

The Integration of a New Ideology  
and Its Fragile Dependency on Memories in *The  
Handmaid's Tale*



(iStock by Getty Images)

Amalie Bøe Skjæveland

2023



The Faculty of Arts and Education

## MASTER'S THESIS

Study programme: LMLIMAS	Spring term, 2023  Open
Author: Amalie Bøe Skjæveland	..... (signatur author)
Supervisor: Allen C. Jones	
Title of thesis: The Integration of a New Ideology and Its Fragile Dependency on Memories in <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> .	
Keywords: Ideology, Memory, Resistance, Atwood	Pages: 72 + attachment/other: .....  Stavanger, 11 May 2023 date/year

## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I will explore how ideology has been implemented in The Republic of Gilead as they are amid a forced ideological shift, turning away from an ideology much like our own, and building a new society grounded on an extremist Christian ideology heavily influenced by Biblical scripture. I will also explore how both Gilead and Offred use and abuse memories in order to both maintain and resist ideology. By examining certain scenes in the novel through the lens of theories on ideology and memory, I will highlight the integration of a new ideology and its fragile dependency on memories, as well as examine the “Historical Notes” epilogue in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the people who made this thesis possible, starting with my supporting and patient supervisor, Allen C. Jones. He has always been encouraging and helpful, making it easy for me to believe in my work. Thank you for always being available to answer question quickly and providing me with great guidance. Through his guidance and critical questions, he has pushed me to become a better reader and writer, exceeding my own expectations of myself and my work.

I would also like to thank my loving and supportive husband, Kristoffer. Thank you for pushing me when I felt discouraged and lost, and for giving me the space and environment needed to complete my thesis. Luckily, you enjoy reading through my work and helping me find the right words when I am in doubt. You truly are the strictest but best motivator, forcing me to work when my motivation was low. Thank you for caring for our girls and taking them on adventures when I needed to write.

Lastly, I must thank my two daughters Irie and Lumi for being a beaming light during dark times where writing seemed impossible. You inspire and motivate me to be a better student, wife, and mother. The completion of this thesis was motivated by my desire to make you proud.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	IV
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER ONE: IDEOLOGY .....	6
WHAT IS IDEOLOGY? .....	7
REPRODUCING THE CONDITIONS OF PRODUCTION .....	8
INTERPELLATION.....	12
CHAPTER TWO: IDEOLOGY IN <i>THE HANDMAID'S TALE</i> .....	14
ALTHUSSER'S THEORY OF IDEOLOGY IN PRACTICE .....	15
BE FRUITFUL, AND MULTIPLY: THE CEREMONY.....	21
CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	27
CHAPTER THREE: MEMORY .....	29
THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MEMORIES .....	29
FICTION, NARRATIVE, AND THE USE OF MEMORY .....	32
CHAPTER FOUR: MEMORY IN <i>THE HANDMAID'S TALE</i> .....	35
THE MANIPULATION AND ERASURE OF MEMORIES.....	36
"IT WAS MY OWN FAULT. I LED THEM ON": MEMORIES AND INTERPELLATION .....	41
MEMORY AS RESISTANCE .....	43
CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	48
CHAPTER FIVE: HISTORICAL NOTES.....	50
THE TROUBLE WITH PIEIXOTO .....	51
THE PRESENCE OF IDEOLOGY IN THE "HISTORICAL NOTES" .....	54
CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	56
CONCLUSION.....	59
WORKS CITED .....	63

## INTRODUCTION

Poet, novelist, story writer, essayist, and environmental activist Margaret Atwood is regarded as one of Canada's finest living writers ("Margaret Atwood."). Her collections *Double Persephone* (1961) and *The Circle Game* (1964) ensured her public attention as a poet, and her books have been hugely popular around the world, earning her numerous literary awards ("Margaret Atwood."). Although Atwood is a favorite among feminists, she "began as a profoundly apolitical writer" (Atwood qtd in "Margaret Atwood."), but as time went on, she "began to do what all novelists and some poets do: [she] began to describe the world around [her]" (Atwood qtd in "Margaret Atwood."). One of her most known works is the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Since its release in 1985, the novel has sold over fifty million copies in over 30 countries around the world ("A Message from Margaret Atwood"). It has been adapted into both a film, an opera, a ballet, different plays, and a hit TV-series of 5 released seasons and one final season confirmed to release. The 2017 release of the MGM/Hulu TV-series provided the novel with a new wave of attention and popularity, particularly with younger generations who had no former knowledge of the novel and its chilling depiction of the totalitarian regime that is Gilead. The novel is still very much influential today, and it is therefore important to examine it further.

Atwood began writing *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1984 while she was living in the Berlin Wall-encircled West Berlin. She recalls visiting several countries behind the Iron Curtain where she "experienced the wariness, the feeling of being spied on, the silences, the changes of subject, the oblique ways in which people might convey information" (Atwood qtd in "Margaret Atwood on What..."). These experiences together with her early childhood years during World War II, heavily influenced her writing of *The Handmaid's Tale*. In the edition of the novel used as the basis for the thesis, Margaret Atwood herself writes a message to the reader after the novel is finished. Here, she explains that the novel came about due to her fascination with the dystopias she grew up with, like Orwell's *1984*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* in combination with her studies on Puritan New England in the seventeenth century ("A Message from Margaret Atwood"). In an interview with Penguin Random House, Atwood reveals that ever since the novel's release in 1985 she has been asked numerous times how she came up with these events and this totalitarian regime. She argues that her answer has always been the same: the terrifying events "all have their precedents in some of the darkest chapters in world history" ("Margaret Atwood on the real-life events..."). The dystopian society she wished to create in her novel "would contain

no feature that human beings had not already put into practice, somewhere, sometime, or that they lacked the technology for” (“A Message from Margaret Atwood”). Atwood argues that each event in the novel is based on real-life events that have already taken place around the world throughout the years:

The group-activated hangings, the tearing apart of human beings, the clothing specific to castes and classes, the forced childbearing and the appropriation of the results, the children stolen by regimes and placed for upbringing with high-ranking officials, the forbidding of literacy, the denial of property rights – all had precedents, and many of these were to be found, not in other cultures and religions, but within Western society, and within the “Christian” tradition itself. (“Margaret Atwood on How She...”)

The fact that the novel is heavily influenced by real-life events is perhaps what has made it such a worldwide success. By being equally beautiful and horrifying, the novel is a sublime literary work which successfully evokes feelings of fear and anger at the same time as it evokes the feeling of hope. Many of the events that inspired the novel are still issues affecting millions of people around the world, and the novel is therefore highly important to examine.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, The Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian and theocratic state, has replaced The United States of America. Due to radiation birth-rates are at an all-time low, and the percentage of birth defects in the few children successfully carried to term and born is high. The new, self-appointed leaders have therefore created a new social class (or *caste*) system where elite couples having trouble conceiving are assigned Handmaids to bear children on their behalf. This class system is part of a new ideology being implemented in Gilead. Based on Puritanism, the new ideology is fundamentally different than the ideology previously ruling the U.S. Ideology is a term commonly referred to in connection to extreme, often totalitarian, collective views and mindsets. Some argue that the term has been “thoroughly muddied by diverse uses” (Converse qtd in Knight 619). For instance, the Nazi movement of World War II is often used as an example of ideology in every-day discussions. However, ideology is much more comprehensive. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) lists several meanings of the word ‘ideology’, such as “Abstract speculation; impractical or visionary theorizing” (“ideology” def. 2) and “A systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics, economics, or society and forming the basis of action or policy; a set of beliefs governing conduct” (“ideology” def. 4). The first definition of ideology is in regard to ideology as an extreme, such as Nazism, while the second definition concerns ideology in every-day life. In fact, each society can be said to have a ruling ideology which guides each individual through life according to the norms established within that society. For instance,



every country can be said to have its own way of being and acting, due to each country's individual ideology. Inhabitants are unconsciously and automatically shaped by the ruling ideology, making them part of a collective group. This is very much an identity-creating process, meaning that our entire identity is molded by ideology. A society's ideology is therefore crucial in the creation of our identity, which is what Gilead is trying to exploit and manipulate to suit their need for healthy children.

Offred, the novel's protagonist, is one of the women who have been converted to a Handmaid. The main plot of the novel is centered around her narration of her life as a Handmaid in Gilead, with spontaneous flashbacks to her life before as a wife, mother, daughter, and friend. The novel consists of her experiences in Gilead, which she has recorded onto a tape recorder and hid in a locker for someone, anyone, to find in the future. Memories play a significant role in Gilead. Not only is the narrative dependent on memories, but the ideology is dependent on controlling memories to continue its domination in society. Through Offred's narrative, which she records on tapes and hides for a future audience, she gives a chilling description of her life as a Handmaid in Gilead. However, throughout her narration she is sporadically and spontaneously experiencing flashbacks from her former life as woman with identity and agency. Her tale is essentially a narrative of memories being intruded with flashbacks of a former life. The act of recording her memories and creating an archive to counteract the officially sanctioned archive in Gilead works as a way for Offred to resist the new ideology being implemented. The leaders of Gilead are dependent on the erasure and manipulation of its citizens memories to ensure the reproduction of the conditions of production – or, in other words, to ensure that the conditions making their ideology possible is being reproduced so that the ideology is also reproduced and maintained. As long as citizens remember their former lives, with freedom of speech, their own names and identities, the implementation of a new ideology will never be successful. However, while Gilead depends on controlling the memories of its citizens, Offred uses her memories to resist ideology while also creating the opportunity for others to do the same in the future.

In this thesis I will examine ideology and memories, as well as their connection and dependence on each other. The research questions I seek to answer are:

- 1: How is the new ruling ideology in Gilead being implemented through Ideological State Apparatuses, Repressive State Apparatuses, and Interpellation?
- 2: How are memories used and abused to both secure and resist ideology by Offred and the leaders of Gilead?

These questions I will answer by looking at theories on ideology and memory while focusing on key scenes in the novel, such as The Ceremony.

In this thesis I argue that the leaders of Gilead have put in place Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses to ensure the continuation of its ideology. However, because the novel takes place during the shift from one ideology to another, the Ideological State Apparatuses have not yet begun to function as the main source of reproduction. Therefore, Gilead is heavily dependent on the use of the Repressive State Apparatuses, such as The Eyes and The Aunts' use of violence and terror. I argue that The Ceremony, in which the Commander attempts to impregnate the household handmaid, showcases how every member of the household is partially or fully interpellated by ideology. Not only is the household interpellated, but the Ceremony also shows us how the reader is also being interpellated to attend. I argue that the narrative structure of the novel carefully interpellates the reader as a pre-Gilead person and urges them to continue reading to ensure the survival of the old ideology. Furthermore, I argue that the Ceremony also shows the surprising power dynamic between husband and wife, The Commander and Serena Joy, as well as the general power dynamic between men and women in Gilead. Additionally, I argue that the new ideology in Gilead heavily depends on memories – specifically the manipulation and erasure of memories. Gilead must remove and manipulate the memories of its subjects past life to fully integrate the new ideology and to successfully interpellate every citizen. However, I argue that since many are still interpellated by the former ideology, Gilead must enforce the use of Repressive State Apparatuses to aid in this process. By controlling its subject's memories, Gilead can ensure the reproduction of the conditions of production in order to uphold the new ideology.

Furthermore, I argue that Offred utilizes her memories, both consciously and unconsciously, as a weapon against The Republic of Gilead. She constantly reminds herself of her former life and manages to record her story and experiences which functions as an archive of the former ideology. By doing so she creates an archive that challenges the officially sanctioned archive provided by Gilead, creating the opportunity for resistance by future generations. Her remembrance of her past preserves her old identity, which she was supposed to lose along with her name. Although some argue that Offred is a passive by-stander unwilling to help the resistance movement, I argue that although she is passive within Gilead, her resistance is still valuable, and her active resistance begins when she records her archive while hiding underground. I argue that through her memories, Offred actively resists the new ideology while at the same time ensuring the possibility to resist by others in the future. The

creation of an archive that challenges the officially sanctioned one creates the possibility for resistance for her future audience. As argued by Theo Finigan “with control of the past comes domination of the future” (435), and it is exactly this Offred provides her future audience with – the knowledge of the nation’s past in order to change its future. I therefore argue that Gilead’s dependence on memories will either be what makes their ideological shift successful, or it will be their downfall. Lastly, I argue that the “Historical Notes” section following Offred’s narrative provides the reader with valuable information on the authenticity of *The Handmaid’s Tale*. This section, containing a (fictional) university talk by Professor Pieixoto, also includes ideological elements, and thus deserves attention by the present thesis. I argue that Professor Pieixoto’s talk is highly sexist and patriarchal, showcasing that the ideas and values of Gilead are still present centuries after the republic’s collapse. Pieixoto judges and censures Offred and the importance of her lived experience due to his personal desire for concrete facts about Gilead’s structure. The thesis argues that Pieixoto, through his role in the educational ISA, attempts to interpellate the reader as a subject of the ideology in 2195. However, as the reader is already interpellated by Offred’s narrative, I argue that Pieixoto’s attempt is unsuccessful.

## CHAPTER ONE

### IDEOLOGY

In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), 'The Sons of Jacob', an extremist Christian thinktank, seize control of the US, renaming it as The Republic of Gilead. By implementing their own ideological ideas and practices, they attempt to increase birth rates as there has been a surge in infertility and children born with birth defects due to nuclear-plant accidents and dumping of chemical, biological, and toxic waste into the sewage system. It appears that the society in the novel is currently in between ideologies, as the plot is centered around first-generation Handmaid *Offred*'s struggle to accept and adapt to the new ruling ideology. Through flashbacks and the stories Offred provide, as well as things being said by the ruling class, one gets a glimpse of the former ruling ideology as a contrast to the new ruling ideology in the newly founded republic. The former ruling ideology in *The Handmaid's Tale* is much like the one we live in today, where women have their own rights and are very much in control of their own bodies and choices. The new ideology being implemented on the other hand has stripped women of their rights to read and write, to dress as they please, and of their own bodies.

This first chapter of the thesis outlines theories on ideology, with some examples from *The Handmaid's Tale*. By looking at what ideology is, and how it functions, the chapter will provide a clear idea of ideology heavily centered around the theories of Althusser. Althusser uses the terms Ideological State Apparatuses, Repressive State Apparatuses and Interpellation in regard to ideology. He argues that in order for ideology to continually reproduce the conditions of production the ISAs, RSAs and Interpellation must be successfully implemented in all parts of society. The reproduction of the conditions of production he argues is done primarily through the Ideological State Apparatuses, such as the educational ISA and the family ISA. In this chapter these terms will be explained and discussed to elaborate on what ideology is and how it functions with the aim of utilizing them in the discussion regarding Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. The following chapter will then use the framework provided here as its basis for discussion on how ideology is integrated in Gilead and discuss the implication of this integration.

## What Is Ideology?

The term ‘ideology’ is hard to define. Terry Eagleton believes this is because “‘ideology’ has a whole range of useful meanings, not all of which are compatible with each other” (Eagleton 1). James H. Kavanagh argues that ‘ideology’ is commonly read in relation to political ideas, especially as a negative term about someone trying to impose extreme political ideas on a mainstream political system. The meaning of ‘ideology’ in recent cultural criticism, however, is heavily influenced by and developed in Marxism. Kavanagh believes this has to do with the fact that Marxism has always sought out to be a “more comprehensible kind of theory that could understand the ... relations among political, economic, *and* cultural elements in specific societies” (307). Along with Friedrich Engel, Karl Marx first elaborated a definition of ‘ideology’ in *The German Ideology*. This definition is still very much influential in cultural analyses, even though Marx and Engel gave more detailed definitions in later works on how to understand ‘ideology’ (Kavanagh 307).

Christian Fuchs argues that ideology “defines [a] dominative group’s aims, actions, identity, membership, norms, resources and values” (222), and that there is always a relationship to a subordinated group. By using ideology, the power of the dominative group is justified and naturalized, making the subordinated group accept their situation as subordinate (Fuchs 222). Ideology, Fuchs argues, is used to create “definitions of individual groups, defines a relationship and suggests how this relationship should be organized” (222). Additionally, Fuchs argues that the power conflict between the two groups is reproduced to make sure that if new realities emerge, they fail at changing the old power dynamic in the social formation. This reproduction is typically done through ISAs, as explained in the following paragraphs, such as the educational ISA.

In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” Louis Althusser analyses how ideology makes it possible for people to “consent to a society in which many [are] oppressed” (Leitch et.al. 1283) by looking at social systems and what makes them function. Furthermore, he “analyzes how dominant social systems and institutions subtly mold human subjects through ideology, in turn reproducing the system” (Leitch et.al 1283). Althusser argues that for an ideology to uphold itself, it must continually reproduce the conditions of production – meaning that it must always uphold the conditions that has made the ideology function. If this does not happen, the chances of a revolution significantly increases. This reproduction, Althusser argues is done using Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs for short) – and in

extension Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA for short) ensure that the ideology is reproduced through repression and violence.

