

**Interpretation of the Metaphors of Light/dark****In Selected Poems by Margaret Atwood - A Feminist Study****Rania Mohamed A. Mageed, PhD****Interpretation of the Metaphors of Light/dark****In Selected Poems by Margaret Atwood - A Feminist Study****Abstract**

Margaret Atwood, a Canadian poet, award-winning writer, and a renowned feminist, wrote several poems dedicated to women and their struggles. In her poetry, Atwood reflects earnest thoughts on gender in relation to culture and female oppression. Her poems expose the silent and hidden operations of gender and confront its politics. She draws attention to the noxious dimensions of gender discrimination and attacks the narrow, dominant, social and aesthetic constructions of culture. In her poems, she often elucidates on women's social oppression and confinement by the dominant patriarchal sovereignty. This research paper uses the feminist approach in literary criticism as its framework. It examines how Atwood persistently employs the Metaphors of light/dark to express a sense of opposition to values and practices of the dominant patriarchal culture. Traditionally, the sun has represented vitality, the life force itself, whereas darkness or absence of sun has represented loss of that life, death. More importantly, the qualities associated with the light of the sun – energy, power and divinity, have traditionally been considered masculine. Such associations have in turn excluded women from the powerful, dazzling and masculine world of light and relegated women to a position of subordination in the realm of darkness. This research paper aims to scrutinize the metaphors of light/dark in selected poems by Margaret Atwood to reveal her rebelliousness and rejection to accept these traditional assumptions on women's position in the dominant patriarchal culture as well as her determination and affirmation for women's possibilities for change, growth, and development.

**Keywords:** feminism, gender studies, poetry, metaphors, Margaret Atwood

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## Introduction

Margaret Atwood (born 1939) is a prolific and controversial writer of international prominence whose works have been translated into many languages. Since 1961, she has published novels, shorts stories, poems, and works of literary criticism. She has received several honorary doctorates and is the recipient of numerous honors, prizes, and awards. She is perhaps best known for her novels, in which she creates strong, often enigmatic, women characters and excels in telling open-ended stories, while dissecting contemporary life and social politics. She is similarly highly recognized for her publication of distinguished books of poetry. She is the author of over fifteen books of poetry, including *The Door* (Houghton Mifflin 2007); *Eating Fire: Selected Poems, 1965-1995* (Virago Press Limited, 1998); and *Morning in the Burned House* (Houghton Mifflin, 1995), which have enjoyed a wide and enthusiastic readership worldwide.

Atwood is further a women rights activist and a feminist writer. She writes about many of the issues of concern to feminists from the '70s up to today. Her writings feature "intelligent, self-absorbed modern women searching for identity." As Howells comments: "Atwood has always been seen as a feminist icon, albeit a resistant and at times an inconvenient one," and, as a sign of which, "her poetry is a combination of engagement, analysis and critique of the changing fashions within feminism." (35-36) According to Atwood, in the world of today women still fear physical and sexual violence, and despite long-running feminist campaigns, they have not achieved equality." (Nischik 25) Atwood has therefore frequently explored the female experience of the world through her poems. She writes with a distinctive awareness of the role of gender in shaping women's identity. She considers both the aspects of gender—what a person is taught to show the world—and the ways they might defy those norms. "What does it mean, for instance, in the Tudor era to be a male person? What does it mean to be a female person?" she says. "And in our age, we no longer think that there are only two packages, pink and blue. And science has backed that up. It's a bell curve. It's a continuum. And your character can be situated anywhere on that continuum. (27)

Most of Atwood's poems wrestle with the politics of gender. As Christine Gomez writes, Atwood poetry "examines themes related to the politics of gender, such as enforced alienation of women under patriarchy, the delimiting definition of women as a function, the patriarchal attempt to annihilate the selfhood of women, the gradual carving out of female space by women through various strategies and women's quest for identity, self

definition and autonomy. (74) Atwood's poems are governed by feminist consciousness which runs as an undercurrent. They depict a process of struggle for change which transcends gender and urges for healthy human relationship between man and woman. Her poems are therefore unique and in many ways. Although women are commonly victimized by the patriarchal assumptions, they emerge as survivors in Atwood's poems. She reveals an affirmation of women's ability to change and transform the values and practices of the dominant patriarchal culture.

