

Celebrated author Margaret Atwood challenges #MeToo's lynch mob justice

Linda Tenenbaum
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The #MeToo witch-hunt has received another blow to its hysterical media-backed denunciations of prominent men in the arts and entertainment industries.

On January 13, Margaret Atwood, the 78-year-old, multi-award winning Canadian novelist, poet and literary critic published a forceful comment, entitled “Am I a Bad Feminist?” on Canada’s *Globe and Mail* web site, opposing #MeToo and defending the right of every accused person to due process and natural justice. For this, she has faced a storm of feminist protest and concerted efforts to intimidate her into silence.

“The #MeToo moment,” Atwood writes, “is a symptom of a broken legal system.” She warns that if “the legal system is bypassed because it is seen as ineffectual, what will take its place? Who will be the new power brokers?”

#MeToo is a political movement that is being directed by the Democratic Party in the US, in order to exploit, for its own ends, what is a serious and complex issue. Its class nature is revealed in the methods it employs. #MeToo has already initiated trial by Internet, with the world’s corporate media assuming the role of judge, jury and executioner, as, in Atwood’s words, “stars fall from the skies.” Anyone daring to disagree is treated as “an apostate, a heretic or a traitor.” And punishment directly follows accusation, with no redress.

In her comment, Atwood mounts a direct challenge to the #MeToo movement’s reactionary lynch mob justice.

“My fundamental position is that women are human beings, with the full range of saintly and demonic behaviours this entails, including criminal ones. They’re not angels, incapable of wrongdoing. If they were, we wouldn’t need a legal system.

“Nor do I believe that women are children, incapable of agency or of making moral decisions. If they were, we’re back to the 19th century, and women should not own property, have credit cards, have access to higher education, control their own reproduction or vote. There are powerful groups in North America pushing this agenda, but they are not usually considered feminists.

“Furthermore, I believe that in order to have civil and human rights for women there have to be civil and human rights period, including the right to fundamental justice, just as for women to have the vote, there has to be a vote.”

Atwood has put her beliefs into practice. In her *Globe and*

Mail piece, she explains that in 2015-16, she publicly defended the rights of academic, novelist and friend, Steven Galloway, former chair of the University of British Columbia’s (UBC) department of creative writing, against whom a number of accusations of sexual misconduct had been made.

“The university went public in national media before there was an inquiry,” she writes, “and even before the accused was allowed to know the details of the accusation. Before he could find them out he had to sign a confidentiality agreement.

“The public—including me—was left with the impression that this man was a violent serial rapist, and everyone was free to attack him publicly, since, under the agreement he had signed, he couldn’t say anything to defend himself.”

More than 100 academics, novelists and writers joined Atwood in signing an Open Letter that protested his anti-democratic treatment at the hands of UBC. The letter insisted that the university’s handling of the case was “contrary to the principles of fairness and justice,” and emphasised, in bold type, “Justice ... requires due process and fair treatment for all.”

Despite the fact that an independent judge eventually declared the sexual misconduct allegations to be false, Galloway was sacked and his career ruined.

Nevertheless, Atwood’s feminist detractors were outraged at the Open Letter and at her insistence on Galloway’s right to due process. In her comment, she accused them of distorting and vilifying the letter, in a series of tweets, as a “War on Women.”

Atwood’s primary concern is to uphold the right to due process, that is, a guarantee that the rights of any accused are respected. This must include notification of any and all allegations and/or charges in advance of any proceedings, the right to answer such allegations, to have a fair and impartial hearing and to be treated throughout according to a transparent and established procedure.

Along with every other democratic right, all of the above are now being trashed. Not a single one of #MeToo’s male victims has been accorded any substantive due process.

Unsurprisingly, Atwood’s exposures enraged the #MeToo Twittersphere:

“Margaret Atwood asks: Am I a bad feminist? Yes when you prioritize your powerful male friend over sexual

assault/harassment victims you are in fact a bad feminist.”

