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**NEOLIBERAL BIOPOLITICS IN MARGARET  
ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE***

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences

Bachelor's Thesis

April 2020

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Venla Venäläinen: Neoliberal Biopolitics in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

Kandidaatintutkielma

Tampereen yliopisto

Englannin kielen, kirjallisuuden ja kääntämisen tutkinto-ohjelma

Huhtikuu 2020

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Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tarkastella vallan jakautumista ja menetelmiä, joiden avulla ihmisiä kontrolloidaan Margaret Atwoodin spekulatiivista fiktiota edustavassa romaanissa *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Teoreettisena viitekehystenä toimi Michel Foucault'n määritelmä biopolitiikasta uusliberaalissa kontekstissa, jossa vapaa markkinatalous ja kilpailu ohjaavat ihmisten toimintaa. Biopolitiikalla viitataan biovallankäytön mahdollistamaan ihmisten biologisten toimintojen kontrollointimenetelmiin, ja sen tavoitteena on suurempien ihmismassojen hallinta.

Tutkimuksen relevanssi pohjautuu yhtäältä tämänhetkiseen uusliberaaliin poliittisen talouden tilaan ja toisaalta biotekniikan kehitykseen, joiden risteyskohtia romaanissa tutkimus tarkasteli kriittisesti. Atwoodin spekulatiivista fiktiota on analysoitu laajasti eri yhteiskuntakriittisten lähestymistapojen kautta, mutta analyysi uusliberalismin näkökulmasta on ollut vähäistä. Aiempi tutkimus on esittänyt, kuinka Atwoodin *MaddAddam*-trilogiassa (2003-2013), johon tarkasteltu romaani sisältyy, keskitetyn hallinnon poissaolo myötävaikuttaa yksilönvapauden tuhoutumiseen, kun äärimmäinen kulutuskapitalismi ei kykene tuottamaan hyvinvointia ja joutuu turvautumaan väkivallan uhkaan. Tämä tutkimus jatkoi uusliberalismin yksilönvapauden ristiriitojen sekä laajempien sosiaalisten ongelmien tarkastelua biopoliittisesta näkökulmasta, jota varten *Oryx and Crake* tarjoaa äärimmilleen viedyn tulevaisuudennäkymän.

*Oryx and Crake* esittelee maailman kahtena eri ajanjaksona, joista ensimmäisessä säännöstelemätön kapitalismi on johtanut tilanteeseen, jossa kilpailevat biotekniikkaan ja lääketieteellisuuteen erikoistuneet yhtiöt ja niiden kaupalliset intressit ohjaavat kaikkea ihmisten toimintaa. Lisäksi romaani esittelee post-apokalyptisen maailman, jossa ihmiset on korvattu yltiöterveillä post-ihmisillä. Tutkimuksessa selvitettiin, kuinka ihmisten tahto alistetaan palvelemaan vallitsevaa uusliberalistista ideologiaa subjektivaation keinoin. Tutkimus käsitteli myös uusliberaalin biopolitiikan kasvavan jalansijan ongelmallisia vaikutuksia romaanin ensimmäisessä yhteiskunnassa sekä uusliberaalista biopolitiikasta pohjautuvia piirteitä romaanin post-apokalyptisessä yhteiskunnassa.

Tulokset osoittivat, että uusliberalismin ja biopolitiikan risteyskohtiin nivoutuu niin luonnon manipulointiin kuin ihmisoikeuksiin liittyviä kysymyksiä ja riskejä. Tulosten perusteella voidaan väittää, että nykymuotoisesta biopoliittisesta kehitystrendistä voi vahvistuessaan seurata monenlaisia yhteiskunnallisia ongelmia.

Avainsanat: biopolitiikka, biovalta, uusliberalismi, spekulatiivinen fiktio, subjektivaatio, *homo economicus*

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# ABSTRACT

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Bachelor's Thesis  
Tampere University  
Degree Programme in English Language, Literature, and Translation  
April 2020

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This thesis examined the occurrence and distribution of power and the techniques of control in Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003), employing the critical approach of biopolitics developed by Michel Foucault. Biopolitics, according to Foucault, refers to the means of controlling the functions of the human body, and aims at managing large populations of people. The novel displays biopolitics in a neoliberal context in which free market competition guides all human actions.

