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**Disciplining the Body:  
surveillance, power, and  
Violence in Margaret Atwood's  
*The Handmaid's Tale***

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## **Dedications**

For the one and only, my heaven... Beautiful mom

To the reason of my being, my father

To the circumstances, you grew in me like Daffodils!

To the tulip flower of my heart, my sister Nour El Houda and my

sister Asma

To the ones who helped me, assisted in my hard times, my friends:

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## **Abstract**

The world has gone with too many aspects: repression, doubt in religion, dictatorship, and so many other universal aspects. The misunderstanding of religion changed people's perspective over others; it dislodged truth and replaced it with fanatic thoughts. The treatment of authorities toward others became preternatural, the division started off to appear as a necessity, men were regarded as the God power of every rule and misogyny was the upmost clear portrait. Margaret Atwood (1939), the Canadian speculative writer, who witnessed a radical change in the fundamentalist religion in the U.S and through her historical background, showed an interest in women who were the first targeted tool by the new republic Gilead. In her novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), she offered a new relationship between totalitarianism and the body, wherein the patriarchy is the featured aspect; through her narrative lenses, she drew what probably would happen in the nearest future by depicting the change from religion to politics. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate what a totalitarian state can do to mark its disciplinary power over women bodies. In addition to this, it targets to show how religion can be sometimes dangerous against the docile and the illiterate creatures.

**Keywords:** Body, discipline, feminism, dystopia, Gilead, Margaret Atwood, the Handmaid's Tale.

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# **General Introduction**

The world has gradually been immersed into scepticism, faith becomes business, and materialization distracts those who truly believe in God. All the powerful evils dug into all kinds of human beings' lives and tried to disembody it from logical and ontological existence. When all these happen, people start to see the world from down earth. Such kind of despair creates a new way of frightening among the whole population; new social beliefs construct themselves under the excuse of either prosperity or past happening wars, various general rules or truths are being rejected by elite people.

To probe the novel under study, research questions can present as such:

- How did Gilead use religion as a mean of control?
- How are women seen under a dystopic and totalitarian state of Gilead?
- How did The Gileadean republic enforce the women's body to be reproductive and surveilled?

In an attempt to fulfil this work, the following hypotheses concerning the research are drawn :

- The use of the new religion of quasi-protestant republic and subverting passages from the bible makes it real and set rules on its basis.
- Women may become objects and animals under strictness.
- Exerting power over docile women under social and political norms.

This research hinges upon two methodological approaches: theoretical; it covers the theories of the feminist body and analytical; in which how the dystopic and totalitarian aspects are related to the female body.

This research is divided into three chapters; the initial chapter is theoretical as it is concerned with the literature review in which various scholars discovered many aspects of



women's bodies, how it functions and its image through the realm of politics (Biopower), culture, and nature (ecofeminism).

The second chapter, however, is analytical as it aims to reveal the extent of religious false beliefs the state of Gilead misinterpreted.

The third chapter is also analytical wherein the core intention was about the image of totalitarianism related to the novel and the female body. It, therefore, sheds light on the possible aspects every totalitarian state can have to create dystopia via imposing control on women's bodies.

# **Chapter one**

**Critical perspectives on The Female Body**

## 1. Introduction

Feminism has widely been discussed throughout history, during many decades men tried to change women's rights by using religion, political needs under their service. Religion thus has always been a static thing for those who truly believe in it. However, the reduced existence of its believers made society suspecting little things. For so many years, religion became a tool to control the weakest creatures on earth. Along with this control, women's bodies were a choice to gain a position in a dystopic society and to firmly prove the man's superiority over women. Accordingly, this chapter is devoted to talk about critical perspectives about the body, its nature and disappearance referring to the novel under scrutiny.

## 2. Scholars, writers' perspective about the women's body, discipline and/ or (discipline vs space)

Bodily disciplined arose many feminist writers that captured the interlocked relationship between the women's body with other manly use. Beauvoir's anger of this has been highlighted by saying: "Our bodies are trained, shaped and impressed with the prevailing historical forms of ... masculinity and femininity" (qtd in. Bahman 91). On this occasion, Michel Foucault put forward in his book *discipline and punish* that a "body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (136). *The Handmaid's Tale* subjects to talk about bodies as repressive, dark, disciplined and guided. In addition to this latter, Lee Bartky stated: "We women cannot begin a revision of our own bodies until we learn to read the cultural messages we inscribe upon them daily and until we come to see that even when the mastery of the disciplines of femininity produce a triumphant result, we are still only women"

(151). From this standpoint, Bartky admits that women's bodies are changing according to the social status and needs of male dominance.

Critics carried on to probe the bodily reference to forced motherhood and objectification in which Rao stated: "Motherhood in this novel retains both the oppressive aspects of a "patriarchal institution," as well as the pleasurable facets of the experience" (19). hence, using bodies just as an object is viewed as oppressive and bad discipline for the women's experience.

Throughout history, women were confined to domesticity and raising children to males. Women were regarded as a sex object, and they were compared to the unwomen by their reproductive abilities as the handmaid's tale has shown. In her book *the second sex*, Beauvoir showed that the woman's status is reduced to subjugation and traditional male dominance. Moreover, biology has a great impact on defining the women's body as something accessible. She says further: "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb. An ovary; she is female. This word is sufficient to define her [...]. The term female is derogatory not because it emphasized woman's animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex" (qtd in. Zarrinjooee 33). Moi, on the one hand, goes further with Beauvoir's affirmation: "To say that sexed body is the inevitable background for all our acts is at once a claim that is always holds the key to the meaning of a women's acts"(qtd in. Zarrinjooee 120). In this latter, women are expected to act according to these paradigms (sex and biology).

Beauvoir asserts women's inferiority by saying: "the universal predominance of males, her own education (in schools)-everything confirms her in her belief in masculine superiority" (qtd. in Zarrinjooee 70). Furthermore, Beauvoir confirms that women will be considered useless unless their bodies are inherited to men's sexual desires. She said: "it is impossible to

regard woman simply as a productive force: she is for man a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object—another through whom he seeks himself”(qtd in. Zarrinjooee 85).

"The Handmaids are required to submit to sexual intercourse with their Commanders monthly in the hopes of achieving a pregnancy, sexual passion is entirely set aside and love no longer exists, at least not officially. Sex is a function" (Macpherson qtd in. Zarrinjooee 55). This institutionalized and forced heterosexuality is the background of such patriarchal power.

The female body was widely observed as a destructive object under materialistic and political systems that are allied with disciplinary methods thus it turns the female body into nothing. Susan Bordo states: "the human body is itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control"(qtd in. King 21). Others see that "Women are the ‘other half’; necessary evils for reproduction"(Bailey qtd in. King 99). Body and politics, in this regard, described by Foucault as "the hysterization of women’s bodies" (qtd in. King 104), those who support patriarchy and demand for the fertilized world are meant by this description.

