

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO MARGARET ATWOOD

SECOND EDITION

The field of Margaret Atwood studies, like her own work, is in constant evolution. This second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* provides substantial reconceptualization of Atwood's writing in multiple genres that has spanned six decades, with particular focus on developments since 2000. Exploring Atwood in our contemporary context, this edition discusses the relationship between her Canadian identity and her role as an international literary celebrity and spokesperson on global issues, ranging from environmentalism to women's rights to digital technology. As well as providing novel insights into Atwood's recent dystopias and classic texts, this edition highlights a significant dimension in the reception of Atwood's work, with new material on the striking Hulu and MGM television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*. This up-to-date volume illuminates new directions in Atwood's career, and introduces students, scholars, and general readers alike to the ever-expanding dimensions of her literary art.

CORAL ANN HOWELLS edited *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (first edition, 2006) and, with Eva-Marie Kröller, *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* (2009). She has published extensively on contemporary English-Canadian women's writing, and her publications include *Private and Fictional Words, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro*, and *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identities*. She also coedited, with Paul Sharrad and Gerry Turcotte, the final volume of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of this book.

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EDITED BY
CORAL ANN HOWELLS
Institute of English Studies, University of London



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To the memory of Graeme Gibson
1934–2019

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Notes on Contributors

- SARAH A. APPLETON is Visiting Professor, Indiana University Southeast. Her special interests are in Margaret Atwood, women's literature, and contemporary fiction. She has published extensively on Atwood, and her books include *Once Upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales, and Legends in Margaret Atwood's Writings* (2008), *He Said, She Said: An RSVP to the Male Text*, coedited with M. Howe (2001), and *The Bitch Is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (2000). Her essays on Atwood include: "Freed from the Salt Mines of Virtue: Wicked Women in Margaret Atwood's Novels" (2012) and "Margaret Atwood and "Corp(SE)ocracy" (2011).
- J. BROOKS BOUSON is a Professor of English at Loyola University in Chicago. In her scholarship and teaching, she has focused on twentieth- and twenty-first-century women writers, with an emphasis on the study of shame in literature and the trauma narrative. Her many books include *Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood* (1993), *Quiet As It's Kept: Shame, Trauma and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2000), and *Shame and the Aging Woman: Confronting and Resisting Ageism in Contemporary Women's Writing* (2016). She is the editor of three critical collections on Atwood (2009, 2011, 2012).
- MARTA DVOŘÁK is Professor Emerita of Canadian and World Literatures at the Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris. She has authored *Mavis Gallant: The Eye and the Ear* (2019), which sets up a trailblazing connection between the writers' writer Atwood admired and the whole spectrum of the arts. Dvořák has also edited books ranging from *Tropes and Territories* (2007, with W. H. New) and *Crosstalk* (2012, with Diana Brydon) to *Translocated Modernisms* (2016, with Dean Irvine). She has published award-winning work on Atwood, including *Lire Margaret Atwood: The*

Handmaid's Tale (1999/2016), and on Carol Shields, Nancy Huston, Jane Urquhart, Ernest Buckler, and Anita Desai.

BRANKO GORJUP has edited the Peter Paul Bilingual series of Contemporary Canadian Poetry (English/Italian), which includes a volume on Margaret Atwood, *Tricks with Mirrors / Giochi di specchi*. (2000). He has also edited essays by or on Canadian authors, including Northrop Frye, *Mythologizing Canada* (1997), *Northrop Frye's Canadian Literary Criticism and Its Influence* (2009), *White Gloves of the Doorman: The Works of Leon Rooke* (2004), *Margaret Atwood: Essays on Her Works* (2008), and a special issue of *Nuovi Argomenti* (2003) featuring Canadian contemporary writing in English. He has taught Canadian literature at universities in Canada, Italy, and Croatia. He lives in Venice and Toronto.

