

A handmaid's tale essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In 'A Handmaid's Tale' religion is a major theme, probably the most dominant. There are many references to religion, although most are not explicit. Religion is simply a constant undertone which manifests a greater depth to the novel. Firstly, the location is biblical. Gilead was a restorative mountainous region in ancient Palestine that is referred to in the Old Testament. 'Balm in Gilead,' it is the image of an embattled state. It was a place for reconditioning your spirits (Myrrh), and it was renamed [to Gilead] when the regime started.

Even things like the shops in town have a biblical link. 'Lilies of the Field' for instance is a reference to the beautiful flowers spoken of in the Old Testament. 'Milk and Honey' refers to the promised land. 'Eyes', who are fundamentally spies placed in order to catch offenders of the regime, is a proverb also from the Old Testament. Even the protocol greeting, "Blessed be the fruit" is a biblical reference, (Luke's gospel 1: 42.) In the first chapter we are introduced almost immediately to religion. The Angels that govern the Red Centre are, in theory, educating the handmaid's by the words of God.

This is ironic as angels are normally associated with protection, not incarceration with is effectively what is being done to the young women who are learning to be handmaid's. Another thing that is said to have taken place at the Red Centre is a sort of confession. The idea of purging your former self in order to start fresh and live, think and act proper is something that is alluded to regularly. Janine's confession was like a confession, however instead of being a private confession, it was done in front of all of the other girls. "It was my fault, she says.

It was my own fault. I led them on. I deserved the pain. ” The concept of confessing your sins in order to be forgiven is still present, but now it is solely to act as an example for the other girls, to keep them in line thus making it less biblical and less of a soul purification. When Offred arrives at her new residence, Atwood explains the clothing choices. The commander's wives are dressed in blue. Light blue is a colour that is linked to the virgin Mary. They are in fact subliminally suggested to be Virgin Mary figures as they did not fornicate, yet still are given a child.

The colour green that the Marthas have to wear is also a biblical reference. The only religion that the regime is pushing is Puritanism. It is an echo of what the former society would call ‘ a Christian right-wing agenda. ‘ Any other religion that was present after the establishment of the new regime was considered invalid. All other religions were intrinsically eliminated. Offred reflects about how Baptists were smoked out of their homes as they were simply a more liberal version, therefore unacceptable. Later on in the novel she talks about the Jews “... they were given a choice.

They could convert, or emigrate to Israel.... raids at night, secret hoards of Jewish things dragged out from under beds... And the owners, sullen-faced... pushed by the Eyes against the walls of their bedrooms, while the sorrowful voice of the announcer tells us about their perfidy and ungratefulness. ” The regime criminalises anything that interferes with reproduction, “ God's gift”, this is why the doctor's who performed abortions were hung with the installment of the regime. Prior to the ceremony, the whole household gathers in the living room to hear the Commander read extracts from the bible.

This is to remind them of the purpose of sex, something that is biblical and is to produce a child, not for pleasure or recreation. The commander reads the bible with discomfort, as described by Atwood, and during the reading Offred's mind wanders. This demonstrates how people are not truly dedicated to the religious side, it is simply a formality for them. Even at the Prayvaganza we get the impression that people are not there to pray and genuinely care about it because Atwood writes, "... Attendance at the Prayvaganza isn't compulsory... ut the galleries seem to be filling up anyway.

I suppose it's a form of entertainment, like a show or a circus. The whole basis of the regime and the biblical references it upholds is subjective to the leaders of the regimes interpretations. They take quotes from the bible and either change them completely, or misrepresent them so that they can apply to the rules they want to be enforced. Offred is aware of this, " All flesh is weak. All flesh is grass, I corrected her in my head. " " Oh God, obliterate me. Make me fruitful. Mortify my flesh that I may be multiplied.

Let me be fulfilled... " This prayer is very specific and elucidates everything that the regime wants. They have taken this prayer and made it so that it goes hand in hand with the regime's ideology. In conclusion, the amount of assertion of religion that is submitted from the regime is slightly ironic as the people lose any complaisant personal emotion they have towards religion as they now associate it with dictatorship and oppression. In fact, some of the beliefs undermine the words of the bible, such as saying hands and feet are not essential.