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**A comparison of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and
its sequel *The Testaments***

Čestné prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem svou bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Olomouci

.....

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Table of contents

Introduction.....	7
1 Margaret Atwood.....	8
1.1 Accomplishments.....	9
1.2 Common themes.....	9
1.3 Political views.....	11
2 Atwood's inspiration.....	12
3 Prophetic qualities.....	14
3.1 Contemporary reaction to the book vs now.....	14
4 Works.....	16
4.1 The Handmaid's Tale.....	16
4.2 The Testaments.....	18
5 Comparison.....	20
5.1 Narrative.....	20
5.1.1 Narrator.....	20
5.1.2 Point of view.....	21
5.2 Time frame.....	21
5.3 Setting.....	21
5.4 Themes.....	22
5.4.1 Dystopia.....	22
5.4.2 Gender roles.....	22
5.4.3 Religion, theocracy, totalitarianism.....	24
5.4.4 Fertility.....	24
5.4.5 Rebellion.....	25
5.4.6 Choice.....	25
5.4.7 Truth and knowledge in connection to power.....	26

Conclusion	27
Bibliography.....	29
Appendices.....	32
Resumé.....	33
Annotation.....	34

Abstract

Margaret Atwood continues to be considered one of the most versatile writers of our time. Her books gained popularity all around the world. One of her most popular novels is *The Handmaid's Tale*, which was published in 1985. Not long ago, in 2019, the author published a sequel to this book – *The Testaments*. This bachelor project focuses on comparing the two aforementioned books. It aims to uncover any parallels or differences between them. Furthermore, this project is marginally interested in contemporary resurgence in popularity of *The Handmaid's Tale* and tries to uncover any possible reasons for this phenomenon.

Introduction

“*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum. Don't let the bastards grind you down*”

— Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

This seemingly timeless quote originated from *The Handmaid's Tale*, a book that was written more than 30 years ago by Margaret Atwood. Praised by both readers and critics alike, the story of a dystopian theocratic state of Gilead continues to capture readers' attention across generations. And what's more, the themes such as body autonomy, violation of fundamental human rights, or the threat of climate disaster is more relevant now than ever before. Concerned people on Twitter even explicitly claim that some parts of the United States are one step away from becoming *The Handmaid's Tale* (See Figure 1).

In 2019, *The Testaments*, a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, was published. Around the time of its publication the author announced, that it will provide answers to some frequent questions fans of the first book seek.

The main goal of this project is to compare the two books mentioned before. It aims to do so by applying secondary sources and confronting them with the contents of the books, which serve as primary source. The expected outcome is coherent comparison of the two novels split into smaller chapters which will make the similarities and differences more easily discernible.

The first part of the project introduces the author. It describes her early life and beginning of her writing career as well as her accomplishments in the field of literature. Additionally, it touches on the topic of her political views and how they are presented in her work. It includes the author's testimony of the circumstances of the origin of the books. The last chapter of the first part of the project is concerned with current events, how people are remembering *The Handmaid's Tale* and what the author says about the situation.

The second part is dedicated to the comparison of the novels. To make it clearer, the comparison is divided into individual chapters about respective themes.

This work proved to be challenging regarding secondary sources. While there was a great number of sources for *The Handmaid's Tale*, qualified academic sources dealing with *The Testaments* were substantially less numerous and harder to find.

1 Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood, who was born on the 18th of November 1939 in Ottawa, is one of the most famous contemporary Canadian writers. *She received her undergraduate degree from Victoria College at the University of Toronto and her master's degree from Radcliff College* (Atwood, 2019). Atwood is an accomplished writer, whose books has gained popularity all around the world.

Although she discovered passion for writing in her early childhood, she did not completely focus on becoming a professional writer until much later. During the time Atwood was growing up, Canadian national literature did not have the same status as literature from other English-speaking countries. It was not taken seriously and was perceived as some kind of a “*cultural cringe*” (Flajšar, et al., 2012, p. 35).

In fact, it was as late as 1960s and 1970s that Canadian authors such as Michael Ondaatje, George Bowering, and Margaret Lawrence together with Margaret Atwood at the forefront, became acknowledged (Flajšar, et al., 2012, p. 39). She is a versatile writer. In her bibliography there are essays, novels, poems but also books on literary criticism. And despite the fact she is best known for her prose, she has one of the most interesting poetic careers in Canadian context (Flajšar, et al., 2012, p. 33). Margaret began writing poems at university, and later mentioned Northrop Frye as a figure that influenced young poets, such as her, and aspiring writers to be taken seriously (Kröller, 2004, p. 144).

