



UNIVERSIDAD DE JAÉN
Centro de Estudios de Postgrado

Master's Dissertation/
Trabajo Fin de Máster

Centro de Estudios de Postgrado

***THE HANDMAID'S TALE: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
THE NOVEL AND ITS TV
SERIES ADAPTATION***

Student: Sánchez Fernández, Isabel María

Tutor: Dr. Lourdes Estrada López

Dpt.: English Philology

June, 2022

ABSTRACT

Cinematographic adaptations from a book to a novel are not always to everyone's taste. We can find them with references to the original novel, following the same story, or even extending it, as in the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*. This film adaptation not only tells the novel as Margaret Atwood wrote it, but goes further by extending the story and focusing on current issues.

This paper aims to highlight the main differences between the original novel and the TV series. To do this, we will focus on the flashbacks as a comparative element and on what these past stories of each character contribute to the original story.

To achieve this, we will set different objectives which will have to be fulfilled through the study in order to reach a conclusion. After a theoretical framework, different female characters from the novel and the TV series will be compared, observing their main differences and the reasons for them, as this will answer our initial objectives. Once the objective has been achieved, a final conclusion will be drawn to conclude the research work.

Keywords: adaptation, Atwood, The Handmaid's Tale

RESUMEN

Las adaptaciones cinematográficas de un libro a una novela no siempre son del gusto de todos. Podemos encontrarlas con referencias a la novela original, siguiendo la misma historia, o incluso ampliándola, como ocurre en el caso de *El cuento de la criada*. Esta adaptación cinematográfica no sólo cuenta la novela tal y como la escribió Margaret Atwood, sino que va más allá ampliando la historia y centrándose en temas de actualidad.

Este trabajo pretende destacar las principales diferencias entre la novela original y la serie de televisión. Para ello, nos centraremos en los flashbacks como elemento comparativo y en lo que estas historias pasadas de cada personaje aportan a la historia original.

Para ello, plantearemos diferentes objetivos que deberán cumplirse a lo largo del estudio para llegar a una conclusión. Tras un marco teórico, se compararán diferentes personajes femeninos de la novela y de la serie de televisión, observando sus principales

diferencias y las razones de las mismas, ya que esto responderá a nuestros objetivos iniciales. Una vez alcanzado el objetivo, se elaborará una conclusión final para finalizar el trabajo de investigación.

Palabras clave: adaptación, Atwood, El cuento de la criada

Index

1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. THE AUTHOR: MARGARET ATWOOD.....	6
2.1 American women in Atwood's era	7
3. <i>THE HANDMAID'S TALE</i> : THE NOVEL (1985).....	9
4. <i>THE HANDMAID'S TALE</i> : THE TV SERIES (2017-PRESENT).....	11
5. THE CONCEPT OF DYSTOPIA IN <i>THE HANDMAID'S TALE</i>	14
5.1 Religion and Dystopia.....	16
5.2 Feminist dystopia	18
6. <i>THE HANDMAID'S TALE</i> : SCREEN ADAPTATION	20
6.1 Flashbacks	21
6.1.1 Characters.....	24
6.1.1.1 June Osborne (<i>Offred</i>)	25
6.1.1.2 Serena Joy (<i>Mrs Waterford</i>).....	27
6.1.1.3 Moira Strand	30
6.1.1.4 Emily Malek (<i>Ofglen</i>).....	32
7. CONCLUSIONS	35
8. WORKS CITED.....	37

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays there are countless dystopian novels in the history of literature. From the coining of the term "dystopia" by the politician John Stuart Mill in 1868 to the present day, different versions and ideas of this term have gradually been incorporated into our culture, whether through film, photography, or literature (Gregory Claeys, 107). A dystopia depicts a world or society far from being desired by anyone, in which fateful events occur because they have been imposed, and where its inhabitants suffer the consequences. Dystopia is understood as an idealized world that is far from pleasant for anyone. The scholar Claeys explains that it is an inverted negative version of utopia (14), meaning that, just as utopia represents an "ideal society", dystopia presents the opposite, even if there are people within it who advocate the opposite.

However, the idea of "feminist dystopia" emerged much later in literature. At the same time that feminine thought was modernizing, the perception of whether the non-egalitarian society in which we lived was fair for everyone was changing, and texts were born as a way of criticizing the fact that a feminist dystopia is implemented in different ways: whether it is women who have power over men, or in a society governed by men in which women are repressed and gradually try to take revenge and achieve equality and freedom, as in the case of Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Observing the success and repercussion of this novel, it was taken to the cinema as a television series in 2017, adapting the original book written by Atwood in one season of a TV series that covers the story in 10 chapters of approximately 50 minutes in length. In addition, seeing the success of the series, the production company Hulu has produced three more seasons that continue the story where the author left off, and which continue to be representative today.

In this paper, we are going to analyze why the film adaptation of the novel was made, how some elements have been emphasized in the television series, why they have been emphasized, and how this have been achieved. To do this, we will focus on the use of "Flashbacks", since in the series, compared to the original novel, they play a fundamental role as they are the key to understanding the past of many characters who are barely mentioned in the book, and we will see what is achieved with them, if they contribute something new to the story or if they simply make it easier for the viewer to understand the reason for certain events that in the book are explained in an open and

non-specific way. Taking as a point of reference the novel written in 1985 and the TV series adaptation in 2017 by Hulu, the main objectives of this work will be the following:

- To know the main differences between the novel and the TV series.
- To know what the flashbacks in the series contribute to each character and how this has repercussions in the novel.

To do this, we will begin with a theoretical overview of the author and her novel, as well as the film adaptation of the novel and the repercussions it has had today as a means of vindication. After this, we will explain the concept of dystopia within the novel and its adaptation to the cinema, observing the different fields within it, such as feminist dystopia and the role of religion within it, as it plays a fundamental role in both versions.

Knowing the author, her novel, the adaptation, and the concept of dystopia, we will proceed to the comparative analysis between the work and the TV series, focusing on the use of flashbacks in the latter, what is achieved with them and how they are introduced in the series since as we can see, they are almost always intended to make the story more understandable or simply to expand its content. Within the flashbacks, we will focus on four female characters, three of whom are rarely mentioned in the novel and are given a strong voice in the series, and one of whom is the protagonist. She is the narrator of the story in the first 1985 version and we will get to know much more about her thanks to the film adaptation.

Finally, we will finish the work with a section of conclusions in which we will analyze whether we have achieved the main objectives set out above and we will make a critique of the work and the conclusions that have been drawn from it beyond the research questions posed.

2. THE AUTHOR: MARGARET ATWOOD

Born in Ottawa in 1939, Margaret Atwood began her literary career composing poetry, and later began writing novels, of which she is considered a true master. Raised in a middle-class family, Atwood gained intellectual and practical skills from her mother, who was considered an independent thinker. She completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto, and in 1961 began working at Harvard University. She is

considered a human rights activist and feminist. Reingard M. Nischik explains why Atwood stands out from other novelists, and that is because "she was perceptive enough to recognize the important social issues of her time and was not afraid to be the first one to speak up" (21).

Her first novel, *The Edible Women*, appeared in late 1969. At the time, Atwood was known as a young poet, who went somewhat unnoticed in Canada, but this fact changed with the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale* in 1985, and she was hailed by the London Review of Books as "the most distinguished novelist under fifty currently writing in English".

Described as a "versatile and prolific writer" by Coral Ann Howells (10), Atwood has written eight novels, ten books of poetry, three short story collections and numerous books of criticism and essays, as well as two children's books. Other authors, such as Nischik, define her as "a spokeswoman for human rights" (1), making her one of the most important writers of our time.

Today, Atwood is seen as a representative of national post-colonialism through her literature. The influence of Britain can be seen in her works, and the author acknowledges that "for the members of a country or culture, shared knowledge will not survive" (Nischik, 171). This means that the nationalism that is represented in Atwood's texts comes as an influence of shared knowledge with other people from that culture. However, besides nationalism, another common theme in Atwood's works is the influence of Puritanism.

2.1 American women in Atwood's era

For a clear conception of what Atwood wanted to convey with her work, we need to understand the context in which it was written. It is not the same to create a novel in one year as in another, as drastic changes can happen and affect society in one way or another. That is why it is necessary to clarify and explain the historical context of the author, as well as the situation of women at that time, as it is the most recurrent theme in the work, in order to better understand what she wanted to transmit to her audience, and the similarities we can find between reality and fiction.

