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“The Company at St. Anne’s” and “The God’s Gardeners”: What C.S. Lewis and Margaret Atwood Teach Us about Caring for Our Planet

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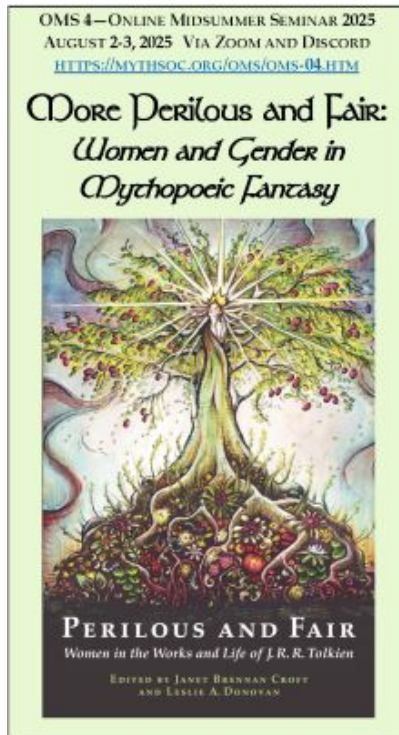
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“The Company at St. Anne’s” and “The God’s Gardeners”: What C.S. Lewis and Margaret Atwood Teach Us about Caring for Our Planet

Abstract

At first sight, *That Hideous Strength* (1945) by C.S. Lewis and the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003, 2009, 2013) by Margaret Atwood seem to have little in common. Yet, despite differences of time and place, and approach of the authors, there are startling and generative similarities between the two communities they depict, the Company at St. Anne’s and the God’s Gardeners. In considering the groups’ opposition to reductionist technocracy and a shared set of principles, Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy seems to be carrying on the heart of Lewis’ dystopic *That Hideous Strength* as effective ecological and ethical speculative fiction.

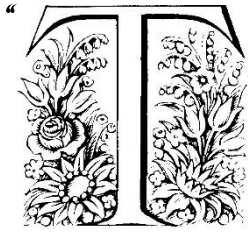
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Margaret Atwood; speculative fiction; dystopia; reductionist technocracy; ecology; environmental ethics

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“THE COMPANY AT ST. ANNE’S” AND
“THE GOD’S GARDENERS”: WHAT
C.S. LEWIS AND MARGARET ATWOOD
TEACH US ABOUT CARING
FOR OUR PLANET

ANNE-FRÉDÉRIQUE MOCHEL-CABALLERO

IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S DYSTOPIAN NOVEL *ORYX AND CRAKE* (2003), we learn through a series of flashbacks what the world was like before almost the whole of humanity was wiped out. In one of them, an artist called Amanda Payne illustrates the excessive consumerism and environmental exploitation of the world she lives in with ephemeral displays. She spells out single words on the grass with animal carcasses and then photographs them from a helicopter as vultures come to eat the carrion. The last word that she ever created was “love.” As Christina Bieber Lake notes, this “‘vulturization’ of language” (116) could be seen as “the central metaphor of *Oryx and Crake*” (130), the first novel of the *MaddAddam* trilogy. With its emphasis on violent destruction of meaning and values, I would argue that Amanda Payne’s artwork could actually be viewed as a metaphor for the way evil is portrayed in the whole *MaddAddam* trilogy as well as in C.S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*.

In *That Hideous Strength* (1945), set in post-Second-World-War England, an organization called the N.I.C.E. (the National Institute for Co-ordinated Experiments) aims at taking over the government and eventually gaining power over the whole world. They are opposed by a community gathered at the Manor at St. Anne’s around a leader named Ransom. To achieve their goal, the N.I.C.E. do not hesitate to destroy nature, to torture animals, and to disregard basic human rights. By contrast, the Company at St. Anne’s lives as a community based on solidarity, in harmony with nature, and in obedience to a Supreme Being. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, Margaret Atwood presents us with a post-apocalyptic world set in the near-future in a place previously known as the United States. In the first novel, *Oryx and Crake*, we learn that the scientist Crake decided on the destruction of the human race. He designed a hybrid species, the Crakers, as a replacement for flawed humans. The second novel, *The Year of the Flood* (2009), takes place at the same time, but provides the perspective of two female characters, Toby and Ren. Both women become involved with an eco-religious cult called “the God’s Gardeners,” which adopts a green lifestyle in total contrast with the wasteful ways of the rest of society. By developing their

survival skills, the God's Gardeners get ready for the coming catastrophe. In the third novel, *MaddAddam* (2013), the surviving characters—both humans and Crakers—try to find food and protect each other from the dangers of the new world.

