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### Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret Mini Analysis

In *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*, we are presented with what seems to be a classic coming of age book. As we explore it, we find a surprising amount of realism and depth - Blume takes the very ordinary and even banal circumstances that any tween or teen girl may find themselves in, and makes it interesting and entertaining. Despite this book being over 40 years old, the story is as fresh and relevant today as it no doubt was when written. As with many books of this genre, the themes include self discovery (in this case with a particular emphasis on Margaret's religious beliefs), friendship, peer pressure, and sexual awakening.

Having had the fortune to have been raised in the 80's and 90's, I have been exposed to legions of coming of age films. Although it feels as though John Hughes is responsible for virtually all of them, the film that I chose as a comparison piece is Cameron Crowe's *Say Anything*. Although *Say Anything* is targeted towards a slightly older audience and features older characters, many of the same major themes are explored. In this movie, we follow the protagonist Lloyd Dobler, as he is graduating from high school. Lloyd is framed as a genuinely nice person who has a small circle of friends, and desperately wants to ask out the class valedictorian, Diane Court. As a character, we come to learn that Lloyd has no strong ambitions, and is uncertain about his future. He struggles with the ideas that the older generation (as

symbolized by Diane's father) have about fitting in, and when pressured about his future plans, he gives a rambling answer that includes not wanting to "buy, sell, or process anything" for a living. This is met by obvious distaste by the adults present. In the same way, Margaret is seeking her own way with regards to her religious beliefs, and although she is unsure, the adults in the book (represented in glaring comparisons by Margaret's two grandmothers) both try to push and influence her, and both are upset by Margaret's refusal to accept either Christianity or Judaism, and both completely dismiss the idea of atheism or agnosticism out of hand (as is evidenced by Margaret's maternal grandmother's stating "Nonsense!" when Margaret's father puts forth that possibility).

The second major theme that is similar is that of sexual and emotional awakening. In *Say Anything*, this is the primary theme - Lloyd gets to know Diane, and they begin to have a relationship that eventually turns sexual. Lloyd goes through the intense high that comes with a teenage relationship, and the introspection that comes when that relationship goes sour. Lloyd struggles to find emotional maturity during the tumult of this post-high school relationship and breakup. In a thematically similar way, we see Margaret going through the difficulty of being pre-pubescent and waiting for her first period, and at the same time, she daydreams about boys that she feels are unreachable (in the same way Lloyd longed for a relationship with Diane early in the film). The girls in their "PTS" secret club share advice and emotional support for each other whilst struggling with their emotions and hormones, similar to Lloyd's group of friends. The final similarity is the struggle that the girls have with the pressure of impossible icons - they compare themselves to the girls in Playboy and to more mature looking girls at school, and long to look like them, and pressure each other to become mature faster. In a similar vein, we see

Lloyd dealing with lofty ideals. When he is being given advice from his closest friends about emotional maturity, he is told: “No. The world is full of guys. Be a man. Don’t be a ‘guy’”.

While this appears to be genuinely good advice, the flip side is that it pressures Lloyd to be what his female friends imagine as a perfect man, in a relational and emotional sense.

*Are You There God? It's Me Margaret* has been considered a classic for some time, and it's easy to understand why. The characters are relatable, and deal with the same timeless issues that teens and tweens struggle with, in timeless fashion. We can take away from this several lessons that children can learn and that we can discuss - the notion that parents and grandparent's are not always right, the ideas that peers can struggle in the same way, and the idea that how others may look and how they may feel are often vastly different. The ideas of independence, empathy, and of understanding the thoughts and behaviors of pre-teen girls all combine to make this book a wonderful and enjoyable one.

## WORKS CITED:

Blume, Judy. *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. Delacorte Press, 2013. Apple EPUB.

Crowe, Cameron. *Say Anything*. 20th Century Fox, 2002. DVD.