



# Multiple Levels of Inherent Malevolence in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*

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**Abstract**— Margaret Atwood's much anticipated dystopian trilogy comes to a gripping and dramatic close with *MaddAddam*, which epitomises her signature blend of adventure, humour, romance, deft storytelling and a vivid imagination that is firmly rooted in reality. *MaddAddam* mostly adhered to the same structure as the first two novels, even though it began soon after the conclusion of *The Year of the Flood*. This post-apocalyptic dystopian trilogy is plausible, complete with nuclear sword-rattling, environmental pollution, the resurgence of ancient diseases, and the emergence of new illnesses that have the potential to spread into a pandemic. The complex interactions that occur between humans and other species—both in the context of human-virus relations and in the broader context of anthropogenic environmental destruction—have also been brought to light by the outbreak. This is just as crucial. This paper surveys how certain sects in the novel derive pleasure from the sufferings of others and their desire to harm others turns into addictive violence.



**Keywords**— Survival, Maliciousness, Violent, Criminals, Hunger Games, Addictive Violence

Margaret Atwood is a highly renowned figure in Canada and beyond. Poet, author, essayist, storyteller, and environmental activist, Atwood does it all. She's among the top living authors in Canada. Numerous literary prizes, including the Booker Prize, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, and three Governor General's Awards, have been bestowed upon her works in the United States, Europe, and Canada. The praise that Atwood receives from critics is reflected in her success; her books are regular bestsellers, and her works have been adapted into hit television shows and films.

Raised in Ottawa, Atwood graduated with a BA from Radcliffe College and an MA from Victoria College, University of Toronto. She became well-known as a poet in the 1960s because of her poetry collections "Double Persephone" (1961), which received the E.J. Pratt Medal, and "The Circle Game" (1964), which received a Governor General's Award. The references to her later trilogy of technological dystopia and environmental disasters may be found in *The Year of the Flood* (2009), *Oryx and Crake*

(2003), and *MaddAddam* (2013). In these works, Atwood refers to her intent as "speculative fiction" as opposed to "science fiction."

In August 2013, the third and last book in the dystopian trilogy, *MaddAddam*, was published. The story that started with *Oryx and Crake* and went on throughout *The Year of the Flood* is concluded here.

The three books don't follow one another's plots even if they are a trilogy. The narratives of *The Year of the Flood* and *Oryx and Crake* essentially follow one other. Since each of these books has an own cast of characters, they all present the same events from various perspectives. The plots of the first two novels overlap near the finish, and *MaddAddam* is the continuation of this united narrative. One of the effects is that, in contrast to *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, which are both highly autonomous and can be read stand-alone, *MaddAddam* requires some background information on the earlier books. Not surprisingly, *MaddAddam* begins with "The

MaddAddam Trilogy: The Story So Far" (MA xiii–xvi), a synopsis of the previous novels' plots.

*Oryx and Crake*, the first book, opens in post-apocalyptic medias res. For the majority of the book, Jimmy, the Snowman, the main character and protagonist, believes he is the last human survivor of a pandemic. Snowman is a post-apocalyptic name that he picked. The genius bioengineer Crake was Jimmy's childhood friend. Jimmy learns too late that the globe in Crake's environmental utopia is free of harmful human impact. In order to do this, Crake manipulates the epidemic to create space for his ecologically friendly humanoid splices, which he refers to as Paradise Models but which everyone else refers to as Crakers. Jimmy is spared from the virus by Crake so that he might release the Crakers from the laboratory where they were made and acclimatise them to the altered climate in which they are intended to flourish once the turmoil has passed. Unbeknownst to Crake, though, the Crakers manage to hold onto more humanity than their creator had intended, and with the aid of the Snowman, they quickly create their own complex mythology to make sense of the chaos in their environment. Up until the book's conclusion, the two stories of Snowman's post-apocalyptic, present-tense experience and his roughly chronological, past-tense memory of his previous existence as Jimmy are told in alternating sections. A tiny group of human survivors is spotted on a beach by an armed Snowman in the novel's epilogue.

