

Religion as a Form of Civic Resistance in The Year of The Flood¹

Tufan Zamani'nda Bir Sivil Direniş Biçimi Olarak Din

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Abstract

This article focuses on the teachings and actions of God's Gardeners, an anarchist, religious and environmental organization, most widely described in the *The Year of the Flood*, the second book of Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy. This novel, on the one hand, focuses on the environmental and climate crisis, on the other hand, describes the living conditions of the low socioeconomic classes from different perspectives. In this future fiction, capitalist institutions have taken over the administrative power with the help of modern science and they have suspended democracy. Under this circumstance, religious minorities of different faiths and origins have come out with the aim of filling the gap that has been emerged after the disappearance of democratic institutions in civil society, and thus their number and supporters have increased rapidly. It is seen that the Gardeners movement has gained strength by finding positive confirmation from the middle and lower classes, and especially from the oppressed women of any class. This article claims that the Gardeners, as represented in the trilogy, are supported by various segments of society, and turns into a form of civic resistance in time.

Keywords: Atwood, religion, anarchism, Marxism, environmentalism

Özet

Bu makalenin odağında, Kanadalı romancı Margaret Atwood'un en geniş haliyle MaddAddam üçlemesinin ikinci kitabı *Tufan Zamani'nda* ele aldığı anarşist, dini ve çevreci bir örgüt olan God's Gardeners'in öğretileri ve eylemleri yer almaktadır. Bu roman, bir yandan çevre ve iklim krizine odaklanırken, diğer yandan düşük sosyoekonomik sınıfların yaşam koşullarını farklı perspektiflerden anlatmaktadır. Bu gelecek kurgusunda kapitalist kurumlar, modern bilimin yardımıyla yönetim gücünü ele geçirmiş ve demokratik yönetimi askıya almıştır. Sivil toplumdaki demokratik kurumların ortadan kalkmasıyla ortaya çıkan boşluğu doldurma iddiasıyla sayıları ve destekçileri hızla artan farklı inanç ve kökenlerden dini azınlıklar ortaya çıkmıştır. God's Gardeners hareketinin orta ve alt sınıflardan ve özellikle her sınıftan ezilen kadınlara desteğini alarak güç kazandığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışmada üçlemede temsil edilen haliyle Gardeners hareketinin toplumun çeşitli kesimleri tarafından desteklendiği ve zamanla bir sivil direniş biçimine dönüştüğü ileri sürülüyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Atwood, din, anarşizm, Marksizm, çevrecilik

Introduction

Canadian poet, novelist and environmental activist Margaret Atwood has positive and conscious attitudes towards environmental and humanitarian issues since the beginning of her writing career. In addition to her deep environmental sensibility that allows us to put her in "a great tradition of environmental writers"², she is also interested in sexual politics, which she handles within a general humanitarian framework. She strongly rejects representing women "merely as examples of a gender": A woman character in an Atwood novel could be neither an angel nor a harpy but an ordinary individual like most men characters³. After a long list of successful literary endeavours, she has published the MaddAddam trilogy which is widely regarded as Atwood's most environmentally conscious work.

¹ This paper was prepared by benefiting from the first author's doctoral thesis.

² Messer 2007, 16.

³ Atwood 1979, 33.

These novels, *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), are widely regarded as the writer's reaction to contemporary environmental issues like the deterioration of the balance of nature due to pollution, the exploitation of nature, global warming, the depletion of natural resources and the extinction of species.

Using a range of different narrative forms and perspectives, the trilogy tells the story of a group of people who survived after an apocalyptic pandemic caused by a human-made virus. The narrators deal with the before and after periods of this event to give the contrast between the two states of the world that differ significantly. In the meantime, they offer individual survival stories of these characters in newly transformed social and environmental conditions and the challenges they faced in the process of building a new social system. Before the deadly pandemic the world was ruled by multinational technology companies with an understanding that reminds the economic system of the late 19th century defined as 'corporate capitalism'⁴. This period is characterized by close relationship between corrupted politicians and capital groups that created a situation where economic power became the sole source of political influence. In Atwood's future fiction the logic of the capitalist economy encourages people to consume more, purchasing goods and services that are not actually needed, which, in many respects, constitutes the core of today's economic activities. In this way, the capital accumulated in the hands of a certain social group turns into an instrument of political power. This power also enables the determining of the dominant ideologies in society and the manipulation of cultural institutions.

