More Liveable” Speculations: the Gender of SF in Margaret Atwood’s Short Story “Oursonette” and in the Comic Book / Graphic Novel War Bears

Katarzyna Ostalska
Department of British Literature and Culture, University of Łódź
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8553-7517
DOI: https://doi.org/10.26485/ZRL/2020/63.1/2

Słowa kluczowe: contemporary English-language literature, speculative fiction, Margaret Atwood, comic books, graphic novels, “Canadian whites,” superheroines, gender discourse

ABSTRAKT

Taking into account the broadness of the SF genre, the article commences with examining the difference between speculative fiction and science fiction, as outlined specifically by Donna J. Haraway and Margaret Atwood. Drawing on Atwood’s understanding of speculative genre, the paper analyses two separate but intertwined artistic forms: a classic short story with embedded dialogue and a comic book / graphic novel based upon the extended version of the earlier narrative. The short story “Oursonette” was written by Atwood as a part of a national project of artists commemorating the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Canadian Confederation. It depicts Victory in Europe Day, 8 May 1945, from the perspective of Canada and its impact upon the publishing of “Canadian whites,” otherwise known as WECA comic books. Partially black-and white War Bears (2019), referring to the tradition of “Canadian whites” comics, is a modern graphic novel, co-authored with Ken Steacy, which essentially uses the plot of Atwood’s “Oursonette” as the foundation for drawing an expanded story that precedes and follows the original. The narrative is not simply elaborated, a new dimension of visual imagery and a significant layer of intersectionality have changed its meaning to a large extent. The article analyses those alterations in detail to come to a conclusion as to whether they are beneficial or redundant to the original form and content. Thematically, the paper probes the gendered dimension of Atwood’s (and partly Steacy’s) rendering of the superheroine subcategory, with regard to SF genre and its literary convention. The article compares how this issue is represented in both examined literary genres: a narrative by Atwood and a comic book / graphic novel by Atwood and Steacy.

BIBLIOGRAFIA


Atwood Margaret (2011), In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination, Virago, London.

Atwood Margaret, Steacy Ken (2019), War Bears, Dark Horse Books, Milwaukie.

Cocca Carolyn (2016), Superwomen: Gender, Power and Representation, Bloomsbury Academic, New York.


The Problems of Literary Genres

Les problèmes des genres littéraires

Speculative Genre
Later in the book in an Margaret Atwood is a bit like my friend Lil—she is both right AND left-brained. She writes like a dream and knows her way around science and technology. Many people ask Atwood why she does not like the term "science fiction" for her work. I love how Atwood regards schlocky pulp fiction, myth, history and comic strips all with an equally analytical eye, taking us with her on a journey through her life as a reader and a writer. Stories of aliens taking over the world and sexy vampires have a rich and far-reaching literary ancestry, and many of the tropes that define science fiction can be found in the kind of books that are taken much more seriously than anything involving monsters and made-up worlds. Summary: Science Fiction is legit, guys, so you best respect. Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer who has written award-winning poetry, short stories and novels, including The Circle Game (1966), The Handmaid’s Tale (1985), The Blind Assassin (2000), Oryx and Crake (2003) and The Tent (2006). Several more books followed, yet it was 1985’s The Handmaid’s Tale that garnered Atwood a massive wave of acclaim and popularity. In addition, Atwood’s novel Alias Grace, a murder tale set in the mid-19th century in upper Canada, released as a miniseries in the fall of 2017.

Speculative Fiction and Comics. Atwood is a prolific writer who has penned additional novels that include Cat’s Eye (1989) and The Blind Assassin, which won the Booker Prize. Margaret Atwood is making more comics. Following up her playful graphic novel series Angel Catbird, the Handmaid’s Tale author is back with a new comic: War Bears. Like its predecessor, War Bears features a superhero with strong animal characteristics. Except this time, there’s also a meta-fictive element. The real story is not the adventures of the heroic Oursonette, but the struggles of the people creating her — like aspiring young artist Al Zurakowski and no-nonsense publisher Gloriana Topper — in the short-lived comics industry of World War II-era Canada. In addition to the actual fighting (seen mostly in the story-within-a-story excerpts of Al’s Oursonette comic), a central dynamic of War Bears is the relationship between Al and his female boss. Margaret Eleanor Atwood CC OOnt CH FRSC (born November 18, 1939) is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, teacher, environmental activist, and inventor. Since 1961, she has published 18 books of poetry, 18 novels, 11 books of non-fiction, nine collections of short fiction, eight children’s books, and two graphic novels, as well as a number of small press editions of both poetry and fiction. Atwood has won numerous awards and honors for her writing, including the Booker Prize (twice).