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Working the Garden: Women and Religion in Apocalyptic Fiction

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Working the Garden: Women and Religion in Apocalyptic Fiction

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English at
The College of William and Mary

by

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Overview

In this paper, I analyze Margaret Atwood's trilogy, *MaddAddam*, focusing primarily on *The Year of the Flood* and its portrayal of religion, ecofeminism, and survival. In the first section of the paper, I outline the religion, the God's Gardeners, and the importance of their deep ecological beliefs. Following that, I show how Atwood provides an ecofeminist view of this religion through the perspective of female protagonists. Then, I detail the issue of survival and the way religion is repurposed for society to survive. Finally, in the last section, I compare *MaddAddam* to Octavia Butler's novels, *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*, as well as, Jean Hegland's novel, *Into the Forest*. These texts all portray women's roles as rebuilders of society in tandem with their rewriting of religion. I highlight how both the authors and characters of these works use writing to revise and restructure religion and their established communities with ecofeminist belief systems. Ultimately I aim to answer the questions: Why do new communities – particularly those led by women – that form in a post-apocalyptic world need religion at all? How do these women manipulate or interpret former religions as their own? How can religion intersect with ecological intentions in a positive way? What would that look like?

An Environmental Religion

Who is it tends the Garden,
 The Garden oh so green?
 'Twas once the finest Garden
 That ever has been seen.
 And in it God's dear Creatures
 Did swim and fly and play;
 But then came greedy Spoilers,
 And killed them all away...
 Oh Garden, oh my Garden,
 I'll mourn forevermore
 Until the Gardeners arise,
 And you to Life restore.
From *The God's Gardeners Oral Hymnbook*
 Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (xi)

Who is it that will tend "The Garden," the Earth, when it is destroyed? This is the first question asked by the God's Gardeners, an ecologically conscious religious group centered in Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction *The Year of the Flood* and concerned with a coming apocalypse. But before looking at the end, the beginning must be understood. In the beginning, according to Gardener theology, there was Adam One and Creation Day. It is not the typical Biblical story of creation, but the creation of the Edencliff Rooftop Garden, the God's Gardeners' urban garden, spanning city rooftops and operating as the group's base. The Edencliff Rooftop Garden insulates the group, allowing them to be wholly self-sufficient as they learn how to live in harmony with nature. Adam One, the group's leader, preaches his sermons in the Garden, surrounded by all kinds of plants and flowers, fruits and vegetables, butterflies and bees; it is a sanctuary in all definitions. Its Creation Day marks the start of time for the God's Gardeners, as they demarcate their years starting from this date. The Gardeners'

environmental focus centers on their Garden, a microcosm revealing their concern for the Earth as a whole. Their Garden is their “small part in the redemption of God’s creation from decay” (YF 11). As they look toward an apocalypse, what they call the Waterless Flood, they view themselves as “a plural Noah” having been “forewarned” of a coming disaster and “called” to “restore Life” after destruction hits (YF 91, xi).

Biblical allusions are frequent, as seen in references to Noah, the Flood, the Garden of Eden, Adam, and the Creation story. In her acknowledgments, Atwood specifies, “the Gardeners themselves are not modeled on any extant religion, though some of their theology and practices are not without precedent” (YF 433). Atwood uniquely blends environmental activism, aspects of fundamental Christianity and other similar religions, and scientific thought in her creation of the Gardener religion. The Gardeners further incorporate aspects of typical organized religions alongside their own sermons and hymns, with specific rituals, marriage and burial ceremonies, Festivals, Feast Days, a defined diet, and dress code. Their holidays, or Saints’ Days, honor various environmentalists, martyrs, and theologians, from Rachel Carson to Julian of Norwich. Since the ecological is so intertwined with the religious, Lauren Maxwell, who writes on environmental activism within the Gardeners’ religion, describes the Gardeners as “a movement that grounds environmental stewardship in spiritual devotion” (Maxwell 4). The combination of spiritual devotion to Earthly stewardship lends their religion its compelling individuality; the Gardeners propose unique and worthwhile ideas about survival off the land.

Margaret Atwood states in *The Times UK*’s article about *The Year of the Flood*, “People have made the comment that unless environmentalism becomes a religion it’s not

going to work” (Wagner). Atwood indicates that the Gardeners are a response to this ideal, seeing *how* it would work if environmentalism were a religion. She notes in the article that environmentalism does have “that element of faith” similar to religion, where one “must believe” in the cause to be dedicated enough to it (Wagner). This belief in environmentalism informs Atwood’s portrayal of the Gardeners and their religion. As Maxwell points out: “In depicting the sustainable lifestyle of the Gardeners, Atwood provides us with a model by which we might alter our own behaviors to develop better relations with the living things around us” (Maxwell 9). Atwood shows how the Gardeners’ ecoconsciousness is admirable in their way of thinking about living in harmony in nature, and in how they specifically practice it. She uses her text to argue for devotion to the environment, especially in the face of its destruction.

The Gardeners exist in a complex, pre-apocalyptic world that obscures and challenges environmental concerns. They refer to society outside of their own as the “Exfernal World,” a decaying and polluted landscape of widespread consumerism and environmental exploitation. A small number of biotechnological Corporations control society, sectioned off into various Compounds where scientists and businessmen live and work. In contrast to these elite, privileged Compounds are the “pleeblands,” the cities of the lower classes, where the Gardeners operate. With such an emphasis on biotechnology, the world is filled with genetically-engineered creatures serving various purposes. Some serve as specifically cosmetic resource, like Mo’Hairs, sheep bred to provide human wigs. Pigoons, however, are enormous pigs created to house human brain tissue and other organs for harvest, resulting in highly intelligent creatures. The Gardeners must navigate

a reverence for nature among a changing environment filled with hybrid creatures like rakunks, wolvogs, and liobams.

Atwood has displayed great care for the way her audience will absorb the Gardeners' spiritual environmentalism. Her book tour for *The Year of the Flood* underscores the importance of the religious aspects of the Gardeners. On her tour, Atwood visited churches, using local actors and singers to sing Gardener hymns and narrate Adam One's sermons to audience members. Instead of a whole cast touring around, Atwood herself was the only one who changed locations, being conscious of her carbon footprint and traveling by public transportation. She equipped each location with the scripts, music, and other materials in order to pull off these large events that placed the religious messages of the Gardeners at the center. The level of production contained within *The Year of the Flood* is evident in a teaser video for the short film "In the Wake of the Flood," that follows Atwood's tour.¹ The clip reveals how this tour brought the Gardeners and their hymns to life, giving their theology greater dimension and importance. Snippets of multiple performances also show how the Gardeners are open to interpretation, with varying presentations of their dress and speech as kooky or dramatic or serious. Atwood's novel evolves from text into real people singing and preaching Gardener ideals. In "Compassion, Imagination, and Reverence for All Living Things: Margaret Atwood's Spiritual Vision in *The Year of the Flood*," Carol Osborne states: "Atwood is using her novel, and the promotional events connected with it, to 'preach' the key principles of the fictional God's Gardeners: environmental stewardship, sustainable living practices, and reverence for the interconnectedness of all living things" (Osborne

¹ <https://vimeo.com/6911315>

32). Atwood wants her readers to share in her beliefs, highlighting the progressive thought that is needed in order to understand the Gardeners' commitment to sustainability and their centering of nature within their spiritual discourse.

Atwood's understanding of religion gives some context to the Gardeners' beliefs. In an interview with *Random House*, printed in their hardcover edition of *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood is described as a "Pessimistic Pantheist" ... defined as the belief that "God is everywhere, but losing" (Atwood RH). Per Atwood's explanation, the universe is made from something, and various terms can be attributed to this something, but many people label it as "God." In this case, every form of matter is therefore a "different expression of 'God,'" so when species become extinct, God is essentially being diminished. If the entire world contains God in it, then, any alterations or destruction to the Earth erases iterations of God. Through this explanation of her beliefs, Atwood reveals just how crucial ecological consciousness is to her philosophy, since it is tied to her spiritual view of the world. Similarly, the Gardeners maintain the conviction that Creation, or the Earth, is manifestation of God. Atwood states that, in the Biblical response to the theory tying destruction of the Earth to the destruction of God, "It is noteworthy that the covenant made by God after the flood was not just with Noah, but with every living thing," and "assume[s] that...the 'God's Gardeners'...used this kind of insight as a cornerstone of their theology" (Atwood RH). Atwood explains that God's Biblical promise not to destroy the Earth in its entirety was made to all of his Creation. She hints at the concept of nature-human interconnectedness, that all living things, and not just humans, are essential to the created world. She reveals the centrality of this idea to the Gardeners' belief system, marking it as the "cornerstone" of their theology. When

Atwood refers to interconnectedness as “insight,” she emphasizes how this view is a deeply progressive and innate understanding of God’s role relative to the environment.

