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**ECOFEMINISM IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE ROBBER BRIDE*  
BA thesis**

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**TARTU  
2023**

## ABSTRACT

Canadian author Margaret Atwood has addressed environmental and gender inequality issues in her literary works for decades, becoming a significant contributor to the discussion surrounding both topics whose relevance has only grown over time. Ecofeminism, a feminist theory that combines both, seeks to address the underlying causes of women's oppression and environmental degradation through criticising patriarchal systems of domination and binary oppositions that place women and nature in the subordinate position in society against men and culture. The aim of the thesis is to find out how ecofeminist ideas are developed in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*, a novel published in 1993 with a focus on women's empowerment, putting it in the context of Atwood's earlier and later works.

The introduction provides an overview of how Atwood's works and activism relate to feminism and environmentalism, a brief summary of the novel and the main concepts of ecofeminist theory. The first two subchapters of the literature review explore the different branches of ecofeminism and how ecofeminist theory has appeared in Atwood's other works. The third subchapter discusses previous scholarship on *The Robber Bride* and its main themes. The empirical part focuses on the analysis of the downsides of the hierarchical and consumerist society the characters live in and the ecofeminist lifestyle as an alternative through contrasting two characters in the novel. The conclusion summarizes the main findings of the thesis.

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## INTRODUCTION

If we didn't have "the environment" – the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat – there wouldn't be any literature at all because we ourselves would not exist. /.../ In that sense, the preservation of an environment similar to the one we have is a precondition of literature. Unless we can preserve such an environment, your writing and my writing and everyone else's writing will become simply irrelevant, as there will be nobody left to read it. (Atwood 2010: para. 6)

Known to emphasise interconnections between what is often considered polar opposites like culture and nature and their survival (Atwood 2010: para. 10), Canadian author Margaret Atwood is also lauded for her near-prophetic ability to write about societal issues since the beginning of her career that either have stayed relevant through time or are more relevant than ever in the present, encouraging people to analyse some of her earlier works to identify themes that reflect the current state of society. As time passes, new meanings can be found in older literature in an interactive and shifting process between author and reader (Tolan 2007: 4). Some of the more significant topics that have grown in importance are the position and treatment of women and environmental issues, between which a link has also been identified by Atwood herself, as "issues, which are typically spoken of in isolation, are for Atwood inextricably related, and the theme of connection is one that characterises her world-view" (Tolan 2007: 7). Speaking to the French news channel France24 in 2020, Atwood expressed her belief in a tie between the perpetrators of women's issues and the climate crisis (Atwood 2020). She has also emphasised the urgency of addressing the climate crisis as it will affect the lives of women most of all (Atwood 2018). While she has not identified with the feminist movement herself, critics have found significant commonalities between Atwood's works and feminist theories (Tolan 2007: 2), as her writing is influenced by cultural discourse as much as she impacts it herself (Tolan 2007: 4).

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Robber Bride*, which was published in 1993, is centred around the stories and relationship dynamics of women. The three main characters of the

novel – the war history professor Tony, the successful businesswoman Roz, and the sensitive eco-conscious New Ager Charis, are haunted by their past. Both their childhood trauma and the actions of the manipulative, multifaceted and elusive character Zenia, who is described to lure the three women's partners away from them and then abandon them, bond the characters together as they often meet up to not only discuss their lives and the world, but their shared hatred for Zenia. The characters ultimately step out of victimhood and into their own power, and also learn to affirm their identity past societal expectations and their own insecurities, largely due to Zenia's influence. The women's lifestyles also differ significantly. Roz embraces the cold city life and the cruel masculine world of business and financial success after growing up poor, half-Jewish and half-Catholic as she struggles with feeling a disconnect between her identities. Charis, however, chooses to live a quieter life in harmony with nature and deep inner spirituality after suffering from the trauma of sexual abuse in her childhood, which caused her to split herself in two. She buried her heavier and traumatised childhood self, and chose a new identity for herself with a new name that would be lighter and rid her of all negativity. This contrast between the two characters, but also their similarity in terms of their split identity lend themselves to ecofeminist analysis, as the thesis explores how oppositions in society like man/woman and culture/nature manifest in the novel and what the consequences of such divides may be.

While plenty of Atwood's works have been analysed through the ecofeminist lens before, previous research on *The Robber Bride* has mostly focused on its power feminism and the shaping of female identity separate from societal norms in the novel. Thus, a gap in the research can be identified as society's relationship with nature in the novel has not been explored before. Ecofeminism effectively combines the two significant themes in Atwood's writing – feminism and environmentalism. A feminist theory originating from the 1970s, ecofeminism seeks to address the issues of the exploitation of women and nature together,

which are believed to originate from capitalist patriarchy that subordinates women and nature to the man's culture (Gaard 1993: 18). In general, many view that one of the main problems ecofeminism tackles, but also perpetuates in its many approaches, is the dualistic approach of seeing women and nature as the 'Other' to the man's 'Self' in society (Guttmann 2016: 40). Multiple hierarchical dualisms or the separation of concepts that oppose each other in society, such as culture/nature, male/female, mind/body, emotion/reason are also identified (Plumwood 1993: 43). Ecofeminists believe that power-over relationships characterise the dynamic between the oppositional pairs with one side being the subordinate to the culturally superior dominant (Vance 1993: 134). The subordinate pairs of the oppositions are also usually linked to each other, manifesting as the association of women with nature, body, and emotions as opposed to the superior male culture, mind and rationality (Plumwood 1993: 43). This also means that the undervaluing of women will negatively affect how nature is treated, or vice versa, as they are connected (Bile 2011: 12). In a sense, ecofeminists wish to reject domination over all and believe that all patterns of domination and systems of oppression must be addressed together and eradicated as they are all interconnected, and women's issues and ecological problems cannot be solved without the other (Vance 1993: 134).

While the novel's focus is not environmental issues, the aim of this thesis is to highlight some of the ways the society surrounding the novel's characters and the characters' attitudes themselves increases the divide between the oppositional pairs like culture/nature and man/woman, and the hierarchical relational structures that ecofeminists wish to eradicate. The second aim is to explore how the character of Charis offers a balancing and alternative worldview in the novel that aligns with ecofeminist ideals.

