

# COVID-19 Infodemic: A New Historicist Analysis Of Atwood's Oryx And Crake

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## Abstract

This research intends to explore the current calamitous situation of Covid-19 in the context of Oryx and Crake, mirroring how Covid-19 and Oryx and Crake are linked through the perception of unification and the consciousness of the world as a whole by holding the entire world hostage. It vigorously examines the disease being presented as a weapon of mass destruction, followed by a conspiracy theory, the reality of the present and fancy of the future, generating a feeling of mingled contradiction, a psychological aspect, and stout human response to the unpredicted as some shared themes between the two. The potential strength of the New Historicism was found applicable in contextualizing COVID-19 and Oryx and Crake, which explore and project forward the biotechnological, social, political, cultural, economic, and climatic givens of the pandemic ridden world. It involves a parallel study of a literary work, interpreting events as the products of time. The textual interpretation was based on observation of historical context to see how following pandemics of the past may allow today's world to detect the fundamental causes of such diseases. Understanding the pandemic through intellectual history highlighted the consequences of unscrupulous exploitation of bio-engineering threats, a sense of uncertainty, fear, and insecurity, biotech corporations, and marketing genetically engineered life forms. The study optimistically concludes that COVID-19 can be considered a wake-up call of nature, an undeniable part of the very survival. It puts forward the challenge to be considerate of the dire need of confronting the disrespect of human dignity and moral dilemma brought by scientific developments. It raises ethical concern, verbalizing that science is a human activity, and relates to human values, therefore, it is capable of ethical evaluation.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Pandemic, Infodemic, New Historicism, Scientific developments, Ethical concern, Socio-economic Implications, Worldwide Cooperation

## Introduction

Humanity, although, has lived through several epidemics and pandemics such as the Black Death, Bubonic Plague, Spanish Flu, Swine Flu, SARS, MERS, Ebola in the past; yet Covid-19 has proved to be different from the outbreaks humans have been ever exposed to before (Ahmad, I., Gul, R. & Zeb, M. 2022). It is disparate in terms of being highly contagious so much so that almost everyone in this world is at the risk of infection; its biological, environmental, political, and socio-economic implications (Norman & Reiss, 2020); its potential to trigger an intricate web of problems with the depletion of world resources, and its tendency to inflame instinctive fears “since there is no remedy to improve the situation”, and putting humankind in a defensive position, as the situation is expected to “be a thousand times worse in the future” (Urgan, 1984). Accordingly, amidst the widespread confusion, panic, and ongoing fear of COVID-19, a new revelation has started making news (Gul, R., Ahmad, I., Tahir, T., Ishfaq, U. 2022). People are feeding their anxieties by voraciously consuming movies and books about plagues and outbreaks in the past which have prompted them to claim that Dean Koontz’s *The Eyes of Darkness*, Stephen King’s *The Stand*, Albert Camus’ *The Plague*, Margaret Atwood’s *Maddaddam*, *The Year of the Flood*, Peng Shepherd’s *The Book of M*, Sylvia Browne’s book *End of Days: Predictions and Prophecies about the End of the World*, Daniel Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year*, 1993 episode of the cartoon series *Simpsons*, 2011 movie *Contagion*, and the South Korean film *Flu*, had predicted the outbreak of this deadly disease with uncanny precision (Sidharth, 2020).

The aforementioned narratives, accentuating the fluid and intercontinental histories, effects, and possible cures depict global epidemics or pandemics afflicting all of humanity, like Covid-19, which humanity must either put up a unified front against or perish (Batool, S., Tahir. T., Gul, R., Ishfaq, U. 2021).

In Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, Crake, a disillusioned bioengineer, unleashes a “hot bioform”, a “virus that he artificially creates and spreads via developing the so-called BlyssPluss pill”, that exterminates most of the humans (Gul, R., Tahir., Ishfaq, U., Batool, T. 2021). Covid-19, though as opposed to the disease released in the *Oryx and Crake*, is a natural creation that has left many individuals, governments, researchers, scientists, and pharmaceutical companies, stunned, unprepared, and exploring a territory that it has not experienced before; yet, it reminds us of Atwood’s world while learning to live in pandemic time (Bukhari, S, K, S.; Said, Hamdan; Gul, R; Seraj, P, M, I. 2021). It not only mirrors the real-world political and social structures that Atwood borrowed from, but also reflects human behavior currently displayed.

This study, being of considerable relevance at present, offers multiple perspectives on the Covid-19 outbreak. It aims at bringing into light the creepily accurate predictions and conspiracy theories associated with this pandemic (Ahmad, I., Gul, R. 2021). It considers ways in which the dystopian world depicted in the novel, to various degrees, serves as a reflection of the Covid-19 pandemic with the effects amplified by the rampant socio-economic inequality, political and religious fervor, and climatic changes; making the world Alfred Toynbee’s unified “single planetary society”, which has “passed the point of no return...despite all the linguistic, religious and cultural barriers that still sunder nations and divide them into yet smaller tribes” (Gul, R., Zakir, S., Ali, I., Karim, H., Hussain, R. 2021; Ali, I., Gul, R., Khan, S. S., Karim, K. 2021; and Sabo & Graybill, 2020). The study will also create new opportunities for researchers, providing a context that will not only lend a hand in understanding of what is happening in the world and analyzing the current trends, but also in providing alternative vision to look for insight into the current situation via literary, socio-cultural, and historical artifacts.

## Objectives

This study aims to

- examine how the Covid-19 pandemic and Oryx and Crake are linked through the perception of unification and the consciousness of the world as a whole, by holding the entire world hostage, affirming concerns about socio-economic and environmental disasters that humankind might stumble upon in the near future.
- analyze how Covid-19 and the human-created virus, JUVE, in Oryx and Crake act have become a challenge for researchers and pharmaceutical companies.
- evaluate how the post-apocalyptic what-if scenarios in Oryx and Crake and during the current pandemic presage a dystopian world in which humans are attempting to survive, adapt, and grow up in quarantine, and social isolation.

## Background of the Study

It comes as no surprise that with the outbreak and rise of Covid-19, many conspiracy theories, creative interpretations, fictional accounts, and wild guesses have been evoked. Predictably, some believe the Bible had prophesied about Covid-19 centuries ago. A Bible study leader for the former American President, Donald Trump's cabinet, for instance, had asserted that the pandemic was God's wrath. Some social media posts claim that Michel Nostradamus, the French astrologer, and physician, had predicted the Covid-19 outbreak in 1555. Likewise, in 2018, the American Worldwide Threat Assessment is said to have warned that "a novel strain of a virulent microbe that is easily transmissible between humans continues to be a major threat". Jeremy Konyndyk, the former director of the USAID's Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance, had also hinted that a pandemic similar to the 1918 flu will emerge. Similarly, Robert Webster, an Avian Influenza authority, is believed to have predicted a flu pandemic in his 2019 book (Ayub, A., Gul, R., Ali, A., Rauf, B., M. 2021). Bill Gates, emphasizing that "the world must brace itself for a pandemic on war-footing", had aired quite accurate forecasts related to the outbreak of a lurking global viral outbreak, first in 2016 and then in 2018.

