



**UiT** The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education

**“No Shadow Unless There is Also Light”:**

**Margaret Atwood’s Dystopia as a Vehicle for Anger and Hope in Feminist Resistance**

Maiken Bye Johansen

Master’s thesis in English Literature and Education...ENG-3983...May 2024



## Abstract

This thesis explores the current relationship between dystopian narratives and abortion politics in the United States with a focus on Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Opposition to abortion seems to be fundamentally entangled in religious belief and misogyny, and opponents of abortion are shamelessly basing their arguments on emotion, misinformation, and fearmongering. Throughout this thesis, I argue that the abortion debate is inherently emotional, that emotions are vital for resisting oppression and injustice, and that dystopian narratives can be vehicles for powerful emotions like anger and hope. I discuss Atwood's relationship with feminism and trace how her novel has been read by scholars. My theoretical grounding is Sarah Ahmed's theory on emotions and feminist attachment. In this thesis, I view abortion care through the lens of reproductive justice, a framework that places abortion alongside other central issues of injustice and oppression.



## Acknowledgments

To my supervisor, Emelie. You are a shining light in a world that can, at times, get awfully dark. Without your guiding hand and warm words of encouragement, this thesis would not be what it is today. You have inspired me for years, and I will be forever grateful for everything you have taught me.

To my roommate, study buddy, and friend, Martine. You have been the Samwise Gamgee to my Frodo Baggins. I cannot imagine where I would be without your love and support. Thank you for being my steadfast companion. You made life infinitely better.

To my family. Thank you for making me feel loved, supported, and safe. I am so lucky and grateful to have you.

To my friends, who stood by my side as I rebuilt myself. You are a safe harbor in a stormy sea. You are the first rays of sunshine after a dark and cold winter. You are the sweet smell of summer rain. You make my heart laugh and my soul smile.

To the masterdontosaurus. Thank you for reminding me that I have people who believe in me and cheer me on.



# Table of Contents

|       |  |    |
|-------|--|----|
| 1     | Introduction .....   | 1  |
| 2     | Cultural and Political Context .....   | 5  |
| 2.1   | The Abortion Debate in the United States .....                               | 5  |
| 2.2   | The Misogynistic Efforts of the Trump Administration.....                    | 15 |
| 2.3   | The Handmaid’s Tale in Adaptation and Protest.....                           | 18 |
| 3     | The Head and the Heart: Feminist Identity, Emotion, Dystopias, and Law ..... | 23 |
| 3.1   | Margaret Atwood the “Bad Feminist” .....                                     | 23 |
| 3.2   | Feminist Emotions.....   | 27 |
| 3.2.1 | Feminist Anger and Feminist Hope .....                                       | 28 |
| 3.3   | Reproductive Justice.....  | 31 |
| 3.4   | The Power of Dystopian Narratives .....                                      | 33 |
| 4     | The Handmaid’s Tale .....  | 34 |
| 4.1   | The United States of Gilead.....   | 35 |
| 4.2   | Oppression and Outrage .....   | 39 |
| 4.3   | Seeds of Resistance and Hope .....   | 45 |
| 5     | Conclusion.....  | 50 |
|       | Works Cited.....   | 53 |





# 1 Introduction

Tim and I will not stop until Missouri is literally the Handmaids Tale.

— Gregg Keller

When asked whether *The Handmaid's Tale* is about to “come true,” I remind myself that there are two futures in the book, and that if the first one comes true, the second one may do so also.

— Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* was released in 1985, one decade after abortion was legalized and declared a constitutional right in the United States of America. Atwood has explained that her dystopic vision was an exploration of what kind of totalitarianism the States would become should democracy cease to be and of how that would happen. Recently, however, she suggested that “we're beginning to see the real-life answer to that query” (“Go Ahead and Ban My Book”). The 35 years since the release of the novel have seen unrelenting attacks on women's rights, especially on their reproductive rights. For decades now, it has been clear that anti-abortion activists were working to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion and solidified it as a constitutional right. Though women have led a continuous fight for their rights for decades, Trump's time in the White House made it clear just how very fragile those rights are. With the reversal of *Roe*, reproductive rights are under serious threat. It is unlikely that anti-abortion activists and legislators will be content with leaving the regulation of abortion up to individual states. “If this sort of laissez-faire, let-others-decide-for-themselves attitude were feasible, they wouldn't have to change any laws at all” (Foster 288). Instead, abortion opponents are likely to fight for a nationwide ban on abortion care, which would have devastating repercussions for women, not only in the States, but all over the world. There is a saying that goes: when America sneezes, the world catches a cold. As the United States is a very powerful country with a lot of influence internationally, the policies laid down in the US will inevitably affect other countries as well. It is not unlikely that the reproductive policies in the US will send ripples internationally (Baber Wallis).

This thesis explores the current relationship between dystopian narratives and abortion politics in the United States with a focus on Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Opposition to abortion seems to be fundamentally entangled in religious belief and misogyny, and opponents of abortion are shamelessly basing their arguments on emotion, misinformation, and fearmongering. Throughout this thesis, I will be arguing that the abortion debate is inherently emotional, that emotions are vital for resisting oppression and injustice, and that dystopian narratives can be vehicles for powerful emotions like anger and hope. I will demonstrate how *The Handmaid's Tale* triggers vigilance through Atwood's incorporation of many unsettling similarities between her novel and the cultural and political landscape in the United States. I will chart the emotional journey of the narrator, Offred, and demonstrate how the pain, suffering, anger, and anguish of the women in Offred's story translates through the page and its potential to be felt and channeled through the reader. Crucially, I argue that though *The Handmaid's Tale* is dark and dystopic, it is also inherently hopeful. Through moments of light and beauty, defiance and resistance, and the certainty that Gilead will end one day, Atwood leaves her dystopic vision open for hope. I will analyze how these emotional patterns, and the symbol of the handmaids, are used in the real world for feminist protest. To signal the difference between the novel and the symbolism used in protests, I will use Handmaid to refer to the characters in Atwood's novel, and handmaid to refer to the symbolism used in protests in the real world.

Atwood's novel, widely regarded as one of the most iconic feminist dystopias of our time, takes the reader into a dark future in which a theocratic patriarchal totalitarian power has taken over the States and made fertile women into reproductive slaves for the ruling upper class. Atwood, who has made a point of not inventing anything in her novel, has remarked that many of the oppressive practices found in her novel can also be found within Western and Christian culture and traditions ("How She Came to Write").

In the last ten years, clinics offering abortion have seen a significant increase in "incidents of harassment, threat, and violence" (Foster 18). Opponents of abortion have used misinformation and lies as a basis for their arguments for decades. Since the very beginning anti-abortion activists have claimed that abortion can harm women both physically and psychologically. However, there has been no scientific evidence backing this claim – a claim used to justify abortion restrictions for decades. Thanks to the *Turnaway Study*, we now know that the claim is categorically wrong. The study found clear evidence that not only does abortion not hurt the mental health of women, but that "[d]enying women access to abortion services results in worse physical health, poorer economic outcomes, and reduced life

aspirations, including the chance to have quality relationships and wanted pregnancies later” (Foster 284). While the negative experiences of individuals are valid and deserve appropriate care, the pattern is clear: while having an abortion, a very common and safe medical procedure, does not cause any long-term harm, being denied an abortion when one is wanted is often very harmful to women. In fact, the vast majority of “women who have abortions felt their decision was right for them” (Foster 247).

In my close reading of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, my theoretical tool set will be centered around feminist theory. I will be using Sarah Ahmed’s theory on feminist emotions and feminist attachment. I will focus on feminist anger and feminist hope, and their role in feminist resistance to oppression. I will also be viewing abortion care through the lens of reproductive justice, a framework that places abortion alongside other central issues of injustice and oppression. It is a framework that values and highlights women’s experiences and voices and has an intersectional view of oppression and injustice. These theories represent the head and the heart, the rational and the emotional. However, as I will discuss, emotions and rationality are deeply intertwined. In combining the two I am acknowledging the deep connection between the head and the heart. Ahmed’s theory of feminist emotions and feminist attachments emphasizes how emotional reactions are justifiable and reasonable, and the reproductive justice framework embraces the feminine and the emotional in their way of viewing women’s oppression and arguing for women’s equality. Heather Latimer, a professor of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies who has written extensively on reproductive politics and representation of abortion in popular culture, wrote, “As headlines declare that we now live in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, it is clear that the genre has become a touchstone for representing abortion” (“*Roe* and Our Dystopic Imagination” 835). The cultural embrace of comparing the United States to *The Handmaid’s Tale* speaks to the power of dystopian narratives in making sense of the dark and dystopic tendencies of our contemporary time. The widespread use of the handmaid symbolism in protests can help us understand something about how dystopian narratives can channel emotions into real-world feminist resistance.

I will begin by briefly outlining the history of the abortion debate in the United States, with a particular focus on the accelerated attacks on women by the Trump administration. I will then discuss Atwood’s relationship with feminism and women’s rights as a backdrop to understanding the feminism of her novel. From Atwood’s feminism, I will move on to Ahmed’s theory on feminist emotions and feminist attachments and explore the role emotions play in feminist identities and feminist resistance. I then introduce the reproductive justice framework and how it can help us understand abortion care as part of a larger, holistic,

picture. From there, I introduce some scholars on dystopian narratives to help us understand the power of the dystopian imagination. I then begin my close reading of *The Handmaid's Tale* by showing the similarities between the novel and our contemporary time, discussing the many ways in which these similarities call for vigilance. After that, I move on to the novel's channeling of anger as a response to pain and suffering, and then to its channeling of hope and defiance through moments of light.

Latimer wrote that “how we talk about abortion in this moment will help set the terms of the debate going forward” (“*Roe* and Our Dystopic Imagination” 835). In the spirit of her statement, I want to address my stance on the matter of abortion care. I believe that reproductive rights are at the core of equality and women's rights, and I unequivocally support the right to abortion.

## 2 Cultural and Political Context

### 2.1 The Abortion Debate in the United States

Though abortion is a very common and safe medical procedure, the debate surrounding it is “so controversial it decides elections and ruins Thanksgiving dinners” (Foster 15). It is a debate steeped in hatred, outrage, and violence. While supporters of abortion care accuse the opposition of hating women and of wanting to suppress and dominate them, opponents of abortion care throw out accusations of sin, murder, and devil worship. Marlene Gerber Fried, a scholar and an activist who has written extensively on the topic, explains that the main reason why the issue of abortion dominates reproductive and sexual politics is that “the political right in the US has made opposition to abortion ... the centerpiece of a broad conservative agenda” (Fried, “The Politics of Abortion” 229). The efforts against abortion, Fried explains, “is only part of a much broader effort to reverse the gains made by the women’s civil rights and welfare rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s” (234). Though it can feel like the abortion debate has never been as controversial and polarized as it is today, it has been a contentious issue for a long time and continues to be a conflict colored by “hopeless polarization, personal hatreds, and political dysfunction” (Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law* 212). Since the legalization of abortion with *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 landmark Supreme Court decision that solidified abortion as a constitutional right, abortion rights have been the target of continuous attacks. This opposition to abortion care is deeply rooted in misogyny and religious beliefs, and in their crusade on abortion rights, opponents of abortion are blatantly using emotion, misinformation, and fearmongering to stigmatize abortion and attack abortion rights.

The anti-abortion movement has always been based on religious belief, and though abortion opponents have tried to tone down the religious aspect of their arguments, it is still at the very core of the anti-abortion movement. Bradley Onishi, a professor of religious studies who has researched Christian nationalism, explains that “the belief that abortion is murder is founded on the premise that life begins at conception” and that this premise “continues to motivate millions of Americans when they go to vote in local, state and national elections” (Onishi). This premise is addressed by Laura Hooberman, doctoral student in Critical Social/Personality Psychology at CUNY graduate center, who states that while it is “anyone’s right to believe that God sanctifies an embryo at the moment of conception, imbuing it with a unique, human soul,” “it is also, of course, no one’s right to restrict access to healthcare based on a medically and scientifically unsubstantiated belief” (Hooberman). Sadly, though, that is

what has been happening in the US for decades. After the legalization of abortion, abortion opponents began working against abortion rights immediately. Though their goal was to make abortion illegal, they knew that challenging and overturning *Roe* would take time. In the meantime, they therefore tried to make abortion as inaccessible as possible, and relentlessly attacked access to abortion care through “legal restrictions, unnecessary and burdensome regulations, continued threats and violent attacks on clinics and providers” (Fried, “Thirty-five Years of Legal Abortion: The US Experience” 88). While working towards these goals, the anti-abortion movement has also tried to shape public opinion on abortion, and much of their rhetoric and their campaigning is aimed at “stigmatizing abortion and the women who have them” (Fried, “The Politics of Abortion” 232). After Ronald Reagan was elected president and led the Conservative Right into political power, the anti-abortion movement experienced a major boost. The anti-abortion movement was “highly visible, well funded and had evangelical and Catholic churches as their base” (Fried, “Thirty-five Years of Legal Abortion: The US Experience” 89). Mary Ziegler, a legal historian and professor of law who specializes in the law, history, and politics of reproduction, explains that though arguments about the costs and benefits of abortion have always been part of the abortion debate, abortion opponents have for decades “primarily focused on what they described as a constitutional right for the unborn child” (*Abortion and the Law* 11). This “allowed what had been a predominantly Catholic, faith-oriented movement to make a legal and moral argument to a broader audience” (11). While the anti-abortion movement has done some tactical shifts to tone down their ecclesiasticism, “religious conservatives are continually looking for opportunities to blur the line” (Fried, “The Politics of Abortion” 235), and time and again use their religion as a political weapon. Abortion opponents have repeatedly used the right to religious liberty as an argument to demand exemption for legislation mandating that they provide reproductive healthcare, like birth control pills, IUD’s, the morning-after pill, and abortion, as they “felt that the government had trampled on their religious freedom” (Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law* 193). Their use of religion as a political weapon has “been part of a larger strategy to prioritize the religious liberty of a select few at the expense of others” (Ahmed et al.). While they claim the right to religious freedom for themselves, conservative politicians keep bringing religion into the conversation about abortion rights. In 2012, Richard Mourdock, a Republican running for Senate, “stated during a speech that when women became pregnant as a result of rape, it was ‘something that God intended to happen’” (Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law* 192). Similarly, that same year, Rick Santorum, a Republican presidential candidate stated in an interview that abortion should be illegal even in the case of

rape, and that “the right approach is to accept this horribly created, in the sense of rape, but nevertheless, in a very broken way, a gift of human life, and accept what God is giving to you” (Walker). Statements like these are not only hostile towards women, but they also highlight the tendency of abortion opponents to push their religion on others. When abortion opponents use their right to religious liberty as an argument to not provide vital reproductive healthcare to women, while they at the same time consistently bring their own religion into the conversation, they reveal the blatant hypocrisy at the heart of the anti-abortion movement and their desire to force their religious beliefs on others.

In more recent decades there has been a shift of strategy within the anti-abortion movement. Instead of only relying on arguments about protecting the unborn fetus, abortion opponents have “tried to reframe the abortion debate as a women’s health issue, suggesting that abortion hurts women, leading to depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts” (Foster 4). This change of approach, Fried points out, is “designed to undercut the claim that the anti-abortion movement does not care about women” (Fried, “Thirty-five Years of Legal Abortion: The US Experience” 88). By shifting their focus from the rights of the fetus to the health and well-being of women, abortion opponents are, in other words, trying to hide their religious beliefs about the sanctity of life from the moment of conception and their true motives behind their so-called concern for women. However, though abortion opponents claim that their opposition to abortion is driven by their concern for the health and well-being of women and children, the policies they support reveal something about the true motivations behind their opposition. The policies abortion opponent support, however, reveal that though they claim that their opposition to abortion is driven by their concern for the health and well-being of women and children, in reality, it seems to be driven by a desire to control women’s bodies. A recent study on opposition to abortion and policy preferences found that though abortion opponents were likely to support all policies that promised to prevent abortion, there was a clear preference for policies that “would likely restrict casual sex” (Moon and Krems 19). This study found that increased opposition to abortion predicted increased support for policies that would punish women seeking abortion, increased support for abstinence-only sex education, and decreased support for policies that sought to prevent abortions through comprehensive sex education. Moon and Krems, the authors of a paper on the study, point out that the findings that “abortion opposition predicted *increasing* support for abstinence-only but *decreasing* support for comprehensive sexual education” is noteworthy (19). As the two policies “differ only in whether they might be perceived as likely to discourage versus facilitate casual sex,” the study concludes that “these findings must be attributed to abortion

opponents' preference for policies that restrict casual sex" (Moon and Krems 19). This preference for abstinence is reflected in the policies pushed by conservative politicians. As Fried notes, their politics suggest that in addition to abortion, they see all reproductive rights as a threat, and "among the other casualties is access to contraception, sexuality education that includes anything other than abstinence, and health care for the 9 million women of childbearing age without it" (Fried, "The Politics of Abortion" 230). A closer look at the policies abortion opponents push reveals the insincerity of their concern for the health and well-being of women and children. Their concern is, in other words, mere virtue signaling meant to manipulate public perception. Despite their moral grandstanding, conservative politicians reveal through their actions and words that what they are concerned about is not protecting women, but suppressing and controlling them.

