

# Identity, Gender Roles, Feminism and Rebellion in Margaret Atwood's Select Works

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**Abstract:** Margaret Atwood is a Canadian novelist and poet. She is the winner of two Booker Prizes. Several of her works have been adapted for film and television. Themes of gender, climate change, identity and women's issues permeate her works. This paper studies some of her critically acclaimed works.

**Keywords:** Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments*, *Alias Grace*, *The Year of the Flood*.

## I. Introduction

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian novelist and poet. She is the winner of two Booker Prizes. Several of her works have been adapted for film and television. Themes of gender, climate change, identity and women's issues permeate her works.

## II. *The Handmaid's Tale*

*The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian novel, published in 1995. A dystopian novel focuses on issues such as state terror, poverty and suppression. The novel is set in the fictional Republic of Gilead. The Republic of Gilead has overthrown the US government in the novel. The Republic of Gilead is a totalitarian and patriarchal state. The handmaids are women who are forced to produce children for the ruling class of Gilead. Identity, gender, rebellion, love, feminism and fertility are the themes here.

## III. *The Testaments*

*The Testaments* is a novel by Atwood, published in 2019. It is a sequel to the aforementioned novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel is set fifteen years after *The Handmaid's Tale*. It comes under the genres of science fiction and dystopian fiction. It is narrated by a woman from Gilead named Agnes and a woman from Canada named Daisy. The novel depicts resistance against the regime. The novel focuses on totalitarianism, fear, repression and power.

## IV. *Alias Grace*

*Alias Grace* is Atwood's historical fiction novel which was published in 1996, and was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The novel is influenced by real life events, with fictional elements added to it. It focuses on the real life events of the murders of Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery in Canada. The servants who worked for Kinnear were convicted for the crime. In the novel, fictional doctor named Simon, researches the case. Social class, gender, justice and power are other themes here.

## V. *Oryx and Crake*

*Oryx and Crake* is another of Atwood's novel, published in 2003. It comes under the genre of speculative fiction. Speculative fiction departs from realism. Speculative fiction achieves this by adding imaginative futuristic supernatural elements. The protagonist is a character called Snowman. It is revealed in the course of the novel that Snowman was a boy called Jimmy who has now changed due to genetic and pharmaceutical engineering. Themes include scientific technology and its dangers, the importance of relationships and the power of corporations..

## VI. *The Blind Assassin*

*The Blind Assassin* is a novel by Atwood, published in 2000. The novel is set in a fictional town named Port Ticonderoga, and in Toronto. Past events that occurred in 1930's and 1947 are narrated in the novel. *The Blind Assassin* comes under the genre of historical fiction. Several events that occupy significance in Canadian history are mentioned in the novel. The protagonist can time travel, and eventually falls in love with a woman who belongs to a different world. Oppression, resistance, violence, death loss and memory are the vital themes.

## VII. *Surfacing*

*Surfacing* is the second novel of Atwood's, and was published in 1972. The novel revolves around the life of a woman who returns to her hometown, situated in Canada, in search of her missing father. She is accompanied by Joe, her lover, as well as Anna and David, a married couple. She recollects her childhood and starts to eventually be driven into madness. Feminism and separation are at the heart of the novel. Alienation and identity crisis experienced by women permeate the novel.

## VIII. *The Edible Woman*

*The Edible Woman* is the first novel of Atwood's, and was published in 1969. The protagonist is named Marion. The novel depicts multiple gender stereotypes. The narrator's points of view include the first and the third. Food and clothing

are used as major symbols in the novel to highlight characters' personalities. Marion struggles with food society and her fiancé. Male hegemony, women's enslavement, gender roles and consumerism are the dominant themes.

#### **IX. Cat's Eye**

Cat's Eye is a novel by Atwood, published in 1988. The protagonist is a painter named Elaine Risley. During the course of the novel, the protagonist reflects on the past i.e., her childhood and teenage years. She reflects on the memory revolving around Celia, a girl who was the leader of a group of three girls. Celia was very cruel to her and has influenced Elaine's life and her art. The novel is set in between World War II to the 1980s. Identity crisis, cruelty, memory, art and conflict are the main themes.

#### **X. The Robber Bride**

The Robber Bride is a novel by Atwood, published in 1993. The novel revolves around the lives of three women and Zenia, the women's nemesis. The novel is set in Toronto, Canada. The three women are named Tony, Roz and Charis. The novel alternates between flashbacks and the present. Zenia had betrayed the three women by interfering in their romantic relationships. Power struggles between men and women, friendship and trust are the main themes.

#### **XI. The Year of the Flood**

The Year of the Flood by Atwood, published in 2009, is a dystopian novel. It basically provides a perspective of the lower classes belonging to the novel Oryx and Crake. The lower classes live in the pleeblands. They are the God's Gardeners, a religious sect that follows a combination of biblical practices along with some scientific beliefs. God's Gardeners are also vegetarian, so they preserve plant and animal life. Repercussions of human activities on the environment, sexual objectification, of women and physical abuse are the core themes.

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