The relevance of this thesis is based on the current state of neoliberal political economy and the development of biotechnology, the intersections of which this thesis examines critically. Speculative fiction by Margaret Atwood that *Oryx and Crake* represents has been widely analyzed through various types of social criticism, but critique in terms of neoliberalism still requires examination in more detail. It has been previously proposed that in the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013) that also includes *Oryx and Crake*, the absence of a centralized government contributes to destructing liberal freedoms, as the extreme capitalism fails in delivering social good, which results in resorting to the threat of violence. This thesis continued to illustrate the contradictions of liberal freedoms and broader negative social consequences that biopolitics in a neoliberal context may lead to when applied to the extremes, which is portrayed in the novel.

*Oryx and Crake* presents the world in two different time periods. The first one is characterized by the dominance of medicine and biotechnology companies and their commercial interests that control human actions in all social domains. The novel also presents a post-apocalyptic world, in which people are replaced with super-healthy post-humans. This thesis examined how the people in the novel are subjugated to serve the dominant ideology by means of subjectivation. A further aim of the thesis was to discuss the extensive social issues involved in the development of neoliberal biopolitics in the pre-apocalyptic society, and to examine the characteristics of the post-apocalyptic society that are based on neoliberal biopolitics of the former world.

The results indicate that the intersections of neoliberalism and biopolitics include questions and risks concerning themes such as nature manipulation and human rights. Based on the results, it can be argued that the current biopolitical trend of development may lead to various social problems if allowed to continue as it is.

Keywords: biopolitics, biopower, neoliberalism, speculative fiction, subjectivation, *homo economicus*

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis examines power and control in Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) through the theoretical framework of biopolitics, "a politics that deals with life (Greek: *bíos*)" (Lemke et al. 2011, 2), which the French philosopher and social scientist Michel Foucault defines as means of controlling biological processes of humans such as state of health, physical appearance, and life expectancy (1990, 182-4, 191-2). More specifically, the thesis will employ the framework of neoliberal biopolitics, as the modern society of the novel is based on neoliberal norms. Neoliberalism is generally regarded as an ideology that considers competition and free market capitalism as defining characteristics of human actions (Harvey 2). Furthermore, it will be examined how neoliberal biopolitics as it occurs in the novel creates large-scale social issues and eventually contributes to the birth of an apocalypse.

*Oryx and Crake* is the first novel of the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013) a series of "speculative fiction" (Atwood 2014: 513) that portrays a future neoliberal world where unregulated capitalism has seized power and thus allowed a security company called "the CorpSeCorps" to brutally eliminate any threats to the prevailing system (Vials 238). The novel relates the memoir of the main character Jimmy, who was born into the upper class and resided in a privileged, segregated community before surviving an apocalypse caused by a plague that was triggered by his friend, a renowned scientist called Crake, and assisted by his lover Oryx. The second novel, *Year of the Flood* (2009) employs perspectives of two apocalypse survivors, who were members of an anti-corporate organization named "God's Gardeners" in the pre-apocalyptic society. In the third novel, *Maddaddam* (2013), the survival story of these two characters continues as they live with the other remaining humans. In this thesis, the focus is directed at the first novel *Oryx and Crake*, because it displays the most nuanced and explicit depiction of biopolitics and the issues that may emerge from it when applied to the extremes.

*Oryx and Crake* portrays the life of Jimmy, later referred to as Snowman, in two types of societies at different times. The first society is a neoliberal dystopia where corporately mandated control and discipline establishes members acquainted with business, technology and medicine as people of higher importance and value. These upper-class people, including Jimmy, live under constant surveillance in gated, sterile communities referred to as “the Compounds” that will be focused on in this thesis, whereas the lower-class people reside in more crime-ridden areas called “the pleeblands”.

In this thesis, the pre-apocalyptic society is juxtaposed with the post-apocalyptic version of itself in which neoliberal biopolitics no longer impacts the society because all the human-built post-humans living alongside Snowman are purposely provided with ideal health and happiness. These societies can be interpreted as a critique of the development of neoliberal biopolitics today, the post-apocalyptic one highlighting the impossibility of allowing the biopolitical trend of development to continue forever. The connection to contemporary issues of development is supported by Atwood as well, as she regards *Oryx and Crake* as “speculative fiction”, which in contrast with “science fiction” illustrates trends that are already available and therefore more observable (2014: 513).

The relevance of this study stems from the current state of political economy of life on the one hand, and the development of biotechnology on the other. Cooper (2008) examines the aspects of today’s neoliberal biopolitics, analysing the intersections of biological processes and capital accumulation strategies in the bio-tech industry of the United States. Cooper argues that “neoliberalism and the biotech industry share a common ambition” in terms of exceeding both economic and ecological limits to “growth associated with the end of industrial production, through a speculative reinvention of the future” (2008: 11-13). This suggests that the concepts of neoliberalism and biopolitics, the critique of which can be detected from the novel, are closely intertwined in the contemporary political atmosphere.

