Paradice Lost, Paradise Regained:  
*homo faber* and the Makings of a  
New Beginning in *Oryx and Crake*  

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Margaret Atwood’s novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) critiques modernity’s commitment to *homo faber*—he who labors to use every instrument as a means to achieve a particular end in building a world, even when the fabrication of that world necessarily demands a repeated violation of its materiality, including its people. Atwood propels her novel through the memories of the main character, Snowman, a survivor of a deadly viral pathogen created and unleashed by his best friend, Crake. Too much a product of a profit-driven world who mirrors its economy of self-interest, Crake emerges as the quintessential *homo faber*, making it unlikely that any kind of positive social change will happen directly through him.

Instead, Atwood’s character Snowman serves as a potential site for change. He faces the challenge of either taking deliberative and participatory action in the creation of a yet-to-be imagined inviolate world, or imitating *homo faber*. Atwood marks this tension from the outset of the novel, symbolizing it in Jimmy’s name change to Snowman, which evokes The Abominable Snowman—“existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards [. . .] known only through rumours and through its backward-pointing footprints” (8). These mythic and multi-directional footprints (they point backward as they move forward) represent Snowman’s liminal position and potential power—to repeat a past cycle of aggression against nature in the name of personal profit, or to re-imagine a way for future living grounded in a genuine concern for others. Snowman’s narrative about his
past is concomitant of his ability to cross boundaries on several levels and to challenge existing structures all while working within them. At novel’s end, when the possibility for again belonging to a community is revealed to him, he must choose: to retreat from, attack, or engage humanely the strangers with whom he is confronted. If he chooses the third option, it is possible that he will help to build a world unlike that which *homo faber* has produced.¹

Under girding the development of *homo faber* is a basic, instrumental philosophy that has contributed to an elision of violence against material goods, including human instruments. This instrumentalism has naturalized the division of labor under capitalism and led to an increased decentralization in governing communities and alienation among individuals. *Homo faber*'s instrumental worldview—grounded in separation and enclosure—acts as the cohesive agent that assures Jimmy a leading role in Crake’s “Paradice” project. Of course, it is this same instrumental perspective that separates the two men as well. On one hand, Crake’s scientific intelligence, evident through his work in Paradice where he creates the BlyssPluss pill and the genetically-spliced Crakers, positions him as a member of an elite class that values instrumental production only as it is linked with personal gain. On the other hand, Jimmy’s humanistic tendencies socially marginalize him. Even as he is part of the privileged, scientific community because of his family background, he moves forever closer to membership in the

¹Atwood’s last chapter “Footprint” intertextually recalls DeFoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* where Crusoe discovers human footprints in the sand and experiences anxiety about his imminent meeting with others whom he identifies as “cannibals and savages” (260). After seeing the footprints, he recalls his time on the island: “In my reflections upon the state of my case since I came on shore on this island, I was comparing the happy posture of my affairs in the first years of my habitation here compared to the life of anxiety, fear and care which I had lived ever since I had seen the print of a foot in the sand” (259). For a brief but useful discussion on Atwood’s literary intertextuality of DeFoe’s work see Richard A. Posner’s book review “The End is Near” (*New Republic* 229.12 [22 Sep. 2003]: 6).
“uncivilized” Pleebland culture that literally sits beyond the walls of his world.

Belonging and not belonging to his community is a marker that Snowman/Jimmy is Atwood’s vehicle for showing that potential social change may be enacted. The supposed “good” life that homo faber has fabricated, and that has been reified in modernity, finds itself in question in this novel. Though it is plausible that readers, through Snowman, might concede the possibility for re-making a world in imitation of its predecessor, they might also be able to imagine a potential watershed moment in his decision—where future-life will be motivated less by personal gain and grounded more in a genuine care and respect for others. Since the novel concludes before that decision is made, however, choice and accountability are left in the minds of the readers, although Atwood does guide readers to contemplate seriously the ethical implications of particular choices.

**THE MEANS TO PARADISE**

In the *Politics*, Aristotle identifies antiquity’s instrumental approach as integral to life. He claims that “no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he be provided with necessaries.” Future-technology was envisioned as a way of easing the burden of life, and it was accepted that slavery would remain a tacit part of human existence until there would be some effective replacement for it, for until “the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them” (bk. 1, pt. 4), there would be a need for the enslavement of others to ease life’s load. Since the means to “paradise”—or a better life exempt from difficult physical labor—was understood to emerge through active citizenry, more leisure time was desired so people could devote themselves to politics. Antiquity’s goal in using slaves was to assist men in negotiating the realities of polis life and to fulfill the nature of man who is “a political ani-
mal” (bk. 1, pt. 2). The slave, according to Aristotle, was “the minister of action” (bk. 1, pt. 4). Property in the form of slaves who produced labor for household survival assured property owners that they could tend to civic duties.

Aristotle’s description of the enslaved worker whose labor is a means for familial survival is identified some centuries later as *animal laborens*, the servant to nature who desires abundance from hard labor. The meaning for *animal laborens* emerges through the accepted idea that caring for nature through difficult labor will grant sustenance and survival. Joanne B. Ciulla points out, though, that since thinking and ideas were considered to be the most critical aspect of daily work in Greek life, intellectuals avoided humiliation by turning over hard physical labor to others. Because the Greeks found the devaluation of the material world abhorrent, they understood *homo faber*—what they identified as the work of hands—as philistine, although they understood the making of tools as instruments to help *animal laborens* as necessary.