In this new field of control and because of the marginalized role that women were trapped in, patriarchal agencies became more dominant and aiming to centralize women's body according to their affairs and the situation they are in:" The well managed body of the 80s is constructed so as to be even more multifunctional than its predecessors. It is a body that can be used for wage, labor, sex, reproduction, mothering, spectacle, exercise, or even invisibility, as the situation demands" (Singer qtd in. Price and Shildrick 193)

Reproductive technologies as a disciplinary process tried to make women's bodies fragmented and condemned by the social binaries systems that are planned. Women on the other hand expressed the bad image reproductive technologies hold:

We, women [...], declare that the female body, with its unique capacity for creating human life, is being exploited and dissected as raw material for the technological production of human beings. For us women, for nature, and for the exploited peoples of the world, this development is a declaration of war. Genetic and reproductive engineering is another attempt to end self-determination over our own bodies. (Klein qtd in. Mahjouri 258)

It is a big argument that feminist theorists were aware of such acts; Klein reinforced this logical view and highlighted the most vital factors of male domination using these disciplinary technologies. She identifies that scientific reproduction: "take-over of our bodies for male use, for profit making, population control, medical experimentation and misogynist science" (qtd in. Mahjouri 259)

Disciplines have existed a long time ago in the monasteries and armies, however, the 18th marked new kinds of disciplines that gathered new objectives thus collect: "general formulas of domination" (Foucault 137), these formulas, therefore, were well planned and organized as Foucault explain,

[t]he historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. (137). this discipline further makes women passive, because: "western philosophical discourse is incapable of representing femininity/woman other than as the negative of its own reflection" (Moi 132)

The strong identification of women's fashion was highly defined in the Victorian era in which differences of the sexes must appear. hereafter marked discomfort of femininity and arouse Foucault's writing about torture and comparing it to what is happening to the female's

body, which for him: "mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy"(34). This further explains the effect of fashion that women follow with displeasure.

This fashionably Discipline has been already practised on womens' bodies even after the pre-modern period; women were still regarded as material agents and primitives. They are, in addition ; objected to serving the patriarchal agency. Moreover, their femininity trait is destined to be this way, they are infamy like the pre-modern period identified them. this name-calling made men attracted by women's othering, othering thus push back men to control and correct the shape of the female body to put it into restraint As De Beauvoir said : " In woman dressed and adorned, nature is present but under restraint, by human will moulded nearer to man's desire"(qtd in. King 191)

Having corsets within the women's body in the pre-modern period and even after considering one of the conspiracies of male domination. It is, therefore, a manipulation and a discipline that can firmly deform the beautiful emblem of the female body. Besides, looking at details, controlling and shaping certain parts of the body went to the extent of harmful girdles and corsets. This highlighted one of the apocalyptic times of women's existence and rightful activities. This regulation was prevalent over the whole world, making women's body:" present the inert and passive qualities of an object" and» [seem] to man to be his property, his thing"(Beauvoir qtd in. King 180-190)

For further knowledge, Gilead enforced women in particular political binaries to keep their bodies into service and space. Furthermore, space's extension was even to enclose their sexual act where the women's bodies must be opaque and unseen. This kind of discipline had a bad effect on the body. However, a good plan for the social and political status of Gilead. Lefebvre confirmed that production and reproduction consider one of the necessary tools for

the permanent existence of space that attribute: "the social relations of reproduction" (32). Space is not just a concrete wall built but also a systematic and powerful foundation that is tightly used to preserve sex for reproduction only.

In the related relationship, space has been widely known not only for its geographical term but also for its cultural and political dimension. According to Lefebvre:

Space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics; it has always been political and strategic. [...] Space has been fashioned and molded from historical and natural elements, but in a political way. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally populated with ideologies. (Lefebvre 170)

Accordingly, the more space contributed to control women's bodies, the more the body is surveilled and disciplined. Because of such an act, women's bodies become imprisoned to male domination.

The body in its various concepts has a connected relationship with culture. It can be put within a cultural resource and embedded in its big context; hence it is believed that: "body debased, humiliated, and inscribed to excess by all the signs of consumer culture" (Kroker qtd in. Balsamo 33). So from the aftermentioned saying, it is clear that the female body is objected to a given culture and society.

### **3. Feminist body theories**

Feminism as a movement and a theory has been divided and linked to many issues and concepts; the body hence has its theories that were discussed by multiple writers and feminist theorists.

#### **3.1. Ecofeminism**



In the Ecofeminist view, a woman's body and nature are linked. Consequently, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a good example that better illustrates this idea ; mainly that both women and nature are neglected by men. In the novel, Atwood depicts women's degradation to male domination from Gilead that forced them to bear children and indoctrinated as handmaids. The protagonist like any other women in the story has been restricted, oppressed, utilized, and tamed as any natural resource. Her body is under control and severe political rules. Wilson said: "Through Offred's Tale Atwood presents a timeless vision of sexual/gender politics in a fallen world" (qtd in. B.C 294). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, there are references to which is related to nature as plants, flowers and animals. Handmaids were obliged to think about themselves as seeds, not as reproductive object. Ecofeminism is defined also as: "a movement that makes connections between environmentalisms and feminisms" (qtd in. Oppermann 23). In *The Good-Natured Feminist: Ecofeminism and The Quest For Democracy*, a further detailed definition stated by Sandilands Catriona: "ecofeminism is a movement and a current analysis that attempts to link feminist struggles with ecological struggles" xvi). Ecofeminism as a theory and equally women and nature-centred has been first coined by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, in these similar years ecofeminism was additionally discussed by many scholars and critics. In the 1980s, studies enlarged to make a parallel relationship between the oppression of men over women and the treatment of human beings over nature, within this theory:

Ecofeminist critics focused and elaborated on such significant issues and questions as politics of women's bodies, new reproductive technologies, psycho-social aspects of birth and mothering, peace and disarmament, population and female infanticide, economic and social conditions of women in developing countries, workforce by women, nature of Western science and technology and the religious perception regarding women and nature (Hay 84).

In the *Handmaid's Tale*, ecofeminism has a big part: "I stand on the corner, pretending I am a tree"(Atwood 30). Consequently, many critics and scholars described it as "ecologically informed feminism" (Hay 73). The gradual perception of some critics toward women and nature in ecofeminism enlarged as essentializing the biological sex to determine their gender it is thus, biological essentialism which symbolizes: "women's monthly fertility cycle, the tiring symbiosis of pregnancy, the wrench of childbirth and the pleasure of suckling an infant, these things already ground women's consciousness in the knowledge of being coterminous with nature"(Salleh qtd in. E Kruse 340). In addition to this claim, Salleh strengthens his point of view by admitting that ecofeminism is about to be: "democratic project" which "enlists men to join women in reaffirming their place as part of nature and in formulating new social institutions in line with that position" (qtd in E Kruse 100).

### **3.2. The Body in Biopolitics / Biopower**

A vital concern of the political body brings us to Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and many other scholars who firmly defined the relationship between biology and politics or as so-called biopolitics or biopower, and defining that biological power over bodies, aiming at "achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (40). Following this line of analysis, the body can be put within a political context in which the body is considered as a root to fix some political issues, Foucault inserts in his work *Discipline and Punish* that power relations toward the body do not simply 'repress it, they rather produce it, having 'an immediate hold on it; they invest it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies and to emit signs" (25). Power of politics is hence considered to be as 'Microphysics' that vitally deals with body and institutions. Moreover, self-discipline that the government works with, is in the core interest with how the body

functions, and certainly how it should be like in a strictly political field. Every institution is thoroughly embedded with the body to make it surveilled and docile. The most notable point relating to power is that when it changes to discipline, the division of a certain region appears and thus the body transforms into a compliant device.

Gilead's political sphere in the novel can be considered as an intervention to "the simple natural life" (Agamben 1) because this intervention has to do with two words 'bios and 'Zoe', "the difference between zoē and bios, which both mean "life" in ancient Greek. However, where Zoe means life "common to all living beings", bios implies a political life. Zoē is excluded from the polis and only belongs to the sphere of reproductive life" (Agamben 5). Aristotle who was against blending Bios and Zoe into one plot already discussed these connected words: "Aristotle takes the greatest care to distinguish the oikonomos (the head of an estate) and the despotēs (the head of the family), both of whom are concerned with the reproduction and the subsistence of life, from the politician [...]" (Agamben 2). however, this blend connection is meant to be a 'biopower', It is a term used to "describe power as it concerns human life, in particular with regard to the human body on one hand and human populations on the other" (Arnason 295).

