

# explorations



Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature

## Blending Christianity and Ecology in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*

DOI: 10.25167/EXP13.20.8.8

Laura Suchostawska (University of Wrocław)  
ORCID: 0000-0002-8884-8107

**Abstract.** The article presents a study of selected sermons and hymns created by a fictional eco-religious cult called God's Gardeners, which appear in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Year of the Flood*. These texts are analyzed by means of Fauconnier and Turner's theory of blending (conceptual integration). They are a mixture of different areas: the Bible and Christianity, on the one hand, and current environmental issues and science, on the other. The application of blending theory demonstrates how new interpretations of the Bible can be constructed as a result of blending two or more different input spaces to form a new story.

**Key words:** Margaret Atwood, God's Gardeners, blending, Bible, ecology, vegetarianism

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In her so-called MaddAddam trilogy comprising the novels *Oryx and Crake* (2004), *The Year of the Flood* (2010),<sup>1</sup> and *MaddAddam* (2013), Margaret Atwood presents the world in the not-so-distant future. The events described in the novels take place in America just before and after the collapse of the Western civilization, brought about by a global pandemic, artificially introduced by one of the characters, which almost entirely wipes out the human race. The world before the disaster is fraught with grave environmental problems caused by climate change, as well as massive species extinction. A relatively small group of people, a fictional eco-religious cult called God's Gardeners, try to resist destructive trends in the mainstream society, especially rampant consumerism that leads to the degradation of the planet. The novel *The Year of the Flood* focuses on this radical environmental group, whose spiritual leader is a man called Adam One. God's Gardeners are vegetarians, they grow their own organic food on rooftop city

---

<sup>1</sup> *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* were published for the first time in 2003 and 2009, respectively.

gardens, prepare their own natural remedies, make their own simple clothes, conserve water and energy, use recycled materials, and avoid technology. Through such activities, they attempt to resist the contemporary society “intent on turning everything into a commodity” (Şavkay 2019, 250). In addition, God’s Gardeners possess “all the usual trappings of an organized religion” (Bouson 2011, 18). They follow their own calendar of festivities and saints, most of them connected in some way with nature or ecology, for example, Saint Dian, martyr (Dian Fossey), or Saint Rachel and all Birds (Rachel Carson).

While Atwood presents a fictional group and its teachings in her novel, there have been numerous serious attempts to incorporate ecological issues into Christianity and to develop Christian environmentalism and ecotheology. David G. Horrell (2014) offers an overview of ecological interpretations of the Bible, ranging from critical approaches to certain biblical passages perceived as fostering harmful attitudes to the environment (“resistance”) to attempts to demonstrate that the Bible can offer positive inspiration for creating ecological theology and environmental ethics (“recovery”).<sup>2</sup> Adam One’s references to the Scriptures in his sermons for God’s Gardeners would belong to the latter category. In addition, biblical texts can also be used for the opposite purpose, to justify exploitation of nature for human needs, without considering consequences for the environment. In fact, as Horrell’s overview of various interpretations of the Bible with respect to environmental matters demonstrates, some people actually use the authority of the Scriptures to justify domination and exploitation of nature for human ends, though their views are not as extreme and exaggerated as those in Atwood’s fiction.<sup>3</sup>

As Horrel (2014) observes, the Bible “can be read and construed in a wide variety of ways” and it is “ambivalent and ambiguous in terms of its ecological implications” (117). Excessive human control over nature and resulting environmental problems that we face nowadays were obviously unknown to ancient authors and their readers. Consequently, biblical texts “do not, by themselves, straightforwardly or unambiguously provide a blueprint for ecological theology or environmental ethics” (80). As the Bible does not deal with such issues directly, biblical inspirations have to be supplemented with contemporary science and knowledge of current ecological problems, in order to arrive at certain conclusions as to how Christians should relate to their environment nowadays and what their moral responsibility is. Thus, reading the Bible becomes “a constructive and creative act, shaped by the perceived priorities of the contemporary context, and informed in that perception by science” (126).

The religion of God’s Gardeners constitutes a mixture of biblical texts and Christian tradition, on the one hand, and ecology, biology, environmentalism, and vegetarianism, on the other: “Atwood mixes together science, religion and environmentalism as she imagines the eco-religion of the pacifist and vegetarian God’s Gardeners” (Bouson 2011, 18). They “rely strongly on verbal means” (Mosca 2013, 47) and their sermons constitute

---

<sup>2</sup> More recent examples include the encyclical *Laudato si’* by Pope Francis from 2015 or, in Poland, the publications by Jaromi and Olszewski (2010), Jaromi (2019) and Hołownia (2018), who consider ecology and the relationship between humans and other beings from the perspective of Catholic theology.

