Redefining Atonement in the Eco-Dystopian World of Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx & Crake*

By Rachel Gilman

What if there was no God? Apocalyptic fiction writing can cause thought-provoking questions such as this to infiltrate even the faithful reader’s mind. However, from a perspective of faith in God and in atonement, considering a dystopian world becomes an exercise in placing human identity in the context of self-creation and self-destruction rather than in a divine origin related to a heavenly Father and a saviour. Without a belief in a spiritual genesis of animals and the natural environment, their purpose becomes more dictated by the progress of human need and their end becomes less intertwined with the fate of humanity. Characters that act as creators and destroyers who are limited to their own understanding and potential redefine atonement in the dystopian world of Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx & Crake*.

In the beginning of Atwood’s story, the reader meets Snowman, aloft in a tree with only a bed sheet wrapped around him. As he wakes up in this unusual circumstance, out of habit he checks his watch, ‘a blank face is what it shows him: zero hour. It causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is’.1 The absence of official time reflects Snowman’s marginal existence between the past and the present. Atwood constructs two interweaving narratives and identities of Snowman and Jimmy, his former self, as he attempts to survive the post-apocalypse world and reflects on his past. Katherine Snyder describes these alternating narratives as an

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'arduous reverse journey’ in which ‘Snowman retraces his steps to the place that marked
the beginning of the end for humankind as a whole and for him as an individual’.

The reader learns from flashbacks that Jimmy was Snowman’s real name, and that
he has adopted the post-apocalypse persona of Snowman as a literal manifestation of his
sensibility to his fragile existence. ‘The Abominable Snowman—existing and not existing,
flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known
only through rumours and through its backward-pointing footprints’. Snowman considers
his existence on the edge because all other humans have been annihilated and all that
remain are him and the Crakers— a genetically perfected human species with all the
frailties of the past human race spliced out of them created by Crake, Jimmy’s former best
friend. But as Jimmy’s stilted interactions with the Crakers develop, their true human
nature develops, proving that the things Crake wanted to get rid of are inherent. It is this
marginal existence that impels Snowman to seek reconciliation through atonement with
those whom he has lost.

Jimmy’s past is typified by a constant struggle for reconciliation with the significant
people in his life. This struggle is defined by language, Jimmy’s greatest strength, and he
develops that strength into a career that eventually saves his life and the precious hopeful
remnants of human nature. Jimmy’s mother, his best friend Crake, and Oryx, the love of his
life, motivate Jimmy to seek reconciliation by choosing for himself how to preserve
humanity. Central to Jimmy’s story is Crake, whom, driven by an abstract understanding of
human nature, attempts to reconcile humanity with nature by completely reinventing the

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2 Katherine V. Snyder, \""Time to go\": The Post-apocalyptic and The Post-traumatic in Margaret Atwood’s Oryx
species to be more animal-like. These new models are known as ‘Crakers’, and are isolated from the rest of the world except for contact with Oryx, both Jimmy and Crake’s lover, who acts as a teacher to the Crakers. As Jimmy’s two narratives flash backwards and forwards between the past and the present, it becomes clear that his role to care for the Crakers is effectuated by his ability to both instruct and construct meaning with language. This turns him into a mediator between the Crakers and the absent Oryx and Crake, whom they come to glorify as deity. This hierarchy is exactly what Crake wanted to splice out of humankind, citing it as the cause of all fear and pain. This paper will examine how the theme of seeking reconciliation and atonement draws parallels between Oryx & Crake and the Biblical narrative of man’s relationship to hierarchy, gods, and a saviour. Those parallels are most obvious in a close examination of Jimmy/Snowman’s character as an unlikely saviour who reluctantly attempts to survive the dystopian world while redefining atonement for himself and for humanity.

In its foundational text the Holy Bible, Christian theology provides humankind’s genesis to be first spiritual, then physical by a heavenly Father-creator and His Son Jesus Christ, offering the first sense of hierarchy to the world. As Atwood places her main character Snowman in a post-apocalyptic world, it is necessary to understand the origin of apocalypse in Christian dogma. The word ‘apocalypse’ means any ‘revelation or disclosure’ and is defined by the revelation given to John on the isle of Patmos for which the book of the New Testament is named. The Greek origin of the word literally means ‘to uncover or reveal’. The word ‘apocalypse’ has come to be associated with the destruction at the end of the world, as described by the book of Revelation. Upon further study and support from

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modernly revealed religious texts, a greater understanding of what brings the end of the world reveals that it is also the symbolism of a new beginning. This brings greater understanding of the human potential and responsibility towards each other and the natural environment. Understanding the apocalypse also elucidates the necessary role of a saviour in making atonement possible for all living things.

In Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, there continues the general theme found in all scripture, that ‘there will be an eventual triumph on this earth of God over the devil; a permanent victory of good over evil [...] The victory would be achieved through Jesus Christ’. The symbol of Jesus Christ in Christian dogma is that of redemption from sin and eventual salvation, or eternal life with God. Christ’s atonement makes it possible for humankind and all living things to be redeemed and live with God again in a glorified and immortal state. John the Revelator saw this in his vision, saying, ‘every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him...’ (Rev. 5:13). The apocalypse ushers in the millennium, which restores a harmony to all living things including animals. Modern revelation also establishes that the earth itself will be glorified at the time of the millennium, which comes after what is understood as the apocalypse. 'We believe [...] that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory'. Christian theology stipulates that all of God’s creations are significant and will be redeemed to a

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6 *The Holy Bible* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1977). All subsequent Bible references are from this same edition.
7 Joseph Smith, 'Articles of Faith 1:10', *Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981)
glorified and perfected state because of the atonement of Jesus Christ the Saviour.\(^8\)

Atwood’s dystopian world is the very opposite of this state described as the millennium. While Snowman lives in fear of the genetically modified animals that now roam freely in the deserted landscape, the Crakers seemingly live in harmony with the earth as taught to them by Oryx. Snowman’s role as mediator to the Crakers is a continual attempt at explaining what he does not understand—Oryx and Crake’s reasoning behind the creation of the Crakers and why he was left behind.

Jimmy first encounters Oryx while observing her instructing the Crakers in the Paradise dome—the original site of Crake’s grand experiment before the annihilation of the human race. By Crake’s design, only Oryx, naked like the Crakers and delivering simplistic daily lessons on what to eat and how to treat the animals, is permitted to interact with the Crakers. Katherine Snyder draws the parallel between the ‘Paradice’ created in the dome and the paradise of the first man and woman on earth. ‘The dome is a kind of man-made Eden, a highly controlled environment in which these new Adams and Eves were kept in an enforced state of innocence, cordoned off from all knowledge deemed by their human maker to be confusing, risky, or otherwise contaminating’.\(^9\) Crake has essentially limited their agency by genetically splicing out as much of human nature as would lead the Crakers to repeat the same mistakes of humanity’s dismal past. According to Christian dogma, since mankind was given agency from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden they must choose to reconcile themselves to God. In the book of Moses it clarifies what God commands Adam and Eve in Genesis regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

‘I, the Lord God, commanded man, saying: Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely

\(^8\) See Isaiah 11:6–9.
\(^9\) Snyder, p. 309.
eat, But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee’ (Moses 3:16–17). The ability to choose leads mankind to make mistakes, but also creates a need for a saviour in order to return to God. The Crakers have limited agency because Crake’s vision of a more animal-like humanity prevents them from needing to judge between good and evil. In fact, Crake eliminates all need for a god, because he does not believe in one, so he neurologically tries to eliminate the concept of hierarchy for the Crakers. Jimmy explains:

What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world’s current illnesses. For instance, racism – or, as they referred to it in Paradice, pseudospeciation – had been eliminated in the model group, merely switching the bonding mechanism: the Paradice people simply did not register skin colour. Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it. Since they were neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land, there was no territoriality: the king-of-the-castle hard-wiring that had plagued humanity had, in them, been unwired. They ate nothing but leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two; thus their foods were plentiful and always available. Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones: they came into heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than man.

By limiting agency for the Crakers to only the fulfilling of animalistic needs, Crake’s plan remains imperfect, because it still creates the need for a mediator, which maintains a hierarchy in the post-apocalyptic world. This is why Jimmy is charged with helping usher in the new era of the Crakers and aid them in adjusting to the fallen world that they inherit.

