

Get Ready for your Exam!

UNIT 17

Évaluation



Like the Kingdom of God, the Republic of Gilead is both now and not yet. Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* conjures a theocratic dystopia — a version of the United States taken over by fundamentalist Christians after a terrorist attack on Washington. Women are now divided into rigid classes determined by an idiosyncratic interpretation of the Bible. Atwood's protagonist, Offred, is a Handmaid — a fallen woman who is forced to bear children for righteous couples — and the book follows her sufferings under the Gilead regime. Atwood paints in garish strokes intended to shock: This new society calls homosexuality "gender treachery" and forbids women to read, own property, or choose their own clothing. Since the novel's publication three decades ago, Gilead has existed as a paper nightmare that gains or loses dimension based on the state of our national politics. Of course, we don't divide women into classes of Marthas, Handmaids, Econowives, and Wives; we call them "the help," "surrogates," the working class, and the one percent. [...]

Set in the very near future, Hulu's new adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* subtly updates Atwood's dystopia. [...] In the show, as in our moment, it is not just men, but crucially some women, too, who fervently wish for a society where women are no longer free or equal. Women known as Aunts initiate the Handmaids into their new roles; Wives terrorize Handmaids with little restraint. These women midwife Gilead into the world, though it's not clear what they stand to gain from any of it.

Most contradictory and recognizable of all these female collaborators is Serena Joy, the wife of Offred's commander. Before Gilead, she graced American television screens as a preternaturally blond evangelist. (Serena Joy was her stage name, a nom de guerre for the culture wars.) Even though she occupies the highest rank for a woman in this new world, she is now legally inferior to her sad-sack husband and, finding herself childless, has to employ Offred as a surrogate. Rage roils the edges of her ice-princess restraint. "She doesn't make speeches anymore," Offred notes in the book. "She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word." [...]

But *The Handmaid's Tale* does more than present a possible future: it asks us to consider how we'd end up there. A form of feminism that celebrates power for power's sake, instead of interrogating how it is concentrated and distributed, will usher us into fascism. Feminism means something. Some choices oppress the women who make them, and some beliefs, if enforced, would oppress everyone else, too. Allow an anti choice woman to call herself a feminist and you have ceded political territory that you cannot afford to lose. Stripped of political meaning, "feminist" becomes an entirely subjective term that anyone with any agenda can use. [...]

Margaret Atwood makes a perfect cameo in Hulu's series. She plays an Aunt, and she slaps the side of Offred's head during her re-education. Pay attention, she seems to say. Wake up.

Sarah Jones, *The New Republic*, 2017

Compréhension de l'écrit



- Write in your own words what life in Gilead is like.
- Explain the following quote:
"*The Republic of Gilead is both now and not yet.*" (l. 1)
- What parallel does the journalist draw between Gilead and the United States?
- In Gilead, how do women accept their fate?

Expression écrite



Choisissez l'un des deux sujets.

Sujet 1 : From what you have read or from what you know about Margaret Atwood's novel or the series based on her novel, could Gilead exist in the future? Why (not)?

Sujet 2 : Comment on the last sentence of the article:
"*Margaret Atwood makes a perfect cameo in Hulu's series. She plays an Aunt, and she slaps the side of Offred's head during her re-education. Pay attention, she seems to say. Wake up.*" (l. 31)