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Race and Gender Discrimination in Margeret “Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale”

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work for my dear mother whose affections love encouragement made me able o get success and honor.

I dedicated also to all my sisters for giving me self confidence and pushing me to success.

To my dear daughter Chiraz and my dear son Mohib .

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Abstract

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a Dystopian novel that reveals some predominant feminist issues such as subordination, marginalization, suppression and exploitation of women used for an absolute sexual pleasure. It strives to display the issue of inequality towards women in a male society, uncover the crisis of identity and oppression threatening them in the very same misogynistic society. Moreover, it resorts to illuminate their subservience and their hopes for freedom. These women are depicted more as objects rather than individuals following restricted rules. They are manipulated by a ruthless theocracy that determines them by their bodies 'as a two-legged womb' not their persona. There are few icons used by Atwood like calling flashbacks and narration by the protagonist to denote women's strength, resistance and their fervency to be freed. These symbols took place in a society ruled by a super male power that allowed all forms of oppression and violence against women, as men were not blamed for any sexual abuse or insult women could face. Such totalitarian regime used some ideologies, religious references as well as propaganda to manipulate women's behaviour and their thoughts

General Introduction

General Introduction

In the period of nineteenth century the world literature had known many changes and developments in the way of writing novels and literary tests, since this period went through different changes in politic, economy religion and many stages in the life of the citizens around the world, world war 1 and 2 were the main reasons why many authors shifted from one way of writing to a different one thus giving birth to new genre.

Fundamentally, the dystopian genre flourished in the literature of (19) nineteenth century and cropped up as a relations against utopian genre, while the industrial Developmental people to worship material prosperity and neglect humanity, after a period of prosperity and perfection, an awful depression appeared the reason why writes arrived about the future and decided to write about it in order to warn readers and make them more aware.

The British writer George well's 1984 is one of the best twentieth century novels that can illustrate all the aspects of patriarchy and oppression enacted in Dystopian societies, after it had a great impact on billion readers and more profound influence as well it serves as an inspiration for many other writhers.

One of the best novels of Dystopian literature the Handmaid's tale written by Margaret Atwood published in 1985, it explores thermos of women oppression, gender discrimination male domination in Dystopian societies in addition to the sexploitation of women, and many gender issues such as identity and dehumanization and sensual oppression of women, this leads to a number of questions.

1. Could the handmaid's tale be considered as a feminist work?
2. Could the handmaid's mirror final resistance and their lust for freedom?
3. What role could society play in a patriarchy community like the one depicted in the handmaids tale?
4. Did Atwood succeed in predicting the future of dystopian societies where patriarchy can be the main wrinkle to oppress and reduce women's power?

In order to fulfill the above question the main approach used is feminism, approach since the novel treated most of gender issues such as gender discrimination identity – oppression- Exploitation violence marginalization of women.

The present research work is divided into three chapters, the first one is about the conceptualization of gender discrimination and its predominant faces, the second on is concerns with Dystopian literature and the main features of patriarchal societies moving to the

General Introduction

third one which deals with the analyses of the Handmaid's tale and how Margeret At woods treat gender discrimination and ferniest issues?

Chapter I

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination refers to the practice of granting or denying rights or privileges to a person based on their gender, in some societies, this practice is longstanding and acceptable to both genders, certain religious embrace gender.

Discrimination as part of their dogmas however, in most industrialized nations it is either illegal² or generally considered inappropriate, attitudes towards gender discrimination can normally of society much of the discrimination of s attributed to stories such as a woman begin from man's rib and societal practices can these literary fiction references are made to females being the fairer, weaker sex and males being the strong invincible hinters of the world.

The combined power of these societal and religious beliefs left little room or equitable thinking for centuries.

I.1 Definition of Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination means discrimination based on a person's gender or sex which one of ten affects girls and woman do not have the same opportunities as boys and men for education, meaningful careers, political influence and economic advancement

Gender based discrimination happens thorough out the world. Because of gender discrimination women who perform the some tasks as men are often paid less and receive fewer benefits from their work even in developed countries like Canada, woman earn only 70.4% of what men earn.

The root cause is based in culture, a society's culture both shapes he way things are done, and explains why that is, culture defines who women and men are , what they do and establish he's the structure of relationship between them cultural explanations describe "woman's work" and men's work in the home and the community, these explanations defers among societies and change over time, generally , women have less personal antimony , fever resources and less influence than men' regarding decisions which affect and form their societies and their own lives

I.1.1 Examples of Discrimination

There are several ways that a person can experience discrimination some examples are.

1. Race and national or national or ethane group a bank has lending rules that make it unreal son ably difficult for wen grants to get loans; this may be the case of discrimination based on two grands: race and national or ethnic groups.
2. Color: A person is systematically referred to secondary screening at airports due to the color of their skin.

I.1.2 Examples of Discrimination

There are several ways that a person can experience discrimination. Some examples are:

- A bank has lending rules that make it unreasonably difficult for new immigrants to get loans. This may be a case of discrimination based on two grounds - **race and national or ethnic origin.**
- A person is systematically referred to secondary screening at airports due to the color of their skin. This may be a case of discrimination based on the ground of **color.**

- An employer assigns her employees to weekend shifts without recognizing that some employees observe the Sabbath and cannot work on those days. This may be a case of discrimination based on the ground of **religion**.
- An employer's physical fitness requirements are based on the capabilities of an average 25 year old instead of being based on the actual requirements of the job. This may be a case of discrimination based on the ground of **age**.
- A female employee with an excellent performance record announces that she is pregnant. Immediately, her employer begins to identify performance issues that lead to her dismissal. This may be a case of discrimination based on the ground of **sex**
- A policy provides benefits to some married couples but not to others. This may be a case of discrimination based on two grounds - **sexual orientation** and **marital status**.
- After having a child, a woman cannot find childcare to continue working overnight shifts, and her employer does not allow.

Flexibility by scheduling her on day shifts. This may be a case of discrimination based on the ground of **family status**.

- An employer requires all employees to have a valid driver's licence. People who cannot drive due to a disability are not given an opportunity to show how they could still perform the job by, for example, using public transit. This may be a case of discrimination based on the ground of **disability**.
- A person is denied a job because of a previous conviction for which a pardon has been granted or a record has been suspended. This may be a case of discrimination based on the ground of **pardoned conviction**.
- Someone is denied a job because they shared the results of their genetic testing with a potential employer. This may be a case of discrimination based on the ground of **genetic characteristics**.
- A policy requires that a person identifies themselves as either male or female. This may be a case of discrimination based on **gender identity or expression**.

Oppression occurs when individuals are systematically subjected to political, economy cultural, or social degradation because they belong to a social group...results from structures of domination and subordination and, correspondingly, ideologies of superiority and inferiority (8).

Oppression is the inequitable use of authority law or physical force to prevent others from being free or equal. It is the source of injustice, by practicing tyranny and power over people. However, community is not always oppressed by cruel leaders, but also by the System itself. On the other hand, oppression can be physically and psychologically practiced within a Dystopian society through for instance, sexual violence and racism (Lewis).

Oppression is a harm through which persons are systematically and unfairly constrained, burdened or reduced by any of several forces. Harms are inflicted by both psychological and material forces of oppression .Thus; oppression cannot be given one definition. Yet, it is hereby understood and agreed that oppression is the process of treating humans in a dehumanized manner. Furthermore, it is used to describe the way dominant groups organize and protect their position as dominant ones. Usually making life more difficult for people in less privileged groups i.e. oppressed classes.

I.2 The Predominant Faces of Oppression

According to the American political theorist and feminist Iris Young oppression is the State of treating other people as less human, that is in a dehumanized manner, by denying their language, education, and other opportunities(“Five Faces of Oppression” 1).She States that there are five faces or types of oppression which are: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and, violence.

I.2.1 Exploitation

Exploitation is the act of using people’s labour to produce profits while, not compensating them fairly. The American Sociologist and historian Charles Tilly defined exploitation as powerful, connected people deploying resources from which they draw significantly increased returns by coordinating the effort of outsiders, whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort .

I.2.2 Marginalization

Marginalization expels a whole category of people from useful participation in social life. , these groups are subjected to severe material deprivation (as not having access to basic resources) and even extermination (such as genocide).Marginalization is in some ways worse than exploitation because society decided that it cannot or will not use these people even for labour. Most commonly, people are marginalized based upon race (“Five Faces of Oppression”2).

For instance, in the Dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood women are marginalized, sent to a place called Gilead where all women are subjugated to men regardless of rank or status. Men are usually commanders. Women tend to be defined by negative reference to the men as the human norm. By their lack of the identifying male characteristics, women are treated as 'Others' or objects used only as a source of production deprived of their rights as well as their freedom. There are just handfuls of roles that women are allowed to hold in Gilead, valued only by their perceived moral virtues and their ability to bear children.

I.2.3 Powerlessness

The idea links to Karl Marx's theory of socialism: some people "have" power while others. The powerless are dominated by the ruling class and are confined to the position of the eternal submissive. These kinds of helpless people in general are characterized by lack of decision-making. In consequence, they are exposed to disrespectful treatment because of the lowered status.

To some extent, powerlessness creates what the Brazilian educational Philosopher Paulo Freire calls a Culture of Silence. According to Freire, oppressed and marginalized people become totally silent that they do not even talk about their oppression or call for their rights. If they reach this stage of oppression, it creates a culture where in it is forbidden to even mention the injustices that are being committed (ibid).

I.2.4 Cultural Imperialism

Cultural Imperialism involves taking the culture of the ruling class and establishing it as the norm. The groups that have power in society control how the people in that society interpret and communicate. Those who are oppressed by cultural imperialism are both marked by stereotypes and made to feel invisible. The stereotypes define what they can and cannot be. At the same time, these same stereotypes turn these people into a mass of others that lack separate identities ("Five Faces of Oppression" 3).

I.2.5 Violence

It is the most obvious and visible form of oppression. In American society, women, Blacks, Asians, Arabs, gay men, and lesbians live under such threats of violence. In her book *Analyzing Oppression*, the American Professor of Philosophy Ann E. Cudd argues that violence is and has always been a crucial component in the origin and maintenance of oppression. It explores how violence and the threat of violence constrain the actions of groups, harming the victims and benefiting the correlative privileged social groups. It argues that women as a group are oppressed materially through violence, and that there is a credible,

psychologically effective threat of greater harm that is transmitted by the obvious material harm that they do suffer (85-86).

I.3 Gender Discrimination in Dystopian Societies

Talking about gender discrimination often starts by defining the concept of gender because there is always a mistaken thought of gender and sex to be the same, while sex refers to the biological differences between male and female, gender has nothing to do with how females and males are represented biologically, but how they are represented culturally and socially. It is also defined i.e (gender discrimination) as the individual acts of abuse and violence patterns of power and control, and systems of abuse and violence perpetrated against women and girls due to their gender that is the target.

Women have been oppressed from the old time, even in the ancient Greece from where the term democracy originated, women were deprived from political rights and it was forbidden to leave home after dark.

Only if they are accepted by their husbands, the same case as the ancient Rome, which means that woman from the old time were marginalized and oppressed.

The teacher and psychologist Steve Taylor in his book *The Fall* claims that the oppression of women is a symptom of psychological disorder called “Humana” it appears in the obsession of taking power and being in control in addition of being brutal and maltreated by denying their right and their feelings .

According to Jhon Stuart Mille, what cancels the differentiation between male and female is gender ideal that is when male and female are equally treated in society (not man being stronger than women because he is a man) gender oppression will vanish or at least decrease, because women are imaged as weak and emotional . They are oppressed by men; the main purpose that made feminism focus on gender was the deep revision of gender roles, which looked like as the most effective way of changing relations between men and women

Gender discrimination was among the major grooms of dystopian societies when and where. There is no government or if there is, it is an oppressive and controlling government and either there is a huge income gap between the poor and the rich or everyone faces extreme poverty.

That's why through Dystopia authors express their concerns about issues of humanity and society and war the people about their weaknesses, authors use it as a literary technique to discuss reality and depict issues that night happen in the future, thus the role of Dystopia also serve as warnings about the current state of affairs of the government or of those in power..

Chapter II

Dystopian Literature

Dystopia is a world in which everything is imperfect goes terribly wrong Dystopian literature shows is right marsh image about what might happen to the world in the near future usually, the main thorns of dystopian works are rebellion, oppression resolution wars over population and disasters on the other hand utopias is a perfect world exactly opposites to dystopia .

That the Republic of Gilead is a Dystopian society manipulated by cruel leaders who 'r(deprive women from their rights and their freedom (“Utopia and Dystopia information”).

II.1 Definitions of Dystopia

Dystopia is a world that involves domination and suppression, values superiority and imposed inferiority. In a Dystopian universe the dominant parties set their power through oppressing, exploiting, and abusing people. Moreover, in Dystopian societies, the dominant party create laws and rules that fit and suit its interest, neglecting what may suit its citizens (Das 55)

Dystopia may be considered as a horror fiction since it takes readers beyond reality. Not to provide an escapist world for readers, but to warn them of the growth of oppression in societies nowadays (Bloom 82). That is Dystopia pictures oppressive societies that are controlled by a tyrannical power that is wrongly practiced and used to manipulate people and thus arrest them in paralysis. It is also shaped by a patriarchal System that offends women, gives them no right or freedom, and *The Handmaid's Tale* can be the best example that shows all aspects of Dystopia, totalitarianism, and patriarchy.

David.W.Sick defines Dystopia as a world that is always set in the future, suggesting that there is yet time to reverse trends that concerned the author. Dystopia is a hopeful genre, which deliberately scares us for our own good: it does not exist in a vacuum, but shows the reader frightening visions of what might arise from events he or she can clearly see in the contemporary world.

David. W's definition means that Dystopia did not appear from nothing; it has a big role in changing our future since it frightens people and make them aware of what could happen to the societies if people keep living and acting the same way.

Dystopia is also defined as the opposite of Utopia. Utopia is an imaginary place, where people live under perfect conditions and where social justice is achieved as well("Utopia and Dystopia information").It symbolizes people's hopes and dreams, and it is turned to be synonymous with impossible.

II.2 Dystopian Societies

Patriarchal describes a general structure in which men have power over women patriarchal society consist of a male dominated power structure throughout organized society and in individual relationships.

Power is related to privilege in a system in which men have more power than women; men have some level of privilege it which women are not entitled.

The concept of patriarchy has been central to many feminist theories; it is an attempt to explain the stratification of power and privilege by gender that can be observed by many objective measures.

From the ancient Greek patriarch was a society where power was held by and passed down through the elder males, when modern historians and sociolinguists describe “patriarchal society” they mean that men hold the position of power and have more privilege , head of the family unit, leaders of social groups.

Boss in the work place and heads of government in patriarchy, there is also a hierarchy among the men, in traditional patriarchy, the elder men had power over the younger generations of men, in modern patriarchy, some men hold more power and privilege by virtue of the position of authority and this hierarchy of power is considered acceptable.

The term comes from father or father figure hold the authority in a patriarchy’s traditional patriarchal societies are usually also patriarchal titles and property are inherited through male lines.

II.3.Patriarchal Discrimination in Dystopian Societies

Patriarchy is the dominance of men to everything, and everyone, including women. The American feminist author Bell Hooks gave the example of her life as she suffered from a patriarchal family. Their parents had that patriarchal life style; she said that in churches they learned that God created man to rule, and woman had to help man to achieve this task, these beliefs were reinforced in every part of the society such as schools, clubs, court-houses, and specially churches.

Hooks commented on the damages created by patriarchy in a society, stating that, until we can collectively acknowledge the damage patriarchy causes and the suffering it creates, we cannot demand for men the right to be whole, to be givers and sustainers of life...they are imprisoned by a System that undermines their mental health .