10 Pearl of Great Price, trans. by Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981)
As the story traces Jimmy and Snowman’s experience as this mediator, the reader recognizes how Jimmy’s reconciliation with himself and the people in his past is also, in part, a reconciliation for the Crakers with their past and future. When Snowman hears the Crakers sing, he describes it ‘as if crystals are singing’ or ‘more like ferns unscrolling – something old, carboniferous, but at the same time newborn, fragrant, verdant’. This suggests that the Crakers are more a part of the earth as humans than Snowman and his species ever were, but hearing them brings emotion to Snowman as he connects with their humanity:

On some non-conscious level Snowman must serve as a reminder to these people, and not a pleasant one: he’s what they may have been once. I’m your past, he might intone. 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!”

Snowman has not only been enacting the role of mediator, but now becomes very much the scapegoat for his eliminated species and what their destruction represents. This makes Jimmy an unlikely saviour figure, but one who is capable of bringing some form of atonement to the post-apocalyptic world in which he and the Crakers now exist. In contrast, Christian theology affords all humankind the choice to follow Jesus Christ whose example brings salvation. The role of a saviour is that he takes on the sins of all humanity and pays for them with his life so that he can extend mercy and fulfill justice, which requires that each individual pay for the wrongs they have committed. The reconciliation between God and man comes through man’s repentance, or acknowledging and confessing

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mistakes and willful disobedience, and choosing to accept Jesus Christ, the Saviour.\textsuperscript{14} The prophet Isaiah wrote of Christ, ‘surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: [...] he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities’ (Isa. 53:4–5), reflecting that a saviour figure has empathy because of what he suffers that others have suffered or committed.\textsuperscript{15} The Crakers are dependent on Snowman as their mediator and saviour because of his knowledge of Crake and Oryx. His traumatic existence between the past and the present is how he suffers the effects of the sins of those gone before, and perhaps also of those to come.

With his knowledge of the destroyed world and his relationship with Crake and Oryx, Snowman is in a sense ordained to preside over the dissemination of all necessary information to the Crakers. Snowman exists tentatively along the fringe of the habitat the Crakers create on the beach, and comes and goes as necessary to his survival. Snowman struggles with his role, yet it is not until the end of the text that the reader learns that Crake, just before killing Oryx and getting shot by Jimmy, tells Jimmy, ‘I’m counting on you’.\textsuperscript{16} As Jimmy watches the annihilation of the human race from the safety of the locked-down Paradice dome, he also observes the Crakers in their forced state of innocence and contemplates the last words of Crake, and of Oryx, who had likewise urged his responsibility to them. She told him, “If Crake isn’t here, if he goes away somewhere, and if I’m not here either, I want you to take care of the Crakers.” She explained further, “They are like children, they need someone. You have to be kind to them”.\textsuperscript{17} After several weeks

\textsuperscript{14} See Jacob 4:11 from The Book of Mormon, trans. by Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981).
\textsuperscript{15} Isaiah 53:4–5.
\textsuperscript{16} Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 385.
\textsuperscript{17} Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 378.
locked in the dome, waiting on everyone outside to die, Jimmy decides finally to take on a new persona, Snowman, and introduce himself to the Crakers as one who speaks for both Oryx and Crake. Snowman then makes directives to the Crakers on Oryx and Crake’s behalf as he guides them from the Paradice dome to the beach where they will be safer in the aftermath of the virus strike.

Language is Jimmy’s specialty and interest from an early age. It becomes the focus of his university studies and ultimately his career, advertising the many products to alter any aspect of the body. Crake hires him for this skill to advertise the BlyssPluss pill that spreads the apocalyptic virus wiping out the human population. In the present, language remains the power tool that Snowman wields in order to maintain credibility and status with the Crakers, explaining bits and pieces about Oryx and Crake when he is questioned.