For the high-tech future community of the MaddAddam trilogy, scientific knowledge becomes the most important commodity and the single source of political power and authority. This situation leads to the emergence of an environment in which participatory non-governmental organisations, an intrinsic ideal of western democracies, have almost completely disappeared. The administrative organs of the modern state, which had been acquired as a result of a long and painful era of revolutions, have lost validity. Eventually, there is hardly anyone left to oppose the current oppressive system, except for a group of anarchist religious cults. In the light of these considerations, this paper primarily focuses on the dialectical relationship between economic substructure and the superstructure of the fictional future society of Atwood's trilogy in a Marxist sense and it examines the functionality of non-hierarchically organized religious cults against the anti-democratic practices of the administrative power depicted throughout the novels. In other words, this paper argues that the anarchist religious organisations as represented in the trilogy emerge as a form of civic resistance with the dysfunction of democratic institutions. Contrary to the presuppositions of Marxist analysis, in the world of MaddAddam trilogy where labour unions and political parties do not exist, religion seems to be the only option left to raise awareness of the public on issues such as social classes, environment, and consumption.

Religion as a Response to Democratic and Environmental Concerns

In *The Year of the Flood*, the second book of the trilogy, Atwood sheds light on the lower section of the social strata which is quite distinctly segregated by a number of religious and political dissenter groups. Rich elites and scientists live in special residential areas, the so-called compounds, with the protection of high-tech security. The compound life offers exceptional living opportunities for the residents. This section of society is depicted in detail in *Oryx and Crake* that sets the scene of the class struggle with the perspective of a young man, Jimmy/Snowman, who is the son of a top scientist from the corporate world. The isolation of the compound people is reminiscent of medieval towns that were surrounded by thick walls for security reasons. One of the first things Jimmy noticed when he left the compound world was the "asymmetries [and] deformities" in the pleeblands⁵. This detail clearly shows the contrast between two settlements. The necessary condition for having the privilege of staying inside the walls is belonging to a proper social class. The residents are composed of similar types of people: the executives

⁴ Screpanti (1999) made a review of the different forms of capitalist system that defines corporate capitalism as a system in which individual enterprises are replaced by the corporations. According to Screpanti, corporate capitalism is "based on a diffused private property regime. The great corporation supersedes the small family company. Its ownership is structured in the form of a joint stock company with a dispersed shareholding, while internal control is implemented through huge and complex hierarchies of command. The firm is no longer a thing that belongs to a person or a group of persons endowed with residual control. Rather, it is itself a person, i.e. a social entity with a legal personality, able to enter into contracts and transactions with all the other social actor" (14).

⁵ Atwood 2004, 339.

and top scientists of the corporations and their immediate families. However, the setting of *The Year of the Flood* mostly consists of the ‘city’, the so-called pleeblands, where the majority live: the working class, the poor and a small group of wealthy people who often make money from illegal businesses condoned by the corporations. This novel for the most part tells the stories of two women, Toby and Ren, who struggle with problems caused by poverty, unbalanced income distribution and inadequate social security system. Both women are ex-members of an environmentalist religious sect, God’s Gardeners. Much of the information about the Gardeners that appears unsystematically throughout the novels is filtered through Toby’s and Ren’s perspectives. This anarcho-pacifist organization is governed by a board of experienced members called Adams and Eves. Besides, there are the sermons of Adam One, the spiritual leader and founder of the Gardeners, given on the Saint’s and feast days that are interspersed among the chapters. These two women who are quite different from each other in terms of their character, appearance, age and origin, somehow survived the apocalyptic event that is called the ‘Waterless Flood’ by the Gardeners. While presenting their stories through flashbacks to different periods of their lives, the novel also gives details of the beliefs and lifestyles of the other members of the Gardeners.

Atwood’s speculative fiction trilogy, mostly *The Year of the Flood*, provides topics for discussion about the key position of religious groups in society and their reactions to the problems of the era. She not only creates a new belief system with a set of principles and practices, but also aims criticism towards today’s environmentally insensitive theological groups with her satirical style. Besides the God’s Gardeners, “a lot of fringe cults worked the Sewage Lagoon, trolling for souls in torment” such as “PureHeart Brethren Sufis”, “Ancients of Day”, “Hare Krishnas”⁶, “The Lion Isaiahists and the Wolf Isaiahists”⁷. Aside from these cult groups that address themselves to the poor people in the pleeblands, there are also “rich-people religions” such as “The Known Fruits” and “the Petrobaptists”⁸ which are influential among the privileged Corps people. CorpSeCorps often allows the activities of religious minorities. The reason for that is, according to Adam One, “They claim to respect the Spirit and to favour religious toleration, as long as the religions don’t take to blowing things up: they have an aversion to the destruction of private property.”⁹ There are also other environmentalist groups in the pleeblands such as “the Fernside Collective, the Big Box Backyarders, the Golfgreens Greenies”¹⁰ that sell or exchange the organic products in a market called “the Tree of Life Natural Materials Exchange.”¹¹ The Gardeners are portrayed as more radical in terms of both practice and faith. For this reason, the “ecofreak”¹² label is used to humiliate them in the streets.