Though they are both dystopias, *That Hideous Strength* (1945) and the *MaddAddam* trilogy appear to be very dissimilar books, at least on the surface. Lewis was a British man who wrote his dystopia almost a century ago; he describes a world which looks like the one he was living in at the time, while also containing supernatural elements, like Merlin come back to life, or demons and angels. Some critics classify *That Hideous Strength* as “fantasy rather than science fiction” (Shippey 244) and Lewis himself labels it “A Modern Fairy Tale for Grown-Ups” in the subtitle. Atwood is a living Canadian woman who writes about a world which does not exist but which may appear more realistic, in that it is devoid of anything supernatural and it looks very much like what ours could do in the future. Atwood insists that her dystopia is about “human society and its possible future forms” (*In Other Worlds* 115) and that it is “alarmingly close to fact!” (*Year of the Flood* [YF] 433). While Lewis seems to fully endorse the Christian values defended by the Company at St. Anne's,² Atwood has a more detached way of relating to the God's Gardeners. She obviously also feels sympathetic towards them. The clearest sign is probably that she asked her friend Orville Stoeber to set the lyrics of their songs to music and that she used them during the international tour promoting the book. Stoeber wrote the songs “for the reasons the Gardeners themselves would have written them: for the purpose of praise, adoration and prayer to our planet, in thanks for its animals and plants and the ‘primate seeds’ that led to our human experience” (Stoeber). In “The Acknowledgments,” Atwood writes that “anyone who wishes to use any of these hymns for amateur devotional or environmental purposes is more than

¹ On the surface, the twenty-first century Atwood trilogy could seem nearer to our own preoccupations than *That Hideous Strength* since it describes a society faced with problems like genetic modification, global warming, and a world pandemic. However, some of Lewis's fiction was also very close to reality at the time and is still so now. Because of this closeness to reality, *That Hideous Strength* could also be viewed as “speculative fiction” in Atwood's definition of the term (*In Other Worlds* 115). According to David Downing, Lewis was a visionary when writing his dystopia during World War II: “Indeed, Lewis's concerns about exploitation of the environment for short-term economic goals and about the needless suffering of animals used in scientific research anticipate widespread public awareness of these issues by almost a half-century” (146).

² The leader, Ransom, is supported by a fictional Lewis, especially in the second book, *Perelandra*. In the whole trilogy, critics have noticed similarities between the character Ransom and real-life Lewis (Patterson, “Some Kind of Company” 190) or his friends Tolkien (Downing 127) and Charles Williams (Downing 133). These identifications show how close critics believe Lewis to be to his character's values and principles.

welcome to do so” (YF 433). Nevertheless, Atwood also points to the Gardeners’ weaknesses by showing them to us through the eyes of several characters who distance themselves from the group in one way or another. For instance, Toby doubts whether she is a believer even when she becomes an “Eve” (the name given to female leaders in the community), Ren is scared by their predictions of doom and perplexed by their contradictions (YF 59) and another Gardener, Zeb, decides to turn to bio-terrorism.

Despite the differences in time, place, and approach of the authors, there are clear parallels between the two communities. In particular, they are faced with a common evil and they have similarities in the way they tackle it.

A COMMON ENEMY

The God’s Gardeners and The Manor each face an institutional evil. In *That Hideous Strength*, the N.I.C.E. leaders slowly try to gain power. Although their aim is eventually to govern the whole world, they start by taking control of a small place in rural England. They begin by tricking the university board into selling them Bragton Wood “through a deceitful hiding of the real agenda” and “a basic appeal to greed” (Dickerson and O’Hara 211). They then extend their influence by playing on people’s credulity and apathy, using the press as propaganda, buying more and more land, and having their own police gradually replace the community’s police force. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, we find the same methods at play, where powerful people take advantage of other people’s naivety and selfishness, and use the media and the “CorpSeCorps,” a private police force, to achieve their aims. The resemblances are so striking that it is as if the Atwood trilogy was a kind of sequel to *That Hideous Strength*, describing what would have happened had the N.I.C.E. actually managed to spread its influence and methods throughout the world. Indeed, the N.I.C.E.’s model of ecological and social totalitarianism is perfected and globalized in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. In Atwood’s dystopia, there is no more central government. The world is entirely controlled by corporations composed of privileged minorities, which resemble the N.I.C.E. The disrespect for nature we find in *That Hideous Strength* has reached the next level: instead of simply torturing animals, the corporations have made a lot of them extinct; instead of just felling trees and diverting rivers, they have destroyed the planet to such a point that a massive climate change has occurred with all its negative consequences; instead of discreetly lying, cheating, and killing the odd opponent, they do it on a massive scale.

