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ANIMAL WRITING OF MARGARET ATWOOD: ANIMAL OTHERS IN *ORYX AND CRAKE*

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ABSTRACT

A well-known Canadian author of contemporary fiction, poetry, and criticism is Margaret Atwood. She is regarded as the "queen of Canadian literature" and has a stellar international reputation. Atwood frequently addresses themes of women, nation, and ecology in her works, which have exquisite frameworks and a variety of styles. She has given the world numerous widely recognized classics and is industrious and prolific. When her 2003 book *Oryx and Crake* was released, it was shortlisted for several prestigious literary awards, including the Noble Prize. Finally, it made the Booker Prize shortlist. This paper investigates how animals are depicted in the novel, examines how humans and animals interact within the context of the animal turn, considers how literary representations of animals and the symbolic meanings attached to them relate to actual animals, and further illuminates Atwood's views on animal ethics in the study and use of science and technology.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood; *Oryx and Crake*; zoocriticism; animal others

1. Introduction

As one of the most famous writers in Canadian English literature, Margaret Atwood is better known than any other Canadian English writers. Published in 2003, *Oryx and Crake* is a novel which consists of fifteen parts. It begins with the part that gives a description of the protagonist Snowman, who seems to be the last human survivor in a post-apocalyptic world destroyed by a mysterious virus. Together with Snowman are a group of transgenic hybrid animals and man-made creatures called the crakers. Snowman haunted by memories of the past, and gradually, through flashbacks, it can be learned that Snowman was once Jimmy, a boy who grew up in a dystopian society ruled by unscrupulous scientific corporations and that Jimmy's friend, Crake, a prominent scientist at the RejoovenEsense Compound, is responsible for the scientific catastrophe. In addition, in his narration, Snowman also recalls the story happened between him and the female protagonist Oryx, who comes from a poor country. In a word, the story takes place in a world where scientific achievement is the main focus of the society, and mankind's obsessions with science and technology ultimately allow the ethically blind scientist Crake to destroy the world.

Since the novel was published, *Oryx and Crake* have been attracting the attention all over the world. The opening of *Oryx and Crake* has Snowman, the sole human still alive in a post-disaster world, recalling his past. It relates the tale of a mass extinction brought on by the misuse of science and technology by humans. Since its release, academics both domestically and internationally have examined and evaluated it from a variety of

perspectives, the most popular of which are ecological criticism, comparative research, and dystopian literature. Some foreign scholars try to interpret it from the perspectives of ecology and eschatology. Jayne Glover argues that Atwood's attitude is ironic and she incorporates into a futuristic tale disparate element taken from current ecological concerns, which makes this novel a particularly rewarding text (2009). Aziz Mohammadi and Kohzadi, the two scholars contend that *Oryx and Crake* tackles environmental is such as global warming, pollution and over-population. They believe that the novel comes as a warning against the wrong direction where the society is going. Therefore, they think that Atwood has used literature as a device to warn the readers against the possibility of a disaster (Aziz Mohammadi and Kohzadi 2014). Some academic scholars study *Oryx and Crake* from the comparative perspective. Yoo Jihun makes a comparison between the two literary works. He thinks that Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *Butler's Dawn* can both be viewed as dystopias, because they critically reflect on the dystopian impulses of traditional sci-fi and speculative fiction. He concludes that "Both novels are explorations of complicated futuristic situations that shed considerable light on our current affairs, respond to our anxieties about scientific breakthroughs and technological advances" (Yoo 680). Dystopia literature is another important perspective in the study of the novel. Professor Yang points out that through the manipulation of a highly-centralized state power with the help of technology, *Oryx and Crake* expresses Atwood's deep reflections on the alienation of human beings as well as reveals her pity and lament over the reality (Yang 2005).

The study of the animal as the Other in literature has, however, received little attention from academics. As a result, this essay choose Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* as its subject of study. It then examines the animal writing in Atwood's speculative fiction using textual analysis. The two social structures of the family and society are utilized to demonstrate in the first section of feminist animal writing that the gender relations in the book share the same roots as patriarchal sexual oppression and species discrimination. The second section discusses the topic of interspecies justice for the creatures in the story who are denied life support by fusing Anthropocene criticism with technological reason. The third section argues that people are not animals. In the post-human period, people overly pursue reason in an effort to shed their animal qualities, which gives rise to non-human and non-machine creatures like Crackers.

