



The Legacy of Trauma and Intimacy: Intergenerational Impact in the Novels by Margaret Atwood's "*The Handmaids Tale*" and "*The Testaments*"

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the connections between intimacy, memory, and trauma witnessing in the setting of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood. Atwood's novel "*The Handmaid's Tale*" is examined in Chapter One, which charts Gilead's misuse of memory on both an individual and a social level. In order to preserve her memories and, thus, her sense of self, I contend that Offred resorts to both recent and recollected personal experiences.

The Testaments explores the intricate relationship between intimacy and trauma, showing how Gilead's repressive system sustains both across many generations. Gilead's rigid social structure and the suppression of individual desires severely limit the potential for genuine intimacy. The Handmaids, stripped of their autonomy and reduced to reproductive vessels, are denied the opportunity to form deep, meaningful connections. This deprivation of intimacy has far-reaching consequences for both the individuals involved and future generations. The trauma of Gilead can lead to a fear of intimacy, as individuals may associate closeness with pain and vulnerability. This fear can manifest in various ways, such as avoidance, emotional detachment, or compulsive behaviors. Despite the challenges posed by Gilead's oppressive regime, the characters in *The Testaments* demonstrate the enduring power of human connection. Through acts of kindness, empathy, and solidarity, they find solace and strength. Women in Gilead form clandestine networks of support, providing each other with emotional and practical assistance. These connections help to mitigate the effects of trauma and foster a sense of belonging. Older women, like Aunt Lydia, can serve as mentors and guides for younger generations, sharing their wisdom and experience. These relationships can provide a sense of continuity and hope for the future. Sharing stories is a powerful way to process trauma and connect with others. By recounting their experiences, characters in *The Testaments* can find meaning and purpose, and inspire others to resist oppression. By exploring the complex relationship between trauma and intimacy, *The Testaments* offers a poignant commentary on the enduring impact of historical and social injustice.

Keywords: Voice, womb, Intimacy, Trauma, Fear, Loss of Identity

Introduction:

Gilead, a theocratic dystopia, is a place where silence is enforced and fear reigns supreme. The Handmaids, reduced to reproductive vessels, are stripped of their autonomy and subjected to physical and psychological abuse. This systemic oppression has far-reaching consequences for both the individuals involved and future generations. The rigid social structure of Gilead stifles genuine human connection. The Handmaids, forced into a life of servitude and sexual exploitation, are denied the opportunity to form deep, meaningful relationships. This deprivation of intimacy has a profound impact on their mental and emotional well-being.

A World of Silence and Fear

Women in Gilead form clandestine networks of support, offering each other solace and protection. These bonds of solidarity provide a sense of belonging and hope in a world of isolation and despair. Older women, like Aunt

Lydia, can serve as mentors and guides for younger generations, sharing their wisdom and experience. These intergenerational relationships offer a lifeline, helping to break the cycle of trauma.

Sharing stories is a powerful way to process trauma and challenge the dominant narrative. By recounting their experiences, characters in *The Testaments* can reclaim their voices and inspire others to resist oppression.

Through its exploration of the complex relationship between trauma and intimacy, *The Testaments* offers a poignant commentary on the enduring impact of historical and social injustice. By examining the ways in which trauma is transmitted across generations, Atwood highlights the importance of breaking the cycle of violence and creating a more just and equitable future.

The woman awakens to a dismal and unjust morning. She loses her identity. Her individual liberties are undermined. She loses her job. She loses her financial accounts. She is no longer able to read, write, speak, or even think since she has been silenced, exploited, and disempowered. No actual authority, no independence, no role in intellectual and political decision-making... She is confined to patriarchal authoritarianism, denied any privacy, and treated with contempt. lose control of her bodily form. Authorities own it and have control over it.

All she can do is ovulate and inseminate. From now on, she is a two-legged uterus. Body torture, mental control, identity fragmentation, and involuntary sexual servitude for all time...A woman must decide between punishment and discipline. Is this bizarre circumstance a foreboding prophecy or are there just patterns of reality.

Fragmentation of Identity:

When the handmaids are given an alias, they come to understand that they are a "national resource" (Atwood, 1985, p. 56). Individual identities are becoming less solid and are being blown, flipped, and tossed around by all the whims of patriarchal theory. Therefore, in order to get over their identity issue at the Red Center at night, the handmaids discreetly mouth their true names. In a world of rigid restriction and persecution, keeping their true names in mind makes it easier for them to stick to their ab initio identities. The emancipation of women and the end of patriarchy for them are advanced by this split second, even if it is just slight. As stated below, Offred highlights the importance of identity strengthening the essence: "I have a different name, which is not Offred. "My name is not 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 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, 1985, p.69).

Intimacy, a Complex and Forbidden Fruit

In Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, intimacy is a complex and often disturbing concept. Gilead, the totalitarian regime, has stripped women of their autonomy, reducing them to mere reproductive vessels. This stark reality severely limits the possibility of genuine human connection and intimacy.

The most striking example of a perverted form of intimacy is the "Ceremony," a ritualized act of procreation that is far from intimate. It is a clinical, emotionless process designed to serve the state's reproductive goals. The Handmaid, reduced to a mere object, is forced to submit to this dehumanizing experience.

