

University of Pardubice  
Faculty of Arts and Philosophy  
Department of English and American Studies

Woman and Womanhood in Selected Novels by Margaret Atwood  
Kristýna Veselá

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Jméno a příjmení: **Kristýna Veselá**  
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Téma práce: **Žena a ženství ve vybraných románech Margaret Atwood**  
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Vedoucí práce: **PhDr. Ladislav Vít, Ph.D.**  
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### Zásady pro vypracování:

Autorka se ve své práci zaměří na vybranou prózu současné kanadské autorky Margaret Atwood. V teoretické části nastíní relevantní témata feministické a genderové literární kritiky. Na tomto základě provede detailní rozbor vybraných raných děl *Surfacing* (1972) a *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) a srovná je s díly nedávnými, např. *Penelopiad* (2005) a *The Testaments* (2019). Soustředí se bude na zobrazení žen, jejich postavení ve společnosti a na vztah mezi muži a ženami. Vzhledem k tomu, že vybraná próza pokrývá období od 70. let do současnosti, se autorka pokusí zohlednit i možný vývoj a proměnu v zobrazování zvolených témat. V Závěru z předchozích úvah vyvodí obecnější úsudky.

### Seznam doporučené literatury:

#### Primární zdroje:

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998.

Atwood, Margaret. *Surfacing*. Toronto: M & S, 1999.

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Podpis studenta:

Datum:

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## **TITLE**

Woman and Womanhood in Selected Novels by Margaret Atwood

## **ANNOTATION**

The thesis is focused on analyzing women's characters, their roles, and behavior in selected novels by Margaret Atwood, whose masterpieces originated mainly in the second wave of feminism. The aim is to introduce and compare two distinct ways of the portrayal of women who find themselves in oppressed positions by stereotypical conventions in a patriarchal society. The thesis also examines relationships between men and women and explores Atwood's representation of female inferiority and her effort to place these genders on the same level.

## **KEYWORDS**

feminism, second-wave feminism, consciousness-raising, patriarchy, gender roles, victimization

## **NÁZEV PRÁCE**

Žena a ženství ve vybraných dílech Margaret Atwoodové

## **ANOTACE**

Práce se zaměřuje na analýzu ženských postav, jejich rolí a chování ve vybraných dílech Margaret Atwoodové, jejíž vrcholná díla vznikala hlavně v období druhé vlny feminismu. Cílem této práce je představit a porovnat dva odlišné způsoby v zobrazování žen, které jsou utlačovány stereotypními konvencemi v patriarchální společnosti. Práce také zkoumá vztahy mezi muži a ženami, prozkoumává Atwoodové znázornění ženské podřízenosti a její snahu umístit tyto gendery na stejnou úroveň.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

feminismus, druhá vlna feminismu, budování povědomí, patriarchát, genderové role, viktimizace

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	8
<b>1. GENDER ROLES AND SEX WAR</b> .....	10
<b>2. THEORY OF FEMINISM</b> .....	18
<b>2.1 Late 20th-century feminism</b> .....	18
<b>2.2 Feminists, literature, and Margaret Atwood</b> .....	22
<b>3. PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SELECTED ATWOOD’S NOVELS</b>	25
<b>3.1 Woman as a fighter</b> .....	25
<b>3.2 Woman as a monster</b> .....	34
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	43
<b>RESUMÉ</b> .....	45
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	48

## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of time, women have been always pushed to the sidelines and regarded less important despite their crucial role in the human procreation process and bringing up offspring. They are usually seen as persons standing behind the kitchen counter, feeding the kids, or cleaning the dust on the shelves. Their jobs tend to be quite often more challenging but less paid. Somehow even their body construction is the source of their predetermined inferior position in the world of firmly ingrained patriarchal society. Everything that connects to the female gender seems to be less advantageous and less attractive than what connects to men. Even though there were several efforts from the ranks of feminist movements to at least partially overthrow the patriarchy and one-sided politics, we still live in a world that most probably will remain male-oriented forever. Women in U.S. history reached many important milestones, such as the right to vote in the first wave of feminism, the right to an abortion in the second-wave feminism, and the Violence Against Women Act signed during the third wave of feminism. Still, women keep demanding equality and positioning on the same level with their oppressors – the men.

The major purpose of this thesis is to bring near the matter of inferiority of women remaining in the modern world. The first theoretical chapter aims to introduce gender itself and its predestined roles stated by cultural conventions established by society with a patriarchal mindset, which continuously deepens female submissiveness in every aspect of her life. This theory focuses on various features of patriarchy, patriarchal dictionary, sexist ideologies contained in fairy tales, and its limited division of women which subconsciously shape the mind of girls from an early age. Furthermore, important issues, such as objectification of a woman's body and victimization are addressed. Additionally, an interesting point of view on differences between male and female bodies examined by Simone de Beauvoir is put in the context with the question of female inferiority. It should provide a deeper insight into the topics which are considered serious problems in Margaret Atwood's selected novels mentioned later in the analytical part.

The second chapter of the theoretical part offers significances of feminist history in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, which means the period after the second world war when feminism came back into fashion. It briefly outlines the waves of feminism but mainly it focuses on the methodology performed by the second-wave feminists during their activism. It mentions not only classic feminist premises related to the objectification of the female body or sex inequality but also the feuds and controversies inside feminist circles. Later, this chapter deals with the reformation of feminist literary criticism, its new approaches towards female texts, and shortly comments on

the connection of Margaret Atwood to second-wave feminism and her contribution to feminist writing.

The main subject of this thesis is the analysis of the representation of women's characters, their roles, and behavior in novels *Surfacing*, *The Penelopiad*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood. The analytical part comprises two subchapters that examine two ways of the portrayal of women in Atwood's novels.

The first subchapter seeks for female characters as victimized gender burdened by the rules of patriarchally programmed society. It focuses on their everyday life fight using their self-reliance and overcoming these obstacles in order to survive. It analyzes some of the relationships between men and women and how women are viewed by them. Most importantly, it describes the role of the female body in the stories and perception of it by the female protagonists.

The second subchapter examines female characters from their vicious side and explains what led them to behave like monsters. It interconnects their behavior to the circumstances of their life situations and shows how disunited and competitive can female species be. Eventually, the analysis takes into account the evolution of some characters over the years.



# 1. GENDER ROLES AND SEX WAR

Before moving to the actual examination of feminist theory as such, it is crucially important to understand, what precedes the issues feminists tend to address. This chapter examines how physical and psychological differences between men and women predetermine their fates in a patriarchally oriented society. It shows how definite are their gender roles and how naturally patriarchy forms our mind-set without consent or consciousness.

Therefore, it is essential to put the term of gender and sex into context and explain the differences between them. The term gender is very often misinterpreted and blended with the term sex. McDowell points out that “while sex depicts biological differences, gender, in contrast, describes socially constructed characteristics.”<sup>1</sup> This statement can easily raise the question whether the person born as a female or male can be reconstructed if they are not raised according to ordinary stereotypes. Usually, the women are brought up by mothers, who show them every habit they have been taught by their mothers, and so the next generations. These habits tend to be most frequently orientated only to women’s work such as cooking, cleaning, taking care of husband and children.

In 1949, as a reaction to these occurring stereotypes, Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist, brings the idea about femininity, claiming that “no biological, physiological or economic fate determines the figure that the human being presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creative indeterminate between male and eunuch which is described as feminine.”<sup>2</sup> McDowell notes that female members of society continued to explore their frustration and coped with the acceptance of traditionally defined femininity due to Beauvoir's commitment.<sup>3</sup> *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* comments on the concept of female subjectivity:

Feminist theorists have posited the notion of an alienated female subjectivity as the female is determined socially, linguistically, and biologically by patriarchy, through entrance into the symbolic order and recognition of the primacy of the *phallus*. Thus, female subjectivity is occasioned by lack of the biological penis which gives her entry to the *Law of the Father* represented by the symbolic phallus. Woman is therefore positioned oppositionally within discourse, identified by her difference.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell, Linda, *Gender Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 13.

<sup>2</sup> de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 295.

<sup>3</sup> McDowell, *Gender Identity and Place*, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Gamble, Sarah, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (London: Routledge, 2006), 307.

The term *phallus* is derived from Latin, meaning “an image or a model of the penis, especially one representing the power of men to make women pregnant.”<sup>5</sup> It symbolizes the Law of Father and is perceived as an elementary ‘truth’. *Phallogocentrism*, according to *The Routledge Companion*, “represents a form of double-bind to the female subject, who is constituted linguistically and socially by a male lexicon which makes masculinity the measure of normality.”<sup>6</sup> With Beauvoir’s interpretation of women as ‘Others’, and as the title of this remarkable concept suggests - the second sex, she helped feminists question and theorize the ‘naturalness’ of gender distinctions and look at them as variables.

When it comes to theorizing each gender, these topics gradually emerged as a field of study and in the 1960s, women’s studies became a part of the emancipatory feminist theory. Whereas men’s studies academically explore what it means to be a male in modern culture and it mainly examines masculinity, politics, and sexuality, women’s studies are according to *The Routledge Companion*, a theoretical discipline that uses feminist and interdisciplinary approaches to put the lives and perspectives of women at the forefront of research, while exploring social and cultural gender interpretations, such as privilege and oppression systems. It also examines the interactions between authority and gender as they interact and social positions including race and sexual orientation.<sup>7</sup> Lois Tyson stresses that women’s studies sometimes called Gender and Women’s studies, often primarily focus on the position of women in a patriarchal society and their oppression caused by standards established by men.<sup>8</sup>

The phenomenon of patriarchy is defined according to *The Routledge Companion* as “a system ruled over by men, whose authority is enforced through social, political, economic and religious institutions.”<sup>9</sup> In modern times, one could see as a problem with patriarchy the increasingly frequently referred topic of pronouns correctness. Specifically, the usual usage of the pronoun ‘he’ for both sexes. While some people might think that this is just nitpicking and it belongs to the English language conventions, the feminist effort to eradicate this tendency is based on the belief that the male way of looking at life is standardized and taken as a gender uniformity. Tyson submits that as the criterion by which the experience of both sexes is judged, patriarchy uses male experience.<sup>10</sup> As a horrid example, Tyson underlies this statement that in history when testing drugs, they only used men as subjects, but then the same drugs were prescribed also for women without taking into account the different composition of the female

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<sup>5</sup> “Phallus”, Cambridge Dictionary, Accessed on February 27, 2021  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/phallus>

<sup>6</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 273.

<sup>7</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 326.

<sup>8</sup> Tyson, Lois, *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 271.

