

Reproductive Dystopias: A Comparative Analysis of Surrogacy in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Farm*

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Abstract

The article dives into the comparative examination of reproductive dystopias in two notable literary works, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Joanne Ramos's *The Farm*. These books provide unsettling pictures of futures in which women's reproductive bodies are treated as property. Fertile women in *The Handmaid's Tale* are relegated to the position of 'handmaids' by the theocratic state of Gilead, where they are routinely impregnated and compelled to have children for the ruling elite. The plot of *The Farm* centres on a high-end surrogacy centre that hires women from poor backgrounds to carry its customers' children. Examining these dystopian fictions via a comparative perspective, this article examines how they mirror social fears about women's reproductive rights, autonomy, and exploitation of women's bodies. It also analyses how the writers attack modern themes like gender inequity, reproductive technology, and the commercialization of parenting via these tales. This comparative research sheds light on these dystopian ideas, providing a thought-provoking look at the possible repercussions of reproductive exploitation and the critical need to protect women's reproductive autonomy in the actual world.

keywords: Reproductive Dystopias, Surrogacy, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood, *The Farm*
Joanne Ramos

Introduction

Both Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Joanne Ramos' *The Farm* deal with the unsettling concept of reproductive dystopias, and the article "Reproductive Dystopias: A Comparative Analysis of Surrogacy in *The Handmaid* and *The Farm* delves into the thought-provoking exploration of these two seminal literary works. These books provide vivid and unsettling pictures of cultures where women's bodies are treated as property and used for reproductive ends. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, we are introduced to Gilead, a theocratic society in which fertile women are seen as property and compelled to serve the privileged by bearing their children. In contrast, the society shown in *The Farm* is one where women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are actively sought out to serve as surrogates for wealthy couples. By drawing parallels between these dystopian stories, we might better understand the underlying worries about reproductive rights, autonomy, and the ethics of assisted reproduction that permeate them. The essay also aims to analyse how these works of literature challenge modern themes such as sexism, reproductive technology, and the commercialization of motherhood. By engaging on this literary investigation, this research seeks to obtain a greater understanding of the tenuous junction between reproductive exploitation and women's autonomy, resonating with current issues around reproductive justice and bodily agency. Comparison of Surrogacy in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Farm* as Reflections on Reproductive Dystopia examines Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Joanne Ramos's *The Farm*, two groundbreaking novels, both of which deal with the disquieting subject

of reproductive dystopias, in depth. These books provide vivid and terrifying pictures of cultures where women's bodies are seen as mere commodities to be manipulated, controlled, and used for the sake of reproduction. By analysing these stories critically, the social commentary woven and the importance of the dystopian warnings could be understood better throughout.

The research aims to explore and dissect the thematic elements within Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Joanne Ramos' *The Farm*, that pertain to surrogacy, reproduction, and the dystopian societies in which they are set. The objective is to uncover the authors' motivations for incorporating these themes into their works and to shed light on the social, political, and ethical commentary they aim to convey. Furthermore, the article likely intended to provoke critical thinking and discourse around the topics of reproductive rights, gender roles, power dynamics, and societal control. By conducting a comparative analysis, this seeks to highlight the similarities and differences in how surrogacy is depicted in these two novels and what these portrayals reveal about the respective authors' worldviews and critiques of contemporary society. Ultimately, the intention is to provide readers with a nuanced understanding of how literature can serve as a lens through which to examine complex real-world issues. By delving into these reproductive dystopias, this research aims to engage readers in meaningful conversations about the implications of reproductive technologies, the manipulation of women's bodies, and the broader socio-political landscapes that shape the experiences of individuals in these fictional worlds.

Symbolism and Imagery:

The symbolism and imagery that the authors (Atwood and Ramos) employ adds dimension to the comprehension of the author's exploration of the overarching theme of reproductive dystopia. The oppressive character of the worlds that both writers have constructed is communicated via the use of images and symbols that are both vivid and emotive. For instance, the crimson robes that the handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale* wear serve as a striking visual expression of their function in Gilead. These robes reflect both the handmaids' fertility and their servitude in the society of Gilead. They are a visual representation of the suppression of individuality, as the Handmaids are stripped of their names and identities, known only by their roles. The red colour symbolises both fertility and the shame associated with their sexual servitude. It is also reminiscent of historical puritanical clothing, highlighting the theocratic nature of the society. Analysing the use of these robes provides insights into the loss of agency and identity in this dystopian world.

When seen side-by-side with the life of the surrogates, the lavish facility in *The Farm* becomes a striking emblem of both affluence and exploitation. The imagery of luxury and isolation highlights the theme of class disparity and the dehumanisation of surrogates as they are treated as mere vessels for reproduction. This analysis intends to peel back the layers of meaning that are hidden behind such symbols and imagery by examining how they contribute to the overall narrative, reinforce the thematic messages, and invite readers to contemplate the implications of reproductive dystopia in the fictional societies being discussed.