The progressiveness of the Gardeners’ religious beliefs is evident through the lens of Anne Primavesi’s book *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity*, which explores a theological, ecofeminist reevaluation of Christianity and argues for interconnectedness between the environment and its inhabitants. This reading is important in understanding the Gardeners’ traditional Christian elements and the ways in which they attempt to embrace nature-human interconnectedness. In her chapter, “Ecofeminism and Christian Imagery,” Primavesi asserts: “If we take transcendence seriously, we acknowledge our interdependence with all the created world related to God...and believe that each created being has intrinsic value” (Primavesi 152). Understanding interconnectedness means recognizing that “*all* beings live in a relationship with God” and nature has “intrinsic value” outside of humankind’s recognition of that value (Primavesi 152). The Gardeners firmly believe that their “sacred task of stewardship” lies in sustaining the intrinsic value of each created being, down to the smallest bug. Adam One preaches that the Gardeners, and all humankind, should not “consider...[themselves] as exceptional...that [they] are set above all other Life,” and asks, “Why do we think that everything on Earth belongs to us, while in reality we belong to Everything?” (YF 53). The Gardeners reject the separation of God and nature that traditional Christianity perpetuates through the assumption that humans are the only beings that can encounter God. This belief allows humans to “assume that their dominance as *human beings* is a divine right, and that their ability to speak to and on behalf of God indicates their unique relationship with God” (Primavesi 147). The

Gardeners transcend this hierarchical confinement of nature in traditional religious thought. While traditional Christianity sees nature as inferior, allowing for it to be “used/abused,” the Gardeners understand nature as a place to encounter the divinity of God and see “interconnectedness with the non-human world [as] part of [a] relationship with God” (Primavesi 147, 152).

The Gardeners take the principle of nature-human interdependence so seriously that they revere even the Beetles and Moles of the Earth.² In their hymn, “The Garden,” quoted above, the Gardeners’ emphasis on the value of all created beings in the world is clear.³ The Garden’s or the “created world’s” Life is only full when “God’s dear Creatures” exist and flourish. Because the Gardeners value God’s Creation, they hold themselves responsible as the ones who will restore Life when it is diminished, intervening in the subordination of nature and proving Primavesi’s reading of religion as an accurate one. The environmental messages contained within the Gardener hymns are important, yet their message can be read in varied ways based off the language they use. For example, the “greedy Spoilers” are meant to be an urgent threat, but labeling destruction with an unusual word makes it seem less serious. The hymns encapsulate the complexity of the Gardeners, for they can be viewed as comical and absurd, yet they have earnest meaning. The Gardeners praise “holy weeds...that flourish in the ditch”⁴ that are holy because they are natural and cannot be bought from any “superstore,” and they admire “God dwell[ing] in the midst of [a golden Peach],”⁵ as it shines with life (YF 127, 278). While weeds or peaches are certainly unconventional subjects to praise in hymns,

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FweGdlVhKHg>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDqGYopOSn8>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgZqdqL52qw>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bfyn4SzUJU4>

and can be read as silly, they reflect the deeper reverence of environment and Creation in the Gardeners' theology.

Atwood intersperses fourteen hymns throughout the novel, emphasizing their importance to the Gardeners' religious message. Often vacillating between serious and comedic language, the hymns are appealing in many ways; their humor lends them accessibility alongside their refreshing highly progressive view of environmentalism. Additionally, these visual texts exist in a space apart from the novel, which creates an entirely different experience of them. Listening to these hymns with their composed music establishes a clearer understanding of them as songs that a religious group would really sing together in a church service. In a review of *The Year of the Flood*, Gillian Beer writes that the hymns "sustain and structure the novel and are moving, humorous, compelling and perfectly rhymed. The rhyming means much. It knits up disorder; it discovers kinships; it solaces; it reveals. It persists to the end. These are songs to be sung together" (Beer). While the hymns as interjections structure the novel as a whole, they also structure and call attention to the specific details of the Gardeners' beliefs. The hymns separate out the Gardeners' directives for living, imparting urgent calls to action, such as a turn from pride and foolishness.

In the hymn, "Oh Let Me Not Be Proud,"⁶ the Gardeners sing about nature-human interconnectedness. The first stanza is an earnest plea: "Oh let me not be proud, dear Lord,/Nor rank myself above/The other Primates, through whose genes/We grew into your Love" (YF 54). Here, the rhyme between "above" and "Love" emphasizes the message that God's Love allows the Gardeners to understand that they are not ranked above any other Primates, though they may be more genetically advanced. The message

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heF0Ipd37Ro>

sets up the notion of hierarchy that they aim to move away from, yet they ultimately contradict themselves later in the hymn. The third stanza furthers the commentary on human evolution through monkeys and gorillas: “We cannot always trace Your path/Through Monkey and Gorilla,/Yet all are sheltered underneath/Your Heavenly Umbrella” (YF 54). Their point is that just because humans have a higher capability of understanding God than their primate ancestors, it doesn’t mean that primates deserve less than humans or mean less to God. However, the rhyme between “Gorilla” and “Umbrella” is different than the previous connection between “above” and “love.” The rhyme is much more humorous and it also seems more forced, which hints to a deeper issue in the Gardener theology, where they often force specific ideas to fit a broader message. Contradiction exists in the last stanza, as well, when they sing “Let us not scorn our lowly birth,/Nor yet our Primate seed” (YF 54). The entire message of the hymn calls for humans to lose their pride, because God’s love covers all of His Creation. The Gardeners connect the evolution of monkeys to humans as a way to prove that humans are not “above” other primates, because they came from them. Yet, this also indicates that humans *are*, in fact, more advanced and “above” in the evolutionary scale of primates while the use of the phrase “lowly birth” implies a level of hierarchy and scorn that they just wanted to refute.

Contradictions present in the hymns reveal the difficulty the Gardeners have with clearly outlining their beliefs. In *The Telegraph UK*’s review, the hymns are described as “sonorously bathetic,” (Moore). Whenever the hymns are supposed to impart impactful ideas, the message unintentionally falls flat due to the Gardeners’ theological conflicts or

comical word choices. In their hymn, “Oh Lord, You Know Our Foolishness,”⁷ they begin with playful language: “You know our foolishness,/And all our silly deeds;/You watch us scamper here and there,/Pursuing useless greeds” (YF 198). They connect “silliness” with “foolishness,” which makes it seem as if their message is not of deep concern. Then, they define foolishness as “find[ing] the Sky an empty void,/The Universe a blank,” and “fall[ing] into despondency...curs[ing] the hour that bore us” (YF 198). The tone distinctly shifts to a more ominous reprimand of foolishness. There is a dark vision of the Universe, before it shifts back to “jest[ing]” and “sing[ing]” and “laugh[ing] with childish glee,” praying that God will still “treasure” His “Fools” (YF 198). The purpose of this hymn is unclear. Are the Gardeners taking responsibility for their “foolish” actions in order to change their ways, or are they simply patting themselves on the back for recognizing their failures? The vacillation between tones produces a tension that reveals the problems the Gardeners have with producing a precise message, as well as having that message be seriously considered.

One of the bigger messages where the Gardeners contradict themselves is in their practice of vegetarianism. They are “strict vegetarians” that reject eating all meat, and particularly protest the Exfernal World’s meat creations like SecretBurgers, containing mysterious ground-up animal protein, and the genetically-modified ChickieNobs. Because of their garden, the Gardeners never lack in food. They learn how to forage, grow, and know which plants and Edible Weeds to eat, judging what is safe by whether or not “a mouse has eaten it” (YF 125). These skills prepare the Gardeners for survival in an apocalyptic world. In Adam One’s sermon, “Of the Gifts of Saint Euell,” he highlights

⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWThlX3X_jQ

resource management, knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants, and the skill of using whatever the land has to offer.

However, their vegetarian philosophy is contradicted within the same sermon, as Adam allows Zeb, a male Gardeners leader, to teach the Gardeners the “trapping of small Animals for survival food in times of pressing need” (YF 125). He rationalizes this allowance by saying that as long as “gratitude is felt and pardon asked” and if one is willing to later offer oneself “to the great chain of nourishment” in turn, then survival outweighs the belief in vegetarianism (YF 125). Contained within this message is a complex relationship between life, death, shame, thankfulness, and resource seeking. Many Gardener followers feel conflicted over this message, especially after the apocalypse when resources are low.

The Gardeners struggle with being taken seriously within two spheres: the Exfernal World’s surface level perception of them and the female protagonists’ view of their incoherent theology. The Gardeners’ presentation of themselves contrasts the sterility of the Compounds and their emphasis on a groomed appearance. Adam One “wear[s] a caftan that loo[ks] as if it had been sewn by elves on hash,” and the rest of the followers wear “dark clothing” (YF 39). They hardly take long showers, do not have mirrors, and all have a “sour odour” from constantly being around dirt (YF 209). Their appearances are off-putting to the Exfernal World, coming across as “dirty hippies,” or part of a cult. Though the way they dress fits with their environmental thinking, it does not allow for them to be considered as holding legitimate beliefs.

Ecofeminism and Religion

Toby and Ren, the two female protagonists, provide a critical, ultimately ecofeminist lens through which to look at the Gardeners. Primavesi defines an ecofeminist view as “a specific sort of ecology” based off the “relationship between women and Nature” (Primavesi 24). Ecofeminism explores the domination of women and the domination of land in relation to one another. Atwood layers concerns about domination and the origins of it over her concerns about the environment. Her female characters come to shape the belief system of the Gardeners, due to these concerns. Ecofeminist beliefs emerge from the religion, after the male leaders are gone. Particularly under Toby’s guidance, the Gardener religion is repurposed in order to survive after the apocalypse.