<sup>3</sup> Adam One’s father created the Church of PetrOleum, and in his teachings he supported the development of the oil industry with references to the Bible. It appears that Adam One, following his father’s example, created his own religious movement in an analogical way, although his goals were entirely different.

elaborate “textual constructs” (44), which provide justification for their views and principles. In order to analyze the hybrid worldview of God’s Gardeners, blending theory will be employed, since its application can demonstrate how the group’s leader constructs their ecotheology, which cannot be derived from the Bible and Christianity alone but has to be supplemented with other areas of knowledge and experience.

## 2. BLENDING THEORY

Blending theory, also known as conceptual integration theory, developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, is presented in the most comprehensive way in their book *The Way We Think* (2002). It is a flexible framework for investigating a wide range of different phenomena in cognition, language, literature, art, and other areas, frequently employed in cognitive linguistics and cognitive poetics. It can also be applied, for instance, to analyzing interpretations of biblical stories (see my study of blending in New Testament parables, Suchostawska 2012).

Blending is a dynamic process, creating mappings between temporary mental spaces, which recruit small parts of larger conceptual domains, relevant to a particular case. A conceptual integration network consists of at least four mental spaces: two (or more) input spaces, which constitute the starting point for the process of blending, a generic space, containing schematic structure common to both input spaces, and a blended space (a blend), which results from the process of blending and is a complex combination of selected elements and relations from the input spaces. Fauconnier and Turner distinguish four different types of conceptual integration networks: simplex, mirror, single-scope, and double-scope networks (for their detailed description see Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 120-135). Only the last type will be relevant for the present analysis. In a double-scope network, unlike in other types of blending, each input space has its own distinct structure and both contribute to the structure of the blend, not only one of them. Adam One’s sermons and God’s Gardeners’ hymns can be analyzed as instances of double-scope blending of Christianity and environmentalism. The input space including some aspects of Christianity and the other input space containing some aspects of environmentalism undergo the process of blending, and the resulting blended space of God’s Gardeners’ ecotheology is a creative combination of elements of both Christianity and environmentalism. The structures of input spaces in a double-scope network are usually incompatible in some respects and may clash to some extent. Double-scope blending involves selective (partial) projection of structure from both input spaces to the blended space, giving rise to the appearance of new emergent structure in the blend, present in neither of the input spaces. Thus, as we will see, one input space can impose parts of its own structure on the blend, overriding some aspects of the structure of the other input space, which are inconsistent with it, if the structure of the former is deemed more important (for example, see section 3.3.).

In addition, Mark Turner developed a cognitive theory of parable, involving projection of one story onto another: “Most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking is organized as stories. The mental scope of story is magnified by *projection* – one story helps us make sense of another. The projection of one story onto another is *parable*, a basic cognitive principle that shows up everywhere” (Turner 1996, v). According to Turner (1996, 5), creating a parable “begins with narrative

imagining – the understanding of a complex of objects, events, and actors as organized by our knowledge of *story*. It then combines story with projection: one story is projected onto another.” The teachings of God’s Gardeners constitute an attempt to deal with complex environmental issues in terms of stories. Certain biblical stories (the fall of man and the flood) become parables that help people to make sense of current events, such as the ecological crisis. A given biblical story (one input space) is projected onto an aspect of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world presented in the novel (the other input space) to provide its interpretation and to create a system of ethical principles suited to new challenges that humanity is facing.

### **3. BLENDING CHRISTIANITY AND ENVIRONMENTALISM IN GOD’S GARDENERS’ ECOTHEOLOGY**

In *The Year of the Flood*, the chapters narrating events in the lives of the protagonists are intertwined with passages which offer a glimpse at the group’s theological and ecological views. There are 13 sermons and hymns scattered throughout the book and covering the span of 20 years, which regularly interrupt and, at the same time, comment on the narration. Each main chapter is preceded by a sermon by Adam One and lyrics of a hymn from *The God’s Gardeners Oral Hymnbook*. Each of the hymns is closely related thematically to the content of the sermon, which in turn is connected with the day’s celebration, as well as current events.

