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Modern America Totalitarian Surveillance through the Speculative Fiction
Context of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to:

My family, whom I love immeasurably

My Parents

Who are made from every bit of heaven, for their endless love and inspiration.

My Aunt Dr. Guibadj Khaira

The one who left the world, but did not leave My Heart.

Allah Yarhamek. رحمة الله عليك

My Brother and Sisters

My Weakness, My Strength.

My Best Friend A.R

For her sweet companionship, love, and support.

*To all the ones in my life – family, friends, and colleagues – who encouraged, supported, and
loved me along the way.*

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A special thanks to every teacher who taught me a single letter during my educational career.

Abstract

In a rapidly changing world where political hegemony and economic ambition are most noticeable, “speculative fiction” seems to be the most workable approach to the future. The term speculative fiction allows writers to superbly present their vision of the future, thus escaping the scorching image of science fiction. It can see as a wake-up call designed to warn readers and force them to acknowledge the dangerous direction that society is taking. The authors use fiction, alternate worlds, history, mystery, and time travels in this case. The meticulous study of Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) from the point of view of speculative fiction presents itself as an example of such a reading of the future. The novel takes place in the fictional totalitarian society of Gilead, and the story discusses the hypothesis of the subversion of the current “democratic” community of the United States of America by a totalitarian regime. The new imagined reality presents a futuristic wasteland influenced by current ideologies. Atwood has created a dystopian environment to provide critical insights into the phenomenon of totalitarian surveillance and the escalating crisis of lack of privacy and loss of freedom. This dissertation aims to reintroduce the reading of *The Handmaid’s Tale* as a speculative fiction text that examines the totalitarian politics prevailing today to provide an exemplary view of the modern American policy of surveillance and information monopoly where humanity and democracy advance in reverse to the backward, and the intellectual freedom of individuals descends to the bottom in a supposedly democratic country. This thesis will undertake an analytical, critical, and historical approach to conducting this study. Finally, this dissertation concludes by finding that the crisis of freedom loss, either physical or intellectual, in the fictional or real-world results from living under a totalitarian regime.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, Speculative fiction, Dystopia, Totalitarian Surveillance, modern America, Freedom.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

Background of the Study

Literature combines both asking and answering the hardest of questions. There are more questions than answers in speculative fiction, a genre that seeks to address the question “what if?” by creating alternate scenarios. The adaptation of postmodern tradition was essential as literary genres evolved, and speculative fiction provided it. This broad genre dominated the world of postmodern literature. Utopian and dystopian literature promoted the experimental idea of speculative fiction and its serious attention to the human experience, which was affected by contemporary events. By the late 1970s, speculative fiction had emerged in broad scope, and less than a decade later, Margaret Atwood, a well-known Canadian author, coined the concept “speculative fiction” to describe her dystopian novels, most notably “*The Handmaid’s Tale*.”

The Handmaid’s Tale merely wants to raise awareness. It is about “Gilead,” a mono-theocratic state founded after a fundamentally Christian organization known as “The Sons of Jacob” rose after a military coup revolt. This regime ousted the US government by blasting Congress and assassinating the President. Gilead is a dystopia set in the near future, a perfect representation of a dehumanizing society. Gilead’s women are its most distinctive trait. Gilead is infertile land with few reproductive females. They forced a group of women known as the Handmaids into reproductive slavery solely to bear children for the leaders. Although the story has had a significant impact, it has been dogged by controversy since it was published in 1985. It sparked a lot of discussions and left a lot of things unresolved. While *The Handmaid’s Tale* does give an overt critique of political regimes and the entirety within them, the more interesting aspect of *The Handmaid’s Tale* is the exercise of power inside modern society. It depicts a totalitarian system in which women are oppressed and deprived of their fundamental human rights.

The Handmaid's Tale novel is a worrying investigation of the consequences of censorship and how power can use unfairly, making Margaret Atwood's dystopian vision feel so real. While the novel is classified as futuristic fiction, it is truly a "look forward through history, not backward. As a result, it isn't only amusement but a subtle reminder that our freedom and rights aren't rigid but are already unraveling." (Wendy Squires, "*A Handmaid's Tale isn't science fiction, it's a warning*," 2017)

Problem Statement

The ability to say anything one wants and to criticize whatever one wants has been regarded as a valuable and primary right of human freedom. The first amendment of the United States Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom of speech or the press." (Constitution of the United States, "*First Amendment*"). However, such freedom is frequently restricted both in the United States and in countries that appear to be liberal because of a hidden surveillance data system. The question of whether surveillance should be imposed is intricately tied to the question of who should administer it. Why? To what extent can government surveillance legislation turn into a repressive campaign for individual freedoms carried out by a totalitarian regime? These are a matter that Atwood delves into in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In Gilead's, the regime asserts control by imposing surveillance in many fields and prohibits women from their most basic freedom. These measures are used to reduce the likelihood of revolt. While Atwood makes it plain to readers that Gilead's totalitarianism is a bleak future, she also makes us doubt to what extent the Republic of Gilead succeeded in portraying the future society of Modern America? Was it a speculative warning for us? Thus, we start understanding that nothing is more terrible than being held captive in your own home.

Objectives

The current study's goals are to declare the modern American government methods regarding the imposition of restrictions through surveillance, as well as to provide a conceptual

framework about the censoring impact on individual's freedoms, referring to the various futuristic issues addressed in *The Handmaid's Tale*, mainly surveillance. The study has the following sub-objectives in particular:

- To construct a conceptual framework that deals with Atwood's speculative fiction novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and the modern American society.
- To display the surveillance sources that restrict the freedoms of individuals in modern American society.
- To figure out whether *The Handmaid's Tale* is a fictional work influenced by the real working of humanity.
- Is "*The Handmaid's Tale*" a warning to the futuristic modern society?

Preliminary Literature Review

Previous studies have considered *The Handmaid's Tale* as either a fictional nightmare or an exaggeration of realities, such as the horrific treatment of women, according to a preliminary literature review research. *The Handmaid's Tale* has made little headway in terms of being classified as speculative fiction. In terms of society, they have embraced a variety of approaches. For example, because *The Handmaid's Tale* includes various characteristics that can be addressed from a feminist and gender viewpoint, they attempted to reveal and explain gender inequities. What is lacking in past studies is *The Handmaid's Tale's* view as speculative real-life fiction, through the holistic and structured approach of censorship imposed on women, which has prevented them from expressing their most fundamental rights, like freedom of expression. Although *The Handmaid's Tale* story takes place in the future, one of Atwood's self-imposed rules while writing was that she would not use any events or practices that hadn't happened in human history. Atwood challenges students to reflect on current social attitudes and the treatment of the citizens of Gilead. She shows both sides of Gilead. The regime can be

obscenely repressive in many ways, but it is also possible that such a regime was born in response to concerns about personal freedom.

Critics like Brooks Bouson, who relate the work to the antifeminist backlash, cannot match the current dystopia status back to what wouldn't be a speculative fiction dystopia. The transition from reality to a credible dystopia causes an examination of society's current circumstances to determine how dismal the future can be. If critics like Bouson claim that dystopia in the novel has its roots in history, how does then *The Handmaid's Tale* vary from the setting in which it was published? Speculative fiction loses all sense of relativity if it isn't examined in the present because speculative fiction defines primarily by what today's society presents. What are the specific elements of an individual's freedom status in current society, which faced an additional threat in the novel if the difference between reality and that of the story is a matter of degree? As a result, it inextricably linked the element of time to the definition of speculative fiction. Speculative fiction requires evaluation and comparison to reality to identify its aspects as future speculation.

Structure of the study

Three chapters will be included in this study, two introductory chapters and one practical chapter. A general introduction provides an entry of the novel and a summary of our research topic and questions. The study's primary themes, including the rise of the speculative fiction concept, will be discussed in the first chapter. The second chapter will introduce a summary of the narrative and further details of the events and dimensions that created this literary production and its relevance to the current scene. The last chapter will assign to the practical part, which is concerned with the extensive totalitarian examination in the novel and answering the research questions in referring to modern America.

Methodology

For this study, descriptive analysis is the primary research approach. This approach is essential for this study; to offer criticisms of totalitarian powers between fiction and reality, thus identifying the freedom issues. This study will first examine the surveillance restrictions in the Atwood novel and their impact through a structured approach. Based on these classification methods, surveillance sources that restrict the freedoms of individuals in modern American society will be displayed; to explore whether *The Handmaid's Tale* is a work of fiction influenced by the actual workings of humanity. As a result, determining whether *The Handmaid's Tale* is a warning to the futuristic modern society. Based on a detailed analysis of current American government surveillance methods, the impact of existing surveillance constraints on individual freedom will be determined in the third part of this study. Finally, once the surveillance restrictions systems identify, a conceptual framework between Margaret Atwood's speculative fiction novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and modern America will outline.

Chapter One:

Conceptualizing Speculative Fiction in

Dystopian Literature

Chapter I:

Conceptualizing Speculative Fiction in Dystopian Literature

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section will be the background conceptualization of speculative fiction through the three approaches which portray the rise of this literary genre, from the 19th century to the 21st century. The second section will provide the sub-genres of speculative fiction based on Annie Neugebauer's diagram and what has been achieved in the first section. Finally, the third section will provide the dystopian literary context of speculative fiction through the contribution of prominent literary works of Yevgeny Zamyatin, George Orwell, Margaret Atwood, and others.

1.2 The Rise of Speculative Fiction

Speculative fiction is a literary super-genre that involves several types of novels, each of which contains elements of fiction based on guesses. In this general category of fiction, genres cover certain features related to reality, science fiction, fantasy, horror, supernatural fiction, superhero fiction, alternative history, utopian fiction, dystopian fiction, and various topics such as futurism. Rose Michael, in her article "*How Speculative Fiction Gained Literary Respectability*," states that "Writers use speculative fiction as a convenient way to figure out what is the idea of becoming a human being human in modern society and dealing with post-humanism." (3). This kind of fiction is stories about creating a real world, which may be inappropriate.

Marek Oziewicz, a Professor of Young Adult Literature, in his article "*Speculative fiction*, 2017," states that "more questions exist than answers in speculative fiction." (3). Although disappointing, it is still beneficial because the ongoing discussion about the content and reasons for speculative fiction has led to more ideas than any single definition. Therefore, rather than looking for convincing claims, it is better to learn more from the diachronic

perspective of speculative fiction, as a term has expanded in semantic scope since they coined it as a genre name in the 1940s.

A search on Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia entitled “*Speculative Fiction*, 2002,” traced the history of speculative fiction to ancient Greece, where playwrights such as Euripides (approximately 480-406 BC) explored alternative versions of the truth. The speculative fiction appears in the author’s social context through the stories they tell, like that in Euripides’s earlier Greek play tragedy “*Medea*, 431 BC,” when he speculates that: “The princess of the Kingdom of Colchis, Medea killed her children rather than they being killed by other Corinthians after her death, then she escaped to Athens” (1). This case highlights that such a work of speculative fiction, wherever it was deliberate or unintentional written before the genre creation. The idea, in its broadest sense, catches both a conscious and oblivious part of the human brain’s desire since time immemorial to research and figure out the world and react to it by making imaginary creative and aesthetic tools.

In history, what is now called speculative fiction was known as a historical invention or historical fiction. These appear in the literary criticism of William Shakespeare when he compares time and space, such as Duke Theseus of Athens and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazon, the English fairy Puck, and the Roman god Cupid in “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 1605” in the fairylands of Merovingian of the German ruler Oberon. In mythology, it related the concept of speculative fiction in works such as “*The Lord of the Rings*, 1937” by J. Tolkien is called fictional speculation, creative design, or the generation of knowledge. Such historical supernatural alternative themes continue to exist in modern speculative novels. Therefore, William Shakespeare’s “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” and J. R. R. Tolkien’s “*The Lord of the Rings*” are speculative fiction novels, although the term didn’t exist yet. “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*” speculates a world within which characters move seamlessly, through time

and space within the woodland and therefore the Fairyland, whereas “*The Lord of the Rings*” imagines mythical creatures that did not exist in our world. (*MasterClass*, 2021)

Marek Oziewicz writes in the Oxford Research Encyclopedias of Literature that the term ‘speculative fiction’ has three different historical meanings. The first meaning is a subgenre of science fiction (SF or Sci-Fi) that deals with humanity rather than technological problems. The second meaning considers speculative fiction as an independent genre that goes against science fiction and focuses on the future. Last, the third historical meaning is that speculative fiction is a super-category of all types, where Oziewicz explains: “that deliberately depart from imitating ‘consensus reality’ of everyday experience. In the latter sense, speculative fiction includes fantasy, science fiction, and horror, but also their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres like the gothic.” (1). He asserts that the understanding of speculative fiction as a term of a wide-range cultural field, formed during the first multicultural transition in 1970, in reaction to the West, post-Enlightenment, and colonialism mentality arose from the need for a term that was long excluded from literary stories, that failed to represent reality, or it focused on adopting unreal situations. Speculative fiction novels result from this challenge and become a “tool to break the prejudices of Western culture.” (4). Thus, they raise people’s awareness of literary works that imitate reality and works designed to inspire humankind about nature around them.

Three different approaches represent the rise of the term speculative fiction. The original approach, which has long been questioned and not entirely abandoned, considers a subset of science fiction. This method is traced back to Robert A. Heinlein, an American science fiction writer, who coined the term speculative fiction in 1941 and popularized it through his essay “*On the Writing of Speculative Fiction*” in 1947. Although Heinlein himself coined this term, it was cited earlier in an article in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* (1889),

which refers to Edward Bellamy's "*Looking Backward, 2000-1887*." (*Speculative Fiction* 2, 2002)

Heinlein defended the term speculative fiction, saying that: "*speculative fiction reflects the highest aspirations of science fiction, including its highest quality*." (Oziewicz 4, 2017). Consequently, Heinlein's first method defined speculative fiction as a narrative not related to science or technology. Instead, he linked it to the behavior of human beings to respond to new situations caused by science or technology. This first method emphasizes human issues rather than technical issues. It clearly distinguishes the term speculative fiction from popular and restrained science fiction, which corresponds to Marek Oziewicz's statement: "*Speculative fiction represents a global reaction of the creative human imagination struggling to imagine a possible future at a time of a great transition from local humanity to global humanity*." (Oziewicz 2, 2017)

However, Heinlein's use of speculative fiction is also restrictive, even if he is not an elitist. He not only excludes all science fiction and novels, which were called later hard science fiction, but also fantasy, horror, and other non-parody genres. According to Marek Oziewicz, Heinlein's attempt to replace science fiction in the classification chart failed. Part of the reason is because of the qualitative characteristics Heinlein attributed to many speculative fiction novels found in science fiction and other disciplines, which are non-imitation categories outside of Heinlein's jurisdiction. A more direct reason is that in the 1960s, people's understanding of what it means to involve science fiction or general literature in society changed, starting from Heinlein's idealistic moral and clear patterns, of a human model derived from their forecast behavior to social criticism and then to the questioning of repressiveness current status (4). Although Heinlein's definition was no longer used in the late 1960s, various protest traditions in science fiction adopted the term itself. In addition, only recently that Heinlein's basic idea of speculative fiction and science fiction are synonymous was questioned.

The second approach theorizes speculative fiction as a category that is not synonymous but the opposite of science fiction. Partly; because of the explosive diversification of science fiction since the New Wave movements of the 1960s and partly due to the merger of fantasy, science fiction, and horror films that occurred in the late 1970s, where this position expressed concerns about the blurring boundaries of this genre. It considered the emerging culture and the field of speculative fiction novels as undoubtedly a new trend. Oziewicz states that: “This method is not without warning because of the historical development tradition of critical reflection, especially the innovative works of Judith Merril, Robert Scholes, Diana Wagner, and Catherine Hume.” (5).

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Judith Merril and other writers and editors widely used speculative fiction to express dissatisfaction with traditional science fiction in the New Wave movement context, that no longer used in the middle of the 1970s. Judith Merril promoted the widespread use of speculative fiction in an anthology of “*The Year’s Best Science Fiction*,” published between 1959 and 1969. Although Merril’s definition has constantly developed by 1967, she had understood speculative fiction as a new type of literature that relied on traditional assumptions and extrapolation of scientific methods but was free to use than science. In her view, speculative fiction novels are unique modern literature novels that use fantasy and creative elements to comment or speculate on society, human nature, life, reality, and any other themes under the general heading of philosophy. Moreover, she views speculative fiction as a set of non-mimetic genres fighting for social change, and this view has spread to many other collections and monographs. Oziewicz writes:

Judith Merril’s influence spread after her collection “*Spaced Out: Three Novels of Tomorrow*,” which donates in 1970 to the ‘Toronto Public Library,’ is unique enough to say on the library website that it contains certain aspects of modern speculative literature, including science-

fiction, and fantasy-fiction elements, satire, surreal, and others speculative future aspects and conceptualization experimental works; whether, in novels, poetry, drama, prose, or other forms, as well as scientific bibliographies and critical materials, and modern related fields of speculative writings. Since 1991, her collection has become a prominent source of speculative fiction, known as the "*Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy*." (Oziewicz 10)

On the other hand, Margaret Atwood is another major proponent of this second approach. In the late 1980s, Atwood used speculative fiction as a better term to describe her dystopian novels, beginning with "*The Handmaid's Tale*, 1985," to "*Oryx and Crake*, 2003," until "*The Year of the Flood*, 2009". Atwood's distinction depends on probability, although it is not necessarily scientific. She believes that science fiction contains stories about impossible events, such as the invasion of Mars and similar events in the Herbert George Wells stories. Whereas speculative fiction refers to events that may happen, which explore the unrealized future of our planet. According to Oziewicz: "most of the prominent figures of this second approach do not use the major equipment of science fiction if not all, so they can be distinguished from science fiction." (5)

The third approach is the broader, less explanatory, and increasingly broad understanding of speculative fiction is to adapt the term to the entire wide field of non-mimicry narrative literature. Oziewicz asserts that "The third perspective of speculative fiction does not represent a genre, as it is with Heinlein, Merrill, and Atwood's methods. It is not limited to literature but covers the entire range of narrative media, from print to drama, broadcast, tv, video games, and many other mixtures." (6). To explain further, in literature, this third approach flourishes in many forms of novels, stories, picture books, comics, graphic novels, and poetry; provides a general term for fantasy, science fiction, as well as other non-imitation

categories, they may or may not come from these two categories, but violate the relationship classification or have established themselves as independent traditions style. These include, but are not limited to, utopias, dystopia, horror, gothic, steampunk,¹ alternative history, time travel stories, magical realism, supernatural stories, a post-world doomsday novel, or post-apocalyptic fiction, traditional literature including myths and legends, fairy tales, folktales, ghost fantasies tales, and others, if they based on non-imitation impulse, that is, a deviation from a broad understanding of verisimilitude to consensus reality.

Since the 2000s, this understanding of speculative fiction has become essential. Although it is mainly among young readers, writers, and scholars or who speak from the perspective of a few people, it received little support from experienced researchers. Among the critical arguments against this third approach is that speculative fiction unproductively blows up the genre boundary between science fiction and fantasy. For instance, the elements often used to disqualify texts as science fiction by adding counterfactual narratives to past and present scenes or non-magical or supernatural texts that traditionally place them outside the border of fantasy. Other critics have observed that speculative fiction novels can refer to social, political, or philosophical speculation rather than scientific texts, or they may not use any fantasy elements. On the other hand, Oziewicz explains that: “The vague meaning of the term ‘speculation’ can apply to all literature in its broadest sense. Whereas, its abbreviation does not correspond with the term ‘extrapolation,’ which may lead to much debate.” (7). Furthermore, the American academic writer Brian Attebery suggested in his article, “*Special Section, ‘Extrapolation,’* 2009,” this criticism against speculative fiction reflects the widening gap between scholars who were very proficient in fiction and criticism before the 1990s and scholars who are more familiar with the latest works but do not necessarily understand the

¹ Steampunk: science fiction’s steampunk subgenre features retro-futuristic technology and aesthetics based on industrial steam-powered machinery from the 19th century. As a form of speculative fiction, it can deal with current social issues and alternative futures or pasts.

history of these works. According to Attiebery, this latter group studies literature with various theoretical methods and critical terminology. Speculative fiction seems to be one of these new labels and debates with its questions, assumptions, and techniques. (7)

To understand the third approach of speculative fiction, it may be helpful to locate its origin by applying the emergent culture in Brian Attiebery's article "*Extrapolation*, 2009," showing comments on the dynamics of the social and cultural fields. Attiebery asserts that the prevailing culture challenging by the emerging culture, with its emotional structure based on different life experiences. As the example of "*Extrapolation*" shows, most science fiction and fantasy culture institutionalized in modern academia does not show any need or interest in the term speculative fiction. On the other hand, emerging cultures are labeled speculative fiction to conceptualize their experience with new non-imitative writings and connect them with old ideological forms of speculative fiction. For this second theory, speculative fiction has become a widely accepted term, referring to the entire field, challenging the prevailing culture through the consensus between various non-imitation genres and emerging genres. (Attiebery 8-9, 2009). Consequently, Oziewicz asserts Attiebery's theories explaining that speculative fiction in 'modern' understanding reflects a qualitative leap that brings together various prevailing and emerging traditions, describing that:

The expansion of the world's literary landscape, due to the increasing recognition of fantasy, science fiction, and horror culture, the spread of indigenous, minority, and post-colonial narratives, which change the popular Western concepts of reality or uses non-imitation elements in different ways, rather than the traditional Western genres; led to the need for a new conceptual category to understand the diverse and mixed types of modern narratives; known as speculative fiction category. A diverse

range of thought experimentation that presents an open-ended view of reality. (Oziewicz 3)

In short, the distinction between imitation and non-imitation literary forms, even if these terms may be ambiguous, is necessary to understand speculative fiction as a collection of genres. The non-imitation concept began in the 19th century in gothic, horror, fantasy, and science fiction novels, and then quickly realized the diversification and mixing of these non-imitation genres with other non-imitation forms in the 20th century. It can track these genres as separate threads in a long process, and these processes combine to form a field of speculative fiction in the 21st century. Oziewicz asserts that the critical thinkers of the 20th century discovered the fallacy of reality that “all literature established models of reality, rather than today’s copies, redefining imitation and non-imitation as a dual response to reality.” (2). Thus, speculative fiction draws inspiration from the impulse of non-imitation. Though the difference is the lifeblood of literary criticism, the attractiveness of the term speculative fiction lies in its inclusiveness and openness.

This shift in the early 2000s, when the term speculative fiction was adapted to represent the collective realm of non-imitative literature, has changed the territory of the literary field and redefined its power struggle. First, it abandoned the border wars between the genres, their exclusive definitions, and the controversy about cognition or other primacy claims that have long been a hallmark of genre criticism. Second, it redefines the goal of the power struggle in this field instead of winning the stigma of literature for a particular genre. It is better to study how non-imitation genres may be more suitable for solving current global problems and reflecting on a multicultural world; with different views, traditions, and experiences. Third, the adoption of speculative fiction as a general term has enabled literature to interact productively with other fields, including drama, film, visual art, music, and even science. In this new movement, speculative fiction arises to be a large branch of literature related to other cultural

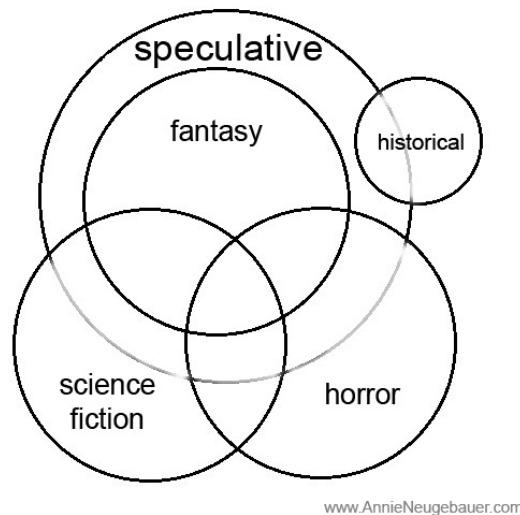
fields rather than a narrow branch of science fiction. It is part of the contemporary global culture, in a sense that this relatively isolated domain was not, at least not from the beginning. According to Oziewicz: “The field of speculative fiction novels resists stratification, which is part of specific individual types of dynamic fields. It provides a new way to distribute value by prioritizing the relations system within the field rather than individual works.” (Oziewicz 9)

To sum up, in the late 1990s, speculative fiction had many historical meanings. Nowadays, these meanings replace by the concept of emerging culture, a new consensus that refers to the fuzzy set of cultural production. The fuzzy set was first applied to gender research by Brian Attebery, who described it as “a category without clear boundaries, defined by similarity with similar examples, from the same or to something similar.” (Oziewicz 2, 2017). In recent understanding, speculative fiction is a fuzzy set category that includes all non-imitation genres that differ from common imitations of reality. From fantasy, science fiction, and horror to their derivatives like gothic, zombie, post-apocalyptic novels, ghost stories, superhero stories, magical realism, etc. In speculative fiction novels, we no longer focus on technology or the design of a world we control but on reading complex literary works that deal with contemporary culture and society through ‘non-imitation’ lenses that may change the future. It is an unbounded fuzzy space in our multicultural world that supports human creativity to restore the forgotten or marginalized fiction to interact with reality. Oziewicz, assert the value of speculative fiction, saying: “For those who appreciate the term, this is the largest diverse and most dynamic category in the modern narrative.” (Oziewicz, 19, 2017).

1.3 The Sub-genres of Speculative Fiction

Margaret Atwood took up the torch of speculative fiction. A collection of essays from 2011, *“In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination,”* contains her thoughts on this genre; she states that: “Science fiction and all of its hyphenated forms, science-fiction fantasy, etc. are covered under the umbrella of speculative fiction by some, while the opposite is true by others.”

Thereby, she believes that all of these fantastical genres are intertwined in some way, saying: “When it comes to genres, boundaries are increasingly defenseless and things slide through them carelessly.” (7). In an attempt to visualize this merging phenomenon, the writer Annie Neugebauer illustrates the ‘differences’ between speculative fiction and other related genres in a 2014 blog post in the below diagram:



Annie Neugebauer designed this diagram based on her belief that speculative fiction takes changes our existing world by asking ‘What if,’ “What would have happened if the Nazis had won the Second World War? What if people had an x-ray vision?” (Annie Neugebauer, “*What Is Speculative Fiction?*”). According to her, this definition:

Open up the fields to include science fiction, fantasy, and horror and expands to other genres such as alternate history, weird stories, dystopian, apocalyptic tales, time travel, and superhero fiction. On the other side, it excludes science fiction and horror stories that don’t include speculation, i.e., horror without supernatural elements or science fiction based on current technology. (Neugebauer, 2014).

It’s an interesting diagram that includes different genres, which arose from distinct definitions of speculative fiction since its rise. However, various fiction magazine editors

define speculative fiction differently. But a quote attributed to Raymond M. Coulombe, the editor of "*Quantum Muse*," is my favorite, which reads:

You might ask yourself, what is speculative fiction? the first thing that comes to your mind is 'what if?' Then the answer must be 'fiction.' What if time machines are available? What if we could travel faster than the speed of light? What if there was a system of magic that could codify and relies on? What if we have an honest government?" I prefer to base on this, as an entire career built in favor of writing only 'what if?' (qtd. in Herron, 2016)

The exact definition of speculative fiction is still an open field to interpretation, no matter how many people you ask. However, the only thing that most writers of speculative fiction agree on is that most novels of this genre fall into at least one of the following sub-genres, cited in MasterClass Encyclopedia depending on the structure of the story:

1. **Science fiction:** In general, but not always, science fiction is speculative; it's about imagined technologies that don't exist in the real world as time travel, aliens, and robots. The subgenre of time travel is common in speculative science fiction novels.
2. **Sci-fi fantasy fiction:** science fiction stories inspired by myths, folklore, and fairy tales, combining unreal technology and supernatural realism elements.
3. **Supernatural fiction:** science fiction stories about mysterious knowledge or hidden power, including witchcraft, spirituality, and psychic abilities.
4. **Space opera fiction:** is a soap opera, a play about science fiction stories set in space, focused on conflict, romance, and journey.
5. **Urban fantasy fiction:** fiction stories happen in an urban environment in the real world but operate according to magical rules.

6. **Utopian fiction:** the stories about a civilization that the author believes is an ideal society.
7. **Dystopian fiction:** stories about societies considered problematic in fiction novels world, often mock government rules, poverty, and oppression.
8. **Apocalyptic fiction:** a story that happened before and during the catastrophe that caused many of the world's population to die. The stories focus on characters who struggle to survive, such as escaping from zombies or trying to escape from a deadly plague.
9. **Post-apocalyptic fiction:** are stories focused on survivors who discovered how to deal with new environments, such as appearing after a global nuclear catastrophe or surviving the complete collapse of society.
10. **Alternate history fiction:** these stories focus on valid historical events but are written as if they were discovered with different results.
11. **Superhero fiction:** stories about superheroes and how they use their skills to fight against supervillains.

1.4 Speculative Fiction in Dystopian Literature

Utopian and dystopian fiction are among speculative fiction genres, which discuss different social and political situations. The utopians fiction novels depict an environment in line with the author's spirit, with various attributes of distinct realities attracting readers. The term utopia is traced back to a book published by Sir Thomas More in 1516, which describes an ideal society on a fictional island, free of poverty and suffering, focusing on the social, political, and moral aspects. Whereas dystopian fiction novels are the opposite, they depict an environment contradictory to the author's spirit. It's where a person living conditions are bad, through deprivation, massive poverty, disease, loss of individualism, public distrust, government control, technological control, oppression, war, or a combination of them.

Dystopian writers have studied at least one reason among these, usually as an analogy to similar problems in the real world.

