

Zoom Chat Week 3: Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God* (Part 1, pp. 1-119)

Kyle: Why are they all named Mary? Is that a real tradition or is it just how this book portrays this family?

Taylor: What role do the different religions play in Cedar's new life in hiding and her decision to run? I know there has been a lot of general Christianity and "ways of the Church" so to speak, but what about her Native American heritage, which in her mind, I believe outweighs the country's new religion?

John: Cedar's adopted name is Cedar Hawk Songmaker while her original Native American birth name is Mary Potts. Her adopted name sounds much more like an indigenous name utilizing an animal (e.g. Sitting Bull, Black Wolf, Black Elk, etc.). By making the names opposite of what one might expect, what is Erdrich saying about Native American culture? Is he making a statement that indigenous Native American culture has been white washed as they have traded their traditional culture for Western culture? Or is Erdrich speaking about how Cedar's two identities are inseparable? That is, she can be both Cedar and Mary at the same time and all the time.

Brooke: 1. Why does the theme of controlling pregnancy/birth seem to be so prevalent in apocalyptic literature and media? 2. What is the significance of the world essentially devolving?

Reed: Why did Erdrich choose to make the main character an adopted native as opposed to any other race? Is that supposed to subtly lend to the narrative portraying government as self-interested and evil

Tim: Cedar considers intelligence a 'maladaptation' a wrong turn in evolution. This is contrast to stupidity, which enabled dinosaurs to live for millions of years with small brains. How does this echo the article in the beginning of the class that discussed the role of complexity and simplicity in the role of the apocalypse? Do you believe intelligence is a maladaptation?

Sierra: My questions: 1. What do you think the doctor means by "it's the size of the measurements" and "we got one" ? How does this tie into the themes of evolution that we see in the book? How does it tie into the other events in the book? 2. How does Cedar's childhood mold and shape her identity? How did the stereotypes she grew-up around shape how she saw herself later on and throughout the book? 3. How do you think Eddy's themes of depression tie into the themes presented in the book and how do they impact Cedar?

Lina: The government in the story seems to have a lot of power, through the Patriot Act the book mentions. How can we balance the government from being able to so easily take away the rights of a group, like they do with pregnant mothers in this book?

Grant: Cedar seems to struggle with her native roots due to being raised by wealthier white liberal parents. Also, Cedar does not seem able to fit in with her adoptive family's culture well

and hints at disappointing her adoptive parents at times. Do you think Cedar has struggled with her own individual identity due to her family situation?

Samantha: I find it super strange that evolution is running “backwards” in this book. One major basis in the theory of evolution is we genetically evolve to better survive in our environment. I just wanted to ask under what circumstances (environmental, socioeconomic, etc.) would have to be in place for evolution to start reversing itself?

Josie: The “Mother” that appears on the computer in Cedar’s home seems to be some sort of artificial intelligence that is able to turn on without any human interaction with it. Could this be a way that the government is trying to find pregnant women? Is this a “Big Brother” situation where it was always watching and tracking the people? I also feel this could be the author trying to hint at the price of increasing technology and the dangers of big government.

Robert: In Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God*, we see a government that has seized control over reproductive rights. More specifically, they have forced pregnant women to report to clinics or various government-run facilities, so they can oversee and even mitigate any complications that are believed to arise in the next generation. My question simply is do you fear or are you concerned of a point where a government bears too much power? If so, at what point is their control worth this concern?

Natalie: 1. How does DNA make-up and genetic changes fit into the theme of apocalypse? I guess I am asking how this book narrative and the idea of genetic changes fit into an apocalypse novel. 2. How do we see past apocalypses from the Ojibew people and their survival?

Kyle: My prepared question: In the story after Cedar notices the change in the news reporters she runs to the bank to withdrawal her savings. She then buys baby clothes and begins prepping for the apocalypse by buying a series of vices. Do you think Cedar is right in that people in the apocalypse will be drawn to vices such as alcohol and cigarettes? What do you think will be most important material after the apocalypse begins?

John: I accidentally refer to Erdrich as "he." That was a typo.

Miles: You touched on Catholicism earlier, but what is the significance of Cedar, whose adopted parents are not Catholic, being Catholic like her birth mother?

Rhi: 1. In the first chapter of the novel, Cedar talks about her adoption by the Songmaker family and how they made her feel special, like royalty. Later on in the novel she expands to say how they have always supported her explorations of identity, but can be overeager and “want a piece of Native pie” (p. 56). This idea made me think of the white savior complex and how the intentions of white families who adopt children of different races and ethnicities can come into question. That being said, do you think that the Songmakers harbor a white savior complex in adopting Cedar? 2. One thing that I am confused about is why it is implied that some of the Neanderthal babies are intentionally killed. Why is life less important if it is assumed to be less

intelligent? Is Erdrich using the topic of de-evolution to comment on topics like abortion specifically or to expose in general how some lives are valued less than others if they are different? (You already kind of answered this question in the intro)

Whitney: do you think that the methods of harsh capture of women would have been so bad if it were men who needed to be studied? I was surprised that there was no public outcry it seems like everyone is trying to save themselves and not worrying about these women as much.