### **Reproducing the Conditions of Production**

Firstly, it is important to grasp the idea of society and how it functions. Althusser argues that to exist, a society must “reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce” (1286). In other words, for a society to function, it must continually reproduce the conditions that made it possible to function in the first place. It is a well-oiled machine of reproduction, and if the one making the machine fails, the entire machine stops working. Specifically, if the conditions that make a social formation function suddenly change or stop, the social formation cannot stay the same, because the conditions are different. Thus, social formations are dependent on reproducing the conditions of production to stay the same. Therefore, if a revolution was to take place, one would have to radically change or stop the reproduction of the conditions of production to revolutionize and change a current social formation.

For instance, Kavanagh argues that according to Marxist theory, every society has been and is defined by its class structure. This structure entails that a society has a specific relation between the dominant class and the producing or working class. The dominant class “owns and controls the major means of producing wealth”, while the producing/working class “depends for its survival on selling its labor power to the dominant class” (Kavanagh 308). This relation between the dominant class and the working class, Kavanagh argues, ensures “that the production ... of all the goods and services constituting the wealth of a society takes place” (308). Therefore, to ensure this production of wealth in a society, the society must first and foremost ensure the reproduction of the relationship between the two social classes. In other words, to produce wealth, a society must first make sure that the relationship between the dominant class and the working class is always reproduced. This reproduction is done using an Ideological State Apparatus, such as education. At school we gain knowledge in several subjects, all with the intention to equip us to become citizens that “*can take part in working life and society*” (Utdanningsdirektoratet, original emphasis). In other words, everything we learn at school (at least in the Norwegian education system) is introduced to us to make us able to partake in working life and society. Therefore, we are convinced to go sit in offices all day and stare at computers rather than go hiking. Additionally, Eagleton argues that “The study of ideology is among other things an inquiry into the ways in which people

may come to invest in their own unhappiness. It is because being oppressed sometimes brings with it some slim bonuses that we are occasionally prepared to put up with” (Eagleton xxii). For instance, if one does not take part in working life, and instead goes hiking every day, there are no bonuses to be earned. If one works, one earns money and a pension, one has social interactions with coworkers, and one is actively contributing to society by paying taxes. However, if one does not work and only go on hikes, one loses the security that comes with having a job, such as income to afford housing, food, and other essentials necessary to live a comfortable life. Therefore, we don’t go hiking because we get security from having a job and contributing to society.

To continually reproduce the conditions of production, one must ensure that all parts of the social formation continue doing its duties. For instance, every individual must accept their role, and continue fulfilling their role. This, Althusser argues, is done through ideology. Althusser argues that “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser 1300). In other words, ideology is the way we perceive the world we live in, even though this may or may not be the reality of our world. The reproduction of the conditions of production, Althusser argues is done through The Ideological State Apparatuses, which in turn the Repressive State Apparatus secures through repression (Althusser 1294). Kavanagh argues that societies have “repressive mechanisms” whose job is to “manage recurrent social tension, [and ultimately] *force* social subjects to accept the relations of subordination and dominance between classes” (308, original emphasis). Such mechanisms can for instance be the police, the military, and the courts. These mechanisms are what Althusser calls The Repressive State Apparatus. The RSA’s role in a social formation is to secure “the political conditions of the reproduction of relations of production” (Althusser 1294), which is done through force. However, Kavanagh concludes that it is better, both financially and efficiently, that every social subject, from both the dominant class and the working class, understands the social system set in place, find it fair to everyone, and/or as a better alternative for them, and/or impossible to change. Kavanagh argues that when this happens, ideology is the primary means of managing society and the reproduction of class relations, instead of force.

Adding to this, Kavanagh argues that once ideology dominates the reproduction of social relations, it becomes easier for the dominating class. This, he argues, is because the working class will, instead of fighting against the system, accept it and rather try to get what they can and rebel in easy-to-control ways, such as through self-destruction. At the same time, the dominant classes “are freer to believe that their wealth and power are ... justified” (Kavanagh

309). In such situations, Kavanagh argues that “the social regime of class relations will remain stable” (309), despite there being individuals who are dissatisfied with the situation.

An important factor in the reproduction of the conditions of production is that submission to the social formations rules and norms are also being reproduced. This, Althusser argues is mainly the function of the Ideological State Apparatuses, such as the schools, the church, and the family. For instance, at school children learn different skills required to perform different occupations, such as reading, writing and science. In addition to this, children also learn “the ‘rules’ of good behaviour” (Althusser 1287), such as moral, respect and the proper way of speaking to others. Furthermore, by teaching this, the ISAs “ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology*” (Althusser 1287, original emphasis). In other words, by teaching children the rules and norms of society, they are being taught how to continually reproduce the conditions of production to maintain a society’s ideology. Here, *subjection* does not necessarily mean a conscious subjection – or giving in – to the ideology, but it is a subconscious acceptance of a way to view the world. The ISAs are teaching us to accept a society or culture’s norms and values without us even being aware.

The Ideological State Apparatuses, as explained by Althusser, are “a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (1291). Additionally, Althusser provides a list of the institutions he regards as Ideological State Apparatuses:

- The religious ISA
- The educational ISA
- The family ISA
- The legal ISA
- The political ISA
- The trade-union ISA
- The communications ISA
- The cultural ISA

(Althusser 1291)

Althusser argues that the educational ISA is the dominant ISA in capitalist social formations. This, he argues, is because the schools follow children from a young age, often beginning at the age of six, and through their most vulnerable years, essentially teaching them how to behave and live according to the ruling ideology. Then, at the age of about 16 many begin working. However, many carry on with higher education, and throughout the years they fill the posts of “small and middle technicians, white-collar workers, small and middle



executives” (Althusser 1296). Lastly, a portion of them either “fall into semi-employment” or become “agents of exploitation”, “agents of repression”, and “professional ideologists” (Althusser 1296). Therefore, through one’s entire academic career, one is subconsciously learning the ways of the ruling ideology.

Although, many of the same qualities are also taught in the other ISAs, the school is the only apparatus which has the obligatory audience of every child in the social formation for several hours a day, five days a week. Therefore, the school may be considered the most vital organ in the reproductive system of a social formation. Eagleton also emphasizes that education is a key component in an ideology:

It is testimony to the fact that nobody is, ideologically speaking, a complete dupe that people who are characterized as inferior must actually learn to be so. It is not enough for a woman or colonial subject to be defined as a lower form of life: they must be actively *taught* this definition, and some of them prove to be brilliant graduates in this process. (Eagleton xxiii-xxiv)

This is where the ISAs play a central role. The main task of the ISAs is to teach social subjects what their roles are in the social formation. Eagleton therefore argues that those who are oppressed have been taught to be so, they have been taught their role in society. In Eagleton’s opinion it is impossible to simply be something, one must learn it, and this is done through ideology.

Moreover, Althusser emphasizes the importance of not confusing the Repressive State Apparatus with the different Ideological State Apparatuses. Firstly, and most obviously, there is only one Repressive State Apparatus, while there are several Ideological State Apparatuses. The RSA is essentially the State, including the different branches controlled by the government, such as the police and military. The ISAs are separated (but not always) from the state such as the family or a religious group. Secondly, the Repressive State Apparatus belongs to the public domain, while the different Ideological State Apparatuses are mostly part of the private domain. Moreover, Althusser argues that both Repressive and Ideological apparatuses function by both repression and ideology. However, the important distinction is between whether they function firstly by repression or firstly by ideology. The Repressive State Apparatus, Althusser argues, functions firstly and primarily by repression, and secondly by ideology. The Ideological State Apparatuses, on the other hand, Althusser argues functions first and foremost by ideology and secondly by repression. For instance, when Moira attempts to escape from the educational Rachel and Leah Center, the Aunts “used steel cables” to hurt her feet (Atwood 143). Although the center is considered an educational facility with the

hopes of functioning as an ISA, they must from time to time turn to physical enforcement to ensure the subjection of the women. Even though the ISAs and the RSA are separate from each other, they are mutually dependent on the other. The ISAs main function is to continually reproduce the conditions of production through ideology, while the RSA secures this reproduction by repression. Similarly, the RSA, or simply The State, is dependent on the ISAs to reproduce the dominant ideology to maintain the State as it is.

### **Interpellation**

Ideology is something that is present in everyone's life, whether one knows it or not. Althusser argues that ideology "interpellates" or "hails" individuals, turning them into subjects (Althusser 1306). By this, Althusser argues that ideology functions in the way that it recruits individuals by hailing them, and when these individuals 'responds' to this hailing, they become subjects (Althusser 1306). Ideology addresses us, offering us identities in which we recognize ourselves – such as citizen, wife, religious follower, girly-girl, tomboy, etc. Therefore, ideology is part of constructing our identities and securing our place in society. Through interpellation, we encounter our society's (or ideology's) values, internalize them, and believe they are our own. One example of gender role interpellation is when girls are being portrayed in magazines playing with dolls and loving the color pink. Through these interpellations, we learn to live according to our society's ideology, making its norms and values part of who we are.

However, Althusser argues that this hailing/interpellation and the answer by the subject happen without any succession. Therefore, "the existence of ideology and the hailing ... of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing" (Althusser 1306). Bennett and Royle rephrase this by simply stating that "subjects -people - make their own ideology at the same time as ideology makes them subjects" (234). The notion of this idea is terrifying, as this implicates that ideology goes to the heart of one's identity and how one conceives oneself "as subjects in the world and all that this involves" (Bennett and Royle 234). Therefore, to identify as a human or a subject is in fact an effect of ideology. Interpellation explains the way we are sorted into groups and roles by different institutions, such as the school, the family, or a religion. These institutions shape and police our behaviors and boundaries, our sense of wrong and right, and our values. Our sense of self and our experiences of the world are always bound up to the institutions we have been raised and educated by. However, as Althusser argues, although one might feel free to choose one's identity, beliefs, or values, it is

in fact all part of the ideological system. Even though we believe we can reject the interpellation, we are in fact only rejecting that particular instance of interpellation - we are still bound to the ideology we have been raised and educated by. Our immediate experiences are therefore conditioned by ideology. Despite this, Althusser's point is not that ideology conceals the real world, it is rather that our mediated experiences are constructed for a reason – to ensure the reproduction of the conditions of production. Interpellation works best when it is an invisible and consensual process, and when the subjects believe these values are their own that reflect the best and most obvious way to live.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IDEOLOGY IN *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

Ideology is a key element in the new social structure that is Gilead. After being seized by The Sons of Jacob and renamed as *The Republic of Gilead*, the country and its citizens are forced to go through major changes. These changes are implemented through the use of ideology and its key components. However, as the novel is set in a time between two ideologies, one is introduced to both the old ruling ideology and the new ruling ideology being implemented by the dominant class. As a result of being in between ideologies, one witnesses the challenges that come with trying to change a social structure at its core and how the citizens react to this change.

This chapter focuses on how ideology has been implemented in The Republic of Gilead. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, The Republic of Gilead is amid a forced ideological shift, turning away from an ideology much like our own, and building a new society grounded on an extremist Christian ideology heavily influenced by Biblical scripture. The republic has changed both Ideological State Apparatuses as well as Repressive State Apparatuses to support and ensure the continuity of the emergent ideology. For instance, education was already in place in the old ideology, but it has been completely reinvented to support the new ideology. Therefore, all Handmaid's are "educated" at The Rachel and Leah Centre, which the republic aims at developing into a leading Ideological State Apparatus. However, since they have not yet successfully erased all traces of the past ideology, they are heavily dependent on Repressive State Apparatuses, such as The Eyes, to ensure the compliance of its subjects. Through the Ideological State Apparatuses, such as The Rachel and Leah Centre, Gilead attempt to interpellate its citizens to internalize the new ideology's values, laws, and norms. This, however, proves to be difficult for some, like Offred, who are already interpellated by the old ideology. Nonetheless, Offred's acceptance of her role as a Handmaid show that the new ideology has in fact interpellated its subjects to some extent. The ideology hails her as a fertile woman, and this she responds to and accepts. She does not, however, accept the hailing of an identity-deprived, name-less, surrogate-like being whose days are carefully controlled to serve the upper class's desire to secure the family lineage.

The Ceremony is an event where it is evident that no citizen can escape the interpellation of ideology. Every member of the household, from every societal class and rank, has in some capacity been interpellated to be present in the room while the Commander

attempts to impregnate the household Handmaid. Some have completed the interpellation process by fully accepting the ideology's values as their own, while others have only been partially interpellated and find themselves interpellated by more than one ideology at once. Also, the Ceremony showcases social ranking in Gilead and interesting power dynamics between men and women. For example, the power dynamic between The Commander and his wife Serena Joy changes during the Ceremony and Serena Joy experiences a rare sense of power over her husband. During The Ceremony is the only instance where the wife is in control, to some extent. The husband must knock and be allowed entry by the wife before the Ceremony can begin. Serena Joy usually likes to keep the Commander waiting, because it emphasizes her illusion and feeling of power. However, during the specific Ceremony characterized in this thesis, the Commander is eager to get started, and ignores the custom of waiting for the wife's consent to enter, showing that he is ultimately in control over the entire household no matter what. Furthermore, the narrative structure of *The Handmaid's Tale* carefully and strategically guides the reader back and forth in time, placing the reader exactly where they need to be in order to sympathize with and support the novel's protagonist. This also creates a clear divide between the reader's ideology and Gilead's ideology, further emphasizing the readers support towards Offred. In other words, the novel's structure also utilizes some aspects of ideology in order to create an ally for Offred as she guides them through her, sometimes amoral, experiences as a first-generation Handmaid.

By using the framework of ideology provided in chapter one, this chapter will showcase how ideology is present and functions in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The focus of the discussion will follow the same pattern as the theory, starting with the reproduction of conditions of production and moving forward to interpellation. Lastly, the chapter will focus on "The Ceremony" to emphasize the arguments made regarding ideology in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

### **Althusser's Theory of Ideology in Practice**

Many of Althusser's thoughts and arguments regarding ideology are heavily present in Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*. The totalitarian regime put in motion by The Sons of Jacob have implemented its ideology to all parts of the social structure and have cleverly made use of *Ideological State Apparatuses* to start the process of reproducing the conditions of production of this new social structure and ideology. Not only does the dominant class employ ISAs to secure the reproduction. Since the plot of *THT* is set as the social structure is

in a paradigm shift where a new ideology is being implemented, to ensure reproduction the leaders of Gilead have also focused on employing *Repressive State Apparatuses*. These RSAs use force, repression, and violence to ensure that the ideology's subjects don't revolt against the new regime.

The clearest use of ISAs in *The Handmaid's Tale* is the use of the educational ISA known as *The Rachel and Leah Centre*. Here, women are taught how to act according to their new roles as Handmaids. As Althusser argued, the educational ISA is the most influential of the ISAs since the school is the only apparatus which has the obligatory audience of every child in the social formation for several hours a day, five days a week. However, in the novel it is not children being educated, but women of fertile age. The men of this new society see women as aides with the tasks of caring for the house, cooking the meals, birthing, and raising children while remaining obedient and quiet. Women are therefore in no need for reading or writing, and they are therefore given limited opportunities. Nevertheless, the educational ISA provided by The Rachel and Leah Centre functions the same as school does for children. The Handmaids are being taught how to act their part in the social structure, molding them into what the dominant class needs. This becomes evident when Offred states that they "are [Aunt Lydia's] to define" (Atwood 175). Aunt Lydia and her fellow Aunts are the women in charge of re-educating Offred and the other women at the center to become Handmaids. Jane Armbruster argues that Aunt Lydia, and her fellow Aunts, teach the new ideology by;

First [teaching] forgetfulness. Then they teach that women's struggles for equality and autonomy caused all the rape and violence committed against women before Gilead. They also teach that restrictions on mobility and communication are protecting the handmaids from the rape and violence brought upon them by feminism. Women's struggles for liberation are likewise blamed for Gilead's continuing problems. (Armbruster 147)

Here, Aunt Lydia functions as a symbol of how the educational ISA is used to create obedient subjects in a social structure. Despite this, since the society in the novel is amid changing ideologies and structure, it is difficult for Offred and her fellow Handmaids to adapt to the teachings of the new educational ISA. Offred grew up in a different ideological structure and has therefore been taught how to act accordingly. Therefore, having to learn to act according to the new ruling ideology, an ideology vastly different than the one she is used to, is difficult for Offred. The generations to come, on the other hand, will have an easier time learning the dos and don'ts of the ideology. This future contrast between generations is also strongly highlighted by Aunt Lydia several times in the novel:

You are a transitional generation, said Aunt Lydia. It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make. It is hard when men revile you. For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts. (Atwood 181)

Offred, however, finds no comfort in this. Her attitude towards Aunt Lydia's statement becomes evident in the sentences following the former passage: "She did not say: Because they will have no memories, of any other way. She said: Because they won't want things they can't have" (Atwood 181). Offred, on the other hand, argues that if "they will have no memories, of any other way" (Atwood 181), like she has from the former ruling ideology, it will naturally be easier for them to conform to the new ideology being taught at the Rachel and Leah Centre. Aunt Lydia argues that "[t]his may not seem ordinary to [the Handmaids], but after a time it will" (Atwood 55). Meaning that if they hang in there and do their duty they will, after a while, be comfortable with the situation and "[it] will become ordinary" (Atwood 55).