In his *Creative Evolution* (1911), Henri Bergson defines *homo faber* in order to theorize intelligence, writing that “intelligence, considered in what seems to be its original feature, is the faculty of manufacturing artificial objects, especially tools to make tools, and of indefinitely varying the manufacture” (139). While this is

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2 In her discussion, derived from *The Working Life: The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work*, Ciulla uses as an example Plutarch’s commentary on Archimedes who did not leave behind any writings on his mechanical works or instruments because he regarded “as sordid and ignoble the construction of instruments and in general everyday art directed to use and profit, and he only strove after those things which, in their beauty and excellence, remain beyond all contact with the common needs of life.” (37)

3 Arendt points out that the Greeks did not use the word labor, *ponein*, to describe the work of the hands and body. Rather, they distinguished between the *cheirotechnēs*, the craftsman, who “minister to the necessities of life” through use of their hands, and those using their bodies, *tō somati ergazesthai*. In both instances they used *ergazasthai* (work) to define what is done with hand/bodies. With modernity, labor—unlike work—does not “designate the finished product.”
a useful definition with which to begin, Hannah Arendt furthers the discussion of *homo faber* in *The Human Condition*. Arendt begins with a simple definition, “The Latin word *faber*, probably related to *facere* (‘to make something’ in the sense of production), [and] originally designated the fabricator and artist who works upon hard material, such as stone or wood” (136). She goes on to argue, however, that *homo faber* is contrary to *animal laborens* because he has always destroyed nature, not worked with it. Arendt asserts that modern *homo faber*’s domination depends upon one constant—that he understand himself as the measure of all things. While no doubt dependent upon natural resources to complete his work, he fails to note this fact and thus marks the resources as invisible in his fabrication. Arendt argues, in reiterating a popular Marxian claim that the process gets lost in the product, that with the fabrication and eventual reification of the product, *homo faber* himself loses sight of the several components critical to human creativity and ingenuity, changing the very essence of nature (150). For Arendt, the real tragedy of *homo faber* is his self-absorption in his own activity. He has naturalized reified production and has appropriated from *animal laborens* the desire for abundance—rewriting goals of communal sustenance derived from natural materials for basic needs to those of personal (often monetary) fulfillment through the use of natural resources to engender surplus.

In other words, in modernity productivity becomes more than the mere output of objects or tools derived from natural resources to ease the toil involved in life. The instrumentalism once integral to producing good citizens and committed to the ideals of technological innovation evolved into a form of production that eschewed outward-looking objectives (like community building through government, for example) for inward-
looking ones. Under capitalism, then, production pressures instrumentalism to undergo a critical metamorphosis though remaining goal-oriented, for the desire for making becomes further complicated by the desire to accumulate wealth. Capitalist production necessitates the value of the natural laborer only for how much he/she is capable of accomplishing, often in a designated amount of time. Labor is a ceaseless cycle of “means” and “ends,” for the laborer’s fiscal survival and the boss’s accumulation of capital. This metamorphosis of the labor process as divided depends upon a shifting, albeit intact, instrumental philosophy dating back to the ancients. Adam Smith begins his most famous text, *The Wealth of Nations*, by lauding this division of labor as essential and natural to human existence: “the necessary, though very slow and gradual consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” (25 Book I, Ch 2; my emphasis). The rise of private property and industrialism under capitalism would most likely have seemed onerous to Aristotle, whose naturalized system of slavery and wealth-getting existed because society desired free time to deliberate upon the wealth of the government. His claim that “money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase interest” is moot. So, too, would be his ideas about active citizenry in a centralized governmental space.

Just as in antiquity technology was marked as the potential liberator of slaves, so Enlightenment philosophy argued that “reason embodied in science and technology could liberate the human race from prejudice, ignorance, and injustice [and] could eventually liberate all women and men and democratize their social institutions” (Arendt 268). Paradoxically, this desire for science and technology has not led toward but away from democratic liberation. As Benjamin Barber claims, whereas “[d]emocratic citizenry expects speech/action and the assumption that [its] people would be committed to it, [. . .] the rise
of private-interest groups and technologies [. . .] has [caused] democracy [. . .] to have lost its participatory purpose” (270). According to Barber, democracy more often than not has not “resist[ed] the innovative forms of demagoguery that accompany innovative technology” (270). When today’s *homo faber* produces technologies that originate in material resources—as Atwood has Crake and others do via genome splicing, for example—he is “successful” only to the degree that those technologies can be marketed and sold to a populace on the premise that they can fulfill emotional desires. Whether such products are really “good” and “needed” to live a decent life are certainly questionable. Today, their democratic possibilities are certainly more in question. Even in earlier modern periods like the Renaissance, technological developments like moveable type were linked to democracy and the potential for liberating people from oppressive work conditions, as such an innovation would allow for heightened literacy across class boundaries and, hence, an increase in individuals able to participate in active citizenry. Yet potential liberation in labor through technological advancement has not readily demolished the institutions of slavery. In fact, such an institution has taken on other forms (like the selling of children as sex slaves—as in Oryx’s case—on the black market). In essence, the continued validation of a division of labor to the contemporary laboring process—of which instrumentalism is a necessary part—only creates alienation and forecasts the possibility of an infertile democracy. In *Oryx and Crake* it appears that the more divided or separated or enclosed individuals become, the fewer opportunities there are for an ethics of sustenance through care to displace an ethics of flagrant profit and wide-open technological advancement.