The first half of the literature review focuses on the theoretical background of ecofeminism and highlights some of the key branches and concepts of ecofeminism that will

be relevant to the empirical analysis of *The Robber Bride* in the second part of the thesis. The second half of the literature review details some of the ways ecofeminist concepts and ecofeminist spirituality have manifested in Atwood's novel *Surfacing* (1972) and the three novels in the *MaddAddam* trilogy – *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013) – according to significant scholars who have contributed to the research of Atwood's works. These novels are chosen as they highlight the changes in Atwood's writing over the decades concerning the topic. It also explores how Atwood's liberalism, power feminism and belief in personal responsibility conflict with her simultaneous goal to address environmental problems to which hyper-individualism and capitalism contribute, and how this conflict has appeared in her novels through the decades. Some of the themes that are explored in the empirical part are addressed and an overview of the previous research on *The Robber Bride* is also given.

The empirical part of the thesis aims to fill the gap in research concerning *The Robber Bride* in terms of its criticism of consumerism and hyper-individualism, as a contribution to the study of ecofeminism in Atwood's works. It also explores the ways in which ecofeminist ideas manifest in the book based on ecofeminist theory and previous readings of Atwood's novels which highlight similar issues but have not yet been studied in *The Robber Bride*, placing it in the context of previous research and furthering the ideas presented in them. The empirical part is divided into two subchapters with the first detailing how the novel criticises the hierarchical and capitalist society in which the characters live and the potential future of women. This is done mainly through the analysis of Roz. The second subchapter focuses on ecofeminism in the novel primarily through the analysis of the character Charis.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.1 Key concepts of ecofeminism**

Reflecting the various branches of feminism at large (Bile 2011: 2), there are many subtheories and sections of ecofeminism that differ in ways such as their belief in an inherent connection between women and nature and if the connection, socially constructed or not, should be celebrated. While many wish to break this symbolic tie between women and nature, cultural ecofeminism, the first bigger trend of ecofeminism, adheres to the belief that this bond is natural, inherent to women and should be celebrated instead (Grewe-Volpp 2016: 211). Their approach glorifies the female, sees it as superior to the male and excludes the stereotypically male world from positive female experiences and qualities associated with giving life, such as nurture and empathy (Grewe-Volpp 2016: 211). Cultural ecofeminists have faced a lot of criticism, however, for essentialist notions that resemble patriarchal beliefs and placing women in the same box many have fought to escape – in the role of the nurturer, as the kind and caring mother, the provider (Lahar 1993: 113). It is also criticised for not being a constructive way to promote change in society as placing women above men in the hierarchy of moral values reverses the opposition instead and does not address the root of the problem (Vakoch 2012: 22).

Related to cultural ecofeminism is a theory of an ethic of care characteristic to women and most famously suggested by Gilligan (1982). Such an ethic focuses on mutual responsibility and a prioritisation of compassionate and empathetic ways of relating to others, valuing relationships and connection over self (Lahar 1993: 111). It also puts the weight of responsibility on the self to go through changes that would make one a more moral individual (Lahar 1993: 113). However, many claim that implementation of such an ethical

theory will not be enough to save the planet and society needs to transform the ways in which we relate to life around us completely (Kheel 1993: 244).

Another theory criticised for its ineffectiveness to bring about real change is liberal ecofeminism, which shuns the connection between women and nature, but also promotes a female assimilation into the capitalist domination-based male world, ultimately aligning with culture and individualism more than nature and a relational way of living (Grewe-Volpp 2016: 213), directly opposing cultural ecofeminism that wishes to celebrate a separate and superior female world. Plumwood (1993: 28) also notes that no real equality will be achieved with such an approach and the dominant opposition to nature remains intact. The liberal perspective also goes against ecofeminist goals, however, that wish to eradicate the opposition and hierarchical relationship between culture and nature (Grewe-Volpp 2016: 213). Where the ethic of care and liberal efforts often converge, however, is in an overvaluing of personal responsibility and green consumerism in the case of liberalism, which pushes consumers to show their care for the planet by buying their environmentally friendly products (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 9). As both the ethic of care and green consumerism put the responsibility on personal efforts and on women specifically, they are criticised for overemphasising the power of the individual and the gendered power of women in the fight against climate change instead of addressing the systemic and political factors that go into environmental problems (Bile 2011: 24).

Other branches like social ecofeminism emerged, which assert that the connection between women and nature and their opposition to men should be severed as the differences between men and women are socially constructed and the dynamic between the sexes can be influenced by societal values, emphasising society's responsibility in changing the individual (Grewe-Volpp 2016: 212-213). This would also mean that men and women are not inherently different in the ways they relate to nature and a positive connection with nature

can be cultivated instead in both men and women through socialisation. In addition, this would eradicate the mutually reinforcing cycles of repression between women and nature and the need for men to define themselves as different from women by distancing themselves from nature (Bile 2011: 16). Just as liberal feminists can adopt masculine characteristics in an effort to gain power and success, men can be socialised to be more caring (Bile 2011: 19). Thus, a third perspective finds middle ground between affirming the connection between nature and women and completely disregarding it, emphasising the importance of rejecting the systems of domination and valuing and nurturing the human-nature connection for both sexes and across all domains instead (Bile 2011: 19).

There are different ways to cultivate that connection, however. One thing that could contribute to a transformation of humans' relationship to the world is spirituality as Western culture is thought to value matter over spirit (Bile 2011: 23). Spiritual ecofeminism centres around the concept of the ancient Gaia, or Mother Earth in the place of a male God as an alternative to the patriarchal domination-based religions (Kheel 1993: 251). The worship of Gaia would help to cultivate a connection with the natural world (Kheel 1993: 251). Some ecofeminists also believe in the worship of the Goddess, stemming from the traditions of ancient cultures that were more peaceful and interconnected with nature than later societies (Spretnak 1984: para. 21).

