

# Gilead as a dystopian novel

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



GILEAD AS A DYSTOPIAN NOVEL “ The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood takes place in the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian and theocratic state where women are seen as an object. Because of low reproduction rates, the Handmaids are assigned to bear children for elite couples. Atwood wrote this novel based on a dystopian society to warn the reader about the dangers of a theocratic and oppressive society. She creates a dystopia with the elements such as; the oppression of women, the perversion of religion and the anti-feminist ideologies. The first element which creates an anti-Utopian structure in Gilead is the oppression of women. In Gilead, women are unable to vote, hold property or jobs. For example in one of the flashbacks of the narrator, she tells how they were fired and how their money was transferred to their husbands’s accounts. It is an evidence that they try to control women with taking their independence. Also, women aren’t allowed to read and write because it could encourage them to rebel. For instance, the Bible is always kept locked to prevent women from reading it. Because if they can read it, they will realize the perversion of religion in their society. Another way, in which Gilead oppresses women is the control they have over their names. The Handmaids take their names from their Commanders such as “ Offred”, “ Ofen” and “ Ofwarren”. The purpose is to emphasize that the Handmaids are objects and controlled by the Commanders. To sum up, by taking the women’s jobs, money, right to read and write, the oppression is built. The second element is the theocratic regime and it is conveyed through the vocabulary, the role of the Handmaids and the dominance of males. In Gilead, politics and religion sleep in same bed. There are many biblical references. Domestic servants are called “ Marthas” in reference to

the New Testament, all stores have biblical names like “ Milk and Honey”. It provides a reminder that the founders of Gilead act on the authority of Bible itself. In the Red Center, the role of the Handmaids is explained from the story of Rachel and Leah. They are told how lucky they should feel because of the holiness of their role, to reproduce. In the novel, religion is used to fear people and make women obey their male counterparts. Women are seen as slaves and sexual objects. In brief, there is an obvious perversion of religion and Atwood shows the consequences of it by creating a well-structured dystopia. The Republic of Gilead is built with anti-feminist ideologies like women must be controlled by men. Their freedom is taken away and they become like objects who don't question anything. The idea that women should return to being housewives is against feminism. Serena Joy is an anti-feminist and she “ makes speeches about how women should stay at home”. There is a huge conflict between Serena Joy and the feminist characters like Offred's mother. Offred's mother works against pornography and tries to teach Offred how to be an individual, strong woman when she's a child. In Gilead, the women are “ valued only in terms of their biological usefulness as child bearers”. Atwood builds up a strong dystopia by making its rules based on anti-feminist ideologies. “ The Handmaid's Tale” can be seen as a dystopian novel. The oppression of women is linked to the Bible, however, it doesn't have any message like women must obey men. It shows how the founders of Gilead pervert religion according to their advantages and how they create rules based on anti-feminism. Finally, the oppression of women, the perversion of religion and anti-feminist ideologies are like keys on the same key ring which open a door to a dystopia called Gilead.