Arnason states that: "'Biopower' is a term that incorporates two ways of control over human life: anatomo-politics, which refers to control over human body, and biopolitics, which stands for the control of human population" (Arnason 295). That it is consequently the pivotal discussed subject in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Anatomo- Politics in addition came into being and continued to be the most used technique

[...] it [anatomo-politics, JS] focused on the body as a machine and sought ways to discipline it, to make it both useful and docile, as it was integrated in 39 the new economic system of industrialised societies. [...] At first, the main institutional field of the anatomo-politics, or discipline, of the human body were the school and the army, but

this aspect of biopower soon operated also in prisons, hospitals, and factories. (ibid. 298, emphasised). From this quote, it is clear that the body is kept under constant discipline with all the possible ways of those economic systems.

#### **4. Conclusion**

To conclude, it can be said that feminism came with feminists; writers, theorists, philosophers, politicians. From the very start, women claimed their rights against the doctrines of patriarchy. In this chapter, we tried to discuss the most perspectives of the women's body, how it is disciplined, and with what it is connected to build a theory as Biopolitics and Ecofeminism. Feminism with its broad analysis split up many writers' opinions in which everyone discussed his own vision toward women's body, its function, its instincts, and its decadence within cultural, political and philosophical contexts. the following perspectives below about the body vary according to each field.



# Chapter

# Two

**Religion as an excuse to control The Female Body**

### **1. Introduction**

Religion has always been the source of faith and truth, it is definitely necessary for everyone's life. If religion does not exist, perhaps the world would live in distress and uncertainty. Yet, the case is different in Gilead. In this totalitarian state, religion is totally misused to control and repress people. This misuse; consequently, promotes the emergence of power and theocracy and turns normal women into handmaids. In addition to religion, many ways were used by the totalitarian regime of Gilead to keep the dominance and restrictions over women's bodies. This chapter is meant to show the false biblical beliefs that Gilead came with to maintain power and control over handmaids. Moreover, it aims to reveal the tools that formed docile bodies and the fragmented image women could be trapped into.

### **2. Biblical Distortive References in Gilead from the Bible**

Before Gilead came into being, there was a terrorist attack planned by the sons of Jacob against the president of the United States of America and the members of congress. Following this tragedy, the sons of Jacob started to reform a new state and armed forces under the excuse that Islamic terrorists are criminals. This point has been reinforced in the novel, as Offred pointed out: "It was after the catastrophe, when they shot the president and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic

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fanatics, at the time" (Atwood 184-5). Accordingly, Gilead started to present itself as a good state that seeks independence for its citizens. Besides, the political plans started to take control over people as Offred stated: "That was when they suspended the constitution. They said it would be temporary. There wasn't even any rioting in the streets. People stayed home at night, watching television, looking for some direction" (Atwood 185). In fact, Gilead's goal is to rearrange society and spread out again the importance of fertility after the age of «R-strain syphilis», "infamous AIDS epidemic" and "Artificial insemination" (Pieixoto qtd in. Atwood 318- 319).

In the 'Historical Notes' section in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Pieixoto shows that in pre-Gilead, there was something called "the use of surrogate mothers [...] which was considered to have biblical precedents" (qtd in. Atwood 319). Gilead, in addition, used this latter to emancipate its control from the possible doubts of citizens. The novel's basic references were from the bible. They have been used falsely by Gilead in order to fit its purposes as Tan explains it: "the distortion of the Old Testament Texts, or simply 'biblical fundamentalist'" (qtd in. Lopez 96). Regarding the female position in this republic, Cooper has mentioned Handmaids' position within the regime and its illusional religion: In the absolute majesty of this God and his Old Testament deputies, the patriarchs, resides also the gender politics of the fundamentalist republic: the subservience of women—their restriction to the domestic sphere and classification in terms of childbearing abilities—reapplies ancient models of sexual differences and masculine imperativ .(50)

### 2.1. Blessed Are the Meek

This is one of the scriptures Gilead extracted from the bible to empower its control. Yet, it is incomplete as well as purposefully distorted. In what is known as the Beatitudes in the bible; the passage is mentioned: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth "(King James Bible, Matthew 5.5). From the biblical meaning of the meek: The meek will inherit the land



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and enjoy peace and prosperity (King James Version, Psalm 37.11). While Jesus in The Bible used this passage to acknowledge people how they should perform in front of God, Gilead used a fragmented passage in order to frighten the handmaids. Although Offred usually acted according to the rules implied in Gilead and contribute to the new tendencies of this regime, she was fully conscious of the abnormal beliefs and misinterpretation of the state for this she corrected Aunt Lydia in her mind: "Blessed are the meek. She didn't go on to say anything about inheriting the earth" (Atwood 76). Her realization further illustrated as she puts it while talking to Jesus: "I wish I knew what you were up to. But whatever it is, help me to get through it, please. Though maybe it's not your doing; I don't believe for an instant that what's going on out there is what you meant" (Atwood 206)

### **2.2. Blessed Be the Fruit**

This is another religious context expressed indirectly and fragmentally in the novel. Handmaids used this expression as a salutation while its meaning is different in the Bible: "Blessed be the fruit of your womb, the produce of your soil and the offspring of your livestock, the issue of your herds and the young of your flocks!" (King James Version, Deuteronomy 28.4). The reason behind using half of the verse is to make handmaids getting used to unusual words while speaking instead of making them rebellious by using the whole passage. The word 'Fruit' was repeated by Offred unintentionally while seeing a pregnant woman belly resembles "A huge fruit" (Atwood 39). The word additionally stressed the reason mentioned above and that the fruit is related to the woman's womb, which means 'A child'. For this fact, the word 'womb' was not mentioned within the context of Gilead.

### **2.3. The Misinterpreted Story of Rachel and Leah by Gilead**

Giving birth in the novel was instructed firmly from the Bible: "And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die" ( King James version, Gen. 30. 1). Although the circumstances for

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bearing children in Rachel's story and Gilead are different, this state insisted on putting its illusionary (review this word) references to build more docile bodies. The real story is when Rachel envies her sister Leah for having babies with Jacob. It is not as Gilead put it and pretend that God's plan is the case.

In another passage from the Bible, Gilead implemented its territory. This was achieved when the commanders read out loud the scriptures on the day of the ceremony, which Rachel puts as: "And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her" (King James Bible, Gen. 30.3). This is a similar case to what happened in the novel between Serena Joy, The commander and, Offred.

It is worth noting that the name of the Red Centre in the novel where handmaids are assigned to train and being indoctrinated was related to Leah and Rachel in the bible. This technique had an enormous impact to convince women that every plan is connected to God's command. Furthermore, in the Bible, Leah and Rachel were married while in Gilead both Offred and the commander were not. There are many problems concerning the interpretation of Gilead, First, it confirms the irrelevance between what is said in the bible and what is said in Gilead. Second, it reveals that every totalitarian state can trace its power through using something that is not opened for discussion or disagreement as Religion.

