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Interplay of Food with Gene-Modification: A Post Humanistic Study of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

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Introduction

Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* presents an unsettling and bioengineered vision of the world. The man-made hemorrhagic virus made every human extinct except for the Snowman. With the inception of the novel there was one constant chatter about the availability of food in the compounds and the artificial production of meat. The dystopian vision of the novel reveals a grim and impoverished food reality of the third world countries. In an essay by Atwood, *Writing Oryx and Crake* she reveals, 'The rules of biology are as inexorable as those of physics: run out of food and water and you die. No animal can exhaust its resource base and hope to survive. Human civilizations are subject to the same law.' (Atwood 285) In the world of modifying beings the modification of food is just a drop in the ocean of hybridization. Scientists playing the role of Gods according to Jayne Glover have "been blamed for the objectification of nature" (Glover 52). Where theorists like Chung-Hao Ku sees this alteration of food as breaching the "fine line between humanity and monstrosity" (Ku 109) there are others who see the visible dichotomy between science and reason. The posthumanistic vision tries to keep balance between the human and the natural world.

An anthropologist Nick Fiddes in his seminal work *Meat: A Natural Symbol* (1990) argues that meat plays a major role to justify human dominion over "Nature". He further argues that this rampant hybridization of food is out of line for environmentalism (Fiddes 230-232). This environmental concern has a spiral effect towards food scarcity and publicized health issues which resulted in "turbulently declining reputation of meat" (233). The research tries to dismantle the human-nature hierarchy of the text further elevating the environmental concerns in the work.

Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood is a dystopian novel that explores various themes, including the role of food in society. Food plays a significant and frequently unsettling role in the story's dystopian future world, which has been devastated by genetic engineering and corporate greed. The stark difference between the privileged and the marginalized is symbolized in this book by food. The main character, Jimmy, also known as Snowman, remembers the meals he had as a child. He remembers the flavor of real meat, fruits, and vegetables, which in the modern world have become rare luxuries. The novel introduces the idea of "ChickieNobs," a revolting fast-food item that illustrates the extreme effects of unrestrained scientific advancements. Artificially created creatures that resemble chickens are called ChickieNobs. The main theme of *Oryx and Crake* is biotechnology taken too far. As the plot of the book develops and Snowman struggles to survive, he muses on a time when biotechnology firms like HealthWyzer and Rejooven Essence had untold riches and power. These corporations treated health, pleasure, and life as any other commodity, emboldened by people "driven by base appetites and fears" and "stimulated by the latest technological innovations": investing a lot of money in creating and safeguarding products and services that improve and extend life.

By contrasting the dichotomy of human and nature the transgenic modification of animals play a major role in shaping the environment. As humans are typically the product of their food and surroundings as well as active moderators of other organisms. As a result, *Oryx and Crake* serves as a cautionary tale that fosters a long-term ethical awareness of modern agricultural practices. *Oryx and Crake's* pre-plague food production systems foreshadow upcoming sustainability issues for contemporary genetically altered, monoculture-dependent agriculture, and its post-plague wilderness challenges the absolute status of the human. This fictional world is battling climate change and overpopulation. In this paper, we'll look at Atwood's criticism of food production ethics in the context of the ChickieNob and the Pigeon, as well as the subsequent statements she makes that cast people in the role of consumable animals.

Atwood tries to present a world where the elites living in the Compounds try to depict a healthy and bountiful society when it comes to food. Although the artificial prosthesis attempts to present the food as a really enticing entity: "soy-sausage dogs and coconut-style layer cake" (Atwood 72), "SoyOBoyburgers" (74), "ChickieNobs Bucket O'Nubbins" (242), and pharmaceutical organ-bank pigeons (30). These so called cuisines of the agri-industrialized world gave a sneak peak to the present day America where, the "frankenfish" salmon that is currently awaiting FDA approval and the transgenic canola that has escaped the confines of the farm to grow wild in the fields of North Dakota are both examples of genetically modified organisms. In fact, the neon green rabbits and the goat that produces spider silk in her milk, two of the creatures Atwood describes in *Oryx and Crake*, are already extinct. (Gould; Kac). Our contemporary concerns regarding gene modification have been put through the text quite evidently in the form of these Chickienobs and Pigeons. According to Regine Kollek, transgenic manipulation makes a case "possible to overcome the barriers which

normally limit the arbitrary crossbreeding of organisms of different species.” (Kollek 97).

Chickie Nobs

Subjugating animals to a mere blend of tissues which humans find tasty is the cause of all gene modification in *Oryx and Crake*. Amid the rising food crisis and subsequent dystopian imagery one noteworthy fact is the real world experimentation with chickens since the 1950s. The facts that Atwood tries to bring in a fictionalized form has been actualised according to Donna Haraway chickens have been “manipulated genetically since the 1950s to rapidly grow megabreasts,” a condition that leads to “young birds who are often enough unable to walk, flap their wings, or even stand up” (When Species 267). Even the description of the creatures as chicken without feathers, “makes you feel like God ” (Atwood 51) giving humans the position to alter the life of creatures for their convenience. This portrayal of animals and the real world experimentation on chickens find an equivocal voice in Glotfelty as he puts it: “literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, and ideas interact.” (Glotfelty 19). This amalgamation of literature and reality keep on reflecting itself through Watson- Crick Institute staff, who were defending the Chickienobs by saying: “No need for added growth hormones and the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain.” (Atwood 203). So the whole point of discussion stops itself on this one facet of it being ethically right just because the Homo Deus has even taken the capacity to feel pain from the creatures.

Conclusion

The present study points towards the capitalistic view of food in the novel *Oryx and Crake* where the conclusion drawn is that Crake's capitalistic-scientific perspective on food and animals in the pre-apocalyptic setting of the novel shifts to encompass people as well. Animals are observed in the novel's post-apocalyptic setting simply as products, nearly identical to food. The disclosure of Crake's strategy demonstrates that he has expanded his way of thinking to encompass humanity. In the pre-apocalyptic world of the novel, the system is the capitalistic-scientific system, and as the pandemic spreads, the system comes to be realized as the ecosystem. Neither humans nor animals are valued as things in and of themselves anymore. Instead, both are viewed from the perspective of their utility for the system. the solution to the research query.

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