Given the limited scope of the article, only some of the sermons given by the group’s leader and some hymns related to them thematically are discussed, namely those that refer directly to the Scriptures. One of the cornerstones of God’s Gardeners’ ecotheology is their interpretation of the biblical stories of creation of the world, the fall of man, and the flood. These three stories from the book of Genesis, to which Adam One refers in his teachings, are also some of the most commented on passages in Christian ecological theology and environmental ethics (see Horrell 2014, 12). However, many other biblical texts commonly quoted in the context of ecology do not appear in the novel; for example, there are few references to the New Testament. It must also be emphasized that Adam One’s teachings are not presented systematically but are relatively informal speeches directed at a small circle of friends and their children. As such, they are both fragmentary and provisional, and these fictional sermons cannot be judged against real-life versions of ecotheology, as they do not result from any professional, rigorous theological study.

#### **3.1. THE CREATION OF THE WORLD AND EVOLUTION**

The very first page of the novel introduces a blend of the biblical story of the Garden of Eden and the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century degradation of the natural world. The hymn entitled “The Garden” (Atwood 2010, ix), which actually precedes the novel, describes the devastation of Eden by humans. Once the Earth was God’s Garden, a beautiful place where his creatures lived happily; now they have all been killed, water is polluted, and woods have turned into a desert. The only hope is that God’s Gardeners will restore the garden to life. By creating rooftop gardens in the middle of urban wasteland, God’s Gardeners are doing their “small part in the redemption of God’s Creation” (13).

The first of Adam One's sermons inserted in the novel (Atwood 2010, 13-15), given on Creation Day, presents an account of creation of the world by God. Adam One opposes literal readings of the Bible, favored by fundamentalist groups of Christians, since he believes that God's Gardeners "could not achieve their goal of reconciling the findings of Science with their sacramental view of Life simply by overriding the rules of the former" (287). He explains that the six days of creation correspond to millions of years, "for His days are eons, and a thousand ages of our time are like an evening to Him" (14). Furthermore, he emphasizes that the order of creation in Genesis corresponds roughly to the order of development of species on our planet according to the theory of evolution, so there is actually no serious conflict between the two accounts.

The second sermon (Atwood 2010, 61-64), given during the Feast of Adam and All Primates, develops the issue of evolution and underscores human kinship with other species of animals. On that day, the Gardeners affirm their "Primate ancestry," for which they are criticized by both sides: on the one hand, by more conservative Christians, adherents of creationism, on the other, by those scientists who espouse the theory of evolution and, being atheists, exclude the role of God in creating life on Earth. Adam One points out that the biblical story of the creation of man "from the dust of the Earth" is in a sense true and consistent with scientific knowledge, as what was referred to as dust can be described in contemporary terms as "atoms and molecules, the building blocks of all material entities" (62). However, creation does not exclude the existence of processes of evolution: "In addition to this, He created us through the long and complex process of Natural and Sexual Selection" (62). As the Gardeners sing in their hymn on that day: "through Your blend of DNAs / Came passion, mind, and learning" (65). The most prized human qualities, such as the intellect and knowledge, traditionally thought to distinguish humans from animals, are presented as a result of genetic mutations, which, nevertheless, are attributed directly to God's actions.

These sermons and hymns are based on a blend of the story of creation from the book of Genesis and of the Darwinian theory of evolution. In one input space, there is the story of creation of the world by God, while the other input space comprises the general outline of the theory of evolution. In the first input space, there is an agent (God) who performs certain actions to create the world and living beings, whereas in the second input space there is no agent and no actions, only processes of evolution that happen without anyone's conscious intervention. In the blend, the two stories are combined: natural processes of evolution take place, but they are designed and initiated by God. Thus, a conscious agent is added to the scientific account of the appearance of different species on Earth. The stages of creation of the world in Genesis correspond roughly to the stages of the Earth's history and evolution of living organisms presented by scientists; even though there are some differences, the general idea of gradual development is the same. There is one more clash between the input spaces: in one, the time of creation is compressed into a week, whereas in the other the span of time is counted in billions of years. This apparent clash is resolved in the blend by the explanation that the measurement of time is relative, distinct for God and for human beings.

The emphasis on a close evolutionary relation between humans and "our fellow Primates" (Atwood 2010, 62) has an important goal of teaching people humility: "We pray that we may not fall into the error of pride by considering ourselves as exceptional, alone in all Creation in having Souls; and that we will not vainly imagine that we are set above all other Life, and may destroy it at our pleasure, and with impunity" (63-64). In

this prayer concluding the second sermon, Adam One expresses his belief that animals too have souls, a feature traditionally considered as an exclusively human characteristic, which distinguishes people from animals and thus elevates humankind above all other species.