Under the umbrella of speculative fiction, dystopian novels predict the potential sociopolitical, repressive, and futuristic changes that may deprive society of life pleasures. In their book named “*Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*” published in 2013, Basu, Broad, and Hintz defined dystopia as “a kind of fiction that describes the non-existent societies as much worse than the reader society, which is the opposite of utopia ‘a non-existent’ society much better than the current world.” (Basu et al. 2). Writers employ dystopian fiction as a literary method to talk about potential real-world problems in the future and raise the reader’s awareness of their current society. In dystopia, the author points out destructive behavior in society or the system, often called criticism.

The twentieth century considers the golden age of dystopian literature and the years of political turmoil and global panic. The political tensions that led to the First World War made people doubt the world’s future. Therefore, predictions about the world’s future appeared, providing answers to worried readers. Dystopian fiction uses to supply a fresh opinion on the different social and political situation problems that might consider allowed practices or considered common and inescapable, such as social control. Dystopian authors consider social control a prominent aspect of dystopian fiction, exercised by a ruling authority on the population, including religious, philosophical, technological, bureaucratic, reproductive control, etc. Jack London’s 1908 novel “*The Iron Heel*” consider an extraordinary prediction of the events that preceded the First World War. Although London’s work classifies as the earliest dystopian speculative fiction novel, this genre began to flourish after Yevgeny Zamyatin published his seminal literary work “*We*” in 1921.

Dystopian speculative fiction novels often infer elements of modern society, which can regard as political alerts. Yevgeny Zamyatin’s dystopian novel “*We*,” published in 1921,

originally written in Russian, criticized the collectivism of the Soviet Union and identified the imperfections of the communist regime. It considers a pioneer of futuristic dystopian works and political satire. “*We*,” predicted a post-apocalyptic future where society depends on logic and management by mechanical systems, where its population wears uniforms and identifies by a number. Before the publication of *We*, the fiction of ideal societies was merely utopian. However, after 1921, this genre developed a new method to portray the worst; and the negative of the Utopian environment, ideals, and beliefs. Dystopia then became defined as a “fictional portrayal of society in which evil, or negative social and political development, have the upper hand.” (Claeys 107). In addition, “*We*” has influenced many writers and changed their views on the Utopian beliefs of scientific and political achievements. The authors of that time no longer believed in the positive essence of utopia. As a result, they criticized its beliefs for improving life and humanity. Last, as an outstanding work of dystopian literature, “*We*” has listed the major themes and features that will dominate dystopian literature in the next few years, like urbanization and scientific development, government surveillance, and personal conflicts against the homogenized utopian states.

Totalitarianism refers to the complete social control of the population through ideological police and surveillance methods. It is also a feature of dystopian speculative fiction, and it occupies a prominent position in the dystopian novels of George Orwell, Margaret Atwood, and others. Most writer’s interests shifted by the end of the Second World War to a regime that used brainwashing and class division in a society like a prison where one’s individuality and freedom disbanded rather than a paradisiacal world towards political dystopias. This kind of dystopian totalitarian novel, despite its differences, has one goal is to show the author’s fears and worries about such regimes to warn people about their negative consequences on their rights and freedom.

Aldous Huxley's dystopian speculative fiction novel "*Brave New World*," published in 1932, predict the industrial and social changes he saw in 1931; in 2540, which led to compulsory divisions of the population over five castes which achieved industrial success, where the World State kills all people over 60 and uses powerful conditioning technology to control the reproduction and the movement of their citizens. Inspired by *We*, Huxley had followed the same path as Zamyatin, criticizing the ideas of collectivism against individualism, as well as other aspects of population control.

In this context, Yevgeny Zamyatin's dystopian novel "*We*;" influenced George Orwell to write his outstanding dystopian novel "*1984*," in the shadows of the World Wars, published in 1949, about Oceania, a country often at war, where its population was totally under government control, mainly focuses on the impact of totalitarianism on freedom of rights, individualism, and humanity in general. What distinguishes this dystopian speculative fiction literary work from any other novel is that it examines the main aspects of the totalitarian state in detail, including the surveillance imposed by Big Brother; besides, media information monopolies.

In addition, the dystopian speculative fiction novel by Anthony Burgess's "*A Clockwork Orange*, 1962," which took place in a society where is a violent subculture of youth in future England, portrays the protagonist's experience with a country aimed to change his personality according to their will. Furthermore, Stephen King's dystopian novel "*The Long Road*," published in 1979, depicts a similar totalitarian regime by showing adolescent participation in a deadly battle. Moreover, Margaret Atwood's dystopian speculative fiction novel "*The Handmaid's Tale*," published in 1985, depicts the future of America by totalitarian theocratic politics of a state known as Gilead, and warns of oppressive patriarchy, where women have no rights.

The totalitarian regime is not the only theme that characterizes dystopian speculative fiction literature, but also pollution, global warming, climate change, health, economy, and technology. Its themes are common in ‘young adult (YA)’ literary fiction genres, is a type of novel usually written for teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18. The themes and genres of YA related to the age and experience of the protagonist. For example, “*The Hunger Games*, 2008” is a young adult dystopian speculative fiction novel by Suzanne Collins. The story lay in the fictional world of Panem, a future country on the ruins of North America. The Panem totalitarian government known as The Capitol owns most of the state wealth and controls its citizens. They selected children, every year, from 12 districts in Panem to participate in a television death contest called The Hunger Games. (*MasterClass* stuff, 2021)

It sounds like a paradox, but utopia novels are often just dystopia. Such stories can create a utopian world on the surface, a society without war, poverty, and degradation of the environment. However, these utopias often are described as the outcome of social class by exploitation or loss of personal freedom, such as freedom of expression and reproductive rights, which provide them with many mutual features of dystopian fiction literature. Writers usually use both genres as a metaphor in different directions in which humans can move according to their own choice and end with one of two potential futures. As an example, H. G. Wells’s novel “*The Time Machine*,” published in 1895, the story is about “a scientist from Victorian England who built a time machine and witnessed the emergence of capitalist society, in which a utopian world of the future ruled by an underground slave community.” (Michael Bodhi Green, 2021)

In a dystopian or utopian speculative fiction novel, readers from our world will travel to another place or time and see a society that the author thinks of as an ideal or other that depicts the worst prospective outcomes. The key is that our choices may lead to a better or worse potential future world. An example of this literary model, in which a novel is characterized by many elements that move between utopian and dystopian throughout the

fictional society of the novel, is Lois Lowry's dystopian speculative fiction novel "*The Giver*," published in 1993, where he described the society at first as a utopia, however, as the book progressed, the dystopian aspects of the society revealed.

Dystopian speculative fiction literature uses as a literary tool for inferring elements of modern society. It notifies the contemporary trends since it presents stories that criticize current events, people, politics, etc. At the same time, it provides a vision for the future, where the characters struggle against environmental degradation, technological control, and state oppression. P. L. Thomas defined speculative fiction in his book "*Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction: Challenging Genres*" published in 2013, as a fiction that "deals with a dark future, consider as both a representation of current society and as a lived possibility." (Thomas, 108), i.e., speculative fiction is a fiction that deals usually with a bleak future that is a reflects of today's society or the future.

The term 'speculative fiction' was only related to the science fiction genre in the late 20th century since science fiction is a broad genre that contains speculative elements. The concept has expanded in the 21st century to include more subcategories beyond science fiction, such as fantasy and dystopian literature. Nowadays, speculative fiction is a general term for stories that may take place outside the known world.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a literary background of speculative fiction including the definition, shift, and the rise. It has also provided both the sub-genres and the literary dystopian background of speculative fiction, depending on the different features that characterize this futuristic dystopian novel genre, such as totalitarianism and surveillance. The next two chapters will discuss these two concepts and how they are portrayed in a dystopian speculative fiction context which in this case is *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.

Chapter Two:
Speculative Fiction in Margaret
Atwood's Novel “*The Handmaid's Tale*”

Chapter II:

Speculative Fiction in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*

2.1 Introduction

The second chapter will deal in the first section with conceptualizing Margaret Atwood's "*The Handmaid's Tale*" novel as a speculative fiction novel based on real events that inspired Atwood. By remembering the past, speculative fiction writers seek to understand the present and imagine the future. The most interesting speculative fiction novels are those that function as complex meditations that offer insights about the reader's future, as well as those that question the nature of what we think about 'history.' How does *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel that imagines a futuristic state, operate as a speculative fiction novel? The second section of this chapter will be devoted to the characteristics that make *The Handmaid's Tale* a dystopian novel. The discriminatory and misogynistic techniques used by the Gilead regime to subjugate women are the subject of this section. This section first analyzes the 'social hierarchy' and looks at the classification of women as a dystopic element, which defines women according to their reproductive capacity, besides the dress code adopted by Gilead to oppress the Handmaid's body, and presents it as a sinful object. Second, it examines how are compulsory procreation for women. Finally, it describes different mechanisms of fear used by Gilead to oppress women as a means of dystopia. The third section of the following chapter will deal with the futuristic setting and how is elaborated in the novel, based on particular notions were mentioned in the first chapter, mainly the time travel, which Margaret Atwood used to move freely between past, present, and future in "*The Handmaid's Tale*."

2.2 *The Handmaid's Tale* as a Speculative Fiction Novel

"Some books haunt the reader. Others haunt the writer. The Handmaid's Tale has done both."

(Margaret Atwood)

A wide-brimmed white hat and a red cape have become symbols of women's oppression is an image instilled into our minds by Margaret Atwood's 1985 speculative fiction novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, which depicted a futuristic dystopia in which women are imposed into reproductive slavery to bear the children of the elite, and wears this uniform to underline their subservience, due to the environmental toxins that rendered many of the ruling class women infertile, these women were rounded up for the job of reproduction, and prevented from their most basic rights. With the rise of Christian fundamentalism in the 1980s, religious extremists known as the Sons of Jacob took over the American government by bombarding Congress and assassinating President, after a coup, to establish a new theocratic, totalitarian state called The Republic of Gilead in the late twentieth century pushed the society towards Puritan totalitarianism and violent social control. Offred, one of the unfortunate Handmaids in the new social order, tells the story, revealing dark corners behind the quiet facade of the facility.

As a futuristic story, Atwood's fiction is open to a variety of interpretations and readings. Her novel cannot be summed up in its feminist message because it also critiques the political and environmental conditions of a society called the Republic of Gilead. In response to considering *The Handmaid's Tale* as a feminist novel, Atwood stated that:

If you are referring to an ideology in which all women are angels or abused. To the point where they have no moral choice, no. I would say yes if you mean a novel in which women are human beings with all their implied characters and behaviors that play an important role. Besides,

what happens to them is critical to the theme, structure, and plot of the novel. (*New York Times* 2017)

Atwood's interest in women reflects her interest in humanity as a whole, not just the role women play in their communities. The writer's apprehensions appeared in his desire to tell a realistic story and have a protagonist who plays a crucial role in real life, to reflect one of the main elements of speculative fiction. Atwood creates a totalitarian state and patriarchal society based on the Compulsory Christian regime of the Old Testament. She states that the book was written decades ago or that the monadic society of Gilead is predicted in the future because the themes of the novel exceed their anchor to become the subject of present concern. The novel subjects deal with pose a real threat to society in general and women in particular. One of the most fascinating features of *The Handmaid's Tale* is that we are neither introduced to Gilead nor their principles and how this came about we will learn gradually as the story unfolds. This feature makes the journey through grim Gilead more enchanting than it is. Thus, the novel plot is compelling enough to elicit both intellectual and emotional responses.

John Moss, in his article "*Readers Guide to the Canadian Novel*," declared that: "Atwood is aware of the themes and styles she uses, her distinctive combination of the two, that is, form and content, unite her different works, which exhibits such technical and intellectual flexibility that they often seem unrelated to each other." (1). As Howells explains:

Atwood's novels present a kind of affinity. Atwood is a versatile writer who takes on different narrative conventions in each of her novels, whether it's a Gothic romance, fairy tales, espionage thriller, science fiction, or a historical novel, reshaping them and working within them. Her work has always defied the constraints of traditional genres. However, this experimentalism, balanced by a strong continuity of interest, is both aesthetic and social. (*Margaret Atwood*, 5-6).

Atwood considers *The Handmaid's Tale* as speculative fiction, a fictional work about a possible future without any advancements in modern technology. She was an ardent defender of the speculative fiction genre and used it as a definition of her works. In a 2005 article in *The Guardian*, she explains that: "passing through a wormhole in space to another universe is science fiction to me, while speculative fiction is a work that uses available tools such as DNA identification and credit cards, and that takes place on Earth." (Atwood, *Aliens* 2005). She calls dystopian and utopian literature 'speculative fiction' and believes that "if novelists devote themselves to this genre, they may be able to tell us something about the future of our society." (*Waltzing Again* 259). Literature, says Atwood, "can be a mirror in which people can see themselves, and this may lead to change." (*Waltzing Again*, 34). Therefore, Speculative fiction leans towards the genres of utopia and dystopian fiction because it speculates a reality that is always substitutional to ours, whether it is more positive or negative. Margaret Atwood states in "'Introduction' In *Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*": "When it comes to genre, boundaries become more and more unprotected, everything slips indifferently, from side to side." (7). As a result, the political and satirical aspects, as well as, the technocratic and futuristic elements of speculative fiction, correspond appropriately to Atwood's understanding of the genre.

By speculative fiction, Atwood recognizes a very different kind of prose, a fiction built on more definite facts. According to her: "We did it, or we do it, or we can start working on it tomorrow. Nothing unthinkable is happening, and the design trends on which my future society is based are moving." (*Dire Cartographies*, 92). In other words, Atwood is interested in describing the present, and she appears to have found her own methods to participate in the discourse of contemporaries through the vehicle of speculative dystopian fiction. Thus, dystopian speculative fiction novelists have a unique duty to reflect our most damaging and dangerous social trends lead to their logical conclusion, to encourage us to abandon our

arrogance. This can be seen as a wake-up call to shake readers out of their complacency and make them look up and acknowledge the dangerous or even certain harm caused to society. As Atwood confessed after the publication *Alias Grace* (1997), her first historical novel in which she used such devices. In her speaking about the author's attitude to his work, Atwood states:

A fictional world, drawn with love by a writer, may have a more or less obvious connection to the world in which we actually live, but no connection to it at all; is not an option. We should write who we are and when we are, whether we like it or not, and disguise it as we may. As Robertson Davies pointed out, "We all belong to our own time, and there is nothing we can do to run from it. Everything we write will be modern, even if we try a novel set in a previous era." (159)

Speculative fiction occupies a space in which it rigorously presents stunning and innovative thought experiments about the possible future of societies. It uses political and social satire that might create a change in the power strategies of the world. The author uses good writing tools to depict social, political, or ethical issues in real life by understanding them, analyzing, and presenting them in a fictional way to achieve higher consciousness. In addition to showing realism and meaning, speculative fiction must exhibit a higher complexity in themes, plots, thought experiments, and social commentary. In this sense, Atwood is carefully working to adapt this mechanism and technique to her realistic storyline, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which comments on various disturbing topics such as control, surveillance, and nuclear weapons, besides other hidden subjects such as fundamentalism or extremism. Atwood's choice of a theocratic society as an alternative to the materialist society of the United States of America cannot be a coincidence. In recent decades, there have been serious disagreements, which compete and escalated into outbreaks of terror over a particular religion, person, or faith. Therefore, it cannot be just a coincidence that a theocratic totalitarian regime took the

democratic system. These contradictions highlighted stimulated a series of dogmas that later led to specific political and social measures that influenced the entire population of Gilead.

Since imagination has a mirror that might be dark but it can illuminate our real life. Margaret Atwood attaches a personal and literary meaning to the concept of speculative fiction and emphasizes the role of imagination in the dystopia, where speculation arises. In the current world, she says: “understanding imagination is no longer a hobby but a necessity; because more and more often, if we can imagine it, we’ll be able to do it.” (Atwood, *Aliens* 2005). In other words, readers need to use their imaginations and understand the potential consequences of their actions in the future. When Atwood writes *The Handmaid's Tale*, she uses words that are just familiar enough in our common modern vernacular to grab attention and make readers comfortable, but often turns their meaning into something much more sinister than it was originally. She takes advantage of the reader’s familiarity with their own lingo to gain their trust before describing the often-disturbing cultural practices. This way of writing provides the readers with an opportunity to apply both critical thinking and sociological imagination to a story that is still as relevant today as it was when it was first published.

Atwood defined speculative fiction as: “dystopia, and ‘specific’ are things that are intrinsically connected to our modern life. They represent things that can easily happen within our grasp. The closeness to contemporary society makes the words in *The Handmaid's Tale* so intimidating. They are very close to our current vernacular, so they are easily accessible.” In Gilead, Atwood creates a credible dystopian vernacular by creating new compound words or neologisms and euphemizing and changing the meaning of existing words. (Jennifer Keishin Armstrong, 2018). Tae Yamamoto, in her article “*How Can Feminist Read 'The Handmaid's Tale,'*” argues that:

The Handmaid's Tale has a dual purpose because of the way the present and the past are viewed; it is a cautionary tale in which the reader is

warned against the possibility of such evils occurring in our own time by watching the exaggerated horrors of the near future. It also acts as a satire on our society in which they become alienated and criticize their own habits and lifestyles when viewed from a stranger's perspective. (Yamamoto 197, 2009).

Yamamoto hints that Atwood uses irony through the lens of fiction in her story to shed light on obscenity in modern society. Rather than creating a simple warning or just satire, Atwood skillfully combines the two in a sarcastic alert. She criticizes the autocracy of Gilead and the previously secular culture that preceded it. *The Handmaid's Tale* warns against self-propagating oppression. Upon its publication, *Publishers Weekly* magazine declared that *The Handmaid's Tale* "deserves a place of honor, on the small shelf of instructive tales that have entered modern folklore." (*THT*, "*International Acclaim for The Handmaid's Tale*")

Margaret Atwood took a particular interest in the political and social circumstances that surrounded her in the years and decades before the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale*, working on the novel over several years and spending a lot of effort researching distinct elements of her work. An accurate critique of contemporary cultural norms, although it's disturbing albeit, gives Atwood's novel its strength. *The Handmaid's Tale*'s themes of religious fundamentalism, feminism, consumerism, environmental decline, and rampant technology have also become increasingly hotly debated since the mid of the 1980s, making the novel seem more prescient and relevant. Margaret Atwood has been asked the same question about "*The Handmaid's Tale*" since it was published in 1985: "How did you come up with this stuff?" While she always answers that the novel harrowing events are based on events that occurred during some of history's darkest moments. In her "*Note to the Reader*" section attached at the end of the novel; Atwood drew my attention by stating that her fictional state was not an invention. It was a theocratic and totalitarian society that was, and rest in the world.

Clarified that: “We should remember that the society described in *The Handmaid's Tale* is nothing new, only time and place. History shows that what we were in the past, can return.” (316)

In the spring of 1984, Margaret Atwood was living in West Berlin, Germany, surrounded by the Berlin Wall, and when she wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Soviet empire was still there. Influenced by the experience of visiting some countries behind the Iron Curtain, she stated: “I experienced caution, a sense of being watched, silence, changing subjects, indirect ways of communicating information by people, and this has influenced what I write.” (Atwood 2017 pars. 2). She reflects Nazi Germany in the Republic of Gilead, with the suspension of constitutional rights, racial cleansing, torture, eternal sectarian warfare, public executions of homosexuals and dissidents, repressive police operations and espionage, and the distribution of roles among women according to their fertility. (Ellen, *CliffsNotes on THT*). According to Atwood, Hitler's politics are very similar to Commanders of Gilead.

The dramatic events and conditions evident in the details of *The Handmaid's Tale* and the culture of this society can be felt throughout the novel, which inspired its dystopian element. Margaret Atwood states in an interview that the center of Gilead is Cambridge, Massachusetts, specifically the Harvard University campus, even though it is not specifiable in the novel itself: “It's very concrete. The Wall is the wall around the Harvard courtyard. All the shops mentioned are probably there now.” (qtd. in Tomc 80). Atwood created yet another link with the reality of her readers; in this way, the atrocities described in *The Handmaid's Tale* take place at Harvard, a center for intelligence and innovation, and the core of a fundamentalist government like many totalitarian systems. Shirley Neuman, in her book “‘Just a Backlash’: Margaret Atwood, Feminism, and *The Handmaid's Tale*.” states that “Atwood's fictional regime is a possible continuation of reality after 1984.” (859). Atwood's exaggeration of factual episodes

reinforces the perception of the novel as a satirical text. She turned events in the real world into ‘What if this happens?’ This structure allows abstraction from fiction to spatial theory.

Over nearly a dozen interviews and essays, Margaret Atwood has discussed the events and ideas that inspired her to write *The Handmaid's Tale*. Throughout her life, political upheavals and radical social change have marked Atwood's life, she declared. When Atwood says she felt “increasingly alarmed by the speeches of religious leaders in the United States. Besides, I could not ignore a variety of events from around the world, particularly the rising fanaticism of the Iranian mono-theocracy.” The “mushroom cloud” that inspired *The Handmaid's Tale* began to take shape in the early 1980s. Atwood compiled an archive of newspaper clippings that cover real-life events in the mid-1980s that formed the basis of the turbulent world she created of Gilead, documenting the rise of fundamentalist theocracies of the world, including theocratic movements in the United States, that seek to blur the traditional boundaries between church and government, as well as, the rise of totalitarianism and thought about multiple methods that governments could use to control their citizens. These clippings become a convenient repository of stories that support the novel events. For example, *The Handmaid's Tale* was written in 1984, during the anti-feminist reaction in the 1980s, when women's reproductive rights were attacked by the conservative movement in the United States. These negative reactions against feminism demonstrate the reason for Gilead's imagined future state.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood depicts that language is used as a tool to control women by The Republic of Gilead. In the Philippines, language was used as a tool to control too when it comes to political dissidents being killed. The word ‘Salvaging’ has become the government's preferred euphemism. There is an entire section in *The Handmaid's Tale* called ‘Salvaging,’ a ritual that punishes those who break the law severely. Although by “the time of Gilead's creation, it had spread from its origins in the Philippines to become a generic term for

destroying political enemies.” (Atwood 307). The fictitious name provides a part of real-life events. The control of the female body personified control over citizens. In Romania, the government of dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in 1966 controlled women’s fertility by banning birth control and abortion. On the other hand, the one-child policy in China (1979-2015) had the exact opposite effect, according to Atwood. In Romania, the Ceausescu regime forced women to have babies, and in China, they were forced not to. There was a strong connection between the events in the novel and the political climate of that time. Atwood’s felt threatened by the totalitarian regimes at home and abroad. As she explains:

Each book is a mushroom cloud gathered from substances that accumulate over a lifetime. I was interested in the history of totalitarian regimes and the different forms they took in various societies. Although the original idea for *The Handmaid's Tale* came to me in 1981, I avoided writing it for several years because I was worried about the outcome if I could translate it into literary form. (Atwood, *Note to the Reader*)

As a Canadian writer, Margaret Atwood displayed a strong sense of Canadian identity. While she has always tried to maintain a certain distance from Canada’s dominant southern neighbor. As a result, Atwood, like many of her fellow Canadian writers, cannot ignore the influence of the United States. During her Harvard studies of 17th and 18th century American Puritanism, Atwood absorbed the Puritan traditions of New England, watched the rise of the American political far-right, and compared the two ideologies. The Republic of Gilead builds on the 17th-century Puritan roots that have always been found in modern America, which we thought we knew. Atwood said in an interview with Levi Beaulieu: “America was founded by the 17th-century Puritans. America then was not a democracy.” (72). Harsh rules of conduct, public executions, and the criminalization of anything considered a power by the rulers were

all hallmarks of the Republic of Gilead, just as they were all hallmarks of Puritanism in the early years of the United States.

Atwood drew a striking parallel between right-wing Christians, the Moral Majority 'Party of God,' and the 'Sons of Jacob' of Gilead. This is obvious, if not intended. The Moral Majority felt the need for the voice of Christians to be heard in the political force, so it was necessary to create an organization. The party believes that the decline of the traditional American family is because of the spread of immorality in American society. They support prayer in schools, consider homosexuality a sin, and fought hard against any state or politician who supported it. They also fought against the Equal Rights Amendment for gender equality, oppose abortion, and reject all forms of anti-Christian practices. Lisa Jadwin, in her article "*Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (1985): Cultural and Historical Context*," states that the rise of the so-called 'Moral Majority' also influenced the 1980 presidential election of the evangelical Christian political action committee, which is said to have moved two-thirds of the white vote for Ronald Reagan. While this organization was instrumental in defeating Carter, its growth and strength showed a remarkable U.S growing transformation. The Moral Majority formed in 1979 by evangelical preacher Jerry Falwell, sought to ban abortion, oppose state recognition of and acceptance of homosexuality, oppose the *Equal Rights Amendment*, enforce a "traditional" view of family life, and censor media outlets that promoted what the Moral Majority viewed as an "atheistic" view of family life, among other goals. (27). This party is akin to the 'Sons of Jacob' in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The Gilead regime was based on religious fundamentalism, aimed at reviving traditional family values and restricting individual freedoms, especially women. According to Atwood, they replace the United States if conservative extremists gain power in government. (*THT*, 1985). She created a coup scenario and turned the religious rhetoric into authoritarian politics.

Margaret Atwood's masterpiece *The Handmaid's Tale* was inspired by the rise of conservatism in the West following the election of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and after the election of Ronald Reagan in the United States. Jennifer Armstrong, in her article "*Why The Handmaid's Tale Is So Relevant Today*," mentions that during the book release in 1985, Atwood even brought newspaper clippings for her book interviews so that she could show the context of the plot points in the novel. As the growing power of the Christian right and their strong lobbying organizations, 'Moral Majority,' 'Focus on the Family,' and the 'Christian Coalition,' as well as televangelism, after the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980, whereas the novel reflected the United States embrace of conservatism. (April 2018). Atwood believes that this can be a tool to define the position of novels where the writers speculate on our present, as we can say the same for a fiction set in a futuristic society. All future fiction novels are based on the moments in which they were written. Thus, speculative fiction often works the same way. They are the creations of the writer present, regardless of the time or place in which they occur. To explain this idea in detail, Atwood discusses Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter*, set in Puritan New England in her book "*In Search of Alias Grace: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction*" declared that: "*The Scarlet Letter*, of course, does not belong to the 17th century, in the sense in which Puritans might recognize it. This novel uses the British colonial setting of the 17th century to create the new American Republic, built in the 19th century ... Looking back so long, so deeply, we find ourselves." (1512). Atwood's remarks are valid for all futuristic fiction novels, including her own. Exploring history helps writers make sense of today's world, trying to figure out how we got here. According to Peter G. Stillman and Anne Johnson in their 1994 article "*Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in The Handmaid's Tale*," Margaret Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* using real events as inspiration to emphasize that:

For readers today, Atwood's imagined dystopia of Gilead serves as a cautionary tale about how dangerous is the present, in which Gilead can be imagined and predicted. When everything described in Gilead has recently been enacted to some degree by some societies.² The practices and power of Gilead, as well as their physical limitations on Moira and Offred's mother and to transform Offred, exist in modern societies. Gilead's dystopia of the future is already present in the present. (Stillman and Johnson, 81)

By imagining a future that is clearly inspired by the present as well as the past, *The Handmaid's Tale* attempts to comment on and explore both. As Atwood explains in her essay "*Writing Utopia*," American Puritanism and dictatorships, in general, are the basic foundations of Gilead: "The future society proposed in *The Handmaid's Tale* takes the form of a theocracy. In principle, no society completely deviates from its roots. In light of history, the founders of the 18th-century American constitution separated church from state. Whereas, the leaders in *The Handmaid's Tale* have combined them." (97). *The Handmaid's Tale* is a political thriller. It based the plot on a regime inspired by a Puritan heritage. Atwood masterfully uses history for the world of the near future, making it difficult for the reader to discern whether we are moving into the future or reliving the past. Her synthesis of various historical times and her time of writing to create possible future works is a fascinating meditation on the genre of speculative fiction. In Atwood's hands, historical events become more than just memories from the past. In an interview with Tom Vitale, contends when asked if she intended to write a prediction of the future or an allegory of the present in her novel "*The Handmaid's Tale*," Margaret Atwood replied "both," stating:

² Davidson, Cathy. "A Feminist 1984." (19 February 1986); 24.

Any speculative fiction includes a long tradition of ... it is always based on projections of the elements present in our society now, and in fact, there is nothing in *The Handmaid's Tale* that people did not do in one way or another, either in general or in detail. They did it in the past, or they do it somewhere else now, or we have the technology to do it. ... This is an extrapolation from reality, a possible scenario for our society, but also an 'allegory' of what is already happening. (*A Moveable Feast*)

J. Brooks Bouson, in "*Critical Insights: The Handmaid's Tale*," asserts that Atwood's novel provides a glimpse into the future of the United States. This is reinforced by referring to Atwood's description of *The Handmaid's Tale* as a novel that plays on the hypothetical consequences of reality, which she uses to support her. Atwood states: "*The Handmaid's Tale* imagines what would happen if women continued to be confined in the 'domestic sphere.' Her book depicts a 'logical extension' of where we are now." (qtd. In Bouson 136). As a result, Bouson believes that dystopia in *The Handmaid's Tale* does not take place in a distant, isolated, and impossible land like Utopia does. Rather it is set in a real country with a specific historical background. Eleanor Rao writes in "*Strategies for Identity: The Fiction of Margaret Atwood*" that: "history, literature, and the present are interconnected points of this dystopia version of feminism" (18). Atwood designed a futuristic speculative American society of extreme Evangelical fundamentalism and modeled the possible outcome of this movement on social relations. Bouson also supported Rao's idea, using observations from the novel by Frances Bartkowski, Arnold Davidson, and Howell. All widely believe that, in the words of Howell, "history repeats itself with minimal variation, and the main source of fear for the reader is that there is nothing new in this futurist society." (Bouson 136).