The United States has been repeatedly claiming that the virus was originated from a Chinese laboratory in Wuhan as the result of an accident. China, on the other hand, has been deferring the claims and is adamant that the corona virus had hit the US long before it was reported in Wuhan and that the US military had brought the virus to China in October 2019 to halt the economic rise of China (Sabo & Graybill, 2020). Mr. Boyle, a law professor at the University of Illinois, basing his arguments on the circumstantial evidence and the presence of a bio-safety lab in Wuhan, alleged that the corona virus was a bio-weapon genetically engineered in China, with the help of U.S. scientists and researchers (Gul, R., Talat, M., Mumtaz, M., Shaheen, L. 2021). A Montreal-based center published an article-"China's Coronavirus: A Shocking Update. Did The Virus Originate in the US?"-suggesting that it originated in the U.S. Kevin Barrett, a former lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, augmented that the corona virus was created by the "Americans and their partners the Israelis" as a bio-weapon to attack China and Iran. Ali Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, also suggested that the corona virus is a biological weapon engineered by the US. He also refused to take any aid or assistance from the US, claiming that "possibly (U.S.) medicine is a way to spread the virus more" (The Hindu, 2021).

Since Covid-19 is spreading at a faster rate in Pakistan, these conspiracy theories, pushing facts under the rug, have gone even deeper (Bukhari, S. K. U. S., Gul, R., Bashir, T., Zakir, S., & Javed, T. 2021). Owais Tohid, the political analyst and journalist, explicated that the political and religious conservatism, illiteracy, superstitions, and lack of access to resources have played a major role in exacerbating the spread of myths and conspiracy theories (Gul, R., Ayub, A., Mazhar, S., Uddin, S., S., Khanum, M. 2021). Some Pakistanis, taking refuge in denial, believe that there is no disease as Covid-19, that the reports about the ever-increasing death rate are forged, and that the deaths of the people dying because of natural causes are being linked to the corona virus to arouse fear. The others, conversely, perceive it as God's wrath over sins and wrongdoing and consider it as part of a bigger plan to control the world population and to stop the Muslims from going to mosques.

The spread of the virus is fuelled by politics and religion...From the theory that the disease is more harmful in the West than the East, and that it kills white people more than coloured and African American people, and that people in Pakistan have immunity, the list goes on and on...People in Pakistan believe in conspiracy theories...till the reality hits them right in their face (Tohid, DW.Com, 2020).

Literati (2020) opined that the near future may see the mushrooming of conspiracy literature, especially the "fictionalized autobiographical chronicles based in real-time settings" and, these accounts will not only depict the inventive versions of how capitalists might have infected people to wipe them out or to control them via chips installed into their bodies, but will also pave way for the literature of propaganda (Gul, R., Khilji, G. 2021). The writers may also weave bigotry, curse, escapism, ecological concerns, geopolitical breaks, global malaise, socio-economic divide, human indomitability, and the efficacy of the technology, into the fabric of their aesthetic endeavors.

Despite being known for her dystopian fiction and revered for her speculative fiction, Atwood's outlook on the Covid-19 pandemic and the resultant crisis remains optimistic. She stated that life has been "difficult...but I'm not alone on the planet".

I don't think of it as dark...Things are worse in my books...For younger people...it must seem like the end of the world...Anybody who's in a house, isn't ill, has enough food, money...is able to either grocery shop...or have their relatives go and get them food-they're pretty lucky...We have a lot of access that people once upon a time would not have had...remember the scarlet fever, the polio, the TB, the measles...Typhoid. Diphtheria...not that unfamiliar...My mum's entire family had it in 1919...they all survived...it is luck... (CBC Radio, 2020).

Atwood does not consider the current situation a dystopian era, believing the lock-down imposed, might be "an unpleasant, frightening, disagreeable place you don't want to be", yet is not dystopian, for "a dystopia, technically, is an arranged unpleasant society that you don't want to be living in. This one was not arranged. People may be making arrangements that aren't too pleasant, but it's not deliberate totalitarianism. It's not a deliberate arrangement":

Some states just aren't getting support...things are really quite difficult there...we've had these alarms before, we even had plans for dealing with pandemics. And then when there

wasn't a pandemic, they got put on the shelf and a lot of countries just were not ready for this, which they could have been had they remembered (Flood, 2020).

### **Significance**

This study reveals how literature represents the truth of the world that science is learning every day. Analysing *Oryx and Crake*, which makes an imaginative leap into the unknown future, evoking a sense of familiarity and strangeness, the study underlines the importance of apocalyptic literature, which shows the inevitable penalties if capitalistic approach, greed, irresponsibility and unlimited hubris in disregard for the earth and its inhabitants is not encountered (Gul, R., Khan, S. S., Mazhar, S., & Tahir, T. 2020). Comparing characters, actions and situations in the novel and the current Covid-19 situation, pointing a convincing glimpse of the future, conspiracy theory, and humanity overrun by science, contributing to the very elimination of human civilization, this project attempts to deny that literature is merely a world of ideas. It offers that awareness of the implications of the unbridled scientific power on the natural world is a concrete step that can steer us away from Atwood's horrifying future to contravene against the devastation of environment by reengineering humanity in keeping with their own designs or taking drastic measures to guarantee a healthy survival. New Historicism is employed to understand the intellectual history through literary work, contextualizing Covid-19. It relates to configuration of power, society, and how people adapt to the dramatically changing world and try to better understand their place and role in the world, emphasizing the message of the text.

### **Literature Review**

Pathogenic risks were previously considered concerns largely limited to particular environments and groups such as hospitals, surgeries, diseased, children, and elderly, however, weighing up the risks of contamination of Covid-19 in a globally integrated world, wherein "highly dangerous pathogens can be transmitted within hours from diverse corners of the Earth", this perception has radically changed (Norman & Reiss, 2020). Though the world is fascinated by the future, yet the uncertainty it holds is quite unsettling (Gul, R., Tahir, T., Ishfaq, U. 2020). The displaced temporality, modified identities, hybridization, cataclysm, instability, global warming, environmental challenges, terror attacks, worldwide recession, fear, and anxiety that characterize the current world challenge the sense of ontological and economic security in the present. "These are unprecedented times. We have been challenged to the core-physically, socially, psychologically, and...ideologically-by what now appears to be another take on Conrad's eternal call to humanity-'the horror, the horror'" (Anwar-Literati, 2020). This insecurity heightens specifically when considering the post-apocalyptic fiction, the fear and apprehensions these narratives take their roots in, and the interdependent relationship of reality and fiction in them.