Maria: How does the audience (Cedar's unborn child) affect the reading of Future Home of the Living God? What do you think of all the information coming in chunks after the events occur? How would the novel change if it was written from another perspective--Cedar present tense, Phil, an all-knowing narrator writing in third person?

Victoria: I feel like there is a lot of plot lines happening. Does the format of it being a letter/diary make her struggles and emotions more overwhelming? To me, reading from Cedar's perspective makes it feel like I understand the personal impacts of the society.

Taylor: @John I like that point you bring up. I (embarrassingly) kind of thought of it like this: her indigenous family named her Mary because it was a family name and all, and her adoptive family called her Cedar because maybe they thought that was a fitting name for an indigenous person. It could for sure have a lot to do with both of her separate identities, but I also think that it's a way of representing how these identities can intermingle.

Kyle: @Maria I thought the perspective was interesting too. I think it allows us to get a better understanding of Cedar's perspective but it also limits us to Cedar's interpretation.

Alexis: I'm really interested in the ways that Erdrich approaches time and adaptation so far in part 1. Eddy says that "Indians have been adapting since before 1492 so I guess we'll all keep adapting...The world's always going to pieces" (40). I think there is a certain resilience to knowing that cultures and species are able to survive after disasters, but do you think that Eddy is foolishly ignoring that some cultures and species are completely wiped out and are unable to adapt when systems in power make it almost impossible to do so? I know we lose a certain number of languages every year and non-human species become extinct, so is this fair to say adapting will always guarantee success especially since it doesn't seem to extend to non-human agents who are clearly being affected by this disaster? I get that he's talking about the resilience of Native Americans but I'm thinking in terms of humans as an entire species, it could be selfish thinking that we will always win and always overcome because we definitely don't.

Zoe: Why is the government chortling pregnant women? In this apocalypse there is not a lot of knowledge given to the public. There was talk of a virus at the beginning, and scientists said they were working through it, however there is no detail. Are they using the pregnant women and embryos to test medicines/ do science experiments on? Or are they trying to monitor what children are born (white vs poc)?

Alexis: I also find interesting that Cedar admits to struggling with the concept of the present, and that she's very fascinated with the past and the future, yet she's writing this entire book/diary collection to her child as things are happening.

John: @Alexis, I made note of that too

Zoe: On page. 72, they talk about how congress has added an article to the Patriot Act: which includes the ability to seize medical databases, including finding out who is pregnant. How are pregnant women threats to national security?

Brooke: Whitney, I think that is a very good point to bring up. I was also surprised at how there didn't seem to be much public outcry at the "rounding up". I wonder if it is connected to how people feel entitled to women's bodies, so this sort of thing happening doesn't bother them because it's for study, maybe?

Alexis: Since the novel is placed where it seems like people have cell phones, I'm surprised too that the incident in the Target parking lot didn't go "viral". I'm thinking of the impact that George Floyd's murder had on social justice movement in 2020 and beyond, so this was shocking that no one really tried to stop what was happening or at least record it so the police would be held accountable.

Sierra: @Kyle in response to your question, I think Cedar was correct in assuming that people will be drawn to vices like cigarettes and alcohol. Typically when people are put into a stressful situation they tend to look for an escape, alcohol and cigarettes will provide that for most people. Think about today's world, when COVID first hit people were forming lines at stores that sold these items and people were drinking more at an alarming rate. In terms of the second part of the question I think the most important items to have are food, water, and items for trade.

Robert: I think Erdrich uses religion in her novel as a sense of identity. She has one identity (non-religious/Buddhist) with the Songmaker's and another identity (Catholicism) with Mary and Eddy or her other family.

Maria: @Alexis a theme that develops throughout the book is the breakdown of instant communication and constant surveillance on the population through computers and cell phones. Events stopped having the ability to go viral because people didn't have access to the internet anymore for their own safety. It is fascinating to think about what it would take to separate our modern world from the technology we love so much!

Josie: Religion is a mental escape for a lot of people, so it makes sense that it appears as a popular topic in apocalyptic literature

Sierra: @Zoe, in response to your question and comment about the Patriot Act. I don't think it's that the Government views pregnant women as a risk, but has an answer to what is happening.