Her first published work was *Double Persephone* (published in 1961), but the work that gained her recognition due to the debate it initiated is undoubtedly *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972). Although being a piece of literary criticism, this book was intended for a general reader. It was concerned with questions about Canadian identity, what it means to be a Canadian, and how Canadian literature can be compared to British or American literature (Flajšar, et al., 2012, p. 35).

Atwood has worked at many different universities and continues to host lectures about how to write and about her work. Surprisingly, she is not very open to the concept of her biography or autobiography. Since her youth, she has published over fifty books on various topics. Over the years, Atwood gained such popularity that some people call her a “*literary celebrity*” (Howells, 2021, p. 201).

1.1 Accomplishments

As previously mentioned, Margaret Atwood is an accomplished writer. This statement can be supported by listing all the awards she received. As the list would be lengthy, only some awards will be mentioned. According to Britannica (2022), one of the more significant awards is Governor General's Literary Award, which she received two times, first for her collection of poems *Circle Game* (1964) and second for her best-selling novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).

However, she earned her earliest award even before graduating. It was E. J. Pratt Medal for her short self-published collection of poems *Double Persephone* (1961) (Howells, 2021, p. 14), which shares the themes of rejecting materialism and praising the natural world with the previously mentioned *Circle Game* (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

1.2 Common themes

Even though Margaret Atwood's books are set in different timelines, deal with diverse topics, and portray different people, there are some reoccurring themes across the entirety of her oeuvre.

The style of Margaret Atwood's writing is commonly referred to as provocative (Larson, 1989, p. 27). She skilfully uses her narrators, who are almost exclusively women, to narrate stories of fictional worlds and situations about which the reader tends to think this could never happen in our time (Howells, 2021, p. 69). And it is this phrase – "*It can't happen here*", about which Atwood thinks that is foolish. As she made herself clear, regarding the topic of what is and is not possible, "*given the circumstances, anything can happen anywhere*" (Atwood, 1998, p. XIII).

Majority of Atwood's work is labelled as feministic. However, the author herself explains that it is not inherently or intentionally written as feministic. She goes as far as distancing herself from this term. She often repeats that her work is usually just a description and record of events happening in the world around her. Thus, if someone reads her book and comes to the conclusion that it is advocating women's rights, it means there is something not right in the real world.

She also adds that when she started her career as a writer, there were no feministic movements and that she, in fact, predates the movement itself. She admits only to being what she calls “*proto-feministic*”, which relates to the previously mentioned fact there was no feminism when she was young. Alternatively, when taken into account, this implies that perhaps it was her work, ideas, and attitude to speak her mind that inspired feminists (Atwood, et al., 2014).

Many of her stories are set in near future. Among other reoccurring themes are gender, constrictions of domestic life, reproductive rights and mental health. Her main characters are women for whom it is common to suffer. These women are not perfect humans, they are real people, which means they make questionable decisions, which can be seen in *The Edible Woman* (1969), where the main character refuses to eat.

Similarly, to *The Handmaid’s Tale* in *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Atwood described a plague-induced apocalypse in the near future. The story is facilitated through the eyes of a protagonist, who is most probably the event’s survivor as is hinted by flashbacks (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

For Lindsay Van Gelder of Ms. Magazine, Atwood answered why her characters always seem to suffer and if its premeditated. “*My women suffer because most of the women I talk to seem to have suffered.*” (The Editors of Poetry Foundation, 2022). And she again reiterates how was her reputation among feminists unsought.

Another feature that is often found within Atwood’s stories is theme of nature, and mankind’s relationship with it, which is usually portrayed as not positive. There are many of her works concerned with nature, for example the poem *The Moment*, which is implying we are visitors, not owners of the nature. Other example would be *Surfacing* which speaks about developers and technology enthusiasts not respecting nature.

Howells (2021, pp. 61, 62) is convinced that Atwood is using testimony as a form of narrative tool because she apparently realized it is effective in terms of her goal – telling stories with aspect of urgency that they might come to reality.

Some scholars managed to find similarities that are rather obscure. Harold Bloom (2001, p. 2), for example, compares Atwood to writers like Mary Shelly and the Brontë sisters. Regarding similarities with famous authors, in *Using What You are Given: An*

Interview with Margaret Atwood (1983, pp. 301 - 315) Margaret Atwood admits she wrote poems inspired by the style of Byron and Shelly. What is peculiar is that according to Bloom, Atwood writes in the style of Northern Gothic, and he goes as far as comparing Atwood's Gilead to a kind of vampiric realm thirsting after women's blood.

1.3 Political views

In the book *The World Split Open, Great Authors on How and Why We Write*, Atwood (2014, p. 23) suggests that a novel should not be political tract, yet both general readers and literary critics connect her books with political and feminist statements. Atwood also proudly states that she “*began as a profoundly apolitical writer,*” but then “*began to do what all novelists and some poets do: I began to describe the world around me*” (The Editors of Poetry Foundation, 2022) which provides the reason behind why her books are read as political statements or allegories.

