Tampere University

Matleena Kallinen

RELEVANT DYSTOPIAS: ADAPTING *THE HANDMAID'S TALE* FOR TELEVISION

Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences
Master's Thesis
October 2020

ABSTRACT

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Master's Thesis
Tampere University
Master's Program in English Language and Literature
October 2020

In this thesis, I examine the book *The Handmaid's Tale* and the first two seasons of the television series adaptation made from it. Margaret Atwood wrote the dystopian story of *The Handmaid's Tale* in the 1980's inspired by, among other things, the rise of the religious right in the United States. The television series adaptation based on the book premiered on the streaming service *Hulu* in April 2017. The series was renewed for a second season less than a month later due to its popularity. The first season included most of the plot of the novel, and the second season continued the story forward. The television show has been called extremely relevant in the current society of the United States.

The aim of this thesis is to study what has changed and what has been changed when making this television series into a relevant adaptation of the book. I will look at what kinds of changes the adapters have made to the story and the characters and what the reasons behind these changes are. Instead of individual scenes, I focus on a collection of larger themes and the way they are handled in the television adaptation.

The theoretical framework consists mainly of adaptational theory, with an emphasis on texts from Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam, and a collection of academic articles written about *The Handmaid's Tale*. Some chapters also include specific theories that are relevant to the theme in question, such as Foucault's theory of discourse and power in the chapter concerning language and thought and the control imposed on them in both versions of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The analysis section of the thesis is divided into three parts. The first discusses three themes that are present in both the novel and the television series but are represented in different ways in the two versions. These themes are the agency of female characters, religion, and language and thought. The second part discusses two themes that have been added or greatly expanded in the television series compared to the book, which are sexual minorities, and diplomacy and media. The third part discusses the decision to omit the epilogue of the book from the television series, and how this affects the story.

As has been theorized in the adaptational field, multiple different factors affect the adapters' choices during an adaptation process. This was found to be true in this study as well. The culture in which an adaptation is made affects the adaptation itself, and this is especially true for *The Handmaid's Tale*, where the story is moved from the near future of the 1980's to the near future of the 2010's. Situating the story close to the current day allows the adapters to include such relevant themes as the overturning of the same-sex marriage in the show. During the recent years, viewers of the television series have been worried that women's rights, especially reproductive rights and abortion, are under attack from the religious right. This has led to demonstrators wearing clothes fashioned after the dresses of the Handmaids from the television series in women's rights demonstrations.

One of the key findings of this thesis was the fact that the many choices the adapters make to change a text are connected to each other. Deciding to make the language use of the characters less controlled than it is in the novel also increases the agency of the characters. And deciding to make the protagonist a more active and resistant character also makes her less complex than her counterpart in the book.

The analysis of the different themes showed that there are two defining reasons why the television show *The Handmaid's Tale* is considered extremely relevant. The changes in the culture and the political atmosphere in the United States in the recent years have made the story seem more plausible. In addition to that, the adapters have made several choices to move the story to the current time and to add new, relevant themes to it.

Keywords: adaptation, The Handmaid's Tale, dystopia, religious right, relevance

TIIVISTELMÄ

Matleena Kallinen: Relevant Dystopias: Adapting *the Handmaid's Tale* for Television
Pro gradu -tutkielma
Tampereen yliopisto
Englannin kielen ja kirjallisuuden maisteriohjelma
Lokakuu 2020

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan *Orjattaresi*-kirjaa ja siitä tehdyn televisiosarja-adaptaation kahta ensimmäistä tuotantokautta. Margaret Atwood kirjoitti tämän dystooppisen tarinan 1980-luvulla inspiraationaan muun muassa uskonnollisen oikeiston nousu Yhdysvalloissa. Kirjaan perustuvan televisiosarjan ensimmäinen jakso julkaistiin *Hulu*-suoratoistopalvelussa huhtikuussa 2017. Suuren suosion ansiosta sarjaa päätettiin jatkaa toiselle kaudelle jo alle kuukausi ensi-illan jälkeen. Ensimmäinen tuotantokausi sisälsi lähes kaiken kirjan juonesta ja toinen kausi vei juonta kirjaa pidemmälle. *The Handmaid's Tale – Orjattaresi* -sarjaa on kutsuttu äärimmäisen ajankohtaiseksi Yhdysvaltojen nykyisessä yhteiskunnassa.

Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on tutkia mikä on muuttunut ja mitä on muutettu tehdessä tästä kirjasta ajankohtaista televisiosarja-adaptaatiota. Tutkin millaisia muutoksia adaptoijat ovat tehneet tarinaan ja hahmoihin ja mitkä ovat syyt näiden muutosten taustalla. Yksittäisten kohtausten sijaan keskityn kokoelmaan suurempia teemoja ja niiden käsittelyä tässä adaptaatiossa.

Tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys koostuu pääosin adaptaatioteoriasta, keskittyen erityisesti Linda Hutcheonin ja Robert Stamin teksteihin, sekä kokoelmasta *Orjattaresi*-kirjasta kirjoitetuista akateemisista artikkeleista. Joissakin luvuissa on myös käytetty yksittäisiä, juuri kyseiseen teemaan liittyviä teorioita kuten Foucaultin diskurssi- ja valtateoriaa luvussa, joka käsittelee kieltä ja ajatuksia ja niiden kontrollointia eri versioissa.

Analyysiosio on jaettu kolmeen osaan. Ensimmäinen käsittelee kolmea eri teemaa, jotka ovat läsnä sekä kirjassa että televisiosarjassa, mutta joita käsitellään niissä eri tavoin. Nämä teemat ovat naishahmojen toiminnallisuus, uskonto, sekä kieli ja ajatukset. Toinen osa käsittelee kahta teemaa, jotka on lisätty televisiosarjaan tai joiden merkitystä siinä on kasvatettu merkittävästi. Nämä teemat ovat seksuaalivähemmistöt sekä diplomatia ja media. Kolmas osa pohtii päätöstä jättää kirjan epilogi pois sarjasta ja sitä, miten tämä päätös vaikuttaa tarinaan.

Kuten adaptaatiota tutkiessa on teoretisoitu, monet eri asiat vaikuttavat adaptoijien valintoihin adaptaatioprosessin aikana. Myös tämän tutkielman tulokset tukevat tätä päätelmää. Kulttuuri, jossa adaptaatio tehdään, vaikuttaa itse adaptaatioon, ja tämä on totta etenkin tässä tapauksessa, jossa adaptoitava tarina on siirretty 1980-luvun lähitulevaisuudesta 2010-luvun lähitulevaisuuteen. Tapahtumien siirtäminen nykyaikaan antaa adaptoijille mahdollisuuden lisätä tarinaan ajankohtaisia aiheita kuten tasa-arvoisen avioliittolain kumoaminen. Viime vuosina *The Handmaid's Tale – Orjattaresi* -sarjan katsojat ovat olleet huolissaan siitä, että naisten oikeudet – etenkin lisääntymis- ja aborttioikeudet – ovat olleet uskonnollisen oikeiston hyökkäysten kohteena. Tämä on johtanut siihen, että mielenosoittajat ovat pukeutuneet orjattarien pukujen mukaan tehtyihin vaatteisiin osallistuessaan naisten oikeuksia puolustaviin mielenosoituksiin.

Tutkielmassa selviää, että adaptoijien tekemät päätökset liittyvät ja vaikuttavat toisiinsa. Päätös vähentää hahmojen kielenkäyttöön liittyvää kontrollia päätyy samalla lisäämään hahmojen toiminnallisuutta. Ja päätös tehdä päähenkilöstä aktiivisempi ja vahvemmin valtaapitäviä vastustava johtaa siihen, että hahmosta tulee yksitahoisempi kuin mitä kirjan päähenkilö on.

Eri teemojen analysointi osoitti, että on olemassa kaksi pääsyytä sille, miksi *The Handmaid's Tale – Orjattaresi* -sarjaa pidetään niin ajankohtaisena. Muutokset Yhdysvaltojen kulttuurissa ja poliittisessa ilmapiirissä ovat tehneet tarinasta uskottavamman. Sen lisäksi adaptoijat ovat tehneet useita valintoja siirtääkseen tarinan nykyaikaan ja lisätäkseen uusia, ajankohtaisia aiheita siihen.

Avainsanat: adaptaatio, Orjattaresi, dystopia, uskonnollinen oikeisto, ajankohtaisuus

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1. Introduction

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is one of the most popular dystopias created in the 20th century, and recently it has been adapted into a majorly popular television series. The first season of the series aired in April of 2017 with such popularity that a second season was announced the next month (Wagmeister). The series has won several awards, such as Golden Globes, Emmy Awards and a USC Scripter Award for Best Adapted TV Screenplay (Gaskill; "The Handmaid's Tale"; "Winners & Nominees 2018").

Margaret Atwood, the author of *The Handmaid's Tale* and a follow-up novel *The Testaments* re-read both of these books recently. "'I creeped myself out quite a lot,' she said. In terms of the world today, 'they're just a little bit too accurate.'", she was quoted as saying on *The Seattle Times* (Macdonald). The television series has been called both relevant and "extremely prescient due to the recent movements in the United States to reduce reproductive freedom for women" (Cullen, 207). Protestors in real life have worn red dresses similar to the ones worn by the Handmaids in the television series in protests concerning abortion rights around the world, for example in Ireland, Argentina and Texas (Flood). The series is thus not only popular among viewers, but its influence has spread to the sphere of political activism in many countries.

How does an adaptation of a novel written in the 1980's become so popular and relevant today? As Francesco Bacci notes, already when writing the novel in the 1980's, Margaret Atwood "anticipated some of the contemporary social issues that deal with gender, social control, xenophobia, and homophobia…" (169-70). In her review of the first season of the series, Sarah Cullen stated the following: "Few other adaptations can be said to not only remain as faithful to the original text as this adaptation does, but to build on the original in such a way as to draw in the uninitiated and reward the novel's fans simultaneously." (Cullen, 206). The first season

of the series does follow the plot of the novel quite closely. Though, naturally, there are many changes and additions to and omissions from the original material. The second season of the series, however, contains mostly new material: since the first season included almost all of the plot of the novel, the makers of the television series had to continue the story further and add almost exclusively new material. However, the second season contains mostly the same characters and deals with the themes already introduced in the first season. This thesis shall look at the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and the first two seasons of the television series of the same name. The primary focus shall be placed on the first season, but the second season shall be discussed as well, especially in the fourth chapter. The aim of this study is to research how can a novel from the 1980's be made into a relevant television series adaptation in the 21st century? What kinds of changes have been made to make the adaptation more suitable to the 21st century? What else could explain these changes? What themes that did not necessarily exist in the original text have been added or expanded? Has anything been omitted altogether?

A third season of the television show has already aired in 2019, but since this thesis is looking at the adaptation process, and the third season is already so removed from the novel, that it is more a sequel than an adaptation, it is beyond the scope of this research. The follow-up novel to *The Handmaid's Tale* called *The Testaments* (2019) is also excluded. That story is set in the future, 16 years after the events of *The Handmaid's Tale.* Atwood has said that she did not want to "contradict a story already being told", so she did take into account what had happened in the second season of the television series and set her story to a time many years later (Macdonald). *The Testaments* will eventually be adapted for television, but whether it will be a separate product or included in the future seasons of *The Handmaid's Tale* series will remain to be seen (Macdonald). The way that *The Testaments* was announced to be adapted for television soon after its publishing is another example of how many successful books are adapted for film or television and why there is an increasing need for adaptation studies.

The call for more adaptation studies has existed for a long time. In the year 2000, James Naremore wrote in his Introduction, that adaptation studies should be moved to the centre of media studies (15). Less than ten years later Rachel Carroll stated that with the increasing numbers of studies from film and media studies and literary fields, adaptation studies is starting to become its own disciplinary field (Carroll, 35). With so many popular books being adapted into either film or television, there is a constant need for more and more adaptation studies (Stam 2005b, 45). In some cases, a straightforward study of adapting a text into a different media is not enough anymore. For example, in the case of adapting the book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* into the television series *Game of Thrones* the adaptation ended up being made faster than the last installations of the book series and thus the last seasons of the television series had to be written without complete source material. A similar effect happened in *The Handmaid's Tale* when the makers of the television series decided to continue the story onwards and make a second (and a third) season.

One of the debates in classic adaptation studies has been the concept of fidelity (Carroll, 40; Hutcheon, 6-7): how faithful is this adaptation to the source text? Lately, the question of fidelity and its value as an indicator of the successfulness of an adaptation has been largely criticised. For example, Carroll states that looking at the fidelity "reduces the critic to a state of passivity" and the critic ends up simply listing the differences between the two versions (Carroll, 40). I intend to avoid just this. Instead, I shall be looking at a collection of bigger themes: for instance, what themes have been handled differently and what has been added, rather than looking at individual differences within scenes. I shall also attempt to find out why these changes have been made. What kinds of reasons are behind them? Adaptations are said to exemplify "key trends in postmodern culture" (Carroll, 1), among other things. What aspects of the society of the USA might account for which changes?

The following chapter will include the bulk of the adaptational theory that will be used in this thesis. Works from writers such as Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam are in a central role. Throughout the whole thesis theories and texts written about book itself will also be used. The next chapter includes also a look at *The Handmaid's Tale* as an object of adaptation. Why was it chosen to be adapted? What aspects of it would encourage someone to make a television series version of it? On the other hand, what challenges does it pose to the adapter? Lastly, there will be a short look at a previous adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, namely a movie made in the 1990's.

The chapter after that will discuss some themes that have clearly been handled in a visibly different way in the television series version compared to the book. These themes include the agency of many of the female characters and the concept of religion and especially the personal religious beliefs (or lack thereof) of some of the characters. The third focal point of the chapter shall be the role of language and thought in the world of *The Handmaid's Tale*: how strongly are they controlled? How does the control imposed on the use of language affect the actions and even the thoughts of the characters?

The fourth chapter will focus on the themes that have been greatly expanded or even completely added to the television show. For example, the role of sexual minorities is a lot bigger in the television show, both in the present of the story and in the past. There are many more characters that belong to a sexual minority and their storylines are related to this aspect a lot more than in the book. Things such as diplomatic relations and the use of media in handling them also have a much bigger role in the television series. There are diplomatic delegations both sent into Gilead and from Gilead to other countries, and the way Gilead is represented in the media is discussed multiple times. There is even hinting at the untrustworthiness of media in much the way the term 'fake news' is used nowadays.

One major difference between the book and the television series is the lack of the epilogue text, which is often considered one of the most important parts of the book. The fifth chapter shall take a look at the epilogue and its role in the book, and how omitting it from the television series affects the story.

2. Adaptation and *The Handmaid's Tale*

This chapter discusses adaptational theory in general. What are some relevant questions in that field? What is even considered adapting? How has adaptational theory changed during the years? What kinds of things do adapters have to take into consideration when adapting a text?

There shall also be a general look into *The Handmaid's Tale* as source material for an adaptation. What kind of a story is *The Handmaid's Tale*? Why was this text chosen to be adapted? This section shall also include a short description of the story in general as it is told in the book.

The final part of this chapter shall take a quick look at a previous adaptation to a visual media of this book: the movie made in 1990. The movie was not considered a successful adaptation. What changes could have led to this? Has the movie adaptation influenced the television series adaptation in any visible way? This last section shall rely heavily on the works of other researchers, who have looked at the movie adaptation critically over the years.

2.1 Adaptational Theory

As Linda Hutcheon remarks, Western culture has a "long and happy history of borrowing and stealing or, more accurately, sharing stories" (Hutcheon, 4). It is also common for a popular story to have many different kinds of versions – for example the classic fairy tales often known as the tales of the Brothers Grimm. Adapting stories and texts to a different medium could be seen as a natural continuation of this tradition. Hutcheon does not consider sequels or prequels adaptations – the difference there is "between never wanting a story to end … and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways" (9). Since the topic of this thesis is the

adaptation of a book into a television series, I shall focus on the theory concerning adaptations between two different mediums.