Atwood's preoccupation with the status of women in society, that is predominantly male-oriented, urges the use of Feminist Literary criticism as the framework for the analysis of her poems. Feminist literary criticism is the literary analysis that arises from the viewpoint of the feminist theory. On the one hand, it resists and challenges the traditional assumptions which were thought to be universal. On the other hand, feminist literary criticism actively supports including women's knowledge in literature and valuing women's experiences. The basic methods of feminist literary criticism include: examining the way female characters are defined, and challenging the male-centered outlook of women depicted as objects; and revisiting and reevaluating literature and the world in which literature is read because it has valued males more than females.

Furthermore, Feminist literary criticism recognizes that literature both reflects and shapes stereotypes and other cultural assumptions. Thus, feminist literary criticism examines how works of literature embody patriarchal attitudes or undercut them, sometimes both happening within the same work. Feminist theory and various forms of feminist critique began long before the formal naming of the school of literary criticism. In so-called first-wave feminism, the "Woman's Bible," written in the late 19th century by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, is an example of a work of criticism firmly in this school, looking beyond the more obvious male-centered outlook and interpretation. During the period of second-wave feminism, feminists increasingly challenged the male literary canon. Feminist literary criticism has since intertwined with postmodernism and increasingly addresses complex questions of gender and societal roles.

This research paper uses the Feminist Literary criticism to scrutinize the metaphors of light/dark in selected poems by Margaret Atwood to reveal her rebelliousness and rejection to accept the traditional assumptions on women's position in the dominant patriarchal culture as well as her determination and affirmation for women's possibilities for change, growth, and development.

## Discussion

It is difficult to say where precisely,  
or to say how large or small I am:  
the effect of water on light is a distortion  
but if you look long enough, eventually you will be able to see me.  
(Atwood 42)

Metaphor has long been accredited as one of the most important tools for the writers. It allows them to express vivid imagery that transcends literal meanings and crafts images that are easier to appreciate and respond to than literal language. A metaphor is verbal image that activates the imagination by expressing nuances for which no regular vocabulary exists and entices readers to think in abstract ways. (Crisp 11-12) It helps the writer convey his/her emotions and sentiments more clearly and strongly. According to Aristotle in his the *Rhetoric*, metaphors make learning pleasant: "To learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, and words signify something, so whatever words create knowledge in us are the pleasantest. Metaphors have qualities of the exotic and the fascinating." (Garrett 28) One of the most commonly cited examples of a metaphor in English literature perhaps comes from the "All the world's a stage" monologue from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*: "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances".

A metaphor is defined as a figure of speech that, for rhetorical effect, directly refers to one thing by mentioning another and works on the assumption that there are similarities between these things. It is a comparison that is implied without using the words of comparison such as 'like', 'as', 'similar to', and/or 'resembles'. Writers tend to use metaphors to express ideas, feelings, emotions, attitudes, ideologies without stating them bluntly. Metaphors are often expressed through symbols. Whereas a metaphor liken the principle term to something else (whether it be a thing, idea or process) to endow the principle term with characteristics reminiscent of that which it has been likened to, a symbol is much more succinct; it can be a single thing (usually an object but not limited to one) that is not directly given meaning through comparison (like a metaphor) but whose meaning is created by the context in which that symbol is used. (Blumenberg 24) According to Susanne Langer, "A metaphor is not language, it is an idea expressed by language, an idea that in its turn functions as a symbol to express something." (5)

Metaphors are fundamental to the composition and authenticity of literature. Without metaphors literature would be less creative, imaginative and/or aesthetic. Of the different Literary Genres, poetry has always displayed a plentiful use of metaphors. As a matter of fact, the use of metaphor in poetry is one of the most imperative aspects of the poetic style. Metaphors in poetry are used to call up impressive visual images and stir feelings that are needed to fully understand the experience of what is happening in each poem. (Reichlin 12) Metaphor works on many levels in poetry to explain and elucidate emotions, feelings, ideas and/or relationships in a brief but effective way.