Like it was previously stated in chapter 1.2 she does not write intentionally feministic fiction nonetheless it does not mean she does not advocate women's equality and what feminist movement is trying to achieve.

She is also an accomplished environmentalist. Perhaps her love for nature stems from her father, who was a renowned biologist and who often took his family on trips into rural parts of Canada. She let herself be heard many times, that if we allow ocean greenery to die out, we will most likely follow (Howells, 2021, pp. 8 - 40). Evidence of these opinions infiltrating her work can be seen in *The Handmaid's Tale* itself as it is set after an ecological crisis and the world is in disarray, where most of the population is sterile due to pollution.

2 Atwood's inspiration

Chapter two attempts to convey what Margaret Atwood stated as some of her main sources of inspiration and further elaborate on them. All of the information given below originates from the Introduction, written in 2017 and added to the new edition of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The author is reminiscing about the time she started writing this novel, and it did not bear the name it has now. She states that the final name given to it in the end was an homage to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

She started writing the story when she lived in Berlin, and at that time West Berlin was still surrounded by Berlin Wall. She remembers the atmosphere and the way people behaved and interacted with each other. She explained that she drew inspiration from this. In the parts where she resided, she says, lived a lot of elderly women that were scared by the war and also several young boys that were avoiding draft. She did not see many families or babies, and she says that this gave her the idea of how dull the world would be without babies.

The place where her novels take place are in immediate vicinity of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. And she purposefully chose that the State of Gilead will display bodies of criminals on the university's walls because it would cause an emotional reaction in readers.

Atwood reveals that she had read many utopian, dystopian and science fiction books since high school, but had the idea to write her own only recently.

However, her dystopia appears to be different, which has been confirmed by Ketterer (1989, pp. 207 - 217), who calls this type of dystopia contextual. She approaches the genre differently than other well-known dystopian writers such as George Orwell or H. G. Wells. Atwood mentioned that she was up to the challenge but was against the idea of dystopia being made up and fictional. She decided that in her dystopia, nothing will happen that did not already happen throughout the real world's history. A similar thought is incorporated in *The Testaments* which is that "*history does not repeat itself, it rhymes*" (Atwood, 2020, p. 407).

She also states that this novel is not feministic in the right sense of the word. Her women are not pure, perfect beings that would always make right and morally acceptable decisions.

Later, she laments that many people "*accuse*" the book of being anti-Christian or anti-religion. Although the interpretation of a book is always up to the reader, she considers this misconception, because she is not against the practice of religion. It is meant to denounce the use of religion as a justification for tyranny.

3 Prophetic qualities

The chapter contemplates how was the book received when it was first published in contrast with modern perception. Further it will provide evidence that the discussions about Atwood being a prophet are not just from our time. Which will be proven with the help of the work *Margaret Atwood and the Future of Prophecy* (Larson, 1989). It will also include comments made by the author.

3.1 Contemporary reaction to the book vs now

Is the book being read differently now than before, is a question Margaret Atwood got asked in a conversation for a Vintage Books YouTube channel. The answer was “*oh for sure*”. According to her own memory, when the book was published, different countries had contrasting reactions. In England it received positive feedback, but they did not consider it a foreshadowing or a threat. On the contrary, in Canada, the reaction was somewhat different, meaning people were wondering if it would be possible that this happened, and in the United States it was almost a reality at that time. Atwood recalls that after the war, the 1980s were the time of “*pushback*”, certain groups swore to fight against feminism. She adds that since then, the United States “*dodged a bullet*” twice in the elections, but third time was not evaded. She is alluding to Trump’s election as president and the risen concern about reproductive rights being overruled as many feared (Vintage Books, 2018).

A similar statement was made by Atwood earlier this year. While appearing on ABC News, Atwood said to the anchor woman that: “*Fortunately, world was moving away from The Handmaid’s Tale from 1985, let’s say to 2010, but now it started moving back towards The Handmaids Tale and that’s why it resonates. And we are seeing, in various countries around the world, a return of repressive policies towards women, including some states in the United States.*” (News, 2022).

Moreover, the prophetic qualities of the novel are not being questioned only recently. Bloom (2001, pp. 1, 2) disagrees with Atwood’s proclamations that *The Handmaid’s Tale* “*is an imagined account of what happens when not uncommon pronouncements about women are taken to their logical conclusions*” (Bloom, 2001, p. 2). He continues to add that for anything to be a pronouncement, it needs to be spoken publicly by a public figure of

importance. He appears to claim he is not aware of anyone who would have the courage to say that woman's place is in the kitchen during the time he wrote his paper.