Regarding this novel, however, Dunlap notes that “capitalist science” is not the only cause of the fatal biotechnologies presented in it, as she argues that most scholars of science acknowledge that in addition to economics and politics, the development of biotechnology and science in general are also influenced by other forces such as emotion, culture and sexism (2013: 11-12). Therefore, before implying that the speculative apocalypse in the novel would solely be a consequence of neoliberal biopolitics, it should be acknowledged that the world *Oryx and Crake* portrays and the knowledge it produces is shaped by many other complex ideals, too.

According to Vials, much of the criticism on Atwood’s dystopic fiction has read the novels through “eco-criticism, feminism, or postmodern critique”, but critique that analyses the novel in terms of neoliberalism is yet to be developed in more detail (237-38). He observes that the *MaddAddam* trilogy “illustrates a promising cultural tendency in representing the contradictions of neoliberalism that has emerged over the past few decades” and further specifies that the absence of a centralized government contributes to the destruction of liberal freedoms, as the extreme capitalism that has taken over cannot deliver well-being and thus has to rely on the threat of violence (238). This study continues to highlight the social criticism that *Oryx and Crake* portrays by further examining the contradictions of subjectivity and elaborating on social issues of biopolitics in a neoliberal context.

## 2. Theoretical Approach

This chapter will provide an overview of the terms ‘biopolitics’, ‘biopower’ and ‘neoliberalism’ that are relevant for the analysis of Atwood’s novel. The term biopolitics is divided into two main meanings in the political science of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; one group of political scientists conceives of it as “an emerging sub-discipline that incorporate[s] the theories and data of the life sciences into the study of politics, political behaviour and public policy”, whereas other, post-modernist scholars use it to denote the Foucauldian tradition of the state’s political and social power over the lives of people (Liesen and Walsh 2-3). These conceptions are argued to be “qualitatively different, if not contradictory, ways [...] to understand politics” (ibid).

For theoretical cohesion, this thesis will employ the Foucauldian meaning of biopolitics, although Lemke suggests that the term shifts meaning and lacks consistency in the use of Foucault himself and it is sometimes interwoven with the notion of biopower (2011: 34). Considering this, the focus in this chapter will be on Foucault’s descriptions of biopolitics and biopower in *The History of Sexuality* (1990) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), with the addition of related notions and readings of Foucault by other social theorists following the tradition. In *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), Foucault also discusses neoliberalism and its relation to biopolitics.

### 2.1 Biopolitics and Biopower in the Foucauldian Tradition

The terms were first introduced by Foucault in the 1970s (Liesen and Walsh 2), and Foucault’s original notion of biopower, introduced in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1990, originally published in French in 1976), refers to power over bodies, aiming at “achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (40). This power is achieved through disciplining of the individual body, and managing and controlling populations through biopolitics,



referring to techniques of controlling biological processes of the human population concerning health, life, reproduction, death and such (182-4). This mass control is executed by producing knowledge about the individuals and categorizing them through devices such as census and health campaigns (Wilson 36, Kelly 43).

Foucault further distinguishes between sovereign, “juridical-discursive power” and biopower, as the former is based on the sovereign’s power over life only through death and it is directed at legal subjects considered as threats to the existing hegemony (1990: 177-81), whereas biopower stresses the biological existence of people, its main objective thus being fostering life and leaving to die at worst, instead of taking life or letting live (138, 181). Instead of submitting the biological processes, biopolitical techniques attempt to obtrude them “in order to govern [...] them from the inside” (139). Moreover, biopolitics is interested in controlling people as a population of species instead of individual legal subjects (182-4).

However, biopolitics also involves aspects of racism and the politics of death (181). Racism is one of the devices of biopower as it separates those whose life is fostered by biopolitics from those who are left to survive on their own outside of the biopolitical control (Kelly 43). Variations of biopolitical racism include medico-political techniques of “social hygiene” by means of e.g. social exclusion, repudiation, and expulsion that are designed to separate and exclude elements of degeneracy, abnormality and inferiority from the good, healthy ones in order to strengthen the (superiority of the) population (Adorno 105, Karskens 126). A biological threat may also be destroyed, if considered sufficiently dangerous to the existence of a population. Modern military technology enables mass destruction on account of biopolitics; the most extreme instance being a nuclear weapon that enables destroying an entire population in order to secure the existence of one’s own population. (Foucault 1990: 179-81)