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5Benjamin R. Barber provides a brief but useful historical sketch of technologies that advanced democracy in his chapter “Securing Global Democracy in the World of McWorld.”
THE MEANS TO “PARADICE”

An analysis of the social epistemology that informs Crake’s and Jimmy’s childhood and teenage years demonstrates how the creation of “Paradice,” the dome where Crake completes his work, is inevitable. Crake’s two-fold project—to create the BlyssPluss pill and the Crakers—is symptomatic of his life-work as modern *homo faber*. Both Jimmy and Crake grow up in highly privileged, private communities with family members who engage in, more or less, experimental scientific research. It is expected that the boys will engage in similar work. This section examines how the boys’ lifestyles and educations are embedded in a systemic acceptance of separation and enclosure from communities and people not engaging in similar work—which provides them both the means for getting to Paradice.

A division of communities and labor is at the crux of Atwood’s construction of the boys’ early development. That they grow up naturalized to the idea of separation is symbolized by the very real walls that enclose their communities. As part of an elite community involved in scientific research and mind work, the boys are protected from the Sodom and Gomorrah-like visceral nature of the society beyond the walls. Robert Reich calls this process of enclosure “secession” (269), a pulling out of larger society by richer, more elite workers who inevitably, in their acquisition of private living, withhold not just their money and knowledge but their participation. As Barber stresses, the “restructuring of the global economy to meet the demands of the new age information/entertainment sector further reinforces the boundaries between the privileged and the rest” (271). In Barber’s view, Reich’s “symbolic analysts,” who live within the walled communities and who are the fabricators of new technologies and markets, generally ensure an endemic division of labor and social inequality. In *Oryx and Crake*, the expansive areas

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6See Chapter 23.
beyond the walls are called the “pleeblands,” and they conjure pejorative yet mythological ambivalence. According to those living in the compounds, the inhabitants of the pleeblands are “mental deficients” (288). And the mythological nature of place becomes evident through Jimmy, who never actually visits the alien territory until he is an adult, although he does physically get pushed to the margins of the compound when he becomes a writer and not a scientist.

Power through enclosure is certainly not a new idea. More recently in literary and cultural studies, discussions of identity formation under colonial ideology have focused on the symbolic domestication or enclosure of the “wild” landscape. Civility continues to be linked with the metropolitan (and vice versa), and cutting-edge “work” takes place in these inner-sanctums. Using DeFoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* as a centerpiece for discussion—the same text that Atwood alludes to in her last chapter titled “Footprint”—Robert P. Marzec identifies the human desire to stand above nature until it is successfully contained as “the Crusoe syndrome” (131). He stresses how novels in the English tradition have dealt repeatedly with this topic. Whatever nomadic desires to cross real physical boundaries Jimmy and Crake may have—especially as teenage boys—they are curbed through their community’s domestication of them. Even when the boys demonstrate the potential for unbridled energy, it is in a cyber environment, and it generally can not occur without their breaking through some kind of already-made enclosure. Their forays

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7 Marzec’s article “Enclosure, Colonization, and the Robinson Crusoe Syndrome: A Genealogy of Land in a Global Context” discusses Crusoe’s metaphysical desires to stand above the untamed land and how they manifest themselves in his first-night’s stay in a tree on the island. In this argument, Marzec points out that while Crusoe does come down from the tree in order to enclose the land, he metaphysically remains above it until it is appropriately colonized. In Atwood’s novel we are introduced to Snowman’s living arrangements, a tree, and—thus—might have to consider the question whether he will continue to place himself above nature by novel’s end.
into the HottTotts site and Crake’s hacking into his uncle’s computer are just two examples. Jimmy’s father explains,

Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies [. . .] and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside. (28)

Much later in the novel, Crake builds the Paradice dome within the already walled-in RejoovenEsence community, eschewing the public domain even more. The entire fabrication of Paradice demands that Crake don a metaphysical, Crusoe-like attitude, and his early socialization into such a way of knowing has, no doubt, validated this vision.

Educational utilitarianism serves as a critical enclosure in both boys’ lives as well. Reminiscent of the Dickensian portrait of education in his *Hard Times*, Snowman recalls that his junior high Life Skills class tried to provide students only with directly useful information. As the class motto ran, “We are not here to play, to dream, to drift. We are here to practice Life Skills” (42).

In this class students practiced

Double-entry on-screen bookkeeping, banking by fingertip, using a microwave without nuking your egg, filling out housing applications for this or that Module and job applications for this or that Compound, family heredity research, negotiating your own marriage-and-divorce contracts, wise genetic match-mating, the proper use of condoms to avoid sexually transmitted bioforms. (42)

While some of the skills seem to focus innocently on the quotidian aspects of living (using a microwave, for example), others more obviously reflect educational efforts to perpetuate the style of living—an elitist one at best—that is expected to occur within the Compounds (e.g., wise genetic match-mating). There is no analysis of why such skills are important in life, or who claims such skills are crucial in good living, let alone the ethical dimensions integral to such a process. Later, Jimmy enrolls in a public college, Martha Graham, where he discov-
ers that the school’s original Latin motto *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* had been given an addendum: “Our Students Graduate With Employable Skills” (188). Chances are the English translation bears the real weight of the work that is to be accomplished at Martha Graham, especially since “the enthusiasm of the dedicated artsy money had waned” and “the curricular emphasis had switched to other arenas” (188). Martha Graham had become a school whose main area of content was “no longer central to anything,” interesting but tangential to “real” life, like “Latin, or book-binding” (187). Even the once popular visual arts had been lost to technological advances; “[a]nyone with a computer could splice together whatever they wanted, or digitally alter old material, or create new animation” (187). In a search to regain an identity, Martha Graham made “everything” have “utilitarian aims” (188). Compound life’s tendency to provide a less-than-liberal approach to education in Life Skills class merely plays itself out at a higher level in college.