Furthermore, Patriarchal societies are characterized by male dominance, where they use violence to reinforce the acceptance of patriarchal beliefs especially on women and if there is

any resistance or rejection they use certain punishments in order to teach those lessons about appropriate gender role. It was also introduced by The British sociologist Sylvia Wally in *Theorizing Patriarchy* as “a System of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”.

Patriarchy is a term that referred to the complete domination of men in Western society and beyond. In which family Systems or entire societies are organized around the idea of father-rule, where males are the primary authority figures (Crossman)

II.4 Dystopian Literature

The reason why the positive Utopian thinking shifted to a negative representation of the future is referred to some historical events. Most of these events occurred in the nineteenth century, like the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, Nazi Germany, and the Second World War, in addition to the technological progress and the creation of the atomic bomb. All these events created the disillusionment and the fear of the future that it might not be as imagined (Gerhard 1). It is also thought that the:

“Industrial revolution, World War I, the Russian Revolution, growing awareness of environmental damage, rapid progress of technology, popularization of capitalistic trends as well as fear that machine could take power on the men were the reasons for appearance of creation of Dystopian literature(“Utopia and Dystopia Information”).

Dystopian narrative has been a popular literary genre for more than a century. *Fahrenheit 451*, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Zamiatin’s *We* and Orwell’s *1984* are blankly the corner stone of Dystopian literature, representing the best of what Dystopian function has to offer.

Starting with the very first and famous Dystopian novel *WE* by Yevgeny Zamyatin, a twentieth century novel written in 1917, who wrote this novel as a consequence of his deceit after the October Revolution in 1917 since he had bright expectations for the future because of the economy prosperity but it turned out to be a negative outcome what led him change his positive view of the world in the future. He even participated in the Revolution of 1905 as a member of the Bolshevik party willing for the positive change to the future, thus supporting the Revolution. This disappointment mad him Write *We*, a novel written as a warning against the Stalinist totalitarian régime (Gerhard 9-10).

Another example of a Dystopian plot written by Aldous Huxley is *Brave New World*, this novel also was written under, some circumstances. He felt loathsome about the

consequences of the Industrial Revolution in Europe in the twentieth century. These consequences included mass production, technological advances, the loss of individuality, and the transformation into machines because of the increasing number of factories and plants in Europe; especially after he worked at a Chemical plant in England. As a result to all these fears, he wrote *Bra ve New World*, as suggested by Mustafa Mencütekin, who depicts an “inhuman society controlled by technology, in which art and religion have been abolished and human beings reproduce by artificial fertilization” which means that technology controlled societies and it had more importance than human beings (Gerhard 10).

Dystopian literature paved the way to a perfect illustration of a highly oppressed society, manipulated by a totalitarian government that acts against the citizens’ aims and desires. Basically, oppression is caused by a number of different circumstances such as, overpopulation, disease, poverty and sexism, what gave rise to the loss of identity, deprivation of liberty, and unsustainable life conditions as well (Stoner 1). Moreover, Dystopian literature is considered to be ‘cautionary tale’ (ibid). Thus, it can be read as political warning since Dystopian writers depict what could happen in the future based on present issues. Otherwise, it highlights the political and cultural problems that societies suffer from. In this sense, Dystopian literature is said to be a “vessel for political commentary dating back to the 19th century” (Stoner 1) which can be clearly seen in the novels mentioned before.

Zamyatin’s *We*, influenced the use of Dystopian literature as a political commentary by using it as a vessel for direct analogy, for existing Russian political System under Lenin and Putin. “In *We* the One-State suppresses individuality of thought and artistic expression infavour of being the same, which they believe promotes peace” (4). Another interesting novel *1984*, where Orwell shows perfectly the political System of Oceania, an oppressive State that goes behind the mottoes ‘BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU’ (3). Thereby it Controls human thoughts, actions and restrict human companionship, a striking example of this is Winston in the novel, who has no friends and has no right to socialize with anyone outside the politically acceptable conversation.

Finally, the feminist Dystopian novel by Margaret Atwood *The Handmaid’s Tale* written in 1985, this novel is set in a futuristic society called Gilead referring to the United States. The leader of this State adopted a new totalitarian régime and eliminated old ideas and traditions of his society; including family, jobs, love, etc, and substituted them with a strong patriarchal society that divided all the social community into classes according to their social functions: commanders, wives, aunts, eyes, and of course handmaids etc. which means citizens are no

longer free to choose their social rank in society it is a must

II.5 The Influence of Ideology in Dystopian Literature

In totalitarian societies' leaders use specific ways to control citizens, by making them believe a certain ideology, in order to convince them to act and behave in special ways to serve their own benefit. For Marxists "we are blind to our own condition because of the effect of what it calls ideology" (Bertens 83). That is, ideology misrepresents the world for us and makes believe what is not true (85).

Ideology is generally known as a set of ideas that individuals have total belief in it. As AdornoTheodor defined ideology as:

"An organization of opinions, attitudes, and values -a way of thinking about man and society. We may speak of an individual's total ideology or his ideology with respect to different areas of social life, politics, economics, religion, minority groups and so forth (Gerring 958)".

This confirms the previous definition and adds that ideology can be in different fields in society like politics, economics, religion etc.

Althusser's study of ideology and its function in society was built on the work of French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, thus Althusser did not have the same view of the Marxist understanding as 'the false consciousness' that is "A false understanding of the way the world functioned"(Felluga)

Althusser States that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their conditions of existence; he means that, people always think that they are aware and believe they act freely, but in fact they are not (Bertens 85). In his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" he discusses the understanding of ideology as 'the mistaken ideas about the world' to be false .Althusser's view was that ideology is to be seen from the materialistic side, that is, it exists in social institutions (churches, schools, trade unions, families etc.) as he argued: "Ideology exists in institutions and the practices special to them. We are even tempted to say more precisely: Ideology exists in apparatuses and practices specific to them" (ibid). He adds to this idea that these ideologies exist in the social institutions that serves the benefit of the ruling class in order to stay in powerful position by reinforcing specific beliefs or ideologies through certain ways.

According to Althusser, ideology belongs to the State and it has two components which are: First, 'repressive State apparatuses that includes the army, the police, and courts so

that the ruling class reinforces the working class through the use of physical forces while the second component is ‘the ideological State apparatuses’ that maintains the ruling class by controlling people’s ideas, beliefs, values through religion, media, and the educational System (ibid).

The aim of totalitarian societies is to reinforce these ideologies and beliefs in the minds of the citizens. Such ideologies are reinforced by changing old traditions and beliefs with new ones, and implementing them in different social institutions through propaganda

In dystopian societies individuality is deemed an ultimate crime, the concept of individualism is eliminated as people are subordinated by the government, thus a dystopian society includes physical and spiritual oppression, it is a place where citizens live in a dehumanized state and in which independence and freedom are confined.

Chapter III

Literary Analyses of

the Handmaid's Tale

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* reveals feminist issues such as suppression. It is a dystopian novel originally published in 1985. The novel follows the journey of the handmaid, exploring women in subjugation in a patriarchal society and the various means by which these women attempt to gain individualism and independence. *The Handmaid's Tale* won the 1985 Governor General's Award and the first Earthquake in 1987. It was also nominated for the 1986 Booker Prize. The book has been adapted into film in 1990, an opera in 2000, a television series, and other media.

III. Literary Analyses of the Handmaid's Tale

The handmaid's tale is a feminist novel that highlights the perils of women in a society that has not only dehumanized their status but also made it almost criminal to be a women, the novel highlights a cruel world where women do not enjoy the freedom of choice in the handmaid's tale women are painted as objects for male selfish desire and satisfaction.