Both societies can be described as reductionist technocracies. The rulers use science as a tool to reach their goals, without considering ethics. Although the theory behind the actions is not exactly the same, the result is.

In *That Hideous Strength*, the scientist Frost claims that all human thoughts and feelings are just biological responses. He tries to convince his apprentice, Mark Studdock, that all judgements regarding good or evil are “simply an expression of emotion” (*That Hideous Strength* [THS] 14.293) and that he needs to undergo “a systematic training in objectivity” (ibid.) whose purpose is to destroy the “whole system of instinctive preferences, whatever ethical, æsthetic, or logical disguise they wear” (THS 14.294). This is an example of scientism, “an exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the methods of natural science applied to all areas of investigation (as in philosophy, the social sciences, and the humanities)” (“Scientism”). In one of his letters, Lewis quotes “scientism” among the main themes of *That Hideous Strength*, alongside “modern industrialism” and “totalitarian politics” (*Collected Letters* III.498). To Lewis, John West notes, scientism is the “wrong-headed belief that modern science supplies the only reliable method of knowledge about the world, and its corollary that scientists have the right to dictate a society’s morals, religious beliefs, and even government policies merely because of their scientific expertise” (12). For Lewis, scientism does not induce objectivity. On the contrary, believing that the notions of right and wrong are nothing more than chemical reactions in the brain leads to subjectivism and to moral relativism. In *The Abolition of Man*, which contains the theory behind *That Hideous Strength* (THS 2.40), Lewis mentions the existence of a set of universal basic moral precepts, which he calls “the Tao,” “the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false” (*Abolition of Man* [AM] 16). According to him, if society rejects the Tao, it rejects humanity itself. If there are no objective moral laws, the only criteria are feasibility and individual will. This will result in all sorts of abuses. In science, it will lead people to turn nature into an object instead of respecting it as a living being. It will also lead them to consider other human beings as things to be experimented on. Thus, some people will gain control over others using nature. When science is considered a law in itself, ethical concerns disappear.

As Robert Boenig shows in his article “The Face of the Materialist Magician,” Lewis draws a parallel between science and magic, thus warning us against the dangers of putting science on a pedestal. The term “Materialist Magician” comes from *The Screwtape Letters*, in which a senior demon, Screwtape, wants his apprentice to learn to “emotionalise and mythologise [...] science” to such an extent that they will be able to produce “the Materialist Magician, the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls ‘Forces’ while denying the existence of ‘spirits’” (*The Screwtape Letters* 7.39-40). The demon wishes to turn science into a kind of secular religion. This is illustrated in *That Hideous Strength*, when Frost refers to the demons they are serving as “macrobes,” that is to say mere “organisms above the level of animal

life" (*THS* 12.254). As Boenig comments, "the supernatural is thus reduced to the scientific, a reduction that allows the scientists at the N.I.C.E. to perform their morally repugnant deeds without any God to judge them" (11).

In his essay "On Fairy-stories," Tolkien makes a difference between "faerie magic" which fantasy aspires to and which leads to enchantment, and "the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific magician" (32–33). For him, the latter kind of magic "is not an art but a technique; its desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills" (64). As Colin Duriez remarks, "Tolkien, like Lewis, saw a machine attitude, or what might be called technocracy, as the modern form of magic, seeking to enslave and possess nature, rather than to steward her" (80).