At first he’d improvised, but now they’re demanding dogma: he would deviate from orthodoxy at his peril. He might not lose his life – these people aren’t violent or given to bloodthirsty acts of retribution, or not so far – but he’d lose his audience. They’d turn their backs on him, they’d wander away. He is Crake’s prophet now, whether he likes it or not; and the prophet of Oryx as well. That, or nothing. And he couldn’t stand to be nothing, to know himself to be nothing. He needs to be listened to, he needs to be heard. He needs at least the illusion of being understood.18

Snowman is more than just a prophet because of his adeptness with words and their meaning; he is as much in need of meaning in his marginal existence between the old world and the new. The dogma the Crakers are asking for turns out to be more than just belief, but a desire to create and imagine in the form of narrative. For Snowman, having that

18 Atwood, *Oryx & Crake*, p. 120.
power to create the narrative of Oryx and Crake provides the Crakers with their own oral narrative they want, and provides him with purpose by being heard and understood.

However, this intermediary role becomes more difficult for Snowman. ‘Their adulation of Crake enrages Snowman, though this adulation has been his own doing. The Crake they’re praising is his fabrication, a fabrication not unmixed with spite: Crake was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his gradual deification’.¹⁹ Crake originally wanted theology to be erased from the human psyche because he felt it led to tendencies that would weaken and distract humankind. Something unexpected happens though, when a bobkitten bites a Craker child and the others have to throw rocks at it to scare it away. The adult Crakers explain to Snowman that they will apologize to Oryx, who had taught them the animals would not harm them and that they should not harm the animals. Snowman wonders how this communication takes place.

Crake thought he’d done away with all that, eliminated what he called the G-spot in the brain. God is a cluster of neurons, he’d maintained. It had been a difficult problem, though: take out too much in that area and you got a zombie or a psychopath. But these people are neither. They’re up to something though, something Crake didn’t anticipate: they’re conversing with the invisible, they’ve developed reverence. Good for them, thinks Snowman. He likes it when Crake is proved wrong. He hasn’t caught them making any graven images yet, however.²⁰

Reverence for the invisible develops into a desire for dogma and a greater understanding of their origin and existence. Snowman’s narrative becomes the powerful representation of

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²⁰ Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 186.
the Crakers’ identity and inextricably ties his fate to theirs, enhancing his role as a hierarchical figure when the Crakers deify him. “We made a picture of you, to help us send out our voices to you”, they explain to Snowman after he left for a few days, “We knew we could call you, and you would hear us and come back”. The Crakers in essence discover prayer in Snowman’s absence.

Hierarchy seems an inescapable part of humanity in Atwood’s dystopian world. Knowledge and language place Snowman over the Crakers to act as a mediator. Technology enables Crake to change the future thus making him the god of the new world. As teens, the video and computer games Crake and Jimmy played enabled them to test out scenarios of destruction and extinction in game form, without living the consequences. Once at HelthWyzer, Crake pushed his knowledge, skills, and privileges with technology and science to a level of apocalypse and rebirth that affected the entire human race. Educator Neil Postman expresses his belief ‘that many of our most vexing and painful social problems could be ameliorated if we knew how to school our young’. Postman stipulates that schooling and education is not the same thing, and that our education is relentless, ‘for good or ill’ and ‘gives us no rest’. He names several things that act as great educators—poverty, politics, television, school, and arguably religion. In Atwood’s world, technology is a great educator, not only for Crake, but it also taught the ‘biolab hotshots’ that with the advances in transgenics they could create an animal, which ‘was so much fun, said the guys

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21 Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 419.
Postman uses the example of American theme parks to describe a profound truth about how humans are driven by the need to belong to, or create, a narrative:

Nightmare or fantasy, these parks allow one to inhabit a world where some powerful narrative once held sway, a narrative that gave people a reason for living, and in whose absence a kind of psychic trauma ensues. Even if a narrative places one in hell, it is better to be there than to be nowhere. To be nowhere means to live in a barren culture, one that offers no vision of the past or future, no clear voice of authority, no organizing principles.

American theme parks can be likened to Atwood’s constructions of the simulated computer games Crake and Jimmy played. Bloods and Roses, in which the two players trade human atrocities for human achievements to inherit an eventual wasteland, and Extinctathon, where the players guess which bioform is extinct and how it was caused. Postman’s argument is that nightmare or fantasy, creation and destruction, whether by technology or language, enable humans to create narratives, which gives them a reason and a purpose to live.