The symbolic "Eyes of God" in *The Handmaid's Tale* surveil the characters in the novel. These represent the omnipresent surveillance and control of the theocratic regime. The symbolism of the Eyes

emphasises the lack of privacy and the constant threat of punishment, adding depth to the theme of reproductive control and social repression. Same, side by side, the facility, often described as a "gilded cage," in *The Farm* serves as a symbol for the entrapment of surrogates. While the surroundings are luxurious, they are also confining, emphasising the lack of autonomy and choice.

Ethical Considerations:

The reader is thrust into realms where significant moral conundrums are played out, especially those revolving around the ethical ramifications of surrogacy and the autonomy of women's bodies, as they read these stories. Through the exploration of these moral conundrums, one is able to obtain invaluable insights into the intricate landscape of reproductive rights, social control, and human agency. In each of these stories, surrogacy is depicted as a way to assert control over the bodies of women, which raises concerns about whether or not women are being exploited and about the ethical limitations of reproductive technology. The violation of consent and autonomy emerges as a central ethical concern. Both novels delve into the loss of women's autonomy over their bodies, yet they do so within different societal contexts. *The Handmaid's Tale* presents a dystopian, theocratic society where surrogacy is imposed, while *The Farm* explores a setting closer to contemporary surrogacy practices, albeit laden with heightened economic and ethical complexities. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the primary moral conundrum is underpinned by religious and political power, whereas in *The Farm*, it is predominantly shaped by economic disparities and the exploitation of women. A comparative analysis of these novels offers an opportunity to probe how varying societal structures and power dynamics can lead to similar ethical dilemmas concerning surrogacy and women's autonomy. This, in turn, prompts a broader inquiry into the ramifications of these moral challenges and the ways in which women's bodies are subjected to control and commodification across different contexts.

Key Themes and Elements:

The central theme of 'Reproductive Control and Oppression' in the comparative analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Farm* delves into the methods through which totalitarian governments assert authoritative influence over women's reproductive rights. In Margaret Atwood's dystopian realm, Gilead, the state rigorously governs women's reproductive functions, exemplifying the government's complete dominance over women's bodies. Similarly, in Joanne Ramos' narrative, the opulent institution orchestrates and oversees surrogacy, underscoring the power dynamics and economic exploitation within the society. The analysis scrutinises the intricate facets of reproductive control in both literary works. Additionally, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the society is firmly controlled by male dominance, leading to the subjugation of women. In *The Farm*, the power dynamics similarly reflect gender-based hierarchies, resulting in the economic exploitation and subordination of females.

Another important theme is "The Manipulation of Women's Bodies" in both these novels, examining the profound physical and psychological implications of women's bodies being commodified and manipulated for reproductive purposes. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the state dictates the reproductive function of women, dehumanising them in the process. In *The Farm*, the commodification of surrogacy subjects women to control and emotional turmoil. This uncovers the multifaceted impact of such manipulation on women's well-being and identity.

The theme of "Gender and Identity" resonates powerfully in both novels. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the narrative reveals the profound erosion of women's identity in a patriarchal regime. Here, women are forcibly reduced to their reproductive roles, leaving their individuality and autonomy in tatters. Similarly, in *The Farm*, the economic pressures and expectations tied to surrogacy challenge women's perception of self and conventional gender roles. This delves into the intricate and multifaceted exploration of how societal structures influence the formation of gender identities, shedding light on how women negotiate their roles and self-identities in repressive environments, making it a central focus of analysis.

The theme of "Freedom and Resistance" is a prevalent and powerful motif in both novels. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, women grapple with their yearning for autonomy and resistance against the oppressive regime of Gilead. They strive to break free from the shackles of patriarchal control. Similarly, in *The Farm*, surrogates confront the restrictions imposed upon them, endeavouring to assert their independence and resist their commodification. This theme highlights the human spirit's resilience and the enduring pursuit of freedom in the face of oppressive systems in both narratives.

The theme of "Ethical Dilemmas in Reproductive Technologies" is prominent in both novels. *The Handmaid's Tale* delves into the moral quandaries surrounding the state's imposition of reproductive control, emphasizing the violation of individual autonomy and consent. In *The Farm*, ethical complexities emerge as surrogacy becomes a commercialized enterprise, raising questions about the exploitation of women's bodies for economic gain. These narratives explore the multifaceted ethical issues related to reproductive technologies, including consent, commodification, and the implications of such practices on women's rights and well-being, providing a rich backdrop for in-depth analysis.