It is interesting in this context to point out that Adam One typically refers to his listeners as “Dear Friends, dear Fellow Creatures, dear Fellow Mammals” (13). By referring to people as creatures and mammals, which are nouns typically applied to animals, he emphasizes the fact that humans are also animals and relatives of other living beings, and implicitly questions the traditional hierarchy of the Great Chain of Being, with humankind situated above and apart from the rest of creation. This belief is sometimes used as justification for people’s exploitation of animals and the Earth for their own benefit. That is why God’s Gardeners “consider sustainability to be conditional on redefining the relationship between the human and non-human world, based on respect for every living being, a tenet which can be seen as the cornerstone of their theology” (Gilarek 2015, 173). In another sermon, Adam One recalls the principle from the Gospel: “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Matthew 25:40), paraphrasing it as: “Insofar as you do it unto the least of God’s creatures, you do it unto Him” (Atwood 2010, 63). The broad term “brethren/brothers” can be interpreted as referring not only to humans but also to animals, but Adam One explicitly replaces it with “creatures,” a word immediately associated with animals, rather than humans. He attempts to create environmental ethics by extending Christian ethical principles to animals, rejecting the traditional division between humans and the rest of the world. In this, the Gardeners’ approach resembles that of proponents of deep ecology.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2. VEGETARIANISM, THE FALL OF MAN, AND EXPLOITATION OF NATURE

Although killing animals and eating their meat is not considered a sin in the Bible and in Christianity, Christian vegetarianism is consistent with the biblical account of creation. When God created animals and humans, he intended them all to eat only plants, their seeds or fruits, and not each other’s flesh;<sup>5</sup> thus, “the original creation as depicted in Genesis 1 is a herbivorous or vegetarian one” (Horrell 2014, 25). It appears that, according to the biblical account, initially all creatures lived in peace and harmony with each other, and it may be inferred that carnivorousness appeared among people and

---

<sup>4</sup> According to Bergthaller (2010), God’s Gardeners have created a kind of “natural theology, which grafts views familiar from Deep Ecology (most importantly, the evolutionary kinship of all species and the ethical obligations it entails) onto an essentially Christian religious framework” (739). Phillips (2017, 157) also associates the worldview and lifestyle of God’s Gardeners with deep ecology. Deep ecologists attempt to look for deep causes of the environmental crisis in western culture and civilization and try to replace anthropocentrism with biocentrism since, in their opinion, the belief that humans are exceptional and superior to other living beings results in the conviction that people have the right to control and manipulate nature, which leads to its exploitation and destruction (Kulik 2007, 6). Deep ecology is a variety of ecological philosophy, created in the 1970s by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (see Dziubek-Hovland 2004).

<sup>5</sup> “And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so” (Genesis 1:29-30).

among some animals only after the fall of man and probably as a consequence of the original sin, together with all kinds of evil and suffering.<sup>6</sup>

Although God's Gardeners believe that the first humans were originally vegetarians, they appear to assume that some animals were created as predators from the very beginning, and they see nothing evil in their natural behavior. One of their hymns describes the circulation of matter among living beings – animals and plants, which in turn derive nourishment from each other. This is blended with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, who died so that people can live eternally, with references to the Last Supper: "All Creatures know that some must die / That all the rest may take and eat; / Sooner or later, all transform / Their blood to wine, their flesh to meat" (Atwood 2010, 510).

Even though eating meat does not violate any laws of nature, the Gardeners consciously decide to refrain from it for ethical reasons: "we are not as Animals – / We cherish other Creatures' lives; / And so we do not eat their flesh" (Atwood 2010, 417). Since killing other animals and devouring them is natural for many species, not eating meat is in this case a religious principle, which requires reflection and a conscious decision. Despite all their emphasis on human kinship with other animals, this is something that only a human, and no other animal, is capable of doing.

Vegetarianism is one of the main principles characterizing God's Gardeners' lifestyle<sup>7</sup> and is treated as a spiritual issue. For instance, when Adam One preaches in the street next to a burger stand, he does it in a way typical of Christian tales of sudden conversion of a sinner: "I, too, was once a materialistic, atheistic meat-eater." He continues his testimony, telling how one day as he was eating a burger, a mystical experience took place: "I saw a great Light. I heard a great Voice. . . . It said, Spare your fellow Creatures! Do not eat anything with a face! Do not kill your own Soul!" (Atwood 2010, 48). The frames of conversion and testimony from the domain of Christianity are applied to describe his conversion to vegetarianism.

