

Lifestyle

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Models pose during the alice + olivia by Stacey Bendet Spring 2020 Fashion Presentation at Root Studio during New York Fashion Week: The Shows on September 9, 2019 in New York City. — AFP

Russian rapper deletes pro-Moscow video with 1.5 million dislikes

A popular Russian rapper yesterday deleted a music video singing the praises of Moscow authorities ahead of contentious elections after it gathered almost 1.5 million dislikes on YouTube. Timati, a 36-year-old rapper known for his fervent support of President Vladimir Putin, posted the video, titled simply "Moscow", shortly before Muscovites were set to vote in elections for city parliament on Sunday that had caused mass protests. "I don't go to rallies, I don't bull****," the song goes, apparently referring to weeks of protests in Moscow after the authorities barred opposition candidates from running in the polls.

Lyrics in the clip praise the Russian capital as a wealthy city that has become "world standard" and "doesn't hold gay parades." "I will down a burger for Sobyenin," the song says, referring to Mayor Sergei Sobyenin, a Putin ally who has been in charge since 2010 and is detested by the opposition for refusing permission for rallies and cracking down on protesters. Timati, who is ranked the seventh wealthiest celebrity under 40 in Russia by Forbes magazine, made the video together with another rapper, Guf. The video had gained 1.48 million dislikes when Timati took it down on Tuesday, writing on Instagram that he did not intend any offence. "I'm deleting the video to stop this wave of negativity," he wrote. "I made a record. Only I didn't have such a goal."

In Instagram comments, Russians mocked Timati, accusing him of being a sellout and getting paid by the authorities to make propaganda. "The world's first government rapper. I'm sorry for his fans," one commentator wrote. "Did you also return the money to those who ordered (the video)?" asked another. Guf for his part posted an apologetic expletive-ridden video assuring his fans that he was "used" and "didn't get a penny for this, I swear." "I am proud of our young people who understand politics," he says. "I'm sorry that I don't follow the political situation in the country." —AFP

Russian rapper Timati



Margaret Atwood unveils sequel to 'The Handmaid's Tale'



Canadian author Margaret Atwood gives a press conference following the release of her new book "The Testaments".

Canadian writer Margaret Atwood in dates

Here are key dates in the life and career of award-winning Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, whose long-awaited sequel to her hugely successful dystopian novel "The Handmaid's Tale" is officially released yesterday.

November 18, 1939: She is born in Ottawa, her father a forest entomologist and her mother a nutritionist.

1961: Graduates from the University of Toronto with a degree in English. The following year she completes a Masters at Harvard-linked Radcliffe College, in the eastern US city of Boston.

1969: Publishes her first novel "The Edible Woman", a satire about a young woman unable to eat after getting married.

1973: Atwood ends a five-year marriage to writer Jim Polk and begins a relationship with fellow novelist Graeme Gibson, with whom she will have her only child, Eleanor Jess Atwood Gibson (1976).

1985: Publishes "The Handmaid's Tale", which becomes a feminist classic, about a totalitarian society of the future. It is later adapted into a film, cult television series and opera.

1996: Release of her historical novel "Alias Grace", which is also adapted for television, airing on CBC and Netflix.

2000: Wins Britain's top literary award, the Booker Prize, for "The Blind Assassin" published the same year.

2017: US television streaming group Hulu airs the first "The Handmaid's Tale" series, which wins a host of top awards. In July 2019 a fourth series is announced.

September 10, 2019: Release of "The Testaments", the highly anticipated sequel to "The Handmaid's Tale". —AFP

Margaret Atwood released the much-anticipated sequel to her award-winning 1985 novel "The Handmaid's Tale" on Tuesday, with "The Testaments" set to become a similar smash. A terrifying, misogynistic dystopia set in the US northeast in the near-future, "The Handmaid's Tale" has been turned into a major television series and become a feminist rallying point for the #MeToo generation. "It's a question of things escaping from a book to the real world and the author has zero control," Canadian author Atwood told a press conference in London.

Fans flocked to Waterstones' flagship bookstore in Piccadilly, central London, where Atwood, 79, read from her new novel to around 400 avid followers who could get their hands on the book at midnight. "It's very accurate with what's going (on) at the moment, where the world is heading and that's kind of scary," said 27-year-old Melisa Kumas, from the Netherlands but living in London, who wore a red handmaid's outfit. "It may be a bit of a warning to the people." The sequel has already been nominated for the 2019 Booker Prize, one of the English-speaking world's most prestigious literary awards.

Its predecessor, which was nominated for the 1986 Booker Prize, was turned into a film in 1990, an opera in 2000, and an award-winning television drama series which first aired in 2017. The show has boosted sales of the novel, which has shifted eight million copies worldwide in English alone.

Novel set 15 years on

In the original novel, the United States has become the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian religious state where women are sexually subjugated. More than 15 years on from the events of "The Handmaid's Tale", the oppressive theocratic regime maintains its grip on power but there are signs that it is beginning to rot from within. "There are reasons with these kind of regimes to be optimistic because in fact they tend not to last," said Atwood. The lives of three radically different women converge in the novel.

Two, Agnes and Daisy, grew up in the first generation since the new order took over, while a third, Aunt Lydia, wields power through the ruthless accumulation and deployment of secrets. Aunt Lydia was a character in "The Handmaid's Tale", while Agnes and Daisy also cropped up. They are the daughters of the first novel's protagonist and narrator June, who goes under the handmaid name Offred. When the new story begins, Agnes lives in Gilead, while her sister lives in neighboring Canada and is appalled by the human rights abuses being perpetrated across the border.

But the third narrator in particular holds the reader in suspense: the Machiavellian leader of the Aunts—the group of women responsible for training and policing the handmaids. The reader discovers her past as a free

woman and her transformation into a monster through her survival instinct in the face of tyrannical men, and her aspiration for power to get her revenge.

Feminist symbolism

Atwood took more than three decades to create the sequel, inspired by questions asked by her readers about the characters in the first book. The twist of events this century also spurred her into penning a sequel. Atwood said society changed after the September 11, 2001 attacks, bringing in tighter domestic security measures, such as screening at airports. "Once upon a time there was no security. We became more fearful," she said. Atwood said she was also influenced by the 2008 global financial crisis and US President Donald Trump's election victory in 2016.

The TV adaptation has brought "The Handmaid's Tale" to a new audience. The handmaids' white hats and red dresses have become a symbol of feminist struggles such as abortion and women's rights campaigns in countries such as Argentina, Hungary, Ireland and Poland. In the US, they have become an emblem of the anti-Trump and #MeToo movements. "This wave started in Texas," said Atwood, "as a protest tactic" in the legislature. "You are not making a disturbance, you are sitting there modestly, you can not be kicked out for dressing up." —AFP



Canadian author Margaret Atwood poses during a photocall following the release of her new book "The Testaments" a sequel to the award-winning 1985 novel "The Handmaid's Tale" in London. — AFP photos