

Zoom Chat Week 2: Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (Chap. 1-35, pp. 1-192)

Rhi: 1). What reason do you think Atwood has for writing Toby's chapters in the third-person point of view while Ren's chapters are written in the first-person? 2). Toward the end of the reading, there is a section where Adam One admits to lying to his congregation for "the greater good." Other instances occur in which the integrity of the Adams and Eves come into question as well. What statement do you think Atwood is trying to make in doing this? Are the religious leaders of the Gardeners any better than traditional political leaders?

John: Why do the God's Gardeners refuse to use or acknowledge the term "depression?" They use the word "Fallow" instead, which refers to a measure of introspective healing rather than sadness. Is the avoidance of depression a measure of hopeful optimism? Or is it a measure of thought control?

Alexis: I can't help but notice a lot of satire within Atwood's writing and creating this world. Especially with names like SecretBurger and the Painball concept, not to mention learning about the God's Gardeners ideology. I was curious about how satire can be an effective tool to kind of cope with this downfall that the God's Gardeners are facing or even transcending to our real world in how we are facing the climate crisis?

Kyle: The first half of the book focuses on life before the apocalypse with a focus in the Gardener's way of life. The Gardeners detail their version of the fall of man from Eden as descending from vegetarians to meat-eaters. Then they go on to describe technological advancement as a further stage of degradation. In *The Year of The Flood* technology seems to be a tool in which mankind will use to bring about the apocalypse. What role does technology take in apocalypse fiction as a whole?

Grant: When Toby sees Adam One lie to the God's Gardeners and learns of the laptop that the Adams and Eves have in secret, did it remind you of the corrupt nature that many people in our country believe a lot of our politicians exhibit as well? Should Toby reveal the hypocrisy and lies Adam One overlooks and believes are for the greater good of the God's Gardeners even though it directly contradicts what he teaches?

Reed: What is the general incubation time of this disease which seems to kill people suddenly and abruptly and are the melted corpses not contagious?

Tim: If Gardeners policy is to not displace fellow species without equal compensation, who determines equal value? If it is the Gardeners, would they have unconscious bias to benefit themselves in that decision?

Taylor: In any given apocalypse like this one, would it be normal for Ren or Toby to keep their faith in the God's Gardeners, or what little they had? Would the God's Gardeners have stuck to their faith, if they survived? Or would they have abandoned their faith entirely?

Robert: What similarities and/or differences do you notice between the pandemic (or the environment created by the pandemic) discussed by the book and the pandemic we are experiencing in real life?

Natalie: 1) How does corruption among different groups in the novel yield a dysfunctional collectiveness? 2) How does social anxiety play out in the novel, especially among our two main characters?

Lina: What more could the Gardeners be doing to save the earth and the animals? With the Corporations, is there really anything they could do? Is Zeb's violent way better than Adam One's pacifist way?

Maria: My question happens to tie into Dr. Jennings intro: Is Atwood's narrative only for the purpose of fictional entertainment or does she hope to influence the way her reader thinks about ecology, taking care of the earth, the role of government, or something else? What things is she trying to convey?

Josie: "The hazard would be other people. The rioting was everywhere, according to what fitful news she could still pick up from her phone." I think this poses a great thinking question that are people more danger to themselves than any pandemic or natural disaster? Is it the waterless flood or the response to it that causes mass chaos and death?

Miles: The Gardeners have, so far, been portrayed completely differently than I expected them to be. In many or most dystopian or apocalyptic stories that I am aware of, the religious groups and cults are either the main antagonists or a major obstacle. Here they seem the most "normal" of the entire world that we are reading about, compared to the bleak, disgusting surroundings. I could easily imagine a group like that existing today, and I think there are a lot of groups existing that are very similar to them. With so many other aspects of the book being what seem like our society's worst aspects taken to their ultimate "bad" forms, what are Atwood's intended implications of this passive, vegan group that seems so much less fantastic? Also has Ren been stuck in that same room this whole time? it seems weird that she's been able to survive like that, even with food and water

Zoe: CorpSECorpse is a large company that has dominated the world and inflicts fear upon its citizens and criminalizing all that go against it. What does it take for a company like that to take power, and how close are we to having something like that happen?

Brooke: Since we have not read the first book, I was wondering how the disease and infection looked from a more privileged perspective as compared to what we see happening in the more poor areas of society?

Whitney: Do you all think that Adam one has some type of underlying operation with corpsecorp or motive besides being kind to all living things? Something about him seems off to me as if he isn't as holy as he seems.

Sierra: I have two questions for you guys: 1. How does Amanda affect your understanding of social collapse? As her story reflects how environmental factors and treatment of refugees leads to social collapse. 2. Do you think the novel represents the sixth day of creation in the past? Is the future when this virus happened another Noah's ark? Are the survivors the ark?

Kyle: @John the Gardeners are also against allowing people to write and they are careful with the language they use in general. I think it is a tool they use to control their followers.

Victoria: I really like the use of irony throughout their storylines, like Toby working at Secretburgers before being saved by the Gardeners. Does this experience outside of the Gardeners help them in their survival?