Although Atwood is a science fiction writer, she is also a writer of speculative fiction; as noted by journalist Rebecca Hawkes in a 2017 article for the "*Telegraph Magazine*": "She

is obsessed with creating mirror images, of our current world, distorted, but still hauntingly familiar.” Atwood says that “fiction is one of the few remaining forms through which we can look at our society, not in its particular aspects, but in its typical form; through which we can see ourselves and the way we relate to each other, through which we can see others and judge them and ourselves.” (Margaret Atwood in Cooke 275). In the world today, there are many examples of dark and disturbing events we can recall with ease. Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow, a 13-year-old rape victim in Kismayo, Somalia, was stoned to death by fifty men in the middle of a football stadium after being accused of adultery in 2008. This event is similar to the totalitarian state of Gilead, where women victims of rape are beaten to death. (*The Guardian*). Through, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood expresses concern that the present shapes the future in ways we have not yet explored, “By presenting the dire future that lurks in today’s world, Atwood accurately condemns the current trends that could make Gilead a reality.” (Davidson 113). This corresponds to the idea of Leclaire: “By describing only the terrible things that have happened or are still happening, Atwood warns us that such dangers are near to the bones.” (Lacroix, Leclaire, 86).

Atwood’s futuristic world in *The Handmaid's Tale* was once seen as an allegory for the era of President Donald Trump. Trump’s victory has changed the political landscape. Suddenly, the novel prime events felt more plausible than ever: a government’s imposition of martial law following an attack by Muslim extremists and a society that prefers reproductive (and the subordination of women) above all appeared. All of this coincided with concerns about Trump’s authoritarian tendencies and his anti-abortion beliefs. A new level of concern falls on women with each new executive order and law from president Trump, which runs counter to the efforts of US Republicans to restore health programs and women’s reproductive rights.

The Handmaid's Tale has become the source of modern political rhetoric. During the women’s marches on January 21, 2017, against laws restricting women’s reproductive

freedom, activists were seen carrying posters that read “Make Atwood Fiction Again,” where the protesters who supported the abortion freedom choice wore Handmaid’s outfits. On various social media platforms, people began responding to and commenting on Republican’s efforts to



▲ Women protest against president Mike Pence in Philadelphia, 2018. Photograph: Matt Rourke. Credit by *The Guardian*.

ban contraception and abortion, using quoted religious expressions from *The Handmaid's Tale*, such as ‘*Under His Eye*’ and ‘*Bless the Fruit*.’ In the United States, when Vice President Mike Pence visited Philadelphia in July 2018, he was greeted by a wall of female protestors dressed as handmaids. Women protesters in the UK also wore red dresses and white caps to unwelcoming Donald Trump’s visits and protests against his policies and administration. Women around the world have embraced *The Handmaid's Tale*’s iconic outfit as a symbol of protest against the oppression of women. When the women’s marches started with Trump’s inauguration, Atwood wrote for *The Guardian*: “People like to dress up as handmaidens on Halloween and protest. Is this entertainment or a terrible political prophecy? Perhaps both? The Handmaid’s costumes demonstrate an incredible spectacle that shows how little the difference is between the real world and the Atwoodian world.

The novel was received ambiguously among the critics; feelings of fear and skepticism arose. Because of the alarming similarities between events in novel fiction and events in real life, people considered this a prophetic warning. Resurfacing conservative political stances from the 1980s has validated these rational concerns about today’s world. Atwood’s famous plot and costumes became a symbol of female resistance. *The Handmaid's Tale* is now considered the dystopian example of our time, and it looks like it will always be relevant. In *The Handmaid's*

Tale, Atwood suggests that “today’s society, in which there are too many choices, can lead to a totalitarian future that forbids choice.” (65)

2.3. *The Handmaid's Tale as a Dystopian Novel*

Thinking of dystopia refers to images of ruin, destruction, mass genocide, natural disasters, apocalypse, wars, suffering, disorder, and anarchy. Margaret Atwood’s dystopia in *The Handmaid's Tale* is shown through a different image. Instead of anarchy, there is order and legality. Ironically, this order led to a despotic regime that adopted religious fundamentalism as a doctrine and sole source of constitutional decrees. Thus, the shift of the Republic of Gilead from an assumed utopian state to a totalitarian dystopian state, with a total absence of any respect for human rights.

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* novel belongs to the dystopian genre. Atwood mainly relies on feminism and religious fundamentalism to create a dystopian climate. Interestingly, readers who come across Atwood’s novel often notice its dystopian elements at first, as they seem to be the most impressive and memorable parts. The most notable dystopian features found in *The Handmaid's Tale* are the social hierarchy they organized each woman in terms of their fertility, the misogynistic Gilead, and the mechanism of fear. Through the narration of Offred, a Handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, which replaced democratic America founded by Christian fundamentalism, we discover these features. This openly misogynistic republic only grants power to men in Gilead, whereas women consider the cause of fertility problems. “Unofficially, there is no longer a barren man. Only women are fertile, and women are infertile. This is the law.” (79). Malak Amin, in his article “*Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition*,” explains that: “Dystopias is based on power: power as a prohibition or undermining of human potential; power in its absolute form.” (10). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, power is a perversion of human potential, where women are taught the ideology of Gilead and forced into sexual slavery.

2.3.1 The Social Hierarchy

The hierarchical nature is clear evidence in most dystopian novels. Atwood's predecessors, Orwell and Huxley, knew that power never balanced in a dystopian society. There are always leaders who control other people in various ways: brainwashing or keeping the citizens in a state of fear. In Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, the loyalist commanders, to the founders of the Republic of Gilead, act as oppressors. They control society; they call the lower ranks the Guard and the official army the Angels of Gilead. Besides, their dominance over the Aunts, Marthas, and Handmaid groups of women. Dystopian regimes are a key to understanding how dystopian societies function. People interested in dystopian must realize that dystopian regimes are "carried out with the consent of citizen who accepts and may even enjoy his comforting oppression." (Weiss 12).

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the body, more precisely the ovaries, becomes the parameter that establishes a female hierarchy and organizes the different layers of society. Each person in the Republic of Gilead has a role to play, but there are two groups of women who did not contain a function. Firstly, the Unwomen, a dehumanized women class. They are the women who cannot perform any role that the Gilead regime offers because they declared them as infertile women; hence,



▲ Unwomen, *The Hulu, series*.
Photo by: George Kraychyk. credit to
Vulture. APR.28, 2017.



▲ Econowives, *the Hulu, series*.
Photo by: George Kraychyk. credit to
Vulture. APR.28, 2017

they are deemed less than women and sent to the Colonies to clean up the radioactive. Secondly, the wives of the poorest men, Econowives. Although these two groups do not have a formal function, they are an integral part of the dystopian social structure. They most likely symbolize a middle-class of women who aren't wealthy enough to be Wives but not poor enough to be Handmaids.

Marthas, women at the bottom of the social hierarchy, working in household chores, such as cooking, cleaning, and general household chores. Marthas could not have children, that is, fulfill the sacred destiny of the regime, so they were restricted in the role of servants and forced to perform meaningless tasks as a punishment. They represent the stereotypical role of women, who are submissive and face gossip. They were considered unworthy and deprived of the right to marry because of their inability to bear children. Like the rest of the social classes, Marthas dress according to the following official government regulations, in dull green costumes, “as the ancient gowns of a surgeon.” (Atwood 9). Since Martha’s are not suitable for procreation, they have more freedom in their appearance. Offred describes Rita, Martha, who works for the same family, as: “The dress was very similar to mine, long and covered, but with an apron with a bib at the top, no white wings, and veil. She wears the veil to go out, but no one cares who saw Martha’s face.” (Atwood 9). It is clear from Offred’s brief description that they do not value Marthas in society; they are almost invisible. However, they are proud and happy with their role and position in society since they have some privileges such as keeping their real names, unlike the maids, besides; they have some authority within the family they serve, such as delegating the market task to the maid. In this way, the Republic of Gilead ensures that they never rebel against their regime. By Obeying the laws of a totalitarian regime and accepting her passive role, Marthas strengthened those above them; thus, they are as guilty as their oppressors.



▲ Martha, the Hulu, series. Photo by: George Kraychyk. credit to Vulture. APR.28, 2017.

Surprisingly, one of the lowest positions in the social hierarchy belongs to men, or rather the Guardians. The Guardians are unmarried, and serve their masters, the Commanders, whose main task is to ensure the safety of the Commanders, their wives, and children. Offred

says: “The guards aren’t real soldiers. They are used for routine policing and other trivial functions such as digging up the commander’s wife’s garden, and they are either stupid, old, disabled, or very young.” (Atwood 20). Their uniforms are green “with badges on their shoulders and berets: two crossed swords on a white triangle.” (Atwood, 20). Nick, the Guardian of the house where Offred lives, is a piece of evidence that even among the Guardians, there is a definite hierarchy. He does not even have his own home and lives modestly in the commander’s garage. Offered states they deprived him of being married means that: “he is unskilled: a kind of disadvantage, and a lack of connection.” (Atwood 18). Some Guardians specialize in bringing the handmaids to their gynecologist, a task done once a month, and they differ from the rest of the Guardians in that they wear red armbands representing their position. The Guardians think a master’s obeying is an honor. Although they are almost at the very bottom of the social hierarchy, they do nothing to change their circumstances. The Eyes of God, the members of the ‘Incognito-Guardians’ guardians, who operate as secret police, try to detect any violation of the law and the conservation of the law and the decision. A new category of men exists under the Econopeople and perform ordinary jobs, such as doctors.

The only women in this novel with a kind of power are Aunts. As their name suggests, they are authoritative figures, similar to the Catholic nuns, and their primary responsibility is to prepare the Handmaids for their reproductive purposes. They work at the Red Center, known as Rachel and Leah’s Reeducation center, where they reprogram young women into believing that their bodies are used for a higher



▲ *The Aunts, Hulu, series. Photo by: George Kraychyk. credit to Vulture. APR.28, 2017.*

purpose. They achieve these goals through rigorous lectures or a kind of brainwashing technique; however, their principal weapon is the fear of the maids from them. The Aunts are

the ideal product of a totalitarian theocracy; they never question the government and firmly believe in the system value of Gilead, despite their oppressive practices.

The Commander's Wives were at the top of the social hierarchy, directly below their husbands. However, their role in society is unfortunate; they are too old or cannot have children and are forced to watch the mating rituals of their husbands with Handmaids and pray for the possibility of conceiving a child. They lead an empty life, sometimes filled with gossip and strange holidays if a child is born in one of the households. They cannot have children by themselves, so the government keeps them busy by giving them meaningless tasks like knitting scarves for the army. The unsatisfactory nature of their life is hinted at by Offred's reflections: "Sometimes it seems to me that these scarves not sent to the Angels at all, but only unravel and turn back into balls of wool, which, in turn, are woven. Perhaps this is what keeps wives busy, so they feel useful." (Atwood 13). The Wives differ from other women in the way they dress. They wear blue, the color of the royal family. They have no real power, they



▲ The Hulu, series. Photo by: George Kraychyk. credit to Vulture. APR.28, 2017.

despise the Handmaids, but there is nothing they can do to change the social framework. A false sense of authority through biblical precedent allowed them to physically punish the maids "not with the help of any tools, but only with their hands." (Atwood, 16). Thus, it is clear that their power comes from their dominion over the handmaids.

The 'Commanders of the Faithful' are at the top of the social hierarchy, serving as military-political leaders and legislators of the republic. They are primarily responsible for reading the Bible to their family members. Thus, they strengthen the existing



▲ The Hulu, series. Photo by: George Kraychyk. Credit to Vulture. APR.28, 2017.

regime. However, because of the low birth rate, their principal mission is to make the Handmaids pregnant. They do not consider brutes; their demeanor is mature, impassive, and calm. They also follow specific rules or patterns of behavior, especially towards their Wives. We can see this behavior from the following example of Offred: "The commander is knocking on the door. The living room must be the territory of Serena Joy, the commander's wife. He must ask permission to enter it." (Atwood, 86). The Commanders also fell into rank issues; it gave them more money and power. They wear black, a color that emphasizes their authority.

The Angels, among men of the highest rank directly after the commanders, are dedicated soldiers who fight the wars of Gilead inside and outside. They have many privileges, in particular, that of having a wife. On the other hand, we found the Eyes, a Secret Police, a paramilitary state security force. They drive matte black Ford Transit vans with tinted windows and painted winged eyes on the sides. They wear dark sunglasses and little things, such as pins, with an eye emblem. According to Offred, "anyone could be an Eye, and you wouldn't know until it was too late." (Atwood, 2). The Eyes make arrests and interrogate suspects besides monitoring and spying on the citizens. Widely assumed that they torture suspects to death, or if they choose to keep them alive for the time being, blackmail them to get the information they require.

The hypocrisy of the Gilead society occurs in the conduct of the commanders. They claim that their only function is to reproduce. On the other hand, they regularly go to Jezebel, where infertile women work as prostitutes for high-ranking men, using them to escape from a system they created. The most prominent Commanders are Fred, Warren, and Glen, the mainly devout believers who helped create and support the rise of this regime. Ironically, they tend to break the laws by visiting Jezebel and engaging in the black market to get contraband such as alcohol and cigarettes. Commander Fred states that: "officers and senior officials, and the trade delegations are the only ones invited. As a result, the economy stimulates, and meeting new

people is easy and secure in this place. Without it, it's hard to do business." (Atwood 237). Atwood used this role of women in Jezebel to refer to those who will sell their bodies to survive.

Finally, there is a group of women classified as The Handmaids. They called these fertile women the Handmaids. Other women, especially the Wives, since the Handmaids are a daily reminder of their infertility, despised them. Gilead uses women to maintain his social hierarchy. For example, to become a commander, he must gain his Handmaid, a status symbol in Gilead. The Handmaids represent women who have no control over their lives. Besides that, these women were brainwashed and forced into sexual slavery, i.e., indoctrinated in religion for a period, then assigned to Commanders and their sterile Wives. Their monthly ritual Ceremony is a form of sexual assault, a rape with forced consent, where they lie between the Wives legs as the Commanders attempt to impregnate them in the hope of a child. This is one of the harshest rituals that the Handmaids and Wives endure. The Handmaids wear state clothes that almost completely hide their bodies.

Offred describes her clothes in great detail:



▲ *The Hulu, series. Photo by: George Kraychyk. Credit to Vulture. APR.28, 2017.*

With these red shoes with flat heels to save my spine, I get up from my chair and walk into the sunlight. Red gloves are on the bed. I take them, put them on my hands, finger by finger, everything except the wings around my face, red: the color of blood that defines us. The dress was ankle-length, wide, gathered in a flat skirt, reaching beyond the chest, with wide sleeves. We also showed the white wings they prevent us from seeing, but also from prying eyes. (Atwood, 8)

Color-coded clothing is used to distinguish members of different classes. Likewise, in the Republic of Gilead, one can easily guess a person's role simply by looking at their clothing. All of the options are bad, and some are worse, but each is unique; in its own way.

2.3.2 Misogynistic Gilead: A Feminist Dystopia

In "*The Republic*, 375 BC," Plato argues that the only real difference between the sexes is that women "can have children and men cannot have children." (Plato, 383). He believes that both men and women should have equal opportunities per their abilities. However, in Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, all power belongs to men, which is why Gilead's society was based on sexism and social injustice.

Atwood's novel presents a perverse image of a society in which women have no rights. Women rank lower in the social hierarchy and rank highly only in terms of ovarian function. They were used as sex slaves to produce children for the commanders and their wives and treated as private property. Ironically, they prevent their femininity because of the rigid dress code, another form of male dominance over women. They imposed sexual oppression quickly, leaving women with no time to defend themselves. The Gilead government has banned women from working or owning private property and isolated them from all aspects of social and political life. The sudden imbalance between the sexes reason is simple: the childless crisis in Gilead gave men an excuse to dominate the fertility of women. Under the guise of reproduction, the totalitarian regime has institutionalized adultery as a social norm.

Handmaids located in a specific home in Gilead each have their private chamber. They are allowed to live with their Commander's families; however, not considered a part of it but interchangeable; even the anonymous furniture in their room does not include any personalization. They prepared a single basic room for Offred, the house's Handmaid. However, it will soon become clear that it is only a chamber for an exchangeable maid. Stillman and Johnson noticed that "the structure of the family isolates Handmaids." (74). The Handmaid

has a monotonous life that primarily consists of long periods of waiting in her room. As a result, Offred's solitude at home is distinguished by silence. Anyone or anything, even banal chitchat, would be welcome to break the perpetual silence around her: "Such talk used to irritate me. Now, I'm aching to have it back. It was at least a conversation. A sort of exchange." (Atwood 11). Offred is not more than a silent, undesired guest in the house, and perhaps more importantly, she is replaceable. As a space that is supposed to be hers, the Handmaid's room fails in this goal due to its particular function and the social practices that take place in it.

When women become handmaids, they lose everything, even their names. "To erase the identity of the maids, the regime also canceled their original names and named them after their commanders, hence the names Offred, Ofglen, Ofwayne, Ofwarren." (Malak 11). Jessie Givner, in her book *"Names and Signatures in Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye and The Handmaid's Tale."* argues that: "The desire of the Gilead regime to remove the name is actually as strong as the desire to erase the face. Just like the rules of Gilead to remove the mirror, the mirroring of the face, in this way they are trying to remove the names." (58).

The most obvious way to establish power is to deprive women of their femininity. Without their female identity, Handmaids have become mere reproductive tools. Gilead prohibited them from using various toiletries such as makeup: "No more hand cream or face cream, not for us. Such things are frivolous. We are containers, and only the inside of our bodies matter." (Atwood, 96). Men ask women to look and act like nuns, which is ironic because they don't hesitate. When Offred saw a group of Japanese tourists, she was fascinated by the way the women were dressed and says: "They look naked, it took us too little time to change our minds about such things, so I thought: I used to dress like this, this is freedom." (Atwood 28)

The Republic of Gilead prevented the Handmaids of the right to motherhood. Women do not have the right to choose whether they want to have children or not. They had no choice

but to conceive; they made this decision for her, not with her. Their bodies are no longer theirs to use as they please. Medical procedures such as abortion are considered the greatest sin against nature. Moreover, every time a Handmaid gives birth, as in the case of 'Ofwarren': "the personal needs, and desires of the woman in labor ignored, and pain relievers are not permitted." (Atwood 124). After all, they have no right to take care of the children they bear. The child was taken out of her arms and handed over to the commander's family. She no longer had a place or decision in the life and upbringing of this child, and after six months of breastfeeding, she will move to a new family and will never see her child again.

The Handmaids deprive not only of the right of motherhood or the freedom of abortion and names but also of food. The authorities sanctioned their food to keep them healthy and fertile. They are forbidden from drinking coffee and alcohol, smoking cigarettes, or consuming anything in excess. In addition, all maids must abide by strict rules for handling their bodies, such as walking daily to the market "so that the abs work in order." (36). For the Gilead regime, women's reproductive capacity is a national resource that must be protected and nurtured in the best possible way; however, this concern does not apply to women as individuals, as their minds and missions are not linked.

On the other hand, the Handmaids are living under constant threat of being declared as 'Unwomen' if they have not become pregnant on the third time; they will be sent to the Colonies for the rest of their lives, "Where the women clean up radioactive waste like slaves." (Malak 9). Where they are supposed to survive "three years at most before their nose falls out, and their skin peels off like rubber gloves." ("*THT*," 248). Howells, in "*Margaret Atwood's Dystopian Visions*," states that "Offred's real hope is on her own body, who is stripped of femininity by the biological speech of Gilead, and it is harsh sexual practices of the Old Testament." (167). In short, a woman's social value depends on her ability to reproduce healthy children, as demonstrated by moving the maid to another house after the baby is born to repeat

the same process and to be spared from the colonies as a reward. If they cannot be pregnant, they no longer benefit society. Thus, their reproductive potential becomes a means of survival. As a result, Offred regrets its status, saying that: "Concubines, geisha girls, and courtesans are not what we are. Instead, everything has been done to keep us away from this category. We are for procreation, we are two-legged wombs, that all, sacred vessels, or ambulatory chalices." (Atwood 176). Gilead constructs the Handmaid's reproductive service not only as an obligation but also as a 'wonderful privilege,' a sacred contribution to saving Gilead's demographic future.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred frequently quotes Aunt Lydia's words about the new ways Gilead is supposed to build on, as: "The Republic of Gilead has no limits," she says "Gilead is inside you." (23) and, even more ominously, "Remember, your feet and your hands are not important for our purposes." (91). In Gilead, fertility is a powerful tool for assessing a woman's worth. The wombs become a double-edged sword that recognizes the power of the female body and yet oppresses that same body. The obsession with fertility mechanizes the Handmaids and diminishes their humanity. They are submissive to a male gaze that assesses their worthiness according to a sexist standard.

The Handmaid's body is nothing more than a means to a desire, and she can easily replace by anyone who has the same function. "She hanged herself," Offred says thoughtfully, not sadly, as she discovers the death of the previous Handmaid. As a result, Serena replies: "We decided to remove the light fixture in your room." Offred takes a breath and adds: "Serena, as though it clarifies the situation," saying: "Yes, that's what happens. It's best to get another dog if yours dies." Offred, guessing: "I assume Cora found her," adds she screamed because of this, and confirmed by her response, "Yes, she's so weak." She's referring to Cora. (Atwood 187). Since all women can be viewed as one body by the Commander, who implies that the

female body once was referred to as 'the meat market,' the Handmaid's death appears to be meaningless and trivial. (219)

While some Handmaids commit suicide as the last act of rebellion. The Gilead regime took every precaution to keep these women away from danger, including suicide, which would undermine their authority and obstruct their plans. Offred describes: "I know why there is no glass when I look at the watercolor with blue lilies, and why the window is only partially open, and its glass is unbreakable. Fear of running away isn't what they're worried about; we're not getting far. Our chances of success would be slim at best." (Atwood, 7-8)

Since there is no more money, they use the maids as payment or reward. They are the heart of the Gilead economy, the country's most valuable products. Fertile women, for example, are made as Handmaids and sent to the Commander's households as prized possessions, as Offred describes: "I'm waiting, being cleaned, brushed, and fed, like a prize pig." (Atwood, *THT* 79). So, when she is alone in her room and can't do anything but what is asked her to do, she sees herself as a pig prize. Therefore, the bodies and wombs of the Handmaids were considered public places in Gilead.

Prayvaganzas, another form of women as rewards in Gilead, which is group marriages and "marriages; of course, arranged" (Atwood, 219) with some brides "no more than fourteen" (219). These practices are mandatory for the Handmaids; however, for the wives and daughters of the Commanders, "it is not obligatory for them to attend the 'Prayvaganzas,' especially if they are on duty or have small children." (213). Due to the simplicity of the description, coupled with the misleading nature of the name itself, it sounds like a celebration, and there is no resentment towards these child marriages. 'Prayvaganzas' does not seem cruel or malicious but less horrible than mass executions. However, these marriages are still morally corrupt since it is marrying children to supposedly adult men. Atwood covered up the horrifying event with a

frisky name to demonstrate Gilead's ability to create effective propaganda and hide the true nature of the events.

The Handmaid's Tale focuses on the political system's vices that exacerbate depravity and women abuse. Women working for Jezebel cannot have children. To avoid certain death in the colonies, they agreed to work as prostitutes. It required them to wear a variety of exotic costumes that officially were banned by the state. Men at Jezebel's speak for women, flaunt them as if they were their property, and take advantage of their wretched circumstances, as Offred's observation of her Commander's actions has proven. Women view as if they were consumer commodities, packaged in attractive packaging and available for use at any time.

In Offred and the Commander's trip to Jezebel, the ambiguity is even more glaring. In Jezebel, Offred is surprised by the Commander's behavior: "It seems like he is arrogant. He's showing me off to them, and they're looking at my body as if there's no reason why they shouldn't. In addition, he's showing off to me. He's showing me his mastery of the world." (307). When the protagonist realizes that she has no power, Angela Gulick explains:

Offred's clothes and makeup tell her that she is nothing more than a piece of property in Gilead. In Jezebel's, when the Commander dresses her up in garish garb and parades her around like a prized animal, she gets a clear picture of what she is worth. But even Offred has come to realize that she is like a fattened pig, can be slaughtered at any time, as long as it serves its purpose. Offred's desire to be treated as a human being reinforces by this message. (80).

In Jezebel, Offred meets her friend Moira that caught trying to escape from the Red Center, forced to choose between working as a prostitute in Jezebel or being ostracized to the radioactive colonies dressed in a bunny suit costume which emphasizes her female body's shape. Moira's destiny makes Offred think about how much the female body is exploiting.

Their bodies are treated like dirt and exposed to a toxic environment. Whereas, the rebellious but still beneficial female bodies, like Moira's, their productive ovaries were removed so that their bodies become a source of pleasure and enjoyment for foreigners, guests of the state, and figures of Gilead. Angela Michelle Gulick points out in her analysis of the different conceptions of what a woman means in Gilead that:

They had confronted women everywhere she turned with contradictory images of themselves; even if her mother erases from the record, is she still her mother's child? Has she lost her wife status? What if her daughter thinks she's dead? Is she still a mother then? Because of what she agreed to do, is she now a whore? Are we sure she's a woman when she's so close to being declared an 'Unwoman?' After losing her freedom and name, is she even a human being anymore? (67)

The Gilead regime has taken decisive steps to relocate elderly, Jewish, non-white women, and political opponents to radioactive colonies as part of the reform. In this context, Offred's mother personifies everything the Gileadean regime wants to suppress, a strong woman who refuses to accept men as their ruler. Offred recalled how her mother and close friends were returning from a protest: "They were in a march that day, whether it was during the porn riots or the abortion riots, they were so close together." (Atwood 180). It proves that Offred's mother actively fought for gender equality; her feminist view considered her an enemy of the regime, caused her to be an exile in the colonies, which is equivalent to execution. Offred's mother's fate, I believe, demonstrates Malak's claim that positive persons "typically prove woefully ineffective when battling with cruel overwhelming powers." (11), and that "escape or active combat is impossible under the dictatorship;" Offred's mother is eventually exile, "defeated yet defiant. Gilead isn't inside her." (Stillman and Johnson, 80).

2.3.3 The Mechanism of Fear in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Human fear is the main element of the existence of the Republic of Gilead exists. They often used a terrifying method of establishing power in many dystopian stories. Gottlieb, Erika explains in "*Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial*" the effect of fear on citizens in different dystopian societies as follows:

In the dystopian societies of *Fahrenheit 451*, *The Piano Player*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*, the ruling elites no longer wanted to instill in their citizens a belief in the immortality of a party, or a system akin to a particular ideology; they limited their activities on arousing the fear among the population that it might push someone into the circle of outsiders. (40)

In Atwood's novel, the outsider's circle refers to the Unwoman; women who were deemed unfit for Gilead's purposes and sent to the infamous colonies. However, the subordination of society over men and women was based on the constant fear of war. What makes Atwood's novel believable is the fact that the Republic of Gilead was created following an organized terrorist attack. US citizens felt vulnerable and unprotected. In a general state of panic, they found the desired protection from the right-wing religious extremists, a movement called the 'Sons of Jacob.' Offred describes the society before Gilead saying:

You'd bear in mind stories you've read, in the newspapers, regarding women; who have been found in ditches or woodlands or refrigerators in abandoned rented apartments, with or without their clothing on, sexually assaulted or not; dead. There were some locations you did not want to pass through, where you must take precautions, such as securing the windows and doors, shutting the curtains, and turning on the lights. (Atwood, 238)

To maintain its newly established power, the government of Gilead continued to pretend to be at war with members of other Christian denominations, such as Catholics and Baptists. Residents of Gilead do not know the specifics of this conflict. Since reading and writing were prohibited, and television only belonged to commanders and their wives, it is easy to keep the lower-class citizens under the guise of threat. In addition, overseas satellite stations are being blocked. This is the government's way of ensuring that its citizens never learn the truth. Gottlieb explains how authoritarian systems maintain their power by instilling fear in their citizens:

After the 1950s war, the world was divided between three totalitarian dictatorships with the help of the atomic bomb, which only superpowers could create. The perfect and unchanging balance between these three factors has created the preconditions for world peace. The dictator always pretends to go to war because only constant conflicts give him a reason to keep his population in slavery, malnutrition, overworked, and persistent fear of 'satanic' enemies and traitors, and therefore ready to worship the dictator as the rescuer. (82)

Offred suspects the news is fake; however, she did nothing: "So, who knows if this is true? They might be old clips; they might be fake. But I'm looking at it anyway, hoping I can read below, any news now is better than nothing." (Atwood, 82). Offred's passivity could be the result of her fear of successful submission. In addition, as a person devoid of touch and emotion, she craves comfort: "Wish it were true. Wouldn't it be nice if I could believe it?" (Atwood 83)

The regime of Gilead publicly executes people deemed to be enemies of the state, former abortion doctors, Catholic priests, or various scientists. Their bodies are then displayed on a wall, in the previous Harvard Yard, a relic of the past, as a warning. Now, it's a physical

barrier as well as an authority show. It was formerly a “‘simple but handsome,’ architectural feature on campus.” (Atwood 31). Besides, body trauma markers like scars, amputated limbs, and gouged eyes create paranoia about the regime. On the street, there is an accumulation of rebel or criminal corpses that have been there for days as a reminder of what happens to those who disobey authority. The Handmaids were encouraged to walk through the Wall as part of their daily walk and think about the sins of these people:

These people, we were told as war criminals, had no reason to believe that what they were doing was legal at the time: their crimes were retroactive, they committed atrocities, and we must set them up as examples for others. Although, it is unnecessary. Nowadays, no woman in her right mind would try to avoid childbirth if she was lucky enough to get pregnant. We're supposed to hate and despise these bodies. (Atwood, 33)

Offred and her friend Ofglen pause, together, as if on signal, stands and look at the bodies when they first approach the Wall in the novel, saying: “It makes no difference if we look. We're expecting to look at them since that's what they're for; they'll stay there for days before another fresh batch comes in, so many people may view them.” (Atwood, 32). As a museum's collection of statues, the bodies on the Wall are supposed to be watched.