Anti-abortion activists and lawmakers have for a long time been known to ignore scientific findings and to produce and spread misinformation about abortion, those who provide it, and those who seek it "for the purpose of fueling the antiabortion agenda" (Pagoto et al. e42582). The misinformation, often based on a distortion of scientific findings, is commonly spread through leaflets and websites, through media, and by intercepting women who seek abortion and exposing them to anti-abortion propaganda and biased counseling meant to scare them. The list of false claims and inaccurate information proliferated by opponents of abortion is extensive and includes linking abortion to an increased "risk to life, risk of breast cancer, risk to mental health, risk to future fertility and fetal pain" (Rowlands 234). Statements made by prominent anti-abortionists demonstrates their disregard for modern science. In 2012, Republican Representative Todd Akin stated that "women could not get pregnant as a result of 'legitimate rape' because the female body had 'ways to shut that whole thing down'" (Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law* 192). This comment is only one of many, and though these comments are usually met with outrage, they do highlight the conservative right's blatant disregard for science and a seemingly willful ignorance that has no place in this century.

Misinformation about abortion has not only been proliferated and used as the basis of arguments against abortion care. It has, concerningly, also been used in the shaping and making of policies that restrict and ban abortions. When faced with a lack of evidence that restricting abortions will affect women's health negatively, "policymakers have routinely invented it" (Foster 4). In 2007, the Supreme Court released a majority opinion upholding a ban on the abortion procedure called *dilation and extraction*, or by the more inflammatory name *partial-birth abortion* ("Gonzales v. Carhart."). In it, Justice Kennedy "wrote, 'While



we find no reliable data to measure the phenomenon, it seems unexceptionable to conclude some women come to regret their choice to abort the infant life they once created and sustained. Severe depression and loss of esteem can follow” (Foster 4). Though he admits that there are no reliable data to support the claim that women regret their abortions and that their mental health is negatively affected as a result, the claim is still used to argue for the Supreme Court's decision. In addition to actively spreading misinformation and using it as the basis of their arguments against abortion care, anti-abortionists have made efforts to stifle accurate information about the procedure. Some states have passed regulations making it difficult to provide accurate information about abortion without risking punishment for aiding and abetting an abortion (Pagoto et al. 2). Even “the National Cancer Institutes were pressured to remove information about the studies showing that the claim that abortion caused breast cancer was unfounded” (Fried, “The Politics of Abortion” 236). Many states also “have abortion-specific informed consent requirements,” with “explicit legal provisions for the content of information to be supplied to women seeking abortion” (Rowlands 238). The problem with the information some states mandate abortion providers give to their patients is that it is often misinformation, and sometimes even straight-out-lies, about the negative effects of abortion. Some states include information that “inaccurately assert a link between abortion and future risk of breast cancer,” some states “that include information on future fertility after abortion inaccurately portray this risk,” some states “that include information on possible psychological responses to abortion describe only negative emotion responses,” and some include misinformation about “the ability of a fetus to feel pain” (Rowlands 238). Hidden behind the pretext of giving women what they need to make informed decisions about their bodies and futures, is a clear intent of scaring them away from having abortions. It is deeply concerning that misinformation has not only been allowed to shape policies that are harmful to women, but that misinformation and lies are also being actively forced upon them when they seek an abortion.

As well as relying on misinformation to fuel their cause, opponents of abortion have for decades actively used fetal imagery to play on emotions. “Starting with photographs and then adding ultrasound images, antiabortion campaigners have curated fetal imagery to evoke an emotional response” (Callender et al. 1208). One of the tactics they use, with a lot of success, is to grossly misrepresent what a fetus looks like at different stages of development—particularly at the early stages of fetal development. Dr. Joan Fleichman, who is part of a network of clinicians, activists, and patients trying to combat misinformation and normalize abortion care, explained how surprised some of her patients are to see what a fetus

looks like during the early stages of development. Her patients' reactions made her realize "how much the imagery on the internet and on placards – showing human-like qualities at this early stage of development – has really permeated the culture" (Noor). The images presented by opponents of abortion, both on the internet and on placards commonly used by anti-abortion activists outside of abortion clinics, dishonestly depict fetuses exclusively with distinct human-like qualities clearly meant to make us think of the fetus as a person from the point of conception. They are also often bloody and graphic, which is an attempt to portray abortion as something violent and elicit visceral emotional reactions from the viewer. On the other side of the coin is their use of images of babies in their campaign against abortion. An anti-abortion billboard playing on the idea that a fetus can feel pain in the womb, something that has been proven to be untrue until the late stages of pregnancy, depicts what looks to be a 4-month-old baby with blonde hair and a fluffy white headband (Hooberman). While the idea that a fetus can feel pain during an abortion is "a highly emotive aspect of abortion" (Rowlands 238), and the dishonest use of it in anti-abortion campaigning in itself is an obvious attempt to elicit an emotional response, it is here combined with the image of a 4-month-old baby to make the viewer imagine a baby being hurt when thinking about abortion. This "highlights a blatant unwillingness, on the part of the cultural right, to engage in responsible, honest practices when constructing and communicating its political message" (Hooberman). What the conservative right demonstrates time and again is that in their war on women and abortion care, emotion trumps both science and honesty.

Several states in the US have passed laws that blatantly play on emotions. Some states have passed laws "requiring abortion providers to perform an ultrasound for all patients seeking abortion, show and describe the ultrasound images, or offer all patients the opportunity to view the ultrasound" (Callender et al. 1209). These laws "rely on notions that viewing the fetal ultrasound image will provoke or intensify maternal bonding and could reverse a person's decision to have an abortion" and "violate core ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence by mandating practice around ultrasound" (Callender et al. 1209). These laws are a blatant attempt to play on the heartstrings of vulnerable women. Similarly, the deceptively named "heartbeat" bills "make abortion illegal at the point when an embryonic/fetal 'heartbeat' is detected by 'standard medical practice'" (Callender et al. 1209). These bills are problematic in several ways. Firstly, they can ban abortion as early as 6 weeks of pregnancy, a stage of the pregnancy where "the embryo is not typically visible to the naked eye" (Bliss et al.). Secondly, though these bills are named "heartbeat" bills, the "heartbeat" they are referring to is not the heartbeat of a "formed

anatomical heart beating, but rather, electrical activity of cells in an evolving ‘heart tube’” (Callender et al. 1209). In other words, the fetal “heartbeat” that can ban abortion in some states is not a heartbeat in medical terms. Not only do these laws rely on “an ideological interpretation of ultrasound images” (Callender et al. 1209), they also rely on the use of the word “heartbeat” to carry the symbolism of life. Words hold power, and by misleadingly calling the electrical pulse of the fetus detectable at this stage a heartbeat, anti-abortion policy- and lawmakers are attempting to ascribe personhood to the fetus and reach the hearts of the people. Similarly, in 2005 Harold Cassidy, a prominent attorney and staunch anti-abortionist, helped develop a law in South Dakota mandating that abortion providers had to give women seeking an abortion false information about the “increased risk of suicide or psychological distress following an abortion” (Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law* 183-184). The law “asserted that ‘abortion [would] terminate the life of a whole, separate, unique, living human being’ and that a ‘pregnant woman [had] an existing relationship with that unborn human being and that the relationship enjoys protection under the United States Constitution and under the laws of South Dakota’” (Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law* 184). When the law was challenged by Planned Parenthood in court, it was accused of dealing “in emotion rather than truth” and Planned Parenthood claimed that “the mandated disclosures were ideological claims rather than matters of scientific fact” (Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law* 184). Cassidy, however, maintained that “the disclosures were ‘unquestionably truthful and accurate’”, and the law was allowed to go into effect (Ziegler, *Abortion and the Law* 184). These laws demonstrate how the rhetoric of emotion and blatant use of misinformation permeate not only the debate surrounding abortion care, but that it has also been allowed to seep into legislation that should be based on scientific fact. The willful ignorance demonstrated by these laws and regulations, thinly veiled as concern for women, is threatening the future and well-being of the women they claim to protect.

There has for a long time been a need for studies on the effects of abortion on the health and lives of women to combat the vast flood of misinformation out there. Thanks to the Turnaway Study, we now know that most of the claims from the conservative right about the harmful effects of abortion on women’s health are categorically wrong. The Turnaway Study, a longitudinal study conducted on 1000 women over 10 years, is a study on the “emotional, health, and socioeconomic outcomes for women who received a wanted abortion and those who were denied one” (Foster 7). The study is the first of its kind and “offers a unique opportunity to examine the effects of abortion on the women’s lives, and the immediate and far-reaching consequences of laws that restrict access to it” (Foster 8). Diana Greene Foster,

the principal investigator of the study, emphasized that the study was designed to investigate all the different ways abortion could positively or negatively affect women. The study was made to be impartial and to uncover the truth about the effects of abortion, and not with politics or women's rights in mind (Foster 7). Foster explained that "the purpose of the Turnaway Study is to provide, as concretely as possible, an understanding of how unwanted pregnancies and abortion affect the lives of women and their children" (257). The designers of the study were genuinely concerned with finding and documenting the negative and positive effects of getting an abortion, as well as the effects of being denied an abortion and having to carry a pregnancy to term. They, in other words, had the best interest of women in mind when they designed and conducted the study. Importantly, the Turnaway Study found "no evidence that abortion hurts women" (Foster 21). They reported that women who had a wanted abortion were better off in every way than women who were denied a wanted abortion.

Their physical health was better. Their employment and financial situations were better. Their mental health was initially better and eventually the same. They had more aspirational plans for the coming year. They had a greater chance of having a wanted pregnancy and being in a good romantic relationship years down the road. And the children they already had were better off, too. (Foster 21)

The study found irrefutable proof that having an abortion does not harm women in any significant way. There are of course exceptions to the rule, and those occasions deserve sympathy and respect, but the vast majority of women are not harmed by having an abortion. As well as claiming that abortion hurts women, abortion opponents have claimed that women often regret having an abortion, and this unfounded idea "has had powerful sway in legislation and policy" (Foster 124). While it is true that some women come to regret their abortion, the overwhelming majority of women do not. In fact, the Turnaway Study found that "95% of women reported that having the abortion was the right decision for them" (Foster 124). The Turnaway Study has given us extensive data on the effect of abortion. Finally, here is irrefutable proof that abortion does not hurt women, but that being denied an abortion hurts women in serious ways that can follow them for the rest of their lives.

While The Turnaway study found that abortion does not harm women, countering the many claims about the negative effects of abortion made by abortion opponents, it also found evidence that being denied a wanted abortion can be very harmful to women. The study found

that compared to women who received the abortion they wanted, women who were denied an abortion experienced “an increase in poverty; a decrease in employment that lasts for years; a scaling back of aspirational plans; and years spent trying to raise a child without enough money to pay for food, housing and transportation instead of pursuing life goals” (Foster 165). In other words, being denied an abortion and forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term can have harmful effects on the life of a woman—effects that can be felt for the rest of her life. What is more, there is also evidence that “pregnancy takes a tremendous toll on the body” (Brown). A new landmark study reveals “that pregnancy—particularly multiple pregnancies—come at a cost to biological age” (Brown). According to the study women who had carried pregnancy to term were between four and fourteen months “biologically older than their peers who hadn’t” (Brown). Put differently, pregnancy can significantly shorten the life span of women. As Foster points out, “[p]regnancy is not a disease, but it is a major body change that is associated with very serious risks” (143). In fact, because of the many risks associated with pregnancy and birth, “[a] woman in the United States is 14 times more likely to die from carrying a pregnancy to term than from having an abortion” (Foster 142-143). It is, in other words, important to keep in mind that though having a child can be a wondrous thing for those who choose it, the reality is that pregnancy carries with it serious risks and consequences—and it should therefore be within the realm of choice.

In an interview, Jim Buchy, a Republican state representative who cosponsored a so-called “heartbeat” bill, was asked what he thought made women want to have an abortion. After struggling to answer for a while, he admitted that it was “a question he’d never even thought about” (Foster 32). Foster points out that “this one moment completely captures the disconnect between the politics of restricting abortion and the lived experiences of women who want one” (32). Though Buchy was a staunch opponent of abortion, he had never taken the time to consider why anyone would want to have one. He had never “actually considered the women whose lives he was affecting” (Foster 32). Although Buchy’s admittance of not having considered why women would want an abortion feels surreal, it is at the same time no surprise at all. For many, his statement only confirmed what they already knew: that the conservative right does not listen to women, let alone women who want an abortion. The truth is, “most politicians with the power to restrict abortion are male and do not relate to the experience of being a woman” (Foster 33). When politicians refuse to listen to the lived experiences of women, the experiences that should take center stage in the abortion debate are consistently excluded from the conversation. Instead, the conversation about abortion care is often one about constitutional right, religious belief, moral beliefs, benefits, costs, and even

the climate. This disconnect between the debate about abortion and the lived experiences of the women who seek one is truly brought to the fore in the Turnaway Study. It shows us that the women who participated “didn’t dwell on politics or their state’s particular abortion restrictions or the future of Roe. They talked about their own difficult situations” (Foster 278). They were concerned about not being able to care for a child for reasons connected to their own situations, like mental health, economy, substance abuse, or abusive relationships, and they were concerned about the course of their own lives. Those opposed to abortion will “often accuse women seeking abortion of being misinformed, irresponsible, or amoral” (Foster 22). There seems to be a fundamental mistrust on the side of the conservative right of women and their ability to make responsible choices about their own bodies and lives. However, the Turnaway Study shows us that “women make thoughtful, well-considered decision about whether to have an abortion” and it “brings powerful evidence about the ability of women to foresee consequences and make decisions that are best for their lives and families” (Foster 22). In 2016, more than 100 women shared their experiences with abortion in supporting briefs before the Supreme Court was to hear the case of *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt*. It was a major abortion case and concerned “a challenge to a restrictive Texas law brought by several abortion clinics in the state” (Adam Liptak, “Eyes on Kennedy”). The supporting briefs told “the stories of women who say their abortions allowed them to control their bodies, plan for the future and welcome children into their lives when their careers were established and their personal lives were on solid ground” (Adam Liptak, “Eyes on Kennedy”). These stories—stories that clearly align with the findings of the Turnaway Study—were meant to counter the “uninformed paternalism in a 2007 majority opinion in which Justice Kennedy said many women regretted their decisions to have abortions and experienced depression and plunging self-esteem” (Adam Liptak, “Eyes on Kennedy”). Though it is difficult to say whether the experiences shared by these women influenced the Supreme Court, we do know that the Supreme Court decided in favor of the abortion providers who challenged the Texas law restricting abortion and that Justice Kennedy was among the majority (“*Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt*”). Regardless of the effect these stories may or may not have had on swaying the opinion of the Supreme Court, it demonstrates how some women are trying to counteract the use of misinformation and willful ignorance shown by conservative politicians. By sharing their stories, they are highlighting the disconnect between the abortion politics and the lived experiences of women, and they are fighting the narrative that women are misinformed and irresponsible.