Although Althusser views the ISAs as the most important function in the continual reproduction of an ideology, in *THT* the RSAs are equally important in the ideological process. Since the plot is centered around the first generation of Handmaids, and the shift from one ideology to another, the use of RSAs to ensure the function of the ISAs are important in securing the reproduction of the ideology. There are several RSAs put in place to ensure that the citizens of Gilead remain obedient subjects. By threatening both the physical and psychological health of the Handmaids through punishment and its own secret police force known as *The Eyes*, The Republic of Gilead ensures that most Handmaids are afraid to disobey. Early in the novel we are introduced to The Eyes, as Nick, the household chauffeur, winks at Offred and she is unsure of how to respond to this. Offred's immediate thought is that "[p]erhaps it was a test to see what [she] would do. Perhaps he is an Eye" (Atwood 29). The Eyes are concealed soldiers whose main function is to expose and punish those who break the laws of Gilead's ideology. Angela Laflen notes that "it is impossible to tell who is an Eye since they are planted at every social level of society" (Laflen 9), in turn making it difficult to know who to trust. While out grocery shopping with her partner Ofglen, Offred experiences the power of The Eyes:

Right in front of us the van pulls up. Two Eyes, in grey suits, leap from the opening double doors at the back. They grab a man who is walking along, a man with a briefcase, an ordinary-looking man, slam him back against the black side of the van. He's there a moment, splayed out against the metal as if stuck to it; then one of the

Eyes moves in on him, does something sharp and brutal that doubles him over, into a limp cloth bundle. They pick him up and heave him into the back of the van like a sack of mail. Then they are inside also and the doors are closed and the van moves on. It's over, in seconds, and the traffic on the street resumes as if nothing has happened.

What I feel is relief. It wasn't me. (Atwood 261-262)

Here, Offred experiences how The Eyes use force and violence to ensure the reproduction of the ideology, but she also experiences how it makes her feel to suddenly be faced with agents from The Eyes. Not only does Offred and the other citizens of Gilead fear for their physical wellbeing, but they are also constantly afraid of being caught doing something illegal and always feel watched and monitored. Therefore, by using The Eyes as an RSA, The Republic of Gilead ensures that its citizens follow the norms of the ideology which in turn ensures the reproduction of the conditions of production.

What is interesting about this passage, is that this incident happens “Right in front of [them]” (Atwood 261). Is it merely a coincidence that a van with two Eyes stop right in front of two Handmaids, or is this a strategically planned incident? Why did this happen at just the right time for Offred and her shopping partner to witness? It is possible that the van was waiting for Handmaid's to walk by before perfectly timing its arrival and the following assault on the by-passer. However, it seems more likely that the incident was planned to occur in a very public place, to ensure that as many citizens as possible can witness the event and the power the authorities hold. Offred's observation of the Eyes heaving the man into the van “like a sack of mail” (Atwood 262) further emphasizes this. Perhaps this is done as a way of sending a message to Offred and the other citizens present to observe the altercation. The man being taken is not only metaphorically but also quite literally “a sack of mail” (Atwood 262), sending the message to Offred and Ofglen that they could be next if they do not abide by the rules of the ideology. It acts as a warning, and it's an efficient one. It is Gilead's strategic use of its Repressive State Apparatus to repress its subjects into submission.

The last two sentences of the quote further emphasize that Gilead strategically uses The Eyes to scare Handmaid's into submission: “What I feel is relief. It wasn't me” (Atwood 262). This incident, manufactured or not, has successfully frightened Offred, making it more likely that she will give in to the ideology rather than rebel against it. The constant fear of physical punishment is one way the regime maintains its position. Furthermore, the fact that the first feeling Offred has is relief that it was not her is also terrifying because it shows how society has become egocentric – meaning that instead of wanting to help the man being taken, Offred is relieved that it was him rather than her. Gilead's subjects are being alienated from



each other on the basis of fear – both because they are not allowed to speak freely to one another, but also because each must fend for themselves.

Furthermore, the dominant class of Gilead has also implemented a chilling event called a *Salvaging*. During a salvaging, women who have broken the extreme laws of the republic are publicly executed in the presence of wives and their daughters, *Econowives*, *Marthas* and *Handmaids*. Not only does Offred and other women of the republic have to attend the Salvagings as spectators, but Handmaids are also obliged to participate in the execution itself:

I've leaned forward to touch the rope in front of me, in time with the others, both hands on it, the rope hairy, sticky with tar in the hot sun, then placed my hand on my heart to show unity with the Salvagers and my consent, and my complicity in the death of this woman. (Atwood 424)

The use of Salvagings is efficient in making sure that the women of Gilead abide by the rules. Not only because it frightens them into submission, but also because it involves the Handmaid's in the ideological process. By having the Handmaid's participate and perform the execution, Gilead entangles the Handmaid's in their ideological web, making them part of the Repressive State Apparatus.

Any woman in Gilead is a potential subject for a Salvaging, even the wives of the Commanders. If a wife breaks certain rules and laws, they are to be executed during a Salvaging. For instance, a wife can be the victim of a Salvaging if she kills her household Handmaid or is adulterous. This is interesting, because it shows that Handmaid's, Marthas and Unwomen are not the only women viewed as inferior to men. Although the wives are of a higher status, they are still viewed as less-than compared to their husbands. Furthermore, only women can be executed during a Salvaging. Men are executed in silence without the presence of female participants. It is evident that The Republic of Gilead has cleverly implemented both Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses to ensure the reproduction of the conditions of production in their new totalitarian regime. Although they must heavily rely on the RSAs use of violence and repression for the time being, the agents of repression are certain that the ISAs will eventually become the main component in the reproduction of their ideology.

The Republic of Gilead also interpellates its citizens to become subjects, as Althusser argues ideology does. One may not understand how and why Handmaids such as Offred accept their position in the social structure, however it is all an effect of the ideological forces working as they are intended to. During The Ceremony, which will be further discussed later

in the chapter, Offred states that “[there] wasn’t a lot of choice, but there was some, and this is what I chose” (Atwood 146), arguing that she herself has chosen to become a Handmaid. However, according to Althusser, the concept of choice and free will is in fact non-existent. Since “subjects ... make their own ideology at the same time as ideology makes them subjects” (Bennett and Royle 234), free will is impossible to attain. Through interpellation, ideology offers us many different identities which we recognize ourselves as part of, making us internalize the norms and values provided. We believe we choose these, but in fact, we only recognize ourselves in them, and it is therefore not a choice but an internalization of identity. Since ideology interpellates its subjects into categories, such as man, woman, or religious follower, and since the category ‘Handmaid’ also contains other categories which Offred has already internalized as her identity, it is easy for her to ‘choose’ this category as well. Offred therefore has not chosen to become a Handmaid, she has in fact been interpellated by the ideology as a Handmaid. Ideology has hailed at Offred, and she has recognized herself as an appropriate subject to receive the hailing. This does not necessarily mean that she has fully internalized and accepted herself as a Handmaid ideologically, but parts of the identity of Handmaids are already embedded in Offred’s existing identity from the previous ideology making it easier for her to recognize herself as a Handmaid. The ideology needs women of a certain age, who are capable of conceiving and giving birth to healthy children. Since Offred already has a daughter, she can conceive and therefore meets the criteria. For instance, she has answered to the hail of ‘woman’, ‘mother’, ‘fertile’, while simultaneously denying the hail of ‘handmaid’. Although she thinks she has chosen to become a Handmaid herself, it is in fact a part of the ideological process which showcases that although the republic is in between ideologies, the new ruling ideology already has a more prominent influence than one thinks at first.

Interestingly, there is an undeniable power in being a fertile woman in Gilead. Within the ideology Gilead is working to implement, there is a non-ideological force threatening its existence – the womb. This power, however, has been corralled by the dominant ideologies. It is universally known that women are the only ones capable of childbearing, and it has often been viewed as their biological destiny to bear children. Similarly, in Gilead the Handmaid’s are constantly being reminded of this, often through Biblical scripture. Women are the ones who can ensure the future of society through their reproductive abilities. To ensure their power position, Gileadean authorities must figure out a way to get fertile women to make children for them. Since women have been ideologically influenced to believe that it is their biological destiny to bear children in both pre-Gilead and Gilead, they are unable to recognize

the power they have to make or break society. Offred and her fellow Handmaids are essentially in a very powerful position, they are just ideologically unaware of it. When faced with the choice to either become a Handmaid or essentially die from radiation exposure, there seems to be little to no choice for many of them. However, in the future, Gilead expects that their ideological process has made it so that they no longer have to rely on repression (RSAs), but instead ideology (ISAs) to recruit new Handmaid's.

Furthermore, there is also an audible hailing present in the novel, which summons the subjects of Gilead to attend certain events, such as the Salvagings. On her way to a salvaging, Offred describes how herself and the other women of Gilead are being hailed by “[t]he tolling of the bell” (Atwood 417), making them aware of where they need to be and why. Similarly to how Offred has recognized herself as suitable for the hailing that recruited her as a Handmaid and subject of the ideology, the women of Gilead recognize themselves as the receivers of “[t]he tolling of the bell” (Atwood 417). The bell symbolizes how ideology hails individuals making them into subjects who abide by the rules. The bell is a physical and literal interpretation of interpellation, where Offred and the other Handmaid's have been successfully brought into accepting the role as Handmaids and the values, tasks, and obligations that come with the role. Most of the Handmaids are unaware of the fact that they have in some ways accepted their role, meaning that the new ideology is more rooted in society than we originally believe.

Not only is the bell a symbol of the interpellation in Gilead, but the bell also has a strong connection to the church and Christianity. Since much of the reasoning behind the new ruling ideology stems from the Bible – the bell is a symbol of the church and its presence in Gilead. The extremist Christianity that provides the basis of the new ideology is spreading throughout society, much like how the loud toll of the bell summons the citizens of Gilead to attend its ideological practices.

### **Be Fruitful, and Multiply: The Ceremony**

One of the crucial events that truly highlight the chilling social regime put in place is the Ceremony. The main goal of the Ceremony is to conceive a baby, which in and of itself seems like a natural act. However, when the Ceremony is centered around the Commander of the household trying to impregnate the household Handmaid in a way that can, at least according to our ideology, be described as rape it does not seem natural after all. In part six of the novel, Offred guides the reader through how the Ceremony is conducted, as well as drifting in and

out of memories and flashbacks of past events and experiences. The Ceremony itself showcases how every individual in the household is bound to the ideological structures put in place by the dominant class of Gilead.

Throughout this chapter the importance of reproducing the conditions of production to maintain a social structure's ideology has been highlighted through the theory of Althusser and through examples from *The Handmaid's Tale*. Similarly, the Ceremony is a part of the reproduction process in Gilead, both ideologically and physically. Every subject of the social formation has its own role in this reproduction, and as Offred states, each subject takes his or her duty seriously: "This is not recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty" (Atwood 148). Even though sexual intercourse is often pleasurable for at least one of the participants, it is not the case in the sexual act performed in the Ceremony. However, this is not the objective of the Ceremony. It is also important to note that even the people in power in Gilead are also being interpellated by the ideology. Through his beliefs and his religion, the Commander has been educated to accept the ways of the Republic and its values. These values, laws and norms have been imprinted in him through his religious beliefs. Had he been educated through a different ISA he might have refused to perform the Ceremony. This is also why the Commander and Offred have such different views of the ideology. Offred has been raised and educated through a different ideological lens than the Commander. The Commander has been interpellated through a religious ISA and is therefore controlled by the ideology set in motion by The Sons of Jacob. He has not only been appointed the position as a Commander based on his religious beliefs and position within the religion, but he has also recognized himself as a person of this position and let ideology define him as a Commander. This defining has provided him a place and power high up in the hierarchy. Although this hailing comes with power, he is still very much being controlled by ideology to participate in ideological practices that he may not have participated in had he not been hailed as a Commander.

During the Ceremony, the goal is to impregnate the Handmaid, and physically reproduce new subjects to the ruling ideology. These new subjects will be taught the ways of the ideology through the ISAs, and occasionally the RSAs, and become loyal subjects who continue to maintain the ruling ideology. Therefore, through the physical reproduction of children, the Commander does his duty in ensuring the reproduction of the conditions of production as well. Adding to this, the argument previously discussed where Aunt Lydia states that it will be easier for the generations to come and Offred's counter argument that it will be easier because they won't know of another life, proves the power and effect ideology

has on its subjects, especially those who are born into the ideology and not before the ideological shift. These new members of the ideology will be raised and educated through the ISAs of Gilead's ideology, accepting its values, laws, and rules, making them interpellated by the ideology and believing that they have freely chosen to accept it. This truly showcases how ideology functions in controlling the lives of its subjects, and how the ISAs are terrifyingly effective in its task to teach subjects their part in the ideological system put in place by the dominant class. Additionally, as mentioned, Kavanagh argues that once ideology dominates the reproduction of conditions of production, the working class will accept the system and try to get what they can and rebel in easy-to-control ways.

The Ceremony is a clear example of an event that is truly dominated by ideology because of Offred's thoughts both before The Commander enters the room where The Ceremony takes place and after The Ceremony is complete. While waiting for The Commander to enter the room and commence The Ceremony, Offred reflects on wanting to steal:

I would like to steal something from this room. I would like to take some small thing, the scrolled ashtray, the little silver pillbox from the mantel perhaps, or a dried flower: hide it in the folds of my dress or in my zippered sleeve, keep it there until this evening is over, secrete it in my room, under the bed, or in a shoe, or in a slit in the hard petit-point FAITH cushion. Every once in a while I would take it out and look at it. It would make me feel that I have power. (Atwood 123-124)

As previously mentioned, Offred thinks she has freely chosen to become a Handmaid and has therefore accepted her position of low social rank in Gilead. As argued by Kavanagh, Offred has accepted this and tries to get what she can and rebel in easy-to-control ways by stealing some unexceptional and insignificant object to feel that she has power. Stealing is a way for Offred to obtain power, or, at least, a feeling of power. By being able to take something from the ones that have essentially taken her whole identity and life from her, she feels as though she gains a grain of power as well. The ability to take something from the Commander, or to take anything at all, is powerful to a Handmaid who is not allowed to do or own anything. It is the act of stealing which feels empowering, not necessarily the value of the item being stolen. To act out in a society where one's actions are predominantly controlled provides one with a feeling of power.

However, Offred is painfully aware that "such a feeling would be an illusion, and too risky" (Atwood 124). She recognizes that stealing something may make her feel in control and in possession of some power, but that it is ultimately not a legitimate feeling or legitimate

power as the dominant class still controls her life and future. Kavanagh argues that in such situations “the social regime of class relations will remain stable” (309) even though some may be dissatisfied with their position in society. Interestingly, one would normally argue that stealing is wrong, however, in Offred’s case it is not viewed by the reader as wrong. For us it is both something we think of as wrong and something we will be punished for by the state. For Offred, however, the moral aspect has disappeared, and she only fears the punishment of the RSA, or Gilead. Thus, the system in Gilead is creating immorality, or at least amorality, amongst its subjects.

By guiding the reader back and forth between Offred’s life before Gilead and her life as a Handmaid, Atwood creates a connection between reader and protagonist. Since the ideology of Offred’s pre-Gileadean life is similar to the reader’s ideology, the reader connects to Offred and her life as a woman with agency and an identity of her own. Therefore, it is natural to sympathize with Offred, and argue that what the leaders of Gilead are implementing with their ideology is viewed as wrong and patriarchal. For the reader, Offred stealing is considered justified, due to the wrongs being forced upon her as a Handmaid. The removal of her rights, being forced to either become a Handmaid or die from radiation exposure, and the emotional and physical torture inflicted upon her functions as the fundament for the reader to justify Offred’s actions. The reader’s ideology collides with Gilead’s ideology, and this evokes feelings for the reader, much like it did for Offred when it first happened to her. Since Offred previously lived in an ideology similar to the readers ideology, it makes the reader understand Offred’s feelings and reactions to the change in ideologies. The reader is able to put themselves in Offred’s shoes and imagine exactly how she feels, mainly because they can imagine how they themselves would feel if this shift in ideologies would have happened to them.