Adam One interprets the biblical story in Genesis in an original way. One of the first tasks of Adam in the Garden of Eden was to name animals, and this action of naming is interpreted by Adam One as greeting animals affectionately with their names: "Adam's first act towards the Animals was thus one of loving-kindness and kinship, for Man in his unfallen state was not yet a carnivore. The Animals knew this, and did not run away" (Atwood 2010, 15). The first encounter between humans and animals was "a peaceful gathering at which every living entity on the Earth was embraced by Man" (15). The

---

<sup>6</sup> That is why, as Horrell (2014, 46) points out, contemporary "Christian writers promoting a biblical vegetarianism" look for the basis of their views "in the primaeval and eschatological visions, where plants provide all necessary food (Gen. 1:29-30; Isa. 11:6-9)". For Christian vegetarians, "vegetarianism is seen as a way of living eschatologically, in step with, and anticipation of, the realization of God's peaceable kingdom" (93). However, the eschatological vision of peace between predators and herbivores from the book of Isaiah (cf. Horrell 2014, 90-95) is not mentioned by Adam One.

<sup>7</sup> It must be added, though, that God's Gardeners are not vegans and do not abstain from other foods of animal origin, such as honey and birds' eggs. Moreover, they are allowed to eat meat in case of emergency, if few other food sources are available: "if dread Famine drives us on, / And if we yield to tempting Meat, / May God forgive our broken Vows, / And bless the Life we eat" (Atwood 2010, 417). In this, they are quite pragmatic, which helps them to survive in difficult times when they can no longer cultivate their crops. When they kill an animal, they utter "the words for the freeing of the soul and the asking of pardon" (18).

hymn that follows refers again to that idyllic coexistence of the first man with animals: “He dwelt in peace with Bird and Beast, / And knew God face to face” (16). An intimate relationship with God as well as a friendly attitude to other creatures characterized humanity before the fall.

According to Adam One, the scene in which Eve and then Adam give in to temptation and taste the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil provides evidence that humans were originally created by God as herbivorous creatures and only after the fall began to consume meat: “It would have made sense for this foodstuff to have been truly evil – a meat object, such as a beefsteak. Why then a Fruit? Because our Ancestors were fruitivores, without a doubt, and only a Fruit would have tempted them” (Atwood 2010, 329). In the context of God’s Gardeners’ principles, meat is most easily associated with forbidden food; however, Adam One does not want to distort the Scriptures. Instead, he uses this detail as evidence of human eating habits in Eden.

Adam One associates the first sin of disobedience of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, specifically with greed. With time, this inherited tendency led to exploitation and degradation of the Earth. According to Adam One, the first parents disobeyed the “commandment to live the Animal life in all simplicity – without clothing” (Atwood 2010, 63). After the fall, one of the first things that Adam and Eve did was to make clothes for themselves, something that had not occurred to them before, when they lived in the state of innocence, in which animals remain. The need to possess things such as clothing, first made of plants and then of animals’ skins, gave rise to the development of greed, and the desire for material possessions led to exploitation of the Earth: “Ours is a fall into greed: why do we think that everything on Earth belongs to us, while in reality we belong to Everything?” (63). The fall gave rise to gradual evolution of human civilization, which is seen by Adam One as deterioration rather than development and progress: “The Fall was ongoing, but its trajectory led ever downward” (224).

Thus, the biblical story of the fall of man and the original sin can be blended with contemporary environmental issues, such as exploitation of natural resources, extinction of species, over-consumption of meat, ethical treatment of animals, and vegetarianism. The fall of man is the result of disobedience of God’s commandment and can be interpreted as transgression of established limits on the use of the natural world created by God. Eating the forbidden fruit may be perceived in our times, for instance, as a symbol of destroying endangered species of animals or plants. Though sins, which began to spread after the fall, are commonly associated mostly with disrespect to God and harm done to other humans, this specific interpretation highlights ecological sins, those actions that harm other living beings and the ecosystems of the Earth. It is consistent with the structure of the biblical input space, as both input spaces share the same generic structure (harmful actions). In the blend, the current environmental crisis is presented as the final result of the original sin, leading to destruction of all life on Earth, which began with the fall and gradually led to more and more evil.

The result of the broken relationship with God and the rest of creation has had devastating consequences: “We have betrayed the trust of the Animals, and defiled our sacred task of stewardship. God’s commandment to ‘replenish the Earth’ did not mean we should fill it to overflowing with ourselves, thus wiping out everything else” (Atwood



2010, 63). Instead of being stewards of the Earth,<sup>8</sup> humans have become plunderers. The right of people to live, proliferate, and inhabit the Earth has been misinterpreted as the right to do anything they please at the cost of other inhabitants of the planet. It appears that natural instincts and tendencies of humans, focusing mostly on the survival and well-being of an individual and his/her relatives and offspring, combined with present-day immense technological possibilities of influencing the external world, unavailable to other living beings or even to our ancestors, frequently lead to abuse and exploitation of the environment.

