

Anthropomorphism as an Embodiment of Natural Gothic and Man in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

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Abstract

This essay examines anthropomorphism and gothic elements in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Atwood offers several textual clues regarding animals and birds that represent ideal environment. Moreover, she reinforces the narrative descriptions of such animals by polarizing other natural elements, like trees and bird. She constructs the decisive improvement of the literary characters' lives. These character resort to natural places to elevate their peace of mind by spending time in tranquility among environmental circumferences since countryside helps them to live peacefully. Here, Atwood's narrative appropriation of animals and birds essentially relates to the environmental capacity to make the characters relived and contended with nature desired by the characters. The study will apply the concept of anthropomorphism which encompasses the sense of gothic elements. Animals are one of the basic environmental components of the story's natural milieus. Atwood appropriates the view of the Animals through inextricable natural elements, birds, water, forests, and woods. As for birds, they function as the equilibrium of the ecological integrity tackled in literary works. Thus, the study tries to reveal the vital significance of natural biodiversity; and its literary function lies in offering implied textual insights on biodiversity depicted in the novel.

Key words: Atwood; Anthropomorphism; Environment; Ecocriticism; Gothic fiction; Nature

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1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental writings reflect the function of nature and its phenomenon. They provide a vivid picture of how nature is represented and conceived by humans. The representations of environmental nature have a close relationship with the portrayal of natural scenes. Literary works are among the most important writing compositions which deal with the functional manifestations of nature in fictional writings (Abu Jweid, 2020a, p.7). Fictional works, for example, abound with natural elements, such as landscapes and regional scenes which formulate the textual and contextual implicit meanings (Achilles & Bergmann 18). The textual meaning of fictional works carries out the direct depiction of natural elements in literary works (Abu Jweid, p.530). They are the structural construction of natural descriptions and their implicative meanings (Abu Jweid, 2021d, p.11). Such implicative meanings are the contextual form of the environmental writings (Abu Jweid, 2021a, p.52). On the other hand, the contextual feature of environmental writings involve the interaction between the human and the non-human elements (Crane, p.83).

Accordingly, this essay focuses on the incarnation of the human and the non-human elements in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003). The human elements will be the novel's characters. These characters will be studied in terms of their anthropomorphic qualities. Yet, these characters will involve the non-human creatures. Pigeons, for example, are given some human characteristics though they are animals. This is the anthropomorphic feature of Pigeons. Accordingly, the interaction between the novel's characters and such creatures will be studied by using the concept of anthropomorphism. Furthermore, the natural scenes portrayed in the novel will be analyzed by applying the concept of gothic. In ecocriticism, the concept of gothic is used to analyze and discuss the natural scenes like landscapes, forests, animal habitats in which horror

picture come out. Therefore, this essay will apply the concept of gothic to analyze the fear and horror scenes and descriptions in the novel.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) have been studied in different fields. In *Children of Oryx, Children of Crake: Human-Animal Relationships in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam* (2015), Jessica Cora Franken discusses the post-pandemic features of the novel: "Readers experience both the pre-pandemic world of unchecked corporate greed and extreme economic disparity, and the post-pandemic world in which a handful of human survivors attempt to build a community with and among the other survivors: genetically engineered animals and a newly created human like species" (3). These pandemic features are treated in relation to environmental concerns: "The novel tells the story of two other pandemic survivors: Toby and Ren. The narrative alternates between Toby's point of view and Ren's, and also between their post pandemic situation and their lives before. Toby grew up in the plebe lands and scraped by in grueling minimum wage jobs before joining the God's Gardeners environmental cult, mostly to escape her sexually abusive boss" (pp.7-8).

Furthermore, *Oryx and Crake* "was on the cusp of and in many ways predicted the New Carnivore movement and the reinvestment in meat culture. By 2009, the movement was in full bloom a perfect time for a keen-eyed observer like Atwood to offer an examination of what a wholesale rejection of that culture might look like, in a vegetarian, anti-capitalist occult" (p.31). This occult is "exposed, seen, ostracized, and singled out. Because the gaze and looking are given so much weight in the trilogy, it is significant that Crake selects Oryx's eye as the portal into the environmental space, where the idea for humanity's destruction first enters his mind" (p.44). This idea is gained by "delving more deeply into Jimmy's relationship with Oryx adds dimension to the discussion of his trouble with animals and agency. Jimmy's affinity for animals centers on how they help him define himself. He is a tragic example of a Western individual trying to "know" the animal and get the animal to behave according to his narrative rather than being open to entering a space where species can meet and all have agency" (p.44). Such agency is "obvious in a text with few mentions of the natural world, and Oryx is an important voice, reminding us how women, children, and people of color are disproportionately affected by environmental crises. Everything is connected; Oryx's story reveals how climate change led to the children in her village being sold into sex slavery" (p.45).