### **2.4. From Political Slogans to Religious Delusion of Gilead:**

Atwood applied some political sources used purposefully by Gilead in the novel: «From each, says the slogan, according to her ability; to each according to his needs. We recited that, three times, after dessert. it was from the bible, or so they said. St. Paul again, in Acts" (129). The slogan which says 'They said so' here implied by Offred posits the liars and delusion of the republic. Furthermore, this slogan does not have to do with the bible, it is

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actually a part from political slogans that had denounced in 1842 by the *Saint-Simon-Pecqueur*: «regarding CONSUMPTION and DISTRIBUTION of RICHES, [the formula] is to each according to his tastes or his needs [ses goûts ou ses besoins]” (qtd in. Bovens and Lutz 675). In Karl Marx’s 1875 publication, the slogan repeated itself with a bit of modification: “[From] each according to his abilities [Fähigkeiten], to each according to his needs [Bedürfnisse]!”(qtd in. Bovens and Lutz these are examples from the fanatic inspiration the Republic re-created according to its will to make women's bodies under possession.

### **2.5. From Wives in the Bible to Handmaids in Gilead**

The novel's use of disruptive religious references marked the skilful technology of this totalitarian state of Gilead. This becomes clear in one of the important passages in *The Handmaid's Tale* when the commander started to recite some of the biblical quotes: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (235). Truly, this verse is extracted from the bible, but its interpretation inside Gilead is totally different. First, what is meant by 'she', in the Biblical context refers to a wife, not an unmarried handmaid, as Offred repeats what her companion said: "He should tell that to the wives", "when they are into the sherry", "She means the part of sobriety" (Atwood 235). Second, what Timothy 2:15 in King James Version of the new testament tried to reveal in this verse is odd to what the commander told the handmaids, this means that women are blessed when they give birth to their husbands, but it does not mean that others are not blessed. In fact, they are in blessing as well as the wives too.

### **2.6. All Flesh Is Weak, All Flesh is Grass**

It is revealed that the degraded world of handmaids is tightly connected to the fallacies the state used. Throughout the novel, the protagonist re-backed some of Aunt Lydia saying when she had entailed that the commander's Chauffeur is talking to her, "Of course some of

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them will try. All Flesh is weak" (Atwood 57). Yet the fact is "All flesh is grass, I corrected her in my head"(ibid). From this standpoint, Offred is aware of the misconception Aunt Lydia came with to warn women of any weakness or temptation that can occur. It was mentioned in The King James Version as "The voice said, Cry. And he said, what shall I cry? All a flesh is grass and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field" (Isaiah 40.6). That means that both women and men can commit inescapable mistakes.

In order to retain this argument, the bible had asserted that all human beings can commit mistakes, no one can rid of doing mistakes, because of being born from grass, no one can be different from the other, as it puts here:" The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass" (King James Version, Isaiah 40.7)

### **2.7. The Case of Faith:**

Throughout the novel, Offred was puzzled as she questioned herself about something she has seen. Yet, it has no answer. That about the fact that religion in Gilead has nothing to do with what most people could believe. She describes this acknowledgement immediately: "I get out of bed, go to the window, kneel on the window seat, the hard little cushion, FAITH, and look out. There is nothing to be seen" (Atwood 121), then in a moment of bewilderment:" I wonder what has become of the other two cushions. There must have been three, once. HOPE and CHARITY, where have they been stowed?" (ibid). This can make a strong conviction that the only thing Gilead wanted to keep is faith, actually, a fake faith. That means hope and charity are prohibited words in the Gilead's regime and therefore, they are deemed as strange words that every handmaid should avoid to use or see around.

### **2.8. Blessed Be the Poor in Spirit**

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There is in fact another scene where Offred recognized an absence of a verse in the bible from what the commander has recited: "Blessed be the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the silent" (Atwood 102). "I knew what they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking. Blessed be those that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (ibid), she carried on saying: "Nobody said when" (ibid). She wanted to say that the verse blessed are they that mourn (nonsense): for they shall be comforted (King James Bible, Matthew 5.4). The distorting of this passage has shown first, that Gilead wanted women to be silent. Second, men rarely mourn for this the mourn is related to women because of their softness and femininity. This intelligence, therefore, kept women's bodies under strictness.

### **3. The Destructive Image of Handmaids**

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the protagonist encounters many difficulties. In most instances, she felt herself "A national resource" (Atwood 77). It merely strengthened the idea to which the state has power over her and consequently, she will always be considered very low to her body and the outside world. Offred on so many occasions put herself in different transitional positions.

#### **3.1. Nature as a Symbolic Element**

Offred described herself in a varied way, the reason for this is the despair she felt while seeing her body related to the discourse of Gilead and its rules. An example of this is when she testified to her possible pregnancy saying: "I become the earth I set my ear against" (Atwood 85). Furthermore, Offred's bad treatment of herself and her body is noted again

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I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. Inside it is a space, huge as a sky at night and dark and curved like that, though black-red rather than black. Pinpoints of light swell, sparkle, burst and shrivel within it, countless as stars. Every month there is a moon, gigantic, round, heavy, an omen. it transits, pauses, continues on and passes out of sight, and I see despair coming towards me like famine. (Atwood 86)

The novel showed examples of this in order to explain how much a body could be affected by these kinds of pressure and oppression, and eventually revealed common hysteria women can be put into. Moreover, *Margaret Atwood* connected many natural images to the female body, as shown in the Red centre when Aunts were instructing Handmaids: "Some of you are shallow-rooted. [...], think of yourselves as seeds [...] let's pretend we're trees" (Atwood 30). After a moment of recognition Offred said: "I stand on the corner, pretending I am a tree" (ibid)

The use of these metaphors empowered the colonization of the female body and stressed the parallel distinction between women and nature. Rubenstein states: "distinctions between human and non-human are grotesquely inverted or reduced" (107). Hence, using these kinds of metaphors highlighted the idea that a totalitarian state like Gilead could diminish the rights of women by using every possible tool to make women under surrogation.

In another moment of dejection, Offred compares her brain to "the beautiful-sunset greeting cards they used to make so many of in California" (Atwood 212). This ironic description marked her escape from the logical dogma she is living into then ultimately the consequences of being repressed bodily, emotionally and spiritually. Moreover, women have to be protected as well as nature; yet unfortunately, they are rejected, utilized and condensed.

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### 3.2. Handmaids as Animals

The dehumanization in *The Handmaid's Tale* led the protagonist to describe herself as something outside the normality of human beings; it is a kind of paralysis and abnormality. Human beings can feel through a hard Journey, one example about this is: "I wait, washed, brushed, fed, like a prize pig. Sometime in the eighties they invented pig balls, for pigs who were being fattened in pens. Pig balls were large coloured balls; the pigs rolled them around with their snouts » (Atwood 81). It is clear that when people are repressed they can think about themselves as devalued.

Another illustrative passage that is more significant to stop at is when Offred was walking along the washroom and noticing some modifications, beforehand the washroom used to be of men, then of women as the protagonist narrated, then said " why don't women have to prove to one another that they are women? Some form of unbuttoning, some split-crotch routine, just as casual. A dog-like sniffing" (Atwood 85). *In the handmaid's tale*, all handmaids are objected to strict rules, and their lives forsaken by the state, this is the reason why they turn to feel this way.

Many examples portrayed the animalistic symbols women have been characterized through in the novel. By the beginning of Gilead as a new government of The United States of America, Offred described how she had been censored in her job along with many women employers by their boss: "I have to let you go, he said. It's the law, I have to. I have to let you all go. He'd said this almost gently, as if we were wild animals, frogs he'd caught, in a jar, as if he were being humane" (Atwood 187). Offred described herself and others in this way, as she knew what the situation is going to be. Accordingly, this situation has been associated with the disparaged state handmaids become inside Gilead.

