

**Zoom Chat Week 5: Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God* (Parts 2 & 3, pp. 123-267)**

**Josie:** Why is the hospital food for the pregnant women always spoiled or rotten in the first hospital that Cedar is taken to? If the researchers really wanted to protect humanity by catering the fertile and pregnant women, why wouldn't they treat them better, feed them better food, etc.? Maybe if they took better care of these women, the mortality rate of the mothers and babies wouldn't be so low. Erdrich may even be hinting at the idea of poor maternal healthcare for women of color.

**Taylor:** I have questions about Cedar's... definition? Conditions? For trusting the people around her. She trusted Sera and Glenn wholeheartedly throughout the whole novel, up until Sera told her Glenn is her bio-father. She trusted Phil when he came back and loved him, but as soon as she got captured, that bastard, she thought, ratted me out. She trusted him again when she realized he didn't rat her out intentionally. Not even to mention the trust with Eddy and Mary and Goth Mary. She trusted certain nurses (Jessie) but not Orielee with her sick smile, she trusted Tia throughout the whole endeavor, and why in the world did she just randomly trust the post man? This book seems to have a theme that trust can change in the blink of an eye. Any thoughts?

**Brooke:** 1. What is the importance of including an underground group helping women escape the birthing centers? 2. As someone who is not particularly religious, most of the religious aspects in the story were lost to me. Are there any religious references or imagery that would be essential for gaining a deeper understanding of the novel that I missed?

**Grant:** Over the course of the story Cedar goes from wanting very little connection with her family to someone that wants to learn more about their history and connect more with her family. Do you think Erdrich showed the progression of these family relationships in order to show the importance of family relationships and how they are inevitably going to be important to an individual?

**Lina:** What is the significance of the song that only the women know? Why do they know it? What is Erdrich trying to capture or describe by portraying this song?

**Kyle:** Several times in the story pregnant women are abducted for their reproductive potential. This occurs in the shopping center where a male and female cop abduct a pregnant woman and again when a female nurse terrorizes Cedar. Do you think women would be complacent and even assist in the mission of capturing other pregnant women in the real world?

**Rhi:** 1. Just when it looks like Cedar has escaped for good, she is imprisoned again, and her baby is taken from her. The story seemingly goes nowhere, as just when there is hope and Cedar is reunited with her family, it is all indefinitely taken away from her. Why do you think Erdrich chose to end the novel in such an unhappy way? What does this say about how she views society? 2. Why do you think that Erdrich chose not to give specific dates for Cedar's last few

journal entries, labeling them just by month instead of day? Is this a reflection of Cedar's deteriorating mental state and loss of hope following her baby's birth?

**Miles:** There was a quote I could not quite find while looking back about how the world ends with everything going crazy while people do normal things. I think that it is certainly true in times of chaos—like the Great Depression or the world wars or even today—people do their best to lead normal lives, often at the expense of tacitly allowing evil to get away with more and more. Is Erdrich portraying this as an unavoidable reaction that most people have to chaos or something to be acknowledged and worked on in order to avoid a dystopia?

**Robert:** How does Erdrich use Cedar's ambiguous family in this novel to add emotion into her story?

**Josie:** Miles, "This is how the world end, I think, everything crazy yet people doing normal things" (25)

**Sierra:** My questions: 1. How does the treatment of the pregnant women at the hospitals and compounds relate to the treatment of prisoners? How are these women viewed? 2. How does the plan of Eddy to take back the natives land from white people relate to how we have taken land from the natives?

**Natalie:** Does desperation and the will to live overpower our morals, especially in an apocalyptic setting? How apocalypse affect different groups at different times?

**Zoe:** I noticed in the hospital there was only one male staff worker, and I am pretty sure he was a security person not a nurse. How can these female nurses, who may want children of their own be part of this movement to capture pregnant women and do who knows what with their babies?

**Maria:** I was wildly unsatisfied after finishing this book--does anything else happen to Phil? Does Cedar get custody of her baby? Where is Glen? etc. I went online and read some reviews that critiqued Eldrich's attempt at apocalyptic literature...a good shot, but with plenty of mistakes. What plot holes or other mistakes do you see in the novel? How would you review the work?