Though cultural ecofeminists affirm the existence of an inherent spiritual connection between women and nature, the ecofeminist approach to spirituality can also be described through non-essentialist terms, as a space separate from other religions, where women have autonomy and control over their own spiritual lives (Santamaria-Davila et al 2019: 55-60). Some ecofeminists also blame Christianity for implanting a sense of guilt in women for their bodies, sexuality and feelings – the lesser of the binary oppositions between mind/body and rationality/emotions and which are also associated with nature (Santamaria-Davila et al

2019: 55-60). Eaton (2021: 213) details how ecofeminism has brought light to Christianity's blame for the hierarchical dualisms of man/woman and culture/nature. Eaton (2021: 217) also emphasises the importance of increasing the scientific understanding of the complex and intricate ecological systems we are part of and its importance for human survival. This could cultivate respect and reverence for the sacredness of nature, which inspires a need to protect it (Eaton 201: 217). Such an approach has also been criticised, however, as ecofeminists turning away from Western religions has led to what is seen as problematic appropriations of indigenous cultures that follow more earth-based spiritualities, without truly understanding them (Sandilands 1999: 55)

The view of Earth as something that needs protecting or saving can also be seen as problematic by some ecofeminists. This is avoided by materialist ecofeminists who consider all humans and culture as part of the material and thus natural world in a relationship where both sides have agency and power and shape each other, contrary to views that Earth is a helpless object in need of saving (Grewe-Volpp 2016: 214). This means that solving any social or environmental problems involves cultivating a deeper understanding of how this interconnectedness works and where we as humans fit in the ever-evolving reality where the effects of our actions are reflected back to us (Grewe-Volpp 2016: 219). Instead of hierarchical power-over relationships where humans come out on top, interconnection is key (Bile 2011: 27). As everything is connected, rather than focusing on just ethical behaviour, it is harmony, relationality, diversity and respect for one another that should be at the forefront of ecofeminism (Li 1993: 291). A shift in society will also create a change in the stories we tell (Bile 2011: 28) and language has a significant role in affecting societal thinking or patterns of action (Bile 2011: 29), also acknowledged by Atwood (2010): "That is one function of stories: to tell us about our choices, about the actions we might take".

Thus, it is not only ecofeminist literature, but also feminist ecocriticism that plays an important part in the conversation and eventual process of creating a more equal and sustainable world (Gaard et al. 2013: 15). Various subtheories of ecofeminism and their ideas have also been identified in Atwood's works, reflecting the development of ecofeminism over time from its cultural roots to the later materialist theory. As Tolan (2007: 1) points out: "She [Atwood] is so evidently a culturally and theoretically-aware writer who both uses and challenges the ideas which permeate her culture", in conclusion, Atwood provides a unique contribution to the discussion, never committing to a singular viewpoint (Tolan 2007: 3).

## **1.2. Ecofeminism in Atwood's writing**

*Surfacing* (1972) is one of Atwood's first novels to combine both women's and environmental issues. Connections between patriarchal violence and its destructive effects towards both nature and women are made in the novel (Tolan 2007: 42) and the female body and wilderness seem to be in opposition to the male and the rational city (Tolan 2007: 51). While Atwood rejects the notion that women are the victims to male aggression, she does seem to affirm the existence of women's spiritual connection with nature and the binary female nature/male culture split as the protagonist of the novel finds healing and connection with her matrilineal ancestry through her immersion in the wilderness (Tolan 2007: 46). The protagonist's escape into nature to find herself in isolation is also described as a liberal concept. However, the protagonist returns to society at the end of the novel and refuses to further identify with nature (Tolan 2007: 57). Ultimately, Atwood seems to acknowledge the dangers of both excessive individualism and the binary opposition between culture and nature and accepts the need for community and dialogue (Tolan 2007: 57).

According to Özdemir (2003: 60), the novel questions binary hierarchies and affirms the need to take power and step out of victimhood. Özdemir (2003: 66) also points out how

Atwood's view of feminine power in the novel is more characterised by power-to and power over oneself instead of the patriarchal power-over-others view. With this, Atwood shows how power is not inherently bad, but it also necessitates taking responsibility for how it is used.

Eco-gothic readings of *Surfacing* have also been done. Lousley (2018: 415) states that the novel exhibits Gothic characteristics, namely how the repressing of the Other within oneself and refusing to take responsibility for one's own violence can lead to exacerbation of environmental problems. However, Lousley (2018: 424) also points out how Atwood overvalues the importance of individual responsibility in the fight against environmental degradation and notes that while the empowerment of the Other is important, not taking external forces and systems of exploitation into account does not address the full picture. This reading is another one that illustrates conflicting themes in Atwood's writing.

Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy offers a more explicit social critique of the potential pitfalls of hierarchical thinking, capitalist exploitation, consumerism, and extreme individualism. Bedford (2015: 76) finds that the novels are an example of modern ecofeminism, asserting that Atwood is pointing out how capitalism contributes to the exploitation of the most marginalised and powerless with the novels acting as a warning of the more extreme consequences of such a system. In the novels both women's bodies and the environment are exploited as the novels warn of a future where the repercussions of capitalism have reached a point of no return and man's desire for domination eventually leads to the annihilation of most of humankind. Due to the eventual God-like character Crake, human life on Earth is destroyed to create a new and 'improved' human-like species who would be peaceful and live in harmony with nature (Atwood 2003).

In *The Year of the Flood* (Atwood 2009) God's Gardeners are also introduced, an ecoreligious vegetarian community who live sustainably and refuse to participate in the

exploitation of the natural world that happens in the surrounding society. The sermons of the community reflect a combining of spiritual teachings with a scientific understanding of ecosystems and biological evolution as Bergthaller (2010: 739) writes that “the sermons often read like an odd cross-over between biology lesson and theological treatise.”

Lindhe (2015: 42) claims that the novel highlights humanity’s need to cultivate more ethical qualities within themselves based on caring for the Other, like love, gratitude and charity, which would create harmony in our relationships with other humans and with nature. A similar conclusion is made by Wisker (2017: 421) “The novel also seems to indicate that the arts, compassion, creativity, passion, imagination, humanity, and diversity must be preserved, or humankind, nature, and the reason for all life are under threat of extinction. Life without these values and qualities just explodes, implodes, or empties out.” This line of thoughts also resembles the ideas of the ethic of care.

Similarly to the messages of personal responsibility of *Surfacing* and *The Robber Bride*, Bergthaller (2010: 742) talks of the role that self-discipline and practice may play in developing ethical ways of behaving and brings up Garrard’s ethical concept called ‘poetics of responsibility’, which affirms the need to take responsibility on a wider scale and create a better world on a political level through concrete action. However, Bergthaller (2010: 738) also identifies a simultaneous criticism in the novel towards both human identification with nature and the view that empathy or personal transformation can change the world, pointing out that the efforts of the God’s Gardeners to live sustainably cannot prevent environmental disaster. This reflects the doubts some ecofeminists voice about the power of the individual to combat environmental issues. This criticism of the values of personal transformation may point to a possible evolution in Atwood’s personal beliefs concerning individualism and liberalism as their downsides are addressed more significantly in *MaddAddam* than in her earlier novels.