In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis also warns against the risks of giving too much importance to science. He again cites science and magic as two parallel techniques, whose purpose is "to subdue reality to the wishes of men," rather than trying "to conform the soul to reality" and which become dangerous when they are ends in themselves (*AM* 46). In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, the Corporations illustrate this attitude in that they use science to achieve their ends. It is not scientism in that they do not attempt to justify their actions in the name of science as an ultimate source of knowledge. They do not try to achieve objectivity, as Frost does in *That Hideous Strength*. They directly go to the next logical stage, that is to say they "deny the ethics of their acts" (Macpherson 81) and thus reject the Tao. As Atwood argues, "the bad thing is making all science completely commercial, and with no watchdogs. That is when you have to get very nervous" (Halliwell 260–61). Science used as a means to attain personal satisfaction and without ethical considerations is what Atwood describes in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. As for the scientist Crake, he illustrates another form of subjectivism. He does not deny ethics like the rest of society. Thanks to the possibilities of science, Crake acquires a power which allows him to play God, and to decide for himself what is right and wrong. As a result, he destroys almost the whole of humanity. It is another way of rejecting the Tao.

In *That Hideous Strength*, the N.I.C.E.'s operational principle is that scientists are not constrained by ethics in their work. One of the leaders, Lord Feverstone, explains to Mark Studdock that they want to get rid of rivals on the planet—meaning animal and vegetable life—and then deal with "Man himself," using "sterilization of the unfit, liquidation of backward races," "selective breeding," and, ultimately, "biochemical conditioning" and "direct manipulation of the brain" (*THS* 2.40). The scientists working for the N.I.C.E. aim at controlling all forms of life without considering the well-being or the rights of the concerned.

In Atwood's more technologically advanced society, eugenics are likewise on the verge of becoming a reality. According to Crake, who is at the

heart of the project: "They'd be able to create totally chosen babies that would incorporate any feature, physical or mental or spiritual, that the buyer might wish to select" (*Oryx and Crake* [OC] 304). Later, Zunzuncito, another scientist involved in the research, comments: "People were paying through the ceiling for those gene-splices. They were customizing their kids, ordering up the DNA like pizza toppings" (M 43). The mention of huge sums of money and the link made between DNA and such a trivial matter as choosing what to put on a pizza point to a society who uses science in a way that disregards ethics, resulting in the objectification of human life.

In Atwood's dystopia, the rulers have not achieved the N.I.C.E.'s wish of getting rid of animals altogether, but they have destroyed a great number of them, either by causing them to go extinct or by genetically modifying them for their own pleasure. In Atwood's pre-flood world, because of pollution and global warming, the number of animals that disappear from the face of the earth grows daily. Some people vaguely try to clear their consciences by donating money to charities, like Bearlift, which drops food to polar bears from helicopters. They represent a sort of "'shallow environmentalism', which its detractors have called a form of 'cosmetic greenwashing'" (Bouson 79). While some pay out of their fortunes to ease their consciences, others pay a fortune to eat endangered species at a special luxury restaurant chain named "Rarity."

Animal experimentation is critical to the N.I.C.E.'s plan, but readers only get glimpses of the suffering at Belbury. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, however, the use and abuse of animals is at the front of the tale. Scientists work on gene splices and create animals designed to serve humans in various ways. Wolvogs, for example, look cuddly but are extremely ferocious as guard dogs (OC 105). Pigoons are pigs that have been redesigned to farm human organs, including brain tissue. One animal, the Liobam, a crossing between a lion and a lamb, is created for the sole purpose of resolving a dispute between two religious sects (YF 39). Scientists grow Chickienobs, a poultry flesh invention that grows on headless, many-limbed chickens. Besides the ethical questions about their innovative designs, creations like Liobams, Pigoons, and Volvogs end up being quite dangerous once released in the wild. These Frankenfooted animals continue to haunt the survivors of the Flood.

The catastrophe in the making in *That Hideous Strength* becomes reality in the *MaddAddam* trilogy.