And yet, despite all protests, anti-abortion laws are approved. Atwood emphasized that it is crucial for the people to ask, "*are we in favour of forced childbirth*" and to think about consequences of such policies. Atwood also mentioned that almost all totalitarian states throughout history were greatly interested in women's reproductive rights (Life, 2016). So, even though it was unheard of for Bloom in 2000s, for the society of 2020s, the regulations regarding women's bodies and subsequently the right to make decisions about one's own body are already in motion.

This can be further proven by looking at social networks. In 2017 aired a successful Hulu series adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, which resulted in more people being familiar with the story of Offred and the practices of Gilead than ever before. In the context of recent Planned Parenthood restrictions in Ohio, people on Twitter are referencing the events of *The Handmaid's Tale* (see Figure 1).

Atwood said that she gets asked variations of the question whether she is proud that her predictions were true. She answered that authors "*usually don't write these kinds of books in hope their prediction will come true. They write them because they think they might happen but still hope they'd rather don't*" (Life, 2016).

The importance of these books and what they are trying to convey is evident, because as Ketterer (1989, pp. 207 - 217) declares, *The Handmaid's Tale* is "*the best and most successful SF novel written by a Canadian.*" But despite this fact, legal actions as a reaction to this book being assigned to students at high schools were made. One parent was very concerned after reading *The Handmaid's Tale*, a book their child had been assigned to read for class. This unnamed parent was concerned about the anti-Christian tones of the book as well as the language and gruesome practices described in the book (Rushowy, 2009).

4 Works

The main aim of this chapter is to briefly outline plots of the primary sources, *The Testaments* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. The concise story summaries support the further subchapters which are concerned with the comparison of several individual aspects of the books.

4.1 The Handmaid's Tale

The story takes place in near future in a post-apocalyptic world, where birth rates have drastically decreased due to pollution and natural disasters. The new country, theocratic state of Gilead, took over the governing of the United States after supposed terroristic attacks caused their downfall. In reality, it was the radical right-wing party who had assassinated government official.

After these events, the new government quickly initiated a plan of “*saving*” the state and its nation. Laws forbidding women to own property or hold jobs were passed quickly. The new state regime was theocratic, meaning it merged politics with religion, and many of its new rules were inspired by stories from the Bible. Although the entirety of the nation was hierarchically sorted, the new system affected women the most. Men were sorted accordingly by their assets, while women, on the other hand, were assigned roles based solely on the fact whether they can bear children.

The name of the main character, who is also the narrator, is Offred, a woman whose role is now a handmaid, a reproductive machine, which is supposed to birth babies for powerful commanders. It is explained to the reader that the names of the handmaids are not real, Offred simply means of-Fred, making them just a property. She often reminiscence about the old times, when the world was normal. It is through her narrative that readers are provided with all information.

As the story unfolds, the reader learns about the daily life of handmaids, about the obscure rituals they have to partake in, and the twisted version of the Bible and religion, that are used as justification for these principles. Offred admits she had a husband of whom she knows nothing now and often mentions her daughter, who got taken away from her.

Life in Gilead is vague for handmaids, as they are not allowed to read or partake in any form of entertainment, or anything deemed dangerous by the state.

Offred is assigned to a Commander Fred and moves to live with him, his Wife and his two Marthas. There is also a chauffeur Nick, who tends not to respect and follow the rules. On one of her shopping trips, another handmaid named Ofglen reveals to her she is a member of a resistance group, called Mayday.

Offred's monotone life slowly begins to change. The commander often requests her visits, where they talk and play scrabble, which is an activity forbidden to women. Except from having sexual intercourse with commander in order to conceive a baby, she is also ordered by the commander's wife, Serena Joy, to have intercourse with Nick. This results in Nick and Offred having an affair.

One day, Offred learns that Ofglen committed suicide to escape from The Eyes, the secret police, who were coming to take her, due to her involvement with the resistance movement called Mayday. Upon returning home Offred is confronted by Serena, who discovered her late-night visits to the commander and their visit to a nightclub. So, she goes to sit in her room when she notices The Eyes coming to take her away, but Nick stops her in the hall and tells her to go willingly, that they are secretly in the resistance. The further fate of Offred remains a mystery.

At the complete end of the novel, there is a college professor Pieixoto commenting on tapes from Gilead. The reader is informed that these tapes contain Offred's Tale. It is further explained the tapes were hidden for a long period of time

The list of the main characters

- Offred – the narrator of the story and a handmaid
- The Commander – a powerful man to whom is Offred assigned
- Commander's Wife (Serena Joy) – former right-wing speaker and an infertile wife of Commander
- Nick – Commander's driver, he is also possibly an Eye or a Mayday member, or both
- Ofglen – another handmaid, she is a part of resistance
- Moira – friend of Offred, rebellious girl who ended in brothel

- Cora and Rita – Marthas, servants assigned to Commander who usually cook and clean (Atwood, 1998).

