

Brave new world ,the
passion of new eve
and the handmaids
tale



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The Oxford Concise English dictionary defines science fiction as ' a fanciful fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or environmental changes. ' (1976) Joanna Russ explains: ' Science fiction is not fantasy, for the standards of plausibility of fantasy derive not from science but from the observation of life as it is. ' (Russ 1995: 4). Science fiction emerged into the world of literature in the 19th century with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) which paved the way for writers such as Jules Verne and H. G Wells. (Drabble and Stringer 2003: 574) but became really popular between the 1930's to the 1960's. In today's modern culture, science fiction has become more film orientated with films such as *The Matrix*. With the development of special effects it has become easier to make science fiction films, so science fiction books are maybe taking a back seat compared to the films. I think in recent years it has been difficult to write about futuristic dystopias that have not already been done before.

The world is more certain about its future than it was back when these books were written. Dystopias even in fiction are worrying because they are a portrayal of what could happen. Some dystopian novels are extreme but still we could end up in world where all babies are created in bottles or most women are infertile. In this essay I will be looking at the way in which women are represented in three 20th Century Science fiction novels; *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley, *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) by Angela Carter and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood.

The one common theme closely linked with the representation of women in these and many other science fiction novels is sex. The modern view of sex is so universal that any change in it can be very shocking. All of the novels <https://assignbuster.com/brave-new-world-the-passion-of-new-eve-and-the-handmaids-tale/>

portray a dystopia of sorts, two of them futuristic, one set in our own time. Brave New World was written in 1932 by Aldous Huxley, the 5th and most famous of his 11 novels. The title is a quote from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which is also quoted in the book by the character John; ' O brave new world... ' (Huxley 1974: 166).

Brave New World is set in a futuristic London. The people are categorized as embryos in a sort of caste system and conditioned to be Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta or Epsilon. Alphas are the highest order of people, there are no female Alphas and Epsilons are the lowest. This class system is taught by hypnopaedia so that the children will grow up knowing instinctively what class they are and how to behave; Alpha children wear grey. They work much harder than we do, because they are so frightfully clever. I'm really awfully glad I'm a Beta because we don't work so hard.

And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid, they all wear green and Delta children wear Khaki. Oh no I don't want to play with Delta children. And epsilons are still worse they're too stupid to be able... (Huxley 1974: 33) This sleep teaching or hypnopaedia is meant to teach the children the basic instincts and morals that are taught to us by our parents. The concept of parenting in Brave New World is seen as alien; all children are created in test tubes and conditioned through sleep teaching and sexual play.

Having parents and the idea of giving birth and having children naturally is considered unnatural, even repulsive to the people of Brave New World. This explains the reaction towards Linda who was a Beta who got lost and has

lived for the last about sixteen years in the reservation with savages having had a child. The idea in Brave New World of sex being purely for pleasure was an extremely daring thing to consider in 1932 not to mention sex initiated by women. Women were thought of as sweet and innocent, men were the sexual predators. The two main female characters in this novel are Lenina and Linda.

Lenina has grown up in London as a Beta Female, She lives and behaves in the way that is expected of a beautiful beta women. She sleeps with the high up men in the fertilizing station, she has not yet had a pregnancy substitution and she takes her soma in moderation. She visits the reservation with Bernard Marx and is appalled by what she sees especially by Linda who obviously was from London but had got herself lost, had a child in the ' natural' way and become fat. Linda's appearance when she returns to London shocks a lot of people and she buries herself in Soma.

At first it seems that Lenina is written into the book purely to show how sex is represented in Brave New World, behaving as a beautiful Beta woman is expected to. However, as the story progresses, she develops into a more prominent character, becoming a love interest for John, who does not seem to understand the ways in which Lenina and other characters in the book have grown up. He does not see that sex can only be done for pleasure and wants to settle down, however through her conditioning, Lenina does not understand the concept of marriage, aggravating John as this is what he wants most of all.

This is demonstrated when John tells Lenina that he loves her and not understanding his view of love she begins to undress clearly showing how her conditioning has affected her views of the world. Linda is only in the book for a short time because after we meet her and she is taken back to London she drowns her sorrows in Soma and subsequently dies. Despite this, the reader can still learn a lot about her life in the reservation. The character of Linda can evoke feelings of sympathy from the reader.

This is because of the way she has been treated in the reservation due to her upbringing. Linda was attacked by some of the women in the reservation because she slept with their husbands, although she did not understand this to be a bad thing, having lived and grown up in London. On the other hand, some readers who still hold values of marriage and monogamy may not feel sympathetic towards her because of the reasoning for the way she was treated. Linda represents what can happen to a woman when taken out of their comfort zone. The *Passion of New Eve* (1977) is a fantasy apocalypse of vertiginous gender confusion, written alongside her polemic that the pornography of the Marquis de Sade could be integral to a feminist politics. ' (Carter cited in Luckhurst, 2005: 184) Angela Carter wrote *The Passion of New Eve* in 1977 as the 7th of her 9 novels. It's an extraordinary post-feminist story of male chauvinism, cruel realisation and sexual obsession. It is hard to decide whether to see Eve as a female character as he/she changes half way through. Although her body changes I think essentially her mind is male throughout the novel.