**Tim:** When Eddy talks about reclaiming the property from whites for the homeless and the poor, he says they will gain back members and will "enjoy the benefits of more teachers, professors, doctors, lawyers, artists, poets, and gang members." (Pg. 214). Eddy continues to say that gangs took problems into their own hands, acting like a police. Do you see resemblance to the way the reservation feels about cops and the defund the police movement of today?

**John:** Erdrich claims that the first word was the utterance of "mama" and similar words by a child to its mother. She gives this word preference over the word of God saying it came first, despite Cedar's Catholic background. Could this potentially represent a loss of religion for

Cedar? Also, does this echo the story of Abraham and Isaac from the Bible in which a parent, Abraham, must choose between his love for his son and his love for God?

**Victoria:** Cedar had some moments where she hides her emotions really well, like almost impossibly. When Sera shows up at the "prison" is the biggest example. Do you think this is just because of the format of the writing, or that she actually had it that under control?

**Samantha:** 1) I read this book after watching Dead Poets Society and cried more. Thanks. 2) In the book, the government forcibly impregnates women to try and combat the fact reproduction is becoming less successful. This is horrifying and wrong, of course. But if something such as this were to happen in reality, what actions should we as a society take? Should we simply let devolution of our species happen? Should we allow for the harvest of stem cells and the usage of other genetic technologies such as CRISPR? Is there any ethical solution?

**Reed:** What is the point of Cedar getting captured, experience all of the events that happen at the hospital, escape the hospital only to be captured again permanently. Is this just an expression of hopelessness and cynicism in human-kind's ability to rebuild the world after an apocalypse

**Whitney:** can we talk about all the people who were involved in capturing the women. I want to understand who mother was. I thought she was a simulation at first turns out she is a real person. I also want to discuss why the government placed so much importance on birthing new babies are they studying them or trying to kill them off? Also in the end it seemed that Cedar's baby actually was given to her parents and allowed to live did I misinterpret that or was that true? If so why wasn't her baby taken to be studied as well?

**Tim:** @Samantha Dead Poets Society is a great movie. Robin Williams is always excellent.

**Alexis:** Can we talk about how many connections there are with Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"? Since pregnancy is a dominant theme in FHotLG, I easily saw the connections with "The Yellow Wallpaper", especially how women were placed in correctional facilities instead of regular hospitals. Given that these stories are written a century apart, have we made progress since Gilman published this story? And how does pregnancy and raising children and maternal instinct and mental health all tie into surviving apocalypse in FHotLG?

**Victoria:** Also, there are so many weird plots that were never resolved. I want to know more about the giant animal situation.

**John:** @Kyle That is a very interesting question. I think women would be less complacent in capturing women than men since they are unified by their sex, but I think some would still be willing to engage in such behavior. That is because philosophy and religion rather than shared group identity are often times the guiding principles of a person's motivations.

**Samantha:** @Alexis Ooh “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a good connection. I feel like we have made significant progress in the treatment of women in medicine. It isn’t perfect, but with the advancement of science comes the deconstruction of wrong ideas that have no real basis.

**Maria:** @Natalie I think yes, definitely the will to live will overpower morals. We see this especially when Tia and Cedar kill Oreilee. If someone points a gun at you and threatens to shoot, or if someone is trying to sexually assault you...you don't just let it happen, you react in self-defense. Cedar lets go of a moral conviction not to murder knowing that her child might be murdered, or she herself may lose her life if she doesn't act.

**Brooke:** @Alexis, I think an important aspect of Yellow Wallpaper and FHotLG is that women do not get a choice in the way they are treated medically. That they are not really seen as adult humans with free will.

**Whitney:** there was an anti-abortion movement in some culture due to girls being aborted at high rates because they weren't seen as beneficial and if they were born they were mistreated I cant remember where it was, but I think it was in india

**Tim:** @Reed The cynicism and hopelessness of the novel may stem from nihilism.

**John:** In my global health course, we looked at female infanticide. It is very prevalent in India and China

**Robert:** Tim, I definitely agree with your take. I think the end of the novel bears a very nihilistic tone.

**Kyle:** that was also my question

**Sierra:** @Rhiannon, I think Erdrich chose to end the novel the way she did to add to the novels since of darkness and hoplessness. In a way I think it's a cop-out way of ending the novel on a neagtive note, as she seems to think that these types of novels need to end on a sad note. In terms of how she views society, I think she views it has a dark and hopless place. This most likily due to her addressing and seeing the problems and lack of rights we have in our socitey. She thinks that socitey is a place that needs a lot of work and I think the way she wrote the end of book showcases that.