III.1 Biography of Margaret Atwood



Margaret Eleanor Atwood CC OOnt CH FRSC (born November 18, 1939) is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, inventor, teacher, and environmental activist. Since 1961, she has published seventeen books of poetry, sixteen novels, ten books of non-fiction, eight collections of short fiction, eight children's books, and one graphic novel, as well as a number of small press editions in poetry and fiction. Atwood and her writing have won numerous awards and honors including the Man Booker Prize, Arthur C. Clarke Award, Governor General's Award, Franz Kafka Prize, and the National Book Critics and PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Atwood is also the inventor and developer of the Long Pen and associated technologies that facilitate the remote robotic writing of documents. A number of her works

have been adapted to film and television, which has only served to increase her exposure and audience.

As a novelist and poet, Atwood's works encompass a variety of themes including gender and identity, religion and myth, the power of language, climate change, and "power politics".^[3] Many of her poems are inspired by myths and fairy tales which interested her from a very early age.^[4] Among her contributions to Canadian literature, Atwood is a founder of the Griffin Poetry Prize and Writers' Trust of Canada.

Atwood was born in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, as the second of three children^[5] of Carl Edmund Atwood, an entomologist,^[6] and Margaret Dorothy (née Killam), a former dietitian and nutritionist from Woodville, Nova Scotia.^[7] Because of her father's ongoing research in forest entomology, Atwood spent much of her childhood in the backwoods of northern Quebec and travelling back and forth between Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, and Toronto. She did not attend school full-time until she was twelve years old. She became a voracious reader of literature, Dell pocketbook mysteries, *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Canadian animal stories and comic books. She attended Leaside High School in Leaside, Toronto, and graduated in 1957.^[8] Atwood began writing plays and poems at the age of six.^[9]

Atwood realized she wanted to write professionally when she was sixteen.^[10] In 1957, she began studying at Victoria College in the University of Toronto, where she published poems and articles in *Acta Victoriana*, the college literary journal, and participated in the sophomore theatrical tradition of *The Bob Comedy Revue*.^[11] Her professors included Jay Macpherson and Northrop Frye. She graduated in 1961 with a Bachelor of Arts in English (honors) and minors in philosophy and French.^{[8]:54}

In 1961 Atwood began graduate studies at Radcliffe College of Harvard University, with a Woodrow Wilson fellowship.^[12] She obtained a master's degree (MA) from Radcliffe in 1962 and pursued doctoral studies for two years, but did not finish her dissertation, *The English Metaphysical Romance*.^[13]

In 1968, Atwood married Jim Polk, an American writer,^[14] they divorced in 1973.^[15] She formed a relationship with fellow novelist Graeme Gibson soon afterward and moved to a farm near Alliston, Ontario, where their daughter, Eleanor Jess Atwood Gibson, was born in 1976.^[14] The family returned to Toronto in 1980.^[16]

Although she is an accomplished writer, Margaret Atwood claims to be a terrible speller.^[17]

Career

1960s

Atwood's first book of poetry, *Double Persephone*, was published as a pamphlet by Hawkshead Press in 1961, winning the E.J. Pratt Medal.^[18] While continuing to write, Atwood was a lecturer in English at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, from 1964 to 1965, Instructor in English at the Sir George Williams University in Montreal from 1967 to 1968, and taught at the University of Alberta from 1969 to 1970.^[19] In 1966, *The Circle Game* was published, winning the Governor General's Award.^[20] This collection was followed by three other small press collections of poetry: *Kaleidoscopes Baroque: a poem*, Cranbrook Academy of Art (1965); *Talismans for Children*, Cranbrook Academy of Art (1965); and *Speeches f-or Doctor Frankenstein*, Cranbrook Academy of Art (1966); as well as, *The Animals in That Country* (1968). Atwood's first novel, *The Edible Woman*, was published in 1969. As a social satire of North American consumerism, many critics have often cited the novel as an early example of the feminist concerns found in many of Atwood's works.^[21]

1970s

Atwood taught at York University in Toronto from 1971 to 1972 and was a writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto during the 1972/1973 academic year.^[19] A prolific period for her poetry, Atwood published six collections over the course of the decade: *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970), *Procedures for Underground* (1970), *Power Politics* (1971), *You Are Happy* (1974), *Selected Poems 1965–1975* (1976), and *Two-Headed Poems* (1978). Atwood also published three novels during this time: *Surfacing* (1972); *Lady Oracle* (1976); and *Life Before Man* (1979), which was a finalist for the Governor General's Award.^[20] *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, and *Life Before Man*, like *The Edible Woman*, explore identity and social constructions of gender as they relate to topics such as nationhood and sexual politics.^[22] In particular, *Surfacing*, along with her first non-fiction monograph, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), helped establish Atwood as an important and emerging voice in Canadian literature.^[23] In 1977 Atwood published her first short story collection, *Dancing Girls*, which was the winner of the St. Lawrence Award for Fiction and the award of The Periodical Distributors of Canada for Short Fiction.^[19]

By 1976 interest in Atwood, her works, and her life were high enough that *Maclean's* declared her to be "Canada's most gossiped-about writer."^[24]

1980

Atwood's literary reputation continued to rise in the 1980s with the publication of *Bodily Harm* (1981); *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award^[25] and 1985 Governor General's Award^[20] and finalist for the 1986 Booker Prize,^[26] and *Cat's Eye* (1988), finalist for both the 1988 Governor General's Award^[20] and the 1989 Booker Prize.^[27] Despite her distaste for literary labels, Atwood has since conceded to referring to *The Handmaid's Tale* as a work of science fiction or, more accurately, speculative fiction.^{[28][29]} As she has repeatedly noted, "There's a precedent in real life for everything in the book. I decided not to put anything in that somebody somewhere hadn't already done."^[30]

While reviewers and critics have been tempted to read autobiographical elements of Atwood's life in her work, particularly *Cat's Eye*,^{[31][32]} in general Atwood resists the desire of critics to read too closely for an author's life in their writing.^[33] Filmmaker Michael Rubbo's *Margaret Atwood: Once in August* (1984)^[34] details the filmmaker's frustration in uncovering autobiographical evidence and inspiration in Atwood's works.^[35]

During the 1980s, Atwood continued to teach, serving as the MFA Honorary Chair the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, 1985; the Berg Professor of English, New York University, 1986; Writer-in-Residence, Macquarie University, Australia, 1987; and Writer-in-Residence, Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas, 1989.^[36] Regarding her stints with teaching, she has noted, "Success for me meant no longer having to teach at university."^[37]

1990s

Atwood's reputation as a writer continued to grow with the publication of the novels *The Robber Bride* (1993), finalist for the 1994 Governor General's Award^[20] and shortlisted for the James Tiptree Jr. Award,^[38] and *Alias Grace* (1996), winner of the 1996 Giller Prize, finalist for the 1996 Booker Prize,^[39] finalist for the 1996 Governor General's Award,^[20] and shortlisted for the 1997 Orange Prize for Fiction.^[40] Although vastly different in context and form, both novels use female characters to question good and evil and morality through their portrayal of female villains. As Atwood noted about *The Robber Bride*, "I'm not making a case for evil behavior, but unless you have some women characters portrayed as evil characters, you're not playing with a full range."^[41] *The Robber Bride* takes place in contemporary Toronto, while *Alias Grace* is a work of historical fiction detailing the 1843 murders of Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper Nancy Montgomery. Atwood had

previously written the 1974 CBC made-for-TV film *The Servant Girl*, about the life of Grace Marks, the young servant who, along with James McDermott, was convicted of the crime.^[42]

2000s

Novels [edit]