One of the consequences of rejecting the Tao in both societies is that the notion of truth is no longer significant and that language is used and abused as an instrument of control. According to Doris Myers, it is even the main theme of *That Hideous Strength*, which "focuses on the corruption of language and the use of it to control and dehumanize people" (85). This is why Atwood's powerful metaphor of the rotting-meat words mentioned in the introduction is so

pertinent to describe what happens in Lewis’s dystopia too. In *That Hideous Strength*, one of the N.I.C.E.’s aims is to manipulate the masses through newspaper propaganda: for example, Mark is asked to twist the facts by writing a report on a demonstration before it has taken place or by proving the desirability of flooding the beautiful village of Cure Hardy. Myers notes that

the attempt to divorce language from objective, eternal values leads to Babel—to the destruction of law, scientific inquiry, the environment, and human personality itself. If the “emotive” language that reports feelings is unimportant, then there is no reason to preserve an environment just because it is beautiful and pleasant [...]. If the human being is primarily a machine and consciousness a collection of engrams and associations, then law and science are equally useless, for there is no basis for believing that the human race ought to be preserved. If a man is no more than an object to be studied by the use of referential language, then there is no need even to believe in human consciousness. As Lewis says in *The Abolition of Man*, those who step “outside the Tao . . . [step] into the void.” (110)

The stepping outside the Tao is further illustrated by the way in which the N.I.C.E. gets rid of opponents and administers justice. When one scientist, Hingest, realizes he was mistaken about the N.I.C.E. and attempts to leave, they murder him and Mark is threatened with being framed for it. They decide that criminals will be “treated” rather than just serve their term, which allows them to experiment on them with no time limit (*THS* 3.68).

Likewise, in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, the Corporations repudiate the notions of good and evil. They use the media to manipulate people on topics such as climate change and to make the larger population passive—“to render reality into information, rather than to effect material change” (Alaimo 101). They ask Crake’s friend, Jimmy, to use language in a utilitarian way to create advertisements. As a result, “impoverished language leads to impoverished thinking” (Feldman-Kołodziejuk 189)—much in the same way as Mark Studdock’s articles fool the masses in *That Hideous Strength*. The CorpSeCorps get rid of dissidents like Crake’s father, who is said to have committed suicide but was actually pushed off an overpass at rush hour. He had threatened to reveal that the medical Corps, HelthWyzer, infected their customers with disease-laden products so that they could profit by selling remedies further down the line (*M* 254). Criminals, rather than serving ordinary time in prison, are seen as commodities to be used for public entertainment: they are divided into teams and their forced fights to the death in the Painball arena are broadcast on television.

In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, the ruling Corporations choose to reject traditional morality. As a result, just like the N.I.C.E., they corrupt language to manipulate people, they kill opponents and they objectify criminals.

Against the instrumentalization of science and against the violent destruction of meaning and values symbolized by Atwood's vulture metaphor, the two communities found in the novels respond by using similar weapons.

FIVE PRINCIPLES ON HOW TO CARE FOR NATURE

Faced with the shared corrupted worlds described in both dystopias, the Company at St. Anne's and the God's Gardeners stand out by defending values that are opposed to those surrounding them. In *Narnia and the Fields of Arbol*, Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara argue that Lewis teaches us to care for nature with the following five principles: both the community and the individual matter, we should not harm without cause, there is a human obligation to improve other creatures, we should be humble, and finally, stories should play a role in ecological education (258–59). I will show that these principles govern not only the Company at St. Anne's, but also the God's Gardeners' behavior towards nature. I use "nature" in the broad sense of the term, examining how the two groups interact with the land, with animals and with other human beings—since humans are a part of nature and, as such, have a direct impact on their natural world.³

Dickerson and O'Hara first refer to the importance of the community and the individual. In both communities, solidarity is a key factor. The Dimbles, whose house has been destroyed, find refuge at St. Anne's. So does Mark's wife, Jane Studdock, escaping torture at the hands of the secret police. In the same way, the founder of the God's Gardeners, Adam One, saves Toby's life when he distracts her murderous boss Blanco so that she can flee and find refuge at the Gardeners' sanctuary. Devin Brown's remark about the community that forms around Ransom could also apply to the Gardeners: "every member [...] has a unique and valuable role to play [...]. [It] resembles the society described by St. Paul in I Corinthians 12—one body made up of many parts" (46). Yet at the same time, belonging to the community does not mean losing your free will. MacPhee does not have to become a Christian to be part of the company, and neither does Toby have to be a believer to become an Eve. In both communities, people who join do not get absorbed by the group but are allowed to remain individuals.⁴

³ My definition here corresponds to Lewis's sixth meaning in his essay on the word "Nature": "all that is not man-made" (*Studies In Words* 46).

⁴ For Lewis, it is demons who wish to "absorb" their followers and who cannot understand why God "wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct" (*The Screwtape Letters* 8.47).