The Sense of an Ending by Frank Kermode is a popular piece that criticizes apocalyptic paradigms in literary fiction. Seed (2000) augments that the reason why this book is so popular is the way the writer depicts "apocalypse [as] a narrative, one of the fictions which we employ to make sense of our present" (p.11). Berger (1999), in *After the End*, defines the apocalypse as "catastrophes that resemble the imagined final ending...All preceding history seems to lead up to and set the stage for such events, and all that follows emerges out of that central cataclysm. Previous historical narratives are shattered; new understandings of the world are generated" (p.5).

In post-apocalyptic and dystopian fiction, fear and anxiety stem from the external threats, the void left by the apocalypse, and the nothingness arising from the unknown future. The apocalyptic writers rebuild...their narratives from the tainted scratch of a lingering past that has already been destroyed to make way for a new order...influenced by the traumatic events that lead to the catastrophe. The readers, most of the time, realizing fears that provoke new anxieties, insert these narratives into already known contexts (Tambling, 2012).

The Covid-19 pandemic has also evoked and spiked interest in popular fiction about dystopia and apocalyptic pandemics, post-apocalyptic world, and contagious diseases. According to Shwetz (2020), the readers do not fully agree on why books and movies about pandemics appear compelling during a crisis with a real infectious disease (Gul, R., Kanwal, S., & Khan, S. S. 2020). If it provides comfort to some readers; the others, partly scared by the tangible threats, are not sure as to why these narratives feel so appealing and reach out to them to see what is next and how worse the situation can get.

It's...the nature of dystopian storytelling that truly captivates audiences during times of crisis. These tales are traditionally told from the viewpoints of inhabitants in ruined societies, which allow people to immerse themselves in the challenges faced by protagonists (Vecchione, qtd. in Chandran, 2020).

A brief historical overview of the literature that was written in the backdrop of natural or man-made crises reveals the extensive accounts of human endeavors to live and survive through the challenges. The Book of Exodus provides a detailed account of the devastating Egyptian plague which motivated Sophocles to reify Oedipus Rex's kingly traits. Thucydides also stamped an aesthetic mark on the plague that struck Athens and killed Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Decameron by Boccaccio and the Canterbury Tales by Chaucer were based on the epidemic outbreaks and their repercussions (Gul, R., Khan, S. S., & Akhtar, S. 2020). In Pale Horse, Pale Rider by Porter, the protagonists live through the twin cataclysmic events: World War-I and the 1918-19 influenza pandemic. Adam is not allowed to visit Miranda in hospital just the way the relatives of Covid-19 patients are not. The Station Eleven by Maindel follows Shakespearean actors' troupe touring a post-apocalyptic setting decimated by disease. The novel, in face of the fears sharpened by the Covid-19, offers a clear understanding of the cultural response to it and, hence, illuminates and acquaints us more with the present than the future. The Calcutta Chromosome by Ghosh presents "an interconnected history of malaria that spans continents over a century". It not only challenged the Euro-centricism but also the subversive role that the indigenous people played in the malaria research (Chakravorty, 2020). The Pesthouse by Crace is set in post-apocalyptic future wherein the USA is portrayed as a harsh and scarcely populated country. The actual event, however, that caused the country to ramble into this state is not explained. World Made by Hand by Kunstler focuses on how humankind reacts to and copes with new social structures in a post-apocalyptic setting, while striving to find a balance. The fear of disease and sickness, in both World Made by Hand and The Pesthouse, acts as a motif of how the world has relapsed and how little power humans have when illness-even a common cold-threatens the unhinged societies with no access to modern medicine and/or treatments (Gul, R., & Rafique, M. 2017). The Year of Flood by Atwood includes flashbacks to the society that existed before the apocalypse and how the leftover humans live in fear of the invisible enemy, the pandemic.

These works project...that ominous, fatalistic, and fear-inducing tone that depicts ...the effects of isolation and loneliness, loss of normalcy, the threat to survival along with an

emphasis on having a will to survive at the darkest moments of history and retain a hope for a better future (Literati, 2020).

Ovenden (2020) argues that even though fiction does not give the readers a map for how to proceed, yet it provides warning signs concerning what to avoid. In the *Severance* by Ling Ma, the outbreak of Shen Fever from Shenzhen turns New York into a zombie city. The private security contractors; in the novel, guard the properties of the rich only and the face-masks become a means to express taste and wealth. Reading about this is unnerving as it not only captures the seeping panic of Covid-19 but also presents how humanity responds to the chaotic panic and clinging anxiety.

Pandemic fiction, however, it is deemed, does not proffer the readers a prophetic and predictive look into the future; instead, it holds up a mirror to their most inchoate and deepest fears about the present and explores possible responses to these fears (Gul, R., & Reba, A. 2017). Accordingly, years after the publication of Margaret Atwood's speculative, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian novel, the *Oryx and Crake*, humankind has, at last, reached the end of that road, with the Covid-19 pandemic dominating the world and severely damaging the life in the process. According to *The Unbound Writers* (2015), "Oryx and Crake isn't about the future; it's about the present. The book is about us. Whatever future ultimately comes to pass-dystopian, post-apocalyptic, or otherwise-we are responsible for it. This story is our story".

Atwood weaves the narrative of *Oryx and Crake* around the consequences of unscrupulous exploitation of bio-engineering; providing the humans living through Covid-19, a speculative and satirical look at where the world is heading-an environmental catastrophe and socio-economic cataclysm of huge proportions (Mosca, 2013).

As the author often borrows from real historical events when building up her dystopian worlds, Atwood's storytelling continually finds its ways of addressing the future and suggests that time places no restrictions upon her works. The COVID-19 pandemic has left the world exploring a territory that it has not...in the same way..., experienced before..., it offers an opportunity to researchers to look for insights into our current situation in literary, cultural, or historical artifacts, which could lead toward a greater understanding of what is happening around us (Plevíková, 2020, pp.1-2).

## **Method**

To have an in-depth understanding of the selected research area, our work is based on a qualitative paradigm, involving the textual analysis and critical investigation of *Oryx and Crake* in the light of New Historicism by Margarete Atwood. This approach was employed as an instrument, making the research more manageable by taking different interpretations, expressions, contexts, and messages contained in the text into consideration.

The reason behind selecting this novel, in particular, is the havoc wrought by the pandemic at the center of the fictional world portrayed in the novel. As mentioned in the introduction, despite various warnings from the researchers and scientists, the outbreak of Covid-19 has shown that the world was always in a relatively poor state of preparation for such an occurrence.

New Historicism is introduced in 1980, which stands for a parallel study of a literary work, and promotes the reconnection of work with the context in which it was produced, identifying with the historical, political,

and cultural context of the specific period. It believes the historic movement of that specific period is responsible for its birth. According to Tyson, it is the retelling of history, "...questions asked by traditional historians and by new historicists are quite different...traditional historians ask, 'What happened?' and 'What does the event tell us about history?' In contrast, new historicists ask, 'How has the event been interpreted?' and 'What do the interpretations tell us about the interpreters?'" (Tyson, 1999, p.278). New Historicists believe that events are interpreted as the products of the time. The interpretation is subjective, based on observation.

