The Craft of Writing:

Analysis for Margaret Atwood's

"Spotty Handed Villainesses"

https://youtu.be/DlBhqRF_h0A

Purpose of the speech

- Although women have been given greater representation (and the ability to write) through the feminist movement, they have also been limited to unrealistic representations of 'virtue', rather then being able to have more authentic, multidimensional characters.
- Basically, if women are represented as evil or as villains in literature, this is criticised by the women's movement, and Atwood ultimately claims that this limits and oppresses women "yet once again" and also makes literature about women boring as nothing "happens".

Persuasive or Discursive?

- In terms of form, this has both persuasive and discursive elements, yet I'd argue overall that it's a persuasive piece (as the ending has a clear argument, and uses high modality to persuade the reader to agree with Atwood's point).

Key ‘Macro’ techniques used

- Anecdote, intertextuality from a nursery rhyme “When she was good, she was very, very good, And when she was bad, she was horrid!”

Creates a very clear dichotomy between the two (extremely limited) facets of female representation in traditional texts. They were considered to either be an "Angel" or a "Whore“

- Motif “I did after all have curls”
- Irony “He did manage to make ‘very, very good’ sound almost worse than ‘horrid’,” Becomes relevant later when Atwood explores how modern representations of women are confined only to virtuous portrayals of women (rather than giving them the ability to have more evil, duplicitous qualities).

Key ‘Macro’ techniques (cont)

•Rhetorical Questions “But is it not, today – well, somehow unfeminist – to depict a woman behaving badly? Isn’t bad behaviour supposed to be the monopoly of men? Isn’t that what we are expected – in defiance of real life – to somehow believe, now?

Use of rhetorical questions here reflect a more 'persuasive' tone to her writing, as she is leading the reader to agree that it is in fact "unfeminist" to depict a woman "behaving badly.”

She inserts her own point of view into the question through the use of hyphens "Isn’t that what we are expected - in defiance of real life - to somehow believe now?" Through the insertion of "in defiance of real life", she gives a very clear point of view that she feels it is inauthentic and unrealistic to limit the representation of women to only being virtuous

Key ‘Macro’ techniques (cont)

- Hypophora “When bad women get into literature, what are they doing there, and are they permissible, and what, if anything, do we need them for?”

Shifts from rhetorical questions into hypophora, where a composer asks a question (getting the interest of the reader) and then proceeds to answer it. This can be seen as another persuasive technique as she will now proceed to answer this particular question about "what, if anything .. we need them for?"

Key ‘Macro’ techniques (cont)

- Discursive tonal shift “To summarise some of the benefits to literature of the Women’s Movement – the expansion of the territory available to writers”

  This is where Atwood introduces a more 'discursive' tone, as she starts defending the advancements made by the Women’s Rights Movement on female writing, enabling the metaphorical "expansion of the territory available to writers" "a sharp-eyed examination of the way power works in gender relations“

- High Modality “Evil women are necessary in story traditions for two much more obvious reasons, of course.”

  Very persuasive tone "are necessary" "of course“

Key ‘Macro’ techniques (cont)

- Rhetorical questions “They are fully dimensional human beings; they too have subterranean depths; why shouldn’t their many-dimensionality be given literary expression?”

  Very persuasive as you are position to agree with her

- External references/quotes “I will leave you with a final quotation. It’s from Dame Rebecca West, speaking in 1912 – ‘Ladies of Great Britain … we have not enough evil in us.’”

  Gives credibility to Atwood's writing; which here is persuasive as it shows others aligning with her view

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