In 2000 Atwood published her tenth novel, *The Blind Assassin*, to critical acclaim, winning both the Booker Prize^[43] and the Hammett Prize^[44] in 2000. *The Blind Assassin* was also nominated for the Governor General's Award in 2000,^[20] Orange Prize for Fiction, and the International Dublin Literary Award in 2002.^[45] In 2001, Atwood was inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame.^[46] Atwood followed this success with the publication of *Oryx and Crake* in 2003, the first novel in a series that also includes *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), which would collectively come to be known as the MaddAddam Trilogy. The apocalyptic vision in the MaddAddam Trilogy engages themes of genetic modification, pharmaceutical and corporate control, and man-made disaster.^[47] As a work of speculative fiction, Atwood notes of the technology in *Oryx and Crake*, "I think, for the first time in human history, we see where we might go. We can see far enough into the future to know that we can't go on the way we've been going forever without inventing, possibly, a lot of new and different things."^[48] She later cautions in the acknowledgements to *MaddAddam*, "Although *MaddAddam* is a work of fiction, it does not include any technologies or bio-beings that do not already exist, are not under construction or are not possible in theory."^[49] In 2005 Atwood published the novella *The Penelopiad* as part of the Canongate Myth Series. The story is a retelling of *The Odyssey* from the perspective of Penelope and a chorus of the twelve maids murdered at the end of the original tale. *The Penelopiad* was made into a theatrical production in 2007.^[50]

In 2016 Atwood published the novel *Hag-Seed*, a modern-day retelling of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as part of Penguin Random House's Hogarth Shakespeare Series.^[51]

On November 28, 2018, Atwood announced that she will publish *The Testaments*, a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, in September 2019.^[52] The novel will feature three female narrators and takes place fifteen years after the character Offred's final scene in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Non-fiction

In 2008 Atwood published *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, a collection of five lectures delivered as part of the Massey Lectures from October 12 to November 1,

2008. The book was released in anticipation of the lectures, which were also recorded and broadcast on CBC Radio One's *Ideas*.^[53]

Chamber opera [In March 2008, Atwood accepted her first chamber opera commission. Commissioned by City Opera of Vancouver, *Pauline* is set in Vancouver in March 1913 during the final days of the life of Canadian writer and performer Pauline Johnson.^[54] *Pauline*, composed by Tobin Stokes with libretto by Atwood, premiered on May 23, 2014, at Vancouver's York Theatre.^[55]

Graphic fiction [edit]

In 2016 Atwood began writing the superhero comic book series *Angel Catbird*, with co-creator and illustrator Johnnie Christmas. The series protagonist, scientist StrigFeleedus, is victim of an accidental mutation that leaves him with the body parts and powers of both a cat and a bird.^[56] As with her other works, Atwood notes of the series, "The kind of speculative fiction about the future that I write is always based on things that are in process right now. So it's not that I imagine them, it's that I notice that people are working on them and I take it a few steps further down the road. So it doesn't come out of nowhere, it comes out of real life."^[57]

Future Library project [edit]

With her novel *Scribbler Moon*, Atwood is the first contributor to the Future Library project.^[58] The work, completed in 2015, was ceremoniously handed over to the project on 27 May of the same year.^[59] The book will be held by the project until its eventual publishing in 2114. She thinks that readers will probably need a paleo-anthropologist to translate some parts of her story.^[60] In an interview with the *Guardian* newspaper, Atwood said, "There's something magical about it. It's like *Sleeping Beauty*. The texts are going to slumber for 100 years and then they'll wake up, come to life again. It's a fairytale length of time. She slept for 100 years."^[59]

Invention of the LongPen [edit]

Paperback tour in Denver for her novel *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood conceived the concept of a remote robotic writing technology, what would later be known as the LongPen that would enable a person to remotely write in ink anywhere in the world via tablet PC and the Internet, thus allowing her to conduct her book tours without being physically present. She quickly founded a company, Unotchit Inc., to develop, produce and distribute this technology. By 2011, Unotchit Inc. shifted its market focus into business and legal transactions and was producing a range of products, for a variety of remote writing applications, based on the

LongPen technologies and renamed itself to Syngrafii Inc. As of September 2014, Atwood is still Co-founder and a Director of Syngrafii Inc. and holder of various patents related to the LongPen technology.^{[61][62][63][64][65][66]}

Recurring themes and cultural contexts [edit]

Atwood's contributions to the theorizing of Canadian identity have garnered attention both in Canada and internationally. Her principal work of literary criticism, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, is considered somewhat outdated, but remains a standard introduction to Canadian literature in Canadian studies programs internationally.^{[67][68][69]} The continued reprinting of *Survival* by Anansi Press has been criticized as a view-narrowing disservice to students of Canadian literature by some critics, including Joseph Pivato.^[70]

In *Survival*, Atwood postulates that Canadian literature, and by extension Canadian identity, is characterized by the symbol of survival.^[71] This symbol is expressed in the omnipresent use of "victim positions" in Canadian literature. These positions represent a scale of self-consciousness and self-actualization for the victim in the "victor/victim" relationship.^[72] The "victor" in these scenarios may be other humans, nature, the wilderness or other external and internal factors which oppress the victim.^[72] Atwood's *Survival* bears the influence of Northrop Frye's theory of garrison mentality; Atwood uses Frye's concept of Canada's desire to wall itself off from outside influence as a critical tool to analyze Canadian literature.^[73] According to her theories in works such as *Survival* and her exploration of similar themes in her fiction, Atwood considers Canadian literature as the expression of Canadian identity. According to this literature, Canadian identity has been defined by a fear of nature, by settler history, and by unquestioned adherence to the community.^[74]

Atwood's contribution to the theorizing of Canada is not limited to her non-fiction works. Several of her works, including *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, *Alias Grace*, *The Blind Assassin* and *Surfacing*, are examples of what postmodern literary theorist Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction".^[75] In such works, Atwood explicitly explores the relation of history and narrative and the processes of creating history.

Atwood continued her exploration of the implications of Canadian literary themes for Canadian identity in lectures such as *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995).

Among her contributions to Canadian literature, Atwood is a founding trustee of the Griffin Poetry Prize,^[76] as well as a founder of the Writers' Trust of Canada, a non-profit literary organization that seeks to encourage Canada's writing community.^[77]

Feminism

Atwood's work has been of interest to feminist literary critics, despite Atwood's unwillingness at times to apply the label *feminist* to her works.^[78] Starting with the publication of her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, Atwood asserted, "I don't consider it feminism; I just consider it social realism."^[79] Despite her rejection of the label at times, critics have analyzed the sexual politics, use of myth and fairytale, and gendered relationships in her work through the lens of feminism.^[80] She later clarified her discomfort with the label *feminism* by stating, "I always want to know what people mean by that word [feminism]. Some people mean it quite negatively, other people mean it very positively, some people mean it in a broad sense, and other people mean it in a more specific sense. Therefore, in order to answer the question, you have to ask the person what they mean."^[81] Speaking to *The Guardian*, she said "For instance, some feminists have historically been against lipstick and letting transgender women into women's washrooms. Those are not positions I have agreed with",^[82] a position she repeated to *The Irish Times*.^{[83][84]}

In January 2018 Atwood penned the op-ed "Am I A Bad Feminist?" for *The Globe and Mail*.^[85] The piece was in response to social media backlash related to Atwood's signature on a 2016 petition calling for an independent investigation into the firing of Steven Galloway, a former University of British Columbia professor accused of sexual harassment and assault by a student.^[86] While feminist critics denounced Atwood for her support of Galloway, Atwood asserts that her signature was in support of due process in the legal system. She has been criticized for her comments surrounding the #MeToo movement, particularly that it is a "symptom of a broken legal system."^[87]

Speculative and Science Fiction

Atwood has resisted the suggestion that *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* are science fiction, suggesting to *The Guardian* in 2003 that they are speculative fiction instead: "Science fiction has monsters and spaceships; speculative fiction could really happen."^[14] She told the Book of the Month Club: "*Oryx and Crake* is a speculative fiction, not a science fiction proper. It contains no intergalactic space travel, no teleportation, no Martians."^[88] On *BBC Breakfast*, she explained that science fiction, as opposed to what she

herself wrote, was "talking squids in outer space." The latter phrase particularly rankled advocates of science fiction and frequently recurs when her writing is discussed.^[88]