Hutcheon talks about how "adaptations are often compared to translations": "Just as there is no such thing as a literal translation, there can be no literal adaptation" (17). Especially when adapting a text to a different medium, some changes are imminent (Hutcheon, 17; Stam 2005b, 17). Robert Stam simply states that it is impossible to achieve a total 'fidelity' when adapting a text to another medium (2005b, 17). With film or television there is both the multiplying of 'tracks' meaning the addition of things such as music and sound effects, and the increase in the number of people involved – cast and crew and possible support staff – that can all affect the adaptation and make it unlikely, and even undesirable, to achieve fidelity (Stam 2005b, 17). Since each medium is different, they also have different strengths and weaknesses: certain things are easier to express in one medium over another, but this does not mean one medium should be considered superior in general (Hutcheon, 24 and 28).

As both Rachel Carroll and Linda Hutcheon state, an adaptation is an interpretation (Carroll, 1, and Hutcheon, 112). Thus, it does not matter how closely the adaptation tries to recreate the adapted text, "every adaptation is an instance of textual *in*fidelity." (Carroll, 1, emphasis in original). This brings us to an important debate in the adaptational field: the fidelity debate. For a long time, 'fidelity criticism' was a defining feature of adaptation studies (Hutcheon, 6-7). Nowadays this concept is highly criticised. The consensus in this field is that one of the biggest problems that focusing on fidelity causes is the inevitable higher value that this concentration places on the 'original' text – the text being adapted (Carroll, 40; Hutcheon, 17; Naremore, 8; Stam 2005b, 4). This causes the study to mainly focus only on the ways the adaptation differs from the adapted text instead of the process or the reasons behind these changes – which is exactly what this thesis tries to avoid.

In addition to the way fidelity criticism places a higher value on the 'original' text, it is also deemed problematic due to the way it usually values literature over the visual media (Naremore, 2; Stam 2005b, 4). Since the aim of this thesis is not to determine in any way how objectively 'good' the television adaptation is, I should be able to avoid having any biases of this sort and only discuss the differences in the two media when it is relevant for the reasons behind the changes made during the adaptation. To help researchers avoid these problems of fidelity criticism, Robert Stam suggests that they should use comparative narratology in their research, with questions such as: "What events from the novel's story have been eliminated, added, or changed in the adaptation, and, more important, why?" (2005b, 34).

In 2007, Linda Hutcheon paired up with the biologist Gary Bortolotti to look at the question of adaptation from a biological standpoint. Bortolotti and Hutcheon are hoping to move the conversation away from the 'fidelity discourse' with this paper (444). They compare different adaptations to different life forms stemming from the same ancestors. In biology, diversity is celebrated while also being aware of the common origin of the different life forms (445). All organisms have "equal biological validity" and in the same way all cultural adaptations should be seen as having "equal cultural validity" (446). The 'fidelity' to the adapted text should not be an issue even when trying to determine the cultural impact or the 'success' of an adaptation (444, 445). Instead, a researcher could look at the number of people that become aware of the narrative due to the adaptation (452). James Naremore states, that one of the functions of adaptation is "the creation of national or cultural mythology", using as an example the fact that most people know the story of Moby Dick, but only a small portion of those people have gotten to know it by reading the original book (14). I would not go so far as to call *The Handmaid's Tale* a part of the cultural mythology of America, but what is certain is that a lot more people are familiar with the story of Offred nowadays thanks to the television series.

Even with the 'fidelity discourse' so often dominating the field of adaptation studies, Linda Hutcheon does note that there is one situation when the question of fidelity is easily forgotten or chosen to be ignored: when the adaptation in question becomes highly successful financially or critically (Hutcheon, 7). This is, of course, one of the main reasons a text would even be chosen to be adapted – the possibility for financial gain. This is closely connected to the reach a certain adaptation could have. Especially when translating a book to a movie or a television series, the potential audience grows exponentially (Hutcheon, 5).

But what kinds of things have a significant effect on the adaptation itself? Of course, things such as the adapter, the adapted text and the medium to which the text is being adapted make a difference, but one of the biggest factors is the time and place of the adaptation and the culture in which the adaptation is made.

To show how an adaptation is dependent on the time during which it is made, Hutcheon uses the example of different adaptions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In the original text, Hyde has an "undefined and unspecified evil" (28). Each time this text has been adapted, the adapters have had to come up with a physical representation of this evil – and in doing so, they reveal what has been considered evil in that culture during the time of the adaptation (Hutcheon, 28).

As Hutcheon says, "we engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture," and this sentence encapsulates most of the main reasons for decision that are made during an adaptation process (31). Robert Stam states that the context in which the text is being adapted is an inseparable part of the adaptation (2005b, 41), and the adaptation often reveals aspects of the "reigning ideologies" and the popular social discourses of the time of the adaptation (Stam 2005a, 364; 2005b, 42). When it comes to texts that have been adapted into movies multiple different times, each film adaptation shows us aspects of the time and culture of the adaptation (2005b, 45). With *The Handmaid's Tale* television series, this showing of the relevant aspects of the society happens also 'literally' or consciously, since the events have

been moved from somewhere in the near future of the 1980's to the current time, with for example inventions as recent as the Tinder application being shown in the series (season 1, episode 5, 04:40) and same-sex marriage being legal before the revolution (season 2, episode 2, 40:35).

Therefore, adaptational choices are something that are not only affected by the conscious will of the adapter. The adapter also lives in a cultural context and is affected by things such as history (both personal and the public), the political environment and, of course, the genre and medium conventions of the adaptation (Hutcheon, 108). The more time that has passed between the writing of the adapted text and the adaption process itself, the m

ore freedom the adapter has to actualize the adaption to make it "more 'in synch' with contemporary discourses" (Stam 2005b, 42). However, in addition to the cultural differences, there is a myriad of factors that come into the decisions made during an adaptation process. As Hutcheon lists off: "These decisions are made in a creative as well as an interpretive context that is ideological, social, historical, cultural, personal, and aesthetic" (108). Adaptation might also be affected by different forms of censorship, both "external or internal, conscious or un-conscious" (Stam 2005b, 42). Of course, I am not attempting to say that the adapter does not have a free will; only that there are multiple factors that can affect the choices they want to make. Let us next take a look at some of the factors that adapters have to take into account when making decisions.

Naturally, one of the aims of making an adaptation is financial gain. Therefore, an adapter must consider the target market of their adaptation. This might require changes made to, for example, the cultural or historical aspects of the story and sometimes this might change the overall style of the story. As an example of this kind of change, Linda Hutcheon uses most of the film and television adaptations of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* made for American viewers: "A bitingly satiric novel of social pretense and pressure may be transformed into a benign comedy

of manners in which the focus of attention is on the triumph of the individual" (30). Therefore, attempting not to offend the member of the target culture might end up changing the quintessential spirit or the 'lesson' of the story. Robert Stam also talks about the difficulties some adapters might face when trying to decide how much of the story to 'update' to fit the present culture: 'faithfully' made adaptations can be accused of not 'contemporizing' the text enough, while drastically changed adaptations are often criticised for not "respecting the period of the source" (2005b, 8).

There might also be a desire to make an ending of a story more appealing to the larger audience. Generally, this would happen by changing an ending to a more clear cut and happy ending. Interestingly enough, the example that Hutcheon uses for a case like this is the movie adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale*, made by director Volker Schlöndorff and screenplay writer Harold Pinter (Hutcheon, 37). This desire to create a less ambiguous or unnerving ending is especially understandable when making a movie adaptation that is hoped to be a financial success – a traditional 'happy ending' can be assumed to be more enjoyable to the large masses.

Large parts of the adapted texts, for example value systems, are dependent on the context in which they were written. Thus, the adapters must take all of this into consideration and sometimes update the stories they are adapting to appeal to and attract similar responses in contemporary audiences. For example, when adapting a 300-year-old text such as *Robinson Crusoe*, the adapter is almost forced to be 'unfaithful' to the source material and criticise the ideology of the novel harshly from almost a "political obligation" (Stam 2005a, 77). In his book *Literature through Film*, Stam describes an essay written by François Truffaut in the 1950's, in which Truffaut states that many screenwriters "simply exploit their source texts to introduce a limited set of secularist, anti-militarist, and left-wing ideas. The result is a flattening out of the heterogeneity of literary sources" (256). *The Handmaid's Tale* could be described as

a story supporting these left-wing ideas to begin with, but throughout this thesis we shall discuss whether the television adaptation seems to be even more 'leftist' than the novel. In their paper, Bortolotti and Hutcheon present two questions that they consider relevant in today's adaptational research: "*why* and *how* certain stories are told and retold in our culture?" (445, emphasis in original). Therefore, why was *The Handmaid's Tale* adapted?

2.2 *The Handmaid's Tale*

The Handmaid's Tale tells a story of a woman called Offred, who lives in the dystopian society of Gilead. The story is situated in the 'near future' in the area of the United States. Fertility has been rapidly decreasing in the world due to many different factors, such as extensive use of birth control and environmental catastrophes and diseases. A group of people in the United States end up carrying out a revolution and creating Gilead, a society which draws inspiration from the ideas of the fundamentalist Christian religious right. They use parts of the Bible to justify their actions. Women do not have the right to own anything anymore, or to read, or have jobs (other than "fulfilling their biological destiny", which means having children or taking care of them). The few fertile women are rounded up and trained forcibly to become Handmaids, types of reproductive slaves for the men in high positions in the new society, called Commanders. Another class of women are the Wives of the Commanders, women that are given the responsibility of running the households. The Handmaids are subjected to a ritualized rape every month in hopes of them getting pregnant and providing the Commanders and their Wives with children that they cannot have themselves. The Handmaids are stripped of their own names and given new names based on the Commander of their household, such as the main character Offred, whose Commander is named Fred. There are also other classes of people in Gilead, such as Aunts, who help train and control the Handmaids and Marthas, people who take care of the cleaning and cooking in the households. The story is situated at a time a

couple or a few years after Gilead has been formed, so all the citizens still remember how things used to be "in the before". Offred, for example, had a job, a husband and a daughter. She and her husband tried to escape to Canada with their daughter, but they were caught. At the time the story begins, Offred does not know what has happened to her husband, if he is even alive, but is aware that her daughter has been placed in the care of other people in Gilead. A few years after Gilead has been formed, Offred is placed in the household of the Waterfords, with the Commander Fred Waterford being an important official. Offred tries to survive as best as she can and hopes that Gilead does not last forever.

Arnold Davidson describes *The Handmaid's Tale* as a standard example of a dystopian narrative structure. There is first "hopeless despair" and brutality of the regime, then some hope of resistance and lapses in the control, and finally the affirmation that human emotions prevail and a possibility of escape, due to a relationship of sorts with the driver of the Waterfords, Nick (Davidson, 116). This familiar form of the story is one of the reasons the novel has been so successful. Amanda Howell states that the novel has become a classic, and notes that it is "regularly taught in high schools" (Howell, 222). David Hogsette lists off some of the main themes of the story. It includes "issues of self-discovery, self-expression, self-construction, gender discrimination, political oppression, and patriarchal domination" (Hogsette, 263). All of these are popular themes in fiction and real life even today, in addition to being "important feminist and humanist concerns … within social, political, and economic communities" (Hogsette, 263).

Dystopian stories have often been considered as warnings or predictions. Atwood herself describes her book as an anti-prediction: a hope, that the existence of this detailed record of a possible future will make such a future impossible (Atwood, xiv). As was noted in the previous chapter, a movie or television series adaptation has the potential of reaching a much greater an audience than a book. If Atwood hopes, that telling this story might help prevent it from becoming a reality, it is not surprising that she would want it to be adapted for television.

And in any case, the wish to adapt her story can be taken as a mark of success, and something that would make the original story written by her even more popular (Bortolotti and Hutcheon, 450; Stam 2005a, 255). But what reasons might the adapters themselves had for choosing this particular text to adapt?

First of all, any time anything is decided to be adapted, the economic gain has to be considered. Choosing an already popular text for adaptation basically guarantees that there is at least an audience of some size already interested in the product, especially if there have been other adaptations made previously, that have attracted audiences (Hutcheon, 29 and 128). Another reason a certain text might be selected is a wish to pay homage to a beloved story (Hutcheon, 20). Something like this could be said to have happened with *The Handmaid's Tale*, since the showrunner Bruce Miller is reported having wanted to adapt *The Handmaid's Tale* for television for years (Dockterman). Amanda Howell notes how in the 21st century "female-centred series have enjoyed widespread popularity" (Howell, 222). This might help explain why Miller was finally given a chance to do his adaptation.

Another supporting factor was certainly the relevance of the story to the current society of the United States. When writing her book, Atwood did not want to include in the story any kinds of events that had no basis in reality. Therefore, she used as inspiration events that had all already happened in some part of the world or another. In her own words, she "wanted the toads in it to be real" (Atwood, x). Even so, writing the story in the 1980's, she described the main premise of the story – something like this happening in the United States – as "fairly outrageous" (x). However, in more recent interviews Atwood has stated that especially the US has recently moved towards Gilead "instead of moving further away" (Flood). The original novel has gained a lot more popularity lately. During the two years since the presidential election in 2016, *The Handmaid's Tale* sold three million copies and spent over 80 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list (Merritt). The author and her story are even a common thing to

reference in demonstrations: the sentence "Make Margaret Atwood fiction again" has been seen written on signs carried by demonstrators (Merritt). With the first season of the television series airing in 2017, this series seems to have been made in the perfect time.

As Hutcheon notes, the "'rightness' of the historical moment" a work is adapted affects the reception and the will to produce certain adaptations (Hutcheon, 143), and here *The Handmaid's Tale* the television series was very successful. With dystopian movie series such as *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent* enjoying great success in the last decade, it is no wonder producers are also eager to produce dystopian television series. And with things such as women's reproductive rights as a constant topic of conversation especially in the United States, a book filled with such relevant topics as women's rights and a falling fertility rate caused by environmental catastrophe, an adaptation of this classic was to be expected.

Even though the society of Gilead seems dramatically different and, as a dystopia should, a horrifying example of a future where everything has gone wrong (Baccolini and Moylan, 1-2), as Arnold Davidson notes, perhaps Gilead is "not such a radically different order after all" (Davidson, 113). Davidson considers *The Handmaid's Tale* as a story about how easy it is for a society to "slide into 'final solutions' only slightly less brutal than those attempted in Nazi Germany" (113), and this is why it is so useful as a warning to the societies of today. The way that protestors have adopted slogans relating to this television series shows that viewers agree with Davidson's views about Gilead seeming surprisingly familiar when compared to the current societies.

Another inviting aspect in this story is the fact that while condemning the properties of today's society that make a Gilead possible, Atwood is able to use some comedic effects: "There is something humorously appropriate, for example, when the Commander's wife, formerly a spokesperson for women in the Phyllis Schlafly mode, gets exactly the life that she earlier advocated for others and does not find it good" (Davidson, 114). Therefore, the story is

not all bleak and horrible. There are also moments of resistance that Amanda Howell calls 'little utopias' especially in the television series version – these kinds of scenes might help viewers to deal with "anxieties about present political reality" (Howell, 225) and help maintain the hope that something can always be done.

One of the most obvious changes when adapting a book into a television series is the added visuality of the target medium. And the world of *The Handmaid's Tale* is visually very pleasing. For example, there are certain coloured clothes issued for people of certain classes: red for the Handmaids, blue for Wives, black for Commanders and so on. Even the umbrellas people use are always of the correct colour (Atwood, 19). The colours that the women wear Atwood based on Western religious iconography: "the Wives wear the blue of purity, from the Virgin Mary; the Handmaids wear red, from the blood of parturition, but also from Mary Magdalene" (Atwood, xiii). All this symbolism makes for a visually pleasing image.

Another thing that highlights the role of visuality in the story is that there is little to no text seen in Gilead; most information is transmitted through pictures. "The store has a huge wooden sign outside it, in the shape of a golden lily; Lilies of the Field, it's called. You can see the place, under the lily, where the lettering was painted out, when they decided that even names of shops were too much temptation for us. Now places are known for their signs alone." (Atwood 34-35).

Furthermore, there are also many locations (which translate to possible sets for the television series) with a great contrast between each other, for example the simple and old-fashioned households of the Commanders and the night club styled place, Jezebel's, situated in an old hotel and made into a type of a brothel (Atwood, 246-248). It is understandable why a story which puts this much emphasis on the visuality of the story would gladly be adapted to a visual medium.