Additionally, as the novel unfolds, "the reader is led to question whether the child in the pornographic video is even Oryx at all. The text leaves open the possibility that Jimmy has condensed a few 'exotic Others' who look like Oryx into one person, a glorified other for him to fetishize" (p.45). Here, Atwood "plays with the narrative

convention of focalization, destabilizing the power positions of focalizer (Jimmy) and focalized object (Oryx). Although the reader "receives the focalized narrative through Jimmy, Atwood uses humor to chide Jimmy for his fetishization of Oryx" (p.46). This focalization is told "from Snowman/Jimmy's point of view in *Oryx and Crake*, though, pigeons are a constant threat. As lab animals they were given human neo cortex tissue, and it has made them cunning and intelligent. They plan ambushes, deploy scouts, and have long memories" (p.56).

In "Gender as a Social Construct in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*" (2012), Shaista Irshad argues that "the construction of masculinity in the novel as superior and ultimate in itself overlooks and exempts men from all sorts of weaknesses, and projects them as fully in command of their emotions and actions, practical and reasonable whereas women are seen as emotional and sentimental fools not capable of reasoning and logical approach" (p.587). The opposition between males and females is exemplified in the character of Oryx: "Oryx, the central woman character, is known to be a child porn star. She is sold during her childhood by her mother, along with her brother because of poverty" (p.588). This is because "she suffers class, gender, and sexual as well as colonial exploitation. She becomes a sexual commodity passing from one man to another, with each one exploiting her sexually. She is acquainted with the job of women in society during her childhood itself" (p.588).

Hence, all "the roles and duties of women revolve around her body, as she is seen only as a body. The village women make all effort to make her, 'look pretty and healthy' as these were essential requisites for them to be purchased by rich people" (p.588). In this sense, Atwood "being a postmodern writer marks out the instability of gender categories, where both male and female characters transgress the gender boundaries which are believed to be naturally ordained" (p.589). Thus, Atwood "clearly demonstrates through various instances how gender of both men and women are artificial and socially constructed under the patriarchal guidance and ideology. Since gender identity is all about performance learned through discourse, male and female characters exhibit both masculine and feminine identities irrespective of their sex. This is more prominently brought up in the novel through the characters of Oryx and Jimmy" (p.589). Moreover, Atwood "explains that the gender construction endows all the power and authority in the hands of patriarchy. This gendered society segregates women from all the major spheres, subordinating and marginalizing them to the areas which are pre-labeled as feminine" (p.589).

According to Irshad, Atwood "proves both the gender categories of masculinity and femininity as unstable and constructed culturally in discourse. She shows this more exquisitely through the character of Jimmy, who despite being man, displays interest in arts, and defends it against masculine science represented by scientist friend Crake" (p.589). This is because "Oryx being a woman is shown

to be practical and reasonable in her approach as opposed to Jimmy who is displayed as emotional and sentimental. Jimmy is shown to be opposing Crake for all of his scientific endeavors, be it new inventions or genetically engineered organisms" (p.589). Accordingly, the image of "Oryx is described as sexual commodity who is sexually objectified and oppressed in patriarchal society owing to her femininity. She is harassed both on account of her sexuality and class and treated as "body" and object" (p.590). Therefore, Atwood deconstructs the "belief of masculinity as biologically superior and femininity as biologically inferior. She nullifies the essentialism associated with gender and gender identities proving them to be the product of social and cultural construction" (p.591).

Cora Franken and Irshad discuss the implications of environmental qualities in the Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. They tackle some gender and social interests in their studies. They deal with the environmental influence on the novel. However, they do not discuss these interests in the light of ecocriticism. Therefore, I will apply the concepts of anthropomorphism and gothic to analyze the novel's environmental elements as an incarnation of the relationship between nature and man.