### 1.3. Scholarship on *The Robber Bride*

Falling between the publication of *Surfacing* and the later *MaddAddam* trilogy, *The Robber Bride* (1993) takes a much more assertive stance against essentialism and women's inherent morality than *Surfacing*, also reflecting the move away from cultural ecofeminism over the decades, but primarily continues with topics such as self-inflicted victimhood and women owning their power.

Previous scholars have pointed out that *The Robber Bride* has been described as a power feminist novel (Bouson 2011: 8), which explores women's capabilities to be the villain and their hunger for power and revenge (Bouson 2011: 16). The novel also deals with power dynamics and struggles between the sexes, between women and between families (Staels 2011: 39). Power feminism, similarly to liberal feminism, puts individual responsibility on women to assert themselves against the patriarchy without placing themselves in the position of the victim (Tolan 2011: 80-81). Power feminism also questions women's inherent moral virtue (Tolan 2011: 82), opposing the principles of cultural ecofeminism and theorists like Gilligan who argue for the moral superiority of women.

The women in the novel also struggle with gender expectations (Staels 2011: 39). As Zenia breaks free from the constraints that society put on her as a woman, including the ones that push women to be 'good,' she inspires the other characters express the sides of themselves they have suppressed that are deemed as unacceptable (Staels 2011: 42). For example, Zenia encourages Tony to be whoever she wants and to embrace her rebellious side (Staels 2011: 42), characteristic to the aims of liberal feminism. Also exhausted with always trying "to be nice, to be ethical, to behave well", Roz admires Zenia for having the freedom to act outside of the norms set for women (Vickroy 2011: 63). As Atwood acknowledges evil to be part of women as much as it is of men (Ramirez 2022: 198), the findings point to a criticism of essentialism that cultural ecofeminists exhibit about the

inherent goodness of women. Ramirez (2022: 191) also emphasises how the characters were complicit in upholding patriarchal oppression, by accepting the roles in which the society put them – as the docile and self-sacrificing counterpart to their partners, often just tolerating their harmful actions. Thus, Zenia also inspires the characters to step out of victimhood and take responsibility for their situation (Ramirez 2022: 192).

It has also been described as a postmodern Gothic novel where instead of destroying the Other, it has to be eventually accepted as part of the self. As the three main characters are forced to face their trauma through the mysterious Zenia – the metaphorical Other and antagonist yet simultaneous shadow self of the characters – they also have to eventually face the Other within themselves, the parts they are too scared to face (Bouson 2011: 20-21). It is also hoped that through women's assertion of their existence and power, their position as the Other will disappear (Tolan 2011: 81). Such postfeminist notions that focus solely on personal responsibility, however, can have negative effects as they downplay the importance of community and collective efforts and take away the blame from external factors completely (Tolan 2011: 80). In addition, such an approach is not constructive to ecofeminists who believe that feminism needs to address everyone and everything that is in the subordinate position in society, as one cannot truly be free until all 'victims' of oppression are attended to, be it a self-maintained victimhood or not. Typical of neo-Gothic literature, however, fears surrounding the destruction of gender, race and class hierarchies can be transformed into a liberating experience instead by accepting the Other as part of the Self (Staels 2011: 38). The novel thus highlights how the destruction of opposing dichotomies in favour of an acceptance of mixed identities that incorporate both sides can be helpful in destroying systems of domination (Tolan 2005: 468). Also significant to the novels previously discussed and to ecofeminist theory at large, allusions to Zenia's otherworldly and spiritual nature are made. As Zenia is likened to the Great Mother or Great

Goddess from ancient matriarchal religions (Stael 2011: 48) and a wicked witch (Appleton 2008: 3), spirituality and its use to both oppress and uplift women is also established as a central theme in *The Robber Bride*.

Previous research has thus found a link between Margaret Atwood's fiction and ecofeminist principles that criticise the exploitative nature of capitalism, the binary oppositions that place women and nature in the position of the Other and promote the move away from patriarchal domination-based religions towards more earth-based or alternate spiritualities. Atwood also writes of women's empowerment through stepping away from victim mentality and taking responsibility for one's own actions. Critics also point out how Atwood's liberal and individualist beliefs conflict with her call for action against capitalist exploitation and hyper-individualism as she ultimately seems to affirm the need for balance or the co-existence of multiple truths in one. In *The Robber Bride* specifically, Atwood takes a stance against essentialism and victimhood as the novel speaks of women's capability to be 'bad' and their fight for freedom and self-determination against societal pressures, expectations, and gender norms. The following empirical part thus further explores some of the themes in *The Robber Bride* that have been established so far as a chronological midpoint between the initial ecofeminist presence in *Surfacing* and the more explicitly ecofeminist *MaddAddam* trilogy. Namely, the conflict between her liberalism and environmentalism, her criticisms of binary oppositions, Western consumerism, capitalism, and religion, and the presence of an alternative ecofeminist worldview as a balancing factor are analysed.

## **2. EMPIRICAL PART**

### **2.1 Consequences of liberalism and individualism**

#### **2.1.1 Roz and power-over thinking**

Roz, the most successful careerwoman of the main trio as the CEO of a women's magazine, showcases the ideal of power feminism where women have shattered the glass ceiling. Roz also identifies as a feminist, being part of feminist groups with political aims. Though in the beginning it was a magazine dedicated to featuring ordinary women and their accomplishments, it became more focused on consumerist and superficial topics like looks and sex (Atwood 1993: 418). Feminism became commercialised, applicable to every woman and it was utilised by businesses to sell more products instead of focusing on sincerely improving women's lives, reflecting society's rampant consumerism. A shift in Roz' feminist friends over time also signifies societal change: "And then her friends gave up wearing overalls, and left the mag, and into dress-for-success tailored suits, and discussed burnout instead..." (Atwood 1993: 398), highlighting how feminism also became more aligned with the masculine capitalist world where success matters most.

In addition to being successful, women were still expected to take care of the household and have a bigger role in raising the children while maintaining a career, which makes the discussion of 'burnout' significant due to the larger workload women had in those situations. It is also another way women and men were unequal despite the significance of women having access to male-dominated careers. Roz raised three children and managed to cultivate a close relationship with them whilst maintaining a career, being a perfect model for the woman who can have it all.