## 2.2 Foucauldian Biopolitics in a Neoliberal Setting

Neoliberalism, according to texts that have approached it critically, is generally understood as an ideology that sees free market exchange as an ethic that is capable of guiding human actions in all domains. It has extended the experience of buying and selling market commodities to other social spaces and thus become an image of society that refers to the entire human existence, promising that maximal market transactions will deliver social good. (Read 2, Harvey 3)

Neoliberalism has gained strong influence in the political-economic sphere from the 1970s onwards and it has also become a prominent part of the way many people perceive and interpret the world (Harvey 2-3). This claim is amplified by proposing that neoliberalism entails the ideals of dignity and freedom that appeal to those “who value the ability to make decisions for themselves” (5). However, Harvey also argues that restoring the economic power of the elite is what neoliberalism primarily strives for, but this aim is disguised by appealing to advancing the individual freedoms of the masses, disregarding the realities of class distinctions. (11, 40, 202)

In *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), which consists of Foucault’s lectures on biopolitics at the Collège de France between 1978 and 1979, the concept of biopolitics is further defined as Foucault introduces the notion of government, linking the interest in biological processes of a population with neoliberal state formation and subjectivation processes. He argues that neoliberalism constitutes a new mentality, in which the logic of competition governs individuals, states, and corporations (12). Neoliberalism takes society rather than a state as its focus, and requires that the state should provide for fair conditions of the market in order to avoid monopolies, but refrain from intervening in the market itself and thus provide market freedom (319). However, the freedom to pursue one’s own interests within this regime is not absolute, because with any liberal government, the very act of producing freedom includes “the

establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats” (63).

In this framework, the human is seen as a *homo economicus*, a competitive creature whose life is determined by *human capital*: salary as the result of investment in one’s skills on the one hand, and one’s body, brains, class and genetics on the other. Under this new mode of biopolitical control, these natural limits of humans are to be overcome through biotechnology and medical procedures such as plastic surgery and genetical engineering so that the individual can keep pace with the competition. (215-37) This urge is motivated by the fear of losing one’s social status and hence becoming subject to not only economic, but also medical threats, as the element of fear “transforms healthy individuals into asymptotically ill people who are expected to take preventive measures” to control their health. Individuals are responsible for the evaluation and management of these threats that can result in social success or failure. This success or failure determines the group that the individual belongs to in terms of assumed dangerousness. (Lemke 2014: 62-68)

*Homo economicus*, according to Foucault, “is the interface of government and the individual” (2008: 252-3), which denotes the role of *homo economicus* as a subject of governmental rationality on the one hand, and “an entrepreneur of himself” on the other (226). This reciprocity stems from the above-mentioned notion that neoliberalism does not only refer to a manner of governing economies and states, but it also extends to the individual level of thinking (Read 3, Harvey 2-3), which makes people govern themselves in a manner that further intensifies the neoliberal regime and thus serves the interests of the ruling power, as in furthering the medicalization and geneticization of the society (Read 5-6, Lemke 2014: 68). In contrast with *homo juridicus*, the legal subject that consciously submits to disciplinary power, *homo economicus* is an outcome of *subjectivation*, having become a self-governing product of the

regime through internal subjugation of neoliberal values that appeal to aspirations rather than rights and obligations (Foucault 2008: 260, 270; Wilson 36; Read 6).

This chapter has provided a theoretical overview of the central concepts in this thesis, also illustrating the intersections of biopolitics and neoliberalism embodied in the product of subjectivation, *homo economicus*. This conceptual framework will be employed in the following analysis chapters, first focusing on the power relations and modes of control in the pre-apocalyptic society of *Oryx and Crake*.

### **3. Biopower, Biopolitics, and Subjectivation in the Pre-Apocalyptic Society**

This chapter will examine the occurrence and distribution of power and control in *Oryx and Crake*, focusing on biopower and biopolitical control in the privileged communities of the pre-apocalyptic society of the novel. Furthermore, it will be studied how the people living in the Compounds are subjugated to behave in a manner that produces, to paraphrase Foucault, entrepreneurs of themselves (2008: 226). The focus will be directed at the control of their bodily functions, providing examples of biopolitical techniques that are applied for controlling them.

#### **3.1 Power and Control**

In the pre-apocalyptic society, the nation-state is absent – instead, communities are governed by the CorpSeCorps, a private security company that functions as a state authority on the one hand, and corporations for which the people work on the other. As noted earlier, the wealthy people in the heavily monitored company towns called Compounds are contrasted with the people living in the dilapidated, allegedly dangerous pleeblands.