One of the most dominant metaphors used in poetry is the metaphor of light/dark (sun/moon). Traditionally, the sun has been a symbol of power, growth, health, passion and the cycle of life in many religions and cultures. Some believe it is an illustration of the higher self, while others see the sun as a god to be worshiped. But mostly, the sun is valued because of its ability to grow crops, sustain communities and create life. It is perceived as a representation of the cycle of life because of its cycle throughout the day. It rises at dawn with the beginning of life for the day and eventually must set or "die". Native American tribes usually included sun symbols in stories documented through art and passed down through the generations. In Egyptian culture, a winged sun disc symbol stood for protection. The Egyptians also worshiped the sun god Ra. In Chinese culture, sun is a "yang" symbol associated with heat, masculine qualities and heaven.

The light/sun is thus often depicted as a masculine symbol. In popular Greek mythology, Apollo the Sun god has a Moon goddess, Artemis, as a twin sister. In Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), the sun signifies the renewing cycle of life and regeneration against postwar decay and infertility. In Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130," the sun is traditionally warm and bright, but the eyes of the speaker's mistress are apparently the opposite of this good image, being cold and dull: "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun. ("Sonnet 130", 1609) In D.H. Lawrence's short story, *The Woman Who Rode Away*, men are depicted as "the fire and the day-time," whereas women are "spaces between the stars at night."

An intense preoccupation with gender-related conflicts as imaged by sun/light and darkness metaphors is therefore extensively spotted in women writings. It represents a female tradition in which women writers have covertly expressed their views of social and/or sexual realities in

terms of light/dark metaphors. Over and over, women writers have written from awareness that the sun, God, masculine, vigor, sexuality, and maybe language are all representative of each other in their dominant patriarchal culture. These women writers quite often therefore feel themselves restricted to the world of darkness, or better imprisoned there as a result of having, as Emily Dickinson puts it, "No Station in the Day," no place in the world of the sun. (Bennet & Royle 38)

For most women writers, the metaphors of light/dark comprise a female poetics of the sun as a masculine force which constrains their energies rather than encourages possibilities for development, as it usually does for men. In her suggestions for deconstructing classical philosophical, Helene Cixous further argues that 'Male' has always been identified with the activity, the sun, the light, and the day, whereas 'female' has always been identified with passivity, the moon, the darkness, and the night. "Laid under the burning-glass/In the sun's eye," says Adrienne Rich describing the sun. "The pattern of the sun/Can fit but him alone," confirms Emily Dickinson.

Similarly in Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, sunlight represents the expectations that fit the patriarchal ideals and hinders female growth. For instance, picturing her life if she were to marry St. John Rivers, Jane thinks in terms of too much sun. She intuitively fears that she would be "grilled alive" by Rivers' masculine energy. She would just become a submissive wife to a domineering and overbearing husband and this is only compared to being 'broiled in the sun' as Bronte's imagery suggests. Likewise, in one of Bronte's most striking poem in this context, the sun's rising to an apex of power is compared with – even seems to cause – a woman's sinking to a nadir of hopelessness: "Blood-red he rose, and arrow straight/His fierce beams struck my brow:/the soul on Nature sprang elate, /But mine sank and low!" For many of these women writers it is the metaphor of darkness that paradoxically therefore offers relief away from the male presence and dominance in the sun.