Though Roz is kind and caring in many ways like the other women in the novel, she showcases many traits that are not aligned with ecofeminist ideals, however, as she has a hierarchical worldview. Whereas Roz gives money to multiple charities, which shows a level

of benevolence, she sees herself to be on a higher position than others and considers moving upward in society as something to aspire towards. She also shows a reluctance to associate with people 'lower' than her: "She couldn't see the man of her dreams taking a bus; much less could she see herself taking one. What was the use of upward mobility if you had to take the bus anyway? There were limits!" (Atwood 1993: 350). This means that while she has power, it may be the power-over instead of the power-to kind. She inherited this mentality partly from her father who used every opportunity to get ahead with his business pursuits at the expense of the community's wellbeing, such as acquiring land and properties despite protests (Atwood 1993: 346).

As mentioned previously, she likes to give away her money, showing more benevolence than her father, but it is possible that she sees it as something she must do as a woman in her position. In addition, her tiredness of constant giving also shines through, which ties into the main themes of the novel of exhaustion with societal double standards, exemplified by the following excerpt:

So much for the proprieties. So much for earnest old Roz and her poky, boring charities, her handouts to the Raped Moms and Battered Grannies, and, at that time, the whales and the famine victims and the village self-helpers, dowdy plump mommy Roz, shackled to her boring old conscience. It was a selfish, careless remark, a daring remark, a liberated remark – to hell with guilt! (Atwood 1993: 109)

Women deal with the guilt of being selfish and of not always being the provider, while men can seemingly step over others in both their personal and professional lives guilt-free. This showcases how cultural ecofeminism and the 'ethic of care', which ties women to such characteristics might not be a productive way to address both women's and environmental issues as many women will not want to identify with the selfless image that has been pushed on them.

In addition, even if she kept giving, the numerous charities that are listed in the novel showcase the glaring flaw in such a system, as no matter how many charities the rich are involved with, it would not solve the inherent inequality built into the system and the divide

between the privileged and the poor. Roz also acknowledges such a divide by describing how the poor come to resent the people who give, further illustrating the inevitable futility of charity:

To give is a blessing, or so her father used to say. Does Roz agree? Do chickens have lips? To give is basically a drag these days, because it doesn't get you anything, it won't even buy you a scratch-free car, and for why? Because those you give to hate you. They hate you because you have to ask, and they hate you for being able to give. (Atwood 1993: 108)

Despite her exasperation with giving and the disconnect she feels towards the poor in reality, she has a dream of giving away all of her money and becoming something like a monk instead (Atwood 1993: 327). One could theorise that it showcases a tiredness of the corporate world devoid of true fulfilment and spirituality. Despite these realisations, she willingly participates in a life of luxury and such a system and looks down on the people who cannot afford similar comforts. In addition to growing accustomed to having things she could not have as a child due to growing up poor, being rich is one of the few positions where she sees herself having power and importance as a woman:

Roz got with the left hand and gave away with the right /.../ But when the women's movement hit town in the early 70s she was sucked into it like a dust bunny into a vacuum cleaner. She was visible, that was why. She was high-profile and there weren't many women then who were ... (Atwood 1993: 394),

meaning that she would lose more than just money if she gave up her position, making her dream becoming reality even more unlikely.

All in all, Roz represents a woman of the era who grew up in a time of tumultuous change for women where they were breaking free from the bonds of the past, encouraged to go after their dreams and goals and compete with men in the corporate world. However, they were still burdened with the guilt of their sexuality and caged with the need to be motherly, caring and self-sacrificing as such was the centuries-long norm, further exemplifying the possible harm of cultural ecofeminist messaging. Simultaneously, Atwood calls for women to question the role they themselves play in upholding such norms and rethink the value in always blaming men for their problems. While Atwood encourages women to be more

selfish and illuminates existing double standards in a society where men are less criticised, Roz also represents the self-serving and hierarchical capitalist world that ecofeminists criticise. As women become the key players of the men's world of wars, climbing corporate ladders for the sake of equality, ecofeminists realise that no true equality or harmony can be achieved between different groups of people or between nature and humanity as long as such dualistic and hierarchical structures are kept in place. Though the destructive effects of rampant consumerism, hyperindividualism and capitalism are not the focus of the novel as they are in *The MaddAddam* trilogy, for example, Atwood does give a few tentative warnings about where power feminist ideals may lead society and ironizes such a future.

### **2.1.2 The potential dangers of a power feminist future**

Feminism's goals being aligned with joining men in the quest for power for self-serving goals is caricatured in the following excerpt where women participating in combat after describing war's devastating consequences is described as 'striking a blow for feminism', before simultaneously admitting that even gaining such equality, terrible as it is, seems impossible to imagine due to the strength of the patriarchy, which puts women in the role of the carer. This also shows how the vision of feminism has become aligned with capitalist power-over aims that can lead to the destruction of nature and further inequalities:

The lust for power will prevail. Thousands will die needlessly. Corpses will rot. Women and children will perish. Plagues will rage. Famine will sweep the land. Relief funds will be set up. Officials will siphon off the cash from them. It's not all bad, though – suicide rate will fall. And maybe women soldiers will get a crack at front-line combat, strike a blow for feminism. Though I doubt it. They'll probably just be doing bandages-as-usual. (Atwood 1993: 33)

Even though power feminism teaches women to not assume the position of the victim, some level of fault in how women are treated must still be placed on society. The hopelessness women feel towards achieving true equality is expressed in the following quote where Tony describes her frustrations with not being seen as an equal as a war history

professor next to her male colleagues, who value being ‘society president’ over her lectures, further showcasing how success has ultimate importance in the patriarchal world:

As time goes on she has come to feel, at these events, more and more like a talking dog ... She used to think that her work was accepted or rejected on its own merits, but she’s begun to suspect that the goodness of her lectures is somehow not the point. The point is her dress. She will be patted on the head, praised, few a few elite dog biscuits, and dismissed, while the boys in the back room get down to the real issue, which is which one of them will be the next society president. (Atwood 1993: 124)

Atwood also paints a worrying picture of the future from an ecofeminist perspective when the female children of the trio are described to like playing war games, with their Barbies taking over the world and wanting to succeed at all costs (Atwood 1993: 437), which are values that align with patriarchal and capitalist ideals. Though the children also signify a hope for the future of women, it presents itself as a tentative warning about the potential pitfalls of where perpetuating the ideals of power feminism could lead us in its current state. Though the descriptions are clearly an exaggeration, Atwood also does so in her speculative fiction like the *MaddAddam* trilogy, painting a hyperbolic picture of a potential future as a warning.

