




Storytelling as Environmental Discourse in *Oryx and Crake*: Climate Change and the Hope for Survival

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Abstract

As the climate changes and ecosystems unravel, scientific reports and policy recommendations often struggle to spark the emotional urgency needed for action. This article explores how storytelling, particularly - speculative fiction, can bridge that gap, carrying environmental realities into the realm of lived experience. Using Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) as a case study, it examines how literature can serve as both warning and survival strategy. Atwood's "ustopia"—a blend of utopia and dystopia—mirrors our present moment of ecological crisis, technological promise, and corporate power. Within the novel, Snowman's fragments of stories, myth and memory become a form of resilience, revealing the role of narrative in enduring catastrophe. Drawing on climate fiction and the environmental humanities, the article argues that storytelling is not merely an art, but a vital means of engaging with, and surviving, the climate emergency.

Keywords: Climate Fiction (Cli-fi), Storytelling, Warning, Hope, Survival

Introduction

Storytelling is a timeless tradition that transcends cultural, religious, and geographical boundaries. Elif Shafak (2024) describes "the ancient art and craft of storytelling" as "universal", observing that, in telling stories, fiction writers "connect with something bigger than us, older than us, and definitely wiser than us". In this present age of angst, when environmental collapse is no less perilous than wars, storytelling has to carry on the light of hope to remind people of their collective capability of being united to protest all the destruction and division. In other words, storytelling can, and does, play a vital role in how we respond to global catastrophes, including climate disasters. By appealing to human emotion and moral consciousness, storytelling holds the position of a more persuasive device in contrast to climate reports and policy documents. Thus,

storytelling, in the form of fiction, particularly in the realm of speculative narratives, translates ecological crises into personal, relatable, and emotionally resonant experiences and enables its readers to confront with their complexities.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) shows just how powerfully a story can transform the way we see our world. Set in a future twisted by environmental collapse and unchecked science, the novel works as both a stark warning and a reminder that stories themselves can help us endure. Through its dystopian lens, Atwood confronts human greed and carelessness, yet she also shows how storytelling can keep memories alive, nurture resilience, and hold on to hope even in the face of disaster.

Atwood has long championed the idea that literature can shape public awareness, and she has a particular passion for speculative fiction. She draws a clear line between it and science fiction, pointing out that speculative fiction stays rooted in the real: instead of inventing worlds out of nothing, it stretches current trends into futures that could genuinely happen. As she notes, these are “things that really could happen but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books” (Atwood, 2011). In the same Guardian article, she coins the term “ustopia”—a fusion of utopia and dystopia—to capture the ambivalence of her fictional worlds, which closely mirror our own and underscore the urgency of their warnings.

Within *Oryx and Crake*, storytelling is not merely an artistic device but a lifeline. The protagonist, Snowman, survives by clinging to memories, myths, and personal narratives, illustrating the vital role of story in making sense of loss and devastation. Beyond the character's internal need for narrative, the novel itself operates as a prime example of climate fiction—or cli-fi—confronting readers with the implications of technological hubris, environmental degradation, and unchecked capitalism. Atwood leverages speculative fiction as both critique and call to action, pushing readers to consider the very real trajectories we are following.

This article investigates how Atwood mobilizes storytelling as both structural and thematic strategy to engage with climate discourse. It examines the ways fiction can shape public perception, motivate collective action, and offer visions of alternative futures. Through a close reading of *Oryx and Crake* within the broader framework of cli-fi, the discussion affirms the crucial function of literature in confronting ecological crises. In doing so, it reinforces the idea that storytelling is not simply a reflection of reality—but a vital tool for survival in an increasingly uncertain world.

Literature Review

A review of existing scholarship on *Oryx and Crake* reveals that most researchers approach the novel through an ecological lens. While a close reading of the text confirms that Atwood's central concerns include nature, the human-nature relationship, and

ecological issues, these themes often serve more as the backdrop than the focal point of the main narrative.