Toby and Ren are both pleeblanders, taken in and cared for by the Gardeners, and they both often question many of the Gardeners ideals and actions throughout the novel. While Atwood portrays the Gardeners as models of ecoconsciousness, she builds in just enough skepticism through these characters’ perspectives in order to determine how to truly embrace interconnectedness in an ecofeminist way.

Toby comments on the “tedious” prayers and “scrambled” theology of the Gardeners, asking: “Why be so picky about lifestyle details if you believed everyone would soon be wiped off the face of the planet?” (YF 46-47). Questions like this, that raise very obvious issues of the Gardeners, are asked often by Toby. Atwood chooses two female protagonists to interrogate the values and flaws of the Gardeners because gender conflict permeates their interactions with the Gardeners. Women are included within the

leadership structure of the Gardeners; their leaders are comprised of both men and women, identified as numbered Adams and Eves, “though their numbers indicate...their area of expertise rather than their order of importance” (YF 45). Toby is given the title of “Eve Six,” becoming highly valued within the Gardener community. With this role, she also gains support from female role models and the ability to serve as a role model to other women, like Ren. After Zeb compliments Toby, Ren makes the observation: “It’s kind of shocking to hear Toby called a babe: sort of like calling God a studmuffin” (YF 399). This comment reveals the nature of women’s value in the Gardener community; Toby is so well respected that finding value in her looks seems almost as absurd as thinking that God is important because he’s attractive.

Though the Gardeners preach interconnectedness and aim to have a balanced leadership, they still fall victim to hierarchy, specifically patriarchy. Applying an ecofeminist lens to patriarchy “radica[lly] critiques...prevailing gender hierarchies, which assume that men, by nature, have rights and power over women and the non-human world” (Primavesi 37). The Gardeners aim to remove gender hierarchy within their community, yet they still use “gender-specific language” within their leadership and theology, “which either excludes women or includes them only as part of the male norm” and ultimately “keeps pathogenic hierarchical structures in place” (Primavesi 39). A truly transcendent view of religion, one that views nature as a place to encounter God’s divinity, would see God as “transcendent, above and beyond all gender, concepts and categories” (Primavesi 139). However, the Gardeners still use “male categories *alone*...for God,” while referring to all humankind as “Man,” and placing importance on two male Biblical figures, “Adam” and “Noah,” as models of stewardship (Primavesi

139, YF 90-91). Additionally, using the labels of “Adams and Eves” within their leadership structure, appropriates a problematic Biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden that implies the inferiority of “Eve” to “Adam.” This narrative sustains Adam’s importance, since God created Adam first, and identifies Eve’s role as his helper. Adam One’s sermons often focus on Adam’s relationship with God, but rarely mention Eve’s. Toby recognizes the issues with the Gardener leadership, as she gets used to being a member, “Figuring out the Gardener hierarchy took her some time. Adam One insisted that all Gardeners were equal on the spiritual level, but the same did not hold true of the material one: the Adams and the Eves ranked higher” (YF 45). She questions why, if the Gardeners truly believe in equality, a hierarchal leadership exists at all. Suggested within this recognition too is that Adam One is even higher than the other Adams and Eves, since he is the main male leader who controls the Gardeners’ theology. And though he preaches nature-human interconnectedness, as Toby notes, this seemingly progressive spiritual view falls flat in contrast to his “material” practice of it.

Toby provides a practical lens with which to analyze the Gardeners, and her stream of consciousness is deeply affected by them. From the very start of the novel, Toby’s practicality contrasts with the Gardeners’ eccentricities. The first sentence in which they are introduced in the text isolates their key differences. Toby thinks, “Unlike some of the other Gardeners – the more wild-eyed or possibly overdosed ones – she has never been under the illusion that she can converse with birds” (YF 1). Immediately, Toby distances herself from a typical Gardener way of thinking, indicating the ones she most differs from are those who are “drugged” or “crazy.” Later, the text shows how the Gardeners utilize natural plant toxins, creating elixirs and potions to induce visions and

“out-of-body voyaging substances” for “Vigils” (YF 169). Using drugs like psilocybin mushrooms and poppy plants, the Gardener followers hold Vigils with some frequency. However, Toby is a realist, as opposed to some of the religion’s followers who feel so connected to the Earth and its creatures that they believe they can speak with animals. When she has her first Vigil, and envisions an animal, she merely states: “You are the effect of a carefully calibrated blend of plant toxins” (YF 171). She does not immediately subscribe to Gardener thought, but the fact she contemplates them on the first page of her narrative is significant. The Gardeners often intervene in a deep level of her consciousness, revealing how much of an impact they make on her.

Toby has an extremely difficult life up until she meets the Gardeners. Her mother dies from an unknown sickness and her father commits suicide in the resulting fallout. She hides the evidence and disappears into the pleeblands, burning her identity. She struggles to find work, selling her hair and eggs for money, ending up at a pleebmob business. The Gardeners rescue Toby from the pleeblands, saving her from Blanco, her sexually predatory and violent boss. One of Toby’s former coworkers, a Gardener woman, sends the group to Toby’s work and helps her escape. When the Gardeners first save Toby, she feels overwhelmed with gratitude and exhilaration at her welcome dinner. The garden is safe and beautiful, a sharp contrast to the “torture” that Toby experiences in the Exfernal World (YF 38).

Shortly after her arrival, with her practicality kicking in, Toby steps back and observes her situation, “What was she doing among these friendly though bizarre people, with their wacky religion and – right now – their purple teeth?” (YF 44). While she initially connects to the garden itself, from the start she maintains a skeptical view of the

Gardeners. Yet she feels indebted to them, thinking, “She couldn’t just walk away openly. That would be too blatantly ungrateful: after all, these people had saved her skin” (YF 47). No matter how uncomfortable she feels around them, they are a better alternative to her previous life, and so she stays with them for some time.

The novel opens in “Year Twenty-Five, The Year of the Flood,” first introducing Toby within the time frame of the apocalypse and introducing the Gardeners through Toby’s reflections on the past. Toby remembers Gardener theology: “*Imagine how terrible it would be if there were no death!*” and then immediately questions herself: “Do I still believe this?...Everything is different up close” (YF 1, 4). From the start, the conflict between Gardener theology and Toby’s views is clear. The Gardeners embrace death, viewing it as “purification of the Earth,” which holds true throughout the novel, as they anticipate the coming apocalypse, believing themselves to be the chosen ones who will be left alive (YF 1). Toby has also believed this at one point in her involvement with the Gardeners. As much as she may separate herself from Gardener theology, she owes some of her beliefs and perspectives to their influence. As she begins to question some of those beliefs, she realizes that in the face of death, beliefs can quickly change. This realization is important for understanding the world of the apocalypse and the way destruction forces people’s beliefs to adapt for survival.

Toby’s adaptation of Gardener theology proves necessary, as she struggles for survival in the apocalypse. She is alone in the AnooYoo Spa, her place of work, where she locks herself inside when the apocalypse hits. When Toby finds three pigs digging near the garden fence at the Spa, she ultimately shoots one, inciting her to reflect on Gardener theology. The inner dialogue between herself and Adam One’s teachings

grapples with this killing. She knows that Adam One would say, “They’re God’s Creatures. Never kill without just cause” (YF 18). Hesitating, she holds fire, until she convinces herself it is self-defense through saving her long-term food supply, and she shoots the boar. Immediately after, she argues with herself: “You’ve acted rashly and from anger. You ought to feel guilty. Still, she thinks of going out with one of the kitchen knives and sawing off a ham” (YF 19). She is unsure of how to feel in this moment of crisis, conflicted between Gardener teachings and her impulses. Though she’s running low on food supplies, she’s still holding on to the “Vegivows” she took while she was a Gardener. She recites the standard Gardener apology, but she “doesn’t feel apologetic...enough” (YF 19). Toby’s thoughts are riddled with contrasts between her rational desire to survive and her emotional desire to adhere to the Gardeners’ belief system.

It is evident, though, that Toby benefits from a particular set of skills taught within the Gardener community that allow her to remain alive. She understands how to garden, forage for food, and use herbal medicines, which are all important means of acquiring resources. Practical tools of gardening and living off the land are essential in a post-apocalyptic world. Teaching survival skills is at the forefront of the Gardeners’ practice of their religion. With classes like “Culinary Arts,” “Holistic Healing with Plant Remedies,” “Predator-Prey Relationships,” “Animal Camouflage,” and “Emergency Medical,” the focus on surviving off the environment is evident (YF 61). The Gardeners teach their followers how to glean specific resources from the land, like the “bark of the Willow in respect of pains and fevers,” and prompt them to memorize “the names of the Plants, and their seasons, and the locations in which they may be found” (YF 126). Their

reverence of nature is wrapped up in a survivalist focus that shapes their theology and practices.