We used New Historicism as a theoretical method in the exploration of the selected text to see how the current qualitative textual interpretation may be associated with historical context. Atwood, being the daughter of a forest etymologist, has been a voracious observer of nature. She has written about politics, the power of language, myths, climate change, and animals rights. The mentioned work explores a disease, which depicts the near-total extinction of humanity. The pharmaceutical companies in the novel have gone beyond creating medicines to battle disease and bodily dysfunction. About her work, it is noticeable how the Covid-19 pandemic has turned into a global disaster, thus becoming a challenge for the researchers. There is a salient comparison between the Covid-19 and the deadly virus in the book, on the loose, killing millions of people. Atwood projects the readers into a time that is both all too familiar and beyond one's imagination. One of the major themes in the book is that the disease is also presented as a weapon of mass destruction, signifying a conspiracy theory. The current critical situation caused by the Pandemic is strongly similar to the situation portrayed in the novel. Considering these themes, the potential strength of the application of this theory is found powerfully applicable in contextualizing the present pandemic COVID-19 concerning other historical pandemics in the light of apocalyptic literature. As a post-apocalypse fiction, the novel is the defining genera of the present time.

### **Textual Analysis**

Oryx and Crake offers a challenge in terms of separating fiction from the real. The consequences of proposed technologies are one of the dominant themes, overlapping with the central idea of a fatal disease, leading humanity to near extermination. Snyder claims in "Time to Go": The Post-Apocalyptic and the Post-Traumatic in Margaret Atwood's Oryx and Crake" that the future presented in the novel seems to be both "recognizable and unrecognizable", depicting a major aspect of dystopian novels (Snyder, 2011, p.1). Artistically, the imagined future it offers suggests the readers to imagine the future in the real present. The novel symbolizes the COVID-19 Pandemic situation. Thus, the concept of New Historicism ideally displays the connection between the historical context located in the book and the present situation where the reader can strongly identify with what the novel stands for. The potential of the imagined future in the novel demands "double consciousness" to associate it with the current situation of uncertainty regarding the future (p.1). The future setting in the novel may suggest that currently, humanity may come to such a pass where there is severe environmental degradation, and enchantment for machinic lifestyle. Snyder suggests that this is "already substantially, if not literally", one is living today. (p. 2).

Over the last years of 2019 and 2020, the novel has been able to gather and produce new reflections and meanings for the readers in the ways that the main characters' behaviors during the fictional pandemic are reflected in the behavior of the humans living through the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis undoubtedly offers a valuable insight into the fictional world and today's real world. According to Manjikian (2012), it is the connotations to reality and "the close relation to real life that enables the reader to connect with the



narrative and thereby be able to identify with” it (p.6). The setting and theme in *Oryx and Crake* are analogous to what is conceivable to the people of the twenty first century and it is this alluding to the known and unknown; real and fictional; factual and imaginative, that movingly triggers response from the readers.

The following excerpt from the novel traces the striking similarities its fictional world has with the present pandemic situation,

Street preachers took to self-flagellation and ranting about the Apocalypse...graphs showing infection rates, maps tracing the extent of the epidemic...There was no disguising the fear of the commentator...they're working ...It's...Encouraging grin, thumbs-up sign, unfocused eyes, facial pallor. Documentaries were hastily thrown together, with images of the virus...and commentary on its methods...a species-jumping mutation or a deliberate fabrication is...They'd given the virus a name, to make it seem more manageable...Jet speed Ultra Virus Extraordinary...killer virus has broken out...Major arteries sealed off...In the second week, there was full mobilization. The hastily assembled epidemic managers called the shots-field clinics, isolation tents; whole towns, then whole cities quarantined...the doctors and nurses caught the thing themselves, or panicked and fled...All communication...has ceased...Hospitals are off limits until further notice. If you feel ill, drink plenty of water and call the following hotline number. Do not...attempt to exit cities (Atwood, 2003, pp.242-244).

The way the world has been paralyzed by the lockdown due to Covid-19, Jimmy, the protagonist is also found trapped in the post-apocalyptic present, suffering the solitary human survival of the JUVE virus pandemic while being locked in the dome. The lockdown has ended travel and public gatherings in addition to the social culture, leaving only virtual and electronic executions and leisure activities in a commodified world, likewise, in the novel, “live performance had suffered in the sabotage panics of the early twenty-first century” (Atwood, 2003, p.187).

As the JUVE pandemic breaks out, Oryx is distressed at the cataclysmic effects of the “BlyssPluss” pills she had sold around the world. Similarly, Covid-19 vaccines claimed to help protect people from contacting Covid-19 and boosting their immunity, have largely distressed the scientists by the serious side-effects such as myocarditis, anaphylaxis, blood clotting disorder, and pericarditis, in addition to muscle pain, nausea, headache, fever, allergic reactions, fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, shortness of breath, blurred vision, chest pain, etc. (Jeong on, 2021). Crake did not confide the fatal bite in the pills to Oryx, the world was not informed of these negative effects in advance. He makes sure that Jimmy knows everything is under control, while “Jimmy witnesses on television the worldwide plague or “Red Death” decimating humanity as a result of Crake’s “BlyssPluss Pills” (Alban, 2016, p.93); the scientists solaced the users that everything was under control while the television and electronic media shared the news of the cases with congealing blood, headache, heart attack, and other related symptoms of the Covid-19 vaccination, treatments and control measures instituted. Moreover, the reports of large trenches and mass graves dug to accommodate and cremate the influx of deceased due to the Covid-19 pandemic, outside the cities (Evon, 2020), are evocative of Jimmy talking about the “burning corpse-filled churches...the sack of Jerusalem” when he says that “the worst part of it was those people out there-the fear, the suffering, the wholesale death” (Atwood, 2003, p.345-368).

Jimmy fails to address the rampant problems in his society, is obsessed with his comfort, and unwilling to see the corollary of his lifestyle (Cassidy, 2013). “He doesn’t know which is worse, a past he can’t regain or a present that will destroy him...Then there’s the future. Sheer vertigo” (Atwood, 2003, pp.184 & 149). He justifies his lack of empathy and compassion by saying that “he was in shock. That must have been why he couldn’t take it in” (Atwood, 2003, p.344). Treating human tragedy like a television show by conflating media and real life, rejecting the consequences of his apocalyptic psyche, he refuses to understand the larger political realities (Cassidy, 2013, p. 54-55). The executive political leaders throughout the world, navigating their efforts to deal with Covid-19, reflect Jimmy’s behavioral characteristics. Their visions remain too limited to allow them to picture, much less to deal with the apocalypse. Many of them have been found guilty of using the pandemic to achieve their ends, denying or trivialising the pandemic by spreading misleading information and frequently appearing in public without wearing masks. “Conspiracy theories proliferated...it was a religious thing...God’s Gardeners...a plot to gain world control... virus was made here in the Paradise dome... subsequently eliminated...then encysted in the BlyssPluss...Social disruption was maximized, and development of a vaccine effectively prevented” (Atwood, 2003, pp.242-244 & 348).

