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Critique of Cosmopolitan Modernity in Atwood's *The Robber Bride*

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By

Neelam Joshi

Symbol No.: 281957

T.U. Regd. No.: 6-2-327-81-2008

Central Department of English

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– Neelam Joshi

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Letter of Recommendation

Neelam Joshi has completed her thesis entitled “Critique of Cosmopolitan Modernity in Atwood’s *The Robber Bride*” under my supervision. She carried out her research from June 2017 to January, 2018. I hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted for Viva voce.

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Badri Prasad Acharya,

(Supervisor)

Date:

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English

Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Critique of Cosmopolitan Modernity in Atwood’s *The Robber Bride*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Neelam Joshi has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

_____ Internal Supervisor

_____ External Examiner

_____ Head

_____ Central Department of English

_____ Date: _____

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Abstract

Utilizing the concept of modernity and gender as conceptualized by Janet Wolff, Rita Felski and Bonnie Kim Scott, this research project concentrates on the difficulties and crises upon female characters in Atwood's novel The Robber Bride. Most of the female characters in The Robber Bride are deviated from their cultural root and individual identity. They feel that the temptation to follow the Westernized thought has distorted the taste and attitude of the young generation. The main character of this novel Roz belongs to the class of handmaid's fertile women who is forced to bear children for elite, barren couples and rich people. Roz forgets her real name, cultural identity and her own background being lost in the midst of Western technocratic world. She comes in metropolitan American city to search for her better life, but she becomes a puppet in the hands of different males in the city simply because she is a woman. Though modernity promises about education, development, and betterment of humanity, it deteriorates Roz in the level of a puppet rather than enlightening her.

Keywords: Modernity and the City, Cosmopolitan Modernity, Multiple Modernities, Public Sphere, Private Sphere, Flanuer, Flaneuse, Dystopia

This research project concentrates upon how social unrest and cultural chaos arise on the life of women in the midst of cosmopolitan modernity. It analyzes the undercurrents and fallout of welcoming western concept of liberal thought and modernity. *The Robber Bride* tells the story of Roz in the Republic of Gilead a theocratic totalitarian society. She is from lower strata of the society. She goes to capital city of Gilead in search of better life, education, and equality. However, human rights are severely limited and women's rights are even more curtailed; for example, women are forbidden to read. Roz gets frequent humiliation, sexual assault and relative marginalization in the metropolitan city. If ultramodern norms and values are imposed in female uncritically, females fall into chaotic situation. There can be unrest and communal conflict due to the direct tussle between imitated western values and the native trends and culture. *The Robber Bride* demonstrates how dystopian view and disillusionment affect the lives of female characters. The obsessive search for the western cultural model in Canada resulted in crisis, conflict and perpetual unrest.

The youth cultural environment of Canada categorically rejects the sovereignty and the unique supremacy of western ideals like universal human rights and democracy, modern secularism, political liberalism, gender equality and individual freedom. *The Robber Bride* is written in the grey zone. The setting of the novel is in American society where native Canadian Roz is lost in emptiness and hollow of modern scientific development. She is deviated and hung between several problems. *The Robber Bride* reflects the political and social unrest in Canada. *The Robber Bride* is reflection of people's history, a bottom-up rather than top-down view of a country in flux. Atwood's work moves back forth in time and focusing on small events and everyday people, Atwood breathes life into history by describing the effects of larger-than-life events on the average citizen.

The thesis explores into the lives of the characters who have several dreams regarding education, development and their expansion in the future life and they have strong gut to fulfill these dreams even adapting the new cultural behaviors, costumes and rules of the urban city. However, it is a tragedy that the golden dreams their hardships to fulfill them do not bring any positive outcomes in the life of the poor females in Western world. The research articulates the condition of middle class women who are used only as a tool in the commodity culture and the source of amusement of the higher-class males of the modern society. However, failing of both and have separated life without any hope and expectation at the end of the life of the main character.

In *The Robber Bride*, Western thoughts like democracy, enlightenment rationality, universal human rights, and gender equality are depicted as enfeebled and powerless to transform the society. These crucial components of cosmopolitan modernity have rather put the seed of socio-cultural troubles in society. Canadian youths believe in the pragmatic and modernizing influence of western thought. However, they are compelled to face the harmful consequences. They are tired of social instability. If the utilization of western thoughts creates conflict, despair and disillusionment on the part of Canadian youth people how can the nonwestern programs of transforming traditional society become successful.

The Robber Bride as is Atwood's depiction about the modern scenario and the effects of urbanization, city, and development. It projects the concept of modernism and gender. When the society turned into modernization and industrialization, not only males, but also many women from different parts of the villages migrated to the urban city and started to struggle there to live a better life. In this regard, the notion of *flaneur* was developed to represent especially the educated, higher class males from

urban area and whose job is just to stroll in the city, streets and markets to gaze the middle class female who used to go to the market and public space for their job. Therefore, the streets, parks, cinema hall and other public spaces were considered to be the setting of those male *flaneurs*. But, the term *flaneuse* was coined by twentieth century sociologist Janet Wolff in her essay, "The Invisible Flaneuse" (1985) where she defines *flaneuses* as those middle class women who come from different country sides and doing work for the societal development economically.

