

Mapping Shadows: Eco-Dystopia in Margaret Attwood's

The Handmaid's Tale

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Abstract

The genre of science fiction has long been concerned with the entanglement between ecological catastrophe, humans and technology. Margaret Attwood in her work *The Handmaid's Tale* blatantly captures the complex human-nature web of relation, societal decay, environmental degradation and reign of tyrannical power. In a grim, dystopic setting, the reality of events unfolds through Offred's narration. This paper explores the landscape, nature and women under the theoretical framework of ecocriticism and eco-dystopia. An eco-dystopian world is marked by an abundant decay of nature and society. Despite being well acclaimed as a dystopian novel, critics have made less effort to underscore the eco-dystopian notions. By tracing the roots of this decay, the paper seeks to reflect Attwood's novel as an eco-dystopian one. Such a reading places the text as a cautionary narrative that draws parallel between ecological destruction and woman oppression.

Keywords: Eco-dystopia; Landscape; Woman; Nature; Ecocriticism.

Introduction

Margaret Attwood's seminal work, *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts a dystopian world where the future of humanity is challenged, ecological destruction is prevalent, and an oppressive power system reigns. The narrative, set in the Republic of Gilead, explores the life

of 'handmaids' whose bodies are controlled by the state. Through Offred's first-person narrative, the ideological struggle and patriarchal oppression in Gilead are revealed. The selective interpretation of Bible text adds to the promotion of women's oppression. Reflecting on the biblical parts, Moldovan quotes Harold Bloom, "Bloom calls the novel a fine example of 'Gothic dystopia', drawing inspiration from the darkest aspects of the history of American Puritanism" (Moldovan 105).

The author herself calls it as an illustration of 'ustopia', a combination of utopia and dystopia where "the imagined perfect society and its opposite" (Attwood 66) exists together. In this form, "it is always bracketed by two journeys: the one that transports the tale-teller to the other place and the one that transports him (or her) back so he can deliver report to us" (Attwood 71). In Attwood's words, the novel conceals utopia in dystopia and vice versa where "one is in the past—the past that is our own present. The second is placed in a future beyond the main story by the Afterword at the end of the book, which describes a future in which Gilead the tyrannical republic of *The Handmaid's Tale*—has ended, and has thus become a subject for conferences and academic papers" (Attwood 91).

In general, Attwood critiques state-imposed power, patriarchal order and reproductive responsibility. The novel appears as a stark reminder of the environmental crisis and distortion of female agency by oppressing their fundamental rights to their bodies, sexuality and freedom of choice. Through the lens of eco dystopia, the present scenario's climate crisis, state emergency and conflict become the focal point. It is in this matrix; that the study of the novel is placed. The paper attempts to examine the novel through an eco-dystopian lens, unpacking the novel's exploitation of both nature and women under the totalitarian regime of Gilead. By close reading the landscape imagery, floral symbolism, and urban decay, it argues that environmental collapse is not a backdrop to the novel's dystopian threads, but rather an intertwined force. The deterioration of natural world explicitly symbolises the systematic

oppression of women. Reading environmental degradation and patriarchal oppression as interconnected forces, the paper reflects the regime's patriarchal undertones and the deteriorating ecology as interconnected forces.

Ecocriticism and Eco-Dystopia

Tracing back to the origin of ecocriticism, William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" published in 1978 defines it as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature... to discover something about the ecology of literature, or try to develop an ecological poetics by applying ecological concepts to the reading, teaching, and writing about literature." (Rueckert 107). It aims to provide deep insights into the web of relationships between natural and human entities. Therefore, exposing the human disparage towards nature calls for a vital acknowledgement concerning the recent climate emergency. In emphasizing this emergency, "the emergence of ecocriticism in the academy had signalled a new and a promising hermeneutical horizon in our interpretations and understanding of the natural world and literature" (Oppermann 103). Subsequently, the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) enlightened the environmentalist perceptions of modern eco-critics. Moreover, as a theoretical body, it strives "to see literature inside the context of an ecological vision" (Rueckert 115).