CORAL ANN HOWELLS is Professor Emerita at the University of Reading, and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of English Studies, University of London. She edited *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* (first edition, 2006), coedited with Eva-Marie Kröller *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* (2009), and coedited with Paul Sharrad and Gerry Turcotte the final volume of *The Oxford History of the Novel in English* (2017). She has published extensively on contemporary Canadian women's fiction, especially writing by women. Her many books include *Margaret Atwood*, *Alice Munro*, and *Contemporary Canadian Women's Fiction: Refiguring Identities*. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

EVA-MARIE KRÖLLER is Professor Emerita at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. She has edited *The Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* (2004, 2017), and is coeditor with Coral Ann Howells of *The Cambridge History of Canadian Literature* (2009). Her book *Writing the Empire: The McIlwraiths, 1853–1948* is forthcoming in 2021 with the University of Toronto Press. She has published widely on travel writing and cultural semiotics, and won the Distinguished Editor Award of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals for her work as editor of the journal *Canadian Literature* (1995–2003). She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

REINGARD M. NISCHIK is Professor Emerita of American Literature at the University of Konstanz, Germany. She is the author and editor of thirty books on Canadian, American, and comparative literature, including her editions *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact* (2000), *The Canadian*

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Short Story: Interpretations (2007), and *History of Literature in Canada: English-Canadian and French-Canadian* (2008), as well as her monographs *Engendering Genre: The Works of Margaret Atwood* (2009), *Comparative North American Studies: Transnational Approaches to American and Canadian Literature and Culture* (2016), and *The English Short Story in Canada: From the Dawn of Modernism to the 2013 Nobel Prize* (2017).

ELEONORA RAO is Associate Professor of English and American Literatures at the University of Salerno, Italy. Author of *Strategies for Identity: The Fiction of Margaret Atwood* (1994) and *Heart of a Stranger: Contemporary Women Writers and the Metaphor of Exile* (2002), she is also editor and co-translator of Atwood's *The Door (La porta)* (2011) and coeditor with Christine Lorre of *Space and Place in Alice Munro's Fiction: "A Book with Maps in It"* (2018). She has guest edited special issues of *Literary Geographies*, *Mapping the Imagination: Literary Geography* (2017) and of *Humanities, Negotiating Space in Women's Writing* (2019). She was the president of the Margaret Atwood Society from 2015 to 2017.

PILAR SOMACARRERA is Professor of English and Canadian Literature at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. She has translated three of Margaret Atwood's poetry collections into Spanish: *Power Politics* (2000), *The Door* (2009), and *True Stories* (2010). She has published numerous articles on Atwood and other Canadian women writers, and edited *Made in Canada, Read in Spain: Essays on the Translation and Circulation of English Canadian Literature* (2013). She sponsored Atwood's honorary doctorate from her university in 2017, the first one Atwood has received in a Spanish-speaking country.

DAVID STAINES is Professor of English at the University of Ottawa. As a scholar of medieval literature and culture as well as Canadian culture and literature, he has authored, edited, or coedited more than twenty books, including *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture* (1977), *Beyond the Provinces: Literary Canada at Century's End* (1995), *Northrop Frye on Canada* (2001), *Marshall McLuhan: Understanding Me* (2003), *The Letters of Stephen Leacock* (2006), *The Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro* (2016), and *A History of Canadian Fiction* is forthcoming in 2021 with Cambridge University Press. His awards include the Lorne Pierce Medal from the Royal Society of

Canada (1998), and the Order of Canada and the Order of Ontario (2011). He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada.

FIONA TOLAN is Senior Lecturer in English, Liverpool John Moores University. Her special interests are in contemporary British and Canadian women's fiction. She has published *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction* (2007) and numerous essays in British, Canadian, American, and Australian journals on Margaret Atwood, Pat Barker, Alice Munro, and Carol Shields. She is guest editor of a special Atwood issue of *Contemporary Women's Writing* (2017) and author of *The Fiction of Margaret Atwood: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (2021).

GINA WISKER is Senior Lecturer, University of Bath, and Professor Emeritus, University of Brighton. Her publications include *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction* (2012), *Margaret Atwood's Alias Grace: A Reader's Guide* (2002), *Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale* (2010), *Horror Fiction* (2005), and *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* (2016). Gina co-edits online horror and dark fantasy journal *Dissections* and poetry magazine *Spokes*.