In 2005, Atwood said that she does at times write social science fiction and that *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* can be designated as such. She clarified her meaning on the difference between speculative and science fiction, admitting that others use the terms interchangeably: "For me, the science fiction label belongs on books with things in them that we can't yet do ... speculative fiction means a work that employs the means already to hand and that takes place on Planet Earth." She said that science fiction narratives give a writer the ability to explore themes in ways that realistic fiction cannot.^[89]

Margaret Atwood repeatedly makes observations about the relationship of humans to animals in her works.^[90] A large portion of the dystopia Atwood creates in *Oryx and Crake* rests upon the genetic modification and alteration of animals and humans, resulting in hybrids such as pigoons, rakunks, wolvogs, and Crakers, which function to raise questions on the limits and ethics of science and technology, as well as questions on what it means to be human.^[91]

In *Surfacing*, one character remarks about eating animals: "The animals die that we may live, they are substitute people ... And we eat them, out of cans or otherwise; we are eaters of death, dead Christ-flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life." Some characters in her books link sexual oppression to meat-eating and consequently give up meat-eating. In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood's character Marian identifies with hunted animals and cries after hearing her fiancé's experience of hunting and eviscerating a rabbit. Marian stops eating meat but then later returns to it.^[92]

In *Cat's Eye*, the narrator recognizes the similarity between a turkey and a baby. She looks at "the turkey, which resembles a trust, headless baby. It has thrown off its disguise as a meal and has revealed itself to me for what it is, a large dead bird." In Atwood's *Surfacing*, a dead heron represents purposeless killing and prompts thoughts about other senseless deaths.^[92]

Political Involvement

Atwood has indicated in an interview that she considers herself a Red Tory in what she sees as the historical sense of the term, saying that "The Tories were the ones who believed that those in power had a responsibility to the community, that money should not be the measure of all things."^[93] In the 2008 federal election, she attended a rally for the Bloc

Quebecois, a Quebec separatist party, because of her support for their position on the arts, and stated that she would vote for the party if she lived in a riding in Quebec in which the choice was between the Bloc and the Conservatives.^[94] In an editorial in *The Globe and Mail*, she urged Canadians to vote for any other party to stop a Conservative majority.^[95]

Atwood has strong views on environmental issues, and she and Graeme Gibson are the joint honorary presidents of the Rare Bird Club within BirdLife International. Atwood celebrated her 70th birthday at a gala dinner at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario. She stated that she had chosen to attend the event because the city has been home to one of Canada's most ambitious environmental reclamation programs: "When people ask if there's hope (for the environment), I say, if Sudbury can do it, so can you. Having been a symbol of desolation, it's become a symbol of hope."^[96] Atwood has been chair of the Writers' Union of Canada and helped to found the Canadian English-Speaking chapter of PEN International, a group originally started to free politically imprisoned writers.^[97] She held the position of PEN Canada president in the mid 1980s^[98] and was the 2017 recipient of the PEN Center USA's Lifetime Achievement Award.^[99] Despite calls for a boycott by Gazan students, Atwood visited Israel and accepted the \$1,000,000 Dan David Prize along with Indian author Amitav Ghosh at Tel Aviv University in May 2010.^[100] Atwood commented that "we don't do cultural boycotts."^[101]

Adaptations

The novel *Surfacing* (1972) was adapted into an eponymous 1981 film, written by Bernard Gordon and directed by Claude Jutra.^[107] The film received poor reviews and suffers from making "little attempt to find cinematic equivalents for the admittedly difficult subjective and poetic dimensions of the novel."^[108]

The novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) has been adapted into several eponymous works. A 1990 film, directed by Volker Schlöndorff, with a screenplay by Harold Pinter, received mixed reviews.^{[109][110]} A musical adaptation resulted in the 2000 opera, written by Poul Ruders, with a libretto by Paul Bentley. It premiered at the Royal Danish Opera in 2000, and was staged in 2003 at London's English National Opera and the Minnesota Opera.^[111] Boston Lyric Opera mounted a production in May 2019.^[112] A television series by Bruce Miller began airing on the streaming service Hulu in 2017.^[113] The first season of the show earned eight Emmy's in 2017, including Outstanding Drama Series. Season two premiered on April 25, 2018, and it was announced on May 2, 2018, that Hulu

had renewed the series for a third season.^[114] Atwood appears in a cameo in the first episode as one of the Aunts at the Red Center.

In 2003, six of Atwood's short stories were adapted by Shaftesbury Films for the anthology television series *The Atwood Stories*.^[116]

Atwood's 2008 Massey Lectures were adapted into the documentary *Payback* (2012), by director Jennifer Baichwal.^[117] Commentary by Atwood and others such as economist Raj Patel, ecologist William Reese, and religious scholar Karen Armstrong, are woven into various stories that explore the concepts of debt and payback, including an Armenian blood feud, agricultural working conditions, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The novel *Alias Grace* (1996) was adapted into an eponymous six-part 2017 miniseries directed by Mary Harron and adapted by Sarah Polley. It premiered on CBC on September 25, 2017, and the full series was released on Netflix on November 3, 2017.^{[119][120][121]} Atwood makes a cameo in the fourth episode of the series as a disapproving churchgoer.

In the Wake of the Flood (released in October 2010), a documentary film by the Canadian director Ron Mann, followed Atwood on the unusual book tour for her novel *The Year of the Flood* (2009). During this innovative book tour, Atwood created a theatrical version of her novel, with performers borrowed from the local areas she was visiting. The documentary is described as "a fly-on-the

Atwood's children's book *Wandering Wenda and Widow Wallop's WundergroundWashery* (2011) was adapted into the children's television series *The Wide World of Wandering Wenda*, broadcast on CBC beginning in the spring of 2017.^[124] Aimed at early readers, the animated series follows Wenda and her friends as they navigate different adventures using words, sounds, and language.^[125]

Director Darren Aronofsky had been slated to direct an adaption of the MaddAddam trilogy for HBO, but it was revealed in October 2016 that HBO had dropped the plan from its schedule. In January 2018, it was announced that Paramount Television and Anonymous Content had bought the rights to the trilogy and would be moving forward without Aronofsky.^[126]

Awards and honours[edit]

Atwood holds numerous honorary degrees (e.g., from Oxford University, Cambridge University, NUI Galway and the Sorbonne),^[127] and has won more than 55 awards in Canada and internationally.

Awards[edit]

- Governor General's Award, 1966, 1985^[128]
- Companion of the Order of Canada, 1981^[129]
- Guggenheim fellowship, 1981^[130]
- Los Angeles Times Fiction Award, 1986^[131]
- American Humanist Association Humanist of the Year, 1987^[132]
- Nebula Award, 1986 and Prometheus Award, 1987 nominations, both science fiction awards.^{[133][134]}
- Arthur C. Clarke Award for best Science Fiction, 1987^[135]
- Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1988^[136]
- Canadian Booksellers Association Author of the Year, 1989
- Trillium Book Award, 1991, 1993, 1995^[137]
- Government of France's Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, 1994^[138]
- Helmerich Award, 1999, by the Tulsa Library Trust.^[139]
- Booker Prize, 2000^[140]
- Kenyon Review Award for Literary Achievement, 2007^[141]
- Prince of Asturias Award for Literature, 2008^[142]
- Nelly Sachs Prize, Germany, 2010^[143]
- Dan David Prize, Israel, 2010^[144]
- Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, Canada, 2012^[145]
- Los Angeles Times Book Prize "Innovator's Award", 2012^[146]
- Gold medal of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, 2015^[147]
- Golden Wreath of Struga Poetry Evenings, Macedonia, 2016^[148]
- Franz Kafka Prize, Czech Republic, 2017^[149]
- Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, Germany, 2017^[150]
- Companion of Honour, 2019^[151]

III.2 The Setting

The story reads like a fictional autobiography, however the story is not just a propaganda to highlight gender issues this is because of its complex characters setting, thematic concerns in the republic of Gilead women are not supposed to read write or even listen to music, these are usuries only reserved for men; women are also denied the natural pleasure such as love and recurrence they have seen as objects of male enjoyment some thigh that has no human values other than to make men happy, they dive in a dystopic world, the

male characters identify with the suffering of the female character but can't do anything as they rated by the faith.

