

The handmaid's tale

Literature



The beginning of the extract immediately catches the eye, as the first paragraph is only composed of one short sentence; " The Ceremony goes as usual. " therefore emphasising it and creating a pause. This makes the reader doubt about it's signification even though it's a simple phrase, it's a declarative sentence forming a statement . The word " Ceremony" refers to a formal act such as a wedding, the fact that the author capitalised it re-enforces it's importance and consequently the impression of a positive and joyful occasion .

However the end of the sentence " goes as usual" instals a dull feeling to the phrase, giving the " Ceremony" a sense of routine, fading away the idea of a happy moment and suggesting that it's unavoidable. The writer makes the reader unprepared for the description to follow, thereby creating a greater feeling of shock. Indeed, the opening of the second paragraph makes the reader feel embarrassment and shame towards the narrator. " Fully clothed except for the healthy white cotton under drawers". She is lying on a bed, fully clothed except for her privates uncovered.

As the description continues, the author uses the subjunctive " if I were to open my eyes" which expresses a wish, a possibility, a state of unreality. This allows the narrator to imagine the " white" carpet representing purity, which reassures the reader that is shocked by the previous sentence. But she then states that she " would not see" it, which dives the reader into deep shock. The writer uses other imagery such as " skirted dressing table" to emphasis how the legs of the dressing table are as white of the narrator are not even to be shown.

At the end of the second paragraph the reader encounters the metaphorical description of the canopy. " the canopy (...) by the gauziness of its fabric and its heavy downward curve, both ethereality and matter. Or sail of a big ship. " This illustrates the big belly of a pregnant woman, using alliteration to intensify the metaphor. This suggests that the sexual intercourse is purely for procreation which is confirmed later on the text " I do not say making love". " A mist of Lily of the Valley surrounds us, chilly, crisp almost".

The author creates a cold atmosphere that subsequently tells the reader about the narrator's state of mind. The fact that it's " chilly" suggests that the narrator is not aroused by her partners. Furthermore Serena's scent, the " mist of Lily of the Valley" that is " crisp" used to describe the smell could represent Serena's feelings towards the narrator. The reader realises that Serena is present while her husband tries to impregnate the narrator, where she is forced to endure physical closeness with a woman she despises. " Above me, Serena Joy is arranged, outspread.

Her legs are apart, I lie between, my head on her stomach, her public bone under the base of my skull (...) She too is fully clothed" The use of scientific and morbid words such as " bone" and " skull" suggests the lack of emotion and establishes a profound idea of death, thus contrasting it with the belief that sexual intercourse is a moment of deep affection and passion between two or several partners. The image of death also highlights the submission and the powerless role of the narrator " she is in control". Moving on the intercourse is now referred as a " process" that would result into a " product".

Using such words related to manufacturing the narrator appears to be a sex robot stripped from emotions, which will give birth to a child considered to be nothing more than a merchandise. The narrator does not only dehumanise the intercourse and her future child but also herself. " Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body". She refers to her privates only as the bottom part of her figure reducing herself to an object, amplifying the distance of feelings. The vulgarity and repetition of the word " fucking" implies stress but wouldn't it be abnormal in such circumstances?

Such a taboo word however deliberately produces shock to the reader.

Overall the narrator is shown as her soul was not with her. She states she is not forced into this, like a form of rape " Nor does rape cover it" but certainly does not enjoy this. She lies on a the bed like a ghost, a spirit without soul or feeling. The act of sex here is only for the purpose of reproduction, it's treated more like a business than the expression of love. The intense and very vulgar language comes to shock the reader making it even sickening. Through this scene the author manages to prosecute the inequality of sexes.