The theological structure in Atwood’s fiction seems to be in line with the teachings of Jesus and his earliest followers, who suggest a necessary correlation between true virtue and poverty. Indeed, in the first centuries after Jesus, poverty was considered the greatest virtue among believers, perhaps depending on such biblical verses as “And He raised His eyes toward His disciples and began saying, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God”¹³. Evidently, God’s Gardeners (and other cults of the lower income groups) have some similarities with certain early Christian groups, such as the Ebionites. Just like the Gardeners were declared illegal by the Corps, they were declared heretical by the dominant Christian authorities. “The Ebionites derived their name from the Hebrew word ebyôn, i. e., poor, which may have been characteristic of their moral ideal of renouncing property”¹⁴. Among early Christians, besides the Ebionites, there were also groups called Zabians (the Greek writers called them Baptists or Disciples), Nazarenes, and Essenes. Even with a superficial overview, similarities can be noticed:

They were total abstainers from wine and meat, living either as hermits in the desert on purely vegetable food and wild honey, or in congregations of monastic communities,

⁶ Atwood 2009, 52.

⁷ Atwood 2009, 53.

⁸ Atwood 2009, 52.

⁹ Atwood 2009, 66.

¹⁰ Atwood 2009, 195.

¹¹ Atwood 2009, 194.

¹² Atwood 2009, 54.

¹³ Luke 6:20

¹⁴ Carus 1898, 512.

rejecting bloody sacrifices, objecting to taking oaths, and believing in chastity, abstinence, and poverty as the main means of salvation.¹⁵

During the Middle Ages when science was under great pressure and scientific progress was hindered by organised religion, numerous heretical sects emerged in many parts of Europe: e.g., the Fraticelli (also known as Spiritual Franciscans), the Beguines and the Beghards, Boni Homines (also known as Bonhommes) and the Waldensians (or Poor Men of Lyon).¹⁶ As it is seen from the above examples religious minorities that openly or covertly oppose the established order are not uncommon in the Christian western world.

God's Gardeners also have a spiritual lifestyle; conversely, unlike their medieval counterparts, they do not turn their back on the positive aspects of contemporary science. According to Adam One humans "could not achieve their goal of reconciling the findings of Science with their sacramental view of Life simply by overriding the rules of the former".¹⁷ Therefore, in the context of radical environmental movements, an analysis on the discourse of the Gardeners on the role of religion and science seems necessary. There have been many debates on the relationship and contradictions between religion and science from the emergence of modern sciences to the present. Even though, throughout modernity, science is said to be one step ahead in this fractious relationship, in contrast to the predictions of many 19th and 20th century thinkers, the effect of religion on social, economic and political fields has not disappeared. In this context, we should not underestimate the ability of religions to survive in the contemporary world. From the days when Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, we have witnessed that the religious discourse survives by transforming itself in accordance with the spirit of the time.

More recently, environmental problems have begun to be discussed within these two dissimilar fields. These discussions are shaped around two opposing views that are related to how religions define anthropocentrism. According to monotheistic religions (especially Christianity should be considered here), God created nature to serve people. It can be considered that this notion causes anthropocentrism and eventually leads to ignorance of nature. On the other hand, it is also possible to approach the same concept from a different perspective. To see nature as a creation of God, unlike the *nature morte* (dead nature) envisioned by the Cartesian perspective¹⁸, paves the way to see it as a subject in itself, like human beings. In this context, a common point is reached with the discourses of radical environmental movements such as Deep Ecology which is a politically marginal movement advocating the restructuring of political institutions to achieve a nature-centred lifestyle. In Christianity, nature is alive and full of life. Yet, the ultimate subject for Christians is God, not man. God has created nature, and by extension the environment, and entrusted humans to take care of it. The Bible says, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it."¹⁹ From this point of view, a nature-centred view of monotheistic religions can be inferred alongside the more commonly understood God-centred perspective. In *The Year of the Flood*, God's Gardeners and their leader Adam One try to fulfil such a mission of combining these two perspectives and establish a religious doctrine that sees all other creatures as subjects and respects non-human nature since it is also a creation of God.

Ecology as a field of science is closely related with environmental problems. It is predicted that the data provided by scientific experiments and observations, as their potential persuasiveness is considered higher than other information sources, will facilitate voluntary participation in the fight against environmental problems. Although it sounds like a logical expectation, it only corresponds to a situation that can occur if society, at least the majority, behaves rationally. Looking at the state of the world, it can easily be said that hoping for rationality in the behaviours of the majority would itself not be a rational behaviour. Scientific studies contribute to the fight against environmental problems, yet scientific knowledge is not enough to affect behavioural change. Commonly, people act in different ways and have different motivations, resources, and sensibilities. For example, many scientific studies have been carried out about the damage caused to nature and the environment by plastic packaging waste. However, it is still heavily used and poses a significant threat for the current and future

¹⁵ Carus 1898, 526.