Another effective method of imposing fear and punishment on so-called war criminals or enemies of the state is to let the maids execute them with their bare hands. This ritual is similar to the ancient practice of sacrificing people for the common good. Thus, the Handmaids have a sense of authority; they feel more important than people who are allowed to kill. Gottlieb argues that “allowing the victim to act as an executioner towards other victims is perhaps the most important ritual to demonstrate the basic mechanism of a dictatorship.” (108)

At the Red Center, Aunts uses many methods to train the maids and force them to conform and behave under Gilead's expectations, such as instilling fear with physical punishment with "electric cattle prods strung on their leather belts." (Atwood, 4); or by repeating official regime propaganda, they led women to believe they were ugly and unclean if they did not serve the purpose of creation. According to them, this sacred opportunity allows those fertile women to atone for their crimes and fulfill their 'divine' role of populating the earth. The Gilead theocracy, the so-called religious state, believes that women continue Eve's evil, so it does not give them any power. Instead, they used to bear children and not be thrown away.

The Aunts want the Handmaids to believe their plight is their fault. Atwood highlights a part of Gilead's genuine propagandistic nature by phrasing them in this way. These Aunts portrays as sympathetic, but in actuality, they are the ones who brainwashed the Handmaids into accepting their new jobs without resistance. At one point, a maid admitted they raped her at fourteen, but instead of comforting her, the aunts humiliated her by forcing all the other maids to turn against her:

But who was to blame? Aunt Helena raises her finger.

We chant, "*Her fault, her fault, her fault;*" together.

Who directed them? Aunt Helena smiled, pleased with us.

She, She, She.

But why? Why the God allow such a terrible thing?

To teach her a *lesson*; To teach her a *lesson*; To teach her a *lesson*. (Atwood

72)

Blaming the rape victims becomes a doctrine to ensure the Handmaid's bodies are stripped of any sexuality which would attract their attention and that of the rapists; so they can be 'pure' reproduction bodies.

To sum up, it is the oppression exerted on the female body that makes the novel a dystopia. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the male and female characters gain authority. However, the power of this authority they use to subjugate and further exploit the Handmaid's body. Women of the social hierarchy, Aunts, and Wives are tyrannical figures who impose their will over the maids. Yet, the power movement between men and women is inherently dystopian, as it circulates to achieve the same goal, which is possession of the female body. On the other hand, *The Handmaid's Tale* has several distinctive dystopian features. The Gilead regime use techniques to eliminate rebellious thoughts or actions, as well as served as a frequent reminder of the regime's power. These methods include brainwashing, public executions, intimidation, and suppression of all forms of personal and political freedom. The online dictionary *Merriam-Webster* defines dystopia as "an imaginary world or society in which people lead miserable, inhuman, and frightening lives." Throughout the novel, Atwood's characters are dehumanized by the dictatorship that rules the society of Gilead and deprived of free will. It is particularly troubling, as characters were disappointed because of the idea that free will separates humans from other creatures and machines. (Dima-Laza, 51). Although Gilead is said to be based on Christian ethics, it "unfortunately lacks spirituality and benevolence." (Malak 9). On the contrary, life in Gilead is based on "Submission, corruption, fear, and terror," making it a dystopian place. (Malak 10). Therefore, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* novel is essentially a dystopian novel.

2.4 *The Handmaid's Tale* Futuristic Setting

One of the most prominent features of dystopian speculative fiction is the setting in terms of time and place; because it separates this type of fiction from others. Nathan Bransford argues that the framework of any fictional novel comprises three main elements: unfamiliar, dynamic, and based on norms, values, and beliefs. However, since the setting plays a prominent role in a dystopian speculative novel, it can include other characteristics such as being the

antagonist of the protagonist, sharing the history with the current world, and depicting a period that highlights the main character. Finally, it's common in dystopian fiction to start with an illustration of the system and society that builds the fantasy realm; and then it moves to the main character that will slowly make changes in his world.

The Handmaid's Tale story takes place in the Republic of Gilead's futuristic America. By using the previously mentioned characteristics of speculative fiction, Atwood addressed all the grotesque outcomes of social and political injustice, as well as areas of inhumane nuclear experiments. *The Handmaid's Tale* tries to predict the future under certain circumstances. The author's concern about the hegemonic politics of the United States pushes her toward futuristic representations to help readers shape a non-Gilead futuristic society, unoppressive and free land. Time travel is the primary speculative fiction technique used by Atwood to present this dystopian and ideologically diverse community. By this technique, Atwood crosses all the physical barriers of time and space.

In addition to the 'spatiotemporal' relationship, time serves as one of the four dimensions that help us evaluate the significance of an event and its ramifications. In this regard, Atwood's novel is one of the best examples she used time in storytelling as a tool to shift between past, present, and future. The setting, 'Gilead,' serves as a backdrop to a society trapped between the dimensions of time and space. Behind closed doors in Gilead's community, the events reveal, with ambiguous and sporadic references to the protagonist Offred, the past, and the causes that led to the present. The chronology and time frame of the narrative reveals only in the futuristic section of the "Historical Notes" at the end of the book. Through Offred and the members of the Gilead society that readers realize interpersonal and inter-community conflicts regarding past and present ideologies.

The time travel used by Atwood not only imagines the future; but also moves freely between the past and present. The 1990s (the imagined future at the time of writing) present a

community that dates back to a very ancient time in the isolated past where all human and financial interactions were based on the instructions of the Old Testament scriptures. The vocabulary like the Guards and soldiers called the Angels, the instructors known as Aunts, the camps where the maids trained are The Rachel and Leah Centers, and many other examples which connect the Gilead society to the BC era.

In other words, Atwood's novel depicts time travel as follows: she wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* about a decade ago practically, in the 80s, to speak about the 1990s, and its plot takes some characteristics of a distant past dating back to the BC era. However, readers realize at the end of the novel that the entire story of Gilead was discovered by a chance and haphazardly arranged in the middle of the 22nd Century. This latest episode of uncovering Gilead and Offred's story is another example of the use of time travel. It brings us back to the 'records' that led to this discovery. Early in the story, in her containment chamber as a surrogate mother, Offred found the message 'Nolite to Bastard carborundum,' which means 'do not let the bastards break you,' engraved on the floor. This event takes readers to an even earlier time to learn the story of the woman who wrote it, and at the same time, inspires the protagonist that resistance has always existed and must not abandon.

As if Margaret Atwood had never finished captivating her readers, she further finished the novel with an appendix titled "Historical Notes" on *The Handmaid's Tale*, which gives her readers more details about the futuristic Gilead. In just 17 pages, Atwood explains how Offred's story came to us in its current written form, further she shows the reconstructed nature of fiction and reality and gives us some hints about how much the future has changed.

Atwood's vision of the future includes the Republic of Gilead and other elements. Following Offred's narrative, which concludes with her arrest by Eyes, who may or may not be members of the underground resistance movement Mayday, the reader is given "Historical Notes" on *The Handmaid's Tale*, which is the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, held

in 2195 in a society reminiscent of North American culture before the Gileadean revolution. There are both men and women at this academic conference, and the way they speak and the method they conduct historical research suggests that Sons of Jacob's power did not last or spread beyond the United States. Offred's story has an intriguing epilogue as a glimpse into the future. It gives the reader hope that Offred got away from Gilead for a while and that Gilead's hold on the United States was only temporary. However, a closer look reveals that there is more in this section. By imagining academia's resurgence in the twenty-second century following the fall of Gilead, Atwood works to critique and comment on late twentieth-century academia; she quickly establishes and then subverts the reader's expectation that the Republic of Gilead of the second future she presents will be drastically different.

Atwood uses a back-and-forth time travel technique to keep readers engaged until the 'Historical Notes' section at the end of the novel reveals the timeline of events. A feature of this section is that it simply tells us how the story of Offred became public. What first appeared as Offred's narrative tragic experience turns out to be a history of a specific era in Gilead's history.

The "Historical Notes" is a section by which Atwood ends the novel. It is described as a "partial transcription of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gilead Studies." (Atwood 311). This section, consisting mainly of a monologue by Professor Pieixoto, is a historical and fictional explanation of what happened in Gilead, told by historians and anthropologists 150 years in the future, specifically in 2195. We learn first that it is not a real written story. Readers find that Offred recorded all of her testimonies on audio cassettes, where they discovered by chance in an unearthed cabinet near Bangor, Maine, and reconstructed by Professors Pieixoto and Wade from about "thirty cassettes, of the type which has become obsolete in the 80s or 90s with the emergence of the compact disc." (Atwood, 312), and they "were fortunate to have rebuilt a machine capable of playing such tapes several years earlier

with the help of their excellent resident antiquarian technicians, and they immediately began the laborious task of transcription.” (Atwood, 313). Thus, the unnumbered tapes and the discreet recording are arranged chronologically from the point of view of the two professors. Pieixoto openly comments that: “It was up to Professor Wade and me to order the speech blocks in the order they seemed to go; but as I have said elsewhere, all of these arrangements are based on conjecture and should be considered approximate, pending further research.” (314). We discover more about the history in both the past and future of Gilead through this section.

The Sons of Jacob, of course, created a strictly gendered society that sought to eliminate all non-whites and non-Protestants. The world we see in the “Historical Notes,” is at first glance, very different. The conference features both sexes working together in their academic endeavors, and the setting is Denay, Nunavit, a predominantly Indigenous Canadian territory - as well as the Indigenous names of academics such as Maryann Crescent Moon, Johnny Running Dog, etc. suggest that this society is different from the one we left. We soon learn that, despite the apparent equality of gender and the vastly different ethnic composition, the flaws of pre-Gilead culture that allowed the Sons of Jacob to rise to power remain. Before Professor Pieixoto’s lecture, Professor Maryann Crescent Moon, the symposium’s Chair, makes a few announcements that set the conference’s absurdity:

The fishing trip will go on as scheduled tomorrow, and if you forgot your rain gear or insect repellent, you would purchase them for a small fee at the Registration Desk. As predicted by our own infallible Professor Johnny Running Dog, a break in the weather will occur the day after tomorrow, so the nature walks and Outdoor Period-Costume Sing-Song will take place at that time. (Atwood, 299)

It’s to believe that just a few short moments ago, we were in Gilead, terrified for Offred’s safety as she was carting away in the black van of the Eyes. Suddenly we’re moved

into a world where lack of bug spray and bad weather is the only thing its characters worry about, besides the 'Outdoor Period-Costume Sing-Song,' contrasts sharply with Offred's tale of degradation and death.

Historical Notes section speaker Darcy Pieixoto, the voice of the academy, is conceited, and he likes to flaunt his knowledge by making smug jokes. In his speech titled "*Problems of Authentication about The Handmaid's Tale*," he discussed these issues. Pieixoto and his team of anthropologists chose the title of Offred's narrative story recordings to be named 'The Handmaid's Tale,' where "all puns were intentional, particularly those relating to the archaic vulgar signification of the word tail." (Atwood 301). As well as drawing attention to the outdated slang term for women as sexual objects, he is actively taking part in its continued use of this language, effectively regarding Offred to the status of the sexual position once more. The fact that they meet his remark with laughter and applause highlights the sarcastic content of the conference. With his impartial and non-objective reading against Offred, Pieixoto is adamant about ignoring the human implication of the Handmaid's story and the horror of Gilead. He warns his audience:

We should exercise caution when passing moral judgment on the Gilead. Surely by now, we've come to understand that judgments are necessarily cultured specific. Furthermore, Gilead society was under a great deal of demographic and other pressure and was influenced by factors that we are fortunately free of today. It is not our job to criticize but rather to gain an understanding of the situation. (Atwood, 383)

Pieixoto has turned into an apologist for the Republic's atrocities rather than operating as a historian seeking to comprehend Gilead's life. He is inconsistent with Offred's story to relieve the Gilead's Commanders of guilt or moral censure. If we do not pass moral judgment on them, Offred's pain and revolutionary act of revealing her story lose its meaning. If we do

not judge their actions, we leave the door open for the oppression of this magnitude to occur again. Offred has told a story in which they killed her husband, kidnapped her daughter, and forced her into sexual slavery; besides, submissive men and infertile women were exiled into radioactive colonies, and those who opposed the totalitarian dictatorship were tortured and executed. It is ridiculous for Pieixoto to suggest that historians should not pronounce judgment on these deeds. It is the historian's responsibility to comprehend, but if that comprehension eliminates any moral obligation to acknowledge the evils of such a society, then both failed, those who attempt to comprehend and those who aim to educate their own time. By satirizing academics, Atwood points to yet another element in modern society that encourages extremism.

On the one hand, academic discourse satirizes academic claims. More seriously, sexism and moral relativism draw ideological parallels between Gilead's dystopias and post-Gilead society. Rhetorically, the conference speaker, Professor James Darcy Pieixoto, continues the process of ironic texts that the multiple epigraphs initiated. So, through his editorial acts, and now, in the present narrative of the novel, through his presentation at the conference, Pieixoto provides another narrative voice, another level of interpretation to frame the handmaid's narrative. The original text of Offred, recorded on audiotape, is presumably intended to educate a wider audience about Gilead and thus serve the same purpose of taking action to eradicate the horrors of dystopia. But, Pieixoto's reading, which ignores the dystopian part and focuses on satirical narration rather than an impulse toward social change, is the one that perpetuates Gilead's dystopia in her current future picture.

To make matters worse, this academic conference of post-Gilead shows that futuristic society is still rife with the misogyny that allowed the Sons of Jacob to rise to power. This lecture shows "disturbing signs of the staying power of sexism." (Bouson 155). As a result, Offred's suffering was reduced to a conference lecture in which a male historian criticizes her

for failing to provide 'real' information to historians who came after her: "She could have told us a lot about the Gilead empire's inner workings if she had the instincts of a reporter or spy." (Atwood, 310). The story of Offred was reduced to crumbs by historians like Pieixoto and his followed anthropologists. The primary focus of this lecture was on the Commanders, and they even admired the ability of the Sons of Jacob to completely reorganize society to meet their purposes, calling them "brilliant and remarking on their 'considerable' ingenuity" (Atwood 308). The 'Commander's identities and events of the past are their only concerns, not the people those figures and events shaped their lives.

On the other hand, their comments about Offred are frequently dismissive and condescending. They asked Professor Pieixoto to be brief in his speech so that they don't miss the lunch, as happened the day before. Followed, of course, by laughter, referring to the perceived "weakness and inferiority of women." (Atwood 381). As opposed to making an effort to understand Offred as a person, they see her as merely "one of many, who must be seen within the broad outlines of the historical moment in which she was a part." (305). Furthermore, the way these scholars deal with Offred's story makes one feel resentful and disguising. At the start of the novel, while Offred waited for the ceremony with the Commander to begin, she said: "I am waiting. I compose myself. My self is something that I have to compose like a speech is composed, not something that is born." (Atwood 86). In attempts to advance their career at the expense of their humanity and outrage, they transformed Offred into "a thing done, not a thing born," erasing her pain and suffering within minutes of a "little conversation." (Atwood 381). As with Offred's story in Gilead, this section about post-Gilead is distinctly speculative and prone to personal biases.

In the post-Gilead conference, Offred disappears, just as she feared would be in Gilead history, as she says when imaging the future: "The Handmaids will be 'invisible' in the future history when Gilead control presents the Handmaids lives and sacrifices as nonexistent and

unimportant.” (Atwood 228). According to Atwood, Pieixoto and the other scholars have failed to grasp the significance of Offred's story. Using her narrative to speculate on Gilead's life and practices, they objectified it to a frightening level. As a result, they ignore her story. Just as Offred's served a purely biological function in Gilead, in the post-Gilead era, it fulfills a purely informational function. For Professor Pieixoto and his academic colleagues, “she is a stepping stone to professional advancement and a possible source of information about his true interest, the male elite of Gilead.” (Stein, 274). The genuine horror of this is that it takes place in a futuristic Gilead where equality has been restored in name only. The scariest part is that it takes place in a world that looks eerily similar to our own.

Nevertheless, Atwood's Post-Gilead world described in 2195 raise a crucial question in the novel. How different is the ‘enlightened’ world of 2195 from Gilead? The surnames of the presenters at this conference, such as Running Dog, Crescent Moon, Pieixoto, Wade, Chatterjee, and Van Buren, show that higher education has become multi-cultural. Besides, the chair of this committee, Professor Maryann Crescent Moon, is a female, so maybe this world has become somehow equal in terms of female rights to work. On the other hand, when you see what kind of responses elicit laughter and applause, ‘Our job is not to blame but to understand,’ the suggestion of the title of ‘The Handmaid's Tale,’ besides ‘The Underground Frailroad,’ it is clear that this futuristic society is also not perfect.

According to David Ketterer, in “*Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale: A Contextual Dystopia*,” the “Historical Notes” create a certain temporal fraction between the past and the future, which deactivates the dystopia in the novel and makes it only a momentary transition between the past and the tolerable future. The story of Offred appears as a closed and completed dystopian parenthesis of the past and present. Ketterer questions the effectiveness of the warning incorporated in the novel if the dystopian story is only transitory. However,

Atwood is also interested in the historical context that preceded dystopia emergence and “the historical development that led, overtime or abruptly, away from dystopia.” (213).

Dystopian mapping with temporal shifts gives Atwood's writing its characteristic discontinuity. Ketterer states that “*The Handmaid's Tale* does not fit into the traditional dystopian genre since to some extent depends on a linear conception of time.” (213). The “Historical Notes” context shifts follow a cyclical concept that ‘swings’ from normality to dystopia, creating discontinuity before returning to normalcy again. Like day, and night shifts in the chapters, as noted by Ketterer. However, Pieixoto's speech reflects persistent gender discrimination. The question would be: Is Atwood's dystopia cyclical if sexism still exists, or is it linear? And if linear, is the Gilead era line slightly bolder than the post-Gilead one? Jacques Leclaire, in “*The Handmaid's Tale: A Feminist Dystopia?*” sees the “Historical Notes” serve as an addition to Offred's narrative, accentuating Atwood's warning positively. It's a tool feminist dystopia can use to gain notoriety. The signal of danger becomes higher when a society that has fought against sexism but still has remnants of prejudice and gender inequality is depicted. He further explains that: “‘The Historical Notes’ shows Atwood's appeal, to demand a ‘radical change’ that safeguards women from discrimination in the future, rather than just a change.” (Lacroix and Leclaire, 86). When it comes to the “Historical Notes,” Arnold E. Davidson says they “provide comic relief from Gilead's grotesque text. However, the epilogue is the book's most pessimistic section.” (Van Spanckeren and Castro 120).

The Futuristic Republic of Gilead hasn't learned anything from its history if it can find reasons to tolerate oppression and murder wherever its demographic factors or an intellectual desire to ‘understand.’ Further, the scholars of 2195 are setting the way for Gilead to rise again. As Arnold Davidson, in his article, “*Future Tense: Making History in The Handmaid's Tale*,” explains, Atwood's text emphasizes “how we choose to construct the history in part determines the history we are likely to get.” (115). Atwood, in “*Writing with Intent*,” states that: “Why

bother trying to make society better, or even visualize it improved, when you know it's all going to start all over again, like clothes in the laundry?" (93).

A time travel experience was presented professionally by Atwood in "*The Handmaid's Tale*," she travels within times between the past, present, and future in a way that makes you want more. The "Historical Notes" section at the end of the novel provides additional perceptions about the futuristic Gilead in a way that reorients the reader's impression of the entire story. With just a glance, it's easy to see how neither the society before nor the society after the Republic of Gilead differed that much. Specifically, sexism, which persists in post-Gilead culture. The reader achieves, in the end, a final portrayal that depicts Atwood's desire to highlight warnings against today's aggression and hegemony policies. By adding this second future to the first (The Republic of Gilead), Atwood made a perfect futuristic novel.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a conceptualizing of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as a speculative fiction novel. Moreover, the novel analysis proved it is dystopian. This analysis has also provided some characteristics that help to showcase totalitarianism as the principal theme of the next chapter. This chapter also portrays the futuristic setting of *The Handmaid's Tale* through the time travel features used by Margaret Atwood between the past, present, and future. The following chapter will analysis of the novel from a different angle, focusing on the examination of the Gilead totalitarian regime practices, including surveillance and language control themes and the causes that lead the protagonist to suffer from a freedom loss and identity crisis; in the same context with modern American surveillance.

Chapter Three:

***The Handmaid's Tale* Looking Towards the
Future through the Totalitarian Regime of
Gilead and Modern America.**

Chapter III: *The Handmaid's Tale* Looking Towards the Future through the Totalitarian Regime of Gilead and Modern America.



Image by: Rebecca Hendin. Credit to: BBC.

3.1 Introduction

In some ways, *The Handmaid's Tale* raises these concerns. What is the focus of Atwood's ostensibly Dystopian vision? Is it even partially existing in today's society? However, dystopia can't be defined or delimited from only a feminist perspective. I expand on these inquiries by asking; if Atwood's fiction presents a dystopia that primarily targets the Handmaid's body to criticize the current state of society, then in what ways does this representation of the dystopic body similar to the current state of Modern America society? In this chapter, I demonstrate that Atwood's dystopia vision already exists in reality and that the gap between Atwood's fiction and the present is due to Atwood's future vision. I'll divide this chapter into two sections for study. I'll look at how totalitarianism affects the body on a variety of levels, including body control, surveillance, and communication. My research focuses on the totalitarian regime's methods of suppressing people in the realms of fiction and reality.

The body is the prime element that shows the immediate impact of totalitarianism since it is the object of analysis. In the primary section of the third chapter, we'll look at how the Sons of Jacob gradually constricted the lives of characters and the locations they used to inhabit to build a totalitarian state. I'll look at Gilead's control over all women, particularly the Handmaids. Gilead's disciplinary mechanism includes the constraint and monitor women's movements, knowledge, language, and even thinking, as well as their impacts on the Handmaid's freedom and identity.

This thesis will look in the context of Michel Foucault's work "*Discipline and Punish*," which deals with the relationship between authority and the body. I'm going to investigate the Handmaid's relationship with her own body and the forces that dominated it, which helps analyze the totalitarian regime in modern American society. The concept of communication, whether with one's own body or the public, is crucial in illustrating how dystopia is attached to reality.

To trace the movement of power and how it impacts social connections in the novel, Foucault's concept of power relations is useful. Foucault sees power as a network of power relations. The way power operates and flows in society fascinates him. His research focuses on the continual flow of power and how it shapes and influences social hierarchies. Foucault's theory allows me to explore how the Handmaid's body is disciplined and subjected to various forms of totalitarian control. Her body is programmed to follow the rules and has to be submissive according to Gilead's dictates.

Foucault's notion provides a theoretical framework for examining woman's position investigation inside Gilead's hierarchies. In the first section, I also present my interpretation of power in the novel. It illustrates that the totalitarian regime does not always entail men to hold authority. The conceptions of power held by Michel Foucault help analyze power play in the novel. It can study the power dynamics between male and female characters as a fluid force for

the Aunts, rather than a static entity attributed only to male characters like Commanders. This knowledge helps to analyze how women wield power and how this power is used to control the Handmaid's body. In another way, the Handmaid's body might be viewed as a landscape where external forces collide in an attempt to colonize it. Besides, the "*Panopticon*" metaphor of Foucault in his theory of *Discipline and Punish* sheds light on the Handmaid's extensive surveillance. The societal surveillance agents in the novel are the Eyes and guardians. The Handmaids are not only restricted to certain areas, but they are also observed wherever they go. Their bodies are regularly monitored and checked to ensure that they follow the rules.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood is chock-full of inventive wordplay inspired by the author's apocalyptic visions. In the first section of the third chapter, I'll also go over some of Atwood's wordplay in the novel and how it complements and interacts with the totalitarian regime of Gilead. The way she manipulates words reflects the nature of the propaganda that makes Gilead's environment so repressive and frightening. This section depicts Gilead's language and the "truth" utilized within the discourse context to oppress women. My goal is to demonstrate this by examining the lens of discourse and language through the theory of *Power/Knowledge* by Michel Foucault to conclude how power, in the form of oppression, performs in *The Handmaid's Tale* through the concepts of language and "truth," employed in monopolizing information. Thus, strengthening the Gilead totalitarian regime.

In this context, I intend to look at how language functions in dystopian and speculative fiction work. The dystopian speculative fiction authors employ neologism and euphemism to develop familiarity with an unusual idea. These authors avoid the sense of fear that a reader may otherwise experience about the true meaning by establishing a new, playful-sounding phrase with a sinister connotation. The Authors achieve the same purpose by reinventing or reusing existing words to convey something new and scary. By using these strategies, on the

other hand, these works serve as cautionary tales about the dystopian possibilities that may occur. The authors mimic the slow boiling of getting used to a dystopia when it is already there, desensitizing readers to the reality of dystopias; readers accept new phrases or terms without asking for explanations because novelty overcomes horror. However, when readers realize the true meanings of these words, their fury will grow as their senses of empathy toward the story characters, who have also been duped by this wordplay. These works like *The Handmaid's Tale* are warnings against the degradation of particular components of society. They force readers to reflect and morally scrutinize what is happening in each book and how it relates to our reality by familiarizing the otherwise strange ideas; covered by language control and information monopoly. Finally, in the first section, I provide the impact of losing freedom based on the Handmaid's identity crisis.

The second section of this chapter explores the similarities between dystopia and reality through *The Handmaid's Tale* and Modern America. The current study emphasizes the concept of speculative fiction outlined above because it clarifies the existence of Atwood's supposed dystopic vision. It affirms that in a dystopian society, freedom, control over one's body, and justice are all missing, just as they are in real life. My understanding of dystopia questions the existence of a utopian reality and explores the limits of utopia, as it tries to portray reality as already bleak. The distinction between the two is a matter of degree. If the establishment of freedom and justice is a non-dystopic society, then a dystopic future would negate these elements. By using Michel Foucault's theories, I'll show that today's society lacks any of these utopian qualities. In actuality, due to the regime's intrinsic totalitarian control, the utopian paradises with their core characteristics of freedom, the autonomy of the body, and justice can never be implemented in real life. As a result, dystopia's future is already embedded in the present to some level and doesn't give rise to any fresh ideas that aren't already in existence.

Government control limits the populace's freedom. Foucault demonstrates how power relations always mediate the body. The regime control that breathed into daily life rhythms continues to discipline it. In the second section, I'll also demonstrate, on the one hand, the significance of freedom issues and their relation to justice. On the other hand, how its deficiency affects the individual's thinking. The Dystopic body in *The Handmaid's Tale* shows that in the current thesis, speculative dystopia fiction is based on the temporal component, where the past is reenacted in the future.

3.2 Totalitarianism in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Atwood's novel depicts the ravages of a fictional totalitarian regime. *The Handmaid's Tale* provides a bleak vision of the repercussions of a totalitarian regime cloaked in religious fundamentalism eroding human rights in general and women in particular. As a result of this dictatorship, a dystopian society dominated by a patriarchal order was born. The main totalitarian features used in *The Handmaid's Tale* are as follow:

3.2.1 Body Control in *The Handmaid's Tale*

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the body plays a tremendous force to control. The novel is about the Gilead totalitarian regime that has taken control of the United States because of a continuing reproductive problem and environmental tensions. They forced fertile women into sexual servitude to create children in this new society. Within the nation of Gilead, a variety of social and legal frameworks influences the Handmaid's body.

Scholars have used many theoretical approaches to the body; however, Michel Foucault's theory is the most useful for contextualizing and comprehending the body's involvement in Atwood's work. In his 1975 book "*Discipline and Punish*," Foucault created the concept of the docile body, which investigates the history of the modern penal system, the sociocultural background of punishment, and the impact of shifting power relations. According to Foucault, a body is 'docile' and "can be subjected, utilized, transformed, and enhanced"

(Foucault, 136). The body serves as a dystopic emblem of power, authority, and control in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The examination of the Handmaid's body has explained how a body can be submissive and controlled. Michel Foucault presents how he sees human bodies as those used to being disciplined, where human bodies become docile to achieve the control goals. For him, the human body was direct and disciplined from birth. This discipline not only "produces docile 'bodies,' but it also becomes a capacity that dissociates power from the body." ("*Discipline and Punish*," 138). That is, the body's energy is disciplined, developed, and then reversed to become a restriction, a force of submission. This control also extends to the body, space, and morality, which is an ideological control., besides schools, military institutions, and control measures are examples of the impact of the power of control over the submissive body. Gilead's control over the body is totalitarian patriarchal, but it represents religious constraints and class divisions. Bodies, particularly fertile women, become a reproductive machine, a threat of revolt, and a social status signal.

The Foucault lens is based on a long philosophical history, and much of Foucault's work on power and the body can interpret with *The Handmaid's Tale*. The concentration on reproductive control in the novel and the class inequalities in Gilead highlight what Foucault refers to as a "new scale of bodily control" as he saw the body as a collection of pieces rather than a whole. According to him, the body discovers to be both an object and a target of power. "There was a useful body and an understandable body," according to Descartes. Nonetheless, there are "places of convergence between the two." (Foucault, 136)

The Handmaid's Tale depicts Foucault's mechanization of the body. Through various laws of food control and decorum that emphasize the body's utility and contribute to its submissiveness and control, focus on what Foucault calls the individual body's "economy, the efficiency of movements, and their internal organization." There is an "uninterrupted, persistent compulsion" in which the processes are supervised more closely in this new control

performed on the body. To achieve the most productivity with time, space, and movement, partitioned as precisely as possible. (Foucault, 137). By economizing the body and managing its movements over time and place, the Handmaid's shift from one home to another represents corporeal utility and docility under Gilead. The state hopes that by pairing them with a new Commander, Handmaids who could not conceive will complete their job of bearing children. In the sense that these transactions maximize productivity. This approach to the body, according to Foucault, has its roots in industrialization, which "made possible the meticulous control of the body's operations, which ensured the constant subjugation of its forces" and established a relationship between utility and subjugation, which Foucault refers to as disciplines. (137). Angela King, in her article "*The Prisoner of Gender: Foucault and the Disciplining of the Female Body*," interprets the female body as "a special target of disciplinary authority to demonstrate that gender, specific femininity, is a discipline that produces bodies and identities and acts as an effective form of social control" (30). Men are defined by their brains and their link with rationality, whereas women, their reproductive system, and their fertility define them.

