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Title: Representation of Speculative Trauma and Empathy Generation: A Study of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*.

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Abstract

The research project, “Representation of Speculative Trauma and Empathy Generation: A Study of Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments*” is premised on the representational capacity of Atwood’s select speculative novels for empathy generation. It examines the interdisciplinarity between literature, trauma studies, narrative empathy in order to study the techniques of representation in Atwood’s speculative novels that can empathically engage the audience. As the name suggests, speculative fiction has speculative elements: it extrapolates past and current crises in human societies to portray catastrophic futures. Even though the situations portrayed in these novels are not real as they are imaginatively rendered, they have strong references to past and present traumatic events. Most importantly, they may engage readers emotionally and affectively, which is particularly important in this age of mechanical reproduction, hyperreality, and post-truth, where the authenticity of media and the press is constantly questioned. The materials selected for this include Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and its sequel *The Testaments* (2019). These novels have been discussed in and out of academia that Brexit took place and Donald Trump won the US election in 2016. This study is intended to be an academic response to the massive change that world politics has been undergoing in the twenty first century in the form of the rise of populism in the United States and many parts of Europe. It proposes to expand our knowledge and improve our understanding of emotional responses to the creative arts through careful analysis of speculative texts.

L’abstract

Il progetto di ricerca “Rappresentazione del Trauma speculativo e della Generazione di Empatia: uno Studio su *The Handmaid’s Tale* e *The Testaments* di Margaret Atwood” si basa sulla capacità rappresentativa dei romanzi speculativi selezionati di Atwood per la generazione di empatia. Esamina l’interdisciplinarietà tra letteratura, studi sul trauma, empatia narrativa per studiare le tecniche di rappresentazione nei romanzi speculativi di Atwood che possono coinvolgere empaticamente il pubblico. Come suggerisce il nome, la narrativa speculativa ha elementi speculativi: estrapola le crisi passate e attuali nelle società umane per ritrarre futuri catastrofici. Anche se le situazioni ritratte in questi romanzi non sono reali in quanto sono rappresentate in modo fantasioso, hanno forti riferimenti a eventi traumatici passati e presenti. Soprattutto, possono coinvolgere i lettori emotivamente e affettivamente, il che è particolarmente importante in quest’epoca di riproduzione meccanica, iperrealtà e post-verità, in cui l’autenticità dei media e della stampa è costantemente messa in discussione. I materiali selezionati per questo includono *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) di Margaret Atwood e il suo sequel *The Testaments* (2019). Questi romanzi sono stati discussi dentro e fuori il mondo accademico che la Brexit ha avuto luogo e Donald Trump ha vinto le elezioni statunitensi nel 2016. Questo studio vuole essere una risposta accademica al massiccio cambiamento che la politica mondiale ha subito nel ventunesimo secolo nel forma dell’ascesa del populismo negli Stati Uniti e in molte parti d’Europa. Si propone di ampliare le nostre conoscenze e migliorare la nostra comprensione delle risposte emotive alle arti creative attraverso un’attenta analisi di testi speculativi.

For Professor Rezaul Karim Siddique

My teacher in the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

A good human being. A terrific teacher. A parent to all his students.

One April morning in 2016, I woke up to the news of his murder. He was killed by Islamist militants for his love of music and liberal views. That day, more than ever, made me realize the relevance of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

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Introduction

The recent years have seen a surge of both popular and academic interests in speculative fiction, especially those of the dystopian nature, in the wake of various crises the world is faced with today. Some of the major concerns include environmental crisis, a global pandemic, the resurgence of the political right (giving way to the policies of intolerance, exclusion, racism, and violation of women's rights), migration, neofascism and the resultant persecution of minority groups, the violation of the freedom of speech, late capitalist commodification, the unchecked rise of corporate power, the possible abuses of genetic sciences, among many others. Speculative fiction generally intensifies the present or past crises and project them into speculative futures. Lay readers in general and academics in particular tend to see them as cautionary tales of future traumas that need to be paid attention to today to pre-empt catastrophic tomorrows.

Speculative fiction is an umbrella term, encompassing a number of different genres of fiction, such as science fiction, sci-fi fantasy fiction, supernatural fiction, space opera fiction, urban fantasy fiction, utopian fiction, dystopian fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction, etc. As the name suggests, it has speculative elements, which means that it often extrapolates past and current crises in human societies to catastrophic futures. Sometimes called "what-if" books, speculative works centre around conjectures based on the past and present events. Some speculative fiction often has dystopian traits: they are set in bleak, horrific, and nightmarish worlds in the future, where the present-day crises have been intensified, often culminating into an apocalypse. They portray those who hold the power (a totalitarian state, a dogmatic religious group, capitalistic corporate organizations, etc.) taking a firm control over the citizens, depriving them of their rights to function as individuals, dissolving their identities into state-approved structures, and manipulating information to their sinister ends.

In the twenty-first century, right-wing politics has seen a resurgence of popularity in the US and Europe, and thereby brought back the threats of violence and traumatic wounds of the twentieth century, which humanity is still licking today. The Trump administration in the US, Brexit in the

UK, Golden Dawn in Greece, Front National in France, Brothers of Italy in Italy, Front National and Alternative for Germany in Germany have promoted extreme nationalistic and nativist ideologies, authoritarian tendencies, and religious conservatism which, in each case, assumes a supposed superiority of a minority group over the inferior masses, demanding policies of exclusion, xenophobia, racism, male chauvinism, neofascism, and religious intolerance. The revival of the far-right in the mainstream politics has posed a challenge to women rights, putting the hard-earned achievements of feminism under threat as they speak against the progressive feminist agenda like women's reproductive rights and equal pay, and advocate for the sinister return to the traditional family values and maintaining the status quo of patriarchal traditions.

Indeed, the beginning of the twenty-first century has witnessed a plethora of political conflicts, violence, and persecution of the minority. This has resulted in an overwhelming crisis of refugees throughout the world. According to the Global Trends Report 2021 published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in June 2022, an unprecedented 89.3 million people around the world (not including the Ukrainian refugees in 2022) have been forced from home, which is higher than the displacement caused as an aftermath of World War II. This displaced population includes refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, the internally displaced and stateless, who are fleeing war, violence and persecution in countries including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. 53.2 million among them are internally displaced, which means they have been forced to leave their homes, but remain in their own country, exposing themselves to persecution, violence and trauma every day. In addition to the ongoing persecution, the Russian invasion in Ukraine left 5.6 millions of refugees across Europe since 24 February 2022 (last recorded on 5 July 2022). UNHCR has declared Ukraine a Level 3 emergency which is the highest level. However, the greatest disaster looming over the entire human race is the environmental crisis. In 2021, extreme weather events like floods, storms and droughts displaced around 23.7 million of people within their own countries. The latest Groundswell report estimates that slow-onset events across six regions could force 216 million people to move within their countries by 2050.

The first step to deal with these crises is perhaps to generate concern and empathy for the persecuted, survivors, marginalized and threatened population on a large scale. The definition of "empathy" is debated over, and it includes a wide range of experiences. A much generalized way of defining empathy is the ability to sense, feel and to imagine other people's emotions, thoughts and their surroundings. The power of imagination plays a great part in understanding what a person might be going through, what s/he might be thinking and feeling, and why s/he might be doing so. This is the very reason why artistic and literary representation of trauma is capable of creating a heightened concern for the victims. To feel empathy, one has to be able to imagine, understand and recognize the sufferings of the victims, forming an affective connection with them, which is what literature helps us to achieve.

Speculative fiction generates a strong emotional response in readers as it draws on elements of past and contemporary societies, which make its fictional representation credible, relatable, and engaging. It is difficult to discard the possibility of the calamitous future they portray because all the causes responsible for such a future are already present in the contemporary world or in history. In addition, these novels represent how an oppressive system alienates and dehumanizes characters. This may lead to a better understanding and compassion for those who are being persecuted at this moment. Technological advancement allows us to observe the activation of mirror neurons (known as the empathy neuron) in fMRI imaging. The recent studies in neuroscience have shown that the mirror neuron areas of human brain light up in fMRI imaging while simply listening to the description of an absent other's actions (*Empathy and the Novel* viii). Readers of novels feel the pains of characters imaginatively and vicariously, which may lead to character identification. Thus, literary rendition of trauma in speculative novels fulfills two important conditions of affective empathy on the part of the readers: to be able to imagine and understand the situation of the victim, and to identify with the characters. This may contribute to empathic considerations for trauma victims and survivors in the past and present, and may work as a deterrent to a devastating future.

The materials selected for this research include Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its sequel *The Testament* (2019). *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* portray a grim futuristic society in which a totalitarian state called The Republic of Gilead which takes a firm control over the citizens, stripping them off their rights to function as individuals, dissolved their identity and moulded human beings into a state-approved structure to fulfil its fascist agenda. The regime manipulates people through propaganda for hegemonic purposes, even uses repressive tools of the state if necessary, all for the selfish gain of the ruling class. The regime borrows ideas from infamous dictators in history, and synthesises them into an all-encompassing ideology. Broadly speaking, the major theme of Atwood's duology is unjust power politics, i. e. the oppression of the powerless by the powerful. This unequal and non-egalitarian exercise of power has taken many shapes throughout the history in various places at various times: the oppression of black people by the white, of women by men, of the colonised by the colonisers, or of the unsuspecting, common masses by the corporate organisations. This universal theme of the exercise of power by those in authority over the powerless makes its fictional representation relatable and engaging for a wide section of the human population through history. This perhaps explains the enormous popularity of Atwood's speculative novels.

Margaret Atwood was born in Ottawa, Canada in 1939. A prolific writer, she has by now published eighteen novels, nine collections of short stories, and eleven nonfiction volumes. There are eighteen volumes of poetry, five e-books, eight children's books, libretti, television screenplays, graphic novel, cultural and literary critique, as well as numerous essays, forewords, and reviews. She is reputed to be Canada's most recognised writer, and her works have been translated into over forty languages. She spent her formative years mostly in Canada (more specifically in Northern Quebec, where she would go along with her entomologist father for his field research). Her undergrad was completed in 1961 at the University of Toronto. One can see her being impacted by her Canadianness both as a human being and as an author, yet her writings represent themes that are as relevant to Canada as for the rest of the world.

Atwood's first literary breakthrough as a novelist came in 1969 when she published her feminist novel *The Edible Woman*, cementing her international reputation. Indeed, feminist issues featured consistenly in her subsequent works, namely *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life Before Man* (1979), and *Bodily Harm* (1981). These texts also deal with a host of other subjects, such as the environment, pornography, the relationship between children and adults, especially parents. These subjects feature more prominently in her later works. The novels mentioned above established her as a significant literary voice, who is able to intervene in important socio-political, cultural as well as psychological issues.

However, it was *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) that brought her major literary accolades; she won the Governor General's Award in 1985 and Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987; this novel was also nominated for the 1986 Booker Prize. *Cat's Eye*, which was published in 1988, traces the transformation of Canada during the twentieth century, and was a finalist for both the Booker Prize and Governor General's Award in 1989. The next novel *The Robber Bride* (1993) that explores female bonding, solidarity and friendship was nominated for the James Tiptree, Jr. Award and the Governor General's Award in 1994. In 1996, *Alias Grace* came out winning Giller Prize for that year and being a finalist for the Governor General's Award and Booker Prize; it was also shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction in 1997, and was the author's first historical novel. Atwood eventually won the Booker Prize for *The Blind Assassin* (2000), and it was nominated for the Governor General's Award in 2000, Orange Prize for Fiction and Hammett Prize in 2001. Set in Toronto in the 1930s and 1940s, yet narrated from the perspective of the present day, the work incorporates elements of postmodern metafiction, historical fiction and pulp fiction. This ambitious novel evidences Atwood's growing interest in popular culture, which she retains in *MaddAddam Trilogy*. Novels of this trilogy have won significant literary awards and have been commercially successful. *Oryx and Crake* (2003) became a finalist for the Governor General's Award, Booker Prize in 2003, and the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2004. The next novel of the trilogy *The Year of the Flood* (2009) was a finalist for the IMPAC Award in 2011. *MaddAddam* (2013), the third novel of the trilogy, was named a Goodreads Choice for Best Science Fiction 2013. Between *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* came out *The Penelopiad* in 2005, which

is a retelling of *The Odyssey*'s major events from the women's perspective of Odysseus' wife, Penelope. This short story was nominated for the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature in 2006 and IMPAC Award in 2007. Atwood wrote the novel *Scribbler Moon* in 2014, but because it is part of the Future Library initiative, it will not be released until 2114. Bleak, negative futures, one of the defining aspects of her novels, also feature in *The Heart Goes Last* (2015), manifesting the author's socio-political concerns. One of her most recent novels *Had-Seed* (2016), which is a part of a Random House series, is a retelling of Shakespear's *The Tempest*. Her most recent work, *The Testaments* (2019), was a joint winner of the 2019 Booker Prize. It is the follow-up to *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the novel is set fifteen years after *The Handmaid's Tale.*

The Handmaid's Tale started getting a renewed and overwhelming public attention following the 2016 US election and Brexit. It gathered momentum when Hulu started airing the TV series of the same title. Its readership/audience reached every corner of the world. The Handmaid costume has become the symbol of protest. Every now and then there is news of people protesting, wearing the Handmaid's red costume. Only the season 1 of the Hulu TV series is an adaptation of the novel; afterwards the plot continues independently. The TV series draws heavily on the controversial policies and measures taken by the Trump administration. However, people have been speculating about what happens when the book ends, since the narrator's story ends quite abruptly in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Atwood decides to write its sequel, *The Testaments*, thirty five years after the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale*. It came out in 2019, which made Atwood the joint winner of the 2019 Booker Prize. Atwood writes in the "Acknowledgement" section of *The Testaments*.

> But before the actual placing of words on pages, *The Testaments* was written partly in the minds of the readers of its predecessor, *The Handmaid's Tale*, who kept asking what happened after the end of that novel. Thirty-five years is a long time to think about possible answers, and the answers have changed as society itself has changed, and as possibilities have become actualities. The citizens of many countries, including the United States, are under more stresses now than they were three decades ago.

> One question about *The Handmaid's Tale* that came up repeatedly is: How did Gilead fall? *The Testaments* was written in response to this question. Totalitarianisms may crumble from within, as they fail to keep the promises that brought them to power; or they may be attacked from without; or both. There are no sure-fire formulas, since very little in history is inevitable. (*The Testaments* 417)

Atwood has reached a large audience through different media, and the popularity of her novels should be subject to critical exploration. Why are so many people touched by her ideas? Do people find empathic connection with the characters? Do they see themselves in similar situations to those of the characters? Do they perceive their own familiar worlds to be heading towards the dystopian realities represented in Atwood's duology? These are the questions the enormous popularity of her novels inspires us to ask. *The Handmaid's Tale* has been adapted into a movie, a TV series, several radio and stage adaptations, and a musical. Atwood regularly appears on the TV, newspapers and online news portals for interviews and discussions on these novels. These factors have been considered during the selection of the primary texts as well.

This thesis is premised on the representational capacity of speculative novels for empathy generation. Even though the situations portrayed in these novels are not real as they are imaginatively rendered, they have strong references to past and present traumatic events. Most importantly, they may engage readers emotionally and affectively, which is particularly important in this age of mechanical reproduction, hyperreality, and post-truth, where the authenticity of media and the press is constantly questioned. The distorted oversaturation of fake news or inauthentic stories and images often has a dire consequence: they sometimes cast doubt on the narratives of victims and survivors. The fictional representation of victimhood, on the other hand, asks for a voluntary suspension of readers' disbelief; therefore, this may bridge the gap between readers and the real others.

This study examines how speculative novels generate empathy and a heightened emotional awareness that may deter future catastrophes through a series of research questions. To enumerate these questions here:

1. How do speculative traumas as represented in the medium of speculative novels lead to empathy generation?
2. What makes the anticipation and speculation of future traumas in Atwood's novels believable and relatable?
3. What representational techniques in speculative novels can effectively generate empathy?
4. How do Atwood's speculative novels extend our understanding of and knowledge about trauma, and empathy?
5. What are the intersecting points where studies of trauma, speculative fiction, and empathy meet?

This study mainly consists in library research in the qualitative mode. The two focal areas of this investigation are: a. Formation and contextualization of theory; and b. Critical analysis of Margaret Atwood's duology. As for theory, I explore how the theories of trauma, speculative fiction, and empathy converge around the novels of Atwood. To be more specific, this investigation draws insights from critical and literary theories such as feminism, neo-Marxism, Frankfurt School, trauma studies, theories of representation, cultural studies, reader response theory, theories of narrative empathy, reder-response theories, cognitive theories, etc. Atwood's speculative novels will be contextualized theoretically by being positioned within the critical framework. Secondly, this research engages in critical exploration of her primary texts analyzed from the critical perspectives provided by the theoretical schools, movements, etc. mentioned above. Investigating Atwood's treatment of speculative traumas in terms of religion, gender, science and technology, climate, and capitalism is a major focus of this study. In addition, the study zooms in on the tools of representation like defamiliarization, localized view and everydayness, historical rootedness, and narratorial intimacy that Atwood uses for empathy generation. The textual analysis mainly consists in the comparative as well as thematic studies of

primary materials. This is perhaps obvious that such a research does not have an empirical dimension although it relies on empirical research and experimentations done in the areas of neuroscience and/or behavioural sciences. It is also heavily informed by popular news items about readers' response to the duology, Atwood's interviews, her writings on the creative process and the screen adaptation of her novels.

In the first chapter, I have attempted to provide a theoretical framework that is used in this study. Theories around the genre of speculative fiction, trauma, and empathy are discussed so as to provide a critical context for the analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* in the following chapters. This critical framework has been drawn from areas as diverse as literary studies, trauma and memory studies, cultural studies, cognitive theories, etc. Section 1.1 attempts to define speculative fiction and traces the genre's history and development. It also discusses related genres such as dystopian fiction and science fiction. It has been pointed out that speculative fiction almost invariably aims at social critique. In addition, I have drawn attention to the fact that speculative fiction centres around the representation of trauma. In section 1.2, the idea of speculative trauma is discussed in the context of speculative fiction. Also, I have discussed how empathy connects a novel's characters to its readers. In section 1.3, I have looked at the different ways empathy is generated through fiction, and I have been particularly interested in the concept of narrative empathy. Along with this, I attempt to establish a link between affective empathy and altruism. In the final section, I attempt to explore affect theories and situate the turn to affect in the psychological and political context of today's world.

Chapter 2, which is entitled "Representation of Speculative Traumas in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*," attempts to engage in the critical analysis of Atwood's duology. I begin with defining Gilead as totalitarian theocracy in section 2.1. The idea of totalitarianism with a theocratic dimension has been commented upon in this section. The next subsection (2.1.1) discusses the unlikely connection between utopian thinking and totalitarianism. And in the following subsection (2.1.2), the fall of Gilead is detailed in order to have an understanding of how totalitarian governments fall apart. Section 2.2 deals with a

working definition of climate trauma, and subsection 2.2.1 demonstrates the centrality of climate trauma in the representation of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. The next subsection (2.2.2) explores the gendered dimension of climate change and ecological disasters, whereas the section entitled "Religion and the Right Wing Politics in Gilead" (2.3) elaborates on the role of religion within the political structure of Atwood's dystopia. In the final two sections (2.4 and 2.5), I have discussed two major sources of speculative trauma as represented in Margaret Atwood's duology respectively, namely patriarchy and the abuses of technology.

The third chapter centres around the question of empathy generation through Margaret Atwood's duology. It aims at discovering the storytelling techniques that the author uses for forging an empathic connection between the characters and readers. Recent cognitive-oriented storytelling theories are used to elucidate the formal and stylistic aspects via which the two novels might provide readers with a profoundly immersive, empathic experience. Section 3.1 examines features of the two novels that may contribute to character identification, which is seen to be the most important factor in eliciting empathy in readers. In addition, this section delves into the novel's characters and their psychology to examine the dynamics of empathy (or the lack of it). Section 3.2 investigates the representational strategies that Atwood employs to create situational empathy. It examines how far Margaret Atwood's claim that everything in *The Handmaid's Tale* has historical parallels is true. Furthermore, it considers how defamiliarization, an often used representational technique in speculative fiction, is used in Atwood's duology and what impact it may have on readers' perceptions. In section 3.3, I explore the "Theory of Mind" and how it influences novel reading in general and Atwood's duology in particula. Section 3.4 discusses empathy among characters, readers and writers. Insights from this discussion are used for a relevant analysis of Atwood's novels. The following section, 3.5 explores both the popular and critical responses to Atwood's duology. In particular, it examines the protests inspired by *The Handmaid's Tale.* Finally, in section 3.6, the arguments and controversies surrounding the concepts of empathy are discussed.

Chapter 1: Speculative Fiction, Trauma, and Empathy: A Theoretical Exploration

1.1. Speculative Fiction: Main Approaches and (Non)definitions

The definition of speculative fiction is a hotly debated topic, with each attempt yielding more questions than answers. According to the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*, speculative fiction is "a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems," "a genre distinct from and opposite science fiction in its exclusive focus on possible futures," and "a super category for all genres that deliberately depart from imitating 'consensus reality' of everyday experience" (Oziewicz 1). Since the year 2000, the most recent interpretation of this genre has gained traction, which defines speculative fiction broadly, including utopian fiction, dystopian fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction, cli-fi, gothic, weird fiction, ghost stories, supernatural fiction, superhero tales, alternate history, space opera fiction, urban fantasy fiction, steampunk, slipstream, magic realism, and fractured fairy tales, as well as hybrids and related genres. In some ways, defining speculative fiction as an all-encompassing blanket term that covers a wide range of non-mimetic genres appears to be an attempt to devise a fail-safe technique.

The past few decades have observed a boom in the non-mimetic cultural products: novels—especially the young adult fiction, short stories, dramas, poems, films, TV series, comics, graphic novels, radio programmes, computer games, and many more. This contributed to the already increasing blurring of genre boundaries. The rigorous, inflexible generic rules of writing in the classical period, and later in the Renaissance, have been going out of fashion increasingly since the beginning of the twentieth century. While discussing how genre distinctions became fuzzy with time, Eleonora Rao observes that, since the Renaissance, writers and poets started questioning the dogmatism and traditional concepts regarding the "purity" and "laws" of genres. The Romantics emphasised a piece of art's originality, distinctiveness, and spontaneity, substituting rigid adherence to rules with the "protean quality of genre," which is subject to alteration and evolution, as opposed to rigid conformity to norms (*Strategies for Identity* XIII-XIV). This tendency is prevalent till date, but it does not suggest the abolition of genre distinction altogether. Rather, Rao writes, "[A] genre can provide a useful frame of reference for the writer and the reader. The creation of a genre framework within the text allows the writer to point out

the generic norms and at the same time to subvert them in a recognizable way" (Strategies *for Identity* XV).

R.B. Gill gives interesting statistics about the astounding diversity of speculative fiction and its lack of standard definition in his article "The Uses of Genre and the Classification of Speculative Fiction." The Internet Speculative Fiction Database (user-modifiable) had 83,815 authors, and 203,561 publications as of June 2011, with 47,758 of them having been confirmed by ISFDB moderators (71-72). By 26 July 2022, the statistics stood at 236770 authors, 742283 publications, among which 173091 publications are verified. Gill also mentions the science fiction/fantasy category on the Random House web pages which listed 981 books in June 2011. For fantasy, science fiction, and paranormal literature, the Penguin Group (USA) search box revealed almost 6,920 hits. However, in 2022 Random House web page and Penguin Group does not show the total number of books under the aforementioned categories. According to Gill, the enormous number of published books in this category indicates that speculative fiction rankings are typically impacted by economic issues. Science fiction, fantasy, utopian and dystopian fiction, apocalyptic fiction, fantastic voyages, magic realism, steampunk, ghost stories, and Gothic with supernatural aspects are among the classifications used by publishers and booksellers. However, unless published as a work of fiction, ISFDB excludes unattributed fairy tales, graphic novels, games, and philosophical works having a speculative bent (71-72).

The predicament of defining genre boundaries concerning speculative, or any classification for that matter, attributes to how the human brain functions in pattern recognition. While the human brain recognizes similarities out of complex patterns, it also makes efforts to simplify that complexity at the same time. This is why we catalogue the distinct characteristics and characters of genres like science fiction, fantasy, horror, and hybrids, as well as cognate genres like utopian fiction, dystopian fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction, cli-fi, gothic, weird fiction, scary stories, supernatural fiction, action hero tales, alternate history, space opera fiction, urban fantasy fiction, slipstream, steampunk, fractured fairy tales, magic realism, and so on, but at same time recognise how they have common and overlapping characteristics (Zadeh 54). Traditional definitions with hard edges serve specific purposes—in the decision making of who will receive

the award in a special category, or to understand how the historical periods have regarded the literary types, for example, but these definitions are highly subjective, proscriptive, and compartmentalised (Gill 75). In other words, the attempt at greater precision and rigid definitions fails to take into account the wide spectrum of colourful complexities. This calls for alternative types of classification that does not compromise the complex, fuzzy sets of genre characteristics. This is a dilemma that has existed for decades, but it does not necessarily need a solution.

Robert A. Heinlein coined the term "speculative fiction" in 1941. He remarked that speculative fiction captures the ultimate goal of science fiction while dealing with human actions in reaction to new challenges produced by science and technology, rather than the marvel of science and technology itself, in his guest of honour speech at the World Science Fiction Convention in 1951 (Oziewicz 3). To put it another way, the core concerns of speculative fiction are human, not mechanical. Oziewicz considers this notion, which is first among the three historically situated meanings of speculative fiction (3). Reiterating Heinlein, Darko Suvin says, science fiction is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7–8). Suvin recognizes the political aspect of science fiction. He famously propounded the notion of "cognitive estrangement" in science fiction, which is derived from the Russian formalist idea of defamiliarization. He holds a predominantly Marxist perspective: to question the established assumptions and challenge the status quo. Science fiction is a tool that can exploit cognitive estrangement to see the alternative possibilities of a given situation (7–8).

Critics point out several shortcomings of Suvin's definition: It is predetermined, it favours inclusiveness over strict definition, and it is arbitrary instead of logical. These criticisms pose inescapable, yet in a way advantageous, challenges in the concept of speculative fiction. It is extremely difficult to classify a genre like speculative fiction because there are no preceding literary traditions. They were mostly designed to satisfy the critic's aims, therefore, all definitions will be personal and stipulative. For example, Robert Heinlein believes that speculative fiction "must [be] possible to the universe as we know it" (49). Heinlein's demand has had little impact,

but it does serve as a useful reminder that genres function as interpretive tools and value purveyors (Gill 74). While Gill agrees with Suvin's definition of speculative fiction, he also observes that some level of estrangement is a result of encountering the unknown.

However, Heinlein's definition appears as prescriptive and limiting to many critics. Later in his 1947 essay "On the writing of Speculative Fiction," he comes up with what he calls "a group of practical, tested rules which, if followed meticulously, will prove rewarding to any writer" (2). These rules posit that the plot should narrate a human problem rather than a technological one, that it should extrapolate already established scientific facts to produce a new situation, and that no established scientific fact should be violated. Otherwise, any newly proposed theory should be reasonably plausible and thoroughly explained by the author. About the prescriptive nature of this guideline, Samuel R. Delany comments that it might just help some young aspiring writers with a reference point to cling on to, or some editors of science fiction magazines with a standard or a model (147-148).

Looking for a rigorous definition of speculative fiction is as futile an endeavour as defining its genre boundary. The best definition till date is perhaps the one given by Delany (precisely because it admits to the impossibility of a proper definition). According to him, speculative fiction is "one of the numerous terms that numerous critics for numerous reasons have decided is inadequate for the numerous things that fall under it" (149). Indeed, all the sub-genres under the term speculative fiction have overlapping characteristics. Unlike any traditional genre, it lacks uniformity, although any specific work hardly ever corresponds to the rigid boundaries of the definitions. Judith Merril, on the other hand, considers that speculative fiction constitutes "a special sort of contemporary writing which makes use of fantastic and inventive elements to comment on, or speculate about society, humanity, life, the cosmos, reality and any other topic under the general heading of philosophy" (Oziewicz 3).

The second historically situated meaning comes from Margaret Atwood. For her novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009), she prefers the term speculative fiction to any other characterization. She explains in her book *In Other Worlds* (2011) that science fiction contains "things that could not possibly happen," such as a tentacled

Martian invasion on Earth (15). On the contrary, speculative fiction involves "things that really could happen but hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books," such as the presence of submarines and balloon travel in Jules Verne's books (*In Other Worlds* 15). In other words, speculative fiction extrapolates current trends into plausible (imagined) futures. Although Atwood is aware of how the borders of the genres are increasingly undefended, and the literary devices and techniques often intrude freely into the territory of neighbouring, cognate genres, her definition may come across as subjective, and even prescriptive—perhaps unintentionally. From her definition, it would appear that the main criterion for speculative fiction is the writer's prophetic capacity, which is problematic. The unchallenged view till now is that the main feature of speculative fiction is the power to create wonder and awe.

Ursula K. Le Guin, one of Atwood's most vocal opponents in this area, writes in a review of Atwood's then-newly published *The Year of The Flood*, the second volume in the *MaddAddam* Trilogy, that the author avoids using the label "science fiction" to avoid being pigeonholed into a literary ghetto. Published in *The Guardian* in 2009, this article caused an uproar. Le Guin says that while she understands Atwood's stance, this puts her in a precarious position. She finds Atwood's definition of science fiction and speculative fiction arbitrarily restrictive. To quote her, "I could talk about her new book more freely, more truly, if I could talk about it as what it is, using the lively vocabulary of modern science-fiction criticism, giving it the praise it deserves as a work of unusual cautionary imagination and satirical invention." Following a public conversation with Ursula Le Guin in the fall of 2010, Atwood responded to this critique by claiming that what Le Guin means by science fiction is, in her description, speculative fiction. Similarly, Le Guin's definition of fantasy would encompass elements of Atwood's definition of science fiction (*Other Worlds* 15).

The third kind of approach was developed around the year 2000. What triggered this development cannot be traced to any particular reason. Possibly the long-standing debate regarding the genre coupled with an increasing number of non-mimetic cultural productions demanded a more inclusive, less prescriptive, and flexible umbrella term to evade the narrow definitions of Heinlein, Merril, and Atwood. Nonetheless, in the second half of the twentieth

century, the number of non-mimetic works expanded dramatically, not only in literary forms such as novel, short story, picturebook, comic book, graphic novel, and poetry, but also in radio, film, TV show, drama, computer game, and even fan culture formats.

This approach endorses two qualities of speculative fiction: first, it questions the normative notion of reality, and secondly, it can hack the mainstream popular cultural artefacts to empower the people at the margins. It challenges the Western obsession with the real and the dominance of mimetic art. The conventional concepts of "real" and "truth" have been supplanted by "hyperreal" and "post-truth" in this age of mechanical reproduction. Besides, modern science has found out that the matter and energy we know is, at best, four percent of the entire universe, the rest inspires imagination and speculation. On the other hand, it is self-assertedly non-real. To quote Keith Booker, "… [S]peculative genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and horror, far from being escapist forms that simply allow their consumers to avoid engagement with reality, are in fact themselves vehicles for new forms of critical engagement, and often quite self-consciously so" (*Speculative Fiction* 3). Speculative fiction exploits this for its own benefit: It opens up the possibility for giving a voice to the voiceless by bypassing the hegemonic authority. In a way, this is a kind of covert hacking of the mainstream media to reach the mass population.

1.1.1 History and Evolution of the Genre

Speculative fiction and mythology seem to be situated far apart from each other, but the first of the pair has its roots in ancient myths and epics. Myths are the structural elements that are at the very foundation of works of literature, especially the non-mimetic kind, such as science fiction (Booker, *Speculative Fiction* 3). This aspect of myth interested Northrop Frye, who worked extensively on myth criticism. To quote him, science fiction is "a mode of romance with a strong inherent tendency towards myths" (49). Myths and epics functioned as an attempt by ancient people to seek supernatural explanations for difficult questions about their lives and surroundings when their existing knowledge would not offer sufficient explanation. The roots of speculative fiction can be traced back to Menippean satire as well, which dates back to ancient

Greece. It mocks certain human behaviours, such as stinginess, perversion, lechery, bragging, etc., and real-world social issues. This ancient technique later informed the writings of Erasmus, Voltaire, Jonathan Swift, Aldous Huxley, Kurt Vonnegut, etc. Mikhail Bakhtin had also identified certain "fantastical" elements in Menippean satire (*Speculative Fiction* 3). However, the first fully formed genre that preceded speculative fiction is utopia—the oldest sibling of the family. Thomas More started the tradition with his 1516 book *Utopia*. The book depicts an isolated island called "Nusquama," which is derived from the adverb "nusquam," that means "no where." It represents an imaginary realm that provides a site for some of More's philosophical, political, and social reflections. Later, More changed the name of the island from "Nusquama" to "Utopia". From the Greek "ou-topos", which means "no place" or "nowhere," he invented the term "utopia." Although the words utopia and nusquama have the same meaning, they are homonyms or puns because the nearly identical Greek term eu-topos signifies "a good location." Therefore, the term utopia is a paradox in itself: The perfect place is identical to no place. Although More coined the term, the concept had already existed. The desire to imagine a better society had plenty of precedence—Plato's *Republic* (written in approximately 380 B.C.) for example, or the biblical Garden of Eden. Republic—the first written account we find that thoroughly describes a utopian society—is not a work of fiction: It is an intellectual exercise in the form of a conversation about the possibility of a better society. The quest for a shared understanding of a perfect society, and humankind's ruminations over ways to achieve it, therefore, date long before More' *Utopia*.

Utopian literature, however, does not strive to portray a perfect society but a better one, by providing a rich philosophical space. The way a particular society in a particular era conceives of and envisions the idea of progress is central to any political and philosophical discussion. This explains why brilliant minds like Karl Marx and Frederick Engels have worked extensively on the topic, as have contemporary cultural critics, like Michel Foucault and Frederick Jameson. In her course "Great Utopian and Dystopian Works of Literature," Pamela Bedore identifies three constitutive features of utopia: imaginary place or a gated community as the spatial setting, euchronium or the imaginary time in the future, and the visitor trope. Early utopias were frequently placed in remote locations on earth, such as islands with walled communities. In the late nineteenth century, utopian thinking shifted from imagining a society in a different location

to imagining a society in a different time, a concept known as euchronium. The visitor metaphor, the third convention, is essentially a lookout point from which an audience or guest might see an imaginary, well-functioning society separated in time or space. Frequently, the traveller meets a character who defines the place's ways, as well as its philosophy, politics, and economy. There can also be more than one guest that can offer many different insights into the society at any given time. They provide a link between the reader and the text. After More's book, utopia as a genre saw relatively little progress over the next two centuries. In 1616, exactly a century later, an anonymously published French utopia called *An Account of the Great* and *Wonderful Kingdom of Antangil* appeared, which was heavily influenced by More. Valentin Andreae's German utopia *Christianopolis* (1619) and Tommaso Campanella's Italian utopia *The City of the Sun* are two more rare examples (1623). *New Atlantis* (1627), a paradise by Francis Bacon, was published after his death. He was enthusiastic about the potential of science which resulted from the scientific revolution in the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century—the age of Enlightenment—was the celebration of reason above all. Inspired by the advancement of scientific and philosophical theories, there was an enormous enthusiasm about progress through rational ideas and thoughts. Satirical utopias—also called the anti-utopia—emerged in this century. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *Voltaire's Candide* (1759) are two excellent examples. The humorous representations of these satirical utopias are created using four general techniques: incongruity, superiority, community, and disruption.

The printing press and railroads were marvels of the nineteenth century, as were ground-breaking theories like Darwin's theory of evolution. This period was also preceded by the Age of Enlightenment–a period marked by a zeal for reason and science. The first science fiction was born on a cold, dreary day in 1816, often known as the "year without a summer" due to the volcanic eruption on Mount Tambora in Indonesia the year before: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818). It tells the narrative of Victor Frankenstein, a scientist who gives life to a creature in an experiment, only to have fatal consequences. It was inspired by an experiment conducted by an Italian physician named Luigi Galvani on how a mild electric shock could make a dead frog's leg twitch. He concluded from the experiment that there was a connection between animation of life and electricity. However, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, H.

G. Wells, and others carried the light that Mary Shelley lit. Until then, the utopian tradition had been exclusively Eurocentric, but at this period, American literature began to emerge. Individualism and self-reliance were at the heart of the transcendentalist movement. Despite the fact that it was not truly utopian, the movement sparked a flood of ideas about utopias in America. Individualism and self-reliance are major themes in both Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" (1841) and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), which are indicative of deep optimism and conventional utopian imaginings. Between 1825 and 1860, there were about a hundred actual utopian communities in the United States, the most notable of which was Brook Farm, seeking an alternative to conventional 19th-century society. It is no surprise that the number of utopias created in this century had nearly tripled. Not only did the change take place only in terms of the number, but utopian thinking took a different turn as well. It was during this time there was a transition from utopia to dystopia.

As the term "dystopia" or "bad place" suggests, dystopian fictions depict a grim futuristic society, where contemporary and past crises have taken a sinister turn (Moylan 72). Sir Thomas More created the term "dystopia" in Utopia, though it emerged as a genre much later than utopia—at the end of the eighteenth century, to be precise, especially as a wary reaction to the Enlightenment's hopes. Following that, in the first half of the twentieth century, utopian optimism gave way to dystopian reality as the world witnessed the tremendous destruction wrought by two world wars, the development of fascist power, colonial dominance, and the dangers of technological abuse. It became apparent that the Enlightenment may not have been entirely a blessing.

Though dystopian novels existed prior to the early twentieth century, there was a broad movement from utopia to dystopia. Although it is difficult to pin down the characteristics, broadly speaking, dystopias extrapolate past and current trends in human societies and project them into (usually catastrophic) futures. Sometimes called "what-if" books, dystopian works centre around conjectures based on the past and present events. They are set in bleak, horrific, and nightmarish worlds in the future, where the present-day crises have been intensified, often culminating into an apocalypse. They portray those in power—a totalitarian state, a dogmatic religious group,

capitalistic corporate organisations, etc.—taking firm control over the citizens, depriving them of their rights to function as individuals, dissolving their identities into state-approved structures, and manipulating information to their sinister ends, as seen in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). Meanwhile, another significant development in science fiction history occurred between the 1920s and the 1950s: the rise of pulp fiction, which was published in popular periodicals although the pulp era helped to popularise the notion of science fiction as a cheap, sensational, and filthy genre.

Dystopian fiction portrays the future of society and humanity in a seemingly pessimistic light.[1] Utopian writings typically depict a future in which technology improves people's lives and society advances, whereas dystopian works depict the opposite. Mastery over nature to the point of desolation or turning against humanity; breakthroughs in technology that enslave or regiment people's lives; the forced separation of individuals in society into castes or groups with defined functions; and collective memory lapses and histories that make humanity easier to manipulate psychologically and eventually leads to dehumanisation are all recurring themes in dystopian fiction. According to critics, some terrible historical circumstances during the twentieth century helped the emergence of dystopian fiction. These critics say that some of the best dystopian novels were written during the Nazi era in Germany, the Stalin era in Russia, in response to various battles throughout history, and as a critique of various totalitarian governments. Individual liberty, the need for individual resistance to dictatorships, and the power of technology to change people's lives are all themes that dystopian fiction commonly examines (Mahida 2). Some of the canonical works of twentieth-century dystopian fiction have been regarded as inspirations by several contemporary dystopian authors, including Margaret Atwood, Chinua Achebe, Anthony Burgess, Ursula K. Le Guin, Isaac Asimov, Kurt Vonnegut, and Ray Bradbury (Mahida 2).

