



## Oryx & Crake Representations

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**Abstract:** *The critical dystopian novel, Oryx and Crake, emphasizes the spectrum of viewpoints on the ethical issues of biotechnology and the emergence of technocracy within the United States. Margaret Atwood demonstrates an analysis of this issue's opposing sides through the main character's resulting perspective during his development with his parental figures and the technocratic environment he survives in. This essay examines the multiple types of fragmentation that occurs as a result of the division between the parental figures.*

**Keywords:** *Dystopia, Fragmentation, Biotechnology, Ecofeminism, Technocracy, Hegemony*

**Materials & Methods:** *Extensive research of Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake included study of psychological fragmentation, the materialistic movement in which the setting took place, and critiques of a technocratic society according to ecofeminism and hegemony.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* exhibits a climax in conflicting interests within Jimmy's adolescence. The mother and father each maintain opposing stances on the ethical background and implementation of biotechnological advances as the marriage of both pairs simultaneously impacts Jimmy's development. Atwood presents Jimmy's family conflict in the "Rakunk" section of chapter four to emphasize the conflicting ideologies involved in biotechnological advancement.

### 2. THE PARENTAL REPRESENTATION

As a scientist, the father combines the genes of separate beings and contributes to the furtherance of animal testing on pigeons in NooSkins for the discovery of "a method of replacing the older [human] epidermis with a fresh one" (55). His contributions position him on the supporting end of the biotechnological advancement ideology spectrum between support and opposition. This placement and his domestic role implies that such advancement is the focus of anthropocentrism as The Great Acceleration of the mid-twentieth-century enters into the field of promoting scientific improvements for humanity<sup>1</sup>. The Great Acceleration era continues into current economic trends and involves an increased consumption of the Western model of production and consumption, as the father exhibits by gifting a rakunk to Jimmy from the laboratory he works in. Despite the gift's later significance to Jimmy as a symbol of the promising aspects of biotechnology, Jimmy reveals that he cannot remember his father as an entity outside of NooSkins or OrganInc. In Jimmy's later memories, the father is "a sort of pastiche" that only consists of "ears backlit against the kitchen window" and "the left hand" (49). Just as the patriarchal connection to technology persists in separate pieces, the father's fragmented influence persists in Jimmy's later mind when he lives as Snowman. The father also acts as a patriarchal connection to Jimmy by communicating his constant support of biotechnology. The e-birthday card, for instance, has "five winged pigeons doing a conga line" to imply that the pigeons are normal enough in Jimmy's life to appear whimsical in the given context (50). Verbally, Jimmy notices that his father presses his perspective further by asking "*Right, Jimmy?* a bit too much" (51).

By contrast, the mother manifests her views onto Jimmy through a gift of "pyjamas for little kids" and other irrelevant items (50). She also must snap "out of her trance" and smile "as if someone had yelled Smile! And goosed her with a fork" to maintain her gender role as the matriarchal figure of the family (50). Altogether, the trance and untimely gifts imply that the mother is detached from the biotechnological setting. Before the father gives Jimmy a pet rakunk for his birthday, the mother

voices her internal conflict with the setting through her complaints “about the tight security at the HealthWyzer gates” that make her feel “like a prisoner” (51). Through these actions, the mother could represent the ecofeminist approach to the realm of biotechnology. Ecofeminism, in this literary context, stands as a “critical science which grounds and necessitates critique of our existing society”<sup>2</sup>. The mother experiences this critical thought as cognitive dissonance in her setting. As she asks, “in a detached, matter-of-fact voice” about the care of the rakunk, she insinuates her distress within the technocracy realm of biotechnology (52).

### 3. THE ARGUMENT OF BOTH SIDES

The discourse that arises between the mother and father within this realm demonstrates the type of arguments that both ends of the biotechnological advancement ideology spectrum within a technocracy consider the most significant. The father argues that, as a part of the NooSkins organization he “can give people hope”, but the mother asserts that “you hype your wares and take all their money” until the organization restricts the treatments to the patient due to insufficient funds (56). She supplements her argument of the ethical issue regarding money through the addition of appeal to nature by stating that “you’re interfering with the building blocks of life” (57). She then describes the act as “sacrilegious” to pinpoint the level of consideration that NooSkins, OrganInc., and other corporations have for the existing ecological chain (57). The father counters the connotations of this statement by reminding her of her status as “an educated person” and asserting that “there’s nothing sacred about cells and tissue” (57). The culmination of these arguments births a division between the parents. This division fragments the family and later fragments Jimmy’s reality.

### 4. JIMMY’S REACTION

As the main source of memories involving his parents and the technocracy, Jimmy’s reaction to the discourse and hegemony of the parents presents Atwood’s recognition of “difference, complexity, hybridity, fluidity, and partial and situated knowledge” within the issues of environmental degradation and technocratic control as it is demonstrated through biotechnology<sup>3</sup>. Jimmy exists as the literal and mental culmination of his parents’ perspectives. Despite the culmination, the father appears to have impressed the support technocracy upon Jimmy more than his mother is able to impress her opposition to it. This is due to the setting’s hegemony in Jimmy’s childhood and adolescence.

In the HealthWyzer public school, Jimmy entertains and comforts himself with the company’s training. His extracurricular enjoyment of “Classics in Animal Behavior Studies” during his lunch period demonstrates his leaning ideals towards the compound’s message of biotechnological persistence (54). Jimmy enjoys the game due to its involvement with word creation, such as “corknut”, and the Alex’s defiance towards the game (54). These two traits mirror Jimmy’s growing resentment with the organization and his involvement within it as a powerless child within its system. He doesn’t connect these two internal feelings, so they become psychologically fragmented. As he reaches adolescence, Jimmy’s surroundings within the compound’s security and his parents’ conflict fragments his understanding of reality to such a degree that he begins to view his affection towards girls through their body parts. Regarding his first crush on Wakulla Price, he only details her “brown hands” and “pink nails” (55). This psychological fragmentation can be noted by psychologists as Jimmy’s act of separating himself “so that interactions across a particular category boundary” with women is reduced<sup>4</sup>.

### 5. RESULTS

The result of this fragmentation during Jimmy’s beginning adolescence is resentment towards both sides of the argument. Jimmy’s reaction towards his parents’ involvement in his life epitomizes this theory. After hearing the argument through nanotechnology that he has built, Jimmy notes that the “good stuff” that his parents have engaged themselves in doesn’t help the situation because they “knew nothing about him, what he liked, what he hated, what he longed for” while appearing to expect him to “wander off the tracks” at any point in his life (58). This reaction positions Jimmy as representative of a person on the spectrum between the supporters and opposition of the technocracy who may assert pieces of arguments from either side.

### 6. CONCLUSION

The discourse that results from the mother’s and father’s conflicting stances center on the shift in humanity within a technocracy. Both parents conditioned Jimmy’s viewpoint on biotechnological

advancement as it relates to his life. Through verbal and nonverbal cues, such as complaints and gifts, each parent either promotes or condemns the advancement. The aggregate results in a visible dichotomy between the conflicting sides on the ethics of technocracy. The dichotomy also fragments humans into artificial categories that press separate realities on the labeled people. Through these separate realities of each member of the family; Atwood implies that the conflicting ideologies regarding a technocracy fragments humanity.

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