It is clear, however, that societal change is possible. An excerpt describes how the children differ from their parents, as they feel comfortable to take up space in the world and go after what they want (Atwood 1993: 452). Though that is something their parents struggled with and thus there is hope for some liberation and change in a positive sense, it can also be read as a side effect of the hyperindividualist and capitalist society that surrounds them, and the power feminist culture that seeks to assimilate women into the patriarchal world of domination over others. This in return does not bode well for environmental and inequality issues that ecofeminists want to address. Though the novel contains discussions of war being men’s doing, it makes it clear that women have the same capabilities in them, furthering anti-essentialist notions in the book. Roz’s children playing war games with Barbie dolls also comments on a hypothetical future where the dualistic hierarchical

structures stay in place but the roles between men and women are reversed. It questions the values society prioritises and if striving towards those things in is a good idea.

### **2.1.3 Futility of individual action and green consumerism**

Besides groups of people like the poor being affected by power-over thinking, so is nature. The setting of *The Robber Bride* is Toronto, and its uncaring city environment is highlighted in multiple excerpts. The city is described as a car-centric and urban development-focused landscape (Atwood 1993: 326). The greediness of landlords and the exploitative relationship between them and the tenants is mentioned (Atwood 1993: 190), another mark of the relationship between the rich and the less well off. The cruel concrete world is paralleled with Charis' out-of-city island escape where nature is more accessible, the world moves at a slower pace and the people seem to be kinder. However, that way of living is also threatened as the city planners want to take control over the island, signifying a domination-based mindset and paralleling humanity's uncontrollable efforts to control nature. In an excerpt, Charis distances herself from the so-called city people, aligning herself with nature opposing the city:

The city wants to tear down all these houses, level everything, turn it into a park. A lot of the houses here went that way, years ago, before people dug in their heels. Charis sees it as envy: if the city people can't live here themselves, they don't want anyone else to be able to do it either. (Atwood 1993: 58)

There is also an awareness of environmental issues in the novel that is passingly mentioned such as "irradiated chemical-saturated agro-business maxi-farms" (Atwood 1993: 69), which hints at how uncontrolled capitalism and environmental issues go hand in hand. The ozone layer hole and the extinction of whales are also mentioned (Atwood 1993: 56). Despite these acknowledgements of environmental problems, parallels can be drawn between the 1990s and today's society, as it shows that besides the existence of even more awareness, not much has changed. People do not have enough energy or will to care about

such things in their already busy and stressed-out personal lives and environmental issues are treated as an after-thought or just a normal part of modern life. As the characters already express their exhaustion towards hearing about worrying news from other parts of the world and finding the will to care, adding environmental problems to the list might just be too much to bear. Even then, putting the responsibility on the average person to fix the world can be seen as unfair and futile.

Roz' twins caring about environmental issues and wastefulness is shown, however, as they replace plastic pens with fountain pens (Atwood 1993: 96), use recycled stationery (Atwood 1993: 91), ban paper tissues from the house and so on. Yet these are all examples of green consumerism, which can be seen as a useless way to fight the real issues of climate change and plastic pollution since the emphasis is still on consumption and personal responsibility. Atwood points out this irony through the character of Roz, who remarks the twins' inability to turn off their lights when appropriate despite caring about the environment (Atwood 1993: 91). This means that consumer-focused environmental activism can be purely fashionable and changed into a product just like feminism was, in a similar fashion to Roz' magazine becoming more commercialised. Tackling environmental issues will ultimately take way more than just buying environmentally friendly products.

## **2.2 Ecofeminism in the novel**

### **2.2.1 Charis' ecofeminist ethos**

The character who truly embodies the lifestyle of an eco-conscious person from an ecofeminist standpoint is Charis. Being also the most stereotypically feminine, spiritual, and sensitive of the group, and simultaneously the least outwardly logical and rational, her contribution to the group dynamic and story overall is seemingly undervalued. Parallels can

be drawn between the treatment of her character, the values she represents in society and the changing expectations for the perfect woman. Though in a liberal feminist society, women are more free to make their own choices in life, some paths are more favoured. She is also infantilised and often treated as less intelligent by the characters. Her partner Billy ridicules her vegetarian food and other interests, associating bunnies with women: “He makes fun of Charis’s herbal teas and won’t eat salad, not even the lettuce Charis grows herself. ‘Rabbit food’, he calls it. ‘Fit for nothing but little bunnies, and women’” (Atwood 1993: 238). As described by Bile (2011: 16), the existence of hierarchical binary oppositions may make men want to distance themselves from anything associated with women, such as vegetarian food. While Charis often buys into others’ beliefs about herself, she learns to assert herself and identity more over the course of the novel and exclaims at one point that she ‘does have a life’ (Atwood 1993: 484). This is an important point, as it showcases that while she might not be pursuing a career that would make her wealthy, or be the most academic person, she raised a child as a single mother and found purpose, fulfilment, freedom and independence in her life all on her own through spiritual pursuits like being a yoga teacher, gardening and working at a shop tied to her interests, and she can thus be read as a feminist character. Though she is furthest from the ideals of power feminism and the nonconforming high achieving careerwoman, the ecofeminist principles of respect for all beings and cultivating a connection to nature make her character valuable from an ecofeminist standpoint.

For example, Charis is very concerned with taking care of others and her surroundings, following an ‘ethic of care’ towards the world. She tends a garden and cares for her backyard chickens with fervour and dedication, is vegetarian and volunteers to help the lesser off with her time. She consciously romanticises nature around her: “She makes an effort to find the mist beautiful – everything made by nature should be beautiful – but succeeds only partly” (Atwood 1993: 228) and treats it with care, even if it is not reciprocated

as showcased by the cruelty of her chickens (Atwood 1993: 232). Some of her environmentally friendly actions also include composting and second-hand shopping (Atwood 1993: 227). She also sees herself as part of the buzzing surroundings invigorating her: “She loves the house and, even more, she loves the island. It’s infused with a vibrant, brooding, humid life; it makes her feel that everything – even the water, even the stones – is alive and aware, and her along with it” (Atwood 1993: 227).

