

# Threat from Virtual Reality as an Anti-Social Culture: Pornography Addiction in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

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## ABSTRACT

**Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is the first dystopian novel in the *MaddAddam Trilogy*. The novel depicts a dystopian view of the future for the human race. Among the various threats to the human race, addiction to pornography is a serious issue. In *Oryx and Crake* two teenagers are addicted to pornography. The detached nature, troubled relationships, erotic dreams, lassitude and burying one's guilt have a strong impact on them and they become sexual perverts. Hence, there is a dichotomy between real and the unreal where the youngsters are not able to evaluate, and interpret the behavior and the authentic image of women, leading to the development of an anti-social culture. The present paper will analyse the dystopian effect of pornography and virtual reality on young minds by warping their ability to distinguish between authentic and false experiences.**

**Key Words: Pornography, Virtual Reality, Relationship, Perversion, Authentic and unreal, Anti-social culture**

*Oryx and Crake*, the first part of the Madd Addam Trilogy by the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, is a dystopian speculative fiction. This study will consider the dystopian possibilities in the future for the human race where humans and numerous hybrid organisms co-exist. A threat from the virtual world, by ways of video gaming and 3D cinema used for sporting events, music, videos, pornography, short films and fine arts, turns

human nature into artificial living, thereby negatively influencing human behaviour and their interpersonal communication.

Merriam Webster defines virtual reality as “an artificial environment which is experienced through sensory stimuli provided by a computer and in which one’s action partially determine what happens in the environment.” Young minds are endangered into virtual reality through unwanted behaviors which become the cultural trends of self-gratification resulting in personality disorders and societal disruptions. Wikipedia defines anti-social culture as “the actions that harm or lack consideration for the well-being of others”. It is also defined as any type of conduct that violates the basic rights of another person. Such behaviour is considered to be disruptive to others in society.

*Oryx and Crake* presents a very subtle embodiment and example of a threat from virtual reality to the human reality through pornography addiction. According to Wikipedia “The meaning of pornography is derived from the ancient Greek words *porne* meaning prostitute and *graphein* meaning to write. The word pornography is defined originally as any work of art or literature depicting the life of Prostitutes.” The novel begins with the protagonist named Snowman (once also called Jimmy) who is the first male protagonist and whose complex is seen in his detachment from others, his addition to child pornography and his poor relationship with his girlfriends. Jimmy is, the best friend of Crake, deeply in love with Oryx, known for his words, studies in Martha Graham Academy. His addiction in pornography perverts him to have affairs with numerous women throughout his youth. He craves for sex, cigarettes and alcohol.

Virtual media plays a major role in creating fabricated descriptions to the audience which are embedded in the minds of the people. Oryx, the porn star’s appearance on a child pornography site Hott Totts, a global sex-trotting site, leaves obscure images about sexual pleasure in the minds of Jimmy and Crake who see her first time: “She was small-boned and exquisite, and naked like the rest of them, with nothing on her but a garland of flowers and a pink hair ribbon . . . The act involved whipped cream and a lot of licking. The effect was both innocent and obscene” (103). Oryx, who is preoccupied with the act of sex and pleasure, projects herself as the epitome sex partner who tries to offer painful pleasure to Jimmy and Crake.

Oryx who has been sold into the pornography industry, later understands the real lack of parental love. But she still upholds the value of money as a path towards survival. “Love was undependable... so it was good to have money value” (147). Oryx becomes lover to both Jimmy and Crake. She believes in Crake’s genius and his vision but she finds pleasure in being with Jimmy. Crake finds his way through by interpreting sex as the

desire and source of problem to the human life: “No more prostitution... no pimps, no sex slaves, no more rape” (194).

Jimmy and Crake gradually move away from internet sites to the sale of Blysspluspill that which becomes the tool to change the acts of sex. According to Jean Baudrillard, the French sociologist, “Internet pornography acts in Atwood’s novel, becomes the source of different simulations of sex which have formed new notions of sex.” Jimmy’s parents both worked at Organ Inc Farm as a genographer and a microbiologist. Jimmy’s mother had earlier opposed the idea of genetic engineering as something against humanity and nature and she criticizes saying, “[...]. You’re interfering with the building blocks of life. It’s immoral. It’s ...sacrilegious” (64). Jimmy’s mother anticipated the dangers of genetic engineering and so gradually leaves her job, home and family just for the virtue of being honest and to be clean with her conscience. She had questioned her husband, “Believe me, [...] why can’t you get a job doing something honest? Something basic” (65). Unable to improve the situation she leaves the house and her husband seeks another woman. The departure of Jimmy’s parents from the family was another cause of the drifting into visual and mental stimulations.

Jimmy and Crake have lost their sense of the real because of the repetition of the images which do not have any real references. There is no way to distinguish the real from the unreal or fantasy, as the images haunt them and suppress as the original. The loss of sense of real through impact of media’s image sex is apparent in Jimmy’s adult life, with the shift from one affair to the other, with no convinced and steady relationship, just because of the his initial encounter with sex has been shaped by the unreal.

As Jimmy grows he begins to explore the world of sex apart from love. A series of girlfriends, married lovers, prostitutes and pornography meet his physical need for sex without providing much emotional content. He tends to find hurting, flawed women attractive. When he meets Oryx, he falls for her completely. Crake has mere a sensuous attitude toward sex and so considers Oryx a commodity, who could be financially purchased, whereas Jimmy is unable to do so. Oryx becomes a sexual slave to the owners of transnational corporations who run porno sites and gain a lot of benefits by organizing such sites. However, the relationship cannot hold long as Crake begins experimenting with developing new species. But he finds no sense of fulfillment anywhere and develops a sense of guilt and in his desperation kills Oryx and Crake is killed by Jimmy.

Atwood in this novel is attempting to present a cataclysmic possibility foreboding the threat that awaits the young minds that are addicted to virtual worlds. The novel is a red alert to all those who may consciously or inadvertently drift into porn sites for they would soon be unable to distinguish between authentic and false

experiences. Though there are numerous dystopian writings that predict gloominess and doom for the human race, Atwood's genius and brilliance has made *Oryx and Crake* a classic in this category. It is a work that one may ignore only if they have no thought for the future.

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