3. THE CONCEPT OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM

The concept of anthropomorphism is sometimes associated with "something of the religious taboo which still clings to secular, modern instances of anthropomorphism, even if it is animals rather than divinities that are being humanized" (Knafl, p.15). In addition, despite the fact that the "alleged analogy between the psychological development of children and the intellectual development of whole cultures has been largely discredited, the view that anthropomorphism of any kind is incompatible with modern science lingers" (p.16). Considered from a moral standpoint, anthropomorphism "sometimes seems dangerously allied to anthropocentrism: humans project their own thoughts and feelings onto other animal species because they egotistically believe themselves to be the center of the universe" (p.83). In recent years, another "moral dimension of anthropomorphism has been opened up by the debate over animal rights" (84). Sometimes, the concept appears in satiric texts (Abu Jweid, 2020f, p.102).

The moral is not only central to debates over anthropomorphism (Abu Jweid, 2020b: 6); it is also at the core of "epistemological and methodological debates in scholarship on animals and society" (Melion, p.55). Before either animal "individuality or subjectivity can be imagined, an animal must be singled out as a promising prospect for anthropomorphism. We do not choose to think with any and all animals. There seems to be no simple explanation as to why some species are singled out as good to think with and others not" (p.113). Furthermore, the concept of anthropomorphism is more common than "zoomorphism which (as elsewhere), tells

us comparatively little about animals; an anthropomorphic text assumes a basic identification, such as lion as king, and then, although the object of discourse is, theoretically, an animal, the text imagines the animal as behaving the way the human does, betraying the fact that it is interested only in kings and not at all in lions" (p.90). Zoomorphism is more complex "although this time a human being is the explicit object, the bestial qualities imputed to the human usually reveal an observation of animals more detailed (if no more accurate) than that of anthropomorphism, and the text teaches us simultaneously what sort of person it thinks that animal is like and what sort of animal it thinks that sort of person is like" (p.157). Here, literary concepts have allegorical literary implications (Abu Jweid and Kaur, p.8).

And where anthropomorphism "simply leaps over our knowledge that most animals cannot speak, zoomorphism seizes upon language as a point of potential difference between humans and animals and worries that point in various ways, imputing human speech to certain individual animals and either muteness or, on the other hand, the ability to understand animals to certain individual humans" (Moore, p.46). A vital space between "anthropomorphism and zoomorphism is marked out by a mythological cluster about talking animals and humans who commit the fatal error of mistaking sexual humans for animals" (p.83). Henceforth, the natural anthropomorphism of women is the other side of the coin of this luminal anthropomorphism of the epics, in which some animals speak human languages and some humans—males, contrasting with females—are privileged to understand the language of animals. In the full spate of sexuality, women lose their human language and become like animals (Abu Jweid, 2020c, p.13).

4. THE CONCEPT OF GOTHIC

The concept of gothic includes the horror qualities in literary works (Abu Jweid and GhadaSasa, p.338). This is because "Gothic Fiction consists of accessible essays written by leading Gothic scholars who specialize in a range of periods, national literatures, and narrative forms. The fourteen essays comprised in the volume offer a loosely chronological survey of Gothic fiction from the 1760s to the present" and "Together they introduce the reader to key themes and conventions of the Gothic, describe various social and aesthetic contexts that shaped the genre, and represent the major critical approaches in Gothic studies" (Neill, p.206).

Moreover, the concept of "Gothic dramatizes cultural struggles and ambivalences. It articulates our most profound fears and desires and narrativizes intractable social problems. Yet the Gothic is an aesthetic that transcends any one narrative form or moment in history. It negotiates between "high" and "low" culture, has been identified as both revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, and accommodates multiple interpretations" in which "the

Gothic has survived and thrived because of its endless adaptability, as the range of essays in this collection suggests” (Neill, p.207).

The concept of gothic has discourse qualities to discuss the characteristics of anxiety and fear: “gothic discourse of anxiety and even terror shadows national assertions of ‘peace, order, and good government’. He emphasises cultural, political, and psychological dimensions of ‘northern gothic’ in a study which treats colonial and postcolonial gothic, urban gothic, Native gothic, diasporic gothic, and the gothic films of David Cronenberg and Lynne Stopkewich” (Howells 342). There are some interesting pairings “across historical periods which demonstrate gothic refigurings of the classic tropes of European gothic: sublime or menacing landscapes and haunted houses, buried secrets, fragmented identities and dark doubles, estranged outsiders, trauma and monstrosity - all ways of representing the uncanny” (p.342).

Furthermore, the “traditional gothic spaces are transformed into psychological labyrinths in the underground existences of the city’s marginalised, alienated population, whose desperate lives constitute a subversive critique of consumerist culture and its commodification of human bodies. There are similar figurings of grotesquely mutated or monstrous bodies in gothic elements” (Howells 343). The gothic elements of the text and the tendency of the text to use some of those gothic symbols to create an unsettling feeling is explicitly linking together many of the themes from the preface, introduction, and previous chapters-the revision of the gothic, the haunting nature of the text (Abu Jweid and Sasa, p.165).

