

Themes:

- **Rebellion**
 - **Memory**
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- Rebellion: The totalitarian regime of Gilead promotes a society conventional to traditional gender roles. However, despite not having any power, women like the Marthas who gossip are rebellious in some way, as they show that communication and socialising forms strong social bonds that not even Gilead can subdue.
- Another form of rebellion can be seen when Serena Joy smokes her cigarette, which is illegal in Gilead, and how even though she seems to uphold the standards of the state in terms of Handmaids, even she cannot resist rebelling for pleasure.
- Memory: Offred thinks back to the times before Gilead, which could be linked to her ideas of “wanting to last”. She uses the past before Gilead to persevere, imagining the lives of sexualised teenagers, magazines, what she used to wear, how she used to live etc. possibly to fuel hope.
- Offred can be seen confusing memories and subjective impressions with reality.
- Offred’s memories when she is alone at night keep her alive, thinking about her daughter gives her hope and gives her a chance when she puts the realities of her mind over Gilead.

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Section IV - Waiting Room - Chapters 8-12

- Offred and Ofglen return from another shopping trip, in which they saw three new bodies hung from the Wall
- Ofglen mentions that it is a beautiful “May day”, and Offred considers the use of the word “mayday” for asking for help
- On the way back, they pass a funeral procession of Econowives, the wives of poorer men, mourning deceased babies
- Back at the Commander’s house, Offred passes Nick, who again breaks the rules by speaking to her
- Inside, Offred discovers the Commander breaking the rules by standing outside her room, looking in, invading the only space she gets to call her own
- She recalls how she explored the room carefully when she arrived, and on the third day discovered a Latin phrase scratched into the floor of the closet: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*

- It is time for the Ceremony, during which all of the household first assemble for family prayers. Offred has to kneel on the floor
- Then the Ceremony is performed in the bedroom - Offred lies on her back between Serena Joy's legs, holding her hands
- The Commander enters and has sex with Offred in a detached and impersonal manner
- When Offred is sneaking downstairs, Nick enters the room behind her. He and Offred embrace, sexually attracted to each other, before Nick informs Offred that the Commander sent him to tell her to see him in his office the next day

Section VII - Night - Chapter 18

- Offred lies in bed, thinking of Luke and her family

Section VIII - Birth Day - Chapters 19-23

- At breakfast, a siren announces the arrival of a Birthmobile, which takes Offred and the other Handmaids to Commander Warren's house, as Offwarren has gone into labour
- Ofwarren gives birth to a baby girl, who is immediately handed to the Wife as hers
- After dinner, she visits the Commander in her study, where they play Scrabble

Section IX - Night - Chapter 24

- Offred decides she must live in the present and work within its rules to her advantage
- She realises that the Commander's unusual behaviour may be able to be exploited somehow

Section X - Soul Scrolls - Chapters 25-29

- The Commander and Offred play Scrabble, and one night he allows her to look at an old copy of Vogue magazine
- At the next Ceremony, something has changed. Offred feels more awkward and shy with the Commander, who seems to want to be more intimate with her, even though Serena Joy is there
- On another shopping trip with Ofglen, the pair stop outside a shop called "Soul Scrolls", which prints out prayers
- Under the guise of pretending to pray, Offred and Ofglen discover that neither believes in the doctrine of Gilead
- Ofglen reveals that there are more like her - the resistance
- In the Commander's study, after Scrabble, instead of reading, Offred asks to talk and to find out a bit more about him

It features all of the key characteristics of dystopian fiction, as well as control through language:

The meanings of words are changed to their opposites

For example, Atwood uses the word “Aunts”, which has reassuring and comforting connotations, and subverts it, using the word to label people in her world who are key instruments of oppression

A direct contextual link can be drawn here with Orwell’s use of “Newspeak” in 1984

Those who founded Gilead did so through the idealistic but misguided expectation that their new regime would improve human life and the future of the humanity:

However, it failed to factor in the expectations, principles and behaviours of real people

The control or manipulation of technology was a means to strip the rights and freedoms of women in this new, super-patriarchal reality:

- The perversion of technology and its uses is another typical feature of dystopian literature
- Atwood does not imagine futuristic and far-fetched technology
- Instead she alludes to the possibility of extreme social control using technology current to the 1980s

Once established, Gilead does not rely on technology in order to exert its power and control over its citizens.

In many ways, it is the lack of technology that is another way of the regime removing power from people, via the lack of access to information

Gileadean ideology seems to be more of a reaction against technological progress rather than an example of it

The narrative perspective of the novel is different from traditional dystopian literature, as the protagonist is relegated to the margins of society and confined to domestic spaces:

Offred does not know what is happening beyond her immediate surroundings, and has to rely on snatched bits of information

Due to Offred’s ignorance, the reader only learns of Gilead’s political philosophy and its mechanisms via the male voice in the Historical Notes

In this sense, *The Handmaid’s Tale* could be considered a form of “feminine dystopia”, as the choice of a female narrator and the story