Ambika Bhalla, Dr. Jap Preet Kaur Bhangu, and Dr. Manmohan Singh (2014), scholars based in Punjab, India, argue that *Oryx and Crake* “warns people to reflect on the path man has pursued,” ultimately posing the question of “how to reconstruct the green civilization” (p. 766). Similarly, Dr. Soraya Chihi (2022) interprets the novel as a “predictive narrative,” emphasizing that “Atwood is one among a number of authors who have forecasted COVID-19 in their fictional worlds” (p. 230). Chihi further contends that the novel exemplifies how human art can anticipate the emergence of viruses, connecting these predictions to 21st-century environmental concerns (p. 234).

Research scholars S. J. Soumya and Dr. N.U. Lekshmi (2023) focus on the ecological discourse within the text, specifically analyzing “the impact of the destruction of ecosystem” (p. 51). Turkish scholar Kevser Ates (2024) takes a related approach, examining the novel’s postmodern culture from an ecological standpoint and highlighting the contrasting values placed on science and art. For instance, in the world of *Oryx and Crake*, institutions like Watson-Crick, which produces elite scientists, are prioritized over arts-focused academies like Martha Graham (p. 152).

Doris Humbuch (2013) of UAE University emphasizes the theme of “Environmental Politics,” describing the novel as a “clear statement against prevailing anthropocentrism in favor of more ecocentric approaches” (p. 53). Meanwhile, Chinese scholars Xin Hao and Miaomiao Wang (2024) analyze the root causes of the ecological crisis presented in the novel and suggest possible solutions (p. 81). Gurpreet S. Saund and Kulandai Samy (2023) further this eco-critical discussion by focusing on the anthropocentrism and dystopian ecological themes within the narrative.

Javier Martin (2019) broadens the analysis by exploring intersections of dystopia, feminism, and phallogocentrism. He concludes that Crake’s utopian experiment fails precisely because it relies on a phallogocentric worldview—one that excludes art, love, emotion, and the authentic human experience (p. 180). Similarly, Brazilian researcher Tatiana de Freitas Massuno (2019) reads the novel as a “cautionary tale about the dangers of conceiving scientific knowledge without taking human concerns into consideration” (p. 18). Evelina Magnusson (2020) explores the destructive impact of humanity on the earth in the novel, attributing the ecological crisis to human greed and the belief in human exceptionalism (p. 01).

While writing about these cautionary tales, scholar Katherine V. Snyder says, in order to grasp the caution offered by the tale, we must see the imagined future in our actual present and also recognize the difference between now and the future-as-imagined. Thus, the reader of such fiction must sustain a kind of double consciousness with respect both to the fictionality of the world portrayed and to its potential as our own world’s future (Snyder, 2011, p. 470).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach to data analysis in order to address the central research question. The primary source for this investigation is Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), the first novel in the *MaddAddam* Trilogy. This text serves as the cornerstone for examining the question:

How can fiction, through its imaginative engagement with dystopian futures and alternative possibilities, influence cultural attitudes, inspire activism, and function as a catalyst for environmental awareness?

This study looks at *Oryx and Crake* through the lens of climate fiction (cli-fi) to show how literature can respond in meaningful ways to urgent ecological challenges. It takes the view that storytelling is more than a mirror to the world—it can also spark environmental awareness, especially when addressing global crises.

To explore the novel in depth, the research uses a range of secondary sources: peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and other critical works, both printed and digital. These provide a mix of perspectives and theoretical approaches that shape the reading of the text. The study also examines interviews with Margaret Atwood, gathered from newspapers, magazines, and online media such as YouTube, to gain insight into her views on climate change, speculative fiction, and the role of storytelling in society.

The methodology combines close reading of scholarly work on *Oryx and Crake* with a thematic review of Atwood's interviews and public talks. Using these two strands together offers a fuller sense of how the novel has been received and the key environmental and narrative themes Atwood returns to in her work.

