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FEATURES OF MODERN FEMINIST NARRATOLOGY (BASED ON THE NOVELS BY MARGARET ATWOOD)

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the concept of gender in modern narratology. It is worth to mention that gender and narrative explore how gender, sex, and sexuality might shape both narrative texts and the theories through which readers and scholars approach them. That is why feminist writers take the gender difference into account as a foundational aspect of narrative structure.

To start with, feminist narratology refers to the study of narratives from the feminist perspective, taking into account the impact of gender on narrative patterns [2]. It is seen from three different perspectives: the representation of women in narrative and women's writing, feminist film theory, and the feminist critique of psychoanalysis. According to the research conducted by Cambridge University in 2018, feminist theorists and critics have demonstrated that no theory of narrative has neutral terms or assumptions. It is evident that all narratives have ideological premises and functions, starting with the concept of sex itself. The terms 'gender', 'sex', and 'sexuality' are the main subject of feminist narratology. In most academic pursuits today, 'sex' stands for the

biological designations of male and female (with some scholars including 'intersex' as a designation), while 'gender' marks social identities, roles, and behaviours as well as qualities of masculinity and femininity that have been associated with specific sex, and 'sexuality' refers to the orientation of desire toward a particular sexed or gendered object [1].

Gender and narrative studies point out that gender, sex, and sexuality are significant not only to textual interpretation and reader reception but to textual poetics itself and thus to the shapes, structures, representational practices, and communicative contexts of narrative texts [3].

In the novels *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Edible Woman* by the most famous feminist writer of the XXI century Margaret Atwood, the concepts of 'gender' and 'gender discrimination' are clearly seen. Atwood's narratives are conventional and realistic as they closely observe people and relationships in a specific social and historical location. Atwood explores women issues using elements of history, fiction, science, fairy tale, and dystopia [2]. In her novels, the protagonists assert their individuality in the process of discovering themselves.

The writer's narratives rely on ordinary people from all walks of life. The protagonist of *The Edible Woman* is Marian, a young woman with a job in consumer marketing, while the main character of *The Handmaid's Tale* is Offred, both a maid and a servant. The social status and roles of both characters are highlighted. It is emphasized that both women are from the middle and lower class, which help the ordinary reader understand the narratives better. The characters are so believable and usual that the reader quickly identifies with them. This tactic brings out the extraordinary from the mundane. Both stories beat on feminist favour and have an autobiographical touch.

The works by Atwood depict the struggle against social patriarchal order, which arbitrarily elevates men to the positions of power and control and degrades women to positions of powerlessness and subjugation. It is clearly

highlighted in *The Handmaid's Tale* where people are categorized into various classes, the lowest and with limited rights is women population. Offred is a handmaid whose main role is to reproduce [1]. She is seen as a property of an influential male ruling layer and cannot choose on her own. Offred's desires are ignored and even judged. Margaret Atwood created a dystopian society in which all steps of lower classes, mainly women, are controlled by the powerful cast.

The theme of control is highlighted in *The Edible Woman*. After the main character Marian gets engaged, she becomes unable to eat. She is unable to consume food because she is being consumed by her relationship. Additionally, *The Edible Woman* examines a woman's inability to eat side by side with the unhappiness in her relationship.

The novels by Margaret Atwood are struggle against 'sexism', that is, the discrimination against women for being women. 'Sexism' is a belief that the persons of one sex are inferior to the persons of the other sex, that is, women are inferior to men.

Usually, Margaret Atwood selects a nameless, first-person singular narrator 'I' to tell the story. It is clearly observed in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Surfacing*. Both novels are about the nameless protagonist and are conveyed using the present tense. The protagonists of the novels recall past events [2]. In *Surfacing* the protagonist examines the pieces of evidence of her childhood, such as scrapbooks, drawings and photo albums. However, the past events of *The Handmaid's Tale* are reflected in the mind frame of the heroine. Atwood returns to the present signalling the return of the protagonists to the present. As a result, they refuse to be victims and give up the belief that they are powerless. Both novels have an open ending which is a peculiar quality of female narratives and such ending grants the reader with freedom to speculate the future of the protagonist.

All in all, the study of gender and narrative needs further investigation. The novels by Margaret Atwood explore feminist issues in unique ways. She

encourages the self-representation of women and changes the misconceptions of their image in the society. Margaret Atwood's characters are ordinary people which make readers understand the problem of gender discrimination better. Her novels have an unreal setting but very closely represent modern society. The topic of gender narratology has various perspectives for investigation as it covers the most burning issues of the XXI century.

References

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