Preface

This fully revised second edition of *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood* offers a comprehensive overview of Atwood's work in multiple literary genres over nearly six decades. For this edition all chapters have been updated, several have been substantially rewritten, and two new chapters have replaced those in the original edition, to reflect new developments in Atwood's immensely varied production and in Atwoodian critical studies. This volume represents both a revisiting of her earlier work and an appraisal of her literary output and her evolving global persona since 2000, opening with a chapter on Atwood as an international literary superstar who is "above all else Canadian." Chapters cover textual and contextual issues related to topics that have recurred with shifting emphases throughout her career, together with chapters on Atwood and history, Atwood's revisions of classic texts, Atwood's humor, and three genre chapters focusing on her poetry, short fiction, and recent dystopias (including *The Testaments*). A final chapter on the Hulu and MGM television adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* introduces a new popular dimension to the reception of Atwood's work, signaling new directions in Atwoodian studies and highlighting the latest stage in the evolution of her remarkable literary career.

Acknowledgments

My thanks to all the contributors old and new to this volume for their enthusiastic cooperation and collegiality; also to Emily Hockley and Natasha Burton at Cambridge University Press for their warm encouragement and assistance throughout, and an extra word of gratitude to Eva-Marie Kröller and David Staines for their consistently wise advice at various stages in this project. Thanks to Jennifer Toews, Natalya Rattan, and Andrew Stewart, reference librarians at the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, for their assistance with manuscript materials. Many thanks to Robin S. Clifford for his technical expertise and special thanks to my own darling girls, Phoebe and Miranda, for their help in preparing this manuscript for publication, and finally to my husband, Robin, for his generous and faithful support, as always.

I am grateful to Margaret Atwood for permission to quote extracts from her private correspondence with several contributors, and extracts from unpublished Atwood manuscript materials in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. Extracts from poems in *The Circle Game*, *The Animals in That Country*, *Power Politics*, *True Stories*, *Morning in the Burned House*, and *The Door* are reproduced with kind permission of Margaret Atwood and of Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London.

Note on Editions Used

In quoting from Margaret Atwood's novels, poems, and short stories, contributors to this volume have used a variety of British, Canadian, and American editions, usually paperbacks when available. Details of editions used are included in the endnotes to every chapter.

Abbreviations

<i>AG</i>	<i>Alias Grace</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>The Blind Assassin</i>
<i>BE</i>	<i>Bluebeard's Egg</i>
<i>BH</i>	<i>Bodily Harm</i>
<i>CE</i>	<i>Cat's Eye</i>
<i>DG</i>	<i>Dancing Girls</i>
<i>EW</i>	<i>The Edible Woman</i>
<i>GB</i>	<i>Good Bones</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hag-Seed</i>
<i>HT</i>	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>
<i>JSM</i>	<i>The Journals of Susanna Moodie</i>
<i>LBM</i>	<i>Life Before Man</i>
<i>LO</i>	<i>Lady Oracle</i>
<i>Madd</i>	<i>MaddAddam</i>
<i>MBH</i>	<i>Morning in the Burned House</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>Moral Disorder</i>
<i>MID</i>	<i>Murder in the Dark</i>
<i>NWD</i>	<i>Negotiating with the Dead</i>
<i>O&C</i>	<i>Oryx and Crake</i>
<i>OW</i>	<i>In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Power Politics</i>
<i>PU</i>	<i>Procedures for Underground</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>The Robber Bride</i>
<i>S</i>	<i>Surfacing</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Selected Poems</i>
<i>SPII</i>	<i>Selected Poems II</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Strange Things</i>
<i>SW</i>	<i>Second Words</i>
<i>THGL</i>	<i>The Heart Goes Last</i>
<i>THP</i>	<i>Two-Headed Poems</i>

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<i>TT</i>	<i>The Testaments</i>
<i>WT</i>	<i>Wilderness Tips</i>
<i>YAH</i>	<i>You Are Happy</i>
<i>YF</i>	<i>The Year of the Flood</i>