Storytelling in *Oryx and Crake*

Throughout history, stories have helped people make sense of the world around them, offering lessons, warnings, and hopes for the future. When it comes to climate change, narrative forms like speculative and climate fiction can connect cold scientific facts with human emotions. These stories make complex, often distant environmental issues feel more immediate and real to readers.

Walter Benjamin, as cited in Melissa Cristina Silva De Sa's (2014) work, views storytelling as a fundamental form of shared human experience—“an experience which is passed from mouth to mouth” (p. 49). In *Oryx and Crake*, oral storytelling becomes a crucial means of transmitting knowledge, preserving identity, and making sense of a world on the brink of extinction. The novel presents three major forms of storytelling, each reflecting different aspects of survival, memory, and meaning-making.

Three Major Forms of Storytelling in *Oryx and Crake*

The first form of storytelling is Snowman's recollection of his past when he was "Jimmy". From childhood, storytelling has been Jimmy's way of understanding the world and carving a place for himself within it. Whether through fabricating entertaining narratives or constructing his personal history, Jimmy instinctively turns to stories as a coping mechanism. As a teenager, he crafts and performs exaggerated tales of his parents—his "Evil Dad" and "Righteous Mom"—finding validation in the reactions of his peers: he "could not resist the applause" that followed his lunchroom performances (Atwood, 2003, p. 60). These early instances of storytelling demonstrate Jimmy's reliance on narrative to navigate his fractured reality and maintain a sense of belonging.

Since his childhood, Jimmy knows that, unlike his parents, he is a "word" person. Jimmy values words/ stories more than numbers in his life. While art is "An empty drainpipe. An amplifier" for Crake; for Jimmy, "When any civilization is dust and ashes, ... art is all that's left over". He argues with Crake that "Images, words, music. Imaginative structures. Meaning- human meaning, that is – is defined by them" (Atwood, 2003, p. 168-167). Inquiring about the "floor models" of genetically engineered customized babies for the potential buyer parents, Jimmy's final question is "Do they make jokes?" (Atwood, 2003, p. 306). Because that is what grants human beings their unique status—their edge. It is this distinction and sophistication that sets them apart from artificially created entities.

The second form of storytelling occurs as Jimmy—later transformed into Snowman—attempts to recount the story of Oryx and Crake. This effort represents his struggle to construct a coherent narrative in a world where human culture itself is vanishing. Snowman finds himself unable to bridge the vast cultural gap between the pre-apocalyptic world and the Crakers, the genetically engineered beings Crake left behind. Simple concepts, like "toast," become incomprehensible to them, rendering Snowman's attempts at storytelling futile: "*Toast is something very, very bad. It's so bad I can't even describe it.... Toast is me. I am toast.*" (Atwood, 2003, p. 78). His inability to articulate meaning reflects not only the loss of human history but also his own fractured identity. Additionally, Snowman acknowledges that storytelling is inherently subjective, fragmented, and shaped by perspective. Oryx's story, for instance, is not singular but consists of multiple, conflicting versions: "*There was Crake's story of her, and Jimmy's story about her as well, a more romantic version; and then there was her own story about herself, which was different from both, and not very romantic at all*" (Atwood, 2003, p. 114). This realization underscores the limitations of storytelling—while it attempts to construct meaning, it is always incomplete and shaped by the teller's biases.

The third form of storytelling is Snowman's creation of a mythology for the Crakers. In fabricating a divine narrative around Oryx and Crake, Snowman transforms his own personal history into myth, ensuring that the Crakers inherit a structured belief system

to make sense of their existence. Through this act, he sustains both himself and the Crakers, using storytelling as a tool for survival and continuity. His role as a storyteller grants him authority, but it also forces him to reshape reality, blurring the line between fact and fiction. Snowman becomes a storyteller for the Crakers, shaping their understanding of the world through myth. Since they lack the intellectual framework of traditional human societies, Snowman constructs religious-like narratives, positioning Crake as their creator and Oryx as their benevolent guide. This demonstrates how stories are not just reflections of reality but tools for shaping belief systems and guiding behavior. Though Crake has been concerned that his new creations should not be allowed to lean to any kind of art ["As soon as they start doing art, we are in trouble" (Atwood, 2003, p. 361)], once the Crakers are on their own, "A story is what they want" (Atwood, 2003, p. 102). Again, at the end of the story, Snowman only has his tales to trade with the newly discovered surviving people. In this way, Atwood suggests that storytelling has always been a fundamental part of human survival, influencing how we make sense of the world and pass down knowledge.