<sup>10</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 80.

body.<sup>11</sup> Tyson offers a general note to patriarchy when stating that it can be defined “as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles.”<sup>12</sup>

Patriarchy as such lies in the belief that men are superior and women are born as inferior species, which goes along with the term sexism. According to Tyson, these assumptions have begun to be held to keep women helpless by refusing them educational opportunities to achieve physical, political, and social strength, to preserve the male dominance in positions of economic, political, and social power. Thus, it is clear that the role of women as inferior kind has been formed culturally by a patriarchal society, and in no way biologically.<sup>13</sup>

According to *The Routledge Companion*, “patriarchy often operates at the level of the stereotype in order to categorize the roles and characteristics of women which are viewed as essentially different from those of men.”<sup>14</sup> On this subject, it is no news that women and men are frequently not equal in terms of salary conditions when men are paid more than women for the same job, and that there is little opportunity for women to reach high positions in the job due to the possibility of getting pregnant and therefore being unreliable in performing the job for the required period. There are many other ways in which this male dominance and power are constructed and implemented in developed countries: e.g. by legal society. For example, the structure in the tax and social security programs. McDowell gives an example of women’s legal status in Britain throughout the nineteenth century when women’s life and property lied in the hands of their fathers or husbands until the Married Women’s Property Act was adopted in 1885. Moreover, women could not legally undergo an abortion until 1967 and until the 1970s, they did not obtain access to mortgage financing without a male guarantor.<sup>15</sup>

When addressing the issue of stereotyping, McDowell explains that society programmed as patriarchal works on the basis of a binary gender distinction and the belief that women have their specific place when it comes to public and private life. She submits the table of the social construction of gender distinctions, which plays a critical role in such society:<sup>16</sup>

<i>The masculine</i>	<i>The feminine</i>
Public	Private
Outside	Inside
Work	Home
Work	Leisure/pleasure
Production	Consumption
Independence	Dependence
Power	Lack of Power <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 81

<sup>12</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 81.

<sup>13</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 306.

<sup>15</sup> McDowell, *Gender Identity and Place*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> McDowell, *Gender Identity and Place*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> McDowell, *Gender Identity and Place*, 12.

Traditional gender roles see men as strong, capable, competitive, and less openly expressing feelings and emotions. Contrarily, women are seen as weak, powerless, emotional, and with maternal instincts. Tyson explains that this is founded on biological distinctions between men and women, as are considered part of our unchanging nature.<sup>18</sup> She illustrates the instance of the word *hysteria* “which derives from the Greek word for womb (hystera) and refers to psychological disorders deemed peculiar to women and characterized by overemotional, extremely irrational behavior.”<sup>19</sup> It is rather a patriarchal premise that women suffer from hysteria and what concerns men, this behavior would be overlooked or given a different, less hurtful name, e.g. shortness of temper. Male programming also refers to specific situations when men do not behave male enough. Under the integrity of manhood, actions prohibited to men are called “womanish”, i.e. inferior.<sup>20</sup> So, from a patriarchal point of view, female behavior is considered bad and worthy of ridicule. It is apparent from the vulgar language in the male context that the worst attack the man can experience is to be compared to a woman or regarded feminine by his male peers. As an instance, Tyson gives a word “sissy”, which means “cowardly” and “feminine”, and is very similar to the word “sister”. The same, of course, applies to homosexuality, and to be a “real man” in patriarchal culture requires to look at this behavior as feminine.<sup>21</sup> Along with the male language mannerisms, the labeling can be also mentioned. For example, when a woman is inclined to promiscuity, a man would unflatteringly call her a *whore* or a *slut*. On the contrary, when a man sleeps with more women, he would be called with a more positive word *stud*.<sup>22</sup> This sexist behavior goes along with *misogynist* attitudes and it denotes how patriarchal society works on a double meter and puts men in a more beneficial position. Misogyny, according to *Cambridge Dictionary*, means “feelings of hating women, or the belief that men are much better than women.”<sup>23</sup>

It is obvious that patriarchal programming constantly undermines women’s self-esteem and emphasizes the attributes which women lack in contrast to men, and so fosters submissiveness in them. Since the beginning of time, little girls have been told fairy tales full of stereotypes where the story revolves around princesses rescued by princes. These fairytales can be an excellent illustration of how patriarchal programming shapes our minds. Feminists have been concerned with various fairy tales of this kind since their patriarchal features are showing destructive roles of women as incapable of rescuing themselves. As a habit, these

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<sup>18</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 81.

<sup>19</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 81.

<sup>20</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 84.

<sup>21</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 84.

<sup>22</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> “Misogyny“, Cambridge Dictionary, Accessed on February 25, 2021  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/misogyny>

women must be physically attractive and good to be worthy of salvation by charming princes. The essence in these stories is at the core “instruction” for little girls that if they behave well, the “right” conduct will be rewarded with marriage and happy life ever after, as it was the only desirable profit for girls. However, Tyson argues that not only women but also men are influenced by these stories when they are expected to be heroic, wealthy rescuers and providers of women’s happiness.<sup>24</sup> Peculiarly, this most harmless activity such as writing and reading fairy tales can show in what ways is women’s mindset formed and reconstructed from a young age without their knowledge. “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, “Cinderella”, and “Sleeping Beauty” are exemplary stories, where divergent types of main female characters are presented and stereotyped by sexist ideology offering a limited division of women. On the one side, there are beautiful, chaste, innocent, angelic “good girls” who are rescued from unpleasant life situations by charming men who take them off to get them married. Tyson notes that “the plot thus implies that marriage to the right man is a guarantee of happiness and the proper reward for a right-minded young woman.”<sup>25</sup> On the other side, there are “bad girls”, violent, jealous, and monstrous characters whose destinies are sealed from the beginning. Tyson adds that “these characterizations imply that if a woman does not accept her patriarchal gender role, then the only role left her is that of a monster.”<sup>26</sup>

The general division of women as “good girls” and “bad girls” easily shows how was the sexist ideology fed by men’s desires. It could be argued that as good girls they imagine their good, decent wives, who take care of their children, cook them dinner and watch TV with them. In other words, the saints’ ones who evoke the feeling that they need to be dependent on someone of male sex whose approval for survival is requested. This pattern of the “good girl” also applies to the daughter role and lies in the belief that she has to perform a somewhat prosperous role and is expected to please others. Nevertheless, along with this notion comes the sense of emptiness and delusional feeling of having to be likable.

Tyson on the countersubject of the “bad girls” group explains:

According to a patriarchal ideology in full force through the 1950s, versions of which are still with us today, “bad girls” violate patriarchal sexual norms in some way: they’re sexually forward in appearance or behavior, or they have multiple sexual partners. Men sleep with “bad girls,” but they don’t marry them. “Bad girls” are used and then discarded because they don’t deserve better, and they probably don’t even expect better. They’re not good enough to bear a man’s name or his legitimate children. That role is appropriate only for a properly submissive “good girl.” The “good girl” is rewarded for her behavior by being placed on a pedestal by patriarchal culture.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 85.

<sup>26</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 86.

As de Beauvoir adds the patriarchal civilization has always been benevolent for male sexual freedom in contrast to women, who had to be committed to chastity and were confined to marriage.<sup>28</sup> She clarifies:

From primitive times to our own, intercourse has always been a 'service' for which the male thanks the woman by giving her presents or assuring her maintenance but to serve is to give oneself a master, there is no reciprocity in this relation. The nature of marriage, as well as the existence of prostitutes, is the proof: woman gives herself, man pays her and takes her. Affairs with servant girls have always been tolerated, whereas the middle-class woman gives herself to a chauffeur or a gardener loses caste.<sup>29</sup>

As for the sexual interaction between man and woman, it is a topic that can be comprehensively discussed from myriad various points of view. For better understanding the latter issue addressed in the analytical part, it is appropriate to deal with this topic from the female point of view. The male and female body is constructed and considered completely different. The same applies to their eroticism. Physiological constructions of those bodies contribute to female submissiveness, and so the most burning matter of seeing the female body as a *sexual object* arises.

Simone de Beauvoir examines it at a very detailed and explicit level. She explains that male eroticism functions on a relatively simple basis as well as his body transition. For a man, erotic pleasure lies in the objectification of something desirable. Usually, he directs his desires towards another person, commonly a woman. Expression of this need is his erection and with his penis, hands, mouth, and whole-body he can fully reach out to his partner while he moves and stays independent at the focus of the action as the *subject* in contrast to the object. Therefore, the feminine flesh as the object becomes prey for him and he obtains the desirable outcome of complete relief and getting rid of unpleasant secretions through the climax. He combines his contribution to the species with his personal pleasure.<sup>30</sup>

According to de Beauvoir, a woman's sexual stimulation prevails in clitoral orgasm, which is like the male one reached by kind of mechanical manner, although it is not directly part of the common coition, and it does not play any role in procreation. The woman is always fertilized through her vagina, which is mostly a place for male sexual excitement and stimulation, so in a certain sense, the act of coition and fertilization always comprise a kind of violation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 369.

<sup>29</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 369.

<sup>30</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 366.

<sup>31</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 367.

De Beauvoir explains that “formerly it was by a real or simulated rape that a woman was torn from her childhood to the universe and hurled into wifehood, it remains an act of violence that changes a girl into a woman, we still speak of ‘taking’ a girl’s virginity, her flower or ‘breaking’ her maidenhead.”<sup>32</sup> In effect, the usual sexual act brings women into a state of dependence on the man. As in most species, it is the male who has the violent position whereas the female submits to his embrace. She can be taken at any moment, but only in a state of erection can he take her. Sexual intercourse does not occur without the approval of the male, and its inevitable termination is male gratification. Nevertheless, the fertilization of a woman does not lead to her pleasure and she cannot even tell if that happened. The fertilization suggests the completion of the sexual act and while the male’s deal is here ended, the woman’s service begins. Subsequently, she is exposed to the painful process of pregnancy, giving birth, and lactation.<sup>33</sup> With these powers, woman evolves into the most useful tool for humankind and also man’s enjoyment.

For a woman who enjoys pleasing a man sexually, who is aware of her physical attractiveness, loves her body, and perceives herself as an erotic object for men, pregnancy can get frustrated. She can feel deformed, ugly, and incapable of being seen as attractive.<sup>34</sup> She feels threatened by her own body ruining her self-esteem and takes it as a curse. This feeling can be eligible. Iris Marion Young points out that suddenly, pregnancy culturally desexualizes her and liberates her from the sexual gaze that used to define and instrumentalize her when she was not pregnant yet. <sup>35</sup> “The look focusing on her belly is one not of desire, but of recognition. [...] Indeed, in this society, which still often narrows women’s possibilities to motherhood, the pregnant woman often finds herself looked at with approval.”<sup>36</sup>

To some extent, the body can be turned into a woman’s enemy or obstacle. Her sex organ is mysterious, it is hard to understand, it bleeds each month, it embarrasses her in the underwear stained by fluids that passively leave her body, unlike men who can normally consciously and intentionally control their physical processes. The feeling of being a piece of flesh or prey is related to the fact that the female body makes men selfish lovers or even dangerous animals. Either she is lying on the bed waiting for a man’s climax while trying to encourage him with sighs ignoring her own yearnings or she is taken without consent painfully,

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<sup>32</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 367.

<sup>33</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 368.

<sup>34</sup> de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 484.

<sup>35</sup> Young, Iris M., *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2005), 54.

<sup>36</sup> Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, 54.

disgracefully, having her physical shell humiliated and left like an empty torso. These aspects suggest female omnipresent passivity.