4.2 The Testaments

The story of *The Testaments* is once again set in the state of Gilead. It has been 15 years since the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*. This time, the story is narrated by three different women. They seem to have nothing in common, but as the story unfolds, their path intertwines. These women are Aunt Lydia, who was first introduced in *The Handmaid's Tale* as one of the trainers of the handmaids. Agnes, a child of an influential Gilead family, and Daisy, whose real name is later revealed to be Nicole.

Aunt Lydia

It is explicitly stated in the book that Aunt Lydia is currently the most powerful of all the Aunts. She was present at the very beginning of Gilead, helping to enforce its rule. She laments that she is an old lady now and probably will die in near future, provided no one will assassinate her first. She testifies that although she helped establish Gilead, and is very powerful, she intends to overthrow the regime. One of the methods how she gained power was by collecting information about powerful people. She now plans to release these secret records of the Gilead to the public outside of the state.

She, similarly, to Offred, talks about her life before Gilead, and how she was not always this strict Aunt who is devoted to Gilead. She was a judge. She continues to report how a Gilead official barged into her workplace and told her she is no longer employed. She explains, it probably looked similarly across the whole country. She regards how they were all given a choice either to be compliant with the regime or die, or go to colonies, which also resulted in death. She explains that she chose to be compliant because that meant survival.

Agnes

Agnes is a daughter of a powerful family of Gilead, at least she thought so. After reaching the age of thirteen her stepmother wants her to get married, which she is not very fond of. Even though she is only a child she explains how the practices of Gilead were horrifying to her and that she did not agree with it. She starts attending school for Aunts, where she learns to write and read, which is a privilege only reserved for the Aunts, in order

to avoid marriage. While at school, Agnes became power hungry after a mysterious folder containing secrets of the state was delivered to her.

Daisy

Daisy is a girl living in Canada. One day her parents are killed, and Daisy discovers that they were not her real parents and in addition, they were the agents of resistance. She leaves with another person involved with the resistance, Ada, who reveals to her that her real identity is Baby Nicole, who is kind of a legend in Gilead because she was smuggled out of Gilead when she was still a baby. Daisy begins to cooperate in the plan of retrieving compromising documents from a source in Gilead, she lets herself to be recruited by *Perl Girls*.

All three stories converge in the Ardua Hall, where Aunt Lydia resides and where Daisy also arrives. It is here that Aunt Lydia places Daisy in Agnese's room and the girls meet. Aunt Lydia reveals herself as the source of information to Daisy and gives her the promised documents. In addition, a plot twist of the story is revealed, which is the fact that Agnes and Daisy are sisters who then, with the help of Becka, successfully escape to Canada. In Canada, secrets of Gilead become public, and these events finally set in motion the downfall of Gilead.

In the end, professor Pieixoto returns, and once again gives his lecture about the recorded testimonies. It appears that a symposium is held for Gilead Studies, that according to the professor became more popular.

The list of the main characters

- Aunt Lydia – the narrator, one of main characters, the most powerful Aunt
- Agnes – second narrator, daughter of powerful Gilead family, Daisy's sister
- Daisy – third narrator, the almost legendary Baby Nicole, infiltrates Gilead
- Becka – friend of Agnes, helps the narrators
- Commander Judd – one of the men who created Gilead, head of The Eyes
- Aunt Vidala – another powerful Aunt, an enemy of Aunt Lydia
- Ada – Resistance agent, took care of Daisy after her parents were murdered (Atwood, 2020)

5 Comparison

The main goal of this project is to compare the novels summarised in the previous chapter. First it will focus on broader aspects before getting to some themes that are of great significance in both books.

5.1 Narrative

As Holman (1936, pp. 335, 336) writes, a narrative is one of four types of composition. He further states that there are two main types of narrative, simple narrative and narrative with plot. The objective of this type of composition is to either interest and entertain or to instruct and inform. It can be argued that both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* incorporate all four objectives.

It solely depends on how the reader looks at the novels. The book itself has the entertaining value, but if observed from the perspective of the fictional scholars, it serves the purpose of informing. Because the heroines from both books recorded their testimonies in hope their experiences would not be forgotten.

