

Echoes of childhood in a novel oryx and crake

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



In Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* we see the cause and effect of how our childhood and how we are raised has a large correlation to what type of adult we become. Through the character of Jimmy and later his new persona Snowman, the reader is shown the detrimental effects of an abandoned childhood. Not only do Jimmy's poor choices in his adult life have a clear link to his neglected and unguided childhood they also create an adult that is emotionally damaged and unable to see the right path in his life even when he wants to.

Atwood's similarities between Jimmy and Snowman and their relationship in his childhood through to adulthood clearly exemplify the cause and effect of one another. Early on in Jimmy's life not only does his mother leave him but once she leaves, his father seems to drift away too. Jimmy's father does not care about his son's pain. He cares more about getting his new girlfriend into the family home as quick as possible. His father's lustful and seemingly meaningless relationship with Ramona is reflected in Jimmy's future relationships with woman.

Later in Jimmy's life he enjoys sexual relations with married women not because it is exciting but rather because he knows that they will not want anything long term or emotional! He comes to the realization that the relationships with these married women is purely about sex for them to, when his clock wakes him up one morning: " It was pink, phallus-shaped: a Cock Clock, given to him as a joke by one of his lovers. He'd thought it was funny at the time, but this morning he found it insulting. That's all he was to her, to all of them: a mechanical joke. " (343).

Jimmy's quick one night stands are not only because he did not love these women enough but rather that he does not know how to love. He never knew the nurturing love of his mother or father. As well as a child Jimmy was only exposed to the negative relationships of his father. So when he became an adult he was not only unaware of how to behave in a mature, caring relationship - but he was also unaware for a long time that there was anything wrong with how he was treating the women in his relationships.

The only person Jimmy thinks highly of is his father and he is doing these types of acts to his co-worker, hence the young boy grew up believing that selfish, uncaring and self-gratification behaviour is the norm in a relationship. Jimmy deep down was depressed and felt empty in side, and subconsciously he knew that this meaningless sex was wrong but he didn't know any other way. An example of this is, " Even sex was no longer what it had once been, though he was still as addicted to it as ever. He felt jerked around by his own dick, as if the rest of him was merely an inconsequential knob that happened to be attached to one end of it. Maybe the thing would be happier if left to roam around on its own. "(306).

This quote is important because it shows that many of Jimmy's life decisions are purely sexual and a part of him wishes that he was not like that. He feels led around by his sexual drive. Jimmy does not want to go where it is taking him, but since he was never taught what true love was really about, he is locked into a life of meaningless relationships as he yearns to find someone that can somehow ignite a feeling or emotion within. Yet all his relationships led him to a dead end because his starting point in the relationship is not about care and trust but merely lust.

Jimmy's only expression of love and affection in his childhood was through his pet Rakunk (Killer) and an escape for Jimmy to get away from his hectic world. Once Killer was gone, Jimmy seemed to turn off that part of him that loved and felt love completely. In a conversation with one of his lovers he even admits that he is emotionally damaged " I'm a lost cause he would tell them I'm emotionally dyslexic" (231). In the context of the story he is simply trying to get his lover to feel sorry for him. Ironically however, there is truth in what he is saying; he does not understand how to express his emotions.

Having never experienced a positive way to express his feeling in his childhood it caused him to be so cold and empty in side. He was as inhuman and void of emotions as his small childhood pet. Once the world's inhabitants are wiped out, Snowman is left with the task of taking care of the Crakers. Whether it is the fact that Snowman wants to be the parent he never had, or if he just simply doesn't want to lose his only somewhat human interactions, it is evident that he cares about these creatures. In the time of crisis he exhibits a compassionate reasonability toward the Crakers because it is his duty to look after the new race of humans.

Perhaps the only positive by product of his dysfunctional childhood is that he knows what it is like to be deserted and left uncared for so he strives now in his adulthood as Snowman to protect the Crakers as best he can. Even though Crakers original vision for these creature was to make them Godless and without art, Snowman taught them things in there " childhood" that contradicted there original thoughts. Snowman teaches them about the world and tries to make them understand their surroundings better, even

though his explanations make him feel isolated and alone; reminding him of the sad childhood that he had.

He gives them something to believe in and he teaches them right from wrong. He becomes the parent that he wishes he had had. Atwood seems to marvel or poke fun at what our youth can get their hands on nowadays. Jimmy's desensitization to violence and pornography at a very young age certainly changed his outlook on life. Jimmy's isolation from the world furthered when his curiosity got the best of him and he watched the awful child pornography movies. He and Crake spent their time doing things that would not lead to a normal development at all.