Although these women writers experience the dominant culture as existing in opposition to themselves and to their individual talent, they continue to use the traditional metaphor of light/dark to express their sense of gender in relation to culture. Many, as a matter of fact, have further utilized the metaphor of light/dark to express a sense of opposition to the values and practices of the dominant male culture. As stated by the prominent feminist, Adrienne Rich, "the feminist poet [have] sought to validate and politicize woman's experience

by defining the self, rejecting cultural differences, and revealing the substance of her life." Women writers hence use the metaphors of light/dark as a "subversive tool for women in trying to create a space for a feminine existence, outside the static closure of the binary oppositions that underlie patriarchal ideology" (Ozdemir 58).

One of the most fascinating women writers who use the traditional pattern of light/dark metaphors is Margaret Atwood. Margaret Atwood's use of these light/dark metaphors reveals a determination to revise, refute, and transcend the old boundaries between light/dark and at times even change the gender of the sun itself. After all, 'art' for Atwood "is a moral issue and it is the responsibility of the writer/artist not only to describe the world, but also to criticize it, to bear witness to its failures, and, finally, to prescribe corrective measures—perhaps even to redeem." Erinc Ozdemir further emphasizes that Atwood's writings therefore "valorize femininity against masculinity, while at the same time it paradoxically dramatizes a desire to destroy all dichotomies and dualistic thinking" (58).

In her poetry, Atwood, as Gina Wisker comments, "deals with respect for the possibilities of language underpinning her ability to express forms of perceptions and to demystify the stereotypes, the personal, national or gendered myths and representations by which we conceive and manage our lives" (11). As Reingard M. Nischik asserts, Atwood's "extraordinary intellectual and imaginative power and gift of language, the uncanny topicality of her theme" (21) has made her a favorite with readers, critics and scholars. Draper names Atwood among such poets as Elizabeth Bishop, Maya Angelou and Judith Wright for showing "the strength and diversity of what women's creative powers can actually achieve" (160).

In her use of the old traditional metaphorical associations of light/dark, Atwood not only demonstrates an awareness of their implications for women in the dominant patriarchal culture but also suggests an affirmation of possibilities for women. In Atwood's poems, the sun seems to be everywhere, and it is domineering and 'ruthless'. In "Crow Song," for example, it is an "arid sun" beating over a field "where the corn has rotted and then/ dried up," so that even the crows "flock and squabble." A sun that should fertilize and feed instead stains the speaker/woman of Atwood's Suzanna Moodie poems "its barbarous color," as it shrivels" the "green fruit". In another poem Atwood shows a sun that "doesn't forgive" but only "looks" at destruction and indifferently "keeps going." (Gorjup 52) It is as if Atwood wishes to warn the reader against the culture which is bound to the sun that "is ruthless." The sun just does not care,

she says; "sunheat "from the wall is" grating and sunheat" nails "you down"  
like "all the things/after you/ that can after you/ with their clamps and poisoned  
mazes."

I see you fugitive, stumbling across the prairie,

Lungs knotted by thirst, sunheat

Nailing you down, all the things

After you that can be after you

With their clamps and poisoned mazes

The metaphor of the sunlight in Atwood's poems is evidently associated with absolute victimization. When the poet-narrator is "Sleeping in sun-/ light," she complains that "you occupy/ me so completely" digging your claws in." Meanwhile, her own eyes "lift like continents/ to the sun and erode slowly." Similarly, in her sequence of animal songs in "You Are Happy", Atwood illustrates her concern with victims of sunlight who stand for the women victimized by the culture dominated by the Sun- that represents the man. The bull in "Bull Song," for instance, stands "dizzied/ with sun and anger," its "neck muscle cut,"/ blood falling from the gouged shoulder."

Also the rat in "Rat Song" accuses its oppressor of getting "the rifle down" and with "the flashlight, aiming for my brain," whenever he hears "me singing." (Houghton 45-54)

When you hear me singing

you get the rifle down

and the flashlight, aiming for my brain,

but you always miss

and when you set out the poison

I piss on it

to warn the others.

You think: *That one's too clever,*

*she's dangerous,* because

I don't stick around to be slaughtered

and you think I'm ugly too ...

All I want is love, you stupid

humanist. See if you can.

Right, I'm a parasite, I live off your

leavings, gristle and rancid fat,...

