

MARGARET ATWOOD ON FINDING INSPIRATION

Man Booker Prize-winning author Margaret Atwood discusses finding inspiration and glow-in-the-dark animals at Bristol Festival of Ideas. By Clare Diston.



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Margaret Atwood has an unusual technique for finding inspiration: put your left hand on the table in front of you and hold your right hand in the air. Stay like that for long enough and you'll get an idea. "Nobody really knows where inspiration comes from," she says, "so when people ask me I just make up stuff like that."

Even though the grand dame of Canadian fiction probably doesn't sit at home waving her arms above her head (much as we'd like to believe she does), it's quite obvious that her inspiration isn't in short supply.

Returning to the [Bristol Festival of Ideas](#) for the first time since 2009, Atwood was discussing her latest novel *MaddAddam* – the final instalment of her trilogy which began with *Oryx and Crake* and continued with *The Year of the Flood*. *MaddAddam* is set in the same futuristic world of the first two novels, where scientists have delved into the "genetic toybox" and come up with glowing green rabbits, bulletproof spider silk and transplantable human hair.

But Atwood's ideas aren't purely science fiction. Being an avid reader of scientific journals, her knowledge of what is really happening in the scientific world (yes, we do have [glow in the dark animals](#)) gives her work the eerie tinge of reality.

Still, the technology in *MaddAddam* is just the backdrop to a very human story. Atwood makes it clear that our tendencies towards love, hate, anger and hope aren't obliterated or even altered by our developing technologies.

"People getting in spaceships are just people getting in spaceships, and nothing else," she says. "Humans remain much the same whether they're communicating by email or – heaven forbid! – handwritten letters." When asked why she thought printed books were not dying out, Atwood was insistent that novels and long narratives can coexist with shorter forms of entertainment. Radio, TV, video games and movies were all supposed to wipe out books but none of them did, she explains, putting it down to how deeply ingrained storytelling is in human nature. "Everyone is always revising and narrating to themselves the stories of their own lives," she adds.

Tickets for Atwood's talk at St George's on August 28 were sold out and the queue for the book signing extended around three sides of the hall, proving just how popular her novels continue to be. However, she remains reserved about her own achievements in the industry. "Reading is one to one," she says. "Some people will like your book, some won't, but if just one person does then that's pretty good."

Clare Diston is a Bristol-based writer, editor and book blogger at 50ayear.com. When she doesn't have her nose buried in a book, she's probably rummaging through charity shops looking for more! Find her on Twitter [@gildius1](https://twitter.com/gildius1)

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