Women as being objects have been shaped in some passages from the novel. Offred's dissatisfaction with her body is revealed when she described herself: "Your own skin is like a

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map, a diagram of futility, crisscrossed with tiny roads that lead nowhere. Otherwise you live in the moment. Which is not where I want to be" (Atwood 155). In addition to the strict rules of the Republic of Gilead, this heretical thought kept every handmaid contributed to the extremism of the state. Next to the handmaids' description of themselves, Aunts were the powerful discriminators who dragged down the handmaids within the regime, while describing what Aunt Lydia's desire, how the handmaids should look like with their body, Offred put it as: " She wanted our heads bowed just right, our toes together and pointed, our elbows at the proper angle. Part of her interest in this was aesthetic: she liked the look of the thing. She wanted us to look like something Anglo-Saxon, carved on a tomb; or Christmas-card angels, regimented in our robes of purity" (Atwood 206). The foregoing passage upholds what handmaids have to look and perform according to the agenda of Gilead.

When the ceremony was held in the novel, handmaids had to sit down and listen to the biblical passages by the commander. Before its start, Offred explained how the commander's manner is over her and the handmaids: "He looks us over as if taking inventory [...] As if we are something he inherited, like a Victorian pump organ" (Atwood 99). This confirms the diagrammatic sight of the regime over handmaids, as being an object of docility and weakness and therefore a tool of submission and game.

Portraying women as objects continued in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In their daily walk, Offred and Ofglen stride along the street, Offred detailed once again the look she and her companion must look like: "We must look good from a distance: picturesque, like Dutch milkmaids on a wallpaper frieze, like a shelf full of period-costume ceramic salt and pepper shakers, like a flotilla of swans or anything that repeats itself with at least minimum grace and without variation" (Atwood 226). The protagonist viewed herself as something attractive but utilized and old. In fact, all that is said by the narrator is from the nostalgia Gilead made them feel.



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What can be noticed about Offred as being an object is when she defines herself as "A thing" (Atwood 78). She tried to accept that Gilead is "A heartland" (Atwood 77) and she eventually leading a "Pampered life" (ibid). This can be considered as a self-denial women live with if they are condemned into a totalitarian Republic as Gilead.

### **4 .Conclusion:**

All in all, all that has been discussed earlier in this chapter revealed the powerful tools the Republic of Gilead came with to repress women's desires, freedom and ultimately their bodies. Margaret Atwood tried to show every possible way of controlling women by a totalitarian state. It can be also considered as a caution for any woman who is situated anywhere in the world; they can be deceived by a wrong religion, they can be in touch with many dictator ways that strip away their identity and compare them with so many other things that people must not compare them to. In brief, the discussion above in this chapter has been targeted to how so far any totalitarian government can do to have everything because of one goal that is reproduction.

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# **Chapter Three : The Tactics of Gilead**

## **1. introduction**

Margaret Atwood's famous novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is feminist speculative science fiction, in which it narrates a new world of apocalyptic feminism, political and religious curve. The novel is told by the first-person narrator Offred who discussed her and other handmaids' story about a totalitarian regime that tore up their freedom and turned them into subjugated handmaids. Based on the political foundations, totalitarian republics trace foregrounds of control to maintain and enforce its people for that Gilead came into being with forceable foundations in which violence, surveillance, and discipline were its basics. On the surface, Gilead seems like a normal place where people live in peace and harmony, while in fact, it is a place where they belong to a big violent and massive erotic patriarchal society.

## **2. Gilead's Political and Social Tactics**

There are many systems which recognizes a totalitarian state, the tactics below were followed to keep the handmaids under control

### **2.1. Isolation and separatism**

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the woman is stripped away by a set of dominant rules; Margaret Atwood tried to reveal the misogynistic truth of a theocratic regime that swept away a woman's body, identity and existence. In Gilead, isolation is one of the tools that thwart women's independence. Gilead separated handmaids from their homes, their jobs and their families, in this regard Arendt said: "totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals" that "demand total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member" ( 323), she also notes that "such loyalty can be expected only from the completely isolated human being" who does not have "any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaintances" which makes it possible for him to belong only to the movement itself "( 323-324). This republic cut off all the ties

that can relate to social connections. In addition, it is quite fair that Offred shows her loneliness when she found herself separated from her family and her job, she once sings

*I feel so lonely, baby,*

*I feel so lonely, baby,*

*I feel so lonely I could die. ( Atwood 66)*

## **2.2 Disciplining Bodies by Imposing Space**

In order to maintain power, space is the ultimate tool that suspends Offred and her mates to have one shared place. Every handmaid has her own room. In her description of the room of gymnasium, Offred spots the light on the outside world of Gilead by saying:" We weren't allowed out, except for our walks, twice daily, two by two around the football field which was enclosed now by a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire" (Atwood 16), these kinds of arrangement help to provide a disciplinary space to make the body more subjugated than ever before. In his famous work *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains the reason for space that is to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conducts of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merit. (143)

When Offred passed across the kitchen where the Marthas were inside, she quite obviously notes that Marthas are not allowed to speak to her until it is necessary, she finally gets aware that: "Marthas are not supposed to fraternize with us"(23)

The disciplinary space that Gilead tried to implement in the novel is considered 'Enclosure',

Is neither constant, nor indispensable, nor sufficient in disciplinary machinery. This

machinery works space in a much more flexible and detailed way. It does this first of all on the principle of elementary location or partitioning. Each individual has his own place; and each place has its individual. Avoid distributions in groups; break up collective dispositions; analyse confused, massive or transient pluralities. Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed. (143)

In the novel, it is important to note that Gilead's building has no big difference from the very old centuries, thus, those walls were made to break the space between handmaids and the outside world, Offred pays her attention to the wall that: "is hundred of years old too. Like the sidewalks, it's red brick, and must once have been plain but handsome. Now the gates have sentries and there are ugly new floodlights mounted on metal posts above it, and barbed wire along the bottom and broken glass set in concrete along the top" (Atwood 43)

### **2.3 The Loss of Identity**

It seems that the control built by Gilead was not enough to patronize its governmental goals. In Gilead or any state of dictatorship, each individual has to believe that his identity must be in service to others, in other words, for sacrifice. From Offred's comments: "we lived in the gaps between the stories"(Atwood 69). This further means that handmaids are useless and incapable to mark their story by themselves. As they are also a bit from everything. In further argument, Offred seems so desperate for her body when she said: "I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely"(Atwood 74-75) for she is convinced that only her body is at utmost importance.

Under constant rules, the Aunts whom they are the conspirators and the supporters of men's domination in Gilead practise a brainwashing technique to convince handmaids that following the new rituals are vital, for on this occasion Aunt Lydia conditioned handmaids

that:" if you have a lot of things, you get too attached to this material world and you forget about spiritual values"( Atwood 76) establishing such obligations made Offred so dismissed when saying:" I don't have those things any more, the clothes and hair. I wonder what happened to all our things. Looted, dumped out, carried away. Confiscated"(Atwood 76)

On every possible occasion, Handmaids must learn by heart the instructions of Aunts. However, in the bathroom, Offred may feel the freedom and relief she might never feel outside. As a result, she reports her state as: "the bath is a requirement, but it is also a luxury. Merely to lift off the heavy white wings and the veil, merely to feel my own hair again, with my hands, is a luxury. My hair is long now, untrimmed." (Atwood 74). All that used to represent Offred's freedom before, is now driving her to a state of mourn because she is aware of the serious environment she lives in where identity and self-recognition do not exist.