Though the middle class women contributed to their time and energy to develop the city economically, they were forgotten to define and portray by the traditional writers and artists, Thus, Janet Wolff talks about those marginalized female in the modern society and she coins the term *flaneuse* and *female flaneurs* to justify their role in the modern society. She speaks from the perspective of *flaneuse* who were made *flaneuse* by the female *flaneurs* and *flaneurs* in the modern city. The main character Roz in the fiction has been presented as a typical modern *flaneuse* who has been used only as the commodity tool and defined as an unstable lower class not developed and uncivilized female by the so - called higher class males of Canadian society.

However, sociologist Janet Wolff, Feminists Anke Gleber and Bonnie Kim scott revisited the notion of defining modernity. Feminist critics found that many traditional painters like Charles Baudelaire, artists and poets used to make the portrayal of an educated male walking in the streets aimlessly or just for staring the females and he was considered to be a *flaneur* in respective manner. Most importantly, Janet Wolff reviewed the traditional notion to define the women and she drew up the conclusion that city is not favorable for females because it is dominated

by males. Females should go through sense of humiliation and assault in public sphere.

Bonnie Kim Scott defines modernity as the "forgotten gender infected territory" (78). Gender, which is defined as a social construction rather than an essential biological trait, comes in many forms: in languages that assign genders to nouns and pronouns; in what sociologists describe as "sex roles," which divide and limit what persons of one sex or the other can do in private and public spheres; in efforts to recuperate the culture or traditions of women, as neglected and marginal (87). "Masculine" and "feminine" are the classic designations within gender, different from the biological male and female, but generally paired, respectively, with them. Lesbian and gay male interpreters have analyzed the underlying binary of the gender pair, suggesting that it also privileges a heterosexual norm (98).

The middle class females who arrived in America migrating from village in search of many golden dreams and study were used as a commodity tool in restaurant, shopping centre, and parks. They were just for the male gaze so Janet Wolff termed and defined them as *flaneuse*. In the text, *The Robber Bride* has presented the main character Roz including other female characters, Tony and Charis as typical *flaneuse* in the Modern capitalistic American Society.

Atwood is the prominent author of the contemporary Canada. Atwood is largely considered as the novelist with vigorous longing for politico-cultural realism. She criticizes several social and ideological bigotries. She always stands for the progressive transformation of society. Angela Carter makes the following remarks about the novel, *The Robber Bride* on its historical reality and representation of Modern American society and realistic situation of the Females of nineteenth century in city as:

The Robber Bride personalizes the political and social changes in his country over the past few decades in this novel unlike most historical narratives from USA, which are pegged to political events? *The Robber Bride* is a representative of people's history, a bottom-up rather than top-down view of a country in flux. By moving back and forth in time and focusing on small events and everyday people, Atwood creates life into history by describing the effects of larger-than-life events on the average citizen. (12)

Thematically, Carter opines about the political and social issues that are merged and modified in the novel. In a sense, *The Robber Bride* Atwood tends to reflect upon the history of modern Canada. Modern Canada has come a long way since the last few decades. Yet it still has to face countless number of challenges and troubles. Atwood is recognized as one of the best authors who can contemplation upon history that gives profound insight to those who want to alter the course of history of modern Canada and the condition of the modern female youth.

Howard Goldblatt is another critic of Atwood who analyzes Atwood's novel on the basis of the sensual imageries for the depiction of modern society and its open expression. He is critically aware of Margret Atwood's ability to have her own aura of writing novel and he criticizes about her limitations as a novelist. He enumerates how Atwood has injected her own anecdotal experience to portrayal of society. Goldblatt argues thus:

Atwood, rather than exploring the darker undercurrents of society or the depths of the characters, she seems to make it her goal to stay on the surface. Much of the energy of the novel is spent on long and sensuous descriptions of the effect and impact of ultra modernity.

There are too many episodes when the reader has to witness this or that character urinating, and to endure long descriptions of the urine.

Whether Atwood has been successful in portraying the characters in their organic form or not, it is not clear. But one thing is undoubtedly clear that daily activities are described in a vivid and vigorous way.

The real charm of Margret Atwood's literary aura is that she is skillful in describing the common incidents of life. (27)

Symbolically, Goldblatt appreciates upon Atwood's selection of real character from the society and her vivid depiction to carry out the theme of the novel as a representation of the contemporary society of Canada and America.

Joanne Arnott is a celebrated critic and author who looks Margret Atwood's literary representation from western eyes. She criticizes the dystopian effect of the book in reference to another American novelist Anthony Burgess as:

The Robber Bride is hardly a work of fiction. This is essentially a dystopian text. It seems like a novel but is a complete story. In contrast to Anthony Burgess's often-expensive novel it describes events spanning four decades from 1969 to 2009. While amounting to a memoir, Burges is selective in what he presents. But Atwood inclusively presents the totality of scenario. (37)

By writing this novel in the form of dystopia, Atwood tries to attack the transitional politics of Canadian society. The constantly shifting scenario of Canada has affected the common pattern of Canadian youth. The modernization of Canada is both subversive and uplifting as well. Both the rosy and seamy side of modernizing Canada is brought to the focal point. Primarily, Atwood's fiction is most often set in her native country Southwestern Ontario. Her *Story* explores human complexities in an

uncomplicated style. *The Robber Bride* is representational story about the middle class women of the Nineteenth Century, their positive vision regarding the capitalistic modern society and their struggles getting a successful life. But unfortunately the result comes negative to them. Roz dooms to sacrifice the real taste of life owing to her subordinate condition. She is helpless, alienated and suffered by the blow of western culture. Another critic Murphy Georgeann makes criticism as:

The Robber Bride (1978- published in Canada as *Who Do You Think You Are?*) begins and ends back in Ontario, following the progress of the protagonist Roz, whose life parallels Atwoode's in many ways. Atwoode's plots since 1978 often set near her childhood home, regularly concern strategies of coping and acceptance: in her own words, "I write about where I am in Life." (7)

In this way, Atwood's *The Robber Bride* has been criticized from different perspectives from different critics. Some have analyzed it on the basis of its theme and its depiction of the realistic cultural scenario of the contemporary society, and some have analyzed its technical and metaphorical part. Although all these critics have raised different issues in this novel, critique of modernity project is totally absent in their reviews and consistent commentaries. Modernity has robbed man of manhood. Modernity is expected to enrich human comfort and minimize labor. Nevertheless, science has denuded the humanity of human beings as it misused by totalitarian rulers. It has denuded the manhood of man. The issue of scientific optimism and Roz's implicit view on the systematic denudation of manhood is increasingly new and untested issue. Roz's denuded manhood is miserable and heart-rending. That is why, the researcher has picked up the issue of critique of modernity.

Roz is degenerated into neurotic and paranoid because of the worst condition of the society, totalitarian political system, and manipulation of science and technology. Her degraded condition in dystopian world is described as:

Below in the little valley, the still gray serpentine of a river. Motionless and precise. Along the shore a burden of dead reeds. Are you okay? He said. The boy nodded. Then they set out along the blacktop in the gunmetal light, shuffling through the ash, is the other's world entire . . . They crossed the broken asphalt apron and found the tank for the pumps. (Atwood 4)

The critique of Enlightenment universal is central to the thinking of the philosophers of the post-modern period happen to scrutinize its main protagonist's miserable condition because of modernity. The conclusion he arrived at was that the scientific knowledge was actually marked by a contradiction because "scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. In short, there is a recurrence of the narrative in the scientific" (Sarup 136-7).

The scientific knowledge, so to say, can only prove its superiority with the help of the narrative. In other words, "Lyotard showed that science was like all other human activity" (Drolet 25). The dystopia theory considers science's "degradation."

Furthermore, Booker M. Keith, also stands up against the Western tradition of rationalist thinking and its premise of reason, formed by the search for certainty and termed "logo centric" (Moynan 77). Though main protagonist Roz, primarily affiliates with the logo centric way of seeing the world, his reasoning inevitably simultaneously involves the deconstructive impulse - the tendency to subvert itself.

The research aims to prove loopholes of modernity project. Applying the critique of

modernity project as conceptualized by Janet Wolff, Griselda Pollock, Rita Felski and Bonnie Kim Scott the research proves its hypothesis.

The issue of worry and disillusionment created on modern woman by modernity is extensively dealt with in this thesis. In the fictitious world of *The Robber Bride*, the author raises the issues of disparity and discriminations over females in modern city. Dream for harmonious society, political liberalism, and economic status, democracy and human rights are dream for females. In the peculiar world of Canada, the Western thoughts turn out to be the source of despair. Hence, woman is just a mean to satisfy the male.

For the first time *flaneur* was characterized by the French Painter Baudelaire in his painting and arts to present the new dynamic complications of modern life. Traditionally, the traits that mark the *flaneur* were wealth, education, and idleness. He strolls to pass the time that his wealth affords him, treating the people who pass and the objects he sees as texts for his own pleasure. So, the *flaneur* is supposed to be free to probe his surrounding for. Janet Wolff makes discussion about the version of *flaneur* and *flaneuse* as the words are originally coined from France and this was coined to represent the modern society which she defines as:

The *Flaneur*, the French term is always used, in English as well as in German is the person who strolls aimlessly in the modern city, observing people and events, perhaps if the *flaneur* happens also to be a writer or an artist with a view to recording these observations in word or image. Although this particular figure has a prehistory in eighteenth century thought, it is generally agreed that its prominence in the literature of modernity dates from Bauldaire's mid nineteenth- century essays on the modern life. (19)

Primarily, the concept of *flaneur* was centered on males where females were not accorded and they were not identified. The *flaneur*, however, is exclusively a male. The privilege of passing unnoticed in the city, particularly in the period in which the *flaneur* flourished that is, the mid- nineteenth century to the early twentieth century - was not accorded to women, whose presence on the streets would certainly be noticed. Not only that as many historians of the period have pointed out, women in public, and particularly women wandering without aim, immediately attract the negative stamp of the 'non - respectable'(19).

Wolff coined the term *flaneuse* associating a woman with city to define the women of the nineteenth century and especially for white male's pleasure, which she defines as:

The variety of city was again coded as a site of white masculine pleasure and hence as a potential threat to bourgeois femininity even as live experience provided examples of a tremendous variety of spatial practices across different genders, classes, and ethnicities. Such contemporary dichotomies were immediate motivation for the examination of the historical condition of cultural invisibility that termed as the *flaneuse*. (2)

Wolff questioned on early 20th century regarding already formed *flaneur* and says, "The female version of modernity's urban stroller, such a person due to certain ideologies such as private and public sphere, gender , female *Flanerie* is impossible (18). In early Twentieth century, many Feminists and Artists like, Janet Wolff, Anke Gleber, Walter Benjamin and Griselda Pollock came with the idea of revision to define the undefined women of the nineteenth century.

