



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

FEMINISM IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S BODILY HARM AND THE HANDMAID'S TALE

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Abstract: Margaret Atwood was a Novelist, Poet, Critic, Cultural Activist, Feminist, and Social Activist. Her literary career is contemporary fiction writer. She Won 9 "Governor General's Awards", 5 "Booker Prizes" and 3 "Orange Prizes for Fiction". Margaret Atwood's Bodily Harm and The Handmaid's Tale examine women's values in a chivalric manner. Rennie, of Bodily Harm, and Offred, of The Handmaid's Tale are both women in their thirties used by the author to explore how they react to 'oppression in all its manifestations, both physical and psychological'. Atwood, in her later novels and poems, seems to focus on the struggle in which she sees men and women. This paper aims to bring out the view of feminism in Atwood's Bodily Harm and The Handmaid's Tale.

Index Terms - Domination, Patriarchy, Animus Projections, Women's Rights, Excruciating, Dystopian Society.

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is important to women's society because men are not given the all freedoms for women. First of all, the freedom is not given by others. It is taken by us. But in this patriarchal society, one's freedom is given by others. At the beginning of the 19th century, individual women and some men were speaking against male dominance where women were relegated to the margins of society and were provided low status.

1.1 THREE WAVES OF FEMINISM

First-wave feminism – It focused on the promotion of equal contract, marriage, parenting, and property rights for women. The movement succeeded in gaining women the right to vote and other legal liberties. **Second-wave feminism** – Began in the US, and then spread to Europe, and Asia. It focused mainly on sexuality, reproductive rights, and the wage gap. The movement succeeded in securing career options for women, and many reproductive rights. **Third-wave feminism** – Fights for equality by focusing exclusively on female victims of gender-neutral issues. Everything is the patriarchy's fault, also rape culture.

Napoleon Bonaparte said that women are nothing but machines for producing children, nature intended women to be our slaves, and they are our property. Still, many countries do not give the freedom of education to women that example is Pakistan. Atwood's most of the work is related to feminism. Women do not think about themselves because their life gives to their parents, husbands, and children.

2. Feminism in Bodily Harm:

Bodily Harm published in 1981, concentrates on the survival of Rennie who protests being conquered both physically and psychologically. She undergoes surgery for breast cancer which is a symbol of her victimization where parts of her body are mutilated to demolish her physically and mentally. The novel presents poignantly the abuse, torture, mutilation, and finally the destruction of female bodies in hospital beds and prison cells for purposes of male domination sexually. This cancer leads her to break up with Jake. As she finds herself alone, a mysterious stranger spies on her and enters her house while she is out but leaves a rope on her bed. Rennie's boyfriend Jake engages in sadistic sexual pranks with her, and Paul, her lover in the Caribbean, where she goes on a vacation, is inhumanely remote and uncommitted. Jake disguises sexual desire as love and wields love as a weapon rather than as a gift. For him, love is a crude game intended to hurt women as he can.

Rennie's physical, loving, and social life falls apart. Furthermore, she realizes that she has not chosen her job and has lost some ideals of hers. She is still alive, but she remains practically alone and empty. Rennie is particularly weak, due to what happened to her in the few months following the identification of her breast tumor. It then is not surprising that she is led to such bad events without being able to resist. Jake remarks that women should be locked in cages. He has an exploitative and debased view of the female sex. He considers her only an object of sex. Rennie goes south to the island of St. Antoine, only to encounter more violence,

sexual and otherwise. She becomes involved in the political turmoil on the island and ends up in prison along with Lora. In prison, Rennie and Lora feel lonely and victimized by the male. Thus throughout the novel the main character of the novel, Rennie is victimized by the male in the patriarchal society.

Rennie gets involved in love with Paul, a tourist guide on the Caribbean island. She feels to strike a meaningful relationship with him as he does not abandon her on the grounds of scar. She realizes her female passivity and her ability to establish a meaningful relationship with any one of her male associates. Jake, Daniel, Paul's trinity symbolizes her animus projections. Lora's mother is helplessly dependent on her husband and so she goes to the rescue of Lora even when her husband used to threaten his step-daughter with sexual assault. Lora is sexually assaulted, beaten, mutilated, and killed by the policemen. Finally, Rennie analyzes the importance of breasts, and then she avoids sexual relationships with others and she leaves her boyfriends. Because they give importance to her physical body only not for her mind or soul.

3. Feminism in The Handmaid's Tale:

The Handmaid's Tale, which came into print in 1985, has a strong female discourse. Women are regarded as mere sexual objects in Gilead, a republic where diseases have yielded most men and women infertile. Offred is among the handmaids who have been appointed by the commander to breed children for society. The Commander and Offred play Scrabble which is forbidden since women are not allowed to read, and he lets her look at old magazines like Vogue. The women are color-coded: blue Wives, red Handmaids, green Marthas. The Handmaids no longer have any say in the life and upbringing of that child, and after six months of breastfeeding, she is moved to another family and will never see her child again. The woman is a slave to the commander. She has no name, no identity of her own.



Offred can leave the house only on shopping trips, the door to her room cannot be completely shut, and the Eyes, Gilead's secret police force, watch her every public move. All are cracked down on women's rights, forbidding women to hold property or jobs. Aunt Lydia supervised the women, giving speeches extolling Gilead's beliefs that women should be subservient to men and solely concerned with bearing children. The stratification of women into their different roles helps keep them in their respective controlled places. Rita, one of the Marthas who live at the Commander's house, shows no sympathy for Offred's situation but identifies with another Martha who has been accidentally shot. The segregation and powerlessness of all their positions prevent them from recognizing their common enemy: masculine power.

Offred tries to combat her situation in different ways. She feels trapped in an overwhelmingly excruciating dystopian society which curbs her freedom. She is enslaved by the government physically and psychologically because of her fecundity. The handmaids do not leave from commanders so they are like the handicapped position. Offred was willing to sacrifice to instigate change, either for herself or for her daughter.

4. Summing up:

Atwood brilliantly explores the sufferings of women in a patriarchal society and how they become powerful through their feminist attitude, overcome their struggle, and assert their identity through language and other feminist attitudes, through her novels *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Still, now, our country is also giving special importance to men. Each parent wants the boy child. The old women believed in superstitious beliefs. They are drawn borders for women not crossing that limit. Like women not see other people's faces, we wear the traditional dress. The women's education is not developed in the villages.

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