[1] Although dystopian fiction tends to be gloomy and pessimistic, it can be argued that dystopia is ultimately about hope. This sounds contradictory, but dystopia aims to point out the perilous tendencies of the present so that they can be avoided in the future. Thus, it hopes, although cautiously, for a positive change in the society.

1.1.2 Speculative Fiction as Social Critique

Speculative fiction is widely known for its capacity of being a kind of literature that is socially transformative.[2] It represents a radical discontinuity between the fictional worlds and the world of our experience, and in that process, it envisions social change. Tom Moylan observes its trajectory and scope: "From that early period, and throughout its varied and shifting history, this negative narrative machine [dystopian literature] has produced challenging cognitive maps of the historical situation by way of imaginary societies that are even worse than those that lie outside their authors' and readers' doors" (xi). Speculative fiction has the potential to voice alternative views that can move the world in the direction of better tomorrows. Gill divided speculative fiction into two categories, for interpretive or heuristic purposes: (1) categories of engagement or social critique and (2) categories of replacement or surrogate experience. He notes that although they are relevant to all genres of literature in general, these categories are especially relevant to speculative fiction (79). This section explores the many ways in which speculative fiction offers social critique and a subversive cultural impact.

"Cognitive estrangement" is a term used by Darko Suvin to describe how speculative fiction functions as a tool to defamiliarize our existing world in order to highlight the social issues. Suvin defines science fiction in this way: "S[cience] F[iction] is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7). Defamiliarization is one of the basic techniques of speculative fiction which the Russian Formalists initially considered as the literary approach basic and necessary for distinguishing between literary and non-literary speech. By centering their condemnations of societal structure on historically or chronologically remote situations, speculative fiction presents new perspectives on worrisome socio-political behaviours that could otherwise be considered as usual or seen as valid and unavoidable. This investigation of alternative viewpoints clearly recalls

[2] Since the term "speculative fiction" includes utopia, dystopia, science fiction and many other non-mimetic genres, I include the characteristics and scope of some of these genres into the discussion of this section.

the defamiliarization process, but it also recalls Bertolt Brecht's alienation impact in the way it refuses to accept this boundary and relates the formation of new perspectives on literary issues to specific social and political events. Dystopian fiction is related to science fiction in this manner (Booker, *Dystopian Tendencies* 19). In the sixties and seventies, feminist writers—Lois Gould, Rhonda Lerman, Judith Merril, James Tiptree Jr., Angela Carter, Kate Wilhelm, Carol Emshwiller, Suzy McKee Charnas, Octavia Butler, Tanith Lee, Doris Lessing, Sally Miller Gearhart, Barbara Ehrenreich, and others—used speculative fiction as a tool to articulate feminist theories and thoughts. They used the techniques of defamiliarization to achieve cognitive estrangement effect to prompt the readers to question the status quo and its androcentric biases.

One of the major concerns of speculative fiction is creating visions around social issues like the drive towards non-pluralistic truth. The quest for incontrovertible truth often takes the routes of science and religion. This ruthless drive towards truth and logic can be a perilous preoccupation—one that can be related to the drive for power and supremacy that allows authoritarian governments to flourish. In Nietzsche's view, both science and religion impose simple judgements on a vastly complex reality, confining the person to a "limited domain" that excludes other possibilities. Sigmund Freud's work, however, attempts to curb early Enlightenment confidence in the power of reason, maintaining a scepticism that reason would ever triumph in human affairs. Even though religion is without a doubt the most oppressive power in history for Freud (as it is for Nietzsche), he would very certainly consider Soviet Communism as a reinscription of religion rather than a rejection (Booker 10-11). Even in works ostensibly inspired by the evolutionist hope for a more logical future, such as *The Future of an Illusion* (1928), Freud's anti-religious rant is intense and at times caustic. He conveys his idea that religious belief is not merely ridiculous, but also possibly antagonistic and detrimental to humanity's survival. Sigmund Freud saw religion as illogical and erroneous as a scientist, but as a sociologist, he saw religion as a vital component of society's repressive (and oppressive) mechanisms. In his book *Society and Its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud specifically identifies religion as one of the factors contributing to massive hostility of the modern civilization to human happiness and satisfaction of human desires (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 11). According to Freud, religious faith arises from a child's sense of powerlessness and need for a strong and protective father figure; nonetheless, it is this longing

that lends erotic appeal to authoritarian tyrants such as Hitler and Stalin. Furthermore, both fictional dystopian regimes and real-life totalitarian governments rely on the same form of mass hysteria that Sigmund Freud associates with religion as a method of achieving "protection against suffering by a wrong remoulding of reality" (Freud et al. 30). Finally, Sigmund Freud attributes religion to the same monologic urge for conformity that drives dystopian governments. Despite the traditional Christian focus on free will, he observes that religion intentionally denies its followers choice and imposes its own route to happy and pain-free living on everyone. Religion saves many individuals from individual neurosis by putting them into a state of physical infantilism and bringing them into a mass delusion at this cost (Freud et al. 34).

Furthermore, what constitutes human happiness is a major concern of utopian and dystopian thinking. Freud has important insights into the conditions of life that create unhappiness and neurosis. He condemns the past as a burden, and a reason for neurosis. His hostility to the past also informs his rationalist perspective. The past is not just a dead-weight to be thrown away by educated minds; it is a living, breathing force that threatens to govern the present (Rieff 187). Freud appears to become progressively pessimistic about the ability of human society to overcome the confines of the past. Freud's call for a revolutionary challenge to the authority of the past is reminiscent of Nietzsche's: Freud adopts the retroactive inclination of Romanticism but not its longing. Despite the fact that his own research was frequently historical in nature, Freud's pessimism about the future is nothing more than a cry for a return to the past (Booker *Dystopian Impulse* 9). By the time he published *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), he had created a critical portrait of human society that resembled dystopian literature in many aspects. In this book, Freud examines a number of ways for finding happiness in today's environment (Freud and Riviere 26-32). He claims that the pursuits of pleasure-driven happiness are an inextricable part of being human, and we have no choice but to seek them. The conditions of life in the real world, according to Freud, make this "program of being glad... to be completed" impossible to attain (Freud and Riviere 32). He goes on to say that there are three reasons why human happiness is impossible to achieve. Despite technical advancements that have made substantial inroads into our capacities to overcome nature's fundamental antagonism, we can do relatively little about the first two of these reasons, "nature's superior force" and "the feebleness

of our own bodies." The third reason, "the inadequacy of the norms that modify human beings' mutual interactions in the family, state, and society," appears to be a human-made issue that may be remedied with human effort (Freud and Riviere 36).

In dystopian fiction, regimes commonly utilise minorities to buttress their anti-difference sentiments, and this form of demonisation is very prevalent even in modern societies (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 10-11). However, this phenomenon, according to Freud, is not so much an aberration associated with certain totalitarian regimes as it is a fundamental component of civilization itself. He says that as long as "other people are left to absorb the manifestations of their aggressiveness," it is possible to always "bond together a significant number of people in love" (Freud and Riviere 68). Freud equates current totalitarian regimes like as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union with a strong and focused belligerence on an easily identifiable Other, but he traces it all the way back to the beginnings of Christianity: "When the Apostle Paul presented universal love between men as the cornerstone of his Christian society, great intolerance on the part of Christendom against those who remained outside it became the natural consequence" (Freud and Riviere 69). The criticism of Soviet Communism by Sigmund Freud is straightforward. He claims, for example, that the community forces in Soviet society are shaped more by capitalist hostility than by affection for their own convictions. In a similar vein, he links the Soviet Union's "bourgeois persecution" to Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews, then links both to "the narcissism of minor differences," a fundamental trait of Western civilisation. The human tendency for hostility, according to Freud, is commonly manifested in the selection of scapegoats (such as Jews or the bourgeoisie) who are only marginally different from the established standard.

Sexuality acts as a key focus of subversive energies for authoritarian governments, given its potential as a source of significant disruption to power. The suppression of sexuality is one of the ways dystopian societies regulate people, whether through religion or other methods. The prevalence of sexual suppression in dystopian works can be attributed to Freud's influence. This perspective has influenced neo-Freudians like Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown, who, like Freud, see sexuality as a basic site of societal repression, but emphasise the reverse side of this

figuration. According to these theorists, sexuality can be a source of intrinsically disruptive energies, and sexual emancipation is a crucial step toward greater social and political liberty (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 12). Marcuse's interpretation of Freud's work as creating the foundation for a socialist paradise, comparable to Fourier's vision of a perfect society built on the communal utilisation of innate urges for the greater benefit, has a clear utopian bent. On the other hand, institutional power, according to Michel Foucault, constantly engages in sexual suppression as a matter of principle. In contrast to what he terms Freud's "repressive theory," Foucault claims that modern society chooses to harness and channel sexual energy for its own purpose, rather than repressing or even destroying it. To put it another way, sexuality does not have to be in direct conflict with governmental power; in fact, it may be advantageous: "Pleasure and power do not contradict or negate one another; they seek one other out, overlap, and increase one another" (Foucault et al. 48). Rather than fundamental desires, sexuality, according to Foucault, is the consequence of socially and discursively conditioned reactions. He describes sexuality as "a dense transfer site for power interactions" (Foucault et al. 103). Sexuality, on the other hand, serves as a focal point for a range of activities intended at making the individual a target of administrative control in modern society. Psychoanalysis, according to Foucault, contributes to modern society's broader tactics for influencing human behavior by defining certain sexual acts as normal and others as abnormal. As a result, society does not aim to eliminate even "deviant" or borderline sexual practices; rather, the state seeks to retain such activities in order to provide repulsive standards against which to assess good behavior (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 12-13).

Of course, one of Nietzsche's favoured techniques of evading the constriction of logic and its drive for truth is art. In this, he foreshadows Martin Heidegger, who sees art (especially poetry) as the weapon of choice in the struggle against humiliating technology. He claims that vital meditation on and final conflict with it must take place in a domain that is, on the one hand, akin to the core of technology while, on the other, profoundly apart from it. The more we sceptically investigate the essence of technology, the more opaque the core of art becomes (8). For both Nietzsche and Heidegger, art acts as a counterbalance to science. It is no surprise, however, that much early twentieth century truly experimental art reflects Nietzsche's scepticism of science

and reason. In fact, Habermas considers Nietzsche to have a key philosophical influence on aesthetic modernity, claiming that "he is the first to develop the conceptions of aesthetic modernity even before avant-garde awareness actually manifested in twentieth-century literature, painting, and music... the anarchical purpose of the Surrealists to shatter the continuity of history is already effective in Nietzsche" (Habermas and Levin 25).

Adorno's work reveals Friedrich Nietzsche's influence in both his rejection of logic and his reliance on art. Furthermore, Nietzsche's entire theory symbolises a turning point in modern scepticism and dystopian thinking. Nietzsche criticises science's hubris and steadfast demands for final truths, instead proposing for a "gay" science that empowers rather than disempowers, that preserves an appreciation for the weirdness of the world without asking that everything be characterized and realized in rational ways. Nietzsche rails against the epistemological colonialism of science, rejecting it as a new sort of religion, worshipping the god of machines and autoclaves. The skills of the spirits of nature acknowledged and employed in the service of a greater egotism, it believes it can resolve the world's problems through knowledge, and guide our lives (Nietzsche 109). Freudian psychoanalysis, according to Adorno, is to blame for the Enlightenment's loss of real individuality, which was hidden by the bourgeois ideal of the powerful, autonomous man. "Unenlightened cognition plays directly into the hands of bourgeois disenchantment," Adorno writes (60). He highlights the long-standing trend, dating back to the Middle Ages and continuing since the Enlightenment, to see a link between psychological progress and the development of the bourgeois individual. By routinising and banalising human experience and reducing individuals to simple instances of common case histories, Adorno charges current analytic psychology of leading to a broad cultural alienation of people and experience (65). Despite his well-known pessimism, Adorno's use of art as a substitute for Enlightenment science and rationality suggests that he still has utopian aspirations, even if he believes that utopian goals would not emerge organically from history but would instead necessitate a radical break with the current order (Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* 13).

The hardships of artistic expression in a planet utterly dominated by the authoritarian logic of the economy are even worse than the servitude to which performers were subjected for millennia in that they were mentored by the ruling elite, powerful and influential religions, and even the growing bourgeoisie of the commencement of capitalist modernity: “If artists were lackeys before the French Revolution, they now are entertainers” (Adorno 283). On the one hand, the artist acquired liberty from influences outside his conscience by being allowed to choose the concept of the work, its medium, and its implementation; on the other hand, he is now bound to requirements of popular taste, to the marketability of his work. Thus, the freedom of invention gave way only to the ambiguities inherent in the true potential of art’s existence in the reified world, so that the commodities of these cultural industries cannot be seen in any sense as successors to traditional art (Fianco 3). Much more than a diversion for those who are simply waiting for disasters, Adorno’s art is the primary means of seeking a better and more compassionate practice that is not done in the name of self-justifying domination.

According to Foucault, the main issue of the neoliberal system is always social defence and the containment of threat emerging from the boundaries of the system itself. He claims that the racism embedded in the capitalist system is defined by its opposition to the other. When we look at the history of the kinetic utopia, we can see how events like 9/11 and the seemingly never-ending war on terror confirm Foucault’s argument. Al Qaeda, bin Laden, and Atta first targeted the emblem of American economic dominance, provoking a fierce defence of the system in battles against the Taliban in Afghanistan and, later, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. For writers like Derek Gregory, the preservation of “civilization” meant a new sort of colonialism, and failing to recognize the racial aspects of the American-led “War on Terror” would be a mistake. What is less evident, but perhaps equally stunning, is how, in the aftermath of the financial crisis, colonial authority was inverted and began to take effect in Western governments through the establishment of a new politics of demonisation and hatred. The Islamophobia that has gripped America and Western Europe since 2001 has laid the groundwork for this racial politics of hatred (Featherstone 9). As previously noted, 9/11 highlighted the difference between pure economic liberty, which, as Hobbes recognised, eventually leads to extreme deprivation, and social and political enslavement in a security scenario (Hobbes et al.).

While More's utopia was effectively abandoned by replacing every proclamation of the good with a statement of improbability (for example, the good place is a no place), which can be read as an earlier iteration of the vital method Theodor Adorno (1981) would later call "negative dialectics". John Gray attempts to argue that the vast majority of utopians genuinely believe in their strategies and want to see them realised. More was willing to condemn early mediaeval fortifications that put common land in private hands, but he never believed it was truly possible. As a result, the concept of a lovely location is transformed into a no-go zone, a farce. According to Gray (2007), utopian political figures throughout history, from the Jacobins to Mao, Pol Pot, and Baader-Meinhof, to modern Islamic Radicals, have been seduced by egalitarian justice concepts and have attempted to impose their plans on the world through the violent destruction of those who are seen to stand in the way of their realisation. Gray's subject, on the other hand, is not just for the Left. He also criticises neoliberal capitalists and politicians for their utopian vision of a global economy without borders. He emphasises that achieving this utopian ideal necessitates the brutal eradication of other lifestyles, which goes against the ethical core of utopia itself: people's ability to realise themselves via interactions with others. Gray answers to a Popperian philosophy of reason, rationality, and critique, which he considers more moderate, open to dispute, and fundamentally negotiating in his critique of a kind of thought that threatens violence, devastation, horror, and eventually totalitarian dictatorship (Featherstone 4-5).

The attraction of the utopian illusions portrayed by Disneyworld and similar amusement parks has been proven by the international expansion of theme parks in recent years. Escapism, of course, plays a role, but Disneyworld ultimately symbolises both the negative image of utopian thinking as a method of escaping reality and the good image of utopian thought as a pragmatic Aristotelian entelechy of the ideal Platonic potential that already exists in the real world (Booker 1-2). Nonetheless, the park is significant in a variety of ways, demonstrating the utopian project's whole complexity and undesirability. Disneyworld is an awe-inspiring showcase of human intellect and technological power, attracting tourists from all over the world to rest and enjoy themselves in an idealised setting of peaceful coexistence. The park's technological

advancements are notable, but so is the smoothness and efficiency with which it is administered. The ease with which these subservient people stroll about the park under the continual surveillance of uniformed overseers could be seen as a frightening foreshadowing of dystopia, even if the overseers are disguised as cute cartoon characters (Booker 1-2). A resurrected capitalism managed to reach its own imagination of total profiteering and manipulation of employees and customers through a global labour division in a global market of products and services under the pseudo utopian banner of rational choice and the free market. Simultaneously, the constitutional system of prioritising immediate financial gain resulted in the budgetary erasure of entire geographic regions and populations judged no longer, or not yet, worthy of conservation, preservation, or protection by the leaner and meaner economic engine (Moylan 161).

Disneyworld and its progenitor Disneyland, according to Jean Baudrillard, are examples of terrible escapism intended to distract attention from societal problems in the "real" world. According to Baudrillard, Disneyland is a carefully calibrated attempt to remove itself from the surrounding world, validating the "hyperreality" of current American culture. This distinction, however, is a hoax. Baudrillard points out, "Disneyland exists to conceal the truth that Disneyland is the "actual" America, the entire "real" continent (just like prisons exist to hide the fact that it is the society in all of its prosaic omnipresence, which is carceral). Disneyland is designed to make the rest of the world appear fake so that we believe the rest of the world is genuine, but in truth, all of Los Angeles and the rest of America are now hyperreal and simulations" (Baudrillard and Poster 172) The dual nature of Disneyworld, for example, underscores the basic reality that what one person considers a lovely dream may appear to another as a nightmare. It also explains why so many modern intellectuals are sceptical of utopian projects, believing that they ultimately benefit the status quo. Marx was certain that his vision of a perfect communist regime in the future was not a fantasy. Rather, he sought to show that some characteristics of this society had already begun to appear within the capitalist system. Marx considered communism as a logical, even unavoidable, consequence of capitalism's historical progression, which he attempted to prove through a scientific examination of capitalism. But, contrary to what Marx and Engels

would have us believe, the distinction between socialism and utopianism is less obvious (Booker 4-6).

Given late-nineteenth-century pessimism about the utopian potential of science, it is not surprising that many Neo-Marxist intellectuals disagree with Marx's conviction in a future utopian society in the twenty-first century. This scepticism of the Enlightenment manifests itself in the Frankfurt School, especially in the critical theory of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *In The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno contend that reason is conscripted for the sake of power in the Enlightenment, and as a result, Enlightenment rationalism enslaves, rather than liberates, humanity: "What men want to learn from nature is how to fully dominate it and other men" (Horkheimer et al. 4). Horkheimer and Adorno gravely doubt the legitimacy of logical thought, including their own, as a result of their approach. Their critique devolves from a reasoned examination of the Enlightenment to a purposely paradoxical performance that exaggerates, in their opinion, the flaws inherent in rational reasoning in general. As Albrecht Wellmer points out, Adorno's suspicion of Enlightenment rationality leads him to look for a locus of legitimate reason elsewhere, which he discovers in art: A work of art reveals the irrational and false character of empirical reality while also foreshadowing an order of rapprochement through its aesthetic synthesis and the configuration of its elements (Bernstein and Wellmer 48).

British political philosopher John Gray pushed for the extinction of utopia in 2008, in the midst of the American-led "War on Terror." Gray believes that utopia is a dangerous concept as history has often demonstrated. He also claims that globalisation has spawned new faith-based utopian violence following a formalist concept of a historical design that encompasses the past, present, and future. According to Gray, the eschatological assumption that battle, devastation, bloodshed, and the final tragedy would usher in the new and built paradise was pure fantasy founded on faulty theological thinking. The utopians' mistake, according to Gray, is to believe that it is possible to separate the entirely good from the completely horrible and discover some realm of unadulterated good free of evil, tracing the origins of utopian thought back to Zarathustra and old religious conceptions of right and wrong. This good place is otherworldly in religious beliefs

and only accessible after death; yet, in modern utopian notions, the good place is elsewhere, on the other side of the ocean, and can be reached by discovery and adventure (Featherstone 4).

If dystopian literature is characterised by scepticism toward utopian ideals, postmodernist apocalyptic fiction could be said to be shaped by the same scepticism. Woody Allen's mockumentary *Sleeper* is about a science fiction journey to a future totalitarian society, for instance. Although *Sleeper* incorporates, albeit parodies, many common characteristics of the dystopian genre, its humorous tone belies a nihilistic scepticism that dystopian stories may prevent a dreadful future from occurring (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 141-142).[3] The seriousness and ridiculousness of the movie are reminiscent of many postmodernist works that attempt to make political statements while doubting their own abilities to do so correctly. As a result, *Sleeper* serves as a dystopian thriller as well as a parody on dystopian flicks. In a nutshell, it is a postmodern work heavily influenced by the difficulty of distinguishing between parody and exemplification, which is a crucial feature of postmodern art. This ambiguity implies that generic boundaries are softer in a postmodernist framework; and that the line between utopia and dystopia is vague. The unclear categorisation of "utopian" and "dystopian" works by Western postmodernists is one of their most distinguishing features. Authors like Samuel R. Delany and William Gibson, for example, construct imagined universes that blur the utopian-dystopian boundary. More "mainstream" postmodernists, such as Thomas Pynchon, produce works that straddle the line between terrible future prophecies and stunningly realistic portrayals of the present. Even books that appear to be indisputably dystopian, such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale (1985)*, include significant sarcasm and humour, unlike many of its dystopian forerunners (Booker *Dystopian Impulse* 141-142).

[3] According to the film's Wellsian narrative, Miles Monroe (played by Allen) is frozen in 1973 and awakens 200 years later in a high-tech dystopian America ruled by a dictator. The Leader, however, has been killed by a rebel bomb, leaving just his nose unharmed when Miles arrives. The Leader's henchmen attempt to clone a successor from the nose, but Miles smashes it, saving the day. Despite the happy ending, Miles is convinced that traditional sources of hope, such as science, religion, and politics, will never be able to solve the problems of modern society. He claims to be persuaded "Sex and death are the only two once-in-a-lifetime experiences. At the very least, you won't be sick when you die" (Booker, *Dystopian Impulse* 141-142).

1.2 Speculative Trauma: Introduction

Mental distress or suffering, which are both typical human experiences, are not the same as trauma. It is the result of one or more occurrences that cause psychological discontinuity or rupture as a result of being exposed to shocking events—either directly or indirectly—that surpass the person's ability to cope with the emotions involved, eventually leading to significant, long-term negative consequences. Some people get post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after witnessing a major traumatic event, which is widely known as psychological trauma. In the 1960s, the prevalence of violence against women and children, such as rape, battering, and incest, was recognised, as the cause of the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder among women. The same kind of psychological impairment was seen in Vietnam war veterans, and was noticed earlier in the twentieth century as well, particularly in relation to the Holocaust.

Paul Crutzen used the term "The Anthropocene" to characterise the new epoch in which humans have transformed into a harmful "geologic force," the impact of which on unconscious psychological circumstances, societal discourses, and media representations is pushing trauma theory in new directions (Kaplan 1). In one such theoretical development, Ann Kaplan defines "Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome" (PreTSS) as a disorder that exists alongside the well-known "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD) (4). The phenomena of PreTSS might be conceptualised as a new lens for the ever-expanding discourse of trauma theory. Future time is a prominent issue, as is thinking about the implications and cultural work that dystopian pre-trauma imaginaries perform in our newly traumatised historical era. It is important to note the circularity of representations that both foresee and respond to historical events. Such depictions carry a high emotional charge, especially when historical events lead to war or foreshadow future environmental destruction. These fantasies serve as warnings, a form of "memory for the future," and Kaplan investigates what the future holds for memory (Kaplan 4, 18).

1.2.1 The Classical View of Trauma

Neurologist Jean Martin Charcot, a French physician who worked with traumatised women at the Salpetriere hospital, did the first research on the link between trauma and mental disease. Charcot's study in the late 1800s concentrated on hysteria, a female-specific disorder. Sudden paralysis, forgetfulness, sensory loss, and convulsions were some of the hysterical symptoms. Hysteria was considered to manifest in the uterus in the great majority of patients, and the symptoms of hysteria were thought to manifest in the uterus. Hysterectomy was the standard treatment for hysteria until Charcot. Charcot was the first to recognize that psychological rather than physiological reasons were to blame for hysterical symptoms (Ringel et al. 1). Freud was influenced by Charcot and adopted some of his ideas during his early studies on hysteria (1893–1895). In *Studies on Hysteria* (1893), co-authored with Josef Breuer, Freud said, "We must stress out that we deem it crucial for the explanation of hysterical occurrences to presume the presence of dissociation, a splitting of the content of consciousness" (Ringel et al 2). The process of a hysterical experience involves the repetition of a physiological state that the patient has already experienced at the moment of trauma.

Freud was confronted with incidents of sexual seduction in the post-puberty phase of their growth during the early years of his practice while treating female patients who had developed symptoms of hysteria. However, in his opinion, these occurrences were insufficient to explain the condition. Based on his patients' descriptions of being sexually seduced as children, Freud assumed that a pre-pubertal sexual trauma was linked, a genital stimulation of the child by an adult that it could not experience as sexual. The early experience now took on meaning in a postponed action following puberty and sexual maturation, with the ability to feel it as such in the meantime. This first event develops its traumatic effect as a result of the exposure with the extreme experience and the overstimulation, which pushes the individual to defend against remembering it and renders it unconscious. If this defence mechanism fails, a hysterical symptom emerges (Bohleber 2-3). However, Freud subsequently shifted from "seduction theory" to "conflict theory," indicating that hysterical symptoms were generated by the undesirable nature of sexual and aggressive desires rather than memories of external trauma.

Freud's subsequent work on war neurosis and the problem of traumatic repetition, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)*, deepens and extends his earlier ideas on the defence mechanisms of ego, as well as the formation and ramifications of trauma on the psyche. Ego conflicts arise as a result of traumatic events being "split off" from the ego's oneness and suppressed, only to return later in nightmares (Freud 8). As a result of the conflicts caused by trauma, traumatic neurosis is characterised as "the result of a significant breach in the protective screen against stimuli" (35). According to Freud, the mind is divided between outer and inner layers, with the outer layer serving as a "protective barrier" against harmful external impulses (35). When "fright" strikes, which is defined as "the state a person enters when he is confronted with danger without being prepared for it," the lack of anxiety, along with external stimuli, results in neurosis (11, 32, 36). Due to a lack of internal resistance, external stimuli penetrate the barrier and infiltrate the inner psyche. Trauma is considered as an external disruptor of an unprepared system as well as an internal defence mechanism against sensory overload.

In the conventional trauma model pioneered by Cathy Caruth, trauma is viewed as an event that separates awareness and prevents direct linguistic representation (*Trauma* 3-4). This perspective emphasises the severity of suffering by claiming that traumatic events permanently alter the psyche. Trauma is an unprocessed event that shatters identity and is not properly remembered or depicted. Trauma is seen as a direct source of fragmentation or dissociation, which contributes to the notion of transhistorical trauma (Trauma 9). This concept emphasises the pain caused by an external source, which leads to internal mental changes and irreversible alterations of identity. The idea that a traumatic experience fractures both language and awareness, resulting in long-term injury and needing various story forms, encapsulates this view of trauma (Mambrol).

According to Caruth, latency and dissociation make it impossible to effectively absorb or describe a painful experience (Trauma 7). Trauma's dissociative and linguistic irregularities are exemplified by the belief that a traumatic event can only be portrayed as a recurring absence. Based on Freud and Lacan's theories of delayed return of the suppressed and a determining absence, Caruth claims that trauma is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past," but only identified in "the way it is precisely not known in the first instance— returns to haunt

the survivor later on" (*Unclaimed Experience* 4, 17). Trauma creates a twofold contradiction in consciousness and language: the paradoxical need to understand the past but inability to do so (7). "For the attempt to understand trauma brings one repeatedly to this peculiar para- dox: that in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness," Caruth contends (*Trauma* 6). The unique manner of remembering results in an approximate recall but never definitive knowledge because traumatic events enter the psyche in a unique way, creating an aberrant memory that resists narrative representation (Mambrol).

Although Brooks Bouson and Laurie Vickroy emphasise the dissociative effects of trauma, they also use the model to look at the social and cultural implications of traumatic memory and severe experiences. In Toni Morrison's work *Quiet As It Is Kept*, Bouson depicts the suffering of the African American community as a result of discriminatory structures and practices. In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction (2002)*, Vickroy examines the formal innovations found in contemporary trauma narratives, incorporating postcolonial and trauma theories to investigate the ways in which the lead characters' individual consciousness portray the cooperative emotional journey of a social group (Mambrol). *Traumatic Realism* (2000), a study of Holocaust literature that claims that traumatic experience generates "reflection on the formal constraints of representation" and a social response resulting from "public circulation of discourses on the events," evidencing Rothberg's usage of the classic model within a modern cultural system (Rothberg 7). According to Rothberg, traumatic realism is both a literary genre and a cultural response that embraces both the mundane and unusual aspects of bereavement (9). The author's concentration camp experience, Rothberg believes, generates a manner of characterisation that assumes that "the extreme and every day are neither opposed, collapsed, nor transcended through a dialectical synthesis—rather, they are maintained together and kept forever apart" (Rothberg 130).

When the cultural context of a person's or a group's traumatic experience is taken into account, proper attention can be paid to depictions of traumatic events such as rape, war, the Holocaust, the Gulag, American slavery, colonial persecution, and racism. Holocaust studies, feminist

studies, and postcolonial critique are all concerned with a complex web of social and cultural factors that influence how trauma is linguistically and ethically articulated (Mambrol). According to Naomi Mandel's book *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust,* and *Slavery in America (2006),* the traditional understanding of trauma as unspeakable is a "discursive production" that avoids moral responsibility in depicting atrocities by focusing on the "issues inherent in speech" rather than the "ethical obligations involved in such representations" (Mandel 4, 5). In her study of trauma and the paradoxes of remembering in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, Mandel writes, "Silence and forgetting are as much a deliberate and self-conscious gesture on the part of the subjugated as they are the consequence of the subjugating culture's expectations and standards" (172).

Greg Forter uses and adapts the Freudian-Caruthian trauma model to emphasise the difference between "punctual" trauma, or a once-in-a-lifetime tragic event, and "non-punctual" trauma, or an ongoing and everyday event, in his assessment of the political and historical aspects of extreme experience in modernist and postcolonial fiction in *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism* (Forter 98). He contributes to trauma theory by proposing the concept of "signification trauma," which allows for a more transformative understanding of the incident and thus its significance (Forter 116).

1.2.2 Collective Trauma

To begin with, collective trauma is a scientific concept that describes the emergence of a new meaningful and causal network between previously unconnected events, structures, perceptions, and behaviours. This concept throws light on a rapidly growing field of social responsibility and political action. Collective traumas are developed by social groups, national communities, and even entire civilisations in order to not only intellectually recognise the existence and causes of human sorrow, but also to "take on board" some meaningful responsibility for it. In theory, members of organisations can experience the grief of others if they can recognise the source of trauma and take moral responsibility for it (Alexander 1).

The fact that this new theoretical paradigm closely matches real life is one of its most compelling features. Throughout the twentieth century, people have spoken about being tormented by an encounter, an occurrence, a form of aggression or harassment, or even just a sudden and unforeseen, and sometimes not even particularly devious, experience of social transformation and change, first in Western societies and then globally. We usually refer to an organisation as traumatised when a leader dies or is murdered, a ruling system falls apart, or an unexpected turn of events occurs. When an actor's or a group's environment changes in a radically unanticipated and unfavourable way, they describe themselves as traumatised (Alexander 2). In layman's words, trauma is a naturally occurring incident that destroys a person's or a group's sense of well-being. Traumatisation is felt and regarded to be a reflexive and quick reaction to extremely stressful circumstances. The experience of trauma happens when a terrible incident shatters the symbolic and temporal order. Human beings require safety, order, love, and a sense of belonging above all else. If something occurs that substantially diminishes these requirements, it is unsurprising that people will be traumatised as a result, according to the lay perspective (Alexander 2-3).

When trauma takes place before public eyes through mediation, it takes on new dimensions and requires novel frames of interpretation. As a result of mediated mass communication, traumas can be expressively dramatised, and opposing interpretations can have a major influence over people's conception of any event. The criteria of media coverage such as specificity, ethical neutrality, and conceptual balance impose constraints on representational processes. Also, the competition for audience in newspapers and magazines with large readerships frequently leads to exaggerated and biased "news" output. As an incident is broadcast as a trauma, a specific group is termed "traumatised," and another group is dubbed "offenders," politicians and other plutocrats may target the media, its stakeholders, and often the reporters whose reporting established the facts of trauma (Alexander 18).

Collective trauma experiences are largely sociological symptoms in which the victim is identified, guilt is assigned, and the ideal and material repercussions of traumatic suffering are dispersed

across society. Traumas are felt, talked about, and communicated in such a way that the collective identity is dramatically affected. This revision of identity will entail a thorough re-remembering of the shared past, because memory is not only social and constantly developing, but also closely linked to one's current sense of self. Not only in the present and future, but also in the past, identity is constantly produced and maintained. There is often a moment of "quiet" when the collective identity has been recreated in this manner. The structures of meaning flatten out, impact and feeling become less important, and the concern with purity and defilement fades. As effervescence fades, transition gives way to reaggregation. When the heightened and extraordinarily powerful language of trauma fades, the "lessons" of trauma get objectified in monuments, museums, and collections of historical artefacts. The new communal identity will be built on the foundation of sacred locations and rituals (Alexander 22-23).

In his fourth-century Confessions, St Augustine highlighted the strange and perplexing nature of memory and the link between memory and oblivion: Memory is dependent on self-reflection: "I remember that I remember." It is one's recollection of oneself, of one's soul, of one's life narrative across time: "I remember with joy a sadness that has passed." Augustine acknowledges the ubiquity of memory, which even animals and birds possess, in the absence of which they would not be able to return to their nests and occupations. He also highlights memory's dilemma: We cannot hunt for something we have lost unless we recall it at least to some extent (Hodgkin 239). Memory's paradox applies not only to the history of individuals but also to the history of entire civilisations.

In terms of the time dimension, the mechanisms of remembering and forgetting have a particularly special relationship in this century. In a concise but insightful examination of history and memory in the context of deportation, Anna Rossi-Doria observes that the twentieth century has largely been a period of memory cancellation, prolonging the tendency to erase the past, a process Walter Benjamin identified as arising from the crisis of memory in the age of modernity (76). Any action aimed at erasing memory, on the other hand, cannot avoid becoming a forceful attempt to create a new set of memories to replace the prior one. In many respects, the realm of memory is a battleground, and it would be more accurate to say that this century has produced

a conflicting mix of remembrance and forgetfulness. Raphael Samuel's *Theatres of Memory* is a wonderful depiction of the evolution of perceptions on memory in the twentieth century .

Hiroshima's metamorphosis into a site of pleasure and urban entertainment is an illustration of memory's dual character, and how it may be glorified and destroyed at the same time. In research done between 1986 and 1990, Lisa Yoneyama identified the dominant aesthetic in Hiroshima's rebirth as one of brightness, comfort, and cleanliness. The town was transforming into a futuristic megalopolis and an international centre of trade and consumerism, where the "dark and dismal" was being replaced by the "bright and cheerful." Death, wrath, grief, or anguish have little place in the official geography of memory, according to Yoneyama (57). This illustrates the precarity around the concept of memory in the event of collective trauma.

"... [C]ultural memory... is most forcibly transmitted through the human voice and body – through the testimony of a witness," Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith said in the introduction to their special edition of the journal *Signs* on "Gender and Cultural Memory," implying that cultural memory is best understood at the intersection of the individual and the social, where the individual is called upon to portray the social development in all of its multiplicity (Hirsch and Smith 5). According to Hirsch and Smith's definition, cultural memories of trauma are generated through the constant interaction between the individual and the collective.

In a powerful and notable comment from the late 1970s, Elie Wiesel labeled the Holocaust a "ontological evil." However, from a social standpoint, evil is epistemic rather than ontological. Simply by being awful, a painful event might take on the status of evil. It all boils down to how pain is identified and classified. "Auschwitz has no real story, simply a set of figures," Diner has remarked, and he is correct in one sense, but "it may appear a paradox" when considered in isolation (Diner 178). Being bad is, first and foremost, a matter of representation. A traumatic event may be considered as ontological evil, or its badness, its "evility," may be viewed as situational and subjective, as something that may be diminished and transcended, depending on the type of portrayal. In reality, considerations around ontological vs. contingent stance of the Holocaust were essential in how the Holocaust was portrayed across time (Alexander 202).

According to the progressive narrative, the mass deaths of Jews were not the end, but the beginning. They were part of the enormous trauma of World War II, which can be considered as a crossroads in a chain of events that would eventually be remedied, along with other events of Nazi horror. The newly acquired global-historical significance of the idea of "mass execution", on the other hand, demonstrates that they were a conclusion rather than a beginning, a death trauma rather than a birth trauma, and a source of sadness rather than hope. The conclusion of a narrative determines its telos. In this new tragic interpretation of the Jewish mass murder, suffering, not achievement, becomes the telos of the story. The Jewish mass killing became an iconic, out-of-time event rather than a historical incident in this awful drama of sacred evil. This transcendental experience, this transcendence of time and space, allowed for unprecedented degrees of psychological identification (Alexander 225-226).

Instead of atonement via development, the tragic narrative of collective traumatic experience dramatises the trope of the perpetual return. "Wherever we look, the events of 1933–1945 cannot be relegated to the past," Hartman says, rejecting "the call for closure" and explains that "they aren't over; anyone who comes into contact with them is gripped and finds detachment difficult" (2). According to him, those who study large-scale trauma must "reverse history and progress and find a way of restoring to the imagination of coming generations the depth of the catastrophe" (2, 5).

During the somber reenactment of the Holocaust, the initial incidence has become a "trauma play" that the "audience" return to time and time again. Surprisingly, this turned out to be the only way to avoid a new disaster. As a result of this tendency of always returning to the site of trauma, the tragedy of the Holocaust attained legendary weight as the archetypal sacred-evil of our time. The Holocaust shattered ethical self-identification, self-esteem, and even self-confidence in the ability of a phenomenon like "modern development" to continue to function, in the sense that it had come to occupy this hegemonic mythical status. Returning to the Holocaust trauma and identifying with the victims' sufferings and powerlessness was, in some ways, a way of ensuring that the confidence-shattering horror persisted into modernity. It was basically admitting that it may happen again. In this way, postmodern relativism and discomfort

were influenced by the tragic framing of the Holocaust. Since the tragedy took the place of the progressive story of Nazi mass murder, ethical rules that protected good from evil did not appear to be as strong as modernity's confident claims had promised (Alexander 228). With the arrival of the more tragic outlook, barbarism became ingrained in the very nature of modernity. Bauman's fascinating text *Modernity and the Holocaust* delves into this disputed and complex topic. While Bauman claims to be opposed to large-scale universalising ambitions of theorisation around the idea of collective trauma, the ethical implications of such a position appear to be clear (Bauman 2).