5.1.1 Narrator

The main and most obvious difference in terms of narrator figure is that *The Testaments* uses three different narrators from different places, *The Handmaid's Tale* on the contrary uses only one. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Offred tells her story in coherent easily understood way, on the other hand, the story of *The Testaments* is told by three different women. This gives us three separate stories told in three different ways. Aunt Lydia wrote her memoirs into The Ardua Hall Holograph, but Daisy and Lydia gave only oral testimonies that were later transcribed. These different testimonies alternate between chapters. In conclusion the single narrator makes *The Handmaid's Tale* easier to comprehend, simultaneously the three narrators in *The Testaments* make reading somewhat challenging in terms of putting everything into context, but it provides different points of view which can be rewarding.

5.1.2 Point of view

In addition to previous chapter, more narrators also mean multiple points of view. Indeed, all of the narrators use first person perspective, nevertheless they differ in tone. Offred's story is told in a very straightforward way, and the information given to the reader is almost raw. Aunt Lydia's account of events seems to be somewhat calculated, and the stories of Daisy and Agnes are those of teenagers.

While in *The Handmaid's Tale* Offred's narration is often straight to the point, in *The Testaments* the three intertwined narrator figures focused more on day-to-day life. Throughout the narration it is clear that Gilead will soon fall

5.2 Time frame

The first novel is set in a post-apocalyptic, post nuclear world. It is not clear what exact year it is in the story unlike in the sequel, where we still cannot be sure what year it is, but we can be positive it is set 15 years later after Offred was taken away by the Eyes.

Both novels include a chapter with the title Historical Notes. A man who is introduced as professor Pieixoto hosts a class of Gilead Studies. (Atwood, 2020, p. 408) It is in *The Testaments* where we can find cleverly hidden allusion when the professor finds it peculiar that after such a great amount of time, people started to be interested in Gilead history, which can be possibly read as an allusion to risen popularity of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

5.3 Setting

According to Holman (1936, p. 491) setting, which is a background to a narrative, is a combination of the following features: “*actual geographical locations, occupations and daily manner of living, the time or period in which the action takes place, general environment (religious, mental, emotional conditions of characters)*”.

The geographic location of both novels is, for majority of time, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Besides that, *The Testaments* also take the reader to Canada.

Thanks to the testimony being used as a form of narration the daily manner of living is always present, it is its core. The reader is immediately after beginning of reading confronted with what is happening to the characters.

5.4 Themes

This chapter will focus on comparing individual themes that are presented in both novels. It tries to reveal which ones are leading themes and which ones are pushed into background. It also tries to uncover to what extent are these themes used similarly, if they are presented identically or if they differ in some aspects.

5.4.1 Dystopia

Baldick (1990, p. 64) describes dystopia as “*a modern term invented as the opposite of utopia, and applied to any alarmingly unpleasant imaginary world, usually of the projected future. The term is also applied to fictional works depicting such worlds.*” Other famous authors who wrote dystopian genre are for example H. G. Wells or George Orwell.

To add to this Ketterer (1989, pp. 207 - 217) presents a new subgenre of dystopia which was already mentioned in chapter 2 – a contextual dystopia.

Both novels take place in a theocratic state of Gilead almost at the same time, so naturally the dystopic features present in them will be identical. According to Baldick (1990, p. 64) a utopia should come after the fall of dystopia, however it does not in Atwood’s case. What comes after is a world similar to what we would call normal, where professors can give lecture without anyone confronting their misogyny.

5.4.2 Gender roles

Gender roles are presented as very rigid within Gilead and the population is further divided into sort of casts, each having clear purpose and task to perform. We have been shown many times throughout the novels, that any deviation from the “*norm*” will result in punishment. Since the beginning Gilead had a clear goal of limiting women’s freedom and taking away anything that could resemble it.

How crucial is freedom of ownership can be seen when Offred think about the time she could call something her own. “*My own clothes, my own soap, my own money, money I had earned myself. I think about having such control*” (Atwood, 1998, p. 24).

As it was mentioned before, the nation was divided into casts, a concise list of these castes with short explanation can be seen below.

- The Commanders are the most powerful men with important jobs. They are also wealthy resulting in a handmaid being assigned to them.
- The Angels is a kind of militarised police that is allowed to carry guns and they are feared
- The guardians are usually young, or too old, men, who hope to prove themselves so they can move higher in the hierarchy. They are also known to be the most fanatical.
- The Eyes are a secret state police.
- The Aunts are the only women allowed to read and are in charge of training handmaids in red centres.
- The Marthas are in fact a servant class of women.
- The Wives, usually dressed in blue, are often infertile wives of commanders.
- The Econowives are ordinary women and wives of poor men, they are recognised by striped dresses.
- The handmaids who only wear red colour.