Moreover, similarly to how the women of Gilead are being summoned by a bell to attend the Salvaging’s, the members of the household are summoned by a bell to attend the Ceremony. “The bell wakes me...”, Offred says, and “[w]hen the bell has finished” (Atwood 118; 121) she can descend the stairs and enter the sitting room where The Ceremony will take place. However, Offred is not the only subject being summoned by a bell:

Cora comes in first, then Rita, wiping her hands on her apron. They too have been summoned by the bell, they resent it, they have other things to do, the dishes for instance. But they need to be here, they all need to be here, the Ceremony demands it. We are all obliged to sit through this, one way or another. (Atwood 124)

It is evident that all members of the household must obey the summoning of the bell and attend The Ceremony. They have all answered to the hailing and become subjects at different social levels and classes. The Commander and his wife, Serena, have recognized themselves as fitting their roles, due to their social standing and religious beliefs, and are therefore worthy of their positions in the ideology. Similarly, Cora and Rita have recognized themselves as the receivers of the hailing for *Marthas*, as they are not fertile nor of a high social and religious standing, but still possess valuable traits as chefs and housekeepers. To some extent, they have all agreed to be part of this, and the bell functions as the RSA forcing the subjects to come when called upon to attend the Ceremony. Each person present during the Ceremony has therefore willingly turned towards the hail and accepted it, but the bell forces them to physically attend when called upon. Each individual present in the room has been interpellated by the ideology and has been taught that this is the right place for them to be. They have been taught where to stand in the room, which actions to perform during The Ceremony, and what their roles are after The Ceremony is finished. However, everyone has not been called by the bell the same way. Each person has been called to a certain category, type, action, and location in the Ceremony. It is therefore not one bell calling everyone the same way, it is a rather personal calling where each person receives a different call according to their roles.

Not only have they been audibly hailed by a bell, but their presence has also been secured by their ideological interpellation as subjects in specific roles. It is important that they are all there to continuously remind the subjects of Gilead of the importance of reproduction. They are amid a fertility crisis, and much of the Gileadean ideology is centered around resolving this issue. By having the Ceremony be mandatory for all household staff, it creates a feeling of importance and solemnity. Additionally, by having them feel as part of something important, Gilead aims at creating the urge to *want* to be present and the desire to be included in the Ceremony. This will in turn make it easier to ensure the continuity of the ideology, because there will be less chance of rebellion. It is by providing the household with a false sense of importance they can ensure their compliance in the future.

Interestingly, the Ceremony also showcases the social classes of Gilead and their positions within the household and society in general. Offred enters the room first and finds her place: kneeling beside Serena Joy's chair where Serena Joy will "enthroned herself" (Atwood 121). Since Serena Joy has a limp, she might "put a hand on [Offred's] shoulder, to steady herself, as if [she's] a piece of furniture" (Atwood 121). Next comes Cora, followed by Rita, and they find their place behind Offred – standing. Nick comes in after them, and his

place is also behind Offred, standing with Cora and Rita. Serena Joy comes in next, takes her seat beside a kneeling Offred, and turns on the TV. The last to arrive is the Commander. This order of entry as well as the difference in posture at the Ceremony may seem to symbolize the difference in rank within the household. Offred is at the bottom of the food chain; no one shall wait for her, and she is placed kneeling on the floor. Cora, Rita, and Nick seem to be somewhat equal within the household, having the same position in the Room, and being allowed to stand. The wife, Serena Joy, is next and is allowed the luxury of sitting down. Lastly, in comes the Commander. Not only is the Commander allowed to sit – he is also allowed to read the Bible out loud to the others – a luxury the women of Gilead are not allowed. This order of entry signifies not only their rankings within the household, but also their ranking in Gilead in general. Handmaids are at the bottom, and the Commanders are at the top.

However, upon the Commander's arrival there is an interesting twist. Although the Commander is the head of the household, during the Ceremony it becomes evident that there is a shift in power:

The Commander knocks at the door. The knock is prescribed: the sitting room is supposed to be Serena Joy's territory, he's supposed to ask permission to enter it. She likes to keep him waiting. It's a little thing, but in this household little things mean a lot. (Atwood 134)

Suddenly, the wife holds power over her husband. This power dynamic has been removed from all of society, so it is interesting that before the Ceremony the wife is allowed a certain amount of power over her husband. Why, then, have the wives been given a momentary sense of power over their husband during the Ceremony? Perhaps it is an attempt at yielding some power to the wives to maintain authoritative power for the husbands. By giving away some power, the Gileadean authorities are gaining more power through the compliance and subjection of the wives. In other words, by giving the wives power over the sitting room and the Commanders entry before the Ceremony, the wives are more likely to comply to the regime and its patriarchal laws. However, during this particular Ceremony the Commander is eager to enter the room and begin the Ceremony, and he therefore ignores protocol and enters the room without Serena Joy's

Lastly, there is an interesting structuring of the text which carefully guides the reader back and forth between past, present, and future. Atwood constructs both the entirety of the novel, and the most important events of the ideology in Gilead with flashbacks in order to position the reader in relation to the characters. For instance, during The Ceremony the



narrative shifts between Offred's present thoughts and her memories of her past life with her husband and daughter. As readers we have our own ideology which, most likely, is similar to the one Offred had before Gilead. By constructing certain parts of the novel with flashbacks of Offred's former life, Atwood emphasizes the differences between Offred and the reader's ideology and Gilead's ideology. To justify Offred's actions that one might consider to be bad or wrong according to our ideology, Atwood must make the reader empathize, sympathize, and understand Offred. To do so, the reader must be introduced to Offred's former life in order to showcase the losses she has experienced due to the implementation of a new, limiting, and patriarchal ideology. Therefore, by carefully navigating the reader back and forth between past and present, Atwood successfully manages to ensure that Offred is viewed as a woman simply doing what she must to survive the patriarchal wrongdoings being inflicted upon her. The reader's ideology and Gilead's ideology collide and intertwine with each other, and by shifting from past to present Atwood ensures that the reader is present in both ideologies at the same time. The use of memories and flashbacks are not only a key component of the narrative in *The Handmaid's Tale*, but memories also play a vital role for the maintenance of the ideology while at the same being a powerful tool of resistance against the ideological regime of Gilead. This connection between ideology and memory will be further examined in the following chapters.

## **Chapter Summary**

As this chapter has highlighted, ideology is very much present in The Republic of Gilead. The leaders of the republic have cleverly put in place ISAs and RSAs to ensure the reproduction of conditions of production to maintain their ideology. Ideology is at the core of the social structure and controls the subjects of the republic. As Aunt Lydia says, "[t]he Republic of Gilead ... knows no bounds. Gilead is within you" (Atwood 37). The Ceremony showcases how every citizen, no matter the social rank, is partially or fully interpellated by ideology. This is evident by the fact that all the members of the household are present at the Ceremony, despite perhaps wishing not to be. Interestingly, it becomes evident that the Commander is also bound by several ideological rules and practices, despite his high ranking within the household and in society in general. The reader during the Ceremony is equivalent to a Martha – present, watching but not actively participating. However, much like the rest of the household, the reader too has been carefully guided, or interpellated, to attend the Ceremony. This is done through the narrative structure and its dependence on memories of the past

intertwined with the present. It is an ideology of its own – carefully interpellating the reader to continue reading and continue being present, to ensure the survival of the old ideology in Offred's narration. Through reading, the reader aids Offred in her resistance to the new ideology and in her attempts to keep the old ideology alive in her memories. The reader is interpellated as a pre-Gilead person to ensure empathy for Offred and her actions. Therefore, if a hypothetical hyper-patriarchal man were to read the novel, he would not read it the same way.

However, and surprisingly, the wives who may seem in a powerful position are just as confined as the other women of Gilead. They are more often in the company and presence of Marthas, Handmaids, Wives and Econowives, while the men are in their own company. The same laws that affect the other groups of women apply to the wives as well, meaning that they are not allowed to read or write or own property of their own. Although they are in a more powerful position than the Handmaids and Marthas they oversee in the household, they are ultimately placed in the same group – Women. Gilead's power structure is shaped like a pyramid: “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” (Atwood in Literary Hub).

All in all, it seems as though the new ideology has been able to interpellate its subjects deeper than what one first expects, despite it seeming that Offred and others are dissatisfied with their new position in society. However, if Offred and other citizens of Gilead can maintain their memories of a past identity – one that is grounded in the ideology from before – there is room for change and resistance. This concept of memories functioning as resistance to ideology will be further explored in the next chapters. By connecting memories and ideology to each other it will showcase ideology's fragile dependence on memories to maintain itself while simultaneously act as Offred's resistance to the new ideology.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MEMORY

Memory serves as a vital component in the narrative structure of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Functioning as a key narrative component is the repeated back and forth between the past and present of Handmaid Offred's experiences. Throughout the novel, the reader is constantly presented with Offred's flashbacks and memories of the past in stark contrast to her repressed present as a Handmaid in The Republic of Gilead. Not only do these flashbacks and memories provide valuable information of Offred's life before the Gileadean regime, but it also functions as Offred's personal resistance to the ruling ideology and its goal of erasing its subjects past identities and memories. The connection between ideology and memories may not be obvious at first glance. However, in Gilead the ruling ideology is heavily dependent on the manipulation and erasure of its subject's memories to uphold and assert itself. Memories, or rather the demolishing of memories, is a key feature of the new ruling ideology to secure compliancy of its subjects.

This chapter therefore outlines important theories regarding memory, such as voluntary and involuntary memories and nostalgia. These theories will aid the discussion in the next chapter on how the use of memories in the novel functions both as resistance and as a means of control.

#### **The Psychology of Memories**

Dorthe Berntsen distinguishes between two different types of memories: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary memories, Berntsen describes as memories one deliberately retrieves. Involuntary memories, on the other hand, are spontaneous memories which occur without any preceding attempt at retrieving them. In other words, voluntary memories can be controlled, whereas with involuntary memories one has little to no control of which memory that pops up. These involuntary memories occur suddenly, without any warning, during daily life activities. However, Berntsen argues that involuntary memories are often prompted by experiencing features that match the current situation, such as a specific smell, feeling or sound ("The Unbidden Past" 138). Additionally, Berntsen notes that voluntary memories more often refer to summarized event representations of many similar episodes while involuntary memories refer to specific episodes or experiences. For example, a voluntary memory could be a memory of thunderstorms in general, while an involuntary memory could

be the memory of one particular thunderstorm (“The Unbidden Past” 140). Involuntary memories are also linked to more emotional reaction and are therefore more likely to have a greater impact on mood than voluntary memories (“The Unbidden Past” 140). In other words, involuntary memories are more connected to emotion and emotional reactions than voluntary memories. Therefore, “[p]eople who have experienced highly stressful and/or traumatic events often suffer from involuntary, intrusive memories of those events” (“The Unbidden Past” 141).

Another important aspect of memory is *nostalgia*. The word *nostalgia* is a combination of the two Greek words *nostos*, meaning “to return home”, and *algia*, meaning “a painful feeling”. The word *nostalgia* can therefore be defined as a painful longing to return home. The word was first used in 1688 as a medical term for the homesickness of Swiss soldiers longing to return home (Probyn 1996; Spitzer 1998 in McDermott 390). Scott Alexander Howard argues that *nostalgia* involves “a felt difference between past and present” (Howard 641) and he divides *nostalgia* into several requirements according to the different ways in which *nostalgia* presents itself in an individual and its situation. Howard differentiates between two types of *nostalgia*: the *naïveté* requirement and the *poverty of the present* requirement. In short, Howard summarizes the difference between the two requirements as such:

The *naïveté* requirement demands that there be a particular discrepancy in knowledge between the past and the present. The *poverty of the present* requirement claims that *nostalgia* involves an evaluation that the past was preferable to the present. (Howard 642)

The *naïveté* requirement can be explained in short as missing a time where one was too naive to understand or acknowledge the truth of one’s surroundings. According to Susan Stewart, a nostalgic person (according to the *naïveté* requirement) “dreams of a moment before knowledge and self-consciousness” (Stewart qtd in Howard 642). Additionally, Richard Moran argues that *nostalgia*

... is part of their essence to capture a sharp sense of the difference between the world as represented by the naive state of mind of one’s former self and the (then) unappreciated truth about the transience of that former world. (Moran qtd in Howard 642)

For instance, one often hears people say they miss being a child because everything was easier as a child. However, as children we are often too naive to understand or acknowledge

some of the bad parts of our surroundings. The reality is that we were most likely to young and naive to remember the bad times or for instance that the family funds were limited.

The *poverty of the present* requirement on the other hand argues that "... what is necessary for nostalgia is that the desirable features of the past appear to be compromised or lacking in the present" (Howard 643). In other words, the past contains features that one is missing in the present, and therefore a longing to return develops. This process, Howard divides into two steps. Firstly, "...one makes a negative assessment of the present" (Howard 643). This could be anything, big or small, but essentially it involves disliking something in one's present, such as for example the rise of social media. Then, "aided by a selective memory, one flees to an idealized and imaginary past" (Howard 643). In other words, one dislikes something in one's present and then remembers something from the past, making one miss and wish to return to the past. This "selective memory" (Howard 643) comes from a motivation, which Howard argues can be either a need or a desire, and this motivation arouses the memory of the past, creating the feeling of nostalgia with the poverty of the present requirement as its basis.

Howard also presents a third model of nostalgia, which he refers to as "*Proustian nostalgia*" (644). This model, he argues, does not, unlike the two previously discussed models, involve regarding the past as a time more favorable than the present. Proustian nostalgia is characterized by unmotivated, cue-dependent memories which are short, sudden, and involuntary. The Proustian model presented by Howard is centered around nostalgic involuntary autobiographical memories as described by Proust. According to Berntsen, involuntary memories as described by Proust typically have six main characteristics. First, the memory is a spontaneous recovery of a forgotten scene. Second, it is usually a remote event, such as a childhood event, being remembered. Third, the retrieval of the memory is heavily cue-dependent, meaning that there is no motivation to retrieve the memory, it is purely remembered by a specific cue. Fourth, the cues mentioned in the third characteristic are typically sensory cues such as smell and taste. Fifth, they involve an extraordinary strong sense of reliving the past. Sixth, and finally, these memories are accompanied by a strong feeling of joy ("*Involuntary Autobiographical Memories*" 26). However, Howard argues that there is one last characteristic Berntsen has not included in her account of Proustian nostalgia, which is the ephemerality of these memories. These memories are very short-lived and have been described through poetry as "a sudden lurch" (Zwicky qtd in Howard 645).

Howard also highlights Proustian nostalgia as a counterpart to the poverty of the present requirement. The first characteristic that distinguish the two models is the fact that

Proustian nostalgia is unmotivated. As mentioned, Proustian nostalgia is triggered by cues. These cues are different than motivations, where motivations are pre-existing states, such as a need or a desire, and cues are stimuli one encounters that lurches a memory into one's mind. In other words, Proustian nostalgia "relies on accidental memories", whereas nostalgia as described by the poverty of the present requirement "is a response to a felt deprivation in the present" (Howard 645). A second reason to distinguish the two models is the fleetingness of the Proustian nostalgia as opposed to the desire to return to a more favorable past as characterized by the poverty of the present requirement. Since the Proustian model is characterized with short, sudden memories and the poverty of the present requirement is characterized by the desire to return to a more favorable past, the two modes are fundamentally different. Additionally, the Proustian model of nostalgia is characterized by its involuntariness, whereas the poverty of the present requirement is characterized by a (very much voluntary) desire. Lastly, a significant difference between Proustian nostalgia and the poverty of the present requirement of nostalgia is the Proustian model's "ability to be directed at a past which was experienced as a negative time" (Howard 646). In other words, Proustian nostalgia can be memories of negative times, whereas memories according to the poverty of the present requirement focuses on the positive times of the past.

### **Fiction, Narrative, and the Use of Memory**

Several academics have written about fiction and the use of memory in general. Gayle Greene has focused on memory in feminist fiction and argues that memory is used to connect past and present. Similarly, Patrick Brady argues that "[m]emory is used in literature to relate the present to the past, thus uniting two distinct moments either of history, or of the author's life, or of an evolving plot line" (200). Greene also argues that memories are a means of "constructing a self and versions of experience we can live with" (293). Since memories are helpful in constructing a self and a personal identity, Greene also argues that to doubt one's memories is to doubt oneself, and to lose one's memories is to lose oneself and one's identity.

Although Niklas Salmose writes about textual memory in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), his argument regarding non-chronological narrative can be applied to many literary works. The non-linear narrative, Salmose argues, "jumps back and forth in time in order to support the emotional experience of inner time instead of clock time" (67). In this thesis' case, the non-linearity of the narrative is due to the constant flashbacks and memories of the novels' protagonist. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* define flashbacks as; "interpolated narratives or

scenes (often justified, or naturalized, as a memory, a reverie, or a confession by one of the characters) which represents events that happened before the time at which the work opened” (Abrams & Harpham 296). The protagonist, Offred, is recording her story on a tape recorder, and while doing so, she is spontaneously and involuntarily flooded with memories and flashbacks, making her storytelling somewhat chaotic.