That is why, according to Bergthaller (2010), God's Gardeners "must resuscitate the Biblical myth of the Fall" (731). It requires considerable effort to live in an environmentally friendly way, so it is not enough to rely on natural tendencies. A higher moral order is necessary; hence the need for religious principles. The resulting teachings, practices, and rules guiding the lives of the group's members aim to reconcile weak human nature with a transcendental order that alone can subdue the more destructive natural tendencies (739). In Atwood's novel, nature "acquires normativity only by virtue of its createdness at the hand of God – that is, through the place it occupies" in the eco-religion of God's Gardeners (Bergthaller 2010, 740). As a result, some interpretations of *The Year of the Flood* treat it as a call "for a turn to religious belief" (Ridout 2015, 36). According to Bouson (2011), Atwood "looks to religion – specifically eco-religion – as she seeks evidence of our ethical capacity to find a remedy to humanity's ills" (18). It is possible that "unless environmentalism becomes a religion it's not going to work" as it is analogous to religious faith: "You must believe that come what may this is the thing to do" (Atwood, quoted in Bouson 2011, 25-26).<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3. THE ANCIENT FLOOD AND THE "WATERLESS FLOOD"

Another biblical story of crucial significance to God's Gardeners is the account of the great flood, Noah, and his ark, to which one of the sermons is devoted (Atwood 2010, 107-110). The flood described in the book of Genesis cleansed the Earth of evil people, wiping out almost all human beings, except Noah and his family. Numerous animals perished too, except those that were saved by Noah in his ark, besides underwater creatures: "God was evidently willing to do away with numerous Species, as the fossil records attest" (108), but the rest have survived until the present. Adam One points out that after the flood God established a covenant with Noah and his family as well as "with every living creature." It proves that "the Animals are not senseless matter, not mere chunks of meat. No; they have living Souls, or God could not have made a Covenant with them" (109). This biblical passage demonstrates that "humanity is inextricably bound up

---

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the notion of stewardship see Horrell (2014, 28-35).

<sup>9</sup> Canavan (2012) disagrees with those who perceive Atwood's novel as "a Bible for the world to come" (155) or a project of an "ecological religion" (158). Nevertheless, it appears that Atwood was aware of the possibility that her readers might adapt or incorporate some elements and ideas from her novel in their own environmental activism. As she herself wrote in acknowledgments: "Anyone who wishes to use any of these hymns for amateur devotional or environmental purposes is more than welcome to do so" (Atwood 2010, 517). To facilitate this use, music to their lyrics was composed by Orville Stoeber and a CD called *Hymns of the God's Gardeners* was released.

with the rest of the earth community. All the earth somehow slides into the degradation and corruption that begins with Adam and Eve's disobedience" and it "is emphatically included in the covenant God makes after the Flood" (Horrell 2014, 47-48). Referring to the promise of God after the flood: "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; ... neither will I again smite every thing living" (Genesis 8:21), Adam One concludes that since the end of the great flood, it is humanity, and not God, that is to blame for any form of destruction of the natural world and for the extinction of numerous species of animals, and he follows this with examples of contemporary devastation of various ecosystems by humans.

The sermon is based on a double-scope conceptual integration network with two input spaces. One of them comprises the biblical story, with immoral humanity destroyed by God in the flood, and Noah, who survives and saves other living beings. The other input space includes God's Gardeners, who see themselves as a righteous minority surrounded by corrupted society. The resulting blend is a hypothetical future scenario. The Gardeners believe that another disaster will soon destroy the human race: "God had promised after the Noah incident that he'd never use the water method again, but considering the wickedness of the world he was bound to do something" (Atwood 2013, 26). Thus, the idea of the flood is projected to the blend from the biblical input space, but in the blend it is a future global catastrophe of an unknown type, referred to as the "Waterless Flood." Later on, a disaster does indeed occur and it turns out to be a plague that kills most humans on Earth but does not affect any other species.<sup>10</sup>