In her use of the metaphors of light/dark, Atwood emphasizes the confinement within which women writers strive to survive. Women are compared to the trapped rat; a 'parasite' that 'live off' man's 'leavings.'

if you could afford to share

my crystal hatreds.

It's your throat I want, my mate

trapped in your throat.

Though you try to drown him

with your greasy person voice,

he is hiding / between your syllables

I can hear him singing.

Atwood asserts however that no matter how hard man tries to restrict their 'voice' once observed in the 'flashlights' of the day, women are 'clever' and 'dangerous' and they can be heard 'singing' The rat in this poem represents the woman writers who are denied all opportunities to express their talents or thoughts.

In her "*The Journals of Susanna Moodie*," and through the metaphors of light/dark, Atwood adopts the voice of Susanna Moodie, a noted early Canadian writer, and attempts to convey Moodie's feelings about life as a woman in the Canada of her era. In this collection of poetry Atwood traces the change, the growth and the development in Moodie's character and presents her modernized version of Susanna Moodie's experience where she, as Atwood explains in the Afterword, "has finally turned herself inside out, and has become the spirit of the land she once hated." In her poem "Daguerreotype Taken in Old Age," Atwood depicts a most alarming and frightening image of the impact of sun on Moodie. Atwood complains that:

I know I change  
have changed  
but whose is this vapid face  
pitted and vast, rotund  
suspended in empty paper  
as though in a telescope  
the granular moon  
I rise from my chair  
pulling against gravity  
I turn away  
I and go out into the garden  
I revolve among the vegetables,  
my head ponderous  
reflecting the sun  
in shadows from the pocked ravines  
cut in my cheeks, my eye-  
sockets 2 craters  
among the paths  
I orbit  
the apple trees  
white white spinning  
stars around me  
I am being  
eaten away by light

In this poem," Moodie as moon is being 'eaten away' by the light of the sun- as the daguerreotype is destroyed by light. Metaphorically, then, light is

destructive and disparaging to Moodie. Now Moodie associates herself with "the granular moon" — she is a figure of the night. The analogy of Moodie as the moon insinuated throughout the poem: "I revolve among the vegetables," "I orbit," and the apple trees are seen as "white white spinning / stars around me." The concluding lines bring the poem, and Moodie's change, to a focus: "I am being / eaten away by light."

In addition to depicting the destructive effect of the light/sun in the male dominating culture, Atwood's poems also contain a determination to understand what she describes as the two markedly different worlds of light and dark, described in one poem, for example, as "Two Gardens." One of these gardens has been "measured," carefully and consciously planted in the sun with "fabric-/ textured zinnias, asters/ the colors of chintz; thick/ pot-shaped marigolds, the/ sunflowers brilliant as/ imitations." These flowers of the sunlit world seem tidily domestic, associated as they are with the fabric of upholstered sitting-room chairs. Even the sunflowers seem only imitations of something wilder, like emblematic objects d'art on a table.

But waiting just outside the "string borders" of this pleasant, cultivated brightly lighted garden, a wilder life of darkness raises itself. In the dark plants grow "without sunlight, flickering/ in the evening forest/ certain ferns; fungi/ like buried feet/ the blue-/ flags, ice flags/ reflected in the bay/ that melt when the/ sun hits noon." These "other" plants are rooted, Atwood assert, "in another land," adding, "they are mist/ if you touch them, your/ eyes go through them." (Houghton 65-66) Although these other kinds of plants might be also frightening, learning to survive in the garden of darkness is essential part of Atwood's determination for survival and growth.