Samantha: If you were living in Toby and Ren's universe, do you think it would be more beneficial to try and survive alone, as Toby is currently doing in the novel, or to join a cult society like God's Gardeners?

John: @Kyle: That seems like a strong connection

John: @Robert: On page 15, Atwood writes that isolation from the Flood produces effects of paranoia among the survivors. Comparing to our own pandemic, I know many people who have developed paranoia and anxiety as a result of COVID. That I would say, might be a similarity.

Whitney: @samantha I would rather live in a group because at least someone knows you and you have some sort of protection whereas everyone out in the plebs seems kind of out for themselves and their own gratification

Zoe: Oh yeah

John: David Koresh comes to mind

Brooke: @Whitney I definitely agree that something does seem really off with Adam One, but I don't know how insidious it'll turn out to be

Taylor: @Whitney Yes! If he "knows everything," and I think he does, why does he let Burt grow a weed farm???

Josie: so creepy

Brooke: Doomsday cults

Tim: Another thing I noticed, when Toby goes to Adam and Eve meeting, Toby notices a laptop. Adam One assures it is just for storing data, but he seems to know information about Toby and Ren without them telling anyone. Maybe he uses that computer to contact CorpSeCorp to spy on his Gardeners.

Victoria: He proves he is willing to lie for his own benefit and reputation. That's a huge red flag.

Kyle: They're definitely a cult. But still probably the best option for a community presented so far.

Samantha: @Zoe I think when mass amounts of people are desperate for money, food, love, basic human needs, they are more susceptible to being taken advantage of. This allows powerful organizations and companies to rise and take control of the people. I don't think the United States is close to that level of nationwide despair, though. The country may seem like it's "on fire" right now but we're at least not having a civil/world war (I would really like it to stay that way).

Robert: Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Sierra: I agree with you Whitney, I think Adam One is hiding something and is really just using the Gardners as a way to control people. For example people are not allow to write or leave any trace of themselves, this is form of controlling people. In a way he is taking a way of expression. If you notice and pay attention to the types of classes the Gardener take, none of them are lanuange or way for expression or ways to express ideas, there all about srivial. He also tries to say that everything is to be done for the group. Another red flag is that he lies for his own benefit and reputaution, and to most importantly keep control. This idea is kinda expressed after Piler dies and Adam lies about the cause was to the Garders and in his conversation with Toby afterwards

John: Biofilm Bodyglove

Whitney: yes! remember the part where zeb comes to tell adam one whatever is going on with burt? The adam one says tell me first so if I need to edit what I say to the gardeners I can

Lina: It almost felt like ignoring a problem they didn't want to have to deal with.

Robert: I agree with John and Whitney. I believe it is a means of thought control that's disguised as hopeful optimism.

Brooke: @Lina, as they do quite often

Victoria: If they acknowledged people's depression, then they have to acknowledge it isn't perfect. All the rules are for sure to keep control.

Samantha: I think it's a measure of thought control because if the purpose of God's Gardeners is to be a perfect society of people, you cannot have members exhibiting mannerisms that are not perfect.

Taylor: It reflects a lot of regular religion, like if you're sad, the God or Gods you worship will handle it and bring you good fortune, or it's because it's a challenge from God(s) to see if you're "worthy"

Natalie: Yes, Victoria, I agree! They're trying to project an idealistic and utopian way of life and denying problems they face help them keep this appearance.

Reed: yes she was high. I think the concealed but regular incorporation of drugs into the gardeners story also felt like a hint at the gardeners being cult like and discourage individual thought

What kind of cult is this? What are the different sources of their religious beliefs/practices?

Whitney: doomsday

Taylor: They seem like major naturists

John: Hymns

Whitney: drug use like shrooms to transcend

Samantha: bible x naturalist fanfiction

Kyle: There are Christian origins

Maria: The celebration of saints and saints days seems like a spinoff of Roman Catholicism

Josie: They really remind me of hippies

Alexis: He's the bartender of religious beliefs

Tim: @Josie: That's what I was thinking.

Taylor: Is there going to be explanation of how they started, or is it in another book, or should we piece it together ourselves?

Brooke: Everything that benefits his goals

Maria: But the question is, what are his goals?

Robert: It seems like a mishmash of lots of different religions that can be used to draw the most amount of people in.

Whitney: I love how the kids are kind of jerks and make fun of it all like they see through the nonsense lol I think he preys on vulnerable people because others would not live in those conditions if they had it good

Victoria: I got Midsommar vibes

Sierra: @John I agree, I think it is a form of thought control, Adam One wants everyone to be happy not find the cracks and bad parts of the Garders. Adam needs people to see that thier way of life is best and that it is perfect. But it also creates the narrative that God will heal all and that he has a reason for these people going into a Fallow state. In fact, Adam One states that when people go into this state they trying to find thier soul and understand it, making it seem like depression or Fallow is good thing or a spritcal journey

Samantha: I got animal farm vibes for some reason

Grant: @Zoe, I think it takes desperation of the people to want a company like CorpSECorps because they want some type of law and order. I also think the greed of a company like

CorpSECorps will take advantage of this. I do not think we are close to a company or situation like that in our society because of our current legal systems and laws.