Compounds called “HelthWyzer”, “OrganInc Farms”, and “RejoovenEsense” are all named after bio-engineering or medical companies and hold biopower not only over the Compound citizens, but also over any people that use their products outside of the Compound. They create welfare and value in the Compounds that they govern through trade in these products, but also subjugate all their citizens to serve their neoliberal interests, as the compounds compete with each other in the free market, too. Compounds constantly endeavour to court more renowned scientists in order to develop better products and offer them better company goods as inducements. This comes across when the young Jimmy and his scientist family move from OrganInc to HelthWyzer where there is a better hospital, more shopping malls and other diversions, and biomedicine products that are more high-end (Atwood 2001: 50-53).

People outside of the Compounds are generally avoided as if they carried diseases, and Compound people do not visit the cities unless they must, always accompanied and inspected afterwards (24). However, this impression of the pleeblands is imposed on the Compound people by the CorpSeCorps in order to secure the interests of the ruling corporation, which is, to keep the biomedical inventions and their environment clean and safe from any outside threats such as competitors and bioterrorism. People in the Compounds believe only “the loose change – the addicts, the muggers, the paupers, the crazies” reside in the pleeblands (25), but when Jimmy later enters these regions with Crake, he realizes that these conceptions had been vastly exaggerated (287). Preserving and developing the inventions is the main priority of the Compound government, overriding the security of the its people. This comes across when the fate of Crake’s father, a previously renowned scientist that “fell off a bridge”, is revealed; he was executed by the CorpSeCorps for disapproving of the company’s new policy that would have required moral concessions (180-81).

It could therefore be interpreted that in the Compounds, the companies represent the ideology that must be adhered to for the society to function, whereas the CorpSeCorps hold the executive “juridical-discursive power”. According to Foucault, this repressive mode of power that is based on prohibition, segregation and strict rules has yielded to modern, more discreet modes of power such as biopower that rely on the independent submission of the people to the social system (1990, 109-112). However, the CorpSeCorps subjugating the people to their control by appealing to the fear of blatant and extreme violence implies that this power that Foucault deems as outmoded is predominant in the modern society of *Oryx and Crake*.

It is implied that the CorpSeCorps use biopower to maintain the Compound’s order as well, as their actions of violence, such as “spraygunning” an intruder carrying a “hostile bioform” to death (Atwood 2001: 51) are motivated by maintaining “social hygiene” i.e. excluding an element of degeneracy from the subject of protection (Adorno 105). Although the

main objective is protecting the inventions, the people living in the Compound are equally protected as an essential part of the best possible environment for the inventions that define the Compound's status.

The more advanced the technology is, the more strictly the people are controlled and expected to behave in a manner that preserves the status of the Compound, because when there are better, more developed technologies prone to risks, the competition becomes even more impudent. Therefore, the freedom that the neoliberal government produces does not appear without “the establishment of limitations, controls” and such (Foucault 2008: 63). The control that the CorpSeCorps produce enables them to intervene in the private lives of the residents and produce knowledge about their physical state and location. After moving to a more privileged Compound, Jimmy's mother begins “feeling like a prisoner”, complaining about the ruder, more suspicious guards (Atwood 2001: 51).

Jimmy's father, on the other hand, has eagerly internalized the state's neoliberal values that appeal to his aspirations, getting access to the diversions and commodities, such as golf courses and medical treatments of the Compound in return for working as a bio-engineer of the ruling company (Atwood 2001: 41). Moreover, he sees the world as made up of “us” and “them” through the eyes of the CorpSeCorps that he refers to as “our people” (27), and explains their status to the young Jimmy by comparing their position to the kings and dukes that are “nice and safe” in their castles that keep “everybody else outside” (28).

Thus, an atmosphere of fear that is based on an adversarial relation between ‘us’ and them’ is established by the CorpSeCorps to make the people believe that they belong to a superior community that requires protection from potentially harmful outside influences, although the real reason is less anthropocentric, as previously discussed. This juxtaposition of the privileged ‘us’ and the unfortunate ‘them’ agrees with what Lemke suggests about fear in a neoliberal government: it “fulfils an important moral function” by constantly appealing to the

“threat of unemployment and poverty” (2014: 68). From a biopolitical point of view, this list could be complemented by the threat of disease and physical inferiority, too.

Resistance to this atmosphere of fear is demonstrated by Jimmy’s mother, who creates a successful escape plan from the Compound, lives as an anarchist outlaw for several years and is eventually executed by the CorpSeCorps for plotting against the Compound and disobeying its laws (Atwood 2001: 286). Jimmy’s mother demonstrates bravery by disregarding the world view imposed by the government, which eventually leads to her execution, and it suggests that in a society where life is highly valued, it can become prone to extortion. Therefore, dying for one’s values is the ultimate act of resistance.