In his article about *The Handmaid's Tale* the novel, Glenn Deer describes a dilemma Atwood has faced while writing her story: "the author needs to both condemn particular social injustices and to portray the mechanisms of oppression as credible enough, as sufficiently powerful and seductive, to represent a believable evil, not an irrelevant or far-fetched one" (Deer, 112). As has been stated before, the society of Gilead is not considered to be too far-fetched in the 21st century society of the United States. Thus, it was probably deemed quite easy to create a believable Gilead for the television series due to the current political atmosphere. But what were some of the challenges *The Handmaid's Tale* as a text poses to the adapter?

One of the most obvious answers to this question is the fact that one of the defining aspects of *The Handmaid's Tale* is the amount of internal speech included in the book. In fact, most of the book consists of the inner dialogue of Offred. An example of this is the way the first chapter of the book includes no dialogue whatsoever (unless you count the list of five names that ends the chapter), but rather only an intricate description of the atmosphere in the Red Centre told by Offred (Atwood, 13-14). While a written text can contain as many inner thoughts of the narrator as the author cares to include, a visual medium of film or television series is not very good at showing the thoughts of the characters. As Linda Hutcheon notes, "film is not supposed to be good at getting inside a character, for it can show only exteriors and never actually tell what is going on beneath the visible surface" (Hutcheon, 57-58). The only 'literary' device that, in this case, the makers of the television series have in their disposal to achieve a description of the inner thoughts of the characters is voice-over (Hutcheon, 58). And this is something the television series has ended up using extensively. However, there is a limit to how much voice-over there can be used in a scene that cannot last forever and where something also has to happen visually to please the viewers.

When considering *The Handmaid's Tale* specifically, in connection with the difficulties in showing the thoughts of the characters is the difficulty of showing time and the way the

passage of time affects the characters (Hutcheon, 65). It is quite difficult to show a gradual change that has happened in the minds of the characters. As an example, there is a scene in the book where Offred sees a group of Japanese tourists in knee-length skirts and high heels, and notes how differently she regards them compared to the 'normal reaction' in the 'time before': "I stop walking. Ofglen stops beside me and I know that she too cannot take her eyes off these women. We are fascinated, but also repelled. They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this" (Atwood, 38). This change in attitudes is easier to describe in text than it is to show in a visual medium.

Another time-related aspect of *The Handmaid's Tale* that could cause difficulties for the adapter that there seems to be no clear structure or an advancement of the plot in the book. In fact, in the epilogue it is revealed that the story as we have read it has been edited and compiled by an academic professor called Pieixoto from a collection of audio tapes, found in a box without a correct order (Atwood 313-314). Thus, the book does not provide us with a clear, 'correct', linear order of the events. Hutcheon posits that from the evidence, that is to say, what kinds of stories are most often adapted for the screen, it seems that "linear realist novels" are "more easily adaptable than others" (Hutcheon, 15). Especially when considering the medium of a television series, which is consumed as individual episodes, it is understandable to want to have a linear progression of events to keep the viewer interested in always watching the next episode.

Sarah Cardwell wrote an article about temporality and time in films and film studies. According to her, the subject of temporality has been seen as a problem in film studies: film is often "described as being restricted to an 'eternal present tense'", being much more limited in terms of tenses than literature (Cardwell, 82). Of course, this does not mean that events have to happen in a linear order in films and television. But filmmakers have to use tools such as

voice-overs and dialogue to guide the viewer to understand when a particular scene is happening: "When one watches a film, one can usually comprehend the linear progression of this time scale, even if there are flashbacks or flash-forwards included" (Cardwell, 86). Interestingly enough, it would seem that in the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, the temporality is made clearer in the television series version compared to the novel. Since most of the events in the novel consist of Offred thinking about things past and present, it is not even always necessary to be sure of where the scenes are situated on a timeline. And with the revelation at the end of the book, that someone else has tried to figure out the right order of the scenes afterwards, it is even more clear that there is no sure way of knowing the timeline of the events. Therefore, in this case the temporality could be said to be clearer in the television series, but this of course has required an effort from the makers of the series to create a fixed linear order for the scenes.

There has also been some criticism directed towards the actual filming the story of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Pamela Cooper wrote an article about the sexual surveillance in *The Handmaid's Tale* and about how making a movie version of that story had some contradictory aspects. According to her, "the very act of filming *The Handmaid's Tale* automatically shifts the issue of surveillance-enforced misogyny to a metafictional or metacinematic level" (Cooper, 57). In a way, there is something odd about making an adaptation to a visual media about a text that criticises surveillance. But as has been noted, dystopian texts are often written as warnings, the more people hear a warning the more chance it has of being taken seriously and adapting a text especially for television or a movie increases the potential audience manifold. In the book, Offred's mother criticises the lack of information about women's rights' struggles that the 'young people' at that time had: "You young people don't appreciate things, she'd say. You don't know what we had to go through, just to get you where you are." (Atwood, 131). Thanks to the television series adaptation, a lot of people have now seen a cautionary tale of how easy it might be to strip women of their rights once again. And this has already led to some of them

marching for women's rights with slogans relating to this series. Clearly, this adaptation has made an impression.

2.3 Previous Adaptations

Throughout the years *The Handmaid's Tale* has been adapted to multiple different media, such as an opera, a ballet, and theatre, with varying success (Blake). Francesco Bacci notes that this latest adaptation to a television series has received both critical success and an approval from the author Atwood, despite some additions and differences (Bacci, 167). Things are slightly different for the movie adaptation made in 1990.

As Hutcheon states, sometimes adaptations are based on more than one text. This is especially true for stories that have been adapted successfully multiple times, such as Dracula films, that are "as often seen as adaptations of earlier films as they are of Bram Stoker's novel" (Hutcheon, 21). So how much does this seem to be true for *The Handmaid's Tale*? Can the television series be seen as an adaptation of the movie? I would argue that it cannot. Unless one considers the movie adaptation as a cautionary tale of what not to do.

First of all, the way it was advertised, and the overall style of the movie was drastically different from the atmosphere and quite honestly the whole idea of the book. For example, the movie places emphasis on the sexuality of Offred by making the Ceremony scene violent instead of the emotionally distant and stoic version of the books and the television series, and by making the relationship of Offred and Nick a more romanticized version (Howell, 221-22).

Amanda Howell also notes how the film version "silences the voice of the Handmaid" (Howell 220), making the character of the Commander Fred the most important character of the film. As Howell points out, this effectively "replays a Hollywood version" of the Historical Notes from the end of the novel. Film studios were worried that a film about a woman and told

from a woman's perspective would not be successful enough, so the male perspective was made prevalent in the adaptation. (Howell, 220-21).

The clearest way the film does this silencing, is the way that there is no voice-over narration and thus the inner life of Offred is basically left completely out of the film (Howell, 221). All we see of Offred's previous life is the attempted escape from Gilead with her family. With both the voice-overs or the inner thoughts of Offred and the flashbacks absent, Offred cannot realistically be considered the main or at least the most important character of the film.

But one of the most striking differences between the movie adaptation and the book (or the television series), is the change in the ending. The movie ends with Offred murdering Commander Fred and escaping, pregnant with Nick's child. Cooper calls this a 'soap-opera conclusion' that diminishes the warning of the story, and the power of the totalitarianism, presenting it as "a fragile political structure, relatively easy to assault, overcome, and evade" (Cooper, 60). If a totalitarian regime were so easily conquered, why would we even need dystopian stories as warnings? But alas, the experience we have from the history of "totalitarian regimes in the 20th century deeply contradicts this implied view", as Cooper notes (60).

Even the visuality aspect, something that could easily be shared by two adaptations of the same text to a visual medium, is not as similar as it could be. Of course, the colours that the women wear are the same in both versions, but those colours are based on the descriptions in the novel. And even then, the red clothes of the Handmaids in the movie version are a lot less covering. They are shorter and thinner, and the heads of the Handmaids are only covered with a thin see-through veil, unlike the large winged white headdresses the Handmaids wear in the television series, and Offred is often seen without a headdress altogether.

One change that both the movie and the television series adaptations made compared to the book is the omission of the epilogue called "Historical Notes", situated some 200 years after the main plot. Still, it is more understandable that a television series that is planning to

make many more seasons worth of content would not want to include an epilogue situated long after the main storyline, at least yet, it is less understandable that a one-off movie adaptation would exclude it. And as will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this thesis, deleting the epilogue affects the message of the story quite significantly.

3. Changing Themes

Many different things can lead to changes made during an adaptation process. As Hutcheon notes, when a popular text is being adapted to television, the adapters know that they already have a potential audience that they can build on, but they "must also expand that audience considerably and must use all the available persuasive means … to do so" (Hutcheon, 128). While the book is told strictly from the point of view of Offred as a first-person narrative, the television show version has utilised the chance to also include scenes without Offred present. These kinds of shifts in "the focalization or point of view" can lead to "major differences," Hutcheon also states (11). In the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, it has fleshed out some characters that were only able to be described in a limited way in the book due to the first-person narration.

This chapter shall take a closer look at the themes that have been treated differently in the television series, but that are present in the book also. For the part of the television series, the discussion shall be mostly limited to the events of the first season. Due to the particularities of the medium being used, a film or television series often ends up handling some themes in a more simplified way, since this kind of visual medium "has to convey its message by images and relatively few words; it has little tolerance for complexity or irony or tergiversations" (Louis Begley, qtd. in Hutcheon, 1). This is one of the things I shall be paying attention to throughout this chapter. Robert Stam notes how often the changes made during an adaptation process can be explained by the ideologies that are prevalent in the culture where and when the adaptation is being made, and adaptations might end up being either more or less radical due to these ideologies (2005b, 42). Among other things, the portrayal of religion in the television series seems to have been affected by this. However, one could argue that the character of Offred is made more radical in many ways.

3.1 Agency

One of the themes where there is a very noticeable difference between the two versions is the agency and the level of activity of the female characters. Some examples of this are Offred's level of determination to get out of Gilead, the amount of times she voices her disagreement or resistance towards the officials of Gilead, and the behaviour of Serena Waterford: another character that acts a lot more defeated in the book version.

In her Introduction, Atwood answers some questions that she has often been asked. One of these is "is *The Handmaid's Tale* a 'feminist' novel?" (Atwood, xii). Atwood does not give a simple yes or no answer, but rather asks a follow-up question about what a feminist novel is. She states that her female characters are not "angels and/or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice", but that they "are human beings – with all the variety of character and behaviour that implies" (xii). I would argue that the women in the novel are a lot more flawed and, in some sense, more realistic due to that than they are in the television series. As Bacci notes, the character of Offred in the novel "has been praised but also criticized for her passivity" (159). Especially towards the end of the novel she is quite far from the determined and rebellious Offred of the television series. It seems like the female characters in the television series in general show a lot more agency and resist the oppression a lot more strongly than the characters in the novel – not just in the new, added material of the second season, where it is naturally needed to advance the plot, but also already during the first season.

Of course, in neither version is Offred happy to be in Gilead. But there is a big difference between how actively Offred wants to or tries to find a way out. In the book, Offred is a lot more worn down by Gilead's control. She is not planning an escape. She does say she intends to "get out of here" (Atwood, 144), but she is not really taking any active steps to achieve that. In fact, she makes an effort to imagine that her daughter is dead, because that is "easier, to think of her as dead. I don't have hope then, or make a wasted effort." (74). In the television series,

however, she is determined to not only escape herself, but also to save her daughter, Hannah. In the very first episode, Moira and Offred talk to each other in the Red Centre, and Moira tells Offred that "you're gonna get her back, all right? … All this crazy shit is gonna end and then we'll find her. I swear" (19:37). The episode ends with Offred thinking to herself: "I intend to survive… for her. Her name is Hannah. My husband was Luke. My name is June" (53:13).

In the television series, Offred and her best friend make and execute a plan to escape the Red Centre together. In the book, however, Moira is the only one planning ways of escaping and Offred actually tries to convince her not to try to escape, because it would be too dangerous and also because she did not want to have to be in the Red Centre without Moira (Atwood, 100). In the television series Moira is still the more active party in the escape plan and the only one who manages to escape, but Offred is also very much involved with the escape plan. Offred lures Aunt Elizabeth to a restroom where Moira attacks her. While Moira is the one holding an edged weapon, Offred takes the Aunts cattle prod and even shocks Aunt Elizabeth with it once while telling her to disrobe (episode 4, 23:56). Aunt Elizabeth tries to reason with Offred, who clearly is known as a less forceful person than Moira: "Please. I know this wasn't your idea" (24:21), but Offred wants very clearly to actively escape as well, and actually tells the Aunt to "shut the fuck up", while tying her to a pipe. Offred and Moira make it out of the Red Centre and into a train station, but Offred gets caught while Moira, masking as an Aunt in Aunt Elizabeth's clothes, makes it into a train going to Boston. Offred smiles and nods to Moira to let her know that it is okay that she escapes without her (36:40). Of course, later it is revealed that Moira did not manage to escape after all that time, but is recaptured and taken to Jezebel's, a kind of a secret brothel of Gilead.

There are very few moments in the book where Offred "breaks character", or truly shows her feelings. One of these moments happens after a Scrabble game at the Commanders office, when the Commander has gotten Offred some hand lotion, and Offred notes that she cannot

keep it in her room, because the rooms are searched every now and then. “What for? He said. I think I lost control then, a little. Razor blades, I said. Books, writing, black-market stuff. All the things we aren’t supposed to have. Jesus Christ, you ought to know. My voice was angrier than I’d intended, but he didn’t even wince.” (Atwood, 167-168). Offred is very aware of the need to maintain control in the book, more so than in the television series. This is also reflected on the amount of control Gilead in general imposes on the Handmaids – that, too, is greater and more comprehensive in the book than in the television version.

For example, the shopping is done much more freely in the television series. In the book, the Handmaids only stand in line, hand in tokens to Guardians, who then hand them their items (Atwood, 36). In the television series the stores are more like stores in real life, where the Handmaids gather their items in their baskets and then go to the counter with them. This gives the Handmaids a chance to exchange some words with each other while shopping. Not just with their own shopping partner, but with others too. It is of course natural, that a television series would want to increase the number of scenes with meaningful dialogue. But this does end up increasing the agency of the Handmaids and in some way lessening the level of control imposed on them, when compared to the book. In the book they are told to be quiet in the line, and it is quite impossible to have conversations, especially about something meaningful (Atwood, 36).

According to showrunner Miller, the “central conflict in the show is between June and Offred” – calling Offred’s inner voice June, as if she were two separate characters. It makes the show more interesting, when June’s rebelliousness gets her into more trouble than Offred in the book is willing to risk (Dockterman). Near the end of the book, after she has started some sort of a relationship with the driver Nick, Offred is starting to not want to escape Gilead anymore, but rather stay there with Nick. “Ofglen is giving up on me. She whispers less, talks more often about the weather. I do not feel regret about this. I feel relief” (283). However, one

morning Ofglen is replaced by another Handmaid, a new Ofglen. The new Ofglen tells Offred that the previous one hanged herself, when she saw the Eyes coming for her (Atwood, 297). Only a couple of pages later the Eyes come for Offred, too, although Nick tells her that they are actually from the Mayday rebel organization, and Offred should trust them (305). The story ends with Offred going inside the van, unsure of her fate.

