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Chapter 1: Background on Margaret Atwood
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   Lee Briscoe Thompson
   
   Despite strenuously resisting being labeled a “genre” author, Atwood is well known internationally—in the classroom, with critics, and among average readers—mostly because of her science fiction and fantasy novels.

2. The Impact of Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Utopianism on Atwood’s Writing 28
   
   Margaret Atwood, as told to Danita J. Dodson
   
   This 1997 interview with Atwood explores the impact of feminism, postcolonialism, and utopianism on the author’s writing in general and specifically on The Handmaid’s Tale.

Chapter 2: The Handmaid’s Tale and Women’s Issues
1. The Handmaid’s Tale Addresses Sexism and Ignores Racism 42
   
   Ben Merriman
   
   Atwood clearly borrows from the African American experience of slavery in framing the plight of the Handmaids. In doing so, she unintentionally creates a “politically hazardous fantasy” in which white American women have suffered in a way that replicates that of African Americans.

2. The Handmaid’s Tale Is a Defense of Abortion and Pornography 46
   
   Anne Barbeau Gardiner
Atwood has unfairly—and inconsistently—grouped all conservative Christians into a single authoritarian bogeyman. In railing against this bogeyman, Atwood implicitly defends abortion and pornography as inseparably intermingled rights.

3. The Treatment of Women in *The Handmaid’s Tale* Is the Historical Norm

*Jill Swale*

A look back at first-wave, second-wave, and third-wave feminism, as well as postfeminism, demonstrates how these real-world political movements map to various aspects of *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

4. *The Handmaid’s Tale* Dramatizes the 1980s Antifeminist Backlash

*Shirley Neuman*

Throughout the twentieth century, feminist movements made great gains in securing equal rights and social standing for American women. The fictional nation of Gilead is both a result of the backlash against these political gains and the solution to the social dangers that filled the void left when these movements lost momentum.

5. Feminism and Religious Fundamentalism Merge in *The Handmaid’s Tale*

*Barbara Ehrenreich*

Atwood’s novel highlights the identical totalitarian leanings at the heart of both the extreme conservative right (represented by the government of Gilead) and the extreme liberal feminist left (embodied by Offred’s pornography-burning mother and radical friend Moira).

6. The Special Impact of *The Handmaid’s Tale* on Female Readers

*J. Brooks Bouson*

*The Handmaid’s Tale* can have a profound emotional impact on readers, especially women. This impact is magnified by Offred’s metaphorical role as the Commander’s incestuous daughter-bride and is compounded by Atwood’s detailed exploration of how the Handmaids must participate in their own subjugation.
7. Controlling Women's Voices in *The Handmaid's Tale*  
*David S. Hogsette*

By including the fictional "Historical Notes" (delivered by an arrogant male professor) at the end of her novel, Atwood provides readers with a perfect example of how not to read victims' accounts of their oppression.

8. Women Oppress Women in Atwood's Novel  
*Tara J. Johnson*

As has been the case throughout history, the oppressed minority in *The Handmaid's Tale* (in other words, all women) is controlled by a group drawn from its own ranks. This subgroup of the oppressed thus becomes vital to maintaining the status quo—possibly more so than their oppressors.

**Chapter 3: Contemporary Perspectives on Women's Issues**

1. Opponents of Gay Marriage Seek to Restrict Sexual and Marital Freedom for All  
*Linda Hirshman*

Opponents of same-sex marriage claim that laws defining marriage as exclusively heterosexual are intended to "reinstitutionalize" marriage as a union dedicated to raising and protecting natural-born children. This very broad argument implicitly attacks adoption, divorce, single-parent families, and any sex outside the confines of marriage.

2. The Surrogacy Market in India Exploits Vulnerable Women  
*Amana Fontanella-Khan*

The booming surrogacy industry in India almost exactly mirrors the Handmaids' plight: vulnerable women find themselves manipulated into pregnancy and virtually trapped in "surrogacy homes."

3. Government Policies Should Not Treat Women as Childbearing Vessels  
*Sunsara Taylor*
In April 2006 the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report recommending that doctors treat all women of childbearing age as being potentially pregnant. While some applauded these recommendations as good and reasonable health care, many saw this as a step toward defining women exclusively in terms of their reproductive roles.

4. Modesty Is Forced on Women in Chechnya

*Tanya Lokshina*

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Chechen Republic has been politically unstable. As this Sunni Muslim nation becomes increasingly conservative, Chechen women find themselves publicly attacked and humiliated by men who believe these women are not appropriately veiled and modest.

For Further Discussion

For Further Reading

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