1.2.3 Speculative Trauma

Trauma studies scholars are always creating new knowledge about national and international disasters and their cultural ramifications by looking at the role of art produced on the atrocity in collective memory processes, as well as witnessing. In the context of the climate crisis on a global scale, a fresh theorisation of speculative trauma warrants our immediate attention. "Speculative trauma" refers to the overwhelming anxiety and extreme distress in anticipation of future trauma in response to the present-day crises. However, Kaplan E Ann refers to speculative trauma using the term "pretrauma" or future trauma (Kaplan 28). Representation of pretrauma in films or fiction, for example, provides "a powerful dynamic of repetition and expectation" that serves as the foundation for "all our imaginings and thinking," as Christine Gledhill puts it (Gledhill 11). The universe of pre-trauma representation is described by Agamben as a "state of exception." It is no longer merely a question of authoritarian power, but also of a democratic process in which people allow themselves to be controlled, that is, when authorities designate a state of exception as necessary, ostensibly for the security of the people, they do not protest. When it comes to current politics, Agamben claims that the state of exception is becoming a "dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics...the state of exception appears as a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism" (Agamben 2-3).

The dystopian imagination in films and fiction invites the audience to imagine a future self being a part of tragic circumstances. It is unclear how exactly such a representation of future traumatic events will impact the audience's psychology. Adam D. Brown and his colleagues' research attempts to deal with such impact in a useful way. In their research, the notion of pretrauma takes advantage of perceptual psychology of speculative future selves of the audience (Kaplan 32-33). There is some overlap between Kaplan's study of pre-traumatic stress and Brown's study of future selves in the context of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Brown's group discovered in 2011 that "individuals with PTSD viewed their…. pre-trauma self more favorably than their current or anticipated future self" (Brown et al. 300). In the meantime, Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius discovered that "the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context, and the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and the individual's immediate social experiences." They continue by claiming that "possible selves... reflect the extent to which the self is socially determined and constrained."

The natural environment has long been represented as polluted almost to the point of extinction of the human species in some of the speculative futurist situations detailed below. These films present a world that is diametrically opposed to the Romantic worldview. While humans and the natural environment are indeed mutually supportive, the relationship is now adversely symbiotic. Instead of being viewed as a positive moral guide, nature is now portrayed as dropping dead and taking humans with it. Nature, in these representations, is no longer what humans can depend on for food. Nature in its fading state is no longer a passive object of human glances; it is now active, a negative force, a violent appearance, and frequently an actor in its own right (Kaplan 40). What we once thought of as unbothered, intricately constructed nature is now horrific, violent, and punishing. In the representation of speculative trauma, this violent agency of nature, which was thought inert once, gets prominently highlighted.

The film *Take Shelter* (2011) identifies the reality of an unexpected and fatal climate event, as well as nature's possibilities for hazard. The story explores the psychological state of a person who has been traumatised by envisioning a future climate catastrophe. The hero turns out to

have been accurate in predicting climate catastrophe, and is traumatised before any real traumatic event (Kaplan 52-53). In terms of unnerving audiences about the precarity of the environment, M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* (2008) foreshadows *Take Shelter*. But, despite being made before *Take Shelter*, it begins where *Take Shelter* ends and that is, with nature turning disastrous. The film employs the cliche of a sudden event that alters the course of history. The characters, in this case, are traumatised because the event occurs in the filmic present. Audiences, on the other hand, are once again in the situation of witnessing an incident that has not yet occurred, experiencing a type of pre-trauma or proactive anxiety as simulated future humans. *The Happening* contains storytelling devices that argue that humans are responsible for the sudden haunting transformation in nature that causes humans to decimate themselves. While there is some debate about the reason for the catastrophe in *The Happening*, there is no obvious sign that humans are contributors to climate change in *Take Shelter*. (Kaplan 55-56).

Other dystopian futurist films have a more direct political connection than pre-trauma climate projections when the representation of violent reactions of nature triggers a political intervention in terms of global warming attention. The films and fiction of Richard Fleischer, Margaret Atwood, and Alfonso Cuarón raise concerns about human life on the verge of extinction, whether due to fertility issues (*The Handmaid's Tale, Children of Men*), or overcrowding (*Soylent Green*). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, political thrillers address the risks of corporate capitalism, which is directly linked to environmental destruction. These threats enter the picture as each director imagines the fate of human civilization. Cuarón also makes us think about the more recent frightening turns that capitalism has made in the technology era, as articulated by Giorgio Agamben and Slavoj Zizek. The movies and novels mentioned above are political thrillers set in pre-traumatic worlds on the edge of cataclysmic disasters due to human indifference and/or environmental change (Kaplan 59-60).

Soylent Green, a 1973 film directed by Richard Fleischer, is based on Harry Harrison's 1966 short story "*Make Room! Make Room!*" and Volker Schlöndorff adapted Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* into a film in 1995. These films contain similar narratives and a similar

mix of political and environmental issues. They address the issue of time and memory in a futurist dystopian world where the future of humanity is uncertain. They also look back to the earlier times when things were different and provide us with what Kaplan calls "memory for the future"—images of a possible pre-traumatic future. Building on Harrison's story, Fleischer's film, *Soylent Green*, addresses issues such as overpopulation that are still relevant today, albeit somewhat overshadowed in public discourse by spectacular climatic changes that the media gravitates to (Shmelev 84). And, like Cuarón's film, it incorporates the plot of a political thriller with problems of overpopulation and the exhaustion of Earth's food resources. Indeed, *Soylent Green*, like *Children*, has two stories. The relevance of the story of Earth's extinction is highlighted in the film's opening collage of images from around 1860 to the present, which emphasises the influence of increasingly rapid technological developments on the environment and social life (Kaplan 61-62). According to Roger Ebert, who reviewed the film in 1973, "*Soylent Green's* real achievement is to create a 21st Century world that is convincing as reality; we somehow don't feel we're in a science fiction picture." He goes on to say that Fleischer believes in "a basic (depressing) probability: that by the year 2022, New York will look essentially the same as it does now, only 49 years older and more run down" (Pratt 200).

Volker Schlöndorff's movie *The Handmaid's Tale* (1995) and the later TV series adaptation of the same name (2017- till date) represent speculative trauma from a woman's perspective. This is yet another story of tormented remembrance, but here the traumatic nature of memory is prominent. Offred, the female protagonist, is self-consciously capturing her story and acknowledging a future audience (readers learn about the narration being recorded in the novel's "Historical Notes" at the end). She is afflicted with PTSD; nightmares and fantasies of her traumatic detachment from her daughter and husband when fascist authorities took over control of North America horrify her. In the recurring flashbacks provoked by everyday triggers, she is fleeing with her child, the police apprehend her and compel the child from her arms, and she is then apprehended. The novel concludes with a conference, proving that the world actually survived. The professors towards the end of the story seek to comprehend Offred's narration in the novel's final section, "Historical Notes," in 2195 (Offred's narrative dates to 150 years earlier, 2045). Readers are informed that the manuscript was discovered on old 1990s-style cassette

tapes in a US military locker. They propose intricate speculations about what happened to Offred, along with a possible getaway through Canada to England, but the story ends in ambiguity (Kaplan 67-68).

Children of Men (2006) deals with similar anxiety about future catastrophes. In interviews and opinion pieces, both Žižek and Cuarón suggest that the film contains two stories: the foregrounded, action--hero, Hollywood--style story in which the white male hero saves the black woman, the first female to become pregnant in eighteen years, and the backstory that provides a critique of capitalism as we know it (Kaplan 69-70). "The true focus of the film is there in the background, and it's crucial to leave it as a background," Žižek says in his DVD commentary. He goes on to say that the film "gives the best diagnosis of late capitalism's ideological despair" ("Zizek on *Children of Men*"). Pretrauma worlds like these conjure up not only horrific visions of humanity's future, which may be upsetting to the spectator, but also the trauma of not having a future at all, or only a fleeting one (Kaplan 67-68). Perhaps it is this very fear of the future that makes dystopia and utopia a useful part of human thought that is carried down through generations.

Climate change threatens what is likely the most fundamental political concept of the modern era: liberty, which is vital not only to current politics but also to the humanities, arts, and literature (Ghosh 2). Since the Enlightenment, philosophers of liberty have been "primarily, and appropriately, preoccupied with how humans might escape the injustice, oppression, inequality, or even uniformity imposed on them by other humans or human-made systems," as Dipesh Chakrabarty points out (Chakrabarty 208). Nonhuman forces and processes were previously not considered in this calculus of freedom; rather, independence from Nature was seen as one of the fundamental characteristics of freedom. Only those peoples who had broken free from their environment were regarded to have historical activity, and only they were considered to be worthy of historians' attention— other peoples may have had a past, but they were not considered to have history, which manifests itself through human agency.

The effects of global warming have already been experienced throughout the world, not only in the form of a rising number of large-scale catastrophes but also in the form of a slow but

inevitably demolishing livelihoods. Still, the major focus of political attention has shifted to concerns that are linked to questions of identity in some way: religion, caste, ethnicity, language, gender rights, and so on. The disconnect between the common good and the concerns of the public realm indicates a shift in the character of politics. (Ghosh 4). “Humans have become geological agents, influencing the most basic physical processes of the world,” writes Dipesh Chakrabarty in his book *The Climate of History*, compelling historians to reassess many of their fundamental conceptions and approaches (4). Ghosh goes even further, stating that the Anthropocene threatens not only the arts and humanities, but also our rational thinking and, more broadly, contemporary society. The sophistication of the technical jargon that serves as our primary stance on climate change, of course, adds to the difficulty. Without a doubt, the difficulty stems from the crisis in the representation of speculative trauma in arts and humanities. Identifying how this occurs, according to Ghosh, is a crucial task: it may hold the key to understanding why modern civilisation is unable to cope with climate change. Indeed, because the climatic crisis is also a cultural crisis, and hence a crisis of imagination, this is possibly the most urgent problem that culture has ever faced in its broadest meaning (Ghosh 4).

Existing communities and mass groups, according to Ghosh, must be at the forefront of the campaign if a major breakthrough is to be reached and the securitisation and corporatisation of climate change is to be avoided. Religious organisations, in particular, can mobilise a considerably bigger number of individuals than any other type of organisation. Furthermore, religious belief systems are not bound by the constraints that have made climate change such a difficult problem for our current governance systems: They transcend nation-states and recognise intergenerational, long-term commitments.

Climate change has a much smaller impact on the literary world than it does on the public sphere, according to Ghosh. While the challenges posed by climate change for contemporary writers are unique in some ways, he has begun to recognise that they are ultimately products of a larger and older grid of literary forms and norms that came to accurately sculpt the descriptive imagination at a time when the abundance of carbon in the atmosphere Is about to rewrite the earth’s ultimate fate (Ghosh 3). As if climate change were somehow equivalent to extraterrestrials or

interplanetary travel in the literary imagination, fiction dealing with the issue is almost by definition not taken seriously by respectable literary magazines: The mere mention of the subject is enough to consign a novel or short story to the genre of science fiction. It is as if climate change were somehow analogous to extraterrestrials or interstellar travel in the creative mind (Ghosh 3).

1.3 Empathy

This section attempts to theorise narrative empathy and draw a link between empathy and altruism while studying several scientific theories and hypotheses. In addition, it analyses how narrative empathy works, as well as the correlation between art, empathy, and the brain. Besides, it addresses how empathy has evolved both historically and in fiction. In layman's terms, empathy is the ability to understand what other people are going through, to view things through their eyes, and to put oneself in their shoes. People who lack empathy are represented as monsters or robots in popular culture. A lack of empathy is frequently associated with sociopathic behaviour, serial killer traits, and developmental disorders such as autism in popular culture. Celebrities and other public figures often express their support for empathic behaviour in specific as well as general contexts. A heartless antagonist is the polar opposite of the "empath" of popular science fiction. As is represented in *Parable of the Sower,* for example, the protagonist is unable to avoid receiving and experiencing the sensations of those around her. From a psychological standpoint, empathy is a spontaneous sharing of emotion that can be triggered by a variety of stimuli such as hearing or seeing someone's condition, emotional state, or reading or visualising about them. It is then not necessarily a deliberate reaction. The human brain has such a structure that it naturally shares a variety of emotions. In contrast, sympathy is a deliberate act of replicating a person's emotion in the way they perceive.

Why human beings have an egoistic drive to survive and thrive even at the expense of others despite their intrinsic tendency towards fellow-feelings—is a question that has been occupying philosophers for centuries. An early exploration on this issue can be traced in Thomas Hobbes'

Leviathan (1651), where he argued that human nature is such that "the inevitable outcome of social living is a state of virtual warfare, with each against all" (Davis 2). The absence of internal reasons to willingly control our desires lead people to strive to maximise personal gain at the expense of others, and produces a human existence that Hobbes describes as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Davis 2). It can be inferred from this that peace and social order can only be established when all individuals in a society are willing to shun selfish creature comforts and "surrender individual rights and freedoms to the state, which then exerts the kind of control over individual egoistic actions that the individuals themselves will not" (2). In contrast to this rather pessimistic view, Adam Smith suggested (about a century later) that the regulation of egoistic behaviour comes from the restrictions individuals place on themselves that springs from sympathy, not from an external source like the state. Smith's term "sympathy" means "the shared feeling that results when we observe other people in emotional states, the compassion we feel for their sorrow, the resentment when they are slighted, the joy when they triumph" which is approximately the modern equivalent of empathy (2). Smith propounded that human beings are naturally bestowed with an ardent ability to experience and express a "fellow-feeling" when we observe someone experiencing a powerful emotional state. Yet another century later, Herbert Spencer elaborated Smith's idea with his exploration of underlying fellow-feeling in not only humans, but also in other species. He argued that sympathy is largely a means of communication which has an adaptive function in species, particularly in the area of self-defence. This prompts all members of a group to experience the same affective state (such as the sympathetic fear in response to others' fear of alarm cries, siren, etc.) that helps to coordinate the behaviour of many individuals (3-4).

Philosophers have explored empathy since Spencer and Smith, and contemporary theorists have opted for the term empathy instead of sympathy. Empathy is a relatively newer term than sympathy; it appeared over a century ago. The English word "empathy" was coined as a translation for the German psychiatric term Einfühlung, which literally means "feeling-in" (4). Other possible meanings for the word were "animation," "play," "aesthetic sympathy," and "semblance," according to English-speaking psychologists. In 1908, two psychologists from Cornell and Cambridge proposed the term "empathy" for Einfühlung, based on the Greek words

"em" for "in" and "pathos" for "feeling," and it was widely accepted. Empathy did not primarily refer to feeling another person's emotion at the time (i.e. the early 1900s) the phrase was coined, but rather the opposite: It meant enlivening an object or projecting one's own imagined sensations onto the world. Kinaesthetic empathy—a physiological feeling or movement that produces a sense of merging with an item—was the focus of some of the earliest investigations of psychology regarding empathy. Suzanne Keen discussed the contrasts between empathy and sympathy in her book *Empathy and the Novel* where she defines the spontaneous sharing of sentiments as empathy and more complicated, differentiated feelings for others as sympathy (22-24). Empathy is responsible for a lot more than just shared emotions in people. Deficits in empathy, for example, might result in psychopathology and chaos in human interactions. A lack of ability to recognise others' sad, fearful, or unpleasant feelings could be the source of various impairments and disorders. Alexithymia, for example, is a dispositional disorder characterised by the inability to verbally communicate emotions in emotionally "tone-deaf" people who are oblivious to their own or others' feelings. The disease can make it difficult for the patients to develop relationships and apply their thoughts.

In addition, people's ability to experience primal empathy, or the phenomenon of spontaneous contagion of feelings, demonstrates that humans are fundamentally similar, with only tiny distinctions. According to psychologist Martin Hoffman, the physiological and cognitive response systems of human beings are fundamentally similar, resulting in identical sensations being produced by similar conditions (62). Singer and her colleagues, on the other hand, believe that our capacity to function successfully in social situations is crucial to our survival, and that empathising abilities are an important part of that success. This ability to empathise evolved from "a system for conveying our internal physical states and subjective feeling states" (Singer et al. 1161). Stephanie Preston and Frans B. M. de Waal provide examples of animal behaviour that demonstrate cognitive flexibility and emotional empathy (285). Perspective taking is demonstrated by an ape who holds and strokes an unconscious human newborn who has fallen into her enclosure, and compassion is demonstrated by a monkey that offers an appropriate tool to another after seeing its struggles to solve a problem. The fact that humans share a loving instinct with our primate cousins does not rule out the possibility of using it to aid others.

According to Stephanie Preston and Frans de Waal, witnessing or visualising someone in an emotional state triggers innate simulation of the same experience in the viewer, including cognitive and physiological reactions. To quote them, “Empathy processes are expected to entail both fast reflexive sub-cortical processes (straight from sensory cortices to thalamus to amygdala to reaction) and delayed cortical processes” (12).

Empathy is a concern of Singer’s group, which connects second-order re-representations of others to the mechanism that allows us to forecast how emotional inputs will affect us. The majority of psychologists believe that empathy is both affective and cognitive. This was stressed in early studies of empathy as both aesthetic reactions and emotional contagion. Human beings are story-sharing creatures,and emotional contagion is responsible for our reactions to narrative. This awareness does not produce our sentiments, but it does make emotional states visible through names and activates our expectations about what emotions signify (Keen, “Narrative Empathy” 209). On the other hand, prose and cinema stories rely on our intrinsic tendency to empathise with others to manipulate our emotions. Inherited characteristics play a big role in our vulnerability to emotional contagion. Our personal experiences and cultural surroundings have an impact on how we naturally perceive common emotions.

Empathy is widely regarded to be a female trait in popular opinion. Keen approaches the gender dimension of empathy with the references from certain research work that confirms the gender stereotypes. One of these researches is done by Simon Baron-Cohen that sheds light on the difference between the capacity for empathy in men and women. In his book, *Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brains* (2003), he remarks that “the female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy” while “the male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems” (1). There are significant differences between men and women when it comes to emotional conduct. Many experts, such as Eisenberg and Lennon, believe that the gender disparities are due to assessment methodologies rather than genuine differences (Carlo et al. 73-117). Moreover, feminist and post-colonial critiques point to the essentialising universals that have been used to confine the concept of human, and

emphasise historical circumstances or social conditions that traditionally associates "care," with women and "understanding" with men (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 8).

Psychologists use a range of techniques to assess and appreciate empathy. Physiological testing, generally in conjunction with self-reports, can show the extent of sympathetic responses (or lack thereof) (Taylor et al 377.). Psychologists track changes in heart rate and skin conductance (palm sweat). They use EMG (electromyographic) techniques (Shields, Mesquita and Karasawa) to collect data on both visible and inaudible facial emotions. They ask participants how they feel or act in various scenarios, capturing data through self-reports and questionnaires administered during or shortly after the studies. Empathy scales are customised surveys that are designed to assess a participant's level of empathy (Minami and McCabe 429). Recently, we can observe the dynamics of empathy in the human brain using Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), which revolutionised cognitive science, including the study of empathy. This allows us to observe and analyse the activity of mirror neurons (also known as the empathy neurons) in response to various stimuli, which help us develop theoretical hypotheses on the physiological substrate to address the issues of how and why empathy functions in human bodies and minds.

1.3.1 Narrative Empathy: A Theoretical Exploration

The bulk of narrative empathy theories argue that empathy may be affectively communicated from the writer to the audience through the medium of literature. Narrative theorists and discourse processing experts have found a correlation between literature reading (that includes a variety of narrative styles) and empathy, often based on empirical studies done in non-literary areas. Some theorists and academics believe that formal procedures are empathic, while others believe that asking about specific literary reading effects can gauge the reader's perspective toward the text. The insights of the later group typically lead to narrative approaches. The most commonly recognised feature of narrative fiction that is linked to empathy is character identification. Attributes of the character such as name, description, indirect inference of features, reliance on types, relative flatness or roundness, illustrated actions, narrative paths,

dependability of attributed speech, and methods of the portrayal of human psyche are regarded to aid in character identification and empathy. The essence of the writer-reader negotiation (which includes the storyteller's person and their underpinning location, the narrator's relationship to the characters, the internal or external perspective on characters, and, in some cases, the style of the depiction of characters' consciousness) comes in second place to the formal quality most commonly associated with empathy.

In his book *Lost in a Book*, Victor Nell writes, "We intentionally enter the realm of fiction because the scepticism to which our adult brain commits us is weary: we seek for safe places—a love we can wholly trust, a truth we can entirely believe… Fiction satisfies that craving because we know it's fake" (56). Examining how literary works or dramatic performances use empathy, either by reflecting empathy or by creating circumstances that actively engage the ability of their audience for empathy, is one way to approach mind and narrative from an intercultural viewpoint. Suzanne Keen proposes certain observations and hypotheses regarding narrative empathy in her book *Empathy and the Novel*. Empathy for fictitious characters appears to require only the most fundamental characteristics of identity, place, and sentiment. Even when the fictional character and the reader differ in a variety of practical and evident ways, character identification for a fictitious character usually leads to empathy, and vice versa (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 66-71). Empathy may not be elicited by all emotions felt and generated by the characters; in fact, negative emotions elicit stronger empathic responses from fictional characters and events, regardless of the circumstances. Novelists have no way of knowing how their work will be received. Empathy for a fictional character does not necessarily correspond to the author's explicit invitation or set-up. A lack of imaginative role-playing self-extension and a stronger recognition of previous (or current) experiences are characteristics of situational empathy. When an author uses situational empathy, he or she may be able to connect with just those readers who have been through similar situations. Novelists regularly emphasise the importance of empathy in both reading and creating novels, as well as their belief in the capacity of narrative empathy to affect readers' ideas and lives. This viewpoint stems from their past experiences as rapid empathisers.

According to Keen, character identification is often influenced by internal monologue of the characters, whether achieved through first-person narration, figural narration (in which the third-person narrator remains hidden and reports only on the main character's single, focal centre of consciousness), or authorial (omniscient) narration that moves inside characters' heads. According to the following experts, narrated monolog has a significant impact on readers' feelings about characters. David Miall observes that free indirect discourse is especially likely to cue literacy and allow empathic decentering since it transfers "privileged knowledge about a character's cognition" (54). Sylvia Adamson reaches the same conclusion, claiming that recorded monologs should be read as "empathetic narratives" (Keen, "Narrative Empathy" 219). The narrator's persona appears to have a considerable impact on readers' reactions, in relation to the modalities of portraying inner life. The readers tend to form a particularly deep relationship with the narrative voice in first-person literature, when the narrator self-narrates about his or her personal experiences and feelings (219).

Empathy for fictional characters, according to Keen, may only require the most fundamental characteristics of identity, context, and emotion, rather than complex or accurate portrayal (*Empathy and the Novel* 66-75). Character identification frequently elicits empathy, even when the character and the reader vary in a variety of practical and obvious ways. Natural empathy for a fictional character's feelings also aids character identification. Mark Turner developed a complicated model of the mind in his important work *The Literary Mind (1996)* and other publications, demonstrating how our own mental self is always the basis of our knowledge of others. He proclaims that humans have a "theory of mind" that allows them to "recognize the mental states of others, take an intentional stance toward them, and characterize folk psychology of faith, goals, and aspirations to them are a black box, a theoretical amendment, a magic wand, unless we show where, in cognition, we find the source of such a knowledge of mental states in the first place" (36). Such knowledge comes from our own experiences and self-awareness. Regardless of whether the details of the experience match, negative emotions boost empathy for fictional people and events. Empathy for the characters is not always implied when reading emotionally interesting literature. In addition, literature's potential to evoke empathy in readers may change through time (and certain novels may only elicit empathy from their original,

immediate readership). Empathy for a fictional character, for example, does not have to correspond to or invite what the author appears to build up or invite. The plot and circumstance drive situational empathy, which involves less self-extension in imaginative role playing and a deeper understanding of previous (or current) experience. As a result, a passing reference to historical, economic, cultural, or social events may assist readers in empathising with fictional characters.

Empathetic inaccuracy—incorrectly identifying with the feelings of a fictional character—is a potential limitation of narrative empathy. Empathy inaccuracy occurs when a reader reacts empathetically to a fictional character in a way that contradicts the author's intentions (222-223). In the novel-reading setting, empathic inaccuracy can be maintained because neither the author nor the fictitious character directly refutes it, unlike in real-life, face-to-face situations. In other words, fiction-reading does not allow the scope of interrogating a character about how they feel, while we respond empathetically to a story. Only the text has the power to affirm as well as arouse our emotions (222). Indeed, literary studies encourage nontraditional readings of fiction, which may be based on purposeful role-playing actions that contradict the authors' heightened sympathetic flaws and apparent objectives. In fact, there is no particular form of storytelling that ensures the empathic reaction of the readers that adequately matches the emotions of fictional characters. As a result, extratextual sources like author interviews have become critical instruments for assessing the accuracy of literary empathy. Besides, the establishment of a "triangulated sympathetic bond" is suggested by writers' comments about their narrative techniques (222). In this model, author's empathy contributes to the formation of literary entities in order to elicit empathy from readers. In reality, there is no certainty that a reader will recognise and respond to a specific narrative moment. Critics argue that this leads to misinterpretation or worse because genuine people might find their position in the empathetic triangle uncomfortable. In contrast to this view, some research on empathic accuracy reveals that human mind-reading talents are remarkably precise, albeit further cross-cultural confirmation is needed. Ordinary individuals respond fairly well in laboratory tests of empathic accuracy; whether it is due to exceptional understanding of facial clues, body language, tone of voice, context, or excellent role taking on the empathiser's side, remains an important consideration.

However, the accumulation of assumptions about painful feelings and experiences of others can have long-term negative implications. The phenomenon is commonly known as "empathy fatigue."[4] Long exposure to first person narrative, especially if the narration contains constant violence and pain, may create empathy fatigue, or even empathic dissociation. According to media experts, the news industry has flooded newspapers and television stations with decontextualized images and stories of tragedy and suffering, resulting in widespread empathy fatigue. As a result, the general public has become desensitised to or even hostile to helping individuals in need. Fictional representation invites a willful suspension of disbelief on readers' part; thus it can reach the minds of readers bypassing the numbness that the overexposure of media representation creates.

1.3.2 Affective Empathy and Altruism

Empathy has been found to lead to morality and ethics, as well as a shift in attitudes toward members of other groups. It is widely believed that "empathic emotion motivates altruistic action, resulting in less aggression, less fickle helping, less blaming of victims for their misfortunes, increased cooperation in conflict situations, and improved actions on behalf of needy individuals and members of stigmatized groups" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* vii). Some psychologists believe that empathy encourages us to help others. According to social psychologists, those who are predisposed to empathy (as measured by a number of empathy scales) have higher rates of prosocial behaviour, such as picking up a crying baby, calming others, or aiding a troubled individual. Hoffman shows how empathy and compassion are inextricably linked, and how fiction becomes involved in positive social processes. He argues, presumably regarding human beings in general, that "the link between empathy and care is represented in the prosocial moral reasoning that accompanies an individual's behavior when they encounter someone in distress" (225). Psychologists and theorists studying the relationship between

[4] The term "compassion fatigue" is a misnomer, according to recent academic study, and should be replaced with "empathy fatigue." This shift is supported by a growing amount of studies examining the neurophysiology of empathy versus compassion meditation practices.

sympathetic responses and moral thinking, moral judgements in particular, have validated this position. Hoffman's research on the importance of empathy in nurturing care and judgement informs us what two nineteenth-century American authors wanted for their readers.

According to Hoffman, as global empathy changes toward a more egocentric response, a sympathetic component may arise. Empathy may definitely turn into a variety of guilt feelings, which can or cannot lead to altruism or helping others. Hoffman offers five choices for turning empathy into various moral outcomes, each of which is dependent on appraisal of the reasons on the perceiver's part. If the victim has caused their own suffering, they may no longer be regarded as a victim, and empathy for them may cease. If the victim is unable to handle their agony, the perceiver may feel sympathetic anguish and empathy for them. If the perceiver is a member of a group suspected of causing the victim's pain, empathy may turn to guilt; if the spectator does nothing to help the sufferer, they may feel guilty for their inaction; and if the observer is a member of a group suspected of causing the victim's suffering, they may feel guilty by association. Besides, our proximity to the victim dampens empathic effects. We may be innocent civilians, participants (transgressors), or virtual transgressors (who feel guilty despite not being involved), and we may be confronted with situations in which many claimants make competing claims on us or in which caring appears to be at odds with justice (Hoffman 3–4). Empathy does not necessarily produce a single emotion when it is translated into further moral repercussions. In addition, sorry feelings can contribute to a sense of impotence in the face of others' sufferings instead of leading towards altruism. Grief, on the other hand, can be transformed into helpful patterns, though Hoffman recognises that this is less likely to occur without parental or other forms of supervision (Hoffman 9).

Although empathy may frequently lead to sympathy, it does not always lead to just actions on the perceiver's behalf. In one study, Batson and his colleagues discovered that feelings of empathy for a community member who was having a social problem led to an altruistic desire to donate resources to that person as an individual, diminishing the collective good (Batson et al. 619). In a separate study, they revealed that empathy-induced generosity can lead to actions that violate moral criteria of fairness. In contrast to Hoffman, Batson and his colleagues conclude that

the two impulses, empathy-induced altruism and the drive to follow moral standards, "sometimes cooperate, but sometimes conflict" (Batson et al. 1042). Moreover, mature sympathy, pity, and compassion are not always the consequence of empathy, and empathy, as previously noted, does not always lead to altruistic actions. Each of these emotions can be triggered by cognitive processes such as a desire to help, in addition to empathy. Furthermore, in their research on prosocial growth, psychologists Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer discovered that "the link between empathy and prosocial action is neither easy nor inevitable" (Eisenberg and Strayer 11). Keen, on the other hand, believes that fiction cannot capture the impact of empathy as accurately as if the events represented happened in real life. She is sceptical about the concrete possibility of empathy being translated into altruistic behaviour: "Surveying the existing research on the consequences of reading, I find the case for altruism stemming from novel reading inconclusive at best and nearly always exaggerated in favor of the beneficial effects of novel reading (*Empathy and the Novel* vii).

1.3.3 A Turn to Affect

The idea of affects has a history that goes back to Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics* published in 1677.[5] But the affective turn—a more thorough engagement with what affects are—came in the mid 90s from philosophers Brian Massumi, and Eve Sedgwick. In particular, the turn to the neurosciences of emotion has recently taken place in the humanities and social sciences. Affect theory is still in its infancy; it can in part be seen as a move away from the linguistic turn of the mid-twentieth century, central to which was the idea that language was the primary way we understand the world. An engagement with how language is constructed, used and changed should be fundamental to theories about human nature or social institutions. Affects theory might be seen as bringing biology, the material world and the body back into the discussion and uniting scientific

[5] Prior to that, in the seventeenth century, the anatomist Thomas Willis wrote "Pathology of the Brain." In 1690, John Locke wrote an essay on human understanding where he talks about how we were taken to be the Tabula Rasa and that our identities are really situated in the body. These two pivotal texts that really forwarded in different ways, revolutionary ideas about the relationship between the body and particularly the nerves and senses, and human thought and action.

and social theories. Affect theories are diverse and singularly undefinable. Due to the nature and trajectory of this area, there is no single, generalised theory of affect till date (and it is highly unlikely that there will ever be in future).

In affect theory, affects are like forces; they are prior to intentions, autonomic, and pre-subjective. They are the intensities that move us. Affect theory proposes a way of theorising about the social forces that we encounter which might trigger the body to respond in a certain way. Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg define affect in the following way:

> Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability (1).

According to this definition, affect is found in the intensities that pass from body to body, and the resonance circulated "about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds" (1). The "body" can be human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise.

For the philosopher Brian Massumi, affect precedes emotional states: affect is not a personal feeling; rather, it is a non-conscious experience of intensity that cannot be fully realised in language because effect is always prior to or outside of consciousness. In one of the foundational texts on affect theory, *Parables for the Virtual*, Brian Massumi observes the ramifications of the body and its capacity for movement and sensation in the context of cultural theory. In this book,

he explores the possibility that movement, affect and sensation "might be culturally-theoretically thinkable" (4). At the same time, he attempts to address the problem specific to affect theory that "there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect" (27). Massumi investigates how a body performs its way out of a definitional framework that is not only responsible for its very construction, but seems to prescript every possible signifying and counter signifying move as a selection from a repertoire of possible permutations on a limited set of predetermined terms. Massumi argues that abstraction and matter are the same and that matter is always in movement. However, Sigmund Freud once claimed that affect does not really reflect or think; affect acts (357–359). He also proposed that the outlets of affect persist in close vicinity to the movements of thought—so much so that sensate tendrils extend constantly between unconscious and conscious thoughts.

In her book *Touching Feeling*, Eve Sedgwick almost reverses Massumi: She thinks of affect theory as overcoming the dualistic divide between mind and body but starts by looking at how we are affected by language. She begins with a discussion on performative utterances, a concept by the philosopher of language J. L. Austin which argues that language not only describes the world but also creates it. In other words, the language itself influences and creates the world.[6] Endorsing the "Basic Emotions paradigm" connected to the work of Silvan Tomkins and Paul Ekman, she concludes that affects can be triggered by virtually any object, and it may happen without the knowledge of our cognitive of the object or stimulus that triggers it. In addition, she treats the emotions as inherently independent of intentions. In her turn to affect, the affects are held to be "a set of innate, automatically triggered brain-body behaviors and expressions operating outside the domain of consciousness and intentional action" (Leys 465). Certain manner of diction and stylistic devices used in the news, politics and books which create our identities, utterances, and affect language codes, norms. This has the affective language that constructs subjects in a particular way, by giving the appearance of being voluntary. According to Massumi's logic of being real but abstract in every moment, language has a number of possibilities. In relation to

[6] Judith Butler famously applied performative utterances to gender, arguing that gender itself is performed, that it constructs and affects the world. How a woman should behave or the appearance she is expected to have some of the conditions that construct, produce and perform gender.

this logic, Sedgwick invokes material texture and brings movement into the theory. It goes beyond simply thinking about language and social construction to major themes about fluidity and motion.

In her book *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject*" Rei Terada posits that construing emotion is nonsubjective. The works of poststructuralist thinkers such as Derrida, de Man, and Deleuze centre around the "death of the subject," and how the "subject" is constructed by the discourse(s). It leaves an unresolved question about the place of emotion. Terada points out that if one assumes emotion to be dependent upon subjectivity, the "death of the subject" would also seem to mean the death of feeling. This makes poststructuralist emotion look like "a symptomatic irruption, an unconscious contradiction," despite the fact that emotional effects appear to be pervasive in poststructuralist theory (3). Terada comments on the pervasiveness of emotions in poststructuralist theory in this manner: "Poststructuralist thought about emotion is hidden in plain sight; poststructuralist theory deploys implicit and explicit logics of emotion and, as its very critics point out, willingly dramatizes particular emotions" (3). Her work suggests a positive relation between the "death of the subject" and the very existence of emotion. She argues that a. a discourse and ideology of emotion exist; b. poststructuralist theory shows their relation; and c. the effect of this exploration is to suggest that we would have no emotions if we were subjects. Emotions are dependent upon specific contexts, such as the time period, the historical/geographical/cultural context, the climates, socialisation, etc. To cite an instance, blushing—which is a bodily aspect—is associated with shame. The conception of shame is specific to the context of a society at a given time. It is possible that nudity in a particular society is the norm; hence an individual does not blush if nude. On the other hand, perhaps in another society where nudity is absolutely unusual, even relatively uncommon or prohibited, an individual would blush, feel embarrassed, and perhaps sweat. It may even be traumatising in particular contexts.

One of the concerns of affect theorists is how political argument and rationality operate in relation to the affective response of the people. In the past, most philosophers and critics including Kant and Habermas overvalued the role of reason and rationality in their account of how people actually form their political opinions (Leys 436). Ruth Leys comments:

> The claim is that we human beings are corporeal creatures imbued with subliminal affective intensities and resonances that so decisively influence or condition our political and other beliefs that we ignore those affective intensities and resonances at our peril—not only because doing so leads us to underestimate the political harm that the deliberate manipulation of our affective lives can do but also because we will otherwise miss the potential for ethical creativity and transformation that "technologies of the self" designed to work on our embodied being can help bring about (436).

The affective turn reinstates the importance of the role our corporeal affective dispositions play in thinking, reasoning, judgement, and reflection. As Massumi points out that Ronald Reagan's success as a politician can be attributed to his ability to "produce ideological effects by nonideological means. . . His means were affective" (39-41). Masumi describes Reagan as brainless and without content. Nevertheless, his political success lies in the way ideology is produced and operated: "Ideology is construed here in both the commonsense meaning as a structure of belief, and in the cultural-theoretical sense of an interpellative subject positioning" (263). An open-source article conducted an inquiry into why Donald Trump is so appealing to a surprisingly great number of Americans.[7] The article points out that the appeal is emotional: Trump showed a kind of freedom—a freedom to give voice to his messy emotions and sentiments that are socially unacceptable. He does so without shame and fear of being reprimanded. When he is criticised, he responds with the same kind of uninhibited, politically incorrect insults. On an emotional level, seeing someone be that free and that comfortable with themselves can be appealing to a certain segment of American society, while his very repulsiveness might be the other side of the coin. This is one of the many instances where the turn to affect provides the missing link to the formation of political thinking and participation in the context of polarisation.

[7] Stephen D. Reicher, S. Alexander Haslam, "Trump's Appeal: What Psychology Tells Us," *Scientific American*, March 1, 2017, scientificamerican.com/article/trump-rsquo-s-appeal-what-psychology-tells-us

Chapter 2: Representation of Speculative Traumas in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

2.1 Gilead as a Totalitarian Theocracy

"Evil is unspectacular and always human,
And shares our bed and eats at our own table"

W. H. Auden, "Herman Melville"

A short Ted-ed clip by Alex Gendler called "How to recognize a dystopia" poses some important yet simple questions regarding what Atwood calls the "talent for insatiability"—our drive to imagine a better, more perfect society, even at the worst of times. "Have you ever tried to picture an ideal world?" Gendler asks. "One without war, poverty, or crime?" Then he goes on to explain how dystopian fiction represents utopian yearnings giving way to dystopia. Then he says, "Think back to the perfect world you imagined. Did you also imagine what it would take to achieve? How would you make people cooperate? And how would you make sure it lasted? Now take another look. Does the world still seem perfect?" (00.00-05.55). These are crucial questions to ask in order to understand the totalitarian theocracy called Gilead.

Regarded as the most extreme and complete form of authoritarianism, totalitarianism is a political system that allows those in power to have complete and absolute control over people, their political freedom, and agency. It is intolerant to the slightest trace of anything that it recognises as subversive, and often uses violence to serve its purpose. Thus, people do not have the freedom to form opposition parties, and there is no room for dissent. Totalitarian regimes[1] exercise surveillance as a tool to have control and regulatory power over the public and private lives of the citizens. They take over mass media to broadcast propaganda so as to instil hegemonic ideologies in the minds of the people. The Republic of Gilead embodies all these characteristics of totalitarianism and more. It came into being as a result of a coup that

[1] In this chapter, I have often discussed "totalitarian regimes" as a general umbrella term, identified by certain common features that have been seen to recur in historical totalitarian regimes. I have done so for the convenience of the argument, and am aware that the regimes differ largely from each other in their mechanism and operation.

overturned the US government and liquidated the congress. Unlike many totalitarian regimes in history, it is not led by a single dictator or an absolute monarch, but by a group of "Commanders" known as "Sons of Jocob".

One of the ways in which totalitarian regimes work is by attempting to colonise the minds of the people—sometimes by coercion and violence, and sometimes through hegemonic consent. To quote Aunt Lydia in this regard, "The Republic of Gilead… knows no bounds. Gilead is within you" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 33). The sentence has a lot of dramatic strength because it is written in an aphoristic style. Its binary form, with the second sentence strengthening the meaning of the first, comprises the declaration of the entire totalitarian ideology, which is present not only in the state's workings, i.e., outside an individual but also within him or her, entrenched in the unconscious. There is no way out of Gilead, whether one is looking outside or inward, for Gilead becomes a part of the self (Filipczak 173).