When Atwood wrote the novel we are going to study in this work, she was living in a Germany where the Soviet empire ruled, and was holding firm, as the Berlin Wall

had not yet fallen. The author tells how during her travels to the countries that formed the Iron Curtain, she had the feeling of "being objects of espionage" (Atwood, 11), which inspired her to write this work. In a similar way, being born at the beginning of the Second World War made her develop her critical thinking and see that anything could happen even in the most developed places on the planet. Framing an author in another context is not the same as framing him or her in a war, and especially the Second World War, in which people were persecuted because of their race, ethnicity or sexual orientation, an argument similar to the one we can find in Atwood's novel.

As Dyah Prajnandhari explains, "Offred, as the fictional character made by Atwood, could be the reminder, or in the words, the realisation of feminisms during 1970s" (22). Among other things, in 1973, the decision and power over abortion did not rest with women, but was controlled by the Supreme Court. Moreover, in that same year, the Equal Rights *Amendments* (ERA) were beginning to plummet, and, to make matters worse, with Ronald Reagan governing with a conservative party, "people no longer saw the future of ERA" (23). The future of women seemed blurred by the fear that Reagan would be elected and abortion criminalised, since, as Prajnandhari states, he did not seem to care about women, whom he used to campaign for election and appear to care about them, but did so simply to clean up his image (4). However, the fear came when he was elected president, starting with the fact that he did not include women in his office, and he imagined the "traditional" family, "which was divided into a working husband and a domestic wife" (25).

With the arrival of Jimmy Carter to the presidency in 1977, as Fred Fejes explains, it was a time of hope for homosexuals, as "it seemed they were now being accepted as part of mainstream American life" (1), leaving aside the term "disease" to refer to homosexuality. The new President promised new laws and rights that would protect gays and lesbians and the entire homosexual population was delighted with this president (1). However, eighteen months later, the American people realised that Carter was not keeping his word, and gay marriage and gay adoption were still banned in the country. The president was backing down to his people with the excuse that he "had enough problems without taking on another" (quoted by Fejes, 2), and this made the gay and lesbian population feel unprotected and disadvantaged.

As we have seen, Margaret Atwood lived through not only the Second World War, but also an America full of changes and false promises for women and the homosexual community, which only worsened their situation, and it is understandable then, that the fear of these groups intensified, seeing how little by little the people who governed them and who in theory would be in charge of protecting them, were giving them the cold shoulder. That Atwood would write this work was not to be expected, as it was a novel loaded with criticisms of the American society present at the time. It is a novel full of drastic changes and twists, but understanding its historical context, we can imagine the fear that was going through the author's mind and the reference she made in this book to the America in which she lived. This book is not a reflection of the America of the 70s and 80s, but a reference to them and what could happen if everything that their presidents said became true. This is a novel, no more and no less, made to raise awareness.

3. *THE HANDMAID'S TALE: THE NOVEL (1985)*

If we look at the different works that emerged at this time, we can observe, as Michelle points out, that "1984 was a banner year of authors of dystopian literature" (1). The people of these times were looking for a "perfect society", which George Orwell had created earlier in his well-known novel *1984* (1949). Angela Michelle indicates that Margaret Atwood "was writing a text that was arguably to take over where *1984* left off" (1), i.e. that the author sought to continue the thread of a dystopian novel, offering her readers a dystopian society in the year in which Orwell's novel takes place. The author explains that *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is "an example of dystopian fiction focusing on physical and spiritual oppression, media manipulation, and the control of human thought as necessary governing mechanisms of society" (1), which has often been compared to Orwell's *1984*.

As Rosario Fabrini explains, "the heat of this text lies not only in its popularity, but in the power of language to make the author's voice known in a genre of literature largely dominated by men: science fiction" (8). Atwood was making her way among men with her new novel *The Handmaid's Tale* in the genre of dystopia, for as the author explains, "the time-space scenario that is recreated is far from ideal and is described rather as catastrophic" (8). Atwood wanted to convince her readers that a coup d'état had occurred in the United States, which she feared would not happen because it would

create a society that "stands on the foundations of the 17th century roots of Puritanism, which have always lain beneath the modern America we thought we knew" (Atwood, 12).

In this work, Atwood shows how the United States of America change little by little, becoming Gilead, a state in which each person has an assigned role depending on their sex, social status and most importantly, their fertility. The novel's protagonist, June, whose real name is only mentioned once in the entire work, is kidnapped and taken to this city, where she drops her name to become Offred (Of- Fred) as she belongs to her commander, Fred Waterford, and his wife, Mrs Waterford. Offred's job in this place, like all the other handmaids who are part of this group, is to bring children into the world with her commander and give them to him and his wife and then move to another house and go back to functioning as a concubine. Commander's wives cannot have sexual relations with their spouses and therefore no children either.

In this society in which women are measured by their ability to bear children, we find a protagonist who "plucks up the courage to face everyday situations, to escape the system that oppresses her and, perhaps, to be reunited with her husband Luke and her daughter" (Fabrini, 8). It is a work full of references, and is undoubtedly an example of revelation on the part of the protagonist. The author uses these references as a means to communicate with her readers, making a criticism of the American society in which they lived, in which the rights not only of women, but also of people who belonged to the homosexual collective, were gradually being rejected and despised by their rulers. As Amin Malak points out, "Atwood reveals the indignity and terror of living under a futuristic regime controlled by Christian fundamentalists" (9) using Offred as the heroine living under this regime.

To this day, this novel remains highly relevant in the feminist context, since, as Jeniffer Armstrong explains, it is a "speculative novel", i.e. "a work that imagines a future that could conceivably happen without any advances in technology from the present" (2). Atwood herself explained that the difference between a Science Fiction novel and a Speculative novel is that "Science fiction has monsters and spaceships; speculative fiction could really happen." (Atwood, quoted by Armstrong, 3). When this novel was published, Atwood admitted that it "reflected America's embrace of conservatism [...] as well as the power of the Christian right" (3), since this novel has

also been interpreted as a critique of the biblical book of Genesis, as several passages from it are mentioned.

Since its publication, Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* has served as an inspiration for different projects, such as an opera by Poul Ruders in Copenhagen in 2000, a ballet performance offered at the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (Canada) in 2013, to its most current adaptation, the HULU series, starring Elizabeth Moss (2017-present) (Armstrong, 6). Moreover, as English professor SC Neuman wrote, "Offred, in short, is a fictional product of 1970s feminism, and is set in a situation that is a fictional realisation of the backlash against women's rights that gained momentum during the early 1980s" (quoted by Armstrong, 8). This novel has marked a before and after in the history, not only of cinema, but also of feminism, as it has served as a symbol in the present day.

4. *THE HANDMAID'S TALE: THE TV SERIES (2017-PRESENT)*

The Handmaid's Tale tells the story of a society that changes after a coup d'état and becomes Gilead, a place where the birth rate has dropped due to pollution, and a heteropatriarchal system has been established in which women have lost all their autonomy and freedom and are divided depending on their social status. As in the book, according to their fertility, women are organised as: the Commanders' wives, who cannot have sexual relations with their husbands, the Marthas, who are those women who are no longer fertile and serve as housewives for the Commander and his wife, the Aunts, who are in charge of training the handmaids, making them see how lucky they are to have the possibility of bringing children into the world, and finally, the Handmaids, who are those fertile women responsible for bringing children into the world and delivering them to the Commander and his wife, dedicating their entire fertile life to this.

The series, like the book, uses June (Offred) as the main protagonist, but with the difference that in the TV series is her first time as the mother of a baby that will not be hers, that is to say, as a handmaid, while in the book the protagonist tells the story of her third time as a "handmaid". In this TV series we see the plot from the point of view of the protagonist, in which we can get to know her story and finally bring to life the characters of the novel. This allows the viewer, especially those who have previously been a reader, to see what Atwood represented in her work, and how the series has

followed in the footsteps of the book, basing itself on the physical appearance of the characters, the clothes and, therefore, the colours.