### **3.2. Contradictions of Individualism and Social Engineering**

The apparent freedom to pursue one’s aspirations that are actually determined by social engineering is implied by Jimmy’s superiors in the passage where Jimmy talks with them in the advertising agency he has just begun working for:

“What people want is perfection,” said the man. “In themselves.” “But they need the steps to it to be pointed out,” said the woman. “In a simple order,” said the man. “With encouragement,” said the woman. “And a positive attitude.” “They like to hear about the before and the after,” said the man. “It’s the art of the possible. But with no guarantees, of course.” (243)

In the Compounds, the selection of biomedical treatments for preserving fertility, beauty, youth et cetera appears unlimited, and as Jimmy ages, more products become normalized, the corporates grow even more powerful, and the products become even more extreme. The product development begins with “pigoons”, transgenic knockout pig hosts that grow human-tissue replacement organs in OrganInc (19) and eventually extends to a treatment in RejoovenEsense that promises “totally chosen babies that would incorporate any feature, physical or mental or spiritual, that the buyer might wish to select” (302).



This shift from inventions mainly concerning vital health care to redundant genetical engineering indicates that in a free market society determined by competition in all social domains, new needs are constantly created for the *homo economicus* to excel socially, which is reinforced by the commercialization of health and well-being that is evident in the rhetoric of the product names and slogans such as “Throw Away Your Condoms! BlyssPlus, for the Total Body Experience! Don’t Live a Little, Live a Lot!” (310).

Furthermore, it is not only the competition of social status that fuels these urges, but also the pursuit of extreme health to the extent of immortality. Every natural limit, such as age, is to be overcome at any cost, as exemplified by Jimmy’s father: “What well-to-do and once-young, once-beautiful woman or man, cranked up on hormonal supplements and shot full of vitamins but hampered by the unforgiving mirror, wouldn’t sell their house, their gated retirement villa, their kids, and their soul to get a second kick at the sexual can?” (53).

As defined by Lemke according to the Foucauldian concept of neoliberal biopolitics, this healthiness contest separates those who do not participate in it as asymptotically ill and physically inferior human beings (2014: 62-68). Thus, the fear of this status overrides any potential moral opposition to the extreme products and procedures. The hopelessness and shame associated with physical inferiority comes across in Jimmy’s father’s new wife’s attempts to conceive when having to resort to heavier treatments even after “hormone-sodden, potion-ridden” attempts, according to Jimmy, as she personally avoids talking about the problem with the correct words (248).

Therefore, Jimmy’s father’s access to the Compound’s golf clubs and products that promise everlasting youth is no more freedom than coercion, considering that the knowledge that the state produces about its citizens ensures that their actions are supervised. Moreover, the biomedical products that the Compounds produce require promoters for the ideals that they attempt to sell outside of the Compound borders as well. The father is practically obliged to

follow the same lifestyle as every other resident in the Compound, as his identity is fixed by the government to preserve and advance his health and property at the risk of being socially excluded or even removed from the community that he resides in. Thus, the father is inclined to consent to his own subjugation due to his privileged position.

They key findings of this chapter indicate that both the ideological, normative power of the ruling companies and the executive power held by the private police force constitute a commercial, repressive state that transforms people into entrepreneurs of themselves. This is achieved by appealing to social pressure disguised as personal aspirations. The social pressure of being physically able concerns all members of the society in some way, which makes biopolitics a particularly effective means of controlling people. The next chapter will focus on the social consequences that emerge from neoliberal biopolitics in the novel.

## **4. Problems Emerging from Biopolitical Development**

Atwood's novel raises interesting questions related to the extensive social issues as consequences of biopolitical development in the neoliberal society. Firstly, it will be examined how neoliberal biopolitics creates issues in the pre-apocalyptic society regarding social themes such as distribution of wealth and health, human rights, and collectiveness. The second and final chapter will focus on the post-apocalyptic society, discussing its absence of neoliberal biopolitics, and examining how the characteristics of the post-humans in the post-apocalyptic society reflect the issues of the former society.

### **4.1 Social Issues in the Pre-Apocalyptic Society**

In the neoliberal society of the novel, the contradictions of people's varying starting points in life and unregulated free market capitalism maintain and reinforce class distinctions. Thus security, an aspect of biopolitics that can be beneficial as such, is also distributed unevenly. In the pleeblands and more distant places that are not defined with names, mass control over the populations' health is non-existent, as it is only directed at the people that are important for production and preserving the free market economy, which indicates biopolitical racism (Kelly 43).