"The Hunger for Human Relationships in *The Handmaid's Tale*" by Nkiru Okocha describes Humans are psychologically predisposed to specific wants, emotions, and ways of thinking. But when they are in danger, they start acting lethally to protect themselves. As an example, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* skilfully illustrates how the need for human connection motivates risky reactions. Several characters illustrate this concept by breaking recently enacted rules in the theocratic and dictatorial Republic of Gilead. In particular, Offred, a handmaid whose role is to have children, battles her desire to share a passionate moment with others. In order to procreate, her Commander also had intercourse with handmaids, but the absence of closeness leads him to do sacrificial acts. Additionally, Nick, a Guardian who works for the Commander as a servant and bodyguard, longs for sex with Offred. These people make all deadly decisions, yet their desire for human connection serves as their main driving force. Thus, according to *The Handmaid's Tale*, people's need for human connection increases when they are in constrictive situations, and as a result, their choices have dangerous and uncertain consequences.

Fear of Intimacy:

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a chilling exploration of a dystopian future where women are stripped of their autonomy and reduced to reproductive vessels. In this bleak world, the concept of intimacy is profoundly distorted and exploited.

The most glaring example of this perversion is the ritualized act of procreation known as "The Ceremony." Far from being an intimate act between two consenting individuals, it is a clinical, dehumanizing process designed to serve the state's reproductive goals. The Handmaid, reduced to a mere object, is forced to submit to this violent and impersonal encounter.

In Atwood's dystopian Gilead, intimacy is not only restricted but also perverted. The "Ceremony," a ritualized act of procreation, is a prime example of this perversion. It strips women of their agency, reducing them to mere reproductive vessels. The lack of emotional connection and the mechanical nature of this act highlight the fear and loathing associated with forced intimacy.

The constant surveillance and the threat of punishment create a pervasive sense of fear and mistrust. Characters are hesitant to form deep connections, fearing betrayal and the potential consequences. This fear of intimacy can lead to emotional detachment, isolation, and a sense of despair.

Trauma, both personal and societal, plays a significant role in shaping the characters' fear of intimacy. The Handmaids, in particular, have experienced severe physical and emotional abuse, which can lead to long-lasting psychological scars. This trauma makes it difficult for them to trust others and form healthy relationships. Intimacy requires vulnerability, and many characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* are reluctant to expose their true selves to others. The fear of rejection, judgment, and potential harm can prevent them from forming deep connections. This fear is exacerbated by the oppressive regime, which discourages individuality and independent thought.

Despite the challenges, the characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* still yearn for human connection. Offred, for example, often reminisces about her past life, longing for the intimacy and love she once knew. This longing highlights the fundamental human need for connection and the devastating impact of its denial.

The Perpetuation of Trauma:

Sex and gender, Violence and trauma Why Gilead is personal by Wind Goodfriend, co-editor of 'The Handmaid's Tale Psychology', she puts lights on the forms of abuse and describes The people of Gilead are aware that any mistake in judgment or conduct could result in death, rape, or bodily or sexual retribution. Persistent and pervasive dread permeates Gilead and violent relationships alike.

The basis of this dread in a close relationship is the display of weapons, the threat of physical or sexual violence, extortion, and any actions that coerce a partner into doing something against their choice. Threat and dread, which govern people across Gilead, are based on the same psychological dynamic. When Janine tells Esther, "They will continue to harm you, repeatedly, until you comply with their demands," she makes this threat very evident. That's what they do." Eleven The entire cultural system is built on fear and threats: the Eyes' pervasiveness, the Wall's imminence, and the awareness that your friends might turn against you if you divulge too much. The world is designed to put people "in their place."

In Gilead, women are not only prohibited from owning property; they are property itself. Like livestock, handmaids have ear tags that may be scanned. June is shocked to learn that the Mexican group has arrived to talk about the potential for Handmaids to be sold as exports or trade commodities. In a similar manner, their Commanders own and register Marthas. Even the highest-ranking women in their society, wives, are aware that their financial influence is tied to their husbands or dads. Mrs. Putnam, a widow with a small kid, is dubious about marrying the first Commander who pops the question, despite the fact that he was the one who ordered the killing of her former husband, after realizing that a young mother in Gilead will not be permitted to stay single in a big house without a spouse for very long. Her own mother also urges Serena to go back to Fred when she is being physically and emotionally abused by him, telling her, "You know there's no place in this world for you without Fred."

Isolation is a form of intimate relationship abuse that abusers use since it may be extremely difficult to withstand feelings of loneliness and isolation. The act of isolating victims contributes to the continuation of abuse because victims lack social resources, such as family and friends, to turn to when they are in need. The laws and culture of Gilead society have also engendered a sense of isolation, which leads to a lack of trust and loneliness among the oppressed women's classes. Isolation is a palpable threat and punishment, and it is used frequently. When June tells Serena that she is not pregnant, dashing Serena's hopes, Serena's immediate angry response is to confine June and threaten continued isolation. "*You will stay here, and you will not leave this room. Do you understand me? Things can get much worse for you.*" And this isolation works. Soon, we see the first time June really loses control of her emotions and seems to lose hope for the future, begging Serena to end the confinement.

Atwood's dystopian world is perhaps uniquely terrifying because of its use of the category of psychological abuse: *using children*. The most emotionally damaging specific tactic in this category for many parents, threatening to take children away. Unfortunately, this is the entire structure of Gilead's social and political existence.

June's affection for Hannah demonstrates her emotional sensitivity despite her strength. Serena takes advantage of the fact that she is expecting Nick's child by blackmailing her. Through a locked car window, Serena shows June Hannah and says, "As long as my baby is safe, so is yours." It serves as a blatant reminder to June that Serena can use Hannah against her, as well as a threat.

In the end, the government employs this strategy in a more formal way when it threatens to harm Hannah if June doesn't speak, so blackmailing her into disclosing the whereabouts of multiple fugitive Handmaids. They

are aware that this is the most effective negotiating strategy and that June is only interested in this one bargaining piece.

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