Regarding the TV series adaptation of the novel, Atwood herself says that she made a cameo in it and was able to observe how, although it was only a series, in the breaks, the actresses would go to have a few laughs, while she felt "a horrendous disturbance", quoting her, that "it was very, very much like the story" (15). A cinematographic adaptation of a novel does not always please the public, but in this case the author herself sees her novel represented to perfection in the television series. For Atwood, who wrote the novel, we can imagine what it was like to see it represented in the cinema, and how hard it is to see how the novel comes closer and closer to reality, since cinema is the art form that comes closest to reality, as we can observe with our own eyes the stories they tell.

However, the big difference between the TV series and the book are the internal monologues provided by the main character in the TV series, which "may indicate that Offred's narrative is the most important part to tell the story" (Harrison, 2020, quoted by Prajnandhari, 13). The series represents Atwood's novel as she wrote it, but with the difference that it takes place in the United States of 2017, when the series was launched, so that the viewer can feel represented and see how everything can change with a coup d'état, and remove the thought of "this cannot happen here", as Atwood herself indicates (12). The author wanted to make the reader aware of the situation they were living in the United States, and to make a critique using a dystopian reality of what could happen if the situation of women continued to worsen over time.

For Paola Anabel Bastidas, "the production context of the series also responds to themes in which the female point of view is given prominence, as it has been seen that there is demand and acceptance for themes that reflect collective concerns such as gender violence or environmental pollution" (68). This means that this series, although it has used the novel as a reference, has been adapted to current society and to the problems that concern today's society, in order to bring the viewer closer to a reality.

It is necessary to highlight one of the elements that stands out visually in the series, which is the use of colours, as the maids wear a deep red outfit, which as the author explains is the colour of fertility, and an easy colour to capture in case of escape. Furthermore, the series is framed in a greyish palette, which "guides the viewer of *The*

Handmaid's Tale towards an unreal context of marked chromatic duality" (Ángeles Martínez-García et al., 68). In this palette of greys, the viewers can see how the colours of the clothing of some characters stand out against their surroundings, with the Commanders' wives wearing light blue suits, the Commanders wearing black suits which, as Atwood herself explains, is "the colour of prestige" (43), and the Marthas and the Aunts, being infertile women, wearing green and brown suits, all much more muted than those of the handmaids or the Commanders' wives.

Furthermore, through the use of flashbacks in the series, the viewer is able to observe what June's past life was like, and thus "help the viewer to reconstruct her story and to understand, ultimately, the process by which the totalitarian regime was established and the loss of women's autonomy" (Martínez García et al., 71). In the series is shown, through small details, how this coup d'état did not happen from one day to the next, but rather how it was gradually established in American society. One of these clues is the detail that, for example, from the moment this totalitarian regime begins to be established, some scenes of June with short hair (above her shoulders) are shown, to when she enters Gilead, with long hair that falls down her back (and we sense that they cannot be hair extensions, as they cannot use accessories). In addition, while the coup d'état is occurring, June has time to notice that she is pregnant and having her baby, Hannah. Finally, they both are captured, Hannah being 5 years old.

At the time of its release, the series garnered different reviews, "troubling political reality" (Jenna Tonn, 417), and served as political inspiration. In March 2017, groups of women dressed in red and white bonnets of Handmaids (see Fig. 1) created protests against abortion restrictions, and the Handmaids' costumes were the clothing of many feminist marches in 2017 and 2019 around the world. It is also worth noting that Amazon reported a 200% increase in downloads of the book in Kindle format when Donald Trump came to power in 2017 (Sharon Verghis, sbs.com), which displeased a large part of the female public not only because of his misogynistic comments, but also because of his racist remarks (Sierra Brewer & Lauren Dundes, 2), demonstrating the widespread fear among women that Atwood's work would become a reality. In addition, it has not only had a great impact on society, but also on the world of cinema, where it has won 15 Emmy Awards in categories such as "Outstanding Drama Series" , "Outstanding Writing for Drama Series" , "Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Drama Series" in 2017, among others (emmys.com).



Figure 1. Women dressed as Handmaids commemorating Women's Day in Huelva, Spain. (ABCandalucia.com)

If we ask ourselves today why *The Handmaid's Tale* is still such a famous novel and series, the answer could be the widespread women's fear. The journalist Verghis states that "to young women grappling with oppression and abuse, from sexual harassment to the curtailing of reproductive rights, Atwood's slim tale is a potent touchstone and reminder of the power of female voices as a tool of resistance" (sbs.com). Bruce Miller, the creator of *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series, admitted that he adapted the novel to modern times in order to reach a wider audience, because as he said "we don't bend the story, but we try to make the story make sense, in light of today" (Miller, quoted by Teghan Simonton). There is no doubt about the impact of the series nowadays, not only in cinema but also as a symbol of society that is used to vindicate women's rights, and this can make people feel the series "very close" because of the fear that something similar could happen in the near future.

5. THE CONCEPT OF DYSTOPIA IN *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

In order to understand the concept of 'Dystopia' it is necessary to know the difference between it and 'Utopia', as the latter presents a description of an idealised society, while 'Dystopia' "is popularly supposed to be an inverted, mirror, negative version of utopia" (Claeys, 14). A dystopia is the opposite of an ideal society, which Utopia posits, and how those people living in this society are either dissatisfied or pretend to be happy within it. If we use for example, the fascist invasions or Nazi ideologies, it is easy to observe how these go from being a Utopia to become the "dystopias of the violent 20th century" (R.K Isaac, 330), because as the author explains in the title of his work *Every utopia turns into dystopia*, it takes a utopia to turn into a dystopia.

Dystopias have been described on numerous occasions as 'conservative' (Claeys, 107) and were linked to "the end of the utopia" (108), although the author argues that a text can be considered dystopian or not depending on the point of view in which it is told. *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is a dystopian text, since we see what happens through the eyes of the protagonist and we know what she thinks from her internal monologue, which makes it clear that it is far from being a Utopia, or an ideal society, being quite the opposite. However, the concept of dystopia can also vary depending on the viewers or readers, as some people might come to consider the society of Gilead as ideal or even come to understand those who govern and run such a society.

The greatest exponents of the dystopia genre were Aldous Huxley with *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell with his *1984* (1949). Their most recurrent theme is "the quasi-omnipotence of a monolithic, totalitarian state demanding and normally exacting complete obedience from its citizens" (Claeys, 109). If we compare it with Atwood's novel, it is observable that the same patterns are followed: a totalitarian society in which each person has a duty that they have to obey to. However, the big difference we can find with those texts that pioneered the concept of dystopia is that they use "technological advances to ensure social control" (109). In Atwood's novel and in the television series adaptation control is exercised through the force of those who govern and the armed forces, who control every point of Gilead so that no one escapes from there, even though it was adapted to the present day. If we think about the adaptation of this series to reality, a relationship with the social crisis that exists with climate change can be established, as it is the excuse used in Gilead to create the society in which they live.

There are different dystopian characteristics that we can find in the TV series in Gilead, as David Ketterer explains: "the lack of freedom, the constant surveillance, the routine, the failed escape attempt (in this case by Offred's friend, identified by her real name, Moira) and an underground movement (in this case called Mayday)" (211), which can be observed in the TV series as well as in the novel. Moreover, the fact that women are reduced to their capacity to bear children and to being a womb, as Almudena Machado-Jimenez explains, leads us to think that in addition to being a dystopia, this becomes a "patriarchal utopia" in which "the womb being the lacking organ in the fraternity" (46). However, not so much in the novel but in the TV series, not all men are in agreement or happy with the society in which they live, that is, not for all of them it is

a utopia, although for those who created the laws of Gilead, which they consider an ideal society.

While it is true that the different dystopian novels of the 20th century stand out for being written by men, *The Handmaid's Tale*, in addition to being written by a woman, has as its protagonist a woman being the victim of the dystopian society. In the case of Atwood's novel, Offred "is also confronted by an apparently invulnerable and omnipotent male authority: Gilead, the fundamentalist theocracy of Atwood's novel is ruled in the name of that supreme patriarch" (Chris Ferns, 376). However, this character is not happy with the society in which she is living; on the contrary, the protagonist gradually rebels against Gilead and all that it entails. Narrated in the first person and seen from the eyes of Offred in the television series, Margaret Atwood makes her readers and viewers participants in this dystopia, knowing how the protagonist feels at all times and what has brought her there, which is the simple fact of being a fertile woman.