In these conditions, when a woman is limited in her sexual freedom and urges or violated sexually, there is no doubt about the fact, that in a certain way, she gets victimized. The term ‘to victimize’ someone is defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as “to treat someone in an intentionally unfair way, especially because of their race, sex, beliefs, etc.”<sup>37</sup> Sexual violence performed by men on women has been always present and in modern times we can encounter topics related to sexual harassment in the workplace or rapes at home. Although some measurements and laws against these violent acts have been adopted, Tyson argues that “public awareness and willingness to support the victims of such mistreatment still lag far behind the legislation. For example, there is the lingering belief that the victim must somehow be responsible”<sup>38</sup> She presents several questions: “‘How low-cut was her dress?’, ‘Did she aggravate her husband before he beat her?’”<sup>39</sup> Tyson calls this victim-blaming when it is believed that woman gets into trouble on account of her inappropriate behavior and not gender.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “Victimize”, Cambridge Dictionary, Accessed on February 25, 2021  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/victimize>

<sup>38</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 123.

<sup>39</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 123.

<sup>40</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 123.



## 2. THEORY OF FEMINISM

### 2.1 Late 20th-century feminism

This subchapter focuses on the waves of 20<sup>th</sup>-century feminism and outlines its theory. It describes not only how were female movements divided due to their differences, but also in what way they were united. The following quote from the philosophy book *Gender Trouble* written by Judith Butler helps to open this subchapter about the feminist premises:

For feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women. This has seemed obviously important considering the pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all. Recently, this prevailing conception of the relation between feminist theory and politics has come under challenge from within feminist discourse.<sup>41</sup>

Feminism, as both an analytical field and a political movement, is a complex subject matter rich in a number of ideologies with various approaches and many perspectives. McDowell states on feminist scholarship that generally, its key aim is “to demonstrate the construction and significance of sexual differentiation as a key organizing principle and axis of social power, as well as a crucial part of the constitution of subjectivity, of an individual's sense of their self-identity as a sexed and gendered person.”<sup>42</sup>

After gaining some sense of liberation thanks to the right to vote gained in 1920, in the first-wave period, feminism was pushed into seclusion after World War II. Another impulse began to emerge with the idea of Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), who argued that feminist issues ostensibly seemed to be resolved and introduced new topics about discrimination against women, social inequality, and persisting stereotypical status of women. *The Routledge Companion* brings near the concept of *The Feminine Mystique*, in which Friedan argues:

the mystique derived from psychoanalysis a simplistic notion of femininity as essentially passive and was perpetuated through sociological arguments that women be set completely different educational and social goals from men. Coerced by seductive media images and limited by their lack of useful training, millions of white middle-class women absorbed themselves in home, husband, and children, becoming trapped in what Friedan somewhat drastically termed a ‘comfortable concentration camp’.<sup>43</sup>

Margaret Walters in *Feminism: A very short introduction* introduces Betty Friedan's background and states that she belonged amongst radical feminists aware of social inequalities

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<sup>41</sup> Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1990), 2.

<sup>42</sup> McDowell, *Gender Identity and Place*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 198.

and for that reason, in 1966, she became a founder member of NOW, the National Organization of Women in order to gather women in the mainstream movement for gender equality.<sup>44</sup> In the 1970s, this step was one of the starting stages of the period when second-wave feminism was initiated.

According to Sue Thornham, the second wave of feminism was undoubtedly established on a more collective and revolutionary approach in contrast to the first wave emphasizing mainly earlier feminist writing and activism. It carried feminist consciousness supported with radical activism even though it was also symbolic with certain sorts of internal divergences. Whilst NOW, The National Organization for Women was formed based on Equal Rights tradition and anti-sex discrimination as a reaction to the misstep of America's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Women's Liberation Movement, a political alignment that emerged in the late 1960s as a non-national organization, presented its assertions revolving fundamentally around the progressive community's infrastructure, the underground press, and free universities.<sup>45</sup> They said that cultural, psychological, and social equality were all essential for women to rise above their status as second-class citizens in their societies.

Second-wave feminism worked on the basis of a principal tactic called 'consciousness-raising' regarded as a method for women to build a mutual awareness of oppression. *The Routledge Companion* further describes its credo 'the personal is political' and explains that "the belief was that, far from each story being individual, common patterns would emerge, thus demonstrating that female experience, rather than being exclusive to the individual, was in fact rooted in a wider system of sex inequality."<sup>46</sup>

As reported by Fiona Carson, one of the main concerns of the 1970s second-wave feminism movement was unfair stereotyping and perceiving women as objects of the male gaze in the aesthetics of both high art and mass culture. The most well-remembered visual gestures targeted visible images of the beauty industry or patriarchal ways of objectification. The first public demonstration held by the Women's Liberation Movement took place in September 1968. The sexist paraphernalia of femininity and 'objects torturing ladies' (such as panties, false eyelashes, curlers, wigs, and modeling magazines) were trashed by feminist protesters at the Miss America beauty competition to criticize a regime that assessed female worth by appearance – and so the myth of bra-burning originated.<sup>47</sup>

What sometimes divided opinions within these movements were differences in race, class privileges, and sexual orientation. Walters introduces another feminist activist bell hooks,

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<sup>44</sup> Walters, Margaret, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 102.

<sup>45</sup> Thornham, Sue, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 25-26.

<sup>46</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 174.

<sup>47</sup> Carson, Fiona, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 94-95.

who claimed that “white women behaved as if the movement belonged to them”<sup>48</sup> and acted racist since the profoundly interconnected topics of race and class have been consistently neglected. She highlights that they were asserting generally known ‘oppression’ of women at the expense of ignoring real inequalities in the American feminist society. Some of the conferences unintentionally showed painful truth. Sisterhood, as suggested in *The Routledge Companion*, “conveys the implicit assumption that all women have certain areas of experience in common on which a sense of identification can be founded.”<sup>49</sup> Sisterhoods are strong, but it is easy to forget that the bond between sisters can be complicated. Splits and disputes were unavoidable. For example, in terms of consciousness-raising, some women argued that this was best suited to skilled middle-class and upper-class women who could achieve power over communities through their articulacy, or proficiency in this core practice.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, *The Routledge Companion* talks about lesbian feminism. Lesbian feminists argued that lesbianism was a political choice over desire and that lesbians were marginalized rather than other women. As a result, a hierarchy of views and perspectives emerged, with political lesbianism being viewed as a single ‘correct’ feminist identity. This claim supported the fact that lesbianism, in particular, rejects heterosexuality and effectively detaches from the final path to female subordination - sexual dominance. The radical response to this argument ranged from separatist calls to an understanding of the value of not excluding straight women.<sup>51</sup>

However, Carson claims that all feminists were united in concerns about how “women’s bodies are controlled within a patriarchal system, which regulates women’s access to such services like contraception and abortion, while at the same time idealized forms of their bodies are objectified, by various means, for male consumption and sexual delectation.”<sup>52</sup> The main trouble which necessarily needed to be highlighted was male violence, the actual act of rape, and another male creation, a legitimate rape – pornography. Susan Brownmiller published a complex study of rape *Against Our Will*. Walters points out that it “deconstructed the centuries-old male ‘myth of the heroic rapist’, and coined a slogan that was rapidly picked up by other feminists: ‘pornography is the theory and rape the practice’.”<sup>53</sup> Brownmiller in her book stated:

There can be no “equality” in porn, no female equivalent, no turning of the tables in the name of bawdy fun. Pornography, like rape, is a male invention, designed to dehumanize women, to reduce the female to an object of sexual access, not to free sensuality from moralistic or parental inhibition. The staple of porn will

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<sup>48</sup> Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, 105.

<sup>49</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 298.

<sup>50</sup> Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, 114.

<sup>51</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 238.

<sup>52</sup> Carson, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 94.

<sup>53</sup> Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, 114.

always be the naked female body, breasts and genitals exposed, because as man devised it, her naked body is the female's "shame," her private parts the private property of man, while his are the ancient, holy, universal, patriarchal instrument of his power, his rule by force over her.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, Walters adds on the topic of rape that regrettably, some later feminists twisted this desperately needed insistence that rape is a dangerous and violent offense. She, for example, mentions Catherine McKinnon, for whom "a woman is always, indeed almost by definition, a victim. To be about to be raped is to be gender female in the process of going about life as usual."<sup>55</sup>

Speaking of later feminists, in the 1990s, other waves of feminism are dated. Benjamin Brabon talks about the third-wave feminism that spoke to younger women who consider their beliefs standing based on second-wave feminism, however, this period is trying to be open for every woman, no matter her political or cultural background. Its features are embracing diversity and individualism and engagement within the popular culture.<sup>56</sup> The underground punk movement called Riot Grrrls is related to this wave, fighting rape, domestic abuse, and racism while at the same time, its message seems to be misinterpreted and faded by the new period of 'Girl Power' slogan which was coined by freshly emerging band Spice Girls, who "convey an implicit rejection of many of the tenets popularly identified with second-wave feminism, such as the notion that the beauty and fashion industry contributes to women's objectification, and attempts to create alternatives to patriarchal power constructs."<sup>57</sup> This moment starts to blend third-wave feminism into the new notion of feminist concept, called postfeminism. *The Routledge Companion* claims that:

[...] the alignment of postfeminism with the theory is problematic. Instead, they use the term in connection with a distinct group of mostly young British and American feminists who have attacked feminism in its present form as inadequate to address the concerns and experiences of women today. Indeed, this is the context in which the term itself was coined, and is, therefore, the one in which it is most correctly used. [...] Generally, they support an individualistic, liberal agenda rather than a collective and political one, on which grounds their detractors frequently attack them for being pawns of a conservative 'backlash' against feminism, which seeks to limit its effectiveness.<sup>58</sup>

According to Brabon, the second wave's emphasis on women's victimhood as a unifying political factor is now seen as counterproductive and should be replaced by "power feminism,"

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<sup>54</sup> Brownmiller, Susan, *Against Our Will* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 394.

<sup>55</sup> Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*, 114.

<sup>56</sup> Brabon, Benjamin A. & Genz, Stephanie, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2009), 156.

<sup>57</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 212.

<sup>58</sup> Gamble, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 277-278.

which is “unapologetically sexual,” “free-thinking,” “pleasure-loving,” and “self-assertive.”<sup>59</sup> Since then the TV female characters such as Carrie Bradshaw, Ally McBeal, and Bridget Jones begin to occur.

## 2.2 Feminists, literature, and Margaret Atwood

The theory of this subchapter includes the connection of the second wave feminism period with the feminist literature and explains the phenomenon of seeing feminism as a literacy form. It brings near the fact that feminists take their writings as a form of trying to hunt out the stereotypes. At the end of this subchapter, there will be an introduction of Margaret Atwood as a feminist writer, and her significant contribution to feminist work in the Canadian context.

According to Jill Lebihan, in the 1960s, and more broadly in the 1970s and 1980s, women teachers and students at universities started to categorically incorporate feminist-oriented approaches to texts as the expression of second-wave feminism. Since there was a lack of female-authored texts in the syllabus, feminists based their critical interest on depictions of women in male-authored canonical books. This style of critique remains popular, and it often takes the form of tracking down chauvinistic attitudes towards women and using them to describe the forms in which these limited cultural representations construct social inequality. Their focus aims at the limiting representation of women as sexual objects, rather than political subjects, which creates a definite notion of womanhood. Feminist critics claimed that canonical texts habitually depicted women as either virgins or whores. The whores, for the most part, met their demise, while the virgins ended up in marriage.