In the novel, Oryx, who was born into poverty somewhere in the Far East and climbed up the social ladder with the help of her chief and lover Crake, tells Jimmy that his father's lung disease eventually resulted in his death as there was no health care available, which led to even more extreme poverty in the family. As a result, Oryx and his little brother were sold to a trafficker. (113-15) Moreover, these less fortunate people are exploited by the Compound scientists to work as guinea pigs for testing new pills and treatments (209), because they are

content with relatively small rewards, and the scientists are not required to suffer the likely negative consequences outside of the Compounds.

However, the security that the Compound people are offered depends on their level of compliance with laws and unwritten rules of the Compound, such as excess consumption and maintaining perfect hygiene. At times, even perfect compliance does not protect the privileged from fateful consequences. Instead, mere inattention may lead to what we perceive as severe violations of human rights, as in the case of Crake's mother; an obedient citizen and a supposed nail-biter, whose finger became inflamed in the hospital where she worked, and who was exterminated as a consequence (174-175). Thus the attitudes of the people to themselves as living beings contradict the attitudes of the CorpSeCorps; in order to comply with the norms of the society, people invest their time, effort and money in procedures that are supposed result in supreme health, while still being prone to accidents that put everything they have accumulated in themselves in danger. Nevertheless, their privileged position prevents them from resigning themselves to any less.

The indifference to the people does not only characterize the CorpSeCorps. Although the Compound citizens are all preoccupied with seeking immortality for themselves, their upbringing has made them incapable of empathizing with others, or with unknown people at least, owing to the culture they consume. Growing up, Jimmy and Crake used to watch public executions and porn from the non-privileged parts of the world for entertainment, described as follows by Jimmy: "body parts moving around on the screen in slow motion, an underwater ballet of flesh and blood under stress, hard and soft joining and separating, groans and screams, close-ups of clenched eyes and clenched teeth, spurts of this or that" (84).

This normalization of violence can also be seen as a biopolitical technique to control people's collective desires that would otherwise hinder the competition, that is, to keep them from assisting those in need of assistance in the same pursuit of health and wealth. Crake's

assistant Oryx, who was discovered by Jimmy and Crake through a child pornography site, and who and later became a lover of both of them, appears to make an exception in this, and hence becomes a key figure in raising Jimmy's awareness of social issues.

Another issue regarding the people's right to life arises from the unrestrained power of the ruling biomedical companies that can manage large populations of people who merely need to use the company's products in order to be controlled in ways that they are not aware of. This is exemplified in the novel by the "BlyssPluss Pill", a medical treatment against "all known sexually transmitted diseases" and for "unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess" that is harnessed by the ruling scientists of the RejoovenEsense Compound, such as Crake, to also sterilize people without them knowing it, in order to control population growth (290-92).

Eventually, exploiting this power is applied to the extreme, as Crake creates a deadly virus that is planted into the BlyssPluss Pill and distributed all over the world. This extremist act of biopower conforms to Foucault's definition of biopolitical racism (1990: 179-81), the objective of which in this case being to secure the existence and possibilities of the man-made humans Crake had created. This objective, however, requires that he destroy the threat to the post-humans that is the entire human race.

#### **4.2. Biopolitical Issues in the Post-Apocalyptic Society**

In the post-apocalyptic society, all humans are either dead or absent in the story except for Jimmy, who has developed a new identity as Snowman, a storyteller with memories from the old world including Oryx and Crake that the post-humans regard as deities. The appearances of the post-humans, referred to as the Crakers, represent what is regarded as physical perfection: they are "admirably proportioned" and have smooth skin, white teeth, "no bulges, no dimpled orange-

skin cellulite ... no body hair [and] no bushiness” (98). The Crakers are also equipped with a mechanism that allows them to heal injuries by purring similarly to cats (154), and their daily routine consists of eating regular amounts of “leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two” that are “always available” (303).

What these features suggest is that the Crakers are immune to products of neoliberal biopolitics such as genetical engineering and plastic surgery: they are born naturally beautiful and healthy, and their tendencies are designed to effortlessly maintain this state. Moreover, they are programmed to not be able to fear death (301), which prevents them from striving for immortality similarly to their pre-apocalyptic counterparts.