In the television series, however, Ofglen disappears already in episode 3. She has been found to have a relationship with a Martha. Later in the episode, when Offred is returning home in the car, Nick suddenly warns her: "You need to remember a few things. You can't change anything about this. It's gonna end the same no matter what you do, so there's no point trying to be tough of brave. Brave isn't part of any of this. Everybody breaks. Everybody" (20:23). When they arrive at the house, some Eyes and Aunt Lydia are there waiting for Offred. Since Ofglen was Offred's shopping partner, they interrogate her (violently) about whether she knew anything about Ofglen's relationship (in which case, Offred would have been required to report it). After denying talking about anything else than shopping and the weather with Ofglen, Offred is asked whether she knew Ofglen was a gender traitor (meaning, a lesbian). Offred admits that she did know that, since Ofglen mentioned her wife once. Aunt Lydia asks why Offred did not tell this to anyone. Offred seems to have gotten enough of it and says: "I knew she was gay" (28:46), using a forbidden word (gay). Aunt Lydia tells Offred to "remember her Scripture" and quotes the Beatitudes to her: "Blessed are the meek" (29:45). Offred answers with quoting them further: "And blessed are those who suffer for the cause of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Aunt Lydia starts giving her electric shocks as punishment and Offred is only saved by Serena, who intervenes since she suspects Offred to be pregnant. Even though in the beginning of that same scene Offred thinks to herself that she does not want pain, that she will do anything to not be punished, she still decides to very actively fight back with her words.

Francesco Bacci describes the voice of book Offred as having "some rebellious characteristics. Firstly, June refuses to forget that she has a voice and even if she is aware of the appalling risks that she is undertaking, she speaks loudly" (162). Bacci also says that Offred "carries the flag of the feminist figure in a world where feminism has been forbidden and censored" (162). I am not saying that the Offred in the book does not show traits of feminism, but they have definitely increased the forcefulness of Offred's feminism in the television series considerably. As David Hogsette notes, in the book Offred was not interested in politics and "through active ignoring, through exercising her freedom not to care, Offred did not notice the gradual encroachment of the subjugating power of Gilead" (Hogsette, 275). In the television series, however, they show Offred in a women's rights demonstration with Moira, but the two leave the demonstration when shots are fired into the crowd of demonstrators (episode 3, 40:30).

I agree with Glenn Deer in that in the book, Moira is clearly the one who is given "spectacular heroism", and even though Atwood hints at Offred having "the strength appropriate to a heroine, … Offred is not a Moira" (Deer, 127). For example, before the description of the first Ceremony, Offred thinks about wanting to steal something. Stealing something as small as a dried flower would make her feel more powerful, but she knows that "such a feeling would be an illusion" and even that feels "too risky" for the Offred in the book (Atwood, 90). In the television series, the differences between the levels of agency of Offred and Moira are a lot smaller. However, even the thought of Moira seems to be a source of strength and courage for Offred, who for example thinks to herself as if talking to Moira, while being confined to her room in the fourth episode and almost losing all hope: "Moira, you wouldn't stand for this shit. You would not let them keep you in this room for two weeks. You'd find a way out. You'd escape" (37:24). Then she imagines what Moira would tell her if she saw her at that moment:

"Get up! Get your crazy ass up!". This gives her the courage to appeal to Commander Waterford to make Serena let Offred out of her room.

Nevertheless, in the television series, the roles are sometimes switched. In the eighth episode Offred meets Moira for the first time since their escape attempt in Jezebel's. This time it is Moira that is feeling defeated and has lost agency. This meeting also happens in the book, but while in the book Offred only feels sad and frightened about Moira's lack of caring ("She is frightening me now, because what I hear in her voice is indifference, a lack of volition" and "I want gallantry from her, swashbuckling, heroism, single-handed combat. Something I lack." (Atwood, 261)), in the television series Offred tries to encourage Moira, and tells her that "we're gonna find a way to get you out of here" (episode 8, 36:22). In the book, Moira's final destiny is unknown. Offred would like to think she escaped for good, but as she never returns to Jezebel's, she has no way of knowing. In the television series, Offred does return to Jezebel's for some Mayday business.

In both the book and the television series Offred first hears about the resistance movement Mayday through her shopping partner, Ofglen. In the second episode, Ofglen asks Offred to join them. "You can join us … there's a network" (05:33). Offred is hesitant, and answers: "I don't know. I'm not that kind of person." "No one is until they have to be", Ofglen comments. Soon after this, Ofglen is caught having a relationship with a Martha, gets severely punished and ends up becoming Ofsteven. In episode five Offred sees her again. That time, when Ofsteven tells Offred that Mayday cannot use her anymore, since she has been caught once, but Offred could help them (39:28), Offred almost immediately asks how she can find them. The scene ends with Ofglen stealing a car and running over one Guardian before being detained – showing much more agency than Ofglen ever did in the book.

Afterwards, Offred deduces that Alma, another Handmaid, is part of Mayday too, since she seems to know a lot more than a Handmaid should. She lets Alma know, that she wants to

help, and Alma tells her to return to Jezebel's in episode 9: "They need you to go back to Jezebel's. They've been trying to get a package out of there" (09:48). This leads to Offred quite frankly seducing the Commander to take her out to Jezebel's again, very actively and deliberately using her femininity and sexuality as a weapon.

In the book, there is a scene where Offred teases two Guardians by simply moving her hips as she walks away: "It's like thumbing your nose from behind a fence or teasing a dog with a bone held out of reach, and I'm ashamed of myself for doing it, because none of this is the fault of these men, they're too young. Then I find I'm not ashamed after all. I enjoy the power; power of a dog bone, passive but there" (Atwood, 32). Glenn Deer calls this "the power of the powerless, of the seductive prey" (Deer, 127). The television series has once again taken an idea of a possible way of resistance from the book but changed the circumstances and made Offred a much more active party and much more capable of using this aspect of her character for her own gain. However, this time Offred is unable to visit the bar section of Jezebel's, but when she meets Moira once more, she tries to convince her to pick up the package instead. This is when it is revealed that Gilead has defeated Moira's spirit, and she tells Offred to "just go home and just do what they say" (29:17). Once again, Offred is given the role of the more active character, and she ends up giving Moira a pep-talk of sorts. "You keep your fucking shit together. You fight!" (30:39), she tells her, but instead of seeming encouraged, Moira leaves the room still looking defeated.

However, in the end of this ninth episode it is revealed that Offred's talk actually worked and it gave Moira the boost of courage to try again and this time to finally manage to escape Gilead to Canada. A butcher surprisingly hands Offred something extra with her meat. It is revealed to be the package Mayday wanted to get out of Jezebel, with a note from Moira: "Praised be, bitch. Here's your damn package. Xoxo, Moira" (45:21). Although Moira is the

character that manages to escape Gilead altogether in the television series, in some scenes leading up to this Offred is clearly made the more active character. In fact, Amanda Howell describes this difference as Offred taking on characteristics of the book Moira: "While June's voice is clearly that of Atwood's narrator, June is also the product of American television: vocally rebellious, increasingly heroic, very much like Atwood's Moira in fact" (Howell, 223).

As said in the beginning of this chapter, adaptations to film or television end up often being simpler in many ways. One of the ways this shows in *The Handmaid's Tale* is the simplification of Offred's feelings towards the Waterfords. In the television series it is quite clear that Offred mainly despises the Waterfords. However, in the book, Offred is not sure what she feels. Thinking about the Commander, she says: "I ought to feel hatred for this man. I know I ought to feel it, but it isn't what I do feel. What I feel is more complicated than that. I don't know what to call it. It isn't love." (Atwood, 68). Offred also feels more guilty towards Serena about seeing the Commander on some nights in the book. In the television series, she does not really care about the feelings of the Waterfords, or at least she is a lot more focused on the harm they do to her than the ways she might hurt their feelings. In the book, she feels like "an intruder in a territory that ought to have been hers. … I was taking something away from her, although she didn't know it" (Atwood, 170). Offred does seem quite surprised at her own feelings, and is not sure why she feels so guilty, but nevertheless, she does feel that. In the television series her feelings seem a lot less complicated. Of course, once again, it is easier to describe many different and even somewhat contradicting emotions in a first-person narrative book than it is in a television series. But I believe this is another example of the way the television series wants to simplify things and the motivations of characters and make Offred someone that the current audience would be more willing to identify with, as a fiercer fighter for her rights than the more complex book Offred.

In the book, Aunt Lydia asks the Handmaids to be understanding of the Wives and of their hatred towards the Handmaids. “You must realize that they are defeated women. They have been unable…”, she says talking about their assumed infertility. The Wives in the television series, however, are not acting extremely defeated. A prime example of this is Mrs. Putnam, the Wife of Janine’s or Ofwarren’s Commander. Near the end of the first season it is revealed that Commander Putnam has engaged in a forbidden affair with his Handmaid. The other Commanders hold a meeting to decide how to punish Commander Putnam. Fred Waterford mentions that they should consider the fact that Putnam has a wife and a new child, and thus should not be punished too severely. Another Commander notes, that Mrs. Putnam testified for her husband, but not to make his punishment as small as possible: “She came to ask for the harshest possible punishment. She fears for his immortal soul. … She loves her husband very much” (episode 10, 28:14). Even though the action is painted as a show of caring, it is quite clear that Mrs. Putnam wanted her husband to suffer and succeeded: Commander Putnam ends up losing a hand as punishment.

Even clearer is the change in the character of Serena Waterford. Serena is quite different in the television series compared to the book. A lot of these differences might seem to stem from the fact that she is made a lot younger in the television series. In the book, she getting old, she walks with a cane and has arthritis (Atwood, 24). In the television series she is maybe in her thirties and would still be able to have a child of her own at least based on her age. She is also clearly still in love with her husband and they even share some romantic moments with each other during the first season.

In the book, Mrs. Waterford is a lot more resigned. A part of Ceremony night is the fact that the Commander has to knock before he enters the sitting room. Offred thinks that this knock is very important to Serena, who likes to keep the Commander waiting for a moment. “It’s a little thing, but in this household little things mean a lot” (Atwood, 97). This little thing

is one of the few moments in the book that give Serena any agency – extremely small compared to the television series.

In the book, it is mentioned that in her past life, she used to make speeches. “She was good at it. Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay home” (Atwood, 55). “She doesn’t make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. 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” (56). Arnold Davidson describes her fate as “humorously appropriate” (Davidson, 114). In the television series, it seems more sad than funny.

Instead of just speeches, the television series Serena has written a book in the past and was actually an active contributor to creating Gilead. It is shown in episode six that still in the early stages of Gilead, when the revolution had already happened, but when Serena was only starting to make their house ready for them to live in, Fred comments that she should be coming with him to meetings (37:44). At that stage the other Commanders have already refused to include a woman in the decision-making process.

Since in the television series Serena used to be a lot more active in the process of creating Gilead, it is understandable that she would be less ready to give up all her power so soon after the creation of Gilead. For example, she still tries to give advice to Fred in matters of state, even if Fred dismisses her comments most of the time. When in the fourth episode Fred mentions that an Aunt has escaped to Canada and has given an interview to *The Toronto Star*, Serena advices Fred: “The important thing is not to discredit what she said, but we need to discredit her” (07:14). Fred answers with a “you don’t need to worry about this. I promise”, but this does not please Serena.

In the television series, Serena is also not afraid to disagree with her husband out loud, for example about the importance of a reception or a feast for the Mexican delegation in episode six (15:57). In this case, Serena ends up being correct, and her planning of the feast (introducing

the Handmaids and bringing in the children born in Gilead at the right time) helps them to get a trade deal. Thus, Serena is able to use the tools that are allowed to a woman in her position to have an important effect on diplomacy.

Towards the end of the season Serena seems to get more and more frustrated with the lack of power she has. The last straw seems to be when she finds out about Fred's affair of sorts with Offred – about the Scrabble nights and how he has taken her to Jezebel's. In the last episode, Fred finds Serena in his office, where she is not supposed to be. At first Serena offers to play Scrabble with Fred. Fred refuses, says he has to work, and that she knows the law. Serena answers in an acid tone: "Yes, I do. I helped write it" (13:16). But even in this moment, Serena refuses to act completely defeated. Instead, she reveals that Offred is pregnant, but not with Fred's child: "It isn't yours. You're weak, and God would never let you pass on that weakness" (15:08). And when Offred reveals that she has not wished to become pregnant, because she would not want to bring a baby into the household of the Waterfords, Serena somehow organizes a car to take her and Offred to see (only through the car window) Offred's daughter Hannah on a yard somewhere in Gilead. Serena threatens Offred and Hannah to make sure Offred tries her best to carry the pregnancy to term: "As long as my baby is safe, so is yours" (24:35).

With all these examples of women on different levels of the society showing signs of resistance, it is no wonder that the overall level of control in Gilead seems less than it does in the book, and that it is easier for female characters to stay or become more active. This all culminates in a joined rebellious act of the Handmaids in the last episode of the first season. Near the beginning of the episode Offred thinks about the package she has hidden in her groceries and how she has seen signs of resistance in the midst of the Handmaids. "It's their own fault. They should have never given us uniforms if they didn't want us to be an army" (05:51), the voice-over says as the Handmaids walk in a visually pleasing formation down the street.

But an even more powerful scene takes place later in the episode, when the Handmaids are called to a Salvaging and asked to stone to death Janine, one of their own, who has been convicted of one of the worst crimes one can commit in Gilead – child endangerment. For the first time in the series, every one of the Handmaids refuses a command. The new Ofglen, someone who has so far been very happy to be a Handmaid, since in the past she was homeless and had a drug addiction, is the first to object. "Aunt Lydia, c'mon. We can't do this." (44:24). She is struck down by a Guardian. Once she is carried away, Aunt Lydia tries to get the other to comply, but Offred drops her stone, says "I'm sorry, Aunt Lydia" (46:35), and the others follow suit. Not a single one of the Handmaids is ready to follow Aunt Lydia's orders, showing both that there are no 'true believers' among the Handmaids that would blindly follow any order given by the officials and that every one of them is ready to resist the regime with a little encouragement. Aunt Lydia sends them all home, obviously to await a punishment. When Offred sits by the window, waiting for the van to come pick her up, she states that although she ought to feel afraid, she actually feels serene: "I tried to make things better for Hannah. Change the world, even just a little bit" (52:00). No matter what happens to her next, she is at peace with her actions. Being able to show this much agency and encourage the other women to resist Gilead's orders as well makes her happy.

When Hutcheon talks about adapters, she says that among other things, they show their respect and critique (Hutcheon, 3). Near the end of the book, Atwood's Offred thinks about her story and her own character: "I wish this story were different. I wish it were more civilized. I wish it showed me in a better light, if not happier, then *at least more active*, less hesitant, less distracted by trivia" (Atwood, 279, my emphasis). There is a similar scene in the television series, but the wording is a bit different: "I wish this story were different. I wish it showed me in a better light. In a different story. Maybe I wouldn't be such a fucking weakling" (episode 8, 00:58). It seems like the television series adaptation has taken Offred's words to heart and

made her more like the active protagonist she herself wished to be in the book. Even in a scene where the television series Offred critiques herself, she seems more forceful by using strong language. It makes sense that Offred does not wish to be more active in the television series, since the adapters have already taken care of that complaint by making the character a lot more active in their version.

Hutcheon notes that 'radical' texts are often generalized in the process of adaptation (15). Even though I said at the beginning of this chapter, that the character of Offred is made into a more radical character, making her more radical could be seen as making the over-all adaptation less radical, by turning Offred into more of a traditional, simply heroic protagonist, who the viewers can look up to, and who can encourage them to fight against the injustices of their own life. It might be too scary to make a television show where people have gotten used to a society like this. Especially a main character being passive to a current, action loving audience, could be extremely off-putting. After all, I doubt *The Handmaid's Tale* would have become such an inspiration to demonstrators all over the world if Offred's character had been a 'faithful' adaptation of the complex character in the book. One of the chapters ends with Offred thinking about her mother and how things used to be. This paragraph sums up quite nicely the lack of resistance and determination that the beaten down Offred often shows in the book: "I want her back. I want everything back, the way it was. But there is no point to it, this wanting" (Atwood, 132).

3.2 Religion

Religion is an immensely important part of the novel, which becomes obvious the moment one opens the book, since the first epigraph of the book is a Bible verse. In her article Kellie Deys joins the many critics who have stated that Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is clearly critical of the fundamentalist Christian religious right (3). Gilead is a theocracy that, as Francesco

Bacci also mentions, uses texts from the Bible as justifications for the oppression of the government (160). Arnold Davidson sums this up with the words "chapter and verse can be cited for every atrocity" (Davidson, 117). Therefore, it can even be said that religion is one of the key themes of the novel. Although this is also the case for the television series, I would argue that the way this theme is handled is different in the adaptation.

