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## The Issue Of Undermined Women In “The Handmaid’s Tale” By Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* was originally published in 1985. It is about many relevant topics including, human rights, fertility, fundamentalism, misogyny, gender inequality, and above all, power. The book is set at an unspecified future time period also known as the Gilead period. The protagonist and narrator, Offred, is a handmaid in the new republic of Gilead, a true totalitarian state.

Almost completely dressed in red, the handmaids are a class of women which have one sole purpose, conceiving and carrying children for the wealthy men. As Offred describes it in her own words, “We are two-legged wombs, that’s all; sacred vessels, ambulatory-chalices”. Each handmaid is an exclusive concubine controlled by a commander, whose duty revolves around the insemination of these women. “The Commander is the head of the household”, their first names are taken by the respective handmaid with the addition of the preposition, "of", in order to imply a sense of inescapable possession. This further induces overthrowing power and dominance that men have in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The handmaids are also predominantly policed by the wives, aunts and marthas. Although the book attempts to portray ways in which the handmaids try all means to achieve individualism together with independence, they are still oppressed and obligated to submit to men, at times even to women.

An instant feeling of disturbance rushed through me as I put down this book after having read it, knowing that I am one of the many young women susceptible to this. My main concern is the fact that this novel is attempting to depict and forecast what we may have in store for us in the near future. Is this a future that could conceivably happen? Possibly. Or is this book perhaps a warning, as we see our present selves in a twisted mirror, wondering if we may ever grow to adhere to the regime of Gilead as current trends continue to exist and extend? Without a doubt.

Despite Margaret Atwood’s scary means, the speculative fiction still acquires a distinct nobility. It bears a sense of humor about itself and evokes uncertainty towards Offred’s worst enemies, the wife Serena Joy and the Commander, Fred. Who as a matter of fact, aren’t even revealed as such until the very end of the novel. Best of all, *The Handmaid’s Tale* finishes with the possibility of redemption. Realistically, Offred might as well have survived the abduction. She even states herself, “And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light.” I can feel her liberation as she lets herself be taken by the unknown. As “light” usually associates with goodness and safe feelings, it seems as though she has made peace. In actuality, she is saying that she is moving beyond the negative, dominating darkness, and moving into the light wherein the possibility of redemption may be implied.

Aside from the meager righteousness, innumerable complications still rise. For instance, Atwood deeply explores prejudice against women, misogyny. It is easily perceivable as the handmaids are considered as the sex slaves, bearing children for people that undermine them to the utmost extent. A major negative detail in the book is how the handmaid's are cruelly manipulated into thinking that being restricted from freedom is Gilead’s way of protecting them. Should we adolescent women be alarmed as we live our lives absent minded from the power of manipulation?

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Another hefty violation towards women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, is how the handmaids are constantly threatened by the living nightmare of becoming infertile, as Offred wistfully states, "Give me children, or else I die." (71). This novel shares comparable concepts to the movie *Gattaca*, with relation to genetics. Gilead might not be a society built on genetic perfection, however just like *Gattaca*, the simplicity of birthing a child is very closely scrutinized. Women who are the healthiest are selected for the job of reproduction which is essentially most important job. The other women whose reproductive organs aren't, "good enough", are subverted and sent to do other domestic jobs.

As the wife of the commander, Serena Joy is provided with more freedom, however, her body is not her own. In this ludicrous society, the female reproductive organs are supposedly the ones that always fail, never the male. Nonetheless for Serena and her husband, it is quite the contrary. Serena has to forcefully give away the affection that she bears for Fred and unwillingly give him up to another woman because he thinks that she is infertile when in reality, he is sterile. Moral of the story, it is never the man's fault however, if a handmaid can't get pregnant she will automatically be known as "Unwoman" and get exiled. I find the concept unrighteously abominable.

It seems as though Margaret Atwood enjoys upholding the fundamentalism of her style of writing in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The frequently fragmented and incomplete human voice that she uses gives her book a bizarre tone it may not have had otherwise. Atwoods' powerful diction also provides the audience with the pure horror to the actuality of the protagonists' lived experiences. She also incorporates a substantial amount of euphemisms such as the euphemizing of names, sex and other taboos. This deeply employs the extent of restriction of freedom in Gilead and accentuates on the vulnerability to consequences of injustice for women and men.

The overall message that I seem to be persistently receiving, is how undermined women are in this male dominated society. Atwood has placed all of these concepts, ideas, and themes together to show that in our real present world there might be laws in place to protect women however, at some point this just won't be enough. *The Handmaid's Tale* is becoming strikingly relevant at present, having been produced as a film, soon a graphic novel, translated into 40 languages, and more. Disregarding the fact that I find the plot and its background intriguingly obnoxious, I do recommend this book.