Atwood demonstrates how Offred, despite her repulsion to Gilead, is infected by its conservative ideology. Offred feels fascinated and repelled at the same time by the Japanese tourists she meets on her way back home from shopping. They seem undressed to her, and their legs seem almost naked beneath their short skirts. Even their very cheerfulness seems aggressive (*Handmaid's Tale* 26). She also notices that her own body seems strange and outdated to her (52). In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt explores the ways totalitarianism colonises people's minds, their beliefs, and how it makes them unable to show or feel dissent or even trust themselves to experience their own experiences (xxi). Gilead spreads as if like germs, infecting the interior, psychological world of its people as well as their external reality. There are many instances of this in Gilead—one of which is how Becka responds to the molestation by her father Dr. Grove (a pun might have been intended with the verb "grope"). While she suffers tremendously, she is convinced that she should keep quiet about it, that she should be self-sacrificing like the concubine in Aunt Estée's version of the Biblical story of "Concubine Cut into Twelve Pieces." In Aunt Estée's retelling of the story, the concubine, having felt remorse for being "disobedient," chooses to sacrifice herself instead of allowing her owner to be raped by wicked Benjaminites, which is a "brave" and "noble" act (Atwood, *Testaments* 303). In this instance, Becka's feelings and response, for a large part, is constructed by the regime. Rei Terada's comment is pertinent here: "If one

presumes in the first place that only subjects feel, then poststructuralist emotion looks like a symptomatic irruption, an unconscious contradiction" (7).

In totalitarian states, we often see the appearance of a so-called "strong man" in the midst of some kind of chaos—economic, political and so on. That is to say, when people are disconnected from each other and social bonds are not as strong as they had previously been, an emergence of a charming, determined, and strong totalitarian leader is often observed. He offers an ideology which claims to explain everything—why people are unhappy, why there are crises and how to end them. This narrative becomes increasingly gripping and compelling, seducing ordinary people with its totalizing vision. Eventually it becomes so powerful that it is impossible to disagree with or argue about this ideology (Arendt, *Totalitarianism* 313). In Gilead, people are utterly disconnected from each other, which is convenient, because disconnected people are easy to control and manipulate. Conversation, friendship, and bonding are not encouraged. Offred, for example, yearns for even the slightest, most trivial exchange of words. She lingers around the kitchen in the hope of a conversation, even when she realises she is not welcome. "How I used to despise such talk," she says, "Now I long for it. At least it was talk. An exchange, of sorts" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 21). Sometimes she even tries to overhear a conversation between Rita and Cora. Not so much as to snoop, but for the sheer longing for connection. She is careful at the same time not to tempt Rita to friendship with a smile, since Marthas are not supposed to fraternise with the Handmaids. Furthermore, the regular greetings are changed in Gilead, which brings further alienation. Conversations sound like:

> "We've been sent good weather."
>
> "Which I receive with joy."
>
> "They've defeated more of the rebels, since yesterday."
>
> "Praise be," I say (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 29).

As it is typical in totalitarian regimes, there is surveillance and mistrust everywhere. Everyone is everyone else's spy. Perhaps not always willingly, but they are forced to report any suspicion of nonconformist and/or subversive activity. Gileadian society is regulated by surveillance. There is no single autocratic ruler like the "Big Brother" in Atwood's imagined

universe, but everyone in it is tangled up in a system of monitoring and counter-surveillance, from Commander Fred to his domestic employees, from the doctor who inspects Offred to Offred herself. *The Handmaid's Tale* repeatedly highlights the pervasiveness of the critiquing gaze; the word "omnipresence" is used several times; the term "Eye" is everywhere. The greeting "under his eye" alludes to the divine stare while also implying that everyone is watched by someone else. When Aunt Lydia encourages her "girls" i.e. the Handmaids to be as inconspicuous as possible, she makes it sound like a transcendent principle: "To be seen — to be *seen* — is to be… penetrated" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 39). Even the "Salvagings," which appear to be impromptu, reveal themselves to be meticulously choreographed, highly overseen exercises in which the performers are uncomfortably aware that they are being watched: "It's a mistake to hang back too obviously in any group like this; it stamps you as lukewarm, lacking in zeal" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 289). The continuous surveillance of everyone's behaviour by everyone else (at a level of efficiency that eliminates the need for a "Big Brother") combined with the ever-present fear of strictly delineated repercussions are elements of a social-control technology that is neither mediaeval nor radically modern (Foucault 306). Gilead's emphasis on child-bearing, the legislation banning reading for women, as well as the other principles and standards that characterise this society reveal themselves to be the mechanisms of control. These mechanisms function to domesticate not just women—although the great majority of these devices appear to be targeted directly at them, presumably because they represent the most provocative threat—but the entire social body. Gilead aspires to employ ultimate societal control and the perfection of power exercise. This is not a theocracy only, but a world transformed into a constant penitentiary as well.

To support the ideology propounded by the totalitarian leader(s), totalitarian regimes make use of terror. Totalitarian terror splits the two constitutive components of a human being: body and identity. It dissolves the integrity of an individual—their name, identity, rights, and reduces them just to a body. Once the individuals are reduced only to the body, Arendt says, their status becomes "superfluous." Human beings become mere numbers or just bare life forms, which are easy to eliminate (*Totalitarianism* 296). She describes how Nazis started their extermination of Jews by first depriving them of all legal status, making them second-class citizens and cutting them off from the world by herding them into ghettos and concentration camps. All this happened in a global environment where the rest of the world

mostly chose to turn a blind eye to the plights of the Jews (296). In addition, a condition of complete rightlessness was created before the right to live for Jews was challenged. This is uncannily similar to Atwood's representation of Gilead—women, non-Christians, non-heterosexual people are second class citizens with fewer or no rights. LGBTQ community, subversive people, and Handmaids who fail to give birth to a healthy baby even after their third post or break any rule are sent to the infamous "Colonies." Colonies are the places where expendable women are sent to clean toxic waste, and to burn dead bodies after a battle. If one is lucky or their offence is not grave, they are assigned to do agricultural work, such as cotton picking or fruit harvesting. The toxic dumps and the radiation spills are the most hazardous, where people get three years maximum before they become sick and die (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 200). Anyhow, all of those Colonies have inhuman conditions (since better conditions incur more expenses for the authority which they deem unnecessary): insufficient food and warm clothing, excessive hard work, lack of treatment, and punishment. This treatment of women is similar to the Jews in the concentration camps in WWII. This was made possible in Hitler's regime because people's identity was taken away, making them superfluous.

Although Gilead uses various forms of violence to gain control over the population, on the surface, it is the perfect picture of serenity. Streets become safer than ever—nobody dares catcall or harass women. Offred describes the neighbourhood:

> Doubled, I walk the street. Though we are no longer in the Commanders' compound, there are large houses here also. In front of one of them a Guardian is mowing the lawn. The lawns are tidy, the facades are gracious, in good repair; they're like the beautiful pictures they used to print in the magazines about homes and gardens and interior decoration. There is the same absence of people, the same air of being asleep. The street is almost like a museum, or a street in a model town constructed to show the way people used to live. As in those pictures, those museums, those model towns, there are no children (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 21).

This apparent picture of serenity on the outside indicates how efficiently Gilead manages to hide its violence and terror. Aunt Lydia observes that beneath this picture of calm, serenity, and order, there is the presence of unspeakable, yet invisible, terror:

> So peaceful, the streets; so tranquil, so orderly; yet underneath the deceptively placid surfaces, a tremor, like that near a high-voltage power line. We're stretched thin, all of us; we vibrate; we quiver, we're always on the alert. Reign of terror, they used to say, but terror does not exactly reign. Instead it paralyses. Hence the unnatural quiet (Atwood, *Testaments* 277).

One might ask, does this apparent calm mean that the regime's power is beyond any question, and its stronghold is final and complete? In Hannah Arendt's analysis, this kind of state of apparent order implies the stability of totalitarian power since chaos and violence would mean its absence:

> …[P]olitically speaking, it is insufficient to say that power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence; to speak of non-violent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it (*On Violence* 56).

This is an extraordinary position by Arendt in the history of political thoughts. Typically, when a regime flexes its military muscles or uses police force, it is considered as a manifestation of its power, as violence is believed to be the final arbiter in political disagreements. On the contrary, the state that uses violence to desperately cling to power does so because it is in jeopardy. States sometimes use violence in order to achieve order and obedience. Subsequently, the loss of power may lead to the inevitable use of violence in order to regain its control and power. Aunt Lydia's thoughts certainly follow the same direction as Arendt's: "Hanging from a belt around my waist is my Taser. This weapon reminds me of my failings: had I been more effective, I would not have needed such an implement" (Atwood, *Testaments* 4). Her statement suggests that she feels the need to use violence only when the power of her control is lost or diminished.

But why does the Republic of Gilead happen in the first place? How does any totalitarian regime come to power? What is at the core of Gilead? There is no sure way to answer these questions. Totalitarianism is actually often seen to be overdetermined by a number of conditions. Severe crises—economic, environmental, political or social—may cause a state of

fear and insecurity that can push a society to its verge. Usually, a cataclysmic cause and effect relation between these elements leads to this crisis point. In the case of Gilead, environmental disaster, falling birth rate, and economic crisis were some of the major conditions. Aunt Lydia poignantly reflects on the crises and points out some more reasons: the climate crises and the long negligence and the lack of responsibility about it, the falling birth rate over many decades, economic depression and the resultant joblessness, the disconnected, atomised population in a panic mode and their zeal to find scapegoats in order to come together and remedy the situation (Atwood, *Testaments* 66). In times of uncertainty, people are guided by fear. This leads them to seek protection and guidance to the community, which Freud calls the "herd instinct" (117). Herding involves the loss of an individual's free will to some sort of a collective opinion. This situation is a fertile ground for the "strong man" (in case of Gilead, strong men: a small group of elite leaders called the "Sons of Jacob") to appear with their oversimplified ideology that offers simplistic guidance in the context of a terribly complex predicament.[2]

Herd instinct, or herd mentality is particularly perilous when people do not use their critical or rational faculty because their survival instinct kicks in and they ignore any rational, critical, or moral considerations. A totalitarian regime is created by the lack of critical thinking, and once created, it in turn, produces the condition of thoughtlessness. This condition is totally opposed to citizens' political agency and responsibility. Arendt covered the trials of Adolf Eichmann in 1961 for *The New Yorker*, which published a series of her essays on the event. Later in 1963, she published a book-length analysis of Eichmann, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, where she discusses what she calls "the banality of evil," an idea offering profound insights into Nazi brutality (*Eichmann* 7). Eichmann, a high-ranking Nazi German official and a war criminal, organized the deportation of more than 1.5 million Jews from all over Europe to ghettos, killing centres, and killing sites. His main role was to plan and organize the logistics of the deportation of Jews in minute details (Holocaust Encyclopaedia). In popular imagination he was portrayed as a monster or criminal mastermind. Arendt observes, on the contrary, that he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence without a cliché, failed

[2] The rise of Adolf Hiter is greatly attributed to the economic pressures due to the Versailles Treaty after WWI that led to high unemployment, inflation, huge national debts, which intensified after the Wall Street Crash of 1929. This, coupled with the fear of Communism—the common enemy, caused many Germans to turn to far-right parties such as the Nazis.

to follow a train of thoughts or see other people's perspectives. His problem was the problem of thoughts: his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think. Arendt claims that Eichmann's key problem is that he stopped thinking, to the point of essentially abdicating his rational capacity. She sees this as characteristic of citizens living within a totalitarian regime (7). We see such instances of minimised thinking in Atwood's duology as well. In a totalitarian regime like Gilead, thinking is discouraged not only for perpetrators but also for the victims. Offred says, "I try not to think too much. Like other things now, thought must be rationed. There's a lot that doesn't bear thinking about. Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 17).

An important philosophical, political, and theoretical question, therefore, is how ordinary people commit extraordinary crimes. In other words, what explains the widespread participation in totalitarian evil? Arendt argues that it is not a particularly evil psychological profile that makes it possible, but the political process that makes unimaginable acts possible. It is not enough to blame the Holocaust on the moral failures of Nazi leaders. It is the nature of the totalitarian regime itself that makes it possible for large numbers of otherwise ordinary people to kill millions of innocents. The key is the participation of the majority—either "voluntarily" or by coercion—that invests the regime or political order with power. Totalitarian regimes facilitate a kind of self-delusion. People participating in totalitarian evil can delude themselves into thinking they are just doing a regular, everyday job: making patrols to maintain order, selling fruits and vegetables, making bread, filling out the paperwork to authorise a search, etc. It is the tacit or forced consent of people engaged in regular, everyday works that helps the regime go on. Eichmann's defence at his trial was that he had never killed anyone and did nothing out of the ordinary; he was doing his job just like any government official. Modern economy and administration involve small sets of responsibilities assigned to individuals. These individuals become just cogs in the machine that runs the system. In the totalitarian state, these cogs are unthinking automatons without any political agency (*Eichmann* 78-79).

The major debate concerning Arendt's concept of the banality of evil is whether she has gone too far in her portrayal of Eichmann as a clown, a fool, or a joke; whether evil is truly banal. Some critics find it disturbing whether Arendt implies that the Holocaust is a banal incident. The merit of her concept lies in the idea that evil does not come marked in an obvious way as

it appears in myths or children's fairy tales. Evil exists in ordinary people, in all of us. Commander Fred, for example, is a rather ordinary man who is clumsy and shy in his initial interaction with Offred. He is as ordinary as someone longing to play scrabble. Aunt Lydia, who is the chief member of "Thank Tank" that planned and executed the training of Handmaids, is a vulnerable human being fraught with constant fear, guilt, and certain empathy that is not allowed any outlet. She says, "How can I have behaved so badly, so cruelly, so stupidly? you will ask. You yourself would never have done such things! But you yourself will never have had to" (Atwood, *Testaments* 403).

2.1.1 Utopia, Terror, and Totalitarianism

Although it may appear implausible and ironic, the Republic of Gilead is formed out of a utopian zeal in response to the environmental pollution and falling birth rate. It is based upon a complex set of ideas—mostly drawn from Christian teachings. Gilead explains its existing crises in the light of the Bible: It all happens because people have strayed from the path of God. Gilead dreams of a harmonious society where women would be at home, subservient to men; where there would be children again, raised by mothers who are always available to them; where women are not catcalled, harassed, molested or raped in the street; where environment pollution has been taken care of by the expendable population; where food, commodities, and provision are not wasted. In Gilead's vision, women would not have to go on the rat race of finding a husband. They would not "strain" themselves by wearing high heels, tight clothes, and toxic make-up. Obsession over physical appearance would stop. Nobody would consume junk food. Nobody would waste food, or other commodities. Wives, Marthas, Handmaids, and Daughters would live in perfect harmony in a shared sisterhood. They would not know how to read and write, which would make them pliable, because they would be far away from rebellious and subversive ideas. Pregnancy would be celebrated; pregnant women would be taken care of, spoiled and fussed over. God-fearing men would be faithful to their Wives. Most men would go through sexual starvation; so, when they are allowed to have a Wife, they would be appreciative. Giving up one kind of freedom (mostly the freedom of choice), they would have another kind of freedom—freedom from hunger, abuse, pollution, etc.

Some of these dreams at least, sound like good things, and certainly desirable. It is no surprise how Serena Joy dreams of Gilead, dedicates her whole life to it, and almost dies for it. Once her dream becomes a reality, she willingly gives up her life-long career, her privilege of reading and writing. Even though she is unhappy with her new situation, she goes on uncomplainingly. Since she does not have many things to do, she occupies herself in gardening, or weaving scarves for the Angels, even though she does not seem to derive much pleasure from such menial work. Such is the power of utopian dreams. This is one kind of persuasion totalitarian regimes tend to employ. The other kind of persuasion involves terror, which is used on Offred and Aunt Lydia. Both are uprooted from their previous lives. Offred is estranged from her family and friends. Her mother is sent to the colonies to clean toxic wate, her daughter is sent to another family because she is deemed incompetent and unfit to raise a child. She does not know the whereabouts of Luke, and at times of Moira. She herself is subjected to state approved rape every month, called the "Ceremony." Aunt Lydia, who has struggled all her life to achieve professional success against many odds, is forced to use her competence to plan and execute Gilead's sinister design of surrogacy, as an alternative to death. It is a chilling thought that such crimes could be committed, out of aspiration and hope for a future vision, rather than from desperation alone.

Gilead is a compelling example of how one person's utopia can be another person's dystopia. Returning to the Ted talk mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it can be clearly seen how utopian visions of a particular society should be subject to critical scrutiny. It warns about the strategy undertaken by societies to establish their utopian ideals. Moreover, how far the society would go in order to establish their ideals also determines whether the society would be utopian or dystopian. Gilead employed over-simplistic solution to a complex problem and enforces this solution by force, coercion, and ultimately, terror. Although the concepts of utopia and terror may seem antithetical, history has witnessed them to come together repeatedly, particularly in post-Enlightenment modernity.

In his course titled *Utopia and Terror in the Twentieth Century*, Vejas G. Liulevicius discusses the many instances when these seemingly odd coupling of the terms "utopia" and "terror" appears to function in history. Ordinarily the word "terror" implies feeling panic, or alarm, but it also has a more specific political usage—as a political method in the pursuit and wielding of power. It involves, he says, "organised use of violence for political, deliberate ends." When

used politically, terror “seeks to instil fear and panic and aims at forcing a deliberate transformation.” Such deliberate and organised targeting of ordinary people, civilians, even uninvolved and non-politicised individuals make this method disturbingly effective. Liulevicius debunks the popular saying “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” which in many ways is a kind of defensive statement that aims to shake off the stigma of the label of “terrorists.” He observes that it is not entirely adequate to the political realities of terrorism because terrorists quite deliberately aim to target the innocent and the uninvolved, which is not something that freedom fighters do.

Towards the late nineteenth century, the optimism and confidence of the Enlightenment reached a height that was never imagined before. Reason was believed to be capable of achieving anything and everything. Human race strived for perfection, and set ideologies—nationalism, socialism, communism, fascism, Nazism, a whole series of isms and ideologies—in motion. Ideologies are systems of ideas which offer an all-encompassing explanation of the existing reality. Modern age has seen a succession of ideologies that describe how the world works, and/or how it should work. The totalising ideologies employed by many states encountered resistance in history, of course, either passive or active, since not every individual or society willingly submitted to being radically reconstructed. These ideologies, once adopted by totalitarian states, involved considerable epistemic and physical violence to achieve their vision of perfection. Such usage of terror would often be justified with the notion of the end being the justification of means (Vejas G. Liulevicius).

Totalitarian ideologies promise the ultimate meaning, and a perfect future salvation; many ideologies, in fact, constitute, what we might call, political religions. They draw on many of the earlier religious impulses, commanding fanaticism, commitment and sacrifice from true believers (Liulevicius). Like religion, they also offer rewards. They offer immense confidence that the true believers are on the right side of history, and they will inevitably be immortal by being a part of the regime. They give justification to true believers for realising their beliefs by any means necessary, including the escalating use of violence. Liulevicius says in this regard, “In essence, ideologies, or ideas would have consequences.”

Totalitarian regimes often find a scapegoat to blame all the evil by typically enforcing their intolerance of differences through persecution of specific marginalised groups. By putting one group (the scapegoat group) at a disadvantage, other groups gain a favourable situation.

Under Eichmann's supervision, it was determined how the property of deported Jews would be seized; and he made sure that the offices he directed in the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) would benefit from the confiscated assets. In a much similar fashion, since Gilead's scapegoat happens to be women, especially the fallen women, their property and possessions are passed on to their next of kin (male). In this case, an individual suffers because they are a member of a particular community, collective, or a group (female). In such incidents as genocides or mass persecution, an individual is beaten or injured or arrested because they are a Jew, a black, a homosexual, a Native American, a woman, a transgender, or a religious minority.

In short, the way in which trauma operates cannot be discussed solely at the level of an individual. It demands a slightly different approach that requires a much broader canvas to represent trauma. Oppression that is inflicted on individual identity demands a holistic outlook that investigates how trauma operates because of an individual's participation in an ideology, or a particular community. In Jeffrey Alexander's definition, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness" (1). In other words, cultural trauma is something that afflicts a larger group of people where their identities determine the nature of trauma that they experience. In *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the formation of African American identity* (2003), Ron Eyerman speaks about how the traumatic memory of slavery is passed on through generations even though slavery has long been abolished. Here trauma is a collective, shared memory. Trauma is inherited and transgenerational because it participates in a collective memory process, through which descendants of those who experienced slavery also participate in a certain kind of trauma. Cultural trauma, therefore, is something that is transmitted across generations. The inheritance of a collective memory and a collective identity means that subjectivities are in many ways determined by what happened to people's grandparents a long time ago.

2.1.2 Fall of Gilead

How did Gilead fall? "*The Testaments*," says Atwood, "was written in response to this question. Totalitarianisms may crumble from within, as they fail to keep the promises that

brought them to power; or they may be attacked from without; or both. There are no sure-fire formulas, since very little in history is inevitable" (*Testaments* 417) Indeed, there is no easy explanation as to why totalitarian regimes fall. The overwhelming display of confidence by the supporters of the regimes, and their projection of the powerful image of stronghold may make it seem like these regimes are eternal. Nourishing hopes is a tremendously arduous task in such a regime—as Aunt Lydia finds out, "My larger fear: that all my efforts will prove futile, and Gilead will last for a thousand years. Most of the time, that is what it feels like here, far away from the war, in the still heart of the tornado" (Atwood, *Testaments* 277).

Resistance to such regimes could come in many forms. It ranges from active opposition to something as ordinary as jokes directed against the repressive regime. Bearing witness by people who thought, reflected on, and wrote about the atrocities of their age and its violent trajectory is also a significant form of resistance. All the narrators—Offred, Aunt Lydia, Agnes Gemima, and Daisy/Baby Nicole/Jade— bear witness in these two novels by Atwood. Given the situation, bearing witness and leaving its record is particularly risky. If discovered, these records could mean death. Aunt Lydia's anxiety is apparent in these lines:

> I'll stash this screed in its hiding place, avoiding the surveillance cameras—I know where they are, having placed them myself. Despite such precautions, I'm aware of the risk I'm running: writing can be dangerous. What betrayals, and then what denunciations, might lie in store for me? There are several within Ardua Hall who would love to get their hands on these pages (Atwood, *Testaments* 5).

Both Aunt Lydia and Offred can perhaps be accused of complicity to Gilead to some extent. Then again, when there is an enormous imbalance of power, often people lose the ability to act with agency. It is worth noticing that both these characters choose to remember, to bear witness. Their act of remembrance is a form of resistance as Milan Kundera famously says "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (3). Unlike Eichmann, these two narrators never give up their agency despite several setbacks. Agnes Gemima, who was raised in Gilead, displays childish belief in the "stories" other people tell her; yet, there are many acts of defiance on her part as well. She chooses to feel kindness towards the Handmaid who dies in childbirth. Against the pressure of the family, she decides not to marry and become an Aunt instead.

Humour has a subversive function in Atwood's novels, and comedic representations often reverse the hegemonic binaries, or purposefully upset the status quo. This demonstrates an inner reserve of resistance that have not been quelled by the regime. It is worth noticing that the typical Atwoodian dry, sarcastic, dark humour, which is all but non-existent in *The Handmaid's Tale*, returns in *The Testaments.* In Aunt Lydia's account, Ardua Hall Holograph contains many instances of humour that can easily be counted as irreverent to the regime. For example, when Commander Judd tells her in a self-explanatory manner that he had perhaps taken harsh measures to test whether she was reliable and worthy, smilingly she says, "So kind of you to tell me[.]" Although later she writes in her apologia, rather in an indignant and cheeky way, "The muscles of my face were beginning to hurt. Under some conditions, smiling is a workout" (Atwood, *Testaments* 178). Since she chooses to play her role only because it is the sole alternative to being shipped to the Colonies, her account of Gilead's hypocrisy and crimes contains a sarcastic, dry humour, as if she is revelling in its failure. In her own words,

> Here I also keep another set of files, accessible only to a very few; I think of them as the secret histories of Gilead. All that festers is not gold, but it can be made profitable in non-monetary ways: knowledge is power, especially discreditable knowledge (Atwood, *Testaments* 35).

Aunt Lydia gives us a picture of how things have been falling apart, and how Gilead's centre can no longer quite hold. Even something as ordinary as oranges suggests how the situation has been turning dire for Gilead. The availability of oranges has been sporadic since Central America is lost to the Libertheos, causing interference with the supply of oranges from California and Florida (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 35). This makes them luxury items—so much so that they are offered as sacred offerings at the bottom of Aunt Lydia's statue (Atwood, *Testaments* 4). Not only this war, but Gilead has also been fraught with many other wars since its beginning. Although the regime has been broadcasting only the news of victory, the dead bodies piling up in the Colonies within city walls paint an ominous picture. The regime hurriedly gets these bodies disposed of, fearing plague. In addition, food is rationed. Only the Commanders enjoy real coffee, but even they come under rationing. There is fake cheese, fake coffee, etc. which suggests that the production of goods in Gilead is not exactly thriving. Besides, high immigration rate has been a long-standing problem, which makes Gilead look

bad to the international community. Commander Judd's analysis of escapes reveals that Gilead has been struggling to tackle the exit routes of illegal immigration (Atwood, *Testaments* 62-68).

Liulevicius observes that there is a certain inner instability in totalitarian regimes. At some point they start to believe their own propaganda, and thereby start to lose a sense of the limits of reality. This may sometimes lead to their fall from within. Frederick R. Waterford or Commander Fred believes he is untouchable. In Professor Darcy Pieixoto's research we find that "he was accused of liberal tendencies, of being in possession of a substantial and unauthorised collection of heretical pictorial and literary materials, and of harbouring a subversive." Waterford, as all high-level Commanders are also directors of the Eyes, does not pay a great deal of attention to the fact that Nick could be an Eye, as many Drivers and Chauffeurs have been. He takes Offred to Jezebel's for the cheap thrills of a power trip, and has Nick drive them there. "Like most early Gilead Commanders who were later purged, he considered his position to be above attack. The style of middle Gilead was more cautious," says Pieixoto (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 322). Commander Judd too grows too comfortable with his power. He poisons a number of his Wives so that he can take a child bride again, which is a reckless act even for a Commander. His ego gets the better of him and he deems disciplining Gilead's women beneath him, so he trusts Aunt Lydia to the task completely, as long as he does not find any obvious loose ends. The microdots carried by Agnes and Nicole reveal a great many discreditable personal secrets pertaining to various high-level officials, including plots devised by Commanders to eliminate other Commanders. The exposed secrets trigger the "Ba'al Purge" that weakens the regime as it thins the ranks of the elite class. The sequence of events leads to a military putsch and a popular revolt, leading finally to the fall of Gilead (Atwood, *Testaments* 410-412).

2.2 Climate Trauma

The experience of environmental sadness—the sense of loss and grief over the destruction of an ecosystem—has been part of our existential crisis for a long time. The short-sighted attempt to use up the planet and its resources for its own material benefit has been self-destructive in the era of the anthropocene. Psychotherapists are addressing the effects of the

environmental crisis on the human mind ever more increasingly. Ecopsychologist Joanna Macy affirms that "...loss, unmeasured and immeasurable, is the pivotal psychological reality of our time" (241). This awareness about the existential threat that looms over humanity informs much of Atwood's work, including *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. In these novels, she explores the global environmental dangers we face because of our failure to act, and speculates the probable future consequences.

Michael Richardson asserts how climate catastrophe has manifestations on both micro- and macro-levels of existing ways of life:

> Climate catastrophe works on ecologies and bodies alike as a kind of wounding, one not simply or solely to the everyday stuff of biological life but to the very constitution of experience and expression. This wounding is not so much traumatic as it is traumatically affecting. It is a wounding that manifests in jarring, rupturing, disjunctive encounters with future crises in the contemporary moment. While this traumatic affectivity manifests in multiple forms, it has particular consequences for aesthetic expression and its relation to experience itself (1).

Since climate trauma is a global phenomenon, Ricardson contends, its dynamics ranges from the macro to the micro, from the planetary to the personal, from the geologic to the momentary (2). E. Ann Kaplan analyses how future catastrophes get featured in a collection of dystopian films and novels in her book *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction* (2016). She proposes the term "pretrauma" to describe the traumatic imaginings of future catastrophic scenarios (xix). In these scenarios, she says, "audiences are invited to identify with future selves in uncertain, dangerous, and ultimately unsustainable worlds. Such identifications result in a pretraumatised population, living with a sense of an uncertain future and an unreliable natural environment." She situates PreTSS–Pretraumatic Stress Syndrome or the experience of terror of a future catastrophe—against the traditional notion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is a condition triggered by past traumatic events. In her own words,

> Conceptualizing the phenomenon of PreTSS offers a new lens for an expanded trauma theory. Future time is a major theme, along with thinking through the meanings and cultural work (including that pertaining to race and gender) that dystopian pretrauma

> imaginaries perform in our newly terrorized historical era. … Finally, the circularity of representations that both anticipate and respond to historical events is significant. Such representations have a strong affective charge, especially as historical events lead to war or anticipate future ecological devastation. These fantasies function as warnings, a kind of "memory for the future," and I investigate what future there is for memory as these fictional humans come to an end (4).

Pre-Trauma symptoms include nightmares, flashbacks, hallucinations, depression, and paranoia which are identical to those of traumas of the past (Kaplan 2). Zhiwa Woodbury, however, refers to a long-time climate activist who thinks "we are making a grave mistake by relegating trauma theory to the ''symptom box'' in our analysis of the climate crisis, rather than seeing the crisis itself as a new form of trauma. In other words, the climate crisis does not just induce trauma under certain circumstances—it is a new form of trauma that pervades the circumstances of our life." Woodbury proposes the case for a new taxonomy of traumatology: Instead of considering climate trauma as a potential symptom of episodic events associated with climate change, climate change itself has to be considered as a new, superordinate form of trauma (1). She divides the current schema for assessing how human beings experience trauma into three overlapping categories: generational (epigenetic) trauma, personal trauma, and cultural trauma (3).

Climate trauma is a planetary level of trauma, which affects all human and other life forms, as well as inorganic substances. Therefore, only personal trauma or psychological trauma is not adequate to cover its multiple dimensions; hence the relevance of cultural trauma, which has a much bigger scope. Cultural trauma afflicts a large group of people where their identities determine the nature of the trauma that they experience. According to Jeffrey C Alexander, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves an indelible mark upon their group consciousness" (1). Ron Eyerman deliberates on the inheritable, transmissible nature of cultural trauma. In his definition, "As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (2). Cultural trauma embodies shared traumatic memories. For example, the descendants of people who have been traumatised by their

experience of slavery may inherit the memories of their forefathers, even though they were not directly exposed to the violence themselves.

2.2.1 Representation of Climate Trauma in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

In *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, the continual assault on the global biosphere results in a full-scale climate catastrophe. This leads to infertility in women, and sterility in men (although in Gileadean metanarrative, the concept of male sterility does not exist.). In the "Historical Notes" section Professor Pieixoto exemplifies how stillbirths, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase in Gilead. Various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage, leakages from chemical and biological-warfare stockpiles, thousands of both legal and illegal toxic-waste disposal sites, acts of dumping toxic-waste into the sewage system, the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays lead to an incredible decline in birth rate. Offred's narrative gives a chilling picture of the extent of the catastrophe:

> The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells. Who knows, your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies. Maybe a vulture would die of eating you. Maybe you light up in the dark, like an old-fashioned watch. Deathwatch. That's a kind of beetle, it buries carrion.
>
> I can't think of myself, my body, sometimes, without seeing the skeleton: how I must appear to an electron. A cradle of life, made of bones; and within, hazards, warped proteins, bad crystals jagged as glass. Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers. Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas fault, nobody's fault, during the earthquakes, and the mutant strain of syphilis no mold could touch. Some did it themselves, had themselves tied shut with catgut or scarred with chemicals (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 122).

This contemplation clearly depicts Offred's anxiety about the catastrophic conditions of her environment. While being taken to the birthing ceremony of Ofwarren, she cannot help wondering whether Ofwarren will be able to give birth to a healthy baby or an "Unbaby," because there is no way of telling since the use of ultrasound or some such technology to determine the condition of the baby is banned. Besides, the birth rate of "Unbabies" with deformities like "a pinhead or a snout like a dog's, or two bodies, or a hole in its heart or no arms, or webbed hands and feet" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 122). This graphic description given by Offred is quite disturbing. However, the situation in certain Colonies is worse. People who are forced to clean up the toxic dumps and the radiation spills in these colonies live for three years at best, before their "nose falls off and … skin pulls away like rubber gloves" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 260).

In the Pre-Gilead era, there has been widespread denial and negligence about these crises. Aunt Lydia's rumination supports this observation:

> In that vanished country of mine, things had been on a downward spiral for years. The floods, the fires, the tornadoes, the hurricanes, the droughts, the water shortages, the earthquakes. Too much of this, too little of that. The decaying infrastructure—why hadn't someone decommissioned those atomic reactors before it was too late? The tanking economy, the joblessness, the falling birth rate.
>
> People became frightened. Then they became angry.
>
> The absence of viable remedies. The search for someone to blame. Why did I think it would nonetheless be business as usual?
>
> Because we'd been hearing these things for so long, I suppose. You don't believe the sky is falling until a chunk of it falls on you (Atwood, *Testaments* 66).

This suggests that people have been unable to recognize the threat of climate change for a long time, and failed to act. Woodbury observes, "We humans have a natural tendency to dismiss thoughts of trauma … and as a community we have always been slow to recognize new forms of trauma" (2). Besides, climate change is a slow process, which makes it harder to be recognised immediately and with urgency. As Rob Nixon declares, "Climate change, the thawing cryosphere, toxic drift, biomagnification, deforestation, the radioactive aftermaths

of wars, acidifying oceans, and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles that can hinder our efforts to mobilise and act decisively" (2). He calls the slowly declining climate "slow violence," by which, he means "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). In Atwood's words in this context, "Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 47).

After a period of apparent non-response, Gilead addresses this catastrophe by taking sudden, drastic, dehumanising measures. One of these measures is a prejudiced, and an almost total rejection of technology. Instead of using machines, they clean-up toxic waste by a squad of expendable population. They refocus on traditional values in manual labour, such as women knitting, gardening, and making fresh bread at home. This could be interpreted as a trauma response on the part of Gilead to the overwhelming, all-round catastrophe. Critics have argued that there is a link between environmental degradation, environmental rights, and human rights. Generally speaking, environmental degradation prepares a fertile ground for a general decline of human rights, especially the rights of the less-privileged class. In this regard, Pramod K Nayar quotes from Linda Hajjar Leib:

> … environmental issues, until now considered the privilege of policy-makers, are increasingly becoming an important matter for human rights advocates, judges and other stakeholders. Environmental rights equip human rights activists, environmentalists and victims of environmental degradation with a powerful tool with which to overcome the 'sovereignty wall' often raised as a barrier to any form of state liability. International human rights law, unlike other forms of international law, deals with issues that arise between individuals or groups of individuals and an offending state, whether it is their state of citizenship, state of residence, or a foreign state (7).

It has been observed time and again that in any crisis situation, the women, children and the old people take the worst hit. They become the casualty of wars and natural disasters. In Gilead too, women are made the scapegoat of the environmental crises. More specifically, women who are not heterosexual or monogamous, have had an abortion at any point of their lives, have been feminist activists or married more than once or married someone who is

married before. The human rights of these women are brutally violated by the regime, creating almost an entire generation of internally displaced, traumatised women.

2.2.2 Gendered Dimension of Climate Change and Ecological Disasters

While discussing the bioeconomic and bioinformational turn in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Nayar observes that it renders the genetic material of some groups vulnerable, especially the Handmaids. He says, "...[E]coprecarity is the rendering of some lives vulnerable to exploitation, disenfranchisement and exposed to harm" (126). In the future society depicted in these novels, women are "reduced to the organs and their functions as determined by the social order and authorities. In one sense, then, their bodies are alienated from themselves because there is no agential control over the futures of these bodies" (129). Offred has ownership neither over the Ceremony—the monthly ordeals to go through in order to comply with the forced surrogacy rules of the regime—nor over its fruit, i.e. any baby it produces. Serena Joy explicitly reminds her, "As far as I'm concerned, this is like a business transaction" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 25). The women are human capital; their wombs are not their capital or resources, but the capital or resources of the state. They are preserved, taken care of, and regulated by the regime. It is often referred to as reproductive futurism, where the future of humankind hinges upon reproduction and all biopolitics focuses upon the woman's body because the woman's body has to be preserved, controlled, regulated as a business transaction.

Sheila Jasanoff proposes that the Handmaids are "manipulated biological entities" and they have "dual ontologies—as goods and as persons" (164). They are not allowed to have their desires, anxieties, consciousness, and sentiments, but their principal role is "an integral and ontologically stable component of the economic and cultural system" (164). This is what Offred feels about this dual ontology:

> I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. I could use it to run, push buttons of one sort or another, make things happen. There were limits, but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me.

> Now the flesh arranges itself differently I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping. Inside it is a space, huge as the sky at night and dark and curved like that, though black-red rather than black. Pinpoints of light swell, sparkle, burst and shrivel within it, countless as stars. Every month there is a moon, gigantic, round, heavy, an omen. It transits, pauses, continues on and passes out of sight, and I see despair coming towards me like famine. To feel that empty, again, again. I listen to my heart, wave upon wave, salty and red, continuing on and on, marking time (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 61).

Offred is aware that she has been reduced to one organ—her womb—over which she has no ownership. She has limited agency, such as to feel emotions, or to extend her hand towards sunlight, but she is, in fact, transformed into an object, a "chaste vessel" to be used by the bio-capitalistic society of Gilead (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 255). Nayar comments in this regard, "This is precisely the ecoprecarity of the human form, when the integrity, for long deemed intrinsic and natural to it, becomes purified, reduced to socially valuable functions" (141).

The reassignment of the children of the Handmaids and other "fallen" people to a new "worthy" family in Gilead creates a crisis of identity and a precarity of belonging. Since the true identity of these children are kept hidden, the Aunts keep the "Bloodlines Genealogical Archives" in order to prevent incest, to which only they have the access (Atwood, *Testaments* 35). Despite Gilead's best efforts, it is apparent that the forced removal of those children causes the precarity of belonging. In Agnes' case, the discovery of her genetic linkages alters her kinship radically. She is unsettled to hear that the loving Tabitha is not her biological mother, but a certain Handmaid is, which alters her perception of her roots, rights, social positions, etc. Later, through "Bloodlines Genealogical Archives" in Ardua Hall, she discovers her bloodline. Thus, the discovery of genetic linkages can be unsettling.

Atwood addresses not just the misogyny of the dominant anthropocentric mentality, but also the oppression of "others" by dominant social classes, races, colours, and nations. The Commanders have a household consisting of a Wife, possibly children (or a Handmaid if they do not have any), a Martha or more, a chauffeur, etc., which means he has access to both opulence and sexual gratification. But other men in Gilead lower in rank are not allowed to

marry or have any kind of contact with women. The slightest advance towards any woman would lead them to "Salvaging" which means literally being torn apart by the Handmaids. Knowing their powerlessness, Offred enjoys her little power—"power of a dog bone, passive but there"—titillating them by moving her hips in a seductive way (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 32). Besides, the heap of rotting dead bodies of soldiers outside the city indicates that it is not only Unwomen who die in large numbers in Gilead.