Her ethos generally consists of a respect for and acceptance of nature and its inhabitants regardless of how uncivilised or unfeeling they may at times be and a willingness to live among nature in symbiotic harmony:

It’s like leaving a wild patch in the garden. She knows she is sharing the space with other entities, even if they can’t be seen or heard, and it’s just as well to show them you’re friendly. Or respectful. Respectful is what she means, because she does not intend to get too cosy with them. She wants them to respect her, as well. (Atwood 1993: 229)

In another section, Charis emphasises the interconnectedness of everything as she describes how the molecules of her body have been part of everything else at some point (Atwood 1993: 62), aligning most with the materialist ecofeminist ethos. Compared to the individualist power-feminism of Roz, Charis sees herself as part of everything, not truly defining the borders between her and the rest of the world. A significant part of what contributes to that might be her spiritual life.

### **2.2.2 Rejection of Christianity**

While Zenia seems to represent some of the figures of ecofeminist spiritualities like the Great Goddess, it is Charis who embodies the practice of ecofeminist spirituality the most. Charis is interested in New Age spirituality and strongly rejects Christianity. As Charis is the only character in the book who seems to have a spiritual connection with nature, Atwood does not suggest that such ties are somehow natural for every woman, however, furthermore opposing the cultural ecofeminist viewpoint. That can also be seen from the

other women's reluctance to have Charis transform their gardens as they do not seem to be much interested in such endeavours.

Though many of the characters reject Christianity, it is Charis who most outwardly does so, giving up Christianity and other religions as they 'are so intent on punishment' (Atwood 1993: 71). She sees the violence and the patriarchal archaic symbolism in Christian messaging and refuses to conform to it:

For Billy his country was a kind of God, an idea that Charis finds idolatrous and even barbaric. She finds the standard God with his white beard and anger and lamb sacrifices and death angels barbaric too, of course. She has gone beyond all that. Her god is oval. (Atwood 1993: 240)

The novel repeatedly questions the guilt women feel about their sexuality due to the indoctrination of the Church as characters like Roz also express the shame they feel towards their bodies:

She remembers those skirts from the last time around, in the sixties, you had to sit down with your legs glued together or all would be on view, the once-unmentionable, the central item, the foul and disgraceful blot /.../ an invitation to male peering, to lustful pinching and leering, to foaming at the mouth, to rape and pillage, just as the nuns always warned. (Atwood 1993: 402)

The hypocrisy of the teachings of the Church is challenged especially as they preach love but not of the physical kind (Atwood 1993: 385). The internalisation of those kinds of principles also makes them critical of the 'liberated' Zenia, often shaming her for wearing revealing clothing, for example (Atwood 1993: 14). Though the harshest criticisms against Zenia happen in their youth and society got more liberal as they aged – "So much has changed. It's the married people now who are considered immoral" (Atwood 1993: 247) – the characters battling with shame is a central theme of the novel.

Thus, ecofeminist spirituality can offer solace to characters like Charis and Roz who have felt the oppressive and misogynistic effects of Christianity and organised religion in general, while helping them feel more connected to the world around them. While Charis is engaged in the practice of alternative spiritualities, Roz expressing interest in abandoning

her current life for a more spiritual one shows how Western city people can feel void of spirituality in their life. With the destruction of such hierarchical binary oppositions like matter over spirit, balance between the two sides can be restored.

### **2.2.3 Charis as ‘balance’**

Charis’ stark contrast against the background of a society that does not seem to understand her illustrates the seeming futility of small-scale sustainability movements that are focused on the consumer, however and further highlights the irrelevance of her ideals in modern Canadian society. There are also other aspects to her character that stop her from being a true ecofeminist ‘hero.’

While Roz is involved in various charities, Charis’ chosen name for herself comes from the word ‘charity’ and she identifies strongly with her generosity and selfless traits. That has a downside, however, as sometimes she can give too much at the expense of herself, which Zenia takes advantage of. Her character can also be seen as ‘too good for this world’ as she finds it hard to talk about darker topics like war or politics that she deems too negative (Atwood 1993: 240). Charis’ good-natured positivity and caring attitude towards everyone and everything is oftentimes accompanied by a refusal to face reality and the true suffering of others, as her principles cloud her judgement, thus some of her statements can come across as dismissive and ignorant. An example of that is her wishing to give panhandlers carrots instead of money due to her dislike for what money can do to people, not realising that having it to an extent is a necessity for people (Atwood 1993: 222).

Although Charis embodies the ecological and ethical side of ecofeminism that emphasises the importance of personal responsibility and connection with nature, she lacks political ambition and vision and belief in things changing for the better on the grand scale (Atwood 1993: 243), qualities which Roz and her partner Billy have. While Charis wants to help other women (Atwood 1993: 244) and disapproves of war, her idea of going about

saving others, and through it the world, is different as she believes in personal change and transformation most of all, characteristic to some of Atwood's other ecofeminist characters like the God's Gardeners. Although characters like Roz and her children represent the downsides of liberalism, green consumerism and power-over thinking, Charis' character can also be read as a criticism of the ethic of care and ecofeminists who believe that the world can only be saved through changing the self without acknowledging the power of socio-political factors and actions.

While she exhibits non-dualistic thinking in other areas and accepts the cruel side of animals, the balance between good and bad in humans is something she struggles with. This is due to having split herself in two after being raped, as she could not face the reality of such cruelty and decided to identify with the positive 'charitable' part of herself. Though more sensitive and empathetic to the suffering of others by nature, showcased by her refusal to eat meat ever again after the pig at her grandmother's farm was slaughtered, such traits were taken to the extreme after she experienced her trauma. Thus, her refusal to face reality is also a refusal to face her old self, the part of her that is damaged and less wholesome, the Other. However, as she eventually seems to merge with her old self, reconciling the two opposing sides, this could mean that besides gaining confidence and more will to stand up for herself and her wants and needs, she will not shy away from the darker topics and parts of life anymore, which can potentially make her efforts to help others be more productive and perhaps even more large-scale in the future, making her a true ecofeminist activist. As the characters learn to accept the Other within themselves and merge their split identities, scholars like Tolan (2005: 468) theorise that such a shift is imperative to moving away from a societal mindset that is focused on domination-based oppositions.