¹⁶ Magee 2002.

¹⁷ Atwood 2009, 333.

¹⁸ Callicott 1992.

¹⁹ Genesis 2:15

generations. This example shows that, although there are differences between cultures, a significant proportion of people do not have environmental awareness about their consumption habits. It cannot be ignored that as forms of symbolic production, literature and religion have a wider sphere of influence than science and are therefore able to compensate the shortcomings of science in terms of raising awareness of environmental issues.

The Year of the Flood contributes to this debate by showing the consequences of current environmental degradation. Religious groups that give importance to natural life, like God's Gardeners, are not Atwood's invention. The utopian agrarian communes mostly established by American romantics throughout the 19th century can also be seen as a kind of religious anarchist movement²⁰. There are many similarities between God's Gardeners and these groups, which can be considered marginal minorities because they reject established societal norms of the time most of which are the cause of our environmental problems today. The Gardeners also have some similar characteristics with the environmental movements and religious groups of modern times.

One can argue that environmentalism, which includes a system of thought and action, has become a kind of religion. Like all religions it aims to trigger a change for the whole world. Adam One in one of his sermons in which he constantly uses religious references, explains the Gardeners mission based on a teaching where humans and nature are equally important and valuable. There is love and respect for all creatures created based on this thought. Adam One says,

By covering such barren rooftops with greenery, we are doing our small part in the redemption of God's Creation from the decay and sterility that lies all around us, and feeding ourselves with unpolluted food into the bargain. Some would term our efforts futile, but if all were to follow our example, what a change would be wrought on our beloved Planet!²¹

In the Western world the attitudes of religions towards modernization, progress, democracy, and capitalism show parallels with their attitudes towards environmental issues. By the end of the 20th century the gradual decline of their popularity led religions to attempt to interfere in some areas of civil society. From this period onwards, divisions between civil society and state provided new areas of work such as feminism, gay rights, human and animal rights, minorities-related issues, and environmentalism for non-governmental organizations. Of course, religions cannot be expected to show the same interest towards all these areas. In the developed western countries where traditional religions have been weakened, it is known that many churches are interested in environmental problems. However, according to some environmentalists, religious institutions benefit from this situation and are not sincere about their environmental awareness.

At this point, it would be useful to recall a seminal article on the relationship between Christianity and environmental issues, and its author. Medieval historian Lynn White JR found the roots of the modern-day environmental crisis in the Christian theology. In "Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis" (first published in 1967), White suggested that the idea of seeing all nature as a raw material warehouse for human use did not start with the Industrial Revolution. This understanding emerged when Judeo-Christian theology with its creation story in Genesis broke away from the pagan understanding of nature. According to Judeo-Christian tradition, body of the first man, Adam, was created from clay. However, it is the soul that gives life to him. Humans consist of half-body and half-soul. This dualist thinking makes the metaphysical half of man, the soul, superior to the earthly half, the body. That's why religious point of view regards nature as a temporary place and this makes it impossible to show due diligence to its protection. White wrote that, "Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter of nature... Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (...), not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for

²⁰ The founder of the Fruitlands commune (1840) in Harvard, Massachusetts, Bronson Alcott, is known as an abolitionist and for his opposition to paying taxes, even before H. D. Thoreau's famous act of civil disobedience. "Alcott was jailed in 1843 in the same prison in which Thoreau was later jailed in 1846" (Fiala 2013, 2) because of his refusal to pay his taxes. According to Andrew Fiala New England was a region of "American non-resistant Christian anarchism" (2) in the 19th century. Besides Fruitlands there were other utopian religious communities such as Brook Farm (1841) and Hopedale Community (1842) both founded in Massachusetts.

²¹ Atwood 2009, 15.

his proper ends".²² In this case, the indifferent attitudes in Western world towards nature come from Christianity and it is no different in Muslim countries and for the Communists; as for White, "Marxism, like Islam, is a Judeo-Christian heresy".²³ According to these religions when the 'end' comes, human beings (the rewardable ones as it should be) would be saved, but not nature. As long as this understanding continues, all scientific discoveries and new technologies would not be the proper cure for the ecology crisis. For White, the belief system that sees human beings as superior and privileged to other creatures in nature should be abandoned as soon as possible. In this context, it is seen that White shares the same perspective with the deep ecology philosophy. Like White, a considerable number of Western environmentalists do not regard Christianity as a nature-friendly belief system, so they sympathize with eastern philosophies such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, which counsel a more harmonious relationship with nature.

