

Childhood trauma in the maddaddam trilogy



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Margaret Atwood, renowned author of many novels, crafts the beautiful Maddaddam trilogy, consisting of *Oryx and Crake*, *Year of the Flood*, and *Maddaddam*. The series is portrayed as a work of feminism, environmental activism, and even anti-commercialism, set in a post-apocalyptic world. Although it is set in the future, it involves many timeless issues that are important in the present day, such as the consequences of sex work, the growing presence of corruption in the corporate sphere, and, interestingly, the importance of a parental bond during a child's development. Throughout the Maddaddam trilogy, Atwood explicitly demonstrates how childhood trauma, especially involving a parent, leads to irrevocable mental damage that drastically affects the events of a child's entire life.

The implications of a less-than-loving parental relationship are shown primarily through Jimmy, as he is unable to form a deep connection with either one of his parents. He feels alienated from his father, a "numbers person," because Jimmy himself is a "words person;" his father values numbers and science, making Jimmy feel ill-equipped and broadening the gap between them. This is reinforced throughout his childhood, shown when Jimmy says that he feels sorry for the pigeons trapped in their cages, just as he had felt sorry when watching the pile of dead animals being burned. In both of these instances, his father had been on the other side, convincing him that the animals felt nothing — however, this only strengthens Jimmy's opposition to him. On the other hand, his mother, who is firmly against the lack of ethics that the Corps hold, quits her job. This, unfortunately, does not allow for an increase of bonding between mother and son. She is withdrawn from Jimmy, sometimes not speaking to him, sometimes yelling, sometimes

crying. Jimmy doubts her love for him, feeling the iciness of her emotional stoicism and even going so far as to make her cry. She ends up leaving the house, smashing their computer and taking Killer, Jimmy's only friend, with her. Because of these traumatic events, Jimmy remembers his upbringing as a dark time, reminding himself that he is not defined by those times: "' I am not my childhood,' Snowman says out loud" (Oryx 68). His mind is forever haunted by his inability to perform to his father's standards, and his physical insatiability in adulthood is perhaps brought about by the lack of affection he received from his mother. His time in college, later while working, and even after the Flood, he is unable to detach himself from his notions of not-good-enough, instilled forever by his parents.

A slightly different chain of events occurs with Ren, one of Jimmy's brief love interests. During Ren's life in the Compound, she lives with her unemotional father Frank and her mother Lucerne. Lucerne is high-maintenance and never shows extreme care for Ren's feelings. However, the lack of adoration is not what scars Ren; that is accomplished by Lucerne's leaving of Frank, running off with Zeb to the God's Gardeners. Not only does Ren get wrenched from her home, losing her father, but she also is forced to start a new life in the pleeblands, a place that she had only heard of previously. Her mother's selfishness does not stop there, however. After uprooting her daughter from her home to live in a completely new world, she offers no solace. She instead shows her overt desire for Zeb in front of Ren repeatedly, almost rubbing the change of pace in Ren's face. Of course, when Lucerne is done with Zeb, she takes Ren right back to the Compound, to Frank and yet another new house. Ren is unable to settle down, unsure of what to think or

do. She never has a true father figure, as Zeb comes and goes, and Frank offers no emotional support. She is unable to feel her worth in her family; Lucerne drags her around at whim, and this feeling of worthlessness follows Ren into adulthood. She goes into the sex industry, working for Scales and Tails as “talent.” She repeatedly assures herself and others that she works as an important person at Scales: “I wasn’t only a disposable. I was talent” (282). This need to reaffirm her worth, and the choice of work in general for her, is derived from her childhood experiences with her mother; because she did not feel an emotional connection with either one of her parents, she seeks solace in physical connection at Scales.

Unlike the previous two characters, Crake, although also suffering from a lack of emotional connection as a child, does not seek a connection elsewhere — at least, not to humans. While Crake is still young, his father is pushed from an overpass because of his resistance of the Corps. It is deemed a suicide, and Crake is left to figure out the true reason by himself. His mother moves in with Uncle Pete, a friend of Crake’s father, after the death, and although Uncle Pete has good intentions, Crake never warms to him. Crake, a “numbers person” through and through, is crafting chemicals during his childhood, possible drafts of his plague, and his chosen subjects are his mother and Uncle Pete. While their deaths are deemed accidents from an unknown bioform, Jimmy infers that Crake has tested his creations on them; Crake almost giddily describes how his mother “frothed” at her death, turning to foam because of some hot bioform. This early indication of his lack of connection to his mother and father figure manifests later in life as well, when he engineers the BlyssPlus pill to wipe out the human race.

His emotional detachment is also shown in his manipulation of Jimmy and murder of Oryx, showing that he is incapable of forming a truly strong bond with anyone.

Ironically, the one person with the arguably most traumatizing childhood is an emblem for the rest. Oryx, sold by her mother at a young age, forced into child labor, and eventually ending up as a sex worker, is a symbol of hope throughout each novel. Both human and Craker alike regard Oryx as a goddess after her death. Her rough childhood has no visible impact on her adult life, as she is extremely mysterious about her past life. However, she is the lover of both Jimmy and Crake, seemingly ethereal and beautiful even in the most chaotic of times. She is immortalized as a deity of nature after her death, the only company for Jimmy after the plague. However, if her childhood was the most detrimental, how then can she be remembered so fondly? Perhaps Atwood is showing the audience something. Perhaps she is demonstrating that while the individual characters, each of whom have suffered in their childhoods, bear their scars for their lifetime, they are able to find solace in one another. The reader never sees into Oryx's mind; she never shares her own thoughts, but from the outside, the reader can only see the comfort she provides for others. This is her source of real immortality; while Crake is also remembered, he is remembered angrily; but calm, loving Oryx, who also suffered, acted as solace for those around her, and she will forever be known as a true god.