

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Literature is classified into three major kinds of genres; those are novel or fiction, play or drama, and poem. All three major kinds of literature provide a reader with the pleasures of entering a world different from, yet similar to, his own. While a novel may be set in the actual world, it portrays imagined people and events. A novel is a fictional, narrative prose usually too long to read in a single sitting. A novel, then, is a long narrative prose and its length allows the novelist to present fully the world he has chosen to describe (Havighurst, 1968, p.561-563). A novel, like a poem, is made of words. “It is more like a poem seen in sections through a microscope—so highly magnified that to perceive its total rhythm and so estimate its value with conviction is a feat attended with the greatest difficulty.” (Leavis, 1968, p.212). The novel and the drama or play are similar because they show the interactions of character and action in rather full detail. “Yet, play, less like lyric poems than any other literary form, are above all public – only concerned with how people behave when they are together.” (Havighurst, 1968, p.562).

When the readers read novels, they can know what the characters say and do. More than that, they know what the characters think and feel. As with imagined people in all good novels, people can share the characters’ inner life. “The many sides of their personalities can be examined more thoroughly, in the light of a larger number of incidents, than is possible in any other form.” (p.563). By reading a novel, the readers can know more about the details of the characters in the novel. The readers can get a clearer view about the problems the characters are facing, the situation where they live, how the characters respond to the condition and the problems they are facing. The readers will also get a clearer view of the characters’ emotion during the time they are facing their problems. The readers can even involve emotionally with the characters in the story. That is why the writer chooses novel than the other genres of literary works.

From many novel authors, the writer chooses Margaret Atwood. Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa in 1939 and attained degrees from the University of Toronto and Radcliffe College. Margaret Atwood had lived in many places and now lives in Toronto, Canada. She supported her writing habit with many non-writing

jobs in youth, but has been a full-time writer since 1972 – fiction, screenplays, poetry, and non-fiction – with short interludes of guest teaching here and there. She was the chair of The Writers' Union in 1981 to 1982, and president of PEN Canada in 1985 and 1986.

As a Canadian novelist, short-story author, and critic, Margaret Atwood focuses mostly on the feminism, sociological, and political subject. Often referred to as a "feminist / ecological treatise" by critics, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, for example, reflects the politics and issues of the postmodern society (Hutcheon, 1988, p.145). Like the journey itself, the language, events, and characters in Atwood's novel reflect a world that oppresses and dominates both femininity and nature. Atwood's works have always been political in the way that they represent a social consciousness, concern for the survival of individuals, particularly women, in a world characterized by hostility and violence that are both latent and overt.

Atwood also has emerged as a champion of Canadian literature and of the peculiarly Canadian experience of isolation and survival. Margaret Atwood also has a clever technique in presenting the heroine initially as a vice like a sleepwalker conceiving disjointed perceptions of its surroundings, as well as flashing reminiscences about a bygone life (Rigney, 1979, par.8).

The writer, therefore, chooses Margaret Atwood because most all of her works contain many worth-studied elements, such as feminism, politics, and so forth. Her works also give many perspectives about human's life and the conditions they must face. Atwood has a good technique in presenting her works so that the readers can get at least "something" new about human's life and how to deal with life.

From all of her interesting novels, such as *Surfacing* (1972), *The Edible Woman* (1976), *Bodily Harm* (1983), *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1989), *The Robber Bride* (1993), *Morning in the Burned House* (1995), *Alias Grace* (1996), and *The Blind Assassin* (2000), the writer chooses *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) to analyze. She chooses it because among all her novels, it tells clearly about what can be found in human's life. *The Handmaid's Tale* tells about the condition of women, which can be found until now. It contains many perspectives about women and the difficulties in their lives. The novel contains also the example

of women who feel depressed under the oppression she is burdened. It gives a good example that even though women have already felt depressed and known nothing to do more, they still have to keep alert and think carefully about their next steps in facing the condition.

