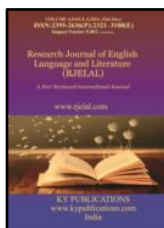




AN ECO-FEMINISM: A STUDY OF MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

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ABSTRACT

Margaret Atwood, a Canadian feminist writer focuses on the problems of victimized women. This paper is based on the assumptions of Ecofeminism which has an evolving vocabulary and passages from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this novel Margaret Atwood explores the women's quest for their own identity. This novel is the projection of female destiny which is locked into female biology. It depicts the essentialist nature and fulfilling of the female body. The author has delivered to us a particularly advanced and complex view of women's nature and of women's role in society. The novel reveals her de-construction of patriarchal structures of power and dominion. It is not gender specific but a comprehensive criticism of all power structures that interiorize and dehumanize individuals, especially women. In the Republic of Gilead the majority of women to be barren and men sterile so fertile women have to play as the role of Handmaids to popular official Commanders. The protagonist Offred is forced to become a handmaid. She has lost her husband and children during the terrible years. The women were treated as the child bearers. Offred, rebels against her society abortive, her rebellion against Gilleadian ideology is praiseworthy. The re-emergence of women's movement is fostered through the female characters in the novel. The author demonstrates the range and complexity of sexual power politics and provides a solid foundation for understanding the evolution of her feminist sympathies. Then they escaped from the Republic of Gilead to the underground Female Road. The environmental crisis and the ecofeminism are dealt in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Key words: ecofeminism, barren, fertile, sterile, bearer

Margaret Atwood in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* deals the problem of woman's survival in a male-dominated society. The female protagonist, Offred struggles for survival in a society of Gilead. It portrays the socio-political assumptions of Ecofeminism. The novel is the projection of female destiny which is locked into female biology. It depicts the essentialist nature and fulfilling of the female body. The novel presents the story of a woman in a society, where she is regimented to serve for the Commanders. Her main duty is to play as a Handmaid. They represented as the powers of

fertility and birth. The novel deals a reflection of women's particular relationship to nature through the reproductive and productive work of giving birth to children and feeding and keeping them healthy as they grow. The Handmaid's are women with "viable ovaries" (THT135) are forced to bear child for the childless Commanders. They are only women who are fruitful and fruitless. Offred lives with the Commanders and his wife Serena. Most women in Gilead are infertile after repeated exposure to pesticides, nuclear waste, or leakages from chemical

weapons. The few fertile women are taken to campus and trained to be Handmaids.

Infertile lower-class women are sent either to clean up toxic waste or to become "marthas" house servants. No women in the Republic are permitted to be openly sexual; because sex is for reproduction only. When Offred's marriage with Luke is decreed invalid because of Luke's prior marriage they attempt escape. But their plan has been discovered, and they fled back into Gilead. Luke is shot, her daughter is given away to needy woman in the upper circle and Offred is in to the training center of handmaids. Now Offred is in the service of the Commanders and his wife Serena Joy. She is unable to produce children so she hates Offred for taking her husband's seed. If Offred does not become pregnant, she will undoubtedly take revenge by sending her away, possibly the toxic colonies. Offred does not become pregnant, but she does develop an unexpected relationship with the Commanders. Then Offred escapes from the Republic of Gilead to the underground female road to tell her tale of victimization. Offred rebels against male hegemony and the cruelty. Gilead is a repressive and highly alienating structure of society, especially for women. Annis Pratt's generalization about women's fiction can be applied to Offred's narrative:

Women's fiction manifests alienation from normal concepts of time and space precisely because the presentation of time by persons on the margins of day-to-day life inevitably deviates from ordinary chronology. (11)

All women in the reproductive age-group have been rounded up and kept in communal houses manned by Aunts and Commanders and watched over by eyes and waited upon by Marthas. Their main aim is to produce children. They have been reduced to one biological function, reproduction, motherhood diverted of dignity, privacy, are linked to the strategies of survival. Offred is a bonded slave sexually, wants something forbidden with her, play scrabble. Women are separated according to their functions, as Wives, Marthas (housekeepers), Handmaid's (child-bearer), Aunts (disciplinarians), and Jezebels (prostitutes),

and kept in segregation. As Emma Parker says, "one of the main ways the system of oppression is enforced is through food." (354) Offred feels her life is "animalist life" (THT 104). Here Offred is clearly a victim. Offred emerges as a rebel and fights by breaking the silence by using language.

Offred is one of the several "handmaids" to be recruited for "breeding purposes" (THT 146) of the Commanders who are childless due to the infertility of their wives. Offred says "we are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (THT 146). These women are completely controlled by men. The Handmaids are required to reinforce their submissiveness. As Offred says, "Oh God, king of the universe, thank you for not creating me a man" (THT 182). The novel demonstrates the range and complexity of Margaret Atwood's representations of sexual power politics, and provides a solid foundation for understanding the evaluation of her feminist sympathies. The re-emergence of women's movement is fostered through the female characters in the novel. Atwood portrays Cultural Feminism, Separation, Materialist Feminism, and Radical Feminism in this novel. Thus the warning is against the essential biologism and the economic production. The eco-feminist should address to transform the international economics and international politics. For eco-feminist this is an ideology that destroys the earth's life through the leading countries remember that Margaret Atwood's Gilead is the exploited environments. Hence my attempt brings the new direction in eco-feminism through the novel.

References

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