The God's Gardeners, a pacifist ecological group, are the focus of *The Year of the Flood*. They attempt to be ready for the Waterless Flood, the end of the world they believe is coming. The trio of central characters is either current or past members of the collective. The novel is divided into seven chapters, each of which is narrated by the founder of the Gardeners, Adam One. Ren, who was raised in the sect, is trapped in the Scales and Tails club during the pandemic as an exotic dancer, and Toby, an elderly woman who had to flee and was running a spa at the time of the catastrophe, are the two main characters of the novel. Chapters with Ren as the main character are told in the first person, but chapters with Toby as the main character are told in the third. Similar to Snowman in *Oryx and Crake*, both women fear that they might be the last ones living after the epidemic, and a large portion of the novel is made up of recollections that illustrate the years leading up to the outbreak. Much of Toby and Ren's lives are spent in the riskier Pleeblands, whereas the pre-apocalyptic story of *Oryx and Crake* is portrayed from Jimmy's privileged perspective as a long-time resident of the protected compounds. When Ren and Toby finally cross paths towards the book's conclusion, they decide to

help Ren's friend Amanda, who has been kidnapped by other survivors. The group of individuals that Snowman encounters on the beach at the conclusion of the first novel is included in the second volume's plot, which is where the two narratives come together. The spiritual environmentalism of the Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* provides, in many respects, a welcome diversion from the general doleful tone of *Oryx and Crake*.

The temporal relationship between the three novels—*Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* being set largely simultaneously, with *MaddAddam* serving as the story's climax and continuation—invites a dialectical reading of the MaddAddam Trilogy to some extent.

The characters in *MaddAddam* include those who have previously appeared in the show; Zeb and Toby, two survivors of the biological disaster upon which the series is based, are the ones who narrate the story. The novel details their efforts, along with those of the other survivors, to bring civilization back. It has a unique style, with sporadic factual explanations of the characters' more in-depth pasts mixed in with a rather straightforward storyline. This was also included in the other two novels of the trilogy, *The Year of the Flood* and *Oryx and Crake*. Margaret Atwood's gripping science fiction trilogy, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, attests to the unwavering power of love and kinship.

After the Waterless Flood disease killed most of humanity, Toby and Ren were able to protect their companion Amanda from the vicious Painballers. They rejoin at the MaddAddamite cobb house, which has lately been reinforced against man and giant Pigoons. The Crakers, a kind, nearly human species made by the brilliant but now-deceased Crake, accompany them. Their hesitant prophet, Jimmy-the-Snowman, is recovering from a debilitating illness, and Toby is left to spread the Craker doctrine, which holds that Crake is the Creator. As both Chung-Hao Ku and Danette DiMarco point out, it deals with the concept of homo faber from the perspective of a techno-cultural society, leaving Crake as "a product of the capitalist machinery" (Ku 119), who "works his tools" not to improve life for all humanity but to create marketable commodities that only serve to "fulfil emotional desires" (DiMarco 176)

Crake's cynical or insane revolt, fights against this monetization of human creativity and science, and it is against this that he unleashes the sickness that kills out mankind for the benefit of posthumanity. The economic forces behind the technology that enable a globalised society create benefits primarily for those with higher financial resources and deny benefits to those who cannot afford them. Rosie Braidotti deconstructs the workings of

strong bio-powers, or businesses that deal in genetics and biology for profit, in her essay "Feminist Epistemology after Postmodernism". Braidotti claims that:

bio-power has already turned into a form of bio-piracy in that it aims at exploiting the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells. The self-replicating vitality of living matter is targeted for consumption and commercial exploitation (70).

This is due to the current proliferation of "new biotechnologies of 'Life,'" which include "the widespread phenomenon of traffic in organs and body-parts; and the growing industry of genetic engineering and farming of living tissues and cells" (Braidotti, 70–71).