The Aunts, the most powerful of the women, who are allowed to write and read are portrayed as cunning women, completely devoted to the regime. This is disproven in *The Testaments* where it is revealed that nothing is strictly black and white. Aunt Lydia who was antagonized in *The Handmaid's Tale* is given space to narrate her side of the events in the sequel. Aunt Lydia was a woman of power in her past life and so she managed to find path to power even in this regime. „*Rather than fall prey to fortune, Aunt Lydia wants to be instrumental in turning the wheel; she wants to hold on to power*” (Kim, 2019).

For the sake of making babies, sexual violence against women is permitted, it is explicitly requested. Also, no other than heterosexual marital union is allowed. Convicted homosexuals are killed and their bodies displayed at university walls.

The narrator of the first story thinks about how the world really changed, that before women were afraid to go out alone after dark, but now “*No man shouts obscenities at us, speaks to us, touches us. ...There is more than one kind of freedom, said Aunt Lydia.*

Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it" (Atwood, 1989, p. 24). She also addresses her missing mother, that this resembles what she advocated, it is women's country only different than they imagined.

5.4.3 Religion, theocracy, totalitarianism

Theocracy is a state where religion and state are merged into one. The fictional theocratic state of Gilead uses perverted version of Bible to enforce their laws. Moreover, women are not allowed to read resulting in them not being able to check if what is being told to them is truly written in the Holy Bible.

The expanding nature of Gilead is proven in *The Testament* where Pearl Girls are sent to Canada to recruit new followers.

5.4.4 Fertility

A cult is created around the concept of fertility. Gilead forces still fertile women in positions of handmaids so the nation can continue to grow by having healthy babies. Nonetheless it is a double-edged sword. Being a handmaid is a difficult position, wearing red means they are always seen. Apart from this, they are usually hated by other women even though, the handmaids most often do not enjoy their position. But being fertile also gives women the advantage, if they ever bear a healthy child, they will never be sent to colonies. The status of fertility remains unchanged across both novels until the actual fall of Gilead.

Even though the state suggest that the fault is in women, thus they separate them into the fertile and infertile group it is a statement of hypocrisy. The fact the government forbade using the word sterile in regard to men, does not prove it is not true. A doctor in *The Handmaid's Tale* is well aware of this fact and moreover he offers to impregnate Offred.

While Gilead advocates no one is allowed to touch women or partake in intercourse out of wedlock, powerful men still use their position of power to force themselves on young girls, like it was seen in *The Testaments*. And while this can cause fertility problems in the girls it is overlooked because of the high rank of the men.

5.4.5 Rebellion

Acts of small rebellion are performed every day in Gilead. Everything depends on how much risk is each person willing to take. The biggest form of rebellion in *The Handmaid's Tale* is the Mayday, but they need to be very careful in order to not be detected. However, the truly big acts of rebellion are present in *The Testaments*.

Small acts of rebellion include men looking at the handmaids faces, deviation from the formal greetings, or even taking butter as substitute for lotion.

In *The Testaments*, there is a lot of rebellion presented to the reader, the cause may be, that two of our three narrators are teenagers, and those are known for rebelling.

Ultimately it is women, although legally stripped of power, who through rebellion managed to overthrow the oppressive regime.

5.4.6 Choice

Women are given choices throughout the stories, but these choices are most of the time an illusion and this choice does not affect change anything. The only seeming choices women are given is whether they will surrender to the regime or not, the later often results in torture, death or moving to colonies, which also results in death.

When Aunt Lydia was given this kind of a choice, either be compliant with the regime or die, or be send to work in toxic wasteland. Similarly, some younger women can choose if they want to work in the colonies or in a brothel. But considering that working in brothel extends life expectancy of the colonies the choice is clear.

To commit suicide is often the last choice people trapped in this regime can make before being taken away and tortured. To make a choice about your own body should be a basic human right however in totalitarian regimes it can be taken away.

The question is if the freedom of choice is taken only from people in totalitarian regimes. And the answer is no. Daisy is growing up in Canada, that is supposed to be a free country and yet, her choices are limited as well as Agnese's. It is more about the circumstances than the regime itself

Agnes is aware of her lack of choice. She recalls an incident which maybe have been a cause of her epiphany regarding Gilead. Handmaid of her father died while giving birth. People present that day praised the handmaid for sacrificing herself so the baby could live, but the truth was, no one asked her. The doctor simply cut her open to save the baby without even considering asking her. (Atwood, 2020, pp. 104 - 105).

Interesting remarks about the theme of choice comes from Aunt Lydia “*We were a society dying, said Aunt Lydia, of too much choice*” (Atwood, 1989, p. 25).

5.4.7 Truth and knowledge in connection to power

It was previously stated that reading and writing is prohibited to women of Gilead. This serves as a way of pacifying them. Because without reading and writing, they have no means of communicating, complaining and scheming. It also means they cannot check if what’s being told is true.