Memory theorist and psychologist Dan McAdams observes that “Certain events from our past take on extraordinary meaning over time as their significance in the overall story of our lives and times come to be known” (295). Therefore, McAdams believes that “our current situation in life and our anticipation of ... the future ... partly determine what we remember and how we remember it” (295). This view of memories changing and adapting over time demonstrates both its ability to affect the present and future, and it also means that the present and future can affect one’s memories of the past. Furthermore, memory theorist Daniel Schacter explains that memories are “constructed from influences operating in the present as well as from information stored about the past” (17). Thus, since memories can both affect and be affected by the present and future, memories can never be an exact replica of the past. For instance, Offred recalls the time her eleven-month-old daughter was stolen out of the supermarket cart:

I heard her start to cry. I turned around and she was disappearing down the aisle, in the arms of a woman I’d never seen before. I screamed, and the woman was stopped. ... She was crying and saying it was her baby, the Lord had given it to her, he’d sent her a sign. ... I thought it was an isolated incident, at the time. (Atwood 99-100)

Here, Offred realizes that her memory of the event was in fact one of the first signs of the ideological shift that was to happen in her society. At the time she simply believed that the woman was crazy, but her present life in Gilead has affected her memory of the past to understand the significance this event had and how it was a foreshadowing for the horrifying events to come in her future.

The connection between narrative and memory is not only limited to the use of memories as a narrative technique in literary works. Narrative is also used to construct and shape our memories. James Olney argues that “Memory enables and vitalizes narrative; in return, narrative provides form for memory, supplements it, and sometimes displaces it” (Olney qtd in Foust Vinson 8). In some ways, then, memory and narrative are reliant on one another. McAdams argues that “We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories. ... In order to live well with unity and purpose, we compose a ... narrative of the self that illustrates

essential truths about ourselves” (11). Similarly, Sarah Katherine Foust Vinson argues that we use information from many sources, such as “learned narrative structures, stories we have been told, and ... fragments of our personal experiences” (10) to understand and interpret our histories. In other words, we use narrative to construct our memories into stories, making it possible for us to remember and retell events and experiences.

Furthermore, Foust Vinson argues that to create and remember memories, one must have an understanding of narrative structures or frames. Foust Vinson argues that these “Narrative frames ... concern not only the formal elements of a ... memory’s construction ... - but also the existing narrative models and stories that are available to help us understand and shape our experiences” (31). These frames are “story forms that we have encountered that provide examples of and models for understanding and narrating our personal experiences” (Foust Vinson 31). In other words, through every day-life-activities, such as reading, being told a story or even through listening to music one learns narrative frames, or story forms, which later help frame the creation of memories. If not for these frames, one would not be able to understand or make sense of one’s experiences, and certainly not store them as memories.

Not only are these narrative frames essential to our creation and storage of memories, they also “have a vital impact on the way we tell our memories” (Foust Vinson 31). This is because the way we story our memories “affects the structure of recall, which in turn affects the structure of later recall” (Rubin qtd in Foust Vinson 31). As Foust Vinson puts it “the narrative framing devices that we have been taught shape the memory that is retrieved, and later, the recalled story of that memory becomes part of the memory the next time it is recalled, in a perpetual fashion” (31-32).



## CHAPTER FOUR

### MEMORY IN *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

As previously mentioned, memories play a significant part of the narrative provided by Offred whilst recording her story on tapes. As Amanda Howell puts it, “The Handmaid’s Tale mediates between past, present, and future, engaging anxieties about present political reality and projecting them into a fantasy of the future” (225). Not only is Offred using her memories to retell her tale, while retelling she is also faced with spontaneously recurring memories from her life before Gilead. The narrative of the novel is therefore heavily influenced by memories in most of its aspects. It is essentially memories containing involuntary, spontaneous memories being recorded by Offred. Offred is recording her memories from her time and experiences in Gilead while being underground after getting out from Gilead. Therefore, she is using her memories of Gilead to tell her story, while at the same time being flooded with involuntary memories of her past life before becoming a Handmaid. Memories are therefore at the core of her narrative, and essential to the structure of the novel. This chapter uses the theories from the previous chapter and puts it in relation to Offred’s narrative from her life in Gilead.

To ensure the reproduction of the conditions of production, The Republic of Gilead is using its citizens memories as a weapon against them. By manipulating and/or erasing the citizens memories, Gilead ensures that memories from the former ruling ideology are changed or erased to make room for the new ideology. If Offred and the other citizens of Gilead have memories of the former ideology’s values and laws, the complete implementation and maintenance of the new ideology will be impossible. Therefore, by manipulating or erasing their personal stories, their names, the memories of their loved ones, and historically significant events, Gilead aims at creating none or less favorable memories of the past to then in turn make the new ideology more appealing. In many ways, Gilead is successful and is actively removing its citizens identities from a past ideology. The memories of the oppressed subjects are of vital importance to both the subjects and the rulers of the ideology; subjects need the memories of their past to keep hold of a sense of self and identity, while the rulers of Gilead depend on the erasure of such memories, and in turn the subject’s individuality and sense of self, to ensure the establishment of the new ideology. This dependency on memories is the ideology’s Achilles’ heel. If it is dependent on manipulating and erasing its subject’s

memories, it also creates the opportunity for the subjects to utilize their memories as a means of resistance.

Despite this, Offred actively utilizes her memories of her past as a woman with agency to resist the ongoing attempts at interpellation by the new ideology. Offred utilizes her memories to ensure that she does not lose her past ideological identity. By constantly reminding herself of her appearance, her name, her family and friends, and the rights she once had as an individual, she ensures that the old Offred is not lost. Not only is she utilizing memories of herself to keep her old self alive in the new totalitarian society, but she also ensures that her husband, daughter, mother, and best friend are not forgotten by narrating their lives as well. Through narrating her experiences both before and in Gilead and recording her narrative with a future audience in mind, Offred creates her personal archive of life in the totalitarian republic. This archive functions as a counter-archive to the officially sanctioned archive provided by the leaders of Gilead, creating the possibility for resistance to the new ruling ideology. The act of remembrance ensures that the woman she once was is not lost, both in her own memory as well as in an archive she hopes will be discovered and utilized as resistance by the ones who come after her.

This chapter uses the theories from the previous chapters and puts it in relation to Offred's narrative from her life in Gilead. In doing so, the chapter shows how ideology and memory are connected to one another, and that there is a fragile dependency on memory in The Republic Gilead for both its leaders and its citizens.

### **The Manipulation and Erasure of Memories**

Not only is the narrative of *The Handmaid's Tale* dependent on memories, but it is also a central feature of the totalitarian regime of Gilead. One way for a totalitarian regime to control its subjects, Hilde Staels argues, is to abolish the memories of the past (Staels 460). The leaders of totalitarian regimes aim at erasing "any traces of a "past" that does not coincide with the officially sanctioned version" (Finigan 435). This is because, as Finigan argues, "with control of the past comes domination of the future" (435). The Sons of Jacob, the totalitarian founders, and leaders of Gilead, wish to dominate its subjects by disrupting and rearranging their experience of time, memory, and history. For instance, the Handmaids' days are carefully rationalized and planned out, giving them no time for reflection or any actions that may lead to them feeling like an individual instead of a subject. Furthermore, this control of time is also accompanied "by the state's attempts to manipulate – and in some

instances, *erase* – the traces of memory and even historical time itself” (Finigan 437). By taking away women’s names and identities, Gilead aims at erasing memories of a past life as individuals with agency. Additionally, by manipulating women’s memories, the authorities wish to create a negative association of the past and create a positive association of the present, removing all possibilities of nostalgia towards the past.

Additionally, both Gilead and Offred experience nostalgia as described earlier in the thesis. However, they experience it very differently. One of the reasons for the implementation of a new ideology is based on the nostalgia of a past where women are inferior to men. The leaders of Gilead use the past as reasoning for implementing their new ideology, even though it is not necessarily the correct view of the past they utilize, it is *their* view. During one of Offred’s late night visits to the Commander in his study, he explains why this ideology has been enforced:

We’ve given [women] more than we’ve taken away, said the Commander. Think of the trouble they had before. Don’t you remember the singles bars, the indignity of high-school blind dates? The meat market. Don’t you remember the terrible gap between the ones who could get a man easily and the ones who couldn’t? Some of them were desperate, they starved themselves thin or pumped their breasts full of silicone, had their noses cut off. Think of the human misery. ... This way they all get a man, nobody’s left out. ... This way they’re protected, they can fulfil their biological destinies in peace. With full support and encouragement. ... All we’ve done is return things to Nature’s norm. (Atwood 338-9)

This is the narrative the authorities are attempting to embed in the minds of Handmaid’s, Wives, Aunts and Marthas – the women of Gilead. Their memories of the past focus on the negatives of dating and relationships and women’s desperate and “natural” need for a man. They therefore view their actions as justified and even greater than the alternative the past provided. Additionally, they view their solution to this “problem”, the implementing of a new ideology, as “A return to traditional values” (Atwood 9) while drawing inspiration from Biblical texts such as the story of Rachel and her Handmaid Bilhah to justify certain actions. It appears the founders and leaders of Gilead have a nostalgic view of another past, one that existed before the past they have now “saved” women from. This nostalgia is very much rooted in the Bible, and it seems that the “traditional values” (Atwood 9) they have returned to are values described in the Bible.

It appears Gilead partially fits into the *poverty of the present* requirement outlined by Howard, where “the desirable features of the past appear to be compromised or lacking in the

present” (Howard 643). There is a past which contains features that the Sons of Jacob wishes to return to, and therefore they initiate in creating a new regime. Firstly, they have made “a negative assessment of the present” (Howard 643), such as how women were desperate for male attention and the lack of viable pregnancies and plummeting birth rates. Then, they “flee to an idealized and imaginary past” (Howard 643), which essentially seems to be a past outlined in the Bible where men of power can obtain Handmaid’s to secure their family lineage when their wives are, for whatever reason, unable to become pregnant. The difference between Gilead’s nostalgia, and the *poverty of the present* requirement outlined by Howard is that this fleeing to “an idealized or imaginary past” is not “aided by a selective memory” (643), it is rather aided by Biblical scripture. Nonetheless, there is in fact a dislike of the present which leads to the wish to return to a past, it is just not aided by a memory.

Offred’s nostalgia on the other hand concern all three models outlined by Howard. To start, let us look closer at how her nostalgia fits into the *naiveté* requirement. During her narration, we learn that Offred is nostalgic towards a time “before knowledge and self-consciousness” (Stewart qtd in Howard 642). She looks back fondly at the time before Gilead where she was too naïve and, at times, too self-centered to be fully aware of the dangerous changes slowly being incorporated in society, especially towards women. In Gilead she recalls these times with a longing to this “blissful” ignorance and naivety. For instance, her friend Moira anticipated the upcoming coup long before it happened, while Offred was surprised when the new laws concerning women holding property were enforced. At the time, Offred was too naïve to understand or acknowledge the truth of her surroundings. In retrospect, she realizes that these horrifying changes to society begun earlier than what she originally noticed due to her naivety. The second model of nostalgia, the poverty of the present requirement is perhaps the model easiest to recognize in Offred’s narrative. It is evident that Offred has a “negative assessment of [her] present” life in Gilead, and by narrating her memories she “flees to an idealized ... past” where she was a woman with agency, free to work, write, read, and hold property. She dislikes her life as a Handmaid, thinks back on her past life, misses it, and wishes to return to her former self and former life. Lastly, Offred also experiences the Proustian model of nostalgia, where cues, such as smell and sound, trigger involuntary autobiographical memories from her past. Upon returning from one of her scheduled shopping trips, Offred is met by the smell of yeast in the kitchen, reminding her of life before Gilead:

The kitchen smells of yeast, a nostalgic smell. It reminds me of other kitchens, kitchens that were mine. It smells of mothers; although my own mother did not make

bread. It smells of me, in former times, when I was a mother. This is a treacherous smell, and I know I must shut it out. (Atwood 74)

Here, Offred's memory of a former time is recovered by the smell of yeast, bringing her back to her life as a mother before Gilead. Through this memory she experiences the seven characteristics of the Proustian model of nostalgia; (1) her memories are spontaneous recoveries of forgotten scenes, (2) it is often a remote event, an event that took place from several years ago, (3) the memories are heavily cue dependent, (4) the cues are sensory cues such as smell, (5) the memories involve an extraordinary strong sense of reliving the past, (6) they are accompanied by a strong feeling of joy while also (7) being very short-lived flashbacks. The Proustian model of nostalgia can also, interestingly, involve memories of negative times and events, showing that it is possible to be nostalgic over times that were not necessarily good, but still better than the present. This scene shows us, as Hilde Stales argues, that "Offred wants to absorb the smell of objects that bring back to mind the context of the past. The connection with these memories, though it is a painful recollection, is necessary to her survival" (460).

Furthermore, Gilead's leaders seek to eliminate all traces of the past ideology, both the memories of it and the physical evidence of it. Physical evidence of Pre-Gilead, such as buildings, have either been renamed, removing all its prior significance, or simply destroyed and removed. Thus, when out on one of her scheduled shopping trips, Offred reflects on the removal of buildings:

There used to be an ice-cream store, somewhere in this block. I can't remember the name. Things can change so quickly, buildings can be torn down or turned into something else, it's hard to keep them straight in your mind the way they used to be. (Atwood 253)

These vanished buildings can be said to symbolize Offred herself; demolished, stripped of herself and her personal history making it difficult to remember the woman she is, or used to be, before Gilead. Memories of her "self" are fading, making her like these buildings. Gilead has demolished her and filled the gap with Offred the Handmaid.

Not only has Gilead torn down familiar buildings, but it has also gone further and split up families, confiscated photographs, denied unsupervised social interaction and removed or altered every form of media available to its inhabitants. Additionally, there is a constant threat of torture, disappearance, and execution of those who disobey to guarantee control and domination of Gileadean subjects. This removal of physical memories, social interaction, and the threat of physical violence aid in the removal of personal identity and memory, resulting

in the erasure of the already fragile connection of past and present. With the loss of any trace of “normality”, Offred experiences that her memories are fading, and things are becoming harder and harder to remember correctly. Some of these memories are insignificant, such as what the name of a double scoop of ice cream with chocolate sprinkles on top was called. The loss of memories of herself and her loved ones, however, are more disturbing. Although she remembers “exactly what [Luke, her husband] was wearing” (Atwood 160-1) when she was taken by government officials, his face is becoming difficult to remember.

The removal of mirrors in Gilead also makes it so she has a hard time remembering her own features and must remind herself of her most noticeable features; “I am thirty-three years old. I have brown hair. I stand five seven without shoes. I have trouble remembering what I used to look like. I have viable ovaries” (Atwood 222). Gilead has successfully made sure that its subjects have been “lifted clean out from the stream of history” (Orwell qtd in Finigan 441). The loss of memories from a time prior to Gilead, ensures that its subjects do not leave a trace of their existence behind for others to remember, making it easy for the ideology to be upheld in the future.

Unfortunately, Offred’s identity is not only lost from her own memory. Offred’s daughter, that was taken from her by the authorities, has also been put through the same process of memory removal as her mother, resulting in the erasure of Offred as her mother:

Time has not stood still. It has washed over me, washed me away, as if I’m nothing more than a woman of sand, left by a careless child too near the water. I have been obliterated for her. I am only a shadow now, far back behind the glib shiny surface of this photograph. A shadow of a shadow, as dead mothers become. You can see it in her eyes: I am not there. (Atwood 352)

The final four words of this quotation shows how the totalitarian regime has accomplished their mission of removing someone’s memories to control them and make them compliant subjects. Offred has ceased to exist in her daughter’s mind. She has most likely been placed in the home of a Commander and his wife and has after some time started to recognize them as her parents. Gilead has erased Offred.

Furthermore, Gilead actively attempts to change and manipulate history to make it conform to its new ideology. This also, is done with the hopes of re-narrating the Handmaid’s memories. During their “education” at the Rachel and Leah Centre, the Aunts are continuously trying to change the Handmaids’ view of their past as women in the country. By shifting the focus from the good parts of the previous ideology, such as choice, freedom of speech, and the rights to work, to other parts of it, making sure to manipulate it into

something negative, the Aunts aim at altering the Handmaid's memories of the past to make them believe that they are in a better position as Handmaids as opposed to the free women they once were. For instance, the Handmaid's are forced to attend weekly film screenings, often showing "old porno film[s]" (183):

Women kneeling, sucking penises or guns, women tied up or chained or with dog collars around their necks, women hanging from trees, or upside-down, naked, with their legs held apart, women being raped, beaten up, killed. ...

Consider the alternatives, said Aunt Lydia. You see what things used to be like?

(Atwood 183)

By showing these films, the Aunts aim at making the Handmaids begin to reshape and re-narrate their memories to fit into Gilead's narrative of the past. The Aunts attempt to manipulate the idea of what the lives of women used to be like to make the Handmaids believe that this was their life prior to Gilead. However, if the Handmaids maintain their personal memories, the Aunts mission will be unsuccessful.