The use and fetishization of the Handmaid's bodies, particularly their fertility, reflects the state-body relationship, in which Gilead valued the Handmaids primarily on their ability to produce children. Disciplines, according to Foucault, are centered on the body, not only in terms of its talents or subjugation but also in terms of "Forming a relationship that makes him more obedient in the mechanism itself whenever he becomes more useful"; Foucault refers to this as political anatomy. This 'machinery of power' sheds light on power dynamics between bodies and between the state and the body. It explains how to manipulate other women's bodies, not just to make them obey a person's wants, but also to make them operate like a machine, using "the tactics, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines." Political

anatomy does not discover suddenly; it resulted from a series of minor events that “gradually produced the blueprint of a general method.” (Foucault, “*Discipline and Punish*,” 138)

In Gilead, the industrial disparity led to the spread of chemicals and thus epidemic diseases, especially infertility, which led to the rise of the state of Gilead. To describe such disciplinary responses to natural urges, Foucault developed the term ‘biopower.’ The natural and political bodies meld together in the presence of biopower. The relevance of biopower can notice in the context of the Gilead government. Gilead was rising as a solution to several national challenges, including a massive infertility epidemic. They oriented the newly founded theocratic government on reproduction because of the biological catastrophe. This purpose is arguably a survival instinct, is strengthened and solidified by religious ideals, and enforced by the totalitarian state hierarchy. Through this biological reason, Gilead defends its ultimate control over women. By utilizing biopower, Gilead is dehumanizing women by robbing them of their right to own money or labor to gain greater control over their bodies, particularly their reproductive systems. Women are treated as subhuman when these rights take away from them.

Another aspect of Gilead’s authoritarian government is activity control. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Offred’s daily life existence in Gilead is regulated tightly in ways that mimic monastery life. According to Foucault, the timetable began in a monastery and swiftly spread to schools and hospitals. According to seventeenth-century laws, which often “retained a religious aspect” comparable to Gilead’s totalitarian regime, “all persons shall wash their hands, offer up their task to God, and make the sign of the cross before beginning their work.” (Foucault 149). It recalls *The Handmaid’s Tale* time-table control. Bells and other sounds, for example, are used to keep track of time. Offred notices that “the timekeeper’s bell is ringing. Bells used to maintain time here, much like in nunneries” (Atwood, 8). Here, too, the bell produces a rhythm. It signifies a change in activity or the passage of time. Many people have become accustomed to hearing the bells because they are so ubiquitous. The bell also

announces the beginning of the ceremony, which involves the Commanders and their Handmaids engaging in sexual rape intercourse. As Offred says: “When the bell rings, I descend the stairs, my feet in their clean red shoes counting the way down as the clock ticks with its pendulum, keeping time.” (Atwood, “*THT*,” 79). Offred is aware of the purpose of the bell and what they expected of her at this time. When she counts her steps down the stairs, she follows a ritualistic pace that is perhaps self-inflicted by her subconscious desire for distraction rather than imposed by the Ceremony parameters. The ritual, for example, illuminates what Foucault calls the “temporal elaboration of the deed” in Gilead (Foucault, “*Discipline and Punish*,” 151). Rather than a defined period, individual gestures and actions are regulated or set to a rhythm. Certain socioeconomic classes are fenced off and organized in Gilead at occasions like the Prayvaganza. Offred observes, “This rope segregates us, marks us off, protects the others from being contaminated by us, creates for us a corral or cage, so into it we walk, organizing ourselves in rows, as we know how to do, kneeling them on the cement floor.” (Atwood, 214).

On the other hand, the radioactive Colonies play a powerful tool of control over the population of Gilead, especially the fertile women. They sent sterile women and poor men to clean these toxic Colonies, putting their bodies at risk. Moira, describe to Offred that “The Colonies are worse, with the toxic dumps and the radiation spills. They estimate that you only have three years until your nose falls off and your skin rips away from your body like rubber gloves. It is cheaper not to feed you or provide you with safety clothing. They are mainly folks they would like to get rid of, anyway.” (Atwood, 248). For the government to achieve its goals, bodies are left to rot and decompose. These horrific bodies, both dead and alive, are symbols of the social interplay between power and prejudice in Gilead. Gilead is committing genocide in the end, with the Colonies disguising their mass murder of marginalized people in places

ravaged by toxic waste and war. These policies of intimidation and threats by the Gilead regime helped facilitate discipline and control over the population.

As I mentioned in the second chapter, Atwood illustrates body control primarily through Gilead's caste system; they assign women a specific duty with associated clothes and responsibilities, with no way to escape these roles other than prostitution, exile, or death. In Gilead, the Wives clothes in blue, the Aunts dressed in brown with electrical cattle prods on their leather belts, the Handmaids in red, as Offred notes, "red: the color of blood, which identifies us" (8), and the Marthas are dressed in dull green and serve as cooks. The Econowives wear striped outfits colors, with the Widows wearing all black; whereas, the Unwoman, who will be starved to death or infected with unknown diseases in the Colonies, wear gray overall. There are also Jezebel women, prostitutes only for the Commanders and high-ranking people. This rigid classification structure aims to eliminate undesired cultural trends and beliefs while keeping the population terrified to keep their potentially reactive under control. This stratification legitimizes a "hyper-patriarchy" in which "males recover severe authority over women" (3-4), as Christopher Jones described in his piece "*Women of the Future: Alternative Scenarios*," Jones explains the psychological motivation for the Gilead invasion perfectly.

In this context, Foucault describes five operations brought into action by the normalizing gaze in *Discipline and Punish*: comparison, difference, hierarchization, homogenization, and exclusion. He reveals the disciplinary mechanisms that enforce social norms and determine what is acceptable and what is not. Differentiation classifies people based on their capacity to follow the rules set forth by those in positions of power. Because it forces everyone to fit into a model, it leads to mechanization. The normalizing reason, in Foucault's words:

Individual actions refer to as a whole, it is a field of comparison, a space of differentiation, and the concept of a rule to be followed, according to

Foucault's definition. It distinguished people based on the following general rule: the rule should operate as a minimum threshold, an average to be respected, or an optimum toward which one should strive. It ranks the individual's social hierarchy; based on the abilities, level, and 'nature' of individuals in terms of their worth. It introduces the constraint of conformity that must achieve through the 'value giving' measure. Finally, it maps the exterior frontier of the abnormal, which will define the difference regarding all other differences. (183)

The Handmaid is responsible for pregnancy in Gilead. Although, chemicals and radioactive fallout caused widespread sterility. They do not require fertility testing for men in the Republic of Gilead. The female body is a scapegoat, an item forced to bear the brunt of the guilt for men's sterility. By accepting men's infertility, patriarchal ideology refuses to place the male figure on a par with or below a woman. The charge against women is founded on the sexist belief that women are entirely responsible for the success or the failure of the conceiving. Infertility makes her a useless slave who is incapable of achieving anything. The concept of a productive body brings to mind Timothy Murphy's interpretation of the body in *Naked Lunch* "Like thought, the trained body domesticated and subjected to the production process as an instrument, the body's basic organization aids capitalist control" (97). The expectations of those in power in *The Handmaid's Tale* are to have a child to live a balanced life, whereas Offred's aim is to birth a kid to survive without being transferred to the colonies and dying of toxicity. Motherhood becomes a means to a goal rather than an end in itself. Insemination failure becomes a metaphor for death. Not only would the Handmaid's body fail those she serves, but it even her too. Only a woman's body, specifically her womb, is valuable to Gilead. As a result, the Republic of Gilead skillfully interposes itself between women and their bodies, rendering the latter a perpetual source of internal strife. The body of the Handmaid becomes a

menace to her. After a set number of tries, she develops the ability to carry a weapon that can destroy her. The body transforms into a time bomb that puts the life of its owner in jeopardy. It takes on the form of her adversary.

Furthermore, Gilead does not allow the Handmaids to corrupt their bodies; all the Handmaids are controlled by a diet and daily walks and expected to remain slender to remain in their working position. In other words, they exist because their bodies are helpful. The body, according to Foucault, is “shaped by many distinct regimes; is marked by the rhythms of work, and poisoned by food or ideals, by eating habits or moral laws.” (qtd. in Grosz 148). The body is engulfed in power and unable to escape the realm of politics. He argues that “power relations have an immediate influence on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, and drive it to carry out tasks.” (qtd. in Besley and Peters, 59). As a result, the body can never be free of political and social control, and its person can never fully control it.

Control is not limited to men or commanders in Gilead. The Gilead regime uses the Aunts to brainwash the Handmaids and controls them. This disparity in power captures the idea that authority can be given to women in Gilead, even if it's in fragments or in a small way, which helps us better understand the totalitarian system of Gilead. Ironically, another disciplinary technique intended to prevent the Handmaid's body from having sexual desires is the screening of films about women's torture. Many sexually humiliating and violent behaviors against women depicted in these films are among the Aunts favorite tactics. Offred recalls one terrible clip: “We had to witness a woman being chopped slowly to bits, her fingers and breasts snipped off with garden shears, her stomach split open and her guts taken out.” (Atwood, 118). Aunt Lydia utilizes this clip to demonstrate men's earlier contempt towards women and to prove that the female body is more valuable in Gilead civilization to justify their complete control under the totalitarian regime, which is a radical approach.

The irony is that despite the Aunts emphasis on the abuse of the female body in the past, it is the Aunts who punish the disobedient women through discipline and physical punishment on their bodies to control them. And the tortures inflicted on the Handmaid's bodies are no less heinous than those depicted in the film. Offred remembers Moira's feet being battered severely with the steel wires after she was hauled back to the Red Center, after her first escape: "They start with her feet, then her hands. Moira couldn't walk for a week after the beating. They didn't give a damn to what they did with her, even if it was for the rest of her life" (92). While discipline and punishment employ to make The Handmaid's body 'useful' for reproduction, they are also used to manipulate their thoughts. Indeed, the Aunts attempt to persuade the Handmaids that Gilead has restored women's respect, as now they are appreciated for "having the future in their hands" (Atwood, 55). The Aunts portray themselves as motherly instructors to the Handmaids, guiding them down the path to Gilead assimilation. They describe Gilead's objective by saying: "Women banded together for a similar goal! As they walk the path of life together, each fulfilling her assigned work, they assist one another in their daily responsibilities" (162). In the society's context, Aunt Lydia's pep talk on solidarity is alarmingly ironic. It's an insidious totalitarian process designed to persuade women that their subservience brings them personal satisfaction while serving the greater good.

The Aunts here presents one of Atwood's central messages, depicting that totalitarian regimes exist because people are too complacent or afraid to resist them or even welcome them by helping the government control each other. In the 19th century, industries employing female labor usually housed specially trained female overseers to guarantee discipline, according to Foucault ("*Discipline and Punish*," 157). The underlying logic was that military forces alone are insufficient to maintain discipline. Further, it is "necessary to have this new distribution of authority known as discipline, with its structures and hierarchies, inspections, exercises, and methods of training and conditioning, at the same time" (Foucault, 158). *The Handmaid's Tale*

utilizes the same principle. Professor Pieixoto, in the “*Historical Notes*” section, explains that “The finest and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other objectives was through women themselves.” (Atwood, 320). He further states that the women who volunteered like the Aunts of Gilead did so not only because they believed in “traditional values,” but also because of the “benefits they may gain, when power is limited, a small amount of it is alluring.” (Atwood, 308). They enact the state’s doctrine with brutal zeal; they are merely mouthpieces for the Gilead totalitarian authority. Female cooperation in women’s subjugation is crucial to the state’s survival by relying on women to oppress and control each other for serving the purposes of the government interests; Gilead’s founders succeeded in eliminating feminist solidarity, resulting in disunity; thus, avoiding women’s revolts.

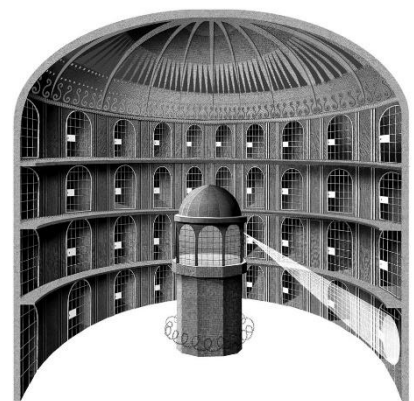
Gilead also controls the bodies of the Commanders and their Wives. The government obliges the leaders to perform the monthly ceremony of rape with their Handmaids. The wives, although they have some freedom to care for their gardens and move around, the Gilead government controls their bodies too, as they are forced to attend the birth ceremonies of the Handmaids in the neighborhoods and cannot simply stay in the house; thus, they are bound like their maids. Stein concludes that “The Gilead’s rulers are trapped in the same oppressive rituals they impose on the lower social classes” (“*Scheherazade*,” 272). Therefore, the space they created via their restricting customs is mirrored within themselves. Gilead’s influence is most palpable because all ritual participants must follow the established instructions, although there is no one to supervise them. Because of the panoptic structure of the family, skipping the ceremony is not an option; the Republic is thus both present and absents at the same time.

The central goal of power, according to Foucault, is the body. It’s a battleground for supremacy. According to the movement of numerous discourses functioning on it, the body is remodeled and redefined continually. Foucault views the body as the site or reservoir where society and culture’s disciplinary forces are articulated and maintained in his book *Discipline*

and Punish. Through his body, the individual is constantly 'subjected' to the social control mechanism. When power is oppressive and repressive, pleasures and wants expressed through and intimately tied to bodily subjectivity are suppressed. According to Foucault, power always leaves its imprint on the body. Bodies are constantly shaped by laws, social hierarchy, and other types of control and authority, "It is already one of the primary implications of power that certain bodies, gestures, discourses, and desires get defined and constructed as individuals," he says (Foucault "*Power/knowledge*," 98). By limiting and managing their joys and desires, power teaches bodies to conform and discipline, as well as engages them in normalization processes. Bodies become 'docile' due to disciplinary procedures. As a result, the body is not only the source of control but also the site of power. Foucault believes that power is a force that is present all around us and that defines the organization of any particular civilization. As "a more or less ordered, hierarchical, coordinated cluster of relations," it is continually constructed, generated, and sustained (198). Power, in this perspective, "has to be viewed as a productive network that flows across the entire social body." (119). The general public views authority as one-sided and synonymous with 'law;' "On one hand, there must be a sovereign, or ruler, who says no and imposes punishments, and on the other hand, there must be people who accept these prohibitions." (Foucault, "*Discipline and Punish*," 140)

3.2.2 Totalitarian Surveillance as an Aspect of Speculative Fiction in *The Handmaid's Tale*

The Panopticon theory of Foucault provides control over the Handmaid's bodies. The prison, created by Jeremy Bentham, keeps a close eye on the inmates, who are separated and not allowed to socialize with each other. From their vantage in a central tower, where they are unseen, the guards can see inside each cell. Constant observation is a control strategy that allows



▲ Artwork for the *New York Times* book review of *The Panopticon*, by Jenni Fagan.

the monitored party to internalize the surveillance process. Its goal is to compel compliance with the restrictions. Censors oppress and destroy people who transgress the norms as part of the normalization process. The Panopticon was a metaphor for Foucault's research into the effects of surveillance on people in disciplinary settings and their relationship with the observing system to highlight the obsession of the regimes of societies in subjugating their citizens in his book "*Discipline and Punish*," where he defines a Panopticon prisoner as being subjected to asymmetrical surveillance: "He is seen; but at the same time, does not see; he is an object of information, never a communication subject." (200). He also clarifies the power-knowledge relationship, as both; power and knowledge are driven by observing others. According to Foucault:

The body is a field or surface on which power, knowledge, and resistance are played out. The body's materiality, as well as its desires and pleasures, are formed and limited to a narrow range of acceptable attitudes by societal norms, self-surveillance, and disciplinary practices. (McDowell and Sharp, 203)

Surveillance is intended to produce docility. The threat of societal discipline ensures that people behave in a compliant manner. The internalization of surveillance, rather than total surveillance, is used to create submission.

Similarly, the Handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale* are only permitted to exchange ritualized greetings, not talk with one another. In the narrative, the Eyes censorship lights are constantly flashing over the houses and in the streets to check that no Handmaid has wandered away from her place. The totalitarian regime keeps an eye on the Handmaid's bodies; at all times. Offred describes the dystopian watchful eye, saying, "I see the two of us as...in the short glass eye of the mirror as we descend," as well as the hostile masculine gaze that objectifies the feminine form symbolized by the round mirror in the Commander's house's corridor.

Offred is not permitted to handle sharp objects, such as knives or blades. They barred her from harming her body because it is a national resource rather than hers. They used surveillance coercion on the body and its mobility. Further, Offred has been tattooed; so that she cannot travel too far, saying “Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse” it’s supposed to ensure that “I’ll never be able to disappear into another environment. I am far too valuable ... I am a national asset.” (Atwood, 80). The eye on her ankle serves as a constant reminder that her body is a coded object watched. It’s a weapon in the hands of an outside force.

The medical examinations as a type of surveillance strengthen the Foucauldian idea of the body as a ‘spectacle’ that perpetuates the power structures that developed within. The Handmaids see doctors regularly to have their ovaries examined, and their chances of becoming pregnant are estimated. The medical investigations turn the Handmaids into reproduction machines, obliterating their identity and objectifying them. The hospital transforms into a surveillance system that reaches into a woman’s body and separates her from her identity. They converted the ovaries into a ‘central object’ that is more real than the Handmaid. She becomes an unwoman, an invalid human being if they don’t work well. They monitored the Handmaid’s bodies, where they lost their sense of individuality and became collectively held property. “We are vessels; the insides of our bodies are all that matters” (Atwood, 126). Offred states she is a piece of a collectively owned resource throughout her story. In her work “*Sexual Surveillance and Medical Authority in Two Versions of The Handmaid’s Tale*,” scholar Pamela Cooper states that: “the gaze of the doctor,” in which she explains the doctor’s usage as a kind of surveillance in Gilead. (Cooper, 49). Offred’s unequal power relationship with the doctor, whom she only sees once, symbolizes Gilead’s totalitarian regime power.

The persistent threat of observation is another aspect adding to the household’s thick and frigid climate, further complicating successful appropriation procedures. They held the Handmaids as virtual prisoners in their Commander’s houses. Offred says that she is not

permitted to leave her room after a particular hour in the evening. "I am out of place," she says as she slips out of her room in the middle of the night to take a flower from the sitting room, which is totally against the law." (Atwood, 121). She has no other options for exploring other than her room and the limited areas in which she is with a partner. The location where she can be alone could provide her with the ideal prospect of escape or suicide. This blank "offers the ultimate escape of self-annihilation" (Atwood, 76). When Offred first enters the room, she instantly comes to the following conclusions: "The room's door cannot be secured or even well-closed, in addition to the lack of 'protective' measures in place." (Atwood, 18). This allows any authority or member of the house access simply to Offred's personal space at any time, which creates a *Panoptic* climate since, even in the place that is supposed to be allocated for her, Offred is vulnerable to exterior control and surveillance. The home is similar to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon in this way, as a jail that employs a "new mode of obtaining the power of mind over mind" (qtd. in Foucault *"Discipline and Punish,"* 206) by convincing captives that they are constantly being observed. These would lead to inmates self-regulating their behavior because "the persons to be inspected should always feel as if they are under inspection, or at least as if they stand a good probability of being so" (qtd. in Foucault, 206). On the other hand, the aim of companionship is not to relieve that loneliness but to keep an eye on the Handmaid's movements. On their way to the food stores, Offred has to walk doubled by another Handmaid saying that: "We're only allowed to go there in groups of two. This is intended to be for our safety, but the idea is ridiculous; we are already well protected. She's my spy, as I'm hers. If one of us falls due to something that occurs on one of our regular walks, the other will be held responsible." (Atwood, 23).

Any feelings of sympathy or camaraderie between the Handmaids are obliterated because of the internalization of surveillance. Sharon Wilson connects Offred to the naive "*Little Red Cap*," who meets the wolf it dismembered and devoured on her way to her

grandmother's house in her book *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics*. However, the handmaid must not deviate from the path on her way from the households to the stores and back, except for the short diversions to the Wall, where the regime's hanged foes are exhibited. Since Handmaids exercise their limited mobility continually under the careful eye of male guards, even these means of movement inside the Gilead environment are regulated and monitored. The path would raise suspicions and put her life in jeopardy if she changed it.

One of the red costume's unique features is to allow a limited view of the Handmaid's surroundings. According to Offred: "The skirt is full and ankle-length, with a flat yoke that reaches over the breasts and full sleeves. The white wings are also a specified issue; they meant to keep us from both seeing and being seen" (Atwood, 42). The white wings are reminiscent of a racehorse's blinkers; which, limit a horse's peripheral and rear vision. Offred says she "learned to see the world in shots" (Atwood, 38). They deprived handmaids of clear visibility of what is going on around them; to avoid being diverted from their single reproductive job. Behind the crimson suit, the Handmaids are 'taught' to be meek through a technique known as 'dressage.' The wings remove the female gaze. The term 'blinding' indicates the Handmaid's forced ignorance and the prohibition of reading and writing. She poses less of a danger to Gilead's patriarchy and totalitarianism the less she knows. The monolithic dictatorship understood that observation equals knowledge, and knowledge equals power. Handmaids are kept as blind objects, losing both; tactile and visual contact with the world around them. The garment serves as a barrier between their biological selves and the rest of the world. "A border frames the body and isolates it from the rest of the social world, thereby operating as a form of container or wrapper," said Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro. (17)

The distribution of humans inside a specific space is one method in which disciplines, and hence bio-power, prosper. Disciplines sometimes require the enclosure of the body in a locked place. The enclosure isn't always used to punish people. While prisons tried to punish

and prevent crimes like vagrancy and looting, other enclosures, such as universities, were more subtle in their discipline. Monastic discipline produced the model student. They also used enclosure in the military to prevent deserters and keep army troops in place. At the same time, industrialization brought new forms of enclosure and control, such as factory areas. As the forces of production grow more concentrated, the goal was to “derive maximum advantages and neutralize the inconveniences (thefts, work interruptions, disturbances, and cabals); to protect materials and tools, and to master the labor force” (Foucault *“Discipline and Punish,”* 142). Enclosure in these factories became about efficiency and production, not only about ideal behaviors or incentives. When the Handmaids are taken to the Rachel and Leah Center to begin their training as a Handmaid, they must adhere to a strict discipline and seminar schedule that includes topics like the Ceremony, Gilead restriction, and the Bible. As Offred described it:

We tried to sleep in the army cots that were set in rows with spaces between them so we could not talk, we had army blankets and flannelette sheets identical to those used by children (...) With electric cattle prods strung from their leather belts, Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth were watching us. Except for our daily walks around the football field, which was ringed now by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire, we weren't allowed to leave the house. (Atwood, 4).

Furthermore, the public event of marriage Prayvaganzas consists entirely of absolute obedience. During the prayers and ceremonies, all women, especially Handmaids, are expected to remain silent and armed Guards closely observe and control their movements; the Eyes are everywhere, always on the lookout for the tiniest infringement. Their voices have been entirely hushed once more. The Gilead regime uses enclosure to achieve its goals by enclosing the Handmaids and confining them to a tiny place.

Surveillance in Gilead illuminates the power in a broad, encompassing sense and the gendered authority. Because they engage with the Handmaids daily, the Gileadean police force, known as the Guardians, represents a more personal type of surveillance. Because they can permit or deny the Handmaids physical access, surveillance provides them control over them. In other words, they may enforce Foucault's enclosure bounds, which the Gileadean rules make possible.

The punishment of execution, trauma markers on bodies, such as scars, amputated extremities, and gouged eyes, as well as mounds of dead rebel or criminal bodies left in the street for days, serve as a reminder of the regime paranoia. There is also the Wall they have transformed from a "plain but handsome" architectural component of a university into a physical barrier (reminiscent of Foucault's concept of enclosure) as well as a display of authority (31). Gilead's spatial control is an extreme example of what Foucault refers to as a "carceral texture of society, that captures the body and observes it constantly" (*"Disciplines and Punish,"* 304). In Foucault's Panopticon theory, the wall, like the jail, validates regime disciplinary carceral forms. The female bodies are all docile because they are situated in this texture and have their bodies controlled and monitored both geographically and physically. "Surveillance, information censorship, re-education camps, and totalitarian violence are all used to retain power" (Neuman, 857).

Surveillance in Gilead recalls Foucault's theories on selfhood and subjectivity, as recounted in *"The History of Sexuality, Volume 1,"* where Foucault argues, "There is no need for guns, physical violence, or material limits. Nothing more than a look. A scrutinizing gaze, which, under its weight, each man will interiorize to the point that he is his own supervisor, each individual thus executing this surveillance over and against himself." (155). According to Foucault, an individual internalizes the authoritarian curtain to the point that they become self-surveillant, embracing social norms and cultural standards in their behaviors and identities.

Foucault, who worked extensively on the Panopticon concept, further explains that the state treads a narrow line to maintain the structures and behavioral patterns it requires: “If you are too brutal, you risk inciting revolts.” Again, if you interfere too seldom, you risk allowing politically costly phenomena such as resistance and disobedience to emerge in the gaps” (*Disciplines and Punish*,” 155). Thus, they must constantly reinforce the prospect of Gilead surveillance in their citizen mind.

3.2.3 Language as a Means of Power and Control in the Republic of Gilead

Most dystopian books extensively use language as a tool of oppression. Language is a principal aspect of how authors build the new off-kilter universe in which the characters live in dystopias. “Language is a vital weapon for the ruling dystopian power structure” (Baccolini 5-6). Such novel authors recognize the value of words, whether written or spoken. Dystopian rhetoric is constrained frequently and coercively. It takes away the ability of its speakers to express their feelings and desires. In such cultures, citizens are being shaped and reinterpreted to match the regime ideologies without this fundamental freedom of speech. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Gilead regime affects its nation's ability by using language to control their specific rational thinking and body through propaganda and censorship. Atwood demonstrates how language manipulation is a necessary precondition for achieving power, both public and private. The moment this power attends, virtually every important aspect of the human condition, such as memory, self-identity, community, and freedom, is vulnerable to irreversible damage.

More precisely, in speculative fiction, neologism and wordplay are helpful signs of a changed, dystopian society in which the government has gained significant power. The author's definition shows the plunge towards dystopia in new words, specific activities or things in such worlds that are frequently devious, hazardous, or menacing and play significant roles in society's functioning. Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is an example of the

types of neologisms that grabbed my curiosity. To describe the government of Gilead's increasingly oppressive practices, Atwood uses existing words and combines them to create new ones. Because these new concepts have origins in existing English vocabulary, helping to alter reality just enough so that the world and language appear both familiar and alien in a valid dystopian speculative fiction form.

Foucault combines power and knowledge into an indestructible entity in which neither exists without the other. On the one hand, he inextricably linked knowledge production to power. On the other hand, knowledge can't occur without power; and power can't exist without knowledge. To wield power, Agents of authority frequently have to rely on these principles to fulfill their disciplinary goals. Discipline agents also help to create a particular 'truth' as long as it serves their purposes. As a result, the production of knowledge and the exercise of power are mutually beneficial. Power and knowledge are always inextricably linked. They have an unavoidable reciprocal relationship. According to Foucault's argument in "*The History of Sexuality*," power relations are not external to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, or sexual relations) but are inherent in the latter. They are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibrium that occur in the end and vice versa. (94)

The authority in Gilead uses two fundamental methods to keep women under control. First, they use specific vocabulary to perpetuate women's subjugation. Second, they resort to acts of violence or threats of violence, a more direct and violent form of dictatorship. By combining these two, the dictatorship in Gilead maintains control over women. In this context, I will analyze the inherent link between language and oppression in *The Handmaid's Tale* using Michel Foucault's discourse principles. I will allude to specific rules of what constitutes "truth." Interpretations, ideas, actions, and utterances, according to Foucault, must be made within the context of what is the underlying "truth" of the discourse's values. In

“*Power/knowledge*,” Foucault states: “Each society has its regime of ‘truth,’ or ‘general politics,’ of truth: the discourse it accepts and allows to function as truth; the mechanisms and instances that allow one to distinguish between true and false statements.” (131). As a result, in Gilead, such claims as the fact of women should not be able to access to read or write, fall inside Foucault’s “truth.”

In Gilead, reading and writing are both considered crimes. Women are forbidden access to books, paper, and pens; even scribbling is a secret activity. If they are detected reading or writing, they cut their arms and legs off; they mercilessly judge things inessential for reproductions. Besides, all reading materials and films were being destroyed, starting with newspapers, which were initially censored but later totally gone. Collective publishing houses have been defunct. After the Gilead leadership; revealed who had performed abortions in pre-Gilead society, they burnings hospital records. Even the Bible, the only text that might consider appropriate reading material, is locked away and only read by the Commander on Ceremony nights. “He can read it to us, but we can't read it ourselves” (“*THT*,” 112). Atwood emphasizes her point, which became a prominent theme in *The Handmaid's Tale*, saying: “In any totalitarian takeover, the goal of all such repression is to mute the voice and eliminate the word, leaving only the voices and words of those in authority. The word itself is supposed to have power elsewhere, which is why so much effort expending to suppress it” (“*An End to Audience*,” 350). Free access to reading and writing, as well as learning and expressing oneself, therefore, is regarded as quite detrimental to the survival of this theocratic society, which is set brutally on denying the reality of women as human beings; because of the regime’s desire to control and repress resistance. These determine Foucault’s “truth,” which is, in this case, a “truth” about control over women.

