

Attributes of Posthuman Science Fiction: A Critical Study of Margaret Atwood's Novel *Oryx and Crake* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World***Chandan Sahoo**

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Article Received: 11/11/2025**Article Accepted:** 12/12/2025**Published Online:** 13/12/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.12.161**Abstract:**

Does COVID-19 give a flashback to the novel of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, or present geopolitical conditions of the war between Russia and Ukraine raise the same question: "Would you want to survive?" All those questions make a juxtaposition between posthumanism and literature. Greatly saying literature is the reflector, imitator and future of human life and Earth. The genre of Science Fiction and Apocalyptic novel encompasses imaginative concepts of scientific technology of Genetic Engineering, Transhumanism, and Bio-Weapons. This research projects aim to raise questions about the boundaries of science and humans. How futuristic science fiction is not a mere imagination but depicts the harsh reality of human culture. The dystopian world of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* explores the dehumanising effects of technology. In the name of physical enhancement and happiness, people came under the control of science and government. The research aims to analyse both novels through posthumanism. The theory deconstructs humanism and seeks to establish a harmonious relationship between 'human and machine', 'human and science' and 'human and natural world'.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Genetic Engineering, Science Fiction, Transhuman, Apocalyptic.

Introduction:

The present research paper explores science fiction and apocalyptic novels from the Posthuman era. The literature of this period establishes a connection between humans and non-humans. Before delving into the Posthuman age in literature, it is essential to understand what humanism is. Humanism is a democratic and ethical worldview that prioritises human concerns over divine or supernatural ones. In English Literature from Chaucer to Shakespeare and from John Donne to T.S. Eliot, the focus was on human emotion and moral values. Conversely, Posthumanism refers to going beyond humanism. Oxford Research Encyclopaedia defines "Posthumanism as a philosophical perspective on how change is

enacted in the world. As a conceptualisation and historicisation of both agency and the Human. It differs from those conceived through humanism..... a Post Humanist perspective assumes that agency is dispersed through dynamic forces, of which human participants are a part but do not fully control or direct.” The posthuman era is characterised by technology’s dominance over even the most intellectual beings, reshaping every aspect of life, with Artificial Intelligence eventually replacing humans. Transhumanist ideologies envision a future shaped by technologies that eliminate ageing and enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities. These developments also lead to genetic engineering, nuclear weapons, and bio-weapons. An example of dangerous technological control over society can be seen in Aldous Huxley’s novel *Brave New World*. Under the guise of happiness and open sexuality, technology is used to tightly control reproduction, such as through the surgical removal of ovaries, the ‘Bokanovsky Process’ and ‘hypnopædic’ conditioning. The society in *Brave New World* seeks materialistic pleasure and happiness, heavily reliant on the drug ‘Soma’. The use of this medicine fosters desires for food, sex, sleep, and fashionable clothing, at the cost of humanity, dignity, morality, and emotional depth. The outbreak of Covid-19 as a pandemic prompts reference to Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. Literature, especially science fiction and apocalyptic novels, serves as a reflection, imitation, and predictor of human life and Earth’s future. These genres explore imaginative scientific concepts such as genetic engineering, transhumanism, and bio-weapons. Therefore, Posthumanism also offers a reflection on humanism. In traditional humanism, man was central to all literary creation. But over time, changes in human life, society, and literature have occurred. Revolutions in thought and scientific inventions have compelled humans to transcend traditional feelings and advance beyond humanism. Consequently, posthumanism, in its critical form, is a new conceptualisation of humanity. It examines cultural representations, power relations, and discourses that have historically positioned humans above other life forms and under their control.

Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* explores the causes and consequences of an apocalyptic fallout. The non-linear style and oscillation between past and present in the narrative resemble, to some extent, Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The narrative critiques molecular engineering, gene-splicing, geo-engineering, and pharmacological and cosmetic experiments carried out in the name of human development, science, and progress. These pursuits have fatally backfired. The human condition is portrayed as a predicament, with Jimmy pondering whether there was any real difference. The pursuit of a cure through technology and science has contributed to a state of chaos, demonstrating once again that science is a double-edged sword. The posthuman perspective, aiming to prevent a population explosion and save the planet from ecological collapse by manipulating nature’s mechanisms, has ricocheted. The detonation has misfired; the repercussions are unwelcome. Atwood touches upon the subtle politics of radical environmentalism, which views sapiens as a disease. Humankind, despite our collective and individual dislocation, is a part of nature and does not fit into the human-nature dualism. The idea of a cure, conditioned on the absurd

notion of a 'pure life' free from danger, disease, rapture, and ambivalence, inevitably becomes reactionary. Atwood's novel invites us to reconsider the politics of an absolute cure, juxtaposed with the question of care.