## **2.2 The Misogynistic Efforts of the Trump Administration**

When Donald Trump was elected president of the United States in 2016, “many American women confronted a crushing reality: their fellow Americans (including a plurality of White women) had elected a brazen misogynist as president, rejecting the first woman to run as a major party nominee” (Chira 72). Though Trump, “a vulgar candidate with little evident piety, a well-documented history of disparaging comments and predatory behavior toward women, and a checkered marital past, which included boasting about his infidelities” seems “an unlikely oracle for family values”, exit polls from the presidential election of 2016 “suggest that as many as 81 percent of voters who identify as evangelicals in the United States” voted for Trump (Balmer 3). It is telling that “3 percent more evangelicals voted for Trump in the 2016 election than voted for Mitt Romney in 2012”, and it “tells us all we need to know: it was not about the Bible and morality, after all” (Butler 13). Nancy Wadsworth, a professor of political science who has extensive experience writing about race and religion in American politics, argues that the evangelical embrace of Trump aligns with the history of evangelicalism in America. While some might believe the narrative that evangelicals “held their nose and voted for Trump” because “[t]hey felt besieged by a swift-moving culture that, under President Obama, insulted their faith and threatened to rob them of their religious liberties,” Wadsworth argues that “Trump’s racism and misogyny might actually resonate with the evangelical base”. She explains that a look at history “reveals that when white conservative evangelicals feel threatened by cultural change, the old demons of racism and misogyny, which lurk at the heart of the American evangelical tradition, return with a vengeance” (Wadsworth). As Robert Jensen, a professional writer and professor in the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas who has spent much of his career researching and writing about feminist philosophy and politics, argues, Trump won the election “precisely because of his longstanding open contempt for the idea that women are fully human”. It is, in other words, likely not despite Trump’s misogyny (and racism) that evangelicals rallied behind him both before and after the presidential election of 2016, but because of it.

Although abortion rights have been under continuous attack ever since abortion was legalized, the election of Trump and the policies his administration has put into effect have been devastating for women’s rights in general, and reproductive rights in particular. The American Center for Progress reports that, while “[f]requently ignoring relevant data and research, the Trump administration has used the rule-making process to issue guidance, interpret public policy, and implement statuses in ways that are fundamentally harmful to

women” (Ahmed et al.). During the four years Trump resided in the White House, his administration blocked financial support to family planning clinics that offer abortion, threatened private abortion coverage by implementing a rule that would force health insurance providers to “bill consumers separately for the part of insurance premiums that covers abortion services,” removed protections from “discrimination based on gender identity, sex stereotyping, and pregnancy status” from the Affordable Care Act, and expanded an employer’s ability to opt out of offering contraceptive coverage to employees in their insurance “based on religious or moral objections,” (Ahmed et al.). What is more, the Trump administration expanded the so-called conscience rule, a policy that protects healthcare workers who oppose abortion and made it easier for them to refuse reproductive healthcare to patients “on religious or moral grounds” (Sanger-Katz). A policy review by the Guttmacher Institute concluded that the expansion of the ‘conscience rule’ effectively means that “religiously affiliated health care institutions have increased power to impose their values and agenda on society at the expense of patients’ health and rights” (Sonfield). These policies cause great harm to the overall health and well-being of women, and, essentially, made the United States a more dangerous place to live for women and other marginalized groups.

The Trump administration’s efforts against reproductive rights are rooted in misogyny. Their policies are born from a fundamental belief that women are lesser than men. They are manifestations of a harmful and hateful ideology leaning on fearmongering, proliferation of misinformation, and emotional manipulation to garner support. The Trump administration’s policies do not harm women by accident. They are made to make life more difficult and more dangerous for women and other marginalized groups, while also making life easier for primarily white, powerful men. According to the Center for American Progress, the administration’s

harmful regulatory agenda is part of a larger and unfortunately all-too-familiar agenda to strip women of their fundamental rights to control their own bodies and economic futures, while catering to social and religious conservatives and big-business interests. (Ahmed et al.)

The policies set in place by the Trump administration clearly target the rights of women and other vulnerable groups, while they at the same time pander to the religious conservatives who voted Trump into the White House. Trump’s presidency wreaked havoc on women’s rights, and for many, it felt like women’s hard-won progress was pushed back decades by



Trump, his administration, and their harmful policies.

While policies are reversible and can be dismantled with the election of a new president, federal judges and Supreme Court Justices have life tenure. Trump's appointments of judges and Justices have, in other words, changed the fabric of the judiciary system for generations to come. During his presidency, Trump "worked closely with Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and other Senate Republicans to reshape the federal judiciary" (Gramlich). An analysis by the Pew Research Center found that Trump appointed "more than 200 judges to the federal bench", 54 of which were appointed to the federal appeals courts, "which have the final word on most legal appeals around the country" (Gramlich). In four short years, Trump effectively "'flipped' the balance of several appeals courts from a majority of Democratic appointees to a majority of Republican appointees" (Gramlich). What perhaps felt most important, most devastating, was his appointment of three Justices to the Supreme Court of the United States. Already the first year of his presidency, Trump appointed Neil Gorsuch, "a reliable conservative committed to following the original understanding of those who drafted and ratified the Constitution" (Liptak and Flegenheimer), to the Supreme Court. The year after, in 2018, Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh, a judge with "a long career in conservative politics" who despite "credible, powerful allegations of sexual assault" and his use of "partisan rhetoric" was confirmed to the Supreme Court (Buchanan and Meller). In 2020, Trump nominated Amy Coney Barret, a judge with "an almost uniformly conservative voting record in cases touching on abortion, gun rights, discrimination and immigration", to the Supreme Court (Adam Liptak, "Barret's Record"). The nomination of Barret came only weeks before the presidential election of 2020, and though Republicans had successfully denied president Obama a Supreme Court appointment in 2016 because "the American people should have a voice in the selection of their next Supreme Court Justice" (Everett and Thrush), they "shredded their own past pronouncements and bypassed rules in the process" as they rushed to confirm Barret into the Supreme Court in a "lightning-fast Senate approval" (Fandos). Trump's appointment of three conservative Justices to the Supreme Court secured a conservative majority, and was a maneuver that would have lasting ramifications felt long after Trump left the White House. After almost 50 years of legal abortion in the United States, the religious and conservative right had successfully stacked the Supreme Court with Justices ready to overturn the landmark Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*.

## 2.3 The Handmaid's Tale in Adaptation and Protest

Though Donald Trump and his administration dealt several brutal blows to women's rights during their time in the White House, women did not simply take it lying down. Susan Chira, a renowned American journalist who has extensive experience covering gender issues and the criminal justice system, explains that "Trump's election turned out to be a boon as well as a curse for the feminist movement. The shock and anger galvanized women into political action and prompted a resurgence of feminist energy not seen in decades" (Chira 73). This resurgence of feminist energy was felt already the day after Trump's inauguration, as women flooded the streets of Washington DC on January 21, 2017, in protest of his "vulgar and violent sexism" (Benz). The Women's March

was a festival of protest, the mood not defiant but exuberant, the signs a grab of every conceivable cause, united only in their revulsion for the president who had been inaugurated the day before. Marchers hoisted children on their shoulders or guided elderly parents through crowds so dense at times it was difficult to walk. (Chira 7)

Chira describes the Women's March as a day of excitement, of togetherness, of cheer. Though opponents of abortion have demonstrated their proclivity for emotional manipulation aimed to trigger anger, fear, shame, and guilt—on this day, their harmful and misogynist rhetoric was countered with joy, wonder, and hope. It was a celebration of women and of solidarity, and the high spirits of the march set the mood for the movement that followed. Though Scenes like these, Chira explains, "were repeated in cities across the country and, even more surprisingly, the world" (Chira 75). The election of Trump represented an immediate threat to women's rights, and with the Women's March, women all over the world showed their intent to fight back. What began as a feminist reaction to the election of a brazen misogynist into the White House grew into an ongoing global women's movement. The groundswell of women gathering in protest was an impressive manifestation of collective power and feminist solidarity. L. A. Kauffman, a longtime grassroots political organizer, activist, and journalist, writes that women all over the world "were reclaiming their voices and the public and political space for action in the very act of marching" (Kauffman 76). "A great many participants left the marches feeling energized, and they channeled that energy into a remarkable array of grassroots organizing work" (Kauffman 89). Though it can be difficult to measure the impact of large demonstrations like The Women's March, there is no

denying that it sparked a fire, and “[i]n the year after Trump took office, women constituted a majority at protest after protest” (Kauffman 76). The movement has, impressively, also been credited with an “increased voter turnout, record number of women running for office, and, in 2018, the largest-ever number of women elected to Congress” (Benz). Its greatest impact, however, is arguably “its energizing of activists, especially young women, in the United States and around the world” (Benz). The march introduced many new activists to the power of collective action, and importantly, inspired hope for the future (Benz). The Women’s March in 2017 sparked a fire, and the women who marched that day helped form what would become the resistance to Trump and the deep-seated misogyny he represented.

In the fight against misogyny and the onslaught of attacks on reproductive rights, women found something that could communicate their fear and anger to the world; the red dress and white winged bonnet of the handmaid’s uniform from Atwood’s iconic feminist dystopia, *The Handmaid’s Tale*. On March 10, 2017, women unmistakably dressed up like Atwood’s handmaids were seen “silently circulat[ing]” the South by Southwest festival (Boyle 845). In a marketing stunt promoting the premiere of their adaption of *The Handmaid’s Tale* into a television series, Hulu had hired cosplayers to walk through the festival in pairs (Hughes). The unsettling sight of “Atwood’s tale of institutional misogyny bleeding out into the real world” (Hughes) thoroughly creeped out festival attendees. More importantly, though, the stunt, described by Bustle writer Jordana Lipsitz as “appropriately terrifying”, caught a lot of attention. A few days later, on March 20, 2017, inspired by Hulu’s marketing stunt, abortion rights activists donned the red robes and white winged bonnets of Atwood’s handmaids and “descended on the Texas State Capitol to make a striking silent protest of Senate Bill 415, legislation that proposed to ban a common second-trimester abortion procedure” (Boyle 845). Though the Senate gallery is open to the public while the Senate is in session, no speaking is allowed, and “the activists seized on the idea of a ‘powerful visual protest’ and punctuated the galleries in a costume that ‘spoke volumes’” (Boyle 845). Sitting in silence in the gallery, the activists were “sending a message with their presence—turning cosplay into a political act, and inspiring a national anti-abortion protest movement that has adopted the costume as a de facto uniform” (Andrew Liptak). Images of the handmaid activists “went viral on social and mainstream media,” and following the protest, the activists “form[ed] the activist organization ‘Texas Handmaids,’ which inspired the ‘Handmaid Coalition,’ ‘Handmaids Costa Rica,’ and multiple handmaid-style protests across the United States, Canada, Australia, England, Ireland, Croatia, Finland, Poland, Slovakia, Costa Rica, and Argentina” (Boyle 845). Women all over the world, clearly feeling

a connection to the iconography of the handmaid, put on the uniform and gathered in protest against “a slew of antiabortion legislation, violence against women, and the rise of misogyny and the conservative far Right in governments and in everyday life” (Boyle 845). The iconography of the handmaid had become “an international protest symbol” (Bell). In the US, feminist activists continued to use the language and iconography from *The Handmaid’s Tale* in protests against the continued attacks on women’s rights. Inspired by the “haunting display” (Bradley) of the handmaid protestors in Texas, women organized similar demonstrations against anti-abortion legislation in their own states. Dressed in red cloaks and white bonnets, they walked through State Capitol buildings and attended the hearings of anti-abortion legislation in complete silence. The red and white of the handmaid’s uniform provided a powerful visual statement that evoked powerful emotional reactions. It embodied the terror and the rage they felt as they witnessed the erosion of their rights, and it communicated those feelings to the world. It was a rallying cry to women who recognized the similarities between Gilead and the politics and rhetoric being pushed by the religious right, and it was a loud wake-up call to those who had not paid attention. Importantly, it was also a message to their political leaders that continued attacks on women’s rights would not be met with silent submission.

Opposition to abortion and other reproductive rights has always been deeply rooted in religious beliefs and misogyny, and the Handmaid—the embodiment of the oppression of women and other marginalized groups by patriarchal and religious forces—became a powerful symbol of women’s fear and anger, and of their intent to fight back. Trump’s shameless misogynistic rhetoric, his close ties to religious conservatives, and his administration’s many harmful attacks on women’s rights made women draw clear parallels between Atwood’s dystopic vision of the future and the political climate they were living in. The following years, the iconic red uniform of the handmaid was a staple of feminist activism fighting against the Trump administration’s misogynistic efforts (Bradley). For many, Atwood’s dystopian tale of theocratic and patriarchal dominance was beginning to feel “all too real” (Hamedy). Handmaid activists bore testimony to every major attack perpetrated by the Trump administration against the wellbeing of women. They were present at the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Brett Kavanaugh, protesting his “anti-abortion, anti-healthcare and anti-women’ views” (Wheeler). After the death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, handmaid activists were present at a vigil in her memory, demanding that her seat should be filled after the presidential election only a few weeks later (Tapp). When Trump, ignoring the cries of outrage from both protestors and Democrats, nominated Amy Coney

Barret to the Supreme Court, handmaid activists protested outside the then-Judge Barret’s Supreme Court confirmation hearings (Haring). Handmaid activists continued to fight the conservative right’s chipping away of women’s rights and protested policies that increasingly reminded them of Atwood’s theocratic Republic of Gilead. Laura Bradley, an award-winning writer and entertainment reporter, wrote, “[t]hese dissenters in creepy cloaks and hats might not save *Roe v. Wade*—but they do provide a constant, ominous reminder to Washington, D.C., that women are watching”. Seemingly undeterred by blow after blow of oppression and injustice, these women keep getting up to fight for their rights.

Though women had watched in horror as Trump appointed conservative Justice after conservative Justice to the Supreme Court, they did not simply watch on as it happened. Every step of the way, women—including women dressed as handmaids—had gathered in protest. Though the handmaids themselves protested in silence, their very presence was making a whole lot of noise. It was a promise that the continued rolling back of women’s rights would not be allowed to continue in silence. They would be there to bear witness, to make sure that the world paid attention, and that the crimes against women would not be forgotten. Instead of letting their fear and anger paralyze them, they let it fuel them. On May 3, 2022, a leaked draft of the majority opinion from the Supreme Court revealed that they intended to overturn *Roe* (Gerstein and Ward). Following the leak, people gathered in peaceful protest outside of the Supreme Court and outside the homes of the Justices thought to be part of the majority, and among them were handmaid activists (Burke). On June 23, 2022, the Supreme Court declared that they were overturning *Roe v. Wade*, and Justices Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barrett helped form the majority, “fulfill[ing] a prophecy from then-candidate Trump that his high court picks would vote just that way” (Sherman and Gresko). The use of *prophecy* seems appropriate, given the deeply religious nature of abortion resistance. The majority opinion, authored by Justice Samuel Alito, “bizarrely suggests that overturning *Roe* will give women a stronger electoral voice on abortion, denies that abortion rights are linked to gender equality, and, in a blatant contradiction to the First Amendment, presents the religious view that a fetus is a human being and abortion is murder as established and common sense” (Latimer, “Abortion Politics and the Dystopic Imagination” 83). Justice Alito’s majority opinion perfectly highlights how religious conservatives are successfully blurring the line between church and state, increasingly weakening the divide between religious belief and the governing realm, and it can help us understand something about why women might see something of Gilead—a patriarchal theocracy—in the political climate in the United States today, and why they draw upon the iconography of the handmaid to fight for

their rights. After the court officially released the majority opinion that overturned *Roe* on June 23, 2022, “protests swelled in Washington, D.C., and in city centers, town plazas and parks across the United States” (Hubler). Though the overturning of *Roe* felt like a deafening blow to women’s rights, women took to the streets yet again to signal their intent to keep fighting. Before the presidential election of 2020, Chira wrote,

Just as the women who won the grueling battle for suffrage knew a century ago, the prize of full equality for women remains elusive. The backlash to women’s power epitomized by the rise of Donald Trump remains a potent strand of American life, but perhaps less potent than many women feared in 2016. The work of wresting and sustaining power for women will remain, no matter who prevails in 2020. (84-85)

This remains true in 2024. As we approach a new presidential election with Trump as a major candidate, Americans face the very real possibility of an emboldening and empowerment of the far right. No matter the outcome of the election, the fight for women’s rights, of “wresting and sustaining power” (Chira 85), will remain. The widespread use of the handmaid’s uniform in activism and protests, and the powerful emotional responses to the sight of handmaids walking around in the real world, suggest that something about dystopian narratives like Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* resonates with people, and it demonstrates that these novels and the emotions they evoke can be a driving force in the continued fight against oppression and injustice.

