

On 'Freaks' and the Feminine in Margaret Atwood's 'Lusus Naturae'

Authors : Shahd Alshammari

Abstract : This paper considers one of Margaret Atwood's short stories 'Lusus Naturae'. Through a critical lens that makes use of Julia Kristeva's work on Powers of Horror and abjection, this paper suggests that the monstrous girl is the disabled woman, the abject in society. The monster is used as a metaphor for the unknown, the misunderstood, and the 'different' woman. Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) is a pedagogy that calls for making course material accessible and relevant to students. Through the study of literary texts, we are able to help create agency inside and outside the classroom. Stories are a necessary part of establishing connections across borders and boundaries. Stories are meant to raise awareness both inside and outside the classroom. The discussion is equally important, and the text is meant to facilitate relevant questions that the students need to consider when it comes to identity. Questions to consider are: what does it mean to be a 'girl' today, and what implications and consequences are at hand when you fail to perform this gendered identity? Gender is sometimes a fatal bond in the Middle East, and even more so, is the disability. In the case of our unnamed protagonist, she undergoes a process of un-becoming, a non-linear process of growing up. In a sense, it is a counter-Bildungsroman. The reading of this text emphasizes that a non-linear narrative is sometimes necessary for the female protagonist's self-awareness and development. Discussion in class facilitates this sense of agency and questioning of gender and disability.

Keywords : disability, gender, literature, pedagogy

Conference Title : ICALLTL 2018 : International Conference on Applied Linguistics, Language Teaching and Learning

Conference Location : Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Conference Dates : November 19-20, 2018