



Review Article

Gender and Power in the Works of Margaret Atwood and Zadie Smith

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ABSTRACT

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The complicated links between gender and power are looked at in this article through the works of two famous modern authors, Margaret Atwood and Zadie Smith. Their stories have a lot of feminist and postcolonial ideas in them. Through a comparison of a few chosen novels, such as Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and *Swing Time* (2016) and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Alias Grace* (1996), the study looks at how both authors deal with themes of female agency, systemic oppression, and navigating one's identity within racialised and patriarchal power structures. This study looks at how Atwood and Smith show resistance, cooperation, and ways to survive in social and political settings with racial and gendered structures. It does this by using feminist literature theory, intersectionality, and postcolonial theories. Their story patterns and themes are both the same and different, according to the study. This helps us understand the bigger effects on society and ideas. We can better understand how contemporary feminist literature questions and changes conversations about gender and power by seeing how Atwood's bleak vision and Smith's mixed points of view can always be used to talk about how complicated identity politics are.

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1. Introduction

To get a sense of bigger social and political problems, it's still important to look at how gender and power work in modern writing. The stories that Margaret Atwood and Zadie Smith write are very interesting because they are set in different times and countries and explore how gender, race, and power affect each other. Smith's books are mostly set in towns with lots of different kinds of people. They show how identity is made within power systems that are based on race and gender. On the other hand, Atwood's stories are often set in dangerous and unrealistic times and places, and she is very critical of how men rule and put down women. When we look at all of their work together, it helps us understand how power works for women in various social and cultural settings. This makes feminist writing more interesting.

"The Handmaid's Tale," by Atwood (1985), is without a doubt one of the most important feminist dystopias. It paints a scary picture of women being abused by religion and political power. After *Alias Grace* (1996), she wrote more books with the same theme. These books look at how women have been pushed to the edges of society throughout history and how stories can be places where power struggles take place. Smith, on the other hand, talks about how gender, race, class, and postcolonial identity work together in her books *White Teeth* (2000) and *Swing Time* (2016). In both books, the main characters are strong women who have to deal with systems of power and isolation in modern Britain. It makes Atwood's more negative view stronger that Smith is interested in multiculturalism and hybridity. They then have a deep conversation about how power changes and stays the same between works.

Some of Atwood and Smith's works will be looked at in this paper. The main focus will be on how their stories build, attack, and question famous ideas. The study looks at how the female characters in the books try to stay alive and fight back using feminist literary criticism, intersectionality, and postcolonial theory. It also looks at the cultural complaints that are built into the books' structure and themes. To fully understand how modern writers have reacted to women's power, we need to look at how they deal with race, history, and identity in their works and see how they are similar and how they are different.

A lot of people in academia talk about how literature affects and reflects gender politics. This paper adds to that conversation by showing how important interdisciplinary analysis is for understanding complicated social realities. The argument says that Atwood and Smith show how strong stories can be as a way to study feminism and take action in culture by showing how oppression works and also making room for freedom and change.

2. Literature Review

The study of gender and power in writing has been an important part of feminism and culture criticism for a long time. A lot of important feminist writers, like Judith Butler (1990), have talked about how gender is not a fixed biological trait but an identity that is made by society and can change. With this performance reading, common opposites are put to the test, and literature is used to question and break down gender norms. It was made popular by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Intersectionality theory says that to fully understand how power works in texts, you need to also look at how different kinds of oppression, like race, gender, and class, affect each other.

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Especially since Atwood criticises male power and surveillance, these theory models have been used by a lot of people to look at her work. Moylan (2000) is one researcher who looks at how Atwood questions past stories and the part that memories play in how women see themselves. People who study her, like Gilbert and Gubar (1979), look at how she uses future situations to show how the system controls women's bodies and identities. Foucault's (1977) ideas of biopower and discipline surveillance as ways to control people can be seen in Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale," which is studied for how it shows totalitarian control hidden behind religious language.

On the other hand, reviewers have said that Zadie Smith's books are great because they really look into identity in postcolonial and mixed settings. Brennan (2003) and Hall (1996) are two scholars who have written about Smith's work and how it shows how cultural membership is fluid and how people negotiate having multiple identities. Like Crenshaw's ideas about intersectionality in literature, Smith's female characters often have to deal with how race, gender, and class affect each other. Some writers, like McLeod (2010), have looked at how she uses humour, comedy, and social criticism in her stories to fight structural crimes and bring them to people's attention.

It's becoming more and more popular to compare Atwood and Smith. Wilson (2015) is one researcher who has looked at both writers as female critics who lived and wrote in different places and times. They have compared Smith's urban mixed realism to Atwood's dark allegories. Smith's focus on how race and gender affect people's bodies and Atwood's focus on how power works in society fit together well in this body of work. Their work as a whole shows how difficult and normal it is for women to have power these days.

