

FEMINISTIC APPROACH WITH MARGARET ATWOOD S NOVEL

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Abstract

The goal of this particular study is to zero down on feminism as it appears in the works of Margaret Atwood. The opening of the article discusses both the historical context of the Canadian Novel as well as the recurring themes that appear throughout Margaret Atwood's books. It begins by illustrating the paradoxes that are inherent to human life, focusing particularly on the feministic perspective, and then it proceeds to present the work's conclusion. The argument made in this paper is that feminism and going inside, or making an inner journey, are strongly connected. There are two alternatives available to everyone: the first is to live in a world of make believe similar to that of an ostrich, and the second is to step into the room and confront the truth. The first strategy would be well comfortable and handy, but the second would need one to make adjustments to their beliefs and attitudes.

keywords: *Feministic, Margaret Atwood*

INTRODUCTION

In the following study, the tight connection between feminism and post colonialism in Margaret Atwood's novels will be investigated. Both feminism and post colonialism may be understood as political, economic, and social movements that seek to combat oppression, patriarchy/colonization, and other forms of social inequality. The study also places an emphasis on a number of other significant issues, including how women are colonised, victimised, and silenced; how women are sometimes predators; how women are responsible for their own humiliation, downfall, and disruption; and finally, how women can achieve survival and freedom for themselves. For a variety of reasons, the researcher has decided to restrict the scope of his investigation to only three of Atwood's novels: *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). To begin, each of these books centres on the protagonist's journey toward self-awareness. Second, the conclusions they reach are open-ended, circular, and gloomy. Thirdly, they represent a variety of authorities, including patriarchal and matriarchal authorities, natural authorities, imperialist authorities, and theocratic authorities. Fourth, none of the three characters in these books have opinions that are particularly radical on political issues; this makes them quite difficult from a feminist point of view. Fifth, the first two of these books take place in Canada, while the third book takes place in the United States. In conclusion, these books represent various periods in Atwood's literary career: *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing* are examples of classic realism, but *The Handmaid's Tale* is a work of science fiction, and its conclusion necessitates a rereading of the entire book. Margaret Atwood was born in Canada in 1939, and she currently works as a poet, writer, critic, and playwright. It is difficult to go through her body of work and not think about Canadians or women. She lives in constant worry that she would be separated from her homeland and identity: "We need to know about here [Canada], since here is where we dwell." (*Survival* 19). In her essays, she is unable to distinguish between her own anguish as a woman and the agony of Canada as a country that is culturally and economically colonised. In addition, she

does not see a significant distinction between patriarchal dominance and imperial dominance, contending that both of these types of dominance result in oppression and sadness on both the individual and the social level. She writes in order to embody how Canada and women are humiliated and raped, attempting to convey a genuine image of a nation that is easily battered on every level. She is able to be adjacent to wounds, faults, and corruption thanks to her clear situation, insightful vision, and well-established determination.

She admonishes the people of Canada that they will be in for a gloomy future if they are unable to reach greatness and centeredness by placing an emphasis on human freedom for both men and women on equal terms. Atwood's negative outlook is quite obvious throughout all of her literature, but it is most obvious in *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*. The stories in these books blend the real with the fantastical, the fantastical with the real, the materialistic with the spiritual, love with strife, and dream with defeat. They follow both the feminist novel and the Canadian novel as their own paths. Nevertheless, the concept of the woman's relationship to the nation can be seen throughout the majority of her works. This serves to highlight the fact that complete independence for Canada cannot be achieved until women are liberated from the limits of patriarchy as well as those imposed by society as a whole. Atwood adds that she will not squander the soil that was tilled by her forefathers and maintains that people who are not loyal to Canada are destined to die a slow and lingering death. She is prepared to oppose and criticise both American imperialism and social and religious limitations, whether they come from inside the United States or from outside the United States. On the other side, some authors find it easier to just keep quiet or even end their own lives than face the humiliation of losing their work. At the early beginning of *Surfacing*, it is implied that the Canadian properties have been desecrated by the Americans in the following ways:

I can't believe I'm on this road again, twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying, the disease is spreading up from the south, and I notice they now have sea-planes for hire. But this is still near the city limits; we didn't go through, it's swelled enough to have a bypass, that's success. (7)

This indicates that the people of Canada must have had their souls assaulted in retaliation for the attack. This passage also suggests that "America is not a nation but a metaphor for a collection of economic, environmental, and political activities that also belong to Canada," as the author of this excerpt puts it (Fiamengo 7). In other words, it's possible that America is referring to the negative consequences that modern technology has had on the environment as well as women. However, in order to reach logic, equality, freedom, harmony, healing, and transcendence, women may make use of such technology. Fiona Tolan contends that "in line with ecofeminism, the [unnamed narrator] connects herself as a woman with nature, and so views herself as threatened and victimised" (43), which is why the protagonist makes an effort to reject the patriarchal civilization. Tolan asserts the following:

Ecofeminists and spiritual feminists, in particular, were concerned about preserving the apparently feminine ideals of care, harmony, and healing, and they championed the positive relationship of woman with both the body and with nature. Mary Daly, a feminist theologian and author of the books Beyond God the Father and Gyn/Ecology, for example, campaigned for the rejection of patriarchy and portrayed Christianity as a barbarian colonisation of old goddess stories. She also labelled Christianity as a form of colonialism. She argued that women could begin to rediscover their suppressed natural selves with the help of communication and cooperation by "speaking our selves, hearing and following the call of our

undomesticated, wild being." This could be accomplished by "speaking our selves, hearing and following the call of our wild being." (18)

In a nutshell, the devastation of land and women is symbolic of fragile determination and the fight to falling apart. As a result, the protagonist makes the choice to reside in the forest in order to discover both her homeland and her past. This demonstrates the importance of the archaeological knowledge that Michel Foucault possessed, according to which subalterns should look further back in history in order to reconstruct the colonial heritage from a different perspective.

Atwood contends that women are subject to tyranny at the hands of not one, but two forms of authority: the power of traditions, as well as the force of physical and cultural colonialism. This may be understood as a form of double colonisation. She emphasises the fact that their executioners, whether men or women, are also executed, and that their jailers are likewise incarcerated. In the novel "The Handmaid's Tale," women's lives are governed by societal, political, and religious expectations. In *The Edible Woman*, the only way for women to maintain their careers is for them to be denied the right to have children. After having the honour of land taken away from us, we have no regard for any other form of honour. This is the cycle of suffering that plays out in *Surfacing* as a result of people's actions to destroy nature and women.

Naomi R. Wolf shows adequate regard to sexual interactions in her book *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (1990). Because of this, she accuses extreme feminists of isolation and the annihilation of sex. "If you stick a pin in Canadian literature at random, nine times out of ten you'll strike a victim," is something that Margaret Atwood says in her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (39). The term "survival" was coined by Northrop Frye, who defined it as "living through a series of crises, each one unexpected and distinct from the other" (220). Atwood also discusses what she calls the "Four Basic Victim Positions," which include the denial of victimisation, acceptance of victimhood, rejection of victimisation, and transitioning into a "creative non-victim" position (*Survival* 19). The people of Canada are portrayed as childlike, helpless, pacifist victims, and both they and their female counterparts are handled as though they were minors. They can't get enough of the scenery and are mystified by the variety it offers. Native Canadians, European settlers from England and France, and other racial and cultural groups make up Canada's population. They are distinct from one another not only ethnically but also culturally. The atrocities that were committed throughout various periods of colonialism have also inflicted significant harm on Canada. These professions have not only had an impact on the military and the materialistic domains, but they have also strengthened their roots in the cultural identity, economy, and sociology of the societies in which they have operated. Both feminism and postcolonialism are movements that fight against injustice and oppression; their central focus is on rebelling against the dangers of patriarchal, societal, and colonial subjugation in order to maintain their identities. Both women and countries are displaced and deterritorialized; women's fragile bodies and fertile lands are both conquered and raped. Offred, the protagonist of "The Handmaid's Tale," is uprooted from her natural habitat in the novel. She is required to neglect her name, which is a form of identity distortion as well as the denial of personal and cultural past. The use of Offred's true name is punishable by death in Gilead:

I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginably distant past. I lie in my

single bed at night, with my eyes closed, and the name floats there behind my eyes, not quite within reach, shining in the dark. (The Handmaid's Tale 79)

This conveys a kind of violation and possession. Offred also stresses out her suffering throughout the following extract:

My crimson skirt is knotted all the way up to my waist, but not any higher. Just underneath that, the Commander is getting his fuckon on. The lower half of my body is what he is now fucking with. Because he is not engaging in sexual activity, I do not use the phrase "making love." It would not be correct to say that they were copulating too since it would indicate there were two persons engaged when in fact there is only one. Neither does the term "rape" apply because there is nothing going on here that I haven't consented to... I will never forget the words of wisdom that Queen Victoria gave to her daughter. Put some thought into England when you close your eyes. However, we are not in England. (Chapter 93 of The Handmaid's Tale)

These women, who are being used as handmaids, have already been mistreated and restrained. Sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices, and containers are all names for these objects. During the process of indoctrination, they are intimidated, and their bodies are utilised for the sake of the nation. They are responsible for shaping Gilead's destiny in one of two ways:

She [Aunt Lydia] continued by saying that the future was in your control. She extended her own hands to us, making the age-old gesture that was simultaneously an offering and an invitation to move forward into an embrace and an acceptance of one another. She said, "in your hands," while staring down at her own hands as though they were the source of the inspiration for the phrase. On the other hand, they contained nothing. They had nothing in them. Our hands were intended to be full with the future, which could be grasped but not seen. We were not supposed to be able to see it. (Chapter 55 of The Handmaid's Tale)

In this setting, women are subject to the authority of the Aunts, whose responsibility it is to instruct the handmaids. According to Harold Bloom, those Aunts are pronatalists in addition to being against immodesty, reading, and writing, and materialism. Furthermore, they deny reading and writing (22). Under the pretence of their faith, Offred and her coworkers are subjected to monthly sexual rituals that keep them in subservience. This is the hopeless situation that theocracies find themselves in, which is why some radical feminists advocate either abandoning religion altogether or reinterpreting these religious sources from a feminist perspective. They are subjected to torture as a result of being labelled as lesbians or unwomen and having the ability to have children taken away from them. The symbolism of the handicapped and sterile governor (Mr. Fred) in this case refers to the western civilisation, which is on the verge of extinction: "The monthly 'Ceremony' of rape... inexplicably demands the attendance of the Wife, the Handmaid, and the Commander. It compiles the humiliation, objectification, and ownership of women in Gilead that is practised through institutionalisation (Cavalcanti 166): The Ceremony is carried out in the normal manner. The Handmaid's Tale, page 85: "I lie on my back, fully dressed save for the healthy white cotton under drawers" "The handmaids lost control of their bodies and, as a result, of their identities," Alanna Callaway says (38). In the novel "The Edible Woman," women are not permitted to keep their wages in the event that they get married or become pregnant; doing so is regarded as a dishonourable act toward the institution: "Marian was aware... that Mrs. Bogue had a strong preference for her daughters-in-law to either not be married or to be seasoned veterans who had their potential for unplanned pregnancies