John: @Sierra: Exactly!

Josie: @Whitney I totally thought of that too. The children are unusually rude. Most fictional accounts use children as innocence fillers

Alexis: When they were talking about playing in the dumpster because of their beliefs of death..it also shows that children are the most vulnerable to these dangerous acts of brainwashing

John: What were your thoughts the distinction between normal God's Gardeners and full fledged Adam and Eve's?

Taylor: I think having a hierarchy creates more people to help out with the brainwashing

Tim: What percentage of the people live in the Compounds compared to Pleeblands and Garden? It doesn't seem to specify.

Kyle: It seems like the Adam and Eve's are "in on the game" even if they don't believe in the cult.

Tim: @Kyle: Yeah, totally.

Taylor: And he really shoved Toby into that title of being an Eve... I wonder why Adam picked on her?

Brooke: @Kyle: Jeb [Zeb?] as a perfect example

Josie: Adam One used Toby's connection to Pilar in order to benefit himself. Toby didn't really seem to have a desire to be an Eve.

Kyle: @Taylor probably because he was worried she might leave and she's the only one who had Pilar's knowledge.

Sierra: @Joise I agree, Toby really wasn't given a choice and she really, really tired to fight against it. Like she was so against it that she was willing to tell that to Adam's One's face, which I think is a pretty brave thing to do

Brooke: I think it's humorous, but there is a distinct possibility that if this situation were to happen in real life, this sort of overzealousness can overtake society as a coping mechanism

Maria: Makes me think of the creation of ridiculous combinations of animals like the rakunks and liobams

Samantha: Advancing technology is both our savior and our doom - Olaf in Frozen II

Victoria: The biggest theme of technology tends to be surveillance. Like once some entity "knows all," the end is near. This isn't quite what happens in The Year of the Flood, but it is still part of the plot.

Maria: Lol Sam!

Maria: Some examples of technology leading to our doom: zoonotic disease spillover can stem from farming animals and people genuinely feared the end of the world by nuclear war in the 50s during the Cold War and for decades beyond.

Zoe: The technology definitely can lead towards a downfall, it can also prolong a war/ make the defense side weaker or stronger. This can be seen in how the Rifles became illegal and if you had it then the CorpSEcorpse would see you as a threat to their movement and implement rules to make sure no one can use technology against them

Samantha: Technology isn't evil by itself, but I think without ethical boundaries it is dangerous. Especially considering new advancements like CRISPR and other genetic tech.

Kyle: I thought it was interesting in this novel that technology brought about the plague. In contrast when I made this question I was thinking about the movie I Am Legend where the scientist cured the disease.

Samantha: Maybe she's a time traveler and she's trying to warn us

Zoe: When I was reading it I noticed a lot of it seemed very relevant to today and like things we are all experiencing now

Grant: I think she is trying to convey what could happen in our society if we continue to behave and make decisions like we have been. I think the dangerous uses of technology ties into this too.

Kyle: She certainly has a message in favor of combating climate change. I think all writers influence an agenda in some way, but I believe she has some deliberate objectives.

Zoe: @grant and the fact that we see similarities in life today can show that what she was predicting is true

Reed: generally fast killing viruses cant spread so effectively which threw me off

Sierra: @Maria, I think she is trying to get us think about these complex issues. For example with Corps, I think she wants us to think about the control that companies and government have on us and how that control can lead to terrible things or even brainwashing. For example the Crops want people to buy the pills that they make and promote them as nothing as good. This is done so people think they can trust them, leading to the Crops making people into test subjects without them knowing. Another example would be the PainBall as a punishment, it's a form of control, it's way of controlling the population. It's the governments way of getting rid of rule breakers or people they don't like, while also appearing to be giving them a chance.

Tim: Speculation or warning

Hope Jennings: Jeremiad (prophetic tradition that offers warning so that we change our actions to avert the apocalyptic future)

Maria: Her ecological warnings are pretty obvious, but what sort of political warnings do you think might she be trying to communicate?

Whitney: @Maria I think she warns against allowing govt to get too powerful and to be weary of the intentions of the rich or powerful corporations in our society today.

Zoe: Making sure corporations are held responsible so they don't get too big

Whitney: eco issues tend to harm the people who contribute least first

Alexis: there's a lack of regulations/involvement in the crisis.

Kyle: I agree with Zoe

Josie: I agree with Alexis

Sierra: I agree with Zoe and Whitney

John: She obviously warns the problem of climate refugees from Texas and Mexico as increased prevalence and strength of natural disasters. This extends to other regions as well. This requires a government to establish a refugee/immigration policy.

Brooke: The power come from those with money, like how those doing illegal things can pay off Corpsesorps to turn a blind eye

Tim: Climate crisis was seen in the drought in Wisconsin that Amanda went through.

Maria: Trump is a businessman as much as he is a politician...

Zoe: @Maria All politicians - business people for their own brand/party whether its good or bad

Josie: I feel like she's really showing how everything in human society is related: economic status, politics, environmental issues, the stability of specific communities, etc.

Alexis: ^^ intersectionality!