Walter Benjamin extended the idea, "flaneur came to rise primarily because

of an architectural change in the city of Paris. This change was rooted in building capitalism involved the creation of the arcades, which were passageways through elegant shops and park" (37). Baudelaire's depiction of *flaneur* in the city that "Baudelaire would be torn rest of his life between the stances of *flaneur* and dandy, a disengaged and cynical voyeur on the one hand, and man of the people who enters into the life of his subjects with passion on the other. *Flaneur*, as both lines of continuity and ruptures between nineteenth century and *flaneur* as its medium, paradigms, while rethinking of questions of gender and representation in the space of the modernity" (11).

The Robber Bride chronicles the life of a middle class woman in modern American society after migrating from the small countryside of Canada, Ontario. The most important issue of cultural domination, patriarchy, objectification and the commodification of females are the major concerns of this research. The life of main character Roz and her positioning in the American society is highly discussed and dealt. The issues of modernity and feminine gender are discussed as Janet Wolff discusses them as they are the paradigms of modernity.

In the text, the society represents the modern city and modern society and the main character Roz represents middle class females who are being *flaneuse*, not well recognized and well settled female returning to their native land or village. The main character, Roz, after growing up in the little town of Hanratty, Ontario, won a scholarship to a prestigious Canadian university. She left the village dreaming about many successes to rise from poor to rich and become a modern woman in the urban arena. At her first semester, she found a comfortable place to live, a part-time job, and a male admirer. But she was just treated as uncivilized and dirty which narrator describes as the retrospection of the main character Roz as:

Her shoes have left marks on the clean wet part of the floor, Emotional peak. "I don't know what to do about her." She looks down, sees her dirty knees (following Roz's eyes), and rubs at them viciously with her bare hands, smearing and the dirt around. She humiliates me, "she says, straightening up. There it is the explanation. Humiliates me, she repeats with satisfaction. She has no respect. (17)

Roz comes in cosmopolitan location in search of better life, education, and career. Indeed she dooms to face frequent blow of humiliation and defeat. She is morally, physically, and emotionally assaulted.

Janet Wolff makes description about the role of middle class female in the city as a commodity tool for the economic enhancement of the consumer culture. She says, "New opportunities for women in public as the department store supplanted the arcade, the mobilized gaze entered the service of consumption, and space opened for a *flaneuse* whose gendered gaze became a key element of consumer address" (20).

Likewise, the stereotypical representation of the working class female in the city was highly dealt by the males of the urban area, females were rather defined as bad, fallen, whore and ideologies of bad which Wolff describes as:

Here, women move center stage in the modern metropolis, whether as prostitute, housewife, mother, new women or androgyny of 1920s and early 1930s. Seen anew in the context of their actual lives, and in their representation in paintings by women artists, these figures offer a striking contrast to their more familiar prototypes in part of men and in the dominant ideologies of gender - ideologies of the 'good' and 'bad' woman, angel/whore, virgin/ fallen women. (25)

Roz after migrating into a capitalistic urban society, feels very strange with the

cultural tradition that is different from the countryside, Ontario. The narrator describes Roz's unfamiliarity with city lights and inhuman behaviorism of people. She finds criminal attitude on people and happens to see a boy child in the street lying due to lack of parents and food but people do not have any concern and sympathy for him who she feels very painful and describes the reality of the modern city and makes comment as:

That was how she knew all she knew. She never saw sunlight, in those days, except on her days off. But she saw plenty else. She saw a man cut another's man's stomach with a knife. The stomach's owner just sat looking down surprised with no protest. Flo implied that was nothing, in Toronto . . . Roz saw a child die of a fit, too, its face was black as ink. Well I am scared, said Roz provokingly. There is the police anyway. (58)

The narrator narrates the compulsion of Roz to do job to enhance her education as she is poor and cannot sustain her life in the expensive city. She respects even minor work and starts to work in Library. She used to hear the songs and music from bar and restaurants. She got a job working in the Library of the college, instead of in the cafeteria. Dr Hensawe was a friend of Head Librarian. She worked on Saturdays afternoon. She worked in the stacks, putting books away. On the Saturday afternoons in the hall of library was nearly empty, because of games. The narrow windows were open to the leafy campus, the football field, the dry fall country. The distant songs and shouts came drifting in. (75)

In the library while working she meets Mitch from British Columbia, he starts to gaze her and follows her. Roz finds him as an agent of patriarchy who seems masculine in his behaviors. He forces her when proposing her for love. Roz

remembers the days with Mitch that how humiliated she was because of her class and her origin. She narrates as:

He did seem masculine to her because he took those chances. Only a man could be so careless and demanding. We come from two different worlds" she said to him, on another occasion. She felt like a character in a play, saying that. "My people are poor people". You would think the place I lived in was a dump. Now she was the one who was being dishonest, pretending to throw herself on his mercy, for of course she did not expect him to say, oh well, if you come from poor people and live in a dump then I will have to withdraw my offer. (78)

Mitch is a rich educated, young man from British Columbia having urban experience and strolls around the city as *flaneurs* does. Roz feels that he is by birth rich but very proud. There was something edgy, jumpy, and disconcerting about him. His voice would break under stress with her, it seemed he was always under stress - he knocked dishes and cups off tables, spilled drinks, and bowls peanuts, like a comedian. He was not comedian; nothing could be further from his intentions. He came from British Columbia. His family was rich. (69)

Moreover, about the role of woman another critic Bonnie Kim Scott in her text *Gender in Modernity* defines 'modern man' from the perspective of two spheres as Public sphere and Private sphere. During the early nineteenth century, male was considered for going to public world but the female was kept under the male in private sphere. In this context Scott describes as:

Parks and theater halls as luminal spaces of modernity, urban sites caught between or outside the public and private spheres, where women could be seen without being categorized as fallen and

sexualized, where they could inscribe alternate interpretations of femininity. I want to carry that argument further, charting the way parks allowed alternate views of femininity and modernity to be staged in Paris . . . parks were indeed key segments of public space to which women laid equal claim as men; more specifically, parks staged family life sphere, counterbalancing the dominance of masculinity. (34)

Scott's question is about the liberation of female in the modern city. How the construction of shopping as particularly feminized. How feminized activity affected its ability to become an object of the Male's gaze (14). Further she comments and says , "many female strollers was involved in such activities during the time such as cinema going, shopping, The fact is that there was women's lack of access to the distortions of cultural theory and solidarity which foregrounds male activities and women invisible?"(18).