### **“It Was My Own Fault. I Led Them On”: Memories and Interpellation**

The removal and manipulation of its subjects' memories of the past is essential to ensure the continued and future compliance of Handmaids. By either removing or manipulating the memories of a better past, Gilead ensures that its subjects will accept and embrace the new ideology, simply because they have lost the pleasurable memories of their past as individuals. As Foust-Vinson argues "once women no longer remember their past lives, as feminists and postfeminists, pre-Gilead, they will no longer rebel against the current totalitarian, patriarchal society" (71). For instance, Offred recalls an incident from a Testifying session at the Rachel and Leah Centre where fellow Handmaid-in-training Janine recalls being gang-raped at fourteen which led to her having an abortion. Leading the Testifying, Aunt Helena urges the other Handmaid-trainees to chant and blame Janine herself for the rape:

But whose fault was it? Aunt Helena says, holding up one plump finger.

*Her* fault, *her* fault, *her* fault, we chant in unison.

Who led them on? Aunt Helena beams, pleased with us.

*She* did. *She* did. *She* did.

Why did God allow such a terrible thing to happen?

Teach her a *lesson*. Teach her a *lesson*. Teach her a *lesson*.

(Atwood 111-2, original emphasis)

The first time Janine testifies, she burst into tears at the condemning chant by her fellow Handmaid-trainees. After bursting into tears, the chanting continues: “Crybaby. Crybaby. Crybaby” (Atwood 112). The second time Janine testifies about the rape and abortion, however, she beats the other Handmaid-trainees to the punch:

This week Janine doesn't wait for us to jeer at her. It was my fault, she says. It was my own fault. I led them on. I deserved the pain.

Very good, Janine, says Aunt Lydia.

You are an example. (Atwood 112)

After being told by her equals that she is the one to blame, Janine eventually starts to believe that it is true. Janine has been hailed as guilty and begins to accept this hailing. She starts to second guess her own recollection of her past trauma and begins to believe the narrative being prescribed to her. The Aunts in charge of educating these women to become Handmaid's are hard at work attempting to remove and/or manipulate memories of a past life and society as more favorable than the one Gilead is working to implement. There is a desire to erase memories of the past as well as ensuring the lack of nostalgia towards their former lives by attempting to change their memories from “good” to bad. In the case of Janine, Gilead successfully manipulates her memories of the past to ensure her compliance and cooperation as a Handmaid.

The fact that Janine allows her memories to be manipulated is not the most chilling aspect of the Testifying session. Not only are the Gilead officials, in this case the Aunts, doing their part of the memory manipulation, but they are also including the fellow Handmaid's in the process of manipulating Janine's memories by having them chant at her. Not only does this affect Janine and how she perceives herself in her memory and present, but it also affects the Handmaid's doing the chanting. As Offred states, they start to view her differently:

Aunt Helena made her kneel at the front of the classroom, hands behind her back, where we could all see her, her red face and dripping nose. ... She looked disgusting: weak, squirmy, blotchy, pink, like a newborn mouse. None of us wanted to look like that, ever. For a moment, even though we knew what was being done to her, we despised her. (Atwood 112)

Sadly, this act of collective verbal abuse alters Offred and the other Handmaid-trainees' view of Janine's story of abuse. Instead of comforting and supporting Janine's decision of abortion, they, like Janine, begin to believe in the message of their chant. The disgust Offred and the others feel hails them as ‘not-her’, and instead of being her ally they become her enemy. Gilead has successfully alienated Janine from the other Handmaid's, creating an even more



lonely environment for women. Gilead effectively kills two birds with one stone: not only do they take advantage of the Handmaid-trainees in the manipulation of others, in the process they also alter their view of rape, abortion and the women who have been traumatized by these events. This leads to a further establishment of the new ideology being implemented where abortion is considered a crime and women are ultimately to be blamed for being raped.

## **Memory as Resistance**

Despite Gilead's attempt to use its subject's memories as a weapon against them, Offred uses her memories to resist the totalitarian ideology forced upon her. Sinead McDermott argues that "... remembering can be a form of resistance to the erasure of women's lives and of domestic histories of abuse within patriarchal discourse..." (394), which is true in the case of Offred and Gilead. By consistently reminding herself of her former life, Offred makes sure that the patriarchal regime of Gilead is unable to erase her identity and the abuse they have inflicted upon her. By recording her story Offred creates an archive for the generations to come to ensure that her personal story and the history of a time before Gilead remains. In doing so, not only is she herself resisting, but she is also creating the possibility for the next generation to resist the regime, by making sure that they are aware of the abuse Gilead has inflicted on its subjects. While recording her tale Offred chooses to believe that she has a future audience: "Because I'm telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are" (Atwood 410). However, it could also be said that because she is telling this story, she is also willing herself into existence. Her identity as a woman with agency has been removed by Gilead, but by utilizing her memories of her past life she actively regains some sense of self. Therefore, she could just as easily state "I tell, therefore I am".

Similarly, Offred tells the story of several of her loved ones from the time before Gilead. One person she tells of is her best friend, Moira. Offred tells her audience about Moira from both the time before Gilead and her life in Gilead. The two friends briefly reconnect at different times in the novel at The Rachel and Leah Centre and at a Jezebel's. Just as Offred wills her audience and herself into existence, she ensures the continuing existence of Moira as well:

This is what she says, whispers, more or less. I can't remember exactly, because I had no way of writing it down. I've filled it out for her as much as I can: we didn't have much time so she just gave the outlines. ... I've tried to make it sound as much like her as I can. It's a way of keeping her alive. (Atwood 377)

By keeping Moira alive in her memories, as well as permanently record her in her personal archive, she ensures the survival of Moira as an individual and the continued knowledge of her existence. As long as Offred keeps Moira alive through her memories, the Gileadean regime will have failed to erase her from its history. This preservation of loved ones is not only limited to Moira. Offred does her best at preserving her memories of others as well, such as her husband, Luke, their daughter, and her mother. Although she does not know the fate of any of her loved ones, she carves them into Gilead's history through her recording, making it difficult for the totalitarian regime to erase their existence from its history. It is a way of keeping them alive, both in history and in her memories. Additionally, as she keeps her loved ones alive in her memories, she is also actively resisting the regimes attempts at erasing her memories, past self, and identity.

In "Archival Embodiment in *The Handmaid's Tale*", Joseph Hurtgen examines how archival embodiment is used in *The Handmaid's Tale* as a means of resistance. Hurtgen argues that in the novel Offred uses her narrative "as a way of resisting being archivally written upon" (13). Hurtgen argues that each society has an archive. This archive is a set of "culturally produced ideas" which are "replicated across populations that inform social interaction" (Hurtgen 12). Therefore, what Hurtgen argues in relation to Offred is that she records her narrative to maintain her identity and create her own archive, in order to resist the ideas being prescribed to her as a woman by the dominant archive of Gilead. The standard that has been archived in the Gileadean regime is patriarchal. Women are controlled by men of the dominant class; their rights have been removed and their value is measured through their marital status and their fertile prospects.

Additionally, "Once a given standard is archived", Hurtgen argues, "it becomes entrenched and difficult to remove" (13). Not only is it difficult for Offred and other women in Gilead to remove the standard archived in their society, but they have also been stripped of the opportunity to read and write and to speak freely, making it difficult to create a new archive where women are considered equal to men. By recording her voiced narrative, Offred creates not only a physical archive of cassette tapes, but also the possibility of a new archive of culturally produced ideas accepted and spread through social interaction in society is created through her narrative. In doing so, Offred resists the dominant archival ideas of Gilead, making it possible to someday alter the culturally produced ideas accepted by society.

While it's clear that Offred attempts to keep her memories of loved ones alive, Stillman and Johnson (1994) argue that Offred is in fact not resisting the Gileadean ideology

but is inevitably merged with it and becomes a compliant subject. They do acknowledge that Offred tries to maintain a sense of self but believe that she ultimately fails at this:

While Offred does transgress many rules – in her clandestine meetings with the Commander, in her arrangement with Serene Joy to visit Nick, and in her continuing visits to Nick – those transgressions directly enmesh her into the system of sex, power, and corruption that characterizes the actual workings of Gilead and powerfully construct her as a being who defines herself by her body. (Stillman & Johnson 75-6)

This argument of becoming someone defining herself by her body with the lack of a self and an identity is being grounded by Stillman and Johnson in Offred's cautiousness and her way of giving in to the requests of the forces of power in the household. At the same time, Stillman and Johnson highlight the fact that Offred rejects her fellow Handmaid Ofglen's requests for information valuable to the underground resistance Mayday.

Furthermore, they do acknowledge the fact that Offred does occasionally look inside herself and retrieve memories allowing her to "recall a sense of self" (Stillman and Johnson 73). However, they feel that Offred is unsuccessful in holding on to these memories, making both them and her sense of self fade away.

The claim that Offred gives in to the regime and is not actively resisting its ideology can be discussed further. At first glance, Offred may seem to resign to her life as a Handmaid several times in the novel. For instance, after entering a sexual relationship with the household chauffeur, she has no need to leave Gilead and "want[s] to be [there], with Nick" (Atwood 415). Additionally, nearing the end of Offred's narration, after she has learnt that her former shopping partner and an active ally of the resistance has hanged herself to avoid being taken by Gilead officials, Offred fears that she is the next target on the list. The fear of being taken makes Offred reconsider her desires:

Everything they taught at the Red Centre, everything I've resisted, comes flooding in. I don't want pain. ... I want to keep on living, in any form. I resign my body freely, to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject. (Atwood 441)

It may seem as though Offred gives in to the ideology. However, the quote also makes it evident that she has actively resisted the ideology forced upon her, but that she is unable to resist the flooding of the ideology any longer. Despite this, Offred's voluntary, and at times involuntary, activation of memories throughout her narration is her personal way of resisting Gilead. By narrating her life experiences both before Gilead and in Gilead, she is making sure that her identity remains intact through all the horrors and traumas she encounters during her time as a Handmaid.

In addition, Stillman and Johnson compare Offred to Moira, her friend from the time before Gilead. They briefly reconnect at both the Rachel and Leah Centre and at a Jezebel's the Commander brings her to. In the novel, Moira is depicted as an outspoken, confident, and capable person who is very clear in her ideas and opinions of society. Stillman and Johnson view Moira as Offred's "opposite" and "an exception, an outsider, a rebel, a maverick" (79), who actively and loudly resists the patriarchal regime inflicted upon her. At the Rachel and Leah Centre, Moira actively resists through her escape attempts, although they are unsuccessful. Moira is a woman refusing "to succumb to the despairing sense of security that complacency offers", possessing and representing "an energetic, persistent striving for freedom" (Stillman and Johnson 80). However, despite her fiery resistance, Moira ends up as a prostitute in a Jezebel's. Stillman and Johnson argue that there is a duality to life there. On the one side, life there "offers limited freedom: except for work, the women are left to themselves, to drink, to do drugs, to have sex with each other" (80). On the other side, however, the women there are "completely isolated, marginalized from the rest of society, in a dead-end, a prison" (Stillman & Johnson 80). To conclude Moira's plotline, Stillman and Johnson argue that "The last we ever see of Moira she is imprisoned, defeated but still defiant. Gilead is not within her" (80).

Even though Moira is a strong, outspoken woman she ends up giving in to the patriarchal regime. Moira does attempt to escape the Rachel and Leah Centre more than once, and she is not afraid to get into physical fights with authorities. However, after several failed escape attempts, it seems as though Moira resigns her resistance and accepts that she can never escape. She is content with being imprisoned at the Jezebel's which scares Offred:

She is frightening me now, because what I hear in her voice is indifference, a lack of volition. Have they really done it to her then, taken away something – what? – that used to be so central to her? ... I don't want her to be like me. Give in, go along, save her skin. (Atwood 387)

Oddly, Offred also compares her and Moira, wishing that Moira keeps hold of her identity and sense of self and not become like Offred. It appears this active resistance to the regime has not done Moira any good, she has still ended up as a compliant subject. She does have some sense of freedom at the Jezebel's, but she has nevertheless been put in a specific position by the regime and has no way of escaping this. As Offred notes, Moira is indifferent, and it is therefore incorrect to claim that she is still defiant. Gilead is very much within Moira – the patriarchal regime has successfully forced Moira into a position where she cannot rebel against them and through its torture has created a compliant subject content with her situation.

We never learn what happens to Moira at the end, but it seems like her active resistance has not done her very many services, and she is still very much a prisoner of Gilead.

It is easy to assume that Offred has given up herself as she admits: “I don’t want [Moira] to be like me. Give in, go along...” (Atwood 387). It is true that during the events Offred narrates she has given in to Gilead as Stillman and Johnson claim. However, her resistance primarily happens *after* she has been taken from the Commander’s household and brought to “The Underground Femaleroad” (Atwood 460). It is here that the narrative is being recorded on tapes and stored in a “metal footlocker, U.S. Army issue” (Atwood 461) for others to find at a later time. The act of recording her story and experiences both before and during her time in Gilead is Offred’s way of resisting the patriarchal regime. As Rob Luzecky argues: “Offred’s act of recording her testimonial for future generations constitutes a concrete act of rebellion” (444). Therefore, one can argue that her resistance does not begin until she is outside of Gilead and is able to create an archive of her own.

However, as she mentions several times during her recording, while in Gilead she continuously activates her memories to ensure that she remembers pieces of her former pre-Gilead self:

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. 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. (Atwood 129-30)

Her former name is not the only personal attribute she reminds herself of. She also reminds herself of the key characteristics of her appearance, such as height and hair color.

Furthermore, she shares her ‘secret’ name with the Commander’s chauffeur, which she engages in a sexual relationship with: “I tell him my real name, and feel that therefore I am known” (Atwood 414). In doing so she not only guarantees the existence of her former self in her own memory, but she also ensures that others know of her former self, constituting her as an individual in the history of Gilead. Offred is holding onto how she was formerly hailed as: an individual, a name, a woman, a mother, a daughter, and a wife. By doing so, she also ensures that the former ideology does not disappear.

This also connects to Hurtgen's arguments previously outlined in this chapter. By creating a personal archive of her own, Offred ensures that her personal identity stays intact. Additionally, by recording her story, Offred creates the possibility for others to remember or learn of a time before Gilead and its patriarchal, totalitarian regime. As Finigan puts it:

[The Handmaid's Tale] raise[s] the possibility that the archive could function as the means of a historiographic corrective that would counter the totalitarian manipulation of history ... with a supposedly more accurate – and thus *anti*-totalitarian – record of authentic individual experience. (Finigan 435-6)

In other words, the act of recording her experiences is a way of creating an archive of her own different than the officially sanctioned archive Gilead creates. In doing so, Offred creates the possibility for future resistance. If discovered by future generations of Handmaid, Offred's archive creates the opportunity for those who do not know of another life other than the life the regime has assigned them to become aware of the crimes of Gilead. By retelling her truth and her experiences as a first-generation Handmaid acutely aware of the crimes being inflicted upon her freedom and individuality, she provides future Handmaid's with the necessary knowledge and tools needed to develop a resistance of their own.

Furthermore, not only does the activation of memories ensure that Offred keeps hold of her sense of self and her identity as a woman with agency, but it also ensures her connection with basic emotions such as anger, desire, love, and hate. These are emotions Gilead wish to eradicate from its Handmaids. There is no need for these emotions, simply because they are not essential in the reproductive process and model being implemented in Gilead. On the contrary, these are emotions that will hinder the complacency of Handmaids and ultimately hinder the implementation of the new ideology. Additionally, once one remembers and feel these emotions, it is possible to act accordingly. Therefore, as Offred remembers and feels desire, pleasure, and love, she engages in an illegal, sexual relationship with Nick the household chauffeur.

## Chapter Summary

The new ideology being implemented by The Sons of Jacob is heavily dependent on memories – or, at least, the manipulation and erasure of memories. To fully integrate the new ideology and to begin successfully interpellating the citizens of Gilead as subjects, The Sons of Jacob must remove and manipulate the citizen's memories from their former lives as subjects of the old ideology. However, as many are still interpellated as subjects of the former

ideology, Gilead must enforce the use of Repressive State Apparatuses to aid in the process. Clearly, Gilead depends on memories to ensure the reproduction of the conditions of production that is necessary to uphold the new ideology.

Interestingly, Offred utilizes her memories as a weapon against the republic. By constantly reminding herself of her former life, both intentionally and unintentionally, she manages to record her story and her experiences on a tape recorder which functions as an archive of the former ideology. Offred uses her memories to ensure that she does not lose her identity in a society aiming at creating identity deprived Handmaids. On the one hand, Offred may seem merely a passive observer, not a rebel actively resisting the cruel ideology being inflicted upon her. On the other hand, Offred does resist the ideology through the preserving of her interior life, feelings, and thoughts. Her recollections of her past function to preserve her old identity that she was supposed to lose along with her name. Although it is not the loud, rebellious resistance performed by her best friend Moira, Offred's passive resistance is still valuable. *The Handmaid's Tale* argues that passive acts of rebellion also have value.