Gothic novels, from the outset, “were designed to draw readers in emotionally and evoke a response of either terror or horror. provides a useful explanation of the significance of terror and horror to the Gothic in literature. She argues that terror expands the soul and awakens the senses, while horror is so powerful that it causes the destruction of the latter and the shrinking of the former” (Howells, p.343). The distinction between the two “is that terror reflects evil in the environment rather than in humankind itself and that horror posits evil as inherent in people. terror and horror as separate emotions, they are increasingly brought together in Gothic texts, noting that, while horror may disgust the reader and suggest the futility of fighting evil, terror creates sympathy for otherwise monstrous characters, in whom readers see themselves” (p.343). By evoking “such responses and precipitating an examination of human nature and the place of evil in the human mind. Intended to educate people and potentially avoid the rise or continuation of such evil in the world within a contained framework. To convey the darkness and evil that are central to the subgenre” and gothic novels “typically incorporate depictions of dream landscapes and figures of the subconscious imagination. beings - mad monks, vampires, and demons - and settings - forbidden cliffs and glowering buildings, stormy seas and the dizzying

abyss - that function as powerful symbolic representations of a character’s mental and emotional turmoil” (p.343). Additionally, fictional characters are evaluated in terms of their literary individuality when they analyzed by means of gothic elements (Abu Jweid, 2021e, p.7).

Gothic novels “are not only distinguished by particular settings and characters but also have been treated historically as suspect because of their effects on readers, especially female readers. Gothic texts are designed to draw audiences in making the reader identify with what he or she read[s]” (Andrews, p.6). This moral purpose enables readers to exercise safely and so educate their emotions, but such a journey has also been perceived as potentially addictive because Gothic novels provide an alternative to the banality of daily life (Abu Jweid, 2020d, p.94). The fear of many “critics during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was that excessive mental stimulation would impede appropriate moral development. Although viewed as escapist literature, Gothic texts were seen as increasingly dangerous precisely because they allowed for the unlicensed indulgence of an amoral imagination that was a socially subversive force (Abu Jweid, 2020e, p.207). In psychoanalytic terms, Gothic “novels epitomized the return of the repressed, in which subconscious psychic energy bursts out from the restraints of the conscious ego” (Abu Jweid, 2021b, p.9). This kind of mental “freedom could undermine family values and cultivate destructive and anti-social desires” (8). Reading “Gothic novels came to be seen as a step toward moral corruption, precisely because reading them might lead to an inability to differentiate between ‘art and life’” (p.8) and precipitate action based on desire rather than logic.

Gothic characters, or villains, typically remain wicked and evoke terror, they serve as symbols of moral relativism because they also elicit sympathy, forcing those who engage with the novels to wrestle with their own ambivalent perspectives on the nature of evil (Abu Jweid, 2021c, p.26). The villain thus “becomes an object of both pity and fear. Some authors of Gothic texts have taken this ambiguity even further by combining hero and villain into a single character who illustrates the complex moral and psychological relationship between good and evil” (Andrews, p.9). The concept of gothic provides a “rich starting point for rethinking what such a juxtaposition of concepts might mean beyond the fusion of a Native trickster and a Gothic hero/villain in a text” (p.15).

5. CONCLUSION

This study focused on anthropomorphism and gothic elements in Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003). In this sense, it demonstrated how the animals and birds represent the environment as a crucial component of natural places dwelt by the fictional characters that try to find suitable dwelling conditions for their life. Together with the animals and birds, woods are elements of environmental gothic observed by Atwood through the

narrative fabrication of the novel. In literature, gothic woods are meaningful for the fictional characters. Each character perceives the woods in a certain way; and he or she understands woods according to the degree of inclination to woody environment.

The study, therefore, shed light on the narrative significance of the fictional characters. The characters, equivalently, are preoccupied with woods because they mean a lot to them. In the first place, they are the environmental background of the natural consecutive phenomena, such as sunset which makes her feel more comfortable and satisfied with nature. Therefore, anthropomorphism and gothic elements are environmental components that include many anthropocentric elements, like animals, birds, insects and so forth. They also include natural physical components, such as lanes, paths and roads. Thus, they were explored as representations of anthropomorphisms due to the fact that they are closely associated with the qualities of human beings and gothic places.

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