Atwood's representation of the dystopian society offers an ecofeminist perspective towards various forms of oppression within androcentric power systems. Through this representation, the patriarchal persecution of people from lower socioeconomic standing is revealed. While the primary focus is on gender and especially women, who are believed to be the most victimised group, the novel also includes other oppressed groups. The Econowives are the impoverished subjects who are pushed to the periphery by the patriarchal power structure due to their inferior social rank. These women are subjected to twofold subordination under Gilead's hierarchical social order: first, by patriarchy due to their gender, and then by the upper-class individuals due to their economy-based social rank. Gilead's class conflict and hierarchical social order is a direct result of patriarchy exerting its dominance and authority not just over women and the environment, but also over individuals from economically disadvantaged levels. The ties and connections between the dominating subjects of various species, genders, and social strata are represented in a way that reveals that phallocentric attitudes are used to build comparable power structures in order to subjugate all of those oppressed units (Şenel 91).

Female Gileadeans are classified according to their capabilities and fertility or social standing, as dictated by the totalitarian regime's regulations. Aside from women, the patriarchal system establishes a hierarchical structure among men as well, which is determined by their social ranks. Men and women, on the other hand, are seen as binary opposites, and Gileadean males are superior to females regardless of their socioeconomic station. "Mind/body, spirit/corporeality; abstraction/embodiment; sky/earth; competition/cooperation; asceticism/promiscuity; rationality/intuition; culture/nature" are examples of patriarchal dualities that are of major interest of ecofeminism (Plumwood 43). The patriarchal side of these binaries are generally invested with supremacy, whilst the feminine side is constantly undermined. The Guardians are drawn from the "othered" category of men, and they are not

like the rest of society (Şenel 87). Due to their low social standing, no woman is assigned to them. Offred assumes they must be dreaming of a woman, perhaps a Handmaid (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 32).

Patriarchy justifies its violent and oppressive treatment of women throughout Gilead's totalitarian dictatorship by focusing on the supposed immoralities of their lives prior to the regime. As a result, patriarchy establishes a repressive rule and social order that compels women to "learn in silence with all subjection" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 233). According to Commander Fred, the male belief that all women and nature are submissive things created for the benefit of men is Nature's standard. Offred wants to know why men would prefer a secret club full of sex workers rather than Handmaids or Wives, so the Commander covertly takes her to Jezebel's (a secret club full of women missioned to sexually serve for Commanders of higher rank) and answers her: "Nature demands variety for men. It stands to reason, it is part of the procreational strategy. it is Nature's plan… Women know that instinctively. Why did they buy so many clothes in the old days? To trick the men into thinking they were several different women. A new one each day" (249). So now that women do not have all those different clothes in Gilead, Commanders "merely have different women" (249). This is an irony, but the Gileadean elite does not acknowledge it (Şenel 91-92). This uncovers the male-chauvinistic attitude of the ruling class of Gilead.

The Gileadean regime sets in motion a man-made disequilibrium in nature's ecological order that leads to women's continued enslavement. The disruption of natural balance in the dystopia certainly affects women's biological structures, rendering them barren. According to Professor Pieixoto, there are various reasons for the drop in birth rates. To begin with, the wider availability of forms of contraception and abortion in the late twentieth century has a significant impact on pre-Gileadean birth rates. Moreover, chemical pollution caused male sterility as well (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 316-317). Furthermore, the professor's investigation in 2195 reveals that the most critical condition that causes such disastrous sterility in Gilead is that the environment has been severely contaminated by the late twentieth-century androcentric mindset:

> Need I remind you that this was the age of R-strain syphilis and also of the infamous AIDS epidemic, which, once they spread population at large, eliminated many young sexually active people from the reproductive pool? Stillbirths, miscarriages, and

> genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase, and this trend has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage that characterized the period, as well as to leakages from chemical- and biological-warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites, of which there were many thousands, both legal and illegal- in some instances, these materials were simply dumped into the sewage system- and to the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays (316-317).

Because women and nature are on the same side as opposed to men and culture, a radical ecofeminist perspective holds that attacking the pre-established hierarchy and reversing the existing binaries is worthwhile. Thus, radical ecofeminists actively promote not only the affiliation between women and nature but also the other "feminine attributes," such as "irrationality, emotion, and the human or non-human body as against culture, reason and the mind" (Garrard 23). Though it has been critiqued as essentialist, the duology contains an element of radical ecofeminism where the females are depicted as having restricted freedom due to their relationship with nature. For instance, the storyteller frequently declares that she is alive when she is in nature. Offred exhibits a unique relationship with the sun, which is a natural gift. Life is dark, gloomy, stagnant, and unbearable in the prison-like room she is forced to live in, but whenever she touches the sunlight on her skin through the half-opened window of her chamber, she feels renewed, alive, and breathing, and the prison-like room appears to be a room of privilege. The narrator is drawn to sunlight, fresh air, and flowers of all kinds. To put it another way, she sees herself as a natural being: "But a chair, sunlight, flowers: these are not to be dismissed. I am alive, I live, I breathe, I put my hand out, unfolded, into the sunlight. Where I am is not a prison but a privilege" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 18).

Abuses of science have a direct impact on Gileadean society, with women bearing the brunt of the consequences. The handmaids are the first victims here since they are tasked with reversing the devastating results of environmental pollution (Kuźnicki 8). This particular function forced upon them basically reduces fertile women to breeding activities only, because the need for children is primary in Gileadean society, since it suffers from fertility problems and the resultant underpopulation:

> The chances are one in four, we learned that at the Centre. The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes

> years to clean up, and meanwhile, they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells. Who knows, your very flesh may be polluted, dirty as an oily beach, sure death to shore birds and unborn babies. (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 122)

In other words, due to the low childbirth-rate and a general shortage of food resulting from the environmental contamination, the Gieadean world is sliding into slow decay. As a result, handmaids are the "chosen" ones, since they can, at least theoretically, assure the nation's continuance. All of this, however, comes at a price, which in this instance is utter submission. They are no longer treated as human beings. Instead, their biological roles appear to be the only important thing to Gilead's male-dominated society, which strengthens the overtly misogynistic regime (Kuźnicki 11). Patriarchy in Gilead takes a firm hold by integrating religion into the ideology of the regime: "the takeover of the theocracy came about gradually, as a response to the breakdown of consumerist capitalist democracy, to the infertility caused by the ecological imbalance of nuclear experiments, fallout, and toxic waste" (Kuźnicki 11). It is no surprise that women—in this case, the Handmaids—pay the highest price in a male-dominated culture, practically risking their minds and bodies for a nation in which they are not even fully recognized citizens.

2.3 Religion and the Right-Wing Politics in Gilead

Margaret Atwood offers a novel spin to her dystopian depiction of the Republic of Gilead by representing a society that looks up to the select Biblical teachings for guidance which is inextricably tied to the method of authority of the regime. Her representation of religious ideology, in fact, serves as one of the bases of the duology. Gilead was founded as a Puritan theocracy inspired by the seventeenth-century Puritan New England. Its power structures are justified by specific passages from the Bible, demonstrating how religion can be used to construct and maintain authoritarian regimes. The Bible is the source of authority and power for Gilead's leaders, despite the fact that only a few people are allowed to read it. The only Bibles are kept "in the darkness of their locked boxes, glowing with arcane energy" either in the Reading Room of the Ardua Hall (for which a higher authorization is required) (Atwood, *Testaments* 35) or in the Commanders' houses, locked up in boxes, to which only the

Commanders have access (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 98). This restricted access implies that the citizens of Gilead ascribe a mythical sense of power to them in their minds.

The regime bases their Rachel and Leah Centre (where Handmaids are trained) on the brief account in Old Testament which states that when Leah was unable to bear her husband Jacob a child, she asks Jacob to have intercourse with her handmaid Bilhah, so that she can have the child born in the handmaid's womb. Quoted from Genesis 30:1-3, this section appears on the epigraph of *The Handmaid's Tale*:

> And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.
>
> And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?
>
> And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.

Genesis 30:1-3 are among the many texts that show that in patriarchal Hebrew times, it was fully permissible for a man to have intercourse with his servants (slaves) and even have children by them, especially if his wife was barren. Using this as the basis of their principle, the regime is able to impose and justify a regressive vision of marriage and gender that benefits them at the expense of women. By enacting this law, they form a class of Handmaids who are forced to carry the powerful elite's children. As is pretty standard of speculative fiction writers, Atwood exaggerates the ritual of impregnation called the "Ceremony." It is extremely unlikely that the traditionalist religious right would ever adopt the sexual practices illustrated in this novel; however, she attempts to argue that patriarchal traditions that consider women solely as fertility objects can be no more dehumanising than the contemporary customs that regard them as sex objects.

The religious practices followed by the Aunts and trained to the Supplicants (the aspiring Aunts, under traineeship) borrow ideas from Christian convents. In a Christian convent, a nun is a religious woman who takes serious vows, pursues a solitary life of prayer and repentance within a cloister, and forgoes the present world in order to concentrate on the afterlife. Nuns' orders often provide shelter for illegitimate daughters from undesired marriages or from

outside the marriage vows, presumably for their own safety. The Vatican has now decided on a less stringent life for the few remaining orders of cloistered nuns. Despite this, the term "nuns" is still used to refer to all female religious leaders (Kaler 44). Sisters, on the other hand, are religious women who take modest vows to live in non-cloistered groups so that they can undertake bodily works of mercy like nursing and teaching.[3] While Atwood refers to a Handmaid as a "Sister, dipped in blood" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 11), she uses the categories of nuns and sisters interchangeably (Kaler 45). However, the "Supplicants" or the young girls who take the vows and train to be Aunts at Ardua halls seem more similar to the "nuns." They are trained in a rigorous manner: They have to clean and scrub, learn to read the Bible, shun worldly pleasures such as good food, good clothes, conjugal life—overall lead a life of modesty and sacrifice. In many ways, the training aspiring Aunts receive appears to be similar to those of Christian nuns and sisters. In Ardua Hall, young girls enrol as "Supplicants" first. There is a probationary period of six months; and then nine years of training, followed by missionary work abroad as "Pearl Girls." They become full Aunts upon completion of their mission abroad. A successful mission involves bringing a convert home, whom they call "Precious Pearl."

The Supplicants' missionary work abroad is similar to the expansion of Christianity through missionaries—a project that is mainly associated with colonialism. The basic premise is the European metropolitan centres were the civilised "self" and their holy responsibility is to spread light to the "fallen races" living in the darkness of their respective colonies. The main target of these Pearl Girls is Canada, since it is a democratic country that rejects all of Gilead's ideals. Gilead's leadership strengthens their grip over their own citizens by teaching and supporting the belief that the outside world is evil and the cause of God's wrath. These residents want to live virtuous lives and hence dread the degradation of the outside world. Gilead leads their people into believing that Canada is ethically corrupt, comparing it to Sodom, a city that God curses in the Old Testament for the depravity of its citizens. The Pearl

[3] These communities of sisters, which evolved from the laity, or secular "third orders" of laymen, and quasi-religious groups like the beguines, are frequently misnamed "nuns"; the two words have become synonymous, especially as "sister" is a title of honour used by both. In addition, someone raised in an English environment, such as the Canadian author, can use the term "sister" to refer to a nurse, a term coined in honour of the Sisters of Mercy who worked in the Crimean War hospitals with Florence Nightingale (Kaler 44).

Girls in Gilead who constitute missions abroad have the same underlying motivation as the missionaries in the colonial period. Aunt Lydia writes:

> The Pearl Girls were originally my idea—other religions had missionaries, so why not ours? And other missionaries had produced converts, so why not ours? And other missionaries had gathered information used in espionage, so why not ours?—but, being no fool or at least not that kind of fool, I'd let Commander Judd take credit for the plan (Atwood, *Testaments* 67).

Pearl Girls invite the destitute or whoever would like to convert to and participate in the Gileadean lifestyle and spiritual principles. However, their job description also includes espionage. This is not perhaps too unlike the original colonial missionaries, who have been noticed in history over and over again, to have a very significant political role in the colonial hegemony.

As is typical for many totalitarian theocracies, Gilead's religious ideologies promise the ultimate meaning, and a perfect, undisputed future salvation. According to Gileadean teachings, obeying God is the same as obeying the government. This gives Gilead's leadership more authority, because they may argue that any discord is a violation of not only Gilead, but God's commandments as well, and hence a danger to the dissenter's mortal soul. Like religion, they offer immense confidence that the true believers are on the right side of history, doing God's holy work. An almost comic instance can be observed in the way Aunt Lydia is all but practically sainted and women leave offerings at her statue (Atwood, *Testaments* 3). Her statue is a token of appreciation by the Gileadean authority to recognise her contributions, but in reality, it is inevitably an effort to immortalise her as part of their hegemonic propaganda. Both dystopian governments in fiction and totalitarian governments in real life rely on the same form of mass hysteria that Sigmund Freud associates with religion as a means of achieving "protection against suffering by a deluded remoulding of reality" (Freud et al. 30). He attributes to religion the same monologic drive for uniformity that underpins dystopian governments. Despite the traditional Christian stress on free will, he remarks that religion purposefully denies its followers choice and imposes its own path to happiness and safety from misery. Religion saves many individuals from neurosis at this cost by forcing them into a condition of physiological infantilism and dragging them into a mass hallucination (Freud et al. 34).

Gilead also contains a religious feature that is strongly akin to the "Two Minutes Hate" and the "Solidarity Service" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* respectively; they are its "Prayvaganzas," "Salvagings," and "Particicutions." They are all put to good use as outlets for pent-up energy in ways that benefit the state. Participatory practises like the "Two Minutes Hate" are intended to channel the public's grievances and aggressions onto the regime's adversaries. This is a largely successful approach to manage the public because, when they are inclined to despise the government and harbour enmity and resentment against it, the regime provides the outlet for their displeasure and fury towards the political enemies of the state. This renders the state's adversary as the object of the people's rage, even if that adversary is the only one who can free them from the state's oppression. Offred's shopping partner and a resistance member, Ofglen (the first one) pushes ahead of the rest of the Handmaids and repeatedly kicks the victim in the skull during the Particicution. When Offred presses her for an explanation, Ofglen admits that the sufferer was not a rapist as they have been led to believe, but a political prisoner, another resistance member, whom she has knocked out to put him out of his misery (*Handmaid's Tale* 221-223). The Particicutions are far more effective than the "Two Minutes Hate", the neologism itself being a combination of the two terms "participation" and "execution." Nevertheless, there are parallels because they are both examples of the pent-up fury and rage directed at a single person who is also the enemy of the state. During the Two Minutes Hate, that person is Goldstein, who may or may not be a fictional creation by the Party for this specific reason. The regime provides the victim the final humiliation of being pulled apart by the very people he is attempting to aid at the Particicution, which is likely to be a warning and a deterrent (Nordström 12). This way, Gilead uses terror to subjugate its population.

Nevertheless, in *The Testaments*, it is clearly demonstrated that Gilead's comprehension of the Biblical God is erroneous, and that religious bigotry is widespread among Gilead's leadership. This implies that a repressive government based on religion abuses religious principles with no concern for how those principles were intended to be exercised. Anja Breuer pointed out that Soul Scrolls, Gilead's praying machines, represent a "hypocritical and superficial abuse of religion… in contrast to the way Offred uses prayers" in *The Handmaid's*

Tale (17).[4] Atwood's novels demonstrate that Gilead's leadership only uses a portion of the Bible and ignores the rest. In contradiction to the popular belief, while Atwood's writing appears to advocate "a total break with biblical tradition" at the first look, her literature actually favours Biblical traditions in some ways (Hinz 23). When Becka, a "Supplicant" preparing to be an Aunt, is finally allowed to study the Bible for herself, she realises that the "Gilead kind of God"—an overpowering patriarchal and authoritative God—does not match with the notion of God described in most of the Bible. Becka tells her companion Agnes that the Bible "does not say what they say it says," and that after reading it, one can either "believe in Gilead or... believe in God, but not both," contending that Gilead's repressive picture of God and the Bible's description of God are essentially very dissimilar (Atwood, *Testaments* 298). Becka's discovery is rather significant because she initially appears to be extremely susceptible to Gileadean propaganda.

The rampant religious intolerance of Gilead makes it extremely difficult for people with other religions, such as Islam and Judaism, even other sects of Christianity. Gilead is strongly opposed to Christian sects like Catholics, Quakers, and Mormons, placing them in the same camp as secular Canada. This shows that Atwood is attempting to warn us about the radicals and abusers of Christianity rather than the problems of Christianity as a whole. There are images of the army "smoking out a pocket of Baptist guerrillas," and "five members of the heretical Quaker sect" (*Handmaid's Tale* 92-93). Commander Judd devises the "Jewish boat-person plans" that simply dumps more than one boatload of Jews into the Atlantic in order to maximise profits (219-220). Elsewhere, the difficulties of practising Judaism are indicated: "You don't get hanged only for being a Jew though. You get hanged for being a noisy Jew who won't make the choice. Or for pretending to convert. That's been on the TV too: raids at night, secret hoards of Jewish things dragged out from under beds, torahs, talliths, Magen Davids" (159). Although religion is among the regime's two main instruments of control, in Gilead the whole society is based on a twisted version of Christianity, with the Bible's texts serving as precedents for the regime's draconian rules and regulations (Nordström 13). The religious conservative, political, right-wing in America in the 1980s pushed women to return to their

[4] Surprisingly, there is no mention of Soul Scrolls in *The Testaments*, although both the Witness Testimonies given by Agnes and Nicole, and Aunt Lydia's account portray a vivid image of the religious side of Gilead.

homes to “fulfill their putative biological destiny.” The ritualised intercourse in which the Handmaid lies between the wife’s legs symbolises this in the narrative (Neuman 5). Serena Joy exemplifies the existence of important women among the Christian Right. She was a significant figure in its “time before,” lecturing about how women should stay at home. Presently, in Gilead, she “stays in her home, but now it doesn’t seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she’s been taken at her word” (*Handmaid’s Tale* 39).

Margaret Atwood’s representation of Christianity has a mimetic quality to it, as it is concentrated on a conflict between two types of culture: one of the texts and one of the essences, one that is faithlessly deceitful and one that is without pretension. Mimetic representation has long been acknowledged as a distinguishing aspect of Atwood’s writing. Sherrill Grace’s psychologically oriented study of Atwood, *Violent Duality*, published in 1980 is often invoked in this context. “Violent duality,” according to Grace, refers to “the distorting barriers between self and other” that figure frequently in Atwood’s poetry and fiction, barriers that must be knocked down in order to “establish a new complete self” (Grace and Norris 15). Homi Bhabha and Rene Girard present two very distinct viewpoints on mimesis, both of which involve concerns of Christianity. The relationship between colonialism and imitation is at the centre of Bhabha’s model, whereas mimetic conflict and sacrifice are the focus of Girard’s perspective. Despite the fact that their theories are completely different, they both demonstrate compatibility with key features of Atwood’s writings (Derry 92). According to several critics, Atwood’s treatment of Christianity depicts it in a patriarchal, authoritarian, restricted, institutional, and oppressive light (Beyer 327-328). Others have pointed out how much of Atwood’s work supports a viewpoint that may be deemed implicitly or explicitly religious in other ways. This viewpoint frequently includes a form of personal “spirituality” that is anti-patriarchal, nature-centred, and humanistic, but not necessarily Christian (328).

Atwood represents a form of religious fanaticism portraying strict homogeneity in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. She depicts a society that ironically combines two extremist views: the Puritanical right, which views women’s proper place in the home as the property of men, as many extremist countries do, and the feminist left, which protests patriarchy’s exploitation of women and their bodies. Totalitarian governments aim to control every element of people’s lives and maintain constant influence over society (Kouhestani

129). As we read Offred's story, Atwood pushes us to engage in an interpretive rethinking of both American history and American literature by underlining the context of brutality in a colonial empire-building society (Dodson 70). Those who disagreed with their religious and racial doctrines were violently expelled, hanged, or enslaved and ultimately silenced by the reformers who built Gilead, just as the Puritans who built the country in the 17th century did. As a result, *The Handmaid's Tale* calls into question any previous interpretation of the Puritan story as a utopian mission dedicated to divine justice for all and reveals the domestic imperialism long denied by classic American Studies academics like Perry Miller (Kaplan and Pease 3-11). Professor Pieixoto of the Gileadean Symposium is a caricature of Miller, according to Karen Stein, because both "explain and valorize the texts they interpret ... overlook[ing] the inherently sexist element of Gileadean and Puritan civilizations" (61). As Annette Kolodny demonstrates, both European colonists and the forefathers of American Studies used the term "virgin land" to deny Indian displacement, frontier brutality, government plunder, land destruction, class harshness, racial cruelty, and sexism (4). In order to recreate and retell the Puritanic history in the novel and expose the truth about its dismal inheritance of prejudice and brutality, Atwood concentrates on stories from the American creative traditions that highlight enslavement (Dodson 70). Slotkin explains in his critical study of the American tradition that when we read Offred's story alongside stories of enslavement in American literature, it becomes clear that Atwood demonstrates the Puritanic way of thinking resurfacing in American thought on a regular basis. Exorcist inclinations have occurred frequently throughout the cultural history of the United States, where "the hunting down and slaying of rabid beasts embodying all qualities of evil" is enacted (154).

Notwithstanding Gilead's promises to be a morally pure haven, the bulk of its top officials are morally corrupt. Some of them murder and bribe others in order to gain authority, while other powerful figures sexually abuse and even murder children and young girls. Despite Agnes previously believing in Gilead's good cause, she recognizes that beneath its outer show of virtue and purity, Gilead has been rotting from within (Atwood, *Testaments* 302). This implies that it is not the stronghold of Biblical principles as it purports to be; she learns about the rampant and hideous atrocities at the highest echelons of government. The role of the Bible in Gilead as depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* raises questions regarding the Biblical code's meaning and ramifications in Atwood's vision. Is the book about a

literalising misinterpretation of the Bible, (McSweeney and Bloom 7), that is, a fundamentalist understanding of the bible that leads to severe ideological consequences? In light of this perspective, the narratives and testimonies in the novels are expressions of their writer's longing for freedom, meant to expose their subjugation. The goal of the ideologically conditioned misreading is to break the texts down into easily understandable chunks. As a result, the misunderstanding would consist of repressing the text's limitless potentials (Filipczak 172). Although parts of the Bible are used in Gilead, Atwood makes a point of not making Christianity the central focus of the novels' social critique, implying that while religious doctrines can be abused and turned into a vessel for totalitarianism, it is not the root cause of such corruption, but rather a potentially hazardous weapon.

2.4 Patriarchal Trauma

Ideologically speaking, Gilead is a totalitarian, theocratic, patriarchal regime, which means that one of its formative ideologies is absolute patriarchy informed by religion. Since patriarchy, especially the authoritarian kind that exists in Gilead, adopts a strictly binary code for masculinity and femininity, an individual is allowed a narrow spectrum of expression through the assigned gender roles. It is intolerant of fluid gender identities, and labels the act of having non-binary identities as "Gender-Treachery." Individuals who commit "Gender-Treachery" are either executed and hung on the Wall for public display, or they are sent to the Colonies. This is one of the many ways Gilead uses violence to impose gender identities, creating wound, grief, and loss.

A simple way of defining the patriarchal wound, or patriarchal trauma would be an intergenerational suffering caused by the imbalance of power between genders. This wound impacts psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being. Some of the symptoms may include hypervigilant personality, nightmares, flashbacks, irrational fear, guilt, shame, melancholy, fragmented sense of both self-identity and external reality, etc. Some of these symptoms are observed in the female characters of both the novels. In the Red Centre, Janine experiences some sort of delirium—she temporarily loses her grip on the overwhelming reality. Both Agnes and Becka develop an intense distaste for male sexual organ, which later turns into a full-fledged phobia. Both of them contemplates suicide when their families fix

their marriage. Becka, in fact, attempts to execute it. Having rescued her, Aunt Lise explains to Aunt Lydia why Becka attempted suicide, "Well. It's the penises. It's like a phobia" (Atwood, *Testaments* 211). Surprisingly, this is the reason why many young girls often commit suicide in Gilead. This suggests how horrifying their idea (and later, experience) of sexual relations is, partly because the Aunts paint a rather appalling picture of men, their body, and their desires, primarily in order to dissuade them from premarital sex.

Patriarchal trauma often finds an outlet in the form of nightmares and flashbacks. Agnes experiences vivid nightmares about marital rape, which demonstrates how deeply traumatised she is. Aunt Lydia, too, has repeated nightmares:

> Some women had nightmares, as you'd assume. They would groan and thrash about during them, or sit bolt upright with modified shouts. I'm not criticising: I had nightmares myself. Shall I describe one for you? No, I will not. I'm fully aware of how easily one can become fatigued by other people's nightmares, having heard a number of recitals of these by now. When push comes to shove, only one's own nightmares are of any interest or significance. (Atwood, *Testaments* 143)

In her nightmares, she sees her own public execution, and those she has passed sentences on rejoice. Her constant fear of getting caught and being subjected to public humiliation finds outlet in her dreams. Offred, on the other hand, experiences unsettling flashbacks from the life before Gilead. Ordinary, everyday things, like the sunlight, smell of baking or of soap, kneading the flour cause her memories to flood in, which makes her overwhelmed. Flashbacks, nightmares, etc. are, not to mention, considered to be some of the common symptoms of trauma.

Women who have been uprooted by the regime from their pre-Gileadean life experience a tremendous loss of identity. Their identities have been torn apart and reconstructed by the regime, leaving them with a fragmented sense of self and a suspended identity. Aunt Lydia, for example, recounts that she felt like "a jigsaw puzzle thrown onto the floor" (150) following the prolonged physical and psychological torture by the regime after her capture. This experience leads her to annul her own personality in order to avoid death: "I was one person: I risked becoming no person" (148). Offred, on the other hand, is no longer a wife or mother, but rather "a national resource" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 54). As a consequence, Offred's

body begins to feel like a machine whose goal is to serve the state rather than herself, highlighting the interactions between people and machines that are at the heart of dystopia but, more precisely, the detachment that often follows sexual abuse (Rainn 31). Observation of Offred's relationship with her body in *The Handmaid's Tale* clearly suggests that she goes through a fragmentation between her body and the self. In the pre-Gileadean period, she thought of her body as "an implement for the accomplishment of [her] will" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 61), whereas in Gileadean period, she defines herself as a cloud, smoke, even cotton candy, which are essentially the images of indefiniteness and invisibility (61, 70, 111). It suggests her body's inability to do something concrete to alleviate the pain she is in, and her inability to react to it, to appropriate it. Bodily functions like sleeping, eating, and having sex have all become mechanical jobs for Offred to complete. There is no joy or even a genuine connection to what her body does. Offred compares touching her own body with "running [her] hand over a plateful of dried rice [...] There's something dead about it, something deserted" (82). The picture is both violent and powerful, conveying the challenge of reconciling oneself to one's body in such abusive surroundings. Choosing rape over death does not make the act consensual, and Offred reacts to the Ceremony in the same way she would to a sexual assault: She detaches herself from her body and refuses to acknowledge that she is a part of it: "[T]he Commander is fucking [...] the lower part of my body," she informs us, "only one is involved" (*Handmaid's Tale* 76). Offred had already become a victim, no longer an actor in her own life, but something inert, without control over her destiny and, therefore, without a voice, in the early phases of her loss of freedom (Lapicque 27-28).

It is not entirely clear where the Handmaid's status lies in Gileadean society. Atwood's representation of Handmaids demonstrates that they are both pristine and filthy at the same time—both the "Madonna" and the "Whore." These women, whose positions in Gilead's society are unknown and shifting, are whatever their society identifies them to be (Gulick 46). When Offred describes the procedures to be followed when appointed to a new "post," for example, she says: "On first days we are permitted front doors, but after that, we are supposed to use the back. Things haven't settled down, it is too soon, everyone is unsure about our exact status. After a while, it will be either all front doors or back. Aunt Lydia said she was lobbying for the front. Yours is a position of honour, she said" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 17-18). But then again, Agnes' account demonstrates that it is a common conception

among people that the Handmaids are "untouchables" in a sense—formerly "sluts" but reformed in the Rachel and Leah Centre by the Aunts, but still they are assumed to be dark, mysterious entities (Atwood, *Testaments* 92-94), despite the Aunts' advice of not to be rude to the Handmaids or call them sluts "because they were performing a service to the community by way of atonement" (84). It is only natural that Offred's psyche is fraught with the contradictory sexual roles for women. Sometimes, she is strong, self-assured, in command of her sexuality, mirroring the "modem woman" over whom the Commander laments because the new reality of Gilead has left the men with nothing to do about courtship–no games around wooing and seduction. She feels timid, unsure, and ashamed because of her sexuality at other times. It is important to note that, as an affect, shame ensures an individual's absolute difference from the other (Sedgwick and Adam Frank 106). The important thing about the experience of shame is the singular, unique, subjective feelings of an individual, rather than their conscious or unconscious wishes or intentions toward some object. Thus, according to the analysis of Sedgwick, shame "transforms and produces identity, without any moralism and indeed without giving identity any specific content" the (Leys, "The Turn to Affect" 465). However, Offred is torn between these opposing responsibilities since she is at the whim of everyone else around her. Those in positions of authority have defined her identity, profession, and the whole history. Gilead's leaders appear to be quite prepared to make all decisions for its inhabitants since they have taken every measure to erase individual and autonomous thoughts from its citizens. When the Commander leads Offerd to Jezebel's where she sees other commanders and foreign diplomats, for example, Offred discovers that she is as sacred as she is a "whore":

> It occurs to me he is showing off. He is showing me off, to them, and they understand that they are decorous enough, they keep their hands to themselves, but they review my breasts, my legs as if there's no reason why they shouldn't. But he is also showing off to me. He is demonstrating, to me, his mastery of the world ... it is a juvenile display, the whole act, and pathetic; but it is something I understand (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 189).

She is the Commander's prized property, off-limits to all others (hence, sacred), and she is a "whore" for exhibiting her sexuality for all to see. The totalitarian regime makes profit from this kind of fragmentation of identity, because it allows them to control, manipulate, and

hegemonize the individuals. Once the identity is split and fragmented, it becomes easier to treat the body as a mere cog in the larger machine of the regime.

The female population of Gilead has been brainwashed into believing that their homes, Red Centre, and Ardual Hall are their own domains (and that the Commanders and the government would safeguard them) where they may safely carry out their primary civil responsibility of reproduction, or help others do it. To forward their manipulation, the Gileadean regime adopts the notion that "anatomy is destiny." They use propaganda to make women believe that childbearing is the ultimate meaning and fulfilment of life. Aunt Estée teaches young girls, "Every woman wanted a baby … Every woman who wasn't an Aunt or a Martha." Aunt Vidala adds, "Because if you weren't an Aunt or a Martha, said what earthly use were you if you didn't have a baby?" (Atwood, *Testaments* 84). Making childbearing the destiny of womanhood, the regime exerts control over the female body.[5] This process starts quite early in life, in fact. As soon as they start menstruating, they are considered "a woman"—eligible for marriage. Agnes describes her own painful experience:

> ". . . But the goal in every instance was the same: girls of all kinds—those from good families as well as the less favored—were to be married early, before any chance encounter with an unsuitable man might occur that would lead to what used to be called falling in love or, worse, to loss of virginity. This latter disgrace was to be avoided at all costs, as the consequences could be severe. Death by stoning was not a fate anyone wanted for their children, and the stain of it on a family could be next to indelible" (*Testaments* 154).

When they come of age, i. e. they start menstruating, they move to Rubies Premarital Preparatory—a school for young women of good family who study to be married. Gilead takes away women's choices, transforming them into pretty bonsais, good for decoration but they

[5] When Ofglen and Offred visit the Wall, we learn about the regime's view on abortion: "Each [man] has a placard hung around his neck to show why he has been executed: a drawing of a human foetus." They were doctors before then when such things were allowed" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 32). The Aunts lecture the Handmaids about the atrocities of technology that have once been employed in childbirth (supported by Aunt Elizabeth), in addition to proclaiming that advanced birth control methods are an offence to God: "A cooperative patient. Once they drugged women, induced labor, cut them open, sewed them up. No more. No anesthetics, even. Aunt Elizabeth said it was better for the baby, but also: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow, thou shalt bring forth children" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 91).

never reach their full potential. Moreover, Atwood demystifies the stigma attached to women who choose not to reproduce by explaining their position at "Jezebel's." The Biblical name "Jezebel" alludes to a character of the same name who is involved with prostitution (Lapicque 24). Atwood emphasises the concept that these women are not serving the aims of procreation because they reject to become Handmaids and instead engage in sex with any intention other than procreation. They are brutally judged by Gilead for their decisions, as evidenced by the remark above. It demonstrates that a woman's decision regarding fertility (if there is any at all) influences whether or not she is deemed a "legitimate" woman. The Jezebel's women are "Unwomen," because they refuse to follow women's "natural" duty to reproduce.

The indoctrination of women starts quite early in Gilead. Only the privileged few get to go to school, such as the Commanders' daughters. The Vidala School is one such high profile school which teaches religion, embroidery, several stitching, basic painting, and some religious rhymes that must be memorised since reading and writing is forbidden. This non-access to true learning breeds superstition. For example, the death of a Handmaid is believed among the girls to be a sign of bad fate (Atwood, *Testaments* 109). At the Vidala School, practically there are two religions: the official one taught by the Aunts about God and the special sphere of women, and the unofficial one which is passed from girl to girl by means of games and songs. The rhymes are designed to indoctrinate young girls with Gileadean patriarchal ideology. Let us consider a poem by Aunt Vidala:

> Just look at Tirzah! She sits there,
> With her strands of vagrant hair;
> See her down the sidewalk stride,
> Head held high and full of pride.
> See her catch the Guardian's glance,
> Tempt him to sinful circumstance.
> Never does she change her way,
> Never does she kneel to pray!
> Soon she into sin will fall,
> And then be hanging on the Wall (Atwood, *Testaments* 288).

This poem is meant to warn girls about the consequences of the lack of modesty and sinfulness. It covertly suggests that, just by showing their strands of hair, walking on the sidewalk with head held high and making direct eye contact, women can be seductresses, leading the supposedly helpless and blameless Guardians to sinful circumstances. This poem embodies Gileadean misogyny and passes it on to young learners. The songs girls at Vidala school chant are rather disturbing, which indicates that they pick up on the Gileadean atmosphere of violence and misogyny. To cite one example: "One for murder, Two for kissing, Three for a baby, Four gone missing, Five for alive and Six for dead, And Seven we caught you, Red Red Red!" (109-110). The ominous song suggests that something is not quite right in these girls and the environment they grow up in. The songs are symptoms of a society that is breeding invisible violence which is internalised in the children.

The Gileadean regime carefully controls the environment and programmatically manipulates women to break down their resistance. Aunt Lydia's account gives a horrific picture of how brutal and meticulously planned is the method of torture in Gilead. Upon her arrest, she, as well as other captive women have been barred from access to the bathroom, forcing them to urinate in full view of others (119). This has been designed to generate guilt and shame among them. Besides, they shoot a group of women keeping another group as witness, as a warning or threat in order to instil fear, but perhaps also to induce guilt among the survivors. To push this guilt further, they make Aunt Lydia shoot her only friend in the camp. According to Ruth Leys, "By common agreement, guilt concerns your actions, that is, what you do—or what you wish or fantasize you have done, since according to Freud the unconscious does not distinguish between the intention and the deed, the virtual and the actual (*From Guilt to Shame* 11)." On other hand, "Shame … is held to concern not your actions but who you are, that is, your deficiencies and inadequacies as a person as these are revealed to the shaming gaze of the other, a shift of focus from actions to the self that makes the question of personal identity of paramount importance" (*From Guilt to Shame* 11). She also observes that survivor guilt is "inseparable from the notion of the subject's unconscious identification with the other" (*From Guilt to Shame* 10). Mark Danner discusses the method of torture in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq that can be traced back to techniques developed by the CIA in the 1960s (71). These methods involve generating and intensifying shame and guilt; it is claimed to increase the chances of the prisoner being open to suggestion and likely to comply. However, in Red

Center, Aunts gather women in a circle and discuss their faults. Then they make everyone judge the accused by pointing at her "Her fault! Her Fault!" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 59). This cruelty is the reiteration of the Aunts' shaming at Thank Tank camp (although the technique is different). The accused Handmaid in this scenario is made to feel shame and guilt being exposed to the diminishing and disapproving gaze of others.

In order to dissuade women from forming their own opinions, newspapers, movies, and media are all outlawed for almost all women as well. Gilead does not want women to be aware of world affairs or the current affairs of its own government since it is deemed dangerous. They are not permitted to read as it might encourage them to achieve self-actualisation and engage in any pleasure or subversive activities that do not benefit the new society. Female journalism, in particular, is problematic since, in general, these publications deal with independent women who can dress and live as they like. This type of journalism, it is clear, does not adhere to the government's norms, which require women to be submissive (Violeta 11). The new generation of Gileadean women grow up illiterate—ignorant about some of the basic ideas and life skills. Agnes is shown to have no knowledge about how big her country might be because they are never taught to read maps (Atwood, *Testaments* 285). Prohibition to reading, combined with their non-access to news and media make the worldview of Gileadean women narrow, hazy, and distorted.

Moreover, young girls growing up in Gilead have an unhealthy body image and almost no sexual education—making them terrified of their own body and the body of the opposite sex. Agnes is terrified when she reaches puberty:

> "More alarmingly, my breasts were swelling, and I had begun to sprout hair on areas of my body that we were not supposed to dwell on: legs, armpits, and the shameful part of many elusive names. Once that happened to a girl, she was no longer a precious flower but a much more dangerous creature … Soon I could expect blood to come out from between my legs: that had already happened to many of the girls at school … we knew about from Scripture verses that had been read out to us: blood, purification, more blood, more purification, blood shed to purify the impure, though you weren't supposed to get it on your hands. Blood was polluting, especially when it came out of girls" (Atwood, *Testaments* 85-86).

The quote shows Agnes' fear and anxiety around her body. This fear, coupled with the prospect of marriage, turns into a full-fledged phobia that gives her nightmares and depression. Menstruation is viewed as a physical defect in the reproduction process, rather than a bodily mechanism. Offred says, "Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure. I have failed once again to fulfil the expectation of others, which have become my own. I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will" (*Handmaid's Tale* 61). This objectification of the women's body makes it possible for women to be used as a tool in the dystopian government's hands for exercising dominance.

It is rather noticeable how all the narrators in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* speak the language of their respective pasts. Confined to a rigid Gileadean rule, Offred and Aunt Lydia speak in the language of the past, which they are familiar with, yet the language of the past is diametrically opposed to the authority's new language. Offred expresses regret to the reader for being "a fugitive from the past," "wander[ing] back," and simply "a blank, here, between parenthesis" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 182). Her plight as a Handmaid at the Commander's mansion stays quite grim, despite the name "June" suggesting some optimism. The notion that she can no longer declare possession of herself complicates her relationship with herself. Offred is no longer whatever she was before the regime, which may explain why we hear so little about her in the present-tense in Gilead chronology. This suggests that the dominant regime may be able to overlook the past, but human memories are difficult to erase. While acts and actions may be controlled, minds and thoughts are more difficult to control because individuals are not totally in agreement with the new regime's ideologies (Kouhestani 131). The official language aims to replace the former language, which is rejected and suppressed, with scriptural speech. As a dictatorship, Gilead tries to build social norms by abusing Biblical and theological beliefs as its main philosophy. Offred's cassette recordings and Aunt Lydia's diary function as explicit deconstructive scripts of social conventions that use language to criticise the status quo. Their commentary and description of the new regime provide a critical view of Gilead's official narrative. On the other hand, Nicole has a hard time adjusting to the language of Gilead, as does Agnes when she escapes to Canada. Once she has gained her freedom, she must learn how to be free. However, the effort on the part of the

regime to take control over everyday speech leaves its population with a kind of impairment in their thoughts and expression.