Although Offred's acts of remembrance inside Gilead are passive ways of resisting, her act of recording and creating an archive to be found by others is an active form of resistance. Her most prominent resistance therefore begins as she is recording her memories. Through creating an archive which challenges the officially sanctioned archive provided by Gilead, Offred also creates the possibility for resistance for her future audience. As mentioned, "with control of the past comes domination of the future" (Finigan 435), and it is exactly this Offred provides her future audience with – control of the past, to have the opportunity to dominate the future.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### HISTORICAL NOTES

Interestingly, after the reader is left in the dark by Offred, never learning her fate, there is a final section in the novel named “Historical Notes”. This final part of the novel is a “partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies” at “the University of Denay, Nunavit, on June 25, 2195” (Atwood 457). Essentially, the “Historical Notes” section is a transcript of a university talk by Professor James Darcy Pieixoto titled “Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid’s Tale*” (Atwood 459). Here, it is revealed to the reader that the entire novel is a transcript of Offred’s taped recording, studied, and arranged by Professor Pieixoto and his co-worker Professor Wade “based on some guesswork” but nevertheless “regarded as approximate, pending further research” (Atwood 462). During his talk, Pieixoto makes several sexist remarks, which through the response of the audience, shows the reader that even though the Republic of Gilead does no longer exist, the values and ideas which once gave rise to the totalitarian regime are still very much present in the year 2195. During his talk, it becomes evident that Pieixoto is more concerned with facts than human experiences, and he therefore regards Offred’s story as lacking value since it does not contain any traces of concrete facts such as printout from the Commander’s personal computer. He is more concerned with learning the specifics of the social structure than learning how it was to live as a first-generation Handmaid in Gilead.

This last chapter of the thesis focuses on the final section of Atwood’s novel – the “Historical Notes”. By analyzing this section, specifically the talk Pieixoto gives to his fellow academics, the chapter argues that the arrangement of Offred’s tapes by Pieixoto and Wade, together with their attitudes towards stories, women and Offred make their transcribed version of Offred’s story an unreliable one. Thus, the entire experience changes for the reader, and they are no longer certain what is true and what is not. Additionally, the chapter argues that similarly to both the structure Gilead and the novel itself, this section is also embedded with ideology – though in a less terrifying and repressive way. In 2195, the ruling ideology is successfully reproduced through ISAs, and the university talk described in the “Historical Notes” section is a clear example of this.



## The Trouble with Pieixoto

The revelation that the entire novel is in fact a transcript of Offred's recorded tapes arranged by the partial "guess-work" (Atwood 462) of Professor Pieixoto and Professor Wade creates an uncertainty of the authenticity of the transcription of Offred's experiences. Although Professor Pieixoto and Professor Wade have done their best with the difficult material they were presented with, there is no way to confirm the order of the transcript. The entirety of Offred's tale therefore becomes somewhat unreliable, in the sense that one can never know for certain that it has been transcribed the same as it was originally recorded by Offred. As Dominick M. Grace argues:

The "Historical Notes" section ... undermines the historical authority of Offred's account by revealing that the text of the novel is not the direct record made by Offred of her experiences, but is itself a construct, a transcript of tape-recorded commentaries, edited and structured, and interpreted by its twenty-second-century editors, who have, in a way, repeated the very process that Offred herself uses, but with a very different agenda. In effect, our entire experience of Offred's account has been deceptive, for we have been reading it, but it is not a document at all, but a series of recorded audiotapes. The text we have read is a documentary study, a transcription edited by male scholars, not an unmediated account of Offred's experiences; it is a retrospectively organized interpretation of that account. All that we have assumed about the text we have been reading, including the authority of the order in which the events are narrated, is violated by the "Historical Notes," and the voice we thought we were listening to is subsumed, even fictionalized, by Pieixoto. (Grace 486-7)

Not only does the "Historical Notes" make the reader question everything they have read up until this point, but the university talk, with sexist and patriarchal undertones, by Professor Pieixoto leaves the reader with a feeling of dissatisfaction and discomfort when faced with Pieixoto's perpetual attitudes. These attitudes are what Offred's narration suggested as the basis of the creation of Gilead in the first place.

Scholars have consistently commented on the sexist comments by Pieixoto and have suggested that the conditions that first led to the founding of Gilead still exist in the 2195 we are presented with in the "Historical Notes". For instance, Ken Norris argues that:

The desire for future scholars to dress up in period costumes and 'play' at the roles of Gileadean society, the sexism of Professor Pieixoto, and his failure to learn anything

of the human equation in Offred's story, all suggest that the informing principles of Gilead have not entirely disappeared. (Norris qtd in Grace 481)

His stance on the matter is not the only one, and many have argued that Pieixoto prefers to see history in terms of "observable facts, in simple and unequivocal truths and ordered cause and effect relationships" (Grace 488). He is simply uninterested in the human-factor of the story, and instead he wishes Offred would have provided some concrete facts instead of her lived-experience. Since Offred provides no reliable facts about her Commander or her life in Gilead, Pieixoto utters his desire for text rather than oral accounts:

She could have told us much about the workings of the Gileadean empire, had she had the instincts of a reporter or a spy. What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford's private computer! However, we must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has deigned to vouchsafe us. (Atwood 476)

Pieixoto views Offred's oral account simply as 'crumbs' in the history of the world, and anything on paper, such as texts as privileged.

Furthermore, Grace argues that Pieixoto's *The Canterbury Tales* analogy underscores this point of preferring text over oral accounts. For instance, Grace argues that the fact that Pieixoto and Wade have named the transcript 'The Handmaid's Tale' "in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer" (Atwood 460) essentially undermines their argument that their transcript has been arranged in the correct order by linking it to a work of fiction rather than a historical account. Additionally, Grace argues that similarly to how the order of Offred's tapes have been determined by Pieixoto and Wade, the order of *Canterbury Tales* have also been the subject of editorial speculation. Kimberly Fairbrother Canton argues that once Pieixoto can place Offred's memory-influenced narrative within Chaucer's canon, he can begin to "invalidate the importance of her story through lame sexist jokes, but, at the same time, use her story to glean lurid details about the Gilead regime and its leaders" (128), which is the information Pieixoto finds interesting in Offred's story. Thus, Canton argues, "The efficacy of Offred's [memory narrative] is ... always limited by Pieixoto's intrusions into her text" (128), and therefore "her story as it is related in history – as we have it in the novel – will always be a mediated memory, a reconstruction from fragment (so it no longer seems to be a fragment), and first-time readers will always be duped by it" (128). In other words, Pieixoto and Wade's way of arranging Offred's tapes has an extraordinary impact on the readers impression of the tale, and the following "Historical Notes" section will also alter this impression. As readers,

we can never truly know Offred's true memories, as she narrated and arranged them, because we cannot know whether or not Pieixoto and Wade have arranged them correctly.

Pieixoto only wishes to discover facts about Gilead, and Grace argues that "His desire for twenty pages of printout from Waterford's computer is unsettlingly reminiscent of the Commanders blithe assertion of power of statistics over human experience" (489). Despite having an extraordinary record of human experience, Pieixoto wants names and dates. Since Offred never reveals her real name, Pieixoto argues that we do not know much about her – despite the very personal narration of her life as a woman both before and during the Gileadean regime. Pieixoto wants *history*, but Offred gives him (*her*)story, making it difficult for him to accept the story's validity as historically significant. Ignoring Offred's lived experiences, Pieixoto "is more concerned with the mechanics involved in transcribing, and validating the authenticity of, the tapes ... than he is with their contents" (Grace 489). Furthermore, Grace notes that Pieixoto ignores that out of all the names listed at the end of the first chapter, the name June is the only name unaccounted for in Offred's completed recording. Whether or not June is Offred's real name is most likely not important, since, as Pieixoto points out, the names used are most likely pseudonyms to protect the identities of her allies and enemies. However, by simply ignoring the possibility of this, Pieixoto makes it abundantly clear that Offred is invisible to him. Additionally, while giving a very brief account into their search for Offred's real name and identity, Pieixoto goes into a detailed account of the research done to decipher the identity of The Commander. The few details he does provide on their research of Offred is negatively centered around his desire for concrete facts about the society and structure of Gilead. He argues that Offred could have included some details surrounding her situation, such as real names and dates instead of the detailed accounts of her life in both pre-Gilead and Gilead. Unlike his account of Offred, when discussing their research into the identity of the Commander, Pieixoto goes into great detail about the potential candidates, Waterford and Judd, giving the audience and the reader a clear insight into his favoring of the Commander over Offred.

Interestingly, it seems as though both Pieixoto and his fellow scholars have more understanding and acceptance of the Commander and Gilead's way of thinking. Stillman and Johnson argue that Pieixoto and the other scholars "use the norm of scholarly distance to avoid judgement" (82). As Pieixoto decides to take an "editorial aside", he argues that "we must be cautious about passing moral judgement upon the Gileadeans" (Atwood 463). This he justifies with the fact that "Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free",

and he then concludes that “Our job is not to censure but to understand”, to which he receives applause by his fellow scholars (Atwood 463). This suggests that he approves of the repressive treatment of women in Gilead. As they joke and “understand”, Stillman and Johnson argue, “they thoughtlessly participate in the “banality of evil”: they accept great evil as an everyday event of ordinary humanity” (82). However, they only reserve from judging when it is regarding Gilead. When it comes to Offred, on the other hand, Stillman and Johnson argue that “they do judge” and “they demean Offred’s education” (82). Yet, none of the scholars present at the talk question Pieixoto’s account of Commander Waterford and Commander Judd as men “of considerable ingenuity” (Atwood 474). Additionally, Stillman and Johnson argue that “through Pieixoto’s words, the chair’s acquiescence in them, and the audience’s laughter and applause” (82) they all become complicit in the sexist ideas and values formerly present in Gilead, as well as showing a lack of feelings towards Gilead’s victims and showing no desire to avoid another Gilead. In addition to this, Carol A. Senf argues that Pieixoto “further reveals his insensitivity to the women in his apparently academic audience ... by his overt sexist comments” (449). For instance, Pieixoto’s plays on the multiple meanings of the word “chair” in order to make a sexual joke about Professor Maryann Crescent Moon, who functions as the Chair at the academic convention: “I am sure we all enjoyed our charming Arctic Char last night at dinner, and now we are enjoying an equally charming Arctic Chair. I use the word ‘enjoy’ in two distinct senses, precluding, of course, the obsolete third. (*Laughter.*)” (Atwood 459). For Pieixoto and the audience, Grace argues, it is accepted to joke about Professor Crescent Moon’s sex appeal, and it shows us Pieixoto’s “reductive and simplistic view” (486). Despite this being an academic conference in the year 2195, Senf argues that through these sexist jokes and comments it is evident that there is still a “distinct inequality” (449) between men and women.

### **The Presence of Ideology in the “Historical Notes”**

Despite the shortness of the “Historical Notes”, at least compared to rest of the novel, Atwood has still managed to include an abundance of material for literary discussion. This second part of the chapter will steer back to the previous conversation on ideology and examine how the “Historical Notes” section is strongly ideological. Though some arguments may seem obvious from the first part of this chapter through the sexist attitudes of Professor Pieixoto and his scholarly audience, there are still some aspects yet to be discussed.

The “Historical Notes” re-narrates and manipulates our understanding and memory of Offred’s tale. Suddenly, we are forced to reconsider our perception of Offred’s tale and consider the new information provided to us in the “Historical Notes”. Similarly to how Janine begins to question her account of and role in the group raping of her, the reader is also beginning to question their account of Offred’s tale. Suddenly, it becomes unclear whether everything we have read is true, or at least chronologically ordered as Offred intended when recording the tapes. Pieixoto’s university talk creates an uncertainty and makes the whole novel seem unreliable. Since Pieixoto’s view of women in society is rather sexist and patriarchal, it becomes difficult to be certain that his transcription of Offred’s lived experience is true to the original story. By structuring the novel as she has, where the “Historical Notes” function as an epilogue to Offred’s narrative, Atwood sets the reader up to view Pieixoto and the rest of 2195-society as patriarchal and bearing strong resemblance to Gilead. However, had Atwood structured the novel with “Historical Notes” at the beginning, the entire experience would be fundamentally different. If so, the reader would perhaps not have noticed the sexist, patriarchal attitudes of Pieixoto and his audience, and the entire reading of Offred’s tale would be influenced by the “Historical Notes”.

Furthermore, as the convention in the “Historical Notes” takes place at the University of Denay, Nunavit, there is reason to suggest that the university functions as an Ideological State Apparatus in the ongoing process of reproducing the ruling ideology of society in the year 2195. The University functions as an educational ISA and attempts (with varying levels of success) to interpellate not only the audience members, but also the reader to become a subject of the ruling ideology. This ideology, although similar, is different than the ideology in Gilead which the reader has just experienced. The ideology being communicated by Pieixoto is similar to the one in Gilead - patriarchal and sexist, favoring men and concrete facts over women and lived experiences. On the one hand, it may seem that nothing has truly changed from Gilead to 2195. On the other hand, however, women in 2195 are more equal to men and have regained their rights to read and write, to work, and to speak freely. For instance, the convention’s Chair is a woman, and there are female Professors scheduled to speak as well. However, the sexist jokes and comments by Pieixoto followed by the applause and laughter of the audience make it evident that many of the same attitudes towards women in Gilead remain despite the republic’s collapse. The educational ISA, in this case the university, is attempting to interpellate the reader into a subject of the ruling ideology. It is unclear whether Pieixoto is consciously attempting to interpellate us, or if it is an effect of his own interpellation as a subject. If he is unconsciously working to interpellating the reader, it

shows how ideology has affectively interpellated him as a subject to ensure the continued reproduction of the conditions of production, proving that the ideology is working as intended. However, since the reader has already been interpellated as a subject of the ruling ideology of the time before Gilead, the interpellation attempted by the university is unsuccessful. Due to being interpellated by Offred's narrative, the reader can make personal assumptions about Pieixoto's talk through the ideological lens adopted through *The Handmaid's Tale*. The reader is therefore able to notice, and react accordingly, to the sexist comments by Pieixoto and recognize them as inappropriate and Gilead-like. Likewise, ideology is also the reason why the audience members agree with Pieixoto's statements, laughing and applauding with him. They are already interpellated as subjects of the current ideology, as is Pieixoto. They have been hailed to adopt the values and ideals of the ideology, which are, apparently, still very much patriarchal and reminiscent of the ideology in Gilead. Even the 'victim' of the sexist jokes and comments, Professor Crescent Moon, has been interpellated by the ideology to accept these jokes. Not only does she accept the sexist remarks on her appearance, but she has also been interpellated to accept the seniority of men, which becomes apparent in her introduction of Pieixoto's talk where her admiration of him is evident.

## Chapter Summary

The "Historical Notes" following Offred's narrative complicates the readers understanding of the story. The section provides the narrative with a new frame, where it becomes unclear what is in fact authentically Offred and what is Pieixoto and Judd's account of her story. When it becomes evident that 'The Handmaid's Tale' is not the authentic narrative of Offred, but rather the academically ordered transcript of her tapes by two relatively sexist and patriarchal male scholars, the voice we believed "we were listening to is subsumed, even fictionalized, by Pieixoto" (Grace 486-7). Through his talk it becomes evident that Pieixoto prefers facts over fiction, and several times he reveals his annoyance at the lack of concrete evidence and facts of Gilead in Offred's tale. He is uninterested in her lived experience and wishes instead to unearth specific details about the fallen republic.

Oddly, it seems that Pieixoto is more concerned with discrediting Offred's tale, rather than exploring its importance to the knowledge of a Handmaid's lived experiences in Gilead. He gives little-to-no positive regard of Offred or her tale. In fact, the little regard he does give Offred is negatively centered around her lack of concrete facts and details about the Gileadean

system and structure included in her tale. While he briefly explains their search for Offred's identity, including very few details, he goes into a more detailed account of their exploration of The Commander's identity to fulfill his desire for some tangible evidence of the tales authenticity. Additionally, Pieixoto argues the importance of reserving judgement on Gilead and its leaders. As he argues, "our job is not to censure but to understand" (Atwood 463). By hiding behind scholarly distance, Pieixoto suggests that he approves of the repressive treatment of women in Gilead. Despite encouraging to withhold judgement on Gilead, Pieixoto and his audience have no issues with voicing their judgement of Offred and her narrative. They judge Offred's education, as well as the education of the other women living at the time. By transcribing Offred's narrative through his patriarchal lens, Pieixoto essentially censures Offred and her narrative's importance and meaning. Furthermore, through laughter and applause the audience become complicit in Pieixoto's sexist and patriarchal views. This shows how the ideas, beliefs and values that once governed Gilead's regime are still intact centuries later. Though it seems that women are more equal in 2195, as they can become Professors and Chairs at academic conventions such as the one in the "Historical Notes", there is still a distinct inequality between men and women present.

