

# Development of the theme by Margaret Atwood



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Margaret Atwood tells the story of a handmaid called Offred living in the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian and theocratic state that has replaced the United States of America, in her novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. In the theocratic Republic of Gilead, extreme conservative, religious ideology is followed as a solution to societal problems. Doctors who performed abortions are hanged at the Wall outside what used to be Harvard University because abortion is a crime.

Women are banned from possessing money or owning property to ensure their dependence on men. And based on the biblical precedent of Rachel and Leah, where fertile servants can carry on adulterous relationships to allow infertile women to have children, handmaids are assigned to bear the children of elite couples that have trouble conceiving because of the dangerously low reproduction rates. Furthermore, Offred is assigned to bear a child for her Commander, Fred Waterford, and his wife, Serena Joy. In the theocratic state, women are nothing more than their fertility. Atwood develops her theme about femininity in the Republic of Gilead through the usage of figurative language, tone, and imagery.

The idea of a woman's eggs comes up frequently in *The Handmaid's Tale*, as it reminds us that they're part of a woman's reproductive cycle. Offred usually has eggs for breakfast to make her own healthy eggs. One day at breakfast, Offred thinks to herself that [looking] at the egg gives [her] intense pleasure, adding that, Pleasure is an egg... If [she has] an egg, what more can [she] want? (Atwood 110). In her mind, there is nothing else that she can want because having an egg symbolizes her being fertile. Another example of figurative language in *The Handmaid's Tale* is with the

comparison of women and flowers. Flowers are often considered symbols of beauty or fertility, both defining femininity in the novel. In the novel, flowers are a reminder that many women lack fertility. The older wives in the novel hang onto their beauty and fertility by decorating themselves in flowers or tending gardens. Oddly, Serena Joy is bizarrely pleased by mutilating flowers. Serena Joy's mutilating of flowers is seen by Offred as an attack on their fertility (Atwood 153). Perhaps, the attack on the flowers are attacks that she would like to make on Offred, the flower living in her house. With the women's attitude toward eggs and flowers in the Republic of Gilead, Atwood develops the theme that women are nothing more than their fertility in the theocratic state.

Another way Atwood develop the theme of femininity is by tone. For example, in chapter forty one, Offred says that she wishes [the] story... was about sunsets, birds, rainstorms, or snow (Atwood 267) but she can't because she says things for how they are, showing her dispassionate and factual tone. With the narrator's tone, the audience realizes that throughout the book, Offred's life revolves around her fertility because that is all she is in that theocratic state. We, as the audience, understand that she can't tell the story differently because that's what she knows and what she knows is that she lives in an uncivilized state obsessed with her fertility. By using tone it showcases that that women are only being used for their fertility and aren't able to do anything us or anything about it.

Lastly, Atwood develops the theme through imagery. In Gilead, Offred's power is her fertility because that's all women are" their fertility. She's just a childbearing vessel and Atwood illustrates a clear image when Offred, Serena  
<https://assignbuster.com/development-of-the-theme-by-margaret-atwood/>

Joy, and Fred Waterford have The Ceremony, a highly ritualized sexual act undergone to conceive children. In The Ceremony, Offred lies between Serena Joy's legs with her head on Serena's stomach, both fully clothed. Offred describes that [Serena's] pubic bone [is] under the base of [her] skull and that [Serena's] thighs are on either side of [her] as Offred's arms are raised to hold hands with Serena (Atwood 93-94). The position the narrator is in signifies that she and Serena Joy are one being (Atwood 94), Offred acting as the fertile uterus of Serena Joy. During The Ceremony, as Offred is having intercourse with Fred, Serena grips Offred's hands as if she's the one having intercourse. This further illustrates that women in Gilead are nothing more than their fertility. With Atwood using imagery it helps people see just how the women were treated, and how the fertility of a women were being used.

In the Republic of Gilead, women are nothing more than fertile, childbearing vessels and the author develops that idea by utilizing figurative language, tone, and imagery. We see in *The Handmaid's Tale* that the women have most of their freedom taken away and their only worth to society is their fertility. They aren't supposed to use their minds and are forbidden from reading, working outside of their homes, and spending money. Those who are fertile like Offred become baby-making machines and live lives revolving around their fertility. Other than that the women's have no freedom whatsoever and aren't allowed to do anything that gets their mind to think.