Universality in the Storytelling of *Oryx and Crake*

Atwood skillfully enhances the universality of these narratives by stripping characters of concrete identities. Oryx, for instance, shares details of her childhood, her village, and her journey into human trafficking, yet she cannot recall her real name or provide any clear markers of her origin. When questioned by Jimmy, she confesses her inability to remember even the face of the man who first violated her. This deliberate erasure of specifics transforms Oryx into a symbolic figure, representing countless unseen and unheard victims of exploitation.

Cyclical, Sensory-Driven Narrative of *Oryx and Crake*

Like a castaway chronicling his surroundings, Snowman documents his world through a cyclical, sensory-driven narrative. The natural world, despite its devastation, remains deeply intertwined with his storytelling. The novel is rich with imagery of insects—grasshoppers, beetles, flies, bees, ants, rats, mice, and caterpillars—each serving as a silent witness to humanity's downfall. Snowman awakens each morning "listening to the tide coming in, wave after wave sloshing over the various barricades, wish-wash, wish-wash, the rhythm of heartbeat" (Atwood, 2003, p. 3 & 371). Even in the post-apocalyptic landscape, the sky's rosy, deadly glow transforms the lagoon into surreal hues of pink and pale blue, a haunting yet persistent reminder of nature's enduring beauty.

Environmental Dilemmas in *Oryx and Crake*

One of the central environmental concerns in the novel is the impact of unchecked human intervention in nature. Atwood portrays a world suffering from climate change-induced catastrophes, including rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and biodiversity loss. These elements mirror contemporary environmental challenges, such as the climate crisis, deforestation, and the mass extinction of species due to human activity.

Atwood also critiques corporate exploitation of natural resources and the commodification of life itself. The novel's powerful biotech corporations, such as HelthWyzer and OrganInc Farms, manipulate genetics and ecosystems for profit, producing genetically modified animals like the Pigoons (engineered for organ harvesting) and ChickieNobs (headless chickens grown for meat). These creations raise ethical questions about genetic engineering, animal rights, and the consequences of treating life as a commercial product—issues that are already debated in fields like bioengineering and agribusiness. Atwood's deepest concerns are reflected in Jimmy's internal conflict as he visits Crake's scientific projects – “Why is it he feels some line has been crossed, some boundary transgressed? How much is too much, how far is too far?” (Atwood, 2003, p. 206).

Additionally, *Oryx and Crake* explores the ethical implications of creating a post-human species. Crake's vision of a genetically engineered “perfect” humanity—free from violence, hierarchical structures, and sexual jealousy—raises questions about the morality of altering human nature. His experiment with the Crakers is reminiscent of real-world debates over genetic editing technologies like CRISPR and their potential to “enhance” future generations. Atwood asks readers to consider whether science should have limits and who gets to decide what is “ideal” for humanity's future.

Ethical Dilemmas and Social Critique in *Oryx and Crake*

Beyond environmental destruction, Atwood's speculative lens highlights ethical dilemmas concerning capitalism, social inequality, and the commodification of human lives. The novel presents a world where corporate monopolies have replaced traditional governments, exacerbating social divisions between the privileged elite living in secure compounds and the impoverished masses left to survive in the lawless “pleeblands.” This stark contrast reflects real-world concerns about economic disparity, corporate control over essential resources, and the increasing privatization of healthcare and technology. Jimmy's father lightheartedly uses an analogy to convey a harsh truth to him, saying, “Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots on the ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies, said Jimmy's father, and the Compounds were the same idea” (Atwood, 2003, p. 28).