5.1 Religion and Dystopia

A very interesting point to note in this novel and television series is the use of religion as an "excuse", since "in a theocracy like Gilead, the Bible becomes an instrument that can justify all the extreme and oppressive actions of the government" (Francesco Bacci, 160). In the bible book, the Genesis, the sisters Rachel and Leah are married to Jacob, and Rachel is envious of her sister because she can have children with Jacob, but she cannot, so she asks her maid Bilhah to become pregnant by her own husband (Jacob) and to give him the children she begets with him. In Gilead, the Handmaids take on the role of the biblical characters of the sisters' and Jacob's maid, Bilhah, who is charged with fathering Jacob's children. As Elena Nicolau states, "the Old Testament story of Rachel and her handmaid Bilhah, is the basis of Gilead's strategy to combat its fertility crisis". As this scholar states "the Handmaid is reduced to a childbearing vessel", since once the handmaids fulfil their task of begetting and giving birth to a baby, they hand it over to the Commanders and their wives, to continue their lives as Handmaids, as is the case of Offred in the novel.

In this dystopian story, before each "Ceremony" (the act in which the Commanders must impregnate the Handmaids, who are between the legs of the

Commander's wife), the Commander reads aloud a passage from Genesis which states as follows:

When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she sent her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" 2 Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" 3 Then she said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf,[a] that even I may have children[b] through her. (Genesis, 30:1-3)

However, the story of Rachel and Bilhah is not the only reference we find in *The Handmaid's Tale*, as the novel and its film adaptation are loaded with them. In the United States, not only does the name change to become Gilead, but the vocabulary used is also changed and restricted, always using religious references, such as "Blessed be the fruit" or "May the Lord open". Among others, these "blessings" are used as a form of greeting for the maids, which always refers to the fruit, which are the children they are to bear, and to God, who will see to it that the miracle of becoming pregnant occurs. Furthermore, throughout the novel and the TV series, the maids are reminded by the Aunts of how important they are, how lucky they are to be able to bring children into the world, once again reducing their status as women to being only useful for bringing children into the world.

Moreover, the maids are not the only characters in which we find a similarity with the Bible, but also the wives of the commanders. For them, the ideal woman resembles the Virgin Mary of the Christian religion, since, as Machado-Jimenez explains, "she perfectly embodies the idea of a submissive virgin-mother" (50). It reduces their condition as women to being a virgin mother, which resembles the wives of the commanders, who will be mothers without having had sexual relations with their husbands, and will be submissive to them, being relegated to housework. As this scholar explains, in the novel, women are silenced in front of men, that is, they only have the right to obey what a man, in this case, their husbands (50).

Many events in the novel and the TV series revolve around religion, as it is the "pillar" that underpins everything that happens and is justified by the word of God. However, "the society is run to the greater glory of God the Father, but from Offred's point of view His is not a presence, but an absence" (Chris Ferns, 377). The protagonist

refuses to justify what she is suffering is due to God, as she, beyond seeing a religious figure, can only see her Commander as a surrogate. Furthermore, Atwood herself explains that her novel is not against religion, but "is against the use of religion as a façade for tyranny", adding that "they are quite different things" (17), since with this book and this series, the aim is not to turn the viewer against religion or to criticise it, but rather those behaviours that are justified on the basis of religion and the sins that God forgives.

Most dystopian novels, including the famous *1984* and *Brave New World*, "have made clear departure from past religions, most notably historical Christianity itself" (Peter Halabu, 2). If we look at these novels, they have in common a totalitarian society ruled by men. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, we can also observe how this dystopian society, which has the name Gilead, bases its law on the Old Testament of the Bible to govern society. Each person has a role, which implies a biblical character, and the acts that are committed, in this case rape, are justified with a biblical passage that tells the story of how a husband gets a maid pregnant and she gives her children to him and his wife, as happens in this story.

5.2 Feminist dystopia

While dystopian literature was born in the 20th century, the first novel of dystopian feminist literature was brought by Charlotte Haldane with *Man's World* (1927) and Katherine Burdekin with *Swastika Night* (1937). Later, around the 1960s, different speculative novels were published that "accompanied second-wave feminism" with novels such as Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* (1967) or Pamela Kettle's *The Day of Women* (1969). As Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan explain, "these texts portray future bad places for women" (49). However, these novels continue to be written in the twenty-first century, having as a common element the dystopian character of the novel, "exploring dominant themes of control of reproductive rights, sexual and other forms of violence against women, and the balance of power between sexes" (Dillon, 169), in novels such as Jennie Melamed's *Gather the Daughters* (2017) or Joanne Ramos's *The Farm* (2019). What these works do is a critique, from a woman's point of view, of a society that marginalises women because of their gender.

As Baccolini and Moylan explain, "feminist dystopias are an intrinsically critical genre" (48). This means that these novels, usually written by women, and aimed at

women who have identified themselves "as an oppressed group" (Felski 1, quoted by Baccolini and Moylan, 47), are used as a critique, either of society or of anything that is considered unfair. A dystopia is a "textual representation of a society apparently worse than the writer's/reader's own" (Cranny-Francis, 125, quoted by Baccolini and Moylan, 48). In these novels, feminism is used "as a tool for political and social change" (Dillon, 170), as could be seen in demonstrations in 2017 against Trump's election in the United States, with signs reading quotes such as "*The Handmaid's Tale* is NOT an instruction manual!" (170). The dystopian novel, and in this case, the dystopian series that adapts a previous novel, serve as a model of critique and demonstration today, as they speculate a society that creates fear in the viewing or reading public.

In *The Handmaid's Tale* series, the ideas of oppression, and as a consequence, the revelation of the protagonist, are the main factors in the story. One study found that "as long as there is a possibility to escape through rebellion, we are never completely lost and doomed to live in a dystopian future" (Eva Pigmans, 25), which means that the protagonist, Offred, will always do everything possible to escape, even if it means rebellion. In this story, oppression is exercised towards women, who are the ones who are classified according to their fertility, sexual orientation or social status. Felski declares that the feminist novel "lies in the struggle for equal civil and political rights for women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Quoted in Pigmans, 25), although, as the author notes, "feminist texts are often woman-centered, but woman-centered texts are not always directly feminist". However, Atwood's novel can be categorised as such, as it follows feminist novel patterns such as "the roles of men and women and their position in society" (26).

The representation of inequality between the two genders "have pointed out when discussing feminist (dystopian) literature" (Pigmans, 26), and in *The Handmaid's Tale* it is the main recurring theme, as everything that happens to the protagonist and the other handmaids is because of their ability to have children. In addition, the figure of the man is presented as privilege, power, elegance, travelling back in time to ancient cultures where only men worked, while women stayed at home, taking care of the house or raising their children. As Pigmans points out, the difference between the genders serves "as an element of warning so as to signal how a certain type of society is undesirable and should be avoided" (26), and further notes that "the lives of women appear to be under more direct threat" (26), depriving them of all their basic rights,

since in the dystopian feminist novel, it is they who suffer the consequences of the dystopian society, in this case, Gilead.

Furthermore, the scholar Joanna Russ states that referring to the concept of "Matriarchy", there are few authors who have dared to treat this subject seriously, which means that there are few female characters in science fiction books who are dominant (physically and emotionally) over men (205). If we look at the novel written by Margaret Atwood, there is no female character who presents these characteristics over a male one, since Offred, despite being somewhat against the situation, at no time does she appear to dominate a man. Furthermore, this scholar adds that women science fiction authors try to write about worlds in which men and women are equal (206), but in *The Handmaid's Tale* we see the opposite, a work written by a woman in which men are notably superior to women in terms of their rights.

However, the fact that *The Handmaid's Tale* is a novel written by a woman, in which the difference between the genders is depicted and its female characters are not revealing, does not detract it from being a feminist dystopian novel. Gorman Beauchamp quotes that "the book belongs to the genre called the dystopia, a genre that projects an imaginary society that differs from the author's own, first, by being significantly worse in important respects and, second, by being worse because it attempts to reify some utopian ideal" (1). Margaret Atwood wanted to offer her readers a male-led society in which women have no voice, but by doing so, she is serving as a revelation and a warning of what could happen in the future if we continue to allow the gender gap and the privation of women's rights. A dystopian novel posits an undesirable society, and Atwood achieved her goal with this novel as she transformed what is an ideal utopian society for patriarchy into a collective dystopia.