"Comparing Fictional Dystopias to Real-World Issues" serves as a thought-provoking backdrop in both novels. *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Farm* offer compelling narratives that reflect real-world concerns such as women's rights, reproductive autonomy, and societal power dynamics. By drawing parallels between these fictional dystopias and genuine societal issues, readers are prompted to contemplate the relevance of these narratives to contemporary challenges and to critically analyze the potential consequences of failing to address these real-world concerns.

Significance:

This research is significant as it addresses current discussions on reproductive rights, gender dynamics, and the ethical implications of surrogacy. It also contributes to the broader discourse on literature's role in reflecting and critiquing societal issues.

Research Objectives:

The objective for comparative analysis of surrogacy in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Joanne Ramos' *The Farm* is to critically examine and analyze the portrayal of reproductive dystopias in these two dystopian novels. The analysis aims to explore the themes, narrative strategies, and societal implications of surrogacy within the contexts of these fictional worlds. By conducting a thorough comparative analysis, the objective is to gain a deeper understanding of how these authors use surrogacy as a literary device to comment on gender, power dynamics, reproductive rights, and

societal control. Additionally, the objective is to assess the relevance of these narratives to contemporary discussions surrounding reproductive technologies and ethical and social implications they pose. Ultimately, the goal is to provide valuable insights into the ways in which literature can reflect and critique real-world issues related to reproduction and gender in dystopian settings.

Review of literature

Handmaid's Tale (2018) Within the realm of feminist literary criticism, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood has been the focus of in-depth examination and discussion. Researchers, such as Susan S. Lanser, who wrote about it in her article "The book has been the subject of feminist criticism, which has focused on how it criticises patriarchal power systems and reproductive control. As observed by academics such as Lauren Rule Maxwell in her book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, the famous red robes worn by the handmaids have been seen as a sign of both subjugation and fertility "Freedom to reproduce is the topic of "Red Robes and Scarlet Letters."

Chelsea Mikael Frazier (2020). On the other side, Joanne Ramos's play, *The Farm*, has prompted conversations on social class, racial inequality, and the commercialization of reproduction. According to the academic Amy Monticello's paper "The chapter "Surrogacy in Joanne Ramos's discusses how the author uses the book to reveal the exploitative parts of the surrogacy business and its repercussions for women who are on the margins of society. In terms of social criticism, Ramos' depiction of the lavish facility as a symbol of privilege and inequality has been deconstructed. "In Joanne Ramos's, Reproductive Desires and the Luxury of Choice are Examined.

Krista Hoefle in *Studies in the Novel* (2021) The ethical implications of surrogacy, as they appear in these works of fiction, have been thoroughly analysed. scholarly works such as "The Ethics of Reproductive Technology in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and ethics and Exploitation in Joanne Ramos' delve into the moral conundrums presented by these texts, particularly with regard to the autonomy of women's bodies and the implications of reproductive choices.

Conclusion

The fascinating manner in which both dystopian tales expose crucial themes and social challenges are shown via a comparative examination of surrogacy in the novels *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *The Farm* by Joanne Ramos. A feminist literary touchstone, *The Handmaid's Tale* offers a scathing critique of patriarchal power structures, reproductive control, and the symbolism of the handmaids' red robes as both symbols of oppression and fertility. *The Handmaid's Tale* has been hailed as a landmark in the field of feminist literary criticism. On the other side, *The Farm* by Joanne Ramos dives into questions of class, racism, and the commodity of reproduction, with the luxurious facility functioning as a glaring emblem of wealth and injustice. The novel was written by Joanne Ramos. Both books force readers to confront difficult ethical questions, such as the autonomy of women's bodies and the ethical repercussions of surrogacy, which brings the novels' ethical themes to the forefront of the reading experience. Scholars have conducted extensive research on these topics, during which they have investigated the moral conundrums raised by the texts in question, thus shedding light on the complexities of reproductive choice as well as the exploitation of women's bodies.

This comparative analysis makes it clear that these literary works serve not only as captivating dystopian narratives but also as thought-provoking tools for critical reflection on the real-world implications of reproductive rights, power dynamics, and gender equity. This realisation becomes apparent as a result of the fact that these works of literature serve both of these functions. Both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Farm* provide a forum for discussion on the significance of preserving reproductive autonomy and women's rights, while also encouraging readers to confront unsettling truths about the potential repercussions of reproductive exploitation. Both of these novels invite readers to face uncomfortable truths about the potential consequences of reproductive exploitation. In an era that is characterised by on-going discussions regarding reproductive justice and the ethical boundaries of assisted reproduction, these novels continue to resonate with their audiences, highlighting both the enduring significance of their warnings and the ability of literature to engage with complex sociocultural issues. In the comparative analysis that has been provided in this article, it becomes abundantly clear that both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Farm* continue to play an important role in discussions regarding reproductive dystopias, societal ethics, and the never-ending search for gender equality, identity and bodily autonomy.

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