far in the past. According to what she had been overheard saying, newlyweds had a tendency to be unstable (168). Some people believe that feminism promotes behaviours in women such as "leaving their spouses, killing their children, practising witchcraft, destroying capitalism, and becoming homosexuals" (Jadwin 229- 30). We are left wondering if those who advocate for feminism or males who are religious are more to blame for the dissolution of households. The educational possibilities available to women are similarly restricted. They are thought to have the same level of competence as Native Americans when it comes to working with equipment. According to Kudchedkar, the women in Margaret Atwood's works are victims of personal victimisation, which has its origins in the destructive and dominating pattern that was prevalent in colonial times. The women suffer from psychological strain and a feeling of inferiority in comparison to the men. This lends credence to the idea that the life of a woman is synonymous with the experience of colonialism (249). Seymour Survey is a market research firm, and Marian, the protagonist of "The Edible Woman," is employed there. The stereotype of this organisation is that it is a snare for women. As seen by Marian's statement that "the corporation is stacked like an ice cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the bottom crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle," this also implies that patriarchy represents western dominance through capitalism (The Edible Woman 19). The male executives, advisors, statisticians, and psychologists are located on the upper portion of the building. This is the area where talks or disputes with customers take place, and the offices that these professionals work out of are quite plush. The machines make up the bottom crust, and the female department is responsible for connecting the upper and lower crusts. This is because they have to look out for the human species. This is a widespread condemnation of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonisation, all of which have granted women nothing outside of their parameters. The female body is colonised by repeated pregnancy (as depicted by Clara in "The Edible Woman"), rape (as depicted by Offred in "The Handmaid's Tale"), and traditional sex (Anna in *Surfacing*). This is also a symbol of the cultural imperialism that the United States practises since, according to Eva Mackey's argument, "similar ideas of marginality are utilised by Canadians outside of Quebec (the majority) to define Canada in relation to the United States" (129).

Offred is presented as a person who has been colonised during the course of *The Handmaid's Tale*. To ensure their own survival, both she and Canada will need to put up a fight: Canada has put up a fight against imperialism from the British, French, and cultural Americans. In addition to this, she is required to go against both patriarchal and cultural norms. On the other hand, she learns to adapt to this new environment by falling in love with Nick and attempting to become pregnant in order to keep from being deported to the colonies like unwomen and her mother. To put it another way, she has effectively integrated herself into her new existence to the point that she is now more Gileadean than the Gileadean herself. As a result, the heroine occasionally plays a role in the process of her own colonisation or captivity. Because of her dependency, naiveté, and passivity, she is the one who is to blame for her own pain (Note: 1). In a nutshell, she is the voice of the majority of Canadians who are not more extreme and extremist. On the other hand, Offred's mother and her friend Moira are the types of people that enjoy an active, adventurous, and optimistic lifestyle. They have been brave enough to take action against the oppression and injustice that exists. The former is a devoted Second-Wave Feminist who has burned sexist journals, which has resulted in her life ending up as that of an unwoman: "I saw your mother, Moira... There was a close-up of her, and it was definitely her." (*The Handmaid's Tale*, pages 263 and 264) The latter makes many unsuccessful attempts to get away. Both have expressed a preference for death, either overtly or covertly, over the fleeting pleasures of life. They are the embodiment of the philosophical purists that call themselves Americans. Ironically, the culture of Gilead is quite compatible with the ideology of radical feminism, since it promotes segregation and outlaws pornography to ensure that women are not subjected

to sexual assault or other forms of harassment. As a result of their authority over the handmaids, unwomen, and servants, husbands' wives and aunts also have the mistaken belief that they wield significant influence.

