

Handmiad's tale essay sample

[Literature](#), [Fiction](#)



A truly valuable novel is not purely based on content, but has the ability to challenge and spur readers into reaction based on construction and language of the text. Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* is a true example of such value, as her novel not only attracts readers but also warns us of the uncertainties and dangers of the future. She demonstrates how language can be used as a powerful tool for both manipulation and domination as well as how reconstructions of both fiction and history can never be objective. Although the content of a dystopian novel provides the reader with high levels of entertainment, it has no significance unless it is able to stimulate readers to consider and reflect upon the world as it is today. *The Handmaid's Tale* exposes readers to the true power of language and its ability to cease creativity and freethinking. Governments of Gilead know that the fundamental key to complete control is the power of words and language. In efforts to dominate society, language is contained and restricted thus preventing the fluidity of communication and all viable sources of information. By choosing suitable scriptures from justifiable passages such as the bible, it provides methods of indoctrination and manipulation.

The Handmaid's are forced to listen chosen sections of the bible such as from Genesis 30: 1 ' Give me children or I shall die! ... here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her ... and even I may have children through her.' By feeding only chosen information to society, women are thus led to believe their existence is only to function as ' Two legged wombs and sacred vessels.' The definition of Gilead provides further Biblical allusions, as its name suggests a fertile and desirable land, which is ironic since Gilead in Atwood's novel describes the exact opposite. Gilead has become a wasteland devastated

with war and oppression of its own citizens. The Governments of Gilead fails to mention that the bible continues to describe the state as ' a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood.' Since only godliness and beauty is associated with Gilead it therefore promotes their ideology of the regime. Even normal ritual of conversations have been replaced with set phrases from the Bible such as " Blessed be the fruit, May the Lord open" displaying the annihilation of expression and freethinking. Furthermore, words are altered to perpetuate the role of the Handmaid's as Offred, the protagonist, states ' They play it from a disc, the voice was a man's.

Blessed be the poor in spirit... and blessed be the silent. I knew they made that part up... they left things out too, but there was no way of checking.' Although Gilead has intentionally prohibited the Bible and distorted its content, Offred is also acutely aware of the true power behind language. She gradually acknowledges that she is able to manipulate language to create her own subjectivity, giving her small satisfaction of rebellion against Gilead's rigid totalitarian society. She creates satires with phrases such as ' There is a balm in Gilead' which she changes to ' There is a bomb in Gilead' as well as producing puns with the multiple meanings behind the word chair. She infers that it is the ' leader of a meeting or also a mode of execution... and the French word for flesh.' Furthermore, to emphasise the power of language there is a message inscribed in Offred's closet, ' Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.' This becomes Offred's motto as she recites and touches the inscription daily to ensure that she will not assimilate and surrender to Gilead's regime. Ultimately it suggests the power of language, due to the

multitude of ways it can be interpreted, thus becoming a dangerous tool as it gives power only to those who know the truth.

This parallels Atwood's motives as she instigates the dangers of restriction and misinterpretation of language. By distorting and tampering with language it becomes a tool to manipulate the state. This therefore provides readers with a warning and a far more challenging perspective of the novel and life in comparison to the mere content. Construction within Offred's story is evident due its self-reflexive nature, as readers are encouraged to question the authenticity of the text rather than to immediately accept and believe the work of fiction. It is evident, that the novel is non-linear, frequently shifting from past to present. The discontinuity of the text allows readers, to construct Offred's ongoing story, thus discouraging us to form a fixed and conclusion to the narrative but rather to continue investigating and questioning the text. Throughout the novel it suggests that Offred is also aware of her contingency in her own narrative and despite her use of present tense she is not experiencing the events but recounting them. Offred repeatedly states " This is a reconstruction; all of it is a reconstruction." She continues to say " The things I believe can't all be true... But I believe in all of them." This indicates that Offred's accounts are reflections of her own thoughts and perspectives rather than an objective historical text.

It is part of human nature to constantly form opinions based on past experiences and our own integrities thus, we will always show a degree of biasness. Furthermore, the majority of Offred's flashbacks are merely based on memories which are always flawed and fragmented especially due to the

traumas Offred has experienced. Thus such an open fiction allows audience to actively interrogate the values and ideals of the novel. Through the Historical Notes, the metafiction within the novel becomes clearer as readers are left to question the credibility of not only Atwood's work but all forms of text we are issued with. Through the Historical Notes it is evident that the novel was not a direct record by Offred, but a series of 'Thirty unordered tapes that were arranged based on guesswork and approximations' by male professors with completely different agenda's compared to Offred. The irony of two male Professors imposing on a female's personal documentation mirrors Gilead's society where males intruded all aspects of a female's life rendering them helpless. Furthermore, these two Professors have become prestigious and reputable due to a woman's story which again parallels Gilead, due to lack of acknowledgement for women.

Thus the Historical Notes casts doubt of validity of the entire novel as Pieixoto sees history as an artefact with only simple unequivocal truths whereas, for Offred this is an account of her true experience. These notes invites readers to reject Pieixoto's so called 'true historical analysis' of Gilead and abandon his theory that their 'job is not to censure but to understand' thus engaging individuals to understand that history will never be fixed due to our inability to be completely objective. Therefore Atwood warns readers to become aware to constructions not only within novels but from all sources of information as it may lead to forming a suppressed state similar to Gilead. Thus it is evident that the true value of a novel lies not only within the content but also within its ability to encourage readers into further evaluation of life itself. Through questioning both the benefits and dangers of

language and the credibility of each text based on its construction it equips us, as humans, to avoid the possibility of transforming into a Totalitarian state like Gilead. Therefore, Atwood's novel instigates a cautionary warning that there are aspects of our lives that already parallel Gilead's state and thus adjustments and alterations to how we live today must be initiated.