Many hours online watching the porn and be-headings made Jimmy shut off his emotions and become emptier inside. He was desensitized and came to believe that these things were okay. One can see how desensitized Jimmy is when he and Crake get in an argument: "Crake let Oryx fall backwards, over his left arm. He looked at Jimmy, a direct look, unsmiling. 'I'm counting on you,' he said. Then he slit her throat. Jimmy shot" (394). Jimmy had seen a lot of violence and bloodshed in his life and it may be why he did not think twice to shooting his only friend.

The violence that brought them together eventually pulled them apart. Even Jimmy comments on himself being unemotional when he sees his best friend and the love of his life on the ground decaying: "As for Oryx, she's face down; she's turned her head away from him as if in mourning. The ribbon in her hair is as pink as ever. Oh, how to lament? He's a failure even at that." (399). Due to the neglected childhood where Jimmy grew up believing that

no one had any concern for his pain or problems it forced him to bury his emotions deep inside and in effect turn them off.

This cause creates the effect of a person who is no longer able to feel emotions in his adult life - even in the loss of his close friend. He seems aware that he should feel some emotion at the loss of his friend but he is unable to express it. Throughout the book the characters self-reflections bring the reader back to reality and show that what is happening is not natural. In the worlds of Oryx and Crake as well as our world we see Atwood making the subtle comparison between the two worlds with respect to greed and money.

If you have the ability to use a computer and you have a credit card, then you can get whatever your heart desires. We see this today with children of wealthy families who shirk their responsibilities and use their parent's money to buy expensive cars, clothes and drugs yet in the end they are spoiled and void of all emotions. Their interests in things are as passing as the latest fashion trends and hence they never really learn the benefit and beauty of real lasting friendships and relationships. Once again we see that Jimmy's childhood filled with porn and violence defined his perverted actions later in life.

From his first sighting of Oryx in a child porn film, through to carrying a picture of her with him throughout his life until he actually met her, and then continuing to idolize her in real life shows how confused he really was. The girl of his dream that he had always been searching for was actually a tortured, helpless, abused individual. Yet that is what he was striving to find

- in an attempt to complete himself in a relationship. His lack of direction from his parents left him to unknowingly wander about.

In the end it only led him to see her as a sex object; the closest thing to love that he could ever experience. Throughout the book and especially following Jimmy's childhood you could see his sense of inadequacy. Jimmy constantly strives for the attention of others due to the snubbing that his parents had given him. Instead of forming lasting connections with anyone he merely sought 4 temporary solace and attention. This later manifested itself in the form of his sex addiction. Since Jimmy's parents had ignored him for so long he desperately wanted someone to notice that he existed.

Jimmy had an 'in your face' personality and it seemed like he was constantly trying to let everyone know he was still there. As well this created a lack of self-confidence that burdened him to constantly worry what others thought about him. When Jimmy first met Crake he fell back into his regular habits "Jimmy found himself wishing to make a dent in Crake, get a reaction; it was one of his weaknesses, to care what other people thought of him." (88). Jimmy's character would often just say things for shock value because he thought if he held up an interesting conversation then people would not leave like his mother did.

If Jimmy's mother had not abandoned him Jimmy could have amounted to something better. Jimmy seemed to keep a low profile after his mother left to avoid the CorpSeCorps. He never wanted to attract too much attention to himself and that may be a reason he did not attend a more prestigious university. Once again his parents' abandonment of him led him down a negative path. Jimmy became Snowman because he did not like the person

he was when he was younger and he tried to distance himself from the old him as much as possible.

Jimmy must have felt very disgusted with himself to feel the need to create a new persona. “‘ I am not my childhood. ’ Snowman says out loud. He hates these replays. He can’t turn them off, he can’t change the subject. ” (81). This quote shows the reader how Jimmy was affected by his childhood, yet took no responsibility for it. He used his parents’ poor parental skills as an excuse for his bad behaviour. Yet his past continues to haunt him. He hates the memories but it is all that his life has become. Atwood clearly portrays the need for all of us to have a caring, nurturing and guided childhood.

A time in our life where we know that we are safe and protected and are raised in an environment that shows us the correct way to live our lives so that we can build lasting relationships. In turn this will lead to true love - the ultimate desire of every human being. Through her main character, Jimmy, we are shown the emotional emptiness that results from a lack of direction as a child. With this knowledge we can learn the importance of being a good parent to our own children in the future so that they can grow to be confident, productive and loving members in society.