

“It was [Jimmy’s] job to describe and extol what—oh so easily—could come to be. Hope and fear, desire and revulsion, these were his stocks-in-trade, on which he rang his charges.”

Oryx and Crake, page 248



Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* is the story of Jimmy aka Snowman, the only human survivor of an superbug engineered to wipe out the whole human race. In his journey back to the corporate Compounds that contained the lives of the upper class, Jimmy not only struggles to keep himself alive in a dangerous world full of wolvogs and pigeons but also reflects on life as it was before. Born to brainiac parents, Jimmy fails to live up to the scientific potential that affords him the privileged life he grew up in. His advertising job makes him a minor player in the Compounds, but through his connections he ends up with a front row seat to the apocalypse. Jimmy’s past and present come together through the stories he tells of his two best friends: Oryx, the sex worker who mentored the posthuman Children of Crake, created to replace mankind, and Crake himself, their creator and the man who engineered the downfall of humanity.

MY BODY IS NOT MINE: CORPORATE AND TECHNOLOGICAL CONTROLS ON IDENTITY IN DYSTOPIAN SCIENCE FICTION

BY CARYN DIMARCO

Late Capitalistic Worlds in Crisis

Though different stories in many ways, Atwood and Bacigalupi’s novels share one major thing: each depicts a dystopia fueled by late capitalism. Marked by a turn from industrial to consumer capitalism, the late capitalist economy shapes not only the market but also, according to Frederic Jameson, all of society because it is all-encompassing and dominant. Therefore, seemingly utopian scientific advancements—bodily enhancements, disease-

resistant crops, and other genetic manipulations that guide evolution—are made not to improve the lives of all, but to exploit consumers as far as their wealth will allow. I argue that because all technological production is ruled by money, these “advancements” actually worsen existing hierarchies in society, as seen in the stark class divides between Atwood’s Compounds and Pleeblands, Bacigalupi’s calorie men and the average Thai citizen.

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Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Windup Girl* takes place in the Thai Kingdom after an economic contraction that has devastated global economies. The remaining markets are driven by crop plagues and foodborne illnesses that have put human health at constant risk: most of the world survives on genetically modified crops from American calorie companies. Thailand is determined to retain its independence from these corporations that threaten the economy and environment. The power struggles between the Thai ministries of Environment and Trade are exacerbated by the political maneuvers of the foreign calorie company representatives trying to rebuild the global economy. These political conflicts come to a head due to the unknowing actions of the title character—Emiko, the Windup Girl whose technologically augmented body puts her in constant danger, but also makes her an unexpected source of power and rebellion.



“Jaidee makes a face. ‘We aren’t safe in any case. If it’s not Trade, it’s blister rust or cibiscosis or something else, something worse. We aren’t living in a perfect world anymore. This isn’t the expansion.’”

The Windup Girl, page 56

IDENTITY

Atwood and Bacigalupi show how race, gender, class, and ability affect individuals’ daily lives. Atwood’s work, which takes place in America, reflects the same hierarchies that structure our society today; Bacigalupi’s vision of Thailand shows a fiercely nationalistic country in which all *farang* are untrustworthy, yet in which the white Americans and Europeans from the calorie companies still hold a surprising amount of sway.

TECHNOLOGY

Anne Cranny-Francis argues that technology carries the values of society and disciplines its users accordingly, but what does this mean for users when technologies become part of the body? For example, Crake’s deadly BlyssPlus pill encourages sexual activity, but also sterilizes its users. Emiko’s windup body is immune to human diseases, but she too is sterile, and also set apart from humans by her stutter-stop motions.

TRANSNATIONAL SEX

Interestingly, both books are heavily marked by sex work. Oryx and Emiko, two title characters, are Asian women whose only relationships to the powerful men around them are for pay. Technology marks their roles here, too: Crake and Jimmy first see Oryx in a kiddie porn video and fetishize her to the point that they want to find her for themselves. Emiko, as a windup, is both illegal and taboo—and therefore incredibly sexy.

RESISTANCE

Atwood and Bacigalupi present groups who contradict capitalist thought with environmentalism. Some of these groups are religious: God’s Gardeners in *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Windup Girl*’s Grahmites and Buddhists. However, there are non-religious protestors as well: Crake’s MaddAddam team has long been undermining the Compounds, and the Thai Kingdom’s Environment Ministry constantly tries to stop the ills of capitalism.