### 3 The Head and the Heart: Feminist Identity, Emotion, Dystopias, and Law

#### 3.1 Margaret Atwood the “Bad Feminist”

In a profile on Margaret Atwood from 2017, writer and journalist Rebecca Mead wrote, “Given that her works are a mainstay of women’s-studies curricula, and that she is clearly committed to women’s rights, Atwood’s resistance to straightforward associations with feminism can come as a surprise.” It is puzzling, and perhaps a bit disheartening, that the author of what is widely regarded as one of the greatest feminist dystopias ever written seems so opposed to being called a feminist. Fiona Tolan, a scholar who has written extensively on contemporary women’s writing and feminism, explains that though Atwood has “repeatedly been pressured to support and endorse feminist politics and to explicitly associate her work with the movement,” “[s]he has famously “refused to be drawn into such an allegiance” (Tolan 2). Instead, when talking about her novels, Atwood has consistently circumvented “the ‘F word’” (Grady). Though *The Handmaid’s Tale* is widely regarded as one of the most iconic feminist dystopias of our time, Atwood herself has argued that it should not be defined as a feminist dystopia. A feminist dystopia, according to her, “would have to be one arranged strictly on gender lines, where all men fare better than all women, and in which this arrangement of things is the driving force of the book” (“A Feminist Dystopia?” 16). *The Handmaid’s Tale*, she argues, is therefore not a feminist dystopia, “but instead falls within the parameters of the dystopia as a form” (Atwood, “A Feminist Dystopia?” 19). In an article on how she came to write her most famous novel, she elaborated on her belief that *The Handmaid’s Tale* is not a feminist dystopia.

The Handmaid's Tale has often been called a ‘feminist dystopia’, but that term is not strictly accurate. In a feminist dystopia pure and simple, all of the men would have greater rights than all of the women. It would be two-layered in structure: top layer men, bottom layer women. But Gilead is the usual kind of dictatorship: shaped like a pyramid, with the powerful of both sexes at the apex, the men generally outranking the women at the same level; then descending levels of power and status with men and women in each, all the way down to the bottom, where the unmarried men must serve in the ranks before being awarded an Econowife. (“How She Came to Write”)

Toril Moi, an acclaimed academic who has written extensively on feminism and literary theory, however, argues that *The Handmaid's Tale* is the very prototype of a feminist dystopia (Moi 26:16). Atwood's understanding of feminist dystopias, she adds, feels like a caricature of feminism (Moi 33:40). Moi argues that contrary to what Atwood seems to believe, feminists do not deny that some women oppress other women, or that some women have more power than some men (33:50). In any case, despite Atwood's statements, *The Handmaid's Tale* is clearly seen as a feminist dystopia by many of her readers, as made evident by its continued use in women's studies curricula, and particularly in the widespread use of the handmaid uniform in protests against the continued attacks women's rights around the world. It seems that many readers share Moi's opinion; that *The Handmaid's Tale* is not only a feminist dystopia, but that it has also become a touchstone for feminist dystopian narratives.

Does Atwood's stance mean that all these women are wrong to use her work for protest? Does the author's intention for the novel outweigh the reader's interpretation of it? According to Tolan, that does not have to be the case. She explains that one can assume

that each reader experiences a dynamic interaction with the text, making associations and uncovering connections, and that the writer is equally a dynamic reader of texts. What results is a view of literature as a product of its time, but also as a shifting product of the time in which it is being read. (4)

The use of the handmaid's uniform in the fight against oppression demonstrates that protesters have made connections between Atwood's novel and their contemporary time, supporting an understanding of literature as "a shifting product of the time in which it is being read" (Tolan 4). Atwood's own reactions to the handmaid protesters also suggest that they are not wrong to use her work in protests, as she has been known for reposting pictures of handmaid protesters on her social media and has even praised them in interviews (Hamedy; Birkin 25). Though Atwood did not intend for *The Handmaid's Tale* to be a feminist dystopia, she does not seem to mind that women all over the world are using her iconography to fight for feminist causes. In fact, her reposting of handmaid protesters in action and appraisal of them in interviews even suggests that she approves of it. Moi herself points out that Atwood does have clear feminist sympathies (27:45). Despite her aversion to the word feminism, Atwood cares a lot about women's rights. As Tolan points out, there is "common political ground that Atwood holds with feminist ideology" (2). This common ground is visible, specifically, in Atwood's fiction: "An examination of both Atwood's novels and the



contemporaneous progression of feminist discourse from the 1960s to the present day quickly reveals a sympathy of concern and a coincidence of enquiry” (2). Part of that common ground is the issue of reproductive rights and access to abortion care. Atwood is a vocal supporter of reproductive rights and has made it abundantly clear what she thinks about the importance of abortion for equality between the sexes:

What kind of country do you want to live in? One in which every individual is free to make decisions concerning his or her health and body, or one in which half the population is free and the other half is enslaved?

Women who cannot make their own decisions about whether or not to have babies are enslaved because the state claims ownership of their bodies and the right to dictate the use to which their bodies must be put. (Atwood, “A Slave State?” 361)

Atwood, in other words, believes that a woman who can’t choose whether or not to have children is effectively enslaved because the state is claiming ownership over her body by robbing her of that choice. This seems to contradict her argument that *The Handmaid’s Tale* is not a feminist dystopia. In her novel, no woman can choose whether or not to have a child, and therefore, according to Atwood, all women are enslaved. Despite her previous statements about her novel not being feminist, her statements about women’s rights in the real world suggest that it is. Atwood has demonstrated again and again that she is an observant person who is sensitive to ripples on the surface of the contemporary political climate, and though she has been evasive of the word feminist, she does not hide her opinion on the political climate in the United States and the continuous attacks on women’s rights happening there. In a piece reflecting on how *The Handmaid’s Tale* might be read differently today than it was read 30 years ago, she said that in the States, “the pushback is in full swing: you’re seeing women’s reproductive rights being rolled back at a very swift pace” (“Read Very Differently Now”). After concluding that her novel is, indeed, being read very differently now because of the misogynistic efforts against women’s rights, she added: “I’m not pleased” (“Read Very Differently Now”). After Roe was overturned, she also posted a picture of herself holding a mug with the words “I told you so” on it, with the caption “In Nova Scotia with appropriately sloganed coffee mug...” on her social media (Atwood, “In Nova Scotia”). Though she might be opposed to straightforward association with the words *feminist* and *feminism*, she does not seem afraid of being associated with feminist values and causes. She has demonstrated that she is a steadfast supporter of women’s rights throughout her entire career as an author and as

a person living in this world.

Atwood's definition of feminism is closely tied to human rights. In her profile on Atwood, Mead writes, "Her feminism assumed women's rights to be human rights, and is born of having been raised with a presumption of absolute equality between the sexes" (Mead). Atwood herself has stated that she "see[s] feminism as part of a larger issue: human dignity" (qtd. Tolan 7). To say that women's rights are human rights is, arguably, an uncontroversial opinion. Atwood has lived through "the sometimes divisive years of second-wave feminism" (Mead), and she has stated that she "didn't want to become a megaphone for any one particular set of beliefs" (Atwood qtd. Mead). Looking at the contentious history of the words *feminist* and *feminism* might also help us understand her aversion to the so-called f-word. Celebrated feminist author Ursula K. Le Guin wrote:

Those who see human rights as consisting of men's rights labeled every woman who spoke up for justice as a man-hating, bra-burning, intolerant shrew... [T]hey successfully degraded the meaning of the words feminism and feminist, identifying them with intolerance to the point of making them almost useless, even now. ("89a. About Anger")

This demonization of the words *feminist* and *feminism* has stopped many women from professing their allegiance to the feminist movement, and it might have something to do with Atwood's aversion to the words. It seems, though, that as long as she can connect her definition of feminism to the idea that women's rights are human rights, she is more relaxed about identifying herself and her work with the feminist movement. It is, however, still important for her that the term is "defined before she will state her position" (Mead). Her definition of feminism, being "intersectional, interested in how power perpetuates itself through systems, unapologetic in its embrace of femininity, with plenty of room for complicated and unlikable women" (Grady), seems very much in line with what the feminist movement is concerned with today. However, it is precisely because Atwood believes in absolute equality between the sexes—her belief that women hold as much of a universal position as men do—that Moi argues Atwood should say that she is a feminist (38:35). After all, as Moi points out, women are not oppressed because they are human—women are oppressed because they are women. And that, Moi adds, is the main theme of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Handmaids are not held captive because they are human. Handmaids are held captive and ceremoniously raped because of their ability to have children.

## 3.2 Feminist Emotions

Emotions have for a long time been used to invalidate and silence women's voices. Though feminist scholars have worked to reclaim "emotions as proper grounds for producing knowledge" (Lépinard and Quéré 299), emotions are still being used against women who speak up in public and political spheres (Frasca et al.). Indeed, "[w]omen's inability to properly control emotions is one of the most salient and consistent stereotypes in the West" (Frasca et al. 421). Sara Ahmed, an independent feminist writer and scholar, explains that "emotion has been viewed as 'beneath' the faculties of thought and reason. To be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous" (Ahmed 3). Importantly, this "subordination of emotions also works to subordinate the feminine and the body" (Ahmed 3). "Emotions", she explains, "are associated with women, who are represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement" (Ahmed 3). It is the belief that women's emotionality disqualifies them from the realm of thought and reason that is essentially weaponized against women to silence their voices. As Ahmed writes, "Feminists who speak out against established 'truths' are often constructed as emotional, as failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of 'good judgement'" (Ahmed 170). Instead of countering this "dismissal of feminists as emotional" with a "claim that feminism is rational rather than emotional", Ahmed argues that feminists must continue to embrace emotions (170). Feminists, she explains, "need to contest this understanding of emotion as 'the unthought', just as we need to contest the assumption that 'rational thought' is unemotional, or that it does not involve being moved by others" (Ahmed 170). In other words, to counter the weaponization of emotions to invalidate and silence women's voices, women must continue to challenge the idea that emotion and reason are contradictory to one another, and they must continue to explore and talk about the deep connection between what is felt and what is thought.

Ahmed is interested in what emotions do, and in her work on emotions and feminism, she has explored the role emotions play in "how one becomes attached to feminism" (170). Emotions play a part in how one becomes engaged in the feminist movement. They are a part of how one begins to identify as a feminist, and how one comes to see the world through a feminist perspective (Ahmed 170-171). To illustrate how emotions can affect feminist attachment, she describes her own emotional journey into feminism:

The anger, the anger that I felt about how being a girl seemed to be about what you shouldn't do; the pain, the pain that I felt as an effect of forms of violence; the love, the love for my mother and for all the women whose capacity for giving has given me life; the wonder, the wonder I felt at the way in which the world came to be organised the way that it is, a wonder that feels the ordinary as surprising; the joy, the joy I felt as I began to make different kinds of connections with others and realise that the world was alive and could take new shapes and forms; and the hope, the hope that guides every moment of refusal and that structures the desire for change with the trembling that comes from an opening up of the future, as an opening up of what is possible. (Ahmed 171)

Ahmed's emotional journey into feminism illustrates how such a journey involves a wide and colorful range of emotions. Feminist attachments, in other words, depend on and will be affected by many different emotions. I will, however, focus on the effects and power of feminist anger and feminist hope. Though I acknowledge the importance of all emotions, it is my belief that these emotions, in combination, are a big part of what makes us strive for a better future—a more just future. A future free from oppression and injustice.

### **3.2.1 Feminist Anger and Feminist Hope**

Feminist anger suggests that the pain felt by women—pain caused by experiences of violence, injury, and discrimination—"is wrong, that it is an outrage, and that something must be done about it" (Ahmed 174). Anger, in this sense, means both being angry about something you have judged as wrong *and* feeling that something must be done to change it. "Crucially," Ahmed explains, "anger is not simply defined in relationship to a past, but as opening up the future" (175). Being angry is therefore not only about being against something, but also about being for something, and anger can help fuel action that can work towards change, and change into what one is for. Put another way, anger can be a deep well of energy that can be drawn upon to create a better future. It can energize both individuals and groups, and fuel actions needed to move towards change.

Although it is perfectly reasonable to respond to pain, oppression, and injustice with anger, feminist anger has historically been used to paint a picture of feminist as irrational and intolerant. Women's anger, though "a reasonable response to social injustice", has frequently

been used to justify “the dismissal of feminist claims” (Ahmed 177). To counter the use of feminist anger as a weapon against the feminist movement, Ahmed cautions that it is important not to deny that feminists are angry, because their anger is justified. Instead, feminist must continue to point out the connection between the emotional and the rational in their anger. As Ahmed writes,

We must persist in explaining why our anger is reasonable, even in the face of others who use this anger as evidence of poor reason. Making public statements, getting heard, writing banners: these remain crucial strategies for feminism, even when they fail to get uptake. (Ahmed 177)

Women must not stop being angry at the pain caused by violence, oppression, and injustice, but must instead keep pointing out why their anger is justified and a reasonable and rational response to that pain. A powerful way of doing that is through activism. Handmaid protestors are, in essence, both expressing anger and explaining why they are angry. By protesting in the handmaid uniform, these activists are drawing upon Atwood’s dystopia to explain that they are angry that their contemporary society is looking more and more like a dystopic nightmare. By calling on the spirit of Atwood, protesters are pointing to the use of religious beliefs to justify oppressive and unjust laws aimed at controlling women’s reproductive choices.

Le Guin once wrote, “Anger is a useful, perhaps indispensable tool in motivating resistance to injustice” (“89a. About Anger”). She not only saw anger as a reasonable and justifiable response to injustice, but also as a weapon against it. She saw it as something that could be drawn upon to resist misogyny and oppression. Le Guin believed that anger should only be called upon in situations of danger, lest we let it corrupt us and define us (“89b. About Anger”). However, she also warned that “[i]f women who value freedom are dragged back into open conflict with oppression, forced to defend ourselves against the reimposition of unjust laws, we will have to call on anger as a weapon again” (“89a. About Anger”). Though we know that reproductive rights have always been under attack, with the reversal of Roe, we now see a full-fledged open attack on the reproductive rights of women. What are women in the United States, if not in combat to defend themselves from being pushed back centuries, from being pressed back under the thumb of men? Anger, then, is the weapon women must draw upon, sharpen, and wield in the fight ahead.

While Le Guin believed that anger is an important weapon in the fight against oppression and injustice, she was also concerned with what anger can do to us if we are not careful when wielding it. Le Guin asks, “What is the way to use anger to fuel something other

than hurt, to direct it away from hatred, vengefulness, self-righteousness, and make it serve creation and compassion?" (Le Guin 89b). Though she acknowledges the immense potential power of anger, she also recognizes that it can be incredibly self-destructive. The question then becomes, how can we use anger as a tool, as fuel in the fight, without letting it consume us? The answer to that, according to Ahmed, is hope. Hope, she explains,

is what allows us to feel that what angers us is not inevitable, even if transformation can sometimes feel impossible. Indeed, anger without hope can lead to despair or a sense of tiredness produced by the 'inevitability' of the repetition of that which one is against. (Ahmed 184)

Hope is what makes us believe that change is possible, even when it might not seem like it. It is, in other words, what allows us to direct our anger at something useful, just as the handmaid protesters have done. Instead of just being angry and lashing out, they have channeled their anger into action through their hope that what they are angry about, the relentless attacks on women's bodily autonomy, is not inevitable.

Ahmed writes that "if we give up hope, of course, there is no hope" and explains that "the emotion of hope keeps something open" (185). Atwood seems to share this idea of hope and the importance of it. In a podcast she appeared on, talking to Jane Goodall about the importance of hope, she said,

If you're not hopeful, things are going to get less hopeful. And if you are hopeful, that may generate more hope and actually inspire people to take action. Because if you don't have any hope, there's no use doing anything. ("Hope is the Legacy")

For Atwood, hope seems to be inherently tied to action. Hope gives us a direction to move towards. It aligns with the idea that being angry is about being against something and also for something else, and that hope allows us to move towards that something else. It allows us to dream of a better future, and to believe things can change from what you're against into what you are for.