Some critics of the Gardener religion view their survival skills as the only beneficial aspect of their religion. In the “The Comic Apocalypse of *The Year of the Flood*,” Hope Jennings describes the God’s Gardeners as “a radical cult of wilderness survivalists,” and claims that, though “they are clearly the only ones best equipped to endure the deprivations and dangers of the ‘new world,’ Atwood does not expect us to take seriously, or even accept, their version of environmental apocalypticism” (Jennings 13). Jennings argues that the “muddled rationale” of Adam One’s “scriptural exegesis” is all in service of his “radical environmental agenda” (Jennings 14). While her interpretation of both Adam One’s theology and the skills that equip the Gardeners for survival is accurate, there is more at play within the conflict between theology and survival. The Gardeners can be read as more active than Jennings makes them out to be. She sets up a weak argument for the Gardeners’ passivity, citing their view of interconnectedness and not wanting to destroy Creation, as “amount[ing] to...car[ing] more for the suffering of fish than people” and results in them “turn[ing] towards a blank or nihilistic apocalypticism: ‘We find the Sky an empty void,/The Universe a blank’ (YF 198)” (Jennings 14). This quote comes from the Gardeners’ hymn “Oh Lord, You Know Our Foolishness.” When placed in context, the excerpt is about the foolishness that results from doubting God’s Love, therefore resulting in the incorrect belief that the Sky is empty. When Adam One exclaims: “How much have we lost, dear fellow mammals and Fellow Mortals! How much have we wilfully destroyed! How much do we need to restore, within ourselves!” (YF 13), Jennings concedes that the Gardeners have “a

reasonable point here, one that underlies the majority of environmental discourses and Atwood's own view that we are bringing ourselves to the brink of destruction through our own willfully destructive actions" (Jennings 13). She takes issue, however, with how the Gardeners have no other solution than "a complete cataclysm that will cleanse the world and humanity of its degenerative decay, leaving in its wake a new world set aside especially for the chosen believers" (Jennings 13). The Gardeners are active in preparing for the apocalypse. They look forward to the destruction not to "passively stand...by as witnesses to its annihilation," but as an opportunity to restore the Earth in a meaningful, ecologically conscious way. Adam One's theology, no matter how "muddled" it may be, is then necessary to some degree for imparting the seriousness of environmental destruction to his followers.

In "Survival in the Post-Apocalypse: Ecofeminism in *MaddAddam*," Anna Bedford makes the point that "from an ecological view, eliminating the human population, along with their violent ways of interacting with the world, is not a tragedy, and can only be dystopian from an anthropocentric perspective" (Bedford 88). The Gardeners seem to hold a deep ecological standpoint, countering an anthropocentric view that regards humans at the center of existence. Deep ecology, as defined by Michael Zimmerman, in "Feminism, Deep Ecology, and Environmental Ethics," "maintains that the humanity-nature relation" can only be transformed "with the elimination of the anthropocentric world view that portrays humanity itself as the source of all value and that depicts nature solely as raw material for human purposes" (Zimmerman 169). The Gardeners' theology aligns with deep ecology, yet it is in this identification that its flaws are realized. The Gardeners have difficulty reconciling their responsibility as stewards

with their goals of nature-human interconnectedness. As noted, the Gardeners' hierarchical leadership is problematic, as well as having humans at the center of their religion, praising Saints and Biblical figures, like Adam and Noah. These aspects of their religion do not fit alongside a progressive ideology that values nonanthropocentrism.

An ecofeminist critique of deep ecology raises concerns of it as an “inadequate means for ending the human domination of nature” with its focus on “*human-centeredness*, instead of...male-centeredness (*androcentrism*)” as harmful views (Zimmerman 169). Whereas, “a truly ‘deep’ ecology would have to be informed by the insights of eco-feminists, who link the male domination of nature with the male domination of woman” (Zimmerman 169). Ecofeminism’s criticism of the shortcomings of deep ecology fit with Atwood’s skeptical portrayal of the Gardeners and necessitates her inclusion of female perspective.

The difference between ecofeminism and deep ecology is important within the text’s survival narrative. Bedford suggests that within Atwood’s texts, “ecofeminist ethics and practices are key to surviving the apocalypse—for human and non-human alike” (Bedford 71). Specifically, an ecofeminist vision that has a spiritual component is necessary for survival. Those who survive “are connected beings, part of caring communities, or, in ecofeminist terms, ‘selves in relation’” (Bedford 85). The term “self in relation” is repurposed from Val Plumwood’s ecofeminist reimagination of deep ecology’s definition of the “ecological self,” which Plumwood establishes in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Plumwood interprets the “ecological self...as a form of mutual selfhood in which the self makes essential connection to Earth others, and hence is a product of a certain sort of relational identity” (Plumwood 85). The idea of self in relation

is important to surviving the apocalypse, because it establishes the self as deeply connected to the environment and community. This definition connects to Toby's spiritual experiences rooted in the environment, that allow her to survive. The concept also details the caring communities that both foster and stem from selves in relation. Relations to the environment and to others may "be those of care, custodian, friendship, or various diverse virtue concepts, to that other, who is treated as deserving of concern for its own sake, and hence as intrinsically worthy or valuable" (Plumwood 85). These relations come into play later, as Toby rebuilds society after her survival, operating from her self in relation to create a caring, diverse community rooted in the environment.

Survival and Religion

Atwood has concerned herself with survival throughout her works, and has written a survey of Canadian literature, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, as evidence of her fascination with this theme. She states how "a preoccupation with one's survival is necessarily also a preoccupation with the obstacles to that survival...the obstacles tend to become harder to identify and more internal," and this view underlies Atwood's exploration of survival in her *MaddAddam* trilogy. She focuses on the effect of survival on people both externally and internally (S Atwood 33). The internal obstacles, she notes, "are no longer obstacles to physical survival but obstacles to what we may call spiritual survival, to live as anything more than a minimally human being" (S Atwood 33). Through this lens, *MaddAddam* can be situated as the search for spiritual survival within the demand for physical survival.

Survivalism is first introduced when Toby arrives at the Edencliff Rooftop Garden, after being rescued by the Gardeners. She immediately is in awe, and it is a very spiritual moment: “She gazed around it in wonder: it was so beautiful...Each petal and leaf was fully alive, shining with awareness of her. Even the air of the Garden was different” (YF 43). Her reaction is highly emotional, and she finds “herself crying with relief and gratitude” and she feels as if “a large, benevolent hand had reached down and picked her up, and was holding her safe” (YF 43). She later recognizes the moment as “being flooded with the Light of God’s Creation” (YF 43). This moment exposes the deeply spiritual connection that Toby has to the Garden itself, and her association of it to safety. She connects her physical survival to this spiritual moment, and as she continues among the Gardeners, she recognizes just how much she associates the physical with the spiritual. The most valuable thing that she gleans from the Gardeners is this spiritual survival that sustains her will to live, even in the midst of destruction. Her spiritual survival is also crucial to how she rebuilds the world after destruction, giving her the building blocks for structuring a new community.

When Toby feels connected to the Garden, she places herself in relation to the Gardener community, gaining her further support both physically and spiritually. Toby primarily gains a mentor through Pilar, the original Eve Six, who guides her spiritually. While her views on God remain ambiguous, she often looks to Pilar and the bees that Pilar introduces her to for comfort. Pilar tells her, “You can always tell the bees your troubles” and though she “initially feels foolish,” Toby eventually keeps coming back to the bees (YF 99-100). Directly after Pilar’s death, Toby visits the bees, feeling a sense of responsibility to continue Pilar’s relationship with them. In times of great distress, Toby

gains comfort from talking to the bees, “‘Stand by me,’ she said to the bees. ‘Be my messengers,’ As if they could hear” (YF 254). Even though her skepticism pervades at first, she slowly stops feeling foolish talking to them and begins to accept the bees as a source of support when nothing else remains. It is important then, that when Blanco later attacks the Garden, the bees are the ones that protect Toby. She uses them as a line of defense, knocking down their hive. Afterward she notes, “they’d sacrificed many of their own in the battle” (YF 255). In this instance, these spiritual entities for her act as a source of her physical protection.

When Toby talks to the bees, “She always [finds] herself using a formal style with the bees” (YF 258). Her formality indicates that Toby has a level of respect for the bees, linking them to Pilar and the respect she had for her as a role model. Her talks with the bees resemble a form of prayer for Toby, indicating their role as a form of God. Much later, after everything is destroyed, Toby’s hope is attached to the bees. She wakes to a bee crawling on the sill of the spa, and she whispers to it to send help from the Spirits, thinking: “Superstition, she knows that; yet she feels oddly encouraged” (YF 319). She begins to buy into her own beliefs, including the comfort and familiarity that the bees bring to her even in a world of destruction. Throughout the establishment of the new community, Toby continually seeks out Pilar and the bees’ spiritual guidance. When Zeb says, “First you talk to bees, now you want to talk to dead people? Even the Gardeners never went that far,” Toby says, “Think of it as a metaphor” (M 219). Her spiritual connection to the bees and to a female Gardener indicates Toby’s progressive ecofeminist beliefs. Unlike the Gardeners who maintain a patriarchal view of God, Toby turns to a

female mentor and nature as her forms of God. She uses her belief in these entities to help her survive spiritually and physically.

