a stop to haphazard reproduction and replace it with a superior method. They are the second stage of a single plan, you might say. Those human-like creatures have pre-selected characteristics like

beauty, docility, a UV-resistant skin, a built-in insect repellent, an unprecedented ability to digest unrefined plant material, and immunity from microbes. (Atwood, 2003, p.304).

Utopia, meaning ‘no-place’ or ‘nowhere’ is a Greek word. William More coined it in his book *Utopia* (1915). *Utopia* reflects More’s question of the possibility of attaining a perfect world. The source of his utopia is Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Critias* (360 BCE). The island of Atlantis in *Timaeus*, which was drowned in the sea as a punishment, can be an early example of eco-fiction. The perfect utopian world gives way to what contrasts with it: dystopia, another imaginary, imperfect place or society. Atwood blends utopia and dystopia to create ustopia. Atwood explains that in the ustopian world lies the perfection of the utopia and the imperfection of dystopia (Manwaring, 2024, p. 163). Crake attempts to exterminate the human race to destroy the dystopia that accompanies it and replace it with a utopia created by him through his perfect Crakers. Still, thinkers disagree with an optimistic view of such a utopia to be conceived out of a dystopian and postapocalyptic world because of the pessimism and lack of sympathy of the postmodern times. The Crakers will not develop into the perfect society of More. (Lindhé, 2015, p. 43)

Oryx is Crake’s assistant. Crake explains to Jimmy that he has been connected to her through Student Services, which is a system at Watson-Crick that provides the students with partners according to their specifications. Oryx is the same girl Crake and Jimmy watched on HottTotts when they were fourteen. This is a stark evidence of the isolation of the elites from socializing normally. The girl chooses her name Oryx after ORYX BEISA, which is provided by Crake, the name refers to an extinct “gentle water-conserving East African herbivore” (Atwood, 2003, p. 311) featured in the game Extinctathon. She is the teacher of Crake’s perfect humanoids and the one who called them Crakers.

The Paradise Project and Crake’s plan, especially the Crakers, sharply contrast with what Bookchin wants in his social ecology. Bookchin explains the term “wholeness” from ecology’s view: “ecological wholeness is not an immutable homogeneity but rather the very opposite—a dynamic unity of diversity. In nature, balance and harmony are achieved by ever-changing differentiation, by ever-expanding diversity.” (1991, p. 24) Ecology views “wholeness” as a dynamic unity in diversity formed through evolving complexity and change rather than uniformity because the harmony and balance in natural systems result from complexity that includes different elements working together. He asserts that ecosystems with different species and complex interactions provide them with flexibility and

adaptability to be resilient to any change or disturbance. Hence, what Crake creates is a project that will wipe out human beings as the element of diversity, and replace them with more static and never-changing beings that look like humans. Bookchin, in saying: “To assume that science commands this vast nexus of organic and inorganic interrelationships in all its details is worse than arrogance: it is sheer stupidity.” (1991, p. 25) as if he is criticizing Crake’s belief that he can control every aspect of nature, through science. Nature has its spontaneity that keeps it in order, and any factor that disrupts it can lead to harmful consequences.

#### 4. Conclusion

Having examined Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003) in the light of Murray Bookchin’s social ecological theory, the following could be concluded: firstly, the Study offers a social ecological reading of human domination over each other caused by capitalism. Being privileged, humans permit themselves to exploit other people and eventually the natural world they are entitled to preserve. Secondly, capitalist systems driven by their pursuit to make profit, consider that the end justifies the means, no matter what they are and how they affect their environmental surroundings. Finally, through envisioning a post-apocalyptic world where the main character in the novel, and its only possible survivor, Snowman, stands alone in the cold and an empty landscape. Both Bookchin and Atwood effectively convey that equality and harmony among humans are essential for social and ecological prosperity.

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## صدى الأطلال: قراءة اجتماعية- بيئية لرواية (أوريكس وكريك) لمارغريت اتوود

### المستخلص

تتناول الدراسة الحالية قراءة اجتماعية بيئية لرواية الكاتبة مارغريت اتوود (أوريكس وكريك (2003) وفقاً لنظرية موري بوكتشين الاجتماعية البيئية. ويستعرض التحليل الأدبي لهذه الرواية قضايا مهمة تتعلق بالانجاز الأدبي للكاتبة يتمثل الأول بقدرتها على خلق ديستوبيا سردية يجد فيها بطل القصة سنومان نفسه حبساً في عالم ما بعد الخراب، تحكمه الهندسة الوراثية وتؤثر فيه الرأسمالية على مفاصل الحياة كافة، وثانيهما ينعكس في تصوير الكاتبة، من خلال نظرية بوكتشين الاجتماعية البيئية، السبب الكامن وراء ذلك الخراب الاجتماعي البيئي الذي حل في مثل هكذا عالم ملوث يساء فيه إلى الحيوان والإنسان على حد سواء و تستعبد المرءة فيه وتضطهد ، صوراً مستقبلية قائمة لمجتمع يقع فريسة للتكنولوجيا الحيوية الفوضوية والجشع الاقتصادي اللامتاهي ، صورة لخراب بيئي تنقرض فيه الأنواع ، ويتغير فيه المناخ، وتتناقص فيه الموارد، وتنقش في الأمراض، وتقتل الهندسة الوراثية في تحقيق أهدافها السامية في خدمة الإنسان والطبيعة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الاجتماعي-البيئي، بوكتشين، سنومان، كريك، الانهيار البيئي، أوريكس، كريك.