Yet of course this world of darkness that arises outside the "string borders" of the carefully planted life in the sun can be terrifying. Atwood's Suzanna Moodie observes the vulnerability of the 'cleared', 'lined spaces' as opposed to the overwhelming quality of the dark wilderness when she describes the men planting their small field, their " faces and hands, candles/ flickering in the wind against the/ unbright earth." She fears for them, recognizing their limitations, their clinging to the illusion that they can dominate the earth: "If they let go/ of that illusion solid to them as a shovel, / open their eyes even for a moment/ to these trees, to this particular sun/ they would be surrounded, stormed, broken/ in upon by branches, roots, tendrils, the dark/ side light/ as I am." (Houghton 66-67) Suzanne, the woman in this poem, thus identifies the existence of the darkness and understands its power; the

men, on the other hand, are unconscious both that darkness exists and that it is potent.

In addition, this "particular sun" is for Atwood a source of strength, guidance and motivation for women. In her poem "For Archeologists," Atwood even presents her instructions to surviving there:

Deep under, far back  
the early horses run  
on rock / the buffalo, the deer  
the other animals (extinct)  
run with spears in their backs

Made with blood, with colored  
dirt, with smoke, not meant  
to be seen but to remain  
there hidden, potent  
in the dark, the link between  
the buried will and the upper  
world of sun and green feeding,  
chase and the hungry kill

drawn by a hand hard  
even to imagine

but passed on  
in us, part of us now  
part of the structure of the bones

existing still in us  
as fossil skulls  
of the bear, spearheads, bowls and  
folded skeletons arranged  
in ritual patterns, waiting  
for the patient searcher to find them

exist in caves of the earth.

In this poem, Atwood's "hidden, potent" symbols are "part of the structure of the bones" that will prize a "patient searcher" with the connection missed in the male dominant culture, the connection that links and makes whole the dark ("the buried will" and the light ("the upper world of the sun"). Finding such hidden secrets of darkness, argues Atwood is necessary for the

development of that dominating culture: as Suzanna Moodie says at one point, "I was not complete; at night/ I could not see without lanterns." (Houghton 83-84)

In addition, Atwood believes that there is an enormous energy gained from living in the darkness; an energy that can be gathered and employed for growth and development. According to Atwood, it is this growth of the self that is the ultimate goal of life. Such growth of self requires "constant discipline, persistent efforts, and the highest responsibility and wisdom".(Bennet & Royle 88) Atwood therefore writes of a sense of victory in rising out of the darkness. In "Song of the Worms," for example, Atwood writes of these creatures of the dark as if she were writing about women.

We have been underground too long,  
we have done our work,  
we are many and one,  
we remember when we were human

We have lived among roots and stones,  
we have sung but no one has listened,  
we come into the open air  
at night only to love

which disgusts the soles of boots,  
their leather strict religion...  
Soon we will invade like weeds,  
everywhere but slowly;  
the captive plants will rebel  
with us, fences will topple,  
brick walls ripple and fall,  
there will be no more boots.  
Meanwhile we eat dirt  
and sleep; we are waiting  
under your feet.  
When we say Attack  
you will hear nothing  
at first.

In this poem, and so are the women, the worms seem resolute to inhabit the earth. The fact that they are both "many and one" further suggests that they are part of an crowd as enormous and persistent as an underground "nation"

ready to 'invade' and take its rightful and influential place in the world of light above. (Houghton 104)

Not only does Atwood use the metaphorical associations of light/dark to depict this sense of powerful energy emerging from darkness, she also turns the traditional metaphors into new ones. She transforms her images of women to create women's own metaphors, and thereby, women's own new lives. One of the best examples of Atwood's creation of the new metaphoric associations for light and dark is her poem "Tricks with Mirrors." "I wanted to stop this," states the speaker/woman in the poem, "this life flattened against the wall, / mute and devoid of color, / built of pure light, / this life of vision only." Atwood is clearly referring to the life women have only as reflected on them by a - male - light that sees only the surface; by a culture that does know their true value.

