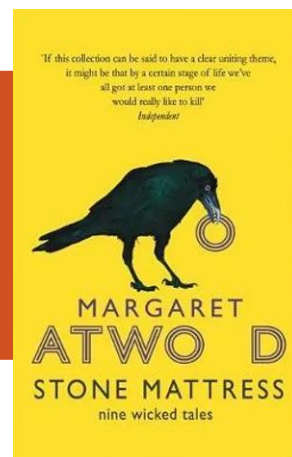




Stone Mattress

Margaret Atwood



Author Background

Margaret Atwood (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 several small press editions of both poetry and fiction. Atwood has won numerous awards and honours for her writing, including the Booker Prize (twice), Arthur C. Clarke Award, Governor General's Award, Franz Kafka Prize, Princess of Asturias Awards, and the National Book Critics and PEN Centre USA Lifetime Achievement Awards. Several of her works have been adapted for film and television.

Atwood's works encompass a variety of themes including gender and identity, religion and myth, the power of language, climate change, and "power politics". Many of her poems are inspired by myths and fairy tales which interested her from a very early age. Atwood is a founder of the Griffin Poetry Prize and Writers' Trust of Canada. She is also a Senior Fellow of Massey College, Toronto.

Atwood is also the inventor of the Long Pen device and associated technologies that facilitate remote robotic writing of documents.

Book Summary

Margaret Atwood turns to short fiction for the first time since her 2006 collection, *Moral Disorder*, with nine tales of acute psychological insight and turbulent relationships recalling her award-winning 1996 novel, *Alias Grace*.

A recently widowed fantasy writer is guided through a stormy winter evening by the voice of her late husband in "Alphinland," the first of three loosely linked stories about the romantic geometries of a group of writers and artists. In "The Freeze-Dried Bridegroom," a man who bids on an auctioned storage space has a surprise. In "Lusus Naturae," a woman born with a genetic abnormality is mistaken for a vampire. In "Torching the Dusties," an elderly lady with Charles Bonnet syndrome comes to terms with the little people she keeps seeing, while a newly formed populist group gathers to burn down her retirement residence. And in "Stone Mattress," a long-ago crime is avenged in the Arctic via a 1.9 billion-year-old stromatolite. In these nine tales, Margaret Atwood is at the top of her darkly humorous and seriously playful game.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ In one word, how would you describe your impression of the book?
- ❖ Margaret Atwood called the stories “Tales” instead of “Short Stories”. What do you think of this choice?
- ❖ What is “wicked” about these tales?
- ❖ How do the first three stories link with each other? What narrative device is used?
- ❖ What is/are the overarching theme/s of the book?
- ❖ What themes emerge from each story?
- ❖ What are the social commentaries brought forward by Margaret Atwood in these stories?
- ❖ Which story did you like best?
- ❖ Which story did you like least?
- ❖ What similarities do these stories share?
- ❖ Do you think any of the stories could be expanded into a full-length book?
- ❖ Which story would you like to see made into a film? Why?

References and further reading

- ❖ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Atwood
- ❖ Book Movement: <https://www.bookmovement.com/bookDetailView/38359/Stone-Mattress-By-Margaret-Atwood>
- ❖ Publishers Weekly: Interview with M. Atwood re Stone Mattress: <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/profiles/article/64151-atwood-s-tales-margaret-atwood.html>
- ❖ The Oddness of Moving Things: blog entry on Stone Mattress: <https://geoffwhaley.com/2014/09/08/stone-mattress-margaret-atwood/>
- ❖ Financial Times: Ursula K. Le Guin on the Stone Mattress: <https://www.ft.com/content/fe6f7aa4-3822-11e4-a687-00144feabdc0>