Critical analysis shows the difference between Jimmy and the reader in terms of past, the imagined future and no future as Jimmy is already living in the future. Oryx and Crake is pervaded by nostalgia whereby the world is divided into a before and an after. The reader discovers the past catching up with the post-apocalyptic present and the reasons for the catastrophe only through Jimmy’s memories and his attempt of making sense of what happened, giving an insight into the causes of massive destruction and near-extinction of the human race. There is more to it than hazardous environmental policies and that with the Covid-19 pandemic threatening the rhythm of normal life; many of the fictional accounts in the novel have become real (Mosca, 2013).

Jimmy looks at his watch where, “A blank face is what it shows; zero hour...this absence of official time”, signifying the lost relation of man with time. (Cited in Snyder, 2011, p.3). He represents a bygone memory, a “snowman”, living in the future who awakes in a “bleak” world of darkness which makes “the socio-economic disparities” of a life where he was still “Jimmy”, an ideal past, ironically, a time which the reader would probably want as a future. Considering Covid-19, it disrupted the concept of time, making before and after the major markers of temporality. People have started questioning their level of security on both individuals and societal levels. The more fearful they become with an ever-advancing fear of the future events and the accumulated knowledge, the less they feel secure in the present. This transition has provoked insecurity and fights for survival and sanity.

There is a growing awareness that the very structures constituting the world are changing ever faster...reality is transformed in unexpected ways...the ground is slipping from beneath our feet, and people are seeking a secure foundation that once again can provide meaning and purpose in their lives (Taylor, 2007, p.348).

Jimmy calls himself snowman to forget the past and perhaps “a different name would do that for him. (Ctd in Snyder, Atwood 348-349). Juxtaposing paradoxes of hopefulness and uncertainty, his “unimaginable present” stands for an unimaginable future in the present wake of COVID-19 (p.1). Snyder illustrates the psychological aspect of the novel as it encounters the idea of quarantining an individual and dissociating one from the rest of the world. Jimmy is unable to quarantine his thought from the lost humanity. Covid-19 took its toll upon the mental condition of people as they have to adapt to a whole new normal. She mentions Freud’s idea that it takes

“two moments” to compose trauma, for example, any later incident triggers the effects of the earliest incident or event. For Jimmy, it is the past and future, giving meaning to each other in a different manner, portraying the boundary between the present and fancy of the future, generating a feeling of mingled contradiction, revolving around a deep sense of loss.

Snowman has flashbacks of mundane realities of life: “motivational speaker” and “standup comic” stylistically represent today’s situation of people longing for the pre-pandemic time. (Atwood 37-237). His thought process becomes a mental landscape of today’s man for the past where everything from the present was unimaginable. Scene are sequenced in a way where the reader may know where Jimmy began, but not where he would end up, effortlessly portraying the present situation. The attempts on the part of people to move on with a hope of a pandemic free life is stylistically portrayed, where Jimmy decides to go to the Crackers, “From habits he lifts his watch; it shows him his blank face...Snowman thinks time to go” (374). The idea critically goes both ways, either today’s man has embraced the harsh reality of the Pandemic lifestyle or it is rejoining a new journey to rebuild humanity, predicting a future without the pandemic.

Connecting the novel and COVID-19, a grim acknowledgment of the current and engaging with futurity, Atwood’s “consumption-obsessed dystopian society is our future, and Snowman’s flawed vision is our vision... The utopian vision in these books that sees a glimmer of human possibility in the midst of so much darkness offers us a way forward, a way to avoid the dire future Atwood has so carefully drawn (Cassidy, 2013, p.104).

### **Associating Conspiracy Theories**

In his book, *Is COVID-19 a Bioweapon?: A Scientific and Forensic Investigation*, Fleming (2021), exposes those who committed a crime against humanity by violating the Biological Weapons Convention Treaty and developing coronavirus as a bio-weapon, through the money trail of Covid-19. He proclaims that the key to prove and understand Covid-19 as a bio-weapon is its spike protein, now being made in the people through Covid-19 vaccines, which he deems “nothing more than the genetic code” of this bio-weapon. The data on the racial disparity of the deaths caused by Covid-19, provided by Homeland Security News Wire (2021), is alarming. The disproportion in the death rates of people coming from black, white, Asian, American, and Hispanic origins raises a lot of questions. “Non-East Asians are dying at rates 20 times higher than that of East Asians...not a statistical “blip”...the virus has massively unequal kill rates-and kills people of different races differently...the signature of a bio-weapon...it kills the “enemy” far more that it hurts your own people” (Homeland Security News Wire, 2021, par.1).

Fernández (2021) writes that along with bombing hospitals, ambulances, and medical personnel, Israel, criminally excluded “2.7 million” Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from the vaccination program. “It’s hardly shocking, in this charmingly capitalist world, that rich countries are getting vaccines while poor countries are getting screwed...Israel’s war on coronavirus is also a war on the Palestinians...nothing whatsoever miraculous about coronapartheid” (Fernández, 2021, par.7 & 13).

The novel is be possibly a comment on today’s obsession with scientific advancement with outcomes not considered, where the question of morality is pushed aside, where having a void of humanistic thinking may lead to dehumanizing effects. The pill which Crake invents is experienced on poor sex workers who unknowingly become sterilized. This heinous aspect can be associated with ongoing conspiracy theory on COVID-19, justifying it being biogenetically introduced plague. Crake’s experiences with human embryo

and animals show breaching of the divide between humans and animals. For example, “Pigoons” carrying human tissues and DNA, human qualities in Crackers “which do not exist in their world, nor does family-trees, marriages nor divorces” and (Atwood,2004, p.359). “Watch out for the leaders, Crake used to say. First the leaders and the led, then the tyrants and the slaves, then the massacres. That’s how it’s always gone” (p.184). Atwood may question the degraded dignity of human beings when Jimmy feels inferior to scientifically created humans as he thinks of himself scientifically insufficient. Science has been given importance to a level where humans feel inferior to their own creation. Sarcastically, it is evident in Crake’s idea that human qualities of knowledge and self-awareness are not the solution. He rather introduces a plague and wipe them away, creating humans with animal and plant traits. This concept resonates the population growth theory and its sinister aspects of being inconsiderate of how important humanity is.

In *The Americans*, Boorstin (1965) emphasizes on the potentially destructive force of science by calling it a major rider of the apocalypse after war, death, famine, and pestilence. Atwood augments that even though science and fantasy can be helpful in realizing human dreams of eternal youth, beauty, and hyper intelligence, yet, it also has the power to destroy the world. The scientists create hybrid animals in the novel as Jimmy’s father states, “There had been a lot of fooling around in those days: create-an-animal was so much fun, said the guys doing it. It made you feel like God” (Atwood,2004, p.57). Crake believes that things created by science are no less real than things created by nature. Assuming God-like power, Crake, in his exercise to better the world by getting rid of the wrongs, ends up bringing a catastrophe upon it. The “Great Rearrangement” and the making of the “Great Emptiness” (Atwood, 2003, p.106) within the dystopian world portrayed in the novel strike the chords of “Noah’s Ark” and “New World Order” as “Crake’s project is called “Paradice” (instead of paradise)... is different.. man-made...a hint of Crake’s playing dice with human lives and to a certain extent playing God (Silva De Sa, n.d., p.56).