Toby grapples with her spiritual and physical needs for survival often, and this is particularly seen in her vision of a liobam. When Adam One approaches Toby about being an Eve, she responds: “I can’t accept. To be a full-fledged Eve...it would be hypocritical,” and cites her uncertainty of belief in the Gardener religion (YF 168). Adam One responds that in the Gardener religion, “action precedes faith” and that as long as she acts “as if” she believes, true “belief will follow in time” (YF 168). Toby feels conflicted about the difference between belief and action, her spiritual and physical means of survival. She recognizes the Gardeners theological contradictions on this matter. Adam One asks her to do an “overnight Vigil” and “pray for the strength” to face her “doubts and fears” (YF 169). The vision she has of a liobam perfectly represents her dual nature. The liobam is a genetically spliced lion-sheep creature that was “commissioned by the Lion Isaiahists...to fulfill the lion/lamb friendship prophecy” (YF 94). The animals are both gentle and strong, appearing tame from the outside, but able to devour any prey. The vision “highlight[s] Toby’s ability to hold two perspectives at once,” and alludes to both her peaceful Gardener tendencies and her strength to fight to survive (Osborne 36). The duality of the liobam indicates that the spiritual and the physical, belief and action, are equally as important in terms of Toby’s ability to survive. At the end of the text, Toby recognizes the strength liobams lend, when she prays to them among other animals in a time of need. She thinks, “What Saint should I call upon? Who has the resolution and the skill? The ruthlessness. The judgment. The accuracy,” and she prays, “Dear Leopard, dear Wolf, dear Liobam: lend me your Spirits now” (YF 415). This prayer fits into her

ecofeminist belief system as well, highlighting her decentering of humans and calling upon animals. Significantly, she prays to both a genetically engineered animal and natural animals, indicating how, in a post-apocalyptic world, she must bridge both the natural and artificial elements of the world to establish a new community.

In *The Year of the Flood*, Atwood explores this post-apocalyptic world, speculating on what would theoretically remain and what one would need to survive and rebuild. Through this exploration she reveals that religion, or some form of spiritual belief system, is necessary for survival. It is significant that she chooses two female protagonists to relay this issue as they move away from patriarchy, especially in the context of religion. Jennings notes that Atwood is “offer[ing] a ‘feminine’ vision, or revelation...grounded in a (skeptical) faith in the possibility of human survival and/or redemption” (Jennings 16). The “feminine vision” she points out is necessarily a revision of the patriarchal religion the Gardeners perpetuate. Atwood grapples with how her characters view their survival and how their motivations are connected to spiritual belief. The Gardeners help frame Toby and Ren’s belief systems, but the women use their interpretations of Gardener teachings in order to structure their thoughts.

The drafts of *The Year of the Flood* manuscripts contain much insight into how Atwood developed the issue of survival and the Gardeners’ influence on Ren and Toby. Located in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto, the Margaret Atwood Papers include 474 boxes and items. Collection 595, Boxes 1-11 primarily contain *The Year of the Flood* manuscript drafts dating from September 2006 until its release date in 2009. The second chapter of the book – Ren’s introduction section – dramatically changed from its first draft to the final product, ultimately ending

with less focus on the Gardeners and more concern with herself. Ultimately, looking at the evolution of Atwood's writing, as well as Ren's writing, is important in understanding how writing functions in post-apocalyptic worlds as a way to revise and move forward.

In the published novel, the chapter begins with: "*Beware of words. Be careful what you write. Leave no trails.*" This is what the Gardeners taught us, when I was a child among them" (YF 6). Ren's tone is very matter-of-fact, and she is primarily concerned with writing now that the Waterless Flood has hit. Despite the Adams and Eves claiming that writing is "dangerous," she feels that any writing is safe now, because most people are dead. What she chooses to write is her name, "Ren," which she has "written...a lot of times" (YF 6). She then describes the situation she is in: she's trapped inside of the "Sticky Zone," a sealed off room for potentially contaminated dancers at Scales and Tails, a dance and sex club. She feels "lucky...really very lucky" to have survived the Waterless Flood, seeing her survival thus far as a series of fortunate circumstances. At the end of her chapter, she thinks about Zeb and Toby, the people who have made her feel secure in her life. She specifically considers Toby, thinking, "She was so tough and hard – but if you're drowning, a soft squashy thing is no good to hold on to. You need something more solid" (YF 8).

This version of the chapter situates three important elements related to Ren and her survival. The first, is the matter of writing, which can be viewed as a form of survival and rebuilding. This theme comes back later, particularly in *MaddAddam*. There is a conflict between the Gardeners' fear of words and Ren's current use of writing as a way to be sure of herself and her existence. It is significant that she "can write down anything

[she] wants,” and chooses to write her name; this act indicates the importance of her sense of self to her current state (YF 6). It alludes to the Biblical idea of “naming” as existing, as seen when Adam names the animals, which the Gardeners preach: “To Name is...to draw another towards one’s self” (YF 12). It is also an implied act of defiance against the Gardeners, since she goes against “what the Gardeners taught” (YF 6). She also seems to accept that most people are dead – at least, those “who would have [her writing] against [her]” (YF 6). The second element of the chapter, is the relation of “luck” to Ren’s current existence. Though Ren mentions the Gardeners, and the Spirit, she does not attribute her survival to God. Instead, she is grateful for Scales and Tails and the fact that their emphasis on safety and allowed her to stay alive. Her gratitude to others connects to the third element of her survival, which is the people who make her feel secure. She then thinks about three people, two of which were Gardener leaders: Zeb and Toby. Immediately, Toby is set up as a “solid” presence in Ren’s life; Ren notes that when “you’re drowning” you need someone like that “to hold on to,” identifying Toby as a necessity for survival (YF 8).

Ren is more direct and purposeful in the earlier drafts, whereas her narrative in the final version is more subtle and introduces a number of ideas that are explored later in the novel. Ren, in this final version, is quite calm about her situation, willingly accepting the fact that she is locked inside of a room with a dwindling food supply. It is not until more than halfway through the novel where she thinks about the moment she had to tell herself “not to panic” and that “it was just a matter of waiting it out” in order to get out (YF 282). When she ultimately realizes that no one would be letting her out anytime soon, she determines to “take one day at a time” and “be practical” in order to plan out

her meals (YF 283). As reassurance, she thinks: “You create your own reality, the horoscopes always said, and the Gardeners said that too” (YF 284). Here, she recognizes horoscopes first, then the Gardeners, which diminishes their importance to her. She also recognizes her ability to control the situation, relying on herself to survive.

The character in the earlier drafts is much more direct and purposeful – questioning why she is alive and considerably dwelling on writing a message. In an early word processed draft of *The Year of the Flood*, at the beginning with no name attributed to the inner dialogue, Atwood wrote: “What have I been saved alive? I’ve been saved alive for a reason. I must have been. For a purpose, for some important mission, to transmit a message. But then anyone in my situation would think that. What is my situation? What indeed is my message?” (YF MS 1.3, 595). On the document, the questions “What have I been saved alive?” and “What is my situation?” are crossed out, and the last question “What indeed is my message?” is both written in and crossed out. Atwood crucially starts out the thought process of her female protagonist with asking the purpose of her survival. Essentially, Atwood asks herself why her female character has been saved alive: What is significant about her survival and what is her message?

In a presumably later version, Atwood furthers her character’s fixation on survival, this time identifying her as Brenda, and tying in the Gardener perspective. Brenda thinks:

If I were still a God’s Gardener - if I still believed all those things they taught us - I’d have to assume I’ve been saved alive for a special purpose. Why do I find myself sitting comfortably in this place of refuge while millions of other people have drowned in the Waterless Flood? I can’t put

it down to my virtuousness, since I'm not lacking in any of the ordinary bad qualities I can think of. I know how the Gardeners would frame it.

Brenda, it is your duty to be a Messenger, like the one in the Book of Job, who arrives from a scene of complete and total destruction and declares, I only am escaped alone to tell thee. This is what you must do. You must be our Messenger to the Future. This is why you've been Chosen. (YF MS 1.6, 595)

The Gardeners pervade Ren's, or Brenda's, thoughts here more than the final draft. In this iteration of the character, Ren does not associate as a God's Gardener, nor believe "all those things" they taught her. This distinction is important, because it reveals a point where Atwood had Ren very explicitly detach herself from the Gardeners. This way of thinking about the Gardeners is similar to how Toby, in the final version, thinks about them. Ren is very clearly influenced by them, but her skeptical view contrasts with "how the Gardeners would frame" or consider an issue. Atwood builds on the question of why this specific young woman has been saved alive, by ruling out "virtuousness" as a reason why she has survived. The idea of being saved as a result of virtue is what the Gardeners preach when they claim they will "survive to replenish the Earth," exempting themselves from the destruction of the Waterless Flood, because they fully believe they are God's chosen ones (YF 47). Using this perspective of Ren, Atwood responds by saying that "virtue" is not an element for survival, though the Gardeners would think that to be alive, is to be Chosen. The Biblical reference here is important, as well, because Atwood reimagines a male Biblical character, Job, as a female, Ren. It also connects the idea that there is a specific purpose to destruction, a meaning that only the Messenger or lone

survivor must discern. This version places more weight on Ren as a survivor. She is special, and like Job, alone in her duty as Messenger. She does not attribute her survival to anyone but herself, nor think of anyone other than herself. By removing this way of thinking in the final version, Atwood writes a more ecofeminist character who does not dwell on self-importance like the Gardeners.

The way she thinks about writing changes throughout the drafts. In Box 5, for example, before she thinks “I can write down anything I want,” Ren thinks, “I have nothing more to fear from them, I’m free to break the rules” (YF MS 5.3, 595). In this version, as opposed to the final, she aligns herself with the Gardeners’ fear of words, since no longer having “nothing more to fear” indicates she once feared words also. Her rebellion against the Gardeners is clearer, specifying that she is “break[ing] the rules” by writing. The fact that she would say this instead of “there are no more rules” is interesting, as well, as it implies the rules still exist even though she later writes that “the Adams and Eves are surely dead” (YF MS 5.3, 595).