The story revolves around a lady named Toby who battles to survive in the sick, destitute, and devastated remains of human society after a catastrophic epidemic. The novel provides predictions on how the collapse of the government and all of humanity's basic resources would affect normative ways of being and behaving, such as the nation-state and personal morality. Atwood demonstrates how many facets of society that allow it to flourish depend on the continued upkeep of customs and institutions that are weaker and more fragile than we think.

The novel opens with an introduction to Toby and Ren. They get together to find Amanda, a woman who was abducted by two men after being raped. The men are part of a cruel group known as the Painballers, who provide the surviving elite class, who still control the means of production, with gruesome gladiatorial contests on demand. Ren and Toby locate Amanda and help her get away from the Painballers. Upon returning to the camp, they encounter multiple Crakers, a humanoid race that desires cooperation. The Crakers were created by a scientist named Crake in the precursor *Oryx and Crake*. As they make their way back to the main camp building, Toby, Amanda, and Ren inadvertently interrupt the Crakers' mating rite. Toby brushes off the sexual assault of Ren and Amanda by two Crakers as a cultural misunderstanding.

Toby and Ren also rescue Jimmy, the missing prophet and Craker spiritual leader who is badly injured and unable to carry out his duties. Instead, Toby chooses to tell the Crakers about the history of civilization's downfall. While she is engaged in this activity, her partner Zeb returns to the camp. According to Toby, the pandemic was brought on by a medicine developed by a company called HelthWyzer, and she assisted Zeb and his manager Pilar in smuggling some of the drug out of the plant. After Pilar passed away, Zeb's friend Glenn received a chess set from Pilar that held the tablets. As he got older, Glenn

adopted the alias Crake, become political extremist, and started producing the drugs in huge numbers. He believed that any negative sentiments would be eradicated from the remaining society by the pandemic he started. He believed this civilization to be the camp that Toby, Ren, and Zeb are currently residing in, giving it the name MaddAddamites.

A second group of people came to be known as the Gardeners as a consequence of the pandemic. They developed and spread a theological doctrine that emphasises gratitude for the relationship between nature and science at all times. Toby is one of the Gardeners who went by the moniker "Adam One" originally. Zeb, Adam One's brother, is currently searching for him. In addition to the Painballers, the roving packs of Pigeons—bioengineered, sentient pigs—also represent a threat to the humans at the encampment.

A little Craker child by the name of Blackbeard acts as the formal go-between for the Maddaddamites and the Pigeons during the Painballers' onslaught on both towns, assisting in the formation of an alliance between the two groups. Lead by Toby and Blackbeard, the Pigeons besiege and kill the Painballers at Paradise Dome, a weapons storage facility. Blackbeard retells the tale to the camp, adding that Adam One was briefly found prior to his death in combat. Jimmy had lost his life helping Zeb and Toby apprehend the Painballers and get them to the encampment for a trial. The MaddAddams bury Jimmy and Adam while the other villagers gather the remains of their loved ones for similar farewell rituals.

After the struggle against the Painballers, Ren, Amanda, and Swift Fox find out that they are expecting half-Craker offspring. By bearing healthy offspring, they initiate a new lineage within the human race. Zeb and Toby tie the knot. As the new prophet of the Crakers, Toby decides to educate the next generation of half-human, half-Craker children how to read, write, and communicate like Blackbeard. They thereby uphold the custom of telling stories aloud at the campsite. At the conclusion of the book, Zeb sadly dies while attempting to locate the campsite. Distressed, Toby goes into the woods and ends his life by eating deadly mushrooms. A brief epilogue depicts a youthful Blackbeard narrating the stories of Zeb and Toby to a group of Craker children.

Andrew Sean Greer writes in the New York Times Book Review that:

What a joy it is to see Margaret Atwood taking such delicious pleasure in the end of the world.... In *MaddAddam*, the third volume of Atwood's apocalyptic MaddAddam trilogy, she has sent the

survivors of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* to a compound where they await a final showdown. But what gives *MaddAddam* such tension and light are the final revelations of how this new world came to be, and how the characters made their way to this battle for the future of humanity. Atwood has brought the previous two books together in a fitting and joyous conclusion that's an epic not only of an imagined future but of our own past, an exposition of how oral storytelling traditions led to written ones and ultimately to our sense of origin...Atwood's prose miraculously balances humor, outrage and beauty.