Findings

As the climate crisis becomes more urgent, climate fiction plays an important role in shaping how people see and respond to environmental challenges. Novels like *Oryx and Crake* do not just warn us about the future; they also remind us of human resilience and the ability to adapt. In Atwood's dystopian world, Snowman turns to storytelling as a lifeline, showing that as long as stories are told, hope remains alive. In this way, fiction acts both as a warning and as a source of encouragement.

Oryx and Crake as a Warning for Humanity

From the very beginning of *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood makes her purpose clear in one of the novel's two prologues. By invoking Jonathan Swift, she signals that her story should not be brushed aside as pure fantasy. Instead, she frames it as a cautionary tale, rooted in unsettling truths and intended to provoke reflection.

The novel does more than imagine a bleak future—it warns against the cost of doing nothing. Atwood takes aim at environmental neglect, reckless scientific ambition, and the corporate control of vital resources, building a world that feels all too possible. Immersing readers in this speculative reality, she creates a sense of urgency that facts and figures alone rarely achieve.

Atwood seamlessly weaves contemporary anxieties about climate change into *Oryx and Crake*, making the novel's warnings feel eerily familiar. Jimmy's mother's lament that "all good things of the past are ruined" could easily be lifted from a present-day climate change newsletter. She recalls how her family's beach house "*got washed away with the rest of the beaches and quite a few of the eastern coastal cities when the sea-level rose so quickly, and there was the huge tidal wave ...*" (Atwood, 2003, p. 63). Similarly, young Jimmy observes environmental devastation in a stark, matter-of-fact tone: "*as time went on the coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes...*" (Atwood, 2003, p. 24). These descriptions, though embedded in a fictional narrative, closely mirror real-world climate crises, highlighting Atwood's concern for the unfolding ecological catastrophe.

Beyond environmental collapse, Atwood also underscores the social consequences of climate change. In *Oryx*'s village, families are driven to sell their own children to human traffickers because they can no longer afford to feed them. The unpredictability of the weather has rendered farming unsustainable: "*the weather had become so strange and could no longer be predicted—too much rain or not enough, too much wind, too much heat—and the crops were suffering*" (Atwood, 2003, p. 118). These conditions echo real-life struggles faced by vulnerable communities worldwide, where climate instability leads

to food shortages, displacement, and exploitation.

Atwood also exposes the sinister intersections of corporate greed, scientific ambition, and environmental decay. Crake, the scientific prodigy, discovers that the very authorities responsible for curing disease are, in fact, the ones creating it. When Jimmy watches the news — “*more plagues, more famines, more floods, more insect or microbe or small-mammal outbreaks, more droughts, more chickenshit boy-soldier wars in distant countries*”—the disasters do not seem distant or unimaginable (Atwood, 2003, p. 21). In a world that has just endured a global pandemic, these warnings resonate more strongly than ever, reinforcing Atwood’s prescient critique of human negligence and systemic failure. As Kevser Ates (2024) identifies in her work — “Atwood artfully hints at how technological manipulation and biological control might eventually pose a threat to our existence in the future” (p. 157).

Rather than presenting purely bleak dystopias or idealized utopias, Atwood, in her fictitious “ustopia”, often crafts narratives where these two visions coexist, revealing the ways in which one person’s utopia can be another’s dystopia. *Oryx and Crake* embodies this concept by depicting a world that is, in some ways, an advanced technological paradise, yet one that ultimately leads to devastation and collapse.

From a utopian point of view, Crake’s genetic experiments—and the creation of the Crakers—can be seen as an attempt to perfect humanity. He imagines a post-human species without war, environmental destruction, or social hierarchies. Designed to live in harmony with the natural world, the Crakers show no aggression and avoid destructive habits like overconsumption or territorial conflict. For Crake, they represent an ideal future, a “solution” to the flaws he sees in human nature and civilization.