As the personification of a scientist with God and Prometheus complex, Crake’s perspective is to change human nature by preventing humans from making the same mistakes over and over again and to save the environment (Howells, 2006, p.72). Crake, by presuming that he has killed all the humans, is convinced that the re-emergence of inequality and racial discrimination has been averted, “racism...in Paradice had been eliminated...Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes... Since they were neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land, there was no territoriality (Atwood, 2003, p.305).

The corporate power, “CorpSeCorps”, in Atwood’s hypothetical work is a major force that controls the environment, its inhabitants, and scientific experimentation. Genetic engineering corporations are the richest, and exempted from being held accountable for any unexpected outcomes the experiments carried out by them may have. The dystopian world in the novel is defined by a rigid separation between the inside, the safe and enclosed “compounds” bought by various corporations for their members to live in, and the outside, the unsafe rest of the world. Moreover, the outer spaces, disparagingly called “pleeblands” are freely pillaged and trashed and, when necessary, used as the specimens for scientific experiments. The world history is littered with examples of the inhabitants of the third world countries being used as specimens for clinical experiments. For instance, recently, Major General Amir Ikram, the Director of National Institute of Health, Islamabad, informed Pakistanis that Pakistan has earned \$10 million through the clinical trial of Chinese vaccine CanSino Bio. He also said that many other biotechnological companies from the UK, Korea, Japan, and China wish to conduct Phase-III clinical trials of their vaccines in Pakistan.

He further elaborated that these experiments will generate billions of dollars and can earn the country huge revenue and foreign exchange (Bhatti, 2021).

In the novel, Crake sends out a number of verbal signals to Jimmy, trying to inform him of the hostile bioforms and virus within the vitamin pills that the corporates had created in order to make the diseases linger, to earn profits through expensive remedies. “Nothing hypothetical here:... you’d need more sick people. Or else and it might be the same thing-more diseases...don’t they keep discovering new diseases?”...“Not discovering,” said Crake. “They’re creating them” (Atwood, 2003, p.142). By saying that “their puny little diseases had been simple-minded, in compound terms, and fairly easy to contain”, Atwood is trying to explain that when these pharmaceutical companies run out of diseases to cure, their next strategy is to invent new ones (Atwood, 2003, p.247).

Such greed-ridden and corporately controlled actions of the owners of these pharmaceutical companies, that reflect the “typical consumerist behavior” (Plevíková, 2020, p.12), are also reminiscent of Crake’s decision to eliminate humans due to capitalism, racism, exploitation, corruption and other such vices that humans have brought into world and the bio-creation of a new race, rather than helping them to mend their ways and eradicate these transgressions. “BlyssPluss is...secret project of Crake...causes a deadly pandemic that brings humanity to near-extinction...the Crakers have not been bioengineered as a playful experiment...they are actually intended to replace humans once BlyssPluss wipes them off the world (Mosca, 2013, p.45).

Moreover, by manufacturing and profiting from the anti-aging cures and other various medicines for diseases, the corporates exploit the fear of death, decay, and other health-related issues; and, thereby, commodify fear. The “pleebes” are manipulated into buying the drugs prescribed by the compounds. The BlyssPluss pill is sold, claiming it to be a rejuvenating drug that promises youth among other benefits, is in reality a virus containing death sentence. The pill, therefore, becomes a tool of biological warfare that also helps fears of economic and political nature surface (Atwood, 2003, p.343).

Oryx and Crake also shows the increasing ecological destruction of the earth, destruction of crops and livestock, massive flooding, and mass consumerism of humanity, which Jimmy’s art student friends describe as “a giant slug eating its way relentlessly through all the other bioforms on the planet, grinding up life on earth and shitting it out the back-side in the form of pieces of manufactured and soon-to-be obsolete plastic junk” (Atwood, 2003, p. 244).

Snowman can be considered as a slave of the climatic changes and the engineered wild life: during the day, he is forced to take refuge from the increasing temperature in the shadow; and, at night, he is afraid of the wildlife. His habit of checking for “scales” and “tails” before descending his abode, the recognition of danger, and his fear of the wild animals allude to the constant state of fear and anxiety. In terms of real life, fear and anxiety of catastrophes have directly resulted from the environmental and industrial aspirations gone wrong and human efforts to control nature. Jimmy’s memory of a colossal bonfire of animal carcasses is the manifestation of “one of the real-life bonfires that were lit in 2001 to manage the hysteria caused by the widespread Foot-and-Mouth epidemic” and is reminiscent of the recent chain of forest fires in Australia, Turkey, France, Italy, Lebanon, Spain, Siberia, Canada, the Balkans, and Greece that have devastated the forests, consumed billions of trees, and killed millions of animals in addition to succumbing some of the most idyllic towns and fueling high temperatures and heat wave (Mosca, 2013, p.42).

In accordance with Schwab's "Bill Gates, Climate Warrior. And Super Emitter" (2021), there are widespread controversies over the way Bill Gates's personal fortune, which increased during the pandemic. In "How Bill Gates and the 1% Can Help the Environment", Spodek (2020) states that Gates believes that "private investors should foot the bill for increased spending on technologies to fight global climate change" (par.1). He briefly acknowledges "the ways his own wealth impacts climate change-and even concedes that he needs to make changes" in his book, *How To Avoid A Climate Disaster*. His main credential related to the climate change, according to Schwab (2021) is as an investor.

Gates's book could be read as an advertisement for his investments...he devotes many pages to promoting the need for new technologies to fight climate change...even calls on the US government to become a co-investor in advanced nuclear energy companies, like the one he founded, TerraPower...With no irony...goes on describing 'policies that governments can adopt' to fight climate change-like supporting and subsidizing the companies in which he is invested...(Rogers-Wright, qtd. in Spodek, 2020).

Biden, according to Anthony Rogers-Wright, understands the "environmental justice", that is, equity and justice are fundamental to climate change; which, however, is completely absent in Gates' book. "If Gates really wants to be effective and lift up equity...he should be listening to people who are being impacted the most and scaling up their solutions, rather than coming in with a parachute and with an air of white saviorism that causes more harm than good (Rogers-Wright, qtd. in Spodek, 2020).

Christine Nobiss, pointing to the recent reports of Gates becoming the largest farmland owner in the US, says that this reflects the Manifest Destiny mentality that needs to be critically challenged while politically fighting around climate change. Gates' landholdings are intrinsically linked to the never-ending cycle of colonization and climate change, as agriculture is a major source of carbon emissions (Schwab, 2021).