What is more intriguing is that, inside the sphere of knowledge, whoever controls power, controls knowledge. Hence over what they can say and claim, this is power, and

Foucault argues “the word ‘subject’ has two meanings: subject to someone else through control and dependency, and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings imply a type of authority that oppresses and subjugates” (“*Essential Works of Foucault*,” 331). As a result, the ‘subjects,’ or women like Offred, are forbidden from reading to prevent them from learning. “Who knows if it is true?” Offred describes the televised broadcasting she allows to view, which is under the state-controlled, by broadcasting only government-friendly content and simultaneously obfuscating any information: “It could be old clippings or a forgery. But I keep watching in the hope of being able to read beneath it. Any news is better than no news right now” (Atwood, 92). At the same time, she must fight a part of herself that wants to accept the regime’s “truth.” It only shows negative news about the Republic wars and no news of organized opposition, which is what Offred is most interested to know. “He tells us what we want to believe,” she says of the propagandist-elocutionist. “He has a powerful ability to persuade others. I fight against him” (93). Both “power of knowing the truth, and power to distribute this knowledge,” according to Foucault, are two principal forms of control a state possesses over its people (34). People in Gilead have no choice but to believe what the authorities tell them because they cannot read or write. Gilead deftly rewrites history and seizes control of all avenues of information delivery, including news broadcasts on television.

The neologism existence of the words implies that they are institutionalized and government-sanctioned ways of referring to immoral practices. One of the worse neologism practices in the novel is the name of the Handmaids; this Gilead-created method of referring to women shows that the government approves of, and even encourages, women’s tyranny. They subjected the Handmaids to a re-identification procedure in which they exchanged their previous identity for a new one that is more befitting of Gilead’s principles, thereby rendering her helpless and identity-less, to eliminate traces of the discourse in the society before. As a result, they forced each Handmaid to give up on her name and acquire a patronymic comprising

the preposition 'Of' and the first name of the commander to whom she is assigned. Therefore, the novel's protagonist is known as Offred because her Commander's first name is Fred, making her a "lost person" with no name (Atwood, 132). Offred is an 'everywoman' since she doesn't know her name. The dictatorship requires the Handmaids to forget about their previous lives and morals. Their previous personality and means of self-identification must be eliminated, and changing their names is one method. Although this example may appear insignificant compared to other more severe measures, the male-dominated language of Gilead becomes ever more clear as it shows how the regime works to limit any power for women, including the 'power' of having a separate personality from men. Thus, the process of re-identification is critical for a totalitarian dictatorship like Gilead to survive. It must ensure that persons who have lived in the society 'before' act not just within the context of Gilead discourse but also within the context of another discourse are aware of a different "truth" and do not pass on their knowledge and opinions to the next generation. As said, the regime's tool is the use and control of language to ensure that their discourse is the only one heard.

The next generation of Handmaids will have it easier because they will not know of a different way of life and will grow up according to the regime's values: Aunt Lydia remarked, "You are the generation in transition. It is the most difficult for you. We are aware of the sacrifices you are asking to make. It's difficult to be despised by guys. It will be simpler for those who come after you. They will gladly assume their responsibilities." She didn't say, "Because they won't have any other memories" (Atwood, 127). It is an excellent example of how language twists to obscure Gilead's negative qualities through words. Because the future Handmaids have no awareness of an alternative, it will be simpler to accept their situation. As stated in the Foucault discussion, no discourse can construct out of thin air; no 'truth' can create out of thin air. Even though the new 'truths' appear ludicrous at first, they must be justified

considering the preceding 'truths' conditions, thus diminishing opposition to the official language in the future.

Propaganda and the construction of Gilead's own 'truth' are two crucial factors in maintaining this control. Truth, according to Foucault, is a set of "well-defined procedures for the creation, regulation, distribution, circulation, and use of statements. "'Truth' is inextricably linked to the systems of power that produce and sustain it, as well as the effects of power that it induces and extends. A 'truth,' based regime." (*Power/knowledge*, 133). Gilead creates its truth to bind its people to its values and principles, establishing a regime based on information and facts that ordinary people cannot verify.

According to Foucault, "knowledge is power, and power has control over knowledge." (*Power/knowledge*, 52). The authority manipulates language for their aims, to attain the power. For example, Gilead believes that the cause that contributed to the chaos in the past was the type of freedom that prevailed. Aunt Lydia informs the handmaids that "there are two kinds of freedom: freedom to and freedom from. During the chaos, there was freedom too. Now you are free. Do not dismiss it" (34). They blamed the threat of humanity's existence on God's wrath against women's liberties, oblivious to the real reasons. They argue that the only approach to protection is to return to 'traditional' values and women's traditional roles. The Republic can control and strengthen language by undervaluing historical discourse. Because language is the foundation for thoughts, and those who manipulate language can also control the mind, the concept of 'freedom' in Gilead for future generations will only exist as 'freedom from,' the belief of 'freedom to,' as we know it, will vanish. Thus, the expression used "freedom to" in future generations will be rigorously prohibited.

The Gilead regime utilizes language to create obedient citizens in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Citizens become uniform by speaking a particular way. They lose their identity, but perhaps more significantly, they lose their ability to create rebellious thoughts that may lead

them to confront the system. The Gilead leaders have restricted the manner is far more frightening than the disappearance of printed language from Gilead. The state has specific notions about where and when women should be able to talk and express themselves, and the women fearfully observe these restrictions. The regime assumes that if a person's vocabulary is limited, their thoughts are also restricted. The Handmaids discourse exemplifies this repressive use of language; they must use particular phrases and expressions that are predetermined and appropriate for their roles as surrogate mothers, including "*Blessed be the fruit*" and "*May the Lord open*" (25) "*Under his Eye*," (59) and "*Praise be to God*," (364).

Offred explains the standard greeting between two Handmaids as follows: "*Blessed be the fruit*," she says to me, referring to the norm greeting between us. I respond, "*May the Lord open*," is the accepted response (Atwood, 19). This pre-arranged encounter between two women is quite restrictive. They emphasize the necessity of fertility to the Handmaids through language. The fruit alludes to a child born from the Handmaid's sacred mission. Even the norm farewell sounds like a cautionary note, reminding the Handmaids that they are always "*Under His Eye*" (Atwood, 45). They must never forget the fact that they are under surveillance. The Eye, on the other hand, isn't just about God. It serves as a reminder that the government, with the help of the all-seeing Eye of the complex espionage system, is watching their every move.

The state scrutinizes and censors even the absence of speech or silence. When an Interpreter (and most likely an Eye) asks Offred if she is happy, she realizes that it isn't always the case "It's just as hazardous not to speak" as it is to speak, and murmurs, "Yes, we're quite happy ... I feel compelled to say something. I'm not sure what else to say." (39). "It's safer to make stuff up than to claim you have nothing to reveal," Offred later remarks about 'Testifying' (92). Offred is well aware that she must keep her lips shut and seem foolish, "As is customary, we lived by ignoring. Ignorance is not the same as indifference; you must work at it" (53).

Furthermore, the Gilead lexicon is authoritarian and restrictive. They referred to infertile females and malformed newborns as “Unwomen” and “Unbabies” (144). In the story, we could not even know the protagonist’s real name, “My name isn’t Offred, I have a different name, which no one uses now because it is illegal” (Atwood, 104). Gilead keeps control over women’s bodies by maintaining control of their names. The government’s attitude toward those people reflects through these terms, so they are treated inhumanely and with contempt. This language use has a direct bearing on how people in this society think. They can mistreat each other without feeling guilty or regret if they think of each other mainly, women, as inhuman, as “Un’s” This is, without a doubt, the most horrifying and powerful use of language in Gilead.

They have banned even the most benign language used in Gilead. Graphics and icons, which regard as safer than actual words, have replaced public signs and billboards. “They concluded that even the names of shops were too much temptation for us. Places are now identified solely by their signs” (“*THT*,” 25). “Red hexagons” indicate “A stop” (“*THT*,” 27), the “*Lilies of the Field* shop has signed with a great golden lily” (“*THT*,” 33), “the *Milk and Honey* store has signed with three eggs, a bee, and a cow” (“*THT*,” 34), and the “*Loaves and Fishes* store has signed with a fish with a smile and eyelashes” (“*THT*,” 212). They drew even the placards posted on the executed bodies to inform the public of their crime graphics. When the Gilead regime permits the viewing of written language, the language serves as propaganda, reinforcing the messages previously implanted in the minds of the Handmaids. “Women’s Prayvaganza Today” and “God is a National Resource” are displayed prominently on enormous banners (“*THT*,” 276-277). Throughout the narrative, we get a broad sense of life in Gilead, which is oppressive. Written words no longer exist in this world and have been substituted by fewer ‘threatening’ visuals. For example, Offred, during a shopping trip, notices the first barrier, which is like the barriers that block off roadworks or dug-up sewers:

A yellow and black striped wooden crisscross with a red hexagon means to halt. Because it isn't night, there are several lanterns near the entryway that are not lighted. I know there are floodlights hooked to telephone poles above us for emergency use and troops with machine guns in pillboxes (Guards place) on either side of the road. The wings over my face prevent me from seeing the floodlights or pillboxes. (Atwood, 27).

This detailed account of one of the shopping expeditions illustrates several forms of separating barriers. There are two barrier types, besides the physical barrier represented by the troop's presence, barricades, and the yellow and black wooden crisscross. The first is the visual barrier imposed on the Handmaids by the wings, which limits their peripheral and upward vision as well as their perception. The second barrier is linguistic, as evidenced by the usage of the color indicators rather than words or spoken communication.

Furthermore, men, too, are forbidden from speaking to the Handmaids, effectively isolating not only the protagonist and her peers but the entire state of Gilead. Traders and Handmaids use the tokens to communicate nonverbally in the marketplace. "I grab the tokens from Rita's outstretched hand," Offred says. They have photos of the things they can be exchanged for on them: "twelve eggs, a slice of cheese, and a brown steak-like thing" ("*THT*," 21). Those who have reached the counter later in the marketplace hand their tokens over it to the two men in Guardian uniforms who stand on the other side, "No one says much" ("*THT*," 35). Totalitarian regimes demonstrate their control by restricting verbal communication. Dialogue would imply self-expression, which could elicit opposition.

The Gilead's laws and principal existence are based on the Bible, the Old Testament, which the leaders of Gilead regard as the ultimate source of all legislation and social norms. Atwood, through *The Handmaid's Tale*, aims to highlight the group of people that attempt to

govern the society's private actions; such as procreative rights, under the pretext of religious belief and defining 'moral' behavior, using their ideology to create control regulations for the rest of society. In Atwood's novel, selectivity is the conspicuous fundamentalist feature. The regime manipulates the facts to maintain its power. When the Handmaids listen to the Bible on tape, it is the most blatant illustration. Offred sees that several passages of the Bible have been changing, but she cannot prove this because reading is prohibited:

We listened to it on tape in a man's voice. The poor in spirit are Blessing, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *Blessed be merciful. Blessed be the meek. Blessed are the silent.* I knew they made it up; I knew it was incorrect, and I knew they left things out, but there was no way of knowing for sure. They made it that way, so even the Aunts couldn't accuse the reading of sin. (Atwood, 89)

The sentence "*Blessed are the silent*," which appears in the Beatitudes, was not included in the Bible. The dictatorship incorporates this section to teach the Handmaids the importance of remaining subservient. The silence could also refer to the fact that women cannot read or write. They have been cut off from all forms of communication and information.

Indeed, spirituality is only present in the reciting of the Bible just before the monthly Ceremony by the commanders. They employed biblical texts in such settings to impose "governmental authority and shape a specific reality for the people of Gilead" (Stein, "*Proposal*," 61). Religious writings, according to Foucault, are frequently used to regulate and delimit discourse within organizations, which is what is happening in Gilead. "Things started once and preserved because it assumed that behind them there is a secret or a treasure" ("*Discourse and Punish*," 56). During this Ceremony, Offred hopes to see the truth, the objective truth in the Bible. Citizens of Gilead, particularly the Handmaids, are denied access to the 'truth' area within their fictional universe. The totalitarian government of Gilead

appropriates biblical passages to impose brutal political control, to build a new political reality for its subjects.

Lucy M. Freibert in *“Control and Creativity: The Politics of Risk in Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale,”* investigates the comic implications of biblical allusions and analogies, citing “humorous correspondence between the biblical text and Atwood’s fiction” (283) and “high burlesque” (284) in the prayer sequence preceding the impregnation ritual. The biblical verse Genesis 30:1-3, which serves as the epigraph, emphasizes the value of children over women and discusses the male dominance subject over women in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. It’s about the story of Rachel and her handmaid, Bilhah. Rachel and Leah are sisters who were married to Jacob in the days when polygamy was legal. Leah has no trouble having sons after sons, while her sister Rachel, Jacob’s love, cannot conceive. Rachel persuades Jacob to impregnate Bilhah, her handmaid, so she might have children “through” her. Later, Rachel takes both of Bilhah’s sons that she gives birth to. (Nicolaou Elena, 2017). Gilead uses Rachel’s yearning for children as a pretense for the re-population program. These regime ideas are hand-picked from the Bible to govern the populace and satisfy the ruling class’s personal goals. They use the Bible as the foundation for the state-sanctioned rape, the monthly impregnation ceremony that the handmaids must experience, “Like any theocracy, this regime will cherry-pick a few Bible verses to legitimize its actions” (Atwood, 10). Gilead obliterates the meaning of the biblical scripture in its reimagining by turning a woman’s fertility into a male control tool. Women in Gilead are all trained to “think of themselves as seeds. We’re here for reproduction ... We are two-legged wombs” (*THT*, 146). All of this happened in the name of religion. This is not a religion; but a symptom of religious instructions being manipulated for political control, which in Atwood’s opinion, leads to tyranny:

A group of authoritarian men gain power and strive to re-establish patriarchy in its most extreme form. As an authoritarian state, the regime

employs biblical symbolism, and many totalitarian regimes have used religion as a cover for their control. It simplifies the process of producing heretics. The main religion in the novel is attempting to acquire doctrinal dominance, and familiar religious denominations are being wiped out. (Atwood, "*Politics Power*")

The Republic of Gilead has been set up and rising due to a lack of language and freedom of expression. What is more alarming is how this society perverted language to achieve its dehumanizing objectives. The government uses wordplay to enhance censorship and tyranny, yet it is a byproduct of that oppression. They altered words to alter the language of residents. The new terms are the pinnacle of propaganda, supporting a style of thinking that supports Gilead's rule. The new expressions are somewhat recognizable, with roots in ordinary English, yet they have the same weight as Newspeak's compound words. The government's main drive for compliance and cooperation with the new regime includes neologisms and euphemisms. Language influences citizens' thoughts in both circumstances, causing them to think particular things based on the words they forced them to use. Governments routinely "seize language (and, through language, power) for their repressive aim" (Sisk, 13). Atwood exposes Gilead's deceitful and oppressive behaviors of politicizing wordplay in the guise of propaganda to minimize what is being described and remove remorse, and responsibility from their practices for their purposes, by producing an official special vernacular that ignores and warps reality.

The social classification and context of the novel both use euphemistic terms. For example, the term 'Handmaid' conjures up an idea of a female servant who is unobtrusive and merely exists to service the household's needs in a domestic sense. *Merriam-Webster* defines a 'handmaiden' as "a female servant whose primary job is to serve or assist," according to *Merriam-Webster*, there is no indication of forced servitude or anything like nefarious here; the Handmaids are helpful, necessary to the home members. In actuality, readers are quickly

aware that the Handmaids are oppressed and coerced into this duty, which goes far beyond ordinary domestic work. In fact, except for regular grocery shopping, they provide relatively little housekeeping service. On the other hand, the 'Aunts' in Gilead are merely aunts in the name. Using Aunt as a euphemism for 'trainer' or, most aptly, 'brainwasher' makes the older women seem more familiar. They are named after caring personalities who can be pals and confidants in the reader's world. By framing them in this way, Atwood highlights a critical part of Gilead's actual propagandistic nature. They describe these 'Aunts' as kind, but in actuality, they are the ones who brainwashed the Handmaids into accepting their new jobs without resistance. In addition, if a Handmaid falls pregnant, the Aunts serve as midwives during birthing. In helping a woman give birth, there is an implied trust; since the real aunt may be helpful in the ordinary world of readers. However, the kid is "placed ceremoniously" (Atwood, 126) in the arms of the Wive, not the Handmaid, by these 'Aunts,' who quickly breach that trust.

Furthermore, the Guardian's full title is 'Guardians of the Faith,' which is similarly "Pious but less exact" (Atwood, 20). The holy titles euphemistically transform the 'Guardians' from ordinary guards to lofty and significant members of society, at least in name, if readers don't examine too closely. Giving biblical noble-sounding euphemism names hides the fact that they are usually menial labor jobs. Gilead's goal of manipulating public perception by suggestive language was furthered as a result of this. Even the name Gilead comes from the Bible and refers to a hilly region east of the Jordan River in Palestine. Its Hebrew meaning is "heap of the witness." (Gilead, Genesis 31:48). As the Commanders wish to brand their Gilead, the Bible describes it as a highly quietly and fertile country. Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale*, on the other hand, is the opposite of a heavenly paradise; it is corrupt and defective, and it is a clear illustration of extremists abusing religion for personal gain.

In this context, the word '*Salvaging*' literally means 'saving,' but readers soon learn that it refers to the act of executing individuals who do not follow Gilead's laws, "Three wooden pillars that stand on the stage, with the loops of rope" (Atwood, 273) are prepared for a public group hanging. Atwood is simply relegating such thoughts to a nonviolent mental nook. She appears to do this on purpose to propagandize and change the reader's opinion of state-sanctioned behaviors. Moreover, '*Prayvaganzas*,' the neologism's meaning a jubilant spectacle with religious overtones thrown in for good measure. The innocent-sounding combination of 'pray' and 'extravaganza,' as well as the story's repeated descriptions of the event, work together to normalize the concept and give readers the sense that these are ordinary occasions. Inside Gilead, this also serves as propaganda. The upbeat name obscures the true meaning and function to persuade citizens of its suitability. Though Gilead may not be a strong empire, the "*Salvaging*" and the other ceremonies are indications of mental colonization; Gilead must control its nation's thinking, and Atwood depicts 'brainwashing' through euphemism by changing innocent terms to serve as propaganda.

Religious ceremonies such as the "*Salvagings*" and "*Prayvaganzas*" are promulgated as "steam valves for the female elements" by the state, which cynically selects the texts it privileges to legalize its political domination (Atwood, 390). The state has control over its written texts. Only men are officially permitted to read the Bible, which is kept locked away. The prayers are printed on prayer scrolls and intoned in mechanical monotones by computer banks of prayer gear, but no one reads or listens to them: "you can't hear the voices from outside; only a murmur, a hum" (Atwood, 216). As a result, the computer prayers are like Offred's voice: unheard. In this scene, Atwood embodies the complete abolition of language in Gilead to build and retain control.

The other key fundamentalist trait in Atwood's story is inerrancy. The official government wants its citizens to believe that everything contained in the Bible is accurate, and

they should act under that belief. The Handmaids, for example, are not provided any anesthetics to help them cope with their labor pains because the Bible states that one must suffer to bear children: "I will greatly multiply thy anguish and thy conception; in sorrow, thou shalt bring forth children." (Atwood, 114). The Gilead administration uses the Bible to bolster their ideas. They want the Handmaids to believe that childbirth is a sacred mission for them. The regime's interpretation of the Bible, on the other hand, is literal, as the Handmaids will perish if they fail to produce offspring. Through the Bible, the Sons of Jacob found fertile ground for their views, which fits in with Foucault's theory that "sexuality and politics provide a fertile ground for those in power's prohibitionist techniques" (*"Discourse and Punish,"* 52).

The Gilead regime's commitment to changing the English language to conform to its new cultural standards is through neologisms. However, a neologism isn't the only tool Atwood offers Gilead's leaders; besides the more obvious practice of coining new words, the novel's wordplay also includes euphemism and altered meanings of existing words. Unlike neologism, which uses as a novelty to distract from the horrors of Gilead's new culture, euphemism is a more subtle form of propaganda and control. The familiarity of the word given facilitates the acceptance of the same word with a different meaning already existing in the English language. Gilead, in the novel, uses this familiarity to spread propaganda and fool society members into believing that what they are doing is just and legal. Each of the phrases used by Atwood, which are often capitalized as part of their altered meaning, refers to a specific deed, ceremonial, or cultural phenomenon in Gilead. The new definitions contrast dramatically with the word's original meanings, which are frequently significantly higher negative. In Gilead, language has altered into a tool of oppression.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the enormous impact of language on the maintenance of authority, and regime control over people, can be witnessed. Atwood has shown the harmful effects of words on our lives. Life would be pointless if we did not have a language to express

ourselves and connect with others. Language, on the other hand, has the potential to deceive and oppress. Stein refers to this as a “continuum of repression: once people burn books, the path is open for more censorship” (Stein “*Scheherazade*,” 277).

3.2.4 Consequences of Loss Freedom and Identity in *The Handmaid's Tale*

In dystopian literature, freedom, or the lack thereof, is a dominant theme. Most dystopian literature depicts totalitarian civilizations with severely limited or non-existent freedom. The ruling class, whether it is the government or another sort of social divinity, frequently deceives its citizens into believing that they are free while they are severely confined, both physically and emotionally. According to Harley Ferris, in “*A Study in Dystopian Fiction*,” states that citizens who have their emotional and intellectual freedom repressed become passive:

The suppression of “free radicals” in the human mind and heart, such as love, spiritual awakening, discovery, creativity, and invention, keeps a person focused on his tasks, leaving no time or space to think, consider, reflect or meditate. The motivation is not for themselves, but only for the state; conditioned them to love it. (12)

Women can't have a complete identity until they have control over their bodies; if they don't have control over their bodies, they lack self-control, independence, and integrity. The significant prevalence of sterility in the United States of America has prompted political elites to construct a social system based on religious extremism and strict political hierarchy, to have ultimate control over women's bodies, as depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Women are forbidden from reading, writing, and working since these freedoms could make them rebellious and self-reliant. Gilead's goal is to deprive women of their autonomy to turn them into submissive vessels and reproductive tools that will secure the next generation's breeding. On the other hand, they have been brainwashed by the government into believing that their

reproductive functions are holy, as well as they are too afraid and subservient to fight. Gilead theocracy, the so-called state-in-religion, sees women as continuing to perpetrate vices; hence they are not trusted with any authority or influence. Instead of eliminating them, they have been charitably taken for breeding reasons.

The Handmaid inhabits a body that is not only objectified or fragmented but also strange. Somehow it becomes an enemy who oppresses its inhabitants. The self and the body can no longer communicate with one another. The women work together for the greater good of Gilead as a whole. On the contrary, this dystopian society is designed to oppress and control their body, not enhance them.

Because a woman's identity is limited to her biological functions, her own body enslaves and imprisons her. Handmaids are nurturers and procreators. The totalitarian culture views the entire female organism as a vessel fitted for "the maternity service," as Simone de Beauvoir put it (Scarth, 141). They sacrificed the individuality of the Handmaid. The goal and procedure of bringing newborns into the world receive complete focus. Gilead's masculine gaze and its sexist boundaries are used to conceive their selfhood. As Foucault has argued, "The discourse of sex is the locus of the subject's subjugation." (*"Discipline and punish,"* 150). Gilead marginalizes Handmaids by the objectification and appropriation of their bodies by employing them as reproductive machines.

The Republic of Gilead's residents is well aware of their limits. The Handmaids are being educated that they now have a different kind of liberty. Aunt Lydia said that "there are several types of freedom. It is impossible to have both "freedom to" and "freedom from." It was "freedom to" in the days of chaos. Now you are free. Don't waste it" (Atwood, 24). The freedom to choose to marry or not to marry, to work or not to work, to bore children or not to bear children has been replaced with the freedom from divorce, bankruptcy, and abortion. By removing the need for choice, the state can control the individual desires and channel them into

socially acceptable channels. Therefore, populous freedoms become limited as a result of the government's control over their choices. The Handmaids have lost control over their bodies and, as a result, their identities.

Women in previous generations had careers and property, which they prioritized over children. This type of behavior could not be tolerated, so the Gilead regime's first act after taking power was to abolish women's property rights and fire them from their positions. All of their property and money are supposed to be given to a husband or a close male relative. They have supplanted the key notion that women should have autonomy over their lives and bodies with the principle that reproduction is the most important thing.

'Freedom to' refers to every human being's fundamental right to behave, dress, and speak according to their own free will. Women in the United States had that independence, yet they were sexually abused frequently. The Republic of Gilead is proud of the fact that women, especially the Handmaids, are well-protected. Women have little freedom in such a culture, but they are protected from sexual violence in the streets. Offred is well aware of how restricted her life as a Handmaid is. She understands that every act of liberty comes with its own set of constraints: "I have the night to myself, my own time, to do with what I choose, as long as I am silent. As long as I don't move, as long as I remain motionless." (Atwood, 49).

On the other hand, the entire concept of 'freedom from' is highly contentious, as they directly tied it to the number and degree to which they subject commoners to specific limitations and rules. Another episode in the story demonstrates the public's support of unjustifiable killing, as the guards who killed an innocent Nun moving near their camp were "doing their job," as Cora put it, "keeping us secure." Rita stated, "There is nothing safer than death." (Atwood, 30). Murder becomes acceptable, despite all rational, legal, and even widely accepted human logic, in which people are dehumanized and viewed as insurgents.

It may be crucial to comprehend how people might give up their independence, as they did in Margaret Atwood's novel. Totalitarian oppressors utilize societal stability as a justification to govern and homogenize their populations. In a crisis, Weiss claims, "it is typical for individuals to willingly yield their freedom to a government or other authority that offers them protection, and freedom from uncertainty, danger, terror, hunger, and other such things" (9). The Republic of Gilead created a false sense of security by convincing its individuals that they were safer under the constraints put on them. However, without individual stability, there can be no social stability. Totalitarian oppressors utilize societal stability as a justification to govern and homogenize their populations.

Gilead's view of the body disrupts the coherence between a woman and as merely a means of production. Offred's body has been taken from her. They reduce her to a womb that must contain the seeds of the next generation. She has lost track of where she and her thinking belong in her body. She is exiled from it and exists outside of it. Offred echoed this unease when describing her body, saying that: "My body appears to be obsolete. I try to avoid looking at my body; I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that so thoroughly defines me." (82). She is unable to imbue it with emotions or imbue it with feelings. There is no unity of the subject and the body. Because each occupies a different area, she is detached and alienated from it since Offred is dialectically closed as an individual; her ability to give birth is the only thing that matters. She is no longer considered a person but rather a tool in a utilitarian society. As a result, the feminine individual rejects her own body. Gilead wants to break the body's "concrete soul's oneness" (Carman 6). According to Descartes: "I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am extraordinarily closely tied and, as it were, interwoven with it so that I and the body form a unit" (qtd. in Skirry 98). Whereas Offred's body has become 'something;' that she does not want to identify as her own. Correspondingly, by assembling her own body as "a thing," she perceives the separation of her

body from herself. That is why she sometimes has trouble distinguishing between reality and her dreams because she recalls the vision in which she was with her child and feels frantic and despair about her predicament. Offred reminisces and expresses her despair occasionally: "Perhaps the life I believe I am living is a paranoid delusion" (Atwood, 109). And now and again, she "hears something inside her body disintegrate" (Atwood, 146). Overall, she is distraught as a result of the separation of her body and self.

By claiming ownership of the body's subjectivity, the Gilead society destroys the subject's unity with its body. Gilead's leaders have taken every measure to erase individual and independent thought from its citizens. Therefore, Offred's opinions, even those personal about her body image, have been shaped by what she has been taught. As a result, of the inconsistent commands she has received, she has mixed feelings about herself. According to Catherine McLay, "Atwood's works include protagonists who are 'in quest of their identity,' the novels are a study of inner space, the external environment becoming a projection of the inner mental trip." (123). In "*Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*," Sidonie Smith contends that "If, as Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty indicate, being 'home' refers to a location where one lives within familiar, safe, and protected bounds," the autobiographical subject may discover that the body is the residence of a stranger who is not at home in the body and is homeless. Martin and Mohanty add, "The realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of differences even within oneself, caused by the link of specific bodies to the political body gives rise to an internalized sensation of homelessness." (Sidonie, 128)

As they monitor the Handmaid's bodies, they lose their individuality sense and become collectively held property. Offred states that: "We are containers; the insides of our bodies are all that matters." (Atwood, 126). She thinks of herself as a piece of a collectively owned resource throughout her story, notably when she refers to herself in the plural, implying that a

community identity has swallowed her identity. When speaking of her skin, she says to the Commander, “our skin gets dry,” and at the delivery scene, she says, “we are one grin” (Atwood, 126). Because “the same body that serves me, is a notably incompletely constructed thing. I do not have the possibility of removing myself from my body nor it from me” (Husserl and Welton, 184). The Handmaid’s body engulfs her entire identity, anchoring her selfhood in her womb. Offred has trouble communicating with body parts whose worth varies from one organ to the next. Offred believes her body “is never entirely reducible to being only a thing; nor does it manage to soar above the status of a thing,” as Elizabeth Grosz puts it. As a result, “it can be both a thing and a non-thing.” (“*Volatile Bodies*,” 164). This perplexity is what causes her to be concerned about her skin while yet despising her physique. They entrapped her in the prison of her own body, which she does not possess.