In Gilead Language is used as a tool. All the names given to certain functions, like The Eyes, meaning the eyes of God, are powerful when spoken, and even feared.

Truth and information and the fear of the truth being leaked is the power of Aunt Lydia. She managed to create a network of information.

In opposition to truth stands lie. All people lie and it does not matter whether it is a white lie or a serious lie. And in Gilead, lying is sometimes required in order to survive.

In The Testaments is presented a lying that is supposed to protect someone vs the lie told by the state to cause fear.

Truth and fear of the truth coming out, in that is power
The ban on reading is as severe that all written text is removed from the public, even shop signs were exchanged for pictograms “*when they decided that even the names of shops were too much temptation*” (Atwood, 1989, p. 35).

Conclusion

Canadian author, Margaret Atwood became, thanks to her outstanding literary work, a literary celebrity. Her stories, varying both in genres and themes became popular all over the world. Reader of this project is presented with complex description of Atwood's work and achievements with added commentary to what inspires her.

Chapter one is divided into three subchapters, it narrates Margaret Atwood's life and literary career, it also mentions her biggest literary awards. It briefly talks about common, reoccurring themes within her work before moving to last subchapter of this chapter, that is political views. Her political views reflect most of her common themes. This chapter provides a summarised biography of Margaret Atwood to the reader, this chapter is important in order to completely understand motivation behind many of her works.

Chapter two reports what the author said in preface, written in 2017 that is now added to *The Handmaid's Tale* books. The preface proved to be an interesting addition to the book, and it helps readers understand where Atwood drew the atmospheric inspiration.

Chapter three outlines the prophetic values of Atwood's works, that are often credited to them. The subchapter in this part gives the reader background to political events happening around the world and why Atwood's work risen in popularity so much. It also mentions a peculiar event that took place at one Canadian high school, where parent made legal actions against the book being assigned to the students.

Chapter four, titled "works" summarises plots of both *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*. It also adds a short list of main characters. These summaries help reader understand the following chapter.

Chapter five proved to be the most complex to arrange. Eventually this thesis divided the comparison into two subchapters. First one commenting on general concept of the books with included dictionary entries for some terms, and the second focusing on previously selected themes. The division into small chapters according to themes makes it more comprehensive for the reader.

To conclude this work, it needs to be mentioned that in the end there were more similarities and parallels presented, in the two compared novels, than differences. The main difference is usually in the way the themes were portrayed and in which book. This comparation concludes that *The Handmaid's Tale* is telling the story in a more

straightforward way and *The Testaments* on the contrary sometimes intertwines the three narratives too much.

This thesis may serve as a base to conversation on any of the topics presented throughout, it already includes plot summaries of the novels which can be beneficial in saving time of the students or perhaps not to expose them to unacceptable language.

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Appendices

Figure 1: Tweet “Ohio is one step away from #handmaidstale”



Resumé

Závěrečná práce je zaměřena na srovnání dvou děl Margaret Atwoodové – Příběh služebnice a Svědectví. Po nastudování primárních a sekundárních zdrojů byla vybrána klíčová témata, kterým se v rámci srovnání práce věnovala detailněji. Práce čtenáři nejdříve představí autorku samotnou. Po přečtení by měl čtenář získat základní vědomosti o tématech autorčina nejúspěšnějšího díla Příběh služebnice a jeho pokračování Svědectví.

Annotation

Jméno a příjmení:	Aneta Leitnerová
Katedra nebo ústav:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Petr Anténe, M.A., Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2022

Název práce:	Srovnání díla <i>Příběh služebnice</i> od Margaret Atwoodové s jeho pokračováním <i>Svědectví</i>
Název práce v angličtině:	A comparison of Margaret Atwood's <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> and its sequel <i>The Testaments</i>
Anotace práce:	Hlavním cílem této práce je srovnat dvě díla Margaret Atwoodové, <i>Příběh služebnice</i> a <i>Svědectví</i> , nejdříve obecně a posléze na základě vybraných klíčových témat. Dílčí cíl je představit čtenáři samotnou autorku, jakých dosáhla ocenění a odkud čerpá inspiraci.
Klíčová slova:	Atwoodová, <i>Příběh služebnice</i> , <i>Svědectví</i> , dystopie, feminismus, politika, reprodukční práva
Anotace práce v angličtině	Project first introduces the author, her work and accomplishments also what inspires her. Main goal of the project is to compare <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> with <i>The Testaments</i> , first in general, second by individual themes
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Atwood, <i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> , <i>The Testaments</i> , dystopia, feminism, politics, reproductive rights
Přílohy vázané v práci:	Figure 1: screenshot: tweet: „Ohio is one step away from #handmaidstale
Rozsah práce:	34 s.
Jazyk práce:	Angličtina