The Government started to take pregnant women because of the abnormalities happening in womb. In the government's eyes they need these women for research and find out what is happening. While also wanting to keep the abnormal children out of the normal mix of humans

Samantha: I think Erdrich may be trying to tell us just because someone has a certain heritage doesn't mean they necessarily fit the assumptions placed upon that culture by others. Also I was typing this as you were talking so you basically said everything I typed lol

Kyle: I think it might be a comment on how modern society places such a large emphasis on identity. Her white parents are the one who are focused on her heritage.

Rhi: I agree. On p. 66 Cedar even talks about how she feels like "a walking contradiction, maybe two species in one body . . . an insecure Ojibwe, a fledgling Catholic, an overstriving brain cooking up conflicting dramas." She doesn't really have just one single identity

Grant: I agree with you Kyle, I also think Cedar's parents efforts to connect her to her heritage are superficial and ultimately caused her to be more disconnected from her ethnicity.

John: Then Noble Savage trope

Josie: It just goes to show that our identity is more complicated than heritage and ethnicity. Though both are important, there is more to an individual person.

Whitney: I wonder why she didn't feel special even when she met her family. They are so unique and interesting. It's kind of sad that because they didn't fit her expectation of what a native person is like she missed out on what they are like and what they have to offer. It seems like she looks at them from a very judgmental place

Tim: @Kyle. You are right. Of lately, society seems focus on identity quite a bit.

Sierra: @John I agree with you, I think Native American culture has been whitewashed. For example, when we learn about their history and culture in school, we are made to look at their ties to animals, how their actions are viewed as savage, and we are made to believe that natives dress and look a particular way. So we grow up viewing Native Americans in this way. It also doesn't help that when dolls or merchandise is made of them it only follows stereotypes. So it makes sense that Cedar's parents named her the way they did, they are showcasing this whitewashing. and by Erdrich including this, I think she is trying to say that is the case

Zoe: The sabertooth cat thing eating the chocolate lab

Brooke: These are really good thoughts! I wish I could have connected it like that haha

Kyle: There is a reference about investing in genetics as it could be big with the reproductive crisis.

John: I also think that reproductive control is prevalent because apocalyptic literature focuses much on the future. The people living in an apocalypse want to survive and ensure they make it to the future. Given their desire to survive in the wake of an apocalyptic tragedy, they are okay with control over reproduction. This is because reproduction concerns the next generation of individuals. Apocalyptic survivors will pay whatever price is needed to ensure that the human race survives, even if it includes using regressive or degenerative policies.

Rhi: @Brooke for the second question, I think that it can kind of tie in with what Dr. Jennings was talking about in the intro, about the Eugenics movement that was inspired I guess by Darwin's work. It allows Erdrich to comment on topics like racism, how people are valued as "better" or "worse" according to characteristics they can't control. Also leads into conversations on abortion and women's rights to their bodies

Whitney: wait so its illegal to not have funerals? people don't have funerals all the time

John: This leads to a contradiction, that seems to permeate Erdrich's work: The idea of taking a step back in order to take a step forward.

Alexis: So much for saving women and children first”

Kyle: 2 laws away with the 14th amendment. But under seemingly extreme circumstances those rights might get swept under the rug.

Rhi: @Whitney I agree that Cedar seemed very judgmental of her family at first. To me it seemed like she almost didn't want to allow herself to like them or become close with them because she was still bitter that her mom gave her up for adoption

Whitney: @Rhiannon I agree they were so open to her except her little sister lol and she just judged them the entire time and came with her own motives without caring about the experience of meeting your birth family

Whitney: it makes sense to be bitter though so I get it

Kyle: I missed the reasoning too

Josie: @Whitney It makes you think why Cedar was willing to meet her birth family in the first place. If she was going to be so judgmental, then why go in the first place?

Whitney: @Josie yes she just went to find out about genetics as if they were just going to pull out the 23 and me results lol

John: Also took advantage of the sudden fear of the citizens

Samantha: Maybe they just wanted to use a previous act because older laws have more precedent?

Tim: @John yep

Kyle: The patriot act is why I'm worried about what the government is doing with Covid

Samantha: @Whitney "23 and me results" I'm dead lol

Brooke: @Rhi, that's a good point. When there's a lot of turmoil, it can be easier for racism to take power and push their agenda to the forefront of society. I also feel like racism and misogyny are interconnected in the sense that when there is one, there is almost always the other. Women's and BIPOC's right always seem to be the first to go too.

Sierra: @Rhannon and @Whitney I agree with you both! Cedar was very judgmental to her family when she first met them. However, I also think this judgmentalness comes from her being scared that they won't be like how she was grown up to think they were and that if they weren't she would feel like she had less of an identity

Taylor: "Alexa is listening"

Kyle: You can whisper "Hey Siri" and she picks it up

Rhi: Mother is terrifying

Alexis: I don't want to know about that info lol. Knowing my family history is just fine by me. But the fact that Cedar goes to her biological parents to find genetic information ties into this idea too about knowing the truth

Robert: Siri always has to be listening for her to recognize us saying hey siri...