Covid-19 posed great challenges to the researchers due to the unresolved questions related to coronavirus epidemiology and pathogenicity, and lack of approved antiviral drugs for the Covid-19, the preventive measures, and strategies to control and inactivate the virus to cure it. The recent fires and floods have revealed the unpreparedness and impotence of the developed countries against natural disasters; there is a need to figure out ways as to how weather systems will change with the ever-changing climate rather than just thinking about how the climate will change. The pandemic conspicuously exposed the flaws of the prevailing precarious socio-economic order, dysfunctional environment, healthcare sector and calls for recalibrating the existing approaches and practices to respond to the future pandemics and crises more effectively and for recognizing and addressing the deeper shortcomings of the current systems and their interface with humanity.

The ending of the novel with 'Time to go' may demonstrate the possible consequences of bioterrorism and the irresponsible behavior of the multinational corporations that try to take absolute control over environmental and climatic deterioration at a time when Covid-19 is escalating out of control. It may inspire the readers to "contemplate the potentially dire consequences of our own flawed, if not yet dystopian, vision" (Cassidy, 2013, p.105). The apocalypse conveys the death of civilization and culture, making the effects of Covid-19 pandemic clear. The pre-apocalyptic society depicted with the science as the dominant

belief system, is almost entirely secularized; the post-apocalyptic social structure, on the other hand, has its foundations in religion whereby the Snowman acts as a fake intermediary between gods and Crakers.

Likewise, in the novel, the food production efficiency had been maximized by Watson-Crick Institute through the creation of animal-like forms of life. The following scene elaborates on how the chicken had been made pragmatic for the ever-increasing needs by genetically modifying it: “A large bulblike object...Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing...“Those are chickens”... The thing was a nightmare. It was like an animal-protein tuber (Atwood, 2003, p.203). This example can also be interpreted as a critique of the contemporary industrial food production systems. In “How do you like your beef...old-style cow or 3D-printed?”, Rubin (2019) augments that the Israeli and Spanish manufacturers of the realistic 3D-printed steaks, fillets, chicken thighs, and artificial raw meat, claim their products taste like the real meat and have huge ecological benefits (par.1 & 3). This meat, that strappingly mimics the fat, blood, and muscles of an animal, is produced either from the vegetable matter and/or from animal cells genetically modified and engineered in a lab. “When you buy some beef at the butcher’s, you know it comes from cattle...imagine if this cut of meat...had been made from scratch-without slaughtering any animal...in the future, more cows may be able to roam the fields without having to fear the slaughterhouse (Moskvitch, 2013, par.1 & 6).

This also resonates with the humanitarian concerns about the exploitation and abuse of living species. “It was claimed that none of the defunct pigeons ended up as bacon and sausages: no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own” (Atwood, 2003, pp.28-29). Jimmy, having similar concerns as his mother who considered the “Pigeon Project” as “immoral” and “sacrilegious”, also did not want to eat a pigeon, for he thought of them as living creatures, much like himself (Mosca, 2013, pp.41-42).

### **COVID-19 Joins the History of Pandemics**

As the world is witnessing the disastrous emergence of Covid-19, it is worthy to mention that deadly pandemics have been there throughout human history. Incorporating New Historicism, if Covid-19 is placed into the historical context of other pandemics, many of them have proven to be a challenge to the very existence of humanity. Killing an ample percentage of humanity, the diseases are, however, faced by the intense struggle on the part of humans to survive and researches to cope with them. Covid-19 threatened the rhythm of everyday normal life by an unfamiliar threat of the untimely loss of human life. The purpose to compare it with *Oryx and Crake*, also tracing the historical context of pandemics is to trace the shared similarities, for instance, the intensity of uncertain situation, sense of insecurity, and the negative outcome of scientific experiences, where the dignity of human is denied in order to pursue materialistic developments. New historicism strongly considers subjectivity on the part of the observer, relating to incidents taking place in the course of history, which is one of the motives this research article finds the scope to trace the aforementioned aspects.

Morens, Daszak, Markel, Jeffery and Taubenberger explore in their research work, “Pandemic COVID-19 Joins History’s Pandemic Legion”, that “around 12,000 years ago”, human family gave up on nomadic lifestyle, which gave birth to a lifestyle where humans started living with “domesticated animals”. It was the intensity of this closeness and “environmental alterations” due to which the agents of diseases occurred (2020, p.1). The chain of other pandemics followed the Athenian plague. The irony related to these diseases is that humans quickly forgot the lessons after confronting their deadliest consequences. Similarly, the

pandemic diseases evolved from “animal pathogens”, becoming agents of infecting humans. The first pandemic, perhaps officially recorded was the “plague of Athens” (430 -425BCE), the cause of which was not recognized (2). The population of humans expanded and these agents began to initiate the pandemics. Tracing the origin of the very name, they believe that pandemic was never a “scientific” term, rather it is a subjective term, describing the large epidemics. According to the mentioned research, “Epidemic” is a Greek word which means “that which is upon people” (4) it was after “global influenza”, which emerged in 1889, that the epidemic took a new meaning, referring to a disease widely occurring, and covering regions. The historical congregation of humans and animals have led to diseases like small pocks and measles. The research mentions that it was after 1999, that frequent “live-animal markets” of China led to “three epidemics”. The lethal “bird flu” linked with the “poultry-adapted influenza” identified as “H5N1 and H7N9” have taken over a thousand human lives, SARS almost caused a worldwide pandemic in “2002 and 2003, killing 774” and in 2019 and 2020, “SARS-CoV-2 is causing the new fatal pandemic, COVID-19” (4). The article raises a critical question that are the previous “coronavirus emergences within 17 years” forerunners of an era in which a new universe of “enzootic coronaviruses” will recurrently appear, threatening the future. Such questions can be answered by further research, involving global collaboration. With the start of 2020, people reluctantly learned the new normal of socially being distanced and taking preventive measures as the aspects of the pandemic to which, they had to adapt themselves. For example, during the “plague pandemic of the 1340s”, which also required social isolation, young people limited themselves to the countryside to avoid the outbreak, as mentioned (7). The fact that China also became partially successful in achieving a limited regional control is a reminder to similar anecdotal evidences. Apparently, it is a simple act of creating a manifold market of large live-animal an area populated by humans, but it caused “four fatal zoonotic diseases within 2 decades” (4). COVID-19 is as lethal as the “1918 influenza” pandemic (17).

Considering the new Historicists idea that the incidents taking place are identified according to the context, historically, humans have proven to be the decisive cause of pandemics. Diseases like yellow fever, and dengue are also associated with feeble sanitation. Humans themselves being the reason is also verified by a historian Alfred Crosby, that the diseases travel along humans and he calls it the “Columbian exchange” (cited in Morens et al 2020, p.5art). For instance, Columbus’s first expedition to America brought syphilis to Europe. For example, “black death” trailed trade courses. Same is the case with, COVID-19 as the world is dominated by globalized economy, global interdependency has brought humans even closer than ever. The global economy is highly dependent on international routes, which in today’s critical situation of pandemic is proving to be unhealthy. Travelling on the part of humans not only spread the disease, but the pandemic itself lead to a global economic downfall. Sarcastically, it is the age of exploration which became the time for international microbial destruction.