A critical difference between this draft version and the novel is that after Ren says she “can write down anything [she] wants,” she does not write her name, but instead “think[s] of what [she] might write, supposing [she] had anything to write with” and starts: “*Dear Adams, Dear Eves...I haven’t seen you for a long time, but I’ve thought of you often*” (YF MS 5.3, 595). This change is important, as it highlights the evolution of Ren’s character from not identifying with the Gardeners in the prior draft, to placing importance on the Adams and Eves in this draft, to ultimately ending up with a greater focus on herself and a subtler mention of the Gardeners’ influence. She continues her imaginary letter by outlining what she would want to “set down” – the “Edencliff

Rooftop Garden, and the Festivals, and the hymns,” before moving into “how [she] left the Gardeners, and about Jimmy...then about how [she] ended up dancing at Scales” (YF MS 5.3, 595). In this draft, the impact of the Gardeners on Ren is more vital than Ren’s experiences outside of them and her sense of self, since they are the first thing she wants to write about. This revision is part of Atwood’s process of determining how to shape the character. Is she going to primarily focus on the Gardeners through Ren or will Ren be at the center of her own story? The imaginary letter serves as an outline for how the final version of the novel eventually ends up laying out Ren’s story, starting with the Gardeners and ending up at Scales and Tails, but ultimately prioritizing Ren’s version of her experiences and her own sense of self.

Ren worries that her “letter would be a letter to nobody” since “the Adams and the Eves are surely dead,” more explicitly doubting they are alive than in the final version, which only mentions enemies being most likely dead (YF MS 5.3, 595). In the final version of the novel, Ren’s calmness is more convincing, because she still hopes that the Adams and Eves are alive and will find her. In this version, however, she is more desperate. She finishes her letter, “*Dear Adams, Dear Eves, forgive me, I would write. Please don’t be angry with me: this writing can’t hurt anybody now,*” thinking, “That’s what I would say to you. And then I’d add: *I don’t want to be dead*” (YF MS 5.3, 595). Again, there is a level of fear here with regards to the Gardeners’ “rules” about writing, and she still seeks their forgiveness, despite consciously disregarding their beliefs, which adds to the conflict of her character. Her final line, “*I don’t want to be dead*” is more direct than anything in the final version’s introduction. This statement carries much more weight here than when Ren says it in the final version much later into the text, in the

moment she realizes she is locked into the Sticky Zone: “But now I was locked inside, with no one to let me out. *Oh please*, I thought. *I don’t want to be dead*” (YF 281). There is a lack of assertiveness in this use of the sentence. Instead, she says it in a dejected way, as a reaction to her immediate circumstance. However, in the draft, she is claiming her existence and it can be read much more confidently, as if she is fighting for her life.

In Master Copy 3, dated February 2008, likely a closer version to the final novel, Ren’s concern with writing a letter to the Adams and Eves is still present. She changes her apology after asking the Adams and Eves to forgive her: “*I was thoughtless. I put too much trust in material things. I ignored your warnings, and I laughed at you and made fun of you. Yet I have come to value what you taught me. So please don’t be angry with me,*” and still finishing with, “*I don’t want to be dead*” (YF MS 7.1, 595). Atwood adds more to Ren’s feeling of guilt, berating herself for ignoring Gardener teachings. The addition of the line, “I have come to value what you taught me,” is of great importance, because it indicates the answer to a major question: Does Atwood expect the reader to value what the Gardeners teach? Clearly, yes, because Ren does. Though this line is not included in the novel, its message remains, especially when the published version of the novel is read in relation to earlier drafts.

Compared to different drafts of the novel, another critical moment appears in this draft identifying a clear distinction between Adam One and Toby, and the way they convey a fundamental belief. In this version of her letter, after she writes about “the Edencliff Rooftop Garden...Festivals...and the hymns,” Ren simply says she will include “what happened to [her] afterwards...put[ting] in the bad stuff as well” (YF MS 7.1, 595). She thinks: “I know you wouldn’t approve of it, but you used to say, *Ren, every life is a*

precious gift. Nuala used to say that. Adam One used to say, *No one is insignificant*. And Toby used to say, *Stiffen your spine: we are all vertebrates here, even you, Ren. Try to remember that*. And I am trying” (YF MS 7.1, 595). The difference between these phrases is significant, underlining the difference between the Gardener leaders, especially Adam One and Toby. Adam One, true to his teachings, summarizes the Gardener belief that all of God’s Creation is equal, thereby saying that everyone is significant. Everyone certainly includes the moles, beetles, snakes, etc. that he praises in his sermons. Toby’s saying emphasizes her toughness, telling Ren to “stiffen [her] spine” and sounding very rigid herself.

The contrast between Adam One and Toby extends deeper than just their approaches to communication, there is a contest between how each one’s vision of religion plays into survivalist ideas. Both of these characters are important leaders within the Gardener community, but only Toby survives as a spiritual leader in the new world, in charge of a community that combines all forms of existence: Gardeners, MaddAddamites, Crakers, Pigoons, and Painballers. Her survival stems from her inherent connection to nature, her ecofeminist self in relation, and she leads this new community based off of this connection. Her ecofeminist viewpoint fits well with a religion that takes nature into account. Adam One, however, created the Gardeners as a response to his father’s religion and role as a preacher, and less because of his own spiritual connection to Earth, which Atwood outlines in *MaddAddam*. Toby’s belief system is more authentic, because she connects to nature first, and then factors in the religious aspects later. She is shown interacting with the land first and foremost, whereas Adam One is only show proselytizing and never portrayed with a spiritual interaction with nature. Since Toby’s

belief system is more authentic, she is positioned as the rightful spiritual leader of the post-apocalyptic world, a direct and honest leadership. She is able to establish a truly interconnected community, both non-anthropocentric and non-patriarchal, because she values ecofeminist principles in a genuine way. Her version of religion becomes a necessity for this new society in the wake of the apocalypse.

The *Year of the Flood* ends with Toby observing a Gardener Feast – Saint Julian and All Souls – that emphasizes forgiveness. She asks the group to be “grateful for this food” and “remember those who are gone,” and utilizing similar language to Adam One, she asks “Dear Adams, dear Eves, dear Fellow Mammals and Fellow Creatures, all those now in Spirit” to lend their strength (YF 431). Toby gleans her strength from her community that combines humans and nonhumans. She is able to effectively communicate with this diverse group, brokering a peace with the Pigoons and teaching the Crakers.

The Crakers and the way Toby shapes them are an important ending for *MaddAddam*, revealing the relationship between environmentalism and religion. They are created for environmental reasons, as a self-sustaining species specifically designed without capability for abstract thought. However, they ultimately develop a religion from Toby’s repurposed teachings. Toby teaches the Crakers their origin story, using Oryx and Crake as symbols, and she still continues certain Gardener feasts and celebrations. *MaddAddam* opens with her telling the Crakers their origin story with a play off the start to the Biblical Creation story, “In the beginning, you lived inside the Egg” (M 3). She values structure and purpose, and it is clear that the organizing aspect of religion is important to her, and is necessary for the Gardeners to have. She teaches Blackbeard, a

young Craker, how to write as a way to continue a valuable structure of existence, rewriting the past and building the future. Therefore, a female synthesis of the Gardener religion is what remains at the end, continued through a newly established community and solidified through Toby's influence on the Crakers. The trilogy ends with Blackbeard writing "The Story of Toby," and she becomes a spiritual figure within it, because of this, Toby is the last human with the last word, with human-Craker hybrid children continuing into the future

Rewriting Religion

For women who are survivalists, issues of environmentalism and religion often emerge in conjunction with rebuilding the world, showing that an ecofeminist belief system must be embedded in religion. The apocalyptic fictions of *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* by Octavia Butler and *Into the Forest* by Jean Hegland center female protagonists in the process of survival and world rebuilding. Both texts embrace ecofeminist concerns, erasing patriarchy to construct new, diverse communities. Moving away from hierarchal structures allows their established communities to thrive and become truly interdependent with nature.

These fictions alongside Atwood's trilogy reveal ecofeminist religion as an essential component of restructuring society. In order to move forward, their female characters rewrite patriarchal religions and Biblical narratives, repurposing them for their own use. Their revision of the past through writing passes on their belief systems into the future and imagines a world that values their ecofeminist ideals.

Butler and Hegland's apocalyptic works exist within a similar society as Atwood's trilogy, one where "patriarchal violence has denigrated nature and women's bodies" (Hutner 77). Heidi Hutner, in her chapter in *Women Writing Nature: A Feminist View*, compares the *Parable* texts with *Into the Forest* and explores the ecofeminist views inherent to the utopias they create, describing them as "feminized Edens" (Hutner 77). These "feminized Edens" result from the characters' responses to patriarchal power imbalances, and Butler and Hegland represent them in their female protagonists' use of nature to build community. Similarly, in Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, the community ends as a "feminized Eden." Toby is the female leader of a diverse community where humans and nonhumans exist side by side and her community is created out of a formerly patriarchal religion, just as Butler and Hegland's characters build new communities out of patriarchal systems in order to survive.