Firstly, there seems to be a smaller emphasis on personal religion in the television series. What I mean with this is that in the book, Offred spends a lot more time thinking about her own religion or praying in some sort of way. For example, there is a scene in the book where Offred says her prayers in the evening, in a way that suggests she does this every day. She goes through the Lord's Prayer and adds her own remarks to it. She speaks to a God in a way that makes it seem clear she believes there is a god that is listening: "I wish I knew what You were up to. But whatever it is, help me get through it, please" (Atwood, 204). In the Introduction Atwood herself describes this action as Offred refusing "to believe that this regime has been mandated by a just and merciful God" (xiii). This does not in any way suggest that Offred does not, however, believe in a just God herself – after all, she asks God to help her "get through it". Another example of Offred's personal faith is a moment before the Ceremony. The Commander leads the household in prayer, and Offred prays herself: "I pray silently: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.* I don't know what it means, but it sounds right, and it will have to do, because I don't know what else I can say to God" (Atwood, 101). Again, it is made clear that even in her own personal thoughts she does believe there is a God that she can say things to. Francesco Bacci even calls this spontaneous way that Offred's faith appears in the book "a powerful weapon in the fight for survival" (Bacci, 169). Offred's way of believing that there is a God and that what is happening is not His will, lends her strength in various places throughout the book.

In the television series, however, it is not that certain that Offred has a personal faith, or at least personal faith does not play an important part in her life. God seems to be only an afterthought to her – something she adds to the end of some of her thoughts in the form or a prayer, such as a quick "Please, God, let her remember me" (episode 1, 23:53) in the end of a scene where she thinks of her child Hannah, who has been separated from her, or a "Please, God, I don't want pain" (episode 3, 25:03), when she is about to be questioned about her relationship with Ofglen.

Offred's thoughts are not the only source of religious reflection in the book, either. Other Handmaids also talk about their personal religion. For example, at one point, Offred and Ofglen walk past a place called Soul Scrolls, which is a building that contains machines that print out prayers that the Wives can order over the phone. There Ofglen asks Offred of her own beliefs: "Do you think God listens … to these machines?" (177). It is therefore evident that Ofglen believes there is a god that either listens or does not listen to prayers. A lot of the scenes centred around the personal religious beliefs of the characters seem to have been cut or changed in the television series. For example, the scene with the Soul Scrolls or the Soul Scrolls in general do not appear in the television version. Although this scene does not advance the plot in any way, the Soul Scrolls are a classic example of critique towards inauthentic expressions of religion in the book. As Kellie Deys remarks, the Soul Scrolls are in effect a way for the Wives to buy religiousness. Deys sees this as a criticism of consumerism in the American culture (10). Therefore, leaving this part of the story out of the adaptation served two purposes. First, it simplifies the way religion is presented in the series by deleting a conversation about God between two people, who have become victims of a state that uses religion to justify horrors. Second, it refuses to heavily critique consumerism – something that is a big part of the American culture and could end up alienating more viewers than criticism of religion.

In the television series religion is much more often mentioned in the context of the people in power using it for their own personal gain. In the eighth episode, there is a scene where three future Commanders are planning Gilead and the turning of the fertile women into Handmaids. Some of them are worried about what the Wives would think of these types of concubines, so they come up with a way to have the Wives present for the act, though "Act may not be the best name from a branding perspective", as Fred Waterford says. Thus, they come up with the Ceremony. There is precedent for all of this in the Bible, and the Commanders are happy with that. "Sounds good. Nice and Godly. The wives will eat that shit up" (episode 8, 17:36), one of them comments. For a show that portrays religion as such a clear tool for gaining power used by unpleasant men, it might be alienating to have many of the worst victims of this power shown to have a strong personal faith as well, especially with the adapters seeing the world becoming more secular at least in the public sphere (Hanska, 185). As Jan Hanska states in his dissertation, "Secularism is not against religion, it merely attempts to remove religion into the private sphere of a citizen's existence" (Hanska, 244). Even though most of the discussion about religion in the novel happens inside Offred's own thoughts, seeing those reflected on the television screen could be seen as too strong or too public a representation of faith for the current viewer.

However, there is one particular way in which Offred could be seen as, if not more religious, then at least more knowledgeable about religion in the television series versus the book: Offred seems to be more able to 'fight back' with religion in the television series. For example, in the book, Offred tells that in the Red Centre they had to listen to a recording of a man reading the Beatitudes from the Bible. This recording includes a sentence that is not originally from the Bible: 'blessed are the silent'. "I knew they made that up, I knew it was wrong, and they left things out too, but there was no way of checking", Offred says (Atwood, 100). Another sentence that she talks about is a slogan they were made to recite: "*From each,* says

the slogan, *according to her ability; to each according to his needs*. We recited that, three times, after dessert. It was from the Bible, or so they said." (Atwood, 127). Again, Offred does not know if the verse is from the Bible or not. Of course, in the original phrase, the pronoun is male in both sentences, and even then, it is not truly from the Bible (it is in fact a nineteenth-century socialist slogan (Boven and Lutz, 237)). But Offred does not know this. She thinks there might be something wrong with it, but she is not sure. And she is definitely not able to correct the phrase or the Beatitudes confidently, as the television series Offred does in the interrogation scene.

In the television series there is one character whose personal religion is shown quite a lot, in fact, more so than her counterpart in the novel. That person is Serena Waterford. But she does not seem very empowered by her religion. Instead, it seems like her personal religion is largely the reason for her current position and she has had to sacrifice a lot because of it. But she still holds on to her religion and hopes that one day it will lead to her having a child. The television show includes a scene where it is shown that Serena and Fred tried to have a child of their own in the past. The inability to have a child seems to be one of the reasons Serena ended up being so involved in setting up Gilead. When the ambassador from Mexico asks Serena if she is happy in Gilead, she answers: "I am blessed to have a home and a husband to care for and follow" (episode 6, 13:50). The ambassador then brings up the book that Serena wrote, called *A Woman's Place*: "Back then, did you ever imagine a society like this? … A society in which women can no longer read your book? Or anything else." "No, I didn't", Serena answers. "God asks for sacrifices, Mrs. Castillo. That has always been His way. But He gives the righteous blessings in return." In a television show where religion is mostly shown simply as a weapon or an instrument of control, a depiction of personal faith could be seen as a way to diversify the representation of religion. However, in this instance the strength of the personal faith seems to have led the character in question into an undesirable situation. And as

such, even this depiction can be seen as a critique of religion, or at least a blind, nonadaptive faith.

As Pete Falconer states, historical change and the context of the societies in which a text has been made and is adapted in "can be important in explaining their priorities and points of emphasis" (Falconer, 61). And as Hutcheon notes, for instance contemporary events in relation to different themes such as religion, can affect both the viewer and the adapter (Hutcheon, 149). One of the most defining aspects of the society of the United States during the time the book was written was the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Jan Hanska argues in his dissertation that religion still continues to have a huge impact in politics, especially in the United States (Hanska, 158). However, the impact was much more prevalent in the 1980's, when Ronald Reagan was president for eight years. In fact, "Reagan has sometimes been claimed to have risen to power with the help of the religious right" (Hanska, 186). Janet Larson calls *The Handmaid's Tale* novel a description of what America could look like if leaders from the religious right, "the Bill Brights and Jerry Falwells of the 1980s were to win their 'Holy War' against feminism and achieve their goal of taking over political power in America" (Larson, 34). Reagan is seen as someone who gave the religious right an increase of power in the 1980's (Hanska, 188). This is why Reagan and his political supporters are often mentioned when *The Handmaid's Tale* is discussed: Pamela Cooper even calls the administrators of Gilead "neo-Reaganites" (Cooper, 49). But although Reagan supported and was supported by the religious right, he did not necessarily believe that the government should be religious: "For him, people were closer to God than the state was or could be. State was in fact an apparatus that distorted the relationship between the practically divine will and God's will imposed on them" (Hanska, 159). And even though the novel seems to warn us about the dangers of letting the religious right rise to power, I would argue that this sounds very similar to how religion is portrayed in *The Handmaid's Tale* book: what truly matters is the personal faith of individual people.

Since the 1980's, secularism has been on the rise in the United States. Even though many Americans still frequent churches and identify as religious, nowadays "they are likely to derive their values and modes of thought from secular sources instead of religious ones" (Hanska, 187). Values originating from religion as a basis for government are even seen as a "divisive factor within the nation" (Hanska, 243). Perhaps the makers of the television show no longer deemed it necessary to have the characters reflecting on their personal faith and whether God wants this or hears certain prayers since morale and values come from elsewhere in today's society – with the current values it is clear that what is happening in Gilead is immoral, and the opinion of a god is not relevant. Hanska also talks about the large number of Christian denominations in America. There is a mutual respect between the denominations and people are allowed to have differing opinions about religious matters. Excluding the extremist fundamentalists, America is seen as a "fundamentally very religiously tolerant nation", where differing views are accepted and even respected (Hanska, 183). Therefore, since religion is considered to be a private affair and people are allowed to make up their own minds about different religious questions, showing characters having any certain kinds of views might be unappealing. In the current atmosphere it is perhaps better to let all the viewers keep their own views intact and not impose any kinds of fixed views on them, at least via the main character, whom most viewers are asked to identify with.

David Hogsette states that the book shows the "absurdity of Christian fundamentalism" (Hogsette, 273). I believe he is right and that the book is very clear in the way it denounces these kinds of extremist and fixed views, while also showing many other kinds of faith and believers. However, Hogsette expresses concerns that the representation of Christian fundamentalists in the book might be alienating for some readers, especially those who identify as fundamentalists themselves: "those readers may consider Atwood's description of their views as over-simplifications of the true complexities of their particular spiritual or political stance"

(Hogsette, 273). If the views presented in the book are considered over-simplified, what can be said about the views the television series represents?

In her introduction, Atwood states that her book is not anti-religion but "against the use of religion as a front for tyranny" (xiv). I do not think the television series can truly be considered to be anti-religion either, but it does include a lot of criticism towards religion and relatively few positive expressions of it. It is clear that the television series shows religion in a much more simplified way and has diminished the role of religion in the story, except as a tool of oppression and justification for violence.

3.3 Language and Thought

Baccolini and Moylan talk in their Introduction about how the people who hold the power in dystopian stories use language as a weapon (5-6). Free use of language is often forbidden, and the people are forced to repeat empty propaganda. That is why the first step in the protagonist beginning to resist the rules of their repressive society is re-appropriating language and starting to use it more freely (Baccolini and Moylan, 6). This is exactly what happens in *The Handmaid's Tale*. As Harriet Bergman notes, an important part of imposing control on the newly made Handmaids is the defamiliarizing of their own language: the Handmaids are stripped of their own names and given new ones, patronymics made from their Commander's name and the preposition 'of', and even the accepted greetings are changed into "truncated Biblical statements" such as 'Blessed be the fruit' and the appropriate answer 'May the Lord open' (Bergman, 848). Furthermore, Francesco Bacci describes Offred's soliloquies, during which she uses language freely and refuses to conform to the regime's limitations concerning language use, as "her fierce rebellion" and an example of how "language is used as a weapon" (Bacci, 162).

Michel Foucault has discussed the relationships between language, power and reality and written about them extensively. Sara Mills interprets this theory of discourse and talks

about how Foucault believes that discourse "is something which produces something else" (Mills, 15). Language and speaking do not just represent and describe what is happening in the world, they affect it and create or form the world at the same time. David Hogsette also talks about different theories that suggest that "women can use language to create their own subjective meaning and thus challenge certain socially and politically oppressive institutional meanings" (Hogsette, 263). Therefore, the way that language use is described in *The Handmaid's Tale*, how intensely it is controlled, and how often the characters refuse to follow the rules imposed on language use, are very interesting to look at and are closely connected to the strength of the resistance against the regime of Gilead in other areas as well.

Foucault does not think anything in societies is automatically permanent or fixed, but everything can change. Even the concept of truth is not an absolute for Foucault; it is something "which societies have to work to produce, rather than something which appears in a transcendental way", and in fact people work to "exclude certain forms of knowledge from consideration as 'true'" (Mills, 16). This idea is supported in both versions of *The Handmaid's Tale* for example in relation to the word 'sterile'. In both the book and the television series Offred visits a doctor's office and the doctor offers to impregnate Offred himself, after commenting that most Commanders are probably sterile (Atwood, 70, and episode 4, 17:11). In the book, Offred is shocked that the doctor dares to use that word: "I almost gasp: he's said a forbidden word. *Sterile*. There is no such thing as a sterile man any more, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law" (Atwood, 70-71). In the television series Offred also notes in her thoughts that the word 'sterile' is forbidden, but she is not as shocked about the use of the word – this is in line with the other instances that show that in the television series the language is much less controlled than in the book.

Another thing that Mills notes is that Foucault is not interested in only looking at the discourses of the current society, but also the history of discourses and how they have changed.

Even though some discourses seem natural to us due to their familiarity, Foucault would like for us to look at them as strange, because they are not permanent since "discourses are constantly changing and their origins can be traces to certain key shifts in history" (Mills, 23). Especially the book version of *The Handmaid's Tale* seems to be a prime example of this kind of thinking. Of course, in this story it is perfectly clear that the revolution and the birth of Gilead is a major historical event that has suddenly changed almost all accepted discourse in the society. Furthermore, the concept of familiarity of language and discourse is a common theme in the book. For example, one of the first instances of what we the readers would consider normal language in the present time of the book comes in the form of a greeting. The first time Offred visits the Commander's office, the Commander says 'hello' instead of one of the new greetings. Offred thinks about how she has not heard this "old form of greeting" in years and it takes her by such surprise that she is unable to answer it in any "appropriate" way (Atwood, 147). Offred often reflects on the language and what Foucault would call the history of discourses. Harriet Bergman has also noticed this and remarks that "any random memory of a place or a word causes Offred to think about the relationship between the old language, the old ways, and the new" (Bergman, 848).

In both the book and the television series there is a comment from Aunt Lydia about how all this will be easier for the future generations. In the first episode Aunt Lydia talks to the Handmaids in the Red Centre: "I know this must feel very strange. But ordinary is just what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you right now, but after a time, it will" (18:47). In the book, Aunt Lydia also talks about the future generations: "For the ones who come after you, it will be easier. They will accept their duties with willing hearts. She did not say: Because they will have no memories, of any other way. She said: Because they won't want things they can't have" (Atwood, 127). As was described in the Agency subchapter, the characters in the television series are much more active and their willpower seems much greater than that of the

characters in the book. In the book, the characters are much more beaten down and can imagine that the next generations will be even more compliant, but in the television series there is still resistance visible everywhere. The Handmaids even seem to be preparing to resist more strongly in the future. It seems like their meaning is to make sure there will not be a second generation that will have to live in Gilead.

Foucault sees power more as "a form of action or relation between people which is negotiated in each interaction and is never fixed and stable", instead of simply something imposed on people by the State or current regime (Mills, 34). I would argue that both versions of *The Handmaid's Tale* in a way show Foucault's theory in action. The difference in them is that the level of control that the regime imposes on its subjects in the book is much greater and as a result the characters are more hesitant and have less chances to show resistance, which leads to the power of the government seeming greater, which ends up being a vicious circle. In the television series language use is much less controlled, which allows for more instances of resistance already on the level of language use, which diminishes the perceived power of the regime, thus making resisting seem easier.

So, let us take a closer look at the use of language first in the book, then in the series. Bergman notes that in the beginning of the book, Offred is already quite used to the new rules around the language and uses the new terminology, words such as Unbaby and Birthmobile, with "apparent ease", and she has also accepted "her new name, thinking of her old one as 'something hidden, some treasure'" (Bergman, 848). Furthermore, David Hogsette reminds us that the "Republic's information-communication policy that restricts reading and speaking to only a carefully selected few" has diminished Offred's language skills (Hogsette, 266) – when she starts playing Scrabble with the Commander, she notices how spelling words correctly required a lot of effort (Atwood, 164). The restriction on language is the beginning of the vicious circle, but since Offred is the protagonist, she is shown trying to break out of the circle.