Emotions, like anger and hope, "are crucial to the emergence and maintenance of activism" (Whittier 372). Emotions can fuel, unite, and inspire. Gathering together, united by a common cause or a common enemy, can lift the spirit and fuel further action. Kauffman explains that protests are about gathering power rather than wielding it (84). This suggests

that hope is an essential part of protesting, as hope is a belief that a change for the better is possible. Kauffman writes,

Perhaps the biggest challenge that movements face is sustaining the hope that's required for people to keep taking action over time. So sometimes the most consequential way a mass protest can work is by changing the protesters themselves, giving them the taste of collective power they need to stay in the fight. (Kauffman 95)

This is what we saw happen with the Women's March. Women seemed to be energized, and they took that energy into the fight for women's rights. It is also what happened with the handmaid protesters and their growing resistance. The handmaid uniform helped the protesters dramatize their feminist resistance. Putting on the iconic red dress and white winged bonnet helped them channel the heroine fighting the oppressive regime, a powerful narrative that gives hope, both to the protesters and to onlookers.

### **3.3 Reproductive Justice**

Reproductive Justice is a framework that places abortion alongside other central issues of injustice and oppression. Like Atwood, this framework views women's rights as part of something larger—as being part of human rights and human dignity, Ross et al., members of SisterSong, the organization that created the framework, explain that Reproductive Justice “does not reduce the focus on abortion but contextualizes it within the larger matrix of oppression” (Ross et al. 15). Reproductive Justice, they explain, is

a theoretical paradigm shift and a model for activist organization centering three interconnected human rights values: the right *not to have children* using safe birth control, abortion, or abstinence; the right *to have children* under the conditions we choose, and the right *to parent children we have* in safe and healthy environments. (Ross et al 14.)

The Reproductive Justice movement, they add, “is based on the human right to make personal decisions about one's life, and the obligation of government and society to ensure that the conditions are suitable for implementing one's decisions” (Ross et al. 14). While the Reproductive Rights, or pro-choice, movement has been criticized for overlooking issues faced by poor women and women of color, and only focusing on the issues of white,

privileged women, the Reproductive Justice movement “can appeal to a broader and more diverse group of women, help destigmatize abortion, and improve public understanding of the complexity of decisions about reproduction” (Ziegler “Reproductive Justice” 276-277).

One of the many problems with the abortion debate has been the lack of perspectives from the women who seek abortions. Loretta J. Ross, a feminist academic and activist, and founding member of SisterSong, argues that “[r]eproductive justice theory is needed because many earlier theories about reproduction paid inadequate attention to the physical, socioeconomic, and emotional realities of Indigenous women, poor women, trans women, and women of color” (184). The reproductive justice framework importantly works to shift the focus back to individuals, looking at women as whole human beings. In other words, Reproductive Justice is a framework that works not only to shift the debate by placing abortion alongside other equally important feminist concerns central to women’s equality, but also works to center the voices of women.

In 2023, on what would have been the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Roe* had it not been overturned in 2022, SisterSong released a declaration in collaboration with other organizations fighting for Reproductive Justice, reclaiming the demands of the right of women to own their bodies and control their futures. The declaration recognized the grim state of women’s rights today and acknowledged that there is a lot of work to be done before women have secured the rights first demanded almost 30 years ago. It states that “[their] vision is a future rooted in human dignity and worth, bodily autonomy, joy, love, and rest” (“Visioning New Futures”). It unabashedly embraces the feminine in its envisioning of the future, while at the same time resolutely stating that “[they] will not be silenced” and that “[they] will take up the space [they] need” (“Visioning New Futures”). In their fight for liberation, SisterSong activists travel to give speeches, presentations, and workshops on the Reproductive Justice framework, facilitate collaborations between groups with aligning goals, organize conferences for women of color to come together, and organize activism both online and in-person (SisterSong, “About”, “RJ Training”). It feels especially apt that leaders of the Reproductive Justice movement gathered on what would have been the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Roe* to recommit themselves to the fight for the future they envisioned together.



### 3.4 The Power of Dystopian Narratives

Dystopian narratives have a great potential as vehicles for emotions like anger and hope. They can be shared narratives, taking the readers on an emotional journey and strengthening feminist attachments. These narratives can help open the eyes of the reader, nudging them along as they learn to see the world through a feminist lens. Dystopian narratives invite the reader into a dark, corrupted world, often characterized by oppression and injustice, and placed sometime in the unknown future. Baccolini and Moylan, who have both researched and written extensively on dystopian narratives, explain that these dystopic visions have

served as a prophetic vehicle ... for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside. (Baccolini and Moylan 1).

They are, in other words, centered around observations the author has made of the world they live in. They are a way for the author to make sense of social and political trends they find worrying and to express their concerns about what might happen should we fail to do something about it. Dystopian narratives have been a preferred medium to explore feminist themes and issues for decades, and recent years have seen an upsurge in dystopian novels written by women, that try to make sense of an increasingly darker contemporary world (Latimer, "Roe and Our Dystopic Imagination" 835; Baccolini 520). Women are concerned for their rights, and rightly so, but why do they turn to dark dystopian narratives when the world seems to be becoming more and more like the bleak societies these authors are trying to warn us about? Baccolini explains that feminist dystopian narratives "has come to represent a form of counternarrative to hegemonic discourse" (519). Feminist dystopias, like Atwood's, can help create a space of resistance, which can inspire resistance in the real world. The handmaid protesters, inspired by the resistance in the novel, expanded the space of resistance into the real world. They brought the story of resistance and opposition to life. Baccolini writes that novels like Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* "maintains a utopian horizon in the pages of dystopian science fiction and in these anti-utopian times. (518). Though it is a grave warning, Atwood has also left her novel open for hope, which can help us understand why it resonates so powerfully with the handmaid protesters.

## 4 The Handmaid's Tale

Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, is a story of resistance and hope that functions as a shared counter-narrative to the discourse of the abortion debate. It is a warning and a call-to-action and has enormous potential to evoke and channel emotions that can be used to fuel feminist resistance. The novel depicts a frightening future in which an extremist Christian Evangelical group calling themselves the 'Sons of Jacob' has attacked and killed the president of the United States and Congress, forcibly taking power over the country. What used to be the United States of America is replaced by the Republic of Gilead—a totalitarian patriarchal theocracy. As a result of toxins and environmental disasters, the population is suffering a fertility crisis, and birthrates are at an all-time low. Fertility is thought of as a precious national resource, and fertile women, called Handmaids, become breeding slaves for the powerful Commanders of the regime and their Wives. As the title of the novel suggests, we follow the story of a Handmaid called Offred, and most of the novel is from her point of view. The novel has two open endings. The first is the end of Offred's narration, when we learn that she is taken away by unknown people, which could be either friends or foes. The second is the historical notes from a symposium of Gileadean studies far into the future.

The narrative voice of Offred is incredibly potent. Atwood has built this great big world, and Offred invites us into it. Her powerful narrative voice makes the reader share her longing, her sorrow, her fear, her anger, her shock. It truly draws you in, and it is such a powerful example of how emotions are a part of becoming engaged with the world around you, with becoming engaged with feminist ideas and the feminist movement.

Atwood saw something in the cultural and political landscape in the US that must have worried her, and that she wanted to warn her reader about. Her novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* was first published almost 30 years ago, in 1985, and was met with “everything from tepid reactions to outright pans to glowing odes” (Fallon). While some critics called Atwood's dystopian vision paranoid poppycock or a hodgepodge, others called it gripping and compared it to cultural touchstones like George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (Fallon). According to Atwood herself, some readers in the US recognized something of their contemporary cultural and political climate in the novel, and “asked ‘How long have we got?’” (Atwood, “Reflections” 246). Others were skeptical. After *Roe* had been overturned, Atwood shared on social media that,

when *Handmaid's Tale* came out in 85, there was disbelief. I thought a religious-right takeover was possible in the US, and was Crazy Margaret. Premature, but unfortunately too close. That doesn't make me happy. ("My Goodness")

Sadly, the novel leaves a quite different taste in the mouths of the readers today than it did 30 years ago. It's beginning to taste foul. For some time now, women have seen an increase in attacks on their rights, and today, they're seeing their rights rolled back at an alarming rate. Sadly, the themes of patriarchal and theocratic oppression, and loss of reproductive rights have become more relevant than ever before.

Atwood's observations of our society cuts through the hypocrisy of the conservative right and shows us the true motives of conservative politicians. The similarities between Atwood's fiction and reality shock the reader awake and force them to open their eyes to what is happening in the political and cultural climate of the States. Atwood's dystopian narrative can also be a vehicle for emotions like anger and hope, which can fuel resistance against misogyny and oppression. They can channel anger towards hope, helping us form a sturdy resistance against forces that would see women's progress dragged backward.

## 4.1 The United States of Gilead

What makes the many similarities between Atwood's dark imaginings and the real world so terrifying, is the fact that they are not imagined at all. At the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*, in what we're told is the transcript of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, Professor James Darcy Pieixoto says that "there was little that was truly original with or indigenous to Gilead: its genius was synthesis" (344). This is the genius of Gilead—and of Atwood's novel as well. Atwood has carefully made a point out of not inventing anything in her novel and she has been very vocal about her inspiration from reality. "I made a rule for myself: I would not include anything that human beings had not already done in some other place or time, or for which the technology did not already exist" (Atwood, "How She Came to Write") Everything, she explains, had precedents found in the real world, and much of it can be found not only within the Western world but also "within the 'Christian' tradition itself" ("On How She Came to Write"). The Republic of Gilead is, in other words, a synthesis of Atwood's real-world observations, and it is what Atwood imagined would happen if a totalitarian power were to seize power in the United States. "Nations never build apparently radical forms of

government on foundations that aren't there already," Atwood explains. She believed that the deep foundation of the United States was "the heavy-handed theocracy of [...] Puritan New England—with its marked bias against women—which would need only the opportunity of a period of social chaos to reassert itself" ("How She Came to Write"). Her dystopian imaginings are, in other words, a coalescence of the horrible deeds human beings have already done to one another throughout history, and it is her answer to how democracy could cease to exist in the States.

Atwood did not only draw inspiration from the past. She also drew inspiration from what she saw happening in the United States as she was writing her novel, and the Republic of Gilead has many eerie similarities to actual statements and actions by religious conservative forces in the US. This not only makes the reader question whether the plot of the novel could happen in the future, but it might also make the reader wake up and take a closer look at the threats to women's rights that are very much present in the US today. Atwood has described the 1980s as "a decade of pushback" against feminism and the progress women had made the decade before. ("Read Very Differently"). "People were saying that they would like women to be back in the home in their rightful sphere, and that all of the gains that people thought they had made ought to be reversed," she observes ("Read Very Differently"). Atwood, in other words, saw something in the cultural and political landscape in the US that must have worried her, and that she wanted to warn her reader about. The parallels she draws between her dark imagined future and the contemporary political and cultural climate can jolt some life into the reader. The novel is very much meant to make the reader sharpen their ears, open their eyes, and pay close attention to what is going on. Her novel, and the chilly similarities between it and the contemporary United States, make reality harder to ignore. As Offred says,

We lived, as usual, by ignoring. Ignoring isn't the same as ignorance, you have to work at it.

Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it. (67)

This passage touches upon some uncomfortable truths, and it might force the reader to confront them. It is more comfortable to ignore dangerous developments in the world around us than to pay attention to them, and perhaps feel that you must do something about it. It is also easier to do that—to ignore those changes and developments—if they are small and gradual. Atwood reminds us of the gradual infringements of women's rights, and it is easy to

imagine the development of abortion politics in the United States as a gradually heating bathtub. The most important thing to do is to wake up and get out of the hot water before we're boiled to death, and with her novel, Atwood is trying to help us do that.

*The Handmaid's Tale* reminds the reader that women's rights are fragile and that it's necessary to be alert, must be vigilant, must not take women's rights for granted, and the parallels between Atwood's dystopic vision and reality help her do that. There are so many examples that could be mentioned, like the use of religion in law, the proliferation of misinformation and propaganda, the blocking of accurate information, and even the abstinence-only policies. In Gilead, abortion providers are hanged, "like war criminals" (43). This immediately brings to mind the ongoing criminalization of anyone who helps facilitate an abortion in the States. In more recent years, Offred's account of how the Sons of Jacob took power and Gilead came to be, how "they shot the president and machine-gunned the Congress" (199), will also conjure images of the Make America Great Again movement popularized by Trump and their violent storming of Congress in 2021. Even Serena Joy's speeches about the sanctity of the home, about how women should be wives and homemakers, are suggestive of the many white women who vote for the politicians and lawmakers that implement policies that are harmful for women. When Offred remembers seeing Serena Joy on television, she said, "Really she was a little frightening. She was in earnest" (56). This feeling might resonate with some readers who will look at this passage and think of the women who not only support misogynists, but also push misogynistic and harmful rhetoric. It might be easier to be vigilant when one is angry and afraid, and the many parallels between the nightmare that is Gilead and the politics and rhetoric pushed by religious conservatives in the United States are frightening and provoking. The fear and anger of seeing these similarities and realizing the direction in which the political situation is heading can hopefully serve as a wake-up call and might heighten the reader's sense of vigilance enough to make them engage in political efforts to fight those who want to force their religion on others and are working to make the United States of America more like the Republic of Gilead.

Throughout the novel, Offred has "attacks of the past" (63), flashbacks to her life before Gilead. These flashbacks to Offred's past, to the time before Gilead, provide a stark contrast to the totalitarian patriarchal theocratic hellscape in which Offred finds herself. We get to see glimpses of her life before Gilead had manifested, and importantly, these glimpses look like a life many readers will find familiar. The flashbacks are there to place our current way of life in the past. The life Offred is remembering is almost like the lives we are living

today. What this tells us is that Offred was like us, and it is a way of warning the reader just how fragile women's rights are. During one of her flashbacks to her life before, Offred, Offred, reminiscing about something as ordinary as laundromats, says,

I think about laundromats. What I wore to them: shorts, jeans, jogging pants.  
What I put into them: my own clothes, my own soap, my own money, money  
I had earned myself. I think about having such control. (33)

This is such a powerful passage. It effectively solidifies Offred as someone just like us. Someone who wore shorts, jeans, and jogging pants, who owned soap that she bought with her own money, and who visited laundromats to do her laundry. It is a stark contrast to the life she describes in Gilead. However, it is also a passage so full of longing—longing for something so many of us take for granted, like owning clothes you have picked out yourself, wearing them, washing them. Owning soap that you have bought with your own money, because you have a job. Offred's longing tone when she remembers this part of her life, a part that used to be routine, can remind the reader just how fragile women's progress is—the progress that allowed women to do get an education and a job, earn money and own property. Offred's powerful narrative voice makes us feel her longing, feel her sadness, and feel her anger, and it reminds us that these ordinary everyday choices and routines are about having control over our own lives. Through her, we might realize that we too would think of them—these everyday choices—with longing. Flashbacks like these can force us to think about our own lives and it might make us think about the fragility of hard-won women's rights, and make us realize that if we take them for granted and keep ignoring what is happening, we are at risk of losing them.

As well as showing us that Offred had all the rights that we have, her flashbacks also show us how they were taken away. We get to see how Gilead came to be, through Offred's eyes. We get to hear her account of what happened as the Sons of Jacob gradually tightened their grip on the United States and made it into the Republic of Gilead. She tells us of the fear and confusion that hit as the president and Congress were killed, as the Sons of Jacob blamed Islamic fanatics and declared a state of emergency. As Offred shares her experience of the attacks and of women's rights being rolled back, she takes the reader along on her emotional journey through these memories. The feeling of shock, disbelief and anger as she—and every other woman—lost the right to have a job, to access their own money, and to own property. The struggle of trying to explain how it felt to her husband, Luke, who didn't seem to grasp

how devastating it felt. “You don’t know what it’s like, I said. I feel as if somebody cut off my feet” (205). All these flashbacks of how women’s rights were systematically rolled back, not only a little bit, but all the way, are terrifying. When recalling the time following the loss of her human rights, Offred shares her grief with us:

I tried not to cry at mealtimes. By this time I’d started to cry, without warning, and to sit beside the bedroom window, staring out. (206)

Offred’s emotional response to the loss of her human rights, her perfectly reasonable emotional response, is potent. Her grief, the sense of loss and helplessness at feeling like her feet are cut off, is palpable. The similarities between Gilead and the United States, and the flashback to Offred’s life before the American democracy was replaced by a totalitarian theocracy, make it harder to ignore the continuous attacks on women’s rights happening right now.