There is an obvious rising trend in new religious forms that have more mystical and spiritual aspects. For Watling,

Alongside 'traditional' religious visions, there are emerging 'new' ones. In particular, science is seen to offer resources for understanding the cosmos and humanity's role in it, as well as combating environmental problems by suggesting new, possibly more environmentally friendly, ways of acting.²⁴

Whether or not this situation will reach the level of the Reformation of Christianity will be understood in time. However, if we speculate in the manner of Atwood, we can say that new religions can survive to the extent that they can offer solutions to the problems experienced by contemporary societies. Here it is necessary to draw attention to another connection between the MaddAddam trilogy and the contemporary world we live in. Considering the socioeconomic problems among underdeveloped countries and the underclasses of developed countries, it is seen that religions are strengthened by the deterioration of peace, trust, security and economic prosperity. Emma Tomalin's article, "Religions, poverty reduction and global development institutions" determines that,

While the Western-led modern global development institutions that have emerged since the Second World War have tended to be secular in nature, over the past decade or so there has been an apparent 'turn to religion' by global development institutions, as well as in academic development studies. This reflects the realization that modernization and secularization do not necessarily go together, and that religious values and faith actors are important determinants in the drive to reduce poverty, as well as in structures and practices that underpin it.²⁵

Based on this view, we might expect that a religious organisation like the Gardeners would appeal most to the people who are the most vulnerable to the economic and social problems of society. However, Atwood's approach to this is far from straightforward. She presents the doctrines of the Gardeners from the point of view of two women, Toby and Ren, who have not participated in this group voluntarily and regard them critically.

Toby is the daughter of an air conditioner dealer who killed himself after becoming unemployed because of his wife's health expenses. The mother, who was addicted to cosmetics and nutritional supplements, became terminally ill due to, as it turns out later, the side effects that the Corps deliberately add to their products. They spent all their family savings on a medical treatment that was worse than useless. All alone in the Pleeblands after losing both of her parents, Toby was faced with the cruel side of life and survived many hardships. When her life was in danger, she joined the Gardeners as a refuge. The story of Ren, who is the daughter of a senior corporation employee, is quite different from Toby's. When Ren's mother left her husband for a handsome Gardeners member, she took her daughter with her. Therefore, she was able to take the philosophical and survival skills training given to the child members. Eventually, paths of Toby and Ren crossed in this anarchist-oriented environmentalist cult, which they joined for

²² White 1996, 8-10.

²³ White 1996, 9.

²⁴ Watling 2008, 473.

²⁵ Tomalin 2018, 2.

reasons beyond their control. Yet, the conversion of both women was an absolute success: When they had to leave the Gardeners, they willingly continued the teachings and habits they had acquired there.

Atwood reveals the details of the characters, the setting, and the events sparingly. The course of events in the novel, as occasionally interspersed crumbs of information, reveal more details about the Gardeners. They try to explain the biblical texts about creation and natural processes based on hard sciences. They define their belief system as a scientific religion in which actions are more important than beliefs. The leader of the group once explained this to Toby as follows: “In some religions, faith precedes action. In ours, action precedes faith. You’ve been acting as if you believe, dear Toby. As if — those two words are very important to us. Continue to live according to them, and belief will follow in time.”²⁶

The Gardeners believe in both evolution and God. They are strict vegans and most of their food comes from the rooftop gardens they establish on the roofs of abandoned buildings in the city centre (There are many vacant buildings as the rich have left this part of the city and moved to their high-walled and tightly secured compounds). The spiritual leader and founder of the group, Adam One, was an epidemiologist: “I was a scientist. I studied epidemics.”²⁷ This humanist scientist used to think that “man was the measure of all things”.²⁸ It seems that at one point he gave up this belief and began to think that “We cannot know God by reason and measurement; indeed, excess reason and measurement lead to doubt.”²⁹ He was, in his own words, once “a materialistic, atheistic meat-eater”³⁰ and then turned into an anarcho-pacifist who aims to initiate an economic and social structure with those who will survive after the irreversible environmental apocalypse that is compatible with nature (There’s not much detail about his transformation process in *The Year of the Flood*. This issue is clarified in the last book of the trilogy.) They believe in an apocalyptic event they call the ‘Waterless Flood’ which will wipe humans off the face of the Earth, just as the biblical flood did the non-believers according to the Abrahamic religions. During one of the sermons which Adam One traditionally gives on Saint’s days (the Gardeners have established a pantheon of ecological saints based upon the names of naturalists and environmental activists) and Feast days, in which he says; “we know that Comets and nuclear holocausts are among the possible tomorrows, not to mention the Waterless Flood, that we fear looms ever nearer”.³¹ Adam One and other Gardeners believe that the path chosen by humankind will lead them to a great disaster, because they are thoughtlessly damaging nature without which no one can continue living.