Education in the utilitarian tradition must ultimately find a way to separate the wheat from the chaff, even in cases when those being divided are already among the privileged. Favored over Jimmy because of his strengths in science and math, Crake is courted by several prestigious and private institutions of higher education. Deciding finally upon Watson Crick, a highly protected “palace” (199) when compared with the falling apart, unprotected Martha Graham that sits adjacent to the sprawling and wild Pleeblands, Crake more fully becomes inculcated into the lessons of *homo faber*. Jimmy, meanwhile, although still within the system, becomes alienated from the values of Compound life as he furthers his education:

After a humiliating wait while the brainiacs were tussled over by the best Edu-Compounds and the transcripts of the mediocre were fingered and skimmed and had coffee spilled on them and got dropped on the floor by mistake, Jimmy was knocked down at last to the Martha Graham Academy. (174)

The brainiac’s merit—that is the compunction to engage in scientific research to “better” the world—marginalizes Jimmy
further. He gets a single room at the Academy, he doesn’t successfully keep a love interest for very long, and he thinks of Crake as his only friend. Jimmy’s admission into the once-liberal-arts Academy, and Crake’s into Watson Crick, is just one example of how the division of labor—and unproductive versus productive labor—is supported. More than once Crake asserts the dictum of this division. Once, while visiting Crake at Watson Crick, Jimmy inquires whether Crake has a girlfriend. Crake’s response is “Easy for you to say [. . .]. You’re the grasshopper, I’m the ant. I can’t waste time in unproductive random scanning” (207; my emphasis). Even Jimmy has internalized outward social expectations of him. He is all too aware that “his wordserf job [with AnooYoo] was surely one that Crake would despise” (253).

**The Fabrication of Paradice: In *homo faber*’s Image**

Although the RejoovenEsense leaders’ drafting of Crake right after his graduation from Watson Crick is what finally affords him the opportunity to build the Paradice dome, it should be clear by now that his upbringing has well-prepared him for success. Besides being schooled early in utilitarian demands and being effectively cloistered in the research Compounds, it is the scientific discoveries that emerge during his lifetime, especially in human genome splicing, that finally allow him to fabricate Paradice. Such “discoveries” and “advances” are grounded repeatedly in a violation of nature. Crake’s willing participation in and justification of this violation enables his identification with modern *homo faber*. In a sense, perhaps Crake’s attitude is best understood through the words of workers participating in hybridization research at the OrganInc biolab: “create-an-animal was so much fun [. . .] it made you feel like God” (51). When Jimmy visits Watson Crick, he sees magnificent butterflies with “wings the size of pancakes” and “shocking pink” (200). In reference to their fabrication, Crake says, “After it happens,
that’s what they look like in real time. The process is no longer important” (200; my emphasis). Crake has simultaneously left out details about the use of real nature in their creation, has called Jimmy’s attention back to the human’s mind process of creating, and identified the butterflies’ final existence as dependent upon that human element, even as he tries to stress that the “process is no longer important” (200; my emphasis).

Harmless products such as the butterflies are often ignored, unless they become a nuisance or threat, while the process of their development becomes an end in its own right. Jimmy remembers that when “products” become dangerous in the OrganInc biolab, they are “destroyed” (51). The “cane toad with a prehensile tail like a chameleon’s that might climb in through the bathroom window and blind you while you were brushing your teeth” (51) is one example. Later, when—as Snowman—he faces having to escape human-eating Pigoons, his situation calls attention to the dangers of technological innovation incurred without ethical preponderance. Even when a fabrication is neither necessarily destructive nor incidental, it can still be lowly regarded. Crake himself refers to the Crakers as “floor models”—indicating that they are useable, but also implying some degree of sub-level status in the evolution of their line.