Critics document this movement over the past thirty years under two waves. The first wave of ecocriticism was concerned with contemplating nature as a "took a great stride toward philosophic" (Buell 118). In contrast, the second wave inculcated a "critique of how our culture devalues and degrades the natural world" (Mishra 169). Eco-criticism has gained wide interest in academia due to an ever-increasing case of natural disasters, pandemics, technological advances and capitalism. Paul J Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer posit the "growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by

proposing to use the term “Anthropocene” for the current geological epoch” (Crutzen and Eugene 484). Human consumption and pollution, along with the unequal division of poverty pose a threat to the human species. Henceforth, an interest in the field of eco-criticism to tackle these issues is rising. It is with this perception; that Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* will be surveyed as to how the text engages with the climate crisis and challenges the probability of a way out of this dilemma.

The term dystopia was originally used by John Stuart Mill in 1868 in a speech to define “Britain’s treatment of Ireland “too bad to be practicable,” and its proponents “cacotopians” (after the Greek, bad place), or dystopians” (Claeys 53). It became popular when Glenn Negley and Patrick elaborated the term as “the opposite of eutopia, the ideal society” (Claeys 53). Dystopia, partially known as a subgenre of utopian fiction, focus on a totalitarian state where individuality is non-existent and power structure is complex. Atwood describes dystopia as described as “the opposite of utopias- they are Great Bad Places rather than Great Good Places and are characterized by suffering, tyranny, and oppression of all kinds” (Atwood 85).

Scholars identify the genre’s dormant origins in the earlier works such as Aristophanes’ *Parliament of Women* (390 BCE), Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888). Early dystopias analysed the potential limits of political and social reform through a combination of “sin, stupidity, folly and malevolence” (Claeys 54). Another peculiar theme of anxiety that stemmed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution was inculcated into this genre through the works of Adam Ferguson, Karl Marx and Samuel Butler. More specifically, “The Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 provided the greatest impetus to the specifically anti-collectivism literary dystopia” (Claeys 55) by catalysing the modern dilemma of freedom versus happiness.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, literary dystopias flourished in the works Mary Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

(1949) and Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). These fictions demanded the readers to apprehend dystopia as what we today address as left-wing thought. A hatred towards consumerist capitalism, highly politicised setting and pervasiveness of totalitarianism illuminates their works. Subsequently, the genre in recent times has evolved to typify the "spectre of environmental catastrophe" "potential centrality of robots to human life", "human/mechanical identity and the challenges of artificial intelligence" (Claeys 60). Accordingly, modern dystopian fiction evolves from satirizing the collectivism of Bolshevistic tradition to a broader scope of addressing the conformity towards liberal democracy, "on the problems of nuclear war, environmental collapse, and the predominance of various forms of technology over humanity" (Claeys 61).

As a subgenre of dystopian fiction, Eco-dystopia dwells on the impacts of environmental degradation, climate change, and other catastrophic events in a post-apocalyptic setting. It is often speculated that the meeting of dystopian criticism and Anthropocene has resulted in the flourishing of this hybrid genre. Marco Malvestio attempts to define Eco-dystopia as follows:

In eco-dystopias, we can find "apocalyptic" events, meaning decisive fractures between two moments in time, but more frequently these "apocalyptic" events are nothing more than the continuation of currently ongoing processes, in accordance with an understanding of climate change not as a single phenomenon, but rather as a summation of phenomena too various and too wide to be clearly deciphered, not to mention stopped. (Malvestio 28)

He highlights the tendency of this subgenre for its exclusive, sensational and spectacular focus on climate change in contrast to the Anthropocene. The environment in this genre transgresses as damaged to the point of being in an irreversible state. Another striking feature is their inquiry into the human-nature relationship in times of ecological crisis. These narratives may include

the production of new social, political and ecological dynamics in an altered society where humans are unable to sustain their lives in normal conditions. In contemporary dystopias, according to Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler, “technological progress means both a movement away from and simultaneously a movement into or towards nature-away from nature-as-wilderness, but towards nature-as-garden, a constructed, mediated, engineered nature” (Hughes and Wheeler 3) which constitutes an essential part of utopia itself.