Women believed that there would be no future after all that they lost and to whom they were obliged to succumb, the chances were absent and despair appeared by Offred's recognition:" I can't think of myself, my body, sometimes, without seeing the skeleton: how I must appear to an electron" (Atwood 124). In this regard, women lose their potential and ability to be independent. Daniels and Bowen describe these women's daily life, "they have no choice regarding the treatment of their bodies; no permission to select the individuals with whom they pass time; [they have] no control over their lives" (428)

All that is left for the Handmaids is to accept the idea of Gilead's control because as Vevaina wrote: "The Republic of Gilead justifies its sexist policies with the socio-biological theory of natural polygamy and legitimizes its racist and sexist policies as having biblical precedent" (qtd in. Mouda 224).

#### **2.4. Fear for Penalty**

As with many tactics Gilead used to maintain power over the handmaid's body, showing fear constructed as a new and necessary level of control that handmaids should embrace and follow. Handmaids, among them Offred, showed the amount of fear they have towards their bodies because it is the only flesh that keeps them in survival. Stephanie Barbé Hammer defines it as “a very different kind of technology [...] the technology of power which Michel Foucault has called discipline” (qtd in. H. Howell 45). In addition, the most fearful thing handmaids were afraid of is to be sent to colonies and have been called 'Unwoman'. In the novel, when the testifying process held place, Aunts were ready to listen to the handmaid's complaints and past events: "It's Janine, telling about how she was gang-raped at fourteen and had an abortion" [...] "But who's fault was it? Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger" [...] "Her, fault, her fault, her fault, we chant in unison. Who led them on? Aunt Helena beams, pleased with us. She did. She did. She did" (Atwood 83-84). By the answer followed by Janine: "It was my fault, she says. It was my own fault. I led them on. I deserved the pain." (Atwood 84). One can see from these examples that Handmaids are forced to believe and obey the advocating rules of Gilead because of fear.

Inside Gilead, women have to give birth to the commanders in sometimes-short terms, in doing so, Offred feels much frustrated with the possibility of not giving out one or being late to do so. The fact is, in Gilead, women have to rush into this process and follow all the instructions that could bring a child into being otherwise handmaids are in a serious problem. During Offred's visit to the doctor that is monthly programmed for all handmaids, the doctor offers himself to her, he says: "I've seen your chart. You don't have a lot of time left. But it's your life" after she refuses his proposal as she went on saying "No. I can't." "The penalty is death"(Atwood 73). Though giving birth for commanders is a life goal but Offred refuses the Doctor's offer and prefers to wait rather than turning to the penalty that was her greatest fear.



In Fred Waterford's household when Offred was indoctrinated as a handmaid, there exist rules, among those rules are that commanders must not have any contact with handmaids, because as Offred says: " We are for breeding purposes, [...] we are two-legged womb, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices"(Atwood 148). However, Waterford insists on meeting her and she was afraid of two things, first, of the commander's wife Serena Joy, second, for the worst things that may come if not meeting the commander. She states, "If I'm caught, it's to Serena's tender mercies I'll be delivered [...]. After that, reclassification. I could become an unwoman"( Atwood 148). In this regard, Offred's whole subjugation is to abend to rules; avoid suspicion, and the obligation of having fear to be excluded from punishment and thus being bodily inherited to all the circumstances of the new Gilead's traditions.

In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault discussed another kind of punishment similar to what *The Handmaids Tale* entails, is the Semio-technique of punishment, in which he defines it as follows:

This 'ideological power' which, partly at least, will remain in suspense and will be superseded by a new political anatomy, in which the body, once again, but in a new form, will be the principal character. And this new political anatomy will permit the intersection of the two divergent lines of objectification that are to be seen emerging in the eighteenth century: that which rejects the criminal 'from the other side'- from the side of a nature against nature; and that which seeks to control delinquency by a calculated economy of punishments. A glance at the new art of punishing clearly reveals the supersession of the punitive semio-technique by a new politics of a body. (103).

From this quote above, it may be constructed that teaching fear in the heart and minds of handmaids make the process of disciplining their bodies so much easier than anyone could ever think, Moreover,

Having the ideas of crime and punishment must be strongly linked and 'follow one another without interruption [. . .] When you have thus formed the chain of ideas in the heads of your citizens, you will then be able to pride yourselves on guiding them and being their masters. A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of re- Generalized punishment their own ideas; it is at the stable point of reason that he secures the end of the chain; this link is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work; despair and time eat away the bonds of iron and steel, but they are powerless against the habitual union of ideas, they can only tighten it still more, and on the soft fibres of the brain is founded the unshakable base of the soundest of Empires'. (Servan qtd. in Foucault 102-103)

It seems significant that handmaids in general and Offred, in particular, have to believe the dogma of the totalitarian regime of Gilead. Offred when telling the death of her mother in the story upsettingly concludes:" I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance" (Atwood 51)

The narrator's fear shows the paradoxical relationship with her body. There were times where Offred checks herself:

I sink down into my body as into a swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing. Treacherous ground, my own territory. I become the air I set my ear against, for rumours of the future. Each twinge, each murmur of slight pain, ripples of sloughed-off matter, swellings and diminishings of tissue, the droolings of the flesh, these are signs, these are the things I need to know about. Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which have become my own. (Atwood 85).

In addition, Atwood explicates the dichotomy between fear and the conflict that is merely swaying into the handmaids' mind. Offred has something else to tell about her body compared to past events and the present:

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, pushbuttons, of one sort or another, make things happen. There were limits but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me. Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object. (Atwood 85-86)

## **2.5. The Eyes and Spies**

Whatever is in the implementation of Gilead, it runs only on the circuits of its plans. In the novel, the handmaids' future reproduction is allied with new techniques that try to cover women's existence and unfold the necessity of feminist reproductive technology. In this regard, handmaids are also again: "caught up in a network of surveillance and counter-surveillance" (Hammer qtd in. H. Howell 45). Whosever set these rules, he is aware of the amount of effect they make on handmaids' bodies and thus the body becomes the sole purpose. When Offred describes Nick, the commander's Chauffeur, she notices that he is looking at her constantly until she suspiciously recognizes: "Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do. Perhaps he is an eye"(Atwood 30). In another context, Offred meets her walk-companion Ofglen; she then describes the reason for walking by two in Gilead's space: "the truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable" (Atwood 31).

In the words of David Lyon, surveillance is used for, "any collection and processing of personal data, whether identifiable or not, for the purposes of influencing or managing those whose data have been garnered" (qtd in. Dubrofsky and Magnet 2), in order to develop our

idea about surveillance, Offred has a great deal with exploring how surveillance is spreading out in streets by the Guardians too:" Behind the barrier, waiting for us at the narrow gateway there are two men, in the green uniforms of the Guardians of the faith [...] and they are either stupid or older or disabled or very young, apart from the ones that are Eyes incognito"(Atwood 32)

Many Writers reinforce the idea that surveillance is to go further to extend and it is not just: "dismantle or disaggregate the coherent body bit by bit" ( in Dubrofsky and magnet 9) but also: " remake the body, producing new ways of visualizing bodily identities in ways that highlight othered forms of racialized, gendered, classed, abled, and disabled bodies, as well as sexualized identities" (Dubrofsky and Magnet 9). One example is when Offred and Offglen pass across the street watching Japanese tourists and an interpreter approaches

"Excuse me," He says to both of us, politely enough. "They are asking if they can take your picture.", "I look down at the sidewalk, shake my head for No. what they must see is the white wings only, a scrap of face, my chin and part of my mouth. Not the eyes. I know better than to look the interpreter in the face. Most of the interpreters are Eyes, or so it's said" (Atwood 40)

In the narrative under study, Aunts are the most conspirators who teach new techniques that handmaids should accept and embrace. among these lessons is how to be surveilled and under security, when Offred refuse to take pictures with the Japanese tourists, she remembered Aunt Lydia saying:" Modesty is invisibility, never forget it"(Atwood 40-41). From this above example, Surveillance must be sometimes figured as invisibility, as for Gilead is modesty and a normal ritual every woman should follow.