Several instances suggest Crake’s acceptance of an instrumental existence that depends upon the violation of nature in the name of science and profit. With regard to the testing of the BlyssPluss pill, he speaks antiseptically about such violence as failed research—not as unethical activity. For example, he highlights that “[a] couple of the test subjects had literally fucked themselves to death, several had assaulted old ladies and household pets, and there had been a few unfortunate cases of priapism and split dicks [. . .]. One subject had grown a big genital wart all over her epidermis” (295). Even his response to the research subjects indicate his acceptance of objectification in the name of research and profit. They are “[f]rom the poorer countries [. . .]. Whorehouses. Prisons. And from the ranks of
the desperate, as usual” (296). This matter-of-fact recitation resembles an earlier event in his life when he claims, with respect to the Happicuppa coffee wars, that there have always been “peasants” (179). Even with regard to his own innovations he claims that the BlyssPluss pill “would become a huge money-spinner” (295). He knows and accepts, long before Jimmy, that HelthWyzer had been creating diseases for profit (211). When he and Jimmy visit the Pleeblands he boasts, “this is where our stuff turns to gold” (288), and “You have no idea how much money changes hands on this one street alone” (289). And during Jimmy’s visit to Watson Crick, Crake claims that the inventors of the ChickieNobs will “clean up” especially because “[t]hey can undercut the price of everyone else” (203). Aristotle may have identified technology as a way to provide people with a better life exempt from the hard work of life’s necessities, but it is capitalism’s promise that people will mostly develop technology to reap fiscal rewards. Crake himself makes the bio-plague, in the form of BlyssPluss, for profit, although he is fairly silent on this fact, making it possible for others like Jimmy to mistakenly interpret his work as “culture” work. Not until Jimmy receives a phone call during the actual outbreak does he realize that Crake has serious financial investors.

As homo faber, Crake acts as the transformer of materiality into instruments. He also reveals his divine aspirations. In a reference to chess, he claims to Jimmy that the “[r]eal set is in your head” (77), indicating that humans can find the truth if they think hard enough. While a notion common in research—to always seek truth and to expect your ideas to be dispelled on that journey—this attitude carries with it the possibility for conflating the human and divine if misinterpreted. Crake confuses the boundaries of human/divine when he becomes fluent in genetic

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8Brenda Laurel offers an excellent discussion of what it means to engage in “culture work” in her book *Utopian Entrepreneur* (Cambridge [MA]: MIT Press, 2001). According to Laurel, such work means allowing humane values to guide work in public and private sectors.
blueprinting and recklessly uses his knowledge to alter the world according to his own vision or word. Once thought to be a quality of the divine—to create a person outside of natural birth—it now becomes known and measured by man. It is not surprising that Crake envisions himself as divine, the creator of an “elegant” idea like Paradice. And two of his human instruments critical in the tending to Paradice include Jimmy and Oryx.

**TENDING TO PARADICE: ORYX AS HUMAN INSTRUMENT**

Crake invites Jimmy and Oryx to tend to Paradice. The former acts as Crake’s “wordserf” by heading the advertising campaign for BlyssPluss. The latter assumes the position of teacher to the Crakers. In part, through their labor, Crake is free to have the leisure time to think. Both Jimmy and Oryx interpret their invitation to labor in Paradice as promotions—a move from slave status to citizen, in a sense, which is paradoxical since they really survive as slaves to Crake’s concerns and “free” enterprise. This brief section addresses Oryx’s role in the novel as it pertains to her as human instrument to Crake and Jimmy.\(^9\)

Before she can be re-imagined and brought to mythological status through Snowman, who (as Jimmy) cares deeply about the abuses that she suffered as a child, she exists as a femininized territory that Jimmy and Crake emotionally (for Jimmy) and sexually (for Crake and Jimmy) conquer. She is virgin and whore—and acts as an instrument in each case. She is akin to nature as the material or body that must be manipulated in order for *homo faber’s* production to occur, although now the process has turned its eye on human labor instead of non-human natural resources. And Oryx is so transformed in the process of production or making (i.e., what Jimmy or Crake make of her) that her essence—as

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\(^9\) I do not wish to diminish the importance of Atwood’s construction of Oryx, which is worthy of fuller and richer exploration with respect to feminism and religion among other topics.
raw material—can never be known. Snowman recalls his feelings about seeing Oryx for the first time in Paradice, revealing her as a mirror to his self-knowledge: “She turned into the camera and there it was again, that look, that stare, the stare that went right into him and saw him as he truly was” (308; my emphasis).

Oryx’s history is one of sexual enslavement grounded in a system of instrumental, late capitalist exchange. For her, although money cannot replace love, money at least makes people responsible for others. In childhood, Oryx’s mother sells her so that other family members might be properly cared for. Oryx sees it as her duty to fulfill the prophecy handed to her by her family on the day that she is sold. In other words, her personal experience teaches her that care is grounded in duty and that everything has exchange and use value (122-126). For her, “having a money value was no substitute for love [. . .]. But love was undependable [. . .] at least those who wanted to make a profit from you would make sure you were fed enough and not damaged too much” (126). Later in life, Oryx trades sex for literacy and a plane ticket. She speaks of her enslavement as necessary because there is a demand for it. Exploitation is merely a matter of fact: “Working was what Jack called what they did” (143).

Crake and Jimmy encounter Oryx first through the HottTotts website, and later Crake engages her services when he is a post-grad at Watson Crick—a school that provides the sexual services of “trained professional[s]” (203) for its students. Oryx retains an instrumental and dehumanized quality in other ways as well: in receiving payment to tend to the Crakers, in serving both Crake and Jimmy sexually, and in delivering the BlyssPluss pills worldwide. During her time in Paradice, she understands her subordinate position, telling Jimmy more than once that “Crake is my boss” (313).