The Handmaid's Tale is often termed a “typical dystopian plot” (Stillman and Anne 70) in its depiction of a commanding regime, its complex power structure and totalitarian politics. Similar to *Brave New World*, Gilead is narrated as a society of hierarchal roles and activities. And yet, it is a “distinctive dystopia [,] facing plagues and ecological crises” (Stillman and Anne 71). On the surface, the novel serves as a narrative of ideological struggle. However, it also touches upon the alienation of humans from nature in society, which “has been central to the dystopian imagination’ (Hughes and Wheeler 3). As a powerful depiction of oppressed life under a totalitarian regime, the novel has been approached through various lenses of feminism, ecofeminism, ecocriticism, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, dystopian literature and so on. An intersection of gender and dystopia, wide range of criticism against the dystopian power structure and their ideologies have been raised through many articles. Recently, apart from these, ecological dimensions of dystopian factors have been underscored through a few papers “‘Not an Instruction Manual’: Environmental Degradation, Racial Erasure, and the Politics of Abortion in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)” (2020) by Christabelle Sethna, “Biopower and Dystopian Novels: *Brave New World*, 1984, and *The Handmaid's Tale*” (2020) by Ilsu Sohn and “Toxic Environments in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Its Sequels, And Other Feminist Dystopias” (2022) by Peter Hajdu. Atwood’s novel indeed illustrates such a society, where exploitation of exploitation of natural habitats ultimately leads to the destruction of the society itself. Dorothy Jones, quoted by Adelino Cataldo notes that the text “continually demonstrates how

enclosed systems, with their restraints of human freedom and imagination, are essentially life-denying” (Cataldo 157).

Landscape

Although the novel does not explicitly dwell on environmental issues and scientific advancements, echoes and shadows of these become crucial in the discussion of landscape. The novel is rich with descriptions of barren landscapes, unpredictable weather patterns and urban decay. The garden, “domain” (Attwood 12) of the Commander’s wife symbolizes their desire to create “order” in both nature and society. The description goes, “the garden, which is large and tidy: a lawn in the middle, a willow, weeping catkins; around the edges, the flower borders” (Attwood 12). It is a tamed space where many of the wives have been asked to “order and maintain and care for” (Attwood 12). The task of taming the garden is given to women, and some women are excluded from this. However, this still situates women into their traditional roles of housekeeping. These well-maintained gardens creating an artificial beauty are a symbol of controlled nature. Offred’s nostalgic reference to her garden as “fullness” (Attwood 12) where she could smell the earth is contrasted against Serena’s Garden. This symbolizes the decayed old past before the rise of an oppressive regime.

The constant imagery of red in relation to the garden translates its hazardous nature. It is equated to “red radiation” (Attwood 191) which is capable of manipulating both human and floral bodies. The garden showcases the oppressive nature of the regime, where they create offspring artificially through coercive copulation. Handmaids are de-sexed, dehumanized and manipulated similar to the taming of nature for creating a garden. The women, tamed for procreation are equated to seeds and bearers of fruit. For Offred, Serena’s Garden is barren and chaotic when she argues “From a distance, it looks like peace” (Attwood 12). This highlights

the fragility of the garden, where a collapse is possible in future. The uniform existence of gardens in the homes of many commanders signifies a homogenous society where power is concentrated among a few people. According to Raluca Moldovan, the garden is “not only as symbol of birth regeneration and rebirth, but also of mutilation, blood and death” (Attwood 109) echoing the lines from *Tulips* of Sylvia Plath. The novel thus showcases the garden as a metaphor for forced reproduction and regulation of the natural process of reproduction.

Flowers in the garden occupy a central space in revealing the eco-dystopian tropes. Often, women’s fertility is equated to the flowers in the garden. Just like the growth of flowers is controlled, the woman’s reproductive capacity is used against women as a tool of oppression. Deborah notes, flowers in text display a “pre-Christian celebration of spring’s floral profusion and the cyclical fertility of those blossoms” (Hooker 276). The passage in which Offred observes Serene Joy “snipping off the seedpods with a pair of shears” elaborates the stark contrast between them (Attwood 153).