Research Questions

1. How does the concept of Carry Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?* help us to understand the development of scientific technology in genetic engineering and transhumanism becomes the cause of apocalyptic fallout in posthuman futuristic science fiction?
2. How does Donna Haraway's insight into Cyborg and feminism, and Cary Wolfe's *Critical environments: Postmodern Theory and the pragmatics of the "outside"* shed light on women's society and human culture in the context of co-constitutive relationships with nature and the environment?
3. How does the concept of capitalism help the posthuman society to establish a neo-colonisation of science, and the theory of Biopolitics by Michel Foucault, help us to figure out how science becomes the only wealth-generating machine?

Primary Material:

The genre of science fiction, though, gives a new horizon to literature and Film and also simultaneously highlights the post-human condition on the Earth. An apocalyptic condition that is concerned with the end of civilisation due to nuclear warfare, Pandemic, AI, cybernetic revolt and climate change. This research proposes to understand the role of Science Fiction through the following works: Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* is a posthuman experiment of science, which has consequences, a fatal ending for human society. The use of medical, biological and psychological technology has become a threat to society. Searching for superficial happiness, open sex, and control over birth is the cause of loss of individual identity and values.

The novel *Oryx and Crake* centres on a post-apocalyptic narrator called Snowman, living next to a group of wild human-like beings he named Crakes. Flashback shows Snowman was once a child called Jimmy who grew up in a world controlled by multinational and wealthy residences for their workers' families. Close to starvation, Snowman wants to return to the remains of a settlement named 'Rejooven Esense' in search of food, even after deadly genetically modified mutant animals overtake it. He provides an argument for the Crakers, who see him as a trainer, and continues his adventure forging.

H.G. Wells' 1896 science fiction, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, is about a mad scientist, Doctor Moreau, who creates human-like hybrid beings from animals by vivisection. Here in this novel, we see human interference with nature, which destabilised the civilisation of the island. Moreau's scientific experiments create Beast People that symbolise the frightening consequences of science unrestrained by morality.

Never Let Me Go, the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, is a dystopian science fiction. The novel moves around the conflict between humans and posthuman clones. The three pivot

characters, Kathy, Tommy and Ruth, who have been created from original human DNA through the process of Gen-cloning deprived of human love, affection and emotion. Hailsham gave them super facilities, but their life is known for being organ donors only for the sake of a human experiment.

William Gibson's widely acclaimed cyberpunk aesthetic novel, *Neuromancer*, examines the blurring of the boundaries between the human and machine in a world dominated by a powerful multinational corporation. The theme of the novel is about corporate power, criminal delinquency, illegal trade of body parts and AI-controlled virtual worlds. The book emerged as the most representative text of posthumanity as it examines the diverse possibilities offered by unrestrained technological development of AI.

Literature review:

Genetic engineering is one of the pivot themes in posthuman science fiction. In the 21st century, a drastic change came into human society as the new development of microelectronics, nanotechnology, robotic science and prosthetics ultimately created the technological climate for the evolution of posthuman. Steve Clarke in his cited article *A Brave New World: Understanding the Ethics of Human Enhancement*, talks about the debate of ethics on posthuman science fiction "For the past two decades a debate has raged in academic philosophy and bioethics about the rights and wrongs of using drug therapies, genetic interventions, mechanical augmentation and other medical procedures to enhance human physical and mental capacities above the normal upper limits for our species." He also identifies that many bio-conservative opponents of human enhancement argue that it is morally wrong to alter human nature, to play God, or to seek mastery of ourselves, even if attempts to do so are likely to benefit humanity as a whole. So the ethics of human enhancement is a major concern for the present research.

"A genre of fiction dealing with the impact of imagined innovations in science or technology, often in a futuristic setting" (Yeoman 509) defines the novel *Brave New World*, which represents the world state where the citizens' bodies and minds are regarded as the possession of the government. "A Foucauldian Reading of Huxley's *Brave New World*" of Hamamra Bilal finds that *Brave New World* is a representation of man's dystopia ruled by the utilitarian World State, which strips humans of love, freedom, family, religion and art. The novel shows a posthuman world where human beings are mass-produced through a hatchery. And in a world state, all human beings become puppets in the hands of this totalitarian society. They have been systematically controlled of their mind and body through engineering and biological conditioning. *Brave New World* represents a world where "the attempt to recreate human beings in the likeness of termites has been pushed almost to the limits of the possible." (Huxley 24)

"The pillars of mankind, love, marriage, motherhood and parenthood, vanish from the landscape of the world state because they date back to the decadent social scale and because

these human states of being with what they spawn of ‘endless isolating pain, [...], uncertainties and poverty’, Mond asserts, force people ‘to feel strongly. And feeling strongly, [...] how could they be stable?’ (35). Mond eliminates language that expresses thoughts and emotions, the sources of instability. So in *Brave New World*, technology is used to control society through the destruction of individual freedoms and identities subsequent from the oppressive government’s extensive conditioning of its young. The controllers manipulate the grouping of hierarchy and career paths based on these habituated placements. The world state eradicates class conflict that is based on social inequality, greed and egoism since class conflict disrupts their socio-political-economic structure.