6. *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*: SCREEN ADAPTATION

While it is true that 32 years have passed since the novel was first published in 1985 until it was adapted into a TV Series in 2017, it is easy to recognise the main differences between these two versions of the story. The main and most important distinction is that the series has lengthened the story created by Margaret Atwood by producing more seasons of the series, as only the first season of this TV series corresponds to the original novel. This has meant that viewers can follow the story of June (Offred) in Gilead and see how this character evolves, as it presents a big contrast with the

beginning, in which she is shown as a more submissive woman who fulfils her role in that society, while, as the seasons go by, she rebels against them and fights to bring back her previous life. However, for this paper, we will focus on the principal differences between the first season of the series and the original novel, observing and highlighting the aspects that have been emphasised, why certain elements, characters or characteristics are there, to finally reach a conclusion as to why these changes have occurred.

In order to make this comparison, we will divide this section into different subsections differentiated by categories and these by subcategories, as we will begin by referring to the flashbacks, and within these, what we know about certain characters who are given more voice in the television series than in the novel when we learn about their past.

6.1 Flashbacks

One of the main differences between the cinematographic adaptation and the original novel is the use of flashbacks. The novel is narrated through June's eyes, and she tells us in the first person what she is experiencing in the present, sometimes remembering her previous life. The TV series has brought these memories to the big screen in the form of flashbacks in which the viewer can visualise what the protagonist's life was like before the coup d'état took place. However, thanks to these flashbacks we can observe various details that have been added, such as the fact that the coup d'état did not happen from one day to the next, but rather progressively, seeing how little by little women lose their rights, as well as being expelled from their jobs or deprived of their money (see Fig. 2). They also show how the protagonist's life progresses from the beginning of that society, since the viewer is able to observe how from the moment everything starts to change until she is kidnapped, she has time to fall in love with her husband, get pregnant, have a daughter and have her daughter turn 5 years old.



Figure 2. Elizabeth Moss performing as June being expelled from work for being a woman

In this scene the viewers can observe how Roger, the director of the publishing company where June used to work, tells all the women who work for him that they have been fired, not by his own choice, but because he is forced to. This new society, which was taking hold in the United States, relegated the role of women to that of being submissive, working in the house, as a wife or as a handmaid. All these roles, created by men, left women in a position where they could not have any possessions, nor their own money or belongings, as they were all destined for their husbands or the state of Gilead. This explains why June was previously unable to use her bank account to pay in a shop, or why there was a macho attitude towards her and her friend Moira in a coffee shop. The fact that women could not have their possessions brings us back to the history of the United States in which Margaret Atwood wrote her novel. It was not until the 1970s that women were able to have their own credit cards, as before they needed their husband's signature to be able to make any payments. However, the struggle to be financially independent of their husbands continued throughout the 20th century. Moreover, it was not only the deprivation of having their own money that attacked women's rights, since for example only 12 years before the publication of her novel, abortion rights had been approved in the United States and the use of the contraceptive pill had previously been banned, which was allowed from 1960 onwards.

At the same time, while the viewer can appreciate how society is changing, when for June and Luke (her husband) everything remains normal. We can continue to notice details of how little by little various brushstrokes that will later be seen in Gilead were already being implanted in their city, Boston, without them realising that it was a warning of what was going to happen to them. When June gave birth to her daughter Hannah, while she was in the hospital sleeping, she woke up and realised that she did

not have her newborn baby girl next to her. She had been stolen by another woman who claimed that this child was her daughter (see Fig. 3), although in the end June and Luke managed to get her back. This is similar to the later society in which June must live, Gilead, where her daughter is not stolen, but consciously given to another family to be a daughter. The main difference is that June and Luke manage to get Hannah back, but in Gilead the babies never see their biological mothers again when they are given to the Commanders and their wives.



Figure 3. Elizabeth Moss acting as June talking with the woman who almost stole Hannah.

The use of flashbacks in the series allows the viewer to be able to observe, not imagine, what society was like in the past and how it gradually evolved into Gilead. The main objective of this is to make the viewer perceive how allowing certain sexist and misogynist attitudes, as well as the patriarchal society, can lead to a coup d'état like this, which is not implanted overnight, but appears little by little in everyday actions such as shopping or going to work. The author of the novel wanted to make her readers aware of what could happen in a dystopian future, and the film adaptation, which appeared at a time when women in the United States feared for their rights because of Trump's rise to power with misogynist speeches, as a warning of what could be coming, which was a dystopian society. However, just as we see this as a reference to the past, there is currently a great deal of controversy as the US Supreme Court wants to step backward by outlawing abortion as it was before 1973. When this news was published, social media exploded and "Handmaid's Tale" became Trending worldwide on 3 May 2022 on the Twitter platform, as many compared the Roe V. Walde's decision "to the conservative dystopia of the book and its namesake show" (Josh Elliot), and many protesters took to the streets dressed as the maids seen in the TV series (see Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Women dressed as *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series to protest against the Supreme Court proposal on May 2022. (theatlantic.com)

Following the idea put forward by the US Supreme Court, the author of the novel has stated her position in the online newspaper *The Atlantic*, arguing that she considered giving up writing her novel because she considered it "too far-fetched", but that now she is seeing the opposite, since, as the author explains, "thus a "deeply rooted" tradition is that women's reproductive organs do not belong to the women who possess them. They belong only to the state" (Atwood). At the same time, the author argues that this illegalization of abortion would have consequences for today's society that would go directly against women, since, as the author explains, women who have abortions will be branded as murderers.

6.1.1 Characters

In this section we are going to discuss how the flashbacks that we see in the TV series provide much more information with respect to the original book, since in the latter the reader knows about June, the main character, but hardly any details are given about other female figures that in the series are of great importance not only for the protagonist, but also for understanding the story in general. The individuals we will analyse will be June, and how these flashbacks give us more information about her that make us understand better what the novel wanted to convey; the character of Serena Joy, of whom in the book we only know that she is an older woman, wife of the Commander, who is not too happy about having Offred in her house; and finally, we will deal with two LGBTIQ+ characters, who are only mentioned in the book as Moira,

June's best friend, and Emily (Ofglen), a handmaid she meets at the Red Centre who is in the same situation as her and the other fertile women of Gilead. What all these characters have in common is that they help us to have a broader perspective on the old and new societies, as they offer us additional stories that complement the main one.

6.1.1.1 June Osborne (*Offred*)

June Osborne, called Offred in Gilead, is the protagonist of the novel and the TV series. A 34-year-old married woman, she is abducted along with her daughter Hannah by Gilead agents in Boston to take her to what will become the setting of her story, and therefore of the novel and TV series. Thanks to her we know the story that Margaret Atwood narrated, and which we subsequently got to see on television with the series *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-present). However, although she is the character we know the most about, being the main character, it is the flashbacks offered by the TV series that make us see what her past life was like, her thoughts and how she got there.

The first time she met Luke, who later became her husband, was when he was already married to another woman. Here we can spot the history that developed between them, something that is mentioned in the book, but not that Luke was being unfaithful to his previous wife and that June was the one with whom he committed this infidelity. Why is this emphasised in the series? Because it is a story of oppressed women and sisterhood, and June is the one who leads the revelation against this society, seeing that she once participated in an act of infidelity towards another woman can make the viewer see that it is not necessary to be an example of feminism (as for example the character Holly, June's mother, is), to be against a society that oppresses women in the way that Gilead does. Moreover, in Gilead, adultery and divorce are condemned, which is why June and Luke are separated, a fact that is not explained in the novel. Flashbacks to these scenes reflect June and Luke sneaking off to hotel rooms (see Fig. 5), hiding from Luke's wife, whom he eventually divorces to marry June.



Figure 5. Elizabeth Moss and O.T Fagbenle performing as June and Luke in one of their affairs in a hotel room.

In addition to the abduction attempt on Hannah mentioned above as a prelude to the society that was to come, in another flashback in the television series, they show how June is called to work to pick up her daughter Hannah from school, who is ill, and in the hospital they question her ability as a mother by letting her daughter go to school sick. This flashback is show us the idea which was being implanted in the American society, questioning the role of the mother, which, according to the society that was being established, was to be a woman who devoted herself only to housework and her children, instead of being a working woman, with her own income and other things to do. This leads us to appreciate it later as one of the other excuses to take away the biological mothers' own children, which in the novel is not so easy to notice, as these scenes are not narrated in the work written by Atwood.