Atwood frequently emphasises Offred's lack of courage throughout *The Handmaid's Tale*, most notably when she refers to herself as a "coward" who "hate[s] the thought of pain" (81). Those worries, however, are just as relatable as Winston's terror of torture. Rather than separating the reader from the protagonist, the author is able to bring them together through the most basic of human instincts. Though the "ordinary" characters may frequently join a body of organised opposition for the sake of the plot, their limitations will be underlined in most circumstances. Similar to *Nineteen Eighty Four*, Atwood's work emphasises the reality that torture invariably extracts the truth (and any number of handy lies) from anyone (219-220). The goal of dystopian fiction is to show the struggle of the human condition when it is grinded by a totalitarian society, not to depict exceptional fortitude. Offred's condition may easily suggest tragedy, given her loss of independence and, perhaps more poignantly, the loss of her daughter, which is one of the most traumatic events of the novel. Tragic events, like victimisation, contribute to the dystopian effect by placing individuals in inconceivable situations that the reader (hopefully) feels they must not allow to occur. The same desire for societal reform exists in a dystopia as it does in utopia, and part of what the author must reveal is the human agony that is unavoidable under authoritarian leadership. This is accomplished by portraying the protagonist as tragedy-stricken, victimised, and, perhaps most importantly, dehumanised (Lapicque 12).

The regime employs the frequently used strategy "divide and conquer" to get select women to cooperate perpetuating their agenda. A small portion of the group of individuals targeted for control is granted a restricted amount of power, causing an imbalance of agency among women. Aunt Lydia acts for the government, serving in a role of "mother" to all of the Handmaids as they are being groomed. She is their overseer and warden during their re-education at the "Red Center," where they are taught the new regime's order and their duty as Handmaids. She has contributed to the formation of an artificial and forced connection between women. Putting Aunt Lydia in a position of authority over the Handmaids, the

regime attempts to create a guise of solidarity[6], which is intended to successfully suppress any resistance from the Handmaids. Offred recalls her preaching solidarity among women in a sarcastic way:

> "There can be real bonds of affection," she said, blinking at us ingratiatingly, under such conditions. "Women united for a common end! Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task. Why expect one woman to carry out all the functions necessary to the serene running of a household? It isn't reasonable or humane. Your daughters will have greater freedom. We are working towards the goal of a little garden for each one, each one of you"—the clasped hands again, the breathy voice—and that's just one for instance. The raised finger, wagging at us. "But we can't be greedy pigs and demand too much before it is ready, now can we?" (*Handmaid's Tale* 128-129)

Aunt Lydia's accounts prove that those who have been given this authority strive to keep it not only because of the benefits it brings them, but also because they are afraid of the consequences of any deviation from the norm; meanwhile, those who are truly in authority, in this scenario the governing males of Gilead, have established a safety buffer between themselves and the oppressed women. The administrators are men (or a minority of men); some women have some, yet no genuine, power, and the majority of women are regulated and have no agency. Rhonda Hammer describes this type of strategy in her book *Antifeminism and Family Terrorism*, where she focuses on the anti-feminist movement and the women that support it:

> The most effective way to both paralyze and prevent widespread support for the feminist movement was not so much to disseminate those voices who represent the hardcore conservative and patriarchal opponents to feminism. Rather, publicizing and exploiting critiques by women was a more effective antifeminist tactic, employing

[6] During "Testifying" meetings at the Red Center, the women are forced to turn against or humiliate each other in systematised sessions. Any interaction and show of affection are intentionally prohibited (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 59).

> members of the very disenfranchised groups the feminist platform resolved to empower" (13).

Hammer's analysis can be used to understand how the Gilead administration employs women to oppress women. Using women to symbolise anti-feminist ideas is very effective, because it is difficult to recognise that women can hurt their own chances of having rights (Pettersson 14). When authority is in the hands of the anti-feminists, there are major ramifications for the women Hammer refers to as "collaborators." Serena Joy is a tragic symbol of women's loss of power. She has been an advocate for the ideals that would ultimately become law in Gilead before the coup. Offred recalls seeing her on television: "Time or Newsweek it was, it must have been. She wasn't singing anymore by then, she was making speeches. She was good at it. Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay home" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 38). The contradiction is that Serena Joy has been suggesting that women should not be managing the political sector, but she has been doing just that. She, however, does not seem satisfied with what Gilead has become, and appears bitter. This is something Offred notices: "She doesn't make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word" (38). Serena Joy's ability to articulate herself has been fascinating but she utilises it to undercut her own interests.

The idea of women's "solidarity" is crucial to Gilead's triumph, because the new system would only be sustained if its women are subjugated. This is achieved partially in *The Testaments*; Agnes, Becka, and Jade share sisterhood and solidarity which suggests that the brutal and dehumanising control of the regime over women finally has been receding. We can compare the two generations of women in Gilead for clarity. Offred is relieved when Ofglen hangs herself rather than be captured by the Eyes (Gilead's secret police) because Oflgen would then be unable to divulge any information that can potentially risk Offred's life: "She did it before they came. I am so relieved. I feel thankful to her. She has died so that I may live. I will mourn later" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 227). Agnes, on the other hand, asks questions, and looks for their answers: "I wondered about the words I was writing. Was Charity really greater than Faith, and did I have either? Was Love as strong as Death? Whose voice was the voice that the bird was going to carry? Being able to read and write did not provide the answers to all questions. It led to other questions, and then to others" (Atwood, *Testaments* 293).

Whereas Offred shows no sorrow, just feels relief that she is secure for the time being, Becka sacrifices herself so that her friends may live.

2.5 Technological Backlash: A Return to Traditional Values

Unlike the ordinarily established norm of speculative fiction, the future society in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* appear to be attempting to reach perfection by making extremely limited use of technological capabilities. Gilead actually attempts to move backward in time. In reality, this technological backlash is in part a response to the harm technology and industry have done to the former United States, to the point where three out of four women are barren. Offred recalls, "The air got too full, once, of chemicals, rays, radiation, the water swarmed with toxic molecules, all of that takes years to clean up, and meanwhile they creep into your body, camp out in your fatty cells" (*Handmaid's Tale* 89). Seeing the harm that technology, pollution, and improved birth control techniques (including contraceptive methods and abortive measures) have brought, this society yearns for a "golden age" when Christian philosophy rules the land, a time when faith overtakes the machine. There has never been a "golden age" for everyone, as Margaret Atwood points out in *A Moveable Feast*. Divisiveness exists in all communities. There are people in Gilead who do not accept the church-state or agree with its policies. The only code of conduct in Gilead has been established using the Judeo-Christian Bible. For the residents of Gilead, seclusion has become captivity, harmony has been achieved only by physical danger (Pettersson 26).

Notwithstanding their anti-technology position, the Gileadean elites are able to regulate the society and the Handmaids through the use of technology, which is rather ironic (Dalke and Blankenship 13). Offred narrates how the transformation happens, driven by a burst of adrenaline:

> "…everything went on the Compubank… If there had- still been portable money, it would have been more difficult… It was after the catastrophe when they shot the president and machine-gunned the Congress and the army declared a state of emergency. They blamed it on the Islamic fanatics, at the time… that was when they suspended the Constitution. They said it would be temporary… Newspapers were censored and some were closed down, for security reasons they said. The roadblocks

> began to appear, and Identipasses. Everyone approved of that since it was obvious you couldn't be too careful. They said that new elections would be held, but that it would take some time to prepare for them" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 138).

Even though the Republic of Gilead has an anti-technological stance, they use the assistance of technology (the Compubank, machine guns, roadblocks, and Identipasses) to govern the residents of Gilead, but this is one of the numerous paradoxes in the duology. We can still observe the regime employing technology to govern its population after it is founded. There are nighttime searchlights, permanent tattoos to mark a significant national resource, and media control: "Serena clicks the channel changer. Waves, colored zig zags, a garble of sound: it's the Montreal satellite station, being blocked … They only show us victories, never defeats. Who wants bad news? … several blank channels, then the news … Such as it is: who knows if any of it is true? It could be old clips, it could be faked" (*Handmaid's Tale* 67).

The Republic of Gilead strikes us as a regressive turn back through time, to a type of governance and lifestyle centred to some extent on Biblical patriarchy, to a certain degree on Islamic militantism, and also on Hindu caste system. With the exception of a few automobiles and computers, technology as we know it—as the tools, mechanisms, machinery, and knowledge which either make our lives simpler or try to destroy them—seems to have been banished from this society. Perhaps the most disturbing part of this technological exile is Gileadean society's outrageously inefficient denial of any surgical tools for avoiding and treating sterility even to ensure hazard-free childbirth, which appears to be the society's primary concern (Hammer 45). It is inconceivable that if infertility were truly such a severe issue, this deeply hypocritical culture does not legitimise fertility technology or at least give it a chance.

As is characteristic of Atwood's satirical narrative, Hammer would argue that the seeming absence of technology in Gilead is not what it purports to be (45). Rather, a very distinctive form of technology is at work here because this is both opaque and all-pervasive–that is, very essentially, the technology that Michel Foucault dubbed as "discipline":

> It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualize power. Power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certainly connected distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce

> the relation in which individuals are caught up... Consequently, it does not matter who exercises power ... Similarly, it does not matter what motive animates him. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribed in himself the power relation; in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault 202).

One such vision of Gilead reveals why, despite its bizarreness, its social structure looks strangely familiar (Stimpson), and it is in this resemblance that Atwood's satirical narrative finds its political drive. The social transformation from the democratic USA to totalitarian Gilead is odd because this formalised society of the future is a monstrous mirror reflection of our own time—a society that wants to control our behaviour and attitude so proficiently and stealthily that we fail to acknowledge the degree to which we are exploited (Foucault 217).

Gilead demonstrates the risk and danger of uncritical and wholesale rejection of Enlightenment. In throwing out the evils of technology, they throw away the gifts too. It is, therefore, a prejudiced rejection. They do not even seek the help of technology in childbirth, which is of supreme importance in Gilead. They do not utilise medical technology to facilitate childbirth initially because they have been reluctant to use any form of technology. Later, however, they do use it when the situation turns dire (*Testaments* 105-108). While Agnes' family, doctors, and nurses laud Ofkyle for making the "ultimate sacrifice" and dying with "noble womanly glory," Agnes is troubled because it was not a self-sacrificial death on Ofkyle's part, and it "wasn't something she chose" (*Testaments* 108). Without seeking Ofkyle's permission or offering her a choice, Gilead has imposed it on her. This clearly indicates that Gilead refuses to use technology to save its citizens. Agnes' repulsion and despair suggest that the greatest injustice done to her as a woman is not Ofkyle's death itself, but her absolute incapacity to choose whether to live or to sacrifice herself. This suggests that when it comes to using technology to reduce human sufferings and labour, Gilead obstinately, and sometimes irrationally, opposes.

Chapter 3: Techniques of Narrative Empathy in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*

3.1 Character Identification

> For there is nothing heavier than compassion. Not even one's own pain weighs so heavy as the pain one feels with someone, for someone, a pain intensified by the imagination and prolonged by a hundred echoes (17-18).
>
> Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

The Handmaid's Tale and *The Testaments* deal with the scope of empathy in a society where its members face severe climate crises, constraints of resources, and an oppressive regime that stifles individual freedom. As it is generally observed in speculative novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* represent how an oppressive system alienates and dehumanises characters. This offers the readers an opportunity to understand the characters, vicariously feeling how they feel, what they think, and why they do what they do. In other words, readers often experience character identification—an affective engagement and self-projection of readers onto characters. It should be noted that this may either lead to empathy or personal distress—"aversive emotional response also characterised by apprehension of another's emotion" (Keen, "Theory of Narrative Empathy" 208). Suzanne Keen clarifies, "character identification is not a narrative technique (it occurs in the reader, not in the text), but a consequence of reading that may be precipitated by the use of particular techniques of characterization" (216). She observes that although "these qualities have not yet been investigated in a comprehensive fashion," "[a] few techniques of characterization have actually been tested for their relation to readers' emotional responsiveness or empathy" (216-217). Elsewhere she adds:

> No specific set of narrative techniques has yet been verified to over-ride the resistance to empathizing often displayed by members of an in-group regarding the emotional states of others marked out as different by their age, race, gender, weight, disabilities, and so forth …
>
> … Character identification often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways, but

> empathy for fictional characters appears to require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization (*Empathy and the Novel* x-xii).

Some of these criteria include the plot-laden action-stories compared and contrasted with narratives focusing on characters' inner lives. *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* both centre on the inner lives of the characters. Although *The Testaments* contains a significantly faster moving plot than its prequel, especially the Witness Testimonies 369A and 369B narrated by Agnes and Daisy/Jade/Nicole respectively, both the novels are laden with the representation of the characters' intimate psychological selves. Offerd's narration, for example, is a fanfare of sensory perceptions and intense emotions, much to the frustration of Professor Pieixoto—who would rather have historical facts and evidence instead. Her account offers a bleak, chilling atmosphere of the Republic of Gilead. For example, she calls for the readers' attention immediately by the vivid portrayal of the Red Center in a horrific flashback. The shocking nature of that palimpsestic place is revealed through the description of the former gymnasium where there have been games cheered by buoyant cheerleaders, music, dances, and sex, placed side by side with the present-day arrangement of army cots in rows, patrolled by the Aunts with their electric cattle prods (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 5-6). Her raw emotions mixed with the detail-oriented nature of her narration offers an intensely immersive reading experience. Readers can feel her discomfort and anxiety when she appears in the house of Commander Fred, and her disappointment when she realises that the Wife, Serena Joy is, in fact, a former activist who actively fought for Gilead; therefore, there is no possibility of any friendship with her. In another instance, she narrates a "Salvaging" which is a ritualistic public execution. The incident is portrayed in such a great detail that she essentially becomes the eyes and the ears of the readers. Minute details, such as the rope that smells like tar, lying in snake-like formation in front of the kneeling Handmaids, the egg-yolk coloured dandelion, the signs of ageing on Aunt Lydia's face—the deepening furrow on either side of her nose, the engraved frown on her forehead, her gestures of nervousness and discomfort. Amidst this tensed atmosphere, basic, raw human elements find outlet, such as hunger, involuntary laughter at Aunt Lydia's difficulty, the sound of someone retching (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 217-219). The actual act of execution is narrated in similarly detailed-oriented manner:

> I've seen it before, the white bag placed over the head, the woman helped up onto the high stool as if she's being helped up the steps of a bus, steadied there, the noose adjusted delicately around the neck, like a vestment, the stool kicked away. I've heard the long sigh go up, from around me, the sigh like air coming out of an air mattress, I've seen Aunt Lydia place her hand over the mike, to stifle the other sounds coming from behind her, I've leaned forward to touch the rope in front of me, in time with the others, both hands on it, the rope hairy, sticky with tar in the hot sun, then placed my hand on my heart to show my unity with the Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death of this woman. I have seen the kicking feet and the two in black who now seize hold of them and drag downward with all their weight. I don't want to see it anymore. I look at the grass instead. I describe the rope. (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 220)

Such vivid narration of violent incident—almost like a pornography of violence—is neither uncommon nor ineffective in this novel. The comparison of the neatly organised feet of three women hung from beneath the hem of their dresses—two pairs of red shoes on either side and one pair of blue in the middle—to a snapshot of a ballet dance is almost sickening. Cognitive processing of these images unlocks the possibility of triggering perceptual simulations of both sensations and movements in readers. Readers can potentially "see" the entire charade, and "feel" the horror and the resultant impatience to leave this entire episode behind as quickly as possible, as Offred herself does. They can vicariously "smell" the rope, "feel" the tactile sensation of the red velvet cushion beneath the knees of the kneeling Handmaids, even possibly feel spit secreting in their mouths in aversion. In fact, throughout the novel, Atwood's narration is intimately focused on bodily movements and sensations, which calls for simulation of these movements and sensations on the readers' part. Essentially, the fullest immersive reading experience heavily depends on the readers' vicariously taking in the embodied simulation offered by the novel.

Atwood's duology contains a plethora of details, many of which are sensory. Smell plays an important role in the duology, and at times it allows the characters to escape their reality. For example, when Offred fantasises about how Nick would smell "tanned skin, moist in the sun, filled with smoke" (*Handmaid's Tale* 16) but far more frequently uncomfortable "the smell is of our own flesh [...] sweat and a tinge of iron, from the blood on the sheet" (98), or more

visibly when Moira describes her attempt to escape Gilead: “in a truck full of chickens […] I almost puked from the smell” (199). The reliance on stench pertains to the affective formation of an oppressive environment, a contrast with the degree of freedom that Offred derives through her sensory experiences, something she possesses, and which cannot be snatched away. Atwood uses the sense of smell to create claustrophobia and discomfort. Readers can appreciate the vicarious experience of the senses affectively.

Both *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments* use first person narrative, which, according to many critics, is capable of generating affective possibilities in fiction. In general, first person narratives offer an intimate, personalised perspective that may enable the readers to step into the shoes of the characters. Atwood’s masterful use of this technique creates a tremendous urgency that dramatically enhances the experiential dimension of the narrative. Keen unequivocally asserts the affective impact of the first person narrative:

> Narrative theorists, novel critics, and reading specialists have already singled out a small set of narrative techniques—such as the use of first person narration and the interior representation of characters’ consciousness and emotional states—as devices supporting character identification, contributing to empathetic experiences, opening readers’ minds to others, changing attitudes, and even predisposing readers to altruism (“Narrative Empathy” 213).

First person narrative technique in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments* activates an extensive and sustained array of perceptual simulations in its readers. Aunt Lydia’s narration offers another layer to her identity beneath her cold, stoic, authoritative countenance on the surface:

> I have chosen my title advisedly, for what else am I doing here but defending my life? The life I have led. The life—I’ve told myself—I had no choice but to lead. Once, before the advent of the present regime, I gave no thought to a defence of my life. I didn’t think it was necessary. I was a family court judge, a position I’d gained through decades of hardscrabble work and arduous professional climbing, and I had been performing that function as equitably as I could. I’d acted for the betterment of the world as I saw that betterment, within the practical limits of my profession. I’d contributed to charities, I’d voted in elections both federal and municipal, I’d held

> worthy opinions. I'd assumed I was living virtuously; I'd assumed my virtue would be moderately applauded (Atwood, *Testaments* 40).

This way of introducing herself in her own language presents her as an ordinary human being with moderate ambitions in career and reasonable expectation from life. It suggests that in ordinary situations she perhaps could have been a successful, responsible professional and citizen. In effect, it shrinks her back to "the size of an ordinary woman" from the exalted status in Gilead where she is "swollen with power, true, but also nebulous with it— formless, shape-shifting" (36). This shrinking back to her normal size is something she is anxious about and makes constant effort at throughout her narration. She is aware that she is a "bugaboo used by the Marthas to frighten small children," and manages to cast an "unsettling shadow" in the minds of the Commanders at the same time (36). The tone of her narration suggests the unsettling alienation she must feel at her changed status of a legend in Gilead. Keen suggests that such detailed introduction of characters is significant in providing experientiality. To quote from her, "The descriptive language through which readers encounter characters is assumed to make a difference (content matters!) ... [D]irect description of a character's emotional state or circumstances by a third-person narrator may produce empathy in readers just as effectively as indirect implication of emotional states through actions and context" ("Narrative Empathy" 217-218). Quoting from David S. Miall, she points out that what accounts for the character identification the most is the characters' motives, rather than their traits. However, she also comments, "[I]t remains unclear when, and at which cues, readers' emotional self-involvement jump-starts the process of interpretation" (218).

Aunt Lydia, like John Henry Newman himself, presents her very own "apologia pro vita sua" (Latin: A defence of one's own life) through her account. She narrates in great detail how her life has been in the pre-Gilead period, how she was arrested and suffered torture and threat, how she joined the infamous "Thank Tank" as an alternative to being shipped to the Colonies, how she escapes many purges and manages to have a rather long political career, and how she operates within Gilead with her own agenda of a "double agent." While doing so, the complex, multi-layered, dynamic nature of her character is revealed. E. M. Forster asserts that the psychological depth expressed by the roundness of characters is "capable of surprising in a convincing way" (Forster 78). This may lead to empathetic responses towards stereotyped villains and antagonists. Aunt Lydia repeatedly pleads her imagined reader to consider her

situation with kindness and understanding: “How can I have behaved so badly, so cruelly, so stupidly? you will ask. You yourself would never have done such things! But you yourself will never have had to” (Atwood, *Testaments* 390). In fact, she goes to the length of keeping a secret diary explaining her position, knowing full well it would mean her doom, should the diary be discovered. For a discreet person like her, this act of risk-taking is unusual and definitely suggests an ulterior motive (which also indicates the desperation of her “apologia”). Whether her “apologia” and her actions—particularly those towards the end—redeem her character or not is a different question, but her side of the story sheds a different light on her character, which may cause a change of perception on readers’ part, if not actual empathy. According to Wayne Booth, “If an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, then the psychic vividness of prolonged inside views will help him” (377–8).

Atwood’s technique of creating ordinary and familiar characters is crucial for constructing a spontaneously shared affect between self and the fictional other. All the characters in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Testaments* are ordinary: no heroes, no villains. They have small aspirations, and their own private sorrows. They are capable of love and kindness, yet are not beyond certain pettiness, selfishness, even cruelty. For a Commander’s daughter who is “doubly chosen,” Agnes Gemima is an ordinary girl who craves company and affection from adults who show kindness: from Tabitha, Zilla, and Aunt Estée. She struggles with petit point crotchet at school (as any young girl might struggle with homework). The power struggle, meanness, and competition she experiences among her schoolmates is not uncommon among little girls of that age. In fact, much of the “drama” at her school has resonance with Atwood’s other novel, *Cat’s Eye* (1988). A well-behaved sweet girl (Agnes), a toxic bully (Shunammite), a sensitive, gentle girl who is often pushed around (Becka), a tough teacher—strict to the point of causing trauma (Aunt Vidala), a gentle and kind teacher (Aunt Estée) are not perhaps uncommon characters in a school setting anywhere. Similarly, a loving, well meaning, yet involuntarily hurtful, mother, a distant father, a kindly governess in a home situation is not entirely out of the ordinary. Agnes herself asserts, “I imagine you expect nothing but horrors, but the reality is that many children were loved and cherished, in Gilead as elsewhere, and many adults were kind though fallible, in Gilead as elsewhere” (Atwood, *Testaments* 14). This shows the apparent ordinariness of her situation and her character, even

amidst the nightmarish society like Gilead. Likewise, Atwood takes care to portray the legendary Baby Nicole as an everyday teenager with whom real teenagers perhaps would not have much difficulty identifying with. Debunking the Gilead myth of a cherub-like image, Atwood portrays her as a well-meaning teen with a rebellious streak and an overenthusiastic value judgement that often proves erroneous, who has just started realising that her parents are not the smartest people. Quite heroically, she voluntarily goes to Gilead with a mission to bring back the stash of information from "the source," yet gives herself away as she blurts out on one occasion that God is "an imaginary friend" (*Testaments* 318). Her continuous struggle with swearing and the use of irreverent language create a hilarious comic relief in the tense situations, also setting her free from any delusion of the heroic, legendary, cherub-like aura. From their observation regarding empathy generation, David Hume and Adam Smith anticipated that human beings (like other primates) have a tendency of experiencing empathy and fellow-feeling towards apparently familiar people, most readily and accurately (4). Keen observes, "We may find ourselves regarding the feelings of those who seem outside the tribe with a range of emotions, but without empathy" ("Narrative Empathy" 214).

Atwood's characterization does not accommodate extremely heroic characters, precisely because the legitimacy of her characters' everydayness is required to adequately convey the repressive regime's atrocities in contrast. A dystopian protagonist rarely shows great courage in the face of injustice for the same reason. The reader must be led to believe that the protagonist might be anyone, which explains the recurring figure of the "everyman" as a typical protagonist of dystopian books, a major character who is not a hero and who, like the reader (supposedly), possesses no special set of abilities. In truth, the term "everyman" comes from a mediaeval English morality plays in which the protagonist is a synecdoche for humanity and whose fate is "dramatized from the Christian standpoint" (Collins Dictionary). The employment of this figure in dystopian fiction is not by chance, as the struggle of the dystopian hero frequently mirrors the plight of mankind as a whole, which has not yet fallen into Christian damnation but is nonetheless imprisoned in a most hellish civilization. Erika Gottlieb describes Winston, the protagonist of Nineteen Eighty-Four, as a "modern Everyman [who] struggles [...] against the dehumanising forces of totalitarian dictatorship" in her book *Dystopian Fiction: East and West* (Gottlieb 4). As previously said, dystopia is a warning intended to leave a lasting effect on the readers. The more they identify with the protagonist,

the more intensely they will feel the harshness of the dystopia. As a result, even if they are perpetrators of injustice, a dystopian hero is always first and foremost a victim of the system (Lapicque 11-12).

Writers are often blamed for portraying "negative" characters with empathy and/or playing the Devil's advocate; this, however, offers an intimate glimpse into the psyche of these characters. Examples of this include Vladimir Nabokov's portrayal of the character Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (1955), and Jane Austen's portrayal of Emma Woodhouse in her novel *Emma* (1815). Wayne Booth asserts, "By showing most of the story through Emma's eyes, the author ensures that we will travel with Emma rather than stand against her" (245). Austen skilfully records her inward contemplations and inside views that encourage compassion for flawed Emma. Humbert Humbert—a paedophile—can expect a chance at compassion, if any at all, only through literature which enables one to put oneself in someone else's shoes, and understand a different, complex, and perhaps contradictory self. Literature offers multi-layered dimensions of human self that makes it difficult for readers to become a ruthless judge and pass sentences (Nafisi 118). As can be seen in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, the so-called antagonistic characters (e.g., Aunt Lydia, Aunt Elizabeth, Commander Fred, Serena Joy) appear to have an unmistakably vulnerable and humane side. Aunt Lydia and Aunt Elizabeth have been collaborators of the regime, drafting and executing horrendous rules for women, doing the bidding on Gilead's behalf both inside and beyond Gilead. However, underneath their severe and somewhat placid countenance, they are ordinary humans trying to live another day. Aunt Lydia, both fox and the cat, with her bag of tricks, pulls her strings from above. She uses the information she accumulated over the years to give the regime a fatal blow that eventually leads to its fall. She embraces her own death in doing so, although she has lived for many years before her death, enjoying the little power she manages to get hold of. However, her reaction upon overhearing the vows of friendship between Agnes and Becka is, "It was enough to melt the hardest heart. It almost melted mine" (Atwood, *Testaments* 249). This shows she is capable of empathy and compassion. The pathos in the last entry on her diary is touching, as she addresses her imaginary reader, right before her supposed suicide:

> I picture you as a young woman, bright, ambitious. You'll be looking to make a niche for yourself in whatever dim, echoing caverns of academia may still exist by your time.

> I situate you at your desk, your hair tucked back behind your ears, your nail polish chipped—for nail polish will have returned, it always does. You're frowning slightly, a habit that will increase as you age. I hover behind you, peering over your shoulder: your muse, your unseen inspiration, urging you on ... But now I must end our conversation. Goodbye, my reader. Try not to think too badly of me, or no more badly than I think of myself (Atwood, *Testaments* 390).

Atwood's masterful characterization brings to the fore the vulnerable side of the so-called negative characters. Serena Joy, an active and devoted supporter of the regime, is bored and miserable in her role of a Wife, knitting her never-ending scarves, participating in the Wives' ruse of "falling ill" in turn so that they can get together and have a little party, ordering prayers on "Soul Scrolls," and gardening. Her garden seems to say, "Whatever is silenced will clamor to be heard, though silently" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 120) which sounds like a silent warning, mocking her, which she is unaware of. She takes the trouble of collecting the picture of Offred's daughter for her (183). It might as well be a device of manipulation to make Offred comply with her plan of getting Nick to make her pregnant, so that she can get rid of Handmaids once and for all. Still, the fact that she acts genuinely surprised when the members of the Eyes come to arrest Offred suggests that she, after all, does not report her (245). The powerful and privileged Commander Fred, similarly, reveals a rather vulnerable side as he invites Offred to play scrabble at the risk of compromising himself. He then goes on to request her, with certain sadness, to kiss him as if she means it (111). It appears to be more of an expression of craving for human company and connection than merely sexual desire. Suzanne Keen is partially right when she says, "Novelists known to be nice people may exercise their empathy on behalf of nonexistent beings and indeed on behalf of nasty characters" (*Empathy and the Novel* 127). She is partially right because in these two novels, Atwood's characterization quite successfully points to the fact that a rigid totalitarian theocracy operating amidst many crises spares no one; those who hold power and enjoy comparatively better station in society are miserable as well. As has been observed over the centuries that in patriarchal societies, it is not only women who go through sufferings, humiliation, and difficulties, but men as well. Atwood remains aware of that knowledge. Her method of characterization does not let any particular group relax, assuming they would be fine should the present-day crisis intensify into a full-blown catastrophe.

Keen's observation on naming/absence of a name has a special significance in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. She claims, "The naming of characters (including the withholding of a name, the use of an abbreviation or a role title in place of a full name, or allegorical or symbolic naming, etc.) may play a role in the potential for character identification" (94). Naming a character may contain clues regarding their race, gender, religion, geographic location, age, social status, precise placement of species, and other aspects (68-69). Lack of a name or symbolic/unconventional naming, on the other hand, may contain indications of certain social and political circumstances. The Republic of Gilead undertakes a massive project of changing names of the individuals. Handmaids are the worst victims of this project—their names are obliterated, thereupon called by the impermanent names formed with the epithet "Of" followed by the name of the Commander they are assigned to, such as "Offred" (Of Fred; the property of Fred), Ofkyle (Of Kyle; the property of Kyle) and so on. As a result, there is no way of tracing them once their station is changed, or they are sent to the Colonies or executed. They are easily erased from the official history of Gilead (except for perhaps the secret "Bloodline Genealogical Archive" in Ardua Hall, which only Aunts have access to), since they are considered as biological machines only used in the service of reproduction. Denying the Handmaids their names—one of the central constituting elements of individual identity—the regime denies them their humanity. This act of dehumanisation can also be observed in Yevgeny Zamyatin's early dystopian novel *We* (1924). Under an authoritarian rule, characters in this novel have numbers for a name, such as D-503, I-330, O-90, R-13, and so on. They are not allowed to have individual identity, private routine, or to form human connection and attachment. In other words, they are reduced to bare countable bodies. Hannah Arendt suggests caution about such situations; once the individuals become mere numbers and bare lives, they become "superfluous," which makes it as easy to kill them as flies (*Origins of Totalitarianism* 296). To politically conscious readers this would ring a rather ominous bell, which may set their empathy in motion. Notwithstanding, this kind of tampering with the names as a narrative technique has affective possibilities for lay readers as well. A particular character without a name caught in a perilous situation creates a hotbed of possibilities in

readers' minds; anybody of the readers' known world, or even they themselves could hypothetically be in that situation.[1]

Not only the Handmaids, but other groups of people in Gilead have been renamed. Some of the Commanders voluntarily change their names, possibly because they mean to disown their Pre-Gilead records, and wish to make it difficult for historians to trace it. Also, the name of Commander Fred's wife is changed to Serena Joy, although it is not clear whether all Wives' names are changed in Gilead. Professor Pieixoto seems to think that this is "a somewhat malicious invention by our author [Offred]" perhaps because the name has satirical connotations (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 244). Aunts have a limited choice about their names. They can pick from the names of commercial products, such as cosmetic lines, cake mixes, frozen desserts, and medicinal remedies available to women in the immediate pre-Gilead period, which is supposed to be "familiar and reassuring to them" (*Handmaid's Tale* 243). However, this is ironical, humiliating, and cruel, partly because neither Aunts nor the Handmaids (whom they are responsible for) are allowed limited physical comfort, such as good food and clothes—let alone the luxury of cosmetic products, desserts, etc., and partly because it mocks their supposedly dignified role. This perception of wrongdoing and injustice may potentially induce anger for the regime and sympathy for characters.

3.1.2 Empathy of the Characters

The tale of the Republic of Gilead is a heart-rending one, which depicts a world where the scope of empathy is constricted. Characters here are not encouraged to form human bonds, and to display gestures of empathy and kindness. In Gilead, only official interaction is allowed, which is extremely ceremonial and formal. Especially the characters from the "transitional generation" such as Offred, Serena Joy, Commander Fred, Rita, Cora, Zilla, Nick, Aunt Lydia, Aunt Vidala, Commander Judd etc. are overly cautious, cold, and strict in their manners. In these sentences of Offred's account, there is a clear fear of breaking any set decorum: "Or I would help Rita make the bread ... But even if I were to ask, even if I were to violate decorum

[1] Imagining oneself in someone else's shoes never gets easier, because, metaphorically speaking, these "shoes" do not have "names" on them; therefore, they are not individual property, and free for anyone who wants to try them on.

to that extent, Rita would not allow it. She would be too afraid. The Marthas are not supposed to fraternise with us" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 11). Offred, in exchange, does not smile when she receives the tokens for shopping from Rita: ""All right," I say. I don't smile. Why tempt her to friendship?" (11). This small and seemingly insignificant exchange suggests the rigidity of everyday interaction where human emotion and warmth is not encouraged. An act of empathy that is not prescribed by the regime can be fatal. For example, at one particular "Particicution," Ofglen (the first one) recognises the man to be executed as a Mayday Operative, and decides to give him a quick death, to save him from a prolonged misery. Afterwards she commits suicide in order to avoid her imminent arrest, which would be much worse (243-244). One possible explanation of this tragic incident is that her empathy gave her away. Quite plausibly, Offred's initial reaction to Nick was extreme caution and suspicion. She is very apprehensive with the casual attitude of Nick: "He's too casual, he's not servile enough. It may be stupidity, but I don't think so. Smells fishy, they used to say; or, I smell a rat. Misfit as odor" (16). Her suspicion increases as he winks at her, since she cannot fathom why he would take this unnecessary risk—she could very well report him. She concludes, "Perhaps it was a test, to see what I would do. Perhaps he is an Eye" (17). This kind of ubiquitous suspicion further hinders any chance of forming a bond and sharing a connection. Indeed, an atmosphere of alienation, mutual suspicion, and absence of connection is typical of authoritarian regimes. This is also observed, for example, in *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949) and *We* (1924). In both novels, it is against the law to fall in love. In *Nineteen Eighty Four*, The Party attempts to withhold love and the pleasure of sex from marriage, so that loyalties between spouses would not become stronger than the loyalty between the individuals and Big Brother. In *We*, citizens use tokens to have sex as a leisure activity but they are not allowed to fall in love and have a romantic, monogamous relationship. In Gilead too, falling in love is something that is completely out of the question. Commander Fred is surprised at Offred's suggestion that they overlooked romantic love. He readily asserts that falling in love is not worth it; besides, "Arranged marriages have always worked out just as well, if not better" (175). Offred remembers Aunt Lydia's remark, "*Love*, said Aunt Lydia with distaste. Don't let me catch you at it. No mooning and June-ing around here, girls. Wagging her finger at us. *Love* is not the point" (175). Keith Booker observes that the tendency of dystopian novels to focus on sexuality is partially attributed to Freud's influence. For Freud, the society derives most of its power from the repression of sexual desires. This repression is at the core of these

societies/regimes primarily because it is a potential source of powerful subversive energies (*Dystopian Impulse* 12).

Similar to sexual energy, empathy can potentially be a powerful subversive force. In contrast to the almost impenetrably dark rendition of *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments* offers brief moments of empathy, friendship, understanding, and co-operation. Although these moments are not many, these scant instances add up and create an undeniable atmosphere of hope. Despite being born and brought up in a society that is prejudiced against the Handmaids, Agnes finds it in her heart to be curious about Ofkyle. She speculates who she really might be underneath her blank face. She does not believe that her mind is really blank, since she knows how to make a blank face herself. This is an important first step towards empathy, the demonstration of which can be seen later in her reaction when Ofkyle dies at childbirth. Agnes realises the great injustice done to Ofkyle in every step of the way. She sees the falsehood right through the official narrative of Gilead that comes through Aunt Lydia, regarding Ofkyle's death. According to this official narrative, Ofkyle has "died with noble womanly honour" and "made the ultimate sacrifice;" thus, she has "redeemed herself from her previous life of sin" (Atwood, *Testaments* 108). In truth, Ofkyle has not made the choice to embrace death and to be the "shining example to the other Handmaids" (108). Her body is left unceremoniously in her room after the birth of her baby, although everyone fussed around her as long as she carried the baby. Agnes slips into her room when the celebration stops and everyone leaves, and places a kiss on her pale forehead (107). She promises to remember her, which she later proves that she does; as soon as she has the power as an Aunt, she traces her identity in the "Bloodlines Genealogical Archives." Jackie Shead notes that Agnes's "response to the story of Job and to Ofkyle's pregnancy suggest Tabitha's maternal affection has created a capacity for empathy. Agnes understands what a close bond feels like and therefore how it must feel for others" (12). By deciding to remember the Handmaid, to call her by her real name "Crystal," Agnes demonstrates a silent resistance towards the regime. Her empathy is a tool of resistance that contains inherently transgressive energy.

Indeed, empathy is embedded in small acts of kindness as well as the few instances of ultimate act of self-sacrifice in *The Testaments*. The friendship Agnes shares with Becka, and later with her sister Nicole is the miraculous spark that gives light to the otherwise harrowing reading experience. The very existence of these bonds suggests that Gilead could be resisted

against. Jackie Shead observes how the shared bond between two generations creates a formidable power:

> The later stages of *The Testaments* demonstrate the combined strengths of two generations, together with the potency of the written word. The narrators are drawn together both geographically and emotionally – and textually when the testaments of Daisy and Agnes start to intertwine. Identities are shared, and a strengthening bond emerges between the half-sisters and Becka. By way of contrast, the novel ascribes to the older and experienced Aunt Lydia both strategy and cunning (14-15).

Indeed, characters of the second generation show a greater capacity of empathy. Becka's sacrifice and support for the mission of carrying the microdots, Agnes and Becka's generous acceptance of Baby Nicole despite their differences remain crucial for the final fate of Gilead. As Jackie Shead proclaims, "... Becka's responses are subceptual – tacit or at a bodily level … She is deeply distressed by the Old Testament account of the Levite and his concubine, no doubt because it tells the story of a helpless woman abandoned to rapists" (12). Agnes empathises with Baby Nicole when she is distressed by witnessing the "Particicution" where two men are ripped apart by the Handmaids. She understands that this way of Baby Nicole's introduction to Gilead's ways is "somewhat harsh." She criticises such rules: "The Founder Aunts devised these rules. Becka and I would have opted for a less extreme method" (Atwood, *Testaments* 280). This criticism already suggests a wish for a different kind of world where extreme methods like "Particicution" do not exist. Such a milder, kinder approach is not consistent with Gileadean ideology.