Crake’s dream of a new pain-free human race becomes Snowman’s painful reality. After learning that Crake screamed every night while dreaming, but that he never remembered his dreams, Snowman realizes, ‘every moment he’s lived in the past few months was dreamed first by Crake. Now wonder he screamed so much’. Snowman explains this to the Crakers as he led them from Paradice, knowing they understood dreams because ‘Crake hadn’t been able to eliminate dreams. We’re hard-wired for dreams,

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24 Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 57.
26 Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 256.
he’d said’, so Snowman had made that a crucial part of the Craker’s own narrative. He lets
the Crakers believe that this fallen world is a bad dream that Crake dreams so they won’t
have to.27 Real life for Crake had been a painful reality; watching his mother dissolve and
die, unable to communicate any final words to him, had left him ‘nil’ about the situation,
attributing the communication failure to ‘just like daily life’. Jimmy sensed, however, that
this reaction ‘was Crake preserving his dignity, because the alternative would have been
losing it’.28 Snowman is the only person capable of experiencing the present with
knowledge of the painful past, and the means to overcome the breakdown in
communication with language, his tool for empathy.

What divides Crake and Jimmy is the art versus science debate. To Jimmy, it’s a
personal struggle for preservation of words, language and meaning—ultimately, the tools
crucial to reconciliation through empathy.

‘When any civilization is dust and ashes,’ he said, ‘art is all that’s left over. Images, words,
music. Imaginative structures. Meaning—human meaning, that is—is defined by them. You
have to admit that.’

‘That’s not quite all that’s left over,’ said Crake. ‘The archeologists are just as interested in
gnawed bones and old bricks and ossified shit these days. Sometimes more interested. They
think human meaning is defined by those things too’.29

This is the greatest contrast between Crake and Jimmy: Jimmy is equipped with language to
confront human meaning that might include suffering and pain. Crake is not. From his days
working in the archaic university library at Martha Graham, Jimmy is eventually fired
because he cannot bear to throw away any of the books. In present time, words long

27 Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 411.
28 Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 208.
29 Atwood, Oryx & Crake, p. 197.
forgotten come to Snowman, reminding him of things lost and he feels responsible to them.

‘From nowhere, a word appears: Mesozoic. He can see the word, he can hear the word, but he can’t reach the word. He can’t attach anything to it. This is happening too much lately, this dissolution of meaning, the entries on his cherished wordlists drifting off into space’.\textsuperscript{30}

Meaning is central to Snowman/Jimmy’s character and identity. Preserving language is his way to create that meaning. Neil Postman describes this as what makes us human.

My intention here is [...] to claim that we cannot do without [gods], that whatever else we may call ourselves, we are the god-making species. Our genius lies in our capacity to make meaning through the creation of narratives that give point to our labors, exalt our history, elucidate the present, and give direction to our future.

The purpose of a narrative is to give meaning to the world, not to describe it scientifically. The measure of a narrative’s “truth” or “falsity” is in its consequences: Does it provide people with a sense of personal identity, a sense of a community life, a basis for moral conduct, explanations of that which cannot be known?\textsuperscript{31}

To answer Postman’s question for Snowman, it provides a sense of personal identity—albeit a fractured one—and at the very least motivates him to keep going, to keep surviving. The consequence of Crake’s narrative, which destroys all human life with a virus that Jimmy is immune to, is that Jimmy gets to choose between death and a new beginning.

In Jimmy, a natural ability to interact with the world through compassion and empathy sets him apart from the humans Crake wants to destroy. As a boy Jimmy had related in a much different way to animals than those around him, expressing sympathy for creatures’ pain and empathy for their capacity to think and feel. He developed empathy for