Furthermore, it should be noted that, as mentioned in section 4.1, and as the author of the novel stated, this book is not against religion, but against using religion as a "front" to commit the acts that are happening in Gilead. One of the flashbacks that the television series offers, Hannah, June and Luke's daughter, is baptised by the Catholic church, which can make the viewer notice that June is a believer in Christianity, and this emphasises the words of the introductory section that opens the novel of *The Handmaid's Tale* pronounced by its author. Thanks to these flashbacks, the viewer can learn more about June and the people around her, as well as her mother, Holly, who is not mentioned in the book, and a little more about Moira, a character we will discuss later, best friend of the protagonist and feminist activist and part of the LGBTIQ+ collective.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight one of the main differences between the television series and the novel written by Margaret Atwood. In the latter, the

protagonist's name is only mentioned once, at the beginning, and she does not even say it is her name, as it can be seen in this quote:

We learned to whisper almost without sound. In the semi darkness we could stretch out our arms, when the Aunts weren't looking, and touch each other's hands across space. We learned to lip-read, our heads flat on the beds, turned sideways, watching each other's mouths. In this way we exchanged names, from bed to bed: Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June. (Atwood, 6)

As the reader can observe, and as will be observed throughout the novel, June's name is mentioned in the narrative, but she does not say which of these five women's names is hers, and she does not mention it further in the novel. In fact, Atwood herself has admitted in *The New York Times* (2017) that her original idea was not to call her protagonist June, but that it was the readers themselves who deduced that this was Offred's original name, not seeing it mentioned again in the novel. The TV series adaptation gives a radical twist to that, in which the protagonist herself says her name at the end of the first chapter, and this may be because it would be impossible to make those flashbacks that are so fundamental to understanding the story without mentioning the protagonist's real name, since in her life prior to Gilead, her name was not Offred, but June Osborne.

6.1.1.2 *Serena Joy (Mrs Waterford)*

Serena Joy, hidden behind the name of Mrs. Waterford in Gilead, is the wife of the Commander, Fred Waterford, and together they are expecting a baby fathered by Offred. This character is of paramount importance in both the novel and the TV series, and even more so if we try to make a comparison between the two, as there are major differences between the two versions. The first and main distinction, which can be seen after watching a couple of episodes of the series and reading some of the novel, is that in the latter, Serena is barely mentioned, and the only thing that is said about her is that she is an old lady with grey hair, who has arthrosis and uses a cane. This appearance that Atwood described in her novel does not correspond to that shown in the TV series, since in the latter, the Commander's wife, played by Yvonne Strahovski, is that of a young woman, around 30 years of age, with a good physical appearance and no health problems.

The series allows us to get to know this character both in Gilead and in her past. In the scenes in the TV series she is a strong, calculating woman who is not happy to have Offred in her house, just as is narrated in the book, in which we can read the first conversation between her and the protagonist, in which we learnt that she does not want to have the handmaid near her, and even less that she wants her husband to get close to her. Despite, as we will see below, the fact that she helped draft the law of Gilead, she is not satisfied with it, and so are the other wives as they are jealous of their handmaids, as they are not the ones who can have sex with their husbands and bear their children. The first conversation between Serena and Offred in the series goes like this: "I want to see as little of you as possible, she said. I expect you feel the same way about me [...] As for my husband, she said, he's just that. My husband. I want that to be clear. Till death do us part. It's final' (Atwood, 13-14).

However, despite the malicious behaviour of this character in the TV series, it is the flashbacks in the TV series that actually provide new information and sometimes make distinctions between the first version of the story and this adaptation. In the book, Mrs. Waterford, known before Gilead as Serena Joy, was a member of a religious TV show in which hymns were sometimes sung and she was the soprano. In contrast, in the TV series, through the use of flashbacks, we learn how in the past Serena Joy was a right-wing writer but published a book called *A Woman's Place*, which gives its name to episode 6 of the first season of this series, and reveals the ideas she had before this society, which embarrass her husband and which she tries to hide. If we stop to think about why this distinction between singer and writer, we can come to think that the TV series wanted this character to be a writer to have an excuse to show what her thoughts were before Gilead and her position on feminism, as being part of a musical group does not give her room to talk about her thoughts in public. In addition, this contrast also helps to demonstrate how Gilead was gradually implanted in American society, as when she goes to present her book at the university, she is greeted by students booing her (see Fig. 6) and throwing objects at her, welcoming her with banners accusing her of being a Nazi, to the point that she is even shot and ends up in hospital. This, once again, demonstrates the discontent of the people with the dystopia that was being implemented and how it was progressively reaching the United States.



Figure 6. Serena Joy being booed by young university students at the presentation of her book, interpreted by Yvonne Strahovski

In addition, the flashbacks provide information about the pre-Gilead love affair of Fred Waterford and his wife. As scenes from *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-present) show us, the two lived together at home, each devoted themselves to their work, and had a normal relationship in which they had sex, dated and acted normally. These scenes serve as a contrast to the society of Gilead, of which Fred is one of the leaders, and how Serena helped to draft those laws with which she was not entirely happy. Their names were made public and she was already known, which is why she gets booed at her talk at the university and people don't want her there, as she is a woman who is going to help turn other women into concubines with no rights. However, as this society takes hold, and especially over the course of the seasons of the series, Mrs Waterford is not happy with the situation, and although she does not want to show it publicly or in front of her handmaid, she misses her past relationship with her husband in which they were intimate and spent more time together.

The contrast between this character's present in Gilead and her past is only emphasised in the TV series, which provides a second story to this character and a way to understand her better, both in the novel and in the film adaptation. Furthermore, she is shown as a character who, although in the past she was in favour of feminism, now only sees fertile women as objects, and as we see in episode 3 of the first season of the TV series she starts to treat Offred well after the ceremony when she thinks she is pregnant, i.e. when she considers her useful and fulfilling her role. However, this also

leads us to observe the contrast of when she learns that Offred is not pregnant, but that it was simply a delay in her menstruation, and she attacks her and treats her badly again (see Fig. 7) since she does not consider her useful and as she is not carrying his future baby.



Figure 7. Mrs Waterford shouting at June when she finds out that the handmaid is not pregnant (performed by Elizabeth Moss and Yvonne Strahovski)

6.1.1.3 *Moira Strand*

Moira Strand, a fertile, black, homosexual woman in her thirties, is June's best friend since they were teenagers, and is an essential character, considered a heroine, as she is one of the few people capable of escaping from Gilead and reaching Canada. In addition to her exploits, she is a character of which it is interesting to make a comparison with the original novel and the adaptation to a television series since in the latter her true image is presented, while in the novel written by Atwood she does not even play as important a role as in the series. Once again, it is through the flashbacks that the importance of this character is highlighted. In addition to being June's best friend, she is a black and homosexual woman, which she has to hide in order not to be transferred to the colonies (explained later) and be considered an "Un-Woman".

Leaving the use of flashbacks for later, we will focus first on the difference in Moira's appearance in the series compared to the book. In the book, the protagonist's best friend is described as "Caucasian", whereas in the series she is an African-

American woman, a lesbian, who, like the vast majority of women and people in Gilead, is against the imposed society. The change in appearance from the original novel to the book may be due to the fact that in the novel, African-Americans are called "Children of Ham" (Atwood, 59) in a derogatory way, and perhaps in the series they wanted to emphasise this and give Moira's character more voice. Her physical appearance in the TV series it makes her more groundbreaking, as her race is discriminated against by all those people who implanted Gilead's society in the United States.

The second fact that is worth highlighting about this character is that she is a woman activist and part of the LGBTIQ+ collective since in Gilead homosexuality is punishable by death or transfer to the colonies. Here, women are despised and must work all day on the land, surrounded by toxic substances that cause them to die of intoxication. Moira hides her sexual orientation from the moment she enters the Red Center until she escapes from it, so the only scenes we see of this character and from which we know she is homosexual are the flashbacks the series provides us with, thanks to which we get to know her better and understand her resentment, as she is a feminist activist and knows that her race and orientation are punishable in Gilead. In addition, after the first season of the TV series, which is based on the book, the viewer is able to perceive through a flashback how in the past, Moira was a surrogate mother who had to give her child to another family, which serves as a prelude to what was to come. Furthermore, although this has been added by the directors and screenwriters of the series for the continuation of the series, it serves, once again, to demonstrate not only how Gilead was gradually implanted, but also to show that allowing "surrogacy" favours the creation of a society like this. This has been introduced in the series because it is a controversial issue in the United States today, which is opposed by feminist and LGBTIQ+ groups. It is a practice that was born in the 1980s, when the novel was published, so it is possible that Atwood also used this argument as a criticism of surrogacy that was beginning to be introduced in her country. However, this practice has been approved little by little in every state in the United States and which feminist groups are against, as it turns women's bodies into "profit centres". (Gloria Steinem, quoted by Genevieve Gluck in *Feminist Current*).