## **4.2 Oppression and Outrage**

Before we even learn what is going on—before we learn what Gilead is, or Handmaids, or Aunts, or Commanders—we learn that Aunts patrol and carry electric cattle prods. At the very beginning of the novel, Offred tells us that “Aunt Sara and Aunt Elizabeth patrolled; they had electric cattle prods slung on thongs from their leather belts” (10). Though we have not been told yet, we understand that the Aunts are not carrying the electric cattle prods for the protection of the narrator and her companions. We understand that it is to be used on them, to be used to control them. We understand that in this scenario, they are the cattle.

The Handmaids, as we soon learn they are called, are brutally dehumanized and thoroughly robbed of their identities. Their position as livestock is made painfully evident, not only in the way they are treated but also in what they are forced to wear. The Handmaid uniform consists of an ankle-length red dress and a white winged bonnet, designed to “keep us from seeing, but also from being seen” (14). The white wings of their bonnets effectively work as blinkers on a horse. They make it “hard to look up, hard to get the full view, of the sky, of anything” (40). Their blinkers create an artificial blind zone, ensuring that the Handmaids will never have a full view of what is going on around them. They are not allowed to see the larger picture. When Offred shares her experience of navigating this new dark world with her blinkers on, she says that they “have learned to see the world in gasps”. Gasp, gasping, gasping for air.

Through Offred's powerful narrative voice, Atwood communicates a sense of desperation, of need, of shock, of danger, making readers emotionally invested. However, while being kept from seeing the surrounding world is an incredibly effective tool of oppression, Offred also points out another devastating effect of the white winged bonnets they are forced to wear. They prevent the Handmaids from being seen, which is an immensely important part of the human experience, both in the metaphorical and literal sense. Being seen is a key part of your identity, of being identified as individuals. It is an essential part of connecting and communicating with other people. The uniform is designed with absolute subjugation in mind, and discovering all the ways it works to oppress and erase the Handmaids is a devastating and infuriating experience. Through Offred's voice, we immediately understand that she feels what is being done to her, and we are invited to share her feelings.

Another effective way the regime has of dehumanizing women and obliterating any sense of individual identity is by forbidding the use of the names the Handmaids had before they were enslaved by Gilead. A name is a fundamentally important and personal thing, and the thought of it being taken away, forcibly, is heartbreaking. The new names imposed upon the Handmaids by the regime do not belong to them either; rather, the names are meant to indicate who they belong to. In the notes from the Twelfth Symposium at the end of the novel, professor Pieixoto explains that their Handmaid names were "patronymic, composed of the possessive preposition and the first name of the gentleman in question" (343). They are, in other words, named after the Commander they belong to, but only as long as they are placed under his service. Offred, then, belongs to a Commander named Fred. While learning that their names are taken from them is heartbreaking, learning that they then are named after the man who ceremoniously rape them once a month is infuriating. Making matters worse, we also learn that any official records of their real names and identities were destroyed when they were made Handmaids, and replaced with a four-digit number. They are, in so many ways, treated like mere cattle.

I cannot avoid seeing, now, the small tattoo on my ankle. Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse. It's supposed to guarantee that I will never be able to fade, finally, into another landscape. I am too important, too scarce, for that. I am a national resource. (77)



Handmaids are tattooed. They are branded, like livestock. Marked with identifying digits, like livestock. Like Jews during the Holocaust, who were also dehumanized in the most horrific ways. It is a very powerful emotional parallel to draw, one that channels anguish, outrage, sorrow, and shock. The erasure of identities and brutal dehumanization of the Handmaids can help open our eyes to the oppressive forces of the anti-abortion movement, and help us understand that they will not stop at abortion.

Women in Gilead are reduced to their reproductive organs and are judged by their ability or inability to get pregnant and rear children. This premise is made obvious from the very beginning of the novel, and with no group is it more evident than with the Handmaids. After describing the frugal nature of her room, Offred explains that it represents the sort of return to traditional values, of making use of things of no further use, that they like in Gilead. Then she devastatingly says, “Waste not want not. I am not being wasted. Why do I want?” (13). By placing herself next to things not being wasted, like a rug made of braided rags, she suggests that her use now is her reproductive organs. They are not being wasted. However, she also reminds us that though she in the eyes of the Gileadean regime is not being wasted, she wants. She might have been reduced to the use of her reproductive organs, and the Commanders might think that they can use them however they want—like that rug—but Offred reminds us that she is a person, and she has her own wants and needs, her own wishes and dreams, though she is not allowed them.

The reduction of women to their bodies, their bodily functions, is part and parcel of the ideologies currently working against abortion. Women are utterly determined by their bodies in those ideologies, a situation which Atwood illustrates throughout the entire novel, especially when Offred tells us that she has learned to avoid looking at her own body because she does not “want to look at something that determines me so completely” (75). Offred has effectively been reduced to her body, to her uterus. There is no difference between who she is and what her body can do, must do, or else she might die—she is her body. The reduction of Offred to her reproductive abilities, and Offred’s understanding of it, is glaringly obvious when she describes the experience of the ceremonial monthly rape by the Commander and his Wife:

My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the  
Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body.  
(110)

This passage is crushing. The Commander is not fucking her, he is fucking the lower part of her body. The lower part of her body is what is considered a precious national resource. They only value her for her ability to get pregnant and carry the pregnancy to term, and this passage truly drives that home. Then Offred says,

I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. (110)

The regime's dehumanization is incredibly strong in this passage. Offred makes it clear that she knows that she is not considered a person, because “only one is involved” (110) in the fucking, and that is the Commander. She, who she is, is not a part of it. The Commander is fucking the only thing she is valued for, namely her reproductive organs. However, in this passage, Offred also reminds us that there *is* a difference between her body, her reproductive organs, and who she is, and she reveals that she is aware of it. She is actively creating distance between the two, refusing to accept that she is her body. If she had accepted it, she would not have made a point out of how she is not a part of the ceremony. It is a devastating passage in more ways than one. While it highlights the dehumanizing nature of policies that reduce women to their reproductive organs, it also refuses to accept the premise of these policies.

In the Republic of Gilead, as in the real world, illiteracy is a tool of oppression and dehumanization. With the exception of the Aunts, women and girls in Gilead are strictly forbidden from reading and writing. Literacy is intimately tied to power and privilege, and illiteracy has historically been a part of reinforcing and perpetuating systems of power and oppression. In the transcripts of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, we learn that one of the founding members of the Sons of Jacob stated, “Our big mistake was teaching them to read. We won't do that again” (345). Though we don't learn this until the very end of the novel, it confirms how very intentional the prohibition of reading and writing for women and girls was. The founders of Gilead weaponized illiteracy, as they were afraid of the power of reading and writing. To read and to write is in many ways to wield power, and the founders of Gilead were clearly afraid of what women could do with that kind of power. This fear is palpable from the very beginning of the novel. When Offred tells us about one of her daily walks to get groceries, she describes the storefront of one of the stores. “The store has a huge wooden sign outside it, in the shape of a golden lily; Lilies of the Field, it's called” (34). Then she adds,

You can see the place, under the lily, where the lettering was painted out, when they decided that even the names of shops were too much temptation for us. Now places are known by their sign alone. (34)

So afraid are they of the potential power of reading, of what reading could lead to if women were allowed, that they have removed all lettering from places women might see it. They fear that even reading the names of a store would be “too much temptation” (34). Something you do not want cannot tempt you, and this reveals that Offred suspects that the Commanders know that women want to read. Put differently, the reason women in Gilead do not read is that it is prohibited by the regime, not that reading is not in their nature. By removing and hiding away written words like a precious treasure, the Commanders give away that they know that women want to read just as much as men do.

The Bible is kept locked up, the way people once kept tea locked up, so the servants wouldn't steal it. It is an incendiary device: who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it? (103)

Again, this passage highlights the power of reading and the fear the Commanders had of what women could do with that power. The Bible, the one book that must be in every home, is locked up. They will not risk what could happen should women get a hold of it.

The Bible is a particular risk because the Commanders in Gilead, much like the religious conservative forces in the States, have made a practice of cherry-picking and altering Biblical passages, using them to justify their mistreatment of women and other oppressed groups. Offred tells us of a passage from the Bible they were read when they were being trained as Handmaids, a passage that she could tell they had altered to fit their ideology. “I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out, too, but there was no way of checking” (105). Offred is painfully aware of what they are doing, but she is powerless to do anything about it. There is no way for her to challenge them, because there is no way for her to check the source material herself. This passage shows us how effective illiteracy is as a tool of oppression, and it reminds us how important literacy, being able to read and write, is for fighting oppression and injustice, and how important it is that we do not give it up. Not only is it key for gaining knowledge and spreading ideas, but it is also essential in challenging oppressive forces. When the Commander is reading from the Bible to his household, Offred observes that “[h]e has something we don't have, he has the word. How we squandered it, once” (104). This is a pointed remark, reminding us not to squander our words.

The Commanders clearly fear the power knowledge gives. The women could question their authority if they had knowledge. If they could read the Bible, they could read what the passages used to justify their oppression really say. They could question the legitimacy of the power the men, and especially the Commanders, hold. With her novel, Atwood is reminding us not to squander our power to question the rhetoric and justifications used by abortion opponents.

Importantly though, as well as fearing the power of knowledge that comes with reading, the Commanders also fear the emotions that could arise should women be allowed to read and write. Narratives have an immense potential to evoke powerful emotions, as demonstrated by Atwood and *The Handmaid's Tale*. This is something the religious right recognizes, as religious and cultural conservatives are notorious for trying to ban books that disagree with their worldview, including Atwood's novel (Atwood, "Go Ahead and Ban My Book"). The handmaid protesters are channeling the emotional power of Atwood's dystopian narrative into their resistance to real-life misogyny and oppression. The novel can help us experience an emotional journey from heartbreak to outrage to defiance, an emotional journey that builds into action. Throughout the novel we move with Offred, we experience her emotional reactions to the oppressive forces around her, and we step out of the narrative into the real world, taking the emotional charge with us to challenge the real dystopia.

Offred is left only one word to read. In her room, there is an embroidered cushion. She shares that she "can spend minutes, tens of minutes, running my eyes over the print: FAITH" (68). She can spend tens of minutes reading that one word, over and over. She is hungry for words. It is a potent word, with several meanings, and for Offred it can mean to keep faith, to not lose herself completely, to hold on.

The brutal oppression and dehumanization of women, and especially of the Handmaids, portrayed in the novel has a powerful potential to ignite feelings of anger in the reader. Offred's powerful narrative voice makes us emotionally invested. It can force us to experience her pain through her narration. As Ahmed argued, feminist anger, as a response to pain caused by experiences of gendered violence and discrimination, is feeling that this pain is an "outrage, and that something must be done about it" (Ahmed 174). The anger, the outrage, felt by the reader in response to the gripping, unrelenting pain of women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, especially the pain of Offred, can serve as a "call for action" (Ahmed 174). Offred's pain of being robbed of her full humanity can evoke anger that can be channeled into the fight against being robbed of ours.

### 4.3 Seeds of Resistance and Hope

Although *The Handmaid's Tale* is a story of brutal oppression and injustice, it is also a story of hope and resistance—of fighting back in big ways and small. Atwood makes that clear from the very beginning when Offred tells us that she “intend[s] to last” (14). With this line, Atwood sets a hopeful and defiant tone that continues throughout the novel. There is a defiance in Offred that, though it seems quiet, is very loud to the reader. Offred seems to be obedient and subservient, but her thoughts are anything but. Now and again, Offred’s inner defiance becomes an act of defiance. Though these acts are small, they leave a big impression. Quite early in the novel, Offred tells us of a time when she stopped by a security checkpoint. Though she is not meant to, Offred looks into the eyes of a young Guardian and holds his gaze until he looks away.

It’s an event, a small defiance of rule, so small as to be undetectable, but such moments are the rewards I hold out for myself, like the candy I hoarded, as a child, at the back of a drawer. Such moments are possibilities, tiny peepholes.  
(30)

These small moments of defiance, though practically undetectable, carry great importance. Offred is collecting them, as if at the back of a drawer, to keep them, to remember them, to pick them up and look at them when she needs to—and so can the reader. Small and quiet acts of defiance cannot topple oppressive regimes and fight injustice, but they can have a cumulative effect. Offred’s acts of defiance can be collected, and one by one stoking the defiance in the reader. As the collection grows, it opens up possibilities of more defiance. Offred’s defiant spirit can inspire defiance in others, both in the world of the novel and in the real world.

Offred’s hopefulness manifests itself in the way she describes the world around her. Though she describes a dark and oppressive world filled with violence, she also gives a lot of space to the good things. Offred is clinging to these brief glimpses of light:

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. (14)

This passage conveys hope, humanity, and a determination to stay alive. It reveals that Offred is holding onto life and that she is determined to last without being overwhelmed by dark thoughts. Her focus on these things, like flowers and the feeling of sunlight on bare skin,

provides relief from the darkness of the world around her—both for her and for the reader. Though these small glimpses of light only lift the spirit ever so slightly, it is enough to make her not give in. These brief moments keep her alive, they keep her from finding those other escapes, the ones she could open within herself if she wanted. Offred is not succumbing to darkness, she is not withdrawing into herself. Instead, she is mostly present, and she still takes *in* the world, both the good and the bad, which is crucial for taking *on* the world. It is a choice she is making, and it is an important one. Passages like this one have the potential to deepen the connection between Offred and the reader and can inspire us to not give in.

While the flashbacks to Offred’s past, her memories of a life lived, function as a contrast to her life in Gilead and a warning of the fragility of women’s rights, they are also a touch of defiance. When Offred is alone in her room, at night, her flashbacks are no longer “attacks of the past” (63), but instead are a place for her to seek refuge. “But the night is my time out. Where should I go? Somewhere good” (47). Her time is not out at all, rather, it is inside, inside of her mind. Though her body is held captive in the house, in the room she has been assigned, her mind remains free. It remains hers. Though her body is controlled, the regime has not found a way to control her mind. In her mind, she can visit the world as it used to be. Throughout the novel, Offred seeks refuge in memories of her daughter, of her husband, of her mother, and of her best friend, Moira. Throughout the novel, her memories of Moira and her mother come to represent defiance and resistance to male domination. They are both fierce feminist activists, often described as spunky and headstrong. Through them, and especially through her mother, we are reminded of the bravery of the women who came before us. The bravery and endurance of the women who fought so that we would have all the rights we have today. These memories of them, her loved ones, are something for Offred to hold on to. In one of these excursions into her past, Offred visits a powerful memory of Moira:

You wait, she said. They’ve been building up to this. It’s you and me against the wall, baby. She was quoting an expression of my mother’s, but she wasn’t intending to be funny. (199)

In this passage, Offred is invoking the spirit of Moira and her mother. She is telling us a story, a story of resistance, and she is making these fierce feminists a part of the narrative.

One of the loudest acts of defiance and greatest conveyers of hope in the novel is the message Offred finds, left behind by a previous Handmaid. While carefully exploring her room, inch by inch, she finds words, “in tiny writing, quite fresh it seemed, scratched with a

pin or maybe just a fingernail, in the corner where the darkest shadow fell: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*” (63). Though she does not know what it means at first, it ignites something in her. Here it was, this act of bravery, “a message, and it was in writing, forbidden by that very fact, and it hadn’t yet been discovered. Except by me, for whom it was intended” (63). There is the rush of a secret, of a secret message between women, whose very existence has come to be defined by subjugation and powerlessness. This message, the idea of communing with another Handmaid, one who was there before her, energizes her. “It pleases me to know that her taboo message made it through, to at least one other person, washed itself up on the wall of my cupboard, was opened and read by me” (64). Although she does not understand the words, she understands the message it is meant to relay. It is a message of defiance, of anger, of encouragement, of togetherness, of hope. The message is encouraging Offred to keep up her quiet resistance, to keep on holding on to life, and it becomes a prayer she repeats again and again throughout the novel. “I pray silently: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*. I don’t know what it means, but it sounds right, and it will have to do, because I don’t know what else I can say to God” (107). Here it is, what the Commanders feared, doing what they feared it would do. One Handmaid has used her literacy, her written words, to leave a message behind for another Handmaid. One day, Offred makes “a grab at knowledge” (213), and asking the Commander what the phrase means, learns that it is a joke between schoolboys, and can be roughly translated to “Don’t let the bastards grind you down” (214). This, however, does not change the meaning of the message. It does not matter that she got it from the Commander, or that it is a joke among schoolboys in origin. Just like *The Handmaid’s Tale* has remained a feminist dystopia despite Atwood’s statements that it is not, the message of the phrase Offred found in her cupboard remains. The novel, and the phrase, have come to symbolize defiance, resistance, and resilience. The many handmaid protestors demonstrate that Atwood’s message of resilience is being found and read, and used to resist the unrelenting attacks on women’s rights.