Mitch proposes Roz for marriage. Roz finds the idea is very 'furious'. Though she discards him, he follows her for his selfishness and for proving himself superior which narrator describes, "Mitch Blatchford was in love with Roz. This has become a fixed, even furious, /'idea with him. For her,a continual surprise. He wanted to marry her. He waited for he after classes, moved in and walked beside her what he thought of their conversation. Roz was flattered and but nervous" (68).

Roz faces discrimination between lower class and rich class people, she is facing low self-esteem in the city. Therefore, firstly, when she rejects the proposal, the narrator shares Mitch reaction to Roz is very furious. He treats Roz as an object and he is going to buy and charges her with bad hearing words. The narrator describes the incident as:

"Please Mitch let me not marry you" she said again with even less

conviction "you are crazy" she didn't blame him for thinking so. Her voice sounded unnatural, wheedling, and silly. As soon as he opened the door she faced the fact of him, his sleepy eyes, his pajamas, she saw that what she had come to do was enormous, impossible. She would have to explain everything to him, and of course she could not do it. She could not find any tone of voice, any expression of the face that would serve her. (93)

Scott transposes the feminist critique of the literature of modernity and describes the past literatures by the traditional male authors and painters who described woman as inferior and treated as women undermining their contribution in the society.

Male is a lived, occupiable position available or unavailable to urban subjects based on their gender, class, or sexuality. Particularly, Scott and Wolff are interested in investigation on the social construction about the *flâneur*. Forms of transforming and say that, *flâneurs* advocating posters, sold goods, supermarkets, bookstores, window shopping, department store and cycling. Woolf further asserts:

It is essentially literatures about transformations in the public world and in its associated consciousness. Its author, sociologists, social commentators of one sort or another like their mainstream brethren consistently ignored the private real, the domestic arenas that were women's primary domains. Its protagonists, invoked to epitomize the experience of modern life were invariably male figures: the dandy, the stranger, the flâneur. Within these academic essays, literary Roz, and poetry Wolff contended, women were largely absent; confined to home, to invisible arena of the private. (4)

The flâneur, however, is necessarily a male. The privilege of passing unnoticed in the

city, particularly in the period in which the *flaneur* flourished. That is the mid nineteenth century, that was not accorded to women, whose presence on the streets would certainly be noticed. Not only that as many historians of the period have pointed out, women in public, and particularly women, apparently wandering without aim, immediately attract the negative stamp of the non - respectable.

It is not accident that prostitutes appear as the central female tropes in the discourse of modernity. The narrator shares the memory of Roz about another female character Tony in the city. Roz and Tony they were treating as the *flaneuse* in the modern city. They never get respect by the other male and bourgeois female. Roz remembers the incident of a girl, Tony who is sexually assaulted by her father when he is drunk. Roz remembers the incidents when she feels humiliated and faces bullying by the males in the library.

Tony had been smashed against the wall, by her father drunk, when she was a baby. . . Her nose was crooked making every breath she took a long, dismal sounding snuffle. Her teeth were badly bunched together so that she could not close her mouth and never could contain her qualities of spit. She may not have been as stupid as everybody thought, but simply stunned, bewildered, by continual assault. And in spite of everything there was something hopeful about her she would follow after anybody who did not immediately attack and assault her.

(28)

Roz in the retrospection section, remembers her past days when she was victimized by the male of modern city. She remembers that she was used for the amusement of the several males.

Narrator articulates the animalistic behavior of Roz's husband in the party in

front of many couples. Mitch kisses her in an insulting way hurting her which she remembers, "For crying out loud", said Mitch heartily, and he did squeeze her and kiss her, with a loud smacking noise on the neck. He always smacked when he kissed. (112) Furthermore, during the party with many people, when Mitch treats Roz in a barbaric way, Roz cannot resist this because she is trapped by the modern cultural values. Narrators describes, "Tony and West had pitched out of the way for the party. She went out of the back door and stood burning and shivering in the cool wet night. She was humiliated, she was ashamed of Mitch" (111).

Another critic Anke Gleber makes an argument about the privilege that was only given to the male boycotting the presence of female. Generally, females are considered as prostitutes during that period with bad image .Women's access to urban space in the early twentieth century introduces gender biased and alternatives posed by feminist historians for rethinking the public/ private divide. They describe a modernity in which women are no longer visible, although these are important matters to address.

