

The Handmaid's Tale

Context

- Published in 1985
- Dystopian fiction
 - ↳ set in the near, recognisable future
 - ↳ a contemporary issue has been magnified and is of immense significance
 - ↳ imaginative exploration of ~~the~~ a near future with a crucial problem
- Atwood calls her novel a "speculative fiction" as she uses the book to explore what the future could look like, theorises possible futures
- At the time, there was severe backlash against the women's rights movement and civil rights movement. In her novel, Atwood ~~is~~ investigates what the world would look like if these ~~resistance~~ resistance groups overthrew the government.

Nothing is fictionalised; Atwood has spliced together elements from various ideologies, totalitarian regimes, etc. "There is nothing in this novel that hasn't already happened."

Key Themes

- People's rights
- Democracy - is it taken for granted?
- Prescient = predicts the future especially accurately
- Totalitarianism, a government that is not democratically elected seeks ~~to~~ ~~control~~ ~~to~~ ~~restrict~~ restrict people's freedom, deeming any ^{form of} defiance as worthy of total consequence
- Gilead is theocratic

Context Is All

~~Political Influences~~

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Political Influences

- Berlin Wall, divided Germany, Soviet Union
↳ harsh, authoritarian regimes
- WWII, "change could be as fast as lightning", Nazi Germany + Ceausescu's Romania (Totalitarian regimes)
↳ nature of totalitarian thinking that is one of this novel's standout features, particularly surveillance + terror
- Theocratic society of Puritan New England in the 17th century, Founding Fathers of America

Literary Influences

- "Wariness, the feeling of being spied on, the silences, the changes of subject the oblique ways people might convey information" → ~~was a~~ Linguistic communication/discourse.
- "The Scarlet Letter," Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1850
- "1984," George Orwell
- "Brave New World," Aldous Huxley
↳ Ideas of surveillance are ~~spiced~~ spiced.

Other aspects of the novel's background include...

- Banned from reading in some highschools in the US when it was first published.
- High level of CCTV camera's in Western Society; To what extent are we, as ostensibly ~~the~~ free subjects actually subject to the surveillance mirrored in ~~silica~~ ~~and~~ that is associated with totalitarianism?
- The novel makes us reflect on our own context, ~~to~~ as if to say, "you think it couldn't happen here, but could it?" "Anything can happen anywhere, given the circumstances" Atwood.
↳ from the point of view as a speculative fiction, the Handmaid Tale is a warning, a warning to us all.
- US setting => Atwood sees the heritage of extreme political thought ≠ liberal Canada
↳ currents of religious extremism, on which America was founded, ~~persist~~ ^{persist}.
- 1980s resurgence of the "New Right"
↳ traditional values: Birth Dearth, misogyny, emasculation, extreme view on abortion (pro-life).