Covid-19 is also a cause of fear that has prompted changes to social and religious practices. However, at the same time, a new type of reflection about collective experience during the pandemic has set in. The enormous solidarity and spirit of unity are clearly visible in the civil society: the vaccines, healthcare, financial support, and information are being exchanged, unprejudiced by national egoism. Besides, the feeling of shared fear has not only triggered emotional responses, but has also driven people around the world to social media to share their lived realities to alleviate their anxiety and express their joy. The 2020 study, “View from my window: Global connections during Covid-19”, by Suliza Hashim shares the photos and short narratives of the Covid-19 lockdown experiences, taken from the Facebook page, View From My Window (launched by Barbara Duriau on March 22, 2020), that presents interactions amongst strangers



who share their personal and private thoughts and their lives while grappling with “the new normal...[and] authentic articulations of communities experiencing similar challenges, in fear for the invisible enemy. Issues involving loss, isolation, friendship, and empathy...” (p.11).

Joakimsen (2015) states that humans are constantly tampering with nature, natural laws, and ecosystem. The water is intentionally polluted to sell clean mineral water. The overpopulation and capitalism are destroying the earth with their ever-increasing demands for production and consumption, and by irrevocably changing the living space through human intervention (Joakimsen, 2015, p.23).

It suffices to think of the four fundamental threats to the survival of the human race today- ecological catastrophe, worldwide poverty and famine, structural unemployment on a global scale, and the seemingly uncontrollable traffic in armaments of all kinds, including smart bombs and unmanned drones (Jameson, 2010, p.22).

## **Conclusion**

Oryx and Crake mirrors not only Covid-19, apocalypse, displaying utter helplessness associated with the insecurities about the future, but also demonstrates a common denominator, and infuses the moral convictions of the twenty first century humans into the narrative, which intrinsically link the characters with the real humans. While responding to current issues within healthcare, politics, economy, society, religion, and literature, and expressing cultural trends, fixations, and contemporary fear of end of the time and world narratives, the novel explores the capitalistic nature of advanced biotechnology as the society portrayed in the novel accounts for seeking a utopian future and acquiring ubiquitous tyranny using advanced scientific technology. Covid-19 is not only furthering human integration with technology with the emergence of trans-humanism that seeks to surpass human body's limitations and death, but also ethically violating scientific developments that threaten human stability.

The challenges of infodemic and conspiracy theories need to be addressed collectively, calling for climate action to be given supreme significance in global recovery efforts. It can be, at times, difficult to distinguish between truth and false information, which though has some vestige of truth to it, yet is spun to make it misleading. Covid-19 demonstrated the need for access to reliable, factual, and scientific information, along with social, print, and electronic media, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations to assume their responsibilities in countering the infodemic.

Humans are doomed for “human society... never learned, it made the same cretinous mistakes over and over, trading short-term gain for long-term pain” (Atwood, 2003, p.244). Despite various national and international warnings from the researchers, scientists, and clinicians, and years of planning, the world was caught unprepared. The failure to adequately make and execute plans has paralyzed the global economy and exacted a heavy human and economic price. Moreover, the pandemic has also exposed fault lines in the social structures that perpetuate ethnic, racial, economic, social, religious, and gender disparities. The world requires to minimize the economic impact of the pandemic and bridge the entrenched gap between the haves and have not by respecting human rights, opposing any form of discrimination, avoiding racism and xenophobia, extending help to the poor and ensuring fair accessibility to medical treatment.

Even though many of us, spending time in lockdown, left to electronic devices, with the pressure to thrive and survive, with the finishing line changing constantly, finding ways to cope during this traumatic

pandemic, and with no clear end in sight, have been experiencing hopelessness over two years into the pandemic, given the circumstances, the light at the end of this Covid-19 tunnel, though dim, is still shining.

What's wrong with a few months stuck at home, baking sourdough, whipping coffee, trying yoga, no longer commuting to work, and hopping on Zoom calls with friends? Some even welcomed this slower pace of home life...we engaged in activities that brought joy, happiness and hope (Arnaldo, 2021, par.6 & 11).

Similarly, Sheikh (2021), calls the Covid-19 lockdown as the fundamental anchor created to keep the miracle of life alive:

Treat lockdown as Boon...a golden opportunity to have a great time with family... the best time to spend with each other... with parents...to learn new skills and enjoy life. Give time to your hobby...an opportunity to cherish with friends online...to enjoy more sleep...Life has too much to offer provided we have the right mindset (par.1).

Even though it is not too early to distill lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, yet the world needs to have readiness and resilience to the potential future waves of the current pandemic, and also the future infectious disease and calamities. Therefore, concerted efforts are required to address the critical connections between environmental degradation, climate change, and the outbreak of novel pathogens, review the overall state of preparedness from time to time, and a Covid-style combination of ambitious policies and rapid advancements in technology. Besides, it stipulates researchers, policy makers, and governments to address effective dimensions for health and wellbeing, which go beyond the implications of this pandemic.

What Covid-19 shares with other pandemics is the stout human response to the unpredicted, terrifying moments of pandemics, suffering the shock and irresistibly painful moments of filled hospitals, displaying utter helplessness. However, following pandemic of the past and their origins may allow today's world to detect the fundamental causes of such diseases. There is still much to be done, but these efforts may act as a stepping stone to protective approach to pandemics. With Atwood claiming that "things are worse in my books", Oryx and Crake demonstrates "a universal sinking into an absurd state where hope is devoured by desperation": "...as a species we're doomed by hope, then?" "You could call it hope. That, or desperation" (Atwood, 2003, p.122). Predicting the downfall of human civilization and capturing the transition from hope to hopelessness, she draws a dystopia that arises as the literary representation of a dehumanized world, shaped by blind faith in scientific creativity. Though the outbreak of Covid-19 has shown that the world was always in a relatively poor state of preparation for such an occurrence, it also signifies vulnerability of humanity against the power of nature, and being caught off-guard denies the fact that it holds absolute power.

In terms of mitigating Covid-19, uncertainty may prevail the situation for an unpredictable time, but going forward is also undeniably inevitable. There is no assurance of the destruction it will further cause. Humanity needs the reconsideration of fixing inadequate pandemic fortifications. It strongly requires a cooperative worldwide responsibility, as facing such challenges have been unpredictable and sudden. The world closely interconnected gives one no choice, but to stand together. Moreover, Covid-19 can be considered a wake-up call of nature upon which the very survival is dependent. It is not only on material level, but the spiritual level can also not be denied, as Oryx and Crake also puts forward the question of

morality and virtue in terms of messing with the laws of nature, highlighting the disrespect of human dignity in the name of scientific developments.

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