Adam One tries to recruit new members by preaching on the streets and opens branches in different cities and countries by increasing the number of their members. He proclaims, “Spare your fellow Creatures! Do not eat anything with a face! Do not kill your own Soul!”³² When the Gardeners met Toby during such an event, she was working for a SecretBurger fast-food restaurant. Adam One made one of his usual speeches: “Every day you stand here selling the mutilated flesh of God’s beloved Creatures, it’s injuring you more. Join us, my dear — we are your friends, we have a place for you.”³³ After many years, when Toby became Eve Six on Pilar’s death, she described the structure of the Gardeners as,

For the Gardeners, it seemed, were no longer a tiny, localized cult. They were growing in influence: far from being confined to the Sinkhole Edencliff Rooftop Garden and its neighbouring rooftops and the other buildings they controlled, they had branches in different plebs, and even in other cities. They also had cells of hidden External sympathizers embedded at every level, even within the Corporations themselves. The information provided by these sympathizers was indispensable, according to Adam One: by means of it, the intentions and movements of their enemies could be monitored, at least in part. The cells were referred to as Truffles because they were underground, rare, and

²⁶ Atwood 2009, 234.

²⁷ Atwood 2009, 54.

²⁸ Atwood 2009, 54.

²⁹ Atwood 2009, 325.

³⁰ Atwood 2009, 54.

³¹ Atwood 2009, 325.

³² Atwood 2009, 54.

³³ Atwood 2009, 55-56.

valuable, because you never could tell where they might appear next, and because pigs and dogs were employed to sniff them out. Not that the Gardeners had anything against actual Pigs and Dogs, Adam One made haste to explain — only against their enslavement by the forces of darkness.³⁴

It is understood that the Gardeners movement has gained strength by finding positive confirmation from the middle and lower classes, and especially from the oppressed women of any class. This is the reason why their activities were eventually declared illegal, and their headquarters were raided by CorpSeCorps forces. Yet, the organization has not disappeared completely, provided that they carry out their activities underground. Certainly, behind this success of the God's Gardeners, there is a persuasive analysis of environmental degradation, climate change, moral degeneration, socioeconomic problems, poverty, and unfair distribution of income. Adam One, who has modelled himself on the example of Jesus in many respects, has succeeded in adapting for the Gardeners' doctrine the egalitarian discourse of early Christianity, which saw material wealth as worthless as can be seen in Proverbs 22:2, "The rich and the poor have a common bond, The Lord is the maker of them all". At the initial stage of Christianity, the movement primarily included the poorest and most oppressed groups of society. Engels wrote the following on this subject:

The history of early Christianity has notable points of resemblance with the modern working-class movement. Like the latter, Christianity was originally a movement of oppressed people: it first appeared as the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves, of poor people deprived of all rights, of peoples subjugated or dispersed by Rome. Both Christianity and the workers' socialism preach forthcoming salvation from bondage and misery; Christianity places this salvation in a life beyond, after death, in heaven; socialism places it in this world, in a transformation of society.³⁵

Here, Engels focuses on the similarities between early Christianity and communism³⁶. Jesus himself acted among the poor and the dispossessed; and frequently attacked the rich. When he entered Jerusalem, it is no coincidence that at first, he expelled the usurers from the temple. The communism of the early Christians can be seen in the fact that there was common ownership of all the wealth in their community. Any person who wanted to join them first had to give up their worldly possessions. About the Fellowship of the Believers, Acts 2: 44-45 says, "And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need". In the same way, the Gardeners have an egalitarian structure that despises material wealth. Adam One says, "Money is a terrible temptation. It is sickness."³⁷

There are also significant parallels between the teachings of the Gardeners and Marx's opinions about spiritual life. He wrote that, "to develop in greater spiritual freedom, a people must break their bondage to their bodily needs — they must cease to be the slaves of the body. They must, above all, have time at their disposal for spiritual creative activity and spiritual enjoyment".³⁸ Marx and later Marxists are generally known for their critical attitudes against religions. In fact, Marx was not primarily concerned with the concept of religion, but with what people did using religious institutions (organized religions). Marxist criticism underlines how religion has turned into a repressive ideology; "an ideology that helps to keep the faithful poor satisfied with their lot in life, or at least tolerant of it, much as a tranquilizer might do".³⁹ Marx, in his "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in which he made his famous analogy between religion and opium, begins with the definition of religion and his criticism of religious institutions. For him, "criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism".⁴⁰ Obviously, Marx rejects mystical views about the creation by saying, "Man makes religion, religion does not make man".⁴¹ He discusses the issue as an historical and social phenomenon from an

³⁴ Atwood 2009, 264-265.