Hogsette states that the book shows "the self-liberating potential of an individual's act of storytelling" (Hogsette, 263). Bergman seems to agree with this and notes that Offred "survives through language" (Bergman, 848). She continues that to survive in the new society, "Offred learns to use the new language of her own time so as to seem part of the new order that the language reflects" and that the perceived "absolute power" of the new regime is an illusion "created by its language" (848). Therefore, language is obviously an immensely important part of the control and power, but at the same time the power is not an absolute and it is susceptible to resistance in every situation where language is used – exactly as Foucault has theorized.

Bergman states, that in the past, Offred was apolitical, oblivious to the connection between power and language or the control of it, and generally a person who did not "[care] particularly about the written word" before Gilead was founded (850). Hogsette notes how after the formation of Gilead, Offred very quickly "begins to realise the existence of a relationship among language, the self, institutions, and power" (266) – which could be summed up as the power of language. Language is powerful and it is everywhere. Bergman even notices how the first 'sin' Offred commits in the book "occurs in the form of words": as the Scrabble game played with the Commander (850). Offred "exercises language as if it were a new muscle" also outside the Scrabble games, by simply thinking about language extensively, such as the word 'chair' and its different meanings (Bergman, 849).

Later on, "Offred realizes that language can be used as a force of resistance" (Hogsette, 269). In his analysis of the language use of Offred, Hogsette seems to recreate Foucault's theory almost word by word: "She learns that the source of reality is in language use itself" (270). According to him, this realization makes it possible for Offred to use her words to attack Gilead by using language to create a "subversive or, at least, counter version" of reality (270).

However, even with all these realizations, the amount of resistance that Offred shows in the book in the form of language use or otherwise is quite small compared to the Offred in the

television series. This could all be seen stemming from the allowed language use. In the book, the Handmaids rarely say anything else except repeat the accepted greetings, comment on the weather and sometimes talk about the shopping and food. About halfway through the book, Offred notes that her and Ofglen do not necessarily use the formal greetings anymore. Instead, they just "smile and move off" (Atwood, 174). Shortly after this, Ofglen feels brave enough to ask Offred about whether she thinks God hears the Soul Scrolls – something, that leads to them revealing to each other that they are not "true believers" (Atwood, 177). The courage to have this first instance of a proper conversation comes from the simple absence of the rehearsed, official greetings. Even the absence of these controlled phrases is a strong enough sign for Ofglen to open up to Offred. The language use in Gilead is truly so controlled, that silence and smiles at the right time can be interpreted as a willingness to resist the current regime. The atmosphere in the television series is quite different.

The Handmaids in particular are able to talk with each other a lot more freely in the television series. For example, they are able to exchange a couple of sentences or even news quite often: before Salvagings, during shopping, and so on. In the book it is made clear that they are very seldom able to speak about anything meaningful. It is presented as a rare occasion when Offred is able to ask after Moira during a Birth Day, which do not happen often: "Sometimes you can find things out, on Birth Days." (Atwood, 134). Even so, Offred is barely able to exchange a couple of sentences, before they have to stop talking again.

As mentioned in the Agency subchapter, the shopping is done differently in the television series: instead of quietly waiting in line, the Handmaids are able to walk freely inside a store and exchange some words with each other. The difference in the level of control is very visible already in the first episode of the series. When Offred and Ofglen run into another shopping pair inside the store, one of the other Handmaids greets Offred and Ofglen with "Hey!" at 13:24. Although she immediately continues, "Under his eye", using also a normal

greeting diminishes the impression of control over language, when in the book Offred was surprised to hear the word ‘hello’ from the Commander. In this same shopping scene, the Handmaids start talking about oranges being in the store. When Offred notes that she does not have a token to be able to buy the oranges, the same Handmaid who said ‘hey’ tells Offred to use her Commanders name to get them anyway: “Tell them you’re Commander Waterford’s. He’s really high up. His name’s on the news” (13:41). This causes the three other Handmaids in the scene to exchange worried glances, and the Handmaid in question to quickly say “I… didn’t read it, I promise!” with a very scared voice. First of all, in the book it is made clear that without a token, a Handmaid cannot buy things, no matter whose Handmaid they are. This is not the case in the television series. Secondly, the Handmaids are not at all worried about using ‘old’ greeting words or having small conversations – what scares them is the notion of reading the news, since reading is against the law. But speaking in general does not seem to be a very rare occasion.

There is also a Salvaging in the first episode, where Offred ends up being situated next to a Handmaid she knows from the Red Centre. After they have quickly greeted each other with the standard “Under His eye” greeting, they immediately start catching up with each other. The other Handmaid mentions with whom she is posted and comments, “He can barely get it up” (39:41), and they smile at each other. Again, showing that the Handmaids are quite able to say other things than government mandated greetings and other meaningless musings, and not only that, they are even brave enough to mock the Commanders with each other.

At one point in the book, Offred is walking with Ofglen during a shopping trip, and she thinks about the fact that there used to be an ice-cream shop somewhere near the place they are. In the television series, this is turned into an actual conversation between Offred and Ofglen: one of the first real conversations that they have. It is during this conversation that

Ofglen reveals that she used to have a wife – something that is a lot more personal and dangerous than anything the Handmaids ever talk about in the book. What is interesting, is that when Offred is questioned repeatedly about what she and Ofglen have talked about while going shopping during the interrogation scene of the third episode, Offred answers that they only talked about shopping and the weather (26:41) – something that describes what is actually true in the book.

Of course, it is clear that conforming to the strict rules concerning the language would make it impossible to have actual conversations, and meaningful dialogue is naturally important to have in a television series. Furthermore, making multiple seasons of a television series would not sound like a smart idea if almost all the characters shown would just endlessly repeat the same lines – how could the story progress if that was the case? Therefore, it is not surprising that during the second season of the television series the Handmaids start resisting the rules about language use even more. For example, in one scene Offred greets another Handmaid with the accepted "Blessed be the fruit", but instead of answering "May the Lord open", the Handmaid says: "May the… Force be with you?" (episode 8, 11:13).

One of the scenes where the situation has clearly moved even more towards an uncontrolled atmosphere is a scene in episode six of the second season. Serena surprises the pregnant Offred by organizing a small get together for her and the Handmaids from nearby houses (23:32). Serena tries to get a conversation started, and at first the Handmaids only carefully talk about the generally accepted topics: "We've been sent fine weather" (24:54). Serena seems to be confused about the lack of conversation and says: "Pretend you're on one of your walks- What is it that the two of you talk…" (25:21). Encouraged by this Offred starts suddenly talking about a brunch place from the before, and Serena ends up being the one who remembers the name of it. Serena then comments: "Well, who knows, maybe we were there at the same time" (25:57). Talking so openly about the before and even encouraging Handmaids to talk about it

seems odd, even with the more relaxed attitude towards language in the television series in general. This kind of scene would be quite unimaginable in the book, where the control does not even seem to stop at the language use, it even affects the personal thoughts of Offred.

In her article, Pamela Cooper notes how parts of Offred's narration reveals "her internalization of Gilead's gender prejudice" (Cooper, 54). An example of this is a scene where she and Ofglen see Japanese tourists in knee-length skirts and high heels. "I stop walking. Ofglen stops beside me and I know that she too cannot take her eyes off these women. We are fascinated, but also repelled. They seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this" (Atwood, 38).

Glenn Deer states that in Gilead "private consciousness is all that is left; it cannot be regulated by the state. Offred may have lost most of the power to control others, to observe and control her world, but she still controls her private thoughts" (Deer, 128). Even though it is of course true that Gilead does not possess any device with which to completely control the thoughts of the people, and that there are scenes where Offred actively considers what she would like to think about – she even thinks about thoughts as places: "Where should I go?", she asks herself at one point, when she has some free time (Atwood, 47) – I believe it is also clear that the control she is subjected to in all other areas of her life also affects her thoughts. They are not completely under her control. When Offred reflects on Moira's escape from the Red Centre, she talks about how she and the other Handmaids were already getting used to the control and rules: "I think we found this frightening. Moira was like an elevator with open sides. She made us dizzy. Already we were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure" (Atwood, 143). The Handmaids are also adopting the values of Gilead regarding the importance of new children: when the Birthmobile lets everyone know that a child is being born, it seems to genuinely make everyone happy (Atwood, 121).

In all ways, Offred has given up much more thoroughly in the book. She does not think she has any chance of saving her daughter. In fact, she actively tries to think of her as dead, since that seems easier (Atwood, 74). Offred still tries to desperately hold on to some kind of hope. In the first half of the book, she imagines different kinds of endings for Luke. She does not know what has happened to him, not even if he is alive. But she wants to believe, wants to hope, that one day she will get a message from Luke that will prove he has survived, and still loves Offred. “It’s this message, which may never arrive, that keeps me alive. I believe in this message” (Atwood, 116). In the television series, hope, determination, resistance, and all such things are very commonly present in Offred’s voice-overs.

“Like other things now, thought must be rationed. There’s a lot that doesn’t bear thinking about. Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last”, thinks Offred in the second chapter of the book (17). In the first episode of the first season, the voice over relates the same: that “thinking can hurt your chances,” while Offred sits by herself in her room (05:15). But in the television series, Offred is talking about thinking of “other ways of escaping”, meaning suicide. And it is made quite clear that in other ways, she is not focusing on controlling her thoughts. For example, at 10:28 in the same episode, Nick asks Offred if she is going shopping, and Offred thinks of a snarky answer: “No, Nick, I’m going to knock back a few at the Oyster House Bar. Want to come along?” Of course, out loud she only says ‘Yes’. But already this early in the television series it is obvious that (also) inside her thoughts, Offred is not nearly as defeated as Offred in the book is. This becomes even more clear when later in the same episode Offred is shopping, and all the Handmaids seem very excited about the fact that there are oranges in the store. “I don’t need oranges. I need to scream. I need to grab the nearest machine gun” (14:12), Offred thinks while eyeing a Guardian carrying a machine gun.

In both the book and the television series, Offred is aware that thoughts affect a person’s well-being, that consciously thinking about things can either help or harm. In the book, Offred

talks about sanity being a valuable possession: “I hoard it the way people used to hoard money. I save it, so I will have enough, when the time comes” (Atwood, 119). In the series, Offred is banished to her room in episode four, not permitted to leave the room for anything. She starts thinking about Luke and Hannah but is aware that she has to limit her thoughts: “If I let myself fall in too far, I will never get out” (01:46).

Foucault talks about how strict disciplinary structures affect even people’s thoughts “so that individuals learn to discipline themselves or learn self-discipline through this notion that they are potentially under surveillance” (Mills, 35). The Handmaids in the television series are clearly much less affected mentally by the oppression and control imposed on them, and for that reason they also practice self-discipline a lot less. Or, alternatively, since they self-discipline less, they accidentally voice out loud small acts of resistance, and this weakens the oppression and its effect on their mental state. This could be seen as an opposite chain reaction to the vicious circle described earlier in this chapter. From an adapter’s point of view it can also be seen as such: wanting to increase the versatility of the dialogue automatically lessens the feeling of control, and this makes it easier to keep adding more pieces of dialogue where the rules are ignored, and so on.

The changes made in the handling of this theme in the television series adaptation are quite closely connected to the changes made to the agency of the characters. As such, a lot of the same reasons for the changes apply here also: the main character is made more active, the resistance more vocal. Amanda Howell notes how even though there is a lot more physical action in the television series compared to the book, the series “nevertheless maintains a focus on talking back and breaking silence as key issue” (Howell, 223). As an example, she uses the contents of the package Moira manages to retrieve from Jezebel’s: a collection of handwritten letters from women imprisoned all over Gilead. Offred ends up reading these letters in the final episode of the first season (34:00) in a powerful scene. Howell calls this collection of letters “a

clear nod to the power of #MeToo and #TimesUp movements." (223) and also considers the scene of Offred reading them very influential: "The feeling of relief and release which attends June's reading of these accounts … confirms the way the series resonates with such social media movements" (223). Howell compliments the series for its "focus on female subjectivity and its thematization of women's resistance to enforced silence" and comments that this television series adaptation has "extended its audience well beyond the novel's readership" (227). This expansion of audience is, of course, an aim of all television adaptations, and I believe the added amount of resistance shown in the series compared to the book has been instrumental in achieving this.

4. Expanded and Added Themes

When talking about film adaptations, Robert Stam mentions how adaptations often cut out scenes and leave out some events of novels they are adapting to be able to make the movie be of a "'normal' feature length" (Stam 2005b, 34). This, of course, is not really a concern for a television series adaptation. In fact, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the opposite has happened. Since the television show has already continued past the events of the book, they have of course had to add lots of new material. But they did already add things to the first season. For example, Linda Hutcheon notes how one of the things adapters do is "actualize or concretize ideas" (3). This has been done to the fate of the character Luke in the television series: in the book, Offred does not know what has happened to Luke, even whether he is alive or dead. In one train of thought she imagines multiple different fates for Luke (Atwood, 114-116). One of these is that he somehow made it and escaped to Canada. This small mention is something that the television show runners decided to expand on, and therefore there is almost a whole episode in the first season about "The other side" (the title of episode 7), showing how Luke did indeed escape to Canada.

In his text about recent adaptations of Westerns, Pete Falconer comments on how the makers of contemporary Westerns are tempted to "cram as many aspects of the genre as possible into one film" (Falconer, 66). I believe something similar might have happened with the adapters of *The Handmaid's Tale*: the makers have wanted to put commentary on almost all social issues into the adaptation: LGBTQ rights, female genital mutilation, refugees, social media campaigns such as #MeToo, and environmentalism, to name a few. These additions could be seen as ways of 'pushing' the story to the 'left', which sometimes happens to adapted stories (Stam 2005b, 42).

Since there are so many added themes and storylines in the television show, it would of course be impossible to consider all or even most of them. Instead, I have chosen two themes that the television show has added or expanded to focus on, sexual minorities, and diplomacy and media. Both themes are already present in the first season of the series, but since the themes are expanded significantly during the second season, the discussion in both these chapters will also include material from those episodes.

4.1 Sexual Minorities

As both Robert Stam and Linda Hutcheon note, the culture in which an adaptation is made automatically affects the product (Stam 2005b, 45; Hutcheon, 147). Hutcheon states, that even if an adaptation is made in the same society, political issues, for example, might have changed so much that an adaptation made long after the original text has been published can be considered transcultural (147). One of the ways that the culture in the United States has changed since the publication of the novel, is the attitude towards sexual minorities.

Dawn Baunach researched the attitudes towards same-sex marriages in America between the years 1988 and 2010 and found, unsurprisingly, that the attitudes became much more accepting over time (Baunach 364 and 368). By 2010 a majority of people were found to approve of same-sex marriage (368). Baunach sees these changes in attitude as a reflection of a cultural shift and notes that while "societal advances in secularism" might have contributed to this change, they are not the only factor to consider. Collier, Hom, Bos and Sandfort state in their research that while public attitudes affect public policy, the opposite is also true: public policy helps shape public attitudes (Collier et al. 142). It is only natural, then, that the legalization of same-sex marriages in the United States in 2015 on the federal level both reflects and increases the positive attitude towards LGBTQ rights in America. And thus, it is not surprising that that is one of the themes that has been notably expanded in the television series.

In 2005, Robert Stam noted how Hollywood adaptations had the tendency to water down film adaptations to keep them from being too radical, by for instance "purging the source of the 'controversial'" (Stam 2005b, 43). As an example of this 'controversial', Stam uses "the lesbianism of *The Color Purple*" (43). In her book, Hutcheon notes how issues previously considered radical might become more common and normal later, leading to something Hutcheon calls "temporally induced deradicalizing shift" (148). I believe this has happened with the sexual minorities in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Sexual minorities in Gilead are called gender traitors and hanged, unless they are fertile women, in which case they can still serve as Handmaids. However, as Janet Larson notes, the only people 'seen' hanged for this crime in the book are men (Larson, 38) – a couple of nameless, unknown men. And none of the Handmaids is said to be a lesbian – at least as far as Offred knows. In fact, the only character confirmed as a lesbian in the book is Moira.

