
Main Characters In Generation X

Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* is a novel in which young adults essentially tell each other stories of their life, and these stories tell the views of the generation as a whole. As one can imagine, because of all the storytelling, the use of literary devices is littered throughout the course of the novel. In the first half of the novel, we are given a good sense of who the main characters are through detailed character development of their past and their views. There have been three static characters established; Andy, Dag, and Claire. The novel is told from the first person point of view of Andy Palmer, the main protagonist.

The setting is established in Palm Springs, Florida, where the trio live together in a lowly bungalow. It has been established that the three have moved here in attempt to start a new life with a clean slate because they were all unhappy with their old lives. It is important that the setting is here because we get a sense of their lives and only their lives, for the most part. Obviously we become introduced to people in their past and the odd passer-by, but other than that, there really are no other characters developed in the novel as of yet. It's almost like they are in a world where they can do what they want, free from others criticism.

So far, there really hasn't been any real development of an antagonist although there have been a few established in the storytelling sessions. One being Martin, Dag's boss when Dag lived in Toronto, and some people Dag worked with when he lived in Toronto, none of which have made a second appearance. If anything, it seems like the protagonists (Dag, Claire, and Andy) seem to believe they themselves are the protagonists in a world surrounded by antagonists.

In terms of character development, there is a fair bit to be said. We have been introduced to Dag's past, briefly about Claire's past, and mostly to Andy's past, which is inevitable because the whole novel is told through Andy's eyes. Dag is constantly paranoid of a nuclear attack; it is a constantly recurring motif in his storytelling sessions. We also know that Dag is a compulsive vandal, possibly because he thinks the world is going to end soon and is taking out his frustration on it. Dag also escapes from Palm Springs for a couple days to determine just how bad a nuclear explosion would be. He is confronted with the reality that the mushroom cloud isn't nearly as big as most people make it out to be, so he is momentarily at ease. But then he is quickly in just as much fear as he was, he realizes at how at ease he became when he was told that they were smaller, but it's just a smaller version of the same death. "And once these people saw the new, smaller friendlier explosion size, the conversion would be irreversible. All vigilance would disappear. Why, before you know it you'd be able to buy atomic bombs over the counter – or free with a tank of gas! Otis's (Dag's) world was scary once more." (71)

We don't know much about Claire, just that she comes from a family she essentially hates. She has developed an antler collecting obsession which so far seems irrelevant, but something so random can't help but be mentioned, it's got to have something to do with the plot. In her storytelling session, she tells a story of love and how true love is being abused and is too easy to achieve. As described in the story "...the radiation waves emitted by a woman in love are of just the right frequency to boost the rocket ship's engines and help it lift off." (43) The astronaut went on to say "... there's only enough air in the ship for one person. You'd have to die. Sorry.

But, of course, once we get to the moon, I'd have the right machines to revive you." (43) The machines meant to bring the lover to life never really existed. The astronaut's lover obviously had great love for him to have that kind of trust, but really the astronaut was just using her.

Andy has been the most well-developed character in the novel as of yet. Much of Andy's young adult life was spent in one room, ten years straight in fact. He only leaves that room after his dog tries to kill him and is exposed to what the outside world has become. He makes a commitment to get caught up, even with a ten year handicap. In his storytelling session, he tells a story of when he was a foreign photo researcher. In this story, we come into contact with a life philosophy which is probably one he shares. The life philosophy is this: "Only the individual who is solitary is like a thing subject to profound laws, and if he goes out into the morning that is just beginning, or looks into the evening, that is full of things happening, and if he feels what is going on there, then his whole situation drops from him as a dead man, although he stands in the very midst of life." (59). I have yet to figure out exactly what this means, but it sounds like the man who lives by himself has the opportunity to go out and do something with his life, and when he takes that opportunity his old life takes a fall and a new one begins. Andy also expresses envy towards his parents that they didn't have to be worried about "futurelessness". Andy says "I want to tell them that I envy their upbringings that were so clean, so free of futurelessness. And I want to throttle them for blithely handing over the world to us so much like skid-marked underwear." (86)

There has been a new character introduced named Tobias, who seems to resemble an antagonist as Andy doesn't seem to be fond of him, but he insists that he doesn't hate him. To quote Andy's thoughts of Tobias "He is like a passenger on a plane full of diseased people that crashes... and the survivors, not trusting each others organs, snack on their own arm." (81). Andy and Dag are both envious of Tobias because of how good he looks, but they dislike his living style.

What these character developments appear to be doing is letting the reader establish who is a static character, and the author appears to have done a good job. I feel like I could personally get to know Dag, Claire, or Andy without very much of an introduction. This type of character development has whetted the reader's appetite for further reading. You know what the characters are like, now you want to know what's going to happen.