But from another angle, his ideal is deeply dystopian. Achieving it requires mass extermination: Crake deliberately releases a pandemic to wipe out the human population, clearing the way for his engineered species. His disregard for human life—and the erasure of culture and history—casts a long shadow over his vision. Even before the collapse, the society he inhabits is shaped by corporations that manipulate genes, commodify life, and tighten their grip on social control. It is a dystopia uncomfortably close to our own.

Atwood’s idea of “ustopia” complicates the line between speculative fiction and plausible reality. The dystopian elements in *Oryx and Crake*—climate breakdown, bioengineering, unchecked corporate power, and deepening inequality—are not far-off fantasies but logical extensions of current trends. Environmental degradation, pandemics, and the privatization of vital resources are already pressing global issues. The novel’s world-building feels convincing because it draws so heavily on real scientific, economic, and political concerns. As a result, *Oryx and Crake* becomes more than a cautionary tale; it is a sharp commentary on the path society may be taking.

Dr. Baris Agir (2022) analyzes the theme of environmental apocalypticism in *Oryx and Crake*, interpreting the novel as a cautionary tale that anticipates potential future

ecological catastrophes. Agir highlights the narrative's critique of various interconnected issues, including the consequences of industrial technology, the ethical dilemmas of genetic engineering, economic instability, political disorder, and the challenges posed by overpopulation (p. 120).

The Dependence on Storytelling for Survival in the Text and in Reality

Using *Oryx and Crake* as an example, researcher Dr. Soraya Chihi writes about the important role played by literature to reflect the ills of society in all its fields - a role that could not be played by a scientific report, showing how stories can help to raise people's awareness about the danger of Anthropocene. Simply said, Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* is a novel of big value; it shows how writers of literature are gifted to predict and foretell the outbreak of viruses that resemble real earthly ones, like Corona virus... (Chihi, 2022, p. 249).

In the post-apocalyptic landscape of *Oryx and Crake*, storytelling becomes essential for survival for Jimmy, both physically and psychologically. Jimmy, now transformed into Snowman, relies on memory and narrative to maintain his sense of identity and cope with loneliness. He tells himself stories about the past—his childhood, his relationships with Crake and Oryx, and the world that was lost. “Hang on to the words”, he tells himself when he needs to maintain his inner discipline (Atwood, 2003, p. 68). Justifying his codename “Thickney”, borrowed from an Australian bird that hangs around cemeteries, Snowman utters old, rare words as some mystic “Mantras”, words that are only saved in his heads and otherwise be gone, gone forever from the history. These recollections, though fragmented, help him piece together meaning in a world that has otherwise been stripped of history and human culture.

Yet, beyond its cautionary message, storytelling in the novel also serves as a means of survival and resilience. Narratives provide a way to cope with uncertainty, to construct meaning in the face of chaos, and to imagine alternative possibilities. In the real world, climate fiction (*cli-fi*) holds the same potential: it challenges readers to reconsider their relationship with the environment, to recognize the consequences of unsustainable actions, and to take responsibility for shaping the future. Crake identifies “hope” as the reason of our ultimate doom. Therefore, he wants to take away hope from his factory made “human species”. However, he is unable to dissociate “dream” and “singing” from the essence of humanity; these elements ultimately endure as symbols of hope—suggesting that, despite the imposition of artificiality, nature possesses an inherent resilience and will, in time, find a way to heal the wounds inflicted by humans, who are often blinded by the pursuit of short-term gains. “Crake hadn't been able to eliminate dreams. *We're hard-wired for dreams*, he'd said. He couldn't get rid of the singing either. *We're hard-wired for singing*. Singing and dreams were entwined” (Atwood, 2003, p. 352). Melissa Cristina Silva de Sa

(2014) in her dissertation states, “If storytelling in the beginning of the novel is disregarded as unimportant, in the post-apocalyptic world it is all that is left of human culture: a story to be told by its last survivor...” (p. 54).