There are numerous mappings between the two input spaces. Noah corresponds to God's Gardeners: "We God's Gardeners are a plural Noah . . . We must be ready for the time when those who have broken trust with the Animals – yes, wiped them from the face of the Earth where God placed them – will be swept away by the Waterless Flood" (Atwood 2010, 110). In a conceptual integration network, one element can correspond to two or more elements in the other input space. As a result, "a plural Noah" appears in the blend. The opposite is possible too: when two or more elements in one input space correspond to one element in the other input space, they can be fused into a single element in the blend. In the biblical input space, Noah and his ark are two separate and distinct elements, but they both correspond to an individual Gardener in the other input space. In the blend, Noah and the ark are fused, since the body of a God's Gardener, a new Noah, corresponds to an ark, as their hymn explains: "My body is my earthly Ark, / It's proof against the Flood; / It holds all Creatures in its heart, / . . . It's builded firm of genes and cells, / And neurons without number; / My Ark enfolds the million years" (111). As a result of evolution, the human body contains traces of earlier species. Moreover, human memory saves animals from disappearing completely from the Earth: "we Gardeners will cherish within us the knowledge of the Species, and of their preciousness to God" (110). Children are told that saying the names of the species is "a way of keeping those animals alive" (376). The animals saved by Noah, then, correspond to memories of animals carried in the minds of the Gardeners, but also to genome records of animals. As Adam One explains: "Our role in respect to the Creatures is to bear

---

<sup>10</sup> However, the disaster is not brought about by God as punishment but by a human being. God's Gardeners' relative success in facing the catastrophe is due to their caution, avoidance of contact with the rest of the population, earlier preparations, survival skills, but also their "sense of community" and solidarity (Labudova 2013, 32).

witness ... And to guard the memories and the genomes of the departed" (300). It is conceivable that he "harboured a dream of restoring all the lost Species via their preserved DNA codes, once a more ethical and technically proficient future had replaced the depressing present" (295). The information was stored by the Gardeners "to keep alive the possibility of repopulating the globe, Noah-style, with those species that would be lost" (Snyder 2010, 20). Thus, what is saved in the blend are not actual animals but the knowledge of these animals. There is one more mapping involved. Mount Ararat, where Noah's ark finally landed after the flood receded, corresponds to hidden refuge and storage places filled with food supplies as well as with seeds of various plants, which the Gardeners construct, meant to enable them to survive after the disaster. In the blend, these places become multiple "Ararats." Through double-scope blending, then, the hypothetical story of the "Waterless Flood" inherits partial structure from both input spaces. Some aspects of the structure in the contemporary input space are deemed more important and, consequently, they override the structure of the biblical input space. As a result, the new story in the blend has emergent structure of its own, with a plural Noah, who is at the same an ark, saving virtual animals.

Finally, it must be added that Adam One turns out to be quite pragmatic when he admits in a private conversation that he combines such biblical stories with environmental concerns in order to persuade people to change their behavior, as environmental ethics not supported by religious belief appears to be less convincing: "most people don't care about other Species, not when times get hard. All they care about is their next meal . . . But what if it's God doing the caring?" (287).<sup>11</sup> Since people tend to believe in some kind of deity, "we need to push popular sentiment in a biosphere-friendly direction by pointing out the hazards of annoying God by a violation of His trust in our stewardship" (288). All people will ultimately suffer from negative consequences of the devastation of the Earth, whether they believe in God or not, but according to Adam One: "If there's a penalty, they want a penalizer. They dislike senseless catastrophe" (288). Introducing God into the story of environmental crisis in the blend helps to give it unity and adds a conscious agent (God) to a collection of various events (such as natural disasters and disease) which otherwise may seem unrelated. It also compresses and emphasizes the cause-effect relationship between harmful, selfish human actions and their future negative consequences, framing them as a form of penalty for evil deeds.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

As demonstrated above, the biblical description of creation of the world, as well as the subsequent stories of the fall of man and the flood, are blended in Adam One's sermons and God's Gardeners' hymns with contemporary environmental concerns, with current knowledge of the natural world, and modern trends such as vegetarianism. The resulting blends function not only on the level of ideas but also on the level of language. The sermons and especially the hymns contain elements of archaic language typical of

---

<sup>11</sup>As Terence E. Fretheim (2012) points out, the high value of every creature to God constitutes "the basic theological grounding for biblical reflections on environmental matters," since it implies that humans should take care of them "for God's sake and not simply for their own sake or for the sake of the creatures" (686).

these two traditional religious genres and of the Bible, as well as contemporary scientific terms and vocabulary.