Moira's character appears as a representation of hope, as she is one of the few women and people who manage to escape from Gilead to reach the neighbouring

country, Canada, and meet Luke, her best friend's husband. Together they try to keep informed of what is happening in Gilead, but little can be done from the outside. In episode 6 of the first season, different references in Mexico come to visit the new country, and far from leaving frightened by the situation, they are even graced and benefited by it, leaving with thoughts of implanting it in their country too, as the birth rate is also falling there. The few people who try to escape from Gilead are punished, and the fact that Moira, a black and homosexual character, is one of the few able to do so, makes this character of great relevance to the story.

However, it is also important to add one of Moira's final scenes in the book, in which the reader stops knowing about her. We learn the story of how Moira ends up working at Jezebel's, a clandestine bar, as a prostitute, and where she meets June, to whom she tells that she would rather be a prostitute than a handmaid. Once again, it is the TV series that shows us Moira's character in depth, since in the novel her ending was not clear, as Offred, the narrator of the story, explains:

Here is what I'd like to tell. I'd like to tell a story about how Moira escaped, for good this time. Or if I couldn't tell that, I'd like to say she blew up Jezebel's, with fifty Commanders inside it. I'd like her to end with something daring and spectacular, some outrage, something that would benefit her. But as far as I know that didn't happen. I don't know how she ended, or even if she did, because I never saw her again. (Atwood, 176)

The fact that the series wanted to emphasise this character, changing her physical appearance and providing flashbacks to her past, serves to show how all kinds of women could enter this society, as long as they were fertile and could use their womb as a tool. Moira is a revealing character, who beyond being the black homosexual woman of the story, served as an example and as a help to women who were going through the situation of living in Gilead and who, like all of them, is against it and against the rights of people.

6.1.1.4 Emily Malek (Ofglen)

Known as Ofglen during the first season of *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-present) and in the novel written by Atwood, she is a handmaid kidnapped from the former United States to be taken to Gilead to work as a concubine for its commander Glen Deeds. She is Offred's companion on their trips to the supermarket, in which they must watch their

every word. In one of these conversations she tells the protagonist that she is a member of a resistance movement in Gilead, run by the handmaids, called Mayday. One of the main reasons Emily was brought to Gilead, apart from being a fertile woman, is because in her previous life she was a professor at the University, something that was punishable in Gilead because they had the idea that in this institution they taught people ideas that did not agree with what was being implemented in Gilead. However, this character later stands out for being a lesbian woman, and when this is discovered in her new dystopian society, she is mutilated as punishment for her homosexuality.

The main difference between the character in the TV series and the one written by Atwood in 1985 is her name, which is never mentioned in the original novel, but has been given that name by the producers and screenwriters. This is because in the TV series, in contrast to the book, this character has an important role, as they emphasise the fact that she is a lesbian woman, who tried to escape to Canada before the coup d'état with her wife and son Oliver, and who, frustrated at not having succeeded, leads several movements of revelation in Gilead, showing a character with a strong and very intelligent attitude. Once again, it is thanks to the flashbacks that we get to know Emily's character better and not just Ofglen. We also appreciate in the TV series through the use of flashbacks how she gradually became aware of how dystopian society was being implanted in the United States when she was expelled from university for being a lesbian.

In addition, Emily's character in the TV series provides us with a vision that is not narrated in the novel, as it is told by Offred, who does not visit this place, and these are the scenes in "The Colonies" (See Fig. 8). "The Colonies" are areas of North America which have been contaminated by pollution in the country, and which contain radioactive particles. This is the place where people who commit a crime in Gilead are sent as a form of punishment, whether they are men or women, because if they spend the rest of their lives there they are condemned to die. In the novel, this place is only mentioned in passing, as in the first chapter in which the narrator listens to the maids talking about this location, but it is never described. While it is true that in the first season of the series, which is based on the original novel, we do not see any scenes of this area, the second season, which serves as a continuation of the story, shows us a glimpse of this spot that the handmaids feared so much, but to which many preferred to go rather than being raped or punished by mutilation.



Figure 8. Alexis Bledel performing as Emily working in “The Colonies” in Season 2

Emily, beyond being Offred's companion, is a kind of hope for her as she finally realises that there are more people in Gilead who think like her, and serves as an inspiration to participate in the Mayday movement to try to tear Gilead apart from within. As we see in the excerpt from the novel below, one of the first conversations between Emily and Offred goes like this:

"I thought you were a true believer," Ofglen says.

"I thought you were," I say.

"You were always so stinking pious."

"So were you," I reply. I want to laugh, shout, hug her.

"You can join us," she says.

"Us?" I say. There is an *us* then, there's a *we*. I knew it.

"You didn't think I was the only one," she says.

I didn't think that. It occurs to me that she may be. (Atwood, 117)

A similar conversation is the one they have in the TV series and the one that gives Offred hope, and although Emily does not stand out in the first season with the use of Flashbacks, but for being the lesbian punished with mutilation in Gilead. She is one of the main characters in the story since, as we can appreciate as the seasons go by,

she leads several revelations that end up taking her to the Colonies and later bringing her back to Gilead due to the lack of fertile women, a place from which she ends up escaping. In the novel she is just another maid, but in the 2017 adaptation she is also a woman who seeks the same thing as the protagonist: to escape from that place to return to her family, and to take revenge at all costs for what has been done to her country.

7. CONCLUSIONS

To finish this work and as a final conclusion, we must remember that the objectives of this Master's thesis were to know the main differences that exist between the novel and the television series, and to know how the flashbacks in the series contribute to each character and how this has repercussions in the novel.

The research began with a theoretical framework in which we explain the context of the author, the novel and the TV series in the story, and proceed to explain the concept of feminist dystopia and all the variants within this that we can find in the novel written by Atwood in 1985 and in the 2017 TV series. Knowing the context and plot of the story, as well as its main themes, we proceeded to carry out a comparative analysis through the use of flashbacks of each character from the first version to its latest adaptation, through which we were able to answer our initial research questions, revealing the main differences that exist between both versions, what the flashbacks of the television series contribute that the novel did not contribute at the time, and to understand the reason for the story of each character.

With this research work we have been able to reach different conclusions. One of them is that Atwood wanted to leave an open ending, in which it was not known what would happen next with the protagonist. However, it has been the producers of the series who have been in charge of providing an answer to the unknown left by Atwood thanks to the television series, which has been very well received by both readers and viewers, as it continues with the plot of the original novel and vindicates those aspects that Atwood wanted to highlight in 1985 but adapted to the present day. The use of flashbacks in the series plays a crucial role, as the producers of the series have wanted to take some characters further, giving them more of a voice in the series than they have in the novel. Why? We came to the conclusion that each of the characters analysed represents something different, a different model of woman not only within the novel

but also within feminism, as each one provides a different vision of the story thanks to the knowledge of her past and her context through the flashbacks.

As we have been able to observe throughout the work, this story has had a great repercussion from its publication to the present day. This is not surprising, knowing the elements that compose it and what a story like this means in a 21st century society, in which the feminist movement is more enraged and attentive to the inequality that exists between the two genders and the rejection that still exists for those who belong to the LGBTIQ+ collective.

The Handmaid's Tale today represents what the author feared would happen and what we as viewers fear will happen, due to the different political and social changes that have occurred over the years and that have gradually had repercussions on our present day. If this success of the story has been achieved, it has been thanks to the film adaptation, which has served as a warning of what could be to come if certain decisions are taken and certain behaviours are allowed. The reader and the spectators are able to observe that this story is nothing more or less than a fear of a dystopian future that could happen even in the most advanced country in the world, and affect ordinary people from all existing social classes.

