

Kincaid recounts some of her childhood memories, like, her habit of reading at the library and the visit by the princess Margaret of England. In the fourth section of the essay she celebrates the small-island environment and the beauty of the landscape in the old days. But the tortured recollections of her mother can be seen lying undercurrent here also. Her harsh attack and denouncement of England, the colonizer, becomes a metaphor for the mother figure, and Antigua may be interpreted as the colonized daughter island. The mother-daughter relationship is intensely depicted in the story titled 'The Pot Maker' by Temsula Ao but from a different angle, where Arenla, a skilled potter refuses to teach her daughter, Sentila, the craft of pottery because it is no longer an economically viable activity in their village. There is tension between Arenla who despises her traditional craft, and the untutored Sentila who yearns to make pots like her mother. The women of Changki village were renowned for making sturdy pots and also, in the distant past, headhunting parties spared the village from attacks as all the skilled potters of the tribe lived there. Thus, for a mother to refuse to teach her skills to her daughter is considered not only a denial of traditional values but also a threat to the security of the community. The story ends with Sentila taking position of the new pot-maker after her mother's death. Temsula Ao has intricately woven the ideas of communal bonding and fear of vanishing cultural traditions of a tribe who face confusion and chaos in the outside world in the name of progress and development. Commenting on this change, Temsula Ao says: "The sudden displacement of the young from a placid existence in rural habitats to a world of conflict and confusion in urban settlements is also a fallout of recent Naga history and one that has left them disabled in more ways than one" (2006, x).

At this juncture both Temsula and Kincaid's narratives reveal that the history of their homelands is one of dispossession, economic exploitation and cultural damage. The stories by Temsula bring us closer to what came to be considered "Naga Way of life" after the outbreak of the war between the Naga underground army and the Indian government forces (Misra, xxiii) . In the opening story of the collection titled 'The Jungle Major', Punaba is an ugly, unassuming Ao-Naga man who joins the Naga underground resistance. But the story centers on his beautiful wife, Khatila, whose sharp mind and farsightedness save Punaba from capture by the Indian soldiers. This simple tale focuses on the way how such critical times of war completely transformed the cultural ethos of the Naga people. In *A Small Place* Kincaid pinpoints the exploitation and damage suffered by Antigua more vehemently. She condemns economy, health, entertainment and education, showing how all of these functioned as tools marginalization. For instance, she alarms the tourists in Antigua that "no actual Antiguan trusts" the doctors there. Even the ministers in the government fly to New York "to see a real doctor" (8). The building of the library has a sign on it from colonial times about the pending repairs. It was a site of colonial indoctrination, where Antiguan learned to love the culture of their oppressors before realising that it erased their own culture. As Diane Simmons observes:

When the story is shown to be false, subjects of colonialism are left with an immense sense of loss, so overwhelming that they try to cling to the old belief, though on some level they now know how destructive it is to do so. (1994, 139)

On the prospect of the natives of the island visited by tourists she feels angry and insulted as how painful it is to be reduced to an object and therefore diminished. The English tried to reproduce Englishness where it could not be reproduced. This brought a tremendous “destruction of people and land” (24). The Antigua that the author knew as a small child no more exists. The literature of the colonized communities is mostly grounded on experience, and its subject is always historically situated. Temsula Ao and Jamaica Kincaid provide personal experiences as a primal source of understanding and creativity. Both of them speak with the language of memory which also serves as a voyage of self-discovery not just for the characters they create but for the writers as well. In the narratives of both Ao and Kincaid the history of the region is not only one of dispossession, violence and cultural loss, but also one of resistance, creativity and self-determination, and that is marked by colonialism, imperialism and racism as well as by revolt, reconstruction and hybridization. It is not exclusively a revision, but also a writing against and a writing over, a literature which generates its own theory. These narratives uncover for natives of their homeland and for the rest of the world, what lies behind the imperial version of their past, and present history, and reveals to them who they were, who they are, and who they can become. Therefore, Craig Tapping has rightly observed that, “Practice, the self-representation of formerly silenced, marginalized or negated subjects, is always already a theory of the other” (1989, 52).