Butler deliberately crafts a new religion out of a patriarchal belief system. Lauren Olamina, the protagonist in *Parable of the Sower*, creates her religion "Earthseed" in response to her Baptist minister father's beliefs. His religion relies on patriarchally established power inside the church and this hierarchy extends into the home. Lauren's divergence from her father's religion is established as the impetus for her new faith when she states, "My father's God stopped being my God. His church stopped being my church" (PS 7). She does not believe in a "big-daddy-God," or any gendered version of God (PS 15). Lauren rejects both a patriarchal father figure and a patriarchal Christian religion. Despite theological incompatibility, Lauren respects her father, just as Toby respects Adam One, saying, "My father has his blind spots...He's the best person I know, but even he has blind spots" (PS 57). Lauren feels that her father focuses too heavily on

theology, and not enough on concrete action. When he preaches from Genesis six on Noah and the ark, he “focus[es] on the two-part nature of this situation. God decides to destroy everything except Noah, his family, and some animals,” but Lauren points out “if Noah is going to be saved, he has plenty of hard work to do” (PS 67-68). Lauren focuses on the process of rebuilding after destruction, rather than who will be doing it. She knows that in order to survive destruction, there must be “hard work,” and she yearns for specific knowledge that will contribute to her survival. Her father, however, concentrates solely on the destruction and Noah’s role as the chosen survivor. Noah’s story, mentioned in the Gardener faith, is a common Biblical reference in the midst of an apocalyptic narrative. He serves as a significant model particularly for religious men, whereas women are excluded from this male-centric narrative. Atwood takes the same message of Noah as the “chosen one” for survival with Adam One using him as an example of the Gardeners’ role in rebuilding the world. However, like Lauren, the Gardeners focus on the “hard work” that will need to be done in order to survive.

Just as tension exists between Toby’s survival narrative and Gardener theology, a similar tension occurs for Lauren. After the destruction of her neighborhood and her familiar world, a young man asks Lauren if stealing bothers her. She responds, “I mean to survive,” before he quotes “Thou shalt not steal” (PS 172). Lauren immediately “smother[s] a flash of anger before [she] answer[s],” thinking, “He wasn’t my father. He had no business quoting scripture at me” (PS 172). She responds again, “I said I mean to survive...Don’t you?” (PS 172). This conversation identifies Lauren’s priority for survival, and her recognition that survival is rooted in a functionalist adaptability that

directly opposes her father's static theology and the behavioral guidelines associated with patriarchal power.

Lauren sources her belief system from her experiences through a deep connection to the environment, just like Toby. Lauren's early vision of her religion elucidates these elements:

I am Earthseed. Anyone can be. Someday, I think there will be a lot of us. And I think we'll have to seed ourselves farther and farther from this dying place. I've never felt that I was making any of this up—not the name, Earthseed, not any of it. I mean, I've never felt that it was anything other than real: discovery rather than invention, exploration rather than creation...All I do is observe and take notes, trying to put things down in ways that are as powerful, as simple, and as direct as I feel them. (PS 76)

Her religion is intrinsic to her being, not invented or based on anything, and she emphasizes “discovery” and “exploration” (PS 76). Her beliefs are natural and personal. Her perspective is the basis of her ideas. She observes the world around her, writing down her theology as simply and directly as possible. Lauren connects people to seed, professing that humans (particularly women) are supposed to be reproducing and seeding the land, that they cannot thrive in toxic environments, or “dying places,” and that society should be constantly moving and growing. With this definition of Lauren's religious followers, Butler postulates that religion and the community it creates are inherent to the custodianship of the land.

Butler links belief and survival through Lauren's use of Earthseed as her motivation to forge a new ecofeminist community among a crumbling society. She

isolates both the individual experience of belief and the communal “self in relation” that Atwood also does with Toby (Bedford 185). Lauren’s belief is more explicit, but the concept of belief in *something* as a driving force to survive is the same. Lauren says, “When my father...disappeared...it was Earthseed that kept me going. When most of my community and the rest of my family were wiped out, and I was alone, I still had Earthseed. What I am now, all that I am now is Earthseed” (PS 262). When Lauren’s community is gone, when everything has been destroyed, what remains is her belief in Earthseed and her belief in what she can build out of her religion. Her physical survival depends on her spiritual survival. For Lauren and Toby, women who rebuild their worlds after catastrophe, part of what they rebuild is a spiritual experience. Their spiritual survival is important as a means of hope in the future, and as the structure on which they rebuild their society.

Just as Toby finds hope through the environment, using bees as reminders of comfort, Lauren finds hope through her belief system founded in nature. The strong ecofeminist beliefs these women hold enable them to become leaders of new communities that incorporate a necessary spiritual connection to the environment in order to survive. But, as Lauren writes in “Earthseed: The Books of the Living,” “Belief will not save you./Only actions/Guided and shaped/By belief and knowledge/Will save you./Belief/Initiates and guides action—/Or it does nothing” (PT 348). In contrast to the male religious leaders in these texts, Lauren’s father and Adam One, Lauren and Toby’s spiritual beliefs guide them to action and equips them for physical survival. Butler also specifies “knowledge” alongside belief as a guiding force of action. As related to survival, knowledge of the land and survival skills to live off the land is essential.

Lauren and Toby's abilities to adapt quickly and repurpose their beliefs to suit their survivalist needs are inherent to their success. Lauren's whole theology is "God is Change," which allows her to constantly modify her beliefs. She includes the notion of learning from the past in her written theology, "To survive,/Let the past/Teach you-/Past customs,/Struggles,/Leaders and thinkers./Let/These/Help you./Let them inspire you,/Warn you,/Give you strength./But beware:/God is Change/Past is past" (PT 376).

Lauren recognizes that she can grow alongside knowledge of the past, and that she cannot survive in stagnant tradition. She worships change, which comes to mean a revision of the past in order to shape a community in the new world. Her continual rewriting of religion allows her to constantly move forward and focus on what the ideal future world looks like.

Lauren establishes growth as the foundation of her new community, saying, "We might be able to do it – grow our own food, grow ourselves and our neighbors into something brand new" (PS 224). She connects the act of growing food, individual growth, and communal growth as necessary components for creating "something brand new" and tying together her ecofeminist belief system with her devotion to change. As Michael McCormack writes, in "Your God is a Racist, Sexist, Homophobic, and a Misogynist...Our God is Change," "Lauren's conviction that 'God is Change' leads her to a non-dogmatic practice of religion that is more interested in forming small, tightly knit communities of mutual support," while also attempting to "resist the rigidity and repression of organized religion" (McCormack 21). As Lauren moves farther from previous rigid concepts of religion, she focuses on the people themselves linked together by a spiritual bond that brings them closer to nature. She writes that Earthseed is

“learning to live in partnership with one another...and at the same time working out a sustainable partnership with our environment. It’s about treating education and adaptability as the absolute essentials that they are” (PT 359). Lauren outlines the vital tenets of establishing her community and introduces a new idea of “partnership” that extends beyond humans and into the environment.

Growth from the past is significant to Toby, as she figures out how to repurpose Gardener teachings for her own use in her new community. At the beginning of *MaddAddam*, she feels that, “Once the Gardener Adams and Eves taught you something, you stayed taught” (M 10). She quickly realizes that not all of the Gardener teachings will be beneficial in this new world, when due to her recognition of the “God’s Gardeners Feast of Saint Julian and All Souls: a celebration of God’s tenderness and compassion for all creatures,” she loses the captured Painballers because she did not want to kill them. As the novel progresses, she remembers Gardener invocations, Feasts, Festivals, but she notes, “There would be no point in being a Gardener now: the enemies of God’s Natural Creation no longer exist, and the animals and birds – those that did not become extinct under the human domination of the planet – are thriving unchecked. Not to mention the plant life” (M 209). Her past with the Gardeners “inspires” her and “give[s] [her] strength,” but she also recognizes change in relation to the environment. She makes changes to the Gardener calendar as she incorporates the diversity of the new community, “adding the Pigoons to the regular calendar of Gardener feasts” (M 379). For Toby, maintaining the Gardener calendar is necessary as a means of structure, yet her act of building on it allows her to reinterpret and rewrite what is important in her new community.

As Lauren and Toby integrate diverse members in their growing communities, they abandon the hierarchal structures of the past, dissolve the patriarchy, and repurpose a new kind of human collective. For, as Lauren writes in *Earthseed*, “Embrace diversity/Or be destroyed” (PS 196). Lauren’s community contains a multiplicity of race, gender, sexuality, and age, and Toby’s community additionally includes non-humans. Plumwood’s self in relation calls for the necessary recognition of diversity among community: “Respect for others involves acknowledging their distinctness and difference, and not trying to reduce or assimilate them to the human sphere. We need to acknowledge difference as well as continuity...to establish non-instrumentalising relationships with nature, where both connection and otherness are the basis of interaction” (Plumwood 80). Plumwood places importance on difference as a way to deeply connect with nature. She notes that difference is inherent in nature, so a human society more responsive to the natural world accounts for difference as well.