III.3 Major Themes

In Institutions of higher education professors have found the Handmaid's Tale to be useful largely because of its historical and religions basics, the novel teaching points include , Introducing politics and the social sciences to students in a more concrete way demonstrating of reaching to our freedom bath political and intellectual and acknowledging among the main themes treated in the hand maid's tale :

III.3.1 Patriarchy

The republic of Gilead is a patriarchal regime and upon its rise to power women are its first victims the laws implemented by Gilead start by firing all women from their jobs then transferring their funds to the male of the family then depriving them from education Even the aunts who are the most powerful women in Gilead are inferior to the Guardians and the angels who are allowed to carry real weaponry.

The most striking of all is the patriarchal view of women that is showcased by the way they are who are servants and maids Econ-wives Wives handmaids who bear children and jezebels who are whores the republic sees women as only good and fitting for these roles.

III.3.2 Hypocrisy

The republic of Gilead poses laws but does it actually abide by them itself? the most ironic thing is that women who were engaged in an affair with married men prior to the establishment of Gilead are punished and become handmaids but engaging in extramarital intercourse with and handmaid for the sake of childbearing is somehow legal.

III.3.3 Gender Oppression

Offered is best understood from the analysis of her name, the symbolic roles she plays in the novel as the symbols of women suffering. Offered, the protagonist is kidnapped from her husband and this separated from her family by oppressive dynasty.

She is brought to the commander's house to bear children for his barren wife .Offred is her patronymic name which can be broken down into two names: of and Fred. This indicates that she is Fred meaning that she belongs to Fred, the commander.

Offred had seen to change throughout the story from the wife of a peasant to the emblematic figure of women liberation. Her significance is seen through her symbolic birth name June, which in the contest of the Republic of Gilead means mayday, the day the

women, will be salvaged from their torment. Her name June this becomes symbolic of the resistance that would soon lead to their freedom (Atwood 220)

III.3.4 Exploitation

She describes her physical attributes that are distinctively feminine. Furthermore, despite living in a world where a woman is just an object of man's desire Offred was able to strictly maintain the definition of herself as purely woman, devoid of any material trappings this : ' I am thirty-three years old . I have brown hair. I stand five seven without shoes' (Atwood 143) . It is this appreciation of herself as a woman coupled with her symbolic name June which makes Offred the emblematic figure of the resistance to male domination.

III.3.5 Sexual Oppression

Offred describes her sexual experiences from the first person's prescriptive and sees sex in four ways. For her, the sexual experiences that women in the republic of Gilead go through cannot be termed as lovemaking, neither can't they be said to berate the right and the power to refuse.

III.3.6 Freedom

Freedom is one of the themes that Gilead twists to establish its theocracy. One of the aunts brainwashes the handmaids into thinking that they actually have freedom, but of a different kind.

There is a distinction between freedom to and freedom from. Freedom to means liberty to do whatever you want and according the Aunt, that is pre-Gilead freedom where women ended up being raped or harassed or hurt. Instead the Aunt suggests that Gilead offers a freedom formal those things.

Essentially Gilead appears to be the savior who put these women in this strict confinement so that they are safe from all the harm of freedom.

III.4 The Main Characters

III.4.1 Offred

The narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred is a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, but she can remember the time "before", when she was married to Luke and had a daughter.

III.4.2 Ofglen

Offred's partner for shopping and other "acceptable activities". She is a member of an underground resistance organization, Mayday. When she is caught, she kills herself before she can be taken prisoner. Another woman is sent to replace her, assuming her name and erasing her existence.

III.4.3 Moira

Offred's best friend from "before", Moira is active in the feminist movement. Offred and Moira wind up in the same training center, but Moira escapes twice, the second time permanently.

III.4.4 Luke

Offred's husband before the inception of the Republic of Gilead. He left and divorced his first wife for Offred, which ultimately allowed the Republic to declare their union illegal, and gave the government the right to take their child.

III.4.5 Aunt Sara

One of the older, infertile women who agree to watch over and train the Handmaids rather than be

III.5 Feminist Reaction to Oppression

Ever since antiquity, there were several powers, ideologies, tendencies and beliefs that women sought to dispose of. Attempting to make situation better, these efforts are for the sake of freeing themselves and these trials rose against the process of domination, patriarchy, oppression as well as living under pressure, and being abuse by different kind of harassment establishing in a specific societies and different domains such as Economics and Politics.

Feasibly, in particular society's women's aim is to achieve equality, individual freedom as well as creating their new rules, principles and gauges. Since forever, women suffer from various kind of oppression, inequality, marginalization, torture and agony from the most powerful force, 'Men'. Subsequently, feminism is a reaction against the superiority of men and the way they see, treat, and define women as sexual objects, rather than individuals. Women attempt to defend themselves differently, even through literature, exposing the truth and reacting against the spitefulness and misogyny. It still continues through the twenty-first Century yet, although women succeeded in having some right, men still have the power and word to be said.

The Feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the beginning of the Second Wave Feminism. They are liberal feminist, Marxist and social feminist as well as social construction feminist. They all fight for the same thing which is women's right but, they differ in the methods to approach and achieve those rights. Liberal feminism claims that men and women are not different though they are but only biologically. Liberal feminism calls for equality between men and women concerning social roles as well as having the same rights.

Judith Lorber quoted the liberal feminist saying that, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex" (9). Judith said that the goal of liberal feminism in the United States was embodied in the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which was never ratified.

The goal of Marxist and socialist feminism is unlike others; its aim is to fight against women's oppression and exploitation. It stated that if a woman must work in her home then she merits to be supported by men and be economically dependent on 'the man of house', exactly like her children. Or have the right to work outside and fulfill her needs and duties and ends up working hard twice inside and outside the house and be strong as much as men are.

The social construction of gender simply denotes that gender is a social construct, men and women are prescribed their behaviour, character traits and identity constituents following their genders by society. These roles are social constructions, in which female or male identity is a social construction itself. The social construction of gender became problematic among critics and scholars who insisted that men and women must be by their skills, competencies and qualifications, not by their gender or sex.

On the whole, feminist call for several reforms in the 1970s, takes it into public consciousness, since women were ignored, marginalized and interrupted. Feminists organized political movement that defended their rights and gave them the chance to become part in workplaces, schools and even home. Women became more aware about their abilities, power, social right as well as everyday puts downs.

Out of this awareness, feminism is totally against male domination, that men are more valued than women and men are the leaders of society because they are the most powerful creatures (Lorber 17). It is a movement against any kind of objection, control, abuse, sexual and gender oppression, harassment, male domination, manipulation and rape. It is more into intimacy, value, caring and sharing. Feminism has been a protection of victim's rape, the condemnation of pornography, sexual violence and inequality since the dominant power relationship between men and women is unequal and unfair (Lorber 18).

Gender oppression is the fundamental issue of feminism. Feminists reacted against gender oppression, since it is an act of violence patterns of power, control, and political System that are prepared against women due to their gender. then has been focused right from the beginning on gender because a thorough revision of gender roles seemed the most effective way of changing the power relations between men and women. Since no one will want to give serious power to a person who must be timid, dependent, irrational, and self-

pitying because she is a woman. Though gender has nothing to do how females and males look or how they really are. But, describes the characteristics that a society or culture delineates as masculine or feminine, how they are culturally constructed.

Feminism seeks to change the power relations between men and women that prevail under what was called patriarchy, and they worked hard to achieve gender equality: Many feminists — and particularly liberal feminists- feel that human beings cannot develop their true potential until they would live in a society where men and women have complete equality. One solution to this problem is to abolish gender roles, or to value social and legal norms because they promote gender neutrality. Because actual gender roles are shaped by patriarchy, the elimination of gender roles would open up possibilities for human emancipation.