The story of the survivors is presented, and specifically, it describes how the horrors of the past are turned into a series of kid-friendly bedtime tales, delivered to the big-eyed, polyamorous Crakers by the rifle-wielding Toby. The tiny community of survivors resides in the old cob house, a former garden stand that has been strengthened with a fence, a vegetable garden, and eventually beehives. Zeb, who also survived, houses Toby and a bunch of other MaddAddamites.

Threats from the Painballers include intra-species conflict, interspecies pregnancy, rape, and wild pigeons. By the time the Crakers decipher a deal between the Maddaddamites and the Pigoons, one is ready to fall apart, just as Snowman-the-Jimmy does when he sees Oryx and Crake's bodies.

The humanoids that go by the name of the Crakers, or Children of Crake, are a fair representation of humanity. They provide a hopeful idea of what life might be like after humanity. To counter the threat to mankind, however, Crake removes humanity entirely. Think about pigeons, for example, which were created in order to cultivate human organs for transplantation; this allows them to become more "human" than "animal." The story also raises doubts about the precise boundary that sets humans apart from other animals.

It's a busy scene, but most of it is explained in Zeb's background, which he tells Toby and she repeats to the vaguely human-looking "Crakers." Similar to her function in the second novel, *The Year of the Flood*, Toby is important in the present. Her background as a member of the God's Gardeners eco-"Eves" groups allowed her to rescue Amanda and Snowman. At the "MaddAddamites" cob house, she may tend to Snowman, who is unconscious and suffering from a fever due to an infection in his injured foot. After the two disgusting (and hazardous)

"Painballers" have finished torturing Amanda, she used to be vibrant and active but is now a worn-out shell. She makes sure Amanda is taken care of. Since she didn't kill the Painballers when she had the chance, Toby hasn't been able to get rid of them, but she tries to tell herself that nobody is perfect.

Atwood tells Zeb's story using a minimum of two distinct narrative threads. We are in the room as spectators to their post-apocalyptic, no-holds-barred courtship while Toby draws out the story from him. When it happens, it's not depicted exactly as he said in his own words; instead, it's described as scenes from the kind of gritty, hardboiled dystopian fiction that readers of the genre would be familiar with. We once heard about the passing craze for dystopian fiction that Atwood appears to be exhibiting here. In addition, there are the technologies and near-future landscapes, as though Atwood is daring the reader to question it. Someone says that people decided to ignore the reality of what was happening rather than indulge in survival fantasies.

Even individuals who receive financial support to study science do so in order to challenge the notions that they are taught. The Rev also fulfils a multitude of additional requirements. Don't hold out any hope for the future of parenting or for any positive effects that internet gaming might have; he's a sadist on the point of perversion. Human nature is terrible in Atwood's dystopian future, especially the masculine human nature he represents.

In describing Painball, Atwood concentrates on the idea of addictive violence. Why do the players still engage in competition? They are unable to halt. All it takes for them to become addicted is a small taste of revenge rage and pure, unadulterated aggression. Eventually, the players lose all sense of proper behaviour. Their brains have become so conditioned to this created environment of real violence that it has changed how they process pain, especially empathic pain. Essentially, they are no longer able to empathy; instead, they are driven to commit harm since it gives them an addictive high.

The purpose of the pain ball was to allow individuals to enjoy seeing other people suffer. Similar to the Hunger Games, the players in the Pain Ball Game inflicted agony on others. They tried to enjoy inflicting misery on others since they think they are impervious to it. They lack the passion of empathy or sympathy; therefore they look for satisfaction in other people's suffering. They pushed others to fight for their lives while killing Amanda.

