

How does atwood explore the theme of love in the novel 'the handmaid's tale'?

[Life](#), [Love](#)



The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood describes the story of Offred, a Handmaid, a woman ascribed a breeding function by the society in which she lives in, and who is placed with a husband and wife higher up the social ladder that " need" a child. Through Offred's eyes we explore the rigidity of the theocracy in which she lives, the contradictions in the society they have created, and her attempts to find solace through otherwise trivial things. In this essay I will talk and explore the issue of how " love" is portrayed throughout the 'Handmaid's Tale.

The people and the situations, where love is required and abused, such as in the 'ceremony! ' The immediate form of love in the novel is the love between 'Offred' and her best friend 'Moira. ' This love is portrayed to the readers through the eyes of 'friendship' shared between two people through times of childhood, right through to the times of hardship, such as in the society of Gilead. Moira has been Offred's friend right from high school, when she would come around her house, 'dropping her denim jacket onto the floor... Right through to the times where Offred was having an affair, with Luke, her present husband. Moira's love for Offred seems to come across as her guide and advisor, she is the one individual described by Offred as being a 'fantasy' and also by the other handmaid's.

When Moira and Offred meet one another after a time of separation in the new regime Offred describes being 'ridiculously happy. ' This immediately indicates to the reader, the fact that the friendship shared between these two women is so intense that even after a long separation they are 'still' excited and happy to see one another.

Most readers can relate to this, from their personal experiences, when they have been separated from their childhood friends and then have come into touch, these feelings are both felt and explored by the handmaid's and the readers, who relate to the feelings and emotions of separation. The one factor against their friendship in the society is that they are unable to explain what they feel for one another, they derived of talking and making any form of communication towards one another, 'Friendships were suspicious... e avoided each other. '

This also immediately informs the reader of the fact that these two women care for one another to such an extent that they are unable to cause any harm to one another, if it means to not talk to each other than so be it, they will not talk to one another. They care for one another to the extent that they will not allow a ridiculous law from the Gileadian society to come between their most intense and long friendship.

The readers can relate to this from their own experiences, because if they too have intense friendships with their friends then they too will try their utmost hardest to not allow any one or any law to come between them. The 'love' of friendship between Moira and Offred, outlines the fact that there are still people living in this society that value friendship, even though it is forbidden. Like Moira, from Offred's past she had memories of her husband Luke and her young daughter, whom she loved very much and also the two closest family members she lost the night they were running away from the society of Gilead.

Memories of her daughter seem to always be sad, as the flash backs she gets of her daughter are of a distressing nature. This is a clear example of when Offred has a nightmare of the night she was 'running with her' (her daughter). Offred remembers 'holding her daughters hand' and then also seeing 'her go away from me... being carried away from me. ' These memories of Offred's daughter are extremely painful for her as she wakes up wiping her 'wet' face, which are obviously 'tears.

From this the readers come to a conclusion that Offred loved and still loves her daughter so much that even when she thinks or dreams of her it brings tears to her eyes. Offred loves her daughter so much and probably regrets and is saddened by the fact that she was unable to say her final 'goodbye' to her own daughter. Even though Offred throughout most of her novel doesn't know where her daughter is she, or whether she is still alive or not, she believes in her heart that her daughter is still alive and one day in the future she will meet her.

This immediately shows that readers that the love and bond between mother and daughter is so deep that Offred, a mother still is adamant that one day they 'will' meet again. Luke, Offred's husband, like their daughter has also been taken away from Offred, who has no idea where he has been taken, what he does and whether is still alive. However Offred is still in the belief that like her daughter Luke is well, healthy and one day he too will meet her and all three of them will run away as far as possible where the Gileadian society will not find them.

Offred loved Luke so much in her past that she was willing to spend days and even night with him, 'before the divorce,' of him and his present wife at that time which was not Offred. This immediately informs the readers that the love that was shared between Offred and Luke was so intense that they were willing to leave everything that they had in the past to be with one another, and if this meant Luke divorcing his wife for Offred then so be it. The extent of their love was the result of their daughter.

Offred throughout the novel has believed that Luke and her would reunite again in the past, she fantasises of him when she's on her own, 'I want Luke here so bad... I want to be held, told my name... want to be valued... I want to be more than valued. " This immediately informs the readers that the love shared between Offred and her husband Luke, was a love in which Offred felt 'loved' and 'valued' not used for the single purpose of 'sex,' just to make babies for the 'un-women! The theme of 'love' in the novel is given a whole new identity in the 'Handmaid's Tale,' this, because, 'love' is if you have strong emotional feelings of affection for someone. The idea of 'making love' is when two people 'in love' and have sexual and romantic feelings towards each other and express it through 'making love-sex. ' However in the handmaid's Tale, the handmaids are being completely used for the function of making babies for the couples that can't have any.

These women are having 'sex' with men they are 'not' in love with, with men who 'don't' feel anything towards them, with men who just want them for the function of making babies and nothing else. There is no emotional attachment... 'Kissing is forbidden! ' this is the total abuse of the name and

meaning of 'love. ' As far as the Gileadian society is concerned, there should be no love between two people, women should be baby and sex machines to use whenever they want, this is shown to the readers when Nick is described as not having a 'woman issued' to him yet!

Therefore the context of 'actual' love does not exist in the novel; love is only sex and babies. No emotional attachment, as in the ceremony, where Offred is held down and 'fucked,' by the commanders, who 'fucks' her and leaves. The ceremony in which the commander 'fucks' Offred is blatantly the most disturbing forms of so called 'love' in the novel. In this scene, Offred is pinned down by the commanders wife, whilst the commander 'fucks' her. 'Kissing is forbidden,' which obviously means that there is no emotional or sexual attachment in the whole process of making love.

Offred herself explains that she is 'not' making love with the commander. It is him who is just 'fucking her. ' From this ceremony the readers come to a conclusion and realise that the actual meaning of love had be re-written, just like the palimpsest, therefore the people living in the society have had to stop the 'normal' way they should be thinking about making 'love' and now just have sex for the benefit of having children.

Overall I come to a conclusion, that the theme of by Margaret Atwood, 'love' in the novel has been completely abused by those living in this regime, especially the commanders. I also come to a conclusion that there are still some people in the regime, such as the handmaids, who still crave the

desires they have had in the past, such as being 'valued' and 'loved' by their husbands.

Also I have learnt that 'love' in this novel is not necessarily about 'sex' but also the 'love' between two friends; Offred and Moira, who are each others backbones throughout the novel, inspiring each other to become better people and over come this regime. Finally I have also learn that love is not only about 'sex' its about loving one another mentally, emotionally and then physically, you only realise what you had in the past, until you lose it... this is what has happen to the handmaid's.