8. WORKS CITED

- ABC Andalucía. “Colectivos feministas recrean el «Cuento de la Criada» en Huelva contra la sociedad «patriarcal» en el 8M”. *ABCAndalucía*. March 2021. https://sevilla.abc.es/andalucia/huelva/sevi-colectivos-feministas-recrean-cuento-criada-huelva-contra-sociedad-patriarcal202103082047_noticia.html?ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F. Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Armstrong, Jennifer Keishin. “Why The Handmaid’s Tale is so relevant today”. *BBC*. 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180425-why-the-handmaids-tale-is-so-relevant-today> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Atwood, Margaret. “*The Handmaid’s Tale*”. Heinemann. Portsmouth. 1993.
- Atwood, Margaret. “Margaret Atwood on What ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ Means in the Age of Trump”. *The New York Times*. 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Atwood, Margaret. “I invented Gilead. The Supreme Court is making it real”. *The Atlantic*. 2022. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/supreme-court-roe-handmaids-tale-abortion-margaret-atwood/629833/>. Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Bastidas Mayorga, Paola Anabel. “Estetización de la violencia de género: Análisis visual de la primera temporada de El cuento de la criada”. *Ñawi: arte diseño comunicación*, Vol 6, n 1. 2022. <https://200.10.147.22/index.php/nawi/article/view/938/923> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Bacci, Francesco. “The Originality of THE HANDMAID’S TALE and THE CHILDREN OF MEN: Religion, Justice and Feminism in Dystopian Fiction”. *Central Eastern European Online Library. Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 3.2. 2017. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=594496> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

- Baccolini, Raffaella and Moylan, Tom. "Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination". *Routledge*. New York and London. 2003.
- Beauchamp, Gorman. "The Politics of The Handmaid's Tale". *The Midwest Quarterly. Literature Resource Center*. 2009. <http://mpenglish.pbworks.com/f/HT+-Beauchamp.pdf> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Bledel, Alexis, performer. "The Handmaid's Tale". *Hulu*. Hulu.com. 2018.
- Brewer, Sierra and Dundes, Lauren. "Concerned, meet terrified: Intersectional feminism and the Women's March". *Women's Studies International Forum*. Vol 69. 49-55. 2018. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277539517301449> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Claeys, Gregory. "The origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell". *Utopian Literature*. Edited by Gregory Claeys. Cambridge University Press. New York. 2010.
- Claeys, Gregory. "Three variants of the concept of Dystopia". *Dystopian Matters*. Edited by Fétima Vieira. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Newcastle. 2013.
- Dillon, Sarah. "Who Rules the World? Reimagining the Contemporary Feminist Dystopia" . *The New Feminist Literary Studies*. Edited by Jennifer Cooke. P. 169-182. Online published. Cambridge University Press. 2020.
- Elliot, Josh. "A Roe v. Wade Leak Threatens US Abortion Rights & Here's Why 'Handmaid's Tale' Is Trending". *Narcity*. 2022. <https://www.narcity.com/roe-v-wade-us-abortion-rights-why-handmaids-tale-is-trending> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Fabrini, Rosario. "El ojo del poder: dispositivos de vigilancia y control en The Handmaid's tale de Margaret Atwood". *Revista de literaturas modernas*. Vol 51 n°1. p. 7-13. 2021. <https://revistas.uncu.edu.ar/ojs/index.php/literaturasmodernas/article/view/3764/3926> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Fejes, Fred. "Gay Rights and Moral Panic. The origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality". 1st ed. *Palgrave MacMillan*. New York. 2008.

- Ferns, Chris. "The Value/ s of Dystopia: The Handmaid's Tale and the Anti-Utopian Tradition". *The Dalhousie Review*. p. 373-382. 1989.
https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/bitstream/handle/10222/61007/dalrev_vol69_iss3_pp373_382.pdf?sequence=1 . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Gluck, Genevieve. "Surrogacy is not a gay rights issue; it is a women's rights issue". *Feminist Current*. 2020.
<https://www.feministcurrent.com/2020/04/19/surrogacy-is-not-a-gay-rights-issue-its-a-womens-rights-issue> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Halabu, Peter. *Christianity in Dystopia. The Honors College of Oakland University*. 2007. <http://our.oakland.edu/handle/10323/1695> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Howells, Coral Ann. "Modern Novelists. Margaret Atwood.". 1st ed. *MacMillan Education*. New York. 1966.
- K. Isaac, Rami. "Every utopia turns into dystopia". *Tourism Management Journal*. Elsevier. ScienceDirect. Vol 51. p. 329-330 . 2015.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261517715000965> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Ketterer, David. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale": A Contextual Dystopia ("La servante écarlate" de Margaret Atwood: une dystopie contextuelle)". *SF-TH Inc. Science Fiction Studies*. Vol 16 n°2. P.209-217. 1989.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/4239936?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Af77b34732cb77a64d29a0447754e6cd5&seq=5#page_scan_tab_contents . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Machado- Jimenez, Almudena. "Sorority without Solidarity: Control in the patriarchal utopia of Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale". *Beyond Philology*. No 15/3. p. 44-63. 2018.
<https://czasopisma.bg.ug.edu.pl/index.php/beyond/article/view/2448/1917> . Accessed 25 May 2022.
- Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid Tale" and the Dystopian Tradition". *Canadian Literature*. p. 9-15. 1987.

Martinez García , Ángeles & Rubio Hernández, María del Mar. “Subversive myths in the series *Alias Grace* and *The Handmaid’s Tale*”. *Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales*. Vol 36. N° 92 p. 59-87. Universidad de Sevilla. 2020. <https://idus.us.es/handle/11441/101787> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Michelle Gulick, Angela. *The Handmaid’s Tale by Margaret Atwood: examining its utopian, dystopian, feminist and postmodernist traditions*. Iowa State University. Academia. Iowa. 1991
https://www.academia.edu/20083774/The_Handmaids_Tale_by_Margaret_Atwood_examining_its_utopian_dystopian_feminist_and_postmodernist_traditions . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Nicolau, Elena. “This Biblical Story is At The Heart of The Handmaid’s Tale”. *Refinery29*. 2017. <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/04/151796/handmaids-tale-meaning-rachel-bilhah-bible-story> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Nischik, Reingard M. *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. Camden House. New York. 2000.

Prajnandhari, Dyah. “Woman Oppression in The Handmaid’s Tale TV series Season 1: Transitivity Analysis”. *Journal of English Language & Literature*. Vol 11 n° 1. p. 11-12 Santa Ohama University. 2020. <https://journal.ubm.ac.id/index.php/english-language-culture/article/view/2402/1930> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Pigmans, Eva. *The Feminist Dystopia: A literary (Sub)genre?*. Radboud Universitet. 2018. <https://theses.ubn.ru.nl/handle/123456789/5746> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Prajnandhari, Dyah. *The representation of oppression seen from the main woman character in The Handmaid’s Tale TV Series Season 1: Transitivity Analysis*. Universitas Sanata Dharma. Yakarta. 2021. https://repository.usd.ac.id/38884/2/174214077_full.pdf . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Russ, Joanna. “The Image of women in science fiction”. *Science Fiction Criticism. An anthology of essential writings*. Ed. by Rob Latham. p. 200-211. Bloomsbury.

London and New York. 2017. <https://ebookcentral--proquest--com.ujaen.debiblio.com/lib/ujaen/reader.action?docID=6210966> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Simonton, Teghan. “The Handmaid's Tale rides the political wave around women's rights — and contributes”. *USAToday*. 2019. <https://eu.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2019/08/13/handmaid-tale-connects-womens-rights/1942433001/> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

“The Handmaid’s Tale. Awards and Nominations.” *Emmys. Television Academy*. <https://www.emmys.com/shows/handmaids-tale> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Tonn, Jenna. “The Handmaid’s Tale. Hulu. Season 1 (April-June 2017). Television.” *Journal of the History of Biology*. Vol 51 n°2. p. 415-417. 2018. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2038480261?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true> . Accessed 25 May 2022.

Verghis, Sharon. “Why can’t we get enough of The Handmaid’s Tale”. *SBS. Sbs.com*. 2018. <https://www.sbs.com.au/topics/voices/culture/article/2018/04/19/why-we-cant-get-enough-handmaids-tale> . Accessed 25 May 2022.