"We should not harm without cause" is the second principle that works in both communities. In *That Hideous Strength*, MacPhee is eager to fight, but Ransom explains to him that they should not use the same weapons as the enemy, that there should be a "distinction between ends and means" (Aeschliman 78) and that they have to wait rather than take the initiative. When MacPhee protests: "I'd be greatly obliged if any one (sic) would tell me what we *have* done—always apart from feeding the pigs and raising some very decent vegetables," Ransom answers him: "You have done what was required of you [...] You have obeyed and waited" (*THS* 17.368). He thus emphasizes the importance of trusting a superior force of Good rather than blindly attacking the enemy. Destruction comes, but it is not orchestrated by the human characters; its origin is supernatural. The members of the N.I.C.E. meet their ends through the attack of animals and an earthquake—as if nature itself took its revenge (Hudson 11)—and through killing each other, as egoism reaches a climax and everyone tries to save their own skins at any cost.

The God's Gardeners' creed advocates non-violence to the point of expecting followers to be vegetarian and to relocate slugs rather than kill them. Various members of the group later put this aspect into question. Led by Zeb, the MaddAddams decide that passivity can only last so long, and they form a dissident group of bio-terrorists—although they still do not kill people. When in danger of dying of hunger, Adam One allows the community to eat rats, recommending them to be thankful for the gift of the rodents' lives. At the beginning of *MaddAddam* [M], Toby regrets forgiving the Painballers, the criminals who survived the Flood, instead of killing them on the spot, since they manage to escape and put everyone's lives at risk again. At the end of the third book, the community hold a trial for the Painballers, condemning them to death and carrying out their execution. They have moved from "we should not harm at any cost" to "we should not harm without cause"—the ethic at play in Lewis's work.

Both communities consider that violence should not be decided on lightly and that it should never be seen as an easy answer to achieve one's goal.

The third principle is that there is a human obligation to improve other creatures. Behind this concept lies the idea of good stewardship, inspired by God's order to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1: 28. This idea has often been criticized by ecologists since it has led to numerous abuses (Clark 1). However, Dickerson and O'Hara argue that it was not supposed to be this way. They contend that the order to "dominate" should be understood in the light of the verb "keep" in Genesis 2: 15, which means "bless" and therefore "serve" and "protect" (199–200). The company at St. Anne's "improves" the animals in the house by helping them to "perfect their natures" (258). As Nancy Lou-Patterson puts it, "humankind raises animals by means of domestication to a new level of being"

("Some Kind of Company" 190). The humans achieve this by educating the animals, like Mr. Bultitude the bear, or the mice which come when Ransom summons them to feed them, and by considering them as a part of the company (Brown 46).

Adam One concurs with this interpretation of Genesis in his sermons: "We have [...] defiled our sacred task of stewardship" (YF 53). The Gardeners' protection of all animals is even pushed to ridiculous extremes. For example, Adam One mentions the pubic louse among "God's tiniest Angels" (YF 160). In *MaddAddam*, when a new community forms under Toby's lead, the humans keep faithful to the spirit of Adam One's teachings by taking care of the innocent Crakers, protecting them from the Painballers, and teaching them to fend for themselves.⁵

As a Christian, Lewis believed that humans had a special place in creation, but contrary to what some critics have implied,⁶ his vision is not purely anthropocentric.⁷ Dickerson and O'Hara point out that, in *That Hideous Strength*, it is the members of the N.I.C.E. who are anthropocentric in the extreme since they argue "for clearing the planet of all nonhuman life: animal as well as vegetable" (217). For Lewis, "survival of our species [...] should not come at the cost of the oppression of other life" (216).

The Gardeners' position corresponds more to that of radical "deep ecology." "[W]hereas 'shallow' approaches take an instrumental approach to nature," Greg Garrard explains, "arguing for preservation of natural resources only for the sake of humans, deep ecology demands recognition of **intrinsic value** in nature" (24, emphasis in original). For some radical movements like Earth First!, "there is a political imperative to defend the ecology of the earth, that is to put Earth First [...] not 'People First!'" (Bouson 79). This is what the Gardeners think deep at heart, Zeb informs Toby: "All the real Gardeners believed the human race was overdue for a population crash. It would happen anyway, and maybe sooner was better" (M 330). Because of this vision, some

⁵ The fact that the Gardeners wish to go back to Eden's prelapsarian state underlines their desire to live in harmony with animals rather than to exploit them, according to Northrop Frye's interpretation of the biblical text: "There are two levels of nature: the lower one, expressed in God's contract with Noah, presupposes a nature to be dominated and exploited by man; the higher one, expressed in an earlier contract with Adam in Paradise, is the nature to which man essentially belongs" (139).