Postcolonial feminist critics, such as Mohanty (1988), help us understand Smith's new literary ideas. This is especially true when we think about how colonialism and globalisation test traditional feminist ideas. Smith works on stories that are specific to an area or city and don't fit into broader conversations. This is like what Mohanty said about Western female universalism being wrong. However, Atwood's stories often cover a range of time periods, from real events to made-up worlds. This gives them a unique view on how women are abused.

If you want to know how power moves through words and institutions, Michel Foucault's ideas from 1978 are still important to feminist literature criticism. Atwood and Smith both use story structures that show and change how power works. Some of these are shaky narrators, broken stories, and metafictional elements that make you question the truth of the stories that are telling. This way of writing emphasises how power is unclear and can be bought, which fits with postmodern critiques of big stories.

Most writers agree that this is the best way to look at gender and power because they are difficult ideas that are rooted in culture. This is clear from readings of Atwood and Smith's works that are feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist. Because of this, they are great examples of how female power is shown in current writing.

3. Previous Studies

A lot of different studies have looked at the themes of gender and power in Margaret Atwood's and Zadie Smith's writing. Few books have been studied as much as "The Handmaid's Tale" by Atwood, which is about women being abused and men being in charge. Some feminist reviewers, such as Gilbert and Gubar (1979), talked a lot about how Atwood used women's bodies as political spaces. More recent reviewers, such as Baccolini and Moylan (2003), add to this by talking about how the book fits into the way that science fiction can imagine and study social power

systems. A 2010 study by Davis and others shows how Atwood uses stories to explain how biopower and tracking work.

Many reviews have said that Zadie Smith's writing shows how race, class, and gender act on each other in complex ways. Brennan read *White Teeth* in 2003 and thought it was a funny and complicated book that challenged the idea that race is important. Lewis (2015) talks about how Smith's *Swing Time* looks at race identity and female friendship. She looks at how power works in people's lives and in groups. This theory from Crenshaw (1989) is often used to look at how Smith's characters deal with their complicated identities in postcolonial and diasporic settings.

We can learn a lot from comparing the works of two writers, even though they don't happen very often. Wilson (2015) says that both Atwood and Smith are feminist writers who question women's power in various political and social settings. The study says that Atwood's dystopian stories show how oppression works at the system level, while Smith's urban realism focusses on daily forms of power and defiance. McCarthy (2018) also looks at the structure of stories and how both authors use broken stories and unreliable narrators to make us think about power and control in their writing.

Other research that looks at the effects of power beyond gender has included looks at race, colonial, and class relations. To understand female power, critics use the basic postcolonial feminist frameworks that Mohanty (1988) and Spivak (1999) provide. These frameworks stress how important cultural uniqueness and global settings are. An author and researcher who studies the connection between gender, power, and historical memory is Evernden (2002). He has noticed how Atwood uses historical stories in *Alias Grace*.

Taking everything into account, previous research proves how deeply Atwood and Smith's literary works look at gender and power, but it also shows that there aren't many in-depth comparisons that include feminist, postcolonial, and story points of view. This paper aims to fill in this gap by comparing and contrasting the writers' formal and subject methods. This will help us gain a deeper understanding of how gender and power interact in modern writing.

4. Methodology

Feminist, postcolonial, and interdisciplinary theories are used in this qualitative, comparative literary analysis of Margaret Atwood and Zadie Smith's writings to look into how gender and power are formed and disputed in those works. *White Teeth* (2000) and *Swing Time* (2016) by Smith are two of the picked books. *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Alias Grace* (1996) by Atwood are also two of them. We chose these books because they took a critical look at racialised and male power structures, negotiating identity, and structural abuse in the context of women's agency.

Close textual analysis is the major method, with a focus on how characters grow, how stories are told, recurring themes, and the political and social settings of the stories. This method lets you carefully look at how each author shows the complicated nature of gendered power and how their choice of style supports or goes against these showings. Postcolonial studies, gender theory, and feminist literature criticism are some of the additional sources that are used to put the study in context and make it better.

The first part of the study looks at how stories are told. Atwood often shows how patriarchal power works by using historical and future settings to show how fragile women's experiences are by using broken stories and unreliable narrators. The controlled voice of the storyteller in *The Handmaid's Tale* shows how the main character defies and obeys a totalitarian government. *Alias Grace*

also looks at truth, power, and female abuse from different points of view.

While Smith's stories are more focused on overlap and hybridity, they also use a multiracial and postcolonial urban realism. The complex nature of racial and gender identities in the modern world is shown in the way her books are told, with many characters and points of view coming together. In *Swing Time*, the problems that arise between female friends are looked at in the context of racial and world power imbalances. In *White Teeth*, the stories that span generations show how race, class, and gender are all connected.

How power is built is one of the main ideas of the second line. The books by Atwood show how the law, religion, and society control women's bodies and lives. The heroes fight back in many ways, such as by remembering, subverting, and taking back the story. People in Smith's stories have to deal with power battles every day, as well as structural crimes, cultural identity, and their own and other people's pasts. She focusses on how identities can overlap and how power relationships can change in her study of gender, which is linked to race and class.