Some critics say that Atwood's work, *The Handmaid's Tale*, gives something that cannot be found in her other works. It is dramatizing the interrelationship between power and sex, even though accusing male "misogynous mentality," (Clements, 2003, par.9) upholding and cherishing man-woman partnership. The novel also offers two distinct additional features: feminism and irony. It can be seen from this quotation:

It tells about some feminist groups who exercise the same faulty judgment, for example those who abuse censorship, so that they forfeiting their own freedom along with both the writers and the reading audience. Here, feminism functions inclusively rather than exclusively, poignantly rather than stridently, humanely rather than cynically. The novel's ironic tone, on the other hand, betokens a confident narrative strategy that aims at treating a depressing material gently and gradually, yet firmly, openly and conclusively, thus capably succeeding in securing the reader's sympathy and interest (par.9).

It means that there are two elements, which are feminism and irony, that can draw the readers' attention. The feminism feature can be seen when Atwood tries to show from her novel that most of the characters in the novel experience oppression from the patriarchal ideology in the place they live. This is where Atwood's strength as a feminist author shown. The ironic feature can be seen from the way Atwood tells the story about the feelings and the unhappy condition of the characters, especially Offred, the female main character, when she has no choice to survive from the oppression she faces.

Rigney argued that *The Handmaid's Tale* is the proof of Atwood's appalled ability in presenting story. It is also the one, from many Atwood's works, which has succeeded in making a movement of the genre. She stated:

The novel shows Atwood's strengths both as an engaging storyteller and a creator of a sympathetic heroine, and as an articulate craftswoman of a theme that is both current and controversial. As the novel signifies a landmark in the maturing process of Atwood's creative career, her self-assured depiction of the grim dystopian world gives an energetic and meaningful impetus to the genre (Rigney, 1987, par.9).

Atwood's work *The Handmaid's Tale* clearly tells about the feminism, that is the patriarchal ideology. It can also be found in the novel that women are oppressed by the male dominance in the Republic of Gilead, the representative of the patriarchal society that bears the patriarchal ideology used by Atwood. The writer notices that, from many centuries ago, women have experienced discrimination by men. People believed that women are "weak creatures" that have lower position than men do (Bressler, 1999, p.180). Because of that ideology, people began to "create" a social position for men and women. They walked with belief that men had the control towards women. They even believed that they had the power to do anything to women and women should be submissive to them. This is what they called the patriarchal ideology. Started from this ideology, there occurs also a belief that women were created, as if, to suffer under men's oppression. This ideology has attracted the writer's attention and she has found that there is the same ideology in the novel.

Conservative Christians, as it can be seen from the novel, control and establish a dictatorship in the Republic of Gilead. Most women in Gilead are infertile after repeated exposure to pesticides, nuclear waste, or leakages from chemical weapons. The few fertile women are taken to camps and trained to be handmaidens, birth mothers for the upper class. They are placed in a house of the commanders and should serve the commander sexually. Infertile lower class women are sent either to clean up toxic waste or to become "Marthas," house servants. No women in the Republic are permitted to enjoy sexual intercourse simply because of their desires. It is believed that sex is for reproduction only. The new Republic government declares this a feminist improvement on the sexual politics of today when women are seen as sex objects. The government feels that women may not be seen as sex object when they serve men sexually because of some reasons, a duty for example. There will be no sexual abuse when other people know the "owner" of the women. Some men

might have no courage to disturb somebody else's property. In this novel also, women are considered as men's property, so that the other lower class men may not disturb the women. It can be seen from the way handmaidens are named. They are named according to their Commander's name. For example, if the Commander's name is Fred, the handmaiden is called Offred. The handmaidens are given the word "of" before the name of their Commander. It is to show to whom the handmaiden belongs.

The writer notices the changing of the "world" where Offred, the main character, lives. Fertile women are camped and trained to be handmaidens. Yet, the writer also notices that some women, that are camped to be handmaidens, run away from what they call a "duty." They feel that they have rights to decide what they want to do. They also feel that women should not serve men sexually by force. On the other hand, Offred, the main character in the story, also becomes the victim of the oppression of male dominance. Instead of running away and risking her own life, Offred decides to survive from the oppression she is burdened. She does not have much time to accept the changes in the circumstances she lives. Many women resist the changes and they end up in misery, even death. Seeing this, Offred's fear of the thinking of pain and death makes her more desperate. However, she tries to use her own consciousness to think of the best way to keep alive. Offred sees that the best way to keep alive is to be accepted in that patriarchal society, The Republic of Gilead. She decides to behave according to the society's acceptance, even though it is obvious that it does not make her better and brings conflict within herself. The writer is curious to know how Offred survives in the changing situation that obviously oppresses her. The writer chooses this topic because it is obvious that the strategies of survival Offred uses might be a crucial "tool" for her to survive inside the patriarchal society, especially when it is found out that Offred is also facing depression and being trapped inside of it. Offred finds that there might be no other way to escape from the Republic of Gilead instead of using some strategies or doing something to keep surviving, especially when her own life is at stake.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