Posthumanism, the binary term of humanism, came into existence in response to the transformation of the human body by the means of the development of science and technology. Michel Foucault comments in his work, *The Order of Things* gave a critical remark that, “It is comforting, however, and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.” So present research also concerns posthumanism in popular culture. The posthuman entity is often described as a ‘physical counterpart (and successor)’ to the universal human (Seaman 247). This kind of posthuman being is represented in popular culture as a physical entity that is created as a result of specific techno-scientific developments. Moreover, techno-scientific development is omnipresent in our everyday lives, as it is also widely popularised and commercialised by popular culture. Cultural posthumanism, therefore, considers new understandings of humans and their nature, which usually stems from various developments of technology and how they affect the position of humans in contemporary society.

Time To Go: The Post-Apocalyptic and The Post-Traumatic in Margaret Atwood’s ‘Oryx and Crake’ by Katherine V. Snyder discusses the future condition of speculative science fiction of Atwood. “The future as imagined in dystopian speculative fiction must be simultaneously recognizable and unrecognizable, both like and not-like the present.” (Suvin 71) In order to grasp the caution offered by the tale, we must see the imagined future in our actual present and also recognise the difference between now and the future as imagined. Thus, the reader of such fiction must sustain a kind of double consciousness with respect to both the fictionality of the world portrayed and to its potential as our own world's future.

Science is the key factor in posthuman society. The research explores the development, struggle and consequences of genetic engineering in posthuman science fiction. We know that DNA consist of codes that determine how an organism behaves and grows. It is an engine to create life, and by the invention of genetic engineering, the production of hybrids increased. J Brooks Bouson in his *Game Over for Ever: Atwood’s Satiric Vision of a Bioengineered Posthuman Future in Oryx and Crake* makes it clear “In a biotechnological world in which the "boundaries between science fiction and science fact are

fast collapsing." Corporations can own, patent, and commodify technologically designed species, and while some scientists are attempting to clone human beings, "others imagine concocting chimeras that are half-human, half-ape for medical and experimental purposes." (23) If the postmodern adventure in science "strives to overcome all known limits, subverting boundaries such as those that demarcate species, it also steers us into an alleged age of biological control. Moreover, even as a heedless "gene rush" is now underway, the genetic sciences, all too often exhibit "a dangerous one-dimensional, reductionist mind-set that is blind to the social and historical context of science and to the ethical and ecological ground." (Bouson 139)

Research Methodology:

Methodology is a way to solve the research problem systematically. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. It studies the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his/her research problem, along with the logic behind them. The Methods applied for gathering and analysing the data are of great importance in influencing and evaluating the quality of a research assignment. My research will be descriptive as well as analytical in nature. So this research would consist of close reading, interpreting and in-depth analysis of primary sources of all the Posthuman Science fictions considered for the study. It will also be supported by secondary sources that throw more light upon Science fiction, post-apocalyptic and dystopian novels as a distinct genre under the umbrella term posthumanism.

Conclusion:

Posthumanism, on the one hand, merely refers to an ontological condition in which many humans now, and increasingly will, live with chemically, surgically, and technologically modified bodies and/ or in close conjunction with machines and other organic forms. On the other hand, post-humanism is also a new conceptualisation of the human. Posthumanism studies cultural representations, power relations and discourses that have historically situated the human above other life forms, and in control of them. As a philosophical, political and cultural approach, it addresses the question of the human in the age of advanced technology. The story of the novel *Oryx and Crake* unfolds on two distinct time levels and presents both the events that lead up to and those that occur after a bioengineered plague has killed nearly all of humanity. It follows the life of the protagonist Jimmy, who, after the plague, has named himself Snowman, alternating between pre- and post-apocalypse times. The novel is split into two storylines. The first follows Snowman's endeavours after the human population of Earth has been wiped out by a massive, deadly plague, when all that apparently remains are the Crakers (a genetically manipulated group of beings who are similar to but not the same as humans and survive easily in this environment) and Snowman himself, who watches over the Crakers and struggles himself to survive. The second storyline follows Jimmy (this was Snowman's name before the plague hit) and describes how the Crakers, the plague, and Snowman's lonely existence came to be. On the other side, Aldous Huxley's representation of the future AF 632, the society of *Brave New World* becomes the slave of technology. Their life is purely controlled by machines and

chemicals, which leads them in the journey of uncertainty. Babies are produced in a hatchery, so human beings lose their natural birth process. So their society becomes a clone of humans as children are born from artificial embryos. Society is divided into five castes-Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon, which depend on the use of chemical vaccination. The drug Soma controls their life as it helps them out of emotion, desire and human relations, gives relief from pain, but the consequences become fatal at the end.

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