³⁵ Engels 1990, 447.

³⁶ It is worth remembering that there are profound differences of opinion between left-wing and right-wing Christians on this subject. This is because they are based on different scriptures.

³⁷ Atwood 2009, 211.

³⁸ Marx 1988, 29.

³⁹ Tyson 2006, 59.

⁴⁰ Marx 2010, 175.

⁴¹ Marx 2010, 175.

“irreligious” perspective. “Religion” as “an inverted world-consciousness” has been turned into a weapon in the hands of the clergy who have served as the agent of the ruling class for centuries.⁴² In this way religious doctrines have become the main reference for comprehending existence for the masses. For this reason, “The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion”.⁴³ Marx’s analysis does not include a negative attitude towards religious feelings or individual connections to divine powers, but a realistic interpretation that recognizes the importance of spiritual life. He continues,

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people. To abolish religion as the illusory happiness of the people is to demand their real happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears, the halo of which is religion.⁴⁴

If the works of art, according to Marxist premises, that raise the consciousness of the working class and thus serve the proletarian revolution are not seen as repressive, in the same way the Gardener doctrines that instil environmental awareness and love in its members within the paradigm of contemporary science cannot be regarded as repressive either.

The Gardeners often transform biblical concepts into their daily practices. For example, they regularly pile up food and supplies in several secret places for the use of post-apocalyptic survivors. They call them ‘Ararats’. Adam One explains this as, “with the essential items we must include in our Ararat storerooms in preparation for the Waterless Flood.”⁴⁵ Toby also created one after she got a job at AnooYoo Spa. Although organic/vegan nutrition is obligatory for every Gardener, they are also aware of the fact that they will eventually need animal protein sources after the Waterless Flood. Therefore, they implement a rigorous training program for their members that includes hunting and survival skills. Almost all routine activities of the Gardeners aim to improve their ability to survive after a major disaster.

By presenting the God’s Gardeners by means of the critical observations of Toby and Ren, Atwood draws attention to the challenges and advantages of a green civilization. On the other hand, there is another group called the MaddAddamites that has its roots within the Gardeners. Although there is some information about this group in *The Year of the Flood*, the details of their activities are only given in *MaddAddam*. The separation between the Gardeners and the MaddAddamites is a result of Adam One and Zeb’s disagreement over the nature of the organization’s activities. Besides, this separation also represents similar disagreements within modern environmental movements or anarchist religious groups. The MaddAddamites do not approve of the passive resistance philosophy of Adam One; they believe in direct action to bring change to society and the world order.

The dialogue below clearly illustrates their conflict. A group of Gardeners, including Zeb, are involved in “a scuffle in the Sewage Lagoon”.⁴⁶ When they returned to Edencliff Rooftop Garden, the disagreement comes to light,

“I hope there was no lasting damage,” said Adam One. “Much as we deplore the very existence of SecretBurgers, and the depredations of this — this unlucky individual, we want no violence.”

“Booth overturned, meat thrown around. All he suffered was cuts and bruises,” said Zeb.

“That is unfortunate,” said Adam One. “It’s true that we sometimes have to defend ourselves, and we’ve had trouble with this — with him before. But on this occasion, do I have the impression that we attacked first?” He frowned at Zeb. “Or provoked an attack? Is this correct?”

⁴² Marx 2010, 175.

⁴³ Marx 2010, 175.

⁴⁴ Marx 2010, 175-176.

⁴⁵ Atwood 2009, 123.

⁴⁶ Atwood 2009, 347.

“Asshole had it coming,” said Zeb. “We should be getting medals.”

“Our way is the way of peace,” said Adam One, frowning even more.

“Peace goes only so far,” said Zeb. “There’s at least a hundred new extinct species since this time last month. They got fucking eaten! We can’t just sit here and watch the lights blink out. Have to begin somewhere. Today SecretBurgers, tomorrow that fucking gourmet restaurant chain. Rarity. That needs to go.”