Offred is another character that can't be trusted as a storyteller. An excellent illustration of this may be found in the epilogue, titled "The Historical Notes." It would appear that professor Pieixoto and his colleagues are responsible for reconstructing the entire tale and receiving it. This epilogue stresses that even after the collapse of Gilead, men's views toward women are still antagonistic, even if Gilead has been destroyed (the biblically-inflected nation Atwood imagines: it is a puritanical, reactionary, militaristic regime). Wagner-Lawlor contends that Offred's storyline in and of itself can be "faulted on similar grounds particularly because it is retrospective and seems, for all the vivid description of life as a handmaid, too artful and self-consciously constructed, too distant, and too noncommittal about what happened and what will happen". On the other hand, these so-called "historical Notes" make reference to surviving and resisting. According to Hogsette, "Women may use language to generate their own subjective meaning and oppose specific socially and politically restrictive institutional meaning." Hogsette makes this argument in her article (263). This classification may be understood as a technique for oppressing and suppressing women. In Gilead, there are three language systems: the Gilead system, the narrator's system, and the academic rhetoric of the novel's concluding section. Both Yazdani and Royanian believe that Offred uses language as a weapon in her struggle against tyranny and inequality "She gradually realises the significance of language not only for her own self-realization but also for her continued existence. The ability to communicate with others via language gives her the strength necessary to make it through daily life in Gilead and to speak out against the patriarchal society's treatment of subjugated women".

MARGARET ATWOOD, A FEMINISTIC AUTHOR

Margaret Atwood is one person who has succeeded in understanding the pitiful predicament that women find themselves in. Because of her work as a feminist female novelist in Canada, she is today regarded as a national treasure. After the end of the First World War and throughout the first three decades of the 20th century, it is believed that women's rights activists made their first intentional efforts to promote gender equality. Women were given the opportunity to work and earn an appropriate wage for their labour. An unanticipated shift in society took place as a result of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. This shift resulted in greater freedom for women. It took about a century for women to feel liberated from the exploitation that was institutionalised, and it was a process of liberation from exploitation that took place throughout that time period. In addition, Margaret Atwood infused her masterwork with the kinds of events and occurrences that crystallise the steps involved in the process of women's liberation. She portrayed the early position of women who lived their lives ignorant of the exploitation they were subjected to, as well as their eventual rejection of that exploitation in order to live a life of freedom. Margaret Eleanor Atwood is a well-known and highly regarded Canadian female author who is also recognised for her work as a feminist critic and social activist. Since she was a little girl, she had always had a deep interest in reading books, and she always regarded reading to be her passion. As a result of her predisposition toward authoring laudable works of literature, she has penned more than thirty-five volumes, including novels, short tales, poetry, literary analyses, social history, and books for children. These works span a variety of genres and formats, including: Her works have been translated into more than twenty-two languages, making them accessible to readers all around the world. The name Margaret Atwood is practically synonymous with contemporary writing from Canada. During the 1960s, Atwood established her name in

the literary world as a poet, and since then, she has garnered a significant following for her work as a fiction writer. She is a well-known figure all throughout the world, particularly among feminists. She quickly earned a name for herself as a serious writer with enormous untapped talent. She demonstrated a great insight into the workings of woman's mind and established a recognised name among women authors for her imaginative interpretations of feminist views. She also exhibited extraordinary insight into the workings of women's minds. She investigates the connections that may be made between people, the natural world, and human behaviour and power. By teaching students at a number of different reputable colleges about literature, she was able to build a strong reputation for herself. Margaret Atwood is frequently and intimately connected with the feminist movement. Through her engaging writing, she consistently strives to give women more agency. The names "feminism" and "feminist" were first used in France in 1872, followed by the Netherlands in 1872, then Great Britain in 1890, and lastly the United States of America in 1910. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first use of the word "feminist" was in 1894, and the first use of the word "feminism" was in 1895. Elaine Showalter provides a narrative of the evolution of feminist thought, which can be broken down into a number of distinct periods. Readers investigate the ideals that lie behind works of written literature from across the world in the first step of the process, which is known as "feminist criticism." The second approach is referred to as "gynocritics," and it is based on the concept that the woman is the one who produces the meaning of the text, which then becomes the trajectory of the individual or collective literary career of women throughout history. The final stage in the evolution of feminist theory is referred to as gender theory, and it is at this phase that the ideological impacts on individuals as a result of male-dominated literature as well as the consequences of the gender system are investigated.