This could be demonstrated when she is with Zero, when she says ' My anger kept me alive' (Carter 2003: 108). Unlike the other woman she keeps her <https://assignbuster.com/brave-new-world-the-passion-of-new-eve-and-the-handmaids-tale/>

sanity, hiding herself within her mind, only submitting to him in body. At the beginning Evelyn's lack of respect for women is obvious; as he does not even remember the name of the girl he took out on his last night in London and also the way he treats Leilah, although he is fascinated by her he still treats her as an object for his own pleasure. I do not think he gains respect for women by becoming one if anything he loses respect for himself.

Mother is a fascinating character in this novel with a body fashioned by her own scalpel, the non-consensual sex change of Evelyn, the all female community; she is a full-blown feminist to the extremes. Mother's original plan was after transforming Evelyn into New Eve to impregnate him with his own sperm harvested before the operation to create and give birth to a new messiah. However Eve escapes only to be captured and plunged into another hell, the hell of life with Zero, the patriarch with one eye, one leg and seven 'wives' (eight once he has Eve).

The women of Zero are traditionally submissive, brainwashed to worship Zero as a god while he treats them as lower than the beasts, He is the typical patriarch. Tristessa is another character in the book, with whom Evelyn, through his boyhood has been sexually obsessed with. Throughout the book she is portrayed as a woman, named by Zero as the 'Queen of Dykes'. Zero has an obsession with her as he is very homophobic towards lesbians and as 'Queen of Dykes' she is public enemy number one to him.

Once they find her palace, it is revealed that she is actually a man, which to Zero is a big joke as she has been hiding her manhood behind a facade of femininity throughout her career. However for Eve, this uncovering, brings a

mixture of pity and love, and noticing this change in Eve towards Tristessa, Zero and his wives perform a mock wedding for the couple. This makes a mockery of the gender crisis that Tristessa is having and unbeknownst to them, Eve is also having. As they dress her up in the suit, he/she sees a glimpse of her former self. I was a boy disguised as a girl and now disguised as a boy again, like Rosalind in Elizabethan Arden. ' This quote compares Eve to Rosalind in Shakespeare's ' As You Like It'. In Shakespeare's time Rosalind would have originally been played by a man disguised as a woman then once again disguised as a boy when Rosalind goes into the forest as Ganymede. Before we meet her Tristessa is represented as this mysterious and almost mythical creature with her desert hideaway, her glittering glass palace that sounds like it comes straight out of a fairytale. Tristessa, Carter's conflation of figures such as Rita Hayworth, Joan Crawford and Marilyn Monroe, embodies female essence so perfectly because she is a man in drag. '

(Luckhurst, 2005: 194) The Handmaid's Tale is the 6th of Margaret Atwood's' so far 12 novels, she is the only author out of the three still writing and still living even. The Handmaid's Tale is the only novel that shows life as we know it as a memory rather than speculative history as in Brave New World.

Most women have become infertile due to radiation poisoning or sexually transmitted disease, those women still fertile become handmaids. The females in this novel are categorised according to the kind of people they are. The Wives wear blue and are the infertile women married to the Commanders in the city. The Martha's wear green and are simply servants they are also infertile. Handmaids wear red and their basic function is to bear

children for the wives. Handmaids are seen as the lowest of the low, they do not even have their own names.

The story is narrated by a handmaid known as Offred, a name made up of the word ' Of' and the name of her Commander Fred. Offred often refers to the past; this novel is set in the future, so that past we assume is our own time. In this novel the women are represented as quiet submissive until the discovery of the handmaids support network who subsequently save Offred's life. The skill to being a handmaid as it is represented in the book is to be invisible. Offred manages this as far as she is required but becomes a ' real woman' again when she enters the world of the commander.

This intimacy, friendship even is like many things for handmaids, forbidden, she is taking a risk in going to see the commander, but she would take a risk in not going if she didn't. The biggest risk in the book is when the commander actually takes Offred out. The handmaid seems like a game to him, he wouldn't like it but it would not cause him too much trouble if he got caught although it could destroy Offred, literally. ' I know without being told that whats he's proposing is risky, for him but especially for me; but I want to go any way. (Atwood, 1996: 243) Offred talks of the past, of her husband and daughter. She mentions little things, like conversations or short phrases that her mother or Moira used. The Handmaids Tale is the only novel that refers back to our own time in this way. The handmaids although looked down upon possibly mainly through jealousy a lot of hope is resting on them and they are under a lot of pressure to produce a child and go to lengths at the risk of becoming an unwoman. Their faces are obscured from view by the white

wings they have to wear; this is to hide their identities in part from themselves.

These handmaids have no identities of their own they belong to their commanders to do with as they see fit. (Russ, 1995) In conclusion I have shown that despite science fictions futuristic tendencies, the role of women is not progressing but coming to complete standstill if not regressing. Women in the novels are once again becoming passive and submissive (Wolmark 1994) They are objects of function or desire rather than individual beings. The least passive of each of the women I have studied is Eve, because her mind is still male to an extent.