But in the television series there are multiple gay and lesbian characters. For example, during their diplomatic trip to Canada in the ninth episode of the second season, the Waterfords meet the Canadian Deputy Minister for Immigration, Kevin McConnell. When Fred Waterford greets him, he mentions in quite a poignant tone: "I was very fond of visiting the States before. With my husband" (14:05), making it clear that marriage equality is still a reality in Canada. Moira is also a lesbian in the television show, but so is Offred's original shopping partner, Ofglen. We also see scenes of the partners of both these women from the before: Moira's fiancée and Ofglen's wife. In the book, we know nothing of Ofglen's past. Offred wonders about it when she notes that Ofglen seems to be praying: "Maybe, I think, there's someone, someone in particular gone, for her too; a man, a child" (Atwood, 41). As Falconer notes, adapters often have the desire to add or expand the backstories of characters to explain their motives more (Falconer, 66), and this is exactly what the television show has done. Ofglen has both a wife and a son in the series.

Ofglen mentions her wife and son to Offred already in the second episode of the first season. But in the second episode of the second season we get to see much more of Ofglen's backstory. The flashback scenes are situated in a time after the assassinations of the politicians but before the official founding of Gilead. Ofglen is still teaching in a university as a professor of cellular biology, when her boss – another member of the LGBTQ, a gay man – lets her know that he wants her to not teach next semester, since he thinks it would be better to lay low for a while. Ofglen is disturbed by this idea and comments: "So, you thought it was time to hide the dykes" (11:53). When the boss says that he thinks it would be safer, Ofglen notes that "they can't scare us back into the closet" (12:36). The boss then answers with "I though mine was the last generation that had to put up with this bullshit. I thought all of you were so spoiled" (12:41) and "Welcome to the fight. It sucks" (13:03). This is reminiscent of the way Offred's mother comments on Offred and her generation in the book, about how they do not appreciate how good things are for them, and how much the older generations of women had to fight to achieve the rights that women had at that time (Atwood, 131). Although, unlike Offred in the book, who does not really take her mother's words seriously ("Now, Mother, I would say. Let's not get into an argument about nothing." (131)), Ofglen wants to fight to keep her rights and refuses to stop teaching.

However, the next flashback we are shown is a scene where the boss is found hanged on the campus, with the slur 'faggot' written under him (37:24). That is when Emily decides to try to fly to Canada with her wife and child, but she is stopped at the airport. Since her originally Canadian wife and their child have Canadian citizenships, they are allowed to leave. Emily tells the airport official that she was told that as long as they travel together as a family, there would be no problems at the border. Then Emily shows the airport official their marriage certificate, and he says she only needs a "border traffic bypass stamp" and tells her to meet her wife and child at the gate (38:54). The next official she meets starts to interview Ofglen by

asking whether she was the one who gave birth to the child. He refuses to let Emily board the plane, and when Emily tries to show him their marriage certificate, the official tells her that the document is not recognized and they are not married, since it is "forbidden by the law" (40:35). It becomes clear that Emily is in trouble after this. When she tries to stand up and demand to get a lawyer, she is forcefully made to sit back down and asked if her son was born from "[her] egg or an implanted embryo" (41:01). The fact that she had viable ovaries clearly saved her life, but she was condemned to be a Handmaid.

In the first season, most of Ofglen's storyline is also connected to her being a member of a sexual minority. In the third episode of the season it is revealed that Ofglen had been having an affair with a Martha, another added lesbian character. This character, however, is not even given a name. She is shown shortly in a trial scene and then executed, since she was infertile and committed a crime. Ofglen, however, still has her viable ovaries and is instead condemned to a 'Redemption', which is revealed to mean female genital mutilation, the removal of her clitoris. Bacci comments that this happened because the character "lost her own gender's goal: reproduction" (163). Aunt Lydia visits her after the operation, and claims that this was for her own benefit, since now she will "not want things that she cannot have" (48:16). The Gilead officials treat female genital mutilation as a cure for lesbianism. When Commander Waterford later reveals to Offred what they did, he talks of it as saving Ofglen: "We helped her. We saved her. We had a doctor take care of the problem. It's such a small problem, truth be told" (Episode 5, 31:43). Ofglen is later placed in a new household as a Handmaid, because Gilead has of course kept her ability to become pregnant intact. But as was mentioned in the Agency chapter, Ofglen's storyline in the first season ends with her stealing a car and running over a Guardian, before being taken captive and sent to the Colonies.

Although LGBTQ representation in television series is nowadays common and it would be odd not to see diverse characters in a television series situated in the 21st century, the show

has been criticized especially on the issue of representation in the first season. Sarah Cullen states in her review, that the brutality with which Ofglen and her Martha lover were treated was "possibly misguided", since it is an unfortunately common trope in the Western media to kill off lesbian characters (Cullen, 209). But if we choose to overlook this possibly problematic part, I believe the adapters have made smart and partly obvious choices in including more storylines concerning sexual minorities.

Even though 'gender traitors' are mentioned in the book a couple of times, and Moira is told to be a lesbian, one cannot really consider sexual minorities or LGBTQ rights being one of the themes of the book. However, as has been stated, the society was quite different in regard to these groups in the 1980's. It would not have made much sense to have a conversation about the change in the atmosphere towards sexual minorities in the book, since they were still widely discriminated against at that time. In many ways, the battle for the LGBTQ rights was in its early stages when the book was written.

In the same way, it would not make sense not to discuss these themes in the television series. Since the adapters decided to situate the series close to the current time, the legality of same-sex marriage had to be dealt with. Since the original book discussed how women's rights had to be fought for and how easy it could be to strip women of those rights once more, the way this happens to LGBTQ rights in the television series is a good parallel or reinforcement of the original message. And with many people being worried about the future of the Supreme Court of the United States, and the rights of minorities and women in general due to the majority of the current justices being from the conservative side, the overturning of the same-sex marriage could very well become a reality in the United States in real life (Taylor). With both the attitudes towards LGBTQ people and their rights being much better nowadays and there being a question of whether a new generation is going to have to repeat the fight for their rights,

the adapters have seem to have done a good job of making the representation more relevant and timely, especially with the flashback scenes of the second season.

4.2 Diplomacy and Media

One of the themes that is barely mentioned in the book, but which is an important part of the television series, is diplomacy and international relations. As Bacci also notes, the book barely mentions what is happening in other countries, other than that some people have managed to escape to Canada (Bacci, 157). However, although diplomatic relationships are not really talked about, Gilead is not completely shut off from the rest of the world. There is the scene with Japanese tourists visiting Gilead and meeting Offred and Ofglen on the street. The tourists are walking around with an interpreter, and they ask Offred and Ofglen if they are happy: "I can imagine it, their curiosity: *Are they happy? How can they be happy?*", Offred thinks, before she answers with a murmur, that yes, they are (Atwood, 39, emphasis in original). In the television show, there is no tourism in Gilead. There is even a piece of dialogue commenting on how absurd such a thing would be: when the Handmaid Alma lets Offred know that there will be some people visiting the Waterford household, Offred comments: "Tourists? That's kind of messed up" (episode 6, 02:01). Alma corrects her that they will in fact be diplomats.

The diplomats are a part of a trade delegation sent from Mexico. These trade negotiations are a continuing storyline throughout the first season. In the fourth episode Commander Waterford and his wife Serena have a small conversation about an embargo that the UN has declared on them, and Serena is convinced that they will have to lift it soon if they do not want the euro to collapse (Episode 4, 06:33). It is clear, then, that the international community does not approve of Gilead. In the same episode, the Commander goes on a trip. Offred asks him where he was during a Scrabble game: "I was in Mexico to coordinate a trade delegation. Lots

of difficult personalities. You have no idea", the Commander answers (38:47), laying the foundation for the visit of the diplomats during episode six, and establishing the importance of diplomatic relationships with other countries in the series.

There are actually some similarities between the Japanese tourist scene and a scene in the television show, when Offred is introduced to the trade delegation in the Waterfords' house. Gilead has of course claimed that Handmaids have chosen to be Handmaids themselves, so the Mexican ambassador is curious about whether Offred is happy. And with the Waterfords and other officials in the same room, Offred has no other choice but to say: "I have found happiness, yes" (12:21).

A little later in the episode a worried Fred tells Serena that they really need to come to an agreement with the Mexican delegation: "If we don't make progress on trade, in six months our currency will fall off a cliff" (15:41). The biggest revelation regarding the diplomatic relationships in this episode comes after Serena impresses the delegation by showing them the children born in Gilead in the last couple of years during a feast, where the Handmaids are also present. When Alma seems worried about the fact that it seems that a deal will be made, Offred dismisses her by asking, "what does it matter how many oranges we trade with Mexico?" (35:34). That is when Alma reveals that "Gilead only has one thing to trade that anyone wants. Red tags" (35:43), talking about Handmaids. This episode makes clear the fact that fertility has dropped dramatically in other countries as well, and especially since Gilead claims that the Handmaids have chosen this life themselves, they are wanted goods, and a way for Gilead to create diplomatic relationships with other countries despite there being some worrying rumours circulating about the treatment of women in Gilead – as the Mexican ambassador reveals earlier in the episode: "We've heard a bit about Handmaids. But it is difficult to separate rumours from facts" (10:16).

The day after the feast, the Mexican ambassador and her assistant visit the Waterfords once more to bring gifts to both Offred and Serena. The ambassador thanks Offred for her honesty, clearly relieved by the impression she has gotten, that the Handmaids have truly chosen this life themselves. When Offred finds herself alone in the room with the diplomats, Offred tells them that she did not choose this, that she is a prisoner. The ambassador says that she is very sorry for Offred, which is when, in what Howell calls "a moment of marked Trump-era irony", Offred asks the ambassador to not be sorry but to help her instead (Howell, 223). This is when the ambassador tells Offred how in the city she is from, no children have been born alive in years and for this reason she cannot help her (47:42). Thus, the solving of the fertility crises and maintaining diplomatic relationships is deemed more important than the human rights of individual people – something that reflects the way diplomacy works in real life as well.

Canada, however, is shown in a much more positive light. One could even argue that Canada is shown as a utopian safe haven. In the first season, both Luke and Moira are shown being able to escape to Canada and live there as refugees. In the last episode of the season Moira is being welcomed to Canada by a social worker, and she is almost shocked by all the help she is getting. It is also hinted at in that scene that the international community in general is accepting refugees from Gilead, when the social worker states that "You may be moved to another refugee program elsewhere in Canada or even another country" (36:32). Moira is then reconnected with Luke and in the second season they are shown living with another Gilead survivor, working to spread awareness of what is going on in Gilead. Luke believes that other countries are preparing for a military invasion into Gilead, since both the Canadian and British army are "doing military exercises along the border" (episode 3, 03:20). This, however, has not happened yet and does not seem very likely. Even though Canada is continually accepting

refugees, they are also maintaining at least some kinds of diplomatic relations with Gilead as well.

An upcoming diplomatic trip to Canada is discussed by a group of Commanders in episode four. They think they might manage to convince Canada to ease some sanctions it has set on Gilead (20:46). The actual trip takes place in the ninth episode of the second season. Commander Waterford is chosen to be the one to go, and he takes Serena with him, to try to show them that women are supporting Gilead as well – despite some reports: "Canadians think women here are oppressed" (05:06). This is why the theme of diplomacy is so closely connected with media. For example, in the fourth episode of the first season we see a conversation between Fred and Serena about an escaped Aunt, who managed to escape to Canada and gave an interview to the Toronto Star. Fred comments, that the interview was "Lies and hyperbole. Everything in the worst possible light" (06:58). Fred is worried about its affect on the international relations.

However, despite these instances of leaked information, the first day of the trip goes quite well for Commander Waterford from a diplomatic standpoint. During a scene where Luke, Moira and the third survivor, Erin, are watching the news about the Gileadeans arriving in Canada, we can hear the reporter tell, that the "agenda for the visit" has not been made public (10:44). Later, another reporter comments that trade will surely be a part of the negotiations, since the economy of Canada has suffered from losing the United States as a trading partner. It is clear by the way they are respectfully received by the Canadian officials, that both sides believe they could benefit from better diplomatic relations. Fred expresses the hope that in "the coming years" they will be able to restore tourism as a "key part" of Gilead's economy (14:12), and that evening he tells Serena, that "We made progress this morning. Border security is on the table, maybe even extradition of illegal emigrants" (30:39) – a terrifying possibility for the refugees who have managed to escape Gilead into Canada. All of this is signifying that Gilead

does not wish to be cut out from the rest of the world, which means that diplomacy will most likely continue to be an important topic in the show.

Earlier that same day, Moira recognizes Fred Waterford in the news, and she and Luke go meet an official of the United States consulate and demand that they arrest Waterford as a war criminal. But the official tells them there is nothing they can do, since "In the end, we are guests of the Canadian government" (11:37). She urges Luke and Moira to take part in the protests they have planned, instead. With the limited amount of information in the media about the reality in Gilead, the Canadian officials are able to continue the negotiations even with some protests happening. Furthermore, Fred Waterford constantly assures that the claims about mistreatment of women are false. Even though he never uses the term 'fake news', his attitude towards media and encouragement to not trust it sounds very relevant. For example, when Luke manages to get his attention from a group of protesters when the Waterfords are arriving to their hotel in the evening, Luke accuses him of raping his wife. Fred Waterford answers, that "You have a twisted perception of our country, Mr. Bankole. But we all know the media doesn't care much about the truth these days" (29:44). And when a security personnel apologizes to Waterford for letting Luke try to attack him physically, he says he understands it, since "there's a lot of misinformation out there" (30:12).

In his article concerning 'fake news', Tarlach McGonagle mentions, that it is "by no means a new phenomenon", even though it is much more talked about currently (McGonagle, 205). However, he notes that there is currently a "surge in usage of the term 'fake news' in public discourse by public figures and in particular by those who hold positions of authority" (209). Having Commander Waterford constantly hint about the 'fakeness' of the reports about Gilead represent exactly what McGonagle talks about. This is another example of the adapters taking a relevant theme and including it in the television series, making it more grounded in the current society.

However, reporting about Gilead in the media is what ends up cutting the Waterfords' trip short. That same evening, Nick, who has been taken on the trip as a security personnel, finds Luke in a bar after the demonstration and hands him the letters that were inside the package Moira helped smuggle out of Jezebel's. Moira is disappointed to learn the package contained letters, and says she thought it was a bomb, "something to make Gilead go boom" (40:44). Erin notes that these letters still could achieve that.

The next morning, the Waterfords are greeted by the Canadian officials and told that the negotiations are over, and they are "no longer welcome in Canada" (41:21). The officials tell the Waterfords that the night before, "someone uploaded a series of letters from women in your country, and the public reaction here in Canada has been overwhelming" (41:28). Fred still tries to discredit the letters, but the officials tell him they "believe the women" (41:40) – as Amanda Howell noted, there are similarities between the letters and the #MeToo movement (Howell, 223).

As I said before, the image painted of Canada is quite positive – possibly even a bit unrealistically idealistic. Canada is also mentioned in the epilogue of the book, but not in such a positive light. In the book, it is mentioned that the people who escaped from Gilead to Canada usually moved on to England, since Canada was not necessarily safe enough for the escapees, because at times it returned refugees to Gilead. This is exactly what Fred Waterford was planning to start negotiating about with the Canadians, before he was asked to leave the country. It will be interesting to see whether these extraditions end up happening in any point of the television series or whether Canada remains a safe haven, begins to actively resist Gilead, or even starts a war with Gilead. In any case it is clear that the international community is interested to find out what is happening in Gilead and is not willing to simply leave Gilead alone – something that I believe viewers would find uncomfortable to watch, even if it were more realistic.

The adapters have worked to make the television series more relevant by adding these themes. The balancing between maintaining good diplomatic relations and trying to affect, for instance, the treatment of certain minorities in a foreign country with sanctions is an interesting topic both in the television series and in real life. Adding discussion about the trust people place on traditional media outlets and the effect of social media, are also great ways to highlight that the story is taking place close to the current time, which increases the perceived relevance of the series even more.