Whitney: you know it's so easy to get those google homes for free my job gave them away the conspiracy theorist in me is like why are they practically giving these away!

Samantha: My google will activate randomly sometimes and it scares me

Zoe: I feel like mother is the scariest part of both novels so far honestly. It feels too real

Tim: I swear there have been times when I was just thinking about a topic and then it is a suggested topic on my phone.

Josie: My question was about relating mother to Big Brother

Whitney: don't google a product you might want its gonna be recommended to you on every app for the next 6 months lol

Zoe: @Tim I got an add on facebook for something my brother got for Christmas that I did not look up previously and that I have no need to look up what so ever

Grant: All the time I will talk about a product in front of my phone and I will receive ads for that product for the next week

Whitney: that's literally the pandemic

Brooke: Something like this got revealed at border detention centers recently right? Like a year or two ago. Women in hospitals were being sterilized without consent and a nurse leaked it.

Alexis: I would recommend the Social Dilemma doc on netflix about how giant companies can predict and control our lives. It's scary that the government can control us, but it's also in the hands of businesses like Facebook and Google too

Natalie: @Alexis, yes I have heard about that!

Kyle: I didn't even pick up that the apocalypse was ongoing until Cedar went for the ultrasound.

Whitney: I thought that the issue was going to be with how different racial mixes have different viability because the doctor that let cedar go asked her if her boyfriend was white

John: Absolutely.

Tim: I think everyone probably does.

Kyle: The government literally rounded up Japanese people in WW2 so it's not so unreasonable.

Rhi : @Whitney Yeah, I agree. & later on the organization that Mother works for was talking about stealing the leftover, non-Caucasian frozen eggs so I thought it was going to have something to do with race too

Tim: @Kyle Also, the Trail of Tears rounded up a bunch of people and displaced them

Lina: Yes, Kyle, I was thinking about that too. It's already happened :0

Whitney: good ole electoral college

Taylor: Might as well mention too, the Holocaust

Samantha: There's that electric shock experiment Milgram performed that helped explain why the Nazis did what they did and conformed, so it is not unreasonable to theorize the govt. can do horrendous things to its citizens and some people don't question it.

Maria: If we're beyond our breaking point, if the government already has too much control...what can we do about that?

Brooke: So long as there is hatred embedded in the government, it is always going to be possible that it will happen again.

Tim: @Samantha The Milgram experiment is interesting. Kind of similar goal as the Stanford Prison Experiment

Samantha: @Tim Ooh you're right!

Brooke: @Samantha, I watched videos of that for class and it was horrifying. But you're right, it shows how things like that happen

Kyle: Well traditionally with a government that has too much power you either vote them out or riot.

John: This may be an unpopular opinion, but I think that COVID, while definitely a pressing issue, was used by the government(similar to 9/11) to increase the size and power of the government. Restaurant lockdowns, home quarantines, seem very controlling. A few months ago, a man in California was arrested while kayaking on the ocean with no one around because of breaking COVID violations. Are people not in control of their own fate?

Sierra: @Kyle, that's very true and @John I agree with you

Samantha: @Kyle I think it depends on the state of the people. Before Hitler, the government in Germany was in such a weak state the people effectively elected an individual who led a totalitarian government.

Whitney: and it hurt people too @John all these shut downs sent kids who depended on meals from school home and mental health issues increased

Alexis: I was just going to add that ignorance is almost more dangerous than intervention, even if that intervention through government action is harmful.

John: That's the scary part. Permanent control rather than temporary control

Samantha: Raider up oof

Whitney: I so agree Alexis lets not forget that we were told not to wear masks in march there was so much misinformation that lead to panic

Grant: Its hard to imagine the government being able to balance the level of control they should use for public safety during the pandemic when they do not have a good track record with being given too much control

Reed: my opinion: allowing the spread of a disease has more implications than a singular persons fate and that's why the government can intervene. I agree with alexis

Kyle: There was fighting even before covid. I agree that crisis allows some decisions to get swept under the rug of "emergency".

Whitney: I admit to lacking self control and finishing the book

Kyle: ^ not a bad thing

John: We never got to the issue of abortion in this discussion, but it is prevalent in book. Maybe next class we will.

Tim: That happens in the Middle East

Alexis: you shouldn't' have said that noooo

Samantha: i peaked at the end and MY GOD

John: She is very descriptive about the development of the fetus which generally spurs discussion on the abortion debate.

John: Like very descriptive

Rhi: @Reed I definitely agree. One person's selfish actions (i.e. refusing to wear a mask or quarantining) can have such a huge, negative impact on the whole

Tim: Take Care!