Though the Commanders have stolen Offred’s name, though they have destroyed any evidence it ever existed and forbidden it, Offred refuses to give it up. She won’t give up her “shining name” (99). Though she is no longer known by it, she refuses to forget it.

I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I’ll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried. This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that’s survived from an unimaginably distant past. I lie in my single bed at night, with my eyes

closed, and the name floats there behind my eyes, not quite within reach, shining in the dark. (99)

She keeps it inside of her, summoning strength from it when she needs it. Though it is not quite within reach, it is not lost either. It is there, with her, every night. She wears it inside, like an amulet. “I repeat my former name, remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me” (114). Her name becomes a source of strength. Though she never tells us what her name is, the knowledge that it is there, in her mind, becomes a symbol of her quiet resistance. The Handmaids frequently use their real names, from before, when they talk to each other, and Offred tells us the names of the ones she knows. It becomes a way of resisting the dehumanization, at least amongst themselves. When they use their real names, they are, in a way, taking their identity back. They are refusing to let it die. Their names, along with them, will keep holding on, waiting for the day when they can use it and be known by it again.

Offred’s quiet defiance eventually grows into something bigger. Several times throughout the novel, Offred tells us that she wants to steal something, anything, from the household. It would make her feel like she had power. Though she admits that feeling would only be an illusion, illusions can be powerful. Illusions can fuel action, they can drive the individual and the collective. Though Offred at first decides it is too risky, something in her makes her try. One night, after the monthly ceremonial rape, after gathering strength from repeating her shining name to herself, she gives into the urge. She sneaks downstairs to take a wilting daffodil:

I find the daffodils, crisp at the edges where they’ve dried, limp towards the stems, use my fingers to pinch. I will press this, somewhere. Under the mattress. Leave it there, for the next woman, the one who comes after me, to find (115).

This act of rebellion goes beyond the kind of quiet individual resistance Offred has had up until this point, and has grown into a quiet, communal resistance. That she wants to leave the daffodil behind for the next Handmaid to find suggests that Offred’s defiance has grown bolder, and it illustrates how strong her hope is. This daffodil would, like the message left behind by the former Handmaid, be her way of telling the next Handmaid to hold on, to not let the bastards grind her down. It is a symbol of hope, and though hope can feel like an illusion, it holds immense power.



The loudest presence of defiance and resistance in the novel is, undoubtedly, the existence of open resistance to the Gileadean regime. We get the first taste of it this open resistance when Offred implies that Gilead is at war. The fact that Gilead is at war means that Gilead has borders somewhere, which opens up the possibilities of escape, some time and somehow. It tells us that Gilead is not everywhere, that this theocratic patriarchal totalitarian regime is not infinite. Also the existence of resistance groups, like Mayday, confirms the limitations of Gilead's power. Even before Offred learns about it, her belief that such a group must exist is the source of one of the most potent passages of the novel:

I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow;  
or rather, no shadow unless there is also light. (122)

This passage relays an absolute belief in light, in goodness, in hope. It is a powerful reminder that wherever there is shadow, there will also be light. Wherever there is oppression and suffering, there will also be resistance and hope.

Offred's most striking act of hope is the very act of telling her story, of recording it and hiding it away, hoping that it would reach someone. She is imagining a listener. She is imagining us. "I will say *you, you*, like an old love song. *You* can mean more than one. *You* can mean thousands" (50). Offred is telling her story to whoever might be listening—or reading—and it could be thousands. In Atwood's own words, "[e]very recorded story implies a future reader" ("The Handmaid's Tale in the Age of Trump"). In recording her story, she is hoping and trusting that it will find someone who wants to listen. Just like Offred's recorded story is an act of hope, so is Atwood's. Atwood's story, *The Handmaid's Tale*, is in itself an act of hope from her. In writing the novel, Atwood is writing to an implied listener, and she is hoping that we are ready to listen. Her dystopian narrative is both a warning and light that shines in the darkness, guiding the way for whoever is there to listen.

## 5 Conclusion

The abortion debate in the United States is characterized by polarization and a deep divide between the opposing sides. I have argued that the debate is inherently emotional. Opposition to abortion is deeply rooted in religious belief and misogyny, and opponents of abortion are basing their arguments on misinformation and fearmongering, aiming to evoke emotions like fear, shame, and guilt. Abortion opponents have demonstrated a blatant disregard for truth and honesty, and refuse to listen to or trust women, especially women who seek abortions. They hypocritically use their own religious beliefs as an excuse to opt out of offering women vital reproductive healthcare, while at the same time forcing their religion on others through harmful rhetoric and policies. A look at the policies they support and push reveals that, though they claim to care about the well-being of women and children, their true motives are far more sinister. They have shown again and again that what they want is to suppress and control women. They have shown a fundamental disregard for truth, honesty, and women's perspectives.

This situation was clear in Margaret Atwood's chilling observations of the world when she wrote *The Handmaid's Tale* 35 years ago. However, though the forces pushing against abortion and women's rights have been present for decades, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States seemed to accelerate the unrelenting attacks. But women are fighting back. In response to Trump's election, women who were disgusted, afraid, and angry that such a brazen misogynist could be elected president gathered in massive protests, sparking what would become a global movement for women's rights. Out of this feminist resistance grew a protest strategy centered around Atwood's iconic feminist dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale*. Protesters, united in their fear of the direction of the political climate and in their hope for a better future, donned the red cloak and white winged bonnet of the handmaid uniform and gathered in protest.

Though women's emotions have historically been weaponized against them to silence their voices, emotions play an important part in the feminist movement. Anger is, arguably, one of the most important emotions for feminist resistance. As a response to pain and injustice, anger has always been a powerful driving force towards change. Emotion and rationality are closely intertwined, and by continuing to speak up, and through their activism, feminists are highlighting their anger as well as the rationality behind it. However, to channel anger into change for a better and more just future, we need hope. Hope is what allows us to channel our anger into something productive. It allows us to channel the energy of anger into

action. Together, anger and hope become an incredibly potent force that can fuel individuals and collectives into action, which is crucial for feminist resistance.

Emotions are important for feminist attachments, for starting to identify as a feminist and see the world through a feminist lens. Though Atwood is celebrated as a feminist icon, having dealt with many feminist issues in her writing and written one of the most celebrated feminist dystopias, she has had a somewhat complicated relationship to feminism. Throughout the tumultuous and sometimes divisive decades of second-wave feminism, the words *feminist* and *feminism* were effectively demonized, coating the words with very negative connotations that continue to haunt the feminist movement today. While this can help us understand Atwood's relationship with feminism, it can also help us understand something about her emotional journey into it. Though Atwood has shared common ground with the feminist movement for decades, it is possible that her emotional journey into feminism began with negative emotional experiences, making her reluctant to be associated with such a loaded term as the 'f-word'. However, she, along with many other women, would likely have had a wave of positive emotional experiences from the upsurge of feminist resistance following Trump's election. Seeing her handmaids come to life and stand up for their human rights would doubtlessly have been quite an emotional experience, one that could have been a part of her softening to the word *feminism*—as long as she can define it within human rights.

Looking at the many alarming similarities between the Republic of Gilead and the political climate in the United States today, it is no wonder that women are invoking the spirit of Atwood to fight oppression and injustice. The oppressive and misogynist nature of the continued attacks on women's rights—especially on their reproductive rights—can only be described as dystopian. I have traced the parallels between Atwood's dystopic vision and the contemporary political and cultural climate of the States and found that a core function of *The Handmaid's Tale* is as a wake-up call, a warning to stay vigilant, and a call-to-action.

Atwood's dystopian narrative evokes strong emotions. Offred's narration of the unfathomable pain felt by her and other women in the novel makes the raw emotions of outrage, and grief almost palpable. However, the novel is also filled with hope and resistance. The defiant acts of the Handmaids are catching. They can be collected by the reader, and taken out and studied when needed. These big and small acts of defiance and resistance are, at their cores, hopeful. Atwood beautifully counters the darkness of her dark imagination with moments of light and hope for the future. The widespread use of the handmaid's uniform in protests against attacks on women's rights is a testimony to the enormous capacity of dystopian literature to provoke and channel emotions, emotions sorely needed to fight

oppression and injustice. Invoking the spirit of Atwood to fight oppression also means promising to keep fighting, should we be pushed back further.

Abortion has been made the centerpiece of a much larger religious conservative agenda, and to fight the forces that are trying to ban abortion, feminists need to see the bigger picture. The reproductive justice framework can help us understand abortion as a part of something larger. It views reproductive rights as part of human rights and human dignity, and can help us understand the full spectrum of issues and concerns. Viewing the handmaid protesters through the lens of reproductive justice can help us expand what has been mainly viewed as a protest tool against attacks on abortion care to include the full spectrum of rights women must achieve to be fully equal.

Though the world around us seems to be getting more and more like a dystopian nightmare, hope is important, and there is good reason to hold on to it. Recently, France became the first country in the world to make the right to abortion a part of the constitution, which shows us that there is reason to channel anger into feminist resistance (Ekern and Haugen). As Atwood shows us through Offred's story, though times may be dark, we must always strive to find hope. With her feminist dystopia, she helps us do just that, both within the novel itself and outside of it. Like the writing Offred found on the wall inside the closet, or the daffodil she wanted to steal and leave for the next Handmaid to find, *The Handmaid's Tale* is a message of defiance and resistance left behind from Atwood to the reader. Handmaid protesters, channeling the anger and hope they found in the novel, used it to create something, something that created even more hope for the future, through protesting, encouraging more women to join the fight, showing that they are not alone.

## Works Cited

- Ahmed, Osub, et al. *Women Have Paid the Price for Trump's Regulatory Agenda*. Center for American Progress, 10 Sept. 2020, [www.americanprogress.org/article/women-paid-price-trumps-regulatory-agenda](http://www.americanprogress.org/article/women-paid-price-trumps-regulatory-agenda). Accessed 9 Jan 2024.
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh University Press, 2014. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.mime.uit.no/lib/tromsoub-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1767554>.
- Atkins, Jen. "The new normal: Activist handmaids and cosplay choreographies in Trump's American." *European Journal of American Culture*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2022, pp. 187-208. *Intellect Ltd*, [https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac\\_00071\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/ejac_00071_1)
- Atwood, Margaret. "Go Ahead and Ban My Book." *The Atlantic*, 12 Feb. 2023, [www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/02/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-virginia-book-ban-library-removal/673013/](http://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/02/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-virginia-book-ban-library-removal/673013/). Accessed 14 May 2024.
- . *The Handmaid's Tale*. Everyman's Library, 2006.
- . "The Handmaid's Tale: A Feminist Dystopia?" *Lire Margaret Atwood*, edited by Marta Dvorak, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1999, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pur.30511>.
- , guest. "Margaret Atwood: Hope is the Legacy We Build Together for a Better World." *The Jane Goodall Hopecast*, from Jane Goodall Institute & FRQNCY Media, 1 March 2022, <http://disq.us/t/45nitzg>. Accessed 20 Feb. 2024.
- . "Margaret Atwood on What 'The Handmaid's Tale' Means in the Age of Trump." *The New York Times*, 10 March 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html). Accessed 18 Apr. 2024.

- . "Margaret Atwood on How She Came to Write *The Handmaid's Tale*: The Origin Story of an Iconic Novel" *Literary Hub*, 25 Apr. 2018, [www.lithub.com/margaret-atwood-on-how-she-came-to-write-the-handmaids-tale](http://www.lithub.com/margaret-atwood-on-how-she-came-to-write-the-handmaids-tale). Accessed 26 Jan 2024.
- . "Margaret Atwood: the road to Utopia." *The Guardian*, 14 Oct. 2011, [www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/14/margaret-atwood-road-to-utopia](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/14/margaret-atwood-road-to-utopia). Accessed 25 Apr. 2024.
- . "My goodness, some of you are good at misreading! To be clear: when *Handmaids Tale* came out in 85, there was disbelief. I thought a religious-right takeover was possible in the US, and was Crazy Margaret. Premature, but unfortunately too close. That doesn't make me happy." X, 12 July 2022, [x.com/MargaretAtwood/status/1546825708621778944](https://x.com/MargaretAtwood/status/1546825708621778944).
- . "In Nova Scotia with appropriately sloganed coffee mug...." X, 11 July 2022, [x.com/MargaretAtwood/status/1546500429185486849](https://x.com/MargaretAtwood/status/1546500429185486849).
- . "A Slave State?" *Burning Questions*, Chatto & Windus, 2022, pp. 361-362.
- Baber Wallis, Anne. "'When America Sneezes, the World Catches a Cold' What does overturning *Roe v. Wade* mean for women's reproductive health in Africa?." Editorial. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, vol. 26, no. 7, 2022, pp. 9-11. doi:10.29063/ajrh2022/v26i7.1
- Baccolini, Raffaella. "The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction." *PMLA*, vol. 119, no. 3, 2004, pp. 518–21. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486067>. Accessed 5 Jan. 2024.
- Baccolini, Raffaella, and Tom Moylan. Introduction. *Dark Horizons : Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, edited by Tom Moylan, and Raffaella Baccolini, Taylor & Francis Group, 2003.

- Balmer, Randall. "Randall Balmer" Forum: Studying Religion in the Age of Trump, *Religion and American Culture*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2017, pp. 3-7.
- Bell, Chris. "How the handmaid became an international protest symbol." *BBC*, 27 July 2018, [www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-44965210](http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-44965210). Accessed 23 Apr. 2024.
- Benz, Dorothee. "The Women's March: Protest and Resistance." *Learning for Justice*, 20 Mar. 2023, [www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/the-womens-march-protest-and-resistance](http://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/the-womens-march-protest-and-resistance). Accessed 9 Apr. 2024.
- Berlinger, Joshua, and Xiaofei Xu. "France becomes world's first country to enshrine abortion rights in constitution." *CNN*, 4 Mar. 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/03/04/europe/france-abortion-constitution-intl/index.html>. Accessed 15 May 2024.
- Birkin, Laura. "The Protester's Tale – The Handmaid Costume as Feminist Dystopian Protest Rhetoric." *Femspec*, vol. 22 no. 1, 2022, p. 25-35.
- Bliss, Erika, et al. «Early Abortion Looks Nothing Like What You've Been Told.» *The New York Times*, 22 Jan. 2023, [www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/opinion/early-abortion.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/opinion/early-abortion.html). Op-ed. Accessed 3 Apr. 2024.
- Boyle, Amy. "“They Should Have Never Given Us Uniforms If They Didn't Want Us to Be an Army’: The Handmaid's Tale as Transmedia Feminism.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2020, pp. 845–870.
- Bradley, Laura. "Under Their Eye: The Rise of Handmaid's Tale-Inspired Protestors." *Vanity Fair*, 9 Oct. 2019, [www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/photos/2018/10/handmaids-tale-protests-kavanaugh-healthcare-womens-march](http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/photos/2018/10/handmaids-tale-protests-kavanaugh-healthcare-womens-march). Accessed 21 Apr. 2024.
- Brown, Elizabeth Anne. "Just one pregnancy can add months to your biological age." *National Geographic*, 8 Apr. 2024,

[www.nationalgeographic.com/premium/article/pregnancy-aging-dna-genetics](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/premium/article/pregnancy-aging-dna-genetics).

Accessed 22 Apr. 2024.