The motives of competition characteristic of neoliberalism have been eliminated, as the Crakers hardly require resources other than food, and those resources that are required are evenly distributed and there is no shortage of them. The Crakers function as a close, equal community; they lack racist behaviour and the ability to create hierarchical relations. Crake sees this ability and racism as “responsible for the world’s current illnesses”. (304) According to these instances, a critical stance towards biopolitics and neoliberalism can be deduced from Crake’s actions.

Eliminating human features that would be influenced by biopolitics and neoliberalism suggests that the ideology they constitute is so appealing and all-invasive that people require an intrinsic system to resist it. Moreover, Crake’s mother and father were both executed under the impact of these values as discussed in the previous chapters – the mother for not being observant of biopolitical regulations, and the father for not consenting to the company’s new uses of biopower, both essential for the competition of the companies. Considering these personal reasons, Crake was given a motive for revenge. Consequently, he created new humans and massacred the entire population, instead of maintaining hope that the

prevailing status quo could be changed, which can be deduced from the actions of Jimmy's anarchist mother, another social critic in the novel.

On the other hand, the other motive for securing the living conditions of the post-humans and creating them in the first place suggests that Crake is also a victim of the neoliberal biopolitical regime. When handed an excessive amount of power as a lead scientist of RejoovenEsense, he functions just as every other leading figure – he does not use the power for collective good, but for maintaining the status quo by further developing the biomedical products, which also necessitates its adverse social effects as discussed previously.

Some of Crake's values manifested in the Crakers reflect neoliberal ideals, too. The Crakers are designed to grow up expeditiously, as he argues that “far too much time was wasted in child-rearing” (156). This view illustrates the neoliberal tendency to strive for maximal economy in all domains of life. Furthermore, the fact that the Crakers will “drop dead at age thirty – suddenly, without getting sick” (301) suggests that human life is only valuable to Crake in its physically most capable form.

It can be argued that the creation of the Crakers conforms to biopolitics at the most extreme; controlling every single bodily function of a population. Selecting the eye colours and skin tones of the post-humans (6), and cherry-picking features from the animal kingdom such as blue buttocks signalling mating season, “a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the baboons” (163), Crake develops himself a God complex as he not once questions his self-justification for manipulating nature and creating features that conform to his preferences, whether they are arbitrary or calculated for an external purpose. The latter may be the case with the anti-neoliberal, anti-biopolitical features discussed initially in this chapter. Overall, Crake appears to despise aspects of neoliberal biopolitics on the one hand but advocate some of them on the other, which has made the post-apocalyptic society what it is.

## 5. Conclusions

A reason behind Crake's decision to create post-humans and replace humans with them is implicitly stated already at the beginning of the novel when Jimmy's father tells Jimmy about the reasons behind some unsuccessful experiments in OrganInc: "create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it; it made you feel like God" (49). This refers to the challenges of responsibility that arise from power. Biopower, as it applies to vital biological processes, has particularly disastrous life-threatening effects when fallen into the hands of a leader who does not endeavour to foster life.

Another explanation for the post-apocalyptic society is that Crake's urge for revenge on the system was so immense that in order to achieve his goal, he was willing to sell his soul to the ideology that killed his parents. Not that the motives would necessarily have to be due to personal reasons – perhaps Crake was motivated by the general idea that someone must play the God to end the greed and dissatisfaction that is deeply imprinted in people due to neoliberal values, and peace and harmony in the society could only be attained by completely eradicating the predominant system.

Either way, the benefit or joy Crake gained from his privileged opportunities inclined him to submit to his position as an all-powerful person, as with any other society member higher in the hierarchy than someone else. In this case, though, the outcome of subjugating to this social order was not that the order remained or strengthened, as it had already strengthened to the point that it was unable to sustain itself. It is therefore plausible that in the novel's neoliberal society in which power is not held by a centralized state but by a private police force and competing corporations, a God-like large company leader incapable of empathizing with others becomes insane with power, which results in fatal consequences.



In the pre-apocalyptic society, public health surveillance and the security it creates, an aspect of biopolitics that is generally considered to deliver social good, is overridden by its negative social consequences. This is because biopolitics is exercised in a neoliberal society that has turned into a hyperreal version itself, developing even more extreme biomedical products for controlling the people, and driving the class distinctions even further apart into an unsustainable situation.

The societies portrayed in *Oryx and Crake* suggest that there are questions and risks involved in the intersections of neoliberalism and biopolitics, concerning nature manipulation and human rights for instance. This reading indicates that allowing this modern trend of development to continue may have severe social consequences. For further studies on the topic, it would be interesting to examine the aspects of resistance to this status quo in more detail, featuring the perspectives and experiences of the anti-corporate characters from the pleeblands in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013).

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