Feminist consciousness-raising through the revision of classic works of literature was a vital step towards the development of a modern critical tradition. Still, to truly transform canonical curricula, rereading the same, old, tired texts was not enough. In order to reclaim female, long-forgotten and underrated writing, feminists started to focus on texts written by women and create principles according to which those texts will be judged or examined in the future.<sup>60</sup> This process of examining female writing following new criteria led to the formation of so-called *gynocritics*, which is defined in *The Routledge Companion* as “a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories.”<sup>61</sup>

Despite the newly introduced attitudes and practices, a group of lesbian feminists had difficulties with their writing being acknowledged as a feminist one. Lesbians who wrote openly

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<sup>59</sup> Brabon & Genz, *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*, 64.

<sup>60</sup> Lebihan, J., *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 103-104.

<sup>61</sup> Lebihan, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 105.

about their sexuality and eroticism felt excluded by feminist groups. Owing to the homophobic approaches dominating in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, feminists kept rejecting lesbian practices, which had a crucial impact on the means of representation accessible for queer women. In this manner, also the criticism of lesbian art production was influenced. As a result, lesbian writers inclined to the symbolism to not being so easily recognized. Hence, critics agreed that there is a need to acquire criteria for a lesbian subgenre as well to prevent women's writing be labeled lesbian.<sup>62</sup>

On this topic, Tyson concludes that:

Because feminist issues range so widely across cultural, social, political, and psychological categories, feminist literary criticism is wide-ranging, too. Whatever kind of analysis is undertaken, however, the ultimate goal of feminist criticism is to increase our understanding of women's experience, both in the past and present and promote our appreciation of women's value in the world.<sup>63</sup>

Margaret Atwood is one of the most significant feminist writers in second-wave feminism. The similar course of Canadian feminist activism as in America performed by both, liberal and radical movement helped her not only to aim the themes of her novels at common feminist struggles but also her Canadian roots enabled her to engage also political circumstances, aspects of Canadian nationalism, identity, and environmentalism.

Fiona Tolan states that "second-wave feminism is understood as an umbrella term that usefully incorporates a wide variety of related but diverse and occasionally contradictory discourses, centering on the subjects of gender, femininity, and sexuality."<sup>64</sup> Second-wave feminism's expansive emphasis corresponds to Atwood's own political range. Although Atwood herself refused to be dragged into the traditional feminist club, her work is still intensively analyzed from a feminist point of view. Since the features of the 'real' second-wave feminism remain still unclear, there is a plethora of ways by which can be these works examined.<sup>65</sup> After all, Atwood works with the common feminist topics, such as gender predetermination, female body objectification, and oppression of women, yet she always adds some unique aspect to it. To conclude the characteristics of Atwood's work, Tolan comments on the peculiarity of it:

A theory such as feminism, which is simultaneously political, popular, and academic, immediately negotiates sites of interaction with a myriad of alternative discourses. Consequently, the feminism to be read in Atwood's novels is not the feminism that is to be discovered in feminist textbooks.

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<sup>62</sup> Lebihan, *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, 109.

<sup>63</sup> Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 123.

<sup>64</sup> Tolan, Fiona, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*. (New York: Rodopi B.V., 2007), 2.

<sup>65</sup> Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, 2-3.

Therefore, it is to be assumed that the novelist has generated a new and original contribution to feminist discourse.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, 3.

### 3. PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SELECTED ATWOOD'S NOVELS

The analytical chapter introduces two ways how women are depicted in four selected novels by Margaret Atwood – *Surfacing* (1972), *The Penelopiad* (2005), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and *The Testaments* (2019). It focuses on diverse groups of women to show how distinct and disunited these females can be and what attributes they gain due to the circumstances of their life situations.

The first subchapter examines female characters who are portrayed as a victimized gender burdened by the rules established by a patriarchal society. Besides, it provides an examination of women's reactions to their inevitable destinies. The second subchapter considers what negative attributes women can acquire due to male regulations in order to be 'good girls'. The whole chapter also deals with the matter of ways of perceiving the female body and the imaginary 'war of genders' associated with it.

#### 3.1 Woman as a fighter

Margaret Atwood chooses ordinary women for her works and depicts them in everyday life situations with which they deal. However, the situations are not trivial at their core. Although these characters are no threat in any way, they are often found in a position where their lives are complicated and controlled by burdensome rules established by male society. Those rules often oppress them economically, politically, socially, and psychologically and therefore, they become tied up and victimized, most frequently through silence and hopelessness. Consequently, the protagonists are forced to manage obstacles in front of them and fight in everyday life by using their self-reliance for the sake of surviving another day in an uncompromising society.

Women in Atwood's novels are able to realize they are victimized, disadvantaged and inferior to men and try to take fate into their own hands. In Sukhwinder Kaur's words, "luckily for Atwood's protagonists, the rediscovery of their voice empowers their survival."<sup>67</sup> It is necessary to say that even though heroines are not extraordinary, Atwood puts them into uncommon and unenviable situations.

In *Surfacing*, she leaves the main protagonist, who narrates the story, nameless to emphasize the feeling of her alienation from society. This novel addresses the issue of coping with the narrator's past and her unresolved wrongs. She is trying to drive away remorse and

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<sup>67</sup> Kaur, Sukhwinder. "Representation of Women in the Work of Margaret Atwood," *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education* 16, no.1 (January 2019): 513.



defends her decisions. She remembers how she was manipulated by the husband and forced to have a baby she did not want. For this reason, she is presented as a victim and survivor.

The next paragraph shows the female protagonist's limitation in making her own life decisions and her husband's vision of forming his offspring. It demonstrates complete exploitation of womanhood for male accomplishments and ignorance of woman's feelings:

But I couldn't have brought the child here, I never identified it as mine; I didn't name it before it was born even, the way you're supposed to. It was my husband's, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator. He measured everything he would let me eat, he was feeding it on me, he wanted a replica of himself; after it was born, I was no more use. I couldn't prove it though, he was clever: he kept saying he loved me.<sup>68</sup>

A fairly different type of female issue is in *The Penelopiad*, the reinterpretation of the legendary events of the *Odyssey*, where Atwood tells the story through Penelope and the Maids. Despite the distinction from other novels, women here also face psychological and social pressures. The main theme revolves around the competition between women, especially over male sexual attention. Penelope often compares herself to beautiful Helen since this society values women only for beauty. She feels inferior, even surrounded just by women. Penelope is a faithful and exemplary wife, who most of the time struggles with either her loneliness due to her husband Odysseus' abandonment or fights for her place in the female part of his family. The extract implies her silent fight with the feelings of insecurity and inadequacy due to established male social values and how she imagines ideal scenarios:

I had such a clear picture in my mind—Odysseus returning, and me—with womanly modesty—revealing to him how well I had done at what was usually considered a man's business. On his behalf, of course. Always for him. How his face would shine with pleasure! How pleased he would be with me! 'You're worth a thousand Helens,' he would say.<sup>69</sup>

Another genre in which Atwood escalates her work is a dystopian novel. According to Sharon R. Wilson, the explanation of the term dystopia means "a nightmare, the ultimate flawed world or 'a society worse than the existing one.'"<sup>70</sup> Atwood points out that the book involves events that have already occurred in history, even though she refers to *The Handmaid's Tale* as speculative fiction.<sup>71</sup> Wilson adds that "women's dystopian fiction is about how dystopia creates new worlds, establishes genre, and critique gender roles, traditions, and values."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (Toronto: M & S, 1999), 22.

<sup>69</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (New York: Canongate, 2005), 51.

<sup>70</sup> Sharon R. Wilson, *Women's Utopian and Dystopian Fiction* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 1.

<sup>71</sup> Wilson, *Women's Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> Wilson, *Women's Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, 2.

Offred, the main female protagonist in the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* experiences much more nightmarish fates since she tries to survive every day in the theocratic regime. Her real name June was deleted by the government system of Gilead. The 'of' at the beginning of her new name Offred signifies a preposition of possession and 'Fred' implies the name of the commander. Thus, already her name itself bespeaks manipulation and control by a superior male power. The patriarchal system is displayed here in multiple ways. Women are divided into social groups according to their 'utility' and distinguished by colors of the clothes:

[...] Wives wear the blue of purity, from the Virgin Mary, the Handmaids wear red, from the blood of parturition, but also from Mary Magdalene. Also, red is easier to see if you happen to be fleeing. The wives of men lower in the social scale are called Econowives, and wear stripes.<sup>73</sup>

The crucial theme of this story resonates around fertility. Before June becomes Offred, she is robbed of her own identity, dignity, and most importantly freedom. Gilead made her a concubine alias a handmaid which means staying in a privileged family and providing a baby to the 'less fortunate'. Offred's only worth exists in her biological function, she is "two viable ovaries."<sup>74</sup> Fertility, pregnancy, and the process of giving birth is the source of the power of handmaids. They are motivated and perceived as precious objects. Nonetheless, the handmaids cannot reach any sense of happiness at all because babies are taken from them after breastfeeding is no more needed. Yet they get some 'treat' in a form of a more certain future. Following extracts demonstrates, similarly as in *Surfacing*, a kind of birth control, but in this case for 'higher purposes':

She'll be allowed to nurse the baby, for a few months, they believe in mother's milk. After that she'll be transferred, to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs a turn. But she'll never be sent to the Colonies, she'll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward.<sup>75</sup>

In *The Testaments*, which is a sequel to the previous novel, the most significant character is Aunt Lydia. She occurred in *The Handmaid's Tale* as an extremely capable brainwasher of maids and powerful speaker with a big influence on Offred's thinking. She was a great manipulator from the ranks of female domination and used utilitarianism in order to survive. After twenty-five years, in *The Testaments*, there are several female narrators with completely different social statuses. One of them is Aunt Lydia. She is perceived as a villain in *The Handmaid's Tale*, however, in its sequel, Atwood brings to light the cause of Lydia's atrocious

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<sup>73</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 15.

<sup>74</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 135.

<sup>75</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 128.

actions by telling her backstory through a diary. In substance, Lydia undergoes a great deal of sacrifice for survival when agreed to co-create Gilead and become a part of it:

What good is it to throw yourself in front of a steamroller out of moral principles and then be crushed flat like a sock emptied of its foot? Better to fade into the crowd, the piously-praising, unctuous, hate-mongering crowd. Better to hurl rocks than have them hurled at you. Or better for your chances of staying alive.<sup>76</sup>

As a result of her decision, she faces a similar loss of her previous identity, same as June does but in a different sense:

I've become swollen with power, true, but also nebulous with it—formless, shape-shifting. I am everywhere and nowhere. [...] How can I regain myself? How to shrink back to my normal size, the size of an ordinary woman?<sup>77</sup>

It is impossible to omit the typical feminist features while analyzing Atwood's novels when all of them contain a patriarchal agenda and strong concept of traditional gender roles even though she sometimes strives to break them characteristically.