That is women and men should be socially equal and delete gender roles in societies so that women can practice their rights and express their thoughts freely. The Nigerian novelist Ngozi Chimamanda Achidie explained in her work *We Should All Be Feminist* that feminism is not about hating men. It was her response to her friend who thought being feminist means showing hatred toward men. Consequently, Achidie rejected the idea of her friend, and she called herself an African feminist who does not hate men. Thus, she showed that the concept of feminism is misinterpreted and misunderstood. That's why she wanted to show the real comprehension and meaning of the concepts as well (2)

Achidie said that, "Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political, and economy equality of the sexes", this definition strongly show that feminism is not only about women, even men can be feminist who believe on having the same social, economical, political rights between the two different gender. According to her words women have the right to share their abilities and inner power in all aspects of life. Otherwise, Achidie also showed her pride of being a feminist and called a feminist by her friends though they were formerly against it (Achidie 11).

Allan G. Johnson defines feminism as a concept that encompasses various approaches of gender and patriarchy. He claims that feminism challenges individuals to experience new way to life to criticize what have been already said about human nature, reveal the truth about male centered prerogatives and persecution of women.

In addition to what has been said, that of affording power to men in oblivion to women. Faris gave his own definition to feminism and claimed in *The Muslim Debate Initiative*

(MDI), that "women need feminism because there are women who suffer injustice" (1) that is women should be always defended because they are suffering from bad treatments.

Rosalind Delmar declares that women should get rid of discrimination and marginalization. She claims that women have some special needs that must not be neglected as well as women are blamed for such behaviour 'because of their sex'. To fulfill these needs women need some changes in different domains such as economical, political, cultural and social ones.

The Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood proclaims that feminism is all about women's right. Raising a question of whether feminism means women are better than men or it leads men to be pushed off a cliff. Atwood has her own comprehension of feminism; she has argued that feminism has nothing to do with preferring women than men. Or the allegation women are always right.

During an interview with the American actress Emma Watson for Entertainment weekly, Atwood was asked about if she was bored during the conversation talking only about feminism and being feminist, most importantly, whether her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is a feminist one. She strongly replied that she is very proud of being a feminist, and said that she was not bored and people should realize that feminism is a bunch of different things. She stated that people cannot talk unless they know what is feminism, because if they do not they will have no idea what they are talking about (Maya). Atwood emphasizes on people to look for the real meaning of feminism.

It is clearly seen that Atwood is aware of women and their importance, the reason why always gives priority to women's persona (Sarieh 13). She believes women deserve equality and freedom, at the same time she doesn't mean women and men are the same. It is agreed that Atwood started writing through the second wave of feminism 1970s, for some features of the second wave can be seen in her work *Cat's eye*, about women group exquisiteness of abortion rights and rejecting marriage (14).

The second wave of feminism rebelled against many kinds of oppression and treating women as objects for sexual desire. Called for equality and individual freedom within an iniquitous patriarchal System. In this regard Atwood in *Cat's Eye* said that, it was about men, the kind who caused women to fall. I did not ascribe any intentions to these men. They were like the weather, they didn't have a mind. They merely drenched you or struck you like

lightning and moved on, mindless as. Blizzards or they were like rocks, a line of sharp slippery rocks with jagged edges. You could walk with care along between the rocks, picking your steps, and if you slipped you'd fall and cut yourself, but it was no use blaming the rocks (qtd in Sarieh 14).

The idea is, women may fall because of men, men thought and believe they can make women fall down. Thus falling women clearly depict oppression.

On the whole, feminism main problem was, is and will be always the problem of oppression and gender differences. It is against the patriarchal System that favour men and executes women. Men are the centre while women are considered as other. Thus, men became every single woman's enemy, for everything is defined according to their points of view where women's opinions take no place. Women started fighting men because they were neglected as humans and treated as objects, horribly harassed and abused. As result, if men did not think about women as things, there would be no hatred and no competition between the two species, yet, if women are strong enough, there will be no falling women. If women decide to enter to the male world and challenge him, they'd better be careful and smart, otherwise there is no use blaming men for their fall.

III.6 Critical Interpretations of the Handmaid's Tale

There are many ways in which a critic may approach literary texts. Some of these approaches may be influenced by passing fashions in criticism, and some are very shows more suited to undergraduate or even graduate levels of study. However, students should be aware of some of the approaches adopted by literary critics, especially some of the new ways of approaching literary texts which have emerged in recent years.

Atwood herself has written in a wide variety of genres. The handmaid's Tale may be seen as satire.

III.6.1 Postmodernism

Postmodernism is an approach which moves beyond the « modernism» questioning of previous certainties and acknowledges uncertainty in form and language. Hence The Handmaids Tale may be seen as post-modern in its insistence that:

- Everything is a construct
- There are different versions of the same event
- Everything is open to interpretation

- There is no certain ending.

III.6.2 Feminist literary criticism

Feminist literary criticism has developed throughout the second half of the twentieth century and beyond, and has come part of the academic discipline known as Women's studies which was developed in the 1970s. *The Handmaid's Tale* can be seen as a feminist work which:

- Is written from the point of view of a female character
- Has a great deal to say about the place and role of women in society
- Raises questions about the feminist movement
- Makes the reader aware of the significance of the female body

III.6.3 Psychoanalytical Criticism

Psychoanalytical criticism has been influenced by the theories of psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud (1858-1939). Critics may interpret the text in terms of conscious and unconscious mind, and may evaluate character's behaviour in psychological terms. Such an approach may well be helpful in reading, for example, Atwood's novel *Surfacing*, which deals with a young woman's attempt to find her own identity. *The Handmaid's Tale* can be seen as a novel depicting the inner individual asserting is differentiation from the external identity imposed upon it.

III.6.4 Post-Colonial Criticism

Post-colonial criticism considers the relationship between colonizing nations and their former colonies and also the effects of cultural imperialism, as depicted in literature. Atwood is particularly conscious of her role as a Canadian writer, and the nature of colonialism in various forms is very evident in her novel *Surfacing*. It is also clear that in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

- Canada is seen as the place of escape from a repressive regime on its borders.
- There is also an implicit comment in the historical Notes sections regarding the cultural dominance of previously marginalized Native Americans.

III.6.5 Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a growing movement which considered the relationship between works of literature (and television and film) and the environment, looking at ethical questions arising from depiction of the natural world. Atwood is very committed to the preservation of the natural world – the first six 'favorite sites' listed on her website show environmental groups which she supports – and *The Handmaid's Tale* focuses strongly on the devastating effects of

environmental abuse. Make the story real and eliminates the notion that the story is just mere feministic propaganda

The Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood is famed for her fascinating work she has been writing all her life about form of constriction subjugation servitude and oppression her novel the handmaid's tale displayed dystopian drama is predominantly doomed to be a post modern feminist novel deals with gender issues that's why it was well received by critics helping Atwood's status as a prominent writer of the 20 century

General conclusion

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In institutions of higher education professors have found the Handmaid's Tale to be useful largely because of its historical basis and Atwood's captivating delivery, demonstrating the importance of reading to our freedom, both intellectual and political since the Handmaid's Tale is a feminist novel that highlights the perils of women in a society that has not only dehumanized their status but also made it criminal to be a woman who is painted as an object of male selfish desire and satisfaction something that has no human values because they live in a dystopian world. However, this story is not just propaganda to highlight gender issues; the reader feels that some of the male characters identify with the female character, but cannot do anything.

Much of the discussion about the Handmaid's Tale has centered on its categorization as feminist literature. Atwood sees the Republic of Gilead as a purely feminist dystopia, which is why the novel is categorized as dystopian fiction.

The Handmaid's Tale not only mirrors women's struggle against male domination but also serves a political message; it is a study of power and how it operates, and how it deforms or shapes the people who are living within that kind of regime, which is a dystopian and patriarchal world.

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