Although, the image of women as existing only in mirrors as reflections is not a new one, Atwood transforms the metaphor to show a different kind of a mirror. "I confess: this is not a mirror," emphasizes Atwood, "it is a door/ I am trapped behind." Atwood presents an image of two women: a surface 'flattened' one created by light's reflection, and another one, caught behind the mirror which has come to represent a locked door. In other words, she depicts a mirror in which a woman is seen as two: one learning the truth about herself and her culture and trying to get out, and another on the surface, quietly, tamely and submissively combing her well-groomed hair to the satisfaction of the dominant male culture. In the fifth section however, Atwood affirms, "You don't like these metaphors. / All right." She then concludes the poem with a complete change of the metaphoric associations of light/dark so that the woman/speaker in the poem- and so the woman/reader can perceive herself differently: "Perhaps I am not a mirror. / Perhaps I am a pool./ Think about Pools." (Houghton 121-122)

This is evidently one of the best examples of Margaret Atwood's determination to challenge the old traditional associations of the metaphors of light and dark, giving them new dimensions that not only disclose the secrets of the world of darkness but that also provide new different associations that inspire a new cultural reality for women. For if "I" am a pool, argues Atwood, rather than a mirror, then I am composed of light on the surface but of darkness within, I can grow pond lilies, sunfish, fingerlings, frogs – I am resourceful in many ways. Moreover, if 'I am a pool', I am composed of light, air, water, and earth. I am made up of many essentials – I move with the breeze, I rise into the air; I am part of the entire natural world. I will not only reflect light then – that

is the light of the predominately patriarchal culture – Atwood confirms: I have my own life – as a woman- within, and – maybe "I" can drown "you."

In her insistence upon challenging the traditional metaphors of light/dark to inspire change, growth and development for women, Atwood further breaks the old traditional metaphors in another way. In depicting the sun/light as hostile masculine energy in extreme negative images, Atwood paradoxically and relentlessly devalues the sun/light and all it symbolizes. She furiously insists "You are the sun/ In reverse, all energy/ Flows into you and is/abolished; you refuse/ House, you smell of/ Catastrophe, / I see you blind and one-handed.../You demand, /You demand..." (Houghton 121-122)

In this poem, the sun Atwood depicts is like everything the sun is not supposed to be but really is. Atwood concludes by asking "How can I stop you?" and then, "Why did I create you?" Atwood emphasizes that if women as well as men have are able to create a sun that operates in reverse to the way it should; refusing life, or turning it into refusal or garbage, then by implication, women as well as men are able to destroy that same metaphor, even that same principle of victimization in the dominant culture.

Atwood thus manifestly refuses the old traditional metaphoric associations of light/dark. She challenges them and transforms them into new possibilities for new lives. To accomplish this, Atwood confidently dives into the wreck of these associations and emerge back ready with her own new plan, her own fire, and her new life. In her "Song of the Fox," Atwood further confirms: "I crackle through your pastures/ I make no profit/ like the sun/ I burn and burn, this tongue/ licks through your body also." (Houghton 58) the fox in this poem can burn pastures. It has become strong as the sun, its tongue capable of touching others, licking through them like fire, like words that finally can mean what the woman writer want them to mean.

A final victorious image of the enacted change and transformation in the dominant culture through the modified metaphorical associations of light and dark is seen in Atwood's poem, "Eating Fire":

Eating fire

Is your ambition:

To swallow the flame down

Take it into your mouth

And shoot it forth, a shout or an incandescent

Tongue, a word

Exploding from you in gold, crimson,

Unrolling in a brilliant scroll

To be lit up from within

Vein by vein

To be the Sun.

In "Eating Fire," the speaker/woman realizes the trick and/or the miracle through which women can rise intact over and over. The speaker/woman in the poem finds "in the water/ under my shadow" with "body sheathed/ in feathers, his teeth/ glinting like nails, fierce god/ head crested with blue flame" in "Dream: Bluejay or Archcopteryx." Atwood emphasizes that she has learned to speak fire, she has learned to contain energy herself, and she has learned to do all this by transforming not only the old traditional metaphors of the masculine tradition of light/dark but also her literary metaphors to refuse, revise, challenge and change the cultural reality.

