

## Margaret Atwood: *Oryx and Crake* (2003)

*The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic world in which mankind has largely been destroyed by a laboratory-produced virus. Flashbacks reveal that the main character, Jimmy, grew up in a world dominated by multinational corporations, living in restricted compounds as the son of two scientists. Here, Jimmy meets and befriends a brilliant science student, Crake, who becomes a respected genetic engineer and begins work on a secret experiment to create a race of genetically modified people. In the following excerpt Jimmy and Crake talk about the “floor models”<sup>1</sup> of this newly created race.*

But with the Paradise method, there would be ninety-nine per cent accuracy. Whole populations could be created that would have pre-selected characteristics. Beauty, of course; that would be in high demand. And docility<sup>2</sup>: several world leaders had expressed interest in that. Paradise had already developed a UV-resistant skin, a built-in insect repellent, an unprecedented ability to digest unrefined<sup>3</sup> plant material. As for immunity from microbes, what had until now been done with drugs would soon be innate.

Compared to the Paradise Project, even the BlyssPluss Pill<sup>4</sup> was a crude tool, although it would be a lucrative interim solution. In the long run, however, the benefits for the future human race of the two in combination would be stupendous. They were inextricably<sup>5</sup> linked – the Pill and the Project. The Pill would put a stop to haphazard<sup>6</sup> reproduction, the Project would replace it with a superior method. They were two stages of a single plan, you might say.

It was amazing – said Crake – what once-unimaginable things had been accomplished by the team here. What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world’s current illnesses. For instance, racism – or, as they referred to it in Paradise, pseudospeciation – had been eliminated in the model group, merely by switching the bonding mechanism: the Paradise people simply did not register skin colour. Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it. Since they were neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land, there was no territoriality: the king-of-the-castle hard-wiring<sup>7</sup> that had plagued humanity had, in them, been unwired. They ate nothing but leaves and grass and roots and a berry or two; thus their foods were plentiful and always available. [...] Best of all, they recycled their own excrement. By means of a brilliant splice<sup>8</sup>, incorporating genetic material from...

“Excuse me,” said Jimmy. “But a lot of this stuff isn’t what the average parent is looking for in a baby. Didn’t you get a bit carried away?”

“I told you,” said Crake patiently. “These are the floor models. They represent the art of the possible. We can list the individual features for prospective buyers, then we can customize. Not everyone will want all the bells and whistles, we know that. Though you’d be surprised how many people would like a very beautiful, smart baby that eats nothing but grass. The vegans are highly interested in that little item. We’ve done our market research.”

(418 Wörter)

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1 floor models – die Vorführmodelle

2 docility – die Fügsamkeit, die Gelehrigkeit

3 unrefined – in its natural form

4 BlyssPluss Pill – In the novel, BlyssPluss is a birth control pill that also protects against all sexually transmitted diseases, boosts sexual energy, and prolongs youth.

5 inextricably – untrennbar

6 haphazard – happening or done in a way that is not planned or organized

7 king-of-the-castle hard-wiring – die Herrscherveranlagung

8 splice – Verbindungsstelle