

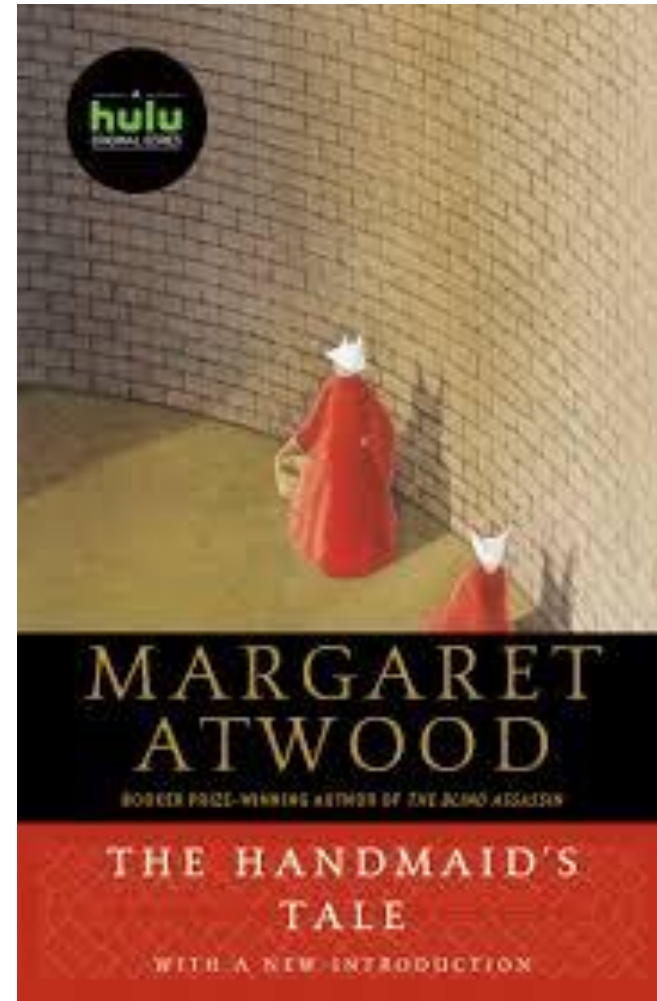
A group of women in red capes and white conical hennin hats, likely during a historical reenactment or festival. The women are walking in a line, and the scene is set outdoors at night or dusk. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights on the red capes and white hats, and deep shadows elsewhere. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and structures.

Handmaid's Tale

Ethan, Anthony, Siddharth, Manisha, Parinita

Overall Background

- imaginary, futuristic writing style
- Speculative fiction
- patriarchy-unforgiving view
- published in 1986
- narrative voice: Offred
- setting: Gilead, future location where Boston is now
- full of biblical allusions
- in hebrew, Gilead means memorial site
- book was inspired by a trip to Afghanistan and the iranian revolution
- Was a backlash from feminist movement
- equal rights amendment- introduced but not passed



Historical Context

- The Handmaid's Tale was written in Alabama and West Germany
 - Observed adherence traditional Christian values in Alabama
 - Horrified by the police state in East Germany
 - These locations have heavy influence on the plot
- Published after the elections of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan
 - The conservative right experienced a resurgence due to the rise of a well-organized religious base
 - Feminists worried that the gains of 1960s and 1970s--proliferation of contraception, legal access to abortion, and greater sexual freedom--could be undone
- Reflects fears promulgated in "*Silent Spring*" (declining birth rates + nuclear energy)
 - The Christian fundamentalists create Gilead due to declining birth rates
 - Gilead struggles with excessive nuclear pollution

About the author

- The *Handmaid's Tale* was written by Margaret Atwood
- Born November 18, 1939 in Ottawa, Canada
- Known for her works of speculative fiction
- Postmodern author
- Feminist perspective
 - Interest in women
 - Focuses on the female experiences in her novels
- Fun Fact: Atwood went to Harvard
- concerned with Canada's cultural identity
- loved reading literature especially mysteries and Grimm's Fairy Tales