The red uniform worn by the Handmaids in “*The Handmaid’s Tale*” severely restricts the body. It covers every part of the body except the face and becomes a tool for Gilead’s patriarchal ideology. Dress is a disciplinary action that requires submission and conformance. It eliminates unique clothing choices to create a mass of undifferentiated bodies. Offred’s outfit causes a bodily disintegration because it obscures her shape and neutralizes her uniqueness. Her body becomes a familiar object among hundreds of similar ones due to the red-coded outfit. The dress can subvert and negotiate dominance since it is “a kind of visual metaphor for identity” (Kuhn 30). The wings that encircle the Handmaid’s faces, on the other hand, are unquestionably the most restrictive objects. They dehumanize the Handmaids and turn them into robots. They also prevent the Handmaids from seeing reality. Offred comprehends the role of the wings: “Given our wings, our blinkers, it is difficult to look up, difficult to gain a full picture of the sky, of anything. We learned to look at the world through shots.” (Atwood, 30). Gilead tightens its grip on what women wear to prevent them from expressing themselves. As a result, when Offred encounters a group of Japanese visitors, the manner they dress fascinates

and shocked her: “They appearing to nude. It has taken such a short amount of time for us to change our thoughts on issues like these. Then I remember: I used to dress like this. That was freedom” (Atwood, 28). In addition, Gilead doesn’t require mirrors. Angela Michelle Gulick correctly observes, “These Handmaids do not need mirrors because they don’t have to worry about their physical appearances. They are no longer real individuals, but virginal sacred vessels” (76). Mirrors are no longer objects of self-awareness but rather objects of feminine captivity, as they strip them of all aspects of uniqueness.

On the other hand, Offred’s fellow Handmaid, Ofglen, is also a part of the resistance. She informs Offred about the opposition and requests that she pass on information received from her Commander, which Offred refuses to do. Offred is relieved when Ofglen hangs herself, rather than being captured by “The Eyes,” Gilead’s secret police, so Ofglen cannot tell anything about her later. “She finished it before they arrived. I’m so relieved. I am grateful to her. She died so that I could live. I’ll be sad later” (Atwood, 298). Offred shows no sadness but rather relief that she is secure for the time being. Unlike other women, such as Ofglen, who would rather die than expose anything that will harm the resistance, Offred is content just to be alive. Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor mentions this in her essay “*From Irony to Affiliation in Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale*,” argues that “Offred is relieved when Ofglen commits suicide because it means that no one will find out about her disobedience, and indirect ties to MayDay (the resistance, her own).” However, she recognizes right away that she has deceived herself by feeling this way; She says, “I am a wretch. I feel their actual force for the first time” (Wagner-Lawlor, 86). Offred had ‘betrayed’ her friend Ofglen by feeling relieved rather than sorrowful because of the powerful Gilead rhetoric. She realizes that the regime’s authority has had a significant impact on her mental health.

The absence of voice mirrors the lack of names. Offred “sings in her brain only.” (Atwood, 67) Resulting in a loss of identity and freedom. Serena Joy, the Commander’s Wife,

is also oppressed and voiceless; as a former gospel singer, she no longer has the freedom to listen to herself. "And sometimes from the front sitting room, there will be the thin sound of Serena's voice from a disc made long ago and played now with the volume low, so she won't be caught listening as she sits there remembering herself." (Atwood 67-68) It is also true of the title, as they gave us the story of an unidentified Handmaid.

The totalitarian patriarchy of Gilead separates women and subsequently relegates them to the domestic periphery, preying on the societal turmoil. Offred serves as a continual reminder that the woman with that name is Fred's wife. Offred attempts unsuccessfully to persuade herself that a name does not define a person and contradicts herself: "I tell myself it does not matter, your name is just a telephone number (...), but what I tell myself is wrong, it matters" (Atwood, 94). Offred's real name, according to Lois Feuer, "is essential to her because it represents a link to her past before Gilead and her self-concept as a valuable human" ("*The Calculus of Love and Nightmare*," 85). They sacrifice individuality in Gilead for the sake of the community, which prevents the development of identity. Following this line of reasoning, "not only their names are obliterated, but also their discourses—their personalities, identities, and human being backgrounds" (Stein, "*Scheherazade*," 271). They deny the Handmaid's basic life; when they are stripped of their real names and forced to serve their masters because free language production is a crucial component of identity formation.

Offred and her fellow Handmaids do not have their private place because Gilead prohibits these processes from its inhabitants. They travel between areas unnoticed and unheard, unable to properly claim a room as their own since they have lost their uniqueness. Individuality and identity are simply not valued in Gilead. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines the term "private place" as "belonging to or for the use of a specific person or group; not for public use" and "a place where you are unlikely to be disturbed; quiet." Privacy in this sense is out of reach for all characters in *The Handmaid's Tale*, given the

ongoing observation, penetration, and punishment by governmental officials and the household members. Offred tries to adjust to her limited freedom, knowing that “a rat in a maze is free to move wherever it wants as long as it stays inside the maze” (Atwood, 165).

The Handmaid's bodies have merged into one. They reeducate the Handmaids of the Red Center to see the female body as a body of production, a body of “freedom from” various things done with the body. Thus, From the freed body to a restricted body. The Gilead's stringent supervision of women, especially the Handmaid's mind, and body exemplify Foucault's theory of disciplinary authority and the submissive body. Gilead's discipline is based on Foucault's idea that “the individual body becomes an element that may be placed, manipulated, and articulated on other bodies. Discipline is no more just art of distributing bodies, extracting and amassing time from them; but of composing forces to create an efficient machine” (164). In Gilead, Women's identities have no value; they are entirely separate from their nature and freedom. As I have sought to demonstrate, identity in the Republic of Gilead's reduced to a few specific roles, each of which serves just one purpose and which together form an “efficient machine” of households and fertility.

Atwood's feminist concerns are evident through *The Handmaid's Tale*, but so is her concern for fundamental human rights. Offred's entire existence in Gilead is a physical and psychological struggle due to the misery that such a life entails. She not only tries to discover love and passion where none appears to exist, but she also tries to understand and find her own experience and identity. The lines between what objectifies Offred and what empowers her to appear to be blurred since the fragments examined in this research allow for different readings. The reader experiences the same bewilderment and worries of women's struggles in the novel in a world that constantly attacks them with their contradicting images.

3.3 Totalitarian Surveillance in Modern America

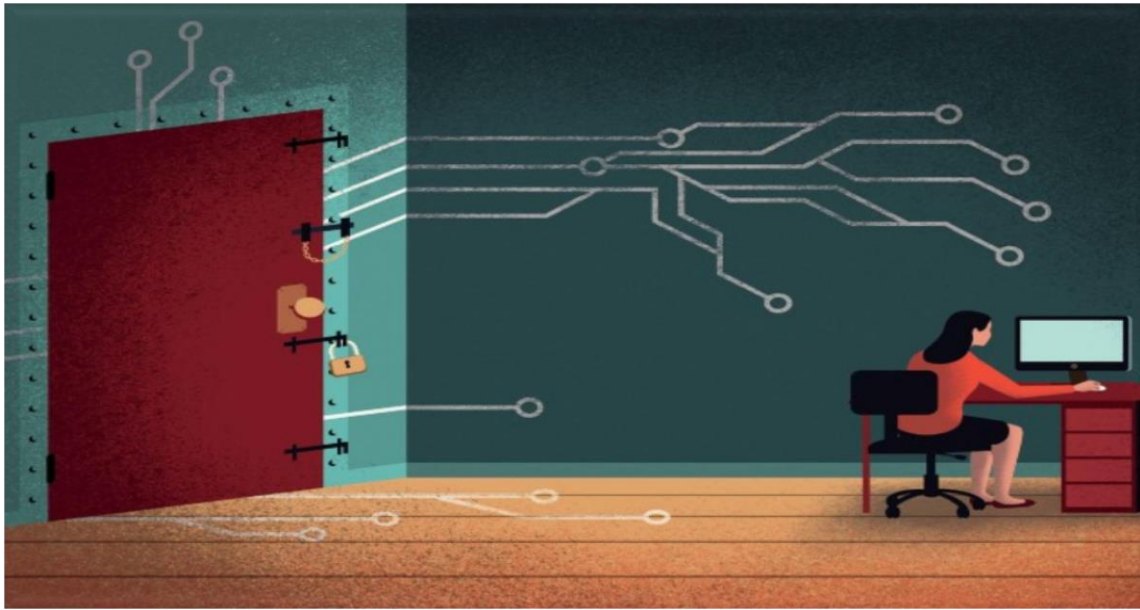


Illustration by: Davide Bonazzi. Credit to: Harvard Magazine.

The United States was regarded itself as a beacon of freedom, democracy, and transparent governance, for centuries. The US authorities pride themselves on the media's ability to report on matters of public concern. This research examines the impact of large-scale electronic surveillance on the practice of individual liberty. In the face of the US government's tremendously strong surveillance system, privacy is becoming increasingly scarce and harder to retain. If the United States does not respond quickly and effectively to these concerns, it risks causing substantial and long-term damage to the democratic fabric of the country.

President George W. Bush's administration rushed to increase the government's ability to predict future unknown terrorist threats, After the demolition of the World Trade Center buildings, on the attacks on September 11, 2001. To achieve this purpose, the Bush administration launched a series of massive data-gathering initiatives known as Stellar Wind. This system entailed the gathering of four types of data without a warrant: telephone content (words spoken), telephone metadata (numbers dialed), Internet content (messages in emails and other online messaging), and Internet metadata (non-content information from digital messages and transactions). Because the various methods of collecting expected violated either

statute law, the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution, or both, Stellar Wind was a top-secret program. It was a forerunner to new legal frameworks that permitted President Bush and President Barack Obama to replicate and extend this system to a more complicated broad surveillance system.

3.3.1 PRISM Surveillance System and the Monopoly of Information

The US government is currently adopting a wide range of surveillance programs that, thanks to technological advancements, enable it to collect personal information and the content of secret conversations on an unprecedented scale. Many of these surveillance systems have recently come to light due to the media reporting based on allegations made by former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden in 2013. Some of these monitoring operations, such as the classified PRISM program, collect personal information about Americans whose not been accused of terrorism or wrongdoing. Snowden documents disclosed confidential presentation slides detailing the existence and functioning of PRISM as a system that provides the United States government to acquire user data from firms such as Microsoft, Google, Apple, Yahoo, YouTube, Facebook, Skype, and others. Furthermore, they've disclosed that the US collects massive amounts of data about phone calls made to, from, and inside the State known as metadata. It also captures the contents of international conversations, emails, and phone calls regularly. It has been collecting vast volumes of cell phone location data on a large scale. Besides, the comprehensive interception of all phone calls made within, into, and out of Afghanistan and the Bahamas and a daily collection of millions of images so the NSA can run facial recognition programs and hundreds of millions of emails acquisition and chat contact lists from around the world, all this done under the name of obtaining foreign intelligence, the collection might be enormous, opportunistic, and targeted without any basis of rights.

The US government has acknowledged the need for reform in response to public concern about the program's encroachment on the privacy of millions of people in the US and throughout the world. It has, however, taken only a few significant steps in that direction. On the contrary, the US government, notably the intelligence community, has adamantly defended monitoring operations as necessary for safeguarding US national security. On June 18, 2013, NSA Director General Keith Alexander informed Congress that since 9/11, 2001, "over 50" terrorist plots have been foiled thanks to monitoring activities. (Ellen Nakashima, *The Washington Post*). Officials contend that in a world of constantly evolving global threats, the US cannot know ahead of time which global communications will be pertinent to its intelligence activities; as a result, it requires the right to collect and monitor a wide range of contacts. Sinha, G A in Human Rights Watch states that:

In our discussions with them, US officials claimed that the programs are effective at filling operational gaps and delivering significant intelligence to the US. They also claimed that the programs are legal and subject to strict, multi-layered oversight, as well as restrictions governing the use of information gathered by them. (*"Liberty to Monitor,"* 2014)

The current US monitoring strategy, which is large-scale and often indiscriminate, comes at a high price. It erodes global digital privacy and sets a terrible example for those countries that are growing their surveillance capabilities, such as India, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and others. It also undermines US credibility in pushing for internet freedom on an international scale, which the US has named a key foreign policy goal since at least 2010. This surveillance system revealed by Edward Snowden caused national protests in the United States on July 4, 2013, "*Restore the Fourth*" marches were held around the United States to oppose NSA snooping. (Bowe Rebecca, "*NSA Surveillance,*")

The New York Times reported that the NSA has been conducting warrantless spying on Americans since shortly after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. (James Risen and Eric Lichtblau, 2005). According to the New York Times, President Bush had given the National Security Agency (NSA) permission to listen in on US citizens' phone calls and collect their emails without a warrant. The warrantless wiretapping operation violated both; the US Constitution, and the federal law governing Foreign Intelligence International Counterterrorism Surveillance "the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act" of 1978 ("FISA" or "FISC"), according to a federal judge. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) specifies rules for physical and electronic surveillance, as well as the acquisition of "foreign intelligence information" between "foreign powers" and "agents of foreign powers" suspected of espionage or terrorism. "These limitations, however, spurred Congress to amend FISA, permitting systematic surveillance without court approval of individuals," implying that the NSA's surveillance efforts had broadened in scope, possibly to an alarming degree. (Sinha, G A, *"Liberty to Monitor"*)

The current NSA surveillance crisis began on June 5, 2013, when the *Guardian* disclosed a secret FISC order from April 2013. (Glenn Greenwald, 2013). Verizon, a US telecommunications company, was ordered to hand over all call logs in its systems to the government (daily, for three months). "The numbers of both participants on a call, as well as location data (IP addresses), call duration, unique IDs, and the time and duration of all calls are passed along," according to the article. (*"Privacy and Civil Liberties,"* 22). Many people refer to the information Verizon forced to turn over as 'metadata,' which refers to information about conversations or transactions rather than the content of those communications (that is, the specific words uttered). Although the *Guardian* piece focused on metadata collection rather than the substance of phone calls, it re-ignited the NSA debate by demonstrating that "the

NSA's call-records program was astonishingly broad and indiscriminate through a rare, primary document" (Glenn Greenwald, 2013).

Within days, Edward Snowden, a former NSA contractor, stepped forward as the document source. Concerned about the NSA's monitoring practices, Snowden gathered an enormous number of NSA files and shared them with members of the press before leaving his job as a contractor for the agency. Since the Guardian report, a slew of follow-up stories has surfaced in other publications, many of which appear to be based on documents provided by Snowden. They substantiate much of what has previously been claimed and disclose much more, illustrating the outlines of the US government's formidable and increasing surveillance infrastructure. A range of surveillance programs aiming at various types of electronic information and communications have been described in specific reports, including the large-scale gathering of 'metadata' relating to domestic phone calls; the content of international chats, emails, and voice calls between Americans, as well as electronic documents, shared globally; business documents relating to international money transfers by Americans (for a CIA program); enormous volumes of location data from cell phones; a now-defunct program to track American's internet usage and emailing patterns; and address books and contact lists from personal email and chat accounts around the world. Where the United States claimed that it is secretly using information gathered through surveillance purportedly conducted for intelligence purposes in standard criminal investigations. (*"Liberty to Monitor,"* 15-16).

By its very nature, big-scale monitoring frequently affects the interests of a significant number of people who are not concerned with any wrongdoing. The US government uses the PRISM system to perform large-scale surveillance using numerous legal powers. As of July 2014, the public was aware of Section 215 of the USA PATRIOT Act, Section 702 of FISA, and Executive Order 12,333.22. Besides these authorities, the FBI can employ National Security Letters to collect enormous amounts of data about national security investigations in

large numbers and without judicial scrutiny (NSL). According to Foucault, “modern societies are characterized by omnipresent surveillance, which is accumulated, in a formal ‘reports and registers’ that comprise ‘an immense police text’ that creates a ‘permanent account of individuals’ behavior.” (*Discipline and Punish*,” 214)

1. Surveillance under Section 215 of the PATRIOT Act

A surveillance act that allows the National Security Agency to collect large amounts of Telephone metadata. In June 2013, the Guardian declared that the phone call metadata program operated under Section 215 of the PATRIOT Act, which allows the acquisition of ‘tangible items’ such as phone records. The bulk telephony metadata program offers the government access to data (for example, metadata on all Verizon phone calls collected daily, allowing the NSA to gather the ‘phone records’ of millions of Verizon customers, based on the FISA Court. (Spencer Ackerman, “*Snowden disclosures*,” 2016).

2. Surveillance under Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Act (FISA)

Federal law allows the Executive Branch to issue year-long warrants for collecting the content of international communications and other data of persons believed to be outside the United States to get broadly defined foreign intelligence information created by the FISA Amendments Act (FAA). The FISA Court approves the government’s ‘minimization procedures’ and ‘targeting procedures’ to guarantee that monitoring is directed at non-US persons outside the US regularly, but it does not issue particular warrants or authorize specific surveillance targets. Under Section 702, the government can acquire and utilize American’s international communications or internationally shared data. Non-US citizens are totally unprotected under these programs, according to the targeting and minimization processes that have been made public so far. (*Liberty to Monitor*,” p.13). Since

2008, Section 702 of the FISA Amendments Act allows services intelligence to eavesdrop on foreigners without a warrant. The NSA, on the other hand, acquired massive amounts of American communications via PRISM. Furthermore, once this information is collected, under section 702, different government agencies keep and search American's phone calls, emails and chats without a search warrant, without a factual predicate, and for several reasons unrelated to foreign intelligence or national security in a mixture of troubling ways. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) can operate a scan for the data of the PRISM to see if Americans are committing routine crimes without any prior suspicion, and a search warrant, this procedure is known as 'backdoor searching'" (Jennifer Granick *"Reining in Warrantless Wiretapping of Americans,"* 3). Officials from the government have frequently stated that section 702 has no bearing on Americans. (Granick, *"American Spies,"* 119). They have declined to estimate the number of Americans whose conversations have been recorded.³ The general people are unaware of Section 702's impact on American privacy. There are valid reasons for caution. The Washington Post looked at a sample data collection that Edward Snowden gave to them where the NSA analyzed and limited the data gathered under section 702. Among the documents were medical records sent among family members, CVs from job hopefuls, and academic transcripts of schoolchildren, a young girl dressed in religious garb beams at a camera outside a mosque in one photograph.⁴ The information contained 'scores' of photos of babies and toddlers in bathtubs with their mothers, etc. (qtd. in Granick, *"Reining in Warrantless Wiretapping of*

³ Dustin Volz, "U.S. to disclose estimate of number of Americans under surveillance," Reuters, December 16, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cyber-surveillance-idUSKBN1452FX>.

⁴ B. Gellman, J. Tate, and A. Soltani, "In NSA-intercepted data, those not targeted far outnumber the foreigners who are," *Washington Post*, July 5, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/in-nsa-intercepted-data-those-not-targeted-far-outnumber-the-foreigners-who-are/2014/07/05/8139adf8-045a-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html.

Americans,” 7). Thus, a recently declassified FISC judgment from November 2015 verified what many people already knew: section 702 collects substantial quantities of data on US citizens. In another way, they subjected Americans to widespread, warrantless surveillance due to the spying PRISM program.

3. Surveillance under Executive Order 12333

When President Ronald Reagan issued Executive Order 12333 in 1981, it went into effect. It has been revised from time to time, but it is still the most prominent executive order governing US intelligence activities, particularly those conducted abroad. Executive Order 12333, like the minimization procedures outlined above, provides certain protections for US citizens, mandating the intelligence community to ‘use the least intrusive tactics feasible’ for US citizens. However, in *“NSA infiltrates links to Yahoo, Google data centers worldwide, Snowden Documents say,”* Barton Gellman and Ashkan Soltani declared that the US government is undertaking widespread surveillance under Section 12333, including “secretly breaking into the main communications cables that connect Yahoo and Google data centers throughout the world.” (*“Washington Post,”* 2013). As a result, it appears that the government can use the executive order to acquire enormous amounts of data on US citizens. (Mark Jaycox *“US Government’s Spying Authority: Executive Order 12333,”* 2013)

This broad surveillance of the PRIMS system caused some of the NSA’s monitoring operations to be challenged in court by a varied coalition of interest groups and private organizations. The US government was used on July 16th by a broad coalition of plaintiffs for “an illegal and unconstitutional program of electronic monitoring dragnet,” used by the NSA to collect all phone records handled by *Verizon, AT&T, and Sprint* in the US. Besides, the

Electronic Privacy Information Center and the American Civil Liberties Union have filed separate lawsuits against NSA. (T.C. Sottek and Janus Kopfstein, "*PRISM*," 2013)

Albeit, the specifics of their cooperation in government surveillance of US residents remain unknown. Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, and other companies have increased their pressure on the United States government to declassify the mechanism that forces them to send over customer data to the government. "We think the US constitution guarantees our right to disclose more information with the public, yet the government is prohibiting us," Microsoft's general counsel Brad Smith stated in an impassioned plea on July 16, 2013. (Brett Molina "*Transparency on data requests*," 2013). Shoshana Zuboff describes this United States absolute cover-up of information and PRISM system hidden truths as follows:

Societies in an information civilization are determined by questions of knowledge. How Is It Distributed? Who regulates it? Who protects that authority? Who can say? Who decides who knows and who doesn't? Although we never elected them to govern, surveillance capitalists now have the answers to all of our questions. They assert ownership rights to our personal information and protect that authority with the ability to manage crucial information systems. (Zuboff "*The Coup We Are Not Talking About*," 1)

Domestic and international arguments have erupted in response to the Snowden revelations regarding whether and how to alter US monitoring techniques. The majority of the debate among US policymakers has been on the implications of monitoring American's privacy rights. According to the US government, its monitoring actions are legal and vital to state national security preservation. However, the surveillance threats on democratic nations eventually push us to face the inconvenient truth that has loomed over the past two decades: "We can have either democracy or a surveillance society, but not both at the same time. An

existential and political impossibility is a democratic monitoring society. It is a battle for our information civilization's spirit. Make no mistake." (Zuboff *"The Coup We Are Not Talking About,"* 2021). Indeed, a privacy sacrifice is also a democratic sacrifice. We know this surveillance climate, covered by modern democratic society, is what Jeremy Bentham called the "Panopticon," a prison built to allow the observer to monitor everything while remaining unseen. Similarly, when you're under constant observation from your home, you're in an unseen prison.

Perhaps the most significant systemic flaw with surveillance is a lack of accountability. Modern surveillance relies on an unacceptably high amount of secrecy, which is the root of this lack of accountability. Spy agencies have long kept surveillance secrets from their targets, such as surveillance tactics, agent identities, and information obtained. But now, in an age of information overload and a world where terrorists lurk among the innocent, everyone's data be monitored. As a result, they disguise modern surveillance from the populace. However, the American intelligence community has learned that it needs to connect with the public more effectively after the Snowden revelations. It is partly to ensure that the public is aware of the measures in place; to minimize spying.

In response to public criticism, President Barack Obama and the US Congress have shown some understanding; through their willingness to declare surveillance system changes. President Barack Obama established the *"President's Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies"* in August 2013. In December 2013, the committee released a report advocating some changes to US surveillance techniques. (*"Liberty to Monitor,"* 16). In January 2014, the PCLOB held hearings on the surveillance operations and released a report that suggested changes to Section 215 of the Patriot Act. The PCLOB issued a second report in July 2014, proposing only minimal changes to Section 702 (Privacy and Civil Liberties (PCLOB) *"Report on the Surveillance Program,"* July 2014). However, in *"Obama's Speech*

on *N.S.A. Phone Surveillance*,” President Barack Obama acknowledged the validity of some concerns about government spying in January 2014, where he promised to make some modifications, including moving data storage from the bulk of domestic metadata programs to private enterprises. (Stephen Crowley, “*New York Times*”). “Currently, the intelligence community is selectively releasing opinions, so influencing public perception and regulating what people know about surveillance laws.” (Granick, “*Reining in Warrantless Wiretapping of Americans*,” 19). Until this writing, there has been no significant tightening of the legal authorities that allow the government to collect massive amounts of metadata and communications content, Section 215, Section 702, and Executive Order 12,333 appears to ensure that widespread and indiscriminate content collection will continue.

The use of surveillance systems by the United States national security has quietly spread to the point where they are vulnerable to undemocratic abuse. The first step toward resolving this issue is to amend the above sections, as they now legitimize programs and laws that jeopardize civil liberties.

3.4 Propaganda and the Monopoly of Information through Surveillance

A conventional characteristic of a totalitarian state is information monopoly. To stay in power and maintain populace control, a leader must employ propaganda and fabricate information to manipulate people’s minds. Complete media domination characterizes this. Information monopoly, like surveillance, is a tool used by those in authority to persuade others of their ideology and gain their trust in the leader’s decisions. Surveillance is a popular means of accomplishing this; by creating a permanent surveillance sense in citizen’s daily life. This permits the opportunity for the regime to monopolize information efficiently that ensures blindly obeying citizens of the state. As a result, totalitarian regimes are willing to go to any length to secure public support, including propaganda, fabricating facts, rewriting history, and manipulating people through persuasive language. Ironically, we realize this essential aspect

of the totalitarian regime in fiction and future societies through the earlier discussion of *The Handmaid's Tale* and modern America.

Officially, Gilead and Modern America discourse is so powerful because no alternative “truths” are allowed to adopt by the public rather than the official ones declared by the regime. It is hard to organize an effective resistance when people are unaware of the absolute “truth.” Particularly the “truth” of surveillance purpose and knowledge monopoly. These highlight the power features and their distribution in totalitarian societies where the regimes paid much attention to communication control and surveillance. Shoshana Zuboff thinks of surveillance as an economic machine; she states that “surveillance capitalists have learned to defend their claims by rhetoric, persuasion, menace, seduction, deception, fraud, and outright theft. They will fight in any way they can to keep this economic machine running.” (*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*,” 483)

3.5 Understanding the Issue of Freedom

Jean-Jacques Rousseau believes that a perfect society existed in pre-civilization Europe before the progress of civilization tainted it. Dystopia is defined as a society that civilization has perverted. Environmental degradation is a hallmark of dystopias, which might cause by excessive use of equipment or the use of explosives. Within a community, violence and hegemonic power supplant order and human goodness. Dystopia is frequently associated with the lack of democracy and unbalanced power distribution. It also shows a lack of hospitality in the concept of citizenship. Political turmoil and injustice characterize dystopian cultures. Primary features include increasing political and economic decline, as well as the ongoing erosion of freedom. In the futuristic vision, those in positions of power massacre and oppress people. Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel shows a group of women exploited by the subordination of their bodies. They are slaves to Gilead's oppressive sexist and totalitarian regime that denies them the freedom and control over their bodies. *The Handmaid's Tale* raises

several interesting themes about paradise, freedom, and justice, particularly the female bodily experience. Indeed, Atwood explains in *Writing with Intent* that “the Utopia-Dystopia as a form invites us to reconsider what we mean by the term human, and above all, what we mean by the word freedom” (95). Outside of the idealistic understanding of the term, this thought encourages one to seek the actual definition and boundaries of freedom. In today’s society, it calls for a rethinking of what it means to be free.

Is freedom possible in utopia if it is not possible in dystopia? Any society’s mechanism depends on the requirement for social control. It governs under standards and rules that help to keep the peace and freedom. Goodwin Barbara provides helpful resources for resolving this issue. Coercion, Terror, Legal Punishment, Education or Rational Instruction, Morality, Inducements, Indoctrination, and Psychological Conditioning, are the eight kinds of social control she discusses in *Social Science and Utopia*; she writes: “All effective means of social control predicate on the successful harnessing of man’s faculties; physical control exploits man’s vulnerability to pain, while other disciplines use the intellect, and psychological control strives to master man through his mind.” (84) Thus, freedom is always already contaminated and limited by a social control that seeks to achieve utopia. Michel Foucault’s concept of power also helps define the boundaries of an ideal society. For him, power is everywhere, dispersed in society. Because it is an omnipresent human dynamic that sets laws and regulates human relations. It’s as productive as it is repressive and prohibitive. People and authorities wield power over each other. Therefore, everyone is subject to the little power that everyone has. Thus, freedom is chained by communal and interactive power.

Is there justice in a utopia society? Justice, according to Jacques Derrida, has not yet come. It’s either a request or a promise. It’s a desire that can’t realize since economic and political factors influence legislation and, as a result, is reliant on oppressions. On the one hand, because the difference is inherent in society, it cannot be founded on homogeneity. As a result,

laws aiming to treat everyone equally cannot be administered evenly to each community member. Laws reflect “the economic and political interests of the dominating forces of society” (Griffin and Moylan, 47). Those in positions of power who cannot speak to everyone create and seize laws, like discourses. The law must be revised and rewritten regularly. It will not be able to deliver on its promise if it is applied haphazardly in each circumstance. Justice’s existence becomes much more implausible in the absence of a stable and grounded reference. “If ‘a judge’ wishes to be just, he cannot satisfy himself with applying the law,” writes Derrida, “Every time, he needs to manufacture a new law” (Griffin and Moylan, 54). As a result, everyone will have equal chances and civil rights; thus, they will express their freedom of choice without fears of public opinion or law interfering.

3.6 The Impact of Totalitarian Surveillance on Individual’s Freedom

Do people behave differently when they believe they are being watched? Even in a modern democracy, can awareness of monitoring influence the behavior of an entire society? What are the ramifications of various forms of privacy invasions?

Apart from the looming specter of an Atwood dystopia, we don’t fully understand why surveillance is harmful and why we should be scared of it as a society. We lack an understanding of what ‘privacy’ means and why it matters so that the answer has anything to do with it. We’ve been able to live with this situation in part since our fears of permanent surveillance have consigned us to dystopian fiction. These warnings, on the other hand, are no longer fiction. Digital technologies, which have also created minutely detailed archives of those lives, have changed our lives. In this age of panic, the Modern American government has demonstrated a strong desire to obtain this information and exploit it for unknown purposes. Although we have a law protecting us from government surveillance, but cannot challenge covert government programs until they are exposed. Even when they are, the surveillance law

merely affords rudimentary protections. Courts typically dismiss objections to such programs due to a lack of standing, arguing that mere surveillance does not constitute a crime.

The crucial point is that modern societies do not comprehend why or when government spying is problematic. Existing attempts to identify the risks of monitoring are frequently ineffective, and they often fail to talk in words that are likely to affect the legislation. I attempt to explain the dangers of government surveillance in this article. I use literature and the work of scholars in the new multidisciplinary field of “surveillance studies” to illustrate what such damages are and why they matter. I’ll go beyond the haziness of existing surveillance ideas to present a more logical understanding and a more practical strategy.