## **2.6. Aunts**

In the totalitarian Republic of Gilead, female solidarity started to take a much more marginalized position, in which women should work according to their social position, most

the aunts. Aunts kept talking about the importance of the presented republic and the unexpected futuristic event that could happen without this republic and thus what the future would hopefully bring if all handmaids perform their appointed activities. This kind of patriarchy again tried to distort the feminist position by assigning women against their same gender. within the novel, Aunts practise a kind of brainwashing, they constantly announced rules and act violently if necessary. During a walk, an Aunt's comment stroke Offred's mind: "The Republic of Gilead, said Aunt Lydia, knows no bounds. Gilead is within you" (Atwood 35). This can be seen as an attempt to convince handmaids that the only road you should take is Gilead, with its rules and rituals.

In her usual walk with Ofglen by the church, Offred caught sight of six bodies of men hanged in a wall; it is actually a kind of a must to see them there. "I feel blankness," she said (Atwood 45). "Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary" (Atwood 45). Though Offred wants badly to feel sorry for them, Aunts reassert that this is a normal way that all handmaids should accept. Hence, everything a handmaid sees (grammatical mistake) can be a caution to her.

According to Barbara Hill Rigney in her book *Margaret Atwood*, "the control agency in this novel is, not the commanders, but the 'Aunts', who run their re-education centres with cattle prods, torture techniques, and brain washing slogans" (qtd in. Mirzayee 118). So far, this can be a justification of the power of Aunts in taking charge of the handmaid's activities more than the owners. An example of brainwashing and lying promises the Aunts assert is: « For the generations that come after, Aunt Lydia said, it will be so much better. The women will live in harmony together, all in one family; you will be like daughters to them, and when the population level is up to scratch again we'll no longer have to transform you from one house to another because there will be enough to go round ». (Atwood 173)

### **3. The Cultural Tactics**

In order to keep the women's bodies under surrogation, Gilead had many different tactics; from this latter, cultural tactics were provided.

#### **3.1. New Fashion and the Red Clothing**

It seems crucial to change the body of handmaids by imposing new fashion clothes on their bodies; the red colour has a significant role in making handmaids' body docile and fragmented. The colour red historically signifies power and trustworthiness. In the handmaid's tale, Red becomes the symbol of weakness to the handmaids, otherwise, it is a kind of resistance and power of Gilead. Offred in describing the red clothing said: "I get up out of the chair, advance my feet into the sunlight, in their red shoes, flat-heeled to save the spine and not for dancing [...] Everything Except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. The skirt is ankle-length, full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, The sleeves are full" (Atwood 20). Their bodies shape is strictly covered because that is what was assigned to them as handmaids.

Assigning this colour to be worn has one more objective behind, that/which is to diminish the actions of the body that it can do, the red colour determines where handmaids should go and where not, from which angle in streets can walk and in which streets they cannot walk. In other words, it orients the women's body and marks its attitude. The colour in Gilead is not just a colour, but it has its deep meaning and significance. In discussing The Roman soldiers Greenfield has shown the relationship between soldiers and handmaids, in which their duty is similar, "the red tunic signified a man who had taken the soldier's oath and no longer lived under normal laws; at this commander's order, he could kill without fear of punishment"(20). One thing that differentiates handmaids and soldiers is that handmaids bear children for the state of Gilead while soldiers fight for their commanders.

As mentioned above, clothing has objectives within the Republic of Gilead, Cynthia G.Kuhn who states in her book *Self-Fashioning in Margaret Atwood's Fiction* stressed this argument:

Because clothing has a close relationship to the body, attention to dress and appearance has been associated with the erotic, particularly the sin of the body. [...] Whether it is categorized as artistic representation or as a semiotic system, dress clearly locates a site of performance. "Performance" is a term used widely in a variety of fields, and an important element of performance is its space as "a border, a margin, a site of negotiation (2-4)

In Gilead, everything is planned thus the dress code is apparently used to prevent handmaids to perform through its cycle; the dress stressed once again the importance of fertility and reproduction. Additionally, it is a system to break confidence and deconstruct the essence of the woman's body. In her walk into the kitchen, Offred saw herself through the mirror:

If I turn my head so that the white wings framing my face direct my vision towards it, I can see it as I go down the stairs, round, convex, a pier-glass, like the eye of a fish, and myself in it like a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairytale figure in a red cloak, descending towards a moment of carelessness that is the same as danger (Atwood 21)

### **3.2. Food**

The rationed portrait of food in Gilead differs from the modern food in any country in the world, as a totalitarian state, Gilead follows its severe outlines and routines of food to sustain the feminist body. Food representation in the novel told what the handmaids are for. In which reason they exist and why. Sarah Sceats's quote in *Images of food and Eating in Margaret Atwood's Novels*: "Eating is a fundamental activity (...) the first thing we do (...)

the primary source of pleasure and frustration (...) What people eat, how and with whom, what they feel about food and why — even who they eat — are of crucial significance to an understanding of human society (qtd in.Lahikainem). Food, therefore, has a strong identification to control and discipline toward the female body.

When speaking about the food in Gilead, it is vital to point out some aspects. For example, cigarettes and coffees are prohibited. The food in this state considers as a tactic and a norm, which indicates that control is limitless and power is for men. As stated by Parker that eating: «is employed as a metaphor for power and is used as an extremely subtle means of examining the relationship between women and men. The powerful are characterized by their eating and the powerless by their non-eating" (349). Food, in addition, is monotonous and almost limited.

The term of food usually relates to femininity because females usually cook as Lupton's inquiry in *The Images of Food and Eating in Margaret Atwood's Novels*: "Food and eating are feminine and embodied" (qtd in.Lahikainem). However, in Gilead, it is restricted and planned. For the Aunts, Food is crucial for the handmaids: "Healthy food. You have to get your vitamins and minerals, said Aunt Lydia coyly. You must be a worthy vessel. No coffee or tea though, no alcohol. Studies have been done. There's a paper napkin, as in cafeterias" (Atwood 77)

Food and its images vary in the novel, for the protagonist butter becomes one of the favourite lotions skin, she longs to tap it and feel the freedom Gilead prohibited. Hand lotions are "Vanities" (Atwood 109). Food is, therefore, considered as a pleasure for the destructive beauty of Offred that is beyond disciplines and rules. Offred, in addition, resembles "old cheese in its smell" (Atwood 109). She looks after being buttered "like a piece of toast" (Atwood 110). These similarities highlighted the successive defeats of the handmaids and the dangerous calamities of the republic of Gilead.