### **Conclusion**

After examining the metaphors of light/dark in selected poems by Margaret Atwood, the researcher reaches the conclusion that by refusing to ignore this blinding traditional metaphors of light/dark; Atwood has explored these metaphors, revised them, and finally transformed them so as to transcend the constraining assumptions of the dominant patriarchal culture.

Margaret Atwood is a celebrated Canadian writer, a feminist critic and a social activist. She is one of those women writers who have fully comprehended the pathetic plight of women. She is therefore often associated with feminism. Atwood's poetry often deals with the hidden subjugated world of women where injustice in society pushes them towards darkness. Margaret Atwood also depicts the internal urge of women to break all conventional identities in order to live with freedom.

The paper traces Margaret Atwood's use of the metaphors of light/dark. It highlights the gender politics as fixed by birth and splits the masculine and the feminine apart with the enforced gender. Atwood experiences the traditional metaphors of light/dark as reflecting the dominant male culture and as existing in opposition to herself as a talented woman and writer. She, however, continues to use them to express her sense of gender in relation to

culture. Atwood's use of these associations progresses from raising questions about women's position in the worlds of light and darkness to identifying strategies of survival to offering possibilities of change and transcendence.

In her poems, Atwood struggles to recreate space for women within the traditional metaphorical associations. Atwood succeeds in revising and reconstructing the dominant cultural thought and thereby the plight of women. The woman becomes aware of her energy and power and forces her existence in the world of man from where she was once removed as a useless commodity that commonly resides in the dark. After all, much of the annoyance and anger a woman feels as a result of submission to the male's world lessens as the woman attempts to change, not just observe, her situation.

Women, argues Atwood, can only experience harmony and transcendence when the male sun's destructive power is reduced, replaced by a quality of light different from that of the normal, overwhelming, judgmental sun – a light that she , in effect creates herself, from long nurturing in the dark.

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## المخلص

مارغريت أتوود ، شاعرة كندية ، وكاتبة حائزة على جوائز عديدة ، وناشطة نسوية مشهورة ، كتبت العديد من القصائد المخصصة للنساء ونضالاتهن. تعكس أتوود في شعرها الأفكار الجادة حول النوع الاجتماعي فيما يتعلق بالثقافة واضطهاد المرأة. كما تكشف قصائدها العمليات الصامتة والخفية للجنس وتواجه سياستها. وهي تلفت الانتباه إلى الأبعاد الضارة للتمييز بين الجنسين وتهاجم البنية الثقافية الضيقة المهيمنة على الأفكار الاجتماعية والجمالية.

غالبًا ما تهتم أتوود في قصائدها بالاضطهاد الاجتماعي للمرأة والقيود المفروضة عليها من قبل السيادة الأبوية المهيمنة. تستخدم هذه الورقة البحثية النهج النسوي في النقد الأدبي كإطار لها. وذلك ليدرس كيف توظف أتوود بإصرار استعارات الضوء / الظلام للتعبير عن إحساسها بالتعارض مع قيم وممارسات الثقافة الأبوية السائدة. فتقليديا ، تمثل الشمس الحيوية ، قوة الحياة نفسها ، في حين أن الظلام أو غياب الشمس يمثل فقدان تلك الحياة ، أو الموت. والأهم من ذلك ، أن الصفات المرتبطة بنور الشمس - الطاقة والقوة والإلهية ، اعتُبرت تقليديًا أيضا صفات ذكورية. وقد استبعدت مثل هذه الثقافة الأبوية بدورها النساء من عالم النور القوي والمذهل والذكوري وأبعدت المرأة إلى موقع التبعية والخضوع في عالم الظلام.

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة استعارات الضوء / الظلام في قصائد مختارة لمارجريت أتوود للكشف عن تمردها ورفضها لقبول هذه الافتراضات التقليدية حول مكانة المرأة في الثقافة الأبوية السائدة وكذلك تصميمها وتأكيدتها على امكانيات المرأة للتغيير والنمو والتنمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النسوية ، دراسات النوع ، الشعر ، الاستعارات ، مارجريت أتوود