Although the present study deals with teachings of a fictional group, blending theory could also be applied in an analogical way to actual versions of ecotheology and various ecological interpretations of the Bible, in order to demonstrate how they are created by combining different areas of knowledge and ideas. Biblical texts can be supplemented with Christian tradition, other spiritual and philosophical traditions, contemporary ethics, science, and the knowledge of current ecological problems. Each such reading of a biblical text is a construction of new meaning, which can be perceived as the outcome of ubiquitous cognitive processes of blending

#### REFERENCES

- Atwood, Margaret. 2004. *Oryx and Crake*. London: Virago.
- Atwood, Margaret. 2010. *The Year of the Flood*. London: Virago.
- Atwood, Margaret. 2013. *MaddAddam*. New York: Nan A. Talese / Doubleday.
- Berghaller, Hannes. 2010. "Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." *English Studies* 91(7):728-743.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. 2011. "'We're Using Up the Earth. It's Almost Gone': A Return to the Post-Apocalyptic Future in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46(1):9-26.
- Canavan, Gerry. 2012. "Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 23:138-159.
- Dziubek-Hovland, Magdalena. 2004. *Przyroda nie należy do człowieka: Sylwetka i ekofilozofia Arne Naessa na tle norweskiej filozofii ekologicznej* [Nature does not Belong to Man: The Profile and Ecophilosophy of Arne Naess against a Background of Norwegian Ecological Philosophy]. Bystra: Pracownia na rzecz Wszystkich Istot.
- Fauconnier, Gilles and Mark Turner. 2002. *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Franciszek, Ojciec Święty. 2015. *Encyklika Laudato si': W trosce o wspólny dom* [Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home]. Kraków: M Wydawnictwo.
- Fretheim, Terence E. 2012. "Genesis and Ecology." In *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, edited by Craig A. Evans, Joel N. Lohr and David L. Petersen, 683-706. Leiden: Brill.
- Gilarek, Anna. 2015. "Humanity in Crisis: Man-made Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." In *Eating America: Crisis, Sustainance, Sustainability*, edited by Justyna Kociatkiewicz, Laura Suchostawska and Dominika Ferens, 163-176. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Hołownia, Szymon. 2018. *Boskie zwierzęta* [God's Animals]. Kraków: Znak.
- Horrell, David G. 2014. *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology*. London: Routledge.

- Jaromi, Stanisław and Michał Olszewski. 2010. *Eco-book o eko-Bogu* [Eco-book about Eco-God]. Kraków: Salwator.
- Jaromi, Stanisław. 2019. *Boska Ziemia* [God's Earth]. Kraków: Znak.
- Kulik, Ryszard. 2007. *Odkrywanie natury: Praktyka głębokiej ekologii* [Discovering Nature: The Practice of Deep Ecology]. Bystra: Pracownia na rzecz Wszystkich Istot.
- Labudova, Katarina. 2013. "Paradise Redesign: Post-Apocalyptic Visions of Urban and Rural Spaces in Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* Trilogy." *Eger Journal of English Studies* 13:27-36.
- Mosca, Valeria. 2013. "Crossing Human Boundaries: Apocalypse and Posthumanism in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*." *Saggi/Ensayos/Essays/Essays* 9:38-52.
- Phillips, Dana. 2017. "Collapse, resilience, stability and sustainability in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy." In *Literature and Sustainability: Concept, Text and Culture*, edited by Adeline Johns-Putra, John Parham and Louise Squire, 139-158. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Ridout, Alice. 2015. "Margaret Atwood's Straddling Environmentalism." *Comparative American Studies* 13(1-2):31-41.
- Şavkay, Canan. 2019. "Myth and Fantasy in Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* Trilogy." *Hacettepe University Journal of Faculty of Letters* 36(2):244-252.
- Snyder, Katherine W. 2010. "It's the End of the World As We Know It: *The Year of the Flood* by Margaret Atwood." *The Women's Review of Books* 27(2):19-20.
- Suchostawska, Laura. 2012. "Blending in New Testament Parables." In *Texts and Minds: Papers in Cognitive Poetics and Rhetoric*, edited by Alina Kwiatkowska, 155-164. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Turner, Mark. 1996. *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License.*  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Laura Suchostawska is an Assistant Professor at the University of Wrocław, where she teaches courses on ecolinguistics, metaphor, and writing at the Institute of English Studies. She holds a PhD in linguistics as well as a master's degree in English studies and in Spanish studies. Her research interests include metaphor, ecolinguistics, and ecocriticism. She is the author of the books *Space and Metaphor* (2005), *Approaching Nature through Metaphors in Thoreau's Writings* (2020), *Relaciones entre el cristianismo y las creencias indígenas en las obras de José María Arguedas* (2020), and she co-edited the book *Eating America: Crisis, Sustainance, Sustainability* (2015).

**E-MAIL:** [laura.suchostawska@uwr.edu.pl](mailto:laura.suchostawska@uwr.edu.pl)