Oryx, shaped by her boss Crake, acts as one of his major strategies in his altering-the-world game. The overall economics of Atwood’s novel point to game and game theory as integral to deciphering a deeper understanding of plot. While used to
maximize Crake’s profit with respect to pill distribution, Oryx is even more readily used as a strategy to get Jimmy to act as Crake’s pawn. Having spent much of his teenage years with Jimmy “watch[ing] porn shows” (85), Crake knows what Jimmy likes in a woman. And he was the first witness to Jimmy’s growing obsession with Oryx. On the day that both boys see Oryx for the first time, Crake creates a “small archive” of her photo, giving Jimmy a copy of her to save (91). Morton D. Davis, in his work on game theory, calls attention to the critical role of strategy, claiming that it “is a complete plan of action that describes what a player will do under all possible circumstances” and that “[t]here are poor strategies, just as there are good strategies” (7). In inventing Oryx as an integral aspect of his game implemented to play on Jimmy’s obsession, Crake’s strategy to win Jimmy over seems a very good strategy indeed.

Yet Davis also illustrates how decision makers do not stand alone or untouched in their game playing or, thus, in their agency. He writes,

A player involved in a game with other decision-making players is in the same position as the scientist who wanted to study a monkey’s behavior. After he placed the monkey in a room and gave it time to get acclimated, he looked through the observation slot—and saw the monkey’s eyeball looking back at him”.(6)

And so Jimmy becomes the monkey looking back at Crake, having the potential to turn Crake’s game plan upside down. For instance, as Snowman he raises Oryx to mythological status when he tells stories about her to the Crakers. In that storytelling he turns away from an understanding of Oryx as human instrument to serve personal needs and constructs a vision of her that sees her as an instrument to be used to sustain community and love. She is reinvented as a goddess whose genuine concern for nature requires that its people give attention to regenerative possibilities, like returning the bones of the fish to the waters that have provided the food. This interpretation of Oryx’s desires for the Crakers ignores not only her human experience
but that experience as it was grounded in capitalist exchange. This revision—from Oryx as an instrument for self validation to Oryx as instrument to maintain others’ well being—is a subtle yet important way that Snowman implements his own strategy to rethink instrumentalism, how in and of itself it may not be negative and how it may be re-imagined.

Of course, readers approach this revision of Oryx (told to the Crakers) only in the context of Snowman’s other story of her. When it is paired with the “absent” text, Snowman’s struggle to make critical choices about how to act in life is highlighted. One choice that Jimmy makes is that Oryx must die, especially as she is a hinge in Crake’s attempt to re-enter Paradice. Crake uses Oryx as the means for attempting to get Jimmy to open the sealed doors that lead into the heart of the dome. In a sense, Jimmy’s future mythologizing of Oryx is dependent upon his killing of her. He cannot allow her—or Crake—to re-enter Paradice in their known human existence, for both have “sinned” against the potential goodness of humanity. So he shuts the doors on them both and stands alone in Paradice.

**PARADICE LOST: THE END OF HOMO FABER?**

Paradice, then, begins with Crake and ends with Jimmy. Jimmy’s solitary existence within Paradice upon the larger world’s destruction places him in a position of being able to reinvent a future world—one that may or may not be more attentive to caring for others. It is after the fall of Paradice that he begins his story that serves as nature’s memory, reminding readers that nature pre-dates human innovation—especially narcissistic research and excessive wealth—and that the pall of the past world—a human tendency toward domination over others—has brought them to this crux in time. Snowman serves effectively as this storyteller because there is evidence from early on in his life that he has the ability to be compassionate and ethical, to see himself as
embedded within the world as opposed to separate or above it. His struggle with modern metaphysics has inculcated him into a philosophy that would demand his straying from relying upon a humane potential, and he recognizes this, too.

His potential to see himself as connected with nature is evident from about the age of five and a half. He witnesses the incineration of piles of “cows and sheep and pigs” that are being destroyed because it is feared that they have been victims of bioterrorism. Snowman remembers that he had been “anxious about the animals, because they were being burned and surely [. . .] would [be . . .] hurt” (18). He also recalls that “[i]n some way all of this [. . .] was his fault, because he’d done nothing to rescue them” (18). His own materiality as equal and not superior to them lingers and reveals itself through the fear of being burned as well. When his father and mother explain that the animals had been plagued by a disease—and “a disease is like when you have a cough” (19)—Jimmy cries. His responsiveness to nature recalls one of Atwood’s beliefs about qualities extant in much Canadian literature. In an interview with Mary Ellis Gibson, Atwood claims that a distinction between Canadian and American works, with respect to the human rites of passage and killing, is as follows:

[1]n American literature killing an animal is an initiation into adult life. You somehow come of age by indulging in this ritual of killing the bear. And it seemed to me that there was a different, an almost opposite way of approaching the death of an animal. In American literature you killed the animal and achieved something by doing it; in the Canadian one, you killed the animal and it was a negative achievement. You didn’t get good things from doing it. You got the horrible realization that you had killed your brother, your relative. (Gibson 36)

In considering Atwood’s claim, it may be plausible to believe that the drives of *homo faber* are countered—even quelled—through repeated personal attentiveness to and concern for human and non-human others. And Jimmy’s responsiveness is not fleeting. For instance, responsiveness to an instrumental model that sub-
sumes materiality is further evidenced in his aversion to eating at the bistro in the OrganInc Farms Compound where people would joke about failed research being used as food: “‘Pigoon pie again,’ they would say. ‘Pigoon pancakes, pigoon popcorn. Come on, Jimmy, eat up!’ This would upset Jimmy; he was confused about who should be allowed to eat what. He didn’t want to eat a pigoon, because he thought of the pigoons as creatures much like himself” (24; my emphasis).