When Roz visits the bar and restaurants invited by her friends of the particular city of America, she finds herself always humiliated and she herself being a fool by the members. When people are drunk in the party, West who is the husband of Tony keeps sexual relationship with Roz. However, at the end, Roz finds that they are making fun of her. Roz realizes that no one is serious with her and feels guilty the narrator narrates the incidents of Roz as:

The people admired were inevitably poorer than she was. it seemed a bad joke on her, after being poor all her life in a place where poverty was never anything to be proud of that now she had to feel apologetic and embarrassed about the opposite condition with someone like Tony,

for instance, who could say middle- class prosperity so viciously and despairingly. (119)

Mitch treats Roz as his personal property to keep inside the house. He visits the bar, restaurants and pub but he does not want Roz to come out. Even he comments upon the dresses of Roz. Roz feels Mitch as her 'watchdog'. He does not want her wearing short skirts. There was beer to drink, and wine punch Tony, who was a splendid cook, was stirring a pot of jambalaya. Roz makes a trip to the bathroom to remove her from Mitch, who seems to want to stick close to her. She thinks that he is being a watchdog; she forgets he may be shy. When she comes out, he moves on. She drinks three cups of punch in quick succession and is introduced to the woman who had written the play. Roz is constantly humiliated by her husband.

Moreover, Roz's life is described as mischief because the other two men after having sexual relationships with Roz, West and Tom they explain the relation as a mischief and mistake. She feels really tormented and used by the all males which narrator describes as:

This time Tom and Roz did not refer so openly to their disappointment. They had begun to hold back a little, maybe to suspect that they were unlucky for each other, they were tenderly, carefully, amusingly, and almost as if the last failure had not happened. He phoned to tell her that his wife and children were going to England. He was going to join them there, but later, ten days. So there will be ten days, cried Roz, blotting out the long absence to come he was to stay in England until the end of the summer. (149)

Roz remembers her life incidents when she gets divorced by Mitch. She is isolated and separated. During that day, she feels herself empty and tired of life due to the

male's domination in the modern society. Narrators narrates this painful condition representing the condition of all the middle class female migrating from the countryside's and describes " She knew that how she had seen him; she knows it, because it happened again. She was in Toronto Airport, in the middle of the night. This was about nine years after she and Mitch had divorced She was alone" (99). She becomes deserted and alone in the modern city.

Females are not machine that can be programmed forever. They have emotions, desires and feelings and desires for freedom. If the state efforts to control the personal freedom of people forever it generates permanent conflict between individual and state. The opening of the novel also casts light upon the conflict and ending also highlights upon the possible conflict. First and foremost, Roz sacrifices her own life for the sake of her survival. She enters the Weapons Lab in Gilead's place – the totalitarian patriarchal society. Despite all of the wrongs that Gilead had done to her, she efforts to survive.

In a dystopian world, bodies are represented as powerless and feeble, being reduced to constant oppression and regulation from the state, which engages discipline to achieve its devious aim. As Michel Foucault in his text *Discipline and Punish* describes it, discipline is a tool that made "possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body" materialized in different ways (137). One of them focused on a scrupulously designed and organized everyday routine, which had to be followed by everyone in society. This coercion grants the ruling elite a perfect opportunity to force people into submissiveness, turn them into robots that are trained to do with preciseness exactly the same thing as everyone else does. Every day and every hour of people's lives is prescribed and directed by the government, prohibiting people any involuntary deviation from the rigid schedule. In fact, it is through the use of such a

strict disciplinary system that social order can be established where people become totally subservient and oblivious to the omnipotent power of the state. Foucault in his work elaborates on this idea and explains that "discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (138). In other words, once a human body becomes totally disciplined, two things happen. On the one hand, the body increases its productive potential and can benefit the state economically, and, on the other hand, it becomes completely obedient, posing no difficulties for the state's control. Thus, inadvertently, the citizens of most totalitarian regimes resemble prisoners because of the rigid discipline that the state requires of their bodies. Foucault discusses the implementation of discipline in penitentiary institutions in *Discipline and Punish* and quotes at length Léon Faucher, who drafted the rules for a Parisian prison:

The prisoners' day will begin at six in the morning in winter and at five in summer. They will work for nine hours a day throughout the year. Two hours a day will be devoted to instruction . . . At the first drum-roll, the prisoners must rise and dress in silence, as the supervisor opens the cell doors. At the second drum-roll, they must be dressed and make their beds. At the third, they must line up and proceed to the chapel for morning prayer . . . Work and the day will end at nine o'clock in winter and at eight in summer. . . . (Foucault 6)

Similarly, characters of *The Robber Bride* follow exactly the same routine. People, to be exact Numbers, live day after day according to the Table of Hours—a detailed schedule of their lives organized and put together by the state.

This Table, proclaimed by the main protagonist as the "heart and pulse of One State," dictates how people should spend every minute of the day—everyone is doing

precisely the same thing in unison, creating a giant organism that acts and moves alike—to shape one body, which can be easily regulated through discipline and order (Atwood 12). Atwood, depicting a typical day in the life Roz, narrates:

Every morning, with six-wheeled precision, at the very same hour and the very same minute, we get up, millions of us, as though we were one. At the same hour, millions of us as one, we start work. Later, millions as one, we stop. Then, like one body with a million hands, at the same second according to the Table, we lift the spoon to our lips. In addition, at the same second, we leave for a stroll and go to the auditorium, to the hall for the Taylor exercises, and then to bed. (13)

Such eerie unanimity does not allow any foreign action that is somehow different from the rest, making it very simple for the government to exercise its control and at the same time use people's productivity for its advantage. This never-interrupted and never-ending routine sucks out any creativity or desire to learn from these people, turning them into one giant mass of pliable material, easily trained and molded. Foucault elaborates on this "time-table" method of discipline and asserts that, because it "establishes rhythm, imposes particular occupations, regulates the cycle of repetition," it allows the state to obtain the same blind compliance from its citizens as commanders get from their soldiers in the army (149). The rigid breakdown of time into hours, minutes, and seconds and disciplinary control of gestures and movements in the military eliminates any free movements and adjusts "the body into temporal imperatives, "which, if repeated continuously, stay in one's body forever (151). By the same token Roz and other characters in *The Robber Bride* "precisely established meals, obligatory walks" that smears any traces of individuality and makes them robotic and identical, like "innumerable waves" in one big "mighty flood"(Atwood 7).