Men in Atwood's novels are most of the time 'the men'. They usually fulfill the most horrible notion of male sex and are displayed as either ignorant, polygamists, chauvinists, manipulators, or tormentors. Their priorities consist of materiality, sexual needs, and power.

Atwood depicts men as beings who prevent women from growth and self-realization and as authoritarians, who do not support women's dreams and tend to dictate to them what to do. She often emphasizes the verbal vulgarism used by men on women to point out the imaginary war between sexes and to burst out a discussion. As for the sex war, women are often found in a position where they lose their dignity because of male lust or selfishness and become only a shell that men play with.

In *Surfacing*, there is the narrator's friend Anna and her husband Dave, who have a disturbingly unhealthy relationship. In one scene, Dave commands Anna to take her clothes off for the movie which he shoots with his camera. Anna is offended and humiliated because Dave is insisting and getting aggressive:

"Come on, we need a naked lady with big tits and a big ass," [...] "It's token resistance," David said, "she wants to, she's an exhibitionist at heart. She likes her lush bod, don't you? Even if she is getting too fat."<sup>78</sup>

This line suggests that Dave has no respect for Anna and his sexist tendencies lead to rudeness and capability of humiliating his wife in front of his friends. However, Anna obeys and complies. "All right,' Anna said under its coercion, 'you shmuck bastard, God damn you!'"<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments* (London: Vintage Publishing, 2019), 161.

<sup>77</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 35.

<sup>78</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing*, 98

<sup>79</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing*, 98

Atwood interprets male characters as agents of both psychological and physical violence. Females suffer and gradually silently battle their victim status. Elaheh Soofastaei suggests that Atwood utilizes characters in her novels to “battle victimization by ‘raising consciousnesses’. If one were to admit all victimization, one could not stay alive. Victimization can be decreased by using power and in Atwood’s novels only infrequently gets the form of physical strength and is never introduced as a fight between good and evil.”<sup>80</sup>

Another example of the inferior position of women is when Anna confesses that she must never show up around Dave without makeup and has to apply it every morning before he gets up: “‘God,’ she said, ‘what’m I going to do? I forgot my makeup, he’ll kill me’.”<sup>81</sup> Anna also admits nightly rapes by Dave but does not seem like doing something about it:

He likes to make me cry because he can't do it himself. It's not just that (makeup); it's something for him to use. He watches me all the time, he waits for excuses. Then either he won't screw at all or he slams it in so hard it hurts.<sup>82</sup>

When it comes to brutal treatment towards women, while heroine Penelope ‘only’ fights for her individuality and authority with other women, there is a different group of female characters who are displayed to violence - the twelve Maids. As they help in events of Penelope’s plot to spy on the Suitors and say bad things about Odysseus while he is absent, they sometimes fall in love with them, but in many cases get victimized by being raped. The twelve Maids are here as the symbol for sexual objects and because of their lower-class status, they are entirely unprotected from it and the Suitors never get punished. Contrary to Penelope, the Maids are not only psychologically violated, but also physically. Eventually, they are even slaughtered by male domination and presented as victims, who lost their fight:

Twelve of us. Twelve moon-shaped bums, twelve yummy mouths, twenty-four feather-pillow tits, and best of all, twenty-four twitching feet. Remember us? Of course, you do! We brought the water for you to wash your hands, we bathed your feet, we rinsed your laundry, we oiled your shoulders, we laughed at your jokes, we ground your corn, we turned down your cosy bed. You roped us in, you strung us up, you left us dangling like clothes on a line.<sup>83</sup>

In a satiric way, Atwood engages the idea of justice at the modern Trial, where even though, the Maids are giving exact details about their raping, the judge takes a male-focused side and claim the Maids were just being ‘rude’ – a classic example of victimization: “*Judge*: ‘I understand they were frequently impertinent’.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Soofastaei, Elaheh & Mirenayat, Sayyed Ali. “Politics, Violence, and Victimization in Margaret Atwood’s Selected Novels,” *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 50. (March 2015): 88.

<sup>81</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing*, 88

<sup>82</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing*, 89

<sup>83</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 103.

<sup>84</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 97.

Similarly, in a strictly hierarchical society of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale*, men have extremely chauvinistic attitudes. Women lack any kind of human rights and represent enslavement. Women are fired from their work and their bank accounts are drained by Gileadean revolutionaries to show male superior power:

“They’ve frozen them,” she said. “Mine too. The collective’s too. Any account with an F on it instead of an M. All they needed to do is push a few buttons. We’re cut off.”<sup>85</sup>

The next dialogue demonstrates the fact, that despite having a higher social status of Commander’s Wife, also Serena Joy is oppressed and forced to stay at home, where she feels unhappy and trapped in the world, she co-created. She is desperate but motivated by the desire of having a baby. Therefore, she breaks the rules because she is afraid Commander is infertile. Thereby she becomes a fighting victim for a better fate as well:

“Your time’s running out,” says Serena. Not a question, a matter of fact.[...]  
“Maybe he can’t,” she says.  
I don’t know who she means. Does she mean the Commander, or God? [...]  
“Maybe you should try it another way.”  
Does she mean on all fours? “What other way?” I say. I must keep serious.  
“Another man,” she says.<sup>86</sup>

On the contrary, Commander is limited in no way and enjoys spending time in Jezebel’s brothel for the society’s elite, where June’s friend Moira works as a sex-worker. In particular part, he even establishes a secret relationship with Offred, even though it is not about sex:

The fact is that I’m his mistress. Men at the top have always had mistresses, why should things be any different now? The arrangements aren’t quite the same, granted.<sup>87</sup>

In *The Testaments*, when mentioning treatment to women, Atwood makes another little note revealing misogynic elements of male society. Although the creation of Gilead system would not have been possible without their assistance, “they didn’t make a big fuss over the funerals of women in Gilead, even high-ranking ones.”<sup>88</sup> This line shows that even their death does not provoke compassion in men. Despite the story revolving around female groups, the upbringing of girls fundamentally consists of the propaganda of patriarchal and Puritan values, which restrict women's freedom. Women are supposed to be involved only in matters that concern them. Owing to the constant and sophisticated brainwashing from an early age, girls

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<sup>85</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 174.

<sup>86</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 198.

<sup>87</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 160

<sup>88</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 72.

believe everything they are told. Gilead enforces rigid gender stereotypes by claiming that they are focused on biology, which in turn influences how women view themselves:

What my father was doing in there was said to be very important—the important things that men did, too important for females to meddle with because they had smaller brains that were incapable of thinking large thoughts. [...] It would be like trying to teach a cat to crochet, said Aunt Estée, who taught us Crafts, and that would make us laugh, because how ridiculous! Cats didn't even have fingers!<sup>89</sup>

The most common way how Atwood depicts exploiting women is through their body, which is the most significant connection of her feminist novels. Men perceive the female body, as a toy or a tool and dishonor it for their pleasure, fun, or even 'duty'.

That is why women's body awareness borders with taking it as a curse or an enemy because they usually connect its use to men. The following instance illustrates how the woman in *Surfacing* perceives the act of giving birth as a mechanical process without any sign of naturality and how she sees herself as a tool or a children machine:

[...] they shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don't let you see, they don't want you to understand, they want you to believe it's their power, not yours. They stick needles into you so you won't hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig, your legs are up in a metal frame, they bend over you, technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or sniggering practicing on your body, they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar.<sup>90</sup>

Another occurrence of a woman traumatized by things that can be done to her body is Agnes in *The Testaments*, who was born to a handmaid and grows up in an elite family. She is a product of Puritan patriarchal society and her only destiny is to become a proper Wife in high-ranked households. She fights against gaining this label due to PTSD after she experienced sexual assault and because of Aunts' constant claim that girls' bodies "are snares and enticements [...], the innocent and blameless causes that through our very nature could make men drunk with lust"<sup>91</sup> and need to be hidden. Her reaction to the idea of being violated or owned by a man is seeking to achieve partial liberation and endeavor to become an Aunt since they cannot get married or have children:

I pictured each one of them on top of me—for that is where they would be—trying to shove his loathsome appendage into my stone-cold body. Why was I thinking of my body as stone-cold? I wondered. Then I saw, it would be stone cold because I would be dead.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 21.

<sup>90</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing*, 57.

<sup>91</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 16.

<sup>92</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 195.

The entire concept of *The Handmaid's Tale* is based on body politics and controlling women's reproductive process for preserving society. There is a special Ceremony held by every elite family, where Commander and his Wife try to impregnate the Handmaid. The Handmaid resignedly describes the process as a desecration of her physical shell:

[...] commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I don't say making love because that's not what he is doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate because it would imply two people, when there is only one. Nor does rape cover it. Nothing was going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice, but there was some and this is what I chose.<sup>93</sup>

Fundamentally, women in *The Handmaid's Tale* are completely viewed as the containers for a 'higher purpose'. There is no more need to provide them any women-stuff since it is unsuitable for a 'servant of God'. They constantly experience a real lack of daily female necessities: "We are containers, it's only the insides of our bodies that are important. The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut."<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, the female body as an object is thematized in *The Penelopiad*, where the Maids are exploited by Suitors and treated as toys for their pleasure. Atwood illustratively points out men's materiality and desire for the female body with the prospect of thrill. The Suitors see only outer beauty, wealth and due to lack of manpower are not afraid to harass women with sexist commentaries. It is obvious from the paragraph below that a Suitor lacks any respect for women and take extremely misogynistic attitudes:

First prize, a week in Penelope's bed, second prize, two weeks in Penelope's bed. Close your eyes and they're all the same – just imagine she's Helen, that'll put bronze in your spear, haha! When's the old bitch going to make up her mind? We're all in this together, do or die. You do, she dies, because whoever wins has to fuck her to death, hahaha.<sup>95</sup>

Eventually, Atwood makes the heroines undergo a sense of salvation and catharsis. S. Banurekaa states in her article that "for survival, the women need to connect to their pasts and other people in the attempt to become a less divided, whole self."<sup>96</sup> David Staines says that although *Surfacing's* landscape is grim, the portrait of the nameless protagonist is delicate and compassionate and it is a victimization analysis at the same time.<sup>97</sup> He states "the nameless heroine wishes to be not human, because being human inevitably involves being guilty, and if

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<sup>93</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 99.

<sup>94</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 102.

<sup>95</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 60.

<sup>96</sup> S. Banurekaa. "Emerging Women in Margaret Atwood's Select Novels," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2013, 25.