FEMINISM IN ATWOOD'S NOVEL

The subject matter of Atwood's works is the hidden, subjugated world of women, where the injustices of society drive them farther and more into the shadows. In her work, Margaret Atwood also illustrates the innate desire that resides inside women to abandon all of their traditional identities in order to live a life of freedom. Margaret also provides many examples in which a victim in the book chooses the path of survival and, later, enables herself to be free from any kind of conventional clutches, such as those in which a woman is seen as an object for sexual pleasure or as a person who does repetitive house hold work such as washing clothes or sweeping floors. Through Margaret Atwood's works, this article explores the woman's survival, which determines her status as a woman in this world. The women who play the leading roles in her books all deal with the struggle to stay alive, which is the central topic of her books. Her books primarily focus on a variety of topics, including anti-Americanism on a more subtle level, multiculturalism, nature vs. humans, the quest for one's own identity, Southern Ontario Gothic, underdog-heroes, the contrast between urban and rural settings, and women's empowerment. She has made an effort to cover all of her experiences as a woman, as a female, and as a writer due to the fact that she is considered a feminist writer of the 1960s. Atwood is subject to a significant amount of nationalism's impact. Her nationalism, her feeling of feminism, and her sense of both the Canadian and female identities are all connected to her feminism in some way. Her critical essays demonstrate both her struggle to survive and her ambition to become gender conscious. In her works, she has carved out stunning caverns that lie hidden underneath her characters and their personalities, and as a result, she transports the reader to the memories of the past through which the present is viewed and experienced. Atwood crafts a self-portrait of woman as the artist and hero who is true to her own inner directives in the books that she has written. These novels deal with the private and genuine experiences that women have. She conjures up a picture of a hero whose character

possesses both depth and empathy in equal measure. The protagonists have a unique relationship with the literature, and this relationship serves to capture their emotions and fantasies. Atwood has conceived of heroes whose lives live up to their expectations of their characters and their destinies. In each of these books, the main character evolves into a distinct person who represents a woman. They each set off on adventures in the hope of regaining bits of themselves that they have misplaced. Atwood believes that the only way for a victim to genuinely survive is for them to own their own responsibility in the situation. Every single one of the ladies in her books must be a victorious fighter since they always make it through. The study examines the challenges that women face in cultures that are predominately male. The themes of books depict women who are trapped behind restrictive preconceptions, and some of these women fight to carve out a place for themselves that is uniquely female. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, including autonomy of thought, self-definition and self-reconstruction of one's own history, creative writing, whether oral or written, and bonding among women via a refusal to take on the position of the victim or the role of subjection. As a result, the focus of the study is on the gender politics that are being fixed by birth and that are causing her to be separated with the mandated gender. During the entirety of her life, she has never been acknowledged as a whole person, and she is unable to place herself in the category of a human being. Atwood gives voice to the events of her life and provides significance to the relatively inconsequential role she plays in society. The quiet woman eventually comes to terms with her uniqueness, which thrusts her into the realm of men and results in her being discarded as an unnecessary commodity there.

CONCLUSION

This paper comes to the following conclusions. First, women and men are two victims of that modern world. Therefore, their unity leads to fighting ignorance. Women are not only oppressed by men, but by underdevelopment, racial segregation, imperialism and by women themselves as well. They cannot give up men because their fate is always connected with them; this also encourages division and ethnicity. Second, men's characters are often distorted as a kind of revenge. Third, life is a matter of adaptation, so women have to change their behavior in order to cope with that new life. Fourth, women are subjected to humiliation under the guise of religion. Fifth, there are different victims in Atwood's novels. These are animals, Indians, sham pioneers, children, artists, women, French Canadians, explorers, and immigrants. Sixth, the endings of Atwood's novels denote pessimism and continuous loss. Finally, women use different weapons (language, eating, and non-eating) in order to fight and resist suppression.

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