In the novel, violence is a recurring subject. At the beginning of the novel, we are shown the survivors of a biological tragedy. Toby, Ren, and Amanda are among



the survivors who are attacked by the criminals. Criminals strive to play a game of death because they think they are immune to sorrow and hence cannot relate to others.

Additionally, the criminals try to kill or viciously assault the camp survivors. They act in violent and uncharacteristic ways for humans. Rather than trying to help others, they would rather injure them. The regular people are taken and made to fight for their lives, only to be slain in the process. Painball players were addicted to the real presentation of death, which kept them attacking and killing people.

The game is a representation of the Mayan basketball game. They used to sacrifice their lives in order to win the game. Another idea related to this game is the Hunger Games. The pain ball appears to be related to the hunger games since players in both games lack empathy and steal other people's lives in order to win. The organisers enjoy the game of death even though they are not actively playing it. They are unique and, by endangering their lives, they invite the public to entertain them. The authorities were unable to break this fatal cycle because they were too reliant on the programme.

The purpose of the camps' construction was to shield occupants from criminal assaults. They offered them the opportunity to reconstruct their civilization and rearrange their way of life. Toby, Ren, and their friends built the camps to provide sanctuary and necessities to those who had survived the criminal attacks and the painball game. The camps prohibited the common people from playing a game of death for entertainment, so the administrators forcibly brought them into jail.

Ren and Toby kept the attack survivors in the camps. They did so after escaping the destruction of the onslaught and trying to establish the foundation for civilization. The criminals planned ways to attack the people or groups that were being rescued at the camps. They would often reemerge in the woods, where they would create traps and murder others to appease themselves. The robbers wanted to eliminate the torchbearers of civilization and spread the pain ball game.

But hatred and viciousness are addictive.  
You can get high on them. Once you've  
had a little, you start shaking if you don't  
get more (*MaddAddam* 323-324).

This is Atwood's explanation for the rise in violence that followed the tragedy. These are not only heartbreaking victims. Once, they had developed an addiction to the taste of unbridled violence in the arena and were desperate for more. They soon lose any feeling of regret and become vicious in their drive to harm others. Their neural pathways have been rewired.

In a more straightforward story, the love and sacrifice of the survivors could be seen as a sign of hope for humanity's future. Rather, they are a jaded, war-torn group of people who have experienced extreme self-preservation. However, Atwood makes a strong case for the importance of all life, making readers reluctant to accept that the novel's main focus is the survival of a destructive race like humans. Even the placid Crakers, with their infantile stubbornness, insist on elevating persons whose intentions they cannot understand and seek mythology. Other creatures that were genetically modified for economic gain by now-defunct firms can be found in the new frontier; some of these species, like Pigoons, are highly intelligent and deadly suppliers of bacon. Painballers, de-humanised ex-prisoners engaged in bizarre life-or-death combat, pose a menace to pigeons, Crakers, and people. The vicious Painballers are unyielding, the Pigoons outweigh the humans, and the Crakers are unable to protect themselves. Luckily, Atwood has more treats in store. Her message is both comforting and unsettling, and the conclusion of this remarkable trilogy leaves us feeling amazed by the rarely considered notion of evolution rather than saddened by humanity's shortcomings.

*MaddAddam*, a fitting trilogy finale, offers a sensible extension of contemporary economic and ecological threats into a post-cataclysmic future, despite the unevenness in narrative and character presentation. Through the eyes of the Apocalyptic survivors, Atwood mediates her social criticism, fusing individual and societal suffering in a variety of ways to narrate the unimaginable. The emergence of a new intellect, the interbreeding of humans and posthumans, and the demise of nearly all significant antediluvian characters all suggest that the planet has been changed utterly, feeling perfectly normal now that its human parasites have been exterminated.

According to Atwood, societies create genesis tales by removing complexity for the sake of simplicity. However, Atwood herself has taken pains to add a great deal of detail to this tale, and like most post-apocalyptic writers, she ends it with a hint of hope. Though it's by no means her best work, Atwood is still a master at analysing human vices and the potential consequences they may have.

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