<sup>97</sup> David Staines, *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 18.

you define yourself as innocent, you can't accept that."<sup>98</sup> This statement suggests that the novel deals with the idea of eco-feminism. Due to her anger at society, the main protagonist's response is a wish to become an animal, merge with nature and leave the falsehood of the civilized world behind. A reaction like this signifies that the woman is fighting with her identity and in certain parts, she loses it completely. She inclines to a certain set of rules to get out of the clutches of conventions and so become innocent:

When I am clean, I come up out of the lake, leaving my false body floated on the surface, a cloth decoy. [...] The food in the cabin is forbidden [...] Also tin cans and jars are forbidden; they are glass and metal. The outhouse is forbidden so I leave my dung, droppings, on the ground and kick earth over. All animals with dens do that.<sup>99</sup>

As for *The Penelopiad* and the afterlife cleansing of the Maids, they try to at least confront Odysseus with the reminder of the dirt he committed and the violence he subjected them to. Mihoko Suzuki states that "Atwood endows the Maids, though outsiders, with a privileged perspective and voice as satirists who critique the ideology of the dominant order that normalized their slaughter by condemning them as unchaste and disloyal."<sup>100</sup> The Maids unveil Odysseus' gender superiority over them, lamenting the sexual double norm that ignores his adultery as he looks for justifications for carrying out deadly punishments, and his possession of "the spear" and "the word" as means of maintaining patriarchal privilege.<sup>101</sup> They promise to haunt him forever for that:

Why did you murder us? What had we done to you that required our deaths? You never answered that. It was an act of grudging, it was an act of spite, it was an honour killing. Yoo hoo, Mr Thoughtfulness, Mr Goodness, Mr Godlike, Mr Judge! Look over your shoulder! Here we are, walking behind you, close, close by, close as a kiss, close as your own skin. We're the serving girls, we're here to serve you. We're here to serve you right. We'll never leave you, we'll stick to you like your shadow, soft and relentless as glue. Pretty maids, all in a row.<sup>102</sup>

In *Offred*'s case, rather than be devastated by her fate, she rebels by storytelling and recording it on a tape. As Patricia Goldblatt points out in her article: "She has hope. Consciously, she reconstructs her present reality, knowing she is making an effort to project an

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<sup>98</sup> Staines, *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, 18.

<sup>99</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing*, 131.

<sup>100</sup> Mihoko Suzuki. "Rewriting the 'Odyssey' in the Twenty-First Century: Mary Zimmerman's 'Odyssey' and Margaret Atwood's 'Penelopiad'," *College Literature* 34, no. 2. (Spring 2007): 272.

<sup>101</sup> Suzuki, "Rewriting the 'Odyssey'", 272.

<sup>102</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 104.



optimistic picture.”<sup>103</sup> She remembers times before Gilead as a ritual of cleansing. She wishes to change the events which happened to her by retelling them:

This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. It’s a reconstruction now, in my head, as I lie flat on my single bed rehearsing what I should or shouldn’t have said, what I should or shouldn’t have done, how I should have played it. If I ever get out of here –<sup>104</sup>

Aunt Lydia takes care of one of the most shocking regainings of the voice from all the characters. Despite being a very ambiguous role in the two novels, she occupies the position of the bravest fighter when revealing she undermines and sabotages the whole system of Gilead by tremendous betrayal. She finds her voice through Agnes who is supposed to transmit a piece of microdot film featuring all the illegal information she has compiled over many decades about Gilead's government. She sacrifices herself for the better future well-being of all women and to get the only possible salvation, ends her life:

And so we come to my end. It’s late: too late for Gilead to prevent its coming destruction. I’m sorry I won’t live to see it—the conflagration, the downfall. And it’s late in my life.<sup>105</sup>

Undoubtedly, Atwood’s female characters are victimized in countless ways. The themes causing their oppression could be examined for a long time but habitually the female body is the source of the heroine’s story since Atwood puts stress on the connection of it with culture and society. The roles of women being fighters in their life situations show Atwood’s interest in female mettle, endurance, and strength. She works with several aspects of patriarchal society and introduces it as a serious issue of breaking the women into pieces, preventing them from self-realization and gaining full respect. Not only the common and current feminist issues are addressed, such as misogyny, objectification of the female body, and hierarchical divisions, which correlate with the topics emerging in second-wave feminism, but also subsequent anger, rebellion, and soul-searching. Atwood tries to bring the heroines at least partial justice in form of inner catharsis, even though their stories do not have a happy end.

### **3.2 Woman as a monster**

Atwood supplies female characters with a rich scale of properties. According to S. Banureka, “Atwood’s female characters are ambiguous, in that they all possess positive and negative qualities, which prohibit them from being categorized as all good or entirely bad.”<sup>106</sup> In the

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<sup>103</sup> Patricia F. Goldblatt, “Reconstructing Margaret Atwood’s Protagonists,” *World Literature Today* 73, no. 2. (Spring 1999): 281.

<sup>104</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 136.

<sup>105</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 348.

<sup>106</sup> S. Banureka. “Emerging Women in Margaret Atwood’s Select Novels,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2013, 25.

context of Atwood's novels, although vaguely, women often occupy the role of metaphorical monsters. The meaning of the word monster as an attributive description of a woman fundamentally implies what a woman can become because of particular regulations she has to follow in order to be 'good'. In other words, how can an ignoring patriarchal system change women from the core due to lacking fulfillment of their necessities, neglected sexual needs, and the deficit of freedom. In the stories, the most basic element depriving women of their original selves is any kind of brainwashing. In this manner, superior patriarchal forces can easily create and form heartless monsters from women who are simultaneously victims in the depth of the fact. Besides, the word 'monster' could reflect the point of view of how society sometimes views women in these stories. For example, infertile and useless women for the community in *The Handmaid's Tale* are perceived as unworthy creatures and are sent to the work colonies. This subchapter also involves important examples of female inconsistency and monstrosities they are not afraid to do to each other.

Tolan explains that "*Surfacing* abounds with victims, but their depiction is filtered through the eyes of the emotionally-traumatized narrator, for whom potential aggressors are everywhere."<sup>107</sup> A consistently unreliable narrator belies the ostensibly impartial first-person narration.<sup>108</sup> The nameless heroine in *Surfacing* gained monstrous attitudes due to her past experiences with forced pregnancy. As a result, she is disgusted by commitments, marriage, and having a child. In the past, she acted based on her inner tendencies and broke free from her destined role she was supposed to play in her life. She gave up her child. That puts her into a position of an infamous kind of woman, who is reluctant to accept motherhood and matters related to it. She lacks interest in a passionate relationship and even sees no point in having it. Moreover, she feels like a slave of the relationship with a man:

It was good at first but he changed after I married him, he married me, we committed that paper act. I still don't see why signing a name should make any difference but he began to expect things, he wanted to be pleased. We should have kept sleeping together and left it at that.<sup>109</sup>

The example below shows how her previous relationship turned her into a cold person and exposes how emotionlessness makes her indifferent. She does not even know the man she spends time with and does not want to change it. For her, the man just serves as a company that prevents the feeling of loneliness:

I sum him up, dividing him into categories: he's good in bed, better than the one

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<sup>107</sup> Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, 45.

<sup>108</sup> Tolan, *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, 45.

<sup>109</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing*, 27.

before; he's moody but he's not much bother, we split the rent and he doesn't talk much, that's an advantage. When he suggested we should live together I didn't hesitate. It wasn't even a real decision, it was more like buying a goldfish or a potted cactus plant, not because you want one in advance but because you happen to be in the store and you see them lined up on the counter. I'm fond of him, I'd rather have him around than not; though it would be nice if he meant something more to me.<sup>110</sup>

Very often, Atwood deals with situations where women stand against each other. She makes the disunity of women a burning topic and it is possible to find this issue in almost all the works studied. It is no coincidence that we can refer here to situations associated with the second wave of feminism when women argued against each other because of social differences while at the same time preaching unity. As expected, women are forced into this disunity by the circumstances created by the patriarchal system and the struggle for a post in society. For women, this alienation from their sex serves as a defense system when they are exposed to certain challenges during the fight for their better future. Disunity habitually results mainly from class division. Even Atwood herself argues in the prologue of her most famous novel: "Yes, women will gang up on other women. Yes, they will gladly take positions of power over other women, even – and, possibly, especially – in systems in which women as a whole have scant power. All power is relative, and in tough times any amount is seen as better than none."<sup>111</sup> Women victimized by other women are usually from the lower social classes who are not protected by any rights and have almost no claim to manage their lives on their own because they are usually dependent on someone else.

What concerns *The Penelopiad*, Suzuki states that "here Atwood returns to her interest in the vexed relationships of women of different classes, specifically the servant and the mistress."<sup>112</sup> It is partially Penelope's contribution to the cause of death of the twelve Maids. She draws them into intrigue on her husband Odysseus, but when they are murdered by him, her actions indicate that she is unfazed. Even at the Trial, Penelope has halfhearted attitudes towards Maid's allegations. Although she cries and feels sorry for them, she mentions that "most maids got raped, sooner or later."<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, Penelope adds, the concern was not the rapes, but being raped "without permission."<sup>114</sup> Instead, she cares more about Odysseus finding her physically attractive after a long separation. To preserve her own good and steady relationship with Odysseus, she does not admit the truth and keeps the whole scapegoating

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<sup>110</sup> Atwood, *Surfacing*, 28.

<sup>111</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 13.

<sup>112</sup> Suzuki, "Rewriting the 'Odyssey'", 273.

<sup>113</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 98.

<sup>114</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 98.

situation secret. While Penelope initially claims that the Maids were like daughters to her, she then admits to the Judge that she was doubtful about them. The extract implies that Penelope is an evil person in the depths of her soul and used the maids to her advantage and to reassure her status:

*Judge:* What who said?

*Penelope:* The maids, Your Honour.

*Judge:* They said they'd been raped?

*Penelope:* Well, yes, Your Honour. In effect.

*Judge:* And did you believe them?

*Penelope:* Yes, Your Honour. That is, I tended to believe them.<sup>115</sup>

It cannot be stressed enough that in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Aunt Lydia, one of the Founders and the most powerful Aunt in Gilead, symbolizes the disunity of women most significantly because coupled with the sex war, also the female war is a crucial theme. Lydia represents the whole group of women who committed the colossal betrayal of their sex and became the Aunts, the most powerful female community, yet firmly tied up to the system. The epilogue in this novel clarifies how the system of Gilead psychologically uses the Aunts to manipulate the Handmaids, making the Aunts a monstrous effective brainwashing tool, torturing the female kind:

Who else among the Sons of Jacob Think-Tankers would have come up with the notion that the Aunts should take names derived from commercial products available to women in the immediate pre-Gilead period, and thus familiar and reassuring to them – the names of cosmetic lines, cake mixes, frozen desserts, and even medicinal remedies?<sup>116</sup>

Lydia often submits the idea of pregnancy as something hardly achievable, and therefore, she sugarcoats it as though the women are saving their species in the war. She manipulates the Handmaids into believing that their lives matter more now by using these analogies as indoctrination and destructs their thinking about the purpose of life:

“It’s a risk you’re taking”, said Aunt Lydia, but you are the shock troops you will march out in advance, into dangerous territory. The greater the risk the greater the glory.<sup>117</sup>

A different instance of disunity of women covers the community of Wives who are basically competing with each other about having a child first or if at all. Although the Wives are grouped victims of the system and are also limited in freedom, they possess common hatred to the Handmaids. Despite the Handmaids being their only hope for having children, the Wives

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<sup>115</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 97.

<sup>116</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 288.