Rita Felski challenges conventional theories of modernity. She questions modernist theories from a feminist perspective highlighting the simple opposition between men's and women's experiences of the modern world. Felski examines the gendered meanings of such notions as nostalgia, consumption, feminine writing, the popular sublime, evolution, revolution, and perversion. She further argues:

What is the gender of modernity? How can anything as abstract as a historical period have a sex? In the context of the current interest in the 'historicity of textuality and the textuality of history,' the idea is not as strange as it may initially appear. If our sense of the past is inevitably shaped by the explanatory logic of narrative, then the stories that we create in turn reveal the inescapable presence and power of gender symbolism. (2)

Felski comes against the traditional concept of modernity. She advocates that modernity is patriarchal and unfriendly for the feminine gender. Modern literature is shaped with patriarchal ideology. It cannot evoke the voice of females. Modern stories by males are loaded with gender symbols.

The Robber Bride also plays a central role as the main protagonist's way of resistance to the totalitarian regime, where women are exclusively valued for their reproductive function and are mentally and physically abused by the patriarchal ruling class. While writing helps the main character to discover her individuality and reconnect with the past, in Atwood's world, Roz, the main heroine, employs writing to reconstruct her body, which has been disciplined and exploited for the state's benefit. As Foucault puts it, the discipline that the state employs to achieve its supremacy has to dominate and control the body to achieve its total subjection: "The discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and

diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (138). Thus, she has to regain her body and reclaim her authority, recreate her identity and challenge the state's ideals by narrating her story. Among the dystopian novels discussed in this chapter, Atwood's novel literally belongs to the tradition of *écriture féminine* and directly reflects the philosophies of the feminist writers on the role of women and their oppression in society. Since women in the totalitarian society are defined only through their social functions of procreation, are treated as "machines," and have no power over the autonomy of their own bodies, the only way to survive and resist the repression is to attempt to regain their bodies (Moyalon 282). Writing, subsequently, becomes the avenue for the reconstruction and liberation of the woman's body, which has been taken away from her, rendering her voiceless and powerless. As Cixous underlines in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," writing enables woman to "return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (395). Since the woman is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow, she has to rebel and let her body be heard through writing,— "an act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being." But also give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal.

Narrating her own story thus becomes essential for Roz because through writing she recreates her body, reconstructs her identity, and remains human. Roz, the main protagonist in Atwood, always refers to her body as something over which she does not have control anymore, something that is foreign or distant from her, something that is needed by the governing elite and thus treated as their property. In the totalitarian society, where as a result of the military coup, religious

fundamentalists obtain governmental power, women who can still reproduce become a "national resource," as nuclear pollution has rendered most women infertile (Atwood 85). Her role now is to give birth, and, if she is unable to accomplish it, she will be labeled an "unwoman" and sent to the Gilead camp to toil laboriously until she dies. Aunts indoctrinate Handmaids to think of themselves as "seeds," but Roz refuses to be considered just a seed: she feels that as a human being she is entitled to have the ownership over her own body and herself (25). Thus, since she is denied the ownership of her body, she must reclaim it through her story. As Mautner thomas assures, " Roz "refigures" her lost body "through the text, as she imagines the narrative as a metaphorical body" (356).The dismembered body is vividly present in this novel and becomes the metaphor for Roz's lost body to the ruthless values, one she must reconstruct through her story. Images of and references to body parts can be detected throughout the whole novel (104). In this dystopia, females are only viewed as "two legged wombs" (176); the doctor who examines Roz "deals with a torso only" (78); the image of hands reoccurs multiple times when Roz thinks how " empty" they seem to her, as they "could be held, but not seen" (Atwood 62). When Roz has memories of her mother, she confesses that she feels like a "missing person" and expresses the incredible urge to hold a human body:

Can I be blamed for wanting a real body, to put my arms around?

Without it I too am disembodied. I can listen to my own heartbeat against the bedsprings, I can stroke myself, under the dry white sheets, in the dark, but I too am dry and white, hard, granular; it's like running my hand over a plateful of dried rice; it's like snow. There's something dead about it, something deserted. (132)

When women all of a sudden become powerless over night as a result of the military

coup that establishes the rule of the dictator , Roz recalls that she thought as if somebody had "cut off [her] feet" (Atwood).

In *The Robber Bride*, the state prescribes which social function each person will serve for the welfare of the country as a whole. Thus, individual feelings or ambitions are disregarded, as dystopias, according to Martin Kessler, "posit a perfectly malleable . . . human nature incapable of experiencing any emotion or exercising any judgment outside of the prevailing . . . frame of reference" (568). Consequently, in *The Robber Bride*, when girls reach the age of sixteen they are prohibited from choosing their future occupations because they are not in control of how their bodies will be used. The state arbitrarily determines what "subjects" they will be turned into and how their bodies will be appropriated according to governmental needs. Roz narrates about her miserable condition as:

Dare not choose in your minds the work you would like to do when you leave the Home of Students. You shall do that which the Council of Vocations shall prescribe for you. For the Council of Vocations knows in its great wisdom where you are needed by your brother men, better than you can know in your unworthy little minds. And if you are not needed by your brother men, there is no reason for you to burden the earth with your bodies. (18)

In other words, individuals' opinions on how to utilize their own bodies are not taken into consideration, and what is more disturbing is that due to the ideological indoctrination, they do not even mind it; they are so used of being told what to do that they see nothing unusual about it.