Privacy is both a social virtue and a democratic ideal. The American government data surveillance system, which has sparked the most current privacy-related scandal, has prompted critics and civil libertarians to declare that such programs violate privacy. That argument has largely failed in the courts and the legislature thus far; this is not because privacy is a minor virtue; but because it lacks the rhetorical strength to counter opposing arguments in favor of national security. The current situation of privacy law in the United States suggests that privacy will remain a high-level ideal but that authorities will be unable or unwilling to enforce it in practice. All data and conversations are at risk of being followed in the information age since they are stuck with outdated and incomplete privacy laws that only cover restricted categories of personal information.

On a theoretical level, I’ll explain why and when monitoring is harmful. First, monitoring is detrimental because it can limit our ability to exercise our civil liberties. Including the surveillance of people when they are thinking, reading, and conversing with others to make up their thoughts regarding political and social concerns in referring to civil freedoms. Such intellectual policing is particularly damaging because it may discourage people from experimenting with novel, unpopular, or critical ideas. We need what knowing to as

“intellectual privacy” to secure our intellectual freedom to think without official scrutiny or interference.

The most significant flaw of surveillance is that it jeopardizes a value dubbed “intellectual privacy.” New ideas often develop best away from the intense scrutiny of public exposure. According to intellectual-privacy theory, people should be able to make their own decisions at times and places of their choosing. It requires a meaningful guarantee of privacy protection from surveillance or interference to promote this kind of intellectual freedom. It relies on the premise that “free minds are the cornerstone of a free society, and the observation of the belief formation and idea generation can cause a negative impact.” (Neil Richards, *Intellectual Privacy*, 403). The intellectual-privacy approach protects ‘intellectual’ activities in the broadest sense, thinking and making sense of the world with our minds. Intellectual privacy is a subset of all things that we might name ‘privacy,’ thus, it is a crucial subset. However, intellectual privacy is not only for intellectuals; it is a necessary form of privacy for all individuals.

The intellectual privacy theory lies on two statements, one normative and the other empirical. The normative claim is that the commitment to free and unrestricted thought and belief is at the heart of Anglo-American civil rights and that free persons should form their minds about major and minor, significant and trivial issues. At the very least, this assertion necessitates safeguarding people’s rights to think and read, similarly to the social practice of private consultation with confidantes. Individuals can acquire both; intellectual variety and eccentric individuality when their rights and social behaviors are protected. They express the belief that essential ideas like truth, value, and culture should emerge from the ground up rather than the top down. (Julie E. Cohen *Configuring the Networked Self*, 2012)

The second premise at the heart of the intellectual privacy theory is empirical: surveillance causes us to gravitate toward the mainstream and the mundane. It is a notion that

when we are monitoring while indulging in intellectual pursuits, broadly defined, thinking, reading, web surfing, or private conversation, they inhibit us from engaging in thoughts or actions that the watchers could deem abnormal. Surveillance thus jeopardizes our society's core values of intellectual diversity and distinctive uniqueness.

Two types of arguments are used to demonstrate how monitoring can limit intellectual activity. The first arguments depend on literary and cultural works; that investigate the premise that surveillance deters eccentric or deviant behavior. Jeremy Bentham's idea of the Panopticon, a jail structured around a central observation tower from which a warden could look into all the cells, inspired many of these works. Because they had no notion when they were being monitored, prisoners in the Panopticon have matched their activities to those preferred by the prison officials. Bentham writes of this system "To be continuously under the eyes of an Inspector is to lose in actuality the power of harming, and nearly the very wish" (qtd. in Basil Montagu *"The opinions of Different Authors,"* 321). The impact of monitoring on cognition and behavior is still accurate. People's fear of being watched encourages them to act and think differently than they would otherwise. Of course, Atwood's horrific picture of the totalitarian society represented in the Gilead regime of *The Handmaid's Tale* is the most prominent cultural examination of the conforming effects of monitoring. Atwood's society intended to prevent not just verbal but also intellectual thinking deterred by constant governmental surveillance.

The second set of reasoning that comes from the empirical work of scholars in the interdisciplinary subject of surveillance studies backs up our cultural intuitions about the impacts of surveillance. These researchers have attempted to comprehend modern forms of surveillance by governments, organizations, and individuals in all of their complexities, moving beyond the conventional metaphors of the Panopticon and Atwood. The scope of this

emerging study is broad, and it includes numerous examples of surveillance effects in a range of settings.

Recent research has looked into the dangers that monitoring poses to democratic governance. Self-censorship, in terms of speech, conduct, or even belief, is one such risk. In a study of the EU Data Retention Directive, by Lilian Mitrou in *"The Impact of Communications Data Retention on Fundamental Rights and Democracy,"* she explains that "Under pervasive surveillance, they inclined individuals to make choices that conform to mainstream expectations." (127). Scholars in this field have investigated the full range of current surveillance techniques, including private data snooping. While surveillance by the government and others can serve a diversity of purposes, one of the most common is to control behavior.

The intellectual privacy theory illustrates why we should extend protections to intellectual monitoring, particularly state-sponsored surveillance. If we cherish eccentric individuality and freedom of thought as individual rights values, we should be specifically skeptical about surveillance of activities that shape those characteristics of the self. Professor Timothy Macklem argues that: "The isolating shield of privacy enables people to create and discuss ideas or to encourage and share activities, that the presence or even awareness of other people surveillance may inhibit," Wherever, better or worse, privacy is both a booster and a protector of the creative and rebellious. (Macklem, *"Independence of Mind,"* 36)

The mechanisms of intellectual privacy explored thus far are predicated on our knowledge, or at least fear, that we are being watched. We are less likely to change our behavior if we have a sense of privacy, even if it turns out to be an illusion. The bottom line in surveillance is that monitoring provides information about the watched person to the viewer or the watcher. Even if the observed are unaware that they are being watched, this information provides the watcher more power over them, which can convince, influence, or otherwise

control them. In addition to the intellectual effects of these practices, surveillance-based attempts at social control may paradoxically feed the very behaviors they are attempting to prevent.

As this section shows, various types of surveillance, covert and overt, public and private, jeopardize our intellectual privacy and the processes of belief formation that underpin a free society. They also establish a power imbalance between the watcher and the watched, putting the observed at risk of extortion. As a result, courts and legislatures should scrutinize any monitoring that jeopardizes these ideals. Thus, a credible fear of government surveillance that interferes with the subject's intellectual activity (reading, thinking, and communicating) should regard as sufficient harm to establish a factual injury under this theory.

Surveillance regimes that operate in the shadows erode the constitutional commitment to intellectual freedom that is at the foundation of most democratic ideologies. Secret, wide-ranging intellectual surveillance activities that are not subject to public scrutiny and cannot be justified in court are incompatible with this commitment and illegitimate in a democratic society. My thesis is not that intellectual surveillance should never be possible but that it is a severe threat to civil liberties when the state wants to understand what people are reading, thinking, and saying secretly. As a result, before the government can execute the digital process of reading our diaries, it must go through a meaningful legal procedure (at the very least, a warrant backed by reasonable cause). However, we should remember that in modern society, surveillance ignores the boundary between public and private privacy. Simply put, intellectual privacy cuts across the public/private split, justifying further legal safeguards for intellectual privacy and the freedom to think and speak freely.

The United States and other liberal democracies throughout the world have so far failed to develop a unified digital century political vision that advances democratic ideals, principles, and governance. We cannot solve the threat of surveillance to intellectual freedom and privacy

through constitutional law and standing doctrine, but they are an excellent place to start. By recognizing the harms of surveillance and crafting our laws accordingly, we can reap many of its benefits without jeopardizing our essential civil liberties or upsetting the power balance between individuals on the one hand and corporations and governments on the other.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the totalitarian regimes in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and modern America. I based this analysis on Michel Foucault's theory *Discipline and Punish* to provide some characteristics that help to showcase totalitarianism as the principal theme in the novel, such as body control, surveillance, and language control, besides the loss of freedom and identity. This chapter emphasizes the realization of the vision of the dystopian speculative fiction in *The Handmaid's Tale* through the futuristic outlook of Margaret Atwood in modern American society in terms of surveillance, loss of freedom, and information monopoly.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

“The literature responses you get are based on the questions you ask.”

(Margaret Atwood, *Waltzing Again*)

Atwood was able to transcend the representation of apocalyptic reality to a more unusual time that embodies her sense of the inevitability of a disastrous future thanks to the many mechanisms of speculative fiction. The trans element of speculative fiction allowed for a more dramatic representation of the envisioned future, although the reality is terrible enough.

Margaret Atwood depicts a dystopian society built on the dictatorship in her novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Asked whether the story is based on actual events, Atwood always says that she did not include any detail or event that had not occurred somewhere in the world, either in new conditions or historical fact, “There will be no fictitious gadgets, laws, or horrors.” (*“Emma Watson interviews Margaret Atwood,”*2017). Margaret Atwood argues. There are so many strands that fed into *The Handmaid's Tale*, such as “group executions, book burnings, the Argentine leader child-stealing, the history of slavery, the history of American polygamy, and the list is endless.” (Atwood, 21)

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, although Atwood suggests a future for American society, it is based not only on the cultural context in which she was writing in the mid-1980s but also on American colonial and Biblical history. Atwood incorporated all of them to create a better grasp of the American present and future. “Countries continue the way they began,” she says in an interview with Victor Lévy Beaulieu, “they reorganize the symbols and structures, but something remains of their origins” (Atwood, *Two Solitudes* 72).

This practice of using real-life events and setting the novel's events in a historical perspective to inspire the dystopia depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Atwood encourages readers to believe that such a fate is not only possible but also likely. She is warning the present-day readers how perilous their present is in which it's possibly imagined Gilead where

everything described in the story has recently been enacted in some form in some society. We may better comprehend how *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as a critique of the current events when we consider it through the vantage point provided by the tradition of speculative fiction.

Dystopia speculative fiction provides the symptoms that might result in a nightmarish future and attempts to raise consciousness about certain vile social or political conditions. Atwood uses dystopia to examine various negative aspects of American culture that have occurred in the past or still exist today. Margaret Atwood depicts a society divided and ruled by tyranny in her dystopia. The totalitarian regimes maintain control through religious, linguistic, and social hierarchical manipulation, violence, and fear uses. The author cautions women and society, as a whole, about the risks of totalitarian fundamentalism.

The manifestations of regime dominance and female discord inside the regime were the focus of our investigation. In this ruling theocracy, the writer depicts a despotic system. The Commanders control all political power and moral authority; they select what is legal and appropriate for their preferences and conveniences. Thus, they have social privilege; and they control all property, including women. This regime forbids women from acquiring education, holding any career, or owning money or property. Furthermore, they are subject to unique restrictions that deprive them of primary human rights and freedoms, most notably the liberty of their bodies, as they push fertile women into reproductive slavery. These roles deprive women of any authority or identity, making a revolt against the system less likely.

This thesis shows that the concept of a utopian body can never realize in reality because political constructs that obstruct the appearance of freedom and justice always mediate the body. *The Handmaid's Tale* looked at how women's bodies subjugate by Gilead's totalitarian and sexist culture and how these bodies come to bear dystopia. At various levels, dystopia has an impact on the Handmaid's body. In the second chapter, I examined the monolithic and misogynist dictatorship on female sexuality; I investigated how the forced labor to which

Handmaids are subject develops a sense of division and classification among women and how this hierarchy undermines their worthiness. I looked at the dress code as a sexist approach used by Gilead to obscure the female body and show it as a sinful object. In the third chapter, I reveal that totalitarianism does not imply that power holds only by men. Indeed, authority is exchanged continuously between male and female characters. The Commander's exchanging power with the Aunts is the clearest example of this movement. The work of power doesn't undermine the dystopic part of the narrative because the Handmaid's body is the object that needs to be subjugated and exploited. Foucault's concept of power relations offered analytical assistance in his theory of *Discipline and Punish*, which allowed me to investigate how the Handmaids are subjected to this power exchange and reveal the irony lying underneath power subversion.

In the third chapter, I also looked at Gilead's techniques, such as constant surveillance to discipline the Handmaid's bodies. I chose the Panopticon metaphor of Foucault as the theoretical framework because his perspective successfully applied to my study of women's oppression in totalitarian societies. Furthermore, I discuss in this that Atwood employs phrases familiar to readers to indicate the regime propaganda; thus, they can link and understand how it is possible to their reality and future. The government's propaganda is so effective at the oppression that it drives human feelings underground because they cannot adequately express themselves linguistically under the government's constant scrutiny. The persecution becomes all the more sinister as readers see through the euphemism and realize the genuine nature of the rulers. Although at first glance, wordplay appears to decrease the sensation of doom, a closer examination reveals that it increases it. Furthermore, the employment of a first-person narrator plays a crucial function in pushing her readers toward critical spectatorship in Atwood's work.

Foucault's notions of power formation and distribution resonate clearly in the novel; it's provided important information about the composition of the Republic of Gilead, as well as the particular spaces within its structure, such as Offred's room. Therefore, Foucault's perceptions turned out to be a rich source of interpretation of the behaviors and attitudes of the protagonists, which made it possible to deepen the examination of social practices in Gilead. Furthermore, the autonomous self maintains impossible due to the highly regulated nature of these spaces and the fact that language as a fundamental instrument for identity construction is rigorously constrained, which is why most characters are subjects to an identity crisis.

There are several totalitarian societies in the world nations that use surveillance and information monopoly to maintain constant control over their inhabitant's minds and behavior. The primary concerns in Atwood's novel are still relevant for today's readers because they draw parallels between democratic and totalitarian world orders and show what might happen if a tendency that could lead to totalitarianism goes unrecognized in a democratic country. For Atwood, surveillance is more than just a tool for protection; it can also exercise power to pursue personal goals and demonstrate knowledge and control on a particular subject and nation. One of the primary topics in *The Handmaid's Tale* to portray our modern civilization is the surveillance used as a tool for executing authority and gaining ultimate power through information monopoly and spreading propaganda. The author uses dystopian speculative fiction to help readers consider the hidden risks in the society in which they live.

Atwood is well aware of the paradoxical American history of tyranny and imperialism; despite its purported concept of freedom and equality. This kind of view by Atwood about what is and what should; be brings us back to the current American government. The same regime that promises peaceful coexistence of diverse ideologies, nationalities, and religions also demonizes the populace, judging an entire entity based on individual cases. Under the conditions of the story, this contradiction would justify any form of manipulation. For example,

the monopoly of information encouraged by the PRISM surveillance system imposes on Americans in the modern era. This system supported by laws limits the intellectual freedom of American citizens inside and outside the country, as I explain in the second section of the third chapter. There are political and societal reasons to study the novel, in addition to the literature motivations. While *The Handmaid's Tale* is precisely a cautionary story that serves as a warning about the dangers of authoritarianism and fanaticism, it also serves as a satirical critique of several aspects of 21st century society. Given contemporary political trends in a post-9/11 society, it seems vital to revisit a work that so extensively probes the ramifications of these developments. Therefore, these were crucial additions to make to the story for better locating it in American society by presenting a more inclusive degree than gender to bring the plot dangerously closer to our own time by expanding the factors that affect our perception of the story timeframe.

Literature has always served as a social mirror. According to Tolan, the novel does not portray “human nature’s pessimism” but rather “the product of the twentieth century’s terrors” (148). It is concerned with the century’s fears and founded on modern society’s current anxieties. Atwood explained that *The Handmaid's Tale* is always timely. Now and then, it floats to the top. Albeit in varied ways, depending on the political climate. Our actual surroundings may alter, but our thinking does not appear to change much.

In a 1982 interview with Jo Brans, Atwood asked if she was a “feminist writer,” she replied, “Feminist is now one of the all-purpose adjectives.” Because the term ‘feminist’ has such a broad definition, Atwood is hesitant to call herself a feminist writer, preferring to describe herself as a person concerned with human dignity, categorizing her “feminism” as “human equality and freedom of choice” (*Waltzing Again*, 81). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood argues, “Progress toward global human rights can never be imaginable unless nations of ‘freedom’ face their own incarcerated horrific realities” (Dodson, 66). Margaret Atwood is

a person who cares deeply for the world and its inhabitants, as evidenced by her writings of this kind.

The dystopia depends on specific concerns and exaggerations in today's world to speculate on how things can worsen if the problems endure. It's the essence of dystopia and speculative fiction to explore a "what if" scenario by constructing a world in which a specific aspect of society has gone tragically wrong. Yet, the overall structure of society remains unchanged and recognizable to readers. This explanation is particularly unsettling because it informs readers about the story's broader background. When we realize specific details, we become aware of how close we are related to the novel in our society. In essence, Atwood guides readers toward a correct reading of the text. Readers are far more easily able to dismiss Offred's story as far-fetched and impossible before being made aware of the vaster backdrop of her story. However, after readers know that Gilead was inspired by modern American society during the publishing period, they are encouraged to draw parallels between Gilead and our own lives, revisiting their interpretations. Similarly, when we consider Atwood's wordplay to construct Gilead, we notice that the word roots are perilously near to a modern concept that we are all familiar with.

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood warns against self-propagated oppression as an analysis of such a culture's authoritarian inclinations. The novel incorporates important tropes and themes from Utopian and dystopian fiction. Tae Yamamoto writes in "*How Can a Feminist Read 'The Handmaid's Tale'?*" that *The Handmaid's Tale* has a dual function because of this reciprocal gaze between the present and the past. It's a cautionary tale to warn the reader against any potential for those atrocities in our own time after witnessing the expanded, exaggerated horrors of the near future. It also serves as a satire on our own culture, in which our habits and lives are de-familiarized and ridiculed as a result of being viewed from afar. (197). Rather than generating just a warning or a satire, Atwood effectively combines the two

into a satirical warning. Without no question, authors like her succeed in their mission of warning people about impending tragedies caused by freedom loss.

Thus, Atwood's dystopia is more realistic because of speculative fiction. Therefore, the story warns of what is coming if people do not fight for their rights. Coral Ann Howells argues in *"Margaret Atwood: The Cambridge Companion"* that: "Perhaps the primary role of a dystopia is to send out danger signals to its readers." (161). Dystopia rooted speaks for the past and present to avoid the immediate future. Howells connects hope to the novel didactic message, assuming that "the warning behind dystopia contains a consciousness of the risk and thus offers hope for avoiding dystopia." Therefore, many dystopias are self-consciously warnings, implying that there is still time to decide; and so hope.

Aside from real-world events and global shifts, the author has always been fascinated by the abstract question of power distribution, the relationship between political and personal matters, and the fuzzy lines between them. The underlying thesis in her 1973 poetry collection *Power Politics* appears to be that power and politics surround us all and infiltrate our daily lives, even if we think we shut ourselves off from them. Atwood says in an interview with Jo Brans: "Politics, for me, is anything that includes who gets to do what, to whom; it's all about who given authority, and who thought to be powerful. Politics also affects the type of discussions you have with others, as what you feel free to say and what you don't." (qtd. in Southwest Review, *"Using What You're Given: An Interview with Margaret Atwood"*).

Atwood's ideas on *Power Politics* are similar to Foucault's in that they both see power as entangled with various sorts of relationships. Atwood believes that power is a material that can't separate from culture or people's everyday lives. Power is our surroundings, wrote that: "it surrounds us, it infects all we are do, unseen and unheard as if it were air ... We all want an independent existence apart from and distinct from public life, where there are no rulers and no rules, no hierarchies, no politicians; easily equal and free individuals." However, because

every culture is a closed system, and ours is established and fed on power, this is impossible, or at the very least, extremely difficult. (qtd. in Howells 43). Power transforms into an environment that provides a haven for a wide range of political oppressions and personal purposes, as I discussed in both fictional and actual worlds.

On the one hand, this simplifies applying the theoretical concepts chosen for this thesis. It is important to remember that Foucault's theories on power and body analyze reality and actual scenarios rather than fictional constructs in the literature. I contend that his hypotheses equally apply to the realm of literary fiction, as its theory resonates in *The Handmaid's Tale*. As a result, *The Handmaid's Tale's* places and politics can analyze in the same way as real locations and political processes can. On the other hand, Atwood's exaggerations of real-life events contribute to the novel's impression as a satirical text. She transforms real-life events into a "what if?" scenario, allowing for a spatial theoretical abstraction in literary fiction; to apply to the present and the future. While scholars are quick to criticize Michel Foucault, I believe it's important to remember that he was a product of his epoch. His views about docile bodies and power relations reflect a broader understanding of politics in the world.

The portrayal of reality inside a fiction structured social setting is the most remarkable thing in speculative fiction, where political environment, social hierarchy or stratification, and economic standing all combine to depict the reality of what Man is in this regard. As a result, in contrast to science fiction, speculative fiction places a greater emphasis on realistic representations than on fantasy alone. Speculative fiction fills a niche in which it delivers a unique thought experiment, rigorously figuring out the repercussions of political notions. Thus, even the tiniest alterations, in reality, have easily foreseeable outcomes.

In speculative fiction, Atwood regards as one of the forerunners and inventors. She uses this technique to present a futuristic perspective in which she expresses her fears about hegemony and world control. She creates a new material of a world suffering from the

overpowering experience of technological advancement, where Atwood provides a visualization of a divergent universe and history, conscious of her dangerous reality. What speculative fiction is all about, and what Atwood has accomplished, is an exceptional combination of hypothetical fantasy and realistic representation. The speculative fiction incorporation in various aspects, such as time travel, the depiction of a sophisticated landmark ideology, fighting the plot's gnarl, and the disoriented character, assisted Atwood in expressing her concerns about the world's future. This depiction of time and its relationship to space and the characters has aided Atwood in shedding light on the symbolic city of Gilead's past, present, and future. The reader can only describe the dramatic backward and downward transition that affects Gilead through the numerous mechanisms of speculative fiction. Though the plot is based primarily on Gilead's 'reality' and 'current,' Atwood constructs unanticipated situations in which she expresses her anxieties about the future. She does not defend existing power structures or authorities, nor does she comment on or highlight how these structures would lead to absurdities; instead, she inserts these structures into various logical settings and scenarios, allowing the reader to weigh the consequences.

This context depicts that dystopian speculative fiction is fundamentally concerned with the writer's contemporary society to build its awful potency on projecting existing tendencies to what the writer believes their logically terrifying implications, according to the term I cited in this thesis. Authors frequently focus on a specific topic and predict how present trends in that area may evolve in the future. For example, totalitarian governments often have a great deal of authority and control over many aspects of their inhabitant's life, as it's the case with the surveillance problem that I have analyzed between fiction and reality. In addition to the centrality of language in information monopoly; and its relation to individual freedom and state control, which is a prominent theme in each case of fiction and reality, with figures struggling or suffering under the government authority.

The Handmaid's Tale is a fascinating approach to delve into mean socio-politic debates; it's closely tied to real-world problems. The book continues to be a critical text for students to explore and apply significant crucial concepts, considering today's social and political situation. Deciding to write a speculative fiction story, Atwood holds the reader's attention by being close enough and far enough from the real world in which the reader lives. Although they are accurately related, the separation between real and unreal makes the novel futuristic message even more powerful in its content. Atwood can raise and confront concerns that have been commonplace and are no longer instantly observed as exceptional in our contemporary reality by intensifying the typical pushback until it is shocking and dramatic within the dystopian reality of Gilead. Because of the dystopian speculative fiction technique of extrapolation that the author uses for her critical goals, the time of the events described is in the future even though that future is not so far from the reality of the ideal reader, as I explain about modern America in the third chapter. The futurity thus serves as a privileged vantage point and can be observed through the current events, resulting in an alienating effect that allows for a detached impartial examination of contemporary society and, as a result, of the author's current and previously inspired politics.

Therefore, dystopian speculative fiction examines humanity's propensity for extremism through the eyes of an author who is touched profoundly by the political machine. It intends to serve as a warning to remind us that repressive power structures influence us all; in an era when political apathy appears to be rising, even in facing increased state surveillance and restrictions on civil liberties. Thus, books like *The Handmaid's Tale* remind us that our basic desires and freedoms as human beings are linked firmly to the authority systems in which we live.

Even though Atwood's story is now an artifact, it has a tremendous impact as a reminder of how thin the boundary between past, present, and the future is. Margaret Atwood's story inspires that Gilead's future dystopia is already present in the present. Furthermore, *The*

Handmaid's Tale paper is completing the future. Atwood shows what happens if people accept their inferior status in society and do not stand up to totalitarian governments; therefore, the societal collapse is likely if people in power do not react to the demands of individuals and institutions in harmonious ways. As a result, this bleak journey serves as a call to action for rapid adjustments. Atwood aspires to build a society or a world where everyone is equal by debasing totalitarian regimes.

Atwood's novel, like its predecessors, is preoccupied with the complicated interplay between power, oppression, the media, language, history, memory, freedom, and human dignity; it may serve as a wake-up call to modern-day people. It's also crucial to look at the language of this book in a different light, focusing on Margaret Atwood's narrative characteristics in *The Handmaid's Tale*. This brief examination of these surveillance problems reveals Atwood's provocative remark on both; Gilead and contemporary society. In its blend of literary tradition, historical reality, political perspective, and astute conjecture about the present and future, Atwood's text is a work of genius in its own right. *The Handmaid's Tale* is amusing, surprising, terrifying, and completely convincing. It's a blistering satire, a frightening warning, and a tour de force, all at once. Each time the reader reads it, new connections are made in the reader's mind, resulting in a broader knowledge of the story. This book is more necessary to read, analyze, comprehend, and fight for the life and world you want to live in it freely today than it has ever been. It's Margaret Atwood at her most brilliant.

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Résumé

Dans un monde en évolution rapide où l'hégémonie politique et l'ambition économique sont les plus visibles, la « fiction spéculative » semble être l'approche la plus viable pour le futur. Le terme de fiction spéculative permet aux écrivains de présenter superbement leur vision du futur, échappant ainsi à l'image torride de la science-fiction. Cela peut être perçu comme un signal d'alarme conçu pour avertir les lecteurs et les forcer à reconnaître la direction dangereuse que prend la société. Les auteurs utilisent la fiction, les mondes alternatifs, l'histoire, le mystère et les voyages dans le temps dans ce cas. Le méticuleusement étudié du roman d'Atwood *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) du point de vue de la fiction spéculative se présente comme un exemple d'une telle lecture du futur. Le roman se déroule dans la société totalitaire fictive de Gilead, et l'histoire discute l'hypothèse de la subversion de la communauté « démocratique » actuelle des États-Unis d'Amérique par un régime totalitaire. La nouvelle réalité imaginée présente une friche futuriste influencée par les idéologies actuelles. Atwood a réussi à créer un environnement dystopique pour fournir des informations critiques sur le phénomène de la surveillance totalitaire et l'escalade de la crise du manque d'intimité et de la perte de liberté. Cette thèse vise à réintroduire la lecture de *The Handmaid's Tale* comme un texte de fiction spéculative qui examine la politique totalitaire qui prévaut aujourd'hui pour fournir une vue exemplaire de la politique Américaine moderne de surveillance et de monopole de l'information où l'humanité et la démocratie avancent vers l'arriérée et la liberté intellectuelle des individus descend vers le bas dans un pays soi-disant démocratique. Cette thèse entreprendra une approche analytique, critique et historique de la conduite de cette étude. Enfin, cette thèse conclut en constatant que la crise de perte de liberté, qu'elle soit physique ou intellectuelle, dans le monde fictif ou réel est le résultat de vivre sous un régime totalitaire.

Mots-clés : Margaret Atwood, Fiction spéculative, Dystopie, Totalitarisme, Surveillance, Amérique moderne, Liberté.

ملخص

في عالم سريع التغير حيث تكون الهيمنة السياسية والطموح الاقتصادي أكثر وضوحًا، يبدو أن "الخيال التأملي" هو النهج الأكثر قابلية للتطبيق في المستقبل. يسمح مصطلح الخيال التأملي للكتاب بتقديم رؤيتهم للمستقبل بطريقة رائعة، وبالتالي الإفلات من الصورة الحارقة للخيال العلمي. يمكن أن تعتبر بمثابة دعوة للاستيقاظ مصممة لتحذير القراء وإجبارهم على الاعتراف بالاتجاه الخطير الذي يتخذه المجتمع. يستخدم المؤلفون الخيال والعوالم البديلة والتاريخ والغموض والسفر عبر الزمن في هذه الحالة. إن الدراسة الدقيقة لرواية أتوود حكاية الخادمة (1985) من وجهة نظر الخيال التأملي تقدم نفسها كمثال على مثل هذه القراءة للمستقبل. تدور أحداث الرواية في مجتمع شمولي خيالي في جلعاد، وتناقش القصة فرضية تخريب المجتمع "الديمقراطي" الحالي للولايات المتحدة الأمريكية بواسطة نظام شمولي. يمثل الواقع الجديد المتخيل أرضًا قاحلة مستقبلية متأثرة بالإيديولوجيات الحالية. تمكنت أتوود من خلق بيئة بائسة لتقديم رؤى حاسمة لظاهرة المراقبة الشمولية والأزمة المتصاعدة المتمثلة في نقص الخصوصية وفقدان الحرية. تهدف هذه الرسالة إلى إعادة تقديم قراءة حكاية الخادمة كنص خيالي تخميني يفحص السياسات الشمولية السائدة اليوم لتقديم رؤية نموذجية للسياسة الأمريكية الحديثة للمراقبة واحتكار المعلومات حيث تتقدم الإنسانية والديمقراطية في الاتجاه المعاكس إلى الخلف، وتتحدر الحرية الفكرية للأفراد إلى القاع في بلد يفترض أنه ديمقراطي. ستتخذ هذه الأطروحة نهجًا تحليليًا ونقديًا وتاريخيًا لإجراء هذه الدراسة. أخيرًا، تختتم هذه الرسالة بإيجاد أن أزمة فقدان الحرية، سواء كانت مادية أو فكرية، في العالم الخيالي أو الواقعي ناتجة عن العيش في ظل نظام شمولي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مارغريت أتوود، خيال تأملي، بيئة بائسة، مراقبة شمولية، أمريكا الحديثة، الحرية.