Jimmy witnesses his own mother’s profound sense of ethics about compound research. Her stance, however, marginalizes her and ultimately marks her as a subversive. When she self-selects herself out of doing research in order to stay at home with Jimmy, she is of no “use.” Finally, because she is openly opinionated about the community’s research—that it is morally and ethically bankrupt—she is identified as a deleterious subject and must be destroyed. While Jimmy’s father holds out hope for scientific research and its ability to better human life—“[t]hink of the possibilities, for stroke victims” (56)—she claims that he and his associates have “thought up yet another way to rip off a bunch of desperate people” (56). In an argument with him, she reveals the bogus divisions under girding his research that infect his thinking: “You hype your wares and take all their money and then they run out of cash, and it’s no more treatments for them [. . .]. Don’t you remember the way we used to talk, everything we wanted to do? Making life better for people—not just people with money. You used to be so . . . you had ideals, then” (56-57).

Although she had possibilities for being a potential site for insurgency, recognizing NooSkins as a “moral cesspool” (56), she fails because she allows her prisoner mentality to overrun her life, nurturing Jimmy’s potential for communion with the world merely in fits and starts. Jimmy’s mother disappears the same year that Crake arrives. Although her influence to live a more ethical life remains with Jimmy—for example, her voice frequently directs him throughout the story acting as an apex
in the conclusion where he hears her say “Don’t let me down” (374)—it will be a struggle for him to easily accept her ideals when he will have to negotiate the desires and expectations that Crake has for them both.

His repressed ethical sensibility is revealed to readers through Snowman when he recalls that (as Jimmy) he did recognize the inherently damaging problems of Compound life. In his visit to Watson Crick, Jimmy thinks that “some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed” (106). And he is not speaking of physical boundaries—like going into the Pleeblands. He is talking about technological and ethical ones like the invention of the wolvogs, which will “take your hand off” (205). He asks, “Why make a dog like that? . . . . Who’d want one? . . . . What if they get out? Go on the rampage? Start breeding, then the population spirals out of control [. . .]?” (205). This is not the first time he suspects people of doing something just for the sake of it. For instance, he is convinced that Crake wants to be Grandmaster of the Extinctathon game, “not because it meant anything but just because it was there” (81).

Jimmy leaves Crake’s Paradice only to return as Snowman, whose initial goal is not for survival in the marketplace, but for survival in general: to find food. Snowman invokes a sort of animal labores sensibility: “Unless you eat, you die” (152). As he journeys toward Paradice it is as though he moves backward through history, tending to the reality that consumption for physical and emotional sustenance and survival is potentially separate from production for economic gain. As he ponders all his sudden free time, he mocks the modern appreciation of instrumental work, some grounded in narcissism: “Woodworking, hunting, high finance, war, golf would no longer be options, he joked” (155). Snowman’s return, however, seems a metaphorical journey in search for a potentially different type of sustenance, too. He must retell the story of his experience, including the death of Oryx and Crake, before he can imagine
a sustenance that can be earned through community building and reciprocity.

**Paradise Regained: The Makings of a New Beginning**

*Oryx and Crake* concludes with Snowman’s realization that other humans are alive and living nearby. He must decide whether he will retreat from, confront, or meet up with this small band. As he negotiates his options, he must necessarily move through the strategy for living that *homo faber* has already provided him. Within this reflection, the possibilities for a life grounded in care become apparent, albeit they are approached as a fearful unknown that might be bypassed in favor of familiar imitation. The following passage sums up the tensions that Snowman faces as he thinks:

What next? Advance with a strip of bed sheet tied to a stick, waving a white flag? *I come in peace* [. . .]. Or, *I can show you much treasure*. But no, he has nothing to trade with them, nor they with him. Nothing except themselves. They could listen to him, they could hear his tale, he could hear theirs. They at least would understand something of what he’s been through. Or, *Get the hell off my turn before I blow you off* [. . .]. He could finish it now, before they see him, while he still has the strength [. . .]. But they haven’t done anything bad, not to him [. . .]. And if he starts killing them and then stops, one of them will kill him first. Naturally. (373-374)

Earlier in the chapter, Atwood returns to images of grasshoppers and ants and recalls this tension in another way. In chapter one of the novel, the grasshoppers and ants operate as literal plot devices and provide a snapshot of the physical conditions that challenge Snowman. Using nature as his urinal, he warns the grasshoppers “Heads up,” seeing them “whir away at the impact” (4). Stinging ants, meanwhile, move “up his arms, the black kind and the vicious little yellow kind” (4). But in the last chapter, these images act as allusions to Aesop’s fable about the ants and grasshopper, where the investment of time and labor entitles one to possession and use. The allusion reminds read-
ers that Snowman necessarily struggles with repeating a cycle of violation and imperialism. He questions whether he, “a single ant,” can have any “relevance in terms of [the] anthill” (371). Does he work and so deserve the use of what he owns? He immediately “pees on the grasshoppers” (372), indicating that he is the defender of the ants’ territory and of the principle that one can own one’s turf and mark it. Shortly thereafter he sees the three strangers, and the most notorious of the three responses that occur to him is an all too familiar one: me or them, mine or theirs? This dichotomous model is prefigured earlier in the text when he reflects upon the Crakers: “these people aren’t violent or given to bloodthirsty acts of retribution, or not so far” (104; my emphasis). It seems unrealistic that Snowman should or would think otherwise. His experiences have taught him this.