**Brooke:** @Rhiannon, I also noticed that her journal entries started to just be labeled by month at the end. I think after enduring so much trauma for the sake of her child, once the child is taken away, she might not have the will to count they days anymore. The days blur together to the point where she only is sure of what month it is.

**Taylor:** @Miles I like your take on that quote from the novel. I think people just continue to live their normal lives to blot out what's going on, and slowly introducing new things (like masks or quarantine) To make everything seem more normal to them to, I guess, avoid more change and

resist. May not be active resistance, but still a sort of way to be in denial that the world is ending.

**Samantha:** I think this can relate to Milgram's obedience experiments, where it's proven it doesn't matter how good/bad you are, authority figures can drive people to do atrocious acts.

**Reed:** maybe they are self-interested but why, as an author, portray the women as the most brutal figures of the movement

**Grant:** Yeah, and we see the desperation shown near then end of the book when the family kidnaps Cedar and they justify it because they say they need the money to feed their family

**Rhi:** Didn't one of the hospital workers say that she agreed to work there because in exchange she would be spared from the womb draft?

Natalie: @Rhiannon like Self-preservation?

**Whitney:** i was also thinking maybe using women as the nurses was a tactic to make them feel more comfortable like they were serving their country by giving up their babies and being in these hospitals so in that way they may feel more comfortable with women nurses or another thing they could also be apart of the rounding up of women and the nurses will become carries and then new nurses will come in

**Rhi:** @Natalie Exactly!

**Josie:** I think that's why women are often main characters of books like these

**Samantha:** My god you're right Josie lol

**Josie:** haha

**Brooke:** @Whitney, That's a good thought! I agree that it might be because they want the pregnant women to be more comfortable with everything that is happening if they feel some sort of solidarity from the workers in the hospitals, even if it is just gender. I'm not sure if it really worked though, seeing as Cedar did not really trust anyone in the facility and I'm sure many other women did not as well.

**Sierra:** @Whitney I agree with your response to the question, I think all the women where only working in the hospital and agreeing with the treatment of these women to save themselves. In the book we see that The Government is always watching, Sera and Eddy talk about how the Government has hidden cameras and hearing devices everywhere and some even float through the air. Plus you have the constant watch of Mother. So if these women didn't complie they would most likily be punished anf thrown in jail or worse be forced to have childern themselves.

There job at the hospital is maybe like an agreement with the Government that gets them out of having to bare children.

**Zoe:** Women I think are seen as very vulnerable persons, very kind, very trusting. These traits can be used for evil or a false sense of security which is how Bernice was able to capture Cedar

**Josie:** I also feel that IF the antagonists were all males, then this book would be put in the category of feminists instead of the broad-reaching themes covered in the book. It would take away the other key discussions in the book

**Zoe:** Cedar and Tia killed someone and when that happened I was so shocked and I feel like it was just played off like "ope my bad" and I feel this kind of connects when later in the book when Tia had a stillborn birth and Cedar was jealous of how she was "free" but really she had this weight of the murder that would linger and never let her really be free

**Kyle:** Maybe because the women are pregnant the other women have been able to dehumanize them. As you said they view them as currency.

**Josie:** give them unsolicited advice about the baby

**Sierra:** @Zoe I agree, women typically show the traits of being vulnerable, kind, and trusting. I think the novel is playing off of this and showing what happens when traits are taken to an extreme. All of the women that agree and act negatively on what is happening are trusting The Government too much and in, a way making themselves vulnerable to be molded or manipulated.

**Josie:** Kind of off topic, but I was wondering why Sera was rude and off put about Cedar's pregnancy

**Sierra:** @Josie I think it's because Sera saw the baby as a danger to the family and the reason for why everyone in the family as to jump through hoops and be on the run.

**Taylor:** So do you think Sera was angry that "my daughter is pregnant" or "my husband's daughter is pregnant" ? Was she blaming Cedar for their life being upturned or Glenn?