\textsuperscript{30} Atwood, \textit{Oryx & Crake}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{31} Postman, \textit{The End of Education}, p. 6.
non-human creatures by putting himself in their position. ‘He didn’t want to eat a pigoon because he thought of the pigoons as creatures much like himself. Neither he nor they had a lot of say in what was going on’.\textsuperscript{32} Crake wants to close the gap between humans and animals by eliminating pain and its causes, but by doing so, he is destroying what enables people like Jimmy to feel empathy in seeing another’s suffering. When touring Watson-Crick with Crake, Jimmy is shown the frightening ChickieNobs development meant to produce just chicken breasts or drumsticks from ‘an animal-protein tuber’ in record time to undercut the competition. However, the chickens have no brains or heads, only the parts necessary for eating. ‘’That’s the head in the middle,” said the woman. “There’s a mouth opening at the top, they dump the nutrients in there. No eyes or beak or anything, they don’t need those”.\textsuperscript{33} Jimmy is horrified, much like his mother was in expressing to his father that the ‘pig brain thing’ was ‘interfering with the building blocks of life’.\textsuperscript{34} Of the ChickieNobs, Jimmy simply asks, ‘’What’s it thinking?‘’.\textsuperscript{35} Jimmy’s sensitivity to life and to its purpose is expressed in his concern for being understood and affording other creatures he feels akin to, the same consideration. His empathy enables him to fulfill his role as a saviour in a more complete way by also taking on himself the feelings and pains of those non-human genetically modified creations.

What makes humans different than animals? Atwood’s dystopian world explores how advances in science and technology open up the possibilities of playing god with animals and their uses to perfect humans. Crake continually breaks down any difference between the two species by claiming that animals have always out-adapted humans. ‘As

\textsuperscript{32} Atwood, \textit{Oryx & Crake}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{33} Atwood, \textit{Oryx & Crake}, p. 238.
\textsuperscript{34} Atwood, \textit{Oryx & Crake}, p. 64.
\textsuperscript{35} Atwood, \textit{Oryx & Crake}, p. 238.
Crake used to say, *Think of an adaptation, any adaptation, and some animal somewhere will have thought of it first*. Crake believes that genetically engineering humans to be more like animals will solve the problem of fear of death and pain. But these two things are inextricably part of the human experience and are meant to teach compassion and empathy. ‘How much misery [and] despair has been caused by a series of biological mismatches, a misalignment of the hormones and pheromones? Resulting in the fact that the one you love so passionately won’t or can’t love you’.

Crake explains, ‘As a species we’re pathetic in that way: imperfectly monogamous’. Both Crake and Jimmy suffered this in an incomplete love affair with Oryx and through losing their mothers. The Crakers are therefore consigned to a state of apparently perfect polygamy but without the hierarchy or connection of families.

In fact, as there would never be anything for these people to inherit, there would be no family trees, no marriages, and no divorces. They were perfectly adjusted to their habitat, so they would never have to create houses or tools or weapons, or, for that matter, clothing. They would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money.

Crake wants to eliminate the gap between humans and animals but instead eliminates, or tries to, the creation of narratives that gives meaning and purpose to life. This is all in an effort to avoid pain, what Crake has seen as the motivator to stop time in the consumption of anti-ageing products; pills to change your hair, skin, eye color, and every other type of modification to the body in order to find happiness. His BlyssPluss pill is the solution. ‘[It]

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was prophylactic in nature, and the logic behind it was simple: eliminate the external
causes of death and you were halfway there’.\footnote{Atwood, \textit{Oryx \& Crake}, p. 345.}

The BlyssPluss pill is the solution for everyone but Snowman. Crake’s desire to
eliminate death is to eliminate fear and pain, but without it, there is no compassion and
certainly no empathy. Crake insists to Jimmy that it needs to be him to watch over the
Crakers, because those working in the Paradice dome are specialists and ""They wouldn’t
have the empathy to deal with the Paradice models, they wouldn’t be any good at it, they’d
get impatient. Even I couldn’t begin to get onto their wavelength. But you’re more of a
generalist”’.\footnote{Atwood, \textit{Oryx \& Crake}, p. 376.} By preventing death for Jimmy, Crake preserves empathy. Empathy enables
Snowman to protect the Crakers and even teach them through his example the positive
aspects of hierarchy—believing and reverencing that which is absent, which in turn
provides them with a sense of identity. At the zero hour in the end of her text, Atwood
leaves it to Snowman to decide the fate of himself and the Crakers. When three human
survivors materialize, Snowman questions if it is a symbol of hope to be heard and
understood? Or is it a threat to the new world and new humanity that he is responsible for?
""What do you want me to do?’” Snowman asks the ‘empty air’. The voice of Oryx, his lover,
comes to him again, ‘\textit{Don’t let me down}’.\footnote{Atwood, \textit{Oryx \& Crake}, p. 432–33.} With an imperfect saviour, whose humanity will
be saved?

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