2. Discussion

Game of Thrones: Animal Others

In the dichotomous cognitive model of the subject and the other, the former uses ideology, political means, language, and culture to exert hegemony over the latter, manipulating, oppressing, and controlling it, whereas the latter, for a variety of historical or practical reasons, has its right to discourse emasculated and obscured, and wanders in the peripheral zone far from the center. Traditionally, postcolonial, feminist, and subjectivity studies have been conducted in the context of human relations, where the "other" usually refers to the other in the sense of race, class, and gender, and the other in the sense of species-animals is customarily excluded, and the subjectivity of animals is often ignored. Ecocritics capture the power structure and workings of the logic of the Other and use them to the critique of anthropocentrism and speciesism. The intention is to highlight how anthropocentrism causes the natural other to go through a process of marginalization, objectification, and wanton seizure in the interaction between humans and nature. As Braidotti observes, ".....the sexualized other (woman), the racialized other (the native), and the naturalized other (animals, the environment or earth). These others were constitutive in that they fulfilled a mirror function that confirmed the Same in His superior position." (Del Fa 27)

2.1 Animalized Woman: The Sexual Politics of Meat

The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory by Carol Adams is a seminal book on feminism and animal studies. Adams contends that patriarchy in human culture shapes what we eat—or, more correctly, who we eat—and that the way sexual politics are put together is strongly tied to how animals, particularly those that are consumed, are perceived. As a patriarchal text, "meat" actually serves as a venue for the manifestation, maintenance, and manipulation of masculinity, reflecting deeper meanings of dominating and being controlled, as well as oppressing and being oppressed. The majority of societies view meat as an

economically important commodity, and the ownership of meat equates to dominance and monopolization of discourse. In addition to mapping the social mirror image of women as the masculine other, and the survival of animals as the human other also highlights the relationship between sexism and speciesism. The logic of patriarchal discourse in the context of human thought and social structure plays a similar role in both the oppression of women and the discrimination of animals. Patriarchal ways of thinking that devalue animals result in the oppression of women by men, and these ideologies that discriminate against women then support the exploitation of animals. In *Oryx and Crake*, the docile, animalized female Oryx serves as the patriarchal society's tool for manipulation. The novel's depiction of the interplay of gender and species discrimination has a significant impact on women, animals, and nature.

The co-exploitation of women and animals is made possible by the absence of dead animals from discussions about meat and the absence of women from discussions about cultural violence, particularly sexual assault. In the novel, Atwood uses a spatial narrative to describe two different time periods to convey the tale of the girl Oryx's upbringing. She does this to demonstrate how, through time, a patriarchal society gradually changes Oryx from a female other into an animalized other.

The initial phase was the utilization of "meat" as a material resource for domestic production. Oryx, from the Asia-Pacific region of the third world, was sold into an apprenticeship at the age of seven or eight in exchange for food because his father had died. Oryx was born in a village where men were the primary laborers in the production field and the main sources of economic income, while women were destined to be the reproductive means from infancy on. The village represents a patriarchal society, and the villagers' sacrifice of women for food is a prime example of how, in an underdeveloped society, the status of women is inversely correlated to the value of meat. Through gender segregation in production activities, men are the main source of meat acquisition, while women—despite being more responsible than men for family duties—are accorded less value than men. "By the time meat becomes a necessary component of a tightly organized economic system, and with it the laws of physical distribution of meat, men have already started to wield the levers of power," (Leakey, 210) and as control of meat entails a monopoly on discourse, it gives rise to the sexual politics of meat. When Oryx is reduced to the status of meat that is arbitrarily exchanged in patriarchal countries, it argues that women's roles in patriarchal societies are also diminished, highlighting the tragic fate of women who are marginalized in the meat-loving economy.