Ultimately, Atwood's novels act less as instructions on what to do, however, and rather as a tool to draw the readers' attention to potential threats and different pathways:

So our stories will inevitably reflect those changes; and once in a while we may even be able to slip into a modern version of the shaman's trance, and journey in spirit to another realm, and bring back something from the Otherworld. It won't be a book of instructions – there isn't one. Perhaps it will be a talisman, to protect us, even a little. Perhaps it will be a list of dangers. Perhaps it will be a charm, to alter the way in which we see. Perhaps we will once more talk with animals, and be instructed by plants. Who knows what forms our metaphors will take?. (Atwood 2010; para. 34)

Like the God's Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood*, Charis' character and worldview is not a perfect alternative in the novel to the society around them in terms of how humanity must change, and more as contrast and balance to the world around them, which can be seen from how much they look like the outcasts in their stories. While both the Gardeners and Charis may portray an extremity on the other end of the scale in terms of selflessness and caring, which can be negative, they are also a reminder of how much society is steering towards extremity on the other end in terms of selfishness, greed and exploitative relationships. In an already rapidly changing world, perhaps taking a step backwards is needed to reflect on how both our own and collective actions affect our environment, to then move forward in a different, more positive way.

## CONCLUSION

Similar warnings about a potential future where if society does not change its destructive and oppressive ways towards the subordinate parts of the binary oppositions found in Atwood's later novels can also be found in *The Robber Bride*. The book speaks of women's empowerment to find freedom, reject the position of the victim and fight against double standards and patriarchal stereotypes of what it means to be a woman, topics which have previously been discussed by different scholars. Characteristic to Atwood, however, the novel does not completely support the liberal power feminist position, which encourages women to enter the patriarchal world of domination and power-seeking, eventually leading to environmental problems and a rift between the privileged and the poor, topics which Atwood develops further in the later dystopian *MaddAddam* trilogy. Through characters like Roz who exhibit hierarchical power-over thinking, the larger society and its ideals are criticised. A warning of a potential future where the continuation of such thinking could lead us is also given as the children of the characters exhibit ruthlessness and a drive to succeed at the expense of others. A criticism of cultural feminism and essentialist thinking can also be found, however, as the blame should not be put on women who are often tired of the societal expectations pushed on them, like being morally good, caring and empathetic at the expense of their own well-being.

Published 30 years ago, parallels can be drawn between the world the characters live in and present society where such problems and divisions already exist, but people are too concerned or exhausted with their own lives to pay much attention to it. Furthermore, the novel questions if simply pushing people and especially women to care more is a productive way to approach the issue due to their wish to be free from such associations. In addition, putting the responsibility to save the world on the people through green consumerism can be another inefficient way to address problems that necessitate political action, and it is another

symptom of hypercapitalism and either its harm or uselessness when it comes to tackling environmental issues.

Thus, Atwood does not only draw attention to environmental problems or women's issues, but comments on their underlying causes and why these problems can be so difficult to solve. Ultimately the novel exhibits warnings more than potential solutions as Atwood is known to not commit to one theory or truth. Its ecofeminism sheds light to the extremities society might be heading towards and some of its issues through the difference and contrast of ecofeminist characters like Charis. Her lifestyle exhibits characteristics of materialist ecofeminism as she sees herself to be part of the active and vibrant nature around her that is full of agency. As the novel also highlights her shortcomings like her refusal to believe in the value of political activism or her ignorance of the harsh realities of life, however, she is by no means a perfect role model. Rather than a necessary lifestyle or ethos everyone should adopt, nor a call to abandon all individualism, Charis highlights the possibility of a different, more interconnected, spiritual, and respectful way of living and relating to others that might not only have a positive effect on people but the world we are part of, rejecting the need to have constant power over others, but taking responsibility for the harm we may cause in our daily life. The harm of binary oppositions, the central concept to ecofeminist theory, is made clear, however. Advocating against extremism on either side and for balance and connection between two sides that are increasingly alienated from each other, we must accept the Other as part of the Self, so the fear of the Other outside of ourselves can also dissipate, leading to a more equal and balanced world overall.

As the current research focused on the contrast between the characters of Roz and Charis and their worldviews, future research on ecofeminism in the novel could focus on a narrower aspect like spiritual ecofeminism in the novel through analysing Zenia's connection to the Great Goddess religions, and Charis' New Age practices.

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## RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

**Kairit Laitinen**

**Ecofeminism in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride***

**Ökofeminism Margaret Atwoodi *Röövelpruudis***

Bakalaureusetöö

2023

Lehekülgede arv: 37

Kanada kirjanik Margaret Atwood on soolist ebavõrdsust ning keskkonnaprobleeme oma teostes kajastanud aastakümneid, olles oluliselt panustanud nende teemade käsitlemisse ühiskonnas, mis näiteks kliimakriisi valguses on järjest olulisemad. Ökofeminism on teooria, mis kombineerib naiste- ja keskkonnaprobleemide teemad, rõhutades, et mõlema ühiseks põhjuseks on ühiskonna hierarhilised ja patriarhaalsed süsteemid ning binaarsed opositsioonid, mille tõttu on mehed ja naised ning kultuur ja loodus vastandlikus suhtes. Bakalaureusetöö eesmärgiks on välja selgitada, kuidas ökofeministlikud ideed Atwoodi 1993. aastal avaldatud teoses *Röövelpruut* väljenduvad.

Sissejuhatus annab ülevaate teosest, ökofeminismi põhiideedest ja sellest, kuidas feminism ja keskkonnahoid Atwoodi loomingus ning aktivismiga seostub, samuti nende teemade olulisusest tänapäeval. Kirjanduse ülevaade koosneb kolmest alapeatükist ning tutvustab ökofeminismi erinevaid harusid, kuidas ökofeministlike teooriaid on Atwoodi teiste teoste analüüsimiseks kasutatud ning kuidas on *Röövelpruuti* ja selle peamised teemasid varasemalt uuritud. Empiirilises osas keskendutakse hierarhilise- ja tarbijaühiskonna pahupoolte analüüsile läbi Rozi tegelaskuju ning analüüsitakse ka seda, kuidas Charise tegelaskuju ökofeministlik elustiil vastandub ülejäänud ühiskonnale. Kokkuvõttes võib öelda, et Charise lähedane side loodusega ning mitte-hierarhiline maailmavaade toob välja teda ümbritseva ühiskonna kalduvuse olla järjest enam loodusest kaugenenud ning domineerimisele orienteeritud. Kuigi Charise elustiil ei pruugi olla täiuslik viis keskkonnaprobleemide lahendamiseks, juhib ta tegelaskuju siiski tähelepanu sellele, et lähedasem suhe ülejäänud maailmaga on võimalik ning tasakaal erinevate vastandlike poolte vahel on vajalik võrdsema ja tervema ühiskonna saavutamiseks.

Märksõnad: Kanada kirjandus, Margaret Atwood, ökofeminism, Röövelpruut

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