We had the irises, rising beautiful and cool on their tall stalks, like blown glass, like pastel water momentarily frozen in a splash, light blue, light mauve, and the darker ones, velvet and purple, black cat’s ears in the sun, indigo shadow, and the bleeding hearts, so female in shape it was a surprise they’d not long since been rooted out. There is something subversive about this garden of Serena’s, a sense of buried things bursting upwards, wordlessly, into the light, as if to point, to say: Whatever is silenced will clamor to be heard, though silently. (Attwood 153)

Offred views the flowers as a symbol of womanhood, meanwhile Serena desires to control their growth. She is contemptuous for the traditional view of women as a desirable flower when she describes the Commander’s sexual activity as “bee is to a flower” (Attwood 161). Here, the state views female as their property to maintain their goal of sustaining the societal order of

Gilead. Flowers also signify the crimes against people in Gilead. Offred affirms “The tulips are not tulips of blood, the red smiles are not flowers” (Attwood 33). The red colour of the tulips and the blood are employed to translate the suffering of people who are prosecuted for crimes against the state. The “one red smile” on the dead body is “same as the red of the tulips in Serena Joy’s Garden” (Attwood 33). These floral motifs and descriptions of the garden encapsulate the major eco-dystopic themes such as excessive use of power, manipulation and surveillance of female bodies, female patriarchal subjugation and state violence.

Urban landscapes play a major role in translating the eco-dystopic factors in the novel. Moldovan notes that even though the novel does not primarily deal with representation of any real urban spaces, “the author provides the reader with numerous clues throughout the narrative, pointing to the fact that the urban space of what was once familiar to both herself and the reader has either been destroyed or repurposed to serve the aims of the regime” (Moldovan 106). The urban spaces in the novel are devoid of greenery and nature. Offred describing the city as a “burning city” (Attwood 191) with “darkening streets” (Attwood 232) proves that the regime is not interested in preserving nature other than maintaining their procreational garden. The wall of Gilead are hundreds of years old made with red brick and “the gates have sentries and there are ugly new floodlights mounted on metal posts above it, and barbed wire along the bottom and broken glass set in concrete along the to (Attwood 31). Its old, ugly composition and the barbed wire to create security showcase the rigid control of the regime against trespassing of normal people, either to its outside or from inside.

The ruins of pre-Gilead society further portray the failure of humans to attain a harmonious relationship with nature. The lines, “a boathouse, where they kept the skulls once” (Attwood 30), “old dormitories, used for something else now” (Attwood 30), “The church...isn’t used anymore, except as a museum” (Attwood 31) and the football stadium used for ‘salvaging’ shows the decay of human communality. The “once peaceful and serene, have

become scenes of mass executions or places where bodies are displayed” (Moldovan 106). Urban decay is evoked again in the environmental pollution caused by the regime’s rules. Rivers are decayed due to the release of toxic chemicals; air is polluted and the life of animals and plants are disrupted. “The air...full of chemicals, rays, radiation and the water swanned with toxic molecules” (Attwood 112) are not cleaned properly by the regime. Through these urban spaces, Attwood shows that behind this façade, Gilead is essentially a “society under constant surveillance, where one must watch one’s every step not to fall out of line” (Attwood 118) which adds to its dystopic nature.

Women and Nature

While discussing Eco-dystopic notions in the novel, it shows that the exploitation of nature and women is similar under a totalitarian regime. The fertility crisis is the predominant crisis in Gilead. As the environment deteriorates, it affects their ability to procreate. This is established in the lines, “No woman in her right mind, these days, would seek to prevent a birth, should she be so lucky as to conceive” (Attwood 33). Pelin Kumbet notes, “Due to widespread and ubiquitous environmental catastrophes, a damaged ecosystem, nuclear fallout, chemical spills, air and water pollution, toxic poisoning... or simply “eco-catastrophes,” along with sexually transmitted diseases, the population has drastically decreased in this outrageous and horrendous world” (Kumbet 27). Hence the women's bodies transform into a central part in maintaining humanity’s survival. The bodies of women suffer a similar fate with nature, that is manipulated, commodified, and altered for human needs.