The second phase is when meat changes from a material resource to a sexual good, and Oryx departs from her own land to work as a children prostitute. Oryx is a children prostitute whose entire career has been an increase in passive animalized and commodification. She is trafficked, her teeth are examined as if she were a commodity, and she begins a life of animalized feminine. Through the depiction of two episodes, Atwood illustrates how both animals and women are ruthlessly mistreated in the sexual politics of meat. One instance is when a male flower vendor forces Oryx and the other girls to use the pigsty to relieve themselves, with "a pig watching them from the other side as they squatted in it"(Atwood 125); the second occurs when the male cinematographer shooting the pornographic video has a special affinity for meat and for noodles that have a lot of meat on them. Pigs that are alive are turned into meat through the process of slaughter, and as the animal's corpse is immediately disregarded, this process is symbolized at the lexical level. Women have changed from being used only as a means of producing money to being a cultural product of sexual violence, including sexual violence in the form of the use of children in sexual actions and the pornographic industry. Men do not physically eat women in the same way that they do meat, but the television constantly shows men consuming females. The man strives to destroy the independent will and identity of the female by constructing their subjectivity from both the animal other and the female other.

2.2 Objectified Life: An Out-of-Control Biotechnology

Atwood offers an in-depth discussion of the nature of science and technology in relation to humans and other species, as well as humans and the earth, and expresses a deep concern for the lives of the animal others, revealing the duality of science and technology from an ecological point of view. Biotechnology, at the forefront of modern science and technology, is used as a lens for environmental imagination.

The story begins in a near-future world where humans are on the verge of extinction and the only survivors are Snowman, a lone survivor of humanity, and the bio-engineered animals Pigoon, Wolvogs, and Crackers. The world has been destroyed by a man-made plague, leaving only ruins, wastelands, and wreckage in its wake. The misuse of biotechnology by mankind has pushed the world closer to Apocalypse. The advancement of science and technology not only frees people from physically demanding work but also significantly increases their capacity to alter the environment. The Multi-Organ Producer, Pigoon, which is intended to grow a variety of safe and dependable human tissues in a genetically modified host pig, and the Wolvogs, a special organism that resembles a dog but is not a real dog but is instead being raised to be a deceptive early warning system, are the focus of Atwood's novel. According to Atwood, the fundamental issue with this type of bioengineering is the scientists' and technologists' ethical and moral awareness. The nearest other species can be dominated by humans, who have no regard for them and who interfere with their right to live. Animals are absent because the rationality-only technologists view life as the result of a collection of atoms with no discernible life features. "Isn't it just proteins! There is nothing sacred about cells and tissues," and this view blatantly removes any ethical or moral control from science. Second, in an effort to increase profits, OrganInc Farms and other biotech firms created the "chicken ball," a brainless, beakless chicken body that resembles a sea anemone and from which 20 fleshy, thick tubes grow chicken meat. This meat was quickly distributed and offered on the global market at a low price. This "chicken" was immediately granted distribution rights and launched at a low cost on the global market. Obviously, this is an artificial abolition of the normal growth process of animals by the capitalist economic globalization driven by capital accumulation and surplus value, which bypasses the interaction with intact living animals and dismembers them in the consumer's brain as individual body parts, rendering living beings completely devoid of any significance of existence.