The "Historical Notes" section following Offred's tale re-narrates and manipulates the readers understanding of the novel. The revelation that 'The Handmaid's Tale' is not Offred's authentic narrative, but rather a transcription pieced together by two rather patriarchal Professors makes it unclear if the novel is the true narrative of Offred's lived experience as a Handmaid in Gilead. Suddenly, everything the reader has learned becomes uncertain and muddled by the knowledge of Pieixoto and Wade's transcription. Furthermore, Atwood's structuring of the novel further influences our reading and understanding of it. Had she decided to use the "Historical Notes" as an epigraph rather than an epilogue, our understanding and reading of *The Handmaid's Tale* would be fundamentally different. However, by structuring the "Historical Notes" as an epilogue rather than an epigraph, Atwood ensures that Pieixoto is unable to interpellate the reader as a subject of the ideology present in 2195. Since his talk is taking place at a university, Pieixoto is enabling an Ideological State Apparatus in an attempt to hail the reader, making them part of the ideology. It is unclear whether Pieixoto is doing so consciously, or if it is an effect of his own interpellation as a subject. If so, it proves that the ideology is working as intended. Nonetheless, as the reader has already been interpellated by Offred's narrative as a subject of the ideology of the time before Gilead, the interpellation attempted by the educational ISA is unsuccessful. Due to being interpellated by Offred's narrative, the reader recognizes

Pieixoto's sexist, Gilead-like attitudes, and can make assumptions on his talk through the ideological lens adopted through *The Handmaid's Tale*. Likewise, since the audience is already interpellated by the ideology, they agree with Pieixoto's statements, laughing and applauding him. They have been hailed to adopt the values and ideals of the ideology, which are, apparently, still very much patriarchal, and reminiscent of the ideology in Gilead. Even the 'victim' of the sexist jokes and comments has been interpellated by the ideology to accept these jokes. Not only does she accept the sexist remarks on her appearance, but she has also been interpellated to accept the seniority of men, which becomes apparent in her introduction of Pieixoto's talk where her admiration of him is evident.



## CONCLUSION

The present thesis has examined how ideology is present in *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. It examines how ideology presents in Gilead and how the authorities are working to implement the new ideology to ensure its domination. Since Gilead is undergoing an ideological shift, the leaders of Gilead have not, yet, been successful at completely reproducing the conditions of production through Ideological State Apparatuses, and they are therefore heavily dependent on the use of Repressive State Apparatuses using violence to ensure domination.

As the present thesis has highlighted, ideology is very much present in newly founded Republic of Gilead. By implementing The Rachel and Leah Center as an educational ISA focusing on the (re)education of women to become Handmaids, Gilead aims at educating women into willingly becoming surrogates for the dominant class. However, as the thesis has argued, since Gilead is amid a transitional period, switching from one ideology to another, they must temporarily depend on Repressive State Apparatuses such as The Eyes to ensure their domination through repression and violence. Through an exploration of key scenes in *The Handmaid's Tale*, this thesis has discussed how each subject in the household is interpellated by religion to some degree. The Ceremony is the clearest instance of this, where it is evident that everyone has been hailed to specific positions, roles, and tasks before, during, and after the Ceremony. Every member of the household has been interpellated by ideology, either fully or partially. Furthermore, this thesis has argued that the reader is also being interpellated by ideology through the narrative structure of Offred's story. By interpellating the reader as a pre-Gilead person, Atwood ensures empathy for Offred and her, at times, amoral actions.

As this thesis discusses, the Ceremony also showcases the surprising power dynamics in Gilead. At first glance, the wives seem in a relatively powerful position compared to the other women of Gilead, such as the Handmaids and Marthas. However, upon further examination it becomes evident that the wives are just as confined as the other women, and they are more often in the company and presence of Marthas, Handmaids, Wives and Econowives, while the men are somewhere separate. The same laws apply as much to the wives as the other female groups, and even though they have more power than other women, they are ultimately placed in the same group – Women. Additionally, during the Ceremony the wife traditionally holds some power over her husband as well, as he must wait for her blessing to enter the room where the Ceremony takes place. However, as the Commander

decides to ignore this tradition during this specific Ceremony it shows that ultimately the man holds all the power, despite the rules of conduct. The wife ultimately has no real power, only a false sense of it, it is merely an illusion.

As this thesis has argued, both Offred and the ideology in Gilead heavily depends on memories. To fully integrate the new ideology and to continuously reproduce it through ISAs, the leaders of Gilead must erase, manipulate, and re-narrate its subject's memory of a past ideology. However, many are still interpellated as subjects of the former ideology, and Gilead must therefore rely on the Repressive State Apparatuses, such as The Eyes, to ensure the reproduction of ideology. Offred, on the other hand, utilizes her memories a weapon against The Republic of Gilead. Through the constant reminiscence of her former life, both intentionally and unintentionally, Offred records her story and experiences on a tape recorder which she hides for a future audience to discover. This recorded tale functions as Offred's archive of the former ideology and her past life as a woman with agency and fundamental human rights. Her archive functions as a counter-archive to the officially sanctioned narrative implemented and controlled by the leaders of Gilead. By creating a counter-archive, where Offred recalls a life before the totalitarian regime to her future audience, she creates the possibility for future resistance by her imagined audience. Since she gives an account of a time prior to Gilead, Offred provides her audience with control of the past. This is significant, because "with control of the past comes domination of the future" (Finigan 435), and it is this she provides her audience with.

In this thesis, I have argued that Offred uses her memories to ensure that she does not lose her identity in a society working to abolish individuals and create subjects. Her recollections of her past life functions to preserve her old identity as multifaceted woman with agency, an identity which was supposed to be stripped from her along with her name. Though, as the thesis outlines, many argue that this use of memories is not an act of resistance by Offred, and that she is a passive observer refusing to aid the underground resistance Mayday. This thesis also recognizes this passiveness in Offred's tale; however, it argues that her active resistance does not fully begin until after she has gotten out of Gilead and is recording her archive while underground. It therefore argues that Offred's acts of remembrance inside Gilead are passive ways of resisting, while her act of recording and creating an archive for future generations is her active form of resistance. Her most prominent, active, and potentially revolutionary resistance therefore begins after she has "given [herself] over into the hands of strangers" (Atwood 453). *The Handmaid's Tale* shows that both passive and active acts of rebellion and resistance both have value.

As this thesis has argued, the “Historical Notes” section following Offred’s narrative provides us with valuable information on the authenticity of Offred’s story. The revelation that her story is in fact a transcript pieced together by two sexist, male Professors makes it so that the reader can never be fully certain that they have experienced Offred’s story in its true form. The thesis has argued that Professor Pieixoto’s talk is highly sexist and patriarchal, showcasing that the ideas and values of Gilead are still present centuries after the republic’s collapse. Pieixoto judges and censures Offred and the importance of her lived experience due to his personal desire for concrete facts about Gilead’s structure. Additionally, the thesis has argued that Pieixoto attempts to interpellate the reader as a subject of the ideology in 2195, and that his audience is already fully interpellated by the ideology. However, as the reader has been interpellated by Offred’s narrative, the thesis has argued that Pieixoto’s attempt is unsuccessful.

Despite nearing the 40-year anniversary of its release, *The Handmaid’s Tale* still remains as relevant as it was in 1985. The universally relatable themes of the novel in combination with the real-life event that inspired The Republic of Gilead ensures that many readers can relate to the novel’s protagonist, Offred. Still, one can see many of the same trends in Gilead happening around the world. For instance, the 2022 decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in the U.S, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling that established abortion as a fundamental right (Center for Reproductive Rights), bears resemblance to the abortion ban of Gilead where women lose the ability to make decision regarding their bodies. By overturning *Roe v. Wade*, The Supreme Court gave states total control of abortion laws, making it possible to restrict or prohibit abortion (Center of Reproductive Rights). Millions of women living in states where abortion has been prohibited are forced to travel to receive medical care, resulting in many simply being unable to access abortion due to financial and logistical reasons (Center for Reproductive Rights). In reference to the 2017 MGM/Hulu series, Atwood said:

“It was no longer a story about something that wouldn’t happen... It had become a story already in process. That is why the iconic red costume with the white hat has become an immediately recognizable protest symbol around the world. It’s a little too real.” (Atwood qtd in Carras)

Similarly, regarding the 2016 American election where Trump was elected President, Atwood notes that basic civil liberties and rights for women were seen as endangered causing an increase in fear and anxiety among Americans. Atwood therefore argues that “it is a certainty that someone, somewhere ... are writing down what is happening” (“Margaret Atwood on What...”), similarly to what Offred does in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. In regard to this, Atwood

wonders if these messages will also be suppressed and hidden, only to be discovered at a later time like Offred's message. "Let us hope it doesn't come to that. I trust it will not" ("Margaret Atwood on What..."), Atwood concludes. The continued overturning of women's rights across the world makes it evident that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a much-needed novel in our society. The novel gives voice to the victims of the removal of fundamental rights, such as the freedom to have an abortion. It also functions as a warning to both women and men: do not live in blissful ignorance, it aids no one. Be proactive, stand up for your rights and use the voice you have been given. Although Offred's tale is a fictional one, it still bears importance in the non-fictional world we live in, where many of us are as blissfully ignorant as Offred was in the time before Gilead.

## WORKS CITED

- Abrams, M.H, and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. “flashbacks” *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 11<sup>th</sup> ed., Cengage Learning, 2015, p. 296
- Althusser, Louis. “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Edited by Vincent B. Leitch et.al. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 2018, pp. 1285-1311
- Armbruster, Jane. “Memory and Politics — A Reflection on ‘The Handmaid’s Tale.’” *Social Justice*, vol. 17, no. 3 (41), 1990, pp. 146–52. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29766564>. Accessed 11 March 2023.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid’s Tale*. 1985. Penguin Random House: Vintage, 2016.
- . “Margaret Atwood on How She Came to Write *The Handmaid’s Tale*” *Literary Hub*. 25 April 2018. <https://lithub.com/margaret-atwood-on-how-she-came-to-write-the-handmaids-tale/>. Accessed 19 April 2023.
- . “Margaret Atwood on What ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ Means in the Age of Trump” *The New York Times*, The New York Times Company, 17 March 2017. <https://nyti.ms/2mtjSC>. Accessed 18 April 2023.
- . A Message from Margaret Atwood. *The Handmaid’s Tale*, by Atwood, Penguin Random House, 2016
- Bennett, Andrew & Nicholas Royle. “Ideology” *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Routledge, 2016, pp. 231-238.
- Berntsen, Dorthe. “Involuntary Autobiographical Memories: Speculations, Findings, and an Attempt to Integrate Them.” *Involuntary Memory*, ed. John H. Mace, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007, pp. 20-49.
- . “The Unbidden Past: Involuntary Autobiographical Memories as a Basic Mode of Remembering.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2010, pp. 138–42. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41038557>. Accessed 10 October 2022.
- Brady, Patrick. “MEMORY AND FORM: THE TEXTUAL STATUS AND FUNCTION OF LITERARY RECOLLECTION.” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3/4, 1982, pp. 199–214. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23536455>. Accessed 05 October 2022.
- Canton, Kimberly F. “‘I’m sorry my story is in fragments’: Offred’s Operatic Counter-

- Memory.” *English Studies in Canada*, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2007, pp. 125-144, *Project Muse*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.0.0072>. Accessed 10 March 2023.05.11
- Carras, Christi. “Margaret Atwood Talks Trump Election, ‘Handmaid’s Tale’ in Power of Women Speech.” *Variety*, Variety Media, <https://variety.com/video/margaret-atwood-trump-election-handmaids-tale/>. Accessed 26 April 2023.
- Eagleton, Terry. “Ideology, Fiction, Narrative.” *Social Text*, no. 2, 1979, pp. 62–80. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466398>. Accessed 17 November 2021.
- . *Ideology: An Introduction*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Verso, 2007.
- Finigan, Theo. “‘Into the Memory Hole’: Totalitarianism and *Mal d’Archive* in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*.” *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2011, pp. 435–59. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.38.3.0435>. Accessed 14 October 2022.
- Foust Vinson, Sarah Katherine. “CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION” *Storied Memories: Memory as Resistance in Contemporary Women’s Literature*. 2010, pp. 1-28, Loyola University Chicago, PhD Dissertation. [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/176](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/176)
- . “CHAPTER TWO: NARRATIVE POSSIBILITIES AND FRAMED MEMORIES IN MASO’S *THE ART LOVER* AND ATWOOD’S *THE HANDMAID’S TALE*” *Storied Memories: Memory as Resistance in Contemporary Women’s Literature*. 2010, pp. 29-94, Loyola University Chicago, PhD Dissertation. [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/176](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/176)
- Fuchs, Christian. “Ideology.” *Communication and Capitalism: A Critical Theory*, vol. 15, University of Westminster Press, 2020, pp. 217–34. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12fw7t5.13>. Accessed 17 November 2021.
- Grace, Dominick M. “‘The Handmaid’s Tale’: ‘Historical Notes’ and Documentary Subversion.” *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1998, pp. 481–94. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4240726>. Accessed 11 March 2023.
- Greene, Gayle. “Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory.” *Signs*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1991, pp. 290–321. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174512>. Accessed 05 October 2022.
- Howard, Scott Alexander. “Nostalgia.” *Analysis*, vol. 72, no. 4, 2012, pp. 641–50. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23359115>. Accessed 05 October 2022.
- Howell, Amanda. “Breaking silence, bearing witness, and voicing defiance: the resistant female voice in the transmedia storyworld of *The Handmaid’s Tale*.” *Continuum*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 216-229, *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2019.1569392>. Accessed 05 October 2022.

- Hurtgen, Joseph. "Archival Embodiment in *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Margaret Atwood Studies Journal*. Vol 9, 2015, pp. 12-21. Margaret Atwood Society, <https://english.sxu.edu/sites/atwood/journal/index.php/masj/article/view/20>. Accessed 05 October 2022.
- Kavanagh, James H. "Ideology" *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., The University of Chicago Press, 1995, pp. 306-320.
- Knight, Kathleen. "Transformations of the Concept of Ideology in the Twentieth Century." *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 100, no. 4, 2006, pp. 619–26. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27644391>. Accessed 22 March 2023.
- Lafren, Angela. "'There's a Shock in This Seeing': The Problem of the Image in 'The Handmaid's Tale' and 'Oryx and Crake.'" *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2009, pp. 99–120. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41158414>. Accessed 10 October 2022.
- Leitch, Vincent B., et al. "Louis Althusser." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 3rd ed., W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 2018, pp. 1282–1285.
- Luzecky, Rob. "Oppression, Speech, and *Mitsein* in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Clio: A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 2017, pp. 437-452. ResearchGate, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354236347\\_Oppression\\_Speech\\_and\\_Mitsein\\_in\\_Margaret\\_Atwood's\\_The\\_Handmaid's\\_Tale](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354236347_Oppression_Speech_and_Mitsein_in_Margaret_Atwood's_The_Handmaid's_Tale). Accessed 05 October 2022.
- McAdams, Dan P. *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. The Guilford Press, 1993.
- McDermott, Sinead. "Memory, Nostalgia, and Gender in *A Thousand Acres*." *Signs*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2002, pp. 389–407. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1086/340916>. Accessed 14 October 2022.
- Penguin Random House. "Margaret Atwood on the real-life events that inspired *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*." *Penguin Random House*, 08 September 2019, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2019/09/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-testaments-real-life-inspiration>. Accessed 18 April 2023.
- Salmoose, Niklas. "Reading Nostalgia: Textual Memory in *The Great Gatsby*." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2014, pp. 67–87. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.5325/fscotfitzrevi.12.1.0067>. Accessed 14 October 2022.
- Schacter, Daniel L. *Searching For Memory: The Brain, The Mind, And The Past*. E-book,

Basic Books, 1996.

- Senf, Carol A. "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall: Narrative Silences and Questions of Gender." *College English*, vol. 52, no. 4, 1990, pp. 446–56. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/377662>. Accessed 11 March 2023.
- Staels, Hilde. "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Resistance Through Narrating" *English Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 5, 1995, pp. 455-467. *Taylor & Francis Online*, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uis.no/10.1080/00138389508598988>. Accessed 18 March 2022
- Stillman, Peter G., and S. Anne Johnson. "Identity, Complicity, and Resistance in *The Handmaid's Tale*." *Utopian Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1994, pp. 70–86. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20719314>. Accessed 05 October 2022.
- Utdanningsdirektoratet. *The Purpose of the Education*. Utdanningsdirektoratet, <https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/formalet-med-opplaringen/?lang=eng>. Accessed 11 March 2023.
- "After Roe Fell: Abortion Laws by State" Center for Reproductive Rights, <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>, Accessed 25 April 2023
- "ideology, *n*." Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford UP, 2023, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.uis.no/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/91016>, Accessed 24 March 2023.
- "Margaret Atwood." *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/margaret-atwood>. Accessed 19 April 2023
997625682. Digital Image. iStock by Getty Images. Web. Accessed 04 May 2023.