**Rhi:** @Zoe I think when they first killed Oreilee it was played off because they were in shock and had to rely on their survival instinct - putting their emotions about murdering someone on the back burner in order to escape the hospital. Later on in the novel, after Cedar has escaped the first time, her feelings and guilt about the murder catch up to her and she feels the need to confide in people. I think it really speaks about how horrible the whole situation/system is, in which the women had to murder someone and set aside their humanity in order to ensure their own survival

**Victoria:** Does her religion play into her view on the baby's life at all? She proves she knows a lot about anthropology and biology, but she also has very traditional religious views.

**Josie:** her religion plays a huge role in Cedar's survival

**Victoria:** Agreed. She holds on to it the whole time.

**Josie:** that and the idea of her growing fetus allow her to have purpose in survival

**Rhi:** @Victoria Yes, I think that religion does play into her view on the baby and life in general. Reading the book I gathered that she converted to Catholicism to spite her liberal kind of atheist parents at first, but once she actually found a church, went to it, found a place that accepted her and she could fit in, etc. she really leaned into the hope that religion offers

**Grant:** Going off what Rhiannon said, I don't think she talked much about a connection between her religion and her baby but they both definitely offered her a hope of survival and purpose

**Tim:** Not being able to write reminds me of the Gardeners in Year of the Flood.

**John:** Here's a question that Erdrich's novel could be commenting on: Are adoptive mothers as loving and "motherly" as biological mothers? Adoptive mothers did not carry their baby but does this make them less of a mother? This dialogue is definitely featured in FHotLG.

**Reed:** maybe I missed this but what does of "Home of the Living God" actually refer to

**Natalie:** maybe to highlight how little people really know when an apocalypse happens? Or how much information we lack during an apocalypse?

**Kyle:** It allows the reader to relate to the character's experience more because we don't understand what's happening in the world. It's how we would experience the apocalypse

**Alexis:** also that knowledge is privilege too

**Sierra:** I found Eddy's writing about how the apocalypse as seemed to cure him to be really interesting and how he seemed to be out of his depressive state after this writing was addressed.

**Rhi:** I think it [apocalypse] gave him [Eddy] a sense of purpose. People needed a leader

**Taylor:** An apocalypse to one isn't always an apocalypse to another

**Lina:** right ^^

**Reed:** I think it comments on Native American's existing currently in apocalyptic boundaries of today's world and our apocalypse is his opportunity

**Zoe:** @reed I think the answer to this may be on page 153 it's a quote from one of Cedar's books. The quote talks about how when there is no room for Christ, when the world is at its worst Christ is there. The last sentence in that quote: "He [Christ] is mysteriously present in those for whom there seems to be nothing but the world at its worst." Essentially I think the title comes from the suffering of those in the world and because they are there and surviving Christ is in them so they are all the living God

**Maria:** My biggest question before we move on from this book: did Cedar get to have custody of the baby? Does Erdrich make this clear or give us clues?

**Lina:** @Maria, It sounded like she did not get to keep the baby. And then she was kept in the prison to be inseminated again to bear more children.

**Tim:** @Lina I think you are right.

**Whitney:** @Lina was the baby given to the parents or something how did she know when the baby first spoke and things like that? Or was she just daydreaming

**Rhi:** @Maria It is unclear whether Jessie was able to help the baby escape but I do not think that Cedar is ever reunited with her kid

**Lina:** @Whitney I think she was just picturing the future then

**Whitney:** Oh I see thank you!

**Maria:** Thanks for these thoughts!

**Lina:** "Life will find a way" xD

**Tim:** See "The Selfish Gene" by Richard Dawkins

**John:** @Reed I believe the title of the novel relates to the Earth as Heaven. Cedar describes the snow as a heaven before it vanished and became rain. This is similar to the Garden of Eden as it was vacated after Original Sin. In addition, Revelations details the second coming of Christ (who could be considered the Living God since Jesus was man and God) on Earth as apocalyptic. This is also similar to the novel in that the apocalypse has already come and all that remains is for life to return to its home.

**Reed:** both interesting ideas. Thanks Zoe and John

**Tim:** Adaptation could imply survival. Those who adapt will survive.