In the third line, we look at how both authors show how strong and able women are to live. Atwood's main characters are strong because they tell stories, keep quiet, and fight against oppressive structures. Smith's female characters, on the other hand, are often strong because they define themselves, find community, and deal with being culturally mixed. Both writers talk about the conflict between resistance and participation. This shows how hard it is to get power when there are many kinds of injustice going on at the same time.

This in-depth look at the study shows how Atwood and Smith use the structure and themes of their stories to question and rethink the power of women. They write in ways that support feminist literary forms by writing about current social issues and giving women's experiences more ways to be shown in different political and social settings.

5. Analysis

By comparing a few works by Margaret Atwood and Zadie Smith, we can see how difficult it is for women to have power in oppressive systems that work together. The ways that these works talk about gender and power are both the same and different. Atwood's stories, which are based on real events and dark worlds, show how men have structural control over women's bodies and words. *Alias Grace* raises concerns about history stories that leave out or ignore the experiences of women who are violently and fighting. *The Handmaid's Tale*, on the other hand, is a powerful story about how authoritarian governments can take away people's freedom by enforcing gender inequality. Atwood uses stories that are broken up and not always dependable to show how memory and truth are fought in places where power is unequal.

Smith's books, on the other hand, look at gender and power through the eyes of diversity, postcolonial identity, and urban realism. Her characters go to places where there are racial, gender, and social differences. This shows how power works in everyday life and in social systems. In *Swing Time*, Smith looks at how fragile female friendships can be when there are power differences around the world. In *White Teeth*, Smith uses a multi-voiced story to show how colonisation and migration histories affect gendered experiences. Smith's research into intersectionality and hybridity adds to the feminist conversation by showing how women in modern mixed societies can take on many identities and fight back in many ways.

Both writers deal with the tension between resistance and participation by showing female agency as a difficult discussion rather than a fixed state. Atwood's main characters often do

sneaky things to get back at the story's authority, while Smith's characters gain power through self-definition and ties to the community. This dynamic shows how important it is to look at gendered power in different situations because strength can look like a lot of different and sometimes opposite things.

Also, the ways that Atwood and Smith tell stories, like using fracturing, false narrators, multiple voices, and comedy, are political as well as artistic. They are against the dominant stories that try to quiet dissenting views and make women's experiences more similar. By changing the way stories are usually told, both writers urge readers to question the validity of dominant views on gender and power.

To fully grasp how gender is portrayed in these works, we need to combine feminist, intersectional, and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. Atwood's future vision is a scary look at male extremism, while Smith's multicultural stories show how people are constantly fighting for identity and independence within complex social structures. The works they've put together show how writing can look at, criticise, and even change the way power works.

The study shows that both Atwood and Smith make important contributions to modern feminist literature by writing about the different and complicated ways that gender affects power. Along with showing how injustice works, their books give people hope for independence, strength, and togetherness. This talk about dystopian and ethnic points of view not only improves feminist literature study, but it also encourages more research into gender, power, and identity in a world that is changing quickly.

6. Discussion

The complicated nature of women's agency within systems of oppression that work together is shown by comparing a few works by Margaret Atwood and Zadie Smith. These works show both similarities and differences in how they talk about gender and power. Because Atwood's stories are based on real events and bleak futures, they show how male power controls women's bodies and words in a structural way. While *Alias Grace* questions historical stories that leave out or ignore violent and resisting women's experiences, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a powerful tale of how authoritarian governments can take away people's freedom by enforcing gender inequality. Atwood's use of fragmented and often unreliable storytelling shows how memory and truth are fought in places where power is unequal.

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7. Conclusion

How do Margaret Atwood and Zadie Smith deal with women's rights, social abuse, and finding out who they are? This paper looked at the different ways that gender and power are shown in their works. In her past and future stories, Atwood shows how institutions and ideas keep men in power. Smith, on the other hand, uses mixed and postcolonial frameworks to show how gender, race, and class shape and confuse identities. Their writings together show how important it is to look at different kinds of people and situations in order to understand how female power works.

The study uses feminist literary criticism, intersectionality theory, and postcolonial points of view to show how both authors use fractured, unreliable narration, and multiple voices in their writing to challenge dominant discourses and give voice to experiences that aren't often heard. Because they are critical of dictatorship, their books are also places to imagine resistance, strength, and change.

Because Atwood and Smith share their works with each other, modern feminist fiction is made better by seeing the fights for justice and freedom from different social and political angles. Atwood writes about the risks of structural sexism and losing one's identity. Smith, on the other hand, writes about the facts of culture hybridity and how identity can change in globalised societies.

New female writers build on the work of the early ones and also go their own way. This is very true when it comes to gay theory, internet culture, and women around the world. It might

also help us understand how important Atwood and Smith's works are on a global scale to look at how they were received and changed in different cultures.

At the end of the day, this study shows that Atwood and Smith's writings still speak to us today and make us think deeply. This shows that books have always been able to make us think about gender and power in new ways.

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