“Our role in respect to the Creatures is to bear witness,” said Adam One. “And to guard the memories and the genomes of the departed. You can’t fight blood with blood. I thought we’d agreed on that.”⁴⁷

The MaddAddamites make contact with each other through a secret online communication network. They also work together with Crake on the Paradise project, unaware of his ultimate intent. Among their actions there are “strange outbreaks of new diseases, or peculiar infestations — the splice porcubever that was attacking the fan belts in cars, the bean weevil that was decimating Happicuppa coffee plantations, the asphalt-eating microbe that was melting highways”⁴⁸ and “the mice that attacked cars”.⁴⁹ Actions similar to those of the MaddAddamites fall into the category of ‘ecotage’, which means performing various criminal acts (such as vandalism, arson, and threats) against the people, institutions and organizations that harm nature and the environment. Although its practitioners regard ecotage as a type of action that never harms humans, it is described as terrorist activity by law enforcement agencies and is often used synonymously with the concept of ecoterrorism or environmental terrorism.⁵⁰ According to Zeb/the Mad Adam, “if you could destroy the infrastructure then the planet could repair itself. Before it was too late, and everything went extinct.”⁵¹ They never intend to kill any living beings; their aim is to destroy infrastructure facilities causing environmental damage and to block the capitalist mode of production that facilitates consumerism.

Conclusion

Considering the end of the trilogy, it is not easy to determine whether Adam One, Zeb or Crake has a point concerning their proposed solutions. In a sense, it can be said that the story raises questions rather than providing answers. Adam One expects a final catastrophe for humans, like, in many ways, a mixture of the Judgement Day and the Biblical Flood, that will bring about the end of humanity in the way that the early Christians expected the apocalypse, but in the meantime, he does not ignore the possibility of being saved along with the other Gardeners since they are the true believers of this destiny. He seems to make a correct diagnosis of the social and political state of the world, one which has been heading towards a painful end due to environmental devastation. Under these conditions he prefers to carry out a pacifist strategy; instead of encouraging people to struggle with the system that has caused the problems, he prefers to save as much as he can from the coming Flood.

However, most of Adam One’s predictions have come true, and after the outbreak, the survivors have managed to establish a new order thanks to the trainings and philosophical doctrines of the Gardeners. At first, Adam One regards the new state of the world as a disappointment, because the debris caused by Waterless Flood is obviously much worse than he would have imagined. After a while, the improved air quality due to the disappearance of human-made pollutants has made him more satisfied. He is certainly hopeful that nature will renew itself sooner or later. This point of view mirrors Deep Ecology’s philosophy of showing equal love and respect for every creature in nature, whereas it would be incomplete and flawed for eco-Marxist philosophy, which aims primarily to eliminate the source of environmental destruction through class consciousness and joint struggle.

Eventually, the Gardeners project has partially failed. Some of the Adams and Eves, who are supposed to be more experienced and dedicated members than the others, are not committed to their mission. For example, Burt/Adam Thirteen secretly grows and sells cannabis in cahoots with the Corps agents. There

⁴⁷ Atwood 2009, 348-349.

⁴⁸ Atwood 2009, 375-376.

⁴⁹ Atwood 2009, 462.

⁵⁰ Wagner 2008, 25.

⁵¹ Atwood 2009, 462.

are even characters that have nothing to do with the ideological agenda of the cult. Lucerne, for example, has no ties with the Gardeners, except for her affectionate relationship with Zeb. The premises controlled by them are seen as a shelter for people without an ID, like Toby and Amanda (a climate refugee from the South); they are there because they have no other place to go. In addition to this, although Adam One has managed to establish a spiritual lifestyle, in harmony with nature, he could not put forward a solution and action plan that would attack the very root of the problem: the world of the Corporations that rule the world. He has created a vague apocalyptic vision that is a mixture of his accurate observations of circumstances and biblical myths. In a sense he has envisioned the ultimate solution as a punishment perpetrated by supernatural powers.

The MaddAddamites are not flawless either; they have been working with Crake in the Paradise Dome for a long time, but none of them could conceive of his secret plans. That Crake accomplished the BlyssPluss project without being noticed, not even by Jimmy/Snowman and Oryx, shows that the MaddAddamites are too short-sighted to see what is right in front of them. These highly intelligent scientists could not prevent Crake's secret plans; on the contrary, they unwittingly made a major contribution to his extermination project. The real success of this group, from a radical environmentalist perspective, is their sabotage activities against infrastructure and industrial facilities, which were unlikely to be continued for a long time due to the security risks they create, however, they have certainly made a significant contribution to the rate of the process of regeneration after the outbreak by accelerating the decomposition of the artificial structures that damage nature.

Consequently, both the God's Gardeners and the MaddAddamites clearly represent the different tendencies and trends within real-life environmental movements. In this context, the failure and inefficiency of their reactions and suggested solutions for environmental problems, expressed explicitly or implicitly throughout the trilogy, can be interpreted as reflecting the author's criticisms against contemporary environmental organisations, whose failures, alongside their successes, might provide insights into how to shape the future of environmental movements. On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that by developing a discourse that blends religion and environmentalism, the Gardeners mission positively affected the lives of many people. Environmental movements should consider the usefulness of cultural institutions such as religion as well as cultural and artistic products.

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