Margaret Atwood Chronology

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|---------|---|
| 1939 | Margaret Eleanor Atwood born November 18 in Ottawa, Canada. |
| 1940–45 | Family based in Ottawa, but spends long periods every year in the bush of northern Ontario and Quebec, as her father is an entomologist; they live in Sault Ste. Marie (1945). |
| 1946 | Family moves to Toronto, though summers are spent up north, and Atwood only begins attending school regularly in 1951. |
| 1952–57 | Attends Leaside High School, where she writes a column for the school newspaper; works as a summer camp counsellor. |
| 1957–61 | Attends Victoria College, University of Toronto; publishes stories and poems in the college literary journal and designs posters and programs for the college drama society; first poem accepted by <i>The Canadian Forum</i> ; begins reading her poems at the Bohemian Embassy Coffeehouse; graduates (1961) with an honors degree in English and wins a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to Radcliffe College (later part of Harvard University). |
| 1961 | <i>Double Persephone</i> (privately published chapbook) wins the University of Toronto E. J. Pratt Medal. |
| 1961–63 | Attends Radcliffe College, where she gains an MA and begins doctoral studies at Harvard University. |
| 1963–64 | Returns to Toronto, where she works at a market research company; first trip to England and France in summer 1964. |
| 1964–65 | Moves to Vancouver to lecture in English at the University of British Columbia; drafts <i>The Edible Woman</i> and writes fourteen short stories and more than fifty poems. |
| 1965 | Returns to Harvard to continue PhD research (thesis not completed). |
| 1966 | <i>The Circle Game</i> published, winning the Governor General's Award for Poetry (1967). |
| 1967 | Marries James Polk, an American postgraduate student at Harvard; they move to Montreal, where Atwood lectures in English at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia). |
| 1968 | <i>The Animals in That Country</i> ; moves to Edmonton, Alberta. |
| 1969 | <i>The Edible Woman</i> ; teaches creative writing at the University of Alberta. |
| 1970 | <i>The Journals of Susanna Moodie</i> and <i>Procedures for Underground</i> ; Atwood and Polk spend the year in England and France; joins Amnesty International. |

Margaret Atwood Chronology

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- 1971 *Power Politics*; return to Toronto, where Atwood is Assistant Professor at York University; joins the editorial board of House of Anansi Press (1971–73).
- 1972 *Surfacing* and *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*; Atwood is writer-in-residence at Massey College, Toronto (1972–73).
- 1973 Atwood and Polk divorce; Atwood moves with Graeme Gibson to a farm in Alliston, Ontario; receives her first honorary doctorate from Trent University, Ontario.
- 1974 *You Are Happy*; TV script “The Servant Girl” for Canadian Broadcasting Commission; cartoon artist for *This Magazine*.
- 1976 *Selected Poems* (Oxford) and *Lady Oracle*; daughter Eleanor Jess is born.
- 1977 *Dancing Girls* and *Days of the Rebels: 1815–1840*; special Atwood issue of *The Malahat Review*, the first critical survey of her work.
- 1978 *Two-Headed Poems* and *Up in the Tree*; Atwood’s first of many world book promotion tours (Paris, Afghanistan, India, Australia); family moves to Scotland, where Gibson is writer-in-residence at the University of Edinburgh for three months.
- 1979 *Life Before Man*.
- 1980 *Anna’s Pet*; family returns to Toronto; elected Vice President of the Writers’ Union of Canada.
- 1981 *Bodily Harm* and *True Stories*; wins the Molson Prize and Guggenheim Fellowship; becomes a companion of the Order of Canada; president of the Writers’ Union.
- 1982 *Second Words: Collected Critical Prose; The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* (coedited with William Toye).
- 1983 *Murder in the Dark: Short Fictions and Prose Poems* and *Bluebeard’s Egg*; receives an honorary doctorate from the University of Toronto; family moves to Norfolk (November 1983–March 1984), then to West Berlin (March–May 1984).
- 1984 *Interlunar*; return to Toronto (summer 1984); elected president of PEN International, Canadian Centre (English-speaking) (1984–86).
- 1985 *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which wins the Governor General’s Award for Fiction (1986), Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best Science Fiction (1987), Toronto Arts Award, Los Angeles Times Fiction Award; Atwood is Visiting Chair of Creative Writing at Tuscaloosa, Alabama.
- 1986 *Selected Poems II: Poems Selected and New, 1976–1986* (Oxford) and *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (coedited with Robert Weaver); wins the Philips Information Systems Literary Prize; Atwood holds the Berg (Visiting) Chair at New York University.
- 1987 Edits *The CanLit Foodbook*, in aid of PEN International; elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada; writer-in-residence at Macquarie University, Sydney.
- 1988 *Cat’s Eye*.
- 1989 *Selected Poems: 1966–1984* (Oxford) and *For the Birds*; wins the Canadian Booksellers’ Association Award; writer-in-residence at Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas.