⁶ For example, Clare Echterling accuses Lewis of having a "parochial" view of the environment based on anthropocentrism and on the notion of good stewardship (93).

⁷ As Sanford Schwartz notes, "In general, Lewis's anthropocentrism is tempered by [...] his recognition of the limits and responsibilities associated with divinely appointed stewardship" (166). Timothy Burberry remarks that "Lewis often portrays anthropocentrism in a negative light" (205).

critics, like Hope Jennings, denounce the cult's "nihilistic apocalypticism" (14). As for Toby, she remembers her mentor, Pilar, whom she has just learnt indirectly helped Crake create his virus, for "her kindness, her serenity, her strength. But underneath, there had always been a hard resolve. You wouldn't call it meanness or evil. Fatalism perhaps" (M 330). This assessment could illustrate Toby's "ambivalent attitude to the Gardeners, where her admiration and skepticism seem to parallel Atwood's own" (Howells 177).

In any event, the ending of the trilogy also suggests that the future of our planet might not involve human beings as we know them today. They might be replaced by an "improved" version of them, designed without the capacity to do evil, a "more compassionate race" (YF 424), with "a global sense of the inter-connection between the human and the non-human environment in the face of common threats" (Braidotti 50). Being closer to animals and to nature in general, the new hybrid species could prove to be better stewards than their predecessors.

Although Atwood's ending suggests a more radical approach to ecology, both writers consider the idea of good stewardship in a positive way.

The fourth principle concerns humility. Being humble means choosing not to exploit nature or other creatures because of a feeling of superiority, but showing respect. We should not act as if there was "no higher law than [our] own will" (Dickerson and O'Hara 259) and we should remember that "our actions have consequences both for other creatures and for the future. This can be an important corrective to human hubris and the corrosive actions that are sometimes dictated by efficiency or expediency" (ibid.)

Humility is encouraged at the Company of St Anne's: everyone is treated with equal regard. Jane is slightly shocked when she discovers that this applies to her former cleaning lady, Mrs. Maggs, as well as to the resident bear, Mr Bultitude, and that "one can learn humility above-stairs as well as below-stairs" (Patterson, "Archetypes of the Feminine" 319). In the novel, St Anne is constantly opposed to the headquarters of the N.I.C.E., "that paradigm of Hell itself" (Howard 125), as a place associated with "faith-inspired interdependence and humility" (Hilder 112).

Adam One often preaches on the topic of humility, with a special emphasis on ecology, asserting that we share the planet with other non-human forms of life which should be respected. He starts his first sermon addressing his "Dear Friends, dear Fellow Creatures, dear Fellow Mammals" (YF 11) thus suggesting equality among dwellers of the earth. One of the hymns sung by the Gardeners is called "Oh let me not be proud" (YF 54). Adam One lets children make fun of adults on April Fish Day to remind them that they once were children too, just as Jesus encourages his disciples to "become as little children" (Matt. 18: 3). His statement, "To be an April Fish is to humbly accept our own

silliness, and to cheerfully admit to the absurdity—from a materialist view—of every Spiritual truth we process” (YF 196), is reminiscent of St Paul’s “preaching of the cross [being] to them that perish foolishness” (1 Cor. 1: 18). His willingness to be foolish, which to him is a form of humility, can also partly account for some of the ludicrous declarations in his sermons.

The fifth and final principle deals with stories and their role in ecological education. Lewis presents the Company at St. Anne’s as a model community to be imitated in their closeness to and respect for nature, a place that embodies “ecological sanity” (Chapman 15), a sort of “Eden” regained (Blount 16). Atwood does not portray the God’s Gardeners as a perfect model, but when compared to the society they are surrounded by, they, too, appear as a globally positive group, what Atwood herself might call “a utopia embedded within a dystopia” (*In Other Worlds* 93). In this group, people try their best to save what they can in a world rushing headlong towards catastrophe: “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). In this final principle, Dickerson and O’Hara are concerned with how fiction can influence people in real life to take ecology more seriously.