The declining fertility renders women vulnerable, and men exploit their vulnerability to oppress them. Women’s reproductive right is removed from their bodies. This is carried out by the introduction of handmaids. Handmaids are trained by Aunt Lydia. She serves the regime and follows disciplines set by the commander. Keck emphasizes this as “[being] the top-ranking Aunt, she exerts more power than any other woman in Gilead.... she is entitled to shape

and authorize policy, law, and education—ideologies of (white) womanhood in particular” (Keck 24). Women are bound to coerced reproductive system in Gilead, where, Offred articulates: “We are containers, it’s only the insides of our bodies that are important. The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut” (Attwood 96). The patriarchal undertone of this brutal system is evident in the fact that, even when the commander fails to impregnate a Handmaid, his infertility is never acknowledged: “There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law” (Attwood 61).

Further, the “un-women” are sent to the colonies where “toxic dumps and the radiation spills” (Attwood 248). Here, too, nature and women are exploited in similar ways. In addition, women’s motherhood is commodified like nature. Offred confirms this in the lines, “We are for breeding purposes: we aren’t concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category” (Attwood 136). Handmaids are stripped of their individual rights and reduced to birth machines. They are under constant surveillance by “the Eyes” and their bodies are assessed according to their fertility status. However, it is crucial to note that wives occupy a powerful status in their society, although they are infertile. They are dependent on handmaids to fulfil their social duty of giving birth. Meanwhile, handmaids who assist them in fulfilling their maternal roles are powerless. Ironically, these wives resent handmaids for their power of fertility too.

The policing of the bodies of Handmaids can be equated to the careful taming of a garden. Humans create gardens to make artificial beauty. The garden offers a visual treat to their eyes. Similarly, Handmaids are planted in each commander’s house to give them offspring. The taming of flowers in the following lines shows how women’s bodies and nature are equally manipulatable.

One day I came upon Serena Joy, kneeling on a cushion in the garden... she was snipping off the seedpods with a pair of shears... she was aiming, positioning the blades of the shears, then cutting with a convulsive jerk of the hands. Was it the arthritis, creeping up? Or some blitzkrieg, some kamikaze, committed on the swelling genitalia of the flowers? The fruiting body. (Attwood 153)

A female body is metaphorically mutilated by Serena Joy's acts. In a regime that imposes discipline and coercive power, Handmaids lose their agency akin to the destruction of nature in an anthropocentric world. All these instances from the novel show how woman and nature are subjugated in an eco-dystopian context.

Nature- A Site for Resistance

Gregory Clays notes that "Pockets of resistance to dystopian regimes" (Clays 61) have become a central theme in dystopian literature after the early 1930s. Attwood's novel is no exception in this case. Michaela Keck asserts that "Attwood's Gilead constitutes a totalitarian state whose sexist patriarchy reduces women to their reproductive function and their supposedly "natural" domestic and religious calling. Yet the testimonies from *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* complicate the idea that women in Gilead are solely the victims of its patriarchy" (Keck 18). "Under cover of the familiar routines of shopping, cleaning and cooking, handmaids develop hidden transcripts, short fragments of speech, small deviations in posture and glance" (Hansot 56).

One prominent example of resistance is Offred's engagement with nature through her thoughts. Her inner desires are often alluded to nature. The confined nature of Gilead provokes her desire for wilderness and nature. Surprisingly, she is not afraid to express her desire. Offred muses "not a dandelion in sight here, the lawns are picked clean. I long for one, just one, rubbishy and insolently random and hard to get rid of and perennially yellow as the sun"

(Attwood 212). The image of a dandelion in a plain field encourages her to yearn for freedom. Her resistance against suppressing sexual feelings is expressed through the lushness of nature and her memories with Luke filled with smell of grass and earth. For Offred, the “weedless lawns” (Attwood 44) of Gilead symbolise the restriction of her bodily autonomy. She establishes through her words “All Flesh is grass” (Attwood 45), which means, to be human is to embrace nature.

Tom Moylan notes that “many dystopias are self-consciously warnings” (Moylan 136). The novel *Handmaid’s Tale* seems to relate particularly well with this statement. It can be read as a warning for our precarious future. An unavoidable ecological apocalypse, leading to the reduction of human fertility rate and the commodification of maternal role seems more real when read within today’s climate crisis. It delivers an insight into the dangers of totalitarianism, and loss of individual freedom, particularly the oppression of women. Women are stripped of their rights, reproductive agencies, and sexuality. Religious extremism and Rigid gender roles worsen life in Gilead. Through Offred’s eyes, Attwood illustrates how a totalitarian regime dehumanizes its people by disguising oppression in the name of maintaining order and morality. This dystopic society serves as a reminder of how freedom can be restricted through the manipulation of religion, politics and even women’s bodies.

