

Margaret Atwood: Transgressing Genre
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Course Description:

“What is genre? What is gender? These seem to remain open questions,” Margaret Atwood said in a 2014 talk on Genre and Gender at Penn University. This course offers to examine Margaret Atwood’s use of genre and gender. Special emphasis will be given to her major novels, beginning with autobiographical elements in *Cat’s Eye*, historiographic metafiction (*Alias Grace*, *Blind Assassin*, *The Robber Bride*) and ending with fairy tale echoes in her novels and short stories. The seminar will scrutinize the dystopian/utopian and speculative fiction/science fiction dilemmas negotiated in Atwood’s fiction and non-fiction (*Maddaddam* trilogy, *The Handmaid’s Tale*). We will discuss the literary usefulness (or lack of it) of genre and form labels, Atwood’s use of intertextuality and genre hybridity.

Course Outline:

1. A Generic Approach to Margaret Atwood’s Fiction: Fictive Autobiographies, Gothic Romance (*Edible Woman*, *Lady Oracle*, *Cat’s Eye*)

Morning Session: *Edible Woman*, chapter 19; Emma Parker. ““You Are What You Eat: The Politics of Eating in the Novels of Margaret Atwood.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 349-368.

Afternoon Session: *The Handmaid’s Tale*, chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; “Science Fiction in the Feminine: *The Handmaid’s Tale*” in: Coral Ann Howells: *Margaret Atwood*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, pp. 126-147.

2. In Search of Canadian History: Margaret Atwood’s Historiographic Metafiction (*The Robber Bride*, *Alias Grace*, *The Blind Assassin*)

Morning Session: Margaret Atwood. “In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction” in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 5 (Dec. 1998), pp. 1503-1516. *Alias Grace*, chapters I “Jagged Edge,” II “Rocky Road,” III “Puss In Corner”.

Afternoon Session: Cooni Vevaina. “Margaret Atwood and History.” In Coral Ann Howells, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, pp. 86-99. *The Handmaid’s Tale*, chapters 7, 8, 9, 10.

3. Speculations on Speculation: Margaret Atwood’s Speculative Fiction Novels (*The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Heart Goes Last*)

Morning Session: Madelaine Davies. “Margaret Atwood’s Female Bodies.” In Coral Ann Howells, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, pp. 58-71. *The Handmaid’s Tale*, chapters 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17

Afternoon Session: Shannon Hengen: “Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism.” In Coral Ann Howells, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, pp. 72- 85. *The Handmaid’s Tale*, chapters 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24

4. Post-apocalyptic Paradise: Margaret Atwood’s Environmental Dystopias (*Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, *Maddaddam*)

Morning Session: Coral Ann Howells: “Margaret Atwood’s Dystopian Visions: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*.” In Coral Ann Howells, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, pp. 161-175. *Oryx and Crake*, chapters “Blyss Pluss,” “Maddaddam”, “Paradise”

Afternoon Session: *The Handmaid’s Tale*, chapters 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30

5. Fairy tale Resonances: Fairy Tale Intertexts in Margaret Atwood's Works (short stories and selected novels)

Morning Session: Margaret Atwood. "The Bluebeard's Egg"; Sharon R. Wilson. "Margaret Atwood and the Fairy Tale: Postmodern Revisioning in Recent Texts." In Stephen Benson (ed.) *Contemporary Fiction and Fairy Tale*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2008, pp. 98-120.

Afternoon Session: Sarah Appleton. "Freed from the Salt Mines of Virtue: Wicked Women in Margaret Atwood's Novels." In Bouson, J. Brooks (ed): *Margaret Atwood: Critical Insights*. Ipswich: Salem Press, 2013, pp. 276-294. *The Handmaid's Tale*, chapters 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41.

Study Materials:

Bouson, J. Brooks (ed): *Margaret Atwood: Critical Insights*. Ipswich: Salem Press, 2013.

Bouson, J. Brooks (ed): *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, Alias Grace, Oryx and Crake*. London and New York: Continuum, 2010.

Nischik, Reingard (ed): *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. Camden House: 2000.

Wilson, Sharon Rose (ed.): *Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations*. Columbus: The Ohio State University, 2003.

Margaret Atwood: *In Other Worlds: SF and Human Imagination*. London: Virago Press, 2011.

Assignments/Exam:

Close Reading Quiz 1, 2, 3 30%

Final Essay 70%

Instruction for final essay:

Bc. students: 6 pages (without bibliography), 3 academic secondary sources minimum

Mgr. students: 7 pages (without bibliography), 4 academic secondary sources minimum

MLA style for documenting sources and in-text citations

Deadlines: 5 June 2019

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