I would like to argue, however, that regardless of this tension, Atwood guides her readers to understand her implied ethics, especially through one critical choice she makes with respect to structure (and hence theme) in the concluding chapter. She repeats the opening paragraph of her novel at the beginning of the last chapter, but with slight variation. The opening passage to the novel reads,

Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving, listening to the tide coming in, wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is still asleep. (3)

The alterations to this paragraph in the last chapter read,

Snowman wakes before dawn. He lies unmoving, listening to the tide coming in, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat. He would so like to believe he is still asleep. (371)

Although slight, the difference between passages is the omission of the phrase “wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades” (3; my emphasis) in the latter. *Oryx and Crake*, with its focus on *homo faber* and instrumentalism grounded in personal profit, has repeatedly revealed the oppressive and degenerative nature of man-made barricades, divisions, separations, and enclosures.
With the passage missing at novel’s end, we must ask why and consider its omission a signifier of the limitless possibilities that might arrive with dissolution. Martha Nussbaum, an advocate for philosophy through literature, calls attention to the importance of stylistic choices when she claims, “Style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters. Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content—an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth” (3). Perhaps a truth here is that in removing barricades we remove the desire to only look inward. We arrive at point where we may look outward too—to others.

Aristotle believed that action was necessary to life and was never possible in isolation because political life had to be deliberative and participatory. Snowman’s concerns at this point may seem far removed from Aristotelian concerns about polis life since he is (and has been) isolated. If he is to initiate community life with democratic leanings, he may, however, need to think about such concerns. The presence of others is a necessity in participating in ethical community building. Just because Snowman questions whether he should risk entering a community does not mean he will not. On one level, it is important to remember that Jimmy has not been with a woman in quite a while. His desire for them as constructed throughout the text might be temptation enough for him to meet up with the group in order to learn more about the “tea-coloured woman” (373) traveling with them. But on another level, there is a good chance that a future meeting with the group may be grounded in the fact that he is a risk taker and revisionist. After all, he has been taking action through storytelling all along. Crake’s life and his commitment to homo faber have served as an instrument for Snowman, as source material. And he has attributed important meaning to it. In the “Brainfrizz” chapter, Jimmy tires of the Blood and Roses trading game that he and Crake play: “[T]he Blood player usually won, but winning meant you inherited a wasteland” (80). Jimmy interpolates the game as pointless be-
cause it puts one in a position of acting merely to win, generally doing whatever it takes to get there.

Although we do not know what Snowman will actually do (since the novel ends at the juncture of his decision-making), his situation is representative of the bigger issue concerning new beginnings. It allows readers to consider in what ways have an instrumental philosophy and homo faber failed us? will we choose to begin our historical life process again by selecting them as our guides? will we leave homo faber behind, although still choosing a form of instrumentalism to guide our action? will we find some new way of community building and caring for one another? Atwood herself has insisted that Oryx and Crake does not answer questions but poses them, that it is “speculative” fiction (“The Handmaid’s Tale” 513). Yet she also hints at her own ethical position, arguing that we live in a “hinge moment” in history where people can and might make choices that will re-route our path away from disorder and inattentiveness to nature (qtd. in Bethune 3).10 As part of a continuum of Atwood’s work that presses readers to examine critically personal and collective choices, Oryx and Crake demands that we interrogate the large and spacious footprints we as humans have left behind—considering how they are impressions of us, of where we have been and where we may go.

Works Cited


10 John B. Breslin and Tracy Alig Dowling’s review calls Oryx and Crake a “novel of ideas” (24). When paired with Posner’s observation that Atwood rails against being called a science fiction writer, it becomes clear that Atwood is interested not in answering questions and providing didactic lessons for her readers, but in posing questions and opening up the potential for humans to make better choices.


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Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained. By: Caje Sukarije. Aizen's feeling down. Everything else belongs to the wonderful Kubo-sensei, and as I intend to make no money off this whatsoever, please, no litigation. The ultimate first chapter. Aizen Sousuke was bored. But watching the girl's body recede, he realised what he was so sorely lacking, and only his new pet could help him achieve it. "Aizen-sama, what a surprise!" cried a female arrancar who was sweeping the floor outside of Inoue Orihime's room. Sousuke had rushed to the room unannounced, eliciting jealous responses from his arrancar. She had been here a week and the proverbial noose of their control was beginning to tighten around her proverbial neck. At least, her inferior mind surmised this to be the case. Essays on Oryx and Crake Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained: homo faber and the Makings of a New Beginning in Oryx and Crake - Danette DiMarco Margaret Atwood and the Hierarchy of Contempt - Peter Watts [.pdf]. Study Guides and Miscellaneous Resources Oryx and Crake Reading Guide - OryxandCrake.co.uk Oryx and Crake Glossary - Random House Teacher's Guide to Oryx and Crake - CBC Study Questions for Oryx and Crake - Kirsten Fisher. Other Oryx and Crake E-cards. to Margaret Atwood's Novels. Luminarium Copyright ©1996-2007 Anniina Jokinen. All Rights Reserved. Book cover images remain under the copyright of their respective copyright owners. This page created on December 18, 2006 by Anniina Jokinen. Last updated January 3, 2007.