Eco-Dystopia and the Possibility of a Redemption

The novel presents an eco-dystopic scenario through the descriptions of landscape, nature and women. Attwood’s Gilead is a landscape ravaged by ecological collapse, serving as a warning about the potential consequences of unregulated environmental harm and its ability to shape social structures, politics and human lives. Widespread infertility due to environmental decay sets an eco-dystopian setting. In the novel, Attwood hints in the following lines, that pollution has led to the destruction of human capacity to reproduce.

Women took medicines, pills, men sprayed trees, cows ate grass, all that souped-up piss flowed into the rivers. Not to mention the exploding atomic power plants, along the San Andreas fault, nobody's fault, during the earthquakes, and the mutant strain of syphilis no mold could touch. Some did it themselves, had themselves tied shut with catgut or scarred with chemicals.

(Attwood 112)

These environmental factors cause a decline in the human population and deform the body of women who take pills. The authoritarian regime responds by prioritizing the birth of children and oppresses women for their fertility status. In Gilead, women are divided into Wives, Economies, and Handmaids. Yet, women are also oppressed by women too. The transformation of Serna Joy from a singer to a wife shows how some women are willingly glad to succumb to patriarchy. Meanwhile, the Handmaids are forced to produce offspring for the elites. Their maternal role is commodified, and are treated as breeding livestock. This oppression towards women is directly due to the collapse of ecology in their society.

The instances of resistance depicted through Offred highlight the eco-dystopian threads of the novel. Offred had initially understood her role as a “two-legged womb” (Attwood 136) and identified with the bleeding tulip flowers. Later, she starts having an illicit affair with Nick even though she is aware that “no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts” (Attwood 136). Another instance of resistance tied to nature is her theft of a withered daffodil from the floral arrangement in the sitting room. This episode is described as,

In the wood at midnight, a magic flower. A withered daffodil, not one from the dried arrangement...I find the daffodils, crisp at the edges where they've dried, limp towards the stems, use my fingers to pinch. I will press this, somewhere. Under the mattress. Leave it there, for the next woman, the one who comes after me, to find. (Attwood 98)

The flower imagery reinforces the Eco dystopic theme where both women and nature are controlled in the novel. In addition, the novel recounts the emergence of the group “Mayday”, who works as spies, gather information from Gileadean officers and help rebels to escape. Offred’s silent resistance is later marked by the emptiness of the garden as she escapes from the Commander’s house. Attwood thus intertwines the description of landscape, women and nature to show an eco-dystopian world in which nature, once a sovereign force, is manipulated by the regime, even as it simultaneously serves a site of resistance and potential redemption.

Conclusion

Though Attwood herself consider writing *The Handmaid’s Tale* as “tackling a ustopia” (Attwood 86), the eco-dystopian elements cannot be neglected. The Eco-dystopia in Gilead reflects manipulation, both of its people and the natural world. Within the boundaries of Gilead, the only surviving remains of life are the gardens. Even so, these artificial gardens show the oppression and exploitation of women. Outside Gilead, lands are barren and uninhabitable and the ecosystem is devastated. Handmaids are considered as “two-legged wombs” “sacred vessels” and “ambulatory chalices” (Attwood 136) who fulfil the demands of the state. Inequality thrives in a society where some women act as perpetrators and some are victims.

In this dystopian setting where ecological collapse reaches its threshold, Offred transgresses as a “protagonist reclaim[ing] suppressed and subterranean memory that is foreword looking in its enabling force...[for] reaffirmation of alternative ways of knowing and living in the world” (Moylan 149-50). Her final escape from Gilead serves as a possible redemption from an oppressive state. Ultimately, by showcasing an eco-dystopic world, the novel functions as a dire warning of environmental degradation, human destruction, and tyrannical politics which may lead to humankind’s doom, a warning that resonates with the context of present-day climate catastrophes.

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