Characters



- **Handmaids:** have sex with their married commanders to produce a child
- **Offred:** real name is June, handmaid, narrative voice of the novel and main character
- **Aunt Lydia:** instructor at the Red Center who instructs handmaids how to serve
- **Moirra:** Offred's best friend who starts out as a handmaid but escapes. She is captured and set to work at a brothel.
- **Janine:** a handmaid who feels guilty because she was gang raped, became pregnant, and had an abortion
- **Fred:** Offred's commander who plays scrabble with her and seems nice, but is cruel and violent
- **Serena Joy:** Fred's wife who used to sing gospel and commander's wife
- **Rita:** The Commander's housekeeper
- **Nick:** Fred's driver who winks at Offred a lot and has sex with Offred to get her pregnant
- **Luke:** Offred's husband who is captured and whose whereabouts are unknown

Summary of the Plot

- Offred's Past
 - Daughter of a feminist
 - Attended a university and was friends with Moira
 - Offred became involved with a married man, Luke, whom she married and had a daughter
- After a military coup where the president and Congress members were killed, the Republic of Gilead was born
 - Women could no longer work or have money
- Offred, Luke, and their daughter were caught trying to flee to Canada
 - Offred was sent to a center for preparing to become a Handmaid, but Moira escaped the center
- Offred is assigned to Fred and his wife Serena Joy to produce a child
 - The doctor suggests the Commander may be sterile, but Offred declines impregnation
- Offred has sex with the Commande, and soon has nighttime meetings where they play scrabble (develop personal relationship)
- Ofglen reveals to Offred that she is part of an underground resistance movement
- Serena Joy arranges for Offred to have sex with Nick to conceive
- The Commander takes Offred to a brothel where Moira works as prostitute
- Attend public execution where a member of the resistance was killed
 - Ofglen is replaced b another handmaid because she hung herself to avoid arrest
- Serena Joy discovered the sexy costume Offred wore to the brothel
- A van of Eyes comes to arrest Offred, but Nick tells her that the Eyes are part of the resistance
- The novel ends with Offred taken away to an uncertain fate

Biblical allusions

- Adam and Eve

- The creation of mankind in the Book of Genesis
- The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken. (Genesis 2:2-23)
- The man replied, "The woman whom you put here with me - she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it." (Genesis 3;12)
- The Republic of Gilead takes passages from Genesis regarding Adam and Eve to justify making women lesser and subservient to men

● Martha

- She had a sister named Mary (who) sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving (Luke 10:39-40)
- Used as justification for Marthas (old female housekeepers) in the society of Gilead, and Martha's condemnation for working by Jesus as a reason for their lower place in Gilead Society

● Jezebel (from the bible)

- Was a phoenician princess and married the prince of Israel
- Her husband died so a man named Jehu told her he would take over the throne by killing her child
- She dresses up in hopes of seducing Jehu and was later thrown out and killed
- Her name used to describe cunning and ruthless women
- Symbol of the first suffragist

Main Themes

- **Stolen Identity**

- In this novel, the identities of the handmaid's are removed in every aspect possible, having only their memories to remain. The names of the handmaid's are not used, but rather the name of their owner is used. They also are no longer allowed to express themselves through clothing, forced to wear uniform colors, and they do not have mirrors, so they lose an idea of their personal image which is part of their identity.

- **Subjugated Love**

- Love has essentially become removed from society, with the intent of sustaining populations being the only goal. The handmaid's are put into a position where they can no longer love, and must be used as reproductive machines rather than as humans.

- **Freedom and Confinement**

- Freedom in this novel has become twisted so much, that there becomes a misunderstanding of what freedom is. Because freedom is relative, the handmaid's look for freedom in their own memories rather than freedom in the physical sense. They have become confined to live in their lives in such restricted situations, treated only as a means to an end.