3.2 Historical Rootedness as Means of Situational Empathy

Speculative fiction of dystopian nature such as *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* are considered as cautionary tales that warn readers of the consequences of the reckless continuation of the existing predicaments. The plots of these novels revolve around a future state of a dark, dystopian kind, called the Republic of Gilead. In many instances, the duology has been considered prophetic by seasoned and lay readers alike, although Atwood vehemently denies any power of prophecy. Atwood claimes time and again, "The rule that I made for the book [*The Handmaid's Tale*] was that nothing went into it that had not happened

in real life somewhere at some time ... And the reason I made that rule was that I didn't want anybody saying, you certainly have a twisted, weird, evil imagination. You made up all those bad things. I didn't make them up." She did extensive research, collected paper clippings, and took notes as a preparation to write the book. This section examines Atwood's claim that she included nothing in *The Handmaid's Tale* that did not have a historical precedence or a present point of comparison. If Atwood's claim is proved right, the plot of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* would be of utmost importance regarding the impact it has on readers.

Historical rootedness of the duology has the power to generate situational empathy in readers. Situational empathy is derived when the readers feel an affective connection with the plot, background, or stylistic features such as particular genres, literary devices, e. g. melodrama, humour, monologue, etc. It is often dependent upon readers' prior experience and knowledge. A chance connection may occur through the identification with the situation presented in the fiction. In Suzanne Keen's words:

> Situational empathy, which responds primarily to aspects of plot and circumstance, involves less self-extension in imaginative role taking and more recognition of prior (or current) experience. A novelist invoking situational empathy can only hope to reach readers with appropriately correlating experiences. The generic and formal choices made by authors in crafting fictional worlds play a role in inviting (or retarding) readers' empathic responses (*Empathy and the Novel* XII-XIII).

The following section explores the historical precedences in resonance with the kind of speculative dystopia represented in Atwood's duology.

The Seventeenth Century Puritan Society in Massachusetts and the Backlash of the Eighties

The Handmaid's Tale is set in the year 2195 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the home of Harvard, which prides itself on being the heart of liberal democracy but started as a seventeenth century Puritan theocracy. *The Testaments*, on the other hand, is set 15 years after the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*, partly in the same place, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and partly in Canada. Atwood relied not only on the history of the seventeenth century

Puritan theocratic state in America but also the political context of the country in the early 1980s, to imagine an authoritarian society governed by the radical fundamentalist right. In a 2017 meeting with Indigo, Atwood said, “America was not initially founded as an 18th-century enlightenment republic. It was initially a 17th-century theocracy. That tendency keeps bubbling up in America from time to time.” She also credits the book’s inspiration to Ronald Reagan’s election to the presidency and the country’s acceptance of Christian conservatives. Reagan was the first President to advocate an amendment to the constitution to reinstate structured prayer in schools, which he did in 1981. In an interview, Atwood said:

> I noticed from looking at my notes that I started actually thinking about [the book] in 1981. What had just happened? Ronald Reagan had been elected, and the religious right was on the rise in those years, the early Eighties. The Seventies was a “fermentous” time, with second-wave feminism making a lot of gains — but not the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment, which got nixed, basically, by Phyllis Schlafly, who got a lovely little cafe named after her in *The Testaments*. And then there was a backlash. There are always backlashes. In the Eighties, that is when people started saying things like “Women belong in the home.” And I started thinking, “Well, if they do, how are you going to get them back in there?” (Stuart)

In order to send women back home, one obviously has to reverse the financial progress that women made over the past one and half centuries. This is what happens in *The Handmaid's Tale*: Following the coup that formed Gilead, the regime invalidates all credit/debit cards in women’s name, and transfers women’s property and money to their next of kin male relative. Contemporary digital banking system makes this process ridiculously easy, unfortunately. It enables any state with modern technology to cut off the banking facilities from a particular race, gender or ethnicity in a matter of a few clicks, should the need arise.

The Salem Witches

The Handmaid's Tale draws inspiration from the infamous Salem witch trials that took place in seventeenth century Massachusetts. The trials began during the spring of 1692 in Salem Village, which subsequently created a wave of hysteria that spread throughout colonial Massachusetts. A special court convened to investigate the young girls who were supposed

to be possessed by the devil, and to hear the cases of several Salem women who were accused of witchcraft. What followed was demonization, threatening, and execution of innocent women. One of the women who was tried for witchcraft was Mary Webster—one of the two people to whom *The Handmaid's Tale* is dedicated. She was arguably at the centre of one of the most infamous witchcraft cases preceding the Salem witch trials. After a well-respected government and church leader in the small Puritan town of Hadley, Massachusetts, fell ill, locals quickly drew the conclusion that a witch had to be involved. They condemned Webster as the culprit and decided to physically assault her and hang her as punishment. It was discovered the next morning that she, in fact, did not die, thus strengthening the suspicion of witchcraft further. She survived, but her story, recounted in detail in 1689's "Memorable Providences," set the stage for the Salem witch hysteria that began in 1692. There is a probability that Mary Webster was Atwood's ancestor, but this is not confirmed. Atwood says this in a New England address titled "Witches':

> I did feel … that it was appropriate to talk of witches here in New England, for obvious reasons, but also because this is the land of my ancestors, and one of my ancestors was a witch. Her name was Mary Webster, she lived in Connecticut, and she was hanged for 'causing an old man to become extremely valetudinarious.' Luckily, they had not yet invented the drop: in those days they just sort of strung you up. When they cut Mary Webster down the next day, she was, to everyone's surprise, not dead. Because of the law of double jeopardy, under which you could not be executed twice for the same offense, Mary Webster went free. I expect that if everyone thought she had occult powers before the hanging, they were even more convinced of it afterward. She is my favorite ancestor, dearer to my heart even than the privateers and the massacred French Protestants, and if there's one thing I hope I've inherited from her, it's her neck (*Second Words* 330-1).

The story of Mary Webster is one of the age-old stories of women being wrongfully accused and persecuted. Her story certainly has echoes in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. While working at Hildegard Library, Agnes finds out in a secret folder that the Handmaid who is wildly rumoured to have had illicit relationship with Commander Saunders, in fact did not have any relationship of that sort (*Testaments* 299-300); nor does she murder her Commander, for which crime she is hanged. Rumour is that the Handmaid is "dangerously

unbalanced," and have stolen a skewer from the kitchen and killed her Commander in "an unprovoked attack" because the demands he has been making of her "had driven her over the edge of sanity" (Atwood, *Testaments* 299). In reality, it is Paula—the stepmother of Agnes, and the former Wife of Commander Saunders—who orchestrates the murder and wrongfully accuses the Handmaid. Despite being innocent, the Handmaid is hanged. She is just another victim like Mary Webster and many others, whose stories are neither heard nor believed. Authorities like Professor Pieixoto are patronising and flagrantly dismissive of women's experiences, plight, and resistance. Atwood seems to be suggesting caution against outright denial of Offred's narrative (by extension, women's narrative in general) by the pun possibly intended in the name of the place where the symposium is held: "Denay, Nunavit" (deny none of it) (*Handmaid's Tale* 235).

Indeed, in Gilead, Handmaids are feared, abhorred, fetishized, like witches were in the past. At the same time they are, in a bizarre way, respected and treasured. The testimony of Agnes shows how Handmaids are perceived by little girls, "I was happy to put the Handmaid [a doll in her doll's house] away in the box because the real Handmaids made me nervous" (Atwood, *Testaments* 21). Shortly after that she says:

> As we marched along the street, the Handmaids would be walking two by two with their shopping baskets. They would not look at us, or not much, or not directly, and we were not supposed to look at them because it was rude to stare at them, said Aunt Estée, just as it was rude to stare at cripples or anyone else who was different. We were not allowed to ask questions about the Handmaids either.
>
> "You'll learn about all of that when you're old enough," Aunt Vidala would say. All of that: the Handmaids were part of all of that. Something bad, then; something damaging, or something damaged, which might be the same thing (21).

The aura of a certain discomfort mixed with a forbidden curiosity towards Handmaids is apparent in Agnes's testimony. The Handmaids on the sidewalks can be seen but cannot be bothered about, spoken to, or touched, because "they were—in a sense—untouchable" (94). In a way, this treatment of them is similar to the way witches were treated in the Middle Ages. While taking their daily walks, Offred and Ofglen put tremendous effort so as to seem inconspicuous, like the older women in Salem, Massachusetts, who were constantly

monitored by onlookers, afraid of being accused of witchcraft. They (Offred and Ofglen) can possibly be blamed and imprisoned for conspiring against the regime for the slightest lapse on their part, which would lead them to the "Ladies' Salvaging," where women are hanged in a chilling women-only ceremony. Not only the Handmaids, but the Aunts also are feared because they know other people's secrets. During her training to be an Aunt, Agnes discovers, "This was what the Aunts did, I was learning. They recorded. They waited. They used their information to achieve goals known only to themselves. Their weapons were powerful but contaminating secrets, as the Marthas had always said. Secrets, lies, cunning, deceit—but the secrets, the lies, the cunning, and the deceit of others as well as their own" (303). Aunts used all these secrets to manipulate others if and when they saw fit; this gave them their power.

The Uniforms

In the Republic of Gilead, people are divided into classes according to their functions and socio-economic status, and each class has their own uniform. The Handmaids have a red gown with a white bonnet that keeps them from seeing and being seen; the Wives of the Commanders have blue dresses; Commanders' daughters have several dresses: pink, the white, plum and spring green; the Aunts have brown dress, loose on top, belted at the waist; Marthas are dressed in dull green with aprons; the Pearl Girls in their silvery grey dresses with long skirts, white collars, white hats and a string of pearls; the Econowives in red and blue and green striped dresses that are cheap and skimpy; the Commanders in sober black with the rows of insignia and decorations; the Angels in neat black uniform, the Guardians of the Faith in green uniforms, etc. The dark crimson colour affiliated with the Handmaids was influenced by a variety of historical occurrences. Red is the colour of blood and vitality. In South Asia, red is traditionally the colour of bridal attire because it symbolises fertility, desire, and youth. Mary Magdalene, typically depicted as a fallen woman, is often painted wearing red. However, during WWII, German prisoners of war who were detained in Canada were given red clothes because they stood out against the snow. The face-obscuring white bonnet was inspired by a 1940s Old Dutch Cleanser packaging, which Atwood recalls scaring her as a child in a session in Santa Fe Film Festival. In addition, the bonnet is evocative of Catholic nuns'

habits as well (Hiltz)[2]. The nuns cover their hair in the same way as the Handmaids do in order to de-sexualize their look (Pearce)[3]. Concentration camps in Nazi Germany had consistent restrictions regarding clothing that were comparable to Gilead's:

> On arrival at concentration camps, prisoners had their clothing taken away, often to be replaced by a striped uniform (now known as striped pajamas). Men would wear a vest, trousers, hat, and coat. Women would be supplied with a smock type dress. . .Prisoners were identified by a number printed on their clothing and also an inverted triangle with lettering to signify the reason for imprisonment. A green triangle was worn by criminals, a red triangle by political prisoners, a pink triangle by homosexuals, a purple triangle by Jehovah's Witnesses, and a black triangle by asocials (including Roma) (Pearce).

In the very same way, everyone in *The Handmaid's Tale* wears a uniform—all pre-Gileadean garments are outlawed. When people are executed, they are hung on the wall and their respective uniforms are vividly visible, like people in uniforms in concentration camps (Pearce). The Guardians and Angels of Gilead, like the SS troops in concentration camps, are required to wear uniforms. The condition of hygiene is poor as "[c]lothes would be changed every six weeks or so. Prisoners would be filthy since they would have to work and sleep in the same clothes" (Pearce). Despite Gilead promoting better hygiene than Nazi concentration camps, the practice of only issuing clean garments at a specific time remains the same.

Childbirth in the Presence of Witnesses

It is customary in the Republic of Gilead to have many witnesses of childbirth. There are two childbirth events—one in the *The Handmaid's Tale* (of Janine/Ofwarren), another in *The Testaments* (of Crystal/Ofkyle). In both the childbirth events, it is observed that women—Aunts, Handmaids, Wives, Daughters gather in celebration, but also to participate in a symbolic way. Handmaids chant in unison "push, push, push, hold, hold hold." Offred says

[2] Madeline Hiltz, "The Handmaid's Tale Is Based on These 8 Chilling Historical Events." *The Vintage News*, 15 Nov. 2021, thevintagenews.com/2021/11/15/these-terrifying-things-in-the-handmaids-tale-are-based-on-real-historical-events.

[3] Summer Pearce, "Historical Context of the Handmaid's Tale." *GoConqr*, 11 Aug. 2016, goconqr.com/slide/6017649/historical-context-of-the-handmaid-s-tale.

that there are about twenty five to thirty women present at the childbirth of Janine/Ofwarren (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 100). Women of the entire district are supposed to arrive and bear witness; Handmaids by red "Birthmobiles," and Wives by blue. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a similar ritual was followed by royals: Royal women gave birth in front of large crowds. The purpose of this ritual was to ensure that the royal baby is not switched for another. The birth of a royal was a political event, since it could signal the future success or failure of a monarchy. Therefore, it had deep implications for an entire nation, which made people concerned about the outcome. As a result, it was not regarded as a private affair, but rather as a moment of significant public concern. "Witnesses were considered essential" during the birth of a prospective successor, according to The Guardian, and chambers would be crammed with "ladies-in-waiting, midwives, servants, and doctors, with male courtiers hovering in the background" (Regalado)[4]. It is said that Marie Antoinette of France fainted from the heat during her childbirth in 1778, because about two hundred courtesans rushed into the room to witness the birth of the future king, which turned into an unbearable and unhealthy environment for childbirth.

Reference to the Bible

Atwood draws heavily on the Bible for the rituals of the new dystopian state. Section 2.3 of the previous chapter discusses Biblical allusions in detail. However, the Biblical verse in the epigraph of *The Handmaid's Tale* is significant throughout the two novels,

> "And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, "Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her."

The Rachel and Leah Center that prepares the Handmaids for their future responsibilities is an explicit reference to Rachel and her sister Leah, both of whom married Jacob in the Old

[4]Michelle Regalado, "9 Nightmarish Things in 'The Handmaid's Tale' Inspired by History." *Insider*, (26 Aug. 2019), www.insider.com/handmaids-tale-based-on-real-world-origins-history-events-2019-8#the-forced-separation-of-mothers-and-children-continues-to-occur-in-modern-society-9.

Testament. Rachel was unable to conceive children, although Leah had no problems. Rachel was dissatisfied, so she presented Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a "vessel" through whom she may have children. Bilhah had two sons, both of whom were named after Rachel. The story serves as motivation not only for the Handmaids' function as "breeders," but also for the foundation of Gilead as a whole. Sons of Jacob is the name of the party that overthrew the US government and formed Gilead in Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel (Regalado). The origins of Handmaids' obligatory salutations to one another and other Gilead inhabitants can also be directly traced to the Bible: Those who "heed the voice of the Lord, your God," will be blessed. "Blessed be the fruit of your womb," it continues (Deuteronomy 28:4, New American Bible); then "The Lord will open for you" (Deuteronomy 28:12). These greetings are part of the "Blessings of Obedience;" they are intended to encourage devoted followers to have plenty.

Human biological fertility is crucial in Gileadean society since it is of concern of politics, biology, philosophy, and history. In Atwood's imagined universe, a sharp drop in human reproduction, allegedly caused by pollution and destruction of the environment, has destroyed the birthrate, particularly among the upper echelons of Gileadean society. Gileadean authorities want to increase the number of children by forcibly recreating Old Testament traditions of concubinage and polygamy, and they rationalize a set of draconian regulations that tightly categorize women according to their biological fertility. Crises enable totalitarianism, as they did in most twentieth-century dictatorships, since societies will accept harsh injunctions to avoid disasters. Some animal populations, particularly frogs, began to drop unexpectedly in the mid-1980s, prompting scientists to speculate that there might be documented evidence of declining fertility among a number of species. Increased environmental harm could be to blame for this infertility or diminished fertility (Jadwin 31-32).

The Community in New Jersey

During her investigation, Margaret Atwood came across a little-known Catholic community called the "People of Hope" in New Jersey where wives were referred to as handmaidens. Apparently, it was from this Catholic cult that she drew inspiration for the title of her piece. People of Hope was founded in 1975 by Robert Gallic, a New York stockbroker, and Rev. James

Ferry, an ordained Catholic priest. The ladies in this group were named “The Handmaidens of God”. However, unlike Atwood’s Handmaidens, who were compelled to produce children, these women were more similar to the Wives of Gilead. The task set before these “Handmaidens of God” was to provide a good example for other women, to observe one another to ensure that they were adhering to their prearranged rules, such as being obedient to their husbands. The People of Hope “subordinates its women, discourages social interaction with non-members, arranges marriages, and sends teenage disciples to “households” for indoctrination (Hiltz). The People of Hope is still operating in central Jersey today.

The Colonies

Women who are considered as unfaithful or immoral (including homosexuals, abortion patients, and others) are shipped to the “Colonies” in Gilead, where they commonly die from the adverse environmental conditions. The practice of imprisoning women who are thought to be immoral can be traced back to a little-known period in American history. This approach was popular in the early 1900s during the execution of the American Plan, according to a report in the Time.[5] Around the time of WWI, the program was established to safeguard American soldiers from sexually transmitted illnesses and prostitution. Thousands of women accused of carrying STIs or engaging in general promiscuity were jailed and imprisoned under the scheme, all in the name of preserving national security. Leaders in Gilead employ the fear of public execution to keep their population in line, frequently hanging suspected rebels on a public wall. Even the Handmaids are engaged to conduct some of the executions on occasions. From Ancient Greece through twentieth-century America, mass executions like these were previously routine.

Furthermore, the population working in Colonies is similar to the radiation clean-up squad of the Chernobyl Disaster that happened on April 26, 1986. Atwood has previously drawn parallels between the technique in *The Handmaid's Tale* and true-crime fiction from the nineteenth century. To support her technique, Atwood referred to historical precedents, such

[5] Scott W. Stern, "The U.S. Detained ‘Promiscuous’ Women in What One Called a ‘Concentration Camp’ That Word Choice Matters,” *The Time*, 15 May 2018.

as Adolf Hitler's atrocities in the concentration camps during World War II. Lebensunwertes Leben, or "life unworthy of life" was a horrifying term coined by Nazi Germany to describe human beings whose lives were insignificant or who should be killed outright. The term was first applied to mentally ill people, then to "racially inferior" or "sexually deviant" people, as well as internal and external enemies of the state. From the beginning of the war, the Nazis had a policy of mass murdering civilians, particularly Jews. This approach evolved into Hitler's "final solution," the complete elimination of the Jews. It started with Einsatzgruppen death squads in the East, who killed over a million people in a series of massacres, and it continued in concentration camps, where prisoners were purposefully denied basic food and medical care. It resulted in the establishment of extermination camps, which were government-run facilities dedicated solely to the methodical slaughter and disposal of large groups of people. As advancing Allied troops discovered these camps in 1945, they saw the consequences of these policies: hundreds of thousands of malnourished and ailing captives, as well as thousands of bodies. They came across evidence of gas chambers and high-volume crematoriums, as well as thousands of mass graves, documentation of horrifying medical experiments, and much more. More than 10 million individuals were killed in this manner by the Nazis, including 6 million Jews.[6]

Women's Salvaging

The women of Gilead gather at a "Salvaging" in Chapter 42, where two Handmaids and a Commander's Wife are publicly executed. Another "Salvaging" takes place right after Daisy/Jade's return to Gilead. Instances of brutal public execution can be traced in history. For example, Public execution methods used during the Qajar dynasty (1785–1925) included hanging, hurling the condemned from city walls, tying them to a cannon's muzzle and blowing them apart, smothering them in a carpet, and re-enacting the crime the offender committed on themselves. Then there was Sham'i Ajjin, which involved creating several slashes in the body and then igniting candles there until the victim passed away. The convicted were paraded through the bazaar before being carried to the public scaffold. Public hanging supplanted more unusual methods of execution around 1890 (Pearce). King Henry VIII

[6] Alan Taylor, "World War II: The Holocaust," *The Atlantic* (2011).

divorced and executed two of his wives because they failed to bear him a male heir. In Gilead, on the other hand, if a Handmaid cannot give birth to a healthy baby, she is transported to the Colonies to die.

Women in Afghanistan

Atwood has stated that a trip to Afghanistan[7] in the late 1970s influenced a section of the novel (particularly the part where Offred and her shopping partner meet the Japanese tourists). The beauty of the country as well as the stillness of its women, who seldom spoke or looked straight at them, captivated her and her husband. Of course, this predates the Taliban's more recent history, but the ideals were already taking root as they visited historical locations. Religious extremism, sexual persecution, and nuclear disasters, she discovered, are the major conditions that have shifted the world from contentment to sorrow.

The Taliban have been known around the world for their misogyny and violence against women during their regime in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, and recently since 2021. Its declared goal was to provide a "secure environment where women's chastity and dignity may once again be sacrosanct," in accordance with Pashtunwali traditions about living in purdah (Dupree 189). Women in Afghanistan were obliged to wear the burqa in public at all times because "the face of a woman is a source of corruption" for males who are not related to them, according to one Taliban spokesman (Gohari 108). Women were not permitted to work, were not supposed to be schooled after the age of eight, and were only allowed to read the Qur'an until then, under a system of systematic separation known as gender inequality (Hasan 165).

Reproduction Laws in Romania under the Communist Rule

During her study for *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood came upon a specific occurrence called "Decree 770." This was a Romanian law that rendered all means of contraception as well as abortion illegal. Romanian women started entering the labour force in the 1950s and

[7] Margaret Atwood, "Taking the Veil," *The Guardian*. 17 November 2001. www.theguardian.com/world/2001/nov/17/afghanistan.weekend7

having fewer children. Due to the scarcity of contraceptives in the 1960s, abortion became the primary technique of family planning in Romania. The Communist Party in power, on the other hand, desired to see a dramatic growth in the Romanian population, thus birth control and abortion were illegal. Ladies were obliged to attend the doctor once a month to check for pregnancy under the Romanian Communist rule and Decree 770, while police officers kept guard in the hallway to assure that women complied. Wealthy women persisted to acquire condoms and birth control in the underground market, but lower-class women were unable to do so. When women discovered pregnancies before their doctors did, they frequently attempted at-home abortions, which resulted in numerous unintended fatalities. The policy stayed in place until the Soviet Union fell apart in the 1980s (Hiltz). The way women's reproductive rights were taken away in Romania has similarity with Gileadean policies concerning reproduction and women's rights.

The Forceful Relocation of the Children

In the seventies in Australia, indigenous children were lawfully removed from their homes and sent to religious institutions or to white families to be fostered (Dray). Tragically, the kidnapping of children has occurred in the United States and Canada as well on multiple occasions. In Canada, this was known as the "residential school system" (Dray). The Child Welfare League of America began "The Indian Adoption Project" in 1958 that continued until 1967. Indigenous children were taken away from their families and placed with other families to learn "American values." Kids were practically taken from their homes and sent elsewhere because they thought that Indigenous children living on First Nation reservations did not live up to American standards. Their birth parents' records were destroyed, and they were simply handed to other white families for adoption (Hiltz). Offred has a daughter named Hannah (Later renamed as Agnes Gemima) in the book *The Handmaid's Tale* who was snatched away and fostered by a Commander and his wife, because the Gilead government argues that Handmaids are unsuited to be mothers. Gilead regulates the allocation of children in *The Handmaid's Tale,* compelling Handmaids to hand over responsibility for the care of their newborns to the families for whom they labour practically soon after birth, just as it did in real-life totalitarian regimes decades ago. "Totalitarianism always has views on who shall be allowed to have babies and what shall be done with the babies," Atwood tells the LA Times.

Regalado mentions some other instances, "... [T]he generals in Argentina were dumping people out of aeroplanes. But if it was a pregnant woman, they would wait until she had the baby and then they gave the baby to somebody in their command system. And then they dumped the woman out of the aeroplane. Hitler stole his children, blond ones, hoping that he could turn them into blond Germans."

Propaganda and Fake News

Under the totalitarian regime in Gilead, there is a massive effort at repressing and bending the truth, spreading half-truths and lies in the form of rumours and TV broadcasts. Propaganda is used masterfully by the regime, which is a trademark of authoritarian control. One example of this is apparent when Offred observes that the Gileadean TV only broadcasts the news of victory in the war, she doubts the authenticity of the news (she is allowed to watch news on TV only in the evenings of the "Ceremony"). Food is rationed in Gilead, and pile after pile of dead bodies of the soldiers are discarded in the colonies outside the city walls. When Ofglen informs Offred of a victory in battle, her inner musing was, "But I'm ravenous for news, any kind of news; even if it's false news, it must mean something" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 18). This suggests that her access to the information about the war's progression is limited or non-existing. Pearl Girls' claim "No homeless in Gilead" suggests prosperity and welfare in Gilead, which is questionable compared to the reality of Gilead's fake cheese, food rationing, and meagre ways of life. This establishes the concept that the authorities are not telling the truth to the international community as well as their own public. This is similar to the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA), which was passed in 1914 and prohibited any criticism of the war, even in private correspondences. Also, the Old Testament account of Jacob, Rachel, and Bilhah has been utilised for Gileadean propaganda. The Bible verses give the idea that the ritual practice is desirable and what God intends, much like how the Nazis used propaganda for their campaign, and the USA advocated war against Germany. Internet filtering in North Korea, China, Russia, etc. manipulates their respective population in a dystopian way (Pearce).

Mayday and Underground Railroad

It is stated in Offred's account that Oflgen (the first one) is a member of a clandestine rebel movement called Mayday, but the Historical Notes that follow Offred's story goes into further details. Offred is unsure about what the resistance movement does to rebel against the regime. On the contrary, Aunt Lydia's account offers a more informed report about the activities of both the resistance groups called Mayday and Underground Femaleroad. Studying resistance movements under various regimes throughout history may offer us better understanding regarding this. There were tiny resistance operations by a few individuals in Nazi Germany, for example. Besides, the White Rose was a non-violent, intellectual resistance group in Nazi Germany, consisting of students from the University of Munich and their philosophy professors. The group became known for an anonymous leaflet and graffiti campaign, lasting from June 1942 until February 1943, that called for active opposition to dictator Adolf Hitler's regime. The cassettes detailed in the Historical Notes can be compared to the White Rose pamphlets (Pearce). In addition, subversive rivals of Gilead's dictatorship face execution as political prisoners, a practice comparable to that of the Gestapo.

Re-education and Training

Offred recalls her experiences in the "Red Centre" where the Handmaids are re-educated by the Aunts to be prepared for their roles and accept the regime's authority (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 13-14). Aunt Lydia plays an important role in this process, as Offred recounts what she says several times throughout the text. Similar instances of re-education can be traced in history:

> [D]uring the Zamosc expulsions the Germans seized many children from their parents to be racially screened for possible adoption by German parents in the SS Lebensborn (Fount of Life) program. 4,454 children were given German names, were prevented from speaking Polish, and were re-educated in SS or other Nazi institutes, where many perished of famine or sickness. Few ever saw their parents again. (Pearce)

The Handmaids were forcefully taken into the system, much like Polish children during Nazi Germany's invasion, to be re-educated with the dictatorship's ideals in order to live a life

under the regime. In addition, the Handmaids would never see their family again, similar to the Polish children (Pearce).

Iran in the 80s

Iran established a theocratic republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini after the revolution of 1979. His rule was opposed in newspapers and publications, which were banned as it also happens in Gilead. Equal rights were denied to women. The marriageable age for girls was decreased to 13; once married, they were not allowed to continue their education, despite the fact that more women were enrolling in universities after the revolution. Many of the initial policies have been suspended in the 30 years after the Revolution because women protested from the beginning. However, segregation is still strictly maintained, and women who are discovered by authorities in mixed-sex situations may be made to submit to virginity tests. The death sentence could be used for extramarital sex. Newspapers and periodicals are likewise outlawed in Gilead because they are deemed to weaken the regime's power and relevance. Offred discusses how women have been rendered financially dependent on males, a situation that is analogous to Iran's denial of equal gender rights. In Gilead, women are not allowed to attend university. "It is the only thing they've given me to read," Offred says while explaining the "Faith" pillow (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 48). The visual signs above shops also contribute to the perception that women are not permitted to receive an education. The so called Morality Police strictly observes the dress code that has been imposed on women. Gilead's marriageable age is similar to Iran's; the girls at Vidala School are considered marriageable right after having their first periods (Atwood, *Testaments* 104). Another parallel with Iran is the separation of men and women. Handmaids, in particular, are denied sexual liberty, and are subjected to ritualistic rape on Ceremony nights (Pearce).

Historical Rootedness in Perspective

In the light of the discussion, it can be conclusively said that *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* have a solid historical rootedness. They draw heavily on historical precedences, which makes their fictional representation credible, relatable and engaging to the readers. This may result in generating a strong emotional response in informed readers. The causes

responsible for a nightmarish future are already existing, or have existed in history. Therefore, it is difficult to discard the possibility of Atwood's dystopia. This may lead to a better understanding of our current crises and compassion for the trauma victims in the contemporary world.

The Handmaid's Tale and *The Testaments* are not immune from the friction between imagination and reality, structure and history, literature and life, which can be a particularly fertile ground for speculative fiction. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election, the popular phenomenon surrounding *The Handmaid's Tale* — the presence of protest banners reading "Make Margaret Atwood Fiction Again"— reveals our tendency to overlook the differences that generate this tension, seeping from history and literature into living history (Jones and Robertson). Horton sees no reason to disagree with Christopher Douglas and others who explore how "the 1980s culture wars on abortion, sexual morality, and gender roles" are reflected in *The Handmaid's Tale*. However, he would be cautious about equating the theological and cultural politics at work in duology with the Christian Right's actual politics (Christou and Horton). Even when scholars correctly place the novel in its historical context, the novel itself attempts to undermine our faith in historical contextualization as a self-justifying horizon of emancipatory politics. Few passages in modern fiction anticipate North's insight that the exhortation to historicize is not automatically radical quite as perceptively as the "Historical Note" at the end of *The Handmaid's Tale* (Horton 18).

3.2.1 Defamiliarization as Means of Situational Empathy

The term defamiliarization was coined by Russian formalists to refer to the technique of representing common, everyday persons, events, experiences in an unfamiliar way so that the representation is disjointed from the perception of the familiar. In doing so, this technique offers new perspectives to the readers to perceive and interpret the familiar world differently. This technique is widely used in speculative fiction, including Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, creating cognitive estrangement effects that may lead readers/audiences to question the status quo and its biases. Atwood uses the techniques of defamiliarization masterfully in the novels to voice alternative views to the dominant

androcentric narrative of the Republic of Gilead that leaves its trails (albeit in a significantly reduced manner) in the "Historical Notes" sections of both the novels. This section of the chapter analyses *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* to find out the techniques and stylistic features Atwood uses to achieve cognitive estrangement/defamiliarization.

First and foremost, Atwood uses spatio-temporal distance—as is commonly used in speculative fiction—to defamiliarize readers' perception. *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in the year 2195, and *The Testaments* is set 15 years after the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Spatially *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in Cambridge, Massachusetts, whereas, *The Testaments* is partly set in the same place, and partly in Canada. Although the Republic of Gilead is situated in the US, it is radically different from the present day US. By creating this spatio-temporal distance, the novels take the readers away from the familiar world. This prompts a wilful suspension of readers' disbelief. It is commonly assumed that the future is tabula rasa, and a locus of infinite possibilities. In addition to this aspect of the future setting, when readers relate the present and past points of references (as discussed in the previous section about historical rootedness), the rendition of the events in the novels seem credible and relatable, yet somewhat strange and unfamiliar.

Atwood uses the motif of the crisis to achieve an effect of alienation. Crisis is something that upsets the status quo, and takes people out of their comfort zones. *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* are set in the background of various acute crises. Aunt Lydia's account contains constant anxiety about being arrested by the regime: "... I was wondering which kind this meeting would prove to be. I must admit that my heart was beating faster than usual, and not only from the stairs: not everyone who has gone in through that particular doorway has come out again" (Atwood, *Testaments* 65). Both Agnes and Becka, on the other hand, are occupied by another kind of anxiety: the prospect of marriage, and by extension, of male desire, since both of them are traumatized in the aftermath of being sexually abused. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, however, the presence of crises is even more intense. There is an immediate threat of being imprisoned, executed, or being shipped to the Colonies every step of the way. The ubiquitous presence of these crises looms large on everything—from the psyche of the characters to the actions of the state and its people. This constant state of high alert takes readers out of their comfort zone and creates a heightened awareness.

Atwood frequently uses shocking comparisons and details to create discomfort in readers. For example, she begins Chapter 8 of *The Handmaid's Tale* in the following way: "The good weather holds. It's almost like June, when we would get out our sundresses and our sandals and go for an ice cream cone" (36). This apparently inconspicuous description of weather and harmless reminiscing of summer days is immediately followed by these lines: "There are three new bodies on the Wall. One is a priest, still wearing the black cassock.: good weather prevails etc. Immediately afterwards she says, there are five bodies on the wall" (36). The sharp contrast between the memory and the reality, the pre-Gileadean and Gileadean scenarios, creates a shocking effect. Even the description of a room is written in a way that creates a similar effect: "A chair, a table, a lamp. Above, on the white ceiling, a relief ornament in the shape of a wreath, and in the center of it a blank space, plastered over, like the place in a face where the eye has been taken out. There must have been a chandelier, once. They've removed anything you could tie a rope to" (7). The attention to details in this description ensures that this is no ordinary room, and this not an ordinary situation. The palimpsestic nature of the ceiling suggests that something has changed for the worse.

Additionally, Atwood uses flashbacks effectively to defamiliarize the reality of Gilead. For example, Offred and Ofglen stop by "Soul Scrolls" on their way back from their daily walks and shopping. Soul Scrolls are shops with shatterproof glass windows, inside which there are machines that mechanically hum prayers that have been ordered by pious people. Offred faintly recognizes a shop, which she thinks used to be a lingerie shop: "I try to remember what this place sold when it was a store, before it was turned into Soul Scrolls. I think it was lingerie. Pink and silver boxes, colored pantyhose, brassieres with lace, silk scarves? Something lost" (133). Again, the sharp contrast of the functions of the same shop is shocking, to say the least. Offred's flashbacks appear at the oddest of times, without a warning. While waiting for the Commander in the evening of Ceremony, she has flashbacks of her daughter and her toys:

> It's a Saturday morning in September, I'm wearing my shining name. The little girl who is now dead sits in the back seat, with her two best dolls, her stuffed rabbit, mangy with age and love. I know all the details. They are sentimental details but I can't help that. I can't think about the rabbit too much though, I can't start to cry, here on the Chinese rug, breathing in the smoke that has been inside Serena's body. Not here, not now, I can do that later (68-69).

The intimate and sentimental nature of this flashback, put in comparison with the current humiliating reality of hers, is poignant. It puts the violence of the regime in perspective by pointing out the unnaturalness of the situation.

Atwood accomplishes defamiliarization in part by using extended first person narratives by multiple narrators from different stations of life whose stories—albeit distinctive—work in unison to subvert the official metanarrative of Gilead. The readers learn Gileadean ideologies through the narrators Offred, Aunt Lydia, Agnes Gemima, and Daisy. Then, they have the chance to compare and verify the perspectives of the narrators and the information they provide with the "Historical Notes" section, which offers a well-researched historical perspective from a significant temporal distance. This point of comparison contributes in achieving cognitive estrangement.

Atwood employs catachresis—a forced and especially paradoxical figure of speech—to elicit a shocking effect. Offred's declaration that she "hunger[s] to commit the act of touch" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 11) is a classic example of this style. Here, hunger is followed by the verb "commit," which is correlated with sin or crime, instantly implying that what the narrator desires is forbidden. This remark appears in the second chapter of the novel, when the reader is still perplexed about Offred and the society she lives in. The deliberate comparison of familiar objects with uncommon things is another example of this defamiliarization technique: The mirror is "like the eye of a fish," and men's urinals resemble "babies' coffins" (8, 60). By forcing us to see the world in a way that is completely foreign, Atwood, like most dystopian authors, not only succeeds in immersing the reader in a strange new world, but also provides important insights into the narrator's state of mind through the use of such imagery. Death, nature, and an all-seeing eye appear frequently throughout the novels, and they are perfectly suited to depict the unnatural slavery of women, the tremendous monitoring of the state, and the ever-present danger of death that hangs over the Handmaids.

Atwood engages the effects of defamiliarization by employing neologisms to underscore the judgments women face in the Republic of Gilead regarding procreation. Officially fertile Women and Handmaids failing to procreate are referred to as "Unwomen," and babies born with deformities are called "Unbabies." This linguistic defamiliarization is a useful literary strategy in satire because it reveals the underlying issues of socio-political concepts. It

provides an alternative narrative to the reader as well. Similar kind of linguistic defamiliarization appears in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*. For example, the "newspeak" word "unperson" refers to the person who has been eliminated by the state and has subsequently been removed from official records and history. By labelling babies born with a disability as "Unbabies," Atwood emphasises Gilead's desire for the reproduction of physically flawless children. Even "imperfect" babies are dehumanised and studied as if they were a non-essential waste of space. It is not clear what happens to these infants, but this designation is morbidly ludicrous. It draws attention to the pressures that Handmaids endure when it comes to reproduction. If a baby is born with a disability, the Handmaid and her inadequacy bear the blame. Her efforts, luck, and fertility issues are the sole reasons for the birth of a defective child, since officially men cannot be sterile or in any way responsible. Therefore, this concept of fault is devoid of any additional connotations, such as the Commander's flaws or the Handmaid's living situation; it is simply the Handmaid's inability to generate an ideal child.

The concept of procreation is defamiliarized in Gilead, its importance being exaggerated almost to the level of sacred religious rituals. Offred's account of the Ceremony is an example of the gravity of the issue of procreation: "This is not recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 77). The elaborate, grim, humiliating narration of the "Ceremony" eliminates any presupposed idea of the sexual act as a form of recreation:

> He is preoccupied, like a man humming to himself in the shower without knowing he's humming; like a man who has other things on his mind. It's as if he's somewhere else, waiting for himself to come, drumming his fingers on the table while he waits. There's an impatience in his rhythm now. But isn't this everyone's wet dream, two women at once? They used to say that. Exciting, they used to say.
>
> What's going on in this room, under Serena Joy's silvery canopy, is not exciting. It has nothing to do with passion or love or romance or any of those other notions we used to titillate ourselves with. It has nothing to do with sexual desire, at least for me, and certainly not for Serena (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 77).

This remark implies that sex in Gilead is used for "business" or procedural functions in order to propagate, rather than for pleasure. Thus, it defamiliarizes the popular concept by exaggerating its importance and ceremonising the procedure of sex. Similarly, Atwood defamiliarizes another popular concept: the concept of the body. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the body is never represented as a whole, but rather as discrete parts with defined roles: the Handmaids are "two-legged wombs" (109), and doctors see "a torso only" during physical screening (50). More noticeable is the image of the feet, which appears several times in the novel, first when Moira is tormented by the Aunts and later when Offred is dismissed and thinks as if someone has "cut off [her] feet" (143). Then again, this is a novel that aligns itself not just to the tradition of dystopian literature but also into the legacy of women's struggle against tyranny. Apparently, Atwood was aware of the torturous practice of foot-binding that Chinese women have undergone for generations. What is certain is that the narrator's bodily alienation is expressed through parts of the body, rather than a whole body. Offred speaks of "amputated speech" and later of her "limping and mutilated story" (159, 212), which is an interesting use of the image of dismemberment in her narrative. This is fitting because Atwood employs various types of literary devices in order to symbolise disintegration. A new parallel between the narrator and narrative is formed: Offred's story is a projection of her shattered personality, a disintegration that, as previously stated, is at least partly the outcome of her sexual servitude (Lapicque 27).