<sup>117</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 115.

show no compassion for their position and only perceive them as a necessary evil they have to bear in their houses. They frequently pretend to be good to them, nevertheless, they hold a grudge towards them. Envy and jealousy are often rooted in this hatred. Women most of the time tend to compare themselves to other women. In the case of the Wives, they are jealous of Handmaids' fertility and cannot stand the feeling that they need somebody else to enhance them with this gift. In this context, Serena Joy represents this group. One could sympathize with her because of her unhappiness and frustration since she has to watch her husband copulating with Offred and wait for her to get impregnated, however, this sympathy is instantly broken when Serena exposes her contempt to the Handmaids. Whereas she sees her life as very difficult, she refuses to see the much worse destiny of other women and spills her anger on them. Whereas Serena regards them as monsters, she acts like one:

Such a, so well behaved, not surly like some of them, do their job and that's that. More like a daughter to you, as you might say. One of the family. Comfortable matronly chuckles. That's all dear, you can go back to your room. And after she's gone: Little whores, all of them, but still, you can't be choosy. You take what they hand out, right, girls? That from the Commander's Wife.<sup>118</sup>

Also, Penelope's motive for betraying her devoted girlfriends is jealousy, which appears a lot in this work. She desperately tries to conquer other women when it comes to devotion to Odysseus. Penelope blames the Maids for her separation from him because every time Odysseus leaves, he alleges that "some force tears them apart."<sup>119</sup> She paranoidly blames them even after their death and stands behind her vicious husband, excusing his actions:

It's the maids. He sees them in the distance, heading our way. They make him nervous. They make him restless. They cause him pain. They make him want to be anywhere and anyone else. [...]  
'Why can't you leave him alone?' I yell at the maids. I have to yell because they won't let me get near them. 'Surely it's enough! He did penance, he said the prayers, he got himself purified!'<sup>120</sup>

Clearly, she prioritizes her husband's assertions, although many suggest that he was unfaithful to her on his travels, while the Maids thoroughly obeyed her orders, which cost them lives. Blind trust in her husband and selfish secrecy evoked a monstrous shift in her.

A separate line, that explicates Penelope's competitiveness with other women, contributes to shaping her attitudes towards them. It involves the imaginary fight between her and her beautiful cousin Helen. Penelope thinks of Helen as her rival and due to lack of self-

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<sup>118</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 117.

<sup>119</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 102.

<sup>120</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 102.

esteem and feeling of not being pretty enough, she feels like her shadow. While Penelope tends to feel threatened by her, Helen is always teasing her because of her rigidity:

‘Oh, Penelope, you can’t still be jealous,’ she says. ‘Surely we can be friends now! Why don’t you come along with me to the upper world, next time I go? We could do a trip to Las Vegas. Girls’ night out! But I forgot – that’s not your style. You’d rather play the faithful little wifey, what with the weaving and so on. Bad me, I could never do it, I’d die of boredom. But you were always such a homebody.’<sup>121</sup>

By this pressure, Helen contributes to Penelope’s paranoia, anxiety, the growth of her inner insecurity, and further anger. Penelope constantly mentions bad relationships with women around her. She repeatedly doubts herself because of Helen and competes with her inside her head:

Helen strolled away, having delivered her sting. The maids began discussing her splendid necklace, her scintillating earrings, her perfect nose, her elegant hairstyle, her luminous eyes, the tastefully woven border of her shining robe. It was as if I wasn’t there. And it was my wedding day.<sup>122</sup>

When it comes to machinations inside the female circles, a good example would be again Aunt Lydia. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, she likes sniffing out the Handmaids’ misbehavior and preparing proper punishments for them. After one Handmaid escapes, Lydia asks the Handmaid Offwarren/Janine to spy on other girls to prevent from happening more similar situations:

I feel I can rely on you, Janine, Aunt Lydia would have said, raising her eyes from the page at last and fixing Janine with that look of hers, through the spectacles, a look that managed to be both menacing and beseeching, all at once. Help me, that look said, we are all in this together. You are a reliable girl, she went on, not like some of the others.<sup>123</sup>

This extract proves that it is the Aunts who are agents of disunity amongst women and they are constantly turning women against each other. It could be said that they are only fulfilling their duties and fighting for their place.

Nonetheless, in *The Testaments*, they use manipulation to their advantage. In this next generation, all the Aunts equal sinister and all-seeing monsters. It is hard to believe what they are capable of. They are cruel and vicious tools of the system, ingraining the fear into little girls. The part of the indoctrination is the discouragement of sex life. More specifically, they are continuously preaching about the sinfulness of sexuality and the wickedness of their body. The girls are alleged to have power over men and they are forbidden to attempt them in any way. Even the swings are prohibited because the skirts “might be blown up by the wind and then

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<sup>121</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 101.

<sup>122</sup> Atwood, *The Penelopiad*, 27.

<sup>123</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 131.

looked into.”<sup>124</sup> The Aunts make little girls so terrified of sexual intercourse or any interaction with men so that in few cases, girls are thinking of suicide.

Some of the Aunts, like Aunt Lydia and Aunt Vidala, are opportunists and usurpers, and for Commanders’ appreciation, they are capable of any atrocity. It is mainly their circles that are full of intrigues and manipulation. Aunt Lydia is the number one intriguer and she is aware of her abilities and makes relationships between Aunts tangled to achieve her personal goals, become the most powerful and thus have the destiny of Gilead in her hands. She intends to destroy Aunt Vidala, her biggest rival since they compete to extend their influence:

What’s next in the waltz of flowers? Lilacs. So dependable. So frilly. So aromatic. Soon my old enemy, Aunt Vidala, will be sneezing. Maybe her eyes will swell up and she won’t be able to peer at me out of their corners, hoping to detect some slippage, some weakness, some lapse in theological correctness that can be leveraged into my downfall.<sup>125</sup>

Eventually, Lydia uses Aunt Elizabeth in her little games and claims that Vidala revealed Elizabeth’s treachery and wants to report her. For her benefit, Lydia subconsciously hints to Elizabeth to smother Vidala in her sleep:

“Such a shame about Vidala’s allergies,” I said. “I hope she won’t suffer an asthmatic attack while sleeping. Now I must rush off, as I have a meeting. I will leave Vidala in your nurturing hands. I notice that her pillow needs rearranging.” Two birds with one stone.<sup>126</sup>

This one note can define what a powerful puppeteer Aunt Lydia is. An initially hidden effort to corrupt the system from the inside gradually rises to the surface and Lydia strives to drown down as many foes as possible with it.

In terms of literary progression, Lydia, yet not a completely reliable narrator, is the character who obtained the greatest evolution. While in *The Handmaid’s Tale* Atwood only points out the tyrannical practices she performs, in a sequel she breathes life into her, reveals her complexity, and makes her more human. But even though Lydia’s intentions were from the beginning for the greater good and she sought for the fall of Gilead the entire time, it is hard to erase and forget her behavior. Despite Lydia’s suicidal redemption, she leaves giant scars in the myriad number of people’s lives and many destructed innocent souls. Atwood shows that bigger actions take bigger risks. On one hand, Lydia is the key fighter, who believes her sacrifice will justify her horrid actions and do ‘favor’ for future Handmaids, but on the other hand, there could be a stormy debate about her being a despicable dreadful monster who does not deserve forgiveness, which by the way Lydia is aware of. Yet she defends her actions, eventually:

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<sup>124</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 103.

<sup>126</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 338.

How can I have behaved so badly, so cruelly, so stupidly? you will ask. You yourself would never have done such things! But you yourself will never have had to.<sup>127</sup>

Every group of female community is fed with different sorts of Puritan values and rules. Young girls are the most suitable adepts for following these rules as required. However, the installation arises various properties in them and, in many cases, they also become hateful beings towards the 'inferior' species. Some of the girls catch Wives' mannerisms and judge the Handmaids based on rumors and doctrine. One of them is Shunammite, Agnes's classmate. Her blindness and naivety define her as a dumb sheep who only parrots everything the Wives say, rooting wrath and contempt in her. She horrendously endeavors for higher class life. To frighten other girls she describes crude false details about giving birth and spreads hurtful rumors about Agnes' mother. She behaves based on Gilead teachings and most of her utterances are the loud source of labeling and calling Handmaids names:

“They're all sluts anyway, they don't need real names.”

Shunammite said a slut was a woman who'd gone with more men than her husband. Though we did not really know what “gone with” meant.

“And Handmaids must be double sluts, said Shunammite, because they didn't even have husbands.”

“I don't see why being a slut is performing a service,” Shunammite whispered.

“It's because of the babies,” I whispered back. “The Handmaids can make babies.”

“So can some other women too,” said Shunammite, “and they aren't sluts.”<sup>128</sup>

This part of Shunammite's dialogue with Agnes depicts her unjustified hatred and disgust towards the Handmaids. Apparently, she just repeats the words she hears and cannot accept others' viewpoints. Her insults signify that she is a diabolical product of society and an aspirant to the procreation of evil beliefs.

In summary, this analytical part proves that female characters use their wicked inner side as a way of the self-defend system. *Surfacing* is quite different from the other novels since the protagonist has no dispute with her kind but rather struggles with relationships with men. She bottles up her feelings and equips herself with emotionlessness mode as a consequence of a traumatic experience and so creates an image of a rigid, cold-hearted woman rejecting motherhood. In other stories, Atwood essentially focuses on the competitiveness of women and what they are able to sacrifice to achieve their goals. She does not forget about the usual wrongs committed by ordinary women in real life, such as jealousy, envy, and lust and therefore, there can be found obvious similarities between men and women. That implies that Atwood does not

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<sup>127</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 347.

<sup>128</sup> Atwood, *The Testaments*, 78.



try to depict women as angels who deserve salvation but rather wishes to put them on the same level as men. Since her heroines are very ambiguous and unreliable narrators, it contributes to the impression, that not all of them are trustworthy. Every Atwood's character is very complicated and endowed with certain nature and urges. That is the reason why is not possible to say if they are good or bad and hence, this concept for the analysis was chosen.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, the theoretical chapter dealing with the burning topic of traditional gender roles and stereotypes related to the hierarchical division of genders shows that although a woman's position in society is fundamentally determined by cultural conventions, also her body structure keeps defining her as a submissive and passive species. It was Simone de Beauvoir who began to question the outdated notion of a woman being targeted in a men-led world. She started to call for female subjectivity and showed that men have always better conditions than women since even the procreation process is exciting for them whereas for women is connected with passivity and subsequent pain. The finding is that the patriarchal system navigates the position of the female exactly where it wants to have her, while to the male species it is benevolent. The female gender is a continual source of doubts by society even when it comes to more serious issues, such as accusations of sexual harassment or violence.

For attempts to change this, feminist activism was needed. Second-wave feminism took care of a method of sharing mutual experience to create a universal pattern, which came to history known as consciousness-raising. Feminist scholars of those times are also responsible for a milestone in feminist literary criticism since they transfer a classical examination of canonical male texts to gynocritics and begin to evaluate female texts from the female point of view.

Since then feminism undergoes many changes and offers distinct attitudes towards its beliefs throughout specific waves. Whereas third-wave feminism is striving to build up the firm resistance to patriarchal supremacy, the other groups coin the Girl Power slogan encouraging women's empowerment and confidence using female weapons to prevent not being labeled as a victim of the system and starts to blend into a hardly definable period of postfeminism.