One of the primary ways cli-fi shapes public perception is by humanizing climate change. Unlike scientific papers filled with data and projections, cli-fi presents characters living through the consequences of environmental destruction. Readers experience climate crises through the eyes of individuals, making these issues feel less abstract and more urgent. Snowman’s struggle for survival in a ruined world filled with genetically modified creatures and remnants of a lost civilization offers a deeply personal and haunting portrayal of what could await humanity if current environmental trends continue. Beyond just raising awareness, cli-fi has also been credited with inspiring real-world action. By imagining dire futures, these narratives serve as cautionary tales that can mobilize readers to advocate for sustainability, climate policy changes, and environmental activism. Alejandro Albertuz Matías (2020) enhances the role of humanists as the “spokesperson” between the scientists developing new strategies and concepts and the ordinary people. According to this scholar – “writers can also contribute by the creation of narratives that pay attention to the environment and the relationship between nature and humankind. ... at the end they all help in developing some kind of ecological consciousness between readers” (p.19).

Conclusion: The Hope for Survival through Stories

In his seminal 2016 non-fiction work *The Great Derangement*, renowned author Amitav Ghosh laments the tendency among contemporary fiction writers to sidestep the pressing issue of climate change, often favoring more conventional or personal themes. He critiques the prevailing assumption within intellectual circles that the responsibility for addressing environmental catastrophes lies solely within the domain of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), while literature is relegated primarily to the realm of entertainment. To illustrate the potential of literature to respond to crisis, Ghosh recalls the climatic anomaly of 1816—commonly referred to as the “Year Without a Summer”—during which Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and their companions were confined to their villas on the shores of Lake Geneva due to persistent rainfall. In response to their confinement, they turned to storytelling as a form of creative engagement. Byron proposed that each member of the group write a ghost story. Although he abandoned his own tale after a few pages, the concept was taken up by John Polidori and later published as *The Vampyre*, now considered a foundational text in the fantasy genre. Mary Shelley, similarly inspired, began work on *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, which was published in 1818 and has since been recognized as one of the earliest works of science fiction. Rather than composing a ghost story, Byron wrote the poem *Darkness*, a work deeply infused with what might now be termed “climate

despair” (Ghosh, 2016, p. 91). A parallel of this historical moment of literary response to environmental crisis can be drawn with an earlier work of Giovanni Boccaccio’s *The Decameron*—a 14th-century collection of stories narrated by ten young people who seek refuge from the Black Death in a villa outside Florence. Like the works of Byron and Shelley, *The Decameron* demonstrates how storytelling can serve both as a coping mechanism and a means of cultural reflection during times of ecological and social upheaval.

Fiction does not only depict disasters—it also imagines alternative futures. This imaginative capacity is crucial; without envisioning better futures, humanity risks being paralyzed by despair. Through literature, we can imagine new possibilities and find the inspiration to strive toward them.

Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, like much climate fiction, does more than reflect society’s fears—it helps shape them. By drawing readers into emotional engagement, cli-fi makes climate threats feel immediate and tangible, bridging the gap between scientific data and public concern. It also critiques political and economic systems that sacrifice long-term ecological stability for short-term gain, urging readers to reconsider their connection to the natural world.

Atwood’s novel is both a warning and a call to reflect and act. It shows where unchecked corporate greed, technological arrogance, and environmental neglect could lead, while also highlighting the role of storytelling as a form of survival and resistance. In the face of the climate crisis, fiction can turn distant or abstract problems into personal ones, motivating readers to care, question, and act.

Literature has long shaped public consciousness—*Silent Spring* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* being well-known examples. In that tradition, climate fiction can inspire communities to work toward a more just and sustainable future. Atwood’s dystopian visions, though grim, still open space for imagining alternatives. *Oryx and Crake* in particular captures the dual nature of storytelling: it serves as a warning against ecological disaster while simultaneously offering hope that change is still within reach. As Snowman muses at the novel’s end, “After everything that’s happened, how can the world still be so beautiful? Because it is” (Atwood, 2003, p. 371). That lingering sense of beauty—and possibility—reminds us of what’s at stake, and why stories matter.

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Biodata

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