5. Omitting the Epilogue

Both Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam talk about how adapters often need to omit some parts of the stories they are adapting (Hutcheon, 19; Stam 2005b, 34). Although, when it comes to a television series adaptation, these omissions are not usually as necessary as they are when making a film adaptation, when the possible length of the final product is much more limited. However, there are things that have been omitted from the television series. For example, one very small but in some ways very important omission happens in the very last scene of the first season. The writers have deleted one word from the final conversation that Offred has with Nick: Mayday. The book ends with Eyes coming to get Offred from the Waterfords' house. In the book, Nick urges Offred to calmly go with the Eyes by saying "It's alright. It's Mayday. Go with them" (Atwood, 305). From the fact that this is the last thing Offred tells us, and her story is later found recorded on the tapes, it seems as if she was right to trust Nick and the people truly were from the resistance group Mayday. In the television version, however, he does not say anything about Mayday, only that Offred should go with them and she will be okay. Deleting the word Mayday opened far more possibilities for season two. The adapters were able to take the story whichever way they wanted. If they would have included the word 'Mayday' in Nick's dialogue, they would have ended with only two possible ways to continue: either it was Mayday, and they try to help Offred escape, or it is not Mayday, and Nick is revealed to be evil.

In the long run, however, this omission is not that important – it was presumable done only to give the writers more leeway for the beginning of the second season. During the second season Offred is seen trying to escape Gilead with the help of Nick, but she is ultimately recaptured and brought back to give birth to her daughter. This, however, has nothing to do with the Eyes coming to get her at the end of the first season, and as such, the change was not a meaningful one. But as Hutcheon notes, sometimes adapters change the whole conclusion of a

story (12). This seems to have happened where the adapters have chosen to not include the epilogue called Historical Notes in the television series.

The epilogue is situated about 150 years after the main story, long the fall of Gilead. It is presented to the reader as a "partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies" (Atwood, 311). In it, a group of academics discuss some tape recordings, that are assumed to be originated from Gilead: the story of Offred, the main story of the book. This is when the reader learns that what they have been reading is actually a transcript of a collection of tapes. The academics in the epilogue are shown as somewhat dubious about the truthfulness or accuracy of the tapes – the main portion of the epilogue consists of professor Pieixoto's keynote speech titled "Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*" (312). In his speech Pieixoto talks about how there are few documents and records about Gilead that have survived, and many stories might have been fabricated later on by people who know that other people are interested and willing to pay money for stories about Gilead. The people in the epilogue seem to even be unsure about the overall truth of what took place in Gilead. At least, they are wary of making any judgements about the state of affairs: "We must be cautious about passing moral judgement upon the Gileadeans… Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free. Our job is not to censure but to understand. [Applause]" (Atwood, 315). This uncertainty does not fit very well together with the situation in the television series, where the collection of letters released to the public caused at least a break in diplomatic negotiations between Canada and Gilead. The series also shows more and more people from Gilead escaping to Canada and telling their stories. As such, the epilogue might end up not fitting the storyline of the television series, as it seems that the actual circumstances of people living in Gilead will become common knowledge everywhere.

But other than giving us some information about what knowledge about Gilead survives for future historians, what is the meaning or the point of the epilogue? Janet Larson notes that the epilogue is a source of hope in the story, since it proves that Offred's story has outlived the regime of Gilead (Larson, 41). However, the way that the epilogue lets us understand that not many stories from Gilead have survived does not necessarily sound extremely hopeful. A lack of stories would suggest that not many people lived to tell the tale, at least not a whole generation. Even if the existence of the Historical Notes proves that two hundred years after Offred's story Gilead has been gone for a long time, at the same time it shows that Gilead existed for quite some time: "The surviving records of the time are spotty, as the Gileadean regime was in the habit of wiping its own computers and destroying printouts after various purges and internal upheavals" (Atwood, 316). It does not sound like Pieixoto is talking about a time span of only a few years here.

Harriet Bergman, on the other hand, calls the epilogue funny, and describes it as "are an impeccable parody of all that is pompous and self-interested in any conference of academics" (852). At the same time, however, she describes the image it gives about the post-Gilead society depressingly familiar – it is a society which has been nominally liberated and where people are "feeling free, therefore, to be sexist" (852-53). Arnold Davidson seems to agree with both these statements, calling the epilogue both a "comic relief from the grotesque text of Gilead" and "the most pessimistic part of the book" (Davidson, 120). Although Davidson also notes that the simple existence of this symposium proves "that Gilead was survived and as such constitutes a distinct note of hope for the future" (114), the general consensus is that the epilogue is, in the words of another researcher, "the most depressing part of the novel" (Deer, 111). Glenn Deer explains that the reason the epilogue is so depressing, is that "it shows how little has been changed by Offred's discourse", since the oppression of women has only changed form, not disappeared altogether (111). David Hogsette takes things even further. First, he calls Pieixoto

a misogynist due to the "several sexist jokes, puns, and witticisms" he begins his speech with (Hogsette, 270). For example, Pieixoto explains that there is a pun in the name of the manuscript, *The Handmaid's Tale*, connecting the word 'tale' to the word 'tail', that has an "archaic vulgar signification," and continuing by saying that that is what was "the bone, as it were, of contention, in that phase of Gileadean society" (Atwood, 313). After complaining about the misogyny of Pieixoto, Hogsette states that since we learn that Pieixoto, a man, is the one who has organized the tapes in this particular order and thus was in control of how and when we hear Offred's story, "Offred becomes Ofjames" (272).

In addition to his misogyny, Hogsette considers one of Pieixoto's biggest flaws his utter determination to remain objective. In fact, he describes the intellectual objectification done by Pieixoto as "an illustration of how not to read her text" and calls for empathy and an understanding of Offred's "human condition" (272). Pieixoto's desire to always remain objective prevents him from empathizing with her – something that is essential in order to understand her (273). Harriet Bergman also criticises Pieixoto's way of "distancing himself from the wrenching events" and refusing to connect with the text emotionally (Bergman, 853). One thing can be said for certain: the television series adaptation is not trying to veer away from emotions or empathy towards the characters, nor is it trying to stay objective.

The importance of the Historical Notes to *The Handmaid's Tale* in general becomes evident already from the simple fact that virtually every scholar who has written about *The Handmaid's Tale* discusses the epilogue at length. David Hogsette even states that the epilogue is an ending that urges the reader to re-read the novel, since the knowledge that someone else has edited the story and organised it in this particular order can change the way the reader looks at it (Hogsette, 263). Furthermore, Arnold Davidson notes that the reconstructed narration of Offred's story in a way reconstructs the gender inequalities of Gilead – she is rescued, and her story is told with the help of a man, rendering Offred herself passive (Davidson, 116). Is the

story even truly hers anymore, if it is edited and re-organized by a sexist man concerned mostly with objectivity?

Since the epilogue takes place 200 years after the events of the main storyline, it cannot be said for sure, whether the adapters are planning to always keep it out of the television series or whether they are planning to end the whole series with it. At least an epilogue as influential as the one in the book seems rather unlikely: with a visual media and with the adapters creating a more linear storyline for the television series, it does not seem plausible that they could end the series by telling the viewers that everything they have just seen has been a reconstruction created by someone else than Offred. However, something that would point to the possibility of the television series planning to add the epilogue into the series later is the fact that if one listens very carefully, in the very first episode, just before Offred (as Offred, not in the opening scene that shows the escape attempt of Offred, Luke and Hannah, when Offred is still June) starts speaking for the first time, at the time 4:35, there is a sound that could be the sound of a tape recorder beginning to record. If the television series ends up ending in a revelation that this story was found recorded on some tapes, and there is no official info of any kind of this Offred or June to be found (as is the fact in the Historical Notes), then that would presumably mean that no matter how hard she tries, Offred will not be able to escape Gilead in the end.

As I have stated before, the things the television series is showing happening in Canada – the publishing of the letters from Gilead, the way that information about the real state of affairs in Gilead is spreading everywhere – make parts of the epilogue happening in the television show seem unlikely. And with the amount of agency and determination they are giving the character of Offred, it would seem odd to have her character reduced to a passive woman, waiting to be saved, and leaving behind only a collection of unverifiable tapes to be found in the future. But then again, the epilogue in the book was also unexpected and changed the way

the story is seen on the second readthrough. The viewers will have to wait and see if the adapters decide to end the series in a similar surprising way.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to look at changes made to *The Handmaid's Tale* when it was adapted for television, the reasons behind those changes, and in what ways was the story considered or made to be relevant. As has been stated before, one of the most common reasons for changes made during an adaptation process have to do with the culture, ideology and social discourses that are relevant in the culture where the adaptation is being made, during the time the adaptation is made. This seems to be true also in the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Adaptations are rarely made to be more radical than their sources. However, even though this adaptation could be seen by some as a more radicalized version of the book (having a stronger 'leftist' ideology in it), I would argue it has been made less radical, which, as has been mentioned, is more often the case with adaptations. Common trends in both the society of the United States and the popular culture are, for example, feminism, secularism and LGBTQ rights, and these are all present in the television series. Furthermore, while some of the characters in the television show have been made more radical in their opinions and actions, they are also made more simplistic at the same time. For example, almost all the Handmaids are clearly disapproving of Gilead – the biggest differences between them are how much are they willing to risk in order to resist Gilead. This can also be an example of making the show less radical: showing the more complex and passive characters of the book being resigned and accepting the new regime of Gilead could actually seen as too radical in the current society where active, feminist characters are celebrated.

The agency and activeness of the characters is a change that can be seen affecting the themes throughout the thesis, not just in the Agency chapter. More important than the added agency of individual characters, such as Offred, is the added agency of all the women in general, and the way this affects and stems from the diminished amount of control imposed by the regime in general. Of course, it would make no sense to have a completely resigned protagonist

or completely resigned women in general in a television series, that has decided to continue the story for multiple seasons. The plot must move forward. However, one could question whether there can be such a thing as too much agency. The show has bestowed so much agency and will to resist to Offred, that it is almost inevitable that she will try to escape Gilead time and time again. But as the protagonist of the series, it would complicate the telling of the story of Gilead, if she were to leave it. And besides, it has been established in the first season, that she is not willing to leave without her first daughter, Hannah. And thus, the makers of the television show might have made a trap for themselves – how many times is it believable to have Offred attempting to escape, before she would surely be executed? Another interesting question is: will the amount of agency given the different characters lead to us witnessing also the fall of Gilead in the television series?

As was discussed in the chapter concerning religion, there are not many portrayals of personal religion in the television series – at least among the people who are being controlled by using religion as an excuse. While the increased secularism in the United States and the common wish to confine religion to the private sphere and let each person decide how they want faith to be or not to be a part of their life, the adapters might be cautious not to impose any certain kind of beliefs about religion on to the viewers. However, with the amount of different kinds of denominations peacefully co-existing in the United States and the general respect towards freedom of religion, another way to approach this subject could be to show multiple different kinds of faiths and instances of religion in the television series, so that the representation would not be as simplified. For example, it would be very interesting to see a character who has survived and escaped Gilead discuss the topic of religion – although nothing connected to religion is shown happening in Canada in the television series, it does not seem likely that religion would just have disappeared from the world outside Gilead. It would also be interesting to see whether the possibly only proper description of a character's personal

faith, the faith of Serena Waterford, ever wavers when she is starting to realize how much she has lost because of Gilead. However, if this were to happen and there were no new descriptions of the individual faith of characters, it would change the representation of religion in the television series into an even more negative and one-sided one, which might already start pushing some viewers away.

All three subjects of the third chapter are closely connected to each other. The ways that Offred has more agency, is less dependant on a god and how her language and thoughts are less controlled by Gilead, all affect, for example, her behaviour in the scene where she is being interrogated about Ofglen. She is able to show agency, resist the control imposed on her and use language and knowledge about religion as a weapon by quoting the Bible back to Aunt Lydia in a defiant tone. There seems to be two possible directions in which the television show can move: either the control on language and thoughts keeps diminishing, which could even lead to a full-blown revolution, or Gilead starts enforcing a much stronger control on language, and the characters have to come up with new ways to resist the regime and encourage each other.

The section of this research where the reason for the changes was most obviously the changes in the culture and social discourses was the first part of the fifth chapter. The legalization of same-sex marriage is one of the largest changes made to the rights of the LGBTQ in recent years, and thus it was only natural that it was discussed in the television show. I believe showing the reduction of LGBTQ rights and the conversation between Ofglen and her boss about having to join the fight for their rights once more is a good example of contemporizing the material: while the idea that women's right to own property would be overturned in the 21st century probably sounds completely unimaginable to a current viewer, the equal rights given to the LGBTQ groups are so recent, that it would seem much more plausible that they could be overturned, even in the current society of the United States.

The chapter where the reasons for the changes were not as easily identified with the help of adaptational theory was the second part of the fifth chapter. However, considering Amanda Howell's comment about the connection between the letters being released and the recent social media movements such as #MeToo, the reasons become much clearer. When Margaret Atwood wrote her book in the 1980's, there was no internet in every household, and there most certainly were no smart phones. But since the adapters chose to bring the story to the 2010's, the effect of social media had to also be included. I do not think it would be believable to watch a series where a whole society suddenly goes off the grid, and people in social media are not interested. Showing that the letters being published causes the citizens of other countries to be outraged about the human rights violations taking place in Gilead could be another example of the television series showing viewers events that they want to relate to: they believe they would be vocal about these injustices were they to happen in real life, just as people all over the world showed support to the Black Lives Matter movement this spring. Another aspect of this part of the story that makes the adaptation more relevant is the continued discussion of the status of the refugees that have escaped from Gilead. It will be interesting to see whether some of the refugees end up being forced to return to Gilead in the television show, as is mentioned to have happened in Canada in the epilogue of the book.

One of the things I am most interested to find out and what could not be answered in this thesis is whether or not the television adaptation will end up including the epilogue itself at the end of the series. Will they show how Offred's story and the stories of other women in Gilead can be misinterpreted or doubted by future historians? History is written by the winners, it is said. Will they show the fall of Gilead? Will there be any winners to write a definitive version of history? Will the increased agency given to Offred lead to her leading a fight against the regime? How soon could they realistically show Gilead being destroyed? If they do show the epilogue in some form, will it also happen 200 years later?

The analysis of the different themes has made one thing clear: just as a text or an adaptation cannot be completely separated from the culture in which it is made, neither can the choices adapters make be separated from each other. All choices made by the adapters are connected to each other and affect each other. This is why the choice to allow the Handmaids to speak more freely also affects the agency of all the female characters, and the choice to increase the agency and activity of Offred also makes her character less complex.

Naturally, the themes discussed in this thesis are only a collection of the themes present in the two versions of *The Handmaid's Tale*. I hope other studies look at the themes I was unable to include in this thesis, such as the increased role of environmentalism in the television series and its use as another justifier in the forming of Gilead, and the concept of consent in Offred's relationships with the men in her life. One obvious subject for a follow-up study is the analysis of the sequel written by Margaret Atwood, *The Testaments*. When announcing the sequel, Atwood cited as her inspiration "questions from her readers" and "the world we've been living in" (Merritt). Is it a continuation or a criticism of the television series? And furthermore, does the television series take the story told in it into consideration in its later seasons? Will the television show be forced to move into the direction of the sequel?

As I said in the Introduction, the aim of this thesis was not to determine how 'faithful' the television adaptation was to the novel, nor to try to define if it was objectively a good adaptation. However, if the success of an adaptation is determined by how many people become familiar with a story because of the adaptation, then *The Handmaid's Tale* television series can be said to have been successful. What is absolutely certain, however, is that it is a relevant adaptation. As I mentioned in the second chapter, when Margaret Atwood wrote her story, she drew her inspiration from real-life events, but even so, she considered the possibility of something similar happening in the United States as outrageous. However, currently, demonstrators are using the dresses of the Handmaids to protest the attempts to limit women's

rights, especially concerning abortion, in the United States. The political atmosphere has changed so much that instead of considering the possibility of the events of her book happening in the United States outrageous, Margaret Atwood describes her writing as a bit too accurate, and demonstrators are carrying signs asking to make Atwood fiction again. Combining this with the conscious decisions the adapters have made to the television series by adding relevant themes into it, the answer to the question of how can a novel from the 1980's be made into a relevant television series adaptation in the 21st century is clear: since the story has both become more relevant due to the changes in the culture of the United States and made more relevant by the adapters.

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