After reading Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the writer comes up with one question she wants to answer by writing this thesis. The writer wants to know how Offred survives in the patriarchal society.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The writer notices that Offred uses some strategies to survive in the Republic of Gilead. Therefore, by writing this thesis, the writer intends to find out the ways Offred survives in the patriarchal society.

1.4. Importance of the Study

The writer hopes that her writing can give the readers an outlook that women in the novel are still oppressed by the male dominance. All women, therefore, are considered as a victim of the oppression, of the condition, which they cannot handle except to walk inside of it. It is obvious, in any case, that women as a victim of male dominance will use their own ways, their own strategies to survive from the oppression. The writer hopes that her thesis can give them, especially women readers, clearer view that even though Offred, as a woman, feels depressed of the condition that burdened her, she still tries to keep surviving. She still thinks rationally and keeps her self-control, so that she will not do something that may endanger her life and loose to the condition. Offred keeps alert and does not take unconsidered steps to fight against the condition. Offred thinks carefully the best ways to deal with it. If not, she may even fall into the situation, she may endanger herself because of the unconsidered steps. Instead of doing something risky, Offred keeps calm and tries to find a way that may not endanger her life. In addition, Offred, at the end of the story, even gets a freedom and safety she hopes for.

The writer also hopes that English Department students can become familiar with Margaret Atwood's works. Most of Atwood's works have issues on feminism and women's survival from the male dominance. It is hoped then that this thesis can give English Department students contribution on idea and perspective in analysing works about the survival of a woman in a patriarchal society. The writer

also hopes that her thesis can give English Department students reference on analyzing Margaret Atwood's works more.

1.5. Scope and Limitation

The thesis is about the strategies of survival Offred uses in order to survive inside the Republic of Gilead. It may also include the conflicts Offred faces while she is using the strategies of survival. The writer analyzes Offred, as one of female-examples who tries to survive inside the changing situation instead of running away from it. She is the only one victim of the male dominance, which is represented in the Republic of Gilead, who succeeds in surviving inside the Republic of Gilead as a handmaiden. The other characters might occur briefly as a supporter in analysing Offred's situation in life. The other characters that may occur in the analysis are such as the Commander Wife, Rita – the Martha in the Commander's house, and the Econowives. They are the female representatives of the Republic of Gilead, who cause Offred's conflicts when she stays at the Commander's house as a handmaiden. There are also Nick, the chauffeur, and Ofglen, people who try to help Offred escape from the Republic of Gilead.

1.6. Methodology

The writer uses the library research. First, she tries to find out the topic of her writing. After that, she searches some theories that can support her in writing her thesis. When the writer has finished searching for the theories, she makes an outline of the theories and especially her thesis, and then she writes from the outline.

The writer uses cultural approach, which is the concept of patriarchy and feminine traits. The concept of patriarchy is used to help the writer analyse the system in the Republic of Gilead, where Offred lives as a handmaiden. The system in the Republic of Gilead may influence Offred in making the strategy of survival in the story. In addition, the explanation about the feminine traits is used to know more about Offred's strategy of survival she uses to survive in the Republic of Gilead.

1.7. Organization of the Study

The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter one is the introduction. In the introduction, the writer tells about the background of the study. She explains why she chooses the novel to be analyzed, why she chooses the author, and why she is interested in the topic she is working. In chapter one, there are the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, importance of the study, scope and limitation, methodology she uses, and the organization of the study. Chapter two contains of the review of related literature. It explains about the theories related to the subject. Chapter three is about the analysis process. Chapter four contains the conclusion of the analysis.