“Just here to say I would rather eat my own computer and then my own face than read something by Margaret Atwood with the title ‘Am I a Bad Feminist?’”

“Wish Margaret Atwood would get back to writing dystopian fiction about a misogynist world instead of, y’know, ACTIVELY CREATING IT.”

“Instead of listening to a famous author w (sic) outdated white politics I’d rather uplift the voices of Black, Indigenous & POC women who know inclusive feminism & tackling rape culture. All authors do research. But Atwood needs some basic anti-oppression training.”

The tone of these tweets reflects nothing so much as the unhealthy state of mind of their authors.

Many #MeToo advocates clearly feel that Atwood has betrayed them. Her 1985 novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, suddenly leapt to prominence at the end of 2016, after Trump was elected US president. Due to the popularity of the book, and the Hulu TV series that followed it, she became the world’s highest-selling novelist in 2017.

The first season of the Hulu TV series has already aired, with Elizabeth Moss (*Mad Men*) chosen to play the female lead. Both Moss and the series itself won Golden Globes at this year’s awards ceremony, which was hijacked, to all intents and purposes, by #MeToo.

The #MeToo crowd seized upon *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a feminist metaphor for today’s “patriarchal” and “misogynist” world, with some even dressing up in the handmaids’ TV series red cape to express their identification with its message.

But *The Handmaid’s Tale* author and the cast of the Hulu TV series have a different view. They argue that the central theme is the disturbing trend towards oppression, dictatorship and the destruction of democratic rights. After last year’s US presidential election, the TV series struck a powerful chord, particularly among young people, with many seeing it as a chilling anticipation of Trump’s presidency and the moves of his fascist and militarist regime towards authoritarianism.

Set in a fictional Republic of Gilead, a theocratic, totalitarian state, the story follows the experiences of its female lead after a violent coup has toppled the United States government, killing the US president, and members of Congress. An unspecified environmental catastrophe has rendered the majority of women infertile. Those who can still bear children are forced, as “handmaids,” to become virtual sex slaves to powerful and wealthy men, who insist upon the production of their own progeny. They live desperately restricted lives, and are constantly monitored. Opponents, both religious and political, male and female, are brutally suppressed, executed, and strung up on the “Wall” as intimidating examples to would-be followers. A second season is about to begin.

At a Tribeca Film Festival after the series release last year, cast members shocked and infuriated numerous feminist fans—for whom *The Handmaid’s Tale* has taken on virtual

cosmic significance—by openly rejecting the “feminist” label.

Writing for online publication *Vox*, journalist Constance Grady reported that Moss had insisted, during a panel discussion, “Honestly, for me it’s not a feminist story. It’s a human story, because women’s rights are human rights.”

Actress Madeline Brewer, who also appears in the TV series, agreed. “I think this is a story about women and about humans ... The three people hanging on the wall [in a scene depicting the aftermath of an execution] were all men. This story affects all people.”

Having interviewed Atwood, Grady wrote that the author “generally frames *The Handmaid’s Tale* as being a book about oppression and dictatorship first and foremost, one that just happens to look at how oppression functions through a woman’s point of view.... *The Handmaid’s Tale* shows the form that oppression takes for women, Atwood is arguing, but it could just as easily look at how oppression looks for a gay man, or a poor man.”

The #MeToo feminist frenzy is a symptom of a broader assault on democratic and social rights in every country, affecting, above all, the working class and youth. The divisive, anti-democratic methods being employed against well-known men today are setting a definite precedent for the ruthless suppression of opponents of war, social inequality, fascism and dictatorship in the coming period. In her comment, Atwood compares the methods utilised by #MeToo to the Salem witchcraft trials, on the basis that the defendants in those cases, too, were “guilty because accused.”

The author’s experiences over the past two years indicate the intensity of the pressures confronting anyone wanting to oppose #MeToo’s vile and slanderous witch-hunt. Atwood’s preparedness, however, to take a principled and courageous public stand against both #MeToo and the conduct of University of British Columbia’s Galloway case, should encourage others to do likewise.



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