There are other things that the two communities share. The company at St. Anne’s advocates solidarity, respect, non-violence, care and humility, which can be summarized in Jesus’s commandment: “love thy neighbor as thyself.”⁸ Although the God’s Gardeners are not supposed to represent one religion in particular, Adam One’s teachings are profoundly influenced by the Bible,⁹ and he, too, preaches on the centrality of love: “Where would any of us be without Love?” (YF 359). Adam One, like Ransom,¹⁰ ultimately becomes a Christ figure when he sacrifices his life to save Toby and the others (*M* 362).

Both authors believe that religion is part of the solution to the problems facing humanity. It is obvious in the case of Lewis, who was a Christian apologist as well as a writer of fantasy and who is renowned for using fiction as a way of conveying theology to his readers. He wrote that he wished to “steal

⁸ This commandment is actually quoted seven times in the Bible, including once in the Old Testament: Leviticus 19. 18; Matthew 19. 19; 22. 39; Mark 12. 31; Romans 13. 9; Galatians 5. 14; James 2. 8.

⁹ So is Atwood herself, as a recent collection of essays has shown. In the introduction, the editors assert: “From her childhood to her latest writings, the Bible has evidently fascinated Atwood” (Graybill and Sabo 8).

¹⁰ In *That Hideous Strength*, Ransom is depicted as a Christ-like figure who consumes only bread and wine (an allusion to the Eucharist), who suffers from a wound inflicted by the enemy at the heel (a reference to Genesis 3.15), and who serves as an intermediary between Heaven and Earth.

past those watchful dragons” in reference to overcoming people’s prejudices towards religion (“Sometimes Fairy Stories” 119–20). Atwood, on the other hand, is best known for *The Handmaid’s Tale*, a fierce criticism of religious extremism. However, she has also made clear that she has got nothing against Christianity, or religion in general.¹¹ Atwood chooses the God’s Gardeners, a group who reinterprets the Bible with an ecological lens, to be part of the new world as her human survivors after the catastrophe. Indeed, she comments that “unless environmentalism becomes a religion, it’s not going to work” (qtd. in Macpherson 86).

CONCLUSION

Despite the many differences between the two communities, on closer inspection, the resemblances are striking. A small group of people refuses to be blinded by greed or to remain passive against a pervasive enemy, and they gather to live together as a community. Their main activity involves tending the garden, looking after animals and preparing for what is to come. They are partly seen through the eyes of female skeptics who eventually join them. They have a leader whom they respect and obey. Their behavior is inspired by the teachings of the Bible, summarized in the commandment of “lov[ing] thy neighbor as thyself.” Both are in a David-and-Goliath situation but their efforts ultimately bear fruit, although the ending of Atwood’s trilogy is far less optimistic than Lewis’s. In our society too, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the discrepancy between powerful multinational companies and political powers who care more for wealth and power than about the future of our planet, and individuals who try to live differently but wonder whether their efforts can change anything. Both Lewis and Atwood give us a glimmer of hope, by stating that a small group who tries to be different can have an impact. At the same time, they are not pretending that it is easy, or even that it is necessarily going to end well, but both authors seem to think that fighting for a better world is worth it whatever the outcome. As Lewis writes, mere survival is not what matters: “Now I care far more *how* humanity lives than how long. Progress, for me, means increasing goodness and happiness of individual lives. For the species, as for each man, mere longevity seems to me a contemptible idea” (“Willing Slaves” 338).

¹¹ For example, in an essay on George Orwell: “As Orwell taught, it isn’t the labels—Christianity, socialism, Islam, democracy, Two Legs Bad, Four Legs Good, the works—that are definitive, but the acts done in their names” (*In Other Worlds* 142), or in a letter claiming that *The Handmaid’s Tale* is not “offensive to Christians” (*In Other Worlds* 243–44).¹The Brotherton Library special collection bought the B2 draft from the Gordon family and date it circa 1925. Scull and Hammond, however, believe that the Brotherton dating is incorrect and should be dated in the 1930s. If it is indeed datable to 1925, then of course the first two drafts in the Bodleian would have to be dated earlier than 1925.

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