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The Significance of the Individual in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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Abstract: *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is Margaret Atwood's novel that describes a totalitarian future in which all facets of human life, no matter how personal, are subjected to a rigidly enforced state ideology. Set in the near future in the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic military dictatorship formed within the borders of what was formerly the United States of America. The complex sumptuary laws play a key role in imposing social control within the new society and serve to distinguish people by sex, occupation, and caste. Women's rights are quickly taken away, largely attributed to financial records being stored electronically and labelled by gender. Like the institution of slavery, women in Gilead are enslaved through biblical justifications. The story that is presented from the point of view of a woman who is deprived of her own name and citizenship and known simply by her patronymic name "Offred," might be taken as emblematic of a woman's survival narrative told within the confines of a patriarchal system represented by the dystopia known as Gilead. Offred thought: I want to be held and told my name. I want to be valued, in ways that I am not; I want to be more than valuable. I repeat my former name; remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me (Atwood 108). Being denied of her existence as an individual she was restricted to private domestic spaces and relegated to the margins of a political structure. Nevertheless Offred asserts her right to tell her story and by doing so, she claims her own private spaces of memory and desire and also manages to rehabilitate the traditionally 'feminine' space assigned to women in Gilead. Atwood's narrative focuses on possibilities for reconstructing a form of discourse in which to accommodate women's representations of their own gendered identity while still acknowledging 'the power of the (male 'universal') space in which they cannot void, to some extent, operating' (Hutcheon 110).

Keywords: Identity, gender, language, sexual violence, dystopia.

A prolific, innovative and versatile Canadian writer, Margaret Eleanor Atwood is a winner of many awards including the Booker Prize and the Governor General's Award. Atwood's first five novels, in particular, demonstrate the range and complexity of her representations of sexual power politics, and provide a solid foundation for understanding the evolution of her feminist sympathies. *The Handmaid's Tale*, her sixth novel, received the first Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987, an award given for the best science fiction novel that was first published in the United Kingdom during the previous year. Atwood has resisted the suggestion that *The Handmaid's Tale* as science fiction, suggesting to The Guardian that they are speculative fiction instead as Robert Potts explains: "Science fiction has monsters and spaceships; speculative fiction could really happen." Atwood has since said that *Handmaid's Tale* can be designated as social science fiction. The novel depicts the author's deep social concerns and questions the situation of women in the North American society. The novel's title, *The Handmaid's Tale*, was inspired by Geoffrey Chaucer's *The*

Canterbury Tales, which is a series of connected stories ("The Merchant's Tale", "The Parson's Tale", etc.) (Kantor 27–44). In this dystopian novel all the horrible developments take place in the United States near Boston, while Canada is portrayed as the only hope for an escape. This reflects her status of being "in the vanguard of Canadian anti-Americanism of the 1960s and 1970s" (Nischik 143). Being a work of speculative fiction the novel is set in a futuristic totalitarian Christian theocracy which has overthrown the United States government. Blamed on Islamic fanatics they begin with a staged terrorist attack that kills the President and most of Congress, a movement calling itself "the Sons of Jacob" launches a revolution and suspends the United States Constitution under the pretext of restoring order. Individual freedom of choice has been outlawed and everyone has been drafted into the service of the state, classified according to prescribed roles: Commanders, Wives, Aunts, Handmaids, Eyes, down to Guardians and Econowives. Gilead has attempted to remove the individuality of its citizens in many ways. Everyone is classified into a rigid hierarchy, with different uniforms in specific colours to denote their role within the state organisation. Without a choice of clothing, the differences in individual appearances are minimised. The new regime moves quickly to consolidate its power and reorganize society along a new militarized, hierarchical, compulsorily Christian regime of Old Testament-inspired social and religious ultra-conservatism among its newly created social classes. Offred is one of a class of women kept as concubines ("handmaids") for reproductive purposes by the ruling class in an era of declining births due to sterility from pollution and sexually transmitted diseases. There is strict censorship and border control, as Offred reminds us in her recurrent nightmare memory of her failed escape to Canada with her husband and daughter, which has resulted in her being conscripted as a Gileadean Handmaid. The book is told in the first person by Offred, who describes her life during her third assignment as a handmaid, to Fred (referred to as "The Commander"). The novel recounts Offred's journey from the Red Center to the house of the Commander. The intertexts of the novel have presented a major field of study and inquiry for many critics from the mythical (the Persephone and the Triple-Goddess) and biblical (the story of Bilhah, Jacob and Rachel) to the fairy-tale (Red Riding Hood) for parodic purposes or a critique of sexual politics in the novel. *The Handmaid's Tale* explores themes of women in subjugation and the various means by which they gain agency and describes the female protagonist's struggle to reconcile conflicting identities: her socially proscribed identity and her authentic identity. It also helps to examine the bodily experience of women under such totalitarian regimes and to understand the ways in which the female body becomes dystopic. Atwood often portrays female characters dominated by patriarchy in her novels (Cooke 127). This novel too reflects the ways in which gender inequality and male domination affect the corporeal experience of women. Offred explains:

We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. ... We lived in the gaps between the stories (Atwood 66-7).

Only after repeated attempts to access her funds does Offred realize that

control of assets no longer exists for the women of Gilead (Atwood 182-6). From credit card subversion, the faceless radical hierarchy moves quickly to presidential assassination, murder of members of Congress, prohibition of women from schools and the work force, control of the media, and banning of basic freedoms. Without books or newspapers, telephones or televisions, Offred has no means of assessing the severity of society's deprivations. Crucially she refuses to be silenced, as in unpropitious circumstances she speaks out with the voice of late twentieth-century feminist individualism resisting the cultural identity imposed on her. Offred makes clear throughout her narrative that she is part of a collectively owned resource. She describes her tattoo as "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" (Atwood 75). The concept of individuality can be both positive and negative. In the case of Offred, she is both invisible and visible as her personality is made invisible by society that cares only for her ovaries, but, she is viable to give birth, therefore, she is made strikingly visible. Atwood uses Offred's visibility as a criticism of a society that is too restrictive and manipulative. In addition, her invisibility criticizes a society where the individual is ignored. The eye on her ankle is an ever present reminder that her body is under surveillance, that it is a tool over which an outside force has power. Offred also sometimes refers to herself in the plural, indicating that her individual identity has been subsumed by a collective identity. She tells the Commander that "our skin gets very dry" when speaking of her own skin (Atwood 167), and describes during the birthing scene that "we are one smile" (Atwood 136). This collective ownership of Offred's body replaces her personal ownership of herself. She no longer connects with her body; she exists outside of it (Atwood 169-72). In the novel's fictional fundamentalist society, sterile is an "outlawed" word (Atwood 70-1). In Offred's relationship to her womb, which itself is a collective entity. She says that "we are containers, it's only the insides of our bodies that are important" (Atwood 96), and again she speaks in the plural, as a collective handmaid. Her body determines her completely (Atwood 73); she is a "two-legged womb" (Atwood 146) that everyone watches and waits for her womb to be filled. Cora and Serena Joy both watch her, hoping for a child, while the monthly doctor's visits remind her of the collective gaze on her womb. A "gold Eye" on the door of the exam room surveils her—her empty womb is being watched by the state (Atwood 69). She no longer has control over her body, over her reproductive capabilities. The doctors, the Eyes, the Commanders, the Wives, they all are the ones who own her womb, that "central object" that is "more real" than Offred herself (Atwood 84). The ritual of procreation, the Ceremony, is a ritual of state power and ownership. The Ceremony is about control by some invisible entity that is not present in the room, but nevertheless holds power over what occurs in the room. As such, Atwood form a great contrast between a character's search for the inner self and a society which cares only for an exterior quality of that character. This contrast serves to criticize the dehumanizing force of society, the use of individuals not as people but as vehicles to reach a certain end or goal.

The clash between two sets of values: traditional and modern, is seen mostly in flashbacks and through Serena Joy. Serena Joy symbolizes the conflict between traditional and modern values. Before Gilead was established, she was a strong advocate for traditional values. She gave speeches extolling the virtues of a society based on traditional values. However, now that she lives in the very society she helped create she finds that she is trapped by it. She dislikes Offred because of her relationship with her the Commander. She struggles with the fact that she no longer has enough power to forbid her husband to sleep with another woman. Serena Joy seems to be caught between the society she helped to create and the world she seems to wish she lived in. To the people of Gilead, traditional values mean that women are inferior to men and modern values mean that women and men are equal. Gilead is based on traditional values while the past that Offred remembers was based on modern values. Gilead is trying to overpower modern values; however this is being resisted in a number of ways. It is implied that the forces Gilead is at war with are fighting for modern values and Moira also fights for modern values by rebelling against the Aunts and Gilead itself. Also, in the beginning of the novel, Offred and Offglen encounter some tourists with women dressed in revealing clothing. This suggests that in other parts of the world individuals still believe in modern values. Their presence in Gilead symbolizes a conflict between the traditional values of Gilead and their own modern ones. Both Offred and Serena Joy experience a separation between the part of their body that is being used by society and the rest of their identity. The Handmaid's body becomes the object with which she is identified. She cannot achieve anything outside of it. It is the only thing that defines her. All she does has to serve it. From Offred's perspective:

I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will. There were limits, but my body was nevertheless lithe, single, solid, one with me. Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping (Atwood 83).

Offred can no longer be identified as a single individual. The image of her ovaries glowing red, barely concealed by her skin, shows that society has chosen her ovaries as the focal point when seeing her as everything about the narrator except his voice is invisible to society. What Offred experiences is fractured communication with body parts the value of which vary from an organ to another. "Remember, said Aunt Lydia. For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential" (Atwood 102). Offred feels that her body, in Grosz' words, "is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it manage to rise above the status of thing. Thus, it is both a thing and a non-thing" (Groz 323). This confusion is what makes her care about her skin and loathe her body at the same time. She is caught in the prison of her own body which does not belong to her. In chapter 29, the Commander laughs at women's supposedly poor mathematical ability. "For them," he says, "one and one and one and one don't make four." But Offred sees this as a great truth: One and one and one and one doesn't equal four. Each one remains unique (Atwood 201).

Throughout the novel *Offred* makes various attempts, even if only in small ways, to assert her individuality and the fact that she is a unique person. To begin with in chapter 2, she refuses to say 'my' room and later, when she does say 'mine' she asserts her right over it: 'There has to be some space, finally, that I claim as mine' (Atwood 60).

In asserting this need for self, Offred also recognises the rights of others to be seen as individuals. Seeing the bodies of victims hung on the Wall, their heads covered to conceal their identity, she observes that 'their heads are zeros' (Atwood 42), but tells us that 'if you look and look, you can see the outlines of the features under the cloth.' She goes on to say that: 'Each thing is valid and really there. I put a lot of effort into making such distinctions' (Atwood 43). She manages to lay claim to a surprising number of things which the system forbids: 'my own time' (Atwood 47), 'my room' (Atwood 60), 'my chair' (Atwood 210), 'my own territory' (Atwood 83) and even 'my name' (Atwood 94). She guards her lost name as the secret sign of her own identity and as guarantee of her hopes for a different and optimistic future:

My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day (Atwood 94).

Despite the oppressive nature of Gilead's regime, several characters still manage to resist the rules and laws imposed by society and the government. Offred does this in a number of ways. She attempts to steal from the Commander, reads the 'FAITH' pillow in her room, the Latin phrase freshly scratched into the floor of the closet "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*," and magazines given to her by the Commander, plays Scrabble with him, meets secretly with Moira while at the Red Centre, have an affair with Nick, and through her thoughts we learn that she does not believe in the concepts Gilead is based on. The Commander also resists aspects of Gilead's regime by inviting Offred to play Scrabble with him, read magazines and taking her to the Jezebel's. Nick displays his attraction to Offred. Even minor characters are seen subverting Gilead. For example, the doctor that performs Offred's check up tells Offred, "It's time. Today or tomorrow would do it, why waste it? It'd only take a minute, honey" (Atwood 71). He is offering to help her get pregnant since he believes the Commander to be sterile. This would be completely against the laws of Gilead. The most important conflict between an individual of society, however, involves a character by the name Moira who has strongly opposed to everything that Gilead stands for. It is clear that she is resisting this society as soon as she is introduced. She meets secretly with Offred at the Red Centre. Moira is a voice of reason, sense, and action and the narrator admits that "Moira was always more logical than [she was]" (Atwood 180). She makes two escape attempts: one is unsuccessful while the other becomes a great personal triumph. On her second attempt, Moira tricks and threatens Aunt Elizabeth, forces her to give up her clothes, and walks out the front doors of the centre dressed as an Aunt (Atwood 141-2). This is a great victory for anyone opposing society, especially the handmaids. This is also the only example of a