Anonymity is a tool that is effectively used in The *Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. Offred's anonymity is the first thing readers notice about her: She has been absorbed by the system and her identity has vanished. Offred's name is never disclosed to the reader, despite the fact that it is important to her effort to re-establish her sense of the self (the TV series adaptation by Hulu, however, mentions her supposed pre-Gilead name "June"). There is a significance to this anonymity, as the readers may easily discern from the exchange of names at Red Center. To begin with, readers' relationship to the dystopia is intriguing; because the speaker is given no identity, she may be anyone. Offred is elevated from an individual to a symbol of her gender in this analysis: She becomes a synecdoche, experiencing the misfortune of all women in a patriarchal culture. Atwood's metafictional use of the enigmatic "you" who "may mean hundreds" and is "without a name" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 33-34) creates a connection between the narrator and the reader. Of course, the elimination of names, which

in the case of the Handmaids has been substituted with patronymics that designate them according to the Commander to whom they are allocated ("Offred" literally means "Of Fred"), is part of the dystopian state's degrading impact. Individuals, like the characters in Zamyatin's *We*, become numbers, losing whatever is distinctive or special about their identities. We can also speculate that Atwood picked the name "Offred" because it resembles the past participle "offered," which represents the narrator's position in the novel, obligated to serve others at all times. This may appear bleak, but one must not forget the other name, June, the one that "nobody uses [...] because it's banned," despite Atwood's efforts to keep the mystery around it. The narrator's real name (June, as the reader deduces from the facts) provides some optimism; it is "some amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginably distant past" in the story (68).

The way the characters feel about themselves is crucial to the understanding of how Atwood defamiliarizes the characters' sense of the self under the regime. If readers follow the stream of consciousness of the characters, they affectively recognise that something is off about the way they feel. Agnes, for example, fears that she is going to be married to a lustful man– "a goat on fire"– who would attempt to violently rape her. She develops this fear because she has learnt at school that all men have terrible, uncontrollable urges that must be curbed by covering the body. She also learns that female bodies are snares and enticements even without meaning to be so, which could make men drunk with lust and lose all sense of control (Atwood, *Testaments* 15-16). Such generalised misconception about men and women's body and bodily relations in a thirteen-year-old is rather unusual and alarming. Furthermore, Offred struggles to see herself as a real person, which makes sense in a world where reality has been flipped upside down by totalitarian absurdity. Irrespective of how long the Gilead regime has been in power, the social norms still strike Offred as absurd; her "red cloak" is still foreign to her, although the novel later affirms that she would consider jeans and short skirts just as disconcerting. When she looks in a mirror the very first time, she finds "a distorted shadow, a parody of something, some fairytale figure in a red cloak" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 8). Eleonora Rao comments that this "red cloak" could refer to *Little Red Riding Hood*: "…[T]he intertextual reference to Little Red Riding Hood is self-evident in the long hooded red garment the handmaids have to wear" (122). For Offred, both the environment and her own self have become impossible to comprehend since they have both been stripped of their

previous selves. Offred has lost authority over her own physique, freedom of expression, and even her name—the most basic identifier. These crises of self-image and identity offer a unique insight to the readers into the bizarre conditions these characters find themselves in.

3.3 Theory of Mind

Theory of Mind is a term used by psychologists and philosophers to describe our ability to decipher others' thoughts, feelings, desires by observing and interpreting human behaviour; it is also commonly referred to as mind-reading. This process is crucial for communication although it is frequently flawed, and when mind-reading is impaired, communication breaks down. According to Lisa Zunshine, "cognitive adaptations of mind-reading are promiscuous, voracious, and proactive," and the very condition of their function is a "constant stimulation delivered either by direct interactions with other people or by imaginary approximations of such interactions, which includes forms of representational art and narrative" ("Embodied Transparency" 68) However, she points out how the words "theory" in "Theory of Mind" and "reading" in "mind-reading" might be potentially misleading as they seem to imply that "we attribute states of mind intentionally and consciously" whereas much of the mind-reading takes place on a level inaccessible to our consciousness (67). Human bodies and their facial expressions do not necessarily convey the cues or information for the observer's conscious interpretation. She gives an example of how our interpretations are frequently incorrect: When we see somebody reaching for a cup of coffee, we assume that they are thirsty; but the person we assumed to be thirsty might have wanted to read the name of the manufacturer on the bottom of the cup (67). Zunshine subsequently mentions the intriguing functioning of "mirror neurons"—also known as the empathy neurons—to explain how our "neural circuits are powerfully attuned to the behavior, and emotional display of other members of our species" (67-68). An action is understood in our brain when its observation causes the motor system of the observer to "resonate," which is why when we observe someone else grasping a cup, "the same population of neurons that control the execution of grasping movements becomes active in motor areas" (Rizzolatti et al 662). This causes our brain not to distinguish between someone doing something and a person that they observe doing it, at least on some levels.

The enjoyment readers derive from fictional narratives can be attributed to their awareness of successful testing of mind-reading adaptations. One must keep in mind that the pleasures of reading fictional minds are susceptible to the same instabilities that make real-life mind-reading both fascinating and aggravating. Literary critics and educators rely for both scholarly understanding and classroom discussions on their "interest in the characters as possible people and in the narrative world as similar to [their] own," but one must be wary of the tendency to treat fictional characters as real people (Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction* 19). This is what is called a "sensational misunderstanding of the essence of writing" (19). Writers can take advantage of readers' constant willingness to postulate a mind when they observe a particular behaviour. They provide the readers with a certain set of scenarios that invites interpretation of the characters' mental states. They also depict certain characters doing this kind of interpretations from the actions of other characters. For instance, Offred notices that whenever she knocks and Nick opens the door, he always holds something in his hand—a toothbrush, or a cigarette, or a glass with something in it (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 213). From this she assumes that Nick is not very keen on seeing her, ". . . as if he's been going about his life as usual, not expecting me, not waiting. Maybe he doesn't expect me, or wait. Maybe he has no notion of the future, or does not bother or dare to imagine it" (213). Here Atwood has the option of directly explaining to the readers Nick's thoughts and intentions—why he opens the door with something in his hand. Instead, she offers only Offred's interpretations and leaves the readers with the task of drawing conclusions to keep the story emotionally cohesive to them. This provides the readers with an activation of the cognitive tendencies by envisioning the hidden mental states of the characters. It involves following the widely accessible representations of such states throughout the narrative, and comparing their understanding of what the given character must be experiencing at a given moment with what they presume could be the author's intention. Even the act of misreading the protagonist's thoughts and feelings, when viewed in this light, does not detract from the cognitive enjoyment provided by fiction reading.

Authors sometimes put their characters in situations in which their bodies spontaneously reveal their emotional states, sometimes when they are unaware and they give themselves away, even though they do not mean to. In Ardua Hall, Jade or Nicole gives away her nervousness and anxiety when she does not sit patiently; instead, she is seen to have

"twisted, squirmed, fidgeted with her feet" (Atwood, *Testaments* 314). Additionally, she starts pulling hairs out of the back of her neck (315). She pretends to be confident and nonchalant about this to her fellow Supplicant Agnes and Becka, and partially succeeds in her effort, but leaves a cue to the readers about her true emotional state. Zunshine calls this kind of access to a character's mental state via her body language "embodied transparency" ("Embodied Transparency" 72). The representation of embodied transparency gives the readers an access to the characters' affective state through the observation of their behaviour. Even if characters fail to notice the moments of embodied transparency, readers are either made to notice them by the omniscient narration, or it is left entirely to the readers' sensitivity to notice them. Either way, they offer readers a possibility of deriving insights through the representation of the body and bodily gestures as a highly privileged, yet unreliable, source of information about the mind.

Furthermore, descriptions of nature are usually focused to provide an indirect glimpse into the feelings of the characters seeing them, even when they do not overtly ascribe human ideas and feelings to natural events and things. Even in works of fiction when they appear to be overrepresented, descriptions of nature are limited.[8] Despite their rarity, they stand out and attract disproportionate attention as a result. It is possible to store certain information/representations "under advisement" due to metarepresentational abilities.[9] What this means is that it is likely to make inferences based on available information that can be false, but the extent of these inferences remains constrained. According to Terada, "Poststructuralist thought about emotion is hidden in plain sight; poststructuralist theory deploys implicit and explicit logics of emotion and, as its very critics point out, willingly dramatizes particular emotions. It has reason to stress emotive experience, for far from controverting the "death of the subject," emotion entails this death" (3). How Offred responds to the early blossoming of spring is suggestive of her renewed responsiveness towards natural phenomena:

[8] Zunshine recalls being astonished lately while rereading the books of nineteenth-century Russian writer Ivan Turgenev and searching in vain for all those lengthy "nature" sections that bored her so much as a teenager. Those seemingly lengthy stretches turn out to be brief, infrequent, and frequently riddled with sad fallacy and personification (*Why We Read Fiction* 8).

[9] See "Metarepresentational Ability and Schizophrenia" section in *Why We Read Fiction*, for more insightful discussion about metarepresentation.

> The willow is in full plumage and is no help, with its insinuating whispers. Rendezvous, it says, terraces; the sibilants run up my spine, a shiver as if in fever. The summer dress rustles against the flesh of my thighs, the grass grows underfoot, at the edges of my eyes there are movements, in the branches; feathers, flittings, grace notes, tree into bird, metamorphosis run wild. Goddesses are possible now and the air suffuses with desire. Even the bricks of the house are softening, becoming tactile; if I leaned against them they'd be warm and yielding (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 120).

The "meta" element of the representation, the little "tag" that defines the information's source, is what prevents the representation from freely flowing inside the readers' cognitive system and being utilised as an input to "many inferential processes, whose outputs are inputs to others" (*Why We Read Fiction* 50-51). The idea of meta-representationalism appears in psychologists' studies of the differences between episodic and semantic memories (memories associated with specific learning episodes or experiences i.e., general knowledge not tied to specific learning experience) (*Why We Read Fiction* 50-51).

3.4 Authors' Persuasion of Empathy and Readers' Perception

Although empathy is not one of the major themes of the duology, Margaret Atwood's modulations of narrative voice and point of view are carefully crafted to stimulate the reader's empathy. Atwood speculates a future society based on her consciously informed position that invites readers to identify with both the characters and the situation. Keen observes, "A careful reader attuned to postmodern technique recognizes that, by the end, Atwood has destabilized the foundations of her fictional world… Readers of *The Handmaid's Tale* readily make connections between Atwood's fictional world and parts of the real world in which women are similarly exploited" (*Empathy and the Novel* 122). She goes on to claim that "[t]his kind of novel doesn't need to mention empathy directly in order to provoke vicarious emotional response in readers; although it is not clear what she means by "[t]his kind of novel" (122). However, it is quite clear that she recognises the novel's potentiality for

empathy generation.[10] The masterful depiction of the dystopian world allows the readers to experience extreme depravity, terror, and sadness vicariously; and thus offers an intriguing study of the nature of narrative empathy and aesthetic emotions. It is important to note that the author's empathy is the fundamental source from which the tone of the narrative is set. Marco Caracciolo says in this context, "[T]he only real consciousness with which readers come into contact through a literary work is that of the author" (198).

Atwood's use of a sustained, intimate, first-person narration followed by the unsympathetic, mocking, sexist take on the narration at the "Historical Notes" section is responsible for generating much of the duology' affective power. On the affective level, it is an effective technique, since human beings generally tend to root for the underdogs. All four narrators of the duology are women—the undisputed underdogs who suffer terrible injustice. The "Historical Notes" conclusively diminishes any hopes for justice, or in the least any kind of recognition of their sufferings. According to Keen,

> [t]he alternating first- and third-person segments that comprise the novel, despite their gaps and uncertainties and the implausibility of Atwood's extreme scenario, evoke strong feeling responses of empathy with Offred, as well as outrage, pity, shock, and horror... In spite of Atwood's deliberate emphasis on the constructedness of her characters, readers persist in feeling with the titular handmaid and hating her oppressors (122).

Character identification is heightened by the novel's projection of its dystopian world through the embodied perspective of the protagonist.

Atwood's use of metafictional devices in her duology has two basic functions: First, it leaves a room for the readers to compare and question the many narrative voices and construct their own understanding about the historical knowledge, and secondly, it fashions a bridge between the characters and the readers. The duology as historiographic metafiction supports the idea of the relativism and plurality of truth, contesting the official grand narratives of the regime. The metafictional devices offer a voice to women who have been silenced by the

[10] Suzanne Keen's book was published in 2007, and *The Testaments* was published in 2019; hence there is no mention of it.

regime and bring their stories to the fore. As Cristina Chifane Chifane, and Liviu-augustin Chifane point out, "The use of intermingling narrative threads, overlapping temporal lines, unreliable narrators, rewritings of the same scene or event, parody and satire, linguistic puns, and the violation of ontological levels converge to reflect the ambiguity and uncertainty of the fictional world and to undermine the male historians' appropriation of historical truth" (1180). In addition, the self-reflexive nature of the narrating voices have an affective pull. The narrators address the readers directly, not only to recount their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but also to explain their failures, confess wrongdoings, and plead not to judge. In other words, the duology actively seeks out to build a bridge between the readers and the characters. Aunt Lydia's account is reticent about affects/emotions and has less expectation for compassion and understanding, in contrast to Offed's and Agnes'. Her feeble expectation has a forlorn tone to it: "Who are you, my reader? And when are you? Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps fifty years from now, perhaps never (Atwood, *Testaments* 64). She is aware that there would be overwhelming accusations against her for collaborating with the regime. Therefore, she explains her side of the story the best she can, and leaves it to the understanding and compassion of the reader: "Goodbye, my reader. Try not to think too badly of me, or no more badly than I think of myself" (391). However, there are elements of inconsistencies and unreliability in her account (as is typical in metafiction) which can be guessed from comparing her narration with Offerd's. Offred's account, however, is more intense and visceral. Her plea to be heard is immediate and desperate:

> A story is like a letter. Dear You, I'll say. Just you, without a name. Attaching a name attaches you to the world of fact, which is riskier, more hazardous: who knows what the chances are out there, of survival, yours? I will say you, you, like an old love song.
>
> You can mean more than one. You can mean thousands. I'm not in any immediate danger, I'll say to you.
>
> I'll pretend you can hear me (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale 34)*.

Chifane observes the affective pull of her narration: "Like a veritably talented narrator, she creates intimacy with the target audience ("Dear"). The same as herself, her audience is nameless and lacks a specific identity. However, by multiplying the number of the potential

recipients of her story, she ensures its representational status and saves it from forgetfulness" (1184). Perhaps Offred starts telling her "story" to preserve her sanity in a context where she loses genuine human connection almost entirely.

Atwood believes in engaging the attention of the reader in the very first page of a novel.[11] She wastes no time in preparing her readers to recognise the pathos in the narration: "Only dead people are allowed to have statues, but I have been given one while still alive. Already I am petrified" (*Testaments* 3). The cognitive dynamics that these opening lines set in motion is likely to invoke an immediate concern for the character in readers. Keen believes that empathetic responses to fictional characters and situations occur more readily for negative states of feeling, regardless of whether the details of the experiences match (*Empathy and the Novel* 72). The phenomenological experience of being transported into a fictional world greatly depends on the reader's experience of narrative empathy. Atwood invokes narrative empathy with these lines in the very first page of *The Handmaid's Tale: "*I remember that yearning, for something that was always about to happen and was never the same… We yearned for the future. How did we learn it, that talent for insatiability? It was in the air; and it was still in the air, an after-thought, as we tried to sleep…" This feeling of yearning and insatiability is a universally relatable one. The subtle readerly simulation of character perceptions and actions may, therefore, lead to empathy.

The constant state of tension is palpable throughout the duology. The narrators' heightened vigilance is critical to their survival in the authoritarian regime. This hypervigilance is potent on the affective level; it is the very appeal of speculative fiction, i. e. taking its readers out of their comfort zone and shocking them into awareness. There seems to be a perilous possibility every step of the way in the duology, which is crucial to the dramatic development of the novels' plot. The vulnerability of the characters is expressed in an intimate, visceral manner. For example, Jade expresses her experience of anxiety in Gilead in this way: "Gilead was slippery, like walking on ice. I felt off balance all the time. I couldn't read people's faces, and I often didn't know what they were saying. I could hear the words, I could understand the words themselves, but I couldn't translate them into meaning" (Atwood, *Testaments* 312).

[11] Atwood teaches a MasterClass on the topic of creative writing where she emphasises the importance of gripping the reader at the first page.

This is representative of the numerous scenarios where acute physical and psychological vulnerabilities are dramatised, and the readers can vicariously perceive heightened sense of vigilance.

There are different opinions among the critics regarding how an unreliable narrator affects the readers, since the effect of narrative unreliability has not yet been tested on readers' emotional responses. David Lodge contends that first-person narration gives writers the opportunity to create unreliable or discordant narrators that take advantage of the almost automatic trust readers place on the narration due to their suspension of disbelief (87–88). Despite Offred's declarations that her story is a "reconstruction" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 112), the reader is sometimes led to believe that she is just narrating the story as she goes along, without the aid of retrospection. This is aided by the use of the present tense and the fact that Offred never implies she is recording her story in any way. Still, readers have no choice but to take her word for it, as she serves as their portal inside Gilead. This is the uniqueness of the directed perception that dystopias frequently employ. Indeed, the reader will discover the new norms of the story-world through the protagonist's eyes, and thus experience what Darko Suvin has termed as "cognitive estrangement," which characterises speculative fiction in general (Lapicque 18-19). However, by presenting the reader with an unreliable narrator and thereby leaving room for mystery, Atwood invites the reader to speculate, negotiate, and investigate. They have agency in the creation and recreation of the story. If Atwood leaves many problems unresolved, the readers must figure out a solution for themselves. To borrow Janet Horowitz Murray's phrase, they must "actively create belief" (142).

Furthermore, readers' values about how rewards and punishments should be allocated may alter upon reading a poignant novel (*Empathy and the Novel* 108). The "Particicution" ritual is evocative of the racist lynchings of the black people in the US and elsewhere (220-221); its rationale provided by the Aunts can be taken into perspective. The man who is executed by the Handmaids is wrongly convicted of rape, as were many blacks who were hanged in twentieth-century America by the KKK. In a similar manner, the "Underground Femaleroad" reminds the reader of the Underground Railroad, a system by which slaves were surreptitiously assisted in reaching the north of the country or Canada when slavery was abolished. In an online piece, freelance writer Noah Berlatsky draws an interesting analogy

between Gilead's misogyny and that of several Asian countries, equating the Handmaids' outfits to "nuns' habits and burqas," connecting women's misery to racial persecution. "Independent Western women have slipped into an Orientalist nightmare," writes Berlatsky, "The worst part about being a Handmaid is that you lose your whiteness." Psychologist Martin Hoffman points out that the narrative of films and novels has the prospect of offering readers the opportunity to empathise with others' "entire life (hard work, expectations, disappointment) and respond, where appropriate, with empathic feelings of injustice" (259).

Finally, the historical rootedness of the duology provokes affective recognition of the damaging nature of the dystopia. Keen suggests that the study of narrative empathy

> …ought to be attuned to historical and social contexts in the period of reception … Readers' empathy for situations depicted in fiction may be enhanced by chance relevance to particular historical, economic, cultural, or social circumstances. Both successes and failures of empathy may arise as much from the specific context and conditions of the reader as from the representation itself (*Empathy and the Novel* 81).

The fact that Atwood bases her imagined theocracy on historically genuine authoritarian regimes may cause passionate engagement on the part of more cultivated readers. Readers can relate this to the historical references that have previously been alluded to in this chapter, because Atwood's story-world is substantiated by the fact that she derives inspiration straight from history (Lapicque 71-72). Nevertheless, by basing her dystopian society in part on the totalitarian regimes that have left a terrifying mark on the twentieth century, Atwood not only constructs but also reconstructs her dystopia.

3.5 Protests Inspired from *The Handmaid's Tale*

The assaults on women's reproductive rights following Donald Trump's election in 2016 have given Atwood's 1985 novel a renewed academic and public interest. Particularly its television adaptation by Hulu has undoubtedly caused its seeming resurrection and popularisation. It is not a coincidence that Hulu aired its first episode in 2017, and *The Handmaid's Tale* became the most read and sold book in the same year. The first season of the TV series adapts the

The Handmaid's Tale, and then takes its own course from season two.[12] This leaves the audience speculating about the ending of the novel. Atwood says that the worldwide discussion and enthusiasm inspired her to write the sequel, *The Testaments*: "My thanks first to the readers of The Handmaid's Tale: their interest and curiosity has been inspiring" (*Testaments* 414). *The Testaments* was published in 2019, and it sold more than 100,000 copies in hardback in its first week alone in the UK. [13] Later in the year, Atwood was a joint winner of the 2019 Booker Prize for her *The Testaments.*

The red dress worn by the Handmaids has recently emerged as one of the most powerful symbols of protest. As a symbol of protest, it is a subversive inversion of its association with the oppression of women. Protests took place all over the world—including in Argentina, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland by women and men wearing the outfit worn by Handmaids. It was worn by pro-choice demonstrators in Ireland demanding to repeal the eighth amendment to the country's constitution (during the successful referendum), abortion rights activists in Buenos Aires, and by the protesters in London to demonstrate against Donald Trump's visit to the UK and the policies of his administration. The US Vice President Mike Pence was welcomed by women wearing the Handmaids' cloak in Philadelphia on July 23, 2017. Why the handmaid's uniform has come to represent a powerful symbol of protest is as telling as the phenomenon itself (Guardian).[14] According to Keen,

> For better or for worse, the novel is a commodity, whose relationship to other products in the marketplace matters when the effects of reading are under investigation. Acquiring particular accessories, garments, and other purchasable tokens of a desired identity can be the direct result of novel reading. The toy industry capitalizes on this phenomenon when it offers action figures, costumes, party

[12] Its adaptation is rather controversial: while the first season was widely praised, the second has been chastised for revelling in excessive violence to the point where the show has been dubbed "torture porn" (Baccolini, "Hope isn't stupid" D41-D42).

[13] Alison Flood and Jade Cuttle, "Handmaid's sales: Margaret Atwood's The Testaments is immediate hit," *The Guardian,* 17 September 2019, www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/17/handmaids-sales-margaret-atwoods-the-testaments-is-immediate-hit

[14] Peter Beaumont and Amanda Holpuch, "How *The Handmaid's Tale* dressed protests across the world," *The Guardian* 3 Aug. 2018.

> decorations, and updated versions of old games as thematic tie-ins to movies, cartoons, and even books (*Empathy and the Novel* 66-67).

Even though *The Handmaid's Tale* and its sequel have been popularised by the market following the logic of capitalism and consumerism, the novels have indeed sown seeds of popular discontents around issues of progressive interest. Women's oppression represented in both the duology and the TV show has resonated with people all over the world. The worldwide protests mentioned above suggest that people have identified with the situation depicted in Atwood's dystopia. This affective association with the fictional world created a hyper awareness in them when they recognised similar conditions in their real world, which made them take part in active protest.

However, Raffaella Baccolini mentions and comments on an example of Atwood's critical dystopia being trivialised: Kylie Jenner, an American media personality, influencer, and socialite who is part of the Jenner-Kardashian business family, prepared and held a *Handmaid's Tale*-themed party for one of her friends in the beginning of June 2019. Three visitors were greeted with "Praise be, Ladies. Welcome to Gilead" mimicking the traditional Gilead greetings. Guests were encouraged to dress in the handmaids' customary red dresses and white bonnets, sipping cocktails like "Praise be vodka" and "Under his eyes tequila." Upon the event's publication on social media, the video went viral causing much outrage. Baccolini finds the event problematic and representative of today's climate of dystopia appropriation. She thinks that "Like the now withdrawn Halloween "Sexy Handmaid" costume," this event "represent[s] a form of appropriation, where something transgressive and radical is taken, tamed, co-opted, neutralized, and commodified" (D43).

Mary McCarthy accuses Atwood of struggling to convey the "proper fear" that is essential to a dystopia in a book review published by *The New York Times* in 1986.[15] In other words, she claims that Atwood fails to tell her readers that her dystopian society is likely to occur if changes are not executed in their current society. To quote McCarthy, "Even when I try to take the Moral Majority seriously in the light of these palely lurid pages, I don't get a shiver of recognition. I just can't see the intolerance of the far right […] leading to a super-biblical

[15] Mary McCarthy," Book Review," *The New York Times* 9 Feb. 1986.

puritanism by which procreation will be insisted on and reading of any kind banned." This contrasts sharply with the women's marches held in the aftermath of Donald Trump's election, where some women brought signs reading "Make Margaret Atwood Fiction Again" (Levine). This is only one example of the recent developments which point out that Atwood's dystopia establishes a terrifying future that is plausible to its reading audiences. Even lay readers are reasonably able to recognise that Atwood's duology is not just about what can happen in the future, but also about what has happened in the past and is happening here and now. As with most dystopias, Atwood's novels have a sense of foreboding, but it is far from the most striking aspect of her message. What really upsets the readers is the latent misogyny that Gilead shares with their own society, which they are accustomed to ignoring. Sexist stereotypes, which have existed for the majority of human history, have been so ingrained in many cultures that they are no longer parceptibe (Holland and Holland). In her duology, Margaret Atwood defamiliarizes the latent misogyny, making it impossible to be overlooked even by the most unwilling readers. As a result, is tough to agree with McCarthy that Atwood's dystopian world causes "no shiver of recognition." The duology presents the reader with the wreckage of their own society which has devolved into a nightmare as a result of very real prejudices that have shaped women's lives for millennia, most often for the worse.

3.6 Debates and Controversies

There is a debate among the theorists around empathy-altruism hypothesis—whether empathy necessarily leads to altruism or changed behaviour. The empathy–altruism hypothesis posits that humans are indeed capable of valuing more than their own welfare (Nussbaum 22-23). The two major antecedents of empathic concern offered by the theoretical framework on the empathy-altruism hypothesis are (a) a perception of another as in need and (b) intrinsic valuing of the other's welfare. A person perceiving another as being in need entails noticing a negative disparity between the other's current state and what they desire on one or more dimensions of well-being. The lack of physical discomfort, negative affect, worry, stress, danger, and sickness, as well as the existence of physical pleasure, positive affect, contentment, and security, are all dimensions of well-being. The negative

disparity at hand is about the well-being of the individual in need, not the well-being of the person who is experiencing empathy. However, it is the impression of the individual feeling empathy, not the perception of the person in need that is at stake. There are times when some people believe they are in need, while others do not. Unless they regard the false perception of the need to be a need, these others will not feel empathy or compassion. On the other hand, there are situations when people do not believe they are in need, but others do. Others may be concerned in an empathic way ("Empathy-Altruism Hypothesis"). The hypothesis is a part of a larger group of psychological theories claiming that a threat to the desired condition elicits emotions, which lead to goal-directed motivation to achieve or maintain the desired state. It varies from other theories, however, in that it believes that our valuing extends beyond our own beloved self.

However, Suzanne Keen is sceptical about the validity of empathy-altruism hypothesis: "Surveying the existing research on the consequences of reading, I find the case for altruism stemming from novel reading inconclusive at best and nearly always exaggerated in favor of the beneficial effects of novel reading" (*Empathy and the Novel* vii). She believes that rather than sophisticated or realistic characterization, empathy for fictional characters may only require the most fundamental components of identity, context, and emotion. Furthermore, reading emotionally compelling stories does not always imply empathy for the characters. Additionally, the potential of the novel to generate empathy from readers may change with time (and certain novels may only elicit empathy from their original, immediate readership). Empathy for a fictional character, for example, does not have to correspond to or invite what the author appears to build up or invite. Situational empathy responds primarily to plot and circumstance, requiring less self-extension in imaginative role-playing and greater understanding of prior (or current) experience. As a result, a passing allusion to specific historical, economic, cultural, or social circumstances may generate readers' empathy for fictional situations (*Empathy and the Novel xii-xiii*).

When a person has an empathetic reaction at different phases, Hoffman claims, developmental levels of empathy can be seen. The crying new-born child demonstrates global empathy; the young toddler may be more concerned with the emotional impact of another's feelings on herself ("egocentric empathy"); any human being should be able to experience empathy with another individual; and the mature perceiver may show empathy for an entire

group of people, including those whose circumstances and prospects differ from her own. According to Hoffman, as global empathy changes toward a more egocentric response, a sympathetic component may arise. This theory contends that mature people's empathy should have a sympathetic component. Empathic effects, on the other hand, are dampened by our proximity to the victim. We may be innocent spectators, participants (transgressors), or virtual transgressors (who feel guilty despite not being involved) in situations where many claimants make competing claims on us, or situations where caring appears to be at odds with justice (Hoffman 3–4). Empathy does not always translate into a single sort of feeling when it is translated into other moral effects. Knowing ahead of time that Hoffman only talks about "victims' awful emotions" explains why his future emotions are dominated by guilt, fury, and sufferings. Hoffman lays out five options for converting empathy into various moral emotions, each of which is tied to the perceiver's judgement of causes. If the victim has caused her own sufferings, she may no longer be seen as a victim, and empathy may not arise. If the victim is unable to manage his agony, the perceiver may experience sympathetic discomfort and empathy for his situation. If the perceiver is a member of a group suspected of inflicting sufferings on the victim, empathy may turn to guilt; if the observer does nothing to help the suffering individual, she may feel guilty for her inaction; and if the perceiver is a member of a group suspected of inflicting sufferings on the victim, he may feel guilty by association (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* 17-18). These true transformations of empathy into a variety of guilty feelings may or may not encourage a perceiver to act altruistically or to help others; in fact, sorry feelings may contribute to a sense of helplessness in the face of others' sufferings. Hoffman, on the other hand, believes that sorrow can be channelled into patterns of altruism, but acknowledges that this is less likely to occur without parental or other types of guidance (9).

Conclusion

The key argument of my research is that the fictional representation of speculative trauma in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* creates the possibility of heightened concern and empathy in readers. The duology represents the culmination of the crises of contemporary societies in a distant future. The crises that we see in Atwood's dystopian vision are also the crises of today's world: climate change, man-made ecological disasters, human rights abuses, populism, ultra-right and authoritarian tendencies, forced migration—both internal displacement and refugee flow, and many others. Since we are affected by these crises on a daily basis, either directly or indirectly/virtually through news, social media, etc., we can make instant connections with the crises represented in the novels. This connection based on readers' prior experience opens up the opportunity of situational empathy. Besides, the intimate narration and nuanced perspective of the narrators give readers an immersive experience, which may lead to character identification. This results in a vicarious experience of the characters' trauma. The notion that "this could happen to us" is one of the consequences that speculative fiction has because of its specific stylistic features. Atwood's duology is no exception—the first book has long been considered prophetic. Its relevance to the world and its impact on the readers are rediscovered again and again. This research, among other things, attempts a scholarly investigation into the reason it is considered prophetic.

The relevance of Atwood's duology is felt now more than ever. The world is still going through a severe crisis created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Although not unprecedented, this pandemic has reached an overwhelming proportion because of globalisation. Modern technology has given us speed and ease of travel, but we discovered poignantly that this also means that the pandemic will spread at an alarming rate. It has been noticed time and again in history that when a severe crisis makes people vulnerable, authoritarian groups attempt to take advantage of the situation. These authoritarian, usually fanatic groups, tend to come up with oversimplified solutions to an extremely complex crisis, exuding an outward façade of confidence. A population already weakened by an overwhelming crisis is susceptible to herd mentality. It is indeed the herd mentality that makes totalitarian regimes possible. Atwood's

duology embodies this historical wisdom through its representation of the state apparatuses of the totalitarian regime, namely The Republic of Gilead. This representation offers readers the tools to recognise the symptoms of totalitarian tendencies. Besides, the ecological decline these novels portray is already happening in our world today. The way climate change is being dealt with is extremely unfortunate. This is perhaps soon going to escalate into fully-fledged disasters. When disasters happen, it creates a fertile ground for totalitarian control over the population, leading to a decline in human rights. Atwood's two novels give us a vivid picture of how the world may end up dealing with the climate crisis and subsequent dystopian reality.

Furthermore, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* draws our attention to another recurrent phenomenon in the events of overwhelming crises: Whenever a crisis happens, women are among the worst hit victims. We can see signs of trauma in different characters: Offred and Aunt Lydia have frequent nightmares and flashbacks; Agnes and Becka develop a phobia of male sexual organ; Nicole is in shock following the death of her foster parents, and as a result of the knowledge of her own true identity. The unbelievable display of carnage at the "Particicution" suggests the hidden trauma and anger of the Handmaids beneath their subdued appearance. The patriarchal trauma is caused partially because women in the Republic of Gilead lose their identity. They are renamed, forced to leave their profession, and can hold no property and money. Marthas, Handmaids, women at Jezebels, and Aunts are practically slaves, who must perform the duty they are assigned to, and they are not paid (which is the very definition of slavery). For Handmaids, things are the worst: they are subjected to state-engineered rape in order to procreate, so that Gilead's fallen birth-rate may recover. They are reduced to only one organ of their bodies: their wombs. They are not allowed privacy, or any human interaction. Failing to give birth to a healthy baby will result in being sent to the "Colonies." Handmaids' bodies are no longer theirs—their bodies are property of the state, to be used in the way it is useful to them. In short, they have no authority over their own bodies whatsoever. They are not even allowed to have a bath all by themselves—a Martha gives them a bath. They are treated like children, on the one hand, and sexual beings, on the other–both at the same time. This treatment by the patriarchal, theocratic, totalitarian state creates a split between their body and their identity, which is traumatising.

This research interprets the technological backlash in Gilead as a trauma response. *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* do not represent a dazzling display of futuristic technology, unlike Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* or Huxley's *Brave New World*. The Gileadean regime responds to the environmental crisis (among other crises) by limiting the use of technology to the bare minimum. Instead of shiny new technology, they focus on manual labour, such as making bread at home, making rugs from old clothes, knitting, recycling, deploying expendable, disposable human beings to clean up toxic waste, etc. I argue that the categorical rejection of science and technology can be read as a symptom of climate trauma. However, Gilead demonstrates the risk and danger of uncritical and wholesale rejection of machines. In throwing out the evils of technology, they throw away the gifts too. It is evident in the instance of the Handmaid Ofkyle's death in childbirth (*Testaments* 106). Although Gilead considers Handmaids as valuable national resources, they do not seek the help of technology even during life-threatening childbirths.

I use the term "speculative trauma" to refer to the anticipation and trauma of future catastrophes that Margaret Atwood represents in both the novels. The traditional notion of trauma refers to the trauma of the past, and calls the symptoms of the past traumatic experience the "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)." Recent research shows that the extreme anxiety and apprehension of future trauma have the similar effects on the human mind as past traumatic events. I refer to E. Ann Kaplan, who proposes the term "pretrauma" to describe the traumatic imagining of future catastrophic scenarios in which audiences are invited to identify with future selves in uncertain, dangerous, and ultimately unsustainable worlds. She uses the term PreTSS or Pretraumatic Stress Syndrom to describe the experience of terror of a future catastrophe.

I argue in my thesis that the representation of speculative trauma in Atwood's duology generates a strong emotional response in readers; they feel the experiences of the characters affectively, imaginatively and vicariously, which may lead to character identification. The localised view of first person narratives offers an emotional connection with characters' plights. I discuss in section 3.1 called "Character Identification" that the prolonged exposure to the narrators' psyche give an immersive experience of the nuances of traumatic experiences of the characters: their grievances, the injustices they are subjected to, their failures, the bitter uncertainty of their lives, their fears and struggles for survival. Thus, literary

rendition of trauma in speculative novels fulfil two important conditions of affective empathy; first, readers are able to imagine and understand the situation of the victim (which I refer to as situational empathy), and secondly, they may be able to identify with the characters (which I call character identification). At the same time, I keep in sight the prospect of compassion fatigue that may occur due to the prolonged exposure to the characters' trauma.

I analyse Atwood's duology to examine the narrative techniques she used that may generate empathy in readers. I have shown how she uses techniques of defamiliarization to upset the familiar order of things, so that readers may notice the ordinary things that seem invisible because of overfamiliarity. Atwood defamiliarizes space and time to create a spatiotemporal distance that offers the opportunity to negotiate the likelihood of these events happening in the future. Moreover, the novels are set in the background of various acute crises. The lens of crisis offered by the novels has an effect of generating constant state of high alert that may take the readers out of their comfort zones and create a heightened awareness. Atwood also uses shocking details, flashbacks, understatement, and exaggeration effectively to achieve this effect.

I have investigated the claim Atwood made over and over again that she has not written anything in *The Handmaid's Tale* that has not already happened in history in Chapter 3. I traced historical evidences of all the horrible things represented in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* and found that the duology heavily draws on historical precedents. My argument for this section is that the historical rootedness of the duology makes fictional rendition credible and relatable to readers. This fact may contribute to the generation of heightened awareness in informed readers.

This study addresses the research gap pointed out in the introduction in a couple of ways. Firstly, through the idea of speculative trauma this research proposes a term that addresses historical trauma without claiming any direct referentiality. Since Atwood's speculative novels selected for this study take the readers to imaginative futures, it may be argued that the traumatic circumstances represented in the novels do not have any historical referentiality. However, this research draws connections between these traumatic circumstances and similar ones in the present and past of human history, thereby establishing a referential connection between history and Atwood's dystopian futures through the idea of speculative trauma. And secondly, this research also helps us in our understanding of the connection

between the idea of speculation in novels and empathy generation. Because of the supposed absence of historicity, it may appear to many that these novels may not be effective vessels for compassion and empathy. However, this research, by historicising speculative traumas, demonstrates how these novels can generate empathic feelings in readers despite their futuristic settings. As it can be seen from my key arguments and the research findings above, this research explores in a detailed manner the representational techniques responsible for empathy generation in speculative fiction in general, and Atwood's duology in particular.

One of the key debates concerning the study of narrative empathy is whether there is a gap between author's representation and readers' interpretation. This study addresses this debate in detail in the third chapter and discusses the potential gaps between authorial representation and the readers' interpretation. People may react in a range of ways towards a novel for a wide range of reasons, including their prejudices and biases. Indeed, readers' interpretation may differ significantly from what the author has originally intended to convey (if it is possible at all to speak of authorial intention today). One example of this is that readers assume that Offred's real name must be June, because there is reference to and mention of all the names mentioned in Offred's narration except "June," although Atwood never really directly mentions her real name. Another concern is whether readers' empathy reliably translates into altruism. This study explores empathy-altruism hypothesis and concludes that empathy generated in readers' minds may not necessarily lead to altruistic actions.

The limitation of this study is that it does not involve field research or lab experiments to empirically assess the empathy of the readers. The study uses library research method for qualitative exploration of Margaret Atwood's duology. Therefore, it does not utilise various means of data collection like surveys and questionnaires. This implies that any empirical investigation into speculative novels' capacity to generate empathy in people is beyond the scope of the present research. Instead, this study focuses on exploring the representational techniques that have been demonstrated to generate empathy by theorists. Since this is qualitative research, it rigorously examines many relevant theories and compares them with research findings from already conducted empirical research. Technological advancement allows us to observe the activation of mirror neurons (known as the empathy neuron) in fMRI imaging: how mirror neuron areas of the human brain light up when exposed to vicarious stimuli, such as listening to the experience of another person. Besides, the many protests

inspired by *The Handmaid's Tale* of late indicate how readers feel the resonance of the novel with various real-life situations. The implications are twofold: relevance of the novel to the present, and hyper-awareness among the protesters. All this gives us very strong reasons to believe that empirical research in the areas such as neuroscience and behavioural sciences in the future may yield more conclusive results on the capacity of speculative fiction for empathy generation.

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