Offred usually believed that food is compared to parts from the woman's body, as she compared "the egg cup to the woman's torso" (Atwood 122). As mentioned above, the meaning of food is beyond what every normal human being can think. It reveals the attitude, the function, and the activities of women inside Gilead, it is mixed up with a realm of rules and subsequent consequences handmaids trapped. It is as Schofield puts it: "articulates in concrete terms what is oftentimes vague, internal, abstract. (...) Food cooked, eaten, and thought about provides a metaphoric matrix, a language that allows us a way to get at the uncertainty, the ineffable qualities of life" (qtd in. Lahikainen)

#### **4. Conclusion:**

This chapter implies the excessive rules and disciplines of the republic Gilead connected to the female body, from social to political to cultural implementation. It shows how totalitarian regime circulates through a varied kind of fields to take control over handmaids whose human life is diminished. In the novel, handmaids suffered from harsh corporeal experiences within this totalitarian society where reproduction traced along with the love of power, patriarchy, and decisive laws. Besides, the work above discussed the weakness of the protagonist that consequently, permitting the catastrophic consequences of subjugation and exploitation of the female body.

# **General Conclusion**

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a prolific novel that has spotted all the dogma of a dystopic world of the characters. This study contains some of the outlines that Atwood tried to convey. Moreover, it discusses the amiss attitudes of a world full of repression and misogyny.

Although misogyny held back centuries ago, still, the way men treated women nowadays is outdated, the problem still long, and the dilemma grows permanently. Yet, from this latter, Atwood had come across the reader through ideas, systems and logical backgrounds to reveal the possibilities of modern living women today while men have always regarded themselves as the prominent human beings that can take everything for granted. From this latter, we noticed that discipline and surveillance in this novel is related to women, who on the one hand, suffered from many atrocities throughout human history. We have seen, additionally, how people from the elite class misuse sacred scriptures to come along their greed. Consequently, this research targeted to come at the process of investigating a further explanation of how totalitarianism comes to control women with all its system, and how in hence women bodies are manifesting during this field of surveillance.

In order to achieve this aim, this study has been built upon three chapters. The first chapter, on one hand, meant to show the theoretical framework concerning the women's body, its function to serve male's desires and theories that reveal how women bodies look in multifunctional fields as politics and nature. On the other hand, the second and the third chapters were analytical, in which they highlight the subsequences of rules as being a pivotal push to force the women body for staying docile.

Through the lenses of the main character in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred indoctrinated for being a handmaid under the strict rules of Gilead. In addition, she shaped a dystopic journey by narrating her and other handmaids' stories within totalitarianism. She also

discussed firmly the system, which lies behind this power, the religious extremism and the establishing order to control the weakest creatures on earth.

After reading the novel, this study goes so far as to enhance the possibility of having transgressive thoughts about religion, excessive possession of women, and abnormal control over the female body which is considered to be the heartland of every human beings. Disciplining the body could be among the dilemmas the world will survey as well as the world will destroy. This makes Atwood re-counts what the universe must look at.

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# Appendix

## **Appendix : Margaret Atwood's Biography and brief summary of her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)**

Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa, Ontario, in 1939.

She is the daughter of a forest entomologist, and spent part of her early years in the bush of North Quebec. She moved, at the age of seven, to Toronto. She studied at the University of Toronto, then took her Masters degree at Radcliffe College, Massachusetts, in 1962. She is Canada's most eminent novelist and poet, and also writes short stories, critical studies, screenplays, radio scripts and books for children ; her works have been translated into over 30 languages. Her reviews and critical articles have appeared in various eminent magazines and she has also edited many books, including *The New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English* (1983) and, with Robert Weaver, *The Oxford Book of Canadian Short Stories in English* (1986). She has been a full-time writer since 1972, first teaching English, then holding a variety of academic posts and writer residencies. She was President of the Writers Union of Canada from 1981-1982 and President of PEN, Canada from 1984-1986. Her first publication was a book of poetry, *The Circle Game* (1964), which received the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry (Canada). Several more poetry collections have followed, including *Interlunar* (1988), *Morning in the Burned House* (1995) and *Eating Fire : Selected Poetry, 1965-1995* (1998). Her books of short fiction include *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* (1982), *Wilderness Tips* (1991) and *Good Bones* (1992).

She is perhaps best known, however, for her novels, in which she creates strong, often enigmatic, women characters and excels in telling open-ended stories, while dissecting contemporary urban life and sexual politics. Her first novel was *The Edible Woman* (1969), about a woman who cannot eat and feels that she is being eaten. This was followed by: *Surfacing* (1973), which deals with a woman's investigation into her father's disappearance; *Lady Oracle* (1977); *Life Before Man* (1980); *Bodily Harm* (1982), the story

of Rennie Wilford, a young journalist recuperating on a Caribbean island; and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), a futuristic novel describing a woman's struggle to break free from her role. She subsequently published *Cat's Eye* (1989), dealing with the subject of bullying among young girls; *The Robber Bride* (1993); *Alias Grace* (1996), the tale of a woman who is convicted for her involvement in two murders about which she claims to have no memory; *The Blind Assassin* (2000), a multi-layered family memoir; and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), a vision of a scientific dystopia, which was short listed for the 2003 Man Booker Prize for Fiction and for the 2004 Orange Prize for Fiction. *Alias Grace*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Cat's Eye* were all short listed for the Booker Prize for Fiction; *The Blind Assassin* won this prize in 2000.

Some of Margaret Atwood's books have been adapted for stage and screen. A television series based on *Alias Grace* was broadcast in 2017, and a television film for *The Robber Bride* appeared in 2007. *The Edible Woman* has been staged, while *The Handmaid's Tale* has been adapted for screen by Harold Pinter in a film directed by Volker Schlöndorff, released in 1990, staged as an opera by Poul Ruders - the British Premiere was performed by English National Opera at the Coliseum, London, in April 2003 - and became a television series in 2017.

Margaret Atwood is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, has been presented with the Order of Ontario and the Norwegian Order of Literary Merit, and has been awarded 16 honorary degrees. She has lived in many places including Canada, England, Scotland and France, and currently lives in Toronto.

Recent books are: *Stone Mattress* (2014), a collection of short stories; *MaddAddam* (2013), concluding the dystopian trilogy started with *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009); *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) and *Hag-Seed* (2016). *The Testaments* (2019) returns to the fictional world of *The Handmaid's Tale* and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

In 2011, she published a book of essays about science-fiction, entitled *In Other Worlds: Science Fiction and The Human Imagination*

Dr Nick Turner, 2009



## **Short summary :**

There is a low fertility rate, and fertile women are being imprisoned and getting forced to reproduce for the high rank of society. They are the handmaids. Offred gets assigned to a commander and his wife, where she is to abide by strict rules.

During each month when she is likely to conceive, there is a ceremony whereby Offred has to have intercourse with the commander to conceive a child who would be considered the family of the commander and Joy, his wife.

Offred often thinks of life before the Gilead came into power. She had a husband and a daughter. She and her husband Luke tried to escape with her daughter but got caught. They were separated, and Offred does not know where her family is. Moira, her friend, escapes the Centre.

Offred breaks routine on orders from the commander, and they become close to the point she kisses him goodnight every night. Offred is not pregnant yet, and they start suggesting the commander is infertile. She is instructed to have intercourse with Nick.

Offred finds out that her friend Moira was living as a prostitute. The commander takes Offred to the brothel. Offred fakes the experience for the commander's sake. She is later sent to Nick, and sex with him is passionate. She starts sneaking to meet Nick, and they start a risky relationship.

A mob of women executes a man accused of rape as was the rule. Offred becomes confronted by Serena about the incident at the brothel, and this presents a danger. A black van arrives to take her away, the commander is surprised, and his wife is angry. Nick had told Offred that the van would lead her to freedom. Offred is not sure where she is being taken