Griselda Pollock points out the failure of traditional notion of modernity created by the traditional writers and artists in their literature by putting male at the

centre and undermining the role of woman in the society. Such literature excluded the possibility of feminine equivalents to its heroes of modern life. The solitary and independent life of the male was not open to women. The sexual division of public from private sphere in the nineteenth century prohibited women from strolling alone in the city. Roz further remembers the past memory and the negative treatment of Mitch after giving divorce to Roz. The narrator talks about the painful condition when she loosed her daughter Anna. Mitch takes responsibility of Anna thinking that Roz cannot give her proper care and facilities. Roz as a hopeless person at the end of the relation with Mitch, she discovers the letter sent by Mitch in which he describes his next life with another girl, Elizabeth. But the life of Roz was distorted so she remembers the decision of Mitch on the letter blaming to Roz saying she is unstable and immoral person. Mitch does not have any respect towards her so he is giving bad ideologies words that narrator describes in this way:

Tom wrote her a letter, o loving humorous letter, mentioning fate. A grieved, relieved, renunciation, before he set off for England.. This last snow of winter was quickly gone, causing some fooding in the valleys. Mitch wrote that he would drive up in June, when school was out, and take Anna back with him for the summer. He said he wanted to start the divorce because he had met a girl he wanted to marry. Her name was Elizabeth. He said she was a fine and stable person. (154)

The narrator narrates the incidents of Roz and her ultimate life. Roz comes to the American World to be educated, developed, and rich. She respects, even works hard as artist, R.J, and works in library. She has to face many hardships. She bears the problem of cultural adaptation. She contributed for the capitalistic society by giving company too many males. And has never got respect by other. At the end, she has to

return in her original village in a ruined condition. She has no hope in the life; no one is coming to meet her. So, the ideals and ideologies of modern society become just as a fantasy and dystopian reality for her. She feels she is ruined and lost in the modern society. Roz just remembers the past days and she has disillusionment created by the modern ideologies and culture. Modernity robs Offered instead of enlightening her.

Finally, representation of the middle class women in literature has now being changed due to the contributions regarding different theories and queries pioneered by new feminist critics especially after twentieth century. In the modern period, new feminist critics came with some new thought and ideologies to redefine past history about women written in art and literature. In addition, they raised the voice for the justice of the women and tried to review the history and rewrite the old literature that gave the new role to the women of the then period and inspire the present world's women.

In this way, the role of women is started to be presented beyond the stereotypical tradition of portraying women in literature. As literature is considered to be the reflection of the society, the past literature represented the contemporary society by creating female characters to show the manner and tradition of the society. In the past, the female's contributions, which were most important for the regulation and expansion of the society, were neglected. Therefore, feminist came up with various versions of ideologies to rewrite the history of those unaddressed woman and tried to give justice by revisiting the traditional notion. *The Robber Bride* is an epitome to reflect the twentieth century society in Canada and America. The thesis explored the role of female, condition and sufferings of female even in modern capitalistic society. The females were made invisible, used only for the male gaze as commodity value.

Atwood published many novels to show the historical scenario of middle class women in twentieth century modern city like America and Canada. Even after the great revolutions like The French Revolution and The World War II, though many things changed, the condition and status of women could not be drastically changed. Atwood tries to present this bitter reality in the book creating a leading female character Roz. The thesis clarifies that a girl being middle class girl from village cannot fulfill her dream in the modern city. Rather she has to face many sorts of insult and humiliations. Therefore, this thesis tries to raise the question upon western philosophy of civilization that cannot be justifiable for the all citizens and all human. Atwood depicts the life of women which has to face many disparities in the society like gender wise, geographic wise and class wise. Therefore, Roz represents most of the all American Western society and its traditions.

The American society was taken as most developed, civilized and highly educated. However, there is lack of emotion, sentiments, and harmony. Atwood has dealt this very situation by presenting many issues and life events of main character in relation to other minor characters in the book. Margret Atwood explicates the issues to show the major contributions of those middle class working women to develop the society but unfortunately, they are considered as manner less, uncivilized and immoral. The condition of the middle class female as in modernity is problematic due to their unclear identify and agency in the patriarchal society. The objectives to use this theoretical technique is to highlight the ultimate life that is painful, desperate and isolated getting return back to their original place. Those females are ruined due to patriarchy. Woolf questions modernity as oppressive project for females. Middle class women in the modern capitalistic society where they are always used as commodity having negative identity among the so- called educated and civilized male. *The*

Robber Bride shows the exact life of the ambitious female who was attracted to the modernity, wanted to develop them, wanted to get education but they were used as the tool for the males and for the economical enhancement of the society only.

The ultimate life of those females in modern society was not valuable, was not given value and not regarded positively. Therefore, the female in city migrated from country sides could not sustain them in the rich city, had to return to the village cutting off the all-temporary rations in the city, and lived an isolated and separated life. For instance, the main character who has to be back at the end of her life though many males had relationship with her. Even her husband gives divorce, takes the decision about daughter Anna. Ultimately, Roz returns to her original place East Ontario and lives her fragmented life as the 'gift of modernity'.

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