Lauren recognizes that “Nature/Is all that exists./It’s the Earth/And all that is on it/It’s the universe/And all that’s in it/It’s God, Never at rest...” and therefore nature plays a role in how her community views connection and partnership (PT 383). Hutner writes, “for Butler, nature is ‘everything and everywhere,’ just as the potential for a caring and equal partnership among all living creatures pervades the human capacity to unify and heal the chaotic dystopian world” (Hutner 73). A partnership ethic is at the center of unification and healing and is reflected in Lauren’s writing: “Partnership is giving, taking, learning, teaching...Partnership is mutualistic symbiosis...Partner one another. Partner diverse communities. Partner life...Partner God. Only in partnership can we thrive, grow, Change. Only in partnership can we live” (PT 135). She encompasses all

facets of community building within partnership: learning, teaching, diversity, growth, and change.

Along with finding partnership among community members as related to the environment, and “feed[ing] into Lauren’s larger Earthseed partnership ethic” is the “de-emphasizing of the biologically-linked, nuclear family” or “shared parenting” (Hutner 73). In Atwood and Butler’s texts, the ending communities are not created from the traditional definition of “nuclear family,” but instead introduce communal partnership that holds the group accountable for its own care. Hutner states, “partnership parenting...and environmentalist partnership ethics are all intertwined...[and it] opens a space for a liberating ecofeminist utopian vision of interdependent relations between humans and nonhuman nature” (Hutner 73).

Toby and Lauren realize their “ecofeminist utopian visions” through their spiritual belief systems connecting them to nature. They both benefit from building their communities around these belief systems, using religion as a structural glue. The women indicate the necessity of religion as a driving sense of purpose for their communities. Lauren writes, “Purpose/Unifies us:/It focuses our dreams,/Guides our plans,/Strengthens our efforts” (PT 137). Toby echoes this sentiment when she notes the Crakers’ lack of religion, “It’s tempting to drift, as the Crakers seem to. They have no festivals, no calendars, no deadlines. No long-term goals” (M 136). Toby’s spiritual leadership gives the Crakers a structure they need, indicating that a revised religion is a central aspect of the new world.

Hegland negotiates an ecofeminist view of survival and religion in a different way, while still combining similar elements of Butler and Atwood’s fictions. Though her

two female protagonists, Nell and Eva, do not explicitly align themselves with a religion or particular belief system, Hegland frames the novel and their journey of survival and community building within a Biblical context. She starts and ends *Into the Forest* with the discussion of Christmas, a Christian religious holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus. Unlike the other patriarchal figures in Butler and Atwood's texts, Nell and Eva's father rejects religion, saying "We're not Christians, we're capitalists," and complaining about their celebration of Christmas (Hegland 4). Shortly afterward, the sisters discuss "an old family joke," where Eva once "asked if Jesus was a he or a she" (Hegland 9). They smile, remembering, how their "Mom said Jesus was a he, but that it was just an accident...He might just as well have been a she...and then Dad asked her if the Virgin Mary could just as well have been a he" (Hegland 9). These moments are meaningful in the context of reimagining religious narratives, which Hegland does throughout her text, with Biblical allusions to the creation story, the Garden of Eden, Mary's virgin birth of Jesus, and even Eva's name resembling Eve. When the sisters reimagine Jesus as female, and the Virgin Mary as male, they introduce the concept of regendering Biblical narratives. When at the end, Eva becomes pregnant and has a son, they bring up Christmas again, repeating their father's saying from the beginning of the novel: "Could be better, could be worse. But at least there's a baby at the center of it" (Hegland 241). Hegland links Eva's birth to a son to Jesus' birth story, implying that this baby represents salvation for these women and the world they wish to build. Additionally, Nell redefines "virgin-born," saying, "children born out of wedlock were at one time referred to as 'virgin-born,'" deepening the connection to Mary's virgin birth (Hegland 210). Nell calls Eva's son "Burl," which

means growth from a tree, establishing him as an ecological figure within the frame of the religious narrative.

Nell also redefines the word “virgin” as “the psychological state of belonging to no man, of belonging to oneself...true to nature and instinct, just as the virgin forest is not barren or unfertilized, but instead is unexploited by man” (Hegland 210). Nell’s act of redefinition, rewrites her sister’s experience to be more empowering. She connects the exploitation of nature to the female body, reclaiming both of their natural states in order to move forward, “*This body is yours...This garden is yours. Take it. Take it back*” (Hegland 160). The ideas of reclaiming bodies and rebirth deeply connect the women to nature, “Nell’s (re)birth through her symbolic dream-connection with the female bear-as-mother leads her to the realization that she must abandon the dystopian society of the post-apocalyptic world, reconnect with her family members, and live in nature” (Hutner 76). The vision of an animal as an indicator of innate connection to nature is similar to Toby’s vision of the liobam, as well. These visions shape the women’s values, aiding them in their understanding of how to rebuild their communities.

Hegland’s text draws comparisons and implications of female connection to nature. Though she does not overtly link religion or spiritual belief to the characters’ motivations, she unfolds her story through a rewrite of Biblical narratives, revealing how religion is linked to issues of rebuilding the world in complex ways.

Butler and Atwood vocalize how religion persists even in newly imagined worlds. In *Conversations with Octavia Butler*, Butler says, “Religion has played such a large part in the lives of human beings throughout human history. In some ways, I wish we could outgrow it...But then, I’m fairly sure that if we do outgrow it we’ll find other reasons to

kill and persecute each other” (Butler 9). McCormack follows up this statement saying that Butler “recognizes the persistence of religion, and uses her novels to explore the possibilities of constructing more ‘mature’ forms of religious thought and communities that can sustain individuals across radical lines of difference” (McCormack 17-18). These perspectives play into Atwood’s use of religion in her novels as well. “She believes that religion — that is, the stories we tell ourselves about where we came from and where we are going — is hard-wired into us: that there is no escape, so long as we remain human beings,” (Wagner). The Crakers exist at the end with a manipulated form of religion, despite their creator intending to erase any sort of religious belief in them. Both Butler and Atwood recognize the permanence of religion in some form, and the necessity of imagining “more ‘mature’ forms of religious thought” that can create positive communities.

Writing is an essential tool for reimagining religion and rebuilding community. As shown in Atwood’s manuscripts, writing is an important piece connecting religion and survival. In every one of Atwood, Butler, and Hegland’s novels, the act of writing is fundamental to issues of survival and perpetuating belief systems. All of the novels are written as forms of journal entries, relaying the idea that to write is to survive. Seen with Adam One’s hymns and Toby’s stories for the Crakers, Atwood uses forms of religious texts to structure her novels and reveal the principles of her religious leaders. Not only does writing outline the women’s beliefs explored within the texts, it ensures the survival of the women’s belief systems long after their death.

The concept of writing as important to survival also plays into each author’s “re-writing” of Biblical narratives. Kimberly J. Ruffin in “Parable of a 21st Century

Religion” posits that “what these [*Parable*] novels do is to ‘write over’ Jesus’s allegoric discourse with both a new religion and a scribal mode of developing a religious language” (Ruffin 91). Similar to Atwood’s structure, Butler’s novels intersperse Lauren’s religious text “Earthseed: The Books of the Living” throughout the story. Clarity is important to Lauren, as she writes, “I’m trying to speak—to write—the truth. I’m trying to be clear,” and emphasizes that writing is how she conveys her message (PS 125). Butler also “uses the parable as a cogent tool in framing this story of a female religious teacher-leader, who, through writing and hard-won effort to spread her message” is able to produce her own theology (Ruffin 92). Since Lauren’s father exposed Lauren to parables, believing that “stories were so important as teaching tools,” she repurposes them for her own message (PT 14). As Ruffin postulates, the use of a storytelling structure, allows for the reader to “seriously consider the develop[ment] of a religion and a religious language” (Ruffin 98). In the same way, Toby’s stories in *MaddAddam* use the storytelling structure to contribute to the Craker’s religious development and codifying a new language for them.

Not only do the authors use rewriting as a tool, but also their characters write to narrate the values of their new communities. Each novel’s ending is centered on generating and producing, using rewriting to move onward, overhauling patriarchal religious narratives in the process. Lauren establishes her religious community at the end of Butler’s *Parable of the Sower*, and writes, “We spoke our individual memories and quoted Bible passages, Earthseed verses, and bits of songs and poems that were favorites of the living or the dead” (PS 328). They use words to bring them together, to remember the past and look toward the future. *Parable of the Talents* ends with Lauren’s last journal

entry before her death, establishing her writing as lasting, existing for others' use. *Into the Forest* concludes with the same notion of prevailing stories. In the last few pages of the novel, Nell chooses three books to take into the forest: "*Native Plants of Northern California* for [Eve]...for Burl the book of songs and stories of those humans who had peopled the forest before us...[and] the encyclopedia's index" (Hegland 238-239). These texts reveal the values that Nell and Eva will establish in their community, placing importance on knowledge of the environment and words. Nell writes, "I know I should toss this story, too, on those flames. But I am still too much a storyteller...to burn these pages," indicating that her story will survive and continue through her writing (Hegland 239). Toby survives through writing at the end of *MaddAddam*, as well, with Blackbeard telling the "Story of Toby" (M 390). The final line in the novel, "Now we will sing," establishes her lasting religious influence as a binding structure of the existing community (M 390). These endings solidify the importance of women as rebuilders of the world after its destruction, leaving behind their progressive ecofeminist belief systems as foundations for societal growth.

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