2.3 Animal Machines: A Cyborg Manifesto

What is the nature of humanity when it transforms into post-humanity as a result of biotechnology? Atwood discusses post-humanity through the construction of the Craker, a cyborg that is a combination of a machine and an organism, which is both an animal and a machine, with the goal of enhancing the organism with artificial technology. Crackers is a half-machine, half-human embodied cyborg in the novel, who accompanies Snowman, a survivor of a man-made plague that has swept through the world, and was created by Snowman's best friend, the brilliant scientist Crake, who was named after an online game called Extinction, in which all players are required to use an extinct species to create a cyborg. Glenn took the name Red-necked Crake, a defunct Australian bird. The naming of the cyborg as Craker is a metaphor for the death of man in the post-human era accompanied by the rebirth of the Cyborg. Furthermore, the Crackers in the novel are developed in such a way that they are humanly designed that any features with animalistic labels are erased, achieving absolute logic. The animalistic features represented by territoriality and hormonality, for example, are fully abolished from the Craker's setting. This transformation first reflects the fact that the human ethical system's understanding of perfect human nature is based on the logical point of opposition between rationality and irrationality (the latter usually equating to animality), while also expressing the practice of such values, and the practice itself contributes to the further entrenchment of this dichotomous structure. Craker's lack of animality reflects Atwood's thoughts on reason in human nature, and how humans can actualize a built reality through whatever means are beneficial to them, while animals are excluded owing to their lack of such authority. Atwood increasingly challenges Craker's humanity. When Snowman hears Craker talk, he recognizes it as a human voice but is perplexed because "it's beyond the human level, or below it." (Atwood 105) Snowman's query reflects Atwood's thinking on whether reason is enough to define the essence of human nature.

Wolvogs and pigoons that have been genetically modified are monstrous cyborgs. Both are distinguished by their cognitive abilities and aptitude to function efficiently, particularly pigeons, which Snowman defines as "a brainy and omnivorous animal" (Atwood 235). This is undeniably a high level of conventional generalization about human biology, implying the disintegration of the posthuman subjective framework. "Some of them may even have human neocortex tissue growing in their crafty, wielded heads," (Atwood 235) Snowman continues. The novel's argument that nonhuman behavior is all about organ impulses for humans, who are supreme in technological reasoning, is undermined by structural parallels between humans and nonhuman creatures.

However, whether it is Crakers or wolvogs and pigeons, the criterion for determining whether a person is human or not has gotten hazy, and the ethical concerns surrounding it are even more debatable. Do moral right topics still need to be defended when the norms of assessment of the live subjects themselves are ambiguous? Are these androids, capable of thinking, speaking, and acting on their own, ethically equal? Do humans have an ethical responsibility to them? In the novel, from Snowman's composed and somber demeanor when he first meets Craker to Snowman's initiative to guide the Crakers to their new home at the beginning of the catastrophe to Snowman's worry that he will have to return to the city to look for medication because of sepsis, it all comes through in the book. Crakers' welfare demonstrates the book's concern for Cyborg's moral and right to life. Additionally, Atwood's meditation on the moral dilemmas facing nonhuman animals is expressed in Snowman's word, "but he couldn't do that, because although the Crakers weren't his business, they were now his responsibility," (350), where she regards the Cyborg as a subject of life and makes an attempt to establish a symbiotic style of existence. As Snowman says to Crakers in the novel, "I'm your ancestor, come from the land of the dead. Now I'm lost, I can't get back, I'm stranded here, I'm all alone. Let me in!" (Atwood 106)

3. Conclusion

This paper examines Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* from the perspective of animal studies, fusing feminism, ecocriticism, and posthumanism, and exploring the relationship between literary representations and animal symbolism and the real animals. It uses the animal others as the starting point to discuss the three aspects of the animal machine, namely the animalized women, the objectified animal, and the animal machine, so as to examine how the imaginary perceptions of animals presented in the works affect their destiny in human society and human society itself. It is examined how the imagined perspectives of animals given in the work affect both their fate in human society and human civilization itself by discussing the piece in terms of objectified animals, objectified women, and animal machines. Atwood confronts anthropocentric ideology's discrimination against different species and women through the literature of the animal other. She also exposes the power dynamics concealed by the politics of the body and thoughtfully considers the relationship between humans and animals.

Atwood's usage of animal imagery in her books is a result of her concept of "de-centering". Animals and oppressed groups like nature and women are in the position of the "other," and Atwood's strategy of "de-centering" differs from general literary criticism's deconstruction of dichotomous oppositions in that Atwood intends to amplify the otherness of the other and strengthen the differentiation and opposition between the self and the other. She portrays the Other, such as animals and women, as enigmatic, unfathomable, and destructive powers in her works to remind readers that they should have respect for the Other. Practically speaking, the societal significance of Atwood's books—including the examination of the moral concern for Cyborg's life and the cautionary tale about the ethics of science and technology—has a significant influence.

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