The analytical part examining the roles of women in Margaret Atwood's novels consists of two parts. The first one focuses on the portrayal of women as fighters. It can be said that Atwood works based on some sort of consciousness-raising, as it was significant for the second-wave period. She chooses particularly the inevitability of the fate of the female body and tells the story through it. The body is the source of limitation in women's lives here, same as oppression by men. Atwood emphasizes the lack of freedom of choice when it comes to treatment with the female body. Most often, victimization is the result of interventions on female resistance and when she is not content with her position in society and tries to do something to avoid her predestined role. Themes like this suggest that Atwood's interest lies mainly in promoting equal human rights and presents these issues in an intentionally exaggerated perspective since women are deeply discriminated, victimized by misogynistic behavior and sexual politics, and basically represented like slaves in her stories. This is why the

body becomes a threat to its own resident and therefore, the heroines continually connect it with their minds.

In these stories, there is a permanent question of survival present. However, Atwood enhances the protagonists with knowledge and self-awareness. Hence, they are capable of recognizing being victimized, and either they refuse this status as the heroine in *Surfacing* or face it and try to fight it as Offred or take advantage of it as Aunt Lydia. Even though they do not achieve any crucial accomplishments, usually they incline to a particular set of principles that help them to mentally leave the unpleasant world in a form of writing, recording or memories, and find some kind of catharsis. Gradually, they go through a period of soul-searching, self-analysis, and seek self-knowledge. Through inner meditation, they try to rediscover lost pieces of themselves and fight the victimization by breaking the silence.

Contrarily, the second analytical part displays the other notion of the woman when she is not either willing to succumb to the patriarchal conventions or she has to adopt her new identity in order not to be punished or rejected. In *Surfacing*, the protagonist uses coldness to prevent her from being hurt by men again and rather chooses not to be dependent on them. The fact she refuses the role of a mother simultaneously puts her in the role of a monster, which implies that Atwood strives to break the outdated gender stereotypes. On the other hand, she substitutes the usual flaws and weaknesses of women, such as jealousy of other women related to the dependence on men. She raises also bad human properties in the most common sense to make known that women can have the same qualities as men and show that women are also capable of handling men's tasks. As the conclusion of the previous subchapter indicates, she does not rescue the women before their fates but rather wants to see them on the same pedestal of power as men. Sometimes characters in her stories are scarcely likable because of their untrustworthiness and ambiguity. Due to the character's complexity and diverse motivations, they all cannot be fully categorized in the same group, but definitely, they deserve our appreciation due to their challenging positions.

In general, the portrayal of female characters and their behavior varies according to their past and present life situation, and they change depending on men's intervention in their affairs and their resistance.

## RESUMÉ

Cílem této bakalářské práce je provést podrobnou analýzu zobrazování ženských postav, jejich rolí a chování ve vybraných dílech kanadské spisovatelky Margaret Atwoodové, jejíž spisovatelská kariéra začala v období druhé vlny feminismu a pokračuje až doposud. Ačkoliv sama autorka odmítá být zatahována do feministických táborů a považuje svou tvorbu za sociální realismus, její díla se celosvětově pojí hlavně k feministické literatuře. Její romány jsou známé svoji tematickou i žánrovou pestrostí a zpravidla v nich řeší problematiku genderových stereotypů, lidských práv, ale obohacuje je i o netradiční aspekty jako je otázka identity nebo environmentalismus.

První kapitola této práce představuje otázku genderové rovnocennosti a dívá se na téma jak z kulturního hlediska, tak z toho fyziologického. Pracuje hlavně s myšlenkou patriarchální společnosti, jejíž působnost se v moderních časech může zdát pomalu zažehnána, nicméně pevně přetrvává ve společenských konzervativních konvencích a stále prohlubuje pocit ženské podřízenosti a méněcennosti. Následně, demonstruje tyto zažité konvence na té nejnevinnější formě jako jsou pohádky pro děti. Vysvětlí, jak tímto způsobem patriarchální společnost formuje nejen ženskou mysl od útlého věku a podstrkuje myšlenku, že žena může dosáhnout žádoucí odměny v podobě manželství jen pokud bude „hodná holka“. V souvislosti na to kapitola představí patriarchální kategorizaci žen do dvou limitujících skupin „hodných“ a „zlobivých“, kdy skupinu těch hodných zastupují hlavně pracovitě milující manželky, které se postarají o děti a uvaří, zatímco skupinu zlobivých zase ženy, které poskytnou povyražení. Díky argumentům Simone de Beauvoirové se lze zaměřit i na problematiku spojenou s procesem lidské reprodukce a jak znevýhodněnou pozici má v tomto ohledu žena, ať už z toho důvodu, že její sexuální uspokojení většinou není, na rozdíl u mužů, součástí procesu početí, ale musí se vyvolat mechanicky, nebo následných bolestivých a nepříjemných stavů v období těhotenství a porodu. Důležitou součástí této kapitoly je vnímání ženského těla mužem, společností a jí samotnou, kdy může nastat situace, že se její tělo stane nepřitelem, prokletím nebo kusem masa. S tím souvisí i časté případy viktimizace, které vyplývají například ze sexuálního harašení nebo znásilnění.

Druhá teoretická kapitola osvětluje feminismus hlavně z historického hlediska a jaké metody konkrétní vlny feminismu 20. století využívaly. Feminismus je jak teoretické učení, tak politické hnutí a oplývá mnoha různými ideologiemi, názory a přístupy. To potvrdily i vlny, které se v historii feminismu vystřídaly. Zatímco první vlna se zapsala do dějin získáním práva žen volit a vlastnit majetek, druhá vlna začala zakládat feministická hnutí, která pracovala na konceptu *counsciousness-raising*, tj. budování vědomí, jež mělo pomoci k získání

rovnoprávného postavení žen a mužů a zamezit tak překážkám ekonomickým, sociálním i vzdělávacím. Objektifikace ženského těla byla pro tyto organizace společným bodem znepokojení, nicméně uvnitř těchto kruhů často docházelo k neshodám hlavně kvůli diskriminaci minoritních skupin, ať už kvůli rase nebo sexuální orientaci. Proto na druhou vlnu feminismu reagovala následná třetí vlna feminismu, která se zapsala do dějin především díky punkové feministické skupině Riot Grrrl, jež usilovala o svržení patriarchátu a bojovala za integritu, toleranci a individualitu zejména pomocí populárních médií. Mezitím přicházela ke slávě dívčí skupina Spice Girls, která hlásala slogan Girl Power v jiném smyslu, než tomu bylo doposud a propagovala dívčí nezávislost společně s módním a kosmetickým průmyslem. V tento moment začala tato vlna splývat s dodnes rozporuplnou a těžko definovatelnou vlnou postfeminismu, který v podstatě podkopává celou filozofii pohledu na ženu jako na oběť systému a hlásá ženskou nezávislost. Od této doby se do televizního prostředí dostávají populární ženské charaktery jako Carrie Bradshaw, Ally McBeal nebo Bridget Jones.

Později se tato kapitola vrací opět k charakteristické druhé vlně feminismu a zdůrazňuje úspěchy dosažené ve feministické literární kritice. V tomto období se feministické kritičky začaly přeorientovávat ze zkoumání kanonických patriarchálních textů mužských autorů k feministickým textům a uvedly do povědomí nový literární termín *gynocritics*, tj. gynokritika, jež se věnovala právě textům psanými ženskými autorkami a představila tak nové modely založené na ženské zkušenosti. Ačkoliv se lesbické autorky zprvu nedočkaly potřebného přijetí, postupně se uvedly do praxe i metody pro posuzování těchto textů na samostatné bázi.

Na konci tato kapitola uvádí do kontextu Margaret Atwoodovou, která má na feministické tvorbě výrazný podíl. Zmíní se zde, že kromě feministických rysů se soustředí také na problematiku spojenou s genderovou a sexuální politikou, ale i environmentalismem a hledáním identity, kterou pro své postavy vykresluje jako klíčovou.

Tato práce se v analytické části dělí na dvě podkapitoly a zaměřuje se na to, jak Atwoodová pomyslně rozděluje ženské postavy ve svých románech *Surfacing*, *The Penelopiad*, *The Handmaid's Tale* a *The Testaments* do dvou skupin. Na jedné straně jsou tu oběti a mučednice systému, které nemají u mužů dovolání a musí si se všemi starostmi poradit svou soběstačností. První podkapitola postupuje podle společných témat všech románů. Nejdříve se zabývá klasickými feministickými prvky, tj. misogynie, sexismus a šovinismus, poté zkoumá roli ženského těla jako důležitou součást příběhu, a nakonec se zabývá jednotlivou satisfakcí hlavních hrdinek.

Atwoodová nejčastěji pracuje s propojením těla a mysli. Obvykle ženskou protagonistku možnosti využití jejího těla sužují a její příběh je vyprávěn úzce spjatý právě s fyziologickými úkazy, jako je sexuální akt, těhotenství, porod nebo jeho vnější vzhled.

Nejčastějším původem těchto skličujících pocitů je zde mužské zapříčinění, jelikož jsou zpravidla zdrojem útlaku zdejších ženských postav a omezují je na životě různými způsoby. Proto je zásadním tématem jejich románů otázka přežití. Nicméně, Atwoodová obohacuje své postavy o povědomí a poznání a schopnost identifikovat situaci, v níž sehrávají roli oběti. S touto rolí nakládá každá jiným způsobem. Ve většině případech se ale autorka snaží hrdinkám propůjčit hlas a vymanit je z obligátního mlčení.

Na druhé straně Atwoodová připisuje ženským postavám i zanevření hodné vlastnosti, které je definují jako „ty zlé“, což je analyzováno v druhé analytické podkapitole. Tato podkapitola postupuje opět podle podobných situací, kdy je žena zobrazena jako monstrum a životní okolnosti ji promítají v nelichotivém světle. *Surfacing* se v tomto ohledu od ostatních románů podstatně liší, protože je zde přítomen pouze důvod jejího sobeckého chování v souvislosti s utlačováním ze strany muže, zatímco ostatní romány pracují hlavně s tématem ženské rivality, soutěživosti a s nimi spojenou závistí a žárlivostí. Podkapitola zhodnocuje, zda je jejich chování oprávněné a jestli si zaslouží čtenářovi sympatie. Na závěr této kapitoly je zvažena zásadní proměna ženského charakteru, který se objevil ve dvou analyzovaných románech.

Závěr práce vyvozuje konkrétnější výsledky analýzy, která zjišťuje, že zobrazení ženských charakterů a jejich chování se různí podle jejich životní situace v minulosti a přítomnosti a že se mění v závislosti na mužském zásahu do jejich věcí a jejich odporu. Obecně lze říci, že touto explicitní a nekompromisní formou líčení se Atwoodová snaží protlačit ženy na stejný stupeň rovnocennosti k mužskému protipólu a chce dokázat, že ženy mohou být stejně dobré i stejně špatné ve vykonávání mužských záležitostí.

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