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- 1990 Attends Berlin Film Festival for premiere of Volker Schlöndorff's film of *The Handmaid's Tale*.
- 1991 *Wilderness Tips*; Clarendon Lectures at the University of Oxford; family spends winter in France (1991–92).
- 1992 *Good Bones*.
- 1993 *The Robber Bride*.
- 1994 Atwood is named Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts and des Lettres by the government of France.
- 1995 *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature*, *Morning in the Burned House*, and *Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut*; *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (coedited with Robert Weaver); series of radio interviews in French with Quebec writer Victor-Lévy Beaulieu.
- 1996 *Alias Grace*, which wins the Giller Prize.
- 1997 *In Search of Alias Grace*; awarded Italy's Premio Mondello.
- 1998 *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965–1995* (Virago); receives an honorary doctorate from the University of Oxford.
- 2000 *The Blind Assassin*, which wins the Booker Prize; Empson Lectures at University of Cambridge; attends premiere in Copenhagen of Poul Ruders's opera *The Handmaid's Tale*.
- 2001 Receives an honorary doctorate from the University of Cambridge.
- 2002 *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*.
- 2003 *Oryx and Crake* and *Rude Ramsay and the Roaring Radishes*; attends the London premiere of *The Handmaid's Tale* opera.
- 2004 *Bottle* (Hay Festival Press) and *Moving Targets: Writing with Intent, 1982–2004*; "Margaret Atwood: The Open Eye" international symposium, University of Ottawa; Toronto premiere of *The Handmaid's Tale* opera; receives an honorary doctorate from Harvard University.
- 2005 *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing, 1970–2005*; *The Penelopiad*; receives an honorary doctorate from the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris.
- 2006 *The Tent* and *Moral Disorder*; *Bashful Bob* and *Doleful Dorinda*; her LongPen debuts.
- 2007 *The Door*; stage adaptation of *The Penelopiad* in Stratford-upon-Avon and Ottawa.
- 2008 *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth* (Massey Lectures); awarded the Prince of Asturias Prize for Letters.
- 2009 *The Year of the Flood*.
- 2010 *Positron* (online series Episode 1 – continued 2012–13).
- 2011 *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* and *Wandering Wenda*.
- 2012 Awarded the Governor General of Canada's Golden Jubilee Medal; Companion, Royal Society of Literature
- 2013 *MaddAddam*; Los Angeles Times Innovator's Award; President's Medal (with Graeme Gibson) Birdlife International.
- 2014 *Stone Mattress*; wins Harvard Arts Medal.
- 2015 *The Heart Goes Last*; Royal Canadian Geographical Society Gold Medal (with Graeme Gibson); *Scribbler Moon* for Future Library.
- 2016 *Hag-Seed* and *Angel Catbird*, Vol. 1; wins PEN Pinter Prize.

Margaret Atwood Chronology

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| 2017 | <i>To Castle Catula</i> and <i>The Catbird Roars</i> (Vols. 2 and 3); TV adaptations of <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> (first series) and <i>Alias Grace</i> ; awards include an honorary doctorate from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid; PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Award; Franz Kafka International Literary Prize; Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels. |
| 2018 | <i>The Complete Angel Catbird</i> ; keynote address at the Vancouver International Ornithological conference; awarded the Adrienne Clarkson Prize for Global Citizenship; appointed a Companion of Honour by Queen Elizabeth II. |
| 2019 | <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> (graphic novel version); <i>The Testaments</i> ; death of Graeme Gibson; wins the Booker Prize (joint winner with Bernardine Evaristo); <i>War Bears</i> . |
| 2020 | <i>Dearly</i> ; awarded Dayton Literary Peace Prize. |
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This chronology shows only a selection of Atwood's numerous national and international literary awards and of her many honorary doctoral degrees. For a full list of awards, see <https://margaretatwood.ca/awards-recognitions/>.

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