Buchanan, Maggie J., and Abbey Meller. "Brett Kavanaugh: A Representation of the Damaged U.S. Judiciary." *The Center for American Progress*, 1 Oct. 2019, [www.americanprogress.org/article/brett-kavanaugh-representation-damaged-u-s-judiciary](http://www.americanprogress.org/article/brett-kavanaugh-representation-damaged-u-s-judiciary). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

Burke, Lauren. "Protester rally outside US supreme court justices' homed ahead of pro-choice marches." *The Guardian*, 13 May 2022, [www.theguardian.com/usnews/2022/may/13/us-abortion-protests-pro-choice-marches](http://www.theguardian.com/usnews/2022/may/13/us-abortion-protests-pro-choice-marches). Accessed 22 Apr. 2024.

Butler, Anthea. "Anthea Butler." Forum: Studying Religion in the Age of Trump, *Religion and American Culture*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2017, pp.12-16.

Callender, Brian, et al. "The power and politics of fetal imagery." *The Lancet*, vol. 398, no. 10307, 2021, pp. 1208-1209. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(21)02129-2.

Chira, Susan. "Donald Trump's Gift to Feminism: The Resistance." *Daedalus*, vol. 149, no. 1, 2020, pp. 72-83.

Everett, Burgess, and Glenn Thrush. "McConnell throws down the gauntlet: No Scalia replacement under Obama." *Politico*, 13 Feb. 2016, [www.politico.com/story/2016/02/mitch-mcconnell-antonin-scalia-supreme-court-nomination-219248](http://www.politico.com/story/2016/02/mitch-mcconnell-antonin-scalia-supreme-court-nomination-219248). Accessed 17 Apr. 2024.

Fallon, Claire. "What Critics Said About 'The Handmaid's Tale' Back in the 1980s." *Huffpost*, 13 Apr. 2017, [www.huffpost.com/entry/handmaids-tale-original-reviews\\_n\\_58e7de23e4b058f0a02f0adb](http://www.huffpost.com/entry/handmaids-tale-original-reviews_n_58e7de23e4b058f0a02f0adb). Accessed 7 May 2024.

Fandos, Nicholas. «Senate Confirms Barret, Delivering for Trump and Reshaping the Court.» *The New York Times*, 26 Oct. 2020, [www.nytimes.com/2020/10/26/us/politics/senate-](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/26/us/politics/senate-)



- confirms-barrett.html. Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.
- Frasca, Teresa J., et al. «Words Like Weapons: Labeling Women As Emotional During a Disagreement Negatively Affects the Perceived Legitimacy of Their Arguments.» *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2022, pp. 420-437.
- Fried, Marlene Gerber. “The Politics of Abortion.” *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2006, pp. 229-245.
- . “Thirty-five Years of Legal Abortion: The US Experience.” *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 39, no. 3, July 2008, pp. 88-94. *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2008.tb00467.x>. Accessed 4 Apr. 2024.
- Foster, Diana Greene. *The Turnaway Study: Ten Years, a Thousand Women, and the Consequences of Having – or Being Denied – an Abortion*. Scribner, 2020.
- "Gonzales v. Carhart." Oyez, [www.oyez.org/cases/2006/05-380](http://www.oyez.org/cases/2006/05-380). Accessed 19 Feb. 2024.
- Gramlich, John. “How Trump compares with other recent presidents in appointing federal judges.” *Pew Research Center*, 13 Jan. 2021, <https://pewrsr.ch/2Zx21cQ>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2024.
- Hamedy, Saba. “‘Handmaids’ descend upon Hill to protest health care bill.” *CNN*, 27 June 2017, [www.edition.cnn.com/2017/06/27/politics/handmaids-tale-health-care-protests/index.html](http://www.edition.cnn.com/2017/06/27/politics/handmaids-tale-health-care-protests/index.html). Accessed 24 Apr. 2024.
- Haring, Bruce. “Amy Coney Barrett Confirmation Battle Already Marked By ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ Protestors.” *Deadline*, 11 Oct. 2020, [www.deadline.com/2020/10/amy-coney-barrett-confirmation-the-handmaids-tale-protesters-1234595476](http://www.deadline.com/2020/10/amy-coney-barrett-confirmation-the-handmaids-tale-protesters-1234595476). Accessed 21 Apr. 2024.
- Hooberman, Laura. “The Dishonest Images of the Anti-Abortion Movement.” *Public Seminar*, 27 June 2019, [publicseminar.org/essays/the-dishonest-images-of-the-anti-abortion-movement](http://publicseminar.org/essays/the-dishonest-images-of-the-anti-abortion-movement). Accessed 22 Jan 2024.

- Hubler, Shawn. "Supreme Court Rules on Abortion: Thousands Protest End of Constitutional Right to Abortion." *The New York Times*, 24 June 2022, [www.nytimes.com/live/2022/06/24/us/roe-wade-abortion-supreme-court](http://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/06/24/us/roe-wade-abortion-supreme-court). Accessed 18 Apr. 2024.
- Hughes, William. "Hulu is filling SXSW with silent Handmaids." *The A.V. Club*, 11 Mar. 2017, [www.avclub.com/hulu-is-filling-sxsw-with-silent-handmaids-1798259060](http://www.avclub.com/hulu-is-filling-sxsw-with-silent-handmaids-1798259060). Accessed 11 Apr. 2024.
- Gerstein, Josh, and Alexander Ward. "Supreme Court has voted to overturn abortion rights, draft opinion shows." *Politico*, 2 May 2022, [www.politico.com/news/2022/05/02/supreme-court-abortion-draft-opinion-00029473](http://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/02/supreme-court-abortion-draft-opinion-00029473). Accessed 21 Apr. 2024.
- Grady, Constance. "The Handmaid's Tale cast has resisted calling it feminist. So Did Margaret Atwood, once." *Vox*, 25 Apr. 2017, [www.vox.com/culture/2017/4/25/15407972/handmaids-tale-margaret-atwood-feminism](http://www.vox.com/culture/2017/4/25/15407972/handmaids-tale-margaret-atwood-feminism). Accessed 24 Apr. 2024.
- Jensen, Robert. "Donald Trump and the Enduring Power of Patriarchy." *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, 17 Nov. 2016, [www.abc.net.au/religion/donald-trump-and-the-enduring-power-of-patriarchy/10096332](http://www.abc.net.au/religion/donald-trump-and-the-enduring-power-of-patriarchy/10096332). Accessed 12 Feb. 2024.
- Kauffman, L. A.. *How to read a protest: the art of organizing and resistance*. University of California Press, 2018.
- Korecki, Natasha. "A timeline of Trump's many, many positions on abortion." *NBC News*, 8 Apr. 2024, [www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trumps-many-abortion-positions-timeline-rcna146601](http://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trumps-many-abortion-positions-timeline-rcna146601). Accessed 18 Apr. 2024.
- Latimer, Heather. "Abortion Politics and the Dystopic Imagination." *Abortion in Popular Culture: A Call to Action*, edited by Brenda Boudreau and Kelli Maloy, Lexington

- Books, 2023, pp. 75-94.
- . "Roe and Our Dystopic Imagination." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2022, pp. 835-838. *Project MUSE*.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. "89a. About Anger." *Ursula K. Le Guin*, Oct. 2014, The Ursula K. Le Guin Foundation, [www.ursulakleguin.com/blog/89a-about-anger](http://www.ursulakleguin.com/blog/89a-about-anger). Accessed 28 Feb. 2024.
- . "89b. About Anger." *Ursula K. Le Guin*, Oct. 2014, The Ursula K. Le Guin Foundation, [www.ursulakleguin.com/blog/89b-about-anger](http://www.ursulakleguin.com/blog/89b-about-anger). Accessed 28 Feb. 2024.
- Lépinard, Éléonore, and Lucile Quéré. "Introduction to special issue." *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol 28, no. 3, 2021, pp. 299-302. Sage Journals, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068211028443>.
- Lipsitz, Jordana. "'The Handmaid's Tale' Promotion at SXSW Is Perfect." *Bustle*, 12 Mar. 2017, [www.bustle.com/p/the-handmaids-tale-promotion-at-sxsw-is-perfectly-terrifying-photos-43766](http://www.bustle.com/p/the-handmaids-tale-promotion-at-sxsw-is-perfectly-terrifying-photos-43766). Accessed 20 Apr. 2024.
- Liptak, Adam. "Eyes on Kennedy, Women Tell Supreme Court Why Abortion Was Right for Them." *The New York Times*, 29 Feb. 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/03/01/us/politics/abortion-supreme-court-women-explain-choices.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/01/us/politics/abortion-supreme-court-women-explain-choices.html). Accessed 2 Apr. 2024.
- . "Barret's Record: A Conservative Who Would Push the Supreme Court to the Right." *The New York Times*, 2 Nov. 2020, [www.nytimes.com/article/amy-barrett-views-issues.html](http://www.nytimes.com/article/amy-barrett-views-issues.html). Accessed 16 Apr. 2024.
- Liptak, Adam, and Matt Flegenheimer. "Neil Gorsuch Confirmed by Senate as Supreme Court Justice." *The New York Times*, 7 Apr. 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/04/07/us/politics/neil-gorsuch-supreme-court.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/07/us/politics/neil-gorsuch-supreme-court.html). Accessed 15 Apr. 2024.

- Liptak, Andrew. “How The Handmaid’s Tale inspired a protest movement.” *The Verge*, 31 Oct. 2017, [www.theverge.com/2017/10/31/15799882/handmaids-tale-costumes-cosplay-protest](http://www.theverge.com/2017/10/31/15799882/handmaids-tale-costumes-cosplay-protest). Accessed 12 Apr. 2024.
- Mead, Rebecca. «Margaret Atwood, The Prophet of Dystopia.» *The New Yorker*, 10 Apr. 2017, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/margaret-atwood-the-prophet-of-dystopia](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/margaret-atwood-the-prophet-of-dystopia). Accessed 18 Apr. 2024.
- Moi, Toril. “Toril Moi om The Handmaid’s Tale.” *Litteraturhusets podkast*, Stiftelsen Litteraturhuset, 19 Jan. 2018, *Acast*, <https://shows.acast.com/litteraturhuset/episodes/608fdee606d0cf2cd972901c>.
- Moon, Jordan W., and Jaimie Krems. “The Role of Opposition to Abortion in Shaping Policy Preferences: Unveiling Hidden Reproductive Goals.” *PsyArXiv*, 11 Dec. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/j5dn3>. Preprint.
- Noor, Poppy. “What a pregnancy actually looks like before 10 weeks – in pictures.” *The Guardian*, 19 Oct. 2022, [www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/18/pregnancy-weeks-abortion-tissue](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/18/pregnancy-weeks-abortion-tissue). Accessed 22 Jan. 2024.
- O’Neil, Lorena. “Planned Parenthood Activists Wear ‘Handmaid’s Tale’ Garb to Protest Sneate’s Health Care Bill at Capitol.” *The Hollywood Reporter*, 27 June 2017, [www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/planned-parenthood-handmaids-protest-senate-trumpcare-bill-1017225](http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/planned-parenthood-handmaids-protest-senate-trumpcare-bill-1017225). Accessed 21 Apr. 2024.
- Onishi, Bradley. “Why Christians—and Republicans—Should Reconsider the Premise that ‘Life Begins at Conception’.” *Politico*, 21 Mar. 2024, [www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/03/21/life-conception-christian-theology-00147804](http://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/03/21/life-conception-christian-theology-00147804). Opinion. Accessed 7 Apr. 2024.
- Pagoto, Sherry, et al. “The Next Infodemic: Abortion Misinformation.” *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2023, pp. e42582-e42582.

- Ross et al. Introduction. *Radical Reproductive Justice*, edited by Loretta J. Ross, Lynn Robert, Erika Derkas, Whitney Peoples, and Pamela Bridgewater Toure, Feminist Press, 2017, pp. 11-31.
- Ross, Loretta, J. "Conceptualizing Reproductive Justice Theory." *Radical Reproductive Justice*, edited by Loretta J. Ross, Lynn Robert, Erika Derkas, Whitney Peoples, and Pamela Bridgewater Toure, Feminist Press, 2017, pp. 170-232.
- Rowlands, Sam. "Misinformation on abortion." *The European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Health Care*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2011, pp. 233-240.  
doi:10.3109/13625187.2011.570883
- Sanger-Katz, Margot. "Trump Administration Strengthens 'Conscience Rule' for Health Care Workers." *The New York Times*, 2 May 2019,  
[www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/upshot/conscience-rule-trump-religious-exemption-health-care.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/02/upshot/conscience-rule-trump-religious-exemption-health-care.html). Accessed 16 Apr. 2024.
- Sherman, Mark, and Jessica Gresko. "Supreme Court conservatives flex muscle in sweeping rulings." *AP News*, 25 June 2022, [www.apnews.com/article/abortion-us-supreme-court-gun-politics-gay-rights-government-and-273d1eb9b6f7af60e1a967e2d47b75df](http://www.apnews.com/article/abortion-us-supreme-court-gun-politics-gay-rights-government-and-273d1eb9b6f7af60e1a967e2d47b75df). Accessed 23 Apr. 2024.
- SisterSong. "About" *SisterSong*, [www.sistersong.net/about-x2](http://www.sistersong.net/about-x2). Accessed 9 May 2024.
- . "RJ Training and Leadership Development." *SisterSong*, [www.sistersong.net/rj-training-and-leadership-development-programs](http://www.sistersong.net/rj-training-and-leadership-development-programs). Accessed 9 May 2024.
- . "Visioning New Futures for Reproductive Justice Declaration 2023." *SisterSong*, [www.sistersong.net/visioningnewfuturesforrj](http://www.sistersong.net/visioningnewfuturesforrj). Accessed 1 Nov 2023.
- Sonfield, Adam. "Trump Administration Rules Prioritize Refusal of Care and Conservative Ideology Over Protecting Patients Against Discrimination." *The Guttmacher Institute*, 9 Oct. 2019, [www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2019/10/trump-administration-rules-prioritize-](http://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2019/10/trump-administration-rules-prioritize-)

- refusal-care-and-conservative-ideology-over. Accessed 21 Apr. 2024.
- Tapp, Tom. "Women Wear 'Handmaid's Tale' Costumes At Ruth Bader Ginsburg Vigil To Protest Trump And McConnell's Actions." *Deadline*, 21 Sept. 2020, [www.deadline.com/2020/09/women-wear-handmaids-tale-costumes-at-vigil-to-mourn-ruth-bader-ginsburg-protest-trump-and-mcconnells-actions-1234581707](http://www.deadline.com/2020/09/women-wear-handmaids-tale-costumes-at-vigil-to-mourn-ruth-bader-ginsburg-protest-trump-and-mcconnells-actions-1234581707). Accessed 22 Apr. 2024.
- Tolan, Fiona. Introduction. *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, by Tolan, Brill, 2007, pp. 1-8.
- Wadsworth, Nancy. "The racial demons that help explain evangelical support for Trump." *Vox*, 30 Apr. 2018, [www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2018/4/30/17301282/race-evangelicals-trump-support-gerson-atlantic-sexism-segregation-south](http://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2018/4/30/17301282/race-evangelicals-trump-support-gerson-atlantic-sexism-segregation-south). Accessed 24 Apr. 2024. Op-ed.
- Walker, Peter. "Rick Santorum 'would urge daughter not to have abortion even after rape'." *The Guardian*, 24 Jan. 2012, [www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/24/rick-santorum-daughter-abortion-rape](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/24/rick-santorum-daughter-abortion-rape). Accessed 5 Apr. 2024.
- Wheeler, Lydia. "Protesters dress as 'handmaids' for Kavanaugh hearings." *The Hill*, 4 Sept. 2018, [thehill.com/regulation/404889-protesters-dress-as-handmaids-for-kavanaugh-hearings](http://thehill.com/regulation/404889-protesters-dress-as-handmaids-for-kavanaugh-hearings). Accessed 21 Apr. 2024.
- Whittier, Nancy. "How emotions shape feminist coalitions." *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol 28, no. 3, 2021, pp. 369-386. Sage Journals, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068211029682>.
- "Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt." Oyez, [www.oyez.org/cases/2015/15-274](http://www.oyez.org/cases/2015/15-274). Accessed 4 Apr. 2024.
- Ziegler, Mary. *Abortion and the Law in America: Roe v. Wade to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

---. “From Reproductive Rights to Reproductive Justice: Abortion in Constitutional Law and Politics.” *The Oxford Handbook of Feminism and Law in the United States*, edited by Deborah Brake et al., Oxford University Press, 2021, pp. 276-293.

